From Conquerors To Conquered Essay, Research Paper

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The Rise and fall of the Aztec Empire is possibly the most important area of study in the modern world. Of all of the nomadic tribes who migrated into Mexico, the Aztecs were one of the last. At first driven away by established tribes, the Aztecs slowly began to develop an empire of immense wealth and power by the late fifteenth century. Due in large part to the accomplishments of their ruler Itzcoatl, the empire expanded to include millions of people from a number of different tribes, including the Cempoala, who would later aid the Spanish in defeating the Aztecs. Because of the melting pot within the empire, the Aztecs had a very diverse culture. However, this immense Aztec Empire would soon be brought to its knees by the doings of one man and his army.

On November of 1519, the Aztec leader Montezuma, received reports of small mountains floating off of the Mexican coast. Was it Quetzalcoatl, the legendary figure who had one day promised to return from across the ocean? In his distress, Montezuma sent messengers bearing gifts to the Spanish ships, in order to greet these gods . However, the Aztec leader was not alone in his attempt to gain acceptance with these strangers. Fearful of the Spanish, and hateful of the wealth and power of the Aztecs, some of the native tribes, particularly the Cempoala and others from the cities of Tlaxcala and Tezcoca, joined forces with Cortes. After the Spaniards annihilated the Cholultecas, the terrified people of the Aztec empire did their best to please them, as the Europeans made their way inland.

By the time Cortes reached Tenochititlan, he had accumulated a large number of allies. Believing that Cortes was indeed Quetzalcoatl, Montezuma greeted the Spanish as if they were gods. Cortes responded, We have come to your house in Mexico as friends. There is nothing to fear. Nevertheless, Cortes kept Montezuma under guard. Instead of resisting, Montezuma did everything he could to please the Spanish, ordering his servants to supply everything that Cortes requested. Montezuma s weakness to the Spanish angered many of his followers, who began to lose respect for their king.

Cortes and his men were amazed by the splendor of the Aztec capital. The Spaniards greed would then lead them to carry out unprovoked attacks on Aztec temples and military leaders. Cortes then had Montezuma instruct his angry people not to retaliate, declaring that the Spanish were too powerful and could not be resisted. However, this angered the Aztecs even more, both at the Spanish and Montezuma. As advanced as the Aztecs were, they were no match for the Spanish forces. The Spanish weapons and training were much more advanced: their cannons, cavalry, crossbows, and iron weapons against the primitive spears and rocks of the Aztecs. Even though the Aztecs often outnumbered the Spanish, they could not overcome the superior weapons of the invaders. As Cortes explains: There was so great a number of them, that the artillery had no need to aim but only to point their guns at the Indian forces.

It is known that Montezuma died during the siege of Tenochtitlan, but it is not known exactly how. Some say that a stone slung by one of his own people, while others say that the Spaniards stabbed him to death. Cortes claimed to be present when Montezuma received a fatal blow from a stone: He received a blow on his head from a stone; and the injury was so serious that he died three days later. It took Cortes little more than two years to conquer most of the Aztec empire. Some Aztec leaders fled the capital; others were imprisoned, or killed. Most of the buildings, schools, and homes lay in ruins. The victory provided gold and glory for Spain, while at the same time it increased the Spanish influence in the New World. Towns and missions spread throughout the newly conquered lands. Both the Spanish culture and their religion, Christianity, became etched on the American continent.

Although so much of the Aztec culture was destroyed, the survivors continue to pass down stories of the mighty Aztecs, as well as those of their vicious defeat.

Works Cited :

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