



Deadly Baggage: What Cortes Brought to Mexico and How It Destroyed the Aztec Civilization

Al Sandine

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In 1519, a few hundred Europeans led by Hernan Cortes sailed from Cuba to the Mexican mainland, where they encountered representatives of the Aztec Empire. Their Iberian history, culture and religion, and their experience in the Greater Antilles made conquest and riches the aim of these adventurers. They regarded themselves as heroes in a romantic crusade of good against evil. Each member of the expedition sought to acquire precious metals and to become a lord of enslaved native labor. Their horses and steel swords, aided by native disunity and susceptibility to Old World diseases, ensured their success.

This analysis of the conquest of Mexico stands in contrast to previous narratives that either reduce the conquest to a contest between Cortes and Montezuma, or describe a near miraculous victory of European ingenuity and Western values over Indian superstition and savagery. The author re-frames the clash of civilizations in New World prehistory that left inhabitants at a disadvantage.

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