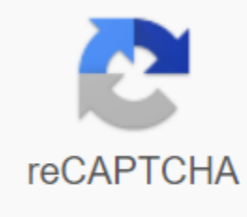




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## Aztec pottery museum

In 1519, Hernan Cortes and his greedy band of some 600 conquistadors began their daring assault on the Mexica (Aztec) Empire. In 1521, the capital of Mexico, Tenochtitlan, was in ashes, Emperor Montezuma was dead and the Spaniards firmly controlled what they had taken to call New Spain. Along the way, Cortes and his men collected thousands of pounds of gold, silver, jewelry and priceless works of Aztec art. What happened to this unimaginable treasure? For the Spaniards, the concept of wealth was simple: it meant gold and silver, preferably in bars or easily negotiable coins, and the better. For the Mexicans and their allies, it was more complicated. They used gold and silver, but mostly for ornaments, decorations, plates and jewelry. The Aztecs appreciated other things well above gold: they liked brightly coloured feathers, preferably quetzaux or hummingbirds. They made elaborate coats and headdresses of these feathers and it was a remarkable display of the richness of wearing one. They loved jewelry, including jade and turquoise. They also enjoyed cotton and clothes like tunics made from him: as a demonstration of power, Tlatoani Montezuma would wear up to four cotton tunics a day and throw them away after wearing them only once. The inhabitants of central Mexico were large merchants who engaged in trade, usually trading goods with each other, but cocoa beans were also used as currency in some way. In April 1519, the Cortes expedition landed near present-day Veracruz: they had already visited the Mayan region of Potonchan, where they collected gold and the priceless interpreter Malinche. From the city they founded in Veracruz, they established friendly relations with the coastal tribes. The Spaniards offered to ally themselves with these disgruntled vassals, who accepted and often gave them gifts of gold, feathers and cotton cloth. In addition, emissaries from Montezuma appeared on occasion, bringing great gifts with them. The first emissaries gave the Spaniards rich clothes, an obsidian mirror, a tray and a pot of gold, some fans and a mother-of-pearl shield. The following emissaries brought a gold-plated wheel six and a half feet in diameter, weighing about thirty-five pounds, and a smaller silver wheel: these represented the sun and moon. Later, the emissaries brought back a Spanish helmet that had been sent to Montezuma; the generous sovereign had filled the bar with gold dust as the Spaniards had requested. He did so because he had been led to believe that the Spaniards were suffering from a disease that could only be cured by gold. July 1519, decided to send part of this treasure to the King of Spain, partly because the king was entitled to a fifth of any treasure found and partly because Cortes needed the king's support for his business, which was on questionable legal ground. The Spaniards collected all the treasures they had accumulated, inventoried it and sent much of it to Spain on board a ship. They estimated that gold and silver were worth about 22,500 pesos: this estimate was based on its value as a raw material, not as artistic treasures. A long list of inventory survives: it details each item. An example: the other necklace has four strings with 102 red stones and 172 apparently green, and around the two green stones are 26 golden bells and, in said necklace, ten large gold stones ... (qtd. in Thomas). As detailed as this list is, it seems that Cortes and his lieutenants have taken a long step backwards: it is likely that the king has received only one tenth of the treasure taken so far. Between July and November 1519, Cortes and his men went to Tenochtitlan. On their way, they collect more treasures in the form of more gifts from Montezuma, loot from the Cholula massacre and gifts from the chief of Tlaxcala, who also entered into an important alliance with Cortes. At the beginning of November, the conquistadors entered Tenochtitlan and Montezuma welcomed them. About a week into their stay, the Spaniards arrested Montezuma under a pretext and kept him in their heavily defended compound. Thus began the plundering of the great city. The Spaniards continually demanded gold, and their captive, Montezuma, told his people to bring it. Many great treasures of gold, silver jewelry and feathers have been laid at the feet of the invaders. In addition, Cortes asked Montezuma where the gold came from. The captive emperor freely admitted that there were several places in the Empire where gold could be found: it was usually crossed by streams and melted for use. Cortes immediately sent his men to these places to investigate. Montezuma had allowed the Spaniards to stay in the sumptuous palace of Axayacatl, a former tlatoani of the empire and the father of Montezuma. One day, the Spaniards discovered a vast treasure behind one of the walls: gold, jewelry, idols, jade, feathers and more. It has been added to the ever-increasing loot pile of invaders. In May 1520, Cortes had to return to the coast to defeat the conquistador army of Panfilo de Narvaez. In Tenochtitlan's absence, his hot-headed lieutenant Pedro de Alvarado ordered the massacre of thousands of unarmed Aztec nobles who attended the Toxcatl festival. When Cortes returned in July, he found his men under siege. On June 30, they decided they couldn't run the city and decided to leave. But what about the treasure? At that time, it is estimated that the Spaniards had amassed about eight thousand pounds of gold and silver, not to mention many feathers, cotton, jewelry and more. Cortes ordered the fifth king and his fifth charged on horses and bearers of Tlaxcalan and told the others to take what they wanted. The mad conquistadors took care of gold: the smartest took only a handful of jewels. This the Spaniards were spotted trying to flee the city: the rabid warriors of Mexica attacked, slaughtering hundreds of Spaniards on the Tacuba roadway outside the city. The Spaniards later like the Noche Triste or Night of Pain. The gold of the king and Cortes was lost, and the soldiers who carried a lot of loot dropped it or were massacred because they ran too slowly. Most of Montezuma's great treasures were irrevocably lost that night. The Spaniards regrouped and were able to retake Tenochtitlan a few months later, this time for good. Although they found some of their lost loot (and were able to squeeze a little more of the defeated Mexica), they never found any of this, despite torturing the new emperor, Cuauhtémoc. After the city had been retaken and he had time to divide the loot, Cortes was as adept at stealing his own men as he had done to steal the Mexica. After setting aside the fifth and fifth of the king, he began making suspiciously large payments to his closest buddies for weapons, services, etc. When they finally got their share, Cortes' soldiers were dismayed to learn that they had earned less than two hundred pesos each, far less than they would have gotten for honest work elsewhere. The soldiers were furious, but there was not much they could do. Cortes bought them by sending them on other expeditions that he promised to bring more gold and expeditions soon went to the Lands of the Maya to the south. Other conquistadors received encomiendas: they were grants of vast lands with indigenous villages or a town on them. The owner was supposed to provide religious protection and instruction to the natives and, in return, the natives worked for the landowner. In reality, it was officially sanctioned slavery and led to unspeakable abuses. The conquistadors who served under Cortes always believed that he had withheld thousands of pesos in gold from them, and historical evidence seems to support them. Customers of Cortes' house reported seeing numerous gold bars in Cortes' possession. Despite the losses of the Night of Pain, Cortes and his men were able to withdraw a staggering amount of gold from Mexico: only the plundering of the Inca Empire by Francisco Pizarro produced greater wealth. The daring conquest inspired thousands of Europeans to flock to the New World, hoping to be on the next expedition to conquer a rich empire. After Pizarro's conquest of the Incas, however, there were no great empires to be found, although the legends of the city of El Dorado persisted for centuries. It is a great tragedy that the Spaniards preferred their gold in coins and bars: countless priceless golden ornaments have been melted and the cultural and artistic loss is incalculable. According to the Spaniards who have seen these Aztec goldsmiths were more skilled than their European counterparts. Diaz del Castillo, Bernal. . Trans., ndlr J.M. Cohen. 1576. London, Penguin Books, 1963. Levy, Buddy. . New York: Bantam, 2008. Thomas, Hugh. . New York: Touchstone, 1993. Friendly warning! We work hard to be precise. But these are unusual unusual so please check that the sites remain open. On the other side of the National Theatre is the Archaeological Museum where the main historical discoveries of the nearby Roman capital of Salona are the main attraction: mosaics, sarcophagi and others. The exhibitions cover the Greek and Roman periods, as well as pagan and medieval. All in all, a worthy attraction a short walk from the city centre. Posted: Thursday February 1 2018 Address: Zrinsko-Frankopanska 25 Split 21000 Transport: All buses to National Theatre Price: Adults 20kn, Children, students and seniors 10kn Contact: mdc.hr/split-arheoloski/eng/FS-opci.html Calling location ° 385 21 329 340 Opening hours: Jun-Sep Lun-Sat 9am-2pm, 4pm-8pm, Sun closed. Oct-May Mon-Fri 9am-2pm, 4pm-8pm, Sat 9am-2pm, Sun closed closed

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