

Art of the Aztec Empire

LD 10: Gamesmanship and the Art of Patolli

Introduction: The daily life of the Mexica Aztec was dominated by events and activities that were far removed from the goings on of the aristocracy and the military. As both agriculturalists and merchants, the Aztecs drew upon the inspiration of many peoples and cultures, and at the same time, spread their own respective influences and culture over the length and breadth of Mesoamerica. As but one reflection of the activities of daily life, the “board game” of “patolli” (or “beans”) was played by both elite and commoner alike. Evidence of the game of “patolli” can be found throughout Mesoamerica and this evidence attests to the antiquity of the game in ancient Mexico and Central America. As a game of chance, this game became an obsession for some players and it was not uncommon for “gamblers” to stake all that they owned at the throw of the “dice” or beans. In fact, Sahagun documents the fact that some Aztec players literally gambled themselves into slavery for another chance at the game.

Incentives: Today, you will compete for the opportunity to “win” 5% to 10% points of extra credit. The player with the highest bean count at the end of the day will win 10 percentage points of extra credit, whereas the second runner up will win 5 percentage points of extra credit.

Instructions: First, see <http://archaeology.monterey.edu/Courses/Aztec/Patolli/Patolli.html> for an overview of how the game is played. If you are playing on a PC or Windows computer, then you may wish to download the game at one of the links at that page. If you are playing the board game version with painted lima beans, then you should review the basic guidelines and rules of the game at said page, or as outlined below:

1. Board game players should gather at the game boards in teams of four.
2. Each player should collect 6 lima beans of the same color or marking (if unmarked, please mark with a standard symbol of your choosing)
3. Five individual beans marked with a single dot on one side will be used as dice.
4. Each player throws the dice until the number one appears (total 5 throws each turn)
5. Upon getting a number one in the dice-throw, enter your first game piece into the center of the board. If the number one does not appear in five throws, relinquish dice.
6. Each player will repeat the throw of dice -- in turn -- until they enter the game.
7. Players will move along the board in a clockwise fashion until they reach the space just before the space they entered the board on.
8. Upon reaching the final “square” the player will exit and will be rewarded with one “asset” of the other player or players’ resources (red or black beans).
9. If you land on any of the triangles on the board, you will forfeit two “assets” to the opponent immediately to your left. Occupied “squares” are off limits to new moves.
10. If you land in any of the semi-circular “squares” at the end of the arms on the board, your opponent(s) will forfeit one “asset” each to you and you get another turn.
11. Your objective is to end the game by exiting all of your game pieces from the board, and obtaining the highest number of total assets available to all players at that board.