

Quetzalcoatl



"He has appeared! He has come back! He will come here to the place of his throne and canopy, for that is what he said he would do when he departed." - Montezuma, on hearing Cortés' description.

Quetzalcoatl, "the feathered serpent," stood for the solar light, the morning star. He symbolized knowledge, arts, and religion. In his time, he had been a rich, powerful man, but he had been expelled and vanished across the sea eastwards, near Veracruz, where Cortés had landed. Legend had it that Quetzalcoatl was white-skinned, bearded and he was opposed to human sacrifice. Unnerving as were these similarities to Cortés, there was one factor that was positively spine-chilling: for the year in which Quetzalcoatl was born and died, and the year in which Montezuma's astrologers expected him to "strike at Kings," was 1-Reed. By a 52-1 chance, 1519, the year that Cortés arrived, was 1-Reed.

Emperor Montezuma Giving Gifts to Cortez



“Hernan Cortes, Spanish conquistador, receiving gifts from the Aztec Emperor Montezuma, Mexico, 1518–1519. Educational card, early 20th century, from a series on famous explorers.

Why did Montezuma Welcome Cortez with Open Arm

Montezuma, the ninth ruler of the Aztec Empire, wasn't too worried when he heard about the Spanish explorers. For years, his spies told him about the Spanish and their travels. In 1519, he got news about a new group led by Hernando Cortés entering his empire from the Yucatan Peninsula. Montezuma lived far

from the coast in Tenochtitlan, now Mexico City. He was a strong ruler who had expanded the Aztec Empire and was thinking about how to deal with Cortés.

The Aztecs worshiped their gods by capturing and sacrificing enemies in war. Montezuma was familiar with fighting and wasn't scared of Cortés and his men. He saw the Spaniards as curious but knew they were just humans like him. However, Montezuma also had to face the thousands of Native American allies of the Spanish, especially from Tlaxcala, a fierce rival. The Spaniards had steel swords, which were better than the obsidian weapons of the Aztecs, and they could get help from towns that didn't like the Aztecs.

Montezuma thought about his responsibility to his people. Starting a war might lead to famine if it disrupted farming. So, he decided to welcome Cortés, show him the greatness of his city, and try to make him an ally. If that didn't work, he could always choose to fight later.

By welcoming Cortés, Montezuma showed his intelligence and strength. He knew the Spaniards were here to stay, and defeating Cortés wouldn't stop others from coming. It was better to negotiate from a position of strength in his own city. Montezuma hoped to convince Cortés that they could be powerful allies and keep his empire safe.

Montezuma hosted Cortés and his men for a few months, showing them the temples, markets, zoo, and palaces. He didn't believe Cortés was a god but saw him as a strong rival who could be useful to the Aztec Empire.

An Aztec Remembers the Conquests of Mexico

The Aztecs thought that Cortés might be Quetzalcoatl, a god and hero who had promised to return from the east. Because of this, when Cortés and his men arrived in Mexico, they were often treated as gods. Montezuma sent gifts to welcome them, but as the Spanish moved toward Tenochtitlán, things changed. The friendly welcome turned into suspicion and distrust, which sometimes led to violence.

When Montezuma met Cortés, he gave him necklaces and asked if he was the king. Montezuma confirmed he was and welcomed Cortés, saying he was tired from the journey and had arrived in his city, Mexico. Montezuma told Cortés that the past kings had protected the city for his return and hoped they could see this moment. Montezuma said it was not a dream and that he was happy to see Cortés in person. He said Cortés was foretold by the former kings and welcomed him to his land.

La Malinche, who was translating for Cortés, told Montezuma that they were friends and there was nothing to fear. Cortés expressed his happiness at meeting Montezuma and assured him of their friendship. The Spaniards then settled in Montezuma's palace and asked about the city's resources, warriors, and gold.

Montezuma led them to the gold, surrounded by the Spaniards who had their weapons ready. He walked in the center while they formed a circle around him.