

Exploring the Aztec empire



Teacher's Notes



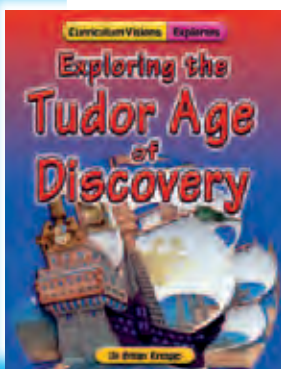
Dr Brian Knapp

Introduction

I hope the video that started the CD worked for you. It is one of hundreds that can be accessed at www.curriculumvisions.com by subscription.

(If you had any trouble, did you remember to load the plug-in needed to run it, called quicktime? If you are running Windows and Internet Explorer, then you might have missed the flashing bar that comes up to ask you if you want to allow it. Do allow the plug-in. It is quite safe. Alternatively, download it from www.quicktime.com.)

The video can only be presented on a CD, of course, and at the same time we put the notes into



A still from the Aztecs classroom cinema.

pdf format, thereby doing our bit to reduce wastes of paper and world energy. We hope you approve of this small step to help the environment.



A still from the Aztecs classroom cinema.

AZTECS 1. People Curriculum Visions
Screen 2/3

Aztec classes

The Aztecs had a highly ordered world. It was controlled by an emperor.

Below him were nobles, then ordinary people and finally slaves.

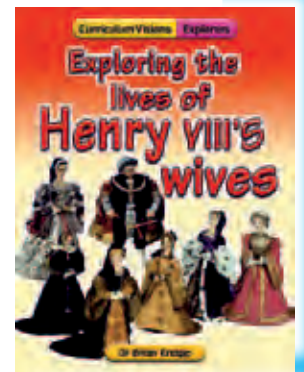
They dressed according to their rank, with nobles wearing fine clothes and ordinary people wearing just simple clothes.

Nobles lived in two storey houses, whereas ordinary people lived in

VISIT THE CINEMA
Click the picture to find out more.
Q: How could you tell a noble from other people?

1. The upper classes wore their hair up and had feathered headdresses. They wore clothes of cotton and had elaborate ornaments.

One of the Aztec pages online, with the captioned picture (inset)



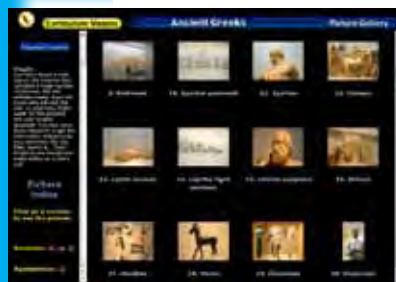
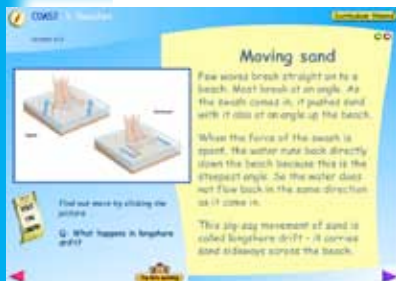
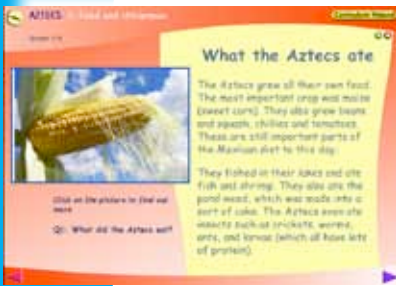
A word about Explorers

Curriculum Visions Explorers are part of our concept of surround learning. By this we mean that we think students learn best if they have a wealth of different resources to benefit from. But this does not mean a collection of disparate resources. Our resources are all integrated, so students can be guided seamlessly between them.

Here is some information on the resources currently available to teach about the Aztec empire and to provide a 'surround learning' environment which will benefit as wide an ability range as possible:

- 1 *The Aztec empire* student class book is a 32-page Curriculum Visions Explorers title.
- 2 You are reading the *Teacher's Notes* that accompany this class book.
- 3 Every topic discussed in the student book is paralleled and elaborated on in videos, still picture sequences and sound in the online website.

If you subscribe to the website your school gets access to all subjects, not just this one, so it is a cost-effective investment. The snapshot pictures on these pages give you an idea of what to expect. All in all we think it is the best support material you can find anywhere and it fully integrates with our books.



If some students need special help from classroom assistants, then they can work through the topic again online, have the text read out and so on. It is also ideal for teachers covering lessons or for students who have missed lessons.

Books and website work together to engage those who would find simply learning from books a challenge to their attention span.

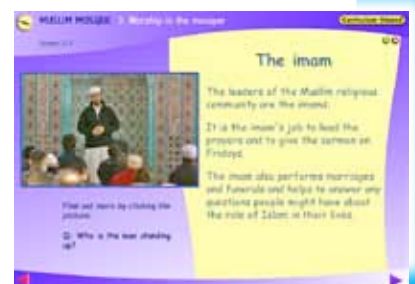
Surround learning

‘Surround learning’ from Curriculum Visions is a unique combination of class books and online resources that work together to provide a ‘surround learning’ environment for your classroom.

Online: The website is an affordably-priced subscription gateway to videos, picture galleries and courses in Geography, History, RE, Science and Spelling. Engage a wide ability range. Plan your teaching at home using our 24/7 access.

Off-line: Full-colour class books, CDs, posters and teacher’s guides with photocopiable masters. Choose from over 300 products in our online bookstore. All of these products integrate with our online courses.

There has never been a better way to support your teaching of the QCA.



Notes to accompany the book

The following pages contain notes about the pictures and text on the pages. They do NOT contain photocopiables for ‘The Aztec empire’, but you can copy and use any of the illustrations in these notes to make your own worksheets.

If you want to show a class the spread of the book while they each have their own copy in front of them, then enlarge the pictures shown on each of the following pages or use the interactive books on the website.

It is not intended that you should be able to read the text from these pages. They are simply visual guides so that you can easily point to a part of a page that students can then look at in their own books. You can find many other pictures and additional information on the Aztec empire at the website The home screen for ‘Aztec’ is shown below.





Did you know ... ?

- The Aztecs were frightened to look at! They painted their skin and wore often covered in warlike objects they had become themselves. They probably wore dark cloaks, necks with shells, and tall headdresses of feathers. Their hair was long – a girl's could not cut or comb her hair – and was stiff with the blood from many sacrifices.

Meet the Aztecs

The Aztecs were one of the great North American civilisations. Today the most powerful people in North America live in the United States, but this is a quite recent change.

Before the arrival of Europeans, the most powerful civilisations lived in what is now Mexico.

They influenced both South and Central America by their trade and conquests.

The land that the Aztecs came to rule was powerful and rich. Many people lived there. At the time of the Aztecs there were more people living in their great city called

Tenochtitlan (great wetland Mexico City) than in any city in Europe.

The Aztecs rose to power over many centuries but their civilisation crumbled away in just a few short months. This is a unique story that you will read about in this book. First, let us meet the Aztecs.



The Aztecs had a highly ordered society that was very hierarchical. They were also known for their art, astronomy and dance.

Where did the Aztecs live?

The Aztecs lived in modern day Mexico and central America in the 13th, 14th and 15th centuries. They called themselves Mexicas and this is where the word Mexico comes from.

The Aztec empire is a deceptively complex subject in that the Aztec empire was very different from other empires, such as the Roman Republic. The Aztecs did not occupy and directly govern conquered areas. Instead, the Aztec empire really consisted of a series of alliances and tribute-paying city states, the Aztecs themselves lived primarily in only one area. You may want to begin by discussing other empires that the children may already be familiar with, such as ancient Rome or the British empire.

Aztec civilisation was very vibrant and complex. The Aztecs built huge pyramid temples and large cities and ruled a large empire. They had a complicated calendar system and practised sophisticated arts and crafts.

The Aztecs began as poor and ignorant immigrants into the Valley of Mexico. No one knows where they came from but when they arrived in the Valley of Mexico they had no power, no land or wealth and only a very simple society,

But they decided they would learn all they could and build up a great civilisation and that is exactly what they did. The Aztecs took what they saw as the best parts of the societies around them and adapted it for themselves. Their civilisation was a combination of the knowledge, skills and religions of all the other civilisations around them.

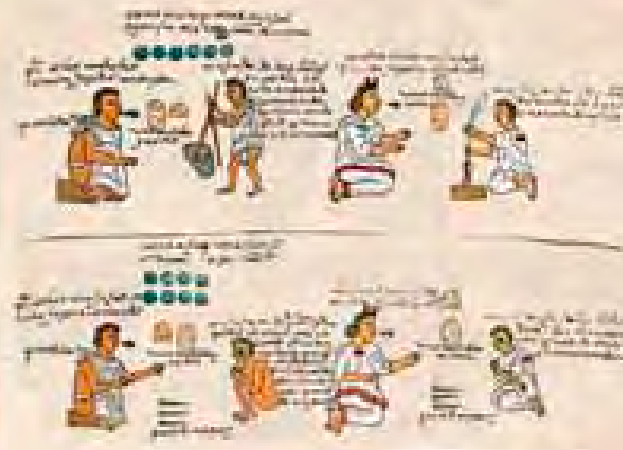
You may also want to draw the children's attention to the timeline on pages 2–3 of the student book. Although the Mexica arrived in the Valley of Mexico towards the end of the 12th century, the high point of Aztec civilisation came between around 1300 and 1500 – this civilisation flourished for only about 200 years. You may like to ask the children what event occurred shortly after 1500 that led to the destruction of the Aztec empire, and how this event affected other peoples in the Americas.

You may also like to point out that the Aztecs did not disappear – millions of modern Mexicans are descended from the Aztec peoples and many of their rituals and beliefs are still practised in some form.

How do we know about the Aztecs?

Today there is almost nothing left from Aztec times. So, how do we know about them? The answer is that the Aztecs had scribes who kept records and made paintings showing their way of life. Little bits and pieces of them still survive and some are shown on this page. The Aztecs were conquered by the Spanish. The Spanish also wrote about the life of the Aztecs and made paintings of them.

This painting shows the cities the Aztecs conquered. To show they were conquered the Aztecs drew the temples together like one huge pyramid.



There are no children in school being taught to read and also being shown crafts and how to farm. The only thing scribes can do is count on 'square holes'. What can you guess will be used for the counting?

Did you know... ?

- The Aztecs did not use letters to write. Instead they used small pictures called **glyphs**. This is similar to the ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs. The glyphs were used to transmit the present and other people of the nation that they had learned from their fathers by word of mouth. (The writing you see here was added later by Spanish.)



This fragment of paper about a maize deposit is an unusual find.

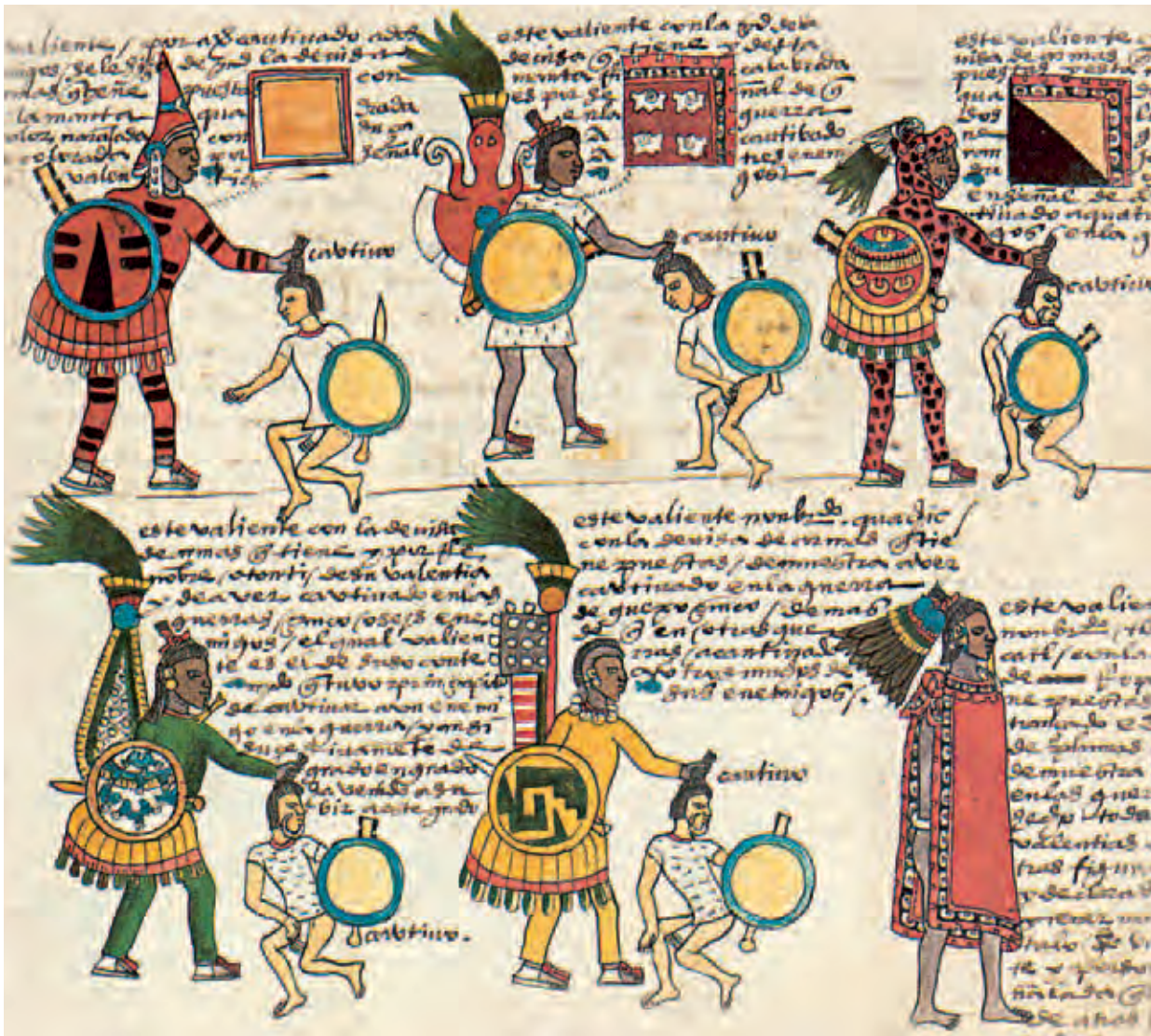
Q What did the Aztecs use for writing?

The Aztecs had a complex written language, and a huge number of documents once existed. Although most Aztec written documents were destroyed by the Spanish priests, there were so many that a few did survive.

The Aztec language was called Nahuatl. The Aztecs wrote using symbols similar to the characters used by the Chinese. All the symbols were pictures of one kind or another. Each symbol stood for an idea, as well as a sound. They had hundreds of different symbols to use in their vocabulary.

These symbols were not placed in sequence, one after the other like the letters and words in a book, but formed part of a larger composition which often took the form of a scene in which many things may be happening at once. An Aztec manuscript is not read in the normal sense of the word, but is deciphered like a puzzle picture in which the pictures provide labels and clues to what is going on. The lower part of

the picture generally represents the ground, while the upper is the sky. Since the Aztecs had not discovered the rules of perspective, distance is shown by placing the furthest figures at the top of the page and the nearest at the bottom. Relative importance is indicated by size: a victorious king, for example, may be drawn larger than his defeated enemy. All figures are in profile, with no three-quarter views or fore-shortening.



Every item in a composition is there to give information, either directly or by implication, and the painter assumes that the person examining the document is familiar with the insignia of rank, the costumes appropriate to the various classes, and the iconography of the different gods.

A priest, for instance, is always depicted with his face painted black, his hair long, and his ear-lobe stained red from blood-letting. He can thus be recognised as a priest even when dressed in warrior costume or plain garb. In the same way, an old person can be recognised by the lines which represent the wrinkles on his face.

Colour was very important in Aztec writing. The signs for grass, canes, and rushes look very much the same in black and white, but in colour there could be no mistake. A ruler could be recognised at once from the shape of his diadem and from its colour – turquoise – which was reserved for royal use.

Aztec writing was mainly done by priests or scribes. They were the only ones who could read the pictures.

The Aztecs wrote about their history and religious ceremonies. Poetry was also a popular topic. To write, the scribes first sketched the outline with charcoal. The pictures were then brightly coloured with vegetables, minerals, and crushed insects and shells. The main colours were red, blue, green, and yellow, and the pigments were sometimes mixed with an oil to give added lustre.

Of the great mass of paperwork that once existed, hardly anything remains. Some are copies of earlier works, while others are written in Aztec script with Spanish or Nahuatl commentaries in European letters.

Each book, called codex, consists of a strip, anything up to 13 metres in length and some 16cm high, made



of paper, maguey cloth, or deer skin, and folded in zigzag or concertina fashion like a modern map, so that wherever the user opened it he was confronted by two pages.

The ends of the strip were glued to thin plaques of wood which served as covers and were sometimes decorated with paintings or with discs of turquoise. Both sides of the strip were covered with writing and pictures, and the individual pages were divided into sections by red or black lines.

Each page was normally read from top to bottom, though in some codices the arrangement is zigzag or even goes around the page.

Aztec personal names were descriptive and were usually written as pictures, or glyphs. For example, the name of the Emperor Acamapichtli means 'Handful of Reeds' and his glyph is a forearm with the hand grasping a bundle of stalks. Chimalpopoca, the name of the next ruler but one, means 'Smoking Shield', and his successor was Itzcoatl or 'Obsidian Snake'.

There was also a phonetic element in Aztec writing. Every word in spoken language has a sound as well as a meaning, and glyphs were sometimes used to indicate the phonetic value of a word rather than its sense. Thus, to give an example from English, a drawing of an eye may be a pictogram (meaning the eye as part of the body), or an ideogram (expressing the idea of sight and vision), or a phonogram (standing for the sound 'I').

In the latter case, the eye symbol can be used, as a sort of pun, to indicate the first person singular. For example, it is possible to write the sentence, 'I can be hospitable', as a series of phonetic glyphs: an eye, a tin can, a bee, a horse, a pit or hole, and a table. The Aztecs applied the same technique to the writing of Nahuatl. Pictures were sometimes used for their sound, without reference to their meaning.



Pyramid of the Sun, the Pyramid of the Moon, and the Pyramid of the Quetzalcoatl.

Each of these pyramids would hold a temple on top.

This is the Avenue of the Dead.

The city was built on a plateau in the Valley of Mexico. Around the pyramids were many smaller structures, including palaces and houses. The walls were painted all over with blue and green in geometric patterns. The city also had great roads and a large system of water pipes.



What was this place like when the Aztecs arrived?

Ancestors

The Aztecs came to power in a land rich in history. Many powerful civilisations had come and gone before them. Three thousand years ago, central America was home to the powerful Olmec people. Their civilisation lasted until about 400 BC. Although their power over others faded away,

their way of life carried on, and their successors built the amazing city of Teotihuacan in the Valley of Mexico. It covered an area of over 82 square kilometres and was a place of giant pyramids connected by a central road. This long road is called the 'Avenue of the Dead'.

The Teotihuacan empire lasted for nearly 1,000 years and then it suddenly vanished, just as the Olmecs once had done before it. Although all of these people had vanished by the time of the Aztecs, they were to be very important in the lives of the Aztecs who followed them.

Did you know...?

- The Pyramid of the Sun is one of the great steps.
- It was built over a natural cave.
- On the top was a temple.
- When the Aztecs arrived, Teotihuacan was a ruin. The Aztecs thought of it as a place where gods were made into gods.
- It was the Aztecs who gave it, and its pyramids, the names we use today. Its original name is unknown.

The term Aztec is used to describe the culture that dominated the Valley of Mexico in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Properly speaking, all the Nahuatl-speaking peoples in the Valley of Mexico were Aztecs, while the culture that dominated the area was a tribe of the Mexica called the Tenochca. At the time of the European conquest, they called themselves either 'Tenochca' or 'Toltec'. The earliest we know about the Mexica is that they migrated from the north into the Valley of Mexico as early as the twelfth century CE, well after the close of the Classic Period in Mesoamerica. They were a subject and abject people, forced to live on the worst lands in the valley.

When the Mexica arrived in the Valley of Mexico, there were many city states and groups of people already living there. Most of these were the descendants of earlier empires that had flourished in the area. One of the most successful of these was the Olmec. The Aztecs learned about these people and tried to copy their success.

The Olmec were an ancient pre-Columbian people who lived in the tropical lowlands of south-central Mexico, roughly in what are the modern-day states of Veracruz and Tabasco on the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, but their influence stretched as far as El Salvador. The Olmec flourished from around 1200 BCE to about 400 BCE. The Olmec had a very sophisticated culture. They had writing and had a complicated religion that involved human sacrifice. They also invented the '0' and had a complex and highly accurate calendar. Olmec art was also very sophisticated and beautiful. Most Olmec cities were abandoned by 400 BCE, although no one knows why, but their culture was adopted and altered by other civilisations, such as the Maya.

The Olmec empire extended through much of central Mexico and south as far as Guatemala and Honduras. It reached its height between 150 and 450 CE, when it wielded power and influence comparable to ancient Rome. The population began to decline around 500–600 CE. Drought related to climate change may also have caused the end of the Olmec empire. As the power of Olmec declined, other nearby centres became more powerful.

The Olmec empire is important because the culture they helped to create remained behind long after their power waned. The Mexica would have known about their empires (the peoples living in Mexico knew a good deal about earlier empires because many of them claimed to be descended from them) and would have consciously tried to copy them. In this way, they could claim to be descendants of the Olmec and other peoples, such as the Teotihuacan, and therefore the legitimate leaders of the area.

The arrival of the Aztecs

Some time after the builders of Teotihuacan the Toltecs rose to power.

During their reign the Toltecs quarrelled among themselves and one group was forced from the area. Their priests prophesied that one day they would return on a day named 'One Reed' along with their god who would have a white face. This prophecy was to be very important in the history of all North America (see page 28).

Sometime later the Toltecs were overthrown by another and the remaining cities struggled for power. To get power, each city hired extra soldiers. Some of the soldiers they hired belonged to a tribe of soldiers called the Mexica. The country of Mexico is now named after them.

These people would later call themselves Aztecs.

Over time, the Aztecs arranged marriages between their people and neighbouring city leaders

who were descended from the Olmecs and Toltecs.

In this way, by 1372 the small tribe of soldiers had made themselves into the most powerful people in the Valley of Mexico.

Then the Aztecs changed their history. They rewrote it to say they were descended from the ancient Olmecs and Toltecs.

A ceremonial Aztec mask.



Did you know...?

- The Aztecs were first called the Mexica. The name may come from the word Mexih (the word that grows in Lake Texcoco), because at the time the Mexica originally settled in the Mexico Basin, the only place they were allowed to settle was on an island in the lake. They were not allowed to catch fish, and to avoid starvation they had to eat the water. So the name Mexica could mean "weed people".

What were the first Aztecs called?

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11

The peoples of Mesoamerica distinguished between two types of people: the Toltec (which means 'craftsman'), who continued classic urban culture of the earlier empires, such as the Maya and the Olmec, and the Chichimec, or wild people, who settled in Mesoamerica from the north. The Mexica were originally Chichimec when they migrated into Mexico, but eventually became Toltecs proper.

The history of the Mexica is among the best preserved of the Mesoamericans. They date the beginning of their history to 1168 and their origins to an island in the middle of a lake north of the Valley of Mexico. Their god, Huitzilopochtli, commanded them on a journey to the south and they arrived in the Valley of Mexico in 1248. According to their history, the Mexica were originally peaceful, but their Chichimec ways, especially their practice of human sacrifice, revolted other peoples who banded together and crushed their tribe. In 1300, the Mexica became vassals of the town of Culhuacan; but some settled on an

unwanted and inhospitable island in the middle of the lake. The town they founded was Tenochtitlan, or 'place of the Tenochcas'.

When they arrived at an island in the lake, they saw an eagle perched on a cactus covered in fruits. This vision fulfilled a prophecy telling them that they should found their new home on that spot. The Aztecs built their city of Tenochtitlan on that site. This legendary vision is pictured on the Coat of Arms of Mexico.

The early settlers added to the island in Lake Texcoco by first building log rafts, then covering them with mud and planting seeds to create roots and develop more solid land for building homes in the marshy land. Canals were also cut out through the marsh so that a typical Aztec home had its back to a canal with a canoe tied at the door.

Relations between the Tenochcas and Culhuacan became bitter after the Tenochcas sacrificed a daughter of the king of Culhuacan; so enraged were the Culhuacans that they drove all the Tenochcas from the mainland to the island. There, the Tenochcas who had lived in Culhuacan taught urban culture and architecture to the peoples on the island and the Tenochcas began to build a city.

The Mexica slowly became more powerful and militarily more skilled, so much so that they became allies of choice in the constant conflicts between the various peoples of the area.

By 1376, the Aztecs knew that they had to select an emperor of royal lineage, to gain respect of their neighbours. With political genius, they chose a man by the name of Acamapichtli as their emperor. He was related to the last rulers of Culhuacan, and his lineage extended back in time to the great Toltec ruler Quetzalcoatl. With the selection of Acamapichtli as the Aztecs first true emperor, they were able to claim descendancy from the great Toltecs.

For the next 50 years, until 1427, the Mexica were a tributary of Azcapotzalco, which had become a regional power, perhaps the most powerful since the Toltecs, centuries earlier. When Tezozomoc, the ruler of Azcapotzalco, died in 1426, his son Maxtla ascended to the throne. Shortly thereafter, Maxtla assassinated Chimalpopoca, the Mexica ruler. In an effort to defeat Maxtla, Chimalpopoca's successor, Itzcoatl, allied with the exiled ruler of Texcoco, Nezahualcoyotl. This coalition became the foundation of the Aztec Triple Alliance.

The Triple Alliance of Tenochtitlan (the Aztec city-state), Texcoco, and Tlacopan would, in the next 100 years, come to dominate the Valley of Mexico and extend its power to both the Gulf of Mexico and the Pacific shore. Over this period, the Aztecs gradually became the dominant power in the alliance, and the Triple Alliance territories became known as the Aztec empire.



highlighting important events such as victory in war, planting crops, rainfall or harvest. Priests performed the rituals. They lived in the temple and spent time looking after sacred fires, praying and offering incense. They dyed their bodies black, wore black clothes and never cut their hair.

Religious ceremonies took place in a pyramid-shaped temple called a teocalli. This temple had sacred pools for ceremonial cleansing, gardens, living quarters for the priests, and racks to hold the skulls of victims. Each neighbourhood had its own teocalli.

Priests and priestesses were very important people. They acted as doctors and taught science, art, writing, music, dance, history and counting. They also had to know astronomy and astrology so they could keep track of the many religious days.

The Aztecs believed that the gods gave things to human beings only if they were nourished by human beings. For example, the priests would nourish the gods by drawing their own blood by piercing their tongues, ears, extremities or genitals. Other sacrifices involved prayer, offerings of food, sporting competitions and even dramas. The Aztecs practised all of these types of 'sacrifices'.

According to Aztec myth, at the beginning of the world, darkness covered the Earth. The gods gathered at a sacred place and made a fire. Nanahuatl, one of the gods, leaped into the fire and came out as the Sun. However, before he could begin to move through the sky, the other gods had to give the Sun their blood. This was one of several myths relating how the gods sacrificed themselves to set the world in motion. Through bloodletting and human sacrifice people imitated the sacrifices made by the gods – and kept the Sun alive.

Priests conducted ceremonies at the temples, often with crowds in attendance. With song and dance, masked performers acted



out myths, and the priests offered sacrifices. To prepare for the ceremonies, the priests performed a ritual bloodletting, which involved pulling barbed cords across their tongues or other body parts to draw blood.

Sacrifice was also linked to rebirth. The Aztecs believed that the world had died and been reborn several times and that the gods also died and were reborn. Death was thus balanced by fertility and the celebration of life and growth.

Some sacrifices involved only one victim, others might involve hundreds or thousands of captives. Aztec history claims that king Ahuitzotl (1468–1502) sacrificed 20,000 people after a military victory. In general, captives taken in battle were used for sacrifice. This was the practice of not only the Aztecs, but the Mesoamericans as well. Indeed, from time to time, rural peoples would send out token armies so that, as a result, there would be captives for the sacrificial ceremonies. All the fighters knew this would happen to them if they were defeated, but they also believed that death in this way gave them a place in the afterlife. Similar ideas of martyrdom and afterlife occur with some religions even today. See also page 38 of these notes.

Another important idea in Aztec mythology was that a predetermined fate shaped human lives. The Aztec ball game, about which historians know little, may have been related to this theme. Aztec temples, like those of other peoples throughout Mexico and Central America, had walled courts where teams of players struck a rubber ball with their hips, elbows and knees, trying to drive it through a stone ring. Some historians believe that the game represented the human struggle to control destiny. It was a religious ritual, not simply a sport, and players may have been sacrificed after the game.

Students may also want to study other Aztec gods. As an IT exercise, you may want them to find additional information and pictures of some other gods.

Some additional Aztec gods

Chalchiuhtlicue

In Aztec mythology, Chalchiuhtlicue (also Chalciuhtlicue, or Chalcihuitlicue) ('She of the Jade Skirt') was the goddess of lakes and streams. She was also known as Acuecucyoticihuati, goddess of oceans, rivers and any other running water, as well as the patron of women in labour.

In art, Chalciuhtlicue was shown wearing a green skirt and with short black vertical lines on the lower part of her face. In some scenes babies may be seen in a stream of water issuing from her skirts. When sculpted, she is often carved from green stone.

Chantico

In Aztec mythology, Chantico ('she who dwells in the house') was the goddess of fires in the family hearth and volcanoes. She broke a religious fast by eating paprika with roasted fish, and was turned into a dog. She also wears a crown of poisonous cactus spikes, and takes the form of a red serpent.

Chicomecoatl

In Aztec mythology, Chicomecoatl ('Seven Serpent', also the name of a day of the Aztec calendar) is goddess of food and produce, especially maize and, by extension, goddess of fertility. Every September, she received a sacrifice of a young girl, decapitated. The sacrifice's blood was poured on a statue of Chicomecoatl and her skin was worn by a priest. She is usually shown carrying ears of maize.

Cihuacoatl

In Aztec mythology, Cihuacoatl ('snake woman'; also Chihucoatl, Ciucoatl) was one of many motherhood and fertility goddesses.

Cihuacoatl was especially associated with midwives, and with the sweatbaths where midwives practised. She helped Quetzalcoatl create the current race of humanity by grinding up bones from the previous ages, and mixing it with his blood.

Although she was sometimes depicted as a young woman, she is more often shown as a fierce skull-faced old woman carrying the spears and shield of a warrior. Childbirth was sometimes compared to warfare and the women who died in childbirth were honoured as fallen warriors.

Coatlicue

Coatlicue, also known as Teteoinan ('The Mother of Gods'), is the Aztec goddess who gave birth to the Moon, stars, and Huitzilopochtli, the god of the Sun and war. She is also known as Toci, ('Our Grandmother').

The word Coatlicue is Nahuatl for 'the one with the skirt of serpents'. She is referred to by the epithets 'Mother Goddess of the Earth who gives birth to all celestial things', 'Goddess of Fire and Fertility', 'Goddess of Life, Death and Rebirth' and 'Mother of the Southern Stars'.

She is represented as a woman wearing a skirt of writhing snakes and a necklace made of human hearts, hands and skulls. Her feet and hands are adorned with claws (for digging graves) and her breasts are depicted as hanging flaccid from nursing.

Coyolxauhqui

In Aztec mythology, Coyolxauhqui ('golden bells') was a Moon goddess. She was a daughter of Coatlicue and the ruler of the star gods. She was a powerful magician and led her siblings in an attack on their mother, Coatlicue, because she became pregnant in a shameful way (by a ball of feathers). Coatlicue's foetus, Huitzilopochtli, sprang from her womb in full war armour and

killed Coyolxauhqui, along with many of the brothers and sisters. He cut off her limbs, then tossed her head into the sky where it became the Moon, so that his mother would be comforted in seeing her daughter in the sky every night.

A shield-shaped stone frieze reflecting this story was found at the base of the stairs on the Templo Mayor. Scholars also believe that the decapitation and destruction of Coyolxauhqui is reflected in the pattern of warrior ritual sacrifice. First, captive's hearts were cut out, then they were decapitated, their limbs chopped off, and finally their bodies were cast from the temple.

Ehecatl

In Aztec mythology, Ehecatl ('wind') was the god of wind. His breath moved the Sun and pushed away rain. He fell in love with a human girl named Mayahuel, and gave mankind the ability to love so that she could return his passion.

Huitzilopochtli

His temple (next to that of Tlaloc) on the Main Pyramid was the focus of fearsome sacrifices of prisoners captured by Aztec warriors. He is considered an incarnation of the Sun and struggles with the forces of night to keep mankind alive.

Huitzilopochtli can only be fed by the blood of sacrifice, to sustain him in his daily battle. His temple on the great Pyramid in Tenochtitlan was called Lihuicatl Xoxouqui, or 'Blue Heaven'.

Huitzilopochtli was the most celebrated of the Mexican deities and came to embody the aspirations and accomplishments of the Aztecs. His cult could have been considered the 'state cult' and was a focus of the powerful economic and political system.

As the power of the Aztec empire grew his image was incorporated into the new lands and regions coming under

Mexica control and he assumed new prominence and attributes. His main temple in the Temple Mayor, was set alongside Tlaloc, god of rain, to show that agriculture and warfare were the basis of the Aztec empire.

Mictlantecihuatl

In Aztec mythology, Mictlantecihuatl was the Queen of Mictlan, the underworld. Her purpose is to keep watch over the bones of the dead. She presides over the festivals of the dead (which evolved into the modern Day of the Dead festival in Mexico) and is known as the Lady of the Dead, since it is believed she died at birth.

Mixcoatl

Mixcoatl, meaning 'cloud serpent', was the god of the hunt and was identified with the Milky Way, the stars and the heavens. Mixcoatl was the father of 400 sons, collectively known as the Centzon Huitznahua, who ended up having their hearts eaten by Huitzilopochtli. The Centzon Huitznahua were killed when they, and their sister Coyolxauhqui, after finding their mother Coatlicue pregnant, conspired to kill her. However, as they attacked she gave birth to a fully formed and armed Huitzilopochtli, who killed his half-siblings.

Nanauati

In Aztec mythology, the god Nanauati is the most humble of the gods. He sacrificed himself in fire so that it would continue to shine on Earth as the Sun, thus becoming the Sun god.

You can find many photos of statues and images of the gods at <http://www.tenochtitlan.com/>

The Aztec calendar

Many American peoples had calendars. The Aztecs had two calendars – a religious calendar and a solar calendar. The religious calendar was 260 days and the solar calendar was 365 days. These two calendars were combined to give a 52-year 'century'.

Reminders that the Aztecs used glyphs, an writing. Days were made up of 20 glyphs, together with the numbers 1 to 13. Each day sign is dedicated to a god.

In the religious calendar each of the seven 13-day periods, or weeks, is shown separately, together with the picture of the god connected to that 'week'.

The Aztecs only wrote about 400 years after the Aztecs lived and the only 11 glyphs almost 20 years into a century of a calendar. This was in the form of this.



Did you know...?

- In the Aztec, Inca and other world were told there had a common time in the past before the sun and moon were. This theory probably was created by Christopher Columbus when he was in the Americas.

There are 20 glyphs named the 13 days, but it was used as a 260-day year. The purpose of calendar was to tell the Aztecs when to perform rituals to their gods. Without this the Aztecs believed the world would come to an end.

How did the Aztecs name their 'weeks'?

In addition to sacrifice, the Aztec religion, like the Mayan religion, was dominated by calculations of time. The Aztecs had two main calendars – the solar calendar and the religious calendar; each day was controlled by two gods, each of which had a good and a bad aspect. In a complex series of astronomical calculations, one could precisely determine how to behave and what to do in order to achieve the best results.

The time-measuring calendar was used to fix the best time for planting crops and other everyday activities, while the religious calendar told when to consult the gods. In the time-measuring calendar, one year had 365 days divided into 18 months. Each month had 20 days, and there were 5 extra days at the end of the year, which were thought to be bad-luck days when disasters were most likely to happen. The religious calendar was a 260-day cycle, called the tonalpohualli, or the 'count of days'.

The Aztecs were also keen observers, finding explanations for celestial phenomena, natural disasters and seasonal cycles. The Aztec Sun Stone records many of these explanations as legends. The huge carving, standing 12 feet high, was completed in 1481 and was discovered in Mexico City in 1790. The face of an Aztec god is at the centre of the stone. Surrounding the god's face are panels representing the four previous creations and destructions of the Earth. Around these panels is a ring of symbols, representing the twenty days of the Aztec month.

In addition to the sacred calendar found on the Sun Stone, the Aztecs relied on a 365-day agricultural calendar. Like the Maya, the Aztecs accurately divided the time it takes for the Earth to travel around the Sun. They named 18 months, each with four five-day weeks. Market days were held once each week. The five remaining days, as in the Maya calendar, were thought unlucky.

Once every 52 years, the sacred calendar and the agricultural calendar ended at the same time. This was a cause for special ceremonies. The Aztec believed it was during this occurrence that the end of the world could come. Every cycle ended with the New Fire Ceremony. For five days before the end of the cycle, all religious altar fires were extinguished and people all over the Aztec world destroyed furniture and possessions and went into mourning for the world. On the last day, the priests waited for the constellation of the Pleiades to appear. If it appeared, that meant that the world would continue for fifty-two more years. The priests would light a fire in an animal carcass, and all the fires of the Valley of Mexico would be lit from this single fire. The day after saw sacrifices, bloodletting, feasting, and renovation of possessions and houses.

Aztec time was divided into 52-year cycles to coincide with this special time, similar to our current 100-year cycles called centuries. Different days belonged to different gods, so days could be good or bad depending on which god's day it was.

A child born on a bad day received its name on a good day, to rule out all harmful effects of the bad day.

One reason that we know so much about the Aztec calendar system is because of the Sun Stone calendar, which is a large carved stone calendar that is currently in a museum in Mexico. The face of Tonatiuh, the Sun god, is in the centre circle of the stone. Around the face are four squares called Nahui-Ollin, or Four Movement. According to Aztec legend, these squares represented the different ways that the four previous Suns (or worlds) had come to an end: first by wild animals, then by wind, by fire, and by floods. The Aztecs believed they were living in the fifth and last world.

Continuing outwards, the next concentric circle shows twenty squares, each naming one of the twenty different days of the Aztec month. Clockwise these days are named as follows:

Twenty days of the Aztec month



cipactli
crocodile



ehecatl
wind



calli
house



cuetzpalin
lizard



coatli
snake



miquiztli
death



mazatl
deer



tochtli
rabbit



atl
water



itzcuintli
dog



ozomahtli
monkey



malinalli
grass



acatl
reed



ocelotl
jaguar



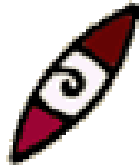
cuauhtli
eagle



cozcacuauhtli
vulture



ollin
motion



tecpatl
flint



quiahuitl
rain



xochitl
flower

The twenty day signs ran consecutively, from crocodile through flower, repeating after the 20th day. Beside the day signs ran 13 day numbers, 1 through 13, the numbers advancing with each day up to 13, when they repeated again with 1. Thus, the day count began with 1 Crocodile, 2 Wind, 3 House, 4 Lizard, and continued up to 13 Reed, when the numbers began again with 1: 1 Jaguar, 2 Eagle, 3 Vulture, and so forth. The 20 day signs and the 13 numbers, advanced side by side, yielded 260 uniquely named days.

Eclipses of the Sun were also foretold by the calendar stone.



The city of Tenochtitlan

The capital city of the Aztec empire was Tenochtitlan, on the site of modern-day Mexico City. It was home to 200,000 people and built on some small islands in Lake Texcoco.

The city was divided into 60 districts where the different class lived. Each class had its own temple complex, and its own farming gardens - called chinampas.

Houses were made of wood and mud. Roads were made of reed (mud). Only pyramids, temples and palaces were made of stone. Canals were used as the main way of getting about.

Tenochtitlan had 25 pyramids, each with a temple on top. Every temple was dedicated to a different god or a hero of the past. The temples were surrounded by plazas and gardens.

The city was run by a council of chiefs. A law governing up to the way of a noble was made from his own or government officials, or teachers in a school. But when he grew up he would also have to be trained in law and then he was expected to lead his own family.

If he grew up in an ordinary family, he would be trained in a temple, a university, or a school for a government where he would be trained and taught the temple's life cycle after he is ready to be a priest. But he could not change class.

Did you know...?

- Each day the streets were cleaned and the refuse was collected and carried away on barges.
- The nobles lived in two-story houses with gardens in which roses and other flowers were grown.
- There were markets for rice fields, including those from whom the nobles would buy their own breadstuffs.
- Schools were allowed to train school until they were 70 years old.

If you have already studied a bit about life in ancient Rome, you may like to compare life in Tenochtitlan with life in republican Rome. Even though the cultures and environments of the two places were different, there were also a number of similarities. Like Rome, Tenochtitlan was more than just a capital city, it was where almost all the Mexica, the founders and rulers of the Aztec empire, lived. Like Rome, the city was divided into districts and, like Rome, class was largely hereditary, with class determining your role in government and the life of the city. The Aztecs also had sophisticated sewage and water systems. However, unlike Rome, Tenochtitlan was divided into largely self-contained neighbourhoods.

Tenochtitlan was one of the most sophisticated cities in the world. An island city, five miles square, Tenochtitlan was surrounded by Lake Texcoco, one of the five lakes in the Valley of Mexico. Three great earth bridges, or causeways, led into the city. Canals were used as streets and people travelled everywhere by canoe. With palaces, gardens, fountains, a royal zoo, a market

with as many as 25,000 people busy buying and selling objects and foods from all over the empire, aqueducts bringing fresh water into the city, sewage collection on large barges for use as fertilisers, and sacred ball courts, Tenochtitlan was more advanced than any city in Europe. And looming over it all, a great pyramid with blood-stained temples on the top.

On arriving in Tenochtitlan, the Spaniards were deeply impressed by the beauty, order and cleanliness of the city, one of the biggest metropolises in the world at the time. Of course, this did not stop them from destroying it completely. Here is one description, by Bernal Diaz del Castillo, one of Cortes' men in his book *'The Conquest of New Spain'*:

“All about us we saw cities and villages built in the water, their great towers and buildings of masonry rising out of it... And when we saw all those towns and villages built in the water, and other great towns on dry land, and that straight and level causeway leading to Mexico, we were astounded. These great towns ...and buildings rising from the water, all made of stone, seemed like an enchanted vision... Indeed some of our soldiers asked whether it was not all a dream... It was all so wonderful that I do not know how to describe this first glimpse of things never heard of, seen, or dreamed of before... When I beheld the scenes around me I thought within myself, this was the garden of the world. And of all the wonders I beheld that day, nothing now remains. All is overthrown and lost.”

Tenochtitlan covered an estimated 8 to 13.4 square kilometres, on the western side of the lake. It was connected to the mainland by causeways leading north, south and west of the city. These causeways were interrupted by bridges that allowed canoes and other traffic to pass freely. The bridges could be pulled away if necessary to defend the city. The city itself was interlaced with a series of canals, so that all sections of the city could be visited either on foot or via canoe.

Lake Texcoco was a brackish lake. During the reign of Mochtezuma I, the 'dyke of Nezahualcoyotl' was constructed. Estimated to be between 12 and 16 kilometres in length, the dike kept the spring-fed fresh water in the waters around Tenochtitlan and held the brackish waters beyond the dike, to the east.

Two double aqueducts, each more than four kilometres long and made of terracotta, provided the city with fresh water from the springs at Chapultepec. This was intended mainly for cleaning and washing. For drinking, water from mountain springs was preferred. Most of the population liked to bathe twice a day; Mochtezuma was said to take four baths a day. For soap they used the root of a plant called copalxocotl (*saponaria americana*); to clean their clothes they used the root of metl, the maguey. The upper classes and pregnant women enjoyed the temazcalli, which was similar to a sauna bath and is still used in the south of Mexico; this was also popular in other Mesoamerican cultures.

The city was divided into four zones or campan, each campan was divided into 20 districts, or calpullis, and each calpulli was crossed by many streets or tlaxilcalli. There were three main streets that crossed the city, each leading to one of the three causeways to the mainland. The calpullis were also divided by channels used for transportation, with wood bridges that were removed at night.

Each calpulli had some speciality in arts and craft. When each calpulli offered some celebration, they tried to outdo the other calpullis. Even today, in the south part of Mexico City, the community organisations in charge of church festivities are called 'calpullis'.

Each calpulli had its own marketplace, or tiyanquiztli, but there was also a main marketplace, in Tlatelolco. Cortes estimated that this market was twice the size of the city of Seville, with about 60,000 people trading daily.

In the centre of the city were the public buildings, temples and schools. Inside a walled square, 300 metres to a side, was the ceremonial centre. There were about 45 public buildings including: the main temple, the temple of Quetzalcoatl, the ball game courts, the tzompantli or rack of skulls, the temple of the Sun, the platforms for the gladiatorial sacrifice, and some minor temples. Outside this walled compound was the palace of Mochtezuma, with 100 rooms.

All new construction in the city had to be approved by the calmimilocatl, an administrator in charge of the city planning.

Here is another description of the city, by Hernan Cortes:

“This great city of Tenochtitlan is built on the salt lake, and no matter by what road you travel there are two leagues from the main body of the city to the mainland. There are four artificial causeways leading to it, and each is as wide as two cavalry lances. The city itself is as big as Seville or Cordoba. The main streets are very wide and very straight; some of these are on the land, but the rest and all the smaller ones are half on land, half canals where they paddle their canoes. All the streets have openings in places so that the water may pass from one canal to another. Over all these openings, and some of them are very wide, there are bridges...

There are, in all districts of this great city, many temples or houses for their idols. They are all very beautiful buildings.... Amongst these temples there is one, the principal one, whose great size and magnificence no human tongue could describe, for it is so large that within the precincts, which are surrounded by a very high wall, a town of some five hundred inhabitants could easily be built. All round inside this wall there are very elegant quarters with very large rooms and corridors where their priests live. There are as many as forty towers, all of which are so high that in the case of the largest there are fifty steps leading up to the main part of it and the most important of these towers is higher than that of the cathedral of Seville...”

The Temple of Tenochtitlan

The Great Temple of Tenochtitlan was in the centre of the city. It was made of two stepped pyramids rising side by side 60m above the city. These pyramids were like two sacred mountains; the blue and white temple on the left was Tonacatepetl, the Hill of Sustenance. This temple was for Tlaloc, the god of rain. The red and white temple on the right was the Hill of Coatepec, birthplace of the Aztec war god Huitzilopochtli. Inside each temple there was an image of the god. Pairs of large serpent heads were placed at the feet of the pyramids. Near the top sculptures of figures held flagpoles with flags of bright paper and feathers.

In front of each temple was a huge stone – the sacrifice stone.

Did you know...?

- The main temple area had 25 pyramids, 5 swimming baths, 2 bridges on which the skulls of the sacrificed were displayed, and 2 ball game fields.
- Because the Aztecs feared their gods they believed that only human sacrifices would make the gods be kind to them.
- They mostly sacrificed captured warriors.

18

Who was sacrificed at the temple?



In 1519 Cortés the Aztecs believed that the Aztecs would be angry if they didn't sacrifice. Who could attack them? Who could attack the Aztecs? Who could attack the Aztecs?

19

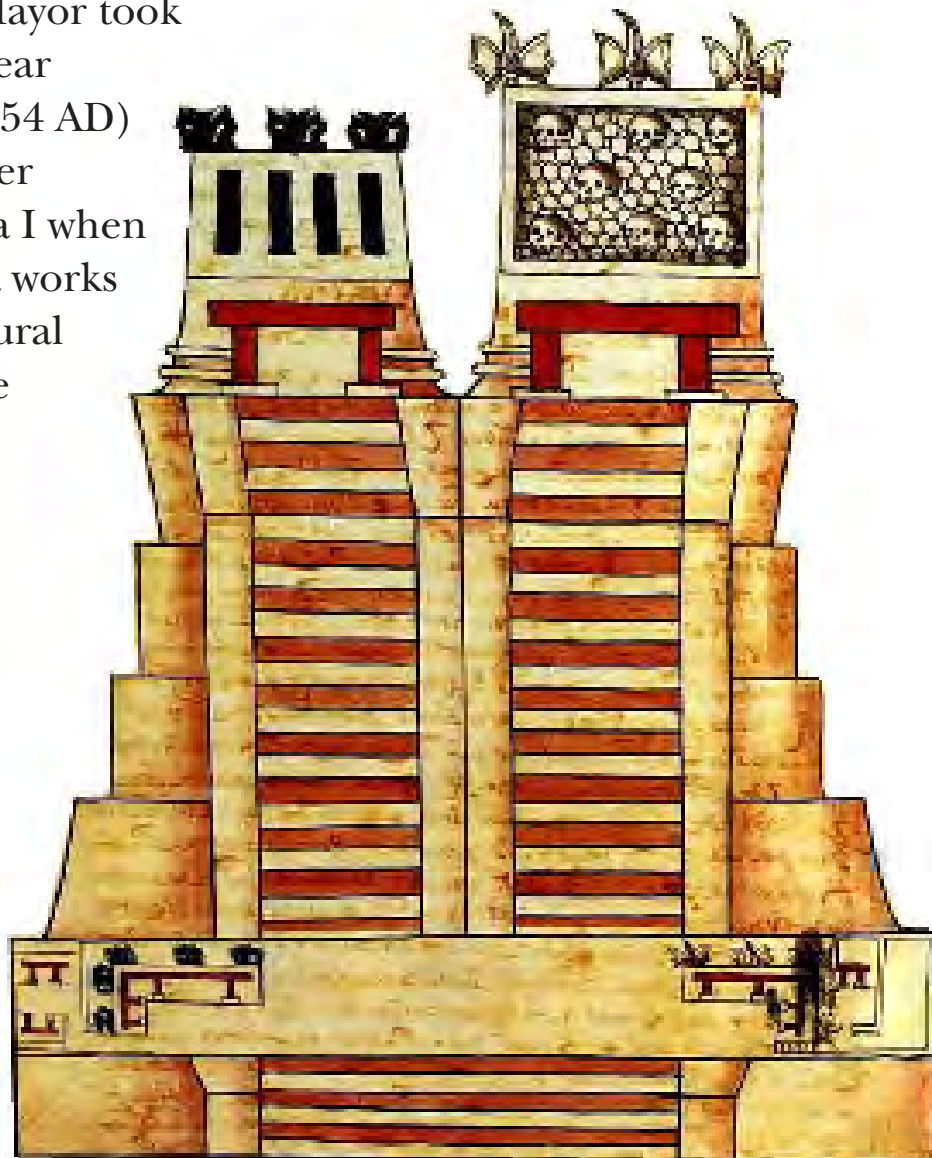
The Templo Mayor (Main Temple) in Tenochtitlan, capital of the Aztec empire, was located in the centre of the city, where the most important ritual and ceremonial activities in Aztec life took place.

Standing about ninety feet high, the structure consisted of two stepped pyramids rising side by side on a huge platform. It dominated both the Sacred Precinct and the entire city. The twin pyramids symbolised two sacred mountains; the one on the left represented Tonacatepetl, the Hill of Sustenance, whose patron deity was Tlaloc, the ancient god of rain; the one on the right represented the Hill of Coatepec, birthplace of the Aztec war god Huitzilopochtli. The temple structures on top of each pyramid were dedicated to, and housed the images of, the two important deities. Access to these shrines was by means of broad staircases, flanked by balustrades. Pairs of large, expertly carved serpent heads were placed at their base, while closer to the top sculptures of figures holding standards displayed banners made of bright paper and feathers.

The seven major building phases of the Templo Mayor began with a simple structure, probably dedicated to Huitzilopochtli, built in 1325 when Tenochtitlan was founded. Subsequently the Templo Mayor grew enormously both in size and elaboration resulting in the impressive structure seen by the Spaniards in 1519.

Reconstructions and enlargements of the temple were sometimes necessary because of flooding and the unstable lakebed on which it was built. Most often, however, successive powerful rulers enhanced the temple to celebrate their own coronations, to honour the gods, and to validate the power of the Aztec empire. The most spectacular expansion of the Templo Mayor took place in the year

'1 Rabbit' (1454 AD) under the ruler Motecuhzoma I when impressive art works and architectural elements were added.



sacrifice. For the smaller states involved it represented a way to fight without risking destruction of an entire city or army, and for the Aztecs it allowed the rulers to continuously demonstrate their might with a constant influx of war captives to Tenochtitlan.

The Aztec army was organised into two layers. The commoners were organised into 'wards', similar to the way the city of Tenochtitlan was organised; and the nobles were organised into professional warrior societies. Priests also took part in warfare, carrying the effigies of deities into battle alongside the armies.

The commoners made up the bulk of the army, the lowest were porters who carried weapons and supplies, next came the youths of the *telpochcalli* led by their sergeants. Next were the common fighters, and finally there were commoners who had taken captives, the so-called *tlamani*. Ranking above these came the nobles of the 'warrior societies'. These were ranked according to the number of captives they had taken in previous battles; the number of captives determined which of the different suits of honour (called *tlahuiztli*) they were allowed to wear. These *tlahuiztli* became gradually more spectacular as the ranks progressed, allowing the most excellent warriors who had taken many captives to stand out on the battlefield.

Commoners excelling in warfare could be promoted to the noble class and could enter some of the warrior societies. Sons of nobles were expected to enter into one of the societies as they progressed through the ranks.

The largest warrior society was the Eagles and the Jaguars. They dressed as the animal they took their name from, some wearing pelts of large felines and others adorned in eagle feathers. The Headquarter of the Eagles and Jaguars was the *Quauhcalli* 'the Eagle House' located in the ceremonial precinct in Tenochtitlan.

The Otomies were another warrior society who took their name from the Otomi people who were renowned for fierce fighting.

The 'Shorn Ones' was the most prestigious warrior society – their heads were shaved apart from a long braid over the left ear. Their bald heads and faces were painted one half blue and another half red or yellow. They had sworn not to take a step backwards during a battle on pain of death at the hands of their comrades.

Once the decision to go to war was made the news was proclaimed in the plazas for several days or weeks in advance. When the troops were ready the march began. Usually the first to march were the priests carrying the effigies, the next day the nobles marched, and on the third day the main bulk of the army set out. The army marched an estimated average of 19–32 kilometres a day.

Battles usually started at dawn – smoke signals were used to show that a battle was beginning and to coordinate attacks between different divisions of the army. The signal to attack was given by musical instruments such as drums and the conch shell trumpet. Usually the battle began with projectile fire from bows or slings. Then the warriors advanced into combat in order of the most distinguished first.

Youths participating in battle for the first time would usually not be allowed to fight before the Aztec victory was ensured, after which they would try to capture prisoners from the fleeing enemy. Normally the objective was to conquer a city not destroy it, since destroyed cities could not pay tribute. Once the city was conquered the main temple would be set on fire signalling the Aztec victory.

Weapons

Atlatl

The Aztec spear thrower was a weapon used to hurl small spears or javelins called 'tlacochtli' with greater force and from greater range than they could be thrown by hand. Murals at Teotihuacan



show warriors using this effective weapon and it is characteristic of the Mesoamerican cultures of central Mexico.

Tlahuitolli

A bow.

Mitl

An arrow.

Micomitl

Aztec arrow quiver.

Yaomitl

War arrows with barbed obsidian points.

Tematlatl

A stone sling, made from maguey fibre.

Macuahuitl

‘Hand stick’, essentially a wooden sword with sharp obsidian blades embedded into its sides. This was the standard armament of the elite cadres. Also known in Spanish by the Taino word ‘macana’. A blow from such a sword was supposedly capable of decapitating a horse.

Tepoztopilli

Wooden lance with sharp obsidian stones in the top.

Quauhololli

A simple club with a spherical wooden ball at the end.



Huitzauhqui

A wooden club with inlaid obsidian blades.

Armour

Chimalli

Shields made by different materials such as the wooden shield 'cuauhchimalli' or maize cane 'otlachimalli'. There were also ornamental shields decorated with motifs made in featherwork, these were called huizzoh chimalli.

Ichcahuipilli

Quilted cotton armour. One or two fingers thick, this material was resistant to swords and atlatl darts.

Ehuatl

The tunic that some noble warriors wore over their cotton armour or tlahuiztli.

Tlahuiztli

The distinctively decorated suits of prestigious warriors and members of warrior societies.

Pamitl

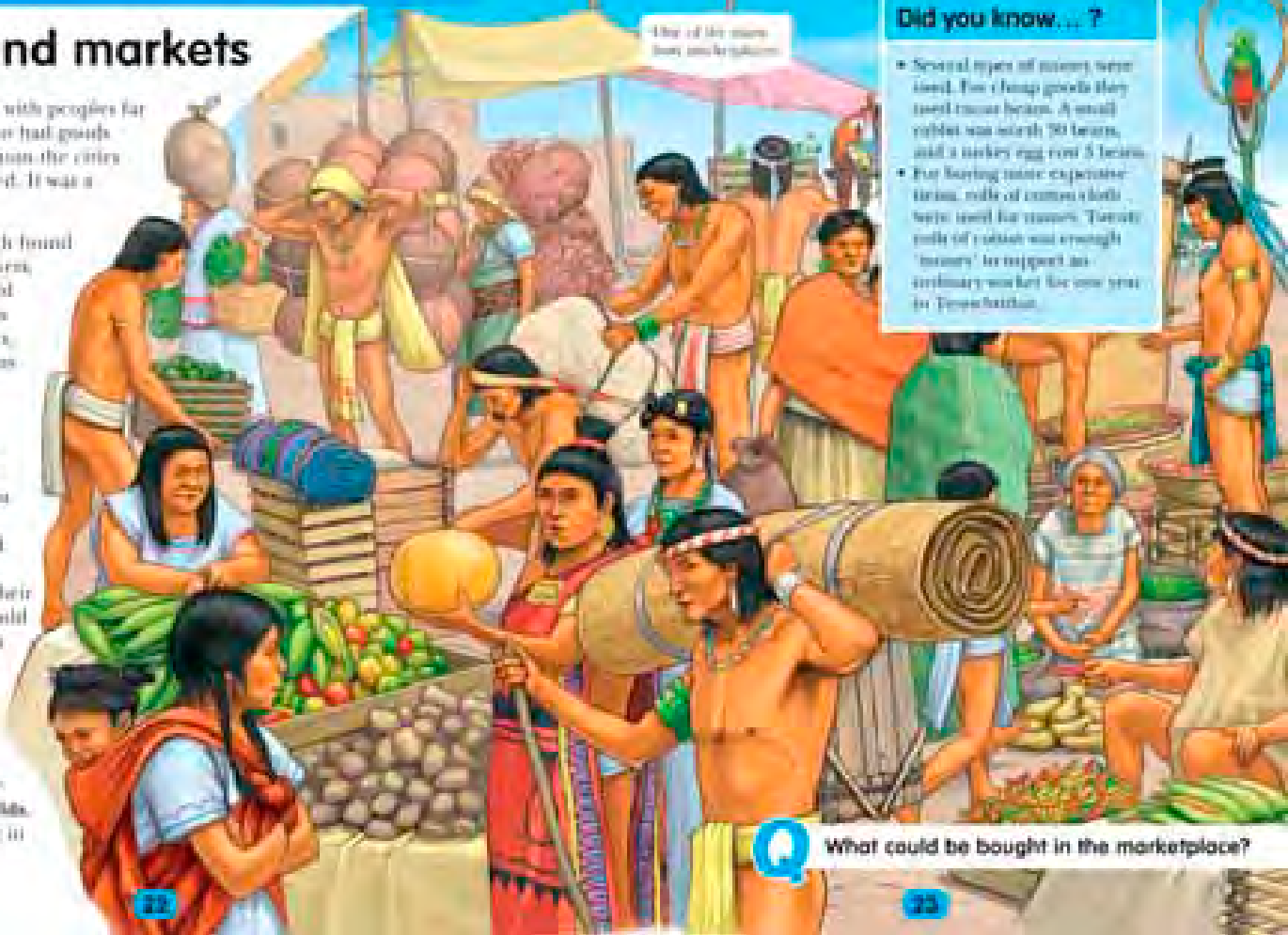
The banner that excellent and notable warriors and officers wore on their backs. They were often personalised so that they could be seen and recognised from a distance.

Trade and markets

The Aztecs traded with peoples far and wide. They also had goods brought to them from the cities they had conquered. It was a kind of tax.

Much of this wealth found its way to the markets, where people could get precious stones and cotton, flowers, rare birds and many other things.

So many goods were on offer that a market was held every day, with tens of thousands of people buying and selling. Farmers brought some of their produce, potters sold their wares, and so on. There were businessmen who traded goods with other parts of America. These people were organised into guilds, each guild trading in one product.



Did you know... ?

- Several types of money were used. For cheap goods they used maize beans. A small rabbit was worth 50 beans, and a turkey egg cost 5 beans.
- For buying more expensive items, rolls of cotton cloth were used for money. Thirty rolls of cotton was enough 'money' to support an ordinary worker for one year in Tenochtitlan.



What could be bought in the marketplace?

Although the Aztecs built very good roads throughout their empire, children may be amazed to learn that they did not have any wheeled vehicles. This was because the Aztecs (like other Mesoamerican peoples) had no draught animals such as horses or cows to pull carts. These did not arrive in the Americas until the arrival of the Spanish. You might like the children to imagine their life now with no wheeled vehicles. How would they do shopping, travel, get to school, etc?

When merchants travelled, they travelled in caravan and transported their merchandise either by canoe (if it was possible) or by slaves, who carried large amounts of goods on their backs. If the caravan was likely to pass through dangerous territory, Aztec warriors accompanied the procession to provide protection.

In Aztec culture, trade was an important part of life. Yet, it was conducted somewhat differently than we think of traditional trade. For one, the Aztecs had no coinage.

Instead, they often used cacao beans as a type of currency. Cacao beans were labour intensive to farm, but easy to transport and all of roughly the same size, so a standardised price could be set for a certain number of beans. This type of currency was most often used in local markets, where people could buy tools, clothes and jewellery. Another use of this currency was by caravans of merchants that travelled towards the region that is now Guatemala, Belize and Honduras. These merchants traded rare items such as jewellery for other rare items such as rubber, cotton and products made from animals (like feathers of tropical birds and jaguar skins).

The merchant class in the Aztec empire was a special subgroup. Although they were below the nobles (mainly priests and warriors), they were above the common farmers. This special merchant class was called *pochteca*, and was mostly hereditary. The *pochteca* class was somewhat removed from the rest of Aztec society. So much, in fact, that the *pochteca* lived in a separate section of the city. They also formed their own guilds and enjoyed special privileges.

The local and regional merchants, known as *tlanecuilo* tended to barter utilitarian items and foodstuffs, which included gold, silver, and other precious stones, cloth and cotton, animal skins, agriculture and wild game, and woodwork. The trade market of the Aztec people was not only important to commerce, but also to the socialisation, as the markets provided a place for the people to exchange information.

The *pochteca* carried out long distance trade which provided the materials that the noble class used to display their wealth. These materials were often obtained from foreign sources.

The highest officials of the *pochteca* were the *pochtecatlatoque*. The *pochtecatlatoque* were the elder of the *pochteca*, and were no longer travellers, but rather acted as administrators, overseeing young *pochteca* and administering the marketplace.

The second group of *pochteca* was the slave traders, known as the *tlatlani*. These people were often referred to as the richest of merchants, as they played a central role in bathing the slaves used for sacrificial victims.

The third group of long distance traders was the *tencunenenque*, who worked for the rulers by carrying out personal trade.

A group of trader spies, known as the *naualoztomeca*, made up the last group of *pochteca*. The *naualoztomeca* were forced to disguise themselves as they travelled, as they sought after rare goods. The *naualoztomeca* were also used for gathering information at the markets and reporting the information to the higher levels of *pochteca*.

All trade throughout the Aztec empire was regulated by officers who patrolled the markets to ensure that the buyers were not being cheated by the merchants. Because markets were so large in numbers, in large cities reaching upwards of 20,000 people, the organisation was crucial, and the Aztecs were able to create a successful market due to the success of enforcing the laws of the trade markets.





Getting enough food

The lands around Tenochtitlan were dry for much of the year and did not give good crops. So how did this enormous city feed itself?

They made **chinampas** – floating market gardens. They first wove sticks into mats. Then they used wooden spades to get mud from the lake bed and they laid this on the mat of sticks to make little islands. They grew crops in the chinampas and irrigated them with lake water.

Each class had its own chinampas and if they had more than enough food to feed themselves they would sell the extra in the markets. In fact, they often had space to spare, and this allowed them to grow luxuries such as flowers, which women often sold in the markets.

The Aztecs turned to the lake and the surrounding wetlands to grow maize, beans and squash.

Did you know... ?

- The Aztecs were unable to produce as much corn as they needed to feed. They did keep turkeys.
- The main cereal was maize; the main vegetables were beans and squash, and the main spice was chilli.
- They used water-logging plants, called agaves, as a source of fibres for weaving ropes and clothing for poor people, and for sugar.

- Cacao beans were used to make a cold chocolate drink.
- They often ate insects because they are a very concentrated food of protein.
- The Aztecs kept beehives and harvested honey.
- The chinampas could grow up to seven crops a year.
- The Aztecs had a much better diet before they were conquered by the Spaniards than afterwards.

Q How were chinampas made?

The Aztec staple foods included maize, beans and squash to which were often added chillis and tomatoes, all prominent parts of the Mexican diet to this day. They harvested acocils, a small and abundant shrimp of Lake Texcoco, as well as spirulina algae, which was made into a sort of cake rich in flavonoids. Children may be interested to taste some of this algae – you can buy it in most health food stores. The Aztecs also ate insects such as crickets (chapulines), maguey worms, ants, larvae, etc. Insects have a higher protein content than meat, and even now they are considered a delicacy in some parts of Mexico.

You may also want to point out that, like all Mesoamerican peoples, the Aztecs did not have large farm animals, such as cows, sheep or pigs. They did raise chickens, dogs, turkeys and guinea pigs for meat. Hunting, for ducks, wild hogs and deer, was mostly reserved for the nobility, since the population was too large for sustainable hunting. Most people would have eaten meat only rarely.

Aztecs also used the plant *maguey* (a fibrous succulent: picture in the Professional Zone) extensively; from it they obtained food, sugar (aguamiel–honey water), fibres for ropes and clothing, and drink (pulque, a fermented beverage with an alcoholic content equivalent to beer). Getting drunk before the age of 60 however was forbidden. First offences drew relatively light punishment but repeat offences could be punished by death.

Cacao beans were used as money and also to make xocolatl ('chocolate'), a frothy and bitter beverage, lacking the sweetness of modern chocolate drinks. Aztec chocolate was mixed with spices and hot pepper. The Aztecs also kept beehives and harvested honey.



The Aztec diet relied on a combination of maize and beans to provide the full quota of essential amino acids and protein. The Aztecs had a great diversity of maize strains, with a wide range of amino acid content. They also cultivated amaranth, whose seeds have a high protein content. It was actually a very balanced diet and people were generally healthy.

After the Spanish conquest, some foods were outlawed, particularly amaranth, because of its central role in religious rituals. After the conquest there was less diversity of food which led to chronic malnutrition in the general population. The Spanish also raised domestic animals such as cows and pigs, which took up a large amount of land, and the Aztec diet suffered.

At home and at school

Until they were fourteen, children learned at home. They had to learn a collection of sayings, called the *sayings of the old*. This is how they passed on their history and myths.

At 15, all boys and girls went to school. The Aztecs were one of the first peoples in the world to have compulsory education for children. There were two types of schools for boys, one kind

(a sort of technical school) taught practical and military skills, while the other kind (a sort of secondary school) taught writing, astronomy, statecraft and religion.

Girls were taught how to look after a home and raise children, and about religion. They were not taught to read or write.

While at school all children were kept under strict conditions, teaching them to be tough and hardy people.



26

Did you know...?

- All Aztecs lived in mud brick (adobe) houses.
- The Aztecs mainly died in rare diseases with a taint of herbs.
- They burned tobacco to try to prevent the house of someone who was ill. They use coffee to try to cure stomach illnesses.
- They had statecraft for war skill.



The process of making flat bread was the same as for a flat disk of baked clay used for three months with a flat to flatten them. Here they baked flat dough to make something like modern tortillas.

27

What was their main 'bread' like?

The Mexica, the founders of the Aztec empire, were one of the first peoples in the world to have mandatory education for nearly all children, regardless of gender, rank or social class.

Until the age of fourteen, the education of children was in the hands of their parents, but was supervised by the authorities of their *calpulli*. The children periodically attended their local temples, so the priests could test their progress.

Part of their education involved learning a collection of sayings, called *huehuetlatolli* ('The sayings of the old'), that embodied the Aztecs' ideals. It included speeches and sayings for every occasion, such as words to salute the birth of a child, and to say farewell at death. The sayings admonished girls to be very clean, not to use makeup and to support their husbands, even if they turn out to be humble peasants. Boys were admonished to be humble, obedient and hard workers. Judged by their language, most of the *huehuetlatolli* seemed to have evolved over several

centuries, predating the Aztecs and most likely adopted from other Nahua cultures.

As in the Roman empire, parents were expected to instill a sense of morality and ethics. Aztec fathers and mothers raised their children with care, making sure the children knew their responsibilities and mastered the necessary life skills. They warned the children against the vices of gambling and theft, gossip and drink, and when the children misbehaved, the punishment was painful. One form of punishment had the parent holding the child over a chilli pepper fire and forcing it to inhale the chilli pepper smoke.

Boys and girls went to school at age 15. There were two types of schools: the *telpochcalli*, for practical and military studies, and the *calmecac*, for advanced learning in writing, astronomy, statesmanship, theology and other areas.

The *telpochcalli* or House of the Young, taught history, religion, military fighting arts, and a trade or craft (such as agriculture or handicrafts). The particular trade or craft taught depended on what neighbourhood (*calpulli*) the children lived in, as each neighbourhood had one or more speciality crafts. Some of the *telpochcalli* students were chosen for the army, but most of them returned to their homes.

The *calmecac*, attended mostly by the sons of nobles and upper classes, was focused on turning out leaders (*tlatoque*), priests, scholars/teachers (*tlatimini*), healers (*tizitl*) and codex painters (*tlacuilos*). They studied rituals, ancient and contemporary history, literacy, calendrics, some elements of geometry, songs (poetry), and military arts.

The healers (*tizitl*) had several specialities. Some were trained to just inspect and classify medicinal plants, others were trained in the preparation of medicines. More than a hundred preparations are known, including deodorants, remedies for smelly feet,

toothpaste etc. Also there were tizitl who specialised in surgery, digestive disease, teeth and nose, skin diseases, etc.

Aztec teachers (tlatimine) propounded a spartan regime of education – cold baths in the morning, hard work, physical punishment, bleeding with maguey thorns and endurance tests – with the purpose of forming a stoical and martial people.

In school, girls were primarily educated in the crafts of home and child raising. They were not taught to read or write. Some of them were educated as midwives and received the full training of a healer; they were also called tizitl. All women were also taught to be involved ‘in the things of god’; there are paintings of women presiding over religious ceremonies, but there are no references to female priests. Perhaps some cults, or ceremonies, were reserved for women.

There were also two other opportunities for students who had special talents. Some were chosen to study in the house of song and dance (singing, dancing and drama were important parts of religious ceremonies), and others were chosen to train for the ceremonial ball game (also a part of the religious rituals). Both occupations had high status.



de las plantas de que
se toman



muchacho de vij. años
En padre la
esta enseñado
como orde
per en con la
flech otiene
en a mano



made de los mil años
esta en el mundo



una tortilla
media

muchacha de vij. años
En madre la
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The Spaniards

In the year called One Reed, the emperor, Moctezuma II, was the most powerful person on the whole of North America and ruled over 10 million people. He was very superstitious and the priests showed him signs that disaster was coming.

For several years there had been bad signs: a burning light in heaven had travelled across the sky, temples had been destroyed by lightning, a huge tongue of fire (a volcanic eruption) had poured out of a nearby mountain.

Then, just as messengers arrived telling of further disaster on the sea (ships) of men (the Spaniards), Hernan Cortes and his troops (led by great captains) and, more important of all, they had white skin. It was just as it had been foretold. The god Quetzalcoatl had returned. Moctezuma must please the god. He must send gifts.

When the messengers arrived, Cortes used a very clever tactic: he treated the Aztec messengers who had brought gifts by firing a cannon and blowing up a tree. They rushed back to tell Moctezuma the amazing power of the god.

When Cortes reached Tenochtitlan, he was amazed by the wealth and organisation of the city. It was far more advanced than anything he had seen in Europe. Cortes wrote: 'The people of this city are dressed with elegance and possess learning.'



Did you know...?

- The main Cortes was with his Spaniards to get as much gold and silver as he could.
- The people Cortes first met were from another empire who were enemies of the Aztecs. Cortes made them become his allies.
- Cortes killed some Aztec priests of the ruling emperor, who then went with him as an interpreter.
- Moctezuma could have tried to fight and stop them, but he decided to let Cortes go. But he could not know because all his court prophets that the god was returning.
- Spanish explorers' temples were called conquistadors, conquering men.

Q What did Cortes think of the Aztecs?

The European Age of Discovery marked the end of all American empires and native cultures. Lured by the promise of gold, the European explorers and mercenaries conquered and looted south and central America. Although the Aztecs had been able to conquer the other peoples around them, they were no match for the Spanish, who were armed with guns, ships, cannon, horses and new diseases the Aztecs had no resistance to. The Spanish needed no excuses to destroy the Aztec empire, the fact that these people were not Christian was enough, even though the first Spaniards to see the Aztec empire were awed by its achievements and scope.

The subject of colonialism is a difficult one, and one that students who are from commonwealth countries (former members of the empire) may have strong feelings about. Therefore, you may wish to begin with a discussion of the motives of the Spanish – to gain wealth – and of the attitude of Europeans at the time of the conquista.

Children may wonder why the Aztecs did not simply fight the Spanish conquistadors when they first arrived. But the Aztecs hesitated for many reasons. One was that their own prophecies had foretold of the destruction of their empire. Another is that the Spanish came with so many new things that Mochtezuma and his people were awed and felt that they were not powerful enough to repel the Spanish. Instead, Mochtezuma attempted to befriend the Spanish – a mistake.

There are actually a few written Aztec accounts of the arrival of the Spanish. These were translated by Spanish priests from original Aztec documents. Although the priests destroyed most Aztec writing, some of the priests had devised a way to write the Nahuatl language of the Aztecs in the Latin alphabet. This enabled eyewitnesses to the Conquest to record an Aztec account of the entire invasion. Many of these documents were only found hundreds of years later, in museums and monasteries in Spain. Here is a sample of the Aztec prose that has survived:

“The ‘stags’ came forward, carrying soldiers on their backs. The soldiers wore cotton armour. They bore their leather shields and their iron spears in their hands, but their swords hung down from the necks of the stags. The animals wear many little bells. When they run, the bells make a loud clamour, ringing and reverberating. These animals snort and bellow. They sweat a great deal and the sweat pours from their bodies in streams. Foam from their muzzles drips onto the ground in fat drops, like a lather of amole (soap). When they run, they make a loud noise, as if stones were raining on the earth. Then the earth is pitted and cracked open wherever their hooves have touched it.”

This and the few other Aztec records that survived do give an insight into the Aztec mind-set. The Aztecs did not seem to view the Spanish as monsters. Even in Cholula, the city

in which the Spaniards massacred most of the inhabitants, the Aztec report of the event includes the possibility that it may have been provoked by falsehoods spread by the Tlaxcalan allies of the conquistadors.

Aztec codices record the omens seen by the people just before the arrival of the Spanish:

“The first omen was a great light that appeared each night at about midnight and moved across the sky, shooting flames. This lasted almost a year.”

Second omen: “A temple of Huitzilopochtli burst into flames. Water poured on the blaze did not put it out and the temple burned to the ground.”

Third bad omen: “A bolt of lightning that came with neither flash nor thunder in only a light rain and destroyed a temple.”

Fourth bad omen: “A stream of comets, visible in the daytime, that raced from west to east, shooting off sparks of fire with such long tails, they filled the sky.”

Fifth: “The lake that surrounded Tenochtitlan rose when there was no wind. It boiled and rose to great heights and destroyed almost half the houses in the city.”

Sixth: “Every night people heard the voice of a weeping woman who cried, “Oh my sons, we are lost” and at other times, “Oh my sons, where can I hide you”.

Finally, reports circulated about “two-headed men roaming the city, who appeared and disappeared at will.”

Mochtezuma himself had looked into a mirror and seen people moving across a plain, armed for war, and riding on what looked like strange deer.

When he heard that strangers were indeed approaching Tenochtitlan, Mochtezuma decided that this was indeed the return of Quetzalcoatl. According to the Aztec documents, he said, “He has appeared. He has come back. He will come here, to the place of his throne and canopy, for that is what he promised when he departed.”

So, it may have been that Mochtezuma and his people viewed the Spanish as representing a revenge of their gods for a transgression, or as the natural end of things. The Aztecs believed that there had already been several ages of humanity, and may have seen the destruction of their world at the hands of the Spanish simply as the prophesied end to their ‘age’. If this was the case, they may not have fought very hard to avoid their own destruction.

Mochtezuma



The end of Aztec times

Cortés was justified by the Aztec religion because it needed human sacrifice. He had also been sent to get treasure for the King of Spain and the only way he would be able to do this was by treachery.

The Spaniards captured Moctezuma and held him captive for six months while they tried to take all the wealth of the city.

Moctezuma's brother then took over as emperor and formed an army. The Spaniards tried to escape but were slowed down by the weight of the treasure they were carrying, and many were killed.

When the Spaniards were gone the Aztecs wrote, "Once again the temples can be swept out, and the dirt (created by the war the Spaniards lived) removed."

Although Cortés had been driven out, he and his men had brought with them the plague, called smallpox, and other diseases. The Aztecs had no natural protection (the disease began to kill them in huge numbers).

With the city so weakened, Cortés and the Aztec enemies came back. The battle for the city lasted four months and the city was finally crushed.

Legend has it that Cortés is displaying the treasure of the Aztecs before the king of Spain. He used the money of the temples and presents to build a new city - Mexico City - and the Aztecs' place, about the same temple had such been, was used as the site of a Christian cathedral. There all the Aztecs were buried in.

Did you know...?

- The Aztec population before the time of the Spanish conquest in 1517 was 20 million; by 1581 it was less than two million.
- Cortés' "New Spain" had so few people left that the Spaniards did not have enough people to farm the land and they began to import black slaves from Africa.
- Today you can hardly find any sign of the Aztec empire, although it lives on in the legends of many Central Americans.

Why did so many Aztecs die?

Hernan Cortes Pizarro, 1st Marques del Valle de Oaxaca (1485–2 December, 1547) was the conquistador who became famous for leading the military expedition that initiated the Spanish Conquest of Mexico. Cortes was part of the generation of Spanish colonisers that began the first phase of the Spanish colonisation of the Americas.

Cortes was born in Medellín, in the province of Extremadura, in the Kingdom of Castile in Spain in 1485. His father, Martin Cortes de Monroy, was an infantry captain of distinguished ancestry but slender means. His mother was Catalina Pizarro Altamirano. Through his mother, Hernan was second cousin to Francisco Pizarro, who later conquered the Inca empire of modern-day Peru.

At the age of fourteen, Cortes was sent to study at the University of Salamanca. After two years, Cortes, tired of schooling and returned home.

By this time, news of the exciting discoveries of Columbus in the New World was streaming back to Spain. In 1503, the eighteen year old Cortes sailed in a convoy of merchant ships bound for Santo Domingo, the capital of Hispaniola. In 1506, Cortes took part in the conquest of Hispaniola and Cuba, receiving a large estate of land and Indian slaves for his effort.

In 1518 he was put in command of an expedition to explore and secure the interior of Mexico for colonisation. Although permission for the trip was revoked at the last minute, Cortes went ahead anyway in an act of open mutiny.

It took nearly three months for Cortes and his men to reach the outskirts of Tenochtitlan. Although Cortes only had a few men with him, it is not true that he defeated the might of the Aztec empire with only these few men. As the Spaniards approached Tenochtitlan they made an alliance with the Tlaxcalteca who were enemies of the Aztec Triple Alliance and they helped instigate revolt in many towns under Aztec dominion. Cortes also made alliances with other enemies of the Aztecs, such as the Nahuas of Tlaxcala and the Totonacs of Cempoala. These peoples sent small armies along with Cortes, so that by the time he arrived in Tenochtitlan, on 8 November, 1519, Cortes was leading an army of around 20,000 (there were about 500 Spanish with around 16 horses).

That same day, Mochtezuma met Hernan Cortes on the causeway leading into Mexico Tenochtitlan and the two leaders exchanged gifts.

Mochtezuma brought Cortes to his palace where the Spaniards lived as his guests for several months. Mochtezuma gave lavish gifts in gold to the Spaniards. However, far from mollifying Cortes, this only convinced him that there was a great wealth to be plundered.

Over the next few months, Mochtezuma continued governing his empire and even undertook conquests of new territory. However, at some point, the Spanish gained control of Mochtezuma and the palace and Mochtezuma became a prisoner in his own palace. Exactly why this happened is not clear from the available sources.

Eventually, the Aztec nobility grew displeased with the large Spanish army staying in Tenochtitlan. When the Aztecs saw the weakened state of their ruler they staged a rebellion in order to eject the Spaniards and their native American allies from the city. The Spanish were massacred and forced to flee over the causeway to the mainland and back to Tlaxcala. When reinforcements arrived from Cuba, Cortes laid siege to Tenochtitlan by cutting off supplies to the island city, and subdued the Aztecs' allied cities. Weakened by smallpox and other European diseases to which they had no immunity, the Aztecs were unable to put up a strong defence and the city fell.

Cortes and the Spanish then began destroying the city, district by district. Survivors were sold into slavery and what items of value remained were taken back to Spain. The rubble from the buildings of Tenochtitlan were used to build Mexico City, the Spanish capital.

With the destruction of their society, the Aztecs were also unable to farm, so they began to starve. The Spanish imported African slaves and European domestic animals, further destroying the agriculture and society of the people. Most of the remaining people converted to Christianity, and the last vestiges of Aztec civilisation disappeared.

However, the Aztecs did not disappear. Many Mexicans alive today have Aztec (Mexica) blood and many of the rituals of the Aztecs live on in altered form, such as the Day of the Dead.