

# EIGHT

## AZTEC HUMAN SACRIFICE

ALFREDO LOPÉZ AUSTIN,  
UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL AUTÓNOMA DE MÉXICO, AND  
LEONARDO LÓPEZ LUJÁN,  
INSTITUTO NACIONAL DE ANTROPOLOGÍA E HISTORIA

Stereotypes are persistent ideas of reality generally accepted by a social group. In many cases, they are conceptions that simplify and even caricaturize phenomena of a complex nature. When applied to societies or cultures, they may include value judgments that are true or false, specific or ambiguous. If the stereotype refers to one's own tradition, it emphasizes the positive and the virtuous, and it tends to praise: The Greeks are recalled as philosophers and the Romans as great builders. On the other hand, if the stereotype refers to another tradition, it stresses the negative, the faulty, and it tends to denigrate: For many, Sicilians naturally belong to the Mafia, Pygmies are cannibals, and the Aztecs were cruel sacrificers.

As we will see, many lines of evidence confirm that human sacrifice was one the most deeply rooted religious traditions of the Aztecs. However, it is clear that the Aztecs were not the only ancient people that carried out massacres in honor of their gods, and there is insufficient quantitative information to determine whether the Aztecs were the people who practiced human sacrifice most often. Indeed, sacred texts, literary works, historic documents, and especially evidence contributed by archaeology and physical anthropology, enable religious historians to determine that the practice of human sacrifice was common in most parts of the ancient world. For example, evidence of sacrifice and cannibalism has emerged in many parts of Europe, dating to the Neolithic and Bronze Ages. Furthermore, human sacrifice is well documented for Classical Greece and Rome. In Africa and Asia, sacrifice arose thousands of years ago: We know that the Egyptian pharaohs habitually immolated prisoners of war and the highest governors of Ur were buried with their families and entourage. Many other examples of ritual violence have been recorded in the history of India, China, Japan, and the Fiji Islands. Evidently, the American continent was no exception. There is ample archaeological and iconographic evidence of the bloody

massacres carried out by the Moche civilization of Peru, by many Mesoamerican peoples of the Maya region, Oaxaca, the Gulf Coast, and Teotihuacan, and by peoples that lived much farther north, including Mississippian peoples and natives of the southwestern United States.

There were all sorts of massacres in the ancient world. In the Nubian kingdom of Kerma, the bodies of men, women, and children shared the same sacrificial grave; in India, a woman was beheaded annually in honor of the goddess Kali; in Carthage, children were dedicated to the god Baal when there was threat of war. Some peoples stand out for their cruelty, such as the Japanese, who buried victims alive to protect castles and bridges; the Celts, who caged victims and set them afire, or the Dayaks of Borneo, who executed victims with bamboo needles. Certain peoples—including the inhabitants of Bengal and Dahomey—are famous for their mass immolations, some of which were still performed in the nineteenth century.

## THE AZTEC IMAGE

If the practice of human sacrifice was so widespread in the ancient world, why is it so often associated with the Aztecs? Part of the answer lies in Spanish efforts to justify conquest from the very moment they arrived on the American continent. Spain and Portugal had to justify to the other European monarchies the privilege granted by Pope Alexander VI in 1493 to take possession of the New World in order to “indoctrinate these natives and inhabitants in the Catholic faith and impose the good ways upon them.” As a consequence, the Spanish assumed the role of defenders of Christianity. To legitimize their conquest, they claimed that their mission included the eradication of human sacrifice and cannibalism by force in order to save innocent lives and souls.

During their stay on the Veracruz coast and their ascent to highland Mexico, the Spanish witnessed multiple human sacrifices performed by peoples who were enemies, subjects, or allies of the Aztecs. However, their extended stay at Tenochtitlan, capital of the Aztec empire, allowed them to observe, in all its complexity, the very diverse ceremonies that climaxed in ritual killing. This experience and the achievement of the destruction of Tenochtitlan throughout the process of conquest, solidified the stereotype of the Aztecs as sacrificers par excellence. It is not surprising that, taking advantage of this charge leveled by the Spanish, other native peoples who were conquered subsequently denied their own tradition and accused the Aztecs of originating these bloody rituals in their territories.

As centuries passed, the stereotype of the cruelty of the Aztecs spread, acquiring new nuances among both the dominant classes and the general population of New Spain and Europe. However, nationalistic ideologies in New Spain at the end of the colonial era and later in independent Mexico prompted a reassessment of pre-Hispanic human sacrifice, sometimes objectively and other times falling into an opposite stereotype.

Currently, both in Mexico and the rest of the world, there is an entire range of popular opinion on this multifaceted subject. At one extreme, there are those who perceive the Aztecs as the biggest sacrificers in world history. Such a view is often found in literature, magazines, and television documentaries, where the subject is usually dealt with in a sensationalistic manner, as if human sacrifice were the only aspect of the Aztec culture that is worthy of attention. Surprisingly,

this view continues as the justification for the brutal process of invasion, genocide, dominance, and marginalization of native Mexican peoples that have taken place for more than five centuries. At the other extreme, and also oversimplified, are those who deny that the Aztecs and their contemporaries offered human lives to the gods. They claim that the documentary sources of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are invalid, arguing that the texts and images that describe ritual human sacrifice and cannibalism are distorted works of the conquistadors and evangelizers themselves, or of the converted or subjected natives. Some fundamentalist groups went so far as to idealize the pre-Hispanic past, imagining peaceful societies engaging in astronomy, mathematics, philosophy, and poetry, and recommend an artificial revival of their values.

## THE EVIDENCE OF HUMAN SACRIFICE

There are other much more rigorous ways to study such a complex phenomenon, with its economic, political, religious, and ethical implications. The social sciences offer a framework free of oversimplification based on varied, objective forms of evidence. The scientific method offers an objective, critical means to evaluate the hypotheses and theories that try to explain social institutions and processes in their historic and cultural context. In the specific case of Aztec sacrifice, a good number of serious, reliable scientific publications of different orientations exist. Among them, we can recommend *La fleur létale* [The Lethal Flower] by Christian Duverger, *Ritual Human Sacrifice in Mesoamerica* edited by Elizabeth H. Boone, *El sacrificio humano entre los mexicas* [Human Sacrifice among the Mexicas] by Yólotl González Torres, *The Human Body and Ideology* by Alfredo López Austin, *City of Sacrifice* by David Carrasco, *Le sacrifice humain chez les aztèques* [Human Sacrifice Among the Aztecs] by Michel Graulich, and *Sacrificio mesoamericano* [Mesoamerican Sacrifice] edited by Leonardo López Luján and Guilhem Olivier. These publications rely mainly on the documentary sources produced in the first decades of the colonial period: the Nahuatl pictographs and texts written in Latin characters by the natives; the tales of the conquistadors, eyewitnesses to the religious life of Tenochtitlan, and descriptions of the Aztec cult made by the missionary friars. The seven publications mentioned above are notable due to their attempts to identify and evaluate the contexts and distortions of these sources, distancing themselves from literal and naïve reading of the historical information.

However, no matter how rich the information provided by the documentary sources, it must always be compared with data obtained from archeology and physical anthropology. Given that most of the historical information relative to Aztec sacrifice refers to the sacred precinct of Tenochtitlan, we quickly see the importance of material evidence recovered from this site during the excavations of the Templo Mayor Project between 1978 and 2007.

Among the discoveries made, the *téhcacatl*, or stone upon which sacrificial victims were stretched as they were ritually killed, provides the most solid evidence of human sacrifice. Two of these stones were exhumed at the summit of one of the oldest stages of the Templo Mayor (c. 1390) (López Austin and López Luján 2001). They were located at the entrances of the two chapels that guard the images of Huitzilopochtli (the sun god) and Tlaloc (the god of rain), where they were visible to the multitude that congregated at the base of the pyramid to attend

ceremonies. Huitzilopochtli's stone was a smooth basalt polyhedron that rose 50 centimeters from the floor. The stone of Tlaloc was a sculpture of the rain god (Figure 1), lying on its back with a cylindrical altar fastened to his abdomen, which reached a height of 51 centimeters. The form and height of both stones assured their ability to function as tables for supporting the victims in the lumbar area, so that they could be bent backward in order to remove their hearts.

Sacrificial knives were similarly important (López Luján 2005) (Figure 2). A little more than one thousand knives have been recovered to date. These instruments are made of flint, a hard stone of great strength, which can be sharpened. The knives are lanceolated with an acute point to penetrate the body before cutting out the heart. A number of them have an ornament representing monstrous faces converting them into personified symbols of the sacrificial instrument, though they are ineffective for performing the rite. These have been identified by specialists as mere votive objects.

We should also consider the remains of the victims that were buried by the Aztecs at the Templo Mayor and adjoining buildings. If we add up the data from four successive archaeological projects in the area, the total reaches 126 individuals (Estrada Balmori 1979; Angulo 1966; Peña Gómez 1978; Román 1990; López Luján 2005; Chávez 2005). Among these are forty-two children—mainly males and suffering from anemia, parasitism, and gastrointestinal diseases—whose throats were slit in honor of the god of rain, and a forty-third child, killed by removal of the heart and dedicated to Huitzilopochtli. A second group is made up of forty-seven adult heads, almost all men, whose skulls and first vertebrae were found in the main architectural axes of the pyramid. Another group includes three skulls with perforations at the temples, which indicate that they come from *tzompantli*, the rack where trophy heads impaled on wooden poles were exhibited. Last, we must mention thirty-three skull-masks representing Mictlantecuhtli, god of death (Figure 3); these consist of the facial portion of the skulls adorned with shells and pyrite as eyes, and with sacrificial knives to simulate the nose and tongue.

Figure 1. A drawing of a sacrificial stone (*chacmool*) found at the entrance to the chapel of the god of rain, Templo Mayor, Tenochtitlan, Phase II (c. 1390 AD). Drawing by Fernando Carrizosa Montfort, courtesy of Proyecto Templo Mayor, INAH.

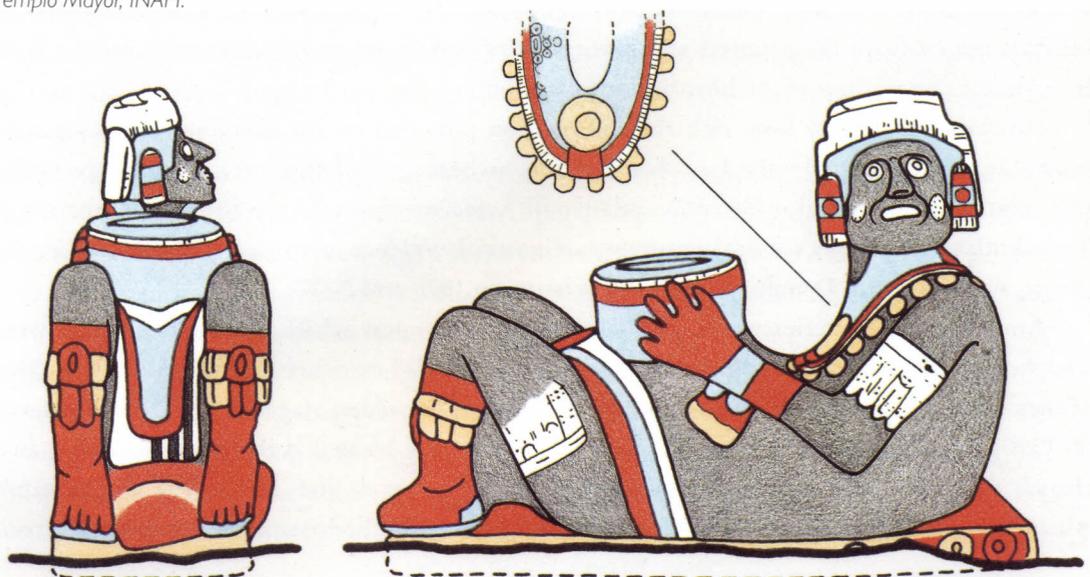




Figure 2. Sacrificial flint knives from an offering at the Templo Mayor, Tenochtitlan.

Recently, traces of blood on the surfaces of divine images, altars, and stucco floors have been identified (Figures 4 and 5). Thanks to modern techniques, significant concentrations of iron, albumin (the main protein in blood), and human hemoglobin were detected (López Luján 2006).

These and other pieces of evidence corroborate the graphic and textual information contained in the documentary sources of the sixteenth century, and they lead us to conclude, without doubt, that human sacrifice was a basic practice of the Aztec religion. At the same time, the evidence demonstrates that the numbers in the historical sources may be wildly exaggerated. There is quite a long way from the skeletal remains of the 126 individuals found so far in all construction stages of the Templo Mayor and its thirteen adjoining buildings to the 80,400 victims mentioned in a couple of documents for one single event: The dedication of an expansion of the Templo Mayor in 1487. In this regard, it is interesting to add that the largest number of bodies associated with a religious venue in Central Mexico was recorded in the classical city of Teotihuacan and not in Tenochtitlan. The excavations done at the Feathered Serpent Pyramid brought to light that this religious building, which dates from 150 A.D., was consecrated with the sacrifice of at least 137 individuals, almost all warriors (Sugiyama 2005). Recently, the remains of thirty-seven individuals were found inside the Moon Pyramid (Sugiyama and López Luján 2007).



Figure 3. Skull-mask representing the God of Death, found at an offering of the Templo Mayor, Tenochtitlan.



Figure 4. Sculpture of the God of Death discovered in the House of Eagles. It was bathed with human blood in a manner similar to that demonstrated in the *Codex Magliabechiano*.



Figure 5. Image of the God of Death being bathed in human blood from the *Codex Magliabechiano*.

## SACRIFICE AND WORLDVIEW

In order to fully understand human sacrifice in the Aztec culture, it is necessary to analyze the links between this practice and pre-Hispanic conceptions of the universe, the gods, man, and all of the creatures with which they interacted in daily life. Human sacrifice is incomprehensible to us if we do not take into account its location and its connection to the immense puzzle we call worldview (López Austin, 1988).

A simplistic perception of sacrifice as an isolated phenomenon will bring about an easy condemnation and an immediate repudiation of the people who practice it. In contrast, a scientific perspective will go beyond passing judgment since it will attempt to develop explanations that are based on the study of historical conditions, religious customs, and social institutions and relations surrounding sacrifice.

In the Mesoamerican religious tradition, humans imagined a universe in which the space-time belonging exclusively to the gods (the beyond) was distinguished from the space-time created by the gods for the creatures (the world). The latter was occupied by human beings, animals, plants, minerals, meteors, and stars, but it was also for the gods and supernatural forces whose

invisible presence meshed with the mundane. Divinity infiltrated all creatures, to give them their essential characteristics and to enliven, energize, transform, damage, and destroy them. In other words, creatures were conceived by the Aztecs and their contemporaries as mixed entities, made up of divine substances (subtle, eternal, predating the formation of the world) and worldly substances (hard, heavy, perceptible, destructible, which enveloped the divine elements).

The Aztecs believed that in primitive times many gods had been expelled from their heavenly dwelling for having violated the established order. One of the exiled, called Nanahuatzin, then decided to immolate himself in a bonfire. As a consequence of his courageous effort, Nanahuatzin descended to the netherworld in order to reemerge from there in the east, transformed into the first creature: the Sun. In this way he became the king of the world in gestation. However, the Sun refused to go to the sky until all his brothers imitated him, accepting sacrifice. The expelled gods could not avoid death, through which they descended to the cold place of darkness, where they acquired—like the Sun—a heavy and destructible shell. Thus it was that they were transformed into every type of worldly being: Pilzintecuhtli created the deer, Xolotl the amphibians called *axolotl*, Yappan the dark scorpions, his wife, Tlahuitzin, the light scorpions, et cetera. In short, through sacrifice the gods became creature creators. From that time, the Sun could begin its daily movement, and day and night followed each other.

The world of creatures communicated with the beyond through multiple portals. When the Sun began to move, the portals allowed the formation of cycles, since the gods and the supernatural forces used them to enter the world and withdraw from it. One cycle, for example, was that of life and death: When creatures passed on, their divine substance was stripped from the heavy worldly shell. The divine substance, now released, was sent to the netherworld, and there it waited for an opportunity to return to the world of creatures, giving rise to a new individual of the same type. Another cycle was the succession of the dry and rainy seasons. Another was time, shaped by the orderly appearance of gods who, with individual talents, periodically burst to the surface of the earth and in their passing changed everything that existed.

As the gods passed through the world and fulfilled their roles, they got tired and eventually lost their power. To recover their strength they had to be fed. That is why they created the human beings, creatures who were forced to worship them and feed them with offerings and sacrifices. Man perceived himself to be a privileged being because of his close relationship with the gods, but at the same time he was indebted to them because they had created him. Man also felt obligated because he received vital energy from the fruits arising from Mother Earth and ripened by the Sun. His debt was so great that the products of his labor were not sufficient to repay what he had acquired, and therefore, he had to offer his own blood and, at the end of his life, the remains of his body.

The relationship between human beings and the gods was interdependent. Human beings felt they were the beneficiaries of divine favors in their daily lives and at all important moments of their existence; they gratefully received rain, the fertility of the land, health, their own reproductive power, victory in war, et cetera. However, erratic rains, bad harvests, illnesses, and military defeats created the belief in fickle, very strict, and, on occasion, avaricious gods. Therefore, the faithful felt obligated to provide offerings and sacrifices to the gods to repay them for their gifts, to please them, or to appease their wrath. They offered the gods the aroma of flowers, incense, tobacco smoke, the first fruits of harvests, and blood and flesh that sustained them. Human beings

thus fulfilled an eternal exchange, preventing the disruption of the cycles, of the course of the Sun, of the passage of time, and of the succession of life and death. In this manner, they became participants in the proper functioning of the world.

With this logic, sacrificial victims had one of two main meanings. On the one hand, some of them were called *nextlahualtin*, or “restitutions.” These individuals were considered simply means of payment, the most prized food to compensate the gods. On the other hand, other victims were the *teteo imixiptlahuan* or “images of the gods.” It was believed that these persons were possessed by the divinities to relive the sacrificial death they had suffered in primitive times. Thus, the divinities, worn out by their work, ended their own cycle on earth: After succumbing to the edge of a flint knife, they traveled to the region of the dead to recover their strength and be born again there.

## THE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC DIMENSIONS OF SACRIFICE

In the tradition of ancient Mexico, man obeyed for thousands of years the terrible obligation of maintaining the world with his own blood and that of his kind. The roots of human sacrifice and cannibalism are ancient. The most ancient evidence of human sacrifice in Mexico comes from the cave of Coxcatlán in the Tehuacán Valley, dating to the hunter-gatherer societies of the El Riego phase (6000–4800 BC). The earliest evidence of cannibalism was recovered at the Late Formative site of Tlatelcomila, Tetelpan, in the Federal District (700–500 BC) (Pijoan and Mansilla 1997).

As the centuries passed and Mesoamerican societies were transformed into chiefdoms and states, ritual killing became increasingly complex. The transformation of their basic principles, with their devotional practices and concepts, must have been very gradual. In contrast, the immediate reasons for this practice changed much more rapidly, following the pace of political and economic change. The chiefdoms and states changed the meaning of this rite, intensified its practice, and began to use human sacrifice as a pretext for expanding their domains and pillaging the weak. This happened mainly during periods when political units competed for military supremacy. The people who experienced this hegemonic zeal most intensely were the Toltecs, the Maya of Chichen Itza, the Tarascans and, of course, the Aztecs. The latter, from 1430 and for nearly a century, waged wars of conquest that expanded their borders from the Pacific coast to the shores of the Gulf of Mexico, and southward to the borders of what is now Guatemala.

During the Late Postclassic period, wars of conquest were sanctioned as a way for men to fulfill their holy mission to perpetuate the existence of the world through human sacrifice (Hassig 1988). Aztec armies and those of their allies carried out ambitious military campaigns from which they returned victorious with numerous prisoners for their large sacrificial festivals. One of the purposes of these festivals was to boast of the military prowess of Tenochtitlan, instilling fear in its enemies. This explains why the leaders of the allied, subject, and independent peoples were invited to these occasions to witness the death of those who had opposed the Aztec rule.

Huitzilopochtli—patron god of the Aztecs—was conceived as the sun and a warrior. His main temple, the great pyramid known as Coatepetl (“Hill of the Snakes”), was considered the center not only of Tenochtitlan, but of the world. In this and many other temples in the sacred precinct and in various districts of the city, the Aztecs sacrificed their enemies with the convic-

tion that their actions made them the saviors of humanity. The common people suffered the consequences of the violent behavior of their rulers; nevertheless, they participated in this ideology, because they were immersed in a militaristic atmosphere, which exalted from childhood the glory of weapons and the demands of bloodthirsty gods. Accordingly, the school, the temple, and the militia were institutions strictly controlled by the government, which imprinted the values of death on each subject of this “benefactor” state.

Evidently, the Aztecs were not the only ones who developed such a militaristic mentality. All neighboring peoples shared this worldview, worshipped the same gods, and honored them with similar rituals. This gave rise to *xochiyaoyotl*, or “the war of the flowers,” an institution created by the Aztecs and their enemies of the Puebla-Tlaxcala Valley. *Xochiyaoyotl* was based on a pact of controlled, periodic battles, in which the contending armies faced each other until one of them asked for a truce. Curiously, there was no interest in gaining spoils, territory, or tribute. At the end of the battle, both groups returned to their capitals bringing as a prize the enemies they had captured alive for sacrifice (Figure 6). But little by little, the Aztecs reduced the male population of the Puebla-Tlaxcala Valley, weakening it economically and militarily. It is noteworthy that a sacred kinship was established between captor and prisoner, who called each other respectively “father” and “son.” Some authors have explained this association by the need of the offerer to deliver to the gods someone of his own nature, his true substitute.

## THE DIVERSITY OF SACRIFICE

Not all individuals ritually sacrificed were warriors captured in battle. The rites of killing had a broad range of victims. Liturgy strictly dictated the origin, gender, age, and condition of those who would die in ceremony. For example, a middle-aged woman, descendant of one of the main noble families of Tenochtitlan, was chosen every year as victim for one of the most important festivals of the agricultural calendar (Figure 7); children with two cowlicks in their hair and

Figure 6. Sacrifice of prisoners of war during the inauguration of the Templo Mayor, Tenochtitlan in the year 1487.

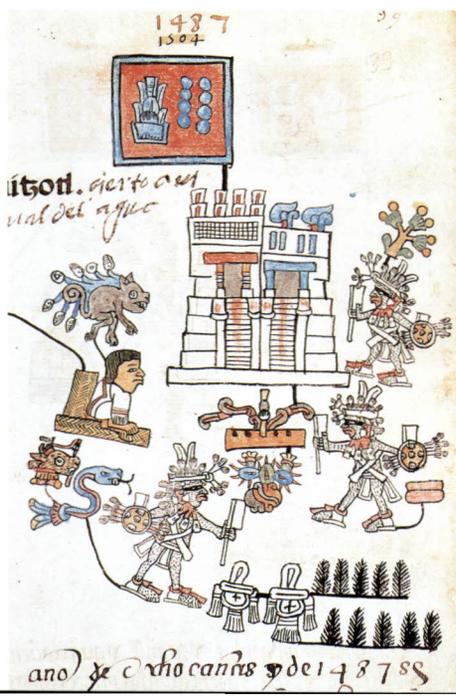


Figure 7. Sacrifice of a woman personifying the goddess of salt.



who had been born under a favorable sign were offered by their own parents to the gods of rain to guarantee rains for the next season (Figure 8); albinos were a precious gift to strengthen the Sun during the feared eclipses, and a large group of dwarfs, humpbacks, and servants of the king were sacrificed after his death in order to help him in the other world. Evidently, there was no lack of those whose devotion drove them to deliver themselves voluntarily, as did certain priests, musicians, and prostitutes. Another important group was made up of slaves (Figure 9). We must clarify, however, that slavery among the Aztecs and their neighbors was of a less strict nature than, for example, among the Romans. In Tenochtitlan, the slave was generally a debtor subject to his creditor as a domestic servant. He remained a slave until he was able to repay his debt. During his service he could not be mistreated, nor could ownership be transferred to another person without his consent. However, if he was unruly and did not comply with the demands of his master, he could be condemned to the condition of “wooden-collar slave” (Figure 10); from then on, he could be sold to merchants or other groups of professionals who wished to offer him to the gods. For this purpose he was ritually bathed and after purification, made a victim of sacrifice.

On many occasions the victims went to death adorned in garments that symbolically joined them to the deities they personified. Dressed this way, they reenacted mythical events, recreating divine actions in the time of man. Depending on the ceremony, the liturgy dictated the method of sacrifice and the disposal of the bodies. The most common death was by cutting out the heart of the victim, who was placed face up on a *téhcatl* (Figure 11). Whether the sacrificer cut out the heart by penetrating the thoracic cavity through the abdomen and diaphragm, breaking the sternum lengthwise, making a small intercostal cut on the left side of the thorax, or a long intercostal cut from side to side, rupturing the sternum transversely, is still under debate. In some ceremonies, before the removal of the heart, the victim was subjected to a bonfire (Figure 12), injured by darts or arrows (Figure 13), or “scratched” with an obsidian sword in a gladiator-like confrontation (Figure 14). In other circumstances, the victim’s throat was slit, or victims were locked away in caves or cavities made in a temple to die of suffocation or starvation; or they were drowned; or they were thrown down from the top of a tall pole. It is possible that the Aztecs also shared customs used by other Mesoamerican peoples, such as strangulation with a net, evisceration, and cooking in a steam bath. The Aztecs threw the dead bodies of the victims from the top of the pyramids, decapitated them, quartered them, skinned them, or kept the head and the femur as sacred objects. At certain festivals they practiced the ritual consumption of the victims’ flesh, a cannibalistic practice whose purpose was the communion of the faithful with the body that had been made divine through sacrifice (Figure 15).

The occasions for sacrifice were varied. The large majority occurred within the framework of the solar calendar, associated with the eighteen months of twenty days into which the 365-day year was divided. Sacrifices were also performed in the context of other cycles, such as the 260-day ritual calendar and cycles of fifty-two years. Outside of predetermined ritual days, individuals were offered for military battles (Figure 16), either before the battle to avoid or win it, or subsequently to celebrate victory. Numerous prisoners of war were also sacrificed to strengthen and consecrate with their blood the foundations of religious buildings and to inaugurate their subsequent expansions (Figure 17). Some rites intended to reestablish the safety and order lost during diseases, droughts, floods, famines, and eclipses.



Figure 8. Sacrifice of a child personifying one of the little gods who assist the god of rain.

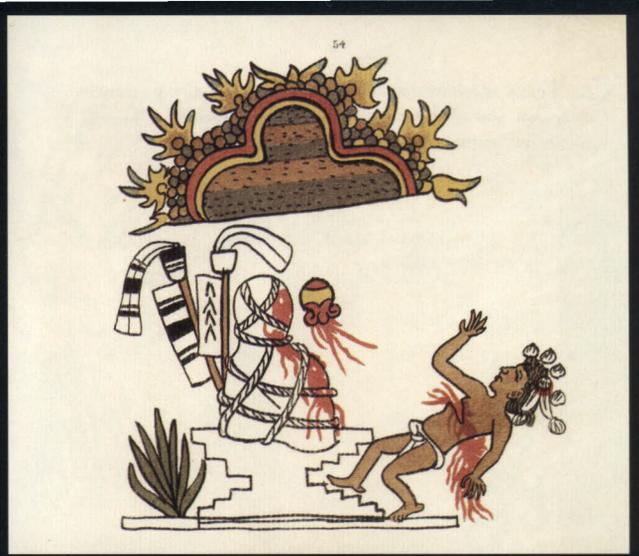


Figure 9. Sacrifice of a slave during the funeral of a master.



Figure 10. Wooden-collar slaves.



Figure 11. Sacrifice by extraction of the heart.



Figure 12. Subjecting a sacrificial victim to fire.

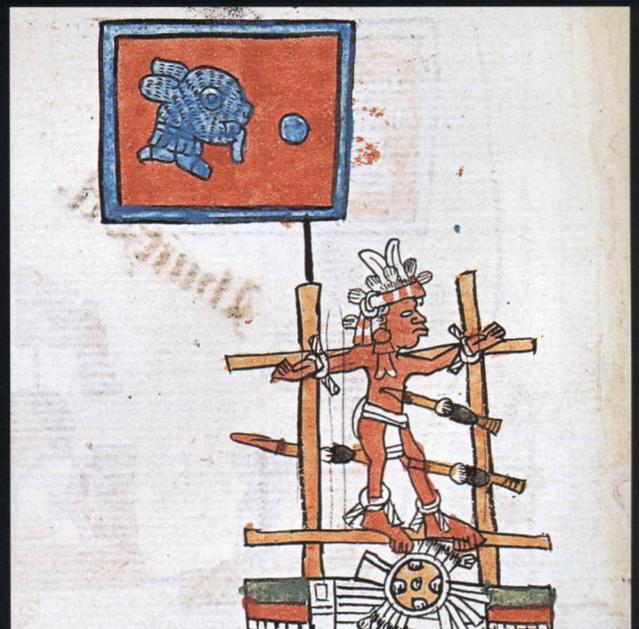


Figure 13. Sacrifice with arrows.



Figure 14. "Scratching" ceremony or gladiator sacrifice.



Figure 15. Ritual cannibalism.

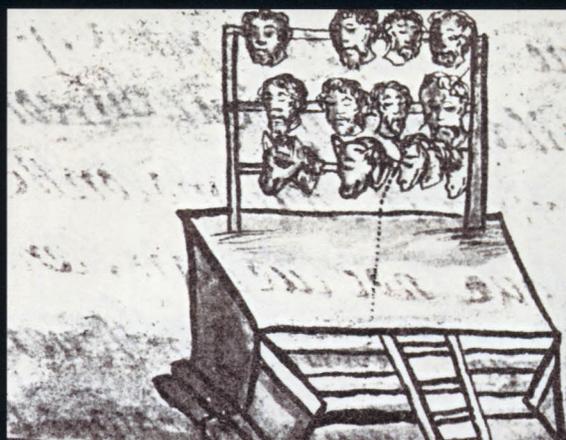


Figure 16. Heads of Spanish soldiers and horses exhibited as trophies at the tzompantli (skull rack).

It is clear that the social phenomena of the remote past, including sacrifice and cannibalism, must be viewed as existing beyond the simple dichotomy of good and evil. They must be critically evaluated using the largest quantity of evidence possible. This is the only way in which we will understand that the Aztecs—with their virtues and faults, with their great contributions and their exaggerated ritual violence—were as human as any other ancient people.

Figure 17. Monolith of the goddess of earth Tlaltecuhltli found in 2006 at the foot of the Templo Mayor. This divinity was fed human blood.



## REFERENCES

- Angulo, Jorge. 1966. "Una ofrenda en el Templo Mayor de Tenochtitlan" [An offering at the Templo Mayor of Tenochtitlan]. *Boletín INAH*, 26:1–6.
- Boone, Elizabeth H., ed. 1984. *Ritual Human Sacrifice in Mesoamerica*. Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks.
- Carrasco, David. 1999. *City of Sacrifice: The Aztec Empire and the Role of Violence in Civilization*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Chávez Balderas, Ximena. 2005. "Sacrificio humano y tratamientos mortuorios en el Templo Mayor de Tenochtitlan" [Human sacrifice and funeral treatment at the Templo Mayor of Tenochtitlan]. Final report, FAMSÍ Project 05054, Mexico City.
- Duverger, Christian. 1979. *La fleur létale: économie du sacrifice aztèque* [The lethal flower: Economy of Aztec sacrifice]. Seuil, Paris.
- Estrada Balmori, Elma. 1979. "Ofrendas del Templo Mayor de Mexico-Tenochtitlan" [Offerings at the Templo Mayor of Mexico-Tenochtitlan], in *Trabajos arqueológicos en el Centro de la Ciudad de México (Antología)* [Archeological works in the Center of Mexico City (Anthology)], Eduardo Matos Moctezuma, ed. Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia: 183–89.
- Graulich, Michel. 2005. *Le sacrifice humain chez les Aztèques* [Human sacrifice among the Aztecs]. Paris: Fayard.
- González Torres, Yólotl. 1985. *El sacrificio humano entre los mexicas* [Human sacrifice among the Mexicas], Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica/Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia.
- Hassig, Ross. 1988. *Aztec Warfare. Imperial Expansion and Political Control*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- López Austin, Alfredo. 1988. *The Human Body and Ideology. Concepts of the Ancient Nahuas*, 2 vols. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press.
- López Austin, Alfredo and Leonardo López Luján. 2001. "El chacmool mexica" [The Mexica Chacmool]. *Caravelle*, 76–77:59–84.
- López Luján, Leonardo. 2005. *The Offerings of the Templo Mayor of Tenochtitlan*, rev. ed. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.
- . 2006. *La Casa de las Águilas: un ejemplo de la arquitectura religiosa de Tenochtitlan* [The House of the Eagles: An example of religious architecture of Tenochtitlan]. Mexico City: Harvard University/Fondo de Cultura Económica/Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia.
- López Luján, Leonardo and Guilhem Olivier, eds. In press. *Sacrificio mesoamericano* [Mesoamerican Sacrifice]. Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia/Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.
- Peña Gómez, Rosa María. 1978. "Análisis de los restos humanos en las ofrendas a Coyolxauhqui" [Analysis of human remains of offerings at Coyolxauhqui]. *Antropología e Historia*, 24:39–51.
- Pijoan, Carmen Ma. and Josefina Mansilla Lory. 1997. "Evidence for Human Sacrifice, Bone Modification and Cannibalism in Ancient Mexico," in *Troubled Times: Violence and Warfare in the Past*, Debra L. Martin and David W. Frayer eds. Amsterdam: Gordon and Breach: 217–39.
- Román, Juan Alberto. 1990. *Sacrificio de niños en el Templo Mayor* [Sacrifice of Children at the Templo Mayor]. Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia.
- Sugiyama, Saburo. 2005. *Human Sacrifice, Warfare, and Rulership: Materialization of State Ideology at the Feathered Serpent Pyramid, Teotihuacan*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sugiyama, Saburo and Leonardo López Luján. 2007. "Dedicatory Burial/Offering Complexes at the Moon Pyramid, Teotihuacan: A Preliminary Report of 1998–2004 Explorations." *Ancient Mesoamerica*, 18:1–20.

EDITED BY ELIZABETH M. BRUMFIEL AND GARY M. FEINMAN

# THE AZTEC WORLD

ABRAMS, NEW YORK

in association with The Field Museum, Chicago

The Field  
Museum



Instituto Nacional  
de Antropología  
e Historia



Consejo Nacional  
para la  
Cultura y las Artes

Project Manager: Ariel Orlov  
Editor: Esther de Hollander  
Designer: Kris Tobiassen  
Production Manager: Jules Thomson

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data:

Brumfiel, Elizabeth M.

The Aztec world / by Elizabeth M. Brumfiel and Gary M. Feinman.

p. cm.

Catalog of an exhibition to be held at The Field Museum, Chicago, from October 31, 2008 to April 19, 2009.

ISBN 978-0-8109-7278-0 (hardcover) ISBN 978-0-8109-8309-0 (paperback)

1. Aztecs—Antiquities—Exhibitions. 2. Aztecs—History—Exhibitions. 3. Mexico—Antiquities—Exhibitions.

I. Feinman, Gary M. II. Field Museum of Natural History. III. Title.

F1219.73.B78 2008

972'.01—dc22

2007048998

Text copyright © 2008 Elizabeth M. Brumfiel and Gary M. Feinman

Published in 2008 by Abrams, an imprint of Harry N. Abrams, Inc. All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, mechanical, electronic, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without written permission from the publisher.

Printed and bound in China

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Abrams books are available at special discounts when purchased in quantity for premiums and promotions as well as fundraising or educational use. Special editions can also be created to specification. For details, contact [specialmarkets@hnabooks.com](mailto:specialmarkets@hnabooks.com) or the address below.

**HNA** ■■■■■  
**harry n. abrams, inc.**

a subsidiary of La Martinière Groupe

115 West 18th Street  
New York, NY 10011  
[www.abramsbooks.com](http://www.abramsbooks.com)

# CONTENTS

## FOREWORDS AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Field Museum, Chicago.....	ix
Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Mexico.....	xiii
Museo del Templo Mayor, Mexico.....	xvii
Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico.....	xix

<b>INTRODUCTION: <i>THE AZTEC WORLD</i></b> <b>IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT.....</b>	<b>1</b>
Elizabeth M. Brumfiel and Gary M. Feinman	

<b>1</b>	<b>MEXICA POLITICAL HISTORY .....</b>	<b>5</b>
	Frederic Hicks	
<b>2</b>	<b>ENVIRONMENT AND RURAL ECONOMY .....</b>	<b>23</b>
	Jeffrey R. Parsons	
<b>3</b>	<b>HEALTH AND DISEASE AMONG THE AZTECS.....</b>	<b>53</b>
	Juan Alberto Román Berrelleza	
<b>4</b>	<b>TENOCHTITLAN IN 1519: A PRE-INDUSTRIAL MEGALOPOLIS .....</b>	<b>67</b>
	William T. Sanders	
<b>5</b>	<b>AZTEC WOMEN: CAPABLE PARTNERS AND COSMIC ENEMIES .....</b>	<b>87</b>
	Elizabeth M. Brumfiel	

6	ARTISANS, MARKETS, AND MERCHANTS.....	105
	Deborah L. Nichols	
7	THE AZTEC EMPIRE.....	121
	Michael E. Smith	
8	AZTEC HUMAN SACRIFICE.....	137
	Alfredo López Austin and Leonardo López Luján	
9	THE ART OF THE AZTEC ERA.....	153
	Felipe Solís Olguín	
10	AZTEC WRITING AND HISTORY.....	179
	Elizabeth Hill Boone	
11	THE AZTECS AFTER THE CONQUEST.....	195
	Enrique Rodríguez-Alegría	
12	THE AZTEC WORLD'S PRESENCE IN COLONIAL AND MODERN MEXICO.....	209
	Eduardo Matos Moctezuma	
13	IMAGINING A PLACE FOR AZTLAN: CHICANISMO AND THE AZTECS IN ART AND RESISTANCE.....	225
	Davíd Carrasco	
	CONTRIBUTORS.....	241
	ILLUSTRATION CREDITS.....	243
	INDEX.....	247