Acoma Pueblo: Ancient City in the Sky

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Párrafo 1 de la selección

In the early 1500s, Viceroy of New Spain Antonio de Mendoza called for the first explorations into the lands north of Spain’s holdings at the time, which are now in modern-day Mexico. Rumors flew of vast cities of gold and incredible riches waiting for the Spanish Crown to claim them. Throughout the 16th and 17th centuries, many expeditions traveled into present-day Arizona and New Mexico. Even though Acoma sat isolated on its mesa, several Spanish explorers visited it, including Hernando de Alvarado in 1540 (a member of the Francisco Vásquez de Coronado mission), the Chamuscado-Rodriguez expedition in 1581, Antonio de Espejo in 1583, and Juan de Oñate in 1598.

Párrafo 2 de la selección

Early Spanish reports indicate that the pueblo was a village of roughly 500 three or four stories tall adobe houses. Windows were small and limited and doors at the ground level did not exist. Instead, residents entered buildings via ladders placed through holes in the roof. At the time, the only way to the mesa’s top was a series of hand and toeholds carved into the steep rock. The people had to carry all the materials used to construct the original community up the cliffs on their backs.

Párrafo 3 de la selección

Because of its location, Acoma was one of the most resistant pueblos to Spanish rule. During early Spanish contact, reports indicate that the Acoma were friendly, often meeting expedition parties at the bottom of the mesa to greet and assist them. As time moved on and the Spanish presence became more and more persistent, however, the Acoma retaliated. In December 1598, residents lured Captain Juan de Zaldívar, one of Oñate's officers, into the pueblo and murdered him and fourteen of his men. This had dire consequences for the village two months later when Zaldívar’s brother arrived with a force of seventy Spanish soldiers to avenge the deaths. A bitter battle resulted in the sacking and burning of much of the pueblo and the death of approximately 1,500 residents. The Spanish forced those who remained to surrender the pueblo to the Spanish. Oñate himself demanded sentencing survivors to indentured servitude and bodily mutilation. Oñate’s harsh and unfair treatment of the Acoma people would later lead to his legal expulsion from New Mexico and Mexico City.