

Food for Thought: A Taste of México in Cortés's *Segunda Carta-Relación*

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Pressed for time, in need of defending his rebellious actions, and lacking the words which could convey the vast wonders of the New World, Hernan Cortés has no other choice but to sharpen his rhetorical skills in order to provide Emperor Charles V with such a delightful taste of Mexico that his majesty will rejoice in the newly discovered country with gusto, leaving him hungry not only for more news, but also for its sumptuous, tantalizingly delicious, mouth-watering foods. In *Segunda Carta de relación* the conqueror offers the Spanish monarch a taste of the new polis, both in its literal and metaphorical senses, for the text is rife with savory edibles which serve juicier purposes than merely to illustrate the flora and fauna of the newly-conquered lands. Well-versed in the art of rhetoric, for he had studied at university, Cortés had received legal training and had worked as a notary and as a secretary to the governor for several years. He had, therefore, become an expert at drafting legal documents, which accounts for his calibrated choice of words in his chronicle. His frequent references to foodstuffs are, in fact, a key ingredient in the concoction of a narrative whose royal addressee is a well-known glutton. Writing during the throes of the reconquest of Mexico, the conquistador must come up with a recipe for success which will legitimize his usurpation of power to Governor Diego Velázquez, justify the loss of the Aztec empire, and win the sanction of his majesty to continue with his expedition in the New World.

The crafting of this document certainly boils down to the urgent need that the conquistador has of informing the king of the Spanish defeat after the well-known “Night of sorrows,” as well as to justify his legal status as a traitor. Digesting such bitter news must certainly have been a hard pill to swallow for a monarch with an insatiable appetite for more lands to rule, for riches to finance the constant wars which jeopardized his massive empire, and for exotic delicacies to enjoy at his Pantagruelian feasts. To the cunning Cortés there was certainly no better way to present those events than by sweetening them with the variety of foods described in his narrative.

Food in early colonial accounts: beyond the mere description of the flora and fauna of America

Food figures prominently in early colonial accounts of the discovery of America. Columbus' *Diary*, the urtext of colonialist discourse, inaugurates a narrative full of wonder and delight (Merrim 2004, 217), fleshed out with foodstuffs presented in a highly aesthetic manner (“There are trees of a thousand sorts, all with their various fruits, and all marvelously scented,” *Diary*, 21 October), but which are always seen with a utilitarian eye for the incipient mercantile society of Europe (“I believe the islands contain many herbs and many trees which will be worth a great amount in Spain for dyes and as medicinal spices, but I do not recognize them and I much regret that,” *Diary*, 19 October).

Faced with the lavish, exuberant, and somehow alien, nature of the New World, European explorers like Columbus felt quickly overwhelmed and astonished by the flora, fauna, and, above all, the inhabitants, of the recently discovered lands. Trying to come to terms with a new reality for which they did not even have words—Cortés himself, for instance, would admit that “no hay lengua humana que sepa explicar la grandeza e particularidades della” (*Segunda carta-relación*, 237)—presented an epistemological crisis—“la mayor amenaza que jamás haya oscurecido el

horizonte de la mente europea” (O’Gorman, 21-22)—, which, more often than not, was addressed and salved through foods (Merrim 2004, 216).

The densely sensuous prose of the Discovery, in which the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and textures of a wide variety of products are vividly recounted was meant to compensate for the linguistic *vacuum* which hindered the accurate descriptions of America by these early travelers. In fact, as Certeau points out in *The Writing of History*, “only the appeal to the senses and a link to the body seem capable of bringing closer and guaranteeing, in a single but indisputable fashion, the real that is lost in language” (68).¹ Thus, Columbus’ descriptions of the scents of fruits (“There are trees of a thousand sorts, all with their various fruits, and all marvelously scented,” *Diary*, 21 October, cited in Gerbi, 34); Vespucci’s references to the sights, flavors and smells of herbs and spices (“We saw crystal, and infinite flavors and odors of spices and herbs,” *Mundus Novus* 37, cited in Gerbi, 42) or Fernández de Enciso’s luscious depiction of the pineapple, where practically all the senses come into play (“when there is one of these in a room it fills the whole house with its smell [...] that miraculous fruit that became yellow when ripe, and inside was like butter, and of marvelous flavor, and leaving such a good and delicate taste that it is quite marvellous” (*Suma de geographia*, cited in Gerbi, 54), are to be interpreted as textual devices that captured the novelties of the newly discovered continent.

Yet, the complexities of the New World as a *mundus alterius*, that is, not part of the previously revealed Christian world, referred not only to its linguistic codification—which in many cases was solved through the practice of renaming—but also to the thorny issue regarding the stark ethnic differences between the Europeans and the native peoples. Certainly, one of the best ways to assimilate the new societies, cultures, economies, religions and races present in those new places was to digest—pun intended—such novelty (and alterity) through its foodstuffs or, to put it in Campbell’s words, by *servicing up* “America as in some sense edible” (48).

This metonymic reduction of an entire continent to a few morsels of food contributed to making the encounter with the “New” or “Other” World more relatable. It enabled Europeans to manage the anxiety provoked by alterity through “a calibrated mixture of pain and pleasure” (Merrim 2004, 216). In other words, the presentation of viands which could prove suitable or unsuitable for the European palate correlated with their like or dislike for the peoples of America. Many of the foods in European accounts of the colonies, in fact, generate tension based on the conflicting forces of repulsion and attraction. The disappointment felt by Michelle da Cuneo at the lack of pearls in oysters is compensated by his gastronomic delight: “all of which we opened, and we found not a single pearl, but they were very good to eat” (Gerbi, 71). The same explorer, however, would express his most absolute disgust when presented with some unknown native fruits, deemed, in his opinion, only appropriate for pigs: “fruit, to our taste, fit only for pigs, though the natives eat it” (Gerbi, 63). The distinct gastronomic discourse of the explorer-chroniclers has, then, the twofold antithetical purpose of possessing or discarding “the unfamiliar, the alien, the terrible, the desirable, and the hateful” (Greenblatt, 10).

Food is most certainly a key ingredient in the construction of identity (López-Rodríguez 2014, 10). As the old saying goes, “you are what you eat,” and diet became central to the colonial endeavor (Earle, 688). First and foremost, food was needed for survival. Virtually all the chroniclers of the time would refer to the hunger endured during the expeditions in the New World. “Either to find food or die” (Earle, 700) was the expressed goal of Spanish official Francisco

¹ Similarly, in *European encounters* Padgen explains the need to use all the senses to codify a new reality. He coins the term “phantasia,” defined as “an attempt to translate initial sensory perceptions into mental images via language” (1993, 51).

Roldán in Hispaniola, and the same desperate attitude is found in other accounts by Cortés (“aquella noche nos aposentamos, con harta necesidad de comida,” 69), Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo (“situación de hambre catastrófica,” cited in López Nuila, 93), Bernal Díaz del Castillo (“y como íbamos muertos de hambre,” 249) and, above all, Cabeza de Vaca, whose *Naufragios* are “un impresionante testimonio del hambre” (Pérez Samper, 181) with constant references to the lack of nourishment (“veníamos muy fatigados de hambre,” 26). Yet, the presence of foods in the New World did not guarantee survival, either, for they were *alien* foods, a point strongly made by Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo when listing the challenges faced by novice conquistadores, who had “to fight such different foods” (358).

From the outset, then, food articulated a discourse based on alterity. Not only did it help to delineate the boundaries between the self and the Other, but it also posed a threat to Europeans. Some of the products found in America proved harmful to the early settlers, as seen in the diary of Felipe de Hutten, who, in the conquest of Venezuela, recorded how sick his companions felt once they consumed the local maize and cassava, for they were “damaging [...] to the healthy who are not accustomed to such food” (367). In a similar line, Oviedo tells of his personal experience with tunas, a scatological anecdote in which the author confessed to almost dying from bleeding:

e oriné una gran cantidad de verdadera sangre (a lo que a mí me parecía), y aún no osé verter tanta cuanta pudiera o me pedía la necesidad, pensando que me podría acabar la vida de aquella manera; porque sin dubda creí que tenía todas las venas del cuerpo rompidas, e que se me había ido la sangre toda a la vejiga, como hombre sin experiencia dela fructa, e que tan poco alcanzaba a entender la compusición e orden de las venas, ni la propiedad de las tunas que había comido. (266)

Aware of the fact that local foods could be lethal, Columbus strongly believed that by providing settlers with “the foods we are accustomed to in Spain” (349) health could be restored and the frequent diseases and even deaths which were taking a toll on European explorers could be, if not eradicated, at least reduced.

However, what was worse than falling sick or even dying was, in the minds of the Europeans, to become the Other through the ingestion of native products. Several treatises of the time provided ample evidence of metamorphoses undergone by the white man when adopting the native diet. Writing on “The origin of the Indians” (1681) Rocha stated: “Here we have seen very white men from Spain, who, on withdrawing into the hills and eating maize and other Indian dainties, return so toasted that they resemble Indians” (212). “Race was in part a question of digestion” (Earle, 697) and the foods of the New World were a key ingredient in the early modern discourse about human differences that European powers developed to understand the Americas and their inhabitants.

Nowhere is the relationship between food and alterity more stunning than in the accounts related to cannibalism. The practice of eating human flesh, first documented by Columbus,² sparked horror and fear in the minds of Europeans. Hand in hand with the image of the noble savage was that of the fierce cannibal who dismembered human bodies, barbecued their limbs and organs, and drank their blood. Used to justify the subjugation of the natives and the conquest of

²As is well-known, Columbus was deeply influenced by the accounts of Marco Polo and Mandeville, with their stories about the Golden City of the Grand Khan and the existence of dog-like monsters. Because Columbus thought that he had arrived in Asia, he projected such images onto the war-like Caribs; as a result, the wounds on their bodies were soon interpreted as signs of cannibalism.

America, cannibalistic images soon populated the collective imagination of modern Europe, engendering a new world on their own. Such tribal rituals were soon echoed in stories, books, drawings and even maps that warned European explorers of the perils of encountering the “Other,” such as the one below, Hernán Cortés’s *Map of Tenochtitlan* (1524), which shows a temple complex with a decapitated human next to racks of skulls.

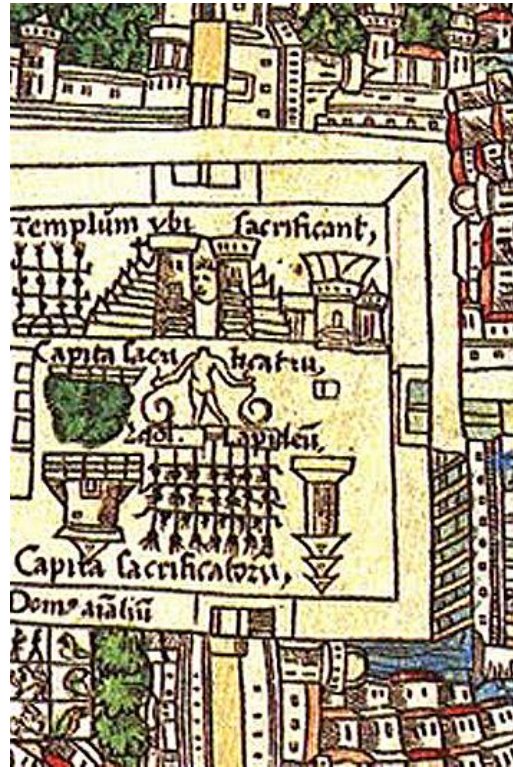


Figure 1. Hernán Cortés’s *Map of Tenochtitlan* (1524)³

Ironically, the same European powers that abhorred and condemned such barbaric practices enjoyed a similar custom at their own tables, where they symbolically devoured their well-known enemies. In fact, one of the most succulent meals served at the European court was “the Turk’s head,” a dish made to commemorate the defeat of the Moors, the nemesis of Christian Europe. This meal was “a pie made to resemble a dark-skinned, long-haired man’s head, flavored with cloves, pepper, sugar and pistachio” (McDonald, 145). Apart from being a display of power, given the excessive use of the much sought-after spices that had triggered the expeditions to the New World, its preparation and consumption took on the allegorical dimension of assimilating and defeating the Other by means of foodstuffs. It was, to some extent, a similar practice employed by European chroniclers to the New World when attempting to illustrate alterity.

³ Image taken from < <https://hyperallergic.com/249898/why-cannibals-were-on-every-16th-century-map-of-the-new-world/> > (consulted 10/02/2018).

The polysemous nature of food in the New World

Arguably, one cannot properly understand colonization without considering the issue of gastronomy (see Fernández- Armesto, 133-137). As has been noted, the meanings of edible products in European chronicles of the New World respond to a variety of purposes which transcend the sole description of the flora and fauna of the newfound lands. As a matter of fact, food has a polysemous value and the very same item can be used to convey very different meanings depending upon the intention of the writer and the effect sought on the addressee. When analyzing foodstuffs in colonial discourse, then, one must bear in mind both the denotative and connotative meanings related to the referent, since, more often than not, they can reveal key aspects of the conquest of America.

To illustrate, consider the different meanings associated with chocolate. Columbus, for example, provided a literal description of the cocoa beans as “almonds” (“almendras”) based on their similar shape—a simile which would pervade most colonial texts, such as that of Cortés’ (“cacao, que es una fruta como almendras,” 46) or Pedro Mártir de Anglería’s (“cierto fruto de unos árboles parecido a nuestras almendras,” 97). Despite the fact that the Genoese failed to realize the myriad applications of the bean, he *did* note that they must have been of utmost importance to the native peoples, judging from their reaction when the beans fell off the ship:

They seemed to hold these almonds at a great price; for when they were brought on board ship together with their goods, I observed that when any of these almonds fell, they all stopped to pick it up, as if an eye had fallen (*Diary*, cited in Mercier, 53).

Had he known that those “almonds” were used as currency, Columbus could have understood the behavior of the natives and would undoubtedly have dived into the water himself to retrieve them.

Its pecuniary significance did not escape other explorers, such as Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo (“estas almendras las sacan y las guardan y tienen el mismo precio y estimación que los cristianos y otras gentes tienen el oro y la moneda,” 87), or Pedro Mártir de Anglería (“la moneda corriente de ellos es cierto fruto de unos árboles parecido a nuestras almendras, que le llaman cacao,” 392). The latter, in fact, would extol the earthly provenance of this form of exchange utilized by the anti-materialistic Indian, since it could eradicate the greedy disposition of the capitalist European:

¡Oh feliz moneda que da al humano linaje una bebida suave y útil, y a sus poseedores los libra de la tartárea peste de la avaricia, ¡porque no se la puede enterrar ni guardar mucho tiempo! (393).

Aside from their monetary importance, cocoa beans were the main ingredient to make chocolate, a drink which was a staple of the native diet, as observed by Cortés: “trajéronme [...] cacao, que es cierto brebaje que ellos beben” (37). The nutritional benefits of the beverage soon caught the attention of other chroniclers, who emphasized its energetic as well as aphrodisiac properties, as seen in the writings of Bernal Díaz del Castillo (“When you have a drink of chocolate, you can travel all day without feeling tired and without feeling a need to consume any other food,” 43) and Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo (“[The emperor] adores this strong drink which gives him a desire to go with women,” 72). Similarly, the notion of social status surrounding chocolate made its way into texts about the New World, particularly those penned by Oviedo, who

underscored the prestige derived from such a drink: “it should only be given to war lords and their leader, the emperor himself” (74).

Nevertheless, the implications of this native brew were not always positive; as with anything which defined the Other, pejorative views were soon associated with chocolate. In Benzoni’s account, chocolate is synonymous with alterity, and the consumption of such a drink characterizes the Indian as a lower form of being, a sub-human creature, for it is a beverage deemed appropriate only for pigs: “It seemed more a drink for pigs, than a drink for humanity” (248).

The meaning(s) of foods in Hernán Cortés’ *Segunda carta-relación*

When writing his *Segunda carta-relación* Hernán Cortés finds himself in an unfavorable situation. Having disregarded the authority of his superior Diego Velázquez, and, consequently, the authority of the king, his legal status brands him a traitor. To make matters worse, without the consent of the monarch, the Spaniard had embarked on the Conquest of Tenochtitlan, which would result in the loss of the Aztec empire after the events known as “la Noche triste” (i.e. the Night of Sorrows). Given these adverse circumstances, Cortés resolves to forge into battle. This time, however, it is not a military war, but a verbal conflict. The pen becomes his sword and “writing becomes action” (Merrim 1989, 62).⁴ It is, indeed, the enactment of a verbal war for, as Carman points out, Cortés carries out two types of conquest in las *Cartas de relación*: the first is the physical imposition of Spanish power in Mesoamerica; the second is the rhetorical (re)construction of the historical events and his heroic persona (2006, 10).⁵

With no time to spare, Cortés must justify his actions to Charles V; with carefully selected words, he makes constant references to foodstuffs to convey a narrative conceived to impress the emperor of his heroic deeds for the benefit of the Spanish crown. Notwithstanding that during the colonial period food encompasses some of the complex issues which arose from the encounter with the New World, namely, alterity, Cortés’ use of edibles differs significantly from that of most chroniclers of his time.⁶ If American products afforded a prodigious sight for most Europeans,

⁴ From its inception the writing of the *relación* equals power (see Merrim 1986, 62-63). The first disregard for legally constituted authority carried out by Cortés is evident in his unlawful appropriation of the commission of writing of a *relación*. Governor of Cuba Diego Velázquez had mandated Cortés to provide him with a “muy complicada e entera relación” (cited in Frankl, 18) of all the things seen in his exploration of Tierra Firme, so that Velázquez himself, in turn, could send that *relación* to the king—following in this manner the chain of command. Cortés, however, instead of respecting that hierarchy of power, sent the document directly to the king, skipping Velázquez, as he admits: “se habían movido con aquella armada y gente contra mí porque yo había enviado la relación y cosas desta tierra a vuestra majestad y no al dicho Diego Velázquez” (99).

⁵ In the same line, highlighting the conqueror’s expertise in rhetoric, Iglesia speaks of Cortés’ “politics of attraction” (28-31), Greenblatt says that “his military strategy relied as much on rhetoric as on force” (1991, 143), Merrim refers to the way “froda” (i.e. cunning) prevails over “forza” (i.e. force) (Merrim 1986, 78) while Pastor (125-126) and Checa (198-202) characterize the chronicler as Machiavelli.

⁶ Food in Cortés is likewise a polysemic sign and it encompasses the complexity of a new world. Aside from its presence in the descriptions of landscapes (“Tiene un valle redondo, muy fértil de frutas y algodón,” 77), foodstuffs provide a glimpse into the local customs of the native peoples, such as their diet (“y trajéronme diez platos de oro y mil y quinientas piezas de ropa y mucha provisión de gallinas y pan y cacao, que es cierto brebaje que ellos beben,” 37), hospitality (“y en esta ciudad [...] nos recibieron muy bien y nos dieron bien de comer,” 40), customs like gift-giving (“Yo les di otras cosas de las de España, con que fue muy contento, y tanto que cuando los vieron otros navíos del dicho Francisco de Garay [...] y que les habían llevado ciertas mujeres y gallinas y otras cosas de comer,” 28) and even cannibalism (“comen todos carne humana,” 72). In addition, considering the economic and religious motivations which sparked the exploration of México, food certainly signifies commerce and religion. The former is seen practically everywhere: from the description of places (“Tiene una muy grande huerta [...] todo de arboledas y

who, like Columbus, Enciso, Oviedo or Mártir de Anglería, paid attention to detail when praising the wonders of the New World, the conqueror sees them with “the cold gaze of a soldier” (Gerbi, 93). His use of foodstuffs is clearly less aesthetic and more utilitarian.⁷ His succinct prose, rather than being descriptive, is cumulative, and the discourse of abundance, characteristic of the prose of the discovery of America (see Ortega 1988, 369-385), definitely flourishes in the *Segunda carta-relación*, for what the explorer basically does is to list or enumerate countless food items, as seen in his depictions of lands (“Tiene una muy grande huerta [...] todo de arboledas y hierbas olorosas, y dentro de la alberca hay mucho pescado y muchas aves, así como lavancos y zarzetas y otros géneros de aves de agua, tantas que muchas veces casi cubren el agua,” 41) and, above all, in the scenes devoted to the Indian marketplaces: “Hay en esta ciudad un mercado [...] Venden mucha leña y carbón y hierbas de comer y medicinales” (33) or “Hay calle de caza donde venden todos los linajes de aves que hay en la tierra, así como gallinas, perdices, codornices, lavancos, dorales, zarzetas, tórtolas, palomas, pajaritos en cañuela, papagayos, buharos, águilas, halcones, gavilanes y cernícalos; y de algunas de estas aves de rapiña, venden los cueros con su pluma y cabeza y picos y uñas” (52).

As a matter of fact, despite dealing with foods, Cortés has no interest in providing a detailed account of all the new products encountered in the New World, which was the case of Enciso and Oviedo, for example. Nor does the conqueror offer a sensationalist account of the new continent, either, as did Staden and Lery with their well-known stories about cannibalism; on the contrary, the Spanish colonizer does not even touch upon the subject, taking its popularity for granted: “hice ciertos esclavos [...] porque, demás de haber muerto a los dichos españoles y rebelándose contra el servicio de vuestra alteza, comen todos carne humana, por cuya notoriedad no envío a vuestra majestad probanza de ello” (72).

When the conquistador brings up the topic of food, he does so because he knows that “[these edibles] will please the sovereign, both for the picturesque and exotic quality they give his dominions and for their cynegetic value” (Gerbi, 92-93). The emperor’s passion for hunting and, above all, eating were well-known, which, to some extent, account for the gastronomic discourse found in *Segunda carta-relación*.⁸

A master in the art of rhetoric,⁹ the Spanish conquistador never loses sight of his royal addressee and spices up a narrative with foodstuffs to impress the sovereign with his heroic deeds.

hierbas olorosas, y dentro de la alberca hay mucho pescado y muchas aves, así como lavancos y zarzetas y otros géneros de aves de agua, tantas que muchas veces casi cubren el agua,” 41) to the observation of local trade (“En estas ciudades hay mucho trato de sal [...] la cual cuecen en cierta manera y hacen panes de ella dicha sal, que venden para los naturales y para fuera de la comarca,” 41), going through several market places (“Hay en esta ciudad un mercado,” 33) and, above all, in the currency they use, which is cocoa beans (“cacao, que es una fruta como almendras, que ellos venden molida y tiénela en tanto, que se trata por moneda en toda la tierra, y con ella se compran todas las cosas necesarias en los mercados y otras partes,” 46). The latter is found in the sacrifices carried out in the temples where their idols are made up of edibles (“Son hechos de masa de todas las semillas y legumbres que ellos comen, molidas y mezcladas unas con otras, y amásanlas con sangre de corazones de cuerpos humanos,” 53).

⁷ As Gerbi points out, the representation of nature in Cortés tends to respond to pragmatic ends. Always thinking in terms of tactics, the conquistador observes the topographical features of the terrains and immensity of forests, and values them for their strategic role: “such was the thickness and height of the trees that even if one clambered up them one could not see a cannon shot’s distance” (63).

⁸ For a detailed study of the culinary preferences and ostentation of Charles V’s meals see García (2000, 18-99).

⁹ Cortés’ mastery of rhetoric has been deeply studied by scholars. Cortés follows the Medieval *ars dictaminis* (salutation, exordium o captatio benevolentiae, narratio, conclusion, Kruger-Hickman, 90-112; Fryer; Zambrana, 71) and adheres to the epistolary genre conventions (Mignolo 1982, 57-116; Marín 1991). His legal expertise due to the several positions held in Seville and the Island Hispaniola is reflected in his familiarity with the *Siete Partidas* by Alfonso X (Elliot, 43-44; Frankl, 9-74; Glantz, 168; Valero, 1965). Likewise, the presentation of his enterprise as a

Cortés needs to forge an image of a hero, but also of a Christian vassal since politics and religion are intertwined during the Early Modern period:

The conquistador cannot afford to characterize himself as separating politics from Christian principles, because much of what gives strength and meaning to Spain's imperial designs of the New World is a deeply felt sense of Christian mission that conceives of the conquest as a crusade in the name of the divine truth. (Carman 2006, 50)

Not by chance, then, the first reference to foodstuffs has clear religious overtones, since they are bread and bacon:

Y porque, como yo creo, en la primera relación escribí a vuestra majestad que algunos de los que en mi compañía pasaron, que eran criados y amigos de Diego Velázquez, les había pesado de lo que yo en servicio de vuestra alteza hacía, y aun algunos de ellos se me quisieron alzar e írseme de la tierra, en especial cuatro españoles que se decían Juan Escudero y Diego Cermeño, piloto, y Gonzalo de Hungría, así mismo piloto, y Alonso Peñate, los cuales, según lo que confesaron espontáneamente, tenían determinado tomar un bergantín que estaba en el puerto, con cierto pan y tocinos, y matar al maestro de él, e irse a la Isla Fernandina a hacer saber a Diego Velázquez cómo yo enviaba la nao. (26)

Cortés cunningly manipulates history and presents Velazquez's men as the true rebels, conspiring against him, and paints himself as always acting on behalf of the king ("yo en servicio de vuestra alteza hacía," 26). When disclosing the alleged rebels' plot, the chronicler fabricates the events, reporting them through the mouths of the Spanish insurgents to present a more reliable account. Despite being an eye-witness, Cortés calls on others to corroborate his version of the events, a legal strategy used to support his actions and justify his transgressions.

Because the explorer is building his heroic image upon Christian principles, he deliberately employs the verb "confess" when presenting the information given first-hand by the insurrectionaries ("en especial cuatro españoles que se decían Juan Escudero y Diego Cermeño, piloto, y Gonzalo de Hungría, así mismo piloto, y Alonso Peñate, los cuales, según lo que confesaron espontáneamente," 26).¹⁰ He claimed that these men had the intention of seizing a brigantine well-stocked with food supplies—which included bread and bacon ("con cierto pan y tocinos," 26)—, killing its captain and setting sail to inform Diego Velázquez about Cortés' plans.

Couching the information in the form of a confession along with references to the presence of bacon and bread is significant within the religious context of early modern Spain. Inheritor of

providential design (Pastor, 182; Delgado, 24-25) along with the Biblical echoes found in his narrative (Elliot, 43-4; Delgado, 23-27) bring to the surface his religious knowledge. In addition, the chronicler is not unaware of the Aztec legends that circulated at the time regarding the arrival of Quetzalcoatl for he makes good use of them (Clendinnen, 69).

¹⁰ In fact, Cortés repeats the verb "confess" to justify the punishment inflicted upon Velazquez's men as though it were a religious consequence of his actions: "Y así mismo confesaron que otras personas tenían la misma voluntad de avisar al dicho Diego Velázquez; y vistas las confesiones de estos delincuentes los castigué conforme a justicia y a lo que según el tiempo me pareció que había necesidad y al servicio de vuestra alteza cumplía" (26). Further on, the conqueror would resort to the same verb of diction to endow his account with verisimilitude by reporting the information given by Indians about the Aztec emperor: "Y así fueron éstos quemados públicamente en una plaza, sin haber alboroto alguno; y el día que se quemaron, porque confesaron que el dicho Mutezuma les había mandado que matasen a aquellos españoles" (45).

the multicultural society of his grandparents, the Catholic monarchs, who had achieved the political and religious unification of the country after the Reconquest (1492), Charles V strengthened Catholicism as part of his political agenda to consolidate his power over his vast dominions, which included the New World, while opposing the Protestant Reformation and facing the struggle to halt the Ottoman advance (see Fernández, 20-49).

The coexistence of the *moriscos*, *conversos* and *cristianos viejos* in the Iberian Peninsula was far from idyllic and the consumption or avoidance of certain foods could bring someone to the Inquisition: “lo que se comía y bebía, o se evitaba comer y beber, podía [...] traerle al ciudadano corriente del imperio hispánico honra o infamia y algún fuego inquisitorial” (Martínez, 84). To prove one’s Catholic faith, individuals were frequently asked to eat pork, for it is forbidden in Islam and Judaism. Other types of foods could likewise reveal religious affiliation. Such was the case of bread, which was part of the staple Christian diet as opposed to the Morisco’s preference for couscous or pita bread: “mientras los moriscos manufacturaban el cous-cous y el pan de pita, la tradición cristiana [...] había impuesto el pan como alimento básico de la población” (Mojica, 2). The inclusion of these edibles among the supplies of the ship that the Spaniards wanted to steal simply highlights the accuracy of the words written by the conquistador, for he is echoing a confession made by true Christians, judging from their diet, and, within the Catholic dogma, this sacrament consists of repenting by telling the truth.

In juxtaposition to the foods of his adversaries, Cortés stresses over and over again the hunger endured by his expedition: “les hice mucho daño sin recibir de ellos ninguno, más del trabajo y cansancio del pelear y la hambre” (30) or “aquella noche nos aposentamos, con harta necesidad de comida” (69). Even though famine was a harsh reality for most European explorers, Cortés makes a concerted effort to connect certain foods with his enemies and the enemies of the Crown. Death from starvation, for example, is shown as a military strategy used by the Indians to prevent the Spaniards from conquering the New World (“Y viendo que si los naturales de esta ciudad quisiesen hacer alguna traición, [...] nos podrían dejar morir de hambre,” 51; “y que bien sabían que teníamos pocos mantenimientos y poca agua dulce, que no podíamos durar mucho, que de hambre no nos muriésemos aunque ellos no nos matasen,” 67) and the native peoples are often defined by their ownership of foods, as observed in their custom of gift-giving, the partaking of meals with the Spaniards as a token not only of their hospitality, but also of their opulence and power: “Luego vinieron conmigo más de cuatro mil de ellos de paz, y me sacaron fuera a una fuente, bien de comer” (32), “y en esta ciudad [...] nos recibieron muy bien y nos dieron bien de comer” (40) and “El señor de esta provincia y pueblo me dio hasta cuarenta esclavas y tres mil castellanos, y dos días que allí estuve nos proveyó muy cumplidamente de todo lo necesario para nuestra comida” (40).

The justification to take control of the copious merchandise produced in the Aztec empire is superbly carried out by means of a religious analogy which likens the Indians with the Moors and the historical resonances of the Reconquest. Examples of this are the intentional comparison of a Mexican city which exhibits a wide array of edibles with Granada, the last Moorish bastion in the Iberian Peninsula,

La cual ciudad es tan grande y de tanta admiración que aunque mucho de lo que de ella podría decir dejé [...] porque es muy mayor que Granada [...] y muy mejor abastecida de las cosas de la tierra, que es de pan y de aves y caza y pescado de ríos y de otras legumbres y cosas que ellos comen muy buenas. (33)

and that of the Aztec temples with mosques (“sus mezquitas y oratorios donde ellos tienen sus ídolos,” 41; “Hay en esta gran ciudad muchas mezquitas o casa de sus ídolos,” 52), and, above all, the identification of emperor Moctezuma with a sultan (“soldan”), that is, the king or sovereign of a Muslim state (“ninguno de los soldanes ni otro ningún señor infiel de los que hasta ahora se tiene noticia, no creo que tantas ni tales ceremonias en su servicio tenga,” 53). In this way, Cortés presents his enterprise as a providential design, as part of the Christian mission commissioned by emperor Charles V.¹¹

Because foods are at the core of the characterization of the Other, their presence becomes indispensable in the portrayal of Moctezuma. Even before meeting the Mexican ruler in the city of Tenochtitlan, Cortés recalls the emissaries sent to the Spaniards with magnificent gifts, which included delicacies (“enviábanos mucha provisión de frutas maravillosas,” 29, “mandábanos buena provisión de comer,” 33 or “Dicho Moctezuma nos enviaba gran provisión de comer,” 34), and during his very first encounter at the entrance of the Aztec capital, which left the explorer awestruck due to the opulence and solemnity of the reception, the conquistador acknowledges the Aztec hospitality due to the plenitude of wonderful foods: “fuimos muy bien proveidos de muchas gallinas y pan y frutas” (43).

Once within Moctezuma’s dominions, food becomes ubiquitous, making its way into temples and palaces, as well as marketplaces. The entire Aztec capital is imbued with flavor and textually condensed into three strategic locations which metonymically represent religion, power and commerce; in other words, the three pillars upon which the Spanish conquest of America was founded.¹² In the verbal construction of Tenochtitlan food serves as a common thread, interweaving these emblematic locations into a pleasure-laden narrative which not only will appeal to a voracious monarch, but will also leave him with a savory sensation, given the mnemonic function attributed to foodstuffs within rhetorical treatises (see Carruthers, Merino Jerez).

Since Antiquity, the crafting of powerful speeches and writing was based on the art of rhetoric. Consisting of five elements—*inventio*, *dispositio*, *elocutio*, *memoria* and *actio*—, each of which was governed by certain relatively fixed conventions (see Merino Jerez, 2-56). At the heart of any powerful discourse lay memory. Certainly, in an eminently oral society, the memorization of a text was vital to the orator, but so was the long-lasting effect sought on the audience’s mind. To guarantee the survival of the message and make the speech memorable, the use of vivid, pleasurable images such as foodstuffs was highly recommended, for they were believed to have a mnemonic effect.

In his *Segunda carta-relación* Cortés himself admits to having difficulty in recalling certain peoples, places and events, for, having lost all of his notes after the fateful Night of Sorrows, writing itself has become a mnemonic exercise for him:¹³ “que demás de las que he dicho son

¹¹ Mejías López analyzes the resonances of the Reconquest in Cortés’ *Cartas de relación*, which include references to Analusian cities as well as architectural designs.

¹²In his analysis of *Cartas de relación*, Checa (190-193) draws attention to Cortés’ use of synecdoche in the conceptualization of the conquest of Mexico, as it enables the conqueror to synthesize information during his pressing situation: “La recurrente condensación del todo en la parte determina que el autor de la *Carta* conceptualice la realidad aplicando a ella repetidamente la figura retórica de la sinécdoque” (192). Checa continues to affirm that the presence of this figure of speech is fundamental to the success of the conquistador’s rhetorical conquest: “el elemento representativo que define la sinécdoque es literalmente fundamental por cuanto resulta insustituible de cara al éxito de determinadas empresas” (193).

¹³Cortés mentions the loss of his documents throughout the *Segunda carta-relación*: “porque en cierto infortunio agora nuevamente acaescido, de que adelante en el proceso a Vuestra Alteza daré entera cuenta, se me perdieron todas las escrituras y abtos que con los naturales destas tierras yo he hecho y otras cosas muchas” (162-163) or “Y luego mandó que le diese los españoles que quería inviar, y de dos en dos y de cinco en cinco los repartió para muchas

tantas y de tantas calidades que por la prolijidad y por no me ocurrir tantas a la memoria [...] no las expreso” (237) or “era necesario más espacio del que yo al presente tengo para las relatar y aun mejor memoria para las retener” (246-247). Yet, despite the fragility of memory, the conquistador seems to have no problem whatsoever in remembering the foods seen or eaten at certain places: “Y a la salida de la ciudad cuyo nombre al presente no me ocurre a la memoria donde comimos gallinas, pan y frutas,” (41), thus reinforcing the mnemonic effect that experiences with edibles have on an individual’s mind.¹⁴

Aware of the important role that memory plays in his rhetorical conquest both for the crafting of his document and for the imprint of his message on the mind of his royal addressee, Cortés himself seems to have resorted to a mnemonic system known as *sistema per locos et imagines*, which was very much in vogue during the early modern period and which was believed to have been used in the discourse of evangelization in the New World (see Ortega 2009, 19-65).

Based on the visual understanding of memory,¹⁵ the system *per locos et imagines* consisted of the transformation of a text into visual mnemonics following some guidelines similar to those used during the composition of a speech.¹⁶ Three main Latin sources provided the foundation for the system—Cicero’s *De oratore* (c. 46 B.C.), the anonymous *Ad. C. Herennium* (c. 90 B.C.) and Quintilian’s *Institutio Oratoria* (c. 95 A.D.)—which gave recommendations regarding the construction of mental places where images conveying the information to be remembered were deposited. Once the images had been stored, the individual could retrieve the information by means of a mental walk, that is, by visiting those places in a systematic fashion and viewing the images kept in each. Pedro de Ravena’s *Phoenix* (1491) provides a good insight into this system:¹⁷

Así pues, tomo una iglesia que conozco muy bien y analizo con atención sus espacios. Paseando una y otra vez por ella me la aprendo, vuelvo a casa y repito mentalmente lo que vi allí, y doy paso a los lugares así: a la derecha de la puerta que conduce directamente al

provincias y cibdades cuyos nombres por se haber perdido las escripturas no me acuerdo” (229). Later, in his *Quinta carta-relación* the conquistador would explain his custom of taking daily notes of the main events and how he lost these documents after the Night of Sorrows.

¹⁴ The conquistador incessantly repeats his inability to recall certain events due to the loss of his personal documents, as well as to the frailty of memory. However, when it comes to foods, Cortés does not seem to hesitate at all. Thus, in Iztapalapa he specifically mentions the types of birds seen (“y muchas aves, así como lavancos y zarzetas y otros géneros de aves de agua, tantas que muchas veces casi cubren el agua,” 41), and despite the fact that he cannot remember many place names, he does recollect the foods seen in them (“Hay en esta ciudad un mercado [...] Venden mucha leña y carbón y hierbas de comer y medicinales,” 33) or eaten there (“Hay de esta ciudad a donde Mutezuma residía, veinte leguas. Yo les dije que me placía, y deje ir al uno de ellos y donde a seis días volvió él y otro [...] y trajéronme diez platos de oro y mil y quinientas piezas de ropa y mucha provisión de gallinas y pan y cacao, que es cierto brebaje que ellos beben,” 37).

¹⁵ Aristotle would say “It is impossible to think without a mental picture,” an idea corroborated, among others, by Thomas Aquinas: “Man’s mind cannot understand thoughts without images of them” (Merino Jerez, 44). This visual understanding of memory led to the elaboration of a mnemonic system known as *sistema per locos et imagines* (i.e. system through places and images), which was widely used during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance

¹⁶ Namely, the organization of ideas, use of the phatic function, formulaic language, since repetition helps memorization, analogies and examples for better understanding and clarification, poignant images to move the audience, etc. In other words, the use of all the devices aimed at achieving the three modes of persuasion as outlined by Aristotle (*Rhetoric* 1378a): *ethos* (the personal character of the speaker transmitted via his self-portrayal), *pathos* (putting the audience into a certain frame of mind by resorting to emotions) and *logos* (the proof provided by words in the search of verisimilitude).

¹⁷ For a detailed study of the system *per locos et imagines*, see the works by Merino Jerez, Chaparro, Yates and Carruthers cited at the end of this paper.

altar mayor pongo mi primer lugar; después en la misma pared, a cinco o seis pies, el segundo, y si hay allí algo real en medio, como una columna, una ventana o algo parecido, pongo otro lugar allí mismo.” (cited in Merino Jerez, 61)

The Spanish conquistador must certainly have been familiar with this method of artificial memory, because in addition to his knowledge of rhetorical conventions due to his several legal occupations, his studies in Salamanca, as Mignolo points out, must have included the study of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, or any other manual of a similar sort, based on the *ars memoriae*:

Sabemos que Cortés estudió en Salamanca; sabemos que la base de toda educación humanista consistía en el estudio de la retórica, la gramática, la poética y la dialéctica; sabemos que los niños aprendían a componer frases, oraciones y fábulas; y que la retórica *Ad Herennium* [...] era el manual obligatorio. (67)

The likelihood of the use of this system by Cortés is reinforced not only by the fact that the conquistador is writing from memory, but also because he knows that the memorization of a text was part and parcel of the act of reading. In fact, as Carruthers states, during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance:

A work is not truly read until one has made it part of oneself—that process constitutes a necessary stage of its ‘textualization.’ Merely running one’s eyes over the written pages is not reading at all, for the writing must be transferred into memory (10)

Therefore, the use of the system *per locos et imagines* could have fulfilled the twofold purpose of, on the one hand, aiding the conqueror in the composition of “hi(s)-(s)tory”—a play-on-word made by Merrim (1986, 80) in her explanation of the historical reconstruction of events and heroic persona carried out by Cortés and other explorers of the New World—and, on the other hand, of reinforcing the image constructed by him in the emperor’s mind. It is, therefore, a linguistic and cognitive tactic as powerful as any wartime strategy employed by the cunning Cortés in the conquest of Mexico.

As already stated, the system *per locos et imagines* revolved around the construction of mental locations and images. As far as the creation of the *loci* was concerned, the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (3.31) suggested the choice of wide, spacious places composed of sub-spaces to accommodate a series of images. However, such places should also be *perfecte*, that is, enclosed, so that the mind would not get distracted in an enormous location. Some of the spaces proposed in mnemonic treatises included cities, like the one below (see Merino Jerez, 56; Ortega 2009, 41), since they provided clear boundaries, and, at the same time, contained sub-spaces within which to deposit interconnected images.¹⁸

¹⁸ In his mnemonic study of the religious discourse of the New World, Ortega (40-42) points out the mnemonic use of cities to illustrate the Franciscan organization of Mexico.

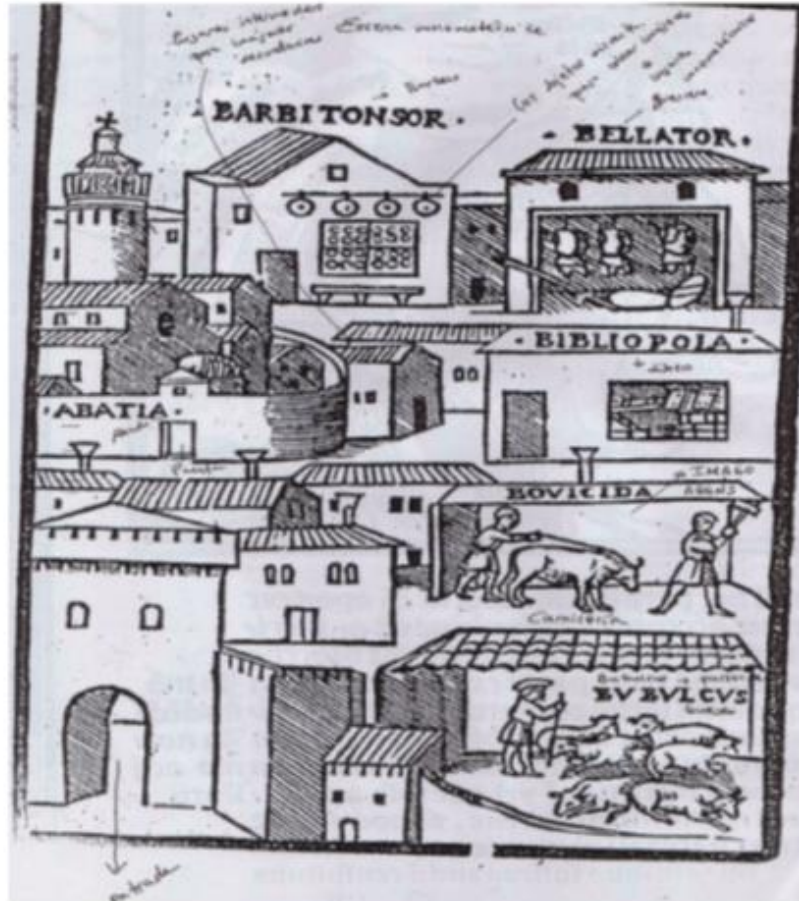


Figure 2. City as a *locus mnemotecnicus*¹⁹

Significantly, the very same map of Tenochtitlan was used for mnemonic purposes by the Franciscans in their evangelization of the New World. As shown below (figure 3), the plan of the Aztec capital serves to illustrate the hierarchy of the Franciscan order and the different roles assigned to each of its members.²⁰

¹⁹ This image has been taken from the mnemonic treatise studied by Merino Jerez.

²⁰ Ortega explains the mnemonic use of this map in the following terms: “Preside la fila San Francisco; en la parte posterior, Martín de Valencia (de la “Misión de los Doce”). En el centro observamos la “Nueva Iglesia” de México y en su interior, el Espíritu Santo. Cuatro capillas posas se sitúan en cada una de las esquinas del recinto, enclaves de referencia para el desarrollo de las actividades de la evangelización franciscana en Nueva España” (2009, 37).

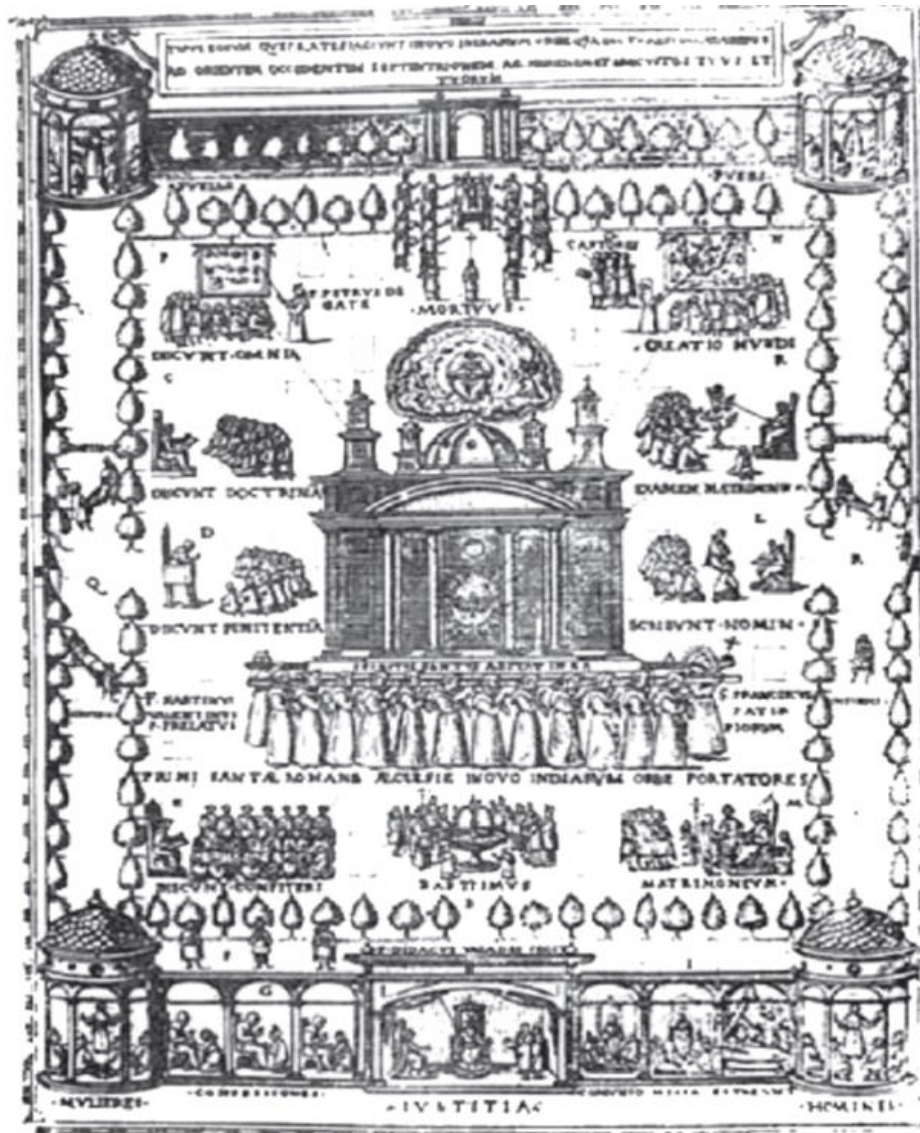


Figure 3. Map of Tenochtitlan as a mnemonic locus²¹

In his description of the Aztec capital, despite adhering to the classical conventions of the *laudibus urbium* (see Curtius, 155), Cortés seems to follow the directives given in rhetorical treatises which underline the importance of selecting large, but enclosed, places which could accommodate smaller sub-places within. Hence, the conqueror chooses a wide but well-defined *locus*—the city of Tenochtitlan—which, in turn, encompasses three *loci*—the temple, the palace and the marketplace—which are also subdivided into chambers, rooms and streets, respectively:

Tiene esta ciudad muchas plazas donde hay continuo mercado [...] Hay calle donde venden [...] Hay en esta gran ciudad muchas mezquitas [...] donde tienen los ídolos [...] Tenía dentro de la ciudad sus casas de aposentamiento. (53-55)

²¹ Map taken from Ortega (2009, 37).

Cortés manages to render the physical movement of his expedition through “a dialéctica espacial” (Zambrana, 73) characterized by the repetition of forms such as “de fuera,” “entrada,” “dentro,” “donde” or “en la cual,” which seem to mirror the mental itinerary which one would take in the recollection of information according to rhetorical treatises.

In addition to their size, *loci* were meant to be *breviter* (*Rhetorica ad Herennium* 3.33), that is, to forge a strong relationship between the signifier (the chosen place) and the signified (the idea conveyed), since it was believed that reminiscence was achieved through metonymic, metaphoric or symbolic connections. So, for example, the use of a *pratium* (prairie) was recommended to convey happiness, whereas a *consistorium* (court) was the ideal location to convey the notion of justice (Carruthers, 8). As mentioned, Cortés’ focus on a temple, a palace and a market, which symbolically stand for religion, power and commerce, could in fact be a mnemonic strategy whose aim was to transmit to the emperor the need to finance the conquistador in the reconquest of Mexico, given that such *loci* represented the main reasons why European empires had embarked on the exploration of the New World.

Once the *loci* have been constructed, Cortés proceeds to fill those places with images. Significantly, the temple, the palace, and, of course, the marketplace, are full of foodstuffs. Apart from giving cohesion to the text, the choice of edibles seems to fulfil a clear mnemonic function.

Food imagery was believed to nourish the mind and aid in the process of memorization: “igual que el alimento nutre a la persona, así las imágenes de comida nutren igualmente a la memoria” (Merino Jerez, 74). Their suitability seemed to stem from their pleasurable nature, for this was the emotion most associated with memory, as stated in different treatises: “The emotion most associated with memory is pleasure” or “The little cell that remembers is a little cell of delights” (Carruthers, 8-9). The overwhelming presence of foodstuffs in the sacrifices of the temple, at the banquets of Emperor Moctezuma and in the effervescent market is, then, both delightful and useful. It aids in the construction and timelessness of a pleasure-laden narrative aimed at sweetening the bitter taste of events that took place during the conquest of Mexico.

Food epitomizes religion, power and commerce, reinforcing the ideas condensed by the *loci* and conforming, therefore, to the characteristic of *fideles* (i.e. faithful to the place and the content represented) required by mnemonic treatises regarding the composition of *imagines* (*Rhetorica ad Herennium* 3.35).

In the temple, alterity is marked not only through its purposeful identification with the Moorish “mezquita,” but also through the absence and presence of foods. The priests in charge of the sacrifices, which involve the offerings of seeds and legumes mixed with human blood, are said to fast: “Tienen abstinencia en no comer ciertos manjares, y más en algunos tiempos del año” (53). Along with the dreadful bloody rituals, the religious observation regarding the conscious self-deprivation of certain foods must surely have been a shock to Charles V, an emperor whose voracity led him to ask for a papal bull which allowed him to eat even before receiving the sacrament of communion (García, 98).

In contrast to the practice of fasting, gastronomic indulgence characterizes the palaces of Moctezuma.²² Appropriately called by the conqueror “casas de placer,” with the mnemonic import attached to pleasure, these royal residences accommodate sumptuous banquets organized on behalf

²² To reinforce the mnemonic reading of foodstuffs in Cortés’ *Segunda carta-relación*, it is also worth noticing the massive presence of foods in the kind of zoo that Moctezuma has within his palace and how order as well as repetition prevail in the feeding of the animals (see López-Rodríguez 2013, 140-160): “y a cada género de aves se daba aquel mantenimiento que era propio a su natural y con que ellas en el campo se mantenían. De forma que a las que comían pescado, se lo daban; y las que gusanos, gusanos [...] y los que maíz, maíz” (55)

of the Aztec emperor: “y siempre [Moctezuma] les hacía muchos banquetes y fiestas” (45). Food is indeed what defines the Mexican ruler as a pleasure-seeker and a gourmand, who celebrated feasts that did not simply parallel, but overshadowed those organized by Charles V himself. Even the daily meals of Moctezuma involved strict protocols followed by hundreds of servants, who tried to satiate the appetite of their master with a great variety of dishes:

La manera de cómo le daban de comer es que venían trescientos o cuatrocientos mancebos con el manjar, que era sin cuento, porque todas las veces que comía o cenaba le traían de todas las maneras de manjares, así de carnes como de pescados y frutas y hierbas que en toda la tierra se podían haber (56)

The minute descriptions of the foods given to Moctezuma include medicinal herbs. Cortés' inclusion of such a detail must surely have pleased the Spanish emperor, who, as is well-documented (see López-Rodríguez 2013, 123-124), suffered from frequent stomachaches and had been prescribed natural remedies such as herbs to palliate them.²³

In the physical, as well as mental, walk through the city of Tenochtitlan, Cortés gradually builds upon foods. Their presence travels *in crescendo* from the temple to the palace, and it finally reaches its climax in the marketplace. The effervescent market, the pinnacle of the hustle and bustle of the city, displays a plethora of merchandise: “donde hay todos los géneros de mercaderías que en todas las tierras se hallan [...] donde hay continuo mercado y trato de *comprar y vender*” (51). A microcosm of the riches of the New World, the Indian marketplace advertised the native goods which could be sold by Spain. This mercantile view, however, was not exempt from the gustatory delights provided by the vision of succulent foods, such as game (“Hay calle de caza donde venden todos los linajes de aves que hay en la tierra, así como gallinas, perdices, codornices, lavancos, dorales, zarcetas, tortolas, palomas,” 52), which would have made Charles V's mouth water, given his passion for meats. Besides, as in the description of Moctezuma's banquets, once more, Cortés decides to include all sorts of medicinal remedies to ease the digestion of his gluttonous Emperor: “Hay calle de herbolarios, donde hay todas las raíces y hierbas medicinales que en la tierra se hallan” (53).

The mnemonic function of foods is well attested not only by their omnipresence, but also in their presentation within the narrative. The organization of edibles in the Aztec capital certainly mirrors the rhetorical principle of the *dispositio*. Central to the composition of a text as well as to the process of reminiscence was *ordo*. Classical treatises such as Cicero's *De oratore* (2.353-4) emphasized the importance of order in the presentation of ideas, for the process of reminiscence was believed to follow the same systematic route: “el orden ilumina la memoria y el orden de los lugares y las imágenes guarda el de los recuerdos” (cited in Merino Jerez, 56).

²³ In his mnemonic study of *Sumario de la natural historia de las indias*, Sánchez Jiménez (269) points out the deliberate use of foodstuffs made by Oviedo to attract Emperor Charles V. The chronicler purposefully comments on the lightness of the delicious products found in America, explicitly mentioning that they are easily digested: “sin duda es un manjar delicado de sabor, y que yo le tengo por mejor que las perdices de España, porque no son de tan recia digestión” (66) o “aunque un hombre se coma una guanábana de éstas que pese dos o tres libras y más, no le hace daño ni empacho en el estómago” (134).

Cortés constantly observes the “concierto y orden” (242) that govern the vast city of Tenochtitlan²⁴ and whether at the altar, the table or the market stall, foods are arranged in a similar systematic manner for mnemonic purposes. The step-by-step description of the making of the idols using a mixture of foods and human blood is, to some extent, replicated in the methodical manner meals are presented to Moctezuma as well as in the design of the display of the goods for sale in the marketplace. In these three places food images stand out for their meticulous organization.

Hence, in the Aztec sanctuaries each idol is made up of a vast quantity of the very same ingredients (“Son hechos de masas de todas las semillas y legumbres que ellos comen, molidas y mezcladas unas con otras,” 53) in order to appease the pagan gods, which, according to Cortés, if infuriated, would starve the native population to death: “y les sacarían los frutos de la tierra y moriría la gente de hambre” (53). The emphasis on order is reinforced by the fact that each of these idols is consecrated to a specific deity:

A cada cosa tienen su ídolo dedicado [...], por manera que para pedir favor para la guerra tienen un ídolo y para sus labranzas otro, y así para cada cosa de las que ellos quieren o desean que se hagan bien tienen sus ídolos a quien honran y sirven (53)

which is placed in its precise chamber: “y las capillas que en ellas tienen son dedicadas cada una a su ídolo a que tienen devoción” (238).

In like manner, *ordo* reverberates throughout the ceremonies surrounding Moctezuma’s banquets. Each of the hundreds of servants carries a dish which is placed on its own heater to keep it warm (“traían debajo de cada plato y escudilla de manjar un brasero con brasa para que no se enfriase,” 56). Among all of the assistants one is devoted to feeding Moctezuma himself (“estaba en pie uno de aquellos servidores, que le ponía y alzaba los manjares,” 56), who, in turn, gives away his leftovers among his guests: “Al tiempo que comía, estaban allí desviados de él cinco o seis señores ancianos, a los cuales él daba de lo que comía” (56). This sensation of order is strengthened by the repetition of the ritual of the washing of the hands at the beginning and end of each meal: “Y al principio y al final de la comida y cena, siempre le daban agua a manos, y con la toalla que una vez se limpiaba nunca se limpiaba nunca más” (56).

The same organizational principle prevails in the depiction of the marketplace, which is divided into well-defined streets where specific goods are for sale: “Cada género de mercadería se vende en su calle sin que entremetan otra mercadería ninguna, y en esto tienen mucha orden” (54). Cortés enumerates the native products in a manner reminiscent of a modern shopping list:

Hay todas las maneras de verduras que se hallan, especialmente cebollas, puerros, ajos, mastuerzo, berros, borrajas, acederas y cardos y tagarninas (52)

Hay frutas de muchas maneras, en que hay cerezas, y ciruelas, que son semejables a las de España (52)

²⁴ At the very beginning of his *Segunda carta-relación* Cortés highlights the order that prevails in the Aztec empire: “Porque para dar cuenta, Muy Poderoso Señor, a Vuestra Real Excelencia de la grandeza, estrañas y maravillosas cosas desta grand cibdad de Temixtitán y del señorío y servicio deste Muteeçuma, señor della, y de los ritos y costumbres que esta gente tiene y de la orden que en la gobernación así desta cibdad como de las otras que eran deste señor hay, sería menester mucho tiempo y ser muchos relatores y muy expertos”(25).

This lexical classification whereby a hyperonym (vegetables or fruits in the case of the excerpts above) heads a list of hyponyms, that is, terms belonging to the same semantic field, was widely used in mnemonic manuals (see Merino Jerez, 60; Carruthers, 80) given the importance of organization in the process of reminiscence.

To enhance the idea of order in the marketplace Cortés purposefully locates a court of law where judges guarantee the proper transaction of goods, punishing the violators according to their laws: “Hay en esta grand plaza una grand casa como de abdiencia donde están siempre sentados diez o doce personas que son jueces y libran los casos y cosas que en el dicho mercado acaecen y mandan castigar los delincuentes” (237).

Finally, to make sure that Charles V is left with a good long-lasting taste of Mexico, Cortés cooks up his gastronomic discourse with a formulaic style based on repetition, for it helps with the process of memorization, as stated in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (3.40): “Por ello, la práctica de este arte [del sistema *per locos et imagines*], ya que tiene aplicación en muchos asuntos, se debe fortalecer con trabajo y ejercicio” (cited in Merino Jerez, 111).

Within each *locus* images of foodstuffs are categorized by means of lexical and syntactic parallelisms, as seen in the description of the idols of the temple (“son de muy mayores estaturas [...] Son hechos de masas de todas las semillas y legumbres,” 53); the meal service offered to Moctezuma (“le traían de todas las maneras de manjares [...] traían debajo de cada plato y escudilla de manjar un brasero [...] los platos y escudillas en que le traían una vez el manjar,” 56) and the sale of products in the marketplace (“Venden conejos [...] Venden mucho maíz [...] Venden pasteles [...] Venden mucho pescado [...] Venden huevos de gallina” (51-52) and “hay todos los géneros de mercaderías que en todas las tierras se hallan [...] Hay calle de caza [...] Hay calle de herbolarios [...] Hay casas como de boticarios [...] Hay casas como de barberos,” 51). Such internal repetitions are projected onto the three urban spaces and are made particularly obvious with the hyperbolic repetition of the quantifier “todos/as,” which certainly conveys the vastness of the wonders of the New World.

Conclusion

In the elaboration of his *Segunda Carta-relación* Cortés cooks up a narrative full of foodstuffs to sweeten up the bitter events that surrounded the conquest of the Aztec empire. By means of mnemonic images of savory edibles the conquistador manages to leave the Spanish emperor with a great taste of Mexico. In fact, as Lévi-Strauss superbly states, “food is not only good to eat, but also good to think with.”

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