

The Legend of El Dorado

Less than half a century after Columbus's discovery of the Americas, around 1541, rumors began to spread among European explorers in South America that anywhere lay a marvelous golden kingdom. At the same time the legend of El Dorado reached the Europe through the Spanish who followed Christopher Columbus to Central America.



Exaggerated legends of El Dorado were supported by the sun-worshipping Chibcha Indians who lived in the mountains – 8600 feet high, near present day Bogota fired their mind. The Chibcha community, it was said, adored gold as the metal of the sun god. They wore golden decorations and covered their buildings with sheets of the valuable metal.

Indians spoke of a holy lake full of gold. Others told about a golden chieftain in a city called Omagua.

As the stories spread, El Dorado came to be a city of gold. In the 1530s the Spaniards and Germans sent several expeditions into somewhere what is currently Colombia to seek El Dorado. However the mountains they were forced to turn back when they ran out of food. Many men were killed in fights with Indians, and all the missions came to grief.



There is some discussion among historians regarding the exact source of the legend of El Dorado. The Spanish conquistadors Sebastian Benalcazar and Gonzalo Jimenez de Quesada as well as the German voyager Nicolaus Federmann claimed to have been searching for El Dorado when they met near present day Bogata in the late 1530s. However, the first written note of the legend originates from the Spanish historian Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo y Valdes. Gonzalo Oviedo in 1541 wrote *Historia General y Natural de las Indias, Islas y Tierra Firme del Mar Oceano*. The story the author had heard from the Indians of Columbia telling of a native chieftain who each morning had gold dust applied to his whole body, which he washed off each evening before going sleep. Although de Oviedo did not confirm the reliability of this story, he reasoned that it was definitely credible, since the massive quantities of gold

that had been found in the previous decades in Peru and Mexico.

The legend of El Dorado did not finish with the conquistadors. Surveyors in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, including the Prussian scientist and explorer Alexander von Humboldt, also sought the legendary treasure.

No notes of El Dorado was found until 1969 when two farmers dug up an gorgeous model raft made of solid gold in a cave nearby Bogota. In the raft were eight tiny oarsmen—rowing with their backs to the regal golden figure of their chief. Also the Lake Guatavita still declines to yield its possible golden treasures.



Despite of fact that some gold and emeralds were found in the muddy banks, the icy depths of the lake were never discovered. It is belived, the offerings to El Dorado the Gilded One is at the bottom of the sacred lake.

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