



Invasion

The Maya at War, 1520s–1540s

MATTHEW RESTALL

Introduction: Offensive and Defensive Strategies

IN A 1525 LETTER TO THE SPANISH KING, Hernando Cortés reported what he had heard about the K'iche' and Kaqchikel Maya from Spanish veterans of the first invasion of Guatemala:

They have done much harm to the Spaniards who are there, and to the [native] friends, their allies, for the country is very rough and there are many people, and they are very bellicose and bold in war [belicosa y ardida en la guerra], and have invented many offensive and defensive strategies [géneros de defensas y ofensas], making pits and many other methods for killing horses, in which many have died (Cortés 1983:272).¹

The “many offensive and defensive strategies” of the Maya in the 1520s–1540s are the topic of this chapter. We cannot, of course, simply accept Cortés’s analysis, shared widely among his

compatriots, that Maya resistance to Spanish invasion succeeded due to native bellicosity and cunning. I therefore suggest a set of alternative factors, while still recognizing the Maya capacity for creative war-making.

These factors are grouped into two categories. The first is innovation: to what extent did the Maya “invent” strategies and tactics (or “types of defenses and offenses,” to translate Cortés’s phrase literally)? Some of the ways in which the Maya fought in this period were innovative responses to new conditions. But many appear to have been traditional strategies, tactics, and practices that were applied unaltered or slightly adapted from Pre-Columbian times. Few, if any, are unique to the history of warfare. Thus, how the Maya fought in these wars is often unsurprising, recognizable, even predictable. Yet details of Maya fighting are relatively unstudied by Mayanists and virtually unstudied for the Spanish conquest period.²

The second category is the “landscape of war” (Scherer and Golden, this volume): to what extent



figure 4.1

Map of the Maya area, highlighting the four regions studied here and showing toponyms mentioned in the chapter. (Map by Matthew Restall.)

were the patterns and outcomes of Spanish invasions—and Maya responses to them—determined by local landscapes, natural and built? In order to propose some answers to that question, I have chosen to examine four distinct regions where Maya fought Spanish or Spanish-led invaders before 1550 (Figure 4.1).

Where, When, and What: Four Regions

The first region is highland Guatemala, specifically the valleys that made up the three kingdoms of the K'iche', Kaqchikel, and Tz'utujil. These experienced two massive Spanish-Nahua invasions, one led by Pedro de Alvarado in 1524–1526 and the other by his brother Jorge in 1527–1529. Pedro died two decades later in northern Mexico (Figure 4.2), leaving behind a reputation as a man quick to violence; his assault on the highlands underscored that infamy, and only after five years of devastating warfare was a permanent Spanish presence established in Guatemala. Sources on the war include sixteenth-century written accounts by Spaniards, Nahuas, and Mayas, as well as visual sources created by Nahuas (see Restall and Asselbergs 2007).

The second region is the Chontal Maya kingdom of Acalan-Tixchel (or Tamactun, as its inhabitants called it). According to its own community history (the *Title of Acalan-Tixchel*, see Restall 1998:53–76), Tamactun in the fifteenth century stretched from Tabasco to the Usumacinta to Chetumal Bay but by the 1520s comprised seventy-six villages in the Yucatan's southwest corner. The kingdom received Spanish expeditions under Cortés in 1525 and Alonso Dávila (or de Ávila) in 1530 (with further Chontal–Spanish contact later in the century). The kingdom experienced some tension and violence in 1525 and 1530 but no warfare; neither side opted to mount an attack. The Tamactun case thus offers a contrast to the other three. Tamactun gradually became a nominal part of colonial Yucatan without having been conquered; it flourished in this state of ambiguity into the seventeenth century before gradually fading into a forgotten frontier.

The third region is northern Yucatan, where the Maya fought Spanish incursions for thirty years—from the coastal attacks on the Hernández de Córdoba and Grijalva expeditions (1517 and 1518) to the crushing of the so-called Great Maya Revolt in the northeast in 1547. In between, the Montejo family led a series of three invasions beginning in 1527 and culminating in the founding of a colony in 1542, centered on Tihó (renamed Mérida). The Spanish presence would prove to be permanent, but the colonial (and postcolonial) boundary would continue to fluctuate, sometimes dramatically, until the turn of the twentieth century. The “Conquest of Yucatan” was thus protracted and complex, featuring numerous instances of Maya warfare that I have barely touched upon here. My sources are a combination of published and unpublished Spanish accounts and colonial-era documents written in Yucatec Maya (the latter of which are translated in Restall 1998).

The fourth region is Belize. The small polity of Chetumal, the larger one of Dzuluinicob, and a smaller one centered on Tipu all roughly covered what is today central and northern Belize. They faced Spanish visits and assaults in 1528 under Montejo, in 1531–1532 under Dávila, and in 1543–1544 under the infamous Pacheco cousins. The last of these incursions left a string of putatively colonial towns along the Belizean river system between Bacalar and Tipu, but they were subject to the Spaniards at Bacalar more in theory than in practice. As in Tamactun, the Spanish never settled Belize, the Franciscans were largely absent, and the long-term impact of conquest efforts was demographic decline. In the pockets of Belize where Christianity did take root, “it was veritably left to its own devices” (Graham 2011:105).

A century after the Pacheco invasion, Belize had a greatly reduced, but thriving, Maya population, with no Spaniards there or within a hundred miles. For the pre-eighteenth-century Spanish, Belize (or “Walix”) remained nowhere, neither Yucatan nor Guatemala, “neither here nor there,” “liminal, elusive, shifting” (Graham 2011:107). By the same token, the Maya of Belize did not write in the colonial period—neither in Spanish nor



figure 4.2

Pedro de Alvarado, as depicted at the moment of his death by a Nahuatl artist in the 1550s. In addition to the Spanish gloss, a sun glyph identifies Alvarado by his Nahuatl nickname, Tonatiuh (Sun). He is also given two features typical of native depictions of Spanish conquistadores—both often missing from Spanish renderings, especially later ones. One is the bushy beard; the Spanish ability to grow a full beard was noteworthy to native observers, and the difficulties of shaving during conquest campaigns meant that conquistadores tended to sport beards, despite their being unfashionable in Europe at the time. The other feature is Alvarado's skirted doublet; he is not shown in the full armor that Spanish painters tended to give the conquerors. (Drawing by Matthew Restall, after the Codex Telleriano-Remensis [original manuscript in the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris].)

alphabetically in their own languages (Mayas in Yucatan and highland Guatemala did both)—and so we have no indigenous sources for this region. (I thus rely on Spanish accounts from the archives in Seville, many of them quoted in Jones 1989; see also Graham 2011).³

In historiographical terms, this chapter is intended as a modest contribution to a recently emerged school of study, the New Conquest History. In the last two decades, the New Conquest History has dramatically reoriented our perspectives on the wars of invasion and conquest in sixteenth-century

Mesoamerica, partly through a careful analysis of documents in native languages and partly by mining the archives for multiple Spanish and indigenous viewpoints.⁴ Although I have previously worked with some of the sources I am using here (e.g., Restall 1998; Restall and Asselbergs 2007; also see Restall 2003; Restall and Fernández-Armesto 2012), I am only now considering whether a specific focus on Maya warfare in the 1520s–1540s might tell us something new about the Spanish conquest and sixteenth-century Mesoamerica. In addition, the chapter's setting within the context of a volume

(and originating symposium) of studies that mostly explore Pre-Columbian patterns using archaeological evidence prompts this question: What patterns of Pre-Columbian warfare help us to better understand Maya responses to invasion in the sixteenth century, and, vice versa, how do those responses shed light on earlier patterns?

Case Study: An Evil Plan

In April of 1524, Pedro de Alvarado wrote a letter to Cortés. Alvarado was in the captured K'iche' Maya capital of Uatlán in the recently invaded

Guatemala Highlands; Cortés was in Central Mexico awaiting news of the conquest expedition that had left six months earlier.

Alvarado described how, upon entering K'iche' territory, he had been forced to fight a series of open battles. Alvarado's expedition comprised a combined force of Spaniards, Nahuas, and other Mesoamerican allies—similar to the even larger force that would be led by his brother a few years later (and illustrated by the participants from one Nahuatl town; Figure 4.3). After one major encounter, Pedro de Alvarado entered the K'iche' town of Quetzaltenango (Xelajub'), finding it completely deserted. Six days later “a great multitude of people” surrounded

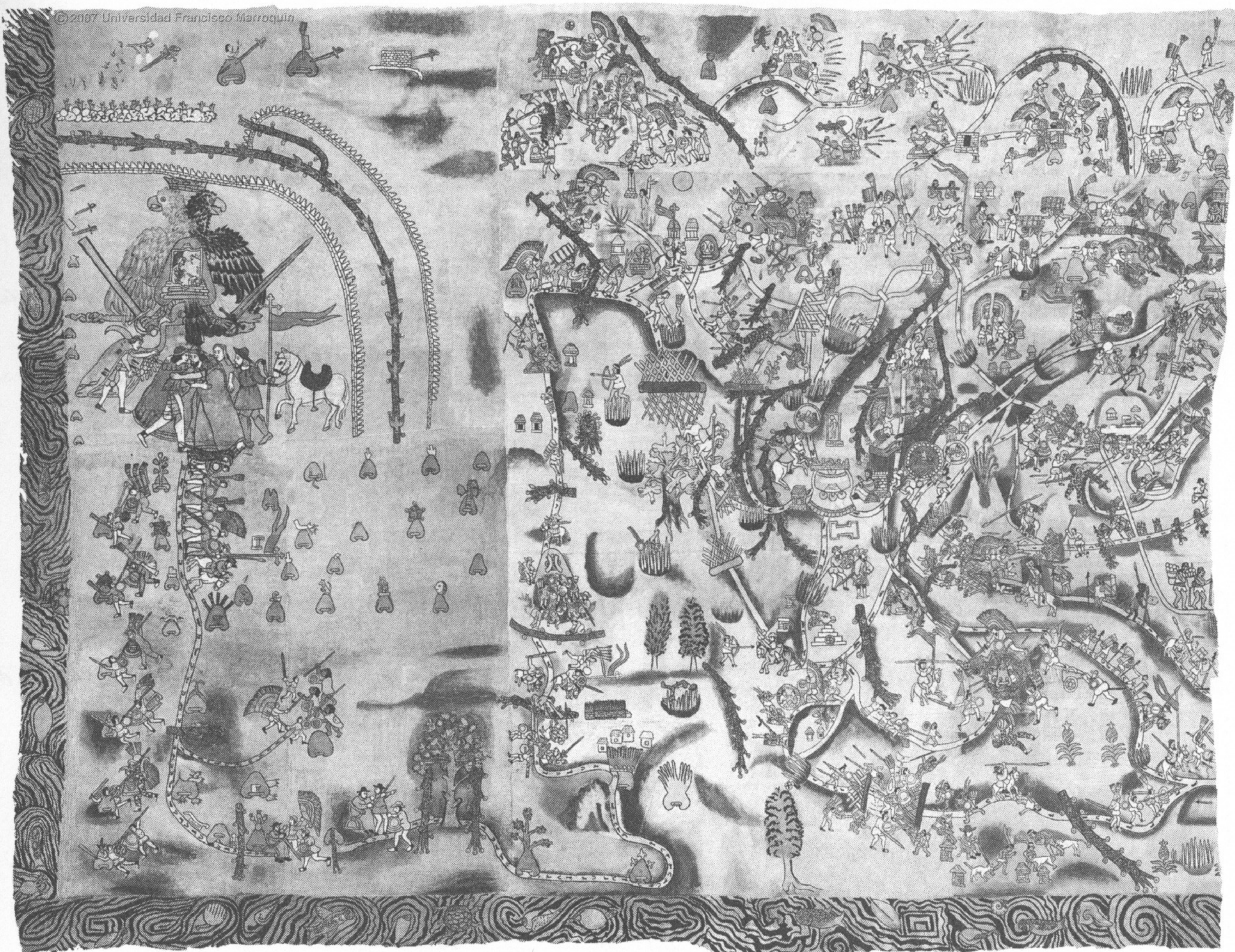
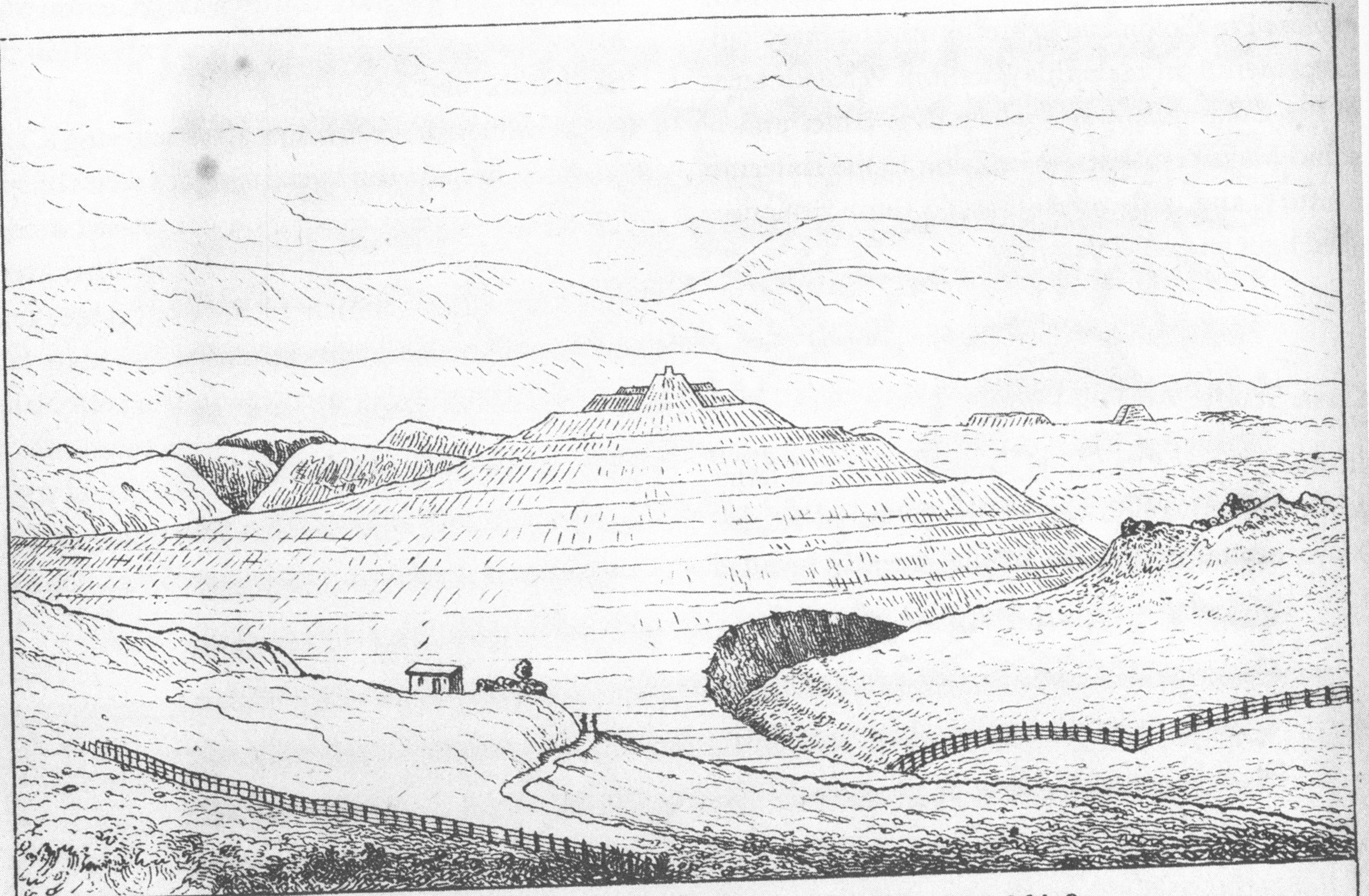


figure 4.3

The Lienzo de Quauhquechollan, painted by Nahuatl artists in the sixteenth century to depict their town's involvement in the defeat of the Aztec empire (left side) and their dominant role in the successful conquest of highland Guatemala in the late 1520s (right side). (This version of the lienzo has been digitally restored by the Universidad Francisco Marroquín in Guatemala City; reproduced with the permission of the Universidad Francisco Marroquín, Guatemala City.)

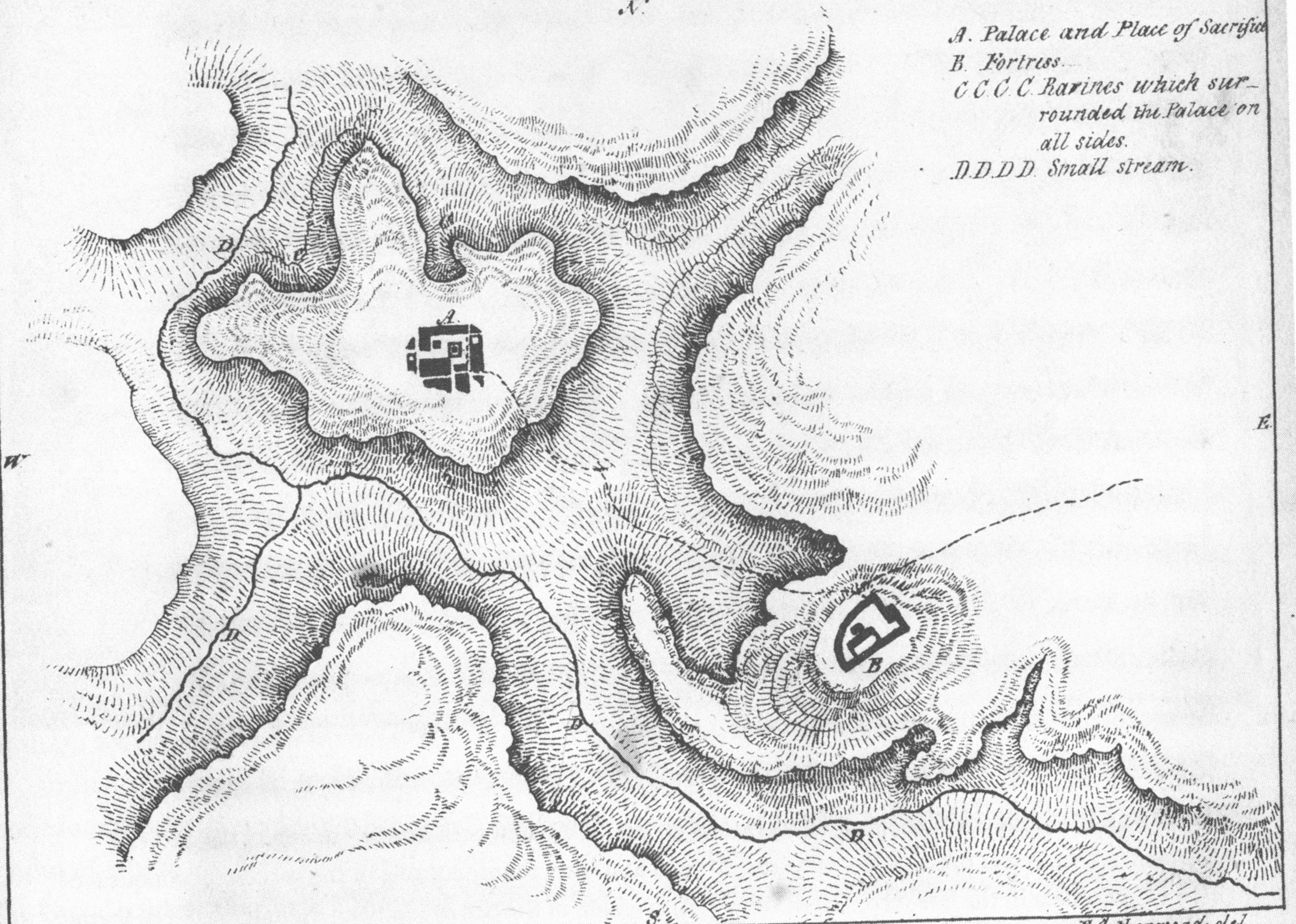


A

DISTANT VIEW OF THE RUINS

A'

- A. Palace and Place of Sacrifice*
- B. Fortress*
- C C C C Ravines which sur-
rounded the Palace on
all sides.*
- D.D.D.D. Small stream.*



J.H. Colen. sc

Vol. 4. Plate 11.

F. Catherwood del

SANTA CRUZ DEL QUICHE

the town (Restall and Asselbergs 2007:31). Realizing he was about to be trapped and besieged, Alvarado broke out and again engaged the K'iche' armies. The Maya then surrendered and invited Alvarado into their capital of Utatlán (Q'umarkaj; Figure 4.4).

But the surrender was a trick. Alvarado's description of the site as a well-designed trap is detailed—he was keen to show how devious the K'iche' were and to justify his subsequent actions—and worth quoting at length:

When the lords of this city realized that their people were defeated, they made an accord with everyone in the land, convening those of many other provinces, and giving tribute to their enemies and recruiting them so that all might come together and kill us. And they agreed to send an envoy to tell us that they wished to be good, and that once again they gave obedience to the Emperor, our Lord; and that I should enter this city of Utatlán, where they afterwards brought me, thinking that they would lodge me inside it, and that once we were encamped, one night they would set fire to the city and there burn us all, without possibility of resistance. In truth their evil plan would have come to pass but that God our Lord could not allow these infidels to be victorious over us. For the city is very strong indeed, and has but two entrances—the one of thirty some stone steps, very steep, and the other a causeway made by hand, much of it already cut, so that that night they might finish cutting it away and then no horse could escape into the country. As the city is very dense and the streets very narrow, there is no way we could

have endured it without either suffocating or else falling down the precipices when fleeing from the fire. As we rode up and I could see inside, and how large the fortress was, and that once inside it we would not be able to take advantage of the horses because the streets were so narrow and walled in, I determined at once to clear out of it onto the plain—although for their part, the lords of this same city advised against it, telling me to sit and eat, and that I could go later, so as to gain time to carry out their plan (Restall and Asselbergs 2007:31–32).

The “evil plan” was foiled, but only just. Alvarado's forces fought their way out of Utatlán and attacked the K'iche' warriors, “chasing them around the countryside and setting fire to it” (Restall and Asselbergs 2007:32). Alvarado then resorted to a tactic that he later justified as a punishment to fit the crime: he trapped the two K'iche' kings with offers of peace and friendship and then, in the central plaza of Utatlán, “in order to ensure the good and tranquility of this land, I burned them, and ordered this city to be burned and reduced to its foundations, for it is a very strong and dangerous place that more resembles a thieves' den than a settlement” (Restall and Asselbergs 2007:33).⁵

What was the Maya perspective on the battle for Utatlán? A K'iche' account of the war, preserved in a colonial document known as the *Title of C'oyoi*, emphasizes how proud the K'iche' were of the “mortar and limestone buildings” of their “fortified capital,” its “stone walls and courthouses,” and how “the soldiers of the great captain, don Pedro Albarado [*sic*] . . . came and quickly

figure 4.4

Catherwood's Utatlán, as published in John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan* (1841). Although labeled “Santa Cruz del Quiché” (the name of the nearby colonial town), this rendering of Utatlán by Frederick Catherwood appears to be fairly accurate and was probably copied from Miguel Rivera y Maestre's drawings published in the 1834 *Atlas guatemalteco* (see Babcock 2012:3, 12–13; Carmack 1981:265–267, 278–279). By the 1520s, Utatlán's platforms, plazas, and stone buildings covered the flattened top of the steep-sided hill (shown by Catherwood as only a few core structures, labeled “A. Palace and Place of Sacrifice”). It was accessible only by a western staircase down to the river (not shown) and a southeastern causeway (gone by the 1830s and not properly shown here). The drawing illustrates how the landscape, and K'iche' modifications to it, made Utatlán an ideal site for a fortified settlement and why Alvarado feared its potential for ambush.



figure 4.5

Tecúm, on the Guatemalan half-quetzal or fifty-centavo banknote, styled as a “national hero” (Tecún Umán Heroe Nacional). (I am grateful to W. George Lovell for sharing his crisp example of the currency.)

brought down all the stone buildings” (Carmack 1973:282, 301–302).⁶

The C’oyoi version does not mention the ambush tactic. But it does take us inside Utlatlán in the weeks before Alvarado reached the town and in a fascinating passage describes the prebattle feting of Tecúm, the K’iche’ general (and grandson of K’iqab’, the founder of the kingdom; Figure 4.5): “For seven days he was carried on the shoulders of the K’iche’ among their houses, carried in feathers and precious stones, anointed in black and yellow, when he was glorified and carried throughout the fortified capital, the great lord Tecúm, the *adelantado* and captain of the K’iche’, for whom they performed a great song and dance” (Carmack 1973:282).⁷ The account goes on to further describe the songs and dances of flutes and drums, the processions in the town and to a sacred place where ritual bloodletting was performed, and the gathering of an army of eighty-four hundred warriors from all the corners of the kingdom (listed by toponym). The description of the subsequent battle centers on the fate of Tecúm, who cut the head off Alvarado’s horse and was in turn stabbed by the conquistador and then trampled by “the trotting horses of the Spaniards in the plains”—a personification of the

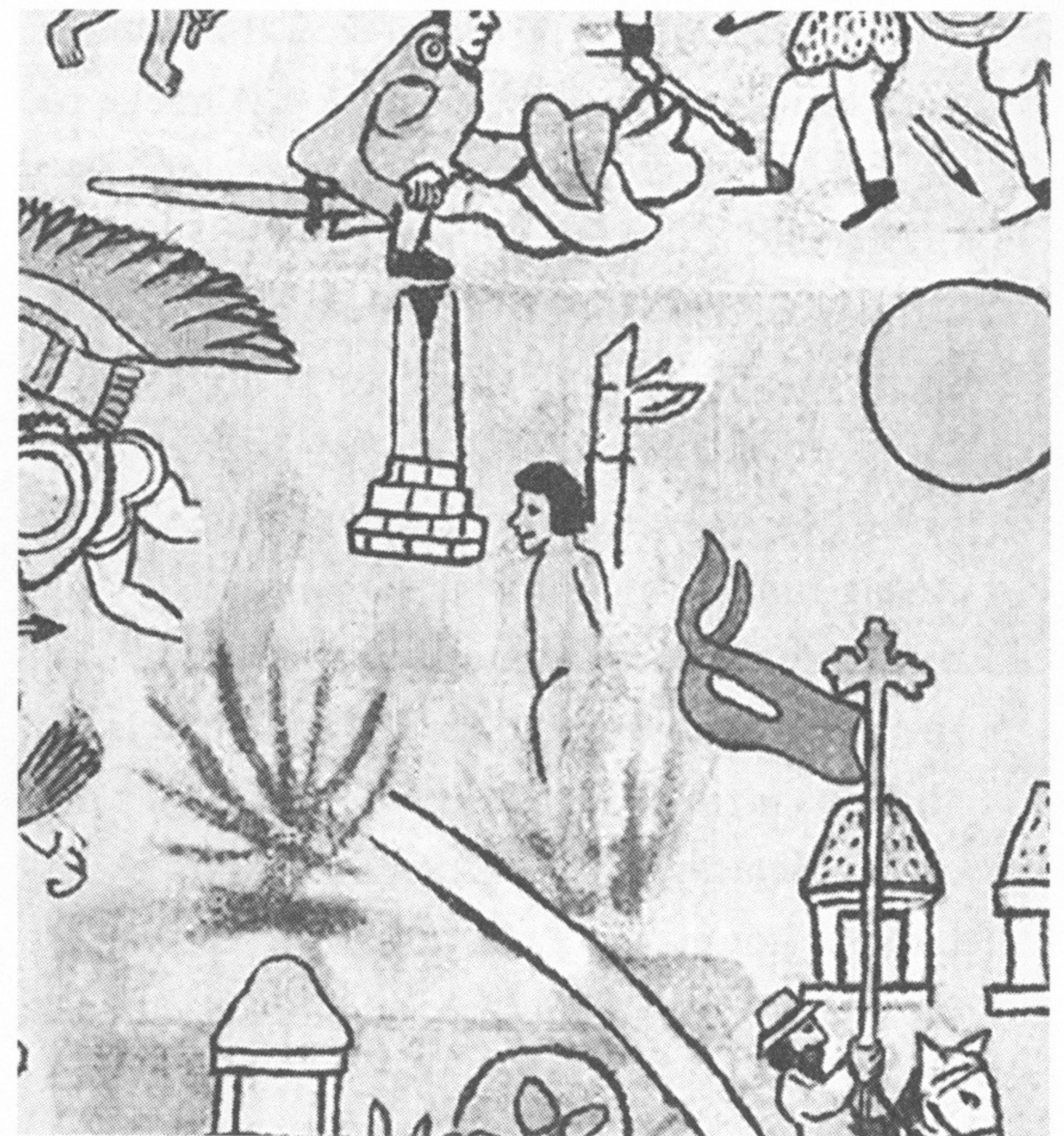


figure 4.6

Detail from the Lienzo de Quauhquechollan, showing Utlatlán as marked by a stone structure and a burning K’iche’ ruler. (Reproduced with the permission of the Universidad Francisco Marroquín, Guatemala City.)



figure 4.7

The Lienzo de Tlaxcala, depicting the defeat of Maya defenders by Tlaxcalan warriors in full battle regalia, assisted by a Spanish conquistador on horseback. (Drawing by Mareike Sattler, after the image in the 1864 Chavero manuscript.)

battle not paralleled in Spanish sources (Carmack 1973:283, 303).⁸

The death of Tecúm and the burning of the kings brought large-scale K'iche' resistance to an end. Both were variously reported and remembered in Spanish, Nahua, K'iche', and Kaqchikel accounts (Restall and Asselbergs 2007:33, 65, 72–73, 98, 105; also see Maxwell and Hill 2006). Tecúm has been appropriated by Guatemalans at various levels, including that of the state (see Figure 4.5). But despite his modern rebirth as

a “national hero,” it was the executed kings, not Tecúm, who were most remembered at the time. (Tecúm is absent from accounts by Alvarado, Díaz, and other conquest-era Spaniards.) The burning of the kings was predictably criticized as excessive by the Dominican firebrand Bartolomé de Las Casas, who alleged that it was Alvarado’s gratuitous retaliation for not being given enough gold by the K'iche' rulers (“and so he had them burned alive, with no further guilt or trial or sentence” [Restall and Asselbergs 2007:72]). The Kaqchikel

stated that the kings “were burned by” Alvarado because his “heart had not been satisfied by war”—a reference probably more related to the conquistador’s demands for gold and other tribute items than his bloodthirstiness (Restall and Asselbergs 2007:105). When the Nahuas of Quauhquechollan painted their cartographic narrative of the 1527–1529 invasion of the highlands (see Figure 4.3), the king-burning had become a symbol of Utlatlán—almost an emblem glyph (Figure 4.6; Asselbergs 2004:153, 156).

The *Title of C’oyoi’s* account of the battle for Utlatlán also credits the role played by the many Nahua allies, “the Yaki people, the great military lords accompanying Alvarado . . . the Eagle and Jaguar warriors” (Asselbergs 2004:282, 301–302). Nahua and Maya accounts generally tend to recognize the crucial allied roles in both invasions of Guatemala (Figure 4.7). Tens of thousands of Nahuas (including Aztecs) and other Mesoamericans outnumbered the few hundred Spaniards both in 1524–1526 and 1527–1529, which has long been recorded in text and image but only recently fully acknowledged in the historical literature (see Asselbergs 2004; Lovell and Lutz n.d.; Matthew 2007, 2012:60–131; Restall and Asselbergs 2007; and the same point applies to Yucatan, see Chuchiak 2007).

The contrast between indigenous records of Nahua roles in the Guatemalan wars and the highly muted references in Spanish accounts is perhaps unsurprising. But it is a clear example of the efficacy of syncretism—that is, the use of multiple genres, texts, and authors in the examination of any aspect of Spanish conquest history, including Maya warfare. With a brief case study in hand, we now turn to three examples of Maya strategies evidenced by these varying, often contradictory, sources.

The full array of strategies and tactics employed by the Maya in the 1520s–1540s—from warfare-avoiding strategies to tactics leading to military victory—would require (and still awaits) a book-length study. I have chosen to briefly analyze three of them here: one, the strategy of diplomacy and intelligence; two, the tactic of urban ambush; and three, the tactic of staked horse pits.⁹

The Strategy of Diplomacy and Intelligence

The Maya strategy of diplomacy and intelligence—put into effect through the deployment of spies or the taking of diplomatic initiative, largely for the purposes of gathering information—would today be called intelligence assessment. It was a strategy sometimes designed to avoid war, sometimes designed to win war. Pre-Columbian patterns of warfare were part of larger traditions of interaction, including long-distance trade and peaceful political engagement. The sending and receiving of high-ranking ambassadors is an important feature of monumental texts in Pre-Columbian Maya cities. That history helps to explain why Maya leaders were keen to garner information about the Spaniards, how they did it, and why they used that information to dispatch diplomatic missions into Spanish-held territory or to meet invading expeditions. Grant Jones (1989:14–22) suggests that in the seventeenth century, Maya emissaries from Tipu and Petén Itzá unilaterally sought peaceful accommodation with the Spaniards, their diplomatic initiative motivated by a reading of traditional calendrical cycles. The Itzá strategy was thus one of war avoidance. In the early sixteenth century, however, Maya diplomatic initiatives seem not to have been part of a strategy of surrender as much as one of warfare: the intention was either to gain intelligence so as to better prepare for war or to avoid war altogether while also retaining autonomy.

Spanish ignorance of the terrain, especially in the early conquest decades of the 1520s–1540s, sometimes allowed Maya diplomatic initiatives to take the form of freely offered guides. When a Spanish–Nahua expedition under Cortés entered Chontal territory from the west in 1525, guides were sent to meet them and lead them quickly through Tamactun and across its eastern borders. The king, Paxbolonacha, tried in vain to avoid meeting them or to host them in his capital of Itzamkanac. But Paxbolonacha resisted an offer from the captive Aztec emperor, Cuauhtémoc, to mount a concerted attack on the Spaniards (Restall 1998:63–64, 2003:147–157), survived twenty days of offering crushing hospitality to the visitors, built a bridge to help them cross one of the region’s many rivers, and

had his warriors guide the expedition successfully into neighboring Cehach territory. Paxbolonacha's actions should not just be seen as a response to unwelcome visitors; they were also a triumph of diplomatic initiative.

Guides often had more hostile intentions; when Montejo and Dávila landed on the eastern Yucatec coast in 1528, guides helped split the expedition into two, led them far apart, told each party that the other was dead, attacked both, and drove them out (Archivo General de las Indias, *Patronato* 1, 1; Jones 1989:26–28). In northern Yucatan, too, Spanish expeditions were frequently misled. More often than not (and not surprisingly), freely offered Maya guides or emissaries laden with gifts and supplies for the Spaniards were spies for their own leaders or were assigned the dangerous task of leading Spanish forces into ambushes. By the time of the third Yucatec invasion of 1540, the Montejos had come to rely entirely on veterans of previous invasions, preferably bilingual Nahuas (Chuchiak 2007). Symbolic of the Spanish distrust of Maya interpreters is the fact that a favorite intermediary of Montejo's (according to other conquistadores) was an African slave named Marcos, who spoke Nahuatl, Maya, and Spanish (Archivo General de las Indias, *Justicia* 300, 3; Restall 2009:17, 114).¹⁰

A slightly different example of the strategic and tactical use of diplomacy at the onset of the conquest period is the pair of ambassadorial expeditions sent by the K'iche' and Kaqchikel to Mexico in 1522. The two kingdoms were fierce rivals, having waged sporadic warfare against each other since the Kaqchikel had broken away from the K'iche' to create their own kingdom fifty years earlier. So, one imagines that in 1522 the two kingdoms put their differences temporarily aside in the interests of gathering intelligence. According to Cortés, whom the Maya envoys met in Tuxpán, they had been “sent by the lords of those cities to offer themselves as vassals and subjects” of the Spanish king (Cortés 1983:184). That, at least, was what Cortés told the king; Charles may have believed it, but no doubt both Cortés and his Maya counterparts understood that a more complex political dance was in motion. For the

Maya, the 1522 embassy had specific precedents: in 1509 the highland Maya had received a large Aztec embassy, and again a decade later Moctezuma sent envoys to inform the Maya of the arrival of the Spaniards (Restall and Asselbergs 2007:1–4). Cortés's response was to send an expedition under Pedro de Alvarado. But as we saw earlier, the K'iche' were waiting for him.

The Tactic of Urban Ambush

The Maya tactic of the urban ambush was introduced previously with the examples of Quetzaltenango and Utatlán. Simply put, the ploy was this: the Maya would evacuate their own urban center or town and the villages leading to it, lure the invaders into the town, and then attack them. Sometimes limited fortifications or barricades were thrown up to direct the invaders into the town center, and often messengers were sent to them with food and invitations to spend the night as honored guests. Sometimes the Spaniards were encouraged or obliged to spend weeks, even months, in an increasingly besieged Maya town.

Spaniards preferred to battle on the open plains, where they could deploy their horses and use their Nahua (or Maya) allies as arrow fodder. The urban ambush turned the horses into a disadvantage and the Maya town into a dangerous maze of unfamiliar streets. For good reason, then, Spaniards feared and fulminated against the urban ambush tactic. By the same token, they often suspected it and were able to foil it. Gonzalo de Alvarado (a cousin of the conquistador brothers) summarized the K'iche' urban ambush technique succinctly: “We were received in peace, under a treacherous plan to kill us” (Restall and Asselbergs 2007:52).¹¹ When the Maya combined tactics—diplomatic initiative as a means to set the urban ambush—Spaniards were furious. Bernal Díaz described in detail how the invaders were almost caught in the Utatlán ambush because Pedro de Alvarado responded to the K'iche' peace overtures “with much love, not understanding the cunning they were employing” (Restall and Asselbergs 2007:65).

The Yucatec Maya at Chetumal successfully used urban ambush twice, seeming to perfect the tactic after their first experience. In 1528, they tried first to fortify and defend Chetumal from Montejo, then let him in and attacked him in the town before finally offering peace, food, and guides—if he left the area. When the Spaniards returned under Dávila three years later, they found the town deserted but stocked with some supplies. The Spaniards took the bait, settled in Chetumal (which they renamed Villa Real), only to find themselves surrounded and under siege for a full year. An attempt to escape west was hampered by treacherous guides and repeated (and varied) uses of the urban ambush technique. Retreating back to Chetumal/Villa Real with most of their horses (eight out of thirteen) killed and twenty-five of the original forty Spaniards dead, maimed, or sick, the expedition again fell under siege.

With escape by land impossible, the besieged survivors eventually managed to flee by canoe down the coast of Belize and were harassed by hostile warriors for the first day of the journey. It then took them an astonishing seven months to travel the length of the Belizean coast to Puerto de Caballos in Honduras, a journey described in heroic and epic terms by Spanish survivors—terms repeated by colonial chroniclers and echoed by Robert Chamberlain (1966 [1948]:119–124; also see Archivo General de las Indias, *Patronato* 1, 1; Graham 2011:128–130; Jones 1989:29–40).

The Spaniards faced no Maya attacks—their enemies were the sea, the cays, the unsuitability of river canoes for transporting horses and heavy supplies, and the lack of large coastal settlements. But, as Elizabeth Graham (2011:129) suggests, the Spaniards surely suffered systematic Maya attempts at sabotage. They relied on Maya prisoners as rowers, but the rowers swam or ran off whenever they could. Their canoes were frequently swamped with water or overturned, so that guns were ruined and swords lost. Maya guides clearly knew the terrain, yet led them to poorly stocked settlements sometimes several days' march inland. Viewed from the Maya perspective, the 1532–1533 journey down the coast of Belize was a successful application of

the tactics that typically were designed to lead to urban ambush: feigned friendship and cooperation, the use of guides and porters (or rowers) to lead Spaniards into traps or away from major settlements, and slow attrition of supplies and support through sabotage and flight. In the end, the journey did not end in an ambush; presumably, no site close enough to the coast was suitable. But ambush was also not necessary. The goal was to be rid of the Spaniards, and it was preferably accomplished without the loss of Maya life and property that accompanied, for example, the 1524 battle for Uxatlán—or the 1532 battle at Chichén Itzá, to which we now turn.

The protracted conquest of northern Yucatan featured various incidents of urban ambush, although they have not been clearly described as such by historians. The most dramatic, large-scale example took place in Chichén Itzá in 1532. Although Chamberlain (1966 [1948]:171) notes that “the Maya employed extremely effective cautious and well-planned blockade and siege methods” at Chichén Itzá and at Chetumal in the same year, the general tenor of his account follows that of the conquistadores themselves and of early Spanish chroniclers. The Spaniards are portrayed as brave and long suffering, the Mayas bellicose and treacherous (Chamberlain 1966 [1948]:134–149), and that description has more or less remained the conventional narrative.

The basic story is as follows: shortly after Montejo the Younger's forces landed on the Yucatec coast in 1532, leaders of the Chel and Pech polities capitulated and gave Chichén Itzá to Montejo to settle (Figure 4.8). Montejo renamed it Ciudad Real and asserted that the Spaniards had thereby “settled a city from which to go out and conquer the country,” in the later words of participant conquistador Blas González (Archivo General de las Indias, *Patronato* 68, 1, 2; also transcribed in Chamberlain 1948:533). When the local population ceased bringing corn, and the Spaniards were attacked by “a great quantity of Indians” upon leaving the city to forage for food, the invaders protested that the Maya had revolted. As one colonial Spanish account put it: “A great multitude of Indians were called up

Despues Chicheniza un assiento muy bueno x leguas
 de Yamat y xi de Valladolid en la qual segun dicen los
 antiguos de los Indios reynaron tres señores hermanos
 Los quales segun se acuerdan auer oido a sus passados
 vinieron a aquella tierra de la parte del poniente, y
 fundaron en estos assientos gran poblacion de pueblos
 y gentes las quales rigieron algunos años en mucha
 paz y justicia. Heran muy oradores de su Dios, y assi
 edificaron muchos edificios, y muy galanos en especial
 uno el mayor cuya figura pintare aqui como la pinte
 estando en el paraq mejor se entienda. Estos señores di-
 cen vinieron sin mugeres, y en muy grande bondad
 y todo el tiempo que vinieron assi fueron muy estima-
 dos, y obedidos de todos. Despues andado el tiempo
 falto el uno dellos el qual se denio morir aunque los In-
 dios dicen salio por la parte de Bacabal de la tierra. Fizo
 la ausencia desse, como quiera que ella fuesse, tanta
 falta en los que despues del regran que comenzaron
 luego a ser en la republica parciales y en sus costum-
 bres tan desonestos y desenfrenados que el pueblo
 lo vino a aborrecer en tal manera que los mataron
 y se desbarataron y despoblaron dexando los edificios, y
 el assiento barto hermoso porq es cerca de la mar x leguas.
 Tiene muy fertiles tierras y prouincias a la redonda
 La figura del principal edificio es la siguiente.

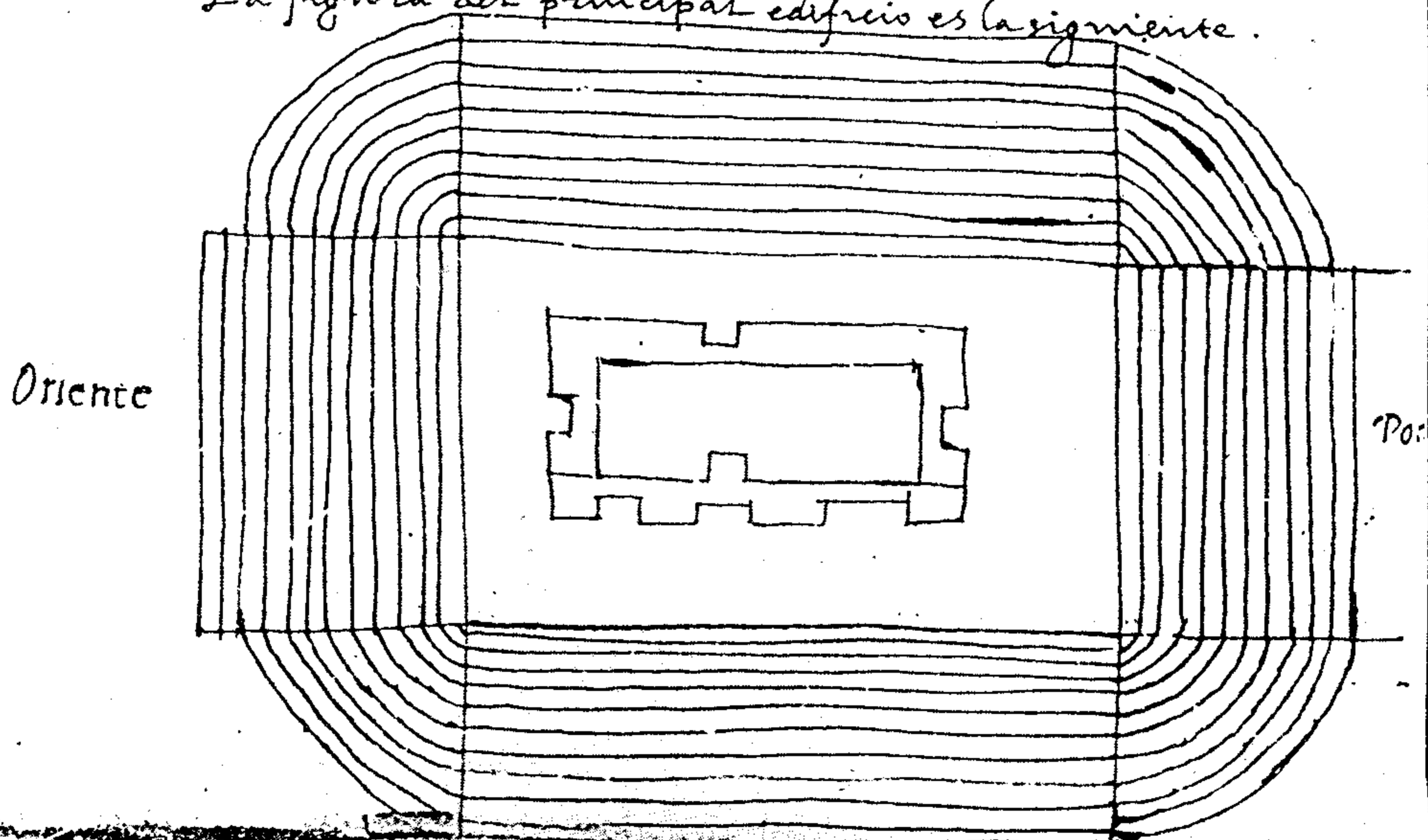


figure 4.8

Landa's castillo at Chichén Itzá rendered in a bird's-eye drawing (Landa 1566:fol. 48v). (Original manuscript [MS #9-5353] in the Real Academia de la Historia, Madrid.)

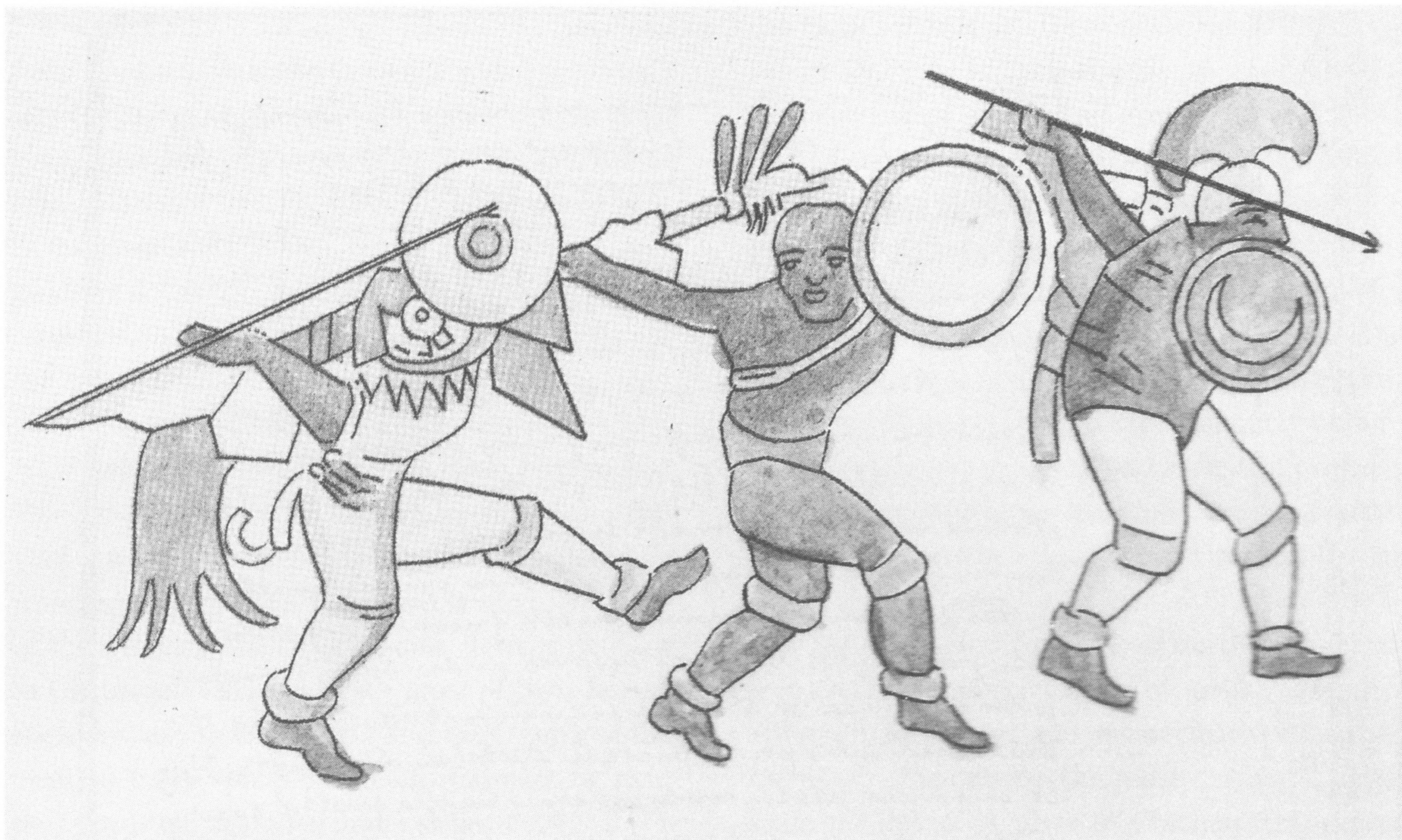


figure 4.9

Warriors at Chichén Itzá, based on the drawings made by Frederick Catherwood of the friezes on the walls of the Great Ballcourt; although the friezes were carved in the Terminal Classic period, and Catherwood's drawings were made in 1841 and often partially imaginative, they nonetheless give us some sense of what Maya warriors looked like as they amassed against the Spaniards in 1532. (Drawing by Matthew Restall.)

and thus quickly surrounded the Spaniards, who were surprised to be encircled by so many enemies" (Cárdenas Valencia 1937 [1639]:17).¹² Things did not go "as planned," Fray Diego de Landa (1566:XIII)¹³ later explained, because Montejo had "made enemies," the "city" was "very far from the sea," and "the Indians, feeling it to be a hardship to serve foreigners where they had been the lords, began to be hostile on all sides" (Figure 4.9).

The theme of Maya revolt was further developed in Chamberlain's conquistador-based narrative. He credited Montejo with selecting a site of "religious importance," "hallowed ground" for the Pech, Chel, and other Maya, thereby ensuring their acceptance of Spanish lordship, which was further confirmed when Maya workers started constructing buildings for Ciudad Real in the center of Chichén Itzá (Chamberlain 1966 [1948]:135–136). A common trope in Spanish narratives of conquest

and revolt is that of the bad apple, the hate-filled deceitful "Indian" who spreads the rot of rebellion; in this case, it was Nacon Cupul, a young leader of the Cupul polity, who feigned submission and then seized Montejo's sword in a failed assassination attempt. This was the signal for the revolt to rise up. The Spaniards "staunchly held on for some months" against a "swelling tide of hatred" (Chamberlain 1966 [1948]:140, 143, 145) before breaking out of Chichén Itzá and being chased west.

Viewed in the larger context of the Maya fondness for the urban ambush tactic, it seems clear that the "settling" of Chichén Itzá was a well-planned Maya trap. While the Spaniards were founding their new capital, the leaders of the surrounding polities were organizing their siege. The Maya selection of Chichén Itzá, centrally located and uninhabited, meant none of the capitals of the surrounding polities were occupied; preparations

for a coordinated attack could proceed. Feigned friendship lulled the Spaniards and facilitated the gathering of information. The Maya account in the Pech titles does not detail a well-planned ambush, but nor does it support the Spanish claim of conquest and revolt. In the *Title of Saci-Sisal*, for example, the foreigners simply arrive—twice—kill some local lords, and then “the Spaniards were attacked by all the Cupul people here” (see Restall 1998:116).¹⁴ Whether the Nacon Cupul incident was apocryphal or not,¹⁵ whatever signaled the start of the siege, the Spaniards did not face a spontaneous uprising but a well-coordinated and fully developed strategy of warfare.

An important factor here is the question of the Maya “city.” In this chapter, I have avoided calling Maya sites cities, allowing *city* to appear only in my translations of Spanish sources. This choice is not just a nod to David Webster’s (2002:150–159) skepticism regarding the term (see also Babcock 2012:19–23, 310–315), but a way of highlighting how Spaniards made assumptions about Maya centers as capital cities; as a result of their assumptions, they were more easily drawn into urban ambushes, failing to see where the important and vulnerable Maya centers of population really lay. Montejo and his compatriots saw Chichén Itzá as a Maya city (*cibdad* or *ciudad*) to be turned into a Spanish one—not just *a* city, but *the* city, the capital of a new Spanish province. Their view was based partly on its scale and its stone buildings and partly on the fact that it was presented to them by local lords as a site that was sufficiently central and significant to be their settlement. But Chichén Itzá was not a city as the Spaniards understood it, certainly not in the 1530s; it was pilgrimage site, a ceremonial center, shared by polities whose capital towns were scattered in far more modest sites across northern Yucatan.¹⁶

Seeing the 1532 battle for Chichén Itzá in this way casts new light on the 1524 battle for Uxatlán. It, too, should probably not be seen as the capital “city” for which Alvarado thought he was fighting. Certainly it was a capital in many ways—the ceremonial, political, religious, and economic center of the K’iche. But it did not contain the homes of

all elite families and many of their subjects, as a Spanish city would have. This interpretation jibes with Alvarado’s description, with the site’s size and location—highlighted by Catherwood’s admittedly stylized drawing (see Figure 4.4 and its caption)—and with the modern archaeological discovery that most of greater Uxatlán’s population did not live in the fortified center (Babcock 2012:269, 289–298). It helps explain why the K’iche’ hoped to contain the invaders there in 1524, protecting their residential towns while they mobilized for the urban ambush, just as the Yucatec Maya were able to do in Chichén Itzá (and to an extent at Chetumal) in 1532.

We have already seen that the urban ambush had a psychological element, a tactic of deception read variously by the Spaniards as treachery and rebelliousness. One additional example of psychological warfare is worth mentioning—an incident in the Kaqchikel capital of Iximché’ in 1524 (Figure 4.10). It took place at a moment that was nonviolent, yet pregnant with the potential for urban ambush. It was never mentioned by Alvarado or in any other Spanish account of the war. Its only source is the Kaqchikel account of Alvarado’s initial stay in Iximché’, and it was written in Kaqchikel Maya. “Tonatiuh was happy when truly he entered Iximché’,” described the Kaqchikel, matter-of-factly.

Tonatiuh slept in the Tzupam palace. The next day, the [Spanish] lord, having dreamed that a frightening number of warriors came to him where he slept, sent for the [Kaqchikel] lords: “Why will you make war on me? Is there something I am doing to you?” he said. “It is not at all that way; it is just because many warriors have died here. It is they that you now see in the pit that is in the middle of them,” said the lords (Restall and Asselbergs 2007:106).

The Tzupam palace was on the square dubbed Plaza C by archaeologists; it was either the skull-rack building attached to one of the plaza’s temples or the large palace on the plaza’s other side (see Figure 4.10). To date, archaeologists have found forty-eight skulls where the skull-rack building

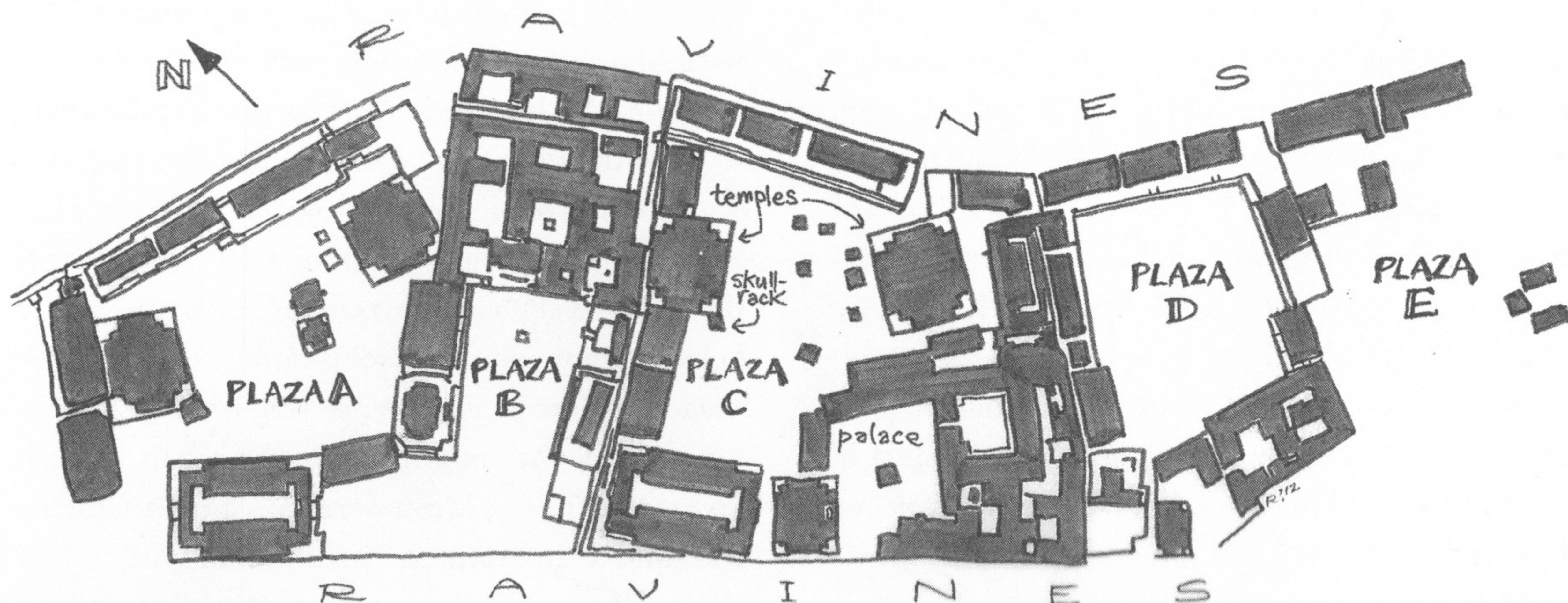


figure 4.10

Plan of Iximche', as it was in 1524 when Pedro de Alvarado spent a bad night in one of the buildings on Plaza C; its hilltop location, with ravines on three sides, made the Kaqchikel capital (like the K'iche' capital of Umatlán) highly defensible and conducive to the execution of an urban ambush. (Drawing by Matthew Restall, after plans in Guillemin 1967:28 and Schele and Mathews 1998:301; see also Babcock 2012:292–293.)

stood. *Tzupam* is Kaqchikel for “skull-rack” (*tzompantli* in Nahuatl). The Kaqchikel term for pit, used in the passage just quoted, is *jul* (*hul* in the original orthography; Otzoy 1999:57), the same word used to denote the deadly horse pits (*jul kej*) to which we shall turn shortly. In other words, Alvarado was deliberately and successfully housed in a building full of ghosts in order to give him nightmares. The next night, the Kaqchikel account wryly observes, the Spaniard slept in a different building.

Did the highland Maya invent the tactics used at Umatlán and Iximche' in specific response to Alvarado's invasion? Did the Yucatec Maya create new strategies and tactics to expel Spaniards from Chetumal and Chichén Itzá in 1532? Surely not, for it seems unlikely that the urban ambush was invented in response to these invasions. Sites like Umatlán and Iximche' were surely chosen to be centers of some sort or another because they were not only fortifiable but conducive to planned ambush. Indeed, the larger pattern of site selection and fortification goes back at least a millennium in the Usumacinta River basin and Maya Highlands (Hassig 1992; Scherer and Golden, this volume;

Webster 1999). To the north, the Yucatec Maya could not build towns on high hilltops or beside ravines because the environment lacks such features. It is thus tempting to imagine places like Chichén Itzá, Itzmal, and Tihó as sprawling urban centers, rather like modern cities. That idea is probably wrong, however; Yucatec sites were surely as fortifiable and as conducive to urban ambush as were highland Guatemalan ones—in their own ways. The heart of Chichén Itzá obviously served the purpose in 1532. And one can imagine Mayapan, with its outer walls and inner maze of structures and smaller walls, creating a deadly setting for the kind of complex ambush-oriented warfare the Maya were to choose in the 1520s–1540s.

Nor do we need to look only to large sites for examples of ambush. Indeed, one infamous village ambush took place during the conquest decades: in a lull between Spanish invasions of Yucatan—in 1536—the Cocom rulers trapped and slaughtered an embassy of Xiu nobles in the village of Otzmal. The Xiu party was crossing Cocom territory in order to conduct a rain-bringing ceremony at Chichén Itzá. The details differ between

various Spanish and Maya accounts, but the consensus was that dozens died in a surprise attack in the village center. Gaspar Antonio Chi later wrote that “Nachi Cocom treacherously killed more than forty lords of the province of Mani, who were passing through his province on a pilgrimage, unarmed and under safe passage—beheading and putting out the eyes of Ah Kulel Chi, who was the most senior of them” (Archivo General de las Indias, *México* 105, 4b).

Only a few survived to tell the tale. “May it be remembered!” declared one Xiu account.¹⁷ Ah Kulel Chi was Gaspar Antonio Chi’s father. A boy at the time of the killings, Gaspar Antonio grew up to be Interpreter General of the Spanish colony, giving him the opportunity as well as the motive to promote the memory of his father’s ambush. He likely influenced the Spanish view of the Otmal ambush—he worked for a while for Diego de Landa (1566:XIV), for example, who described it as an act of Cocom treachery—and ensured the tale would survive. But since the sixteenth century, the massacre has tended to be viewed as a final manifestation of long-standing dynastic feuding and regional warfare between the Xiu and Cocom, and the implication of accounts like Landa’s is that colonial rule, the Pax Hispania, ended such violence. Xiu-Cocom rivalry was certainly real and deep rooted, but Otmal can also be seen in the context of deep-rooted Maya warfare practices. No doubt the Xiu and Cocom had been ambushing each other for centuries, in which case the surprise is not what the Cocom did in Otmal but that Ah Kulel Chi and his Xiu relatives did not see it coming.

The Tactic of Staked Horse Pits

The final Maya tactic that I wish to highlight, one deployed as part of a strategy of violent defensive warfare, is the technique of staked horse pits (Figure 4.11). The evidence for such pits comes from highland Guatemala; both Spanish and indigenous sources on the wars of the 1520s mention the Maya use of sharpened wooden stakes set into the ground. Sometimes these were used in

conjunction with larger barricades (as Pedro de Alvarado details), sometimes they acted as a type of barricade or roadblock (as depicted in the Lienzo de Quauhquechollan), and sometimes they constituted the business end of a horse pit. Staked horse pits are described most often, either because they were used often, because their impact was graphically violent, or because horses were much loved by the Spaniards and much hated by the Maya. Probably all three explanations are valid.

The Maya account of the war against Pedro de Alvarado in the *Annals of the Kaqchikels* describes how “trenches were dug, pits for horses were made, with stakes to kill them. Truly war was waged again by the people. Many Castilians died, and also many horses died in the horse pits” (Restall and Asselbergs 2007:108). Spanish testimony confirms the use of horse pits; in his letter to the king quoted at the beginning of this chapter, Cortés gives particular mention to this tactic. The most detailed Spanish account is by Bartolomé de Las Casas, and it is worth quoting in full:

Then they invented some pits in the middle of the roads, into which the horses would fall and their innards be pierced through with the sharp, fire-hardened stakes with which these pits were full, the pits being covered with grass and weeds so that there might appear to be nothing there. But only one or two times did horses fall into them, because the Spaniards learned to watch for them. But in revenge, the Spaniards made it law that all the Indians of any sex and age that might be taken alive would be thrown into the holes. And thus pregnant and nursing women, as well as children and old persons and any others that they might take, were thrown into the pits until they filled them, pierced through by the stakes, which was a very sore thing to see, especially the women with their children (Restall and Asselbergs 2007:73).

It is typical of Las Casas to turn the topic in support of his argument; his rhetorical strategy is to admit no ambiguity at all, so he must assert that the Maya were *obliged* by Spanish hostilities to dig pits

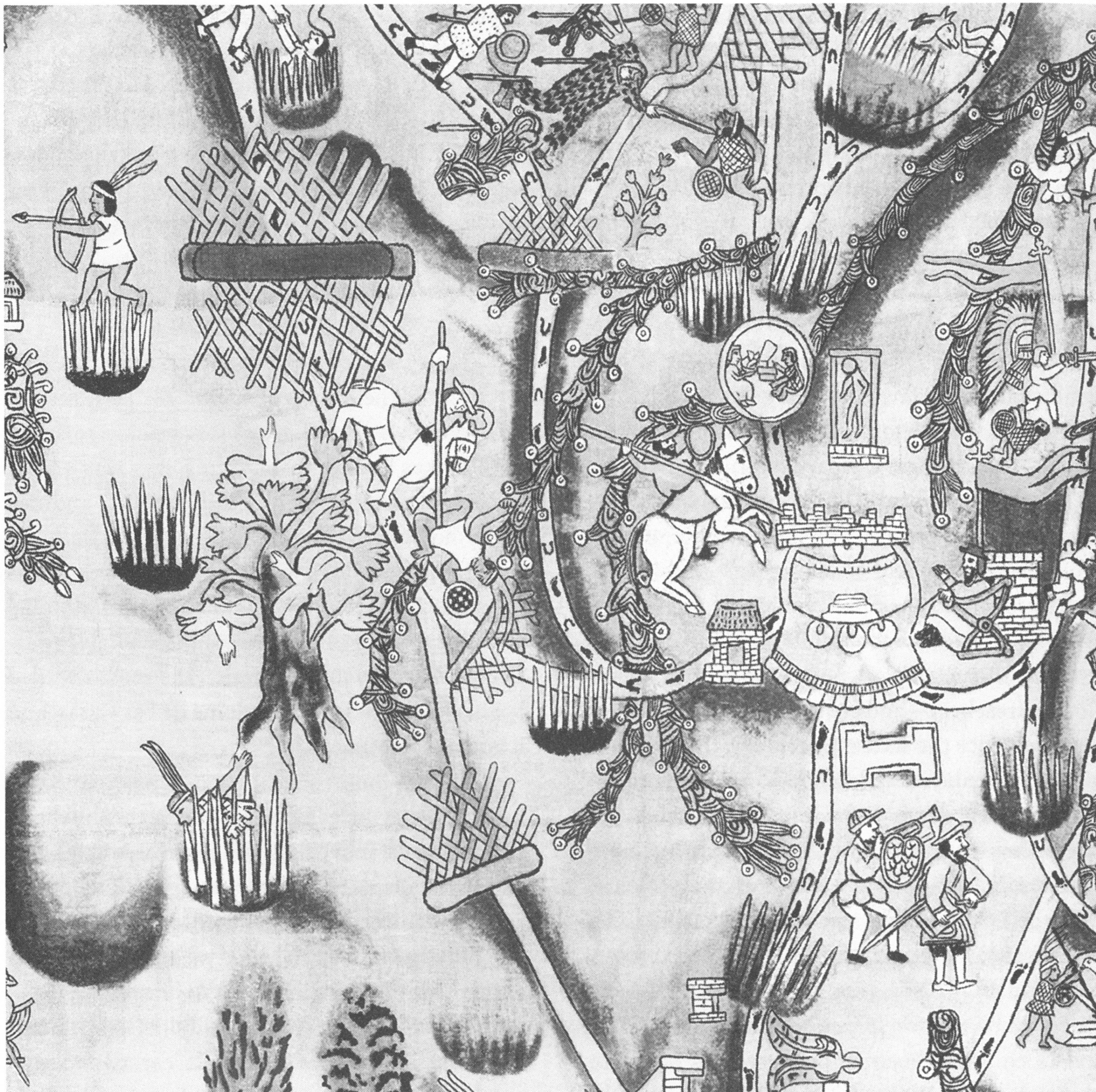


figure 4.11

Detail from the Lienzo de Quauhquechollan, showing about half of the twenty-one staked pits that are depicted on the right side of the manuscript. (Reproduced with the permission of the Universidad Francisco Marroquín, Guatemala City.)

and that mostly innocent, defenseless Mayas died in them anyway. But Las Casas may have had a point: a Nahuatl source—the Lienzo de Quauhquechollan—confirms that Mayas were also victims of their own staked pits (Figure 4.12).

The first third of the lienzo, which covers events in Mexico, contains no staked pits. But the portion that depicts events in Guatemala shows

twenty-one of them—suggesting this was a Maya tactic, not a Mexican one. In addition to the pit showing what seems to be a Maya woman impaled on stakes (see Figure 4.12), one pit contains a horse (see upper right corner of Figure 4.11), and three show Nahuatl warriors dying in them (one of whom is being rescued). The grim novelty of these pits for the Nahuatl invaders helps explain their frequent

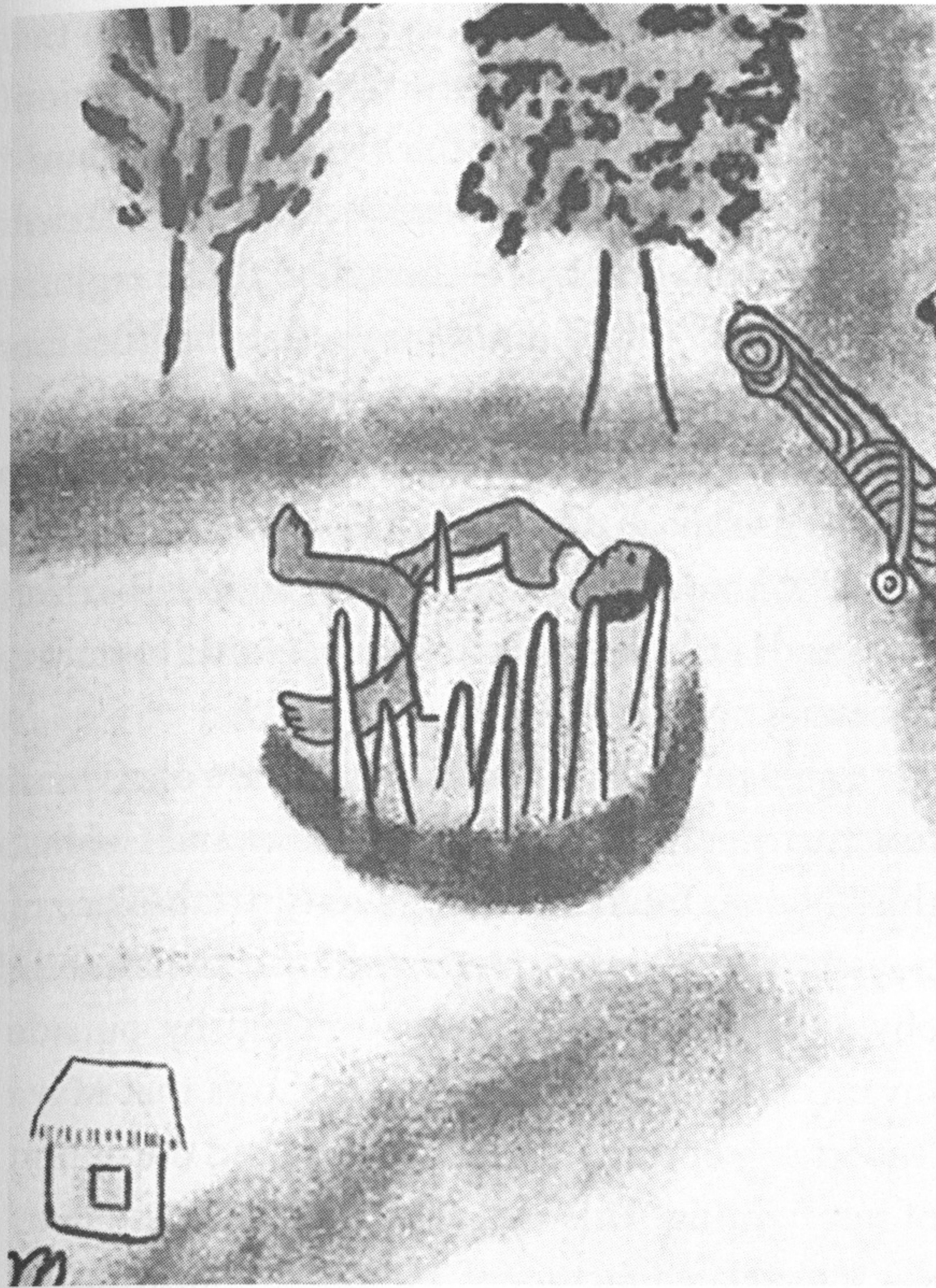


figure 4.12

Detail from the Lienzo de Quauhquechollan, showing what appears to be a Maya woman perishing in a staked pit. (Reproduced with the permission of the Universidad Francisco Marroquín, Guatemala City.)

depiction in the lienzo. We have some evidence that the Maya elsewhere covered staked pits in conjunction with defensive fortifications and barricades—at Chetumal in 1528, for example (Jones 1989:28). But I have yet to find evidence from Yucatan of staked pits aimed specifically at horses or of anything close to the systematic use of such pits in highland Guatemala in the 1520s; environmental factors may have made all the difference, as Yucatan’s shallow top soils were not amenable to rapidly dug deep holes. I suspect, therefore, that this tactic was an innovation—if not entirely new, then adapted from older techniques—developed by the highland Maya in specific response to the Alvarado-led invasions and the horses that came with them.¹⁸

Conclusion: Landscapes of War

The scholars who have contributed to what they call “the spatial turn” have not primarily been historians or anthropologists, but most of us would agree that “no social or cultural phenomenon can be torn from its spatial context” (Warf and Arias 2009:7). As scholars of the Pre-Columbian Maya have shown, the Maya did not view and wage war in a uniform manner; differences of environment and regional history led to the development of “divergent narratives of warfare” (Scherer and Golden, this volume). So how does this heterogeneity help to explain the regional differences in how the Maya responded to Spanish incursions and the differing outcomes of those invasions?

Parts of the Americas on the eve of contact with the Spaniards hosted “frequent warfare” between the various polities and ethnic groups (Arkush, this volume). But in regions such as Central America and the south-central Andes, warfare was not simply caused and defined by ethnic or linguistic differences; rather it seems to have been woven into the fabric of social relations (Arkush, this volume; Ibarra Rojas 2011). This inseparability was arguably characteristic of the K’iche’ and Kaqchikel kingdoms; the former was birthed by a regional revolt against the latter, founded by a warrior-king whose grandson was the K’iche’ general in the 1520s. The highland Maya had trained and equipped veteran warriors, developed efficient ways to mobilize them, fortified towns, and tested tactics such as urban ambush—tactics whose element of surprise surely made them more potentially effective against newcomers than old enemies. Considering the degree to which warfare characterized K’iche’–Kaqchikel relations, and indeed their very identities as kingdoms, it would have been surprising had they not chosen to fight the invaders. Ironically, the K’iche’–Kaqchikel rivalry became a factor that permitted the Spaniards to divide, conquer, and establish a permanent presence.

By contrast, the Chontal Maya of Tamactun had no single archenemy against whom they needed to fortify their towns to remain in a state of military preparedness. Their tactics did not form a

strategy of deadly warfare (no urban ambushes or staked pits), but one of war avoidance. The kingdom's recent history of half-hearted expansion seems to have been designed to create a buffer zone of weak neighbors around them, with "frenemies" like the Cehach to the east. The Cehach had, according to Chontal claims, been defeated in the past by Tamactun and paid them tribute. But in the 1520s their subordination must have been nominal (they skirmished with Cortés's expedition when it entered their territory, led by Chontal warrior-guides, in 1525), while at the same time they posed little threat to Tamactun.¹⁹

The greatest threat to Tamactun prior to 1519 came from the Aztec empire, which already had established an outpost at Xicalango on Tamactun's western edge. The Aztecs would probably have absorbed Tamactun as a tributary province in the 1520s had the Spaniards not arrived (Gutiérrez, this volume, indirectly suggests how that might have unfolded). The Tamactun decision to accommodate the Cortés expedition, supply it generously, and wait patiently for it to leave hints strongly at how an Aztec army would have been received. The irony of Tamactun's vulnerability from the west is that the same modesty of resources—material and human—that would have prevented its sustained resistance to Aztec or Spanish attacks likewise spared it such conquests: Tamactun was hardly worth attacking. In the end, the Nahuatl at Xicalango did go to war against the Maya—but against the Maya of northern Yucatan, as part of the Montejo-led invasion.²⁰

A similar lack of resources did not spare the Maya of northern Belize from full-scale attack; indeed, the Pacheco-led plunder and slaughter of 1544 may have resulted in part from the invaders' realization that long-term exploitation was not viable. But it did spare the region the sustained Spanish incursions that were necessary to colonization. Graham (2011:136) puts her finger on how the two factors worked together: "environmental conditions in Belize" meant it was never "inviting" to Spanish settlers, while "Maya strategies . . . made it difficult for Spaniards to get a sense of what they could exploit in Belize, or how." The

natural environment was thus a factor, but not the primary determinant, in the outcome of invasion wars. Yucatan is flat, with few rivers and no mountains, whereas invaders faced complex and varied highland topography in the other three regions studied here. That did not mean that the Yucatan was more easily conquered. But unlike Tamactun and Belize, its abundant human resources drew Spaniards repeatedly, while its accessible bay (the bay of Campeche, compared to Belize's barrier reef) and landscape helped the Spaniards to stay in Yucatan's northeast.²¹

Scholars of Pre-Columbian warfare often have to ask why polities waged war (Scherer and Golden, this volume; Inomata, this volume). In the case of the sixteenth-century Maya, the answer may seem obvious: because they were attacked by outside invaders. But the Tamactun case shows that Maya leaders sometimes sought and exercised the option of not fighting. This option was made possible by the interrelated factors of Tamactun's location, its surrounding environment, and Spanish attitudes, in contrast to highland Guatemala, which was a landscape of low-level warfare before the Spaniards arrived and was turned into one of devastating conflict by the Alvarado-led invasions.

We would be wrong to assume that Spaniards chose violence any more than Mayas did; we cannot simply throw assumptions of native bellicosity back at the European invaders, as Las Casas did. Despite the war crimes (as we would call them) commonly committed by Spaniards, their preference was for peaceful surrender, as reflected in their privileging of the term *pacificación* over *conquista*. On occasion, Spaniards pillaged and destroyed like pirates, but sometimes they demanded no more than peaceful and temporary (albeit burdensome) hospitality, and more often they came to settle, bringing other Mesoamericans as subordinate co-colonists. This triumvirate of factors—Spanish decisions, Maya decisions, and the landscapes in which the actors met—determined outcomes of relative peace (Tamactun) or extreme warfare (highland Guatemala).

In between the extreme experiences of the highland Maya and the Chontal Maya of Tamactun were

the Yucatec speakers of the north and southeast. From Campeche to Cozumel, Tihó to Dzuluinicob, Maya leaders engaged Spanish and Spanish–Nahua invaders with a combination of hostility and diplomacy, accommodation and trickery, that confused and infuriated the newcomers.

No wonder the Spanish failed ever to settle any corner of Belize. No wonder it took three decades for the Spanish to lay claim to a corner of the Yucatan Peninsula. No wonder the first conquistador–town councilors of Mérida wrote to the king in 1543—when the permanence of the Spanish presence there was by no means certain—that “ever since we entered this land . . . the Indians have forced us into many battles and denied us entry into the country, because they are indomitable Indians, a bellicose

people, raised from birth in warfare” (López de Cogolludo 1688:ch. XII).²² Our happy job is not to accept that the Maya waged war in the sixteenth century simply because they were “bellicose,” nor that they resisted defeat for so long because they were “indomitable,” but to understand how and why they did or did not fight.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to the two anonymous outside readers, to Norman Hammond, to David Webster, and to this volume’s editors, Andrew Scherer and John Verano, for their helpful suggestions and comments on earlier drafts of this chapter.

NOTES

- 1 Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.
- 2 One of the few Mayanists to pay detailed attention to how the Maya fought in the sixteenth century is David Webster (see 1999, 2000), who began his career as a Mayanist by studying warfare.
- 3 Graham 2011 is a splendid example of how archaeology and archive-based ethnohistory can be combined to reconstruct lesser-studied conquest-era stories. Also see Hammond and Bobo 1994 for an intriguing suggestion as to how and why Spanish incursions in sixteenth-century Belize may have prompted a revitalization movement at sites like La Milpa. I am not able to offer any comments on Maya warfare in Belize in the 1540s, as no detailed study of the 1544 Pacheco campaign has been written, partly because the best-known sources (and the ones I have seen) are at extreme ends of the conquistador-narrative spectrum: either the perfunctory apologia of the Pachecos themselves (e.g., Melchor Pacheco’s *probanza de mérito*, “proof of merit,” report in Archivo General de las Indias, *Escribanía* 304b), or the Las Casas–style litany of atrocities in Fray Lorenzo de Bienvenida’s 1548 letter to the crown (surely Landa’s [1566:xv] source for his very similar, briefer account; translated passages

- from both friars’ accounts are in Chamberlain 1966 [1948]:235, and Jones 1989:42–43). Chamberlain’s (1966 [1948]:232–236) version is outdated (but contains archival leads); Jones’s (1989:41–47, 59–60) analysis is excellent, although only a small part of his book; also see Graham 2011:133. A recent summary of previous work on Spanish activities in sixteenth-century Belize is Campbell 2011:3–39.
- 4 A brief historiographical essay, introducing and defining the New Conquest History, can be found online (Restall 2012).
- 5 Bernal Díaz penned a longer and equally justificatory account of this incident (written in 1542, part of his *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias*, but see my translation in Restall and Asselbergs 2007:65). The dismantling of Utatlán’s buildings took place over the successive years, as its stones were used to build the church and other structures in the nearby colonial town of Santa Cruz del Quiché.
- 6 Carmack 1973 used for the transcription and translation of the *Title of C’oyoi*, pages 273–345; translations mine but heavily indebted to Carmack.
- 7 The K’iche’ text is transcribed in Carmack 1973:282; I have adjusted somewhat his translation on page

302. *Adelantado*, literally “invader,” was the formal title granted to a Spanish holder of a license from the crown to conquer and settle a region; Pedro de Alvarado held the license for highland Guatemala.
- 8 On ancient Maya music and its possible use in warfare, see Hammond 1972.
 - 9 Useful to my thinking was Jones’s (1989:28) observation that the Maya of southeast Yucatan employed “fortifications, the tactic of site abandonment, the use of misrepresentation to confuse the enemy, and the presentation of gifts as symbols of truce.”
 - 10 Graham (2011:126) is right to be critical of Chamberlain’s (1966 [1948]:33) unfiltered use of conquistador *probanzas* and thus suspicious of the linguistic abilities of Montejo’s chaplain, Juan Rodríguez de Caraveo—and by extension, all Spanish priests on these early expeditions.
 - 11 Gonzalo de Alvarado’s original letter is in Archivo General de las Indias, *Patronato* 58, 4.
 - 12 This Spanish priest was asked in 1638 to write an account, for the royal chronicler in Spain, of Yucatan’s ecclesiastical history; his brief summaries of preconquest and conquest history seem to reflect well how Spaniards viewed such events in the priest’s day.
 - 13 Roman numeral references are to the chapter numbers used in all published editions (but not in the original manuscript; see Tozzer 1941).
 - 14 I have adapted somewhat my own translation of the Maya text. The document I call the *Title of Saci-Sisal* is embedded within the Pech titles from Chicxulub and Yaxkukul (see Restall 1998:ch. 6).
 - 15 Chamberlain (1966 [1948]:140) found it not in sixteenth-century sources but in the chronicle written a century later by Francisco López de Cogolludo (1688). It is interesting that a reference to the incident appears in the *Title of Saci-Sisal*; one of the few details marking the Spanish arrival at Chichén Itzá is that “when Captain don Francisco de Montejo arrived, it was he who honorably captured [*yah tohil yah tocil*] Naobon Cupul” (Restall 1998:117). But as the extant manuscripts of the Maya titles are late colonial, we cannot be sure the story did not work its way into Maya historical memory after the sixteenth century.
 - 16 When Montejo the Younger returned in 1540 with a larger force, the Maya encouraged him to choose Tihó as the location of the latest in a long string of failed Spanish “cities” in the Yucatan. They may have imagined that what worked at Chichén Itzá in 1532 would work at Tihó in 1541. It is possible that the successful refounding of the city as Mérida in 1542 has masked what may have been intended as another example of the Maya urban ambush strategy.
 - 17 The *Annals of Oxkutzcab*, translated in Restall 1998:81. My thanks to Susan Toby Evans for pointing out (during the symposium) the relevance of the Otzmal Massacre.
 - 18 Defensive pits were also used by the Inca during the conquest wars in the Andes; González Suárez (1891:159) states that the Inca general Rumiñahui, battling Sebastian de Benalcázar at Riocajas in 1534, opened up “deep pits in the mountain ravines [*hoyos profundos en los desfiladeros de la Cordillera*],” which “they covered with earth and branches, so that the horses would fall in there” (my thanks to Tamara Bray for leading me to this reference during the symposium). Hemming (1970:158) states that at Riocajas, “in their desperation the natives invented ingenious traps to bring down the horses”; on this occasion, Hemming describes a staked pit just like those dug in Guatemala a decade earlier, but at other battles of the Spanish–Inca wars the horse traps were “small holes” to trip the horses (Hemming 1970:194–195, 203) or agave spines scattered on the path to cripple them (Hemming 1970:215).
 - 19 The primary Cehach strategy, both when Cortés passed through and when Dávila tried to pass through from the other side in 1532, was to evacuate their towns, leaving no supplies—sometimes even taking the extreme measure of filling wells with dirt (see Jones 1989:35–36).
 - 20 Archivo General de las Indias, *Guatemala* 111 is the 1552 *probanza* of the Nahua governor of Xicalango, detailing how he provided supplies and led men in the invasion of Yucatan, so that “if we had not gone, it would not have been possible to conquer the province of Yucatan”; also see Chuchiak 2007:190.
 - 21 For a brief description of geography in the Maya area, in the warfare context, see Webster 2000:70–72.
 - 22 I used López de Cogolludo 1688 for his transcription of the “Carta de los Conquistadores y Cabildo de Mérida de 14 de Junio de 1542 sobre la Conquista de Yucatán y sus Necesidades.”

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