

The Ancient Aztec Civilization

People of the Sun

History

- From about 1325 C.E. to 1521 C.E. the Aztecs Civilization was in power.
- The Aztecs conquered most of their territory under the leadership of Montezuma I.

Geography and Adaptation

- The Aztec Empire covered most of modern day central and southern Mexico.
- They adapted to living in the Valley of Mexico and to the swampy land by building causeways, or raised roads across water or wet ground.

Cities

- Each city had a central plaza, temples, and pyramids. Each city also had a ball court where games such as oollama were played. Oollama was a combination of modern basketball and soccer. The object of the game was to get a rubber ball through a vertical stone ring. The ball could only be moved by the players' hips, knees, legs, and elbows.
- Tenochtitlan (ten-och-tee-TLAN) was the capital city of the Aztec empire. It was located on an island in the middle of a swampy, shallow lake.

Job Specialization

- The Aztecs had many specialized jobs. Some of the jobs included: traders, priests, teachers, merchants, doctors, and ball players.

Agriculture- The Aztecs used floating gardens as their method of farming.

Floating Gardens (chinampas): In order to plant in swampy, marshy land, the Aztecs made small human-made islands. The Aztecs used mud to build sections of land in the water. They held the dirt and mud in place with a frame. They planted willow trees in the corners, and the roots grew deep and kept the garden in place.

- Cacao beans were made into chocolate, and the beans were used for money.
- Main crops grown were *maize (corn), peppers, and beans.
- They also ate tortillas and invented popcorn.

Government

- The Aztecs were ruled by an emperor.
- Like the Mayas, the Aztecs had city-states. The emperor placed one noble in charge of each city-state in the Aztec empire.
- Forgiveness law- If you confessed your crime to a priest *before* your crime was discovered, you would be forgiven once. You would receive no punishment for that crime. However, if you ever broke another law, you would be punished.
- Warriors were fierce.

Social Class

- Levels of Social Class:
 - Top Level: Emperor, then the rulers of the city-states and priests
 - Middle Level: Merchants
 - Middle Level: The Common People, farmers, warriors, craftsmen
 - Lower Level: Slaves

Arts and Architecture

- Poetry- the highest form of art in the Aztec culture was poetry. The Aztecs wrote many poems about the gods.
- Music- they played various instruments such as flutes, shells, whistles, and drums. They played their music for the gods
- Pottery/Sculptures
- ❖ Jewelry was made from gold and silver
- ❖ Temples were made of stone and had a flat top.

Religion

- The Aztecs worshipped many gods and goddesses.
 - Quetzalcoatl- god of learning and wind
 - Tezcatlipoca- god of war
 - Tlaloc- rain god
- The Aztecs believed in an afterlife. After they died, the Aztecs believed they would be assigned a job to do that helped their gods.

Writing

- The Aztecs had a system of writing. They used glyphs. Pictures represented an item, event, or a sound. Only priests knew how to read and write. Like the Mayas, they had books called codices. They had number system similar to the Mayas but not as advanced.
- Every child in the Aztec empire had to go to school. That included boys, girls, and slaves. There were different schools for different classes of people.

Public Works

- Causeways- raised road two to four feet above ground level; connected Tenochtitlan to the mainland.
- Canals- served as roads for trade and travel between villages.

Aztec Achievements

- Medicine
- Codices written in hieroglyphics
- Aztec Calendar
- Floating Gardens
- Public Schools

End of the Aztecs

- In 1521, the Aztecs surrendered to Spanish Conquistador, Hernan Cortez. When Cortez arrived, Montezuma II thought he was Quezalcoatl and they invited him to the capital city. Cortez jailed Montezuma II, but the Aztecs fought the Spaniards off. The Spaniards left behind small pox. Two years later, Cortez returned and defeated the Aztecs.