

Colonial Latin American Historical Review

Volume 5
Issue 1 *Volume 5, Issue 1 (Winter 1996)*

Article 7

12-1-1996

Antonio Gutiérrez Escudero, Pedro de Alvarado: el conquistador del país de los quetzales

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Recommended Citation

Graham, María del Carmen. "Antonio Gutiérrez Escudero, Pedro de Alvarado: el conquistador del país de los quetzales." *Colonial Latin American Historical Review* 5, 1 (1996): 80. <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/clahr/vol5/iss1/7>

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Pedro de Alvarado: el conquistador del país de los quetzales. By Antonio Gutiérrez Escudero. (Madrid: Ediciones Anaya, 1988. 128 pp. Illustrations, appendix, bibliography. Price not available.)

Pedro de Alvarado, subject of Antonio Gutiérrez Escudero's insightful biography, personifies his time, the transitional period from the end of the Middle Ages into the modern era, during which the reconquest of Spain from the Moors ended and America was discovered. These focal points in history are decisive and essential factors that helped influence the future of Spain and its conquest of the New World. Each of the conquerors, most with dwindling fortunes and estates in Spain, perceived invading the New World as a means of accumulating riches, fame, and power, thus converting their dreams into an adventurous reality.

Gutiérrez Escudero skillfully narrates the life of Pedro de Alvarado from his birth in 1485 until his death in 1541, introducing a controversial and enigmatic person who biographers often describe as existing at the zenith of both arrogance and valiance. Pedro de Alvarado participated in some of the key battles fought during the conquest of America. He took part in the seizure of the island of Cuba, and later was an essential and dominant figure during the conquest of Mexico, first promoted to captain and subsequently chosen as the right-hand man to Hernán Cortés. Alvarado was the founder of the city of

Santiago de los Caballeros, the capital of Guatemala, and he explored and conquered regions of El Salvador and Honduras as well.

Pedro de Alvarado, one of the short historical books in the series "Sociedad Estatal para la Ejecución de Programas del Quinto Centenario," and published by Biblioteca Iberoamericana, Ediciones Anaya in celebration of the quincentennial of the discovery of America, is written for a high school audience, but offers useful insights to serious students of history. Divided into six sections spanning the life of the conquistador, the first section introduces us to Pedro de Alvarado and his family in Badojoz, Spain, culminating in Alvarado's departure to the New World where, upon his arrival, he was thrust into the conquest of Mexico. In the second section of the book, the author details Alvarado's journey from Veracruz to the city of Tenochtitlán, capital of the Aztecs, and the battles in which he participated, including *la noche triste* (Night of Sorrows), up until the completion of the Spanish subordination of the Aztec empire.

Gutiérrez Escudero then traces Alvarado's journey to Central America, where he was a key figure in the conquest of the Quetzal Indians of Guatemala and Central America, and his expedition into Honduras. It was here that Alvarado earned the title *El conquistador del país de los quetzales*; we learn that while involved in other campaigns Alvarado conquered the Quetzales in an exceptionally cruel and heavy-handed manner. His disposal of indigenous leaders included burning at the stake and any manner of lurid executions carried out for shock effect. When he returned to Spain, Alvarado was accused of excessive cruelty and abuse towards the indigenous peoples. Upon his marriage to Francisca de la Cueva, niece of the Duke of Alburquerque, however, the accusations miraculously disappeared. Alvarado finally returned to Guatemala, the scene of his bloodiest battles, where he died on 4 July 1541.

Gutiérrez Escudero cites the opinions and experiences of such chronologists as Garcilaso de la Vega, Bernal Díaz del Castillo, Francisco López de Gomara, Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, Diego Muñoz Camargo, Fray Antonio de Remesal, Cervantes de Salazar, Fray Francisco Ximénez, Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, and Anals by the Cakchiqueles. These chronologies are extremely helpful and offer insights into Pedro de Alvarado from those who actually knew him. Gutiérrez Escudero's work confirms Alvarado's reputation as a ruthless, cruel person motivated only by his desire for wealth and glory.

As with other books in this important series, this work has exquisite illustrations, ranging from historic paintings to modern photographs. Maps assist the reader in enjoying and visualizing not only geographic locations but also the people involved in the conquest of the Americas. A short bibliography lists the various texts detailing the period and the actions of Pedro de

Alvarado. In addition, a two-page chronology of Pedro de Alvarado's life offers the reader an excellent quick reference for dates, places, and events.

Gutiérrez Escudero's presentation of the life of Alvarado may be considered appropriate for a variety of students ranging from advanced high school to the graduate level. A well-written book that could form the basis for further research, it provides the reader with a short, historically accurate perspective on one of the predominant figures involved in the conquest of America.

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