

Art of the Aztec Empire

LD2: Futures Lab: The Aztec Empire in 1619 and 2019

Description: When considering the fate of ancient civilizations, it is not uncommon for those who come to admire the achievements of the ancestors to look at the demise of such peoples with a sense of loss. Speculations about what the Aztec Empire or Maya civilization might have achieved had they not fallen to European armies and disease are not uncommon. As such, the purpose of this Lab Deliverable is to get each of you to consider the unlive fate of the Aztec Empire. In other words, what do you believe the Aztec Empire might have achieved had it not succumbed to the Spanish conquest and the onslaught of colonialism and the spread of European disease in Mesoamerica? Today's exercise will seek to answer just such a question in the relative safety of group and individual explorations based on that information available via discussion, readings, and Internet resources.

Directions: In order to conduct this exercise, you will need to band together in teams of four to six individuals. Each team member will be required to consider the projected fate of a civilization given those facts and statistics provided below, and elucidated via the Ortiz de Montellano (1978) and or Therrell, Stahle, and Acuña Soto (2004) articles distributed in class or attached as an electronic file.

Pertinent Facts and Statistics: The following facts and considerations should be employed as a barometer of the stability and likely future of Aztec civilization had the Spanish not intervened.

1. The Aztec Empire expanded rapidly from AD 1427 through 1487...and as such, much of its ultimate growth occurred in the span of 100 years to 1521.
2. Population projections for the Aztec urban center of Mexico-Tenochtitlan alone stand at 300,000, whereas the Basin of Mexico had a projected population of Central Mexico at 25 million souls.
3. Mesoamerica, and thereby, the peoples of the Valley of Mexico lacked domesticable herbivores or beasts of burden, and their diets were reliant on maize agriculture.
4. Imperial growth was sustained via the implementation of a massive tribute system based on the threat of coercive force.
5. Aztec imperial armies failed to fully vanquish and reign in their neighbors to the east, the Tlaxcalteca, whose armies continually taunted and routed Aztec forces...thereby permitting Tlaxcalteca autonomy.
6. In 1478 Tarascan armies to the west deliver a crushing defeat to Aztec forces, resulting in the deaths of some 20,000 to 40,000 Mexica warriors.
7. The devastating drought, and subsequent famine, of 1454 that cost tens of thousands of lives is documented via meteorological data (See Therrell, Stahle, and Acuña Soto 2004), and was but one of ten to thirteen such significant episodes that transpired on the year proceeding One Rabbit from AD 882 and 1558.
8. So severe was the depletion of the deer population, and thereby "protein deficiency" in the Basin of Mexico, one scholar (Harner 1978) once argued that the Aztec resorted to state-sponsored cannibalism (See Ortiz de Montellano 1978 for arguments to the contrary).
9. Emperor Ahuitzotl's sacrificial extravaganza of AD 1487 entailed the sacrifice of some 20,000 enemy warriors whose leaders were invited to attend and observe.
10. Cortes projected that the sacrificial altars of Mexico-Tenochtitlan saw the sacrifice of some 4,000 enemy warriors and or Ixiptla impersonators alone.
11. The Tlaxcalteca, and other related peoples, ultimately allied themselves with the Spanish against the otherwise feared and hated Aztec Empire.