



# THE AZTECS KNOWLEDGE ORGANISER



## Summary

**The Aztecs** were a group of warriors who lived in Mesoamerica (now central America) between approximately 1250 and 1521.

Although we know them as the Aztecs, the Aztec people used to call themselves **the Mexica**. This is where the country name 'Mexico' comes from.

They became some of the most **powerful people** in **Mesoamerica**. Around the 15<sup>th</sup> Century they built a large and strong empire.

They are known as being particularly **fierce** and violent people, who made human sacrifices to please the gods. But, they were very **skilled** people, particularly at hunting, fishing and art.

Map showing the expanse of the Aztec Empire around the year 1519.



## Aztec Rulers and Emperors



**Acamapichtli** (c.1356-1395)

Acamapichtli was the first tlatoani (ruler) of the Aztecs of Tenochtitlan. His father was from Colhua and his mother was from Mexica, which made him the perfect symbol of the new union. In his 19 year-reign, he brought people from previously-warring cultures together. He also made improvements to agriculture and architecture.

**Itzcoatl** (1398-1469)

Itzcoatl was the fourth tlatoani of Tenochtitlan, ruling between 1427 and 1440. This was the period in which the Mexica were able to fight off the Tepanecs and form the Aztec Empire through a triple alliance with the Texocans and Tacubans. As the most powerful leader in the alliance, he is generally considered the first Aztec Emperor.



**Huitzilihuitl** (c.1379-1417)

Huitzilihuitl was the second tlatoani of Tenochtitlan, leading from 1396 to 1417. He was the son of Acamapichtli and continued many of his policies, including forging alliances with neighbours in favour of fighting them. As he was only 16 when he came to power, he established a Royal Council to advise him. With their counsel, he continued to expand his power base into new lands.

**Moctezuma I** (1398-1469)

Moctezuma I was the second Aztec Emperor and the fifth tlatoani of Tenochtitlan. He ruled between 1440 and 1469. He did a lot of work to consolidate the Aztec Empire, and stretched its borders right up to the Gulf of Mexico, further than before. He brought a significant amount of stability to the empire, and began to make Tenochtitlan the dominant partner and capital city of the empire.



**Moctezuma II** (1466-1520)



Moctezuma II, also known as 'Moctezuma the Younger', was the ninth tlatoani of Tenochtitlan, ruling between 1502 and 1520. He is known for being the Emperor at the time when the Spanish began their conquest. As a result, many sources describe him as weak-willed and indecisive. In fact, the Aztec Empire had reached its largest size under Moctezuma II. When the Spanish conqueror Hernan Cortes arrived, Moctezuma thought he was the god Quetzalcoatl, and would not fight him. The Spanish report that Moctezuma was killed by his own people as he tried to defend Cortes, whilst the Aztecs said he was killed by the Spanish.

## Aztec Daily Life

<b>THE RICH</b>		The rich nobles of Aztec society lived in luxury. Most of them had slaves to do most of their work for them. They lived in homes that were built in brick and sometimes stone. Sometimes the houses had a whitewash to make them sparkle. They had separate sections with steam rooms.	<b>Did you know?</b> Many of the rich carried feather fans around, as feathers were a sign of wealth and status.
<b>THE POOR</b>		Life was very different for the poor. Most of them worked as farmers and fishermen. They did not have slaves, and lived in small huts with thatched roofs. They would have little furniture, although they did blankets and pots for cooking. Many wove mats to decorate their floors.	<b>Did you know?</b> It was against the law for commoner Aztecs to carry feathers. Breaking this law was punishable by death!
<b>FOOD</b>		The Aztecs did not have any sheep, goats, or cows, however they did hunt ducks, turkeys and birds. Their food was very spicy, as they grew chilli and put it into almost everything. They ate beans with almost every meal. They also skimmed algae off lakes in order to make a sort of cheese bread.	<b>Did you know?</b> The Aztecs already had an understanding that beans were good for them, which is why they ate so many!
<b>CLOTHING</b>		Noble Aztecs wore beautiful clothes that were made of cotton. Their clothes had bright dye to make an array of colours. These clothes were decorated with feathers and elaborate embroidery. The poor and slaves tended to wear simple clothes, such as loin cloths.	<b>Did you know?</b> Rulers wore the most beautifully decorated clothes of all, with long cloaks (a sign of status).
<b>RELIGION</b>		The Aztecs believed in many different gods. Each of the gods had a different role, e.g. the god Chicomicoatl was the god who produced food, Quetzalcoatl was the god of civilisation, and Tezcatlipota & Huitzilopochtli were the gods of war.	<b>Did you know?</b> The Aztecs believed in an afterlife. After death, they believed they would be given a job by the gods.
<b>MARRIAGE</b>		Aztec men from all different social statuses got married when they were about 20 years old. Women were younger – about 14-15. Upper class marriages were arranged, and the bride's family gave a feast. Divorce was allowed in Aztec society.	<b>Did you know?</b> When married, a woman would be carried piggyback by her match-maker to her new home.
<b>SCHOOL + WORK</b>		All Aztec children went to school. Most people ended up being farmers, fishermen and hunting. Some were trained to be doctors, teachers and soldiers, which were all respectable professions. Merchants helped to trade goods in and out of the empire, so that there was a range of foods and goods.	<b>Did you know?</b> Craftsmen and engineers were also extremely well-respected, and built great buildings and pyramids.

## Top 10 Facts!

- The Aztecs were known for being fierce warriors – other tribes mostly gave them what they wanted!
- The Mexican capital city – Mexico City – stands where Tenochtitlan once stood.
- The Aztecs built highly impressive palaces, pyramids and temples.
- Every Aztec male was trained as a warrior.
- The Aztecs had their own language (N'ahuatl) and their writing was made up of pictures.
- The Aztecs used to bury dead family members right under their houses.
- Aztec men were allowed to have more than one wife. Most rulers had many, many wives.
- If someone was very poor, they may sell their children into slavery, or sell themselves.
- The Aztecs were very creative. Lots of their architecture and art is still very well-respected today.
- The Aztecs were the first to use cacao beans to make chocolate (a chocolate drink).

## Timeline

1100 – Aztecs are a group of nomad warriors.

c. 1250 – The Aztecs arrive in the Valley of Mexico

1325 – The Aztecs form their own capital city: Tenochtitlan

1375 – Acamapichtli becomes the first powerful Aztec leader

1428 – The Aztec Empire is formed through an alliance with the Texocans and Tacubans

1440 – Moctezuma I vastly expands the Aztec Empire.

1519 – Spanish conqueror Hernan Cortes arrives. He is treated well by the Aztecs.

1521 – Cortes forms an alliance with the Tlaxaca and defeats the Aztecs.

1522 – Tenochtitlan is rebuilt and named Mexico City