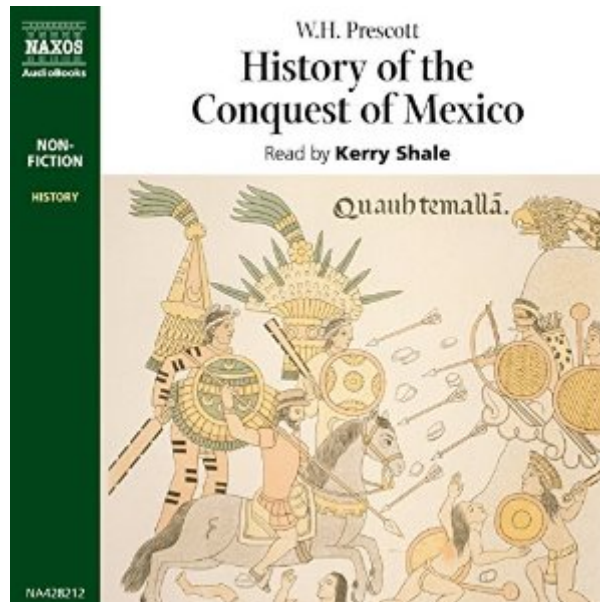


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History Of The Conquest Of Mexico



Synopsis

In 1519, Hernando Cortes arrived in Mexico to investigate stories of a wealthy empire. What he encountered was beyond his wildest dreams - an advanced civilisation with complex artistic, political and religious systems (involving extensive human sacrifice) and replete with gold. This was the Aztec empire, headed by the aloof emperor, Montezuma. With just a handful of men, Cortes achieved the impossible, crushing the Aztecs and their allies, and effectively annexing the whole territory for Spain. One of the most extraordinary stories of conquest in mankind's history is told here in this classic account. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In his "History of the Conquest of Mexico" and its companion volume, the "History of the Conquest of Peru", William Prescott achieves the remarkable feat of portraying the action and adventures of the Spanish cavaliers in a highly readable format for those with little prior knowledge of the Conquests. The subject matter for these books is basically the clash of cultures that occurred between the Old World (in the form of Catholic Spain) and the New (in the form of the Aztecs in Mexico and the Incas in Peru). It is interesting to note that these books were written by in the early 19th century by a partially sighted American author who had never visited the countries but who had access to all available historical documents. The style of writing is such that the reader is never overwhelmed by detail and is continually impressed by the heroic feats of the Spanish and at the same time shocked by their cruelty to the indigenous peoples. In the "History of the Conquest of Mexico", Prescott provides an excellent account of the origin and nature of Mexican civilization at the time of the conquest, describing how the Aztecs dominated the many races of Mexico with savage

brutality, indulging in regular human sacrifices. He then goes on to describe the key player in this adventure, Hernando Cortes, and how he and a small party of cavaliers overcame overwhelming odds to defeat the armies of the Aztecs. While it is impossible not to admire the genius of Cortes, the reader is left in no doubt that the Spaniards were motivated by the promise of Aztec gold and not by the desire to "spread the word of God to the heathen". However, Prescott excuses the means by which Cortes overthrew the Aztec empire as it put an end to the Aztec practice of human sacrifice.

This book is one of the greatest works of world literature, but it can be a deeply disturbing read. By turns, the heart races in outrage and sinks in sorrow at the retelling of the events surrounding Cortes's conquest of the Aztec Empire from 1519 to 1521. There has seldom been an event in history with greater drama, greater conflict, greater peril, and greater moral consequence. Though the conquest is not a turning point in world history, its events can help us fathom many of the most pressing and profound moral and political issues we face down to this day. Prescott tells the story of the conquest superbly, with depth, precision, elegance, sympathy, drama, and emotional power. There are few prose stylists as fine as William Hickling Prescott in the history of English literature, and this is not known widely enough. Many a swollen six-volume history from centuries past has become the province of scholars; few are the classic histories that still can command the attention of lay readers. This is one of them. Many lay readers and scholars testify that this book has lost none of its savor or substance. Prescott emulated Gibbon, that marvel of magnificence in English prose, but thankfully Prescott's style isn't quite as magnificently glorious as the historian's who laid out the momentous decline and fall of the Roman Empire. Prescott's prose stands a bit lower on the register than Gibbon's heroic grandeur; yet Prescott achieves a depth of perception, elegance, and insight that is matched by few writers in all of English literature. As with Gibbon, Prescott's sentences and paragraphs stand as works of art; they are not to be hurried through for the story only, but pondered with an expectation of almost unbounded discovery.

William Hickling Prescott (1796-1859) was an eminent American historian. He wrote in the Preface to this 1843 book, "Although the subject of the work is, properly, only the Conquest of Mexico, I have prepared the way for it by such a view of the civilization of the ancient Mexicans ... If I shall have succeeded in giving the reader a just idea of the true nature and extent of the civilization to which the Mexicans had attained, it will not be labour lost." (Pg. xviii) He notes difficulty of his task, however: "his [Montezuma's] history is to be collected solely from Spanish writers... It is the hard

fate of this unfortunate monarch, to be wholly indebted for his portraiture to the pencil of his enemies." (Pg. 220) He states, "The tutelary deity of the Aztecs was the god of war... The soldier, who fell in battle, was transported at once to the regions of ineffable bliss... Every war, therefore, became a crusade; and the warrior, animated by a religious enthusiasm, like that of the ... Christian crusader ... courted... the imperishable crown of martyrdom. Thus we find the same impulse acting in the most opposite quarters of the globe... each earnestly invoking the holy name of religion in the perpetuation of human butchery." (Pg. 19) He records "the popular traditions respecting Quetzalcoatl, that deity with a fair complexion and flowing beard, so unlike the Indian physiognomy, who... promised, on his departure, to return at some future day with his posterity." (Pg. 122) Later, Cort s "encouraged the idea that his own sovereign was the great Being indicated by Montezuma." (Pg.

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