The Toltecs

- adopted sedentary agricultural practices
- added a strong military and imperial culture
  - conquest of neighboring peoples
- ritual wars
  - war...capture...sacrifice
- “givers of civilization”
Toltec empire

- central Mexico
- expansion into former Mayan territories
- northern Mexico
  - trade with the American Southwest
  - Chaco Canyon ???
Contacts with North America???

✦ Hopewell culture
✦ Mississippi culture
✦ maize, beans, squash
✦ ritual sacrifices and executions
✦ Cahokia
The Aztecs: Origins

- obscure background
- claimed to have lived in the area originally
- exiled to the north
- More likely → nomads from the North
- took advantage of the Toltec collapse
- wrote history to suit their purposes
The Aztecs

- collapse of the Toltecs: 1150 C.E.
- influx of nomadic invaders from the north
- shift of power to central Mexico
  - large lakes
  - fertile agricultural areas
- contests for control
Aztec Settlement

- the legend: an eagle on a cactus, holding a rattlesnake
- an island in Lake Texcoco
- Tenochtitlan
  - 1325 C.E.
  - Tlateloco: a second settlement
The Codex Mendoza: The Founding of Tenochtitlan
Lake Texcoco

- several tribes
- small city-state
- Azcapotzalco, Culhuacan
- Culhuacan: control by diplomatic marriage
- complex alliances, constantly shifting
Aztecs

- new group
- used as mercenaries and occasional allies
- constant movement around the lake shore
  - driven by stronger powers
- reputation: good warriors and religious fanatics
Aztec expansion

- more active role in regional politics
- emerged as an independent power
- political merger: 1434
  - Tenochtitlan, Texcoco, Tlacopan
  - Aztecs dominated the alliance of city-states
Lands of the Aztecs
Aztec View of Tenochtitlan
Tenochtitlan: The *Venice* of the Americas
Ruins of the City Center, Tenochtitlan
Size of Aztec Empire

- B-I-G
- Tenochtitlan, the capital, had approximately 125,000 people, maybe as high as 500,000
- Empire likely had 22-25 million people at its peak (1500)
- Large population meant entrenched agriculture
Social and Political Change

- imperial expansion
- subject peoples paid tribute, surrender land, and do military service
- stratified society
  - under the authority of a supreme ruler
  - Tlacaelel: advised rulers and rewrote histories
  - the Aztecs had been chosen to serve the gods
- human sacrifice greatly expanded
Effects of Aztec Focus on War

★ Led to a polarization of wealth
★ Territorial expansion meant that elites would have vast estates
★ These estates were tended by lower classes – slaves
★ Still, there was social mobility for lower classes – could distinguish themselves in battle
Aztec Tributary System

- Conquered peoples had to pay tribute
- Tribute often paid in foodstuffs – maize, beans, fruit – which could help feed the population
- Other things demanded as tribute included cotton cloth, military equipment, jade, feathers, as well as the occasional sacrifice
Aztec Human Sacrifice

- An important part of Aztec religion
- believed that Huitzilopochtli, their god of war and the sun, required a steady diet of human hearts in order to bring warmth to the world
- Required life energy to heat the earth – needed to grow crops
The Sun God and Sacrifice

- a warrior in the daytime sky
- fighting to give life to the world
- enemy of the forces of night
- the sun needs strength
- 52 year cycle of the world
  - required blood to avert destruction
The Sun God and Sacrifice

- sacrifice for sacrifice
- the gods need nourishment
  - human blood and hearts
- adoption of longstanding human sacrifice
- expansion to “industrial” proportions
War captives were used in the sacrifices

In times of peace, the Aztec would have to resort to ritualistic warfare or flower war

*In the year 1487 the Aztecs reported killing 84,400 war prisoners in four days at the great pyramid of Tenochtitlan*

After a town was conquered, the inhabitants were no longer eligible of sacrifice and became Aztec citizens
Aztecs Sacrifice Neighboring Tribes to the Sun God
Heart Sacrifice on an Aztec Temple Pyramid
Wall of Skulls, Tenochtitlan
The Empire: the Economy

- high population density
- combination of tradition and innovation
  - chinampas
  - 20,000 acres
  - four crops a year
- food as tribute
Aztec Chinampa or Floating Garden:
15ft. to 30ft. wide
Tenochtitlan - Chinampas
Aztec Trade

- Controlled by merchant class
- Did not have draft animals or the wheel
- Trade thus focused on lighter goods
- Merchants also an important part of Aztec intelligence system (like spies)
- Merchants could become very rich, but were not nobility
Aztec Trade

- No Money
- All things bartered
- BUT - there were fixed values for certain goods
- Vast trade networks
Aztec Writing

Chilapan: chi(tl) \downarrow \text{apan}

Colhuascan: colhua \leftarrow can

Ocellotepec: ocelo(tl) \leftarrow tepec

Coatlán: coa(tl) \downarrow \text{tlan}

Coatzinco: coa(tl) \leftarrow tzinco

Ahuacatlan: ahuaca(tl) \leftarrow tlan

Aztec Math

1 2 3 4 5 10 20 400 8000
Aztec Sun Stone -- Calendar
Aztec Sun Motifs
Aztec Gold
Aztec Art

✦ The favored form of art in the Aztec empire was sculpture
✦ Most sculptures were made from limestone, which is still abundant in Mexico today
✦ Aztec sculpture was like most other Mesoamerican cultures and was mostly directly related to religion
Aztec Art

- The Aztecs also made other religious and non-religious artifacts such as jade masks.
- Clothing was also a popular art form and women from around the empire would use bead, flower, and metal decorations.
- These artifacts were sold in markets by visiting merchants.
Aztec Gender Roles

- Gender roles were defined, but women had sway
- Men – were the warriors. Would be expected to fight for the Aztec empire.
- Women – were the home makers. An important role in a pre-industrial society
- Umbilical cord ritual
  - If a baby boy were born, they would cut the umbilical cord, leave it to dry, and then bury it on a battle field. This would simply show that when that boy grows up, he will dedicate his life to war and train to be a good warrior.
  - If the baby was a girl, the midwife buried the umbilical cord near the home’s hearth
- Women also were priestesses, teachers, and the founders of the royal lineage.
The Fall

- 20 million people
- large cities
- appearance of the Spanish disease and European military technology
Spanish Conquest

- In 1519 Spanish explorer Hernán Cortés and more than 500 Spaniards landed in eastern Mexico in search of land and gold
- Kidnaps Aztec leader Montezuma for a gold ransom
- Conquered all of the Aztec by 1525
  - “revenge”
  - 1/3 of population killed
    - Mostly from small pox
  - Survivors forced into labor mining for gold or working on the estates of the Spaniards