

An exploration of the motives of hernan cortes essay

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



Hernan Cortez was a powerful man in the sixteenth century. Cortez discovered a number of complex civilizations in what was then the New World. He was the primary explorer for the inland of Mexico, representing the nation of Spain. His task was to explore and colonize the land, as well as question the natives about local gold.

Cortez successfully negotiated with some of the natives, but the greatest nation of all, the Aztecs, he destroyed. Why did Cortez eliminate the Aztecs? First, some background on Hernan. Cortez was a sickly child in Spain.

He was sent to boarding school, but left after two years without leave. From that point on, he decided to pursue a life of adventure. He joined Cordova's conquest, but he grew ill on the way to Italy, and was stuck there for two years. He sailed to Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic in 1504.

He was a soldier there, and went on a mission to populate Cuba. Cortez was given the task of colonizing Mexico, and was almost stopped by the governor of Cuba as he left. Cortez landed on the mainland and burned his ships so the men could not commit mutiny. From there, he marched inland towards the native civilizations. (famousamericans. net) Cortez had the means to communicate with the natives. Upon reaching the New World, he learned of a Spanish citizen who had shipwrecked recently named Geronimo de Aguilar. Geronimo had been living in the New World, was dressed as a Mayan native, and fluently spoke the Mayan language.

This did not give Cortez the means to communicate with the Aztecs, however. The Spanish could not communicate with the Aztecs until a native

tribe, the Tabasco, gave them numerous women who spoke both Mayan and the Aztec language, Nahuatl. The most remembered of these women was Malinche, who soon learned Spanish and replaced Aguilar altogether.

(historians. org) Now, you as a reader might be thinking at this moment, “ But maybe the Aztecs didn’t like Cortez, and so he had to kill them before they killed him. ” Not so, brave reader. The Aztecs believed that Cortez was Quetzalcoatl. Who is Quetzalcoatl? “ Quetzalcoatl was a god of such importance and power that nearly no aspect of everyday life seemed to go untouched by him.

” (ucsd. edu) He was blessed with good fortune, since he appeared from the direction that the Aztec lore had said the god Quetzalcoatl would appear, on the very day he would appear, wearing shiny armor, all exactly as the ancient predictions said. The Aztecs believed he was a god, and they told him so. Cortez had his translators, and so he fully understood what they said. The emperor, Moctezuma, was quite unsure of how to approach this man, whom he believed was the Aztecs primary god. And so, he decided to play it safe, and lavished them with gold and gifts, food and drink. The Spanish were astounded that this nation could have so much. (pbs.

org) Cortez was well aware of the advanced society of the Aztec nation. The Aztecs had adopted many advanced practices from the earlier native nations, the Mayans and the Toltecs, when they had conquered them. This included a solar calendar, advanced irrigation techniques, and a religious almanac. They had an advanced and complex barter system and trade routes. The Aztecs were a warrior nation, and so they had many fighters.

Cortez immediately disregarded their complex religion involving human sacrifice, and attempted without success to convert them to Christianity. The Aztec religion was focused on appeasing the gods and living in harmony with nature.

“ The Aztec religion was one of constant effort to propitiate the gods in order that they might look favorably upon mankind. The Aztecs, through their religious practices, endeavored to keep a balance in nature. One religious practice to accomplish this was human sacrifice. ” (yale. edu) Finally, Cortez knew of the great amount of gold in the nation and surrounding regions.

(ivcc. edu) Soon after Cortez arrived, Moctezuma decided to throw him a large banquet. Cortez and his men were bloodthirsty for some reason, so they hung a guard and shot one of the Aztec’s tributary tribe’s leader. After that, they took Moctezuma and Itzcohuatzin, the Aztec’s military leader, prisoner. For these reasons, the remaining Aztec leaders elected to have a guard posted at the banquet. The first day of the fiesta went smoothly, but on the second night, the Spaniards began to massacre the Aztecs. Fordham. edu describes it in depth: “ The Spaniards attacked the musicians first, slashing at their hands and faces until they had killed all of them.

The singers-and even the spectators- were also killed. This slaughter in the Sacred Patio went on for three hours. Then the Spaniards burst into the rooms of the temple to kill the others: those who were carrying water, or bringing fodder for the horses, or grinding meal, or sweeping, or standing

watch over this work. Moctezuma and Itzcohuatzin protested, telling the Spanish off for slaughtering helpless, unarmed people. (Fordham.

edu) The massacre was long and bloody, and also without apparent reason. Why did Cortez kill the Aztecs? This, as we will soon find out, was to be the point in time where he finalized the doom of the Aztec nation. From this point on, the Aztecs view of him as a god began to slip away. The question herein emerges. Cortez had the chance to be worshipped as a god while giving orders to a great nation.

The Aztecs would have done his bidding without question. He could have occupied a seat above Moctezuma, but instead chose to give in to bloodthirsty massacres. He could have utilized the great nation as a tool to mine gold and help colonize the continent, which were the Spanish's main goals. Cortez had at his fingertips a network of hundreds of thousands of workers, and instead of utilizing them, he chose to destroy them. Why did Cortez choose to destroy them? Tenochtitlan, the Aztec capital, was a marvelous city to see and be in. Cortez himself described the city as " a dream. " To him, it was the most beautiful city he'd ever seen.

The Aztecs had built the city on a series of floating boxes of earth, so that the whole city was sitting in marsh-like water. This meant that the city's primary method of transportation was by boat. The palaces and buildings were made of brilliant white stone that were scrubbed clean by slaves.

Aqueducts brought water from mountain streams, and smaller floating islands surrounded the larger ones. Farmers lived in mud and grass huts on

these islands, farming, and then taking their produce to the main island by boat. Life was amazing. The Aztecs used their wealth and power to provide a brilliant life in their capital. Montezuma lived in a splendid palace. He was surrounded by his nobles and served by thousands of slaves.

In the palace grounds were beautiful gardens and menageries. " (ivvcc. edu) The city's floating islands had come when the Aztec population grew too big to be supported by the two islands in Lake Texcoco. Brittanica. com reads: " Originally located on two small islands in Lake Texcoco, it gradually spread through the construction of artificial islands to cover more than 5 sq miles. The floating boxes were called chinampas.

After a period of a couple decades, the trees planted on the chinampas would take root, and the landmass would be relatively stable. These man-made islands were amazing for farming, as the water beneath the island kept the soil moist and fertile. 3 causeways were constructed from the island to the mainland, along with aqueducts used to keep Lake Texcoco's fresh water, in contrast to numerous saltwater lakes in the area. By 1519, Tenochtitlan was estimated to have around 400, 000 people living in it, with many more in the surrounding empire. mnsu.

edu) The Aztecs were a nation founded on war. " The custom was that right after birth the umbilical cord of a boy was cut off, dried, and then buried on a battlefield, implying that he would live the life of a warrior forever. Though a life full of hardships, the military career was highly revered in their society. " (Native-languages.

org) They did not establish governments in the nations they conquered, but instead conquered the nations again when they rebelled. This meant that there were literally thousands of warriors at any given time. Cortez was well aware of the prestige that the Aztec warriors held claim to. He was also well aware that he was greatly outnumbered. (pbs. org) Why then did Cortez choose to attack the empire? Even after being aided by the Tlaxcala, Cortez barely won. Losses were heavy on both sides, and Tenochtitlan, the city of Cortez's dreams, was destroyed.

Cortez lost the chance to utilize the nearly half a million people in the surrounding region to populate, colonize, mine, and farm the New World. (ivcc. edu) So, in conclusion, Cortez's actions have not yet been explained. From this point, a few other possibilities emerge as to the reason of his attacks. Was it because Cortez simply did not understand? Cortez might not have fully understood some of the things Moctezuma said, because they may have been lost in translation.

Another possibility is that he understood, but did not have the heart to deceive the natives, and instead sought to kill them. There is also the possibility that he simply didn't think the whole thing through. However, these are all subjects for another paper.