

Unit 3 Expanding contacts: Discovery and exploration

The Spanish conquest of the Americas

Towards the end of the 15th century, a period of discovery and exploration began in Europe. In 1492, explorer Christopher Columbus discovered the islands now known as the Bahamas. This marked the beginning the Spanish conquest of the Americas.

Driven by a desire for wealth, power and territories, countries such as Spain sent explorers known as conquistadors (conquerors) in search of new lands and trade routes. When the Spanish arrived in the Americas, there were two dominant empires there – the Aztec Empire and the Inca Empire. Despite their advanced societies and cultures, the Spanish saw these Indigenous peoples as primitive,



godless 'savages'. They quickly set to work enslaving their people and devastating their cultures.

chapter 19

19A

How were societies organised in the Americas before the arrival of the Spanish?

- 1 Religion was a central part of Aztec society, and human sacrifices were performed in honour of the gods. Why might they have done this?

19B

Why did the Spanish colonise the Americas?

- 1 Great voyages of exploration were launched by Europeans towards the end of the 15th century. What might have motivated Spanish explorers to journey through unknown oceans?

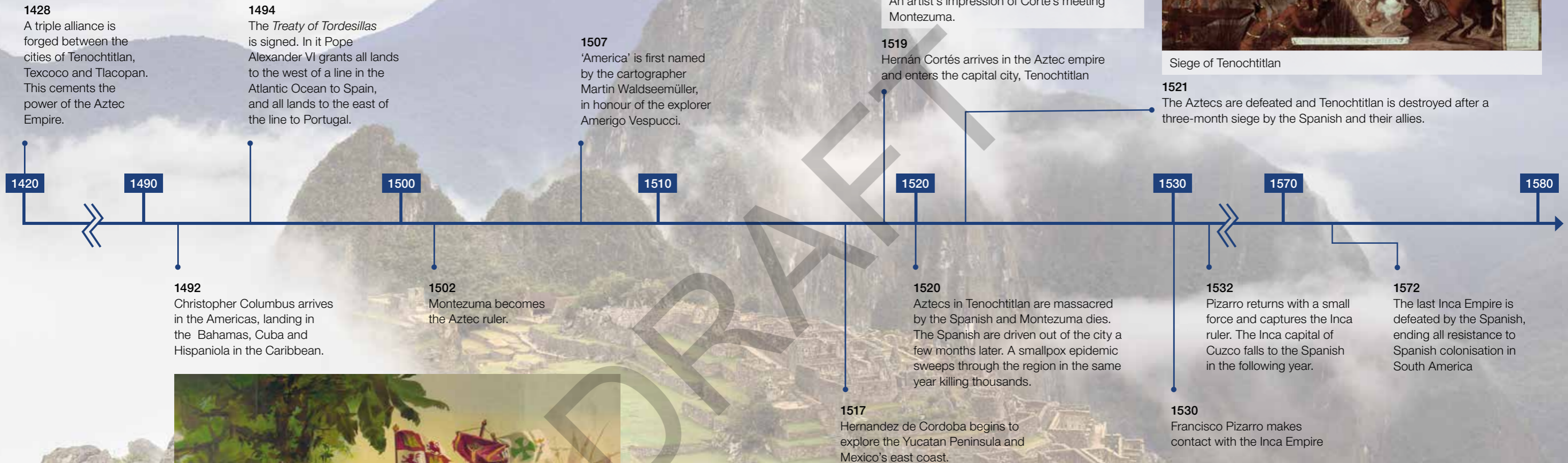
19C

What were the effects of Spanish conquest in the Americas and around the world?

- 1 Spain ruled a great empire in the Americas for three centuries. Suggest how the Indigenous population might have been affected by Spain's colonial rule.

Source 1 An artist's impression of the capital city of the Aztec Empire, Tenochtitlan, before the arrival of the Spanish in 1519. At this time, Tenochtitlan was home to around 200 000 people. By 1521, two years after Spanish arrival, the Aztec Empire had collapsed and Tenochtitlan had been destroyed.

19.1 The Spanish conquest of the Americas: a timeline



An artist's impression of Cortés's meeting Montezuma.



Siege of Tenochtitlan



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

Check your learning 19.1

Remember and understand

- 1 List the Spanish or other Europeans mentioned in the timeline and the key events in which they were involved.
- 2 What was the name of the Aztec ruler when Cortés entered the Aztec Empire?

Apply and analyse

- 3 Use the timeline to calculate the length of 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.

Evaluate and create

- 4 Select an individual from the timeline. Conduct some research and write a paragraph that explains their significance in the Spanish conquest of the Americas.

Source 1 A timeline of key events during the Spanish conquest of the Americas

19.2 The major civilisations of the Maya, Inca and Aztec

Human occupation of the Americas began when people migrated from the Eurasian land mass eastwards, sometime between 40000 and 15000 years ago, during the last great Ice Age. They journeyed on a land bridge between Asia and North America that existed when sea levels were lower than in the present day. Some peoples moved eastwards and settled across the northern parts of North America. Others moved further south, into the most southern regions of North America and into South America. There were three main civilisations in this region – the Maya, the Inca and the Aztec (see Source 2). Only two of these civilisations remained by the 15th century. These were the Aztec, in the region that is now Mexico, and the Inca, in the region that is now Peru.

The Maya

The Maya was the oldest of the three civilisations. It was at the height of its power between 250 and 900 CE, when the Maya ruled a large area of southern modern-day Mexico and northern Central America, centred around the Yucatán Peninsula. The Mayan people did not have a sole leader or capital city. Each of their cities had its own ruler who governed independently. The Maya were skilled in arithmetic and astronomy, as well as having their own form of hieroglyphic writing.

The Inca

The Inca were originally one of many tribes in the Andes Mountains of South America, in modern-day Peru. They conquered other tribes and, by 1493, the Incan Empire had become the most powerful in the Americas, with the city of Cuzco as its capital. Their territories extended for 4000 kilometres on the western coast of South America (see Source 2). They included parts of modern-day Chile, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia. To govern their empire, the Inca developed an efficient administrative system, an extensive network of roads and strategically built stone fortresses. They excelled in working metals such as silver, copper and gold. The Inca built intricate cities and temples. One of the most famous examples of this is Machu Picchu, perched high on the top of a mountain (see Source 4).

Source 3 A reproduction of a fresco at the Mayan site of Bonampak which is known for its well-preserved murals that detail a single battle and its outcome

The Aztec

The Aztecs were a group that originated in the north of modern-day Mexico. Aztec can refer to the civilisation itself, the people, or just the ruling classes. The Aztec people called themselves the *Mexica*. By conquering rival tribes, the Aztecs created an empire that stretched between the Pacific Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico (see Source 2). When the Spanish *conquistador* Hernán Cortés arrived in 1519, there were around 489 **city-states** in the Aztec empire, ruled by the powerful ruler Montezuma II (also known as Moctezuma). The centre of Aztec civilisation was the capital Tenochtitlan.

THE AMERICAS

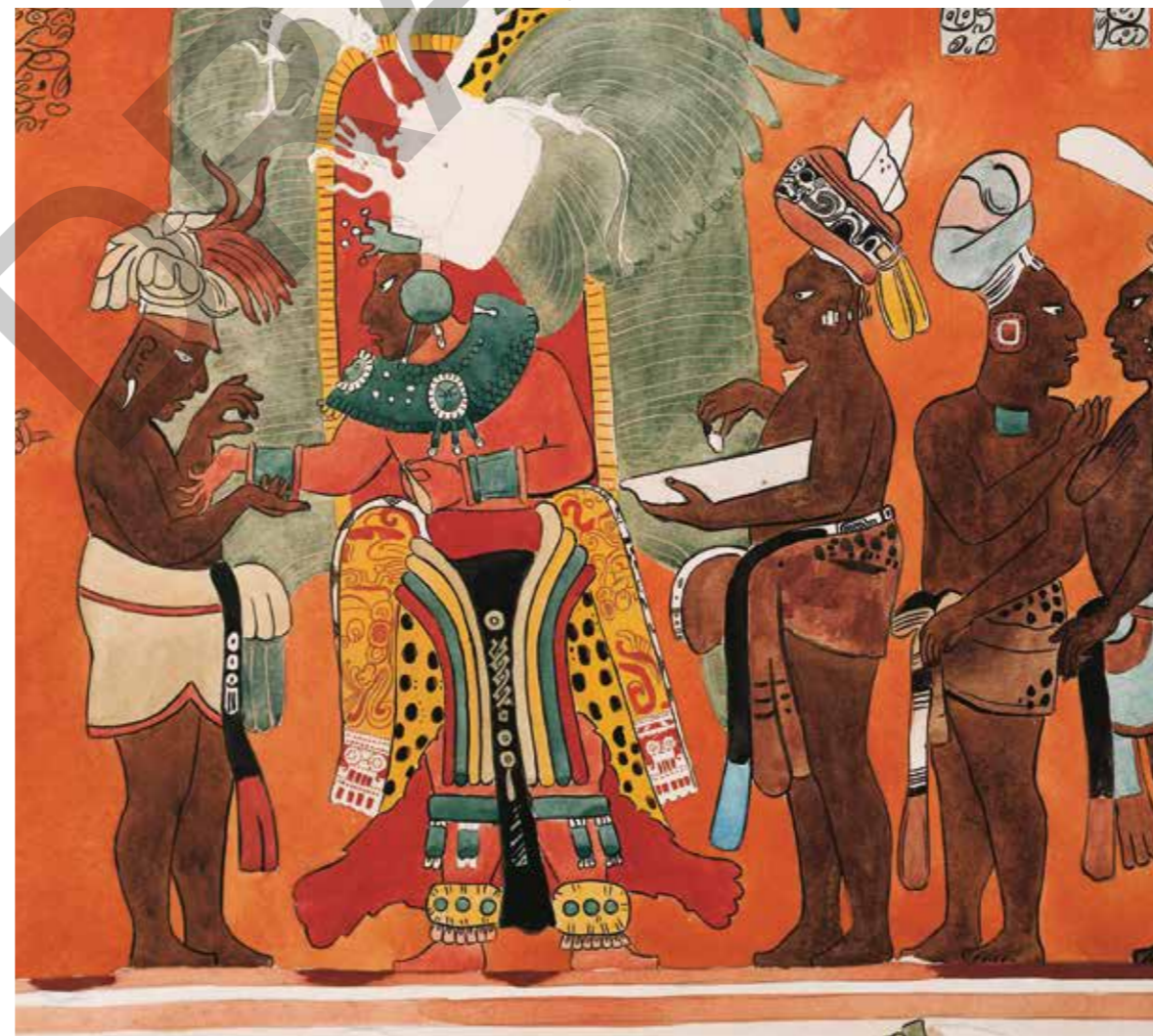


Source 1 Source: Oxford University Press

AZTEC, MAYA AND INCA CIVILISATIONS



Source 2 Source: Oxford University Press



Source 4 The restored remains of Machu Picchu

Check your learning 19.2

Remember and understand

- 1 What were the three main civilisations in the region shown in Source 2?
- 2 In which modern-day countries were the Aztec and Inca civilisations located?

Apply and analyse

- 3 Suggest some of the key skills and features of the civilisation that built the city of Machu Picchu, based on your observations of Source 4.

Evaluate and create

- 4 Use an atlas and Google Earth to examine the geographical features of one of the Mayan, Aztec or Inca civilisations. Describe the main types of environments within your chosen civilisation, and suggest how they may have affected daily life.

19.3 Key groups in Aztec society

The Aztec, Maya and Inca were agricultural societies. Before the arrival of the Spanish, farming life was very different from that found in Europe. In the Americas, there was no iron or steel, and farmers used digging sticks rather than metal ploughs to turn up the land. There were no horses, cattle, sheep, pigs or goats until they were introduced by the Europeans. In Central America, domestic animals such as turkeys, dogs and guinea pigs were eaten.

AZTEC EMPIRE



Source 1

Source: Oxford University Press

Social roles in Aztec society

Aztec society was organised according to a strict **hierarchy** (which means that people had a particular place or class in society). There were five major social classes: the emperor, nobles, warriors, commoners and slaves, and there was little chance of movement out of the class into which you were born.

All free-born commoners were grouped into clans. Members of each clan owned and farmed their land. They were responsible for maintaining their local temples and schools, which every child attended. At the bottom of the social hierarchy were the landless peasants and slaves. Older people were also highly respected in Aztec society.

Emperor

At the top of the hierarchy was the emperor. The emperor was an absolute ruler, selected as leader by a council of nobles. He was regarded by the people as a god and the 'Great Speaker'. He



Source 2 The Aztec ruler Montezuma

lived in a highly decorated palace and enjoyed a luxurious lifestyle. The Aztec emperor ruled with the help of his noble officials, counsellors, judges and military leaders.

Nobles

The nobility included high-level priests, military leaders, landowners, judges and heads of government. Noble status was passed down from parents to children. These ruling groups were privileged, and lived well compared to the ordinary people. Nobles could receive **tribute** from commoners. They lived on their own estates and were the only class other than the emperor allowed to wear decorated capes and jewellery. The wealthy and heroes of war dressed elaborately, with intricate headdresses (often made of feathers), necklaces, earrings and bangles made of gold, silver, copper and precious stones. Their body art included holes in the ears and split bottom lips. The nobility would also show their wealth and dominance through extravagant feasts and expensive gifts to each other.



Source 3 The long feather headdress worn by an Aztec noble

Warriors

Warriors were highly respected in Aztec society. Most males in Tenochtitlan were trained to be warriors. Women could not be warriors. At puberty, most young men left their families and went to live in the local warrior house. Warriors were expected to be very brave and were taught that it was an honour to die in battle. There was a formal hierarchy within the warrior group based on how many live captives (who were later sacrificed to the gods) a warrior had taken in battle. Successful warriors could expect to receive gifts and riches, but for most it was a part-time profession. Most warriors had to practice another trade support themselves.



Commoners

Commoners included farmers, craftspeople, merchants and low-level priests. They were expected to pay tributes to the nobles who owned the *calpulli* (neighbourhoods) that they lived in. Commoners usually ate basic foods and lived in simple homes. They were not allowed to wear cotton, wear cloaks longer than the knee, or wear sandals in the presence of people with higher rank. Commoners could sometimes become nobles through marriage or bravery in war.

Source 5 Illustrations from the 16th-century *Florentine Codex* showing an Aztec man threshing amaranth grain (a food used by Aztecs in their religious ceremonies).

Slaves

Slaves were owned by nobles or wealthy merchants and had few rights. Typically, people became slaves if they were criminals, could not pay their debts or had been captured in war. Slaves could marry with their master's permission and could also buy their freedom. Slave status was not passed down to children; the children of slaves were born free.

Source 4 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 role of men and women in Aztec society

An Aztec family was made up of a man, his chief wife, his other wives, his children and other relatives such as his parents. Marriages were arranged with help from priests, who would consult the stars to check for suitable matches. Girls married at around 16 years of age and men at around 20 years of age. Both boys and girls went to school, although they were destined for very different lives. Women were expected to care for children, cook and weave cloth. They helped to tend home gardens and any other plots of land the family was given to work. They had almost no public role. Men were expected to become warriors and seek glory by capturing enemy warriors.

Aztec discipline

For Aztec children, discipline was very strict, both at home and at school. Punishments included being speared with the sharp spines of a cactus, being left bound and naked in the dark in a cold puddle, or being bound and held over a fire to inhale smoke from burning chillies (see Source 6). Girls were awakened in the middle of the night to sweep the house, and had their fingers cut if they made a mistake in tasks such as weaving. These stories may have been exaggerated by the Spanish, but certainly discipline was physical. Children were being prepared for an unforgiving world dominated by demanding gods.



Source 6 Illustration from the 16th-century *Codex Mendoza* provide an account of Aztec discipline for children. Here, a boy is being forced to inhale dried chilli smoke for disobeying his parents.



Source 7 Typical jobs for children in the Aztec Empire including fishing, weaving and grinding maize (corn) for tortillas (bread).

Check your learning 19.3

Remember and understand

- 1 Explain the difference between a noble and a commoner.
- 2 What rights did slaves have?
- 3 What were some of the punishments given to Aztec children who did not perform their tasks properly or were disobedient?
- 4 Why did Aztec warriors capture, rather than kill, enemy warriors?

Apply and analyse

- 5 Select a source from the unit. What evidence does it provide about Aztec society?

Evaluate and create

- 6 Draw a diagram that shows the social hierarchy in Aztec society, from highest to lowest. Add labels to outline their roles or occupations.

19.4 Religious beliefs in Aztec society

Religion was a central part of Aztec society and dominated almost every aspect of daily life. Aztec gods were demanding and had to be calmed through bloody offerings. The many Aztec gods were responsible for the Sun, warfare, crops, rain, fire, harvests and the dead (see Source 1).

Huitzilopochtli	God of the Sun and of war
Tlaloc	God of rain, agricultural fertility and water
Xipe Totec	God of springtime and new crops
Quetzalcoatl	God of nature, earth and air
Tezcatlipoca	God of the night sky, giver and taker of all life on Earth
Mictlantecuhtli	God of the dead
Xiuhtecuhtli	God of fire

Source 1 The gods most important to the Aztecs

The Aztecs believed that their many gods gave them life. They believed that Huitzilopochtli battled with the forces of darkness every night so that the Sun would come up the next morning. If ever he grew weak the Sun would not rise and the universe



Source 2 This turquoise mask represents the Aztec god Xiuhtecuhtli, the 'Lord of Fire'

would come to an end, so man had to provide nourishment for him in the form of blood sacrifice.

They welcomed Tlaloc as a god who gave life and sustenance, but he was also feared for his ability to send hail, thunder and lightning. The Aztecs decorated their temples for their gods, for example the temple Quetzalcoatl at Teotihuacan was decorated with large sculptures of feathered serpents. The name Quetzalcoatl means 'the feathered serpent god'.

Every spring the priests **flayed** (skinned alive) and sacrificed victims to Xipe Totec and then paraded in their skins. This symbolised the annual spring renewal of vegetation or the renewal of the Earth's skin.



Source 3 A drawing of the god Quetzalcoatl 'the feathered serpent god' from the *Codex Borbonicus*

Life after death

The Aztecs also believed in life after death. The way that Aztecs died, rather than the way they lived, decided what would happen to them in the afterlife. If a person died a normal death, his or her soul would pass through the nine levels of the underworld before reaching Mictlan, the realm of the death god. However, warriors who died in battle and women who died in childbirth joined Huitzilopochtli. The dead were buried with goods of all descriptions for their use in the next life.

Human sacrifices

Human sacrifices were performed in honour of the gods of the Sun, rain and earth. The most common form of sacrifice among the Aztecs involved stretching the victim over a sacrificial stone. Four priests held the limbs of the victim while another priest cut open the chest and took out the heart. The

heart was placed in a *chacmool* (see Source 5) and the victim was then thrown down the steep temple stairs. The body was picked up and part of it, such as the thigh, was given as a reward to the victim's captor, to eat. Those who were sacrificed were considered to be fortunate, since they were guaranteed a place in the highest heaven reserved for warriors who died in battle.

Source 4 A knife used by Aztec priests for human sacrifices



Mass sacrifices

Sacrificial ceremonies could involve just one victim or many thousands at once. For example, when the Temple of Huitzilopochtli was completed in Tenochtitlan, up to 20000 victims were sacrificed. The prisoners were from a group called the Huastecs, from the north-eastern part of what is now Mexico. In 1487, they had tried to revolt against the Aztec Empire but had been unsuccessful. As punishment, the Aztec warriors marched them back to Tenochtitlan, roped together by cords running through a hole in their nose or around their necks.

As they arrived, they were greeted by priests who informed them that they had the privilege of dying as an offering at the great temple. There were four lines of prisoners that stretched the full length of the streets leading up to the temple. They were men, women and children, who cried and wailed as they walked to their deaths. They climbed, stumbled or were dragged up the steps of the pyramid.

When they reached the top, they were sacrificed by the priests. One body after another, after the heart was cut out, rolled down the steps of the pyramid. The steps and the priests became drenched in blood and eventually the blood ran in rivers down the pyramid steps.



Source 6 An illustration of a ritual killing from the *Codex Magliabechiano*, showing victims being sacrificed on the steps of a temple



Source 5 An Aztec *chacmool* – a reclining human figure with a sacrificial tray on his lap, where the hearts of sacrificed victims were placed

Check your learning 19.4

Remember and understand

- 1 What did the Aztecs believe would happen if sacrifices were not made to Huitzilopochtli?
- 2 What was the purpose of a *chacmool*?

Apply and analyse

- 3 How do you think the Aztecs felt about their gods? What makes you think this way?
- 4 Select a source from the unit. What evidence does it provide about Aztec religious beliefs?

Evaluate and create

- 5 Choose one aspect of Aztec life from the list below to research. Create a presentation to share the results of your research, including source material. Examples of topics to investigate include:
 - agriculture
 - calendars and related beliefs
 - daily life of rich and poor Aztecs, including clothing, housing, food and leisure
 - trade and commerce, including valued products
 - warfare, including weapons and tactics
 - gods and religious rituals.
- 6 Write an account of the sacrifice depicted in Source 6 from the perspective of either the sacrificial victim or one of the Aztec nobles watching the ritual.

19.5 Life in Tenochtitlan

Tenochtitlan was the capital of the Aztec Empire. It was founded around 1325 in the Valley of Mexico, now the site of modern-day Mexico City. Tenochtitlan was built on a marshy site and surrounded by an enormous lake (see Source 2). According to legend, the site of the city was pointed out to the Aztecs by an eagle sitting on a cactus plant. Source 1 shows Cortés' first impressions of Tenochtitlan.

As the power of Aztec Empire grew, the entire urban area of Tenochtitlan was carefully rebuilt. By 1519, it was home to 200 000 inhabitants on an island of about 8 square kilometres. This was at a time when Spain's largest city, Seville, had a population of 70 000.

The rebuilt city was laid out on a grid pattern, with 'roads' running north-south and east-west. In Aztec mythology each of the four main points of the compass had important religious significance, each with its own gods, rituals and colours. Because it mirrored the path of the Sun, the east-west axis was the most important one.

Source 1

When we saw all those cities and villages built in the water ... we were astounded ... These great towns and pyramids and buildings rising from the water, all made of stone, seemed like an enchanted vision.

Extract from a letter by Cortés, describing his arrival in Tenochtitlan.

Source 2 An artist's impression of the great city of Tenochtitlan, the capital of the Aztec Empire. Tenochtitlan was built on a marshy site in the Valley of Mexico in the middle of Lake Texcoco.



Many of Tenochtitlan's 'roads' were in fact canals. Six major canals – and many smaller ones – criss-crossed the city. By boat it was possible to travel virtually anywhere in the city. The city was divided into four districts. Each district was composed of neighbourhoods called *calpulli*, inhabited by commoners such as craftspeople and farmers. The crops cultivated by farmers included maize (corn), tomatoes, potatoes, beans, chillies, peanuts, limes and avocados. They farmed on *chinampas*, a clever system of artificial islands built on the shallow parts of the lake and joined together. Canoes took sewage from the city's public toilets to be used as fertiliser on the *chinampas*.

The centre of commerce was the huge market square, where 60 000 people a day came to buy and sell. There was also a sacred precinct in the centre of the city, surrounded by a wall. Within this precinct were temples, public buildings, palaces and plazas. Over everything loomed, the Great Temple or *Templo Mayor* (see Source 4). The blood on its stairs from human sacrifices was visible from a great distance.

The Valley of Mexico did not have all the requirements to keep a city the size of Tenochtitlan running. For example, cotton could not be grown in the valley, nor could most food. There was also very little land in the valley to farm. For Tenochtitlan to survive, it relied on supplies from villages and societies outside the city. Some of the supplies were purchased through trade, but much of the city's wealth and many of its goods were brought in from other parts of the empire through the tribute system. Tributes were the taxes that surrounding populations within the empire were forced to pay to the Aztecs. Each year, Tenochtitlan received 7 000 tonnes of corn, 4 000 tonnes of beans, 4 000 tonnes of amaranth grain and 2 000 000 cotton cloaks. Tributes also included huge amounts of feathers, precious stones and metals, cacao beans (the seed pod from which cocoa is made), tobacco and chocolate.



Source 3 A copy of an illustration taken from a manuscript shows the *chinampa* system used by the Aztecs to construct the gardens for the city of Tenochtitlan.



Source 4 An artist's impression of the marketplace in Tenochtitlan with *Templo Mayor* in the background

Daily life in the Aztec capital



1 Nobles dressed elaborately, with colourful clothing, jewellery and headdresses. For the poor, clothing for men was typically a length of plain cloth wrapped around the body and knotted on one shoulder. Women wrapped a piece of cloth around their hips and legs (much like a skirt), and added a loose top.

2 The markets were the lively centre of the city. Merchants travelled great distances to the markets, by foot or canoe, to sell goods such as feathers, rubber, animal skins and foodstuffs.

3 The *Templo Mayor* (Great Temple) dominated the city. Huge numbers of people – and sometimes animals – were sacrificed at an altar atop this pyramid to please the gods.

4 A popular game involved the use of elbows, knees and hips to flick a rubber ball through a stone hoop on the wall. Sometimes the defeated team lost their lives as well as the game!

5 A poor farming family's home on a *chinampa* (artificial island) was made of mud brick, and its roof was made of reeds.

6 Maize (corn), the staple food of the Aztecs, was ground into a coarse flour to make tortillas, flat bread to wrap around vegetables and meat.

Check your learning 19.5

Remember and understand

- 1 Describe Tenochtitlan's location.
- 2 What was Tenochtitlan's population in 1519 and how did this compare to Spain's largest city?

Apply and analyse

- 3 Explain why the tribute system was necessary for Tenochtitlan's survival and suggest what happened if a group did not pay tributes.

Evaluate and create

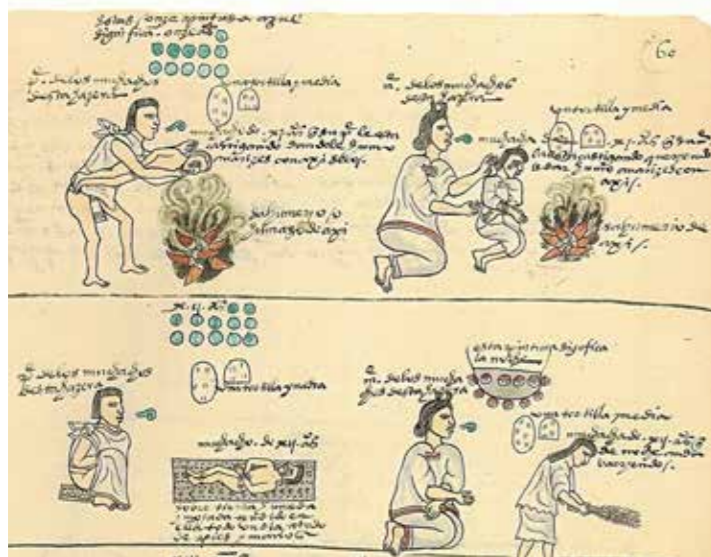
- 4 Research to find out how the Aztec built *chinampas*. Present the results of your research as a step-by-step guide to constructing a *chinampa*, including images and sketches.

Source 5 An artist's impression of daily life in Tenochtitlan

19A rich task

Life in the Aztec Empire

In the 16th century, Spanish explorers created many illustrated accounts of daily life in the Aztec Empire so that people at home in Spain could get a better understanding of traditional culture. Each of these written accounts was bopund together to make a special kind of book known as a codex (plural codices). These codices (such as the *Florentine Codex* and the *Codex Mendoza*) have provided valuable information to historians about how the Aztec people lived beofre the arrival of the Spanish

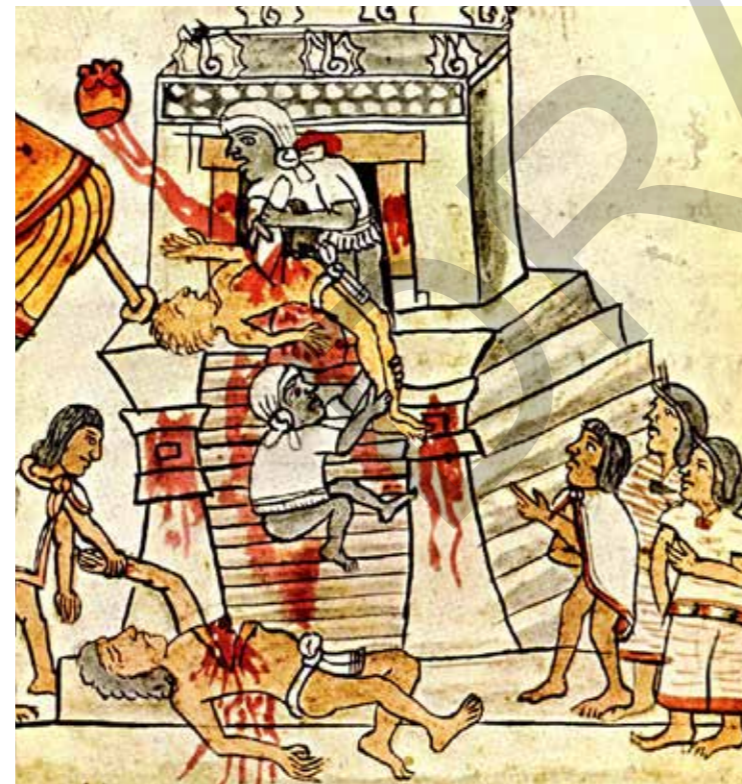


Source 2 Illustrations from the 16th-century *Codex Mendoza* shows punishments for disregarding instructions from a parent – being forced to inhale dry chilli smoke and being forced to lie on damp ground with bound hands and feet.

The *Florentine Codex* was completed over the decades from 1549 to 1579. The 12-volume work was compiled by a Spanish priest together with Indigenous writers and illustrators. It includes more than 2000 painted illustrations, and documents the culture and religious practices of the Aztecs at the time of the Spanish conquests.

The *Codex Mendoza* was commissioned by Spanish rulers in 1541 to create a record of the Aztec Empire. Illustrations were drawn by Indigenous artists, with explanations written by Spanish priests.

The *Codex Magliabecchiano* was another Aztec codex created as a religious document in the mid-16th century.



Source 1 Illustrations from the 16th-century *Codex Magliabecchiano* detail religious practices, such as sacrifices, that were a part of Aztec life. This illustration shows an Aztec priest offering a human heart to the war god Huitzilopochtli.

Source 3

Midwife's address to newborn boys:

My precious son, my youngest one ... heed, harken: thy home is not here, for thou art an eagle, thou art an ocelotl [a jaguar] ... Thou belongest out there ... Thou hast been sent into warfare. War is thy desert, thy task. Thou shalt give drink, nourishment, food to the sun, the lord of the earth. Perhaps thou wilt receive the gift, perhaps thou wilt merit death by the obsidian knife [be killed as a sacrifice to the gods].

Midwife's address to newborn girls:

Thou wilt be in the heart of the home, thou wilt go nowhere, thou wilt nowhere become a wanderer, thou becomest the banked fire, the hearth stones ... And thou wilt become fatigued, thou wilt become tired; thou art to provide water, to grind maize, to drudge; thou art to sweat by the ashes, by the hearth [the floor of a fireplace].

Part of the addresses given by midwives to newborn boys and girls as described in the *Florentine Codex*

skilldrill: Historical sources as evidence

Analysing primary sources

Primary sources are records produced during the period that is being studied. They may be written documents such as letters or visual sources such as paintings and buildings. It is the job of historians to examine these sources and come to conclusions about their usefulness and reliability.

Step 1 Evaluating reliability

It is important to identify, if possible, who created each source and the reason why it was created:

- Who created the source?
- Why was the source created?
- Is there a possibility of bias?
- What message does the source convey?
- What is included and what is excluded?
- What can the source tell you about life at the time that it was created?

Step 2 Evaluating usefulness

To evaluate the usefulness of a source you should ask the following questions:

- What question am I investigating?
- Is the source reliable?
- What messages is the source conveying – both explicit and implicit?
- What is the source saying or showing that will assist me to answer my historical question?
- What additional information would I like that would help me to answer my question?

Apply the skill

- 1 Examine the three sources. What do they tell you about the role and expectations of men and women in Aztec society?
- 2 How are these ideas conveyed?
- 3 How reliable are these sources and why?
- 4 Whose voices have not been heard in this collection of sources? How do you explain this?
- 5 Using books in your library, or the internet, locate another written source and another visual source that reflects additional aspects of life in the Aztec Empire before the arrival of the Spanish. Explain how each adds to your understanding of life in this period.

Extend your understanding

Choose a civilisation in the Americas, other than the Aztec, and locate three primary sources for that society.

- 1 For each source, identify one feature that helps you to understand an aspect of the society.
- 2 Explain which source you believe to be the most reliable and why. Support your answer with reference to the source itself, who produced it, when it was produced and for what audience.

19.6 The Age of Exploration begins

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. This period became known as the **Age of Exploration**. While the Portuguese sailed southward towards the tip of Africa, the Spanish looked to the west, across the Atlantic Ocean.

At this time, much of the world beyond Europe and Asia was unknown to Europeans, and navigating through unknown oceans was incredibly dangerous. Sailors could use the Sun and stars to tell their latitude (how far north or south they were), but there were no reliable ways to establish longitude (how far east or west they were).

Nevertheless, the promise of wealth and riches from finding a new trading route to Asia was strong enough to outweigh the danger. European powers were seeking to expand their empires and establish foreign territories. They did this to gain wealth, power and religious converts. The explorers were attracted by the prospect of material wealth, and the adventure that new lands promised.

Source 1 16th century illustration of Christopher Columbus standing on his ship the *Santa Maria*



The voyages of Christopher Columbus

Spain's rulers, desperate to be more powerful than their European neighbours, were prepared to fund a risky voyage led by an Italian explorer, Christopher Columbus. 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 (South Asia) and reach the fabled lands of Cathay (China) and Cipango (Japan).

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.

Explorers and conquistadors

Columbus was not the first European to arrive in the Americas. However, his voyage is significant because he started the process of colonisation and conquest that would transform the Americas and eventually go on to destroy the established civilisations there, including the Aztec and Inca Empires. The term **pre-Columbian** is used to describe the period before the arrival of Europeans in the Americas.

After the journeys of Columbus, more than 200 ships brought more explorers and wealth-seekers from Spain to the Caribbean between 1506 and 1518. Spain sent conquistadors (conquerors) such as Hernán Cortés and Francisco Pizarro, who took huge risks to explore new territories in the hope of enormous reward.

Reasons for Spanish exploration and conquest

Spain's government and its people were motivated to explore and conquer new territories in the Americas for a number of reasons (see Source 3).



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 fifteenth century, there was an increased European demand for gold to make coins, jewellery and gold thread for tapestries.

Source 3 Reasons for Spanish exploration and conquest

1492	Columbus establishes a settlement at Hispaniola (now Haiti and the Dominican Republic), which becomes a launching ground for subsequent Spanish expeditions.
1508–10	Puerto Rico and Jamaica captured, first stable settlement on the continent established in Panama in 1510 governed by Vasco Núñez de Balboa
1511	Cuba invaded by Diego Velázquez
1513	Florida, on the northern coast of the Caribbean, is discovered but not colonised by Juan Ponce de León
1515	Vasco Núñez de Balboa becomes the first European to see the Pacific Ocean after ascending a mountain on the Isthmus of Panama (the narrow strip of land that links North and South America).
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.

Source 4 Spanish exploration and conquests – key events



Source 4 Aztec gold jewellery found in Tehuantepec in the 1870s, now held in the British Museum. The Spanish took vast quantities of gold and other precious metals from the empires they conquered in the Americas.

The quest for gold

Many explorers went in search of wealth, both for the Spanish Empire and for themselves. They hoped to find complex civilisations with great wealth that they could then conquer and plunder. Their earliest encounters in the Caribbean did not promise such wealth. Nevertheless, some expeditions had seen tantalising glimpses of great civilisations and artefacts made of gold and precious stones.

This encouraged a wave of further exploration and, in both Aztec and Inca territory, the Spanish plundered the wealth and treasures of the empires. Very few gold or silver artefacts have survived because most of the precious metals were melted down to create jewellery or other valuable items back in Spain.

Wealth through tax and slavery

Conquest and colonisation also allowed the Spanish to gain further wealth through taxes. By colonising the Americas, the Spanish could continue to make money by taxing the local population. The Spanish collected the tribute lists from the Aztecs and continued to collect tribute. They also continued the Inca system of *mit'a* (compulsory labour), forcing men to work in the gold and silver mines.

The Spanish introduced a system called the *encomienda*, which resulted in further slavery of the indigenous people. Spanish settlers, usually conquistadors, soldiers or officials, were given responsibility for a certain number of natives. In theory, they were supposed to protect these

natives, teach them Spanish and convert them to Catholicism. Under the *encomienda*, however, they were usually just kept as slaves.

New territories were also an important source of crops for Spain and for Europe. Many exotic and more basic crops that had never been seen in Europe were brought back from the Americas. These included chocolate, tobacco, potatoes, tomatoes, bananas, chilli, corn, turkey, pumpkin, rubber, avocado, peanuts, vanilla and pineapple. Some of these crops, such as tobacco, were extremely valuable in monetary terms.

Spreading Christianity

An important motivation for colonisation, besides wealth, was the desire to spread Christianity to pagan peoples. The Catholic Church sent missionaries to the Americas to live in the newly established colonies. In fact, there were Catholic priests on some of the initial exploration missions.

Check your learning 19.6

Remember and understand

- 1 What were European explorers attempting to discover?
- 2 Which island did Columbus mistake for Japan?
- 3 What sources of wealth were available to the Spanish, aside from treasure and artefacts?
- 4 What was *encomienda*?
- 5 What crops did the Spanish find in the Americas that they brought back to Europe?

Apply and analyse

- 6 How long did it take the Spanish to conquer the Aztec and Inca civilisations following the discovery of the Americas? (Refer to Source 2.)
- 7 List the reasons for Spanish conquest, then arrange them in order of importance. Explain why you have prioritised them as you have.

Evaluate and create

- 8 Conduct further research on the life of Columbus. Then write an obituary for him in which you assess his personality and achievements.
- 9 Create an advertisement or brochure for the Americas, to convince the Spanish population that Spain should send conquistadors to the Americas.

19.7 The Spanish conquest of the Aztecs

Hernán Cortés was chosen by the governor of Cuba to lead an expedition to the mainland of South America. Like many others, 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. He also intended 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.

First contacts, first conflicts

When the conquistadors landed on the eastern coast of Mexico, they 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.



Source 1 An artist's impression of conquistadors slaughtering the indigenous population at Cholula in central Mexico



Source 2 Mount Iztaccihuatl (right) and Mount Popocatepetl (left). Between these two volcanoes is a high pass known as the Paso de Cortés.

Cortés first contact with native tribes was with 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, having added 800 Totonacs to his force of conquistadors. They 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 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.

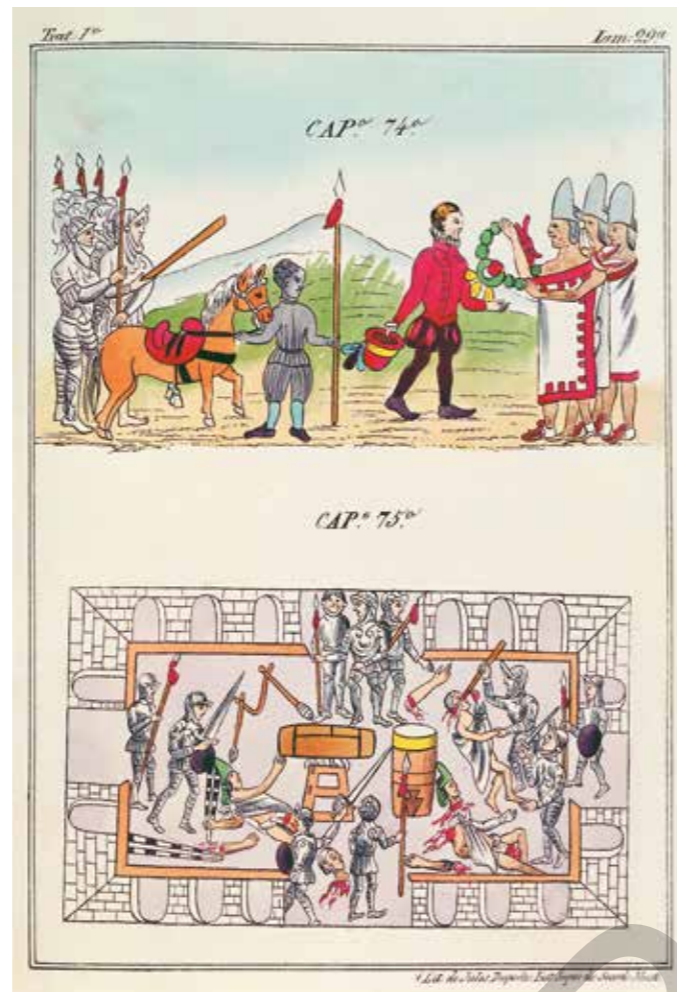
The conquistadors in Tenochtitlan

The conquistadors reached Tenochtitlan in November 1519. Montezuma met Cortés on the causeway (a raised path) leading into the city. He believed at first that 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 collect any treasure he could find in Tenochtitlan.

In May 1520, while Cortés was out of the city, the Spanish massacred a group of Aztec nobles during a festival. 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 Spanish 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 managed to get away unharmed, but hundreds of Spanish soldiers 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.

After escaping from the city, the Spanish retreated to the territory of their Tlaxcalan allies. Cortés rested his army for 20 days, and 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 Spanish willingly, to help throw off the rule of their Aztec overlords (rulers).



Source 3 An illustration of the massacre of Aztec nobles during a festival, from the *Codex Ixtlilxochitl*

The destruction of Tenochtitlan

In May 1521, Cortés returned to Tenochtitlan and laid siege to the city with a force of 550 Spanish and 10 000 Tlaxcalans. As well as carrying out daily attacks, he used boats to cut off 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. The Spanish built a new city on top of the ruins of Tenochtitlan. Stones from the temples, pyramids and palaces were used to build churches and government buildings. The canals that had criss-crossed Tenochtitlan were filled in.

Reasons for Spanish success

Historians estimate that around 100 000 Aztecs were killed during the three months that Cortés laid siege to Tenochtitlan. Tens of thousands of Aztecs and other peoples had also been killed as a result of Cortés' military 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 Spanish, the fierceness of their tribal allies who were enemies of the Aztecs, and the different fighting methods of the Aztec and Spanish.

Source 4 A 19th-century illustration of the final battle between Cortés and Aztec ruler Cuauhtémoc at Tenochtitlan in August 1521



	Spanish	Aztec
Weapons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> used steel for their armour and weapons used gunpowder with powerful cannons and firearms used horses in battle. Before the Spanish came the Aztecs had never seen horses and were initially frightened of them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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
Battle tactics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> were well trained in disciplined military manoeuvres. A smaller Spanish force could defeat a larger Aztec force as long as they could maintain their energy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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
Fighting traditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to Aztec warriors, killing from a distance was not honourable. Battles were highly organised and fought hand-to-hand were used to only wounding their opponents rather than killing (to capture them for sacrifice). This would often give the Spanish a chance to escape from battle to return to fight another day

Source 5 Spanish advantages over the Aztecs in battle

Check your learning 19.7

Remember and understand

- 1 What was the main purpose of the expedition led by Cortés in 1519?
- 2 Which tribes were allies of the Spanish?
- 3 Describe the incident that caused the Aztecs in Tenochtitlan to rise up against the conquistadors in 1520.
- 4 Outline the tactics used by Cortés in his successful siege of Tenochtitlan.

Apply and analyse

- 5 Describe the scene shown in Source 3.
- 6 Source 5 outlines the advantages the Spanish had over the Aztecs in battle. Find sources from the text and your own research that provide evidence for one or more of these advantages.

Evaluate and create

- 7 Write an account of the end of the siege of Tenochtitlan from the perspective of an Aztec survivor, then from the perspective of a Spanish soldier.

19B rich task

Why the Spanish won?

Historians have considered a number of reasons why the Spanish were able to cause the downfall of the Aztec Empire with a relatively small force of *conquistadors*, compared to the huge indigenous population.

We have seen that the Spanish had superior weapons and benefited from the way in which the Aztec warriors fought. Although Aztec warriors were fiercely courageous, they were on foot and only had wooden clubs, bows and arrows with which to fight. By comparison, the Spanish had horses, steel swords, crossbows, rifles and cannons. In addition, it was so important to Aztec warriors to take live captives that they often ended up fighting the Spanish twice – conquistadors who were captured were rescued, and could then fight again.

The Spanish were impressed with the courage of the Aztec warriors, but they could also not understand why they did not surrender when Spanish victory became clear. Under the circumstances, the Aztecs would never have surrendered. They saw the conquistadors as unpredictable, cowardly and unwilling to follow the rules of battle. Such a people were not to be negotiated with.

Source 2 An Aztec depiction of a battle with the Spanish, from a 16th-century codex



Source 1

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

Source 3

[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.

skilldrill: Historical significance

Generating historical inquiry questions

One of the first and most important steps in conducting an historical inquiry is to generate or pose key questions. The questions that you generate will frame and direct the research you then undertake. Usually historians generate one broad question for their inquiry such as 'What were the reasons for the Spanish victory in the Siege of Tenochtitlan?'

After that, you need to generate more specific questions that are related to your overall inquiry question. You can use the following steps to help you develop questions to guide your historical inquiry.

- Step 1** Think about what you already know about the topic. Use this knowledge as a springboard for questions that will help you to understand the topic in more depth. Brainstorm everything you know.
- Step 2** List in point form all the things that you already know about the topic.
- Step 3** List in point form all the things that you would like/need to know about the topic.
- Step 4** Use these two lists to develop a series of questions that will aid your research. You will need to generate three types of questions:
- Simple or closed questions such as 'How did the siege of Tenochtitlan begin?'
 - Open or probing questions such as 'How important was the impact of the smallpox epidemic in the downfall of Tenochtitlan?'
 - Questions that relate to the process of historical inquiry such as 'What evidence is there that Aztec weapons and tactics gave the advantage to the Spanish conquistadors?'

Apply the skill

- 1 Use the process described above to generate one overarching question about the reasons for Spanish success in their conquest of the Aztec Empire. Then develop at least six questions that will help you to address this 'big' question. Make sure that you use at least one of each of the three different types of questions.

You should use the material in this unit and the additional sources provided at the beginning of this rich task.

Extend your understanding

- 1 Using the approach described above, generate a broad question and the three specific questions that would help students to explore the reasons for Spanish success in their conquest of the Inca.

19.8 The Spanish colonisation of Mexico

The defeat of the Aztecs by Cortés encouraged other conquistadors in their dreams of conquest and wealth. By the mid-16th century, Spain controlled territories more than 10 times the size of Spain itself. The Spanish Empire became one of the greatest trading empires of the early modern world and lasted until the end of the 19th century.

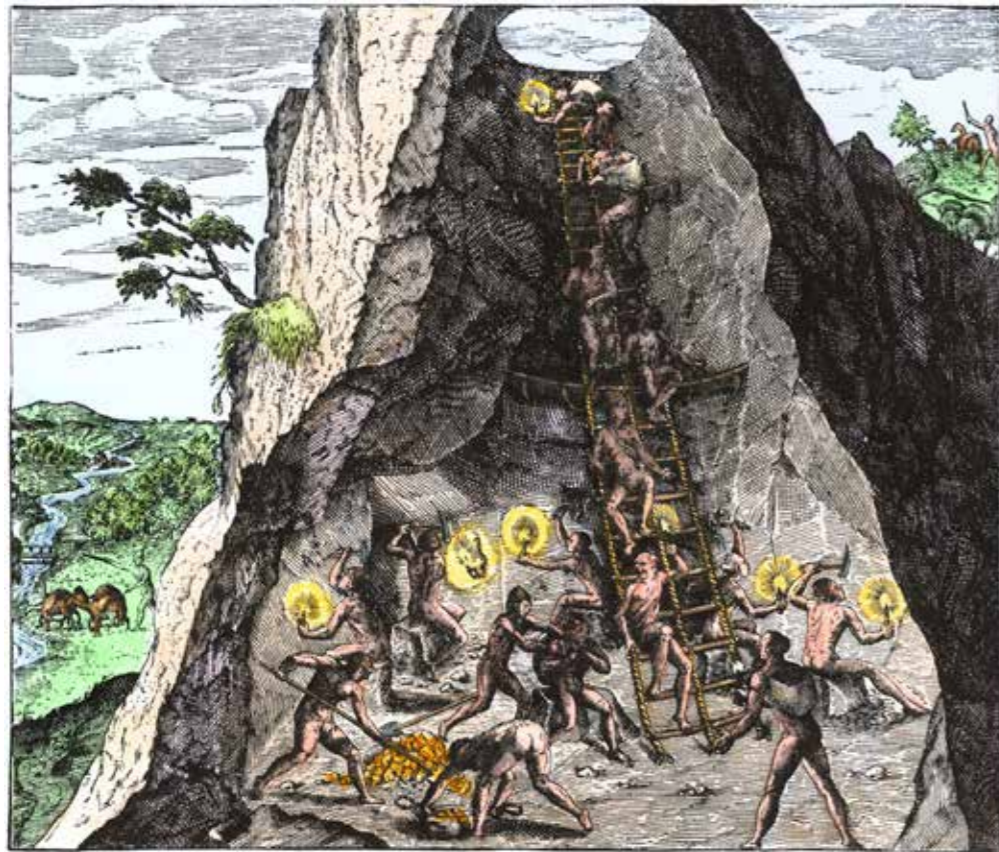
The destruction of Tenochtitlan by Cortés marked the beginning of 300 years of Spanish rule in the former Aztec Empire. From Tenochtitlan, Cortés sent expeditions out in all directions to expand Spanish settlement. Territories were divided up and ruled by Cortés, his Spanish companions and even a few 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.

Treatment of the conquered Aztecs

A remarkable characteristic of Spanish settlement was the part played by indigenous peoples, including the 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.

In contrast to the way some of the native leaders were treated, the Spanish treated the ordinary people very badly. The system of *encomienda*, set in place to protect the Native Americans in practice enslaved them. The Spanish, greedy for gold and silver, forced indigenous peoples to work in the gold and silver mines of the Americas, where they were brutally treated and sometimes worked to death.



Source 1 An illustration of one of the large silver mines established by the Spanish

Short-term effects of Spanish colonisation

The spread of European diseases in the Americas

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 the Spanish colonies dropped by around 75% between 1518 and 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% of the inhabitants of the Inca Empire died from introduced diseases.



Source 2 A drawing from the *Florentine Codex* shows an indigenous man infected with smallpox. The drawing was made by Bernardino de Sahagún, a 16th-century Spanish missionary.



Source 3 The Spanish introduced domestic horses to the Americas as a result of Cortés' expedition

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.

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.

Long-term effects of Spanish colonisation

The colonisation of the New World

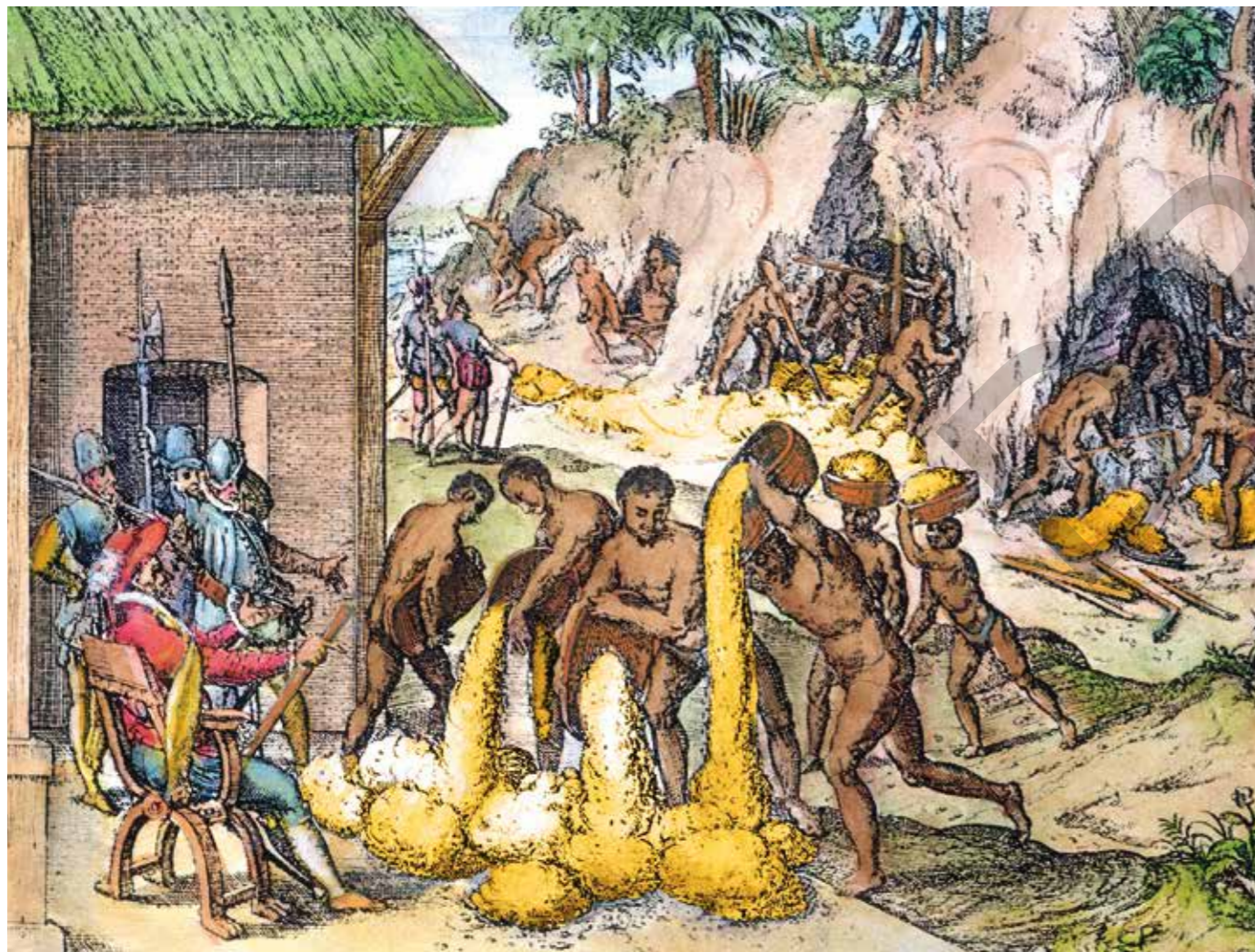
Explorers from other countries were motivated by Spain's success in finding wealth and new land in the Americas. The initial voyage of Christopher Columbus started a wave of exploration in North and South America by the British, French and Dutch. Spain's great rival, Portugal, also set up colonies in 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 4 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.

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

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. 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.



Check your learning 19.8

Remember and understand

- 1 How did the Spanish control the former Aztec Empire after the fall of Tenochtitlan?
- 2 How much of the indigenous population is estimated to have died from European diseases?
- 3 How did colonisation affect the make-up of the population in the Americas?
- 4 Why were the new food crops so important to the rest of the world?

Apply and analyse

- 5 Consider the foods that make up your daily diet, and list all the foods that originated in the Americas.

Evaluate and create

- 6 Research to explain the wider impact of one of the following aspects of Spanish conquest in the Americas:
 - the introduction of European diseases
 - forced labour and slavery in the service of Spanish colonisers
 - the spread of Christianity
 - the introduction of European crops and livestock
 - the introduction of European culture and technologies.

Summarise your findings using a graphic organiser, then create a presentation that would help other students understand the impact of the Spanish conquest for the indigenous Americans.

19C rich task

Impact of the Spanish conquest of the Americas

This chapter has concentrated on the Aztec Empire, but the treatment of the Aztecs was typical of the way indigenous populations in the Americas were treated by European colonisers.

Huge numbers of indigenous people in the Americas died through disease, warfare and brutal working conditions under Spanish rule. Some historians think that the Aztec population declined as much as from 25 million in 1520 to 2.6 million by 1570. And that the Inca population declined from 3.3 million in 1520 to 1.3 million in 1570.

Local religious, cultural and social institutions were dismantled by the colonisers. It took hundreds of years for indigenous populations in the Americas to recover from the effects of colonisation. Some historians suggest they never did.



Source 1 A 16th-century illustration depicting the arrival of Cortés and his conquistadors in the Aztec Empire

skilldrill: Historical sources as evidence

Historical argument

Historical discussions present different opinions about particular historical questions or issues. Follow these steps to research and write your own historical discussion.

Step 1 Consider evidence from a range of sources, and outline different possible interpretations of that evidence.

- Consider relevant primary sources.
- Consider the ideas of other historians, presented in secondary sources such as textbooks and websites.
- Record the sources of all of your information.

Step 2 Make a decision as to your view on the issue. Decide what arguments you are going to make, and how you will support them.

Step 3 Write up your discussion. Your discussion should include all the elements listed in the table below.

Introduction	Introduce the topic and the issues to be explored.
Main body	A series of paragraphs that outline different arguments related to the issue or question. Each point should be supported with evidence.
Conclusion	Sum up the material and give your opinion. Don't say 'I', say something like 'the evidence suggests ...'
Involvement of sources in your writing.	In addition to footnoting all of your sources, you should indicate the source of some of your information, as part of your discussion.
Footnotes and bibliography	All quotes, figures and facts that are not generally known, must be footnoted. All written and internet sources must be acknowledged.

Apply the skill

1 Read the following statements and select one. Write an extended response that discusses whether you agree or disagree with your chosen statement.

- 'In the end, the people of the Americas gained more than they lost by the Spanish conquests.'
- 'While we may weep for the poor Aztec killed on the battlefield or conscripted into slavery we might also give two cheers for the conquistadors for having purged [rid] the Earth of a vile culture.' (Extract from Tim Stanley, 'Two cheers for the conquistadors' at *HistoryToday* website)

Extend your understanding

- 1 Examine Source 2 and describe the activities presented in the painting.
 - a What do you think the artist is saying about the Spanish conquest of the Americas?
 - b Create a photo montage or artwork that represents your own depiction of the events and impact of Spanish conquest of the Americas.



Source 2 This 1951 mural by Mexican painter Diego Rivera, titled *The Conquest or Arrival of Hernán Cortés in Veracruz*, shows details of Spain's colonial domination of the indigenous peoples of Mexico.