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THE PERSON OF HERNAN CORTES IN THE «HISTORY OF THE INDIES» BY LAS CASAS

Summary. *The article discusses the controversy over the characterization of Hernan Cortes in the «History of India» by the famous Dominican monk and one of the earliest indigenous human rights activists in pre-Columbian America, Bartolome de Las Casas. It was determined that the figure of the conquistador evokes mixed emotions in the author, especially before the Cortes invasion of Mexico, the monk uses mostly complementary motifs to describe the figure of the Spaniard, but as a treacherous invader.*

Keywords: *the History of Spain, Hernan Cortes, Bartolome de Las Casas, History of American Conquest, Historiography.*

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ПОСТАТЬ ЕРНАНА КОРТЕСА В «ІСТОРІЇ ІНДІЙ» ДЕ ЛАС КАСАСА

Анотація. *У статті йдеться про спірність визначення характеристики образу Ернана Кортеса у творі «Історія Індій» відомого монаха Домініканського Ордену та одного з найперших правозахисників корінного населення доколумбової Америки Бартоломе де Лас Касаса. Було визначено, що постать конкістадора викликає у автора змішані емоції, особливо до початку вторгнення Кортеса в Мексику монах використовує здебільшого компліментарні мотиви для опису постаті іспанця, однак, описуючи його постать після початку завойовницької експедиції, Лас Касас різко змінює своє відношення до нього, характеризуючи Кортеса як віроломного загарбника.*

Ключові слова: *Історія Іспанії, Ернан Кортес, Бартоломе де Лас Касас, Історія завоювання Америки, Історіографія.*

Problem situation. Bartolome de Las Casas is one of the most famous human rights defenders of his era, but Hernan Cortes is one of the greatest conquerors at the same time and there is a conflict between two persons, given the fact that the conquistador is assigned a significant part of the «History of the Indies».

Analysis of research. The work of Las Casas was the subject of controversy among scientists for many centuries.

The purpose of the article is to characterize the person of Hernan Cortes in the work of Las Casas, to research the book to find out the author's attitude to the Spanish conquistador and his actions in Mexico at the start of Hernan's career. Also the purpose of my work is to study the dynamics of changing the author's views on the personality of the hero as well as their reasons.

Presenting the main material. «A controversial hero» – that is what Christian Duverger called Hernan Cortes, who has been one of the greatest Spanish conquistadors in the 16th century (Дюверже, 2005: 11). At that time he was considered one of the greatest conquerors in history because with a small army he was able to crush an entire empire. At the same time, there were the people who did not believe so. Now I am writing about the person of Bartolome de Las Casas, who wrote «The history of the Indies» in 1561. It also contains the first sustained criticism of the conquest, according to the historical statements. It raises philosophical questions: the moral issues of war, slavery, human rights and the dilemma of the civilizing mission of the Spanish government. Bartolome de Las Casas was a 16th-century Spanish landowner, writer, and bishop of the Dominican Order, famed as a historian and social reformer.

Las Casas is now considered one of the first human rights defenders, especially of the rights of indigenous people. He also criticized all the conquistadors for their cruelty, brutality, violence, and ferocity. During the process of analyzing his work, the readers can see the life of Spanish colonies at the start of their existing that depicted only by the bad side, because de Las Casas touches upon the theme of «slavery», «cruelty», and «brutality». These words have characterized the life of the colonies according to the Bartolome de Las Casas – this is a popular meaning up to today, but not everyone agrees with this assertion, especially in the scientific community. Not every person in Casas' work has been depicted as a brutal and immoral killer who wants to kill everyone who gets in their way. From the moment of the first mention of Hernan Cortes in the work of Las Casas, it becomes notable

that the author has a changeable meaning of the character. The author begins his story about Cortes by the moment when Cortes was sentenced to the death and was able to avoid it (Лас Касас, 1968: 356). The author chose this moment to begin his story about the conquistador, as he considered it a good way to describe Cortes. Mora Rodriguez and Luis Adrian come to this conclusion in the article «Bartolomé De Las Casas: Política y Liberación» (Rodriguez, Adrian, 2006: 229). Las Casas called Hernan Cortes a brave and experienced secretary in the administration of Diego Velazquez. The author also notes that Cortes was rather enough a famous man among the nobility at that time because he was able to visit a lot of appointments in the theaters, main buildings of the government and he was able to speak closely to Spanish nobility. It is known that Cortes studied law at the University of Salamanca, he also knew Latin, and had a well knowledge of philosophy, history, and law (Дюверже, 2005: 65). Las Casas mentioned that the conquistador always knew how to behave himself in society. In chapter 114 the author uses the word «cunning» several times to describe the personality of Hernan Cortes (Лас Касас, 1968: 357). I noticed that the author used the word to describe the personality of Hernan Cortes in the context of the era in which they both lived. The conquistador's cunning that often appears in Las Casas' story as a kind of «justifying element» in assessing personality from the point of view of a bishop Dominican Order. The priest has already raised the question of the immorality of Cortes, and paid attention to the high ambitions of the Spaniard, because of the fact of conquering of American territories by Europeans and carrying out Catholic missionary activities there. The author considered the last one permissible, but also pointed out that missionary activity must be done with the word, not the sword (Martinez, Gonzales, 2019: 32).

Further, the author described the appointments that were associated with the order to start a new expedition, which was appointed to lead Hernan Cortes, not to Juan Grijalva as it was before. There is a historiographic dilemma related to the financing of the expedition because there are several works, for instance «History of the Indias» that goes on to emphasize on the situation when Diego Velazquez gave Cortes a huge amount of money, more over 2000 denaries (Лас Касас, 1968: 359).

But according to Bernal Diaz del Castillo, Hernan Cortes had been in debts and that expedition financed by his creditors, and Christian Duverger had the same opinion (Дюверже, 2005: 65).

Then there was a conflict between Diego Velazquez and Hernan Cortes and later the conquistador decided to go on an expedition secretly at night because he did not want to lose the opportunity to leave the island amid rumors of his resignation. It was 18 November 1518 when the Spanish conquistador left the island of Española. The author described in detail the situation that happened at the night when Cortes sailed. When the ships were already several tens of meters from the shore, Cortes saw silhouettes of people on the shore, so he immediately ordered to lower the boat and got into it himself. Approaching the shore at a shot distance, the Spaniard heard the cry of Diego Velazquez, he said: «Why are you leaving like that?» But Cortes responded: «Sir, excuse me, in such cases, you do it first, and then you think, what will you order me to do?» Velazquez did not find an answer and silently looked at Cortes.

Las Casas emphasized that the Spaniard went to sea with very few supplies because he hoped to replenish supplies in the nearest ports. It was the port of Macaca, where Cortes went from Santo Domingo. Further, the author, with a certain amount of surprise and respect, told how Cortes was able to replenish food supplies on the ships, using his innate cunning and having success in negotiations. Moreover, the author wrote about his dialogues with him and noted that Cortes liked to answer in Latin, quoting various ancient Roman authors and philosophers (Kamen, 1991: 104). It seems to me that this underlines my assertion that Bartolomé de Las Casas had some kind of sympathy for the conquistador. As an example, I can cite a story that the author wrote in chapter 116. In the city of Champoton, on one of the islands, the fleet of Francisco Hernandez and Juan de Grijalva once located, and they perpetrated a massacre there, killing many people. Hernan Cortes, having landed there later, began to console the residents, even took one child in his arms and began humming a lullaby to him, and convinced local women that they were now safe (Лас Касас, 1968: 362). Moreover, Las Casas writes this story, emphasizing on the good

intentions of Cortes. It even seems that this particular passage was written by Francisco Lopez de Gomara, and not Las Casas, because praising the exploits of Hernan Cortes is one of the main features of Gomara's work.

The author raised a very important topic. He touches upon the question of law, that is, he asked the reader directly whether Hernan Cortes has the right to invade someone else's territory inhabited by other people and invite them to join him, to swear allegiance to Charles the Fifth? Besides, we should remember that both God and Charles the Fifth were unknown to the locals. Las Casas criticized the method of negotiations of Hernan Cortes, as he rarely used interpreters at first. Malinche (or Marina), who is known to us as the companion and interpreter of Cortes, appeared in his detachment later, and before her appearance Aguilar was a interpreter, he disappeared from one of the previous expeditions and learned Nahuatl, so he could translate the speech of Cortes for residents. Also, Aguilar's translation talent is very inferior to that of Marina.

However, it gives the impression that from the moment Cortes stepped ashore and first began contacting the locals on the Yucatan Peninsula, Las Casas' attitude towards him had sharply deteriorated, Las Casas wrote more and more about the Spaniard's successes with obvious anger. It is also worth noting that when it comes to the conquest of Mexico, Las Casas very often begins to quote Francisco López de Gomara and after each quote, he writes that Gomara is a liar and that he praises every step of Cortes just because he served the Spaniard. Confirmation of my words can be found in chapter 118, where Las Casas questions Gomara's claim that the local inhabitants of one of the islands engaged in sacrifices (Wagner, 1948: 268).

In chapter 119 Las Casas constantly mentioned Gomara and criticized what Gomara wrote. Moreover, Las Casas accuses Gomara of outright lies, that he wrote a false story, and also constantly justified the actions of Cortes (Jlac Kacac, 1968: 364-369). Further, the criticism of Cortes continues, because Las Casas paid attention to one of the key aspects of the Spaniard's conquests, meaning his mission. In the letters of Cortes, one can also understand that his main mission is to christianize the locals, but it is worth considering that Hernan Cortes had great

respect for the locals, their culture, and even planned to create conditions for learning the local Nahuatl language in the future (Дюверже, 2005: 218). Sometimes Las Casas wrote strange things when he claimed that the Indians should not obey Cortes just because he «mumbled some words in an unknown language». It does not seem to be true, given that the author had previously praised the Spaniard, even claimed that from personal communication he knows how eloquent was the conquistador.

In the next chapter, the author described the moment when Hernan Cortes met with Montezuma, the ruler of the Aztecs. Las Casas criticized the Spaniard for choosing to demonstrate the strength of his army in response to a lavish ceremony hosted by the Aztec ruler. The author wrote that Cortes proposed to arrange several duels of horsemen, in which the Spaniards and Aztecs were to take part in. Also, at the end of the ceremony, a volley of cannons was fired. Las Casas did not like this moment very much, he complains this is a wrong step on the part of the Spaniards because they had military superiority over the indigenous people. Also, the question of the arms is very important for Las Casas because he always defends the power of words and his assertion about the cruelty of using military superiority.

After meeting with Montezuma, Hernan Cortes went to inspect the villages of locals and asked them about the gold. According to the stories by the locals, he found out that Montezuma ruled those lands and that his power was not good, because he turned the inhabitants into slaves. Cortes showed empathy for the locals and promised that if they helped the Spaniards, together they would defeat Montezuma. The author analyzed that moment in detail because he claimed that the cunning of the conquistador to be the main reason for empathy. The reason for Cortes' empathy will not be found out. Referring to the law, the author claimed that Hernan Cortes had no right to protect the locals from Montezuma because the Spaniard could not be sure that those stories were true. This thesis is extremely controversial, because, as Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo believed, the conquistadors entered more than ten different villages, and almost everywhere residents complained about high taxes, frequent sacrifices, and all kinds of oppression that the Aztecs did (Oviedo, 1959: 122). In addition, Las Casas describes himself as a defender of the rights of

indigenous people. In the modern world his figure is popular as an example to be given. Therefore, it is rather strange that he criticized Cortes for trying to help the locals, exposing him as a tyrant. Even if the goal of Cortes was conquest, one must take into account his good attitude toward the culture of local residents, the author described several situations in which the conquistador showed mercy to women and children.

However, Las Casas in almost every such case tried to explain the situation in such a way that it is logical. Therefore, the author puts forward a version that the conquistador pretended that he was worried about the problems of people in order to get more allies in his campaign of conquest. Moreover, the book even quotes Aristotle that the tyrant always rejoices when he sees strife between his enemies. Here the author showed Hernan Cortes as a real tyrant (Jlac Kacac, 1968: 380).

In chapter 125, the author gave a conclusion about the Cortes' story. This chapter is devoted to the lawsuits brought against Cortes by supporters of Diego Velazquez. He did not want to put up with the fact gently that the whole fleet with people just left. Las Casas told a rather long story about how he personally interacted with the three envoys of Diego Velazquez in Spain. It was about sending a message to Emperor Charles the Fifth taking into account all the crimes of Cortes. Therefore, it was the meeting that became the first source of information about Cortes for Cas Casas. Accordingly, much of what the author has learned about the personality of the Spaniard is a report from the people who serve Diego Velazquez. I would venture to suggest that Las Casas' attitude towards the conquistador changed in a negative direction after that meeting because he described how well he communicated with these people. I consider it is not worth reminding that those people came to Spain in order to submit documents with evidence of the crimes of Cortes, which means that they were extremely interested in the image of Hernán Cortes being darkened.

The author's opinion that Cortes was dominated by gold is mistaken. Many times in the book people can find the words that the Spaniard constantly killed people for the sake of gold, however, both the majority of historians of the «Golden Era» of Spain and more modern researchers disagree with this statement, moreover,

in the letters of Cortes it is clearly traced that the questions gold does not bother him at all, he considered gold as a way to reach the goals (Martinez, Gonzales, 2019: 41).

Conclusion. The person of Hernan Cortes in Bartolomé de Las Casas «History of the Indies» is one of the cornerstones of this work. In the book which is devoted to the personality of the conquistador not so much attention is given to Cortes in general. A little over 30 pages, but in these pages there is as much evil as there is respect. It is very notable that before the departure of Hernan Cortes on an expedition to Mexico, the author's attitude towards the Spaniard is extremely different from what he wrote further. At the beginning of his book, Bartolome de Las Casas emphasized on the natural talents of Cortes many times, but later he criticized him even for those things he often agreed with. I mean the situation when the author criticized the decision of the Spaniard to help the locals to get rid of the Aztec oppression. I think that the personality of Cortes is extremely inconvenient for the author, because Las Casas criticized the Spaniard in all situations, sometimes even putting forward logical guesses in order to present them as Cortes' thoughts. I should conclude that the author refers to a personal conversation with people who came to Spain in order to file a lawsuit against the conquistador. Moreover, Las Casas described that conversation as extremely pleasant. It was this conversation that became important for the formation of the author's opinion about Cortes.

Overall, I think the dark image of Hernan Cortes in this book is the result of the author's pre-existing views on colonization in general, as evidenced by the author's attitude towards attempts to force people to convert to Christianity using weapons. It is for this reason that Las Casas wrote so negatively about the conquistador, it is not connected with the personality of Cortes, but the author already established his own attitude towards colonization in general.

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