GAUTENG PROVINCE
EDUCATION
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GAUTENG DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

EXEMPLAR

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HISTORY

TERM 1 CONTROLLED TEST

ADDENDUM

GRADE : 10

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QUESTION 1: WHAT FACTORS LED TO THE DOWNFALL OF THE AZTEC EMPIRE IN THE 16TH CENTURY?

SOURCE 1A

The source below explains the role of conquistadors during the Spanish expansion in America during the 16th Century.

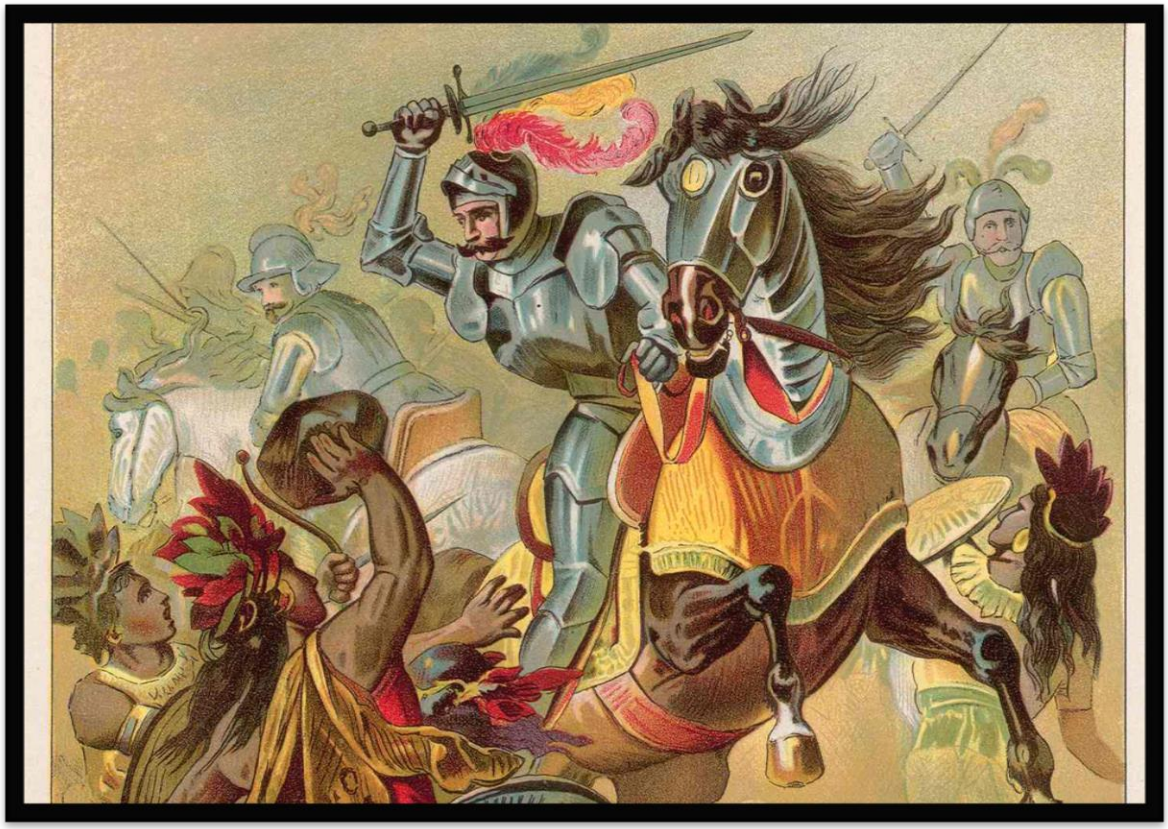
Another set of men who travelled to the Americas after the initial discoveries of Columbus are known to history as the conquistadors. The word conquistador is Spanish for "conqueror." It refers to a Spanish military leader who took part in the conquest of the Americas in the 16th century. The conquistadors were intent on finding and taking the riches of the Indies. They came from many different occupations and were generally not professional soldiers. They sought glory by finding riches, new land, and subjects for the king.

The conquistadors were successful for several reasons. They were brave and daring (courageous) men driven by a powerful desire for wealth. In some cases they were very clever. In addition, they had horses, guns, and steel weapons, none of which the native people had. There were no horses in the Americas until the Spanish brought them. Also, native populations were decimated(devastated) by diseases the Spanish brought, diseases for which the natives had no immunity(resistance).

[From : A.T. Gardner: What Were the Most Important Factors in Explaining the Spanish Victory Over the Aztecs & Incas?]

SOURCE 1B

The picture below shows conquistadors during the war and the weapons they carried.



[From: Weapons of the Conquistadors: Article by Mark Cartwright]

SOURCE 1C

The extract below explains the Spanish destruction of Tenochtitlan and the end of the Aztec empire.

The Spanish hoped to find gold and silver on the mainland of the American continent. At that time the Aztec's empire was the strongest state in central America. Its emperor Montezuma had enormous power, a large army and controlled lives of over 10 million people. The Aztec capital, Tenochtitlan, was a thriving city of 300 000 people with magnificent temples, palaces, a market place and thousands of houses. It was built on an island in a lake in the Valley of Mexico. In 1519 a small group of Spaniard soldiers led by an adventurer, Hernan Cortes, landed on the coast and marched inland to attack the Aztec Empire. Within three years Montezuma was dead, his empire had been plundered, and the city of Tenochtitlan completely destroyed…the Aztec Empire had been broken, their books burned and their monuments destroyed.

[From: Bottaro, J. et.al, *In Search of History*, Review copy, page 41]

SOURCE 1D

The source below explains how Aztec enemies helped the Spanish conquistador, Cortes.

The Aztec military gained power in numbers by adding men supplied from allied and conquered states. With such large numbers the Aztec were able to defeat their rivals, gaining new territory. With each victory Aztec rulers demanded tribute from defeated populations and took captives back to Tenochtitlán to be used as human sacrificial offerings. In the Aztec religion the belief was that the gods had given their lives to create this world and humans had to repay that debt in blood. The religious sacrifices angered other tribes. During the time of Montezuma II's reign the empire was at its peak, but so was the resentment of the subject tribes. Constant rebellions were waged. Although Montezuma defeated the rebellions, they weakened the empire. This instability enabled Cortés to form alliances with other native peoples, most notably the Tlaxcalans, who were old rivals of the Aztec, and the Totonac. The Tlaxcalans' army considerably enhanced the conquistador's numbers and were critical to Cortés's later successes.

[From : Britannica – The Decline of the Aztec]

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Visual sources and other historical evidence were taken om the following:

A.T. Gardner. What Were the Most Important Factors in Explaining the Spanish Victory Over the Aztecs & Incas.

Mark Cartwright. Weapons of the Conquistadors

Bottaro, J. et.al. In Search of History, Grade 10 Learners book

Britannica.The Decline of the Aztec