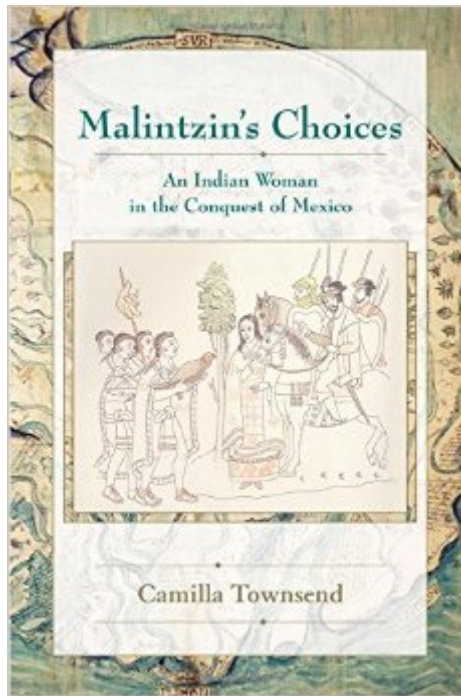


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# Malintzin's Choices: An Indian Woman In The Conquest Of Mexico (Diálogos)



## Synopsis

Malintzin was the indigenous woman who translated for Hernando Cortés in his dealings with the Aztec emperor Moctezuma in the days of 1519 to 1521. 'Malintzin,' at least, was what the Indians called her. The Spanish called her *doña Marina*, and she has become known to posterity as *La Malinche*. As *Malinche*, she has long been regarded as a traitor to her people, a dangerously sexy, scheming woman who gave Cortés whatever he wanted out of her own self-interest. The life of the real woman, however, was much more complicated. She was sold into slavery as a child, and eventually given away to the Spanish as a concubine and cook. If she managed to make something more out of her life--and she did--it is difficult to say at what point she did wrong. In getting to know the trials and intricacies with which Malintzin's life was laced, we gain new respect for her steely courage, as well as for the bravery and quick thinking demonstrated by many other Native Americans in the earliest period of contact with Europeans. In this study of Malintzin's life, Camilla Townsend rejects all the previous myths and tries to restore dignity to the profoundly human men and women who lived and died in those days. Drawing on Spanish and Aztec language sources, she breathes new life into an old tale, and offers insights into the major issues of conquest and colonization, including technology and violence, resistance and accommodation, gender and power. 'Beautifully written, deeply researched, and with an innovative focus, *Malintzin's Choices* will become a classic. Townsend deftly walks the fine line between historical documentation and informed speculation to rewrite the history of the conquest of Mexico. Weaving indigenous and Spanish sources the author not only provides contextual depth to understanding Malintzin's critical role as translator and cultural interpreter for Cortes, but in the process she illuminates the broader panorama of choices experienced by both indigenous and Spanish participants. This work not only provides revisionist grist for experts, but will become a required and a popular reading for undergraduates, whether in colonial surveys or in specialty courses.'--Ann Twinam, professor of history, University of Texas, Austin

In this beautifully written and engrossing story of a controversial figure in Mexican history, Camilla Townsend does a wonderful job unraveling the multiple myths about Malintzin (*Marina*, *Malinche*), and placing her within her culture, her choices, and the tumultuous times in which she lived. The result is a portrayal of Malintzin as a complex human being forced by circumstances to confront change and adaptation in order to survive.'--Susan M. Socolow, Emory University

Camilla Townsend's text reads beautifully. She has a capacity to express complex ideas in simple, elegant language. This book consists of an interweaving of many strands of analysis. *Malinche* appears as symbol, as a historical conundrum, and as an actor in one of history's most fascinating dramas. The reader follows *Malinche* but all the while learns about the

Nahuas' world. It is a book that will be extremely valuable for classrooms but also makes an important contribution to the academic literature.'--Sonya Lipsett-Rivera, professor of history, Carleton University

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

My definition of a "keeper" of a non-fiction book is one where I can read the notes like a separate book; and don't need to read the notes to keep track of what the author has said. This book makes no attempt to find the historical "Malinche." Its focus is on the circumstances and historical knowledge we do have and how that would affect a person in her position. Chock full of data; it suggested over 20 new books for me to add to my already extensive reading list. In addition, I solved two conundrums that had been nagging me for years and clarified where certain actions had taken place. I found, thanks to the clarity of the text a very important book written during the conquest years that had information I thought was not obtainable. Camilla Townsends strictly academic approach and care in the use of non-english records deserves a very strong round of applause.

"What I have tried to write," explains Camilla Townshend in the introduction, "is a book about contexts" (8). Malinche, or Malintzin, the Nahuatl girl who was given to Hernando Cortes as a slave and became his interpreter and mistress, is an elusive figure in the historical record; though many documents, paintings, and oral histories record her existence, few give insight into her motives or

character. Often, Malintzin is depicted as victim or villain, rather than as an astute, resourceful woman making reasoned choices in sixteenth-century Mexico's complex and uncertain political landscape. Townshend focuses on reconstructing the parameters of the world in which Malintzin was raised, the likely trajectory of her life before she met Cortes, and the ways in which other people, indigenous and Spanish, responded to her. In doing so, she crafts a surprisingly detailed and insightful picture of Malintzin's life. Two final chapters on Malintzin's daughter and son depict the consolidation of Spanish rule and the place of mestizos in early Spanish Mexico. Once I started reading, I couldn't put the book down-- and that's an unusual response to have to a work as meticulously scholarly as this one. Highly recommended.

I absolutely love this book. I read it for a history class focusing on colonial Latin America--I read it in two days (I do not recommend this particular strategy, but I had no choice). Townsend flawlessly blends historical data and context with a somewhat hypothetical narrative, and gives voice to a woman that left no written record of her own life. This book is surprisingly powerful, moving, and when Townsend chooses to use poetic language to describe a particular setting or scene, the visuals she creates are spellbinding. I am not a history buff, and getting through historical texts generally takes a lot of work on my part. This book was a joy to read; I recommend it to anyone.

please Salma Hayek make this book a movie!!

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