

Primary Source: Cortez Describes Tenochtitlan. Hernan Cortez. 1520s.

Context:

Hernando Cortés was a Spanish explorer and **conquistador** who landed on the coast of Mexico in 1519. Learning of the powerful Aztec empire and its capital city of Tenochtitlán, Cortés traveled over one hundred miles inland to find the city and claim the Empire for Spain. At the time, the city of Tenochtitlán was home to over 100,000 people and one of the largest cities in the world. In August 1521, the Spanish and their Native American allies defeated the Aztecs and conquered the city. The Spanish leveled Tenochtitlán and built Mexico City on the site of the Aztec capital. Primary sources, such as the accounts written by Hernando Cortés and other Spanish officials, are the only surviving writings we have of this once great city.

Source

"This great city of Tenochtitlán is built on the salt lake, and no matter by what road you travel there are two leagues from the main body of the city to the mainland. There are four artificial **causeways** leading to it, and each is as wide as two cavalry **lances**. The city itself is as big as Seville or Córdoba. The main streets are very wide and very straight; some of these are on the land, but the rest and all the smaller ones are half on land, half canals where they paddle their canoes. All the streets have openings in places so that the water may pass from one canal to another. Over all these openings, and some of them are very wide, there are bridges...

There are, in all districts of this great city, many temples or houses for their idols. They are all very beautiful buildings... Amongst these temples there is one, the principal one, whose great size and magnificence no human tongue could describe, for it is so large that within the **precincts**, which are surrounded by very high wall, a town of some five hundred inhabitants could easily be built. All round inside this wall there are very elegant quarters with very large rooms and corridors where their priests live. There are as many as forty towers, all of which are so high that in the case of the largest there are fifty steps leading up to the main part of it and the most important of these towers is higher than that of the cathedral of Seville..."

This city has many public squares, in which are situated the markets and other places for buying and selling. There is one square twice as large as that of the city of Salamanca, surrounded by porticoes, where are daily assembled more than sixty thousand souls, engaged in buying, and selling; and where are found all kinds of merchandise that the world affords, embracing the necessities of life, as for instance articles of food, as well as jewels of gold and silver, lead, brass, copper, tin, precious stones, bones, shells, snails, and feathers...

conquistador	one of the Spanish people who took control of Mexico and Peru by force in the sixteenth century 征服者 정복자
Causeways	a raised road or path across water or wet ground 堤道: 穿过水或湿地的高架道路或小径 독길
lances	a weapon with a long wooden handle and a pointed metal end. 带有长木柄和尖头金属尖端的武器 긴 나무 손잡이와 뾰족한 금속 끝이 있는 무기
precincts	a commercial area in a town where cars cannot go. 辖区: 镇上的商业区, 汽车无法进入 경내: 차가 다닐 수 없는 마을의 상업 지역