

12

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



This photograph, taken in 2008, shows a South American tribe that has had no contact with the modern world.

Links with our times

In May 2008, the world was amazed by photographs of an indigenous tribe located in the Amazon on the border between Peru and Brazil. This tribe has had no contact at all with modern civilisation — the photograph opposite shows these people were clearly startled by the plane that flew overhead. The world watched with interest as the photographs spread, and many debated the responsibility the modern world had to leave the tribe undisturbed rather than to make contact.

It was a very different story five hundred years ago when the first Europeans arrived on the American continents. Little or no consideration was given to the welfare of the native inhabitants of the new lands and, in many ways, those people were brutally exploited. However, the arrival of Europeans to the Americas would change the world.

Who lived in the Americas?

The Americas were home to a number of different civilisations. The three largest and most powerful of these civilisations were the Inca, Maya and Aztec empires. The Inca people lived on the western side of South America, in the region that is now Chile and Peru. The Maya lived in eastern present-day Mexico on what is called the Yucatan Peninsula, and bordering them to the west were the Aztecs. These three civilisations were made up of a number of tribes and nations. The two civilisations of the Aztecs and Maya make up the region known as Mesoamerica, a region of spectacular temples, architecture and a proud heritage. This chapter will focus primarily on how the Spanish conquest affected the Aztec civilisation.

A timeline of the civilisations of the Americas

CE

1250

1250
Aztecs settle near Lake Texcoco.

1300



1325
City of Tenochtitlan is founded by the Aztecs on an island in Lake Texcoco.

1350

1350
Causeways and canals of Tenochtitlan are built.



1400

1400
Aztecs expand their empire by defeating the Tepanecs.

1440
Montezuma I begins his rule.

1450

1469
Montezuma I dies and is succeeded by Ahuizotl.



1506
Columbus dies.

1500

1492
Columbus 'discovers' the Americas.

1519
Cortes and the Spanish conquistadors arrive at Tenochtitlan.

1520

1502
Montezuma II becomes the ruler of the Aztecs. The Aztec Empire is at its most powerful.

1521
Cortes claims the city of Tenochtitlan for Spain.

1550

1520–1
An outbreak of smallpox, introduced by the Europeans, sweeps through the population of Tenochtitlan, killing up to half the population.

1522
Tenochtitlan is rebuilt and named Mexico City. Declared the capital of the Spanish colony in the Americas — 'New Spain'.

eBookplus

Create a visual timeline of key events during the Spanish conquest of the Americas with the interactive timeline application in your eBookPLUS.

SEARCHLIGHT ID: INT-2954

A map showing the three major Central and South American civilisations — the Aztecs, Mayas and Incas



Key
Aztecs
Mayas
Incas



Jacaranda World History Atlas
Incas pp. 118–19

Big questions



As you work through this chapter, look for information that will help you to answer these questions:

- 1 What was the Aztec civilisation like before the Spanish arrival?
- 2 What were the key events in the Spanish conquest?
- 3 Who were some of the most significant historical figures of the time?
- 4 Why were the Spanish eager to explore the American continents?
- 5 How can historical sources help us understand this period of history?
- 6 What was the impact of the Spanish colonisation on the people they encountered?
- 7 What legacies of the Spanish conquest remain today?

Starter questions



- 1 What do you already know about the Aztec Empire?
- 2 Do you think isolated tribes should be left alone to live without knowledge of the modern world? Why?
- 3 If modern people were to make contact with previously isolated tribes, what effect could this have on those people? Could both groups benefit or would the encounter be positive for only one side?

12.1 The Spanish conquest of the Americas

After the conquest of the Americas, the Spanish recorded the events that took place. However, as these accounts were almost always written by the Spanish, they were very **subjective**. This means they told only one side of the story. As with any historical investigation, it is important for historians to consider a range of sources from all sides to gain a clearer understanding of the truth. The SkillBuilder for this chapter will investigate the importance of understanding different historical perspectives in more depth.

European sources

It has been said that 'history is written by the winners'. This is certainly the case with the Spanish conquest of the Americas. Both during and after the period of the conquest, many of the **conquistadors** maintained detailed accounts of their experiences. They were eager for their actions to be remembered. Hernan Cortes, who led the Spanish against the Aztecs, wrote many letters to King Charles V of Spain, providing a valuable eyewitness account of the events. However, these letters tended to glorify Cortes' victories and downplay his failures.

There were some Spaniards whose first-hand accounts of the time have been recognised as highly important and less biased. For example, Bernardino de Sahagun was a missionary who travelled to the **New World** in 1529, about seven years after the conquest of the Aztecs. He would remain there for the rest of his life, and from 1545 he worked to compile a series of texts that would become known as the Florentine **Codex**. The original was written in the Aztec language of Nahuatl. Sahagun learned to speak Nahuatl, and he could communicate with many surviving Aztec wise men. The Florentine Codex provides a remarkable history and description of the Aztec civilisation prior to the Spanish arrival.

Another useful source is the writing of Bartolome de las Casas. He was a Spanish priest who settled in the New World and was appalled at the treatment of the Native Americans by the Spanish colonists. He wrote to King Charles V of Spain defending the rights of the indigenous people.

Source 1

A scene from an Aztec codex showing ritual human sacrifice. Such practices were part of Aztec religion.

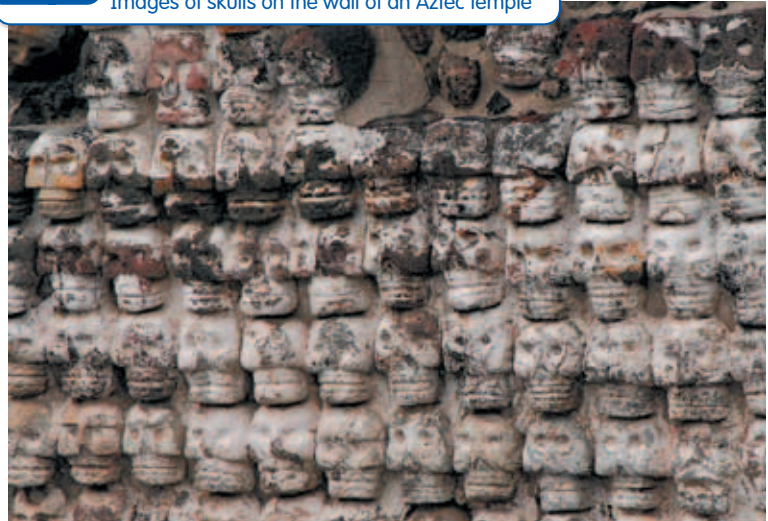


Aztec sources

There are very few surviving written Aztec sources from before the conquest because many of them were destroyed by the Spanish, either intentionally or during the fighting for Tenochtitlan. Most of the sources that were created after the conquest can be useful to historians, but it is important to remember they were created under the supervision of the Spanish. This means that surviving Aztec sources may still suffer from Spanish subjectivity. In the following decades, some descendants of those who experienced the conquest began to record the events from an Aztec point of view.

Source 2

Images of skulls on the wall of an Aztec temple



Source 3

Aztec ritual cannibalism as shown in a codex



How reliable are the sources?

All historical sources are subjective to a certain extent. This means that the authors of the sources are influenced by their own personal beliefs and feelings, rather than purely by the facts. An example of this would be the different attitudes the Spanish and Aztecs had toward human sacrifice. The Aztecs believed that their gods remained strong only through offerings of blood and human hearts, and so human sacrifice was one of the core aspects of their religion. On the other hand, the Spanish felt that the act of human sacrifice was barbaric and demonstrated the inferiority of the Aztec people compared with Europeans. You will have an opportunity to investigate different points of view and perspectives throughout this chapter, particularly in the SkillBuilder.

Source 4

An Aztec pyramid as it appears today. Human sacrifices would have taken place here.

**Activities**

ANALYSIS AND USE OF SOURCES

- Why are Aztec sources that were created after the Spanish conquest considered subjective?
- Why would the Spanish missionaries have had different opinions of the conquest compared with the conquistadors?
- Why would the Spanish intentionally destroy Aztec written records?
- Why are there differences between Cortes' and Sahagun's accounts of the Spanish conquest?
 - How could historians find each source useful despite their differences?
- Examine **Source 1**.
 - What is the man with the knife doing at the top of the image?
 - How do you think the Spanish would have reacted to such an image?
 - Why might they have reacted that way?
- How do you think images like those in **Sources 1, 2 and 3** might have affected the way the Spanish conquistadors viewed the Aztecs? Explain your answer.
- Source 4** shows an Aztec pyramid as it appears today. What conclusion can you draw from this image about the importance of religion to the Aztec people?
- Why are all historical sources subjective to some degree?

codex a pictorial book
conquistador one of the Spanish conquerors of Mexico in the sixteenth century
New World a term used to describe the Americas
subjective based on personal feelings rather than on facts

12.2 The Aztecs before Spanish arrival

For more than three hundred years prior to the arrival of the Spanish conquistadors, the region that is now central and southern Mexico was dominated by the Aztecs. The structure of Aztec civilisation and culture was complex and highly organised with sophisticated architecture and well-developed agriculture.

Rise of the Aztecs

The Aztec people arrived in what is now Mexico in the late 1100s. By 1250, they had settled near the shores of Lake Texcoco, and by 1325 they had begun building the magnificent city of Tenochtitlan.

The city of Tenochtitlan, one of the best planned and most elaborate cities anywhere in the world at the time, was built in the middle of Lake Texcoco on five swampy islands. Three long causeways connected the city to land around the lake's edge. The city itself had a network of both canals and roads so that all sections could be accessed either on foot or by canoe.

Everyday life in Tenochtitlan

School

The Aztecs were a highly organised society. They led rewarding lives, particularly the noble classes. Young boys went to school to learn to live prudently, govern, and understand history and the ways of the elders. Girls were mainly taught at home. At 15 years old, boys could attend one of two types of school: children

of the nobility went to the *calmecac*, which had a focus on advanced learning, administrative skills and religion, or the *tlēpochcalli*, which was basically a military school for commoners. However, all boys learned some fighting skills, regardless of the direction their working life took.

Food

There were generally two main meals a day, with one meal being eaten during the hottest part of the day. A staple of Aztec diet was maize but this was supplemented with a large variety of meat and vegetables. The Aztecs are famous for introducing the world to chocolate; however, this was reserved for warriors and nobility, and was mixed with ground maize to make a drink. Alcohol came in the form of a drink called *octli*. The sap from the maguey plant was fermented but, like chocolate, this was a drink strictly for nobles, royalty and warriors.

Crime and punishment

By today's standards, Aztecs had incredibly harsh punishments for most crimes. For example, if a commoner was found wearing cotton clothes, the punishment was death. Likewise, a death sentence was possible if someone was found guilty of adultery or even cutting down a living tree. The accused would be sentenced by a group of judges in a way that is not so different from Australia's justice system today. Although the punishments seem harsh from our modern-day perspective, it is important to remember that

Europeans from that period would not have been as shocked because punishments were equally harsh in Europe at that time.

Source 1 A modern artist's impression of the city of Tenochtitlan



A The Aztec step pyramids dominated the skyline of Tenochtitlan. When it was decided that a larger pyramid was needed to honour the gods, the Aztecs would simply build on top of the existing pyramid.

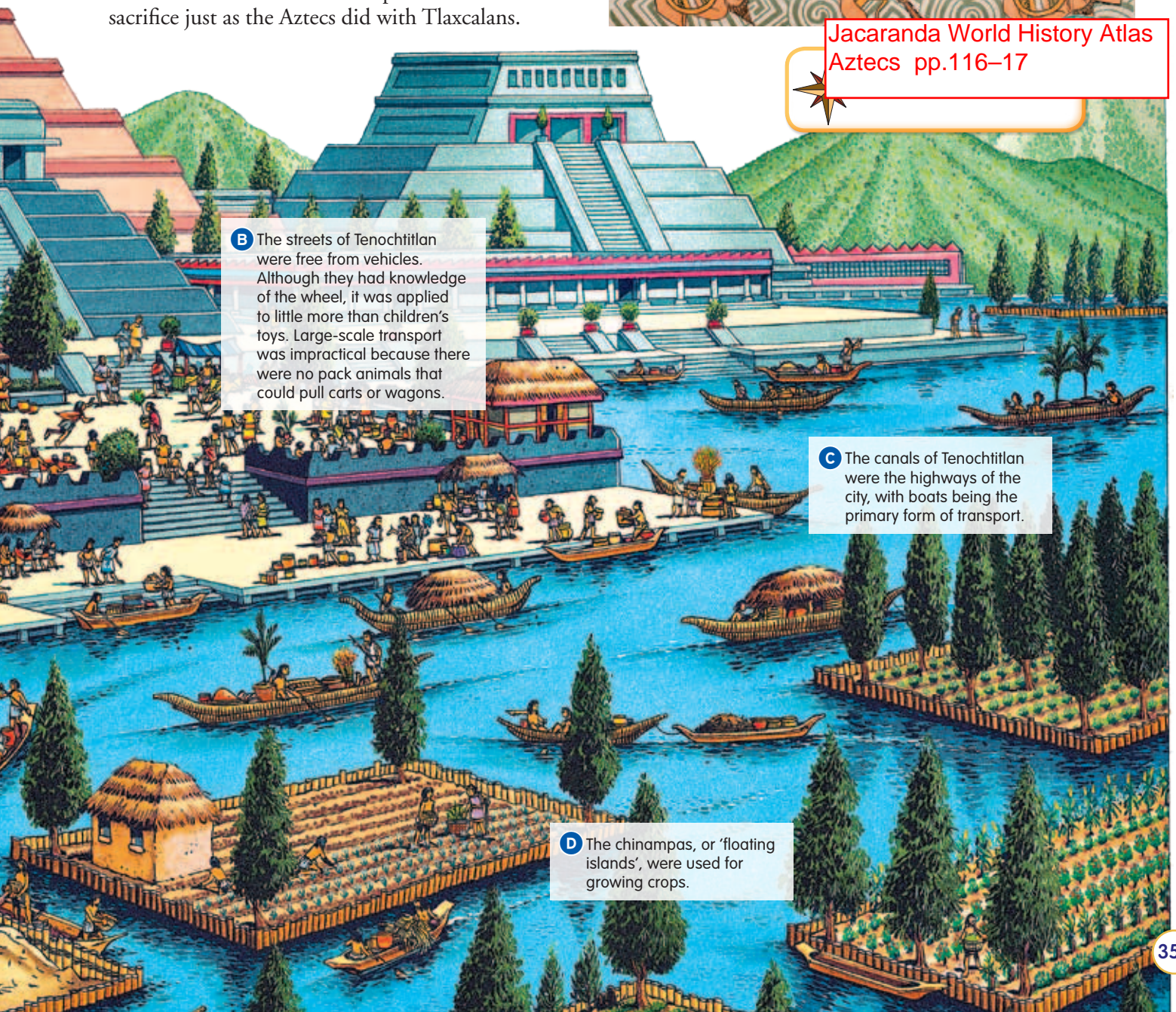
Aztec warfare

Life in the Aztec Empire was not peaceful; in fact, the Aztecs were in a state of perpetual war with the Tlaxcala people who also lived in the region that is now Mexico. The Aztec army was broadly organised into two layers. One was made up of commoners who were trained in basic fighting skills. The other consisted of the professional warrior class. Among the bravest and most skilled of these were the eagle and jaguar warriors, so named because of the distinguishing and fearful uniforms they wore. In the average battle, there were fewer casualties than compared with European battles because prisoners were highly valued as slaves or victims for human sacrifice. Most soldiers would try to disable rather than kill their opponent. This technique was used by the Tlaxcalans and other enemies, and it is likely that the Tlaxcalans used Aztec prisoners for human sacrifice just as the Aztecs did with Tlaxcalans.

Source 2 An illustration from an Aztec codex showing jaguar warriors, who were the elite soldiers in the Aztec army



Jacaranda World History Atlas
Aztecs pp.116–17



B The streets of Tenochtitlan were free from vehicles. Although they had knowledge of the wheel, it was applied to little more than children's toys. Large-scale transport was impractical because there were no pack animals that could pull carts or wagons.

C The canals of Tenochtitlan were the highways of the city, with boats being the primary form of transport.

D The chinampas, or 'floating islands', were used for growing crops.

Mythology and religion

Religion played a very important role in the lives of the Aztecs. They were a polytheistic culture, meaning they worshipped more than one god. In fact, they worshipped many hundreds of gods. They had wide-ranging religious beliefs, including some that were similar to those of Europeans at the time. They believed the Earth was flat and the Sun fought darkness every night so it could rise each morning. The importance of religion to the Aztecs was expressed in their art and architecture, with enormous and elaborate temples built to worship the hundreds of gods that ruled over different aspects of nature and human activity.

Source 3 Some of the most important Aztec gods



Central to Aztec religion was the belief in human sacrifice to please the gods. As many as twenty thousand people a year were sacrificed to the gods at a temple built specifically for that purpose. Most of those sacrificed were slaves or prisoners captured in wars with surrounding cities. The ritual involved priests stretching the subject over an altar and then lighting a fire on the victim's heart. The priest then tore out the heart and placed it in a sacred dish before the bodies were rolled down the steps of the temple to lie in a heap. Many Aztecs believed that dying this way would ensure a quick passage to heaven. Like many other civilisations, the Aztecs believed in the afterlife. They believed that the key to reaching the afterlife quickly was in the way they died rather than the way they lived. Someone who died quietly of old age would have to pass through the underworld before reaching the realm of the dead. But a warrior who died in battle or a mother who died in childbirth would go straight to heaven.

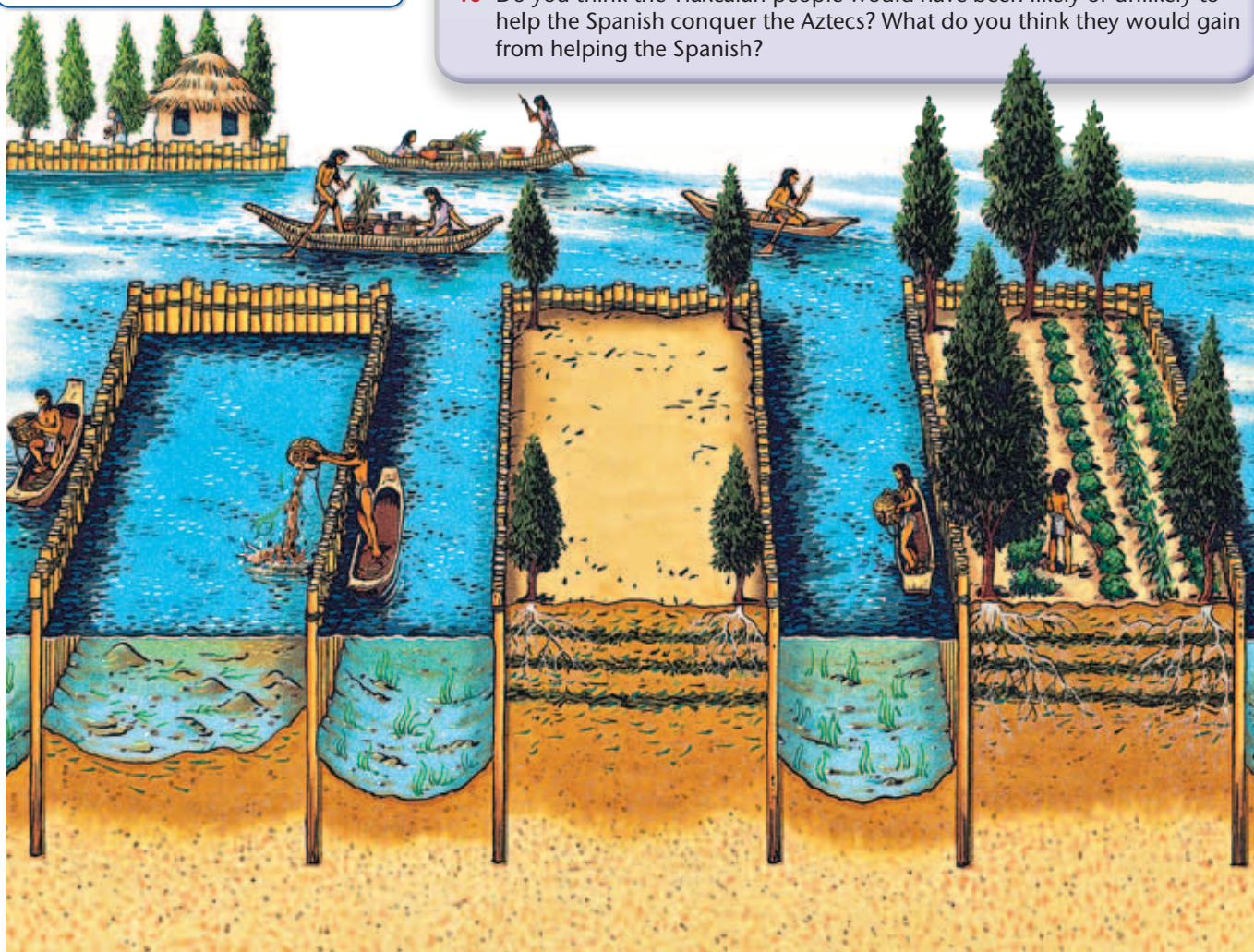
Source 4 A gold pendant representing Mictlantecutli



Agriculture

Built in the middle of a lake, Tenochtitlan did not have easy access to any farmland, so the Aztecs had to use a special method to grow crops. This method involved using chinampas or 'floating gardens', although this second name is misleading. Chinampas were small man-made islands used for crops. An area of shallow lake bed was fenced off and gradually filled with mud, sediment and decaying vegetation until it rose above the water level. This provided a very fertile bed in which to plant a range of crops. This technique is still occasionally used today in some areas of Mexico.

Source 5 An illustration showing the cross-section of chinampas. Each is at a different stage of development.



Activities



EXPLANATION AND COMMUNICATION

- 1 In your own words, describe the city of Tenochtitlan.
- 2 What are some key differences in the diet of the nobility compared with that of the commoners?
- 3 Why might the Aztecs' common use of the death penalty not have shocked the Spanish?
- 4 Outline the key aspects of Aztec religion.

ANALYSIS AND USE OF SOURCES

- 5 Why might the Aztec warriors sometimes dress as certain animals, as shown in **Source 2**? What effect do you think this would have on their enemies in battle?
- 6 Using **Source 3** as a reference, look back to **spread 12.1** and examine **Source 3** in that spread. Can you identify which god is represented in the image? Justify your decision.
- 7 How does **Source 4** support the argument that religion was important to the Aztecs?
- 8 How might the Spanish conquistadors' opinion of the Aztecs have been affected by images like that in **Source 4**?

CHRONOLOGY, TERMS AND CONCEPTS

- 9 Look at **Source 5**. Why is the term 'floating garden' inaccurate when describing a chinampa?

PERSPECTIVES AND INTERPRETATIONS

- 10 Do you think the Tlaxcalan people would have been likely or unlikely to help the Spanish conquer the Aztecs? What do you think they would gain from helping the Spanish?

12.3 Columbus and the New World

The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were a time of exploration and discovery for Europeans. The great sea-going powers of the time, Portugal and Spain, made important discoveries and opened up sea routes for trade and colonisation. But it was a young Italian who would end up having arguably the greatest impact of any European explorer.

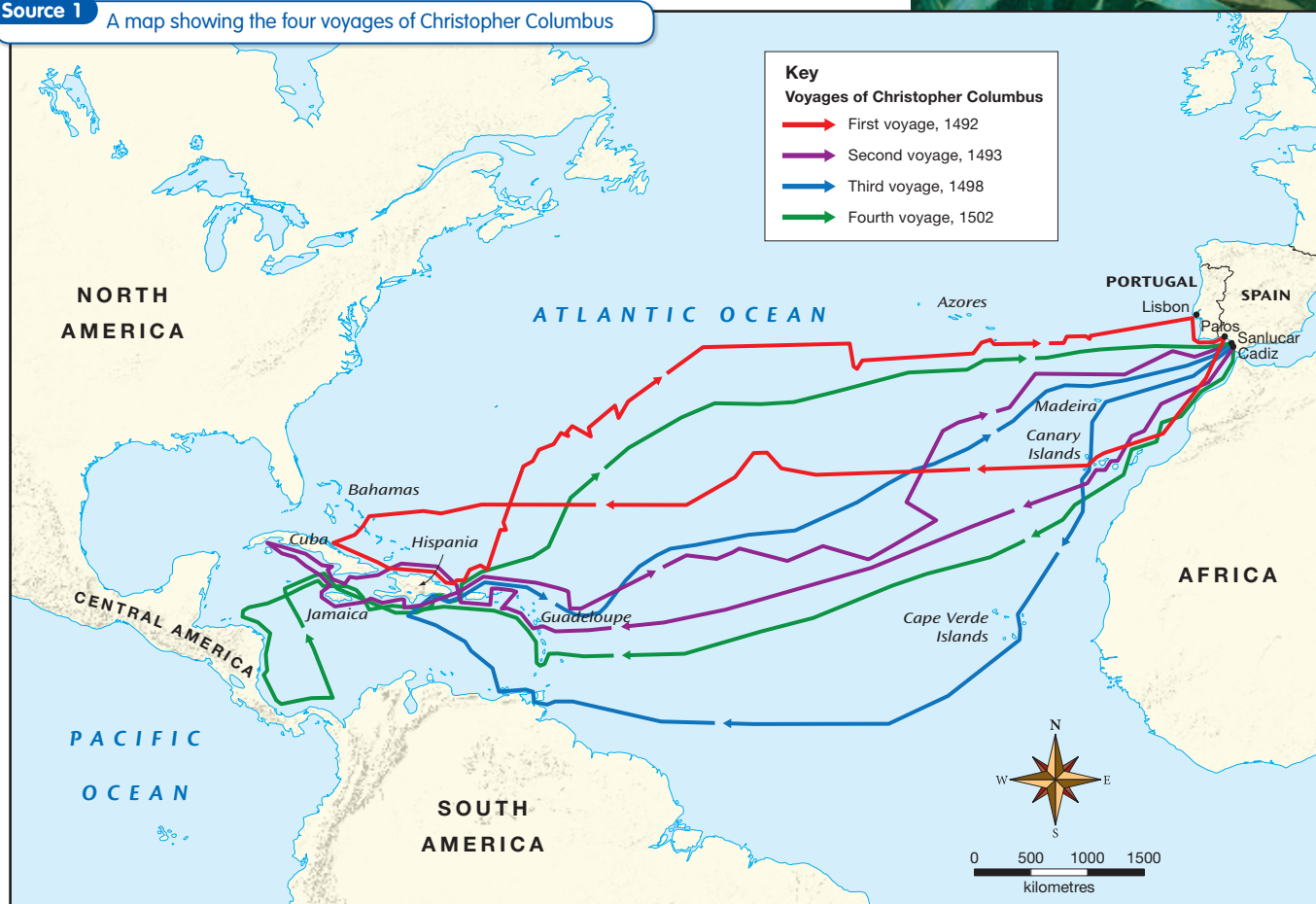
Columbus's first voyage

Just like many other explorers of his time, Christopher Columbus set off with the aim of finding a sea route to the Indies (regions around South Asia and South-East Asia) so that spices could be found and trading routes established. But unlike the Portuguese explorers Bartholomew Dias and Vasco da Gama, who sailed south around the tip of Africa, Columbus sailed west from Portugal, convinced that this would lead him to the 'Far East' or the Indies. Unable to find financial support from the king of Portugal, Columbus turned to the king and queen of Spain, Ferdinand and Isabella. He convinced them that the voyage would bring them wealth and also help to convert the people of the Indies to Christianity.

Source 2 Columbus taking possession of the New World for Spain. This artwork was created in 1862, more than 300 years after the event it shows.



Source 1 A map showing the four voyages of Christopher Columbus





He departed Spain on 3 August 1492, secure in his belief that his next landfall would be Asia. His fleet consisted of three ships: the *Pinta* and the *Niña*, both caravels (ships that were light and easy to manoeuvre), and his flagship the *Santa Maria*, a nao (a larger, heavier ship). Unfortunately Columbus had inaccurate knowledge of the distances involved and was completely unaware, as most Europeans were, that the continents of America blocked his path. After eight weeks his crew were becoming afraid that they would never see land again and begged Columbus to turn around. But when he sighted branches in the water he was sure that land was near. Finally, after more than two months at sea, he set foot on land on 12 October 1492, naming the island San Salvador (modern-day Bahamas). He assumed he was in the Indies and so referred to the inhabitants as Indians.

Columbus continued to explore the region, ‘discovering’ the islands of Hispaniola (modern-day Haiti and the Dominican Republic) and Cuba.

Although he suspected he wasn’t actually in China or India, Columbus thought that he couldn’t be far away. He arrived back in Spain in March 1493 and was made Admiral of the Ocean Sea as well as governor of the Indies. Queen Isabella requested that the Pope recognise Spain as the owner of the newly discovered land and this was granted that same year.

Later voyages

Over the following ten years, Columbus undertook three more voyages to the New World. He discovered Guadeloupe on his second voyage. He found the Venezuelan coast on his third voyage in 1498, which was the first time he actually set foot on the mainland of the Americas. While in Hispaniola, he served briefly as colonial administrator but failed so dismally that he was sent home in irons. The Spanish king and queen restored Columbus to favour and in 1502 he set sail for what would be his last great voyage, this time exploring the southern coast of the Gulf of Mexico.

Columbus died in 1506, two years after his return to Spain from his final expedition. He died still convinced that his voyages had been along the eastern coasts of Asia.

Who 'discovered' America?

For centuries, it was generally accepted that Columbus discovered America when he sighted land in 1492. However, historians today regard this as inaccurate. Although Columbus was the first person to spread knowledge of the New World through western Europe, the Viking explorer Leif Eriksson likely sailed from Scandinavia to North America almost five centuries before Columbus's voyage; however, the details of his expedition remain largely unknown. And, of course, Native Americans had inhabited North America for thousands of years before Columbus's arrival.

Source 3 An engraving from the sixteenth century, by Theodore de Bry, in which Native Americans are set upon by dogs while some Spaniards watch



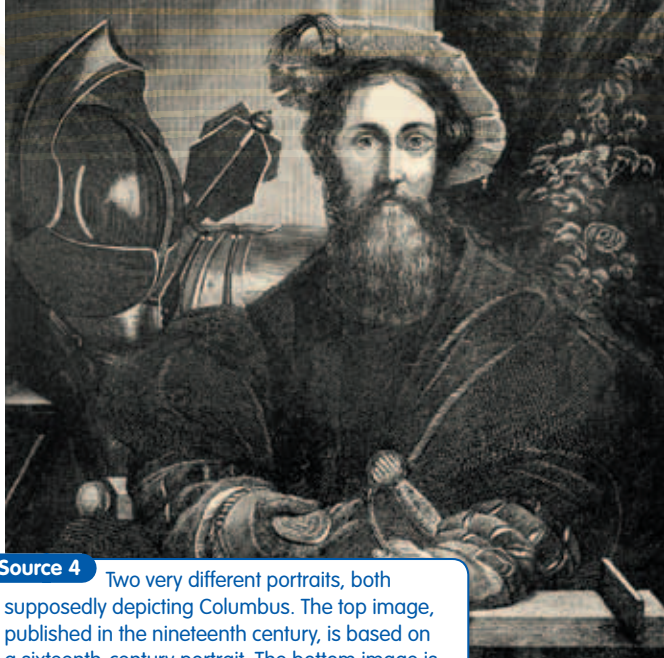
How did Columbus's arrival affect the Native Americans?

On 12 October each year, many Americans celebrate Columbus Day in memory of Columbus's first landing on the island of Hispaniola. Many regard this as a very important date, as it led to the eventual establishment of the United States. But for Native Americans it often has the opposite meaning. It is seen as the beginning of a time of genocide, slavery and the extinguishing of much of North America's indigenous culture.

Did you know?



Despite his obvious importance to world history, nobody really knows what Columbus looked like. There have been hundreds of different portraits, but even the experts can't find enough evidence to prove whether any are accurate representations.



Source 4 Two very different portraits, both supposedly depicting Columbus. The top image, published in the nineteenth century, is based on a sixteenth-century portrait. The bottom image is also a sixteenth-century painting.



Source 5 Excerpts from Columbus's journal, 1492

Thursday, 20 September. Saw a pelican coming from west-northwest and flying to the southwest; an evidence of land to the westward, as these birds sleep on shore, and go to sea in the morning in search of food.

Saturday, 22 September. My crew had grown much alarmed, dreading that they should never meet . . . with a fair wind to return to Spain.

Thursday, 11 October. The crew of the *Niña* saw a . . . stalk loaded with rose berries [in the ocean] . . . and they all grew cheerful.

[Friday, 12 October.] I saw some [natives] with scars of wounds upon their bodies . . . they answered . . . that there came people from the other islands in the neighbourhood who endeavoured to make prisoners of them, and they defended themselves. I thought then, and still believe, that these [other people] were from the continent.

Activities



Student workbook
12.2

EXPLANATION AND COMMUNICATION

- 1 Which two European countries were the major sea powers of Columbus's time?
- 2 What were the names of Columbus's three ships on his first voyage? How did his flagship differ from the other two vessels?
- 3 Which explorers had previously sailed around the southern tip of Africa?
- 4 Why did Columbus call the inhabitants of the lands he discovered 'Indians'?
- 5 How many days did it take Columbus's fleet to sail from Spain to the New World?
- 6 How did Columbus's route to the Indies differ from that of Dias and da Gama's?

CHRONOLOGY, TERMS AND CONCEPTS

- 7 Draw a timeline showing the voyages of Columbus. Label each voyage with a paragraph outlining the main discoveries.

ANALYSIS AND USE OF SOURCES

- 8 Look at **Source 1**. How many times did Columbus actually set foot on the mainland of the American continent?
- 9 Compare the depictions of the Europeans in **Sources 2 and 3**. In what ways are they different?
- 10 Why might the images of Columbus shown in **Source 4** be so different?
- 11 Is **Source 2** a primary or secondary source? Explain.
- 12 Could either image in **Source 4** be a primary source? What information would you need to know to make this decision?
- 13 Read **Source 5** and then answer the following questions:
 - a What suggested to Columbus that he was nearing land?
 - b Why was Columbus's crew frightened on 22 September, and why were they cheered up when they saw rose berries in the sea on 11 October?
 - c On 12 October, Columbus described some of the features of the indigenous people. Who did Columbus think they were referring to when describing 'people from the other islands in the neighbourhood'? Who might the native population actually have been referring to?

PERSPECTIVES AND INTERPRETATIONS

- 14 Divide into small groups. As a group, agree on a definition of 'discover'. Then, using that definition, argue the claim of the Americas being discovered by:
 - a Native Americans
 - b Leif Eriksson (see **chapter 3**)
 - c Christopher Columbus.
 How difficult was it to come to a definite conclusion as to who discovered the Americas? Did all three options above contribute in different ways?
- 15 In what ways is the celebration of Columbus Day similar to that of Australia Day on 26 January each year? How is it different?

12.4 Cortes, the conquistadors and the Aztecs

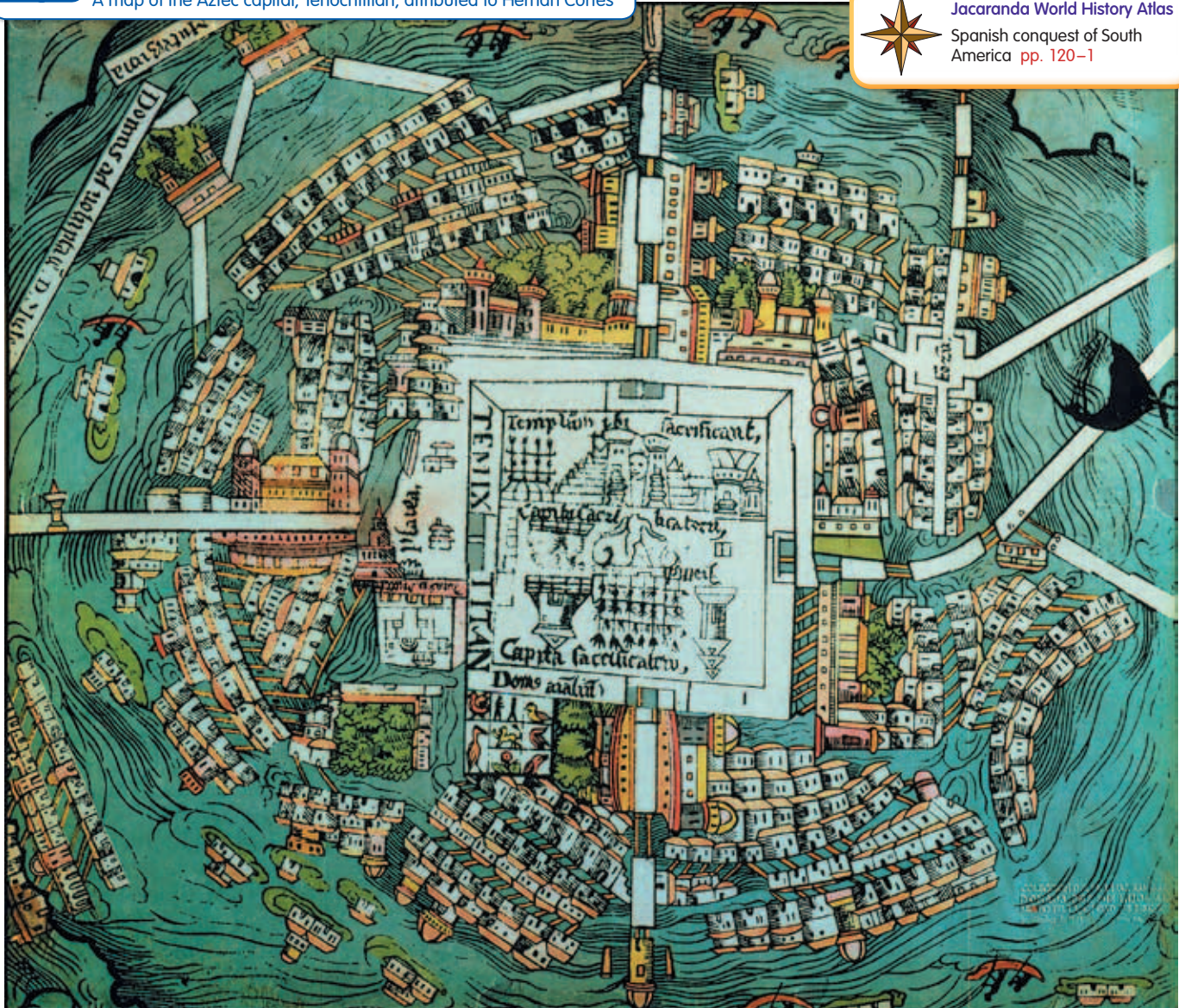
History is full of tales about conquest and colonisation. The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries saw a rapid expansion of European colonies throughout the world, particularly in the Americas. The Europeans clashed, often violently, with the indigenous inhabitants they encountered. In most cases, the two cultures could not **coexist** peacefully — one would dominate the other. The most well-known example is arguably that of Hernan Cortes and the Aztecs.

Ambition and conquest

Born in 1485, Hernan Cortes was the son of a Spanish nobleman. He attended university at Salamanca but had a reputation for not working very hard. When he was 19, he moved to the Caribbean island of Hispaniola, which was then a growing Spanish settlement. About six years later, he took part in the conquest of Cuba under the command of Diego de Velasquez.

Cortes came to believe that the Aztecs in Mexico had much to offer the Spanish conquistadors. At this

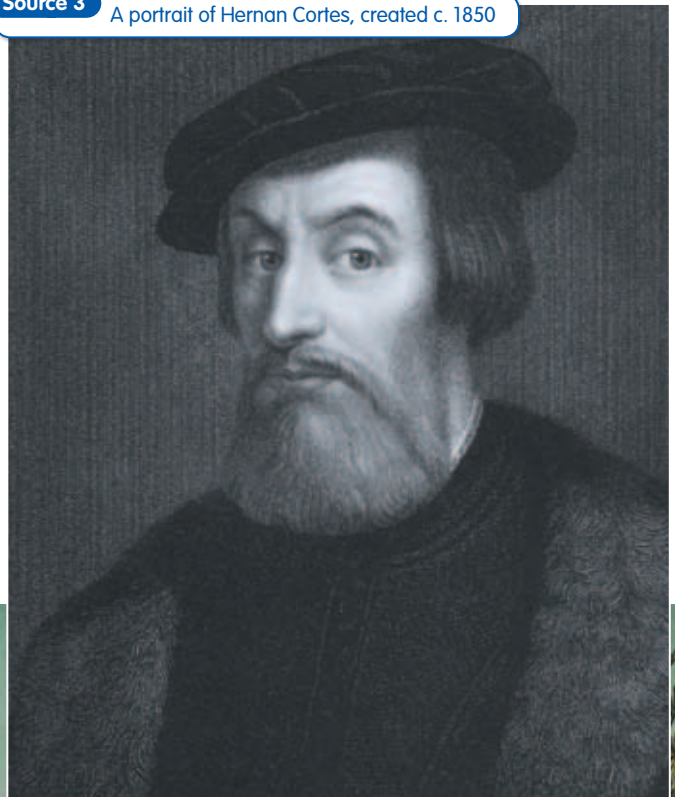
Source 1 A map of the Aztec capital, Tenochtitlan, attributed to Hernan Cortes



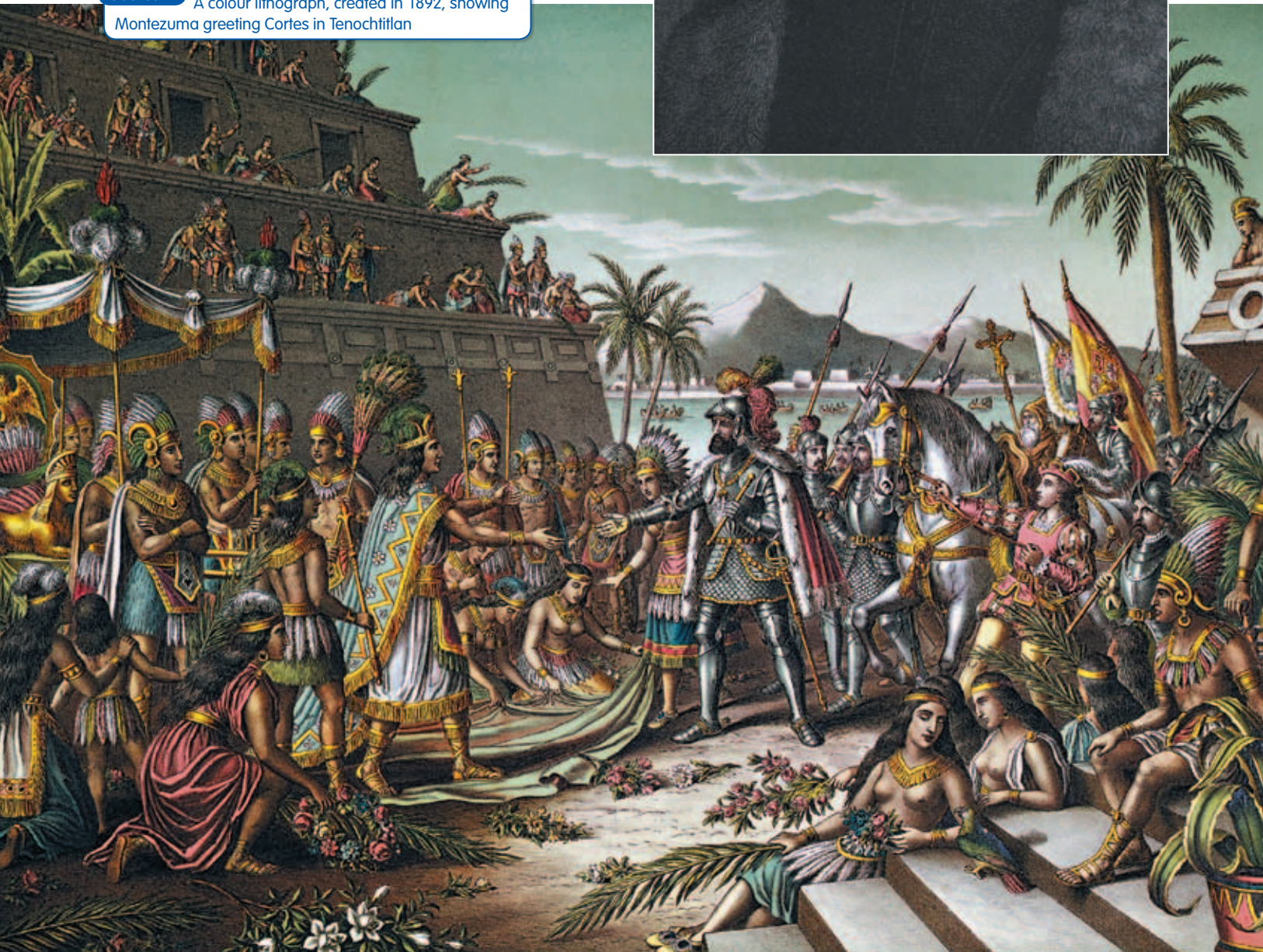
Jacaranda World History Atlas
Spanish conquest of South America pp. 120–1

time the Spanish were interested in two things: gold and converting the Aztecs to Christianity. As a career explorer, Hernan Cortes was ambitious and greedy. He was obsessed with claiming land for Spain and glory for himself. He was also looking for gold and had heard rumours that the Aztecs had lots of it. In February 1519 Cortes set sail for Mexico. Upon reaching the coast in March, Cortes burned his ships to ensure his men did not have any thoughts about desertion. He fought a battle against the indigenous people at a town called Tabasco before founding the town of Veracruz. He then began marching inland to the Aztec capital, Tenochtitlan. On the way, Cortes made contact with Tlaxcala, which was a kingdom that resisted the rule of the Aztecs. The Tlaxcalans initially resisted the Spanish and soon they were fighting.

Source 3 A portrait of Hernan Cortes, created c. 1850



Source 2 A colour lithograph, created in 1892, showing Montezuma greeting Cortes in Tenochtitlan



The Spanish found themselves in trouble because the ground was broken and uneven, so they could not effectively use their horses and cannons. But as they fought their way to level ground the balance shifted in their favour. After the early violent encounters, the Tlaxcalans permitted the Spanish to enter their territory — no doubt they were terrified by the Spanish firearms and horses, neither of which they had ever seen before. For their part, the Spanish granted them a truce in return for their support against the Aztecs.

As he moved further inland, Cortes avoided the well-travelled route to Tenochtitlan to minimise the possibility of ambush. He was also trying to recruit more allies against the Aztecs. For three months the conquistadors made their way through a variety of terrain, from arid mountains to fertile valleys. They were forced to adapt to the daytime heat as their armour was not practical for a climate that was much hotter than what the Spanish were used to. On the journey they saw strange plants and animals that were completely different to what they knew in Europe.

Upon arrival at Tenochtitlan in November 1519, the Spaniards discovered a thriving, highly organised city. Built on the islands in the middle of Lake Texcoco, the city would have appeared to the approaching Spaniards as almost floating on an inland sea. The city had a population of about 250 000 people, and it controlled much of the surrounding countryside. It was from these lands that the city drew its wealth in the form of gold, jewels and crops.

Cortes was welcomed by Montezuma II, emperor of the Aztecs. One theory suggests that Montezuma thought Cortes was the god Quetzalcoatl, who was said to have fair skin and a beard, just like Cortes. After establishing a headquarters in Tenochtitlan, Cortes attempted to strengthen his position by taking Montezuma hostage. This was a common tactic in Europe but was seen as unacceptable to the Aztecs, who attacked and drove the Spanish from the city. During this uprising Montezuma himself was killed,

Did you know?



Iron was a key factor behind the successful Spanish conquest of the Aztecs. The indigenous people of the New World did not use iron; they still used old technologies for weapons. Iron was so important because it formed the principal component in swords, daggers, lances and knives, and was a crucial element in the workings of crossbows. It was central to cannons and other firearms, and it also contributed to the effectiveness of armour, helmets and shields. Iron gave the Spanish an important advantage that helped ensure the defeat of the Aztecs.

Source 4 An Aztec illustration of the Spanish conquest



Source 5 *Lament on the Fall of Tenochtitlan*, a poem by an anonymous Aztec poet

How can we save our homes, my people?
The Aztecs are deserting the city
The city is in flames and all
is darkness and destruction

Weep my people
Know that with these disasters
We have lost the Mexican nation
The water has turned bitter
Our food is bitter
These are the acts of the Giver of Life

possibly by his own people who thought him weak in the face of the Spanish. Cortes returned in 1521 and laid siege to the city before attacking. The battle lasted for two months and the Spanish were forced to fight fiercely for every street. Tenochtitlan was reduced to rubble and many thousands of Aztecs were killed. On 13 August 1521 Cortes was able to claim the city for Spain.

End of a civilisation

It took about two years for the Spaniards to destroy the indigenous civilisation of the Aztecs. Many Aztecs died directly at the hands of the conquistadors. But thousands of others died not from violence but from famine and diseases that were introduced by the Europeans. Those who survived lost their dignity. Their wealth was stolen and their temples were destroyed. Because the Spaniards believed it was their duty to convert the Aztecs to Christianity, the Aztecs also lost much of their culture.

The success of Cortes over the Aztecs led to an unprecedented period of European expansion in the Americas. The following two centuries saw the Spanish consolidate their rule over many Native American societies, including the Inca and Maya civilisations.

The Inca civilisation occupied roughly the area of present-day Peru and Chile, which is one of the most mountainous regions in the world. The Spanish conquistador Francisco Pizarro first made contact with the Inca in 1526, but it took longer to conquer them than the Aztec Empire, largely because of the harsh geographical features. The tropical jungle and mountainous terrain hampered the progress of the conquistadors, who found their armour torturous in such a hot and humid climate. Ultimately though, the combination of superior Spanish weaponry, and the longer term effect of introduced diseases, meant that the Inca could not resist indefinitely. The city of Lima was founded by Pizarro in 1535 and the Viceroyalty of Peru, which was the name given to the region of South America ruled by Spain, was created in 1542.

The Maya proved more of a challenge for the Spanish, despite the fact that they were located in a less harsh geographical region. Occupying much of the Yucatan Peninsula in what is now southern Mexico, the Maya civilisation consisted of a number of independent city-states. There was no single capital city like the Aztec capital Tenochtitlan so the individual states had to be overpowered one by one, making the conquest a long and arduous one for the Spanish. It took more than 150 years before the last Maya city was conquered.

Activities



Student workbook
12.3

EXPLANATION AND COMMUNICATION

- 1 What were the two main reasons for Spanish settlements in the New World?
- 2 How old was Cortes when he claimed Tenochtitlan for Spain?
- 3 Identify three effects the arrival of the Spanish had on the Aztec people.
- 4 Why did Cortes follow an indirect route from the coast to Tenochtitlan?
- 5 How was the climate and landscape in Mexico different to that which the conquistadors were accustomed to in Europe?
- 6 In what ways did geographical features influence the Spanish conquest of the Aztec, Inca and Maya civilisations?

ANALYSIS AND USE OF SOURCES

- 7 Study **Source 1**. What might have been the advantages and disadvantages of the layout of Tenochtitlan if the city was under attack?
- 8 What impression do you get about the initial meeting between Cortes and Montezuma shown in **Source 2**?
- 9 What aspect of Aztec culture did the Spaniards use to their own advantage when preparing for the battle of Tenochtitlan? Explain.
- 10 Why was iron so important in the conquest of the Aztecs?
- 11 Study **Source 4**. You will see one of the conquistadors, possibly Cortes himself, embracing two Aztec warriors. Who could these people be? Why are they not fighting against Cortes?
- 12 Read **Source 5** and then look up the word 'lament' in a dictionary. Do you think it is an appropriate term to use for this poem?

PERSPECTIVES AND INTERPRETATIONS

- 13 Why do you think that most people who live in Mexico and surrounding areas today speak Spanish?
- 14 How would you describe the battle for Tenochtitlan as portrayed in **Source 5**? Do you think you would show the battle differently if it had been portrayed in the art style used in **Source 2**?
- 15 Discuss these issues as a class:
 - a Is it right for one country or group of people to take control of another? Are there any situations in which such action might be justified?
 - b How do you think indigenous people would feel about people from another country or culture invading their lands?
 - c Based on your general knowledge, can you see any similarities between what happened to the Aztecs and what happened to Indigenous Australians?
 - d Do you think it is possible for two cultures — that of an invading people and that of a conquered people — to exist together peacefully? If so, how could this be achieved?

coexist live together at the same time in the same place

12.5 New Spain

After the defeat of the Aztec Empire, Hernan Cortes founded the colony of New Spain, with Mexico City (formerly Tenochtitlan) as its capital. Over time, the colony would grow to encompass most of the region that is now the United States, Mexico and the islands in the Caribbean Sea. Later, it would extend across the Pacific Ocean as far as the Philippines. The Spanish domination of these regions was to last over four hundred years.

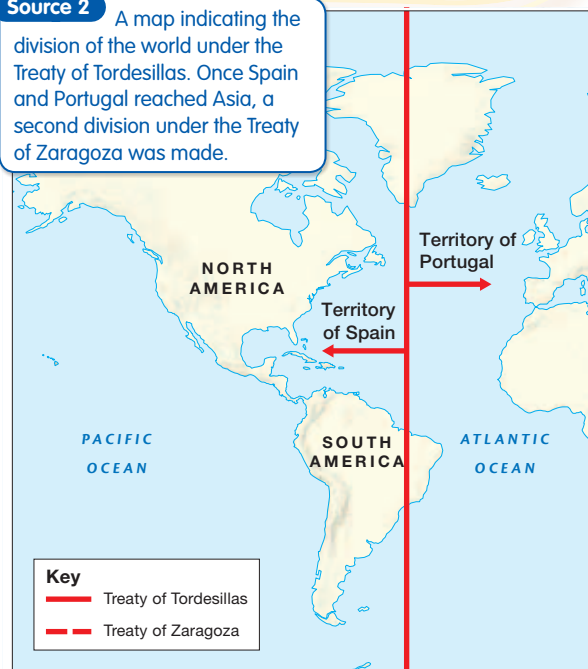
A new empire

The establishment of New Spain meant the creation of a new part of the Spanish Empire. The lands that were brought under Spanish control after the conquest were very wealthy and complex, providing an opportunity for Spain to establish itself as a world power.

The viceroy (representative of the king or queen) was Antonio de Menoza, and he was eager to find out about the territory that Spain governed. In the years following

the Spanish conquest, a series of expeditions were sent to explore and subdue New Spain. Throughout the sixteenth century many cities were established in North and Central America. As these cities were established, missionaries were also set up so that Christianity could be introduced to the native people. Many of the cities were named after particular saints and so begin with the Spanish words for saint — ‘san’ or ‘santa’. San Francisco is one of many cities of this kind.

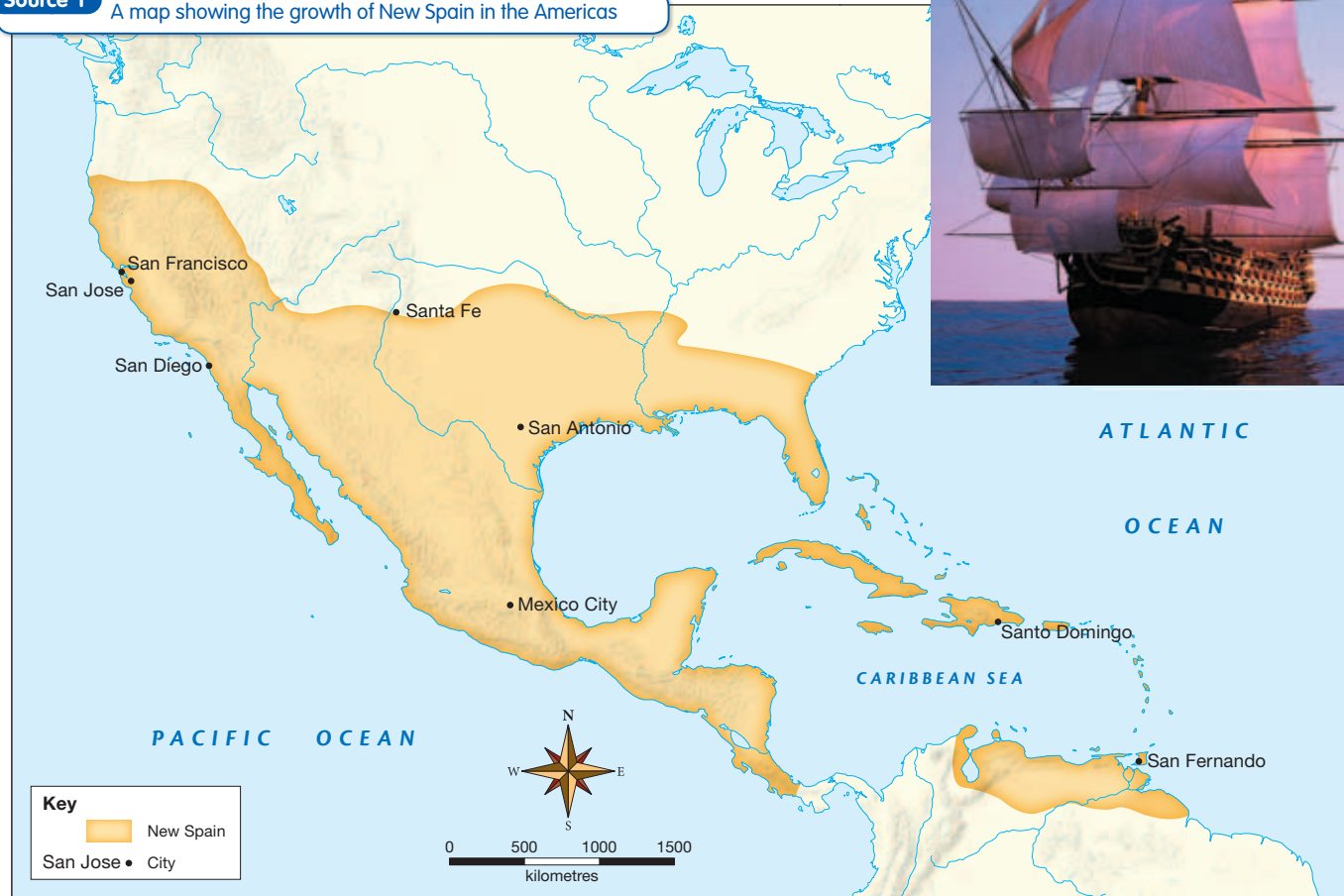
Source 2 A map indicating the division of the world under the Treaty of Tordesillas. Once Spain and Portugal reached Asia, a second division under the Treaty of Zaragoza was made.



Source 3 A Spanish galleon at sea



Source 1 A map showing the growth of New Spain in the Americas





At the same time as the settlement of New Spain, an attempt was made to establish trade routes with the East Indies (modern-day South-East Asia). The Pacific Ocean had the potential to become a trading 'superhighway' for the Spanish by eliminating the need for the long sea voyage from Europe around the southern tip of Africa. A Spanish settlement was established in the Philippines in 1565 and soon a busy trade route developed. Silk, spices, silver and slaves were all transported from Asia to the Americas and then on to Europe.

The Treaty of Tordesillas

By 1494 Spain and Portugal had become rivals, with both trying to establish world empires. In that year, they reached an agreement so that they could each explore and trade in a different part of the world without risking armed conflict with each other. This was called the Treaty of Tordesillas. Essentially, they divided the world in half, with Portugal having access to one side and Spain the other. **Source 2** shows the dividing line as agreed by the two countries.

Expansion and conflict

The signing of the Treaty of Tordesillas may have given peace of mind to the Spanish and Portuguese, but understandably it did not sit well with other European nations. In the late sixteenth century they began to establish their own colonies on the American continents. As the various colonies expanded, conflict was inevitable. The countries most active in the expansion and fight for the New World were Spain, Great Britain and France. The Dutch were also influential, but mainly in the north-east of North America. Their most famous act was founding the city of New Amsterdam, which would later become New York. All of these countries saw in the Americas the opportunity for wealth; because they were often at war with each other in Europe, no country wanted any of the others to succeed.

The end of New Spain

Through three centuries of conflict, Spain had established itself as the governing power across much of the North American continent. But by the beginnings of the nineteenth century the first calls for independence began. The colonies that were under Spanish control felt that they were able to rule themselves. They wanted to play a role in the decisions that would affect them. In 1810, Mexico declared independence from Spain, leading to a ten-year war that would end with that independence finally being recognised. This in turn encouraged many other parts of New Spain to seek independence as well. Britain offered support against Spain because they wanted to end the Spanish **monopoly** on trade in the region. By the 1820s, almost all of the Spanish colonies in the Americas had won their independence. New Spain was disappearing.

In 1898, the Spanish were defeated by the United States in a war that would decide who would control the remaining territories. As the victorious power, the United States took control of Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines, ending more than four centuries of Spanish rule in the Americas.

Activities



Student workbook
12.4

EXPLANATION AND COMMUNICATION

- 1 Why is it that most people who live in Mexico and the western part of South America speak Spanish but people in Brazil speak Portuguese?
- 2 Why did Spain want to create an empire in the New World?
- 3 What does the Treaty of Tordesillas suggest about the power of Spain and Portugal in the fifteenth century?

ANALYSIS AND USE OF SOURCES

- 4 Using **Source 1** and an atlas, find some other cities on the west coast of North America that are named after saints. Use the internet or your library to find out about these particular saints and why these cities were given these names by the Spanish. What does the location of these cities tell you about the size of New Spain?
- 5 Using **Source 2** and an atlas, identify which modern-day countries would have been intersected by the line of the Treaty of Tordesillas.
- 6 Generally speaking, in which direction did New Spain expand?

PERSPECTIVES AND INTERPRETATIONS

- 7 Why would other European countries take issue with the Treaty of Tordesillas?
- 8 Using your answer to activity 7, discuss what problems the Treaty of Tordesillas might have caused.

monopoly an organisation or group that has complete control of something

12.6 Slavery in the New World

Although outlawed by the United Nations in 1948, slavery continues to this day in many parts of the world. There are approximately 20 million people around the world for whom slavery is a terrible reality. Forced to work in dangerous conditions or even to fight in armies against their will, slavery has been a feature of many civilisations for thousands of years. The Spanish colony of New Spain was one of many at the time that relied heavily on slave labour.

What is slavery?

Put simply, slavery is forced labour. A slave is a person legally owned by someone else. Because the slave is the 'property' of their owner, they have no legal rights of their own.

Aztec slavery before the Spanish

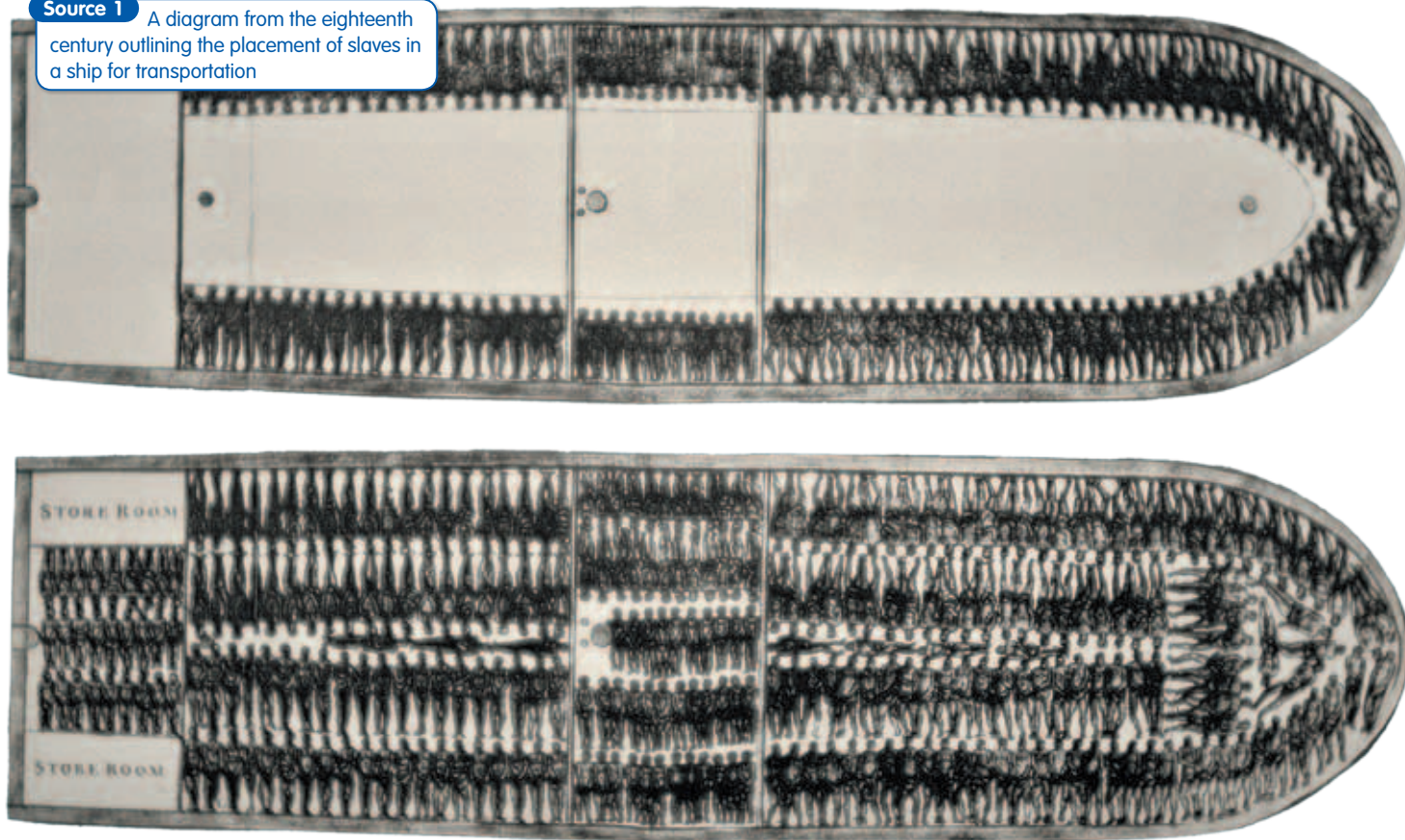
The Spanish did not bring slavery to the New World; they merely introduced a new form of it. Slavery had been an important part of Aztec culture but it was very different to the form of slavery that the Europeans

practised. Aztec slaves could have possessions and often had the opportunity to buy their liberty. If an Aztec slave's master died, the slave would sometimes be freed rather than sold to someone else. People could also sell themselves into slavery as a way of paying debts, and even a murderer could be offered as a slave to the family of the person killed, if requested. One key difference between Aztec and European slavery was its **hereditary** nature. The child of an Aztec slave was not automatically a slave, unlike the European system where a person could be born into slavery.

Slavery in New Spain

Technically, slavery was not permitted in New Spain. In 1493, Pope Alexander VI, at the same time as granting Spain the right to colonise the New World, declared the native people were to be converted to Christianity but not enslaved. However, any that resisted the Catholic faith could be subjected to forced labour. For the conquistadors, this was an easy excuse to declare that any slaves were merely natives who had refused to accept Christianity and had reverted to their own religion.

Source 1 A diagram from the eighteenth century outlining the placement of slaves in a ship for transportation



During the conquest of the Aztec Empire, many thousands of native people died not from violence but from diseases that were introduced by the Europeans. The native population did not have immunity to these introduced diseases and died by the hundreds of thousands in much the same way that Europe was ravaged by the Black Death a century earlier. After the establishment of New Spain, disease continued to claim a massive number of native lives as it followed the Europeans across the American continent. To combat the problem of losing workers, the Spanish began to import slaves from Africa. These areas had already been settled by Spain and so the native people had developed immunity from the common, but otherwise deadly, diseases. Over the course of four centuries, the colony of New Spain received approximately four million slaves from Africa.

A slave's journey

The African slave trade has been referred to as the 'triangular trade' because of the way the ships traversed the Atlantic Ocean. Trading vessels filled

with non-human cargo would sail from Europe to the west coast of Africa. Once there, they would sell and trade the goods and load their ships with slaves. Laden with their valuable human cargo, they would sail west across the Atlantic Ocean and deliver the slaves to the Americas. From there they would load the ships with more goods for the journey back to Europe.

A slave was useful to their master only if they were alive, and captains of slave ships made more money if more slaves survived the horrendous five-week journey across the Atlantic. Some captains packed their ships 'loosely' so that diseases could not spread as easily and slaves would arrive at their destination relatively healthy. Unfortunately, it was more common for captains to pack their ships 'tightly' on the assumption that the more slaves who began the journey, the more that would survive until the end, even if some died at sea. Conditions on board these ships were horrific. Slaves' ankles and wrists were chained and they had no room to move. Poor quality food led to scurvy and lack of hygiene meant that diseases such as dysentery spread quickly. Suicide attempts were a tragic but common occurrence.

Source 2

An illustration from a sixteenth-century codex showing native Aztecs suffering from smallpox



Did you know?



One way for an Aztec slave to win their freedom was to escape from the watch of their master while at the tianquiztli (marketplace) and run to the palace. If they reached the palace without being caught, they became free. Only the master or one of his relatives was allowed to chase the slave — if anyone else interfered, they risked being sold into slavery themselves. Look back at **Source 1** in spread 12.2 and see whether you can find the slave escaping from his master.

Source 3 An illustration of sixteenth-century native slaves building Mexico City on the ruins of Tenochtitlan

Source 4 A map showing the 'triangular trade'



The end of slavery

The Spanish colonisation of the Americas and the slavery that followed led to discussion in Europe about the right to enslave Native Americans and Africans. As the terrible living conditions of slaves became more widely known, the anti-slavery movement gained momentum. Reverend Robert Walsh, an anti-slavery campaigner,

wrote some important accounts of the conditions on board slave ships in his *Notices of Brazil in 1828 and 1829* (see [Source 5](#)). He travelled around Brazil and at sea as part of the effort to abolish the slave trade completely. One of his proposals was to arrest any slavers and have them tried for piracy, even if they were not transporting slaves at the time. In the first half of the

nineteenth century, a range of laws were passed throughout Europe that abolished the slave trade. However, in the United States, slaves were not freed until after the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863.

Source 5

Reverend Robert Walsh served aboard a ship that intercepted the illegal slave trade. This description of the conditions on board a 'slaver' appears in his *Notices of Brazil in 1828 and 1829*.

The slaves were all inclosed ... between decks. The space was so low that they sat between each other's legs ... They were all branded like sheep with the owner's marks ... 'burnt with the red-hot iron' ...

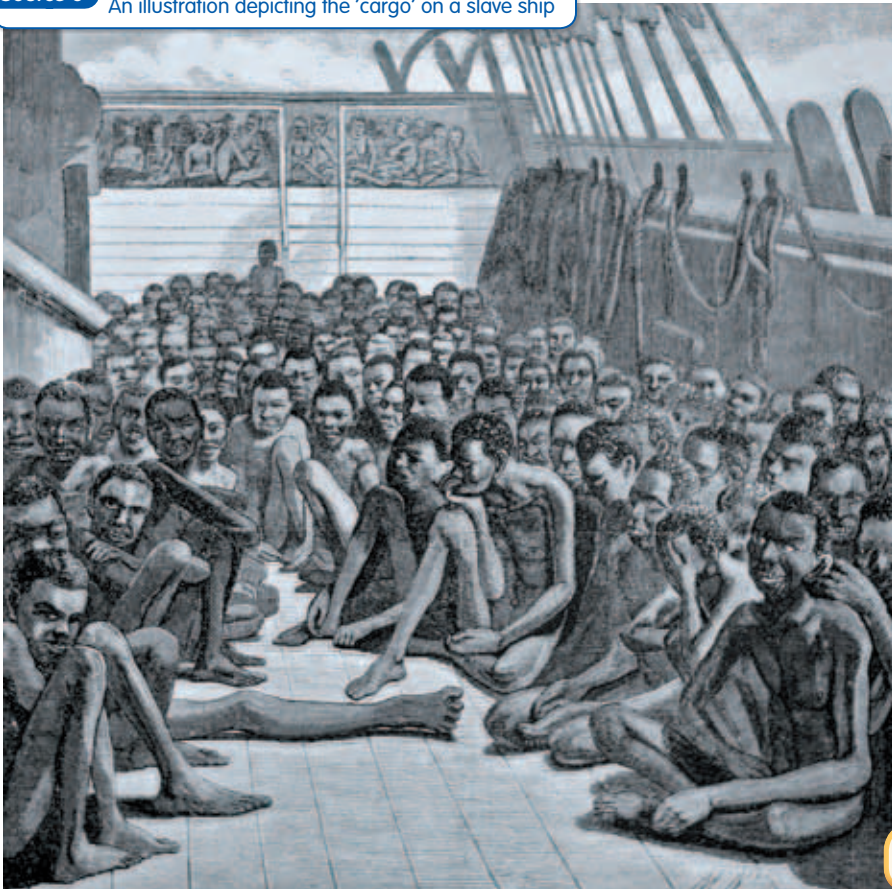
... The heat of these horrid places was so great and the odour so offensive that it was quite impossible to enter ...

... Some water was brought ... They shrieked and struggled and fought with one another for a drop of this precious liquid ...

... While expressing my horror at what I saw I was informed by my friends ... who had visited so many ships, that this was one of the best they had seen.

Source 6

An illustration depicting the 'cargo' on a slave ship



Activities



Student workbook
12.5

EXPLANATION AND COMMUNICATION

- 1 Approximately how many people live in slavery around the world today?
- 2 How did Aztec slavery differ from the kind of slavery introduced by Europeans?
- 3 Why did the Spanish begin to import slaves from Africa?
- 4 In your own words, describe the conditions on a slave ship.

ANALYSIS AND USE OF SOURCES

- 5 What does [Source 1](#) tell you about the attitude of the slave traders towards their 'cargo'?
- 6 Using the scale, find out approximately how many kilometres a ship would travel if it followed the 'triangular trade' route shown in [Source 4](#).
- 7 Read [Source 5](#) and answer the following questions.
 - a Is this a primary or secondary source? Why?
 - b Do you think this is a reliable source? Why or why not?
 - c Why were slaves 'branded like sheep'?
- 8 Look at [Source 6](#). How would you describe the character of those who survived the voyage across the Atlantic Ocean?

HISTORICAL QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH

- 9 Using the internet and your library, create a poster that outlines the issue of slavery today.
- 10 Create a short biography of one of the key abolitionists, such as William Wilberforce. Investigate their beliefs as to why slavery should be abolished and the impact they had on the issue.

hereditary passed from parent to a child

12.7 Impact of colonisation on victims and victors

Any colonisation or occupation by one people over another has a massive impact, not just on the conquered people but also the conquerors as well. Sometimes positive impacts can be mutual, but more often one side benefits at the expense of the other.

Impact on the Aztecs

The most obvious and significant impact of the Spanish conquest on the Aztec people was the severe decline in population over the years of the colonisation. As discussed previously, diseases introduced by the Europeans and the effects of slavery and malnutrition had serious consequences for the native population. It is estimated that the native population of Mexico had declined by 90 per cent by the early 1600s. Examine **Source 1**, which discusses additional reasons for the declining population in Mexico.

Source 1 From *The Population of the California Indians, 1769–1970*, written by Sherburne Cook

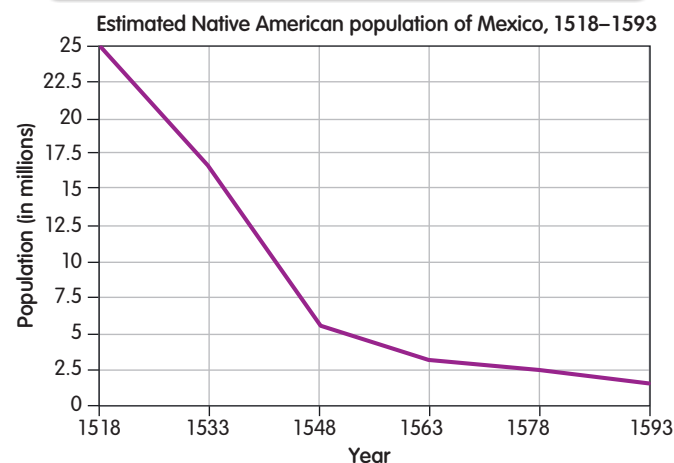
The first [factor] was the food supply . . . the second factor was disease . . . A third factor, which strongly intensified the effect of the other two, was the social and physical disruption visited upon the Indian. He was driven from his home by the thousands, starved, beaten, raped, and murdered . . . The utter devastation caused by the white man was literally incredible, and not until the population figures are examined does the extent of the havoc become evident.

The Spanish conquest led to a loss of culture. Traditional art and music, as well as native languages, were under threat of being lost forever. For example, it has been shown that the codex, the traditional written record of the Aztecs, changed because of Spanish influence. Codices were originally pictorial; however, after colonisation, Spanish and Latin text was introduced.

As New Spain grew, native labourers travelled with the Spanish so that they could be put to work. By doing this, the Aztec, Mayan and Incan people who had lived apart for centuries were suddenly mixing together. This blurred the distinction between the three previously unique cultures. This loss of culture was exacerbated by the

efforts of the Spanish to convert the native population to Christianity. In some cases, rather than converting outright, the native population merely incorporated aspects of Christianity to their pre-existing belief systems. Some of these variations survive to this day.

Source 2 A graph showing the decline of the Aztec population in the sixteenth century



Source 3 A ceramic vase featuring the god Tlaloc from before the Spanish conquest. This artefact is held in the Museum of the Templo Mayor, which used to be a major Aztec temple, in Mexico City.





Source 4 A loss of Aztec culture means that museums are essential for the preservation of many Aztec artefacts. These artefacts are part of the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City.



Impact on the Spanish

The colonisation of New Spain meant that the Spanish Empire became one of the world's most powerful empires. The natural resources that the region contained — gold, silver, furs, sugar and cotton — helped Spain become wealthy. As the native population decreased, they were effectively replaced with huge numbers of Europeans who migrated to the region to make money.

New foods, previously unknown to Europeans, were found on the American continents; these included potatoes, tomatoes, avocados and chocolate.

A truly 'New World'

The term 'New World' was originally applied to the Americas by Europeans. The meeting of different cultures and the exploration of new lands by Europeans led to an increase of geographic knowledge. Communication was established between civilisations that previously had no idea of each other's existence, and as the centuries progressed, ideas and knowledge were shared, paving the way for the modern world in which we live today.

Activities



Student workbook
12.6

EXPLANATION AND COMMUNICATION

- 1 What reasons does historian Sherburne Cook offer for the decline in the Native American population?
- 2 How did Aztec codices change after the Spanish conquest?
- 3 How did the expansion of New Spain affect the Aztec, Maya and Inca cultures? What long-term effects did the meeting of these different cultures have?

ANALYSIS AND USE OF SOURCES

- 4 Sherburne Cook was not a historian by training but he did pioneer population studies of the native peoples of America. He wrote widely on the subject of pre-conquest population levels. From this information, do you think **Source 1** is a reliable source? Why or why not?
- 5 Study **Source 2**.
 - a What was the estimated Native American population in Mexico in 1518?
 - b By what year had the population dropped to approximately 3 million?
 - c According to the graph, in what 15-year time period did the population drop most dramatically? Why might this rapid decline have slowed later?

PERSPECTIVES AND INTERPRETATIONS

- 6 What can **Sources 3 and 4** tell you about the attitude towards the Aztec culture in modern-day Mexico?

CHRONOLOGY, TERMS AND CONCEPTS

- 7 In what way is the term 'New World' inaccurate? Whose perspective does this phrase refer to?

12.8 SkillBuilder

Recognising different perspectives

What is perspective in history?

Perspective means a particular point of view. When studying a historical event, it is important to recognise and consider different perspectives. Imagine there has been a disagreement between students at your school and a teacher must find out what happened. It is likely that all the people involved will have a different opinion about what actually happened. This means they have different perspectives on the event.

Why is it important to recognise different perspectives?

It is almost impossible for anybody to write about history without a particular perspective. The beliefs, experiences and background of a person will affect the way they interpret and record an event. This is true of both primary and secondary sources. But by knowing something about the author of a historical source, we are able to decide how their particular perspective might have affected the way they interpreted the event. We can then take this into account and will be able to gain a more balanced and accurate view of the past.

How to recognise different perspectives

Recognising different perspectives is a useful but difficult skill to master. Here are a few questions that you should ask about the authors of historical sources to help you recognise particular perspectives. You may not be able to answer all questions for all authors.

- *Where is the author from?*
- *Who is the author writing for?* For example, is the source a diary entry written for only themselves or a newspaper publication with a political agenda?
- *What do you know of the background of the author?* Consider whether there may be notable aspects of their character — for example, were they ambitious, selfish or patriotic? Think about whether the author was directly involved with what they were portraying.
- *Would the author have anything to gain from exaggerating the truth?* This is often hard to answer with certainty, but is made easier when there is much information in the previous questions.

Note: The term ‘author’ can refer to anybody who has produced a historical source. Questions of perspective can be applied not only to text but to paintings, statues and other types of sources as well.

An example of how to recognise different perspectives

Source 1, an extract from a letter written by Cortes to King Charles V of Spain, is used here as an example of how the questions outlined previously could be answered.

Source 1 One of Cortes’ letters to King Charles V of Spain, written in 1520. In this letter, he reveals his attitude to Aztec religious beliefs.

Three halls are in this grand temple, and in these are the images of idols . . . the principal ones, in which the people have greatest faith and confidence, I have cast down the steps of the temple, purifying the chapels in which they had stood. In the place of these I put images of Our Lady and the Saints.

- *Where is the author from?* Hernan Cortes was from Spain.
- *Who is the author writing for?* Hernan Cortes wrote the letter for the king of Spain.
- *What do you know of the background of the author?* Hernan Cortes was ambitious and was a conquistador. He was a key figure in the Spanish conquest of the Aztecs.
- *Would the author have anything to gain from exaggerating the truth?* Because he was ambitious, it is reasonable to suggest that Cortes might have wanted to impress his king and so he may have tried to portray the actions of himself and the other Spaniards in a positive way.

By answering these questions, we are now able to study the source more effectively. It is a very important source for historians studying the Spanish conquest, and we can make better judgements about the validity of the information in it when we can recognise the perspective, or point of view, of the author.

Source 2 An excerpt from the writings of Bartolome de las Casas, a Spanish priest who was appalled by how the indigenous populations were treated

The Spaniards first assaulted the innocent after their first landing. In this Isle, the bloody slaughter and destruction first began: for they violently forced away women and children to make them slaves, and ill-treated them.

Source 3 An illustration of the battle for Tenochtitlan created in the sixteenth century after the Spanish conquest

Developing my skills

Examine **Source 2**, part of the writings of Bartolome de las Casas, and answer the questions about author perspective for yourself. You may like to refer to **spread 12.1** to find some information about the author.

- Where is the author from?
- Who is the author writing for?
- What do you know of the background of the author?
- Would the author have anything to gain from exaggerating the truth?

Now try answering the questions about author perspective in relation to an Aztec source. **Source 3** is an illustration of the battle for Tenochtitlan. Although we do not know who the actual author of the source was, we do know they were Aztec.



12.9 Legacies of colonisation

Despite the Aztec Empire falling nearly five hundred years ago and Spanish colonisation ending more than one hundred years ago, remnants of both periods still exist. Aztec culture is experiencing a resurgence in Mexico and the influence of Spain has shaped modern America.

Language and religion

Around the world, Spanish is now spoken by an estimated 420 million people. Only about ten per cent of these people actually live in Spain, but the spread of the language around the globe during the expansion of the Spanish Empire has made it the one of the most widely spoken languages in the world. It is the official language of Mexico and most countries in South America, and is spoken widely throughout the United States. In fact, the vast majority of the world's Spanish speakers live in North and South America. One major exception to this is Brazil. Because of the Treaty of Tordesillas of 1494, Portugal was able to colonise the eastern part of South America. This is why Portuguese is the official language of Brazil.

The introduction of the Roman Catholic faith to the Americas was spearheaded by the Spanish. Denounced as heathens, the Aztec, Mayan and Incan people were often

forced to convert to Christianity, or face slavery or death. Today, the Roman Catholic Church is as present and powerful in the Americas as it is anywhere in the world.

Farming

Despite having few domesticated animals to pull ploughs or carry heavy loads, the Aztecs managed to grow a variety of crops, due mainly to the use of the chinampa. In Mexico today, the traditional chinampa is used only occasionally but is considered an environmentally friendly farming method.

Flying the flag

Perhaps the most visible and significant acknowledgement of the part played by Aztec culture in the history of Mexico is the very flag of Mexico itself. When Mexico declared independence from Spain in 1810, the Aztec Empire became the inspiration for the new national flag. The central emblem is based on the founding myth of Tenochtitlan. The migrating Aztec people were directed by the sun god to build a city on the site where they saw an eagle eating a serpent while perched on a cactus growing from a stone. Legend says that Tenochtitlan was that site. For the independence movement against Spain, the legend became a powerful symbol of independence.

Source 1 The flag of Mexico.
The central emblem is based on Aztec legend.

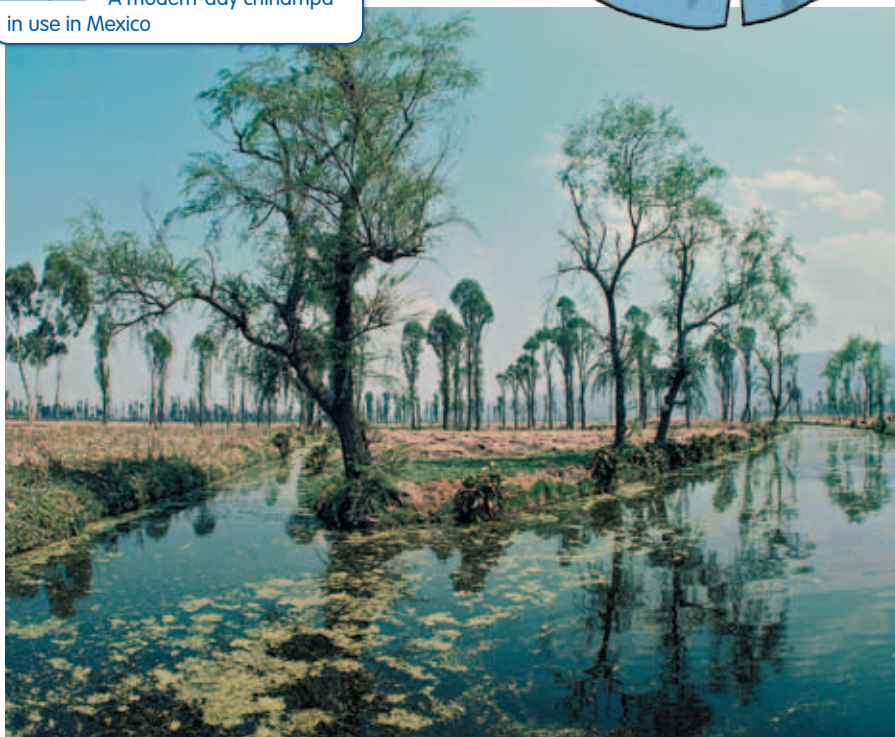


Source 2 Legacies of colonisation can be interpreted differently depending on your perspective.

The conquest of the Aztecs opened up the New World for trade and exploration, and began an exchange of ideas and goods that continues to this day.

The Spanish conquest was a dark episode in history. It caused the collapse of an entire civilisation and signalled the beginning of four centuries of slavery and brutal Spanish rule.

Source 3 A modern-day chinampa in use in Mexico



Activities

Student workbook
12.8

EXPLANATION AND COMMUNICATION

- 1 Why do you think the chinampa is an environmentally friendly method of farming?
- 2 Where do the majority of the world's Spanish speakers live?
- 3 What was likely to happen to the indigenous people who did not convert to Christianity?
- 4 Why is Portuguese the official language of Brazil?

PERSPECTIVES AND INTERPRETATIONS

- 5 How do you think the introduction of a new language and religion helped the Spanish conquer the New World?
- 6 Who do you think benefited more from the Spanish colonisation of the Americas — the Spanish or the indigenous people who were already living there? Justify your answer.
- 7 Look at the two different views of the Spanish conquest shown in **Source 2** and consider these questions:
 - a How can two people have such different views of the same event?
 - b Do you think one of them is more 'right' than the other? Why or why not?
 - c Look back over this chapter and decide which sources each person could have used to draw their conclusion.

HISTORICAL QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH

- 8 Look at **Source 1**. The design of the flag of Mexico is influenced by the story of the founding of Tenochtitlan. Research some other Aztec myths that could be used to create an inspiring symbol for modern-day Aztec descendants.
- 9 A symbol on the Australian flag also references the origins of some of the Australian people. Describe the symbol and explain how it reflects the recent history of Australia.

12.10 Review and reflect

In this chapter you have investigated various aspects of the Spanish conquest of the Americas. You have seen both the positive and negative consequences that resulted.

Review



Quick quiz

- 1 How long did it take to destroy the Aztec civilisation after the invasion by the Spanish?
- 2 How did Cortes use the local indigenous tribes and beliefs to conquer the Aztecs?
- 3 Which European countries colonised North America?
- 4 Give one reason why the Spanish were eager to establish a colony in the Americas.
- 5 What effect did introduced diseases have on the indigenous populations of the Americas?
- 6 Why did the Europeans need to bring slaves to the Americas from Africa?
- 7 For centuries the Americas were referred to by Europeans as the 'New World'. From whose point of view is this term accurate? In what way could it be a misleading term?
- 8 Columbus never actually achieved his aim of discovering a western trading route between Europe and Asia. Despite this, why is he considered so historically significant?
- 9 Were Aztec laws and punishments harsher than those of Europe at the time? Why or why not?
- 10 Identify one significant legacy of the Spanish conquest of the Americas.

Historical questions and research

- 1 Using the internet and your library, research some of the many Aztec gods. Your research should include their names, the aspects of life they influenced, the features that identify them and any myths associated with them.
- 2 What was life like in Tenochtitlan? Write a diary entry for a noble child growing up in the city who is about to be sent to school at either a calmecac or telpochcalli.
- 3 Construct a recruitment poster to appeal to a Spaniard considering becoming a conquistador. Decide on an appropriate slogan and image to help your cause.
- 4 Refer back through the chapter as necessary to place the following events in chronological order:
 - The city of Tenochtitlan is founded by the Aztecs.
 - Bernadino de Sahagun first arrives in the New World.
 - Columbus sets foot on San Salvador.
 - Hernan Cortes is born.
 - Tenochtitlan falls to the Spanish conquistadors.
 - Mexico declares independence from Spain.
 - The Emancipation Proclamation ends slavery in the United States.
 - The Native American population of Mexico falls to 2.5 million.
- 5 Using ICT and other sources, investigate and write a report on one aspect of the wide impact of the Spanish conquest of the Americas. You could focus on the new foods that were introduced to Europe from the Americas, or

how the conquest of the Americas helped increase the wealth of Europe. Share your findings with a classmate.

Analysis and use of sources

- 1 When looking at [Source 1](#), a nineteenth-century Mexican sculpture of an Aztec ruler, can you make any statements about the artist's attitude or perspective towards the Aztecs? What elements of the sculpture provide evidence of this?
- 2 2019 will mark the 500th anniversary of the landing of Hernan Cortes on the coast of America. How do you think this major event should be commemorated? Discuss some options in groups and write a proposal outlining and explaining your ideas.

Back to the big questions

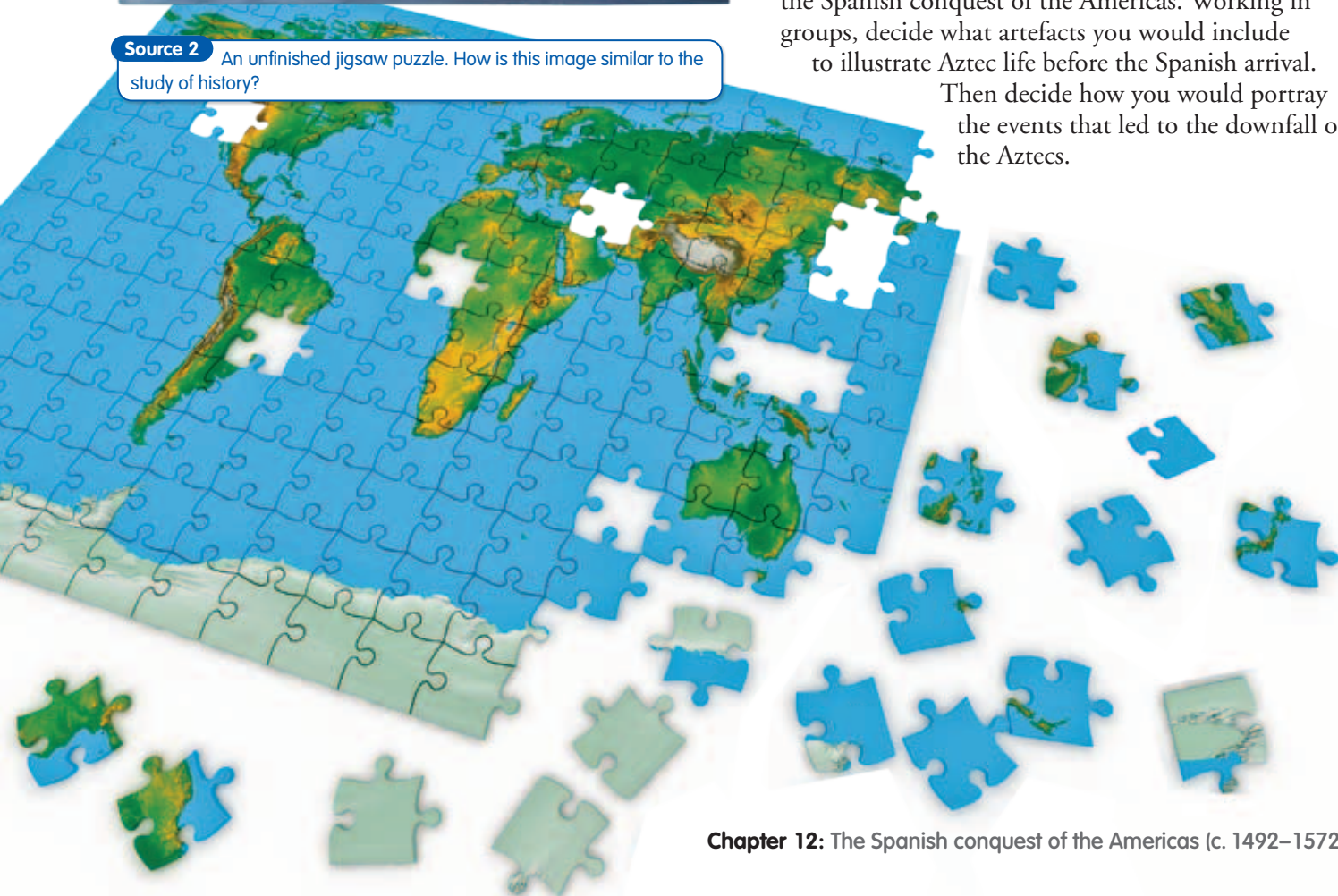
At the beginning of this chapter several big questions were posed. Use the knowledge you have gained to answer these questions.

- 1 What was the Aztec civilisation like before the Spanish arrival?
- 2 What were the key events in the Spanish conquest?
- 3 Who were some of the most significant historical figures of the time?
- 4 Why were the Spanish eager to explore the American continents?
- 5 How can historical sources help us understand this period of history?
- 6 What was the impact of the Spanish colonisation on the people they encountered?
- 7 What legacies of the Spanish conquest remain today?

Source 1 A nineteenth-century sculpture in Mexico City of an Aztec warrior



Source 2 An unfinished jigsaw puzzle. How is this image similar to the study of history?



Reflect



You are now in a position to be able to make thoughtful statements about the issues dealt with in this chapter.

- 1 Refer back to the chapter opener. Having now studied the Aztecs in some detail, think about the effect the modern world might have on the isolated tribe in the Amazon. Summarise your thoughts in a table like the one below.

Positive aspects of making contact

Negative aspects of making contact

- 2 After you complete the table, discuss in groups or as a class the following question:

‘Should the modern world make contact with the previously unknown tribe in the Amazon?’

Your response should refer to the effect the Spanish colonisation of the Americas had on native tribes, both positive and negative, and should come to a conclusion that is supported by historical evidence.

- 3 **Source 2** shows an unfinished jigsaw puzzle. How is this image similar to the study of history?
- 4 Imagine you have been assigned the task of putting together a museum display about the Aztecs and the Spanish conquest of the Americas. Working in groups, decide what artefacts you would include to illustrate Aztec life before the Spanish arrival.

Then decide how you would portray the events that led to the downfall of the Aztecs.

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An Aztec audio dictionary

SEARCHLIGHT ID: PRO-0015

Scenario

As part of the Australian Museum Curators Department, your team has been asked to design an interactive Aztec audio dictionary for visiting school students in Years 7 and 8. The museum is about to open its new Aztec exhibit, which features fantastic artefacts, visuals and movies. Your audio dictionary will give students a better sense of how the words would have sounded when spoken by Aztecs. It will also show them what the words mean. Your interactive illustrated dictionary will feature touch-screen technology and will form an integral part of the museum's display.

Your task

You have been supplied with audio bites of Aztec words being pronounced correctly and Aztec pan-pipe music (which you might add as a sound backdrop) to create an illustrated audio dictionary in PowerPoint. Your audio dictionary should categorise the words into a number of different topics, such as:

- the Aztec calendar
- food
- daily life
- religion, and so on.

A listener will be able to hear each word spoken with an appropriate accent and also get a definition of the word. Visuals can be added to help make the meaning of the words even clearer.

Process

- Open the ProjectsPLUS application for this chapter, located in your eBookPLUS. Watch your introductory video lesson and then click the 'Start Project' button and set up your project group. You can complete this project individually or invite other members of your class to form a group. Save your settings and the project will be launched.



- Navigate to your Media Centre and preview the audio bites of Aztec words, images and music that have been supplied for you. You can use these to create your audio dictionary, but first you will have to undertake some research.
- Navigate to your Research Forum. Research topics have been pre-loaded in the system to provide a framework for your research. You can also use these topics as the pages for your audio dictionary or add your own new topics.
- If working in a team, allocate topics to all the members, who will then create those pages in your audio dictionary. Each team member should then download from the Media Centre the audio bites and images that relate to the topic they are covering.
- To discover extra information about your Aztec words, find at least three sources other than

the textbook. At least one of these should be an offline source such as a book or encyclopaedia. Your Media Centre contains weblinks to help you get started. You could also try searching for 'Nahuatl (Aztec) words'.

- Enter definitions for the Aztec words as articles in your Research Forum. You may also like to enter cool facts and intriguing information that you can add as features in your audio dictionary. You can view and comment on other group members' articles and rate the information they have entered.
- Use the Aztec Audio Dictionary sample in your Media Centre as a guide to creating your own audio dictionary in PowerPoint. Assign time for all group members to have access to your PowerPoint file, and remember to leave time before the final due date so you can review each other's work and make any changes.
- As a group, review your final project and make any adjustments. Make sure all of your pages are consistent, using the same font and style of graphics.
- Print out your Research Report from ProjectsPLUS to hand in to your teacher with your final project.



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Your ProjectsPLUS application is available in this chapter's Student Resources tab inside your eBookPLUS. Visit www.jacplus.com.au to locate your digital resources.

Suggested software

- ProjectsPLUS
- PowerPoint

Media Centre

Your Media Centre contains:

- a selection of audio bites featuring the correct pronunciation of Aztec words
- a selection of Aztec images
- weblinks to sites on the Aztecs
- an Aztec Audio Dictionary sample
- an assessment rubric.



Interactivity



SPANISH CONQUEST OF THE AMERICAS TIMELINE

Use this fun interactivity to create a visual timeline of key events during the Spanish conquest of the Americas from c. 1492 to 1572 CE.

SEARCHLIGHT ID: INT-2954

