

**Aztec Mythology:
The Influence of Aztec Mythology on Mexican Culture and History**

James W. Salterio Torres
Jordan High School for Careers

INTRODUCTION

The impact of the Latin American intellectual explosion in literature dramatically increased the number of books written by Latin American writers translated from Spanish to English and the number of persons reading this literature. After the Mexican Revolution, the awakened interest in Mexican authors (such as Carlos Fuentes, Octavio Paz, Juan Rulfo, Rosario Castellanos, and other writers) in Mexican mythology and culture was reflected in their works.

In art, Mexican mural painters Diego de Rivera, Jose Clemente Orozco, David Alfaro Siqueiros, Rufino Tamayo, and painter Frida Kahlo expressed their deeply felt Mexican heritage by focusing on traditional pre-Columbian art and artifacts, especially on the art and mythology of the Aztecs.

This unit will introduce students to the Aztec major and minor gods and their attributes and functions within Aztec society. Unfortunately, the rich range of the mythology of the Aztecs has been overshadowed by their belief in their sun's need for human sacrifice to survive, a practice that was especially repugnant to the Spanish priests, and was a direct cause of the destruction of Aztec temples and religious writings and practices. Enough, however, has survived and been rewritten, often by churchmen themselves, to once again describe these gods and the rites that accompanied their worship. In this unit I shall retell some of these tales.

This unit will describe unique characteristics belonging to each god and his influence in the everyday life of the people. For example, Yacatecutli was a god important to the economy of the state. He was the god of the merchants or *pochtecas*. Much like the Greek god Hermes, he protected merchants from all sorts of dangers during their travels. Tezctzoncatl, the god of *pulque* wine, was blamed for the offences of his intoxicated followers, similar to the Greek god Dionysus whose *ate*, or madness, overpowered his maenads. Other gods are responsible for providing men with sustenance, such as Chicomecoatl, the goddess of corn maize, and the god Opochtli, worshiped by fishermen, who is said to have invented the fishing net and type of spear used by fishermen.

This unit will point out similarities between Aztec mythology and other world mythologies. From the Aztecs' creation myth and its variations, to the long northern trek of the Aztecs led by their tribal god Huitzilopochtli, who refers to them as "the chosen," until they received a sign indicating where they should build their capital, Tenochtitlan. Students will compare this journey to Moses leading the Jews from Egypt into the promised land of Israel.

I will use this unit to argue that the Mexican psyche has been enormously shaped by its mythological background and history, that the celebration of the Day of the Dead, the Mexican belief that "la vida no vale nada" (life is worthless), and other aspects of popular Mexican culture are reflections of this mythology, and that this Mexican worldview works itself into literary works, such as Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo*, where the protagonist *descends* to a town called Comala, an allegorical descent into Hell, and walks among and speaks to the dead, while seeking an almost mythical cacique long since dead and *El llano en llamas*; Ruben Romero's *La vida inútil de Pito Pérez*; Octavio Paz's brilliant essays on the Mexicans' fundamental nature *El*

laberinto de la soledad; Agustín Yanez's *Al filo del agua*; Carlos Fuentes' *La muerte de Artemio Cruz*; and other Mexican writings.

Students will discuss specific authors who have used Aztec mythology, in one form or another in their writings, including the Chilean Nobel prize-winning poet Pablo Neruda in his *Canto General*. Students will discuss the mythological elements in Carlos Fuentes' science fiction story *Chac Mol*, even though the story deals with a Mayan, not an Aztec, deity.

This unit is written for a 12th grade Advanced Placement course in Spanish and Spanish-American Literature. It will expose my Spanish AP students to Mesoamerican mythology, allowing them to study and compare the similarities and differences with the better-known classical Greek and Roman myths. Students will study and use handouts and visual aids, that is, illustrations of the gods taken from the various codices.

This unit will be taught completely in Spanish; therefore, all of the material in the unit will be translated into Spanish.

OBJECTIVES

This unit will meet the following Project Clear for Languages Other Than English (Foreign Language) objectives:

Goal 1: Communication (Reading) 9.1.h Students will read to discover meaning through context and visual clues.

Goal 1: Communication (Writing) 9.1.i Students will write in the target language to convey a message or to exchange information about everyday activities or oneself.

Goal 2: Cultures: 9.2.a Students will describe some of the daily activities of the people of the target language and how this is reflected in their culture and language.

9.2.b Students will locate the major countries and areas of the world where the target language is spoken and identify some well-known personalities as well as some of the characteristics of the people.

Goal 3: Connections: 9.3.a Students will use the language to make connections with other subject areas and to acquire information.

Goal 4: 9.4.a Students will compare and contrast one language and culture to another language and culture.

UNIT BACKGROUND

Foreword

Desde 'ab inicio' adoramos nuestros dioses y los tenemos por buenos, así deben ser los vuestros y no cureis más al presente de hablarnos de ellos./Throughout all time we have worshipped our own gods and thought they were good. I do not doubt the goodness of the god whom you worship, so do not trouble to speak to us about them at present. (Díaz del Castillo 317)

Moctezuma's words to Cortes contain the seed for the destruction of the Aztec religious system by the Spanish Catholic Church. The religious intolerance of the Spaniards, which had been reinforced by their long and bloody *reconquista* of Spain from the Moors, ending with the expulsion of the Moors and the Jews from Spain in 1492, was in sharp contrast to the Aztec religion, which had already incorporated a great number of ancient Mesoamerican gods into its pantheon. Edith Hamilton contrasts the gods of the Greeks with those of primitive man as follows:

Horrors lurked in the primeval forest, not nymphs and naiads. Terror lived there, with its close attendant, Magic, and its most common defense, Human Sacrifice... These and their like were what the pre-Greek world worshipped. One only need place beside them in imagination any Greek statue of a god, so normal and natural with all its beauty, to perceive that a new idea had come into the world. With its coming, the universe became rational. (4, 8)

It is precisely the Aztec's desire to make their world rational that gave rise to many, even the most terrifying of their myths. Many of the Aztec gods are agricultural gods, and the need to appease these gods through ritualistic planting and sacrifices is shared by cultures that depend on agriculture. The Aztec's creation myths are an attempt to explain the origins of the universe and of man. Unfortunately for the Aztecs, human sacrifice, the most disgusting ritual, is normally the focus of a study of the Aztecs and their religion.

The Aztec religion was polytheistic and some of the anthropomorphic gods in the Mexican pantheon were originally human heroes elevated to divine stature, for example Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl of Tula and Mixcoatl among the Chichimecs. Mesoamerican religion is pervasive in every aspect of their culture. In a very crowded pantheon it is difficult to assign lordship over a distinct sphere – sun, moon, maize, *pulque* or earth – to one specific god. To add more confusion, the Aztec gods often have a number of avatars (e.g. Quetzalcoatl, Ehecatl, Xolotl Tlahuizcalpantecuhtli).

In the end, the Spaniards destroyed Indian libraries, temples, and idols, and other religious manifestations of the Mesoamerican Indians. Most of the accounts and descriptions of the Aztecs and Mayan gods that have survived are seen through a Hispanic prism. But, you only have to attend the Catholic rituals in some of the regions populated by the descendants of the Aztecs and the Maya in Mexico and Central America and of the Incas in Peru, and you will witness the power these religions had to assimilate the gods of other cultures. The semblance may be a normal Catholic mass, but it is always refreshing to see that the conqueror's religion has been assimilated into the religion of the conquered, which has discovered under the guise of the saints and prophets of the Catholic faith many of their old, familiar gods. They are as familiar to them as when an old, Mexican peasant still addresses corn, the sacred plant, as "Your Lordship."

The Origin of the Aztecs

About nine hundred years ago, a tribe of Native Americans called the Aztecs were told by their gods that to the south lay a fertile land where they would found a great city. Led by their tribal god Huitzilopochtli, they abandoned their homeland, reportedly Chicomoztoc, or Seven Caves, or, according to other accounts, from another place called by different names, Aztlan and Azcatitlan, probably located in northwestern Mexico. Modern researchers have not been able to locate this site. According to legend, eight different tribes abandoned this site, among them the Mexica-Azteca.

Huitzilopochtli smeared resin on their ears and foreheads and stuck balls of feather-down on them as a sign that they were his chosen people. The god also commanded them to change their name from Aztecs to Mexica. They began an arduous three-hundred-year journey southward in search of a new place to live.

About AD1250 the Aztecs arrived and settled in Chapultepec, or Grasshopper Hill, but they made many enemies among the surrounding tribes by stealing their married women and because of their repugnant sacrifices. They were driven from Chapultepec and forced to hide in the swamps surrounding the Lake of Tezcoco (Lake of the Moon). Later, they settled in some small islands in the Lake of Tezcoco, near what is now Mexico City.

The fertile highland valley in which they settled had been under the rule of the Toltecs who had consolidated their power gradually in the area after founding their capital Tula about AD 950. The Toltecs enjoyed a rich legacy of myths and legends. In 1168, the Chichimecs destroyed the city of Tula and Toltec rule came quickly to an end. When the Aztecs arrived in the Valley of Mexico, they found several tribes living in the area, but after the fall of the Toltecs no dominant power had risen to take their place. The Toltecs' influence over the Aztecs, however, was significant because the Aztecs adopted their culture, including their myths and legends. As historian Nigel Davies puts it:

Basic to the Mexica version of their history is the reported intermarriage of their elite with the Culhua nobility, *par excellence*, the guardians of the Toltec tradition. This injection of Culhua blood served the Mexica as a pretext, however contrived, to pose as the true heirs of Tula, depicted in Aztec legend as a fabulous city whose temples were faced with gold and turquoise. By virtue of this claim, in their future career of conquest they were merely regaining what was theirs by right, as the 'Colhua Mexica,' or the latter-day Toltecs. (224)

Religion permeated every aspect of Aztec life. The Aztecs assimilated many of the gods from other cultures into their pantheon, including such vital gods as Quetzalcoatl and Tlaloc, and others, from early Mesoamerican cultures, such as the Toltecs and other neighboring tribes.

As the chosen people of the Sun God Huitzilopochtli, the Aztecs had the divine mission to feed the god the hearts and blood needed to make sure the Sun God had the strength to keep moving through the sky. Rather than apply mechanical methods to meet life's challenges, the Aztecs applied spiritual methods. For this reason they practiced countless ceremonies, rituals, divinations, magical phrases and formulas to appease or coerce their gods to grant their wishes.

Foundation Myth

The Founding of Tenochtitlán

The witch, Malinalxochitl, sister of the god Huitzilopochtli, did nothing but cause trouble for the Mexica during their long journey from the north. She charmed spiders and scorpions and ordered them to bite her enemies. The Mexica asked her brother, Huitzilopochtli, what could be done with her. "Leave her behind," he replied, "when she is fast asleep, pick up and leave her behind." And the Mexica did just that. They left her behind at Malinalco.

When the goddess woke up, she became extremely angry with the Mexica. Malinalxochitl learned that the Mexica were at Chapultepec and ordered her young son Copil to avenge her. Copil went and stirred up trouble among the local tribes against the Mexica. He climbed a hill near Chapultepec to watch the Mexica's defeat.

But two Mexica priests climbed up the hill behind him and captured him. They sacrificed him, cut out his heart and threw it away near the present site of the Zocalo.

Copil's heart landed on a rock and from that rock grew a nopal cactus that would later give its name to Tenochtitlán (Place of the Cactus Stone). The date of the founding of Tenochtitlan is generally given as 1324 or 1325, but other dates as early as 1280 and as late as 1362 have been suggested.

Etiological Myth

The Origin of the Nopal Cactus

A long time ago, the Aztecs, who called themselves the Mexica, from whence we get the name "Mexican," were a tribe that inhabited northern Mexico. The gods spoke to the tribal priests and said to move south to a fertile land where they would found a great city. Led by their tribal

god, the warlike and cruel Huitzilopochtli, they began a journey to the south that lasted several hundred years, undergoing many hardships, until they reached a fertile valley surrounded by mountains and two volcanoes. In the middle of this valley was the Lake of Texcoco dotted with large and small islands. Peaceful tribes inhabited the shores of the lake. The Aztecs settled on one of the islands to wait for a sign from the gods, a beautiful eagle sitting atop a plant, where the gods had instructed them to build their capital.

Huitzilopochtli, their tribal god and god of war, was a cruel deity who demanded human sacrifices every day. Soon, the Aztecs were at war with their peaceful neighbors to capture prisoners to sacrifice to the god.

To the North lived Huitzilopochtli's sister with her husband and their son, Copil. Young Copil grew up hearing stories of his uncle's cruelty. Copil felt his uncle's behavior brought shame to the family and it was especially painful to his mother. Copil promised his mother that he would raise an army to capture his uncle and stop the killing and suffering. He reached the shores of the Lake of Texcoco, the Lake of the Moon, and in the distance, in the middle of the lake, he saw the island inhabited by the Aztecs and their god. Tired of the long day's march, Copil decided to rest his men and make camp for the night. He would carry out his plan early the next morning.

But, little did the naïve Copil know that his uncle had received warning of his approach from his innumerable spies. Huitzilopochtli flew into a rage and angrily ordered three of his priests to paddle across the lake under the darkness of night and, while Copil and his men slept, cut out his nephew's heart and bring it to him as an offering. At midnight, the three priests paddled across the dark lake, and found Copil and his men asleep after their long journey. The high priest easily cut Copil's chest open with an obsidian sacrificial knife and ripped out his heart. They brought back Copil's heart to Huitzilopochtli and asked him what he wanted done with the bloody offering. They were ordered to bury it on the island in the middle of the lake. The next morning they found a green plant with red flowers growing where the heart was buried. The high priest told Huitzilopochtli that the plant was called a nopal cactus. According to the priest, it grew from Copil's heart to remind them throughout the ages of his courage and nobility. A few days later, the Aztecs saw an eagle with a serpent in its beak standing on top of a branch of the nopal cactus. The Aztecs built a beautiful city on this spot. They called the city Tenochtitlán, the place of the *tenochtli*, the hard-fruited prickly pear.

Creation Myth

Creation of the Earth and the Sky

The dualistic gods Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca, lightness and darkness, looked down from their dwelling in the sky at the water below. Floating on top of the water was an enormous Earth Monster goddess who devoured all things with her many mouths, for the goddess had gaping mouths at the knees, elbows and other joints.

Everything the twins created, the enormous, floating, terrible, insatiable goddess ate. The twin gods, normally implacable enemies, agreed she had to be stopped. They transformed themselves into two enormous, slithering snakes, and slid silently into the dark, cool water, their cold eyes and flicking tongues seeking her body.

One of the snakes wrapped itself around the goddess's arms and the other snake coiled itself around her legs and together they tore the immense Earth Monster goddess in two. Her head and shoulders became the earth and her belly and legs became the sky. Some say Tezcatlipoca fought the Earth Monster goddess in his human form and the goddess ate one of his feet, therefore his one-legged appearance. Angered by what the dual gods had done, and to compensate for her dismemberment, the other gods decided to allow her to provide the people with the provisions they needed to survive.

From her hair were created the trees, the grass and flowers; from her eyes, caves, springs and wells; rivers flowed from her mouth; and hills and mountains grew from her nose and shoulders.

The goddess, however, was unhappy, and after the sun sank into the earth the people would often hear her crying. Her thirst for human blood made her weep, and the people knew the earth would not bear fruit until she drank. This is the reason she is given the gift of human hearts. In exchange for providing food for human lives, the goddess demanded human lives.

Virgin Birth of Huitzilopochtli

Our mother, the earth goddess Coatlique, was impregnated by an obsidian knife and gave birth to Coyolxauhqui, goddess of the moon, and male children, the stars. She was doing holy work at Serpent Mountain, near Tula, when she picked up a ball of feathers and tucked it in her bosom. She looked for it later, but it was gone. Coatlique soon realized she was pregnant. She told her children, the moon and the stars, the story, but they did not believe her. The gods grew angry because a goddess could only give birth once to an original brood of gods and they vowed to kill her. They gathered an army led by the moon goddess Coyolxauhqui. High above in the mountain shrine, Coatlique heard their raised voices planning her death. She shivered in fear, but then she heard a voice from her womb telling her to not be afraid and that her new child will protect her.

At that moment, Coatlique gave birth to Hutzilopochtli, the Aztec god of war, who sprang forth fully grown and fully armed from her womb, much like Athena from the head (or some say thigh) of Zeus. With the help of a *xiuhcoatl*, or fire-snake, he killed and decapitated his sister, Coyolxauhqui, tore her body into pieces, and threw the pieces into a mountain gorge where her body lies dismembered forever. He threw her head into the sky, which became the Moon. Then he scattered and killed his four hundred brothers who became the stars. This victory established Huitzilopochtli as the principal god in the Aztec pantheon.

Hero Myth

The Myth of Tepoztecatl

According to Tepoztlan oral tradition, Tepoztecatl's mother was a young virgin who would go to the river every day to wash clothes. As she dashed her clothes against the rock a small bird landed on her shoulder and danced on it. A short time later, the virgin became aware she was pregnant. Ashamed, she told her parents and added that the only contact she had was with a bird. Determined to hide her and her family's dishonor, they decided they would get rid of the baby. They made several attempts; on one occasion, the baby's grandfather threw him from a cliff hoping to dash him against the rocks below, but the winds carried and deposited the baby safely onto a plain; on another occasion, they left the baby near some maguey plants to starve, but the maguey plants bent over and gave the baby honeyed-water to drink; and then he was thrown among giant, black ants, but instead of biting and devouring him, they fed him. Finally, they placed the baby in a box and tossed it in the river, but on that day two old villagers named El Coli and La Nana heard the baby's cry and rescued him from drowning. And they raised him as their own.

The boy grew tall and strong. He asked La Nana to knit him a *matlat* or net bag, and he asked El Coli to make him a bow. With his *matlat* and his bow, he ventured out into the hills to hunt game and collect obsidian stones.

Near Tepoztecatl's home lived a monster-serpent called Mazacoatl. Every year the village had to sacrifice one of its oldest citizens to the monster-serpent. One year the villagers chose El Coli to be sacrificed to the beast. Tepoztecatl decided he would face Mazacoatl in his father's place. During their encounter, the giant serpent swallowed him whole; however, it also swallowed

Tepoztecatl's obsidian knife. Tepoztecatl knifed his way through the belly of the beast, killing it instantly.

Then, Tepoztecatl smoke signaled his victory to the people in the valley who immediately began celebrating the god's victory at the house of the family with the largest patio in the village of Tepoztlan. All of the villagers came to the celebration dressed in their finest clothes.

Soon, a stranger arrived dressed in dirty, ragged, linen clothes. Mud covered his feet and body. The host of the party was angered by the uninvited guest's appearance and asked him to leave. No one had recognized the god underneath the mud and the dirty clothes. Tepoztecatl returned to his temple angry and sad. He washed in a stream and put on his finest white, cotton clothes embroidered in bright colors and flashing feathers, and his sandals, symbols of his lordship. Then, he descended to Tepoztlan where he was received with the great admiration, reverence and honor a god deserves. The feasters offered him the most exquisite food and drink and were surprised the god did not open his mouth to eat but instead offered the food and drink to his clothes.

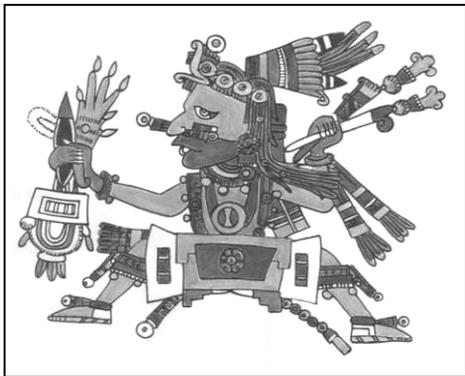
"You feed the clothes, not the man," the god told everyone present. "I am the same shabbily-dressed, mud caked man you turned away. I had just knifed my way out of the belly of the beast." The god lowered his majestic head, his precious feathers quivering in the air, and he cast his shining eyes upon the host and his family. "Now that I am dressed in my divine clothes you wish to honor me. But you failed to do so when I first appeared as an honest, poor, unknown stranger. Pointing his finger at the man who had offended him earlier that day, Tepoztecatl thundered an awful punishment. "I order you and your family to leave this valley!" (Miguel Ibarra's *The Myth of Tepoztecatl* translated and edited by the author)

Since then, when a Tepoztlan family organizes a feast, they do not deny anyone entrance and they do not ask for the name of any unknown guests. They treat all who enter with respect.

Aztec Gods and Goddesses

Creators

Ometeotl



The creator of all things, an androgynous god whose masculine and feminine sides are Ometecuhtli, Lord of Duality, and Omecihuatl, Lady of Duality, also known as Tonacatecuhtli, Lord of Sustenance, and Tonacacihuatl, Lady of Sustenance. This cosmic pair gave birth to four gods: Tezcatlipoca, Quetzalcoatl, Tlaloc, and Chalchiuhtlicue, who would later create the Four Suns and all of the other gods. Responsible for the creation of the world and the gods, he had nothing to do with the creation of mankind. He is said to have created the earth on the back of a giant crocodile. (Redrawn by the author from the Codex Borgia)

Sun, Moon, and Venus

Huitzilopochtli (left-handed hummingbird)
Lord of War and Thunderstorms, Lord of the Sun

The most important god in the Aztec pantheon is Hutzilopochtli. He is the Aztec's own special tribal god and a patron saint of the nobility. He led the Aztecs on their lengthy and perilous journey from the North and gave them the sign – the eagle and the serpent on top of a nopal cactus – for the spot where they would found their capital Tenochtitlan.

Huitzilopochtli is the son of the virgin goddess Coatlique and is said to have sprung from her womb fully grown and in battle-gear to save his mother from being killed by her daughter and sons. He is the Aztec's answer to the Greek war god Ares. Huitzilopochtli is very robust, has extraordinary strength and is a very belligerent destroyer of cities and slayer of peoples. His adversaries fear him as living fire. As protector of the sun, he puts the night gods to flight. Also, he is a necromancer able to change himself into the shape of birds and beasts.

Huitzilopochtli is pictured wearing a helmet in the form of a hummingbird's head and holding a terrible snake-dragon that breathes fire from its mouth. He carries a shield (*chimalli*) with five balls of down, and also darts and bow and arrows. He is a relative latecomer, but his primacy before and after the founding of Tenochtitlan is not to be doubted. During the migration and the settlement in a new place, Huitzilopochtli was the driving force. But like Dionysus, he is a new comer and is seen as the usurper of the supreme role of Tezcatlipoca in Mesoamerica.

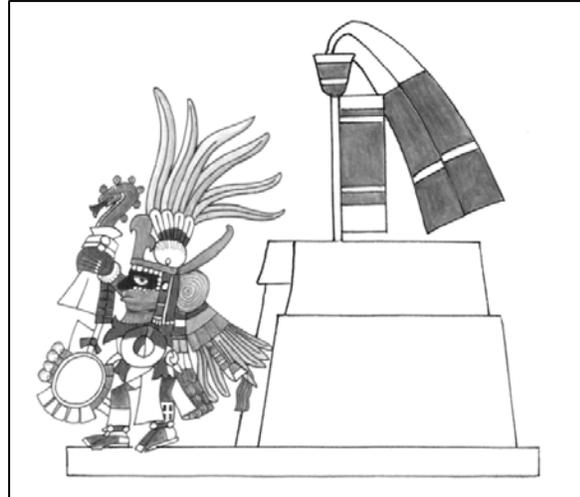
(Redrawn by the author from the Codex Borbonicus)

Quetzalcoatl (Plumed or Precious Serpent) Lord of the Morning Star, Lord of the Wind



Quetzalcoatl, the Plumed Serpent, also known by the names of his avatars or *nahauls* Tlahuizcalpantecuhtli, Lord of the House of Dawn, or Morning Star, or Venus, Ehecatl, Lord of the Wind, Ce Atl (One Reed) and Xolotl (Monster), and White Tezcatlipoca to contrast him with the black Tezcatlipoca. An ancient Mesoamerican deity, he is one of the main gods worshipped by many Mexican and Central American civilizations, including the Olmec, the Mixtec, the Toltec, the Maya and the Aztecs. The Mayans call him Kukulcan and the Quiche Gukumatz. He is the god of life and fertility. He is the creator of man, for whom he invented agriculture and to whom he gave the calendar. He gave man maize corn, having stolen kernels of corn by changing into an ant and stealing them from the ants that had hidden it. He is the patron of many arts and industries. He is also the patron of twins, being himself a twin god.

Quetzalcoatl was the creator of the Second Sun that was knocked from the sky and destroyed by his dualistic opposite Tezcatlipoca. Quetzalcoatl was deceived by his avatar Tezcatlipoca into committing a sin with his sister and went into exile on a raft of serpents. He promised to return in

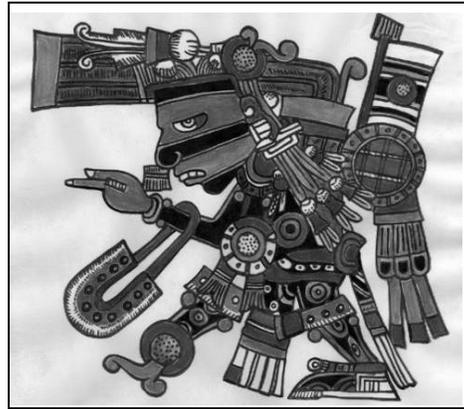


the year Ca Atl; unfortunately about the time Cortes appeared in Mexico, with devastating results for the Aztec Empire.

Quetzalcoatl's appearance is as follows: he wears a pointed ceremonial hat on his head with *quetzalli* plumes. The hat is painted like a jaguar's skin. His face and body were stained black and he wears a worked, loose fitting shirt reaching down to his waist. He wears turquoise earrings, a gold collar with small, precious, marine shells hanging from it, and on his back an emblem resembling flames. His shoes are made of jaguar skin, in his left hand he carries a painted shield with five angles and in his right hand he carries a scepter. He is the temple's high priest. (Redrawn by the author from the Codex Borbonicus)

Tezcatlipoca (Smoking Black Mirror) Creator of Fire, Lord of Death, Lord of the Night Sky, Warriors, Jaguars and Sorcery

In the Toltec's dualistic belief system, Tezcatlipoca is Quetzalcoatl's opposite but equal god. Smoking Black Mirror is the black god who can assume any shape, is omnipotent and omnipresent, and is connected with the night sky, stellar deities, the moon, and with night monsters of evil and destruction. He is the god of night, patron of highwaymen, of sorcerers, and of mysterious goings-on. In the place of a leg bitten off by the Earth Monster, he wears a smoking mirror. When he is on earth he causes wars, enmity, and discord. Called the "fomentor of discord on both sides" he provokes one group to war upon another; and only he understands the world order, and he alone gives man prosperity and fame when it pleases him.



He is the most important god of the priests. He is an enemy of Huitzilopochtli and of Quetzalcoatl, and is symbolized as a jaguar, whose spotted skin represents the night sky. He is connected with all phases of native religion because of his many functions, attributes, and disguises.

Tezcatlipoca is usually depicted holding a dart in an *atl* (spear thrower) in his right hand and his shield or mirror with four spare darts in his left hand. In his mirror he can see the actions and deeds of mankind reflected. He wears a round leather ring with a yellow ribbon on his chest that symbolizes eternity (*anahuatl*), which his three brothers occasionally borrow. His face is striped black and yellow.

He is the avenger of secret sin, the punisher of crime, and a god who can bring luck and good things, but who is often quick to take offense, becoming destructive and evil. He will take on a grotesque human form to give battle to warriors who are alone at night, testing their courage. A warrior who seizes Tezcatlipoca can ask as a ransom a number of maguey spines, signifying the number of prisoners he will capture in his next battle. A gruesome disguise the god sometimes assumed is a headless body with two doors in his chest that open and close and make a noise like a tree being chopped down with an axe. (Redrawn from the Codex Borgia)

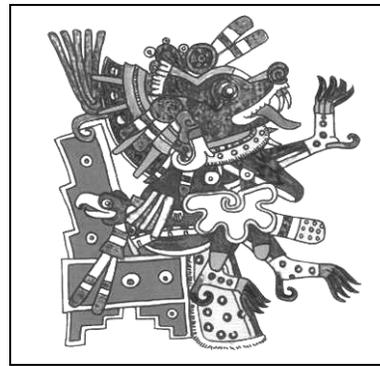
Tlahuizcalpentecuhtli, Lord of the Star of Dawn, Venus as Morning Star



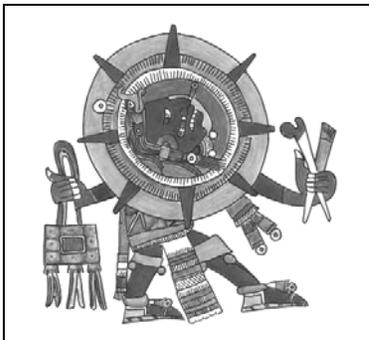
Another avatar of the god Quetzalcoatl, as the morning star he is known as Tlahuizcalpentecuhtli, which means literally “the Lord of the Star of Dawn.” He is the inventor of books and the calendar, the giver of maize corn to mankind, and sometimes a symbol of death and resurrection because the morning star also dies and is reborn each day. Quetzalcoatl is also the patron of priests and the title of the Aztec high priest. (Restored by the author from the Codex Borgia)

Xolotl, Lord of the Evening Star

Another avatar of the god Quetzacoatl, Xolotl is also the god of fire and of bad luck. He is a celestial twin of Quetzalcoatl, the pair being sons of the virgin Coatlique, and he is the evil personification of Venus, the Evening Star. He guards the sun when it travels through the underworld at night. He also brought forth humankind and fire from the underworld. His ability to change shapes makes him a patron of magicians and sorcerers. He is the god of monsters and of twins, and is also associated with dogs. He is also a patron of the Mesoamerican ballgame. He is identified with Xocotl as being the Aztec Lord of Fire. Xolotl is depicted as a skeleton, a dog-headed man or a monster animal with reversed feet. (Restored by the author from the Codex Borgia)



Tonatiuh, Lord of the Sun



The Aztecs believe the sun takes different forms at different times of the day. He is reborn every day as the ancient god Tonatiuh. He is a young, vibrant man with an ochre and red painted face and a red painted body. At its zenith, the sun turns into Huitzilopochtli. As the sun descends it is devoured by the Earth Monster Tlaltecuhli; by night, the sun travels through the dread realms of the underworld Mictlan in the shape of Tepeyolohti, a jaguar named “Heart of the Hard Mountain.” Dawn is a time for concern. The moment of transition between dark and light might be the world’s last. (Redrawn by the author from the Codex Borgia)

Coyolxanuhqui (Golden Bells) Lady of the Moon

Coyolxanuhqui (which means “golden bells”) is the goddess of the Moon. She is the daughter of Coatlique and sister of Huitzilopochtli. She was slain and her body was dismembered by Huitzilopochtli. He threw her head into the sky -- it became the Moon. A frieze shaped like a shield was found at the base of the Great Temple in Tenochtitlan that depicts Coyol-xanuhqui lying on her side. Her arms, legs and head have been cut from her body. She is drawn with balls

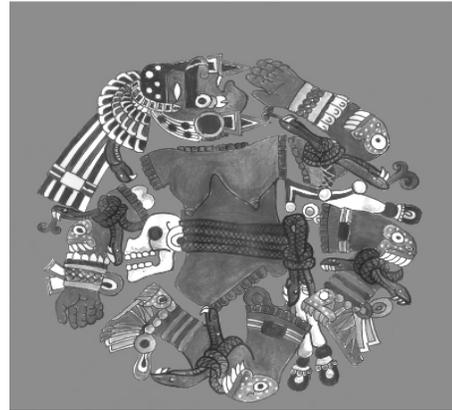
of eagle down in her hair, a bell symbol on her cheek, and a skull at her belt. (Drawn by the author from the above-mentioned frieze).

Itzpapalotl (Obsidian or Clawed Butterfly)

Star goddess is associated with fire and lightning. She is depicted disguised as a butterfly or wearing a

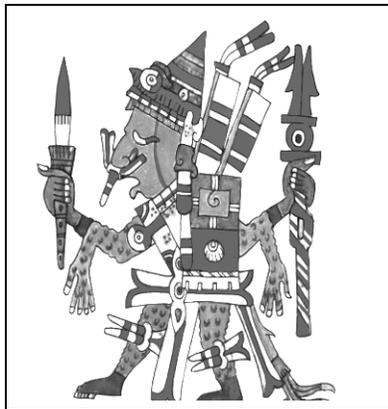


suit studded with obsidian knives on its wings. She has a skeletal face and rules over Tomoanchan. She wears a cape that makes her invisible. Her fingers are like a jaguar's claws and her feet are like an eagle's talons. She is considered the collective archetype of wisdom and is a powerful sorceress. (Restored by author from the Codex Borgia)



Earth and Fertility

Xipe-Totec (Our Lord the Flayed One) Lord of Fertility and Springtime



Xipe-Totec is the god of spring and fertility. His cult is especially repugnant to us because of his ritual that consists of skinning a slave alive and having his priest wear the flayed skin symbolic of the rebirth of earth renewing its mantle of vegetation. Xipe –Totec is pictured wearing the skin of a flayed human being laced up the back, and his body is painted red and white. During *tlaxipealitzli*, a 20-day celebration to this god, a band of his followers wear the skin of flayed prisoners and fight with another band of brave soldiers. After the game, the worshippers go from door to door and demand alms for their god. They are rewarded with strings of corn place around their necks and *pulque*. (Restored by the author from the Codex Borgia)

Xochipilli (Principal Lord of the Flowers) Lord of Games, Dance and Love



Xochipilli is the god of love, games, beauty, dance, flowers, maize, and song. He is also known as Macuixóchitl (five flowers) and is the god who most often dwells in the homes of gentlemen and the palaces of princes. Feasts are held in this god's honor and all who celebrate must fast for four days before the feast. If any man has contact with a woman or a woman with a man during this fast, the fast is pronounced tainted. This annoys Xochipilli, and he will spread such diseases as hemorrhoids and rot to the private parts of those who break it. (Redrawn by the author from the Codex Borgia)

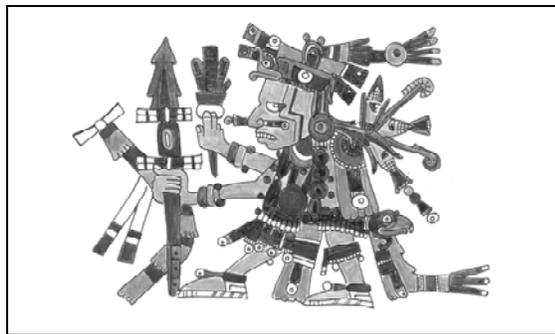


Cioacoatl or Coatlque, The Earth-Mother Goddess

The Earth-Mother Goddess is called the “Snake Woman” or the “One with the Serpent Skirt.” She is also known as Tonantzin, which means “Our Mother.” Coatlicue is the mother of Huitzilopochtli. This goddess brings adverse things like poverty and ruin. The dress and ornaments of this goddess are white. Her hair is arranged to look like two horns crossed on her forehead, she carries a baby’s cradle on her back, and she will go to the market, mingle among other women and leave the cradle there. When the other women notice that the cradle has been left behind, they look to see what is in it and will find a flint rock as hard as an iron lance with which the sacrificed are killed. And people know the goddess Coatlicue has left it there.

Centeotl, The Lord of Maize

Centeotl, or Cinteotle, is the god of maize or corn. He is pictured as a young man with his body painted yellow. He has ears of corn on his headdress, back or in his hands. He has a distinctive black line drawn that runs from his forehead down his cheek to his jaw. (Redrawn from by the author from the Codex Borgia.)



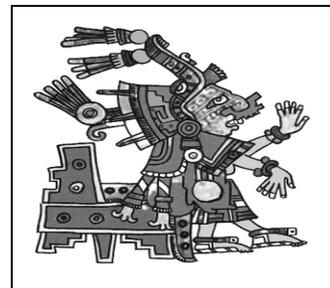
Chicomecoatl (Seven Serpents) or Xilonen (The Hairy One) Lady of Vegetation, Ripening Corn and Sustenance

Chicomecoatl is Tlaloc’s sister; she is also known as Chicomolotzin. She carries the nickname “The Hairy One” because of the tassels that grow on corn. She is the goddess of vegetation, maintenance, ripening corn and of sustenance, what is eaten as well and what is drunk. She is pictured with a red-painted face, a four-sided paper crown on her head, and flowers on her dress and blouse. In her right hand she holds a glass, in her left hand a shield with a large flower. The adornments on her feet, known as *cueitl*, and her skirt, or *uipilli*, and sandals, are all red. (Redrawn by the author from the Codex

Maglabecchiano)

Xochiquetzal (Precious Flower or Flower Feather) Lady of Flowers and Weaving

Xochiquetzal is the Goddess of Love, fertility, flowers, pregnancy and manual and domestic skills. She is the Mother of the twin gods Quetzalcoatl and Xolotl. She was married to Tlaloc but kidnapped by Tezcatlipoca. Other versions have her married to Macuuilxochitl or to Xochipilli. She is also associated with the ball game. In appearance she has her hair fixed in double trellises or has two quetzal feathers on her head. She wears a checkered shirt. She is the patron of wives, prostitutes, lovers, weavers, painters and sculptors. (Restored by the author from the Codex Borgia)



Mayahuel, Lady of the Maguey Plant



Mayahuel is the sister of the Tlaloques and of Centzontotchin. She is depicted as a beautiful young woman and a maguey plant. She represents the maguey plant and all of its products which include not only the fermented drink pulque, but leaves for burning of roofing, roots for making food or sugar, needles and nails, fiber for twine and clothing, and candy. The maguey plant forms part of her body, and she has pulque foam in her hair or dress. She is often conceived of as full of milk and having one hundred breasts.

Mayahuel is also the goddess that brought love to mankind; Quetzalcoatl fell madly in love with Mayahuel, the granddaughter of one of the terrible night-demons called *tzitzimine*. Quetzalcoatl stole her away to Mesoamerica where the two expressed their love by turning into an entwined two-fork tree. Mayahuel's enraged grandmother tracked her down. Mayahuel was torn to pieces by her grandmother and a host of *tzitzimine* who fed on her flesh. Weeping, Quetzalcoatl buried the goddess's remains. His tears saturated the earth. In time the remains of Mayahuel grew into the maguey cactus from which men and women learned to make *pulque* from the cactus's milky sap. (Redrawn by the author from the Codex Borgia)

Tlazolteotl, Lady of Fertility, Love and Eater of Filth or Sin



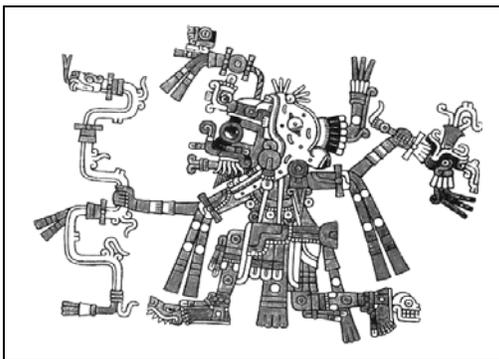
Lady of Fertility, the Purification of Filth, Sickness and Excesses, she embodies the dual aspects of goddess of fertility and childbirth and goddess of purification of filth, lust, and sexual excesses. In her role as sin eater, she comes to a man at life's end and "confesses" him and cleanses his soul by eating its filth, or sins, if he is willing to make amends and perform the penitential acts prescribed by her priestesses. (Redrawn by the author from the Codex Nuttall)

Death and Destiny

Tezcatlipoca (See Sun, Moon, and Venus)

Rains, Winds, and Waters

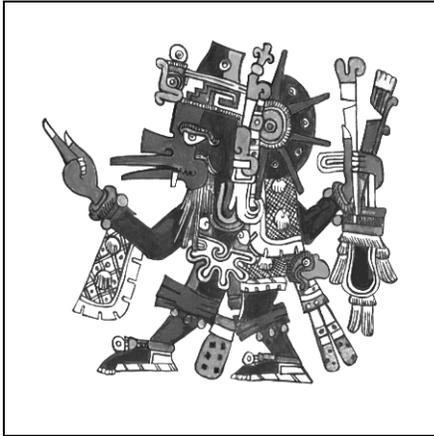
Tlaloc, Lord of the Rain



Tlaloc Tlamacazqui, also known as Nuhualpilli, is the god of rain and fertility. He brings the rains to irrigate the earth, and the rains make grass, trees, fruits and other goods grow. He also sends hail, and lightning, and thunder, and storms, and the dangers of the rivers and the seas.

Called Tlaloc Tlamacazqui means that he is the god that inhabits the earthly paradise and gives men the sustenance they need to live. Responsible for floods, Tlaloc is the force that brings the rain and droughts. He is commonly depicted as a goggle-eyed blue being with fangs. (Redrawn from the Codex Borbonicus)

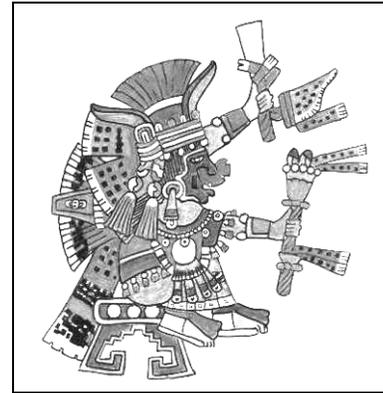
Ehecatl, Lord of the Winds and Birds



Using the attributes of Ehecatl, Lord of the Winds, Quetzalcoatl represents the winds that bring the rain. He sweeps the path for the gods of rain as evidenced by when rains are preceded by great gusts of wind and dust. His breath moves the sun and pushes away rain. He fell in love with a human girl named Mayahuel and gave mankind the ability to love so that she could return his passion. He is depicted wearing his “wind mask,” a bright red mask in the form of a protruding beak or nose and mouth that covers his lower face. (Redrawn from the Codex Borgia)

Chalchiuhtlique, Lady of the Water

Chalchiuhtlique is said to be the sister of the rain gods called *tlaloques*. She is worshipped because she has power over rivers and the seas to drown those who traveled these waters, to create storms and whirlwinds in the water, and sink ships, boats, and other barks that move through the waters. Those who worship this goddess and celebrate her rites are all those who have their farms in the water, those who sell water from their canoes and those who sell water from earthen jars in the plaza. (Restored by the author from the Codex Borbonicus)



Itztlacoliuhqui, Lord of Winter, Cold, Stone and Punishment, and Blind-folded Justice



Itztlacoliuhqui is the god of coldness and of punishment. He is usually drawn blindfolded and colorless except for his neatly sculpted black obsidian face. He carries a *tlachpanoni* (decorated straw broom) in his hand as a symbol of cleansing.

(Restored by the author from the Codex Borbonicus)

Hunting

Mixcoatl (Cloud Serpent) Lord of Hunting

He is one of Tonacatecuhtli and Cihuacoatl’s four children. Mixcoatl is identified with the Milky Way, the stars, and the heavens. In the Aztec pantheon his role is lesser than Huitzilopochtli’s. He is often worshipped as the red aspect of Tezcatlipoca. He is represented with a black mask over his eyes and distinct red and white candy stripes



on his body. He carries a bow and arrows and a net or basket to carry dead game. (Restored by the author from the Codex Borgia)

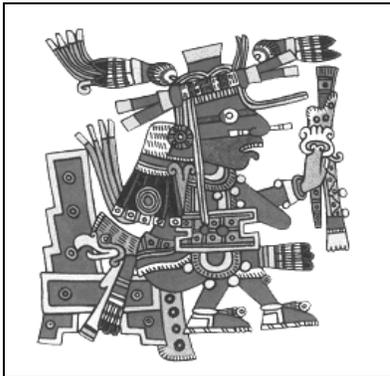
Opochtli (The Left-handed One) Lord of Hunting, Fishing and Bird-Snaring



This god is included among the gods called *Tlaloques*, which means “Inhabitants of an Earthly Paradise.” Opochtli is said to have invented fishing nets and a harpoon-like instrument called *minacachalli* which has three points in a triangle, like a trident, and is used kill fish and birds. He also invented snares to kill birds and oars to row. When worshippers hold a festival for this god, the fishermen offer him things to eat and the wine they drink which is called *uctli*, or by another name *pulque*. They also offer him stalks of green corn and white incense called *copalli*. (Restored by the author from the Codex Rios)

Fire

Huehueteotl or Hiuhtecuhtli (Lord of the Year) Lord of Fire



This god is know by many other names, among them Ixcozauhqui, which means “yellow-faced,” another is Cuezaltzin, or “Flame of Fire,” also Huehueteotl, which means the “Ancient or the Oldest of the Gods,” and finally Tata which means “Our Father.” He is represented as a wrinkled old man with one tooth, bent over or squatting, with brazier on back or head. Everyone considers him as his father when one considers all that he does. He burns, and his flames rise and consume things causing fear. At other times he causes love and reverence. He provides warmth to persons who are cold. He cooks meat to eat, and roasts, boils, toasts and fries food to eat. He makes salt and thickens honey; he makes

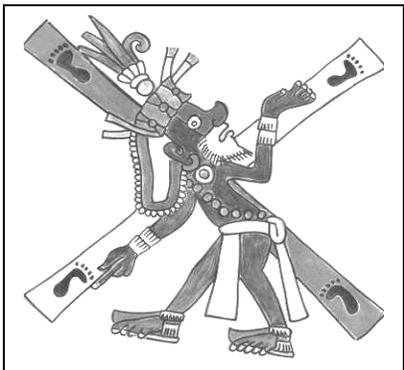
carbon and coal; he heats the bath waters to bathe in; and he makes the oil called *úxtil*. He heats up the lye and the water to wash dirty clothes. And at festivals, he is always the last one to arrive because he walks very slowly, indicating his antiquity. (Drawing from the Codex Borgia)

War

Hutzilopochtli (See Sun, Moon and Venus)

Traders

Yacatecuhtli, Lord of Merchants or *Pochtecas*, Traders and Travelers, and Birds

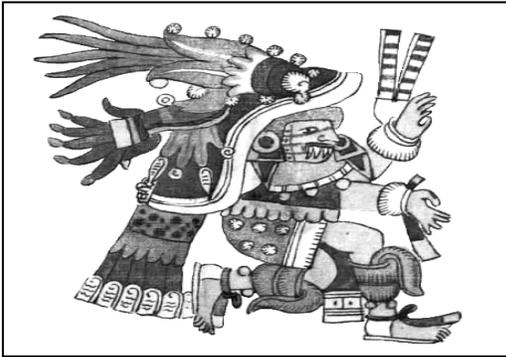


Yacatecuhtli, like the Greek Hermes, is the god of merchants, traders and travelers. He is pictured with white and black facial decorations, his hair is bound in a high sheaf, and he carries a staff and a flywhisk. He is honored by having his statues wrapped in paper wherever they are found. Merchants hold their walking stick, a massive cane called an *utlatl* in high esteem. They carry these walking sticks when traveling and when they arrive at a place they are to sleep, they gather all of their sticks in one bundle and tie them together, lay them at the head where they are to sleep and spill drops of blood in front of them from their tongue, ears

or arms and legs; they offer copal and light a fire that burns before the walking sticks which they hold as the image of the god himself. This is their way of asking for the god's protection from all dangers. (Restored by the author from the Codex Fejervany Mayer)

Ancestral Gods/Cultural Heroes, and Others

Chantico (She Who Dwells in the House) Lady of the Hearth and Volcanoes



Chantico is the goddess of fires in the family hearth and volcanoes. She wears a crown of poisonous cactus thorns, and takes the form of a red serpent. Tonacatecuhtli changed her into a dog for eating pepper on a roasted fish violating a day pepper was banned. (Restored by the author from the Codex Rios)

Queztalcoatl-Topiltzin, Another attribute of Quetzalcoatl

Huitzilopochtli (See Sun, Moon and Venus)

Mixcoatl (See Hunting)

Medicine and Foods

Patecatl, Lord of Healing and Fertility. Lord of the Pulque Root



Patecatl is the god of healing, fertility and the discoverer of peyote. He is the consort of Mayahuel and the father of the *Centzon Totochin* (The Four Hundred Rabbits), the divine rabbits, and the gods of drunkenness. Like Mayahuel and the *Centzon Totochin*, Patecatl himself is a god of pulque, the alcoholic beverage made from the maguey plant. (Redrawn by the author from the Codice Borgia)

Underworld (Mitlan)

The Mesoamerican underworld was a frightening place. It was the resting place of all persons who died but escaped a violent death. Mictlantecuhtli and his wife Mictecacihatl ruled over the underworld where they live in a house without windows.

Mictlantecuhtli, God of the Underworld

Lord of the Land of the Dead. With a skull for a head, is often accompanied by skulls and bones. He wears a diadem called *Xihuitzollli* and paper rosettes. He is painted as a bleached-white skeleton with red blood spots, and long, curly, black hair sprinkled with stars. His clothes are strips of bark paper. He has huge claw like hands that can rip a body into



pieces. He wears a necklace made of eyeballs and his liver hangs from a hole in his stomach. He wears sandals to show his lordly standing. He is the patron god of dogs. (Redrawn by the author from the Codex Borgia)

Mictecacihuatl, Goddess of the Underworld

Queen of the Land of the Dead she is the wife of Mictlantecuhtli. She is said to keep watch over the bones of the dead and also to preside over the festivals of the dead. She and her husband live in Mictlan in a house without windows.

Paynal, Swift Runner



Painal is Huitzilopochtli's second in command. When Huitzilopochtli decides to make war against a province, Painal moves swiftly to meet the enemy, because *painal*, which means "speed," or "celerity," is always necessary in war. This god wears a black mask with white dots on the edge. His body is stained with blue and yellow paint.

During a feast held in his honor, one of the satraps takes his image made of rich ornaments and leads a lengthy procession during which the god's image is carried at a run by him and other of the god's worshippers. This ritual represents the speed needed to face the enemy who often unsuspectingly run into ambushes. (Restored by the author from the Codex Rios)

Ciuapipilti or Ciaopipilli

The goddesses called Ciuapipilti are said to be women who have died giving birth to their first child and have been elevated to the position of warriors and goddesses. They fly through the air and appear before the living at will. They give children diseases such as palsy by entering the body. They lie in wait at the crossroads to cause harm. For this reason parents forbid their children from leaving the house on certain days of the year so they will not be harmed when these goddesses descend from the sky. And when someone gets palsy or falls suddenly ill, these goddesses are to blame. This is the reason feasts are held in their honor and during these feasts they are offered bread shaped into different figures in their temple or at the crossroads.

Napatecutli

One of the *Tlaloques*, he is the god who invented the art of making mats know as *petates*, seats called *icpales*, and cane screens called *tolcuextli*, and that is why artisans engaged in this craft worship him. By his virtue, sedge, reeds, and canes sprout and grow. He is also a rainmaker. His worshippers hold celebrations in his honor to demand he give them the things he normally provides such as water, sedges, reeds, and canes.

Napatecutli is represented as a man dyed in black except for a few white specks on his face. He wears a paper crown painted black and white. In his left hand he carries a shield shaped like a water lily and in his right hand he holds a stalk of flowering paper flowers.

Tepoztecatl or Tezetzoncatl, Lord of Pulque

Tepoztecatl is the Lord of pulque, drunkenness, fertility, and rabbits. One of the four hundred children of the god Pantecatl and Mayahuel he is associated with fertility cults and with Tlaloc.

The Aztec religion is open, their pantheon is hospitable, and this is why Tepoztecatl, a rustic god of the harvest, a local deity worshipped by agricultural people of Tepoztlan, easily found his way in. Tepoztecatl's temple is found on a hillside near the town of Tepoztlan.

Tepeyollohti or Tepeyollotl (Heart of the Mountains) The Jaguar God



Tepeyollohti, the most important of the jaguar gods, is the god of earthquakes, echoes and is associated with the night, caves and the Underworld. He is related to Tezcatlipoca. He is depicted as a jaguar leaping towards the sun. (Restored by the author from the Codex Borgia)

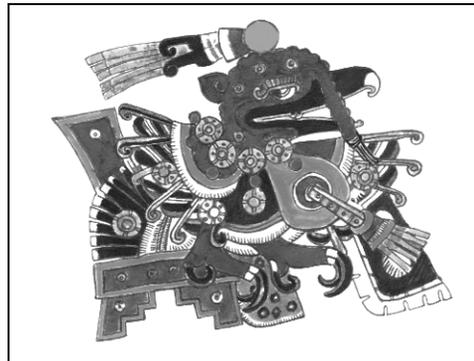
Huehucoyotl (Old Coyote). The Trickster God, the God of Deception



Huehucoyotl, Old Coyote, the Trickster, god of deception, this god is a prankster who loves to pull pranks on people and on the gods. Sometimes, he unwittingly pulls pranks on himself. The god is a shape-changer. He is able to turn himself into any shape, animal or human. (Restored by the author from the Codex Borgia)

Chalchihuitotolin (The Jeweled Fowl)

Chalchihuitotolin is a powerful sorcerer. An avatar of Tezcatlipoca he tempts human into self-destruction. When he takes on the shape of a *guajolote* or turkey, he can cleanse men of contamination, guilt and overcome fate. (Restored by the author from the Codex Borgia)



Tzitzimitl (Star Demon of Darkness)



The most feared of all demons are the *tzitzimene*. To initiate a new 52-year cycle, the people put out all fires and wait in darkness for the conclusion of the New Fire ceremony. Priests stand on the Hill of the Stars at midnight the day before the New Year to see if Venus, or the Pleiades pass overhead. Then, they sacrifice a victim and start a New Fire in the chest cavity of the victim. It is believed that if the New Fire is not created on the Hill of Stars, the *tzitzimene* will attack the sun and also dive headfirst from the heavens and destroy earth. The *tzitzimene* are usually considered women and are compared to spiders hanging upside down from their thread.

The *tzitzimenes* are most to be feared during an eclipse of the sun or the moon when they dive down from their dwelling in the sky and devour humans. (Restored by the author from the Codex Magliabechiano).

LESSONS PLANS

This unit will meet the following Project Clear for Languages Other Than English (Foreign Language) objectives:

Goal 1: Communication (Reading) 9.1.h Students will read to discover meaning through context and visual clues.

Goal 1: Communication (Writing) 9.1.i Students will write in the target language to convey a message or to exchange information about everyday activities or oneself.

Goal 2: Cultures: 9.2.a Students will describe some of the daily activities of the people of the target language and how this is reflected in their culture and language.

9.2.b Students will locate the major countries and areas of the world where the target language is spoken and identify some well-known personalities as well as some of the characteristics of the people.

Goal 3: Connections: 9.3.a Students will use the language to make connections with other subject areas and to acquire information.

Goal 4: 9.4.a Students will compare and contrast one language and culture to another language and culture.

Lesson Plan 1

Objective

Spanish AP students will read and discover early Mesoamerican cultures through the history and mythology of the Aztec Nation and their lengthy journey and founding of their capital. Students will compare the Aztec foundation myth with the Biblical account of Moses leading the people of Israel from Egypt to the Promised Land. The students will compare similarities and differences between the two foundation myths.

Activities

Students will:

Read the section titled the Origin of the Aztecs.

Students will discuss and fully answer or complete the following:

- 1) After reading the foundation myth, and “The Origin of the Nopal Cactus,” are there any facts to be discerned from the mythical foundation of Tenochtitlan?
- 2) Rewrite the “Origin of the Nopal Cactus” as if you were reporting a factual occurrence in a newspaper leaving out any part of the story that might seem dubious.
- 3) What famous Biblical exodus does the journey of the Aztecs remind you of?
- 4) What did the god Huitzilopochtli do to show his tribe that they were his “chosen people”?
- 5) How does the concept of “the chosen people” fit in with the Biblical story?
- 6) What sign were the Aztec people given by their god Huitzilopochtli regarding where they would build their capital? What was the name of the capital? What does it mean?
- 7) The sign given to the Aztecs is still present in the lives of the descendants of the Aztec nation. Where are these symbols still being used today? Bring a sample. (A Mexican flag, Mexican currency, etc.)
- 8) Why were the Aztecs so willing and eager to marry into the Colhua nobility?
- 9) Later, these marriages were used to justify what Aztec policies?

Lesson Plan 2

Objectives

The students will improve their understanding of other cultures, read the mythical story of the founding of the great city of Tenochtitlan and its companion piece on the origin of the nopal cactus, compare the two versions of the myth, tour the city of Tenochtitlan through computer generated graphics, compare this magnificent Mesoamerican city as witnessed by Cortes and his followers with European cities of the time, and understand that Mesoamerican culture was as advanced, and in some cases, more advanced than the European cultures prevailing at that time.

Activities

Students will discuss and fully answer or complete the following:

- 1) Is the emphasis of the two myths placed on the same issue? If not, what are the differences?
- 2) Examine the way each of the main characters of the two myths is portrayed. Is there a difference in their characterization? Why do you think the authors chose to portray them differently?
- 3) Using the Internet, do research on the Aztec capital Tenochtitlan. As part of this investigation, make a map of the capital city of Tenochtitlan once located in the middle of the Lake of Tezcoco that coincides with contemporary descriptions of the city. Include quotations of the description of the city of Tenochtitlan from the works of contemporary authors on which you based your drawing.
- 4) Locate the site of the Sacred Precinct, or the religious center of Tenochtitlan, in a modern map of Mexico City. Where would the Sacred Precinct be located today? What happened to the Sacred Precinct following Cortes' conquest of the Aztec empire? What happened to the great temples dedicated to the gods Huitzilopochtli and Tlaloc in the Sacred Precinct?
- 5) There is a discrepancy in the meaning of the word Tenochtitlan in Nahuatl in the two accounts you have read. What reasons can you give for this discrepancy? Are there any other discrepancies between the two stories?

Students will watch a Microsoft PowerPoint presentation that includes impressive computer-generated graphics of the Aztec capital Tenochtitlan (*Los Aztecas*).

Lesson Plan Three

Objective

To improve students' understanding of other cultures. Students will read the two Aztec creation myths. Students are to compare the Aztec creation myth with any other creation myth they may know.

Activity

Students will discuss and fully answer or complete the following:

- 1) The first creation myth is an account of the dismemberment of a Monster goddess to form the earth and the sky. Read the Babylonian myth of Marduk and Tiamat. Compare the creation of the earth and the sky in the Aztec myth and the Babylonian myth.
- 2) Using the details given in the story, in your own words, describe the Earth Monster goddess in as frightening a description as you can muster.
- 3) In the myth that narrates the birth of Huitzilopochtli, what is the reason given by the gods for their anger against their mother, the earth goddess Coatlique? Do you believe the

- reason for plotting against their mother is really what they say it is, or do you think there is an underlying reason for their anger?
- 4) Write a one-page, single-spaced essay confirming or denying the following statement: Gods fear being usurped by the next generation of gods. Do they have a legitimate reason to fear? Give examples from other myths to support your argument.
 - 5) In the story of Huitzilopochtli's birth, the god is described as born a fully grown god, in full-battle gear, and ready to fight against his half-brothers and half-sister. What other famous warrior goddess reportedly sprung from her father's head, or thigh, in other accounts, fully armed? What Babylonian god is also said to have been born fully grown?
 - 6) Huitzilopochtli, the Aztec's tribal god, gained power over all of the other gods in Mesoamerica. In a historical context, what does this myth convey regarding the position of Aztecs in relation to the surrounding tribes?
 - 7) The myth also serves to explain the birth of the Moon and stars. According to this myth, what is the origin of these celestial bodies?
 - 8) The myth describes how Hutzilopochtli comes from the womb of the Earth Mother with a ray of light and kills the Moon and the stars. On what daily occurrence is this myth based?.

Lesson Plan Four

Objective

To improve the students' understanding of other cultures. Students will read the Myth of Tepoztecatl. This myth deals with a local hero and was possibly not known to the Aztecs. But I have included it for reading because of its moral teaching. Students are to compare the Tepoztlan hero's myth with other known Christian stories and Greek myths.

Activities

Students will discuss and fully answer or complete the following:

- 1) The virgin birth at the beginning of the Tepoztecatl myth is similar to many other stories and myths. Compare this myth with other well-know stories and myths you know.
- 2) In many myths, a child is abandoned or exposed to the elements to avoid the fulfillment of a prophesy. Compare this myth with the biblical story of Moses and the myth of Oedipus. How are they similar? How do they differ? What is the motive for killing the newborn infant in each case? Why did King Herod order the killing of all children less than two years of age in and around Bethlehem?
- 3) Compare Mazacoatl's swallowing of the god Tepoztecatl whole with other tales of monsters or Leviathans swallowing of a person or hero whole. Compare and discuss the differences.
- 4) When the god enters the patio where the celebration of his successful fight against Mazacoatl has begun, he goes unrecognized by the revelers and is ill treated because he is dressed in dirty, torn rags. What other mythical heroes suffer the same fate? Discuss fully.
- 5) There is an old saying that states, "Clothes make the man." How does this myth support or destroy the saying. Explain fully.
- 6) What social custom does the myth of Tepoztecatl establish and enforce by exiling the host's family from the Valley and village of Tepoztlan? How does the god feel about hospitality?

Define the following new words: insatiable, implacable, dismemberment, impregnated, obsidian knife, decapitated, pantheon, necromancer, cacique and avatar.

APPENDICES

A Brief Key to Pronunciation of Names of Aztec Gods

Most of the names in this unit come from Nahuatl, the language spoken by the Aztecs, and still spoken today by about 1.45 million people living in Mexico (*Censo general de población y vivienda 2001*).

The Aztecs had a fine tradition of picture writing. Their history was written in pre-Hispanic painted books called *codices*. Most of these were destroyed during the conquest and scarcely a dozen pre-Hispanic codices survive. (Peterson 231)

As soon as the Aztecs and the Mayas learned to use the alphabet they transcribed some of the codices into Spanish letters, among the most important of these the Mayan *Popol Vuh* (Book of the Council), the Aztecs *Leyenda de los soles*, and *Anales de Cuauhtitlan*.

Nahuatl and Spanish vowels are pronounced alike with a few exceptions. Vowels are pronounced as follows: *a* as in *dart*, *e* as in *bet*, *i* as in *elite*, *o* as in *bore*, and *u* as in *loot*. Most consonants are pronounced like in English, except *j* is like the English *h*, and *g* before *e* or *i* is like the English *h*, otherwise it is pronounced like a regular *g*, as in *goat*.

Unlike Spanish, the *h* is pronounced.

Many Aztecs words have the consonant cluster *tl* pronounced like the *tl* in *beetle*, the *x* which is pronounced like *s* or *sh*, *qu* is pronounced like in *Kay*, and *z* is pronounced like *s*.

Nahuatl words are stressed in the next-to-the-last syllable, except when they end in *n* or *s*, and then they are stressed on the last syllable.

Examples:

Huitzilopochtli	(Hweet-see-lo-POCH-tlee)
Coatlque	(Koa-TLI-Kway)
Tezcatlipoca	(Tes-kay-tli-PO-kay)
Mixcoatl	(Mish-KO-atl)
Xolotl	(SHO-lotl)
Tlaloc	(TLAY-lok)
Tenochtitlan	(Tey-noch-ti-TLAN)
Xipe	(SHEE-pay)

Ometeotl
Ometecohtli (Tonacatecuhtli) = Omecihuatl (Tonacacihuatl)

Tezcatlipoca

FIRST SUN
"Four Ocelot"

Tezcatlipoca created the First Sun. Herat was peopled with giants who ate acorns and pine nuts. The sun was undersized. Quetzalcoatl destroyed the First Sun. All humans and giants were destroyed.

Quetzalcóatl

SECOND SUN
"Four Winds"

Quetzalcóatl created the Second Sun. These beings had nothing to eat but the seeds of trees. Tezcatlipoca in the guise of a Jaguar kicked Quetzalcoatl from the sky and a hurricane wind followed destroying humans, the only humans who survived turned into monkeys.

Tlaloc

THIRD SUN
"Four Rains"

Tlaloc created the Third Sun. People Fed on cereals. Quetzalcoatl destroyed this Sun beneath a rain of fire and burning stones. Only human who turned into birds survived.

Chalchutlique

FOURTH SUN
"Water Sun"

The Fourth Sun was created by Chalchutlicue. Humans fed on a seed called acicintl. Water flowed from the center of the earth and caused a great flood that covered mountaintops. Some humans survived by turning into fish

Nanahuatl (Nanautzin)

THE FIFTH SUN

After the destruction of the Fourth Sun everything was in darkness. The gods met in the darkness at Teotihuacan and realized that a permanent sun would only be possible if one of the gods sacrificed himself. They built a huge fire and two gods created by Ometeotl, Nanahuatl and Tecuciztecatl, were chosen. Tecuciztecatl, a handsome god, tried to leap into the fire, four times, but he was too terrified to do so. Then, Nanahuatl, a god disliked by the other gods because he was sickly and his body was full of sores, jumped into the fire and became the FIFTH SUN. Ashamed, Tecuciztecatl also jumped into the fire and became the Moon. The other 1,600 gods created by Ometeotl realized that Nanahuatl was too weak and would not be able to rise above the horizon unless more sacrifices were made. All 1,600 remaining gods leaped into the fire and the FIFTH SUN rose in the east in full splendor.

1,600 Other Gods

1,600 other gods created by Ometeotl sacrificed their hearts and blood to feed and maintain the FIFTH SUN in motion.

Tecuciztecatl

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Works Cited

- Barlow, Genevieve. "The Origin of the Nopal Cactus." *Stories from Latin America*. Chicago: Passport Books, 1995.
Side-by-side book (Spanish-English) that includes sixteen legends from Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico, and Venezuela.
- Censo general de población y vivienda*. Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática /National Institute of Statistics, Geography, and Information Science, 2001.
- Davies, Nigel. *The Aztec Empire: The Toltec Resurgence*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987.
Nigel argues that the Mexica's version of history allows them to pose as the true heirs of the Toltec tradition "through marriage of their elite with the Culhua nobility, *par excellence* the guardians of the Toltec tradition." Thus, in their future conquests "they are merely regaining what was theirs by right."
- Díaz del Castillo, Bernal. *La historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España*. Linkgua S. L., 2007: 317.
An interesting account of the conquest of Mexico as retold by one of Cortez' men. The description of the Aztec capital Tenochtitlan is especially captivating.
- Hamilton, Edith. *Mythology*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company. 1942.
This is still my favorite introduction for young students to Greek mythology.
- Ibarra, Miguel. "El mito de Tezoztecatl." 5 April 2007.
<<http://es.catholic.net/jovenes/216/550/articulo.php?id=7743>>.
This is the source for the Tezoztecatl myth which I have translated and edited from Spanish to English.
- Los Aztecas*. 25 Feb 2007. <<http://www.louisville.edu/a-s/cml-spanish/classes/laculture/aztecas.pdf>>
A Microsoft PowerPoint presentation on Aztec civilization with impressive computer generated graphics of the Aztec capital Tenochtitlán.
- Peterson, Frederick. *Ancient Mexico: An Introduction to Pre-Hispanic Cultures*. New York: Capricorn Books, 1962.
Professor Peterson's is a good one-volume introduction to the history of ancient Mexico that includes a concise history of the rise and sudden fall of its great empires, its daily life, religion, art and social relations.

Supplemental Resources

- Aztecs at Mexicolore*. 22 March 2007. <<http://www.mexicolore.co.uk/index.php?one=azt&two=aaa>>.
From the U.K. comes one of the most exciting sites for Aztec enthusiasts. Packed with information and illustrations. Among my favorites topics "Aztec Music" (hear and see actual Aztec instruments), "Ask the Experts", and "Aztec Pronunciation" that includes the correct pronunciation of the names of Aztec gods.
- Aztec Mythology: The Gods of Ancient Mexico*. 2 Feb 2007. <<http://godchecker.com/pantheon/aztec-mythology.php>>.
A very complete list of Aztec gods including many minor deities.
- Diana Doyle. "Aztec and Mayan Mythology" Yale-New Haven Teacher's Institute. 2 Feb. 2007.
<<http://www.yale.edu/ynhti/curriculum/units/1993/3/94.03.04.x.html>>.
Yale-New have Teacher's Institute report on Aztec and Mayan Mythology which includes some excellent reading materials for young students.
- Díaz, Gisele. *Codex Borgia: A Full-Color Restoration of the Ancient Mexican Manuscript*. New York: Dover Publications. 1993.
A beautiful facsimile of the Codex Borgia with restoration of the original pictographic language.
- Green, Jen, Fiona MacDonald, Philip Steele, and Michael Stotter. *The Encyclopedia of the Ancient Americas*. London: Anness Publishing Limited, 2001.
Profusely illustrated. Contains numerous projects for middle and high school students.
- Helland, Janice. "Aztec Imagery in Frida Kahlo's Paintings: Indigeneity and Political Commitment." *Woman's Art Journal* 11.2 (Autumn 1990 – Winter 1991): 8-13.
The article provides information on Kahlo's expression of her Mexican identity through a depiction of indigenous Mexican mythology in her paintings, especially Aztec mythology.
- Kirkpatrick, Berni. "The Creation and the Legend of the Four Suns." 2 Feb. 2007.
<<http://www.create.org/myth/997myth.htm>>.
Gives an account of the legend of the Four Suns, and the creation of the Fifth Sun, our current sun.

- Lapesa, Rafael. *Historia de la Lengua Española*. Madrid: Editorial Gredos, S. A. 1991.
A classic work on the history of the Spanish language. Ever wonder the origins of the English words hurricane, Caribbean, hammock, maize, chocolate, iguana, jaguar, toucan and many others came from?
- “Los Dioses.” <<http://www.angelfire.com.bernalduz/boton.htm>>.
This article includes illustrations of the gods taken from various codices and descriptions of the Aztecs gods. It is written in Spanish.
- Miller, Mary and Taub, Karl. *An Illustrated Dictionary of the Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya*. London: Thames and Hudson Ltd. 2004.
Profusely illustrated with copies from the codices and photographs of the archeological sites.
- Phillips, Charles. *The Mythology of the Aztec and Maya: An Illustrated Encyclopedia of the Gods, Myths and Legends of the Aztecs, Maya and Other Peoples of Ancient Mexico*. London: Southwater, 2006.
- Pohl, John. “Mesoamerica.” 18 April 2007. <<http://www.famsi.org/spanish/research/pohl/index.html>>.
The Fundación para el avance de los estudios mesoamericanos (Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies) FAMSI is by far the most complete site on the Internet to cover Mesoamerican cultures. It includes history of Mesoamerican cultures, chronological timeline, writing systems, archeological sites, archives of the Spanish conquest, ancient texts (complete facsimiles of the Indian codices), and so forth
- Soustelle, Jacques. *The Daily Life of the Aztecs*. London: Phoenix Press, 2003.
Soustelle paints a vivid, sympathetic picture of the Aztecs at the moment in history of their greatest achievement.
- “Two Aztecs Creation Myths.” 2 Feb. 2007. <<http://www.crystallinks.com/azteccreation.html>>.
Article gives two different Aztec creation myths.
- Valiant, George C. *The Aztecs of Mexico*. New York: Penguin, 1950.
Although somewhat dated it is still a very readable, factual account of the Aztec Civilization.