

# EXPLAINING AZTEC HUMAN SACRIFICE

RAYMOND CONSTANT KERKHOVE

B.A. University of Queensland, 1983

## THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts  
(Studies in Religion)  
in the Department of Studies in Religion,  
University of Queensland

St Lucia, Australia

February 1994

**AVATAR'S ABODE  
TRUST**  
MEHER ROAD  
WOOMBYE 4559

## DECLARATION

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original - except as acknowledged in the text, and the material has not been submitted either in whole or in part at this or any other university.



Raymond C. Kerkhove,

23 February 1994.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work is dedicated to the bountiful assistance received from the following parties:

**Inspirational:** Merwan S. Irani - the "One behind all isms"; Robert and Lorna Rouse, who gave me the push to see it through.

**Technical Assistance:** My mother, Cea Muuse; Lorraine Yap.

**Financial Support:** My mother, Cea Muuse; and Edmund Parkinson.

**Academic Advise:** My Supervisor, Dr. Lynne Hume. Also, Professor Richard Hutch, Professor Philip Almond, Professor Ed Conrad, the Departmental staff in general, and the staff of Central Library, University of Queensland.

## SYNOPSIS

Human sacrifice was a global phenomenon that has perplexed scholars for centuries. Explaining the ceremony could prove pivotal towards understanding numerous supposedly 'dark' traditions wherein it flourished: Celtic religion, West African religion, Tantra. With this in mind, the following thesis makes an intensive study of the rite's significance in Aztec religion.

The study comprises two parts:

- A. Exposition of the context and nature of Aztec human sacrifice, and attempts to explain it.
- B. Application of Frederick Streng's theory: Aztec human sacrifice as a means of ultimate transformation.

Part A., which begins with an introduction to the study of human sacrifice, also outlines the Aztecs, their religion, and available sources on both. Then follows a chapter that details the nature and aspects of Aztec human sacrifice. A final segment evaluates theories used to account for the practice, and offers an alternative approach: Streng's model of religion as transformation.

The aim of Part A. is to establish that the Aztecs and their religious system were a great deal more sophisticated



than is usually acknowledged. I also hope to show how pervasive and important human sacrifice was in their culture, and the inadequacy of most attempts to explain this.

For Part B., Streng's model is in use as a framework to detail the possible themes of transformation in Aztec human sacrifice, such as 'bursting open'; atonement; remorse and ruin; birth; mirroring; and symbiotic exchange. Each of these form a chapter.

The aim of Part B. is to establish that human sacrifice fulfilled Aztec needs for personal and communal transformation. This serves to underline the complex spiritual motives that I consider the core of Aztec human sacrifice. Indeed, in Part B. I hope to achieve what has not yet been attempted: a *reconstruction* of these motives in considerable detail.

In order to carry out the latter, I draw widely on ancient written sources; on the iconography of monuments and folk art; on current Mexican Indian attitudes and practices; on outsiders' observations; on evidence from archaeology; and even on historical incidents. Hopefully, a clearer, more comprehensive picture will emerge of what Aztecs truly thought and sought when conducting their human sacrifices.

## CONTENTS

---

DECLARATION	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
SYNOPSIS	iv
CONTENTS PAGES	vi
FIGURE SOURCES	x

### PART A: EXPOSITIONS ON THE NATURE, CONTEXT AND EXPLANATION OF AZTEC HUMAN SACRIFICE

#### Chapter One: Introductions

I. Human Sacrifice and Its Study	1
II. The Aztecs, and Aztec Culture	4
III. Source Material	7
IV. Aztec Religion	11

#### Chapter Two: Aztec Human Sacrifice

I. Introduction	35
II. Prevalence and Frequency	35
III. Types	37
IV. Participants	38
V. Format	45
VI. Origins and Historical Development	55
VII. Degree of Acquiescence	61

## CONTENTS

---

### Chapter Three: Theories on Aztec Human Sacrifice

I. The Nature of the Theories	75	
II. The Theories	75	
III. A Critique: Limitations of the Theories	87	
IV. Summary: The Need for an Alternative Theory	100	
V. Towards an Alternative Theory ( Frederick Streng's Model )		101

### PART B: THEMES OF "ULTIMATE TRANSFORMATION" IN AZTEC HUMAN SACRIFICE ( STRENG'S MODEL APPLIED )

#### Chapter One: The Transformation of "Bursting Open"

I. Ultimate Reality as Dismembered Body-parts	112
II. Humanity's Problematic State: Unsevered Bodies as Imprisoned Divinity	118
III. Means: Dismembering, Perforating and Severing	120
IV. Expression in Aztec Sacrifice	125

#### Chapter Two: The Transformation of Atonement

I. Flawless Action as an 'Ultimate'	132
II. Humanity's Problematic State: Error and Remorse	133
III. The Means: Atonement through Blood Penance and Capital Punishment	135
IV. Expression in Aztec Sacrificial Rites	138

## CONTENTS

---

### Chapter Three: The Transformation of Remorse and Ruin

I. Sickness, Ruin and Self-Abandonment as an 'Ultimate'	143
II. Pride as Humanity's Problematic State	144
III. Means: Humility, Humiliation and Self-Abandonment	145
IV. Expression in Aztec Human Sacrifice	149

### Chapter Four: The Transformation of "Birth"

I. Ultimate Reality as Childhood and Springtime	155
II. Our Problematic State: Life as Separation from Holy Innocence	156
III. Means: Dying Young or Attaining 'Rebirth'	156
IV. Cultural and Sacrificial Expression	158

### Chapter Five: The Transformation of "Mirroring"

I. Ultimate Reality: A Fated Game of Masks and Reflections	162
II. Problematic States: Transience and "Facelessness"	165
III. Means: Casually Dying, Dutifully Dying	168
IV. Cultural and Ritual Expression	174

### Chapter Six: The Transformation of Extinction

I. Ultimate Reality as Oblivion and Annihilation	181
II. Problematic State: The Finality of Dissolution, and Divine Malevolence	183
III. Means: Resignation, Realisation and Shock	187
IV. Cultural and Ritual Expression	190

## CONTENTS

---

### Chapter Seven: The Transformation of Symbiotic Exchange

I. Ultimate Reality: The Great, Eternal Sacrifice	195
II. Our Problematic State: Debt and Inadequacy	198
III. Means: Covenants and Great Deeds	200
IV. Ritual and Cultural Expression	203

CONCLUSIONS	209
-------------	-----

### APPENDICES

I. Major Aztec Deities	213
II. Aztec Calendar Ceremonies	216

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

I. Primary Written Sources	223
II. Oral-Visual Primary Sources (Archaeological, Ethnographic) and Secondary Sources	226

## MAPS AND FIGURES

pp.6 - 7

**MAP : Aztec domains (inset showing Central Mexico)**

pp.114 - 115

1. **Split hearts: Teotihuacan murals** Laurette Sejourne, *Burning Water: Thought and Religion in Ancient Mexico* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1956), 125 (Figure 39).
2. **Impaled hearts: Codex Borgia** *ibid.*, 127 (Figure 43).
3. **God-faced heart: Codex Land** Patricia Anawalt, "Understanding Aztec Human Sacrifice", *Archaeology* 35: 5 (Sept.- Oct. 1982), 38.
4. **Gods descending on intestinal / umbilical cord: Codex Nuttall** Zelia Nuttall (ed.), *The Codex Nuttall* (New York: Dover Publications, 1975), 18.
- 5a. **Aztec skull-mask: Offering 57 (Tenochtitlan)** J. Akecenson (ed.), *Circa 1492* (Washington D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1991), 565 (Figure 395).
- 5b. **Knife-nosed, skull-faced divinities: Codex Fejervary-Mayer (Pueblan); Grolier Codex (Toltec-Mayan); Codex Nuttall (Mixtec)** *Grolier Codex*: Michael Coe, *The Maya* (5th Edition London: Thames & Hudson, 1993), 175. *Nuttall Codex*: Zelia Nuttall (ed.), *The Codex Nuttall*, 18.
6. **Oracular skull? - Aztec Temple Stone Monument** Laurette Sejourne, *Burning Water*, 171.
7. **Mayans worshipping a severed head: Dresden Codex** Joseph Campbell, *The Mythic Image* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 160.
8. **Aztecs worshipping a severed head: Codex Magliabechiano** Patricia Anawalt, "Understanding Aztec Human Sacrifice", 40.
9. **Head sprouting a tree: Codex Vindobonensis** Laurette Sejourne, *Burning Water*, 123.

pp.116 - 117

10. God **Xolotl**, showing palm-on-mouth motif: **Codex Borgia** Bruce Scofield & Angela Cordova, *The Aztec Circle of Destiny: Astrology and Divination from the Ancient Aztec World* ( St. Paul: Llewellyn, 1988 ), 66.
11. Eyes of music god peering out of human palms: **Aztec stone drum** Henry B. Nicholson, "Major Sculptures of Pre-Hispanic Central Mexico", *Handbook of Middle American Indians* 10 ,122 (Figure 54).
12. Coatlicue's necklace of human hands: **two Aztec statues** G.H.S. Bushnell, *Ancient Arts of the Americas*(London: Thames & Hudson, 1967), 61 (Figure 4E).  
& Anon., "Tenochtitlan: A City Surrounded By Water", *Vanished Civilisations*(Surrey Hills: Reader's Digest Service, 1983), 291.

pp.118 - 119

13. Ceremony with thigh bones: **Codex Nuttall** Zelia Nuttall, *The Codex Nuttall* 82.
14. Blood flowing down eagle gullets: **Codex Nuttall** *ibid.*, 21.
15. Trilobal glyphs and blades: **San Lorenzo (Olmec), Teotihuacan, Tula (Toltec)** J.Stocker, "Trilobal Eccentrics at Teotihuacan and Tula ", *American Antiquity* 38:2, April 1973, 196 (Figure 1).
16. Blood rain-dots etc. on *danzante* figure: **San Jose Mogote relief** Richard E. Blanton et al, *Ancient Mesoamerica*(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 66 (Figure 2:8).
17. Vampire bats descend on blood-glyph victim: *pahna*, **Tajm** Tatiana Proskouriakoff, "Classic Art of Central Vera Cruz", *Handbook of Middle American Indians* 11, 516.

pp.120 - 121

18. Tezcatlipoca's dismembered body: **Codex Fejervary-Mayer** Joseph Campbell, *The Mythic Image*, 189.
19. Goddess's (?) dismembered parts, **Aztec Stone of Itzpapalotl** Henry B. Nicholson, "Major Sculptures of Pre-Hispanic Central Mexico", 128 (Figure 62)

## pp.122 - 123

20. **Victim on intestinal rack: Tajin relief** Cecilia F.Klein, "Woven Heaven, Tangled Earth" in Anthony F.Aveni & Gary Urton, *Ethnoastronomy and Archaeoastronomy in the American Tropics* 11 (Figure 5).
21. **Victim's heart flying Sun-ward: Codex Magliabechiano** Inga Clendinnen, *Aztecs: An Interpretation*, 240-241 (1st Plate).

## pp.124 - 125

22. **Sacrificial scene, Quetzalcoatl overhead: Chichen Itza gold disc** Victor Wolfgang von Hagen, *The Ancient Sun Kingdoms of the Americas* (St.Albans: Paladin, 1973), 171.
23. **Sacrificial scene, Quetzalcoatl as bench: Temple of Warriors, Chichen Itza** Joseph Campbell, *The Mythic Image*, Figure 392.
24. **Cosmic battles during heart-extraction: Codex Nuttall** Zelia Nuttall (ed.), *The Codex Nuttall*, 69.
25. **Victim sprouting feather-plant from chest: Stela II, Piedras Negras** Joseph Campbell, *The Mythic Image*, 423 (Figure 373).
26. **World tree sprouting from victim's chest: Codex Dresden** R.Jon McGee, *Life, Ritual and Religion Among the Lacandon Maya* (Belmont: Wadsworth Press, 1990), Figure 8:1 (86).
27. **Decapitated ball game player: Chichen Itza ballcourt panel** Tatiana Proskouriakoff, *A Study of Classic Maya Sculpture* (Washington D. C.: Carnegie Institute of Washington Publication 592, 1950, Figure 106c).
28. **Decapitated ball game player: Tajin (Aparico stela)** Tatiana Proskouriakoff, "Classic Art of Central Vera Cruz", *Handbook of Middle American Indians* 325 (Figure 19).
29. **Decapitated figure on ball court: Codex Nuttall** Zelia Nuttall, *The Nuttall Codex*, 3.



## pp.136 - 137

30. **Emblems of penance: Teotihuacan mural and Aztec relief** Laurette Sejourné, *Burning Water* Figures 44-45.

31. **Aztec autosacrifice scene: Codex Magliabechiano** Patricia Anawalt, "Understanding Aztec Human Sacrifice", 39.

## pp.144 - 145

32. **Scabby god (Nahuatzin) becoming the Sun: Codex Borgia** Laurette Sejourné, *Burning Water*, 149.

## pp.146 - 147

33. **Topiltzin being coaxed to drink? - Toltec vase** Francesco Abbate (trans. Elizabeth Evans ), *Pre-Columbian Art of North America and Mexico* (London: Octopus Books, 1972 ), Figure 85.

## pp.158 - 159

34. **Man with 'umbilical cord': Izapa (Stela 10)** S.W. Miles, "Sculptures of the Guatemalan - Chiapas Highlands and Pacific Slopes, and Associated Hieroglyphs", *Handbook of Middle American Indians* 2 (Austin: University of Texas, 1974), Figure 12, 253.

35. **Reclining man being decapitated: Tajin relief** Cecilia F. Klein, "Woven Heaven, Tangled Earth", 12f.

36. **Striped victims descending from heaven: Codex Nuttall** Zelia Nuttall (ed.) *Codex Nuttall*, 20.

37. **Dying warrior transforming: Aztec wood drum from Malinalco** Laurette Sejourné, *Burning Water*, 119.

## pp. 159 - 160

**38. Birth scene and gladiatorial sacrifice scene: Codex Nuttall** Zelia Nuttall (ed.), *Codex Nuttall* 16, 83.

## pp. 174 - 175

**39. Ixiptla of Tezcatzoncatl: Codex Maglabechiano** Patricia R. Anawalt, "The Xicolli: Godly Jackets of the Aztecs", *Archaeology* 29 (October 1976), 262.

**40. Tezcatlipoca as Uantzin: Codex Borgia** S. Marti & G. P. Kurath, *Dances of Anahuac* (New York: Wiener-Gren Anthropological Research, 1964), 131.

## pp. 182 - 183

**41. God emerging from shell: Maya clay sculpture** Irene Nicholson, *Mexican and Central American Mythology* (New York: Paul Hamlyn, 1966) 128.

**42. Feline consuming a human heart: Temple of Kukulcan relief, Chichen Itza** Victor Wolfgang von Hagen, *The Ancient Sun Kingdoms of the Americas*, (St. Albans: Paladin, 1973), 131.

**43. Feathered Serpent swallowing a person: Olmec engraving (Chalcatzingo)** Carmen Cook de Leonarda, "Minor Arts of the Classic Period in Central Mexico", *Handbook of Middle American Indians* 10 (Austin: University of Texas, 1971), 218 (Figure 9).

**44. Feathered serpent swallowing or disgorging soldier-skeletons: Toltec relief (Tula)** Victor Wolfgang von Hagen, *The Ancient Sun Kingdoms of the Americas*, 89.

## pp. 184 - 185

**45. Sacrificial knife motif: Teotihuacan mural** Laurette Sejourne, *Burning Water*, 125 (Figure 41).

46. **Silex 'god-knives': Aztec offering in *Templo Mayor* ( Tenochtitlan )**  
G. Umberger, "Ancient Mexico: Discovering the Templo Mayor", *Archaeology*  
35:4, July- August 1982.

pp.196 - 197

47. **Goddess shattering over the cosmos: Codex illustration** Bruce  
Scotfield & Angela Cordova, *The Aztec Circle of Destiny: Astrology and  
Divination from the Ancient Aztec World* .xi.

48. **Itzamna becomes a plant: Izapa stela** S.W. Miles, "Sculptures of the  
Guatemalan-Chiapas Highlands and Pacific Slopes, and Associated  
Hieroglyphs", 253.

49. **Dead goddess sprouts corn: Codex Borgia** Laurette Sejourne, *Burning  
Water*, 122.

pp.204 - 205

50. **Bird offering's blood feeding Sun and Earth: Codex Borgia** E.C.  
Krugger, *Beyond the Blue Horizon* ( New York: Hager-Collins, 1991), 25.

# PART A:

EXPOSITIONS ON

*THE CONTEXT, NATURE AND*

EXPLANATION OF

AZTEC HUMAN SACRIFICE

# ONE : INTRODUCTIONS

## I. HUMAN SACRIFICE AND ITS STUDY

### a. Definition

Human sacrifice is simply: "the ceremonial slaying of a human being"<sup>1</sup>. On every continent, whether people have been Palaeolithic hunter-gatherers, subsistence farmers or modern city-dwellers, they have killed fellow humans in a ritual context.

Human sacrifice, like all sacrifice, sanctifies (*sacrificium* = *sacer*: holy, and *facere*: to make)<sup>2</sup> and *slays* -rather than merely offers<sup>3</sup>- something, to ensure a relation between a supposed source of spiritual power and person(s) in need of that source<sup>4</sup>. It has three stages: presentation of a human offering; invocation; and actual immolation<sup>5</sup>. Nearly always it emphasises shedding of blood<sup>6</sup>.

The practice was quite diverse. Brandon<sup>7</sup> and Bourdillon<sup>8</sup> recognise no less than eight varieties according to context and motive: propitiatory, funerary, vicarious, foundational and more.

Distinctions between this and other ritual death are obscure. Nigel Davies considers all types of religious killing: ritual suicide, crusades, martyrdom, murders by cults, witch hunts- to be "human sacrifice"<sup>9</sup>. However, this thesis only concerns ceremonies in which sacrificial death was considered an honour, and in which two other parties: slayers and congregation, were involved.

### b. Human Sacrifice as a Field of Research

Excepting sporadic actions by cults, human sacrifice is now extinct, yet it could have become a global institute. In the 16th - 19th centuries, half the world indulged in human sacrifice. It was escalating in Hindu India, South-east Asia, much of Africa, the Pacific and the New World<sup>10</sup>. If Western authorities had not forcibly removed it, what would the situation be in those regions now ?

This question makes human sacrifice an issue worthy of study. No people were "free from the stain"<sup>11</sup>, yet how much has been written on the topic, especially in traditions that practiced it extensively? Consider Saivites and Tantrists, once the chief immolators of Hinduism. Authorities on those schools: Ganesambandha Paramacharya<sup>12</sup>, Nallaswami Pillai<sup>13</sup>, and Bose<sup>14</sup> either neglect to mention human sacrifice; dismiss it as a local, tribal anomaly; or concentrate on Saivites who opposed it.

The rite is also a mystery. Around the globe, religions of human sacrifice were eradicated<sup>15</sup>. Little now remains of texts or paraphernalia to explain them. Indeed, Gilding<sup>16</sup> says we 'massacred' the explanations. We made the topic an "open wound" on the flank of scholarship<sup>17</sup>- "still undeciphered"<sup>18</sup>.

Finally, the ceremony is intriguing as an ethical dilemma:

"Few practices have caused greater moral detestation... technically, the term 'sacrifice' itself is rarely appropriate...every human sacrifice is a ceremonial murder"<sup>19</sup>.

Laurette Sejourne<sup>20</sup> even claims spirituality and "the slaughter of human beings" are so opposed that the former only appears once the latter is eliminated. How, then, did the two co-exist?

### c. The Study of Human Sacrifice

Academics began to ponder such problems when cultures were encountered which still practiced human sacrifice. According to Law, their first response was to observe, and observers' usual conclusion was that these cultures were "different but similar" to their own.

Into the 18th- 19th centuries, eyewitness accounts of human sacrifice in Africa abounded: Kotzebue's *Voyage of Discovery* (1821), Winwood Reade's *Savage Africa* (1863); and *Ewe-Speaking People* (1890). Clavigero's *History of Mexico* (1807) also became available<sup>21</sup>.

Reflecting issues of the day, these works were sensationalist, linking human sacrifice to slavery<sup>22</sup>.

Soon, a flurry of theories arose, focussing on the origins of sacrifice as a whole. E.O. James<sup>23</sup>, Taylor<sup>24</sup>, and Hubert and Mauss<sup>25</sup> claimed sacrifice was 'feeding' – an exchange for Divine assistance. Durkheim, Robertson Smith (1889), and Jevons (1896) saw connections with totemism and communal meals, whilst Gerardus van der Leeuw (1920)<sup>26</sup> suggested sacrifice was a type of magic, and James Frazer<sup>27</sup> argued human offerings were a device for controlling and concentrating death– focusing and atoning community guilt.

These ideas laid invaluable groundwork for later studies. However, non-human and human sacrifices were placed on equal footing, even when human victims were *not* "possessions"<sup>28</sup>. Thus:

"the fact that, at a certain moment, man decided that *murder* would please the gods remain(ed) an enigma"<sup>29</sup>.

Realising this deficiency, scholars since World War II prefer either not to discuss human sacrifice at all<sup>30</sup>, or concentrate on its presence in individual cultures such as the Maori (James Irwin)<sup>31</sup>; Old Testament Jews (Gaster, de Vaux)<sup>32</sup>; and Sub-Saharan Africa (Valeri, Law)<sup>33</sup>. This trend has allowed the cultural context of human sacrifice to be better understood, though the enigma remains.

A few writers persist in giving overviews. In 1951, Adolf Jensen proposed that human sacrifice re-enacted a primal event. Two decades on, Viltorio Lanternari dubbed the practice "anxiety relief"<sup>34</sup>. His line was expanded by Rene Girard, who utilised Levi-Strauss' musings on the relation between sacred and sacrilegious in ritual killing<sup>35</sup>. Girard believed neurosis and psychic crisis stimulated human sacrifice to divert violence<sup>36</sup>.

Recently, the most comprehensive study has been Nigel Davies' *Human Sacrifice in History and Today*. It surveys the rite over all times and cultures. Davies conclusion: that human sacrifice was a 'bridge' by which Divinity was hoped to descend into human form, and humans hoped to rise into Godhood<sup>37</sup>, forms this thesis' foundation.

#### d. Aztec Religion as a Case Study

To examine the issues raised by human sacrifice, a case study has been made of Aztec religion. The Aztecs are a fitting subject. No other people practiced human sacrifice on such a scale, or with such variety and pomp. Ritual killing permeated their entire culture, making them and their predecessors :

" ...strange and remote..Was there also something more brutal and sinister about them ? ...their terrible divinities distinguished by skulls and flayed skins and appetite for eating human hearts. There is something threatening and perverse in their art...And it is a fact that religious sadism increased, reaching its height of course, after the Aztec conquests.. At least one can say the Sumerians and Egyptians of 3000-2000 BC and the Chinese of 500 BC - AD 1 grew more humane and gave up their religious immolations. ... (Ancient) Americans were uninhibited in displaying their sadism, they manifested so little of the counterbalancing virtues of humanity"<sup>38</sup>.

## II. THE AZTECS AND AZTEC CULTURE

### a. The Term "Aztec"

"Aztec" derives from *Aztlan*, the legendary Aztec homeland. Also called *Mexica* and *Tenochca* after their island city-state (Tenochtitlan-Mexico, today's Mexico City), the Aztec were one of several Nahuatl-speaking American Indian groups to flourish in *Mesoamerica*- Mexico and Central America. In popular usage, "Aztec civilisation" denotes the entire sequence of city-states and empires in the pre-Hispanic Basin of Mexico.



Here I sometimes use "Aztec" in the popular sense, because Central Mexico was an "Aztec world" when discovered: economically and politically dominated by the Aztec Empire<sup>39</sup> (see Map). Moreover, Central Mexican traditions form most of Aztec culture.

#### b. Basic Summary of Aztec Culture and History

Amerindian peoples were isolated 25,000 years from the rest of humanity, and Mexican civilisation existed almost as long as China, so Aztec culture had evolved rather differently from the West.

One distinction was that, lacking beasts of burden and hard metals, Mesoamericans never knew animal-power, vehicles or complex machines<sup>40</sup>. Nevertheless, reliance on steel-sharp obsidian (volcanic glass)<sup>41</sup> gave them great genius in stonework<sup>42</sup>.

Science and arts took a different turn from the West, the former concentrating on astro-calendrics, urban planning, hygiene, botany and zoology; the latter, on sculpture, feather and flower craft, and stuccowork. In such fields, Mesoamerica often surpassed the West<sup>43</sup>. Particularly, Mesoamericans had accurate taxonomies<sup>44</sup> and developed many fruits, vegetables, medicinal drugs, gums, adhesives, fibres, and stimulants now used globally<sup>45</sup>.

Mesoamerica underwent several phases. Around 7000 b.c.e., Mexican forager-fishers began simple agriculture<sup>46</sup>. By "Late Formative" times (2300-1300 b.c.e.), villages, chief doms, ceremonial structures and Mesoamerica's basic technology formed<sup>47</sup>. The next thousand years (1300 - 100 b.c.e.), seminal ("Pre-Classic") civilisations evolved: Olmec, Monte Alban, and others- initiating urbanism<sup>48</sup>, scripts, sciences and lapidary. Then came a millennium of improved agriculture<sup>49</sup>, very fine arts, and astro-calendric advances: the "Classic" (100 b.c.e. - 900 c.e.) period: Mayans, Teotihuacan, Tajin, Zapotec, Xochicalco.

Classic times ended violently with "Barbarian" (*Chichimeca*) invasions. Thus began the "Post-Classic" era (900 – c.1530 c.e.): expansion northward<sup>50</sup>; Toltecs; Mixtecs; and Yucatan Maya. The Toltecs (700–1150 c.e.) were the Aztecs' main "mould", culturally and institutionally<sup>51</sup>.

Tremendous population growth characterised the Post-Classic<sup>52</sup>. Sciences and arts fell into neglect, but metallurgy, militarism and improved engineering spread<sup>53</sup>. Finally, under the Aztecs and their neighbours, a slight "cultural renaissance" stirred, c.1460 – 1520.

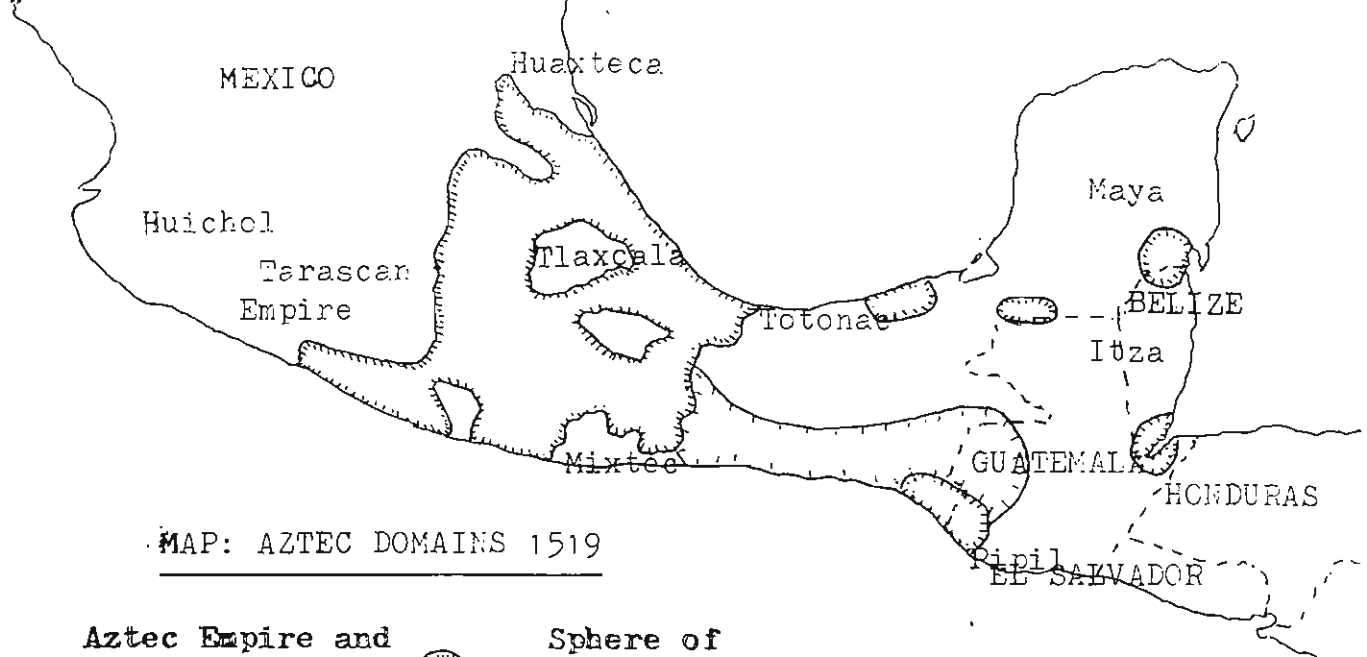
The Aztecs were outsiders: a *tanime* (semi-civilised)<sup>54</sup> *Chichimeca* group who wandered down from north-west Mexico<sup>55</sup>, arriving in the Valley of Mexico c.1150. Founding an occasional community, the Aztecs were evicted (c.1320) to marsh islands of Lake Texcoco<sup>56</sup>, where they built their Venice-like<sup>57</sup> city-state.

In 1428, the Aztecs formed a Triple Alliance with Texcoco and Tlacopan, overthrowing the main power of the time– the Tepaneca. This put them in charge of a rich Empire. Over the next ninety years, conquests and trade expanded it into a far-flung realm of 8–20 million souls<sup>58</sup>.

The Triple Alliance ruled a patchwork of thirty-eight fully autonomous nations and a few strategic (frontier) outposts<sup>59</sup> (see Map). The realms were kept 'Aztec' in the lightest sense<sup>60</sup>: annual tribute; a monitoring of trade routes and markets; some Aztec cults and wares; fortresses and garrisons; and *iuchpatli* (highways)<sup>61</sup>.

Aztec government was once fairly democratic-theocratic<sup>62</sup>, but eventually settled on oligarchy, with elected *Huetlatloani* (Great Speakers: Emperors). Through *Huetlatloani* Moctezuma II, the post of Emperor became virtually autocratic<sup>63</sup>.

The Empire was ended by a Spanish war of conquest (1519–1521). A force of several hundred *Conquistadors* (armed adventurers) under



MAP: AZTEC DOMAINS 1519

Aztec Empire and  
outposts:

Sphere of  
influence:

Sources:

Charles Gibson, "The Structure of the Aztec Empire",  
Handbook of the Middle American Indians (Austin:  
University of Texas Press, 1971), 383f.

Richard E.W. Adams, Prehistoric Mesoamerica (Boston:  
Brown & Co., 1977), 45.

INSET: CENTRAL MEXICO

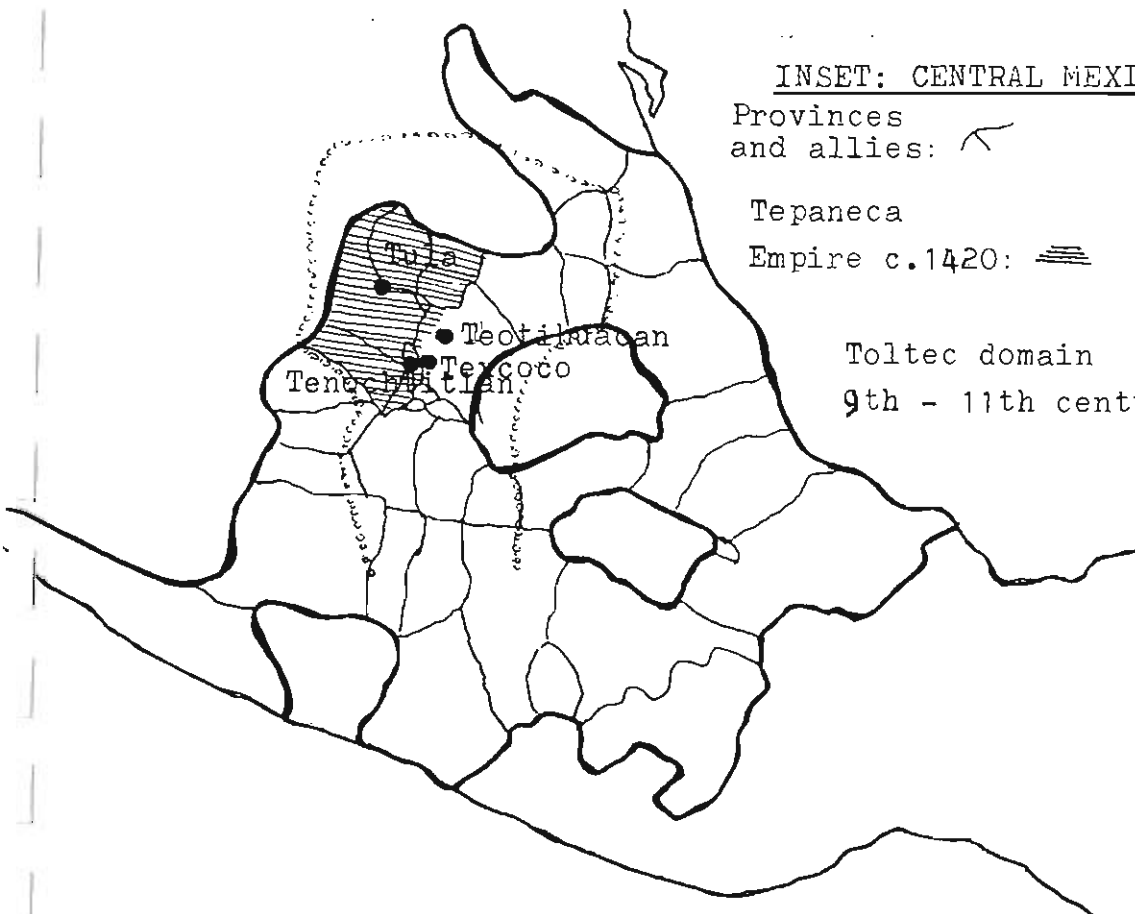
Provinces  
and allies: ↗

Tepaneca

Empire c.1420: ≡

Toltec domain

9th - 11th centuries: ⤿



Hernan Cortes was guaranteed victory by distinct advantages: steel, cavalry, gunpowder, 200,000 native foot-soldiers (allies and Cuban Indians)<sup>64</sup> and devastating epidemics<sup>65</sup>. Tenochtitlan fell in 1521. Outer garrisons and provinces were not subdued until 1524<sup>66</sup>.

This was not the end. Initially, Spaniards were few, so much had to be left intact- even the office of Emperor (until 1563). Aztec and Spaniard intermarried: *mestizo* culture was born.

Then, into the mid-1600's, influxes of Spanish immigrants, forced conversion, slavery and epidemics robbed Aztecs of land, status and culture<sup>67</sup>. Valley indigenes declined from 2,000,000 to 73,000<sup>68</sup>.

After 1840, a recovery began. There are now 800,000 Nahua (Aztecs and related Indians)<sup>69</sup>, and tens of millions of *mestizos* (persons of mixed descent). Much indigenous culture persists, often merged into general Mexican life.

### III. SOURCE MATERIALS

Our knowledge of the Aztecs is defined by available sources:

- a. Pre-Conquest Writings
- b. Ethnographic Data
- c. Art and Archaeology
- d. Post-Conquest Writings.

#### a. Pre-Conquest Writings

At first glance, this might appear the principal source. After all, native texts appear on everything from pottery to monuments and *amoxtlacuilotli* (manuscripts: rolled or screen-folded books of deerskin or bark paper)<sup>70</sup>. There were huge libraries<sup>71</sup> of *amoxtlacuilotli*. Groups of "innumerable" scribes<sup>72</sup> worked only on law and rites, or philosophy and science<sup>73</sup>. Mexican writings existed since 1100 b.c.e.<sup>74</sup>, and *amoxtlacuilotli* by 100 c.e.<sup>75</sup>.

Unfortunately, though, merely 20 or so pre-Conquest books have survived. Nearly all *amoxtlacuilolli* fell into neglect or were incinerated by zealous Catholics<sup>76</sup>.

Even the remainders are probably just 'volumes' of huge 'sets', as Mexican glyphics required much paper to compensate for its lack of grammar and syntax. Indeed, though many Mesoamerican languages were monosyllabic and thus— like Chinese and ancient Egyptian— suitable for hieroglyphs, the Aztec system was very ambiguous. 'Comic-strip' picture-sequences prevailed<sup>77</sup>, only vaguely clarified by coded positioning, colour, design, and gesture, or by sporadic rebus-type phonetic symbols<sup>78</sup>. Each section of a page had somehow to be 'read' from these elements<sup>79</sup>. Rote-learnt song-chants accompanied books to fill out gaps in expression<sup>80</sup>, but these are lost to us, as are much of the glyphs' meanings.

Despite such deficiencies, *amoxtlacuilolli* offer invaluable glimpses into historical, iconographic and calendric contexts of human sacrifice. Only *Codex Nuttall* was readily available here, but secondary source excerpts from Pueblan-Tlaxcalan ('Aztec') works such as *Codex Vaticanus 3773*, and *Codex Ferjervary-Mayer* are used.

#### b. Ethnographic Data

Many Nahuas and other Mesoamericans— the Huichol, Tzotzil Mayans, Lacadon, Zapotec — maintain traditional creeds. Field-studies and analyses are therefore invaluable sources. The thesis makes much use of such work by Vogt, Cancian, Holland, and Redfield, paying particular attention to Oscar Lewis' books on the Nahuatl town of Tepoztlan, and Sandstrom's study of a Nahuatl village, Amatlan.

To use ethnographic data, we must distil indigenous elements from Catholic accretions. Even so, this source has the advantage of detailing the living context of Aztec practices.

### c. Art and Archaeology

Mesoamerica underwent intensive excavations for 100 years, producing abundant data. Such data and art studies are speculative, but give - as Pasztory puts it- some undeniable "hard evidence"<sup>81</sup>. I rely on such material to a greater extent than many other sources. The archaeology of Millon, Soustelle, Diehl, Moctezuma, Sugiyama, Flannery, Marcus and others, and art studies of Anawalt, Pasztory, Proskouriakoff and Krickeberg are often mentioned.

### d. Post-Conquest Writings

This very extensive source takes three forms:

- i. Conquistadors' Reports
- ii. Post-Conquest Aztec and Mayan Writings
- iii. Later Spanish Compilations.

#### i. Conquistadors' Reports

These include Cortes' *Letters (Cartas y Documentos)* and Diaz's *History of the Conquest of New Spain*. They are eyewitness accounts of temples, ceremonies and religious attitudes- including Aztec 'defences' for human sacrifice, for which reason I apply them to a marked degree. Conversely, this source manifests exaggerations<sup>82</sup>, contradictions<sup>83</sup>, sensationalism and a huge dose of blind bigotry<sup>84</sup>.

#### ii. Post-Conquest Aztec and Mayan Writings

Some thousand *codexes* (manuscripts) of this type exist. From about 1525 to 1600, high-born Aztecs such as Tezozomoc (Moctezuma II's grandson), Ixtlilxochitl (Nezahualpilli's grandson) and Chimalpahin penned their people's literature and history in Nahuatl or Spanish<sup>85</sup>, while ordinary Aztecs used glyphics and Latin-script Nahuatl for all kinds of documents<sup>86</sup>. Glyphics were still taught at the Mexican University<sup>87</sup>, and Mayans openly transcribed "pagan"

Scriptures – *Popul Vuh* and *Chilam Balam* – into Latin script. It is thus that Aztec 'Classics' (*Huehuetlalolli*: "Great Word") came down to us<sup>88</sup>, and *Anales de Cuauhtitlan*; *Historia Chichimeca-Tolteca*.

However, this source is extremely varied, reflecting haphazard interchanges of Hispanic and indigenous ways. Some: *Codex Mendoza*, *Codex Maglibechiano*– reproduce *amoxtlacuilotli*<sup>89</sup>. Others are almost completely Spanish in style, or seem dubious: churned out for Europe's curio-crazed courts.

Worse, Aztec authors– now drilled in Classic Western literature (the Bible, Plato)<sup>90</sup>– painted their forebears as Roman orators or Hebrew kings, and carefully side-stepped or fervently condemned human sacrifice.

For these reasons, and as few such texts are available here, they are little used in this thesis, except from excerpts out of secondary sources. However, I quote *Popul Vuh* and *Chilam Balam* extensively. These are Mayan works, but as they were not written under the watchful eye of the Colonial regime, they represent a strong, open 'voice' on native religion.

### iii. Spanish Compilations

This source was often the product of Spanish clerics, commissioned to detail indigenous 'evils'<sup>91</sup>, yet some are disinterested reports. Examples I use include *Collection of Mexican Songs*, Diego Duran's *Book of the Gods and Rites of the Ancient Calendar*, Motolinia's *History of the Indians of New Spain* and Bernardino Sahagun's *Historia de las Casas de Nueva Espana*– better known as *Florentine Codex*.

Such compilations are tainted by their concentration on superstitious and "barbarous" practices. However, they offer great detail. Sahagun's six-volume work is widely esteemed because he

selected the finest Aztec informants; had them agree on each point being recorded; and allowed them to relate their creed in Nahuatl<sup>92</sup>. For this reason, Duran, Motolinia and Sahagun are much used here.

#### IV. AZTEC RELIGION

##### a. Definition and Introduction

Aztec religion was a synthesis of Central Mexican religions, and a few foreign cults. Aztec-type "Nahua spirituality"<sup>93</sup> appeared by 200 c.e. The Aztecs merely added the following features:

1. Nationalistic, solar-military cults (god Huitzilopochtli and goddess Cihuacoatl)<sup>94</sup>.
2. Mass human sacrifice.
3. Countless deities and images - a complex iconography<sup>95</sup>.
4. A cluttered ritual calendar: much 'doubling up' of festivals and rites<sup>96</sup>.
5. Greater use of twin-topped pyramid-temples and skull racks.

Aztec religion will be outlined according to:

- b. Beliefs
- c. Structure
- d. Specialists
- e. Practices
- f. Buildings, Institutes and Statuary
- g. Historical Development.

##### b. Beliefs

The Aztecs recognised hundreds, perhaps thousands, of divinities<sup>97</sup>. For clarity, major ones are listed in Appendix I. Gomara observed the gods were "only so many manifestations of the One"<sup>98</sup>, which agrees with what Aurelio, a modern Nahua shaman, told Sandstrom: "So many?...They're all the same"<sup>99</sup>. Certainly no Aztec image has been excavated which is unequivocally of a single divinity. Rather, all statues combine elements of several gods<sup>100</sup>,



much as gods inhabit each other's temples<sup>101</sup>, and transform into each other in Aztec myths: "Tezcatlipoca altered his name and *changed himself* into Mixcoatl"<sup>102</sup>— even changing sex<sup>103</sup> or becoming one another's aspects<sup>104</sup>.

The Nahuatl word for "deity" (*teo*, *teotl*) was vague: plural yet singular<sup>105</sup> — akin to "outstandingness", forming compounds such as "ravenous" (*teo-ciuhqi*) and "in excellent health" (*teo-patic*)<sup>106</sup>. Apparently there was an imageless Being<sup>107</sup> behind divinities, which Aztecs knew as *Tloque Nahaque* (Lord of the Close Vicinity), *Yohualli ehecatl* (Night and Wind), *Ometeotl* (God of Two-ness?), *Ipalnemoani* (Giver of Life), and *Tonacatecuhtli-Tonacahuatli* (Lord and Lady of Our Flesh).

Gods and goddesses were the "mirrors" (*tezcatl*), "suns" or "offspring" of this being<sup>108</sup>, yet often this "High God" is a title or aspect of them<sup>109</sup>.

Braden believed this confusion stems from scholars falsely attributing exalted concepts to the Aztecs<sup>110</sup>, but his case is refuted by the Aztecs, who were outraged when Spanish monks told them they did not have "One God, Creator"<sup>111</sup>. Haly, following Michael Coe's line of Aztec divinity as "a never-ending pair of dual opposites"<sup>112</sup>, considers the "High God" a pair— a "bone god"— the "marrow" or dead shadow of the gods<sup>113</sup>.

Probably the fuller picture is Eva Hunt's: that Aztec Divinity was an ever-transforming, multiple Reality that *was* nature, in a pantheistic fashion<sup>114</sup>. This would explain the Aztec emphasis on birds, beasts as the gods' *nahualli* (doubles, alter-ego)<sup>115</sup>.

Divinities were organised into twin, quadruple and quintuple aspects<sup>116</sup>. These seem to have rotated as each other's "stand-ins" around the Mesoamerican wheels of time and directional space.

Other pivotal beliefs concerned the Five Cosmic Ages (this world, like the last four, being due to end); and division of the universe into a 'pyramid' of Four Sacred Directions, 13 heavens, and 9 underworlds<sup>117</sup>. A 'pyramidal' cosmos inclined Mesoamericans to regard hills and pyramids as supernatural (*santo tepenej*)<sup>118</sup> connected with lineages and *nahualli*<sup>119</sup>.

Regarding the soul, the belief was that people have an "animal familiar" (bird, beast) *nahualli*-soul. Each human also has a seven-segmented *tonali* (a "calling" or energy), and a *yolotl*- a "heart/life force" or personality-spirit<sup>120</sup>. Depending on one's mode of death, one eventually merges into the underworld or ascends the heavens, some souls returning as butterflies and birds.

#### c. Structure

Nahua religion was "inclusive"<sup>121</sup>: diverse and eclectic. Every province had autonomous, distinctive liturgy, paraphernalia, priestly titles and hierarchy. Variety was relished: "It is not our teaching, to tell others what to do"<sup>122</sup>, whereas Christianity, it was feared, "will restrict your beliefs"<sup>123</sup>. Myths existed in several versions and even sacred words were conditional: "perhaps"; "perchance"; "so said the old ones.."

All the same, there was a wider identity called "this ancient order" or "the Law"<sup>124</sup>. The same festivals and fasts were observed concurrently over most of Mesoamerica<sup>125</sup>, and - just as the Aztecs claimed<sup>126</sup> - their gods were fairly universal to Mesoamerica<sup>127</sup>, or at least had equivalents. If a nation, like the Huasteca, did not observe certain fasts, they were considered unusual: "not keeping the Law"<sup>128</sup>.

Pilgrimages probably created this vague sense of unity. Cholula<sup>129</sup>, Ixchel and Chichen Itza are just a few centres that drew

people from distant kingdoms<sup>130</sup>. Pottery temple models suggest Aztec cities had a thriving souvenir trade geared to pilgrims.

Supported by pilgrimage and therefore independent of political change was the ancient institute of *Quequetzalcoa* ("Quetzalcoatl")—pairs of holy "archbishops" stationed at major religious centres<sup>131</sup>: Cholula, Cempoala, Tenochtitlan, even Tzintzintzun (the Tarascan capital)<sup>132</sup>. *Quequetzalcoa* were old priests, elected by judges and kings, whose prestige and power was comparable to Emperors<sup>133</sup>.

The Aztec Empire itself had priestly offices imposing some structure onto Aztec religion. There was the religious supervisor of the capital and all Aztec provinces: *Mexicatl teohuatzin*; the viceroy-priest: *Cihuacoatl*; the head of all seminars: *Tlaquinilolle*<sup>134</sup>; the priestess in charge of the entire Mother-goddess cult: *Cihuacacuilli*; and a supervisor for each major god-cult in the Empire: *Teopixcatepachoani*.

Below these were 38 grades of priests, broadly divided by age: porter-novices (*piltzintli*—boys), offering priests (*tlamacazqui*, *cinatlamacazqui*—young men, young women), fire priests (*tlapaliuhqui*—middle-aged men and women<sup>135</sup>), sacrificing priests (*huehuequi*—old men) and college matrons (*cihuateopixque*—old women).

#### d. Religious Specialists

The Aztecs had many kinds of religious specialists. There were numerous<sup>136</sup> full-time clergy, male and female<sup>137</sup>, serving everything from *tlaxilacalli*(parish) temples to the *Templo Mayor*. These led a communal life of austerity, penance, scientific-intellectual pursuits, worship and ritual duties<sup>138</sup>. Votive renunciates (*tlamaceuhqui*, *mozauhqui*) and short-term 'nuns' also performed penances and religious duties, for set periods of months or a few years<sup>139</sup>.

Military orders were quasi-religious, devoted to the cults of solar-military deities, and run by "masters" (*tiacheuauh*) and "rulers" (*telpochtlatoque*) who had ceremonial duties<sup>140</sup> and were expected to be upright citizens<sup>141</sup>. Each occupation additionally had a guild or lodge, serving a patron divinity and featuring initiations, ethical codes and grades.

Court 'lodges'- *ichiuyotl* ('friendships' of rulers from many city-states)- debated and recited spiritual poem-songs. Priest-kings were an ancient tradition (eg. the Zapotec *Uija Tao*<sup>142</sup> and Cholula rulers<sup>143</sup>), but the Aztecs lacked these, though 'Great Speakers' had many ritual duties and an aura of sacredness.

Aside from 'official' specialists, there were some religious hermits. Legends speak of Yappan- who lived on a desert rock, and Huemac of Atlixocan- who lived in a cave<sup>144</sup>. The *Popul Vuh* describes hermit-priests of remote shrines whose very paths were forgotten:

" (They) didn't occupy their homes during the day,  
but just walked in the mountains. And this was  
their food: just the larvae of the yellow jacket,  
the larvae of the wasp, the larvae of the bee, which  
they hunted"<sup>145</sup>.

Also outside (but sometimes within) mainstream religion stood a whole range of occultists, who had their own schools. At Cuiclahuac, a lineage of *nahualteutin* (magicians) claimed to have been begun several centuries before by King Mixcoatl, Topiltzin's father<sup>146</sup>.

Most of these 'alternative' religionists seem to have wandered from place to place. Modern *curanderos* (healers) are a survival of the group<sup>147</sup>, which once included conjurers, fortune-tellers, 'witches', illusionists, and storm-makers. Many of these were feared for taking on animal-form to bewitch, rob, rape and kill people<sup>148</sup>.

#### e. Practices

The main Aztec practice was an unceasing round of elaborate, theatrical, "very solemn"<sup>149</sup> calendar rites- akin to the *fiesta*. Each month had distinctive ceremonies (see Appendix II) and special foods, human sacrifices, intoxicants, games<sup>150</sup>, mock battles<sup>151</sup>, music (choirs and dances of thousands, accompanied by orchestras), lengthy *tlayahualoliztli*(processions), "allegorical plays"<sup>152</sup>, costumes and decorations.

Offering was another central activity. Aztecs "gladly parted"<sup>153</sup> with everything - burying, smashing or sinking treasures<sup>154</sup>, even if it meant severe deprivation. Paper, rubber, *copal* incense, and quail were favoured offerings, but anything was given<sup>155</sup>- even pyramid-temples. The rubble fill of a pyramid-temple was crammed with sacrifices<sup>156</sup> and the building was buried as a gift under a new shell, every 8 or 52 years, when all possessions were destroyed.

Austerities (*maceualiztli*-"good deed" or penance), were the third principal practice. Most popular was slitting and puncturing one's flesh to offer blood, but vigils (*tozohualiztli*) of song and dance, fasting (*nezahualiztli*)<sup>157</sup>, self-flagellation<sup>158</sup>, ablutions in freezing ponds, and scorching one's self were also practiced<sup>159</sup>. Particular to Mesoamerica was the habit of perforating one's ears, tongue or penis and then drawing series of rods or threads- lined with sharp objects- through the wound<sup>160</sup>. Periodic confessions before one's family<sup>161</sup>, or before Tlazolteotl<sup>162</sup>, Tezcatlipoca<sup>163</sup> and possibly Quetzalcoatl<sup>164</sup> were sometimes involved.

Like other North American Indians, Aztecs valued vision-quests. *Maceualiztli*; singing; dancing and "ardent desiring with weeping, with sighs"<sup>165</sup> was often to beg a god to manifest (*huetzi* or *huitz* - come, descend). This *moteotia* (seeking a god for one's

self)<sup>166</sup> probably overlapped the contemplative exercises of *ilnamiqui* (to look within) and *monotza* (to call one's self)<sup>167</sup>.

To have visions, prophesize or contemplate, Mesoamericans generally gazed at crystal before a flame<sup>168</sup>; consumed hallucinogens and alcohol<sup>169</sup>; or peered into vats of black water; or into obsidian and magnetite mirrors (the Mayan word for mirror- *nen-* meant 'to rule' and 'to contemplate')<sup>170</sup>.

Lastly, the Aztecs practiced charity. Like the North American *potlatch*<sup>171</sup>, the Aztec guild-feast was a competition in generous giving. Being "very charitable"<sup>172</sup> and seeing beggars as "one's self" was emphasised<sup>173</sup>. A portion of all meals was set aside for the needy<sup>174</sup>, and *calpulli*(ward) temples were distribution centres for food and goods for the poor. Also, lords were supposed to support widows, disabled and impoverished persons from their personal treasuries.

#### f. Religious Buildings, Institutes and Statuary

The centre of an Aztec city had a sacred enclosure (*ithualli*)<sup>175</sup>. Within and around this were important structures: *teocalli*(pyramid temples), *tzompantli*(skull-racks - towers of skulls threaded on poles); and plazas. Besides these, there might be ritual ball-courts, monasteries, *calmecac*(priestly schools), *tlamacazacalli* (priestly seminars), *capulco* (nunneries or girls' schools), *telpochcalli* (military colleges), 'maypoles', banners, *cuicuacalli* ('singing houses'), libraries, crematoriums, giant braziers (for sacred fires), ablution ponds, gardens, artificial forests, monuments, menageries, and shrines<sup>176</sup>.

Teocalli dominated the skyline - *coatepetl* ('world-mountains')<sup>177</sup> with massive pyramid-bases (*tzacualli*)- solid except for underground storerooms. The temples on their summits were so

dark within, and smoky with incense, that their interiors could hardly be discerned<sup>178</sup>. Inside were *tlacquimilolli* (holy relics), idols, ritual equipment, costumes, and a baroque extravagance of wooden and stone carving, murals, tapestries, and curtains trimmed with feathers and bells<sup>179</sup>. Blood<sup>180</sup>, grass and flower-offerings purportedly covered all. As many divinities might be housed in a single temple, most temple interiors had "little houses"<sup>181</sup> (sub-chambers and sanctuaries) for lesser gods..

At open air<sup>182</sup> plazas below *Teocalli*, congregations (which numbered thousands) watched temple rites and dances, sometimes singing and bleeding themselves. Common people stood, whereas dignitaries occupied wicker seating under awnings.

Aztec idols were kept hidden. Most squatted on pedestals on cloth-draped altars. Major ones were curtained, studded with jewels, finely clothed and adorned with stone or metal masks<sup>183</sup>.

Aztecs had shrines and images everywhere<sup>184</sup>: mountain tops, crossroads, lake sides, fountains, caves, fields, national borders (*nonztli* shrines)<sup>185</sup>. Although everything<sup>186</sup> - even a star, insect or water<sup>187</sup> - had statues honouring it, Mesoamericans did not actually attribute divinity to idols<sup>188</sup>. However, passers-by would draw blood to leave as an offering, or paper or flowers at such images<sup>189</sup>.

#### g. Historical Development

Aztec religion's basic elements evolved over millennia, examined here era by era:

##### i. Formative Contributions (7000-1300 b.c.e.)

Tlatilco figurines suggest Aztec paired gods<sup>190</sup> began this early. Aztec household goddesses were identical to female figurines

of this period, implying similar continuity<sup>191</sup>. Note Aztecs knew one household goddess as "Ancient Lady"<sup>192</sup>. Plazas, sacrificial caches, and temple orchestras also arose now<sup>193</sup>.

ii. Pre-Classic Contributions (1300 - 100 b.c.e.)

From this period came the Aztec idea of guilds, *teocalli*, autosacrifice, blood receptacles<sup>194</sup>, and developed mythology<sup>195</sup>. Olmec dwarf-gods were probably ancestral to Aztec Tlalokes and Mayan Bacabs<sup>196</sup>, but the great Olmec Jaguar-god was unknown later. It may have been the prototype of Tezcatlipoca<sup>197</sup>, Tlaloc<sup>198</sup>, or—more likely—Tepeyollotl (Jaguar-Heart-of-the-Mountains). God-*nahualli* common in Aztec times were certainly depicted: feathered serpents; fire serpents; the crocodilian earth-monster<sup>199</sup>.

iii. Classical Contributions (100 b.c.e. - 900 c.e.)

Cults (and perhaps myths<sup>200</sup>) the Aztecs knew were crystallised now. Huehuateotl, Xipe<sup>201</sup>, Tlaloc, Quetzalcoatl<sup>202</sup>, Cinteotl and other gods appear in the form they were known to Aztecs.

Military orders like the Aztecs' Jaguars and Eagles apparently existed<sup>203</sup>, but it is still debated whether there were priests. Possibly, as in the Mayan region, scribes fulfilled the function<sup>204</sup>.

Tezcatlipoca and Huitzilopochtli—so important to the Aztecs—were supposedly introduced to Central Mexico under Toltec king Itztaccaltzin (reigned c.833-865)<sup>205</sup>. Also in his reign, a woman—Xochitl—established Mayahuel's *pulque* (alcohol) cult<sup>206</sup>.

iv. Post-Classic Contributions (900-1530 c.e.)

This period shaped Aztec religion's main features. Solar-military cults such as characterised the Aztec creed were widely followed<sup>207</sup>, and from Chichimecs and Huichols came Xilonen, Mixcoatl and Camaxtli. Mesoamerican cults spread far south and north—the god



of death turning up in Alabama<sup>208</sup>; the long-nosed commerce god in Iowa<sup>209</sup>; and perhaps the feathered serpent in Colombia<sup>210</sup>.

This age's pivotal genius was Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl (947–999?). His cult was Mesoamerica-wide by Conquest times<sup>211</sup>. Although "adored as a god"<sup>212</sup>, and the subject of conflicting accounts<sup>213</sup>, he was apparently historical— a Toltec priest-king and conqueror and law bringer of the Yucatan Mayans<sup>214</sup>. Topiltzin was said, probably correctly, to have invented the institute of priesthood, *calmecac* (priestly colleges), many penances, midnight ablutions<sup>215</sup>, and worship of the High God as dual opposites:

"Skirt-of-Stars, Light of Day..She who endows  
the earth with solidity; He who covers the  
earth with cotton"<sup>216</sup>.

Carrasco believes Aztec notions of the ideal city, the model king and emphasis on creativity and building as worship all stem from Topiltzin's legend<sup>217</sup>. His reign was romanticised as a "golden age".

Two other Toltecs important in Aztec lore were King Huemac (r.1047–1122)— an apparently immortal seer who wrote the *tonalamatl* (astrology almanac)<sup>218</sup> and supposedly occupied a cave in the 16th century<sup>219</sup> and Titlahuacan, whose destructive miracles are said to have instituted Tezcatlipoca's military-sacrificial cult.

#### v. Aztec Developments

Aztec religious history could be divided into six phases:

1. Schisms and Wanderings (c.1110–1325)
2. Prophet-Priests and Sage-Rulers (1325–1440)
3. Speculative Thought and Military Mysticism (1440–1486)
4. Eclecticism and Occultism (1486–1521)
5. Suppression, Decline and Rebellion (1521–c.1840)
6. Integration (c.1840– now).

#### 1. Schisms and Wanderings (c.1110–1325)

The Aztec migration, according to their accounts, began with a religious quarrel between Malinalxochitl and her brother, Mecitli

(considered god Huitzilopochtli). Both seem to have been occultists. Malinalxochitl and her faction set themselves up at Malinalco (which remained an occult centre), and she sent her son, Copil, to defeat the other Aztecs, but was repulsed by priest Cuauhtliquetziqui<sup>220</sup>.

## 2. Prophet-Priests and Sage-Rulers (1325-1440)

During this century of Culhuacan and Tepaneca 'oppression', supposedly wise figures such as priest Ocacaltzin (c.1320-1370)<sup>221</sup> and King Huitzilhuitl (r.1396-1417)<sup>222</sup> lived. The great Nahuatl religious poet: Ayocuan Cuetzpaltzin, "the White Eagle of Tecamachalco" (c.1395-1441), preached life's illusory nature in different towns<sup>223</sup>.

## 3. Speculative Thought and Military Mysticism (1440-1486)

Major developments in Aztec religion now occurred. Tlacauelel (1398-1476) - a humble but powerful general - spread the cults of Huitzilopochtli and Coatlicue, possibly inventing much military-mysticism<sup>224</sup>. His daughter, Macuilxochitzin, furthered his ideas<sup>225</sup>.

Contemporary to Tlacauelel was Prince Nezahualcoyotl of Texcoco (1402-1472). At first an exiled ascetic ("Fasting Coyote of the Hills"), this ruler became the greatest Aztec poet-mystic. He influenced whole generations (many nobles studying under him, most notably Tochiuhuitzin Coyolxiuhqui)<sup>226</sup>. Apart from promoting Tezcatlipoca and the High God (Tloque Nahque)<sup>227</sup>, Nezahualcoyotl was noted for his sanctity<sup>228</sup> and cultural achievements. *Ichnoyotl* were his invention, over which he held spiritual authority<sup>229</sup>.

## 4. Eclecticism and Occultism (1486-1521)

The last thirty-five years of the Aztec Empire witnessed much incorporation of foreign cults. Tlazolteotl, a Huasteca goddess, proved popular, quickly becoming a very important cult.

Occultism- fortune-telling, omens, magic - increasingly occupied the Aztecs<sup>230</sup>. Prince Nezahualpilli (r.1472-1516) is a good example, being an honoured seer. Even *ichnoyotl* meetings Lord Tecayehuatzin began conducting (in 1490) became speculative<sup>231</sup>.

#### 5. Suppression, Decline and Rebellion (1521- c.1840)

The Spanish Conquest obliterated Aztec religious institutes. Aztec nuns were raped; priests butchered; and by 1531 Bishop Zumarraga destroyed 500 temples, 20,000 images<sup>232</sup>, and most Aztec books. One million Aztecs converted in 1524 alone<sup>233</sup>, some child-converts merrily betraying and stoning Aztec priests<sup>234</sup>.

Despite all this, Spanish presence was initially so limited that many *teocalli* were re-built and re-furnished, or worship continued covertly: idols behind Christian images; religious activity shifting to night-time, or to remote temples and cave shrines<sup>235</sup>. Gods were revered in Valley of Mexico caves till 1803.

There was also resistance, especially 1525-1545. Aztecs made a mockery of Sacraments<sup>236</sup>; priests opened new colleges and continued their rites- though it cost them their lives in the Inquisition<sup>237</sup>. Tlaloc's cult revived in 1539, when poor crops were blamed on Christianity<sup>238</sup>, and in some parts, Catholic priests were killed<sup>239</sup>.

In nearby Zacatecas, Tenmaxtle's forces restored the old faith by burning churches, crosses, and converts. In Chamula, Mayans rebelled and re-established human sacrifice as recently as 1868<sup>240</sup>.

#### 6. Integration (c.1840 - now)

Over the last century, *Costumbre* ('customary') religion, as Nahuas call it<sup>241</sup>, has been more openly practiced, expressed through Hispanic idioms. "Forced appropriation"<sup>242</sup>- imperceptible blending of Catholicism and *Costumbre* religion- is the norm. All over

Mesoamerica, God/Jesus is the Sun and Mary the Moon – solar/military /stellar gods fuse with Christian figures, but agrarian deities like Ehecatl, Tlaloc, the Tlaloque and Macuilxochitl are fairly intact<sup>243</sup>.

Perhaps through persecution, images are reduced to straw symbols and paper cut-outs, and rites are covert, village-centred affairs. If ancient idols are turned up in fields, they are revered as *teteomej* (stone gods), but no longer as known gods<sup>244</sup>. Moreover, 'alternative' figures such as *curanderos* (healers), sorcerers and shamans have become the main religious specialists.

However, even Mexican Catholicism has Aztec colouring. Soon after the Conquest, Aztec religion influenced the new order: Franciscan monks adopted Aztec penitence and begging; priests used Aztec religious ornaments, offices, hymns and solar imagery<sup>245</sup>. Note that Aztec Juan Diego's famous 1531 vision of the Virgin of Guadalupe at Tepeyac Hill ('coincidentally' pilgrimage centre for mother goddess Coatlicue !) was of an *Indian* Virgin<sup>246</sup>.

Other influences can be detected in Mexico's bloody penances and Passion scenes; use of life-like images in processions; *postadas* and *postorelas* <sup>247</sup>(which have elements of old myths and sacrificial dramas)<sup>248</sup>; preference for Mass held in plazas before thousands; ornate religious art and love of colourful fiestas. Aztec ceremonies have been adopted: the Day of the Dead and the Festival of Flowers.

This Aztec-Catholic blend is potent enough to flourish abroad. The Day of the Dead and the cult of the Indian Virgin spread over all Latin America<sup>249</sup>. Mexican crews introduced 'pagan' Oaxacan myths to the Philippines<sup>250</sup> and possibly also bloody 'Passion Plays'.

<sup>1</sup> A. Gustave Haydon, "Human Sacrifice", in Vergilius Ferm *Encyclopaedia of Religion* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1945), 349.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Henninger, "Sacrifice", in Mircea Eliade (ed.), *The Encyclopaedia of Religions* 12 (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1987), 544.

- 3 Jan van Baal in *ibid.*
- 4 E.O. James, "Sacrifice: Introductory and Primitive", J. Hastings (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1920), 1.
- 5 J.M. Beattie, "On Understanding Sacrifice" in M.F.C. Bourdillon & M. Fortes (eds.), *Sacrifice* (Bristol: Academic, 1980), 29.
- 6 Joseph Henninger, "Sacrifice", 546.
- 7 S.G.F. Brandon, "Human Sacrifice", *A Dictionary of Comparative Religion* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970), 340.
- 8 M.F.C. Bourdillon, "Introduction", in M.F.C. Bourdillon & M. Fortes, *Sacrifice*, 10-17.
- 9 Nigel Davies, *Human Sacrifice in History and Today* (New York, William Morrow & Co., 1981), 13-15.
- 10 *ibid.*, 7, 18-20, 238, 272-3.
- 11 A.E. Crawley, "Human Sacrifice (Introductory & Primitive)", *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1917), 840.
- 12 D. Ganesambandha Paramacharya Swamikal, *The Development of Saivism in Southern India: 300-1300* (Gurupathara: Shiva Ilakkia Peravignar, 1967) in *passim*.
- 13 J.M. Nallaswami Pillai, *Studies in Saiva Siddhanta* Pt. I (Dharmapuram Adhinam, 1962) in *passim*.
- 14 D.N. Bose, *Tantras: Their Philosophies and Occult Secrets* (Calcutta: Oriental, 1956), 111.
- 15 Nigel Davies, *Human Sacrifice in History and Today* 78-80, 91.
- 16 M. Gilding, "The Massacre of the Mystery", *Journal of Pacific History*, XVII: 2, April 1982, in *passim*.
- 17 Michael Harner, "The Ecological Basis for Aztec Sacrifice", *American Ethnologist* 4 (1977), 133.
- 18 David Carrasco, "City as Symbol in Aztec Thought: The Clues from the Codex Mendoza", *History of Religion* 20 (February 1980), 201 (Footnote 7).
- 19 A.E. Crawley, "Human Sacrifice", 840.
- 20 Laurette Sejourne, *Burning Water* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1957), 13.
- 21 S.G.F. Brandon, "Human Sacrifice", 5t.
- 22 R. Law, "Human Sacrifice in Pre-Colonial West Africa", *African Affairs* 84 (June 1985).
- 23 E.O. James, *Origins of Sacrifice: A Study of Comparative Religion* (Boston: Kennelworth, 1933), 73, 78.
- 24 E.B. Taylor, *Primitive Culture* Vol. II (John Murray, 1903), 375-379.
- 25 Henri Hubert & Marcel Mauss, *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1898), 2.
- 26 Joseph Henninger, "Sacrifice", 531.
- 27 James G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, Pt. VI: *The Scapegoat* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1913) in *passim*.
- 28 Jan de Vries, *The Study of Religion - A Historical Approach* (New York: Harcourt Brace & World Co., 1967), 203.
- 29 *ibid.*
- 30 R. Law, "Human Sacrifice in Pre-Colonial West Africa", in *passim*.
- 31 James Irwin, *An Introduction to Maori Religion* (Special Studies in Religion: 4) (Bellford Park: Australian Association for Studies in Religion, 1984), 66-68.
- 32 R. de Vaux, *Studies in Old Testament Sacrifice* (Oxford/ Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1964), 53-64, 73-80 f.
- 33 T.V. Valeri, *Kingship and Sacrifice* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1985).
- 34 Joseph Henninger, "Sacrifice", 533.
- 35 C. Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1966), 224-225.

- 36 Rene Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore: John Hopewell, 1972), 1.
- 37 Nigel Davies, *Human Sacrifice in History and Today*, 275.
- 38 Jacquetta Hawkes, *The Atlas of Early Man* (London: Macmillan London Limited, 1976), 201-202.
- 39 G. Pasztory, *Aztec Art* (New York: Harry N. Adams, 1983), 7.
- 40 Brian Fagan, "If Columbus Had Not Called...", *History Today* May 1992, 33f. The only machines were simple pulleys, gyratory crushers, articulated and wheeled toys and trolleys, the *comelagotoaste* (a type of ferris wheel), spindle whorls, the loom, the bow-drill and the *kabal* - a foot-turned potters' block. See R.A. Diehl & M. Manderville, "Tula, and Wheeled Vehicles in Mesoamerica", *Antiquity* 61 (1981), 240-244.
- 41 H.E. Driver, *Indians of North America* (2nd Edition, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 169.
- 42 R.E.W. Adams, *Prehistoric Mesoamerica* (Boston: L.Henderson & Co., 1977), 308. Diaz and Cortes describe the deadly qualities of Aztec obsidian weaponry, including lance-poles with 1.75mtr. blades "which could not be deflected". See Hernan Cortes, *Letters* (trans. A.H. Pagden, London: Oxford University, 1972), 70, 130f and Bernal Diaz, *The Conquest of New Spain* (trans. W.J.M. Cohen, London: Folio, 1972) 251, 279, 311-315.
- 43 Jacques Soustelle, *Daily Life of the Aztecs* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1955), 129f.
- 44 B.Berlin et al. *Principles of Tzeltal Plant Classification* (New York: Academic, 1974), 49, 85-95, 169-178.
- 45 A.S. Lyons, *Medicine: An Illustrated History* (Melbourne: Macmillan & Co., 1979), 38, 50-55. See also R.E. Schultes, "An Overview of Hallucinogens in the Western Hemisphere", Peter Furst (ed.), *Flesh of the Gods: The Ritual Use of Hallucinogens* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1972), 5-6.
- 46 Michael D. Coe, *Mexico* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1984), 29, 33.
- 47 Richard E.W. Adams, *Prehistoric Mesoamerica* 308.
- 48 Michael D. Coe, *Mexico*, 46-48, 57. There were a few centres of 10,000 - 20,000 inhabitants, though most people lived in villages of 400 - 600. Cities of 25,000 - 75,000 - and two of 200,000 - began during the Classic era.
- 49 Richard E. W. Adams, *Prehistoric Mesoamerica* 167.
- 50 *ibid*, 235. Fortressed farming-mining communities appeared in the north.
- 51 G. Pasztory, *Aztec Art* 178. See also R. F. Townsend, *The Aztecs* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1992) 48, 61.
- 52 William T. Sanders, "The Agricultural History of the Basin of Mexico", in Eric R. Wolf (ed.), *The Valley of Mexico: Studies in Pre-Hispanic Ecology and Society* (Albuquerque: School of American Research, 1976) Figures 5-7.
- 53 L.H. Feldman, "Axes of Stone and Metal Indices from a Time of Transition", *American Antiquity* 39: 1, January 1974, 135. See also H.E. Driver, *Indians of North America* 2nd Edition, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 168. Though metallurgy appeared in Peru by 1800 b.c.e., and featured as the odd bell or fish hook in Mayan lands by 300 c.e. (see K.O. Bruhns & M. Hammond, "A Mayan Metal Worker's Tool from Belize", *American Antiquity* LVI, 1982, 175-9), it did not become popular in Mesoamerica till after 1000 c.e. Even then, its use was rather ornamental.
- 54 W. Bray, "Civilising the Aztecs", in J.Friedman & M.J. Rowlands (eds.), *The Evolution of Social Systems* (Gloucester Crescent: Duckworth, 1977), 375.
- 55 R.F. Townsend, *The Aztecs* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1992), 55. Small, pre-literate, metal-working states existed in this area. See R.A. Diehl, "Pre-Hispanic Relations between the Basin of Mexico and North-West Mexico", in Eric R. Wolf, *The Valley of Mexico: Studies in Pre-Hispanic Ecology and Society* (Albuquerque: School of American Research, 1976), 284-285.

- 56 W. Bray, "Civilizing the Aztecs", 376. The historical truths of this era are nevertheless debated. See R.F. Townsend, *The Aztecs* 61-63.
- 57 Nigel Davies, *The Aztec Empire* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1987), 303. Tenochtitlan was an engineering masterpiece of aqueducts, 'floating gardens', causeways, canals and dykes.
- 58 W.T. Sanders, "Ecology and Cultural Syncretism in 16th-century Mesoamerica", *Antiquity*, 66:250 (March 1992), 176. See also P. MacGregor Eadle, *Mexico: A Traveller's Cultural History* (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1991), 74.
- 59 Charles Gibson, "The Structure of the Aztec Empire", *Handbook of Middle American Indians* (Austin: University of Texas, 1971), 383.
- 60 M.E. Smith & F.F. Bardon, "Archaeology of the Aztec Empire", *World Archaeology* 23: 3 (1992), 353-5, 360-364, 366.
- 61 G. Kubler, "Pre-Columbian Pilgrimages in Mesoamerica", *Diogenes*, 125: Spring 1984, 18.
- 62 Diego Duran, (trans. F. Horcasitas & D. Heyden), *The Aztecs: A History of the Indies of New Spain* (London: Cassell, 1974), 139. See also Jacques Soustelle, *Daily Life of the Aztecs* 38, 140-141.
- 63 R.F. Townsend, *The Aztecs*, 106. For evidence of this, see Bernal Diaz, *The Conquest of New Spain* (London: Folio, 1972), 253.
- 64 Fray T. de Motolinia (trans. F.B. Steck), *History of the Indians of New Spain* (Washington D.C.: Academy of American Franciscan History, 1951), 273.
- 65 J.H. Charlton, "Population Trends in the Teotihuacan Valley A.D. 1400-1969", *World Archaeology* 4: 1, June 1972, in passim.
- 66 *Lienzo de Peñacala - A Pictorial Document from Guerrero, Mexico* (trans. & ed., M. Oettinger Jr. & F. Horcasitas), (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1982), 6.
- 67 See Charles Gibson, *The Aztecs under Spanish: A History of the Indians of the Valley of Mexico 1519-1810* (Stanford: Stanford University, 1964) or N. Cheetham, *New Spain* (London: Victor Gollanz, 1974).
- 68 Richard E.W. Adams, *Prehistoric Mesoamerica*, 44.
- 69 Alan R. Sandstrom, *Corn is Our Blood: Culture and Ethnic Identity in a Contemporary Aztec Indian Village* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1991), 6.
- 70 Arthur G. Miller, 'Introduction to the Dover Edition', Zelia Nuttall (ed.), *Codex Nuttall* viii.
- 71 Bernal Diaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 197.
- 72 Clavigero in Peterson, *Ancient Mexico*, 234.
- 73 Ixtlilxochitl in C. Bernal 'Introduction' in Diego Duran, *The Aztecs*, xxi.
- 74 J.S. Justeson, 'The Origins of Writing Systems: Pre-Classical Mesoamerica', *World Archaeology* 17: 3 (February 1986) 440-443.
- 75 J.B. Glass, "A Survey of Native Middle American Pictorial Manuscripts", *Handbook of Middle American Indians*, 3.
- 76 Victor W. van Hagen, *The Aztecs: Man and Tribe* (New York: New American History, 1958), 188.
- 77 Arthur G. Miller, "Introduction to the Dover Edition", viii.
- 78 *ibid.*, xi.
- 79 Charles E. Dibble, "Writing in Central Mexico", *Handbook of the Middle American Indian* X (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), 324-327.
- 80 H. Cline, "Notes on Torquemada's Native Sources and Historiographical Methods", *Americas* 25 (April 1969), 372-386. The reference here is to priests "reading" books at sermons. Note that, in *Collection of Mexican Songs* it is said "books speak" and that scribes "sing pictures of books". See Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Native Mesoamerican Spirituality*, 30.



- 81 G. Pasztory, *Aztec Art*, 3-7f.
- 82 E.H. Boone, "Incarnations of the Aztec Supernatural: The Image of Huitzilopochtli in Mexico and Europe", *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 72.4 (1989), 54.
- 83 William H. Prescott, *History of the Conquest of Mexico* (Revised Edition, London, 1913), 206.
- 84 P.E. Green, "The Conquest of Mexico: The View of the Chroniclers", *The Americas* 31.2 (October 1974), 164-165.
- 85 E. Karttunen, "Nahuatl Literacy", in G.A. Collier & R.I. Rosaldo et al. (eds.), *The Inca and Aztec States 1400-1800: Anthropology and History* (New York: Academic, 1982), 395.
- 86 *ibid.*
- 87 W.H. Prescott, *History of the Conquest of Mexico*, 16-17.
- 88 Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Native Mesoamerican Spirituality* (New York: Paulist, 1980), 136-137.
- 89 Kurt Ross (comp. & ed.), *Codex Mendoza* (London: Regent, 1978), 12-13.
- 90 Ixtlixochitl, Ms. de Ixtlixochitl in W.H. Prescott, *History of the Conquest of Mexico*, 94-95.
- 91 E.H. Boone, "Incarnations of the Aztec Supernatural", 67-68. See also what Bernardino Sahagun says himself in *Introduction and Indices of Florentine Codex*.
- 92 Laurette Sejourné, *Burning Water*, 17-18.
- 93 Irene Nicholson, *Firefly in the Night*, 19f.
- 94 David Carrasco, *Quetzalcoatl and the Irony of Empire*, 391.
- 95 Jacques Soustelle, *Daily Life of the Aztecs*, 147.
- 96 Henry B. Nicholson, "Religion in Pre-Hispanic Central Mexico", 409f.
- 97 Miguel Leon-Portilla, "Aztec Gods - How Many?", in J. Akerenson (ed.), *Citra 1492* (Washington D.C., National College of Art, 1991), 507.
- 98 Lopez de Gomara in *ibid.*
- 99 Alan R. Sandstrom, *Corn is Our Blood*, 239.
- 100 G. Pasztory, *Aztec Art*, 88-89, 111.
- 101 Cottie Burland, *Magic Books from Mexico* (Hamondsworth: Penguin, 1953), 17-19, 29-30.
- 102 *Historia de los Mexicanos sur los pinturas* in J. Eric S. Thompson, "Sky-beavers", 216-217.
- 103 Male god Tezcatlipoca was sometimes called goddess Cihuacoatl. See Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods and Rites of the Ancient Calendar* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), 101, or Bernardino de Sahagun, *Florentine Codex* Bk. 2: 226, 238-239.
- 104 Alfonso Caso, (trans. L. Dunham), *The Aztecs: People of the Sun* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1956), 9-11.
- 105 D. G. Brinton, (trans. & ed.), *Ancient Nahuatl Poetry* (Philadelphia: Library of Aboriginal American Literature, 1887), 141.
- 106 Josef Haekel, "Hochgott und Gotter im alten Mexiko", *Kairo*: 13: 1959, 132-133.
- 107 J. Eric S. Thompson, *Maya History and Religion* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1970), 203.
- 108 Alfonso Caso, *The Aztecs: People of the Sun*, 9-11.
- 109 See Bernardino de Sahagun, *Florentine Codex* Bk. 6: 148 and Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods and Rites*, 101.
- 110 C.S. Braden, *Religious Aspects of the Conquest of Mexico* (Durham: Durham University Press, 1930), 19.
- 111 *Colligues and Christian Doctrines* in B. Keen, *The Aztec Image in Western Thought* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University, 1971), 36.



- 112 Michael D. Coe, "Olmec Jaguars and Olmec Kings", in E.P. Benson (ed.), *The Cult of the Feline* (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1972), 13.
- 113 Richard Haly, "Bare Bones: Rethinking Mesoamerican Divinity", *History of Religions* 31:3, February 1992, 278, 286-289.
- 114 Eva C. Hunt, *Transformation of the Hummingbird: Cultural Roots of a Zinacantan Mythical Poem* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1977), 55.
- 115 Guenther Lanczkowski, "Der Aztekische Blumengesang", in C.J. Bleeker, S.G. Braden, M. Simson (eds.), *Ex Orbe Religionum: Studies in the History of Religions (Supplement to Numen) XXII* (London: Lugdun Batavorum & E.J. Brill, 1972), 228, 234-5. See also Henry B. Nicholson, "Religion in Pre-Hispanic Central Mexico", *Handbook of Middle American Indians* 10 (Austin: University of Texas, 1971), 408.
- 116 Henry B. Nicholson, "Religion in Pre-Hispanic Central Mexico", 409.
- 117 *ibid.*, Table 2.
- 118 Alan R. Sandstrom, *Corn is Our Blood* 241.
- 119 See W.R. Holland, "Contemporary Tzotzil Cosmological Concepts as a Basis for Interpreting Prehistoric Maya Civilisation", *American Antiquity* 29:3, January 1964.
- 120 Alan R. Sandstrom, *Corn is Our Blood* 239-240, 257-8.
- 121 *ibid.*
- 122 Prince Chichimecatecotl's statement to Catholics, R. Ricard, *The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico*, 268.
- 123 A Mayan priest to his people about the Christian Bishop. *Chilam Balam*, 15 (28).
- 124 *Colligues and Christian Doctrines*, in B. Keen, *The Aztec Image in Western Thought*, 36.
- 125 T. de Motolinia, *History of the Indians of New Spain*, 123, 125.
- 126 Aztec nobles and priests to Andres de Tapia, C.S. Braden, *Religious Aspects of the Conquest of Mexico*, 118.
- 127 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods and Rites*, 174. See also T. de Motolinia, *History of the Indians of New Spain*, 123.
- 128 *ibid.*, 136.
- 129 T. de Motolinia, *History of the Indians of New Spain*, 123. Cholula was definitely, as Motolinia calls it, the "Rome" of Mesoamerica, drawing people from all regions (see Hernán Cortés, *Letters* 208) to its Quetzalcoatl oracle-image and its 300 other temples.
- 130 George Kubler, "Pre-Columbian Pilgrimages in Mesoamerica", 14-17.
- 131 Bernardino de Sahagún, *Florentine Codex* Bk.3: 7.
- 132 R.E. Greenleaf, "The Mexican Inquisition and the Indians: Sources for the Ethno-historian", *in passim*.
- 133 Bernardino de Sahagún, *Florentine Codex* Bk.3: 9.
- 134 Pierre et Janine Sousson (tr. David Macrae), *Life of the Aztecs in Ancient Mexico* (Faringham: Editions Minerva Libra, 1987), 102.
- 135 Female *tlapaluhqui* are mentioned by Bernardino Sahagún, *Florentine Codex* Bk. 2: 24:104.
- 136 Hernán Cortés, *Letters* 50 estimated there were a million priests in the Aztec Empire meaning one of every eight to fifteen person was a religious specialist full-time. This is possible, given that Cortés, Díaz, Durán and Clavigero speak of hundreds to several thousand priests serving single major temples. Aztec religious centres were like towns in themselves, providing education, research, entertainment, arts, crafts and labour (novices doing much porting etc.).
- 137 Aztec sources, being mostly male, give little indication of the structure of female priesthood, but it seems there were priestess-midwives of Teteoimman; 'Abbesses' of girls' colleges and nunneries; and women teachers of

- Cuicuaalli* (religious song-and-dance houses). Priestess duties included making ritual clothes, idols' clothes, festive foods; preparing offerings; keeping holy fires lit; sweeping holy places; incensing; blessing children; joining religious processions; singing and dancing; and living in seclusion, silence and segregation from men. Clendinnen believes priestess roles were peripheral (see *Aztecs*, 154f), but Henry Nicholson says large contingents of priestesses helped each local priest ("Religion in Pre-Hispanic Central Mexico", 436), while Sahagun describes them incensing and supporting female sacrificial victims (*Florentine Codex* Bk. 2: 25: 104).
- 138 *ibid.*, Bk. 3: 8. See also Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods and Rites*, 119.
- 139 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 2: App. 220. See also Hernan Cortes, *Letters*, 51-52 and T. de Motolinia, *History of the Indians of New Spain*, 127-128. There were all types of votive penitents: youths testing their courage before becoming soldiers; old men and women dedicating their final years to confession and divination; adolescent girls living a religious life until marriage.
- 140 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods and Rites* 121.
- 141 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 3: 4.
- 142 Alfonso Caso, *The Aztecs: People of the Sun*, 90.
- 143 David Carrasco, *Quetzalcoatl and the Irony of Empire*, 133.
- 144 Frank J. Neumann, "The Black Man in the Cave at Chapultepec: An Aztec Variation of the Gatekeeper motif", in F.E. Reynolds et al, *Religious Encounters with Death*, (London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1977), 49.
- 145 *Popul Vuh*, 186.
- 146 Henry Nicholson, "Religion in Pre-Hispanic Central Mexico", 442.
- 147 F. Horcasitas, "It's a Way of life: Mexican Folk Art", *National Geographic* 153: 5 (May 1978), 438.
- 148 *Ritual of the Facabá* (trans. Ralph L. Roys), Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1969, 168-170.
- 149 T. de Motolinia, *History of the Indians of New Spain*, 148.
- 150 Races, ball games, pole-climbing. See Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods and Rites*, 160.
- 151 During Tláhuil, Panquetzaliztli, Hueitecoztl and Ochpaniztli. See Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 2: 17: 31; 3: 4.
- 152 These including quite humorous skits. T. de Motolinia, *History of the Indians of New Spain*, 142.
- 153 *ibid.*, 122.
- 154 A good example of the vast scale of this practice in Mesoamerica is given by J.F. Garber, "Patterns of Jade Consumption and Disposal at Cerros, Northern Belize", *American Antiquity* 48: 4, 1983, 1805.
- 155 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods and Rites*, 169. Sahagun notes that "whatever kinds of living things...or whatever was growing" was offered (Bk. 2: App. 194), while Torquemada records that, for Chicomecatl's feast "every kind of wild beast that can be procured" was slain (C.S. Braden, *Religious Aspects of the Conquest of Mexico*, 292. Flowers, eagle feathers, butterflyes, lime, water, beans, rabbit, coyote, shrimp, earth, snakes, deer and insect larvae are all named as offerings. See Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex* Bk. 2: App. 176; Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 168, 215.
- 156 E.M. Moctezuma, "Archaeology and Symbolism in Aztec Mexico: The Temple Mayor of Tenochtitlan", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* LIII: 3, December 1985, 806. See also E.M. Moctezuma, "New Finds in the Great Temple", *National Geographic* 158: 6, December 1980, 773. Moctezuma reports 7,000 major offerings "stacked like corkwood".

- 157 Fasting varied from 2-10 days for children up to 80-180 days for priests (usually partial fasts). T. de Motolinia, *History of the Indians of New Spain*, 125. See also Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods and Rites*, 144 and J.S. Eric Thompson, *Maya History and Religion*, 243.
- 158 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods and Rites*, 104.
- 159 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, 2: 22: 101, 2: 24: 76-77; 3: 66.
- 160 T. de Motolinia, *History of the Indians of New Spain*, 105, 124, 157.
- 161 C.S. Braden, *Religious Aspects of the Conquest of Mexico*, 69.
- 162 T. de Motolinia, *History of the Indians of New Spain*, 70.
- 163 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex* 7: 8: 11.
- 164 Quetzalcoatl was the object of confession in Yucatan. See Chilan Balam
- 165 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex* Bk.3: 7: 62. Chocainic moiteochiu "he prays weeping"- F.X. Clavigero, *Regulas de la lengua mexicana (Mezsofantí XXII: 10)* J.O. Anderson (trans.), *Rules of the Aztec Language: Classical Nahuatl Grammar* Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1973), 111. Weeping and sighing were usual ways of Aztec worship.
- 166 Miguel Leon-Portilla, "Pre-Hispanic Thought", M. de la Gueva (ed.), *Major Trends in Mexican Philosophy* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1966), 17.
- 167 Irene Nicholson, *Firefly in the Night: A Study of Ancient Mexican Poetry and Symbolism* (London: Faber & Faber, 1959), 157.
- 168 Alan R. Sandstrom, *Corn is Our Blood* Plates.
- 169 T. de Motolinia, *History of the Indians of New Spain*, 96.
- 170 Gene E. Stuart, "Riddle of the Glyphs", *National Geographic* 148: 6, December 1975, 773.
- 171 Pierre et Janine Soisson, *Life of the Aztecs in Ancient Mexico*, 21.
- 172 T. de Motolinia, *History of the Indians of New Spain*, 148, 208.
- 173 Sahagun in Laurette Sejourné, *Burning Water*, 10.
- 174 Zurita in P. Peterson, *Ancient Mexico*, 186.
- 175 B.C. Brundage, *The Jade Steps*, 72.
- 176 Henry B. Nicholson, "Religion in Pre-Hispanic Central Mexico", 438.
- 177 B.C. Brundage, *The Jade Steps*, 71.
- 178 Hernan Cortes, *Letters*, 106.
- 179 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods and Rites* 74, 100.
- 180 Bernal Diaz, *History of the Conquest of New Spain*, 109.
- 181 Hernan Cortes, *Letters*, 103.
- 182 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods and Rites*, 76.
- 183 *ibid.*, 72-73.
- 184 T. de Motolinia, *History of the Indians of New Spain*, 271. See also C.S. Braden, *Religious Aspects of the Conquest of Mexico*, 20.
- 185 *Lienzo de Petlacala* S.II.
- 186 Hernan Cortes, *Letters*, 107.
- 187 Diego de Landa, *Relacion* XV.
- 188 *ibid.*, 81.
- 189 B.S. Braden, *Religious Aspects of the Conquest of Mexico*, 20.
- 190 Peter J. Furst (ed.), *Pre-Columbian Art of Mexico* (New York: Abbeville, 1980), 26-27.
- 191 B.C. Brundage, *The Jade Steps: A Ritual Life of the Aztecs* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah, 1985), 68.
- 192 Walter von Kriesberg, "Mesoamerica", 49.
- 193 K.V. Flannery et al, *The Cloud People* (New York: Academic, & School of American Research, 1983), 208, 211-213. See also K.V. Flannery, "Contextual Analysis of Ritual Paraphernalia from Formative Oaxaca", *The Early Mesoamerican Village* (New York: Academic, 1976).

- 194 Jacques Soustelle, *The Olmecs: The Oldest Civilisation of Mexico* (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1984), 129.
- 195 See R.V. Kinzhalov, "Towards a Reconstruction of the Olmec Mythological System" in D.L. Brown (ed.), *Cultural Continuity in Mesoamerica* (The Hague, Mouton, 1978).
- 196 Walter von Krickeberg, "Mesoamerica", 9. Jungle-dwelling, dwarfish "lords of the beasts" are still worshipped by Indians in the Olmec region.
- 197 This is Michael Coe's theory. See Hasso von Winning, "Late and Terminal Preclassic: The Emergence of Teotihuacan", in Henry B. Nicholson (ed.), *Origins of Religious Art and Iconography in Preclassic Mesoamerica* (Los Angeles: UCLA Latin American Centre, 1976), 152.
- 198 *ibid.*
- 199 On the last, see J. Stocker et al, "Crocodilians and Olmecs: Further Interpretations of Formative Period Iconography", *American Antiquity* 45 (October 1985), in *passim*.
- 200 J.K. Delhalle & A. Luylx, "The Nahua Myth of the Creation of Humanity: A Coastal Connection?", *American Antiquity* 57:1, January 1986, 118-121.
- 201 Both Xipe and Huehuetecatl appear in Teotihuacan by 100 b.c.e. - 100 c.e., Huehuetecatl apparently being a Ticoman/Cuicuilco god dating at least to 500 b.c.e. See Hasso von Winning, "Late and Terminal Preclassic: The Emergence of Teotihuacan", 151-152.
- 202 This god is depicted in Oaxaca and Teotihuacan by 300 c.e., and there is controversy over whether the cult originated amongst the Zapotec, Huasteca or some other group. See Walter von Krickeberg, "Mesoamerica", 18, 23-24.
- 203 C. Millon, "Painting, Writing and Polity in Teotihuacan, Mexico", *American Antiquity* 39, July 1973, 306-311.
- 204 Michael Coe, *The Maya* 184.
- 205 Pedro Carrasco, "The People of Central Mexico and their Historical Traditions", *Handbook of Middle American Indians* (Austin: University of Texas, 1974), 460.
- 206 George C. Valliant, *Aztecs of Mexico* (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1965), 68-69.
- 207 P. MacGregor Eadle, *Mexico: A Traveller's Cultural History* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1991), 12-13.
- 208 James Burillon, "Mesoamerica and the Eastern United States in Prehistoric Times", *Handbook of Middle American Indians* III, 129.
- 209 Cheek, "A Long-nosed God Mask from North-west Iowa", *American Antiquity* 40:3 (July 1975), 328-329.
- 210 Walter von Krickeberg, "Mesoamerica", 43.
- 211 Diego Camargo, *Historia de Tlaxcala* in David Carrasco, *Quetzalcoatl and the Irony of Empire: Myths and Prophecies in the Aztec Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1982), 30.
- 212 Bernardino de Sahagun, *Florentine Codex* Bk.3: 13.
- 213 Robert Chadwick, "Native Pre-Aztec History of Central Mexico", *Handbook of the Middle American Indian* III, 474-5.
- 214 Deigo de Landa, *Relacion* 3 (39-40).
- 215 David Carrasco, *Quetzalcoatl and the Irony of Empire*, 85-86.
- 216 *Anales de Cuauhtitlan*, 3-10 in Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Native Mesoamerican Spirituality*, 169.
- 217 David Carrasco, *Quetzalcoatl and the Irony of Empire*, 86-89f.
- 218 George Valliant, *The Aztecs*, 68-69.
- 219 Frank J. Neumann, "The Black Man in the Cave at Chapultepec: an Aztec Variation of the Gatekeeper Motif", F.E. Reynolds & E.H. Waugh, *Religious Encounters with Death* (London: Pennsylvania University, 1977), 48.



- 220 Nigel Davies, *The Aztecs* 23.
- 221 Ocacaltzin received various messages from Huitzilopochtli which supposedly saved the nation. Diego Duran, *The Aztecs - History of the Indies* 36-37.
- 222 *ibid.*, 40.
- 223 Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Native Mesoamerican Spirituality* 50-52, 276.
- 224 See Diego Duran, *The Aztecs - History of the Indies* 141.
- 225 Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Native Mesoamerican Spirituality*, 259-261.
- 226 *ibid.*, 47-48.
- 227 I. Gilmore, *Flute of the Smoking Mirror* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1949), 143. Gilmore's in-depth account of Nezahualcoyotl's life in this book is well worth perusing.
- 228 He was supposedly exceptionally charitable and humane, not sitting for a meal until assured all in the kingdom were fed. Nezahualcoyotl's favoured retreat - a cave on Texcotzingo Hill - became a place of pilgrimage after his death, until some time after the Conquest. See Richard Fraser Townsend, "Pyramid and Sacred Mountain", in Anthony F. Aveni & G. Urton, *Ethnoastronomy and Archaeoastronomy in the American Tropics* (New York: New York Academy of Science, 1982), 56.
- 229 Nezahualcoyotl claimed that he alone, in his soul, disclosed "the Source of Flowers", and that he united the princes in "loving liens" under him, "recognising the jade" (their spiritual worth?) "from experience". See *Collection of Mexican Songs* Folio 16r. Certainly his followers were in awe of him: "You speak with flowers. You live within yourself", and considered themselves "fatherless" when he died. See *Collection of Mexican Songs* in Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Pre-Columbian Literature* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1969), 461.
- 230 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex* Bk.2: 1-3. See also Charles E. Dibble, *The Conquest through Aztec Eyes* (41st Annual Frederick William Reynolds Lecture) (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1978).
- 231 Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Native Mesoamerican Spirituality* 51-52, 262-277.
- 232 Nigel Davies, *The Aztecs* 300.
- 233 *ibid.*, 301.
- 234 C.S. Braden, *Religious Aspects of the Conquest of Mexico* 167.
- 235 R. Ricard, *The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico* (Berkeley: University of California, 1966), 270. Major idols were smuggled off to secret hiding places, and priests and *tlamitini* (sages) fled to the countryside, operating from there.
- 236 C.S. Braden, *Religious Aspects of the Conquest of Mexico*, 150.
- 237 Peggy K. Liss, *Mexico Under Spain 1521 - 1556* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 80-81. See also R.E. Greenleaf, "The Mexican Inquisition and the Indians: Sources for the Ethno historian", *Americas* 34 (January 1978). Liss points out that the Inquisition in Mexico mainly dealt with "heathen" practices. Greenleaf's article suggests pairs of *Quetzalcoatl*s of major cities were often the ones to defy the Church and thus be executed. This would be the equivalent of Archbishops rebelling against an occupying regime.
- 238 Peggy K. Liss, *Mexico Under Spain 1521-1556* 82.
- 239 U. Lamb, "Religious Conflicts in the Conquest of Mexico", *Journal of the History of Ideas* XVIII: 4 October 1956.
- 240 R. Ricard, *The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico* 302. The Mayans were especially resistant, their last "heathen" kingdom not falling until 1697. *Canek Manuscript* 2: 105-109 shows they threatened to slay converts. Even at the turn of the century, there were areas in the Mayan lands that Catholic priests avoided for fear of being murdered.
- 241 Alan R. Sandstrom, *Corn is Our Blood* 317.

- 
- 242 Richard Haly, "Bare Bones: Re-thinking Mesoamerican Divinity", 302.
- 243 Alan R. Sandstrom, *Corn is Our Blood*, 248. See also W. Madsen, "The Nahuatl", *Handbook of Middle American Indians* VIII (Austin: University of Texas, 1971), 629.
- 244 *ibid.*, 241f.
- 245 Fray T. de Motolinia, *History of the Indians of New Spain*, 124. Diego Duran also mentions this in *Book of the Gods and Rites*.
- 246 J.B. Smith, *The Guadalupe Madonna* (London: Souvenir Press, 1983), 3-9.
- 247 See J. Lopez, *Christmas in Mexico* (Chicago: Ward Books, 1976).
- 248 G. Aldana, "Meso de Nayar's Strange History Week", *National Geographic* 39:6, June 1971, 786-788.
- 249 T.J.J. Leyenaar, "The Day of the Dead: Recurring Reunion", in Charles Efffield, *Cultural Change and Continuity* (New York: Academic Press, 1976), 60.
- 250 J.W. Burton, "Myths Shared with Mexico", R.R. Roces (ed.) *Filipino History: Making of a Nation V: The Spanish Colonial Period* (Metro Manila: Katrung Filipino Publishers, 1978), 276-277, 280.

## TWO : AZTEC HUMAN SACRIFICE

### I. INTRODUCTION

The Aztecs knew human sacrifice as *tlacamicitiztli* ("killing of men"), *nuemana* ("to make an offering") and *nextlahualli* ("debt paid")<sup>1</sup>.

Problems posed by the practice are best assessed after the rite's particulars are known. This also makes it simpler to test explanations. With these ends in view, a detailed account is offered here of the ceremony's prevalence and frequency; types; participants; format; origins and historical development; and the degree of acquiescence involved.

Below, these fields are presented as sections, the aim being to furnish accurate reconstructions of each area based on a blending of primary source descriptions (mainly Sahagun, Duran, and Motolinia). For the section on origins and historical development, archaeological and artistic data and some Aztec histories were used.

### II. PREVALENCE AND FREQUENCY

Cortes found ritual killing "customary all over the land"<sup>2</sup>, which agrees with Duran's assertion that throughout "New Spain" it was:

"a universal festival and was named Coailhuitl, meaning. Feast which Belongs to One and All, ..Even in the most wretched villages, men were sacrificed"<sup>3</sup>

Ritual killing was practiced the length and breadth of the New World<sup>4</sup>.

The frequency of the rite is more arguable, though several sources offer approximations. Diaz's figure of 2 to 5 per temple per day<sup>5</sup> can probably be disregarded, as it is not supported by other sources. By contrast, Motolinia's claim of every centre slaying "several" victims

per Aztec month (every twenty days)<sup>6</sup> supports Sahagun's account, wherein two to six victims are detailed for each month (see Appendix 2).

*Relacion de Tepuztlan* equally gives a figure of two or three every thirty to forty days<sup>7</sup>. Perhaps victim-recruitment occurred on a monthly basis, on account of the monthly<sup>8</sup> "Flowery Wars".

Several victims per month totals annually at 40 to 120 for each temple-complex. This matches Cortes' observation of *tlacamicitiztli* occurring "so frequently that not one year passes" without the sacrifice of "fifty persons at each temple"<sup>9</sup>.



Some ceremonies probably swelled this annual total. Each year, Tlacaxipehualiztli rites (4-23 March) demanded "at least" forty to fifty men. Duran<sup>10</sup>, Cortes<sup>11</sup> and Motolinia<sup>12</sup> all give this number, and agree that twelve to fifteen of these were subsequently flayed at large cities (two to three at smaller centres). The Hueypachtli (10-29 October) Mountain Ceremony consumed fifty to sixty souls<sup>13</sup>. This was held every few years. Other infrequent rites - conducted at four or eight year intervals - saw high numbers too: the New fire ceremony (every 52 years) demanding 400 deaths<sup>14</sup>.

Apparently, the largest holocausts comprised prisoners of war from distant military campaigns, or a deceased king's retinue. Duran speaks of 700 Tliluhquitepec captives sacrificed after one war<sup>15</sup>. Emperor Tizoc's army once brought back nearly 100,000 Tlappanec and Huasteca captives<sup>16</sup>, and *Historia Chichimeca*<sup>17</sup> describes Imperial coronations and funerals wherein hundreds to 2,000 persons were despatched.

Certainly the grandest sacrifice of all - to dedicate the *Templo Mayor* of Huitzilopochtli and Tlaloc (1487) - disposed of war captives. *Templo Mayor* was the Aztec's largest temple, standing on the cosmological centre of their nation<sup>18</sup>, aligned to holy peaks. Its



inauguration marked a crucial time: the transition from one 52-year Aztec century to another; and the beginning of an Emperor's reign.

For this unparalleled mass-sacrifice, Ahuizotl emptied forty-five enemy towns<sup>19</sup>. The total amount of victims slain is debated. Estimates range from 4,000 - the figure given by elderly Aztec informants after the Conquest<sup>20</sup> - through to Clavigero's 64,600 and Torquemada's 72,344<sup>21</sup>. Ixtlilxochitl puts the number higher still: at 80,000 (excluding another 100,000 that year generally) while Gomara stated 136,000<sup>22</sup>. However, Aztec manuscript *Codex Telleriano-Remensis*, which seems the official record of the event, displays - on Folio 39r - two glyphs of 8,000 () and ten glyphs of 400 (): a total of 20,000 for the sacrifice<sup>23</sup>.

If archaeological work on other sites is any indication, then smaller numbers are likely to be correct, and Spanish estimates are likely to be exaggerations, as Anawalt claims<sup>24</sup>. The Spanish described Tenochtitlan skull-rack as holding 72,000 to 136,000 craniums<sup>25</sup>, and Tlaxcala skull-rack as holding 100,000<sup>26</sup>, yet excavations at Tenochtitlan's skull-rack have turned up only 200 skulls there and another 170 at the nearby Tlatelco rack<sup>27</sup>.

Though we can approximate numbers of sacrifices involved at temple-complexes, it is difficult to arrive at totals for cities or the whole empire. For victims slain in the Aztec capital, we have figures as small as Las Casas' fifty to a hundred a year and as large as Gomara's "over 50,000" a year<sup>28</sup>. On the Tlacaxipehualiztli festival, Duran has 1,000 perishing over the entire Empire, whereas Acosta describes 20,000 dying in Tenochtitlan alone<sup>29</sup>. Such tallies are irreconcilable: one estimate is five hundred times greater than the other.

## II. TYPES OF AZTEC HUMAN SACRIFICE

Brundage<sup>30</sup> identified four kinds of Aztec human sacrifice:

*xochimicqui* - "those who die like a flower": adult male war captives.

*tlaaltilli* - "bathed ones" : slave-victims of either sex, purchased and prepared by guilds or lodges.

*pepechhuan* - "fundaments" (from *pepechtli* - a pad or place to sit on): commoner war captives or criminals used as an 'opener' to important rites.

*messengers of the sun*: war captives specifically sent to the sun with messages or petitions, especially in times of crisis.

To these categories, Inga Clendinnen<sup>31</sup> would add the following:

*ixiptla* - "impersonators": slaves and captives of either sex, given lengthy training and duties as representatives of various deities.

*tlacatetcuhine* - "human paper-streamers / debt-offerings": children (usually 3-7 years of age), selected from birth and purchased from their mothers, being raised for sacrifices.

We could also classify sacrifices according to types of killing :

- \* Decapitation
- \* Gladiatorial
- \* Arrow sacrifice
- \* Dying on impact
- \* Drowning
- \* Squeezing
- \* Heart-extraction

Decapitation was common. It seems women and children were almost exclusively slain this way. Often, the throat was slit with a knife prior to beheading<sup>32</sup>, female victims being made to lie cross-legged, sometimes on a pile of produce. *Codex Borbonicus*<sup>33</sup> and Duran<sup>34</sup> concur that the priest carried most female victims on his back.

*Tlahuahuanaliztli* (gladiatorial sacrifice) was the privileged death of exceptionally fit and courageous<sup>35</sup> prisoners of war. Each was tied by one foot to a heavy stone, given dummy weapons and 4 wooden balls, and expected to fight off a sequence of five armed assailants.

The assailants' leader made a speech, danced and raised his weapons in dedication to the sun before commencing<sup>36</sup>. Left-handed fighters took over if the victim defeated the first set<sup>37</sup>. This may be Motolinia's "goading to death with pointed clubs"<sup>38</sup>.

*Tlacaliliztli* (arrow sacrifice) had sets of six captives tied to high poles and shot dead by two thousand archers. The bodies were then cut loose so that bones broke as they thudded to the ground<sup>39</sup>. Slave-victims were also sometimes shot in the throat with an arrow.

Dying on impact included jumping from pyramids and being driven up and off lofty poles, priests pushing or coercing the victim<sup>40</sup>. In one rite, a priest fasted 80 days on tortillas and water to swing a woman upside-down on a rope, knocking her to death against a "God-rock"<sup>41</sup>.

Other modes of death were confined to specific localities or festivals. Drowning normally entailed placing infants in tiny canoes and letting them be submerged by a whirlpool. Squeezing was a Tuluca ceremony: squeezing victims in nets until their intestines came out<sup>42</sup>.

People also died in sacrificial mock fights; or by being drugged and rolled in cages into a fire, later (when half-dead) having their hearts extracted<sup>43</sup>. There were ball-games in which a player was slain on a drum<sup>44</sup>; and *tlacaxipehualiztli*: flaying sacrifice. This was heart-extraction, except that the body was flayed, and the skin worn.

Heart-extraction was by far the most common sacrifice. It is detailed separately in Section V, being so integral to ritual format.

#### IV. PARTICIPANTS

Those involved in Aztec human sacrifice divide into three groups: human offerings, slayers and onlookers (congregation and performers).

#### a. Human Offerings

Most victims seem to have been male prisoners of war: "It was nearly always of these that they sacrificed"<sup>45</sup>. Evidently, the second largest group were male and female slaves. Criminals, servants, children, and priests also featured.

##### i. Prisoners of War

Nearly all adult males could be prisoners of war, because all classes except *pochteca*(merchants) went frequently to battle, and even *pochteca* saw themselves as "warriors"<sup>46</sup>. Neither were priests excluded:

"Both the priests and *tlamacazto*(young priests) fought the enemy and took prisoners... (Only) after having distinguished himself in war or religion, the youth entered upon a career in the army, or in the priesthood, the judiciary or the government"<sup>47</sup>.

Battles always meant taking and being taken captive for sacrifice - this, more than slaying, being the purpose of Mesoamerican warfare.

Also contrary to what might be expected, captives were not foreigners. After 1454, it seems few prisoners from far afield were immolated, it being thought inappropriate to immolate "strangers" hardened by long treks. Rather, "friends of the House"<sup>48</sup> - enemy and vassal *Nahua* states: Tlaxcala, Huexotzinco, Cholula, Atlixco, Tliluhquitepec, and - later - Tepeaca, Calpan Tecali, Cuauhtinchan, Cuauhquechoten and Atlonilco, provided the necessary "hot breads... straight from the fire (of war)"<sup>49</sup> - through "flowery wars" (ceremonial or staged military affrays).

Neither were war captives necessarily proletarians. The proportion of elite victims was very high. In 1404, three hundred "senior" military men were sacrificed<sup>50</sup>. Foreign and rebel heads-of-state<sup>51</sup>, and even the Tarascan Emperor<sup>52</sup> died on Aztec altars.

Possibly, nobility was a more frequent sacrificial target because that class was obliged to lead military campaigns<sup>53</sup>, and made such prized victims. Aztec soldiers always "attack(ed)...the Captain"<sup>54</sup>, which is why Cortes and his commanders often found themselves in danger<sup>55</sup>.

Certainly use of royal captives seems a widespread, ancient tradition. *Codex Nuttall* depicts a gladiatorial combat between princes; the burning of their bones; and the sacrifice of a major king<sup>56</sup>. Aztec King Huitzilhuatl was offered up by the Colhuacan ruler<sup>57</sup>, and great Aztec lords: Ezhuahucatl and Quaquatzin, died at foreign temples<sup>58</sup>. At the Mountain Offering at Tlaxcala, kings of various states "sacrificed one of their highest chiefs"<sup>59</sup>. The Aztec Emperor was therefore being realistic when he told victims:

"You are welcome. You know what the fortune of war is - today for you, tomorrow for me"<sup>60</sup>.

## ii. Slaves

Sahagun implies many *ixiptla* were prisoners of war, yet slaves assume more importance in calendric ceremonies<sup>61</sup> (see Appendix II). Clendinnen argues against slave-victims being locals<sup>62</sup>. However, Duran is clear: "(they are) not strangers, as some have deduced, but natives of the same town"<sup>63</sup>.

Slavery was not a permanent or even impoverished state. Anyone who had fallen into debt or into a criminal lifestyle was a slave. Only repeated offences could warrant a slave being sold for sacrifice<sup>64</sup>. Lodges and guilds purchased slaves to represent their patron, so slave-*ixiptla* for divinities of salt-working, weaving, hunting etc. abounded.

### iii. Criminals

Conspirators<sup>65</sup>; spies; fornicators<sup>66</sup>; thieving sorcerers; judges who gave false reports<sup>67</sup>; priests who gave poor advice; and persons who insulted the gods<sup>68</sup> faced execution by sacrifice. The Ciuapipitlin feast was used for slaying criminals in general, whilst Macuilquaitl was particularly for informers. Although these sacrifices seem to have been summary, adulterers wore feather headdresses<sup>69</sup> and sorcerers had their hearts extracted<sup>70</sup>.

### iv. Servants

When a lord or lady died, slaves and servants might accompany the deceased: "beloved slaves - perchance a score of the men as well as the women"<sup>71</sup>. Pomar tells us only "those who, of their own free will, wished to die with him"<sup>72</sup> had themselves killed.

### v. Children

Babes; 3-4 year olds; 5-8 year olds and 11-13 year olds featured as offerings and representatives of gods, because the Aztec God was often an infant: "my son", "little one", "precious child". To this day, Jesus, Joseph and Mary are enacted by children in Mexican *postadas*. Almost all female *ixiptla*: for Toci, Xilonen, Tlazolteotl, Coatlicue, Huixt~~och~~uatl, Ilamatecuhtli, Chalchuitlicue - were girls of 11 to 13 years of age. Statues suggest this was the "age" of most goddesses. In fact, few women older than 13 seem to have been victims.

Child-victims were sought and paid for everywhere<sup>73</sup>. At Tepoztlan, two or three were sacrificed every 30 to 40 days<sup>74</sup>. Larger cities used more: Pomar speaks of 10 to 50 seven to eight year-old boys slain for Tlaloc in Tenochtitlan<sup>75</sup>, so we can imagine hundreds to thousands of children being annually immolated.

Birth-date or features such as a double cow-lick determined a sacrificial fate. Infants selected on these traits would be raised by priests at a temple building until their appointed demise<sup>76</sup>.

Though Pomar describes *tlacatetcuhine* as slaves of wealthy persons<sup>77</sup>, Duran says Aztecs immolated their "own" children<sup>78</sup>, which agrees with Cortes' observation: "all sons of persons of high blood"<sup>79</sup>, and *Chilam Balam de Chumayel*'s description of these victims as "noble's sons"<sup>80</sup>. Certainly amongst the Mayans, affluent families proclaimed their piety through munificent acts such as surrendering offspring to the sacrificial knife<sup>81</sup>, so perhaps child-offering was an 'elite obligation' in Mesoamerica, as nobility "promised" their children to the gods for numerous tasks. Motolinia found that:

"on the appointed day the Indians sacrifice a boy or girl about three or four years of age. These are not slaves, but *the children of the chiefs*"<sup>82</sup>.

Duran likewise details elite twelve or thirteen year-olds being killed:

"the most comely to be found in that lineage... noblewomen of the royal lineage and generation of the great Prince Tezcacoatl"<sup>83</sup>.

#### vi. Priests and Other Specialists

Priests engaged in penances so torturous that "many" died<sup>84</sup>. Apart from this and perishing in sacrificial mock-battles, chaplains would accompany Lords to the grave, and *neguals* (magicians) were often executed. Indeed, in the Mayan lands, this was compulsory as soon as they reached the age of fifty<sup>85</sup>.

Some Aztec references exist of priests sacrificing themselves during national crises. The Mayan *Chilam Balam* supports that possibility, describing Xiu priests who decide to plunge to death:

"...the priests of Pop and Zawn...are about to destroy themselves on account of their grievous injuries; have

come to the end...of being subjected to violence. Then they walk twice around the (oracle) cave and around the (sacred) well, stopping at the altars. One at a time, they rub their hands over the smooth stone and read the words: 'Justice exists. Heaven exists'. Thereupon the great priest Chilam replies: 'Perhaps so; perhaps not. True, for the present we must carry the highly ornamental great stone, in our misfortune. But there will come a time when the white flames will again be unsheathed...It will come to pass on account of the (sacred) well'<sup>86</sup>.

#### b. Slayers

Only three groups are known to have conducted human sacrifice: high priests; rulers; and high-ranking military officials.

##### i. High Priests

"Sacrificing priests"- *Huehuetqui*: "skilled", elderly men<sup>87</sup>, are described by Motolinia<sup>88</sup> and Duran<sup>89</sup> as high-ranking: chief priests or their "lieutenants". The Aztecs' holiest religious post: *Quetzalcoatl* pairs, included a hereditary slayer: *Topiltzin* ("Our Lord"- name of the Toltec sage-king)<sup>90</sup>. *Huehuetqui* were *Chachalmeca* (Ministers of Divine or Sacred Things), on account of their solemn duty of killing<sup>91</sup>. Several lesser priests assisted them, holding the victim down, dancing, or carrying paraphernalia.

Apart from slaying, *Huehuetqui* incensed and sacrificed to victims on behalf of the deities they represented<sup>92</sup>. Motolinia<sup>93</sup> and Duran<sup>94</sup> also describe *Huehuetqui* enduring severe fasts and penances for victims - even passing 200 to 400 rods through their flesh.

##### ii. Rulers

Occasionally, "other skilled persons"<sup>95</sup> conducted sacrificial rites. In all likelihood, these "others" were the local rulers or Emperor, for Duran describes them opening city festivals with human offerings<sup>96</sup>.



Emperors particularly featured at inaugural mass-sacrifices. Axayacatl (r. 1469-1481) once butchered so many of his army's 700 Tliluhquitepec captives that he grew ill from the smell and had to quit the ceremony, subsequently dying<sup>97</sup>.

### iii. High-Ranking Military Officials

Sometimes, the first prisoner taken in battle was sacrificed on the field by an army dignitary<sup>98</sup>. Equally, "seasoned warriors" were slayers in gladiatorial sacrifice<sup>99</sup>.

### c. Onlookers (Congregation and Performers)

Tovar tells us "all" attended crucial ceremonies<sup>100</sup>, which agrees with Duran's description of "the entire city...all people" turning up, conducting themselves emotionally<sup>101</sup>. It was customary for a large company of people to follow the victim about<sup>102</sup> - rites of human sacrifice often occurring *en plein air* - even on suburban streets<sup>103</sup>. However, crowds at major slayings probably numbered only 5,000 to 10,000, for an "entire city" would not have fitted into Aztec plazas, which were designed to hold "eight to ten thousand people"<sup>104</sup>.

This was nevertheless a sizeable mass of humanity, further swollen by Aztec choirs, orchestras and dance-circles. In the capital, the latter had 1,000 to 8,600 performers. Festivities of human sacrifice afforded much entertainment, banquets, and an excuse for lords to wear their richest fineries. As well, they were occasions for games, announcements, presentations and awards<sup>105</sup>.

Quite apart from passive participation, the congregation sang, danced, feasted, bled themselves, shouted or whistled during various phases of the ceremony. Often they fasted or held vigil in honour of

victims. Those who purchased or captured the human offering guarded, accompanied, bathed, dressed, fed, assisted and entertained their charge - even undergoing lengthy fast-vigils and other penances in empathy<sup>106</sup>.

Congregations as a whole talked with and greeted the human offering<sup>107</sup>. They would "place their little ones" before the candidate to receive a blessing<sup>108</sup>. It was also common to sing, joke and dance for him or her, giving the doomed one gifts, sacrifices, petitions and messages to take to the god<sup>109</sup>.

## V. FORMAT OF AZTEC SACRIFICIAL RITES

Here the sequence of events within Aztec human sacrifice is examined. Pomar reports that *tlacamicitiztli* was only conducted on festival days, different ones honouring different divinities<sup>110</sup>. Certainly human sacrifice was integral to the Aztec ritual calendar (see Appendix II), but we have already noted examples of *tlacamicitiztli* occurring outside of set festivals. In most cases, though, victims were processed within calendric rites, through the following phases:

- a. Dedication
- b. Display (Entrance)
- c. Captivity
- d. Ritual Duties
- e. Ritual Death
- f. Posthumous Rites

### a. Dedication

Slaves and children were dedicated as victims when purchased for that end and bathed with "divine water"<sup>111</sup>. War captives' dedication occurred after clubbing, lassoing, overthrowing and binding them in the one-to-one duels of Aztec warfare. Once bound, the captive would address his captor as "beloved father", and his captor would address him as

"beloved son"<sup>112</sup>, sealing the sacramental relationship. Henceforth, slaves and captives were "the Chosen"; "the Children of the Sun"<sup>113</sup>.

Tied together at the neck with cord or collars<sup>114</sup>, each set was marched off to a temple complex in an appropriate town or city - captor or purchaser accompanying his 'prize'<sup>115</sup>. Some fated souls might be exchanged as part of gifts or tribute<sup>116</sup>.

#### b. Display (Entrance)

Once secured, the slave or captive was triumphantly "displayed", receiving a grand welcome at the place of demise<sup>117</sup>. Duran describes whole processions, greeted on the road by lords, priests (who incensed them<sup>118</sup>.) and sometimes the Emperor himself - filing out according to rank<sup>119</sup>. Crowds sang of the offerings' fate and courage<sup>120</sup>; "greeting them well, as if they had been gods"<sup>121</sup>

Occasionally, the Emperor welcomed fated prisoners with a speech, calling them "Prize of the Gods; Gift of Him Who Encircles the Earth"<sup>122</sup>. He ordered that wounds be attended to; that the captives be fed and given Divine Liquor (a hallucinogenic beverage)<sup>123</sup>, cloaks, shields and the insignia of status<sup>124</sup>.

"these rites were performed in the case of all the prisoners, each one in his turn"<sup>125</sup>.

The location for this ceremony is uncertain. In some accounts, the captives go to the Skull Rack, passing by the feet of Huitzilopochtli - who they were also shown (each in turn) a small image ., to perform adorations before<sup>126</sup>. Duran and Tezozomoc thus imply an outdoor location, yet Sahagun tells us all this happened in the Emperor's palace, and that it was here that the captives were fed - given a great

banquet, quails being sacrificed in their honour<sup>127</sup>. At any rate, Duran says captives thanked the Emperor for "seeing them face to face"<sup>128</sup>.

### c. Captivity.

Next followed imprisonment of a week to a year, depending on the rites. Mayans slew distinguished captives "at once" so they could not harm them later<sup>129</sup>, but this was apparently not Aztec practice. Dedication of new victims occurred every 80 days<sup>130</sup>, so Brundage claims 40 to 80 days as the normal captivity period<sup>131</sup>.

Cortés and Díaz describe wooden cages or prisons for victims. These *malcalli* ('strongholds, cellars'<sup>132</sup>) were by the Emperor's palace.

Landa's informants told him that the containment or guarding of victims ensured they did not "defile themselves by sin"<sup>133</sup>. Each *calpulli* (parish) lord guarded a group<sup>134</sup>, but *ixiptla* had a body of four slave-guardians each - often victims themselves, who had fasted all year to that end<sup>135</sup>.

Duran<sup>136</sup> and Motolinia<sup>137</sup> mention a few victims - *ixiptla*? - being released every 10 days to dance and sing religious songs all night on *malcalli* rooftops, or on platforms in marketplaces.

Victims in *malcalli* were also generally feasted, honoured, entertained and given gifts<sup>138</sup>, the Emperor's captives being especially honoured<sup>139</sup>. One female victim was "always kept tipsy, inebriated, out of her wits"<sup>140</sup>, while many male *ixiptla* had "pleasure girls as guardians" who "amused, caressed" them<sup>141</sup>.

*Ixiptla* evidently received their training during imprisonment. For example, while fasting on a limited diet<sup>142</sup>, Tezcatlipoca's *ixiptla* was:

"...reared in all luxuries, trained in the playing, and in singing, and in speaking. very great care was taken that

he be taught to play the flute and whistle.... hold his flowers and pipe (properly)...that he should be circumspect in his discourses... (and) greet people agreeable on the road"<sup>143</sup>.

#### d. Ritual Duties

For most victims, but especially *ixiptla*, captivity ended with a day, or even weeks, of duties culminating in death: "Those who had to die had performed many ceremonies"<sup>144</sup>.

A very important ceremony was the 'setting up' of *ixiptla* to 'embody' a god or goddess:

"at this time he (the god) was given human form;  
at that time he was set up"<sup>145</sup>.

The victim simply appeared before the public decked in the insignia and costume of the particular deity, and was thereafter treated as being that deity. By themselves<sup>146</sup>, *ixiptla* donned the god's mask, headdress, body paint, staff, sandals, and jewellery<sup>147</sup>. Henceforth, the offering always appeared "dressed well"<sup>148</sup> - not easily discernible from a statue<sup>149</sup>, especially when carried about as 'living images' in litters<sup>150</sup>.

Thus "sigh(ed) for...long(ed) for"<sup>151</sup>, *ixiptla* carried flowers<sup>152</sup>, or disappeared into buildings for frequent costume-changes<sup>153</sup>. Xipe's *ixiptla* sat on a soft, shining jaguar skin and was fanned with plumes and fly whisks<sup>154</sup>. The "Messenger of the Sun", by contrast, carried divine insignia or a bag of gifts for the Sun<sup>155</sup>.

Song-and-dance performed in captivity reached a crescendo during the final days. At the temple plaza or at their usual venues, *ixiptla* and *tlaa/tilli* now led, according to Sahagun<sup>156</sup> and Duran<sup>157</sup>, thousands of people in spectacular dances - entire guilds, numerous priests, contingents of the army, or other groups. Either from dawn to midday, or dawn to nightfall, or even all night<sup>158</sup>, *ixiptla* performed: "until

their voices cracked or became hoarse"<sup>159</sup>. Mock fights and continuous flute-playing might be involved<sup>160</sup>.

Visitation and greeting was another duty. Some *ixiptla* visited individual homes<sup>161</sup>, probably a standard practice, for the Mayans "processed (victims) from village to village" - dancing<sup>162</sup>. *Ixiptla* went greeting and "cheering"<sup>163</sup> people on the road and in their homes<sup>164</sup>, young girls being especially valued for brightening people's spirits during "long fasts". Victims blessed children (carrying them around to that end)<sup>165</sup>, and accepted the gifts, messages, and autosacrifices of those they met, on the deity's behalf<sup>166</sup>. Their assistants meanwhile distributed gifts and food to those visited<sup>167</sup>. Today, vestiges of this tradition survive in *postadas* and *pastorales*, wherein selected children and adults visit homes as the 'image' of Mary, Joseph and Jesus - receiving presents of parrots and dogs<sup>168</sup>.

Other duties of the victim included - in different cases - fasting, autosacrifice, keeping vigil, weeping and sighing<sup>169</sup>, sitting on agricultural produce to consecrate it<sup>170</sup>, leading processions (even for miles)<sup>171</sup> and slaying fellow victims (as in the ball court rites)<sup>172</sup>. In the Mayan region, offerings even determined the nation's future by the lots they cast<sup>173</sup>. Similarly, the Aztec *ixiptla* of Huitzilopochtli actually ruled the Empire for a day, the Emperor abdicating and leaving the city to allow him that right<sup>174</sup>.

"Circumspect discourses"<sup>175</sup> were expected in a few cases. Duran describes an instance in which the victim stood in the midst of his assistants, giving a sermon whilst holding the head of a recently-offered person: "talking to them and preaching divine things and the cult of the gods"<sup>176</sup>. Shouting messages to the gods<sup>177</sup> or having to drink a mug of bloody water and say "so be it"<sup>178</sup> - in recognition of

one's fate were other statements a victim might be called to make. According to Suarez de Peralta these were unusual events, when priests and nobles fussed over the victim, and each one "gives him a message for heaven and offers him provisions and blankets for the road"<sup>179</sup>.

#### e. Ritual Death

##### i. Preparation

Usually, *tlacamicitiztli* took place at midday or midnight<sup>180</sup>. As the hour approached, hair was cut from the crown with a special knife<sup>181</sup> or even yanked out whilst whistles screeched<sup>182</sup>. All possessions and paraphernalia were now given away or buried<sup>183</sup>.

Males had a final bath, followed by full-body painting in red and white (or blue-black and white) stripes<sup>184</sup>. Feet were chalked and sometimes the doomed one wore different-coloured flowers<sup>185</sup>. War-captives were decorated with tufts of down to imitate a fledgling eagle<sup>186</sup>. Otherwise, only a few, disposable garments were worn: a coloured paper loincloth<sup>187</sup>; a paper crown; a paper flag<sup>188</sup>.

Now the victim walked to the place of sacrifice, groups of women offering encouragement<sup>189</sup>. Offerings took their place, standing, in front of or on the *cuauhxicalli* (a large, flat "eagle stone" at the base of the temple)<sup>190</sup> - or before the *tzompantli*, "where the king stood"<sup>191</sup>.

At this point, a clamour of drums<sup>192</sup> so loud that it echoed two leagues away<sup>193</sup> resounded as priests filed out, bearing ritual items<sup>194</sup>, greeting victims honorifically<sup>195</sup> and advising them of their fate<sup>196</sup>. Sometimes, as before, the priest displayed a *tzocalli* (image of a god) to each in turn, proclaiming: "Behold your God!"<sup>197</sup>. In certain cases, the candidate faced the sun or a painting of a god to deliver a final message<sup>198</sup>. More incensing and giving of stimulants occurred.

### iii. Ascending the Pyramid-

#### Temple or Cuauhxicalli

Some offerings were "led"<sup>199</sup> to their death. Others, Duran says, simply followed behind the priest - one at a time<sup>200</sup>. In a few cases, such as the Tezcatlipoca *ixiptla*, the victim climbed up alone - playing, breaking and scattering flutes along the way<sup>201</sup>, or victim and priests went hand in hand<sup>202</sup>.

By contrast, Tlacaxipanslitztli festival victims were dragged up by the hair<sup>203</sup>. Brundage suggests this was necessary because temple-steps became too slippery with human blood for victims to walk up<sup>204</sup>. Whatever the case, a priest anointed the sacrificial slab or *cuauhxicalli* ("eagle stone") as each new victim drew near<sup>205</sup>.

Many victims were sacrificed on the *cuauhxicalli* at the base of the temple. Others climbed the pyramid-temple, being slain on the *techcatl* (sacrificial slab) at the summit. This walk was lengthy. Steps led from one pyramid-tier to another, the victim walking entirely around each in turn. This meant spiralling around the temple four times - an ascent of nearly a mile<sup>206</sup>. As the victim climbed, sometimes shouting praise of his homeland, the whole congregation wept loudly<sup>207</sup>. Contemporary practices suggest music peaked at this stage<sup>208</sup>.

### iv Actual Slaying

Heart-extraction being the centre of Aztec human sacrifice, it will be described here in as much detail as possible.

Aztecs normally slew people in sets of four<sup>209</sup>, one at a time<sup>210</sup>. As soon as the victim stood facing the sacrificial slab or *cuauhxicalli*, he or she was seized "with great speed"<sup>211</sup> by six ministers: one for



each limb, another holding down ("crushing", say some) the throat with a snake-shaped wooden yoke<sup>212</sup>, a tight cord<sup>213</sup> or a sawfish bill<sup>214</sup>, and the sixth being the actual sacrificer. The offering was usually nude<sup>215</sup>.

The *techcatl* was smooth and waist-high<sup>216</sup>. Over it, the victim was stretched "in such a way that if a knife was dropped upon his chest it split open with the ease of a pomegranate"<sup>217</sup>. In silence, the *Huehuetqui* lifted his flint knife high into the air and "with great skill"<sup>218</sup> gashed into the chest.

Brundage says the sternum was thus broken<sup>219</sup>, whereas De Landa describes a point of entry between the ribs on the victim's left side, under the nipple<sup>220</sup>. "Skilful thrusts"<sup>221</sup> now split the chest wide open from nipple to nipple. The priest "plunged his hand in"<sup>222</sup>. To the sound of flutes and whistles<sup>223</sup>:

"with amazing swiftness (he) tore out the heart, ripping it out with his own hands"<sup>224</sup>.

Motolinia<sup>225</sup> and De Landa<sup>226</sup> both comment on the speed and ferocious energy of this operation. Duran says it happened quicker than one could cross oneself<sup>227</sup>. The victim was still alive after this<sup>228</sup>, witnessing the exaltation of his heart as he expired.

Motolinia describes the heart being lifted up to the sun or to the statue of the god in the temple behind<sup>229</sup>, which agrees with Munoz Camargo's observation:

"the strength with which it (the heart) pulsed and quivered was so great that he (the priest) used to lift it up three or four times..until (it) had grown cold"<sup>230</sup>.

However, Duran declares it was actually the fumes of the steaming heart that were dedicated to the Sun, the priest casting the heart in the idol's face<sup>231</sup>, leaving a blotch of blood there. By contrast,

Motolinia describes the priest smearing heart blood on the mouth of the temple image or the lintel of the altar it stood on<sup>232</sup>.

Sometimes the *Huehuetqui* dipped his fingers into the wound and flicked blood in four directions<sup>233</sup> - even licking some off his fingers and moaning<sup>234</sup>. Meanwhile, congregation and clergy sang in unison - varying mood according to the rite<sup>235</sup>. People whistled with their fingers<sup>236</sup>; conch trumpets and other music was played<sup>237</sup>, dignitaries accompanying or answering the tumult<sup>238</sup>. Izikowitz<sup>239</sup> and Stevens<sup>240</sup> believe drumming, jingling, screeching sounds predominated, as Aztec instruments consisted of drums, small bells, flutes, gongs, whistles, rattles, rasps and ocarinas. Simple "clarinets" and three-stringed zithers also existed, but their use was limited.

#### f. Posthumous Rites

Once cold, the heart is described variously as placed on a plate<sup>241</sup>, a bowl<sup>242</sup> or in the depression on the *cuauhxicalli*<sup>243</sup>. Blood from the chest opening meanwhile boiled up. The *techcatl* stood against the edge of the steep temple-steps, so a broad, long curtain of blood descended with each ritual death: "Jade Steps". Below, an *apetlec* - a projecting apron of masonry - caught the flow<sup>244</sup>.

Priests and congregation hurried to collect victims' blood in braziers and bowls to sprinkle on images or offerings<sup>245</sup>, or to smear on the walls and lintels of religious colleges<sup>246</sup> and temples<sup>247</sup>.

If the body was of a war captive, it was tipped off the sacrificial slab, from where it easily rolled down the slippery steps to the masonry apron below: *tlacuayan* - the god's "dining table". Here the corpse was often cut up and the head prepared<sup>248</sup>.

If the deceased was a slave, he or she was carried down<sup>249</sup>. The "owners" or purchasers of the victim came to retrieve the corpse<sup>250</sup> - "each took away its dead, leaving part of the flesh for the ministers<sup>251</sup>.

Occasionally, a sermon was preached<sup>252</sup>. The completion of human sacrifices marked the end of various fasts and penance, and the commencement of ritual feasting, drinking, singing, dancing, farces, games and indulgence in narcotics. Dough images of divinities were "sacrificed", distributed and consumed<sup>253</sup>.

Much work was also under way on victims' corpses. Where ritual format deemed it, some were placed in temple vaults or buried in the temple courtyard<sup>254</sup>. Most, though, were dismembered at the *apetlac*<sup>255</sup> or *tzompantli* (skull rack)<sup>256</sup>. Diaz saw buildings adjacent to temples with knives, chopping blocks, firewood, pots and water for processing and cooking of corpses<sup>257</sup>.

Head-preparation was especially elaborate. The previously-shorn locks of victim's hair were put in a special coffer to be kept tucked into rafters or beams of one's home<sup>258</sup>. The rest of the head was skinned, cleaned and threaded onto *tzompantli* poles<sup>259</sup>. Sometimes some scalp and hair was left attached to the skull<sup>260</sup>. A few skulls found use as vessels or masks.

Other trophies were fashioned from thigh bones to hang in one's courtyard<sup>261</sup>, whilst- back in the hometown of the victim, relatives created an *euillotl* (a human effigy) out of pine log torches, decorated with paper wings and jacket. This was burnt in the deceased's honour for two days at his college, the temple plaza, the *cuauhxicalli* or *tzompantli*<sup>262</sup>

## VI. ORIGINS AND HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

## a. Formative Period (7000 - 1300 b.c.e.)

Mexican human sacrifice appeared with the first signs of agriculture. At Durrón Cave (7500 - 6800 b.c.e.) and the El Reigo phase at Coxcatlan Cave (5500 - 5000 b.c.e.) children were apparently slain to accompany adults. Typically, they were decapitated, the heads stripped of flesh, and placed with the bodies, a basket above and below each<sup>263</sup>. Ritual cannibalism is suggested at Durrón Cave of 3900 b.c.e., and Ajalpan of 1270 b.c.e.<sup>264</sup>. This practice, and defleshing and enclosing of victims' heads in lip-to-lip bowls or baskets, persisted throughout Mexican pre-Hispanic history.

## b. Pre-Classic Period (1300-100 b.c.e.)

Human sacrifice in this epoch continued many customs of the last age. Vessels for cooking victims' flesh are in evidence<sup>265</sup>, and though there is no actual representation of killing from the Olmec headland<sup>266</sup>, jaguars and serpents are depicted mauling and swallowing people, some headless<sup>267</sup>. Tres Zapotes Stela A shows a man holding a knife and a severed head, wearing a belt of head trophies- a motif of many reliefs<sup>268</sup>. Already, skull-offerings were deposited in fours or fives (the sacred directions)<sup>269</sup>, and Charles Spence makes a case for wooden *tzompantli* existing in Cuicatlan Canada (Oaxaca)<sup>270</sup>.

Sculptures at San Jose Magote and La Venta (Altar of the Quintuplets) show men carrying weeping, masked babies<sup>271</sup> - perhaps for rites ancestral to the baby-slaying rain ceremonies of the Aztecs? Certainly Chalcatzingo (700-500 b.c.e.) contains a sacrifice of two same-aged children<sup>272</sup> and Mayan burials of 400-300 b.c.e. had children accompanying adults<sup>273</sup> - continuing the trend evident at Coxcatlan Cave

five thousand years before. Indeed, in Mayan sites, sacrifice was decapitation- the head placed on the chest<sup>274</sup>, much as at Coxcatlan.

Many other elements of Aztec human sacrifice existed by the Pre-Classic. War captives as victims, stripped nude before their demise, appear as three hundred and twenty<sup>275</sup> Monte Alban and San Jose Magote *dazantes* ('dancer') reliefs (600-500 b.c.e.)<sup>276</sup>, one of which seems to depict chest-opening sacrifice<sup>277</sup> (see Figure 16, Part B: Chapter 1). There was already use of victims' bones as fan-handles<sup>278</sup>; tethering of victims; "precious liquid" glyphs for blood (Monte Alban); and *quauhxicalli* (blood receptacles)<sup>279</sup>.

The tally of victims for this early period is difficult to ascertain. Grove suggests only a minimum amongst the Olmec<sup>280</sup>, but Monte Alban folk placed heads under the foundation of each newly erected religious building, whilst early Mayans put corpses under each new *tun*(stelae)<sup>281</sup> surely meaning that many people were regularly slain. At a Mayan site of 400 b.c.e., twenty to hundreds of people were decapitated, dismembered and strewn over the ground under temple platforms and buried corpses<sup>282</sup>.

#### c. Classic Period (100 b.c.e. - 900 c.e.)

Foundation sacrifices and decapitation - burying severed heads in lip-to-lip bowls in offering caches - continued in the Classic era. From Mayan<sup>283</sup> and Zapotec<sup>284</sup> sites we have many examples. Child-sacrifice was also still practiced: sets of eight 3 to 6 year-olds being beaten to death in sacred Mayan caves<sup>285</sup>.

Ball court killing is this era's unique contribution, persisting into Aztec times. The victims - apparently warriors and/or royalty<sup>286</sup> engage in preparatory contemplations and ceremonies, play the game, and


are decapitated, sometimes whilst sitting on a special bench. All of this was rich in mythical, stellar and death symbolism, and may have been used to divine the future<sup>287</sup>. At Tajin at least, vampire bats and vultures lap up the blood and consume the corpse<sup>288</sup>.

If art is indicative, victims by now are mostly royalty and nobility captured in wars with rival city-states<sup>289</sup>, or attendants accompanying rulers to the grave. Zapotec and Mayan lords and ladies are often buried with 3 to 6 attendants, mainly young men<sup>290</sup>, whose heads or hands had been cut off<sup>291</sup>.

Of blue-blooded killings, one Bonampak mural shows King Chaan-muan presiding over the bleeding and decapitation of half a dozen (noble ?) captives<sup>292</sup>. Several Mayan vases depict a captured lord strapped to a chair or platform<sup>293</sup> - believed by Diehl and Pohl to be representative of the *cuch* ceremony, a rite in which animal or human "game" is carried about and burnt to death with firebrands applied to various body-parts<sup>294</sup>. The elite also sacrificed their own selves, a noblewoman of Altar de Sacrificios stabbing herself in the throat in 754. Mayan kings partook in this fatal performance, the event then being painted onto the vase that accompanied her and the flint knife into her tomb<sup>295</sup>.

Like the Aztecs, Classic Maya city-states evidently knew "constant warfare"<sup>296</sup> and subsequent immolations. Demarest claims this custom was a late development (after 700 c.e.), causing the collapse of the city-states<sup>297</sup>, but depictions of warfare and victim-capture also occur in Mayan centres of the 4th and 5th centuries. Fagan finds the "war cult" dating at least that far back<sup>298</sup>.

Although, as in the previous era, there was a prohibition against depicting ritual death<sup>299</sup>, new forms of sacrifice were entering: spearing (Tikal)<sup>300</sup>, and heart-extraction - the principal means of the

Aztecs. Berrin has a strong case for the toponym by which Monte Alban people knew Teotihuacan being "place of heart sacrifice" (  )<sup>301</sup>. Sejourne identified this as a dissected heart<sup>302</sup>, heart-motifs being common there<sup>303</sup> (see Figure 1, Part B: Ch.1).

Certainly heart-extraction is depicted c.300 c.e. at the Teotihuacan outpost of Alta Vista, far north-west of Central Mexico<sup>304</sup>, where the first stone *tzompantli* (skull racks) also appear. Mayan sites: Peidras Negras (Stela II)- see Figure 25 (Part B: Chapter 1)<sup>305</sup>; Uxmal (Pyramid of the Magician, Temple 4); and Tajin, also show some sequences of chest-opening<sup>306</sup>. All of this is intriguing in that it suggests Aztec heart-extraction was a locally-originated (Teotihuacan) tradition, already widespread a millennium before the Aztecs arrived on the scene.

Similarly, Aztec predilection for mass-sacrifice may perpetuate local tradition. The largest human sacrifices yet excavated are Teotihuacano, in the Aztec heartland. At the Teotihuacan Pyramid of the Sun, over sixty soldiers were sacrificed for interment (along with rich offerings)<sup>307</sup>- each corner of every tier of this pyramid and the Pyramid of Quetzalcoatl (100-250 c.e.) additionally holding remains of six-year-old children<sup>308</sup>. Totals were probably staggering, for just outside Teotihuacan, remains of thousands of burnt and/or drowned children, interred in special urns, have been discovered<sup>309</sup>.

#### d. Post-Classic Period (900 - 1530 c.e.)

Essential components of Aztec human sacrifice were now in place, but it was this era which brought them together. The Toltecs were the medium for this. Aztec sacrificial paraphernalia is largely Toltec: skull racks, *chacmools* (heart-receptacles), and striped designs on victims<sup>310</sup>.

Primarily through Toltec influence, heart-extraction sacrifice became popular around Mesoamerica by the 11th century. Toltecs and Chichimecs also brought new means of death: gladiatorial killing, and arrow sacrifice by the 12th century (Chichimeca) - a rite which became very important to the Mayans.

Mayans especially increased variety. According to Thompson, they invented beating to death with thorny branches; jumping from a pyramid; being bound and dashed to death on a pile of stones; and being clubbed about the head and tossed at dawn into *cenotes* (deep sinkholes)<sup>311</sup>. A great Mayan ruler, Hunac Ceel (r.1184-1204), gained the throne by surviving *cenote* sacrifice<sup>312</sup>. Mayan hermit-priests - the four Balams of the *Popul Vuh* (900's c.e.?) - also snatched passers-by on the roads and secretly slew them<sup>313</sup>.

#### e. Aztec Developments (1110 - Now)

God Huitzilopochtli charged the Aztecs with the duty of sacrificial warfare. *Codex Ramirez* relates incidents of heart-extraction even in the Aztec wanderings<sup>314</sup>.

By the early 1300's, the Aztecs were known for the ferocity of their sacrifices, shocking Culhuacan's ruler by delivering 8,000 ears of Xochimilco captives, and sacrificing and flaying his daughter<sup>315</sup>.

Thus mass-sacrifice was an institute quite early in Aztec history. Not long after the city-state was founded, a batch of 500 captives were slaughtered. In 1383, King Acamapichtli took four towns, shown in *Codex Mendoza* as severed heads (decapitated inhabitants?)<sup>316</sup>.

Between 1450 and 1454, the tendency towards large-scale killing was intensified by bad weather and famine. *Historia de los Mexicanos por Pinturas* records how heavy snow and "great hunger", in which wild beasts entered the towns and people sold their children into slavery, was



attributed to Huitzilopochtli's anger over insufficient food. The disaster compelled Tlacaélel and Moctezuma I, under the advise of a Tlaxcalan noble, Xicotecoatl<sup>317</sup>, to institute regular *xochiyaoyotl* - "flowery wars", ensuring a generous supply of human sacrifices<sup>318</sup>.

Tlaxcala was the first city-state to be involved in Aztec *xochiyaoyotl*, the next being Huexotzinco<sup>319</sup>. Other *Nahua* states were appalled by the bloodbaths, but eventually copied the Aztecs<sup>320</sup>.

Moctezuma I also instituted gladiatorial sacrifice<sup>321</sup> and declared the Aztecs' sole purpose would be wars of sacrifice. He excluded wealth and social privileges from those would not go to battle<sup>322</sup>. Warfare and human sacrifice became primary concerns, large numbers of captives being taken in military campaigns (nearly 10,000 by Emperor Tizoc).

The culmination was the *Templo Mayor* inauguration (1486). For four days, fourteen temples continuously immolated at least 20,000 victims in batches of 100, 500, 1000 and more<sup>323</sup>.

When Moctezuma II reigned (1502-1520), large-scale slaughter was still popular with a few new touches, such as enlarging the capital's gladiatorial stone. Moctezuma II also made it obligatory for rebellious provinces to send victims to Aztec centres to atone for their disobedience, a policy which raised many complaints around the time of the Conquest<sup>324</sup>.

When the Conquistadors came to the Aztec capital, they had no success whatsoever in making Moctezuma's subjects abjure from *tlacamicitiztli*<sup>325</sup>. Only after the Conquest did the scale of human sacrifice fall dramatically - the rite being stamped out. Of course, secret immolations persisted in caves and remote temples for generations and, as Davies demonstrates, Spanish Inquisitional executions rapidly

took the place of the rite, developing similarities in style and sequence<sup>326</sup>. Today, human sacrifice is extinct amongst the Aztec.

#### VII. The Degree of Acquiescence in Aztec Human Sacrifice

"Some , we are told, faltered on the stairs. and wept or fainted...They were dragged up by the priests..but for most, *pulque* (alcohol), anger, pride or the narrowing existential focus of their days somehow got them through"<sup>327</sup>.

This is Clendinnen's reconstruction of Aztec victims meeting their end. Obviously, compulsion is inherent in sacrificial slaying. On the other hand, considerable compliance on the victim's part is also suggested. Cases where human offerings "faltered ..weakened"<sup>328</sup> - losing control of their bowels and turning hysterical - were rare enough to be classed *tetlazolmictiliztli* ('insult to the gods') - the 'blasphemers' being hurriedly taken and slain<sup>329</sup>, amidst public exclamations of outrage and dread.

Indeed, if the Toci-impersonator so much as appeared sad over her immanent death, it was a "bad omen"<sup>330</sup>. Dying whilst "extolling" oneself: "(he) bore himself like a man..exerting himself..strong of heart"<sup>331</sup> or whilst "mak(ing) merry and danc(ing)"<sup>332</sup> was evidently more the norm. Aztec warriors, we are told, "go to battle as to their marriage"<sup>333</sup>, and the warrior "offers himself with great joy and gladness"<sup>334</sup>.

Even if this exaggerates the victims' true mood, Aztecs certainly had nothing but contempt for candidates who did not die "properly"- who "insulted" the gods with their ignorance. As Tlaloc replies in one sacrificial hymn: "If anyone has caused Me *shame*, it is because he did not know Me well"<sup>335</sup>.

The hesitant victim was also ridiculed as cowardly: "He quite acquitted himself as a man" sneered Aztecs about those who threw

themselves on the gladiatorial stone rather than fighting<sup>336</sup>. If Spaniards denounced this attitude, they were met with "sarcastic and indifferent" replies<sup>337</sup> - presumably about Christians being "weak and worthless"<sup>338</sup>.

Duties of victim were such that only compliance of the human offering could make sacrificial ceremonies 'work'. Shouting messages, giving discourses, blessing children, dressing oneself as a god<sup>339</sup>, leading dances, singing songs till one's voice cracked - all this necessitates voluntary involvement.

Aztecs did not simply immolate anyone. Of the many slaves at the Azcapotzalco markets, merchants only purchased those who danced "*with feeling to the music*"<sup>340</sup>. Xipe's victims were supposed to be without moral defect<sup>341</sup>, just as Tezcatlipoca's *ixiptla* had to be someone "*without defects...of good understanding, quick*" - a gracious, eloquent man: "*circumspect in his discourses*"<sup>342</sup>. *Ixiptla* were always "*charming, good mannered...best mannered...docile*"<sup>343</sup>.

To be assessed on 'dancing with feeling' or "charm", these qualities must have been *demonstrated*. Knowing what awaited talented performers, why would a slave dance well or convey good understanding? The only obvious answer is that certain slaves *desired to die*.

I would argue that slaves and captives may even have *vied* for important sacrificial roles. Duran was told the Tezcatlipoca-*ixiptla* was "one who had consecrated himself or made a vow to that end"<sup>344</sup>. This is likely because sacrificial death was so desired:

"Those who died in war are well-honoured, they are considered precious on earth, and they are also much desired. Also, they are much envied, so that all people desire, seek, pray for this death... for it is much praised"<sup>345</sup>.

A captive-victim was "well-honoured" by the *euillotl* burnt in his memory; by relics fashioned from his body; and by the 'honour roll' of

his home temple. For years he would be sung and danced about. Aztec lore is full of victims such as Mixcoatl of Huexotzinco, about whom poems were composed:

"Oh glorious youth, worthy of all praise, you offered  
your heart to the sun, clean as a necklace of sapphires;  
you shall return once more to blossom.. to flower on earth.  
..Oh Mixcoatl.. Those who dance the ritual dances should  
carry you in their mouths.. You shall return to the ritual  
dances.. you merit the songs"<sup>346</sup>.

It should be pointed out here that Sahagun says "death in war" meant human sacrifice<sup>347</sup>. In *Cantares Mexicanos*, soldiers are called *tizatl huitl* ("chalk and feather"—sacrificial victims) and *amatl* (sacrificial banners)<sup>348</sup>, apparently in recognition of the connection between going to war and dying on the altar.

Perhaps a warrior's *amatl* signified willingness to die sacrificially? Toltecs panicking over an ominous shower of stones bought *amatl* to volunteer for immolation:

"Behold yet another portent. It was said stones rained upon the Toltecs. ...a large sacrificial stone fell; there at Chapoltepecuitlapilco it came falling down. And afterwards a little old woman lived there. She sold paper flags (*amatl*). She walked about saying: 'Here are your little flags'. And those who wished to die said: 'Buy me one'. Thereupon one went where the sacrificial stone was. None asked: 'What do you already do?' They were as if lost"<sup>349</sup>.

The best evidence for Aztecs desiring and valuing sacrificial death comes from a hostile source: the Conquistadors. Feeling sympathetic for sacrificial captives, Cortes and his men released some, telling them they were free. The victims simply stayed put<sup>350</sup>. Pedro Alvarado found similar. He released two young men who were about to be sacrificed, but instead of thanking him, "they indignantly rejected his offer of release, and demanded to be sacrificed"<sup>351</sup>.

Quite possibly, victims were only accepted if they were compliant - unwilling ones being by-passed. Consider this Mayan reminiscence:

"One old Indian, recalling times long passed, told of an uncommonly pert hussy, who roundly declared that if she were thrown in (into the *cenote* as a sacrifice), she'd be damned if she would ask the gods for a good maize crop or anything else. Another victim was sought"<sup>352</sup>.

"Ungraceful, inept" slaves are never bought for sacrifice, being considered "unfit to represent the gods". Such coarse, disobedient slaves could only be kept "as servants"<sup>353</sup>.

Apparently, the more 'voluntary' the death, the greater one's posthumous standing. Aztec heroes were men like Tlalhuicole, Prince Tlacahuepan and Lord Ezhuahuacatl, renowned fighters who, when captured, refused all offers of freedom, land, wealth or control of the army, demanding instead to be sacrificed<sup>354</sup>.

Tlacahuepan ensured the latter by jumping from a pyramid, saying: "Mexico, I am going, and I shall wait for you!"<sup>355</sup>. Lord Ezhuahuacatl likewise threw himself to death, but from a 20 metre pole, after a moving speech:

"Now you will see that the Aztecs know how to die!"<sup>356</sup>.  
 "Valorous brothers of mine: happy are you who died proving your great personal courage. Go now in honour ..Friends, the time has come! Die brave like me! Know that with my death I will have bought you life"<sup>357</sup>.

Final evidence of acquiescence is the rather lax security around victims. Many were trusted to offer themselves up 'freely'. Quite a few *ixiptla* "walked everywhere in the town"<sup>358</sup> - "By day and by night he followed whatever way he wished"<sup>359</sup>. Even child-offerings never ran off when "left...in many different places"<sup>360</sup>. During the Quechollì festival:

"the rest of the captives climbed up purely at their own will.. (The *ixiptlas* of) Tlamatzincatl.. climbed up purely of their own will; of their own accord they ascend. Then they went straight to the offering stone and died there"<sup>361</sup>.

In Toxcatl, the victim even decided his hour of death:

"he went erect, at the head of the others. And it was purely of his own will when he was to die. When he was to wish it... he delivered himself into (the hands of the priests)"<sup>362</sup>.

*Ixiptla* 'guards' could hardly have cared about halting escape, for they were often to be sacrificed later in the ceremony<sup>363</sup>, a fate which should have encouraged them to conspire with the *ixiptla* to leave.

Notice, also, that the Aztecs were in no hurry to divest themselves of human sacrifice when the Spanish declared it illegal. Instead, Aztec priests exclaimed that "the inhabitants would rise up" if they stopped *tlacamicitiztli*<sup>364</sup>. Tlaxcalans even asked the Conquistadors to spare themselves such talk: "since they would not give up sacrifices even at the cost of their lives"<sup>365</sup>. Many Aztec priests did die defending *tlacamicitiztli* - ironically, in a ceremony rather similar to it: Inquisitional execution.

---

<sup>1</sup> B.C. Brundage, *The Jade Steps* 157.

<sup>2</sup> Hernan Cortes, *Letters*, 35-36.

<sup>3</sup> Diego Duran, *Rites of the Gods*, p.77.

<sup>4</sup> Nigel Davies, *Human Sacrifice in History and Today*, 7, 13-20ff.

- 5 Bernal Díaz, *History of the Conquest of New Spain* 35, 107, 199, 204.
- 6 T. de Motolinia, *History of the Indies* 113.
- 7 *Relacion de Tepultzanin* O. Lewis, *Tepoztlán: Village in Mexico*, p. 225.
- 8 Frances Gillmor, *Flute of the Smoking Mirror* 96.
- 9 F. Peterson, *Ancient Mexico*, 146.
- 10 Diego Duran, *Rites of the Gods* 77f.
- 11 Hernan Cortes, *Letters* 36f.
- 12 T. Motolinia, *History of the Indians of New Spain*, 115.
- 13 *ibid.*
- 14 *ibid.*, 113.
- 15 F. Peterson, *Ancient Mexico*, 79.
- 16 *ibid.*, 199.
- 17 William H. Prescott, *History of the Conquest of Mexico*, 409-410.
- 18 J. Broda, David Carrasco & E. M. Moctezuma, *The Great Temple of Tenochtitlan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), *in passim*. See also David Carrasco, "City as Symbol in Aztec Thought: The Clues from the Codex Mendoza", *History of Religions* 20 (February 1981).
- 19 *Codex Mendoza*, 15-16.
- 20 Cottie Burland, *Magic Books from Mexico*, 16.
- 21 B. C. Brundage, *The Jade Steps* 171.
- 22 *ibid.*
- 23 Patricia R. Anawalt, "Understanding Aztec Human Sacrifice" *Archeology*, Vol. 33.1, January-February, 1980, 39-40.
- 24 *ibid.*, 42.
- 25 De Umbria, *in ibid.*, 41.
- 26 F. Peterson, *Ancient Mexico*, 148-9.
- 27 E. M. Moctezuma, "Archaeology and Symbolism in Ancient Mexico", p. 118.
- 28 F. Peterson, *Ancient Mexico*, 146.
- 29 *ibid.*
- 30 B. C. Brundage, *The Jade Steps* 45f.
- 31 Inga Clendinnen, *Aztecs* 98-101.
- 32 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 232.
- 33 *Codex Borbonicus*, 25 in Patricia Anawalt, "Understanding Aztec Human Sacrifice", 40.
- 34 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 232.
- 35 Pomar, *Relacion de Texcaca* 41.
- 36 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 2: 21: 52-53.
- 37 F. Peterson, *Ancient Mexico*, 157.
- 38 T. Motolinia, *History of the Indians*, 133.
- 39 *ibid.*, 118.
- 40 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 234-5.
- 41 *ibid.*
- 42 Kurt Ross, *Codex Mendoza* 29 concerning place-glyph, 12.
- 43 F. Peterson, *Ancient Mexico*, 147.
- 44 Bernardino de Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 2: 34: 146.
- 45 T. de Motolinia, *History of the Indians* 115f, 133f.
- 46 The *pochteca* prided themselves not on huge profit margins but on their adventures to obtain single exotic items. The fact that they were sometimes slain as suspected spies in foreign lands made them believe they, too, were "warriors". See Inga Clendinnen, *Aztecs*, 137-140.
- 47 Alfonso Caso, *The Aztecs - People of the Sun*, 88.

- 48 Laurette Sejourné, *Burning Water*, 35.
- 49 Diego Duran, *The Aztecs - History of the Indies*, 141.
- 50 *ibid.*, 14.
- 51 *Codex Mendoza*, 66.
- 52 Nigel Davies, *The Aztecs*, 147.
- 53 Jacques Soustelle, *Daily Life of the Aztecs*, 39.
- 54 Bernal Diaz, *History of the Conquest of New Spain*, 23.
- 55 Hernan Cortes, *Letters*, 62.
- 56 *Codex Nuttall*, 84.
- 57 B.C. Brundage, *The Jade Steps*, 177.
- 58 Diego Duran, *The Aztecs - History of the Indians*, 223, 292.
- 59 T. de Motolinia, *History of the Indians*, 132.
- 60 Tezozomoc Vol.II in Jacques Soustelle, *Daily Life of the Aztecs*, 100.
- 61 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex Bk.2: 34: 148*.
- 62 Inga Clendinnen, *Aztecs*, 100 - 102f.
- 63 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 260.
- 64 Jacques Soustelle, *Daily Life of the Aztecs*, 77.
- 65 Frances Gillmor, *Flute of the Smoking Mirror*, 76.
- 66 Popul Vuh, 77.
- 67 F. Peterson, *Ancient Mexico*, 123.
- 68 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 95, 133.
- 69 F. Peterson, *Ancient Mexico*, 122.
- 70 Jacques Soustelle, *Daily Life of the Aztecs*, 57.
- 71 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex Bk.3: Appendix 4: 46*.
- 72 Pomar, *Relacion de Texcoco* in Jacques Soustelle, *Daily Life of the Aztecs*, 201.
- 73 Sahagun in Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Native Mesoamerican Spirituality*, 81.
- 74 *Relacion de Tepoztlan* in O. Lewis, *Tepoztlan: Village in Mexico* (New York: Holt & Co., 1960), 253.
- 75 Juan Bautista Pomar, *Relacion de Texcoco*, 42.
- 76 Inga Clendinnen, *Aztecs*, 98 - 99.
- 77 Juan Bautista Pomar, *Relacion de Texcoco*, 42.
- 78 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 169.
- 79 Hernan Cortes, *Letters*, 105.
- 80 Chilam Balam de Chumayel (ed. Miguel Rivera), *Cronicas de America: 20* (Madrid: Historia 16 / Vienna, 1986), 83.
- 81 Diego de Landa, *Relacion*, 83.
- 82 T. de Motolinia, *History of the Indians*, 118 - 119.
- 83 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 223, 242.
- 84 Kurt Ross, *Codex Mendoza*, 96.
- 85 *Ritual of the Bacabs*, 168 - 170.
- 86 Chilam Balam 7 - 8 (119).
- 87 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 90 - 91.
- 88 T. de Motolinia, *History of the Indians*, 114.
- 89 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 90 - 91.
- 90 *ibid.*
- 91 *ibid.*
- 92 Diego Duran, *The Aztecs - History of the Indies*, 101 - 102.
- 93 T. de Motolinia, *History of the Indians*, 131.
- 94 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 144.
- 95 T. de Motolinia, *History of the Indians*, 114.
- 96 Diego Duran, *The Aztecs - History of the Indies*, 198 - 199.



- 97 *ibid.*, 173.
- 98 B. Carr Brundage, *The Jade Steps*, 140.
- 99 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk.2: 21: 51.
- 100 Juan de Tovar, *Tovar Calendar*, pl. iv.
- 101 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 94, 189 - 190.
- 102 Diego de Landa, *Relacion*, xv ( 84 ).
- 103 Igna Clendinnen, *Aztecs*, 2.
- 104 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 76.
- 105 *ibid.*, 94.
- 106 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk.2: 3: 8; Bk.2: 21: 47.
- 107 Diego Duran, *The Aztecs - History of the Indians*, 102 - 104. See also Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 132.
- 108 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 127.
- 109 *ibid.*, 189. See also Diego Duran, *The Aztecs - History of the Indians*, 122.
- 110 Juan Bautista Pomar, *Relacion de Texcoco*, 40.
- 111 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 131.
- 112 Nigel Davies, *The Aztecs*, 172.
- 113 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 108.
- 114 Diego Duran, *The Aztecs - A History of the Indies of New Spain*, 102.
- 115 B. Carr Brundage, *The Jade Steps*, 165.
- 116 *ibid.*, 185.
- 117 Alphonso Caso, *The Aztecs - People of the Sun*, 106.
- 118 *ibid.*, 101.
- 119 T. Motolinia, *History of the Indians of New Spain*, 166. See also Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 94.
- 120 Diego Duran, *The Aztecs, History of the Indies of New Spain*, 102.
- 121 *ibid.*, 104.
- 122 *ibid.*, 119.
- 123 *ibid.*, 119-120.
- 124 *ibid.*, 102.
- 125 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 112.
- 126 *ibid.*
- 127 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk.2: 29: 114.
- 128 Diego Duran, *The Aztecs - History of the Indies of New Spain*, 119.
- 129 Diego de Landa, *Relacion de las cosas de Yucatan*, XVI (86).
- 130 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 131.
- 131 B. C. Brundage, *The Jade Steps*, 165-7.
- 132 Bernardino de Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk.2: 314.
- 133 Diego de Landa, *Relacion de las cosas de Yucatan*, XV (83).
- 134 B. Carr Brundage, *The Jade Steps*, 161.
- 135 Bernardino de Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk.2: 24: 68-71.
- 136 Diego Duran, *The Aztecs, History of the Indies of New Spain*, 102.
- 137 T. Motolinia, *History of the Indians of New Spain*, 47.
- 138 B. Carr Brundage, *The Jade Steps*, 165-7.
- 139 Clavigero and Torquemada in *ibid.*
- 140 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 212.
- 141 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk.2: 38: 168 - 169.
- 142 *ibid.*, Bk.2, 5:9; Bk.3:8
- 143 *ibid.*, Bk.2, 5:9; Bk.2:24,68-71
- 144 *ibid.*, Bk.2: 5: 9.
- 145 *ibid.*, Bk.2: 23: 66.

- 146 *ibid.*, Bk.2: 34: 76.
- 147 *ibid.*, Bk.2: 20: 40 - 43.
- 148 *Relacion de Tepultzanin* O. Lewis, *Tepoztlan*, 253.
- 149 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 103.
- 150 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk.2: 3: 9.
- 151 *ibid.*, Bk. 2: 38: 168 - 171.
- 152 *ibid.*, Bk. 2: 25: 88.
- 153 *ibid.*, Bk. 2: 20: 45.
- 154 William H. Prescott, *History of the Conquest of Mexico*, 142.
- 155 Diego Duran, *The Aztecs - A History of the Indies*, 101 - 102.
- 156 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex* Bk.2: 38: 168 - 169.
- 157 Diego Duran, *The Aztecs - A History of the Indies*, 101 - 102.
- 158 T. de Motolinia, *History of the Indians*, 47. See also Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk.2: 24: 76; 25: 88.
- 159 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex* Bk.2: 10: 17 - 18.
- 160 *ibid.*, Bk.2: 38: 168 - 169.
- 161 *ibid.*, Bk.2: 5: 9; 2: 24: 68 - 71.
- 162 Diego de Landa, *Relacion*, XV (83).
- 163 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 223.
- 164 *ibid.*.
- 165 *ibid.*, 183.
- 166 *ibid.*, 226. See also Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk.2: 5: 9.
- 167 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 2: 24: 70.
- 168 J. Lopez (ed. C. Ross), *Christmas in Mexico* (Chicago: Wand Books, 1976), 31.
- 169 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk.2: 20: 49; Bk. 2: 36: 136.
- 170 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 226.
- 171 *ibid.*, 81.
- 172 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 2: 15: 2.
- 173 *Chilam Balam* 19 (36).
- 174 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 160.
- 175 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk.2: 31: 68 - 71.
- 176 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 148.
- 177 Diego Duran, *The Aztecs - A History of the Indians*, 122.
- 178 *ibid.*, 132.
- 179 F. Peterson, *Ancient Mexico*, 147.
- 180 Frances Gillmor, *Flute of the Smoking Mirror*, 6, 22.
- 181 *ibid.*.
- 182 *ibid.*, Bk. 9: 14.
- 183 *ibid.*, Bk. 2: 37: 163.
- 184 Codexes show this range of colouring, though Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex* Bk. 2: 21: 53, indicates only one style.
- 185 Nigel Davies, *The Aztecs*, 105 - 106.
- 186 B. Carr Brundage, *The Jade Steps*, 170.
- 187 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex* Bk.2: 20: 42 - 43.
- 188 Diego Duran, *The Aztecs - A History of the Indies*, 120 - 121. See also Olmos and Sahagun in B. C. Brundage, *The Jade Steps*, 170.
- 189 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk.2: 24: 68 - 69.
- 190 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 189. Duran also refers to this in his *The Aztecs - A History of the Indies*, 122.
- 191 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 2: 29: 114. The same admitted by Duran. See *The Aztecs - A History of the Indies*, 120 - 121.

- 192 Bernardino Sahagun, Florentine Codex, Bk.9: 14.
- 193 Bernal Diaz, as in F. Peterson, *Ancient Mexico*, 204.
- 194 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 91.
- 195 *ibid.*, 189.
- 196 *ibid.*
- 197 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 80 - 81.
- 198 *ibid.*, 189.
- 199 Diego de Landa, *Relacion de las cosas de Yucatan*, XV (84).
- 200 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 83.
- 201 Bernardino Sahagun, Florentine Codex, Bk.2: 5: 9.
- 202 *ibid.*, App.: 197.
- 203 *ibid.*, Bk.2: 21: 53.
- 204 B. Carr Brundage, *The Jade Steps*, 169.
- 205 Diego de Landa, *Relacion*, xvi.
- 206 William H. Prescott, *History of the Conquest of Mexico*, 384.
- 207 Bernardino Sahagun, Florentine Codex, Bk.2: 20: 44 - 45.
- 208 J. Norman, "The Huichols: Mexico's People of Myth and Magic", *National Geographic* 151: 6 (June 1971), 841.
- 209 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 121.
- 210 *ibid.*, 91 - 92.
- 211 Diego de Landa, *Relacion*, xv (84).
- 212 *Origen de los Mexicanos*, (ed. German Vazquez), *Cronicas de America* 32 (Madrid: Historia 16/ Vienna, 1987), 117 (Figure).
- 213 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 91 - 92.
- 214 *ibid.*, 121.
- 215 Bernardino Sahagun, Florentine Codex, Bk.2: 94: 170 - 175.
- 216 *ibid.*, Bk. 2: App.179.
- 217 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 91.
- 218 Diego de Landa, *Relacion*, XV (84).
- 219 B. C. Brundage, *The Jade Steps*, 120.
- 220 Diego de Landa in F. Peterson, *Ancient Mexico*, 146.
- 221 Bernardino Sahagun, Florentine Codex, Bk. 2: 2.
- 222 Diego de Landa, *Relacion*, XV (84).
- 223 Bernardino Sahagun, Florentine Codex, Bk.9: 14.
- 224 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 92.
- 225 T. de Motolinia, *History of the Indians*, 115.
- 226 Diego de Landa, *Relacion*, XV (84).
- 227 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 92.
- 228 *ibid.*
- 229 T. de Motolinia, *History of the Indians*, 115.
- 230 Munoz Camargo in Laurette Sejourné, *Burning Water*, 126.
- 231 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 92.
- 232 T. de Motolinia, *History of the Indians*, 115.
- 233 Duran in B. Carr Brundage, *The Jade Steps*, 170.
- 234 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 235.
- 235 S. Marti & G. P. Kurath, *Dances of Anahuac*, (New York: Weiner-Gren Anthropological Research Inc., 1964), 63.
- 236 Bernardino Sahagun, Florentine Codex, Bk.2: 21: 52.
- 237 *ibid.*, Bk.2: 15: 28. This agrees with Diego Duran. See *Book of the Gods*, 344.
- 238 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 94.

- 239 K. A. Izikowitz, *Musical and Sound Instruments of South American Indians* (Goleburg: Elaiavs Boktryrkeri Aktiebolagla, 1934), 67, 201-203.
- 240 R. Stevens, *Music in the Aztec and Inca Traditions*, (Berkeley: University of California, 1968), 34-39, 73, 137.
- 241 Diego de Landa, *Relacion*, XV (84).
- 242 Burr Cartwright Brundage, *The Jade Steps*, 169.
- 243 Diego Duran, *The Aztecs - A History of the Indies*, 112, 120-122.
- 244 Burr Cartwright Brundage, *The Jade Steps*, 169.
- 245 Diego Duran, *The Aztecs - A history of the Indies*, 120-122. See also his *Book of the Gods*, 226.
- 246 *ibid.*, 1989-199.
- 247 *ibid.*
- 248 Burr Cartwright Brundage, *The Jade Steps*, 169-170.
- 249 T. de Motolinia, *History of the Indians* 115.
- 250 Diego Duran, *The Aztecs - A History of the Indies*, 92.
- 251 T. de Motolinia, *History of the Indians*, 132.
- 252 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 184.
- 253 *ibid.*, 94.
- 254 Burr Cartwright Brundage, *The Jade Steps*, 149 - 150.
- 255 *ibid.*, 171.
- 256 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk.2:3.
- 257 Bernal Diaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 206 - 207.
- 258 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk.2: 29: 114 & Bk.2: 80.
- 259 T. de Motolinia, *History of the Indians*, 123.
- 260 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 79.
- 261 *ibid.*, 80. See also Burr Cartwright Brundage, *The Jade Steps*, 160.
- 262 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk.4: 18: 69 - 70.
- 263 Robert D. Diennan, "Religion and Social Organisation in Formative Times" in Kurt V. Flannery (ed.) *The Early Mesoamerican Village* ( New York, Academic, 1976), 351.
- 264 R. S. MacNesh & M.L.Fowler et al, *The Prehistory of Tehuacan Valley*, Vol.5, ( Austin: University of Texas, 1972) , 84.
- 265 Kurt V. Flannery et al, *The Cloud People* ( New York: Academic & School of American Research, 1983 ), 57-64.
- 266 Jacques Soustelle, *The Olmecs*, 89.
- 267 Chalcatzingo relief carvings III and V, Henry B. Nicholson, "Major sculpture in Pre-Hispanic Central Mexico" *Handbook of Middle American Indians*, Vol.10, *Archaeology of Northern Mesoamerica Pt.1* ( Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971) Figure 1 (94).
- 268 R.V. Kinzhalov "Towards a Reconstruction of the Olmec Mythological System" in D.L. Brown (ed.) *Cultural Continuity in Mesoamerica* ( The Hague: Mouton, 1978), 284-285.
- 269 Sir John Eric Sidney Thompson, *Maya History and Religion*, 176-9.
- 270 Charles S. Spence, *The Cuicatlan Canada and Monte Alban: A Study of Primary State Formation* ( New York: Academic, 1980), 239.
- 271 G.H.S. Bushnell, *Three Thousand Years of Art and Life in Mexico.*, Figure 17
- 272 D.C. Grove, *Chalcatzingo* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1985), 67, 106
- 273 Michael Coe, *The Maya* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1992), 56.
- 274 Sir John Eric Sidney Thompson, *Maya History and Religion*, 176.
- 275 Kurt V. Flannery et al, *The Cloud People* , 58-64
- 276 Richard E.W. Adams, *Prehistoric Mesoamerica*, 66.

- 277 Kurt V. Flannery et al, *The Cloud People*, 58-64, 82, 90.
- 278 N.Hammond, "Early Maya Ceremonial at Cuello, Belize Antiquity LIV:212, November 1980, 182.
- 279 Jacques Soustelle, *The Olmecs*, 191.
- 280 D.C. Grove, *Chalcatzingo*, 67, 106.
- 281 J.S.Justeson & P.Mathews, "The Seating of the Tun - Further Evidence Concerning a Late Pre-Classic Lowland Maya Stela Cult" *American Antiquity*, 48: 3, 1983, in passim.
- 282 N. Hammond, "Early Maya Ceremonial at Cuello, Belize' Antiquity, 182.
- 283 W.B. Welsh, *An Analysis of Classic Lowland Mayan Burials* (Oxford: Bureau of International Series 409, 1988 ), 183-5.
- 284 J.Marcus, "Archaeology and Religion: A Comparison of Zapotec and Maya", *World Archaeology*, 10: 2, October 1978, 177.
- 285 J.E. Brady & A. Stone, "Naj Tunich: Entrance to the Maya Underworld", *Archaeology*, November-December 1986, 18.
- 286 F.J. Dockstead "Miniature Ball Game Objects from Mesoamerica", *American Antiquity*, Vol.33: 2, 1968, 252-3.
- 287 Michael Coe, *Mexico*, 87.
- 288 M.E.Kampen, *The Sculptures of El Tajin, Vera Cruz, Mexico* (Gainesville: University of Flinders Press, 1972) in passim.
- 289 L.Schele & M.E. Miller, "The Blood of Kings - A New Interpretation of Maya Art", *Archaeology*, 39:3, May-June, 1976, 62.
- 290 Richard E.W. Adams, *Prehistoric Mesoamerica*, 433.
- 291 Michael Coe, *The Maya*, 78.
- 292 *ibid.*, 104.
- 293 A. Paul, "History of a Maya Vase", *Archaeology*, 29, Apr. 1976, 118-126.
- 294 M. Pohl et al, "Ritual Continuity and Transformation in Mesoamerica: Reconstructing the Ancient Cuch Ritual", *American Antiquity* 46 (July 1981), 29-31.
- 295 J.S.Henderson, *The World of the Ancient Maya* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1981) 155.
- 296 Linda Schele & Mary Ellen Miller, "The Blood of Kings", 61.
- 297 A.A. Demarest, "The Violent Saga of a Maya Kingdom", *National Geographic* 183: 2 ( February 1993 ), 101.
- 297 B.M.Fagan, *Kingdoms of Gold, Kingdoms of Jade - The Americas before Columbus* ( London: Thames & Hudson, 1991 ), 127.
- 298 K. Berrin, C. Millon et al, *Feathered Serpents and Flowering Trees: Reconstructing the Murals of Teotihuacan* ( Seattle: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1988), 105.
- 299 *ibid.*
- 300 Sir John Eric Sidney Thompson, *Maya History and Religion*, 176, 178.
- 301 K.Berrin et al, *Feathered Serpents and Flowering Trees*, 217.
- 302 Laurette Sejourné, *Burning Water*, 120.,
- 303 *ibid.*, 122-127.
- 304 Michael Coe, *Mexico*, 134
- 305 *ibid.*
- 306 Peter J. Furst et al, *Pre-Columbian Art of Mexico*, (New York : Abbeville, 1980), 91.
- 307 S.Sugiyama, "Burials Dedicated to the Old Temple of Quetzalcoatl at Teotihuacan, Mexico", *American Antiquity*, 54:1, January 1989, 103.

- 308 D. Heyden, "Interpretation of a Cave Under the Pyramid of the Sun at Teotihuacan", *American Antiquity*, 40, in passim.
- 309 Nigel Davies, *Human Sacrifice in History and Today*, 170, 202.
- 310 G.H.S. Bushnell, *Pre-Columbian Arts of Mexico* Figure 70 f.
- 311 Sir John Eric Sidney Thompson, *Maya History and Religion*, 177-179. See also Michael Coe, *The Maya*, 139 - 140.
- 312 F. Peterson, *Ancient Mexico*, 83, 147.
- 313 *Popul Vuh* 116, 190 - 196. A similar practice is recorded in *Ritual of the Bacabs*, 170, suggesting hermit-priests dressed as jaguars caught and slew unsuspecting travellers, leaving jaguar prints in their wake.
- 314 *Codex Ramirez* in Charles S. Braden, *Religious Aspects in the Conquest of Mexico*, 14.
- 315 *Tira de la Peregrinacion* in F. Peterson, *Ancient Mexico*, 88.
- 316 *Codex Mendoza* 3f.
- 317 Laurette Sejourné, *Burning Water*, 31 - 32.
- 318 *Historia de los Mexicanos por sus Pinturas* in F. Peterson, *Ancient Mexico*, 145. Irregular "flowery wars" seem to have been practiced in the Valley of Mexico at least by 1400 c.e. If Olmec and Mayan art is any indication, *zochipaoyotl* of some sort existed for thousands of years in Mesoamerica.
- 319 Frances Gillmor, *Flute of the Smoking Mirror*, 104.
- 320 *Exihkochitl* in Laurette Sejourné, *Burning Water*, 32. See also Frances Gillmor, *Flute of the Smoking Mirror*, 104, 140, 167.
- 321 However, *Cronica Mexicana* suggests an early form of gladiatorial sacrifice already existed amongst Nahuatl groups (including the Aztecs) in the 12th century c.e. See E.E. Calnek, "Patterns of Empire Formation in the Valley of Mexico, Late Post-Classic Period, 1200 - 1521", in G. A. Collier, *The Inca and Aztec States 1400 - 1800*, 291-292.
- 322 Frances Gillmor, *Flute of the Smoking Mirror*, 104.
- 323 F. Peterson, *Ancient Mexico*, 453.
- 324 Bernal Diaz, *History of the Conquest of New Spain*, 35f.
- 325 William H. Prescott, *History of the Conquest of Mexico*, 329.
- 326 Nigel Davies, *Human Sacrifice in History and Today*, 13-15.
- 327 Inga Clendinnen, *Aztecs*, 94.
- 328 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 2: 51.
- 329 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 83.
- 330 *ibid.*, 132.
- 331 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 2: 21: 47.
- 332 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 232.
- 333 *Anales Antiguos de Mexico y sus Contornos* in Nigel Davies, *The Aztecs*, 123.
- 334 Diego Duran, *Books of the Gods*, 132.
- 335 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 2: 224-5.
- 336 *ibid.*, Bk. 2: 21.
- 337 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 227.
- 338 *Chilam Balam* 15 (28-29), 25 (51) f.
- 339 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 3: 8.
- 340 Laurette Sejourné, *Burning Water*, 12.
- 341 Juan Bautista Pomar, *Relacion de Pomar*, 42.
- 342 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 2: 24: 68-71.
- 343 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 280.
- 344 *ibid.*, 126.
- 345 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 6: 20.

- 346 *ibid.*, Bk. 6: 21.
- 347 *ibid.*, Bk. 2: 21: 49.
- 348 *Cantares Mexicanos*, 31.
- 349 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 3: 3 - 14.
- 350 Bernal Diaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 159.
- 351 Nigel Davies, *The Aztecs*, 172.
- 352 Sir John Eric Sidney Thompson, *Maya History and Religion*, 181.
- 353 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 280.
- 354 Nigel Davies, *The Aztecs*, 172.
- 355 Tezozomoc, Vol. I, 116 in Jacques Soustelle, *Daily Life of the Aztecs*, 100.
- 356 *Codex Ramirez* in Frances Gillmor, *Flute of the Smoking Mirror*, 96.
- 357 Diego Duran, *The Aztecs - A History of the Indies*, 95.
- 358 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 2: 5: 9, see also Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 132-5.
- 359 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 2: 21: 68-71.
- 360 Juan de Tovar, *Tovar Calendar*, pl. iv.f.
- 361 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 2: 33: 139-140 & Bk. 9: 19: 88.
- 362 *ibid.*, Bk. 2: 20: 49; Bk. 2: 24: 76.
- 363 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex* Bk. 2: 24: 78- 61.
- 364 Bernal Diaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 120.
- 365 *ibid.*, 154.

### THREE: THEORIES ON AZTEC HUMAN SACRIFICE

#### I. THE NATURE OF THE THEORIES

Even works which only incidentally mention Aztec sacrifice will proffer some explanation for it. Consequently, there is no shortage of arguments to account for the rite, yet theories are mostly extemporary, and applied as random combinations.

Clendinnen has rightly attributed this to academic neglect. Scholars consider the topic an enigma and prefer to concentrate on other aspects of Aztec culture, allowing "a few grandly simple" theories to steal the limelight<sup>1</sup>.

Clendinnen only identifies a few explanations for Aztec sacrifice and gives them very little attention. Consequently, what follows is the first attempt I am aware of to categorise recurrent arguments by theme and present their strong points and deficiencies in detail. The headings below identify the explanations which are examined:

- a. Immorality or amorality
- b. Ignorance
- c. Truth betrayed
- d. Eco-political oppression
- e. Hallucinogenic madness
- f. Biological necessity
- g. Psycho-sexual maladjustment
- h. Social conditioning

#### II. THE THEORIES

##### a. Immorality or Amorality

One approach is to consider Mexican immolations a phenomenon akin to Roman blood sports or Nazi death camp experiments: a kind of societal evil<sup>2</sup>.



That was the standard approach of early Spanish observers. Diaz's descriptions of Aztec sacrificial scenes were European-style hells: priests in black, hooded robes smelling of sulphur and rotting flesh; temple doors like the mouths of hell; "diabolical objects" everywhere<sup>3</sup>.

A lingering sense of Aztec 'evil'<sup>4</sup> resulted, later translated into the conviction that the Aztecs represented a pre-moral or amoral stage of religious development. In other words, mass-sacrifices could be attributed to there supposedly being:

"little thought for the perfection of the individual... the moral goals of our religion were largely absent. ...no heaven or hell to reward or punish the consequences of human behaviour"<sup>5</sup>.

Soon it became fashionable to contend that all American Indian peoples were psychologically distinct from other races - perhaps even 'sick'<sup>6</sup>. Anthropologists such as Alexander<sup>7</sup>, Nash<sup>8</sup>, and Cancian<sup>9</sup> portrayed Mesoamericans having different standards on homicide and ethics.

By the late 1980's, this perspective was being championed by Read. He asserted that lifelong participation in rites of human sacrifice had conditioned ancient Mexicans to accept ceremonial holocausts without terror or queasiness. Read believed no thoughts on the morality of the practice were even set into motion in the Aztec mind, the Mexicas' cosmos being fundamentally "amoral"<sup>10</sup>.

#### b. Ignorance

Alternatively, it has been argued that the Aztecs lacked sufficient scientific knowledge or logic to address the vagaries of nature. Human sacrifice supposedly allayed fears about natural catastrophe - offering an illusion of control.

This reasoning is seen in Cottie Burland considering the Aztecs culturally retarded: "only just emerging from the stone age... (retaining) gods of unbelievably modern prehistory"<sup>11</sup>. Later— into the 1960's and 1970's — Neumann<sup>12</sup>, Furst<sup>13</sup>, and William la Barre<sup>14</sup> refined the sentiment by painting Amerindian religions as throwbacks; calling the creeds: "Primeval Shamanism...a kind of Paleo-Mesolithic fossil of the Old World"<sup>15</sup>. They claimed the Neolithic Revolution had brought dramatic ideological changes to the Old World which bypassed the Americas. The Americas supposedly retained archaic hunter-gatherer world-views: "feeding spirit power" and "cannibalistic incorporation"<sup>16</sup>, even in state-level societies like the Aztec<sup>17</sup>.

General studies by Neumann<sup>18</sup>, Weaver<sup>19</sup> and Kearney<sup>20</sup> adopted a related idea: Mesoamerican faiths being riddled with fear and apprehension through their irrational (or as Richard Adams<sup>21</sup> described it, "prerationalist") superstitions, which enticed them to offer up human lives. Fear of natural forces was especially held responsible.

It was Eric Wolf who drew most attention to such an outlook. In *Sons of the Shaking Earth*(1959), he showed how the Mesoamerican environment inspired dread. Wolf noted Mexico is a place where whole villages can vanish overnight through earthquakes, mud-slides, lava flows, floods and hurricanes<sup>22</sup>. Moreover, the Mesoamericans' agricultural efforts were constantly overturned by frost, drought and pests<sup>23</sup>. Their world was harsh: steep mountains, dense jungles, treacherous swamps and burning deserts. Its flora and fauna could be vicious: cacti, tarantulas, scorpions, vampire bats, jaguars and alligators. Extreme practices like human sacrifice helped the Mexicans maintain a sense of power amidst their frightening world.

Certainly this is what Benitez implies. His *In the Footsteps of Cortes*<sup>24</sup> and *In the Magic Land*<sup>25</sup> depict Aztec pyramid-temples as

token volcanoes and Aztec religion as a system for propitiating nature.

### c. Truth Betrayed

On the other extreme from those who considered Aztec religion backward stand savants convinced of its subtlety, but unable to reconcile this with the Aztec's 'barbarity'. Their solution has been to call the latter a perversion of the former. Postulating a time when human sacrifice was not common in Mesoamerica, they hold that the true values of Mesoamerican spirituality were misunderstood or deliberately distorted as the centuries rolled on.

Many of the theorists recognise a fatal 'turning point'- at around 700-1000 c.e.: the collapse of Classic civilisation and Quetzalcoatl's abandonment of Tula. Others see change erupting 1100-1400 c.e.: the last phase of 'Barbarian' invasions and the struggle for dominance of the Valley of Mexico. To hold views like these, one must necessarily believe, with Thompason<sup>26</sup>, that the Aztecs' predecessors were "devote and moderate".

'Truth betrayed' has a lengthy academic history. 16th century friars believed "bloodless" faiths: Christianity or Judaism once flourished in Mexico. This explained, for them, 'Demonic parodies' of Catholic Sacraments in the indigenous faith<sup>27</sup>.

By the 17th century, Creole writers like Carlos Góngora and de Mier were depicting Quetzalcoatl as an anti-sacrificial Apostle- perhaps to defend their Indian past. Certainly, essays by the two shaped the perspective of Mexico's leading scholars: Clavigero, Boturini and others. It almost became 'established fact' that Aztec ceremony was a corruption of an initially bloodless creed<sup>28</sup>.

The arguments hinged on a reference in *Annals de Cuauhtitlan* to Quetzalcoatl "never" sacrificing people, though "often wizards tried

to trick him into offering human sacrifices"<sup>29</sup>; and on the *Florentine Codex* portrayal of Quetzalcoatl's tempter as "a snare, a trap"<sup>30</sup>. Quetzalcoatl's supposed betrayal and his abandonment of Tula was taken as the eviction of peaceful, anti-sacrificial religion in favour of a bloodthirsty creed.

This notion especially appealed to the literary-artistic renaissance (1920's - 1940's) which followed the Mexican Revolution. Quetzalcoatl became a *mestizo* Saviour or Prophet<sup>31</sup>— even a "bearded blonde"<sup>32</sup> or Christ himself<sup>33</sup>.

However, the heyday of the 'betrayal' theory was definitely the 1940's-1960's. Recent experience of Nazi Germany, Stalinist Russia and similar regimes made academics aware that high ideals could be violently perverted. Writers like Sejourne and Nicholson were fond of painting Aztec Mexico as a akin to Nazi Germany — almost devoid of goodness:

"a firefly in the night...a tiny light in a great darkness, a little truth within the ignorance surrounding them...The invisible God had disappeared indeed...(but) just as Christian morality can exist side by side with concentration camps, so Nahua ideals persisted even in the darkest hour of pre-Hispanic Mexican history"<sup>34</sup>.

For Nicholson, the Spanish arrived at a time of Mesoamerican "decadence", when all sense of right and wrong had been lost and when a "long-established culture"(which she defines as 'Nahua spirituality') was usurped by the priesthood, to serve "their own vicious totalitarian ends"<sup>35</sup>.

In *Burning Water* (1956), Laurette Sejourne similarly concluded that pre-Aztec spirituality was "betrayed in its most sacred essence"<sup>36</sup>. She felt Mesoamerican sacrificial motifs began as mystical emblems— like Catholicism's bleeding hearts and crucifixes. With Nicholson<sup>37</sup>, Sejourne claimed that in time, sacrificial symbols were translated into bloody rites.

Typically, 'betrayal' theories rely on the presumption that there existed "strong and opposed currents of thought" in Mesoamerica- one favouring human sacrifice, and the other rejecting it<sup>38</sup>. This had been the stance of W.H.Prescott as early as 1843<sup>39</sup>. Alfonso Caso<sup>40</sup>, Cottie Burland<sup>41</sup> and others elaborated the view in modern times by presenting the cults of gods Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca as mutually hostile streams.

More recently, Miguel de Leon-Portilla developed what might be termed a variation on the above theory, insisting that Aztec religion formed a "contrasted world". He identified Mexican human sacrifice as a natural outcome of the "mystic-militaristic" tradition's infatuation with violence. In "open opposition" to this stood the *tlamatinime* ('sages'), who had "turned away" from such things<sup>42</sup>.

#### d. Eco-political Oppression

Under this section we can place scholars who, as Clendinnen puts it, regard mass killings " the invention of a sinister and cynical elite, a sort of amphetamines-for-the-people"<sup>43</sup>. All theories in which human sacrifice is argued to control slaves, *meceuatlin* (commoners), tributary states or enemy folk could be grouped together here.

The Conquistadors, sometimes described Aztec rule as oppressive and cruel<sup>44</sup>. They implied a connection between displays of wealth or political might and the demand for victims<sup>45</sup>.

'Truth betrayed' theorists already suggested a totalitarian function for human sacrifice, but it was not until the 1970's and 1980's that the matter was fully investigated. By 1978, Barbara Price was claiming:

"human sacrifice in combination with cannibalism acts to stabilise and enrich an existing system of

social stratification and distribution of political power"<sup>46</sup>

Most 'eco-political' arguments also rely on a concept expressed by Conrad and Demarest<sup>47</sup>: that the Aztec 'Imperialist machine' depended on intense, constant warfare between neighbouring polities, with human sacrifice disposing of resultant war captives.

Price, Saunders, Ingham, and Carrasco each applied variations of Marxist theory on 'Oriental Despotism' and the 'Asiatic mode of Production' to the Aztec situation. According to that approach, human sacrifice was a device of the ruling class for terrifying workers into labouring on the hydraulically-based agricultural system, through which the elite maintained control<sup>48</sup>. Ingham in particular believed sacrificial spectacles provided necessary displays of absolute power<sup>49</sup>. In David Carrasco's eyes, this use of human sacrifice was obvious in the New Fire ceremony, a pivotal Aztec immolation. Significantly, it could only be enacted by the Aztec Emperor<sup>50</sup>.

In 1987, Carrasco produced *The Great Temple of Tenochtitlan* in combination with Broda and Moctezuma. This archaeological-cultural study of the central shrine of Aztec religion reiterated political explanations for human sacrifice. The book moved that the *Templo Mayor*'s bloody inauguration served to overawe and frighten rival nations. Thereby, the expense of deploying armies was avoided<sup>51</sup>. Pasztory supports this. She sees the huge and violently-decorated monuments and pyramids of Mesoamerica as created to frighten subject classes into subservience<sup>52</sup>.

A different view of this type elaborates on Price's notion that "competitive stress" in the Aztec upper class was somewhat responsible for sacrificial holocausts<sup>53</sup>. An example is Patricia Anawalt's proposal that Aztec sumptuary laws propelled citizens into war and subsequent sacrifice. As male entitlement to progressively

finer goods, clothes and status rose in direct proportion to the number of captives males procured for sacrifice, each new member of the elite supposedly 'sold' himself to the institute of ceremonial slaughter - by the very process of rising to power. Anawalt held that the public killing of one's captive substantiated claims of entitlement to wealth and power<sup>54</sup>.

#### e. Hallucinogenic Madness

Another angle sees the Mesoamericans' use of drugs as inciting them to violence, irrational fear, a clouded conscience and insensitivity to pain. Supporters point out that whilst the cultures of Europe, Africa and Asia knew barely half-a-dozen hallucinogens, the New World peoples used over a hundred<sup>55</sup>. Mescaline, cocaine, peyote, 'angel dust' (*datura*), 'magic mushrooms' (*basidiomycete*), 'morning glory' (*rives corymbosa*), 'dope' (*marijuana*) and a natural type of L.S.D. are just a few of these<sup>56</sup>. Furthermore, Hughes' study of hemlock and belladonna in European Witchcraft<sup>57</sup> has suggested 'visions' and violence do relate directly to drug-use.

Wasson's *Mushrooms, Russia- A History* (1957) proved pivotal to the development of the theory, claiming there once existed a "cult of the sacred mushroom"<sup>58</sup>. When Eliade's *Shamanism* (1964) appeared, it added the notion of a global prehistoric religion.

The implications of such hypotheses were consummated over the 1960's and 1970's when 'Hippy' interest in mind-altering drugs gave birth to studies of ritual use of hallucinogens amongst modern Mesoamericans: the Huichol, Tarahumara, Mazatec and others<sup>59</sup>. Academic voices tried reading drug use into ancient Mesoamerican iconography and artefacts<sup>60</sup>, whilst Peter Furst's *Flesh of the Gods* (1972) made some study of Aztec religion, identifying the creed as ancient ("Upper Palaeolithic"), psychedelic Shamanism<sup>61</sup>.



Meanwhile, a volley of spurious but popular Carlos Castaneda books, supposedly on the psychedelic mysticism of current Mexican Indians, was firing the public imagination. Castaneda's characters connected Shamanism, hallucinogens, and Toltec-Aztec ideals of "being a warrior"<sup>62</sup>.

Normally, if human sacrifice was at all considered in these arguments, it was as a by-product of the mayhem induced by narcotic abuse<sup>63</sup>. Irene Nicholson went further. She theorised that narcotics may have genetically poisoned the Aztecs- producing a hereditary insanity or cruelty, through which human sacrifice became commonplace<sup>64</sup>.

Somewhat similarly, Anderson's *Peyote - The Divine Cactus* (1988)<sup>65</sup> and Gordon Wasson's *The Wondrous Mushroom: Mycolatry in Mesoamerica* (1980) presented drugs as being a central element in Mesoamerican cultures. Wasson particularly felt that drug-use explained the "excitement and delirium" of Aztec wars and there being "no whiff of opposition to sacrifice". He identified hallucinogenic blossoms on the statues before which immolations occurred, and regarded Aztec "flower songs" to be psychedelic<sup>66</sup>.

#### f. Biological Necessity

By far the most controversial explanation has been that of blaming Aztec human sacrifice on biological need. In this position, environmental stress supposedly made the practice inescapable. The view has proved popular: featuring in general books on Aztec society<sup>67</sup>, and in novels such as Gary Jennings' *Aztec*<sup>68</sup>.

It began with an article by Sherburne Cook in 1946, and was elaborated in the 1970's by Michael Harner and Marvin Harris. Cook noticed the Conquistadors' astonishment at Mesoamerica's dense population. For instance, Cortes reported that the Central Mexican



Basin was "all cultivated and harvested, leaving no place untilled"<sup>69</sup>. The Aztec capital held a quarter of a million people— it was then one of the world's largest cities; nearby Texcoco housed 100,000 folk in its centre and *barrios*<sup>70</sup>; many cities of the Valley of Mexico had over 10,000 inhabitants<sup>71</sup>.

Cook believed this dense mass of humanity lay 'trapped' in the Valley by surrounding ranges. He felt the Aztecs applied incessant warfare and human sacrifice towards alleviating their 'pressure cooker' predicament. This elevated their death rate, ensuring space and resources for the survivors<sup>72</sup>.

Harner and Harris extended the argument, claiming Ice Age 'overkill' of large mammals left the Mesoamericans bereft of sufficient protein sources. "Large-scale cannibalism, disguised as human sacrifice" solved the problem. By ritually consuming 1% of the population (the victims) Aztecs satisfied their unconscious craving for fatty acids and "the eighteen essential amino acids"<sup>73</sup>.

The two scholars indicated that a protein-shy diet of maize, so vulnerable to natural damage, offered no other choice but developing

"state-sponsored system geared to the production and redistribution of substantial amounts of animal (ie.human) protein"<sup>74</sup>.

They purport that, to justify such 'necessary evil', the "pyramid-temple-idol complex" was constructed. Through it, the taking of captives for consumption could be granted religious significance, and citizens were made aware that agriculture was unable to meet their dietary needs. The latter was realised by having sacrifice focus on the unreliability of rain and crop foods<sup>75</sup>.

On a related line, Christian Duverger (1978) offered that Mexico sacrifices constituted a 'technology': a response to the

second law of thermodynamics, with the extraction of hot hearts being a despairing effort to replace energy lost through entropic waste<sup>76</sup>.

#### g. Psycho-Sexual Maladjustment

In explanations of this kind, Aztec human sacrifice is attributed to repressed sexual or violent impulses. The rigidity of Aztec ethics<sup>77</sup>; the severity of Aztec punishment<sup>78</sup> and their strict segregation of social and sexual roles<sup>79</sup> and here regarded as generating unresolved conflicts, which ritualised murder served to relieve.

Freud linked sexual repression to political and ritual oppression<sup>80</sup>, and Jensen proposed that in the religions of non-literate peoples, sacrifice grew out of male fears of female power<sup>81</sup>. Sagan on a similar basis considered cannibalism such as the Aztecs practiced to be repressed aggression<sup>82</sup>.

Soon, in Girard's hands, human sacrifice became "displaced oedipal sadism". Girard believed that priests - frustrated by their austere life, and jealous of royal privileges - released their anger by slaying "mock kings": persons or animals adorned and treated like royalty<sup>83</sup>.

As for the role of the victim, theorists such as Carr and Gingerich alleged that this was "a male erotic fantasy". According to them, Aztec warriors feared and envied women, having spent little time with them. Dying on the sacrificial slab allowed a warrior to escape female possessiveness (the "toothed vagina" of one Aztec myth), yet emulate the mysteries of being female. Chest-opening created a 'vagina'; the flowing blood allowed the victim to experience 'menstruation'; the sacrificial knife (a 'penis') was 'sexual penetration'; and heart-extraction copied 'giving birth'<sup>84</sup>.

Linda Hall<sup>85</sup> and Katherine Porter<sup>86</sup> echo these views. They see Aztec human sacrifice as a flight from female sexual power—desperate assertion of masculinity—unto-death (as the rite's liberal use of *pulque*, a beverage the Aztecs saw as 'semen', supposedly suggests).

#### h. Social Conditioning

Responding to growing evidence for human sacrifice being deeply ingrained in Mesoamerican culture, several authors treat the rite as a 'given'. They regard ritual killings as something Aztecs were reared by their culture to accept, much as Japanese traditionally accepted *seppuku* (ritual disembowelment).

We have seen that Read believed lifelong participation in human sacrifice numbed the Aztecs to the practice. Inga Clendinnen similarly suggested that the Aztec soldier-cum-victim was a social product, propelled into military and sacrificial death through peer pressure (loyalty to his military house) and social expectations: the glorification of capturing and being captured, and the status attendant upon those situations<sup>87</sup>.

Over the 1980's and 1990's, such views have resulted in Burr Brundage's *The Jade Steps* and Clendinnen's *Aztecs*. Brundage made thorough and almost exclusive use of Aztec primary source documents to arrive at a comprehensive reconstruction of their ritual life. He believed the Aztec idea of gods being refreshed and renewed through human offerings made sense to them, and he demonstrated how the Aztecs implemented such notions through their rites<sup>88</sup>.

Clendinnen equally concentrated on prevailing Mexican beliefs, but more in terms of how the rite was socialised. She contended that this was the key to explaining human sacrifice, for:

'The men and women of any particular culture are trained in the great reflective, reiterative texts

of the culture in myths and stories, in games and play, in common-sense pragmatics, in aesthetic and moral preferences; their imagination stretched and shaped to particular themes and possibilities"<sup>89</sup>

To Clendinnen, Aztec human sacrifice was basically a social function: "at once metaphor and matter of social relations...not feeding but feasting"-- a presupposition about the nature of things, made 'visible' through an emotional, moral and aesthetic nexus<sup>90</sup>.

### III. A CRITIQUE: THE LIMITATIONS OF THE THEORIES

To comprehend why the Aztecs slew humans as part of their creed, we must test the validity of explanations just considered, distilling those of some merit from ones which are totally unworkable. Popular and academic 'myths' about the practice distort interpretations of Mesoamerican religion, so these varied views must be addressed. Below, they are examined in the order they were introduced.

#### a. Aztec Immorality/ Amoralism?

Problems with this explanation are patently obvious. Duran<sup>91</sup> and Landa<sup>92</sup> concur with native books like *Codex Mendoza*<sup>93</sup> that 'vices' such as theft, drunkenness, and murder were as condemned in Aztec society as they were in any other. This could not be possible if, as Read contends, Aztec ethics were a Spanish Christian fantasy.

A cruel priest or military official would be removed from office<sup>94</sup>, for sacrificers had to be kindly souls: "careful, helpful, never hurts anyone"<sup>95</sup>. They: "wept for others...were compassionate for others...loving"<sup>96</sup>.

Another difficulty with the theory is that the same Spanish sources which denounce Aztec religion as debased also extol it as virtuous. Are these sources to be believed when they condemn, but not when they praise? Motolinia describes the Aztecs as exceptionally

peaceful, humble, generous and kind - little could hinder them from "reaching heaven"<sup>97</sup>. Duran<sup>98</sup> believed that no people on earth were so affectionate to children. Like Cortes<sup>99</sup>, he even declares the Mexicans "already" good Catholics!

Certainly there is an inadequacy<sup>9</sup> considering Mesoamericans resident 'extraterrestrials'- unfathomably different. To treat their rites as a moral enigma is to neglect that ethics and ritualised killing co-existed in many cultures. India a mere century ago practiced the ethical paradox in *Kalika Purana*: "Slaughter as sacrifice is no murder"<sup>100</sup>.

Finally, if Christians considered Mesoamerican religion 'evil', the reverse was equally true. Aztecs thought Spanish monks were hypocritical, boisterous and insane<sup>101</sup>, whilst the Mayan *Chilam Balam* denounced the new creed as "weak and worthless"- full of cruel, gluttonous liars<sup>102</sup>. Alexander claimed Spaniards were the definition of 'evil' for Mesoamericans<sup>103</sup>. Consider the following unflattering depiction of Christians:

"We became victims of their evil desires... Behind every heap of rocks, the friars, all looking exactly alike, forever negotiating for our souls and haranguing us about the 'true god'. When you tried with all your hearts to emulate them, they obstructed your efforts to protect the people... Little by little we grew weary of the maiming of the people by the Christians. (Their) offences are all alike... Gradually, they began the hangings for the second time... Brothers pleaded for justice in their throats. Gradually we discover that the Christians are great liars. Little by little we realise that they are great cheats"<sup>104</sup>.

#### b. Ignorance ?

The greatest difficulty with this view is ever- growing evidence for Aztec sophistication. Even early Spanish reports reveal amazement at the genius of Aztec crafts and sciences, and a belief that Europe had been surpassed in some fields<sup>105</sup>. Similarly, after

the Conquest, Fray Bartholome de las Casas praised the subtlety and "adequacy" of Aztec thought - likening it to Classic rhetoric<sup>106</sup>.

At any rate, regardless of race or technology, human intellectual capacity has been stationary for 50,000 to 100,000 years<sup>107</sup>. No people anywhere could be 'throwbacks' to 'primitive' modes of cognition. As Hilton demonstrated, the 'primitiveness' of the Aztecs was an invention of de Pauw in 1768, later compounded by academics under the influence of Social Darwinism<sup>108</sup>. It has no independent existence. There is no connection between material simplicity and tendencies to violence. Consider the gentle Tasaday, who knew hardly any tools.

Even so, Mexico's violent environment influenced ritual killing. The Aztecs and Mayans themselves stated they slew victims to bring rain<sup>109</sup>; "to remedy some misfortune or necessity"<sup>110</sup>; or "on account of the destruction of the crop"<sup>111</sup>. Natural catastrophes which devastated the Aztec heartland deeply affected the Aztec psyche, as evidenced in their histories<sup>112</sup>. The prominence of rain gods in Aztec sacrifices and temples is also clear<sup>113</sup>.

However, for a society supposedly cowering before the elements, the Aztecs had very few divinities for natural disaster. Those that were: Iztcolihqui, Chantico, Tepeyollotl and possibly the Tepictoton- all had minor, obscure cults<sup>114</sup>. The Tepictoton, which symbolised mountains, were not revered for fear of avalanches and volcanic eruptions, but for being:

"prodigious...covered with snow; because they considered them to be a divine thing"<sup>115</sup>.

### c. Truth Betrayed?

Archaeology undermines this stance. We now know Mesoamericans perished in mass-sacrifices by scores, hundreds, even thousands as

early as 100 B.C.E. Toltecs and Aztecs were therefore not responsible for the introduction or grand scale of the rite.

There was probably no 'pre-sacrificial' religion to 'betray'. Even the earliest glimmers of agricultural life in Mexico witnessed immolations.

Any hope of Quetzalcoatl representing an anti-sacrificial trend must now be tenuous. At Teotihuacan, where that god first appears in force, his temple is built upon sixty victims<sup>116</sup>. Art studies show Quetzalcoatl's cult was everywhere associated with the *introduction and increase* of heart-extraction and militarism<sup>117</sup>, which is the opposite of what we would expect if the 'truth betrayed' theory were correct.

Whether the historical Quetzalcoatl Topiltzin was much opposed to the practice must also be questioned. His divine patron: Tlahuizcalpantecuhtli (Venus or Dawn) was a god of war<sup>118</sup>, and though *Anales de Cuauhtitlan* seems to present an anti-sacrificial hero, the story ends with Quetzalcoatl sacrificing himself<sup>119</sup>. In other accounts: *Leyenda de los Soles* and *Historia de los Mexicanos por sus Pinturas*, Topiltzin offers up his uncles and a son<sup>120</sup>.

Other supposed representatives of anti-sacrificial 'Nahua spirituality': Nezahualcoyotl and Nezahualpilli, are just as suspect. Like the Mexica rulers, they took captives for sacrifice; conducted preliminary sacrificial rites, and then slew victims with their own hands<sup>121</sup>. Nezahualcoyotl opposed excessive holocausts, but apparently not the rite itself. He adopted a new mode of it from the Aztecs<sup>122</sup>, and gave goods and labour for the *Templo Mayor* inauguration<sup>123</sup>—the grandest massacre ever.



#### d. Eco-Political Oppression ?

Human sacrifice definitely had some eco-political role. By their own admission, the Aztec elite utilised the rite for public recognition of captors<sup>124</sup>; to celebrate military victories; to frighten foreign ambassadors; and to dispose of rivals<sup>125</sup>. Certain rites were invented to render political changes intelligible<sup>126</sup>.

Rumours of Aztec oppression were not entirely unfounded. *Lienzo de Petlacala* records the Popocatecatl community fleeing to another district because they were so "vexed with the demands of Tenochtitlan's ruler"<sup>127</sup>.

Even so, to admit all this does not establish that ritual killing was *primarily* eco-political. As Clendinnen points out, the eco-political argument does not explain "how the trick (of oppression via ritual) worked". Rather, it has commoners and elite following separate ideologies- a rather unlikely scenario<sup>128</sup>.

There are other puzzles. Aztec military conquests worked *against* human sacrifice, by putting victims at ever-greater remove. Similarly, if the Aztecs wished to scare neighbours into submission, surely massacring them in battle, razing a few towns, or a show of arms would prove more effective and cheaper than rituals? Would survivors be "intimidated" when the spectacle took place at the Aztec capital - out of their sight?

The Aztecs lost vast numbers of their own people to foreign temples, which makes no sense if the rite was designed to oppress other nations. During the Tarascan campaign alone, 20,000 Aztecs ended up slain on the battlefield or - for the most part- slain on Tarascan altars<sup>129</sup>.

Equally, to paint Aztec society as oppressive and avaricious merely expresses one extreme of what Hilton calls "the Great Debate"- disagreement over whether Aztec rule was "ordered benevolence" or



totalitarian hell<sup>130</sup>. Many features of Aztec society were more complex and democratic than those operating in Spain. There was social mobility: to the amazement of the Spanish, "men of low birth and worse blood" could rise to high posts<sup>131</sup>. Private ownership existed, and a sizeable middle class of wealthy merchants and bureaucrats<sup>132</sup>. It is even doubted whether vassals were truly oppressed, for the Aztecs rarely installed governors, and only locals at that. They waived or postponed tribute from vassals if they thought it would improve relations<sup>133</sup>. Conquered folk complained of Aztec *topile* (police-spies)<sup>134</sup> more than oppression.

Indeed, what group was "exploited" by human sacrifice? Nobles and priests themselves were victims – perhaps proportionally more so than commoners, as we have seen. Slaves might seem appropriate candidates for social abuse, but were not a permanent class: a person of any rank could fall into slavery, and rise from it to great heights<sup>135</sup>. Slave children were free<sup>136</sup>, and many slaves had property and servants<sup>137</sup>. Sahagun assures us they were less used than captives as victims<sup>138</sup>.

Perhaps even war captives and rebels were not necessarily destined for the temple slab. Many became *tlalmaitl* – landless peasants, porters and domestic servants, working for their captors' families<sup>139</sup>, though *Relacion de Texcoco* states this was only a temporary measure<sup>140</sup>.

Finally, "eco-political oppression" will not explain why human sacrifice already existed in the pre-state farming communities of Formative-period Mesoamerica. Back then, there was no "elite" for the practise to support, so why did it exist then?

#### e. Hallucinogenic Madness?

Admittedly, evidence is too overwhelming to ignore the importance of hallucinogens in Aztec human sacrifice. Intoxicants feature strongly in many modern Mesoamerican ceremonies<sup>141</sup>. The *Chilam Balam* connected Yaxum (a hero-god who concocted the first drug) with sacrificial killing<sup>142</sup> and explicitly refers to congregation who:

"whistle with impatience for the handing around of medicinal herbs (ie. drugs) and for the beneficial effects derived therefrom"<sup>143</sup>

Another passage describes priests ending killings with a rite of making "the face of the gods appear" - apparently a hallucination:

"When the power descended with great force, sprinkling the faces of the fierce warriors, they trembled and shuddered with fear"<sup>144</sup>.

However, none of this explains Aztec ceremonial killing, but just how the rite was endured. Thus, a direct connection between effects of drug-use and sacrificial killing is tenuous. *Peyote* can occasionally induce semi-psychosis, in which the user attempts to kill people, but as he or she "runs amok"<sup>145</sup>, it is difficult to see how this could be worked into the extreme formality of Aztec rites. Usually, inebriation produces numbness and inaction. Partakers fear rather than seek death. An Aztec drinker of "dark fungus wine" moans:

"My heart weeps!...I look with repulsion on death, and I suffer..."<sup>146</sup>.

Consequently, contrary to Furst's observation of the Huichols, an addict was not "head shaman"<sup>147</sup>. Rather, he or she was derided in Aztec society:

"lewd, mad, a scot, shameless, presumptuous, wicked, impudent, ... a libertine who exhausts himself by life devoted to pleasure...he deserves laughter, ridicule"<sup>148</sup>.

The Aztecs loathed anyone who "used their position (as) a drunkard, a madman"<sup>149</sup>. "None at all" drank in the priestly colleges, and this applied as strictly to offering priests as to novices<sup>150</sup>. Neither were the heads of the military colleges permitted<sup>151</sup>. Only persons over seventy years old had free enjoyment of stimulants- an "exclusive privilege"<sup>152</sup>. Even amongst these, "only qualified, very old men...distinguished for military service" openly indulged, and that was purely during "certain festivals, with great temper"<sup>153</sup>.

Sources are unanimous in evincing harsh penalties for intoxication. Common folk and nobility alike were beaten, dragged, evicted and killed<sup>154</sup>. After election, Emperors gave speeches blaming stimulants for every conceivable vice<sup>155</sup>.

Certainly pregnant women and their spouses were excluded from all drug rites<sup>156</sup>, disproving Nicholson's 'genetic insanity' argument.

Narcotics, in other words, were never generally used. Drugs were either for set rites, or for persons suffering pain and stress: severe penance, famine, illness, the torment of battle<sup>157</sup>; sacrificial death: "that they might lose some of their feeling and not suffer so greatly"<sup>158</sup>- it "comforted them greatly"<sup>159</sup>; or sacrificing 'nerves': priests wore *teotlacualli*- a pitch of insect venom, tobacco and 'morning glory' (absorbed through the skin?) so that:

"they lost all fear. They slew men in sacrifice with the greatest of daring...went forth at night, alone...(amongst) wild beasts"<sup>160</sup>.

Of course, there were ritual "communions" over *teoctli* ("Authentic/divine god-wine") <sup>161</sup>- a concoction of alcohol and hallucinogens which, like *yiuahtli* (narcotic powder) was also served to victims. As many as 8000 people might be inebriated, having "visions and revelations"<sup>162</sup>.

However, the "inebriation" was probably staged. Participants only "tasted, sipping...do not get intoxicated"<sup>163</sup>. A single mug was allotted to each, or a single jar was shared by all- with only one straw drilled entirely through (meaning only one person actually drunk)<sup>164</sup>. Young priests beat anyone surpassing the quota<sup>165</sup>. In other cases, the brew was called "sleep-inducing"- congregation pretending to "sleep" and "wake", after which "all mended their grievances with others"<sup>166</sup>. Such instances suggest the rite was actually a device for social cohesion.

A final mark against the drug abuse explanation is that talk of narcotic 'orgies', such as Paredes' report of "frequent drinking parties"<sup>167</sup>, occurs *after* the Conquest, when Aztec society was a "spiritual/social vacuum"<sup>168</sup>. On this basis, Eliade<sup>169</sup> and Greenleaff<sup>170</sup> both see hallucinogenic cults- especially of *peyote*- as post-Conquest developments- acts of defiance against Spanish rule. This in turn means that the cults' existence has little bearing on human sacrifice.

#### f. Biological Necessity?

Most scholarly attention has focussed on this, writers like Garn (1979)<sup>171</sup> and Hunn(1982)<sup>172</sup> contending there were ample non-human sources of protein in ancient Mexico, and that cannibalism produced a net loss in caloric value. Aztec households kept penned or caged dogs, turkeys, quail, rabbits, doves, partridges, ducks or geese for later consumption<sup>173</sup>. Even large animals such as deer and peccary were maintained semi-domesticated in reserves and enclosures as food<sup>174</sup>.

Demographic pressure definitely existed<sup>175</sup>, but densely-populated regions elsewhere: the Hwang Ho and Ganges Valleys - never resorted to cannibalism on any scale so why did Mexico? Similarly,

haemolytic anaemia and extreme osteoporosis appearing in remains of Mayan child-victims<sup>176</sup>, reflects dietary carelessness rather than deficiency, for other Mayan sites prove several kinds of fish, deer, turtle, opossum, shellfish (14 different species) were eaten<sup>177</sup>.

Three thousand years ago, when Mesoamerica was less populated and sea mammal flesh was much eaten, ritual cannibalism nevertheless existed<sup>178</sup> yet, during the lengthy siege of the Aztec capital, the inhabitants did not resort to eating each other but rather consumed: "twigs...grasses...abode..... lizards, rats and worms"<sup>179</sup>.

In contrast to what Harner and Harris allege, protein was never lacking or confined to a single class in the Aztec world. Cortes reported all manner of fish, egg and "chicken" pies and tortillas for sale in Aztec markets<sup>180</sup>. Conquistadors were supplied with large quantities of poultry provisions wherever they travelled<sup>181</sup>. Each Atemoztli, "everyone...men, women" slew 8,000 quail<sup>182</sup>, and when one Spaniard encountered 400 *itzcuintli* (dogs kept for eating) at a small-town market, he was told this was "meager...a tremendous shortage"<sup>183</sup>. Cortes was astonished at the innumerable "chickens" in some towns<sup>184</sup>.

All this was supplemented by the diversity of Aztec cuisine, which included everything from *axolotl* (Mexican 'walking fish') and snakes to lagoon worms, mosquito eggs, tadpoles and water beetles<sup>185</sup>. 'Fast foods', stews and patties were devised from such ingredients<sup>186</sup>, and from other results of fishing and hunting: "birds... fish... shrimp", which- even directly after the Conquest - filled thousands of canoes<sup>187</sup> and were netted "for fun"<sup>188</sup>.

Quite apart from animal protein, the maize-and-bean diet of the Aztecs was quite adequate<sup>189</sup>. Even protein-shy maize contains Vitamin B and Niacin, which, contrary to Harner's suggestion, were *not* indigestible, for Amerindians soaked maize in lime and water<sup>190</sup>.

(ollas- pots- of lime-water featuring in the humblest Aztec kitchens)<sup>191</sup>. Children were reared on bean paste<sup>192</sup> -there being "great abundances" of beans in Mesoamerica<sup>193</sup> - markets selling "tons", both dried and fresh<sup>194</sup>.

Indeed, Aztecs made proficient use of vegetable proteins. Against Harner's and Harris's allegations, ample fat was obtained from nuts and rape seed<sup>195</sup>. There were also cheese-like cakes of *spirulina algae* (a lake scum)- an army ration<sup>196</sup> so protein-rich and fast-growing that it is now exported world-wide<sup>197</sup>.

Another problem with the protein argument is that very little flesh from sacrificial victims was consumed. Women, children, and diseased males were not eaten, and some modes of sacrifice (burning, drowning) made consumption impossible. All torsos were buried or dumped<sup>198</sup>. Heads, organs, skin, bones, and one thigh were all burnt, put to ritual use, or sent to the priests or Emperor.

This left the limbs and buttocks, but even these had to be divided amongst the victim's captors, who could number six or more<sup>199</sup>. Lords and military heads had to be granted a piece, and the captor's portion had to be further distributed amongst all the captor's relatives<sup>200</sup> or even his entire guild<sup>201</sup>. It was a "feast"<sup>202</sup> attended by large numbers<sup>203</sup>.

How much, then, did a 'cannibal participant' actually consume? Apparently only a few slithers. The portion was "cut..to pieces and cooked"<sup>204</sup> in a large pot as *tlacatlolli* ('human stew')- with much tomato, chilli pepper, dried maize, and squash flower garnish<sup>205</sup>. Could a bowl or two of this fulfil one's need for "essential amino and fatty acids"? The captor himself was excluded from the feast<sup>206</sup>- he had risked his life for a 'protein prize' he could never enjoy. Neither could his poor, less successful relatives partake, for only the "illustrious, worthy" could eat *tlacatlolli*<sup>207</sup>.

All this leads us to conclude that eating of victims' flesh was not for sustenance at all, but exactly as Duran describes it: "Communion...solemn banquets"<sup>208</sup>. *Codex Magliabechiano* shows *tlacatlolli* was always placed before god Mictlantecuhtli prior to eating<sup>209</sup>, and when eaten:

"The flesh of those who died in sacrifice was held truly to be consecrated and blessed. It was eaten with reverence, ritual and fastidiousness as if it were something from heaven"<sup>210</sup>.

#### g. Psycho-Sexual Repression?

A psycho-sexual element certainly influenced Aztec human sacrifice. Young men courting women were rejected and insulted if they had not 'proven' themselves by taking victims:

"the women could torment young men into war... thus the women could prod them into battle.. Indeed we men said: 'Bloody, painful are the words of the women'"<sup>211</sup>.

Masculine attractiveness was rated on victim-taking, which is not surprising, considering the status and wealth granted a successful captor. Sacrificial death had a similar aura: it was *women* who greeted captives with songs praising their "great manliness"<sup>212</sup>.

However, it is difficult to believe a culture was driven to slay out of neurosis or frustration. Mesoamerica may have lacked sexually-explicit literature or art, but it was hardly a repressed society. Clendinnen showed that sex was viewed positively, with considerable awareness of female libido<sup>213</sup>.

Neither do Aztec soldiers seem terrified of female power. Casual sex occurred at stores, markets, crossroads, *tenazacalli* (steam bath houses), "pleasure houses" and *auicoyan* ("singing houses")<sup>214</sup>. At *telpochcalli* (military colleges), "pleasure girls" escorted teenage students<sup>215</sup>, such that, before going to war, they were:



"already wise in the ways of the flesh...each slept there with their paramours, by twos, by threes"<sup>216</sup>.

Similarly, there is no evidence for priests envying kings. Priests already enjoyed immense prestige, and their prophetic utterances carried more weight than the Emperor's. They had some of the most powerful posts in the land, and could readily switch to politics (Moctezuma II became Emperor, though he began as a priest).

#### h. Social Conditioning?

In contrast to some theories, this one makes thorough use of source materials, confronting Aztec emphasis on sacrifice and war to a greater degree than other explanations. There is much evidence that Aztecs were conditioned towards human sacrifice. They were convinced that way of life was normal and essential:

"Not only this city but the whole world has these for gods; and the people esteem their fathers, mothers, sons and daughters as nothing in comparison with these, and they will die sooner than do so"<sup>217</sup>.

As we would expect if the 'social conditioning' theory were valid, Aztec priests defended their practices as a 'tradition' they were reared into:

"From our ancestors, from them have we inherited our pattern of life...They taught us all their rules of worship.. Thus ...in their names...sacrifices we offer...For a long time has it been; it was there at Tula (700-1150 c.e.); it was there at Huapalcalco; it was there at Xuchatlapan; it was there at Tlamohuanchan (Xochicalco? 500-1000 c.e. Olmec? 1300-100 b.c.e.); it was there at Yohuallichan (Tajin 500-1000 c.e.); it was there at Teotihuacan (200 b.c.e.- 750 c.e.)... And now, are we to destroy the ancient order of life? Of the Chichimecs, of the Toltecs, of the Acolhuas, of the Tepanecs? (major powers, 900-1420 c.e.)"<sup>218</sup>.



Moreover, we learn from Cortes that Aztecs witnessed human sacrifices and performed blood penance "from a tender age", skewering their flesh each morning before work<sup>219</sup>. This was a society where even children had "inescapable intimacy" with victims' corpses<sup>220</sup>; where a worried Emperor could casually sacrifice a few boys to decide an issue<sup>221</sup>; where a Knight fleeing capture was publicly throttled<sup>222</sup>; where male peers competed for the glory and status of capturing and being captured; where sacrificed victims were "regard(ed) as sanctified"<sup>223</sup>. Is it any wonder that people of such a world perpetuated ritual killing?

Despite all this, 'social conditioning' is not a complete answer. It does not account for the attitudes existing in the first place. Clendinnen confesses that this does not concern her: she is more interested in how the rite was socialised<sup>224</sup>. Brundage is even less help. He decided that the Aztecs somehow became imprisoned by their an 'irrational' belief-system, and that this enslaved their culture<sup>225</sup>.

#### IV. SUMMARY: THE NEED FOR AN ALTERNATIVE THEORY

What is the picture thus far? Has Aztec human sacrifice been explained? The investigation conducted above demonstrates that most theories could be dismissed as fanciful.

The remainder may be summarised as follows: Aztec human sacrifice was probably culturally conditioned- a societal 'norm' (to borrow a sociological term<sup>226</sup>) of Mesoamerica for several thousand years. Population pressure, some fear of natural catastrophe, and a desire to 'prove' masculinity through extreme feats may have contributed to its upkeep. Eco-political forces found it useful, and the prevalence of drugs made it workable.

Granting all this, large gaps in our understanding remain. The above arguments explain how human sacrifice flourished so long in Mesoamerica, but not why it was so central. To discover this, an alternative theory needs to be constructed.

## V. TOWARDS AN ALTERNATIVE THEORY

### a. Frederick Streng's Theory: Religions as Differing

#### Means of Ultimate Transformation

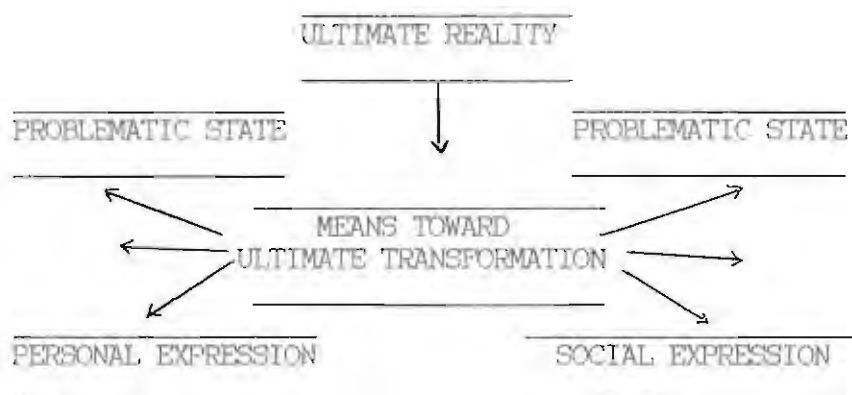
We have seen that the approach which best explains Aztec human sacrifice is the theory of social conditioning. 'Social conditioning' alleges societies ingrain and perpetuate set ranges of activity, such as human sacrifice, but this begs the question: why do some cultures ingrain such *drastic* behaviour, while others do not?

To answer this, we need to apply a model which will explain the diversity of religious practice. Frederick S. Streng's *Understanding Religious Life* (1985) offers such a solution. It explains religious systems as devices through which peoples seek "ultimate transformation". Streng postulates that humans instinctively try to change themselves at the deepest, most comprehensive level they know (the "ultimate"). He believes each religion is a set process for transforming into, or at least connecting with, whatever is held to be ultimately valuable and real<sup>227</sup>.

In Streng's view, the contrasts between religions reflect humanity's natural diversity of opinions- differing "preconceived notions"<sup>228</sup> - about what is ultimately real and therefore worth transforming for or into. Streng hints that this diversity arose from differences in each culture's natural and socio-cultural environments. Presumably, such differences incline each group to accept some means of transformation more readily than others. We have

seen this principle at work in Mesoamerica: a tendency to tolerate rites of sacrifice perhaps because the landscape is violent and unpredictable; because pain-numbing and mind-altering drugs abound; because pompous display and daring feats of *machismo* are so valued.

Streng also notes that preconceptions about one aspect of reality generate preconceptions about all other aspects. Consequently, every culture, by holding presumptions about the world, unconsciously or consciously builds up an entire, integrated system of ideals, lifestyles and even institutes to maintain those views and provide hoped-for transformation. Hence, distinctive spiritual cultures: "Ways" of being – form<sup>229</sup>, as outlined in Streng's diagram<sup>230</sup>:



What the model shows is that set ideas on "ultimate reality" (the ideal state or reality recognized by the particular faith) produce set ideas on humanity's basic dilemma (our "problematic state"). These, in turn, generate preconceptions about the "means toward ultimate transformation"– the techniques or processes for overcoming our "problematic state" and connecting with "ultimate reality". Finally, assumptions about each of these elements are expressed within individual lives ("personal expression"), and as a societal phenomenon ("social expression")<sup>231</sup>.

#### b. Streng's Theory and Aztec Human Sacrifice

Using Streng's model, Aztec human sacrifice - being a religious practice- must represent a particular "means of ultimate transformation", born of a particular set of assumptions about "ultimate reality" and humanity's "problematic state". This contention will be applied over the rest of the chapter.

At first glance, the idea of ceremonials of slaughter being the equivalent of other means of seeking transformation: yoga, charity, Communion - seems preposterous. However, such an argument is fully supported by the findings of Nigel Davies. After researching human sacrifice the world over, Davies declared that it best explained as a means of transformation:

"a bridge by which God becomes man, and man became God - all knew their death was necessary and right....it would be purposeless if painless.. (for) the price of salvation was suffering.. redemption flows from blood and shame"<sup>232</sup>

In the next Section: Part B, Streng's model is applied to recurrent themes in Aztec human sacrifice, to establish how the rite could function as a means of transformation. For the sake of brevity, Streng's "personal expression" and "social expression" have been fused as "expression" (cultural and/or ritual).

I discovered seven themes of "ultimate transformation" to pervade Mesoamerican human sacrifices:

1. 'Bursting Open'
2. Atonement
3. Remorse and Ruin
4. Birth
5. Mirroring
6. Extinction

## 7. Symbiotic Exchange.

These form the chapters which follow. Of course, such themes are thoroughly interwoven in practice, rather than separately expressed, but it will clarify our argument if each is examined as though it were an independent entity.

On the basis of Streng's model, each chapter is divided into:

- I. Ultimate Reality
- II. Problematic State
- III. Means
- IV. Expression.

- 
- <sup>1</sup>Inga Clendinnen, *Aztecs: An Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 3.
  - <sup>2</sup>Irene Nicholson, *Firefly in the Night*, (Faber & Faber, London, 1959), 23.
  - <sup>3</sup>Bernal Diaz, *History of the Conquest of New Spain*, 107, 206-207.
  - <sup>4</sup>Bernardino de Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Introduction & Indices, 50.
  - <sup>5</sup>George Valliant, *Aztecs of Mexico* (Revised Edition, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), 176.
  - <sup>6</sup>C. Guerra, *The Pre-Columbian Mind* (London: Sierra, 1971), 5.
  - <sup>7</sup>L.L. Alexander, "Ricoeur's 'Symbolism of Evil' and Cross-Cultural Comparisons: The Representation of Evil in Mayan Indian Culture", *The Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 44: 4 (December 1977), 720.
  - <sup>8</sup>J. Nash, "Death as a Way of Life: The Increasing Resort to Homicide in a Maya Indian Community", *American Anthropologist* 69 (October 1967), 455f.
  - <sup>9</sup>F.M. Cancian, *What are Norms? A Study of Beliefs and Action in a Mayan Community* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 115f.
  - <sup>10</sup>K.A. Read, "Negotiating the Familiar and the Strange in Aztec Ethics", *Journal of Religious Ethics* 15:1 (Spring 1987), 6-7.
  - <sup>11</sup>Cottie A. Burland, *Magic Books from Mexico* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1953), 12. For a similar approach, see L. Spence, *The Religion of Ancient Mexico* (London: Watt & Co., 1945), 18-19.
  - <sup>12</sup>G.J. Neumann, "Flayed God and His Rattle stick: A Shamanic Element in Pre-Hispanic Mesoamerican Religion", *History of Religions* 15 (February 1976), 260f.
  - <sup>13</sup>Peter T. Furst, *Hallucinogens and Culture* (San Francisco: Chandler & Sharp, 1976), 6.
  - <sup>14</sup>William la Barre, "Amerindian Religions", I.R. al Faruqi (ed.), *Historical Atlas of Religions* (New York: Macmillan & Co., 1974), 52-3.
  - <sup>15</sup>ibid. See also William la Barre, "Hallucinogens and the Shamanic Origins of Religion", Peter J. Furst (ed.) *Flesh of the Gods: The Ritual Use of Hallucinogens* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1972), 272-273.
  - <sup>16</sup>William la Barre, "Amerindian Religions", 52-53.
  - <sup>17</sup>Peter J. Furst, *Hallucinogens and Culture*, 6.
  - <sup>18</sup>G.J. Neumann, "The Experience of Time in Nahuatl Religion", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 44 (June 1976), 259-260.

- 19 M.P. Weaver, *The Aztecs, the Mayans and their Predecessors* (New York: Academic, 1981), 497.
- 20 M. Kearney, *The Winds of Ixtépi: Zapotec World-view and Society* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1972), 44-49f.
- 21 Richard E.W. Adams, *Prehistoric Mesoamerica* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1977), 300.
- 22 Eric R. Wolf, *Sons of the Shaking Earth* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), 1-3, 10, 14-15.
- 23 R.E. Blanton, S.A. Kowalewski et al, *Ancient Mesoamerica: A Comparison of Change in Three Cultural Regions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 11.
- 24 F. Benitez, *In the Footsteps of Cortes* (London: Peter Owen, 1957), 12.
- 25 F. Benitez, *In the Magic Land of Peyote* (London: University of Texas, 1975), 168.
- 26 Eric Thompson quoted in M.P. Weaver, *The Aztecs, the Mayans and their Predecessors*, 417.
- 27 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods and Rites of the Ancient Calender*, 57f.
- 28 E.H. Boone, "Incarnations of the Aztec Supernatural: The Image of Huitzilopochtli in Mexico and Europe", *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 72: 2 (1989), 87.
- 29 *Anales de Cuauhtitlan*, 3-10, in Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Native Mesoamerican Spirituality*, 170.
- 30 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex* Bk. 3: 3-14.
- 31 E.H. Boone, "Incarnations of the Aztec Supernatural", 86.
- 32 B.C. Hendrik, "Quetzalcoatl: European or Indigene?", C.L. Riley et al (eds.), *Man Across the Sea: Problems with Pre-Columbian Contacts* (Austin: University of Texas, 1971), 263. See also P. Honoré, *In Quest of the White God: The Mystical History of South American Civilisations* (London: Hutchinson, 1963), 15-19f.
- 33 B.C. Hendrik, "Quetzalcoatl: European or Indigene?", 263.
- 34 Irene Nicholson, *Firefly in the Night: A Study of Ancient Nahuatl Poetry and Symbolism* (London: Faber & Faber, 1959), 23.
- 35 *ibid.*, 19.
- 36 Laurette Sejourne, *Burning Water: Thought and Religion in Ancient Mexico* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1956), 14-16.
- 37 Irene Nicholson, *Firefly in the Night*, 19.
- 38 Laurette Sejourne, *Burning Water*, 35.
- 39 Inga Clendinnen, *Aztecs*, 3.
- 40 Alfonso Caso, *The Aztecs: People of the Sun*, 26-29, 64.
- 41 Cottie A. Burland & William Former, *Feathered Serpent and Smoking Mirror* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1976) *in passim*.
- 42 Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Native Mesoamerican Spirituality*, 6-7.
- 43 Inga Clendinnen, *Aztecs*, 3.
- 44 Diego Duran, *The Aztecs: A History of the Indies of New Spain* (trans. F. Horcasitas & David Heyden; London: Cassell, 1974), 108.
- 45 Bernal Diaz, *History of the Conquest of New Spain*, 97.
- 46 Barbara T. Price, "Demystification, Encidlement and Aztec Cannibalism: A Materialist Rejoinder to Harner", *American Ethnologist* 5: 1 (February 1978), 105.
- 47 G.A. Conrad & A.A. Demarest, *Religion and Empire: The Dynamics of Aztec and Inca Imperialism* (New York: Academic, 1982), 285-287f.
- 48 J.A. Offner, "On the Inapplicability of 'Oriental Despotism' and the 'Asiatic Mode of Production' to the Aztecs of Mexico", *American Antiquity* 46: 1 (June 1981), 43.

- 49 J.M.Ingham, "Human Sacrifice at Tenochtitlan", *Comparative Studies of Society and History* 26:3 (July 1984), 347,380.
- 50 David Carrasco, "Star gatherers and Wobbling Suns: Astral Symbolism in the Aztec Tradition", *History of Religions*26:3 (February 1987),287-288.
- 51 J. Broda, D. Carrasco, A.A. Demarest, *The Great Temple of Tenochtitlan* (Berkeley: University of California, 1987), 65-66.
- 52 Esther Pasztory, "The Function of Art in Mesoamerica", *Archaeology* 37:1 (January-February 1984), 25.
- 53 Barbara T. Price, "Demystification, Enriddlement and Aztec Cannibalism", 105.
- 54 Patricia Anawalt, "Costume and Control: Aztec Sumptuary Laws", *Archaeology*33: 1 (January-February 1980), 36-37,40-41. See also her "What Price Aztec Pageantry?", *Archaeology*30: 4 ( July 1977), 232.
- 55 R.E. Schultes, " An Overview of Hallucinogens in the Western Hemisphere", Peter J. Furst (ed.), *Flesh of the Gods: The Ritual Use of Hallucinogens* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1972),5-6f.
- 56 R.E. Schultes, " An Overview of Hallucinogens in the Western Hemisphere", 15f. See also William la Barre, "Amerindian Religions", I.R. al Faruqi (ed.), *Historical Atlas of Religions*(New York: Macmillan, 1974), 52-53.
- 57 P. Hughes, *Witchcraft* (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1965), 128.
- 58 U. Kohler, "Mushrooms, Drugs and Potters: A New Approach to the Function of Pre-Columbian Mesoamerican Mushroom Stones", *American Antiquity*41:2 (January 1976),146.
- 59 J.G. Kennedy, *Tarahumaras of Sierra Madre*(Arlington Heights: AHM Press, 1978), 97-126. See also B.G. Myerhoff, *Feyote Hunt*(Ithaca: Cornell University, 1970), 112f.
- 60 U. Kohler, "Mushrooms, Drugs and Potters", 146-8. See also Peter J. Furst, "The Olmec Were-Jaguar Motif", 145.
- 61 Peter J. Furst (ed.), *Flesh of the Gods*, 271-275.
- 62 Carlos Casteneda, *Journey to Ixtlan*(London: C.C. Brodley, 1973),55-56,105-111,188-9. See also his *Tales of Power*(New York: Simon & Schuster, 1974),118,180,272f.
- 63J. Norman, "The Huichols- Mexico's People of Myth and Magic", *National Geographic* 151:6 (June 1971),841.
- 64 Irene Nicholson, *Mexican and Central American Mythology*(New York: Paul Hamlyn, 1966) 198.
- 65 E.J. Anderson, *Feyote: The Divine Cactus*(Phoenix: University of Arizona, 1988), 1.
- 66 P. Gordon Wasson, *The Wondrous Mushroom: Mycolatry in Mesoamerica*(New York: McGraw Hill, 1980) xvii, 57, 83, 95.
- 67 F.F. Berdan, *The Aztecs of Central Mexico- An Imperial Society*(New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1982).
- 68 Gacy Jennings, *Aztec*(London: Arrow, 1986),292-293.
- 69 Cortes, *Letters* 68.
- 70 F.Hicks, "Tetzecoco in the Early 16th Century: The State, the City and the Calpolli", *American Anthropologist*9:2 (May 1982), 231.
- 71 B.J. Williams, "Contact Period Rural Overpopulation in the Basin of Mexico: Carrying Capacity Models Tested with Documentary Data", *American Antiquity* 54:4 (October 1989), 730.
- 72 Sherburne F. Cook, "Human Sacrifice and Warfare as Factors in the Demography of Pre-Columbian Mexico", *Human Biology* 18:2 (May 1982), 68.
- 73 Michael Harner, "The Ecological Basis for Aztec Sacrifice", *American Anthropologist* 4: 1978, 118-119, 127,132..
- 74 Marvin Harris, *Cannibals and Kings*(London: Collins, 1978), 109.

- 75 Michael Harner, "The Enigma of Aztec Sacrifice", *Natural History* LXXXVI: 4, April 1971, 133f.
- 76 Christian Duverger, *La fleur letale: Economie du sacrifice azteque* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1978) *in passim*.
- 77 *Codex Mendoza*, 59-63, 71.
- 78 Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 3: 8.
- 79 Inga Clendinnen, *Aztecs* 141, 153-154f.
- 80 W.R. Gray, *Freud on Ritual* (Missoula: American Academy of Religions, 1979), 162-7.
- 81 A.K. Jensen, *Myth and Cult among Primitive People* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 19? ), 166.
- 82 E. Sagan, *Human Aggression, Cannibalism and Culture Form* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 51.
- 83 Rene Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore: John Hopewell, 1972), 1, 120.
- 84 P. Carr & W. Gingerich, "The Vagina Dentata Motif in Nahuatl and Pueblo Mythic Narrative: A Comparative Study" in B. Swann (ed) *Smoothing the Ground: Essays on North American Oral Literature*, University of California, Berkeley, 1978, 194, 198.
- 85 Linda B. Hall, "Visions of the Feminine: The Dual Goddess of Ancient Mexico", *South West Review* Spring 1978, 133-9, 141-2.
- 86 T.B. Walsh, "Xochitl: Catherine Anne Porter's Changing Goddess", *American Literature* LII: 2, May 1980, 185-6, 189.
- 87 Inga Clendinnen, "The Cost of Courage in Aztec Society", *Past and Present* 177: May 1985, 50, 55, 60.
- 88 Burr Cartwright Brundage, *The Jade Steps: A Ritual Life of the Aztecs*, 156-158.
- 89 Inga Clendinnen, *Aztecs*, 239.
- 90 *Ibid.*, 5.
- 91 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods and Rites of the Ancient Calender*, 95-7. Both Duran and de Landa believed they found equivalents of the Ten Commandments in Mesoamerican religions.
- 92 Deigo de Landa, *Relación*, 458.
- 93 *Codex Mendoza*, 62-63, 71.
- 94 Sahagun in Nicholson, *Firefly in the Night*, 29.
- 95 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 3: 66.
- 96 *ibid.*, Bk. 3: 9: 70.
- 97 T. de Motolinia, *History of the Indians of New Spain*, 96, 112, 145-7, 208-9.
- 98 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods and Rites of the Ancient Calender*, 112, 184.
- 99 Hernan Cortes, *Letters*, 36.
- 100 G.A. Gait, 'Human Sacrifice (Indian)', *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* 6 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1913) 855.
- 101 Charles S. Braden, *Religious Aspects of the Conquest of Mexico* (Durham: Durham University Press, 1933), 118, 146-150, 268.
- 102 *Chilam Balam*, 15 (28-29), 25 (51), 29 (58).
- 103 L.L. Alexander, "Ricouer's 'Symbolism of Evil' and Cross-Cultural Comparison: The Representation of Evil in Mayan Indian Culture", *Journal of the American Academy of Religions* 44:4 December 1977, 713.
- 104 *Chilam Balam*, 15 (28-29), 29 (58).
- 105 Hernan Cortes, *Letters*, 70, 111, 130f. See also Diaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 251, 279, 311-315f.
- 106 Bartholome de las Casas, 'Apologetica Historia Sumaria II: 448, Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Native Mesoamerican Spirituality* 37.
- 107 R.L. Holloway, "The Cast of Fossil Hominoid Brains", *Scientific American* 231: 1 (July 1974), 106-114.



- 108 R. Hilton, "Is Intellectual history Irrelevant? The Case of the Aztecs", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 33 (April 1972), 342.
- 109 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 2: 20: 44-45.
- 110 Diego de Landa, *Relacionxv* (83).
- 111 *Chilam Balam*, 42 (112).
- 112 S.F. Townsend, *The Aztecs* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1992), 129-130.
- 113 E.M. Moctezuma, "Archaeology and Symbolism in Aztec Mexico: The Templo Mayor of Tenochtitlan", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* LIII: 3 (December 1985), 799-800.
- 114 *Codex Cospiain* in Cottie A. Burland, *Magic Books from Mexico* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1953), 21.
- 115 Juan de Tovar, *Tovar Calender* (New Haven: Connecticut Academy of Arts & Sciences, 1951), xi.
- 116 S. Sugiyama, 'Burials Dedicated to the Old Temple of Teotihuacan, Mexico', *American Antiquity* 54: 1 (January 1989), 87, 103.
- 117 Richard A. Diehl, *Tula: The Toltec Capital of Ancient Mexico* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1983), 61. See also K. Berrin, Rene Millon et al, *Feathered Serpent and Flowering Trees: Reconstructing the Murals of Teotihuacan* (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1988), 112-113.
- 118 F.F. Berdan, *The Aztecs of Central Mexico*, 129.
- 119 David Carrasco, *Quetzalcoatl and the Irony of Empire* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1982), 36.
- 120 *ibid.*, 35-36.
- 121 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods and Rites of the Ancient Calender*, 156-157. See also Frances Gillmor, *Flute of the Smoking Mirror* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1949), 143f.
- 122 Frances Gillmor, *Flute of the Smoking Mirror*, 104.
- 123 *ibid.*, 96.
- 124 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex* 8:17:1. See also Motolinia, *History of the Indians of New Spain*, 349-351.
- 125 J. Rounds, "Dynastic Succession and Centralisation of Power in Tenochtitlan", G.A. Collier et al (ed.), *The Inca and Aztec States 1400-1800: Anthropology and History* (New York: Academic, 1982), 67-70.
- 126 Inga Clendinnen, *Aztecs*, 2-4f.
- 127 M. Oettinger Jr. & F. Horcasitas (trans. & ed.), *Lienzo of Petlacala: A Pictorial Document from Guerrero, Mexico* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1982) Ep. II.
- 128 Inga Clendinnen, *Aztecs*, 4f.
- 129 Diego Duran, *The Aztecs: A History of the Indies* 79.
- 130 R. Hilton, "Is Intellectual History Irrelevant? The Case of the Aztecs", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 33 (April 1972), 340.
- 131 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods and Rites*, 138.
- 132 Jacques Soustelle, *Daily Life of the Aztecs*, 41, 140-1.
- 133 E.E. Calnek, "Patterns of Empire Formation in the Valley of Mexico" in G.A. Collier et al, *The Aztec and Inca States 1400-1800* 57.
- 134 *Lienzo de Petlacala*, Ep. III.
- 135 Jacques Soustelle, *Daily Life of the Aztecs*, 73.
- 136 Nigel Davies, *The Aztecs: A History* (London: Macmillan, 1973), 179.
- 137 Jacques Soustelle, *Daily Life of the Aztecs*, 77.
- 138 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 2: 34: 148.
- 139 Jacques Soustelle, *Daily Life of the Aztecs*, 72-73.
- 140 Juan Bautista Pomar, *Relacion de Texcoco* in German Vazquez (ed.), *Varios Relaciones de la Nueva Espana (Historia 16)* (Madrid: NILE, 1990), 40.
- 141 William la Barre, *The Peyote Cult*, 17f.

- 142 *Chilam Balam* 12 (23-26).
- 143 *ibid.*, 12 (6).
- 144 *ibid.*, 18 (36).
- 145 William la Barre, *The Peyote Cult*, 17-18.
- 146 Irene Nicholson, *Firefly in the Night*, 186.
- 147 Peter J. Furst, "To Feel Our Life: Peyote among the Huichol Indians of Mexico" in Peter J. Furst, *Flesh of the Gods*, 144.
- 148 Sahagun in Guerra, *The Pre-Columbian Mind* 25-6.
- 149 Irene Nicholson, *Firefly in the Night*, 29.
- 150 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 2: 27: 106; Bk. 3: 5: 59.
- 151 *ibid.*, Bk. 2: 34: 148.
- 152 *ibid.*, Bk. 2: 27: 106. See also *Codex Mendoza*, 71.
- 153 *ibid.*
- 154 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 2: 9: 116, 34: 148; Bk. 3: 5: 59, 6: 59. See also *Codex Mendoza*, 71.
- 155 Kurt Ross commentary, *Codex Mendoza*, 120.
- 156 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 2: 25: 91, 95. See also Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods and Rites*, 289.
- 157 E.F. Anderson, *Peyote: The Divine Cactus* (Tuscan: University of Arizona, 1988), 30. See also Nigel Davies, *The Aztecs*, 126.
- 158 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 2: 10: 17-18.
- 159 Diego Duran, *The Aztecs*, 101-102, 112.
- 160 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods and Rites*, 116.
- 161 *ibid.*, 178-179, 212. See also Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 2: 10: 17-18; 21: 52.
- 162 T. de Motolinia, *History of the Indians of New Spain*, 96. See also Diego Duran, *The Aztecs*, 225.
- 163 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 2: 96: 30, 207.
- 164 *ibid.*, Bk. 2: Appendix: 207; 19: 36.
- 165 *ibid.*, Bk. 2: 25: 95; 96: 207.
- 166 *ibid.*, Bk. 2: Appendix: 95.
- 167 Tori Paredes, in Guerra, *The Pre-Columbian Mind*, 63-4.
- 168 N. Cheetham, *New Spain* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1974), 141.
- 169 Mircea Eliade, "Introduction" in Peter J. Furst, *Flesh of the Gods*, ix.
- 170 R.R. Greenleaf, "The Mexican Inquisition and the Indians: Sources for the Ethnohistorian", *Americas* 34 (January 1978), 319.
- 171 Garnier G.A. Conrad & A.A. Demarest, *Religion and Empire: The Dynamics of Aztec and Inca Expansionism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1984), 168.
- 172 E. Hum, "Did the Aztecs Lack Potential Animal Domesticates?", *American Ethnologist* 9: 3 (August 1982), 578-579.
- 173 Hernan Cortes, *Letters*, 30, 99, 395, 398, 463. See also Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 2: 37: 160.  
G.S. Stuart's *The Mighty Aztecs* (Washington D.C.: National Geographic Society, 1981) also contains some interesting references to modern Nahuatl protein sources (48f), and G.F. Carter's "Pre-Columbian Chickens" in C.L. Riley (ed.) *Across the Sea: Problems of Pre-Columbian Contacts* (Austin: University of Texas, 1971) makes the interesting suggestion that there was also a native chicken. Compare with Hernan Cortes, *Letters*, 395, 463.
- 174 George C. Vaillant, *Aztecs of Mexico* in passim. See also Cottie Burland & William Formner, *Feathered Serpent and Smoking Mirror*, 80.
- 175 R.E. Blanton, S.A. Kowalewski et al, *Ancient Mesoamerica: A Comparison of Change in Three Regions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1981), 111.

- 176 E.A. Hooton, "Skeletons from the Cenote of Sacrifice at Chichen Itza", in C.L. Hay (ed.), *The Maya and their Neighbours* (New York: Dover, 1937-1940), 276.
- 177 R.E. Blanton et al, *Ancient Mesoamerica*, 194.
- 178 Kenneth V. Flannery, et al, *The Cloud People* (New York: Academic, 1983), 124.
- 179 'Broken Spears' (Aztec poem), Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Native Mesoamerican Spirituality*, 226.
- 180 Hernan Cortes, *Letters*, 103-104.
- 181 *ibid.*, 67, 76, 104, 371, 398. See also Bernal Diaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 71, 81.
- 182 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex* Bk. 2: 24: 73. This is also confirmed by Motolinia, *History of the Indians*, 147.
- 183 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods and Rites*, 278.
- 184 Hernan Cortes, *Letters*, 30, 99, 398.
- 185 T. de Motolinia, *History of the Indians*, 103. See also Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex* Bk. 2: 23: 62, Bk. 8: 30.
- 186 K. van Tulleken, *Mexico* (Amsterdam: Time-Life, 1985), 30, 63.
- 187 Jacques Soustelle, *Daily Life of the Aztecs*, 151.
- 188 Cottie Burland & William Former, *Feathered Serpent and Smoking Mirror*, 80.
- 189 Barbara T. Price, "Demystification, Enriddlement and Aztec Cannibalism: A Materialist Rejoinder to Harner", 100-101.
- 190 F. Peterson, *Ancient Mexico*, 167-168.
- 191 *Codex Mendoza*, 70.
- 192 *ibid.*, 57.
- 193 *Canek Manuscript* Fol. 7: 74-6 in G.D. Jones, "The Canek Manuscript in Ethnohistorical Perspective", *Ancient Mesoamerica* 13 (1992).
- 194 Diego Duran, *The Aztecs*, 10-11.
- 195 F. Peterson, *Ancient Mexico*, 167-168.
- 196 G.S. Stuart, *the Mighty Aztecs*, 113. See also K. van Tulleken, *Mexico*, 63.
- 197 B. McDowell, "The Aztecs", *National Geographic* 158: 6 (December 1980), 727.
- 198 Clavigero in F. Peterson, *Ancient Mexico*, 149. See also Landa, *Relacion*, 35, 49-50.
- 199 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 2: 113; see also Landa, *Relacion* 49-50.
- 200 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 2: 21: 49.
- 201 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods and Rites*, 133.
- 202 T. de Motolinia, *History of the Indians*, 115.
- 203 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods and Rites*, 133. See also Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex* Bk. 2: 98.
- 204 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 2: Appendix 103.
- 205 *ibid.*, Bk. 2: 21: 49; Bk. 2: 53.
- 206 *ibid.*, Bk. 8: 84-85; Bk. 2: 53.
- 207 Nigel Davies, *The Aztec Empire*, 235-237.
- 208 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods and Rites*, 133.
- 209 *Magliabechiano Codex* 72 in Inga Clendinnen, *Aztecs*, plates 240-241.
- 210 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods and Rites*, 191.
- 211 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex* Bk. 2: 23: 63-64.
- 212 Diego Duran, *The Aztecs*, 102.
- 213 Inga Clendinnen, *Aztecs*, 163-167.
- 214 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 2: 57. See also Guerra, *The Pre-Columbian Mind*, 51-52.
- 215 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 2: 21: 56.
- 216 *ibid.*, Bk. 3: 6.

- 
- 217 Aztecs to Andres de Tapia, Charles S. Braden, *Religious Aspects of the Conquest of Mexico* (Durham: Durham University Press, 1930), 118.
- 218 *Colliques and Christian Doctrine* Folio 36 in Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Native Mesoamerican Spirituality*, 215-217.
- 219 Hernan Cortes, *Letters*, 35.
- 220 Inga Clendinnen, *Aztecs*, 4.
- 221 Bernal Diaz, *History of the Conquest of New Spain*, 221.
- 222 B. Carr Brundage, *The Fifth Sun* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah, 1979), 202.
- 223 Diego de Landa, *Relacion*, 49.
- 224 Inga Clendinnen, *Aztecs*, 4-5.
- 225 Burr Cartwright Brundage, *The Jade Steps*, 155-157.
- 226 F.M. Cancian, *What are Norms?*, 1-3.
- 227 Frederick J. Streng, *Understanding Religious Life* (3rd Edition, Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1982), 2-3.
- 228 *ibid.*, 5-8, 15.
- 229 *ibid.*, 25, 43, 63, 84.
- 230 *ibid.*, Figure 1(4).
- 231 *ibid.*, 23-24.
- 232 Nigel Davies, *Human Sacrifice in History and Today*, 275.

# PART B :

THEMES OF ULTIMATE

TRANSFORMATION

IN

AZTEC HUMAN SACRIFICE

(STRENG'S MODEL APPLIED)

## ONE : THE TRANSFORMATION OF "BURSTING OPEN"

### I. ULTIMATE REALITY AS DISMEMBERED BODY-PARTS

In Mexican manuscripts, gods often seem "a compendium of separate parts"- each broken into symbolic units<sup>1</sup>. Even today, symbols of body-parts: a leg, arm, heart- will be presented for priestly blessing in Mexico<sup>2</sup>. These are just two examples of Aztec "magical anatomy"<sup>3</sup>.

That is: Aztecs appear to have regarded body-parts as *independent, supernatural entities*. Dinzel even suggests particular organs were "controlled" by certain gods<sup>4</sup>. After all, ancient *codexes* assign specific calendar-dates to various gods' legs, eyes, and more - perhaps for rites.

Evidently, many Aztec deities were worshipped as *being dismembered forms*. Temple statues of the great goddess Coatlicue are often headless (her face is two serpents sprouting from her neck). Coyolxauhque- the Moon- is a severed head, or dismembered limbs and torso- each part, significantly, bearing a Divine earth-monster mask<sup>5</sup>. Tezcatlipoca's apparition, "the Night Axe", is headless, with a gaping chest-wound<sup>6</sup>. Likewise, primal god-man Piltzintecuhtli is "*stretched out*"<sup>7</sup> - his divided features becoming crops; and the Fire god is *stretched out* in the navel of the world- as shown in *Codex Ferjevary-Mayer*.

Lifeless limbs might appear odd candidates for Divinity, but Mexicans held dead bodies to have great power, as they proudly informed the Conquistadors: "Our gods are already dead"<sup>8</sup>. Mesoamerican reverence for the following anatomical parts demonstrates this:

- a. Heart
- b. Innards
- c. Head and Skull

- d. Eyes
- e. Mouth
- f. Hand and Arm
- g. Foot and Leg
- h. Skin
- i. Blood

a. Heart

As godly names suggest: Jade Heart; Jade Glowing<sup>9</sup>; Heart of Heaven<sup>10</sup>; Mountain Heart; Heart of Earth (the Mother Goddess title)<sup>11</sup>—it was often God's *heart* which was supposedly encountered at death: "rich like jade...when we die"<sup>12</sup>, just as one ate the gods' "Granary Hearts" when consuming their images.

In fact, divinity was a *physical heart*. In *Codex Vindobonensis Mexicanos I*, the god-planet Venus is a heart<sup>13</sup>. The Sun, too, is a heart: 'round, hot, pulsating' —*Tonatiuh* ("He who goes about giving *tona*: heart-souls")<sup>14</sup>.

This last notion was pivotal. Even now, Nahua Indians claim each heart is a spark of the Sun: a fragment of its *istli* (heat or energy)<sup>15</sup>. This is why the Sun is "He who goes about *tona*-ing", and why extracted human hearts were *Yolleteotl* ("Heart-God").

Thus, God was one's physical heart, which is why it was seat of the soul<sup>16</sup>, and why the human figure was "heart-soul"<sup>17</sup>. Note, indeed, that a *tlayolteuani* (occultist) "divines things *with his heart*"<sup>18</sup>, and the *toltec* (artisan) "communes *with his heart*. God is *in his heart*"<sup>19</sup>.

In Mexico, there was an entire iconography of hearts forming rows, floating, fuming, petrified, rising, flowering, devoured by divinities (in their animal-*nahuailli* forms)<sup>20</sup>, dissected or impaled by a god (see Figures 1 & 2), or bearing a Divine face (see Figure 3).

## b. 'Inners'

Mexican Indians definitely regarded abdominal organs to be more than human. Cecilia Klein found that "inners" (especially intestines and stomach) were identified with the cosmos. Underworlds were an intestinal tangle of knots, whilst heavens were 's'-shaped folds like cloth or the large intestine<sup>21</sup>. Note that *Codex Nuttall* has gods descend on intestinal, umbilical-type threads<sup>22</sup> (Figure 4), and that some regions claimed gods sprang from a primal "navel"<sup>23</sup>.

## c. Head or Skull

Skulls and severed heads were apparently the "living presence" and communicators (oracles) of Divinity. In *Popul Vuh*, a gourd-skull wisely instructs a maiden and gives her the Heroes' seed<sup>24</sup>. In *Historia Chichimeca*, the Texcocan Tribunal of God is a human skull on a gold throne - decked in crown and jewels<sup>25</sup>. Under Mesoamerican iconography, having a skull-face was almost a guarantee of being a deity.

Indeed, skulls feature as a 'holy motif' in art by 700-1000 c.e. - everywhere from temples to funerary jars. Mayan and Aztec crystal skulls- oracles and scrying instruments- have been discovered, as has a knife-nosed skull mask, evidently the sacred face of a widely-known Divinity (Figure 5). The Temple Stone of Tenochtitlan bears two reliefs of a smoking shield (god Tezcatlipoca) penetrating a skull, which spews (declares?) Burning Water (war)(see Figure 6). This seems to represent a skull 'speaking for' Tezcatlipoca.

Severed heads were equally revered, since Olmec times. Mayan *Codex Dresden* has musicians worshipping a human head. It is perched on a *kan* (movement, dynamism) glyph at the apex of a pyramid, wafting incense from its nose (Figure 7). Aztec *Codex Magliabechiano* has an almost



# HEARTS

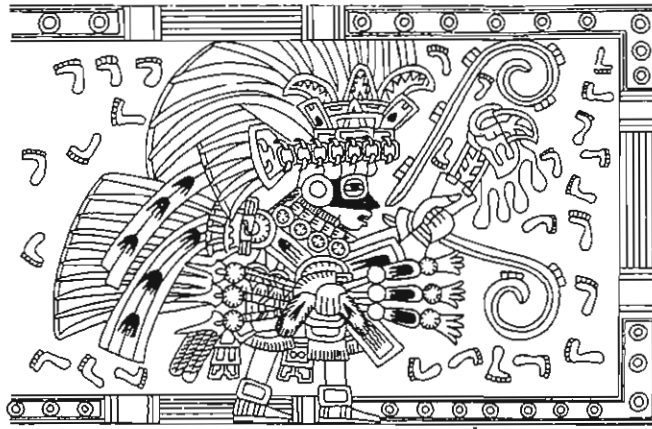


Figure 1: Dawn-Lord splitting a human heart, and detail of a sectioned heart: murals from Teotihuacan (200 b.c.e.-750 c.e.). Note numerous footprints.

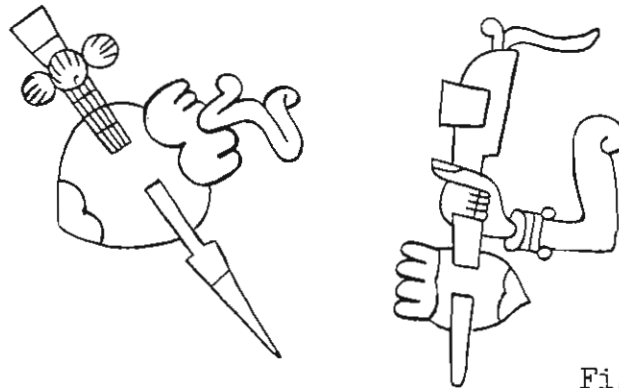


Figure 2: Impaled human hearts. Codex Borgia (Pueblan-Aztec).

Figure 3: Removing a god-faced heart. Codex Laud.



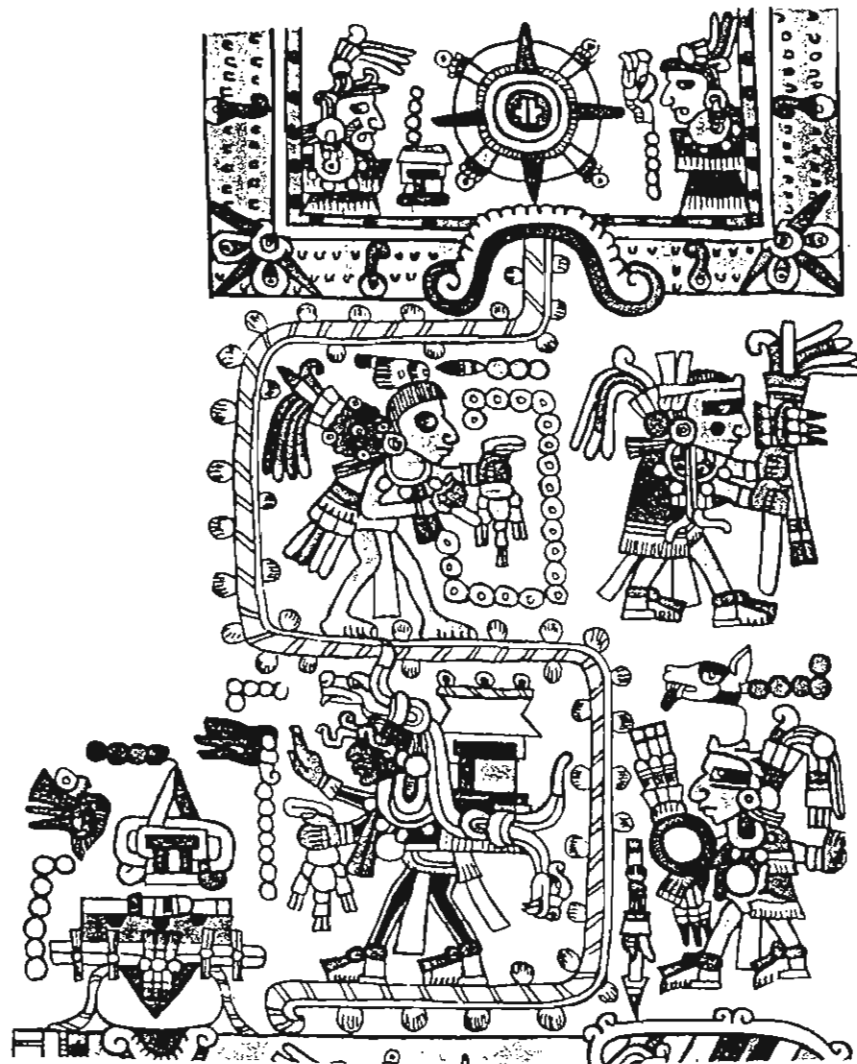


Figure 4: Gods descend on an intestinal or umbilical-type cord, from out of a 'wound' in the highest heaven: Place of Lord and Lady of Our Flesh. Mixtec Codex Nuttall.

## SKULLS



Figure 5a: Human skull used as a sacred object: a mask, probably used by impersonators of the god depicted below. Offering 57 from Templo Mayor, Tenochtitlan.



Figure 5b: Knife-nosed, skull-faced divinity. Clockwise from top: Pueblan Codex Fejervary-Mayer; Toltec-Mayan Grolier Codex; Mixtec Codex Nuttall.



Figure 6: Oracular skull? Skull pierced by god Tezcatlipoca's emblem (smoking shield), spewing Burning Water (war). Relief on Aztec Temple Stone.



Figure 7: Mayan musicians worshipping a head on a pyramid or stand. Codex Dresden.

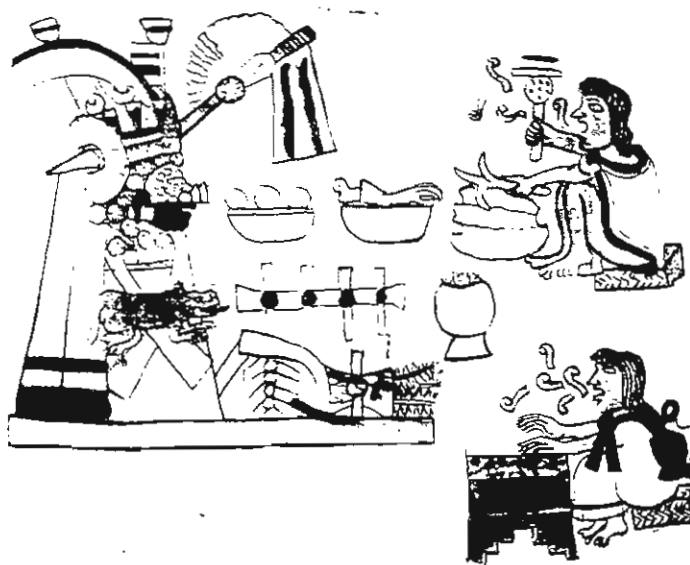


Figure 8: Aztec musicians worshipping the head of the female victim who impersonated goddess Cihuacoatl. Note food offerings and stand. Codex Magliabechiano, Folio 72r.

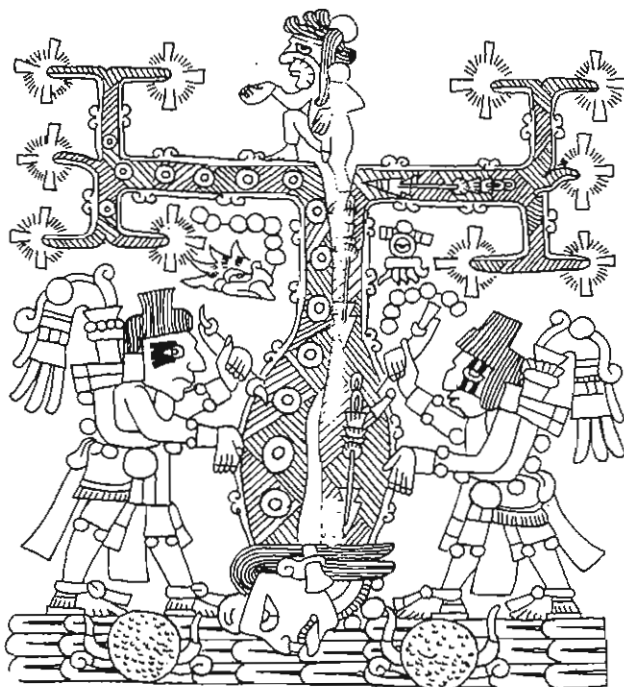



Figure 9 : A head sprouting a tree, from which a man is born. Codex Vindobonensis.

identical scene (Figure 8), suggesting this worship was widely established.

Often severed heads were linked to plant germination, as numerous Mexican manuscripts illustrate (for example, *Codex Nuttall*<sup>25</sup>). *Codex Vindebonensis* has a head sprouting a tree, giving birth to humanity (see Figure 9).

#### d. Eyes



Names of Mesoamerican divinities and spirits reveal a reverence for organs of sight. The High God was "Star/Eye which makes things shine"; Teteoinnan was *Ixpuztec* ("Broken Eye"); Xolotl was "Eye-on-cheek"<sup>27</sup>; Venus was not only Heart but "eye of light"<sup>28</sup>; a main Mayan god was Colop-u-uich ("Snatch out the eye of the sun")<sup>29</sup>; the Mayan gods' spirit-servants are "Rippers of Eyes"<sup>30</sup>; and more recent Mayans consider Crosses "Eyes of God"<sup>31</sup>. The stars, indeed, are eyes. The same word and glyph:  was used for both (see *Codex Mendoza*<sup>32</sup>).

However, something deeper is also intended. *Codex Borgia* and some statues has god Xipe's eyes burst out as Four Quarters of the cosmos<sup>33</sup>, suggesting the eye had ultimate significance. Mesoamericans still distinguish between "looking at" and "seeing" one's "inner space"<sup>34</sup>, and yearn for *Muk'ta?ilel*: the Great Seeing<sup>35</sup>. In this Otumi poem, eyes mysteriously 'absorb':

"In the dew-drop shines the sun;  
the dew-drop dies.  
In my eyes, which are my very own,  
your eyes are shining:  
I- I live"<sup>36</sup>.

#### e. Mouth

In Aztec glyphics, most openings, springs and caves are personified mouths (see *Codex Mendoza*)<sup>37</sup>. Gaping mouths represented


deities all over Mesoamerica for thousands of years, especially as temple<sup>38</sup> and cave-oracle<sup>39</sup> entrances. Notice, too, that the main offering buried in Teotihuacan's Temple of Quetzalcoatl were shell beads shaped as human teeth<sup>40</sup>. The High God was "Lord of the Nearby", which probably related to the mouth, the "amongst"-glyph being teeth (  ); "beside"-glyph being a mouth<sup>41</sup> (  ).

#### f. Hand and Arm

In the Mayan *Chilam Balam*, the hand is God:

"Finally *the Hand* will begin to use gentleness in order to save the hills and mountains and valleys"<sup>42</sup>.

When "the Hand withdraws", people "suffer"<sup>43</sup>. To this day, Tzotzil Mayans entrust themselves to "Hands"<sup>44</sup>. The Mayan god of number "zero" had- since Classic times- a severed hand wrapped around his chin<sup>45</sup>.

A similar tradition must once have existed amongst the Aztecs. After all, Teotihuacan murals and vase paintings show detached "god hands" dispensing rain, glyphs and seeds<sup>46</sup>. *Codex Nuttall* has a huge, taloned hand grasping a hill<sup>47</sup>, and Aztec place-name glyphs feature so many active, severed arms (  )<sup>48</sup>, that the detached arm must have had special significance. Note that the holiest feature of an Aztec god: his or her face, was at times composed of human palms (Figures 10 & 11), and that goddess Coatlicue wears severed hands (Figure 12). Some priestly capes had designs of human palms<sup>49</sup>, and notice that the palm was the gods' favoured food<sup>50</sup>.

#### g. Foot and Leg

During Teotleco, the sign of the gods' "arrival" was one tiny footprint- such as seen on a god's cheek in *Codex Borgia*<sup>51</sup>- mysteriously

## HANDS AND PALMS

Figure 10: God Xolotl, showing palm-on-mouth motif. Note also the dangling eye. Codex Borgia, 10.

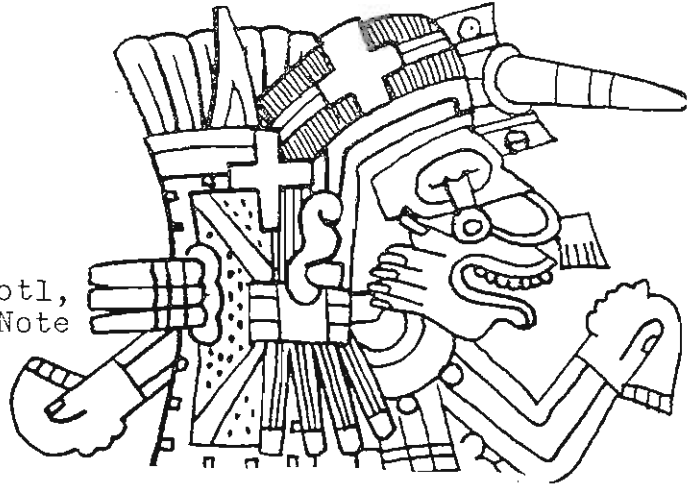


Figure 11: Eyes of the music god peering out of human palms. A stone model of a two-toned drum.



Figure 12: Goddess Coatlicue's necklace of human hands, hearts and skull. Details from two Aztec statues.

appearing on a mound of cornmeal<sup>52</sup>. It was emblematic of the foot's importance. The giant *foot* of 'One Leg' (Tezcatlipoca): bejewelled, taloned - was what Aztecs most commonly saw in their visions, fading into dark clouds:

"(They) can't see all of him, but only  
the foot of an eagle or fowl"<sup>53</sup>.

This was - *Codex Vaticanus 3773* illustrates- a severed foot, perhaps the one the god sacrificed to raise the earth. Significantly, Tezcatlipoca's stump was fitted with a *tezcatl* (obsidian mirror) after he lost this foot, and much symbolism pertained to the "mirror-foot's" omniscience. Leg bones were treated, with skulls, as items of worship in *Codex Nuttall* (Figure 13), and even now in Todos Santos, Crosses are honoured as "feet"<sup>54</sup>.

#### h. Skin

Skin's sacredness is evidenced in the priority given to Xipe Totec: "Flayed, Our Lord"; "Flayer of Skin"<sup>55</sup>. Goddess Toci- the great Earth-Mother, was likewise "She of the Thigh-skin Mask". Neumann even sees paper, so vital to Aztec rites, as 'skin'<sup>56</sup>.

#### i. Blood

The Mayans made blood a god: Chac-dzidzilcik<sup>57</sup>. To Aztecs it was secretly (magically?) "Red Woman"<sup>58</sup>. Blood was awesome and valuable: *chalchihuatl*: "precious (literally, jade) liquid"; "terrible nectar"<sup>59</sup>. It was ultimate beauty and treasure -"quetzal feathers" to the Mayans<sup>60</sup>, and "flowers" or "flowering water" to the Aztecs<sup>61</sup>. Cortes observed that only from victims' blood and seeds of the land were god-images fashioned<sup>62</sup>.



Blood was considered sentient: it "reaches its place of repose"; it "talks" and gives "messages" which only shamans understand<sup>63</sup>. It even appears out of thin air to flow down the gullets of Eagles (Figure 14)<sup>64</sup>.

Belief in sacred, transforming blood was very ancient. Stocker discovered trilobal glyphs and eccentric-shaped stone blades, both symbolising sacred blood, occur equally in Olmec (1300-100 b.c.e.), Teótihuacán (200 b.c.e. - 700 c.e.) and Toltec (700-1150 c.e.) sites (see Figure 15). On a San Jose Mogote *danzante* (dated 600-500 b.c.e.) and a Tajin *palma* (500-1000 c.e.), blood becomes "rain" dots (☉); sacred scrolls (☪); and a flower-like, dissected-heart (☪). On the *palma*, vampire bats carry the sacred substance into the sky (see Figures 16 & 17).

## II. HUMANITY'S PROBLEMATIC STATE: UNSEVERED BODIES

### AS IMPRISONED DIVINITY

Over the last section, we saw Mesoamericans recognised ultimate power- even Divinity- in bodily parts, once those parts or substances were *separated* from the body. This suggests that being physically 'intact' was imprisonment to Mesoamerican eyes. That seems the other meaning behind the *Cantares Mexicanos* verse: "Those flower jewels of Yours are *held as prisoners*"<sup>65</sup>. The following poem states similar:

"Where is your heart?  
You give your heart to each thing in turn.  
*Carrying, you do not carry it.*  
You *destroy* your heart on earth.  
Are you not always pursuing things idly?"<sup>66</sup>.

"Carrying, but not carrying" could well summarise the Mesoamerican attitude to live bodies. Conception supposedly entombed the Sun's "jade"

Figure 13: Ceremony with thigh bones and skull. Note bird being readied for sacrifice, and feathered poles. Codex Nuttall.



## BLOOD



Figure 14: Blood appearing out of mid-air to flow down gullets of eagles (god Tonatiuh?). Codex Nuttall.

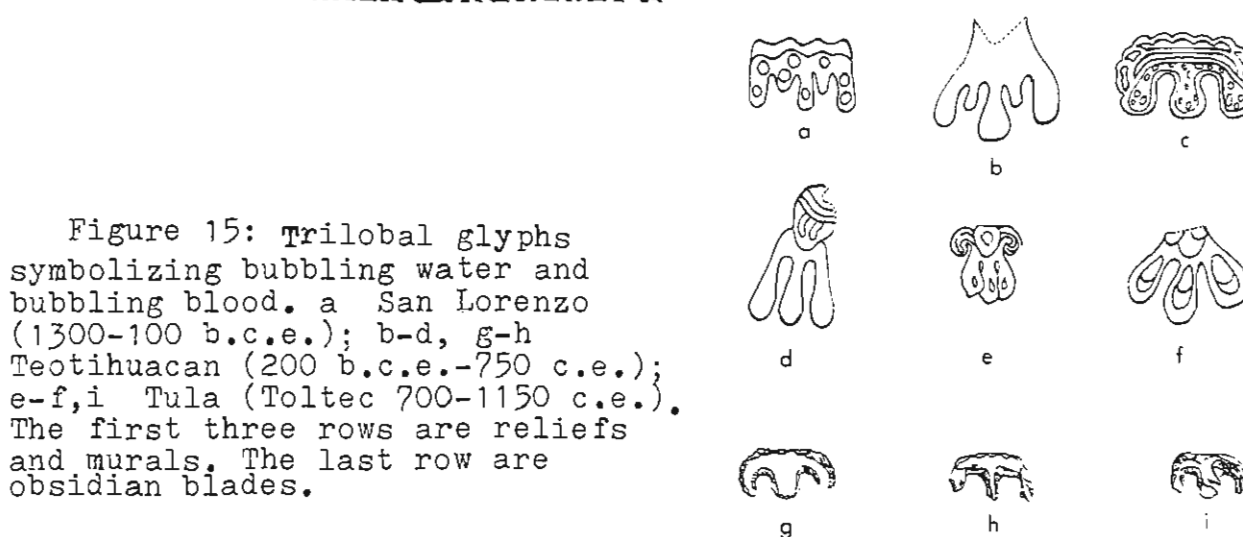


Figure 15: Trilobal glyphs symbolizing bubbling water and bubbling blood. a San Lorenzo (1300-100 b.c.e.); b-d, g-h Teotihuacan (200 b.c.e.-750 c.e.); e-f,i Tula (Toltec 700-1150 c.e.). The first three rows are reliefs and murals. The last row are obsidian blades.

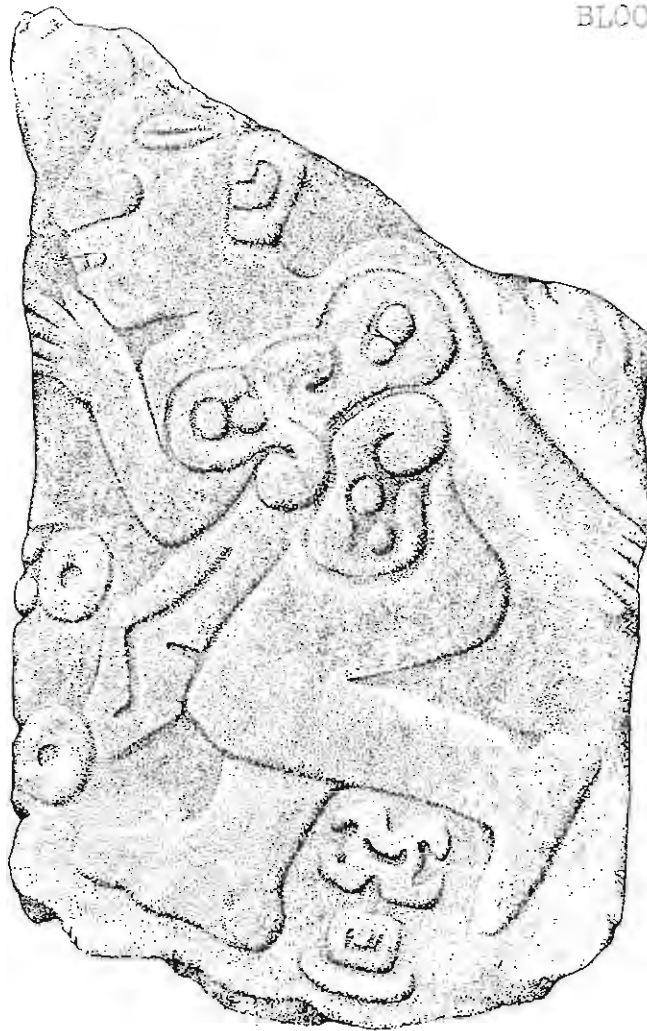


Figure 16.: Blood-rain dots and blood glyphs on the open chest of a victim, San Jose Mogote danzante ('dancer') relief, Oaxaca, c. 600-500 b.c.e.

Figure 17: vampire bats descending on a victim, taking blood-rain dots from him to a glyph in the sky. Note the victim is himself a blood-glyph. Tajin palma (ball game pad), 500-1000 c.e.



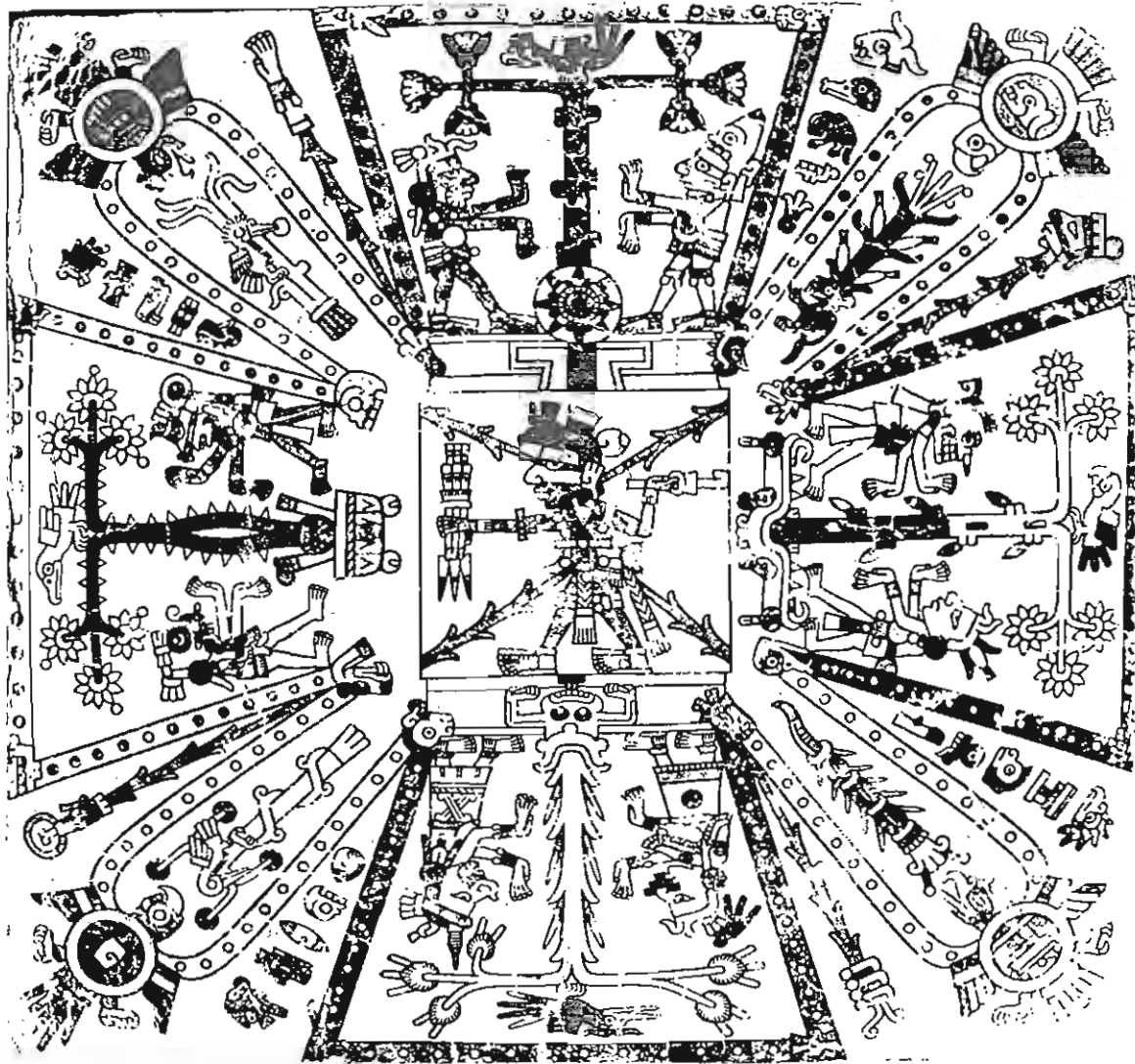


Figure 18: Tezcatlipoca's dismembered body at the cosmic Four Quarters, feeding blood to the God of the Centre. Codex Fejervary-Mayer.

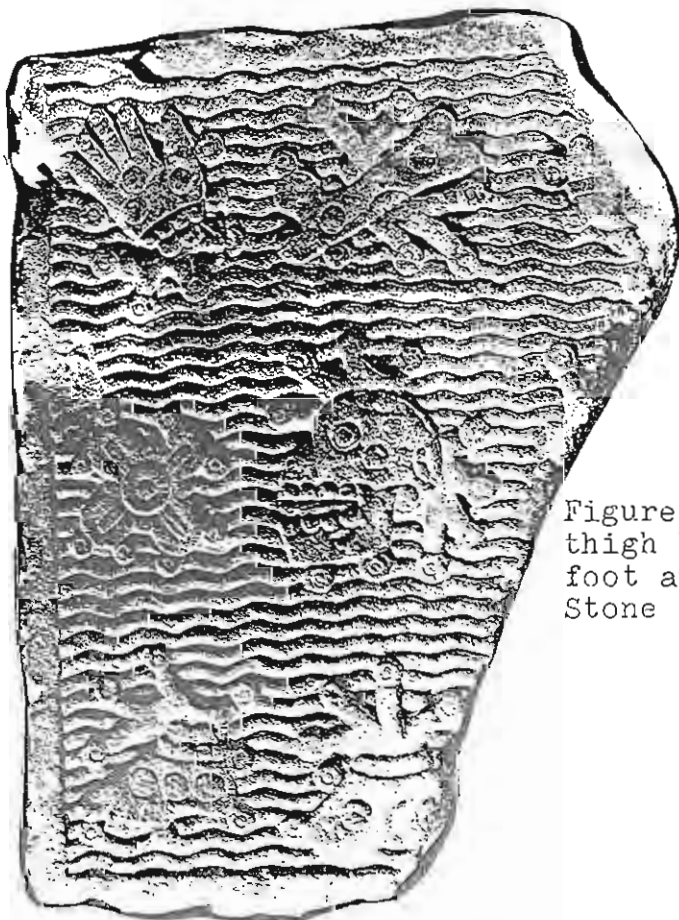


Figure 19: A goddess's (?) severed hand, thigh bone, heart, vagina (?), skull, foot and breasts, tossed onto a liquid. Stone of Itzpapalotl

(the heart) in flesh- making it hidden and "cold" at birth<sup>67</sup>. For children, some hope existed:

"there is still plenty of time, because  
there is still jade in your heart,  
turquoise. It is still fresh, it has  
not been spoiled, it has not been altered,  
nothing has twisted it"<sup>68</sup>.

Conversely, physical maturation entangled one in this "evil-knotted earth"<sup>69</sup>- the heart's "jade" was "twisted" and lost<sup>70</sup>. Further, any wrong-doing bred physical distortion. Our "flowers" (heart and blood?) are "*deformed*" by our desires<sup>71</sup>; the wicked turn "stunted..wrung-out...toothless...dried up"<sup>72</sup> - having entirely "*enshrouded hearts*:" (*yolloquimilli*)<sup>73</sup>.

In other words, the disintegration of body parts was interpreted as the contortion of Divine elements, born of misdeeds. Gods have child-bodies: they are "a youth, always young"<sup>74</sup>; "precious child"<sup>75</sup>, so juvenile form was adored: "virile lad"<sup>76</sup>; "agile ..polished, clean"<sup>77</sup>. By contrast, old people, especially in art, are grotesque, gnarled forms.

For the Aztecs, there was also the problem that flesh removed one from God, the Beyond being "Place of the Fleshless"<sup>78</sup>, which only the "defleshed" enter (hence obsidian-knife winds encountered on journeying there). Even gods there are skeletons.

For these reasons, Tochiuhitzin Coyolauhqui seems contemptuous of his body living:

"It is not true, no it is not true  
That we came to live on the earth:  
We came here only to dream.  
We came here only to sleep."

"As the grass of springtime we are changed.  
*Our hearts will grow green again:*  
And they will open their buds.  
But our body is like a rose tree:

It puts forth flowers  
And then *withers*"<sup>79</sup>.

Note Tochiuhuitzin awaits a *rebirth* of his *heart*. An Aztec soldier waiting for battle to commence somewhat similarly reports craving to *merge* his *heart* with the Sun:

"Each time the sun climbs this hill  
My heart cries out and is sad:  
Would that it were the flower of my heart,  
painted in beautiful colours!"<sup>80</sup>

What the poems imply is a desire to *emancipate* body-parts. How this could be achieved is considered next.

### III. MEANS: DISMEMBERING, PERFORATING AND SEVERING

It appears that, in Mexican eyes, the solution to the above problems was to physically untangle and separate body-parts. Consider the Nahuatl term for sacrifice: *tlaaaailistli*: "the *spreading out* of something"<sup>81</sup>. More obviously, Mayans called human sacrifice: "the *bursting asunder* of the living rock"<sup>82</sup>. The latter concept is graphically illustrated in *Codex Troano*, which shows a body dashed to pieces<sup>83</sup>.

"Bursting asunder" must have been considered a prerequisite for regaining the gods' presence, for we are told:

"Our hearts *must break* as jade near and  
in the presence of the Giver of Life" <sup>84</sup>.

Lords, too, are necessarily "*broken* like a clay vessel...in the Land of the Fleshless"<sup>85</sup>.

Of the various means adopted to burst open and spread out the body for its "salvation", dismembering and defleshing were doubtless central, as they accompanied most killings. Perhaps the choice and precise placing of severed parts was believed to free their latent Divinity, for at *Templo Mayor*, Coyolxauhque's severed limbs form a swastika-like

spiral rotating out from the 'field' of her torso<sup>86</sup>. In *Codex Feriervary-Mayer*, Tezcatlipoca's head, arm, leg and rib cage rest precisely at the Four Sacred Directions (Figure 18)- just as victims' skulls were often placed; and on the Stone of Itzpapalotl, a goddess's parts are splashed onto a sea of water or blood in exact rows of threes (Figure 19). Certainly at Tajin, intestines of victims were stretched over a rack (Figure 20). Klein suggests this was done to 'unravel' the underworlds<sup>87</sup>. Other ways of 'opening up' the body are considered below:

#### a. Extracting the Heart

Heart-extraction as a cleansing fire: freeing and saving the heart, seems the theme of this Aztec poem on Mixcoatzin of Huexotzinco, who died warring the Aztecs:

"Like fine *burnished* turquoise you  
give your heart.  
It comes to the sun.  
You will yet *germinate*-  
Will once again blossom  
On earth"<sup>88</sup>.

Note that hearts were never extracted from child-victims. The Aztecs told Motolinia this was because those hearts did not require it, being still "green"<sup>89</sup>. Conversely, a male who had not died in war or sacrifice had to be fitted with a piece of greenish stone, which became his heart when cremated<sup>90</sup>. Presumably, his own "jade" was beyond redemption.

Consider also Huitzilopochtli's message to his people:

"Your god says he did not come to bewitch  
the people, or control them by... (occult)  
means. He yearns to save them through the  
*strength of their own hearts*"<sup>91</sup>.



At first glance, this speech about being saved by our hearts' "strength" seems metaphorical, but recall that hearts are fragments of *istli* (energy) and that god Tohil in the *Popul Vuh* demanded something similar:

"Don't they want to be suckled on the side and under the arms? Isn't it their *heart's* desire to *embrace* Me? I, who am Tohil?' .... And this is what Tohil meant by being suckled: that all the nations be cut open before Him, and that their hearts be removed through their sides, under the arms... (The gods said:) 'They (the nations) must bring blood and hearts before Us; they must come to *embrace* Us; *they belong to Us already*'"<sup>92</sup>.

The last phrase: "they belong to us already" fits well with what we have noted about the heart being seen as God's 'property', which we carry poorly and ought to return.

Perhaps another indication of 'spiritual emancipation' through heart-sacrifice is the manner extracted hearts were lifted several times and then burnt. In everyday Indian speech, a "burning (hot)" or "rising" heart is the best ('good') heart-- a "very hot" heart being, notably, one *at the point of death*<sup>93</sup>. We also find, in the Nahuatl language, only a long vowel differentiating *tle'cauia* (to set on fire) from *tle'cauia* (to raise or take up)<sup>94</sup>. Such signs suggest the raising and burning of hearts was spiritual exaltation. Certainly hearts were claimed to rise as energy in heat-fumes (*istli* or heat was always the part Mexicans actually offer from a sacrifice)-- into the presence of the God. Possibly this explains the following Aztec verse:

"My heart rises;  
I fix my eyes upon You,  
next to You, beside You,  
O Giver of Life!"<sup>95</sup>.

Scholars neglect this interpretation of the rite, yet we have seen *Codex Laud* displays an extracted heart *transformed* into a god (Figure 3). *Codex Magliabechiano* is still more explicit: a large, stone-like



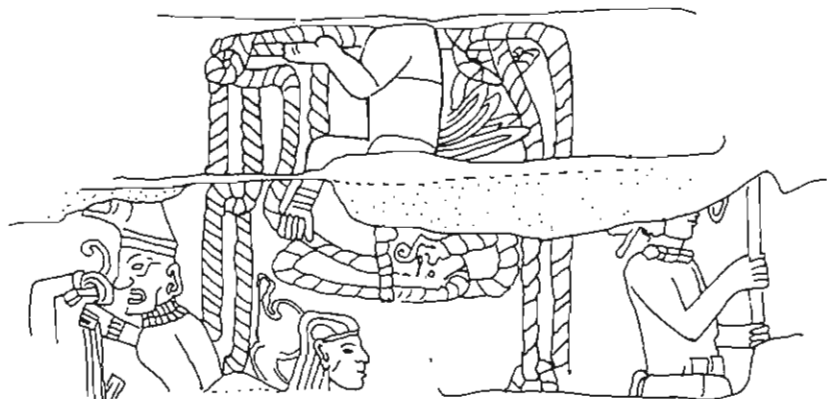


Figure20.: Victim on a rack (?) of tangled intestines. Tajin relief, c.500-1000 c.e.

#### EXTRACTING THE HEART

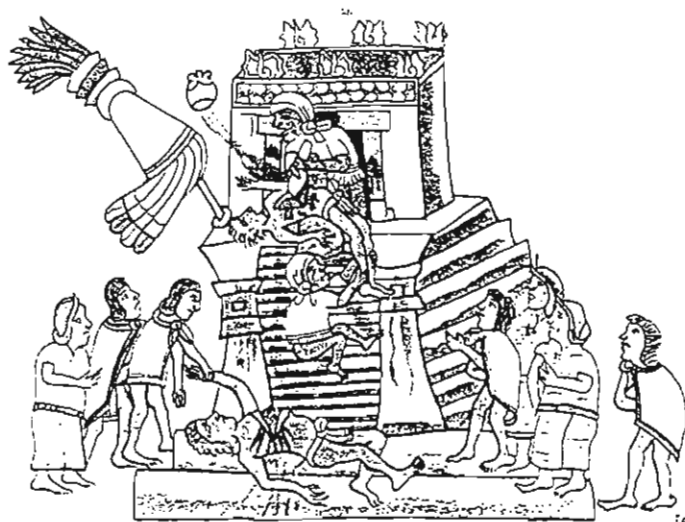




Figure21 : Victim's heart flying Sunward during heart-extraction. Codex Magliabechiano Folio 70. Note similarity between stone-glyph (  ) and heart-glyph (  ).



Figure 22: Sacrificial scene with Quetzalcoatl overhead. Toltec-Maya gold disc from Chichen Itza cenote.

Figure 23 : Sacrificial scene with Quetzalcoatl as victim's bench. Toltec-Maya: Temple of the Warriors at Chichen Itza.

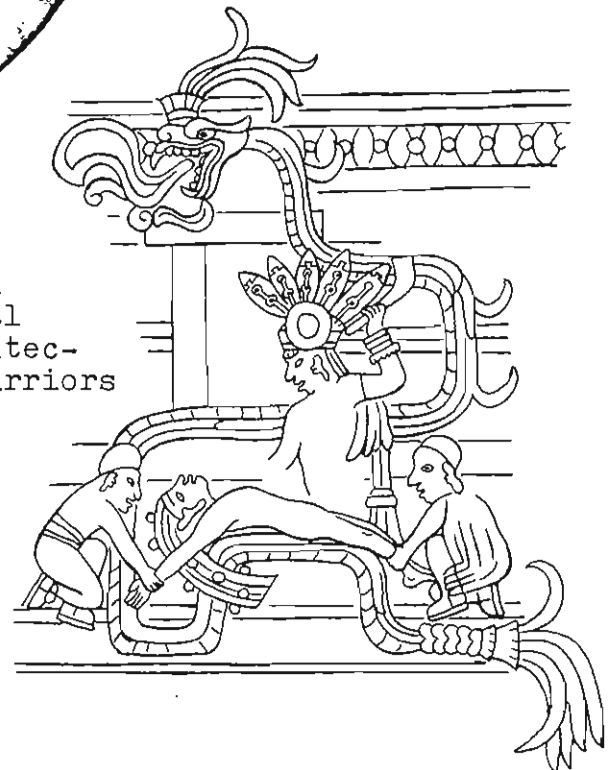




Figure 24 : Cosmic occurrences and battles accompanying a heart-extraction. Codex Nuttall.



heart flies Sunward on a stream of blood above the victim's chest (Figure 21). This is no physical heart: it rises of its own accord.

#### b. Creating a Cavity, and Releasing Blood

In Mesoamerica, gods and goddesses often inhabit small, dark recesses: shells, caves, thrushes' hollows; tiny dark rooms of temples; holes and hollows in *cenotes*<sup>96</sup>. How, then, can they be accessed? Well, *Codex Nuttall* shows (Figure 4) small, wound-like openings () were portals through which gods, people, fire and more enter and depart the human realm- whether from sky, water, earth, womb or hills<sup>97</sup>. This same wound-glyph is seen in the open chests of human offerings.

It thus appears that breaking open certain cavities induced a transformation -direct access to the Gods. Note that *ollin* has *portals* of Place-of-Two-ness () ; that a mystic is "a mirror *pierced through on both sides*"<sup>98</sup>; that Tezcatlipoca bears a *tlachieloni*(pierced mirror)<sup>99</sup> and Quetzalcoatl is "Lord who *pierces*"<sup>100</sup>; that the singer of Tezcatzoncatl's hymn swears he will "*perforate* Mixcoatl's mount"<sup>101</sup>; and flowery wars are "an *opening* through which to propitiate Him who is in Heaven"<sup>102</sup>.

Such imagery suggests the Mesoamerican supernatural was divided from this world by a rather solid wall (as we see in *Codex Nuttall*), which required 'puncturing' for access to occur. Apparently, sacrifice was equated with this 'puncturing' because it created holes in the body that lifted the person out of mundane reality.

Autosacrifice only created small holes in limbs, cheeks and penes, yet it evidently afforded the 'piercer' some degree of transcendence. Classical Mayan reliefs very often depict "vision serpents" arising from the autosacrifice of a nobleman or noblewoman- gods and ancestors

manifesting out of the apparition's jaws<sup>103</sup>. Notice, too, that gods told priests in *Popul Vuh* autosacrifice would be their "salvation"<sup>104</sup>.

Presumably, perforating the heart produced even deeper communion with the Beyond, for *Codex Borgia* and many reliefs and murals show human hearts impaled *by the gods themselves* or *opened* by them (with knives, or punctured by their teeth as carnivore-*nahua*lli<sup>105</sup> - Figures 1,2,42).

It seems that the more blood one released, the greater the transforming emancipation. Chest-opening sacrifice gave a tremendous flow of "precious liquid", so it must have granted unmatched exaltation and liberation of *istli* and *tona*- indeed, the actual *descent* or *arrival* of gods, as Aztec sacrificial hymns proclaim<sup>106</sup>. Notice that a god's arrival often features in depictions of ritual death. One Tajin panel shows a skeletal god (Venus?) descending upon a ball-player being decapitated, another god waiting nearby<sup>107</sup>. In Yucatan art, the Feathered Serpent (god Quetzalcoatl) manifests over the rite, disgorging a soldier-spirit, or providing a 'bench' for the victim (Figures 22 & 23). In *Codex Nuttall*, chest-opening tosses Jaguar and Eagle into spiritual battle, making the Fire Serpent descend (Figure 24). More dramatic still, a celestial feather 'plant' and a Cosmic Tree *emerge* from chests in Mayan illustrations, some watched by four gods (Figs. 25-26).

### c. Decapitating

Decapitation evidently knocked the 'lid' off one's "knotted" body, allowing the seven-segmented *tona*li-spirit to 'untangle'. The Aparico Stela of Tajin, and the Chichen Itza ball court panels, though separated a thousand kilometres and some centuries from each other, both depict a decapitated ball-player sprouting seven serpents (*tona*li?) from his



Figure 25: Victim cooking (?) in a large bowl, as a quetzal feather 'plant' sprouts from his open chest. Stela II, Piedras Negras (Classic Mayan), c.700-800 c.e.



Figure 26: World (?) tree sprouting from victim's chest. Note vulture with victim's eye; Earth Mother's jaws at base; four attendant gods; and the fact that the victim rests on Ahua, the final Mayan day-glyph (☹), which means 'Lord, God'. Codex Dresden.

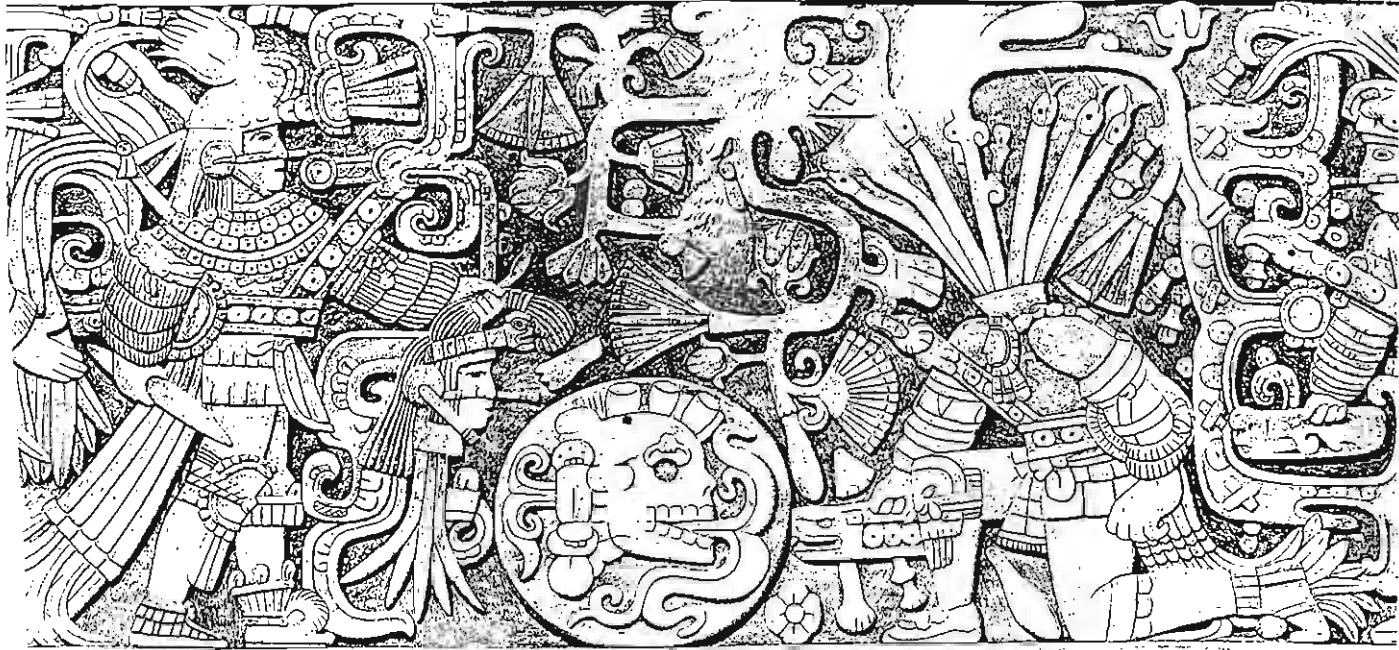


Figure 27: Decapitated ball-game player sprouting seven serpents, two of which are flowering vines. This is a central panel. The rest depict long processions of similarly-clad players approaching this scene from either side. Note the rubber ball at centre has a 'speaking skull' design. Chichen Itza ballcourt panel (Toltec-Mayan, 1000-1300 c.e.).

Figure 28: Aparico stela showing a decapitated, seated ball-game player (gaming baton in one hand, as above). Tajin, Vera Cruz, c. 800-1000 c.e.

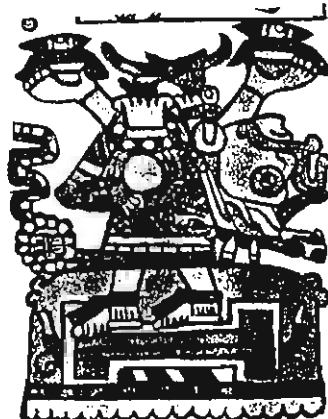


Figure 29: Decapitated figure on ballcourt, with batons (?). Note serpent-hair. Codex Nuttall (Mixtec).



neck. On the Aparico Stela, the serpents are *knotted* at their base (Figures 27-28). *Codex Nuttall* has a similar decapitated ball court figure, with serpents as hair (Figure 29). Perhaps ceremonies of defleshing, painting and otherwise honouring the severed cranium (for instance, stuffing incense in its nose- a Mayan and Aztec practice<sup>108</sup>) were believed to return it to its Divine nature.

#### IV. EXPRESSION IN AZTEC SACRIFICE

Emphasis on breaking open and perforating the body definitely pervades rites of sacrifice. Apart from the self-bleeding perforating of victims, the favoured modes of death indicate it: arrows (which left thousands of holes); gladiatorial; heart extraction; and rites by which victims were flung off poles and pyramids: "(they) came *breaking to pieces*"<sup>109</sup>. In the sacrificial Hymn of Tlaloc, the equating of emancipation/transformation with 'spreading out' the body seems actually stated:

"In Tlalocan, in the turquoise vessel,  
it is wont to come forth, but now is not seen  
*Acatonal* ("On-Reed-born" means 'born to give  
sustenance')....  
*Spread out* in Poyauhtlan  
in the region of mist!  
With timbrels of mist  
our word is carried to Tlalocan...  
In four years  
comes the Arising among us,  
many people  
without knowing it;  
in the Place of the Fleshless,  
the House of Quetzal Feathers,  
is the transformation...  
*Go to all parts*  
*spread out*  
in Poyauhtlan..."<sup>110</sup>

Decapitation's place in Aztec ritual has already been remarked upon. Aztec *tzompantli* and skull-art; their 'Dance of the Severed

Heads'<sup>111</sup>, and how victims gave sermons whilst holding other victims' heads, all speak volumes on the ultimate significance of beheading. One ceremony entailed carrying a cranium four times around a courtyard-covering each of the Cosmic Directions<sup>112</sup>.

Blood's primacy was such that it determined architectural design: the "jade steps" curtains of victim's blood; the thorough caking of temple sanctuaries; the *apetlec*. That distant colleges and temples were anointed with the offering's blood shows the sacramental transformation that was believed to occur in the deceased's fluids, once he or she had been slain.

It also documents how the Aztec saw blood as a liquid of great aesthetic qualities: as paint, jewel, "flower" (the common metaphor for the substance). The following Aztec poem appears to describe heart sacrifice - a warrior's-*nahualli* partaking of the "terrible nectar"; the shower-like curtain of blood - yet it does so in such a way that the event seems beautiful:

"The black and gold butterfly  
is sipping nectar.  
Ah, my friends, it is my heart!  
I send down a shower of white frangipani flowers"<sup>113</sup>.

The Aztec literally wallowed in blood. Their festivals focus on releasing- emancipating- as much of it as possible. Some ceremonies called for priests or people to anoint or cover themselves with blood through spirited fighting and other means<sup>114</sup>. Gladiatorial sacrifice was "the Streaking" because so much blood was shed (the aim being to cut the victim in many places)<sup>115</sup>. Likewise, ball court sacrifices entailed dragging victims over the playing field: "it was as if they *painted it with the victim's blood*"<sup>116</sup>. It is no accident that Sahagun's informants praise how abundantly one victim's blood flows, after the heart was removed:



"gushed up high; it was as if it rose;  
it was as if it showered; it was as if  
it boiled up"<sup>117</sup>.

As for limbs, Chapter II of Part A. already described the special relics fashioned from victims' legs and arms. Sahagun adds: "they performed many ceremonies with the bones"<sup>118</sup>. Crossed thigh bones featured on priestly capes, and amaranth dough bones were the focus of numerous rites<sup>119</sup>, but by far the best piece of evidence comes from Toci's thigh skin mask, which was deemed so powerful that soldiers fought over placing it within the borders of different lands<sup>120</sup>.

The use of victims' skins in Aztec ceremony is especially indicative of how transformative flaying was held to be. *Codex Borbonicus* shows that priests who appeared dressed in entire human skins and elaborate god-costumes were taken as *being* the actual god or goddess, just as Sahagun's informants state<sup>121</sup>. Penitents competed for victims' skins, in the belief that wearing these would cure their illnesses and make them "gods incarnate" (which is exactly how they conducted themselves when fighting, dancing, begging, receiving gifts and "announcing the abundance of future years" in the stinking pelts)<sup>122</sup>.

Human skins were so sacred that many were interred in the *hetlatiloya* (vaults under *teocalli*). Some stuffed pelts stood in the palace, where people came to view them<sup>123</sup>. During *Tlaxipehualiztli*, the coming year's rainfall was prophesied from the juices oozing from a victim's skin hung in the temple<sup>124</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Arthur G. Miller, "Introduction to the Dover Edition", Z. Nuttall (ed.), *The Codex Nuttall* xiii.

<sup>2</sup> F. Toor, *A Treasury of Mexican Folkways* (New York: Crown, 1947), 70.

- <sup>3</sup> Theodor-Wilhelm Dinzl, "The Psychology of Ancient Mexican Symbolism", *Spiritual Disciplines: Papers from the Eranos Yearbook Bollingen Series XXX:4* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 107.
- <sup>4</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>5</sup> G. Pasztory, *Aztec Art*, 155.
- <sup>6</sup> Bernardino de Sahagun, *Florentine Codex* Bk. 4/5:3:157.
- <sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, Bk. 2: Appendix 239.
- <sup>8</sup> Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Aztec Thought and Culture: A Study of the Ancient Nahuatl Mind* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1963), 64f.
- <sup>9</sup> Henry B. Nicholson, "Religion in Pre-Hispanic Mexico", Table 3.
- <sup>10</sup> *Popul Vuh*, 3ff.
- <sup>11</sup> Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods and Rites of the Ancient Calender*, 232.
- <sup>12</sup> Bernardino de Sahagun, *Florentine Codex* Bk. 2: 132.
- <sup>13</sup> Cottie Burland & William Former, *Feathered Serpent and Smoking Mirror*, 14.
- <sup>14</sup> Eva Hunt, *Transformation of the Hummingbird*, 89. See also G.J. Neumann, "The Experience of Time in Nahuatl Religion", 259.
- <sup>15</sup> Alan R. Sandstrom, *Corn is Our Blood*, 239-240.
- <sup>16</sup> Irene Nicholson, *Mexican and Central American Mythology* (London: Paul Hamlyn, 1966), 2-3.
- <sup>17</sup> Alan R. Sandstrom, *Corn is Our Blood*, 257.
- <sup>18</sup> Irene Nicholson, *Firefly in the Night*, 89.
- <sup>19</sup> *Codex Matritensis* 115v, 175c.
- <sup>20</sup> This being a common theme of Toltec and Toltec-Mayan reliefs of 900-1300 c.e. See Donald Robertson, *Pre-Columbian Architecture* (London: Prentice-Hall International, 1963) Figure 45, and Victor Wolfgang von Hagen, *Ancient Sun Kingdoms of the Americas* (St. Albans: Paladin, 1973), 131.
- <sup>21</sup> Cecilia F. Klein, "Woven Heaven, Tangled Earth: A Weaver's Paradigm of the Mesoamerican Cosmos", A.F. Aveni & E. Urton (eds.), *Ethnoastronomy and Archaeoastronomy in the American Tropics* (New York: Annals of the New York Academy of Science, No. 385, 1982), 4-6.
- <sup>22</sup> *Codex Nuttall* 18, 19.
- <sup>23</sup> E.Z. Vogt, *Tortillas for the Gods: A Symbolic Analysis of Zimcanteo Rituals* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1976), 3-4.
- <sup>24</sup> *Popul Vuh*, 113-114.
- <sup>25</sup> Ixtlilxochitl, *Historia Chichimecain* William H. Prescott, *History of the Conquest of Mexico* (Revised Edition, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1913), 116-117.
- <sup>26</sup> *Codex Nuttall* 44, 51.
- <sup>27</sup> Laurette Sejourne, *Burning Water*, Figure 59.
- <sup>28</sup> J.K. Delhalle & A. Luyckx, "The Nahuatl Myth of the Creation of Mankind: A Coastal Connection?", *American Antiquity* 15:1 (January 1986), 118.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ritual of the Bacab* (ed. R.L. Roys, Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1969), xvii.
- <sup>30</sup> *Popul Vuh* 2f.
- <sup>31</sup> A. Villa, *The Maya of East Central Quintana Roo* Publ. 559 (Washington D.C.: Carnegie Institute of Washington, 1945), 97.
- <sup>32</sup> *Codex Mendoza*, 63.
- <sup>33</sup> *Codex Borgia* in Laurette Sejourne, *Burning Water*, Fig. 5.
- <sup>34</sup> Neville Drury, *Don Juan, Mescalito and Modern Magic: The Mythology of Inner Space* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), 10-11.
- <sup>35</sup> E.Z. Vogt, *Tortillas for the Gods*, 62.
- <sup>36</sup> Irene Nicholson, *Firefly in the Night*, 119.

- 37 *Codex Mendoza*, 11, 18.
- 38 Hochob temple in Campeche for example, S. Eric Thompson, *Mayan History and Religion*, Pl.7.
- 39 Note Chalcatzingo c.700-600 b.c.e., D.C.Grove, "Chalcatzingo, Morelos, Mexico: A Reappraisal of the Olmec Rock Carvings", *American Antiquity* 33:4 (October 1968), 490.
- 40 S. Sugiyama, "Burials Dedicated to the Old Temple of Quetzalcoatl at Teotihuacan, Mexico", *American Antiquity* 54:1 (January 1989), 99.
- 41 *Codex Mendoza*, 38-39.
- 42 *Chilam Balam*, 7 (14).
- 43 *ibid.*
- 44 E.Z.Vogt, *Tortillas for the God* 50-52.
- 45 Linda Schele & Mary Ellen Miller, *The Blood of Kings: Dynasty and Ritual in Maya Art* (New York: George Braziller Inc., 1986), Pl. 110 (293).
- 46 Laurette Sejourné, *Burning Water*, Figures 12-14.
- 47 *Codex Nuttall*, 49.
- 48 *Codex Mendoza*, 1-3, 39, 48-49.
- 49 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex* Bk.2:24:72).
- 50 Cottie Burland & William Fomer, *Feathered Serpent and Smoking Mirror*, 40, 48.
- 51 Laurette Sejourné, *Burning Water*, Figure 75.
- 52 Juan de Tovar (trans. & ed. G.Kubler & C.Gibson), *Tovar Calendar* (New Haven: Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1951), xi.
- 53 *Codex Riosin* Cottie A.Burland, *Magic Books of Mexico*, 17.
- 54 E.Z.Vogt, *Tortillas for the Gods*, 17-21.
- 55 Irene Nicholson, *Firefly in the Night*, 182.
- 56 F.T.Neumann, "Paper- A Sacred Material in Aztec Ritual", *History of Religions* 13:2 (October 1973), in *passim*.
- 57 *Ritual of the Bacabs*, 9.
- 58 Alfonso Caso, *The Aztecs: People of the Sun*, 64-65.
- 59 *ibid.*, 13.
- 60 S. Eric Thompson, *Maya History and Religion*, 176.
- 61 Eva Hunt, *Transformation of the Hummingbird*, 92.
- 62 Hernan Cortes, *Letters*, 107.
- 63 E.Z.Vogt, *Tortillas of the Gods*, 62.
- 64 *Codex Nuttall*, 21.
- 65 *Cantares Mexicanos*, Song 67:19.
- 66 Irene Nicholson, *Firefly in the Night*, 156, 203.
- 67 G.H.Gossen, "Animal Souls and Human Destiny in Chamula", *Man* 10:3 (September 1975), 449.
- 68 *ibid.*, Bk.6:18.
- 69 *Chilam Balam*, 27 (41).
- 70 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk.6:18.
- 71 Ayocuan, quoted in Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Native Mesoamerican Spirituality*, 50.
- 72 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk.6:21.
- 73 *Codice Matritensis*, Folio 116r. *ibid.*, 210.
- 74 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk.3:2:11.
- 75 *Codice Matritense* in Leon-Portilla, *Native Mesoamerican Spirituality*, 141.
- 76 *Book of Songs of Dzitbalache* 77-78 in *ibid.*, 231.
- 77 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk.6:21.

- 78 *Collection of Mexican Songs* Folio 14v. in Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Native Mesoamerican Spirituality*, 184.
- 79 *Collection of Mexican Songs* Folio 14r.
- 80 Laurette Sejourne, *Burning Water*, 62.
- 81 Alan Sandstrom, *Corn is Our Blood*, 287.
- 82 *Chilam Balam* 6 (12), 7 (14).
- 83 Maud Oakes, *The Two Crosses of Todos Santos* Bollinger Series XXVII (New York: Pantheon, 1951), 21.
- 84 *Cantares Mexicanos* 64:10.
- 85 Irene Nicholson, *Firefly in the Night*, 193.
- 86 E.M. Moctezuma, "New Finds in the Great Temple", *National Geographic*, 158:6, December 1980, 766-767.
- 87 Cecilia F. Klein, "Woven Heaven, Tangled Earth", 11f.
- 88 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk.6:21.
- 89 T. de Motolinia, *History of the Indians*, 119.
- 90 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk.3: Appendix 2.
- 91 Diego Duran, *The Aztecs*, 16-17.
- 92 *Popul Vuh*, 174, 185.
- 93 G.H. Gossen, "Animal Souls and Human Destiny (in Chamula)", 449-450.
- 94 F.X. Clavigero (trans. J.O. Anderson), *Reglas de la lengua mexicana* (*Mezozofanti xxii:10*) (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1973), 8.
- 95 *Codice Matritensis* Folio 195r. in Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Native Mesoamerican Spirituality*, 187.
- 96 J.S. Henderson, *The World of the Ancient Maya* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1981), 181. See Don Diego Sarmiento de Figueroa's report to Charles V, in which he describes Mayan beliefs about their *cenotes*.
- 97 *Codex Nuttall*, 18, 19, 21, etc.
- 98 *Codice Matritensis* Folio 118r.-v. in Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Native Mesoamerican Spirituality*, 200.
- 99 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex* Bk.6:3, 14.
- 100 Laurette Sejourne, *Burning Water*, 142.
- 101 Bernardino de Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk.2: App.242.
- 102 Irene Nicholson, *Firefly in the Night*, 42-44.
- 103 Linda Schele & Mary Ellen Miller, *The Blood of Kings* Plates.
- 104 *Popul Vuh*, 190.
- 105 Pyramid of Tlahuizcalpantecuhli relief, Tula, Donald Robertson, *Pre-Columbian Architecture* (London: Prentice-Hall, 1963) Figure 45. A similar motif occurs on the Toltec-Mayan Temple of Kukulcan. See Victor Wolfgang von Hagen, *The Ancient Sun Kingdoms of the Americas* (St. Albans: Paladin, 1973), 131.
- 106 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk.2:160f.
- 107 Tajin ballcourt panel, G.H.S. Bushnell, *Ancient Arts of the Americas* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1967), 72.
- 108 E.M. Moctezuma, "New Finds in the Great Temple", 772-773. We have already noted that the severed head in *Codex Dresden* warts incense from its nose.
- 109 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk.2:21:48.
- 110 *ibid.*, Bk.2: App: 224-225.
- 111 Burr Cartwright Brundage, *The Jade Steps*, 160.
- 112 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 148.
- 113 Poem in D. McDowell, "The Aztecs", *National Geographic*, 158: 6, December 1980.
- 114 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex* Bk. 2: 30: 120-121, 33: 133, 135.

- 
- 115 Burr Cartwright Brundage, *The Jade Steps* 161.
  - 116 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex* Bk. 2: 34: 145.
  - 117 *ibid.*, Bk. 2: 25: 44.
  - 118 *ibid.*, Bk. 2: 3: 5.
  - 119 *ibid.*, Bk. 2: 24: 72.
  - 120 *ibid.*, Bk. 2: 30: 120-121.
  - 121 Patricia Anawalt, "Understanding Aztec Human Sacrifice", 39 - 40.
  - 122 Juan de Tovar, *Tovar Calendar*, pl. iv.
  - 123 B. C. Brundage, *The Jade Steps* 220.
  - 124 Juan de Tovar, *Tovar Calendar*, pl. iv.

## TWO : THE TRANSFORMATION OF ATONEMENT

### I. FLAWLESS ACTION AS AN ULTIMATE

#### a. In Aztec Cosmology

We have mentioned that, in Aztec calendrics, gods slot into, and rotate around, each other's places in a precise, regular manner. Even in sacred art they are "frozen in unalterable positions"<sup>1</sup>— their actions forming repetitive, flawless patterns geared to the cosmic 'clock'.

It is obvious that the Mesoamerican universe was well-ordered. Myth and history, space and time are habitually fused in the quest for recurrent patterns: numeric, thematic or spatial. A recent translation of a Classic Mayan Quiragua stela suggests Mesoamericans saw their entire creation-story as enacted in the cycles of the night-sky<sup>2</sup>.

#### b. In Aztec Social Mores

Given such a cosmology, it is not surprising that every aspect of Aztec life similarly demanded strictness, piety<sup>3</sup>, and "deep reverence"<sup>4</sup>:

"they hold their gods in more fear and reverence than we show our God...(serving them) with great vigour... night and day...on hills and cliffs"<sup>5</sup>.

Mesoamericans still equate "being good" with precise performance of ceremonies and obligations<sup>6</sup>.

Also, like the Romans, the Aztecs were obsessed with legalities:

"there is no citizen that does not know the laws, because the fathers...never ceased instructing their sons"<sup>7</sup>.

It was said that an Aztec had merely to be shown a drawn line and told not to cross it, in order to be kept prisoner<sup>8</sup>. Even today, Nahuas exhibit much detached seriousness and formality<sup>9</sup>.

## II. HUMANITY'S PROBLEMATIC STATE : ERROR AND REMORSE

These attitudes meant that misconduct of any type was a very serious matter for the Aztecs. A minor blunder: a dancer making a false step; a novice priest allowing a doughball-offering to roll; an offering priest with a tiny speck of lint on his tunic - saw the offender ruthlessly beaten or even executed<sup>10</sup>.

This harshness was not only applied by authorities. When Prince Nezahualpilli had his own son and two thousand others garrotted for making fun of a Tula noblewoman, "*the people applauded so severe and exemplary a punishment*"<sup>11</sup>. If an officer was demoted or exiled for having an affair, all his peers abandoned him, jeering: "Go, rascal! How can we care for thee?"<sup>12</sup>. Likewise, if a father discovered his daughter had been flirting, he would tell her she could now "never come near to the gods...Better that thou should *perish immediately*"<sup>13</sup>.

Neither was there much hope of clemency from the gods:

"...even if no one should see you...bear in mind that the God of the Near and Close will see you. He will provoke the anger of the people. He will arrange it. He will send you that which He will determine, perhaps paralysis, blindness or putrescence. And you, then, you will desire to be in tatters, in rags"<sup>14</sup>.

One of the Aztecs' principal gods, Tezcatlipoca, watched and judged humanity from his mirror, shooting at them his four arrows: "punishment for sins"<sup>15</sup>. If penitents had secretly engaged in carnal acts prior to visiting his statue, it was claimed its obsidian eyes would grow misty in condemnation. The 'guilty' were then dragged away and slain<sup>16</sup>.

As though such severity were not sufficient, an Aztec also carried around a sense of being *personally responsible* for community ills. Mesoamericans believed a person's *tlatlacolli* (sin) could supernaturally cause all the suffering and death which befell his or her

town<sup>17</sup>. Chamula and Quintana Roo Mayans still attribute plagues and droughts to the anger, pride or sexual misconduct of some residents<sup>18</sup>.

*Tlatlacolli* is not just 'sin' in the Christian sense. Clendinnen emphasised that it is also a sacred, disordering force<sup>19</sup>. It generates *tlazomiquistli*- 'Filth-Death'. For instance, turkey chicks are supposed to die when brought into the presence of an adulterer<sup>20</sup>.

This might explain why "all Mexico knew it" if a priest made a ritual blunder<sup>21</sup>. Apparently, erring could incur total devastation.

Consequently, any mistake carried with it a crushing sense of dread, guilt and ostracism. To blunder was to condemn one's self and others to death, a fact seemingly embodied in Classical Nahuatl, wherein only a long vowel differentiates *ni-c-yecoa* ("I sin") from *ni-c-ye.coa* ("I finish it")<sup>22</sup>.

Of course, like people anywhere, the Aztecs were fallible, so how did they come to terms this draconian outlook? Simply, they seem to have 'misbehaved' in secret. Sahagun's informants tell us that if a man privately drunk alcohol, or kept several mistresses, it was accepted, as long as he was very, very discreet<sup>23</sup>. Notice how the Emperor was lauded not so much for never drinking, as for "being *never seen* drunk in public", and for acting "extremely harsh with those who were"<sup>24</sup>. Mendieta<sup>25</sup> and Duran<sup>26</sup> concur that the Aztecs prayed not so much for forgiveness as for their iniquities remaining *hidden*.

This apparent double standard sprang from Aztec emphasis on decorum in social behaviour. However vile one was in private, one was expected to avoid displaying this publicly, for others' sake.

We can nevertheless imagine that the contradictions of this tormented the Aztec soul. On the one hand, all *tlatlacolli* (sin) was deathly serious. No matter how minor, a mistake was "blasphemy, ritual



offence, falsehood, adultery, drunkenness"<sup>27</sup>. On the other hand, people are naturally inclined to err.

Perhaps a consequence of dealing with this paradox was *nonecoliloca* - "the hatred which I feel for myself"<sup>28</sup> - a self-loathing remorse. Poets speak of "hearts weeping" over secret sins<sup>29</sup>; of making their way "crawling" upon the earth<sup>30</sup> - *titlallo'que, tisoqui'que* ("we are of earth, we are of mud")<sup>31</sup>:

"We take pleasure in nothing. We are altogether miserable, O wretch (my self), thou art my adversary! I would have thee suffer!"<sup>32</sup>.

Severe self-condemnation remains a popular emotion in modern Mexico:

"(We like) to tear ourselves apart, to denigrate ourselves...to admit we have all the defects in the world"<sup>33</sup>.

### III. MEANS: ATONEMENT THROUGH BLOOD PENANCE AND CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

#### a. Blood Penance Atonement: Partial and of Entire Lives

How could the Aztecs deal with *tlatlacolli* and self-hate? Art points to *tlacoquixtiliztli*: blood penance, as time-honoured means (Figure 30). Self-bleeding penances and sacrifices were conducted whenever Mesoamericans wished to 'remedy some misfortune or necessity'<sup>34</sup>, tears and blood being felt to wash out "all the vile qualities"<sup>35</sup> within us. Priests - being continuously penitent - are called "clean...washed"<sup>36</sup>. Sins are atoned through *blood penance*, as *Codex Magliabechiano* depicts (see Figure 31) - tongues slit for vices of speech; ears for vices of hearing<sup>37</sup>.

However, even torturous *tlacoquixtiliztli* could only suffice for minor misdeeds. This is where human sacrifice comes into the picture. When Hernan Cortes slandered Aztec gods at the *Templo Mayor*, Emperor

Moctezuma told him he would now have to offer many sacrifices to atone for this "great *tacacul*" (sin or offence)<sup>38</sup>. The sacrifices were certainly *human*, for elsewhere Diaz says Moctezuma "insisted on killing some more men and boys" over something he considered disturbing, after which he felt "much happier"<sup>39</sup>.

In fact, 'penance' and 'human sacrifice' were interchangeable words in the Aztec language<sup>40</sup>. Clearly, grievous misdeeds could only be "paid" for with human lives: others' or one's *own*.

Somewhat like Samurai, who commit *seppuku* (ritual disembowelment) as "an ultimate justification...a way of saving face"<sup>41</sup>, many Aztec *teqihua* (soldiers) could have found human sacrifice an honourable end to the ostracism, condemnation and guilt they were subjected to for "failing" in some capacity. Amongst Mayans- as Aguilar, Landa and Clavigero attest- suicide was the usual means of dealing with any sense of guilt:

"for a slight (reason)...(they) hanged themselves, or threw themselves down precipices, or put an end to themselves by abstinence"<sup>42</sup>.

Except when overdosing on *teonanactl* (a drug-potion), suicide was not customary amongst the Aztecs<sup>43</sup>, so sacrificial death may have served instead.

Take the case of the Texcocoan dignitary who unwittingly committed a crime: marrying a noblewoman already betrothed to Prince Nezahualcoyotl. For this, he was given an 'honourable' death by being sent on a hopeless military campaign, wherein he was killed or taken for sacrifice<sup>44</sup>.

Nullifying one's errors through sacrificial death is also evident in the story of Hunapu and Ixbalanque. Since 400 c.e., the tale of these Divine Twins was prominent in Mesoamerica, being represented all over

# BLOOD PENANCE

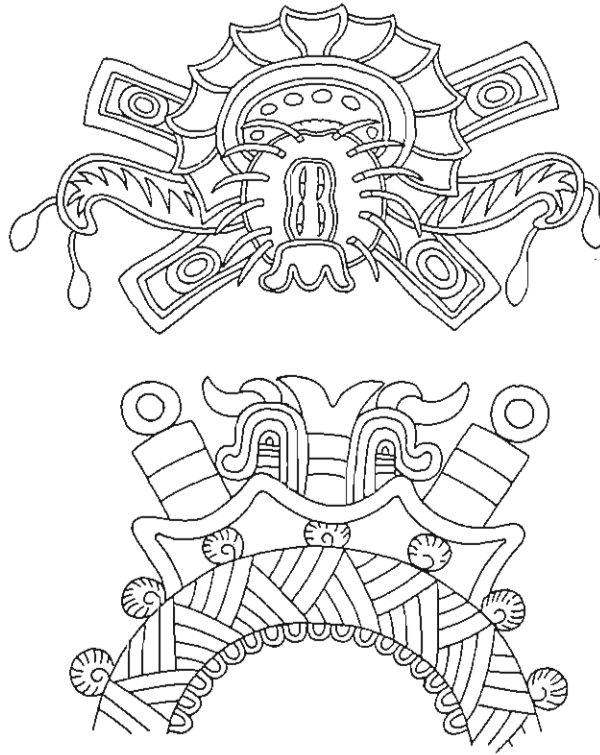


Figure 30: Emblems of penance: a Teotihuacan (200 b.c.e.- 750 c.e.) fresco of a cactus, into which self-bleeding knives are embedded, and an Aztec (1400-1520 c.e.) relief of a penance symbol, the curved section symbolizing the ball of twine into which penitents stuck bloodied spines and thorns.

Figure 31: Autosacrifice and weeping before god Mictlantecuhctli (Lord of Death). Codex Magliabechiano, Folio 79r.



the Mayan region on vase paintings. Local variations on the legend (e.g. Homshuk in Vera Cruz) seem to be depicted on Tajin ball court sculptures, and certain Oaxacan jewellery.

The torturous trials of the Twins in Xibalba (the Underworld) – their *being repeatedly sacrificed* – captivated Mayan artists, suggesting this episode was the tale's climax. If that is so, the myth is clear proof that sacrificial death was a "purification through suffering", for the Twins themselves, after triumphing over pain and death, declare:

"Here is the *sinner*, the warrior...the grasper,  
his *sins conquered* to cry for you there"<sup>45</sup>.

Aztec myths similarly imply redemption through sacrificial death. Syphilis-ridden Nahuatzin and incestuous, intoxicated Quetzalcoatl remedy their lowly states by plunging into bonfires. Nahuatzin emerges as the Sun<sup>46</sup>. Quetzalcoatl emerges as Venus. Yapan likewise pays for being seduced by being slain (thereafter living as a scorpion)<sup>47</sup>.

More importantly, death in war or sacrifice is virtually *described* as "washing away" the deceased's misdeeds. The battleground is "the Sea"<sup>48</sup>; fighting is when "the waves wash over us"<sup>49</sup>.

#### b. Human Sacrifice as Capital Punishment

There was a second means by which human sacrifice offered atonement. Death was the penalty for most crimes – even minor matters such as use of a false argument; striking one's parents; or swiping a few ears of corn<sup>50</sup>, and the death penalty usually took the form of human sacrifice. In Chapter II of Part A, we saw that rebellious lords, spies, fornicators, thieves, judges who gave false reports, priests who gave bad advice and those who insulted the gods were all sacrificed, and

that the Cuapipiptlin and Maacuilquaitl festivals were geared to slaying criminals.

Certainly when the impersonator of Tezcatlipoca was slain, it was treated as a "lesson" to onlookers, apparently on the consequences of crimes of avarice:

"And this (his death) betokened our life on earth, for he who rejoices, who possessed riches, who esteemed our Lord's sweetness...thus ended in great misery"<sup>51</sup>.

In a similar sense, prisoners of war were "criminals" in Aztec eyes, and human sacrifice was a means of punishing them. Consider how Moctezuma II defended human sacrifice in speaking with Cortes:

"We have the right to take away the lives of our enemies. We could kill them in the heat of battle as you (Spaniards) do yours. What is the injustice in allowing those who are *condemned to death* to die in *honour* of the gods?"<sup>52</sup>.

By this understanding, *all* Aztec victims were capital offenders: either condemned criminals; slaves who had fallen into the sacrificial category through repeated misdeeds; or prisoners of war.

The 'offence' of being a prisoner of war was presumably either that of not submitting to Aztec rule, or simply the dishonour of being defeated. Note that Emperor Cuauhtemoc begged Cortes to slay him when he was captured, and that the Mayan lord in *Rabinal Achi* felt he must be sacrificed for losing his battle:

"Alas, truly, I must die...I await only my death, my destruction"<sup>53</sup>.

#### IV. EXPRESSION IN AZTEC SACRIFICIAL RITES

##### a. Personal Atonement in Aztec Rites

In agreement with the motive Sahagun's informants give for slaying the Tezcatlipoca *ixiptla*, Duran says a speech was sometimes made after a

human sacrifice which concerned our "low state" and how misery and death pursued those who "fell" morally<sup>54</sup>. This again supports our view that ritual death was envisaged as punishment or atonement for misdeeds of some sort.

Frequently, Aztec hymns of human sacrifice refer to the performers (especially the victim) as *penitents*. The victim in the Song of Atlaua comes "with penance sandals"<sup>55</sup>. The priest or victim in Song of Tlaloc brings "festal bundles of blood-stained ears of corn"<sup>56</sup>. Similarly, the victim in Song of Cihuacoatl sings that the goddess, too, is a penitent (blood-spattered eagle). The singer (victim?) chants of thorns used in blood penance; of brushwood (probably for sweeping of temple grounds or for feeding the sacred fires - acts of penance conducted by women):

"The Eagle..  
whose face is spattered in blood..  
The wise goddess of Chalma.."

"The thorns  
The thorns fill up my hand  
The thorns fill up my hand  
Like corn of godly field..  
Brushwood fill my hand  
Brushwood fill my hand..."<sup>57</sup>

There was also a great deal of "washing" imagery in the treatment of victims, as though they were being purged of error. Slave-victims were "the bathed ones". All male victims were painted in blue stripes, like water, and were made to "enter the sand", which was sprinkled before them<sup>58</sup> - as though they were on a sea shore. Gladiatorial death, in like manner, was "dancing on the breast of the flood"<sup>59</sup>.

#### b. Community Atonement in Aztec Rites

The human offering impersonating Mother Goddess Toci is described as "consecrated to annul all sin"<sup>60</sup>. This is just a sample of the

element of community atonement through sacrificial death which seems to have pervaded some Aztec ceremonies.

The practice of giving victims messages and petitions to take with them to the gods gives some indication that a victim could serve as representative for the people. Peralta positively observed that in times of dire emergency, Aztecs selected one person to go beyond death to plead for them<sup>61</sup>, which could explain the tone of this verse of a sacrificial hymn:

"To the Region of Turquoise Mist  
To plead for us (for our sake)  
he shall go"<sup>62</sup>.

It could also account for the following Aztec poem:

"I embrace mankind...with trembling quetzal feathers,  
with circlets of song,  
*I give myself to the community.*  
I will carry you with me to the Place where we all,  
one day, all must be taken"<sup>63</sup>.

However, clearest evidence of 'community salvation' through a human offering comes from Mayan descriptions. For example, the *Chilam Balam* says one female victim:

"took upon herself the *guilt* of the locusts  
that have destroyed all that the people sowed"<sup>64</sup>.

Another passage implies human offerings absorb community vices:

"Three lives, three lives, are consumed by fire...  
Malevolence shall be consumed. Secrecy shall be consumed"<sup>65</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Arthur G. Miller, "Introduction to the Dover Edition", xii-xiii.

<sup>2</sup> Richard A. Wertime & Angela H. Schuster, "Written in the Stars: Celestial Origin of the Maya Creation Myth", *Archaeology* 46:4 (July-August 1993), 30-32.

<sup>3</sup> Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods and Rites*, 95-96.

<sup>4</sup> T. Motolinia, *History of the Indians of New Spain*, 148.

<sup>5</sup> Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods and Rites*, 95, 129, 169.

<sup>6</sup> F.M. Cancian, *What are Norms? A Study of Beliefs and Action in a Mayan Community*, 55-56.

<sup>7</sup> Clavigero in E. Peterson, *Ancient Mexico*, 121.

- 8 *ibid.*, 94.
- 9 Oscar Lewis, *Life in a Mexican Village - Tepoztlán Revisited* Urbana: University of Illinois, 1962, 287-290.
- 10 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex* Bk.2: 6: 11; Bk.2: 25: 80-82, 85-86.
- 11 *Historia Chichimeca* App.3 in Prescott, *History of the Conquest of Mexico*, 400-410.
- 12 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex* Bk.2: 25: 105.
- 13 *ibid.*, 6: 18.
- 14 *ibid.*, 6: 19.
- 15 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods and Rites of the Ancient Calendar*, 99.
- 16 Juan de Tovar, *Tovar Calendar*, xix.
- 17 Diego de Landa, *Relacion* in F. Peterson, *Ancient Mexico*, 150.
- 18 A. Villa, *The Maya of East Central Quintana Roo* Publication 559 (Washington D.C.: Carnegie Institute of Washington, 1945), 99.
- 19 Inga Clendinnen, *Aztecs* 50-52.
- 20 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex* Bk.5: 29: 191-192.
- 21 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods and Rites of the Ancient Calendar*, 95.
- 22 F.H. Clavigero, *Rules of the Aztec Language*, 7.
- 23 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex* Bk.2: 27: 102-103; 2: 34: 148; Bk.3: 5: 59.
- 24 Kurt Ross, (commentary), *Codex Mendoza*, 26.
- 25 Mendieta in F. Peterson, *Ancient Mexico*, 150.
- 26 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods and Rites of the Ancient Calendar*, 98, 101.
- 27 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex* Bk.2: 5: 1. Bk.2: 25: 84-86.
- 28 F.H. Clavigero, *Rules of the Aztec Language*, 78.
- 29 Irene Nicholson, *Firefly in the Night*, 186.
- 30 Nezahualcoyotl poem in Laurette Sejourné, *Burning Water*, 7.
- 31 F.H. Clavigero, *Rules of the Aztec Language*, 88.
- 32 Poem in Irene Nicholson, *Firefly in the Night*, 191.
- 33 A. Riding, *Mexico: Into the Volcano* (London: LB.Taurus, 1985), 20.
- 34 Diego de Landa, *Relacion*, XV (83).
- 35 *Poquí Wuh*.
- 36 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex* Bk.6: 21.
- 37 T. de Motolinia, *History of the Indians*, 82.
- 38 Bernal Diaz, *History of the Conquest of New Spain*, 203.
- 39 *ibid.*, 221.
- 40 Burr Cartwright Brundage, *The Jade Steps*, 152, 187.
- 41 K. van Tulleken, *Japari* (Amsterdam: Time-Life, 1985?), 146.
- 42 Francisco Clavigero, *Historia antigua de Mexico* in Frank J. Neumann, "The Black Man in the Cave: An Aztec Variant of the Gatekeeper Motif", 47.
- 43 *ibid.*
- 44 Frances Gilmor, *Flute of the Smoking Mirror*, 109-118.
- 45 *Poquí Wuh*, 141.
- 46 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk.2: 124.
- 47 Alfonso Caso, *The Aztecs: People of the Sun*, 26.
- 48 Irene Nicholson, *Firefly in the Night*, 22.
- 49 *Cantares Mexicanos* Song 68, Folio 58 r. 5a.
- 50 F. Peterson, *Ancient Mexico*, 123-124.
- 51 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 2: 24: 21.
- 52 Moctezuma to Cortes, in Clavigero, as quoted in C.S. Braden, *Religious Aspects of the Conquest of Mexico*, 59.



- 49 *Cantares Mexicanos* Song 68, Folio 58r, 5a.
- 50 F. Peterson, *Ancient Mexico*, 123-124.
- 51 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 2: 24: 21.
- 52 Moctezuma to Cortes, in Clavigero, as quoted in C. S. Braden, *Religious Aspects of the Conquest of Mexico*, 59.
- 53 *Rabinal Achi* in *R. A. Teatro Indigenas Prehispanico* as translated by Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Pre-Columbian Literature*, 105.
- 54 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods and Rites of the Ancient Calendar*, 184.
- 55 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex* Bk. 2: 243.
- 56 *ibid.*, 2: 224-225.
- 57 *ibid.*, Bk. 2: 236-237.
- 58 *ibid.*, Bk. 2: 30: 123.
- 59 *Cantares Mexicanos* Song 67: 19.
- 60 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods and Rites of the Ancient Calendar*, 232.
- 61 Pecalta in F. Peterson, *Ancient Mexico*, 147.
- 62 Sahagun (Sacrificial hymn) in Irene Nicholson, *Firefly in the Night*, 87.
- 63 *MSS Romance de los*, Folio 27r., Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Pre-Columbian Literature*, 82.
- 64 *Chilam Balam*, 42 (112).
- 65 *ibid.*, 32 (65).

### THREE: THE TRANSFORMATION OF REMORSE AND RUIN

#### I. SICKNESS, RUIN AND SELF-ABANDONMENT AS AN ULTIMATE

From the last two chapters, it is obvious that the manner Aztecs perceived their gods (their Ultimate) profoundly shaped the means of transformation they sought. Here we shall establish that this is equally true with regards to their tendency to regard divinities as humiliated, diseased or debauched.

Consider principal Aztec deities. Huitzilopochtli is really a mass-murderer: "the Terrible One, Slayer of Races"<sup>1</sup>; Tlaloc is found in gout, dropsy and rheumatism<sup>2</sup>; and *Codex Borgia* shows Tezcatlipoca as Uauntzin- a humiliated, stripped, bound and sacrificed captive<sup>3</sup>. Elsewhere, he is "Mocker", "Sodomite", "God of the Evil Omen"<sup>4</sup>. Even the honoured Sun is actually *Necoc Xaotl*- "Sun of Discord".

The wider we spread our search, the more examples appear. *Codex Laud* shows goddess Mayahuel as a poor, naked, homeless drunk. God Tezcatzoncatl is "the wine- full of sin"; Chicomecóatl is "Causer and Giver of Ailments"<sup>5</sup>; Xipe is "a man who has been flayed and ill-treated"<sup>6</sup> or "He who drinks at night"<sup>7</sup>; Tlazolteotl is "Filth, Abandoned Mistress, Eyes full of Ashes"<sup>8</sup>; Xolotl is a slaverling hunchback whose feet are turned backward to mark his cowardice.

The Aztecs' neighbours were even less polite about some gods. Consider Mayan divinities such as Pus Master, Trash Master, Stink Master, who work:

"to make people swell up, to make pus come out of their legs...to reduce people to bones...until they die from emancipation and oedema"<sup>9</sup>.

For Mayans, the Moon Herself is nothing but "a vile *kax*" (prostitute)<sup>10</sup>.

Why did Mesoamericans honour such repulsive and 'demonic' attributes? They admitted their gods represented- and produced - illness, trauma and death<sup>11</sup>. The implication is that such phenomena had positive value in their spirituality. Why this should be will become clearer if we consider one "problematic state" Mexicans believed afflicted humanity.

## II. PRIDE AS HUMANITY'S PROBLEMATIC STATE

*Codex Florentine* contains a tale of extreme importance to the Aztecs: the story of how the Sun came to be. Pondering the world's darkness, the gods had decided one of them must light a new sun by dying- jumping into a bonfire. First choice was the popular, wealthy god Tecuzistecatl. Reluctantly, as a back-up, the gods also chose Nahuatzin - the despised, pimply god of syphilis.

On the crucial day, Tecuzistecatl arrived in splendour, with rich offerings. Poorly-clad Nahuatzin, by contrast, gave only thorns he had used to bleed himself. However, when time came to die, Tecuzistecatl lost his nerve so it was Nahuatzin who, "resolving all at once...closing his eyes", flung himself in, becoming the new Sun. In their embarrassment, the other gods followed<sup>12</sup>. This dramatic triumph of a lowly god is represented in *Codex Borgia* (see Figure 32).

What the tale highlights is the belief that smugness and pride keeps humanity from its goals. Elders chided "great killers" who were "unworthy of the taste of grieving"- who could not truly serve the gods<sup>13</sup>.

In fact, no amount of *personal achievement* could earn one a high place in the Aztec heavens. Even if a man took countless captives for

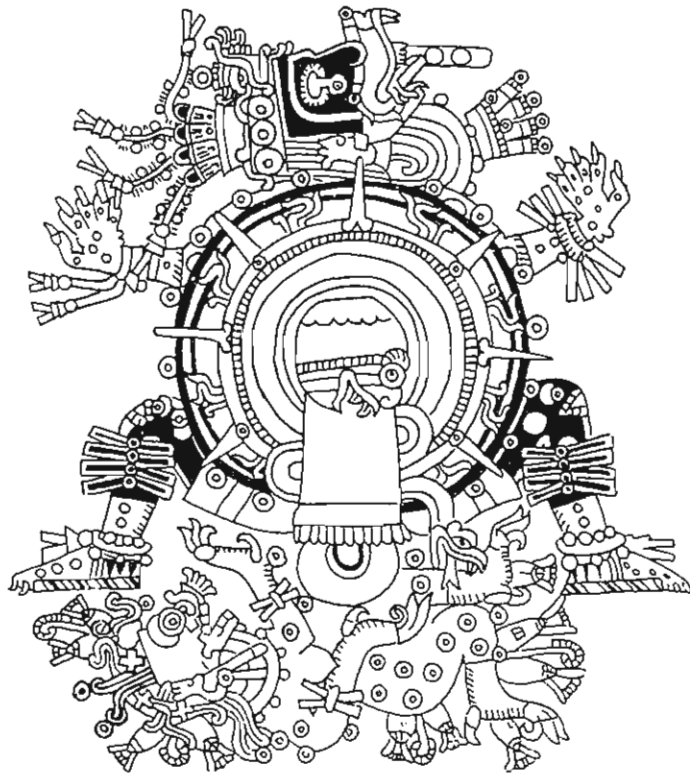


Figure 32: Scabby god becoming  
the Sun. Codex Borgia.

sacrifice, he would still have to suffer the torments of the underworlds after dying<sup>14</sup>. The *Florentine Codex* explains that only those who themselves *die* in sacrifice or in war could enter the solar paradise. It even lists the types of sacrifice conducive to this<sup>15</sup>.

Aztec discourses therefore accent the dangers ("intoxication") of mortal success. Foolishly, we become "arrogant"<sup>16</sup>—believing we can "possess the earth"<sup>17</sup>, when, in fact, we are in need:

"There is mocking of others on earth. There is rejoicing over the misfortunes of others; there is laughing at others; there is ridicule on earth. And what they say...what they tell one is not true; there is only ridicule. ...Did (our forefathers)...perhaps act superior? ...become presumptuous? ...come belittling one?...come regarding no one with consideration? ...come forgetting?... (Remember that) all is permeated by pain... We are in want as to that which hangs from our hips, from our necks...In truth we turn it around....And look at us! By the grace of our Lord of the Near and Close, we go dying...we go like skeletons"<sup>18</sup>.

### III. MEANS: HUMILITY, HUMILIATION AND SELF-ABANDONMENT

#### a. Humility and Penance

"Take great pains to make yourself friends of God... Look that you are not proud...but that you be humble. If your body gathers to itself strength and pride, *punish and humble it*"<sup>19</sup>.

For the Aztecs, the way to deal with our pride is to "punish" and humble ourselves. Humility and the enduring of torturous penance were much praised<sup>20</sup>. Prescribed penances of "Four *Humiliations*"<sup>21</sup> and the call to "*humiliate* ourselves before the gods"<sup>22</sup> resound through Mesoamerican literature. Significantly, one of Topiltzin's institutes was a "House of Shame"<sup>23</sup>, and the *Telpochcalli* (military college) was "the house of penance; the house of weeping"<sup>24</sup>. We have seen that the fasts and austerities of Aztec priests and penitents were sometimes so

severe that they died, or- in their agony - hurled themselves to death in war (in battle or by subsequent sacrifice).

#### b. The Path of Ruin: The Quetzalcoatl Legend

There was yet another means of destroying pride. As we saw in the last chapter, in Aztec society the slightest error was bound to be a person's ruin. Ironically, this meant that *tlatlacolli* (sin) had a certain prestige in Mesoamerican thought, because it produced such intense humility. It could <sup>be</sup> even argued that *tlatlacolli* was considered a necessary catalyst for true humility and for the highest self-negation of all: physical death.

Perhaps this is why there were so many divine patrons of vice and ruin. Consider the high status of Tezcatlipoca. Ultimately, this great god is nothing but a tempter who provokes people into surrendering their lives. He seduces the ascetic Yappan, King Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl, and the entire Toltec nation. In each case they are humiliated and perish.

The story of Tezcatlipoca's role in King Topiltzin's ruination is perhaps the most important legend of Central Mexico. Topiltzin's "fall from grace" was so pivotal it is still enacted in Mexican Indian religious dramas. It appears less in art, but- significantly- the scene of interest is usually Topiltzin's "fall" (see Figure 33).

The tale basically relates how the great sage-king, living a religious life, was enticed by Tezcatlipoca (incarnated as Titlahuacan) to drink alcohol and commit incest with his sister. In remorse, the king abandons his capital, buries his wealth and wanders about for years, until he finally either sails away forever or - according to other versions- immolates himself on a bonfire.

## SIN AND RUIN



Figure 33: Toltec vase apparently depicting Topiltzin being coaxed to drink. The girl before him holds a jar of liquor. Titlahuacan sits behind, encouraging. Above, an older (bearded) Topiltzin in a feathered serpent kneels before a man (the one who "guards..already aged" at Tlapallan?) or a god. Vase in Museum für Völkerkunde, Vienna.

As far as this chapter is concerned, what is important is that Quetzalcoatl *engineered* his own 'fall' and subsequent "disappearance", considering it beneficial. His aides wanted to halt Titlahuacan (his tempter, god Tezcātlipoca) from visiting him, but the sage-king forbade them from doing so and, instead, fussed over his supposed enemy, saying: "I have *awaited* him for five, for ten days"<sup>25</sup>. He greeted Titlahuacan not warily but honorifically ("Grandfather") and knowingly: "I *know* and welcome thee"<sup>26</sup>.

*Florentine Codex* says Titlahuacan "had indeed tricked" the King, but never that the trick was unplanned. Rather, his reactions indicate it was a deliberate device, duplicating the one he (as god) applied when he stumbled in obtaining bones to re-create humanity:

" he fell...*in order that he might strive, in order that the dawn might come*"<sup>27</sup>.

Titlahuacan's 'trick' was for a duty the gods assigned him: of giving Quetzalcoatl "a body" (making him aware of the physical world again?). When Titlahuacan offers the Sage-King alcohol (forbidden to priests), he does not hide his intent. He tells Quetzalcoatl honestly: "it will intoxicate (you)...make you weep"<sup>28</sup>.

Both here and in a later case of bibacity at Cochtacan, Titlahuacan explains to Topiltzin that he will neither gain the compassion he desires, nor the spiritual re-birth he yearns for ("be made a child"), unless he partakes:

" Here is thy portion. ..thou wilt weep. Thou wilt then become *compassionate*. Thou wilt think of thy *death*, and also thou wilt think upon where thou wilt go...Thou wilt just go there to Tollan-Tlapallan, 'the Metropolis of Light and Wisdom'. *A man guards there, a man already aged. You will consult with one another.* And when you will return again here, you will once again *be made a child*. Place it before thee as thy portion, thy need"<sup>29</sup>.



"(Titlahuacan) said to him: 'Where art thou going?' Then Quetzalcoatl said: 'There to Tlapallan, I go to learn'. Then the wizard said to him: 'It is well, drink this...*Neither can it be that thou shouldest not drink it...No one do I accept, no one do I release, who I do not give pulque, make drunk, make besotted. But come, be of good cheer, drink it!*'"<sup>30</sup>.

If Quetzalcoatl 'fell' involuntarily, his subsequent obedience of Titlahuacan's instructions about embarking for *Tlapallan*, and his continuing to be persuaded to drink by him, would be a remarkable example of naivety. It seems more likely that the conversation between Quetzalcoatl and Titlahuacan at Cochtacan is exactly what it sounds like: an exchange between a pupil and master- the former repeating the latter's orders; the latter checking that the former is doing as instructed.

Notice that Quetzalcoatl's *fall* is the climax of his tale. Only *tlatlacolli* (sin) can give him sufficient self-hate to be propelled into abandoning all and preparing for the spiritual transformation of sacrificial death (through which he becomes Venus). It is his *error* which makes possible his obsession with remorse- his spending days lying in a coffin. It makes him abandon throne, palaces and city. He has all his possessions burnt or buried<sup>31</sup>. He and his followers begin their wanderings, enduring ever-greater humiliations, the Sage sobbing so violently at times that his tears pierce holes in stone<sup>32</sup>:

" his heart was then influenced...No longer did he forget it, he only continued to reflect...  
'In no way will it be possible to stop me...  
*I am called, the Sun calleth me*'"<sup>33</sup>.

This is the link between Quetzalcoatl's tale and sacrificial death. "The Sun calleth him" was only said of persons who would die in war or sacrifice<sup>34</sup>. Just as Titlahuacan predicted, Quetzalcoatl had begun "thinking about his death"- wishing himself dead.

Clavigero's informants spoke of *nonemictiloca* ("the death which I bring upon myself")<sup>35</sup>. Perhaps many a Mesoamerican "brought" a sacrificial death upon his or her self in a fit of self-loathing? In some Aztec poems we read what appears to be a yearning to be ruined:

"Where is the road that leads to the Region of Death, the Place of our Downfall?"<sup>36</sup>.

Certainly, after his fall, whatever pride Quetzalcoatl had over his attainments as a penitent and 'good king' was vanquished by intense self-hate: "Woe is me! My body is of clay! I have the desires of a slave!". He now engaged in self-abandonment: the relinquishing of his very life, for his destination, *Tollan Tlapallan*, had a number of meanings, two of which were: the place of 'black and red' (perhaps 'death and blood')- and "*the Burner*"<sup>37</sup>. The latter is precisely how Quetzalcoatl ended his life in *Anales de Cuauhtitlan*: on a bonfire<sup>38</sup>. Quetzalcoatl clearly sought *Tollan Tlapallan* in order to die there, as the sources themselves state:

"(It was the Region) where he is no longer... (where he) goes away to disappear....he went to die there"<sup>39</sup>.

#### IV. EXPRESSION IN AZTEC HUMAN SACRIFICE

##### a. Slave-Victims, Condemned Criminals and Prisoners of War:

###### Glorious Miscreants?

The manner Aztec slaves became victims puzzled Clendinnen:

"Only the most determined fecklessness could... bring a Mexica slave to the three separate judgements of recalcitrance or 'non-fulfilment of contract' which condemned them to the wooden yokes of the slave liable for ritual death, yet it is this category which is commonly claimed as the source of the 'god-images' who played their terminal parts

in the festivals"<sup>40</sup>.

Clendinnen thinks this impossible, yet many did err thrice and fall into sacrifice. Moreover, slaves were *honoured* for this. They were Tezcatlipoca's "beloved sons", with special holidays during which their masters gave them gifts<sup>41</sup>. If one vexed them, misfortune was believed to befall one's house. Even more curiously, Aztecs willingly *sold* themselves into slavery (sacrificial death?) to finance mere feasts<sup>42</sup>.

These enigmas can only make sense in the light of what the last two sections show: that a woeful, debauched predicament was esteemed as a path to the transformation which ritual death supposedly offered. I would argue that it is quite possible miscreants *deliberately* condemned themselves to ritual death.

After all, such an end made atonement for one's life. Perhaps offenders also believed they were on a special "road of downfall" to the gods, for drunkenness, promiscuity and other 'misdeeds' were held by Aztecs to invite the workings of great- if sinister- supernatural forces - as Clendinnen herself explains<sup>43</sup>.

Sin certainly betokened ritual death in the Aztec mind. Those born on the day '1 House' are "patrons of vice and sin", who would end their lives "on the sacrificial block". A "carnal woman" is likewise called "a sacrificial victim...a captive"<sup>44</sup>.

#### b. *Tlatlacolli* and Quetzalcoatl's Tale in Aztec Sacrificial Rites

Within Aztec human sacrifice, it is possible to observe the same sequence of events that occurred in Quetzalcoatl's tale:

1. initial penance and purification
2. moral 'downfall'
3. abandoning of possessions and status
4. humiliation and deprivation
5. sacrificial death or 'disappearance'.

For this reason, the sacrificial expression of themes of "necessary downfall" will be examined using that legend. Aztec priests claimed all their rites originated in Quetzalcoatl Topiltzin, so perhaps Quetzalcoatl's tale was the model for Aztec human sacrifice. Alternatively, he may have been some one who had managed to truly 'live out' an existing ceremonial format.

Whatever the case, Aztec victims usually began their sacrificial careers like him: with penances and purification ("bathing" ), as we have seen. Then came a 'fall' - plying the human offering with alcohol (as Christ is in modern Indian Passion Plays<sup>45</sup>); keeping him or her "tipsy"<sup>46</sup>. Often, just as in Quetzalcoatl's case, the victim's chastity and moderation was also abandoned: Ixociuhqui and Tezcatlipoca impersonators indulging in an orgy of feasting, drinking and a great deal of sex<sup>47</sup>.

Note that this is accompanied by the priests' and congregation's ritual drug-taking and other breaking of rules: "a thousand follies"<sup>48</sup>. Priests rob, bleed, beat or fight whoever they encounter<sup>49</sup>.

There was a deliberate overturning of ethics during sacrificial rites: an honouring of - even a wallowing in - 'filth'. Consider how priests wore human skins, "smelling like dead dogs"<sup>50</sup>. Some penitents did this for 20 days, until even passers-by complained that "(it) nearly wounded the head. It could not be endured"<sup>51</sup>. Perhaps the Aztecs had a Tantra-like emphasis on detachment in the midst of excess, and certain crime, pleasure and filth was indulged in so intensely and repeatedly that it became a virtual austerity?

At any rate, the next stage of Quetzalcoatl's tale: abandonment and associated humiliation, also featured in sacrificial rites: "The pleasure girls took all the bathed one's belongings"<sup>52</sup>. Like

Quetzalcoatl, victims buried their possessions or distributed ~~th~~ amongst the congregation<sup>53</sup>.

Then followed humiliations: long vigils; yanking out of hair; possibly even taunts and harassing, if modern Indian religious dramas are anything to go on<sup>54</sup>. It is significant that the doomed all wore emblems of *humility and self-abandonment* to their ends: stripped to nothing but paper crowns and loincloths<sup>55</sup>. Others seem to have been entirely naked<sup>56</sup>. Simple clothing or nakedness was the Mesoamerican symbol of penance. Note that confessing Aztec penitents dressed just like victims, in paper loincloths<sup>57</sup>. We are reminded that Quetzalcoatl similarly relinquished his jewels and, at his demise, set aside his garments, shrugged his shoulders and flung himself into a bonfire<sup>58</sup>.

Evidence that humility and remorse was the general atmosphere of sacrificial rites is also found in the manner sacrificing priests themselves donned paper garments similar to the victims to perform their rites<sup>59</sup>, additionally applying child excrement to their faces.

Finally, just as Quetzalcoatl either "disappeared" or died sacrificially, victims and other dying persons were said to "vanish"<sup>60</sup>: "depart forever"<sup>61</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Irene Nicholson, *Firefly in the Night*, 83-84.

<sup>2</sup> F Peterson, *Ancient Mexico*, 131.

<sup>3</sup> S Marti & G.P Kurath, *Dances of Anahuac* (New York, Weiner: Green, 1964), 131.

<sup>4</sup> Irene Nicholson, *Firefly in the Night*, 80.

<sup>5</sup> Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods and Rites*, 223.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>7</sup> F Peterson, *Ancient Mexico*, 128-130.

<sup>8</sup> Alfonso Caso, *The Aztecs: People of the Sun*, 54.

<sup>9</sup> *Popul Vuh* 107.

<sup>10</sup> Chilam Balam S. Eric Thompson, *Maya History and Religion*, 244.

<sup>11</sup> Alfonso Caso, *The Aztecs: People of the Sun*, 26.

<sup>12</sup> Bernadino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk.2:74-75:124-5.

<sup>13</sup> *Anales de Quauhquemotlan* R.Haly, "Bare Bones: Rethinking Mesoamerican Divinity", 288-289.

- 14 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex* 3: 43.
- 15 *Ibid.* 3: Appendix 2.
- 16 *Collection of Mexican Songs* 16r., Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Native Mesoamerican Spirituality*, 7.
- 17 Irene Nicholson, *Firefly in the Night*, 175.
- 18 Bernadino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex* Bk. 6: 20.
- 19 Sahagun in Lorette Sejourne, *Burning Water*, 9.
- 20 T. Motolinia, *History of the Indians*, 149.
- 21 *Papal Vuh*, 9.
- 22 Zurita in F. Peterson, *Ancient Mexico*, 186.
- 23 David Carrasco, *Quetzalcoatl and the Irony of Empire*, 30.
- 24 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex* Bk. 3: 4.
- 25 *Ibid.*, Bk. 3: 4: 18.
- 26 *Ibid.*
- 27 *Leyenda de los Solares* Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Pre-Columbian Literature*, 92-99.
- 28 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex* 3: 4: 15-16.
- 29 *Ibid.*, 3: 4: 16-18.
- 30 *Ibid.*, 3: 14: 35.
- 31 *Ibid.*, 3: 14: 33.
- 32 *Ibid.*, 3: 3: 14.
- 33 *Ibid.*, 3: 13: 35; 3: 14: 16-18.
- 34 *Ibid.*, 6: 21. The Mayan *Kahmal Ach'it'ale* expresses a similar theme of a lord being "called" to sacrificial death.
- 35 F.K. Daviger, *Rules of the Aztec Language*, 78.
- 36 Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Pre-Columbian Literature*, 56.
- 37 F. Peterson, *Ancient Mexico*, 69.
- 38 David Carrasco, *Quetzalcoatl and the Irony of Empire*, 36.
- 39 Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Pre-Columbian Literature*, 110, 128.
- 40 Inga Clendinnen, *Aztecs*, 100.
- 41 Jacques Soustelle, *Daily Life of the Aztecs*, 78.
- 42 T. Motolinia, *History of the Indians*, 106-107.
- 43 Inga Clendinnen, *Aztecs*, 50-51.
- 44 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex* Bk. 10: 3: 45-57.
- 45 Frances Toor, *Mexican Folkways* (New York: Crown, 1947), 483.
- 46 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods and Rites*, 212.
- 47 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex* 2: 38: 141, 163-169, 2: 5: 9; 3: 2: 11.
- 48 *Ibid.*, 2: 6: 11.
- 49 *Ibid.*, 2: 6: 11; 2: App. 179.
- 50 *Ibid.*, 2: 2: 53.
- 51 *Ibid.*, 2: 22: 58.
- 52 *Ibid.*, 2: 39: 168.
- 53 *Ibid.*, 2: 37: 137.
- 54 B. Gyles & E. Sayer, *Of Gods and Men: Mexico and the Mexican Indian* (London: BBC, 1980), 186.
- 55 *Ibid.*, 2: 20: 42-43. See also Diego Duran, *The Aztecs: History of the Indians*, 120-121.
- 56 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods and Rites of the Ancient Calendar*, 92.
- 57 G. Pasztor, *Aztec Art*, 196.
- 58 David Carrasco, *Quetzalcoatl and the Irony of Empire*, 36.
- 59 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods and Rites*, 91.
- 60 Quoted in Nigel Davies, *The Aztecs*, 126.

---

<sup>61</sup> Poem in Irene Nicholson, *Firefly in the Night*, 76.

## FOUR: THE TRANSFORMATION OF "BIRTH"

### I. ULTIMATE REALITY AS CHILDHOOD

#### AND SPRINGTIME

"Heed what the old men went saying: that the children, the youths, the maidens, are the real friends, the really beloved of the Lord of the Near and Close. They live with Him; they rejoice with Him; He makes friends with them...it is said, *through them the earth yet endures. They are our intercessors*"<sup>1</sup>.

We have already noted that most Aztec divinities are depicted as being youths or children. What this accents is the ultimate value Aztecs gave to childhood. Deepest affections went to children, who were adored as "little dove", "precious feather", "my blood", "my colour", "my image", "precious jewel"<sup>2</sup>. The highest Aztec heaven was occupied not by saints, but by innocent babes<sup>3</sup>. Any and every kind of freshness, youth, innocence and springtime seems to have been glorified by the Aztecs. Notice that one of their major heavens, Tlalocan, is where:

"They live in eternal spring; never is there withering; forever there is sprouting, there is verdure; it is eternally green"<sup>4</sup>.

Similarly, the Paradise of the Sun sees people transformed into creatures of springtime:

"And when they had passed four years there, then they changed into precious birds—hummingbirds, orioles, yellow birds, yellow birds blackened about the eyes, chalky butterflies, feather-down butterflies, gourd-bowl butterflies; they sucked honey from the flowers there where they dwelt"<sup>5</sup>.



## II. OUR PROBLEMATIC STATE: LIFE AS SEPARATION FROM HOLY INNOCENCE

As detailed in Chapter 1, the Aztecs were much concerned that the very process of living perverted and destroyed the spiritual "jade" within them. Life is a slow withering— a gradual distortion of a perfect image (gods being mostly children, not adults).

Consequently, there was a feeling that this world has little to offer:

"We came only to be born.  
Our home is beyond:  
In the realm of the defleshed ones.  
..This is not the place to accomplish things.  
Certainly nothing *grows green* here:  
Misfortune opens its blossoms"<sup>6</sup>.

This is simply a "place of forgetfulness"<sup>7</sup>, where all "flowers" are really "dried flowers" and everything is "only on loan"<sup>8</sup>.

## III. MEANS: DYING YOUNG OR ATTAINING REBIRTH

The Aztec answer to this dilemma seems to have been the one proposed by the above poem: death. According to *Leyenda de los Soles* death is the "Land of Birth"<sup>9</sup>, and the Hour of Death is actually the Hour of Birth: one is told to "Arise!". Thus death gave the opportunity to become a "newborn" again.

To this day, Mexicans await death with great fervour and anticipation<sup>10</sup> — considering it a Spring-like "Dawning". Aztec poetry is rich in talk of death as renewal: "germinating", "blossoming again", "greening". There was also a strong conviction that, as one Aztec poet put it: "I came to earth to *perish from the earth*"<sup>11</sup>.

It seems that regaining the pure state of childhood was sought by two means. One was ensuring that one never lived beyond childhood: that one died a child or a "pure youth/maiden". The other was dying sacrificially.

#### a. Dying Young

"those who die prematurely, the tender youths, the tender maidens. To him who went not experiencing, not approaching vice, filth, it is said, Our Lord showed bounteous mercy... the children who die become as precious green-stones, as precious turquoise, as precious bracelets. And then... at that time, the Lord of the Near and Close gives one... merit, joy and prosperity. And in the time of childhood, still in the time of purity, *the good death is merited*"<sup>12</sup>.

Childhood death was "the good death". It is still the practice in the Nahuatl town of Tepoztlán to celebrate rather than mourn the passing of an infant. Rockets are fired; flowers decorate everything; and dances are performed. The bereaved assert that their child has "become an angel immediately"<sup>13</sup>.

Probably this goes a long way to explaining the very ancient Mesoamerican tradition of sacrificing children. As mentioned in Chapter 1, *tlacatetcuhtin* hearts were so pure and "green" that they were not extracted from the child's corpse<sup>14</sup>. Moreover, the Aztecs themselves tell us child-victims were:

"sought everywhere... It was said: 'They were indeed the most precious debt-payments. (The Tlalques) gladly receive them; they want them'"<sup>15</sup>.

According to the *Chilam Balam de Chumayel*, *tlacatetcuhtin* in the Mayan lands died as representatives for their blue-blooded parents<sup>16</sup>. We know high-born Aztec families also offered their own children. Perhaps this practice of offspring dying in place of adults is what Aztecs meant by children being "our intercessors", through whom "the world endures".

## b. Rebirth through Sacrificial Death

For an Aztec, the purpose of birth was to die for the gods: "Those worthy of the gods are born"<sup>17</sup>, so there is no contradiction in dying in order to be "born". Not having merited "the good death" in childhood, at least - if "pure in heart" - one might be "called" by the Sun to die, thereby being reborn as a Springtime butterfly or bird, and living "hard by, nigh unto" the Sun- possibly the Ultimate state (Mesoamericans envisaged merging with the Divine as a type of Twinship, so esoteric poems made much of being "joined to, at the side" various gods):

"the pure in heart are very precious...the gods require them, seek them, call out to them. He who goes pure, who dies in war, they say the Sun summons. He calls out to him. He lives hard by, nigh unto the Sun. He goes gladdening Him...Always forever, he lives in pleasure, he rejoices; ever glad, without pain, he sucks the different flowers...For verily he lives in the House of the Sun, which is a place of wealth, a place of joy"<sup>18</sup>.

Some Pre-Classic and Classic reliefs certainly appear to depict the "birth" of adult sacrifices (Figures 34 & 35). *Codex Nuttall* has striped victims descending like newborn babes from heavens below vagina-like openings<sup>19</sup> (Figure 36). One Aztec drum apparently depicts a dying warrior (a victim?) being re-born an eagle, surrounded by "flowering song" glyphs, and flanked by Eagle and Jaguar (Figure 37).

## IV. CULTURAL AND SACRIFICIAL EXPRESSION

### a. Child Sacrifice

*Tlacatetcuhine* were central to Aztec rain ceremonies<sup>20</sup>. It was said their presence was used to "arouse devotion"<sup>21</sup>. It is significant that both Mayan and Aztec child-sacrifices sometimes occurred in caves, which were considered by them to be "wombs".

Figure 34: Man with umbilical  
cord or intestine protruding.  
Stela 10, Izapa Maya (400 b.c.e.-  
300 c.e.).

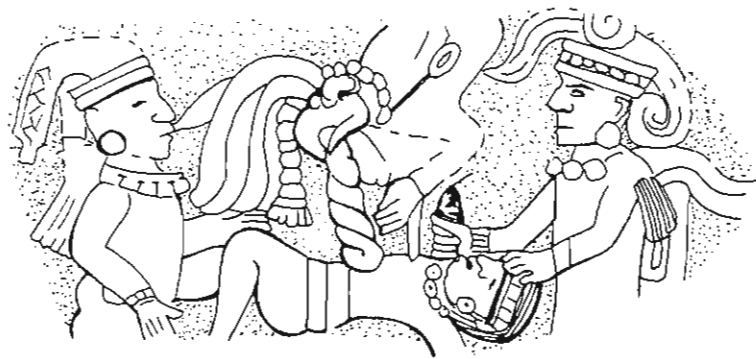
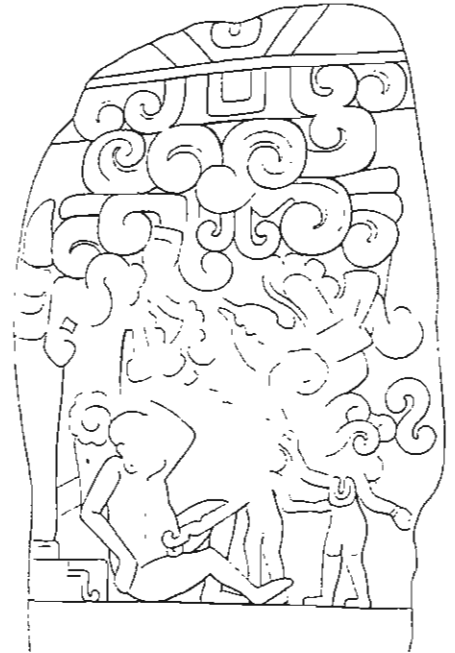


Figure 35: Tajin panel (500 - 1000 c.e.)  
of reclining man being decapitated. Note  
umbilical cord (?) and descending vulture  
god or priest.

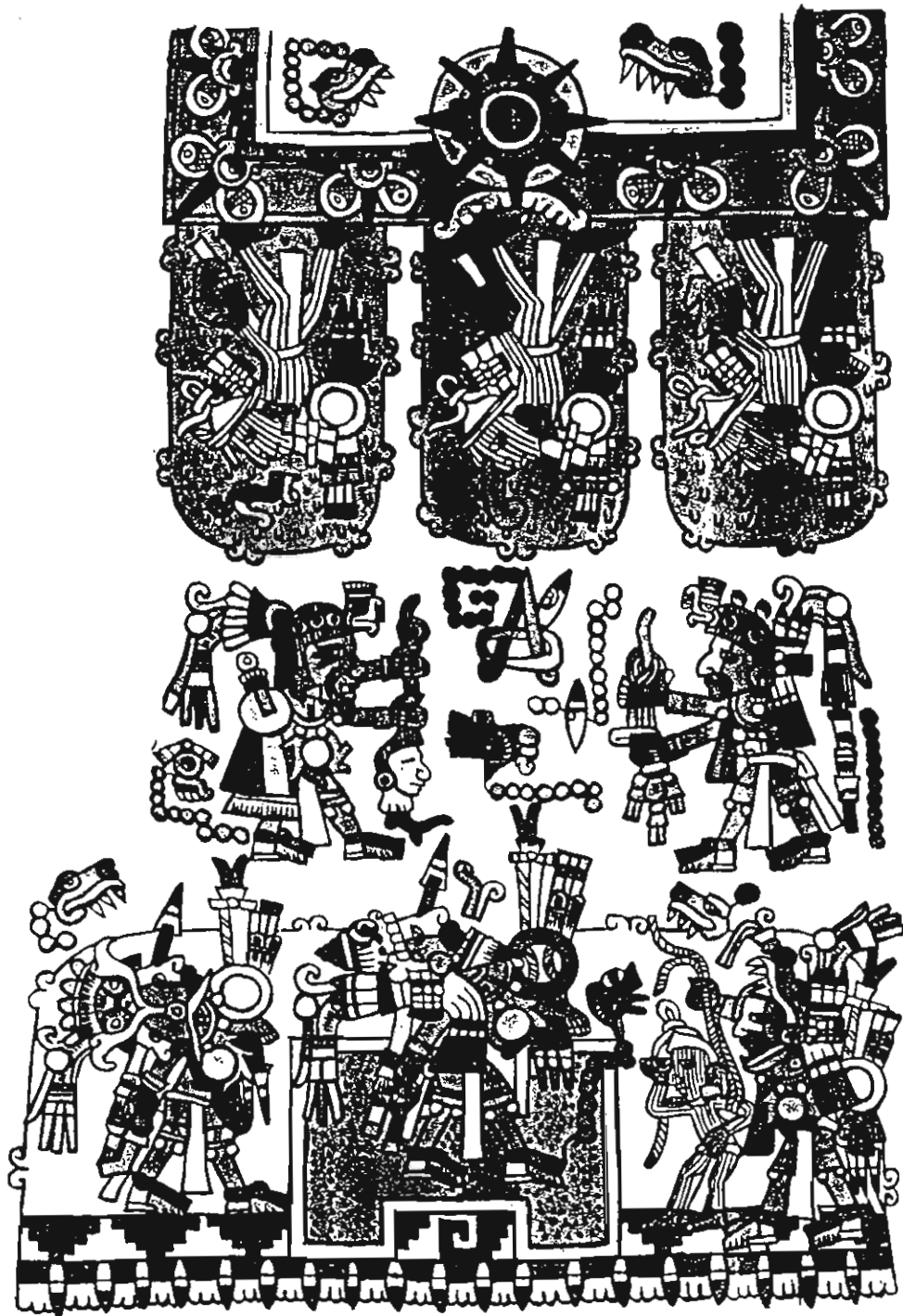


Figure 36: Striped victims descend from heaven below a vagina-like opening. Note the decapitation and ball court rites below . Codex Nuttall.



Figure 37: Wooden Aztec drum from Malinalco, depicting dying warrior becoming an eagle. Note Jaguar and Eagle (Tezcatlipoca and Tonatiuh) bear sacrificial flags and weep and sing "burning water" (war).

## b. Adult Sacrifice

Re-birth can be read into the very capture and treatment of victims. The captor *fathers* his quarry, who is "my beloved son"<sup>22</sup>. Soldiers off to die in war or sacrificially are likewise "our beloved children"<sup>23</sup>.

During ceremonies of immolation, victims become virtual babies: pampered, washed, clothed, fed and made to stand naked. They are even called "*children* of Lord of the Earth...*Children* of the Sun"<sup>24</sup>, whose demise is usually at a nation's *tlalxico*- "navel" (capital)<sup>25</sup>. The fire and water used in sacrificial rites (both ritually and as a means of killing some candidates- for instance, by drowning or burning) apparently revived the victim's virgin, childhood state. In the Mayan lands, *cenote* and cave water was actually called *zuhuyha*- "virgin water", and fire used in ceremonies was "virgin fire"<sup>26</sup>.

Of all slayings, gladiatorial sacrifice was the most strongly linked to "birth". Like a newborn child, a gladiatorial victim was tied to a hole by what was called the "sustenance rope". This ran, significantly, to the waist, and was pulled up and cleaned after each slaying<sup>27</sup> - like an umbilical cord. It is intriguing that *Codex Nuttall*'s portrayal of the rite has the rope disappearing into, rather than being tied around, the stone and that the victim cries like a newborn babe. The format is also somewhat similar to a *Codex Nuttall* birth scene (see Figure 38).

Aztec sacrificial hymns also evince a birth theme. In Song of Xipe Totec, the victim says:

"My life shall revive  
and the young man grow strong..."

"My Corn Cob God lifts his eyes.  
Why should I fear?"

*I am the tender corn shoot."*

"Of jade my heart is made  
The Gold...I'll see  
My heart *will be refreshed*"

"The fledgling man grows strong  
The man of war *born*"<sup>28</sup>.

The Song of the Warrior of Huitznahua similarly speaks of "birth", in this case coinciding with the descent of "the portentous sign" and the dawning of day<sup>29</sup>. More graphically, the Song of Ayopechtli- a childbirth goddess- seemingly has the victim being "born" by dying:

"Bestir yourself  
Be sent  
Bestir yourself  
New child  
Bestir yourself  
Be sent  
Bestir yourself  
Jewel child  
Bestir yourself"<sup>30</sup>.

Finally, we see the emphasis in the feast of Ixocauhqui. After a human immolation, it was said: "the *growing* is achieved"<sup>31</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 6: 21, translated by Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Native Mesoamerican Spirituality*, 78-79.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, 63-64f.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, 21.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, 80-81.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Collection of Mexican Songs 4x*, in Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Native Mesoamerican Spirituality*, 181.

<sup>7</sup> Irene Nicholson, *Firefly in the Night*, 192.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, 137.

<sup>9</sup> Laurette Sejourne, *Burning Water*, 71.

<sup>10</sup> T.B. Walsh, "Xochitl: Catherine Anne Porter's Changing Goddess", 185f.

<sup>11</sup> Aztec poem in E. Kissan & M. Schmidt (trans. & ed.), *Flower and Song: Poems of the Aztec People* (London: Anvil Press, 1977), 47.

<sup>12</sup> Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 6: 21 in *ibid.*, 80-82.

<sup>13</sup> R. Redfield, *Tepoztlan: A Mexican Village* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1930), 142.

<sup>14</sup> T. de Motolinia, *History of the Indians*, 113.

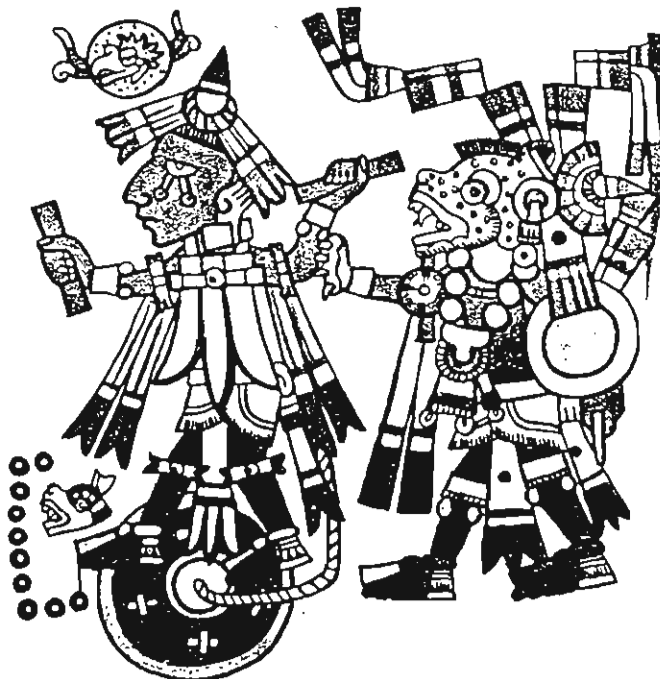
<sup>15</sup> Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 2: 20: 42-43.



# BIRTH AND GLADIATORIAL SACRIFICE



Figure 38: Illustrations from Codex Nuttall, showing similarities in portrayal of birth (above) and gladiatorial sacrifice (below).



- 16 Chilam Balam de Chamuyel, 83.
- 17 Laurette Sejourné, *Burning Water*, 70.
- 18 Bernardino Sahagún, *Florentine Codex Bk. 6: 21*, in Miguel León-Portilla, *Native Mesoamerican Spirituality*, 79.
- 19 *Codex Nuttall*, 4, 19, 20.
- 20 Diego Durán, *Book of the Gods*, 160-164.
- 21 T. de Motolinia, *History of the Indians*, 130.
- 22 *ibid.*, Bk. 2: 21: 54.
- 23 Jacques Soustelle, *Daily Life of the Aztecs*, 44.
- 24 Diego Durán, *The Aztecs - History of the Indies*, 108-109.
- 25 Anonymous, "Human Sacrifice ( Aztec )", J.R. Himéls, *Dictionary of Religions* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), 156.
- 26 John Eric Sidney Thompson, *Maya History and Religion*, 184.
- 27 Bernardino Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 2: 21: 52.
- 28 *ibid.*, Bk. 2: 160.
- 29 *ibid.*, in Miguel León-Portilla, *Native Mesoamerican Spirituality*, 193.
- 30 *ibid.*, Bk. 2: 235.
- 31 *ibid.*, Bk. 2: 38: 168 - 169.

## FIVE: THE TRANSFORMATION OF "MIRRORING"

### I. ULTIMATE REALITY: A FATED GAME OF MASKS AND REFLECTIONS

#### a. Changing Images

To the characteristics of the Aztec Ultimate examined thus far, we can add that of its being *Teyocoyani*: "the intoxicator of men"<sup>1</sup> -- a never-ending, transformative *hallucination*: a Divine game of forms that never really were. Horrid as the divinities may seem, Aztecs knew them as "counterfeits" -- *tlachichinualli*<sup>2</sup> and toys -- *nenetl* (dolls)<sup>3</sup> or *tepitoton* ("little moulded ones" or "the very little ones"). Even the active volcano Popocatepetl is playful: "the Divine Singer"<sup>4</sup>.

Remember that Mesoamerican deities are but *zingles* (strolling players) and *bacab* (literally: "actor, clown" -- one who 'wanders' around the Four Quarters of the universe)<sup>5</sup> : meshing into the cosmic clock as each other's stand-ins. The Mayans say all gods are "masks"<sup>6</sup>, so it is probable they only exist as roles for the ever-transforming, imageless Ultimate which underlay them.

The "imagelessness" of Reality is evinced in the true features of major idols being *invisible*: heavily masked<sup>7</sup>, veiled<sup>8</sup>, under layers of cloth<sup>9</sup>, tucked away in dark temples<sup>10</sup> where only priests are permitted to see them<sup>11</sup>, or even *buried*<sup>12</sup> -- though the populace knew that underneath lay nothing but a featureless piece of wood or a shapeless dough blob<sup>13</sup> -- a "non-image" behind the image. Serge Gruzinski makes the valid remark that in *Codex Telleriano-Remensis*, Aztec gods are presented

merely as their costumes and ornaments, as though this is all they are; as though whoever or whatever wears these will *become* that deity<sup>14</sup>.

Cosmic clowning also manifested in the numerous *nahualli* (alter-egos) and *tezcatl* (mirrors) each god adopted. Lanczkowski identifies *xochicicatl* (flower songs) as poems wherein gods assume manifold bird and animal forms<sup>15</sup>. Some *xochicicatl* present us a dance between myriad images, as though the ever-transforming Aztec Divinity is playing hide-and-seek- manifesting now as a rabbit or parrot *nahualli*, and now as a man:

"I who come am the Deer-Two Rabbit,  
the Rabbit bleeds..  
the Deer with big horns  
My fine master, my friends, we open  
His book of flowers, His book of songs.  
Whose?  
His."

"I'm a rascal  
I am the thrush with the red breast.  
Now I shrill my song: jajojojen  
I come to make paintings  
where the courtyard spreads out..."

"I wink my eyes  
as I go laughing;  
from within the court I come  
into a flower I am changing myself.  
I am the Rabbit who suffers..."


"I am the chattering Parrot,  
I go to catch it, I throw it...  
Now I begin, now I can sing.  
From there I come, from the interior of Tula;  
now I can sing; now my voice bursts forth,  
the flower has opened.  
Listen to my song:  
"Stealer of songs, oh my heart,  
where can you find them?  
You are in need. But like a painting  
grasp firmly the black and red ink,  
then perhaps you will no longer be a beggar"<sup>16</sup>.

Not only does the speaker here jump between different gods' *nahualli*, but he or she seems to be *both* devotee and god. This almost mystical

merging of subject and object is expressed in the paradox of "I go to catch it, I throw it".

#### b. Reflected Images

Perhaps such emphases merely highlight a sense of one-ness and identity with outside phenomena available through narcotic hallucinations, but I am inclined to believe this was also an Aztec belief: that each natural and supernatural entity is a *reflected mirror-image*. Consider how the Aztec High God is called *Moyocoyani*- "Inventor of Himself: Perfect One Who Imagined or Reflected (*yocoya*) Himself into Existence"- or, as *Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca* puts it, *Tezcatlanexia*: "Mirror Which Makes Things Shine Forth (Appear); Inventor of People"<sup>17</sup>.

Moreover, individual gods are *nahualtezcatl* (alter-ego mirror-stone) and bear names like Mirror Boy, Smoking Mirror<sup>18</sup>, Serpent Mirror, Straw-Covered Mirror<sup>19</sup>, Red Mirror, Mirror of Fiery Brightness, Mirror of Night and Day<sup>20</sup>. The sky is still called "the living Mirror" by Nahuatl<sup>21</sup>, and ever since 1200 b.c.e.<sup>22</sup>, mirrors have been prominent in Mesoamerican iconography. One of two glyph-markings that identify a Mayan figure as a god is: , which means 'mirror' or 'brightness'<sup>23</sup>.

What this Mesoamerican obsession with mirrors could signify is that the gods were considered reflections (mirror-images) of people, and *vice versa*. We have seen that the Mayan word for mirror- *nen*, also signified contemplation and ruling: human activities<sup>24</sup>. Plus, *Codex Matritensis* (Folio 118r- v.) describes a wise person as *tetozcachuani*: "a perfect mirror, a mirror pierced on both sides"<sup>25</sup>.

### c. Gods as Humans, and Humans as Gods

Quite aside from mirror-symbolism, the Aztecs definitely possessed a notion of humans and gods being potentially images of each other. *Tlaquimillolli*- sacred godly relic-bundles - the holy of holies in temples, must have reminded them that some gods are just revered historic persons, these often being *the remains of real people*: an old cloak, a bow, even a jawbone and ashes<sup>26</sup>. Sometimes this historicity is freely admitted, for instance in the case of god Huitzilopochtli<sup>27</sup>. Certainly *Altepeteotl* (community gods), who were *alteyollotl* ("heart of the community"- patrons of particular wards or guilds), are simply historic "founding fathers"<sup>28</sup>, and when dancers embrace each other in certain rites, they seem to recognise each other's potential Divinity, saying: "they embraced Huitzilopochtli"<sup>29</sup>.

## II. PROBLEMATIC STATES: TRANSIENCE AND 'FACELESSNESS'

### a. Cruel Games: Lack of Reality and Impermanence

The Ultimate as an ever-changing, ephemeral game of reflected images was a problematic situation for the Aztec, for it implied that everything is unreal and impermanent: *in xochitl, in cuiaatl*- just flowers, just songs ; *cahuitl*: "that which is about to leave us"<sup>30</sup>:

"All that is real, all that is rooted  
They say it is not real, that it is not rooted"<sup>31</sup>.

"Thou abidest to give *reality* to the earth"<sup>32</sup>.

Earth becomes "region of the fleeting moment"<sup>33</sup>, where, Aztec poets often complain, we live, sleep and speak "as in Your dream"<sup>34</sup> :

"We merely dream; we only rise from a dream; It  
is all as a dream"<sup>35</sup>.

This bred the fear that humanity, as Prince Nezahualcoyotl expressed, only exists in the High God's "book of paintings"<sup>36</sup> (*amoxtlacuiloalli*) – presumably like the comic-type figures therein. Being so ephemeral, we could all be blotted out at will:

" With flowers You write, Giver of Life,  
With songs You colour, with songs You shade in,  
Those who must live in *tlatlipac* (mundane reality).  
Later You will destroy Eagle and Ocelot;  
We only live in Your book of paintings  
here in *tlatlipac*.  
With black ink You will blot out  
all that was friendship, brotherhood, nobility..."<sup>37</sup>.

As dream-like "paintings", we should doubt our own reality as well:  
"Perhaps we really do not exist? Perhaps we mean nothing to You?"<sup>38</sup>.

This latter possibility made many Aztecs feel they were trapped in the cruel game of a God who "makes fun of people": "makes sport with men"<sup>39</sup>; "You mock us"<sup>40</sup>. They bemoaned that they were entirely at God's mercy:

" Who does as He wishes,  
He determines, He amuses Himself  
As He wishes it, so will it be.  
In the palm of His hand He has us.  
At His will, He shifts us around  
We shift around  
like marbles we roll,  
He rolls us endlessly"<sup>41</sup>.

We are, Aztec poets believed, nothing more than a diversion: "Thy spectacle, at which Thou doest laugh"<sup>42</sup>.

#### b. Fated Death

Worsening the matter was the *fated* nature of the gods' cruel game. Tezcatlipoca actually meant "Fate"<sup>43</sup> and two of each person's souls

*nahualli* (*nut* in Mayan)<sup>44</sup> and *tona*, are similarly prescribed: "fate, destiny"<sup>45</sup>.

Fate is cruel because, as we have seen, merely being born on a certain day could mean one would be sacrificed<sup>46</sup>. Even those who meet no such end are nevertheless destined to perish some day.

Just as each individual is programmed for destruction, the very cosmos is due to end on the day 4 Ollin, having previously terminated on 4 Water, 4 Rain and 4 Ocelot. A notion of impending doom plagued the Aztecs, as many scholars have pointed out<sup>47</sup>. Each cycle of years could bring total dissolution of the world.

The ominous awaiting engendered by this outlook shaped Mesoamerica's culture. Severin's analysis of the Mayan *Paris Codex* led her to believe the date Katun 8 Ahua saw massive destruction of monuments and offerings in Mayan sites. She surmises that similar occurred *all over Mesoamerica* on 280 b.c.e and 956 c.e.<sup>48</sup>. Certainly the Aztecs' 52-yearly New Fire Ceremony witnessed mass-destruction of all furnishings and goods, the quashing of all fires and an intense vigil in which the world's fate was awaited<sup>49</sup>.

### c. Finding God's (and Our) Face

An Ultimate which is ever-changing and hidden is difficult to attain. It is paradoxical: "He" yet "She"<sup>50</sup>; a Being that is "awaited..(yet) everywhere"<sup>51</sup>; who has a "House" but "can be in no place"<sup>52</sup>. Perhaps, the Aztecs asked, it is not "real..rooted"?<sup>53</sup>.

Certainly the Ultimate had so many forms that they yearned to know Its true face:

"Will I be able to look upon,  
able to see, the face of my Father,  
my Mother?"<sup>54</sup>.



Our own 'true' face and heart (*ixitli*, *inyollotl*) is similarly unknown. People are supposedly born without a set "face". They acquire one from a wise person who knows *neixtamachiliztli*: "the art of giving wisdom to faces"<sup>55</sup>. Indeed, the main value of a sage is that he or she "perfects faces"<sup>56</sup>.

"gives a face...leads (people) to develop it...  
causes a face to appear in them"<sup>57</sup>.

Notice that when Quetzalcoatl Topiltzin went to 'seek a god for himself', he "just lay there, he just lay there *with his face covered*"<sup>58</sup>.

### III. MEANS: CASUALLY DYING; DUTIFULLY DYING

#### a. Light-Hearted Acceptance of One's Death

"The night here grows drunken  
Why do you have to be coaxed?  
Slaughter yourself now!  
In garments of gold  
Array yourself"<sup>59</sup>.

So opens the sacrificial hymn of Xipe Totec. I believe it embodies a major Aztec solution to the problems raised above. If existence is ephemeral, it follows that death is of no consequence. Readily perishing becomes an excellent expression of the transient, dream-like game of existence. Consider how the Divine Twins, tested by the gods of Xibalba, who governed death, showed their conquest of mortality by *making a game* of slaying each other:

"Next they went sacrificing themselves, one of them dying for the others, but they would suddenly look alive again... (Enthralled, the gods of death demanded:) 'Sacrifice both of us!' 'Very well, you ought to come back to life. After all, aren't you Death?'...The boys accomplished it only through words, only through self-transformation"<sup>60</sup>.

Apparently, human sacrifice was practiced - as sermons accompanying it stress - to awaken onlookers to life's fragility; to engender a ready acceptance of the fate which befalls all people. At the end of his travails, even the Mexicans' greatest hero: Quetzalcoatl, simply "shrugged his shoulders" and tossed his life away<sup>61</sup>

Perhaps, too, life's 'game' is best entered into joyously, with an appreciation for the delight it gives the gods: "only through us" is Giver of Life gladdened<sup>62</sup>. By light-heartedly playing the 'game of death' you can "intoxicate yourself" with the realisation that "the Lord of Duality is acting"<sup>63</sup>.

"Perhaps one of us,  
why not all of us,  
will give You,  
will gladden  
the Inventor of Himself?"<sup>64</sup>.

Even now, Chamula Maya dance on flaming ground to "give pleasure to the gods"<sup>65</sup>.

Warfare (*xochitonal*- "flowery destruction"<sup>66</sup>) was the most favoured 'game' for pleasuring the gods. Soustelle has established that Aztec battles were more like an elaborate rite, restricted by countless niceties<sup>67</sup>, and held at very regular intervals<sup>68</sup> for the "trying of the valiant men"<sup>69</sup>. Anawalt<sup>70</sup> and Hassig<sup>71</sup> support these views, and draw attention to the incredible wealth and pomp involved.

*Xochitonal* was a casual *indulgence* in death: "How *light-heartedly* do the princes shoot at each other"<sup>72</sup>. Even the enemy were not really the enemy. Often they were "friends of the House", whose rulers freely entered Aztec centres to recite poetry at *ichiuycilis*. Indeed, as we have seen, it was an "enemy" noble from Tlaxcala who came up with the idea of regular "flowery wars" in the first place.

In other words, the hostilities of Aztec warfare and sacrifice were probably an act. Heed how the struggle seems to be a set of prescribed *roles* rather than political realities: war is called *yaoyotl*- "enemy business"; the battlefield is *yaopan*- "enemy place"<sup>73</sup>; the enemy is *pinotl*- "stranger". In *Cantares Mexicanos*, Aztec soldiers at war with Black Mountain folk describe them as "our Black Mountain *friends*"<sup>74</sup>.

Remember that Aztecs were capable of feigning enmity even within their own society. Consider the mock battles for the feasts of Tititl, Panquetzaliztli, Ochpaniztli, and Hueitxotli<sup>75</sup>. These pretend-wars were a "bloody fight to exhaustion"<sup>76</sup>, so serious that "some died"<sup>77</sup>.

Moreover, dying in war or subsequent sacrifice was casually accepted as the normal consequence of the transformative, highly symbolic 'game of conflict' whereby the gods were pleased and the universe maintained. Notice how Mayans said their warriors went to battle "hungering (as if) for a *universal* conflict"<sup>78</sup>. More pointedly, consider the Zitlalala (Guerrero) "jaguar fights" still held by Nahuatl today. Therein, men dress as jaguars and confront each other with clubs and whips, occasionally causing fatalities- all simply "to bring rain". Significantly, combatants view their affrays as a *battle for the cosmos*:

"We must sacrifice with all our hearts...  
Even if others do not know us,  
We must fight to save the world"<sup>79</sup>.

It also seems that playing the deadly games of 'warrior' and 'being a victim' were personally intoxicating. Mesoamericans are fascinated by activities which produce an adrenalin rush. Moments of tension, pain and terror are believed to bring "flowers" and other supernatural phenomena closer. Notice, for example, the following Song's reference to a sense of Divine presence ("You're *alive*") and supernatural "waves" at the prelude to gladiatorial death:

'Life Giver, You're alive at this place of fear.  
The waves are rolling over us.  
Let's go perish at the navel, at the roundel (the gladiatorial  
stone)"<sup>80</sup>.

A lord dying on the battlefield is in rapture: "gyrates and spins with  
flowery death", whilst of soldiers it was said: "with shields, they yet  
find joy"<sup>81</sup>.

Perhaps for this reason, war was considered a mystical activity:  
*atl-tlalochinolli*: "Burning Water"—a fusion of opposites: *teuatl*  
*tlachinolli* "Divine Liquid Fire". Aztecs spoke mysteriously of the fact  
that "only there (on the battlefield) do they (the heavenly flowers)  
blossom"—in "the bonfire's heat"<sup>82</sup>. The verse is from 'The Song of the  
Verdant Season', in which the author berates those who do not appreciate  
war's spiritual purpose. Notice he claims it is impossible to pluck  
"flowers" (a type of spiritual experience?) "upon earth":

"those who have not achieved wisdom,  
in whom it has not Dawned, within their hearts;  
those who, as concerning war, lie in the stupor  
of death,  
in whom is the night of deep darkness glorified..."

"O my friends,  
do not let the flowers ...depart in vain...  
While you are doubting, friends,  
you will look in vain for the flowers upon earth.  
How could you possibly pick them or create them?"

"When you look upon the princes with  
disdain and suspicion, you suffer.  
Come, fill your eyes with flowers and song!"<sup>83</sup>.

#### b. Duty to Fulfil Destiny

"The Giver of Life resists no one...  
So the cortege continues:  
It is the universal march!"<sup>84</sup>.

Another approach to humanity's fate was dutiful enactment: meeting death  
as a necessary task in an on-going process. North American Plains  
Indians were resigned to the *necessity* of dying on the warpath:

"I am a Fox  
 I am *supposed to die*.  
 If there is anything difficult  
 If there is anything dangerous;  
 That is mine to do"<sup>85</sup>.

Similarly, Aztecs told their sons that they should never regard earth as their home<sup>86</sup>. Their duty was rather to kill and die for the gods:

"War is your destiny, your task  
 You shall give drink, nourishment,  
 Food to the Sun and the Earth...  
 It is met that you give *all your heart and body*"<sup>87</sup>.

An Aztec soldier, notes Pomar, is *tequihua*: "one with a commitment, a task"<sup>88</sup>. When he died as a captive, he became: "a man who made good use of his calling"<sup>89</sup>. Somewhat like a player of Aztec *patolli* - a symbolic board game in which one tries to go back to start, covering 52 squares (an Aztec century- and lifetime?) - the Aztec soldier "stakes all"<sup>90</sup> on a pre-determined end.

### c. Creating an Image

As Hvindfeldt showed, Divine and personal 'facelessness' was addressed by becoming *teixiptla* ("one who *ixiptla*- represents or 'images'- something") - creating a form for the Ultimate to inhabit. Much as Catholics adhere to transubstantiation - believing a wafer can actually become the living body of Christ through the Mass, Aztecs held that some rites completely fused an object into Divinity.

*Nintectia*- "to worship an image as a god"<sup>91</sup> was never done casually. It only occurred after elaborate preparation. Major images were made by properly-trained *toltec*- artisans who were themselves often priests - under strict seclusion, fasting and abstinence. After various rites and being left in temple sanctuaries, these "became" gods<sup>92</sup>.

Notice that when a dough figure was 'sacrificed', "the body of (god) Huitzilopochtli died"<sup>93</sup>, and people consumed it with tears and

sighs – saying that, though unworthy – they “ate God”. Heed also how the transformation of the dough gave all participants a degree of *teo* (god-ness). Priests who had looked after it became *teopizqui* – “(inner) possessor of a god”<sup>94</sup>; those who fasted solely on it were now *teocuague* – “god-eaters” or “god-carriers”<sup>95</sup>.

The highpoint of this process of image-ing was always when someone enacted a divinity. A priest or victim who appeared in the holy garments of a deity was considered to be that god or goddess<sup>96</sup>: *nicnoteati'tzinca* – “I consider him a god”<sup>97</sup>. Whoever wore a victim's skin went about “considering himself *divine*”<sup>98</sup>. Image and impersonator were so fused in Aztec ceremony that Duran recognises no difference. He says a statue of a god was either “a wooden image or *live man*”<sup>99</sup>. The elaborate attire of *ixiptla*<sup>100</sup> made this possible (see Figure 39).

There was an even deeper side to this image-ing. As Brundage points out, “face” and “mask” are the same word: *nayacatl*<sup>101</sup> in Aztec literature. The implication is that a mask can create a face – perhaps even God's true face or our true face? Consider how it was said: “Oh Giver of Life, *mould me*”<sup>102</sup>.

This could explain a great deal about human sacrifice. The Aztecs said the *ixiptla*-victim “g(ave) *human form (to)*:...set up” a god<sup>103</sup> – literally creating for Him or Her a “face” (*ixitli*)<sup>104</sup>.

However, it seems this “face” – this identity with the god – was only realised once the offering had *died as the god*. In one sacrificial hymn, Chimalpanecatī “dons shield as a mask”<sup>105</sup>, presumably meaning warfare masks the deity's face, but in the Song of Cihuacoatl:

“Eagle feathers are no mask,  
for he rises *unmasked*”<sup>106</sup>.

My guess is that this verse refers to the “unmasking” of the victim and goddess alike in the process of sacrificial death. As we have seen, “all

victims' craniums were defleshed and often their bodies flayed- a true "unmasking". Since Tlatilco times (c. 600 b.c.e.), skeletal and half-flayed faces of gods and men have populated Central Mexican art.

Certainly soldiers marching to battle were sometimes masked- playing at being gods and goddesses- often costumed as Divine animal-*nahualli*. Heed also that human sacrifice was called *neteotoquiliztli*: "the desire to be regarded a *god*"<sup>107</sup>, whilst those who die sacrificially were *teomicqui*: the "God-dead"<sup>108</sup>.

The association between full identity with the gods and ritual death was doubtless demanded because, as we have seen, gods themselves were sacrificial victims, and the climax of their respective tales was often ritual death (see Figure 40). If a "true face" was to be found in duplicating the gods' actions, then obviously that imitation must extend to a similar demise. At any rate, the connection between "enacting" god and engaging in *tlacamicitiztli* was very strong, for gods could only be "reborn" through each new *ixiptla*<sup>109</sup>.

#### IV. CULTURAL AND RITUAL EXPRESSION

##### a. Impermanence

Neumann sees paper's prominence in Aztec sacrificial rites as an expression of impermanence<sup>110</sup>. Definitely the Aztecs made much ceremonial use of perishables: plaster, papier mache, reeds, wood, clay, flowers, grass- afterwards destroying their ornate creations.

Mexico today still retains an easy acceptance of death. It is played with and joked about<sup>111</sup>. "Bread of Dead" is fashioned in the shape of skeletal babies, guitarists and sheep<sup>112</sup>; sugar skulls - incised with one's own name - are eaten<sup>113</sup>; and young men test fate with

Figure 39:

The ixiptla  
of Tezcatzoncatl  
showing the  
elaborate attire  
and insignia  
worn by those  
impersonating  
the gods.

This victim  
wears an xicolli  
-"godly jacket".

Codex  
Maglabechiano  
Folio 54.



Figure 40: God plays victim.  
Tezcatlipoca as Uantzin, the  
striped offering. Codex Borgia.



contests of jay-walking through speeding traffic or diving from Acapulco's cliffs onto rocks below.

#### b. Playing Death's Fated Game

A sense of fate was imbued in sacrificial rites through extensive reliance on *tonalamatl* (astrological almanacs) before each slaying<sup>114</sup>. Ball game sacrifices also suggest this. Especially for the Mayans, captives were "balls" tossed by fate. In one 8th century case, a pun was made on the name of the captured king of Copan: 18 Rabbit is 18 Ball<sup>115</sup>.

Human sacrifice itself could rightly be interpreted as an elaborate, symbolic 'game' for re-enacting cosmic events. The elements which show this are too numerous to detail here. It will suffice to note the repetitive use of 'fours'; set movements around the Sacred Directions<sup>116</sup>; and the synchronising of the victim's death with movements of sun- the actual slaying occurring when the sun was either directly overhead or directly 'underneath' (midnight).

#### c. Mirroring

Aztec victims must often have seen themselves reflected in their god-statue's jetstone or obsidian mirror-eyes<sup>117</sup>, forehead<sup>118</sup>, shield<sup>119</sup>, sandals<sup>120</sup>, lower face<sup>121</sup>, or back<sup>122</sup> - or perhaps in the pierced "devices with which to see" which the priests carried<sup>123</sup>, apparently in imitation of Tezcatlipoca's *tlachieloni* (pierced mirror)<sup>124</sup>. Whether this had any significance in terms of the victim's mimicry of the god is difficult to discover, but it is interesting that mirrors were present.

#### d. Image-ing

Aztecs would "merrily celebrate" any feast "by dressing as gods"<sup>125</sup>. In fact, when the hour of sacrifice arrived, it was declared: "it is time to go out with masks"<sup>126</sup>. Victims, priests and the dead were all fitted with masks<sup>127</sup>.

Image-ing was central to Aztec culture. As soon as one was born, an image was made. Again at 4 months, and for each year as one grew up<sup>128</sup>, there would be statues made depicting one. Finally, if a person died sacrificially, an *euillotl* image was burnt. It is noteworthy that sacrifices were made to this, as though to god<sup>129</sup>.

Apart from duplicating a god, human sacrifice blended captor and captive into one 'person'. The two dressed alike and suffered similar fasts and penances. It is significant that they became "father" and "son" and that, when the captor was offered some of his captive's flesh, he would refuse with the words: "Shall I perchance eat *my very self*?"<sup>130</sup>.

In Classic Mayan times, rulers even named themselves after their captives. Thus, Bird Jaguar of Yaxchilan was "Captor of Ah-Cauac" until 755, and "Captor of Jewelled Skull" after that, also calling himself: "He of the Twenty *Bak* (Captives)"<sup>131</sup>.

Finally, we can see image-ing expressed in how victims were treated and addressed. Like divinities, they were "Lord" or "Lady"<sup>132</sup>. A slave-victim would be: "hallowed as a goddess...all worshipped her as the deity"<sup>133</sup>. Duran states victims were honoured "as if they had been gods"<sup>134</sup>, and both he<sup>135</sup> and Sahagun<sup>136</sup> relate instances and hymns wherein god and victim seem to have fused into one. Perhaps this explains why, when a victim for one particular offering drank a potion

as a prelude to his death, it was called *Neyolmaxilitztli*:

"Realisation, Fulfilment"<sup>137</sup>.

- 1 Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Native Mesoamerican Spirituality*, 63.
- 2 B.C. Brundage, *The Jade Steps*, 63.
- 3 *Ibid.*
- 4 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 126.
- 5 Sir John Eric Sidney Thompson, *Maya History and Religion*, 227.
- 6 *Ritual of the Bacabs*, 169.
- 7 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 100.
- 8 *Ibid.*
- 9 L. de la Haba, "Guatemala, Maya and Modern", *National Geographic* 146: 5 (November 1977), 668.
- 10 Hernan Cortes, *Letters*, 106. See also Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 211.
- 11 I. de Motolinia, *History of the Indians*, 132.
- 12 G. Paszlory, *Aztec Art*, 90.
- 13 Hernan Cortes, *Letters*, 107.
- 14 *Codex Telleriano-Remensis* Folio 9r. Serge Gruzinski (trans. D. Dussinheare), *Painting the Conquest: The Mexican Indians and the European Renaissance* (Hamazon: UNESCO, 1992), 57.
- 15 Guenther Lonskowski, "Der Aztekische Blumengesang", in C.J. Bleeker, S.G. Braden and M. Simon (eds.), *Ex Orbe Religionum: Studies in the History of Religions* (Supplement to Numen), XXII (London: Lugdun Batavorum & E. J. Brill, 1972), 228, 231-235.
- 16 *Collection of Mexican Songs* 67r. in Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Native Mesoamerican Spirituality*, 205-206.
- 17 Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Pre-Columbian Literatures of Mexico*, 62-63.
- 18 Josef Haackel, "Hochgott und Götter im alten Mexiko", 36.
- 19 Henry B. Nicholson, "Religion in Pre-Hispanic Central Mexico", Table 3.
- 20 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods and Rites*, 99, 179.
- 21 Alan R. Sandstrom, *Corn is Our Blood*, 231.
- 22 Jane Wheeler Ficer-Ferreira & Billy Jose Evans, "Mossbauer Spectral Analysis of Iron Ore Mirrors", in David L. Brownman (ed.), *Cultural Continuity in Mesoamerica* (The Hague: Mouton, 1978), 138.
- 23 Linda Schele & Mary Ellen Miller, *The Blood of Kings: Dynasty and Ritual in Maya Art* (New York: George Braziller Inc., 1986), 43.
- 24 G.E. Stuart, "The Riddle of the Glyphs", *National Geographic*, 148: 6 (December 1975), 773.
- 25 Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Native Mesoamerican Spirituality*, 200.
- 26 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 143 - 144.
- 27 Richard C. Padden, "Huitzilopochtli", R. Wauchope (ed.), *The Indian Background of Latin American History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963), 53 - 59.
- 28 Henry B. Nicholson, "Religion in Pre-Hispanic Central Mexico", 409.
- 29 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex* Bk. 2, 33: 64.
- 30 Laurette Sejourné, *Burning Water*, 27, 32.
- 31 *Romances de las Senores de Nueva Espana* Fol. 113r. - 10r. in Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Native Mesoamerican Spirituality*, 245.

- 32 *Book of Songs of Dzuthalache* 46-47 in Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Native Mesoamerican Spirituality*, 230.
- 33 *Collection of Mexican Songs* Folio 10r & 14v in Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Native Mesoamerican Spirituality*, 258.
- 34 Irene Nicholson, *Firefly in the Night*, 195.
- 35 Poem in Miguel Leon-Portilla, "Philosophy in Ancient Mexico", *Handbook of Middle American Indians* 10 (Austin: University of Texas, 1971), 450.
- 36 Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Native Mesoamerican Spirituality*, 244.
- 37 *ibid.*
- 38 *Cantares Mexicanos* *ibid.*, 448.
- 39 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 415: 3, 157, 11: 175.
- 40 Irene Nicholson, *Firefly in the Night*, 177.
- 41 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 2: 6, Folio 43r.
- 42 Irene Nicholson, *Firefly in the Night*, 177.
- 43 G. Pasztory, *Aztec Art*, 196 - 197.
- 44 *Ritual of the Escabaxli*
- 45 Alan R. Sandstrom, *Corn is Blood*, 258.
- 46 Inga Clendinnen, *Aztecs* 98 - 99.
- 47 G.J. Neumann, "Experience of Time in Nahuatl", *Journal of American Academy of Religions* 44 (June 1976), *in passim*.
- 48 G.M. Severin, *The Paris Codex: Decoding an Astronomical Ephemeris* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1981), 69f.
- 49 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 7: 9.
- 50 *Anales de Cuauhtlan* Folio 21r in Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Native Mesoamerican Spirituality*, 246 - 247.
- 51 *Cantares Mexicanos* Folio 21r.
- 52 *Romances de las Senoras de Nueva Espana* Folio 4v - 5v in Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Native Mesoamerican Spirituality*, 246 - 247.
- 53 Miguel Leon-Portilla, "Pre-Hispanic Thought", in M. de la Cueva (ed.), *Major Trends in Mexican Philosophy* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1966), 33.
- 54 Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Pre-Columbian Literatures of Mexico* 85.
- 55 *Codice Mendoza* Folio 118r in Miguel Leon-Portilla, "Pre-Hispanic Thought"
- 56 Irene Nicholson, *Firefly in the Night*, 155.
- 57 *Codice Mendoza* Folio 118r.v in Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Native Mesoamerican Spirituality*, 200.
- 58 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 3: 2 - 14.
- 59 *ibid.*, Bk. 2: 160.
- 60 *Popul Vuh*, 150, 153-155.
- 61 Laurette Sejourné, *Burning Water*, 58.
- 62 Irene Nicholson, *Firefly in the Night*, 180.
- 63 *Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca* in Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Pre-Columbian Literatures of Mexico*, 52-53.
- 64 Poem of Tecayehuatzin, *Collection of Mexican Songs* Folio 9v in Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Native Mesoamerican Spirituality*, 262.
- 65 H. la Fay, "The Maya, Children of Time", *National Geographic* 148: 6 (December 1975), 259.
- 66 Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Aztec Thought and Culture: A Study of the Ancient Nahuatl Mind* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1963), 175.
- 67 Jacquesoustelle, *Daily Life of the Aztecs*, 73f, 140f.

- 68 Tezozomoc in Jacques Soustelle, *Daily Life of the Aztecs* 210.
- 69 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods* 93.
- 70 Patricia R. Anawalt, "What Price Aztec Peasantry?", *Archaeology* 30: 4, July 1977.
- 71 R. Hassig, "Aztec Warfare", *History Today* 40 (February 1990).
- 72 Irene Nicholson, *Firefly in the Night* 43.
- 73 *Cantares Mexicanos* 29.
- 74 *ibid.*, Song 12.
- 75 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex* Bk.2: 17: 31; 2:11; 13: 31; 146; Bk.3: 4.
- 76 *ibid.* Bk.2: 31: 146.
- 77 *ibid.* Bk.2: 15: 27.
- 78 *Chilam Balam* 24 (96).
- 79 B. Gyles & E. Sayer, *Of Gods and Men: Mexico and the Mexican Indian* (London: B.B.C. 1980), 743-749.
- 80 *Cantares Mexicanos*, Song 68 (Folio 50v. - 5a).
- 81 Song of Otomiecuhthi, Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex* Bk.2: App. 234.
- 82 Irene Nicholson, *Firefly in the Night* 42 - 44.
- 83 *ibid.*
- 84 *ibid.* 61v. as translated by Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Native Mesoamerican Spirituality*: 183.
- 85 J. Luning, *Indians of the North American Plains* (London: Macdonald, 1978), 9.
- 86 Jacques Soustelle, *Daily Life of the Aztecs* 63 - 64.
- 87 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex* Bk. 5: 31.
- 88 B.C. Brundage, *The Jade Steps* 137 - 138.
- 89 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex* Bk. 3: 10: 23.
- 90 Kurt Ross, *Codex Mendoza*, 113.
- 91 F.K. Clavigero, *Rules of the Aztec Language*, 96.
- 92 T. de Motolinia, *History of the Indians*, 97.
- 93 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex* Bk.3: 6.
- 94 Guenther Lanczkowski, "Different Types of Redemption in Mexican Religion", in E. J. Wexblowsky & C. J. Bleeker (eds.), *Types of Redemption. Contributions to the Theme of the Study Conference: Jerusalem 14-19 July 1968* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1970), 128.
- 95 Henry B. Nicholson, "Religion in Pre-Hispanic Central Mexico", 431.
- 96 T. de Motolinia, *History of the Indians*, 302.
- 97 F.K. Clavigero, *Rules of the Aztec Language*, 96.
- 98 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods* 176.
- 99 *ibid.*, 102.
- 100 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk.2: 18: 33.
- 101 B.C. Brundage, *The Jade Steps*, 143.
- 102 Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Aztec Thought and Culture*, 79.
- 103 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex* Bk.2: 23: 68.
- 104 Arvid Hvidtfieldt, *Testi and Iztpilatli* (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1958), 80 - 88.
- 105 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex* Bk.2: App. 227.
- 106 *ibid.* Bk.2: App. 231.
- 107 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 177 Note 4.
- 108 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex* Bk.2: 197.
- 109 Laurette Sejourné, *Burning Water*, 162.

- 110 Frank Neumann, "Paper- A Sacred Material in Aztec Religion", 150-154.
- 111 Oscar Lewis, *Tepoztlan Village in Mexico*, 84.
- 112 Ted J. J. Leyenaar, "The Days of the Dead: Recurring Reunion", 60-62.
- 113 F. Harcastas, "It's a Way of Life: Mexican Folk Art", *National Geographic* 153:5, May 1978, 646, 666-667.
- 114 Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Native Mesoamerican Spirituality*, 29.
- 115 Linda Schele & Mary Ellen Miller, *The Blood of Kings: Dynasty and Ritual in Maya Art*, 251-252.
- 116 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex* Bk. 2: App. 190.
- 117 Bernal Diaz, *History of the Conquest of New Spain*, 204.
- 118 C. E. Dibble, *The Conquest through Aztec Eyes*, 13.
- 119 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 99.
- 120 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 2: App. 210.
- 121 *ibid.*, Bk. 2: 31-161.
- 122 *ibid.*, Bk. 2: 4-76.
- 123 *ibid.*, Bk. 1: 30, 34.
- 124 *ibid.*, Bk. 6: 314.
- 125 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 71.
- 126 Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Pre-Columbian Literatures of Mexico*, 48.
- 127 J. Akenson (ed.), *Citra 1492* (Washington D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1991), 548.
- 128 T. de Motolinia, *History of the Indians*, 356.
- 129 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 4: 18: 69-70.
- 130 Sahagun as translated in Inga Clendinnen, *Aztecs*, 95.
- 131 Linda Schele & Mary Ellen Miller, *The Blood of Kings*, 210.
- 132 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 189.
- 133 *ibid.*, 232.
- 134 Diego Duran, *The Aztecs: History of the Indians*, 109.
- 135 *ibid.*, 42.
- 136 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex* Bk. 2: 226, 238-239, 242.
- 137 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 132.

## SIX : THE TRANSFORMATION OF EXTINCTION

### I. ULTIMATE REALITY AS OBLIVION AND ANNIHILATION


The 'sinister' nature of Mesoamerican pantheons is obvious to even casual observers. Where else but Mexico would a god like Micapetlacalli, "the Box of Death"<sup>1</sup>, flourish ?

Little attempt has been made to understand the significance of this. Brundage established that darkness and night had positive, dynamic value for the Aztecs<sup>2</sup>, but the matter runs deeper. It would seem, as I hope to determine in the following, that the Aztec Ultimate was Itself a type of emptiness, with extinction being much desired.

#### a. God as a Vacuum

The Aztec Ultimate could be a vortex: "*everything* goes to His House"<sup>3</sup>. For the Aztecs, the dead "vanish" into<sup>4</sup> and are "hidden"<sup>5</sup> by the High God. This is not surprising, given Its 'empty' character as "Night and Wind" (*Yohualli Ehecatl*).

When manifesting as gods, It is similarly vaporous. It is "Wind" or "Air" as Quetzalcoatl; "Shadow"<sup>6</sup>, "Black One" (Ixitlitlin) or "the Night"<sup>7</sup> as Tezcatlipoca; "born in the rain-mist"<sup>8</sup> as corn-god Cinteotl; "dwells in cloud land"<sup>9</sup> as Huitzilopochtli; and "he who is among the clouds" as the fire-god Xiuhtecuhtli<sup>10</sup>.

We have already mentioned the belief that deities inhabit, or manifest as, various cavities and vacuums. This, too, seems connected with Divine 'emptiness'. A shell is the Mayan symbol for zero (  )<sup>11</sup>,

and one of their gods was actually called *Mahuq'utah* (Nought)<sup>12</sup>, so we can safely assume that shells signified a type of void or vacuum. Mayan iconography has people<sup>13</sup>, deities<sup>14</sup> (see Figure 41) and Cosmic Trees<sup>15</sup> emerging from shells and turtle shells<sup>16</sup>. The Mayans even recognised 'shell deities': Green Turtle, Conch God and Great Lord of the Conch<sup>17</sup>.

Though there was a "He-of-the-Sea shell" (the Moon) and turtle-shell-dwelling gods amongst the Aztecs, caves more or less took the place of merlons in Central Mexico. Again, though, a 'void' has a supernatural, creative quality. All Aztecs (and all gods in some myths) were believed to originate in "the Seven Caves". Moreover, the name of a main Aztec god, Tlaloc, meant "path under the earth" or "long cave"<sup>18</sup>.

#### b. God as a Devourer

Religious art of Mesoamerica is often characterised by animals (god-*nahualli*) and skeletal gods devouring humans<sup>19</sup> or their hearts (Figure 42). God, in fact, is very often a carnivore: an eagle (gods Tonatiuh, Cuauhuieihuatl), a snake (gods Quetzalcoatl, Xiuhtecuhtli, goddesses Cihuacoatl, Coatlicue), an owl (Tlacolotl), a jaguar (Tezcatlipoca), a coyote (gods Huehuecoyotl, Tezcatlipoca<sup>20</sup>), a crocodile (goddess Tlaltecuhli - the Mayans' Itzamna), a mountain lion (Acolmiztli). Even gentle animal-*nahualli* will assume destructive guises. Totochtzin Tezcatzoncatl is an "angry rabbit, *maddened with drink*"<sup>21</sup>. Although a rabbit, he is "the monster"<sup>22</sup>.

Divine ferocity was not the only thing being conveyed thus. More important seems to have been the image of gods as ravenous *devourers*, who swallow people whole (see Figures 43 & 44). It was as though communion with the Divine were a patently deadly business, demanding surrender of one's very existence.



THE ULTIMATE AS VOID



Figure 40: God emerging from a shell.  
Mayan clay sculpture.

THE ULTIMATE AS DEVOURER



Figure 41:  
Jaguar or puma (a god)  
consuming a human heart.  
Temple of Kukulcan,  
Chichen Itza.

THE ULTIMATE AS DEVOURER



Figure 42: Feathered serpent swallowing a person.  
Olmec engraving at Chalcatzingo, 900-500 b.c.e.



Figure 43:  
Feathered  
serpent  
swallowing  
or disgorging  
warrior-skeletons. Toltec relief at Tula (750-1150 c.e.).

### c. God as an All-Consuming Fire

When God is not consuming people, He or She floods, drowns, blinds or incinerates them: "burns people, singes, scorches them". The last image was particularly apt, for Aztec temples were made of *tezontle*—volcanic stone<sup>23</sup>, and the Aztecs were always talking of "bonfires" and "burning" in spiritual tones.

The Aztec God was "the *Possessor of Fire*"<sup>24</sup> and "*Mother of the Inferno*"<sup>25</sup>. As Tepeyollotl, He walks on a lava flow<sup>26</sup>; as Tlaloc, His face is "bright and red like a flaming fire"<sup>27</sup>. As Tonatiuh, He is "the blazing one"; as Xipe, He is "Mirror of Fiery Brightness". The Deity "rains ashes" — just as Tezcatlipoca sometimes manifests as a "billowing, rolling bundle of ashes"<sup>28</sup>.

Such imagery stressed the Ultimate's role as extinguisher of life. It was claimed the High God:

"hurls upon men the *xiuhcoatl* (fiery serpent) and fiery auger, that is, war, destroying torment, body-consuming fire"<sup>29</sup>.

## II. PROBLEMATIC STATE: THE FINALITY OF DISSOLUTION, AND DIVINE MALEVOLENCE

When Ultimate Reality is conceived as that by which humans are utterly obliterated, various dilemmas result. Firstly, a strong awareness of the universal pervasiveness of death develops. Nezahualcoyotl was fond of reflecting that:

"all the earth is a grave: nothing escapes it. Nothing is so perfect that it does not fall and die"<sup>30</sup>.

The view simply perpetuates that of a talking gourd-skull in the *Popul Vuh*:

"This my head, has nothing on it. Just bone...It's the same with the head of that great lord...it's just the flesh that makes his face look good. And when he dies, people get frightened by his bones"<sup>31</sup>.

Secondly, death becomes not just an end, but a *complete extinction and dissolution*: we "depart forever"<sup>32</sup>; "In the Place of Mist *he is no longer*"<sup>33</sup>; "Alone I must go- *my own self shall be lost*"<sup>34</sup>.

Perhaps because the soul's journey through the underworlds was believed to terminate at *Toanpopolihuiyan*- "Common House, *where we lose ourselves*"<sup>35</sup>, afterlife was a *fusion*- a final, somewhat fearful loss of identity and individuality: "They become *as one* in the Land of the Dead"<sup>36</sup>.

Thirdly, Mexicans were troubled by their deities' malevolent (*xic-tli*)<sup>37</sup> nature. Tezcatlipoca is actually called *Yoatl*- Enemy<sup>38</sup>: *Tecoyaomiqui*(God of the Enemy Dead)<sup>39</sup>, and most significantly, "Enemy on Both Sides"- He stood *against* Aztecs as well as for them.

With a God like this, it is no wonder that complaints proliferated. *Teotl* are blamed for inflicting disease, torment and catastrophe. The High God is said to be unfeeling: "Sharp"; "Thy heart is of stone"; "Thy silence seems inexorable, O Giver of Life"<sup>40</sup>. He or It does not care about our lives: "mocks us...betrays us". Worse, "He is enraged at one. He kills one"<sup>41</sup>. As Awesome and Terrible Lord- God of Evil Omen<sup>42</sup>, He has made us *Imalacualihine*: "prisoners of His food"<sup>43</sup>.

Often Aztecs express a sense of helplessness in the face of this Divine cruelty and duplicity. Although they serve the gods, the Sun "wages war" on them<sup>44</sup>. At the height of the famine of 1450-1454, the Emperor announced that it was God who was destroying the nation:

"He who wages war against us is the Lord of All Created Things, the Lord of Night and Day. Who can fight against Him?"<sup>45</sup>.

PROBLEMATIC STATES: THE ULTIMATE AS SACRIFICIAL  
IMPLEMENTS



Figure 44: Pattern of curved obsidian knives (used in heart-sacrifices). A Teotihuacano mural, 100-600 c.e.

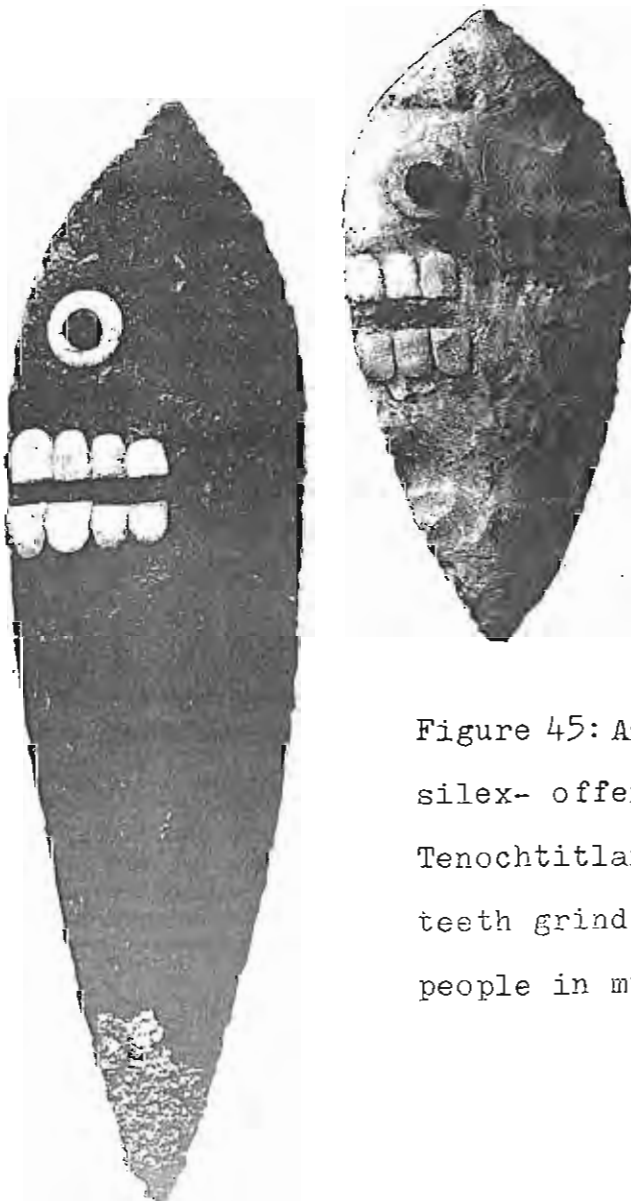


Figure 45: Aztec "god-knives" of silex- offerings from Templo Mayor, Tenochtitlan. Knives with grinding teeth grind up and disgorge gods and people in much of Aztec art.

It must have troubled the Aztecs that their God was the very *implement and medium* of their destruction: the "Enemy"- "Warrior"<sup>46</sup>; the "Lord of the Chase" (Amimitl, Camaxtli)- whose 'game' was evidently human; "the Sacrificer"<sup>47</sup> and "Wounder"<sup>48</sup>. *Teotl* manifest as the very paraphernalia for *tlacamicitiztli*: god Iztlacoliuhque (Curved Obsidian Knife); god Tecpatl (Flint Knife- an aspect of Tezcatlipoca)<sup>49</sup>; god Itztli (Obsidian Knife)<sup>50</sup>; god Teocomitl (God Rock)<sup>51</sup>; and the sacrificial slab itself: god Itztapal Totec ("Stone Slab Our Lord"- an aspect of Xipe)<sup>52</sup>.

In other words, when someone died sacrificially, it was the *Teotl* who, as knives, slabs and other devices, did the actual slaying. The theme seems bizarre to Western scholars now, but in fact it was echoed around the Aztec and pre-Aztec world in art generally. Consider Huerra's description of Aztec skull racks: "Wherever one turned his eyes, they fell on death"<sup>53</sup>. Add to this temple-entrances of gaping mouths; murals of knife-rows (Figure 45); sculptures of skeletal gods with claws ready to strike<sup>54</sup>, or knife-gods grinding their hungry teeth (Figure 46). Small wonder one Aztec poet declared:

"Do I perhaps go with Him? He, too,  
came to cut off my life on earth!"<sup>55</sup>.

However- and this was the greatest dilemma- our violent death was considered an essential prerequisite for attaining anything truly lasting. A Mexican "Dance of the Five Suns" - pre-Hispanic in origin- has each dancer (Sun) dying, but reborn through the strength of the Fifth Sun. The performance ends with the Suns all dancing together, the Fifth Sun gyrating with great energy at the centre<sup>56</sup>. What this epitomised is a concept of death as the gateway to fuller life.

Yaqui Indians today call death the "crack between the worlds"<sup>57</sup>. It seems Mesoamericans were fascinated by the junction between living

and dying. The actual moment of expiring had, in their understanding, tremendous spiritual potential. When a man died, he was henceforth addressed as "god Cuecuxtzin". When a woman died, she was henceforth addressed as "goddess Chamotzin", for *teo-ti* - "to die" is literally "to become God"<sup>58</sup>.

Sacrificial victims highlight this. They were actually called "gods" and treated "as though divine"<sup>59</sup>. They become true *nahualli* (animal-twins) of the deities: "You are created Eagle-Jaguar"<sup>60</sup>.

In this sense, death was pivotal to our theosis. Mexicans still consider it important to "die well" and have "a good death"<sup>61</sup>. Mexican Indians will even say: "Tell me how you die, and I will tell you who you are"<sup>62</sup>.

However, such outlooks create a problem. Although, on the other side of death: "nothing is sad at Thy side"<sup>63</sup>; "peace and happiness are there"<sup>64</sup>; "all is eternal there"<sup>65</sup>; "the answer will be known"<sup>66</sup>- what can be said of our current state?

Is it of value at all? It would appear not:

"Now that you begin to look around you, be aware. Here it is like this: There is no happiness, no pleasure. There is heartache, worry, fatigue. Here spring up and grow suffering and distress...There is no place of well-being on the earth...They say that the earth is a place of painful pleasure, of grievous happiness"<sup>67</sup>

In the Aztec understanding, we are plagued by the problem of being strangers and misfits here. The earth is "not the place to accomplish things", because physical life has removed us from our true task and home:

"Where are we bound? our home is elsewhere, in the Land of the Fleshless"<sup>68</sup>.

"Somewhere else is the Place of Life.

There I want to go.  
 There I will have genuine flowers  
 the flowers that delight  
 that give pleasure to the heart"<sup>69</sup>.

Earthly life is also, as we have seen, an empty dream— a misery, so there was constant craving to enter the Beyond: "Allow us to die— our gods are already dead"<sup>70</sup>.

### III. MEANS: RESIGNATION, REALISATION AND SHOCK

#### a. Resignation

Faced with such mental crises, one Aztec approach was evidently passive surrender: "I will go down there; nothing do I expect"<sup>71</sup>. At times, dying must have seemed a relief from the confusion and torment of living. A diseased man would address Tezcatlipoca quite angrily and despairingly:

"O wretched Sodomite!  
 Already Thou takest  
 pleasure with me.  
*Slay me quickly!*  
 Trample me underfoot!"<sup>72</sup>.

Perhaps a similar wearied resignation underlay human sacrifice.

#### b. Realisation

*Otiquittaco quinequi moyollo yehua itzmiquitla* : "Thou camest to see it..thy heart desireth it: it was death by the obsidian blade!"<sup>73</sup>. There are several Aztec poems which suggest that a moment arose in many an Aztec's life when he or she realised that the 'answer' to all difficulties— the event they most yearned for— was *xochitonal*: "flowery destruction"— a glorious military or sacrificial demise:

"Fear not, my heart: on the Plain  
 I covet death by the obsidian knife:  
 all that our hearts desire is death in war!"



"Oh, those of you in the battle:  
I long to die by an obsidian blade,  
Our hearts wish only for a warrior's death!"<sup>74</sup>.

X "Now thou hast come to know what it is thy heart was desiring:  
it was death by the obsidian knife!  
Thou art clad with gilded skin, studded with jade;  
with it thou art made to rejoice in the midst of the Plain.  
Now thou hast come to know what it is thy heart was desiring:  
it was death by the obsidian knife!  
Our death was utterly ended"<sup>75</sup>.

We have seen that such an end was spectacular and highly esteemed,  
so this approach is not, in my estimation, surprising. After all, is not  
the warrior a "friend of death"<sup>76</sup>? How could this be, unless death was  
desired? Clendinnen was convinced from Aztec discourses that a  
sacrificial end was dreaded: "a most bitter fate"<sup>77</sup>, but this seems a  
misinterpretation. I would counter that whenever an Aztec described the  
horrors or seriousness of a thing, it was intended as *appreciation* -  
darkness and terror having real worth in their world. At any rate, in  
most sources, a "flowery" demise is exalted:

X "That is *why we were born*!  
That is *why we go to battle*!  
That is the *blessed death* our  
ancestors extolled!"<sup>78</sup>.

Moreover, in the last statement of the poem given earlier: "our  
death was *utterly ended*", it would appear that the sacrificial death had  
a kind of ultimate finality. Death itself, we are told, is "ended"  
through *tlacamicitiztli*.

What does this mean? We see similar in poems and hymns. In the  
Song of Cihuacoatl, ritual death apparently offers a promise of Ultimate  
satisfaction: "13 Eagle is Our Mother/ *May He sate me!*" - and, again, a  
"final" ending: "Let men be dragged away/ It will *forever end*"<sup>79</sup>.  
Likewise: "Here may it *end at last*/ (on) the Plain of the Serpent"<sup>80</sup>.

Was sacrificial death considered a means of spiritual liberation or fulfilment? I feel it must have been. Consider the tone of ecstasy and deliverance in the sacrificial 'Song of Amimitl':

"You have come to linger  
At *the gate of exit*  
I have come to linger  
At the House of Darts  
Stand there  
Come to stand there  
I only go afar  
I only go afar  
I only go afar"

"Already I am taken  
I am sent  
I am sent.."

"Let Him hasten..  
Let Him hasten.."

"With obsidian I rejoice me  
With obsidian I rejoice me  
With obsidian I rejoice me"<sup>81</sup>.

To me, the hymn conveys a sense of blind yearning to be "taken" by the god in death. The victim waits impatiently at "the gate of exit" and "rejoices" with obsidian.

### c. Frightening to Death

We have seen that Ultimate Reality for the Aztecs is sometimes a 'death of the self': a Divine Oblivion. It follows, then, that the process of attaining that Reality might not be too pleasant, even if the rewards of the state beyond life are well worth it.

Given this outlook, the horrific divinities of the Aztecs can begin to make sense. Perhaps it was considered necessary to *frighten* people into Reality. Perhaps the aim of Aztec religion was to jolt people out their mundane existence and little egos? Did they believe that not only the body, but the ego itself could expire if sufficiently shocked?

Circumstantial evidence would suggest so. The sermons accompanying ritual killings "extol fear, reverence"<sup>82</sup>, and Duran noted the great awe and dread in which gods were held<sup>83</sup>. Moreover, in the sacrificial songs of Huitzilopochtli, the talk is often of fear *and* mergence:

"Oh, among the young people of Huitznahuac,  
my captive is dressed in feathers,  
I am feared, I am feared,  
my captive is dressed in feathers"<sup>84</sup>.

"Our enemies are those at Amantla;  
come *adhere* to us!  
War is made with combat,  
come *adhere* to us!"<sup>85</sup>.

However, the strongest evidence may be the sacrificial 'Song of Yiacatecuhtli'. One stanza runs thus:

"In a coffer of jade  
I burn myself up  
Not with easiness  
My priests have brought me  
The heart of water  
Whence sand is scattered"<sup>86</sup>.

The "coffer of jade" was probably the eagle-bowl, in which human hearts were incinerated. The victim seems to be saying that he is utterly *annihilating* himself through dread ("not with ease") and ritual death. The Sea-symbolism in sand-scattering has already been discussed, but in light of this, it is possible the rest of the stanza conveys the victim envisaging his physical heart replaced by an oceanic "heart of water".

#### IV. CULTURAL AND RITUAL EXPRESSION

##### a. Voids and Vortexes

Emphasis on dissolution had many expressions. Warriors off to battle and possible sacrifice wore *ehēcacozcaatl*- "wind jewels", which were sectioned shells. Shell-decorations was common in sacrificial garb

and temple reliefs alike, and one type of female victim was said to be an 'empty vessel' - a "hanging gourd"<sup>87</sup>.

The habit of holding sacrifices at midnight<sup>88</sup>, and tossing child-offerings into whirlpools must have supported the idea of the soul disappearing into a dark vortex. Certainly most victims' hearts were brought into the blackness of temple interiors<sup>89</sup>. Temples of Cihuacoatl were especially "always pitch black..`Place of Blackness'"<sup>90</sup>.

#### b. Carnivores

This imagery extended into all aspects of Aztec culture. To give just a few examples, a city was *altepetl*- "water monster"<sup>91</sup>, its sacred precincts surrounded by a *Serpent Wall*. Moreover, captors are called "Bears" and the sacrificing priest for gladiatorial slaying was always the "Old Mountain Lion"<sup>92</sup>.

#### c. Frightening to Death

Many Aztec rites seem deliberately contrived to instil a maximum of dread. The ceremonies for Xipe, with their stinking, flayed skins, were considered particularly horrific<sup>93</sup>, yet each festival had its own brand of terror. During Teccizquacuilli, a powerful man wore the skin of Teteoinnan's *ixiptla* and ran about with priests, threatening and presenting such a ferocious appearance that:

"There was much fear; fear spread over the people...the *ixiptla* and her companions set upon the warriors..they just scattered..terrified"<sup>94</sup>.

On another occasion, the Ometochtli priest would appear in horrific guise, chewing sharp stones!<sup>95</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Alfonso Caso, *The Aztecs - People of the Sun*, 64.

- 2 Burr Cartwright Brundage, *The Jade Steps* 155.
- 3 *ibid.*, 184.
- 4 Nigel Davies, *The Aztecs* 126.
- 5 Sir John Eric Sidney Thompson, *Maya History and Religion* 73.
- 6 Cottie Burland, *Moctezuma: Lord of the Aztecs* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1972), 57.
- 7 Sir John Eric Sidney Thompson, *Maya History and Religion* 293.
- 8 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 2: App. 238.
- 9 *ibid.*, Bk. 2: App. 221-223.
- 10 Sir John Eric Sidney Thompson, *Maya History and Religion* 230.
- 11 *ibid.*, 75.
- 12 *Popul Vuh* 187.
- 13 Linda Schele & Mary Ellen Miller, *The Blood of Kings*, Pl. 106a (280).
- 14 *ibid.*, Pl. 118a.
- 15 M. Pohl & J. Pohl, "Ancient Maya Cave Rituals", *Archaeology* 36 (May - June 1983), 30.
- 16 G. Pasztory, *Aztec Art* Pl. 226.
- 17 Sir John Eric Sidney Thompson, *Maya History and Religion* 278.
- 18 D. Heyden, "Interpretation of a Cave under the Pyramid of the Sun at Teotihuacan", *American Antiquity* 40 (April 1973), 130-5.
- 19 *Codex Ferjervary-Mayer*, 28 in Alfonso Caso, *The Aztecs - People of the Sun* 63.
- 20 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex* Bk. 4/5: 186.
- 21 *Collection of Songs* in Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Native Mesoamerican Spirituality*, 206.
- 22 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex* Bk. 2: 242.
- 23 A.F. Montes, "The Building of Tenochtitlan", *National Geographic*, 158: 6 (December 1980), 761.
- 24 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods* 204.
- 25 This is one of Coatlicue's names: Tzitzimichuatl - Torquemada in Irene Nicholson, *Firefly in the Night* 88.
- 26 *Codex Cospiandini* Cottie A. Burland, *Magic Books of Mexico*, 22.
- 27 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods* 155.
- 28 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex* Bk. 4/5: 12: 177.
- 29 Sahagun in Laurette Sejourne, *Burning Water*, 158.
- 30 *ibid.*, 132-133.
- 31 *Popul Vuh*, 113 - 114.
- 32 Irene Nicholson, *Firefly in the Night*, 76.
- 33 Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Pre-Columbian Literatures of Mexico*, 111.
- 34 Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Native Mesoamerican Spirituality*, 255.
- 35 *ibid.*, 44.
- 36 Irene Nicholson, *Firefly in the Night*, 174.
- 37 *ibid.*, 32.
- 38 Alfonso Caso, *The Aztecs - People of the Sun*, 28.
- 39 *ibid.*, 59.
- 40 Irene Nicholson, *Firefly in the Night*, 199.
- 41 *Primeros memoriales* 6:42 in R. Haly, "Bare Bones: Re-thinking Mesoamerican Divinity", 246.
- 42 Irene Nicholson, *Firefly in the Night*, 87.
- 43 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods* 107.

- 44 Irene Nicholson, *Firefly in the Night*, 80.
- 45 Diego Duran, *The Aztecs - History of the Indians*, 149.
- 46 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 41: 5: 150.
- 47 Alfonso Caso, *The Aztecs - People of the Sun*, 64.
- 48 Sir John Eric Sidney Thompson, *Maya History and Religion*, 205, 236.
- 49 Alfonso Caso, *The Aztecs - People of the Sun*, 29.
- 50 *Codex Borgia* Pl. 32, Burr Cartwright Brundage, *The Jade Steps*, 173.
- 51 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 148.
- 52 Henry B. Nicholson, "Religion in Pre-Hispanic Central Mexico", Table 3.
- 53 Burr Cartwright Brundage, *The Jade Steps*, 89.
- 54 *Codex Cospiacoin* Cottie A. Burland, *Magic Books from Mexico*, 21-22. See also G. Pasztory, *Aztec Art*, 158.
- 55 Poem in Laurette Sejourne, *Burning Water*, 7.
- 56 Irene Nicholson, *Firefly in the Night*, 54.
- 57 K.P. Kramer, *The Sacred Art of Dying: How World Religions Acknowledge Death* ( New York : Paulist, 1988 ), 170.
- 58 Josef Haekel, "Hochgott und Gotter im alten Mexiko", 132 - 133.
- 59 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 131, 204, 232.
- 60 Irene Nicholson, *Firefly in the Night*, 49.
- 61 Frances Toor, *A Treasury of Mexican Folkways*, 161.
- 62 G.G. Reck, *In the Shadow of Tlaloc: Life in a Mexican Village* ( Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1978 ), 64..
- 63 Irene Nicholson, *Firefly in the Night*, 173.
- 64 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 6: 17: 203.
- 65 Irene Nicholson, *Firefly in the Night*, 50.
- 66 *ibid.*, 195.
- 67 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 6: 18 as translated by Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Native Mesoamerican Spirituality*, 63.
- 68 Irene Nicholson, *Firefly in the Night*, 177.
- 69 *Cantares Mexicanos* in Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Pre-Columbian Literatures of Mexico*, 186.
- 70 Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Aztec Thought and Culture*, 64.
- 71 *Cantares Mexicanos* in Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Pre-Columbian Literatures of Mexico*, 84 - 85.
- 72 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 3: 2: 12.
- 73 Irene Nicholson, *Firefly in the Night*, 135.
- 74 *ibid.*, 168.
- 75 *ibid.*, 190.
- 76 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex* Bk. 2: 30: 123.
- 77 Inga Clendinnen, *Aztecs*, 100, 104.
- 78 Irene Nicholson, *Firefly in the Night*, 94.
- 79 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 2: 236 - 237.
- 80 Irene Nicholson, *Firefly in the Night*, 190.
- 81 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex* Bk. 2: 233.
- 82 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 184.
- 83 *ibid.*, 95.
- 84 Song of the Warrior of Huitznahuac ( Huitzilopochtli ) in *Codex Matritensis* as translated by Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Native Mesoamerican Spirituality*, 193.

- 
- 85 Song of Huitzilopochtli, in *Codex Matritensis*; *ibid.*, 191.  
86 Song of Yiacatecuhli, Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 2: 245.  
87 *ibid.*, Bk. 2: 27: 104.  
88 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex* Bk. 2: 120.  
89 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods* 211.  
90 *ibid.*  
91 G. Pasztory, *Aztec Art* 167.  
92 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods* 177-178.  
93 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex* Bk. 2: 22: 59.  
94 *ibid.*, Bk. 2: 32: 120 - 121.  
95 T. de Motolinia, *History of the Indians* 302.

## SEVEN: THE TRANSFORMATION OF SYMBIOTIC EXCHANGE

### I. ULTIMATE REALITY: THE GREAT, ETERNAL SACRIFICE

The Mexicas' universe could be described as an eternally-slain yet living victim. In *Historia de Origen*, gods constantly sacrifice themselves for humanity's sake<sup>1</sup>. Each new Sun (cosmic age) is born and destroyed through the battles and self-sacrifices of the gods<sup>2</sup>, and the pantheon itself originates, as *Huamantla Codex* illustrates, from a *dead* god. According to one myth, goddess Itzpapalotl (Obsidian Butterfly) created the "1,600 divinities" by hurling Herself down from the heavens and shattering into 1,600 obsidian fragments<sup>3</sup>. Mexican *codexes* depict a variety of "shattering goddesses", with figures emerging from their joints (see Figure 47), so this story must have been widespread.

The world is similarly a sacrifice. As *Historyre du Mechique* and *Vaticanus 3773* show, we exist on a living, crocodilian Goddess, dragged up by Tezcatlipoca (who lost his foot in the process) and split in two<sup>4</sup>. The Nahua today still call stones the Earth Mother's "bones", water Her "blood"<sup>5</sup>, and maize and soil Her "flesh"<sup>6</sup>.

Each Age's Sun, Moon and Stars were slain gods - tossed into bonfires or killed in battle. The Mayans hold the Moon to be one of Kin's (the Sun god's) eyes, which Kin plucked out when people complained of too much light at night<sup>7</sup>. The reds and pinks of every sunset similarly bespoke a sacrificial tale: the Eagle-Sun's daily, bloody "death"<sup>8</sup>.



*Codex Borgia* tells us all people arose from sacrifice: when Quetzalcoatl bled his penis over human bones<sup>9</sup>. In south-eastern Mexico, our origin is even more violent: we sprang to life when deities sliced off their own fingers<sup>10</sup>.

Lastly but most importantly, all human food is considered the sacrificed body of the Divine Couple's first son: Piltzintecuhtli. Staple crops - maize, chia, sweet potato and amaranth - first grew from his corpse: his nails, fingers, hairs, ears, and nose<sup>11</sup>. Indeed, crops and trees spring from slain God-bodies quite early in Mesoamerican art, suggesting that this kind of mythology was universal to the region (see Figures 48 & 49).

God sprouting our food was a deeply ingrained notion. The Mexica claimed God: "*makes Himself food* to give us health"<sup>12</sup> - that gods are food. That is precisely how Chicomtecoatl, a corn goddess still much revered in Mexico, is described to Sahagun:

"She is our sustenance...she is our flesh,  
our livelihood. If she were not, we should  
indeed die of hunger"<sup>13</sup>.

The making of god-images from different kinds of important food seeds<sup>14</sup> illustrates the belief. During Atemoztli, *tzoalli* dough statues of gods were edible down to their bean eyes and squash teeth<sup>15</sup>.

Such statues had profound significance for the Aztecs. In the festival of Panquetzaliztli, no less than 400 godly dough bones were consumed with the understanding that "the god is eaten"<sup>16</sup>. The considerable number of other dough figures of divinities which were 'sacrificed' and swallowed in other Aztec feasts as well suggests Nahua people constantly reminded themselves that *all* eating was a case of *nictecocua*- "I eat God"<sup>17</sup>. Perhaps that is what Aztecs meant by *tonacayotl*- the "fleshhood"- of the gods. *Tona* means soul or destiny;

# THE GODS' GREAT SACRIFICE

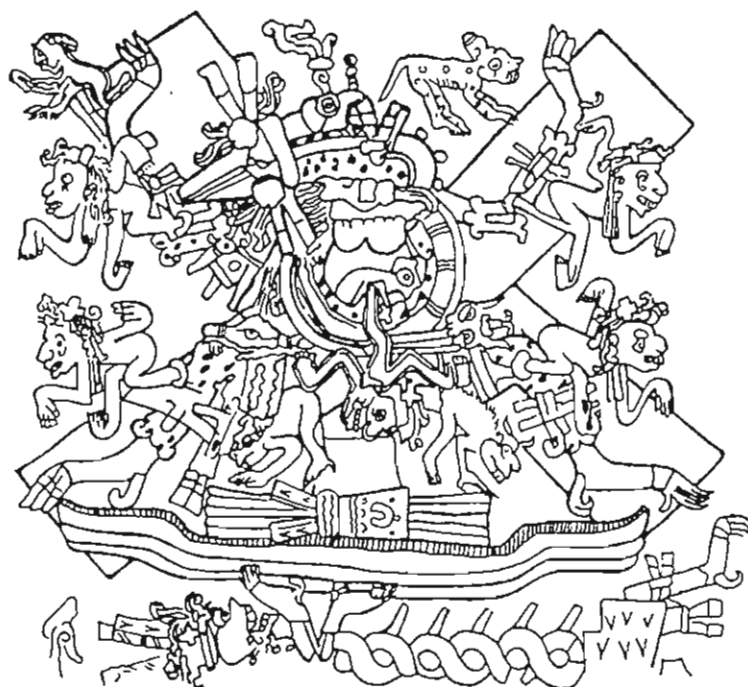


Figure 46: Goddess shattering over the Four Quarters of the Cosmos (symbolized by the cross behind her)- gods appearing from her joints.



Figure 47: Itzamna (Mayan crocodile-iguana High God) becoming a plant. Izapa stela, 250 b.c.e. - 100 c.e.

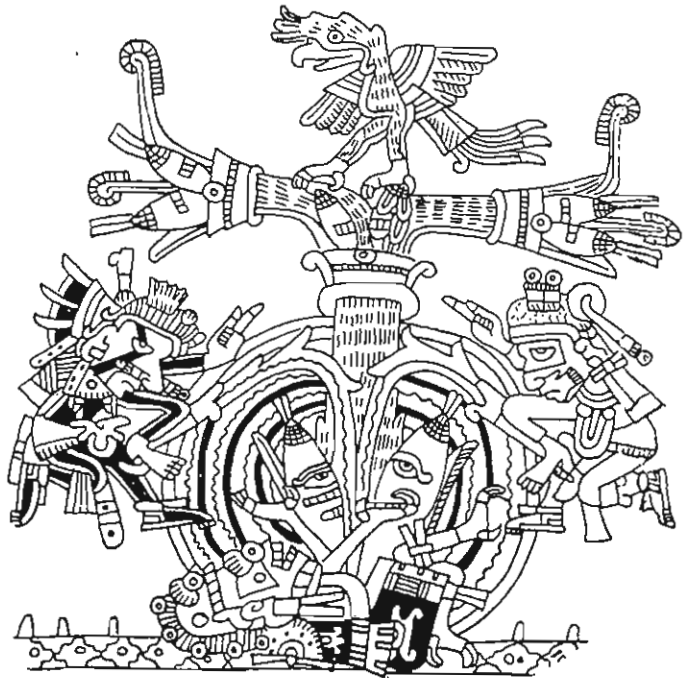


Figure 48: Dead goddess sprouts corn, flanked by Quetzalcoatl and Xochipilli. Codex Borgia.

*nacatl* means body or flesh; and *yotl* means "hood". *Tonacayotl* suggests a bodily, sacrificial presence of the gods in the physical world.

Certainly deities, food and life are all inter-connected in Mesoamerican thought. Modern Nahua maintain that life is just the energy (*istli*) or warmth of the Sun-god, which is born in us, and continues to revive us through food (mainly maize). Without this *istli*, we cool down and die<sup>18</sup>.

Equally, however, gods require *our istli* - in the form of sacrifices, hearts and blood - to continue to perform their tasks. This symbiotic relationship is eloquently expressed by modern Nahua of San Miguel in a dancing song:

"We live here on the Earth (stomp the ground)  
We are all fruits of the Earth  
The Earth sustains us  
..when we die, we wither in the Earth.  
We eat of the Earth,  
and the earth eats us"<sup>19</sup>.

As this implies, the cosmos operated rather mechanically - certain outputs requiring certain inputs. Diaz often heard Aztecs defend human sacrifice as a *necessary* exchange, the gods having given "everything that is good..all their temporal needs"<sup>20</sup>. When Cortes confronted Moctezuma II on the prospect of banning human sacrifice, the Emperor replied that it would be impossible, because of this inter-dependence. True, he admitted, his people offer up many human lives, but this is fully warranted: the gods "preserve our lives" and give "nourishment, honour, wealth"<sup>21</sup>.

What this response indicates to me is that the Aztecs thought their killings *produced* the Divine bounty, just as the Gods' mythical killings had supposedly produced the world. Aztecs presumed nothing happens by chance. Illness only occurs because "payment" has not been

made to the gods<sup>22</sup>. Even when recovery eventuates, sacrifices still need to be made:

"because he had not died, because he would  
be (otherwise) dead"<sup>23</sup>.

It was felt that if one "paid" the gods enough, one could even prevail over fate<sup>24</sup>. A priest who performed penances of 9-12 months was supposedly able to influence national events<sup>25</sup>. Equally, Lords engaging in set penances and sacrifices "set people free"<sup>26</sup>; "protect the people"<sup>27</sup>. Pain and sacrifice instantly create certain conditions or benefits.

This explains the importance of ceremonial precision in Aztec religion. Apparently, failures in ritual performance would *automatically* stop rain from falling and *cause* calamities. Maybe this is why the Aztecs were so shocked when Spaniards suggested they abandon all sacrifices. Consider the Mexicans' reply:

"Why is it you *compel* us to *bring down*  
*destruction* upon our city?"<sup>28</sup>.

## II. PROBLEMATIC STATE: DEBT AND INADEQUACY

Before a body of Spanish Franciscans, Aztec priests defended their practices with the following words:

"Life is because of the gods, with their sacrifice, they  
gave us life...they produce our sustenance...all..which  
nourishes life"<sup>29</sup>.

When everything is born of Divine sacrifice, and life depends utterly on the gods, an attitude of indebtedness and gratitude can be expected. True to this, modern Nahua declare: "everything in our lives is a *gift*"<sup>30</sup>. The stance is patently ancient, for the pre-Hispanic Aztecs also claimed: "We mortals *owe our lives* to penance, because for our

sakes the gods did penance"<sup>31</sup>. In fact, Aztecs go so far as to call themselves *macehuale*: "the dead brought back to life because of the penance"<sup>32</sup>.

In their understanding, our debt to the gods is so great that food sacrifices are quite inadequate. Poets would lament: "Alas, we have no payment"<sup>33</sup>. We are but "pauper(s)"<sup>34</sup> and indebted "slaves" who must "beg a loan" of rain. When we consider how much the gods give and how little we give in return,

"The fact is that we are but slaves  
We are simply standing (dumbly) before Him"<sup>35</sup>.

My findings suggest this indebtedness and insufficiency burdened the Aztec soul. Consider one curious Aztec myth about little fish who bemoan their *inedible* state:

"How wretched we are, what offence have we done to God,  
that we are not edible? Now we are pricking up our ears  
to discern which path to take"<sup>36</sup>.

In my understanding, it is significant that the story ends "happily" with the fish delighted to find their means of *becoming food*.

The burden of indebtedness must have deepened with the Aztec conviction that we maltreat and shame the gods. God is "She who weeps" and the "Rabbit who suffers"<sup>37</sup>. When corn lived amongst us as a man (Homshuk) who declared: "I am destined to give food to mankind. I am He-Who-Sprouts-at-the-Knees", we ridiculed and harassed him - even tossed him over the ocean<sup>38</sup>.

Worse still, as Nahua Shaman Aurelio once explained to Alan Sandstrom, though people spend all their days on the Earth Goddess, they only exploit Her: eating from Her; urinating and defecating all over Her; sleeping on Her and ploughing Her up. She is disgraced: we give Her back so little for all she gives us. She longs to be relieved, fed and

remembered, but we give Her nothing<sup>39</sup>. The shaman's tirade is not a recent invention. Aurelio's pre-Hispanic ancestors similarly described the Earth Mother as constantly weeping and begging to be remembered and fed.

In fact, Aztec gods complain that "men cause Me shame"<sup>40</sup>. In some sacrificial hymns, this "shame" is clearly over our debt to the gods for food:

"You are My Lord, Prince and Magician, and though in truth, it is you who *produce our sustenance*, although you are the first, we cause you only shame"<sup>41</sup>.

### III. MEANS: COVENANTS AND GREAT DEEDS

#### a. A Covenant of Symbiotic Exchange

Faced with debt and shame, one Mesoamerican solution was to form a *covenant* with the gods. Monaghan compared the *Paris Codex* with a current Nuyou Mixtec myth and concluded that, for some Mesoamericans at least, a pivotal reason for human sacrifice was *nchiso yu'uva*<sup>42</sup> - a type of contract with the Earth about giving life for life: a symbiotic exchange between god and human.

*Nchiso yu'uva* was certainly current among the Aztec. The Nahua told Sandstrom that all their sacrifices are "an offering *in return for a favour*"<sup>43</sup>. In fact, most Mesoamerican Indians even now openly acknowledge their sacrifices are payments to the elements for "services rendered"<sup>44</sup>. In the case of the Aztecs, god Huitzilopochtli promised to provide constant food and drink if captives were slain in his honour, and the Aztec agreed to the "deal".

Glance through Aztec poetry, and this sense of mutual exchange will soon manifest. *Cantares Mexicanos* poets declare it. Through war and

sacrifice, they say, we gladly "come to *trade*"<sup>45</sup> - "*bartering* with sun-chalk" (sacrificial victims).

Thus, ritual death in Mesoamerica *pays* for particular boons. In 1578, Oaxacaqn Indians told Cordova in 1578 they had killed humans purely "to *pay the debt* for bringing rain"<sup>46</sup>. Ritual killing was actually called "debt-paying" amongst the Aztecs<sup>47</sup> - *nextlahualli* - "a debt paid, tribute"<sup>48</sup>. Child-offerings were likewise "debt-offerings"<sup>49</sup>.

Ritual death might seem a drastic price to pay for the gods' role in our food, but in Aztec eyes, it was barely adequate compensation. The sacrificial Song of Yiacatecuhtli has a verse wherein the victim sings that, although he does not find it easy to die, he only just "*merits*" the gift of food the god has or will bestow on his people: "I have not *merited our food* with easiness"<sup>50</sup>. Every year, the blood of warriors was sprinkled over 400 dough "*bones of Huitzilopochtli*"<sup>51</sup>, but it never seems to have sufficed as payment for the similar shedding of blood over bones which had, ages ago, created humanity.

After all, the godly sacrifice is never-ending. Aztecs felt that as the gods *constantly* feed us, we are similarly obliged to constantly feed them. We can be fairly sure this is how human sacrifice was regarded. Why else would Mayans call ritual killing *p'a chi* - literally, "to open the mouth (of the gods)"<sup>52</sup>, or their priests say they slew: "on account of the dire need of Hunab Ku (a god) for food"<sup>53</sup>? Why else were Aztec captives *Imalacualhine* "*Prisoners of His Food*"<sup>54</sup>, likened to "hot breads"?

Today, when Nahuas drip blood over the paper images of their gods, they explain that "this is their *food*"<sup>55</sup>, just as, during pre-



Hispanic immolations, it was said that the goddess had been tossed a thigh on which to "*gnaw*"<sup>56</sup>.

It is important to add here that a 'culinary' fate applied as much to the Aztecs as to their captives. When 20,000 Aztec soldiers were lost in a campaign against the Tarascan Empire, priests consoled the Emperor with the thought that:

"By the death of so many warriors he had given *sustenance to the gods*"<sup>57</sup>.

As this indicates, the moment people expired in war or sacrifice was the moment gods "ate". Once Mayan priests had slain some one, it would be said: "The Jaguar is eating"<sup>58</sup>. However, at times gods also *physically* pook of this food - through those who ate the victims' flesh, or through carnivores to which corpses were fed. The latter were then considered to be the gods' *nahualli*<sup>59</sup>.

#### b. Escalating "Great (Courageous) Deeds"

Another response was apparently to try to match the debt to the gods 'tit for tat', by doing something equally magnanimous and bold. Elderly Aztecs told Duran:

"food offerings were of low and poor men, but the sacrifice of human beings was the *honoured oblation* of great lords and noblemen. They remember these things and tell of them as if they had been *great deeds*"<sup>60</sup>.

Nobles were expected to perform "*deeds* worthy of their persons"<sup>61</sup>.

When Tlacaelel instituted "Flowery Wars", he declared it would be a demonstration of generous self-sacrifice *appropriate* to his noble peers:

"let *us* buy with *our* heads, *our* hearts and with *our* lives, precious stones, jade and feathers (that is, captives and wealth) for our wondrous Huitzilopochtli"<sup>62</sup>.

These "great deeds" operated as a type of escalating sacrifice: "little by little *offer yourself* to the torment"<sup>63</sup>. As we have seen, generous offerings and sacrifices constituted a principal Aztec practice. Large quantities of precious stones and fine cloth were habitually relinquished for the gods<sup>64</sup>, and even when Moctezuma was held hostage by Cortes, he kept giving his captor magnificent presents<sup>65</sup>.

Apparently, Aztecs saw such self-emptying as the means to becoming a *tlamitini* (sage) – a true *tlamitini* being "he who *gives things*"<sup>66</sup>.

For Mesoamericans, the process of "giving" culminated in forfeiting one's own life for, from giving up possessions, one moved on to giving up comforts: performing arduous penances such as log-carting<sup>67</sup>, lengthy runs<sup>68</sup>, scorching, cutting and skewering one's flesh<sup>69</sup>, or carrying torches and allowing the resin to drip down one's arms<sup>70</sup>. Eventually, "the good valiant warrior...*hurls himself to his death*"<sup>71</sup>.

In other words, the most generous and courageous act of all was to surrender one's life in war or sacrifice. In Chapter 2 of Part A., the association of ritual death with ultimate courage was already remarked upon. Here it suffices to add that such self-giving was deemed responsible for spiritual growth. In *Popul Vuh*, the penances and sufferings of the Divine Twins *made* the two heroes "sages":

"They had grown up in great suffering. They inherited pain. So great men and sages they became...everything was easy for them...they were Substitutes (*Naguals*)"<sup>72</sup>.

#### IV. RITUAL AND CULTURAL EXPRESSION

A human offering on his or her way to a ritual demise encountered various reminders of the gods' great sacrifice. Gods performing severe penances are often depicted on *cuauhxicalli*<sup>73</sup>, and at the base of the

steps up the *Templo Mayor* lay a huge image of a dismembered goddess: Coyolxauhque. Archaeologist Moctezuma considers the latter a purely political statement – symbolic of the nations the Aztecs had subdued<sup>74</sup>, but I would argue it also served to comfort and inspire the doomed – reminding them that, just as they were now going to perish for the gods, the gods had once perished for them.

#### a. The Covenant of Symbiotic Exchange

"Feeding" was repeatedly expressed through the ravenous mouths on temples<sup>75</sup>, and by equally vivid pictures in *codexes* (see Figure 50). In the latter, streams of human blood flow to the Sun, the Earth, or – as in Mayan Stela II at Piedras Negras (731 c.e.) – to the World Tree<sup>76</sup>.

The Aztec obsession with going to war may also be considered a direct consequence of their Covenant with the gods. As Duran observed:

"This was their goal...not to slay, to do  
no harm to man or woman, to home or cornfield,  
but to feed the...idol!"<sup>77</sup>.

Two of the highest Aztec military ranks, *Quaquachitctin* and *Otomi Tlaotnaxinti* comprised of: "wicked but brave warriors, those furious in battle, who only came *paying the tribute of death*"<sup>78</sup>.

Indeed, war is the sacred "duty"<sup>79</sup> of the Covenant. Heed how each victim's death is said to meet that obligation. The female *ixiptla* "gave her *service*"<sup>80</sup>; the male offering went to "*fulfil (his) duty*"<sup>81</sup> – he was his people's "*humble present*"<sup>82</sup>.

The notion of Covenant also found expression in the liturgy of human sacrifice. Messengers of the Sun were expected to "thank Him for His great favours"<sup>83</sup>, whilst after the defleshing of men for Xipe, the crowd or performers would say: "Now our hunger has been changed into great abundance"<sup>84</sup>.

NOURISHMENT

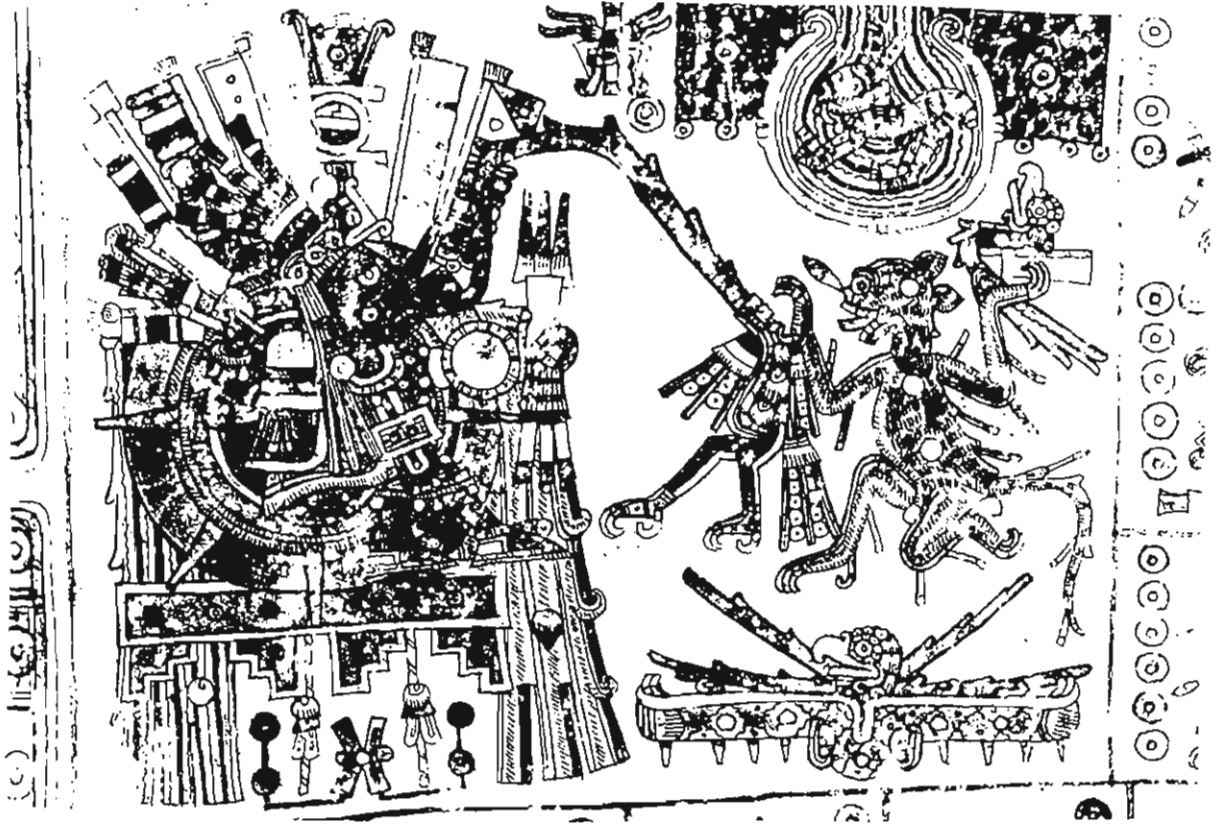


Figure 49: The head of a sacrificed bird splashes into the jaws of the Earth Goddess, whilst a stream of blood flows from the bird's body to the mouth of the Sun God. Codex Borgia.

Similarly, sermons following slayings dwelt on "how much we owe to Him who created us"<sup>85</sup>. Sacrificial hymns were still more explicit: the victim is "taken" and "sent"<sup>86</sup>; he sighs that:

"Not with ease do I nourish the Quetzal bird  
Not with ease do I nourish the Quetzal bird"<sup>87</sup>.

#### b. Performing "Great (Courageous) Deeds"

The Aztecs said they filled *tzompantli* with numerous skulls to show they were "great sacrificers"<sup>88</sup> – each skull providing a little "nourishment". In other words, *tzompantli* demonstrated before the gods just how willing Aztecs were to equal the innumerable Divine sacrifices.

This desire to perform "great deeds" moulded attitudes to death in war. The Conquistadors, though enemies of the Aztecs, freely admitted their foes' immense – almost insane – courage and indifference to pain. Cortes discovered that the more his forces attacked the Aztecs and warned them of immanent destruction, "the less signs they showed of weakening"<sup>89</sup>. Rather, "they seemed ~~more~~ *determined to perish* more than any race of man know before"<sup>90</sup>. Diaz found similar:

"They cared nothing for death in battle...  
They came at us like mad dogs...(showing)  
great courage and ferocity...(fighting) so  
fiercely and closely"<sup>91</sup>.

Aztec recklessness and resistance during the Spanish Conquest was such that their capital had to be levelled block by block, building by building, with most of the population slain or starved to death before victory seemed close for the Spanish. Even then, their Emperor declared: "Let us all die fighting!"<sup>92</sup>. He and many of his peers would later succumb to Spanish torture and execution without so much as a murmur or twitch indicative of the great agonies they were suffering.

- 1 Charles S. Braden, *Religious Aspects in the Conquest of Mexico* 30 - 31.
- 2 Alfonso Caso, *The Aztecs - People of the Sun* 14 - 15.
- 3 Irene Nicholson, *Firefly in the Night* 26.
- 4 Alfonso Caso, *The Aztecs - People of the Sun* 30.
- 5 Alan R. Sandstrom, *Corn is Our Blood* 238.
- 6 *ibid.* See also Inga Clendinnen, *Aztecs* 209.
- 7 John Eric Sidney Thompson, *Maya History and Religion* 203, 235.
- 8 Alfonso Caso, *The Aztecs - People of the Sun* 32 - 33.
- 9 *Codex Borgia*, 30 in Alfonso Caso, *The Aztecs - People of the Sun* 22.
- 10 *ibid.*, 67.
- 11 Henry B. Nicholson, "Religion in Pre-Hispanic Central Mexico". 402.
- 12 Irene Nicholson, *Firefly in the Night* 22.
- 13 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 2: 23: 64.
- 14 Juan de Tovar, *Tovar Calendar*, vi.
- 15 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 2: 16: 29.
- 16 *ibid.*, Bk. 3: 5 - 6.
- 17 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods* 215.
- 18 Alan R. Sandstrom, *Corn is Our Life*, 239.
- 19 *ibid.*, 263.
- 20 Diaz in Charles S. Braden, *Religious Aspects of the Conquest of Mexico* 94, 116.
- 21 Bernal Diaz, *History of the Conquest of New Spain* 240.
- 22 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 2: 19: 36.
- 23 *ibid.*, Bk. 2: App. 199.
- 24 *ibid.*, Bk. 2: 19: 36.
- 25 F. Peterson, *Ancient Mexico* 144.
- 26 *Chilam Balam* 27 (55).
- 27 *ibid.* 27 (54).
- 28 Bernal Diaz, *History of the Conquest of New Spain* 285.
- 29 *Colloques and Christian Doctrines*, in Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Aztec Thought and Culture*, 215.
- 30 Alan R. Sandstrom, *Corn is Our Blood* 368.
- 31 Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Pre-Columbian Literatures of Mexico* 40.
- 32 Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Aztec Thought and Culture* 111.
- 33 *Cantares Mexicanos* 80 : 5.
- 34 Irene Nicholson, *Firefly in the Night* 158.
- 35 Laurette Sejourne, *Burning Water* 63.
- 36 Irene Nicholson, *Firefly in the Night* 102.
- 37 *Collection of Mexican Songs* Folio 67r., in Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Native Mesoamerican Spirituality*, 206.
- 38 Irene Nicholson, *Mexican and Central American Mythology* 64.
- 39 Alan R. Sandstrom, *Corn is Our Blood* 239 - 240.
- 40 Irene Nicholson, *Firefly in the Night* 83-84.
- 41 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 2: 224-225.
- 42 J. Monaghan, "Sacrifice, Death and the Origins of Agriculture in the Codex Venus", *American Antiquity* 55: 3 (1990), 561, 567.
- 43 Alan R. Sandstrom, *Corn is Our Blood* 368.
- 44 S. Orellano, *The Tzutujil Mayans: Continuity and Change 1200 - 1630* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1984), 100.

- 45 *Cantares Mexicanos* 84: 25.
- 46 J. Marcus, "Archaeology and Religion: A Comparison of Zapotec and Maya", *World Archaeology* , 10: 2, October 1978, 175.
- 47 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk.2: 22: 57.
- 48 Burr Cartwright Brundage, *The Jade Steps*, 157.
- 49 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex* Bk. 2: 20: 42-43.
- 50 *ibid.*, Bk. 2: App. 243.
- 51 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods* 88.
- 52 Sir John Eric Sidney Thompson, *Maya History and Religion*, 175.
- 53 *Chilam Balam* 42 (112).
- 54 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 107.
- 55 Alan R. Sandstrom, *Corn is Our Blood*, 286.
- 56 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 2: 3: 122.
- 57 Nigel Davies, *The Aztecs* 126.
- 58 *Popul Vuh*, 191.
- 59 Burr Cartwright Brundage, *The Jade Steps*, 170.
- 60 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 227.
- 61 Juan de Tovar, *Tovar Calendarxi*.
- 62 Diego Duran, *The Aztecs- History of the Indies*, 141.
- 63 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 4/5: App. 18: 66.
- 64 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 104.
- 65 Bernal Diaz, *History of the Conquest of New Spain*, 218.
- 66 B.Carr Brundage, *The Jade Steps*, 99, 101.
- 67 L. de Haba, "Guatemala, Mayan and Modern", *National Geographic* 146:5, November 1977, 668.
- 68 L. Aldana "Meso de Nayar's Strange History Week", *National Geographic* 39: 6, June 1976, 784-7, 789.
- 69 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 2: 24: 76-77., Bk. 3: 66..
- 70 *ibid.*, Bk. 2: 22: 101.
- 71 Sahagun in Esther Pasztory, *Aztec Art*, 227.
- 72 *Popul Vuh* 85-86.
- 73 Alfonso Caso, *Aztecs- People of the Sun*, 37.
- 74 E.M. Moctezuma, "Archaeology and Symbolism in Aztec Mexico: The Templo Mayor of Tenochtitlan", 766-767.
- 75 Bernal Diaz, *History of the Conquest of New Spain*, 206 - 207.
- 76 Linda Schele & Mary Ellen Miller, *The Blood of Kings*, 112.
- 77 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 198f.
- 78 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 6: 20.
- 79 *ibid.* Bk. 6: 31.
- 80 *ibid.*, Bk. 2: 36: 156.
- 81 *ibid.*, Bk. 3: 10: 29.
- 82 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 188.
- 83 Diego Duran, *The Aztecs - History of the Indies*, 122.
- 84 Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods*, 174-5, 198.
- 85 *ibid.*, 184.
- 86 Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Bk. 2: App. 233.
- 87 *ibid.*, Bk. 2: Appendix 213.
- 88 T. de Motolinia, *History of the Indians*, 123.

---

89 Hernan Cortes, *Letters*, 297-298.

90 *ibid.*, 297-298.

91 Bernal Diaz, *History of the Conquest of New Spain*, 56, 142, 336.

92 *ibid.*, 336.



## CONCLUSIONS

## I. GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

Over Part A. of this thesis, we established that Aztec human sacrifice was a complex phenomenon with a long history. We also found most explanations for the rite to be either unworkable or limited. By contrast, when Streng's theory: that religion is a *means of ultimate transformation* was applied in Part B., the ceremony seemed easier to comprehend. The evidence from the last seven chapters suggests Aztec human sacrifice did indeed function as a means of ultimate transformation, providing Aztecs with a process for emancipation, atonement, self-annihilation, 're-birth', 'paying' a perceived debt to the gods, and much more. In fact, a whole range of Aztec and Mesoamerican attitudes, stories, cultural artefacts and ceremonies suddenly begin to make sense when this approach is adopted.

In my opinion, this is because Streng's model addresses a question other explanations have not considered: what was the *purpose* or *goal* of Aztec human sacrifice? There is a subtle difference between this query and the usual one of: 'why did the Aztecs practice human sacrifice?' A question of purpose concerns *intent*, whereas a question of 'why' covers even unconscious needs and effects such as population control and excessive drug use. However valid queries of 'why' may be, the question of purpose is necessarily of greater importance because, no matter what *actually* occurred when someone was slain at an Aztec temple, it is the *ideas and emotions* of slayer and slain- their *rationalisation* of the drastic event - which continue to intrigue and bewilder.

An explanation formulated around the *intentions* of Aztec human sacrifice will unfailingly deliver some understanding of the Aztecs as fellow human beings. This is less possible when the rite is casually

dismissed as a 'political devise' or as a 'means of obtaining protein'. If anything, the latter stances only deepen the mystery - making the Aztecs seem extraordinarily pragmatic.

The beauty of Streng's model is that it allows us to speculate on - and reconstruct- the aspirations and yearnings which underlie even unusual religious practices. Other theories neglect to do this, turning Aztec religion into an abstraction that was, supposedly, endured or enforced rather than lived.

Of course, as already discussed, human sacrifice could never have been promoted and perpetuated for one reason alone. We have seen that even the themes of transformation embraced by the Aztec ceremony were several. However, I would maintain that the transformative purpose of human sacrifice was always paramount, and that other factors outlined in Chapter 3 of Part A. merely supported - or perverted - the main intent of the rite.

## II. ANGLES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The purpose of this thesis was to attack the problem of explaining human sacrifice by engaging in a case study on the Aztecs. I hoped to show that a comprehensive appreciation is required not only of the rite itself, but also of beliefs and aspirations surrounding it.

Themes and symbols explored in the second half of this thesis represent just the tip of an iceberg of little-investigated material on Mesoamerican spirituality. Further investigation could assist immensely in comprehending Mesoamerican culture. It could also help explain numerous sacrificial creeds which have disgusted and perplexed academics

for centuries: Celtic religion, Viking religion, Tantra, Satanism, West African religion, the Polynesian cult of Oro.

To date, such violent, 'dark' faiths are rarely considered as viable means of "ultimate transformation". What, though, if they delineate an entire, un-researched mode of spirituality ? Other, very distinctive 'types' of religion<sup>1</sup> certainly do exist: "devotional" traditions; "contemplative" traditions. Bearing this in mind, it might help to reflect on Ramakrishna's comments about Tantra, a movement despised by his disciples for its erotic ceremonies and its tradition of human sacrifice (outlawed only decades before):

"Why give way to hatred? I tell you, this is also one of the Paths – though it's a dirty one. There are several doors leading into a house: the main door, the back door, the door by which the sweeper enters to clean out the house. So this, too, is a door. No matter which door people use, they get inside the house (that is, God) all right"<sup>2</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> J.B. Carman, "Conceiving Hindu Bhakti as Theistic Religion", in S.T. Katz, *Mysticism and Religious Traditions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983 ), 191 - 198, 203 - 205.

See also F. Heiler, "Contemplation in Christian Mysticism", in *Spiritual Disciplines: Papers from the Eranos Yearbooks* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, Bollingen Series XXX:4, 1985 ), 186 - 187.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Isherwood, *Ramakrishna and His Disciples* (London: Methuen & Co., 1965 ), 76.



## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX I : MAJOR AZTEC DEITIES

## A. War and Sacrifice:

*Tezcatlipoca* (Smoking/Speaking Mirror; We-His-Slaves; Youth; Jade Turkey; Little Black Face; Obsidian Blade) God of justice, fate, night, the army, sacrifice, government and slaves. One-legged, with a mirror-foot. Appears as a giant, dark shadow. Associated with jaguars, turkeys, obsidian knives, blackness.

*Huitzilopochtli* (Hummingbird Who Came Down On the Left; Lieutenant; Human Sun Beam; Terrible One; the Hasty) God of the Aztec nation, and battle. A boy or youth wearing hummingbird helmet and feathers, who gives omens and prophecies. Associated with the sun, weapons, blue and hummingbirds.

*Cihuacoatl* or *Coatlicue* (Woman Serpent, Serpent Skirt, Shield-Lying, Mirror-Serpent) Huitzilopochtli's mother; goddess of childbirth, duty, penance and piety; mother of warriors. A bare-breasted woman with a skirt of snakes (humility) and, often, a skull face. Associated with flowers, war and blood.

*Tonatiuh* (He Who Goes About Warming, Lighting, Giving 'Heart'; Four Earthquake) God of the sun. The solar disc or an eagle. Associated with war, gold, sacrifice, eagles and earthquake.

## B. Agriculture

*Tlaloc* (He Who Makes Things Sprout; Four Times Lord; Magician; the Left) God of celestial water (rain, hail), plant-growth, water-related diseases and accidents. A magician who wears a drowsy, goggle-eyed, fanged mask with a curled nose. Associated with water, green colours and plants.

*Chalchiuhtlicue* (Precious Jade Skirt; Jade Glowing; Huixtotin Lady) Goddess of terrestrial waters (springs, lakes, streams). A heavily-

built matriarch wearing a full, squarish, striped blue dress. Associated with whirlpools, lake industries, salt.

*Xilonen* (Young Maize-Ear Doll; Seven Serpent) Goddess of maize and rural maidens. A young peasant girl, seated or holding corn cobs. Associated with agricultural produce.

*Tlaloc* (Little Tlalocs; *Tepictoton*- Small Moulded Ones) Rain brewers. Child-like, squat (sometimes dwarfish) figures shown pouring rain from jars or holding up the heavens. Associated with mountains and children.

*Cinteotl* (Maize Cob Lord; Prince-Lord) God of agriculture and solar warmth. A young farmer, with maize decorations.

#### C. Expansion

*Quetzalcoatl* (Iridescent Green Quetzal-feathered Serpent; Precious Twin; Our Prince; Dawn Lord; Wind; One Reed) God of priests, Venus (morning/evening star), the wind and sciences. A young, black-painted man wearing a duck-billed wind mask or a conical hat and split-conch pendant. Associated with feathered serpents, puffs of wind, shells.

*Yacatecuhtli* (Nose Lord; Sleep Bringer; Sharp/Curved Nose; Lord of the Vanguard). God of commerce and travel. A walking merchant with a large nose. Associated with the Cross of the Four Directions.

#### D. Domestic

*Teteoinnan-toci* (Our Grandmother, Mother of the Gods, Obsidian Butterfly, Tortoise Bench, Possessor of the Obsidian Skirt) Mother Goddess: Creator, and goddess of women, motherhood, medicine, the earth, weaving. A matriarchal healer- humble and penitent. Associated with caves and the crocodilian *cipactli* (earth-monster).



*Xiuhtecuhtli* (Turquoise Lord; Year Lord; Father of the Gods; Yellow Face; Grandfather; Lord of the Centre) God of fire, parents and time. A stooped old man sitting on the ground. Associated with hearths, braziers, fire serpents and the cosmic centre.

*Tlazolteotl* (Filth) Goddess of lust, florists, forgiveness and the moon. A young woman with a decorated face and downcast eyes.

#### E. Entertainment

*Xochiquetzal* (Flower- Quetzal Feather; Maiden; Abandoned Mistress; Eyes full of Ashes) Goddess of love, prostitution, sex, young women, finery, weaving and leisure. A beautiful, well-dressed girl. Associated with cloth and flowers.

*Xochipilli* (Flower Prince, Pleasure God, Seven Flowers) God of gaming, feasting and festivity. A flower-decked man wearing a helmet, with a skull-like face. Associated with games, hallucinogens, butterflies, flowers and staffs.

*Ometochtli* ( Four Hundred Rabbits; Medicine Lord; He of Izquitlan; He of Totollan, He of the Straw-Covered Mirror). Gods of liquor, drunkenness, chance, gambling and potions. A laughing man or a drunken, angry rabbit. Associated with ball games, board games, medicine bottles, drinking vats and beakers.

#### F. Others

*Xipe Totec* (Flayed Our Lord, Red Mirror, Fiery Mirror, Stone Slab Our Lord) God of springtime, metallurgy, transformation and rebirth. A boy dressed in a flayed victim's skin, often wearing an elaborate headress. Associated with metals, flayed skins, seeds and bursting eye motifs.

*Mixcoatl* and *Camaxtli* Gods of hunting and the stars. Associated with deers, cacti, bows and arrows.

## APPENDIX II : CALENDER CEREMONIES

## A. XIUITL (SOLAR CALENDRIC) RITES

1. Cuahuitlehua/Atlecahualo: "Raising of Tree-Poles,  
"Want of Water"  
12 Feb. - 3 March.

Tlaloque and Chalchiuhtlicue

Rain ceremonies: about a dozen infants purchased for the year; parading of infants in litters; rain fasts; 2-3 infant sacrifices in litters or canoes- tossed into whirlpools; one sacrifice for Xipe. Also dedication of the year's war captives and mock skirmishes.

2. Tlacaxipehualiztli/Coaihuitl: "Flaying of Men",  
"General (Snake) Feast Day"  
4 March - 23 March

Xipe Totec, Huitzilopochtli

Military and flaying ceremonies: awards, promotions, military demonstrations (mock skirmishes); gladiatorial killings; taunting of soldiers; soldiers wear human skins and eat captives' flesh; dances and vigils of Aztec Alliance rulers; mass-sacrifice of the year's (40 - 50) war captives; some baby sacrifices.

3. Tocoztontli/Xochimalal(ya): "Short Fast/Vigil",  
"Offering of Flowers"  
24 March - 12 April

Tlaloc, Tlaloque, Cinteotl, Chalchiuhtlicue, Chicomtecoatl,  
Coatlicue, Atlatatona.

Springtime (first flowers and planting in fields) rites: offering of flowers, fried snakes, and amaranth seed tamales; naming, dancing and blood letting of children; depositing of captives' skins and fashioning of trophies from captives' remains. Short fast/vigil and penances by captors. A girl is decapitated over agricultural produce; a woman is thrown into a well, and a few infants are drowned.

4. Hueytocoztli: "Long/Great Fast/Vigil"  
13 April - 2 May

Cinteotl, Chicomtecoatl, Tlaloque, Quetzalcoatl.

First fruits rites: general fast, blood-letting; domestic altar decoration and sacrifices; blessing of seed corn; offerings before amaranth seed (*tzoalli*) image of maize goddess - eating her 'granary hearts' (cakes); *atole* cooked. 12/13 year old girl sacrificed representing Chicomecoatl. Rites of adolescence: procession of virgins to maize goddess temple for blessing of seed maize, circumcisions, adolescents' ritual drinking, and dedication of adolescents to the gods; long fast of youths; youthful Tezcatlipoca impersonator fasts in preparation for his sacrifice (next month). Drowning of a few more babies to Tlalocues.

5. Toxcatl/Tepopochtli: "Dry Things" (ie. Dry Season),  
"Incensing"  
3 May - 22 May

Tezcatlipoca, Huitzilopochtli, Yacatecuhtli.

Rites concerning gods' images: incensing; offering of amaranth-tamales; large *tzoalli* (dough) image of Huitzilopochtli and other deities made, 'sacrificed', and eaten. Sacrifice of annual impersonators of national patrons (Tenochtitlan: Tezcatlipoca and Huitzilopochtli; Tlaxcala: Mixcoatl and Camaxtli; Cholula: Yacatecuhtli-Quetzalcoatl). Mass-offering of quail. Dancing of women with popcorn garlands (emphasising dryness); military dances; severe penances. Embowering of shrines and patios.

6. Etzalcualiztli: "Eating of Etzalli (Bean-Maize) Porridge "  
23 May - 11 June

Tlaloc, Chalchiuhtlicue, Quetzalcoatl, Xolotl.

Lake/water ceremonies: songs to water, midnight bathing of penitents, reeds collected and woven, treasures tossed into streams and lakes, boy and girl representing Tlaloc and Chalchiuhtlicue rowed out in canoe filled with hearts and drowned. Ritual theft and violence by priests, prostitute-singers and soldiers. Offering and eating of *etzalli* porridge and dance of lords with *etzalli*-filled pots. Offerings to agricultural implements. Penance with 'tree' of ropes.

7. Tecuilhuitontli: "Little Feast Day of the Lords"  
12 June - 1 July

Huixtochuatl, Xochipilli, Tlaloc

Floral and salt-working rites. Much dancing and feasting: captives with captors; dance and heart-sacrifice of Huixtochuatl impersonator and her attendants; lords hold feasts for commoners; obligatory pulque-drinking.

8. Huey Tecuilhuitl: "Great Feast Day of the Lords"  
2 July - 21 July.

Xilonen, Cihuacoatl.

Various women's rites: dance of all Aztec women; adolescent girl impersonates Xilonen - has long ritual duties, sings and dances all night before decapitation; Cihuacoatl-Chimalman impersonator (adult woman) slain; secret meetings arranged between youths and girls; erotic dancing of soldiers with pleasure girls. Nobles again feed poor commoners - dancing and feasting of soldiers and lords. Eating of new corn. Public penance of priests bearing dripping torches.

9. Tlaxochimaco (Miccailhuitontli). "Offerings of Flowers"  
("Little Feast of the Dead").  
22 July - 10 Aug.

Huitzilopochtli, Tezcatlipoca, Yacatecuhtli, all the gods in general.

Field flower rites and ceremonies for the deceased: garlanding of images of the gods; flowers offered to the dead (night-time entertaining of the deceased with songs); merchants' "first flower" feasts on turkey and corn meal; a few minor slayings in connection with flowers, Tezcatlipoca and Huitzilopochtli. Xocotl poles set up at town entrances. More dancing of soldiers and pleasure girls.

10. Xocotlhuetzi (Ueymiccailhuitl) "The Xocotl (fruit?) Falls"  
- "Great Feast Day of the Dead"  
11 August - 30 August

Xiuh-tecuhtli, Otontecuhtli-Xocotl, Yacatecuhtli.

Falling fruits ceremonies; fire and sports rituals: war captives dance with captors and some, drugged, are rolled inside cages into a bonfire; merchants offer a bathed slave to Yacatecuhtli. Sports rites: youths compete in climbing slippery Xocotl pole for jar of sweetmeats and image of Xocotl at summit (ancestral to Mexican *pinata*); Paynal impersonator runs up and down temple, leading competitive races on temples and ball courts. Four victims slain at ball court and dragged about court. More ceremonies for the deceased.

11. Ochpaniztli (Tenahuatiliztli) "The Sweeping (of the Roads)"  
"Commanding/Summoning Someone"  
31 Aug. - 19 Sept.

Teteoinnan-Toci, Tlazolteotl, Atlantonan, Cinteotl-Chicomtecoatl.

Cleansing-renovating rites and goddess ceremonies: canal and building repairs; sweeping of homes, streets and temples; singing of midwives and women doctors; women skirmishes; five-day silence followed

by eight-day silent hand-waving dance of women - led by Teteoinnan impersonator. She is flayed- her skin and a huge costume being then worn by a powerful man, who goes about striking terror. Much buffoonery, skits, dramas and mock skirmishes with balls and brooms. Harvest feast: seed offerings and preparatory fasts. Season of war initiated with slaying of some captives - some by arrow sacrifice; Emperor distributes military insignia.

12. Teotleco (Pachtontli) "The Gods Arrive", "Small Parasitic Plant"

20 Sept. - 9 Oct.

All the Gods, but especially Tezcatlipoca, Yacatecuhtli and Huitzilopochtli.

Rites for the return of the gods: General merrymaking after Tezcatlipoca's footprint 'appears' in cornmeal; gods 'appear' in sequence of age; food offerings in honour of gods; ceremonial intoxication. More fire sacrifices and a victim slain for Yacatecuhtli.

13. Tepeilhuitl (Hyeypachtli) "Hill Feast Day", "Great Parasitic Plant"

10 Oct. - 29 Oct.

Tlaloc, Tlaloque-Tepictoton, Xochiquetzal, Ochtli (pulque) gods.

Hilltop ceremonies: seed-dough 'mountains' decapitated and eaten; *tzoalli* 'snakes' eaten for curative effect; five human victims ('mountains') slain and eaten; *pachtli*- a plant like mistletoe- is hung on temples and worn. Confessions before Xochiquetzal- two noble girls scatter coloured corn and are sacrificed, their bodies placed in the temple cellar.

14. Quecholli/ Tlacoquecholli (Roseate Spoonbill).  
"Precious Feather"

30 Oct. - 18 Nov.

Mixcoatl-Camaxtli, Tlamatzincatl and consorts (Yehuaticue, Coatlicue, Cuetzlaciuhatl), Izquitecatl.

Hunting and military ceremonies: ceremonial hunt- males camp out; animal head sacred trophies; manufacturing of military and hunting equipment; four captives trussed like deer and slain; Mixcoatl-Camaxtli, Tlamatzincatl, Izquitecatl impersonators and their consorts sacrificed; commemoration of famous deceased soldiers.

15. Panquetzaliztli. "The Raising of Banners"

19 Nov. - 8 Dec.

Huitzilopochtli, Tezcatlipoca.

Winter Solstice ceremonies: nightly military dances with flags; 80-day sacerdotal fast and 4 to 8 day general fast; giant seed-dough image of Huitzilopochtli (war patron) made and eaten; mock combats- captives fight their way to temple -imprint hand-impressions and are sacrificed *en masse*; grand procession through city including marathon race led by Paynal impersonator. The drinking of pulque by old people and by soldiers of high status.

16. Atemoztli. "The Descent of Water"

9 Dec. - 28 Dec.

Tlaloc, Tlaloques.

Rain god rites: Tlaloc priests fast; poles of paper streamers and rubber coating erected to honour Tlaloc; *tzoalli* seed-dough images of mountain Tlaloques made and offered by populace- these being feasted, 'killed' and eaten; a few children drowned to Tlaloques and some slaves slain on hilltops to Tlaloques. Offerings to household gods. Exchange of grain for food and drink. Skirmishes and mutual raidings and lootings between young priests and warrior youths.

17. Tititl (Izcalli-Tititl) "The Stretching"; "Contraction, Wrinkled"

29 Dec. - 17 Jan.

Cihuacoatl, Ilamatecuhtli, and all the gods.

Motherhood ceremonies: ritual mock-harassment and dancing of girls and women with little bags; 'Our Mother' (Cihuacoatl-Ilamatecuhtli) leads dance-procession with other impersonators. She is slain by her 'reverse' image- a priest, who dances with her head. Remaining impersonators feast with the lords.

18. Izcalli/ Huehquil-tamalqualiztli/ Xochitoca  
"Growth, Rebirth"; "Eating of Huauhquitl-stuffed  
Tamales"; "Plants Flowers"

19 Jan. - 7 Feb.

Xiuhtecuhtli

Roasting Ceremonies and Children's Rites: corn supplies toasted; small game hunted and roasted; *tzoalli* image of Xiuhtecuhtli (Fire god) constructed on framework; tortilla offerings; priests bore year's new fire; women offer tamales stuffed with greens to family and kin; four-yearly fire sacrifice- captives rolled into bonfire. Child rites: the 'stretching' of children; piercing of children's ears; assigning of godparents; presentation of the most recent crop of (weaned?) children at the local temple every fourth year, with the unrestrained drinking of

pulque: young boys exchange game for tamales; pruning of the maguey. Two women decapitated and flayed- all day dancing. Every four years: lords dance in special finery.

19. Nemontemi. "Worthless; Fill/Complete in Vain":  
(the 'barren' or 'useless' days, outside the day-count).  
7 Feb. - 11 Feb.

Fasting, penance, avoidance of conflict and halting of daily business, as evil forces are abroad. No rituals. Danger that the world will end.

## B. OTHER CEREMONIES (NON-ANNUAL)

1. Atamalqualiztli: "Eating of Water-tamales"

Every eight years in *Tecpatl* (obsidian knife) years, during month(s) of *Tepeilhuitl* or *Quecholli* and/or *Hueytecuithuitl*.

Comedy and other dramatic acts. Seven-day fast with only water-soaked tamales eaten - once a day. Great dance-comedy of impersonators of gods and impersonators of mammals, birds, insects, poor and diseased persons, etc. Nobility abstain from sex and fast. *Mazateca* (religious penitents) devour live amphibians and reptiles from a container of water; are given gifts and dance. Two-day dance ending with a great procession and the eating of sour tamales.

2. Mass Confession to Tezcatlipoca

Every 4 years, during *Toxcatl*.

Curtains before inner sanctuary of Tezcatlipoca drawn aside so all can see his statue; Tezcatlipoca's priest-impersonator appears playing Tezcatlipoca's flute to receive confessions; general remission of sins; statue of Tezcatlipoca furnished with new ornaments, clothes and mask.

3. Toxihmolpilia: "Tying of Years"

Every 52 years (an Aztec century) on the year 2 *Acatl* (Reed) in the month of *Panquetzaliztli*.

New Fire Ceremony: dousing of all fires; grand offerings; smashing of images, clothes, furniture and household goods; general cleaning and renewal; all-night vigil for ascent of *Pliedes*; deity-impersonators ascend *Huixachtlan Hill* - priest bores New Fire on a victim's chest and messengers carry it throughout land; populace burn spots on their wrists; quail sacrifice and much craft activity follows.

## COMPILED FROM

Bernardino Sahagun, *Florentine Codex* Bk.2 - 6.

Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods and Rites of the Ancient Calender*, in  
passim.

Inga Clendinnen, *Aztecs - An Interpretation*, 295 - 297.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

## I. WRITTEN PRIMARY SOURCES

Chilam Balam de Chumayel, a Yucatec - Maya manuscript of the 16th century.

Edition and Translation : Miguel Rivera (ed. ), *Cronicas de America* , 20 Madrid : Historia 16 / Vienna, 1986.

Book of Chilam Balam of Tizimin, a Yucatec -Maya manuscript of the 16th century.

Edition and Translation: M.W.Makemson, trans., *Book of the Jaguar Priest* , New York: Henry Schumann, 1951.

Collection of Mexican Songs, a 16th century manuscript in Nahuatl, preserved in the National Library, Mexico.

Editions and Translations: J.Bineshorst , trans., *Cantares Mexicanos* , Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985.

D.G.Brinton, trans. & ed., *Ancient Nahuatl Poetry* Philadelphia: Library of American, Literature, 1887.

Codex Mendoza, a 16th century manuscript in Aztec glyphs, with Spanish notes and commentaries, preserved in the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

Edition and Commentary: Kurt Ross, comm., *Codex Mendoza- Aztec Manuscript* , London: Regent Books, 1978.

Codex Nuttall, a pre-Columbian (11th century? 16th century?) manuscript in Mixtec glyphs, preserved in the Museum of Mankind, London.

Edition and Commentary: Zelia Nuttall , ed. & Arthur G.Miller, intro., *The Codex Nuttall - A Picture Manuscript from Ancient Mexico*, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1975.

Cortes, Hernan ( trans. A.R.Pagden ), *Letters* ( London: Oxford University, 1972 ).

Diaz, Bernal (trans. W.J.M.Cohen), *The Conquest of New Spain* ( London: Folio, 1972 ).

Duran, Fray Diego, (trans. F.Horcasitas & D.Heyden), *The Aztecs : A History of the Indies of New Spain* ( London: Cassell, 1974 ).

-----, *Book of the Gods, and Rites of the Ancient Calendar* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1971).

Landa, Fray Diego de , *Relacion de las cosas de Yucatan*

Editions: W.Gates, trans., *Account of the Affairs of Yucatan* New York: Dover, 1978. R.Pagden , trans., *The Maya*, Chicago: Howard Greenfield/ J.Philip O'Hara, 1975.

Lienzo de Petlacala, a 16th century pictorial document from Guerrero, Mexico.

Edition: M.Oettinger Jr. & F.Horcasitas, trans. & ed., *Lienzo of Petlacala, A Pictorial Document from Guerrero, Mexico* ,Philadelphia, American Philosophical Society, 1982.

- Motolinia, Fray T. de (trans. F.B.Steck), History of the Indians of New Spain  
Washington D.C.: Academy of American Franciscan History, 1951.
- Origens de los Mexicanos, a 16th century Spanish manuscript from Central Mexico.  
Edition: German Vazquez ( ed. ), *Cronicas de America*, 32  
Madrid : Historia 16 / Vierna, 1987.
- Pomar, Juan Bautista, *Relacion de Texcoco*,  
Edition: German Vazquez, ed., *Varios Relaciones de la Nueva Espana (Cronicas de America )*, Madrid: Historia 16 / Vierna / NILO, 1990.
- Popul Vuh, The Book of Counsel, a Quiche-Maya text transcribed with Spanish alphabet in the 16th century- various copies, one preserved in the Ayer Collection, Newberry Library, Chicago.  
Editions: : Munro S.Edmonson , trans., *Book of Counsel of the Quiche Maya of Guatemala*, New Orleans, Middle American Research Institute, 1971. D.Tedlock, trans., *Popul Vuh*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1985.
- Ritual of the Bacabs, a Yucatec-Maya manuscript with incantations etc., an 18th century copy of an older text, preserved in Princeton University Library.  
Edition: Ralph L.Roys, trans. & ed., *Ritual of the Bacabs*, Norman, University of Oklahoma, 1969.
- Sahagun, Bernardino de, General History of the Things of New Spain  
Introduction & Indices ; Books I; II; III; IV; V; VI..  
Edition: A.J.O.Andrews & Charles E.Dibble, trans. & ed., *Florentine Codex* , Santa Fe, School of American Research and University of Utah, 1981.
- Tovar, Juan de, Tovar Calendar, an illustrated Aztec manuscript of c. 1585, with Spanish text.  
Edition: G.Kubler & C.Gibson ,trans. & ed., *Tovar Calendar: An Illustrated Mexican Manuscript ca 1585* , New Haven, Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1951.

II. ORAL-VISUAL PRIMARY SOURCES  
(ARCHAEOLOGICAL , ETHNOGRAPHIC)  
AND SECONDARY SOURCES

- Adams, R.E.W., *Prehistoric Mesoamerica* Boston : L.Henderson & Co., 1977
- Aldana, G. , " Meso de Nayar's Strange History Week", *National Geographic* 39 ; 6, June 1971
- Alexander, L.L. , "Ricouer's 'Symbolism of Evil' and Cross-Cultural Comparisons: The Representation of Evil in Mayan Indian Culture", *The Journal of the American Academy of Religions* 44: 4 December 1977
- Anawalt, Patricia, "Costume and Control: Aztec Sumptuary Laws", *Archaeology* 33:1 January-February 1980
- , "Understanding Aztec Human Sacrifice", *Archaeology* 35: 5, Sept. - Oct. 1982
- , "What Price Aztec Pageantry?", *Archaeology* 30: 4 July 1977
- , "Xocilli: Godly Jackets of the Aztecs", *Archaeology* 29, October 1976
- Anderson, E.J., *Peyote: The Divine Cactus Phoenix*: University of Arizona, 1988
- Aveni, A.F. & E.Urton (eds.), *Ethno astronomy and Archaeoastronomy in the American Tropics* New York: Annals of the New York Academy of Science, , 1982
- Barre, W. la , *The Peyote Cult* Yale: Shoe String Press, 1970
- , "Amerindian Religions", in I.R. al Faruqi (ed.), *Historical Atlas of Religions* New York: Macmillan & Co., 1974
- , "Hallucinogens and the Shamanic Origins of Religion", Peter J.Furst (ed.) *Flesh of the Gods: The Ritual Use of Hallucinogens* London: George Allen & Unwin, 1972
- Beattie, J.M. , "On Understanding Sacrifice" in M.F.C.Bourdillon & M.Fortes (eds.), *Sacrifice* Bristol : Academic, 1980
- Benítez, F., *In the Footsteps of Cortes* London: Peter Owen, 1957
- , *In the Magic Land of Peyote* London: University of Texas, 1975
- Berdan, F.F., *The Aztecs of Central Mexico- An Imperial Society* New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1982.
- Berlin B. et al, *Principles of Tzoltzil Plant Classification* New York : Academic, 1974
- Berrin, K. (ed.), *Feathered Serpents and Flowering Trees: Reconstructing the Murals of Teotihuacan*, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, Seattle, 1988
- Book, E., "To Cut the Clouds: The Chachaac Ceremony to Invoke Chac to Bring Rain", in M. Jansen et al (eds.), *Continuity and Identity in North America: Essays in Honour of Benedikt Hartmann* Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988

- Blanton, R.E. , S.A.Kowalewski, et al, *Ancient Mesoamerica: A Comparison of Change in Three Regions* Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1981
- Boone, E.H., "Incarnations of the Aztec Supernatural: The Image of Huitzilopochtli in Mexico and Europe", *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 1989
- Borhegyi, S. F. de , "Minature Thin Stone Heads and Other Pre-Columbian Minature Stone Objects from Mesoamerica", *American Antiquity* 32: 4, 1967
- , "Minature Mushroom Stones from Guatemala", *American Antiquity* 26, 1961
- Bose, D.N. , *Tantras : Their Philosophies and Occult Secrets* Calcutta : Oriental, 1956
- Braden, C.S., *Religious Aspects of the Conquest of Mexico* Durham: Durham University Press, 1933
- Brady, J.E. & A. Stone, "Naj Tunich: Entrance to the Maya Underworld", *Archaeology* Nov. - Dec. 1986
- Brandon, S.G.F., "Human Sacrifice", *A Dictionary of Comparative Religion* New York : Charles Schribner's Sons, 1970
- Bray, W., "Civilising the Aztecs", in J.Friedman & M.J. Rowlands (eds.), *The Evolution of Social Systems* Gloucester Crescent: Duckworth, 1977
- Bricker, V.R., *The Indian Christ, the Indian King : The Historical Substrata of Maya Ritual and Myth* Austin: University of Texas, 1981
- Broda, J., D.Carrasco, A.A.Demarest, *The Great Temple of Tenochtitlan* Berkeley: University of California, 1987
- Brundage, B.C. *The Jade Steps : A Ritual Life of the Aztecs* , Salt Lake City : University of Utah, 1985
- , *The Fifth Sun* Salt Lake City: University of Utah, 1979
- Burillon, J., " Mesoamerica and the Eastern United States in Prehistoric Times ", *Handbook of Middle American Indians III* Austin: University of Texas, 1971
- Burkhart, L.M., "The Solar Christ in Nahuatl Doctrinal Texts of Early Colonial Mexico", *Ethnohistory* 35: 1, Winter 1988
- Burland, Cottie A., *Magic Books from Mexico* Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1953
- , *Moctezuma : Lord of the Aztecs* London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1972
- , & William Fomer, *Feathered Serpent and Smoking Mirror* New York: G.P.Putnam's Sons, 1976
- Bushnell, G.H.S., *Ancient Arts of the Americas* London: Thames & Hudson, 1967
- Cancian, F.M. *What are Norms? A Study of Beliefs and Action in a Mayan Community* London: Cambridge University Press, 1975
- Carr, P. & W.Gingerich, "The Vagina Dentata Motif in Nahuatl and Pueblo Mythic Narrative: A Comparative Study" in B.Swann (ed) *Smoothing the Ground: Essays on North American Oral Literature*, University of California, Berkeley, 1978.

- Carrasco, Pedro, "The People of Central Mexico and their Historical Traditions", Handbook of Middle American Indians Austin: University of Texas, 1974
- Carrasco, D., "City as Symbol in Aztec Thought: The Clues from the Codex Mendoza", History of Religion February 1980
- \_\_\_\_\_, Quetzalcoatl and the Irony of Empire Chicago: University of Chicago, 1982
- \_\_\_\_\_, "Quetzalcoatl's Revenge : Primordium and Application in Aztec Religion", History of Religions 19, May 1980
- \_\_\_\_\_, "Star gatherers and Wobbling Suns: Astral Symbolism in the Aztec Tradition", History of Religions 26:3 February 1987
- Caso, A., (trans. L. Dunhan), The Aztecs: People of the Sun Norman : University of Oklahoma, 1956
- Cervantes, M. A., Treasures of Mexico from the National Anthropology Museum Barcelona : Geocolour, 1978
- Chadwick, Robert. "Native Pre-Aztec History of Central Mexico", Handbook of the Middle American Indian III Austin: University of Texas, 1971
- Charlton, J.H. "Population Trends in the Teotihuacan Valley A.D. 1400-1969", World Archaeology June 1972
- Cheek, "A Long-nosed God Mask from North-west Iowa", American Antiquity 40:3 July 1975
- Cheetham, N., New Spain London: Victor Gollancz, 1974
- Clavigero, F.X. Regulas de la lengua mexicana (Mezzofanti XXII : 10) J.O. Anderson (trans. ), Rules of the Aztec Language : Classical Nahuatl Grammar Salt Lake City : University of Utah Press, 1973
- Clendinnen, Inga, "The Cost of Courage in Aztec Society", Past and Present 177: May 1985
- \_\_\_\_\_, Aztecs: An Interpretation Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991
- Cline, H., "Notes on Torquemada's Native Sources and Historiographical Methods", Americas 25 April 1969
- Coe, M.D., In the Land of the Olmec Austin: University of Texas, 1980
- \_\_\_\_\_, The Maya, London: Thames & Hudson, 1993
- \_\_\_\_\_, Mexico London : Thames & Hudson, 1984
- Cook, S. F., "Human Sacrifice and Warfare as Factors in the Demography of Pre-Columbian Mexico", Human Biology 18:2 May 1946
- Crawley, A.E. "Human Sacrifice ( Introductory & Primitive )", Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics Edinburgh : T.&T.Clark, 1917

- Cumrine, L.S. & W.R. Cumrine, "Ritual Service and Blood Sacrifice as Mediating Binary oppositions: A Structural Analysis of Several Mayo Myths and Rituals", *Journal of American Folklore* 83 January 1970
- \_\_\_\_\_, "Olmec Jaguars and Olmec Kings", in E.P. Benson (ed.), *The Cult of the Feline* Washington D.C. : Dumbarton Oaks , 1972
- , "Religion and the Rise of Mesoamerican States", in G.D. Jones & R. R. Krautz, *The Transition to Statehood in the New World* London : Comabridge, 1981
- Conrad, G.A., & A.A.Demarest, *Religion and Empire: The Dynamics of Aztec and Inca Imperialism* New York: Academic, 1982
- , "Ritual Symbolism and Ritual Drama: The Mayo Indian San Cayetano Velacion, Sonora, Mexico", *Journal of American Folklore* 90, January 1977
- Davies, N., *The Aztec Empire* Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1987
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Human Sacrifice in History and Today* New York, William Morrow & Co., 1981
- \_\_\_\_\_, *The Aztecs: A History* London: Macmillan, 1973
- Delhalle J.K. & A. Luykx, "The Nahuatl Myth of the Creation of Humanity: A Coastal Connection ?", *American Antiquity* January 1986
- Demarest, A.A., "The Violent Saga of a Maya kingdom", *National Geographic* 183 : 2, Feb. 1993
- Dibble, C. E., *The Conquest through Aztec Eyes* (41st Annual Frederick William Reynolds Lecture Salt Lake City : University of Utah Press, 1978
- \_\_\_\_\_, "Writing in Central Mexico", *Handbook of the Middle American Indian: X* Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971
- Diehl, R.A., "Pre-Hispanic Relations between the Basin of Mexico and North-West Mexico", in Eric R. Wolf, *The Valley of Mexico: Studies in Pre-Hispanic Ecology and Society* Albuquerque: School of American Research, 1976
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Tula: The Toltec Capital of Ancient Mexico* London: Thames & Hudson, 1983
- \_\_\_\_\_, & M.Manderville, "Tula , and Wheeled Vehicles in Mesoamerica", *Antiquity* 61 , 1981
- Dierran , R.D. "Religion and Social Organisation in Formative Times" in K.V. Flannery (ed.) *The Early Mesoamerican Village*, Academic, New York, 1976
- Dinzel, T. W., "The Psychology of Ancient Mexican Symbolism", *Spiritual Disciplines: Papers from the Eranos Yearbook Bollingen Series XXX:4* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985
- Dockstander, F.J., "Miniature Ball Game Objects from Mesoamerica", *American Antiquity*, Vol.33:2, 1968

- Driver, H.E., *Indians of North America* 2nd Edition, Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1969
- Drury, N., *Don Juan, Mescalito and Modern Magic: The Mythology of Inner Space* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978
- Duverger, C., *La fleur letale: Economie du sacrifice azteque* Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1978
- Ediger, D., *The Well of Sacrifice* London: Robert Hall & Co., 1971
- Fagan, Brian M. "If Columbus Had Not Called...", *History Today* May 1992
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Kingdoms of Gold, Kingdoms of Jade - The Americas before Columbus*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1991
- Fash, W.L., *Scribes, Warriors and Kings: The City of Copan and the Ancient Maya* London: Thames & Hudson, 1991
- Fay, H. la, "The Maya: Children of Time", *National Geographic* 148: 6, Dec. 1975
- Feldman, L.H., "Axes of Stone and Metal Indices from a Time of Transition", *American Antiquity* 39: January 1974 Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1988
- Fitzer, D.M., "Symbolic One-Leggedness: Pacal as Tezcatlipoca", *American Antiquity* 46, June 1981
- Flannery, K.V., "Contextual Analysis of Ritual Paraphernalia from Formative Oaxaca", *The Early Mesoamerican Village* New York: Academic, 1976
- \_\_\_\_\_, et al, *The Cloud People*, Academic & School of American Research, 1983
- \_\_\_\_\_, *The Early Mesoamerican Village* New York: Academic, 1976
- Foster, G.M., *Notes on the Popluca of Veracruz*, Mexico City: Instituto Panamericano de Geografia e historia, Publ. 51, 1940
- Fowler, W.R., "Late Pre-Classic Mortuary Patterns and Evidence of Human Sacrifice at Chalchuapa, El Salvador", *American Antiquity*, 49: 3, 1981
- Frazer, James G. *The Golden Bough*, Pt. VI: *The Scapegoat* London: Macmillan & Co., 1913
- Friedlander, J., *Being Indian in Hueyapan*, New York: St. Martins: 1975
- Furst, P. J., (ed.), *Flesh of the Gods, The Ritual Use of Hallucinogens*, George Allen & Unwin, London 1972
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Hallucinogens and Culture*, San Francisco: Chandler & Sharp, 1976
- \_\_\_\_\_, "The Olmec, Were-Jaguar Motif in the Light of Ethnographic Reality", in E.P. Benson (ed.), *Dumbarton Oaks Conference on the Olmec: Oct. 28 - 29 1967* Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1967
- \_\_\_\_\_, (ed), *Pre-Columbian Art of Mexico* New York: Abbeville, 1980
- Gait, G.A. 'Human Sacrifice (Indian)', *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* : 6 Edinburgh: & T. Clark, 1913



- Ganesambandha Paramacharya Swamigal, D., The Development of Saivism in Southern India : 300-1300 Gurupathara : Shiva Ilakkia Peravignar, 1967 )
- Garber, J.F. "Patterns of Jade Consumption and Disposal at Cerros, Northern Belize", American Antiquity 48:4, 1983
- Gibson, C., "The Structure of the Aztec Empire", Handbook of Middle American Indians Austin : University of Texas, 1971
- \_\_\_\_\_, The Aztecs under Spanish : A History of the Indians of the Valley of Mexico 1519 - 1810 Stanford : Stanford University, 1964
- Gilding, M., "The Massacre of the Mystery", Journal of Pacific History, XVII : 2, April 1982
- Gillmor, F., Flute of the Smoking Mirror Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1949
- Girard, Rene, Violence and the Sacred Baltimore: John Hopewell, 1972
- Glass, J.B. "A Survey of Native Middle American Pictorial Manuscripts", Handbook of Middle American Indians Austin : University of Texas, 1971
- Gossen, G.H., "Animal Souls and Human Destiny in Chamula", Man 10:3 September 1975
- Graulich, M., "Double Immolations in Ancient Mesoamerican Sacrificial Ritual", History of Religions 27: 1, May 1988
- Gray, V.R., Freud on Ritual Missoula: American Academy of Religions, 1979
- Green, P.E., "The Conquest of Mexico : The View of the Chronicles", The Americas 31:2 October 1974
- Greenleaff, R.E., "The Mexican Inquisition and the Indians : Sources for the Ethno historian", Americas 34 January 1978
- Grove, D.C., Chalcatzingo, Thames & Hudson, London, 1985
- \_\_\_\_\_, "Chalcatzingo, Morelos, Mexico: A Reappraisal of the Olmec Rock Carvings", American Antiquity 33:4 October 1968
- Gruzinski, S. (tr. D. Dusivbeare), Painting the Conquest: The Mexican Indian and the European Renaissance Flammurvan: UNESCO, 1992
- Guerra, F., The Pre-Columbian Mind London, Seminar Press Ltd. 1971
- Gyles, B. & E.Sayer. Of Gods and Men: Mexico and the Mexican Indian London, BBC, 1980
- Haackel, Josef. "Hochgott und Gotter im alten Mexiko", Kairos 13 : 1959
- Hagen, V. W. van The Aztecs : Man and Tribe New York : New American History, 1958
- \_\_\_\_\_, The Ancient Sun Kingdoms of the Americas St.Albans: Paladin, 1973
- Hall, L. B., "Visions of the Feminine: The Dual Goddess of Ancient Mexico", South West Review Spring 1978

- Haly, Richard, "Bare Bones : Rethinking Mesoamerican Divinity", *History of Religions* 31: 3, February 1992
- Hammond, N., *Ancient Maya Civilization* Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1982
- , "Early Maya Ceremonial at Cuello, Belize Antiquity, LIV:212, November 1980
- , "Unearthing the Oldest Known Maya", *National Geographic* 162: 1, July 1982
- & E. Pretty et al, "A Classic Maya Family Tomb", *World Archaeology* 7: 1, June 1975
- Harner, M. , "The Ecological Basis for Aztec Sacrifice", *American Ethnologist* 4 , 1978
- , "The Enigma of Aztec Sacrifice", *Natural History* LXXXVI: April 1971
- Harrington, P., "Mother of Death, mother of Rebirth: The Mexican Virgin of Guadalupe", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* LVI: 1, Spring 1988
- Harris, M. , *Cannibals and Kings* London: Collins, 1978
- Hassig, R., "Aztec Warfare", *History Today* 10, February 1990
- Hawkes, J., *The Atlas of Early Man* London : Macmillan London Limited, 1976
- Haught, J.A., *Holy Horrors* Buffalo: prometheus, 1990
- Haydon, A. G., "Human Sacrifice", in *Vergilius Ferm, Encyclopaedia of Religion* Westport: Greenwood Press, 1945
- Healan, D.H., "Architectural Implications of Daily Life in Ancient Tollan, Hidalgo, Mexico", *World Archaeology* 9: 2, October 1977
- Henderson, J.S., *The World of the Ancient Maya* Ithaca: Cornell University, 1981
- Hendrik, B.C., "Quetzalcoatl: European or Indigene?", C.L.Riley et al (eds.), *Man Across the Sea: Problems with Pre-Columbian Contacts* Austin: University of Texas, 1971
- Henninger, J., "Sacrifice", in M. Eliade ( ed ), *The Encyclopaedia of Religions* 12 New York : Macmillan Publishing Co., 1987
- Heyden,D., "Interpretation of a Cave Under the Pyramid of the Sun at Teotihuacan", *American Antiquity*, Vol.40
- Hicks, F., "Flowery War in Aztec History", *American Ethnologist* 6: 1, February 1979
- Hicks, F. "Tetzecoco in the Early 16th Century: The State, the City and the Calpolli", *American Anthropologist* 9:2 May 1982
- Hilton, R., " Is Intellectual history Irrelevant? The Case of the Aztecs", *Journal of the History of Ideas* April 1972
- Highwater, J., "Discovering Ancient Mexico City", *Archaeology* 35: 1, Jan. - Feb. 1982

- Holland, W.R., "Contemporary Tzoltzil Cosmological Concepts as a Basis for Interpreting Prehistoric Maya Civilisation", *American Antiquity* 29: 3, January 1964.
- Holloway, R.L., "The Cast of Fossil Hominoid Brains", *Scientific American* 231:1 July 1974
- Honore, P., *In Quest of the White God: The Mystical History of South American Civilisations* London: Hutchinson, 1963
- Hooton, E.A. "Skeletons from the Cenote of Sacrifice at Chichen Itza", in C.L.Hay (ed.), *The Maya and their Neighbours* New York: Dover, 1937-1940
- Horcasitas, F. "It's a Way of life: Mexican Folk Art", *National Geographic* 153: 5 May 1978
- Hubert H., & M. Mauss, *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function* Chicago: University of Chicago, 1898
- Hughes, P. *Witchcraft* Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1965
- Hunn, E. "Did the Aztecs Lack Potential Animal Domesticates?", *American Ethnologist* 9:3 August 1982
- Hunt, E. C., *Transformation of the Hummingbird: Cultural Roots of a Zinacantan Mythical Poem* Ithaca: Cornell University, 1977
- Hvindfeldt, A., *Teotl and Ixiptlatli* Copenhagen: Manksgaard, 1958
- Ingham, J.M., "Human Sacrifice at Tenochtitlan", *Comparative Studies of Society and History* 26: 3 July 1984
- Irwin, James, *An Introduction to Maori Religion* Special Studies in Religion: 4 Belford Park: Australian Association for Studies in Religion, 1984
- Isaac, B.L., "The Aztec Flowery War: A Geo-Political Explanation", *Journal for Anthropological Research* 139: 4, Winter 1983
- James, E.O., "Sacrifice: Introductory and Primitive", J.Hastings ed. *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* Edinburgh: T.&T.Clark, 1920
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Origins of Sacrifice: A Study of Comparative Religion* Boston: Kernalworth, 1933
- Jensen, A.K. *Myth and Cult among Primitive People* Chicago: University of Chicago, 197
- Jones, G.D., "The Canek Manuscript in Ethno historical Perspective" *Ancient Mesoamerica* 13, 1992
- Justeson, J.S., "The Origins of Writing Systems: Pre-Classic Mesoamerica", *World Archaeology* February 1986
- \_\_\_\_\_, & P.Mathews, "The Seating of the Tun - Further Evidence Concerning a Late Pre-Classic Lowland Maya Stela Cult" *American Antiquity*, Vol.48, 1983
- Kampen, M.E., *The Sculptures of El Tajin, Vera Cruz Mexico*, University of Flinders Press, Gainesville, 1972

- Karttunen, F. "Nahuatl Literacy", in G.A. Collier, R.I. Rosaldo, et al, (eds.), *The Inca and Aztec States 1400-1800: Anthropology and History* New York: Academic, 1982
- Kearney, M. *The Winds of Ixtepi: Zapotec World-view and Society* New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1972
- Keen, B., *The Aztec Image in Western Thought* New Brunswick: Rutgers University, 1971
- Kennedy, J.G., *Tarahumaras of Sierra Madre* Arlington Heights: AHM Press, 1978
- Kinzhlov, R.V., "Towards a Reconstruction of the Olmec Mythological System", in D.L. Brown (ed.), *Cultural Continuity in Mesoamerica* The Hague, Mouton, 1978
- Kissan, E. & M. Schmidt (tr.), *Flower and Song: poems of the Aztec People* London: Annull Press, 1977
- Klein, C. F., "Woven Heaven, Tangled Earth: A Weaver's Paradigm of the Mesoamerican Cosmos", in Anthony F. Aveni & E. Urton (eds.), *Ethnoastronomy and Archaeoastronomy in the American Tropics* New York: Annals of the New York Academy of Science (385), 1982
- Kohler, U. "Mushrooms, Drugs and Potters: A New Approach to the Function of Pre-Columbian Mesoamerican Mushroom Stones", *American Antiquity* 41:2 January 1976
- Kramer, K. P., *The Sacred Art of Dying* New York: Paulist, 1988
- Krickeberg, W. von, "Bauform und Weltbild im Alten Mexiko", *Paideuma: Mitteilungen zur Kulturkunde* 5: 4, 1950
- , "Mesoamerica", in E.O. James (ed), *Pre-Columbian American Religion*, New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1968
- Kubler, G., "Pre-Columbian Pilgrimages in Mesoamerica", *Diogenes*, 125: Spring 1984
- , *Studies in Classic Maya Iconography* New Haven: Memarrot Connecticut Academy of Art, 1969
- Lamb, U., "Religious Conflicts in the Conquest of Mexico", *Journal of the History of Ideas* XVIII: 4, October 1956.
- Lanczkowski, G., "Der Aztekische Blumengesang", in C.J. Blecker, S.G. Braden, M. Simson (eds.), *Ex Orbe Religionum: Studies in the History of Religions (Supplement to Numen)*, XXII London: Lugdum Batavorum & E.J. Brill, 1972
- , "Different Types of Redemption in Mexican Religion", in R. J. Werblowsky & C. J. Blecker (eds.), *Types of Redemption: Contributions to the Theme of the Study, Conference: Jerusalem 14 - 19 July 1968* Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970
- Law, R., "Human Sacrifice in Pre-Colonial West Africa", *African Affairs* 84 June 1985
- Leon-Portilla, M. "Aztec Gods - How Many?", in J. Akerenson (ed.), *Citra* 1492 Washington D.C., National College of Art, 1991
- , *Aztec Thought and Culture: A Study of the Ancient Nahuatl Mind*, Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1963

- , Native Mesoamerican Spirituality, New York, Paulist, 1980
- , Pre-Columbian Literatures of Mexico, Norman : University of Oklahoma, 1969
- , "Pre-Hispanic Thought", in M. de la Gueva(ed.), Major Trends in Mexican Philosophy, Notre Dame : University of Notre Dame, 1966
- Levi-Strauss, C. The Savage Mind London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1966
- Lewis, O., Life in a Mexican Village - Tepoztlán restudied. Urbana: University of Illinois, 1962
- , Tepoztlán: Village in Mexico New York: Holt & Co., 1960
- Leyenaar, T.J.J., "The Day of the Dead- Recurring Reunion", in C. Effield, Cultural Change and Continuity New York : Academic Press, 1976
- Ess, P. K., Mexico Under Spain 1521 - 1556 Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975
- Lopez, J., Christmas in Mexico Chicago : Ward Books, 1976
- Lyons, A.S., Medicine : An Illustrated History Melbourne : Macmillan & Co., 1979
- Marti, S. & G.P. Kurath, Dances of Anahuac New York: Weiner-Gren Anthropological Research, 1964
- MacDowell, D., "The Aztecs", National Geographic 158: 6, Dec. 1980
- MacGee, R. J., Life, Ritual and Religion among the Lacandon Maya Belfount: Wadsworth Press, 1990
- MacGregor Eadie P., Mexico- A Traveller's Cultural History London: B.T.Batsford, 1991
- MacNesh, R.S. & M.L.Fowler et al, The Prehistory of Tehuacan Valley, .5, University of Texas, Austin, 1972
- Madsen, W. "The Nahuatl", Handbook of Middle American Indians: VIII Austin : University of Texas, 1971
- Marcus, J. "Archaeology and Religion: A Comparison of Zapotec and Maya", World Archaeology, Vol.10:2, October 1978
- Marrett, R., Mexico London: Thames & Hudson, 1971
- Millon, C., "Painting, Writing and Polity in Teotihuacan, Mexico", American Antiquity 39, July 1973
- , & B. Drevitt et al, The Pyramid of the Sun at Teotihuacan: 1959 Investigation Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1965
- Moctezuma, E M. " Archaeology and Symbolism in Aztec Mexico: The Temple Mayor of Tenochtitlan", Journal of the American Academy of Religion LIII: 3, December 1985.

- \_\_\_\_\_, "New Finds in the Great Temple", *National Geographic* 158: 6, December 1980
- Monaghan, J., "Sacrifice, Death and the Origins of Agriculture in the Codex Venus", *American Antiquity* 55: 3, 1990
- Montes, A.F., "The Building of Tenochtitlan", *National Geographic* 15: 6, Dec.1980
- Myerhoff, B.G. *Peyote Hunt* Ithaca: Cornell University, 1970
- Nash, J. "Death as a Way of Life: The Increasing Resort to Homicide in a Maya Indian Community", *American Anthropologist* 69 October 1967
- Neumann, F. J., "The Black Man in the Cave at Chapultepec : an Aztec Variation of the Gatekeeper Motif", F.E. Reynolds & E.H. Waugh, *Religious Encounters with Death* London : Pennsylvania University, 1977
- \_\_\_\_\_, "Paper- A Sacred Material in Aztec Ritual", *History of Religions* October 1973
- \_\_\_\_\_, "Flayed God and His Rattlestick: A Shamanic Element in Pre-Hispanic Mesoamerican Religion", *History of Religions* February 1976
- \_\_\_\_\_, "The Experience of Time in Nahuatl Religion", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* June 1976
- Nicholson, H.B., "Major sculpture in Pre-Hispanic Central Mexico" *Handbook of Middle American Indians*, 1. Austin: University of Texas, 1971-
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Origins of Religious Art and Iconography in Pre-Columbian Mesoamerica* Los Angeles: UCLAC, 1976
- \_\_\_\_\_, "Religion in Pre-Hispanic Central Mexico", *Handbook of Middle American Indians* 10 Austin : University of Texas, 1971
- Nicholson, I. , *Firefly in the Night: A Study of Ancient Nahuatl Poetry and Symbolism*, London: Faber & Faber, 1959
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Mexican and Central American Mythology* London: Paul Hamlyn, 1966
- Norman, J. , "The Huichols- Mexico's People of Myth and Magic", *National Geographic* 151 June 1971
- Oakes, M., *The Two Crosses of Todos Santos* Bollinger Series XXVII New York: Pantheon, 1951
- Offner, J.A., "On the Inapplicability of 'Oriental Despotism' and the 'Asiatic Mode of Production' to the Aztecs of Mexico", *American Antiquity* 46:1 June 1981
- Orellano, S., *The Tzutujil Mayans: Continuity and Change 1200 - 1630* Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1984
- Padden, R.C., "Huitzilopochtli", in R. Wauchope, (ed.), *The Indian Background of Latin American History* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968
- Pasztory, E., *Aztec Art* New York : Harry N. Adams, 1983

- , "The Function of Art in Mesoamerica", *Archaeology* 37 :1 ,January-February 1984
- Paul, A., "History of a Maya Vase?", *Archaeology*, Vol.29, Apr.1976
- Peterson, P., *Ancient Mexico*, New York : Capricorn, 1962
- Pohl, M., "Ritual Continuity and Transformation in Mesoamerica: Reconstructing the Ancient Cuch Ritual", *American Antiquity* 46, July 1981
- , "Ancient Maya Cave Rituals", *Archaeology* 36, May-June 1983
- Prescott, W.H. , *History of the Conquest of Mexico* Revised Edition, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1913
- Price, B. T, "Demystification, Enriddlement and Aztec Cannibalism: A Materialist Rejoinder to Harner", *American Ethnologist* 5:1 February 1978
- Proskouriakoff, T., *A Study of Classic Maya Sculptures* Washington D.C.: Carnegie Institute, 1950
- Read, K.A., "The Fleeting Moment: Cosmology, Eschatology and Ethics in Aztec Religion and Society", *Journal of Religious Ethics* 14: 1, Spring 1986
- , "Negotiating the Familiar and the Strange in Aztec Ethics", *Journal of Religious Ethics* 15:1 Spring 1987
- Reck, G.E., *In the Shadow of Tlaloc: Life in a Mexican Village* Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978
- Redfield, R., *The Folk Culture of Yucatan* Chicago: University of Chicago, 1941
- , *Tepoztlan : A Mexican Village* Chicago: University of Chicago, 1930
- Ricard, R., *The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico* Berkeley : University of California, 1966
- Riding A. ,*Mexico: Into the Volcano* London: I.B.Taurus, 1985
- Robertson, Donald, *Pre-Columbian Architecture* London: Prentice Hall, 1963
- Rounds,J., "Dynasty Succession and Centralisation of Power in Tenochtitlan", G.A.Collier et al (ed.), *The Inca and Aztec States 1400-1800: Anthropology and History* New York: Academic, 1982
- Sagan, E., *Human Aggression, Cannibalism and Culture Form* New York: Harper & Row, 1974
- Sanders, William T. "The Agricultural History of the Basin of Mexico", in Eric R. Wolf (ed.), *The Valley of Mexico: Studies in Pre-Hispanic Ecology and Society* Albuquerque : School of American Research, 1976
- , "Ecology and Cultural Syncretism in 16th-century Mesoamerica", *Antiquity*, 66:250 March 1992
- Sandstrom, Alan R. *Corn is Our Blood : Culture and Ethnic Identity in a Contemporary Aztec Indian Village* Norman : University of Oklahoma, 1991
- Schele, L. & M.E., Miller, "The Blood of Kings - A New Interpretation of Maya Art", *Archaeology*, 39:3, May-June, 1986

- \_\_\_\_\_, *The Blood of Kings : Dynasty and Ritual in Maya Art* New York : George Braziller Inc., 1986
- Scofield, B. & A. Cordova, *The Aztec Circle of Destiny : Astrology and Divination from the Ancient Aztec World* St. Paul: Llewellyn, 1988
- Schultes, R.E., "An Overview of Hallucinogens in the Western Hemisphere", Peter J. Furst (ed.), *Flesh of the Gods: The Ritual Use of Hallucinogens* London: George Allen & Unwin, 1972
- Sejourne, L., *Burning Water: Thought and Religion in Ancient Mexico* London: Thames & Hudson, 1956
- Severin, G.M., *The Paris Codex: Decoding an Astronomical Ephemeris* Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1981
- Smith, B., *Mexico - A History in Art* London: Phaidon, 1975
- Smith, J.B., *The Guadalupe Madonna* London : Souvenir Press, 1983
- Smith, M.E. & F.F. Bardon, "Archaeology of the Aztec Empire", *World Archaeology* 23 : 3 1992
- Sousson Pierre et Janine, (tr. David Macrae), *Life of the Aztecs in Ancient Mexico* (Farigliano : Editions Minerva Libra, 1987
- Soustelle, J., *Daily Life of the Aztecs* London : Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1955
- \_\_\_\_\_, *The Olmecs: The Oldest Civilisation of Mexico* Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1984
- Spence, C.S., *Cuicatlan Canada and Monte Alban* New York: Academic, 1982
- Spence, I., *The Religion of Ancient Mexico* London: Watt & Co., 1945
- Steggerda, M., *Maya Indians of Yucatan* Washington D.C.: Carnegie Institute, 1941
- Stocker J. et al, "Crocodilians and Olmecs: Further Interpretations of Formative Period Iconography", *American Antiquity* 45, October 1985
- Stuart, G. E., "Riddle of the Glyphs", *National Geographic* December 1975
- \_\_\_\_\_, *The Mighty Aztecs* Washington D.C.: National Geographic Society, 1981
- Sugiyama, S., 'Burials Dedicated to the Old Temple of Teotihuacan, Mexico', *American Antiquity* 54:1 January 1989
- Taylor, E.B., *Primitive Culture*, Vol. II John Murray, 1903
- Taylor, R.E. & C.W. Meighan, *Chronologies in New World Archaeology* New York: Academic, 1978
- Thompson, J. Eric S., *Maya History and Religion* Norman : University of Oklahoma, 1970
- Toor, F., *A Treasury of Mexican Folkways* New York: Crown, 1947
- Townsend, R. F., "Pyramid and Sacred Mountain", in Anthony F. Aveni & G. Urton, *Ethnoastronomy and Archaeoastronomy in the American Tropics* New York : New York Academy of Science, 1982



- \_\_\_\_\_, *The Aztecs*, London : Thames & Hudson, 1992
- Tulleken, K. van, *Mexico* Amsterdam: Time-Life, 1985
- Tylor, E.B., *Primitive Culture II* London: John Murry, 1903
- Umberger, G., "Ancient Mexico City: Discovering the Templo Mayor", *Archaeology* 35:4. July- Aug. 1982
- Valeri, T.V., *Kingship and Sacrifice*, Chicago : University of Chicago, 1985
- Valliant, G. C, *Aztecs of Mexico* Hamondsworth: Penguin, 1965
- Vaux, R. de, *Studies in Old Testament Sacrifice* Oxford/Cardiff : University of Wales Press, 1964
- Villa, A., *The Maya of East Central Quintana Roo* Publ. 559 Washington D.C.: Carnegie Institute of Washington, 1945
- Vogt, E.Z., *Tortillas for the Gods: A Symbolic Analysis of Zinacantan Ritual* Cambridge: Harvard University, 1976
- Vries, Jan de, *The Study of Religion - A Historical Approach* New York : Harcourt Brace & World Co., 1967
- Walsh, T.B., "Xochitl: Catherine Anne Porter's Changing Goddess", *American Literature* LII:2, May 1980
- Wasson, P.G., *The Wondrous Mushroom: Mycolatry in Mesoamerica* New York: McGraw Hill, 1980
- Weaver, M.P. *The Aztecs, the Mayans and their Predecessors* New York: Academic, 1981
- Welsh, W.B. *An Analysis of Classic Lowland Mayan Burials*, Bureau of International Series 409, Oxford, 1988
- Wertimer, R. A. & H Schuster "Written in the Stars: Celestial Origin of the Maya Creation Myth" *Archaeology*, July/August 1993
- Willey, G.R., "Mesoamerican Civilization and the Idea of Transcendence", *Antiquity* 50, December 1976
- Williams, B.J. "Contact Period Rural Overpopulation in the Basin of Mexico: Carrying Capacity Models Tested with Documentary Data", *American Antiquity* 54:4 October 1989
- Winning, H. von, "Late and Terminal Preclassic: The Emergence of Teotihuacan", in Henry B. Nicholson (ed.), *Origins of Religious Art and Iconography in Preclassic Mesoamerica* Los Angeles : UCLA Latin American Centre, 1976
- Wolf, E.R., *Sons of the Shaking Earth* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959
- Wolf, E. R. (ed.), *The Valley of Mexico: Studies in Pre-Hispanic Ecology and Society* Albuquerque: School of American Research, 1976