

AZTEC RELIGION

Xochitl had a difficult time falling asleep. The excitement of tomorrow's festival kept her mind occupied until she finally became drowsy. Tomorrow, she would attend Ochpaniztli, the festival of the eleventh month. This celebration honored Tlazolteotl, the earth mother goddess. Each month of the calendar had a festival with music, dancing, processions, and sacrifices.

The Aztecs worshipped many gods and goddesses. Each village and each occupation had its own patron god. A different god also watched over each day and each division of the day. The people worshipped the various gods and goddesses to attract the good forces of nature and to repel harmful powers.

Just before the Sun rose, distant sounds of the temple drums woke Xochitl. She dressed quickly, and as she went into the main room of the house, she saw that the rest of the family was already awake and making preparations to go to the temple for the festival of Ochpaniztli. Her mother gave her a basket of corn to place on the temple altar as a tribute to the goddess Tlazolteotl.

Xochitl was glad that her family arrived as soon as they did. Even though it was still early, hundreds of people had arrived and were lining the road leading to the temple. Xochitl's family was still able to find a location that would give them a good view of the procession.

The crowd quieted down as the beat of the drums stopped. Though they were too far away from the temple to hear what was said, Xochitl knew that the priests were now presenting the sacred chants. The chants provided magic to avoid rains at harvest and to celebrate the refreshment of Earth Mother Tlazolteotl. Xochitl knew that the next part of the ceremony would be a human sacrifice to appease the gods.

In this ceremony, a young woman impersonating the goddess of ripe corn would be the sacrifice. This was one of the few Aztec ceremonies that sacrificed a young woman. Usually the victims of the sacrifices were men who were either captives of wars or slaves. Many of the Aztec religious festivals included human sacrifices. The priest cut open the victim's chest and tore out the heart. He then placed the victim's heart on the altar of the god or goddess. In one ceremony to the god Tlaloc, sacrifices even included children. Xochitl's mother had explained the Aztec belief that the blood given in sacrifice gave the gods new strength and energy.

When Xochitl heard the drums and other music begin, she knew it was time for the grand procession. First came the young men of each clan, dressed in their finest ceremonial outfits. Xochitl enjoyed the colorful display of brightly painted clothing and fancy feather work that decorated the clothes. Each clan member also carried a military weapon and shield decorated with the insignia of the clan.



Huitzilopochtli was the Aztec Sun god and god of war. He was also the chief god of Tenochtitlan.

Xochitl watched closely until she recognized her clan's group. Pride filled Xochitl's heart as they passed. She especially enjoyed seeing her uncles and cousins in the procession. She knew that when he was older, her brother would also march with them.

After the last clan passed, groups of warriors with special rank and privileges passed by. Two of the special groups, The Knights of the Eagle and the Knights of the Jaguar, wore animal skins to represent their mascot. These two groups then staged a mock battle to entertain the crowd.

The rest of the festival day was spent visiting friends and feasting. Occasionally other special events provided entertainment and excitement. Other contests and games filled the afternoon. The most important of the games was tlachti. This was a fast-moving game using a rubber ball. Each team tried to score points by putting the ball through rings on the sides of the playing field.

The festival was over by sunset. Xochitl and her family returned home. After the evening meal, Xochitl went to bed early. She had had a busy and tiring day, but in 20 days she would be ready to celebrate the next festival.

AZTEC GODS AND GODDESSES

The ancient Aztecs worshipped over 60 gods and goddesses. This is a list of the more important ones.

NAME	DESCRIPTION
TEZCATLIPOCA	Sun god, most powerful of all gods, chief god of the town of Texcoco
HUITZILOPOCHTLI	Sun god and god of war, chief god of the town of Tenochtitlan
TLAZOLTEOTL	Mother of gods, earth goddess
TLALOC	Rain god, most important to the farmers
QUETZALCOATL	God of learning and the priesthood, also god of arts and crafts
CHICOMECOATL	Goddess of crops
CENETEOTL	God of corn
XIPE TOTEK	God of spring, planting, and re-growth
TONATIUH	A Sun god
MICHLANTECUHLI	God of the dead
XIUHTECUHTLI	Ancient fire god
CHALCHIHUITLICUE	Our Lady of the Turquoise skirt, lakes and rivers

Name _____ Date _____

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. What was the Aztec name for the festival of the eleventh month?

2. Who was Tlazolteotl?

3. What did each Aztec occupation have?

4. In the story, what was Xochitl going to place on the temple altar?

5. What did the priest present during religious ceremonies?

6. What did many Aztec festivals include?

7. What did the grand procession begin with?

8. What were the names of the two Aztec warrior groups?

9. How were the warrior groups distinguished from other groups?

10. What game that the Aztecs played on their festival days might be similar to a game people play today?
