

RETURNING GOD OR BLOOD SACRIFICE:  
WHAT WERE MOCTEZUMA'S INTENTIONS TOWARD CORTÈS?

---

A Thesis  
presented to  
the Faculty of the Graduate School  
at the University of Missouri-Columbia

---

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

---

by  
LORA L. KILE  
Dr. Robert Baum, Thesis Supervisor

MAY 2011

The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the thesis entitled

RETURNING GOD OR BLOOD SACRIFICE:

WHAT WERE MOCTEZUMA'S INTENTIONS TOWARD CORTÈS?

presented by Lora L. Kile,

a candidate for the degree of master of arts

and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

---

Professor Robert Baum

---

Professor Dennis Kelley

---

Professor Christine VanPool

---

---

.....Thanks, Mom for the support and encouragement.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Professor Robert Baum for his guidance, support and rigorous editing of my papers and thesis. You opened the world of Indigenous Religions to me and I am a better writer now for your critiques. I would like to thank Professor Dennis Kelley for his time and insights. You presented theories in a clear and concise manner that allowed me to begin to grasp their meanings. You also kept me balanced and focused. I would like to thank Professor Christine VanPool for her encouragement and expertise in Mesoamerican archaeology. You helped me see many connections that led to new paths to explore.

I would like to thank Professor Kay Read for sparking my interest in *Mexica* religious practices and the discerning questions she proposed during my writing process. I would like to thank Professor Miguel Aguilera for his suggested readings that led to the answers to many perceptive questions. I would like to thank Professor Ivàn Reyna for his assistance with sixteenth century Spanish texts, helping me improve my writing in Spanish and acting as a sounding board as I worked out a few thorny issues on the conception of a deity impersonator. Finally, I would like to thank Professor Robert Smale for allowing a graduate student who was interested in the *Mexica* to sit in on his senior seminar and learn how little I really knew about them.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ii
ABSTRACT .....	v
CHAPTERS	
INTRODUCTION.....	1
Synopsis of Research	
1. THE DEVELOPMENT OF <i>MEXICA</i> SOCIETY .....	24
A History of the <i>Mexica</i> and How the Triple Alliance Developed	
2. SACRIFICE.....	44
A Literary Review of the Meaning of Sacrifice in Religious Studies, How it Applies to the <i>Mexica</i> and an Example of Two <i>Mexica</i> Sacrificial Rituals	
3. THE <i>TEOTL IXIPTLA</i> , THE <i>MEXICA</i> DEITY IMPERSONATORS.....	58
The Significance of a <i>Mexica</i> Deity Impersonator and an Example of Two <i>Mexica</i> Sacrificial Rituals that Involved <i>Teotl Ixiptlas</i>	
4. THE MANY GUISES OF QUETZALCOATL.....	76
A Comparison of the <i>Mexica</i> deity Quetzalcoatl with the Toltec Priest-King Hero Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl	
5. THE INTERACTION OF MOCTEZUMA AND CORTÈS.....	86
An Analysis of the Actions Taken By Moctezuma and Cortès that Resulted in the Conquest of the <i>Mexica</i>	
CONCLUSION.....	106
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	115

## ABSTRACT

In my thesis I will be exploring why Moctezuma Xocoytl, the leader of the Aztecs when they were conquered by the Spanish, sent Hernán Cortés, the leader of the invading Spanish, the sacred garments of three Aztec gods. Traditionally, the answer to this question has been that Moctezuma Xocoytl thought Cortés was the Aztec god Quetzalcoatl returning to claim his empire. However, using the theoretical meanings of sacrifice and the dynamics of imperialism, I will examine the Aztec culture and their religious practices when the Spanish arrived to illustrate that this was not Moctezuma's intention. By examining the sixteenth century documents of the conquistadors and the Spanish priests as well as the surviving Aztec texts, I will present an alternative view of Moctezuma's intentions. I propose that Moctezuma did not think Cortés was Quetzalcoatl but intended to turn Cortés into a special sacrificial victim, a deity impersonator, to be sacrificed to Quetzalcoatl. This new view of Moctezuma, and how I arrived at it, can impact many academic fields: from the historical study of the Spanish Conquest of the New World and the examination of the literary trends found in historical documents to the study of cultural conflicts, imperialism and religious practices among indigenous people.

## Introduction

Two imperial powers met in a clash of cultures, in August of 1520, the Spanish under Hernán Cortés, and the Aztecs ruled over by Moctezuma Xocoyotzin. The interaction of the leaders of these imperial states has led to speculation about why Moctezuma behaved as he did since 1521. Why did Moctezuma hand his empire over to a foreigner? Many historians and scholars have answered this question with the traditional explanation that Moctezuma believed that Hernán Cortés was the Aztec god *Quetzalcoatl*. Part of this argument was that, by abdicating in favor of Cortés, Moctezuma fulfilled an ancient Aztec prophecy that *Quetzalcoatl* would return to claim his empire. Is this interpretation correct? Are there other answers that explain Moctezuma's behavior? If so, who originated the tradition concerning the deification of Cortés? Contrary to the traditional view, could Moctezuma's behavior have stemmed from an intention to employ Cortés as a sacrifice to *Quetzalcoatl*? To answer these questions, I will explore the structure of Aztec society, the meaning of sacrifice within Aztec cosmology, the specific role of deity impersonators, the many guises of *Quetzalcoatl* and the specific interaction between Moctezuma and Cortés between 1519 and 1520.

Central to imperial power is its ability to impose its economic and religious hegemony over subjected peoples. This ability marked the success of its conquest on the local level. Examining the power imposed by an imperial nation has been the heart of

post-colonial theory, described by Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins as the discussion and engagement of colonialism's social hierarchies; power structures and discourses not only based on the time just after colonialism ends. Gilbert and Tomkins proposed that post-colonialism must take on more than the complex experience of imperialism.

(Gilbert, *Post-Colonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics, passim*) Western scholarship creates dichotomies between pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial studies, the Imperial Power and the “Other.” Scholars like Gayatri Spivak and Dipesh Chakraparty introduced an important aspect to post-colonial theory by viewing the subaltern, the voice of those oppressed and silenced by a dominant ideology. Post-colonial scholars attempt to destabilize the Western ways of thinking thus opening room to hear the subalterns’ voices. Utilizing this theory, I will examine the history and religious practices of the Aztec Empire. While Moctezuma was the epitome of the Aztec elite, I will use the voices of his people, as illustrated in the remaining Aztec texts, known as codices, to illustrate how Moctezuma might have viewed Cortés during the conquest. Can reading against the historical texts of the dominant culture, the conquering Spaniards, be blended with the voice of the oppressed Aztec people to provide scholars with a holistic view of the Aztec culture? Can these texts be read in new ways to provide deeper insight into the final monarch’s beliefs toward the man who would conquer his nation? By examining the Aztec codices in conjunction with the Spanish texts, I can weave together the evidence of how Moctezuma viewed Cortés and arrive at his true intentions for this foreign leader.

The Aztec Empire, in what was to become known as Mexico, also presents a model case study to examine the idea of cultural conflict, through the lens of post-colonial theory. The Aztecs’ conquering of the indigenous peoples to become the ruling



power, only to be conquered in turn by a Western European imperial power are an ideal example. The Aztecs arrived in the Mexico Basin in the fourteenth century as a motley group of hunter-gatherers and grew into the economic, political and religious powerhouse of the region over the next one hundred and fifty years. They became the dominant power that subjugated and oppressed the agriculturalist peoples who resided in the area. From a post-colonial viewpoint, the Aztecs were equivalent to the modern Western colonial forces that spread across the globe. The indigenous peoples of the Mesoamerican Basin were transformed into the subalterns whose voice can be gleaned through the customs and religious beliefs that the Aztecs adopted to legitimize their dominance of the region. The Aztecs in turn became the subaltern when Cortés conquered them. This situation presented a host of questions. How did this change occur and how did the Spanish unravel these accomplishments in less than two years? How did one culture impose its religious beliefs over such a vast area and then lose so much to another imperial power? How does an imperial power transform itself into an indigenous power, in turn to be conquered by foreigners?

This was the point where I started my research on the Aztec Empire, its religious beliefs and how the Spanish successfully conquered it in the early sixteenth century. I started by looking at what scholars had to say about how Moctezuma, the Aztec leader, and how the scholars interpreted the Aztecs behavior when Hernán Cortés arrived in his territory. The predominant view was that Moctezuma handed the Aztec Empire over to Cortés because he thought that Cortés was the Aztec god, *Quetzalcoatl*, returning to assume control of the Empire that Moctezuma and his predecessors had been holding for him. That Cortés bore distinct resemblances to *Tolpitzin Quetzalcoatl*, the legendary

priest-king of the Toltec Empire, who is often conflated with the god *Quetzalcoatl* significantly promoted this idea. The Aztecs utilized a cyclical calendar that employed the same names for years. The years repeated in a fifty-two year rotation and were used again in the next cycle, known as a bundle of years. Tolpitzin *Quetzalcoatl* was born in the year *Ce Acatl*, One Reed, and died in the same year, in the successive bundle of years, vowing to return in a year that bore the same sign, One Reed. Cortés arrived in Mesoamerica in *Ce Acatl*, in 1519, during a year bundle nearly five hundred years after *Tolpitzin Quetzalcoatl's* death. Cortés' light skin and beard, combined with his arrival from the East also linked him to *Tolpitzin Quetzalcoatl*. These similarities and how Moctezuma treated Cortés upon his arrival lead to a five hundred year debate as to whether Moctezuma thought Cortés was *Quetzalcoatl* returned. However, was Cortés actually thought to be the god, or the priest-king?

How did the Traditional View of Moctezuma develop?

While I could comprehend that an indigenous ruler could conceive of a foreigner as a god, this view of the conquest did not seem to present the whole picture. I had a hard time understanding how someone such as Moctezuma, who controlled the vast resources of the Aztec Empire, could be as incompetent and naïve as scholars presented him. John Bierhorst argued that

Montezuma II, demonized in the sixteenth-century legend and never rehabilitated in mainstream literary lore, had now become the 'weeping,' 'fainting' coward who had allowed the empire to fall: or, in stronger terms, the arrogant despot 'drunk with his own power,' addicted to human sacrifice, who ignored warnings issued by the God of Christianity, (Bierhorst, *Ballads of the Lords of New Spain: The Codex Romances de los Senores de la Nueva Espana*, 2009:21).

The sixteenth century Franciscan priest, Bernardino Sahagún recorded that at the time of Moctezuma's death, a *Mexica* noble called Moctezuma a "whore of the Spaniards," (Sahagún, *Conquest of New Spain*, 77) supporting the idea that even the *Mexica* thought Moctezuma handed the Alliance over to Cortés. If an elite leader can speak for the masses he controls and truly bring their views to life, this would appear to be one of the subaltern's voices ringing clearly through history. However, Sahagún represented the dominant culture that oppressed and decimated the *Mexica*. It is unknown the extent to which Sahagún influenced his informants or what they jointly recorded starting twenty years after Cortés' victory. David Carrasco suggested the possibility that Cortés and later Spanish writers turned Moctezuma into a political and spiritual weakling to make Cortés "look extravagantly effective," (Carrasco, *City of Sacrifice: the Aztec Empire and the Role of Violence in Civilization*, 220). I assumed that Moctezuma, rather than being ineffectual, had to be a charismatic figure to hold this vast empire together and perpetuate the tribute system that supported it.

Descriptions of Moctezuma by modern scholars of the Aztecs supported this assumption. Jacques Soustelle portrayed Moctezuma as a highly successful war leader prior to his election as the *tlatoani*, leader of the Aztecs (Soustelle, *Daily Lives of the Aztecs on the Eve of the Spanish Conquest*, 62). Carrasco cited the Aztec authored *Codex Mendoza*, which brought to light one of the voices of a member of the *Mexica* elite, and which described Moctezuma as "by nature wise, an astrologer, a philosopher, and skilled in all arts, civil as well as military. His subjects greatly respected him because of his gravity, demeanor and power; none of his predecessors, in comparison, could approach his great state and majesty," (Carrasco, *City of Sacrifice: the Aztec Empire and the Role*

of *Violence in Civilization*, 210). In *The Broken Spears*, Miguel León-Portilla (*passim*) presented Moctezuma as a man bound by his religious beliefs and dependent upon omens from his main god, *Huitzilopochtli*, on how to proceed with the Spanish incursion. These descriptions differed greatly from the image of a weak and ineffectual leader.

I then looked at similar cases of an indigenous group deifying a foreign visitor as justification of a change of rulership. Captain Cook in the Hawaiian Islands came to mind first. Many scholars, using the ship logs and sailors' journals from Cook's expedition, claimed that the Hawaiians viewed Cook as their god Lono. This claim has been used to justify how the Hawaiians treated Cook during his stay in the islands (Sahlins, *How "Natives" Think, About Captain Cook, For Example, passim*). Several other European explorers detailed similar reactions from the native peoples they encountered. Jacques Cartier described Canadian Indians as believing that he was God descended to heal them. According to Sir Francis Drake, the Mirowok Indians could not be persuaded that Drake and his shipmates were not gods when they presented the Mirowok with European goods. Captain John Smith reported that the Susquehanna Indians had trouble restraining themselves from "adoring" Smith and his companions as gods<sup>1</sup> (Obeyesekere *The Apotheosis of Captain Cook: European Mythmaking in the Pacific*, 197-98). Was the apotheosis of Cook and these other European explorers similar to the claimed apotheosis of Cortés during the conquest of the Aztec Empire?

To fully understand Cortés' and Moctezuma's political strategies one needs to understand how the world worked in the 1500s. Using analogies with conquering military figures who justified their success through denigrating the religious ideas of their

---

<sup>1</sup> Obeyesekere utilized the work of William Hamlin, "Attributions of Divinity in Renaissance Ethnography and Romance, or Making a Religion of Wonder," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 24 (1992), pp. 415-47, p 418 for these examples.

conquered foes will provide such an understanding. Cortés could have propagated the belief that Moctezuma thought he was a returning *Quetzalcoatl* in order to justify his actions in the conquest. As will be demonstrated later, Cortés was in a politically precarious position with the Spanish crown and his life was in danger due to his expedition. Cortés chronicled his military campaign against the Aztecs and the riches he gained from them in formalized letters written to King Charles V of Spain. Western Europe had a long history of this style of justification dating back to Julius Caesar's commentaries on his war in Gaul. In *De Bello Gallico*, Caesar described the Celts as being barbarous to the point that they sacrificed criminals, along with grain and animals, in a wicker construct dedicated to their god. He utilized his depiction of the Celts as the ultimate "Other" reinforcing the Roman's rights to bring "civilization" to them. Was Cortés following in Caesar's footsteps?

These thoughts caused me to speculate that maybe, just maybe, Cortés had created the mythology that he was *Quetzalcoatl* to justify his military actions with King Charles V of Spain and the courtiers who controlled Spanish activities in the New World. Would Cortés have known enough of the Aztec religious beliefs to do so? Who stood more to gain from this depiction during and after the conquest, Moctezuma or Cortés? By basing Cortés' arrival within the Aztec religious mythos, would presenting Cortés as *Quetzalcoatl* mollify the Aztecs to rationalize Moctezuma's actions? Would this allow the Aztecs to view Moctezuma in a good light through posterity? Was this a ploy by Cortés to further objectify the Aztecs as the "Other" and in need of Spanish civilization? Did Cortés know enough about Aztec religious beliefs to mythologize himself into a god? The search for the answers to these questions has led me to focus on the facets of the

history of the Aztecs and the Spanish Conquistadors to formulate this question: Did Moctezuma Xocoyotzin, the *Mexica tlatoani*, send Hernán Cortés *Quetzalcoatl* and *Tezcatlipoca*'s regalia as a gesture acknowledging Cortés as *Quetzalcoatl*, the god, or with the intent that Cortés was an *teotl ixiptla*, a deity impersonator, who would be sacrificed to the deity he impersonated?

### An Overview of the Aztecs

To understand the interactions between the Aztecs and the Spanish, especially between Moctezuma and Cortés, I will explore these two groups; their worldviews, as well as their economics, religion, war, and the world in which they were situated. Who were the sixteenth century Aztecs and Spaniards? Aztec is a term applied by scholars to the inhabitants of Mexico-Tenochtitlan, the capital city of the Triple Alliance of *Mexico-Mexico-Tenochtitlan*, *Texcoco*, and *Tlacopan*. Scholars chose Aztec as their appellation in reference to *Aztlán*, the mythical place of emergence for these people and it is derived from the *Nahuatl*, the Aztec language, word *Aztecatl* meaning people of *Aztlán* (Clendinnen, *Aztecs: An Interpretation*, 1). Henceforth, I will refer to the indigenous people of this Alliance as the *Mexica*, after their capital city.

What is typically referred to as the Empire was also not a true Empire but an alliance of the three cities that controlled the economic and political power of the Mexico Basin, an area in central Mexico that encompasses approximately 200,000 square miles and, according to researchers Woodrow W. Borah and Sherburne F. Cook, held a population of 25.2 million people when Cortés arrived in 1520 (Mann, *1491: New Revelations of the Americas before Columbus*, 143). The area the Triple Alliance

controlled was extensive and contained 371 different ethnic groups spread over thirty-three provinces at the time of the Spanish conquest (Matos Moctezuma, *The Aztecs*, 89). A charismatic central leader known as the *tlatoani*, “the first voice”, the *Mexica* leader who combined political control with religious obligations, held this diverse conglomerate of people together. The *tlatoani* was chosen from among the *tlacateccatl*, the four most revered warriors of the noble families, as the most capable leader to continue economic prosperity, success in warfare and religious continuity (Aguilar-Moreno, *Handbook to Life in the Aztec World*, 76). Moctezuma Xocoyotl was the *tlatoani* when Cortés arrived in central Mexico. While Mexico-Tenochtitlan, Texcoco, and Tlacopan composed the Triple Alliance, centralized power rested within Mexico-Tenochtitlan, as the largest of the three cities, which held the main religious complex known as the *Templo Mayor*.

The alliance came to power in 1428 with the defeat of the Tepanec state of Azcapotzalco. As the *Mexica* solidified their hold on the Mexico Basin they combined their hunter-gatherer religious ideas with the religious ideas of the settled people they conquered to form the hybrid religion that was practiced in the Triple Alliance. The *Mexica* who migrated into the Mexico Basin originated from a band of people known as the *chichimeca*, meaning dog people, a term used by the settled agrarian societies in the Basin to distinguish “uncivilized barbarians” from themselves. They considered themselves to be the civilized descendants of the Toltec Empire that had collapsed after the eleventh century. The *Mexica* brought a pantheon of gods with them, the leader of whom was *Huitzilopochtli*. The remnants of the Toltecs had their own pantheon in which *Tlaloc*, the god of rain and fertility and *Quetzalcoatl* played prominent roles. In building the Triple Alliance, the *Mexica* combined the two religious belief systems.

The *chichimeca* wanderers conquered the indigenous peoples of the Mexico Basin.<sup>2</sup> They were a small-scale society with animistic<sup>3</sup> beliefs who settled into a specific location, the Mexico Basin. The *Mexica* believed that their deities walked among them and all things were imbued with spirit. Maize was not only their sustenance but *the* sacred life giver to the people. The lakes the *Mexica* lived upon were not only doorways to the underworld but were alive and sentient beings that could be propitiated as gods. The *Mexica* incorporated their landscape into their religious beliefs; the *Templo Mayor* was built to resemble the mountain Coatepec further tying the *Mexica* to the landscape and embedding them in place. They transformed themselves into the indigenous populace through intermarriage with the native people of the Mexico Basin and by incorporating their pantheon into the *Mexica* cosmology.

The *Mexica*'s sacred stories of the creation of the world formed the basis of their worldview and while *Quetzalcoatl* played a key role in the formation of their world, he was not the high god of the new henotheistic religion, a religion that places one god as the highest among a pantheon of gods. Through many years of wandering until the

---

<sup>2</sup> Scholars have long debated what makes a people indigenous. Graham Harvey described the term indigenous as meaning "belonging to a particular place and people," (Harvey, *Indigenous Religions: A Companion*, 11). Robert L. Winzler used an anthropological definition when he proposed that indigenous was synonymous with small-scale societies who utilize ancestor worship and animism, the belief that everything from rocks and grass to pots, buildings and people are imbued with supernatural spirit, in their religious practices (Winzler, *Anthropology and Religion: What We Know, Think and Question*, 17-18). Ronald Niezen holds that indigenous is a category formed from Western scholarship and legal reform that places native peoples in a diametric "otherness" from the industrialized first world. He stated, "when we look for things that indigenous people have in common, for what brings them together and reinforces their common identity, we find patterns that emerge from the logic of conquest and colonialism. These patterns apply equally to peoples otherwise very different in terms of history, geography, method of subsistence, social structure, and political organization. They are similarities based largely on the relationships between indigenous peoples and states," (Niezen, *The Origins of Indigenism: Human Rights and the Politics of Identity*, p. 87) Both Harvey and Winzler's definitions are problematic as they do not encompass societies, such as the Yoruba, an ethnic group of West Africa with a population of thirty million (according to CIA estimates in 2005), of whom eighteen million are traditional religious practitioners. However, all of these definitions are a starting point for looking at the *Mexica*.

<sup>3</sup> Animism is the belief that all things, animate and inanimate, have a spirit in them. The trees, rocks, mountains, water, wind, animals, and people are all alive, have spirit, and are sentient beings.



*Mexica* founded Mexico-Tenochtitlan, the priests from Aztlán carried a representation of *Huitzilopochtli*, their high god, in a bundle. This bundle was the embodiment of their god. The priests drew inspiration, heeded warnings and listened to the advice that they received from the sacred bundle<sup>4</sup>. Just as the lake and maize were sentient, the *Mexica* perceived the bundle to be as well. *Huitzilopochtli* was the god of the *Mexica* warriors and many of the captives from war were dedicated and sacrificed to him. The *Mexica* formed a religious alliance between *Huitzilopochtli* and *Tlaloc*, the embodiment of rain, who was a central god of the agrarian people who lived in the Mexico Basin and were absorbed into the Triple Alliance. Together *Huitzilopochtli* and *Tlaloc* shared the *Templo Mayor* in the newly built capital.

Sacrifice played a key role in the *Mexica* worldview. They believed that the cosmos would not stay in balance unless their worshipers fed the gods. This food had to be in the form of blood through autosacrifice, bleeding of oneself, and human sacrifice (Read, *Time and Sacrifice in the Aztec Cosmos*, 129). Sacrificial victims were obtained through warfare, the purchasing of slaves and the seizure men, women and children within the community (Read, *Time and Sacrifice in the Aztec Cosmos*, 129). The pursuit of war not only embodied the highest ideals of *Mexica* society but it dramatically affected virtually every aspect of *Mexica* life. Warriors fought to capture other warriors to return as sacrificial victims to the temples. Warriors gained prestige through how many victims they captured, attaining the highest ranks of jaguar and eagle warrior when they had retrieved four or more victims for the priests. The *Mexica* also obtained people for human sacrifice as tribute from their outlying provinces. Dignitaries of both allied and enemy

---

<sup>4</sup> It is not clear from the texts if the *Mexica* held *Huitzilopochtli* to always be manifest in the bundle or if he inhabited it when he needed to guide the priests. It is clear that a the priests held the bundle, like maize, water, springs, and mountains, to be a sentient being who could help or hinder their progress.

city-states attended grand sacrificial spectacles in the capital city to witness the political and religious power centralized in Mexico-Tenochtitlan.

Humans were not the only tribute sent to Mexico-Tenochtitlan. The capital city relied on valuable goods from its territories as well. Feathers, cloaks, maize, shells, obsidian, greenstone and cacao beans flowed into the city to support the Alliance (Clendinnen, *Aztecs: An Interpretation*, 19, 25-28; Carrasco, *Aztec Ceremonial Landscapes*, 149-51). Through its association with maize, the basis of all life to this agrarian society, greenstone became the most precious commodity among the *Mexica*. Green growing maize resembled the greenstone, which elevated the stone to this status among the *Mexica*. While warriors dominated the *Mexica* culture, merchants played a key secondary role, as they negotiated the tribute that poured into the capital (Carrasco, *Aztec Ceremonial Landscapes*, 149-51). Priests also ranked highly within the society as the mediators between the *Mexica* and their gods (Clendinnen, *Aztecs: An Interpretation*, 41-42). Religion permeated most aspects of the daily lives of the populous and the festival cycle formed the cornerstone of the *Mexica* calendar.

Cloaks made of cloth, reeds or featherworks, as well as cacao beans, both perishable items, created the basis of monetary exchange. The *Mexica* did not present ostentatious displays of wealth. Merchants were expected to hold elaborate banquets and give away the goods they accumulated during their travels. Large and sumptuous religious ceremonies where visitors were elaborately given hospitality were undertaken by the *tlatoani* and the state, not individuals (Davies, 272). When Cortés arrived in Mexico-Tenochtitlan, the only “treasure,” by the Spaniards’ standards, belonged to Moctezuma’s predecessor, Axayacatl, which surprised the Spaniards.

## A Synopsis of the Spaniards

The *Mexica* economic structure differed greatly from European values and expectations. The Spaniards' economy was based on gold. Wealth was accumulated and inherited through the family line. The Spaniards were similar to the *Mexica* as they craved luxury items. Spain had developed the desire for jewelry, silks, perfumes, spices and fine cottons, as a result of their long association with the Muslim world under the Moors (Stannard, *American Holocaust: Columbus and the Conquest of the New World*, 61). The *Reconquista*, the Spanish war that expelled the Moors and "reclaimed" the peninsula for the combined Catholic crowns of Ferdinand and Isabella, left the Spanish coffers sorely depleted. Europe, especially Spain, sought a new, more reliable and cheaper supply of gold than from Africa and the Middle East. Ferdinand and Isabella underwrote Columbus' expedition to find a shorter route to the Spice Islands and India for this very reason. Ferdinand's grandson, Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor and King of Spain, suffered from the same needs his grandfather had; due to wars in Eastern Europe, he needed an influx of portable wealth as well.

When the Spaniards finally expelled the Moors from the Iberian Peninsula, their most Catholic rulers focused their attention on obtaining new avenues for filling their depleted coffers. The "discovery" of the new world also afforded landless second sons and artisans, like carpenters and farriers, a chance to seek fortune and glory in the New World. Historian Matthew Restall reconstructs the "typical conquistador" from many biographies as "a young man in his late twenties, semiliterate, from southwestern Spain, trained in a particular trade or profession, seeking opportunity through patronage

networks based on family and home-town ties,” (Restall, *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest*, 43). Conquistadors like Hernán Cortés were born on the lower edge of nobility and sought to gain titles, land and prestige through their exploits in the New World. However, to earn these favors from the Spanish crown, they had to show something in return and precious metals, as nonperishable and divisible goods, were the best return they could provide (Mann, 89). In Europe, the high demand for gold and silver from the *Mexica*, and other conquered New World Natives like the Incas, transformed these non-military seekers of fortune into landed and titled aristocracy in their new homes.

As the Renaissance dawned in Europe, the classical ideas of Greece and Rome, such as Aristotle’s concept of natural slavery, were being rediscovered and utilized in forming the basis of how Europeans should interact with the diverse groups they were encountering in the New World. Many Spanish Church figures, such as Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, relied heavily on these ideas to justify the exploitation of native populations in the colonies they were building as they were bringing “civilization” to them. Aristotle proposed that “one part of mankind is set aside by nature to be slaves in the service of masters born for a life of virtue free of manual labour,” (Hanke, *Aristotle and the American Indians: A Study in Race Prejudice in the Modern World*, 12). The Spanish derived their views of the natives of the Caribbean as brutish “Others” whose religions demanded devilish customs such as sacrifice, murder, incest and cannibalism from Columbus’ and Vespucci’s expeditions. These views informed Cortés’ descriptions to King Charles V in his famous *cartas*, letters, as well.

However, other Spanish theologians, such as Bartolomé de las Casas, believed that the natives could be converted into true Catholics and subjects of the crown. These

views lead to a raging debate in Spain as to the true nature of the indigenous population of the New World. Thus some friars who arrived in New Spain after the military conquest of the *Mexica* envisioned the souls of these “brutes,” In Cortés’ eyes, as the true silver to be mined and even presaged the coming of the millennial kingdom (Hanke, *Aristotle and the American Indians: A Study in Race Prejudice in the Modern World*, 20-21). By the time the majority of the accounts of the conquest were recorded, more than twenty years after Moctezuma’s death in 1520, the Catholic Church had been losing ground to Luther in Europe, but the New World afforded an opportunity to build a new and more powerful Church.

Why Cortés went to Mesoamerica?

The need for precious metals and stones combined with the belief that the indigenous people of the New World needed the civilizing influence of the Spaniards helped to form the worldview of Cortés. The son of a minor noble from Medellín, Spain, Hernán Cortés ventured to the New World seeking his fortune, after not finishing his legal studies at the University of Salamanca. He arrived first in Hispaniola, in 1504, where he worked as a notary. Two years later he joined in finalizing the conquest of Hispaniola and carrying it on to Cuba, where he gained land and an *encomiando*, a grant of land and of Indians to work it. In 1511, he relocated to Cuba and, for a short time, was an *acalde*, or mayor, of Santiago. Cortés built a reputation as a natural leader so the governor of Cuba, Diego Velásquez, appointed him as his secretary. In 1518, Velásquez sent an expedition to explore rumored lands to the west, under Juan de Grijalva. Grijalva founded a colony and found silver and gold in the area now known as the Yucatan, which

was under Mayan control. Velásquez organized another expedition to support Grijalva and establish trade with the natives of this area. He appointed Cortés as captain general of this expedition. However, Cortés' relationship with Velásquez became strained while Cortés was courting two of Velásquez's sisters-in-laws, the Juaréz sisters. Under pressure from Velásquez, Cortés settled on and married Catalina Juaréz. Velásquez doubted the wisdom of retaining Cortés as the expedition leader, as he worried Cortés would undercut Velásquez's return on the venture. Bowing to his fears, Velásquez not only decided to decommission Cortés as the captain general of the new expedition but also swore out an arrest warrant for Cortés to bar him from leaving Cuba.

Cortés had invested his own money in the expedition and decided to weigh anchor without Velásquez' permission. He gathered his men, supplied the ships with as much cassava bread and pigs as he could and set sail for the west. Along the way he commissioned several more ships and convinced their captains to join his group of adventurers seeking their fortunes. In total, Cortés had eleven ships, 500 men and a small contingent of cannons (Gómara, *Cortés: The Life of the Conqueror by his Secretary*, 38). Cortés made landfall in the Yucatan in February, 1519.

#### Cortés' Maneuvering to Succeed in Conquering the *Mexica*

Cortés had various encounters with the native populations living on the eastern coast of the mainland. In the Mayan territory of the Yucatan, his party rescued Gerónimo de Aguilar, a Franciscan priest who had been held captive by the Mayans for several years and who spoke fluent Mayan. In April Cortés encountered and defeated the

Tabascans who were hostile to the Spaniards<sup>5</sup>. Cortés employed Spanish war tactics that differed greatly from common Mesoamerican tactics. Spanish war dogs, armored wolfhounds and mastiffs, frequently played a key role in attacks, killing and mutilating warriors, women and children (Stannard, *American Holocaust: Columbus and the Conquest of the New World*, 83). The dogs were trained to disembowel their victims and were fed on human flesh. The Spaniards used terror tactics to coerce natives into surrender, as well as capturing the native leaders.

The Tabascans paid tribute to Cortés in the form of twenty young women, among whom was La Malinche, a Mayan noblewoman whose fluency in Nahuatl and Mayan proved a valuable asset in assisting Aguilar in translating. In order to keep his men from returning to Cuba, Cortés scuttled all but one ship in July, 1519. The expedition decided to colonize the town of Villa Rica de Vera Cruz, thus breaking Cortés' disputed charter with Velásquez and claiming the land they conquered directly in the name of the Spanish Crown (Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, 25-27). This afforded Cortés the same one fifth of the plunder as the Crown and allowed him to report directly to the Spanish King, Charles V, as a measure to circumvent any charges of mutiny that Velásquez could make. Cortés' wrote his missives to Charles V as *cartas*, in a Spanish literary style reminiscent of Caesar's *War Commentaries*.

Cortés employed cunning and guile in his meeting with naïve leaders and Moctezuma's ambassadors. Cortés met with the *cacique*, local ruler, of Teudilli and explained to him what a good and kind ruler King Charles V was to his people. The ruler of Teudilli replied that his people did not need a new ruler as they had one, who was no

---

<sup>5</sup> The Tabascans were hostile to Cortés' expedition because the Tabascan leaders had charged the one leader who had been friendly to Grijalva with cowardice and treachery for befriending Grijalva. Subsequently, all the Tabascans had vowed to not help any more Spaniards but to eradicate them.

less a king and good, in Moctezuma. He then sent word to Moctezuma of these foreigners “telling him of all he had seen and been told by Cortés, including that the Spanish suffered from a disease of the heart that could only be cured by gold (Gómara, *Cortés: The Life of the Conqueror by his Secretary*, 58). Moctezuma swiftly sent ambassadors to Cortés in Villa Rica. They arrived bearing gifts from Moctezuma in an effort to ascertain who these foreigners were. Apparently they claimed that Moctezuma was too ill to travel to Villa Rica, but he would provide the Spaniards with whatever they sought, including gold, if they would leave without traveling to Mexico-Tenochtitlan, as it was an unnecessarily arduous journey. Cortés employed an elaborate display of proper courtier etiquette to counter the *Mexica* ambassador’s protests to not travel to Mexico-Tenochtitlan. Cortés claimed that his king would not allow him to not make the journey and meet with Moctezuma as it was only proper for the two leaders to meet so Cortés could relate his king’s wishes to the *Mexica* leader.

Moctezuma’s ambassadors returned to Villa Rica again bearing more elaborate gifts, this time including a wheel of gold shaped as the sun, a wheel of silver shaped as the moon and the regalia of *Quetzalcoatl*, *Tlaloc*, the god of rain and *Tezcatlipoca*, the god of the smoking mirror. Cortés donned the regalia of *Quetzalcoatl* at this meeting. This action laid the groundwork for the claim that Moctezuma believed that Cortés was the returning god *Quetzalcoatl* coming to claim his Empire from the line of *tlatoani* who had been protecting and holding it for him for nearly 500 hundred years. Intrigued by the gold he had received and the lure of more, Cortés started to foment a rebellion among fractious elements within the Triple Alliance, starting with the lord of Quiahuitxtlan, and



left for Mexico-Tenochtitlan on August 16, 1520 with 400 Spaniards, fifteen horses, three small guns and 300 native allies.

### The Similarities and Differences between these Imperial Nations

As these two worldviews, that of the *Mexica* and of the sixteenth century Spaniard, obviously clashed one may ask if the misunderstanding of the role of Cortés was simply one of cultural conflict or a difference in cultural realities? Obviously, the Spaniards and the *Mexica* had differing priorities. The Spaniards sought portable wealth in the form of precious metals to fill royal coffers and their own. They desired prestige and land in a new world when these two items were not easily attainable for them in Spain. They also viewed their own religion as the only correct way to live and the New World as an avenue to rejuvenate what was under attack at home.

The *Mexica* believed that the gods held the cosmos in balance through the *Mexica* blood offerings. The gods were immanent within their world and in their everyday lives. The calendar revolved around festivals and sacrifices to the gods. The tribute system not only sustained the Alliance economically, it supplemented the sacrificial victims attained through warfare with fractious city-states within the Alliance.

Tzvetan Todorov scrutinized the cultural conflict between the *Mexica* and the Spaniards and the conquest in terms of colonial and post-colonial theory. Todorov did not, unlike many scholars, perceive the colonial experience as beginning with an initial identification of cultural differences that eased conquest, followed quickly by seizure and colonization, and culminating in the eventual decimation of the indigenous culture under colonial or neo-colonial domination. He proposed that the conquest of the *Mexica* as a

principal repression of the indigenous culture, enslavement, followed by an inverted recognition, colonialism, and ending in a differential recognition, communication (Todorov, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*, 248). He concluded that the *Mexica* fell to the Spaniards, as they were a culture unable to cope with change. Their religion and political structure bound them cyclically to their calendar and omens. Todorov also proposed that this rigidity trapped the populous into a social conformity that crushed individualism. These three interwoven propositions of Todorov, a past oriented cyclical time, a deep social conformity and a “cultural stasis that rendered change nearly impossible,” (Root, 201) form the basis of the *Mexica* inferiority to the Spaniards and ultimately lead to their defeat. The *Mexica* rose to power to dominate the 371 different ethnic groups spread over thirty-three provinces within the 200,000 square miles in ninety-two years. They incorporated the religious beliefs of the agriculturalists who were already settled in the area into their own cosmology. The conquistadors themselves refuted Todorov’s description of a passive social collectivity in their descriptions of intense hand to hand fighting during the siege of Mexico-Tenochtitlan and that the *Mexica* warriors resisted the incursion until their capital fell due to disease and famine.

Todorov’s perception of the *Mexica* and the Spanish is deeply rooted in the dominant Eurocentric view that scholars of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries utilized when studying cultures other than European. He relied on prevailing theories such as Hegel’s theory of “Oriental Despotism”<sup>6</sup> and the savagism with which Native

---

<sup>6</sup> Hegel supported the idea of “Oriental Despotism” in which a single, absolute ruler who was arbitrary ruled the people of the ancient Near and Far East. Hegel further proposed that these people had no freedom as they did not realize they were free. The Greeks moved closer to freedom but were unsuccessful as seen in Aristotle’s idea natural slaves. True freedom did not occur if not all were free. Hegel believed that true

Americans have been historically portrayed. He placed a modern veneer on Juan de Sepulveda's argument that the natives of the New World were sub-human creatures who needed to be civilized by their superior Western European conquerors.

The cultural conflict that Todorov proposed did exist. However, neither of the two imperial powers was inferior to the other; they simply differed as much as they had similarities. As the gods were immanent in the daily lives of the *Mexica*, it is easy to conceive how the donning of *Quetzalcoatl's* regalia could transform this foreigner into *Quetzalcoatl* walking among them. The *Mexica* reality did not differ that much from that of the Spaniards. The two imperial cultures had a religious basis of comparison as both were theistic, waged holy wars and maintained religions based on blood sacrifice. Spain's completion of the *reconquista*, the reconquest of the country from the Moors and the expulsion of the Jews, echoed the *Mexica* warfare for sacrificial victims. Jesus' death on the cross was the ultimate blood sacrifice to bridge the gap between mankind and God. The Spanish utilized Christianity to justify their expansion into the New World, as the Pope gave them the land and the people who occupied it as subjects of Spain to bring under the civilizing influence of the "one true Church." The *Mexica* brought their neighboring city-states under their influence as a similar civilizing force and incorporated them into the Alliance to stabilize tribute channels and to supply needed victims for sacrifice.

There were many differences and similarities between the Spanish and *Mexica* religions. Through its understanding of the account of creation in Genesis, the Catholic

---

societal freedom was not achieved until the development of Christianity within the German principalities. His theory of "oriental despotism" was used as a justification of European colonialism. Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, pp. 142-3.

Church placed mankind above nature emphasizing the act of Adam naming the animals. While this appeared to place the Spaniards' religion at odds with a religion that sought to placate deities through blood sacrifices and revered maize as life, the two religions held many similarities. The *Mexica* gods were immanent within their culture. Some sacrificial victims embodied the gods prior to sacrifice. They walked among the people, blessed the people in a recurring cycle of festivals that could be repeated yearly. Jesus fulfilled these functions within Christianity; he was God walking upon the earth, he blessed and cured his people and festivals such as Easter and Christmas are cyclical events celebrated each year. Jesus was the embodiment of the divine spirit of God, his father. Viewed through the lens of the Hypostatic Union, Jesus is one man who has two natures, both human and divine. However, other views believe that Jesus was born and died a man, becoming deified after his death. Regardless of whether Jesus was born divine or attained deification after death, he was immanent and performed miracles for his people as the *Mexica* gods did for theirs.

Economically, on the surface, the two imperial powers also seemed similar. Both powers structured their economies to support a centralized political structure but their economies were very different. Gold was viewed as the excrement of the gods by the *Mexica* and utilized minimally as decoration to enhance masks and featherwork. The Spaniards could not conceive that cacao beans and cloaks were the basis of *Mexica* currency, let alone greenstone being the most precious item, due to its association with maize. They needed portable wealth in the form of precious metals to sustain the economy and the foreign luxury goods on which they had crafted their imperial culture.

Although both nations used war for expansion and trade goods the two imperial powers also differed in their concepts of war. The *Mexica* utilized war as a means to obtain sacrificial victims. To be good sacrifices, the victims had to arrive alive at the temples. Thus, the warriors' goal was to incapacitate their victims, not to kill them. War also proved a means to attain a higher status within the warrior caste; the more victims retrieved, the higher the status the warrior attained. The Spaniards conversely utilized war both as theater and to terrorize people, such as the disemboweling war dogs or capturing the native leaders. A defeated *Mexica* expected to be captured and sacrificed, not imprisoned and humiliated. Near the end of the campaigns of the conquest, Cortés captured Cuauhtémoc, the last *Mexica tlatoani* resisting the conquest. Cuauhtémoc asked to be sacrificed, per his people's traditions. Cortés refused, utilizing Spanish tactics to imprison the leader to force the people to comply with the Spaniards' will. Cortés denied Cuauhtémoc the warrior's ordained afterlife as a bearer of the sun. Common ground was difficult to find for these two imperialistic cultures, but not impossible. The history of the wanderings of the *chichimecas* and how their society was structured profoundly influenced how they developed into the imperial culture that clashed with Cortés and his Spaniards.

## Chapter 1: The Development of *Mexica* Society

For months before Hernán Cortés arrived in Mexico-Tenochtitlan, Moctezuma, the *Mexica tlatoani*, leader, and Cortés engaged in complex negotiations. At the first meeting between Cortés and Moctezuma's ambassadors, Moctezuma gifted Cortés and his companions with many treasures, including four sets of religious regalia (Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, 12:11-12). The religious regalia consisted of clothing, headdresses and jewelry that matched the clothing the *Mexica* gods wore in pictorial representations. At times the *Mexica* dressed statues of their gods in similar regalia as well. This regalia belonged to the gods *Tezcatlipoca*, *Tlaloc* and *Quetzalcoatl*. For the past five hundred years, scholars associated these particular gifts with Cortés' light skin, beard and arrival from the East to support the contention that as *tlatoani* of the *Mexica*, Moctezuma welcomed Cortés as *Quetzalcoatl* returning to claim his empire. However, the gift of the regalia can be interpreted differently as the *Mexica* would dress representations of their gods, either statues or human deity impersonators, in similar religious regalia during religious rituals, specifically during human sacrifices. The meaning the *Mexica* placed on the regalia and the ritual uses of this type of clothing must be investigated in order to understand the significance of this gift to Cortés.

To understand the roles of the *tlatoani* and the regalia Moctezuma sent to Cortés, as well as the significance sacrificial ritual played within *Mexica* society, one must be familiar with the origins of the *Mexica* and how their complex society developed. The

origins of the *Mexica* are clouded in mystery and have been debated among anthropologists for over a hundred and fifty years. The prevailing view in the mid 1800's was that the *Mexica* had migrated south from the Utah basin. This took an extraordinary amount of time, so they created settlements along the way. However, none of these settlements lasted, until they created Mexico-Tenochtitlan. This early hypothesis accounted for the ruins at Gila in Arizona, as well as Casas Grandes in Northern Mexico (Ruxton, "The Migration of the Ancient Mexicans and their Analogy to the Existing Tribes of Northern Mexico," 91-92). Today, academics vacillate as to whether the *Mexica* originated in Northern Mexico among the *Chichimecas*, who were still there at the time of the conquest, or farther north in the American Southwest. The *Mexica* were known as *chichimeca aztláni*, barbarians from Aztlán, when they entered the Mexico Basin. However, they also shared many traits with the indigenous populations in the American Southwest, including the Uto-Mexican language and the feathered serpent motif. The uncertainty of their origins allowed the *Mexica* to later develop their own historical past, tying them to the previous dominant culture in the Mexico-Basin, the Toltecs. The Toltecs had a hero, priest king known as *Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl* who shared many characteristics (e.g., light skin and beard) with Cortés. It is possible that these similarities lead to the traditional view that Cortés as *Quetzalcoatl* had returned.

The *Mexica* contended that they originated in *Chicomoztoc*, a land of seven sacred caves from which they emerged into this world. Their home, *Aztlán*, was a place of whiteness, an island surrounded by the water of a lake.<sup>7</sup> A group of *Aztláns* migrated

---

<sup>7</sup> According to Miguel León-Portilla's translation of the *Madrid Codex*, Izcoatl, the fourth *tlatoani*, had the ancient *Mexica* manuscripts burned in 1428 C.E, as he felt it was "not wise that all the people should know the paintings." This action allowed the *Mexica* to re-write their history to centralize the veneration of Huitzilopochtli, emphasizing the sacred location where Mexico-Tenochtitlan was built. Moctezuma I, the

south, their priests carrying the sacred bundle that represented their main god, *Huitzilopochtli*, the Hummingbird of the South. *Huitzilopochtli* offered advice, rebukes, warnings and instructions to these bearers on how the Aztláns should proceed until they located the site to erect their city (Clendinnen, *Aztecs: An Interpretation*, 22).

*Huitzilopochtli* was directly involved in guiding his people. The bundle the priests carried personified *Huitzilopochtli* to his people. It allowed him to walk with them during their wandering, as well as offer advice to his priests. This story may sound familiar to followers of Abrahamic traditions. The Ancient Israelites wandered at the behest of their God to return to the land that had been promised to their ancestors as well. While the *Mexica* traveled toward a new destination and the Israelites in *Exodus* wandered on a return to the land of their origins, there are similarities. Both the Hebrews and the *Mexica* were subjugated peoples. The Hebrew were slaves in Egypt and the *Mexica* were dominated by a succession of cultures during their wandering. Both groups claimed to be the chosen people of their god who guided them on their journey, ensuring they would eventually come to the land they would make their own and create a strong nation. As both sets of stories were collected and codified years after the wandering occurred, scholars can critique them as stories that supported both cultures' dominance in the specific areas to which they migrated. Neither the Promised Land nor the Mexico Basin was unoccupied when the Hebrews or the *Mexica* arrived. However, as both peoples were "chosen" by their gods, they received divine approval for conquering their new homes. However, the *Mexica* still had far to travel until they reached the sight of their capital city.

---

fifth *tlatoani*, unsuccessfully sent ambassadors searching for *Aztlán*. (Léon-Portilla, 1963: 155). Scholars have also been unsuccessful in pin pointing the origins of the *Mexica*, narrowing it down to the South West of the United States, Northern or Western Mexico (Aguilar-Moreno, 29).



The Aztláns continued to wander, with adventures occurring at several sites that developed into sacred locations within the religious system of the Alliance. At Culhuacan, they built a settlement and erected a temple to *Huitzilopochtli*. However, they did not stay there long. The *Chichimeca aztláni* continued wandering and created another settlement. Shortly thereafter they encountered a split tree. The priests who interpreted the will of *Huitzilopochtli* understood this tree as an ill omen (Aguilar-Moreno, *Handbook to Life in the Aztec World*, 36). A group of the wanderers decided the tree meant that they were to continue on their journey and they split off from the main group, named themselves the *Mexica* and gave birth to those who would conquer the Mexico Basin.

The *Mexica* arrived next at Coatepec, Snake Mountain. Within their cosmology, *Coatlicue*, Serpent Skirt, *Huitzilopochtli*'s mother, attended a temple on Coatepec. As she was sweeping one day, she found a ball of feathers descending from the sky and tucked it into her shirt. She discovered herself pregnant from the divine feathered ball. Enraged at the pregnancy, *Coyolxauhqui*, She with the Belled Cheeks, *Coatlicue*'s daughter, enlisted her four hundred brothers to destroy their mother (Townsend, *The Aztecs*, 62). Already cognizant of what was happening in the world and aided by an uncle who betrayed *Coatlicue*'s enemies, *Huitzilopochtli* soothed his mother from the womb, instructing her that he would handle the insurrection. He sprang forth full grown and armored, ready to battle *Coyolxauhqui* and her brothers.<sup>8</sup> *Huitzilopochtli* battled his sister, *Coyolxauhqui* and defeated her. He beheaded her and threw her dismembered body down the mountain (Clendinnen, *Aztecs: An Interpretation*, 199). The *Mexica* reenacted *Huitzilopochtli*'s

---

<sup>8</sup> Spanish priests compared *Huitzilopochtli*'s birth to that of Athena in classical Greek mythology as both were born battle ready, armored and fully grown.

defeat of his sister in every sacrificial ritual they held when they threw the beheaded body of the victim down the temple stairs. This epic battle of sibling rivalry did not symbolize a battle between the sexes as much as a battle for control of the people. The *Mexica* later commemorated this battle in their capital city with a stone carving depicting *Coyolxauhqui's* defeat. It graced the base of the stairway to the *Templo Mayor*, the great temple built in Mexico-Tenochtitlan. Scholars such as Inga Clendinnen and David Carrasco proposed that the birth story of *Huitzilopochtli* commemorated the ascendance of a new leader that occurred during this stop at Coatepec (Clendinnen, *Aztecs: An Interpretation*, 22; Carrasco, *City of Sacrifice: the Aztec Empire and the Role of Violence in Civilization*, 81-83). The myth probably memorializes a significant change in leadership that allowed the *Mexica* to persevere.

Coatepec provided the location of the first recorded New Fire Ceremony or binding of the years, in which a victim, who represented the *Mexica* fire god, *Xuihtlamin*, was sacrificed at the top of the mountain, and a fire was lit in his chest cavity. If Moctezuma sent the sacred regalia to Cortés to transform him into a deity impersonator, Cortés would fulfill a role similar to that of the victim playing *Xuihtlamin*. As a purifying agent, the newly lit fire replaced all the fires of the *Mexica* from cooking and artisan fires to those in the palace and temples. The *Mexica* performed this ceremony every fifty-two years as a binding of their age and the turning of the calendar, as fifty-two years was the *Mexica* century. The fire acted as a purifier for the new age and symbolized the rebirth of the sun. The *Mexica* expectantly waited during each ceremony to see if the fire would ignite (Read, *Time and Sacrifice in the Aztec Cosmos*, xix). The overwhelming fear that this would be the year the fire did not ignite weighed heavily on those waiting for the

new fires for their homes. The *Templo Mayor*, the main temple within Mexico-Tenochtitlan, commemorated Coatepec in its massive design, mimicking the mountain itself.

Even the way the *Mexica* decided on the location of their capital city was clouded in mystery and had direct links to their cosmology. The *Mexica* also worshipped *Xipe Totec*, “the filleted one”, as another of their supreme gods (Celndinnen, 96). Popular belief has it that when the *Mexica* arrived in the Mexico Basin, one of the chiefs wanted to marry the daughter of the ruler of the Azcáptzacos, a local tribe, in order to make her the goddess *Yaocihuatl*. The marriage ceremony took place among the *Mexica* and when Achicomatl, the Azcáptzalco chief, and guests arrived at the marriage feast they found a priest dancing a ritual dance, wearing the filleted skin of the bride as they had sacrificed her in order to transform her into *Yaocihuatl*, turning the chief’s daughter into a *teotl ixiptla* (Townsend, *The Aztecs*, 64). The Azcáptzalco expelled the *Mexica* and pursued them through the marshes surrounding the lakes of the Mexico Basin. *Huitzilopochtli* gave the priests a vision that when they saw an eagle perched upon a prickly pear cactus eating a snake, that spot was where they were to build their capital city. This vision was fulfilled on an island in Lake Texcoco. *Huitzilopochtli* foretold that the priests would find specific animals and plants near a lake that resembled Aztlán: a white fish, a white frog and a white willow. The day after the *Mexica* saw these portents in the lake, Quauhcoatl, Eagle Serpent, a priest received a message from *Huitzilopochtli* to “... go at once and seek out the *tenochtli* cactus upon which an eagle stands in his joy... It is there we shall fix ourselves; it is there we shall rule, that we shall wait, that we shall meet the various nations and that with our arrow and our shield we shall over throw them,” (Soustelle,

*Daily Lives of the Aztecs on the Eve of the Spanish Conquest*, 2 quoting Hermann Beyer, 192-193). Quauhcoatl and the *Mexica* found the eagle and there commenced building their capital, Mexico-Tenochtitlan, which was founded in 1325 CE. However, they did not forget their humble origins as wandering nomads who had been shunned by the various communities around the lake and within the Mexico Basin (López Austin and Lujan López, *Mexico's Indigenous Past*, 189). Two hundred years elapsed during their wanderings, four New Fire Ceremonies were commemorated but the fifth would take place in their new capital city.

To politically stabilize their emerging community, Mexico-Tenochtitlan adopted an ancient Mesoamerican custom, *excan tlatoloyan* (the tribunal of three seats) and allied themselves with two neighboring cities, Texcoco and Tlacopan (López Austin and Lujan López, *Mexico's Indigenous Past*, 208). As they built their capital, the *Mexica* began to expand their empire, the Triple Alliance, conquering the populace near them. The *Mexica* integrated their conquered foes into the empire but kept them as separate semi-autonomous entities, making them pay tribute to the Triple Alliance, as the *excan tlatoloyan* became known. Jacques Soustelle described many similarities between this model and how Rome integrated its conquered territories and populaces into its empire. This strategy provided several advantages to the *Mexica*, as well as their largest disadvantage, which Cortés would be able to exploit during the conquest.

The main advantage was a steady supply of victims for sacrifice, which was an integral part of their religion. The *Mexica* held a cyclical view of life and death. Life developed out of death. Soustelle and Carrasco proposed that the *Mexica* felt they owed a blood debt to the gods who had shed their blood to create the fifth sun, the age they lived

in, and set the order of the cosmos. Two gods, *Tezcatlipoca* and *Quetzalcoatl*, created the world through the death of *Atlantli*, the crocodile monster, a female earth deity. The two brothers sent her down from heaven and, after assuming the guise of two giant serpents, tore her body into two, creating the heavens and the earth from the two parts.

Then the rest of the gods descended to console the goddess of the earth and give her gifts. In compensation for her sacrifice it was permitted that from her body should come all that which man needed to live in the world. Her hair became grass, trees, and flowers. Her skin became the grass of the meadows and the flowers to adorn it. Her eyes became small caves, cisterns, and springs; her mouth, large caves. Her nose was transformed into mountains and valleys, (Gabribray, 3-4, quoting from Selma E. Anderson, 178).

The creation of the world from this destruction signaled a need for blood to repay that shed in the creation and that creation comes from destruction. Reciprocity formed the basis of sacrifice.

The *Mexicas* also viewed their world as fragile and perpetually on the verge of destruction. Drought and famine threatened each year, despite the tribute attained from the city-states under their rule. They believed that the great famine of 1450 occurred due to an insufficient amount of sacrifices provided to the gods. The *Mexica* cosmology reflects this anxiety (Soustelle, *Daily Lives of the Aztecs on the Eve of the Spanish Conquest*, 101; Carrasco, *City of Sacrifice: the Aztec Empire and the Role of Violence in Civilization*, 55) The *Mexica* believed that the best way to stave off the anxiety was to repay the gods with blood sacrifices and humans who portrayed the gods were the best to sacrifice.

The cosmological story of the Fifth Sun describes the world as being created in a series of Suns fashioned and destroyed through the actions of *Tezcatlipoca* and *Quetzalcoatl*. Each brother god subsequently created a sun while the other destroyed it in

a battle for supremacy and perfection of the people they formed to inhabit the world. *Tezcatlipoca* shaped the First Sun but jealously, *Quetzalcoatl* fought *Tezcatlipoca*, knocking him to the ground. *Tezcatlipoca* transformed himself into a jaguar and consumed the people of the First Sun. *Quetzalcoatl* bore the Second Sun but dropped it during a fight with his brother, which created a great wind that blew away the spirits and turned the people into monkeys. A third god, *Tlaloc*, carried the Third Sun but *Quetzalcoatl* rained down fire and turned the people into turkeys to destroy this world in jealousy. *Tlaloc*'s wife created the Fourth Sun but *Tezcatlipoca* destroyed that world and its people in a great flood. A divine council created the current age, the Fifth Sun, and populated the world with beings of all the elements; air, water, spirits, fire and rain, as well as people created by *Quetzalcoatl* (Bierhorst, *History and Mythology of the Aztecs: The Codex Chimalpopoca, passim*). The Fifth Sun is balanced and fair, but fragile, and in need of the humans, who must not turn evil or ignore the gods, to prevent the sun from falling from the sky. Humans best show their devotion to the gods through performing sacrifices and providing the gods with blood. If Moctezuma intended Cortés to be a sacrifice to the gods, Moctezuma inferred upon this ‘would be ‘conqueror the greatest role Cortés could play, as far as the *Mexica* were concerned.

In order to maintain that set order and keep the gods happy, the *Mexica* practiced both autosacrifice, blood letting of the priestly caste and nobility as offerings to the gods, and human sacrifice when the debt was larger and the need greater. As the *Mexica* did not sacrifice a member of their populace unless the need was especially great, their conquered neighbors fulfilled these key positions (Clendinnen, *Aztecs: An Interpretation*,

98). Thus, the populace was never integrated into the Triple Alliance's rituals but watched as the elites maintained the cosmic balance.

Sacrificial victims formed the backbone of the *Mexica* rituals and warriors attained the majority of sacrificial victims during warfare. A male *Mexica*'s role was ascribed at birth, "to be born a male in Mexico-Tenochtitlan was to be designated a warrior" (Clendinnen, *Aztecs: An Interpretation*, 112). Warriors were trained in battle tactics from the age of puberty when they left home to attend *telpochcalli*, House of Youths. All who attended were given the potential to excel and those who excelled were lavishly rewarded with titles and lands. However, to retain those rewards, the warrior had to continuously succeed. A warrior who returned from battle with four or more captives, taken in single combat, attained the title of Eagle or Jaguar Warrior, the elite of the warrior class. Commoners and nobles alike had the potential to achieve this status through bringing home captured warriors as sacrificial victims. Thus, the goal was not to kill the enemy but to bring them unharmed to the priests.

With the growth of the Alliance, a zone of pacified city-states surrounded Mexico-Tenochtitlan. With no one to conquer, the *Mexica* soon lost their supply of sacrificial victims. To compensate for this, a formalized state of warfare was developed, known as the *xochiyaoyotl*, the flowery wars (Carrasco, *City of Sacrifice: the Aztec Empire and the Role of Violence in Civilization*, 199). This institution developed after the famines of 1450, which ravaged central Mexico (Soustelle, *Daily Lives of the Aztecs on the Eve of the Spanish Conquest*, 101). Motivated by the belief that the famines were caused by too few sacrificial victims, the leaders of the Triple Alliance and the neighboring cities of Tlaxcala, Cholula and Uexotzinco agreed to arrange combats so that

warriors could obtain sacrificial victims. The *xochiyaoyotl* exemplified the religious nature of warfare as well as the political.

The need for the *xochiyaoyotl* illustrated the growing prosperity of the Triple Alliance. Mexico-Tenochtitlan's population, by the end of the fifteenth-century, was between 200,000 and 300,000 people, which was twice the size of London at that time (Van Pool, T., Personal Communication 2007). Mexico-Tenochtitlan was among the ten largest cities in the world. It was also a center of commerce. Merchants provided chocolate, coffee, vanilla, tobacco cigarettes, *pulque* (the *Mexica* fermented cactus juice), tools, and luxury items such as jade, gold, feathers, silver, turquoise and serpentine stone. There were two zoos, one for predatory birds and another that contained mammals, birds and other animals from all over the Mesoamerican world. Mexico-Tenochtitlan had extensive botanical gardens as well (Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 228-31). Without a doubt Mexico-Tenochtitlan was a cosmopolitan city and the *Mexica* believed it needed the favor of its gods to continue to prosper.

To feed the inhabitants of this cosmopolitan center the *Mexica* developed a unique agricultural system that benefited from the rich nutrients found in the mud of the lakebeds. They piled the mud on top of pylons in vertical rows creating raised gardens known as *chinampas*, "a slender, rectangular strip of garden land 10 to 25 feet wide by 50 to 300 feet long," (Carrasco, *Aztec Ceremonial Landscapes*, 69). The lake gardens were created by piling nutrient rich lake soil on top of the *chinampa* and allowed two or three crops a year. Foodstuffs such as amaranth, squash, and beans grew alongside flowers on these floating gardens. The staple crop of Central Mexico, *elotl*, the Nahuatl term used for a fresh ear of corn, played a key role in everyday life among the *Mexica*, completing



the sacred triad of foodstuff for many Native Americans: corn, squash and beans. Corn was so sacred to the *Mexica* that many of their gods utilized it in their accoutrement or names, such as the rattle on feathered serpents being a corn ear. The abundance of food that the *Mexica* were able to grow on the *chinampas* and their other gardens allowed the culture enough free time to develop specialized skills such as artisans, warriors, priests and elite bureaucrats instead of all of the population toiling to produce food for survival.

While the *chinampas* supplied a significant portion of the staples for the population of Mexico-Tenochtitlan, the capital city received most of its supplies as tribute from the conquered city-states in the Alliance, another advantage of integrating the conquered city-states into the Alliance. *Pochtecas*, merchants, supplied goods from these city-states and also played crucial roles as spies and initiators of war (Carrasco, *City of Sacrifice: the Aztec Empire and the Role of Violence in Civilization*, 148). *Pochtecas* were so vital to the development of the Alliance that the histories of the *Mexica* mention them alongside the rulers in the capacity that trade developed the Alliance as much as political acumen.

As the capital was generally well supplied with trade goods and sustenance, the residents of Mexico-Tenochtitlan did not depend on daily agricultural duties to keep the city functioning. Apart from maintaining their own *chinampas*, the “city’s commoners lived by an urban trade: as sandal makers, fuel sellers, potters, mat weavers, carriers, or any of the multitude of services required in a busy metropolis,” (Clendinnen, *Aztecs: An Interpretation*, 19). The Alliance developed into a complex state where the populace sought specialized occupations, many of which were kin based and situated within the *calpullis*, the wards or neighborhoods that developed within the capital. Feather workers

lived in one *calpulli*, while potters lived and worked in another. Each *calpulli* remained a crucial administrative unit for tribute, labor organization to the city and temple and organization for war. A council of elders ruled them, maintaining local residences and ties. However, ultimately the council answered to the palace for authority, reducing the council to minor administrators of the state.

There were definite class distinctions within the society but they were not rigid. The lower class, or peasants, was known as the *macehualli*. Many *macehualli* were farmers and lower level artisans. Merchants, known as *pochteca*, formed their own class. *Mexica* nobles were known as the *pipiltin*. A *macehualli* could rise through the social ranks if he was an outstanding warrior, but his children would not retain any lands or the titles he had gained. However, this was not the only way a man could attain a higher class. There is a legend that Moctezuma was walking past a cornfield one day, picked an ear of corn and ate it. This was an act of thievery and forbidden by the laws he passed. The *macehualli* asked Moctezuma by what right Moctezuma had broken his own law. Moctezuma had the farmer raised to the status of an advisor. The former *macehualli* became a *pipiltin* and acted as Moctezuma's advisor for the remainder of Moctezuma's life (Soustelle, *Daily Lives of the Aztecs on the Eve of the Spanish Conquest*, 227-8). This legend illustrates that a man could change his social status through honesty and integrity, as well as through superior martial abilities.

The Alliance was built upon its citizens, for whom home life played as vital a role as their occupations. The *Mexica* greatly valued their children. Divine intervention caused conception as it was thought that *Tezcatlipoca* placed children in their mother's wombs (Clendinnen, *Aztecs: An Interpretation*, 180). Presented with their fates at birth,

decided by the auspices of the calendrical day under which they were born, midwives exhorted the children with lyrical metaphorical names (Carrasco, *City of Sacrifice: the Aztec Empire and the Role of violence in Civilization*, 99). Children were known as “my precious son, my precious flower, my jewel, my precious feather,” (Soustelle, *Daily Lives of the Aztecs on the Eve of the Spanish Conquest*, 187). Parents hosted elaborate banquets at the birth and presentation of their children. Extended family members attended the feasts to meet and rejoice at the child’s birth. Children remained close to their mother’s until they achieved the age to commence their education that would ease each child into their role within the Alliance.

All the citizens of Mexico-Tenochtitlan received a formal education. The children of the commoners attended the House of Song, if they were female; and the House of Youths if they were male. Male members of the elite noble houses attended seminaries where they studied religion and astronomy, as well as mathematics. All government officials attended seminaries during their youth. Priests, who were mostly male, were drawn from among the families of the nobles and elites. They required additional training beyond the seminaries and attended *calmecacs*, House of Tears (Clendinnen, *Aztecs: An Interpretation*, 71). Within these schools, the boys learned to fast, do penance, and autosacrifice. They were exhorted not to look back at their homes, their parents, or their families but to embrace the hardships learned in the *calmecac* as a way not only to endure but to overcome the adversity found in life.

Students learned about the complexity of the *Mexica* calendar at the *calmecacs*. Through a complicated calendrical system, the *Mexica* ordered their world into fifty-two year centuries made up of a 260 day cycle which nestled within a 104 year cycle known

as the *huechueliztli*, old age (Soustelle, *Daily Lives of the Aztecs on the Eve of the Spanish Conquest*, 109). Cycles known as Suns, which totaled over 5,000 years, made the calendar more complex. Each day and year was assigned a specific glyph that repeated during the interlocking cycle. Certain days were auspicious and others, such as the five remaining days each year, were not. Names for children derived from the day sign they were born under. The *Mexica* ordered their lives, travels and religious rituals through an intricate divination system developed from the repetitions of the calendar. The cyclical nature of the *Mexica* calendar and the divinations that derived from specific days influenced how Cortés was viewed as he and his companions landed in Mesoamerica in an auspicious year, *Ce Acatl*. While the calendar played an integral role in the daily lives of the *Mexicas*, only the children of the elite attended the *calmecacs* to learn its deepest meanings.

All religious leaders and government officials were members of the elite and noble classes. The elite, who comprised the literate class, were the only people privy to the mysteries of the gods. I would argue that this leads to speculation that the elite were therefore very religious and took their duties to venerate the gods very seriously. The heavy duty of autosacrifice fell on them in order to maintain the cosmic balance. Their dominance of literacy can also be interpreted as a way in which to control the population through controlling the religion and esoteric knowledge.

Females attended the House of Song and learned singing, dancing, and domestic skills such as weaving, spinning and household management. As mothers of warriors yet to be born, women held a position nearly as important as warriors. During childbirth, the woman was known as a warrior in battle bringing forth her child (Clendinnen, *Aztecs: An*

*Interpretation*, 174-75). If danger arose during birthing, the mother's life held precedence over the child's. However, if the mothers died in childbirth, the women were transformed into *tzitzime*, Devil Women, monsters who were destined to destroy the world, the Fifth Sun (Clendinnen, *Aztecs: An Interpretation*, 176-179). Conversely, these same women accompanied the sun on its nightly travels through the underworld as counterparts to the fallen warriors who accompanied it through its daily travels through the sky. The social structure of the *Mexica* society developed so that every member had a place and knew what role they had to fulfill. Within the Alliance, people's function was dictated by their age and social status, whether alive or dead.

The class structure was strict but there was a possibility of social advancement. The main form of improving oneself was through military valor and prowess. If one was a spectacular warrior, you could gain the highest status within *Mexica* society, the Eagle Noble. With this status came land and titles that were inheritable by one's offspring, but within a generation or two returned to the Empire. The titles and the land were not hereditary in the sense that they were in Europe. Therefore a change in status was attainable for a limited time and solely depended on one's own prowess and valor, not your ancestors'.

The entire *Mexica* society was geared toward warfare, including marriage. If a warrior died in battle he was afforded an afterlife in the paradise of *Huitzilopochtli*. The master of the military schools arranged marriages in accordance with the desires of the families of the youths seeking marriage (Clendinnen, *Aztecs: An Interpretation*, 160). A *Mexica* man married one woman as his primary wife. However, he was allowed to have several officially sanctioned but still secondary wives. The children of the primary wife,

whom the man married by tying the edge of her blouse to his cotton cloak in a ceremony attended by their families, legitimately inherited (Soustelle, *Daily Lives of the Aztecs on the Eve of the Spanish Conquest*, 179). Each marriage was carefully assessed so as to ensure the fitness of the warrior for battle. If the marriage did not meet the necessary requirements, the military academy masters would not allow it. Everything must produce more tribute and sacrificial victims.

As warfare drove the Empire and those subjugated by the *Mexica* were not integrated into the fabric of the society, the *Mexica* looked beyond the borders of Mexico-Tenochtitlan for validation. As in the Western world fifteen hundred years earlier, when the Roman Empire appropriated many aspects of the society of the Hellenized Greeks, the *Mexica* followed suit in Mesoamerica. They looked to the past of their adopted region for legitimization.

The *Mexica* viewed the Toltec Empire, which reached its height in the tenth and eleventh centuries, as the epitome of cultivated society. The Toltecs, under their priest king *Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl*, developed the arts and sciences that the *Mexica* emulated to develop from a band of wandering barbarians into the urbane culture the Spanish encountered (Soustelle, *Daily Lives of the Aztecs on the Eve of the Spanish Conquest*, xv). The first *Mexica tlatoani* married a woman of royal Toltec lineage, the last cultural group to hold sway in the Mexico Basin, thus securing his right to royal succession. The *Mexica* nobility even took to raiding the ruins of Tollan, the capital of the Toltecs, for artifacts to bolster their claim of uninterrupted right of ascension. Artisans strove to copy the stylized artwork of the Toltecs to adorn the homes of the *Mexica* elite as well (Carrasco *Aztec Ceremonial Landscapes*, 32). The *Mexica* viewed the Toltec capital,

Tollan, as an ideal city-state, the golden age ruled by the priest king *Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl*. Utilizing the Toltec artifacts and marrying into the lineage strengthened the legitimacy of the rule of a people who still viewed themselves as barbarous interlopers into the Mexico Basin. By linking themselves to this last, strong, unifying cultural group, the *Mexica* sought to collapse the gap of time between the Toltec Empire and their rule of the Mexico Basin. They used the Toltec artwork within their artwork, they named their highest order of priests after the Toltec priest king, *Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl*, and structured their Triple Alliance after the Toltec manner of rule in order to solidify the legitimacy of the *Mexica* claim to the Mexico Basin.

Even though the *Mexica* solidified the Alliance and their power structure using the memory of the Toltecs, their people lived in anxiety. In addition to the uncertainty of famine, drought and warfare, the *Mexica* worried that their world was in constant threat of imbalance (Carrasco, *City of Sacrifice: the Aztec Empire and the Role of Violence in Civilization*, 55). Their cosmology displayed their belief that the gods were immanent and held sway over their lives. Wizards and monsters, such as the *tzitzime* could be encountered in everyday life. The *Mexica* calendar was cyclical and developed so that every day repeated a pattern set down through the millennia (Soustelle, *Daily Lives of the Aztecs on the Eve of the Spanish Conquest*, 101). This fear of the unknown drove the *Mexica* to orient their lives in a way to maintain the cosmic balance. Sacrifice afforded them some sense of control over this anxiety. Cortés' arrival in Mesoamerica heightened the anxiety the *Mexica* faced daily. How better to regain control over the cause of that anxiety than to integrate the Spaniards into the accepted religious beliefs? If Moctezuma intended to transform Cortés into a *teotl ixiptla* and have him sacrificed to *Quetzalcoatl*

as a deity impersonator, the *Mexica* would be working diligently to restore cosmic balance.

At first glance, the *Mexica* do seem as if they were the historically bound, socially conforming and culturally static imperial power that Todorov described. However, they displayed innovative qualities as well. Midwives and local priests delayed the presentation of children born on inauspicious days until an auspicious day occurred. While stratified and codified, society maintained fluidity as well. Commoners advanced social rank through their individual success in warfare, attaining titles and land. These proceeds of war belonged to the warrior, they could not be inherited by their sons. The cycle began again with each warrior as he strove to become a Jaguar Warrior or an Eagle Warrior. *Pochtecas* also displayed this fluidity. The better they performed their merchant duties, the more prestige they gained. Good spies attained titles and status similar to the best warriors on the battlefield. Finally, the *Mexica* displayed innovation within their religion. They integrated the pantheon of their conquered territories into their own cosmology. *Tlaloc* reigned beside *Huitzilopochtli* in the *Templo Mayor*. Xipe Totec, the flayed god, was incorporated from the southern Mixitec during the *Mexica*'s wanderings. Todorov's portrayal of the *Mexica* differed greatly from the reality of this dynamic culture.

The *Mexica* were a hierarchical society in which every member knew his or her role and function. All individuals, from the craftsman to the *tlatoani*, fulfilled their purpose to keep the society moving forward. However, there was innovation that allowed the *Mexica* to incorporate other cultures and their religious beliefs. This innovation and incorporation lends support to the idea that Moctezuma did not believe that Cortés was



*Quetzalcoatl*, as he was not bound to the eternal return mythos. The *Mexica* fought hard to conquer the Mexico Basin. It makes it difficult to believe that their leader would calmly hand his people over to a foreigner.

The imperial society of the *Mexica* was well developed by the beginning of the sixteenth century. However, some cracks presented themselves. The dependence on the cosmology of an ancient civilization, that of the Toltecs, for legitimization and the belief that “*Quetzalcoatl* was the source of all that mattered in Tollan” (Carrasco “*Quetzalcoatl’s* Revenge; Primordium Application of Aztec Religion,” 306) combined with the lack of full integration of their conquered territories led to a weakening of the Triple Alliance by the time of the rule of Montezuma II, also known as Moctezuma Xocoyotzin, CE 1502 to 1520. Cortés manipulated these weaknesses to orchestrate the fall of the Alliance.

## Chapter 2: Sacrifice

Ritual sacrifice was an integral aspect of *Mexica* religion. To fully understand sacrifice, we need to explore its meaning to the *Mexica*. To understand the meaning of sacrifice for the *Mexica*, this exploration entails a historical background and critique of how scholars have viewed the role of sacrifice within religion. Emerging from this critique, we will attempt to determine what the *Mexica* intended the viewer of the sacrifice to understand by breaking specific rituals down and situating them within the overall meaning of *Mexica* religion and culture.

The *Mexica* primarily used sacrificial ritual as protective measures for the community, for healing, and for propitiations of gods for special favors. They did so to obtain and keep the attention of the gods. Hubert and Mauss proposed that “sacrifice is a religious act which, through the consecration of a victim, modifies the condition of the moral person who accomplishes it or that of certain objects which he is concerned,” (13). Consecrating an object to modify its condition may seem obvious but it is that very act that elevates the victim of human sacrifice from a murder victim to a sacred actor in a religious performance. Historically, sacrifices took many forms. The ancient Greeks offered burnt sacrifices of grains and meat to the Olympians. Within the eyes of Christians, Jesus died on the cross as the “ultimate sacrifice” for mankind. Hindus sacrificed clarified butter and soma to propitiate their gods during religious ceremonies. Similarly, the *Mexica* performed many styles of sacrifice to their gods.

*Mexica* sacrifices had many faces and all members of society engaged in it in one form or another. Priests and nobles utilized a daily ritual of sacrifice in the form of bloodletting, *izo*. Cortés provided first hand accounts of *izo* when he described the *Mexica* as daily burning incense that bore blood before undertaking any work. Further, some cut “their tongues, others their ears, while there are some who stab their bodies with knives,” (Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, 35). The practitioners sprinkled blood on “the idols” in the temples or threw it in the air at the culmination of their rituals. Sacrifice was also performed in large festivals that were linked to calendrical events. These sacrifices could take the form of animal sacrifice, such as butterflies, snakes, and quails sacrificed to *Quetzalcoatl*, grains and paper burned, or human sacrifice. Commoners could purchase the animal, grain or paper in the market places to provide them to the priests to consecrate them for the rituals. Warriors or elite members of society provided the victims for human sacrifice. However, the reason the *Mexica* performed these various sacrifices has caused years of speculation.

Many scholars contend that the *Mexica* offered human sacrifices to the gods as a form of debt repayment. Phillip Arnold demonstrates the idea of debt payment through the etymology of the Nahuatl word used for sacrifice, *nextlahaulitzli*. *Nextlahaulitzli* translates into “someone’s debt payment,” (81). Sacrifice was a requirement of creation. The people had to repay the gods who created their world using the same materials the gods used to form the world.

The debt repayment developed out of the *Mexica* worldview and how they conceived of their gods. The *Mexica* were animistic, believing that spirits were present in both animate and inanimate objects. They conceived of the landscape around them as a

corporeal, sentient being. Lightning and thunder were attributed to the *Tlalocs*, gods of rain. *Quetzalcoatl* controlled the wind. *Tecuciztecatl* was the moon and *Nanahuatzin* sacrificed himself to transform himself into the Fifth Sun (Sahagún, *Florentine Codex* 7:Appendix:2). The sentient landscape could be destroyed and reformed, as illustrated in the creation myth when *Tezcatlipoca* and *Quetzalcoatl* formed the earth from the body of *Atlantli*. This reformation of the landscape necessitated a reciprocal relationship between the landscape and the *Mexica*. The blood must maintain what was created in blood.

Peggy Reeves Sanday contends that the *Mexica* held the hungry gods at bay and maintained the cosmic balance through sacrifice. The *Mexica* preserved the social equilibrium by feeding their gods human flesh (Sanday, *Divine Hunger: Cannibalism as a Cultural System*, 7). The creation of the world was directly tied to sacrifice. The gods, *Atlantli*, *Quetzalcoatl* and *Nanahuatzin*, sacrificed themselves to create the world. Their sacrifice created a reciprocal relationship in which the people sacrificed to repay the blood debt the *Mexica* owed (Carrasco, *City of Sacrifice: the Aztec Empire and the Role of Violence in Civilization*, 81). The debt owed to the gods and the universe was paid in blood, specifically through human sacrifice. In order for this debt to be paid, the victim must be made sacred. The consecration of the person whom the sacrifice was performed on, be it *izo* or human sacrifice, elevated the act of bloodletting or human sacrifice to a religious ritual. The need for the sacred act was tied directly to the *Mexica* cosmological myths.

Mircea Eliade, a twentieth century religious scholar, analyzed the role myth played in ritual sacrifice as an outgrowth of cosmic creation and symbols. Arnold,

Sanday and Carrasco utilized Eliade's ideas of myth and ritual to develop their early analysis of sacrifice among the *Mexica*<sup>9</sup>. Eliade proposed that myth is never separated from the ritual. Other scholars, such as Catherine Bell, felt that Eliade's approach limited the ritual to a secondary level and elevated myth to a primary position due to its closer association with the subtext of all religious experience (11). She contends that in his search for universality among religions, Eliade reduces myth to a cosmological function in which the practitioner is struggling to return to the primordial time and mimic *homo religiosus*, religious man. If scholars focus on this reduction of myth, it does not allow them to examine the social dynamics interlaced in rituals. Arnold, Sanday and Carrasco's early reliance on Eliade's theory potentially limited their analysis of the use of myth within *Mexica* ritual, especially human sacrifice, by reducing the sacrifice only to one function, repaying the blood debt. This myopic led them to overlook the roles of other influences, such as demonstrations of political superiority, from acting upon the use of sacrifice as a ritual display.

Ritual sacrifices produced several effects for the *Mexica*. Therefore, I propose that we should approach the function of ritual sacrifice among the *Mexica* as a performance. The *Mexica* utilized sacrifice for its performative aspect to illustrate their power politically and economically. They would host the leaders of their allies and their enemies

---

<sup>9</sup> Eliade rejected E. B. Tylor's view that myth was a misguided explanation of ritual and religion. Instead, he favored an explanation of myth representing awe and *tremendum*. Eliade borrowed this idea from Rudolf Otto (Eliade, *passim*). Otto defined the element of fascination as necessary to religion and objects that create this fascination as daemonic-divine. He further explained that the daemonic-divine object may appear to the mind an object of horror and dread [creating the idea of *tremendum*], but at the same time it is no less something that allures with a potent charm, and the creature who trembles before it, utterly cowed and cast down, has at the same time the impulse to turn to it, nay even somehow make it his own, (Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 31). The symbols that represented awe and *tremendum* necessitated an explanation for this feeling. Thus myths as explanation were created.

during large festivals that included human sacrifice. The demonstration of large-scale sacrifice verified the power held by the Triple Alliance to obtain so many warriors and to utilize members of their own population as sacrifices. This was an exclamation proclaiming how politically untouchable they were. As an example, a Spanish conquistador reported that during the battles for Mexico-Tenochtitlan *Mexica* priests sacrificed Spaniards and

ate their flesh with a sauce of peppers and tomatoes. They sacrificed all of our men in this way, eating their legs/arms, offering their hearts and blood to their idols, as I have said, and throwing their trunks and entrails to the lions and tigers and serpents and snakes that they kept in their wild-beast houses, (Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 152).<sup>10</sup>

By drawing their spectators into the demonstration, the *Mexica* exemplified the performance aspect of ritualistic sacrifice for political purposes, to intimidate the Spaniards.

In his later work, Carrasco expanded on Eliade's assertion that sacrifice was solely tied to the *Mexica* cosmological myth by alluding to sacrifice's performative aspect. Carrasco implied this in his description of the feeding of the gods as becoming "the major religio-political instrument for subduing the enemy, controlling the periphery, and rejuvenating cosmic energy," (*Quetzalcoatl and the Irony of Empire: Myths and Prophecies in the Aztec Traditions*, pg 82). The *Mexica* manipulated ideology and religion in the service of the state. Politics, religion and war were intertwined and interdependent. Thus, I propose that religious ideology and politics were not independent of each other. Religion, warfare, politics and economics integrally supported one another and must be explored in a holistic manner. Using Bell's performative theory and

---

<sup>10</sup> While there were no lions and tigers in the new world, the Spanish used *tigre*, their word for tiger, to describe jaguars. I propose "lions and tigers" to be a Spanish gloss for several large cat species found in Moctezuma's bestiaries, including jaguars and ocelots.

examining the *Mexica* sacrifices in a holistic manner one can revisit Moctezuma's intentions toward Cortés. Sacrificing the leader of the foreign invaders would present a strong political statement to the Spaniards.

Large-scale sacrifice also established the economic superiority of the *Mexica* as they could purchase slaves as sacrifices, as well as receive them as tribute. The use of slaves illustrated that the owners had the economic means to provide the slaves for sacrifice. The procurers also had the means to coerce the slaves into the role of victim. Handlers for the slaves "washed their faces" to change their identities from whom the slaves had been into the sacrificial victim they became (Clendinnen, *Aztecs: An Interpretation*, 102-05). The chosen slave victim was given a narcotic laced drink to make him more docile for the rituals<sup>11</sup>. The *Mexica* displayed economic superiority over their allies and enemies by purchasing slaves as sacrificial victims, and supporting a specialized group who transformed the slaves into sacrificial victims and the produced the narcotic beverage given to the victims (Clendinnen, *Aztecs: An Interpretation*, 102-105). The sheer scale of victims available for sacrifice proved their supremacy.

The *Mexica* utilized many forms of sacrifice in their rituals. Decapitation, burning, strangulation, shooting with arrows and darts, throwing the victim from heights, gladiatorial combat, drowning, and entombment and starvation are many of the forms of human sacrifice the *Mexica* performed (Carrasco, *City of Sacrifice: the Aztec Empire and the Role of Violence in Civilization*, 83). However, the most common form of sacrifice

---

<sup>11</sup> While the *Mexica* sacrificed women as well, historical descriptions of the narcotic drink are discussed in a general manner for all sacrificial victims. The records do not specify if only men were provided it or if all victims, male and female, could partake of it. I use "him" in this reference as a generic term for victims.

was the removal of the victim's heart using a flint stone knife.<sup>12</sup> The heart was then presented to the sun and placed in a *cuauhxicalli*, a ceremonial vessel (Couch, *The Festival Cycle of the Aztec: Codex Borbonicus*, 20-21). Cortés described the victim as still alive during the extraction of the heart. The priests burned the heart and entrails before the images of their gods (Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, 35). The sacrificial victim would then either be hurled down the steps of the temple, recreating *Huitzilopochtli*'s treatment of his sister *Coyolxauhqui*, or the body would be taken by his/her captors to the *capulli* to distribute and eat. Consuming the victim allowed the *Mexica* to internalize the consumptive quality depicted by the victim. The *Mexica* understandings of reciprocity were principally based on giving of food and eating (Arnold, *Eating landscape: Aztec and European Occupation of Tlalocan*, 163). By cannibalizing the victim, the *Mexica* mimicked the actions of their gods; eating each other, eating humans, eating animals. This action was only performed within ritual contexts, after the victim had been consecrated, and afforded the sacrificer divine power when he relinquished his claim on the victim.

The *Mexica* sacrificed war captives, as well as seized members from various segments of society, both willing and unwilling. They sacrificed men, women or children depending on the festival and to which god it was dedicated. The victims were at times foreigners, but often were not (Read, *Time and Sacrifice in the Aztec Cosmos*, 129). When a *Mexica* sacrifice utilized children, the children were drawn from within their communities. Children were "considered the most precious offering," (Arnold, *Eating landscape: Aztec and European Occupation of Tlalocan*, 79). Taking the children from

---

<sup>12</sup> The obsidian knife is generally associated with the extraction of the heart during *Mexica* sacrifice. However, despite its sharpness, obsidian chipped and broke easily. Priests used flint knives instead as they were more durable and dependable (Couch, *The Festival Cycle of the Aztec: Codex Borbonicus*, 20-21).



the community emphasized the pain and tears shed by the sacrifice's observers. This illustrates the emotional intimacy between the children and the observers (Arnold, *Eating landscape: Aztec and European Occupation of Tlalocan*, 85). Arnold's contention demonstrates that not all sacrificial victims were obtained through warfare or purchased in the extensive *Mexica* markets. The *Mexica* would take members of their own community and elevate them to the highly honored status of sacred victim, the status that all warriors strove to attain. Looking at sacrifice from the *Mexica* perspective, if the ultimate goal of sacrifice was to maintain the cosmic balance, then shedding one's blood or giving one's life to maintain this balance was the ultimate gift one could make to the community. The idea of performing violent sacrifice has tantalized scholars, who have sought to explain the phenomena.

In the early twentieth century, René Girard attempted to explain the role of sacrifice within religion. However, later scholars have challenged his explanation. Girard proposed that societies, such as the *Mexica*, utilized sacrifice to displace violent tendencies onto the victim, to avoid inflicting violence on its own members. The purpose of sacrifice was a restoration of internal communal harmony by reinforcing the social fabric. The function of primitive religion for Girard, which he categorized *Mexica* religion as, was taming, training, arming and directing "violent impulses as a defensive force against those forms of violence that society regards as inadmissible," (Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 20). Girard further contended that sacrificial victims would be chosen from outside of the community, as they were the "Other." This designation allowed the community to displace their violence onto someone without close social ties to them (Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 4-13). This is in direct contradiction to Arnold

and Read's findings. The *Mexica* utilized members of their community in specific rituals that needed the very communal ties that Girard proposed they would shy away from. These ties strengthened the ritual of sacrifice, allowing the consecrated victim to be truly altruistic by giving their greatest gift, their own life, to the community.

Girard also argued that primitive societies utilized sacrifice due to a lack of judiciary systems, which is undermined by *Mexica* cultural practice as well. He did caution that scholars cannot assume that sacrifice replaces judicial law as it was not developed in these primitive societies. He proposed that a judicial system is infinitely more effective than sacrifice (Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 18-23). However, Girard's analysis is faulty in regards to the *Mexica* as they employed an elaborate judiciary system with complex laws and consequences for breaking them. The *Mexica* held the office of judge in the highest esteem. Judges opened their courts at dawn and governed a police force that held authority to arrest even the highest officials. Court scribes recorded every aspect of cases; the claims of both sides, the testimonies and sentences imposed by the judges (Soustelle, *Daily Lives of the Aztecs on the Eve of the Spanish Conquest*, 50). Thus, Girard's analysis of the *Mexica* use of sacrifice as a replacement for a judicial system is negated.

As the century progressed, other scholars proposed new theories about sacrifice and deduced that killing was a natural part of transformation within the *Mexica* religious traditions. If imbalance and damage occurred due to people's failures, destruction was the transforming mechanism to turn failure into success, which in turn transformed itself into failure in a cyclical manner (Read, *Time and Sacrifice in the Aztec Cosmos*, 167). Human sacrifice was the destructive tool to initiate the transformation instead of a displacement

of violent tendencies among the community. If Moctezuma intended to sacrifice Cortés to *Quetzalcoatl*, his sacrifice would transform the anxiety of the *Mexica*. Cortés' destruction would create a stable community.

*Toxiuhmolpilli*, the New Fire Ceremony, provides a strong case study of ritual sacrifice to examine these theories. Bernardino de Sahagún described the ceremony in great detail in the *Florentine Codex* (7:9-12). The *Mexica* performed the ceremony every fifty-two years when the four year signs had reigned for thirteen years each to bind together the end of their century<sup>13</sup>. Therefore, *Toxiuhmolpilli* was also known as the Binding of the Years. *Toxiuhmolpilli* occurred in Two Reed after the cycle had completed.

The actions taken in preparation for the New Fire Ceremony had far reaching implications for the *Mexica*. In preparation for the ceremony, all fires were extinguished, all statues of the gods from the people's homes were tossed into water, and the rubbish and cooking utensils were thrown away. Night was terrifying for the *Mexica*; it was the domain of wizards and monsters like the *tzitzime*, Devil Women. The sun provided protection and the lack of fires prohibited the sun from protecting the people. The new fire to be kindled represented the rebirth of the sun.

The ritual of the New Fire Ceremony was specifically adhered to ensure the rising of the new sun. The priests of Copulco chose the sacrificial victim from among the well born to embody *Xuihtlamin*. This victim was consecrated, modifying his moral condition, in order to make him sacred for the sacrificial ritual. The priests lead him to the top of

---

<sup>13</sup> The calendar was a complicated system through which the *Mexica* ordered their world into fifty-two year centuries made up of a 260 day cycle which nestled within a 104 year cycle known as the *huechueliztli*, old age. Each day and year was assigned a specific glyph that repeated during the interlocking cycle, as described in Chapter 1.

Uixachtlan, a mountain near Mexico-Tenochtitlan, which mimicked Coatepec where *Huitzilopochtli*'s birth occurred. *Xuihtlamin* was stretched upon the sacrificial altar, held by four priests while another carved open his chest with a flint knife. The New Fire was sparked in *Xuihtlamin*'s chest and his heart was removed. His heart was then fed to the fire and his body consumed. Only then would relay runners distribute the new fire to the temples, palaces and houses in the entire Alliance.

Great anxiety occurred until the first light of the new fire was observed. If the fire did not spark, the sun could not be reborn. The *Codex Borbonicus* claims this failure would inaugurate the "fifth of the cyclical destructions of the world," (Couch, *The Festival Cycle of the Aztec: Codex Borbonicus*, 83). In preparation of the possible failure of the rekindling of the fire, pregnant women were hidden in granaries to prevent them from eating men (Read, *Time and Sacrifice in the Aztec Cosmos*, 125-6). Everyone else from babes in arms to the elderly ascended to their roofs awaiting the first sight of the new fire on Uixachtlan. Once the fire successfully ignited, all of the *Mexica*, commoners and elite alike, performed *izo*, cutting their ears and splattering the blood toward the fire. Parents cut the ears of their infants so the entire populace performed the penance.

The New Fire Ceremony performed several functions for the *Mexica*. The ceremony echoed the birth of the Fifth Sun at Teotihuacan when *Nanahuatzin* sacrificed himself in fire to birth the new age. Utilizing Eliade, Carrasco and Arnold's approach to analyzing rituals, I see the New Fire ceremony as a re-enactment of one of the cosmological myths of creation. The years must be bound to create a new century and a new sun must be born of fire as a purifying agent. If the ceremony is faulty and the fire is not kindled, the night and its terrors would reign supreme. However, more than this

occurred during the ceremony. The *Mexica* ritual shaped spatio-temporal transformation into orderly motion (Read, *Time and Sacrifice in the Aztec Cosmos*, 124). The *Mexica* utilized the ceremony to situate themselves in relation to their animate surroundings by utilizing Uixachtlan to recall Coatepec as well as temporally binding their lives in fifty-two year cycles. Thus the sacrifice of *Xuihtlamin* functioned on many levels, from commemorating *Huitzilopochtli*'s birth to structuring *Mexica* concepts of space and time.

Another sacrificial case study is the festival of *Tlacaxipeualiztli*, also known as the Feast of the Flaying Men. The *Mexica* dedicated the sacrificial ritual of this festival to *Xipe Totec* (Sahagún, *Florentine Codex* 2:16-17, 8:Appendix 2:83-85). It occurred on what the Spaniards referred to as the “gladiatorial stone,” a stone approximately waist high and a meter and a half wide and elevated upon a platform at approximately a man’s height. The victim, consecrated by dressing him in white chalk and feathers, was tied to the stone by a rope around the waist. After drinking *pulque*, the fermented juice of the maguey cactus, the victim was given four pine cudgels, and a war club upon which the obsidian blades had been replaced with feathers. The victim faced up to four *Mexica* warriors armed with obsidian bladed war clubs who stood upon the platform during the battle.

The performance between the victim and his assailants was integral to the meaning of the sacrifice. Intoxicated by the *pulque*, the victim was released from the prescriptions of the battlefield and fought ferociously. However, the purpose of this display was to present the art of combat, not dispatch the victim immediately. Therefore, the warriors prolonged the performance by delicately cutting the victim. Placing thin cuts all over the victim’s body that ran profusely with blood, the warriors “stripped” him of

his flesh. Eventually, from exhaustion and blood loss, the victim would collapse to be dispatched through excision of his heart.

The festival continued as the warrior who presented the victim returned with the victim's body to his *calpulli*, city district. The priests flayed the victim and donned his skin. That night, dressed in the skins, the priests visited each house. For twenty days after donning the skin, the priest begged in the market. The entire amount the priest earned begging and the skin was turned over to the warrior who presented the sacrificial victim.

The actions of the sacrificial victim reflected upon his captor. Immediately upon returning to the *calpulli* the victim's body was prepared into a feast for the warrior's family. The warrior, mimicking his victim, did not eat the flesh but was dressed in chalk and feathers. The warrior blurred his identity into that of the victim he presented. They addressed each other in familial terms during the victim's captivity, using beloved father and beloved son. The warrior's valor is measured by the performance of his victim during the gladiatorial fight (Clendinnen, *Aztecs: An Interpretation*, 98). If the victim simply lay down and accepted his fate, the warrior lost prestige. However, if the victim fought gallantly and ferociously, this reflected well on the warrior who captured and represented the epitome of the warrior class to be a victim.

This sacrifice was a performance ritual. The combat could be concluded quickly, however, this would not demonstrate the skills honed by warriors. A victim who did not participate or whimpered and begged for a quick death would cause the performance to collapse. However, by performing at his best, perhaps magnificently, he potentially earned a place in history. Great warriors were valorized and commemorated in song for generations after their deaths. Victims of the *Tlacaxipeualiztli* earned the same in the

warrior houses of their home cities. They were also remembered for their skills in meeting what every warrior knew was his only guaranteed reward, death. The victim's death was inevitable, if not on the battlefield, than upon the sacrificial stone.

Sacrifice, extensively performed among the *Mexica*, performed many functions. It was a rite of communion and exchange allowing the *Mexica* to communicate and propitiate their gods. However, it was more than this. Human sacrifice fed the gods, as well as recreated and commemorated cosmological myths. It also acted as performative theater to express socio-political and economic status. Scholars cannot reduce human sacrifice among the *Mexica* to one aspect without collapsing the culture to a caricature of itself.

The *Mexica* developed human sacrifice to fulfill many needs within their society. The ritual of *Toxiuhmolpilli* fulfilled many of those. It echoed the birth of *Huitzilopochtli* as Uixachtlan commemorated Coatepec. The rite purified the *Mexica*. It drew spatial and temporal boundaries. The festival of *Tlacaxipeualiztli* displayed military combat prowess, defined proper behavior for warriors and allowed warriors to commune with their gods, whom the *Mexica* believed walked among them. Human sacrifice assisted with this as well. Many sacrifices incorporated an *ixiptla*, a deity impersonator, as was seen in *Toxiuhmolpilli*. How does this aspect of the sacrifice influence the ritual?

### Chapter 3: The *Teotl Ixiptla*, Mexica Deity Impersonators

The *Mexica* utilized sacrifice for many reasons: to propitiate the gods and keep the cosmos in balance, to demonstrate political and economic superiority, and to bind time and space<sup>14</sup>. Sacrifice also instilled fear in their enemies and allies through its performative aspect. Human sacrifice, with all its elaborate rituals, was an especially effective method to fulfill these many tasks. The *Mexica* used the *teotl ixiptla*, the deity impersonator, as their ultimate form of human sacrifice. Here we will explore the meaning of the *teotl ixiptla* through describing what an *ixiptla* was, the origin of the word, and who could fulfill this role. We will also examine two sacrificial rituals that employ the *teotl ixiptla* as their central actor. One of the main actions a victim had to undertake to be transformed into an *ixiptla* was donning the god's regalia. As Moctezuma presented Cortés with the regalia of three different gods at their first gift exchange, and Cortés donned the regalia, could Moctezuma have intended Cortés to fulfill the role of an *ixiptla* when he arrived in Mexico-Tenochtitlan?

The *teotl ixiptla*, a deity impersonator, was an integral part of many human sacrifices as it was seen as increasing the efficacy of the ritual by increasing the ritual's potency. The *Mexica* believed that their gods walked among them both in physical and non-physical form. The *Mexica* believed that nothing ceased to exist, it simply changed forms (Read, *Time and Sacrifice in the Aztec Cosmos*, *passim*). This is illustrated in the

---

<sup>14</sup> As mentioned previously, the *Mexica* used sacrifice to establish spatio-temporal boundaries within their culture. The New Fire Ceremony "binds the years" into a century when the sun is reborn. This begins a new age that differs from but mimics the new sun in the age of the Fifth Sun.



Legend of the Fifth Sun, as the world and its peoples were destroyed four times but rose again in each Sun, in a different form. The gods could manifest themselves in physical form or embody a human to attain that form. They could also appear as an apparition, in a non-physical form. For example, Miguel León-Portilla related a legend that Moctezuma sent forth “magicians” to stop Cortés and his allies from advancing from Cholula to Mexico-Tenochtitlan. The “magicians” never engaged Cortés, as they encountered a very drunk young man on the road who rebuked and mocked them for their attempts to stop the Spaniards. He continuously asked them, “Why have you come here?” and demanded that they look back at Mexico-Tenochtitlan. When they did, they saw the entire city, from marketplace to *calmecac* engulfed in flames. When they turned back to address the young drunkard, he had vanished and they knew they had been stopped by young *Tezcatlipoca*<sup>15</sup>, (León-Portilla, *The Broken Spears*, 53-54). The manifestation of young *Tezcatlipoca* was not a physical manifestation but similar to an apparition of a god or saint, as when Our Lady of Guadalupe appeared to Juan Diego on Tepayac Hill. This differed from how a god manifested in a *teotl ixiptla*.

The *teotl ixiptla* embodied the god during the ritual, allowing the god to take on a physical human form. Assuming this human form allowed the god to participate in the sacrifice, making the ritual more powerful. By embodying the god, the *teotl ixiptla* provided a physical death for the god. The *Mexica* understood time and matter as cyclical. Nothing ceased to exist, even in death; it only changed form. However, whether physical or supernatural, all things experienced decay. Decay was only stopped through

---

<sup>15</sup> Tezcatlipoca appeared as many different aspects; Red Tezcatlipoca, Black Tezcatlipoca, Young Tezcatlipoca, Yellow Tezcatlipoca. Each aspect wore specific clothing and carried specific accoutrements. It is from this differentiation between the aspects that the “magicians” were able to distinguish that the “drunkard” was Young Tezcatlipoca.

physical destruction, death, when the essence could rejuvenate through changing form. The sacrificial ritual allowed the gods to experience physical death in a human form. If the gods did not experience the rejuvenation through the sacrificial ritual, they would continue to age and decay. This would decrease their power and effectiveness. Their ritualized deaths, as the *teotl ixiptla*, empowered the god through rejuvenation, providing an escape from the diminishing effects of the aging process. As the ritual reinvigorated the god, the god was more likely to listen to the petitions of his/her worshipper. Thus, by killing the incarnation of the god during the sacrifice, the ritual received an increase in power and effectiveness as the god was paying more attention to it.

The term *teotl* held many meanings for the *Mexica*, as demonstrated by the varying interpretations of the words among scholars. In Book 10 Chapter 29 of the *Florentine Codex*, Sahagún defined it as meaning “real” or “extreme.” Carrasco interpreted *teotl* to mean “god” or “deity” (*Aztec Ceremonial Landscapes*, 56). Read expanded on the interpretation as “deity”, finding the term to mean “potent, honored, and sometimes beyond normal human understanding,” (146). In her understanding, something *teotl* could be animate or inanimate, extremely potent or not, potentially positive or negative in nature. Carrasco described a *teotl ixiptla* as being mutable; a plant, animal, object, or human being that was the image of the god. The multiple meanings of the term, real/extreme, a potent honored entity or a deity, inhibit an interpretation of it. If translators cannot determine a definitive meaning, how can a scholar utilize the term to determine how the *Mexica* applied it to the Spanish when they used it to describe them?

Many Spanish scholars, Sahagún and Gómara among them, note the *Mexica* employed the Nahuatl term *teotl* to describe Cortés, (*Florentine Codex*, 12:4:13; Gómara,

128). The application to Cortés as a “powerful being,” “potent,” or “extreme” is plausible. However, the term does not necessarily translate that the *Mexica* thought Cortés was a god.

Clendinnen also found *teotl* to be an elastic category. For her, the “living image” was a constructed thing that did not necessarily have to die. The priest could fulfill this role; the *ixiptla* could be multiple objects. She found they “allowed the staging of most complex reflections and inversions,” (Clendinnen, *Aztecs: An Interpretation*, 249) through their multiplicity. This occurred in situations where an *ixiptla*, as a priest, killed an *ixiptla* who was a sacrificial victim. These cases allowed an image to annihilate a mirror of itself, but was more in that it provided a complex narrative of the possibility and nature of the deity doubly represented. However, “deity representation” or “impersonator” was a poor translation of *teotl ixiptla* (Clendinnen, *Aztecs: An Interpretation*, 252). She proposed that “god-presenter” or “that which enables the god to present aspects of himself” best approximated the Nahuatl term. This is the role, that of a mutable, elastic, powerfully potent being, that I propose Moctezuma intended Cortés to assume when he arrived in Mexico-Tenochtitlan.

Many steps occurred in transforming the victim, whether *Mexica* or Cortés, into a *teotl ixiptla*. Aguilar-Moreno proposed that usually a warrior or slave, and, on rare occasions, an elite person, was chosen for the role as an *ixiptla* (154). Clendinnen asserted that they were formally “named” for the sacred power they were to embody and adorn in some of that deity’s characteristic regalia (252). This naming remained temporary and could be constructed or unmade as necessary in the ritual. The chosen human vessel was ritually bathed; taught specific actions to fit the character of the deity,

such as dancing or flute playing; and elaborately costumed as the deity (Carrasco *City of Sacrifice: the Aztec Empire and the Role of Violence in Civilization*, 83). However, all these scholars agreed that wearing the regalia of the god was an essential step in the transformation into a *teotl ixiptla*. By donning the ritual regalia of *Quetzalcoatl* that Moctezuma presented to him, Cortés took the first step necessary to be transformed into a *teotl ixiptla*. To complete the conversion, Cortés needed to arrive in Mexico-Tenochtitlan, be ritually bathed and taught the specific actions necessary to embody *Quetzalcoatl*.

The completion of Cortés' ritual transformation has been called into question due to the multiple sources that detail the steps that Moctezuma took to prevent Cortés from traveling to Mexico-Tenochtitlan. On many occasions, Moctezuma attempted to “bribe” Cortés with treasures to dissuade his further journeying to the capital city. Sahagún describes Moctezuma sending “sorcerers”<sup>16</sup> to “magically” prevent Cortés from continuing his journey (*Florentine Codex*, 12:8:21). As Cortés came closer to the city, Moctezuma utilized assassination attempts and outright battles to stop Cortés (Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, 74). Why did he attempt to prevent the completion of the transformation if he intended to sacrifice Cortés as *Quetzalcoatl* to *Quetzalcoatl*?

There is considerable debate as to why Moctezuma acted in this manner. Offering the gifts to Cortés might be interpreted as an attempt to bribe him from visiting Mexico-Tenochtitlan. The gifts may also have been seen as the rightful offerings given to a returning god (León-Portilla, *The Broken Spears*, 23-24). However, sending gifts to foreign dignitaries or their emissaries was a normal part of Mesoamerican political maneuverings, though there is no evidence of a Mesoamerican leader sending divine

---

<sup>16</sup> The Spanish utilized the ancient Greek custom of designating foreign priests as magicians and sorcerers to delegitimize their religious practices. Scholars must read against this label every time they encounter it.

regalia as part of these types of gifts. The *tlatoani* sent the best gifts he could as a show of dominance (Clendinnen, *Aztecs: An Interpretation*, 269). This gesture illustrated the greatness of the giver when it was given in extreme measures. The extravagance of the gifts falls in line with the pattern of speech that *Mexica* rulers used, *tecpillahtolli*, lordly speech. *Tecpillahtolli* is an art form in which the speaker means the opposite of what he is stating; thus it is constructed using the principles of reversal and indirection. A man stating that he was the lowly servant truly meant he was the rightful leader when using *tecpillahtolli* (Restall, *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest*, 97-98). This style of speech was taught in the *calmacacs*, the elite schools, where Moctezuma was educated. He would also have learned the *Mexica* negotiating tactic of grandiose gifts as a measure of his own greatness there. Unfortunately, Cortés and the Spaniards were unaware of the *tecpillahtolli* manner of speaking and interpreted the gifts as meaning the *Mexica* had even greater wealth to be plundered.

Moctezuma's use of the "sorcerers" and "magicians" can be interpreted as a measure of his fear of the anomalous Spaniards. Moctezuma's reaction to the arrival of the Spaniards has been described by scholars as everything from "terror" to "apathy" (Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, 12:9:25 and León-Portilla *The Broken Spears*, 32-36 respectively). However, the use of the "magicians" may be seen as a tool to bring the anomalous people into the *Mexica* political and religious understanding. The Spaniards did not react to Moctezuma's gifts in a "normal" manner but fell upon the gold "like monkeys" and "they lusted after it like pigs," (Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, 12:11:30). The Spaniards did not fight like the *Mexica*, to capture warriors for sacrifice; rather they killed both combatants and non-combatants. Cortés and his companions sheathed their

bodies and their arms in armor, not painting their bodies and displaying their weapons, as did the *Mexica* (Clendinnen, *Aztecs: An Interpretation*, 268-69)<sup>17</sup>. The use of the “magicians” may have been a tactic Moctezuma employed to bring the Spaniards under his religious influence and within his logical, cognitive control. The use of “wizardry” was accompanied by offerings of *Mexica* food: turkey hens, eggs, sweet potatoes, avocados, guava and cacti fruits, often soaked in blood (León-Portilla, *The Broken Spears*, 23). This further illustrates how the *Mexica* attempted to control the Spaniards. It has been discussed that the food offerings were a test of the Spaniards; if they ate the blood soaked food, they were gods. If they ate the non-blood soaked food, they were mere humans (León-Portilla, *The Broken Spears*, 33-34). However, it can also be argued that this gesture was another attempt to exert influence over the Spaniards by bringing them into “physical, visual and olfactory contact with the [*Mexica*] cuisine of violence,” (Carrasco, *City of Sacrifice: the Aztec Empire and the Role of Violence in Civilization*, 217). This was another gesture to place Cortés under *Mexica*, and Moctezuma’s, dominion. Thus, Moctezuma’s attempts to stop Cortés’ arrival can be seen as evidence of his fear of Cortés, perhaps even fear that *Quetzalcoatl* was returning. However, they can also be deciphered as normal gestures between political leaders, as with the extravagant gifts seen by some as “bribes,” as well as efforts to bring the new arrivals into *Mexica* religious and cultural understanding as an effort to politically control them. Moctezuma’s intent may have been to transform Cortés into an *ixiptla* as a method of controlling him politically, religiously and culturally.

---

<sup>17</sup> The *Mexica* warriors wore cotton armor during combat. However, the metal armor, helmets and sword sheaths the Spanish used were entirely alien to the *Mexica*. Even the Spanish horses and war dogs wore metal armor.

Many *teotl ixiptlas* were chosen because they had specific characteristics reminiscent of the deity they were to become, that is their aspects that the *Mexica* wished to display. Each year an *ixiptla* was chosen from the slaves to represent *Tezcatlipoca*. He had to be of a specific height with specific facial features, a perfect body, for his role (Carrasco, *City of Sacrifice: the Aztec Empire and the Role of Violence in Civilization*, 84). The female *ixiptla* who depicted *Toci*, our grandmother, was chosen to be a companion to midwives and curers, as *Toci* was their patron deity (Couch, *The Festival Cycle of the Aztec: Codex Borbonicus*, 70). As a young girl, *Toci* represented fertility and fecundity; *Tezcatlipoca* represented the ultimate male in a society of warriors. The *ixiptla* was metamorphosed into the deity for the ritual of sacrifice. Cortés' resemblance to *Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl*, his light skin and beard, as well as his arrival from the east fulfilled specific aspects of the legends surrounding the Toltec priest-king. The very things that scholars have used to justify the traditional belief that Moctezuma thought Cortés was *Quetzalcoatl* would have been characteristics sought for a *teotl ixiptla* to the deity.

Carrasco proposed that the metamorphosis of the deity impersonator was built in a linear manner but cyclical at the same time: warrior/slave→perfect body→cultural paragon→sexual potency→king's god→seasoned warrior→sacrificed deity (*City of Sacrifice: the Aztec Empire and the Role of Violence in Civilization*, 135). Moving through this model afforded an image of the whole male citizenry: from their role designated at birth to be a warrior through leadership to the final role of deity. It also supported the hierarchy of the *Mexica* society with the god surpassing the king who was above the warrior.

The *tlatoani* even participated in these rituals and become an *ixiptla* himself. Motolinía described Moctezuma donning the skin of an enemy lord after the enemy had been sacrificed. Placing the skin on his body transformed Moctezuma into an *ixiptla* during the Bringing Out of the Skins ceremony (64). The sacredness of the essence of the *ixiptla* lingered in the living and dead flesh of the human *ixiptla* and transferred to the person and garments of the priests and *tlatoani* (Clendinnen, *Aztecs: An Interpretation*, 253). Moctezuma tapped the resonance of that sacredness, dancing in the skin with great reverence. There are many sacrificial rituals that involve *teotl ixiptlas*. However, I will only present two here.

The specific sacrificial ritual to *Tezcatlipoca* that involved the *ixiptla* mentioned earlier will present the first case study of this type of sacrifice. The *Mexica* observed this ritual sacrifice in the month of Toxcatl, known as ‘dry season’. This ritual petitioned *Tezcatlipoca*, not *Tlaloc*, the rain god, for rain (Durán, *Book of the Gods and Rites and the Ancient Calendar*, 102). The ceremony was conducted by priests and dignitaries who had fasted and abstained from relations with their wives for five days to purify themselves. During this purification, the priests and dignitaries ate food that embodied divine nourishment. However, the ritual began a year prior to the sacrifice.

The *ixiptla* was chosen from a special group of captured warriors who were carefully guarded until his selection. His characteristics, like Cortés’ resemblance to *Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl*, had to fit these demanding requirements to fulfill his role (Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, 2:67)

He was like something smoothed, like a tomato, like a pebble, as if sculptured from wood; he was not curly haired...he was not rough of forehead...he was not long-haired...He was not of swollen eyelids, he was not of enlarged eyelids, he was not swollen-cheeked...he was not flat-



nosed; he did not have a nose with wide nostrils...he was not thick-lipped, he was not gross-lipped, he was not a stutterer, he did not speak a barbarous language. He was not bucked-toothed, he was not large toothed...His teeth were like seashells...he was not long-handed; he was not one-handed; he was not handless; he was not fat fingered...he was not emaciated; he was not fat; he was not big bellied; he was not of protruding navel; he was not of hatchet shaped buttocks...For him who was thus, he had no flaw, who had no (bodily) defects, who had no blemish, who had no mark...

This perfect specimen was chosen and taught the arts of the *Mexica*: flute playing, flower holding and smoking. For one year he traveled the city with an entourage as the embodiment of *Tezcatlipoca*. The populous greeted and treated him as their god made manifest among them. He was presented to the *tlatoani* who gifted him with many things.

The *ixiptla* was adorned with the regalia of *Tezcatlipoca*, as Cortés was when he donned the gifted regalia. The *ixiptla* wore golden shell pendants in his ears and turquoise mosaic lip plugs, a polished seashell necklace and white seashell breast ornament, golden bracelets on his upper arms and turquoise bracelets on his forearms. On his legs he wore gold bells and obsidian sandals adorned with ocelot fur ears graced his feet. His head was plastered with eagle down and popcorn feathers to complete his transformation. Arrayed in the vestments of *Tezcatlipoca*, the *ixiptla* moved about the city personifying the deity for the *Mexica*.

Twenty days prior to the ritual sacrifice, the *ixiptla* removed this regalia and his hair was shorn. A tuft of hair was attached to his forehead and he donned a quetzal-feather headpiece. He was also provided with four women with whom he lived as his wives, each of whom embodied one of the four goddesses as their *teotl ixiptlas*. The five *ixiptla* sang, danced and distributed food around Mexico-Tenochtitlan for five days. They then went to the lakeshore where the *ixiptla* of *Tezcatlipoca*, going by boat, went to

Cualtepec as his wives consoled him. Upon returning to the mainland, he separated from his wives and traveled fifteen miles outside the *Templo Mayor* in Mexico-Tenochtitlan to Chalco. Here his entourage abandoned him as well. At the small temple of Tlacochealco, the *ixiptla* ascended the temple steps, breaking his flutes one by one. The purified priests<sup>18</sup> seized him and “threw him upon his back on the sacrificial stone: then cut open his breast, [the priest] took his heart from him, he also raised it up in dedication to the sun,” (Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, 2:71). The body was then carried down the temple steps with great care. At the bottom he was decapitated, his skull cleaned out to be placed on the *tzompantli*, the skull rack.

The rite continued with dignitaries, girls and young warrior dancing and singing. They prepared a feast of toasted maize and amaranth dough balls shaped with honey into the god and presented to his image (Durán, *Book of the Gods and Rites and the Ancient Calendar*, 107). The girls presented the image of *Tezcatlipoca* with a feast of tamales and the youths followed, rushing in with their spears. The honeyed tamales were shared by all present at the image. According to Durán, the *Mexica* performed no other human sacrifices on this day.

This ritual bound the center and the periphery of *Mexica* male society. *Tezcatlipoca* was known as the god of the Near and the Close. His *ixiptla* represented this omnipresence through his access to the entire city during his year in the role. The use of the flute by the deity image “creates a sense of space and its cosmic organization,” (Carrasco, *City of Sacrifice: the Aztec Empire and the Role of Violence in Civilization*, 127). The journey of the *ixiptla* onto the lake extended *Tezcatlipoca*'s dominance from

---

<sup>18</sup> The manner in which the priests purified themselves for this ritual is not specified in the records.

the land onto the water as well, making him truly omnipresent. The placement of the skull on the *tzompantli* completed this by returning the god's gaze to that of his people. The use of a perfect warrior to fulfill the role of the *ixiptla* bound the far reaching grasp of the warrior to the centralized position of the populous who watched the ritual performance of the sacrifice and participated in the feast that concluded the rite.

Clendinnen interpreted this ritual in a different manner. She proposed that the god of the Near and the Close stood closer to man than any other. As all must bow to *Tezcatlipoca's* will and the land was in his power, earth was a place of exile that all attempted to escape: warriors strove for death to accompany the sun on its journey. The great feast days of the gods marked the tensions in society, not the centralization of the warrior's role within it. Instead of celebrating the *ixiptla* as the perfect warrior with the perfect physique, the rituals allowed the *Mexica* an escape from the uncertainty of natural disasters such as famine, floods, earthquakes as well as anxieties that develop within a highly stratified society with a small elite aristocracy who ruled in a manner that invoked fear. The great religious rites, like the sacrifice of the *ixiptla*, "formalized and framed the darker obsessions and most painful anxieties of social life, not for easy comfort (the *Mexica* did not look for comfort) but so they could be contemplated, comprehended, and thus rendered tolerable," (Clendinnen, *Aztecs: An Interpretation*, 76). The main attraction of the *ixiptla* appeared to be his inexhaustible courtesy and his ceaseless attentiveness to his worshippers during his year as *Tezcatlipoca*. Clendinnen's explanation feels very close to Karl Marx's idea of religion being the "opiate of the masses." The *Mexica* allowed the *ixiptla's* dancing and courtesy to distract them from the overpowering anxiety that their world could be destroyed if they did not properly propitiate their gods.

Following Clendinnen's interpretation of the *ixiptla*'s sacrifice, the transformation and how the god-presenter responded to his people was of more importance than the act of his death, his rejuvenation, as it brought order to the uncertainties of his worshippers. They enjoyed the celebrations invoked by the *ixiptla*'s dancing and flute playing as well as the spectacle of his sacrificial death.

Another case study that involved a *teotl ixiptla* was the Sweeping of the Road. The *Mexica* performed this sacrificial ritual, dedicated to *Toci*, our grandmother, in the month of *Ochpaniztli*. *Toci* was an earth goddess who was patroness of curers and midwives. The "sweeping" of this ritual referred to the sweeping winds brought on by the winter rains. This rain marked the end of the agricultural season and ushered in the season of war. Sweeping houses and roads enacted the sweeping winds, canals and aqueducts were cleaned and the entire population bathed in an act of purification and renewal.

The *Mexica* marked *Ochpaniztli* with a certain gravity by ceasing all ritual activity for the first five days. Warriors marching throughout the city carrying flowers solemnized the next eight days before the ritual pace increased with mock-skirmishes carried out by the curers and mid-wives armed with flowers. Their goal was to distract the *ixiptla* from the sorrow of stillbirths and the death of the warriors that would occur during the season of war. These women formed the entourage of the *teotl ixiptla* in the days prior to her death. They sat in the marketplace and engaged in women's activities such as weaving. They also begged offerings for *Toci* (Durán, *Book of the Gods and Rites and the Ancient Calendar*, 232-233). On the evening of the fifth day, the *ixiptla* was

escorted through the marketplace where she scattered maize meal. She was then taken to the *tlatoani*'s palace where her virginity was sacrificed to the *tlatoani*.

The priests then escorted the *ixiptla* to *Toci*'s temple where she was arrayed in "her" ritual regalia, an essential step in the transformation process that echoed Cortés and Moctezuma's actions when they donned their regalia. Her sacrifice took place at midnight, with no onlookers or practitioners, only *Toci*'s priest. Stretched on the back of one of the priests, the *ixiptla* was decapitated and flayed. The *teccizquacuilli*, a robust male priest, donned her wet skin and garments, transforming himself into *Toci*'s *ixiptla* (Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, 2:112-117). A portion of the sacrificed girl's thigh skin was made into a mask for *Centeotl*, the maize deity, *Toci*'s son. The *teccizquacuilli* witnessed extensive dances and ceremonies attended by the female *ixiptla*'s entourage of midwives and curers. Four priests dressed as Huastecs, natives of Vera Cruz who wore little clothing and were considered very lascivious by the *Mexica*, swelled the entourage. *Toci* and her entourage met with the city's greatest warriors at the base of her temple. Women chased the warriors throughout Mexico-Tenochtitlan brandishing brooms.

*Toci* chased the warriors throughout the night to return to her temple where she gathered *Centeotl*, her son. The nobles arrayed the *teccizquacuilli* with the eagle down of the warrior on his/her head and legs solidifying the union between the fertility deity and the warriors he/she would later hail. *Toci* slew four warriors at her temple, leaving the remaining sacrifices to be performed by her priests. Then, together, *Toci* and *Centeotl* greeted *Huitzilopochtli* and the gathered city's warriors at the *Templo Mayor* at dawn. The warriors ascended the temple, only to race back down the steps chased by *Toci*'s war

cries. *Toci* then returned to her temple where all of the warriors had amassed in hierarchical rank and file.

Over the next several days, the *teccizquacuilli* in the guise of *Toci* presided over a gathering of the city's warriors. Under his visage, the *tlatoni* awarded first the warriors with their regalia for the war season and then the nobles with their rewards. The warriors, nobles, the Huastecs and *Toci* danced to commence the season of war. As the warriors danced round the temple, the midwives, curers and other gathered women sang songs of lament to their coming death in warfare. *Toci*'s high falsetto rang out over the women's wailings. The festival concluded with the *teccizquacuilli* taking off the sacrificed girl's skin. The skin was then stretched on a wooden frame at *Toci*'s temple, facing outward in protection over the city.

The Sweeping of the Road became an intertwining of the agricultural and the military aspects of *Mexica* society. As *Toci* was a fertility deity, the use of her image to usher in the season of war ties the economic facet of society in with the warriors. Her image was carefully constructed "layer by layer upon the flayed human skin, each layer revealing more of her nature, until the benign custodian of curing and the domestic stood triumphant as the pitiless mistress of war, insatiable eater of men," (Clendinnen, *Aztecs: An Interpretation*, 204). The midwives and curers were transformed into priests during this ritual. They held equal status as the custodians of women in their battlefield, birthing, as male priests did over the warriors in their battlefield, war. By weaving together the biological processes of procreation with the agricultural process of crop growth, represented by *Centeotl*, as well as warfare, the Sweeping of the Roads dramatized reproduction and warfare.

Carrasco focused on different characteristics of this festival. The Sweeping of the Roads illustrated that even when women were featured in a religious ritual, men controlled them, “it is significant that while women play important roles in the sacrifices of women, males direct them, seduce them, insult them, sacrifice them and wear them,” (Carrasco, *City of Sacrifice: the Aztec Empire and the Role of Violence in Civilization*, 210). *Toci*'s *ixiptla* gave of herself throughout the entire sacrificial ritual: she gave maize meal in the marketplace, she gave her virginity in the palace, she gave her life at the temple. However, men directed this giving and even donned her skin to transform themselves into *Toci* and *Centeotl*. Women played the pivotal role in linking the heart of vegetation to the groundwork for war.

The layering of the construction of *Toci* echoes the assertion that *teotl ixiptlas* “allowed the staging of most complex reflections and inversions,” (Clendinnen, *Aztecs: An Interpretation*, 249) through their multiplicity. The sacrificed girl's skin transforms the robust priest into the protectress of midwives and curers. Midwives and curers are the protectors of women in their capacity as warriors, while they give birth to the new generation of warriors. The *teccizquaculli* then, still as the *ixiptla* is attired in the warrior's eagle down, completing the conversion of the female fertility goddess into the epitome of a warrior. This is a complex reflection of the role *Toci* plays for the *Mexica*.

The use of blood soaked brooms as the weapon of choice for *Toci* and her entourage to chase and make war upon the city's warriors is also an inversion. The broom represents the essence of female domesticity. However, it brings fear to the warriors as they are chased across the city. Even though a man portrays *Toci*, women are afforded the

power over the warriors in order to inaugurate them into the coming season of war. They prepare the warriors for what they will face upon the battlefield, perhaps even death.

Both the Sweeping of the Roads and the sacrificial ritual to *Tezcatlipoca* in Toxcatl have many similarities beyond the use of an *ixiptla*. Both have links to warfare. The Sweeping of the Roads ushers in the coming season of war, while *Tezcatlipoca*'s ritual commemorates the perfect warrior. Both festivals also conclude with the remainder of the *ixiptla* "gazing" over the city in protection. The head of *Tezcatlipoca*'s *ixiptla* is placed on the *tzompantli* while *Toci*'s skin is stretched on a wooden frame at her temple. The embodiment of the immanent deity remains in a role of guarding his/her worshippers.

By personifying the god, the *teotl ixiptla* manifested the god among their worshippers. *Tezcatlipoca* walked among his practitioners, providing relief from the uncertainty and anxiety that permeated the *Mexica*'s existence. *Toci* allowed the women in her entourage to assume a role that was beyond their reach except for the few days of the year during her ritual.

The use of a *teotl ixiptla* in sacrifice was necessary through the act of consumption. In sacrifice the act of eating, both by gods and humans, represented sacrifice elevating the victim to a divine status. Only a god was worthy of being offered to a god, "thus, the divine was brought to earth and the human raised in bloody and fetid (for after a while the skins smelled) transubstantiation," (Sanday, *Divine Hunger: Cannibalism as a Cultural System*, 172). The god consumed the heart of the victim in a renewal of himself or herself. Drinking the blood provided the necessary nourishment to the god, keeping the *teotl* of the god in balance with the cosmos.



The utilization of an *ixiptla* during sacrificial ritual allowed the deity to be present among their practitioners. The death of the *ixiptla* rejuvenated the deity through a ritualized death that staved off the decaying nature of life itself. By sacrificing a god to the god him/herself it increased the effectiveness of the sacrifice. If, as I have proposed, Moctezuma intended to sacrifice Cortés as an *ixiptla* to *Quetzalcoatl*, he had laid out his groundwork by sending *Quetzalcoatl's* sacred regalia to Cortés. Cortés bore a striking resemblance to *Quetzalcoatl*, with his light skin and beard. He had aspects that priests would look for in choosing a victim to be transformed into an *ixiptla*. Moctezuma had presented Cortés with the necessary sacred regalia to take the first step in the transformation that would consecrate him in his new role. Unlike the traditional understanding given to Moctezuma's ambassador's warning of the arduous journey, if we employ the lordly speech tradition of *tecpillahtolli* to the speech, Moctezuma was formally inviting Cortés to Mexico-Tenochtitlan. This was the next step needed for the transformation. All that was necessary to complete it was Cortés' arrival, ritual bathing and naming, as well as teaching him the specific ritual acts they wanted him to perform leading up to his sacrifice.

The use of an *ixiptla* deepens many aspects of sacrificial ritual. However, not all gods always called for human sacrifice in their worship. *Quetzalcoatl* traditionally was one such god. As *Quetzalcoatl* is portrayed as the one *Mexica* god who did not want humans sacrificed to him, why would Moctezuma send Cortés *Quetzalcoatl's* regalia? This would seem to negate the argument that Moctezuma intended Cortés to become *Quetzalcoatl's* *ixiptla*. This question can be answered by deciphering the many guises of who *Quetzalcoatl* was to the *Mexica*.

## Chapter 4: The Many Guises of *Quetzalcoatl*

Scholars have been divided as to whether Moctezuma thought Cortés was the *Mexica* deity *Quetzalcoatl* returning to claim his place as ruler of his people. The fundamental issues for this debate lie within the complex nature of who and what *Quetzalcoatl* represents to the *Mexica*. There are many layers to the deity, as well as many manifestations of *Quetzalcoatl* throughout the history of Mesoamerica. He is the wind, a creator god<sup>19</sup>, a priest king and a title given to priests. To fully understand the claim that Moctezuma believed that Cortés might be *Quetzalcoatl*, or not, we must unpack the many guises of who *Quetzalcoatl* was to the *Mexica*.

*Quetzalcoatl*'s name translates into “the feathered serpent.” He is usually depicted as a sinuous rainbow snake bedecked in feathers with a horned head. The deepest roots of the deity the *Mexica*'s call *Quetzalcoatl* date to depictions of the feathered serpent found among the Olmecs<sup>20</sup> who date from 2000 BCE to CE 250, though he was not known by that name among the Olmec. The Olmecs are considered by many to be Mesoamerica's first civilization; according to Muriel Porter Weaver, they were the first Mesoamerican culture to develop cities, large stone sculptures, colossal heads<sup>21</sup>, long distance trade, and what appears to be the first truly state religion with the worship of gods and large public ceremonies (53). There is also recent evidence that they may have developed the first

---

<sup>19</sup> As the wind god, when taking human form, *Quetzalcoatl* was known as *Ehecatl*.

<sup>20</sup> Olmec is a Nahuatl name, which means rubber and not the original name of this culture.

<sup>21</sup> Olmec giant heads look faintly Asian and are more commonly referred to as “baby faces.”

writing system in Mesoamerica. The archaeological evidence of *Quetzalcoatl* has deep roots in this culture. Michael Stirling, the original excavator of La Venta, the Olmec capital from BCE 1200 to BCE 900, found the oldest known depiction of the feathered serpent on Monument 19 (FAMSI 2007). The feathered serpent is prominently displayed on the Feathered Serpent Pyramid in Teotihuacán, as well.<sup>22</sup>

The worship of the plumed serpent reached its greatest height during the Mesoamerican Classic period CE 250 to CE 850 (Gossen, “From Olmecs to Zapotistas: A Once and Future History of Souls,” 558). Within the Classic Period, the Toltecs raised *Quetzalcoatl* to the height of his veneration in Tula, their capital city in the Mexico Valley Basin. In Tula/Tollan *Quetzalcoatl* manifested in human form as the priest/king *Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl*. This avatar of the god was “the exemplary human representative of the deity’s power and authority on earth” (Carrasco, “Quetzalcoatl’s Revenge: Primordium Application of Aztec Religion,” 89). Although shrouded in myth, the *Mexica* claimed that *Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl* was an extraordinary ruler. Tales that have been interwoven into *Mexica* mythology state that he banned human sacrifice, through love for his people, which led to his downfall at the hands of representatives of *Tezcatlipoca* who wanted to reinstate human sacrifice. *Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl* sacrificed butterflies, snakes and quails instead of humans. Several sorcerers<sup>23</sup>, reputedly sent by, or possibly the

---

<sup>22</sup> The pyramid is located at the back of the Ciudadela and was constructed in CE 400 and “[T]he main motif in both tableros and taludes [an architectural form combining rectangular (tablero) and trapezoid (talud) panels] at the pyramid were undulating feathered serpents, depicted in profile and having rattles on the ends of their tails...” (Sugiyama, *Project Temple of Quetzalcoatl*, 1996). It has also been proposed that the 200 warriors found buried at the base of the pyramid with their hands tied behind their backs were sacrificed as possible honored soldiers dedicated to the feathered serpent cult.

<sup>23</sup> The term sorcerers here may refer to *Tezcatlipoca*’s priests as the Spanish referred to the priests as sorcerers, magicians and devils. However, along with priests, the *Mexica* culture also had shaman and sorcerers who were fringe members of society and assisted the populace with needs that the priests did not

manifestation of, his rival *Tezcatlipoca*, decided to brew up some *pulque*, fermented maguey cactus juice, to intoxicate *Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl*. While drunk he committed a sexual taboo, either incest with his sister *Quetzalpetlatl* or intercourse with a priestess (*Codex Vienna*). Breaking this taboo caused him (Carrasco, “Uttered from the Heart: Guilty Rhetoric among the Aztecs,” 16-17) to resolve to leave Tollan with the followers he could gather. They left in the year *Ce Acatl*, One Reed. *Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl* vowed to return to his beloved city in the year *Ce Acatl* to resume his throne, once he had done his penance. There are various traditions of *Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl*'s departure from Tula. Many contend that he left to the east. *Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl* immolated himself after his departure but his heart rose into the heavens to transform itself into the morning star<sup>24</sup> (Sanday, *Divine Hunger: Cannibalism as a Cultural System*, 170). What is known is that the kingdom of the Toltecs quickly collapsed after *Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl*'s departure.

The Mayans of Chichen Itza, an impressive city in the Yucatan Peninsula that was occupied from 514 CE until 1194 CE, had ties to the collapsed Toltec Empire. According to the Mayan mythology, a new ruler whom they called *Kulkukan* came from Tula. *Kulkukan*'s name means “feathered serpent” in Mayan. However, representations of *Quetzalcoatl/Kulkukan* in Mayan society are found as early as the fourth century with a mask that was worn by and buried with a fourth-century ruler of Tikal known as “Blue Green Knot”[1] (Anawalt 1990: 303). Scholars, such as Carrasco, proposed that *Kulkukan* may be a direct borrowing of *Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl* from Tollan (Carrasco,

---

address. *Tezcatlipoca* was also the god of sorcerers. Therefore, it is difficult to determine if the Spanish are referring to priests or practitioners of magic, such as shaman or sorcerers.

<sup>24</sup> The explanation of *Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl*'s death is not consistent within this hero-tradition mythology. Some depictions have his heart turning into Venus, the Morning Star, which is often iconographically used to designate *Quetzalcoatl*, the deity. Others have him sailing away across the eastern sea.

“Quetzalcoatl’ Revenge: Priomordium Application of Aztec Religion,” 311). In 1000 CE, a new ruler migrated to Chichen Itza from Teotihuacán in the west. He brought his followers to defeat the champions of the city and claim it as their own. This ruler was also known as *Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl*.

The *Mexica* rulers “supposed that [*Topiltzin*] *Quetzalcoatl* brooded in a faraway place patiently waiting to reclaim his imperial right,” (Sanday, *Divine Hunger: Cannibalism as a Cultural System*, 170). *Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl*’s vow to return weighed heavily upon the subsequent rulers of his fallen empire. Centuries later, the *Mexica* utilized aspects of the Toltec empire to legitimize their claim to leadership in the Mexico Basin and they adhered to the belief that *Topiltzin* would return in the year of his birth and death, *Ce Acatl*. *Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl* represented *Quetzalcoatl*, the deity and became conflated with him in literary accounts of *Mexica* culture and religious beliefs. This confusion may be the foundation of the belief that Moctezuma believed Cortés was *Quetzalcoatl* returning to claim his empire.

*Quetzalcoatl*, the deity, was the most creative offspring of *Ometeotl*, the Creative Pair. According to Carrasco, “among his powers are the creation of human life, the ability to blow the sun into motion, the sovereignty over one of the cosmic eras, the creation of corn and pulque, and the organization of the universe,” (Carrasco *The Daily Lives of Aztecs: People of the Sun and Earth*, 88). This *Quetzalcoatl* held a special position of being the *Ometeotl*’s double, “the active agent of the high god.” His many feats were recorded in the *Mexica* cosmological myths.

*Quetzalcoatl*, in competition with his brother deity, *Tezcatlipoca*, created the succession of the four proceeding Suns, as described in the *Leyendos de Soles*, the

Legends of the Sun, depicted in the *Codex Chimalpopoca*. This is the first and most complete rendering of the complex tale described earlier in Chapter One, the *Development of Mexica Society*, wherein the two deities created and destroyed the four previous worlds and their inhabitants. The *Leyendos de Soles* illustrates the creative and destructive aspects of *Quetzalcoatl*.

He also is the initiator of human life within this Sun. *Quetzalcoatl* ventured into *Mictlan*, the land of the dead, to retrieve the bones of the ancestors. He won the bones from *Mictlantecuhtli*, Lord of the Dead, utilizing worms, bumblebees and honeybees to hollow out a solid sacred conch that *Mictlantecuhtli* set for *Quetzalcoatl* to blow four times in his realm (Bierhorst, *History and Mythology of the Aztecs: The Codex Chimalpopoca*, 145). At the Lord of the Dead's bidding, quail ground the bones into powder to inhibit *Quetzalcoatl* from leaving Mictlan with them. *Quetzalcoatl* performed autosacrifice, bleeding from his penis, to imbue life into the powdered bones, creating humans to worship the gods in this Sun.

As well as creating humans, *Quetzalcoatl* provided their main food staple. Corn provided the sustenance of the *Mexica* and was held most sacred. Although *Centeotl*, Young Maize Lord, was the deity of corn, *Quetzalcoatl* was the first to secure corn for the *Mexica*. The gods wanted food for their worshippers, to strengthen them.

*Quetzalcoatl* saw an ant carrying corn from the Food Mountain. He transformed himself into an ant and retrieved a kernel of corn from the mountain. The gods then chewed the corn and placed it upon man's lips (Bierhorst, *History and Mythology of the Aztecs: The Codex Chimalpopoca*, 146-147). This proved a great food for the worshippers of the gods. To free the corn from Food Mountain the *Tlalocs*, rain gods, and *Nanahuatl* worked

together. *Nanahuatl* destroyed the mountain with a great crack and the *Tlalocs* retrieved the corn. They assisted *Quetzalcoatl* in distributing the various corn kernels to the people.

The deity *Quetzalcoatl* was also the god of the *calmecacs*, the schools where priests were trained. As the god of “self-sacrifice and penance, of books, the calendar and the arts, the symbol of abnegation and of culture,” (Soustelle, *Daily Lives of the Aztecs on the Eve of the Spanish Conquest*, 171) his appointment as god of priestly education was a natural fit. Once a student finished his education, he could become a novitiate to any of the various priesthoods, which were all were dedicated to *Quetzalcoatl* (Soustelle, *Daily Lives of the Aztecs on the Eve of the Spanish Conquest*, 51-52). Between the ages of twenty and twenty-two the novitiate could choose to fully dedicate himself as a priest. *Quetzalcoatl*, as the deity of the priests, lent his name to the priests of the highest rank, the *Quetzalcoatl totec tlamacazqui* and the *Quetzalcoatl Tlaloc tlamacazqui*.

The *Quetzalcoatl totec tlamacazqui* and the *Quetzalcoatl Tlaloc tlamacazqui* were described as “respected like a lord” and

set apart and chosen to be a keeper of the god. The chief and great judges and all the nobles chose him and gave him the name *Quetzalcoatl*...the best were chosen to become the supreme pontiffs, who were called *quetzalcoalcoa* [plural for *Quetzalcoatl*], which means successors of *Quetzalcoatl*, (Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, 1: 299).

The *Quetzalcoatl totec tlamacazqui* and the *Quetzalcoatl Tlaloc tlamacazqui* were in charge of esoteric knowledge, construction and repair of temples, the ritual paraphernalia used by the priests, as well as the rituals themselves (Carrasco, *The Daily Lives of the Aztecs: People of the Sun and Earth*. 172). As the advisor of the *tlatoani* and the nobles, they also were influential in political decisions including marriages, dynastic ceremonies, alliances and wars.

The feathered serpent symbolized both fertility and kingship among the populous of Teotihuacan (Carrasco, *The Daily Lives of the Aztecs: People of the Sun and Earth*, 125). As the *Mexica* utilized ideas from the Toltecs to bolster their rulership it is not a far leap that they adopted the concepts of *Quetzalcoatl* that dated back to Teotihuacan as well. The lending of his name to the elite priests could also have developed from *Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl*. He was the embodiment of *Quetzalcoatl* on earth. Through his unique temperament and ritual preparation, the priest king “was understood to acquire the power of the deity and to be converted into the *nahual* or spokesman of the god,” (Carrasco, *The Daily Lives of the Aztecs: People of the Sun and Earth*, 88). He was *Quetzalcoatl’s teotl ixiptla*, his “living image,” as Clendinnen described, which did not have to die. The transformation into the spokesman of the god generated a new class of *Quetzalcoatl*, deity metamorphosed into priest-king, which in turn became a title for the highest rank of priest within *Mexica* society.

The conflation of the deity with the hero who ruled Tula can be seen in the *Mexica* dedication to a woman when she gave birth. The midwives ritualistically addressed the newborn as “verily Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl has cast thee, perforated thee,” (Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, 6:181). They then addressed the mother,

[H]ere the truth is verily now, here in the humble mound of dirt in the humble reed enclosure, the master, our lord the creator, the master Quetzalcoatl, flaketh off a precious necklace, placeth a precious feather, here on your neck, on your bosom...he placeth a precious necklace, the incomparable, wonderful, the precious, the rare (Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, 6:181).

On one hand, the priest-king *Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl* was invoked for the child, while *Quetzalcoatl* was invoked for the mother. This could be a convention that shortened the priest-king’s name. The mid-wife may also have been addressing the two different



aspects of *Quetzalcoatl*, as precise speech in a ritual situation was essential for the ritual to be efficacious. It is also possible that Sahagún and his informants mistranslated the ritual speech. However, the fact that both names were used in this context illustrates how scholars of the *Mexica* from Sahagún to present day could easily mistake the two, the deity and the priest-king, for each other. If scholars could confuse the priest, the priest-king and the deity, how much difficulty must Cortés have had in deciphering who *Quetzalcoatl* was?

The sacrifices that were offered to the deity and the priest-king differed as well. *Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl* forbade human sacrifice during his reign in Tula. He sacrificed quails, pigeons, butterflies, snakes and grain. This led to his downfall as the priests/sorcerers wanted to re-establish human sacrifice so the gods would obtain their proper worship. The *Mexica* remembered *Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl* but sacrificed more to the deity, *Quetzalcoatl*. Cholula, the city dedicated to *Quetzalcoatl*, maintained cages of men and boys held and fattened them for sacrifice so “their flesh could be eaten,” (Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 203). Cholula was the center of *Quetzalcoatl* worship in the Mexico Basin at the time of the Conquest. The Temple of *Quetzalcoatl* was the largest pyramid in the world. While there were other temples to the *Mexica* deities, Díaz does not specify which deity the sacrificial victims were intended for.

In Mexico-Tenochtitlan, the *Templo Mayor* was the central temple of worship. The Temple of *Quetzalcoatl* shared the central temple complex with the *Templo Mayor*. Cortés described the Temple of *Quetzalcoatl* as circular in form whose entrance was shaped as a “dragon’s mouth” that brimmed with sharp teeth and dripped with blood, mimicking the grinning face of the feathered serpent. This “hellish” mouth opened into a

room that held implements of sacrifice and “other abominations of fearful import,” (Gómara, *Cortès: The Life of the Conqueror by his Secretary*, 165). Again, sacrifice of humans is not specified but implied. If the *Mexica* were merely sacrificing quails, pigeons and grains to *Quetzalcoatl*, the Spanish reaction would not have been as severe as their descriptions of other rituals that included human sacrifices.

A sacrifice to *Quetzalcoatl* held in Cholula occurred on February 3<sup>rd</sup>. Forty days prior to the feast the merchants procured a man “who was flawless of hands and feet, without a stain or blemish, nor one-eyed, nor with a cloud in his eye, nor lame, nor lacking one hand, nor crippled, nor with bleary eyes, nor drooling, nor lacking teeth,” (Durán, *Book of the Gods and Rites and the Ancient Calendar*, 131). The slave was the *teotl ixiptla* of *Quetzalcoatl* for forty days and dressed in the garments the temple image of *Quetzalcoatl* normally wore: a conical hat, a mantle, his jewelry, breechcloth, golden anklets and earrings, bird’s beak, and shield. He was revered as *Quetzalcoatl* by day and held in a cage by night to prevent his escaping. Adorned as the god and holding flowery bouquets, the *ixiptla* sang and danced throughout the city. Nine days before his appointed death, the *ixiptla* was greeted and advised of his demise by two venerable priests. On the appointed day, the *ixiptla* was sacrificed by having his heart excised and offered to the moon, his dead body rolled down the steps of *Quetzalcoatl*’s temple. The body was then cooked and shared by the principle merchants in a feast.

The *Mexica* codices did not specify that *Quetzalcoatl* received sacrifices that differed from the other deities either. The only differentiations in sacrifices mentioned are when referring to *Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl*. Durán, in his encyclopedic *Book of the Gods and their Rites*, provided a description of a sacrifice to *Quetzalcoatl* that echoed the

*Toxcatl* sacrifice to *Tezcatlipoca*. Durán even draws parallels between the two rituals: the parading around the city and dressing the *ixiptlas* in the deities' garments. The deity and the priest-king are often conflated. *Tolpitzin Quetzalcoatl* was the representative of the deity, his *teotl ixiptla*, while he ruled Tula. Durán provided an example of an *ixiptla* of *Quetzalcoatl* who was annually sacrificed. It is therefore possible that Moctezuma intended Cortés to be *Quetzalcoatl's ixiptla*, intending to sacrifice him in Mexico-Tenochtitlan's festival to *Quetzalcoatl*, instead of believing him to be *Quetzalcoatl* returned.

After sifting through the many guises of *Quetzalcoatl* and separating references to *Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl* from the deity, it is easy to see why the two figures get confused when discussing who Moctezuma thought he was dealing with in Cortés. Writers in the sixteenth century proposed that Moctezuma believed that Cortés was *Quetzalcoatl* returning to claim his empire. This belief has been carried forward through five hundred years of writing on the *Mexica*. However, if the *Mexica* did not confuse the priest king, *Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl*, with their deity, they would not have viewed Cortés as the deity returning. Therefore, when Moctezuma sent Cortés *Quetzalcoatl's* regalia, he could have intended to transform Cortés into a *teotl ixiptla* to be sacrificed to *Quetzalcoatl* when Cortés arrived in Mexico-Tenochtitlan. To further examine Moctezuma's intentions, let us explore the interactions between Moctezuma and Cortés in greater detail.

## Chapter 5: The Interaction of Moctezuma and Cortés

How Moctezuma treated Cortés upon the arrival of the Spaniards in Mesoamerica is the crux of the debate as to whether Moctezuma thought Cortés was *Quetzalcoatl*, the deity, returned or if he intended Cortés to be a *teotl ixiptla* to be sacrificed to *Quetzalcoatl*. To break this discussion down to the most basic components, we will explore Moctezuma's rise to power as the *Mexica tlatoani*, his religious beliefs, the gifts he sent to Cortés and the Spaniards, and what actions Cortés took as he traveled to Mexico-Tenochtitlan. Were Moctezuma's actions those of a frightened leader ready to abdicate his kingdom to a returning god or were they the actions of a Mesoamerican leader greeting a foreign emissary? What did the gifts Moctezuma sent to Cortés mean? What did Moctezuma mean in his "abdication" speech? Did Cortés know and exploit the idea that he was *Quetzalcoatl*, if that is how Moctezuma viewed Cortés? These are the questions we will answer when examining the interactions between Moctezuma and Cortés.

Moctezuma Xocoyotzin, "the angry lord" "the younger", was inaugurated in 11 Reed, (1503 CE) as the *tlatoani*, the first speaker, of the *Mexica*. To attain the rank of *tlatoani*, Moctezuma was chosen by a council of elders from among a group of four noblemen who had attained the rank of *tlacachcalcatl*, the man of the javelin-house, the highest rank of warrior among the *Mexica*. He was thirty-four years old (Soustelle, *Daily Lives of the Aztecs on the Eve of the Spanish Conquest*, 45). During his reign he conquered forty-four territories and consolidated the many conquests of his predecessor

(Carrasco *Aztec Ceremonial Landscapes*, 211). According to the *Codex Mendoza*, the *Mexica* adored Moctezuma and feared him,

and he was greatly feared by his vassals, and by his captains and leaders, that when they negotiated with him out of great esteem and fear that they had, none dared look him in the face, but they kept their eyes on the ground and their head bowed and inclined to the ground, (*Codex Mendoza*, IV:34).

Moctezuma was skilled in all the arts, both civil and military, by nature wise, a philosopher, and an astrologer. The Codex proposed he was the greatest *tlatoani* who lead the *Mexica*.

The role of *tlatoani* caused Moctezuma to transform himself into many *teotl ixiptla*, deity impersonators. When engaged in warfare, he wore *Huitzilopochtli's* attire, assuming the deities divine essence to lead his warriors to victory. The *tlatoani* embodied *Quetzalcoatl* when performing his priestly duties. He was mostly associated with *Tezcatlipoca*, however. The *tlatoani's* mandate to rule and his power to command, punish or reward were drawn from *Tezcatlipoca's* authority (Clendinnen, *Aztecs: An Interpretation*, 81). Perhaps it is this fluidity of divinity that the *tlatoani* believed in that influenced how Moctezuma viewed Cortés. It may also explain why he chose to behave as he did.

Cortés' expedition to Mesoamerica was not the first encounter the native peoples of Mesoamerica had experienced with the Spanish. Francisco Hernández de Córdoba explored the mainland west of Cuba in 1517. Juan de Grijalva's expedition to the same area occurred in 1518 and Bernal Díaz de Castillo accompanied both men on their expeditions. According to Díaz, the presence of the Spaniards in the Caribbean was well known to the coastal natives as they greeted Hernández's men with chants of "Castilian,"

(Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 21). Moctezuma placed men along the coast to watch and report on the Spanish during de Grijalva's expedition when they landed on the east coast (Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 35-36). He sought to gather as much information about these foreigners as possible. Moctezuma had his informants draw pictures of the Spaniards, their clothes, their ships, animals and arms. He wanted to know their customs, manner of dressing, and eating habits, as well as their military strengths. Utilizing the information gathered by his men, as well as the information network developed among local leaders, Moctezuma had extensive intelligence on the Spanish when Cortés landed near Cempoala on the eastern coast in April, 1519.

The information relayed back to Moctezuma may have been to Cortés' advantage, as he possessed a keen sense of how to manipulate people and events to his benefit, though it is debatable how much he was aware of *Mexica* customs and religious beliefs. Cortés needed a decisive victory over a land full of wealth for the Spanish Crown in order to solidify his precarious political standing in Spain.<sup>25</sup> To achieve this, Cortés manipulated not only the Spanish under his command but the native *caciques*, leaders, he encountered. When warned by the Tlaxcalans not to trust Moctezuma's vassals, Cortés stated

[W]hen I saw the discord and animosity between these two peoples I was not a little pleased, for it seemed to further my purpose considerably; consequently I might have the opportunity of subduing them more quickly, for, as the saying goes, 'divided they fall.' ... (Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, 70).

---

<sup>25</sup> Cortés knew that he did not have Governor Velazquez of Cuba's political support for this expedition. Due to his precarious political standing, Cortés needed to convince Charles V of Spain that conquering these new lands was the best course of action.

After the Spanish arrived in Cempoala Cortés consolidated his human resources. He “rescued” the shipwrecked Spanish sailor Gerónimo de Aguilar from his seven-year captivity among the Yucatan Maya and acquired Doña Marina, La Malinche, a woman of noble birth who was given to Cortés along with nineteen other women. Doña Marina and Aguilar’s contributions as translators were invaluable to Cortés.

With the language barrier conquered, Cortés could focus on consolidating his followers and took several steps to prevent a mutiny by his men. He started to lose control of the men under his command when he discovered that several sympathizers of Velásquez wanted to return to Cuba. He scuttled all but one of the ships, which he could use to communicate directly with the court in Spain. He brought the men together and offered them an alternative to continuing under the commission created in Cuba with Velásquez. If the Spaniards founded a town and settled down, the commission would be negated. Cortés and his cohort of men founded the town of La Villa Rica de la Vera Cruz. This allowed them to legally break the charter created by Velásquez, the Cuban governor, and declared Cortés as the Viceroy of New Spain, entitled to a share of the spoils of conquest equal to the Royal Fifth. By breaking with Velásquez, the men would not have to pay him, thus increasing their shares as well. Many of Velásquez’s sympathizers allied with Cortés. Those who did not were placed under house arrest in Villa Rica by the *acalde*, the mayor.

While Villa Rica was built, Cortés strengthened his relations with the neighboring *caciques* through political maneuvering. He had the *El Requirimiento* of 1513<sup>26</sup>, the Spanish Requirement, read to all the native groups:

---

<sup>26</sup> The *Requirimiento* also served as justification for forcing reluctant native groups to convert to Christianity. However, Cortés used it as a tool in his negotiation to gather allies against Moctezuma and the

His Majesty and I, in his name, will receive you...and will leave your women and children free, without servitude so that with them and with yourselves you can freely do what you wish...and we will not compel you to turn Christian. But if you do not do it...with the help of God I will forcefully enter against you, and I will make war everywhere and however I can, and I will subject you to the yoke and obedience of the Church and His Majesty, and I will take your wives and children, and I will make them slaves...and I will take your goods, and I will do to you all the evil and damages that a lords may do to vassals who do not obey or receive him. And I solemnly declare that the deaths and damages received from such will be your fault and not that of His Majesty, nor mine, nor of the gentlemen who came with me. (Restall, *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest*, 87)

This document was read in Spanish to the natives until Cortés' translators could render the document into Nahuatl. Once the *caciques* understood *El Requirimiento* they opened a dialogue with Cortés about accepting Charles V of Spain as their lord. Cortés first learned of Moctezuma when speaking with the ruler of Teudilli. Cortés tried to persuade the *cacique* of Charles V's goodness when the ruler replied

Cortés should know that the Lord Moctezuma was no less a king and no less good; rather, Teudilli was astonished to learn that there should be another such great prince in the world; but, since such was the case, he would send word to Moctezuma to learn his pleasure toward the ambassador and the embassy, for Teudilli trusted that his lord, in his clemency, would not only be pleased with the message, but would reward the messenger, (Gómara, *Cortés: The Life of the Conqueror by his Secretary*, 57).

Teudilli sent messengers to Moctezuma in Mexico-Tenochtitlan that included everything he had seen and been told by Cortés. His message included that the Spanish suffered from a heart disease that could only be cured by gold.

Moctezuma utilized long established Mesoamerican courtly gestures in his communication with Cortés. Moctezuma sent ambassadors to Cortés to relay that he was willing to assist the Spanish in any way possible, including providing the cure they

---

*Mexica*. The debate continues over whether his new allies understood the document or superficially complied with the religious dictates as a means to overthrow Moctezuma and the Triple Alliance.



sought for their illness, on the condition that they not proceed to Mexico-Tenochtitlan (Gómara, *Cortès: The Life of the Conqueror by his Secretary*, 59). Moctezuma plead illness for his own absence and sent gifts of “almost a thousand *pesos de oro* and as many cotton garments, such as they wear,” (Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, 69). Sahagún described how Moctezuma also presented Cortés with

array of Quetzalcoatl: a serpent feather head fan; a plaited neckband of precious green stone beads in the midst of which lay a golden disc; and a shield with [bands of] gold crossing [other bands of] sea shells, [with] spread quetzal feathers about the lower edge and [with] a quetzal feather...the array of Tezcatlipoca—the headpiece of feathers, with stars of gold; and his golden shell earplugs; and a necklace of sea shells...the adornment of Tlalocan: the headdress of quetzal and heron feathers, replete with quetzal feathers...and green stone were his ear plugs...the array of this same Quetzalcoatl was yet another thing; the pointed ocelot cap, with pheasant feathers; a very large green stone at the top...and round, turquoise [mosaic] earplugs, from which the hanging curved sea shells fashioned of gold; and a plaited green stone neck band in the midst of which there was likewise a golden disc...(Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, 12:11-12).

Cortés accepted the gifts, held a presentation of the Spanish guns and cannons to impress the ambassadors and on August 16, 1520, proceeded to embark for the capital city, protesting that as the representative of King Charles, he could not leave without meeting with Moctezuma.

Moctezuma sent his brother to meet with Cortés to dissuade him from traveling further on the arduous journey to Mexico-Tenochtitlan. He gifted Cortés with three thousand *pesos de oro*, describing the journey as filled with horrible food and difficult roads, (Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, 79). Moctezuma’s brother explained that Moctezuma would deliver an annual tribute of a *centrum quid* to Cortés, on the coast or anywhere he desired, if Cortés would abandon traveling further inland. I have been unable to find a description of similar gifts given to other native political leaders that includes ritual regalia. However, these gifts were given to Cortés in the *Mexica* traditional political

manner. Moctezuma implied his great wealth and political power through the extravagant gifts he offered Cortés. The amount of wealth distributed to Cortés is similar to the Indonesian “Big Men” who would go into debt to give grandiose gifts to their vassals in order to secure future favors. Moctezuma did not go into debt for his gifts, but he may have sent such large amounts to indicate how great a leader he was, how wealthy and as a measure to secure “aid” from Cortés in the future. The description of the difficulties of the journey would fall within the ritualized manner of speech that the *tlatoani* and other Mesoamerican leaders engaged in. Therefore, the arduous journey was the opposite and Moctezuma was inviting Cortés to come to Mexico-Tenochtitlan.

Cortés had every intention of traveling to Mexico-Tenochtitlan. He replied asking Moctezuma’s brother to

beg Moctezuma on my behalf to acquiesce to my journey, because no harm would come of it to his person or his land, rather, it would be to his advantage, and that once I had seen him, should he still not wish me to remain in his company, I would then return, and that we could better decide between ourselves in person how Your Majesty was to be served than through ambassadors, even if they were men in whom we placed the utmost confidence, (Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, 80).

Cortés declined again on the grounds that diplomatically he must meet with Moctezuma in order to fulfill his duties as a vassal to the King of Spain. This illustrates that Cortés lacked the knowledge of both *huehuehtlahtolli*, lordly speech, and the Mesoamerican gift giving tradition among political leaders.

Cortés manipulated rumors of unrest to further consolidate his conquest of the *Mexica*. Along his journey Cortés learned of discontent among various towns under control of the Triple Alliance. He wove a tangled web of intrigue recruiting the lords of the towns, such as Quiahuitxtlan and Tlaxcala to ally with the Spaniards against the

*Mexica*. During the first encounter with the Tlaxcala, a Spanish horse was killed. This distressed Cortés as the advantage of the natives thinking the animals were immortal was now lost (Gómara, *Cortés: The Life of the Conqueror by his Secretary*, 99). The Tlaxcalans sent a series of gifts to test the Spaniards' being and intent, according to Spanish sources. They sent five slaves whose flesh the Spanish would eat if the Spaniards were gods; incense and feathers, implements of *Quetzalcoatl*, if the Spanish were benevolent gods; and fowl, berries, and bread if they were but men (Gómara, *Cortés: The Life of the Conqueror by his Secretary*, 105). Gómara reported Cortés chose the fowl, berries, and bread to prove the Spanish were mere mortals. As Cortés' biographer, Gómara implied that this indicated that Cortés had no intention for his allies to believe he was a deity. However, it is unclear if Cortés knew that the *Mexica* were testing his divinity. Several descriptions, including Sahagún and Bernal Díaz, indicate that the Spanish were repulsed by the blood sacrifices and especially with the blood in the food. Cortés' decision to eat the food indicating he was "mortal" was probably a simple case of eating the more palatable food presented to the Spanish. This incident was then woven into the growing literary genre that Cortés was *Quetzalcoatl*. With the intricate network of *pochtecas*, merchants who provided intelligence to Moctezuma and other native leaders, constantly relaying information regarding the Spanish, it is unclear how Moctezuma was not guaranteed to not know Cortés' intent not to be deified.<sup>27</sup>

Moctezuma utilized means other than monetary to prevent Cortés from arriving in Mexico-Tenochtitlan. He sent "magicians" to block Cortés' advancement. They left the capital city with the intent to cast spells to drive Cortés back to the coast. However,

---

<sup>27</sup> This entire debate over the use of the food to establish divinity occurs within the assumption that 1) the *Mexica* thought Cortés was *Quetzalcoatl*, even for a short time, and 2) that Cortés was aware of the significance of his actions within the *Mexica* religious framework.

according to León-Portilla (53), *Tezcatlipoca*, in the guise of a youth appeared to prevent them from fulfilling their mission. They returned to Mexico-Tenochtitlan and reported their encounter to Moctezuma. Moctezuma then plotted to have Cortés assassinated. Cortés discovered the plot and confronted the assassins. The assassins pleaded to Cortés that they were forced into their role by Moctezuma's allies in Chulua who were supported by a garrison of fifty thousand warriors (Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, 74). The assassins begged Cortés' forgiveness and allied themselves with the Spanish to save their women, children and belongings.

Moctezuma's use of "sorcerers" and assassination attempts can be interpreted as attempts to prevent Cortés from arriving in Mexico-Tenochtitlan. This would prevent Cortés from fulfilling his transformation into a *teotl ixiptla*, from becoming the sacrificial victim to *Quetzalcoatl*. However, the "magicians" can also be viewed as Moctezuma's attempt to place Cortés within the *Mexica* political and religious understanding. Moctezuma needed to have these anomalous foreigners within his control to accomplish Cortés' final transformation into a sacrificial victim.

However, Cortés was unaware of Moctezuma's intent and continued with his plans to conquer this new land and its resources. Cortés gathered allies from among the native leaders who were discontented with Moctezuma or the Triple Alliance. When he left Cempoala Cortés counted the fifty thousand natives of that region as loyal subjects of the Spanish Crown (Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, 50). He had recruited four hundred men from Cempoala and three hundred from the neighboring Yztaemestitan (Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, 60). However, Cortés developed his greatest alliance with the Tlaxcalans, who were never subjects of the Triple Alliance. After fierce hand-to-hand combat

between the Tlaxcalan warriors and the Spanish, Cortés negotiated with Sintengal and fifty Tlaxcalan leaders to accept them as “vassals of Spain” and ally with them against the Triple Alliance for they “had lived in freedom and independence from time immemorial and had always defended,” (Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, 63-64). Five or six thousand Tlaxcalans accompanied Cortés on his entrance to Mexico-Tenochtitlan (Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, 72). Cortés arrived at the causeway to the capital city on November 8, 1519 where Moctezuma greeted him.

The first face-to-face interaction between Moctezuma and Cortés was conducted in the formal *Mexica* manner; Moctezuma and his entourage met with Cortés, Moctezuma welcomed Cortés with a formal speech and, in a private meeting between the two leaders, Moctezuma addressed both his and Cortés’ mortality. Two hundred barefoot lords escorted Moctezuma upon Cortés’ arrival. The procession stretched two-thirds of a league along the causeway. Cortés attempted to embrace Moctezuma but Moctezuma’s escorts prevented Cortés from touching him (Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, 85).

Accompanied by his brother, Moctezuma introduced Cortés to all of the lords in attendance. Moctezuma and Cortés exchanged gifts of necklaces and then separated from their entourages. Moctezuma lead Cortés to a large, well-appointed house and had Cortés sit upon a rich throne. After ensuring Cortés’ companions were settled in, Moctezuma returned to Cortés with an array of treasures and said

For a long time we have known from the writings of our ancestors that neither I, nor any of those who dwell in this land, are natives of it, but foreigners who came from very distant parts; and likewise we know that a chieftain, of whom they were all vassals, brought our people to this region. And he returned to his native land and after many years came again, by which time all those who had remained were married to native women and had built villages and raised children. And when he wished to lead them away again they would not go nor even admit him as their chief; and so he

departed. And we have always held that those who descended from him would come and conquer this land and take us as their vassals. So because of the place from which you come, namely, from where the sun rises, and the things you tell of the great lord or king who sent you here, we believe and are certain he is our natural lord, especially as you say that he has known of us for some time. Be assured we shall obey you and hold you as our lord in place of that great sovereign of whom you speak; and in this there shall be no offense or betrayal whatsoever. And in all the land that lies in my domain, you may command as you will, for you shall be obeyed; and all that we own is for you to dispose of as you choose...(Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, 85-86).

Moctezuma continued his speech refuting the rumors that his palaces and household items were made of gold and he himself was a god. He lifted his garments, showing his body to Cortés and said "...[S]ee that I am of flesh and blood like you and all other men, and I am mortal and substantial. See how they have lied to you..." (Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, 86). Moctezuma's insistence that both men were "of flesh and blood" clearly indicates that Moctezuma did not think that Cortés was *Quetzalcoatl*. Moctezuma thought Cortés was a mortal man! Moctezuma then concluded that he possessed some ancestral items of gold that he was willing to give to Cortés, but his houses were made of lime, stone and clay, not the precious metal Cortés sought.

Cortés decided to change the power structure in Mexico-Tenochtitlan. Cortés received word that the captain he left in charge of Vera Cruz attacked Qualpopoca, chief of Almeria, a town under Moctezuma's protection, after Qualpopoca declared his wish to become a vassal of Charles V and then killed two of the Spanish who went to Almeria in response. The Spanish razed Almeria, destroying it with fire. Cortés was informed that Qualpopoca acted upon Moctezuma's orders and escaped the destruction of Almeria. For six days, Cortés viewed the wonders of Mexico-Tenochtitlan and concluded that Moctezuma must be imprisoned for the safety of the Spaniards in the city, for "we

Spaniards are rather obstinate and persistent, and should we annoy him he might, as he is so powerful, obliterate all memory of us...I resolved, therefore, to take him and keep him in his quarters where I was, which was very strong,” (Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, 88). Thus, while the Spanish were ostensibly prisoners of Moctezuma, surrounded by up to 300,000 *Mexica* in Mexico-Tenochtitlan, the same Spaniards placed Moctezuma under house arrest.

Cortés took actions to strengthen his political position in Mexico-Tenochtitlan. He announced to the populace of the city that it was Charles V’s will that Moctezuma remain in power but he had to acknowledge that he was Charles’ vassal. Cortés further explained that to best serve Charles, the *Mexica* should continue to follow Moctezuma as they had before the Spaniards arrived (Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, 91). Cortés allowed Moctezuma to move amongst his various dwellings, both inside and outside the city, accompanied by five or six Spanish guards. Cortés spent his time with Moctezuma gathering information about the wealth and military strength of the Triple Alliance. He sought information on the location of mines and navigable rivers, which Moctezuma provided. Cortés learned of the territories under the Triple Alliance’s control and those that were not. He sent Spaniards out to explore the mines and territories, armed with maps Moctezuma had drawn up. They returned with descriptions of lands to settle as well as with jewelry, skins, featherworks, clothing and precious stones.

Not all *Mexica* accepted Cortés’ dominance, despite Moctezuma’s willingness to work with Cortés. The *Mexica* grew restless and Cacamazin, the lord of Aculucan, a close kinsman of Moctezuma, gathered a large force of warriors and prepared to rebel against the Spaniards. As he was allied with Cortés and had pledged to be Charles V’s

vassal, Moctezuma had Cacamazin captured, brought to Mexico-Tenochtitlan and turned him over to Cortés to illustrate that rebellion would not be tolerated (Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, 97-98). Cortés placed Cacamazin in irons and appointed his son, Cocuzcacin in charge of Aculucan. Several days after this, Moctezuma gathered a council of all the nearby chiefs and weeping, abdicated in favor of Cortés:

My brothers and friends, you know that for a long time you and your forefathers have been subjects and vassals of my ancestors and of me, and that you have been always well treated and honored by us, and likewise you have done all that loyal and true vassals are obliged to do for their rightful lords. I also believe that you have heard from your ancestors how we are not natives of this land, but came from another far away, and how they were brought by a lord who left them here, whose vassals they all were...He departed, saying he would return or would send such forces as would compel [his vassals] to serve him. You know well we have always expected him, and according to things this captain has said of the Lord and King who sent him here, I am certain, and so must you be also, that this is the same lord for whom we have been waiting, especially as he says that there they know of us. And because our predecessors did not receive their lord as they were bound, let us now receive him and give thanks also to our gods that what we have so long awaited had come to pass in our time...(Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, 99).

Moctezuma exhorted his vassals to obey Charles V and Cortés as his representative, rendering to them the services and tribute they had given to Moctezuma. Before Cortés and his notary public, the chiefs submitted themselves to Moctezuma's decree and became vassals of Charles V.

Cortés began gathering gold to send to Spain and removed "idols" from the *Mexica* temples against Moctezuma's advice. He also forbade human sacrifice, as it was most abhorrent to Charles V (Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, 107). He implemented many changes between November, 1519 and the following May, including setting up a cross in the central temple of Mexico-Tenochtitlan, the *Templo Mayor*, the Temple to *Huitzilopochtli*.



While Cortés continued to gather information to strengthen Spain's claim to Mesoamerica, strife was developing in Vera Cruz. In May, 1520, Cortés learned that Velásquez had sent a fleet from Cuba under Pánfilo de Narváez. It anchored in the port of San Juan. Cortés sent a friar and messengers to de Narváez who refused to allow them to return to Mexico-Tenochtitlan. Narváez sought to enlist the men of Vera Cruz to ally with Velásquez and rebel against Cortés. While he was not successful with the Spaniards, de Narváez succeeded in inciting the natives to rebellion (Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, 118). Cortés decided to confront de Narváez and reassure his native allies by his presence. He left Mexico-Tenochtitlan garrisoned by five hundred men with some guns and went to negotiate with de Narváez.

Moctezuma's allies utilized Cortés' departure from the capital to rebel against the Spaniards. Many of the Spaniards who remained in Mexico-Tenochtitlan were imprisoned and five or six of their native allies were killed while Cortés was away. However, upon Cortés' return, Moctezuma apologized for his people's actions for it "grieved him deeply as it did [Cortés] and that nothing had been done by his will and consent," (Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, 129). Cortés returned to Mexico-Tenochtitlan. However, on the second day of his return, the *Mexica* openly rebelled against the Spaniards, hurling stones, spears and arrows into the fortress. Cortés was wounded in the fighting, as were many of his companions. The *Mexica*, outnumbering the Spanish, fought in shifts to exhaust their enemy.

Moctezuma was unable to end the fighting between the *Mexica* and the Spaniards. Still under house arrest, accompanied by one of his sons, Moctezuma climbed to the roof of the fortress. He declared that he would address his captains to cease fighting. When he

reached the breastwork which ran out beyond the fortress, and was about to speak to them, he received a blow on his head from a stone; and the injury was so serious that he died three days later. [Cortés] told two of the Indians who were captive to carry him out on their shoulders to the people. What they did with him [Cortés did] not know; only the war did not stop because of it, but grew more fierce and pitiless each day, (Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, 132).

Thus ended the interaction between Moctezuma and Cortés.

The *Mexica* held their own and drove the Spaniards out of Mexico-Tenochtitlan on *La Noche Triste*, the Sad Night. Many Spaniards died, as did several of Moctezuma's sons and daughters. Cortés was gravely wounded and the treasure the Spanish had accumulated was lost in the depths of Lake Tezcoco. However, the Spanish, aided by a smallpox epidemic, regrouped with their Tlaxcalan allies and brigantine boats, lay siege to Mexico-Tenochtitlan and on August 13, 1521, the *Mexica* surrendered.

In the first chapter of the twelfth book of the *Florentine Codex*, Bernardino de Sahagún detailed omens foretelling the fall of the Triple Alliance that occurred as many as ten years prior to Cortés landing in Mesoamerica. The first was a “tongue of flame” across the sky. The comet lasted a year and caused great dread among the *Mexica*. The second occurred when the temple to *Huitzilopochtli* spontaneously caught fire. Water would not put the flames out. Third, a lightning bolt struck the temple to Xiuhtecutli. Fourth, a second comet streamed across the sky from west to east, reversing the path of the sun. Fifth, the water of Lake Tezcoco frothed and foamed up so that it flooded the houses. Sixth, an old woman was seen weeping about the city crying “O my beloved sons, now we are about to go!” (Sahagún, *Florentine Codex* 1:3). The seventh omen was an ashen crane caught in the hook of a fisherman on Lake Tezcoco. He presented the bird to Moctezuma. It had a mirror on its head, which reflected the heavens. Gazing deeper,

Moctezuma saw conquerors riding deer beyond the stars reflected in the mirror. When Moctezuma summoned priests to interpret the vision, the bird and mirror vanished. The eighth and final omen occurred as monstrous births, such as two-headed men who disappeared when Moctezuma beheld them.

The *Mexica* manipulated nature to their advantage. They were tied to the seasons for agricultural production. However they lived in a very harsh environment where they experienced almost seasonal floods and droughts. Several active volcanoes that produced earthquakes and eruptions also ring the Mexico Basin. Therefore, the *Mexica* sought ways to manipulate their environment both through man-made means, like dikes, canals and *chinampas*, as well as through religious means. They also sought divine assistance, as well. Many of their rituals were designed to please the gods to forestall natural disasters like famine, floods and crop failures. Unusual celestial occurrences, such as the two comets, would provoke fear and concern that they were not performing the rituals properly. The second comet, beginning at sunset and reversing the course of the sun was negating the power of *Huitzilopochtli*, the main *Mexica* deity. Even though Nanahuatzin immolated himself to transform himself into the Fifth Sun, *Huitzilopochtli* embodied the sun, accompanied by his warriors across the night sky. By reversing *Huitzilopochtli*'s daily course, the comet decreased his power to protect the world from spirits, sorcerers and monsters.

Lightning held many meanings for the *Mexica*. It was synonymous with speech and serpents in *Mexica* iconography. It was often used to represent *Quetzalcoatl*, the feathered serpent. By striking the temple, the lightning could be interpreted as *Quetzalcoatl*'s wrath. Fire destroying *Huitzilopochtli*'s temple also symbolized the

destruction of the *Mexica*. The hieroglyph of a burning temple symbolized the destruction of a town.

The ashen heron harkened back to the omens the *Mexica* priests sought when they chose the sight of Mexico-Tenochtitlan; the white frog, heron and fish. The mirror on its head linked it to *Tezcatlipoca*, Smokey Mirror. As the *tlatoani*'s right to rule derived from *Tezcatlipoca*, utilizing the mirror to presage the coming of armed conquerors legitimated the omen. The *Mexica* likened the Spanish horses to deer, as well, due to a lack of a similar animal in Mesoamerica.

However, these omens are not detailed in the existing codices contemporary with the conquest. They first appear in Sahagún's writings, begun approximately in 1540 and completed in the 1580s. As Sahagún worked with second generation survivors of the conquest who owed their political positions to the Spanish colonial system, the omens could be subjective and were possibly even added to the history. The events they described supported the legitimacy of the conquest. The subaltern's voice may not be ringing clearly through in this rendering as much as the voice of the dominant hegemonic society.

The same can be said of Moctezuma's two speeches, the first in private to Cortés and the second directed to his chieftains, formally abdicating. The speeches were delivered in Nahuatl, which Cortés did not understand. Doña Marina and Aguilar translated them first into Mayan and then into Spanish. As anyone who has played telephone knows, a sentence that is repeated several times rarely finishes the same as it began. The speech also seems very deferential. Matthew Restall proposed that Moctezuma utilized the stylized *Mexica* art form of *huehuehtlahtolli*, ancient discourse or

sayings of the elders. *Huehuehlahtollii* was taught in the *calmecacs* to all the elite children. A subset of *huehuehlahtolli*, and the form of speech utilized in Moctezuma's presence was *tecpillahtolli*, lordly speech. Restall described this as using sentences constructed upon the principles of reversal and indirection. Someone utilizing *tecpillahtolli* would not be blunt and direct but say the opposite of what they meant,

Thus Moctezuma's assertion that he and his predecessors were just safeguarding their rulership of the Mexica Empire in anticipation of Cortés' arrival is not to be taken literally. It is a rhetorical artifice meant to convey the opposite—Moctezuma's stature and multigenerational legitimacy—and to function as a courteous welcome to an important guest, (Restall, *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest*, 97-98).

The speech is best described as a royal *mi casa, es su casa* and not an abdication. Even Moctezuma's protestation that he is merely mortal could be interpreted as supporting his imperial status, especially in light of Moctezuma's multiple roles as *Huitzilopochtli*, *Quetzalcoatl* and *Tezcatlipoca's teotl ixiptla*.

A closer examination of the content of Moctezuma's speech also calls into question his intent. The leader he described to Cortés was the ancestral leader who conveyed the *Mexica* into the Mexico Basin. However, Moctezuma does not name him as *Quetzalcoatl*. Due to the symbolism of the leader's leaving and return, the leader has been interpreted as *Quetzalcoatl*. The man Moctezuma describes does not conform to the *Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl* cycle or to the creation myths of the deity *Quetzalcoatl*. The deity created humans during the Fifth Sun from a mixture of his blood and ground ancestral bones. He did not lead them on a pilgrimage to the Mexico Basin. *Huitzilopochtli*, embodied in the bundle carried by the priests, did. *Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl* was born in Tula. He did not lead his people there either. *Quetzalcoatl*, the deity, did not leave nor vow to return. *Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl* was driven out by *Tezcatlipoca's* priests but vowed

to return. Moctezuma's ancestral leader returned to find his people intermarried with the natives and settled into villages they had built. *Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl* either left by boat or immolated himself to transform into Venus, the morning star, depending upon the version of the story. He had not returned yet. The descendants of the Toltecs were still awaiting this event five hundred years later. Upon closer inspection, the leader Moctezuma spoke of does not conform to either of the known *Quetzalcoatl*s.

Another point to address in the interaction between Moctezuma and Cortés is why Moctezuma allowed Cortés to enter Mexico-Tenochtitlan. The city's populace was estimated between 200,000 to 300,000 people. Cortés had less than two hundred Spaniards and at most six thousand native allies with him. The Spanish forces were grossly outnumbered by a city of seasoned warriors. This could have lulled Moctezuma into a sense of security, even when he was placed under "house arrest." After all, he had freedom of movement about the city and to his country estates with only a handful of Spanish guards. When Cortés returned to Mexico-Tenochtitlan after meeting with de Narváez, he portrayed Moctezuma as fearful of the personal reprisal the *Mexica* rebellion would incur from Cortés. This seems out of place for someone who was a *tlacachcalcatl*, a man of the javelin house, the best warrior of an elite warrior society.

What were Moctezuma's intentions toward Cortés? Could Moctezuma's motivation have been curiosity about such a persistent foe? After all, Cortés would not be bought off with the gifts Moctezuma sent. He successfully eluded assassination attempts. Moctezuma's magicians could not drive him away with their spells. Perhaps Moctezuma simply wished to know this man and his intents. Did Moctezuma liken Cortés to a *teotl ixiptla*, an embodiment of Cortés' deity who through his own divine abilities had eluded

all of Moctezuma's traps? Was this a battle of the gods and Moctezuma felt he had to see the divine drama through to the end?

I believe that Moctezuma treated Cortés with the respect afforded to any foreign dignitary. Cortés' resemblance to *Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl* could have triggered Moctezuma's intent to transform Cortés into a *teotl ixiptla*. Therefore, Moctezuma included two sets of *Quetzalcoatl's* regalia among the first set of gifts he presented to Cortés. The further gifts Moctezuma sent were given in the traditional Mesoamerican manner of gifting foreign dignitaries. Moctezuma's admonitions to Cortés not to travel to Mexico-Tenochtitlan were actually a formal invitation to come, given in the manner of *huehuehlahtolli* and *tecpillahtolli*. Moctezuma also adopted this lordly speech style when giving his formal welcoming speech to Cortés. However, Cortés, untutored in this *Mexica* manner of speaking, misunderstood Moctezuma's intent. Moctezuma's employment of "sorcerers" and "magicians" were an attempt to bring an anomalous foreign threat, the Spaniards, into both his political and religious control, as the two were integrally intertwined. Moctezuma intended for Cortés to come to Mexico-Tenochtitlan. He also intended to spend time with Cortés to better understand the Spaniards. However, Moctezuma's ultimate intent was to sacrifice Cortés as a *teotl ixiptla* to Quetzacoatl, once Moctezuma's curiosity and political needs were met.

## Conclusion

Did Moctezuma believe Cortés was *Quetzalcoatl* or did he intend to sacrifice Cortés as a *teotl ixiptla*? This question is very hard to answer. Unfortunately, the primary documentation of Moctezuma's actions during the Conquest exists only from the Spanish point of view. The Spanish destroyed the majority of the *Mexica* Codices in their attempt to eradicate *Mexica* culture and religion. There are only eleven works remaining by *Mexica* authors, several of which were written after the conquest, such as the *Boturini* and *Chimalpopoca* Codices. These books are dedicated to *Mexica* culture and religion. When Moctezuma is mentioned in them, his name is linked with his military conquests or his actions during specific rituals. The codices do not detail what he was thinking or explain his actions during his interaction with Cortés. This hampers an interpretation of Moctezuma's behavior.

Scholars, such as myself, are left to sift through the ethnographic documentation of how a *tlatoani* was supposed to act, the religious rituals described in the codices and writings of the Spanish conquerors, and the *Mexica* cosmology recorded by the *Mexica* and the Spanish to draw our conclusions. We use analogies drawn from similar cultures to compare how they treated European conquerors. We rely upon archaeological evidence to point us in the proper direction. What we end up with in the end is speculation influenced by our own biases situated within Western thought and a literary genre that developed from this to answer the questions we pose. Did Moctezuma believe Cortés was



*Quetzalcoatl* returned? Did he send *Quetzalcoatl*'s two sets of regalia, along with *Tezcatlipoca* and *Tlaloc*'s to Cortés to ensure that this conquering god was properly arrayed when he entered Mexico-Tenochtitlan? Or, perhaps, Moctezuma's intention was to sacrifice Cortés and his companions to *Quetzalcoatl*, *Tezcatlipoca* and *Tlaloc* from the very beginning. There is no right or wrong answer to these questions. There is no "smoking gun" text or artifact, found so far, that definitively states what Moctezuma thought or believed. However, there may be a "smoking mirror." There is simply a carefully constructed but still speculative argument.

The *Mexica* strongly believed that their gods walked among them and influenced every aspect of their lives. The gods could appear as "apparitions" as evidenced in the story of Young *Tezcatlipoca* stopping the "magicians" from thwarting Cortés' advance from Cholula or they could be embodied in the flesh of a *teotl ixiptla*. All aspects of nature contained essences of the divine pantheon, from rain and the lakes they lived on to the volcanoes and mountains that surrounded them. Each social class had its patron deities. Individuals were also dedicated to specific deities at birth. It is easy to see that Moctezuma, from within this religious framework, could envision Cortés as protected by his own individual deity. Some Spanish certainly felt that they were ordained by their God to conquer the lands of the new world, as well as bring the "true faith" to the people who inhabited them. Others, such as Sepulveda, felt that the natives were incapable of being other than "natural slaves" to the Spanish and that conversion was a waste of time. However, did Moctezuma believe that Cortés was *Quetzalcoatl*, or even *Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl*, returned to claim his empire? This question is still debated in academia today.

Gananath Obeyesekere and Matthew Restall strongly argue that the apotheosis, deifying, of Cortés into *Quetzalcoatl*, was an error (Obeyesekere *The Apotheosis of Captain Cook: European Mythmaking in the Pacific*, 197-98, Restall 198). In his own letters to King Charles V, Cortés did not mention that Moctezuma thought he was *Quetzalcoatl*. In fact, *Quetzalcoatl* was not mentioned in Cortés' *Letters* at all. When Cortés identified a *Mexica* deity, Cortés referred to *Huitzilopochtli* almost exclusively (Cortés, *Letters from Mexico, passim*). This lack calls Cortés' apotheosis into question. I have established that Cortés' letters were written as military missives detailing his achievements to King Charles V. Cortés described how the Mesoamerican natives reacted to his arrival and the Spanish introduction of Catholicism. Cortés even lamented that the Tlaxcalans realized the horses were not immortal animals when they witnessed a horse die during battle (Gómara, *Cortés: The Life of the Conqueror by his Secretary*, 99). However, Cortés failed to mention that any Mesoamerican natives thought he was a god. Obeyesekere and Restall built upon this deficit in Cortés' writings to develop their contentions.

Using works by Renaissance scholar William Hamlin, Obeyesekere demonstrated that the suggestion that the indigenous people viewed conquering Europeans as "gods" was a deeply embedded European motif. Hamlin illustrated this proposal with several examples of European explorers' interactions with native populations. Jacques Cartier described the Canadian Indians as believing that he was God descended to heal them. According to Sir Francis Drake, who did not speak their language, the Mirowok Indians could not be persuaded that Drake and his shipmates were not gods when they presented the Mirowok with European goods. Captain John Smith reported that the Susquehanna

Indians had trouble restraining themselves from “adoring” Smith and his companions as gods. Obeyesekere further proposed that “Hamlin’s extensive documentation shows that Renaissance thinking was saturated with this myth model, both literally and as an extended trope to the extent that ‘European voyagers habitually perceived, interpreted, and represented these people within the confines of a thought universe so densely configured that scarcely any space remained for imaging alternative realities...’”<sup>28</sup> (Obeyesekere *The Apotheosis of Captain Cook: European Mythmaking in the Pacific*, 197-98). Obeyesekere summarized Hamlin’s argument that the more the Europeans protested they were not gods the more they bolstered the underlying myth that the natives viewed them this way. It perpetuated the apotheosis mythology that the Europeans were steeped in. While Cortés’ interactions with the *Mexica* occurred prior to the interactions detailed by Hamlin, the same device was utilized in deifying Cortés. The Europeans held this trope so deeply that it was applied to Cortés’ interactions during his conquest of Mesoamerica, even if Cortés did not propose the idea himself.

Restall pointed out that the apotheosis of Cortés appeared in Gómara’s biography of Cortés and Motolinía’s account of the conquest. Gómara alluded to Cortés’ deification during his discussion of Cortés confronting the Cholulan lords after their aborted assassination attempt. Gómara claimed the Cholulan lords confessed as they perceived Cortés as “like one of our gods, for he knows everything: it is useless to deny it,” (Gómara, *Cortès: The Life of the Conqueror by his Secretary*, 128). Cortés’ official biographer utilized the trope that Hamlin proposed was so deeply entrenched in the European psyche and literary styles.

---

<sup>28</sup> Quoted from William Hamlin, “Attributions of Divinity in Renaissance Ethnography and Romance, or Making a Religion of Wonder,” *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 24 (1992), pp. 415-47, p 418.

Restall continued his argument examining the use of the Nahuatl term *teules* to describe the Spanish. *Teules* has a similar connotation as *teotl*. Bernal Díaz de Castillo did not mention the origin or meaning of the Nahuatl term *teules*, which authors such as Motolinía and Sahagún translated as meaning gods. However, Motolinía, in Restall's interpretation, "seizes upon it as supposed evidence that Mexico's natives somehow anticipated the arrivals of the Spaniards—an anticipation that proved the Conquest was part of God's plan for the Americas," (Restall, *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest*, 113). Employing Motolinía and Sahagún's translation and interpretation of *teules*, Restall concluded that the Franciscans, among them Sahagún and Motolinía, invented the apotheosis of Cortés after the conquest (Restall, *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest*, 113). Why did these Catholic priests deify Cortés in the natives' eyes? Were they justifying the eradication of *Mexica* cultural and religious traditions by illustrating the "childlike" belief that Cortés was a returning *Mexica* god? Perhaps this bolstered the trusteeship role the priests assumed. The priests utilized this as another example of the diabolic and demonic aspects of the *Mexica* religion. Regardless of their intent, the priests' writings in the sixteenth century lead to the development of the literary genre many people are familiar with; that Cortés was viewed as *Quetzalcoatl* returning to claim his "Empire."

Contrary to Obeyesekere and Restall's interpretation of Cortés' apotheosis, Peggy Sanday maintained that Moctezuma believed that Cortés was *Quetzalcoatl* returned. She argued that Cortés' actions as he marched through Cholula supported Moctezuma's claim (Sanday, *Divine Hunger: Cannibalism as a Cultural System*, 170). Cholula was the seat of *Quetzalcoatl's* worship, so it was the best place to test Cortés' divinity. Cortés' ease at

discovering the assassination plot, massacre of the majority of the populace and destruction of *Quetzalcoatl's* Temple supported his connection to *Quetzalcoatl*. Only *Quetzalcoatl* or his representative could accomplish the feats that Cortés achieved. However, she also stated “Moctezuma II abdicated his leadership to the Spaniards and was murdered not long after. He had not convinced any significant portion of the Aztec nobility that the Spaniards were the sons and ambassadors of *Quetzalcoatl*,” (Sanday, *Divine Hunger: Cannibalism as a Cultural System*, 171). She further interpreted Cortés’ actions, cleansing the temples and banning human sacrifice, as a possible reinstatement of *Tolpitzin Quetzalcoatl's* rule for Tula. However, she argued that these same actions could be interpreted as an invasion of enemy gods bent on the destruction of the *Mexica* gods and the soul of the people.

Sanday further uses Robert A. Paul’s generative paradigm for the succession of kingly generation<sup>29</sup> to argue that Moctezuma had to abdicate to Cortés. Prefacing the abdication with the belief that Moctezuma envisioned himself as “the holder of *Quetzalcoatl's* status and believer in the prophecy of his return,” (Sanday, *Divine Hunger: Cannibalism as a Cultural System*, 192), Moctezuma had set himself up as the usurper to *Quetzalcoatl's* legitimate claim to the empire. Moctezuma elevated himself to the role of “king-god” in his own right. Sanday utilized Moctezuma’s abdication speech to support her claim. However, as demonstrated earlier, Moctezuma delivered this speech in the rhetorical style of *tecpillahtolli*, lordly speech (Restall, *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest*, 95-96). *Tecpillahtolli* was designed to convey the opposite of what was being

---

<sup>29</sup> Paul utilizes four succession roles, the order figure, the usurper, the nemesis or avenger, and the innocent heir who concludes the oedipal drama and the legitimate successor in Paul, Robert A. 1982 *The Tibetan Symbolic World*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pg 13-18.

said. Thus, Moctezuma's speech was meant to convey his legitimate right to rule, not as a confirmation that Cortés was a returning god.

David E. Stannard negated the "foolish, cowardly or naïve" interpretation of Moctezuma's welcoming of Cortés as well. Instead of viewing Moctezuma's action as accepting Cortés as *Quetzalcoatl* returned, Stannard argued that Moctezuma acted in accordance with normal *Mexica* protocols when receiving visiting ambassadors. The *Mexica* followed Mesoamerican political traditions that dictated "war was to be announced before it was launched, and the reasons for war were always made clear well beforehand. War was a sacred endeavor, and it was sacrilegious to engage in it with treachery or fraud," (Stannard, *American Holocaust: Columbus and the Conquest of the New World*, 76). As Stannard pointed out, Cortés had plainly announced several times that his intentions were to visit the *tlatoani*, not make war upon him. Cortés assured Moctezuma that "no harm would come of it to his person or his land, rather it would be to his advantage, and that once I had seen him, should he still not wish me to remain in his company, I would then return..." (Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, 80). With Cortés' intentions so clearly stated, Moctezuma followed standard etiquette and welcomed Cortés as an ambassador of peace. He provided Cortés and his companions with his own palace to live in while they resided in Mexico-Tenochtitlan. Moctezuma presented the Spaniards with gold, cloaks and precious featherwork items. He presided over elaborate feasts for his guests and escorted them through the wonders of his capital city. Moctezuma's actions echoed the diplomacy afforded to visiting European courtly officials in many ways.

I agree with Restall, Standard and Obeyesekere's interpretation of Moctezuma's actions in that he did not welcome Cortés as either *Quetzalcoatl* or *Tolpitzin Quetzalcoatl*. He offered Cortés multiple "fortunes" by *Mexica* standards not in an effort to prevent Cortés from arriving in Mexico-Tenochtitlan but as a formalized Mesoamerican political show of wealth and power. Moctezuma, according to Sahagún and León-Portilla, sent magicians to thwart Cortés' continued march to the heart of the Triple Alliance. However, the magicians are easily viewed as a religious attempt to bring Cortés and his companions within *Mexica* understanding and control. Moctezuma's speeches, while our current versions are filtered through multiple translations, were still presented in the rhetorical style of *tecpillahtolli*. Moctezuma treated Cortés as he would a visiting dignitary when the Spaniards finally arrived in Mexico-Tenochtitlan. However, Cortés was not treated as a returned god reclaiming his lost empire.

War provided the primary vehicle for acquiring victims for sacrificial rituals at their temples. Moctezuma and his allies outnumbered Cortés and his allies when they arrived in Mexico-Tenochtitlan. Due to his superior numbers, Moctezuma may have considered Cortés and his allies as prisoners of war. Among the *Mexica*, a warrior's goal was to end his life as a sacrifice. Many of these sacrifices assumed the role of *teotl ixiptlas*, deity impersonators. One of the main aspects of the victims' transformations included the donning of the gods' regalia. Moctezuma gifted Cortés with two sets of *Quetzalcoatl's* regalia, as well as one set of *Tlaloc* and *Tezcatlipoca's* regalia when his ambassadors first encountered the Spaniards. It is possible that Moctezuma sent the regalia with the intent to alter Cortés into a deity impersonator. It is just as possible that Moctezuma intended to simply sacrifice all of the Spaniards when he grew bored with

them, without affording them the honor of elevating them to a *teotl ixiptla*. The *Mexica* sacrificed many of the Spaniards during the war of conquest (Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, 256). However, this occurred after Moctezuma's death and within the structure of the war, following the normal *Mexica* protocol.

It is unclear from the documents that scholars currently have exactly what Moctezuma's intentions toward Cortés were. However, from Cortés' own writings, it is clear that Moctezuma did not consider Cortés the embodiment of *Quetzalcoatl* returning to claim a throne that Moctezuma, or his ancestors, had usurped. Perhaps Moctezuma believed that Cortés was under the protection of his own deity. It is clear that Moctezuma afforded Cortés all of the courtesies any visiting dignitary would enjoy and made several attempts to bring Cortés within the *Mexica* political and religious understanding. Perhaps he thought Cortés would be an ideal sacrifice to one of the *Mexica* gods, a *teotl ixiptla*, and all of his maneuverings were to bring Cortés to Mexico-Tenochtitlan to be sacrificed.



## **Bibliography**

- Aguilar-Moreno, Manuel. *Handbook to Life in the Aztec World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Anawalt, Patricia Rieff. "The Emperors' Cloak: Aztec Pomp, Toltec Circumstances." *American Antiquity* 55.2 (1990): 291-307.
- Arens, W. *The Man-Eating Myth: Anthropology and Anthropophagy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1979.
- Arnold, Philip P. *Eating Landscape: Aztec and European Occupation of Tlalocan*. Niwot: University of Colorado Press, 1999.
- Astor-Aguilera, Miguel. "Mesoamerican Communicating Objects: Maya Worldviews Before, During and After Spanish Conquest." Cecil, Leslie G. and Timothy W. Pugh. *Maya Worldview at Conquest*. Boulder: University of Colorado Press, 2009.
- Bell, Catherine. *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Bierhorst, John. *Ballads of the Lords of New Spain: The Codex Romances de los Senores de la Nueva Espana*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009.
- . *History and Mythology of the Aztecs: The Codex Chimalpopoca*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992.
- Broda, Johanna and David Carrasco. *The Great Temple of Tenochtitlan: Center and Periphery in the Aztec World*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.
- Brundage, Burr. *The Fifth Sun: Aztec Gods, Aztec World*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979.
- Carrasco, David and Eduardo Matos Moctezuma. *Moctezuma's Mexico: Visions of the Aztec World*. Boulder: University of Colorado Press, 2003.
- Carrasco, David. *Aztec Ceremonial Landscapes*. Niwot: University of Colorado Press, 1998.
- . *City of Sacrifice: the Aztec Empire and the Role of Violence in Civilization*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1999.
- . *Quetzalcoatl and the Irony of Empire: Myths and Prophecies in the Aztec Tradition*. Boulder: University of Colorado Press, 1992.
- . "Quetzalcoatl's Revenge: Primordium Application of Aztec Religion." *History of Religion* 19.4 (1980): 296-320.

- . The Daily Life of the Aztecs: People of the Sun and Earth. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2008.
- . "Uttered from the Heart: Guilty rhetoric among the Aztecs." History of Religions 39.1 (1999): 1-31.
- Castillo, Bernal Diàz de. The Conquest of New Spain. Trans. J.M. Cohen. London: Penguin, 1963.
- Clenidnnen, Inga. Aztecs: An Interpretation. Vol. Canto Edition. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Cortes, Hernan. Letters from Mexico. Trans. Anthony Pagden. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986.
- Couch, N.C. Christopher. The Festival Cycle of the Aztec: Codex Borbonicus. Vol. 270. Oxford: BAR International Series, 1985.
- Davies, Nigel. "Human Sacrifice in the Old World and the New: Some Similarities and Differences." Ritual Human Sacrifice in Mesoamerica: A Conference at Dumbarton Oaks. 1979.
- . The Aztec Empire. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987.
- Diaz, Gisel and Alan Rogers. The Codex Borgia: A Full Color Restoration of the Ancient Mexican Manuscript. Mineola: Dover Publications, 1993.
- Duran, Fray Diego. Book of the Gods and Rites and the Ancient Calendar. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994.
- . The History of the Indies of New Spain. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994.
- Gilbert, Helen and Joanne Tompkins. Post-Colonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics. London: Routledge, 1996.
- Girard, Rene. Violence and the Sacred. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1977.
- Gomrara, Francisco Lopez de. Cortes: the Life of the Conqueror by his Secretary. Trans. lesley Byrd Simpson. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964.
- Goss, Jasper. "Postcolonialism: Subverting Whose Empire?" Third World Quarterly 17.2 (1996): 239-250.

Gossen, Gary H. and Miguel Leon-Portilla. South and Meso-American Native Spirituality: From the Cult of the Feathered Serpent to the Theology of Liberation. New York: Crossroad, 1997.

Gossen, Gary H. "From Olmecs to Zapatistas: A Once and Future History of Souls." American Anthropologist 96.3 (1994): 553-570.

Graham, Elizabeth. "Close Encounters." Cecil, Leslie G. and Timothy W. Pugh. Maya Worldview at Conquest. Boulder: University of Colorado Press, 2009.

Hanke, Lewis. Aristotle and the American Indians: A Study in Race Prejudice in the Modern World. Chicago: H. Regnery Co, 1959.

Harvey, Graham. Indigenous Religions: A Companion. London: Cassell, 2000.

Heusch, Luc de. Sacrifice in Africa: a Structuralist Approach. Trans. Linda O'Brien and Alice Morton. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985.

Hicks, David. Ritual and Beliefs: Readings in the Anthropology of Religion. Vol. 3rd Edition. New York: Alta Mira Press, 2010.

Hubert, Henri and Marcel Mauss. Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function. London: Cohen and West, 1964.

Leon-Portilla, Miguel. Aztec Thought and Culture: A Study of the Ancient Nahuatl Mind. Trans. Jack Emory Davis. Vol. 67. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963.

—. The Broken Spears: the Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico. Trans. Lysander Kempf. Boston: Beacon Press, 1962.

Lopez Austin, Alfredo and Leonardo Lopez Lujan. Mexico's Indigenous Past. Trans. Bernard R. Ortiz de Montellano. Norman, OK.: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001.

Mann, Charles C. 1491: New Revelations of the Americas before Columbus. New York: Knopf, 2005.

Mark, Richard Lee. Cortes: The Great Adventurer and the Fate of Aztec Mexico. New York: A. A. Knopf, 1003.

Moctezuma, Eduardo Matos. Life and Death in the Templo Mayor. Trans. Bernard R. Ortiz de Montellano and Thelma Ortiz de Montellano. Niwot: University Pres of Colorado, 1995.

—. The Aztecs. Milan: Editoriale Jaca Book, 1989.

- Motolinia. Historia de los Indios de Bueva Espana. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1950.
- Niezen, Ronald. The Origins of Indiegism: Human Rights and the Politics of Identity. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.
- Obeyesekere, Gananath. Cannibal Talk: The Man-Eating Myth and Human Sacrifice in the South Seas. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.
- . The Apotheosis of Captain Cook: European Mythmaking in the Pacific. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.
- Otto, Rudolph. The Idea od the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational. Trans. John W. Harvey. New York: Oxford University Press, 1923.
- Ray, Benjamin C. African Religions: Symbol, Ritual and Community. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2000.
- Read, Kay Almere. Time and Sacrifice in the Aztec Cosmos. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998.
- Restall, Matthew. Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Ricard, Robert. The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico: An Essay on the Apostolate and Evangelizing Methods of the Medicant Orders in New Spain: 1521-1572. Trans. Lesley Byrd Simpson. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966.
- Root, Deborah. "The Imperial Signifier: Todorov and the Conquest of Mexico." Cultural Critique 9 (1988): 197-219.
- Ruxton, George Augustus Frederick. "The Migration of the Ancient Mexicans and their Analogy to the Existing Tribes of Northern Mexico." Journal of Ethnological Society of London 1848-1856 2 (n.d.): 90-104.
- Sahagun, Bernadino de. Conquest of New Spain. Trans. Howard F. Cline. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1989.
- . Florentine Codex. Salt Lake City: University of Utah , 1950-1982.
- Sahlins, Marshall. How "Natives" Think, About Captain Cook, For Example. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.
- Sanday, Peggy Reeves. Divine Hunger: Cannibalism as a Cultural System. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

Soustelle, Jacques. Daily Lives of the Aztecs on the Eve of the Spanish Conquest. Trans. Patrick O'Brien. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1961.

Stannard, David E. American Holocaust: Columbus and the Conquest of the New World. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.

Sugiyama, Saburo. Project Temple of Quetzalcoatl. 20 August 2001. Instituto Nacional de Antropologia e Historia and Aeizon State Univeristy. 5 May 2007  
<<http://archaeology.la.asu.edu/teo/fsp/Icon/icongr.htm>>.

Todorov, Tzvean. The Conquest of America: the Question of the Other. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Harper and Row, 1984.

Townsend, Richard F. The Aztecs. New York: Thames and Hudson, Inc., 2000.

VanPool, Christine. "The Aztecs, continued." Lecture, Columbia: University of Missouri, 1 May 2007.

VanPool, Todd. "The Aztecs." Lecture, Columbia: The University of Missouri, 23 April 2007.

Weaver, Muriel Porter. The Aztecs, the Maya and their Predecessors: Acrhaeology of Mesoamerica. New York: Seminar Press, 1972.

Winzler, Robert L. Anthropology and Religion: What We Know, Think and Question. New York: Alta Mira Press, 2008.

\*\*These works are supplemented by my trip to Mexico City March 29, 2010 through April 4, 2010 in which I examined the *Bortuni Codex* and the *Libellus de Medicinalibus Indorun Herbus* and many artifacts pertaining to Huitzilopochtli and Quetzalcoatl at Museo de Antropologia e Historia. I visited the ruins at Teotihuacan, the City of the Gods where Nanhuatzin immolated himself to become the sun. I also visited the ruins and Museo de el Templo Mayor, the heart of the sacred plaza of Tenochtitlan, the *Mexica* capital city. Here I saw the stone of Coyolxuahqui, Huitzilopochtli's sister and the shrines of Huitzilopochtli and Tlaloc that crowned the second stage of construction of the *Templo Mayor*. I also was able to examine some of the 7,000 artifacts that were recovered from the excavation of the complex from 1978 to 1982. During my trip I took nearly 1500 pictures and obtained invaluable experiences that were applicable to both my research for my thesis and will be to the subsequent classes I will teach.