

# Spain & Aztec

Unit 2: WORLDVIEWS IN CONFLICT

# Worldviews in Conflict

This unit we are looking at the intercultural contact between the Aztec Tribe and Spain.



# **Complete Aztec KWL Chart**

# Introduction to The Aztecs



(Watch until 1:30)

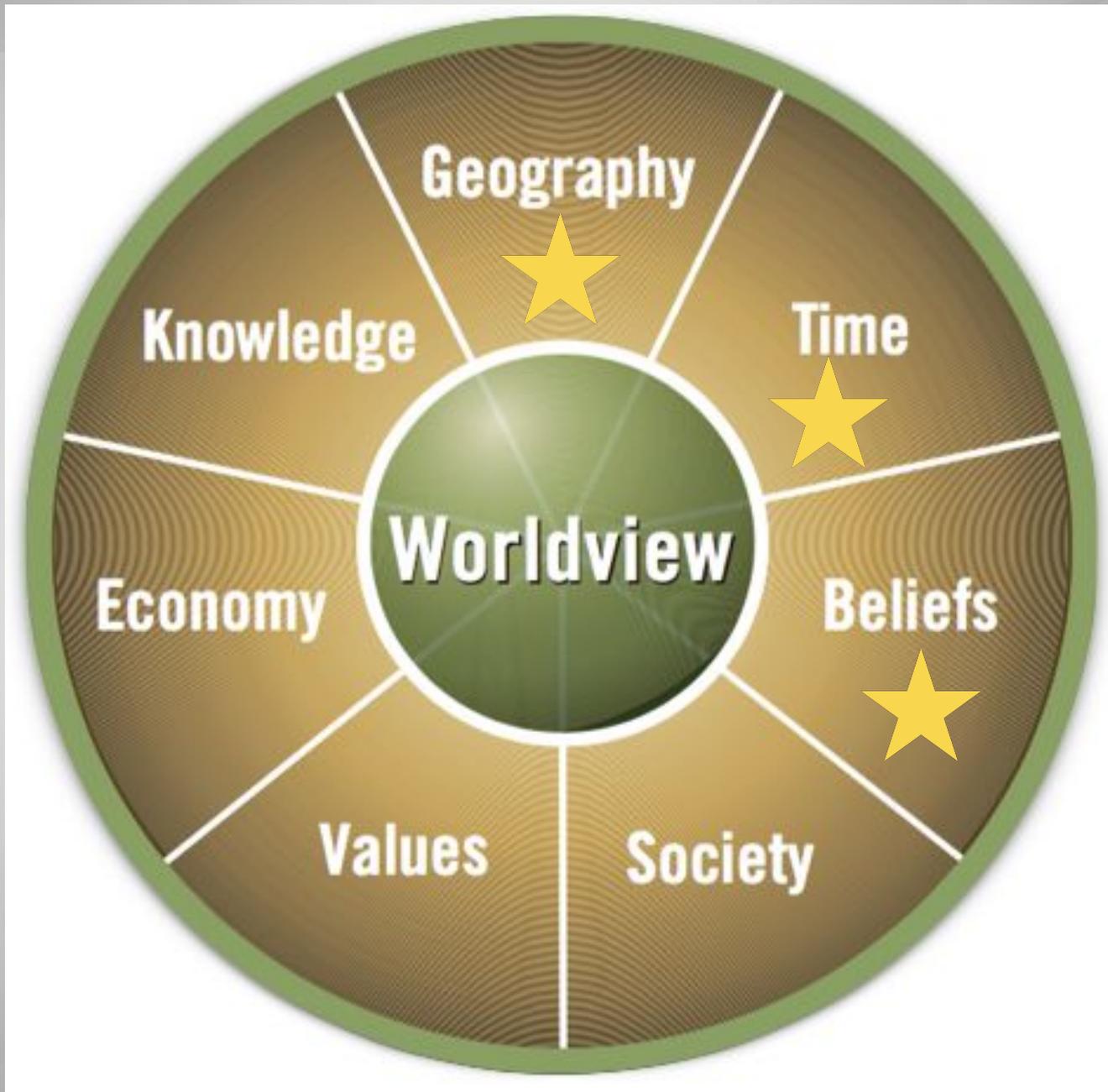
# Ch. 7: The People of The Sun

## **WORLDVIEW INQUIRY**

*In what ways do a group's collective beliefs and experiences contribute to shaping a unique identity?*

# Big Idea

*The Aztec Empire reached its highest point of achievement and power about 500 years ago in the land we call Mexico. The People of the Sun, as the Aztecs called themselves, created one of the greatest civilizations the world has ever known.*



# The People of the Sun

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According to legend, the people we call the Aztecs originally lived in the desert lands of northern Mexico. In 1168, Huitzilopochtli (wheetseel-oh-POCH-tee), the god of the Aztecs, commanded the people to migrate south and told them to look for an eagle perching on a cactus. There they should settle and build a great city.

For more than 150 years the Aztecs travelled over mountain ranges and through river valleys. Eventually, in 1325, the Aztecs arrived in the Valley of Mexico, a wide plain with fertile land, plentiful water, and a mild climate. Many thousands of people already lived there in large cities built of stone.

The only unoccupied land the Aztecs could find was a swampy island at one end of a broad lake. There they saw an eagle sitting on a cactus. Screaming, it opened its wings. The Aztecs had finally found their home. They called it Tenochtitlan (Teh-noch-TEE-tlahn), and over the next 200 years they transformed the island into one of the greatest cities the world had ever seen.

# Tenochtitlan



Turn the the person beside you and discuss...

This was created by Aztec artists in 1540 – over 200 years after the Aztecs arrived in the Valley of Mexico.

Based on the story we just read, what does this image tell us about the Aztec culture?

# The Physical Landscape

How might a society's worldview influence its ability to adapt to its physical geography?

# Map Assignment

# Definitions

**Aztec:** name given to the civilization created by an indigenous nomadic tribe who settled in the Valley of Mexico during the 15th century.

**Dike:** a long wall or embankment built to prevent flooding from the sea.

**Aqueduct:** a watercourse constructed to carry water from the source to a desired area.

**Chinampa:** floating islands built in the water around Tenochtitlan to grow crops.

**Artifacts:** archaeological objects from the past such as clothing, tools, weapons, buildings, etc.

# Definitions

**Primary sources:** items that have survived from the past such as letters, photos, and artifacts typically studied by historians.

**Secondary sources:** accounts of the past written after an event has occurred or person lived such as a biography.

**Ometeotl** (oh-meh-THE-oh-tl): Aztec god “creator of the universe”

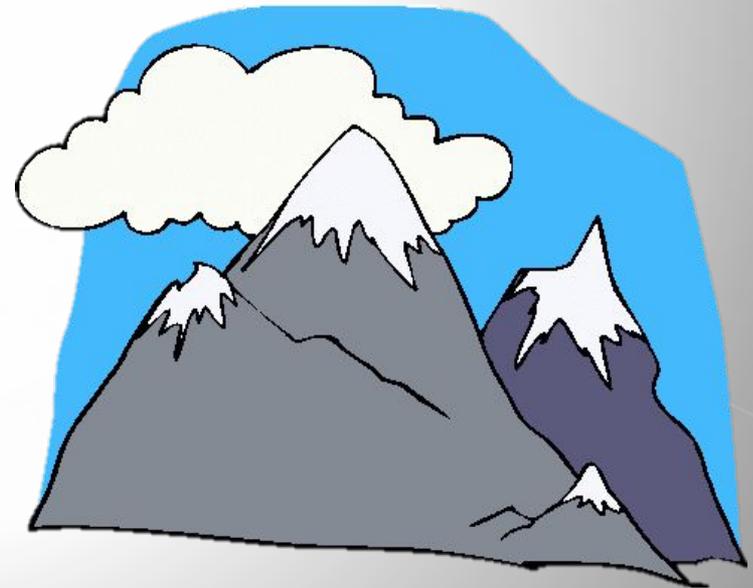
# Geography



When the Spanish arrived in 1519, the area of present-day Mexico was home to many Indigenous groups.

# Geography

- ❁ What do you think of when you see the Rocky Mountains? Do they make you want to go skiing or snowboarding? Do you want to go hiking or mountain biking? Maybe you want to capture their beauty through photography.
- ❁ The kind of person you are – your interests, your attitudes, your knowledge – influence how you respond to the physical geography around you.
- ❁ This is part of your **WORLDVIEW!**



# Geography

For the Aztecs, mountains were **a sacred or holy site.**

✿ They believed that through their height, they **brought people closer to the gods.**

✿ The environment was very important to the Aztec people. The world consisted of two landscapes:

✿ **Physical**

✿ **Sacred**

✿ The temples that Aztecs built to worship their gods were pyramids in the shape of **mountains.**





The landscape of Mexico is filled with tropical jungles and other areas are flat sand dunes and beaches. The mountains run north to south and are seen in the picture in the yellow and brown areas.

# Geography

The Aztecs believed their god **Huitzilopochtli** had led them to the place where they lived.

- ❁ This was not an ideal location. It was a small, swampy island in a lake with salty water.
- ❁ Religion was a powerful force in Aztec society and it gave the Aztecs the determination to survive there.

# The Power of the Mountains

The mountains that surrounded Tenochtitlan gave the Aztecs a sense of **security**.

- ❁ The mountains protected the Aztecs from invaders.

The mountains also **caused problems**.

- ❁ Flash-floods because the mountains were so steep.

# Ingenuity

- ❁ After a great flood swamped Tenochtitlan in 1500 they built a dam across the lake to control the water levels.
- ❁ They also had to build an **aqueduct** to bring in fresh water from underground springs from outside the city.

## Proud Tenochtitlan

Poetry was a highly valued art in Aztec society. By creating poetry, the Aztecs felt that they were imitating their god, Ometeotl (oh-meh-THE-oh-tl), the creator of the universe. They hoped their poetry would give them immortality. During peaceful times, writing poetry was considered the only worthy occupation for an Aztec warrior. To whom might a warrior have addressed this poem praising Tenochtitlan and its people? What might have been his purpose in writing it?

*Proud of itself is the city of Mexico-Tenochtitlan.*

*Here no one fears to die in war. . . . Have this in mind, oh princes,*

*Do not forget it. Who could conquer Tenochtitlan?*

*Who could shake the foundation of heaven?*

**Miguel León-Portilla,**  
*Pre-Columbian Literatures of Mexico.*

- The Aztecs believed that Tenochtitlan lay below 13 layers of heaven. In the poet's words, it was "the foundation of heaven." How does the poem reflect the Aztecs' feeling of security in Tenochtitlan?



## Engineering an Empire - Part 1

## Engineering an Empire - Part 2



# An Island Home: Becoming a Society

The Aztecs also built **causeways** (bridges) that connected lakes to their mainland.

- ❁ They could destroyed at any time to protect their city from invasion.

In the 200 years that they occupied Tenochtitlan they grew from a band of a **few thousand** into a society of **several hundred thousand**.

They became the most productive **plant cultivators** of their time. They grew enough food to feed their entire society.

- ❁ Including: squash, beans, corn, chillies, peppers and tomatoes.



# Think About It...

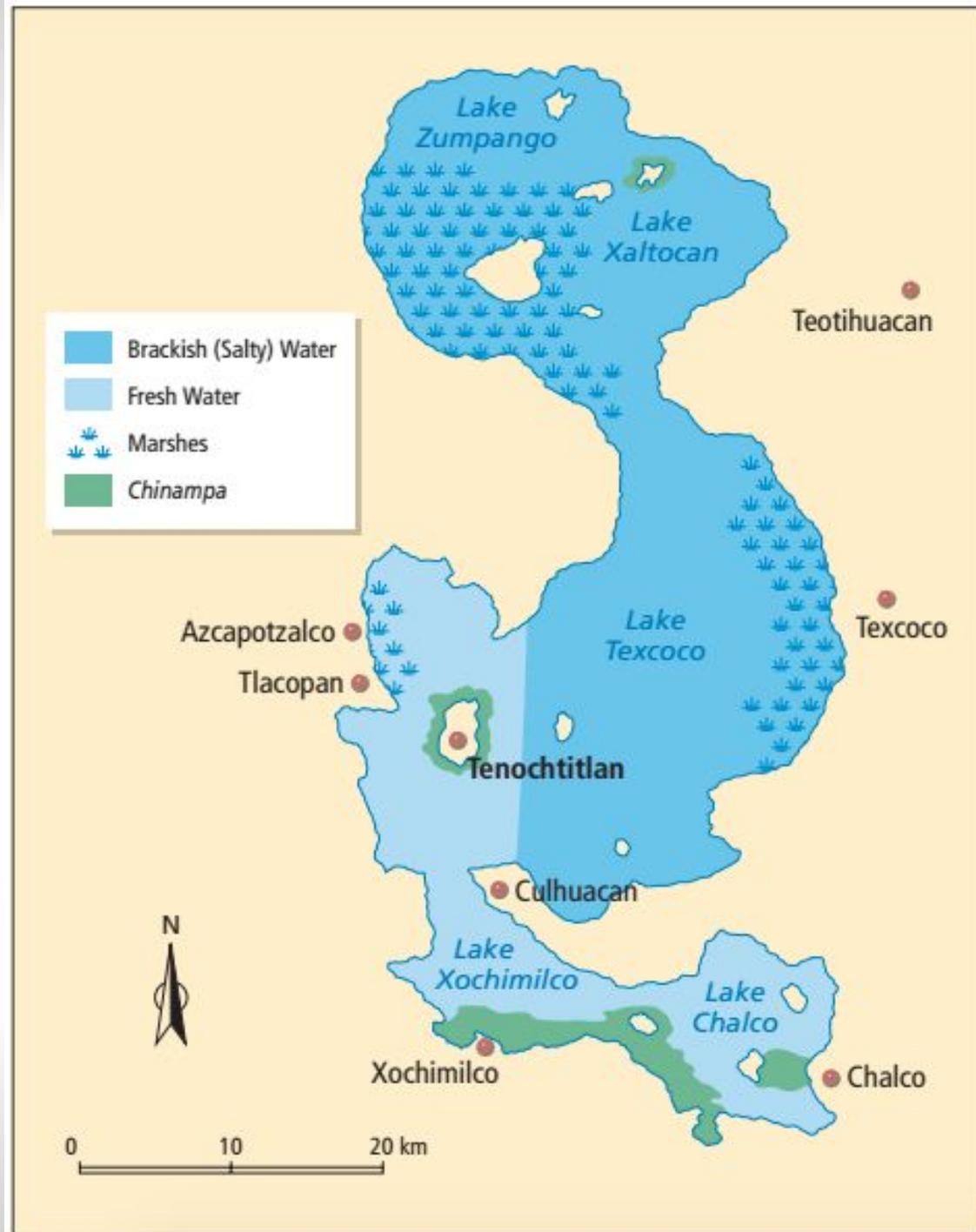
- ❁ Some people choose what to eat based on their religion, morals, or their health.
- ❁ Give examples of each of these!
- ❁ Which elements of your worldview influence your choices about the food you eat?

Can beliefs (religion) influence your eating habits? What about relationship between individual and the state?

# Changing the Geography

Because of their determination to live in Tenochtitlan, the Aztecs made alterations to their land to make it sustainable.

- ❁ They built a chinampa, which greatly enlarged the original island.





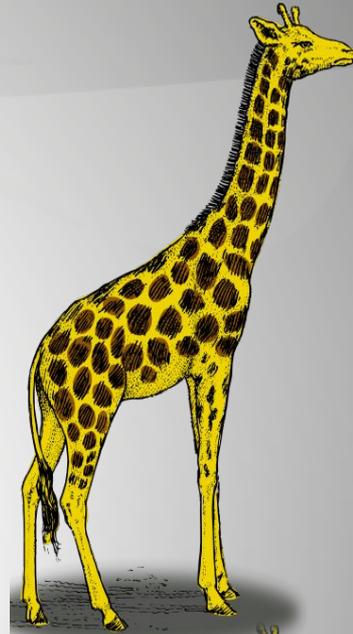
Engineering an Empire - Part 3  
(Watch to 5:00)

# Present Day

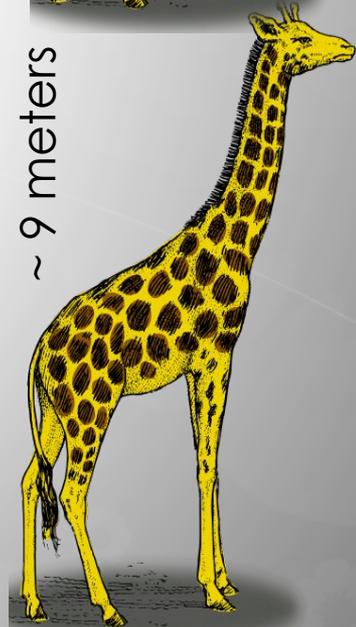
**Mexico City** is built on the ruins of Tenochtitlan. After the Spanish conquering, they built their new city on the ruins in the lake bed and eventually had engineers drain the lake.

To provide water, the aquifer, **underground water beneath the city**, is being drained.

Since it is draining faster than it is being replenished, the city is sinking. Estimates say it has sunk around 9 meters in the last 100 years!



~ 9 meters



# Identifying and Using Sources

**Primary sources** are items that have survived from the past such as:

- ✿ written items (example: letters),
- ✿ visual items (example: photographs)
- ✿ artifacts (example: tools)

**Secondary sources** are accounts of the past written sometime AFTER the event/person. Such as:

- ✿ Biographies
- ✿ Textbooks

**Source Assignment**

**&**

**Fill out Worldview Icon**

# The Sacred Landscape

How did religious beliefs affect the worldview of the Aztecs?

# Definitions

**Codices/codex**

**Solar calendar**

**Sacred calendar**

**Didactic**

**Compulsory**

**Tribute**

# Aztec Gods

The Aztecs believed that the Gods **controlled every aspect of their world.**

They looked to the God for **signs** on how to live. Although the Aztecs had **many** Gods, they believed that **some were greater than others.**



## Huitzilopochtli

whets-eel-oh-POCH-tee

**FIGURE 7-9** Huitzilopochtli encouraged the Aztecs to leave their ancestral homeland and settle in the Valley of Mexico. The Aztecs believed he needed the blood of sacrificial victims to give him the strength to overcome the night's darkness. He was the Aztec's tribal god and had warlike aspects.



## Tezcatlipoca

Tez-cah-tee-POH-kah

**FIGURE 7-10** The most powerful of the gods. Tezcatlipoca's name means "Smoking Mirror," from the black mirror he used to see visions of the future. Also called Lord of the Night Sky, he was locked in an eternal struggle with the god Huitzilopochtli.



**Quetzalcoatl**

ket-zal-COH-ahtl

**FIGURE 7-11** The god of wind, Quetzalcoatl's name means "feathered serpent." The priests offered him flowers, incense, and birds. He left Mexico after a fight with Tezcatlipoca, sailing to the east on a raft of snakeskins. The priests prophesied he would return from the east in the year "One-Reed," bringing destruction to the Aztec empire.

**Tlaloc**

TLAH-lzok

**FIGURE 7-12** The god of rain, Tlaloc could unleash deadly floods or withhold the rains for years, causing drought and famine. The Aztecs feared him because he controlled their survival.





**AZTEC**

**MYTHOLOGY**

**CREATION  
STORY**

**ANIMATED**

THE  
AZTEC MYTH  
OF THE  
UNLIKELIEST  
SUN GOD

TEDEd



# The Aztecs

The Aztecs kept codices in which they recorded information of their society. Codices are important **primary sources** for our understanding of the Aztecs' beliefs.

The Spanish **destroyed** almost all the Aztec codices when they conquered the Aztecs.

Later codices were created by Aztec codex-makers under Spanish supervision.



# Measuring Time: Aztec Calendars

The Aztecs, Mayan, and other Central American societies developed the most accurate and complicated calendars in the ancient world. They were based on extremely accurate:

- ❁ astronomical observations
- ❁ mathematical calculations

The Aztec calendar emphasized the close connection between **gods and human beings**, between the sacred and physical landscapes.



# Aztec Calendar

The Aztecs actually had two calendars:

- ❁ solar calendar
- ❁ sacred calendar.

The sacred calendar was **260 days** long. It took the sacred calendar exactly **52 years** to “catch up” with the solar calendar.

Their great stone calendar, which was dedicated to Huitzilopochtli, showed how the world began and how it will end. The Aztecs believed there were four eras before the present one, and they had been destroyed by **jaguars, hurricanes, fiery rain, and a flood.**

According to legend earthquakes will destroy the next one.

# Human Sacrifice

Of all the aspects of the Aztec worldview, human sacrifice may be the hardest to understand. The Aztecs believed it was necessary to give the gods human blood.

Killing a human being for the gods has deep **religious significance**. They believed:

- ❁ The blood would nourish the gods.
- ❁ It was the strongest expression of their devotion.
- ❁ Without it, the gods would grow sick and die.
- ❁ The world would end without human sacrifice to feed the gods.

War was very important for the Aztecs because it gave them new victims to sacrifice.

# Human Sacrifice

An important religious event called the “**new fire**” ceremony took place every 52 years.

*Why is this number significant?*

The people would fast and let their fires burn out. They waited on rooftops to see the sacred flame lit near Tenochtitlan, then a courier would carry this flame from house to house.



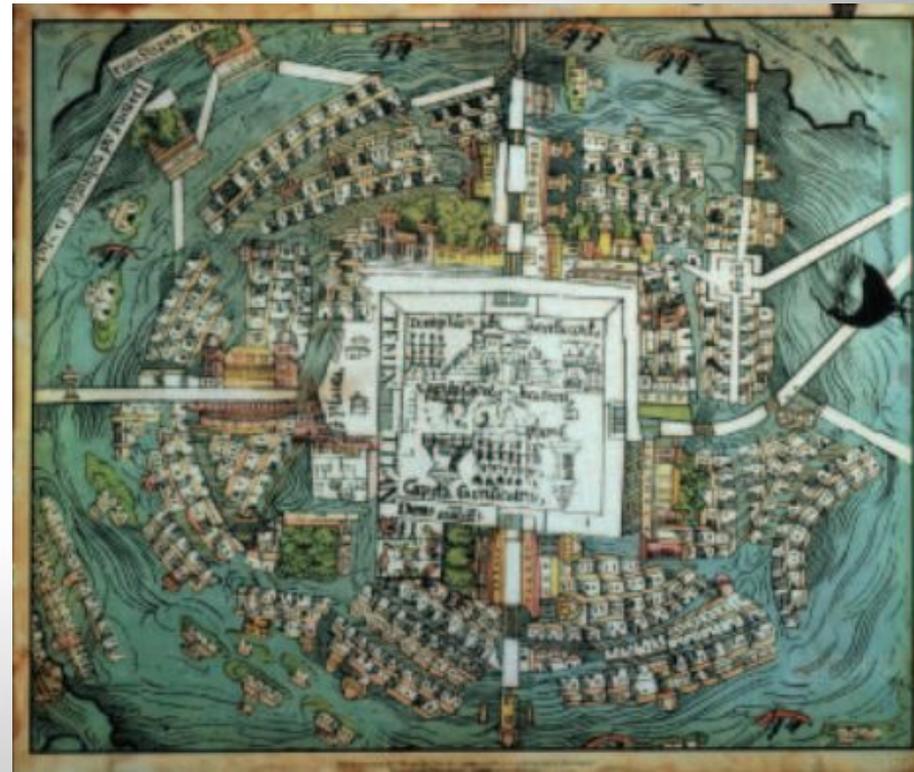
Engineering an Empire - Part 3  
(Watch from 5:00)

# The Centre of the World

According to the Aztecs, the world was a flat, round disc, and Tenochtitlan was in the very centre. They believed the Gods assigned them this special place.

Tenochtitlan itself was divided into four sections with temples in the middle. The Aztecs believed their gods lived in the skies and other places. The skies were the home to the gods and therefore mountains became their sacred place.

Aztec priests would sometimes build temples on mountain tops where they believed the physical and sacred worlds met.



How did religious beliefs affect the behaviours and attitudes of the Aztec people? What aspects or elements of the Aztecs lives were influenced by their religious beliefs?

Calendar

## Religious Beliefs

Environment  
(Where they chose to live)

Actions  
(Human Sacrifice)

Values (what is important to them – mountains, ect.)

**Fill out Worldview Icon**

# Expanding the Empire

*How did the Aztec worldview influence the way people interacted with other cultures?*

# Definitions

**Didactic**

**Compulsory**

**Tribute**

# Expanding the Empire

As the Aztecs were on their journey to Tenochtitlan, they encountered other cultures. Along the way they were involved in conflicts. As a result, they became:

- ✿ disciplined
- ✿ independent
- ✿ resourceful

# Expanding through Trade

This worldview influenced their behaviour and relations with peoples around them once settled in Tenochtitlan.

- ❁ They conquered their neighbors as an empire-building strategy.
- ❁ They made alliances and trade agreements with those around them.

The Aztecs took great pride in these two aspects of their characters:

- ❁ the trader
- ❁ the warrior



**This image is from an Aztec codex. What does it tell you about the Aztec economy?**

# Expanding through Trade

The Aztecs had to travel far distances to acquire the goods they wanted. Aztec merchants often set off with hundreds of slaves to carry the goods they purchased on trading expeditions. They were gone for months at a time.

*If the Aztecs were such good farmers, why were they not self-sufficient?*

# Expanding through Trade

The merchants also acted as **spies** for the Aztec army, drawing maps to show which cities were:

- ✿ well fortified
- ✿ could be easily conquered.

They were then given to Aztec leaders to expand their empire.

# Expanding Through War

Once they had made Tenochtitlan a powerful and successful city they were determined to create an empire. This is because they believed that their god had said, **“We shall conquer all the people in the universe. I will make you lords and kings of every place in the world.”**

By the time the Spanish arrived in 1519, the Aztecs controlled an empire larger than any in North America.

They did this because they believed their group – or society – was more important than the individuals within it.

❁ **Every Aztec was prepared to sacrifice his life for the good of the group.**



**FIGURE 7-21** The main weapon for the Aztec soldier was a war club made from a heavy wood like mahogany and edged with blades of obsidian.

# Warrior Society

As soon as an Aztec boy was born, his parents placed a **tiny bow and shield** in his hands to symbolize:

❁ his commitment to protect the Aztec people.

Military service was **compulsory** among the Aztecs. The worst insult among the Aztecs was to call someone a coward; a lack of courage in any soldier weakened the army, which then threatened the state.

## Patriotic Poetry

Aztec poetry was created to praise the gods, to share stories, and to celebrate the beauty of the natural world. Usually, the Aztecs sang their poems or recited them to music. Much of their poetry was didactic, which means it was meant to teach a lesson.

- Why might an Aztec mother recite this poem to her son?
- What would be the greatest glory her son could achieve?
- Why is the sun god mentioned in this poem?

*Loved and tender son,*

*This is the will of the gods.*

*You are not born in your true house*

*Because you are a warrior. Your land*

*Is not here, but in another place.*

*You are promised to the field of battle.*

*You are dedicated to war.*

*You must give the Sun your enemies' blood.*

*You must feed the earth with corpses.*

*Your house, your fortune, and your destiny*

*Is in the House of the Sun.*

**Albert Marrin, *Aztecs and Spaniards:  
Cortes and the Conquest of Mexico.***

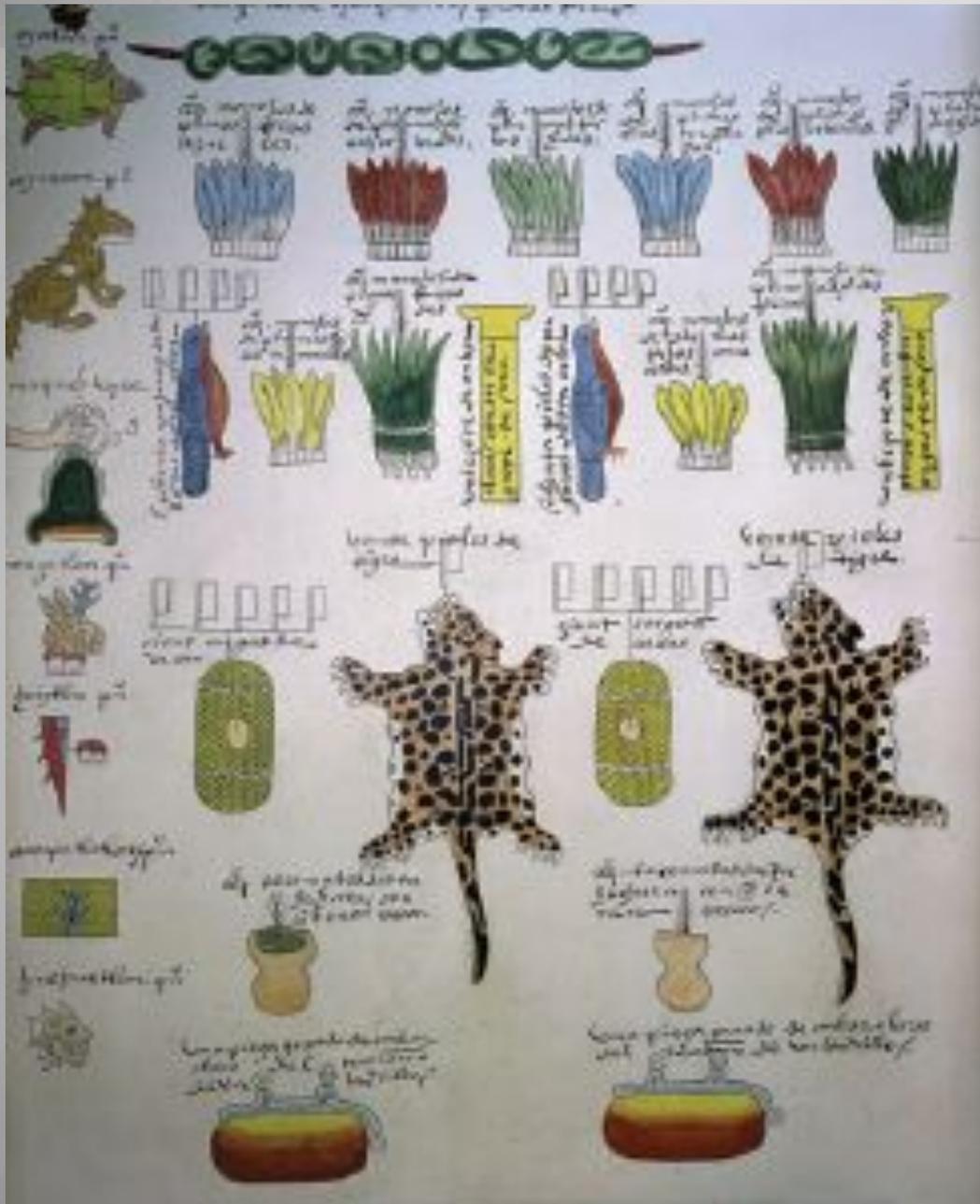
# Warrior Society

Once the Aztecs conquered a neighboring state, they would collect **tribute** (valuable gifts and taxes from the group they conquered).

The Aztecs kept careful record of the tributes they collected. This included:

- ❁ cotton blankets
- ❁ feathered headdresses
- ❁ beads
- ❁ cocoa beans.

Cocoa beans were very important to them. The Aztecs made a drink from cocoa beans and chili peppers which they believed gave them **wisdom and power**. Cocoa beans were also used as **currency**.



This codex uses picture writing to record a list of cities (in the first column on the left) and the tribute each paid.

# The People of the Sun

The Aztec Empire reached its highest point about 500 years ago (1500's) in the land we call Mexico. The people of the Sun, as the Aztecs called themselves, created one of the greatest civilizations the world has ever known.

# **Fill out Worldview Icon & KWL**