

# THE CONQUISTADORS

Following Columbus's sea voyages, many more campaigns of conquest set out in the name of the Spanish Crown, largely in the direction of Central and South America. This had a devastating effect on the indigenous peoples of these lands, with many of their populations decimated as a result of Spanish colonization.

## Greedy for Gold

The journeys were called *conquista* (the Spanish word for "conquest") and the Spaniards who undertook them, *conquistadors* (meaning "conquerors"). Their main goal was to capture new territory, secure and extract resources, and steal as much gold as possible. Central and South America were populated with large cities that contained many treasures. This led to the indigenous peoples experiencing raids and looting at the hands of the Spanish, who were prepared to sacrifice a great deal of human life to satisfy their lust for gold.



## The Downfall of the Aztecs

In the sixteenth century, the region that is now Mexico was ruled by the Aztecs, a highly developed people whose ruler during this period was Moctezuma II. Because he actively oppressed other local peoples and practiced slavery, the conquistadors were able to form alliances with those who suffered under Aztec rule. One particularly famous slave was known as La Malinche, who originally came from a noble family. She acted as a translator for conquistador Hernán Cortés and also became his lover. Her assistance was crucial in helping Cortés overthrow and destroy the Aztec Empire.

1521

## The Incas and Francisco Pizarro

The Inca Empire spread out across the western part of South America. Incas were famous for their cities in the mountains, their trade routes, and their farming skills in high mountain regions, but the Spaniard Francisco Pizarro had no interest in Incan culture, only their gold. On his first trip through its territory, he saw the wealth the empire possessed and resolved to conquer it. It was during the conquistador's third and final expedition, in 1532, that the fate of the Incas, their empire, and the lives of many of their people was sealed.

1533



Previously, there had been two Incan brothers who both wanted to sit on the empire's throne. Eventually they went to war with each other, which weakened the entire empire. One of the brothers died in the war, while Pizarro initially presented himself to the other, Atahualpa, as an ally, with the aim of later overthrowing him.