

Aztec or mixtec ceremonial knife



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Aztec or Mixtec ceremonial knife The Spanish Conquistadors commented on the importance and the amount of sacrifice in Aztec civilization. There are many different arguments about what the role of Warfare to the Aztec is. Some historians argue it to be about capturing people for sacrifice combined with the notion to extract tribute and the expansion of their empire . Sacrifice was of huge importance, it was a socially accepted act of Mesoamerican civilizations. The reason sacrifice took place is a huge debate with many different arguments, some of which talk about its integral link with Aztec religion, and some of which talk about its political importance. One event with huge controversy over is the 1487 mass sacrifice that took place at Tenochtitlan. Not only is there debate over the volume of sacrifice ranging from 80000 to 20000 in different codices, but also for its purpose, was it for religious reasons or was it political shock and awe tactics. The handle of this knife is carved from a single piece of wood and takes the form of a crouching man wearing the regalia of an eagle warrior . The eagle, in Aztec culture was a bird of the day, and helped the sun across the sky . The Eagle Warrior was a well respected rank of soldier. On the handle the Eagle Warrior demonstrates how fundamental human sacrifice was to the Aztec'. The Aztec' placed war at a central role within its society. Warriors captured other soldiers or civilians and gave them to the priests for sacrifice, this was key in the warriors ascension as a warrior, the more captives the more celebrated you were as a great warrior, thus captives and sacrifice were of great importance to the Aztec, as they were a warrior based society. The Mésheeka' or Mixtec sacrificial knife was just for ceremonial use, the blade was not strong enough to perform sacrifice . Thus the knife demonstrates the importance of Mésheeka' or Mixtec religious values, as to manufacture a knife

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so incredible shows its great symbolic importance. There are many different arguments over why sacrifice took place, some historians argue sacrifice was to appease the gods, others say its purpose was to nourish the gods. There is a large belief that the so called 'Flowery Wars' that are so unique to Aztec society were to provide sacrificial victims to nourish their gods. Whilst more scientific approaches state that sacrifice was to help with their low protein diet, and thus the reports of cannibalism can be argued for. Barry Isaac talks of the 1487 mass sacrifice as a political shock and awe technique as well as the traditional religious reasons, he argues that the sources say that over 20000 people were sacrificed and foreign dignitaries and enemy leaders were invited to the event to watch, this showed the grandeur of the Aztec empire and the power it had. One of the most important of beliefs in Aztec or Mixtec society is the belief that the two sons of the gods drew their own blood over the garden of paradise so their parents would create the skies. By giving their own blood it showed that they owed their lives to the gods, and for this sacrifice they got what they asked for. This belief shows the link between sacrifice and appeasing the gods. What we must make clear though is that these beliefs are of Spanish origin, and thus it forms doubt over their accuracy. Due to this fact, we cannot really ascertain the actual context of the knife, as the original sources are few and far between, due to the conquistador's persistence on destroying the original documents. From this the legitimacy of the Spanish evidence is questioned and in reality the codices and sources that we have on the Aztec from the Spanish are probably exaggerated or changed to fit in line with the Christian version of events. One of the main reasons for changing the facts is so that they fit in to Christian beliefs. The apostle's promised Jesus that they would spread the

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word of Christ to the four corners of the earth. If the Spanish priests did not create similarities between Aztec' and Christianity the actual version of events would in fact question Christianity. There are many other similarities, and this proves that there would have been some alterations to the actual facts. If you use the limited sources and the knife together this allows us to find out more about sacrifice and the arguments around it. One meaning of sacrifice could be that they worshiped the sun god, and recognised its power, and wanted to appease the sun god, thus being under its control. Another meaning of this sacrifice was to nourish the sun god, to help with its rise from darkness every day. In conclusion there are as I have stated too few original Aztec or Mixtec sources, and without being able to put a context on the remaining it is impossible to give a proper judgment on why sacrifice took place, we can only assume from pre existing European and eastern examples, for example the Romans carried out sacrifice, so we are able to put a Roman context on Mesoamerican sacrifice. The Spanish sources are most likely altered and exaggerated for their own gain in convincing their peers back home in Spain that the Aztec needed Spanish intervention and conversion. Thus it is difficult to analyse around the knife, we can only assume why the knife was made and what it was actually used for.

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