



The Aztecs

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The Aztecs



- The Aztecs were a tribe of farmers and hunters who settled in Mexico in the 14th century.
- Their capital city was Tenochtitlan, which means “Place of the prickly-pear cactus”.
- The Aztecs spoke the language N’ahuatl and their writing was made up of pictures.
- The Aztecs were creative people. Some were skilled at carving stone. Aztec temples were covered with carving and stone sculptures to please and honour the gods.

Food & Farming

The Aztecs were great farmers. They used a process called “irrigation”. In this process they dug channels in the ground in dry areas to bring water for crops.

The Aztecs diet was mainly vegetables, fruit and grain. Their most important crop was maize.

The Aztecs were among the first people to mix cacao beans with various seasonings to make a drink which they called chocolatl. Cacao beans were seen as a gift from the gods. They were even at times used as currency. They believed that if they drank chocolate, it would give them some of Quetzalcoatl’s {God of learning and wind} wisdom.



Clothing & Houses

- Lower class Aztecs wore simple clothes, often made from the fibers of maguey leaves, spun into thread and woven.
- Upper class Aztecs wore beautiful clothes made of cotton. Clothing was brightly decorated with embroidery and feathers. They also wore jewellery.
- Priests wore large headdresses made from feathers.
- Children wore similar clothes as their parents wore.
- Rich people lived in big houses, built of stone or bricks, built around a patio. These houses usually had several separate buildings. Farmers lived in mud-brick houses.



Religion and Calendars

The Aztecs were very religious people. They believed in many gods. The most important God was Huitzilopochtli { the God of war, the sun, and sacrifice}. The Aztecs believed that the sun needed the blood of humans rise every day.

The Aztecs had a calendar which they marked all the important festivals in the year .There was 365 days in the calendar {18 months of 20 days plus an extra five days that the Aztecs believed to be unlucky}



School

- All children had to go to school even slaves. When they were young, their parents taught them but when they were teenagers, they had to go to school.
- Boys and girls went to separate schools. The girls learnt religion, singing and dancing. They also learned how to cook and sow. Boys learned how to farm or learned a craft like pottery or feather-work.



The Spanish Invasion

Hernan Cortés, a Spanish conquistador, and his men landed on the Mexican coast on April 1519. Montezuma II {the leader at that time} gave them gifts to welcome them.

Although Montezuma did not trust Cortes, he also thought Cortes was the Aztec God Quetzalcoatl. Aztec mythology said that Quetzalcoatl would come to Earth as a man and Cortés had arrived on Quetzalcoatl's birthday.

Cortes began marching towards Tenochtitlan. He conquered some cities and made friends with others. The Tlaxcalans became his closest friends. They hated the Aztecs because they raided the cities for people to sacrifice. Montezuma II tried to keep Cortés from getting all the way to Tenochtitlan, but Cortés continued his march.



The Spanish Invasion

When Cortes finally reached Tenochtitlan, he was welcomed with many gifts and invited inside. Montezuma was still concerned that Cortés might be a god. Eventually tensions mounted between the two sides and a fight broke out. Cortés and his men took King Montezuma captive.

At some point during his captivity, Montezuma II was killed. After he died, Cortes and his men tried to flee. They were attacked by the Aztecs as they fled and nearly two-thirds of the soldiers were killed.

Cortés managed to escape with some of his men from Tenochtitlan. He returned in 1521 and invited local tribes, who were enemies of the Aztecs, to join them. After along battle, Cortes won. He rebuilt the city as Mexico city.



Fun Facts!

- **Misbehaving Children would be held over a stinging fire of chili peppers as punishment. They would also be stabbed with cactus leaves until they were scarred.**
- **The slaves had certain rights. They were not to be mistreated by their owners, they could buy their freedom, and they could not be sold by their masters unless they agreed.**
- **Slaves could own possessions and even own other slaves.**
- **Slaves who escaped their masters and made it to the royal palace would be set free.**
- **If a slave tried to run away, only the master or his relatives were allowed to chase after them.**
- **The punishments for breaking a law were severe with death being a common punishment. Other punishments included having your head shaved or being sold into slavery.**
- **Women would stain their teeth dark red with a dye extracted from a beetle that lives on cactus plants.**

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