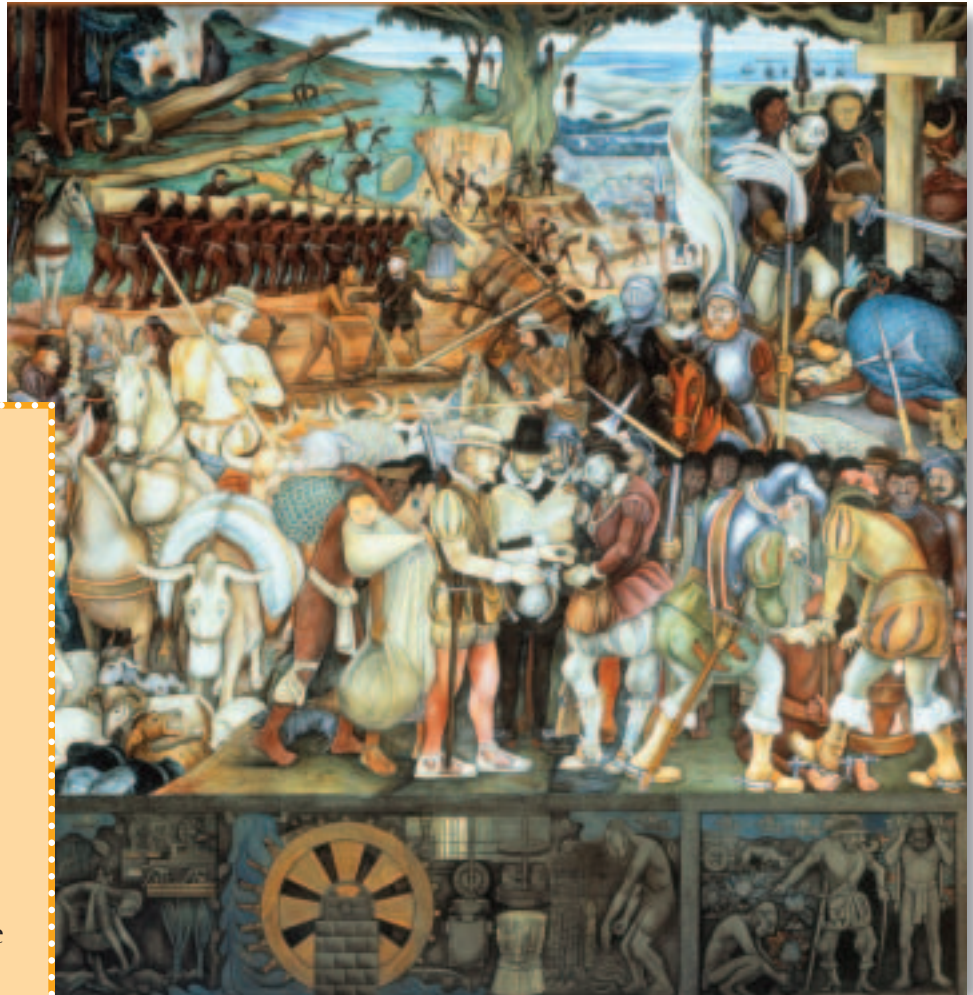


# UNIT 2

## Worldviews In Conflict



### IN THIS UNIT

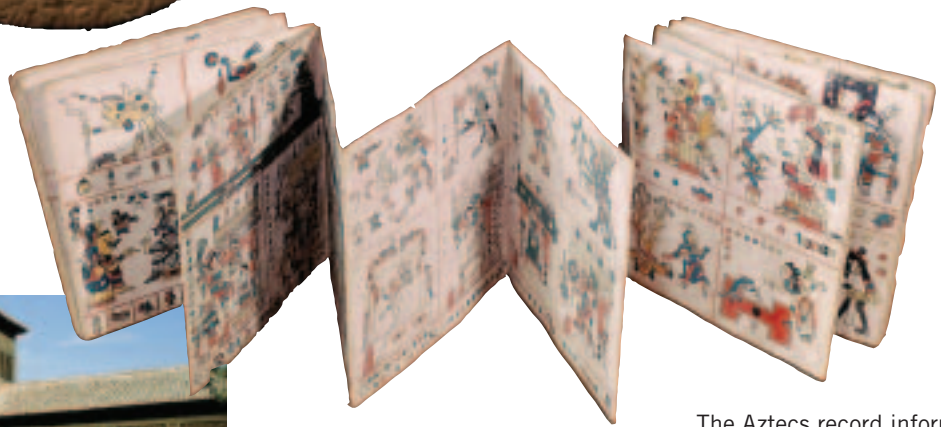
*This unit helps you investigate these questions.*

- ◆ In what ways did intercultural contact between the Aztecs and the Spanish affect each society's worldview?
- ◆ Did their different worldviews mean that conflict was inevitable between the Aztecs and the Spanish?
- ◆ What factors contributed to the dominance of the Spanish over the Aztecs?
- ◆ To what extent does present-day Mexico reflect the experience of Spanish-Aztec contact?

*Disembarkation of the Spanish at Veracruz* by Diego Rivera, 1951. Cortés and his conquistadors went to Mexico looking for gold and new lands to conquer.



The Aztec calendar stone shows the importance of their gods as well as the accuracy of their astronomical observations.



The Aztecs record information about their society in books called codices.



Renaissance Spain exiled the last of its Muslim citizens in 1492, but the Islamic influence, especially in art and architecture, remains to this day, as this garden at the Alhambra in Granada shows.



When the Spanish arrived in 1519, the area of present-day Mexico was home to many Indigenous groups.

# 7

## The People of the Sun



**FIGURE 7-1** What lines from the story help you identify what this image is about? It is part of the *Codex Mendoza*, created by Aztec artists at the order of Viceroy Mendoza of Spain about 1540.

## WORLDVIEW INQUIRY

*In what ways do a group's collective beliefs and experiences contribute to shaping a unique identity?*

*1325. Following the advice of one of their gods, the Aztecs found a new home in the Valley of Mexico.*

According to legend, the people we call the Aztecs originally lived in the desert lands of northern Mexico. In 1168, Huitzilopochtli (wheetseel-oh-POCH-tee), the god of the Aztecs, commanded the people to migrate south and told them to look for an eagle perching on a cactus. There they should settle and build a great city.

For more than 150 years the Aztecs travelled over mountain ranges and through river valleys. Eventually, in 1325, the Aztecs arrived in the Valley of Mexico, a wide plain with fertile land, plentiful water, and a mild climate. Many thousands of people already lived there in large cities built of stone.

The only unoccupied land the Aztecs could find was a swampy island at one end of a broad lake. There they saw an eagle sitting on a cactus. Screaming, it opened its wings. The Aztecs had finally found their home. They called it Tenochtitlan (Teh-noch-TEE-tlahn), and over the next 200 years they transformed the island into one of the greatest cities the world had ever seen.

What effect do you think the experience of hardship and wandering might have had on the Aztec sense of identity? Can you name another group of people who wandered in the desert before being led to a promised land?



## In This Chapter

For nearly 200 years in the country now known as Mexico, the Aztecs ruled an empire. Who were the Aztec people? Where did they come from? In this chapter, you will investigate the role that geography and religion played in how the Aztecs saw themselves. How did geographic facts and religious beliefs influence the way the Aztecs behaved toward each other, their neighbours, and ultimately, the Spanish?

# The Physical Landscape

How might a society's worldview influence its ability to adapt to its physical geography?

## What's in a WORD?

Nineteenth-century historians created the term **Aztec**. They were referring to the civilization created by a nomadic tribe—the Mexica—during the 15th century. Aztec may be derived from Aztlan, the place from which the Mexica believe they set out to find their new home in Tenochtitlan.

What do you think of when you look at the Rocky Mountains? Do you see a place where you can go skiing? A place that challenges you to go mountain biking or hiking? A place where you might find interesting scenery to photograph? The kind of person you are—your interests, your attitudes, your knowledge—influences how you respond to the physical geography around you.

For the **Aztecs**, a mountain was more than a physical site. They also saw a mountain as a sacred or holy site, one that, through its height, brought people physically closer to the gods. For the Aztecs, the world consisted of two landscapes—physical and sacred—that were closely connected. The temples that Aztecs built to worship their gods were pyramids in the shape of mountains.



**FIGURE 7-2 Relief Map of Mexico.** The landscape of Mexico is vast and diverse. In some places, the coastal areas are covered with tropical jungles and in others with sand dunes and beaches. The mountain ranges run from north to south and shelter many fertile valleys. How might a society's beliefs affect the determination of society members to adapt to a challenging physical environment?

The Aztecs believed that their god Huitzilopochtli had led them to the place where they lived. In many ways it was not an ideal location. It was a small, swampy island in a lake with salty water. But religion was a powerful force in Aztec society, and the idea that their god had sent them to this site gave the Aztecs the determination to survive there.

## The Power of Mountains

The mountains that surrounded Tenochtitlan gave the Aztecs a sense of security. Like the walls of a fort, the mountains protected the city from attack by invaders.

The mountains that protected the Aztec also caused problems for them. Because mountains are so steep, rainstorms can cause flash floods in low-lying areas. After a great flood swamped Tenochtitlan in 1500, Aztec engineers built an earthen dam across the lake to the east of the city. This helped control the water levels around their island.

Mountains can also keep out the clouds that would otherwise bring rain to an area. To make sure they had plenty of clean drinking water even in times of drought, the Aztecs built an **aqueduct**. This structure brought in fresh water from underground springs outside of the city.



**FIGURE 7-3** The remains of the Aztec aqueduct can be seen along Chapultepec Avenue in Mexico City.

### EXPLORING SOURCES

#### Proud Tenochtitlan

Poetry was a highly valued art in Aztec society. By creating poetry, the Aztecs felt that they were imitating their god, Ometeotl (oh-meh-THE-oh-tl), the creator of the universe. They hoped their poetry would give them immortality. During peaceful times, writing poetry was considered the only worthy occupation for an Aztec warrior. To whom might a warrior have addressed this poem praising Tenochtitlan and its people? What might have been his purpose in writing it?

*Proud of itself is the city of Mexico-Tenochtitlan.*

*Here no one fears to die in war. . . . Have this in mind, oh princes,*

*Do not forget it. Who could conquer Tenochtitlan?*

*Who could shake the foundation of heaven?*

**Miguel León-Portilla,  
Pre-Columbian Literatures of Mexico.**

- The Aztecs believed that Tenochtitlan lay below 13 layers of heaven. In the poet's words, it was "the foundation of heaven." How does the poem reflect the Aztecs' feeling of security in Tenochtitlan?

## Think IT THROUGH

Some people choose what to eat based on their religion, their morals, or their health. Give examples of each of these. Look at the worldviews icon. Which elements of your worldview influence your choices about the food you eat?

## An Island Home

Lake Texcoco, which surrounded Tenochtitlan, also provided safety from their enemies. The Aztecs built three causeways linking the lake to the mainland. Bridges that connected the causeways to the city and the mainland could be destroyed to protect the city from invasion.

In the 200 years that they occupied Tenochtitlan, the Aztec grew from a band of a few thousand into a society of several hundred thousand. Again their ingenuity and hard work paid off. They became the most productive plant cultivators of their time, producing more than enough food to support a growing population and a powerful army.



**FIGURE 7-4** Squash was only one of the many different types of foods the Aztecs grew. Beans, corn, chillies, peppers, and tomatoes were also grown.

## Zoom In > The Floating Islands

The key to Aztec success as farmers was the **chinampa** (chee-NAHM-pah) or “floating islands” they built in the waters around Tenochtitlan and other areas to grow their crops. The first step was to drive stakes into the lakebed in a rectangular shape. Then the builders laid reed mats within the stakes and piled soil on top. They repeated the process until they had a thick sandwich of mud and mats rising above the water’s surface.

Once the *chinampa* was in place, farmers planted vegetables, flowers, and medicinal herbs. Since the Aztecs had no beasts of burden or plows, each *chinampa* had to be small and very productive. All labour was done by hand using the simplest tools. Farmers accessed their crops by canoe, travelling along the waterways that ran between the plots of land.

1. Consider these two facts about the Aztecs:

- They came from the desert regions of northern Mexico.
- They wandered from place to place for 150 years before settling in Tenochtitlan.

How do you think these two experiences might have affected the Aztec attitude toward food



**FIGURE 7-5** This cutaway model of a *chinampa* can be seen in the museum in Mexico City. If you go to Mexico today, you can still see some of the *chinampa* that have survived from the time of the Aztecs. Farmers still use them to produce corn and other crops.

production? For example, would they tend to collect and store food for hard times, or grow just enough for the present? Explain.

2. Brainstorm two things the Aztecs might have done with any surplus food they produced.

## Changing the Geography

The map in Figure 7-6 shows the many changes that the Aztecs made to their physical geography because of their determination to live in Tenochtitlan. You can see that the *chinampa* they built greatly enlarged the original island on which Tenochtitlan was situated.

You can see that Tenochtitlan was in Lake Texcoco, which was part of an interconnected series of five lakes. There was no river for water to flow out of the lakes. Through evaporation, which left behind the natural salts in the water, the lakes had become salty. Find the barrier the Aztecs built to protect Tenochtitlan from flooding. How did the barrier affect the water on the western end of the lake? Why would this have been an advantage for the Aztecs?



**FIGURE 7-6** Valley of Mexico, c. 1519. The Valley of Mexico at the time of the arrival of the Spanish. Besides Tenochtitlan, where else do you see *chinampa* on the map?



## Identifying and Using Sources

Name a famous person you admire. Choose a person from any field—a current TV or film star, an athlete, a politician, activist, or scientist. How can you find out more about that person? Maybe you can locate a TV or magazine interview with the person. Maybe you learn that the person has just become involved with a certain charity or cause. Perhaps a co-worker has written about what it is like working with this person.

Historians use exactly the same methods to find out about people they're interested in. Historians ask,

- ◆ What does the person *say*?
- ◆ What does the person *do*?
- ◆ What do *other people* say about that person?

To answer those questions, historians seek out **primary sources**. Primary sources are items that have survived from the past. Sources can be anything—written items such as letters and diaries, and also visual items such as photographs, paintings, blueprints, and drawings. For example, an historian writing about Jacques Cartier might read excerpts of the diary in which he recorded his observations and thoughts about his travels. **Artifacts**—objects from the past—are also primary sources. The clothing someone wore and tools used during the time the person lived are examples of artifacts. For example, an historian writing about French explorer Samuel de Champlain might examine his astrolabe to determine the navigational technology of the time.

Historians evaluate primary sources by asking a series of questions. Here are six suggested by historians at Library and Archives Canada:

<b>What</b>	What is the primary source? Describe it in detail, e.g., is it a written document, is it typed, or is it handwritten?
<b>Who</b>	Who created it? How can you be certain it was really that person?
<b>When</b>	When was it created? How can you tell its age?
<b>Where</b>	Where was it created?
<b>Why</b>	Why was it created?
<b>So What</b>	What interpretation of the person or event can be made from the primary source?

Once historians have gathered their sources and evaluated them, they may be ready to write a biography about that person. That biography becomes a **secondary source**. Secondary sources are accounts of the past written sometime after the person lived. This social studies textbook is an example of a secondary source. However, it also contains some primary sources.

### Try It!

1. List three different kinds of primary sources.
2. Where might some of these primary sources be located?
3. Imagine it is the year 2200 and a historian wants to find out more about you. What primary sources might be available?
4. Work with a partner and identify examples of primary sources in this chapter. How does the primary source contribute to understanding a person who lived or an event that occurred?

## Mexico City is Sinking

The capital of present-day Mexico, Mexico City, is built on the ruins of Tenochtitlan. The Spanish destroyed the city after they conquered it in 1521. They built their city on top of the Aztec ruins in the lake bed. A century later, they brought in engineers to drain the lake surrounding the city.

Today, more than 20 million people live in Mexico City. To provide water for this huge population, the aquifer, that is, the underground water beneath the city, is being drained. Because the water is drained faster than it can be filled from underground sources, the city is sinking. According to some estimates, in the last 100 years the city has sunk more than nine metres, the height of a three-storey building.



**FIGURE 7-7** The sinking of the land is causing this church in Mexico City to lean.

### Think IT THROUGH

1. Today, what two major factors are contributing to the sinking of Mexico City?
2. Consulting with Aztec engineers may have helped avoid some of the problems the Spanish builders experienced in the first 100 years. In what other areas might Aztec knowledge have helped the Spanish?

## Over to YOU

1. **a.** What belief led the Aztecs to decide to settle in Tenochtitlan?
- b.** Their decision required the Aztecs to adapt to the physical geography of the area. Create a problem-solution organizer to show the ways the Aztecs responded to the challenges of geography. One possible organizer might be:

Geographic Challenge	Aztec Response
Mountains	
Swamp	
Island	

- c.** How has your community adapted to the characteristics of its physical geography? For example, consider how your community fulfills its transportation, agricultural, or industrial needs. What geographic challenges does your community overcome to fulfill those needs?

2. The Aztecs adapted to their environment by creating *chinampa* to maximize their food production. When settlers first farmed in Alberta, they faced challenges related to the length of the growing season. With a partner, research the development of Red Fife and Marquis Wheat. When conducting a historical investigation, asking the 5 Ws—Who? What? Where? When? Why?—and How? can help. Use the plan on pages 10–11 to help you carry out your inquiry.
  - a.** Use a role-play discussion between Charles Saunders and David Fife to present your information.
  - b.** For Alberta's First Nations and the settlers who came later, physical geography presented challenges. Examine the worldviews icon on page 151. Choose one element and explain how aspects of that element helped Alberta's First Nations and settlers meet the challenges of physical geography successfully.

# The Sacred Landscape

*How did religious beliefs affect the worldview of the Aztecs?*

According to legend, the Aztec decision about where they should live was based on a command from their god Huitzilopochtli. How important is religion in the decisions that you make in your life? Social scientists believe that parents, peer pressure, and the media are important influences on the decisions young teens make. Do your observations and experiences back this up? What other factors influence your decisions?

You have seen how religious views affected the Aztecs' attitude toward their physical landscape. Now let's look at the sacred landscape they believed surrounded them and how it affected their view of themselves and their place in the world.

## Aztec Gods

The Aztecs believed that the gods controlled every aspect of their world and they looked to the gods for signs on how to live. Although the Aztecs had many gods, they believed some were greater than others. By considering why they gave special preference to a few gods, we can learn a lot about Aztec values and culture.



**FIGURE 7-8** The Templo Mayor Museum surrounds the ruins of Templo Mayor—the Great Temple. It was the largest and most important building in Tenochtitlan. Which buildings do you feel are the most important in your community? In your province or territory's capital city? In Ottawa? Explain your thinking.

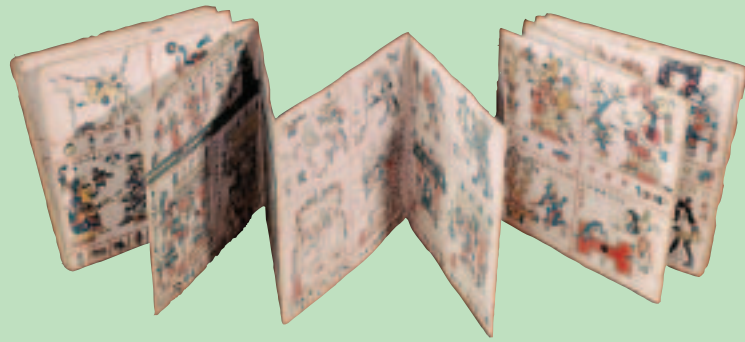
God's Name	Pronunciation	Information	Image
<b>Huitzilopochtli</b>	whets-eel-oh-POCH-tee	<p><b>FIGURE 7-9</b> Huitzilopochtli encouraged the Aztecs to leave their ancestral homeland and settle in the Valley of Mexico. The Aztecs believed he needed the blood of sacrificial victims to give him the strength to overcome the night's darkness. He was the Aztec's tribal god and had warlike aspects.</p>	
<b>Tezcatlipoca</b>	Tez-cah-tee-POH-kah	<p><b>FIGURE 7-10</b> The most powerful of the gods. Tezcatlipoca's name means "Smoking Mirror," from the black mirror he used to see visions of the future. Also called Lord of the Night Sky, he was locked in an eternal struggle with the god Huitzilopochtli.</p>	
<b>Quetzalcoatl</b>	ket-zal-COH-ahtl	<p><b>FIGURE 7-11</b> The god of wind, Quetzalcoatl's name means "feathered serpent." The priests offered him flowers, incense, and birds. He left Mexico after a fight with Tezcatlipoca, sailing to the east on a raft of snakeskins. The priests prophesied he would return from the east in the year "One-Reed," bringing destruction to the Aztec empire.</p>	
<b>Tlaloc</b>	TLAH-lzok	<p><b>FIGURE 7-12</b> The god of rain, Tlaloc could unleash deadly floods or withhold the rains for years, causing drought and famine. The Aztecs feared him because he controlled their survival.</p>	

## SKILL POWER

The Aztecs kept large libraries of books or codices (codex in the singular) in which they recorded information about their society. Codices are important primary sources for our understanding of the Aztecs' beliefs. The Spanish destroyed almost all of the Aztec codices when they conquered the Aztecs. Later codices were created by Aztec codex-makers under Spanish supervision.

W5+H refers to the six question words: Who? What? Where? When? Why? How?

- Use these questions to analyze the paragraph on the left.
- Which codices do you think would have more reliable information—those created before or after the Spanish invasion? Explain.



**FIGURE 7-13** An Aztec codex contains images only—the Aztecs did not use an alphabet. How might anthropologists misinterpret the Aztec visual messages?

## FYI...

The Aztecs, Mayan, and other Central American societies developed the most accurate and complicated calendars in the ancient world. The calendars were based on extremely accurate astronomical observations and mathematical calculations.

## Measuring Time: The Aztec Calendars

The Aztec calendar emphasized the close connection between gods and human beings, between the sacred and physical landscapes.



**FIGURE 7-14** This Aztec stone calendar was found in Mexico City in 1760. The stone is about 4 metres across, 1 metre thick, and weighs almost 25 tonnes. How does the calendar show both the Aztecs' respect for and fear of the sacred world?

The Aztecs actually had two calendars: a solar calendar and a sacred calendar. The sacred calendar was 260 days long. It took the sacred calendar exactly 52 years to “catch up” with the solar calendar.

The great stone calendar, which was carved in the mid-1400s was dedicated to Huitzilopochtli. It shows how the world began and how it will end. The Aztecs believed that there were four eras before the present one and each had been destroyed. According to the legends, the first was destroyed by jaguars, the second by hurricanes, the third by fiery rain, and the fourth by a flood. According to legend, earthquakes will destroy the fifth sun. Tonatiuh (Toe-NAH-teew), the god of the fifth sun in the centre of the calendar, has his tongue sticking out. This shows that he wants to be fed blood.

### Human Sacrifice: Why?

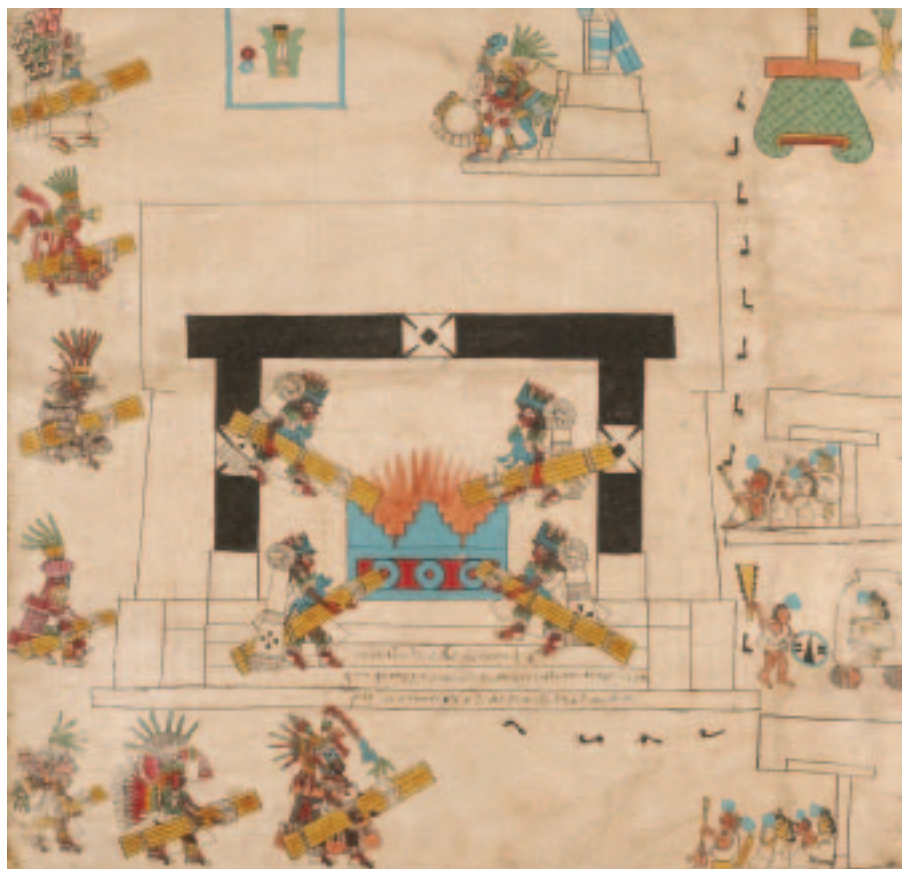
Of all the aspects of the Aztec worldview, the practice of human sacrifice may be the hardest for us to understand. Why did the Aztecs believe it was necessary to give the gods human blood?

It is important to keep in mind that, for the Aztecs, killing another person as a sacrifice had a deeply religious significance. It was the strongest expression of their devotion to the gods, since they believed that the victim’s blood actually nourished the gods. Without it, the gods would grow sick and die. If Tonatiuh and the other gods were not fed the blood of sacrificial victims, the Aztecs believed that the world would end. One of the reasons war was so important to the Aztecs was because it gave them the opportunity to capture new victims for sacrifice.

An important religious event called the “new fire” ceremony took place every 52 years. The people would fast and would let their fires go out. They waited on rooftops to see the sacred flame lit near Tenochtitlan. A courier would then carry this flame from house to house to relight the fires.

### Think IT THROUGH

What beliefs of the Aztecs led to their warlike nature? Do those beliefs mean that war—and human sacrifice—were “right”? How might an Aztec of the 1500s answer this question? How might Indigenous peoples living near them answer it? How might prisoners of war answer it?



**FIGURE 7-15** Here the priests are performing the rituals of the “new fire” ceremony. With a group, discuss this image using the pictures to words to questions formula on page 6.

## Gods or Devils?

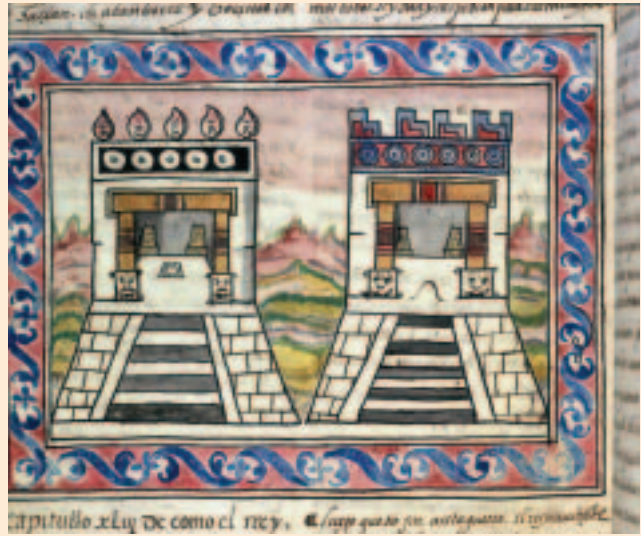
The war that developed between the Aztecs and Spanish was more than a series of battles. It was also a culture clash, as two peoples who viewed the world in very different ways came into contact. Soon after the Spanish arrived in Tenochtitlan, the Aztec emperor Moctezuma took Cortés and several soldiers to the Great Temple to show them the statues of Huitzilopochtli and Tlaloc. The Spanish found the statues soaked with human blood, and as Bernal Diaz, one of Cortés’s soldiers, relates, a religious discussion took place between the two leaders.

[Cortés] said to Montezuma [sic] through our interpreter, half laughing: “Señor Montezuma, I do not understand how such a great Prince and wise man as you are has not come to the conclusion, in your mind, that these idols of yours are not gods, but evil things that are called devils, and so that you may know it and all your priests may see it clearly, do me the favour to approve of my placing a cross here on the top of this tower . . . and you will see by the fear in which these Idols hold it that they are deceiving you.”

**Bernal Diaz del Castillo, *The Discovery and the Conquest of Mexico: 1517–1521.***

### Think IT THROUGH

1. What was Cortés suggesting to Moctezuma? How is his attitude similar to the explorers you read about in Chapters 5 and 6?
2. Why did Moctezuma reply angrily to Cortés’s words? How would you respond if someone insulted one of your beliefs?
3. Restate, in your own words, Moctezuma’s defence of the Aztec gods. Why does he believe they are good? In what ways do they benefit the Aztec people?
4. a. With a partner, brainstorm reasons why today we consider Aztec practices to be wrong. In what ways do those actions go against our society’s values?



**FIGURE 7-16** Most sacrifices took place in temples like these.

Montezuma [sic] replied half angrily (and the two priests who were with him showed great annoyance), and said: “Señor [Cortés], if I had known that you would have said such defamatory things I would not have shown you my gods. We consider them to be very good, for they give us health and rains and good seed times and seasons and as many victories as we desire, and we are obliged to worship them and make sacrifices, and I pray you not to say another word to their dishonour.”

**Bernal Diaz del Castillo, *The Discovery and the Conquest of Mexico: 1517–1521.***

- b. What obligation do we have as individuals to speak up when we believe someone is being wronged? Consider situations such as
  - (i) someone being bullied in your school
  - (ii) places of worship or neighbourhoods in your community that are targeted by vandals
  - (iii) people in countries overseas who are punished, injured, or killed because of ethnic or religious identity

## Tenochtitlan: The Centre of the World

According to Aztec philosophers, the Earth was a round, flat disc divided into four sections. In the middle, where the sections met like the pieces of a pie, was Tenochtitlan, the capital city of the Aztecs. The Aztecs firmly believed that the gods had assigned them a special place or location in the universe.

The city itself was also divided into four sections, which symbolized the four directions. Right in the middle of the city was a large square, which contained a number of temples, including the Great Temple. To the Aztecs, Tenochtitlan was a model of the world, with the Great Temple at the very centre.

Like many peoples, the Aztecs believed that the gods lived in the skies and other places. This was why they thought mountains were sacred places—the mountaintop was that much closer to heaven, the home of the gods. Aztec priests sometimes built temples on mountaintops, where they believed the physical and spiritual worlds met.

As an urban or city-dwelling people, the Aztecs needed to create sacred places inside their cities. Tenochtitlan itself had hundreds of temples. Most of them were built in a pyramid shape to resemble a sacred mountain. The most magnificent of these was the Great Temple in Tenochtitlan, the physical and spiritual centre of the universe for the Aztec people.

### LINK UP

Just as people of the Middle Ages saw Earth as the centre of the universe, so, too, did the Aztecs view their capital city as the centre of the world. ■



**FIGURE 7-17** When Cortés landed in Tenochtitlan in 1519, the city was home to 200 000—more than twice as large as the largest European city at the time. What details in this map explain why the Spanish called it the “Venice of the New World”?



## SKILL POWER

Diego Rivera had been quoted as saying, “I paint what I see.” When you look at images you need to keep in mind that they were created for a particular **audience** and reflect the **bias** of their creator.

Select any image in this chapter and discuss it in terms of audience and bias. To help you think it through ask yourself the following questions:

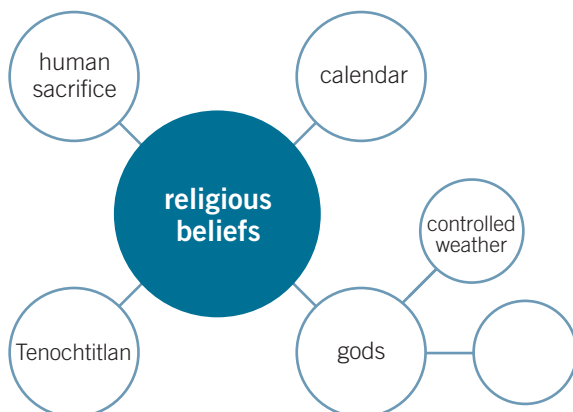
- Who created the image?
- When was it created?
- Where was it located?
- What does the image show?
- Who was the intended audience for the image?
- What do you think was the artist’s intent in creating this image?



**FIGURE 7-18** This detail from a mural called *The Great City of Tenochtitlan* was painted by the Mexican artist Diego Rivera in 1945. Rivera painted a series of murals portraying Mexican history on the walls of the National Palace in Mexico City. Based on what you see in this mural, why do you think Rivera has been called the “creator of the Mexican identity”?

## Over to YOU

1. Add onto the web below to show how aspects of the Aztecs’ religious beliefs affected their behaviour and attitudes.



2. a. What was the significance of the “new fire” ceremony?

b. Is it important to you to celebrate the new year? What ceremonies or activities do you participate in to observe the arrival of a new year?

c. Which elements of worldview are reflected in the ceremonies the Aztecs participated in to celebrate the new year?

3. For the Plains First Nations, the tipi was important for shelter and as a focus for some ceremonies. It also symbolized the values of the First Nations. Conduct research into the uses and meaning of the tipi. Prepare a brief oral presentation about one aspect of use or meaning. In your presentation, include a photograph or drawing illustrating the aspect you choose.

# Expanding the Empire

Would you say that Canada generally has friendly relations with the other countries of the world? What examples can you give to support your answer? How does this attitude benefit Canadians?

The Aztec attitude toward other cultures was rooted in their legendary trek to find a homeland. Along the way, they were involved in conflicts with other peoples. As a result they became a disciplined, independent, and resourceful people. This worldview affected their behaviour once they settled in Tenochtitlan and their relations with the peoples around them.

*How did the Aztec worldview influence the way the people interacted with other cultures?*

## Expanding Through Trade

In fact, conquering their neighbours was only one of the empire-building strategies that the Aztecs used. They more often formed trading and defensive alliances with the peoples around them. The Aztecs took great pride in these two aspects of their character: the trader and the warrior.

Before reading further, ask yourself a question: If the Aztecs were such good farmers themselves, why would they need to trade for goods with other societies? In considering your answer, think about the foods that you eat and where they come from. Why do some of these foods need to be imported?

Now, think about the geography around Tenochtitlan. The city was situated high in the mountains, about 2000 metres above sea level. Even with all their farming skills, the Aztecs could not produce tropical fruits such as avocados, papayas, and cacao, which grew in the rainforests along the coasts. Tropical birds, with the brightly coloured feathers that the Aztecs loved, did not thrive around the city; nor did the cities have deposits of gold or silver.



**FIGURE 7-19** This image of trade goods is from an Aztec codex or book. What does it tell you about the Aztec economy?

## LINK UP

In Chapter 2 you read about the expansion of trade that took place in Europe during the Renaissance. International trade between Europe and the East began as a result of a series of wars called the Crusades. ■

The Aztecs loved all these things, but to get them, they had to trade with the cultures that had these goods. Aztec merchants often set off with hundred of slaves to carry the goods they purchased on trading expeditions. They might be gone for months as they travelled to remote parts of the empire.

The merchants also acted as spies for the Aztec army, drawing maps to show which cities were well fortified and which could be easily conquered. These maps and the reports the merchants made on their return were important to Aztec leaders in their drive to expand the empire.

## FAST FORWARD

### Food Miles

Do you consider an orange a luxury item? If you lived a hundred years ago you might have received an orange once a year as a special gift. But today oranges are part of our daily diet.

As a society gets wealthier, people begin to demand more luxury goods and this leads to an increase in trade. In Unit 1, you saw how this affected Renaissance society. The Aztecs also engaged in trade across their empire.

Today, the transporting of foods across long distances by truck and airplane is common. But what is the ecological impact of all these highway and air miles? The Sierra Club of Canada, an organization that works to protect our global ecosystem, reports: “The long-range transport of food has a significant impact on climate change and the amount of air pollutants released into the atmosphere. In Canada alone, the transportation sector accounts for one quarter of Canada’s greenhouse gas emissions. It has been estimated that the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions attributable to producing, processing, packaging, and distributing the food consumed by a family of four is about eight tonnes a



**FIGURE 7-20** Our stores are filled with foods brought in from across Canada and around the world.

year.” What can we do about this problem? The Sierra Club suggests that buying foods that are locally produced is one of the answers.

### Think IT THROUGH

1. What elements in the worldviews icon affect our food-buying habits?
2. How do our food-buying habits affect the environment?

## Expanding Through War

According to Aztec tradition, an ancient prophecy from Huitzilopochtli said: “We shall conquer all the people in the universe. I will make you lords and kings of every place in the world.” Once they had developed Tenochtitlan into a powerful and successful city, this notion helped to motivate the Aztecs to create a great empire. By the time the Spanish arrived in 1519, the Aztecs controlled an empire larger than any in North America. How did they accomplish this?

The Aztecs firmly believed that the group—their society—was much more important than the individuals within it. Every Aztec was prepared to sacrifice his or her own life for the good of the group.

### A Warrior Society

As soon as an Aztec boy was born, his parents placed a tiny bow and shield in his hands. This symbolized his commitment to protect the Aztec people.

Military service was **compulsory** among the Aztecs. This means that the law required *every* young man to serve in the army. The worst insult among the Aztecs was to call someone a coward; a lack of courage in any soldier weakened the army, which then threatened the state.

### Think IT THROUGH

How might this prophecy lead the Aztecs to believe that the gods favoured them more than other peoples? How would it affect their attitude toward other peoples?



**FIGURE 7-21** The main weapon for the Aztec soldier was a war club made from a heavy wood like mahogany and edged with blades of obsidian.

## EXPLORING SOURCES

### Patriotic Poetry

Aztec poetry was created to praise the gods, to share stories, and to celebrate the beauty of the natural world. Usually, the Aztecs sang their poems or recited them to music. Much of their poetry was didactic, which means it was meant to teach a lesson.

- Why might an Aztec mother recite this poem to her son?
- What would be the greatest glory her son could achieve?
- Why is the sun god mentioned in this poem?

*Loved and tender son,  
This is the will of the gods.  
You are not born in your true house  
Because you are a warrior. Your land  
Is not here, but in another place.  
You are promised to the field of battle.  
You are dedicated to war.  
You must give the Sun your enemies' blood.  
You must feed the earth with corpses.  
Your house, your fortune, and your destiny  
Is in the House of the Sun.*

**Albert Marrin, *Aztecs and Spaniards: Cortes and the Conquest of Mexico*.**

## Tribute

How did the Aztecs, as a society, profit from wars they fought with neighbouring peoples? Once the Aztecs conquered another group, they began to collect **tribute**, or valuable gifts and taxes, from the conquered group. In Figure 7-22, you can see how the Aztecs kept careful records of the tribute they collected from cities they conquered, including cotton blankets, feathered headdresses and shields, strings of jade beads, and cocoa beans.

Cocoa beans, the basis of chocolate, were very important to them. The Aztecs made a drink from cocoa beans, hot chili peppers, and cornmeal, which they believed gave them wisdom and power. Cocoa beans were also used for currency.



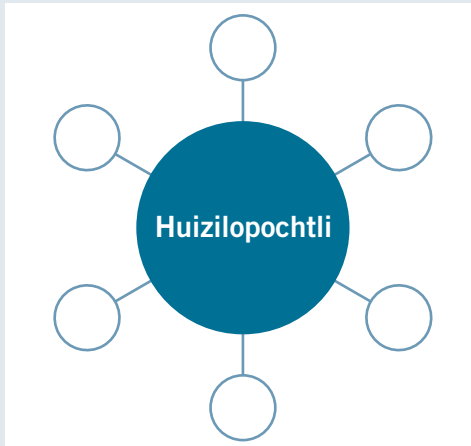
**FIGURE 7-22** This page from the *Codex Mendoza* uses picture writing to record a list of cities (in the first column on the left) and the tribute each paid.

## Over to YOU

1. Create a symbol to represent the Aztec worldview about interaction with other cultures. Share and discuss your symbol with other students.
2.
  - a. The Aztecs believed that the most important duties an individual had were to society as a whole. According to the text, how was this belief expressed when a boy was born?
  - b. How does the Aztec expression of civic responsibility differ from that of Renaissance Europeans that you read about in Chapters 2 and 3?
  - c. Which elements of the Aztec worldview and the Renaissance worldview do not agree with each other?
3. Discuss the following questions in a group: Do you think a society's citizens should sometimes be expected to make sacrifices to put the good of society above the wishes of the individual? Why or why not? If you think citizens should make sacrifices at times, what kinds of sacrifices do you think are reasonable?

# Explore the Big Ideas

The Aztec Empire reached its highest point of achievement and power about 500 years ago in the land we call Mexico. The People of the Sun, as the Aztecs called themselves, created one of the greatest civilizations the world has ever known.



1.
  - a. Create a web diagram gathering information from the chapter about the relationship the Aztecs had with their god, Huizilopochtli. Use information from your web to answer these questions.
    - i. What role did the Aztecs believe Huizilopochtli played in finding a new home for them?
    - ii. What did the Aztecs believe were the god's responsibilities?
    - iii. What did they believe were their responsibilities to the god? Why?
    - iv. What impact did fulfilling these responsibilities have on the Aztec's relationship with other peoples?
    - v. In what ways did their relationship with Huizilopochtli influence their art, literature, and architecture?
  - b. Based on the information you have gathered, why do you think the Aztecs called themselves "The People of the Sun"?
  - c. Based on what you have learned about the Aztec identity, what generalization can you make about the role of beliefs and experience in shaping identity?
2.
  - a. In what ways did the geography of the Aztec land influence three Aztec roles: farmer, trader, and warrior?
  - b. Select three roles in Canada that are strongly influenced by geography and explain geography's influence on each role.
  - c. Would geography have a greater influence on Aztec society or on contemporary Canadian society? Be prepared to support your opinion.
3. Aztec codices were images only—no written language.
  - a. Create your own codex illustrating an activity you participate in regularly or a ceremony or a celebration. Either draw your pictures or create a collage and then accordion-fold the paper. On the back, write the meaning of this codex.
  - b. Show your codex to a partner (without showing the meaning on the back) and have your partner write the meaning of the codex on a separate sheet of paper. Compare your messages. What does this process suggest about the possibility of misunderstanding the Aztec codices?