Alice Martin

Mr. Johnson

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Hernan Cortes

Hernán Cortés was a Spanish conquistador who conquered the Aztec people of modern day Mexico. He landed in Hispaniola (Santo Domingo) after leaving Spain in 1504 to explore the new world. He had an immense impact on Europe, claiming glory for Spain, after he conquered parts of the new world no one had discovered yet.

Hernán Cortés was born in 1485 to “Martín Cortés de Monroy and Doña Catalina Pizarro Altamarino, near Medellín, near Mérida, Extremadura, Castile.” His parents had little money, but had a lot of honor. Cortés went to study at Salamanca, in western Spain when he was 14. “He was very bright” wrote his secretary, Francisco López de Gómara. “Gómara described him as ruthless, haughty, mischievous, and quarrelsome.” He was excited about the stories of the Indes, which Christopher Columbus found, so he set out to port Valencia in hopes of serving in the Italian Wars. He got on a ship with Christopher Columbus and left to explore the new world.

Hernán left Spain in 1504. He landed in Hispaniola, a modern day Santo Domingo. “He served as a notary in the town of Azúa for a few years before joining Diego Valázquez on a 1511 expedition to Cuba, where he climbed the ranks of the local government to become mayor of Santiago.” Cortés was supposed to set sail to Mexico in 1518 but Velázquez canceled his expedition. Cortés set sail anyway with 500 men and 11 ships to find his fortune.

Cortés reached Mexico in February 1519. He gained intelligence from the natives about the land he wanted to conquer. The natives gave him gifts of 20 women. One of them, Marina, became his interpreter and they had a son Martín. Cortés used his new allies to defeat the Aztecs. His allies agreed to this because the Aztecs believed in human sacrifice. They killed up to 250,000 a year, making them be very unpopular with civilizations and tribes who lost people out of this. The Aztecs at this time ruled over 500 small states and some with 5-6 million people.

Cortés entered Tenochtitlan, the Aztec capital, on November 8 1519. Tenochtitlan is near Mexico City in present day. The capital had more than 140,000 people at its height. Montezuma II, the Aztec ruler, thought Cortés and his army were Gods, so he treated them as honored guests instead of prisoners. “Seizing his chance, Cortés took Montezuma hostage and his soldiers raided the city. The enraged Aztec forces drove the Spanish out of the capital. During the Spanish retreat Montezuma was killed and much of Cortés’s army was dead. Cortés tried again and regained control of Tenochtitlan by August 13, 1521. The Aztec army had fallen.

Hernán Cortés died on December 2, 1547 in Spain. While Cortés was conquering Mexico, Velázquez was ruining his reputation. “Hernán responded by sending five now famous letters to the Spanish King Charles V of Spain about the lands he conquered. Cortés spent many of his years planning new expeditions and to seek more areas, including present day Honduras. During his last years however, “he spent seeking recognition for his achievements and support from the Spanish royal court.

Web Sources

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