

# 16.2

## SECTION

# WHAT IMPACT DID THE SPANISH CONQUEST HAVE ON THE AMERICAS?

The discovery of lands in the Caribbean by Christopher Columbus started a wave of exploration and conquest throughout the Americas. Many hundreds of thousands of Indigenous peoples died through disease and warfare, and their traditions and cultures were almost entirely lost.

## OVERVIEW OF SPANISH CONQUEST AND SETTLEMENT IN THE AMERICAS



Towards the end of the 15th century, great voyages of exploration were being undertaken by the Portuguese and the Spanish, as they sought new sea routes between Europe and Asia. While the Portuguese sailed southward towards the tip of Africa, the Spanish looked to the west, across the Atlantic Ocean. Explorers such as Christopher Columbus (an Italian commissioned by the Spanish royalty) were eager to reach the fabled lands of Cathay (China) and Cipango (Japan).

On 3 August 1492, Christopher Columbus set sail from Palos in Spain with three ships – the *Niña*, the *Pinta* and the *Santa Maria* – hoping to find a shortcut to the ‘spice islands’ of the East Indies. In October of that year, however, he landed in the Caribbean islands that are the present-day Bahamas, Cuba and Haiti. He thought that Cuba was Cipango (Japan) or perhaps part of the mainland of Asia. In further voyages between 1493 and 1504, he landed on other islands in the Caribbean, and searched the Orinoco River in South America for a fabled passage into the Pacific Ocean. Having failed to find the passage, Columbus returned home in poor health. He died in 1506, still believing that he had achieved his aim of discovering a western route to Asia.

### Source 16.22

An artist's impression of the arrival of Columbus in the Americas

## Spanish exploration and conquests – key events

After the journeys of Columbus, more than 200 ships brought other explorers and wealth-seekers from Spain to the Caribbean between 1506 and 1518. Spain sent *conquistadors* – conquerors such as Hernán Cortés and Francesco Pizarro, who took huge risks to explore new territories in the hope of enormous reward. Source 16.23 outlines key events in the Spanish exploration and conquests in the New World.

### EXTEND 16.3

- 1 Conduct further research on the life of Columbus. Then write an obituary for him in which you assess his personality and achievements.

**Source 16.23** Spanish exploration and conquests – key events

1492	Columbus establishes a settlement at Hispaniola (now Haiti and the Dominican Republic), which becomes a launching ground for subsequent Spanish expeditions.
1508–1510	Puerto Rico and Jamaica captured, settlement established in Panama
1511	Cuba invaded by Diego Velázquez
1513	Florida, on the northern coast of the Caribbean, is discovered but not colonised by Juan Ponce de Leon
1517–18	The Yucatán Peninsula, the lands of the Maya, are discovered by Hernández de Córdoba Mexico's east coast explored by Juan de Grijalva, who brought back gold trinkets and stories of rich and civilised tribes in the interior
1518–21	An expedition led by Hernán Cortés reaches the Aztec capital Tenochtitlan. His soldiers are driven out of the city in 1521, but with the help of Aztec allies the Spanish capture and destroy the city. This marks the end of the Aztec Empire.
1522	Colonies established in Venezuela ('little Venice'), in South America
1528	The Inca coastline of South America is explored by Francisco Pizarro.
1530–33	Francisco Pizarro sails from Panama with a force of 180 men to conquer the Inca lands. Pizarro's forces capture the Inca ruler and sack the Inca's largest city of Cuzco. Resistance to the Spanish invaders finally ends in 1572.

Spain's government and its people were motivated to explore and conquer new territories in the Americas for several reasons, outlined in Source 16.25



**Source 16.24** Aztec gold jewellery

**EXTEND 16.4**

- 1 Conduct research to complete a table similar to Source 16.23, to outline Spanish exploration and conquests in North America.

**Source 16.25** Reasons for Spanish exploration and conquest



**Expanding empires:** The Spanish and other European powers sought to expand their power and wealth by adding new colonies to their empires. New colonies created wealth for empires through increased trade and taxation, and by using the labour of indigenous peoples.

**New trade routes:** Explorers searched for new trade routes to reach China and the Indies by sea.

**Spreading Christianity:** Supported by the Pope, the Spanish and other explorers wanted to convert pagan peoples (those who did not worship the Christian god) to Christianity.

**The lure of adventure and riches:** Younger sons of the nobility who would not inherit property and men from ordinary families became conquistadors in the hope of finding adventure and wealth, both for the Spanish Empire and for themselves.

**The quest for gold:** In the 15th century, there was an increased European demand for gold to make coins, jewellery and gold thread for tapestries.

**APPLY 16.4**

- 1 The Tainos society on Hispaniola, Spain's first settlement in the region, were wiped out as a result of their treatment by Spanish colonisers. In a group, conduct research to find out the impact of Spanish colonisation of the societies of present-day Venezuela, the Yucatan Peninsula and the Caribbean islands mentioned in Source 16.23.

**REVIEW 16.4**

- 1 Which island did Columbus mistake for Japan?
- 2 Explain why the Americas were not named for Columbus.
- 3 How long did it take the Spanish to conquer the Aztec and Inca civilisations following the discovery of the Americas?

**APPLY 16.5**

- 1 Use a graphic organiser, that includes illustrations, to explain the reasons for Spanish exploration and conquest.



Source 16.26 Hernán Cortés

### STRANGE BUT TRUE

Cortés was also instructed to find the Amazons, a fabled race of warrior women said to live in the region. He was also sent to find out if it were true that there were people with gigantic ears or faces of dogs.

### STRANGE BUT TRUE

Initially, Spanish horses were a terrifying sight to the Aztecs. It is said that the first Native American to see an unhorsed Spaniard fled, believing that the strange animal had come apart to form two separate beings.

## THE EXPEDITION OF CORTÉS TO TENOCHTITLAN

Hernán Cortés was chosen by the governor of Cuba to lead an expedition to the mainland of South America. Like other *conquistadors*, Cortés had come to the West Indies to escape the poverty of his home town in Spain and to seek fame and fortune. In 1519, he set sail with 11 ships and 530 *conquistadors* – including 30 crossbowmen and 12 men armed with arquebuses (an early form of rifle) and cannon. They also took 16 horses and several large fighting dogs. Cortés intended to conquer and colonise on behalf of the king of Spain and in the name of Christianity. His intent was also to find the strait that separated the ‘island’ of Yucatán from the ‘mainland’ in the hope of finding a route to Asia, as it was still believed that China and India were close by, towards the west.

The expedition landed at present-day San Juan de Ulua on the eastern coast of Mexico. Here, the *conquistadors* heard tales of the powerful Aztec king called Montezuma, who ruled from his capital at Tenochtitlan, high in the mountains and several days’ march from the coast. When news reached Montezuma that strangers had landed on the coast, he was unsure how to deal with them, not knowing whether the newcomers were men or gods. He sent splendid gifts, including gold trinkets in the shapes of various animals, a snake’s head made of gold with eyes inlaid with precious stones, and two huge discs as big as cartwheels, one of gold and one of silver and covered with figures and designs. Along with these gifts he sent a message that it would be impossible for the Spaniards to see him and he tried to dissuade them from attempting to come to the capital.

In Aztec culture, giving lavish gifts was a sign of power. Montezuma’s first splendid gifts were intended to show his dominance of Cortés. However, Cortés would have interpreted the gifts as signs of weakness or an attempt to bribe the Spanish. In return, he sent small gifts such as glass ornaments, bracelets and an embroidered cap. These simple gifts were designed to insult Montezuma.

### APPLY 16.6

- 1 Draw cartoons of Montezuma and Cortés, with speech bubbles that show their reactions to the gifts they received from each other. Remember to think from the perspective of both the giver and the recipient of the gifts.

## The *conquistadors’* journey to Tenochtitlan

The distance to Tenochtitlan from San Juan de Ulua was around 400 kilometres. Cortés first moved up the coast to establish a settlement and entered the territory of the Totonac people, who were subjects of the Aztecs. The Totonacs promised to support Cortés in an overthrow of their Aztec masters (the support of tribes who resented the domination of the Aztecs was an important aspect of Spanish conquest). Cortés set out for Tenochtitlan in August 1519 with a force of around 300 *conquistadors* and 800 Totonacs.

The climate was hot and humid, and the first part of their journey was through a flat, heavily forested region, dotted with maize plantations. The land then rose sharply to 1800 metres, where the climate was milder. The next stage was over a cold, bleak plain dominated by a large salt lake. Between the plain and Tenochtitlan, was a chain of high mountains that included the volcanoes Popocatepetl and Ixtaccihuatl, both over 5000 metres high. A pass lay between them at around 4000 metres, after which the land fell away to a valley, and the great lake and the city of Tenochtitlan. Cortés passed through this valley in the summer, when rain fell every afternoon. The paths were deep in mud and rest stops were impracticable.

## The *conquistadors'* journey to Tenochtitlan

### SOURCE STUDY



**Source 16.27** A satellite image of Mexico showing the conquistador's landing point on the gulf coast of Mexico at present-day San Juan de Ulua, and their destination: the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan, now the site of present-day Mexico City



**Source 16.28** Mount Iztaccihuatl (right) and Mount Popocatepetl (left). Between these two volcanoes is a high pass known as the Paso de Cortés.

### INTERPRET 16.2

- 1 Use Sources 16.27 and 16.28 to sketch a map showing the route taken by Cortés, including mountain ranges and other natural features along the way. Add labels to describe these natural features and how they would have influenced or affect the *conquistadors'* journey.
- 2 Use Google Earth or a digital atlas to explore the region through which the *conquistadors* travelled. Suggest which features of the landscape would be unchanged since the time of the journeys of Cortés, and which features would have changed.

### REVIEW 16.5

- 1 What was the main purpose of the expedition led by Cortés in 1519?
- 2 Why did Montezuma send gifts to Cortés when he arrived on the Mexican coast?
- 3 Why did the Totonacs support the Spaniards?

# THE SPANISH CONQUEST OF THE AZTEC EMPIRE

Tenochtitlan fell to the forces of Cortés two years after his arrival on Aztec territory. The Spanish had the advantage of superior weaponry. Their cause was also aided by the devastating effects of a European disease, and by the tribes who became allies of the Spanish.

## First conflicts

The first conflict between the *conquistadors* and native tribes took place when the Spanish encountered and fought the Tlaxcalans, whose territories lay midway between the coast and Tenochtitlan. After being defeated, the Tlaxcalans agreed to become allies and march

to Tenochtitlan. Cortés then reached Cholula, a town close to the high mountains, where Cortés stayed for several days. The Cholulans were allies of the Aztecs and were planning to ambush and capture the *conquistadors* on the road. Cortés learned of the plan and summoned the Cholulan leaders. They arrived unarmed to the temple courtyard, where they were slaughtered by the Spaniards. The Aztecs would have heard about this treatment of their Cholulan allies, before the *conquistadors* reached Tenochtitlan.

The first allies of Cortés, the Totonacs, now returned to their homes laden with gifts from the Spaniards, and Cortés left Cholula with a force of around 1000 Tlaxcalans. He chose to cross the mountains over the most difficult pass (now known as Paso Cortés), to surprise the Aztecs.



**Source 16.29** An artist's impression of *conquistadors* slaughtering the Indigenous population at Cholula in central Mexico

## The conquistadors in Tenochtitlan

The *conquistadors* reached Tenochtitlan in November 1519. Montezuma met Cortés on the causeway (a raised path) leading into the city. He believed Cortés had been sent by the god Quetzalcoatl, but he soon realised that the Spaniards were actually after land and treasure. As relations became less friendly, Cortés took Montezuma as a hostage and sent expeditions into the countryside in search of gold, while he continued to amass any treasure he could find in Tenochtitlan.

In May 1520, while Cortés was out of the city, the Spaniards massacred a group of Aztec nobles during a festival (see Source 16.30). This led to an uprising of the city's inhabitants, and Cortés returned to find that the *conquistadors* had lost control of the city. Montezuma is thought to have been killed by the crowds at this time. In July, the Spaniards tried to quietly withdraw from Tenochtitlan in the middle of the night. However, they were discovered and their withdrawal became a desperate fight to escape. Cortés escaped unharmed, but hundreds of Spaniards and Tlaxcalans were killed.

The Aztecs believed the Spanish threat was over. Soon after they had driven the invaders out, however, smallpox swept through the population. Smallpox and other diseases were introduced to the Americas by European explorers and settlers. Many European diseases were deadly to the native population who had no natural immunity to them. The smallpox epidemic of 1520 had a devastating effect on the Aztecs, quickly killing around a quarter of the population. One of the casualties was Montezuma's successor as Aztec ruler, Cuitláhuac.

### STRANGE BUT TRUE

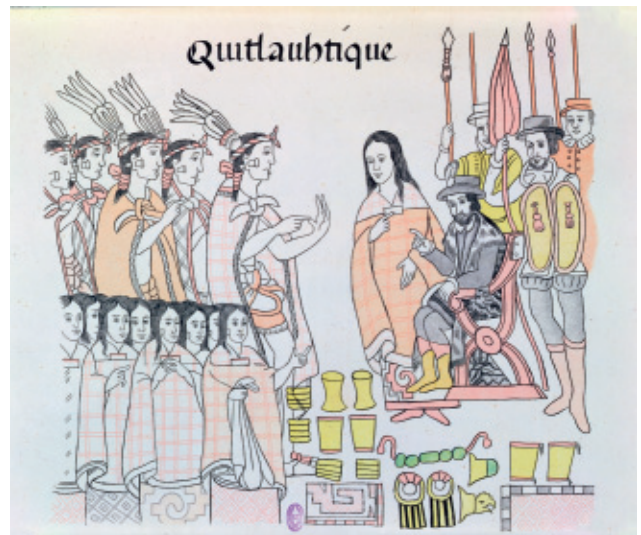
In one account of Montezuma's death, amidst the fighting he went to the palace rooftop to appeal for peace on the urging of Cortés. They responded with a shower of stones, several of which hit Montezuma, and he died from his wounds.

## The conquistadors in Tenochtitlan

### SOURCE STUDY



**Source 16.30** An illustration of the massacre of Aztec nobles during a festival from the Codex Ixtlilxochitl



**Source 16.32** A 19th-century illustration depicts a meeting between Cortés and Montezuma. The woman acting as an interpreter is Doña Marina, known as La Malinche.

### Source 16.31

On the second day [of the festival] they began to sing again, but without warning they were all put to death. The dancers and singers were completely unarmed. They brought only their embroidered cloaks ... their necklaces, their clusters of heron feathers, their trinkets made of deer hooves ... The Spaniards attacked the musicians first, slashing at their hands and faces until they had killed all of them. The singers – and even the spectators – were also killed. This slaughter in the Sacred Patio went on for three hours ... The king Motecuhzoma [Montezuma]... protested: 'Our lords, that is enough! What are you doing? These people are not carrying shields or macanas [wooden clubs]. Our lords, they are completely unarmed!'... [the massacre took place]on the twentieth day after the captain [Cortés] left for the coast. We allowed the Captain to return to the city in peace. But on the following day we attacked him with all our might, and that was the beginning of the war.

An Aztec account of the slaughter of warriors during a festival

### INTERPRET 16.3

- 1 Describe the scene shown in Source 16.32 and suggest what the women and items at the bottom of the illustration are. What does this source tell us about the first contact experience between Spanish and Aztec leaders at Tenochtitlan?
- 2 Describe the scene shown in Source 16.30.
- 3 Read Source 16.31. Does this account support the evidence provided in Source 16.30?

### EXTEND 16.5

- 1 La Malinche was a noblewoman from a native tribe who was given to the Spaniards as a slave. She acted as an interpreter between Cortés and Montezuma at their first meeting, and became the mistress of Cortés. Conduct research to write a brief biography of La Malinche. Include sources that show different perspectives about her role in the Spanish conquest of the Aztec Empire.



**Source 16.33**

A 16th-century illustration of an Aztec warrior from the *Historia de las cosas de Nueva Espana*. The warrior carries a wooden club and a shield made from feathers, agave paper, leather and reed.

## The defeat of the Aztecs and destruction of Tenochtitlan

After escaping from the city, the Spaniards retreated to the territory of their Tlaxcalan allies. Cortés rested his army for 20 days, then set off on a campaign to conquer Aztec allies in the surrounding regions. This was the most brutal campaign conducted by Cortés. He won over half of the Aztecs territories, with the native peoples supporting the *conquistadors* through fear. An estimated 15 000 to 20 000 people died in battle; women and children were enslaved and some captives were given to the Tlaxcalans for human sacrifice and to cannibalise. Other tribes joined the Spaniards willingly, to help throw off the rule of their Aztec overlords.

In May 1521, Cortés returned to Tenochtitlan and laid siege to the city with a force of 550 Spaniards and 10 000 Tlaxcalan. As well as executing daily attacks, he used boats to cut off the city from supplies of food, and destroyed the aqueduct that brought fresh water into the city.

The Aztecs, who were already vulnerable after the smallpox epidemic, were finally overcome after a three-month siege. Cortés

had originally intended to preserve Tenochtitlan and offer it to the Spanish king as a prize. However, after months of bombardment by Spanish cannons, the once-great city lay in ruins. Stones from the temples, pyramids and palaces were used to build churches and government buildings. The canals that criss-crossed the city were filled in.

### Reasons for Spanish success

Historians estimate that around 100 000 Aztecs and about 100 Spaniards were killed during the three months when Cortés laid siege to Tenochtitlan. Tens of thousands of Aztecs and other peoples had also been killed in his campaigns. In contrast, the Spanish lost less than 1000 of the 1800 *conquistadors* who came to Mexico between 1519 and 1521. The success of the Spanish in battle and widely differing casualties were a consequence of the superior technology and weapons of the Spaniards, the fierceness of their tribal allies who were enemies of the Aztecs, and the different fighting methods of the Aztec and Spanish.

**Source 16.34** Spanish advantages over the Aztecs

	Spanish	Aztec
Weapons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Spaniards used steel for their armour and weapons.</li> <li>The Spaniards used gunpowder with powerful cannons and firearms.</li> <li>The use of horses gave the conquistadors some advantage – before the Spanish came the Aztecs had never seen horses and were initially frightened of them.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Aztecs fought with wooden clubs and swords made of obsidian, a hard but brittle form of volcanic rock which broke against the armour and swords of the conquistadors.</li> </ul>
Battle tactics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The conquistadors were well trained in disciplined military manoeuvres.</li> <li>A smaller Spanish force could defeat a larger Aztec force as long as they could maintain their energy.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Aztecs had a tradition of running at their enemies head on. This meant that only the front ranks could fight, to be replaced by rear ranks as they were cut down.</li> </ul>
Fighting traditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Spanish killed enemies from a distance with cannons and guns, retreated when battles were being lost, and attacked villages at night when the inhabitants were asleep.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To Aztec warriors, killing from a distance was not honourable. Battles were highly organised and fought hand-to-hand.</li> <li>The Aztecs were also used to wounding their opponents rather than killing (to capture them for sacrifice). This would often give the Spaniards a chance to escape from battle and fight another day.</li> </ul>

## The defeat of the Aztecs

## SOURCE STUDY

### Source 16.35

[the Aztec ruler Cuauhtemoc] would prefer to die where he was rather than on any account appear before me ... The people of the city had to walk upon their dead while others swam or drowned in the waters of that wide lake where they had their canoes; indeed, so great was their suffering that it was beyond our understanding how they could endure it. Countless numbers of men, women and children came out toward us, and in their eagerness to escape many were pushed into the water where they drowned amid that multitude of corpses; and it seemed that more than fifty thousand had perished from the salt water they had drunk, their hunger and the vile stench. So that we should not discover the plight which they were in, they dared neither throw these bodies into the water ... nor throw them [out of the city] where the soldiers might see them; and so in those streets where they were, they came across such piles of the dead that we were forced to walk upon them ...

Extract from a letter by Hernan Cortés, describing the end of the siege of Tenochtitlan, in *Letters from Mexico*, Anthony Pagden (ed.), Anthony Pagden (trans.), Yale University Press, 1986, pp. 263–264.

### INTERPRET 16.4

- 1 Examine Source 16.36 and identify the advantages that the Spanish had in fighting the Aztecs depicted in the illustration.
- 2 In Source 16.35, what was Cortés referring to that was beyond understanding?
- 3 According to Cortés, what were the causes of death of the besieged Aztecs? What Spanish actions were these a consequence of?
- 4 Write an account of the end of the siege of Tenochtitlan from the perspective of an Aztec survivor, then from the perspective of one of a Spanish soldier.



**Source 16.36** A 19th-century illustration of the final battle between Cortés and Aztec ruler Cuauhtémoc at Tenochtitlan in August 1521

### REVIEW 16.6

- 1 Which tribes were allies of the Spanish?
- 2 Why did Montezuma greet Cortés in peace when the Spaniards arrived in Tenochtitlan?
- 3 Describe the incident that caused the Aztecs in Tenochtitlan to rise against the Spaniards in 1520.
- 4 Outline the tactics used by Cortés in his successful siege of Tenochtitlan.



# THE IMPACT OF SPANISH CONQUEST AND COLONISATION IN THE AMERICAS

The impact of the Spanish conquest of the Americas cannot be underestimated. The arrival of Europeans would lead to the downfall of Indigenous groups throughout the region.

## The Spanish settlement of Mexico

The destruction of Tenochtitlan by Cortés marked the beginning of 300 years of Spanish rule in the former Aztec Empire. From Tenochtitlan, Cortés sent expeditions out in all directions to expand Spanish settlement. Territories were divided up and ruled by Cortés, his Spanish companions and even a few Aztecs who had become Christians, such as the son and daughter of Montezuma. Each town was governed by a *conquistador*, who was meant to ensure that the Indigenous peoples under his protection became Christians and good subjects of the Spanish king. In return, he required their payment of a tribute and their services.

A remarkable characteristic of Spanish settlement was the part played by Indigenous peoples, including Tlaxcalans and Aztecs. Their leaders were permitted to ride horses and dress as the Spanish did, and they played an important role in bringing outlying tribes under the rule of New Spain. In two to three generations, their descendants became indistinguishable in habits and speech from the grandchildren of *conquistadors*.

## Spanish treatment of the conquered Aztecs

In contrast to the way some native leaders were treated once they had conquered the Aztec Empire, the Spanish treated the ordinary people very badly. Under the Spanish, the Aztecs lost their land and independence. The Spanish saw the new territory as a source of great potential wealth. That wealth could only be created through the labour of the population. Natives were given to soldiers, officers and other important Spaniards under a system called the *encomienda*. In theory, the Spaniards were supposed to protect the Native Americans, teach them Spanish and convert them to Christianity. In practice, the Native Americans were usually just treated as slaves. The Spanish were greedy for gold and silver to ship back to Spain. In addition to looting the society, the Spanish forced Indigenous peoples to work in the gold and silver mines of the Americas, where they were brutally treated and sometimes worked to death.

## The expansion of the Spanish Empire

The defeat of the Aztecs by Cortés encouraged other *conquistadors* in their dreams of conquest and wealth. In the 1530s and 1540s, the Indigenous peoples in the regions formerly controlled by the Inca Empire and the Maya were treated as brutally as the Aztecs. The Spanish Empire became one of the greatest trading empires of the early modern world, which lasted until the end of the 19th century.

### Source 16.37

By 1550, Spain dominated the lands and peoples around the Caribbean, and deep into both North and South America: a domain more than ten times larger than Spain itself. The approximately twenty million or more Indians they encountered dwarfed the seven million Spaniards at home. In extent and population, and cultural diversity, the Spanish empire in the Americas exceeded even the ancient Roman, previously the standard of imperial power.

Extract from Michael McDonnell, 'The "conquest" of the Americas: The Aztecs', at *American History for Australian Schools* website

# The wider impact of Spanish conquest in the Americas

## European diseases

Before the arrival of the Spanish, civilisations in the Americas had never been exposed to people from beyond their region. This meant that they had no immunity to diseases that were common in Europe. The Spanish, in contrast, came from a continent that had been ravaged by epidemics (widespread contagious diseases) for hundreds of years. Most Europeans had some immunity to diseases such as smallpox, measles and influenza. When these diseases accompanied the *conquistadors* to the Americas, outbreaks among Indigenous peoples severely reduced their populations. There were major outbreaks of smallpox in the 1520s, measles from 1531 to 1532, influenza in 1545 and 1576, as well as the spread of plague, whooping cough and mumps. It has been estimated that the Indigenous populations in Spanish colonies dropped from 8 million in 1518 to 2.6 million in the 1560s. Some have argued that the effect of these diseases in the Caribbean and South America was worse than that of the Black Death in Europe in the 14th century. It has been claimed that 90 per cent of the inhabitants of the Inca Empire died from introduced diseases.



**Source 16.38** A drawing from the Florentine Codex depicts Indigenous people infected with smallpox. The drawing was made by Bernardino de Sahagún, a 16th-century Spanish missionary.

## Forced labour and slavery

As early as 1493, the Indigenous peoples in the Americas learned what it was to lose their freedom. In the settlement of Hispaniola, the hard work was done by the native Taino people. The *conquistadors* raped women, enslaved men, imposed unjust punishments and insisted on being provided with gold. When Taino chiefs protested, they were overthrown, transported or killed. The Indigenous population in the Caribbean was reduced to almost nothing in two generations. Traditional agriculture was destroyed and the local people were worked to death in the search for gold. In smaller, 'useless' islands the natives were enslaved and moved to the larger colonies as labour. Perhaps 200 000 died in the four largest Caribbean islands in a quarter of a century. As we have seen, people from the conquered Aztec and Inca societies were also treated as slaves by their Spanish 'protectors'.

## The spread of Christianity

After conquest, priests came to set up the Catholic Church in Mexico and other colonies, and carried out thousands of conversions. The rapid conversion to Christianity was remarkable, with hundreds of thousands of Native Americans becoming Catholics. Spanish colonies were soon covered in a network of monasteries, churches, shrines and parishes. Out of sight of the priests, many Indigenous peoples continued to worship the old gods, but without the element of human sacrifice.

### STRANGE BUT TRUE

While the effect of European diseases cannot be underestimated, recent research has suggested that a major disease that dramatically affected the population may have been a home-grown variety. The Aztec name for this disease was *Cocoliztli*, and modern scientists have identified it as a form of Ebola, spread by rats.

## APPLY 16.7

- 1 Conduct research and write a short report about one of the wider impacts of Spanish conquest on the Indigenous peoples of the Americas. Include relevant sources.

### STRANGE BUT TRUE

Because he was convinced that he had reached the coastline of Asia, Columbus never realised – nor was it recognised by anyone during his lifetime – that he had found a new continent. This honour went to the Italian navigator Amerigo Vespucci who made three voyages to the New World and wrote about his discovery. 'America' (both North and South) was named for him in 1507.

## Agriculture and food

From 1522, Cortés brought in European domestic animals – such as cattle, pigs, sheep, goats and mules – from the West Indies to the mainland of the Americas. Native Americans were introduced to the horse by the Spanish. Cortés also imported sugar cane, mulberry trees for silkworms, vines, olives and wheat.

## European learning and technologies

The conquered peoples adapted fast to the new European ways, learning Latin script, the use of the wheel and pulley, employing wax candles for illumination, and working with mules and oxen. They also found out about the advantages of working with metal nails and screws.

## The longer-term effects of Spanish colonisation

### The colonisation of the New World

Explorers from other countries were motivated by Spain's success in finding wealth and new land in the Americas. The initial voyage of Christopher Columbus started a wave of exploration in North and South America by the British, French and Dutch. Spain's great rival, Portugal, also set up colonies in the Americas. Eventually the entire continent came under the control of colonial powers.

### Population change, language and religion

Spanish colonisation dramatically changed the ethnic make-up of the Americas. First, many of the Indigenous populations were killed by disease. Then, many Spaniards migrated to the Americas after colonisation had begun. Approximately 240 000 moved to the Americas in the 16th century, and another 500 000 in the following century.

One of the legacies of the *conquistadors* was the spread of the Spanish language, which is by far the most common language in Latin America now. In fact, it is the second-most widely spoken language in the world, after Mandarin. Brazil's main language, however, is Portuguese. This can be traced back to the Treaty of Tordesillas of 1494, which stated that all lands discovered west of a line drawn down the Atlantic Ocean should belong to Spain and all to the east to Portugal.

The Catholic Church also expanded its worldwide influence after Spanish conquest, spreading to distant regions of South America, Africa and the Philippines.

**Source 16.39** Today, Spanish is the official language of many nations in the Americas, such as Mexico.



## African slave trade

In the Caribbean, the brutal treatment of the local populations meant that most of them died or were not fit to work on the plantations established by the Spanish. To solve this problem, the Spanish brought shiploads of African slaves to work in the Caribbean, and to other parts of the Americas. One impact was the changed ethnic make-up of the population, so that the majority were no longer Indigenous but European and African. A wider impact was the growth of the African slave trade, which became the reason behind one of the great movements of people during the 18th and 19th centuries. It is estimated that around 12 million Africans were captured and brought to the Caribbean, South America and Britain's North American colonies before the trade in humans was finally abolished in the 19th century.



**Source 16.40** African slaves at work in the mines of Hispaniola. Africans were first brought to the Caribbean as slaves to replace the native Taino people, many of whom had died from disease and overwork.

## The Columbian Exchange

The Columbian Exchange is a term used for the transfer of crops, livestock, people and disease between the Americas and the rest of the world after the arrival of Columbus in the New World. We have already discussed the effect of the introduction of diseases, and new livestock (such as horses and other large domestic animals) that transformed traditional farming practices in the Americas. The most significant changes in other parts of the world resulting from Spanish colonisation were the introduction of new crops to Europe and Asia. Imagine Ireland without potatoes, Italy without tomatoes, Switzerland without chocolate, Thailand without chillies. All these crops were unknown outside the Americas before the Spanish arrived but became very important to the diets of these countries. The foods that were brought from the Americas became important sources of nutrition for European populations. Crops such as potatoes and peanuts allowed more efficient farming. These crops could yield more calories per acre than in the past. In addition, foods such as tomatoes and chilli peppers were a rich source of vitamins. In the Mediterranean, these foods enriched diets and improved the health of the population. These improvements in food helped to trigger population growth in Europe and other regions.



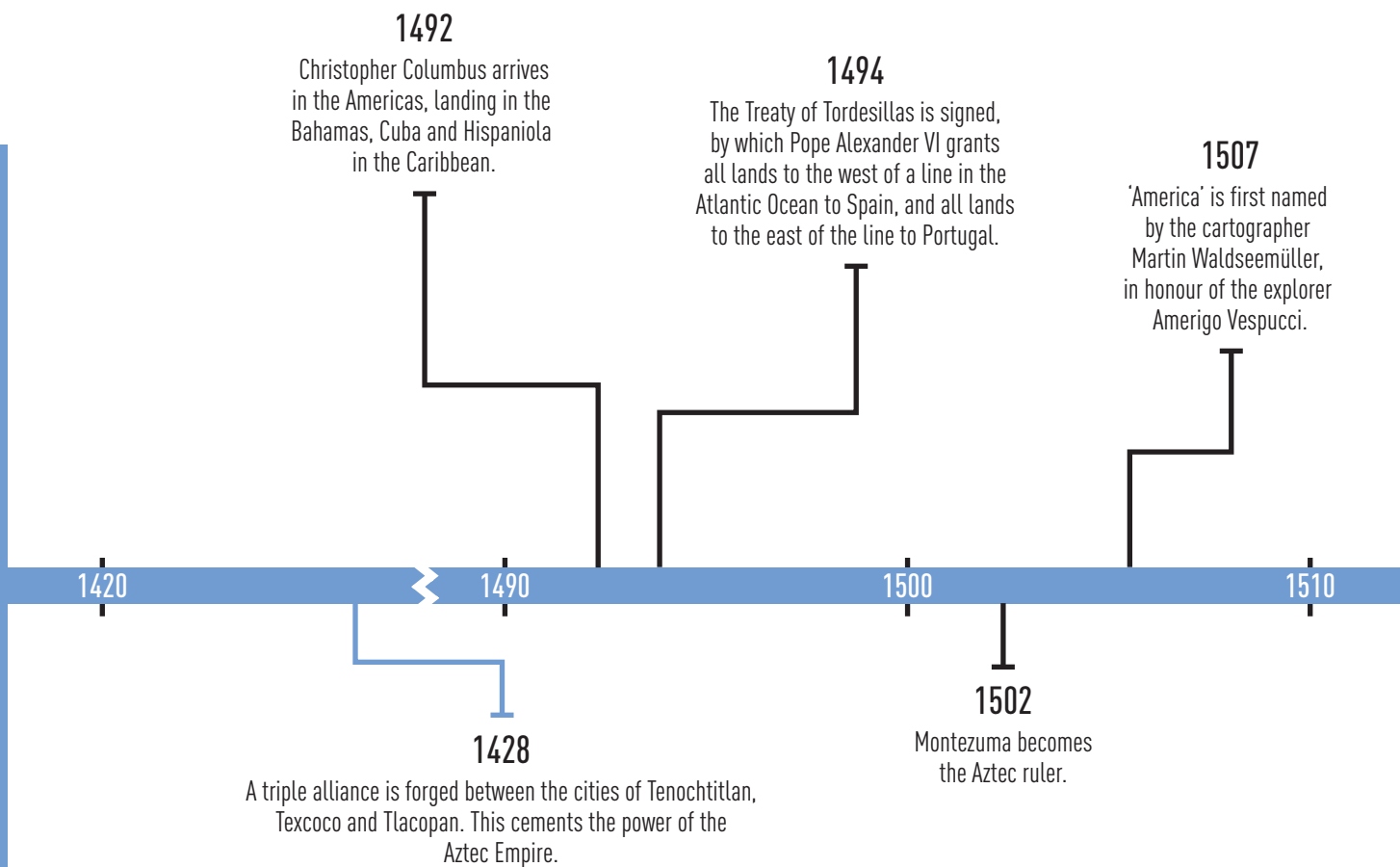
**Source 16.41** Maize (corn) and chillies are two examples of foods that were unknown outside the Americas before the travels of Columbus

### REVIEW 16.7

- 1 How did the Spanish control the former Aztec Empire after the fall of Tenochtitlan?
- 2 Explain the term *encomienda*.
- 3 How large was the population of Spain's colonies in the Americas compared to the population of Spain itself?
- 4 How much of the Indigenous population is estimated to have died from European diseases?
- 5 List the foods that were brought to Europe from the Americas.

# THE SPANISH CONQUEST OF THE AMERICAS – A TIMELINE

T  
I  
M  
E  
L  
I  
N  
E



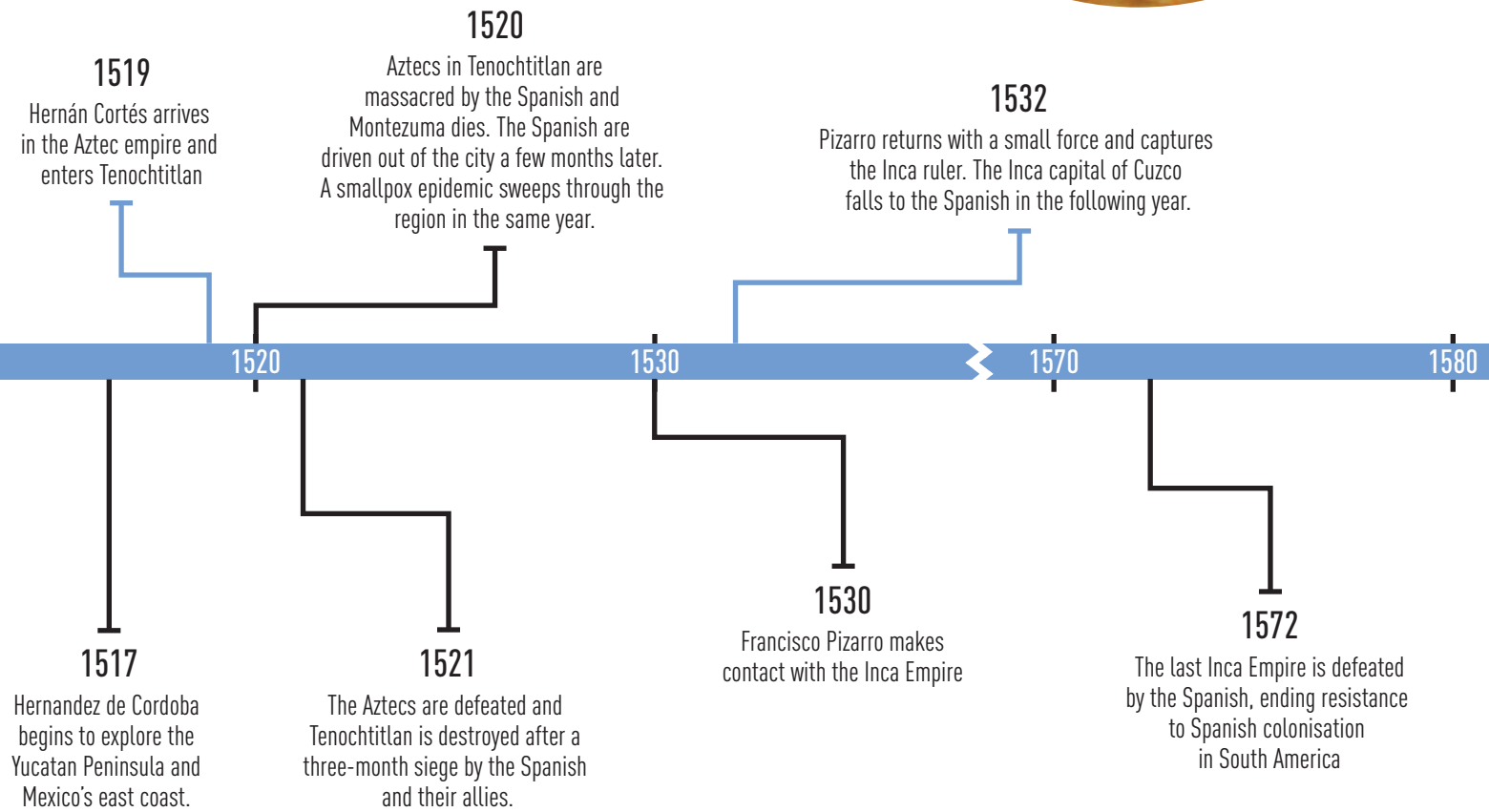
**Source 16.2**  
An artist's impression of the great city of Tenochtitlan



**Source 16.3**  
A 16th-century illustration depicting the arrival of Cortés and his conquistadors in the Aztec Empire.



**Source 16.4**  
A painting showing Pizarro's attack on unarmed Inca warriors in 1532



### REVIEW 16.1

- 1 List the Spanish or other Europeans mentioned in the timeline and the key events in the Spanish conquest in the Americas in which they were involved.
- 2 How long was the period between:
  - a the arrival of Cortés in the Aztec Empire and the capture of its capital Tenochtitlan?
  - b Pizarro's arrival in the Inca Empire and the capture of its capital Cuzco?