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HIST 3400 History of Latin America

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A Dispatch from Cholula, 1519

Three days ago, we arrived in the city of Cholula led by Cortés on horseback and Doña Marina by his side, as she usually is. After discussion with the local Caciques and priests translated by our faithful Doña Marina, we were welcomed into the city but forced to leave the Tlaxcalans behind due to the turbulent history between the two cities. Although the initial welcome was friendly and warm, we gained knowledge after several nights that this was all a ruse. It is for this reason that I write. To explain what happened in Cholula and tell of why we made it out of that city with all of our men. It was because of Doña Marina.

Doña Marina, or La Malinche as she is known to the Indians, has traveled with us since our arrival in former Tabasco, now known as Santa Maria de la Victoria. After her baptism, she took quickly to the way of God and serving the Crown (Enter Doña Marina). Her value became evident as a vital translator due to her knowledge of Nahuatl and Maya languages. But her importance to our conquest does not end there. As I will explain further, her understanding of Indian politics has provided us with insight that would have been otherwise unattainable, insight that has since saved our lives. Despite being an Indian and a woman, even Cortés cannot understate her importance to our mission in the New World. At first, her privilege to walk beside him during our travels seemed an unjust annoyance; however, after further observation and her

loyal acts over the past several days has shifted my perspective and illuminated the numerous reasons in which she deserves that spot.

Now I will explain to you why this is so. As aforementioned, our arrival in Cholula was a rather welcome one. We were offered food and clothing and beds to sleep in as long as we left our Tlaxcalan allies outside of the city limits. Obeying this request, things appeared civil. Although they refused to “give up their Teules, they pledged their obedience to His Majesty, although there was no notary present at the time” (The Massacre at Cholula). Things seemed to be going smoothly as we took our pause in this city on the way to the capital and to Montezuma. Unbeknownst to us, until the shared insight from Doña Marina, Montezuma had sent word to the Cholulans and told them to join his army in attacking us at some point during our stay. There have been many noble soldiers among us during this conquest, however Doña Marina’s actions in Cholula cannot be understated. Prior to their attack, an Indian woman had warned La Malinche of what was to come. In an attempt to protect her, this woman offered La Malinche a place as her son’s wife, evading the violent attack that had been planned against us. Because of her strong loyalty to Spain, Doña Marina was not to give into such an offer. However, as shrewd as she is, she crafted a lie to allow her to relay this information back to her new tribe. Promising the woman her allegiance, she left to “collect her things” and without returning, she informed Cortés her accomplice, of the secret attack.

Truthfully, it is difficult for me to imagine what I would do in a situation similar to Doña Marina’s. Of course, I would seldom pledge my allegiance to anybody other than His Majesty, however; Doña Marina had the opportunity to walk back to those who bleed the same blood as her. Yet, she remained with us. I cannot dictate exactly why this is, I am a man after all, but her

courage cannot go unnoticed. Without her, the Massacre of Cholula would have had a very different outcome. Essentially, Doña Marina has saved the Spanish force.

Her actions these days prove that her loyalty is not mere submission, but rather a choice. As a Spanish soldier, this seems an obvious choice, but I am not her. I cannot understand why she does these things. Perhaps she is in love with Cortés. Regardless, she has aided our conquest in ways that no other man has been able to. His Majesty should know of her importance and the driving force that she has been for our success. Thanks to La Malinche, there is hope for continued victory throughout our conquest. I am no longer perturbed by her position next to Cortés, but rather I will follow them both with confidence and trust as we continue to develop New Spain.

