

History

Lesson 4 of an enquiry of 4 lessons

## **The Spanish Arrival**

Enquiry: How far did fear allow the Aztecs to control their Empire

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# The establishment of the Empire

The Aztec Empire had begun as an **alliance**. The Aztec city of Tenochtitlan had formed an agreement to work with two other **city states**: Texcoco and Tlacopan. The three cities worked well together and became known as the Triple Alliance. Over time the Triple Alliance expanded the amount of land it controlled.

Understanding the history of the Aztecs therefore should involve knowing the history of the the *city-states*. Some city-states accepted being ruled by the Triple Alliance. Other cities resisted and were conquered. After being conquered they had to pay **tribute** to the city states.



# Strengthening of Tenochtitlan

Over time, one city become the most powerful - Tenochtitlan. It would become the heart of the Aztec civilization. All of the Aztec rulers at this time **expanded** the Aztec Empire across Mexico and wanted to strengthen the power of Tenochtitlan. The city grew in size and importance during this time and the Aztec culture came to dominate the region. By the early 16th century, Tenochtitlan is estimated to have a population of between 200,000 and 300,000 people. This meant that it was one of the largest cities in the world at the time and larger than any in Europe.



## **Strengthening of Tenochtitlan continued...**

When Montezuma I, came to power in 1440, Tenochtitlan was the centre of a growing Empire. Under his leadership, some 400 small states were controlled and forced to pay tribute. This was achieved through a combination of trade and armed conquest. By his death in 1468, the empire stretched from the Atlantic to the Pacific, with a population of close to five million people.



# Expansion of the Aztec Empire

This quick expansion meant that the Aztec had **conquered** and **suppressed** many people. The Aztecs controlled these different societies by forcing them to provide tributes and offer citizens for ritual sacrifice.

Aztec culture spread in these areas. This included creating artificial islands to increase farming land. New buildings were constructed in Aztec style. People living under the Aztec Empire also played fun games such, Ullamalitzli, which used a rubber ball. The players could only touch the ball with their head, elbow, knee or hip and it could not touch the ground!



## **Expansion of the Aztec Empire continued..**

Education was of great importance to the Aztecs and it was compulsory for children to attend school which meant everyone was educated.

The empire was made up of loosely connected city states. The empire was held together by force so deep loyalty to Tenochtitlan was rare. When the Spanish arrived, many city states were happy to rebel against the Aztecs.



## The Spanish arrive...

In 1519, the first ever ship from Europe arrived in Mexico. It was led by a Spanish man called Hernán Cortés. He and his followers have become known as **conquistadors**. The Aztec emperor at the time, Montezuma II thought he was the god Quetzalcoatl, so believed no one would want to fight against him. Cortés and his soldiers were welcomed to Tenochtitlan and given jewels and gold. But then, Cortés took Montezuma prisoner. When the Aztecs wanted Cortés to leave Tenochtitlan in 1520, Cortes told Montezuma to calm his people down.



## The Spanish arrival continued ...

Whilst in Spanish **captivity** Montezuma died. The Spaniards said he was killed by the Aztecs, while the Aztecs said Cortés killed him. The Spanish said that the Aztec people threw rocks at him, killing him. The Aztecs said that they found his body in the streets with a lot of cuts made with a sword after the Spanish left. Historians do not know exactly what happened. But the consequence of Montezuma's death was that the Spanish could take over the Aztec Empire.





# Glossary

**Tenochtitlan:** Aztec capital city

**Expanded:** to increase in size

**City states:** cities which have their own government and are independent of the surrounding area.

**Conquered:** taken control by force

**Suppressed:** forcibly put and end to

**Conquistador:** Spanish conqueror

**Captivity:** imprisoned



# Comprehension Questions

1. How did the formation of the Triple Alliance help the Aztecs?

Sentence starter: The formation of the Triple Alliance helped the Aztecs by...

2. How did the expansion of Tenochtitlan help strengthen its control over the Aztec people?
3. Why were some people in the Aztec Empire happy when the Spanish arrived?
4. Did people have reason to feel happy with Aztec rule?

**Challenge:** Why is Montezuma's death suspicious?

