

Aztec indians



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My second paper will be on the Aztec Indians, who are known for their domination of southern and central Mexico. They ruled between the 14th and 16th centuries. They built a great empire and developed very modernized ways of doing things. They had phenomenal architectural skills and waterway systems. The Aztec Indians also had very developed social class and government systems and practiced a form of religion. To begin with, the Aztecs were very skilled in the art of Architecture and waterway systems. An example of the monumental architecture within the Aztec society is the great pyramid of Tenochtitlan. Montezuma I, who was the ruler of the Aztecs in 1466, created it. The pyramid was not finished until the rule of Montezuma II, around 1508(Carrasco, Montezuma Mexico, Pg. 49). Aztec cities and towns also had working drinking water and waste treatment systems. An intricate plumbing system using clay pipes ran down from the mountains around Mexico valley to all of the towns and cities in the valley. As the water ran into each town or city it was the dispersed to 10 or 12 places around town where it flowed into a pool for drinking water or was piped into public baths and toilets. Only nobles had working drinking and bathing systems with running water in their homes. The sewage system worked much like today, having human wastes carried to a collection pool where solids were collected, and then having liquids run off into a series of terraces which filtered the water. Solid wastes were allowed to sit in a collection pool for about six months and then were brought to the lake gardens to be used as fertilizer(Jennings, Aztec, Pg. 220). The Aztec social structure contained four well defined classes. At the bottom of the heap were slaves and serfs, or the Tlacotli, who worked the private lands of the nobility. Next came the Macehualtin, the fortunate, as they were called because they were equally free of the heavy

responsibility of the nobility and of the slaves liability to being basely used. They were the merchants, shopkeepers and artisans that made up the bulk of the population. The Macehualtin belonged to localized kin groups known as calpulli or big houses, each of which had its own lands, clan leaders, and temple(Jennings, Aztec, Pg. 354). After that came the hereditary nobility or Pipiltin, who supplied the top bureaucrats in the Aztec imperial system, and from whose ranks was a formed a council which advised the emperor and elected his successor from the ruling lineage. Also all of the nobility had the sound " ztin" added to the end of their name. At the very top of the ladder was the Uey-Tlatoani, or revered speaker. He had absolute control over civil affairs and it was his job to increase the size of the Aztec Empire every year and if he didn't wage enough wars within a period of time he would be impeached and replaced by the Pipiltin(Oliphant, Atlas of the Ancient World. Pg. 268). The Aztec government consisted of principally of the leadership of the royal house and the vast bureaucracy backed by it. The Uey-Tlatoani dealed mainly with external affairs of the Aztec empire, such as starting wars and making peace treaties. Also there was a parallel ruler, another member of the royal lineage, known as the Cihuacoatl. He dealt mainly with the internal affairs of Tenochtitlan such as the water system and the justice system. The bureaucracy was set into place by the nobles and performed the same function that civil servants perform today(Oliphant, Atlas of the Ancient World, 195). To maintain the empire the Aztec government made the territories it conquered contributes twice yearly. Taxes were collected from the territories also and careful accounts were kept of what territories had to pay. The heavy taxation and forced tribute disgruntled many territories. When Hernando Cortez arrived in the early 1500's they were happy to help

him as spies and informants(Blacker, Cortez and The Aztec Conquest, 143). Aztec religion was based on the worship of many gods, but the most important was the sun god. Aztec priests were not allowed to bathe or wash ever during their time as a priest. This resulted in the priests becoming encrusted with blood and guts over time. The Great Pyramid was built as a sacrificing platform to the gods. At the very top were an altar and a statue of the sun god, which had a hollow body in which the priests placed their victims heart (Oliphant, Atlas of the Ancient World, Pg. 197). Every year Tenochtitlan launched a Flowery War, in which mock battles would take place for the sole purpose of taking prisoners. Usually the wars were small between provinces in the empire but one year a large war with an overwhelming defeat by the province of Tenochtitlan took place and it is estimated that between 10 and 80 thousand prisoners were taken (Jennings, Aztec, Pg. 436). After a Flowery War, prisoners were marched back to a provinces capital and put to a Flowery Death. That is, being sacrificed to the gods. In the year that Tenochtitlan took all those prisoners, it took the priests one full week to put all the prisoners to death. It is said that the area around The great pyramid turned into a lake of blood and the piles of bodies were taller then the buildings. (Jennings, Aztec, Pg. 328.) These different elements show how the Aztec culture flourished for so long, but also they also show how it brought about the Aztecs end. Without these characteristics, the Aztecs would have never developed into the huge empire and culture that they became. The Aztec empire is now gone, along with almost all of the excellent works that the culture created, the great lake, the center of the one world, and most of the Aztec monuments have been buried under the slums of what is now known as Mexico city. The few artifacts that did survive

only did so because they were placed in a museum or buried and dug up recently. What a sad ends for what was once the most prosperous nation in Latin America. One thing has survived though, the Aztec language Nahuatl, may it last forever in defiance of the ones who tried to wipe it from the face of the earth.

. Works Cited Blacker, Irwan R, Cortez and the Aztec conquest, New York: American Heritage, 1978. Carrasco, David, Scott Sessions. Niwot Colorado: University press of Colorado, 1992. Pg. 49. Coe, Michael, Elizabeth Benson. Atlas of Ancient America. New York: Equinox, 1986. Pg. 125, 128, 130, 146. Jennings, Gary. Aztec. Avon, 1980. Pg. 92, 220, 329, 354, 436. Oliphant, Margaret. Atlas of the Ancient World. Simon & Shuster, 1992. Pg. 195, 197, 268.