

11



The Spanish Conquest of the Americas (c.1492 – c.1572)

Source 11.1 The citadel of Machu Picchu

Before you start

Main focus

During the last Ice Age on earth, migrants crossed the Beringian land bridge into the Americas. They owned this world in isolation for thousands of years, until confronted by strangers from the east.

Why it's relevant today

Studying the conquest of the peoples of Mesoamerica and South America allows us to reflect on how the Spanish reacted to changes in their world. They had fought against the Moors for their liberty and imagined all other peoples to be aliens. Their unwillingness to appreciate the cultures of the 'New World' saw them introduce European savagery to what was already a violent world.

Inquiry questions

- Who were the people of the Americas and what were the essential features of their cultures?
- When did the Spaniards arrive in the Americas and why did they go there?
- What did they find there and how did this impact on the relations between the indigenous peoples and the Spaniards?
- What were the longer-term impacts on the world of indigenous Americans of Spanish colonisation?

Key terms

- Aztec
- Beringia
- conquistador
- Inca
- Maya
- Mesoamerica
- Olmec
- pre-Columbian
- Sapa Inca

Significant individuals

- Atahualpa
- Christopher Columbus
- Diego de Almagro
- Francisco Pizarro
- Hernán Cortés
- Itzcaotl
- King Ferdinand I and Queen Isabella II
- Malinche (Doña Marina)
- Moctezuma
- Paolo dal Pozzo Toscanelli
- Tlacaelel

Let's begin

The Spanish first arrived in the Caribbean in the fifteenth century. To their surprise they found entire cultures flourishing in these lands that they had not known even existed. But the Spaniards had not come to gaze admirably on these new cultures; instead, they had come to plunder.



Source 11.2 Scene from a painted casket showing Spanish horsemen hunting a giant snake



Source 11.3 Hernán Cortés and his Spanish captains



Source 11.4 Christopher Columbus



Source 11.5 Olmec head, National Museum of Anthropology, Mexico City

Timeline

CHAPTER EVENTS	WORLD EVENTS
60 000 BC	c. 60 000 First wave of Aboriginal Australians crosses into Australia
40 000 BC	c. 35 000 <i>Homo sapiens</i> replaces Neanderthal man in Europe
First humans arrive in Alaska after having crossed the land bridge from Siberia	
10 000 BC	c. 10 000 Last Ice Age ends
Large game herds of mastodons and mammoths are hunted into extinction in North America	
8 000 BC	c. 8 000–7 000 Indochina is settled
Crops such as potatoes, squash and beans are harvested in South America	c. 6 000 Wheat and barley crops are first grown in Egypt
4 000 BC	c. 4 000–3 000 Mesopotamian cities first emerge in what we know as Iraq
2 500 BC	c. 2 500 Stonehenge in England is constructed
On Andean coast of South America large temple complexes are built	
2 000 BC	c. 2 000 Middle Eastern and Chinese societies begin to use bronze
First ceramics and metalwork in Peru	
1 400 BC	
Olmec civilisation dominates Mesoamerica's east coast	
900 BC	
Chavin civilisation emerges on the Andean coast of Peru	
400 BC	
Zapotec civilisation emerges on the west coast of Mesoamerica	
AD 300	
'Classical' era of Maya civilisation begins	
900	
Chimú civilisation emerges in Peru	c. 1 000 Leif Eriksson sets sail from Greenland to North America
1 400	c. 1 096 The First Crusade begins
Aztec civilisation dominates Mesoamerica	c. 1 450 Gutenberg sets up the first printing press
Inca civilisation dominates Peru	
Christopher Columbus arrives in the 'New World'	
1 500	
Spanish conquer the Aztec Empire	1 533 English Reformation begins; Henry VIII breaks with Rome and makes himself head of the Anglican Church
Last Inca resistance is crushed	1 588 Spanish Armada is defeated by the English
1 600	
Spanish empire is established in the Americas	



Source 11.6 The Americas (with the modern-day country borders)



Pre-Columbian life in the Americas

The people who became the earliest Americans first began arriving in North America between 50 000 and 35 000 years ago, approximately the same time as Aboriginal Australians were first settling Australia. These early Americans had crossed the land bridge (today's Bering Straits) from North Asia, probably following herds of bison, mastodons and mammoths, as well as other migrating animals. But there may have been other more direct motives for their migration. Perhaps they were fleeing dramatic climate change or some greater catastrophe. Or they might have been fleeing an imagined or a real enemy, whose hostile actions were driving them further eastwards. The events occurred so long ago that we will never really know what prompted this daring migration. At best, any attempt at explaining the reasons has to be regarded as speculation.

Long into the distant past, the Ice Age glacial sheets connected Alaska with Siberia into a geological region known as Beringia, thus allowing for the movement of herds and humans between the lands masses. These migrating people were hunters and gatherers who could never imagine life in settled communities. Only their descendants would come to experience that, but it would be thousands of years into the future. The ice sheets melted sometime between c. 11 000 and 10 000 BC, and rising sea levels made further migrations more difficult, trapping both migrating game and humans on the American continent.

Over time, and through natural exploration, these early migrants fanned out into the interior of Alaska and Canada, or followed the coastline of Alaska into Canada and North America. By around 11 000 BC, they had settled the entire American continent from north to south. By no means could it be said, however, that these people were alike: the cultures of the people who first settled the Americas developed significant diversity through time. Still, they shared some surprising common elements.

How many **pre-Columbian** Americans there were at the time of the arrival of Christopher Columbus in AD 1492 is a matter for dispute among **anthropologists** and historians. In 1928 an American **ethnologist**, James Mooney, suggested that the indigenous population of what is today the United States was as low as 1.15 million by the sixteenth century. Indigenous Americans in the nineteenth century, of course, argued that it had been much higher. In 1934, American anthropologist Alfred Kroeber estimated a population as high as 8.4 million from north to south, with at least half of that number living in the Caribbean and South America. Kroeber's calculations held sway well into the 1960s.

But the use of statistics as evidence in history is always open to question. The method of calculation, the assumptions behind the numbers, and the conclusions drawn from them are always problematic. Mooney and Kroeber belonged to a school of thought that assumed that the impact on indigenous American cultures of post-Columbian European colonisation was small. By the 1970s, however, new scholars revisited the question. According to historian Alan Brinkley, they concluded that the indigenous American cultures had been 'catastrophically decimated by European plagues not long after the arrival of Columbus'. American historians Alfred Crosby and William McNeill produced evidence of dramatic depopulation of indigenous tribes because of the influence of diseases such as smallpox, measles, tuberculosis and other plagues imported from Europe. American anthropologist Russell Thornton takes great care to remind us that evidence of population numbers before or after Columbus is not a good indicator of the quality of life of the indigenous people. The impact of the arrival of the Spanish on the population and their quality of life must be considered together.

pre-Columbian a term used by historians, anthropologists and archaeologists to describe the cultures in America before the arrival of Christopher Columbus in 1492 CE

anthropologist an expert in the study of human societies, cultures and their development

ethnologist an expert in the study of character traits of populations

Activity 11.1

- 1 Explain how the earliest Americans were able to migrate on to the continent.
- 2 Identify why the timing of this migration is important.
- 3 List 10 other things that were occurring during this time elsewhere in the world (you may wish to refer to the other chapters in this textbook).

Civilisations of Mesoamerica

Even before Christopher Columbus set sail from Spain to the 'New World', the American world (from north to south) was already old. By 1485 when he first began promoting the need for his voyage, there were an estimated five hundred nations scattered throughout the Americas. Some were semi-nomadic; some lived in villages and had developed agricultural practices similar to any European town; and some were developing sophisticated cultures equal to anything found in Europe. However, this was a world unknown to anybody in Europe. Columbus believed that by sailing west from Spain he would land on the coast of China or Japan, and then sail southeast to the

Spice Islands in Asia. The Olmec, Maya and Aztec civilisations in

Mesoamerica and South America were the first cultures encountered by the Spanish after the arrival of

Columbus in 1492. Each is explored further in the following sections.

Mesoamerica the area of Central America before the arrival of the Spanish

The Olmec

The first civilised society in Mesoamerica was the Olmec. These people appear to have occupied the southern parts of modern-day Mexico around 5000 BC, but like all migrating tribes they would take time to establish themselves. The earliest remains of their civilisation appear to date from c. 1500 BC and their civilisation appears to have collapsed by c. 400 BC. In their prime, they established sites such as San Lorenzo Tenochtitlán, which was abandoned by 900 BC, when they moved their capital closer to the sea, at La Venta. Why the

original city no longer served its purpose is still in dispute. Some experts think that a dramatic climatic impact had forced the move; however, because there was evidence of vandalism at Olmec sites, others argue that a civil war – or an invasion – had erupted, forcing the survivors to move. Increasingly the idea of invasion is losing traction. The most recent arguments suggest that vital river systems dried up or changed course, interrupting the lives of the people of San Lorenzo Tenochtitlán.

The geographical features of the region near La Venta were similar to that found in ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, India and China. In all of these places, there was a strong river system suitable for transport and water supply, and rich alluvial soils allowing for successful and sustainable agriculture. This meant that a large population could be maintained at this new site. It appears that the Olmec planted crops such as maize, beans, squash, manioc (cassava root), sweet potato and cotton along riverbanks between flood periods. They also employed slash-and-burn agriculture to create new fields when old planting areas became exhausted. Fruits such as cacao and avocado helped to supplement the diet of fish, turtle, snake and molluscs from the nearby rivers, and crabs and shellfish in the coastal areas. The domesticated dog seems to have been the single most important source of animal protein, even though they had access to jungle sources such as possums, raccoons, rabbits and deer. But the diet was indeed rich and diverse.

The Olmec became proficient at constructing early styles of stepped pyramids of about 30 metres in height. The pyramids were made from clay and topped by wooden temples. These structures would, over time, influence all future cultures



Source 11.7 Olmec stone head

in Mesoamerica and would reach their most significant in the later Maya and Aztec periods. It appears that in the era dominated by the Olmec, they served a spiritual function. The Maya and Aztec would expand this further by using their step pyramids for ritual human sacrifices.

In all of the Olmec cities sculptures were created of massive stone heads (see Source 11.7),

2–4 metres in height and often weighing as much as 18 tonnes. This style of stone sculpture also would influence sculpture in future dominant cultures in Mesoamerica. The Olmec were skilled at sculpting in jade and obsidian, as well as stone. They also developed a calendar and a system of written signs, including a symbol for zero, which Europeans did not possess until the Middle Ages. The European symbol for zero was inherited from the works of Islamic writers, but this was long after the Olmec were using their own.



Times gone by ...

The Cascajal Block, found in the 1990s by road builders in the San Lorenzo Tenochtitlán region, might shed new light on the Olmec civilisation. The 36 centimetre by 21 centimetre block weighs about 25 kilograms, and is inscribed with 62 **glyphs**, some of which are repeated a number of times. These glyphs are arranged in horizontal rows and have not yet been translated or understood, so their significance and precise meaning remains in dispute. The experts who first had access to the stone believe that the glyphs may be the very first writing anywhere in the 'New World'. However, because the glyphs did not feature in later cultures, this theory is viewed with scepticism by many in the scientific community.

glyph a carved or inscribed symbol; it may be a pictogram or an ideogram, or part of a writing system

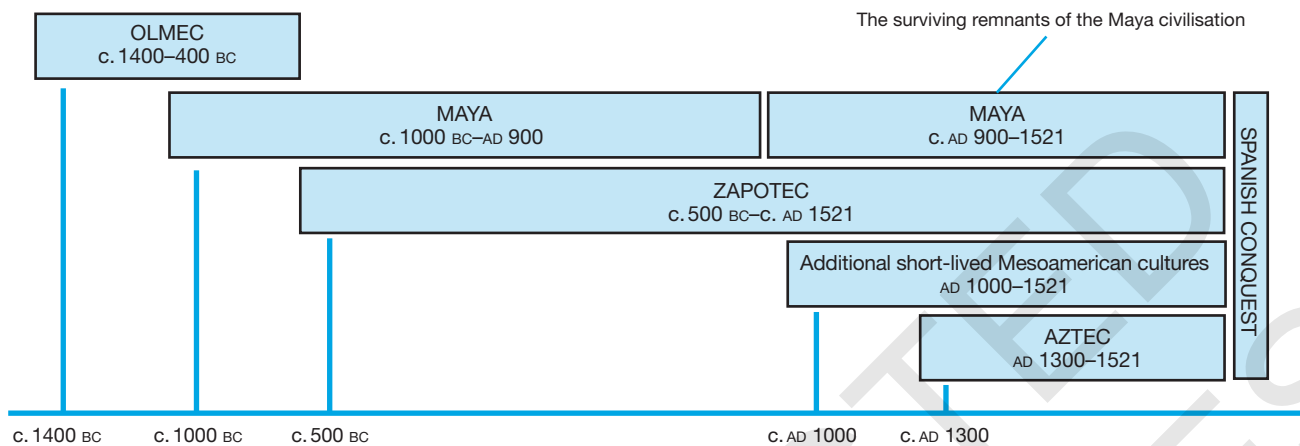
- 1 Investigate more about the Cascajal Block using links available at www.cambridge.edu.au/historynsw8weblinks.
- 2 Identify two other ancient languages we have not been able to yet translate, using the Smashing Lists website available at www.cambridge.edu.au/historynsw8weblinks.

HISTORICAL FACT

The Olmec were responsible for beginning a tradition that would be picked up by future Mesoamerican cultures: the ball game. Across time, the custom of a solid rubber ball being used in a stone court with sloping sides became a feature of Mesoamerican cultures. The evidence we have for this is the earliest surviving balls, as well as figurines of notable players.

By c.400 BC, the Olmec culture had mysteriously collapsed. Archaeologists and historians still puzzle over the reasons. Again some have sought explanations in climatic disruptions, but many today look to earthquakes and volcanic eruptions

as the likely cause. But as their 'writing' is a mystery to us (and because we have so very little of it), we may never know. The explanation might be a combination of things, but perhaps a neighbouring civilisation simply absorbed them as it grew.



Source 11.8 Timeline of Mesoamerican cultures

Activity 11.2

- 1 Identify the evidence in the text to support the view that the Olmec people lived a civilised lifestyle.
- 2 Explain why historians may disagree over whether or not the Olmec civilisation died out.

The Maya

One likely candidate for the absorption of the Olmec is the Maya, a civilisation that would emerge in c. 1000 BC and endure until c. AD 1000. When the Spanish arrived in Mesoamerica, they found the Maya culture alive and well in people living near the ruins of the old civilisation – but none of them could remember all of its details.

The Maya culture did not just ‘spring up’ in the year 1000 BC. Over time it had evolved its own cultural values and traditions, as well as absorbing some from the Olmec as well. Just like the Olmec before them, they had been developing strong trade routes across Mesoamerica to supplement their local resources. The Maya civilisation developed on the Yucatán Peninsula in modern-day Mexico, though their empire would stretch into modern-day Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador and Honduras. The map in Source 11.9 provides some idea of the scope of the Maya Empire at its peak, as well as its proximity to the old Olmec cities of San Lorenzo Tenochtitlán and La Venta.

The Maya were clearly a dynamic culture. The most recent historical view is that the Maya

culture was first established on the Pacific coast, suggesting that over time they extended their influence over the Yucatán Peninsula. They traded with cultures throughout Mesoamerica, and in the beginning controlled the export of cacao trees to other parts of the region, as well as the trade in jade and obsidian. The Maya even traded with island communities such as the Taino in the Caribbean. These were the people Christopher Columbus would first encounter on his arrival in the ‘New World’ in 1492.

Like the Olmec before them, the Maya used slash-and-burn techniques to establish new plantations for crops. Their primary crops were maize, beans and squash. They ate corn straight from the cob and produced a flat bread from it (to make tortillas) and also used it to make tamales. Other crops such as chilli peppers, wild onions, pumpkin, avocado, papaya and pineapple all added diversity to the diet. For meat they usually relied on the domesticated dog, turkey or ducks, but also included wild deer (although this eventually became a meat for the nobility), armadillo, tapir, monkey and a wild pig called a



Source 11.9 Map of the Maya Empire

HISTORICAL FACT

The Maya made a drink from ground-up cacao beans mixed with chilli peppers, cornmeal and honey, which they called *xocolatl* (actually pronounced ‘nahuatl’). The drink was exclusively for the nobles and the Maya *ajaws* (rulers). It appears that the Maya were the first people to cultivate and domesticate the fruit of the cacao tree. Without it, we would not have chocolate.

peccary, as well as the odd manatee (or sea cow), all often varied sometimes by birds, turtle and iguana. Their proximity to the sea also encouraged them to eat molluscs, fish, lobster and shellfish. Essential to the diet was also a range of herbs and spices: salts, allspice, vanilla, white cinnamon and so on.

Social organisation

The Maya civilisation was not a single entity with a clearly defined capital or centre of power. None of the Maya cities reached the size or sophistication of the later Aztec capital Tenochtitlán, which comfortably supported a population of well over 100 000. Indeed, it seems that the Maya cities

were more designed as religious centres rather than political ones. The housing that surrounded each city was relatively rustic – made of stone or mud with thatched roofs – yet the actual religious temples were constructed with precision and attention to detail.

Each city had its political head or **ajaw**, as well as its ruling elite or nobility. Maya society had evolved with a hierarchy of a ruling elite (including priests) and commoners. The *ajaw*'s position was hereditary, a quality they had in common with European monarchies of the time. But the Maya did not have a single overriding leadership: each kingdom within their

ajaw the modernised term for a Maya ruler, lord, king or political leader

loose federation of states was ruled separately. This made it quite difficult for the Spaniards after Columbus to subdue the Maya civilisation, even though it was already in tatters by that time. Yet it must be acknowledged that a sense of a Maya 'empire' emerged because of the common nature of economic, intellectual and spiritual traditions and customs across the various kingdoms.

Beliefs

Like the Olmec before them, and the Aztec who were to succeed them, the Maya believed in multiple deities or gods. The priest class was hereditary, with positions handed from father to son, or a close relative if there was no son. Often, the ajaws and members of the nobility also played a spiritual role in their kingdoms. Most anthropologists and historians agree that there seems to have been a 'professional' priest class in the Maya world that fulfilled a range of tasks from private and public rituals to large festival celebrations and human sacrifices.


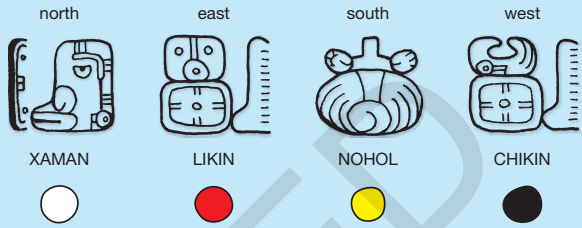
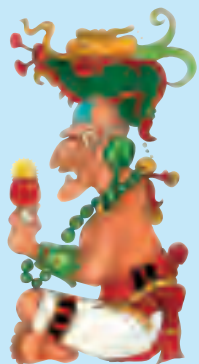

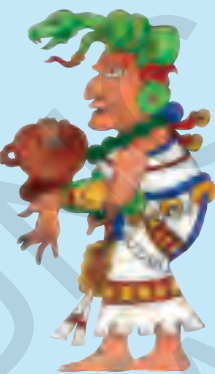

To the Maya, the influence of their deities was everywhere. It was in the wind, in the sun, the moon, the soil, the crops and the water. Their gods also had many manifestations, often matching the cardinal points of the compass (east, west, south and north). Sometimes they would be linked to dominant animal species in a region. Sources vary on the names of the deities or the spelling of the names, but one thing seems clear – gods were often regional and not worshipped universally throughout the loose Maya Empire. But some gods seemed to take a prominent position (see Source 11.10).

Maya ajaws were believed to be intermediaries between the gods and the people, and were

considered to be semi-divine. When they died, they were buried in elaborate tombs filled with all sorts of offerings for them to take into the 'afterlife'. All Maya understood the afterlife to be a dangerous and unpredictable voyage. It meant travelling through the underworld, which was occupied by many sinister gods, all represented by the jaguar – the symbol of darkness. Unlike Western and Middle Eastern religions, 'heaven' was only an option for those who had been sacrificed or for women who had died in childbirth. Apart from this, all Maya recognised that the fate of their ajaw and the common people was to go to the underworld after death. Their personal and individual fate was unpredictable once there.

For the Maya, their science and religion were considered to be one and the same thing. For their time and place, the Maya developed an impressive system of mathematics and astronomy, far ahead of anything in Europe in the same time. Both science and religion were intimately connected to their religious rituals. Their mathematics included a system by which numbers could be coded plus the use of zero; in astronomy, they accurately calculated a solar year, compiled precise tables of positions for the Moon and Venus (in the past as well as into the future), and were able to predict solar eclipses. The Maya were also obsessed with time, as understanding and predicting various cycles of time allowed them to adapt to and best make use of their natural world. The Maya also believed that the world had been created five times and destroyed four times, so all life lived on borrowed time. They dated the origins of their culture to 11 August 3114 BC and their calendar even forecast the end of this life on AD 21 December 2012. Most informed scholars of Maya



<p>Hunab Kú</p> 	<p>The Creator God. He seems unhappy with humanity and likes to wash them away with floods. According to Maya legend there have been two great floods.</p>	<p>The Bacabs</p> <p>north east south west</p>  <p>XAMAN LIKIN NOHOL CHIKIN</p> <p>The four sons of the affair between Itzamná and Ixchel, representing the four cardinal points of the compass: Mulac (the North, always painted white), Cauac (the South, always painted yellow), Kan (the East, always painted red) and Ix (the West, always painted black).</p>
<p>Itzamná</p> 	<p>Son of Hunab Kú. He introduced agriculture and maize to the Maya, and also taught them about books and writing.</p>	<p>Chaac</p>  <p>The God of Agriculture, Fertility, Rain and Lightning</p>
<p>Ixchel</p> 	<p>Wife of Votan (God of War). She had an affair with Itzamná and produced four sons (the Bacabs). Appropriately, she was the Goddess of Pregnant Women and the Rainbow Goddess of Childbirth. She also taught weaving and painting to the Maya.</p>	<p>Ah Puch</p>  <p>The God of Death. He ruled over the ninth level of hell in the Underworld.</p>

Source 11.10 Important Maya deities

history are not convinced by the current gloom-and-doom merchants about this matter.

Until the middle of the twentieth century, most anthropologists and historians had promoted the image of the Maya as a peaceful culture, obsessed with higher-order pursuits such as mathematics and astronomy. Since we have translated most of their hieroglyphics, we now have a different perspective of the Maya. In fact, human sacrifice seems to

have been a central Maya religious practice. It was believed to encourage fertility, demonstrate commitment to the religious beliefs, and to satisfy the desire for blood for the gods. The Maya were convinced that their gods were nourished by human blood, and ritual bloodletting was seen as the only means of making contact with them. The Maya believed that if they ignored these rituals, cosmic disorder and chaos would result.

At important ceremonies, the sacrificial victim was held down at the top of a pyramid or on a raised platform while a priest made an incision below the rib cage and ripped out the heart with his hands. The heart was then burned in order to nourish the gods, and the victim hurled down the steps of the pyramid. It was not only the captives who suffered for the sake of the gods: as the mediators between the gods and their people, the Maya ajaws and nobility underwent ritual bloodletting and self-torture. The higher one's position, the more blood was expected. Spines were jabbed through the ear or genitals, or a thorn-studded cord was passed through the tongue, and the blood was spattered on bark paper or otherwise collected as an offering to the gods.

Like the Olmec before them, the Maya built step pyramids (see Source 11.11). Instead of clay, however, they used limestone rock. On average, the height of Maya pyramids was about 30 metres. Maya city complexes have revealed that there were two types of pyramids: the first was used for religious rituals and festivals (including human sacrifices), and the second to promote civic pride

by acting as a reflection of the power and prestige of the ajaw and his nobility, and in honour of a selected god of the kingdom. Both types of pyramids had steep staircases leading to the top, some pyramids with two sets of stairs, and others with four. The top of the pyramid was always flat, and a temple for rituals was built there. When priests performed their rituals on the religious pyramid, they climbed the stairs in front of the assembled population below. This act symbolised climbing from earth to heaven.

If the Maya thirst for blood (a quality they would come to share with their successors, the Aztec) was not enough, they painted their pyramids a vivid 'blood-red' colour. Today, most of that colour has been washed away. The redness of the ritualistic pyramids highlighted their spiritual nature and their connection with their gods.

The Maya domestic housing for the common people was much simpler and smaller. They were made of perishable organic materials, which is the main reason why no intact examples from the period have been found. Most researchers believe that they were much like the rural



Source 11.11 A Maya pyramid from Chichén-Itzá

houses still seen throughout the region today. As Spanish conquerors were mainly interested in the significance and social power of religious and civic buildings, they paid little attention to the habitats of the common people.

Most sources today describe Maya houses as being built on low platforms that defined the space of each family plot of land (which may have included a family cemetery). A low wall of neatly stacked stones may have surrounded each plot of land. Inside the wall there may have been a well, a toilet, a chicken coup for the family's chickens, a small private garden of foods, and perhaps a laundry adjacent to the house.

The house was one rectangular room with rounded corners, no windows and one central door built to face east. Sometimes there was another door that led to a second hut, used as both a kitchen and a chicken coup. In the traditional kitchens, women would cook on a grill set over three rocks. When the hammocks were hung at night, the main, single-roomed house was converted into a dormitory.

The floor in a Maya home was made of a foundation of gravel covered with white packed soil. The walls had a wood matrix that was covered with mud and straw (adobe), and then whitened with lime. Sometimes (although this was rare) a house would have wooden floorboards.

The roof itself is made of a frame of wood lashed together to form beams. The beams were then thatched with native palm fronds. As the Maya had no nails, all of the joints in the home were tied together with a supple, tropical vine called a liana.

End of the Maya

Just as we do not know what brought an end to the Olmec civilisation before them, we are at a loss to explain the mysterious and apparently sudden end to the Maya civilisation sometime in the tenth century. Did the civilisation run into climatic difficulties, or did their slash-and-burn agriculture fail them so badly that they could not recover? Perhaps they fought among themselves so much that it destroyed the fabric of the life that had sustained them for more than a thousand years. The explanation for their collapse may lie in the fact that they had never managed to reach the status of a centralised empire that their descendants, the Aztec, would reach. But one thing is clear to us: the collapse of the Maya all those years ago sends a clear signal to our highly developed world that even advanced civilisations may not be permanent unless we first imagine our end, and then take positive steps to avoid it. Despite their advanced skills, it seems that the leadership of the Maya were unable to do that, and therein lays the real mystery.

What is also mysterious about their end is that when the Spanish arrived six centuries later, they found people living in the same manner as the ancient Maya, speaking in the same language or dialects, but who had no direct knowledge of their ancestors. How does a strong culture disappear from the face of the earth and yet somehow survive in small communities, even though the people have no direct memory of the original culture? This is a puzzle that ethnologists, anthropologists and historians have yet to resolve.



Note this down

Using the graphic organiser below, summarise the core features of the Maya civilisation.



The Aztec

Smaller and short-lived civilisations came and went following the end of the Maya. Legend has it that one of seven tribes in a place called Aztlán, called the Mexica, left the northern regions of Mexico or southern United States, where it was dry and arid. They were looking for better lives for themselves and their families. Over the course of a century they wandered before arriving in the valley of Mexico. The existence of Lake Texcoco filled with water was probably a reason to look upon this site as favourable for a new homeland.

Social organisation

By c.1350 this tribal group were building a capital city on an island in Lake Texcoco. They began with temples and causeways to bring water to their city. Over time, and in the hands of many rulers, that

city would become the fabled Tenochtitlán – a city capable of supporting more than 100 000 people at its peak. In 1452, the city was flooded and destroyed, and famine hit the population. Between 1458 and 1490, the empire recovered chiefly by conquering other tribal groups and seizing their lands and resources. Under the kingship of Moctezuma II (some sources use the name Montezuma), the Aztec Empire even expanded into what had once been Maya territories. But it was local tribal groups such as the original inhabitants of Texcoco – the Tlacopan and Tepanacs – that would be **subjugated** first. Tenochtitlán was rebuilt as the resources of the empire improved.

subjugate bring under domination or control by conquest

Unlike most other Mesoamerican cultures before them, the Aztec centralised authority in

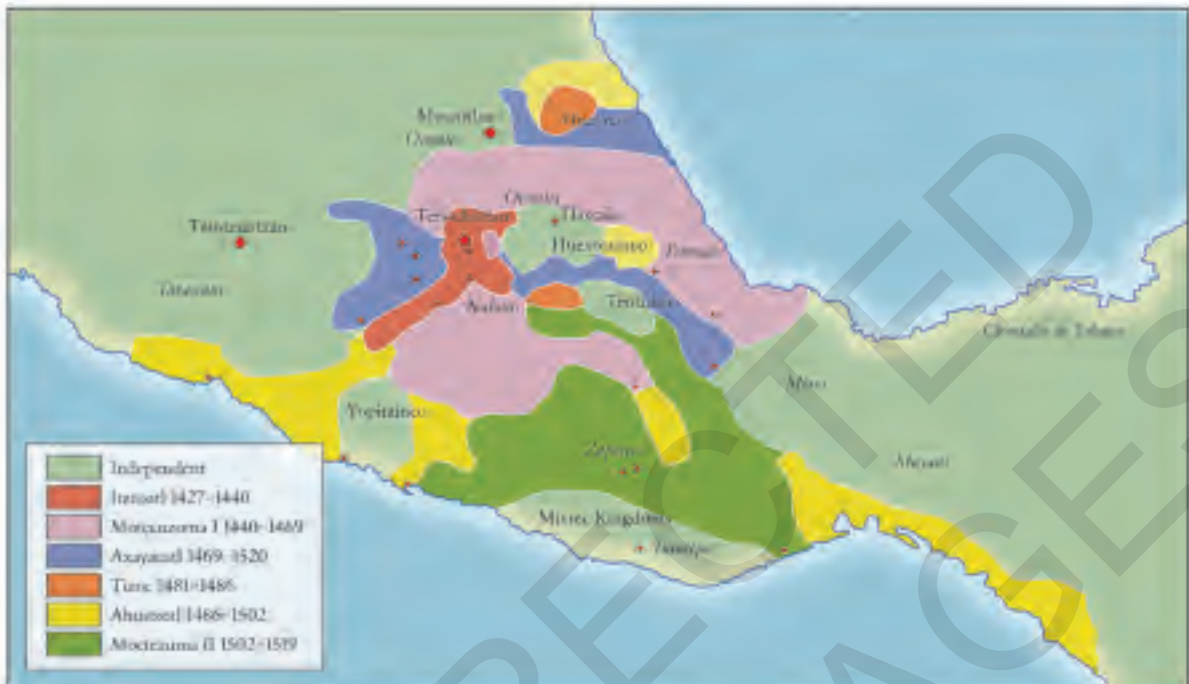


Source 11.12 An artist's impression of the city of Tenochtitlán

their empire. In this way, they were inspired by the short-lived civilisation to the south that preceded them: the Toltecs. The Aztec centralised authority from the earliest times in their migration to the valley of Mexico and Lake Texcoco. Perhaps an explanation for this is that King Achamapitchli (c. 1376–96) wished to prevent breakaway groups being formed during the migration. As the Mexica people established the city and their empire (becoming known to us as Aztec), it became even

more important to ensure that subjugated people were kept under control. Having a centralised authority made this easier.

The wealth and power of Tenochtitlán and the Aztec Empire came about chiefly during the reign of King Itzcoatl (c. 1428–40). He engineered a triple alliance between the Aztec, the people of Texcoco and the people of Tlacopan. Together they crushed the people of Azcapotzalco. But, as is often the case in royal matters, Itzcoatl was



Source 11.13 Map of the expanding Aztec Empire

not the supreme ruler. His nephew and royal advisor, Tlacaelel, seems to have been the real power behind the throne. As the empire and its power grew, Tlacaelel began a reform program of Tenochtitlán's political, religious, social and economic structures. One of the first steps he took was to destroy the history books of the Aztec, and to set about creating a new one that was suited to the times and the newfound power of the Aztec. He wanted the Aztec people to

know their history as a reflection of this new city, not the hungry years as they migrated south. Under the reforms, Huitzilopochtli replaced Quetzalcoatl at the head of the **pantheon** of gods. Tlacaelel also organised the construction of a new temple dedicated to Huitzilopochtli. Until the arrival of the Spanish, it was used for human sacrifices.

pantheon all the deities of a people or religion considered collectively

Research 11.1

Much of what took place between the Spanish and the Aztec occurred in the city of Tenochtitlán. Today, the city lies within the limits of Mexico City. It is important to have some awareness of what the city was like in 1519 when Hernán Cortés first arrived. Go online and complete some detailed research on the fabled city of Tenochtitlán. Present your findings to the class in an oral presentation.

Beliefs

Like the Maya before them the Aztec were convinced of the need to sacrifice people. Many of the victims were captives from war, particularly

those from the Tlaxcala people (to the south-east), whom Tlacaelel persuaded Itzcoatl (and the other kings he later served) not to absorb into his empire. We will never know the reason for

this because it was never recorded. It has been suggested by some historians that the decision was aimed at having the Aztec people permanently prepared for war. The nearby presence of (and apparent rivalry with) the Tlaxcala people gave the Aztec army every opportunity to train new warriors in battle as **skirmishes** took place

all the time. Apart from prisoners of war, other sacrificial victims included those who had committed serious crimes. Treason, theft and cutting down living trees were all crimes punishable by death in Aztec society, as were adultery and frequent drunkenness. Another capital crime was the wearing of cotton clothing by commoners, as this was the exclusive claim of the nobility and kings.

skirmish continual and unplanned battles between parts of opposing armies

<p>Huitzilopochtli</p> 	<p>God of Tenochtitlán; patron of earth, fire and the sun</p>	<p>Tezcatlipoca</p> 	<p>God of Rulers, Sorcerers and Warriors; a rival to Quetzalcoatl, symbolised by a jaguar</p>
<p>Quetzalcoatl</p> 	<p>God of Creation; patron of rulers, priests and merchants</p>	<p>Acolnahuacatl</p> 	<p>God of the Dead; symbolised as a puma</p>
<p>Tlaloc</p> 	<p>God of Rain, Fertility and Lightning</p>	<p>Xochiquetzal</p> 	<p>Goddess of Love</p>

Source 11.14 Important Aztec gods

Whether or not it was accurate, the news of the blood-drenched ceremonies in Tenochtitlán struck terror into the hearts of people such as the Tlaxcala, who were destined for sacrifice if captured. Festivals and sacrifice were almost continuous in the Aztec ceremonial year, with many other gods apart from Huitzilopochtli deserving of their share of blood. Each February children were sacrificed to the maize gods on tops of nearby mountains. In March, prisoners fought to the death, as they would have done in the days of the gladiators in ancient Rome. After these battles, priests would skin the dead and parade around wearing those skins. In April, a maize goddess would receive her share of Aztec children. And so it went on through the year. It has been estimated that shortly before the Spanish arrived, between 50 000 and 200 000 victims a year were being sacrificed in Aztec ceremonies. The first Spaniards who came to Tenochtitlán claimed they could smell the blood of the victims everywhere in the city. Source 11.14 (on the previous page) lists some of the Aztec gods to whom sacrifices were made.

End of the Aztec

An Aztec legend foretold that the god Quetzalcoatl – who had once lived on Earth, and who had once been at the head of the pantheon of Aztec gods – would one day return to claim the land and the Aztec people. The prediction even identified the exact year, month and day of his return. On that very day, King Moctezuma II was told of a man who had arrived in Aztec territory. He wore unusual clothes, spoke a language hitherto

unknown to the Aztec and his skin was white. Perhaps this was Quetzalcoatl who was predicted to arrive – of this Moctezuma could not be sure. Moctezuma initially resisted any thought of contact with this man, but eventually, together with his priests and advisors, Moctezuma II decided it was best to approach this man with caution and so sent ambassadors bearing gifts to meet this man.

The year was 1519. Moctezuma and his Aztec people could not know that their world would be no more within two years. Moctezuma would be dead – his city burned, looted and destroyed – and his people would be subjugated under Spanish conquerors. Their culture would be crushed by the Spaniards, their ancient books destroyed and their religious artefacts smashed. The surviving people would be forced to either work with the Spanish to conquer the rest of Mesoamerica, or become slaves within their own land. This story is examined later in this chapter.

The Inca

Much further to the south, on the western coast of South America, several attempts had been made to establish a civilisation. By the time the Spaniards were conquering Mesoamerica, the Inca had established their empire in what we know today as the country of Peru, along with parts of modern-day Ecuador, Bolivia, Chile, Argentina and Columbia.

Like the Aztec to their north, the Inca Empire was highly centralised. Its political and administrative centre was Cuzco. The empire had grown by both the military conquest and

Activity 11.3

- 1 Explain why you think the Aztec were able to build a stronger and more powerful civilisation than the Maya before them.
- 2 Reflect on why Tlacaélel, the Aztec ruler's advisor, persuaded the Itzcoatl not to form an alliance with the Tlaxcala people to the south of Tenochtitlán.
- 3 Using evidence, justify the claim that human sacrifice was central to Aztec religious beliefs.



Source 11.15 Map of the Inca Empire

peaceful absorption of other cultures. By the early sixteenth century, the Inca Empire stretched along the west coast of South America for about 4000 kilometres.

Within the reigns of two supreme rulers, Pachacuti and Topa Inca (both known as Sapa Inca), the empire developed a complete centralised organisation and a road network of more than 22 500 kilometres. These roads could not be compared with the smooth and paved roads of the Roman Empire, however. Like the Mesoamericans to their north, the Inca did not possess knowledge of the wheel, so did not require smoothed roads. However, the road network was essential to the system of trade and communication established by the Inca civilisation. It connected to suspension bridges that spanned ravines, allowing trade and communication to continue unimpeded. Messages were also sent from place to place along these roads, and housing was built along them to shelter the message couriers. We can only wonder whether all of the detail of the

messages got through every time. Perhaps the messages were essentially simple: orders for an army to ready itself to fight or to go to a particular place; or news about a ruler's death or the name of his successor.

The same network of roads supported trade. Teams of llama made slow but steady progress along the roads, carrying raw materials and supplies throughout the empire. All empires require political, social and economic control. Just as the Aztec had achieved it to the north in Mesoamerica, so the Inca did in the south.

Social organisation

Like the Maya and Aztec, the Inca had strict hierarchical societies. Western concepts such as liberty or equality did not exist in the minds of those who ruled the Inca Empire – nor in the minds of those who were ruled. Farmers in the empire worked land allocated to them by the ruler and could never own it. They could keep food for themselves and their families, but only at

a subsistence level. All food above this level was required to be paid in taxes. Male farmers and their sons could also be required to tend fields owned by the Inca rulers, or their labour might help build roads in their region; they also could be called into the army to help defend the nation.

Inca families could also be expected to move to new locations under the orders of the Inca ruler. It may well have been to newly acquired territories as the empire expanded. This was a way that the ruler could ensure he had 'friendly' people occupying outlying regions of his empire, and not people who may conspire against him. Families forced to move under such circumstances were often called *mitmakuna*.

Some in society were often selected from a very early age to serve the Inca ruler. These were called the *yanakuna* and the *mamakuna*. They

segregate isolate, divided or separate apart from one another

lived in **segregated** communities from each other and the rest of society. The first of them, the *yanakuna*, were young men who cared for the ruler's herds of llamas and alpacas. He could, as he grew up, get married. The *mamakuna* were young women, who could end up doing many things. The most attractive among them might end up in the ruler's harem or given away in marriage to outside rulers who decided to subjugate themselves to the Inca ruler. In general terms they became priestesses in the temples dedicated to the Sun god or they learned the art of spinning the textiles for which the Inca were known, as well as making chicha (a type of maize beer). When the Spaniards first arrived in 1527 in Peru and witnessed the *mamakuna* at work, they thought that they were nuns.

Life in the Inca world was harsh at the best of times. Children were expected to become independent as early as possible. Punishments for misbehaviour were severe, even for children as young as twelve months. Their fathers could be called away to work for lengthy periods and their mothers left to do everything around the house – without any of the aids so common these days. Boys reached maturity at the age of fourteen, when they were presented with a special loincloth as part of a ceremony to celebrate the day. Girls were usually married by the time they were sixteen,

without all of the ceremony we take for granted with such occasions. For the Inca, marriage was an economic issue, not one of romance.

The major crops produced in the small fertile coastline and the dry, arid interior of the empire consisted of twenty-seven varieties of maize, along with potatoes, sweet potatoes, chilli peppers, cotton, tomatoes and peanuts. All of these were unknown to Europeans at the time. The crops were frequently grown in terraced fields, particularly high up in the Andes Mountains. Such an approach allowed them to grow more food in a short period of time, making use of microclimates in regions of their empire. The diet also included the meat of llamas and alpacas, as well as fish near the coast. Unlike Mesoamerican cultures, the Inca built huge stone warehouses where they stored food surpluses, allowing them to survive leaner times.

Beliefs

Just like many of the cultures to their north, the Inca had many deities or gods. It is important to note that that all societies begin this way. For example, the Greeks and Romans, to which much of Western culture owes its origins, had many deities. As their empire expanded they were willing to keep the gods of those they subjugated, but to enforce their own as well.

The major gods of the Inca were Inti (the Sun God) and Mama Quilla (the Moon Goddess). There were also gods associated with the stars, the rainbow and the lightning. The worship of the Inca gods took place at the highest peaks that the Inca could access, as they held such places sacred. The Inca Temple to Inti was located at Machu Picchu at an altitude of 2434 metres. The city of Machu Picchu was begun sometime between 1460 and 1470 by Sapa Inca Tupac Yupanqui, the ninth and most expansive ruler in the Inca dynasty. It is believed that the city was used for solely religious purposes. Few people outside the ruler's closest advisors were actually aware of its existence, and when the Spaniards began the task of dismantling Inca rule and destroying the civilisation, they were not even able to find it. Its glory as a religious site became apparent to us only in 1911 when an American historian located it – for the first time in centuries.



The Spanish arrival in the Americas

In 1492 Christopher Columbus set sail under the Spanish flag on a voyage to Asia. Two matters distinguished his voyage from others before it: he was going by sea, and he was sailing west over an ocean where no European had previously been. In 1992, Spain and some parts of the Americas commemorated the five hundredth anniversary of this voyage, which had changed the world forever. But over the 520 years since Columbus set sail, we are now much more aware of the damage his arrival inflicted on the cultures of the peoples of the 'New World'.

Spain was one of the powerhouses of Europe in 1492. It had only recently driven the Islamic Moors out of its territory, and had united the two kingdoms of Aragon (under King Ferdinand II) and Castile (under Queen Isabella I). The battle to expel the Moors, which ended in 1491, gave Spain a new sense of confidence about itself and its destiny. The killing of 100 000 Moors in that ten-

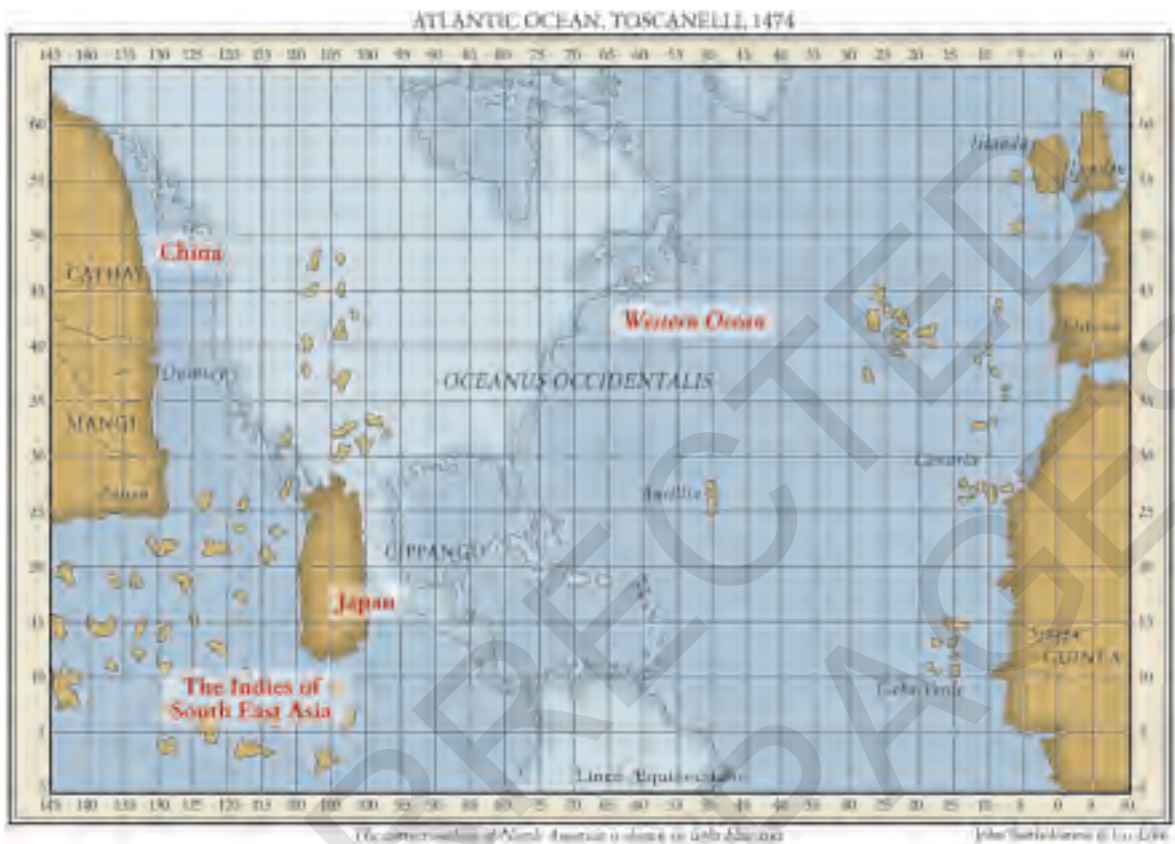
year battle offered a good indication of how the new Spanish rulers would act towards anybody who questioned their authority or challenged their Catholic faith.

Portugal, Spain's rival in all things maritime, was also keen to find its way to Asia, but preferred to sail down the West African coast. Bartholomew Diaz reached the Cape of Good Hope at South Africa (1487–88), and then Vasco Da Gama reached India via South Africa (1497–99).

Columbus dared to offer Queen Isabella the alternative of sailing west over the Atlantic Ocean. He argued that he could reach China by sailing west in only a matter of weeks, whereas it would take a year or two around Africa. Of course, he did not know that there were two bodies of water to cross – the Atlantic Ocean and the Pacific Ocean – and that there was an entire continent in between. As evidence in presenting his case to Queen Isabella, he used a map drawn by the Florentine cartographer Paolo dal Pozzo Toscanelli in 1474 (see Source 11.17). Note: Toscanelli's map has been superimposed over the correct position of the Americas, which was not on Toscanelli's map.



Source 11.16 The Iberian 'Old World' powers, c. 1492



Source 11.17 Toscanelli's map of 1474

Queen Isabella agreed to finance the voyage of Columbus to Asia. She provided half of the funds for his three ships (the *Niña*, the *Pinta* and the *Santa María*) as Columbus had already secured some funding from Italian investors. On 3 August 1492 he set sail from Spain, making his first landfall at the Canary Islands to resupply before heading on into unknown waters. He left the Canaries on 8 September. On 7 October his crew discovered flocks of birds at sea (usually a sign of nearby

land) and on 12 October, at 2 a.m., land was sighted by a sailor named Rodrigo de Triana on board the *Pinta* – though Columbus was to record in his log that he had made the discovery, thus earning a substantial reward for himself. He made first landfall on an island he named San Salvador in the Bahamas, off the eastern coast of modern-day Florida. The indigenous people of the island had already named it Guanahani.



Times gone by ...

Christopher Columbus sailed west into unknown waters from Spain. The risks he was taking were as great as those taken by the United States in 1969 when they sent men to the Moon. Columbus sailed ships called 'caravels', which were invented by the Portuguese.

- 1 Outline the essential features of a caravel that made it useful for sailing into the Atlantic in 1492.
- 2 Identify the technology Columbus possessed to ensure the success of his voyage.
- 3 Explain how knowledgeable Columbus was about sailing in the Atlantic Ocean.
- 4 Reflect on whether you think King Ferdinand I and Queen Isabella II took a great risk by agreeing to Columbus's plan.



Source 11.18
*Columbus Landing
at Guanahani* by
Theodor de Bry, 1594

Activity 11.4

Look carefully at Source 11.18. This woodcut by Theodor de Bry was completed in 1594. Clearly he was not there on the day of the landing by Columbus at Guanahani. It is a presentation of the event.

- 1 Identify Christopher Columbus in the woodcut.
- 2 List what you notice about the way the Europeans are dressed as opposed to the Arawak people of Hispaniola.
- 3 Offer an explanation for the differences.
- 4 Explain how the Europeans and Arawak people seem to be relating to each other.
- 5 Columbus made more voyages to the 'new world' and in his final years experienced mixed fortunes. After his third voyage, he was arrested and spent time in prison. In 1503–04, Columbus was stranded in Jamaica for a year. Research Columbus' life from 1492–1506 and draw up a timeline of the main events.

Columbus continued on to the coast of modern-day Cuba, which he took to be Cipangu (or Japan). He then sailed to the island that is home to the Dominican Republic and Haiti of today, naming it Hispaniola. He returned to Spain carrying some indigenous people with him, a small amount of gold and a mysterious plant that would soon be named 'tobacco'. Additional voyages in the region took him right across the

Caribbean to Central America and modern-day Panama. Despite his optimism, he never found the River Ganges (in India) that he was seeking; the reason is obvious to us now: he was half a world away from there. He died in May 1506 in his mid fifties, still not knowing that the discoveries he had made were lands never before seen by Europeans. To the day of his death, he believed he had been in Asia.



Impact of the conquest: the Spanish and Indigenous populations

Colonisation of the 'New World'

Just twenty years ago the peoples of the Americas marked the five hundredth anniversary of the discovery of the 'New World' by the Venetian-born sailor, Christopher Columbus. To Americans of Italian and Spanish descent, the anniversary was an occasion for celebrations. From this perspective, the voyage of Columbus was a vehicle of discovery and progress. It forged a lasting link between the civilisations of the 'Old World' and those indigenous peoples who had occupied the 'New World.'

However, many residents of the Americas of indigenous and African descent regarded the anniversary in less positive terms. To most of these people, the legacy of the voyages of Columbus was slavery and colonialism. Rather than regarding Columbus as a discoverer, many central and South Americans regard Columbus as an invader who set in motion a train of events that devastated the 'New World' peoples and their cultures. Some pointed out that it was Columbus who was the first to begin the Atlantic slave trade, condemning tens of thousands to a life of slavery. Others more soberly reflected that Europe's prosperity from the fifteenth century onwards was

based, at least in part, on the exploitation of the 'New World'. Five hundred years later, different perspectives have emerged over Columbus and the impact of his voyages.

Disease and death was one consequence. Pre-Columbian America had been isolated from many infections that had plagued Asia, Europe and much of Africa during the medieval era. Indigenous Americans had been spared most of the diseases

common to societies that raised livestock. As a consequence, the 'New World' was defenceless against **epidemics** of smallpox,

influenza and measles, which were most lethal to adults in their most productive years. The eight million Arawak Indians who lived on Hispaniola (the site of the first Spanish 'New World' colony) were reduced to ten thousand by 1520 – just 28 years after Columbus's arrival. The twenty-five million indigenous people in Central Mexico were reduced to 1.9 million by 1585 – within a century of Columbus's arrival. Inca populations in the Andes and Native American populations in North America were also decimated. Source 11.19 indicates the impact of disease on the indigenous peoples of Florida, settled from 1514.

epidemic a disease that affects many people at the same time

Year	Disease	Percentage decline	Estimated population
1517	–	–	722 000
1520	smallpox	–50	361 000
1528	measles	–50	180 000
1545	bubonic plague	–12.5	158 000
1559	influenza	–5	150 000
1564–70	influenza	–10	135 000
1585	unidentified	–10	121 500
1586	Cape Verde Island fever	–20	97 200
1596	measles	–25	72 900
1613–17	bubonic plague	–50	36 450

Source 11.19 Depopulation of indigenous Americans in Florida, 1517–1617

The development of the African slave trade was another important consequence of the voyage of Christopher Columbus. Within decades, Spain had introduced black slaves and sugar plantations into the 'New World'. With the indigenous population

seemingly on the path to extinction, the Spanish and Portuguese turned to African labour, which they used to mine gold and silver, and to raise crops and livestock.

Research 11.2

Research and create a poster on two of the diseases in Source 11.19 and explain how they impact on the human body. On your poster, outline why influenza had such a disastrous impact on the indigenous peoples of the Americas.

The 'discovery' of the 'New World' offered Europeans an opportunity to consider 'Old World' fears and ambitions in the light of what was found in the Americas. Explorers, and the colonists who followed them, believed that the indigenous Americans seemed to embody a sense of 'innocence', yet they enjoyed freedoms unknown in Europe. Some noted that the indigenous peoples lacked sexual restraints, law or private property, yet appeared healthy and seemingly enjoyed eternal youth. All of these beliefs were based on a superficial awareness of the indigenous cultures – and were mistaken. There were others still who were appalled by the hostility of the indigenous peoples who resisted colonisation, and by the blood lust of the Aztec. These European colonists came to the belief that these people – 'children of the devil' – had to be exterminated.

But the voyages of Columbus also helped to stimulate European philosophical thought. In 1516, just twenty-four years after Columbus's first voyage, Thomas More published a book in England titled *Utopia*. In its pages, he described an ideal country where poverty, crime, injustice and other ills – which were all well known to the educated classes in Europe – did not exist. More was taking what he had heard and read about the Americas, and the societies found there, in an effort to re-examine the European world. In time, he would not be alone.

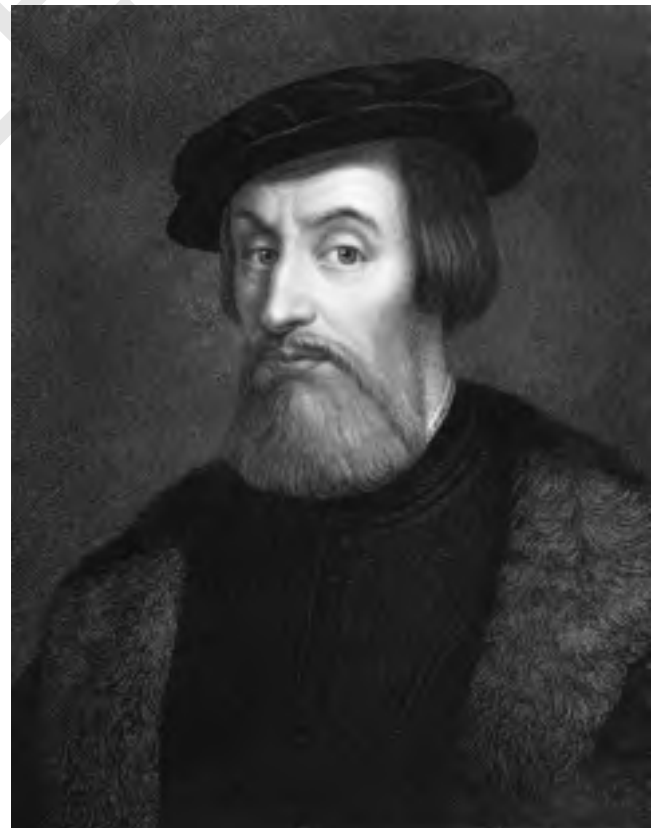
With each voyage sailed by Columbus in the Americas, adventurers, soldiers and colonists followed. Otherwise known as **conquistadors**, they were all seeking to reverse their fortunes. First they came to Hispaniola, but as new lands were identified they began to look over the horizon. The three 'Gs' drove their motivations: all of them sought gold (for personal wealth, the wealth of the Catholic Church or the wealth of a patron back in Spain); some sought glory (for the prestige of Spain and an expansion of its territorial claims); and some worked for God (for the converts they could bring to the Catholic faith).

conquistadors the adventurers, soldiers and settlers who sailed in the service of Spain and Portugal to help establish their country's empire around the globe

The colonists who came to Hispaniola ill-treated the indigenous people. As the population declined because of disease and brutal treatments, other indigenous people were kidnapped and brought to Hispaniola to replace them. The hostility that developed between the colonists and the indigenous people is, in modern terms, perfectly understandable. The Spaniards believed in their superiority, so it followed in their minds that the Arawaks were, by the nature of things, inferior beings. On the other hand, the Arawaks could not understand why these invaders were so brutal, and why they seemed intent on destroying their culture.

Hernán Cortés and the Aztec

In 1519, the conquistador Hernán Cortés set sail from what is today the modern country of Cuba bound for the land of the Aztec. He would not be the first Spaniard to visit Mexico: two years earlier explorers had encountered hostile Maya forces on the Yucatán Peninsula. Cortés came



Caption 11.20 Portrait of Hernán Cortés

better prepared than that expedition – he brought cannon with him, plus cavalry in armour with their horses. His first landfall was on the Yucatán, where a small band of indigenous Americans offered Cortés and his party some food and refreshments and a small quantity of gold – then asked them to go. Cortés made it clear that he would not go without more gold being given to him. A battle between his army and the local people ensued, and it was not long before 450 local warriors were dead, and many more wounded and in retreat. The indigenous group surrendered and offered Cortés more gold and gifts, plus twenty of their women. One of the women called Malinche (later changed to Doña Marina) would become first his mistress and then his wife, and would bear him children. But she had a unique capacity: she could speak both the language of the Maya and that of the Aztec. This skill would serve Cortés well as he could utilise her as a translator.

The real target of the ambitious Cortés was not the Maya but the Aztec under Moctezuma. The Aztec ruler had sent emissaries to meet with Cortés and his army.

The first article presented was a wheel like a sun, as big as a cartwheel, with many sorts of pictures on it, the whole of fine gold, and a wonderful thing to be behold ... Then another wheel was presented of greater size made of silver of great brilliancy in imitation of the moon with other figures shown on it, and this was of great value as it was very heavy.

Source 11.21 The Aztec presented Cortés with gifts on his return that had been set aside to welcome the god Quetzalcoatl

In return, Cortés gave Moctezuma's emissaries a demonstration of his cannon and cavalry on horseback. The noise of the first shocked the Aztec party, and the sight of mounted soldiers on horseback flying along the beach with swords

flashing high in the sun terrified the Aztec emissaries. The Aztec had never seen horses – indeed no American culture had until the Spaniards arrived. They mistakenly told Moctezuma that the men had been riding 'deer'. They also confused him by suggesting that the man and deer were one, somehow joined to each other. No American culture possessed steel swords; they still used sharpened stone tools. To see hardened steel swords flashing in the sun was an amazing thing.

Cortés requested a meeting with Moctezuma. The emissaries asked him to be patient. Although he had not personally set eyes on Tenochtitlán, Cortés knew it was only about 300 kilometres away. For his mission to be considered a success, he had to push on to the Aztec capital. First he formed alliances with the Tlaxcala people (who for decades had been the sacrificial captives of the Aztec) and then marched on to meet his destiny. Along the way, almost as a practice run, the two armies destroyed another indigenous people at Cholula. The whole affair seems to have been driven by the Tlaxcala who wanted revenge against the people of Cholula for some reason. Cortés and his army were there to help out.

When Cortés and his men reached Tenochtitlán they were stunned. On 8 November 1519, the Spaniards marched along the causeway leading into the city. The towers, temples and canoes were thick with crowds who gathered to gape at these strange men and their horses. Rather than have him enter the city uninvited, Moctezuma decided to meet Cortés at the entrance to the city. Moctezuma was in a **litter** draped with fine cotton curtains and borne on the shoulders of members of his nobility. He emerged from the litter and placed necklaces of gold and precious stones round Cortés's neck. Cortés placed a necklace of pearls and cut glass around the neck of Moctezuma, but was held back by two lords when he tried to embrace him.

litter a vehicle containing a bed or a seat, enclosed by curtains and carried by men



Source 11.22 Cortés is received by Montezuma

The Aztec led the Spaniards into the heart of the city, where Moctezuma showered them with more gifts and then housed them in luxury apartments. The Aztec knew about the massacre in Cholula and were taking no chances; they believed that if they were provoked in any way, the Spaniards could behave unpredictably and with great cruelty. Cortés and his commanders were invited to Moctezuma's throne room, and for the visitors the entire experience was a surprise: here was ruler who sat on a throne just like their

monarch in Spain, in a magnificently appointed room with intricately carved wood, burning incense and flowing drapes. It was as if they had suddenly been transported home.

The remainder of Cortés's army had the opportunity to wander the city. Among them was Bernal Díaz del Castillo, who had the presence of mind to continually quiz his fellow soldiers and travellers about their thoughts, which he later published under the title, *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain*.

[It] seemed like an enchanted vision ... some of our soldiers asked whether it was not all a dream ... It was all so wonderful that I do not know how to describe this first glimpse of things never heard of, seen or dreamed of before ... We saw the fresh water which came ... to supply the city ... We saw a great number of canoes, some coming with provisions and others returning with cargoes and merchandise ... We saw [temples] and shrines in these cities that looked like gleaming white towers and castles: a marvellous sight ... We turned back to the great market and the swarm of people buying and selling ... Some of our soldiers who had been in many parts of the world, in Constantinople, in Rome, and all over Italy said that they had never seen a market so well laid out, so large, so orderly, and so full of people ...

Source 11.23 Díaz on Tenochtitlán

Activity 11.5

Look back to Source 11.12 and to Source 11.23 on the previous page.

- 1 Outline the essential features you notice about the design of the city of Tenochtitlán.
- 2 Identify a place you have visited that has had a similar impact on you that Tenochtitlán had on Díaz.
- 3 Reflect on the place you nominated and explain why it stood out so much.

The constant smell of blood from the sacrificial temples also flooded into the nostrils of the visitors. Cortés was concerned that because his army was trapped within the city – and he was clearly outnumbered – he might not be able to escape. His greatest fear was that he or members of his army might be sacrificed. The issue was how to prevent this from happening. Thus, on 16 November 1519, Cortés placed Moctezuma under house arrest and attempted to rule the Aztec through him. However, the power of the Moctezuma was dwindling in the eyes of his people and the Aztec grew ever more resentful of the attacks by the Spaniards on their religion and their relentless demands for gold.

When resistance broke out among the people of a powerful lakeside ruler, Cortés held a ceremony to formalise Moctezuma's submission to the Christian King of Spain. He installed Christian images on the great pyramid, and set in motion the first attempts to destroy the Aztec idols. Still trying to be reasonable, Moctezuma suggested an astonishing compromise: the placing of his gods on one side, the Christians on the other.

Cortés had to leave the city to settle a dispute with another group of conquistadors. While he was away he managed to recruit almost 10000 Tlaxcala and additional Spanish soldiers to support his cause. On his return, he discovered that the Spaniards he had left in the city, under the leadership of Pedro de Alvarado, had panicked during the Festival of Huitzilopochtli when thousands of enthusiastic revellers packed the city squares. In the mistaken fear that his group was about to be attacked, Alvarado ordered the soldiers to slaughter the revellers. Cortés discovered these soldiers besieged in their apartments by the people of Tenochtitlán, who were now prepared

to overthrow Moctezuma and kill the Spaniards to avenge their compatriots' deaths. Under the cover of darkness, the Spaniards and their Tlaxcala allies attempted to flee the city. In the following days, the Aztec warriors killed almost 5000 of Cortés's army as Cortés attempted to retreat.

In May 1521, Cortés returned with a larger army, cannon, cavalry and 25000 Tlaxcala warriors. Cortés ordered that the fresh water supply to the city be cut off, and blockaded the city to prevent both people escaping and supplies entering the city across the water of the lake. What Cortés did not know was that in the ten months or more that he had been away from Tenochtitlán, smallpox had decimated the population of the city. The Aztec had been busy sacrificing people to the gods to stop the sickness, but to no avail. A new ruler, Guatemoc, had replaced Moctezuma. Cortés had him arrested and tortured to reveal the whereabouts of the Aztec gold, and then he gave orders for the city of Tenochtitlan to be destroyed. The mighty Aztec Empire was no more.

Francisco Pizarro and the Inca

Francisco Pizarro first made a tentative foray into Peru in 1528. He then hurried back to Spain to seek an audience with the new King Charles V of Spain, showing him his souvenirs of his visit to Peru. He told the king that he had heard of an empire similar to that of the Aztec and was seeking royal permission to conduct a more thorough investigation. King Charles must have been impressed, for in 1529 Pizarro was given approval to return to Peru without the interference of any other Spanish official in what



Source 11.24 Portrait of Francisco Pizarro

was quickly becoming called Spanish America. Pizarro organised his expedition and set sail for Peru in January 1531.

Pizarro arrived in Peru at an important time: the Sapa Inca, Huayna Capac, had died. There is some evidence that he had died of smallpox, first introduced to the Americas when Cortés was attacking the Aztec at Tenochtitlán in Mexico in 1519. Now it had reached Peru.

The Inca ruler's advisors urged him to name a successor before he died. Some later said that he had chosen his son Huascar, who was the Sapa Inca's representative in Cuzco, the capital. However, others who witnessed the Sapa Inca's death were convinced that he had nominated Huascar's half-brother, Atahualpa, who was in control of the northern part of the empire at Quito. A civil war erupted over who had the right to the throne. Civil wars produce two key results: they divide loyalties between the opposing forces, and they weaken the ruling government in the face of outside invasions, because it is so focused on the internal problems. Spanish writing of the

time praised the civil war because they knew it aided their conquest of the Inca civilisation. On the other hand, Inca observers knew that the civil war had undermined their capacity to resist the Spanish invasion.

The armies of the two contenders for the Inca throne fought their battles. For a while it appeared that Huascar had the upper hand, when Atahualpa's army was routed and he was captured. His escape was an inspiration to his army as it remobilised to support him. In the end, Atahualpa was successful when his half-brother was captured.

All the while, Pizarro had landed his own army in Peru. He had two advantages over the Inca: he had Inca translators with him who could communicate with ordinary Inca people as they marched to the Inca city of Cajamarca; and the Inca army had been too focused on its civil war to offer any resistance. But it would be the Spanish weaponry that would be the difference. Like Cortés before him in Mexico, Pizarro had steel swords, cannon, cavalry on horseback and

mechanical crossbows. And, just like the Aztec before them, the Inca were astonished at the sight of men on horseback. They believed the horses to be very large llamas or alpacas. Atahualpa had been first convinced that Pizarro was a god, but one of his trusted advisors who had met Pizarro assured him they were not gods at all.

Atahualpa planned to meet with Pizarro at Cajamarca, but when he arrived in the city in 1532 he found that there was nowhere for him and his army to stay – the Spanish had already occupied every available space. Pizarro sent one of his priests, Father Vincente de Valverde, to meet with Atahualpa. Valverde's plan was to convert the Inca ruler to the Christian faith, and showed Atahualpa the Catholic Bible, telling him it was the word of 'the Lord'. Atahualpa looked at the book, held it to his ear and said to Valverde dismissively that it did not speak to him. He threw the Bible to ground.

This act provided Pizarro with the reason to attack Atahualpa. He gave the order to fire cannon into the Inca people in the city square, and sent in his cavalry and infantry to finish off the dying and wounded. The Inca army tried to retaliate, but they could not combat such weaponry and were in disarray. Atahualpa was captured and

imprisoned. Pizarro treated his royal captive well by all accounts, instructing his Spanish guards to provide him with whatever he needed.

The Spanish conqueror had charged Atahualpa with trying to organise a rebellion against the Spanish, with the murder of his half-brother Huascar, and with worshipping idols. At his trial he was found guilty of all charges and was to be executed by burning at the stake. Historians dispute what happened next. Some recount that Atahualpa tried to bribe Pizarro and the Spaniards by offering as much gold and silver as wanted; some suggest it was Pizarro who demanded the gold and silver as a ransom. It has been estimated that almost 4.6 million ducats of gold and silver was paid – at a time when ordinary people in Europe would not have earned a single ducat in their entire lives. One-fifth of the fabulous treasure was put aside for Charles V in Spain, and the remainder divided up between Pizarro's army.

Despite the payment of the ransom, Pizarro had Atahualpa executed in November 1534 because of a rumour of an impending revolt of the Inca people. Between 1536 and 1537 they did rebel. Within the year, resistance was crushed and the dazzling Inca Empire passed into history.

Research 11.3

Select one of the significant individuals below and create a PowerPoint presentation that details their arrival in the Americas and their reasons for coming. Include information on the effects this had on the indigenous peoples of the Americas.

- Christopher Columbus
- Hernán Cortés
- Francisco Pizarro





The longer-term effects of colonisation

By 1537, Spain controlled both Mexico and Peru. Political back-stabbing and intrigue occurred between Cortés in Mexico and Pizarro in Peru and others wanting a bigger share of the spoils for themselves. Cortés left Mexico in 1541 and returned to Spain a bitter man. Supporters of Diego de Almagro murdered Pizarro in Peru in the same year, then Pizarro's brother Hernando captured Diego and had him executed. Once the conquistadors were removed, Spain began to exploit the resources in both Mexico and Peru.

Christianity became the established religion, Catholic churches and monasteries replaced temples, and peoples who believed in a diversity of gods were forcibly converted to a religion of a single god. In Peru, however, there were isolated places where tradition continued for a number of years. Source 11.19 depicts the impact of diseases across the Spanish Empire. The impact was largely on the indigenous peoples, and we will never know the real extent of diseases throughout the empire. In Mexico it is estimated that the

indigenous population fell by 90 per cent between 1518 and 1568. In Peru, estimates suggest that the population declined by 95 per cent on the coast and about 50 per cent in the Andes.

Indigenous peoples in both areas lost their land, and were forced to work it as servants of the Spanish authorities. One wonders how demoralised they must have felt. For Spain, the conquest proved to be a boon, as they acquired:

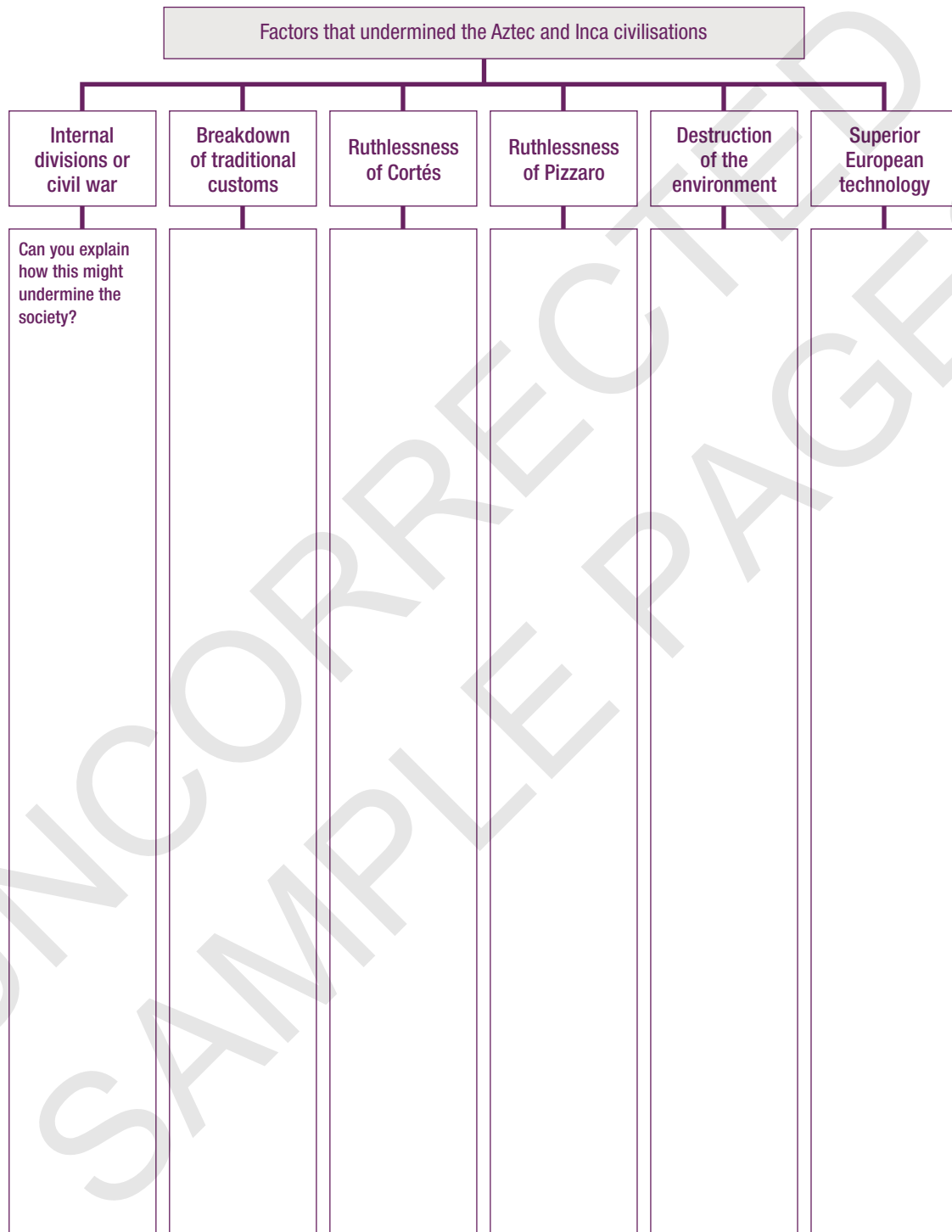
- enormous wealth from the gold, silver and precious stones of the 'New World'
- large amounts of territory (which included two-thirds of what would later be the United States)
- new markets for Spanish manufactured goods
- new resources previously unknown in Europe (such as tomatoes, avocados, sweet potatoes, potatoes, tobacco and cacao).

Thanks to the wealth forcibly acquired in the 'New World', by the middle of the sixteenth century Spain was the wealthiest and most powerful nation in Europe.



Note this down

Using the graphic organiser below, summarise how Aztec and Inca civilisations were undermined.



Chapter summary

- Complex civilisations had emerged in the Americas long before Europeans even knew of the continent. These civilisations were already old when Europeans encountered them. Only some of these civilisations had longevity, including the Maya, the Aztec and the Inca. These societies were highly organised but not always well coordinated. They all had hereditary rulers and elite classes.
- The rulers and priests were considered to be intermediaries between the gods and the people. If bad luck befell their culture, it was believed that it was because the gods were angry. The Mesoamerican cultures used human sacrifice to appease the gods.
- These indigenous cultures produced many technological achievements. The Maya, Aztec and Inca all used sophisticated mathematics and calendars that could accurately predict events far into the future.
- The Spanish conquest of their lands came about because of a burning desire to expand the wealth of Spain through trade with Asia. Christopher Columbus believed that he could get to Asia more quickly by sailing west from Spain across the Atlantic Ocean. The Portuguese, their rival, persevered by going down the west coast of Africa.
- The conquest was left in the hands of conquistadors, who were more interested in their own profits rather than the results for their king or queen. This meant that conquistadors operated independent of government control and they committed great atrocities.
- The cultures of the Americas were crushed by the superior technology of the Europeans, the ruthless application of it in conflict, and the absolute determination of the conquistadors to plunder what they saw and found in the 'New World'. Internal disputes also assisted in undermining these cultures in the face of the European encroachment. Indigenous traditions were smashed and long-standing empires were routed.

End-of-chapter questions

Multiple choice

- The first indigenous people who came to the Americas did so:
 - overland via Greenland
 - across the Pacific Ocean in canoes
 - across the ice sheets in the Bering Straits
 - across the Atlantic Ocean in ships from Africa
- The Andes Mountains are in:
 - Mexico
 - the Yucatán Peninsula
 - California
 - South America
- The first true civilisation in Mesoamerica was:
 - the Inca
 - the Toltec
 - the Olmec
 - the Maya
- The civilisations in Mesoamerica that used pyramid-type structures were:
 - the Olmec
 - the Aztec
 - the Maya
 - all of the above

5 The civilisation that controlled the trade in xocolatl were:

- A the Toltec
- B the Maya
- C the Olmec
- D the Aztec

4 Examine the significance of the role played by Tlaccael in the Aztec political system.

5 Select one of the Aztec gods. What was his or her importance to the culture?

Source analysis

Study Source 11.25 and answer each of the questions.

- 1 What evidence in this painting can you find that this event was regarded as worthy of celebration?
- 2 Look closely on the right-hand side of the painting in the background. Why do you think that some people are touching the ground and others are celebrating further back?
- 3 Consider what the people in the centre foreground of the painting might be doing.

Short answer

- 1 Identify the location of Machu Picchu and its significance in the history of the Inca.
- 2 Who was Hunab Kú and why would the people of the Maya civilisation have feared him?
- 3 Explain the origins of the Aztec and how they become the dominant culture in Mesoamerica by 1500.



Source 11.25 *First Landing of Columbus on the Shores of the New World* (1892)

- 4 How are the indigenous people (left) responding to this event?
- 5 Analyse the accuracy of the painting as a representation of what took place in the 'New World' in 1492. Consider the feelings of the people with Columbus and the responses of the indigenous people.
- 6 Compare the representation of this event in Source 11.25 with Source 11.18. What conclusions can you reach about the purpose of each representation?

Extended response

Describe the impact of the Spanish conquest of the Americas in terms of its indigenous inhabitants. To what extent do you agree that the conquest cost more than it gained for the world as a whole?



Source 11.26 Maya pyramid in Uxmal, Mexico

