



## Durham E-Theses

---

### *An anthropological study of sacrifice with special reference to Aztec material*

Nicholson, P. J.

#### How to cite:

---

Nicholson, P. J. (1970) *An anthropological study of sacrifice with special reference to Aztec material*, Durham theses, Durham University. Available at Durham E-Theses Online: <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/9856/>

#### Use policy

---

The full-text may be used and/or reproduced, and given to third parties in any format or medium, without prior permission or charge, for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes provided that:

- a full bibliographic reference is made to the original source
- a [link](#) is made to the metadata record in Durham E-Theses
- the full-text is not changed in any way

The full-text must not be sold in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

Please consult the [full Durham E-Theses policy](#) for further details.

AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY OF SACRIFICE WITH

SPECIAL REFERENCE TO AZTEC MATERIAL

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author.  
No quotation from it should be published without  
his prior written consent and information derived  
from it should be acknowledged.

ABSTRACT

Human and animal sacrifice can perform similar functions, but the essential difference is that human sacrifice is always a social affair; a victim offered for the benefit of society rather than of an individual. The Aztecs, migrant hunters who settled on the Mexican Plateau in the fourteenth century, believed that human sacrifice was necessary to feed the sun and maintain the harmony of the universe, and that they were the people chosen to perform this duty. Sacrifices occurred at intervals according to a ritual calendar, and at major public ceremonies every twenty days following the agricultural cycle. The structure of sacrifice was similar to that described by Hubert and Mauss, following a set pattern which varied according to the particular purposes of the sacrifice, and the god whose impersonator was being immolated. Of the many gods worshipped, each had their own priesthood and temple necessitating a huge and complex priestly organisation. Religion became the driving force in every aspect of life especially the activities of war; Holy War to obtain prisoners for sacrifice became an obsession of the state. The Aztec emperor was head of the 'church' and occupied a semi-divine status, involving the performance of important ritual duties. The sun and war cult strongly influenced the worship of agrarian deities indigenous to the Valley of Mexico, and a synthesis was formed from the two ideologies which is reflected in the details of some ceremonies. The sacrificial rites, while containing elements of homage, were more than mere gifts to the gods, they were basically redemptive for man as a whole, and were rites of rebirth for the gods whose impersonators were sacrificed. In many sacrifices the god was believed to enter into the victim and the sacrificial flesh was eaten in a communion. Although much of the war and sun cult was absorbed from previous cultures on the Plateau, under the Aztecs the incidence of sacrifice developed into a series of hecatombs, only interrupted by the Spanish conquest.

---

AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY OF SACRIFICE WITH SPECIAL

REFERENCE TO AZTEC MATERIAL



P. J. NICHOLSON

M.A. THESIS 1970



CONTENTS

	page
List of Illustrations . . . . .	v
Preface . . . . .	vi
Chapter 1	
Historical Perspective . . . . .	.1
Chapter 2	
The Mechanism of Sacrifice . . . . .	19
Chapter 3	
Aztec Cosmology: the War and Sun Cult . . . . .	40
Chapter 4	
Sacrifice to Agrarian Deities . . . . .	77
Chapter 5	
Sacrifice of the God, and the Divine King . . . . .	.114
Chapter 6	
Theories of Sacrifice . . . . .	143
Bibliography of Sources . . . . .	.179
Glossary . . . . .	.182
Appendices:-	
1. The Priestly Hierarchy . . . . .	.189
II. The Principle Gods of the Aztec Pantheon . . . . .	.190
III. Monthly Festivals of the Solar Year . . . . .	198
IV. The Calendar . . . . .	204

<u>LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS</u>	following page
fig. 1 Sequence of Cultures . . . . .	1
fig. 2 Table of Aztec Kings . . . . .	8
fig. 3 Map of Archaeological Sites and Linguistic Groups in Mexico . . . . .	16
fig. 4 Map of the Valley of Mexico in 1520 . . . . .	16
fig. 5 Double Temple of Tlaloc and Huitzilopochtli . . . . .	27
fig. 6 Ritual Objects . . . . .	28
fig. 7 Sacrificial Knife (photo) . . . . .	29
fig. 8 Plan of the Sacred Precinct in Tenochtitlan . . . . .	37
fig. 9 Diagram of Nahua Cosmology . . . . .	46
fig.10 Mixcoatl and Iztac Mixcoatl, Hunting Gods . . . . .	55
fig.11 Tonatiuh, the Sun God . . . . .	60
fig.12 Huitzilopochtli, and the Ensigns of the Knightly Orders of Warriors . . . . .	63
fig.13 Tlaloc Scattering Seed . . . . .	80
fig.14 Tlaloc, the Rain God . . . . .	84
fig.15 Sculpture of Xipe Totec, God of Spring . . . . .	85
fig.16 Gladiatorial Sacrifice, and Arrow Sacrifice . . . . .	88
fig.17 Dawn Sacrifice of Quail to Tonatiuh . . . . .	93
fig.18 Xilonen, Goddess of the Green Maize . . . . .	101
fig.19 Cintéotl, the Corn God . . . . .	104
fig.20 Quetzalcoatl, the Wind God . . . . .	116
fig.21 Tezcatlipoca, and Tlaloc as a Rain Cloud . . . . .	118
fig.22 The Day-Signs of the Divinatory Calendar . . . . .	204

PREFACE

Sacrifice is a fundamental concept in many of the worlds religions past and present. It is manifested in rites of great complexity and variety according to the many functions it can fulfill, sometimes several simultaneously. Despite this diversity Hubert and Mauss discovered a unity in the common procedure employed, a procedure which "...consists in establishing a means of communication between the sacred and profane worlds through the mediation of a victim, that is a thing that in the course of the ceremony will be destroyed." This includes any oblation which is partly or wholly destroyed, whether it is vegetable, animal or human. It is from this basic definition of the structure or 'grammar' of the sacrificial rite that this study proceeds.

While there is a wealth of literature on animal sacrifice, there is relatively little discussion of human sacrifice from a general theoretical point of view. Few rites have been recorded by accurate observers, and horrific accounts by early travellers and chroniclers rarely lent themselves to serious analytical investigation. However, well documented examples of human sacrifice are found in the Aztec empire of fifteenth and sixteenth century Mexico, recorded both in the native codices and by the Spanish chroniclers themselves. The aim of this thesis is to study human sacrifice, not as a collection of odd or gruesome customs, but as an institutionalised form of worship forming part of the total religious system within the whole social and ideological complex of the society. By concentrating largely on the study of one society it is intended to show sacrifice in relation to other parts of the social structure, as a complex system of cult and belief.

The amount of literature on Mexican religion is formidable. Much of this information has been obtained from archaeological finds of temples, ritual objects, glyphs, sculptures and particularly from the deciphering of the native codices. These were written in a partly pictographic and partly phonetic style of writing on screen-folded deer skin or bark paper. Most of the pre-conquest codices were destroyed by Spanish missionaries as works of the devil, but the half dozen or so that remain provide a wealth of information about Indian history, ritual, astronomy and political affairs in the empire. Several Indian scholars also contributed a great deal to the knowledge available by translating what they had been taught verbally in the colleges, and what they knew of the painted manuscripts into Roman letters, thus enabling the rich Nahuatl language to be written freely for the first time. Fortunately several of the Spanish missionaries and administrators also recorded a considerable amount of information on the culture and religion they found in Mexico before these were completely transformed. Outstanding among these was Fray Bernadino de Sahagun, whose great achievement in taking down, checking and cross-checking detailed accounts of every aspect of Aztec life from knowledgeable informants in Nahuatl as well as Spanish, marks him as one of the first great field anthropologists. This study leans heavily on his accounts, particularly of the great monthly festivals which were the pre-occupation of the majority of the Aztec populace.

Sahagun's informants were for the most part from the ruling groups of society, the nobles, administrators and priests. Their's was the greater education and knowledge of religious matters, but it means that the picture drawn for us is mainly one of the national worship on the major public occasions. We are told relatively little about the everyday worship of the peasants and ordinary citizens, which was no doubt of vital importance

in their daily activities. However an attempt has been made to show the difference in worship of various sections of society in so far as the priests had a more philosophical and theological approach to religion, whereas the peasants' interest lay in the more magical and efficacious elements of the rites. Both of these aspects are intermingled in most of the ceremonies described, and the response of the people likewise varied according to their ability and status. There is therefore no sharp distinction made between the magical and religious activities in the discussion of the sacrifices.

In general the terms festival, ceremony, ritual and rite, are employed to describe religious activities in a decreasing order of size and complexity. This is not meant to imply any strict classification, but is used primarily for convenience and clarity. 'Festival' or 'feast' is used to describe the entire preparations during the month dedicated to the worship of a particular deity, including the offerings of food and gifts, dancing, singing, parades, purificatory rites, preparation of the victim, and all the activities associated with a major religious event. 'Ceremony' is used to define some major action taking place during a feast, it may last several hours or two days, as in the dedication and sacrifice of a victim entailing an all-night vigil beforehand. The terms 'ritual' and 'rite' refer to less protracted forms of activity, to specific and limited actions within the ceremony, such as taking hair from the head of a victim, a mock battle, or the act of sacrifice itself. There is little occasion to differentiate between religious and secular in this context, all festivals were religious festivals, even military reviews and the traditional ball game were of great religious significance and entailed much ritual procedure.

Apart from the social depth in the interpretation of rites, the historical development is also significant in a discussion of the sacrificial system because the Aztecs were late-comers on the Mexican Plateau, and absorbed much of their culture from previous civilisations which had flowered in Mexico. Despite repeated political upheavels and violent incursions on the plateau, there had been a remarkable degree of continuity in social and religious institutions. The intricate belief system of the Aztecs with its paradoxes, ancient survivals and multiplicity of gods and rites, is the culmination of several centuries of cultural development. Its history is one of synthesis, both of the hunting and agricultural ideologies, and of the many attributes of gods from different times and places into a still formidable number of compound deities. To understand this fully it is necessary to give a short account of the development of religion in this part of Meso-america, beginning with the first period of centralised worship, and the probable beginnings of sacrifice.

---

#### Aknowledgements

I would like to thank Mr.Cottie Burland and my tutor, Dr.Eric Sunderland, for their helpful criticism and advice.

## Chapter 1    Historical Perspective

Archaeology gives us a glimpse of events in Meso-america at the time of the great social and ritual advance of the Classic Period (roughly A.D.100-900, fig.1). By now religion had become organised into ceremonial centres with a formalised pantheon and priesthood; their beliefs expressed in architecture, art and writing. (1)

The Classic Period was characterised by the establishment of theocratic cities, of which Teotihuacan was the greatest in culture and influence. Situated in a side pocket of the Valley of Mexico (fig.4) it was the first real urban centre which, with its daughter cities of Cholula, Atzacotalco and Portesuelo (2), set the foundation for later city cultures. The Teotihuacano spread their culture through trade and pilgrimage, as far south as Kaminaljuyu in Guatemala (3) and the Maya lowlands 700 miles away. Contemporary city cultures were Xochicalco in the state of Morelos, Monte Alban in Oaxaca and El Tajin in Vera Cruz. (fig.3)

The most famous structures in the Teotihuacan site are the enormous truncated pyramids bearing the temples of the Sun and of the Moon. This period was the first in which earth mounds had been replaced by true architectural forms. Some authorities assign these to the first phase of building in the Pre-Classic era (c.200 B.C.) (4), but others believe much of the structure to be of the later phase of building when many other temples, palaces and processional ways were built, the entire site covering something like 7 square miles. (5) Throughout the history of Meso-america, the needs of ceremonial life have determined architectural development, and this is

FIG. 1

SEQUENCE of CULTURES in MEXICO

		DATE	CENTRAL PLATEAU	MIXTEC-PUEBLA	GULF COAST	NORTH WEST		
NEOLITHIC	PRE-CLASSIC	3000	Sedentary agriculture village settlement					
		400						
		200 BC			Olmec			
		AD	Teotihuacan I			Chupicuaro		
		0	Temples of Sun and Moon					
		CLASSIC	TEOTIHUACAN	200	Teotihuacan II			
				400	Teotihuacan III		Late Olmec	
				600	Arrival of first Nahua		El Tajin	Xochicalco
				800	Teotihuacan IV (decline)	692 Beginning of Mixtec history		
				856	Tula founded			
POST-CLASSIC	CITY STATES/AZTEC	1000	Fall of Quetzalcoatl (theocratic phase)	Apogee of Cholula Mixtec expansion		Nahua move south Colima, Nayarit continue pre-classic		
		1168	Fall of Tula (militaristic phase)					
		1200	Arrival of Xolotl Small city states	Tlaxcala city state		Tarascan Kingdom		
		1325	Tenochtitlan founded					
		1429	Triple Alliance	Mixteca-Puebla Culture		Chichimec continue pre-agricultural stage		
		1600	Defeat of Tenochtitlan					

from Coe 1962 and Soustelle 1969



shown clearly in the vast scale of building at Teotihuacan. This in turn signifies a great change in social organisation, enabling thousands of people to be rallied in such undertakings. The ruling powers must have had very powerful sanctions to maintain the necessary economic specialisation and stability to support a civilisation of this order. The general increase in population at this period is evidenced by the large number, and wide distribution of remains; it has been variously estimated to have reached from 10,000 to 100,000, but Willey suggests somewhere between the two as most likely. Large communal dwellings or civic centres have been found at the site away from the main temples, and are believed to have housed the large working population that was needed (6), for it was essentially an urban community although its function was primarily that of a religious and cultural centre.

Evidence of the importance of centralised worship pervades pottery finds, glyphs and sculptures, especially wall frescoes. The earliest representations are of the Fire God, and Tlaloc the Rain God, later are depicted Xipe Totec, Feathered Serpent (Quetzalcoatl), the Sun God and the Moon God. (7) The worship of these gods and the use of the ceremonial calendar of 260 days survived until Aztec times. The prominence of nature worship in the religion is evident and would be expected, since this civilisation was based on the same trio of staple crops - maize, beans and squashes - and the same 'slash and burn' \* agricultural techniques that had been used for centuries past.

\* This system today is called 'milpa', literally 'cornfield'.

It is surprising that they were able to supply the large and reliable food surplus which would have been necessary to support the corvee labour system, and ritual specialists, using these methods. Indeed, failure to do this may have been a factor in their final downfall.

The several successive phases of rebuilding in evidence at Teotihuacan are apparently not accompanied by different art styles and are part of the same culture, which Vaillant interprets as showing religious reform and the establishment of new sets of symbols. It is possible that this new movement included the first use of human sacrifice and ritual cannibalism. In the later phases of both Teotihuacan and Azcapotzalco, ritual dishes fashioned from the tops of skulls were found and the remains of a ritual meal consisting of parts of the human body. (8) Vaillant also cites evidence found by Sejourne' to the same effect (9). On what scale sacrifice occurred, and whether it was an aberration within the culture or learned from other peoples is not known. Prohibitions on human sacrifice by the god Quetzalcoatl in the later Toltec culture, suggests that it was practiced before that time.

The name Teotihuacan in the Nahuatl language means 'place where the gods were made', and according to their legend it was here that the gods created the sun and moon by self-immolation. The gods chose Nanauatzin, the scabby god, and Teccuciztecatl respectively to be the sun and the moon. For four days they each did penance, Nanauatzin offered reeds soaked in his own blood and the scabs from his sores; Teccuciztecatl offered precious stones and expensive copal incense. After the penance, Nanauatzin flung himself into the flames and rose up as the sun;

after four cowardly refusals, Teccuciztecatl followed him into the fire and became the moon. The new sun rose in the east with blinding brilliance but it was stationary, so all the other gods sacrificed themselves to enable the sun to begin his circuit round the earth. (10)

Teotihuacan suffered a violent destruction and its power and influence ceased about 600 A.D. Atzacotzalco continued for another hundred years, but during the following three centuries the same fate overtook all the cultures of the Classic period. The cities were razed to the ground and only the outlying villages remained to continue any parts of the cultural tradition. The causes of the disaster were probably several, Vaillant suggests deforestation, erosion and crop failure; Coe (11) states evidence to show conditions of increasing aridity from about 100 A.D. onwards which could have upset the ecological balance, and intensified the dangers of deforestation. Vaillant also suggests the possibility of internal revolt by a hard-pressed populace whose resources were overtaxed in every way in order to maintain such a system. In the absence of the unifying force of a central power there followed a time of anarchy and separatism, decadence and migration. Small city states, now independent, vied with each other for supremacy and political dominance. A further factor was the pressure from outside by the Chichimeca (collectors and hunters from the drier north west) (12), as they were forced by increasing aridity further into the agricultural land for sustenance. The incursions of these wandering tribes may have played an important part in the downfall of Classic cultures.

Among the tribes of the Chichimeca were the Nahu-

speaking Toltecs\* who, under their semi-legendary leader Mixcoatl, founded the city of Tula (in the present state of Hidalgo) in 865 A.D. From there spread the great Toltec civilisation which was not entirely different from the preceding one; the economic and technicals structure and many of the gods, especially those concerned with agriculture remained the same. However, this Post-Classic era was characterised by the rise of a powerful warrior class and the glorification of war and war gods. For the first time, fortified military centres replaced the theocratic centres of the previous period (13).

The Toltecs were the second great unifying force in Meso-america; by the time of their ninth chief Topiltzin, their hegemony stretched from north of Tula to southern Guatemala, and from the Pacific to the Atlantic shores. A political triumverate of Tula, Culhuacan and Otompan ruled the empire, maintaining the subjugation of surrounding lands and allowing the free flow of tribute and trade.

Despite the use of basically neolithic tools, the Toltecs were prolific stone carvers and sculptors, producing massive and angular works of a comparatively secular style. Religious representations are less frequent than at Teotihuacan for instance, although the same gods are still found. The most common motifs are the Feathered Serpent (associated with the worship of the god Quetzalcoatl), ocelots and eagles (associated with the two knightly orders of warriors), and Tezcatlipoca, their patron deity.

\* Most authorities state their origin from the north west, but Burland (1967 p.32) suggests they were associated with the Pipiles of southern Guatemala and migrated from there.

The cult of Quetzalcoatl was a very important one in Tula, the kings took the name of the god, claiming descent from him, and performing many priestly functions. Aztec chroniclers record this time as a golden age, an age of great fruitfulness and achievement. In a mixture of myth and legend it is told how Quetzalcoatl brought all the great skills of working with feathers, precious stones and gold; all knowledge of the ceremonial calendar, astronomy, writing and even the art of agriculture. Subsequent peoples in the Valley sought proudly to trace descent from these Toltecs, frequently confounding history in the process.

It is apparent that human sacrifice had already been established at this time, since the cult of Quetzalcoatl expressly forbade it, only quail were to be sacrificed, and great emphasis was placed upon penance and self-immolation.

In contrast to this was the bloody cult of Tezcatlipoca associated with violence, war and sacrifice. This cult seemed gradually to gain importance in the later years of Tula's greatness, and may indicate the rising supremacy of a warrior class originating from the earlier hunting peoples absorbed into the culture, eclipsing the priestly intellectual cult based upon existing religious concepts inherited from Teotihuacan. That human sacrifice was probably performed in much the same way then as later among the Aztecs, is suggested by finds at Tula of Quauhxicalli (eagle vessels) in which the hearts of victims were placed, and the same type of tzompantli or skull rack as that used in Tenochtitlan. (15)

There have been recorded several versions of a myth relating to the struggle between Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca. Some variants are clearly symbolic and refer to theological

cogitations on the struggle between good and evil, night and day, spirit and matter. But there is undoubtedly an element of historical truth in the myth which relates how Tezcatlipoca uses various forms of trickery to defeat Quetzalcoatl, who flees with his followers to the coast. Sailing towards the east on a raft he vows to return from there one day. (16) Archaeology supports the theory that the defeated Quetzalcoatl was in fact the ninth Toltec chief, Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl, who fled from Tula at about 987 A.D. and went by sea to Yucatan, finally establishing another sacred centre at Chichen Itza (17).

Subsequently, under the rule of Tezcatlipoca, religion in Tula dictated the necessity for continual war to provide victims for human sacrifice. Politics and religion became inextricably mixed and the warrior class wielded political power. However, the worship of Quetzalcoatl by a small elite priesthood following his example of penance and self-sacrifice continued on into the Aztec period.

About 200 years later Tula suffered the same fate as Teotihuacan and came to a violent end. As the empire collapsed, many ruling families fled to the south, but many also remained in such centres as Atzacapotzalco, Cholula and Culhuacan. Incursions of semi-barbarous tribes from the north had been pressing in on the Valley of Mexico for some time, they had probably assimilated much of Toltec civilisation already, including the Nahuatl language, because soon after the Toltec's downfall they married into the remaining ruling families and established a whole series of warring city states. Chichimec chiefs offered land and protection to surviving Toltec families in return for their daughters in marriage. Thus many new dynasties of city states acquired the sanction of 'Toltec kingship' through

marriage. Later kings claimed descent through grandmothers from great rulers of Tula as a matter of national prestige. This period, from about 1100 - 1300 A.D. was characterised by population movements, city expansion and political fragmentation. One of the tribes caught up in this juggling for power were the Aztecs who, in the space of 200 years were to rise from the position of a small insignificant vassal tribe, to be the third great unifying force in Meso-america.

According to their tribal myths of origin, the Aztecs came from a land in the far north west called Aztlan. From here they had wandered for 150 years, led by four priests carrying the image of their war god and national hero Huitzilopochtli, until they wandered onto the plateau of Mexico about 1200 A.D. They were late comers on the political scene of Mexico Valley and made themselves an unpopular reputation as trouble makers and wife stealers. They eked out an existence first as vassals to the city state of Culhuacan, and then under the power of Atzacapotzalco when it became dominant in the Valley. In 1325 they were allowed to settle poor swamp land on the edge of Lake Texcuco, and here, with simple reed huts they founded their city of Tenochtitlan around the temple of Huitzilopochtli. Fifty years later, although still subject to Atzacapotzalco, they were allowed to establish a ruling house and accepted Acamapitchli of the royal line of Culhuacan \* as their first king.(18) At this time those who could trace descent from the Toltec aristocracy were sought after as rulers and thus,

\* There are several divergent myths tracing his origin, but all try to connect him with Culhuacan and thus to the royal line of the kings of Tula.

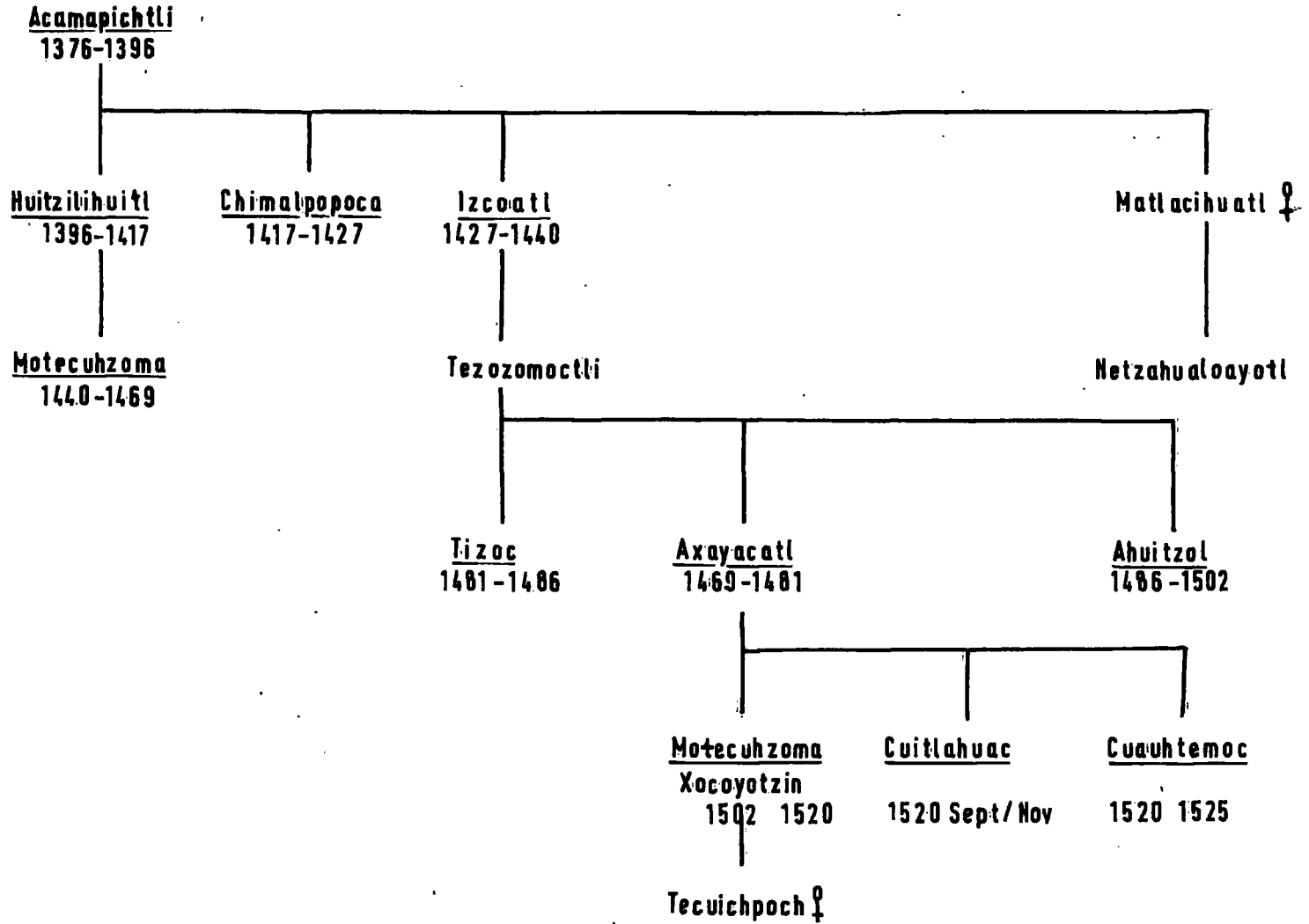


FIG. 2

TABLE OF AZTEC KINGS



Acamapichtli gave the Aztec people the status of a Toltec kingship. He proved to be the first of a line of strong and warlike kings (fig.2), whose ferocity and political acumen led the Aztecs out of servitude into a position of power in the Valley of Mexico. Its future influence was assured by the marriage of Huitzilhuitl (Acamapichtli's successor) to the daughter of Toxozomoc, the ruler of Atzacapotzalco.

The most significant political and social achievements took place during the reign of Izcoatl, especially through the influence of Tlacealel, the king's nephew and chief adviser. Izcoatl formed a defensive alliance with the city states of Texcuco and Tlacppan, and in 1427 finally defeated Atzacapotzalco. Under the wise leadership of Izcoatl the Aztecs became the strongest of the three and led the way to gaining footholds on the mainland. Pieces of this land on the surrounding lake shores were given as booty to leading warriors, and they developed a powerful and wealthy class. The Aztecs had now gained full independence and a large measure of influence over their weaker partners. Izcoatl encouraged a feeling of tribal superiority and pride, burning many of the old histories which revealed their servile past, and embarked on an ambitious programme of civil construction. He built temples, causeways and rebuilt most of the city itself. He reformed legal structure re-organised the priestly hierarchy, and began extensive trade in surrounding lands. The traditional histories and myths were re-written to boost national prestige and develop among the people a belief that they had a mission as a chosen people of the sun, under their war god Huitzilopochtli.

Having established the strength of the nation at home, his successors were able to concentrate on conquering peoples

and lands further afield, reuniting scattered political groups and adopting the structure of the tribute-empire established by the Toltecs. Ahuitzotl finally subjugated an empire which stretched for the first time almost as far as that of the Toltecs.

From the very beginning of the Aztec's struggle for power, one of the chief purposes of war was to provide prisoners for sacrifice at the temples. (20). Since the domination of the followers of the god Tezcatlipoca, each city had sacrificed to its own patron gods and others which were worshipped more widely. In fact a princess given to the Aztecs as a bride for their chief by Culhuacan (21), was sacrificed to the earth goddess Toci, in front of her father who was present expecting a wedding ceremony. During times of comparative peace Motecuhzoma I revived the old practice of the 'War of Flowers', Xochiyāoyotl (22). This was an arrangement of formalised combat mainly against the Tlaxcalans and Huexotzinco, solely to provide a constant supply of prisoners when full scale war of conquest was impracticable. Human sacrifice reached the proportions of a holocaust after the accession of Ahuitzotl. He completed the building of the Great Temple in Tenochtitlan in 1481, and for its dedication had 20,000 prisoners sacrificed in the course of four days, many of whom he killed himself. It had taken two years of campaigning in northern Oaxaca to accumulate such a number. (23) However, the smaller but regular expeditions necessary to maintain the flow of tribute from their vast empire supplied the numbers of victims normally required for the calendrical ceremonies.

By the reign of Motecuhzoma II, the extent of the Aztec domination was as great as that of the Toltecs and included thirty-eight tributary provinces (fig 3). Despite the fact that

this whole area shared a cultural history, and a religion with only minor local variations, each city-state and tribe strove to maintain its political independence with mutual suspicion and constant warring. However, the triple-alliance of Tenochtitlan, Texcoco and Tlacopan survived to this time because of their mutual need. As the cities grew larger they needed more food, cloth and other materials from outside, and with their combined strength they could extract these from their weaker neighbours in the form of tribute. The empire owed no allegiance to a central authority; the emperor maintained no governmental power over the subject peoples, which formed a confederacy of autonomous cities rather than an empire in the European sense.(24) They remained politically independent under their own chiefs, but were threatened from time to time by Aztec ambassadors in order to keep them sending the required amount of tribute, in goods, services or captives. This is today what might be called a 'protection racket', but which Parry calls 'aggressive parasitism' (25). The subject tribes therefore felt no loyalty to their Aztec overlords, and readily betrayed them to the Spanish, hoping thereby to improve their own position in the power game. Even Tenochtitlan and Tlatilolco remained completely independent politically until 1473 when, to put an end to dangerous intriguing by the king of Tlatilolco, Axayacatl had him put to death and installed a governor from Tenochtitlan to maintain order. (26). Despite the common Nahuatl language and culture there was no real unity in the Valley, and even the triple alliance was one of jealousy and mistrust. It was this essential weakness in the structure of the empire that enabled Cortes and his small army of 500 men to penetrate into the Mexican Valley and strike their first telling blows against the Aztec civilisation.

The Spanish force, though small, was well trained and skilled in the art of fighting to kill; their arms were steel swords, guns and cross-bows. The men had determination and optimism in the invasion of Mexico, their aims were gold, personal glory and the esteem of their country and faith. The high calibre of Cortes as the leader of this campaign is a significant factor in their victory, moreover, he burnt the ships in which they had sailed from Cuba; there was no going back. (27).

The Aztecs on the other hand had no regular standing armies of drilled and disciplined men. Apart from the commanders and chiefs who tended to form a permanent structure, the ranks of warriors were able-bodied men who were called upon to fight when required. Cortes' s invasion occurred at harvest time, the people were busy gathering in the crop and were ill prepared for defensive action. Their wooden and obsidian weapons could not stand up to the steel swords, and cross-bows of the Spanish, and their whole attitude and strategy of warfare was entirely different. To the Aztecs<sup>it</sup> was a ceremonial affair of great religious importance, they fought not to rout the enemy and kill as many men as possible, but primarily to take prisoners. In subjugating a rebellious city, the Aztecs would burn down the main temple, take prisoners to sacrifice, and then negotiate and bargain with the chiefs to decide on the tribute to be exacted henceforth. Providing the tribute arrived at regular intervals, no further interference occurred. The Aztecs lost many an advantage in the field against the Spanish by stopping to take prisoners back to the temple, instead of pursuing and thoroughly defeating the retreating enemy. Normally, they would parley with a recalcitrant town to discover why no tribute had been forthcoming; if dissatisfied, the intention to do battle was stated

by the giving of shields and swords to their opponents, and about twenty days later the attack would take place. Such chivalry formed no part of the Spanish tactics; they gained access to Tenochtitlan by showing friendly intentions, and then attacked the people in the main square who were attending a major ceremony.

Many of the subject towns hoping for a successful rebellion against the dominating and predatory Aztecs, not only betrayed them to the Spanish, but fought alongside Cortes's men in the final defeat of Tenochtitlan, especially Tlaxcala the traditional 'sparring-partner' of Tenochtitlan in the Flowery War. Ironically they sought to assert their own position in the Valley with the help of these strangers to overcome Tenochtitlan. The Spanish too had a great advantage in their use of cavalry; the Mexicans had never seen horses before and at first thought them to be monsters or supernatural demons. Psychologically the Aztecs were primed for defeat. Throughout Motecuhzoma II's reign there had been many portents of disaster. Columns of fire had been seen at midnight, temples had burnt suddenly without cause, and comets had been seen during the day. Finally a large bird was brought to the king with an obsidian mirror in the centre of its head, through this Motecuhzoma foresaw the arrival of a force of soldiers who would defeat Mexico and establish a new social order. At first it was generally believed that Cortes was a manifestation of the god Quetzalcoatl, who had thus returned as he promised from the east, in the year One Reed (1519), to overthrow the rule of Tezcatlipoca and re-instate his own cult. Motecuhzoma and his successor Cuauhtemoc soon learnt that this was far from the truth, but by then it was too late.

Finally the Indian population was weakened by diseases brought by the Spanish to which they had never been exposed before. Smallpox, measles and colds took their toll of lives and strengthened the belief among the people that the Spanish were 'teules', gods or demons, who could magically smite them down with these diseases, and against whom man was defenceless. In the last hopeless seige of Tenochtitlan the citizens \* fought desperately for their lives until they were so weak from hunger and disease that they could no longer resist the pressure. They were finally defeated on August 13th. 1521. Traditionally they expected to negotiate with Cortes for the tribute to be paid; they did not expect the crushing of their whole civilisation and the enslavement of their people.

All the treasure of the temples and palaces was taken up by the conquistadors to be shipped back to Spain, but much ornate gold work was melted down. Temples and statues were razed to the ground; sacred books and the ritual insignia of the gods were heaped in the courtyards and squares and burnt. The re-education and conversion of the population to Christianity was assigned to the Catholic missionaries, the various orders taking charge of different localities. Due to this policy of eradicating the indigenous religion, there are barely a dozen pre-columbian codices which have survived until today, and it is largely due to the thorough fieldwork of Father Bernadino de Sahagun and other missionary writers at the time, that so much is known of the ritual practices of the day. With the destruction of the priesthood which had formed an elite of

\* The population of Tenochtitlan was about 300,000 (Vaillant 1965 p.157), but after a year of war their numbers were already decimated.

sacerdotal specialists, much of the ritual and divinatory knowledge was lost, and the religious structure crumbled. That which remained of Nahua religion among the people was rapidly replaced by Christianity. The Indians, used to communal labour for public works, built many churches, and the artisans fashioned statues from new steel tools. The Mexicans found the Catholic faith easy to adopt; the saints replaced their gods and the holy statues and paintings substituted for their idols. But many indigenous elements became absorbed into Christian worship. To what extent Christian ritual was performed as a veneer on the old traditional beliefs is difficult to say, but Parsons (28) in her study of Mitla in the early 1930's found many Aztec characteristics. Some were known only by the old people, such as morning prayers to the sun, folk tales of the creation of the sun and moon, and in isolated villages in the mountains turkeys were sacrificed. However, the divinatory calendar, games, songs and much of the native art had all disappeared because before the conquest they were closely bound up with ritual, and maintained by the sequence of ceremonies which were of course banned after the conquest. In the celebration of the Christian feasts Parsons states that "...impersonation and dramatisation are the distinctive qualities in Aztec religion which are frequently to be traced."

In his study of Tepoztlan, Redfield (29) found much of the material culture basically pre-Columbian, and even the temple of the patron god, Tepoztecatl, remained in the 1920's. In the village 'barrio' (the smallest administrative sub-division), he recognised clearly the pre-Columbian 'calpulli'. Although no longer based on kinship, they<sup>were</sup> still just as independent and suspicious of each other.

In summing up the defeat of the Aztec empire and the Mexican civilisation, Soustelle quotes an observation by Spengler;

"This culture is a unique example of death by violence. it did not languish; it was neither oppressed nor frustrated; but it was assassinated in its prime, cut off as a flower might be cut off by a passer-by." (30)

---



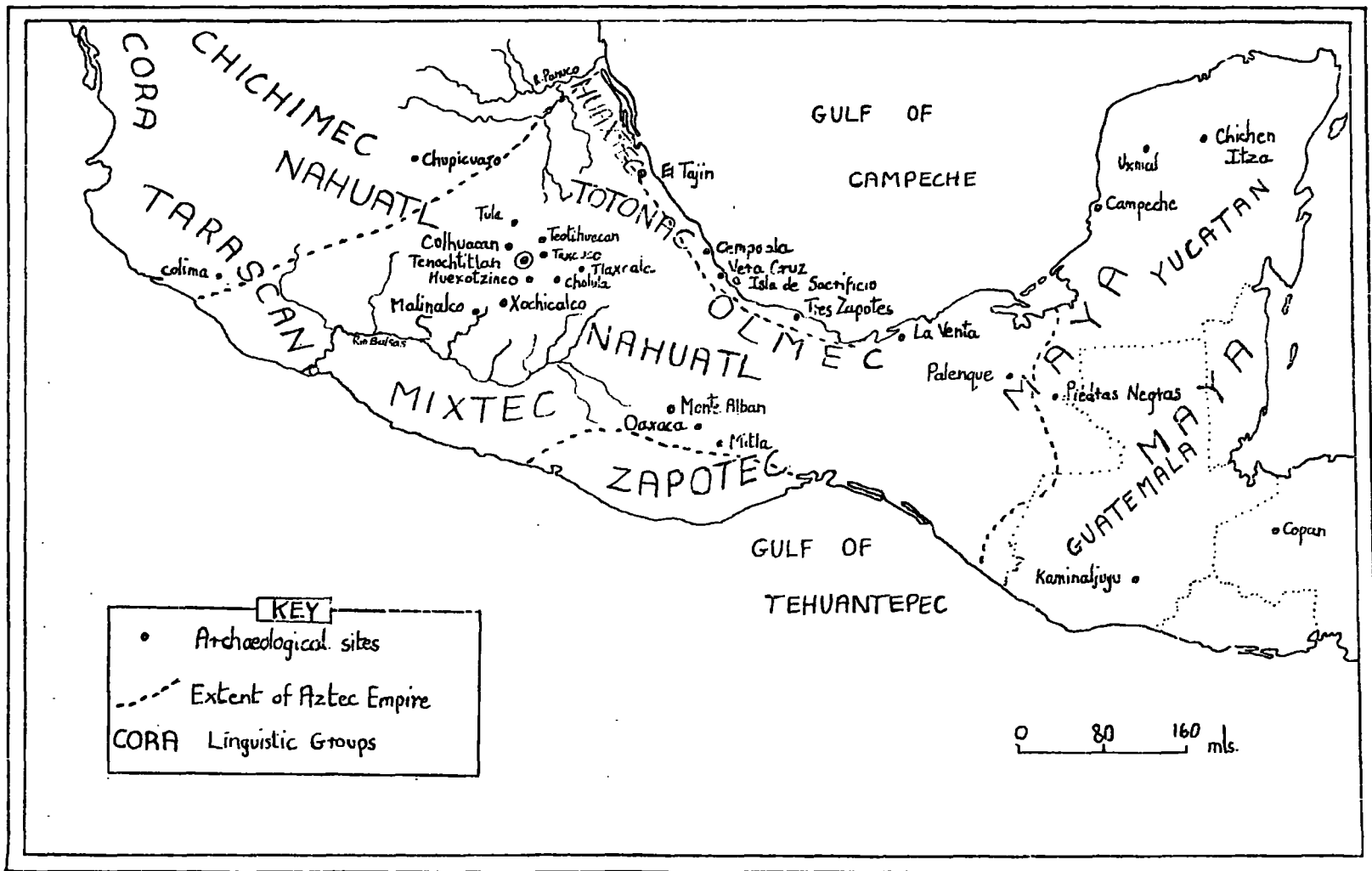
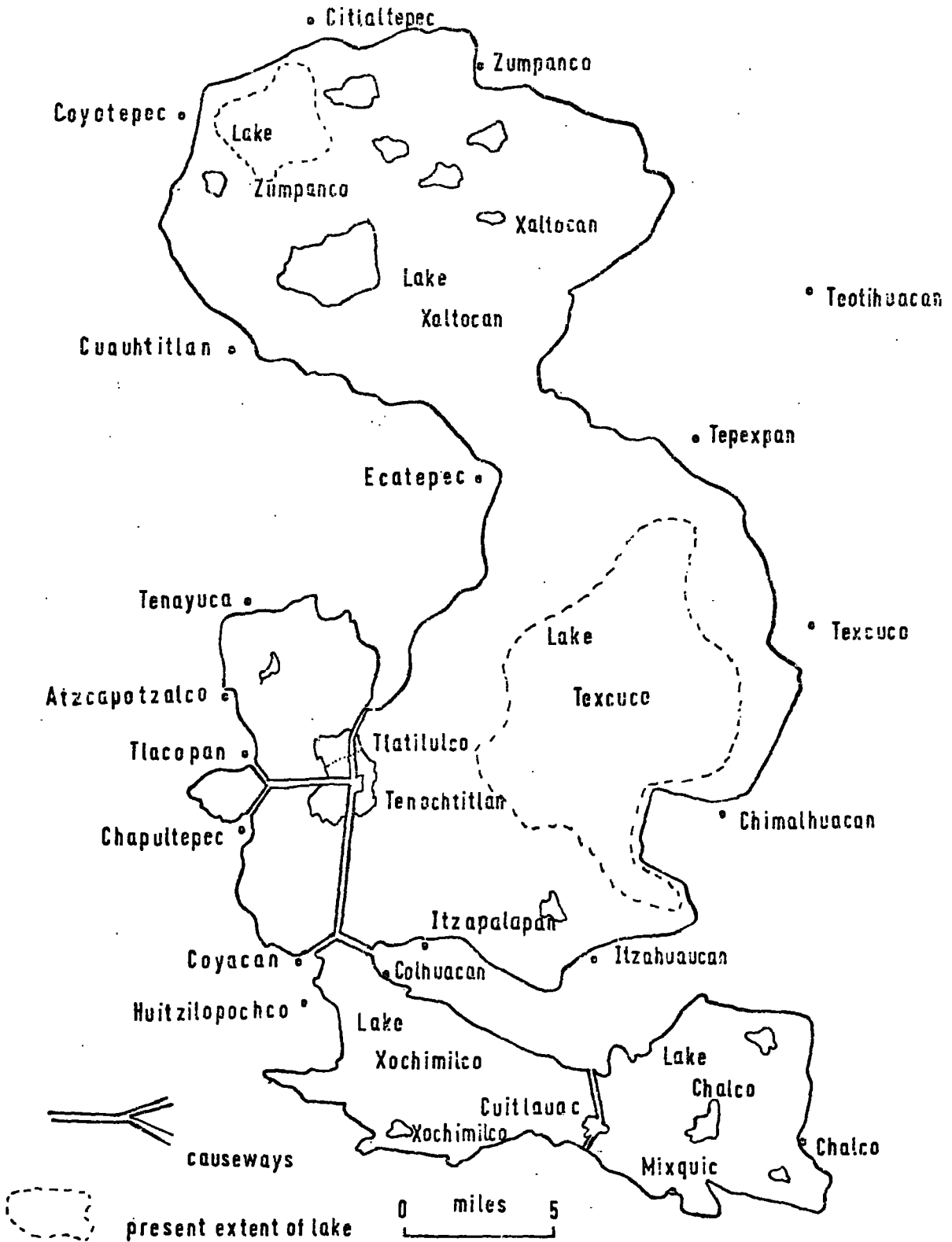


FIG. 3

FIG. 4



VALLEY of MEXICO in 1520

Source References

Full details of sources indicated here are given in the bibliography.

1. Willey p.116; M.D.Coe 1962 pp.103-4; Caso pp.58-9 says they also used the divinatory calendar and bar and dot enumeration.
2. Willey p.116.
3. Vaillant p.44.
4. Willey sums up the dating controversy in footnote 42 p.176, also Vaillant p.59.
5. Willey p.109 quoting R.F.Millon, estimates vary, Vaillant says 6 sq.mls., M.D.Coe 1962 says 3 sq.mls.
6. Willey p.112-113.
7. Vaillant ch.3; M.D.Coe 1962 p.103; Willey.
8. Vaillant p.77.
9. ibid footnote 12 p.286.
10. Sahagun Book 7, ch.2 pp.4-8.
11. M.D.Coe 1962.
12. Lumholtz vol.2, described the Tepecano, Cora and Huichole tribes, probable descendents of the Chichimeca inhabiting north west Mexico.
13. M.D.Coe 1962.
14. Sahagun Book 3.
15. M.D.Coe 1962; Krickeberge part 1, states that all methods of sacrifice were established by the Toltecs, from evidence at Chichen Itza.
16. Sahagun Book 3, also quotes a version from Annales de Quauhtitlan, and Duran's account of Quetzalcoatl burning himself on the eastern shore, and his heart rising to heaven and becoming Venus, the Morning Star.
17. Krickeberge pp.31-6 compares archaeological evidence of Tula and Chichen Itza, where Quetzalcoatl was known as Kukulcan.
18. Vaillant p.110.
19. Sahagun Book 9 p.1.
20. Vaillant p.109.

21. Burland 1967 p.44.; Diaz del Castillo.
  22. Vaillant p.110; M.D.Coe 1962.
  23. Codex Telleriano-Remensis in Kingsborough's 'Antiquities of Mexico', vol.2 p.77.
  24. Soustelle pp.20-21. 1964
  25. Parry ch.2.
  26. Joyce ch.1.
  27. Parry pp.73-84; Diaz del Castillo vol.1.
  28. Parsons pp.326-328, and pp.514-519.
  29. Redfield pp.40-50.
  30. Soustelle p.281. 1964
-

Chapter 2    The Mechanism of Sacrifice

Sacrifice had been defined by Hubert and Mauss (1) as a means of communicating with divinity or religious forces through the consecration of an intermediary victim, which is always destroyed during the course of the rite. It is the religious energy so released which alters the ritual status of the persons involved or the objects with which they are concerned.

The rite imbues the victim with religious energy or sacredness; it becomes a medium between the world of the profane and that of the sacred. Hubert and Mauss call this building of power in the victim and its subsequent release by destruction - "sacrilisation and desacrilisation" - together they form one process which they believe is found in all sacrifices. The movement of the force can be in either direction; the ritual status of the sacrificer can be increased to a state of grace, and a state of sin can be reduced to a state of normality "...the expulsion of a sacred spirit whether pure or impure is a primordial component of sacrifice." The expulsion of the force takes place when the victim is destroyed; the destruction is an essential part of the oblation, differentiating it from other forms of offering. The benefit of the sacrifice can accrue to an individual, a specific group of people, or to the whole community. Where an individual sacrificer is directly effected by the sacrifice it is called 'personal sacrifice', and when objects or mythical beings receive the action of the sacrifice, it is called 'objective sacrifice'. When the entire community benefits, whether directly, or secondarily through the beneficence of the objects or mythical beings, the populace are usually represented by priests or other ritual specialists who perform the rite on their behalf. There are few examples of sacrifice in

which no specialist knowledge or guidance is necessary to carry out the ritual details correctly, especially in the case of human sacrifice which is always a social as opposed to an individual rite. The full efficacy of any ritual usually depends on such accuracy.

Hubert and Mauss disagree with Robertson-Smith's theory that the function of all sacrifice is derived from the communion meal between the god and the kinship group, and point out that the functions of sacrifice are numerous - usually several being present in the one rite without clear demarcation between them. A sacrifice can be used for divination, atonement, communion and so on, the emphasis depending on the situation and the overriding results required of the sacrifice. The occasions for sacrifice among the Aztecs were innumerable. They sacrificed quail at every sunrise, slaves at the burial of influential persons, and prisoners of war after successful forays on the battle-field, or at the inauguration of a new temple. The major public ceremonies of the year, most of which involved large numbers of sacrifices, took place at regular intervals in accordance with agricultural activities and astrological readings. Thus the ends required and the means employed to acquire them were various and complex.

The conclusion reached by Hubert and Mauss was that the unity of the sacrificial system was in the common mechanism involved, and this they isolate and dismantle. Using their description as a framework, the profusion of Aztec sacrifices can be seen to accord with their overall schema.

"Sacrifice is a religious act that can only be carried out in a religious atmosphere and by means of essentially religious agents." The first phase of the act is intended

to increase the ritual status of the people, places, and objects concerned. This is termed the 'entry into the sacrifice'.

Hubert and Mauss describe in detail the ritual purification undergone by the sacrificer (the person doing the actual killing), but point out that in the case of the priest performing this part of the rite, the fact that he is already ordained and is therefore made to some extent sacred, allows him to approach closer to the sacred world with fewer special purificatory precautions. This too is the case with the preparation for Aztec ceremonies. There were occasions when the laity performed simple, domestic rites, usually sacrificing quail, but all the major ceremonies and certainly all human sacrifices were carried out by specially trained priests.

The priesthood was a highly organised body, branches of its hierarchy were responsible not only for ritual, but for the writing and performance of music, astrology, astronomy, education and the compilation of historical records. Their stringent way of life maintained them in a state of 'grace' almost constantly, and so special 'entry' rites before a sacrifice were not usually necessary. The number and complexity of ceremonies, and the necessity to carry them out correctly in every detail required long arduous training. A calmecac (priests's college), was attached to every temple and took pupils from the age of seven or nine years (2), until the age of adulthood at twenty.\* At this age the student could either leave the calmecac to marry, take public office, become a war leader, or stay on as a novice priest (tlamacazton)

\* Generally sons of nobles and public officials attended the calmecac, priestly training was the basis for all responsible positions, maceguals could send their sons but Sahagun does not say how many actually did.

and work his way through the hierarchy. (see Appendix 1). Apparently about one third of the pupils stayed on to become priests (3). In the *calmecac* the boys were trained to lead a life of deprivation and hardship; their limbs were lacerated from blood-letting, and emaciated from fasting and having their sleep continually interrupted for prayers and offerings (4). They were also taught intellectual pursuits; the arts of oratory, astronomy, painting, mathematics, divination. They learnt to recite traditional hymns and histories, and the holy books which contained all the esoteric knowledge of their calling. But rigorous self-control and discipline was the basis of the educational system. During long night vigils the priests (*tlamazqui*), burnt copal incense and offered grass balls soaked with blood obtained from piercing their limbs with *magu*ey thorns and passing reeds through their tongues. Their ears were shredded with such constant mutilation and their hair, matted with blood and holy unguents, was left uncut and unwashed (5); they bathed only their bodies in icy pools at night. The everyday garb of the priests were long black robes, but they donned the splendid insignia of the gods on ceremonial occasions. Such a way of life no doubt inspired mystical experiences and visions, but various hallucinogenic plants and herbs were also widely used for divination and communication with the gods (6). Some though not all branches of the priesthood took a vow of celibacy.(7). So strict were these injunctions on the priests that failure to adhere to them involved painful punishments and frequently death. After the *Etzalqualiztli* festival, any priests who had made even the slightest error in the proceedings were immersed in the lake and left for dead; the direst punishments were meted out to those holding the highest rank and



power, this was so throughout Aztec society - the greater the rank and status the greater the culpability.

Separated physically by their life in the calmecacs and temples, and spiritually by a life of fasting and suffering, these priests were in a ritual status in which they were able to approach the sacred world and perform sacrifices on behalf of the populace. In fact they usually took the name of the god in whose temple they served, and in some respects were considered incarnations of them (8), thus representing the gods as witnesses, to some of the sacrifices (9). Even so, certain ceremonies demanded greater purification before propitiating the gods. Before the feast of Panquetzaliztli all the priests concerned fasted for eighty days, and during the feast of Tlacaxipeuliztli, Youallaun \* (the sacrificing priest), fasted for eighty days before dressing up in the guise of Xipe Totec and killing the victim. In this way he achieved a closer relationship with the deity and, to the spectators in the temple courtyard below, a positive identification.

The immediate benefit of the sacrifice was directed towards the gods (the mythical beings), and through their invigoration the entire Mexican population were secondary beneficiaries. There were occasions when all the people were adjured to fast and maintain sexual abstinence, but as a rule only the captors among the laity underwent special ritual preparation before a ceremony. The importance of their role lay in establishing a certain relationship with their captive before he was taken by the priests for immolation.

The feast of Xocotluetzi was dedicated to the Fire God

\* Youallaun means literally 'night drinker', a synonym for Xipe Totec as the spring vegetation, thought to grow mostly at night 'drinking' the dew.

and the day before the sacrifice, the warriors, who had taken prisoners in battle and were offering them the next day, painted their bodies yellow and their faces red; part of the insignia of the Fire God. They wore devices of butterflies on their backs made of red red arara feathers, to symbolise the flames of the fire. In this garb they danced until sunset and then took their captives to a local temple to hold an all night vigil. An important part of the vigil was to place the captive before the fire and cut hair from the crown of his head. This hair was then tied into a bundle and hung up in the house of the captor as a token of his bravery. There might also have been an element of magic in this rite; among the Aztecs and their neighbours, the style of haircut and position of tufts that a young warrior might wear depended on the number of prisoners he had taken, and thus indicated his valour and status. By keeping the captives hair, the captor in some way made 'prisoner' the victims courage. Also, the victim, by losing his tuft was deprived of his identity and was given over to the god to whom he was being dedicated.

The next day when all was prepared for the sacrifice, the captors took their victims to the foot of the pyramid steps. This was as far as they approached, and from here the priests took the victims up the steps to the techcatl, the sacrificial stone. Similarly, after the sacrifice the body was rolled down the steps again, to be taken up by the captor and the old men of his local temple, and consumed in a communion meal with their kin and friends.

On very important feasts various sections of the people were instructed to join in the fasting and penance. Bancroft (10) describes the preparation for the annual Tlacaxipueliztli festival, for which every fourth year the penances exacted were

particularly harsh. Only priests with sufficient courage to endure this severe test to the end were advised to volunteer to take part, as failure to complete the task brought disgrace and deprivation of their estates. They were given five days to have second thoughts and drop out (which many did), and usually two- or three-hundred began the feast. They first prayed to the god Camaxtli for strength to persevere, and then collected two-foot long sticks 'as thick as the wrist', which were fashioned and polished by carpenters who had fasted for five days in preparation for their task. Flint-cutters who had undergone a similar fast prepared knife blades, a broken blade was taken as a sign of inadequate fasting and was punished. The blades were perfumed and laid in the sun. At sunset on the eve of the great penance, solemn hymns were intoned after which the self-torture began. With the special flint knives, holes were cut in each man's tongue through which he passed the polished sticks, starting with thin ones and going on to thicker ones, the number and thickness depending on his piety and endurance. The chief priest set an example by passing 450 sticks through his tongue. The sticks were thrown on a prepared stack in the temple courtyard as offerings to the god and burnt. This was repeated every twenty days until eighty days had elapsed, at which time the common people were to join in the fast for the remaining eighty days. For this time they were to eat nothing but maize cakes without chili, or any other seasoning (evidently quite a severe penalty). They were not to bathe, were to refrain from sexual relations and keep their fires burning constantly. Just before the completion of the fast, all the temples were repaired and adorned. Three days before the festival, the priests who had taken part in the great penance, dressed up as animals in various

colours and danced all day in the temple courtyard. As Camaxtli was the god of hunting as well as the god war, the association was probably with the animals of the chase.

Although the common people had to fast frequently, and on occasions to offer blood from the ears and tongue, it was the priests who underwent the extreme forms of suffering necessary to maintain a state of ritual purity, and to appease the gods with blood and penance.

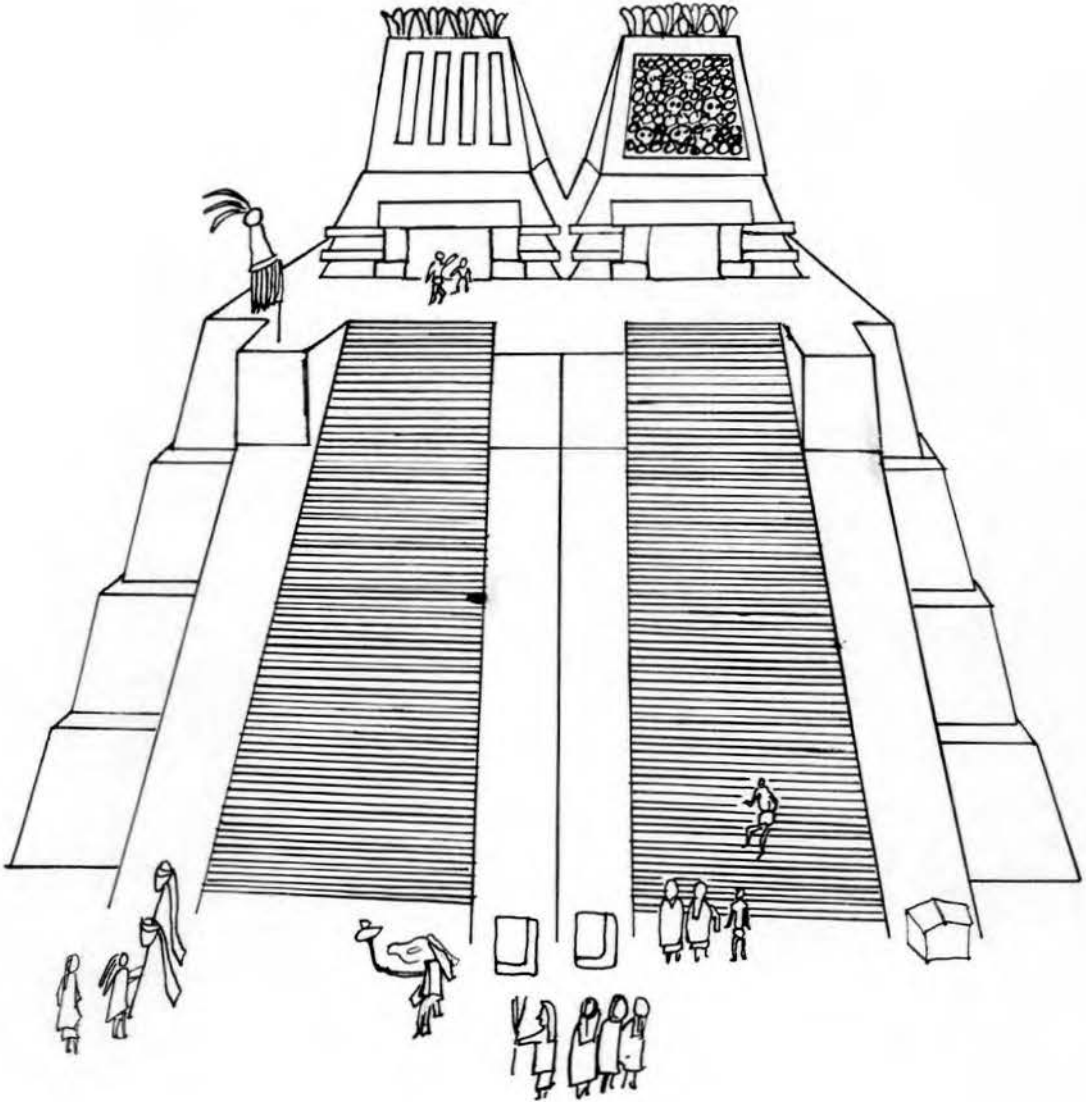
The exact timing of the rites was important, especially those concerned with astronomical phenomena. The Epcoazuacuiltzin was a specialist priest whose duty it was to ensure the correct timing and sequence of rites and to make any calendrical adjustments. The daily sacrifices to the sun were offered immediately the sun showed on the horizon, and the great feast of the sun took place on the day count 'nauí olin' which fell every two-hundred-and-sixty days. The actual sacrifice was made precisely at midday when the sun was at its height. On this day everyone passed straws through their tongues and ear-lobes to offer blood before the image of the sun, and many captives were slain. The astrological calendar (the tonalpohualli), was used for divining the occasions and times for the moveable feasts, which might occur every few days or weeks, and the solar calendar of 365 days was used for the regular seasonal festivals. The solar years was divided into eighteen months each of twenty days; the remaining five days were considered fearful and unlucky, no ritual activity took place and people tended to stay in their homes. Each month was associated with the worship of a particular deity or group of deities\* and the

\* The workings of the calendar is explained more fully in Appendix V, and a summary of the major monthly ceremonies is given in Appendix III.

nature of the sacrifice varied accordingly. The preparation of food, offerings, dancing and fasting usually took place at the beginning of the month, culminating in the sacrifice at the end of the twenty days. The preparation for these vast dramatic ceremonies must have been very costly in time and materials.

Although the people were required to performed simple rites before their own little figurines of the gods, all the major ceremonies were performed in or around the appropriate temple. There were hundreds of temple in Tenochtitlan, many in each of the administrative divisions of the city, and the various tradé guilds and merchants had their own. Bancroft states that seventy-eight were dedicated to Huitzilopozhtli alone. Each was dedicated to the worship of a particular god and had its own calmecac and priestly hierarchy. However, these were all subordinate to the Great Double Temple in the Sacred Precinct where most of the major rites of the year were celebrated.(fig.5). In general, the rites for a particular god took place in the temple concecrated to him, where his image was erected and dressed in his insignia and vestments. The temple was a sacred area which only the priests were allowed to enter, and their lives were directed to maintianing the sanctity of the temple by daily sweeping, keeping fires burning constantly, and offering incense at the altar four or five times during the day and night. When a sacrifice was to be made, the priests collected the victim from the base of the pyramid steps and led him to the top where stood the temple proper. On a platform in front of the temple was a convex stone, the focal point of the sacrifice called the Techcatl. Over this the victim was stretched and

FIG.5



Great Double Temple of Tenochtitlan  
Reconstruction by Miguel Covarrubias

From Caso : People of the Sun

held by four priests, while the fifth and chief among them plunged the sacrificial knife \* into his breast and deftly tore out his heart. The hearts were placed in a special sacred vessel called the 'quauhxicalli' (eagle vessel fig.6.), to be held up in dedication to the sun. Hearts sacrificed to Tlaloc the rain god, were placed in the Cloud Vessel. These and other instruments used, together with the insignia and paraphernalia of the gods which had been worn by the sacrificing priest, were returned to the care of the priest whose special duty it was to maintain their sanctity.

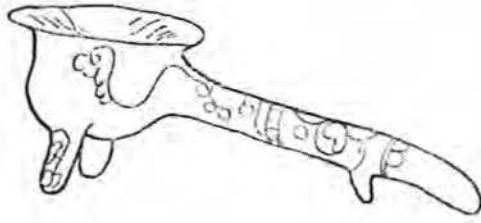
However we are told by Sahagun (11) that on the battle-field the first prisoner taken was sacrificed there and then, but this was still 'in a religious situation and in a religious atmosphere', for war was a sacred activity undergone to obtain victims for the gods. The priests led the columns into battle carrying images of their gods on their backs; the battle-field was considered a sacred place. The prisoner's breast was opened by the priest with the sacrificial knife, and his heart removed and offered to the sun just as would later take place with other prisoners during the festivals in the temples of Tenochtitlan.

The victims sacrificed were not always captive warriors; sometimes women were killed and sometimes children. The nature of the sacrifice and the presiding deity determined the type of victim to be chosen, and the extent of preparation necessary to befit the victim for his sacred ordeal.

Children born on certain day signs were particularly

\* The sacrificial knives are variously described as consisting of flint, obsidian or stone. The knife in the British Museum (fig.7) is of chalcedony; the hilt is of turquoise mosaic in the form of a warrior of the Eagle Order.

FIG. 6



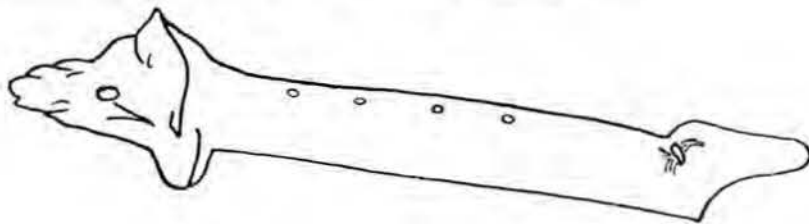
Pottery incense ladle



Stone vessel for sacrificed hearts



Stone 'Eagle Vessel' for sacrificed hearts



Pottery flute

from Gray 1968



suitable for sacrifice to Tlaloc the rain god, during the Atlcaualo festival. These children, and those with 'two cowlicks of hair' were eagerly sought after as offerings (12). Some were bought even before they were weaned; others were offered by devout parents to gain favour from the gods.

Specially selected victims were sometimes necessary when extra potency was required of a sacrifice. For instance the last time the Aztecs celebrated the feast called the Binding of the Years or the New Fire ceremony which took place at the end of each 52-year period, was in 1507, during the reign of Motecuhzoma II. The latter part of his reign had been a troublesome one with many portents of disaster; flying comets seen during the day, the flooding of the city in 1499, lightening without thunder and other signs foretelling the imminent invasion of the Spanish. The king was therefore very anxious to make the best sacrifice possible to avert the evil. During the feast, honour was paid to Xiuh-tecuhtli, The Fire God, and new fire was made, so Motecuhzoma decreed that a victim whose name contained the word 'xiuhtl' - 'fire' should be sought out. They seized a well born man of Hexotzinco, a province with which Tenochtitlan had regular holy wars. He was sacrificed at the appointed time, and in his breast they placed the fire drill to make new fire for the next period of 52-years.(13).

During an eclipse of the sun, when the sun was thought to be in danger of destruction, albinos were seized and sacrificed (14). It seems that in some magical way this gave the sun strength to succeed in its struggle against the powers of darkness which were overwhelming it\*.

\* The people were no doubt terrified of eclipses, but the astronomers would have known when they would occur, and could prepare for the appropriate rituals.

FIG.7



The Sacrificial Knife: this example in the British Museum is made of chalcedony, the handle is carved in the shape of an Eagle Knight and decorated with turquoise mosaic.

However, for most of the seasonal ceremonies the victims were either slaves bought and offered by the merchants and trade guilds, or captives taken in war and offered by their captors. The most highly valued offerings were war captives, especially those of a fierce tribe obtained by the valour and courage of the warriors in the service of their gods. But even these most prized victims had to undergo ritual purification and preparation before they were ready to be presented on the techcatl in the image of the god.

For the feast of Toxcatl, a carefully chosen captive had to live for a year as the impersonator of the god Tezcatlipoca before being sacrificed. Sahagun (15) lists over a hundred qualities and conditions necessary in the chosen youth - he had to be perfect in every detail of mind and body. He was carefully taught the social graces of the time; to play the flute, smoke a pipe, walk and talk graciously, and he had a whole retinue devoted to his care and training. At the same time an impersonator of Huitzilopochtli the sun and war god, was chosen and underwent similar preparations until he too was sacrificed later in the same month. As they went about the street the people looked upon them as the gods they impersonated, paying them homage and asking favour.

Before the Panquetzaliztli festival held in honour of Huitzilopochtli, the slaves (bought and offered by the merchants) had to be ceremonially bathed. Old men of the temple obtained the water from a certain village called Huitzilopochco for there in a cave was a sacred pool and spring named Uitzililatl. The slaves were sprinkled with this water at the foot of Huitzilopochtli's temple before being painted and dressed in his insignia.

To some extent all the victims were impersonators of the gods to whom they were dedicated and sacrificed. The identification between god and victim was achieved largely through the wearing of the characteristic colours and insignia of the god, and also during the preliminary singing and dancing which was usually an important means of concentrating the spiritual power in the victim. In the native codices where the various gods are depicted, a limited number of symbols were used to differentiate between them and their different aspects. The colours of these symbols and their presence in groups together, form the clues to the god's identity. Such complexes of colours and symbols make up the god's insignia and were recognisable to the Mexican people, when they saw the victims dressed in these they believed they saw their gods. Many spirits of natural phenomena were personified, worshipped and received sacrifice in this way.

When the feast of Uei tecuilhuitl was due it was a time of great food scarcity, the young corn crop was still green and no-one was allowed to cut it until after the feast. Xilonen was the personification of the young green maize plant; the human impersonator dressed in her insignia was the embodiment of the spirit of the young maize. The impersonator had to dance very vigorously during the ceremony to ensure the young crop would grow well and ripen, and to concentrate the spirit in her. At the time of the sacrifice she was decapitated, a method which is only associated with the corn goddesses and which seems symbolic of the harvest. This was a sacrifice of 'desacrilisation', the spirit of the maize was concentrated in the victim and released through sacrifice, thus removing the prohibition from cutting the new corn. After this rite the people were allowed to cut some of the green cobs they needed so badly.

The fact that elements and objects of nature were personalised in this way, and in their 'human' form could be influenced and encouraged to fulfill their normal course, is seen in the attitude towards the maize in the festival of Atamalqualiztli. This took place every eight years. Everyone fasted, eating only at midday and then only water tamales, and it was forbidden to eat chili, salt, salt-petre or lime with their tamales. These were all important seasonings in a monotonous diet of maize. Failure to fast was punished and those not found out, automatically suffered 'the itch'. It was said that the purpose of the feast was to give the corn a respite. After being tormented for the previous eight years by being mixed with seasonings to flavour it, this fasting gave it new life (16).

Through the various methods of consecration, supernatural power is built up and concentrated in the victim right up to the moment of sacrifice. Then in some rites, the final dedication takes place when the priests and victims process around the sacrificial stone. At this stage of the ritual the people look on in the courtyard below; the captives are at the bottom of the pyramid steps, and only the priests now handle the victim. The progressive increase in the sanctity of the victim is now complete, but contact must remain with the profane world in order that some benefit of the sacrifice should pass to it. This contact is expressed in the relationship built up between the captor and his captive. The captor is looked upon as the father of the victim; after the sacrifice he does not partake of the captive's flesh for this reason, although he may eat of other captive's flesh. In his account of the Tlacaxipeuliztli festival Sahagun states:

"The captor could not eat the flesh of his captive. He said 'shall I then, eat my own flesh? For when he

took (the captive), he had said: 'He is as my beloved son' , and the captive had said: 'He is as my beloved father.' "

This relationship is reinforced during the night vigil prior to the sacrifice, and the dance of the captive, 'areyto', which they dance together. In this way, not only does the victim represent the god but also the captor; their identities are fused and the victim's death redeems the captor. The captor had been spared in war and brought tribute to his gods, and is so redeemed to continue playing his part in the cosmic process of feeding the sun with life-blood to enable it to continue its course.

The point of contact between man and the divinity is then complete in the victim, but the religious force is still contained within his body. When the knife is plunged into his breast and his heart offered up, the life force is released and replenishes the gods; it may give the maize strength to grow and ripen; or the sun the energy to perform his daily service to man.

After most of the sacrifices, the captor takes the victim's blood in a sacred bowl and with a straw, anoints with blood the lips of all the images of the gods in every temple and shrine in the Sacred Precinct. All the gods benefit from a sacrifice even if not performed specifically for them. In the same way, all the people are redeemed by the death of the victim, and the release of life force necessary to replenish the forces of nature on which man's survival depends.

Although the removal of the heart was probably the commonest form of sacrifice, the methods of sacrifice did vary but not haphazardly. They were strictly prescribed for the particular nature of the ceremony. The arrow sacrifice, originally an Huastec ritual (18) adopted by the Mexicans, involved a victim

tied to a framework and shot with arrows; his blood falling onto the ground was thought to represent the rain. Drowning was the method of sacrifice usually adopted for offerings of children to Tlaloc, the body of the victim was given over entirely to the god and consumed in the water at the time of sacrifice in one act. Victims for the Fire God were burnt after first being given an anaesthetising drug called 'yauhtli' (19), and were then sacrificed over the stone. The decapitation of impersonators of the maize at certain stages of its growth has already been mentioned.

After the killing the supernatural force is released into the sacred world, but the body remains and still contains considerable sanctity and therefore danger too. The methods of disposal and distribution are ritually prescribed and form an inherent part of the ceremony. In the drowning of victims the body is given entirely to the gods, but on other occasions different parts of the body were traditionally apportioned between the gods and the human participants.

The heart\* , the seat of life and essential object of sacrifice was given entirely to the sacred world. After being taken from the victim and offered to the sun and the four directions, it was usually placed in a sacred vessel and burnt. If heart sacrifices were made to Tlaloc they were taken in a canoe to the centre of the lake and thrown into the water. The blood of sacrifice was a sacred and precious thing, it was called 'chalchihuatl' - 'precious water', and was also given only to the gods. After the sacrifices to the Morning Star, the priest flicked the blood in the direction of the god with the middle finger and thumb. On other occasions the captor took the blood of the victim and placed it on the lips of the

\* The heart was called 'yolloatl' which can also mean 'soul' .

idols. Castillo (20) described temple walls thick with the offerings of blood smeared over them and left to accumulate.

Thus in most cases the heart and blood ~~and~~ were apportioned to the gods within the temple and then the body was rolled down the pyramid steps to the courtyard below. This descent from the temple to the ground affected a decrease in the sanctity of the body and therefore in the danger involved in handling it, since it was then taken up by the captor and the old men to a local temple (one where the captor had made a special vow to take a prisoner), and here the other parts of the body were distributed. The head was always put on the tzompantli (skull rack) in the courtyard, and a thigh, presumably a choicest part was usually given to Motecuhzoma. This tribute was not only because he was the king and the war leader, but because he was also the spiritual guardian of his people and was officially the head of the 'church'. The priests however do not seem to have partaken of the victim's body; there is no reference to their receiving any portion of a sacrifice. In most cases, the remainder of the body and the skin was taken by the captor and his friends and relatives who made a stew with it called 'tlacatlaolli' - 'man and maize' (21), and consumed it in a communion meal. Where two or three warriors have shared in the taking of a prisoner (up to five were allowed to share the honour and help each other in this way), it was laid down which parts each man received according to his role in the capture (22). At other times, and especially when there were many captives, the old men of the temple divided the bodies so that every quarter of the city had a share, and everyone ate a morsel (23). But whether they took part in eating the flesh or not, everyone benefited from the very performance of the sacrifice and thus



took a keen interest in the success of the warriors in taking captives. In the latter stages of the Aztec empire the numbers of victims increased until hundreds and thousands were sacrificed during important rites. The effect of the sacrifice was placed in both the sacred and the profane worlds , the continuity of substance forming a contact between the two through the object of sacrifice. This is the same continuity described by Hubert and Mauss in Hindu rites, and in the same way it is not only a continuity, but man's benefit is dependant upon that of the gods. For man to consume his share, the victim must have been consecrated and the gods must have had their share. But for man to use the victim, it must have lost some of its powerful and dangerous force. This is partly lost when the spirit is released in the act of sacrifice, and by subsequent rites, until it is safe to be handled and eaten by all those participating in the final communion. Thus the complete communication is achieved between the people and their gods through their offering.

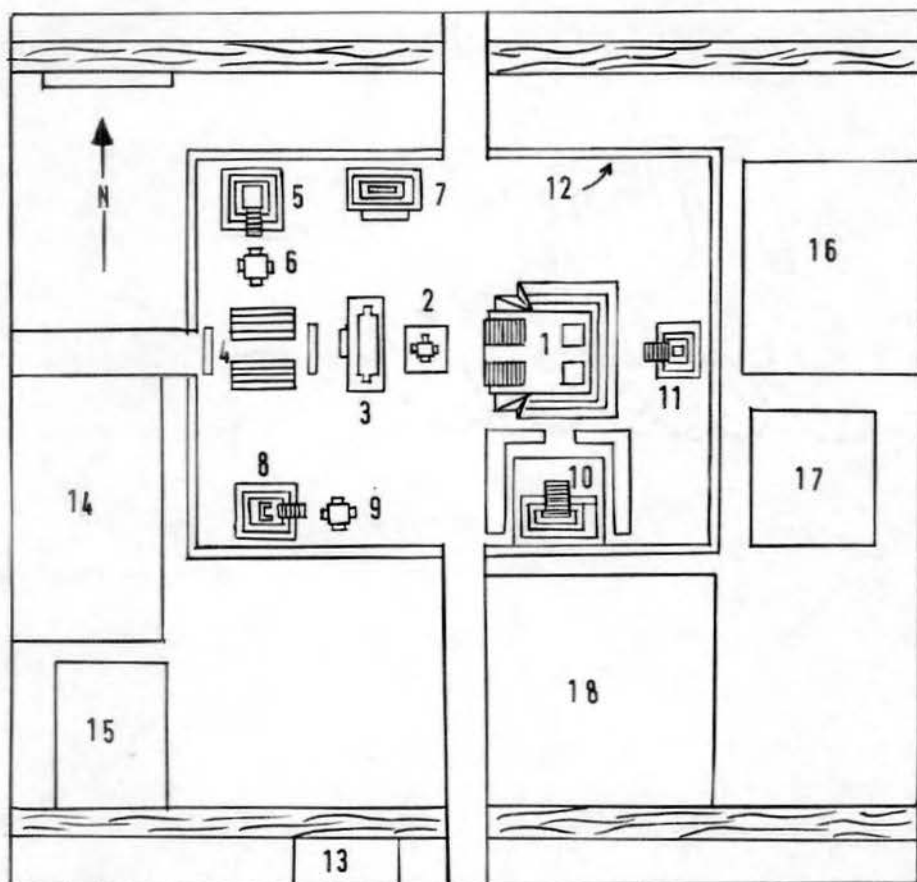
Hubert and Mauss (24) go on to describe the 'rites of exit' necessary to enable the participants to extract themselves from the sacrificial situation, and to re-enter safely into their normal status. Common ways of achieving this are through ritual washing, changing of clothing and changing the name. After Aztec sacrifices, the priests removed their insignia and returned them to the temples; the paper banners and adornments used were burnt with copal incense in braziers. After everyone had dispersed, a general feast and dancing (but still of a religious nature) usually marked the end of the fast and completion of the ceremony. There seem to be no more specific rites of exit, and this may be due to the large and constant part that religion played in everyday life. Some form of prayer

or fasting accompanied almost every activity, and because of the large number of regular and moveable feasts, no sooner was one ceremony over than it was time to prepare for the next, indeed their preparation frequently overlapped. The priests especially were always in a state of ritual purity, and were involved in some sort of sacrifice at least once in the day. There was no sharp division in the society between the secular and the sacred; communication between man and the gods was a continuous process of co-operation established by constant offering. In general Aztec sacrifices were of the objective type and not the personal, that is, the benefit of the sacrifice was passed directly to the sun and other gods, and only indirectly to the people through the strength of the gods, and the eating of the flesh of the victim which has become the substance of the god. Therefore the consecration and release of the spirit became the most important aspect in the majority of Aztec sacrifices, and rites of entry and exit which primarily protect the individual sacrificer are not very prominent.

These then are the basic elements of the mechanism of sacrifice, the consecration, immolation, apportionment and re-entry in the normal life status. In any particular rite, some of these elements may be of little importance or even absent altogether, while others may be emphasised according to the specific function of the rite. This variation in the basic elements can be seen by looking at complete ceremonies in detail within the context of the Aztec cosmology and belief system.

---

FIG. 8:



SACRED PRECINCT OF TENOCHTITLAN IN 1520

from Patrick Gallagher in Coe 1962

KEY TO THE MAP OF THE SACRED PRECINCT

1. The Great Double Temple dedicated to Tlaloc and Huitzilopochtli.
  2. Platform for King Tizoc's huge stone Sun Disc.
  3. Tzompantli; skull rack for the heads of victims.
  4. Ball Court for the Toltec ball-game of Tlachtli.
  5. The Eagle House; warriors meeting place.
  6. Platform for the Great Calendar Stone.
  7. Coacalco, 'house of the serpent', where gods of conquered peoples were held 'prisoner'.
  8. Temple of Xipe Totec.
  9. Temalacatl; stone for gladiatorial sacrifice.
  10. Temple of Tezcatlipoca.
  11. The old temple of Huitzilopochtli.
  12. The Snake Wall enclosing the Sacred Precinct.
  13. Black House, part of the temple of Coatlicue.
  14. Palace of Motecuhzoma I, 1440-69.
  15. House of Songs.
  16. Palace of Axayacatl, 1469-81.
  17. Royal aviary.
  18. Palace of Motecuhzoma II, 1502-20.
-

Source References

1. Hubert and Mauss: Sacrifice, its Nature and Function 1964
2. Soustelle 1964, p.175 quotes Torquemada who agrees with most authorities that children went to school between the ages of six and nine, only the Codex Mendoza states fifteen years.
3. Burland 1923, p.18.
4. Sahagun Book 3, Appendix p.43, described fully the regulations of the priests's house.
5. Castillo described the frightful bloody appearance of the priests and the temples.
6. Native herbs and drugs are described in Codex Badianus by Martin de la Cruz 1552, and in Codex Magliabecchiano. The use of these drugs is discussed in chapter 6.
7. Sahagun sometimes mentions married priests.
8. Soustelle 1964, p.73.
9. as for example in the Binding of the Years (chapter 3) and the Gladiatorial Sacrifice (chapter 4).
10. Bancroft vol.11.pp.312-5.
11. Sahagun Book 8, chapter 17 p.53.
12. ibid Book 2, chapter 20.
13. ibid Book 7, chapter 9 p.32.
14. Burland 1967, p.120 says that cripples and hunchbacks were also sacrificed as representing the monster god Xolotl, the god of darkness, and the Evening Star.
15. Sahagun Book 2, chapter 24 p.64.
16. ibid Appendix p.163.
17. ibid chapter 21.
18. Joyce p.80 quotes the Annales of Quauhtitlan that arrow sacrifice was introduced from Huastec country about 1058.
19. Vaillant p.205 'yauhtli' is a powdered Indian hemp.
20. Castillo vol.1,pp.54-162.
21. Sahagun Book 2, chapter 21 p.46.
22. ibid Book 8, chapter 21 pp.75-76.

23. Thompson, quoting Duran states that only the nobles and warriors ate the flesh, but this may have referred primarily to sacrifices to the sun, the particular god of the nobles and warriors.

24. pp.45-49.

---

Chapter 3    Aztec Cosmology : the War and Sun Cult

The Aztec pantheon was large and complex. Many of the gods they had acquired by conquest, absorbing the gods of cities and provinces they subjugated, others they had inherited from previous cultures in the Valley of Mexico. The various classes and trade guilds had their own patron gods, the feather workers, gold-workers and lapidaries all held their own particular festivals in local temples, clubbing together to buy slaves at the slave market in Atzacapotzalco to offer as a sacrifice.\* The patron gods of the warriors and nobles were the old stellar and war gods of the ancient hunting cultures, which had made repeated incursions into the sedentary towns and cities of the Valley. Huitzilopochtli had been the leader of the Aztecs before they settled in the Valley, Tezcatlipoca had been a Toltec war god, Mixcoatl and Camaxtli were other local war gods adopted by the Aztecs. For the agricultural peasant population the gods of rain and maize held their special allegiance; the rain god Tlaloc was as ancient as the first beginnings of agriculture in Meso-america. Each province, town and quarter of the city worshipped their own local god and jealously guarded his place in their worship. Thus group and local loyalties served to perpetuate the multiplicity of gods, and many of them had over-lapping attributes and functions.

This was at the simpler level of worship among the common folk; the highly trained priesthood and the intellectual elite of the tlamatime or philosophers, sought to unify the plethora of gods into a few basic theological precepts.

\* The feather-workers of Amantlan quarter offered slaves to Coyotl inauial during Panquetzaliztli (Sahagun Bk.9.ch.18&19).

Chief in the pantheon was Ometeotl, the self-generating divinity considered to be both male and female and called Ometecuhtli and his consort Omecihuatl - Lord and Lady of Duality. They embodied the principle of duality which pervaded all Aztec thinking. This pair were known by many names, Leon-Portilla (1) quotes at least thirteen pairs of names, male and female, referring to their various functions. As Citlallatonac 'she of the starry skirt', and Chalchiuhtlatonac 'he who shines like a sun of jade', were the sources of celestial radiance, the stars and the sun. As the spindle of the universe inhabiting the navel of the earth, they were Xiuh-tecuhtli, Fire god and Lord of Time. Fire was a symbol of the centre, as the hearth was the centre of every Aztec home and was placed before every temple. Another name for Ometeotl was Tloque Nahuague, 'Lord of the Close Vicinity', this name emphasised his invisible omnipresence and nearness. The omnipotence attributed to this god is clearly evident in the following poem quoted by Leon-Portilla (2) from the Codice Florentino.

Our Master, the Lord of the Close Vicinity,  
thinks and does what He wishes; He determines,  
He amuses Himself.  
As He wishes, so will it be.  
In the palm of His hand He had us; at His will he shifts  
us around.  
We shift around, like marbles we roll, He rolls us  
around endlessly.  
We are but toys to Him; He laughs at us.

The Divine Duality created all the other gods and through them, man himself. It was believed that in their form as 'in Tonan in Tota' - 'Our Mother and Father', they planted the soul into each unborn child, deciding its birth date and thereby its fate throughout life.



It was said, that in the twelfth heaven  
our fates were determined.  
When the child is conceived,  
when he is placed in the womb,  
his fate comes to him there;  
it is sent to him by the Lord of the Duality. (3).

They were believed to inhabit the highest of the thirteen heavens, in the place called Omeyocan, which in fact spanned both the twelfth and thirteenth levels. Being so far removed from the everyday concerns of the mass of the people, they figured little in the regular round of worship (except at pregnancy and birth), and no sacrifices were offered to them specifically, but only through their various manifestations, and the gods they created. But as a theological concept they figured a great deal in the holy chants and poems of the wise men, the 'tlamatinime'.\* These were often specialised priests who, although trained in the calmecac and sometimes teachers there, followed philosophical thought somewhat independent of the formal religion. A great poet and philosopher was the King of Tezcucoc, Nezahualcoyotl. His thoughts on the nature of Ometeotl appear to have been based on a more ancient concept of the cosmology since he refers to his abode in the ninth heaven, while most contemporary sources agree on there being thirteen.

In the ninth world is the Cause of All, of us and of all created things, and the one only god who created all things both visible and invisible. (4).

Tloque Nahuaque is here described as the supreme creative principle. This seems to be the nearest the Aztecs approached to the idea of a monotheistic supreme being, but he was still

\* literally 'he who knows things'.

thought of as creator and source of power of all the other gods, and not as a single principle replacing them. Moreover these speculations did not prevent Nezauhualcoyotl from playing a full part in the holy wars and regular sacrifices. The highest degree of spirituality was reached by the tlamatinime whose modes of thought were far in advance of the popular religion. They meditated on the deepest metaphysical questions, on the meaning of existence and the possibilities of life after death, and were not always satisfied with the traditional answers in myth and religion. However significant this movement was in shaping the philosophy of the Nahuatl, it continued quite independently of the popular cult of human sacrifice. Nevertheless this cult was based on philosophical and mythical premises. The mythico-religious sanctions for sacrifice lay in the very creation of the universe.

In an ancient account of the origin of the universe (5) it was said that Ometecuhtli and Omecihuatl gave birth to four sons, each of which was identified with one of the four directions. One was the Red Tezcatlipoca presiding in the East, the land of light and fertility. The second was the Black Tezcatlipoca, associated with the North, the dark, cold and barren region of death. Thirdly was Quetzalcoatl, the invisible wind, associated with the West, the land of women. The fourth son was called the Blue Tezcatlipoca, he was later identified with Huitzilopochtli and governed the South. The influence of this quarter was uncertain and was therefore symbolised by the rabbit which could jump in any direction.

These four sons were the four cosmic forces whose activity created all other things and motions of the universe. They each struggled for supremacy; each in turn identifying

themselves with the sun. Each time one of the forces ruled over the universe it was called a Sun or Age. When one god was overcome by the force of another, the age and all its inhabitants were destroyed by a natural cataclysm.\* There were therefore four different Suns, in the first the inhabitants were eaten by ocelots ( a symbol of the earth). In the second the sun and all the inhabitants were swept away by a wind. The destruction of the third was by fire and the fourth by water. Thus the four cosmic forces were associated not only with the four directions, but with the four primordial elements of earth, air, fire and water.

The present or fifth Sun was created when all the gods came to an agreement, and two of them immolated themselves in the primordial fire and were transformed into the sun and the moon. They hung there inert until all the gods were sacrificed which enabled the sun to move. The fifth Sun was therefore called the Sun of Movement, it was created on the day 'nau'ollin', ' four movement'. The present harmony was maintained by each of the sons or directions taking it in turns to influence the activities of the universe, thus resulting in the dynamic alternation of their forces. Each group of years, months and even days was ruled over by a different one of the four directions, and each one presided in turn. The sacrifice and active harmony of the gods in this way created the sun and saved it from inertia, giving it the momentum to move along its prescribed path, through the heavens during the day and under the earth at night. Within this framework of the struggle for supremacy between the cosmic forces, and their restraint by the alternation of their influence

\* Archaeological evidence from lava and flood deposits suggests that the myth of several creations may be based upon fact.  
( Soustelle 1969)

in a dynamic pattern, the various cosmic events were viewed and understood. This is what Leon-Portilla called the 'spacialization of time', every division of time comes within the influence of each of the directions and primordial elements in turn, and each therefore has its distinctive qualities and significance in the life of man. Time and space within the universe were not therefore conceptualised separately.

It was foretold that the fifth Sun would be destroyed eventually as all the others had been. On a day 'nau'ollin', at the end of a 52-year cycle, the world would be devastated by earthquake and famine. To postpone this imminent destruction by maintaining the harmony of the cosmic forces, the Aztecs believed it their sacred mission to supply the gods, especially the sun, with the source of cosmic energy and life the 'precious liquid' - 'chalchihuatl', human blood.

In the mythical example of the gods: "Human sacrifice was an alchemy by which life was made out of death;...As for man, his very first duty was to provide nourishment 'in totia in tota tlaltecuhtli tonatiuh', 'for our mother and father the earth and the sun'; and to shirk this was to betray the gods and at the same time all mankind, for what was true of the sun was also true of the earth, the rain, growth, and all the forces of nature. Nothing was born, nothing could endure, except by the blood of sacrifice." (6)

The enormous number of gods from different sources were usually identified with one or other of the directions, and so became absorbed into the general theology. For example Xipe Totec (originally an Huastec god), was god of spring and the germinating seed. He became associated with the Red Tezcatlipoca of the east, the place of daily resurrection of the sun and thus appropriate for the annual resurrection of nature.

The thirteen heavens, 'the region above us', was inhabited at various levels by the stellar gods, and at the thirteenth by the Lord and Lady of Duality, (fig.9). There were also several levels in the dark regions under the earth, the Land of the Dead called Mictlan, presided over by Mictlantecuhtli and his wife. The souls of the dead had to pass through nine phases or ordeals, first crossing over a river with the help of a small sandy-coloured jóg which had been killed for this purpose at the funeral. Passing through a storm of sharp flint blades the soul finally disappeared in the depths of the ninth region. This was not a hell for there was no thought of perdition, with some exceptions to be considered shortly, everyone passed through these regions of death whether slave or noble, and whatever their standard of morality when alive. The ordeals to be gone through were more the reflections of the hardships of life than ideas of divine punishment. There were two other destinations for those who died in particular ways. Those who died from drowning or from causes thought to be connected with water (lightening, dropsy, leprosy), went to Tlalocan; the green fertile paradise of Tlaloc were all was plentiful. The souls of warriors killed in battle or upon the sacrificial stone went to the House of the Sun, 'Tonatiuhichan', to be 'companions of the Eagle'. They helped the sun win his daily battle over the stars and accompanied him on his journey from the east to the zenith. After four years spent in celestial battles they were reincarnated as humming birds, a truly delightful prospect. This paradise was also reserved for the souls of women who had died in childbirth, considered as courageous a death as that on the battlefield. Their's was the land of the west, 'Cuitlampa', they accompanied the sun from the zenith

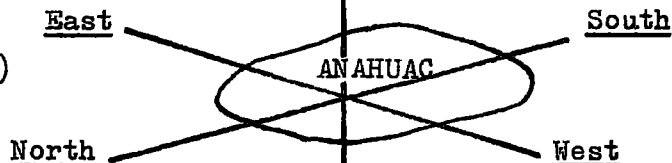
FIG.9

NAHUA COSMOLOGY

The Thirteen Heavens

	Omeyocan	13	Divine Duality
	Chichihuacuauhco	12	Souls of Unborn Children
		11	Unknown
		10	
		9	Gods
		8	Place of Storms
		7	Gods of Day and Night
		6	Dust and Winds
		5	Comets (Citlalinpopoca)
	Ilhuicatl huitzlan	4	House of Venus (The Big Star)
	Ilhuicatl Tonatiuh	3	House of the Sun; Stars
		2	Place of Stars; Tzitzimime
		1	Moon; Clouds; Planets

Four Directions  
(Horizontal Plane)



Mictlan: Land of the Dead  
and the obstacles to be  
passed through

- 1 River to Cross
- 2 Two Mountains
- 3 Obsidian Mountain
- 4 Bitter Winds
- 5 Waving Banners
- 6 Flying Arrows
- 7 Wild Beasts
- 8 Narrow Pass
- 9 Final Resting Place

(Vertical Plane)

At the centre of the horizontal plane was Anahuac, the physical world surrounded by a ring of water; 'Cem-anahuac' - 'that which is entirely surrounded by water', this formed the whole physical world. Whether it was intended or not, this orientation accords with both the early Aztec 'world' of Tenochtitlan surrounded by the lake of Texcuco, and the later empire stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific Oceans. Presiding over the directions at the centre, the navel of the earth and spindle of the universe was Xiuhtecūhtli, the ancient Fire God and an aspect of Ometotl who presided in Omeyocan over the entire universe.

into the dark region under the earth to be risen again the next morning by the celestial warriors. Infant children had a paradise of their own called 'Chichihuacuauhco' - 'in the wet-nurse tree', because they were nourished by the milk which came in drops from this tree in the twelfth heaven, the House of Tonacacihuatl, from which they were probably born again.

All learning was in the hands of the priests. Specialists in divination kept and interpreted the tonalamatl, or Book of Fate, based on the astrological calendar. This calendar the 'tonalpohualli', was the 260-day count with which they divined the times for the moveable feasts, or the auspicious days for trading, warring or performing any particularly important undertaking. When a child was born a priest would be asked to read its fate (tonalli) from the book according to its hour and day of birth, and to which deity and direction was ruling over that period. So binding was fate thought to be upon the individual, that if a child was born at a particularly inauspicious time the parents would wait a day or two until a favourable sign was dominant before having the child 'baptised' and named, so hoping to balance out the bad influences of the birth time. The name usually given was that of the day sign. Divination in this way revealed whether the individual would lead a good life, be industrious or lazy, have success or be a failure and so on. It seems there was room for one to overcome a bad sign, but only by the sort of self-control and dedication which formed the basis of the Aztec education system, both at home and in the schools. Through discipline, austerity and suffering man gained the strength to influence his own destiny. Everyone had frequent recourse to diviners throughout their lives, the date to start school, marry and so on were all of vital importance.

The Tonalpouhque were specialists in divining, they had been educated at the calmecac where the priests were trained but had not become members of the priesthood. Instead they became self-employed 'soothsayers', the Tonalpouhque and the various types of medicine healer were highly respected positions in society.

The central concept in Aztec religion was that man played an essential part in nature's cycle of death and rebirth. Every year the vegetation died and returned to earth, each spring it was reborn. Earth was both womb and tomb for man as well as vegetation. Moreover death was thought essential for the renewal and continuation of life. At every sacrifice a situation of death became a situation of life for all those taking part, because life could only be bought with life. In the act of sacrifice the essence of life was given up to invigorate the sun and other gods (the personifications of nature), that they might be replenished and propitiated to provide man with the means for his survival. Religion did not seek to control nature as something distinct from man, because he himself was part of nature, and because man alone was powerless. Religion was the means by which man played his part in nature's rhythm of destruction and recreation, as a part of nature man had to live by nature's rules however harsh and unremitting. Aztec poetry is full of expressions of man's role as an ephemeral particle on earth, who can only survive by dedication to the performance of his part in the cosmic process. An extract from a poem by Nezahualcoyotl shows clearly this fatalistic belief in the evanescence of earthly things. He compares life's splendours to the fleeting blossoms of flowers:-



The reign of flowers is short. In the morning they boast of their beauty and strength, but by evening they mourn for the destruction of their thrones and the misfortunes which lead to loss, poverty, and the grave.

All things on earth have an end, and in the midst of the happiest life our breath fails. We falter and fall to earth.

All the earth is a grave. Nothing escapes. Nothing is so perfect that it does not fall and disappear. The river, brooks, fountains, and waters flow onward and never return to their delightful source. They hurry to the vast immaterial kingdom, and the broader their banks the swifter they reach the tomb.

That which was yesterday is not today. That which is today may not be tomorrow. (7)

But their acceptance of the realities of their world did not lead to lithargy or despair;

"Their's was an active pessimism; it did not result in a discouraged idleness but in a fiery zeal for the sacred war, in ardent services of the gods, in the building of cities, and the conquest of empires. Brought face to face with a pitiless universe, the Mexicans did not attempt to veil it with illusions, but eked out the precarious scrap of life that the god had granted him with an untameable strength, with labour, and with blood." (8)

If man was not constantly performing his duty, the sun would perish and the Tzitzimime (the supernatural demons who inhabited the second heaven), would descend onto earth and devour everyone. The Aztecs were the chosen people of the sun, their duty lay in fasting, penance, and above all in the sacrifice of the most precious offering, brave and valiant enemy warriors, that their hearts and blood might sustain the sun. Such success in war was only possible by the favour of the

gods, and its main purpose was to provide sustenance for the gods that man's life might continue.

The Aztec's sacred duty was to maintain the sun by the blood of sacrifice, in the same way as the sun itself had been created by the blood of the gods who sacrificed themselves in the ancient sacred city of Teotihuacan. According to this myth (9), after the destruction of the four previous suns, the world was still dark because there was yet no fifth sun, and so the gods took council together at Teotihuacan saying, "Come thither, O gods! Who will carry the burden? Who will take it upon himself to be the sun, to bring the dawn?" One of the gods called Teccuciztecatl came forward and offered to be the one. The gods looked around for another one but they all drew back in fear. They called out to Nanauatzin, a scabby god covered in sores saying, he should be the other one and he eagerly agreed.. A new fire was made and laid in a hearth they called Teotexcalli, and the two gods performed penances for four days. Teccuciztecatl's offerings were all costly, for fir branches he used precious quetzal feathers, for grass balls he used gold. His maguey spines were of green stones, his bloodied spines were of coral, and he used the best incense. Nanauatzin had only fir branches of green water reeds which he bound in threes to make nine bundles. His grass balls were dried pine needles, and he used real maguey spines covered in his own blood. For incense he used the scabs from his own sores. After four nights they threw away all the things with which they had done penance, and at midnight the gods gave these two their adornment. To Teccuciztecatl they gave a heron feather headdress and sleeveless jacket ( a warrior's array), but to Nanauatzin only paper headdress and garments. Then all the gods gathered

before the fire that had been burning for four days and said, "Take courage, O Teccuciztecatl; fall, - cast thyself in the fire!" He went forward to cast himself in but the heat from the flames terrified him and he turned back. Four times he tried but each time he dared not, he could try no more, he was only allowed four attempts. Nanauatzin was called upon next and with determination he shut his eyes and quickly, without fear, flung himself into the fire. When Teccuciztecatl saw this he threw himself in also. While they burned the gods waited, and after a long time the dawn began to redden and the sun burst forth in the east. The light was so intense it was impossible to look on him, his brilliance penetrated evrywhere. Then Teccuciztecatl rose up as the moon, but he was of equal brilliance to the sun so one of the gods flung a rabbit in his face, wounding him and darkening his face as it is today. But neither the sun nor the moon were able to move, and the gods decided that through them the sun should be revived and they agreed that they should all die. In one account Xolotl is chosen to kill all the gods by cutting open their breasts, and finally killing himself. Another version states that even when all the gods were dead the sun still did not move until the wind blew violently upon it.\*

Nanauatzin achieved the strength and courage for his self-immolation through genuine penance, suffering and humility before the gods. Teccuciztecatl, by his lack of proper spiritual preparation and suffering, lacked the courage and was duly shamed by darkening his face.

Ever since this example of the gods man had collaborated in this inflexible process of renewal by sacrifice. Each day when the sun rose, incense was offered and quail were slain and

\* Xolotl and the wind are both forms of Quetzalcoatl (appendix Ll).

~~and~~ dedicated to the sun which was invoked with these words; "The sun hath come forth - the shafts of heat, the turquoise child, the soaring eagle. And how he will go on, or how he may tarry we know not. Work, perform thy office for us, O our Lord." (10) The quail was a black bird with white speckles like the dark night sky sprinkled with stars, and probably symbolised the sun's victory over the stars and the darkness.

The sun was said to have been created on the day 'nau'ollin' (four movements), and so on that day-sign which came about every 260 days, the members of the military Knightly Orders and all the warriors and nobles attended a ceremony for the sun which they regarded as their special patron (11). (Although everyone did military service as a youth and whenever called upon in later life, long-standing service was given by the nobility who occupied the high ranks and gained most of the honours, they also comprised most of the membership of the Knightly Orders).

The ceremony took place in the House of the Eagles, a temple within the Sacred Precinct of the city. The two main Orders were called Eagles and Ocelots, which were the cult names for the sun of daytime and the sun at night respectively,\* and the House of Eagles was their particular temple. All those taking part in the ceremony fasted and did penances for four days, then on the day 'nau'ollin' every person in the city observed a strict fast, not even the children or the sick were allowed to eat until after midday when the ceremony was complete. The priests blew shell trumpets to call the people to assemble at the temple, and the prisoner of war was brought forward

\* The black markings of the ocelot and black feathers of the eagle were said to have been caused by their going into the sooty embers of the fire after the creation of the sun (Sahagun).

accompanied by a throng of nobles. The prisoner's legs were painted with red and white stripes, half his face was reddened, and white plumage was stuck in his hair. This decoration is typical of that of the stellar gods (fig.10). In one hand he carried a staff decorated with loops and knots of leather in which feathers had been inserted, and in the other he held a shield with five balls of cotton on it. On his back he carried a bundle containing pieces of red ochre, eagle feathers, gypsum, pinewood soot and pieces of paper decorated with stripes of liquid rubber. All of these are ritual materials used in the insignia of stellar and war gods, and by the warriors on festive occasions. The prisoner was placed at the foot of the pyramid steps and addressed in a loud voice, "Sir, we beg you to go to our god, the sun, and salute him on our behalf. Tell him that his children the knights and chiefs, who remain here beg him to remember us and favour us from where he is. Ask him to receive this small present which we send him. Give him this staff to walk with, and this shield to defend himself, together with the other objects which you carry in this bundle." The prisoner replied that he would be pleased to do so, for it was an honour to die by sacrifice and become 'a companion of the Eagle'. Death in battle or upon the stone was the only befitting one for a warrior, and as the Aztec's enemies shared similar religious convictions, these were the captive's beliefs too. The prisoner was released and began his ascent to the temple. He proceeded very slowly, pausing for some time on each step to symbolise the slow passage of the sun across the sky. When he reached the summit, he walked to the huge carved stone platform which had in the centre the symbol of the sun and a set of steps at each corner, he ascended and stood on

top of the stone. In a loud voice he addressed the image of the sun hanging over the altar of the temple, turning occasionally to the real sun. When he had finished, four priests climbed upon the stone, each ascending by a different set of steps. They took the staff, shield, and bundle, and grasped his hands and feet. Then the chief priest, ascending with the sacrificial knife in his hand, cut the prisoner's throat, bidding him go with his message to the real sun whom he would meet in his next life. The priests poured the blood onto a font from which it ran down into a canal to spill out in front of the image of the sun carved in the stone. As soon as all the blood had drained away they opened the victim's breast, and taking out the heart they raised it up in dedication to the sun until it grew cold. The ceremony was timed so that the victim ascended the steps exactly at midday when the sun was at its height. Temple priests blew the conch shells as a sign that the fast was over and all might now eat. The priests placed the bundle, staff and shield beside the image of the sun, and took the body of the victim to his captor. The feast was solemnised by eating the flesh of the victim with great reverence, in a communion rite. The usual method of sacrifice by the Aztecs was to remove the heart of the victim, cutting the throat first in this instance is probably because blood, as the vehicle of life and strength was particularly necessary to this ritual, to give the sun the energy to continue its daily passage across the sky. Offerings of blood from the ears, tongue and limbs of the body were made constantly by the priests and the devout to this end.

To stop making offerings was considered fatal, the Tzitzimime (demons and monstrous spirits), were a constant

Figure 10 - overleaf

MIXCOATL, Cloud Serpent, the black mask, feather headdress and striped body-paint are typical of the stellar gods. He holds a shield, arrows, war banner and a hunter's net bag in his left hand. In his right is his spear-thrower.

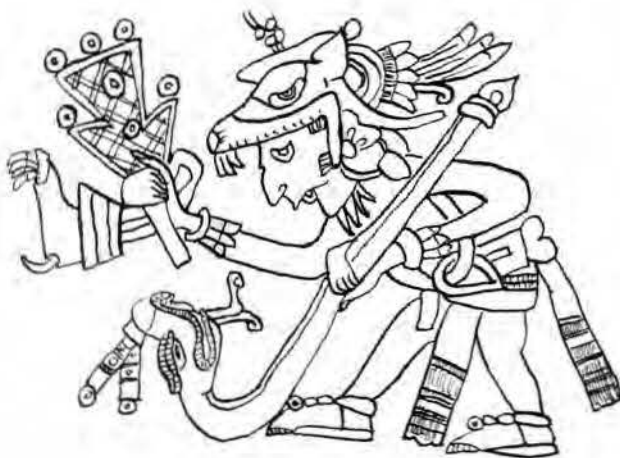
IZTAC MIXCOATL , White Cloud Serpent, an aspect of Mixcoatl. He wears a heron-feather headdress, and a helmet mask of a deer's head. His staff is in the shape of a serpent. His beard shows him as a very old god, and was considered the Father of the Chichimec tribe.

FIG. 10



Mixcoatl

Codex Magliabecchiana



Iztac Mixcoatl

Codex Borgia



threat. The myth tells of four previous creations or Suns, all of which had been destroyed by natural cataclysms such as fire, flood and violent wind, and the present sun was doomed to destruction on a day 'four movement' or 'earthquake' at the end of a 52-year cycle. Total destruction had happened before, and with this precedent the Aztecs knew that nature could withhold from man his means of survival, and that the sun would one day fail to rise. Man's propitiation and coercion could not automatically gain results; man in no way controlled the forces of nature around him. Bearing this in mind it is easy to understand the extreme importance to the Aztecs of the New Fire ceremony held at the end of every 52-year period. This was called a 'bundle' of years, and had great calendrical and astronomical significance, (see appendix V). This ceremony was also called the 'Binding of the Years', for it marked the end of one life and the hope of another, but only a hope, for until the priests had seen the signs in the sky they did not know whether light and life would continue. (12)

On the day of the great feast, the fires in all the temples and houses were put out. The three hearth stones used for cooking, household utensils and all the little stone and wooden images of the gods were thrown away into the lake. Everywhere houses and temples were swept and cleaned, all rubbish was taken up and thrown away. During the first quarter of the night, all the priests and servants of the temple departed in a solemn procession from Tenochtitlan to the summit of a sacred hill called Uixachtecatl near Itzapalapan (fig.4). All the priests were dressed in sacred insignia, each representing one of the gods. They walked very slowly and reached the

temple pyramid just before midnight. The Fire Priest of Copulco\* was the one who would make the new fire, and as they waited for midnight he practiced with his fire-drill, for it was believed that if fire could not be drawn, the sun would be destroyed and the stars and planets would turn into demons and descend to earth to devour man. All the people waited in dread on their house-tops or any vantage point from which to see if and when the fire was made. Pregnant women wore maguey-leaf masks and were locked in granaries for it was feared that if the fire failed, they too would turn into demons. Children were also masked and kept awake all night lest they should turn into mice. Everyone looked toward the summit in expectation. On the summit the priests waited until the Pleiades<sup>‡</sup> were at their zenith at the correct time then they knew that the end of the world was not imminent. The Fire Priest immediately drilled new fire upon the breast of a captive and when the flames shot forward, he slashed the breast of the victim removed his heart and fed the fire with it. They threw the body of the victim onto the bon-fire they had made and everyone rejoiced. As soon as the people saw the new fire they cut their ears and spattered the blood in the direction of the fire, even the children had their ears cut. The fastest of the city's runners then took firebrands from the bon-fire and ran swiftly to the temple of Huitzilopochtli and set the flames in the new hearth prepared with much copal incense. Priests took new fire from here to all the other temples in the city, and the people took fire for their domestic hearths from great central bon-fires made in each quarter of the city,

\*. Copulco was one of the important temples in Tenochtitlan.

‡ Leon-Portilla also says the Pleiades (tianquiztli), but Caso suggests they took the sign from Aldebaran.

until every hearth was relit with new fire as quickly as possible. Everyone now renewed their household goods, utensils and clothes, images of the gods were remade and frequently new temples were built on top of the old. Dressed in their new garments the people were happy and joyful that life had been spared. Incense was offered and quail sacrificed. Everyone was instructed to fast until midday, when captives and ceremonially bathed slaves were sacrificed to the new fire.

As in the myth of the creation of the sun, all the gods were present on the sacred hill waiting, this time not for the sun to rise, but for the vital evidence in the planets that the universe was to continue. The symbol of this was the birth of the new fire, fed by the heart of the captive. The Fire God in his form as the Polar Star was the spindle of the universe as well as the primeval fire; the fire of creation and essential source of heat and light from which even the sun got his power and without which nothing existed. It was through immolation by fire that the sun was created, and by the offering of hearts and blood that it was nourished to follow its daily course. Therefore after the creation of the new fire, at midday captives and slaves were sacrificed to nourish the fire, strengthen the sun, and sustain the cosmic process which would continue for a further 52 years.

The name given to the sun was Tonatiuh - 'he who shines', or such metaphorical terms as 'precious turquoise', 'quetzal-feather', or 'soaring eagle' were used, (fig.11). All these names refer to him as a luminary, and as a mythical sacred land to which the souls of dead warriors were sent. But later the sun was closely associated with other gods of a more personalised nature and frequently represented by them,

especially Huitzilopochtli - the god of war and national hero of the Aztecs. It is fitting that the god of war should represent the sun, since the daily rising and setting of the sun was regarded as a daily battle with the stars. The souls of dead and sacrificed warriors fought in this celestial battle to help the sun to victory, while their counterparts on earth fought terrestrial battles indirectly for the same purpose. The symbol for the day sun was the eagle, for the sun at night the ocelot, and these were the names of two of the Knightly Orders of prominent warriors and nobles in Mexico.\* This association between earthly and celestial war is depicted in the myth of Huitzilopochtli's birth (13). His mother was Coatlicue, also mother of the Centzonhuitznauac ( the 'four-hundred southerners', or stars of the southern sky), and of Coyolauhqui, the moon. Coatlicue lived on Coatepec, the Serpent Mountain, and one day she was performing a penance there by sweeping the temple when she found a ball of feathers, (symbolising the soul of a warrior killed in battle or upon the stone), and she placed it in her bosom. But when her task was finished the feathers had gone, and Coatlicue discovered she had conceived a child. When her other children the stars and moon saw this, they became angry that she should so dishonour and shame them; they wondered who was the cause of her conception. They decided to kill her. Coatlicue was terrified by this, but the child in her womb comforted her and told her not to be afraid. The moon roused the anger of the stars and they prepared for war. Like seasoned warriors they wound up their hair and bound it with warriors' array, and they wore bells on their legs. However,

\* Vaillant (p.219) mentions a third, Arrow Order, rarely written of in native accounts.

Figure 11 - overleaf

In Codex Borbonicus Tonatiuh wears a quetzal-feather headdress, and a back device of a death's head and quetzal feathers. Around his neck and arms are jewels - precious green chalchihuitls stones, gold and turquoise which indicate his high rank. He carries the symbols of war in his left hand, and a fiery serpent in the other.

In Codex Borgia Tonatiuh is seated on a platform covered in ocelot skin. His face, body paint and hair are yellow, and he is decked in chalchihuitl stones, turquoise mosaics, a large gold disc on his breast and gold bells on his legs. His headdress is of eagle feathers, with a humming bird attached to his jewelled head-band and a parrot's head as a back device.

Both these codices are pre-columbian.

FIG.11



Tonatiuh : Codex Borbonicus



Tonatiuh : Codex Borgia

a traitor among them named Quauitl icac who kept Huitzilopochtli, still, in the womb, informed of their movements and their approach to the mountain on which Huitzilopochtli's mother dwelt. He informed him when they reached Tzompantitlan, Coaxalapan, and Apetlac, and then when they were half way up the mountain. When they reached the top, Huitzilopochtli burst forth from his mother's womb fully armed. He had a shield, darts and dart-thrower; his face paint was yellow with blue horizontal stripes, and his forehead and ears were pasted with feathers. The sole of his foot, the left foot, was pasted with feathers and his thighs and upper arms were stained blue. With his weapon, the Fire Serpent 'Xiuhcoatl', he pierced the moon, striking off her head which came to rest on the slope of Coatepetl, her body rolled down the slope crashing into pieces which fell in various places. Huitzilopochtli then arose and pursued the stars, scattering them to the base of the mountain around which he chased them four times. In vain they fought against him as he overpowered and destroyed them. They cried out 'Let this be enough' but he would not stop. Only a very few fled and escaped, they went to a haven in the south. When he had slain them he took from them their adornment, their paper crowns decorated with feathers, and arrayed himself in them as his insignia.

Again the theme of this myth is the resurrecting power of sacrifice; the sun is born each dawn when the spirit of a sacrificed warrior impregnates the earth. Many ideas expressed in the myth were dramatised during the festival of Panquetzaliztli (Raising of War Banners), held in honour of Huitzilopochtli at the time of the winter solstice (14). The victims were painted in the colours of the god's insignia. Their legs and arms were painted in blue stripes; their faces striped with yellow and blue,

and they wore nose-plugs of an arrow and a half disc (fig.12). Many of the victims were slaves bought and offered by merchants, and were ceremonially bathed before the feast day.\* The woman who was to bathe them first bathed herself at the lake edge and set up on the bank a thorn stained with her own blood. The priests fasted for eighty days before the feast, but the owners of the slaves fasted only four days. On the day of the feast, the twentieth day of the month, the victims or 'bathed ones' as they were called took part in a mock battle. Adorned in Huitzilopochtli's insignia they fought against a group which were called the Uitznauac (the southerners), corresponding to the Centzonuitznauac, the stars in the myth. These Uitznauac were aided by a number of warriors. The battle was in earnest, if the 'bathed ones' caught their opponents they slew them by cutting open their breasts, using the ceremonial two-toned drum as a sacrificial stone. As in real war, the purpose was not just to kill the enemy, but to capture and sacrifice them in the proper ritual manner. After the mock battle the 'bathed ones' were led to the temple of Huitzilopochtli and circled the pyramid four times. A priest brought down from the temple the Fire Serpent, made of red arara feathers so that it looked like a blazing firebrand. Its tail was made of paper two or three fathoms long, and as it was carried down its tongue was made to dart in and out like a real serpent. It was dedicated to the four directions, taken to the eagle-vessel at the base of the pyramid and burnt there. Now the victims ascended the temple just as the stars had approached the

\* The fact that merchants offered many of the victims reflects the growing importance of their position in Aztec society, the special bathing was presumably to increase the ritual standing of the slaves to the level of the captives taken by warriors.



Figure 12 - overleaf

Huitzilopochtli - This drawing is from the Florentine Codex, from the drawings by Paso y Troncoso. Huitzilopochtli carries a shield, decorated with eagle's down in the form of the quincunx, a bundle of darts, and a dart-thrower in the shape of the Fire Serpent; the weapon with which the sun defeats the powers of darkness. Around his ankles and knees are tied little gold bells. Tied to his left arm appears to be an amulet made from a human arm; warriors sought the arms of women who had died in child-birth, believing them to contain the magical properties to make them invincible in war.

FIG. 12



Huitzilopochtli : Florentine Codex



Ensigns of the Ocelot and Eagle Knightly Orders carrying war banners: Codex Borbonicus

mountain on which Huitzilopochtli stood. It appears from the ritual that the Serpent Mountain and the temple of Huitzilopochtli were one; the place names mentioned by Quauitl icac when describing the approach of the stars, are locations in the temple. Tzompantitlan was the place where the skull rack stood in the temple courtyard, on which were placed the heads of sacrificed victims. Coaxalapan means 'serpent sand place' and may have been the place for the form of dedication prior to sacrifice when victims were said to 'have entered the sand' (15). Apetlac was the name given to the landing at the bottom of the steps leading to the temple. As in the myth, the killing took place at the top and the bodies were rolled quickly down the steps to the bottom, as the body of the moon rolled down the Serpent Mountain.

Coatlicue, mother of Huitzilopochtli and all the stars, was also called 'Our Serpent Mother', and Spence describes her nature in the pantheon as that of the flower-covered earth of spring from which the sun was born, begotten of the soul of a sacrificed warrior. The earth is represented by the Serpent Mountain which was her abode. Thus in the myth as the young sun bursting forth from the womb of earth, and as the patron god of warriors who perform their battles on earth to provide the blood, the hearts and the souls of captive warriors, Huitzilopochtli formed a link between the celestial and the earthly wars. This is what is meant by the song of Huitzilopochtli quoted by Spence:-

Huitzilopochtli the warrior, no-one is my equal  
Not in vain have I put on my vestment of yellow feathers  
For through me the sun has risen. (16)

Although there were obvious political advantages to the state in having such a well organised warrior class, war was

primarily a ceremonial affair of great ritual importance. \* Sahagun (17) described the dress of the leaders when they went to fight. They wore headdresses and shirts made of costly spoon-bill feathers, and quetzal feathers. On their backs they carried huge wicker carrying frames with skin drums decorated in gold. Their shields were edged with gold and decorated with precious feathers. Warriors of the Ocelot Order wore tight-fitting ocelot skin suits with great ocelot-head masks over their heads (fig.16). The king's array, drum and headdress were all in blue cotinga feathers, one of the colours of Huitzilopochtli representing the blue sky.

When the battle was to be fought the priests divined an auspicious day and led the columns of warriors, carrying images of their gods upon their backs, just as the priests had done during the historical migration of the Aztec tribe. The signal to begin battle was given by the priests making new fire with a fire-drill on the battle-field. Behind the priests came the veteran warriors of Mexico, followed by the young warriors and those of the allies Tezcuco and Tlacopan. The rear ranks were composed of men from other allied provinces. Rewards went only to those who took captives, no matter how many enemies a warrior might kill he received no recognition until he took a prisoner, alone or with the help of others, for sacrifice. The young inexperienced youths had their heads shaved except for a tuft at the back of their heads. If they took a captive with the help of others (up to five were allowed to share in the taking of a

\* Prestige and acquisition of tribute became of increasing importance as the state grew in power; the complexity of the society demanded food and other materials from farther afield, famines and shortages always increased warring activities.

captive), the back tuft was removed leaving a tuft on the right. If he took a captive alone he was called a leading youth, and was dressed up in yellow and red body- and face-paint, his head covered in feathers and taken before Motecuhzoma to receive praise and gifts. The more captives a man took, he was rewarded by being allowed to wear increasingly fine and elaborate clothing, and even grants of land with peasants to work them. But promotion also depended on the quality of prisoners, for example the Huastecs were considered cowardly warriors and to take a Huastec warrior as a prisoner counted for little, but to capture a Uexotzinco was considered very valorous indeed. Those who took three captives were made Masters of Youths, and trained the young men in the military training schools, the *telpochcalli*. Seasoned warriors were those who had taken four captives and they received much honour and great renown.

Despite the importance of the stone-workers, gold-beaters, lapidaries and other artisans in making the ritual objects and images of the gods, the most honoured profession, except perhaps the priesthood, was that of the warrior. Everyone was expected to do their duty in the battle-field, even the priests fought and took captives as well as acting as spiritual and ritual guides. Even merchants sometimes fought in their own platoons, although they usually fulfilled their duties by acting as spies or scouts on their travels in enemy territory. The social status of the merchant class, the *Pochteca*, in later Aztec society was becoming almost equal to that of the warrior class, so much so that Krickeberg (18) suggests that they even went to the 'House of the Sun' after death, with the souls of dead warriors.

When the midwife cut the umbilical cord of a newborn boychild, a miniature shield and spear were placed in his hand

and she dedicated him to the life of a warrior:-

".....this house in which you are born is only a nest, an inn to which you have come.....your true country is another, you are promised elsewhere to the field of battle, where war is waged. That is what you are sent for. Your profession and your talent is war, your task is to give the sun the blood of enemies to drink....." (19)

According to Peterson (20), the umbilical cord was then buried in enemy territory so that when the child was grown up, into a man, he would be mystically drawn back in pursuit of war and honour.

The maintenance of Aztec supremacy over most of what is now Mexico usually provided sufficient prisoners to satisfy the gods, but when these were considered inadequate, religious considerations overrode all others and special arrangements had to be made to provide more opportunities for combat. During the reign of Motecuhzoma I, there had been a period of prolonged floods and famine from 1451-1456 due to severe storms and crop failures (21). The King's priestly advisers warned him that Huitzilopochtli was dissatisfied with the number and quality of captives being sacrificed, and so the system of 'Xochiyaoyotl' - the 'Flowery War' was instituted. This was an arrangement whereby The Aztecs and their allies from the states of Texcuco and Tlacopan, established a permanent state of war with the states of Tlaxcala and Uexotzinco who were also Nahuatl-speaking peoples. They fought regular, frequent battles to enable both sides to obtain more captives, without the expense and logistic problems of formal warfare.\*

\* According to Covarrubias (1957), the years that followed this arrangement were unusually fertile and prosperous, as if to reassure them of the efficacy of their actions (p.318).

Some indication of the dedication and the pride of the warriors and leaders is given in the war poems translated by Irene Nicholson:-

The bonfire smokes! Shields thunder!  
God of the ringing bells!  
The flower of the enemy shudders!  
Eagles and Tigers resound!

Bells clamour, the chieftain is resplendant,  
He who makes the world live is full of delight.  
The flowers of the shield are opening their petals:  
glory spreads, it revolves about the earth.  
Here is intoxication of death in the midst of the plain  
Here, at the side of war, as war breaks out on the plain,  
the chieftain shines, spins, gyrates  
with flowery death in war,  
O prince, O chichimeca chieftains.

Fear not, my heart: on the plain  
I covet death by the obsidian knife:  
All that our hearts desire is death in war! (22)

The bonfire referred to in the first extract is the ritual fire made by the priests to signify the beginning of the battle, and the bells are small gold or copper bells, (oioalli), tied to their calves and ankles as part of their fighting costume. These were included in the typical warrior's array worn by the stars in the myth of Huitzilopochtli's birth.

At the time of Sahagun's writing, Huitzilopochtli had been the war god in Mexico, but he was also the national hero of the Aztecs as a tribe, and in their history as a wandering band of hunters, or Chichimecs, had been their spiritual leader. Both Spence and Sahagun give legends which tell of Huitzilopochtli's origin as a real man (23), a great warrior and sorcerer called Huitziton who, after his death was worshipped as a god. He was

said to have led the people in their wanderings from the dry north-west region onto the Mexican plateau in his disguise as a humming bird, (and since this time all warriors were finally reincarnated as humming birds, the symbol of resurrection). The priests carried his image wrapped in a sacred bundle before the people. Huitzilopochtli was therefore closely associated with the hunting origins of the Aztecs, as Tezcatlipoca was with the hunting origins of the first Toltecs to arrive on the plateau centuries before. It seems likely that the solar qualities of these gods; their presence in many myths concerning the sun and the four directions, and various myths of their miraculous births, were later developments of the priests in adapting their gods to the complex religion they found on the plateau, while maintaining the supremacy of their own gods as far as possible. Huitzilopochtli of course is not named among the gods presiding over day and night periods in the ancient ritual calendar, which was quite unknown to the Aztecs until their arrival on the plateau.

While hunting became less important economically in the agricultural system of the Mexican Valley, it still had considerable ritual significance, especially during the month of Quecholli when they held a ritual hunt dedicated to Huitzilopochtli, and also to Mixcoatl the hunting god of the Tlaxcalans (24). Quecholli occurred during October and November, when agricultural activities for the year had largely ceased until the spring. At the beginning of the month, reeds to make arrows were collected by all the warriors including the small boys under training, and were dedicated to Huitzilopochtli at his temple. All the men and boys ascended the steps to the temple where their ears were cut and the blood smeared upon their foreheads, as the priests



performed this rite they said, "The deer are anointed with blood". The men were identified with the deer so that their fasting and penance would ensure an abundance of deer and a successful hunt. As part of the proceedings, sexual abstinence was observed, the old men gave up their privilege of drinking wine, and they all made offerings of their own blood. While they fasted they made many arrows, tying them into bundles which were left at the foot of the temple. Next day, the warriors were free to make arrows in their own homes and practise shooting ready for the hunt. They hunted on mount Cacatepec where rabbit, deer, coyote and hare could be taken. Motecuhzoma gave capes, (a common article of exchange), to those who took game and they departed home taking with them the heads of the game they had caught. (It does not say so clearly in the text, but it seems that the bodies of the animals caught belonged to the palace and were left with Motecuhzoma in exchange for the capes.)

The twentieth day of the month was the real feast day of Quecholli and the day when the sacrifices took place. The captives were led in procession around the techcatl in dedication and then taken to a local temple for an all night vigil where they were closely guarded. At midnight hair was taken from the crowns of their heads, and all their belongings were burnt. A man burnt his paper streamers, cloak, and water gourd; and a woman, her weaving and spinning tools, basket, cloths and threads. It was said that these things would await them where they were going after death, for these victims would become 'companions of the eagle' (Quauhtecatl), after an honourable death on the techcatl. The next day at dawn, dressed in special paper adornments they were taken to place where they were to die. Four captives were carried up the temple steps by their hands and

feet which had been bound together, with their heads hanging towards the ground. At the top of the steps they stretched over the stone and their hearts cut out. They were thus bound and carried like the deer, and were personifications of the deer. Other captives climbed up the steps of their own free will and were sacrificed on the stone in the usual manner. The captives dressed in the likeness of Mixcoatl and a god called Tlamatzincatl,\* were sacrificed at the temple of Tlamatzincatl.

The preparation for this ceremony was the concern mostly of the warriors, and was designed to increase their prowess in the ceremonial hunt by attaining ritual purity, and probably to increase their skill in war too. Spence (25) believes this ceremony to suggest that all sacrifices were originally of deer, and that human beings were substituted by the Aztecs when a sedentary life, based on agriculture, made it difficult to obtain a sufficient number of deer for sacrifice. Spence explains that in the history of the Chichimecs as wandering bands of hunters, deer was their staple diet, and that deer sacrifices were originally made in order to share the prey with the deity to whom the deer belonged, in order to appease his anger at the animal's death. As the gods provided the means for man's sustenance, so man had to feed the gods. Evidently the hunting gods were not originally man's gods, but the guardian spirits of the deer; they included Mixcoatl, Gmaxtli and Itzpapalotl, all of whom later came to have solar and stellar attributes. With the gradual adoption of agriculture, these ideas were extended to the personification of the elements of growth, rain, grain, earth and so on. This led to the belief that unless the gods were replenished by blood they would be unable to carry out their labours, but the blood was of necessity human

\* 'perpetual youth', an aspect of Tezcatlipoca as a young warrior.

blood because of the lack of deer, and the victims used were enemy warriors because this was more acceptable than using ones own people.

Spence illustrated his argument with a poem about Itzpapalotl whose name means 'Obsidian Butterfly'. Obsidian was the stone widely used in the hunting vultures to kill and skin the prey, and according to Spence was the material later used for the sacrificial knives. \*

O, she had become a goddess of the melon cactus,  
Our Mother Itzpapalotl, the obsidian butterfly,  
Her food is on the Nine Plains  
She was nurtured on the hearts of deer,  
Our Mother, the earth-goddess. (26)

This poem suggests that Itzpapalotl, who had previously been the goddess of the Chichimecs and received deer sacrifice, had become the deity of the melon cactus in an agricultural community.

According to Lumholtz (27), the Huichole Indians inhabiting the dry lands of the Sierra Madre Occidental, are the remnants of the ancient Nahua-speaking peoples who stayed behind when the main stock began their migration onto the plateau of Mexico. His description of the significance of deer in their religion would seem to support Spence's theory. Deer were the emblem of sustenance and fertility and were the most desired food of the gods. However, as the people became increasingly dependant on growing corn, corn was equated with deer, it was sprinkled with the blood of deer that it might become equally sustaining. As in the Quecholli festival, rules of fasting and penance were observed to enable those taking part in a ceremonial

\*. Some knives may have been obsidian but various materials were used, the Mixtec example in the British Museum is of chalcedony.

hunt to be ritually pure, and successful. During a hunt, the people left at home stayed in the temple fasting and praying until the hunt returned.

Examples of animal sacrifice believed to be a substitution for original human sacrifice are frequent, there is no reason to suppose that the substitution could not occur in the other direction. However other animals apart from humans were available and acceptable to the Aztecs as sacrifices, quail for instance were regularly used in immolations. The Aztecs were not averse to sacrificing their own people either, parents offered their own children to Tlaloc during the month of Atl cauloa, but in later sacrifices in a massive scale only prisoners of war were used. The indulgence in armed combat in order to obtain enemy warriors for sacrifice could be looked upon as an extension of the hunting after deer; the weapons used were broad swords, 'macquauitl', edged on both sides with obsidian blades. Spence puts great stress on this point as proving the transition from the hunting of deer with the obsidian knife, to the capture of the substitute offering using the same type of weapon; the same 'magical' stone. However, it may also be that in a culture which made little practical use of metals, and knew no hard metals, obsidian was still the most efficient cutting material.

Spence sums up his argument by saying,

"The idea that the sun could not live without human blood was a Nahua conception, arising out of an earlier belief that it must be nourished upon the blood of beasts."

Although the term Nahua includes the early hunting Toltecs, human sacrifice in Meso-america goes back much further than that. While it is possible that among the Nahua peoples the first sacrifices were of deer, the idea of human sacrifice in the Valley of Mexico

is an ancient one, and sacrifices to Tlaloc and the grain deities were taking place there long before the arrival of the Nahuas. Both Vaillant (28), and Sejourne cite evidence for human sacrifice and ritual cannibalism during the late stages of Teotihuacan culture, and Burland (29) describes a pottery whistle figurine dating from the same period depicting a god bound as a captive cutting out his own heart.

Any attempt to discover the origins of the use of human sacrifice must inevitably involve much conjecture. However the hunting origins of the Aztec people certainly had a strong influence on the religion and culture that flowered in Tenochtitlan. The associations between the sun, hunting and war have already been discussed, but there is also another vital aspect of Mexican culture, agriculture. If the peasants were dependant upon the courage and dedication of the warriors in keeping the gods nourished, the warriors depended for their immediate sustenance on the labours of the peasants. The agricultural gods were among the oldest in Meso-america, and were adapted by the Aztecs who wove them into the fabric of their own religion.

---

Source References

1. Leon-Portilla, 1963 pp.86/98.
2. ibid p.121 quoted from Book 6 (fol.143v) of Florentine Codex as yet unpublished.
3. ibid p.98, quoted from Codex Matritense Vlll, fol.175v.
4. Nicholson 1959.
5. Historia de los Mexicanos Pinturas, a pre-conquest source quoted by Leon-Portilla p.33.
6. Soustelle 1964 p.110.
7. Nicholson 1959 pp.132/3, but a slightly different translation is given in Brinton 1887 p.45.
8. Soustelle 1964 p.127.
9. Sahagun Book 7, chapter 2 pp.4/8; other versions are in Bancroft vol.3 chapter 2; and Spence 1923 p.42.
10. ibid Book 2, p.202.
11. This account is from Thompson 1933 who gives a translation of Duran's account. Spence also mentions this rite but says that it occurs every 203 days; Sahagun gives an account in Book 2, p.202.
12. The following account is from Sahagun Book 7, chapter 94 pp.25/32, the last performance of this rite in 1507 would still have been within the memory of some of his informants. He collected the material in 1547, only 26 years after the conquest.
13. ibid Book 3, chapter 1 pp.1/5.
14. for the account of this ceremony, ibid Book 2, chapter 34 pp.130/8.
15. Hvidtfeldt closely studies this phrase but is unable to come to a clear understanding of its meaning.
16. Spence 1945 pp.66/90; also Sahagun Book 2.
17. Sahagun Book 8, chapter 12; chapters 17 and 18 give further regulations for the performance of war. Castillo also describes native battle dress and strategy.
18. in Pre-Columbian American Religion, 1968 p.40.
19. Sahagun Book 5, chapter 31.

20. Peterson: Ancient Mexico p.115.
  21. Vaillant p.113.
  22. Nicholson 1959 pp.116/8.
  23. Sahagun Book5, chapter 31; Spence 1945 pp.66/90 quotes Boturini.
  24. ibid Book 2, chapter 33, pp.124/9.
  25. Spence 1923 pp.29/30.
  26. ibid 1945 p.30.
  27. Lumholtz 1903 vol.2.
  28. Vaillant p.77 and foot-note 12,p.236.
  29. Burland 1948 p.33.
-

Chapter 4    Sacrifice to Agrarian Deities

The hallmark of the Aztec culture was the religious and social interdependence of the distinct warrior and peasant sections of the society. Both were based on entirely different traditions. The former on the hunting traditions of the north-west plateau, the latter based on the traditions of the indigenous sedentary agriculturists. They had become so interwoven that it is sometimes impossible to disentangle those elements which were indigenous to the Valley of Mexico, from ~~from~~ those brought in by the nomadic, warlike peoples in the various incursions since the end of the Classic period. Overwhelming political power was in the hands of the military, but the entire structure was founded on the ability of the peasants to produce sufficient food surplus to support the vast military and religious organisation. Efficient agriculture was the foundation of the military state and agriculture depended on the resuscitation of the forces of nature through the worship of Tlaloc and other fertility and nature deities. These two ideologies came together in the edifice of the Great Double Temple to Tlaloc and Huitzilopochtli which stood in the Sacred Precinct of Tenochtitlan. It was the main temple of the entire Aztec religious complex. Identified with this partnership was the position of the High Priest, which was held by two priests of equal rank, one was called Quetzalcoatl totec tlamacazqui (High Priest to Quetzalcoatl), and the other Quetzalcoatl Tlaloc tlamacazqui (High Priest to Tlaloc) (appendix I). Their duties extended over all religious matters in the Aztec empire, but they represented the two ideologies of Mexico synthesised into one system.



Tlaloc the rain god, was known all over Meso-america in various forms right back to the beginnings of agriculture.\* There are more representations of him in frescoes and sculptures in the ruins of Teotihuacan than there are of Quetzalcoatl. Krickeberg suggests that he was the major god of the pantheon at that time and that the souls of all the dead by whatever cause, went to Tlalocan, his paradise of the south, after death. (1). In Aztec theology, only those who died from diseases thought to be caused by water (dropsy, leprosy), and from drowning or lightning went to Tlalocan, which was only one of four possible abodes after death. While it seems that some of Tlaloc's prominence in the pantheon had been overshadowed in Aztec society by the worship of the sun and war gods, there were still five major ceremonies of the year dedicated to him or his associated deities. Although Post-Classic influences were great and most ceremonies included heart sacrifice and other ritual associated with the warrior cults, worship to Tlaloc did include many elements which seem to have pre-dated the Nahuatl incursions, and give some insight into the long tradition of human sacrifice in that area. The victims chosen for offerings were not necessarily prisoners of war, although these were frequently sacrificed in addition to those with special pertinence to the ritual situation. For example a young girl is chosen to represent the green maize in Uei tocoztli, and children were sacrificed to Tlaloc at the time of the first spring rains. This appears to be the only time the Aztecs sacrificed children. The manner of death was sometimes by drowning, and in this case the souls of the dead victims went to Tlalocan after their death, and not to be 'companions of the

\* His other forms are, Chac (Maya), Tajin (Totonac), Tzahui (Mixtec), and Cocijo (Zapotec). (Peterson 1959).

eagle' with those sacrificed on the stone. The first month of the Aztec year was dedicated to the Tlalocque, and was called Atl caualo which Thompson (2) translates as 'the buying of the rains'. Seler too saw it as an expression of a contractual relationship and rendered it as the payment of a debt, as the child sacrifices were called 'nextlaali' - 'the debt is paid'.(3). During this month children were sacrificed on the shores of Lake Texcoco, later at a whirlpool in the centre of the Lake called Pantitlan, and finally on the mountain summits where the rain clouds gathered and gave rise to the life-giving mountain streams. The children chosen were those with 'two cowlicks of hair', or two curls (perhaps symbolic of the waves on the water), or those born on a particularly appropriate day sign. The children, unweaned, were much sought after and bought as slaves from the market, or offered by parents who hope to avert evil and gain favour from the gods by such an offering. During Atl caualo slender green poles were erected in every calmecac and temple as a symbol of the lush green growth which Tlaloc brings about. They were decorated with paper streamers and ulli gum, or liquid rubber which was frequently used in ceremonies for the Tlalocque and seems to have represented rain drops. When burnt it produces dense black smoke suggestive of the dark grey rain clouds and thunder clouds. The children were dressed in the symbols of growth and rain; headbands of green quetzal feathers, necklaces and bracelets of precious green stones (chalchihuitls), and their faces were painted with spots of liquid rubber. They were carried to the various sites for sacrifices on decorated litters, and all the people gathered about them weeping, and if the children cried it was considered a good omen foretelling rain, an element of sympathetic magic common to many Aztec rituals.

In one of the codices (4) Tlaloc appears dressed in a costume of quetzal feathers, liquid rubber, foam sandals, and a cloak of chalchihuitls called the 'dripping garment' - 'anachx - echilli'. In Telleriano-Remensis (5), he is seen emanating from a cloud, in fact he is the cloud (fig.20). One of the mountains surrounding the plateau was named Tlaloc; clouds and mountains are important symbols in his cult, and reveal him as a personification of the rain depicted with varying degrees of anthropomorphism. The painting of him on a wall fresco in Teotihuacan however shows him scattering seed (fig.13), and it is his wider function in promoting the healthy growth of the crop to which his cult is mainly directed. Tlaloc was the bringer not only of the life-giving rains, but of the damaging hail, the lightening that accompanies storms, the mildew that attacks the crops and even vermin and frost. A myth tells of Tlaloc's palace where, in four great courtyards stood four enormous jars. In one of these was good water which fell on the grain while it was growing and caused it to sprout; the second contained bad water which caused fungus and mildew; from the third jar came hail which beat down the crop, and the fourth jar contained rain which stopped the crop from drying and being harvested. Tlaloc created a number of dwarfs called the Tlaloque who lived in the four chambers where the jars stood, and drew water from them to sprinkle on various tracts of country as Tlaloc commanded them. Lightening flashes were caused by the dwarfs banging the jars with a stick and cracking them. (6).

The victims sacrificed to Tlaloc were fewer than to the war and sun gods. Sahagun described no human sacrifices for the month Tocoztontli, but at that time the old men of the temple sat rattling their rattle-boards to induce rain to fall, and

FIG.13



Tlaloc scattering seed : mural from Teotihuacan 100-600 A.D.

from Nicholson : Mexican Mythology

flowers were offered as 'first fruits' to Coatlicue, the Earth Goddess of Spring. There appear to be no human victims during the month Atemoztli either. Instead, dough images of mountains were 'sacrificed' in much the same way as human victims usually were. The common people spent much time making the images of amaranth seed dough, but only the priests decorated them in the temples, for which the people paid them with small offerings of food and gifts. Among the list given by Sahagun of the mountains represented were Popocatepetl, Iztac tepetl, Tlaloc, Yoaltecatl, Quauhtepetl, Cocotl, Yiauhqueme and Tepetzintli. The last five of these were mountains on which children were sacrificed for the celebration of Atl caualo. Offerings of food, chocolate and wine were made before the images four times during the night, while the priests sang and played trumpets and flutes in a vigil for them. The next day, the priests stuck weaving sticks into the chests of the images, taking out the little green stones which had been used as their 'hearts' and putting them in a green bowl, and finally cutting off their heads. The paper capes the images had worn, the wooden vessels which had contained food offerings, and the reed mats they had stood on, were all burnt. It is difficult to understand why a society with so little regard for the individual's life should use dough images instead of human victims on this occasion. It is possible that these images were in commemoration of the children who died in the first month. We are told by Sahagun (7) that at the beginning of the month Tepelhuitl, when the people made images of mountains by putting dough on their digging sticks, that they also made images to honour anyone who had died from drowning, or from lightning and had therefore gone to Tlalocan. In a similar way, the dough images made during Atemoztli may have been to honour the child victims,

and small wooden figures of children were sometimes used as foundations for the images.

Although human victims were killed during the Tepelhuil festivities, there were usually only four; three women representing mountains, and one male representing a snake. Tlaloc is often depicted with a snake in his hand, which is interpreted by some authorities to symbolise a thunderbolt. (The use of a rattle-board in rain ceremonies may have some connection with the rattle of the rattle-snake which appears frequently in the codices). A great number of victims were sacrificed during Etzalqualiztli, but this was due to the fact that war captives were killed as well as the chosen impersonator of Tlaloc and this was probably a Post-Classic addition to the ritual. Etzalqualiztli occurred at the end of May and beginning of June, planting for most of the crops was completed and rain was needed to swell the grain and commence growth (8). Special reeds were collected to make ceremonial mats and stools, and the priests had to perform each action with extreme care. If the slightest mistake was made, or a single crumb dropped during a meal in the temple, severe punishments were incurred, sometimes resulting in death.

In preparation for the feast day all the priests and novices pierced themselves with thorns, spreading the blood over their bodies, and bathed at night in the lake. It was the custom at that time for all the people to make a maize and bean gruel called 'etzalli', and to offer it to one another. On the day of the sacrifice, the priest in charge of the ceremony was dressed in Tlaloc's insignia (fig.14), and carried in his hand an incense bag full of shells containing sweet-smelling herbs. The priests accompanying him carried in their arms human images moulded in rubber and dressed in the insignia of the various gods,

and called them 'rubber gods'. They all processed from the temple to a place on the lake shore called Totecco, and here they seized any priests who had been apprehended for misdemeanors during the preparation for the feast and threw them into the water, leaving them for drowned. On the shore, the rubber images were burnt together with sacrificial papers and cones of incense. In the evening, the priests assembled at the top of Tlaloc's temple, to sing and chant to the sound of the horizontal drum, the flutes, conch shells and rattles. The chief priest slew, first prisoners of war upon the stone, and then those specially dressed to impersonate Tlaloc. The hearts were placed in the Cloud Vessel, which was blue and decorated with ulli gum and paper. The Cloud Vessel, papers, quetzal feathers and green stones were all loaded into a canoe at Tetamacolco and taken to the whirl-pool in the centre of the lake called Pantitlan. Here the vessel full of hearts was cast into the water. Thompson (9) states that a boy and girl were also thrown into the water to drown as offerings. The canoe was withdrawn to some distance off where stakes surrounded the whirl-pool, here sacrificial papers were tied to the stakes, and green stones and an incense bag were thrown into the water. The priests paddled to the shore and bathed before returning to the temple.

It is interesting to note that the hearts, instead of being used to smear on the lips of the idols as after other sacrifices, were thrown directly into the water to be 'consumed' by the whirl-pool and rejuvenate the forces of water and rain. The impersonator too was considered quite apart from the captives who were sacrificed separately. The same procedure took place during the month Tecuilhuitontli. Before the sacrifice of the young woman who impersonated Huixtocihuatl, the Salt Goddess

Figure 14 - overleaf

Tlaloc is seated on a throne decorated with jewels because he was one of the major gods of the pantheon. His headdress is of white heron-feathers, with two large quetzal-feathers and a seed sprouting in the shape of a heart attached above the forehead. The serpentine motif of the face with the large circular eyes and tusk-like teeth, are all characteristic of the god. The rosettes and other paper decorations down his back are spattered with liquid rubber, or ulli gum, and he wears jewelled ear-plugs and collar. He holds a rattle stick and rain drops are seen to be falling around him. Codex Magliabecchiano is a post-conquest document prepared by an Indian scribe for the first Mayor of Mexico City to explain ritual and religious matters.



FIG.14



Tlaloc: Codex Magliabecchiano

Caso: People of the Sun

a number of war captives were sacrificed upon the stone. There appears to be a greater emphasis on 'rites of exit' in this particular ceremony too, particularly the offering made at the stakes which defined the outer limit of the whirlpool, and the bathing at the shore before returning to the temple.

Thus the idea of sacrificing prisoners of war to nourish the sun was extended by the Aztecs to other forces of nature, and the role of the warriors in obtaining prisoners was given even greater importance in the annual sacrifices to Xipe Totec, the Flayed Lord. Pictures of Xipe, the ancient god of spring and seedtime, have been found among the frescoes at Teotihuacan, but he seems to have originated among the Yopi peoples of the west coast, and his temple was called the Temple of Yopitli. He was a popular god in Aztec sculpture and painting, usually depicted in the yellow skin of a flayed victim (fig.15). He was the symbol of the seed-corn which splits its outer skin to allow the new shoot to push through. But he also symbolises man's wish for the fruitful climax of the growing season - the earth covered in ripe golden maize, earth's 'golden cap' mentioned in the song to Xipe sung during his festival and taken here from Sahagun's account (10).

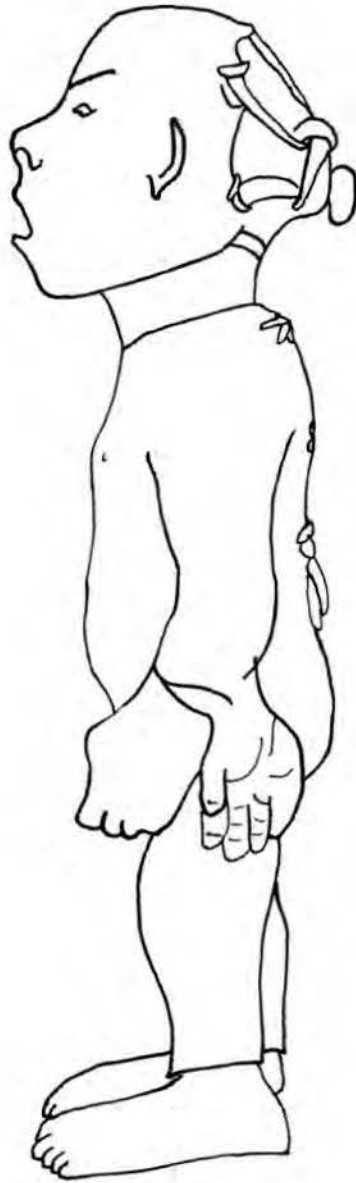
O Iouallauan, why dost thy mask thyself? Put on thy disguise. Don they golden cap.

My god, thy precious water hath come down from Coapan. It hath made the cypress a quetzal. The fire-serpent hath been made a quetzal serpent. Want hath gone from me.

Mayhap I shall die and perish I, the tender maize. Like a precious green jewel is my heart, yet I shall see gold in that place. I shall be content if first I mature. The war chief is born.

My god, give me in part plenteous tender maize. Thy worshipper locketh toward thy mountain. I shall be content if first I ripen. The warrior chief is born.

FIG.15



Atec sculpture of Xipe Totec in flayed skin

from Caso : People of the Sun

Xipe is called Youallauan, Night Drinker, because the vegetation was thought to absorb moisture and grow mostly during the night. 'Precious water' - 'chalchihuatl', refers partly to the spring rains necessary for germination, but 'chalchihuatl' is also the term used for 'blood', there is an association here with the blood of sacrifice necessary to bring the spring rain and the fertility to the crop. Feathers of the Quetzal bird came from the lowland forest areas of the empire and highly prized, thus 'quetzal' was used as a metaphor for any precious object, and because of its vivid green colour was associated particularly with lush growth. Thus in the song, the 'fire-serpent' - the torrid heat of the sun which scorches the vegetation and leads to famine, has become the precious fertilizing warmth to ripen the crops - the beneficial aspect of the sun. The young maize is called the 'warrior chief', because its birth is only made possible by the blood of sacrifice, and its maturation makes possible the continuation of the holy wars in honour of the gods.

Xipe's festival took place at the beginning of the rainy season, when the earth was prepared and the seed-corn planted. This month was called Tlacaxipeuliztli, 'the flaying of men'. The selected victims were called Xipeme (the flayed) or Tototecti (those who died for Xipe Totec).

The influence of post-classic militarism in the worship to this god is revealed in the choice of site for the sacrifice, the choice of victims, and the method of killing by ceremonial combat, The rite took place not in the priestly sanctity of the temple summit but around a special stone called the 'temalacatl' made to represent the Sun's disc, which was situated in the courtyard of the Eagle House or Temple of the Warriors (fig.8). The victims chosen to take part in the combat as offerings were the

most valiant of the prisoners, selected for their honour and courage, as if their strength and virility were an essential part of the offering.

The captors and their captives held an all-night vigil in the local temple, and at midnight the captives were stood before the fire while hair was cut from the crowns of their heads. This act was described by the priests as 'sending upward of the eagle', because through the death of captives the sun was able to rise each day, and after his death the captive would become a 'companion of the eagle', in the House of the Sun. Hallpike (14) suggests that hair-cutting symbolises entrance into society or a section of society under whose control the person then becomes. The merchants cut their hair before leaving on a long journey and not again until they returned and re-entered their own society (15). \*

All those who had captives to offer were dressed in festive attire with their arms and legs pasted with turkey down. The turkey is a guise of Tezcatlipoca the patron god of the Ocelot Order of warriors, and the down symbolised their service to the god by procuring the means of sacrifice, and perhaps ending their life on the techcatl themselves one day.

The method of sacrifice used for Tlacaxipeuliztli has been given the name 'gladiatorial sacrifice' because of the manner in which the victim had to defend himself against a series of assailants before his final death. The use of mock battles and ceremonial combat seem to re-enact the eternal struggle at the basis of the principle of duality, the struggle between spirit

\* Hair certainly had potent magical properties; the hair and middle finger of women who had died in childbirth were taken by warriors and put behind their shields to make them invincible in battle.

and matter, life and death, darkness and light. The assailants were from both the Ocelot and Eagle Orders, the former representing the warriors who accompany the sun in its nightly sojourn under the earth, and the latter, those who carry the day-time sun, with their patron gods Tezcatlipoca and Huitzilopochtli respectively. The captives were decorated in red-striped body paint and covered in down, in the manner of the stellar gods, the stars of the night sky (fig.16).

A captive, renowned for skill and courage in war stood proudly in the courtyard of the Eagle House. A warrior came forward dressed in an ocelot-skin costume. Lifting up his shield and club he dedicated them to the sun. He was followed by an eagle-costumed warrior who dedicated his shield and club in the same way; two other warriors in ocelot and eagle costumes respectively, repeated the actions. They all danced together making fighting motions and leaping into the air. Behind them came a priest called Youallauan dressed in the insignia of the god Xipe Totec. This priest whose life was consecrated to the service of Xipe, performed the final killing of the victim and had fasted for eighty days in preparation for this task.

There now descended from Xipe's temple (Temple of Yopitli), many priests dressed in the insignia of all the various gods, acting as their impersonators to witness the sacrifice. They crossed to the courtyard of the Eagle House and seated themselves around the temalacatl in order of importance, chief among them being Youallauan. A captor led his prisoner over to the temalacatl and, lifting up a cup of wine four times to the four directions, gave it to the prisoner to drink. Before the sacred combat began, a priest sacrificed a quail, cutting its throat with a knife. According to Spence, the quail was the disguise or symbol of Xipe.

FIG.16



Gladiatorial Sacrifice: Codex Magliabecchiano



Arrow Sacrifice to Xipe : Codex Zouche-Nuttal

The captive's shield was raised to the sun, he was lifted onto the offering stone and a priest named Old Wolf and called the 'Uncle' of the prisoner took a rope and tied him to the stone by the waist. He was given a wooden club edged with feathers instead of the obsidian blades of the warrior's clubs, and his only other weapons were four pine cudgels. Everything ready for the combat, the captor left and returned to his place in the courtyard, dancing and watching closely the behaviour of his captive. One at a time each of the eagle and ocelot warriors came forward to fight the prisoner. If he overcame the first the second came forward, if he overcame all four (which happened only very rarely), a fifth and left-handed warrior representing Huitzilopochtli (Humming-Bird on the Left), came forward and usually wounded him severely. When thoroughly defeated but still alive the prisoner was dragged onto the edge of the stone and his heart cut out by Youallauan. His heart, still warm, was held up in dedication to the sun and placed in the eagle-vessel.

Another priest placed a hollow cane deep into the chest cavity of the victim and offered it up full of blood for the sun to drink. A quantity of blood was poured into a green bowl edged with feathers and given to the captor, and with it he fed all the gods in every shrine and every priest's dwelling in the city smearing the lips of the idols with blood from the cane. The head of the victim was cut off to be placed later on the skull rack or tzompantli, and the body taken to a local temple to be flayed and divided up for a feast by the captor's kin and friends.

Later, all the impersonators of the gods and other priests and warriors who had taken part in the sacrifice then danced around the stone, holding the heads of victims. The following night priests performed more dances holding in their



hands, maize stalks. For the remainder of the month, ritual dancing and singing took place daily among the warriors and nobles in the temple courtyards, and among the peasants in their own local temples.

The skins of the victims were worn by the captors or lent to their friends to wear for the next twenty days. The wearing of the skins by the priests and young warriors was an important part of the festival especially for its agricultural efficacy. It dramatised the aim of the ritual which was to effect the successful planting and germination of the seedcorn, and in a wider sense, the whole renewal of spring and continuity of growth. They paid the price in human hearts and blood for the re-awakening of nature's activities. The rebirth of spring and renewed vigour of the earth after winter's 'death' were symbolised by putting on the skins, as the earth puts on a new garment of vegetation each spring. As with all the Aztec sacrifices, a situation of death was necessary for the continuation of life. After the sacrifice, an impersonator of Xipe wearing a skin paraded around the city for the next twenty days, so that all could see the spirit of spring reborn. People worshipped him as if he were the god, offering him tortillas, maize kernels and the first flowers of spring. After twenty days the skins were discarded and the wearers all bathed (in maize flour instead of water), for the first time since the sacrifice. The people of the Valley must have seen many times the rattlesnake discard its old skin each spring and emerge apparently rejuvenated. The continuity expressed and desired in this ceremony was that of life itself through nature's abundance.

Thus the Tlacaxipeuliztli ceremony presents an interesting mixture of ancient agrarian rites, and later elements of the

warrior cult with its associated astral deities, especially the sun. The latter part of the ritual, with the symbolism of rebirth associated with the skin of the victim is quite a common feature in agrarian rites. It is used in the worship of the other Aztec grain deities; Xilonen, Toci and Ilamatecuhtli, and in other societies such as the Greek Bouphonia and the Theban sacrifice of a sacred ram to Ammon. The name of the ceremony (The Flaying of Men), and the fact that the killing upon the stone is performed by Youallauan, point to the definitely agricultural purposes of the rite. However, the former parts of the ritual, comprising the ceremonial combat seem to have become the main part of the month's proceedings.

In this combat the basic idea of dualism and the alternation of life and death, is expressed not in terms of the seasonal rejuvenation of vegetation, but in terms of the alternation of day and night and the daily resurrection of the sun. It is conceptualised in the form of a continuous battle between the forces of darkness and light. This battle is dramatised in the 'gladiatorial combat', the prisoner decorated in the insignia of the stellar gods impersonates the forces of night. His assailants, the warriors of the Ocelot and Eagle Orders, represent the sun in its night and day aspects which fights a daily battle with the stars and moon to enable it to rise. The drama culminates in the victory of the fifth and left-handed warrior representing Huitzilopochtli, the newborn sun who emerged fully armed from the womb of Coatlicue and defeated his brothers and sister, the stars and moon. In fact Huitzilopochtli as the fifth warrior represents the fifth sun, the present era, and therefore in a wider sense the ritual drama can also be seen to re-enact the struggle and defeat of the four previous suns

or eras of Nahua mythology, and the tenuous victory of the present fifth sun, nourished by the heart of the defeated captive sacrificed on the edge of the stone. As in the creation myth where all the gods waited for the new sun to rise in the east, all the gods were represented round the stone, waiting to witness the victory of Huitzilopochtli.

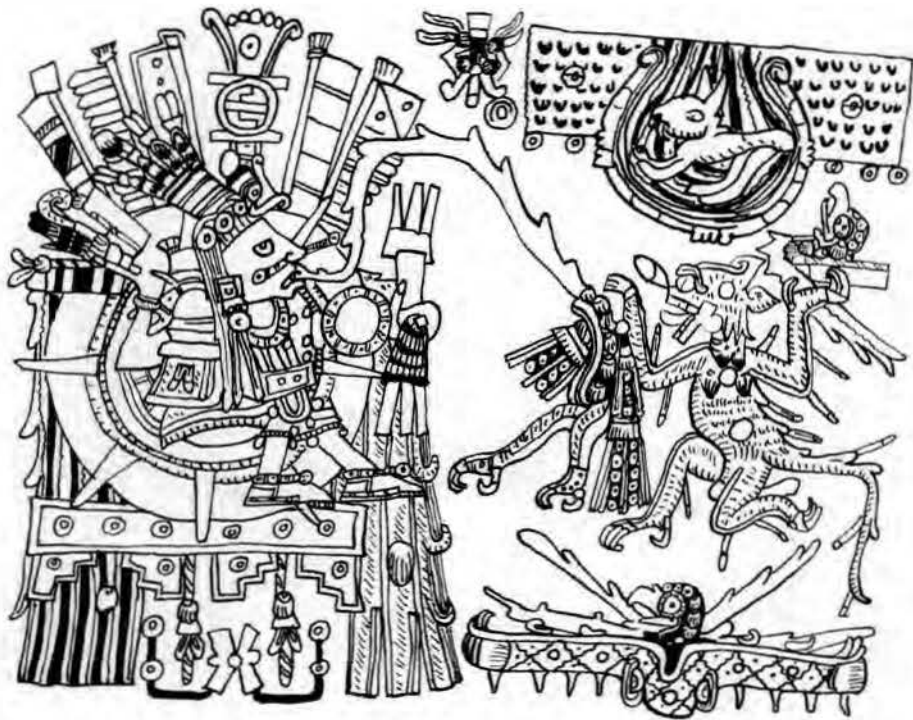
The victory of spring over winter's death was symbolised in the ritual by donning the yellow skin of a victim. This same act can also be interpreted to symbolise the victory of light over darkness by the emergence of the bright yellow sun - yellow is one of the colours of Huitzilopochtli's face paint, and his 'vestment of yellow feathers', as well as being a colour associated with the maize.

Another interesting feature of the ritual is the symbolic importance of quail. Sahagun informs us that many quail were sacrificed each morning as the sun rose (16). The Mexican quail is a black bird covered in white speckles and would seem to symbolise the starry night sky. It is killed just as the darkness of night fades before the light of the sun, which is thus greeted and nourished by its blood (fig.17). However the quail was also the guise of Xipe, an agricultural god, and one was sacrificed just ~~the~~ before the gladiatorial combat began. The quail seems to symbolise the forces of resurrection, both in the birth of spring and the rising of the sun at dawn, and in the gladiatorial combat it is to welcome the victory of the warriors over the 'striped ones', the stars of the night.

The same principles of dualism and cyclic death and renewal underlay both the agrarian and astral aspects of the ritual, and indeed some of the symbols seem to have become interchangeable. This typifies the distinctly Aztec development

Figure 17 -- overleaf

Dawn Sacrifice On the left Tonatiuh is seated on a jewelled throne with the solar disc behind him. Surrounding him are darts, shields, war banners and standards, and beneath the throne hang two ropes decorated with down. It is by these that the sun is drawn across the sky to the zenith by the souls of dead warriors. Between the ropes is the cross-shaped sign 'nauinoln', the day-sign on which the sun was created and would eventually be destroyed. At the top centre of the picture is the sign for Ce Acatl (One Reed), the year sign in which the sun and all creation would be destroyed. On the right the stars and moon (with its rabbit symbol), are still in the sky when the spirit of the planet Venus sacrifices quail. The heads of the quail fall into the jaws of earth below, while the blood is seen to nourish Tonatiuh.



Down Sacrifice of Quail - Codex Borgia

from Burland : Magic Books of Mexico

of older Nahuatl and agrarian beliefs, and reflects the extent to which post-Classic militarism had transformed the older religious practices. Although we cannot know exactly what these older practices were, it is quite likely that other form of sacrifices associated with Xipe (and with the fertility goddess Tlazolteotl), the so-called 'arrow sacrifice', was much older and nearer the original form of ritual. This sacrifice was adopted by the Aztecs from the Huastec region, and in fact it was probably adopted by the Toltecs before them because it was practiced in Yucatan by the Maya, and according to Krickeberg was taken there by the Toltec invaders of the tenth century (17).

For this sacrifice the victim was dressed in the insignia of Xipe and tied by the wrists to a wooden frame (fig.16). Priests and warriors then shot him with arrows until he finally died from loss of blood. The significant part of the sacrifice was that the blood should fall in drops upon the ground, both to feed mother earth with its life-giving properties, and as a sort of sympathetic magic in symbolising a desire for rain. Blood was called 'chalchihuatl' - 'precious water'; it was the only means to obtain water and fertility, as blood was to the gods what water was to man. Both were equally precious, and blood had to spill so that rain might fall and the crops grow. This was essentially a springtime festival and prepared the soil for sowing by rejuvenating and symbolically fertilizing it. The fertility aspect of the rite was even more pronounced in the slightly variant form practiced by the Maya, which sought to transmit the fecundity of man to that of the soil (18). The victim was tied to a stake and painted blue, the symbolic colour of the Chacs or rain gods, and the colour used for most sacrifices among the Maya. After the priests had danced around the victim,

a high priest came forward and pierced him in the genitals, and the blood from the wound was then smeared on the face of the idols, A signal was given and the priests continued to dance around the victim shooting arrows at his heart, the position of which had been marked with a white cross.

The efficacy of the blood of sacrifice and of self-mutilation is at the base of Aztec theology. A myth tells how man was created by Xolotl (the shadow and twin of Quetzalcoatl), who descended to Mictlan and obtained from Mictlantecuhtli, some of the bones of past generations of man from previous eras. He and the other gods sprinkled these with blood from their own limbs, and they came alive and became the men of today (19). It was the essence of life which was concentrated in the blood and transferred to the bones to reinvest them with life. The rituals described serve to reconcentrate the life forces, and they symbolise the rhythmic concentration and dispersal achieved through the application of blood to the earth to fertilise the fields. Frazer described the spring rites of the Khonds of India which seem to have been based upon the same principles. The ritual killing released the energising force or spiritual power of fertility that had been concentrated in the victim by preparatory rites, and special ritual means of dispersal fixes this fertilising power in the soil. The Khonds sacrificed to the Earth Goddess Tari Pennu, a victim (Meriah) who had been bought as such or had been born of Meriah parents. Children could be devoted by their parents or guardians and be brought up as Meriahs, and all their children would automatically be Meriahs, but it was not permitted to sacrifice any other category of person.

Frazer gives his account as follows:-

"Ten or twelve days before the sacrifice, the victim was devoted by cutting off his hair, which, until then had been kept unshorn. Crowds of men and women assembled to witness the sacrifice; none might be excluded, since the sacrifice was declared to be for all mankind. It was preceded by several days of revelry and debauchery. On the day before the sacrifice the victim, dressed in a new garment, was led forth from the village in a solemn procession, with music and dancing, to the Meriah grove, a clump of highforest trees standing a little away from the village and untouched by the axe. There they tied him to a post, which was sometimes placed between two plants of the sakissar shrub. He was then anointed with oil, ghee, and tumeric, and adorned with flowers; and 'a species of reverence which is not easy to distinguish from adoration', was paid to him throughout the day. A great struggle now arose to obtain the smallest relic from his person; a particle of the tumeric paste with which he was smeared, or a drop of his spittle, was esteemed of sovereign virtue especially by the women. The crowd danced round the post to music, and, addressing the earth said, 'O god, we offer this sacrifice to you, give us good crops, seasons, and health'; then, speaking to the victim they said, 'We bought you with a price, and did not seize you; now we sacrifice you according to custom, and no sin rests with us.' (20).

The orgies continued until noon, when the victim was again anointed with oil and each person touched the anointed part and wiped the oil on his own head. The victim might not be bound or show any resistance so sometimes his arms and legs were broken, or he was stupefied with opium. The methods of killing varied, and were sometimes by strangulation, sometimes by burning, but the victim was not killed outright until all present had cut a piece of flesh from the body of the victim avoiding the head and bowels. The pieces of flesh were immediately rushed home to the village by the person chosen to do so, and taken to the village priest. The priest buried part of the flesh in the earth behind his back without looking, as an offering to the earth goddess. The other



pieces were divided among all the heads of households of the village, each of whom rolled it in leaves and buried it in his favourite field, behind his back just as the priest had done. The remains of the victim were later burnt and the ashes scattered over the fields, laid as a paste over the houses and granaries, or mixed with the new corn to protect it from insects. As Frazer points out this was more than just a gift to propitiate the goddess. The adoration of the Meriah, the distribution of the flesh and ashes, and the power believed to reside in any small particle associated with him, suggests the belief in an intrinsic fertilising power present in his person. It is concentrated during the ritual, released in the act of sacrifice, and distributed to the fields during the course of the complete ceremony. Speed was of the utmost importance in conveying the spiritual properties of the sacrificial flesh to the fields. Indeed to ensure that the life-power of the flesh was transmitted unimpaired, it was taken from the living body. The deftness of the Aztec chief priest at sacrifice ensured that the heart held up to the sun was still warm, manifesting the life-force so necessary for the sustenance of the sun.\* Robertson-Smith's description of the Arab sacrifice performed before the morning star, clearly shows this same idea.

The camel chosen as the victim is bound upon a rude altar of stones piled together, and when the leader of the band had thrice led the worshippers round the altar in a solemn procession accompanied with chants, he inflicts the first wound while the words of the hymn are still on the lips of the congregation, and in all haste drinks of the blood that gushes forth. Forthwith the

\* Belief in the intrinsic power of sacrificial flesh was strong; the flesh of victims was used by the magicians sent by Motecuhzoma to bewitch Cortes. (Burland 1967 p.121).

the whole company fall upon the victim with their swords, hacking off pieces of the quivering flesh and devouring them raw with such haste, that in the short interval between the rise of the day star which marked the hour for the service to begin, and the disappearance of its rays before the rising sun, the entire camel, body and bones, skin, blood and entrails, is wholly devoured. (21).

In eating the flesh of the camel while it was raw and still warm, the worshippers absorbed the life, (evidently in Hebrew and Syriac raw flesh is called 'living'), and by shedding blood upon the altar the worshippers achieved a common life bond with the god through the victim.

Returning to agrarian sacrifices, having concentrated the spirit or principle of fertility and released it in the act of killing, this spirit of agriculture usually had to be reinstated or resurrected in visible form. When the Athenians had sacrificed a bullock to Zeus Polieus in the annual festival of the Bouphonia (22), they flayed the animal, filled the skin with straw and sewed it up again so that the 'revived' bull could be yoked to a plough to ritually work the fields. According to Hubert and Mauss the purpose of the Bouphonia was to lift the taboo from the reaped crop so that it could be used. The desacrilisation was achieved by the killing of the ox, while the mimetic revival of the ox returned the spirit of agriculture and the forces of fertility back into the earth.

In Mexico the annual series of agrarian rites followed the natural growth cycle of the maize plant from the preparation of the seed-corn to the harvesting of the crop. Each stage of the plant's development was marked by the sacrifice of a victim chosen to embody the spirit of the corn and personify it as it grew and ripened. The details and purpose of the individual

rites varied with the time of year and stage of growth. The beginning of the planting season, when the early varieties of crops were prepared and sown, was marked by the sacrifices of the Tlacaxipeuliztli festival in honour of Xipe Totec which have already been described. Two months later at the beginning of the Uei tocoztli festival the seed was sprouting, but planting still continued of later crops and therefore ceremonies were held both for the young sprouting maize, personified in the god Cinteotl, and for the blessing of the seed-corn by the goddess Chicomecoatl.

For the first four days penances were performed, everyone made offerings of balls of grass soaked in their own blood to lay before the household altars. Women swept the temples and offered bowls of maize gruel called 'atolli', which was also given out to the youths and priests. "Then they departed to their fields to get the maize god." (23). They collected maize stalks from each of the fields and returned with them to their houses to deck them with flowers and to set offerings of food before them in a basket. They also set down a hard-baked frog; its face had been stained blue and it had a woman's skirt tied about it. In ancient Mixtec creation myths the earth is represented as a frog, or lizard-like creature who emerged out of the primeval waters. Morsels of maize, beans, chia seeds, cacao and all kinds of produce were stuffed into a maize stalk which was then placed on the frog's back. After sundown they took the maize stalks to the Cinteopan, the temple of Chicomecoatl, where they skirmished among themselves, thrashing each other with the maize stalks. Young girls, their arms and legs pasted with red feathers, carried the maize which was to be seed-corn to the Cinteopan. They tied the dried ears in bundles of seven, wrapping them in

red paper spotted with ulli gum, and bore them upon their backs. Although these bundles of 'seven ears' were called 'cinteotl', 'seven ears of corn' - 'chicomolotzin', was also another name for Chicomecoatl. The bundles were laid in the grain bin in the temple until the seed was to be planted. Finally they made an image of Chicomecoatl, worshipping her as the source of all their food and sustenance. Her body paint was red, her paper crown, skirt and chief's shield were decorated in red; the colour of ripe fruit. In either hand was put a double ear of maize - the insignia by which she is identified. Dozens of different kinds of maize, beans and seeds are listed as offerings to her, and songs and dances were performed continuously until the end of the month.

The young green maize was personified in the goddess Xilonen, in whose likeness a young girl was sacrificed in the month Uei tecuilhuitl. This occurred in early summer, and by this time most of the grain stored from the previous year's harvest was used up and serious famine was common. Only after the sacrifice had lifted the taboo from the new crop were people allowed to remove some of the ears to be eaten green. For the first week the local chiefs and nobles distributed food and drink to all the peasants and workers gathered in the towns and cities for the festival. Everyone had to take part in the singing and dancing, men and women dancing together (which was unusual). The women danced with their hair unbound and streaming down their backs like the beard of the maize. For this occasion Motecuhzoma sometimes came out to join the dancing. The chosen victim was a young slave girl. She was dressed in the insignia and colours of Xilonen, the reds and yellows of ripe fruit and corn (fig.18). An all night vigil was held

Figure 18 - overleaf

Xilonen. She wears a paper crown decorated with two quetzal feathers and a sprouting grain of maize above the forehead. Her collar is of precious chalchihuitls, and her nose-plus and earrings are of turquoise. Her hair is long and green like the beard of the young green maize plant. In her left hand is a rain rattle and behind her is an offering of two maize ears or cobs.

FIG.18



Xilonen : Codex Magliabecchiano

[ From Caso : People of the Sun ]

and while her songs were sung, Xilonen had to dance very vigorously accompanied by her priestesses carrying garlands of yellow flowers. In this way the spirit of the maize was concentrated in the young girl who became the embodiment of that force. The priests, blowing horns and trumpets and scattering incense, took Xilonen to the Cinteopan where one of them took her upon his back while another quickly severed her head. Her heart was cut out and placed in a vessel. The spirit was released and dispersed by the act of decapitation, a common method of sacrifice for grain deities, and one which would seem to symbolise the action of reaping. Everyone was then free to gather green maize and green amaranth to make tortillas, and dances were performed, but only by the women.

During the August the corn cobs were becoming soft and white and ready to ripen off, the stalks were bent over and left to harden so that by September the cobs were yellow and ready to gather. These two months were very critical; too much rain could ruin the crop. The ripening maize was worshipped in the form of Toci - 'Our Grandmother', one of the aspects of Tlazolteotl, the Huastec Earth Goddess. Part of her insignia is the grass broom which gives the month its name, Ochpaniztli - 'the month of sweeping'. Again, dances performed by the priestesses, and all the other women young and old were very important throughout the activities of the month. Strangely there was no singing, and except for the sound of the drums the dances had to proceed in complete silence. For four days, the woman chosen to impersonate Toci, and numbers of medicine women formed two opposing bands and skirmished with each other. We are told that the purpose of this was to make the victim laugh and keep her cheerful, for if she should cry it would be a bad omen, probably her

tears would have presaged rain which they wished to prevent. They did not tell her that she was to die for the same reason, and as the priestesses dressed her in Toci's insignia, they consoled her by saying she would sleep with Motecuhzoma that night. At midnight and in complete silence she was led to the temple, a priest seized her and put her upon his back while another cut off her head. Then very quickly they flayed her and a priest put on her skin; he was then called Teccizquacvilli, and had been specially chosen because of his height and strength. They made a mask from the victims thigh skin which was worn by the impersonator of Toci's son, Cinteotl (fig.19). Teccizquacvilli, now impersonating a revived spirit of Toci, rushed down from the temple accompanied by some Huastec warriors and chieftains who ran wildly about striking their shields, and brandishing blood-soaked grass brooms. Teccizquacvilli went to the temple of Huitzilopochtli and stood, arms and legs spread out before his image, then turned about to face the impersonator of Cinteotl. (Spence suggests that this may have symbolised Toci's conception of Cinteotl; maize born through the union of sun and earth.) (24).

The next day Teccizquacvilli, still wearing the victims skin and impersonating Toci, climbed up to her temple where nobles were waiting. They applied eagle's down to his head and feet, face paint, and garments of eagle design. They decapitated a quail before him and then brought four war captives up to the temple. In turn they were stretched over the techcatl and Teccizquacvilli cut out their hearts. The remainder of the captives were slain by the sacrificing priest.

The impersonator of Cinteotl was joined by a group of warrior chiefs, strong and fast runners, and they went to place



Figure 19 - overleaf

Cinteotl. He is depicted here with two maize cobs on his head and a humming-bird device attached to a fillet above the forehead. He wears a gold-disc pendant and a jewelled collar and earrings, with little gold bells on his collar and leg-bands. His hair is golden yellow, the colour of ripe maize, and he is distinguished by a vertical stripe painted on his face. (According to Joyce, vertical stripes are characteristic of the indigenous agricultural gods, and horizontal stripes usually indicate the war and hunting gods of the immigrant tribes.) In his hands is an offering of a smouldering ball of incense and a bundle of sticks.

FIG.19



Cinteotl : Codex Borgia

[ From Caso : People of the Sun ]

the thigh skin mask in enemy territory on one of the side-peaks of mount Iztac tepetl called Popotl temi. There was usually some conflict with the enemy but once the mask was set up on a wooden frame, all departed.

At this point in the month the rituals were interrupted by military reviews, and the handing out of awards and devices to deserving warriors by Motecuhzoma. Teccizquacuilli, Huastec warriors and medicine women continued to perform their dances a little way apart. The closing ceremonies were concerned with that part of the corn harvest which was to be seed-corn. Priests dedicated to Chicomecoatl, emerged wearing the skins of captives who had been sacrificed after Toci's impersonator at the beginning of the month. They ascended the pyramid of Huizilopochtli and scattered maize and squash seeds on the people in the courtyard below, who scrambled and fought for them. Young girls from the temple of Chicomecoatl carried dried maize ears tied in bundles of seven upon their backs to the temple, where the bundles were left until needed for planting again.

As Teccizquacuilli left the temple courtyard accompanied by priests, everyone spat at him as he passed and threw flowers at him before they went on their way. The skin of the victim was taken off Teccizquacuilli and stretched carefully over a wooden frame, so that the head faced forward. They also laid down all the garments, feathers and insignia he had worn, and thus establishing Toci upon the frame they departed and left her.

The method of sacrifice by decapitation on the back of a priest is used only for agrarian sacrifices and seems to be characteristic of them. Frazer described other harvest rituals involving decapitation, actual and symbolic, representing the action of reaping (25). The victim was placed first upon the back

of a priest in the same way as Chicomecoatl's priestesses carried the bundles of seed-corn in both Uei tocoztli and Ochpaniztli festivals. This is also the manner in which an Aztec bride is carried to the house of her groom. Frazier mentions several occasions in northern European custom when harvest rites are associated with the promise of forthcoming nuptials. However in a society without the use of the wheel and with no suitable pack animals, goods were normally carried either in canoes or on the backs of porters, and this would have been the normal way to transport the grain without any necessary connection with marriage symbolism.

The last of the series of sacrifices for the earth and vegetation deities was during the month of Tititl, the seventeenth month of the solar year, which was dedicated to the old goddess Ilamatecuhtli. She was considered a very ancient goddess of primeval times and personified the dry ears of corn stored in the granaries and the barren earth of winter. She was also the patron of the old women who ground maize on the metate stone. Age and death were two preoccupation of winter, and during this month there was also a separate ceremony to sacrifice the likeness of the death god, Mictlantecuhtli. But for the main sacrifice of Tititl the woman chosen to be the likeness of Ilamatecuhtli was dressed in the white clothes trimmed with heron feathers and shells which made up her insignia, and she danced in the courtyard, sighing and weeping over her impending death. She was not only allowed but expected to weep. Some authors point to this as a form of sympathetic magic to obtain rain, but since the growing season was over it may also have been an expression of sorrow at the death of the earth as winter set in.

When the sun had passed the zenith, the victim was led

to the temple together with priests dressed in the insignia of all the gods, including one also dressed in the insignia of Ilamatecuhtli. The sacrificing priest cut out the victim's heart and severed her head, giving it to the priest dressed as Ilamatecuhtli who danced with it leading a procession of all the other priests descending the temple. A wooden grain bin was placed in an eagle vessel and burnt by a priest dressed as a young warrior. After the successful completion of the agricultural year, the emphasis was placed on warring activities. The month's festivities were completed by the 'casting of bags'. These were bags stuffed with paper or grass, with which small boys and youths struck the women to make them cry, and held mock battles among themselves.

A characteristic feature of agrarian rites was the significant role played by women. Apart from the use of female victims to impersonate the maize, many of the dances and songs could be performed only by the women, and in all Aztec ceremonies dancing was a vital part of the ritual. The purpose of the dance was usually to concentrate the spirit of a deity into the victim, or to achieve a magical invigoration of a particular spirit. The extremely lengthy and vigorous dances by Xilonen in Ueitecuilhuilt were thought to ensure a good crop. The antiquity of the agrarian gods in the Mexican Valley is shown also in the fact that important parts of the ritual were performed in the fields and homes of the peasants as well as in the temples. The decorating and worship of the maize stalk itself, and the presence of the frog to symbolise the earth as a primeval monster, all suggest more the myths and beliefs of the ordinary people rather than the more sophisticated theology of the priests and astrologers.

The cycle of agrarian rituals involves a series of

concentrations of a supernatural power which has been variously called spirit, force, energy, or fertility. Hvidtfeldt (26) has equated this power with the concept of mana, and stated that the various parts of the ceremonies are concerned with the concentration and handling of different forms of mana. Hvidtfeldt describes mana as consisting of the essential characteristics of a species, group or object, it having no qualities in itself except the 'high potency' of these characteristics. He allied the term to the word 'power', as in the cutting power of a knife, or the growing power of vegetation, in the latter connoting energy and life. It is characteristic for plants to grow and fruit and a plant with much mana will grow well and fruit profusely; if the mana is lacking or impaired the crops will fail and be weakly. Ritual means are employed to concentrate mana through dancing, chanting, imitative actions of various kinds, and its dispersal and direction can be achieved through sacrifice. Related to this is the concept that as all the members of a species or group of things share the same mana, one of the species can represent the whole. Thus in the festival of Uei tecuilhuitl the young female victim represented the green maize crop. Dancing and other preparatory rites and paraphernalia concentrate in her the power, or mana of the maize, and her dress in the insignia of Xilonen completes the identification. During the ceremony she becomes completely identified with the maize, she is the maize and in her sacrifice is 'reaped' as the crop. The sacrifice releases the mana and lifts the taboo which until then had protected the green crop from being cut.

As with the handling of any supernatural power, the manipulation of mana can be dangerous, and involves precautionary and purificatory rites. These protect individuals from the

intrinsic danger of the power, and protect the mana itself from other supernatural forces which may contaminate or completely destroy it. There were many prohibitions and punishments surrounding the priests behaviour. Their status was one bearing much mana, maintained by fasting and immolation, leaving the hair uncut and unwashed and the physical separation from society. The mana associated with each of the different deities was kept separate, their distinctive ceremonial dress and insignia maintained in their own temple by a specialised group of priests.

In identifying the presence of a mana concept in Aztec religion Hvidtfeldt analysis the Nahuatl term 'teotl', which although usually translated simply 'god', in fact appears in the names of very few gods. He finds that in some cases it would be more accurate to translate it as 'ritual' or 'sacred', and it sometimes implies a sense of potency, or intensification suggesting a possible origin in a concept of mana. Quoting from the Florentine Codex, Hvidtfeldt gives two examples of 'teotl' used in this way. After the flaying of the victims during Tlacaxipeuliztli, the captor takes the thigh bone of his dead captive, cleans the flesh from it and hangs it outside his house with a sleeveless net jacket worn by the warriors, and a spray of heron feathers. "And he wrapped the thigh bone with paper, and provided it a mask. and this was called the god-captive." (malteotl). It seems that the bone with its mask was vested with the power, or mana of the captive, it stands for the captive, and as the seat of his mana is called 'malteotl', or 'captive's mana'.

Sahagun states that during Uei tocoztli, "Then they departed to their fields to get the cinteotl. In as many places as lay fields from each field they got a stalk of green maize." The plants were decorated and offered food, it is the plants

themselves which were 'cinteotl' - 'maize god', they contained the maize mana. Later in the same passage, 'cinteotl' refers to the bundles of seven maize ears which were to become seed-corn. Thus it is not just the plant which is called 'cinteotl', but the maize at all stages, the mana of the maize itself.

The term 'ixiptla' is also analysed in tracing mana concepts in the texts. It is translated by Anderson and Dibble as 'image', or 'impersonator', possibly deriving from 'ixtli' meaning face. In the accounts it is used to refer to images of wood, rubber, paper or dough and to human representatives all in the same passage and without differentiating between them, that is they all 'ixiptla', or impersonate the same thing. This would seem to follow the general rule in the concept of mana that all things containing the same mana are identical, and interchangeable. In the account of the sacrifice for Ochpaniztli (27), the woman dressed in the insignia of Toci is referred to directly as 'Toci' (or her synonym Teteo innan), Anderson and Dibble in translation frequently add in brackets, 'the likeness of', even when the term 'ixiptla' is not present in the Nahuatl text. After the victim has been sacrificed a priest puts on her skin, and in the text he is thereafter referred to as 'she', and later directly as 'Toçi', thus the continuity of identity had been maintained through the donning of the skin of the first impersonator; the mana of Toci, or the mana that was Toci, had been passed on intact. It becomes clear that it is the skin and insignia which 'make' Toci, or contain 'Toci-mana' when, completing the ceremony, the priest takes off the skin and adornments and lays them carefully on a framework and so, "When they had left her they all turned about and departed". 'Her', Toci, was left on the wooden frame, the mana is thus safely fixed and left. Thus 'teixiptla', (those who



impersoate), are mana-bearers, and all those bearing the same mana are considered and treated as identical. They are treated and addressed directly as the objects or attributes whose mana they contain. In the same account, Toci presents herself before the image of Huitzilopochtli in the Great Double Temple, the Nahuatl text simply says, "she raised her arms and legs and spread her arms and legs at the foot of Huitzilopochtli."

It seems that it is the unique combination of colours and symbols, (the insignia), that is characteristic and important in containing, identifying and passing on mana, and the accounts usually describe in great detail the clothes, paints and decorations which make up the distinctive character of the object or deity whose mana is being manipulated.

Thus Hvidtfeldt states that the term 'teotl' can be assumed to have, or to have had a meaning of mana. He also says that this concept can be identified in religions at a certain stage of socio-religious development. He states that primitive religions do not have gods in the strict sense of personalised deities as in the Greek and Roman pantheons, but are more concerned with the increase of mana which is desirable, and removal of that which is not. In an urban society the concepts of mana tend to fade, and while some of the prohibitions and rites surrounding mana may continue as vestiges, the gods are more than distinct forms of mana and come to have myths and 'lives' of their own. Myths cease simply to explain ritual acts and objects and begin to 'fill out' the personal details of the gods, their births, relationships and adventures. Sacrifices become direct offerings to certain gods for favour, or specific reward, or to expiate a sin, and the conceptualisation of the god becomes increasingly anthropomorphic.

According to this schema, the Aztecs appear to have been in a transition phase. The concept of mana was clearly present in many religious texts and rituals, especially those based on the well-being and fertility of natural forces. Even the same deity was depicted in varying degrees of anthropomorphism on different occasions. Tlaloc in Telleriano Remensis is depicted as a cloud, only his face and symbols identify him (fig.21). Yet in other codices he is shown in human form but with the same facial and other features. However some of the gods had a highly complex body of mythology and theology woven around them, particularly those of the priestly and warrior classes. Quetzalcoatl, adopted from the Toltecs had become a culture-hero and bringer of all knowledge, a god-king from a golden age of peace and plenty. Myths and legends tell of his travels throughout Mexico, his reign in Tula and especially his struggles with the other great god Tezcatlipoca. The process of personalising deities into 'proper' gods with their own individuality was aided by the relationships established by the priests and astrologers. Various spirits and deities of local importance were incorporated into the calendar or divinatory tables, and synthesised into compound deities, a process which had been going on before the arrival of the Aztecs but which they continued. At the lowest levels of the social hierarchy local spirits and mana concepts formed a major part of the religious practices, although unfortunately we are not told a great deal about these practices. At the apex of the hierarchy was a highly theology and body of religious belief laying great importance upon a limited number of very individual gods of complex natures.

---

Source References

1. Krickeberg 1968.
  2. Thompson 1933.
  3. Anderson and Dibble in translation of Sahagun Book 2.
  4. Codex Borgia (pre-conquest).
  5. Telleriano-Remensis (post-conquest) in, Antiquities of Mexico, Lord Kingsborough, (drawings by Aglio).
  6. Quoted by Spence 1923 from, Historia de los Mexicanos por sus Pinturas.
  7. Sahagun Book 2, ch.32.
  8. description of Etzalqualiztli from, ibid Book2, ch.25.pp.74/85.
  9. Thompson 1933.
  10. Sahagun Book 2, Appendix.
  14. Hallpike, J.R.A.I. 1969 pp.256/267.
  15. Sahagun Book 9, p.9.
  16. ibid Book 2, Appendix p.202.
  17. Krickeberg 1968 part 1.
  18. description of Maya sacrifice from Morley, 1947 ch.11.
  19. Nicholson 1966, p.27.
  20. Frazer, Golden Bough, ch.XLV11.pp.434/438.
  21. Robertson-Smith, Religion of the Semites.
  22. Yerkes, ch.V111; also Hubert and Mauss, ch.4.
  23. Sahagun Book 2, ch.23.
  24. Spence 1923.
  25. Frazer ch.XLV111.
  26. Hvidtfeldt, 1958 part 11.
  27. Sahagun Book 2, ch.30.
-

Chapter 5    Sacrifice of the God, and the Divine King

The complexity and sophistication of worship offered to the gods of the Aztec pantheon depended on the social and occupational standing of the individual. The maceguals may not have understood the more esoteric meaning of the rituals they gathered to see performed in the city temples, but they worshipped a plethora of domestic and village gods; spirits of the fields, of the crops, and of all the aspects of their natural environment and day to day activities. Almost every action of daily life was associated with specific prayers, omens and superstitions.

" They had innumerable little spirits to pay some regard to. Many families had patron gods who would look after their crops and to whom small offerings were made on all days associated with them in the magical calendar. One gains the impression that among them there was an acceptance of the religious system as a kind of magic and a kind of reliance on it that was not necessarily a very deep religious feeling."    (1)

The guilds of craftsmen each had their own patron god worshipped in a more formal manner. On calendrical days dedicated to their deity, or before important undertakings, the members of a guild would club together to buy a slave from the market at Ahzcapotzalco and offer him as a sacrifice at their own temple. The Pochteca, the nobles and the warriors all performed their own particular sacrifices, as well as playing an important part in the major national feasts in the Sacred Precinct. In addition, cities, towns and villages as well as the quarters of the cities had their own local deities

to whom was owed a special allegiance.

The Aztec theologians at the head of the priestly hierarchy were responsible for rationalising these diverse religious beliefs and deities into an ordered system of ritual, creed and philosophy, an order developed largely out of the workings of the calendar. As the religion and the state grew in organisation and stability together under Aztec domination, many deities emerged as aspects of national compound deities assimilated into a national theology. While these gods did not reach the complex individual characters of the Greek Olympian gods, \* two in particular, Tezcatlipoca (fig.21) and Quetzalcoatl (fig.20), were associated with a large body of myth, legend and ideology, and were regarded as truly universal gods.

To them was attributed the task of hauling the great Earth Monster out of the primordial waters until the monster broke in two, her lower half rising to become the heavens and her upper half descending to form the earth (2). During the struggle Tezcatlipoca lost his left foot, which in the codices is replaced by a round obsidian mirror of the kind used by magicians for scrying; it is called 'the smoking mirror' which is the meaning of 'Tezcatlipoca'. Sculptures of Quetzalcoatl (Feathered Serpent), are common in the ancient city of Teotihuacan and later Mayan culture. In his form as the Evening Star, Xolotl, he descended into the underworld and brought back the bones of extinct generations of man, from which he created man of the present era by the magical power of his blood (3). By turning himself into an ant, Quetzalcoatl

\* The Aztec gods brought their influence to bear in due season according to the universal order of things, and did not exist in the manner of capricious 'super human' as in the Classical mythologies.

Figure 20 - overleaf

Quetzalcoatl. He is the patron of priests and therefore carries in one hand a priest's tasselled incense or tobacco bag, bearing the sign of the four directions, and in the other an incense burner in the form of a snake. From his conical, ocelot-skin hat protrudes a bone symbolising penance, and from which has sprouted a flower. His breast pendants and necklaces are of shells, symbols by which he is usually identified. The red, snouted mask indicates his presence here in the guise of Ehecatl, the wind. (Codex Borbonicus was produced immediately post-conquest.).

FIG.20



Quetzalcoatl : Codex Borbonicus

[ From Caso : People of the Sun ]

stole maize from the other ants and it became man's sustenance.(4)

Both Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca were worshipped by the Toltecs, where myths and legends show them in constant opposition as the dual principles of light and benevolence, and of darkness and evil respectively. Shortly before the fall of the Toltec empire and the destruction of Tula, Tezcatlipoca's influence overshadowed that of Quetzalcoatl. The cult of Tezcatlipoca was associated with the glorification of war and the political influence of the military leaders, as opposed to the priestly leaders of which Quetzalcoatl had been the patron and prototype. Worship to Quetzalcoatl was not completely eclipsed; it survived in Tenochtitlan among an elite of devout priests and nobles of Toltec descent, who dedicated themselves to a particularly stringent way of life. The chief priests still retained the name Quetzalcoatl in their official title as had been the custom among the Toltecs. Both legend and the laws of fate declared that the supremacy of Quetzalcoatl would return again in the future to overwhelm Tezcatlipoca.

When the Aztecs migrated onto the Mexican Plateau and picked up the threads of the disintegrating Toltec culture, the indigenous war and sun god Tezcatlipoca, became compounded with their own war god, Huitzilopochtli. As patron of the Ocelot Order of warriors Tezcatlipoca was the night-time sun which travels under the earth through the region of darkness, forming an antithesis to Huitzilopochtli who was regarded as the fierce day-time sun. Huitzilopochtli was absorbed into the existing cosmogony by being identified with one of the four directions which were ruled over by forms of Tezcatlipoca. The *Historia de los Mexicanos por sus Pinturas* (5) includes a creation myth relating how Ometeotl, the Divine Duality, had four sons



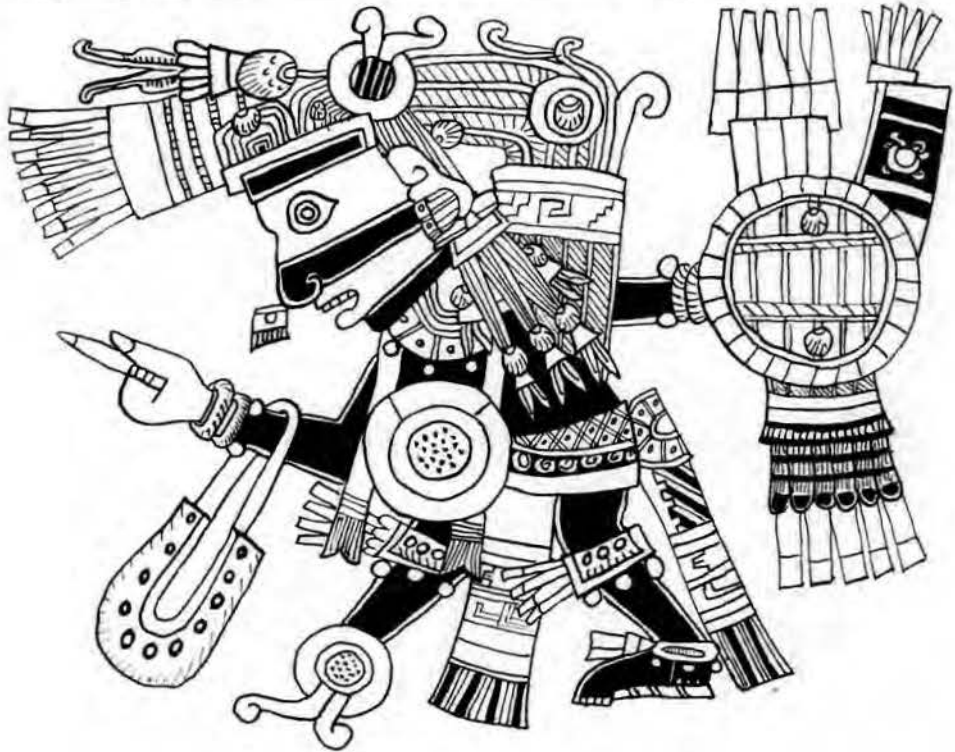
Figure 21 - overleaf

Tezcatlipoca. He is identified by his torn foot replaced by a smoking mirror, (there appears to be another obsidian mirror attached to the back of his head), and the black horizontal-striped face paint. He carries a shield, a bundle of darts bone-tipped and feathered, and a war banner on which is painted a collar decorated with down. These were used for captives destined for sacrifice. His wrist-bands, leg-bands and collar were all decorated with jewels and gold bells, and he wears a large round breast pendant. The down attached to his hair and the two long heron feathers ontop of his head are the symbols of the warrior.

FIG.21



Tlaloc depicted as a rain cloud : Codex Telleriano - Remensis



Tezcatlipoca : Codex Borgia

representing the four directions and the four cosmic forces of the universe. The first son was the Red Tezcatlipoca, with whom were identified Xipe Totec and Camaxtli. Secondly was the Black Tezcatlipoca, his usual form as the trickster god in which he is seen in opposition to Quetzalcoatl. The third son was called Quetzalcoatl, and lastly was the Blue Tezcatlipoca of the south, with whom Huitzilopochtli was identified as the fiery midday sun of the southern sky. In the same way, Huitzilopochtli was absorbed into some of the rituals traditionally dedicated to Tezcatlipoca. During the annual festival of Toxcatl, a youth who had impersonated Tezcatlipoca for a year and had been treated in every way like the god himself, was sacrificed upon the stone. An impersonator of Huitzilopochtli was also kept for a year and sacrificed shortly afterwards. However it seems that Tezcatlipoca was always regarded as the dominant of the two gods; describing the Toxcatl ritual Bancroft (6) says of Huitzilopochtli's impersonator (called Ixteocale), "He always associated with the other doomed one of Tezcatlipoca and shared his enjoyment but as a representative of a less esteemed god, he was paid no divine honour." The tremendous promotion of Huitzilopochtli as a national deity took place later, during the reign of Izcoatl as part of the development of the Aztec's political identity and pride.

Although he was primarily a god of war and of the sun, as one of the original and creative cosmic forces it is not surprising that Tezcatlipoca had a complex character comprising many attributes, Sahagun summarised his nature:-

"Tezcatlipoca (Smoking Mirror), was considered a true god, his abode was everywhere - in the land of the dead, on earth, and in heaven. When he walked on the earth he brought vice and sin, he introduced anguish and affliction. He brought

discord among people, wherever he went he was called 'enemy on both sides'. He created all the evils which came to all men. Sometimes he bestowed riches, wealth, heroism, valour, rulership, dignity, nobility, honour." (7)

Wealth and worldly possessions were associated with Tezcatlipoca's form as the jewelled Turkey (Chalchihuitotolin). Part of his fearsome nature stemmed from his skill as a magician. It was through the use of magic and trickery that he was said to have defeated Quetzalcoatl in Tula (8). With the use of his scrying mirror, Tezcatlipoca could see all the deeds of man, and thus as an all-knowing god was appealed to by the priest to hear confessions. The sins involved were mostly those of ritual impurity, and especially carnal sin, which to the Aztecs was the most heinous of crimes. (Normally confession and forgiveness was possible only once in a life-time, so it was made in late middle age when one was thought too old to commit such sins again).

In his form as Tlamatzoncatl - 'the perpetual youth', he was the youngest and nimblest of all the gods. Another aspect of his youth was his patronage of the Telpochcalli (houses of youth), military training schools where the sons of the maceguals and artisans were educated and trained in the art of war. His nature as a war god involved worship particularly by the nobility who occupied the higher ranks and formed the permanent and organising element of the army, but Tezcatlipoca was not aloof from the ordinary people as Quetzalcoatl had become, and was even the patron of the slaves. Once a year on a day dedicated to him, owners of slaves gave them gifts, and dared not rebuke them for fear Tezcatlipoca might cause them to become slaves themselves (9).

Tezcatlipoca was not entirely evil, he had connections with the lighter side of life, with love, flowers and music. He fell

in love with the beautiful Xochiquetzal, goddess of song and flowers, and stole her from her husband Tlaloc. Nicholson quotes his fervent though somewhat immodest love song:-

She seems to me indeed a very goddess,  
she is so lovely and so gay,  
I must catch her, not tomorrow or any time after  
but now in the very instant;  
I myself in person order and decree it shall be.  
I, the warrior youth, shining like the sun  
and with the beauty of the dawn. (10)

There is also a myth which relates how he brought music down to the earth; in this extract he bids the wind go to the House of the Sun, the source of music:-

'Wind, the earth is sick from silence.  
Though we possess light and colour and fruit,  
yet we have no music.  
We must bestow music upon all creation.  
To the awakening dawn,  
to the dreaming man,  
to the waiting mother,  
to the passing water and the flying bird.  
Life should be all music.  
Go then through the boundless sadness  
between the blue smoke and the spaces  
to the House of the Sun.  
There the father Sun is surrounded  
by makers of music  
who blow their flutes sweetly  
and, with their burning choirs  
scatter light abroad.  
Go, bring back to earth a cluster - the most flowering -  
of these musicians and singers.' (11)

One of the great ceremonies of the year was the annual sacrifice of the impersonator of Tezcatlipoca during the month

Toxcatl, which occurred in late April. The victim had been chosen after the last Toxcatl and had lived as Tezcatlipoca's likeness for a year. The victim was chosen from among the prisoners of war. He had to be perfect in body and intelligence, "...he who was chosen was of fair countenance, of good understanding and quick, of clean body - slender like a reed; long and thin like a stout cane; well built; not of overfed body, not corpulent, and neither very small nor exceedingly tall....." (12) In this manner Sahagun lists over a hundred qualities and conditions necessary in the chosen youth. After being selected he was cared for by the guardians of the temple and taught to play the flute, carry flowers and converse in a gentle and gracious manner - in fact all the qualities of a young nobleman. He was honoured as a god; all the people regarded him as Tezcatlipoca when he walked about the streets, they knelt down before him kissing the earth in an act of reverence and begging favours off him. He was allowed to walk about playing flute wherever he pleased, accompanied by eight young men as companions. These had had their hair cut short in the manner of slaves, although four of them were trainers of youths in the Telpochcalli.

Moteczuhzoma provided the costly garments and jewels in which the victim was dressed because we are told "...verily he took him to be his beloved god (tlacoteotl)...". The impersonator's face was painted black, white eagles down was tied to his loin-length hair and he wore garlands of sweet-smelling flowers. His ear-pendants, lip-plug, necklace and breast ornament were all of shells. His ear-plugs were of turquoise and his bracelets of gold, set with precious stones. On both his legs were tied golden bells (oioalli) which jingled when he walked, and were part of the array of ocelot warriors. He wore a cape of wide-

mesh net and sandals of ocelot skin. In this princely manner he went about until the month of Uei tocoztli, twenty five days before the feast of Toxcatl. Then he abandoned all the ornaments and rich clothing, removed the face paint and had his hair cut short, leaving a tuft of hair tied upon his forehead like that of a war captain, to which were tied heron and quetzal feathers. At the same time he was married to four young virgins who had also been kept by the temple guardians for a year and were named, Xochiquetzal, Xilonen, Atlatonan and Uixtocihuatl (all agrarian deities). For twenty days he lay with his wives. Five days before the feast day, singing, dancing and feasting began and continued until the day of the sacrifice. On the fifth day the impersonator with his wives and companions went to a small, plain temple called Tlacoachcalco (which was also an arsenal). Alone and of his own free will he climbed slowly up to the top of the temple platform, breaking one of his clay flutes on each step. At the top, four priests held him while a fifth cut out his heart, holding it up to the sun as an offering. His body was not thrown down the steps in the usual way, but was carried carefully down and his head mounted on the tzompantli. Apart from the similar ceremony carried out to kill the impersonator of Huitzilopochtli, this was the only sacrifice for that month, although Bancroft (13) says that every fourth year many captives were slain as well.

This sacrifice (more than others described) can be said to correspond to Hubert and Mauss's (14) concept of the 'sacrifice of the god', which they consider to be the highest expression of the idea of sacrifice. They discuss several conditions which must prevail in the sacrificial situation ".in order that the god may descend to the role of victim." Firstly there must be some affinity between the nature of the god and that of the victim.

In all Aztec sacrifices the victims have some degree of sacredness, for this is the supernatural power released in the act of killing, but in the agrarian sacrifices for example this power is specific to the species or phenomena which man is trying to influence. In the sacrifice of Xilonen, the personification of the young maize plant, the identification is solely with the plant, the concept of Xilonen is limited to this and the identification is complete. After the sacrifice, ritual means are employed to disperse the spirit, or in other instances to fix it back into the species. Thus the spirit of the maize exists as a concentrated power (mana) which can be manipulated by the use of ritual for only a limited period, in fact during the annual ceremony. Hubert and Mauss describe how agrarian and other natural deities become detached from the species or phenomena with which they are associated and become individualised. In order for there to be a sacrifice of the god, there must be a god having a separate existence, a personalised god with an individual and permanent presence with which the victim is to have affinity. Tezcatlipoca's origin as a god is assigned to his creation as a cosmic force, but he had certainly become a god of recognisable character in Aztec times. He is a protean god and his influence is almost limitless; he is ubiquitous, invisible, impalpable. As Sahagun recorded, "...he is a true god, his abode was everywhere." This complex nature was personified on earth by his impersonator who had to be young, strong and accomplished in the attributes of both warriors and nobles. He wore the cloths and insignia described as Tezcatlipoca's, and performed actions during the festival which re-enacted mythical deeds ascribed to him. For example his marriage to the lovely Xochiquetzal in earthly form, and his musical



accomplishments on the flute. The ritual portrays him in his guise as the ocelot, dramatising the daily passage of the sun under the earth, but it also symbolises the wider annual cycle of the solstices. Toxcatl occurred in April, when, according to Sejourne the sun reached its first zenith after the winter solstice. The winter period of minimum sun (or the sun in the subterranean world), was symbolised by the impersonator's marriage to the four earth deities, before donning his warriors' array and ascending the temple steps alone where he was liberated, through sacrifice, from the earth. Immediately following this ceremony was the sacrifice to Huitzilopochtli the day sun risen out of the earth; the eagle rising out of the mouth of the ocelot. The image of Huitzilopochtli was carried on a platform up the steps to his temple, accompanied by youths and warriors dancing and singing around it, symbolising the sun's journey across the sky from the east to the zenith accompanied by the souls of warriors. At dawn the following day the likeness of Huitzilopochtli called (ixteocale), offered himself for sacrifice and was killed in the arms of the priests.\*

Throughout his year of office the impersonator was believed to be and treated like Tezcatlipoca, even Motecuhzoma "took him to be his beloved god (tlacoteotl)". The act of sacrifice itself can create or increase the divinity of the victim - the power of sacrifice is implicit in the creation of the sun and moon by the original immolation of the gods. They were in fact reborn in a higher state of divinity after their death in the primeval fire. The regular repetition of rites, and re-enactment of

\* Thompson, Spence and Bancroft all say that the victim was killed in this unusual position but offer no reason for it, while Sahagun himself does <sup>not</sup> specify where he was killed exactly.

mythical episodes can build up a sacred character and help to form the personality of a god existing from one sacrifice to the next. In the case of the Toxcatl festival this continuity was maintained by the impersonator living among the people for a year before his sacrifice, and to continue the cycle immediately after his death another impersonator was established in his place. Evidently the temple guardians kept about ten young captives of pleasing appearance and temperament, and when the time came to install another impersonator they chose from among these. Thus there was no break in the personality of Tezcatlipoca as a ubiquitous god, as the sun of the darkness below the earth, or as a continuous representation upon earth.

The rich symbolism used in Aztec ritual tends to re-enact certain mythical deeds associated with the gods, and the marriage of 'Tezcatlipoca' to the four earth deities may also be connected with the myth of Tezcatlipoca's struggle with the earth monster from which he formed the heavens and the earth and lost his foot in so doing. This union of the earth and sun deities also suggests the magical fertilising of the earth by the sun for the ripening of the crops.

The themes of ritual marriage, perpetuation of the youth of the god, and the particular interest shown by Motecuhzoma in the victim suggest another interesting approach to understanding the ritual. To what extent was there a relationship between the victim and the ruler which was intended to affect the strength and well-being of the latter and thus of the whole empire? Sahagun gives instances when it was believed that the killing of prisoners directly influenced the life and strength of the king. For example in the description of the day signs 'one rain', and 'four wind' and the appropriate ritual activities,

he writes:-

"And then also at that time died those who were in jail, who were there for something which demanded the supreme penalty: perhaps an adulterer, or a thief, or a fire priest of whom something had been found out - perchance he had had a paramour - and who was known as an evildoer; or whatsoever sin he had committed. Also of the captives some then died.

It was said that through these Moctezuma received life. By them his fate was strengthened; by them he was exalted, and on them he placed the burden. So it was said that it was as if through them once more he was rejuvenated, so that he might live many years. Through them he became famous, achieved honour, and became brave, thereby making himself terrifying." (15)

The kings of Tenochtitlan played a vital part in the religious well-being of the empire, and were particularly dedicated to the worship of Tezcatlipoca and his antithesis Huitzilopochtli. In Toxcatl, the impersonator was the only victim, the king himself provided all the insignia and raiment and it was one of the king's canoes which conveyed the impersonator to the temple. Another connection between the two in the ritual is suggested by an ambiguous sentence in Sahagun's text which infers that the impersonator may have been given the name 'Motecuhzoma'. It does not say so directly in the text but this interpretation follows most clearly from the rest of the text.

"Now, during this time, Moctezuma came not forth; those who had been his companions provided the people with food and favours." (16)

In the English text Anderson and Dibble insert 'the impersonator's' in place of 'his'. Hvidtfeldt (17) however follows Seler by retaining 'his' as referring in the sentence to Moctezuma. But since this is the first mention of Moctezuma in this part of

the passage, and there had been no mention of his having any companions, Hvidtfeldt suggests that it was the impersonator who was called Moctezuma and did not appear in public, while the impersonator's companions (previously mentioned as being 'eight young men'), feasted the people. If this was in fact the case it seems to point to a direct relationship between the victim and the king, possibly the victim represented the mana of the king, or was even a substitute for the king. James believes the killing of the king to have had an important bearing on the development of human sacrifice in most cultures.

"The widespread custom of killing the divine king when he showed signs of diminishing virility, was doubtless largely responsible for the development of human sacrifice in agricultural communities since it led to the substitution of captives and other commoners for the royal victim who gave their lives to augment the powers of the gods that the processes of nature might be maintained." (18)

Whether this theory applies to the Aztec example depends to what extent the Aztec king was considered divine.

The Aztec rulers were responsible for military and civil administration, all affairs of state and the material and spiritual welfare of their people. They not only reigned in the sense that the Shilluk Reth reigned as a figure head and symbol, but they ruled as head of the 'church' as well as head of the state. Soustelle (19) has described the form of the monarchy as 'enlightened despotism', his guidance and strength came from his faithful service to the gods. However his power was not absolute; he ruled with the assistance of a council of four, usually close relatives of the king's from whom his successor would be chosen. their most important function was to command

the army in time of war. The closest adviser and 'vice ruler' was the Ciuahcoatl, (literally Snake Woman and the name of an ancient goddess, but the political position was of course always held by a man). Motecuhzoma I appointed his brother Tlacaehlel to this position, he remained there through three reigns and greatly influenced the course of Aztec history (20). The ruler's successor and those of the counsellors were elected by an electoral college of about a hundred made up of an elite of high ranking priests, warriors and government officials. The succession usually went to a brother or son of the late king, but they had no automatic rite to the kingship unless elected. In practice the choice was always made from the same royal line, thus forming a single dynasty. Soustelle observes that in their tribal history the Aztec kings were elected by heads of households, but with the growth of the state in size and complexity the privilege of election became limited to an elite oligarchy, from the reign of Ahuitzotl. (Figure 2 shows the 'family tree' of Aztec kings). The emperor in power at the time of the conquest, Motecuhzoma II, introduced many new measures which elaborated court procedure and increased his ritual isolation. None of the common people were allowed to look on him as he went about the city, they had to avert their eyes as he passed. He was not allowed to touch the ground and so was carried everywhere in a seat covered in ocelot skin. He always ate alone behind the privacy of a screen for no-one was permitted to see him eating. When officials of state or foreign ambassadors wished an audience, no matter how high their rank or status they had to take off their finery and don rough nequen garments; approaching the emperor bare-footed and bare-headed. (21). Motecuhzoma spent many hours observing the heavens, praying, fasting and making

pilgrimages to the ruins of the sacred city of Teotihuacan, where mythology places the creation of the moon and the sun. He was by inclination a scholarly and devout man, and had of course been educated under the rigorous regime of the calmecac.

The precautionary behaviour surrounding the ruler, especially in the presence of other people, suggests the existence of an intrinsic power residing within him which needs to be protected from contamination. He was certainly believed to have some supernatural power derived from his knowledge of the sacred books and the correct practice of his ritual duties. Seligman's definition of the 'divine king' differentiates this concept from others of kings simply possessing varying degrees of sacred or magical power. This definition, (used by Richards (22) and Young (23) in recent studies), includes three criteria. Firstly, that the king exercises a voluntary or involuntary power over nature and fertility; that he is believed to be the 'dynamical centre of the universe' so that his behaviour and condition directly affect the universe and are therefore strictly regulated; and that he was ritually put to death when he grew old or ill, to preserve the virility of the powers he possessed and the well-being of the universe.

Because of the elaborate nature and numerous occasions for rituals and feasts, members of the specialised priesthood performed most of the rites in the main temples of the Sacred Precinct, as well as in the hundreds of little temples throughout the city. But the king, (titled Ueitlatoani - the Great Spokeman), performed rites daily in various temples and observed the winds and birds during the day, and the stars and planets at night for omens and signs to guide his decisions in the interests of the empire. His visions and dreams were also thought to have signs in them for the future. He was expected to remain close

to his people and rule wisely. The position and duties of the king were outlined by the priest during his anointing ceremony\* described by Bancroft:-

"....As soon as the new king was elected, which was immediately after the funeral of his predecessor, the kings of Texcuco and Tlacopan were sent for to be present at the ceremony of anointment; all the great feudatory lords, who had been present at the funeral of the late king, were also invited to attend. When all are assembled the procession sets out for the temple of Huitzilopochtli, the god, of war. The kings of Texcuco and Tlacopan, surrounded by all the most powerful nobles of the realm, bearing their ensigns and insignia of rank, lead the van. Next comes the king elect, naked, except only the maxtli, or cloth about the loins; following these are the lesser nobles, and after them the common people. Silently the procession wends its way along the streets; no beat of drum or shout of people is heard above the tramping. The road in advance is as free from obstruction as a corridor in the royal palace; no-one moves among the multitude that string along its edges, but all stand with bended head and eyes downcast until the solemn pageant had passed, when they close in with the jostling whispering crowd that follows. Arrived at the temple the king and that part of the procession which precedes him ascend to the summit. During the ascent he is supported on either side by a great lord, and such aid is not superfluous, for the staircases, having in all one hundred and thirteen steps, are so arranged that it is necessary to go completely round the building several times before reaching the top. On the summit the king is met by the high-priest and his colleagues, the people mean-while waiting below. His first action upon reaching the summit is to pay reverence to the image of the god of battles by touching the earth with his hand and carrying it to his mouth. The high-priest now anoints the king throughout the entire body with a certain black ointment, and sprinkles him with water which has been blessed at the great

\* Anointing was the ceremony of dedication performed prior to the 'coronation' or inauguration which involved much public feasting and many sacrifices, and usually took place some time afterwards to allow time for preparation.

festival of Huitzilopochtli, using for this purpose branches of cedar and willow and leaves of maize; at the same time he addresses a few words of council to him. The newly appointed monarch is next clothed in a mantle, on which are represented skulls and bones, to remind him, we are told, that even kings are mortal; his head is covered with two cloths or veils, one blue and the other black, and decorated in a similar manner; about his neck is tied a small gourd containing a certain powder, which is esteemed a strong preservative against disease, sorcery, and treason. A censor containing live coals is put into his right hand, and into his left a bag of copal and thus accoutred and provided he proceeds to incense the god Huitzilopochtli. This act of worship he performs on his knees, amid the cheers of the people below, and the playing of musical instruments. He has concluded now and the high-priest again addresses a short speech to him. 'Consider well, Sire' he says, 'the great honour which your subjects have conferred upon you and remember now that you are king, and that it is your duty to watch over your people with great care, to look upon them as your children, to preserve them from suffering, and to protect the weak from the oppression of the strong. Behold before you the chiefs of your kingdom together with all your subjects, to whom you are both father and mother, for it is to you they turn for protection. It is your place to command and to govern, and most especially it is your duty to bestow great attention to all matters relating to war, to search out and punish criminals without regard to rank, to put down rebellion, and to chastise the seditious. Let not the strength of religion decline during your reign, see that the temples are well cared for, let there be ever an abundance of victims for sacrifice, and so you will prosper in all your undertakings and be beloved of the gods.....' The allied kings and nobles next addressed him to the same purpose; to which the king answers with thanks and promises to exert himself to the utmost of his power for the happiness of the state." (24)

The next four days were spent in the temple of Tlacatecco, alone, making offerings of blood, fasting and praying for the wisdom to rule successfully. Thus the real strength of the king lay in his dedication to the gods and his ability to lead his people in co-operating with the laws of fate. During the anointing ceremony and throughout his reign the Ueitlatoani was dedicated



to the service of Tezcatlipoca especially in his form as Huitzilopochtli. However, the king's traditional garments, described by Soustelle consisted of a gold and torquoise diadem, a blue and green cloak, jewellery of chalchihuitls and a sceptre in the form of a snake. All these form part of the insignia of Tlaloc, the rain and major fertility god, and the deity who shared the Double Temple of Tenochtitlan with Huitzilopochtli. Any voluntary influence the king had over nature was achieved not through any magical power which he alone possessed, nor through contact with spirits which he alone could approach, but by the performance of the correct rituals in their due season following the natural rhythm and cycle of events, while the priests and the people also played their particular roles. This ritual activity was frequently directed to influence matters of immediate importance such as the need for rain. After the guild of 'water-carriers', and 'water-sellers' of the city had bought and sacrificed the impersonator of Chalchihuitl, wife of Tlaloc, "Then Motecuhzoma paid great honours to (the goddess) before her image he offered incense and slew quail. Thus they said: 'The chief gaineth rain; he doth a penance for his people.' And giving thanks thus they paid honour to the waters." (25)

There is no evidence that the Aztec king exerted any involuntary effects upon nature and fertility, such as the Lovedu Queen for instance;

"So bound up is she with nature that her very emotions affect the rain.....she ensures the regularity of nature and the changing of the seasons.....her death dislocated the rhythm of nature." (26)

A basic difference here is that the Lovedu world view was based on the assumption that:-

".....cosmic forces are controllable and, in fact, controlled at every turn by man for his own benefit...." and "...it is largely by means of magic of the royal regalia that the chief is able to exercise control." (27)

The Aztecs on the other hand had developed a more or less fatalistic view of the cosmic order; man could not overpower the forces of nature, but could only fulfil his role in providing the cosmic 'energy', ie, life itself to keep the whole process going in its correct order and sequence.

Richards (28) has described the effect on the land and villages of the Bemba, of the sexual activities of the Citimukulu, which are apparently an important source of supernatural power which can be directed to bring benefit in establishing a new village, or starting a new season in the agricultural year. The sexual life of the Citimukulu was therefore carefully regulated; such activities at the wrong time or with the wrong wife could endanger the welfare of his people. No mention is made in the accounts of such stringent regulations applying to the Ueitlatoani, apart from the usual and frequent demands of continence made upon him as part of the necessary penances. Failure to obey the rules of sexual abstinence before some ceremonies, or failure to give sufficient blood incurred ritual impurity and were a danger to the whole community; disease and death could result from such transgressions, but these were the rules which everyone had to obey, and the greater weight of responsibility fell upon those holding the highest ranks in society. Although Aztec puritanical reticence to talk about sex might have concealed information on such taboos, (especially when the investigators were missionaries), there was in general no ritual exploitation of sexual activities; sex was considered a necessary evil and

was rigidly controlled. There were certainly none of the orgies after festivals described by Landa among the Maya.

Myths and legends of the Toltecs described the kings of Tula as 'divine', in factas incarnations of the god Quetzalcoatl. The first king of the Aztecs in Tenochtitlan (Acamapichtli) was acclaimed to be of direct Toltec descent and legend claimed Toltec descent for all the kings of Tenochtitlan as a matter of national prestige. However they were no longer looked upon as incarnations of Quetzalcoatl, especially as the cult of Tezcatlipoca had become dominant and he was now the patron of rulers. Officially Tezcatlipoca was said to have appointed each of the new kings (29), but during the anointing ceremony and the later coronation, there is no suggestion of any spirit entering the king in the way that the Reth of the Shilluk has to be possessed by Nyikang and completely identified with him (30). Nor as among the Bemba when it was feared that if a chief died a natural death he would breathe out the ancestral spirits which were contained within him, and from which he gained much of his spiritual power. On the contrary, Bancroft's account of the anointing would seem to stress the king's mortality especially in the reference to the mantle decorated with skulls and bones which was said to remind him..."that even kings are mortal." However Bancroft may not have found the correct interpretation of the skull and bones design, as this is also the form of decoration applied to the mantles which are put on the image of Huitzilopochtli in the latter half of the Toxcatl ceremony, and appear to be part of his insignia.

The king was held responsible for the welfare of the state but his mode of action was through the performance of set

rituals and penances at prescribed times, and the provision of sacrifices for the gods, not through the manipulation of any magical power of his own or passed down to him from his predecessor. At his anointing he is humbled before Huitzilopochtli, and affirms his allegiance and service to him. It is through this service and his knowledge of ritual procedure and omens that he fulfills his ritual obligations. His particular function which served both religious and political ends was the successful execution of wars to provide captives for sacrifice; indeed this is his first act after his anointing. For the coronation ceremony many prisoners had to be offered, and the newly anointed king had to fight and provide these before-hand. If there was no economic or political necessity for the war, the forthcoming coronation was sufficient reason to establish it. Ahuitzol carried on a two year campaign in northern Oaxaca taking altogether over 20,000 prisoners, many of whom he sacrificed himself upon the stone.

As long as a king ruled wisely and successfully there was no suggestion that his sickness or old age were of particular danger to the state, nor is there mention of ritual death or the safeguard of any spirit thought to reside in the king's person. Richards believes that the Bemba chiefs were strangled when on the point of death, "for fear they would breathe out the *imipashi* of the land", (31) that is his ancestral spirits from which the king obtained his power and upon which the well-being of the people and the fertility of the land depended. The Jukun (32) king was ritually killed if he became ill or broke an important taboo, in order to preserve the strength and sacredness of the kingship which symbolised the unity of the tribe, and the fertility of the land. While it was accepted that the body of the king was mortal, the kingship which he

represented by living according to the taboos imposed, was immortal, and was by these means preserved. The person of the king was killed, but the symbol was rescued and perpetuated in the next king.

Most of the Mexican kings who did not die in battles between warring city states, died a natural death. Tizoc however was poisoned by his chiefs for his lack of success in war, (this brought dishonour to the state, and a falling off in tribute as well as insufficient victims for sacrifice). There appears to have been no ritual motive in the killing, simply a question of liquidating a bad ruler to make way for a better one. There is also some doubt about the death of Moctezuma II. According to Indian accounts he was killed by the Spaniards; Spanish records claim he was stoned by his own people. Castillo states that while Motecuhzoma stood with the Spanish commanders on the roof of a palace building (presumably held hostage), stones thrown at the Spaniards accidentally hit the king on the temple, killing him instantly. Whatever the truth of the matter, it was certainly not a ritual killing of any kind. There was no indication that 'anarchy reigned' after the death of a king as among the Lovedu, or that the 'land breaks up' as among the Bemba. The choice of successor was usually made from among the four members of the Council, the most influential of the royal line, and no one person had an automatic right to rule, nor was the throne challenged or fought for. A dead king was tied in a squatting position, bound in layers of cloth and decorated with paper and feather ornaments with his face covered in a mosaic mask. His clothes and decoration bore the insignia of Huitzilopochtli, and the body was then burned, the ashes being preserved in the temple of Huitzilopochtli.(33)

The kingship of Tenochtitlan and of the entire empire, was a powerful political reality in the structure of the society.

The extent of supernatural power described for other divine kings was not vested in any one person in Aztec society, everyone was at the mercy of fate and had to vibrate to the rhythms of nature according to their degree of knowledge and devotion. Although the king had arduous religious duties to perform, the large body of the priesthood carried out much of the necessary ritual, and when famine and pestilence occurred, no particular action or behaviour of the king was blamed, but the numbers and quality of sacrifices were increased. This was man's role, and the king as head of state and head of the 'church' performed his duty and responsibility by maintaining the present order, and leading his warriors into battle for the glory of the gods.

Evans-Pritchard (34) states that it is the kingship and not the king himself which is divine, and that such a system is typical of societies with a pronounced lineage system,

"...in which the political segments are part of a loosely organised structure without governmental function. In such societies political organisation takes on a ritual or symbolic form which in polities with a higher degree of organisation gives way, though never entirely to centralised administration."

Thus it seems that where there is possibility of political friction, the tenuous position of the kingship is raised to a spiritual plane. If the king in Mexico was ever divine in the manner described by Seligman, then it would have been when the Aztec tribe comprised a group of powerful clans. Indeed a divine king may have been traditional among the agricultural communities indigenous to the Valley of Mexico about which we know very little. However, by the time the Aztecs were established, the power of the kingship had increased while the development of the state and growth of the empire emphasised his duties as an administrator, and the priestly hierarchy took over many specialised ritual obligations.

However, the ritual duties of the king were extremely important, and Motecuhzoma II (more than the other kings), seemed particularly dedicated to the religious side of his role. His fervour led him to introduce many of the taboos which protected the dignity of the king to the extent of putting him on a semi-divine level. Although Sahagun says that Motecuhzoma gained life and strength from the sacrifice of criminals, it is not stated that these prisoners, or the impersonator of Tezcatlipoca were in fact surrogates for the king. There was an element of redemption in all the sacrifices, and it is interesting that Sahagun says of the prisoners, "...on them he placed the burden." In the creation of the sun, the gods took council to decide who would 'carry the burden', and sacrifice themselves to be the sun. The prisoners, while not a direct substitute for the king, carried the burden of providing the cosmic energy for the gods and so redeemed the people and the king. The Toxcatl ritual which rejuvenated and strengthened the god Tezcatlipoca would no doubt have brought benefit to the king also, who served in his name and contributed towards the ritual. Apart from the belief (especially strong in the latter part of the empire), that the greater were the number of sacrifices, the greater was the benefit to the gods and to the people; there was also an element of prestige in showing the power of the state by the number of prisoners it could take and sacrifice, and it is probably this too which reflected favourably on the king whether the victims were war captives or prisoners who had flouted the laws of the land, so that "Through them he became famous, achieved honour, and became brave, thereby making himself terrifying."

If it was not a divine kingship it was certainly a much

ritualised office, and Fortes's conclusions to his study of Ashanti and Tallensi kingship seem appropriate:-

"It is not magic of the 'divine kingship' kind that imposes ritual forms on these offices. The religious character is a way of investing with binding force the moral obligations of society, for its well-being and prosperity, which those who accept office must solicitously translate into action." (35)

---



Source References

1. Burland, 1967 p.67.
2. Nicholson, 1967 p. 26.
3. Leon-Portillas, ch.11.
4. Spence, 1945 p.20, quoting from the Annales de Quauhtitlan.
5. a very old pre-conquest account quoted by Leon-Portillas, P.33.
6. Bancroft, vol.11, p.317.
7. Sahagun, Book 1, ch.3.
8. ibid Book 3, ch.4-14.
9. Soustelle, 1964 p.94.
10. Nicholson, 1967 p.107.
11. ibid p.32.
12. Sahagun, Book 2, ch.24, he also gives the description of the complete ceremony which follows.
13. Bancroft, vol.11. p.317/319.
14. Hubert and Mauss, ch.5.
15. Sahagun, Book 4, ch.11 pp.41/42.
16. ibid Book 2, ch.24 p.68.
17. Hvidtfeldt, p.88/89.
18. O.E.James, p.230.
19. Soustelle, 1964 ch.2.
20. ibid pp.105/106; Leon-Portillas, pp.161/166.
21. Castillo; Joyce; and Biart, ch.2.
22. Audrey I.Richards; Keeping the King Divine. Proceedings of the R.A.I. 1968, pp.23/35.
23. M.Young: The Divine Kingship of the Jukun: a re-evaluation of some theories. Africa 1966, 36, pp.135/152.
24. Bancroft, vol.11. pp.144/147.
25. Sahagun, Book 1, ch.11.
26. J.D. and E.J.Krige in, Ford (Ed.) African Worlds, p.63.
27. ibid p.61.

28. Richards, p.28/29.
  29. Soustelle, 1964 p.105.
  30. Evans-Pritchard, 1962; Leinhardt, 1954 p.153.
  31. Richards, p.30;
  32. Youngs 1966.
  33. Soustelle, 1964 p.205; Sahagun Book 3, Appendix, also describes the funerals of kings and chiefs.
  34. Evans-Pritchard, 1962.
  35. Fortes, 1962 p.83.
-

Chapter 6    Theories of Sacrifice

In trying to account for the system of massive human sacrifice, found and described by the Spaniards at the time of the conquest, Laurette Sejourné points to the inconsistency between the high degree of spirituality, expressed in some aspects of the Aztec belief system, and the brutality of the cult of human sacrifice.

"Whatever its form, the slaughter of human beings is in essence so opposed to spirituality that it is only in the exact measure in which the one is illuminated that the other becomes possible." (1)

Yet the Aztec religion contained elements suggestive of the highest spiritual achievement comparable to the great world religions. As examples of these Sejourné points to the belief in the omnipresent, omnipotent creator god, the Divine Duality to whom newborn children were dedicated; to the confession and forgiveness of sin, after the appropriate penance, which was allowed to each person once in their life; to the strict moral and ethical code based on religious principles which was taught in the homes and schools, and to the emphasis on penance and humility in the lives of both the laity and the priesthood. He interprets the concept of duality running through all Nahua theology, as the opposition between spirit and matter, and the purpose of religion as being an aid to man in achieving a harmony between the two. After the creation of the fifth sun, the glowing orb which hung immobile in the sky was pure spirit, and was saved from its state of inertia by the self-immolation of the gods. Sejourné believes this to be an example, not of

physical sacrifice, but of penance and humility for the attainment of self-knowledge and spiritual strength. Thus the fifth sun, the sun of movement, was so called because it was the era of men capable of attaining divinity by purification. The movement is within men's hearts in trying to harmonise spirit and matter.

In the same way, Sejourné re-interpreted the symbolism of Xipe Totec and the flaying of the victims dedicated to him; in fact he does not believe Xipe to be an agricultural god at all, but a god of penance. As such he symbolises the purification of the individual from his material self, expressed metaphorically as the progressive flaying of the body, the symbol of the penitential act. It seems probable however that in his area of origin on the west coast, Xipe Totec was primarily an agricultural god, and remained so, at least to the farming community. The huge Temple of Agriculture at Teotihuacan shows the importance of the agrarian deities in cultures so dependent upon the crops month by month.

Sejourné believes that the war and sun cult originated purely out of political aims, and that the holy war was a political invention to terrorise the peoples of Meso-america into subjection for the economic ends of a small, powerful oligarchy of Aztec overlords. Therefore the real importance of the souls of dead warriors going to the House of the Sun, would have originated not in the belief that the sun needed the blood of life to continue, but in the concept that every child born contained a celestial particle from the creator, represented as the sun. If the person led a pure life it was returned to the sun, if not it was destroyed for ever.

"It is in this sense that the deity needs human help. Owing to the fact that it detaches a little of itself in every creation, it would end by dying if the individual, leading a

life of darkness and unconsciousness, were to destroy the particle he had received instead of returning it brighter than before....creation is held to be impossible except through sacrifice: the sacrifice of the sun dismembered among human kind: the sacrifice of men to restore the sun's original unity." (2)

According to Sejourné these concepts originated during the Classic theocratic period in the sacred city of Teotihuacan, (although probably limited to the learned priesthood and theologians). Later they were betrayed and distorted into acts of physical sacrifice by successive waves of immigrant hunting tribes during the tenth and eleventh centuries, continuing up to the time of Aztecs who perpetuated and increased the extent of human sacrifice. Sejourné identified the ruins of Teotihuacan with the Nahua culture of the Toltecs, believing them to have been the inhabitants of Teotihuacan in Classic times, and the inventors of the rich spiritual religion he describes. However, later archaeological research (3) has shown that the Toltecs, the first bearers of Nahua culture to Mexico, were in fact part of the first migration wave from the north west region in immediately post-Classic times. (Figure 2 shows the chronological order of cultures). This was after the destruction and desertion of Teotihuacan, but other Classic cultural centres survived later at Atzacapotzalco and Cholula, and may have co-existed with the Toltec capital of Tula for some time, influencing its development. At first the Toltecs seem to have adopted many of the theocratic ideas they found in the culture of the plateau, including the worship of Quetzalcoatl, under whom human sacrifice was expressly forbidden. But by the second half of the tenth century they were worshipping Tezcatlipoca and performing human sacrifices to the sun. This was the beginning of what Vaillant

called the concept of the 'Solar Eagle', upon which the sun and war cult was based and from which it later developed.

It still remains a mystery exactly who the inhabitants of Teotihuacan were and where they came from; gods and symbols depicted in the ruins are found in later Toltec and Aztec cultures, but in the thousand or so years that elapsed between the cultures it is not surprising to find that these symbols have been re-interpreted and added to. Among these re-interpretations could well have been the imposition of actual instead of spiritual sacrifice, but it may not have been a complete innovation, because some of the earliest finds relating to sacrifice and ritual cannibalism are described by Vaillant (4) for the second phase of Teotihuacan (200 BC - 250 AD), and include the remains of human bodies buried beneath the corners of the Temple of Quetzalcoatl. Even though some human sacrifices seem to have occurred in Teotihuacan and Atzacapotzalco, it was with the militarism characteristic of the post-Classic period beginning about the tenth century that it became of major religious significance.

Not only did human sacrifice pre-date the Aztecs by over three hundred years, but they did not even invent the characteristic method of tearing out the victim's heart. This was all part of the Nahua war cult which had been spread by 'aggressive militarism' not only over most of present-day Mexico, but among the Pipiles of Guatemala and the Maya of Yucatan. Krickeberg (5) describes the large colonnade of columns erected at the base of the temples for the gathering of warriors, a characteristic feature of Chichen Itza, as a complete departure from Classic traditional structure and evidence of direct Toltec influence there. There are huge ball courts as at Tula and motifs of eagles and ocelots are common in the sculpture symbolising the earthly warrior orders.

Apparently by the late tenth century the whole cult of sacrifice on the stone and the tearing out of the heart was already well established by the Toltecs at Chichen Itza, (this form of sacrifice even appears in the Gulf Coast as early as Classic Vera Cruz ) (6). The throwing of victims into the sacred wells or cenote was already a Mayan practice which was encouraged and increased by the Toltecs since "...any kind of sacrifice fitted in with their conception of man's inescapable duty to place life at the disposal of their gods."

Castillo too describes temple walls covered with blood where sacrifices obviously took place, on the Island of Cozumel and the Isla de Sacrificia, where such a system could not have been imposed or maintained by the Aztecs by force in the comparatively short time in which they were in a position of power, (they did not begin their political expansion until 1430), and because of the loose-knit nature of their empire. In many places therefore the sacrificial cult had survived long after the fall and disintegration of the Toltec empire, and continued into the Aztec period until the arrival of the Spanish. Even towns such as Cholula which had been strongholds of the Quetzalcoatl cult forbidding human sacrifice, held such sacrifices regularly by the time of the conquest (7).

Cutting out the heart upon the stone, while being the main method of Toltec sacrifice was not the only one; other methods were adopted from the various peoples in Meso-america with whom the Toltecs came into contact, and among whom human sacrifice in some form was an ancient practice. Joyce (8) quotes dates from the Annals of Quauhtitlan for the first uses of the various types of sacrifice by the Toltecs on the Mexican Plateau. Apparently the first introduction was the drowning of children

to Tlaloc in 1018, while the arrow sacrifice (described on p.94) was introduced from the Huastec country in 1058, and the flaying rite which is sometimes associated with it in 1063. All these were rapidly adopted by the Aztecs on their arrival in the Valley of Mexico, and from that time onwards the occasions for sacrifice and the numbers of victims at each rite steadily increased.

Bancroft (9) quotes three Aztec myths which describe the occasions of the first three sacrifices performed by the Aztecs in the early fourteenth century, while they were still under the domination of the city state of Culhuacan, (at that time the ruling power in the Valley). It was said that during a battle between the Culhuas and the Xochimilcos, the Culhuas won due to the timely intervention of their vassals the Aztecs. The Culhua warriors presented many prisoners to their king; the Aztecs who had taken only four kept these hidden and instead presented a bag full of ears cut from dead enemy warriors, saying that the battle would have been lost had they stopped to take prisoners. Feeling proud of their triumph the Aztecs built an altar to their god Huitzilopochtli, and sent word to the king of the Culhua that they wished to give a costly sacrifice at which they desired his presence. The king insulted them by sending priests with an offering of a dead bird, which they laid unceremoniously upon the altar. The Aztecs refrained from comment but laid a flint knife on the altar beside it, and when the king and his entourage arrived for the festival the four Xochimilco prisoners were brought out, they were laid over the sacrificial stone, their breasts cut with the flint knife and their hearts torn out. The Culhuas were filled with such disgust that they discharged the Aztecs from their services and drove them away. After wandering about the countryside for some time the Aztecs founded their capital of Tenochtitlan.



The second sacrifice was to inaugurate the first temple of Huitzilopochtli. An Aztec was out looking for an animal to sacrifice to his god when he met a Culhua called Xomimitl, he attacked and defeated him, then slew him over the sacrificial stone.

The third sacrifice occurred when the king of the Culhua was told that the Aztecs wished to apotheose his daughter into the mother of their god Huitzilopochtli. Pleased at the honour he let her go. When she arrived at Tenochtitlan she was sacrificed and flayed, and a strong young warrior dressed in her skin. When the king arrived to witness the deification, he was horrified to see his daughter had been killed. The Aztecs immediately declared his daughter to be Teteoinnan, the mother of all the gods. In fact Teteoinnan is an aspect of Tlazolteotl an ancient Earth and Mother goddess associated with the Huastec tribes of the east coast. The myth seems partly to explain this absorption of a foreign deity, and together with the first myth describes the annual sacrifice of the impersonator of Teteoinnan and of four captives during the month of Ochpaniztli. Bancroft also suggests that the myths have a large aetiological content in that they explain the relationship between the Aztecs and the Culhua, and the breaking away from their domination by getting the better of them on each occasion. The fact that the myths credit the Aztecs with the first performance of human sacrifice, (the practice apparently disgusted the Culhua) is typical of Aztec myths which sought to glorify their national history.

Sejourne could not believe that the custom of human sacrifice could perpetuate itself from the conviction that the sun must be continually fed with human blood. He considers it to have been a system of terror, invented for political and

and economic ends maintained by the Aztecs through force. The antiquity of the origins of sacrifice have already been discussed, but the domination of the Aztecs began only with their political expansion in 1430 and ended in 1519 with the Spanish conquest. The Aztec empire was not an empire in the European sense of the word. There was no political unity, in general the subject tribes were politically independent under their own chiefs, and performed rites in their own local temples. Soustelle has described them as a confederacy of autonomous cities with their surrounding and supporting countryside. The triple alliance, in which the Aztecs were the most powerful member, was only interested in obtaining tribute to support its large and differentiated population. If tribute arrived regularly and in correct amounts, the subject tribes received very little interference. When they betrayed the Aztecs to the Spanish, it was not so much the uniting of the oppressed, for they had never united politically for any purpose, but they did so as individual tribes or cities with an eye to improving their own political position. They sought the help of the strangers to change the distribution of power, preferably in their favour, not completely to destroy the culture and religion which they shared.

There were however strong and political and economic advantages to the cult of war and sacrifice, and these were certainly exploited by the Aztecs once they became firmly established in the Valley, especially during the reign of Izcoatl under the guidance of his adviser Tlacaelel. Tlacaelel manipulated the religious beliefs for the benefit and aggrandisement of the Aztec state, but it was the manipulation of a belief system already entrenched, hence the swiftness of his success. He projected these beliefs onto a political plane to persuade the Aztecs that

they were a 'chosen people'. Leon-Portilla (10) describes how this came about, and quotes from Duran the text of Tlacaelel's speech to the people.

After Izcoatl's election in 1424, Atzacapotzalco was still the major power in the Valley (they had succeeded the Culhua to this position), and was threatening the annihilation of the still small Aztec tribe in Tenochtitlan. Izcoatl was for submitting to Atzacapotzalco and offering tribute, but Tlacaelel (then a young warrior and Izcoatl's nephew), said that the Aztecs should fight it out, and so they did - victoriously. Having thus established himself as a hero in the eyes of the Aztecs, he became so powerful that the king followed his advice on every matter. In the reign of Tlacaelel's brother Motecuhzoma I, he was given the official title of Ciuahcoatl, the vice emperor, and was the second most powerful person in the empire. Tlacaelel established a military aristocracy by giving titles of nobility to distinguished warriors, and divided the land taken in combat to the king, the elders, the new nobility and the calpulli. He also destroyed many of the old historical pictographs and manuscripts which belittled their origins and role in the Valley up to that time, and had new versions of the history written portraying the Aztecs as the proud and noble heirs to the glorious Toltec culture. The idea that the cosmic forces needed energy, symbolised by human blood, in order to maintain the harmony of the universe and the survival of the fifth sun, became a sacred mission under the preaching of Tlacaelel. He gave the Aztecs a vision of themselves as a 'chosen people', and undoubtedly the prestige and bounty of war implied in this was a contributory factor to his acceptance as the guiding hand in Aztec affairs. Tlacaelel's services as adviser were extended to three kings of Tenochtitlan from Izcoatl to Axayacatl, and were a strong influence over all of them. Duran attributed

to Tlacaelel the instigation of the 'Flowery War ' during the reign of Motecuhzoma I, and gave the following account of his speech of that occasion:

"....our god need not depend on the ~~the~~ occasion of an affront to go to war. Rather, let a convenient market be sought where our god may go with his army to buy victims and people to eat as if he were to go to a nearby place to buy tortillas..... whenever he wishes or feels like it. And may our people go to to this place with their armies to buy with their blood, their heads, and with their hearts and lives, those precious stones, jade, and brilliant and wide plumes ....for the service of the admirable Huitzilopochtli."

('Precious stones', 'jade' and 'feathers' were terms used metaphorically to mean heart or soul, ie. the soul of a captive who would be sent to Huitzilopochtli in the House of the Sun).

" This market, say, I, Tlacaelel, let it be situated in Tlaxcala, Huexotzinco, Cholula, Atlixco, Tliliuhquitepec, and Tecoac. For if we situated it further away, in such places as Yopitzinco or Michoacan or in the region of the Huastecs, all of which are already under our domination, their remoteness would be more than our armies could endure. They are too far, and, besides, the flesh of these barbaric peoples is not to the liking of our god. They are like old and stale tortillas, because, as I say, they speak strange languages and they are barbarians.....and this war should be of such a nature that we do not endeavour to destroy the other completely. War must always continue, so that each time and whenever we wish and our god wishes to eat and feast, we may go there as one who goes to market to buy something to eat..... organised to obtain victims to offer our god Huitzilopochtli."

The influence of Tlacaelel's 'national vision' on the indigenous forms of human sacrifice and worship can be seen in the old agrarian rites described in chapter 4, where war and sun symbols have been superimposed, and large numbers of captives were sacrificed as well as the impersonator of the god receiving the victim. The scale of sacrifice and the intensity of the sense of

mission were the essentially Aztec additions to the Nahuatl culture, and the features which so horrified their European conquerers. According to the Codex Telleriano-Remensis (11), Ahuitzotl had sacrificed 20,000 prisoners at the inauguration of the Temple of Huitzilopochtli; virtually the whole man-power of tribes was wiped out during these holocausts. Successive kings vied with each other in expressing their piety in this way, especially as natural disasters such as famine, flood and drought, recurred fairly frequently emphasising the necessity for such ritual action. The departure from traditional forms of sacrifice common to most of Meso-america was the large extent of human sacrifice, and this was one of the reasons for the readiness of the subject tribes to revolt, some of whom were becoming permanently weakened by the size of tribute demanded in both goods and captives to carry out these enormous ceremonies. It is interesting to consider whether, if there had been no interruption in the political development at this point by the conquest, the weakening of the subject tribes in this way would have led to the imposition of a truly centralised administration by the Aztecs, or whether a drying up of tribute would have led to the collapse of the third Meso-american empire.

It is difficult to know exactly what happened in Teotihuacan and how the aggressive militaristic culture arose; Leon-Portilla stresses the difficulties of studying the concepts and metaphysical ideas of a people from archaeology alone, and the ruins of Teotihuacan are not rich in glyphic inscriptions as are the Mayan ruins. In his study of the thought and culture of the Aztecs, Leon-Portilla has carefully examined the remaining pictographic manuscripts and immediately post-conquest writings in Nahuatl, and he discovers that many of the spiritual concepts described by Sejourne still existed side by side with the war cult. The teachings

of Quetzalcoatl were still the basis of the ethical and moral codes, and were taught in the calmecac and to some extent in the telpochcalli. In the higher echelons of the priesthood, there were small groups of philosophers and theologians whose thinking was way ahead of the formal religion, but whether this stream of metaphysical thought had always existed in the culture of the Valley in varying degrees, or whether this was a revival of the early teachings of Quetzalcoatl is hard to say. Certainly a return of the Quetzalcoatl cult was foretold in the readings of fate and was expected in a year One Reed, 1519 was such a year and at first Cortes was mistaken for the returned Quetzalcoatl come to oust the cult of his opponent Tezcatlipoca. Philosophical contemplation may have been limited to a few thinkers, but the ethics of discipline and self-discipline, and spiritual advance through penitence and humility were all part of the formal religion and of daily life. Leon-Portilla claims that far from merely accepting the long and rich cultural heritage to which the Aztecs became heirs, their tlamatinime (wise-men) questioned and debated the great spiritual problems and added considerably to the philosophy handed down to them. What they thought of human sacrifice we do not know, they do not appear to have preached against it, and even the elite cult of Quetzalcoatl in Tenochtitlan sacrificed the impersonator of Quetzalcoatl, once a year (12) - the god who at one time would receive only snakes and butterflies as offerings (13). It seems that the concept of spiritual exaltation through purification did exist in Aztec culture alongside the war cult, and they shared the same mythical and religious basis; the mythical sanctions for human sacrifice went back to the very creation of the universe.

As to whether the cult of human sacrifice came about as

a result of religious fervour, or purely due to political greed depends on whether one considers political, or religious sanctions to be stronger. Sejourne' clearly believes the former;

"Can we seriously believe that any religion - that is, a revelation to free man from the anguish of his destiny - can be built upon laws of human destruction.....it can only be supposed that the sun's tyranny over physical life did not develop and take root in man's hearts but was planted there by force." (14)

On the other hand, Krickeberg considers that the cult must have been based on deep religious convictions;

"Political circumstances alone cannot have given rise to the hideous increase in the frequency of human sacrifice among the Aztecs. The basic reason was religious; these were primarily sacrifices to the sun god, ....It was not therefore, an innate tendency to cruelty, but a fanatical belief in man's duty to keep the sun in the sky, that led to the practice of human sacrifice and to the belief that death on the altar was a glorious end." (15)

Caso, agrees that although it was used as justification for political expansion, religion was the basic motive in the Aztec world;

"Their entire existence revolved around their religion... It was the prime motive for all individual acts, and was the basic reason for the existence of the state itself." (16)

Irene Nicholson (17) tended to follow Sejourne's approach, believing Aztec religion to be the betrayal of an earlier more spiritually based religion into material terms. However, she allowed that a limited amount of voluntary sacrifice was

consistent with the spiritual ideal. She suggested that the first physical expression of these ideals into actual sacrifice was the killing of a willing victim from among an elite of dedicated worshippers who, by leading a pure and penitential life had reached the perfection of the 'deified heart' - 'yolteotl'; a heart and mind consecrated through the gods to the Divine Duality. Extreme devotion was necessary for the attainment of the ideal, it was called developing 'a face and heart', that is a whole and pure personality, for only a true deified heart was fit to be sent to the god. As an example of this she quoted the sacrifice of the impersonator of Tezcatlipoca in the month Toxcatl;

".....voluntary sacrifice of life for the sake of redeeming the world is a very different matter from the mass murder and the tearing out of hearts of unwilling victims. The earliest human sacrifice in ancient America were probably voluntary. At one of the most important feasts in the calendar, for instance that of the god Tezcatlipoca, a single youth was killed apparently with his own consent.....the sacrifice of the youth was linked with a profound philosophical idea that only the true, the deified heart is worthy to become nourishment for the great star that maintains life on earth."

Most of the accounts claim that the victims went voluntarily to their deaths, especially the captured warriors who wished to die honourably, but there are comments from time to time on the necessity to restrain or guard the victims which would imply that not all were quite so willing, and not all victims were warriors.

Nicholson (18) suggests that the degeneration of this concept of the voluntary sacrifice of specially dedicated people, may have come about as the result of misuse of the



various hallucinogenic drugs known to be utilized by the priesthood in divination and communication with the gods, and by the medicine women and physicians for cures. Descriptions of the plants and fungi used by the Aztecs were made by an Indian physician, Martin de la Cruz in the Codex Badianus in 1552, and by Dr. Fransisco Hernandez, physician to Charles V of Spain, in 1570 (19). Small hard seeds called ololiuqui were soaked in water and chewed, or made into an infusion and drunk to induce visions. The seeds have been identified as belonging to a plant called *Rivea corymbosa* of the *Convolvulaceae* or Morning-glory family, and contain chemicals allied to lysergic acid from which LSD is obtained. These seeds also had analgesic qualities and were used in very weak infusions medicinally. Teonanacatl, or 'flesh of the gods', were small black mushrooms (genus *Panaeolus*), three types of which were described by Dr. Hernandez and are also illustrated in Codex Magliabecchiano. These were also used for cures on occasions but were eaten mostly by the experienced priests to promote revelation and divine meditation. Also used was 'peyotl', from the small, fleshy, spineless cactus *Lophophora williamsii* which grows in northern Mexico, from which it was probably obtained by trade. The fruit of the peyote grows in small 'buttons' which cluster around the top, these are either eaten fresh and whole as 'green peyote', or made into an infusion. The plant contains many effective alkaloids, including mescaline which produces a very complex form of intoxication involving the fantastic kaleidoscopes of colour described by Aldous Huxley (20).

As for the visible effects of these drugs on the behaviour of the priests, Nicholson (21) quotes the description of the Spanish chronicler Acosta of the effects of the herb petum, which in ointment form was also used as an analgesic;

".....by means of this ointment they became witches and saw and spoke to the devil. The priests when smeared with this ointment, lost all fear, and became imbued with cruelty so they boldly killed men in their sacrifices, going all alone at night to the mountains, and into dark caves, not fearing any wild beasts because they were sure that lions, tigers, snakes and other savage animals that breed in the mountains and forests would flee from them because of this petum of their god..... This petum also served to cure the sick, and for children; and so they called it the divine remedy.....so the people went to the priests and holy men, who encouraged the blind and ignorant in this error, persuaded them what they pleased and making them pursue their inventions and diabolical ceremonies....."

(There were of course no lions or tigers in the Americas, Acosta was doubtless referring to the native jaguar or ocelot).

Ololiuqui, peyote and teonanacatl all release psychotomimetic drugs, that is they induce the symptoms of psychosis, but in small dosage this appears to produce only a temporary condition with little permanent change. They are described by an American neuro-psychiatrist as;

"..substances that produce changes in thought, perception, mood, and sometimes posture. These changes occur alone or in concert without causing either major disturbances of the autonomic nervous system or addictive craving. However if there is an overdose, some disorientation, memory disturbance, stupor and even narcosis may occur, but these reactions are not characteristic." (22)

Many tribes in the peyote-growing areas, including the Huichol and the Kiowa, use it regularly in their religion under strictly controlled ritual conditions. Slotkin (23) describes its use by the Native American Church which follows what they call the 'Peyote Way';

" The peyote rite is an all-night ceremony, lasting approximately from sunset to sunrise, characteristically held in a Plains type tipi. Essentially the rite had four major elements: prayer, singing, eating the sacramental Peyote, and contemplation.....Long ago God took pity on the Indian. So God created Peyote and put some of his power into it for the use of the Indians. Therefore the Peyotist takes the sacramental Peyote to absorb God's power contained within it, and in the same way that the white Christian takes the sacramental bread and wine.....Spiritual power gives a person knowledge of how to behave successfully in everyday life, and what to make of ones life as a whole."

Peyote teaches through heightened sensitivity, introspection leading to self-evaluation, and visions to provide a direct experience of God or a spirit intermediary such as Jesus, or the Peyote Spirit.

"The combination of such effects as absence of fatigue, heightened sensitivity to relevant stimuli, and lowered sensitivity to irrelevant stimuli, should make it easier to understand how the individual is disposed to learn from Peyote under especially created ritual conditions."

Slotkin emphasises the importance of the strict ritual organisation of the rite, and the channelling of the psychological effects into increased self-knowledge and communication with God.

The Aztec way of life was based on austerity and humility, the priests lived under a particularly rigorous regime and one would expect the taking of ololiuqui, peyotl and mushrooms to be strictly controlled and channelled in the same way. It seems that when the taking of vision-inducing drugs is divorced from the ritually prescribed magico-religious control and becomes purely a means of secular pleasure, a trip, that social degeneration

becomes a problem. Ironically it may have been due to the religious prohibitions and the very extremes of all the measures of penance and fasting to achieve revelation, that religious fervour could lead to overdoses and cause personality derangement. The power structure of the priesthood was maintained by such a rigid hierarchy that those at the top were in a position of great influence, and the chief priests were held to be the closest to the gods and thus the best to know what sacrifices the gods demanded. It is quite possible too that the constant deprivation and self-torture endured by the priests served to potentiate the effects of the drugs used. It is obviously a subject into which research is difficult but Nicholson (24) quotes Fransisco Guerra, a Spaniard who has studied the use of certain hallucinogenic drugs;

"The consumption of up to ten or twelve teonanacatl mushrooms, after a period of slight muscular inco-ordination or inebriation, gives rise to a feeling of well-being and enjoyment, explosions of laughter, and the well-publicised coloured visions in three dimensions, followed by a deepsleep. Mazatac Indians still use it for divinations, but.....doses of over fifty mushrooms are said to produce intense intoxication and permanent madness. Also when peyotl is ingested a feeling of well-being and visual hallucinations of a coloured nature are produced; some of them may be based in the remote past, others apparently cannot be related to any experience. Mental concentration is difficult, and external stimulations are transferred into mental hallucinations..... Chemical variations in the molecular structure of the mescaline suggests that the spectrum of action of these Mexican drugs can be enlarged and their action on the higher functions of the brain modified extensively."

Nicholson concludes that,

"From Dr. Guerra's evidence it is clear that in ancient times any slackening or laxity among the users of hallucinogens could have brought about degenerate effects."

However, it seems that it could equally well have been over-zealousness in the desire for revelation, that could have led to a gradual mental disintegration of the most powerful priests and larger and larger numbers of human sacrifices. If this is indeed what happened, the increased demand for sacrifices would have been consistent with the political aims of the state and so would ~~would~~ have met with little resistance from that quarter. In any case the two chief priests had a strong say in political and military affairs; there was no distinct division between the secular and the religious.

Aztec religion was a synthesis not only of historical layers of culture and spiritual ideas, but of variations in worship and interpretation of ideas at different social levels. The pupils of the calmecac were even taught a different style of language for the purposes of rhetoric, recitation and prayer, which was not spoken, and not too well understood by the maceguales taught in the telpochcalli. There is a vast collection of myths, prayers, and rites which show the whole range of emphasis from a mixture of mana and magical formulae, to the highest spiritual concepts.

Although at most levels the interpretation of different sets of symbols was passed on from one culture to the next, the villages and their traditions remained a conservative force. Throughout all the political ravages of Meso-america the village with its surrounding countryside has always been the basic social and political unit where the old rituals were preserved. It seems a feature of many complex societies and great religions that a more sophisticated worship by a religious elite exists only in the towns and cities, while the villages maintain the more magical elements of the faith, with the emphasis on the successful

manipulation of the environment, To the Mexican peasants, the importance of the rituals was their efficacy, and the agricultural rites remained basically unchanged in their attempts to rejuvenate and propitiate the fertility gods to follow their natural course. The people brought maize stalks and all kinds of food to the temple as gifts for the deification of the maize; the hearts of victims sacrificed for Tlaloc were thrown into the lake and it was said 'the debt is paid'; the messenger to the sun sacrificed every 260 days in the Temple of the Warriors carried with him a bag of 'gifts' for the sun, but in most rituals the victims were more than simply gifts to the gods to enlist their good favour.

Tylor put forward a theory that the act of sacrifice originated from the giving of gifts to a headman or chief to gain favour and lessen hostility, which, by evolutionary development and substituting of a gift of value for a mere token offering, became an act of homage to the gods.

"As prayer is a request to a deity as if he were a man, so sacrifice is a gift made to a deity as if he were a man.... The suppliant who bowed before his chief, laying a gift at his feet and making his humble petition, displays the anthropomorphic model and origin at once of sacrifice and prayer." (25)

Finally this developed into the doctrine of abnegation, the idea that the significance of the sacrifice is in the worshipper giving something of value to himself rather than in the deity receiving the benefit, the efficacy of the rite being measured by its cost. Tylor classified the types of gift offering according to the manner in which they were made and received, suggesting that the first was the original form and that the other two followed through a process of evolution.

The most primitive in this classification was the bodily transmission of the gift in the material medium, without consideration of exactly how the deity would make use of the substance. In these he included victims thrown into the lake for Tlaloc, and the smearing of the idol's lips with blood. The second form is the transmission of the essence, savour, or soul of the offering, while the solid part may be left untouched, destroyed, or consumed by the worshippers purely for their enjoyment. Sometimes the blood is taken to represent the life of the victim, and this alone is offered to the gods not as a drink-offering but as symbolic of the life of the victim. Finally there is the offering as homage to the deity or as expiation for sin. In this case the sacrifice is received only in spiritual form, the gift is not chosen to be acceptable to the god, or beneficial, but as the vehicle of an act of worship.

Tylor assumes that the more spiritual approach to sacrifice must have been the latest to evolve, but it seems that in the case of the Nahua religion, the spiritual approach may have been the original form.

An Aztec sacrifice was more than just a gift to appease the deity; the choice of victim was of prime importance according to the god being honoured and the season of the year. Prisoners of war were the most favoured victims for Huitzilopochtli, because the holy war undergone to obtain them was an earthly drama of the celestial battle of light and darkness, and formed an essential prerequisite for the sacrifice. The impersonator of Tezcatlipoca had to be young, strong and perfect in mind and body; his death symbolised and affected the annual rebirth of Tezcatlipoca. In the agricultural sacrifices, the victims were impersonators of the spirit of the corn at its different stages

of growth and were therefore chosen accordingly; a young girl to represent the deified green maize plant, Xilonen, and an older woman for the mature crop. The victims were laboriously dressed in the insignia of the gods they represented and the ritual achieved a complete identification, creating the presence of the deity in the victim itself. After the sacrifice parts of the body were eaten by the worshippers, but not purely for their enjoyment. Cannibalism was not a normal practice, it was the ritually prescribed distribution of the body forming a rite of communion between the worshippers and the god. The presence of the deity in the sacrificial flesh is seen clearly when the act of communion is called 'teoquali', 'the god is eaten'. While the presence of the god descended into the victim, the soul and life of the victim went to the god, to the House of the Sun to assist the 'celestial eagle' in his daily resurrection, or to Tlalocan. Although the blood and sometimes the hearts of the victims were placed in the mouths of the idols, these were not thought to be physically eaten by the gods, but were symbolic of the life-force generated in the victims and given over to the cosmic forces represented by the gods. More frequently, the hearts were burnt in the eagle vessel; transformed by primeval fire into the energy of life.

The choice of victims therefore in no way resembled the form of gift which might be given an earthly man, and none of the sacrifices were ever performed privately; there was no individual ownership of a victim offered for sacrifice for one's sole benefit. Sacrifices were always public and for the benefit of the entire society; the victims were procured collectively either on the battlefield, or bought as slaves by the guilds of craftsmen or the Pochteca. These were offered by a corporate group



and were in imitation of the prisoners offered by the warriors; they reflect the increasing importance of the artisan and merchant classes in Aztec society, but were not individual offerings. There could be no suggestion of abnegation in the sacrifice, for without personal ownership there can be no personal loss. There was no loss involved at all, it was the cosmic duty of man to obtain captives for sacrifice, if one was taken prisoner oneself and met the same fate, then it was a fulfilment of one's destiny. If it were a mere exchange of favour for a gift there would be no need for public ceremony and all the paraphernalia of sacrifice. Although in every act of worship there is an element of homage present, the other purposes of sacrifice - the dramatic rebirth of the god; the communion with the god; the resurrection of the soul of the victim to the service of the deity, and the continuation of nature - these are all of more vital concern in Aztec sacrifice.

Tylor classifies the occasions for sacrifice according to the instances when one might offer a gift. These include a sudden present emergency which requires favourable action from the recipient, periodic tribute to an overlord, and payments made in return for protection of wealth. The occasions for Aztec sacrifice were determined by the movements of celestial bodies which were minutely observed and recorded, and the seasonal activities of the elements affecting the growth of crops. The exact hour, and sometimes the exact minute of a sacrifice was vital to its efficacy, and sacrifices had to take place in a carefully calculated order and manner. With the development of the Aztec state, the incidence of human sacrifice increased to such an extent that they took place almost daily; in the event of sudden disasters the numbers or quality of victims was increased at the set rituals. These considerations bear no relation even to the

most rigid rules of gift-giving. Tylor considered that the giving of parts of a victim to a god, blood, head etc, was part of a process of economy which gradually substituted part of the original offering for the whole, or an inferior form of offering as a 'token' may be substituted for a gift. However, in the Aztec case the numbers of sacrifices increased at each ritual, and the events requiring such offerings increased; a complete reversal of the trends which Tylor suggests should be the case. There are examples in Aztec ritual of the sacrifice of dough images, and the offering of food and first fruits, the choice of these offerings depending on the appropriateness to the ritual situation. They can hardly be said to exemplify the substitution of human victims for effigies when the occurrence of human sacrifice was increasing greatly on other ritual occasions.

Robertson-Smith, also an evolutionist, considers an opposite point of view. In his theory sacrifice began as a sacramental meal between clansmen, and by a 'fatal aberration' evolved into a mere offering of a gift or tribute to the deity. He states that originally sacrifice was,

"...an act of communion in which the god and his worshippers unite by partaking of the flesh and blood of a sacred victim.... the very act of eating and drinking with a man was a symbol and a confirmation of fellowship and mutual obligations. The one thing directly expressed in the sacrificial meal is that the god and his worshippers are commensals." (26)

In the Semitic culture upon which he based his theory; eating together both expressed and created the mutual obligations of a kinship tie.

Robertson-Smith defined this kin group or clan as the organisation within which life was sacred, and each member was

responsible for the life of the other, with the duty to carry out blood revenge for the death of any fellow kinsman. The clan was considered as a living whole consisting of one flesh and blood, and the god was believed to be from the same stock as the worshippers; thus the religious and the kinship spheres were identical. At certain times the clansmen expressed their solidarity and nourished their common life by sharing a common meal; a sacrificial meal at which every member of the clan was present including the god, and from which all non-members were excluded. This is comparable to the "sacra gentilicia" of the early Roman religion described by Fustel de Coulange, but unlike the gentes, Robertson-Smith believed the sacred meal not to have begun with the domestic meal, because he thought the wider clan organisation to be older than the household; and later, the household group would contain affines not of the same blood. The religious unit was the clan not the individual; the sacrificial meal was a public feast celebrated by the whole clan with their deity, as one kinship group, and was

"Based on the view that the gods are part and parcel of the same natural community with their worshippers. The divine father or king claims the same kind of respect and service as the human father or king, and practical religion is simply a branch of social duty." (27)

The essential part of the common meal was the slaughter of a sacred victim to be eaten by all present; the life of the beast forming the 'cement' to bond man and god. In Semitic rites the victim was usually from among their herds of cattle or sheep, while camels were sacred to the ancient Arabs, but this was the only time an animal was slaughtered and was the essential element in the sacred meal. It was forbidden to kill an animal except

on the collective responsibility of the clan for a sacrificial meal; in other words the life of the animal was treated like that of a fellow tribesman, because no life not within the kinship bond was protected in that way. The life of the tribesman was sacred except by approved execution which required the consent, and if possible the participation, of every member. From this Robertson-Smith concluded that the relationship between the clan and the sacred animal, whether camel, lamb or cow, was one of totemism. The clan shared a kinship relation with the animal victim, and by man and god eating the flesh and blood of the totem animal, the blood-bond of brotherhood was confirmed and cemented.

"....the principle of sanctity and that of kinship are identical. The sanctity of a kinsman's life and the sanctity of the godhead are not two things, but one; for ultimately the only thing that is sacred is the common tribal life, or the common blood which is identified with the life. Whatever being partakes of this life is holy, and its holiness may be described indifferently, either as participation in the divine life and nature, or as participation in the kindred blood." (28)

Through a process of social evolution the idea of kinship with the deity became attenuated, and gradually a smaller portion of the animal, the blood for example, was given to the god as an offering while only man ate the flesh. The occasions for sacrifice became varied and increased until it developed into a religious banquet principally for the pleasure of consuming meat. This period in Semitic history coincides with rule by divine kings, who were always approached with gifts and tribute. As the sacramental part of the meal became lost in time, sacrifices were regarded as gifts of homage to the court of the divine king, much as grain and other produce had always been given to great

men and leaders. Thus, from his own theological point of view, Robertson-Smith considers the gift aspect of sacrifice not to have been its origin, but a 'fatal aberration'. The feeling of kinship with the totem animal which had existed with the clan herds, had broken down with the concept of private ownership of property. Animals were eaten for hunger and pleasure, and were treated as sacred only on the altar at the time of sacrifice. For the first time it emerged that "the victim qua victim possessed a sacrosanct character which did not belong to it merely by virtue of its natural kind", and because the original kinship meaning was lost, its sanctity at the altar was explained by calling it a substitute for the offering of a tribesman. Later, in situations of imminent danger or as expiation for a great sin, it was thought to be more efficacious to offer what they believed to be the original or real offering - an actual tribesman. The ancient Arabs it seems did sometimes offer their own children, but more commonly a prisoner of war or a slave was substituted for a kinsman. Robertson-Smith states however that on these occasions, because of a natural repugnance to cannibalism, the body of the human sacrifice was never eaten, but was burnt, thrown over a precipice or otherwise disposed of as being too sacred to be handled. Thus, according to this theory, human sacrifice developed out of a misunderstanding of the purpose of the traditional animal sacrifice, and human victims were themselves sometimes substituted by animals sanctified for the purpose. (There is in fact no reason to suppose that cannibalism is naturally repugnant; many societies have practiced it for religious purposes, or simply for pleasure).

Robertson-Smith's theory has been criticised because it was based on very little real evidence; much of it concerned with the origins were little more than conjectures, and it is doubtful whether early Semitic society had totemic clans at all. However

there are some interesting points of similarity in Aztec sacrifice, which was basically an act of communion. Sacrifice was a public feast in which a sacred victim was killed and eaten by the worshippers while part of the victim was given over to the gods, but this was so despite the fact that the victim was nearly always human. The most favoured victims were prisoners of war, but it is possible that at one time it was traditional to sacrifice a tribesman. For example, a relationship stated as that between father and son was established between the captor and the captive during the vigil before the Tlacaxipeuliztli sacrifice (see pages 32/33); and the captor was forbidden to eat of his captives' flesh because it was considered as his own. In Tenochtitlan parents gave their own children to be sacrificed before Tlaloc in the first month of the year, and Bancroft (29) states that the Pipile priests in Guatemala bred bastards which were brought up to be sacrificed when they were six to twelve years old. Thus it is conceivable that at one time a member of one's own tribe should have been sacrificed, but there is no evidence that the Nahua ever had totemic clans, or that human sacrifice was a substitute for any animal sacrifice. If kinship had ever been a consideration in the selection of a victim, it is more likely to have been an actual kinsman who was sacrificed to represent and redeem the rest of the community, rather than an animal regarded as a kinsman.

Undoubtedly kinship was very important in social organisation in the early history of the Aztecs as a wandering tribe of collectors and hunters, and the calpulli (the administrative divisions of the city), were originally based on kinship groups in which were vested the rights of members to usufruct of the land (30). In Tenochtitlan the social importance of clans was diminishing while the duties and obligations to the state were increasing. Land was still held

by the calpulli, but was also handed out to individuals as war booty, and all legal matters were subordinate ultimately to the state court. The complexity of Aztec society, and the differentiation of labour and skills was leading to the development of class society based largely on occupational groups, and notably powerful among them were the Pochteca. However religion was very much a community affair, and the means of procuring victims was a group concern. Prisoners were taken in war by the warriors, and guilds could club together to buy a slave to sacrifice as a corporate group to their own patron deity. Again these were trade guilds not kin groups, and while sons tended to follow their father's trade, there was no rule that they had to do so, and the membership of the guilds was in no way restricted by kinship. Although the calpulli's had their own local temples (usually called 'tribal temples'), families following a certain trade tended to group together to form quarters, for example the feather-workers of Amantlan with their temple to their patron deity Coyotl inauaal. Although some of the gods were thought to have been real men at some time in the past who have since become national heroes, they were never thought of as ancestors or fellow-clansmen but were mostly associated with various elements of the environment. The eating of the body of the victim does not seem to have been a joyful banquet in the way that Robertson-Smith describes a festive communal meal; there was just a morsel for each participant, and human flesh was not eaten at any other time. Whether or not this originally stemmed from old traditions of killing tribesmen, in Tenochtitlan the choice of victim no longer depended on any kinship aspects. Prisoners of war were sacrificed because of the ritual importance of war, and agricultural sectors chose victims most suitable to impersonate the god being honoured.

The sacramental meal which normally followed a sacrifice was therefore not a clan meal uniting the worshippers and the god in a blood-bond of kinship, but a means whereby the worshippers absorbed the essence of the god, while giving to him the life and soul of the victim, thus the communion is called 'teoquali' - 'god is eaten' (31). Those who took part in the communion had to fast in preparation sometimes for many days. While the worshippers partook of the god through the flesh of the victim, the god received the life and soul. These were symbolised by the blood which was smeared on the idol's lips and on the temple walls, and by the heart which was usually burnt. Neither were believed to be physically eaten by the gods despite Tlacaelel's rousing speech that Huitzilopochtli enjoyed eating the flesh of enemies like 'fresh tortillas'.

The life-force which the blood symbolised was the cosmic energy which enabled the movement and cycles of celestial bodies, and the recurrence of the seasons in their due order. The 'precious liquid', the blood of sacrifice, was the 'cement' of cosmic unity. It linked the gods and man through the soul and life of the victim to the rhythm of the universe, enabling man to fulfil his destiny as a particle of life-force caught up in the cosmic process. Yerkes (32) defines the origins of religion as the recognition of a Power and man's search to know its will and co-operate fully with it. The aim of Aztecs rites was complete co-operation with the divinity and the universe as they saw it. The sacrifice of the victim - the imitation of the original sacrifice of creation - redeemed society, the on-going process of recycling the life-force had been achieved and so life for the rest of the community continued.

The reasons and occasions for Nuer sacrifice are numerous, but they are basically redemptive (33). In the first place the



the ox is killed as a means of communicating with the Spirit, the killing invokes him to be present. Although strictly speaking the ox is his anyway, the free offering<sup>of</sup> it puts the right, (kwoth), on the side of the man and places Spirit in a sort of moral obligation. In most cases a sacrifice is made to avert some evil or illness, and Spirit is asked to take the ox instead of man who is threatened. The ox is thus a substitute for the life of the man (since both belong to Spirit anyway), and is an act of separation, of asking the god to take the ox and leave man alone. On the contrary, Aztec sacrifice tied men closer to the gods by engaging them to the cosmic 'wheel of life', symbolised by the continuous cycle of ceremonies re-enacting the death and rebirth of the gods.

The Nuer chose an ox to sacrifice because there was a religious and social equivalence between man and ox. A young man was called by his 'ox name', and the whole social organisation revolved around the lineage herds. In the sacrificial situation the ox stood for man, and when no ox was available a cucumber was used, not as a substitute for man, for there was no special relationship between cucumber and man that could make substitution possible, but as a substitute for the ox which alone could stand for man due to their unique interchangeability. This is not to suggest that the Nuer ever practiced human sacrifice, there was no need when the ox and man were of equal value to their creator, and when the significance of the sacrifice was not in the spilling of blood or in particular ritual actions, but in the intentions and sincerity of the worshipper.

The lack of suitable animals for domestication\* or herding

\* The only domesticated species seem to have been the dog, the turkey and the quail, all important sources of food, but were also used for sacrifice.

may explain the absence in Aztec belief of a special relationship with any species of animal that could stand for man in a similar way. However the choice of victim was not arbitrary. The most prized victim was a prisoner who had been taken in holy war, and who was renowned for valour and courage on the battlefield; the continuation of life had to be obtained through the giving of life itself, the most precious particle of which was in man. Whether or not the sacrifice was originally a voluntary offering of oneself, or of a kinsman, it seems a natural development that as the numbers increased the society should look outside its own borders for victims. Perhaps their courage in war demonstrated their moral fitness as victims; it was certainly considered a valiant thing for a man to go proudly and willingly to his death on the stone. Sahagun described the demeanour of a courageous captive going to be sacrificed during Tlacaxipeuliztli,

"He went strong of heart and shouting, not without courage nor stumbling, but honouring and praising his city. He went with firm heart, speaking as he went; 'Already here I come! You will speak of me there in my homeland!'" (34)

Animal sacrifice is found in societies with all manner of social and political organisations, from the very rigid hierarchy of the Hindu society, to the 'ordered anarchy' of the Nuer. Their religious systems are equally varied in the formality of their worship. It does not matter to the Nuer exactly when or where a sacrifice is made, there is little ritual activity involved and no special official or priest is necessary to carry it out. Usually the head of the household performed the sacrifice and without any purification rites before-hand, apparently the concept of ceremonial purity is unknown to the Nuer. In the Hindu sacrifices

described by Hubert and Mauss there is as much ritual paraphernalia and preparation as in Aztec sacrifice.

Although technically animal and human sacrifice appear to differ little in their function, the important differences between the two is that human sacrifice is always a communal offering in a public ceremony necessitating special officials to represent the whole people in their offering to the gods. In societies which practice human sacrifice as well as personal animal sacrifice, as a rule human victims are used only in cases of great urgency or disaster effecting the entire community, and then the rite is performed by someone representing all the people present. The Khond sacrifice to Tari Pennu was an offering by the entire society for the benefit of 'all mankind'. The victim had to be a Meriah bought in the proper way laid down by religious traditions, only then did the members of the community incur no guilt at the killing. Implicit in the rules of human sacrifice is a certain degree of centralised social organisation. The more complex the rites, the more the technical and ritual knowledge necessitates long periods of training and a large priesthood to guard and pass-on the 'mysteries'. Human sacrifice seems to occur regularly only in societies with an authoritarian regime, it seems that the strength of the state as an aim in itself involves the diminishing importance of the individual life. The person becomes subordinate to the glory and needs of the state, until, in later Aztec times thousands of victims were immolated at a time, and virtually whole tribes were 'consumed' by the sun represented by the national god and culture hero, Huitzilopochtli. There was no guilt felt at the killing of a human to be overcome by procuring the victim in the proper traditional manner, as among the Khonds; it was simply accepted as right. The Aztecs had become ensnared in a vicious

circle of self-preservation by self-destruction, like the serpent swallowing its own tail.

Although sacrifice has been discussed here under convenient headings, it cannot be isolated as a religious phenomena from the rest of Mexican life for which it formed the very basis,

".....one things is certain, and that is that this religion with its scrupulous and exacting ritual, and the profusion of its myths, penetrated in all its aspects, deeply into the everyday life of man. Continuously and totally, it moulded the existence of the Mexican nation....Nothing was born, nothing endured, except by the blood of sacrifice." (35)

---

Source References

1. Laurette Sejourne: Burning Water, 1956.
2. ibid
3. Willey; Covarrubias 1957; Soustelle 1969; Vaillant 1965.
4. Vaillant p.77.
5. Krickeberg, part 1, pp.7/135; Covarrubias 1957 Ch.VIII.
6. Krickeberg p.35.
7. Bancroft vol.II Ch.VI.
8. Joyce p.80.
9. Bancroft vol.II pp.307/309.
10. Leon-Portilla, pp.161/164.
11. Kingsborough, vol.I p.19.
12. Burland 1967 p.66.
13. Sahagun Book 10 Ch.29.
14. Sejourne Ch.I.
15. Krickeberg pp.49/50.
16. Caso 1958.
17. Mexican and Central American Mythology, p.73.
18. ibid pp.68/71.
19. both these sources are quoted in M.Krieg: Green Medicine, Ch.3.
20. Huxley: The Doors of Perception and Heaven and Hell.
21. Nicholson 1967.
22. Dr. Humphrey Osmond quoted by M.Krieg Ch.14.
23. J.S.Slotkin: The Peyote Way, in, Reader in Comparative Religion, (Eds. Lessa and Vogt) pp.513/517.
24. Nicholson 1967 p.71.
25. Tylor, vol.II p.375.
26. Robertson-Smith 1894.
27. ibid
28. ibid

29. Bancroft, vol.11 p.706 quoting Herrera.
  30. Soustelle 1964 pp.95/96.
  31. Sahagun Book 3 p.5.
  32. Yerkes Ch.2.
  33. Evans-Pritchard 1956.
  34. Sahagun Book 2 Ch.21.
  35. Soustelle 1964 p.130 and p.110.
-

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF SOURCES

Bancroft, H.H.	Native Races of the Pacific States of North America	1875 Longmans
Banton, M. (Ed.)	Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion	1966 Tavistock
Biart, Lucien.	The Aztecs (Trans. J.L. Garner)	1913 Chicago
Bray, Warwick.	Everyday Life of the Aztecs	1968 Batsford
Brinton, D.G.	Ancient Nahuatl Poetry	1887 Philad.
" "	The Myths of the New World	1896 "
Burland, C.A.	Art and Life in Ancient Mexico	1948 Oxford
" "	Magic Books from Mexico	1953 Penguin
" "	The Gods of Mexico	1967 Eyre & Spottiswoode
Caso, Alfonso,	Aztecs, People of the Sun	1957 Univ. Okl. Press
Castillo, Bernal Diaz del.	The True History of the Conquest of New Spain	1912 Hakluyt Soc.
Coe, M.D.	Mexico	1962 Thames & Hudson
" "	The Maya	1966 " "
Coulanges, Fustel de.	The Ancient City	Doubleday Anchor
Covarrubias, Miguel.	The Eagle, The Jaguar, and the Serpent	1954 Knopf NY
" "	Indian Art of Mexico and Central America	1957 " "
Crawley, A.E.	Dress, Drink and Drums	1931 Methuen
Dockstader, F.C.	Indian Art of Central America	1964 Corey, Adams & Mackay
Douglas, Mary.	Purity and Danger	1966 Routledge
Evans-Pritchard, E.E.	Nuer Religion	1956 Oxford
" "	Divine Kingship of the Shilluk, in, Essays in Social Anthropology	1962 Faber & Faber
" "	Social Anthropology	1961 Cohen & West
" "	Theories of Primitive Religion	1965 Oxford

- Firth, Raymond. Offering and Sacrifice, in, Lessa 1965 Harper&Row  
& Vogt: Reader in Comparative Religion
- Ford, Daryll. (Ed.) African Worlds 1954 O.U.P.
- Fortes, Meyer. Ritual and Office, in, Essays on 1962 Manchester  
the Ritual of Social Relations Univ. Press
- Frazer, J.G. The Golden Bough (Abridged) 1925 Macmillan
- Freund, P. Myths of Creation 1964 Allen
- Hallpike, C.R. Social Hair, J.R.A.I. vol. 4. No. 2. 1969 pp. 256-264
- Hooke, S.H. (Ed.) Myth and Ritual 1933 Oxford
- Hubert, H. & Mauss, M. Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function 1964 Cohen & West
- Huxley, Aldous. The Doors of Perception, and, Penguin  
Heaven and Hell
- Hvidtfeldt, Arild. Teotl and \*Ixiptlatli 1968 Copenhagen
- James, O.E. Comparative Religion 1961 O.U.P.
- Joyce, Thomas, A. Mexican Archaeology 1920 Medici Soc.
- Kingsborough, Edward, King, Lord Antiquities of Mexico (9 volumes) 1830-1848 London
- Kreig, M. Green Medicine 1965 Harrap
- Krickeberg, W. Pre-Columbian American Religion, 1968 Weidenfield  
first published 1961 as, Die Religionen des Alten Amerika & Nicolson
- Leinhardt, Godfrey. Divinity and Experience. The 1961 Clarendon  
Religion of the Dinka
- " " Shilluk of the Upper Nile, in, 1954 O.U.P.  
African Worlds
- Leon-Portilla, M. Aztec Thought and Culture 1962 U. Okl. Press  
(Trans. Jack E. Davis) Norman
- Lumholtz, Carl. Unknown Mexico (2 volumes) 1903 Macmillan
- Malinowski, B. Magic, Science and Religion 1948 Glencoe Free  
Press
- Morley, Sylvanus. The Ancient Maya (2nd. Edition) 1947 Stanford U.P.
- Moser, B. & Taylor, D. The Cocaine Eaters 1965 Longmans
- Nicholson, Irene. Firefly in the Night 1959 Faber & Faber
- " " Mexican and Central American 1967 Hamlyn  
Mythology
- Parkes, H.B. The History of Mexico 1962 Eyre &  
Spottiswoode



- Parry, J.H. The Spanish Seabourne Empire 1966 Hutchinson
- Parsons, Elsie, C. Mitla: Town of Souls 1936 Univ. Chicago Press
- Peterson, Frederick. Ancient Mexico 1959 Allen & Unwin
- Radcliffe-Brown, A.R. Religion and Society, in, Structure and Function 1952 Cohen & West
- Redfield, Robert. Tepoztlan: A Mexican Village (7th. Impression) 1964 Univ. Chicago Press
- Richards, Audrey. Keeping the King Divine, in, Proceedings of the R.A.I. 1968 pp.23-35
- Riley, Olive. ~~Masks~~ and Magic 1955 Studio Pubs.
- Robertson-Smith, W. The Religion of the Semites 1894 Black
- Roscoe, J. The Bakitara or Bunyoro 1923a Camb. Univ. Press  
" The Banyankole 1923b " " "
- Sahagun, Fray Bernardino de. General History of the Things of New Spain (Florentine Codex) Trans. C.E. Dibble, A.J.O. Anderson Books 1-13 (Book 6 unpublished) 1957-1959 School of American Research Univ. Utah
- Sejourne', Laurette. Burning Water: Thought and Religion in Ancient Mexico 1956 Thames & Hudson
- Soustelle, Jacques. Daily Life of the Aztecs 1964 Pelican  
" " Mexico 1969 Cresset
- Slotkin, J.S. The Peyote Way, in, Lessa & Vogt Reader in Comparative Religion 1965 Harper & Row
- Spence, Lewis. The Gods of Mexico 1923 Fisher Unwin  
" " The Religion of Ancient Mexico 1945 Watts
- Spores, Ronald. The Mixtec Kings and Their People 1967 Univ. Okl. Press
- Thompson, J.E. Mexico Before Cortes 1933 Scribners
- Tylor, E.B. Primitive Culture, Volume 11 1903 London (4th. Edition)
- Vaillant, George, C. Aztecs of Mexico (2nd. Edition) 1965 Pelican
- Willey, G.R. An Introduction to American Archaeology, Volume 1 1967 Prentice Hall
- Yerkes, R.K. Sacrifices in Greek and Roman Religions and Early Judaism 1953 Black
- Young, M. The Divine Kingship of the Jukun 1966 Africa 36. pp.135-152.

GLOSSARY

<u>A</u>	
Acamapichtli	First Aztec king of Tenochtitlan 1376-1396.
apetlac	landing at the base of the temple pyramid.
arayto	dance of the captive and the captor before sacrifice
Atemoztli	'Fall of the Water', 16th. month of the solar year.
Atl caualoa	1st. month of the solar year.
atolli (atole)	gruel of ground maize with fruit or other flavouring.
Azcapotzalco	town on the east bank of the Lake Tezcúco, famed for its slave markets in Aztec times.
Aztlan	mythical home of origin of the Aztecs.
<u>C</u>	
cactli	sandals of leather or maguey fibre.
calmecac	schools run by priests for the sons of nobility, and others dedicated to the priesthood.
calpulli	territorial unit of the city with its own temple, a kinship-based land-holding corporation.
Camaxtli	stellar and hunting god, war god of Tlaxcala.
centzontli	400, used to indicate any large number.
centzonhuitznauac	400 southerners, stars of the southern sky.
centzon Mimixcoa	400 northerners, stars of the northern sky.
chalchihuatl	'precious water', blood, especially of sacrifice.
Chalchihuitlicue	Goddess of seas, lakes and storms.
Chalchihuitotolin	Jewelled Turkey, guise of Tezcatlipoca.
Chantico	Goddess of the domestic hearth.
chia (Salvia hispanica)	grain crop used for gruel, oil and lacquer.
chicauaztli	'rattle staff', used for imitating rain in ritual.
Chichimec	hunting and gathering tribes of north west of Mexico, with the meaning of 'barbarian' in Aztec times.
Chicomecoatl	'seven serpent', corn Goddess and the cultic name for corn.

chinampas	'floating gardens' of reclaimed mud.
Cihuacoatl	'Snake Woman', Earth Goddess and title held by the vice emperor.
Cihuateteo	spirits of women who had died in childbirth.
cihuatl	a woman.
Cinacalco	House of Corn, western paradise of the Sun for the souls of women who died in childbirth.
Cinteotl	Corn God.
cintli	ear of dried mature maize, yellow maize.
Coacalco	temple in the Sacred Precinct where gods 'captured' from defeated tribes were held prisoner.
coatl	serpent, or twin.
Coatlicue	Aztec Earth Goddess.
copal	resin of the copal tree (Protium copal) from which incense was made.
Coyolxauhqui	'Painted with Bells', Moon Goddess.
cuatequit	compulsory communal labour for public works etc to which plebians were liable.
<u>E</u>	
Ehecatl	Wind God, an aspect of Quetzalcoatl.
Etzalqualiztli	Eating of Bean Porridge, 6th.month of the solar year.
<u>H</u>	
huauhtli	early ripening grain crop used in a paste to make images (Amaranthus paniculatus).
Hehuetetl	Old Old God, Fire God.
Huitzilopochtli	tribal, Sun and War god of the Aztecs.
huitzitzilin	humming bird (Trochilus), symbol of resurrection.
huitzlan	south, also left.
huitzli	thorn, especially those of the maguey plant used for drawing blood in penance.
Huixtocihuatl	Salt Goddess.
<u>I</u>	
Itzpapalotl	'Obsidian Knife Butterfly', stellar goddess.
itztli	obsidian.

ixiptlatli	image, impersonator or any human or inanimate likeness of the gods.
Izcalli	18th. month of the solar year.
iztac	white, cold.
izquauac	sacrificial knife, made of various forms of stone.
<u>L</u>	
Llamatecuhtli	Old Goddess, of dry corn and bare winter earth.
<u>M</u>	
macehuales	commoners, peasants, members of a calpulli with rights in the usufruct of its land.
macuauitl	wooden sword edged with obsidian blades.
Mayahuel	Goddess of maguay plant, mother of the Pulque Gods.
maxtli(maxtlatl)	loin cloth.
mayeques	free men but not members of a calpulli, also called Tlalmaitl, 'farm hands'.
metate	stone slab on three legs for grinding corn.
Meztli	Moon
Mictlan	Region of the Dead under the earth.
Mictlantecuhtli	Lord of the Region of the Dead.
milchinalli	fields worked by mayeques or slaves to supply the army.
milpa	'corn field', now used for the typical 'slash and burn' type of agriculture of Central America.
mique	to kill, also to die.
Mixcoatl	Cloud Serpent, Chichimec stellar and War God.
molli	highly spiced source served only at feasts.
<u>N</u>	
Nahua	cultural linguistic group probably originating in Puebla region north west of Mexican Plateau, significant at end of Classic and throughout Post-Classic periods, includes both Toltecs and Aztecs.
nantli	mother (tonan - our mother).
nauhcampa	in four directions, to four places.

nemontemi five 'hollow' or unlucky days at end of solar year.  
nequen fibre of the maguey plant, rough and hessian-like, made up into garments for penance.  
Nezahualcoyotl poet-king of Tezcucco 1418-1472

O

Ochpaniztli Feast of Brooms, 11th. month of solar year.  
octli (pulque) intoxicating liquer made from maguey juice.  
oioalli small gold bells tied to the caplves as part of warriors costume.  
ollin motion, movement, or earthquake.  
ololiuhqui 'holy plant', used as a ritual hallucinogen and in medical diagnosis, (contains lysergic acid).  
Ometecuhtli Divine Duality, chief god of the Aztec Pantheon.

P

Panquetzaliztli Raising of Banners, 15th. month of the solar year.  
patolli dice game with religious and divinatory significance.  
Paynal 'The Hasty', messenger of Huitzilopochtli.  
peyotl hallucinogenic cactus plant used by the priests.  
pilli son of a lord or noble.  
Piltzintecuhtli 'Young Prince', synonym for the Sun.  
pinolli ground and roasted maize with various seasonings.  
pulque octli, liquer made from the maguy plant.

Q

Quauhnoctli 'eagle cactus', cultic name for the heart of a sacrificial victim, relating to a mythical episode.  
quauhtecatli 'companion of the eagle', soul of a dead warrior or sacrificed victim residing with the Sun.  
quauhtemalacatl 'stone disc of the eagles', sacrificial stone set up by king Axayacatl for gladiatorial combat.  
Quauhtemoc the setting sun, also the name of the last Aztec king 1520-1525.  
quauhtlihuanitl the rising sun.

quauhxicalco	'eagle vessel' to hold sacrificial hearts.
quaquacuilti	the old priests of the tribal temples.
Quecholli	a tropical bird, and the 14th. month of the solar year.
quetzal	feather of the Quetzal bird, synonym for 'precious'.
Quetzalcoatl	patron god of the priesthood, Toltec culture hero.

T

tamales	steamed maize cakes stuffed with meat, vegetables etc.
tameme	'transport brigade', porters and carriers.
Tecciztecatl	Old Moon God.
techcatl	convex sacrificial stone over which victim is held.
tecpanpouhque	palace serfs.
tecuhitli	'lord', title of honour and high rank.
Tecuilhuitontli	Small Feast of Lords, 7th. month of solar year.
telpochtli	a youth still attending school, ie under 20 years.
telpochcalli	school for ordinary citizens, emphasising military training.
temalacatl	stone disc to which gladiatorial victims were tied, also called quauhtemalacatl.
Tenochtitlan	capital of the Aztec empire, on an Island in Lake Tezcuco.
teo (teotl)	'god', 'sacred', (holy).
teocalli	'god-house', temple.
teocuitla	'gods' excrement' - gold.
teoqua	priest.
Teonanacatl	'flesh of the gods', black mushrooms used as hallucinogens for divination.
teoqualo	'god is eaten', ritual cannibalism, eating the victim.
teoquemiltl	sacred garment or ritual dress.
teotetl	'divine stone' - jet, rare, and black like the priests's dress and face paint.
Teotihuacan	theocratic city, centre of the Classic culture in Mexico c. 200 BC - 600 AD.
Tepelhuitl	Feast of Mountains, 13th. month of the solar year.
Teteoinnan	Mother of the Gods, synonym for Tlazolteotl.

Tezcatlipoca	Toltec and later Aztec Sun and War God.
Tititl	Medicine woman, healer, physician, user of herbs and magi. Also 17th. month of solar year.
Tlacatecuhtli	'Lord of Men', one of the titles of the ruler, ie. leader of the warriors of Mexico and allied armies.
tlacatlaolli	'man and maize', stew of maize and human flesh used in communion meal after sacrifice.
Tlacaxipeuliztli	'Flaying of Men', 2nd. month of the solar year.
tlachtli	ball game with religious-astrological significance.
tlalli	earth.
Tlaloc	Rain God.
Tlalocan	southern paradise for those who died from drowning.
Tlaltecuhltli	Lord of the Earth, Earth Monster or Frog.
tlaquimilolli	sacred object wrapped in a bundle, eg. Huitzilopochtli's insignia carried by priests during the Aztec migration. Also the name of the priest treasurer.
Tlaxochimaco	'Offering of Flowers', 9th. month of the solar year.
Tlatoani	'He Who Speaks', title of the Mexican ruler.
tlazotla	to love.
Tlazolteotl	Earth Mother, goddess of sexual sin.
tlequilitl	domestic hearth comprising three stones to balance cooking pots.
tliliu	to paint black as in ritual dress and priest's garbetc.
Toci	'Our Mother', synonym for Tlazolteotl.
Tocoztontli	Small Fast or Vigil, 3rd. month of solar year.
Tonacatecuhtli	Lord of Sustenance, synonym for the Divine Duality.
tonacati	to be prosperous, fertile.
tonalamatl	book in which is recorded the divinatory calendar.
tonalli	soul, luck or fate.
tonalpohualli	divinatory calendar of the 260-day count.
Tonalpouhque	'Southsayers', divinatory specialists.
Tonatiuhichan	'House of the Sun', eastern paradise for the souls of dead warriors and victims.

tonameyotl	ray of sun, light, brilliance.
tortilla	griddle maize bread, thin and flat.
Toxcatl	'Drought', 5th. month of the solar year.
tzitzimime	demons, especially the souls of women who have died in childbirth, they would descend to devour humanity on the day the present sun ceased.
tzompantli	skull rack for the heads of sacrificed victims.

U

Uei tecuilhuitl	Great Feast of Lords, 8th. month of the solar year.
Ueitlatoani	Great Spokesman, title of Mexican ruler.
Uei tocoztli	Great Fast or Vigil, 4th. month of solar year.

X

Xilonen	Goddess of the green maize.
Xipe Totec	God of Spring.
Xipilli	Torquoise Prince, synonym for the Sun.
xiuhmolpilli	'sheaf of years', a 52-year period.
xiuhpohualli	Solar Calendar of a 365-day count.
Xiuhtecuhtli	Lord of the Year, Fire God.
xiuitl	a solar year.
Xochiquetzal	Goddess of Beauty, Flowers and Love.
Xocotluetzi	Fall of Fruit, 10th. month of the solar year.
Xochiyaoyotl	'Flowery War', organised combat to take prisoners.
Xolotl	Double God, Evening Star, twin of Quetzalcoatl.
xopan	springtime.

Y

yaotl	enemy, warrior.
yauhtli	herbs similar to hemp used to anaesthetise victims, especially before the fire sacrifice.
yohautli	night, darkness.
yollotl	heart, mind, soul.
Yacatecuhtli	patron god of the Pochteca or merchant's guild.

---

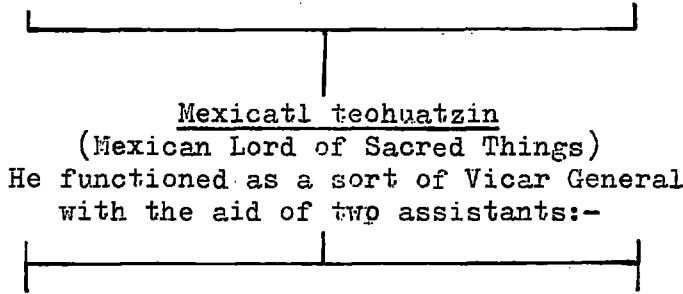


PRIESTLY HIERARCHY IN MEXICO

Quetzalcoatl Totec Tlamacazqui  
(High priest to war god Huitzilopochtli).

Quetzalcoatl Tlaloc Tlamacazqui  
(High priest to rain god Tlaloc).

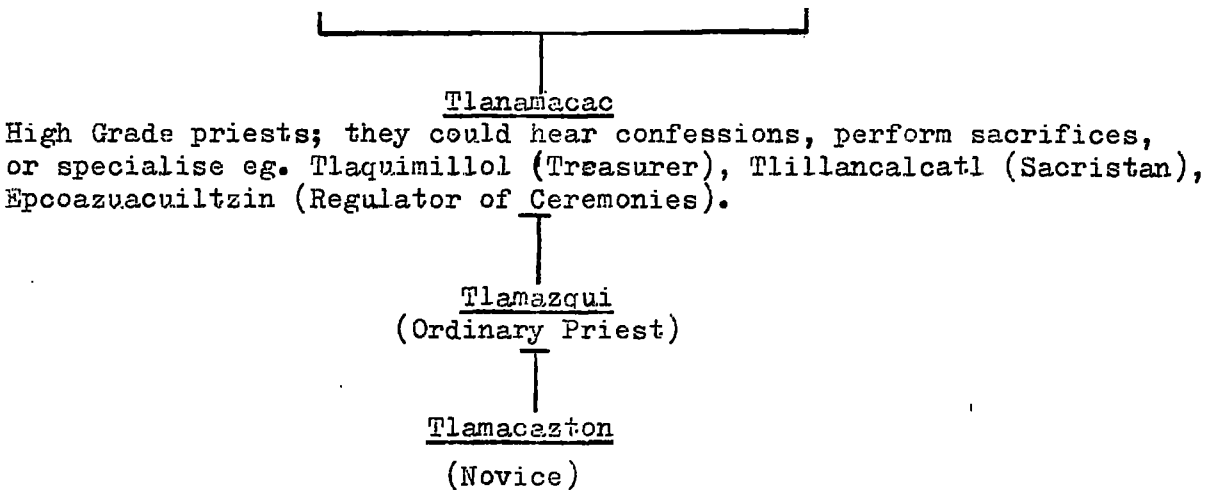
Of equal rank, these high priests represented the two ideologies in Mexico, and were heads of all religious matters in the entire Aztec Empire.



Huitznauac tehuatzin  
(Special responsibility for ritual).

Tepan tehuatzin  
(Special responsibility for education).

These headed a staff made up of the following grades:-



There were enormous numbers of these three ranks of priests to serve each of the gods in their temples and teach in the calmecacs. The priesthood was based on a fine division of labour at all levels, their activities covered music, writing, astronomy and war as well as ritual duties. These are the main grades, Sahagun lists 38 altogether.

Cuatlamacazqui - priestesses, usually dedicated for only a limited number of years before marriage; a small number remained permanently in the priesthood.

PRINCIPLE GODS OF THE AZTEC PANTHEONCELESTIAL GODS\*

OMETECUHTLI and his female counterpart Omecihuatl, Lord and Lady of Duality inhabiting the thirteenth heaven. They were omnipotent and omnipresent gods, they created all the other gods and sent down the souls of newborn children. Also called Tonacatecuhtli and Tonacacihuatl - Lord and Lady of Our Sustenance; Tloque Nahuaque - Lord of the Close Vicinity; Xiuhtecuhtli - Lord of the Year; Huehuetotl - Old Old God.

XIUHTECUHTLI 'Lord of the Year', Fire God and God of Time.

He presided at the centre of the four directions as the spindle of the universe and primeval, pre-solar fire. He was also called Ixcozauhqui - 'Yellow Face'; his guise was the Xihcoatl or Fire Serpent, fire was a symbol of life.

CHANTICO 'In the House', Goddess of the domestic hearth and of volcanic fire. Worshipped especially in Xochimilco, she presided over the west. On her forehead was the sign for war ( a torrent of fire and water), war aspects are common to all the fire and sun gods.

TONATIUH (fig.11) 'He Who Shines', the sun as a luminary, Ollin Tonatiah was the Fifth Sun, the final era of the Aztecs destined to destruction by earthquake on a day 4-ollin. Originally a Toltec sun god. Other names:- Quauhtlehuanitl - The Rising Sun (Eagle); Quauhtemoc - The Setting Sun (ironically the name of the last Aztec king). Piltzintecuhtli - Torquoise Lord; Xipilli - Young Prince. In worship he was usually represented by Huitzilopochtli.

\* The gods are briefly identified in alphabetical order in the glossary.

CITLALINICUE 'She of the Starry Skirt', and her consort Citlallatonac - the radiance of the sun; they were aspects of the Divine Duality as the celestial radiance of night (stars), and of day (sun).

MEZTLI The Moon, also known as Tecciztecatl - 'He from the Sea Snail' The female moon deity was Coyolxauhqui - 'Painted with Bells'.

CENTZONHUITZNAUAC 400 Southerners, star gods of the southern sky.

CENTZON MIMIXCOA 400 Northerners, star gods of the northern sky.

QUETZALCOATL(fig.20) 'Feathered Serpent', or 'Precious Twin'.

A mythical son of the Divine Duality. Patron god of the priesthood, and hero-founder of all knowledge in Toltec legend. He dates back to Teotihuacan, and is especially important as a legendary priest/king of the Toltecs in Tula and Cholula. Also known in the form of Ehecatl - The Wind; Tlahuizcalpantecuhtli - Venus, the Morning Star which lifts the sun out of the darkness. He was worshipped among the Maya as Kukulcan.

Xolotl a god of monstrous and animal-like appearance, he is known as the Double God, and god of twins. He personifies the Evening Star, which pushes the sun into the darkness, as such he is the opposite and twin of Quetzalcoatl and assists him in his creations.

TEZCATLIPOCA (fig.21) 'Smoking Mirror', a protean and ubiquitous god, son of the Divine Duality and sometimes an aspect of them. Associated mostly with war, sacrifice and magic. He was the legendary opponent of Quetzalcoatl in Tula, defeating him with magic. His name refers to the clouding of the obsidian mirror used by magicians for scrying. He presides over all four quarters in his various aspects. Other forms:- Telpochli - 'youth'; Iztli - stone knife (for sacrifice); Yaotl - 'enemy'; Itzacoliuhqui - Carved Obsidian Knife, Lord of Cold and Darkness; Chalchiuhtotolin -

Jewelled Turkey; Tlamatzincatl - Perpetual Youth; Titlavaca - 'He Whose Slaves We Are'. He was identified with the constellation the Great Bear by the astronomers.

HUITZILOPOCHTLI (fig.12) 'Humming Bird Wizard', or 'Humming Bird on the Left'. The humming bird was the symbol of the reincarnated soul of a dead warrior, and the left side of the sun was considered the south, thus, 'reincarnated warrior from the south'. He was Sun and War god, legendary leader of the Aztecs on their migration, and tutelar god of Tenochtitlan. His mother was Coatlicue (Earth Goddess) and his brothers and sisters Coyol xauhqui (moon), and Centzon - uitznaua (stars). He was later identified with the Blue Tezcatlipoca of the southern quarter as one of the sons of Ometeotl. Other names; - Tetzateotl - 'The Terrible God'. PAYNAL - the messenger of Huitzilopochtli, called Paynal the Hasty.

MIXCOATL (fig.10) 'Cloud Serpent', god of the hunting Chichimecs, his wife was Itzcueye - a deer. God of Hunting and of the North Star, he was the Polar Star in later astral theology.

IZTAC MIXCOATL (fig.10) 'White Cloud Serpent', mythical Father or Adam of the Aztec tribe in their history as Chichimecs.

CAMAXTLI a hunting god closely associated with Mixcoatl, especially important in Tlaxcala, and sometimes associated with Tezcatlipoca. Krickeberg identifies him with the very ancient Lord of Beasts still worshipped by the Cora and Tarahumara tribes of NW Mexico.

ITZPAPALOTL 'Obsidian Knife Butterfly', originally a Chichimec tribal goddess associated with Mixcoatl, a stellar goddess later becoming an agricultural deity.

CIHUATETEO 'Serpent Women', goddesses and witches, spirits of women who have died in childbirth, feared for doing mischief to

children and were among the Tzit<sub>2</sub>imime demons. They accompanied the sun from the zenith to its setting in the west, the land of women.

TZITZIMIME demons and spirits inhabiting the second heaven and including many of the stellar gods, who would descend when the end of the Fifth Sun occurred and devour any survivors.

### RAIN, GRAIN AND EARTH GODS

TLALOC (figs. 13, 14 and 21) 'He Who Makes Things Grow', principle rain god since the beginnings of agriculture in Mexico Valley, worshipped in various forms all over Meso-america. With his many assistants called Tlaloque, he personified precipitation in its bad and good aspects, and influenced all weather and thus the fortunes of the crop. He was associated with the south, the fertile land of plenty, and place of the paradise of Tlalocan.

CHALCHIHUITLICUE 'Lady of the Jade Skirt', goddess of seas, lakes storms and the wife of Tlaloc. She had many minor names associated with whirlpools, fog, foam and youth. She was invoked at baptism to purify the newborn baby spiritually and physically. When paired with Chalchiuhtlatonac 'Shining Like a Jade Sun', they were identified with the Divine Duality and functioned as gods of the waters of the universe.

HUIXTOCIHUATL 'Salt Woman', patroness of salt-makers and sister of the Tlaloque.

NAAPATECUHTLI 'Four Times Lord', patron god of mat-makers and all those using reeds, he was one of the Tlaloque.

IZTACIHUATL Goddess of snow-capped mountains, and one of the Tlaloque.

TEPEYOLLOTL 'Heart of the Mountain', mountain and jaguar god associated with Tezcatlipoca.

TLALTECUHTLI Lord of the Earth, primeval earth monster, male personification of the earth in the form of a frog. Female earth deity was Cipactli an alligator-like creature who was pulled out of the primeval waters to form both the heavens and the earth.

TLAZOLTEOTL 'Goddess of Dirt', or 'Eater of Filth' ie. sin, especially carnal sin which she was said to excite, but she also heard confession and forgave such sin. She was goddess of witchcraft, of the sweat-baths (used for ritual as well as physical purity), and was an Earth Mother. Other names:- Teteoinnan - 'Mother of the Gods'; Ixcuina - 'Four Faces'; Toci - Our Grandmother. As Toci she was mother of Cintoetl the corn god. Of Huastec origin she presided over the west, the region of women.

CHICOMECOATL - 'Seven Serpent', corn goddess especially of the seed-corn. A very popular goddess among the people, and is depicted carrying a double maize cob called 'chicahuaztli' - 'for giving strength', used magically to fructify the fields. She was also called Chicomolotzin 'Seven Ears of Corn', as goddess of Sustenance dating from pre-Classic times in the Valley of Mexico.

CIHUACOATL 'Serpent Woman', ancient goddess indigenous to the Valley, an Earth Goddess ruling over childbirth and death by childbirth, also known as Tonantzin - Our Mother; Quauhciuatl - 'Woman Eagle' because women who died in childbirth joined the warriors in the paradise of the sun. In mythology she helped Quetzalcoatl make men from the bones of past generations.

COATLICUE 'Serpent Skirt', Aztec earth goddess associated with spring, mother of Huitzilopochtli and of the stars and moon.

She represents the destructive aspect of earth which swallows up all living things when they die, and all heavenly bodies when they set. But as a result of penance and sacrifice she can give birth to the sun.

ILAMATECUHTLI 'Old Princess', old goddess of primeval times, of the dry ear of corn and of the bare earth of winter. She was patron of the old women who worked at the metate stone grinding corn. Sometimes identified as a female form of Huehuetēotl, and thus an aspect of the Lady of Duality.

XOCHIPILLI 'Flower Prince', god of pleasure, poetry, music, dancing and the ball game (Tlachtli), all of these activities being more of religious than secular importance. Originally a Mixtec god of corn, and known also by the calendrical name of Maculxochitl - 'Five Flower'.

XOCHIQUETZAL 'Precious Flower', goddess of beauty, flowers and patroness of craftsmen and artists. She was said to have been the wife of Tlaloc but stolen from him by Tezcatlipoca. She was worshipped especially in Tlaxcala. Her quarter was the west, and as the female counterpart of Xochipilli she was goddess of love and amusements.

CINTEOTL (fig.19) Corn God, son of Tlazolteotl and sometimes the husband of Xochiquetzal. He presided over the west, and sometimes the north, and was the personification of the growing maize crop and the yellow maize fields.

XIPE TOTEC (fig.15) 'Our Flayed Lord', also called Youallauan - 'Night Drinker'. Often referred to as the Red Tezcatlipoca. He was the god of spring and seedtime, and probably originated among the Yopi people who had for long sacrificed by flaying. He was

also patron god of the goldsmiths.

XILONEN (fig.18) 'Young Maize Ear', deification of the young green maize plant, her likeness was sacrificed in the month Uei tocoztli after which the green maize could be cut for the first time. According to Spence she was originally an Huichole deity.

MAYAHUEL 'She of the Maguey Plant', goddess of the maguey and of fertility. She is depicted with 400 breasts and is the mother of the numerous pulque gods (also called the 400 rabbits), the rabbit is a symbol of capriciousness and is probably related to the effects of drinking octli. Some of the octli gods were:- Tepoztecatl, Ometochtli, Tezcatzontecatl and Izquitecatl . Collectively they were Centzon Totochtin 'The Fourhundred Rabbits'.

PATECATL 'He From the Land of Medicines', god of medicines and drugs, husband of Mayahuel and associated with Ixtlilton - 'Little Black Face', god of health and cures.

#### DEATH GODS

MICTLANTECUHTLI 'Lord of the Region of Death', and his female counterpart Mictecacihuatl, death gods presiding over the nine regions of the land beneath the earth, patrons over the north, and aspects of the Divine Duality in the lower regions of the universe.

TEOYAOMIQUE 'God of Dead Warriors', specialised death god of enemy warriors, also known as Huahuantli - 'The Striped One', from the striped body-paint often used for sacrificial victims representing the astral gods.



GODS OF DIFFERENT TRADES

YACATECUHTLI 'Lord Who Guides Us', patron god of the travelling merchants, the Pochteca.

COYOTL INAUAL patron god of the feather-workers of Amantlan.

NAAPATECUHTLI patron god of mat-makers and workers in reeds.

CHICOMAU ITCUINTLI goddess of the lapidaries; they also worshipped Naua pilli, and Macuicalli, especially revered in Xochimilco, the place best known for its lapidary work.

---

MONTHLY FESTIVALS OF THE SOLAR YEAR

In Mexico the solar year of 365 days was divided into eighteen months each of 20 days, and five days left over which were considered very unlucky. Each of the months (cempohualli), had a name which usually referred to the relevant farming activities or seasonal character of the period. There were specific ceremonies due each month, each dedicated to certain gods. A summary of these ritual activities is given below. The dates used are those given by Bernadino de Sahagun writing shortly after the Spanish conquest in the early sixteenth century.

1. Feb.2nd. - 21st. Atl caualoa (stopping the waters), or Quiavitl eua (the tree rises). The ceremonies were dedicated to Tlaloc the rain god, his assistants the Tlalocque and his sister Chalchihuitlicue. Children were sacrificed on several mountain summits and at the lake's edge. (p.79). Captives destined for gladiatorial sacrifice performed mock battles at the temple of Xipe Totec, and their captives paraded in festive dress.
2. Feb.22nd. - Mar.13th. Tlacaxipeualiztli (the flaying of men). This was seed time and dedicated to Xipe Totec God of Spring, and also to Huitzilopochtli. After gladiatorial sacrifice, the priests danced dressed in the skins of captives and many dances took place, (pp.86-90).
3. Mar.14th. - Apr.2nd. Tozoztontli (small fast or vigil). Rain was needed for the young seed. The month was dedicated to Tlaloc, but flowers were offered as first fruits to Coatlicue the Earth Goddess associated with spring. The skins from the previous ceremony were thrown away and the young captors bathed.

4. Apr.3rd. - Apr.23rd. Uei tozoztli (long fast or vigil).

At this time the maize was sprouting and rites were dedicated to the maize god Cinteotl, and the ancient corn goddess Chicomecoatl. Youths drew their blood as offering, and altars in homes and temples were decorated with maize stalks and all kinds of food. Girls carried seed-corn to the temple to be blessed. An image of Chicomecoatl was made and quail sacrificed before it. Dancing and singing completed the festival, (pp.99-100).

5. Apr.24th. - May 12th. Toxcatl (dry, or slippery). This was the feast of Tezcatlipoca. A youth who had lived as his impersonator for a year was sacrificed, and another youth chosen to take his place for the next year, (pp.122-123). An impersonator of Huitzilopochtli was also sacrificed in the same way. An image of Huitzilopochtli was set up and people sacrificed quail before it. Children born that year were scarified and the feast ended with the serpent dance performed by men and women.

6. May 13th. - June 1st. Etzalqualiztli (the eating of bean porridge). Rites were to the Tlalocs for rain, the rainy season was about to start at about this time. Everyone made and ate a bean gruel known as 'etzalli'. Priests gathered special reeds for rituals, and performed the 'mimicking of birds' in the lake. Impersonators of Tlaloc were sacrificed, and their hearts thrown into the centre of the lake together with a young boy and girl drowned as offerings to Tlaloc.

7. June 2nd. - 21st. Tecuilhuitontli (small feast of the lords). Rain was still desired for the growing crop, and a sacrifice was made in honour of Huixtocihvatl, the salt goddess. Her impersonator was sacrificed at the temple of Tlaloc with other captives. Women danced and sang, carrying flowers, and general feasting took place until the end of the month.

8. June 22nd. - July 11th. Uei tecuilhuitl (great feast of the lords). While the maize was growing was a time of great food shortage, for seven days food and wine was given out to the people by the chiefs. The young green corn was worshipped in the form of the Goddess Xilonen. Amid dancing and singing, her impersonator was decapitated on the back of a priest before the temple of Cinteotl (pp.100-102). After the rite people could eat the new green maize.

9. July 12th. - 31st. Tlaxochimaco (the offering, or birth of flowers). The first flowering of the summer. People gathered flowers to decorate the temple of Huitzilopochtli. Warriors and youths celebrated and danced in the temple courtyard. Everyone feasted on turkey and danced. The merchants held a sacrifice for their patron god Yacatecuhtli, offering slaves dressed in his insignia.

10. Aug.1st. - 20th. Xocotluetzi (falling of the fruit). The sun's heat was needed to ripen the crop and therites were dedicated to Xiuhtecuhtli the Fire God. Captives were burnt in a huge ceremonial bonfire before being sacrificed and their hearts dedicated to the Fire God. Everyone danced and sang in the courtyard, and the youths competed to climb the pole of a Xocotl tree and gain the image of the Fire God on the top. A jubilant procession was held for the winner.

11. Aug.21st. - Sep.9th. Ochpaniztli (feast of brooms). The corn was ripened and ready for harvest. Sacrifices were made of women impersonating Toci, goddess of the ripe corn, and Tlazolteotl, the Earth Mother, both of whom are usually depicted carrying grass brooms. The victims were kept from crying to prevent rain at harvest time. After mock battles with the medicine women they were sacrificed by decapitation, and priests

donned their skins to lead the dancing. There were military displays and mock battles, awards were distributed to warriors. Priests scattered grains of corn over the people who scrambled and fought for them, (pp.102-105).

12. Sep.10th. - 29th. Teotleco (arrival of the gods). Dedicated to the return of all the gods especially Tezcatlipoca, the youngest and first to arrive. Branches were strewn in all the idol's dwellings and maize offerings made. Priests watched for the footprint of Tezcatlipoca in a plate of flour in the temple. There were many sacrifices to the Fire God, the oldest and last to return, followed by dancing and drunkenness by the old people.

13. Sep.30th. - Oct.19th. Tepelhuitl (feast of mountains). Dedicated to Tlaloc. Dough images were made of the mountains where the rain clouds gathered, and offerings made before them. Three female impersonators of mountains, and one/male impersonator of a snake were sacrificed at the temple of Tlaloc. The dough figures were cut up and eaten in the form of a communion, (p.82).

14. Oct.20th. - Nov.8th. Quecholli (a type of bird). Dedicated to the hunting and stellar god Mixcoatl. Everyone fasted and did penance by cutting their ears. Warriors and youths made spear-throwers and darts in the temple of Huitzilopochtli. A ritual hunt was made on Mount Cacatepetl, and sacrificial victims were bound and carried up the steps to the temple by their hands and feet like the deer, (pp.69-71).

15. Nov.9th. - Nov.28th. Panquetzaliztli (raising of banners). Winter solstice. A feast for the war god Huitzilopochtli. The priests did penance for eighty days passing many straws through their tongues. Slaves painted in the colours of Huitzilopochtli performed mock battles with groups of warriors. The ball court

was covered in the blood of victims, and many slaves and war captives were sacrificed, (pp.61-64). Priests and warriors held mock battles. Men and women danced the Serpent Dance and sang the songs of Huitzilopochtli throughout the month. A dough image of the War God was made and eaten by everyone taking part in the form of a communion.

16. Nov.29th. - Dec.18th. Atemoztli (falling of the waters). At this time was expected the first thunderstorms that heralded the heavy winter rains. The feast was dedicated to Tlaloc. People made dough images of the mountains. These were decorated by the priests, and offerings of food and wine made before them during a night vigil. The images were 'sacrificed', their 'hearts' cut out with a weaving stick (tzotzopatzli), and their paper decorations burnt, (p.81). The festival was concluded with general feasting.

17. Dec.19th. - Jan.7th. Tititl (medicine women, sometimes called 'the stretching of the limbs', due to the vigorous dancing performed by the women). The sacrificial victim was dressed in white to represent the Old Earth Goddess Ilamatecuhtli. She danced and wept as she ascended the temple to be sacrificed. Afterwards, a priest, also dressed as Ilamatecuhtli, danced with the victims head leading the people in procession, (pp.106-107). The priests held a race up the temple steps to receive flowers. Men and boys beat women filled with grass or paper to make them cry.

18. Jan.8th. - Feb.1st. Izcalli (growth, or rescuscitation). Dedicated to the Fire God, a wooden image of him was set up before the ceremonial fire. Children collected small animals and snakes to be thrown upon the fire before the image, and people brought tortillas to be burnt as offerings. Every four years,

slaves dressed as Xiuhtecuhli were sacrificed, and children were presented to the fire as a blessing. At this time also children's ears were cut and they were given male and female 'guardians' or 'godparents' from among their neighbours. Motecuhzoma danced the Lordly Dance with his nobles and leading warriors.

Nemontemi - this was the period of the five 'hollow' days which were considered very unlucky. People did as little as possible and stayed indoors. No rituals of any kind took place.

---



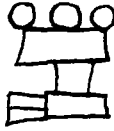

















THE CALENDAR

The calendar is part of the common heritage of almost all Meso-american peoples. The Solar Calendar (Xiuhpohualli), consisted of a year of 365 days, divided into 18 months each containing 20 days. The five days left over, the hollow days, (nemontemi) were believed to be very unlucky, and no festivals took place on those days. About the sixth century the Maya calculated the length of the solar year to be 365.2420 days, (the modern calculation is 365.2422), and they invented a formula for correcting the accumulative error which tends to put the calendar slightly out of line with the natural seasons. The 'hollow days' of the Aztec calendar may have been a similar means of correcting this error, perhaps by having a sixth hollow day every four years. Certain gods of the pantheon presided over each of the named months, and large festivals and sacrifices were held in their honour, depending on the seasonal and agricultural activities at that time.

Quite separate from this was the Divinatory Calendar or Sacred Almanac (Tonalpohualli), which was recorded in the Book of Fate (Tonalamatl). This almanac was calculated on a round of 260 days, divided into periods of 13 days, numbered 1-13 in a continuous series. Also running in a continuous series alongside the numbers was a series of twenty names represented by a glyphs, each day therefore was identified by a name and number, and all the possible combinations of the two (13 multiplied by 20) was 260 days. This sequence of 260 days continued indefinitely quite independent of the Solar calendar, and apparently there is no obvious astronomical reason for basing the calendar on the number 260.



FIG.22

			
crocodile	wind	house	lizard
			
snake	death's head	deer	rabbit
			
water	dog	monkey	grass
			
reed	ocelot	eagle	vulture
			
motion	flint knife	rain	flower

The Twenty Day Signs of the Divinatory Calendar

TONALPOHUALLI: SEQUENCE OF NAMES AND NUMBERS OF DAYS AND WEEKS

CIPACTLI	<u>1</u>	8	2	9	3	10	4	11	5	12	6	13	7
crocodile													
EHECATL	2	9	3	10	4	11	5	12	6	13	7	<u>1</u>	8
wind													
CALLI	3	10	4	11	5	12	6	13	7	<u>1</u>	8	2	9
house													
QUETZPALLIN	4	11	5	12	6	13	7	<u>1</u>	8	2	9	3	10
lizard													
COATL	5	12	6	13	7	<u>1</u>	8	2	9	3	10	4	11
snake													
MIQUIZTLI	6	13	7	<u>1</u>	8	2	9	3	10	4	11	5	12
death's head													
MAZATL	7	<u>1</u>	8	2	9	3	10	4	11	5	12	6	13
deer													
TOCHTLI	8	2	9	3	10	4	11	5	12	6	13	7	<u>1</u>
rabbit													
ATL	9	3	10	4	11	5	12	6	13	7	<u>1</u>	8	2
water													
ITZCUINTLI	10	4	11	5	12	6	13	7	<u>1</u>	8	2	9	3
dog													
OZOMATLI	11	5	12	6	13	7	<u>1</u>	8	2	9	3	10	4
monkey													
MALINALLI	12	6	13	7	<u>1</u>	8	2	9	3	10	4	11	5
grass													
ACATL	13	7	<u>1</u>	8	2	9	3	10	4	11	5	12	6
reed													
OCELOTL	<u>1</u>	8	2	9	3	10	4	11	5	12	6	13	7
ocelot													
QUAUHTLI	2	9	3	10	4	11	5	12	6	13	7	<u>1</u>	8
eagle													
COZCAQUAUHTLI	3	10	4	11	5	12	6	13	7	<u>1</u>	8	2	9
vulture													
OLLIN	4	11	5	12	6	13	7	<u>1</u>	8	2	9	3	10
motion													
TECPATL	5	12	6	13	7	<u>1</u>	8	2	9	3	10	4	11
flint knife													
QUIAHUITL	6	13	7	<u>1</u>	8	2	9	3	10	4	11	5	12
rain													
XOCHITL	7	<u>1</u>	8	2	9	3	10	4	11	5	12	6	13
flower													

Starting with 'CIPACTLI 1' and counting from top to bottom through the series of names and numbers, there are 20 'weeks' each of 13 days. The entire series therefore takes 260 days, and each day is separately identified by its name and number.

The information for divination was collected in pictorial diagrams in the Tonalamatl. The qualities associated with the glyph and the number were considered, and also the spatial orientation; each of the four cardinal points or four directions ruled over one day in turn, so that in the 20 named days there were 4 sets of 5 days ruled by the same direction, which thus determined their good or bad influence. Each 13-day 'week' came under the influence of a different cardinal point in turn, as well as that of a ruling deity; months and years were also grouped under the four directions in this way. Each of the days of the Tonalpohualli was divided into 13 hours, every hour was presided over by a different deity, and the same for the nine hours of the night.

It was the interpretation of all this data that revealed the destiny of each person, and the auspicious times for festivals and important events. Little wonder that it was the task of a specialist with many years training.

Venus was also observed and calculated to have a revolution taking 584 days to complete, (ie. there were 5 Venus revolutions to 8 Solar years). The most important long count unit from the ritual point of view was the Bundle of Years, 'Xihmolpilli', a 52-year period represented pictorially by a bundle of reeds tied together. Within this period, the Solar year and Almanac cycle were able to go through their complete series of combinations and return to their original positions relative to each other. (ie. after 52 Solar years, and 73 Almanac cycles). It was at the end of a 52-year period that the years were 'bound' by making new fire and observing the heavens to see if it was at the end of this bundle that the imminent destruction of the earth would occur. Each one of the 52 years was named according

to the day of the Tonalpohualli on which it began, thus the combination of day, month and year signs could identify any one day of the 52 years. After that, the whole series began again; they rarely needed to pin-point a day over a longer period than 52 years as this was more than the average life-span in any case, but it does create certain problems for archaeologists and historians in fixing the exact dates of events in the correct 52-year period. Although the Bundle of Years was the period most often used in the long count, there was a longer named period, this was the 104-year 'century' called 'one old age' - 'ce uenutiliztli'. The importance of this period was that every 104 years the Almanac cycle, the Solar year and the Venus count all coincided.

---

ie ixqujch