

# Aztec

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The **Aztec** /ˈæztɛk/<sup>[1]</sup> people were certain ethnic groups of central **Mexico**, particularly those groups who spoke the **Nahuatl language** and who dominated large parts of **Mesoamerica** from the 14th to 16th centuries.

The **Nahuatl** words *saztecatl* /asˈtekatɪ/ (singular)<sup>[2]</sup> and *aztecah* /asˈtekaʔ/ (plural)<sup>[2]</sup> mean "people from **Aztlan**",<sup>[3]</sup> a mythological place for the Nahuatl-speaking culture of the time, and later adopted as the word to define the **Mexica** people. Often the term "Aztec" refers exclusively to the Mexica people of **Tenochtitlan** (now the location of **Mexico City**), situated on an island in **Lake Texcoco**, who referred to themselves as *Mēxihcah Tenochcah* /meːˈʃiʔkaʔ/ *teːnotʃkaʔ* or *Cōlhuah Mexihcah* /ˈkoːlwaʔ meːˈʃiʔkaʔ/.

Sometimes the term also includes the inhabitants of Tenochtitlan's two principal allied city-states, the **Acolhuas** of **Texcoco** and the **Tepanecs** of **Tlacopan**, who together with the Mexica formed the **Aztec Triple Alliance** which controlled what is often known as the "Aztec Empire". In other contexts, Aztec may refer to all the various **city states** and their peoples, who shared large parts of their ethnic history and cultural traits with the Mexica, Acolhua and Tepanecs, and who often also used the Nahuatl language as a **lingua franca**. In this meaning it is possible to talk about an Aztec civilization including all the particular cultural patterns common for most of the peoples inhabiting Central Mexico in the late **postclassic period**.

From the 13th century, the **Valley of Mexico** was the heart of Aztec civilization: here the capital of the Aztec Triple Alliance, the city of **Tenochtitlan**, was built upon raised islets in **Lake Texcoco**. The Triple Alliance formed a **tributary empire** expanding its political **hegemony** far beyond the Valley of Mexico, **conquering other city states** throughout Mesoamerica. At its pinnacle, Aztec culture had rich and complex **mythological** and **religious** traditions, as well as reaching remarkable architectural and artistic accomplishments. In 1521 **Hernán Cortés**, along with a large number of Nahuatl speaking indigenous allies, **conquered Tenochtitlan** and defeated the Aztec Triple Alliance under the leadership of **Hueyi Tlatoani Moctezuma II**. Subsequently the Spanish founded the new settlement of **Mexico City** on the site of the ruined Aztec capital, from where they proceeded with the **process of colonizing Central America**.

Aztec culture and history is primarily known through **archaeological** evidence found in excavations such as that of the renowned **Templo Mayor** in Mexico City; from **indigenous bark paper codices**; from eyewitness accounts by Spanish conquistadors such as **Hernán Cortés** and **Bernal Díaz del Castillo**; and especially from 16th and 17th century descriptions of Aztec culture and history written by Spanish clergymen and literate Aztecs in the Spanish or Nahuatl language, such as the famous **Florentine Codex** compiled by the **Franciscan** monk **Bernardino de Sahagún** with the help of indigenous Aztec informants.