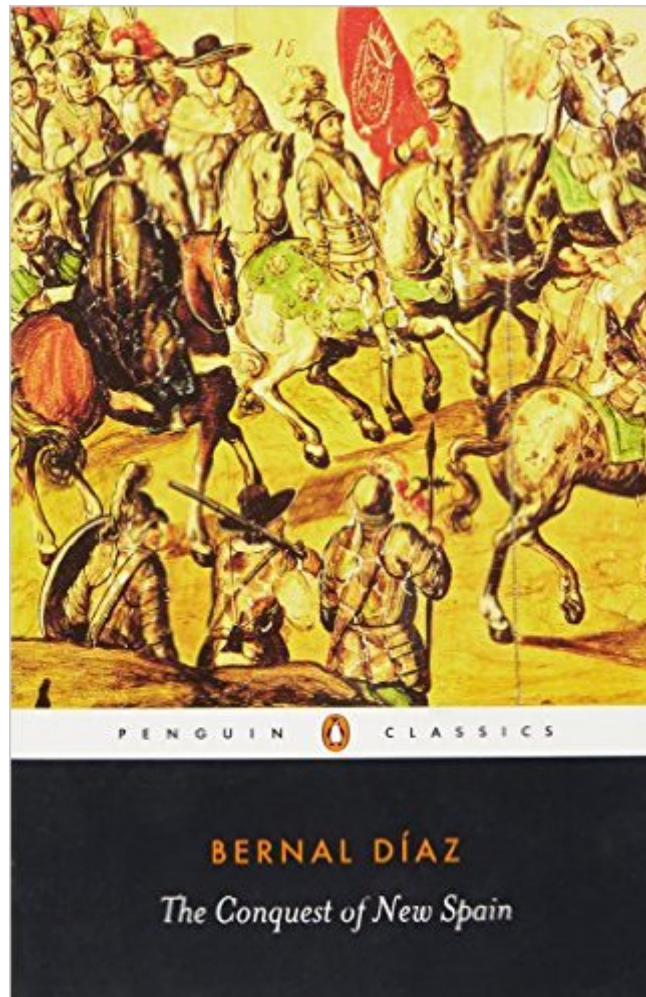


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The Conquest Of New Spain (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

Vivid, powerful and absorbing, this is a first-person account of one of the most startling military episodes in history: the overthrow of Montezuma's doomed Aztec Empire by the ruthless Hernan Cortes and his band of adventurers. Bernal D'Alvarez del Castillo, himself a soldier under Cortes, presents a fascinatingly detailed description of the Spanish landing in Mexico in 1520 and their amazement at the city, the exploitation of the natives for gold and other treasures, the expulsion and flight of the Spaniards, their regrouping and eventual capture of the Aztec capital. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

Book Information

Series: Penguin Classics

Paperback: 412 pages

Publisher: Penguin Books (August 30, 1963)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0140441239

ISBN-13: 978-0140441239

Product Dimensions: 5.1 x 1 x 7.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 10.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars See all reviews (73 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #12,942 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #4 in Books > History > Americas > Mexico #7 in Books > History > Americas > South America #313 in Books > History > Military

Customer Reviews

Let me share with you one of the most beautiful reviews of Bernal's epic, written by the great Guatemalan writer and poet Luis Cardoza y Aragón (from his book "Guatemala: The Lines of Her Palm", translated into English by Michelle Suderman): I started leafing through *The Discovery and Conquest of Mexico* at my student's desk, at night by lamplight. I skimmed summaries, the odd page, then began my reading in an orderly fashion. Tirelessly, I penetrated further and further into the enchanted forest, mesmerized by the story and by this encounter with my warrior culture, with the conquest. I was entering a distant and fascinating world. I witnessed and experienced the

legendary campaign. I saw and heard it. I smelled its odor of iron, gunpowder and tired bodies. I was awed by the descriptions of Tenochtitlan, the markets and Moctezuma's court. The blood looked fresh on the steps of the pyramids. As Humboldt points out, the exhilaration of a newly discovered world is better transmitted by chroniclers than by poets. My first contact with this work was positively prodigious. Exhaustion came after reading for many hours without being able to stop. Captivated by descriptions and memories, I kept going, reading a little more, just a little more. I finally left off when the light of the new day began singing in my window. This is the most comprehensive work on the conquest of America, though it speaks only of New Spain. It contains a wealth of information, and details of all orders, that we do not find in posterior writings on related events-not even adding them together. It was written in Antigua Guatemala, where D'Az del Castillo took up residence in 1545 at the age of forty-nine, and where he died in 1584 after having lived there for about thirty-nine years.

Bernal Diaz del Castillo, Governor of Santiago de Guatemala, wrote his account of the conquest of Mexico while an old man because he felt that many of the works concerning the conflict were little more than de facto hagiographies of Hernando Cortes. Considering his feelings regarding the then-published writings of Bartolome de Las Casas, it is probable that he was equally concerned with rebutting the latter's colorful account of the conquest. Diaz's account is straight-forward and without literary pretensions, presenting a pleasing contrast to the smoother narrative of Cortes' letters and the unbridled passion of Las Casas' BRIEF ACCOUNT. In other words, it makes for quite pleasurable and interesting reading! One of the recurring themes is how the Spaniards are treated by non-Aztecs as they travel toward Mexico City. Many of the states which were more distant from Montezuma's capital were quick to side with the Spaniards in the hopes of throwing off the Mexican yoke and ending their military threat. When the Spaniards appeared to be successful and strong, their allies became more committed to them and when they were shown to be vulnerable their allies began to question the basis of loyalty to the new occupiers. Once the Spaniards gained the upper hand, numerous subject peoples, finding that the Aztec soldiers were no longer able to rape and plunder them or take their sons & daughters to be sacrificed, began seeking the aid of the Spaniards and providing them with support. Throughout, the Tlascalans were their most powerful and consistent allies (and were quickest to adopt the faith of the apparently powerful Christian divinity).

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