



Cortes and Montezuma

Maurice Collis

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The convergence of Cortés and Montezuma is the most emblematic event in the birth of what would come to be called "America."

Landing on the Mexican coast on Good Friday, 1519, Hernán Cortés felt himself the bearer of a divine burden to conquer and convert the first advanced civilization Europeans had yet encountered in the West. For Montezuma, leader of the Mexicans, April 21, 1519 (known in their sophisticated astronomical system as 9 Wind Day) was the precise date of a dire prophesy: the return of Quetzalcoatl, a fearsome god predicted to arrive by ship, from the East, with light skin, a black beard, robed in black?exactly as Cortés would. The ensuing drama is described by eminent historian Maurice Collis in a style that is equal parts story and scholarship. Though its consequences have been treated by writers as diverse as D.H. Lawrence and Charles Olson, never before have the facts of this event been rendered with such extraordinary clarity and elegance.

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