16.2 Aztecs

The first Aztecs were farmers, but when they arrived in Central America, all the good farmland was taken. To survive they had to hire themselves out as warriors.

They settled on a swampy island in the middle of Lake Texcoco, built a capital, and started to conquer nearby towns.

War was the key factor in the Aztecs’ rise to power.

The Aztecs built alliances, or partnerships, to build their empire.

The Aztecs made the people they conquered pay tribute, or give them cotton, gold, or food.

The Aztecs controlled a huge trade network. Markets drew buyers and sellers from all over the Aztec Empire.

By the early 1500’s the Aztecs had the most powerful state in Mesoamerica.

Tenochtitlán was the capital of the Aztec Empire. It was built on an island in the middle of a lake.

The Aztecs built causeways, or raised roads across water or wet ground, so people could access the city.

The gods told the Aztecs to search for an eagle holding a snake in its beak perched atop a cactus. This is where they were to build their capital city.

The Aztecs saw this sign on a swampy island in lake Texcoco.

Today, Tenochtitlán is Mexico City.

The Aztecs built stone canals to bring water to the city and floating gardens to raise food and flowers.

The city had huge temples, a busy market, clean streets, and magnificent palaces.

It was the greatest city in the Americas during the time of the Aztecs.

The Aztecs had a complex social structure, a demanding religion, and a rich culture.

The Aztecs worshipped many gods and regularly made human sacrifices to please the gods.

Sacrifices were often battle captives. Aztec warriors waged frequent battles with neighboring people to supply enough victims.

Aztecs valued art and architecture.

They studied astronomy and devised a calendar like the Maya did.

The king was the most powerful person in Aztec society. He was in charge of law, trade and tribute, and warfare.

The king had nobles to help him manage the kingdom. The nobles were tax collectors and judges and performed other jobs as well.

They passed their down from father to son.

The priests had a great deal of influence over the lives of the Aztecs. They had many duties, including keeping calendars to decide when to plant crops and holding religious ceremonies.

Aztec warriors also had many duties. They fought to capture victims religious sacrifices. They also brought great wealth to the empire. The warriors were very well respected by the Aztecs.

Merchants gathered goods from all over the empire and sold them in the main market. Many merchants were very wealthy and used their money to build large houses and send their sons to private schools.

Artisans were also rich and were important to the Aztecs. They made gold jewelry and elaborate headdresses.

Farmers and slaves made up the lowest class of Aztec society. Most of the people who lived in the empire were farmers who grew maize, beans, and a few other crops. Farmers were very poor and did not own their own land.

Slaves were people who had been captured in battle or who could not pay their debts. They were laborers, and if they did not obey, they were sacrificed to the gods.