

### **The Death of Cuauhtemoc**

There are few events related to Spanish-Mexica war so amply treated by Spanish and Nahuatl sources as the death of Cuauhtemoc: the last independent ruler of the Mexica. While dozens of accounts agree that Cortés executed him during his failed expedition to Honduras, several years after the fall of Tenochtitlan, they give conflicting information as to the exact date, cause, and form of the execution, as well as to the number and identity of people who shared Cuauhtemoc's miserable fate. Some of them blame the brutality of the Spaniards; others justify Cortés's decision by calling Cuauhtemoc a „traitor.” According to some, the Mexica ruler died alone, according to others, accompanied by a crowd of victims. He was hanged or decapitated, right after sunset or at dawn, with or without trial.

We may never know the truth. Colonial historiography submitted the death of Cuauhtemoc to a complex process of mythization, through which it quickly started to reflect current political views of the various authors rather than historical facts. This paper will examine the most important sources—both alphabetic and non-alphabetic (codices)—that speak about the death of Cuauhtemoc, to understand how myths that surrounded it were created, re-created, and re-re-created. It will provide insight into the Nahua ways of constructing biographies, as well as into the shifting roles and identities of Central Mexican *altepetl* (city-states). It will also allow seeing how the Spanish and Nahua discourse of the war changed over the centuries.