

Guatemala Conquest by Pedro De Alvarado

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Abstract

The prodigy of the successful conquest of Guatemala and the Maya region showed the might of the Spanish conquistadors under a ruthless battle leader, Pedro de Alvarado. The Spanish colonization and the problems and resistance they faced, how they established a colony and joined it to the Vice Royalty of New Spain. The influence they had on the kingdoms they conquered, regarding culture and linguistics, with much emphasis on linguistics.

Introduction

At around 800 A.D., the Maya civilization culminated, only to plummet shortly after. It was composed of city-states that were powerful, who traded and warred among themselves. They extended from Southern Mexico to Honduras and Belize. The Maya people had a rich culture and were composed of philosophers, astronomers, and builders. The Maya deteriorated into small kingdoms, with the most robust and most fortified being K'iche and Kaqchiquel, located in central Guatemala.

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The early 16th Century, specifically in 1511, was the first time European Explorers set foot in what would become modern-day Guatemala. There was a ship that got wrecked on its way from Panama to Santa Domingo. There were a lot of expeditions that followed into the Maya kingdoms that triggered efforts to conquer it.

The Spanish were already conquering and colonizing the Americas into; the Vice Royalty of New Spain, and the famous conquest of Guatemala was an extended conflict during this era. In 1524, Pedro de Alvarado came from the newly conquered Mexico into the Modern day Guatemala accompanied by fellow Spanish conquistadors as well as allies which he commanded. The partners acted as translators for the Spanish.

Pedro de Alvarado was a famous conquistador who was well-known for his ruthlessness, power, and lack of fear. He played key roles in not only the conquest of Guatemala but also in the conquest of America, Mexico and Peru. He was born in 1485 in Spain and died in 1541 at the age of 56 in New Spain, present-day Mexico. He was serving as the governor of Guatemala at the time of his death (Moholy-Nagy, Haviland, and Jones).

In his conquest of Guatemala between 1524 and 1540, Pedro de Alvarado is known to be accountable for the deaths of over 4 million Indians in Present-day Guatemala. There are bountiful accounts of his atrocities and how he destroyed the indigenous polities of Guatemala. There were also letters that were translated and published; he had written about the events that took place (Moholy-Nagy, Haviland, and Jones)

The Maya Empire did not collaborate with the Spanish but resisted, thus prolonging the Spanish conquest. The Empire had been surviving as small kingdoms; this was because they had degenerated a few centuries before.

Before Pedro de Alvarado came to conquer Guatemala, he already had the upper hand against the Mayans. Alvarado had war equipment that the ill-fated Mayans did not have access to; this made it harder for them in war. The Spanish had metal armor, horses, steel swords, crossbows, dogs that would fight and also had guns (Feldman).

Apart from having the upper hand during the battles, the Spanish had a preliminary performance before they had landed in the Mayans' territory; they had already sent their most frightening auxiliary, disease. Between 1521 and 1523, prior to Alvarado's conquest, the native communities had been killed by diseases from Europe. The Mayan people did not have immunity to diseases like mumps, smallpox, chickenpox, plague and much more. More than a third of the population is believed to have been killed by these conditions.

The Maya Empire had grown from around 300 A.D to 900 A.D, stretching from Southern Mexico to Honduras and El Salvador. It consisted of a gratified culture of Warriors, farmers, priests, and scholars. They had mighty cities like Copan, Tikal, and Palenque to demonstrate their might as an Empire. The Empire was severely reduced by the diseases, war, and famine that followed (Feldman).

Even after going through a lot, there still were several kingdoms that were independent and had different strengths as well as advancement. The K'iche was the most significant kingdom in the capital of Utatlan. It was located in what is now present-day Central Guatemala.

The K'iche had been paying tribute to the mighty empire of the Aztecs. Earlier in 1521, a robust Aztec Empire had been attacked, defeated and conquered by one Hernan Cortes with merely 500 conquistadors. Their proper use of modern weapons and Indian allies had made their conquer shocking. It is under Hernan Cortes that a young Pedro de Alvaro, along with his brothers, had proven to be ruthlessly courageous and ambitious, thus rising in the army ranks.

When K'iche was mentioned prominently as a vassal state of the Aztec Empire, a conquest was prompted, with Pedro de Alvaro receiving the privilege of leading the conquer. It was in 1523 that Alvarado left with about 400 conquistadores for the K'iche, accompanied by 10,000 Indian allies. Alvarado was a good battle strategist and had learned a great deal from Hernan Cortes.

Pedro de Alvarado used a tactic that Cotes had employed in his successful conquest of Mexico,

turning hatred between different ethnic groups in his favor. There had been a long-simmering hatred between the K'iche and the Kaqchikel. They were traditional enemies. Alvarado took advantage of this and made a treaty with the Kaqchikel, who was an equally compelling kingdom. The Kaqchikel, instead, foolishly consented to the agreement and quickly offered thousands of warriors to Alvarado for the onslaught on K'iche at Utatlan.

However, earlier in the pleasant days of Emperor Moctezuma's rule of the Aztecs, he had warned the K'iche about the Spanish. The K'iche was nevertheless an independent and proud kingdom and would not back down from a fight and refused to accept the offers by the Spanish, which included surrendering and paying tribute to them.

The people of K'iche, on the other hand, selected a young chief, Tecun Uman and united behind him as their leader and warrior; Tecun Uman rounded up feelers and sent them to kingdoms that were neighboring to rebel against the Spanish. He then led about 10,000 soldiers into battle to fight the Spanish invaders.

They met on the field of battle in a famous battle called The Battle of El Pinal. Although the K'iche were brave on the battlefield, the Spanish seemed to have the upper hand. The native weapons did little harm to the metal armor the Spanish wore, while the horses, crossbows, and muskets ruined the native warriors. Alvarado employed a tactic that involved hunting down the chieftains to incapacitate the troops. This worked well in his favor. According to tradition, Tecun Uman, the K'iche leader, had to attack Pedro de Alvarado himself. He did so and beheaded Alvarado's horse, but as the horse fell, Alvarado pierced Tecun with his spear and killed him. The K'iche believe that on Tecun Uman's death, his spirit grew a pair of eagle wings and flew away.

The K'iche eventually surrendered but attempted to trap the Spanish between the walls of their capital city, Utatlan; Alvarado was, however, smart and did not fall for this. He prolonged his military assault on the town, and it eventually gave in. After the victory over the K'iche, the Spaniards were nonetheless not satisfied by the spoils obtained in Utatlan compared to those obtained earlier in Mexico from the Aztecs. However, the hope of native resistance at a large scale in the area was ended when the K'iche were brutally defeated by Alvarado.

Pedro de Alvarado compulsorily enrolled many K'iche warriors into his army to assist him in conquering the rest of the kingdoms remaining in the area. It was a walk in the park for Alvarado when it came to the other smaller countries in Guatemala. He would compel them to surrender, and if need be, he would coerce his natural allies to fight them. Overlooking the help he had received from the Kaqchikel allies, he turned on them and enslaved them.

By the beginning of 1532, Alvarado had conquered all the major kingdoms and made them fall. He now ruled as the governor and recompensed his conquistadors with villages and land. The colonization of Guatemala soon began (Fried et al.).

To avoid colonization, some Mayan Ethnic groups took to the hills, north-central highlands of present-

day Guatemala and would ferociously attack anyone who would come anywhere close, for example, there was one group that was in the present day north-central Guatemala. In their long struggle to survive, one Fray Bartolome de las Casas, a Dominican mendicant Christian, pleaded with the governor to allow him to use missionaries to pacify the natives. This strategy was named The Verapaz Experiment; they would use Christianity instead of violence. He gathered two other friars and took off to the hills. The plan worked, he was able to turn them to Christianity, and peace was brought to the region. The name of this expedition came from the name they gave the place, 'Verapaz' or 'True Peace.' Unluckily, the conquistadors turned on them and enslaved them once the land was under Spanish control, literally undoing everything Fray Bartolome de las Casa had worked for (Minster).

Present-day Guatemala was a unique case for the Spanish who acquired and colonized it. Historically, the place was less cultured compared with other areas they had subjugated. For example, in Peru, where they conquered the Incas and in Mexico, where they conquered the Aztecs, it was the home of the remaining Mayans who had established a civilization that was mighty but had risen and fallen centuries ago. The Maya had worked hard to protect their culture thus prompting the Spanish to use newer techniques to bring them to their colony.

Through the years, the traditional identity of the Maya has been retained compared to areas that were inhabited by the Aztecs. In modern Guatemala, the heroism of the K'iche has remained a memory of the once bloody time, and Tecun Uman has been celebrated as a national hero while Pedro de Alvarado has been remembered as a villain (Fried et al.).

Influence Of The Spanish On The Mayan Languages

In modern times, many may claim that they still have a bond between modern Mayan culture and ancient Mayan culture before the Spanish conquest of Guatemala, but overlook the fact that the different Mayan kingdoms there did not inevitably share the same culture and grammatical formats in their languages. The Mayan empires were in various parts of the Guatemalan highlands. The Mayan word had different dialects, for example, Kekchi, Quiche, Cakchiquel, and Mam, which is today the language of about 300,000 people, of which only two-thirds are pure Maya while the rest are whites and people of mixed blood. There is a majority of Indians who speak Spanish, apparently a total influence of the Spanish conquest.

The entire Mayan language consists of twenty tribes that have dialects that are almost similar, except Huastac and Potosi, who occupied adjacent territory in the Yucatan peninsula, Tabasco, and Chiapas, which is a significant portion of Guatemala and a small part of Salvador and Honduras. The famous old builders who belonged to the ruined Palenque and Copan cities were of this tribe.

In general, the Maya languages are composed of a language stock that was spoken in Honduras all the way up to northern Central America and stretching to southeastern Mexico. There has been an

incomplete reconstruction of their asserted ancestor, Proto-Mayan, who apparently existed 5000 years ago. Spanish conquest of the area was influential in that the present-day countries speak Spanish as their official language.

However, there are over 4 million indigenous Maya in Guatemala, over two million inhabiting Mexico and tens of thousands in Belize and elsewhere who still speak Maya languages but as a primary or secondary language. By 1996, 21 Maya languages had already been recognized officially by name in Guatemala, while Mexico acknowledges another eight words apart from those in Guatemala.

Maya languages can be traced to the pre-Columbian era of Meso-American history with a hieroglyphic script showing two varieties of Mayan languages. Text carved in the Maya script dates to late 1st millennium BCE, this system of writing continued to be used up to the late 16th century when the Spanish conquest took place. The logosyllabic writing system was used at a large scale between 250-900 CE, which was the period of the Maya civilization. To understand their history, there are over 10,000 inscriptions of the Maya language available on pottery, monuments, buildings and bark paper codices, available for scrutiny.

During the colonization of Central America by the Spanish, local languages were forcibly imposed to the serve the Spanish language, Maya was no exception. Maya kingdoms are historically known to have resisted the Spanish, so their influence on the Maya was not as significant as compared to others, such as Nahuatl. There are still many Mayan communities today that are monolingual; most languages remain viable as the Spanish language dominates the area. Due to this domination, some Mayan languages have become endangered.

The different Maya language groups started sharing a collective identity as Mayans who drove Mayan civilization during the 20th century; this was the period Mayan archeology accelerated, and various nationalist ideologies that were ethnic-pride-based became common all over. Their embracing of this identity does not substitute their primary ethnic identities with their languages but instead supplements their identity.

The unity and pride of the Mayans have brought a new light to their distinction, throwing away the racist perspective that was considered when describing the Mayan Languages. Thus, it is more salient to find a language as 'Mayan' than it is to consider English as 'Indo-European.'

There is a modern institution that was established in 1996 to deal with current languages called the Guatemalan Academy of Mayan Languages. It was set up and received funding as a product of the 1996 peace accords of Guatemala. It has been recognized as the authority in standardized orthography matters since it represents the 21 groups of language in Guatemala.

Spanish overshadowed all the indigenous languages in Central America. During the Spanish colonization, Spanish ultimately became the new prestige language with it being formally used in essential domains of the society like religion, administration, and literature. Even though the use of Mayan language officials was refused, there was still a significant size of communities that remained

monolingual.

Even after their resistance to the influence of Spanish, the Mayan words will never be settled; this is because language and self-identification are dynamic. The countless number of ways in which they interact at different scales will always play a significant part in the composition of their words.

In the past several decades, Mayans have been self-determined and revitalized in reaffirming possession of powerful tools that had been claimed by the Spanish in their conquer. Antonin de Nebrija stated in 1492 that there was a link between the right to govern and language. The Mayans have gone through a phase of linguistic and cultural transformation and have bolstered their rights to speak about their identities and cultures as well as their future and not let their different languages hinder their notions.

It would be absurd to think that Spanish conquests did not influence some aspects of the Mayan languages. Mayan languages have, in most aspects, adopted Spanish particles, for example, conjunctions, conversation elements, interjections, connectives, and tags. When Mayan texts are examined, some Spanish particles are found to match with Mayan fundamental particles as discourse markers (Brody).

However, borrowing of these particles does not controvert the universal language contact. How Mayan languages have borrowed from Spanish it is what any other two words can engage in and follows two crucial principles: detachable elements can be readily adopted, and borrowed items are usually closely corresponding with the aspects of the language that is hiring. These characteristics explain the borrowing of Mayan words in Spanish.

One reason why Spanish influenced Mayan languages is because of the kind and rank of bilingualism that took place when the Spanish came into contact with the Maya. On conquering Guatemala, the Spanish language would eventually seem like the higher-status language, thus playing an essential role in influencing the process of borrowing where the Mayans would view Spanish as worth imitating and emulating. Spanish was considered a language of prestige. Also, when Mayans learned to speak Spanish, they would occasionally use Spanish articles as code-switching. Mayans who were bilingual in Spanish with a high Mayan mother tongue would utilize Spanish articles to make them sound as prestigious as they assumed Spanish to be.

The borrowed particles from Spanish were to represent different functions according to the context of conversations. Making generalizations, three functions can be deduced as discourse markers, conjunctions, and hesitations. The most commonly adopted conjunctions are Porque 'because,' pro 'but,' p ues 'well,' and como 'like.' In Mayan languages, for example, Tojolabal, conjunctions are a small set of words that position themselves as clause-initials, meaning they always occur at the start of a sentence. The borrowed Spanish conjunctions also have the same patterns as the Mayan conjunctions; thus, when borrowed, they fit perfectly.

They can also function as discourse markers. Discourse markers are elements that bind structures of

talk. They are mostly used at paragraph breaks and topic shifts to mark a change in discourse. The borrowed Spanish particles match the features and patterns of the native Mayan languages. As hesitations, *este* 'um' and *bueno* 'good' are commonly borrowed. Mayan native speakers can use these clause-initial particles to turn a conversation or hold when deciding what to say next.

However, the Mayan Languages also affected Spanish, and there are a lot of examples to look at, looking deeper at their etymological descriptions. Loan words borrowed from Maya into Spanish may have the same meaning. The following are some of the Mayan words that found their way into Spanish, '*chel*' is a Mayan word meaning 'blue,' in Spanish, '*chelo*' depicts one with hair that is fair and blue eyes and '*chela*' refers to 'beer.'

In Maya, "*ts'onot*" was a natural hole that was a source of water and also a sacred place where they would perform rituals. And believed the *ts'onot* was a pathway to life after death. In Spanish, a '*cenote*' is a naturally occurring hole on the ground full of clean water; etymology studies say the word is of Mayan origin.

In the south-eastern part of Yucatan, people speak Spanish with a specific accent of the local Yucatec Mayan languages, for example, people say, "*Soy muy feliz en Yucatan*" in place of "*Soy muy peliz en Yucatan*." However Yucatan people frequently use and express Mayan words when speaking Spanish, for example: '*sho*' – shut up! , '*wixar*' – to pee, '*chokó*' – hot, '*nojoch*' – big, '*peek*' – dog, '*chichí*' – granny, '*dziritz*' – small.

There are other Spanish words that are of Mayan origin, for example, the Spanish word '*huracan*' which was also loaned to English as '*hurricane*' is potential of Mayan origin and is said to be from the storm god of the Maya '*Jun Raqan*.' The Spanish food '*barbacoa*' is loaned from a Maya's recipe meal called '*Baalbak'kaab*' and led to the English name '*berbeque*.' The word cigar which in Spanish is '*cigarro*' is etymologically potentially from Maya where '*sicar*' is Mayan for smoking tobacco leaves while '*sic*' means tobacco.

Etymological descriptions of the above Spanish words and names have been linked to the various Mayan languages.

In conclusion, the Spanish conquest of Guatemala led by Pedro de Alvarado was one of the most memorable and astounding conquests in history, probably one of the longest compared to the others the Spanish had undertaken. Impacts of the activities that took place have gone down as one of the most strategic battle plans, and the effects that came with the conquering of Guatemala are still being felt mostly in the sense of colonization where even the most diverse and culturally rich Maya languages were influenced by the Spanish.

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