

A the frozen bering
strait, migrated
southward through



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A distant sound is heard. It sounds like a deep drum being hit with a heavy instrument. You hear it again and strain your eyes in the direction of the sound. All around you is dense jungle. Snakes slither between your legs.

You hear the sound once again. In front of you is a dense stand of ferns. You part them and look down into a wide open valley. The valley gets so wide and it is so green that it takes your breath away. But that is not what you are looking at. You are staring at a huge city with glittering buildings shining in the spring sunlight.

Smoke rises up from some of the many houses. You can see and hear children playing in the wide open fields in front of the shining buildings.

Lamas and chickens are being bought and sold. You see bags of gold jewelry being bought and sold.

Beyond the market place you can watch a religious ceremony. You hear the scream of a person being sacrificed to one of the gods. Beyond the city there are roads made of stone and canals full of pedestrians and canos.

Who are these people and what are they doing here you wonder? The above paragraph describes what an early explorer in Mexico might have seen between 1400 and 1500 AD. The Aztec nation is one of the largest and most advanced Indian nations to ever exist on earth. Just about every part of the Aztec life was advance to such a state that at that time of the world the people were living better than many European nations. The Aztec nation is unique in its history, economy, environment, and way of life then any other nation at that time. Perhaps three to four thousand years ago, small bands of hunting-gathering peoples made their way across the land bridge that was <https://assignbuster.com/a-the-frozen-bering-strait-migrated-southward-through/>

the frozen Bering Strait, migrated southward through what is now Alaska, Canada, the United States, Central America, South America, and Mexico, settling along the way. One such hunting- gathering group settled in the Central Valley of what is now Mexico (Nicholson 1985). There is a long history of civilizations in the Central Valley of Mexico; as early as several centuries before Christ agricultural tribes had already settled, and by the birth of Christ had established as their great religious center Teotihuacan. The history of the Central Valley after circa the tenth century A.

D. is one of tribal conflict and superiority. About the time of the fall of this agricultural civilization, which flourished from approximately the second to the tenth centuries A.

D., a new tribe, who we know as the Toltecs, settled at Tula, Hidalgo. They belonged to a larger group known as the Nahua, or Nahuatl- speaking, and seem to have entered the Central Valley from the north or northwest. The Toltec civilization gradually replaced the older, agricultural civilization, as Toltec influence was felt as far as the Yucatan Peninsula and other areas occupied by the Mayan peoples.

Yet by the eleventh century A. D., another tribe, the Chichimecs, had already begun to eclipse the Toltecs as the dominant group of the Central Valley. By approximately the thirteenth century, the Chichimecs had replaced the Toltecs (Wolf 1998). About this time, another Nahua tribe known as the Aztecs began their migration, in c. 1168. They left their mythical mysterious homeland called Aztlan, place of the herons, or Chicomoztoc, place of the seven caves, and migrated southwards through Michoacan (Leon-Portilla

1992). The Aztecs, or “ Crane People,” arrived in the Central Valley and obtained permission to settle at Chapultepec in c.

1248 (Caso 1958). The tradition of tribal conflict in the Central Valley was continued; however, it seems that the Aztecs, at first, were practically enslaved by the other Nahua tribes inhabiting the Central Valley. The Aztec culture would not be subjugated, however, and continued in its struggle for power. By the fourteenth century the Aztecs had founded two settlements on islands in lakes: Tlaltetalco and Tenochtitlan. The traditional founding date of Tenochtitlan is 1325; the quest for the sacred site on which to found Tenochtitlan is relayed to us by an Aztec myth,...

its beginning is found in ancient times, when a humble tribe was banished- by the original Aztecs (Castillo 1908)- from a mysterious homeland it called Aztlan(place of the herons) or Chicomoztoc(place of the seven caves). During the long exile the Mexicas wandered among hostile strangers while anxiously searching for the divine sign, whose presence, prophesied by their god, would mark their arrival in the promised land. The tale continues with the discovery of the omen and the subsequent founding of Mexico-Tenochtitlan on the sacred site. (Leon-Portilla 1992) By the fifteenth century Tenochtitlan had become the center of the Aztec world- the center of Aztec growth, conquest, and expansion. As early as the sixteenth century Tenochtitlan dominated all other cities in the Central Valley and had reached the height of its power and magnificence (Caso 1958). The center of the Aztec empire was located near the Lerma river which is near the southern part of the Mexican plateau. The plateau is the largest of Mexico’s land regions and it is the most varied region consisting of five sections.

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The Volcanic Axis is located across the southern part of the plateau. Many of the volcanoes are still active. This area receives a lot of rain and the soil is fertile. This area is the main area where corn and beans were grown for the Aztec empire. The Bajio lies north of the volcanic axis and has an average elevation of 7, 000 feet. This region houses the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan.

Here there is very little rain and thus the region is very dry. The Mesa del Norte area makes up for more than half of the plateau and has an average elevation of 9, 000 feet. Since it is so high crops are always in danger of freezing. The Sierra Madre Occidental is a long mountain range that forms the western ridge of the plateau. It remained a barrier for the Aztecs and their enemies. Some of this region still has not been explored by people.

The Sierra Madre Oriental is the plateau's eastern rim. The Aztecs had no use for this area but today there is a major coal and oil industry in the area (Aschmann 1985). The average January temperatures of the plateau is from 10 to 15 degrees Centigrade while in July the average temperature is around 20 to 25 degrees centigrade. Thus the weather is much like B. C. Average precipitation is from 30 - 50 cm at the Aztec capital to less than 30 in the highlands.

The central part of life for any Aztec citizen, man or woman, was religion. For example, if a baby was to become a priest, immediately after birth it was painted in black and a beaded necklace placed about its neck, and certain rites were conducted. The necklace was then removed and placed in a temple until the child came of age, when the child would then proceed in some type of ecclesiastical training. It was never doubted the child would

become a priest; the Aztecs believed that the child's soul was caught in the beads, and that the soul would draw the child to the temple inexorably without regard to the will of the child. Similarly, if a child was to become a great warrior, it was decided at birth and similar ceremonies were carried out. Interestingly, these decisions about a child's future were made by the parents soon after birth. Therefore, from the moment a child was brought into the world she was surrounded by religion. The religion of the Aztecs was a complex one, but is generally characterized as polytheistic, based on the worship of a multitude of personal gods.

It is interesting that the Aztecs attempted to incorporate the gods of conquered people into their religion; this was accomplished by considering the conquered peoples' gods simply as manifestations of the gods they already worshipped. Similarly, often in the lower Aztec classes people would create whole gods out of what was generally considered only a manifestation of an attribute of a single god (Caso 6-9). There is a dual creative principle found throughout the Aztec culture, split not surprisingly between the masculine and the feminine. This dual creative principle was expressed in the form of two gods, Ometecuhtli, "two lord," and Omecihuatl, "two lady." Both resided in Omeyocan, meaning "the place two" (Caso 9). Aztec gods were created when Ometecuhtli and Omecihuatl had four sons, to whom they entrusted the creation of the other gods, the world, and man. The sons were named Red Tezcatlipoca, also called Xipe or Camaxtle; Black Tezcatlipoca, commonly called Tezcatlipoca; Quetzlcoatl, the god of wind and life; and Huitzilopochtli, the Blue Tezcatlipoca.

It is surmised that in ancient times Quetzlcoatl was replaced by a White Tezcatlipoca (Moctezuma 1988). One of the fundamental concepts in the Aztec religion was the grouping of all beings according to the four compass directions and the central direction of up and down. Ometecuhtli (heaven) and Omecihuatl (earth) represented the central direction of up and down; this symbolizes the heavens and the earth. Their four sons were each associated with a different color and a different compass point. Black Tezcatlipoca was associated with the North, Blue Tezcatlipoca with the South, Red Tezcatlipoca with the East, and Quetzlcoatl with the West. Animals, trees, days, and also men and women were grouped in this manner. Men, according to the day on which they were born, belonged to one of the four regions of the world.

Aztec mythology states that the world has been created several times, and eventually each creation is followed by a cataclysm that has destroyed mankind. This was necessary, they believed, because rarely is anything perfected on the first essay. Thus, they could not have a perfect creation after the first try.

There are two Aztec myths that clearly illustrate two main tenets of Aztec culture. The first myth centers on Quetzlcoatl. The myth says that if man was to live, he must reciprocate by offering his own blood in sacrifice. This is because man came about from Quetzcoatl making a sacrifice. Sacrifice was essential in Aztec religion, for if no man could exist except through the creative force of the gods, the gods in turn need man to sustain them with human sacrifice. The second myth helps explain the warlike tendencies of the Aztecs. As explained by Caso, according to legend, Coatlicue, the old <https://assignbuster.com/a-the-frozen-bering-strait-migrated-southward-through/>

goddess of the earth, became a priestess in the temple living a life of chastity after having given birth to the moon and stars. One day when she was sweeping, Coatlicue came across a ball of down which she tucked into her waistband.

When she finished sweeping, she looked for the ball of down but realized it was gone and that she was pregnant. When her children Coyolxauhqui, the moon, and Centzonhuitznahuac, the stars, discovered this they became angry and decided to kill their mother. Coatlicue wept over her impending death, but the presence in her womb consoled her. When Coyolxauhqui and Centzonhuitznahuac came to slay her, Huitzilopochtli was born, and with the aid of the serpent of fire (sun's rays) he cut off Coyolxauhqui's head and sent Centzonhuitznahuac fleeing.

Thus, when Huitzilopochtli was born he had to do combat with his brothers the stars and his sister the moon; armed with the serpent of fire he drove them away, his victory signifying a new a new day of life for men. When Huitzilopochtli consummated his victory, he was carried across the sky on a litter by the spirits of warriors who have died either in combat or on the sacrificial stone. Later, in the early afternoon, Huitzilopochtli was picked up by the spirits of women who perished in childbirth. They then lead the sun to its setting. Each day this divine combat is begun anew, and thus Huitzilopochtli must be strong if he is to defeat all of this brothers with only his arrows of light.

To accomplish this task, Huitzilopochtli must be strong, nourished by human blood. Huitzilopochtli is a god, and disdains the coarse food of humans; he

desires chalchihuatl, the precious liquid. Thus the Aztecs, the people of Huitzilopochtli, are charged with the duty of supplying him with food. Thus, for the Aztecs, war was an integral part of their diurnal routine.

War became almost a form of worship of Huitzilopochtli. Their belief that Huitzilopochtli depended on them for chalchihuatl led the Aztecs to establish the Xochiyaoyotl, or "flowery war." The sole purpose of the Xochiyaoyotl was to take prisoners to sacrifice to the sun. Therefore, each Aztec god required his own sacrifices. This led to an unusual culture: one refined, yet with an accepted level of brutality that is still unsurpassed. The Aztecs conducted an interesting ceremony called Toxcatl in the sixth month. A young warrior, most likely captured through Xochiyaoyotl, was selected for his godlike qualities: smooth skin, good looks, and poise among others. He was then trained for an entire year in how to conduct himself as a personage of the court.

He was taught how to play clay pipes, and was given an entourage to attend to him as though he were a lord. Dressed in the attire of the gods, this impersonator of Tezcatlipoca would stroll the streets smoking fine tobacco from gilded reed pipes carrying a bouquet of flowers. Any citizens who met him on the street held him in as high of an esteem as the king himself. Twenty days before the celebration of the festival, his dress was changed to that of a great captain.

He was married to four young maidens, incarnations of the wives of the god of providence: Xochiquetzal, Xilonen, Atlatonan, and Huixtocihuatl. When the day of the festival finally came, banquets, ceremonies, and dances were held

in honor of the youth. The entire population praised him, commoners and nobles alike. Suddenly, he was taken with his wives and court to a small, neglected temple on the shore of a lake. Here, his wives and entourage left him. Left with but a few pages and his clay pipes, he was escorted to the base of the temple. Here, even the pages left him.

He ascended the temple steps alone. On each of the steps, he broke one of his flutes, symbolizing his passed grandeur. Finally, atop the temple he was seized by four priests and stripped of his remaining finery. Each of his arms and legs was seized by a priest, and the young man was stretched atop an altar resembling a flattened cylinder, with his chest thrust high in the air. A fifth priest, in a plunging motion, thrust an obsidian knife into the young man's chest. The priest then reached in through the wound and tore out the young man's heart. Toxcatl had a moral: it was to instruct people that those who enjoy wealth and pleasures in this life will end in poverty and sorrow (Caso 69).

Toxcatl is just one example of Aztec sacrifice. Captured warriors were painted with red and white stripes, in imitation of the astral gods, and sacrificed in the same way. The emptied corpses were then taken to the captors houses " for dismemberment and distribution: flesh scraped from the skulls and thighbones; fragments of flesh cooked and eaten; human skins, dripping with grease and blood, stretched over living flesh; clots of blood scooped up to smear the temple walls" (Clendinnen 261). For the Aztecs, however, these were more than just grotesque rituals. The flesh was eaten atop whole dried maize kernels; to them, the flesh but was a different form of matter in the vegetable cycle (Clendinnen 209). To the Aztecs, the victims

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were the incarnation of the god whose attire they wore; thus, the eating of the flesh was a most sacred communion (Caso 75). The skins of the victims were often worn until decomposition occurred; the removal of the skin was a happy event.

This served to remind the Aztecs of the bitterness of the experience of death. In general, however, human skins were worn to this extreme only after one occasion: The Feast of the Flaying of Men. Other sacrificial methods were practiced as well: some men were tethered to a framework and riddled with arrow until they no longer could stand; some men were burned in sacrifices to the gods of fire; some men were flayed alive and the priest dressed in his skin; some men were decapitated; and some fought in gladiator matches. In these matches, the prisoner was bound and armed with a wooden sword, its usual blades of obsidian replaced with feathers. The prisoner was also given four cudgels of pine. Four expert Aztec warriors, two each from the Jaguar and Eagle clans, would come fight the prisoner one at a time. Should these four fail to vanquish their foe, a fifth man was brought out, always left-handed and thus extremely powerful to slay the prisoner.

This cycle continued until the prisoner was finally exterminated (Bray 1968). To the Aztecs family was very important. The family was an important part of survival. The man was a house builder and a farmer or craftsman while the woman prepared food, cared for the children, made clothes, and looked after the livestock. Aztecs thought that marriage without children was incomplete and thus barren women were looked down upon and scorned.

The aims of an average Aztec was to have a respected position in the community, a happy family life, and a marriage with children. The birth of a child was an important event. Every important event was always accompanied with speeches in Aztec life. As soon as the baby was born, the midwife would give the baby a speech while she cut the umbilical cord. In the speech she explained to the baby what its duties would be in life. If the infant was a boy he would be told that he would be a warrior whose mission was to feed the Sun with the blood of enemies and if the infant was a girl she was to spend her days doing household chores and help the family. In about four days the father would call an astrologer to read the child's horoscope and determine the appropriate day for the naming ceremony.

After a naming ceremony, the name was announced and the news was spread by little boys who ran through the streets shouting. Each child had a calendrical name taken from the day of birth and also a personal name which belonged to him alone (Bray 1969). Education was considered extremely important.

Even from an infant to age four the child was taught with 'quite words'. At age four, practical instruction was given under the watchful eyes of the elders. For example the child was taught all the words of the things he would carry in a basket. He would learn to carry things for his mother and go with his father to the local markets. For girls education was really training for marriage. She would be shown how to make thread and use it.

At age 14 she would learn to weave a loom. She was also taught how to make cloth to support the family. Self control and obedience was taught at

home and punishments were severe. Boys were beaten, pricked with maguey spines, then tied hand and foot and laid naked on the wet ground for a whole day, or else were held over a fire of chili peppers and made to inhale the bitter smoke. Girls were too pricked or held over the fire, being forced to rise before dawn and to spend the whole day cleaning the home and sweeping the street outside (Bray 1968).

In many other ways children were made to feel inferior. A ruler's daughter was made to walk around and never look up from the ground. She was to never talk while eating and must keep absolute silence. Maidens could not go outside the house without guards.

Young unmarried women could never see their father without permission and every time they saw him they would give him presents and gifts they had made. None laughed in his presence and all acted very soberly and modestly (Bray 1969). The choice of who to marry was left up to the man alone. Women had no choice of who they could marry. The two families would arrange and organize the marriage ceremony. The man who was going to get married was released from school and the school gave him many gifts. Now the young youth was considered a man.

The girl who was usually 16, spent most of her time in preparing food for the big event. Marriage ceremonies were held in a house during the night with many people present (usually about 150). The marriage rite took place and the couple were perfumed with incense and were then presented with traditional gifts.

Then they were joined by a match-maker by the young mans cloak and then they were man and wife. The party continued until the young people were tired and the old people were drunk. Then on the fifth day after the marriage ceremony, there was another party in celebration of the married couple (Bray 1969). Polygamy was very common among the Aztecs. This was very important in the survival of the nation because so many males were killed in wars and in sacrifices. Also alliances were made in this way for diplomatic reasons.

If you committed adultery the punishment was death by stoning or strangulation. The person accused had the choice between the two types of punishment. The social structure of the Aztecs is very interesting.

A person called the Great Speaker was the supreme ruler. The son of the Great Speaker not always was the heir. It was a Council of Wise Men- very similar to the Roman Senate- that decided in a democratic way who would be the next ruler of Tenochtitlan. In a way, the election of the Great Speaker was very similar to the election of the Byzantine Emperor (coincidentally, these two cultures are contemporary, the Byzantine ending years before the discovery of America). Once the Great Speaker was elected, he was obeyed in everything, since he was the represented of the god Huitzilopochtli on the Earth.

The Great Speaker was also head of the government, and the main priest of the Great Temple. This curious selection process is due, according to several investigators basing themselves in legends and Aztec tales, to the fact that the first Aztec Ruler Acamapichtli (1376), had for a main wife a woman called

Ilanqueitl, daughter of the lord of a nearby town. This girl was sterile, which caused that the Aztec Lords offered their daughters to him and he also took his women slaves as companions. Logically, this caused that more than one resulted pregnant of the Aztec King and each one claimed the right of carrying the future heir in their wombs. When the majority of the sons of Acamapichtli were old enough, the Emperor ordered a group of priests and great warriors to gather to decide who would the next Great Speaker be.

This originated the birth of the Council of Wise Men, whose members would be the greatest warriors and the wisest priests. Their selection was also democratic since these were also elected by their own Calpullis - we will talk about these later -. This selection process lasted all the time the Aztec Empire lasted. This way never did a dynasty exist (sometimes the Great Speaker was a close relative of the one before, as Moctezuma was Ahuizotl's nephew) of Aztec families, preventing with this the aging of the civilization, just like it happened with the Czars in Russia and the kings in France.

The heart of the Mexica Empire was the Calpulli. Even before the empire existed, the Calpulli existed already. This was generally formed by relatives or people of the same profession, in this manner there were Calpullis for priests, warriors, carpenters, clay workers, etc...

Each Calpulli was a form of autonomous government, with its own Speaker or governor, who was elected by the oldest men living in the Calpulli. Just to give us an idea, we will say that each Calpulli had its own school, its own temple, and if the Calpulli was important sometimes it had its own garrison. In the Aztec society there were no closed societies. Anyone could get to be a

member of the Council of Wise Men. Though, only the men belonging to the nobility could be Great Speakers. There is an Aztec story that narrates how a Tlaxcalteca, Najahuatzin- called the same way as the god who gave life to the Fifth Sun-, was caught by Moctezuma stealing wood from his private forest. When Nanahuatzin answered honestly, Moctezuma awarded him by naming him Main Voice. This story shows how even the poorest people could reach the highest levels in the Aztec society.

This was the reason why the Aztecs were able to control and dominate the largest empire in all of North America and one of the largest worldwide. An Aztec custom consisted in that the Great Speaker, once elected, was no longer human and was a god from then on. In fact, each Aztec Great Speaker was worshiped in the Temple Mayor. The Aztec protocol was that nobody could look directly to the emperor, nor talk or hear him. That is why there was a spokesman who relayed what his lord had said to the subjects and what these would respond to the emperor. Though, in cases of emergency, the king talked directly to his Council (Leon-Portilla 1992, & Hassig 1988).

The Aztecs' main food was corn. The corn was generally ground into flour and then made into masa or dough, which they made into tortillas, drinks, tamales, among other foods. Other foods in the Aztecs' diet were the seeds from the sage plant which were used as cereal; spicy peppers, eggs, turkey, rabbit, dog, lizards, locusts, snails, fish eggs, and as a delicacy, green slime which was scooped off the top of lake Texcoco. That was said to taste like cheese. For drink the Aztecs usually drank water and on special occasions they drank beer and nobles drank chocolate sweetened with honey. Foods

today in Mexico have some basic components of the Aztec fare such as corn, which is still at the heart of the meal.

That is, today corn products are still widely eaten. This can be seen in the tortilla, a round flat sheet of corn that you find in almost every meal in a present day Mexican table; or the tamale, a lump of corn masa containing meat, wrapped in corn husks, and steamed. Both are Aztec foods. Hence, the blend of the Aztec and Spanish cultures can be seen very clearly in food. For instance, it is a common rural Mexican tradition to make tamales, an Aztec food for Christmas, a Catholic holiday. Another example is the fact that tamales are often filled with beef, a product unknown to the Aztecs until the arrival of the Spanish.

Even the method in which the meals were prepared: the corn is ground on a metate, made into masa, which is rolled into a ball and flattened, then placed on a comal cooking sheet and cooked, is still being practiced in remote country locations. In the city people eat much as they do here in the United States (Baumann 1995. And Nicholson 1985). Cultivating the soil was the main way of life. In the Aztec society farmers were generally field workers who prepared the earth, breaking up clumps, hoeing with the coa digging stick, leveling, planting, weeding, and irrigating. They understood the rotations and had to read almanacs so they could determine when it was time for planting.

They made the construction of canals to bring water from mountain springs to the towns and fields of the piedmont and foothills. Calculations have shown that the flow of water through this system was insufficient to have

maintained farming throughout the year (Bray 1968). The amount of decoration on a garment indicated wealth and social rank of the wearer. Rich people had clothes made of cotton while poorer people had clothes made from maguey fibers. Aztec men wore a cloth around their hips and a cloak that was knotted around one shoulder.

The women wore a sleeveless blouse and a wraparound skirt. The amount of decoration around the garment indicated the wealth and social rank of the wearer. Most of the Aztec homes were simple and designed for usefulness rather than for looks. In the upper mountain regions the houses were adobe but in the lowlands they had thatched roofs and walls made of branches and leaves. Usually in the same yard around the house a family had other buildings such as a place to put their tools and a place for their animals. Wealthy Aztecs had large adobe or stone houses with a large patio built around the house. The yard was usually large and the servants were housed in a separate building (Weaver, 1972).

The art of speaking was interwoven with teaching, as the learning of technical skills. Historical accounts, the reciting of stories and poetry, the conduct of law suits, and matters of trade were conducted orally. To be educated was to be a master of oral expression, for people were expected to present artful speeches on all sorts of occasions, both public and private. With all the etiquette required by the highest formalized pattern of Aztec life. Aztec hieroglyphic writing served to communicate names, places, dates, and tallies in association by a system of dots.

The language spoken by the Aztecs was called Nahuatl. This language was one of the most popular ones before the Spanish Conquest because it was the spoken language of the most important race in the prehispanic world: the Mexica or Azteca. Some of the peculiar characteristics of this language, was that it had 23 different sounds: 5 vowels and 18 consonants, divided into 9 primaries and 9 secondaries. For some strange reason our ancestry of the Aztec basically used only the 9 primary consonants, that were considered as sacred sounds; The other 9 secondary consonants appeared only in the regular language of this Mexicatl country (the country around the Aztec empire). An example of this is the poetry Nezahualcoyotl lord and philosopher of Texcoco.

The Nahuatl alphabet is described briefly below. The Aztec have always been warriors, since their time as the Mexica to the time of their demise. The Aztecs at first were known as dirty barbarians so they were not allowed to settle with the present tribes of Central Mexico. Why did the Aztecs need to have a great military? To answer this question you must understand Aztec religion and way of life. The Aztecs whole beginning is based on war and their main god Huitlilopochi was based on war.

The Aztecs had no head army or standing army but it was organized for war. War was used to capture prisoners for sacrifice, punish tributary tribes, and gain new territory. The soldiers were trained at a young age by nobles in special schools. In these schools they taught the warriors their goals in war. The goals were to capture prisoners for sacrifice, and depending on the amount captured gave that warrior prowess.

Failure in battle was a disgrace for those who could not accomplish their task and usually led to their sacrifice. The overview of the Aztec military, is that there is no separation of armies, but the whole empire was set on war. The military had specific goals, but if not accomplished meant shame and death. The Aztecs had a very powerful military and only lost to the Spanish due to the myth that the white people were gods (Bray 1968).

Agriculture formed the backbone of the Aztec economy. Corn was the most important crop along with beans, avocados, squashes, potatoes, and tomatoes. The lowlands provided crops such as cotton, papayas, rubber, and cacao. The main agricultural tool was a pointed stick which was used for digging. In the tropical jungle the Aztecs used the slash and burn agriculture which is still used today. They chopped down the trees and burned them along with the shrubs and the ashes fertilized the soil.

Terraces were cut in the mountains up in the highlands to increase the amount of farmland. Huge irrigation systems were made and the farmers used the mud from the bottom of the irrigation systems to help their crops. As a result the Aztecs yielded huge crops which is the main reason why their civilization was so successful (Hodge & Smith 1994). The market place was one of the main centers of Aztec life. The market at Tlatelolco was the largest in the Americas. Hernando Cortes said that as much as 60, 000 people visited the market in a single day.

Here every kind of merchandise was bought and sold. The Aztecs had no money as we know it but it was goods and services that were traded. It was found that some Aztecs used cacao beans as a form of money (Hodge &

Smith 1994). The Aztecs invented the wheel but they never used it in any form of transportation. The wheels were just used in toys. The Aztecs carried all goods on their backs or using animals to carry them (Nicholson 1985). We still know very little about the Aztecs. Research is always uncovering new ideas and data giving us new insights into the Aztec culture and way of life.

It is interesting how a people so far away from the known civilization at that time developed a political and economic system similar to the system used in Europe and Asia. The Aztec society was a brutal one yet it was one of the most successful societies in Central America until the intrusion of the Spanish in 1519. Their successfulness was can from their religion which demanded that the Aztecs to always be dominant, brutal adversaries. Even though their religion was the dominant theme in setting the Aztecs apart from other civilizations, they were also unique in their history, economy, environment, and way of life. In studying the Aztecs, we are in a way actually studying ourselves and human history. Only by studying ourselves are we able to overcome our mistakes and make this world a better place.

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[hmcb. edu/sbootnru/aztec. htm"; http://www2. hmcb. edu/sbootnru/aztec. htm; font size=" 3"; AppendixThe Gods1. Quetzalcoatl \(The Plumed Serpent\): John Goss. Patron of wisdom, patron of the priesthood.](#)

[As Ehecatl, god of the wind; as Tlahuizcalpantechtli, god of Venus as the morning star. As Ce Acatl* \(One Reed\), a warrior. Special friend and patron of mankind, inventor of writing and the calendar. Reputed to have opposed human sacrifice, but this was likely an invention to please the Catholic priests. 2. Tezcatlipoca \(The Smoking Mirror\): Herbert North, Jr. Patron of war and warriors, sower of discord, rewarder of the valiant; highly capricious, unpredictable. Often seen as a dual opposite of Quetzalcoatl.](#)

[He had many synonyms: Itzli \(knife\), Itzlacolihqui \(curved flint knife\), Yaotl \(enemy\), and many more. 3. Xipe Totec \(Our Lord the Flayed?\): David Hallsten.](#)

[Perhaps the most mysterious of the Teotl: usually assumed to be the patron of springtime and planting, he also probably has sexual/fertility connotations. In the story he is identified as synonymous with the plant god group including Cinteotl \(corn god\), Xochipilli \(Flower Prince\) and Macuilxochitl \(Five-flower\). 4.](#)

[Tlaloc \(Land-lier\): Frank Wasserman. The God of Rain, purely and simply. The source of the name is obscure. Always pictured with fangs and eye-rings, he has no common synonyms. 5. Huehuateotl \(Old, old God\): the Old Man, Old One of the Fire, Eduardo Arias. Also known as Xiuhtecuhtli \(Precious Lord\), he is the ancient fire god, sometimes identified with the creator-diety Ometeotl \(Dual God\).](#)

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6. Xolotl (Monster): the phantom. Sorcerer, dog-face god, twin to Quetzalcoatl; he is identified with Venus as the evening star, and as Quetzalcoatl's Nagual. In the story, he is also considered a dualistic twin to Tezcatlipoca. 7. Patecatl (He from the Medicine-Land): Patecatl.

Patron of medicines, pulque god. 8. Mixcoatl (Cloud Serpent): Sam Cloud. Patron of hunters, Quetzalcoatl's father in his incarnation as Ce Acatl*.

9. Xiuhnel and Mimich (True Turquoise and Arrow Fish): Shownell and Mims. Sacrificial gods, followers of Mixcoatl. 10. Tonatiuh (Heat-giver): Tonatiuh.

The sun-god, originally the "scabby" god Nanahuatzin, who sacrificed himself in fire to become the Fifth Sun. Many authors identify Nanahuatzin with Xolotl, and a few of the old sources say he was Quetzalcoatl's son, but these identifications are not used in the stories. His "date name" is Nahua Ollin* (four movement). 11.

Huitzilopochtli (Hummingbird From the Left?): Huitzilopochtli. God of War and personal deity of the Aztecs; he was probably unknown before their dynasty began. 12. Mictlantecuhtli (Dead-Land Lord): Mictlantecuhtli.

God of the dead, nearly identical to the Roman Pluto. 13. Yohualltecuhtli (Night-Lord): Yohualltecuhtli. Lord of Night, or of the "Temple of the Night"; usually considered a personification of the night sun, that is, the sun below the horizon.

In the stories, he takes Mictlantecuhtli's place as the possessor of the bones of mankind. 14. Tecciztecatl (He from the Innermost Twist of the Conch Shell): Tecciztecatl. Lunar deity, personification of the moon; an upstart sun, his face was darkened when a rabbit was thrown into it. The Goddesses: 1. Chalchihuitlicue (Jade Skirts): Evelyn Wasserman.

Goddess of terrestrial water, rivers, lakes, oceans. In Tlaxcala, she was called Matlalcueyeh (Green Skirt). Spence identifies her as Chimalma (Shield Hand), the mother of Quetzalcoatl in his incarnation as Ce Acatl*.

2. Xochiquetzal (Flower Feather): Susan Hallsten. Goddess of love, beauty, and flowers. Patroness of marriages and perhaps surprisingly, of prostitutes. 3.

Tlazolteotl (Lust-Goddess): Kathryn Phillips. Goddess of sex, with earth and lunar attributes. She was the "eater of sins" to whom the Aztecs confessed their transgressions. Also known as Toci (grandmother), Teteo Innan (mother of the gods), Ixcuina (Four-face), and many other names. She was consistently seen as the mother of Cinteotl, the corn god. 4. Mayauel (translation ?): Mayauel. Goddess of the Maguey (Agave americana), pulque, and all intoxicants thereby.

Original bringer of love to mankind (with Quetzalcoatl). 5. Xilonen (Young corn mother): Xilonen. Corn goddess, in her aspect as the young and tender corn; as adult, she was known as Chicomecoatl* (Seven serpent) or as Chalchiuhcihuahatl (Precious Woman). In old age, as Ilamatecuhtli (Old Princess).

Female sacrifices in old Mexico were often called Xilonen. 6. Cihuacoatl (Snake Woman): Cihuacoatl, Selinde Llorona. Earth mother, variously identified with Coaticue (Serpent Skirt), Tonantzin (Our Mother), and very possibly with the Virgin of Guadalupe, whose shrine stands on the ancient ground sacred to Tonantzin. Some writers say she is to be identified as Toci and Teteo Innan (see Tlazolteotl, above). She is also Quilaztli, who with Quetzalcoatl formed the new men and women after the birth of the Fifth Sun. 7.

[Itzpapalotl \(Obsidian Butterfly\): Liz Cloud. Chichimec goddess \(the Chichimecs where the hunting tribes ancestral to the Aztecs and probably to the Toltecs\), with fire, celestial, and definitely hunting aspects. 8. Mictlancihuatl \(Dead-land Woman\): Mictlancihuatl. Goddess of the dead, wife of Mictlantecuhtli. 9.](#)

[Tzitzimitl \(Air Demon\): Tzitzimitl. Celestial demon goddess, whose origin was in the stars; a peculiar goddess of inertia, the only Aztec deity lacking a beneficent aspect. She is either multiple in or has minions known as Tzitzimeme, who are prevented by an ancient spell of Tlazolteotl's from devouring mankind; they are still perceived as dangerous during eclipses.](#)