



Spain – Hernán Cortés

Conquest Made Easy.

The Spanish conquest of the American continent was the beginning of the end for the Aztecs. Led by Hernán Cortés, the Spanish allied with the Aztecs' enemy tribes, giving them the greater strength. Nonetheless, it took three years to overthrow the Aztec Empire and its ruler Motecuhzoma II, a process which left the capital (Tenochtitlán) and most of the native peoples' written records and documents almost fully destroyed.

As well as weapons and disease, the Spanish were also aided by an old legend. The Toltecs, Aztecs and Mayas all worshipped the god Quetzalcóatl. However, there were also several historical figures who also bore the name Quetzalcóatl. Thus, mythology and reality were mixed, without any clear division between the god and these people.

The most famous man to bear this name was Cē Ācatl Topiltzin Quetzalcóatl, who came to the Toltec throne in AD 980. A religious reformer who banned human sacrifice, he was a thorn in the side of priests whose gods demanded the practice. According to legend, they got him drunk to make him break his own moral and ethical principles.

Upon this, Quetzalcóatl is said to have sailed away on a raft made of serpents, due to return in the year "One Reed". In depictions, Quetzalcóatl is shown either as a white-bearded, light-skinned man or as a giant rattlesnake decorated with the plumage of the Quetzal, a sacred bird.



The great conqueror Hernán Cortés

As chance would have it, of all the years that Cortés could have arrived to conquer the Aztec Empire, he came in 1519, the year One Reed. Moreover, the Spanish were light-skinned and bearded, and wore helmets and armour decorated with feathers and glistening like snakeskin.

Tragically, Motecuhzoma II believed Cortés to be the returning Quetzalcóatl, and welcomed him with open arms, a fact which evidently played into the hands of the Spanish to a fairly significant extent during their campaigns.