Aztec Religion

By Jade Chandler
Who are the aztecs?

Aztecs are the name given to seven Chichimec tribes of northern Mexico, who controlled the valley of Mexico and much of central America from its capital from the 12th century AD until the Spanish invasion of the 15th century. The main political alliance creating the Aztec empire was called the Triple Alliance, together they dominated most of Mexico between 1430 and 1521 AD. They spoke the language Nahuatl which was spoken by most people that lived in meso america.
The religion

The Aztecs had a complex and different groups of gods and they believe that five of them created the world. They worshipped over 100 gods, divided into three groups, with each group supervising one aspect of the universe such as the heaven or the sky; the rain, fertility and agriculture; and the war and sacrifice.

Huitzilopochtli was one of the most important Aztec gods, and was the god who led the Mexica people from Aztlan to Central Mexico. According to some scholars, Huitzilopochtli could have been an historical figure, probably a priest, who became a god after his death.

The Great Temple of Tenochtitlan is the most important shrine dedicated to the gods. The Great Temple, a twin shrine dedicated to Huitzilopochtli and Tlaloc, was among the first structures to be built after the founding of the capital.

There were frequent ritual human sacrifices which were part of the military and ritual activities of the Aztec people. They even practiced cannibalism. They also believed in 13 heavens and 9 hells.
Sacrifices

The Aztec people believed that sacrifice to the gods was necessary to ensure the continuity of the world and the balance of the universe. There were two types of sacrifice: those involving humans and those involving animals or other offerings. Human sacrifices fulfilled multiple purposes, both at the religious and socio-political level. They considered themselves the "elected" people, the people of the Sun who had been chosen by the gods to feed them and were responsible for the continuity of the world. Aztecs fought in wars to capture men to sacrifice. On God's Feast Day, they killed their slaves for the gods.

Human sacrifice usually involved death by heart extraction. The victims were chosen carefully according to their physical characteristics and to the gods to whom they would be sacrificed. Some gods were honoured with brave war captives, others just with slaves. Men, children, and women were sacrificed. Children were especially chosen to be sacrificed to Tlaloc, the rain god. The Aztecs believed that the tears of newborn or very young children would bring rain.

The most important place where sacrifices occurred was the Great Temple of Tenochtitlan. Here a specialized priest removed the heart from the victim and the body was thrown down the steps of the pyramid, while his head was cut off and placed on the skull rack.

There was sometimes times when aztecs sacrificed multiple people. For example, for the reconsecration of the Great Pyramid in 1487, the Aztecs reported that they sacrificed 80,400 prisoners over the course of four days.

Besides humans, the following objects were offered as sacrifices: manatees, jaguars, opposums, parrots, quail, owls, turtles, pumas, crocodiles, squirrels, insects, feathers, dogs, deer, iguanas, turkeys, rubber, cacao, maize, squash seeds, flowers, bark, pine boughs, and needles, honey, wax, jade, obsidian, virgin water from caves, shells, and iron pyrite mirrors.
How the Spanish invasion affected the Aztec religion

Around 1500 CE, Spanish soldiers arrived in the Valley of Mexico. They bought dogs, guns, horses and disease. The Aztecs had never been exposed to childhood diseases before so many died from young diseases such as measles. This civilization was killed by the Spanish and then by the Catholic Church who wanted to destroy all evidence of what they thought was a non-god society who practiced human sacrifice and slavery. Today, there are around one million descendants of the ancient Aztecs living in Mexico. Human sacrifice is no longer part of their festivals. But the art and games the Aztecs created are still enjoyed today.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aztecs</th>
<th>Similarities</th>
<th>Mexicans 2013</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Follow their own beliefs and religion</td>
<td>Have a strong religion</td>
<td>Strong catholic beliefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacrifice humans and animals</td>
<td>Sacrifices</td>
<td>Sacrifice produce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had rulers</td>
<td>Have a strong government</td>
<td>Have a federal government</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maize was the main food source.</td>
<td>Use corn</td>
<td>Chilli peppers and beans are a primary food</td>
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<tr>
<td>Men wore cloaks or capes</td>
<td>Women wear skirts and blouses</td>
<td>Men wear shirts and pants.</td>
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Reflection

Overall I have learnt a lot researching this topic. To start with I had only heard the word Aztec before but now I have a full understanding of how the aztecs lived every day life, their beliefs and the rise and fall of their empire.
Bibliography

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