

LA MALINCHE (MALINALLI TENEPAL) (?–1551)

The indigenous mistress and companion of Hernán Cortés, conqueror of Tenochtitlán, capital of the Mexicas, and other states in ancient Mexico, was known as La Malinche. Supposedly born into a principal family, what we know about Malinalli Tenepal comes from Bernal Diaz del Castillo's account of the Conquest of Mexico. A gift to the Spaniards in 1519, her Nahuatl and Mayan linguistic abilities soon proved profitable in the conquest of new peoples including the mighty Aztecs. Cortes fathered a son with Dona Marina, Malinalli's Christian name, and relied upon her intelligence and keen insights about the indigenous world throughout the conquest. Dona Marina facilitated Cortes' meeting with Moctezuma, leader of the Aztecs and warned the Spaniards of Aztec treachery. She was married off to Juan de Jaramillo, a man of good standing, when Cortes left for the south. With Jaramillo, she had a daughter and it is believed she died either in 1531 or 1551. Dona Marina occupies a central position in some of the key codices or indigenous narratives of the conquest such as the Codices Florentino and the Lienzo of Tlaxcala.