

Conquistador Voices, Vol. I: The Spanish Conquest of the Americas as Recounted Largely by the Participants

Kevin H. Siepel

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Conquistador Voices is an interesting and wide-ranging look at a critical period in history.

In a two-volume work, Kevin H. Siepel offers a comprehensive look at the Spanish conquest of the Americas through the eyes of those who experienced it, interspersing extensive first-person accounts with his own commentary and framework.

The book is explicit about its intended audience, the general reader, and its hope to bring a historical period to life through first-person narratives rather than biased commentary. Siepel's analysis of the Spanish conquest of the Americas is presented under the umbrella of five narratives, centered around five different figures: Christopher Columbus, Hernán Cortés, Francisco Pizarro, Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, and Hernando de Soto. *Conquistador Voices* is not so much a collection of first-person narratives as a historical account with heavy excerpting from primary sources. Even more impressive, Siepel mentions that he translated most of these accounts himself.

Siepel offers a more nuanced view of the conquistadors—showing how they were at once bloodthirsty, religious, intelligent, able to endure suffering and more than willing to inflict it, and more. He notes that, as history is written by the victors, his accounts focus mainly on European sources, which may be seen as a drawback by those expecting to find a greater emphasis on marginalized voices within his work. However, Siepel does offer the Aztec account of the arrival of Cortés, especially interesting given that the leader Montezuma mistook Cortés initially for the “great deity Quetzalcoatl.”

Though Siepel divides each of his five narratives into chapters, he might have considered additional subsections and headers to break up the long blocks of text in certain areas.

Despite this, the book's overall organization is clear and engaging, and manages to accomplish its goal by setting forth a series of first-person narratives with minimal biased commentary. Perfect for anyone looking for a more in-depth look at the Spanish conquistadors, and interested in them as three-dimensional and not just distant figures, *Conquistador Voices* is an interesting and wide-ranging look at an important period in history.

STEPHANIE BUCKLIN (Winter 2016)

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