

**The Funeral Oration of Pericles from *History of the Peloponnesian War*
by Thucydides (431 BCE)**

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In the same winter the Athenians gave a funeral at the public cost to those who had first fallen in this war. It was a custom of their ancestors, and the manner of it is as follows. Three days before the ceremony, the bones of the dead are laid out in a tent which has been erected; and their friends bring to their relatives such offerings as they please. In the funeral procession cypress coffins are borne in cars, one for each tribe; the bones of the deceased being placed in the coffin of their tribe. Among these is carried one empty bier decked for the missing, that is, for those whose bodies could not be recovered. Any citizen or stranger who pleases, joins in the procession: and the female relatives are there to wail at the burial. The dead are laid in the public sepulchre in the Beautiful suburb of the city, in which those who fall in war are always buried; with the exception of those slain at Marathon, who for their singular and extraordinary valour were interred on the spot where they fell. After the bodies have been laid in the earth, a man chosen by the state, of approved wisdom and eminent reputation, pronounces over them an appropriate panegyric; after which all retire. Such is the manner of the burying; and throughout the whole of the war, whenever the occasion arose, the established custom was observed. Meanwhile these were the first that had fallen, and Pericles, son of Xanthippus, was chosen to pronounce their eulogium. When the proper time arrived, he advanced from the sepulchre to an elevated platform in order to be heard by as many of the crowd as possible, and spoke as follows:

“Most of my predecessors in this place have commended him who made this speech part of the law, telling us that it is well that it should be delivered at the burial of those who fall in battle. For myself, I should have thought that the worth which had displayed itself in deeds would be sufficiently rewarded by honours also shown by deeds; such as you now see in this funeral prepared at the people’s cost. And I could have wished that the reputations of many brave men were not to be imperilled in the mouth of a single individual, to stand or fall according as he spoke well or ill. For it is hard to speak properly upon a subject where it is even difficult to convince your hearers that you are speaking the truth. On the one hand, the friend who is familiar with every fact of the story may think that some point has not been set forth with that fullness which he wishes and knows it to deserve; on the other, he who is a stranger to the matter may be led by envy to suspect exaggeration if he hears anything above his own nature. For men can endure to hear others praised only so long as they can severally persuade themselves of their own ability to equal the actions recounted: when this point is passed, envy comes in and with it incredulity. However, since our ancestors have stamped this custom with their approval, it becomes my duty to obey the law and to try to satisfy your several wishes and opinions as best I may.

“I shall begin with our ancestors: it is both just and proper that they should have the honour of the first mention on an occasion like the present. They dwelt in the country without break in the succession from generation to generation, and handed it down free to the present time by their valour. And if our more remote ancestors deserve praise, much more do our own fathers, who added to their inheritance the empire which we now possess, and spared no pains to be able to leave their acquisitions to us of the present generation. Lastly, there are few parts of our dominions that have not been augmented by those of us here, who are still more or less in the

vigour of life; while the mother country has been furnished by us with everything that can enable her to depend on her own resources whether for war or for peace. That part of our history which tells of the military achievements which gave us our several possessions, or of the ready valour with which either we or our fathers stemmed the tide of Hellenic or foreign aggression, is a theme too familiar to my hearers for me to dilate on, and I shall therefore pass it by. But what was the road by which we reached our position, what the form of government under which our greatness grew, what the national habits out of which it sprang; these are questions which I may try to solve before I proceed to my panegyric upon these men; since I think this to be a subject upon which on the present occasion a speaker may properly dwell, and to which the whole assemblage, whether citizens or foreigners, may listen with advantage.

“Our constitution does not copy the laws of neighbouring states; we are rather a pattern to others than imitators ourselves. Its administration favours the many instead of the few; this is why it is called a democracy. If we look to the laws, they afford equal justice to all in their private differences; if no social standing, advancement in public life falls to reputation for capacity, class considerations not being allowed to interfere with merit; nor again does poverty bar the way, if a man is able to serve the state, he is not hindered by the obscurity of his condition. The freedom which we enjoy in our government extends also to our ordinary life. There, far from exercising a jealous surveillance over each other, we do not feel called upon to be angry with our neighbour for doing what he likes, or even to indulge in those injurious looks which cannot fail to be offensive, although they inflict no positive penalty. But all this ease in our private relations does not make us lawless as citizens. Against this fear is our chief safeguard, teaching us to obey the magistrates and the laws, particularly such as regard the protection of the injured, whether they are actually on the statute book, or belong to that code which, although unwritten, yet cannot be broken without acknowledged disgrace.

“Further, we provide plenty of means for the mind to refresh itself from business. We celebrate games and sacrifices all the year round, and the elegance of our private establishments forms a daily source of pleasure and helps to banish the spleen; while the magnitude of our city draws the produce of the world into our harbour, so that to the Athenian the fruits of other countries are as familiar a luxury as those of his own.

“If we turn to our military policy, there also we differ from our antagonists. We throw open our city to the world, and never by alien acts exclude foreigners from any opportunity of learning or observing, although the eyes of an enemy may occasionally profit by our liberality; trusting less in system and policy than to the native spirit of our citizens; while in education, where our rivals from their very cradles by a painful discipline seek after manliness, at Athens we live exactly as we please, and yet are just as ready to encounter every legitimate danger. In proof of this it may be noticed that the Lacedaemonians do not invade our country alone, but bring with them all their confederates; while we Athenians advance unsupported into the territory of a neighbour, and fighting upon a foreign soil usually vanquish with ease men who are defending their homes. Our united force was never yet encountered by any enemy, because we have at once to attend to our marine and to dispatch our citizens by land upon a hundred different services; so that, wherever they engage with some such fraction of our strength, a success against a detachment is magnified into a victory over the nation, and a defeat into a reverse suffered at the hands of our entire people. And yet if with habits not of labour but of ease, and courage not of art but of

nature, we are still willing to encounter danger, we have the double advantage of escaping the experience of hardships in anticipation and of facing them in the hour of need as fearlessly as those who are never free from them.

“Nor are these the only points in which our city is worthy of admiration. We cultivate refinement without extravagance and knowledge without effeminacy; wealth we employ more for use than for show, and place the real disgrace of poverty not in owning to the fact but in declining the struggle against it. Our public men have, besides politics, their private affairs to attend to, and our ordinary citizens, though occupied with the pursuits of industry, are still fair judges of public matters; for, unlike any other nation, regarding him who takes no part in these duties not as unambitious but as useless, we Athenians are able to judge at all events if we cannot originate, and, instead of looking on discussion as a stumbling-block in the way of action, we think it an indispensable preliminary to any wise action at all. Again, in our enterprises we present the singular spectacle of daring and deliberation, each carried to its highest point, and both united in the same persons; although usually decision is the fruit of ignorance, hesitation of reflection. But the palm of courage will surely be adjudged most justly to those, who best know the difference between hardship and pleasure and yet are never tempted to shrink from danger. In generosity we are equally singular, acquiring our friends by conferring, not by receiving, favours. Yet, of course, the doer of the favour is the firmer friend of the two, in order by continued kindness to keep the recipient in his debt; while the debtor feels less keenly from the very consciousness that the return he makes will be a payment, not a free gift. And it is only the Athenians, who, fearless of consequences, confer their benefits not from calculations of expediency, but in the confidence of liberality.

“In short, I say that as a city we are the school of Hellas, while I doubt if the world can produce a man who, where he has only himself to depend upon, is equal to so many emergencies, and graced by so happy a versatility, as the Athenian. And that this is no mere boast thrown out for the occasion, but plain matter of fact, the power of the state acquired by these habits proves. For Athens alone of her contemporaries is found when tested to be greater than her reputation, and alone gives no occasion to her assailants to blush at the antagonist by whom they have been worsted, or to her subjects to question her title by merit to rule. Rather, the admiration of the present and succeeding ages will be ours, since we have not left our power without witness, but have shown it by mighty proofs; and far from needing a Homer for our panegyrist, or other of his craft whose verses might charm for the moment only for the impression which they gave to melt at the touch of fact, we have forced every sea and land to be the highway of our daring, and everywhere, whether for evil or for good, have left imperishable monuments behind us. Such is the Athens for which these men, in the assertion of their resolve not to lose her, nobly fought and died; and well may every one of their survivors be ready to suffer in her cause.

“Indeed if I have dwelt at some length upon the character of our country, it has been to show that our stake in the struggle is not the same as theirs who have no such blessings to lose, and also that the panegyric of the men over whom I am now speaking might be by definite proofs established. That panegyric is now in a great measure complete; for the Athens that I have celebrated is only what the heroism of these and their like have made her, men whose fame, unlike that of most Hellenes, will be found to be only commensurate with their deserts. And if a test of worth be wanted, it is to be found in their closing scene, and this not only in cases in

which it set the final seal upon their merit, but also in those in which it gave the first intimation of their having any. For there is justice in the claim that steadfastness in his country's battles should be as a cloak to cover a man's other imperfections; since the good action has blotted out the bad, and his merit as a citizen more than outweighed his demerits as an individual. But none of these allowed either wealth with its prospect of future enjoyment to unnerve his spirit, or poverty with its hope of a day of freedom and riches to tempt him to shrink from danger. No, holding that vengeance upon their enemies was more to be desired than any personal blessings, and reckoning this to be the most glorious of hazards, they joyfully determined to accept the risk, to make sure of their vengeance, and to let their wishes wait; and while committing to hope the uncertainty of final success, in the business before them they thought fit to act boldly and trust in themselves. Thus choosing to die resisting, rather than to live submitting, they fled only from dishonour, but met danger face to face, and after one brief moment, while at the summit of their fortune, escaped, not from their fear, but from their glory.

“So died these men as became Athenians. You, their survivors, must determine to have as unflinching a resolution in the field, though you may pray that it may have a happier issue. And not contented with ideas derived only from words of the advantages which are bound up with the defence of your country, though these would furnish a valuable text to a speaker even before an audience so alive to them as the present, you must yourselves realize the power of Athens, and feed your eyes upon her from day to day, till love of her fills your hearts; and then, when all her greatness shall break upon you, you must reflect that it was by courage, sense of duty, and a keen feeling of honour in action that men were enabled to win all this, and that no personal failure in an enterprise could make them consent to deprive their country of their valour, but they laid it at her feet as the most glorious contribution that they could offer. For this offering of their lives made in common by them all they each of them individually received that renown which never grows old, and for a sepulchre, not so much that in which their bones have been deposited, but that noblest of shrines wherein their glory is laid up to be eternally remembered upon every occasion on which deed or story shall call for its commemoration. For heroes have the whole earth for their tomb; and in lands far from their own, where the column with its epitaph declares it, there is enshrined in every breast a record unwritten with no tablet to preserve it, except that of the heart. These take as your model and, judging happiness to be the fruit of freedom and freedom of valour, never decline the dangers of war. For it is not the miserable that would most justly be unsparing of their lives; these have nothing to hope for: it is rather they to whom continued life may bring reverses as yet unknown, and to whom a fall, if it came, would be most tremendous in its consequences. And surely, to a man of spirit, the degradation of cowardice must be immeasurably more grievous than the unfelt death which strikes him in the midst of his strength and patriotism!

“Comfort, therefore, not condolence, is what I have to offer to the parents of the dead who may be here. Numberless are the chances to which, as they know, the life of man is subject; but fortunate indeed are they who draw for their lot a death so glorious as that which has caused your mourning, and to whom life has been so exactly measured as to terminate in the happiness in which it has been passed. Still I know that this is a hard saying, especially when those are in question of whom you will constantly be reminded by seeing in the homes of others blessings of which once you also boasted: for grief is felt not so much for the want of what we have never known, as for the loss of that to which we have been long accustomed. Yet you who are still of

an age to beget children must bear up in the hope of having others in their stead; not only will they help you to forget those whom you have lost, but will be to the state at once a reinforcement and a security; for never can a fair or just policy be expected of the citizen who does not, like his fellows, bring to the decision the interests and apprehensions of a father. While those of you who have passed your prime must congratulate yourselves with the thought that the best part of your life was fortunate, and that the brief span that remains will be cheered by the fame of the departed. For it is only the love of honour that never grows old; and honour it is, not gain, as some would have it, that rejoices the heart of age and helplessness.

“Turning to the sons or brothers of the dead, I see an arduous struggle before you. When a man is gone, all are wont to praise him, and should your merit be ever so transcendent, you will still find it difficult not merely to overtake, but even to approach their renown. The living have envy to contend with, while those who are no longer in our path are honoured with a goodwill into which rivalry does not enter. On the other hand, if I must say anything on the subject of female excellence to those of you who will now be in widowhood, it will be all comprised in this brief exhortation. Great will be your glory in not falling short of your natural character; and greatest will be hers who is least talked of among the men, whether for good or for bad.

“My task is now finished. I have performed it to the best of my ability, and in word, at least, the requirements of the law are now satisfied. If deeds be in question, those who are here interred have received part of their honours already, and for the rest, their children will be brought up till manhood at the public expense: the state thus offers a valuable prize, as the garland of victory in this race of valour, for the reward both of those who have fallen and their survivors. And where the rewards for merit are greatest, there are found the best citizens.

“And now that you have brought to a close your lamentations for your relatives, you may depart.”

**The Plague of Athens from *History of the Peloponnesian War*
by Thucydides (431 BCE)**

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Such was the funeral that took place during this winter, with which the first year of the war came to an end. In the first days of summer the Lacedaemonians and their allies, with two-thirds of their forces as before, invaded Attica, under the command of Archidamus, son of Zeuxidamus, King of Lacedaemon, and sat down and laid waste the country. Not many days after their arrival in Attica the plague first began to show itself among the Athenians. It was said that it had broken out in many places previously in the neighbourhood of Lemnos and elsewhere; but a pestilence of such extent and mortality was nowhere remembered. Neither were the physicians at first of any service, ignorant as they were of the proper way to treat it, but they died themselves the most thickly, as they visited the sick most often; nor did any human art succeed any better. Supplications in the temples, divinations, and so forth were found equally futile, till the overwhelming nature of the disaster at last put a stop to them altogether.

It first began, it is said, in the parts of Ethiopia above Egypt, and thence descended into Egypt and Libya and into most of the King's country. Suddenly falling upon Athens, it first attacked the population in Piraeus—which was the occasion of their saying that the Peloponnesians had poisoned the reservoirs, there being as yet no wells there—and afterwards appeared in the upper city, when the deaths became much more frequent. All speculation as to its origin and its causes, if causes can be found adequate to produce so great a disturbance, I leave to other writers, whether lay or professional; for myself, I shall simply set down its nature, and explain the symptoms by which perhaps it may be recognized by the student, if it should ever break out again. This I can the better do, as I had the disease myself, and watched its operation in the case of others.

That year then is admitted to have been otherwise unprecedentedly free from sickness; and such few cases as occurred all determined in this. As a rule, however, there was no ostensible cause; but people in good health were all of a sudden attacked by violent heats in the head, and redness and inflammation in the eyes, the inward parts, such as the throat or tongue, becoming bloody and emitting an unnatural and fetid breath. These symptoms were followed by sneezing and hoarseness, after which the pain soon reached the chest, and produced a hard cough. When it fixed in the stomach, it upset it; and discharges of bile of every kind named by physicians ensued, accompanied by very great distress. In most cases also an ineffectual retching followed, producing violent spasms, which in some cases ceased soon after, in others much later. Externally the body was not very hot to the touch, nor pale in its appearance, but reddish, livid, and breaking out into small pustules and ulcers. But internally it burned so that the patient could not bear to have on him clothing or linen even of the very lightest description; or indeed to be otherwise than stark naked. What they would have liked best would have been to throw themselves into cold water; as indeed was done by some of the neglected sick, who plunged into the rain-tanks in their agonies of unquenchable thirst; though it made no difference whether they drank little or much. Besides this, the miserable feeling of not being able to rest or sleep never ceased to torment them. The body meanwhile did not waste away so long as the distemper was at its height, but held out to a marvel against its ravages; so that when they succumbed, as in most

cases, on the seventh or eighth day to the internal inflammation, they had still some strength in them. But if they passed this stage, and the disease descended further into the bowels, inducing a violent ulceration there accompanied by severe diarrhoea, this brought on a weakness which was generally fatal. For the disorder first settled in the head, ran its course from thence through the whole of the body, and, even where it did not prove mortal, it still left its mark on the extremities; for it settled in the privy parts, the fingers and the toes, and many escaped with the loss of these, some too with that of their eyes. Others again were seized with an entire loss of memory on their first recovery, and did not know either themselves or their friends.

But while the nature of the distemper was such as to baffle all description, and its attacks almost too grievous for human nature to endure, it was still in the following circumstance that its difference from all ordinary disorders was most clearly shown. All the birds and beasts that prey upon human bodies, either abstained from touching them (though there were many lying unburied), or died after tasting them. In proof of this, it was noticed that birds of this kind actually disappeared; they were not about the bodies, or indeed to be seen at all. But of course the effects which I have mentioned could best be studied in a domestic animal like the dog.

Such then, if we pass over the varieties of particular cases which were many and peculiar, were the general features of the distemper. Meanwhile the town enjoyed an immunity from all the ordinary disorders; or if any case occurred, it ended in this. Some died in neglect, others in the midst of every attention. No remedy was found that could be used as a specific; for what did good in one case, did harm in another. Strong and weak constitutions proved equally incapable of resistance, all alike being swept away, although dieted with the utmost precaution. By far the most terrible feature in the malady was the dejection which ensued when any one felt himself sickening, for the despair into which they instantly fell took away their power of resistance, and left them a much easier prey to the disorder; besides which, there was the awful spectacle of men dying like sheep, through having caught the infection in nursing each other. This caused the greatest mortality. On the one hand, if they were afraid to visit each other, they perished from neglect; indeed many houses were emptied of their inmates for want of a nurse: on the other, if they ventured to do so, death was the consequence. This was especially the case with such as made any pretensions to goodness: honour made them unsparing of themselves in their attendance in their friends' houses, where even the members of the family were at last worn out by the moans of the dying, and succumbed to the force of the disaster. Yet it was with those who had recovered from the disease that the sick and the dying found most compassion. These knew what it was from experience, and had now no fear for themselves; for the same man was never attacked twice—never at least fatally. And such persons not only received the congratulations of others, but themselves also, in the elation of the moment, half entertained the vain hope that they were for the future safe from any disease whatsoever.

An aggravation of the existing calamity was the influx from the country into the city, and this was especially felt by the new arrivals. As there were no houses to receive them, they had to be lodged at the hot season of the year in stifling cabins, where the mortality raged without restraint. The bodies of dying men lay one upon another, and half-dead creatures reeled about the streets and gathered round all the fountains in their longing for water. The sacred places also in which they had quartered themselves were full of corpses of persons that had died there, just as they were; for as the disaster passed all bounds, men, not knowing what was to become of them,

became utterly careless of everything, whether sacred or profane. All the burial rites before in use were entirely upset, and they buried the bodies as best they could. Many from want of the proper appliances, through so many of their friends having died already, had recourse to the most shameless sepulchres: sometimes getting the start of those who had raised a pile, they threw their own dead body upon the stranger's pyre and ignited it; sometimes they tossed the corpse which they were carrying on the top of another that was burning, and so went off.

Nor was this the only form of lawless extravagance which owed its origin to the plague. Men now coolly ventured on what they had formerly done in a corner, and not just as they pleased, seeing the rapid transitions produced by persons in prosperity suddenly dying and those who before had nothing succeeding to their property. So they resolved to spend quickly and enjoy themselves, regarding their lives and riches as alike things of a day. Perseverance in what men called honour was popular with none, it was so uncertain whether they would be spared to attain the object; but it was settled that present enjoyment, and all that contributed to it, was both honourable and useful. Fear of gods or law of man there was none to restrain them. As for the first, they judged it to be just the same whether they worshipped them or not, as they saw all alike perishing; and for the last, no one expected to live to be brought to trial for his offences, but each felt that a far severer sentence had been already passed upon them all and hung ever over their heads, and before this fell it was only reasonable to enjoy life a little.

Such was the nature of the calamity, and heavily did it weigh on the Athenians; death raging within the city and devastation without. Among other things which they remembered in their distress was, very naturally, the following verse which the old men said had long ago been uttered:

A Dorian war shall come and with it death.

So a dispute arose as to whether dearth and not death had not been the word in the verse; but at the present juncture, it was of course decided in favour of the latter; for the people made their recollection fit in with their sufferings. I fancy, however, that if another Dorian war should ever afterwards come upon us, and a dearth should happen to accompany it, the verse will probably be read accordingly. The oracle also which had been given to the Lacedaemonians was now remembered by those who knew of it. When the god was asked whether they should go to war, he answered that if they put their might into it, victory would be theirs, and that he would himself be with them. With this oracle events were supposed to tally. For the plague broke out as soon as the Peloponnesians invaded Attica, and never entering Peloponnese (not at least to an extent worth noticing), committed its worst ravages at Athens, and next to Athens, at the most populous of the other towns. Such was the history of the plague.

**The Next Speech of Pericles from *History of the Peloponnesian War*
by Thucydides (431 BCE)**

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After the second invasion of the Peloponnesians a change came over the spirit of the Athenians. Their land had now been twice laid waste; and war and pestilence at once pressed heavy upon them. They began to find fault with Pericles, as the author of the war and the cause of all their misfortunes, and became eager to come to terms with Lacedaemon, and actually sent ambassadors thither, who did not however succeed in their mission. Their despair was now complete and all vented itself upon Pericles. When he saw them exasperated at the present turn of affairs and acting exactly as he had anticipated, he called an assembly, being (it must be remembered) still general, with the double object of restoring confidence and of leading them from these angry feelings to a calmer and more hopeful state of mind. He accordingly came forward and spoke as follows:

“I was not unprepared for the indignation of which I have been the object, as I know its causes; and I have called an assembly for the purpose of reminding you upon certain points, and of protesting against your being unreasonably irritated with me, or cowed by your sufferings. I am of opinion that national greatness is more for the advantage of private citizens, than any individual well-being coupled with public humiliation. A man may be personally ever so well off, and yet if his country be ruined he must be ruined with it; whereas a flourishing commonwealth always affords chances of salvation to unfortunate individuals. Since then a state can support the misfortunes of private citizens, while they cannot support hers, it is surely the duty of every one to be forward in her defence, and not like you to be so confounded with your domestic afflictions as to give up all thoughts of the common safety, and to blame me for having counselled war and yourselves for having voted it. And yet if you are angry with me, it is with one who, as I believe, is second to no man either in knowledge of the proper policy, or in the ability to expound it, and who is moreover not only a patriot but an honest one. A man possessing that knowledge without that faculty of exposition might as well have no idea at all on the matter: if he had both these gifts, but no love for his country, he would be but a cold advocate for her interests; while were his patriotism not proof against bribery, everything would go for a price. So that if you thought that I was even moderately distinguished for these qualities when you took my advice and went to war, there is certainly no reason now why I should be charged with having done wrong.

“For those of course who have a free choice in the matter and whose fortunes are not at stake, war is the greatest of follies. But if the only choice was between submission with loss of independence, and danger with the hope of preserving that independence, in such a case it is he who will not accept the risk that deserves blame, not he who will. I am the same man and do not alter, it is you who change, since in fact you took my advice while unhurt, and waited for misfortune to repent of it; and the apparent error of my policy lies in the infirmity of your resolution, since the suffering that it entails is being felt by every one among you, while its advantage is still remote and obscure to all, and a great and sudden reverse having befallen you, your mind is too much depressed to persevere in your resolves. For before what is sudden, unexpected, and least within calculation, the spirit quails; and putting all else aside, the plague has certainly been an emergency of this kind. Born, however, as you are, citizens of a great state,

and brought up, as you have been, with habits equal to your birth, you should be ready to face the greatest disasters and still to keep unimpaired the lustre of your name. For the judgment of mankind is as relentless to the weakness that falls short of a recognized renown, as it is jealous of the arrogance that aspires higher than its due. Cease then to grieve for your private afflictions, and address yourselves instead to the safety of the commonwealth.

“If you shrink before the exertions which the war makes necessary, and fear that after all they may not have a happy result, you know the reasons by which I have often demonstrated to you the groundlessness of your apprehensions. If those are not enough, I will now reveal an advantage arising from the greatness of your dominion, which I think has never yet suggested itself to you, which I never mentioned in my previous speeches, and which has so bold a sound that I should scarce adventure it now, were it not for the unnatural depression which I see around me. You perhaps think that your empire extends only over your allies; I will declare to you the truth. The visible field of action has two parts, land and sea. In the whole of one of these you are completely supreme, not merely as far as you use it at present, but also to what further extent you may think fit: in fine, your naval resources are such that your vessels may go where they please, without the King or any other nation on earth being able to stop them. So that although you may think it a great privation to lose the use of your land and houses, still you must see that this power is something widely different; and instead of fretting on their account, you should really regard them in the light of the gardens and other accessories that embellish a great fortune, and as, in comparison, of little moment. You should know too that liberty preserved by your efforts will easily recover for us what we have lost, while, the knee once bowed, even what you have will pass from you. Your fathers receiving these possessions not from others, but from themselves, did not let slip what their labour had acquired, but delivered them safe to you; and in this respect at least you must prove yourselves their equals, remembering that to lose what one has got is more disgraceful than to be balked in getting, and you must confront your enemies not merely with spirit but with disdain. Confidence indeed a blissful ignorance can impart, ay, even to a coward’s breast, but disdain is the privilege of those who, like us, have been assured by reflection of their superiority to their adversary. And where the chances are the same, knowledge fortifies courage by the contempt which is its consequence, its trust being placed, not in hope, which is the prop of the desperate, but in a judgment grounded upon existing resources, whose anticipations are more to be depended upon.

“Again, your country has a right to your services in sustaining the glories of her position. These are a common source of pride to you all, and you cannot decline the burdens of empire and still expect to share its honours. You should remember also that what you are fighting against is not merely slavery as an exchange for independence, but also loss of empire and danger from the animosities incurred in its exercise. Besides, to recede is no longer possible, if indeed any of you in the alarm of the moment has become enamoured of the honesty of such an unambitious part. For what you hold is, to speak somewhat plainly, a tyranny; to take it perhaps was wrong, but to let it go is unsafe. And men of these retiring views, making converts of others, would quickly ruin a state; indeed the result would be the same if they could live independent by themselves; for the retiring and unambitious are never secure without vigorous protectors at their side; in fine, such qualities are useless to an imperial city, though they may help a dependency to an unmolested servitude.

“But you must not be seduced by citizens like these or angry with me—who, if I voted for war, only did as you did yourselves—in spite of the enemy having invaded your country and done what you could be certain that he would do, if you refused to comply with his demands; and although besides what we counted for, the plague has come upon us—the only point indeed at which our calculation has been at fault. It is this, I know, that has had a large share in making me more unpopular than I should otherwise have been—quite undeservedly, unless you are also prepared to give me the credit of any success with which chance may present you. Besides, the hand of heaven must be borne with resignation, that of the enemy with fortitude; this was the old way at Athens, and do not you prevent it being so still. Remember, too, that if your country has the greatest name in all the world, it is because she never bent before disaster; because she has expended more life and effort in war than any other city, and has won for herself a power greater than any hitherto known, the memory of which will descend to the latest posterity; even if now, in obedience to the general law of decay, we should ever be forced to yield, still it will be remembered that we held rule over more Hellenes than any other Hellenic state, that we sustained the greatest wars against their united or separate powers, and inhabited a city unrivalled by any other in resources or magnitude. These glories may incur the censure of the slow and unambitious; but in the breast of energy they will awake emulation, and in those who must remain without them an envious regret. Hatred and unpopularity at the moment have fallen to the lot of all who have aspired to rule others; but where odium must be incurred, true wisdom incurs it for the highest objects. Hatred also is short-lived; but that which makes the splendour of the present and the glory of the future remains for ever unforgotten. Make your decision, therefore, for glory then and honour now, and attain both objects by instant and zealous effort: do not send heralds to Lacedaemon, and do not betray any sign of being oppressed by your present sufferings, since they whose minds are least sensitive to calamity, and whose hands are most quick to meet it, are the greatest men and the greatest communities.”

Such were the arguments by which Pericles tried to cure the Athenians of their anger against him and to divert their thoughts from their immediate afflictions.

VIII

Catastrophe and Creativity (c.1350–c.1500)

THE BLACK DEATH

8.1 The effects of the plague: Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron* (1348–1351). Original in Italian.

Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–1375) was the illegitimate son of a wealthy Florentine merchant who, like Francesco Pegolotti (see above, p. 399) worked for the Bardi bank. Boccaccio spent a formative thirteen years at the court of Naples, apprenticing for his father, studying the liberal arts, learning canon law, and meeting aristocrats of the Neapolitan ruling house, the Angevins. He gravitated to poetry and literature, was much influenced by the poet Petrarch, and in the 1330s began composing his first major works. In 1348, back in Florence after much travel, he witnessed the effects of the Black Death and wrote *The Decameron* as a sort of tribute both to the horror of the experience and to the ability of the Florentines to wrest delight, wit, and humor out of tragedy. The book purports to relate the one hundred tales told by seven young women and three young men during a ten-day retreat from Florence to escape the plague. The excerpt here begins on the very first day and, in explaining the reasons for the retreat, reveals the physical, social, and emotional effects of the Black Death.

1. What were the plague's effects on Florentine burial customs according to Boccaccio?
2. Given that Boccaccio was critical of Florentine reactions to the plague, what would he have had the Florentines do instead?

[Source: *The Decameron of Giovanni Boccaccio*, trans. Richard Aldington (New York: Dell, 1930), pp. 30–36 (notes added.)]

The First Day
 Here begins the first day of the Decameron,
 wherein, after the author has showed the
 reasons why certain persons gathered to tell
 tales, they treat of any subject pleasing to them,
 under the rule of Pampinea.

Most gracious ladies,¹ knowing that you are all by nature pitiful, I know that in your judgment this work will seem to have a painful and sad origin. For it brings to mind the unhappy recollection of that late dreadful plague, so pernicious to all who saw or heard of it. But I would not have this frighten you from reading further, as though you were to pass through nothing but sighs and tears in your reading. This dreary opening will be like climbing a steep mountainside to a most beautiful and delightful valley, which appears the more pleasant in proportion to the difficulty of the ascent. The end of happiness is pain, and in like manner misery ends in unexpected happiness.

This brief fatigue (I say brief, because it occupies only a few words) is quickly followed by pleasantness and delight, as I promised you above; which, if I had not promised, you would not expect perhaps from this opening. Indeed, if I could have taken you by any other way than this, which I know to be rough, I would gladly have done so; but since I cannot otherwise tell you how the tales you are about to read came to be told, I am forced by necessity to write in this manner.

In the year 1348 after the fruitful incarnation of the Son of God, that most beautiful of Italian cities, noble Florence, was attacked by deadly plague. It started in the East either through the influence of the heavenly bodies or because God's just anger with our wicked deeds sent it as a punishment to mortal men; and in a few years killed an innumerable quantity of people. Ceaselessly passing from place to place, it extended its miserable length over the West. Against this plague all human wisdom and foresight were vain. Orders had been given to cleanse the city of filth, the entry of any sick person was forbidden, much advice was given for keeping healthy; at the same time humble supplications were made to God by pious persons in processions and otherwise. And yet, in the beginning of the spring of the year mentioned, its horrible results began to appear, and in a miraculous

manner. The symptoms were not the same as in the East, where a gush of blood from the nose was the plain sign of inevitable death; but it began both in men and women with certain swellings in the groin or under the armpit. They grew to the size of a small apple or an egg, more or less, and were vulgarly called tumors. In a short space of time these tumors spread from the two parts named all over the body. Soon after this the symptoms changed and black or purple spots appeared on the arms or thighs or any other part of the body, sometimes a few large ones, sometimes many little ones. These spots were a certain sign of death, just as the original tumor had been and still remained.

No doctor's advice, no medicine could overcome or alleviate this disease. An enormous number of ignorant men and women set up as doctors in addition to those who were trained. Either the disease was such that no treatment was possible or the doctors were so ignorant that they did not know what caused it and consequently could not administer the proper remedy. In any case very few recovered; most people died within about three days of the appearance of the tumors described above, most of them without any fever or other symptoms.

The violence of this disease was such that the sick communicated it to the healthy who came near them, just as a fire catches anything dry or oily near it. And it even went further. To speak to or go near the sick brought infection and a common death to the living; and moreover, to touch the clothes or anything else the sick had touched or worn gave the disease to the person touching.

What I am about to tell now is a marvelous thing to hear; and if I and others had not seen it with our own eyes I would not dare to write it, however much I was willing to believe and whatever the good faith of the person from whom I heard it. So violent was the malignancy of this plague that it was communicated, not only from one man to another, but from the garments of a sick or dead man to animals of another species, which caught the disease in that way and very quickly died of it. One day among other occasions I saw with my own eyes (as I said just now) the rags left lying in the street of a poor man who had died of the plague; two pigs came along and, as their habit is, turned the clothes over with their snouts and then munched at them, with the result that

¹ In his prologue to the *Tales*, Boccaccio explains that he wishes to give amusement to people who helped him when he was suffering terrible pangs of love. Above all, he wishes to give pleasure to ladies, whom he addresses here, for they are always under the authority of men, and "they spend most of their time enclosed in their little rooms, sitting almost idly, wanting—and not wanting—at the same time, addressing various thoughts to themselves that cannot always be joyful."

they both fell dead almost at once on the rags, as if they had been poisoned.

From these and similar or greater occurrences, such fear and fanciful notions took possession of the living that almost all of them adopted the same cruel policy, which was entirely to avoid the sick and everything belonging to them. By doing so, each one thought he would secure his own safety.

Some thought that moderate living and the avoidance of all superfluity would preserve them from the epidemic. They formed small communities, living entirely separate from everybody else. They shut themselves up in houses where there were no sick, eating the finest food and drinking the best wine very temperately, avoiding all excess, allowing no news or discussion of death and sickness, and passing the time in music and suchlike pleasures. Others thought just the opposite. They thought the sure cure for the plague was to drink and be merry, to go about singing and amusing themselves, satisfying every appetite they could, laughing and jesting at what happened. They put their words into practice, spent day and night going from tavern to tavern, drinking immoderately, or went into other people's houses, doing only those things which pleased them. This they could easily do because everyone felt doomed and had abandoned his property, so that most houses became common property and any stranger who went in made use of them as if he had owned them. And with all this bestial behavior, they avoided the sick as much as possible.

In this suffering and misery of our city, the authority of human and divine laws almost disappeared, for, like other men, the ministers and the executors of the laws were all dead or sick or shut up with their families, so that no duties were carried out. Every man was therefore able to do as he pleased.

Many others adopted a course of life midway between the two just described. They did not restrict their victuals so much as the former, nor allow themselves to be drunken and dissolute like the latter, but satisfied their appetites moderately. They did not shut themselves up, but went about, carrying flowers or scented herbs or perfumes in their hands, in the belief that it was an excellent thing to comfort the brain with such odors, for the whole air was infected with the smell of dead bodies, of sick persons and medicines.

Others again held a still more cruel opinion, which they thought would keep them safe. They said that the only medicine against the plaguestricken was to go right away from them. Men and women, convinced of this and caring about nothing but themselves, abandoned their

own city, their own houses, their dwellings, their relatives, their property, and went abroad or at least to the country round Florence, as if God's wrath in punishing men's wickedness with this plague would not follow them but strike only those who remained within the walls of the city, or as if they thought nobody in the city would remain alive and that its last hour had come.

Not everyone who adopted any of these various opinions died, nor did all escape. Some when they were still healthy had set the example of avoiding the sick, and, falling ill themselves, died untended.

One citizen avoided another, hardly any neighbor troubled about others, relatives never or hardly ever visited each other. Moreover, such terror was struck into the hearts of men and women by this calamity, that brother abandoned brother, and the uncle his nephew, and the sister her brother, and very often the wife her husband. What is even worse and nearly incredible is that fathers and mothers refused to see and tend their children, as if they had not been theirs.

Thus, a multitude of sick men and women were left without any care except from the charity of friends (but these were few), or the greed of servants, though not many of these could be had even for high wages. Moreover, most of them were coarse-minded men and women, who did little more than bring the sick what they asked for or watch over them when they were dying. And very often these servants lost their lives and their earnings. Since the sick were thus abandoned by neighbors, relatives and friends, while servants were scarce, a habit sprang up which had never been heard of before. Beautiful and noble women, when they fell sick, did not scruple to take a young or old man-servant, whoever he might be, and with no sort of shame, expose every part of their bodies to these men as if they had been women, for they were compelled by the necessity of their sickness to do so. This, perhaps, was a cause of looser morals in those women who survived.

In this way many people died who might have been saved if they had been looked after. Owing to the lack of attendants for the sick and the violence of the plague, such a multitude of people in the city died day and night that it was stupefying to hear of, let alone to see. From sheer necessity, then, several ancient customs were quite altered among the survivors.

The custom had been (as we still see it today), that women relatives and neighbors should gather at the house of the deceased, and there lament with the family. At the same time the men would gather at the door with the male neighbors and other citizens. Then came

the clergy, few or many according to the dead person's rank; the coffin was placed on the shoulders of his friends and carried with funeral pomp of lighted candles and dirges to the church which the deceased had chosen before dying. But as the fury of the plague increased, this custom wholly or nearly disappeared, and new customs arose. Thus, people died, not only without having a number of women near them, but without a single witness. Very few indeed were honored with the piteous laments and bitter tears of their relatives, who, on the contrary, spent their time in mirth, feasting and jesting. Even the women abandoned womanly pity and adopted this custom for their own safety. Few were they whose bodies were accompanied to church by more than ten or a dozen neighbors. Nor were these grave and honorable citizens but grave-diggers from the lowest of the people who got themselves called sextons, and performed the task for money. They took up the bier and hurried it off, not to the church chosen by the deceased but to the church nearest, preceded by four or six of the clergy with few candles and often none at all. With the aid of the grave-diggers, the clergy huddled the bodies away in any grave they could find, without giving themselves the trouble of a long or solemn burial service.

The plight of the lower and most of the middle classes was even more pitiful to behold. Most of them remained in their houses, either through poverty or in hopes of safety, and fell sick by thousands. Since they received no care and attention, almost all of them died. Many ended their lives in the streets both at night and during the day: and many others who died in their houses were only known to be dead because the neighbors smelled their decaying bodies. Dead bodies filled every corner. Most of them were treated in the same manner by the survivors, who were more concerned to get rid of their rotting bodies than moved by charity towards the dead. With the aid of porters, if they could get them, they carried the bodies out of the houses and laid them at the doors, where every morning quantities of the dead might be seen. They then were laid on biers, or, as these were often lacking, on tables.

Often a single bier carried two or three bodies, and it happened frequently that a husband and wife, two or three brothers, or father and son were taken off on the same bier. It frequently happened that two priests, each carrying a cross, would go out followed by three or four biers carried by porters; and where the priests thought there was one person to bury, there would be six or eight, and often, even more. Nor were these dead honored by tears and lighted candles and mourners, for

things had reached such a pass that people cared no more for dead men than we care for dead goats. Thus it plainly appeared that what the wise had not learned to endure with patience through the few calamities of ordinary life, became a matter of indifference even to the most ignorant people through the greatness of this misfortune.

Such was the multitude of corpses brought to the churches every day and almost every hour that there was not enough consecrated ground to give them burial, especially since they wanted to bury each person in the family grave, according to the old custom. Although the cemeteries were full they were forced to dig huge trenches, where they buried the bodies by hundreds. Here they stowed them away like bales in the hold of a ship and covered them with a little earth, until the whole trench was full.

Not to pry any further into all the details of the miseries which afflicted our city, I shall add that the surrounding country was spared nothing of what befell Florence. The villages, on a smaller scale, were like the city; in the fields and isolated farms the poor wretched peasants and their families were without doctors and any assistance, and perished in the highways, in their fields and houses, night and day, more like beasts than men. Just as the townsmen became dissolute and indifferent to their work and property, so the peasants, when they saw that death was upon them, entirely neglected the future fruits of their past labors both from the earth and from cattle, and thought only of enjoying what they had. Thus it happened that crows, asses, sheep, goats, pigs, fowls and even dogs, those faithful companions of man, left the farms and wandered at their will through the fields, where the wheat crops stood abandoned, unreaped and ungarnered. Many of these animals seemed endowed with reason, for, after they had pastured all day, they returned to the farms for the night of their own free will, without being driven.

Returning from the country to the city, it may be said that such was the cruelty of Heaven, and perhaps in part of men, that between March and July more than one hundred thousand persons died within the walls of Florence, what between the violence of the plague and the abandonment in which the sick were left by the cowardice of the healthy. And before the plague it was not thought that the whole city held so many people.

Oh, what great palaces, how many fair houses and noble dwellings, once filled with attendants and nobles and ladies, were emptied to the meanest servant! How many famous names and vast possessions and renowned estates were left without an heir! How many gallant men and fair ladies and handsome youths, whom Galen,

Hippocrates and Æsculapius themselves would have said and friends, and at night supped with their ancestors in
 were in perfect health, at noon dined with their relatives the next world!¹

8.2 Warding off the plague through processions: Ibn Battuta, *Travels* (before 1368). Original in Arabic.

Pilgrim and adventurer Ibn Battuta (1304–1368) left his home in Tangiers (today Morocco) in 1325 and had covered most of the Arab world by the end of his travels in 1354. He later dictated his observations about culture, geography, and customs. Interspersed with his descriptions were personal experiences, which he called “Anecdotes.” The one recounted here recalled his trip to Damascus in July 1348, when he witnessed fasts, prayers, and processions meant to ward off the plague.

1. What does this source incidentally tell us about everyday life in Damascus?
2. Who joined the processions at Damascus?

[Source: *The Travels of Ibn Battuta, A.D. 1325–1354*, trans. Hamilton A.R. Gibb, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), pp. 142–44 (notes omitted).]

Among the sanctuaries of Damascus which are celebrated for their blessed power is the Mosque of the Footprints (Masjid al-Aqdam), which lies two miles to the south of Damascus, alongside the main highway which leads to the illustrious Hijaz, Jerusalem, and Egypt. It is a large mosque, abundant in blessing, and possessing many endowments, and the people of Damascus hold it in great veneration. The footprints from which it derives its name are certain footprints impressed upon a rock there, which are said to be the print of the foot of Moses (on him be peace). Within this mosque there is a small chamber containing a stone with the following inscription upon it: “A certain saintly man used to see the Chosen [i.e., Muhammad] (God bless and give him peace) in his sleep, and he would say to him ‘Here is the grave of my brother Moses (on him be peace).’” On the road in the vicinity of this mosque is a place called the Red Sandhill; and near Jerusalem and Jericho there is a place which is also called the Red Sandhill and which is revered by the Jews.

Anecdote. I witnessed at the time of the Great Plague at Damascus in the latter part of the month of Second Rabi‘ of the year 49 [July 1348] a remarkable instance of the

veneration of the people of Damascus for this mosque. Arghun-Shah, king of the emirs and the Sultan’s viceroy,² ordered a crier to proclaim through Damascus that the people should fast for three days and that no one should cook in the bazaar during the daytime anything to be eaten (for most of the people there eat no food but what has been prepared in the bazaar). So the people fasted for three successive days, the last of which was a Thursday. At the end of this period the emirs, sharifs, qadis, doctors of the Law, and all other classes of the people in their several degrees, assembled in the Great Mosque, until it was filled to overflowing with them, and spent the Thursday night there in prayers and liturgies and supplications. Then, after performing the dawn prayer [on the Friday morning], they all went out together on foot carrying Qur’ans in their hands—the emirs too barefooted. The entire population of the city joined in the exodus, male and female, small and large; the Jews went out with their book of the Law and the Christians with their Gospel, their women and children with them; the whole concourse of them in tears and humble supplications, imploring the favor of God through His Books and His Prophets. They made

¹ Galen, Hippocrates, and Æsculapius were famous doctors of the ancient world.

² The ruler of Damascus was the Mamluk sultan.

their way to the Mosque of the Footprints and remained there in supplication and invocation until near midday, then returned to the city and held the Friday service. God Most High lightened their affliction; the number of

deaths in a single day reached a maximum of two thousand, whereas the number rose in Cairo and Old Cairo to twenty-four thousand in a day.

8.3 Warding off the plague through prayer: Archbishop William, *Letter to His Official at York* (July 1348). Original in Latin.

During the same month as the Damascus processions, the English archbishop of York William de la Zouche (r.1342–1352) wrote from his residence at Cawood, a few miles southwest of York, to arrange for special processions, prayers, and masses to be held in his diocese to ward off the plague, which had already hit France.

1. What commonalities and what differences were there in York's and Damascus's responses to the plague?
2. What explanation for the plague does William give?

[Source: *The Black Death*, ed. and trans. Rosemary Horrox (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), pp. 111–12.]

Since the life of man on earth is a war, no wonder if those fighting amidst the miseries of this world are unsettled by the mutability of events: now favorable, now contrary. For Almighty God sometimes allows those he loves to be troubled while their strength is perfected in weakness by an outpouring of spiritual grace. There can be no one who does not know, since it is now public knowledge, how great a mortality, pestilence, and infection of the air are now threatening various parts of the world, and especially England; and this is surely caused by the sins of men who, while enjoying good times, forget that such things are the gifts of the most high giver. Thus, since the inevitable human fate, pitiless death, which spares no one, now threatens us, unless the holy clemency of the Savior is shown to his people from on high, the only hope is to hurry back to him alone, whose mercy outweighs justice and who, most generous in forgiving, rejoices heartily in the conversion of sinners; humbly urging him with orisons and prayers that he, the kind and merciful Almighty God, should turn away his anger and remove the pestilence and drive away the infection from the people whom he redeemed with his precious blood.

Therefore we command, and order you to let it be known with all possible haste, that devout processions are to be held every Wednesday and Friday in our cathedral church, in other collegiate and conventual churches, and in every parish church in our city and diocese, with a solemn chanting of the litany, and that a special prayer be said in mass every day for allaying the plague and pestilence, and likewise prayers for the lord king and for the good estate of the church, the realm and the whole people of England, so that the Savior, harkening to the constant entreaties, will pardon and come to the rescue of the creation which God fashioned in his own image.

And we, trusting in the mercy of Almighty God and the merits and prayers of his mother, the glorious Virgin Mary, and of the blessed apostles Peter and Paul, and of the most holy confessor William and of all the saints, have released 40 days of the penance enjoined by the gracious God on all our parishioners and on others whose dioceses have approved and accepted this our indulgence, for sins for which they are penitent, contrite, and have made confession, if they pray devoutly for these things, celebrate masses, undertake processions or are present at

them, or perform other offices of pious devotion.¹ And you are to ensure that these things are speedily put into

effect in every archdeaconry within our diocese by the archdeacons or their officials. Farewell.

8.4 Blaming the Jews for the Black Death: Heinrich von Diessenhoven, *On the Persecution of the Jews* (c.1350). Original in Latin.



In the thirteenth century, European Jews were accused of having arcane and evil knowledge. In the fourteenth century, this idea became lethal when the Black Death struck. Outcasts of every sort—lepers, beggars, and Jews—were accused of spreading poison. Soon the accusations focused on the Jews, who were killed (among other places) in parts of France, Germany, the Low Countries, and Italy. In the *Ecclesiastical History* of Heinrich von Diessenhoven (d.1376), a canon lawyer close to the Hapsburg dynasty, the burning of Jews in Germany was treated as God's way to confound his enemies.

1. How was the guilt of the Jews “proven”?
2. Who tried to protect the Jews throughout this episode?

[Source: *The Black Death*, ed. and trans. Rosemary Horrox (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), pp. 208–10 (some notes added).]

The persecution of the Jews began in November 1348, and the first outbreak in Germany was at Sölden, where all the Jews were burnt on the strength of a rumor that they had poisoned wells and rivers, as was afterwards confirmed by their own confessions and also by the confessions of Christians whom they had corrupted and who had been induced by the Jews to carry out the deed. And some of the Jews who were newly baptized said the same. Some of these remained in the faith but some others relapsed, and when these were placed upon the wheel² they confessed that they had themselves sprinkled poison or poisoned rivers. And thus no doubt remained of their deceitfulness which had now been revealed.

Within the revolution of one year, that is from All Saints [November 1] 1348 until Michaelmas [September 29] 1349 all the Jews between Cologne and Austria were burnt and killed for this crime, young men and maidens

and the old along with the rest. And blessed be God who confounded the ungodly who were plotting the extinction of his church, not realizing that it is founded on a sure rock and who, in trying to overturn it, crushed themselves to death and were damned for ever.

But now let us follow the killings individually. First Jews were killed or burnt in Sölden in November, then in Zofingen they were seized and some put on the wheel, then in Stuttgart they were all burnt. The same thing happened during November in Landsberg, a town in the diocese of Augsburg and in Beuron, Memmingen and Burgau in the same diocese. During December they were burnt and killed on the feast of St. Nicholas [December 6] in Lindau, on December 8 in Reutlingen, on December 13 in Haigerloch, and on December 20 in Horw they were burnt in a pit. And when the wood and straw had been consumed, some Jews, both young and old, still remained

¹ The remission of penance was part of the theology of Purgatory, the place where souls of the deceased are cleansed (purged) of their sins for a certain period corresponding to the number and seriousness of the sins. The archbishop here declares that certain pious acts carried out on earth were equivalent to 40 days of penance in Purgatory. Such a remission of days in Purgatory was called an indulgence.

² Breaking on the wheel was a form of torture.

half alive. The stronger of them snatched up cudgels and stones and dashed out the brains of those trying to creep out of the fire, and thus compelled those who wanted to escape the fire to descend to hell. And the curse seemed to be fulfilled: “his blood be upon us and upon our children.”¹

On December 27 the Jews in Esslingen were burnt in their houses and in the synagogue. In Nagelten they were burnt. In the abovesaid town of Zofingen the city councillors, who were hunting for poison, found some in the house of a Jew called Trostli, and by experiment were satisfied that it was poison. As a result, two Jewish men and one woman were put on the wheel, but others were saved at the command of Duke Albrecht of Austria,² who ordered that they should be protected. But this made little difference, for in the course of the next year those he had under his protection were killed, and as many again in the diocese of Constance. But first those burnt in 1349 will be described in order.

Once started, the burning of the Jews went on increasing. When people discovered that the stories of poisoning were undoubtedly true they rose as one against the Jews. First, on January 2, 1349 the citizens of Ravensburg burnt the Jews in the castle, to which they had fled in search of protection from King Charles, whose servants were imprisoned by the citizens after the burning. On January 4th the people of Constance shut up the Jews in two of their own houses, and then burnt 330 of them in the fields at sunset on March 3rd. Some processed to the flames dancing, others singing and the rest weeping. They were burnt shut up in a house which had been specially built for the purpose. On January 12 in Buchen and on January 17 in Basel they were all burnt apart from their babies, who were taken from them by the citizens and baptized. They were burnt on January 21 in Messkirch and Waldkirch, on January 26 in Speyer, and on January 30 in Ulm, on February 11 in Überlingen, on February 14

in the city of Strasbourg (where it took six days to burn them because of the numbers involved), on February 16 in Mengen, on the 19th of the month in Sulgen, on the 21st in Schaffhausen and Zurich, on the 23rd in St. Gall and on March 3 in Constance, as described above, except for some who were kept back to be burnt on the third day after the Nativity of the Virgin [September 11].

They were killed and burnt in the town of Baden on March 18, and those in the castle below, who had been brought there from Rheinfeldern for protection, were killed and then burnt. And on May 30 they were similarly wiped out in Radolfzell. In Mainz and Cologne they were burnt on August 23. On September 18, 330 Jews were burnt in the castle at Kyburg, where they had gathered from Winterthur and Diessenhoven and the other towns of their protector the Duke of Austria. But the imperial citizens did not want to go on supporting them any longer, and so they wrote to Duke Albrecht of Austria, who was protecting his Jewish subjects in the counties of Pfirt, Alsace and Kyburg, and told him that either he had them burnt by his own judges or they would burn themselves. So the Duke ordered them to be burnt by his own judges, and they were finally burnt on September 18.

And thus, within one year, as I said, all the Jews between Cologne and Austria were burnt—and in Austria they await the same fate, for they are accursed of God. And I could believe that the end of the Hebrews had come, if the time prophesied by Elias and Enoch were now complete; but since it is not complete, it is necessary that some be reserved so that what has been written may be fulfilled: that the hearts of the sons shall be turned to their fathers, and of the fathers to the sons.³ But in what parts of the world they may be reserved I do not know, although I think it more likely that the seed of Abraham will be reserved in lands across the sea than in these people. So let me make an end of the Jews here.⁴

¹ Matt. 27:24: the people’s response to Pilate’s statement, “I am innocent of the blood of this just man [Christ]. Look you to it.”

² Albert II (or Albrecht II), duke of Austria 1330–1358.

³ A reference to Mal. 4:5–6: “Behold I will send you Elias the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the lord. And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to their fathers: lest I come and strike the earth with anathema.” This text was taken to mean that after the coming of Antichrist the prophets Enoch and Elias would reconvert the apostates as a preliminary to the second coming of Christ and the Last Judgment. At the same time, they would convert the Jews to Christianity. Heinrich’s point is that because the second coming is not yet imminent, contemporary Jews could not be entirely wiped out or converted, because some had to survive to be converted by Enoch and Elias in the Last Days.

⁴ The sentence is ambiguous and, given the anti-Jewish sentiments of the author, probably deliberately so. Its surface meaning is that he has come to the end of the two chapters devoted to the Jews and is now about to turn to other matters. But it could also be taken to mean that he hopes to see the extermination of the Jews in Europe, as there are likely to be enough elsewhere to meet the prophetic conditions laid down for Christ’s second coming.



Excerpt from Bartolomé de Las Casas, *History of the Indies* (1561)

*Bartolomé de Las Casas was acutely aware of the dimensions of the tragedy. Las Casas began his tenure in the New World as part of the problem, participating in the conquest of Cuba. As one of the colonizers, he was granted an encomienda by the Spanish governor of the island. In theory, the encomienda system gave individual Spaniards jurisdiction over a group of Indians who were to supply the colonists with tribute and labor. In return, the encomiendero, or the Spaniard receiving an encomienda, assumed responsibility for protecting the Indians, supporting a parish priest, and defending the colony. In practice, the encomienda became a brutal form of slavery, as encomienderos forced native peoples to work in mines to enrich the Spaniards. Las Casas repented his ways, and in 1514 he gave up his encomienda to become a Dominican friar. In his *History of the Indies*, he raised an angry voice against the encomienda, which he thought destroyed the humanity of the Indians and often destroyed their lives as well. In so doing, he joined a group of reformist clergy who valorized the native peoples and demonized the Spaniards and their imperialist enterprises. Las Casas stipulated that his manuscript was not to be made public until forty years after his death (he died in 1566). It is known, however, that the *History of the Indies* circulated in Spain beforehand. While analyzing the excerpt below from the *History*, be sure to keep in mind the friar's perspective.*

The Indians of each region [of Hispanola] were allotted to the Spanish residents; and every Spaniard, according to the degree of his thirst for gold and the laxness of his conscience, not considering that Indians were people of flesh and blood, heaped them in the mines, where their untimely and massive extermination is proof enough of the kind of inhuman treatment they received. The perdition of these people was more vehement and accelerated here than elsewhere because the Spaniards were engaged in pacification - as they call it - and they were accompanied by a multitude of Indians taken in the villages to serve them. Thus, they consumed the island resources and did not bother to reseed them, and the whole island was quickly left unattended and unproductive, since when the Indians were not caught or killed, they deserted their villages to find a hiding place away from the Spaniards.

As I said, then, greed kept the Spaniards from cultivating the land while they marched on to harvest the gold they had done nothing to produce. The price of scant nourishment was endless scavenging; thus they forced men and women, with a diet well below sustenance level, to the most arduous labor. As it is true, as I have already mentioned, that in my presence someone told us, as if recounting an exploit, that he had made his Indians dig and form thousands of cassava mounds by sending them out into the hills every third day for a bellyful of fruit that digging cassava mounds a whole day is much more toilsome than hoeing vineyards in our country since it consists of digging enough earth to form a heap 3 or 4 feet square and deep, not with hoes but with cudgel-shaped sticks.

So then, death made speedier ravages among Indians here than in other places, starvation and hard labor helping. Since all able-bodied men and women were away at the mines, only the old and sick stayed in town with no one to look after them. So they died of illness, anguish and starvation. I was traveling the Cuban roads then and it happened that entering a town I sometimes heard crying in the houses. I would inquire and was greeted with the words "Hungry, hungry." Anyone strong enough to stand on his feet was sent to work, including nursing mothers whose milk dried up in their breasts from lack of food and excessive labor, which caused infant mortality at the rate of

7,000 in three months, as someone who investigated the situation informed King Ferdinand [the Spanish monarch]. Once too, 300 Indians allotted to an official of the King were reduced by nine-tenths in three months because they were driven relentlessly.

Greed increased everyday and every day Indians perished in greater numbers and the clergyman Bartolomé de las Casas, whom we mentioned earlier, went about his concerns like the others, sending his share of Indians to work fields and gold mines, taking advantage of them as much as he could. [Las Casas referred to himself in the third person whenever he meant to speak of his life before becoming a friar.] He always tried to maintain them well, treat them mildly and pity their misery but, like everyone else, he neglected the fact that they were infidels in need of indoctrination into the Christian fold...

As I said, he began to consider the suffering and servitude of these people and he remembered having heard that the Dominican friars of Santo Domingo could not own Indians with a clear conscience and would neither confess nor absolve Indian owners, which the said clergyman disapproved. [Las Casas goes on to describe how he renounced his ownership of Indians and how he conveyed his decision to the Cuban governor.]



Excerpt from Fray Toribio de Benavente, *The Ten Plagues* (1541)

Fray Toribio de Benavente, better known by his Indian name, Motolinía, was one of a group of twelve Franciscan friars who journeyed to New Spain in 1523, after the surrender of Tenochtitlán and the establishment of Spanish rule in Mexico. Others were sent to surrounding towns to baptize the Indians. Fray Toribio remained in Mexico City, built with Aztec labor on the site of Tenochtitlán after the Spaniards razed the city. Civil and church authorities often clashed over policies, and Fray Toribio became an outspoken critic of "the Spaniards," his epithet for Spanish laity whose maltreatment of the Indians was, he believed, jeopardizing not only his efforts to convert the native peoples but also the entire Spanish colonial enterprise. Though the two were not friends, Las Casas and Motolinía shared similar views on Spanish treatment of the Indians.

Motolinía's History of the Indians of New Spain, completed in 1541, is a testimony to his admiration for the people he ministered to in the name of the Catholic Church. The History is in large measure an account of his successful efforts to convert Native Americans, but Fray Toribio also described the people and their customs, the landscape, the plants and animals of the region, and, as in the selection below, the arrival of the Spaniards and the experiences of the native peoples at the hands of their Spanish conquerors. At times, he based his account on testimony from those who lived through the events.

In the year of our Lord 1523, on the day of the conversion of Saint Paul, which is the 25th of January, Father Fray Martin de Valencia, of blessed memory, with eleven friars as his companions set out from Spain to this land of Anáhuac, sent by the most reverend father, Fray Francisco de los Angeles, at that time General of the Order of Saint Francis. They came with great indulgences and pardons from our very Holy Father, and at the special command of His Majesty our Lord the Emperor to convert the Indians, natives of this land of Anáhuac, now New Spain.

God struck and chastened with ten terrible plagues this land and all who dwelt in it, both natives and foreigners.

The first was a plague of smallpox, and it began in this manner. When Hernando Cortés was captain and governor, at the time that Captain Pánfilo de Narváez landed in this country, there was in one of his ships a negro stricken with smallpox, a disease which had never been seen here. At this time New Spain was extremely full of people, and when the smallpox began to attack the Indians it became so great a pestilence among them throughout the land that in most provinces more than half the population died; in others the proportion was little less. For as the Indians did not know the remedy for the disease and were very much in the habit of bathing frequently, whether well or ill, and continued to do so even when suffering from smallpox, they died in heaps, like bedbugs. Many others died of starvation, because, as they were all taken sick at once, they could not care for each other, nor was there anyone to give them bread or anything else. In many places it happened that everyone in a house died, and, as it was impossible to bury the great number of dead, they pulled down the houses over them in order to check the stench that rose from the dead bodies so that their homes became their tombs. This disease was called by the Indians 'the great leprosy' because the victims were so covered with pustules that they looked like lepers. Even today one can see obvious evidences of it in some individuals who escaped death, for they were left covered with pockmarks.

Eleven years later there came a Spaniard who had measles, and from him the disease was communicated to the Indians; if great care had not been taken to prevent their bathing, and to use other remedies, this would have been as terrible a plague and pestilence as the former. Even with all these precautions many died. They called this the year of the 'little leprosy.'

The second plague was the great number of those who died in the conquest of New Spain, especially around Mexico. For you must know that when Hernando Cortés landed on the coast of this country, with the energy which he always showed, he scuttled his ships to rouse the courage of his men, and plunged into the interior. After marching forty leagues he entered the land of Tlaxcallan, one of the largest provinces of the country and most thickly populated. Entering the inhabited part of it, he established himself in some temples of the devil in a little town called Tecocautzinco (the Spaniards called it Torrecilla, 'the little tower,' because it is on a height) and while there he fought for two weeks with the Indians roundabout. They are called Otomíes and are people of low condition, like peasants. A great number of them came together, for the country is thickly populated. The Indians who live farther in the interior speak the languages of Mexico.

As the Spaniards were fighting valiantly with these Otomíes, the news reached Tlaxcallan; whereupon the lords and principal men came out, formed a great friendship with the Spaniards, took them to Tlaxcallan, gave them presents and supplies in abundance and showed them great affection. Not content to remain in Tlaxcallan, after resting for a few days they took the road to Mexico. The great lord of Mexico, whose name was Moteuczoma, received them in peace, coming out in great majesty, attended by many noble lords. He gave many jewels and gifts to Captain Hernando Cortés and a very good reception to all his companions; and so, with his safe-conduct and agreement they went about Mexico for many days. At this time Pánfilo de Narváez arrived with many more men and horses than Hernando Cortés had. Put under the banner and command of Cortés, they showed themselves very mighty and presumptuous because of their arms and numbers, but were so humbled and humiliated by God that the Indians, wishing to throw them out of the city and beginning to make war upon them, drove them out with very little difficulty. More than half the Spaniards died in the retreat from the city, and nearly all the others were wounded, as were also the friendly Indians; in fact the whole force came very near to destruction and had great difficulty in getting back to Tlaxcallan, because of the many warriors who followed them all the way. When they reached Tlaxcallan they cared for their wounds and got back their strength, always showing courage; and, making the best of a bad situation, they set out on a campaign of conquest, accompanied by many of the Tlaxcaltecas, and conquered the land of Mexico. In order to conquer Mexico they had built brigantines in Tlaxcallan which can be seen today in the shipyards of Mexico. These brigantines they carried in pieces from Tlaxcallan to Tetzcoco, a distance of fifteen leagues. When they had put the brigantines together and launched them, having by this time taken many towns and won others over to fight on their side, a great number of warriors went out from Tlaxcallan to fight for the Spaniards against the Mexicans, for they had always been their very deadly enemies. In Mexico and on the Mexican side there was much greater strength, because all the most powerful lords of the land were in Mexico and on her side. When the Spaniards arrived they laid siege to Mexico. The captains waged war savagely along the highways and tore down every bit of the city that they captured; before this practice was instituted, so as the Spaniards retired to their camps at night the Indians re-took all that the Spaniards had won during the day and reopened the highways. Having made a practice of tearing down buildings and blocking up roads, they took the city after many days. In this war, because of the great numbers

who died in both armies, men compared the number of the dead and say that it is greater than the number of those who died in Jerusalem when it was destroyed by Titus and Vespasian.

The third plague was a very great famine which came immediately after the taking of the city of Mexico. As they were unable to plant because of the great wars, some of them defending the land and helping the Mexicans and others fighting on the side of the Spaniards, and as what was planted by one side was cut down and laid waste by the other, they had nothing to eat. Although it sometimes happens that there are barren years in this country, years of little rainfall or of heavy frost, the Indians at such times eat a variety of different roots and herbs, for they can endure barren years better and more easily than other races. In this year of which I am speaking, however, there was such a scarcity of grain (which in this country they call centli when it is in the ear, and in the Islands they call it maíz; and the Spaniards use this latter word, and many others which they brought from the Islands to New Spain); corn, I say, was so scarce then even the Spaniards were in difficulties for lack of it.

The fourth plague was that of the calpixques or overseers, and the negroes. As soon as the land was divided, the conquerors put into their allotments and into the towns granted to them servants or negroes to collect the tributes and to look after their various affairs. These men lived, and still live, in the villages, and though for the most part they are peasants. . . from Spain they have taken possession of the land and order the native lords around as if the latter were their slaves. Because I do not wish to disclose their defects, I shall keep silent about what I think and only say that they make themselves feared and insist upon service as if they were the absolute and natural masters. They never do anything but demand, and however much people give them they are never content, for wherever they are they infect and corrupt everything, as foul as putrid flesh. They make no effort to do anything except give orders. They are the drones who eat the honey made by the poor bees who are the Indians, and they are not satisfied with what the poor things give them, but keep demanding. In the first years these overseers were absolute in their maltreatment of the Indians, over-loading them, sending them far from their land and giving them many other tasks, that many Indians died because of them and at their hands, which is the worst feature of the situation.

The fifth plague was the great taxes and tributes that the Indians paid. As they had, in the temples of their idols and in the possession of their lords and chief men and in many tombs, a great quantity of gold, the accumulation of many years, the Spaniards began to exact heavy tributes from them, and the Indians, terrified of the Spaniards ever since the war, gave everything they had. As the tributes, however, were so continuous that they scarcely paid one when they were obliged to pay another, they sold children and their lands to the money lenders in order to meet obligations; and when they were unable to do so many died because of it, some under torture and some in cruel prisons, for the Spaniards treated them brutally and considered them less than beasts.

The sixth plague was the gold mines, for in addition to the taxes and tributes paid by the towns which had been granted to the Spaniards, the latter began to seek for mines, and it would be impossible to count the number of Indians who have, up to the present day, died in these mines. Gold of this country was a second golden calf, worshipped as a god, for they came all the way from Castile through many dangers and difficulties to adore it. Now that they have it, please God it may not be to their damnation.

The seventh plague was the building of the great city of Mexico, which, in the first years, employed more people than the building of the of Jerusalem. So many were the people engaged in the work that could scarcely make his way along some streets and highways, broad as they are. In the construction some were crushed by beams, others fell from heights, others were caught beneath buildings which were being torn down in one place to be built up again in another; especially did this illicit when they tore down the principal temples of the devil. Many Indians died there, and it was many years before they completely demolished the temples, from which they obtained an enormous amount of stone.

The custom of this country is not the best in the world, for the Indians do the work, get the materials at their own expense, pay the stonemasons and carpenters, and if they do not bring their own food, they go hungry. They carry all the material on their backs and drag the beams and big stones with ropes, and as they had no machinery and plenty of people, they used four hundred men to transport a stone that required one hundred. It is their custom to sing and shout as they work, and their songs and cries scarcely stopped day or night, so great was the zeal which, in the early days, they brought to the building of the town.

The eighth plague was the slaves whom the Spaniards made in order to put them to work in the mines. So great was their haste, in some years, to make slaves that from all parts of Mexico they brought in great herds of them, like flocks of sheep, in order to brand them. They were not content with those who among the Indians are called slaves (for, although according to their cruel and barbarous law some may be slaves, in actual truth almost no one is), but hurried the Indians so to produce slaves in tribute — so many every eighty days — that having exhausted the supply real slaves, they brought their children and their *macehuals* (who are of a low social class, like farmer-vassals) and all whom they could get together, and brought them in, terrifying them into saying that they were slaves. The fact that no careful investigation was made and that branding was cheap produced so many marks on their faces, in addition to the roval brand, that they had their faces covered with letters, for they bore the marks of all who had bought and sold them. For this reason this eight plague cannot be considered the least.

The ninth plague was the service of the mines, to which the heavily laden Indians traveled sixty leagues or more to carry provisions; the food which they carried for themselves gave out when they reached the mines and sometimes on the way back before they reached home; sometimes they were kept by the miners for several days to help them get out the mineral or to build houses for them or to serve them, and when their food gave out they died, either at the mines or on the road, for they had no money to buy food and there was no one to give it to them. Some reached home in such a state that they died soon after. The bodies of these Indians and of the slaves who died in the mines produced such a stench that it caused a pestilence, especially at the mines of Oaxyecac. For half a league around these mines and along a great part of the road one could scarcely avoid walking over dead bodies or bones, and the flocks of birds and crows that came to feed upon the corpses were so numerous that they darkened the sun, so that many villages along the road and in the district were deserted. Other Indians fled to the woods, abandoning their houses and fields.

The tenth plague was the divisions and factions which existed among the Spaniards in Mexico; this was the one that most endangered the country, had it not been that the Lord kept the Indians blinded. These dissensions were the cause of the execution of some Spaniards and the injury and

exile of others. Some were wounded when they came to blows, there being no one except the friars to reconcile them nor intervene. The few Spaniards left in Mexico were all passionate adherents of one party or the other, and the friars had to go out sometimes to prevent their fighting, and sometimes to separate them after they had started, exposing themselves to the shots and weapons of the combatants and the hoofs of the horses. They had to be kept from fighting both because it endangered the Spanish possession of the country and because it was known that the Indians were ready for war and had made provision of arms and were only awaiting the arrival of an expected piece of news. According to a conspiracy arranged by the Indians with those who escorted him, the captain and governor, Hernando Cortés, was to be killed on the road to Las Hibueras. Cortés discovered the conspiracy very near to the spot where the assassination was to have taken place. He executed the chief men who were involved in the treason, thus putting an end to that danger. Here in Mexico the Indians were waiting for one party of Spaniards to defeat the other in order to fall upon those who should be left and put them all to the sword. God, however, did not permit this, not wishing that what had with such difficulty been won to His service should be lost; and He Himself gave grace to the friars to pacify the belligerent factions and the Spaniards to obey the friars as their true fathers, which they did. The Spaniards themselves had begged the Friars Minor (for at that time there were no others) to use the powers granted to them by the Pope until such time as bishops should be appointed. Thus, sometimes by treaty and sometimes by reproof, the friars remedied great evils and prevented many deaths.



Excerpt from Fray Diego Durán, *Aztecs: The History of the Indies of New Spain* (1581)

Below is an excerpt from a history of New Spain written by Father Diego Durán, a Dominican missionary sent to Mexico to convert the Indians after the fall of Tenochtitlán. He was one of the colonial scholars who, in the sixteenth century, learned the language and investigated and recorded the history and culture of the native peoples. Durán's work was based on Aztec picture writings and a chronicle by an Indian noble (written in Nahuatl, the native language). These scholars — Motolinía was another, as was Friar Bernardino de Sahagún — made impressive contributions that are still used by historians to understand Aztec life before and after the conquest. In this excerpt, Durán describes the fall of Tenochtitlán, how the Spaniards rebuilt the city, and the treatment of the native people at the hands of the Spanish conquerors.

When Cortés saw the great number of people covering the flat roofs and filling the streets of the city, he was amazed and became afraid that he would not be able to conquer without bringing much harm to his Spaniards and friends. But he urged the Chalaca, Texcocans, Tlaxcalans and Tecpanecs of Tacuba to take courage and finish with the enterprise. All the men returned to the combat and at this time they realized that the warriors who stood on the roofs were women. They sent word to Cortés about this, and the men began to ridicule and insult the enemy. However, the men of Tlatelolco did everything in their power to defend themselves and killed many enemy Indians and some Spaniards, among them a lieutenant from whom they snatched the banner, tearing it to pieces in front of the entire army. In another document I read that they destroyed four Spanish flags and killed a captain by the last name of Guzmán and that the Tlatelolca won glory in this battle.

In the end, though, the Spaniards, greatly aided by their allies, vanquished the Aztecs. King Cuauhtemoc [the young king who assumed the throne after the death from smallpox of the previous monarch] boarded a small canoe, covered himself with a mat and was rowed out of the city by a single man. However, he was taken prisoner by some Spaniards who saw him from their brig, and he was brought before Cortés.

When Cortés faced this youth, a man of refinement and of handsome appearance, he said to Marina, the interpreter, "Ask Cuauhtemoc why he permitted the destruction of the city with such loss of lives of his own people and of ours. Many were the times I begged him for peace!"

The young king answered:

"Tell the captain

That I have done my duty;

I have defended my city, my kingdom,

Just as he would have defended his

Had I attempted to take it from him.

But I have failed! Now that I am his captive,

Let him take this dagger

And kill me with it!"

Putting forth his hand Cuauhtemoc took a dagger that Cortés carried in his belt and placed it in the latter's hands, begging to be slain. Cortés was greatly troubled by these words and though he did

not rise from his seat, he spoke soft and consoling words in Cuauhtemoc and made him sit next to him.

The entire city then surrendered to Cortés, and when he took possession of it, he went to live in the principal palace of Montezuma which now belongs to the heir of the Spanish captain. He put guards about the city and gave liberty to Cuauhtemoc to go where he wished, telling him to ask for whatever he might desire. Cuauhtemoc asked him to free the men, women and children whom the Spaniards had captured, many of whom had fled from the famine. Cortés then gave orders that, under pain of death, all the Spaniards liberate those who were being held captive. So it was done and all the refugees, men and women, returned to the city and resettled in it. But the dead on that day were over forty thousand men and women who, rather than fall into the hands of the Spaniards, threw themselves and their children into the canals. The stench of the corpses was so great that even though bodies were carried out of the city continually, many were left and the evil spell was unbearable for a long time...

The valorous Cortés conquered Mexico on the feast of Saint Hippolytus, three days before the Assumption of the Most Blessed Virgin, Our Lady. It is said that the latter appeared during the conquest in order to aid the Spaniards. It is also told that the glorious Patron of Spain, Saint James, appeared just as his image appeared in the church of Tlatelolco. The Indians claim that they saw him in the greatest of the battles when the Spaniards were losing and their banners had been taken from them and torn, to their great shame. At that moment the glorious Saint James appeared, frightening away the Indians and favoring the Spaniards through divine permission. Once Mexico had been taken in the name of His Majesty, Cortés ordered that the pyramid be demolished, the idols broken, the city razed and the canals filled in. He divided the land into lots, having ordered the people of Chalco, Texcoco, Xochimilco, and Tacuba to bring stakes, stone, earth and other materials to fill in the lagoons and pools that existed. He also built houses and laid out the streets to the best of his knowledge. He considered it safer to found a city where Mexico had been — within the lake instead of outside of it — as the strength of the country was concentrated in the capital and all the inhabitants were ruled from there. He was afraid that if the site of the city were to be changed there might be a rebellion...

After the city had been leveled, after the Spaniards had begun to build their homes in it, the most Christian Don Hernando, Marqués del Valle, saw to it that the natives were instructed in the things of the Faith. He pointed out the site where the church was to be built, he set up crosses and images and ordered that the Indians be taught the doctrines of our Holy Catholic Faith. All of this had been started by a cleric whom Cortés brought with him, though it is my opinion that this man should have been suspended or excommunicated since I have heard that he was more eager to wash his hands in the blood of innocents than Pilate to wash his hands on the death of Christ.

But let us forget my moralizing. In order to convert the natives, a ship was sent to Spain to inform his Catholic Majesty, the Emperor Charles V, then king of Spain, that this land had been conquered in his most serene name. I have heard a trustworthy person say, however, that some advised Cortés not to send any messages to Spain, but to crown himself king of the New World. These persons promised to pay allegiance to him and obey him, but like a true vassal of His Majesty he refused to commit such an act against his oath of obedience.

Cortés also asked that the friars be sent to administer the sacraments, and the latter were chosen carefully and dispatched to Mexico. So it was that the twelve friars of the order of the glorious Saint Francis arrived in this land three years after the conquest. The twelve gained many converts because of their religious and holy lives, like the original apostles who they imitated in everything. They preached and baptized in all the provinces with apostolic zeal, filled with spirit and divine fervor. Each barefooted friar went off on foot to a different region and each was such a perfect example of virtue that in this way they attracted the natives. The latter were much moved by the words, labors, and abnegation which the friars chose.

Two years after these holy monks had come, men from the order of Our Glorious Father Saint Dominic also arrived, and they were no less holy or zealous in promoting the honor of God and gaining souls. These friars came from the Island of Santo Domingo, which is also called Hispaniola. They took charge of the work of conversion and obtained privileges and exemptions in order to protect the natives. They fought the great cruelty and inhumanity of the Spaniards, by whom a great many evil deeds had been done.

Before the Dominicans arrived, Cortés had already gone forth to conquer other provinces, especially those which we now call Marquesado, the hot country. This land defended itself for many days, its ruler being the lord of Yacapichtlan, who was a son or grandson of the great Tlacaelel, of whom I have spoken many times and whose great deeds I have described. The lords of Yacapichtlan are of his lineage. The inhabitants of this land fled to the rocky cliffs of Tlayacapan, Totolapan, and Tepoztlan but when the artillery began to be active and the natives fell from the cliffs, the Indians disbanded, then fled into the hills. As Cortés conquered these towns he divided them and their people among the conquerors in the name of His Majesty. . . .

In this way the Spaniards went from conquest to conquest, subjecting the land. After each city was taken a Spaniard asked Cortés to grant it to him, and he received it as an *encomienda*. So it was that *iuste vel iniuste*, just or unjustly, men, women, and children were taken, branded on their faces and sold as slaves for the mines or as servants. In those times they even loaded ships with slaves to be carried away from New Spain. I myself met some of them in the home of my relatives, and they were marked in the face with the name of the man who had sold them. These slaves had not come from nearby towns but were brought from more than ten leagues away from Mexico. Most of them were brought to the city from the province of Guatemala and from the coasts distant to Mexico. And even though I did not actually see slaves branded with hot irons on the face, just like horses in a corral, I did see these men and women liberated through the intercession of the monks in the time of the most Christian Viceroy Don Antonio de Mendoza.

At this time Cortés journeyed to the land that is called Las Hibueras taking with him many chieftains from Mexico, Texcoco, Tacuba, Xochimilco and Chalco, and among the chiefs went the valorous king of Mexico, Cuauhtemoc. He was taken along as it was feared that he might cause trouble if he remained in Mexico, [since] the city had been left unprotected by the Spaniards. It seems that after a few days' journey he was accused of rebelling against the Spaniards and of trying to assassinate them. Several witnesses appeared to denounce him and Cortés had the Aztec ruler hanged. In this way perished the great Cuauhtemoc, who had ruled over Mexico three or four years. That he might not depart this world alone, the other chieftains whom Cortés had brought along were executed also. Some died a natural death, others were hanged or run down by hounds and

still others died in different ways. Some Spaniards who attempted to kill Cortés and steal his ship were also hanged.

When Cortés returned from this campaign the Christian religion began to grow and the Indians took to it with love and willingness. After the monks had preached to them they began to abandon their idols. They broke them, mocked them, stepped on them and demolished pyramids upon which they had worshipped. Turning to God, they accepted the true faith in One Deity. With great fervor they begged to be baptized, and it was an amazing thing to see millions who came to be baptized and to give up the blindness in which they had lived...

But let us return to our purpose, and speak again of the Indians, who have been the subject of my book. After the country had been conquered a plague of smallpox broke out. This had been brought by a Negro who had come with the Spaniards. A multitude of Indians died from this disease since there were no doctors and the illness was new to them. So it was that thousands died, attributing the pestilence to the Spaniards who had brought it.

From the period of the plague to the unhappy present, this most fertile and rich land together with its capital, Mexico, has suffered many calamities and has declined with the loss of its grandeur and excellence and the great men who once inhabited it.

I will conclude this work by honoring and glorifying Our God and Lord and His Blessed Mother, the Sovereign Virgin Mary, subjecting the book to the correction of the Holy Catholic Church, Our Mother, whose son I am, and under whose protection I promise to live and die like a true and faithful Christian.



Excerpt from Berdardino de Sahagún, *The Florentine Codex* (16th century)

*When Berdardino de Sahagún, a Franciscan friar who came to Mexico in 1529 as one of the first Spanish missionaries, learned the Aztec language, his superiors directed him to compile a record in Nahuatl of Aztec history and customs. The Spaniards hoped to use the information in his record to convert the Indians to Catholicism. Sahagún transcribed the *Historia General de las Cosas de la Nueva España* ("General History of the Things of New Spain," also known as the Florentine Codex) as it was told to him by Aztec elders who had witnessed the events that led to the fall of Tenochtitlán. Sahagún is regarded as a sensitive recorder and translator of the Aztec stories, but it is important to keep in mind that the words you read below have been transferred to paper through the pen of a Spanish interpreter. The document was produced by the victors and must be used with caution, although Sahagún's account is the closest we come to reading about the events of 1519 to 1521 as the Aztecs understood and responded to them.*

The Aztec account of the conquest of Mexico is found in Book XII of the Florentine Codex. Much of the book is a tale of the arrival of the Spaniards in Tenochtitlán, the encounter with Moctezuma, the rout of the small band of conquistadors, and the siege and fall of the Aztec capital city. Even in this one chapter describing the appearance of smallpox in the fall of 1520, the war against the invading Spaniards remained the central theme.

Twenty-ninth Chapter, in which it is told how there came a plague, of which the natives died. Its name was smallpox. It was at the time that the Spaniards set forth from Mexico.

But before the Spaniards had risen against us, first there came to be prevalent a great sickness, a plague. It was in Tepeilhuitl that it originated, that there spread over the people a great destruction of men. Some it indeed covered [with pustules]; they were spread everywhere, on one's face, on one's head, on one's breast, etc. There was indeed perishing; many indeed died of it. No longer could they walk; they only lay in their abodes, in their beds. No longer could they move, no longer could they bestir themselves, no longer could they raise themselves, no longer could they stretch themselves out face down, no longer could they stretch themselves out on their backs. And when they bestirred themselves, much did they cry out. There was much perishing. Like a covering, covering-like, were the pustules. Indeed many people died of them, and many just died of hunger. There was death from hunger; there was no one to take care of another; there was no one to attend to another.

And on some, each pustule was placed on them only far apart; they did not cause much suffering, neither did many die of them. And many people were harmed by them on their faces; their faces were roughened. Of some, the eyes were injured; they were blinded.

At this time this plague prevailed indeed sixty days — sixty day-signs — when it ended, when it diminished; when it was realized, when there was reviving, the plague was already going toward Chalco. And many were crippled by it; however, they were not entirely crippled. It came to be prevalent in Teotleco, and it went diminishing in Panquetzaliztli. At that time the Mexicans, the brave warriors were able to recover from the pestilence.

And when this had happened, then the Spaniards came. They moved there from Texcoco; they went to set forth by way of Quauhtitlan; they came to settle themselves at Tlacopan. There the

responsibilities were then divided; there, there was a division. Pedro de Alvarado's [a lieutenant of Cortés] responsibility became the road coming to Tlatilulco. And the Marquis [Cortés] went to settle himself in Coyoacan, and it became the Marquis's responsibility, as well as the road coming from Acachinanco to Tenochtitlan. The Marquis knew that the man of Tenochtitlan was a great warrior.

And in Nextlatilco, or Ilyacac, there indeed war first began. There [the Spaniards] quickly came to reach Nonoalco. The brave warriors came following after them. None of the Mexicans died. Then the Spaniards turned their backs. The brave warriors waged war in boats; the shield-boatmen shot arrows at them. Their arrows rained upon the Spaniards. They entered [Nonoalco]. And the Marquis thereupon threw [the Spaniards] toward those of Tenochtitlan; he followed along the Acachinanco road. Many times he fought, and the Mexicans contended against him.



Excerpt from Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *The True History of the Conquest of Mexico* (c. 1560s)
Bernal Díaz del Castillo was a young member of Cortés's army who had come to Cuba, like Cortés, to seek his fortune. He joined Cortés in the expedition to Tenochtitlán. He wrote The True History of the Conquest of Mexico in the 1560s as a corrective to a very flattering biography of Cortés published in the preceding decade. This chronicle represents the perspective of a foot soldier; perhaps Bernal Díaz intended to valorize the men who explored and fought alongside Cortés. Although written earlier, The True History was not published until 1632 (decades after the death of the author).

Now as all the towns in the neighbourhood of Tepeaca were at peace, Cortés settled that one Francisco de Orozco should stay in our town of Segura de la Frontera as captain, with a batch of twenty soldiers who were wounded or ill, and that all the rest of the army should go to Tlaxcala... [the Tlaxcalans had allied with the Spaniards to defeat the Aztecs in Tenochtitlán].

When we arrived at Tlaxcala our great friend Mase Escasi had died of smallpox. We all grieved over his death very much and Cortés said he felt it as though it were the death of his own father, and he put on mourning of black cloth, and so did many of our Captains and soldiers. Cortés and all of us paid much honour to their children and relations of Mase Escasi. As there were disputes in Tlaxcala about the Cacique-ship and command, Cortés ordered and decreed that it should go to a legitimate son of Mase Escasi, for so his father had ordered before he died, and he had also said to his sons and relations, that they should take care always to obey the commands of Malinche [the interpreter who accompanied Cortés] and his brethren, for we were certainly those who were destined to govern the country, and he gave them other good advice.

Xicotenga the elder and Chichimecatecle and nearly all the other caciques of Tlaxcala offered their services to Cortés, both in the matter of cutting wood for the launches [to be used in the siege of Tenochtitlán] and anything else he might order for the war against Mexico. Cortés embraced them with much affection and thanked them for it, especially Xicotenga the elder and Chichimecatecle, and soon persuaded them to become Christians and the good old Xicotenga with much willingness said that he wished to be a Christian, and he was baptized by the Padre de la Merced with the greatest ceremony that at that time it was possible to arrange in Tlaxcala, and was given the name of Don Lorenzo Vargas.

[Here, Díaz describes part of the strategy for subduing towns surrounding Tenochtitlán before attacking the capital city. When Díaz refers to the "Mexicans" he means the Aztec inhabitants of Tenochtitlán, not the entire population of the region we know today as Mexico (García 347-349).]

When Cortés found that to succour some of those towns that clamoured for help and to give assistance to the people of Chalco as well would make it impossible to give security to either one or the other, he decided to put aside all other matters and first of all to go to Chalco and Tlamanalco. For that purpose he sent Gonzalo de Sandoval and Francisco de Lugo with fifteen horsemen and two hundred soldiers and musketeers and crossbowmen and our Tlaxcalan allies, with orders by all means to break up and disperse the Mexican garrisons and to drive them out of Chalco and Tlamanalco, and leave the road to Tlaxcala quite clear, so that one could come and go to Villa Rica without any molestation from the Mexican warriors. As soon as this was arranged he sent some Texococan Indians very secretly to Chalco to advise the people about it, so that they might be fully

prepared to fall on the Mexican garrison either by day or night. As they wished for nothing better, the people of Chalco kept thoroughly prepared.

When Gonzalo de Sandoval marched with his army he left a rearguard of five horsemen and as many crossbowmen to protect the large number of the Tlaxcalans, who were laden with the spoil that they had seized. The Mexicans knew that our people were marching on Chalco, and had got together many squadrons of warriors, who fell on the rearguard where the Tlaxcalans were marching with their spoil, and punished them severely, and our five horsemen and the crossbowmen could not hold out against them, for two of the crossbowmen were killed and the others were wounded, and although Gonzalo de Sandoval promptly turned round on the enemy and defeated them, and killed ten Mexicans, the lake was so near by that the enemy managed to take refuge in the canoes in which they had come.

When the enemy had been put to flight and Sandoval saw that the five horsemen, in the rearguard with the musketeers and crossbowmen, were wounded both they and their horses, and that two crossbowmen were dead and the others wounded, although, I repeat, he saw all this, he did not fail to say to them that they were not worth much for not having been able to resist the enemy and defend themselves and our allies, and that he was very angry with them; they were from among those who had lately come from Spain, and he told them that it was very clear that they did not know what fighting was like. Then he placed in safety all the Tlaxcalan Indians with their spoil, and he also dispatched some letters which Cortés was sending to Villa Rica. In these Cortés told the Captain, who had remained in command there, that if there were any soldiers who were disposed to take part in the fighting, that he should send to Tlaxcala, but that they should not go beyond that town until the roads were safer, for they would run great risk.

When the messengers had been dispatched and the Tlaxcalans sent off to their homes, Sandoval turned towards Chalco. As he marched on he saw many squadrons of Mexicans coming against him, and on a level plain, where there were large plantations of maize and magueys, they attacked him fiercely with darts, arrows, and stones from slings, and long lances with which to kill the horses. When Sandoval saw such a host of warriors opposed to him, he cheered on his men and twice broke through the ranks of the enemy, and with the aid of the muskets and crossbows, and the few allies who had stayed with him, he defeated them, although they wounded five soldiers and six horses, and many of our allies. However, he had fallen on them so quickly and with such fury that he made them pay well for the damage they had first done. When the people of Chalco knew that Sandoval was near, they went out to receive him on the road with much honour and rejoicing. In that defeat eight Mexicans were taken prisoner, three of them chieftains of importance.

When all this had been done, Sandoval said that on the following day he wished to return to Texcoco, and the people of Chalco said they wanted to go with him to see and speak to Malinche and take with them the two sons of the Lord of that province who had died of small-pox a few days before, and before dying had charged all of his chieftains and elders to take his sons to see the Captain, so that by his hand they might be installed Lords of Chalco, and that all should endeavour to become subjects of the Great King of the Teules, for it was quite true that his ancestors had told him that men with beards who came from the direction of the sunrise would govern these lands, and from what he had seen, we were those men.

Sandoval soon returned with all his army to Texcoco and took in his company the sons of the Lord of Chalco and the other chieftains, and the eight Mexican prisoners and Cortés was overjoyed at his arrival. The Caciques presented themselves at once before Cortés, and, after having paid him every sign of respect, they told him of the willingness with which they would become vassals of His Majesty, as their father had commanded them to do, and begged that they might receive the chieftainship from his hands. When they had made their speeches, they presented Cortés with rich jewels worth about two hundred pesos de oro. When Cortés thoroughly understood what they had said, he showed them much kindness and embraced them, and under his hand gave the Lordship of Chalco to the elder brother with more than the half of the subject pueblos, and those of Tlamanalco and Chimal he gave to the younger brother together with Ayotzingo and other subject pueblos.

Cortés begged the chieftains to wait in Texcoco for two days, as he was about to send a Captain to Tlaxcala, for the timber and planking, who would take them in his company, and conduct them to their country, so that the Mexicans should not attack them on the road; for this they thanked him greatly and went away well contented.



Excerpts describing the 1576 Cocoliztli Epidemic

Smallpox was not the only epidemic to strike the New World after the arrival of the Spaniards. Cocoliztli is the Nahuatl word for pestilence and both word and concept appeared in the native language only after the arrival of the Spaniards. Cocoliztli probably describes a form of hemorrhagic fever that was new to central Mexico after the conquest, though the exact diagnosis remains unknown.

[Fray Juan de Torquemada's account below of the situation in Mexico City in 1576]

In the year 1576 a great mortality and pestilence that lasted for more than a year overcame the Indians. It was so big that it ruined and destroyed almost the entire land. The place we know as New Spain was left almost empty. It was a thing of great bewilderment to see the people die. Many were dead and others almost dead, and nobody had the health or strength to help the diseases or bury the dead. In the cities and large towns, big ditches were dug, and from morning to sunset the priests did nothing else but carry the dead bodies and throw them into the ditches without any of the solemnity usually reserved for the dead, because the time did not allow otherwise. At night they covered the ditches with dirt... It lasted for one and a half years, and with great excess in the number of deaths. After the murderous epidemic, the viceroy Martin Enriquez wanted to know the number of missing people in New Spain. After searching in towns and neighborhoods it was found that the number of deaths was more than two million.

[Description from Dr. Francisco Hernández, Physician-in Chief of New Spain]

The fevers were contagious, burning, and continuous, all of them pestilential, in most part lethal. The tongue was dry and black. Enormous thirst. Urine of the colors sea-green, vegetal-green, and black, sometimes passing from the greenish color to the pale. Pulse was frequent, fast, small, and weak — sometimes even null. The eyes and the whole body were yellow. This stage was followed by delirium and seizures. Then, hard and painful nodules appeared behind one or both ears along with heartache, chest pain, abdominal pain, tremor, great anxiety, and dysentery [diarrhea]. The blood that flowed when cutting a vein had a green color or was very pale [and] dry... In some cases gangrene... invaded their lips, pudendal [genital] regions, and other regions of the body with putrefact members. Blood flowed from the ears and in many cases blood truly gushed from the nose. Of those with recurring disease, almost none was saved. Many were saved if the flux of blood through the nose was stopped in time; the rest died. Those attacked by dysentery were usually saved if they complied with the medication. The abscesses behind the ears were not lethal. If somehow their size was reduced either by spontaneous maturation or given exit by perforation with cauteries [heated instruments], the liquid part of the blood flowed or the pus was eliminated; and with it the cause of the disease was also eliminated, as was the case of those with abundant and pale urine. At autopsy, the liver was greatly enlarged. The heart was black, first draining a yellowish liquid and then black blood. The spleen and lungs were black and semi-putrefacted... the abdomen dry. The rest of the body, anywhere it was cut, was extremely pale. This epidemic attacked mainly young people and seldom the elder ones. Even if old people were affected they were able to overcome the disease and save their lives. The epidemic started in June 1576 and is not over in December, when I am writing these lines. Of all New Spain, the disease invaded cold lands (highlands) in a perimeter of 400 miles, and had a lesser effect on the lowlands. The disease attacked primarily regions populated by Indians... Vital energy was consumed quickly.