

The Aztecs of Central Mexico

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to the throne of Texcoco in 1472 at the young age of seven; his father had designated him as legitimate heir. However, Nezahualpilli had at least four older brothers, the eldest being instated as regent for the new ruler. The three other brothers coveted the rulership, and plotted to depose the child. The plot became serious enough to require the rapid intervention of the rulers of Tenochtitlan and Tlacopan. Taken quickly to Tenochtitlan, the young Nezahualpilli was confirmed by the two Triple Alliance rulers as legitimate ruler of Texcoco, with his older brothers looking on hopelessly (Alva Ixtlilxochitl 1965, vol. 2:241–250).

Inheritance of property was more broadly defined than inheritance of title or position. Although not well documented for pre-Spanish times, there is an abundance of documentation, primarily wills, for colonial natives (see Anderson, Berdan, and Lockhart 1976:44–83; Cline and León-Portilla 1984; Kellogg 1986). These wills, involving commoners and nobles, and males and females, in many cases mirror preconquest patterns.

Inheritance by relatives of the most critical resources, land and house sites, took a variety of forms. Usually, where there were several close relatives, especially siblings and children, lands and house sites were divided among them, rather than being vested in a single individual. Spouses inherited from each other, although it appears that the intention was that the surviving spouse hold the property for children until they reached maturity (Lockhart 1992:91). There is no clear difference between nobles and commoners in any of these matters. Especially notable is the wide range of possible heirs; distributed across three generations, land could pass from male to male or female, female to female or male, and even to in-laws. There may have been a slight bias favoring males over females in land inheritance. While such broadly defined inheritance patterns probably were present in pre-Spanish times, the massive native depopulation in colonial times perhaps made the actual inheritance of land by distant relatives a more common event.

Household possessions and other movable property likewise passed broadly from both men and women to multiple heirs. Women tended to favor female heirs, and to include grandchildren in their bequests more often than men did (Kellogg 1986:322–323). Luxury status symbols such as feathered military devices were given from brother to brother. Apparently, tribute from dependent labor also could be inherited. In a 1566 will, a nobleman passed the rights to such tribute to his legitimate wife. The tribute included regular payments in turkeys, cacao beans, tamales, chiles, and wood (ibid.:51).

In sum, rules for transmitting titles, property, and rights were based on kinship. Where fine distinctions within kinship categories were made, they were ideally on the basis of achievement and personal qualities: among sons, the most promising; among brothers, the most capable.

4/Daily Life

CULTURAL CODES, DAILY LIFE, AND INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Embedded in social classes and surrounded by their kinfolk, the Mexica undertook a variety of daily activities. Explicit cultural codes governed the interpersonal relations and the content of these daily activities. These codes defined appropriate (as well as inappropriate) behavior, and set out rules for mutual rights and obligations. The codes were in many ways common to all members of the society, but varied substantially according to class, gender, age, and special positions and occupations.

One commonality was the ideal of the “exemplary life.” For everyone, it was highly valued to be a follower of this ideal, whose hallmarks were obedience, honesty, discretion, respect, moderation, modesty, and energy. These abstract ideals were translated into more concrete behavior through a number of rules. For example, a nobleman advised his son to live in accordance with eight rules:

First: thou art not to give thyself excessively to sleep . . . lest thou wilt be named a heavy sleeper . . . a dreamer. . . .

And second: thou art to be prudent in thy travels; peacefully, quietly, tranquilly, deliberately art thou to go. . . . Do not throw thy feet much . . . nor go jumping . . . lest thou be named fool, shameless. . . .

Third: thou art to speak very slowly, very deliberately; thou art not to speak hurriedly, not to pant, nor to squeak, lest it be said of thee that thou art a groaner, a growler, a squeaker. . . .

Fourth: . . . thou art not to peer at one, not to peer into one’s face, not to stare at one.

Fifth: guard, take care of thy ears, of that with which thou hearest. Do not gossip; let what is said remain as said.

Sixth: when thou art summoned, be not summoned twice . . . thou art to do things at only one bidding, for if thou art twice summoned thou wilt be considered as perverse,

lazy, languid, negligent, or thou wilt be regarded as one disdainful of orders, as a haughty one. This is the time when the club, the stone should be broken on thee.

Seventh: . . . thou art not to dress vainly, thou art not to array thyself fantastically. . . . Thus art thou to tie on thy cape: do not tie it on so that thou goest tripping over it; neither art thou to shorten thy cape. Moderately art thou to tie it on. Nor art thou to expose thy shoulder.

Eighth: Listen! Above all thou art to be prudent in drink, in food . . . Thou art not to eat excessively of the required food. . . . Thou art to drink, to eat slowly, calmly, quietly. Thou art not to stir up the pieces, not to dig into the sauce bowl, the basket. (Sahagún 1950–1982, book 6:121–124)

These eight rules speak directly of the ideal attributes of moderation and discretion. The Mexica viewed themselves as traveling, in life, along a mountain peak. On each side of the peak was a deep abyss. Any deviation from the “straight and narrow” would result in a fall into the crevices; only moderation and discretion in all things would prevent one from tumbling.

With these ideal attributes and rules as guides, just what did it mean to be a proper Mexica father or mother, ruler or peasant, priest or prostitute? How should these different persons act out their roles in everyday life? For the majority of persons in Mexica society, the primary unit of social interaction was the household. As already seen, this unit, nuclear or joint, varied in both number and types of persons. Consider the various persons in Mexica households.

The Mexica father/husband was responsible for the well being of his household. He served as provider and administrator of the household’s property, and as advisor and teacher of his children (particularly his sons). If he had nephews or nieces who had been orphaned, he also cared for them. It was especially important that he be thrifty and “future oriented,” energetic and compassionate. Much of his energy, however, was expended outside the household itself, in field or palace, on battlefields or public works.

The Mexica mother/wife, on the other hand, devoted most of her time and energy to the smooth running of the household. Ideally, she was an attentive mother: diligent, careful, and energetic. She concerned herself with the early education of her daughters. Whether noble or commoner, it was critical that a woman be skilled in weaving and food preparation. A noble girl, on entering womanhood, was advised of her future duties:

What wilt thou seize upon as thy womanly labors? Is it perhaps the drink, the grinding stone? Is it perhaps the spindle whorl, the weaving stick? Look well to the drink, to the food: how it is prepared, how it is made, how it is improved . . . look well, apply thyself well to the really womanly task, the spindle whorl, the weaving stick. (ibid.:95–96)

This same noble girl was admonished not to concern herself with “the herbs, the wood, the strands of chile, the cakes of salt, the nitrous soil” (ibid.:96), for these were not the province of the noblewoman, but of the commoner. A noblewoman had servants to perform these chores, including travels to the marketplace for provisioning the household. She was a manager, coordinating the activities of a large household, spending much of her time perfecting the art of

weaving, but still finding time for some enjoyable social moments (see Figure 4.1a). The commoner woman, described as robust, vigorous, and energetic, would have undertaken the entire spectrum of household chores herself: cleaning, cooking, marketing, and caring for children, as well as doing the spinning and weaving expected of all women.

In a joint household, the married woman frequently resided with in-laws. The potential for conflict in such households may have been considerable, for the “good in-law” is frequently described as one who is a peacemaker and appeaser, while the “bad in-law” is one who sows discord. In addition to the frequent admonitions given to the youths, and the explicit cultural ideals of moderate and tranquil interpersonal relations, there may also have been “avoidance rules.” A brother-in-law and sister-in-law addressed each other by special formal terms; the “bad brother-in-law is one who lives in concubinage with his sister-in-law, who lives in concubinage with his mother-in-law. He is covetous” (ibid., book 10:8). Rules demanding that persons in these relationships avoid one another would have reduced the potential for such conflicts within the extended household.

The ideal child was always respectful, obedient, and humble. Although great emphasis was placed on the training of children, this ideal was not always achieved. For example, a “bad son” may be

one who ignores commands; a fool, lewd, gaudy, vain, untrained; a dunce who accepts not, who receives not the counsel of mother (and) father. Training, teachings, reprimands, corrections go in one ear and out the other. (ibid.:2)

By the same token, the “bad girl” would be

full of vice, dissolute, proud; a whore, she is showy, pompous, gaudy of dress, garish; she is a loiterer, given to pleasure. (ibid.:3)

Such women, who would frequent the marketplace for business, were described as vain, gaudy, destitute, and usually drunk (see Figure 4.1b). None of these qualities was esteemed in Mexica culture. In a more concrete vein, consider the problem of a wayward son as stated in his father’s colonial period will. In addition to taking money owed to some carpenters, the son

took a horse, he just stole it, I am not giving it to him nor have I absolved him; it was worth 5 pesos . . . I his father have not absolved him, for there is a great deal of badness in him. If sometime his badness diminishes, he is to pay me back. (Anderson, Berdan, and Lockhart 1976:61)

Children resided in their parents’ household; boys later moved out to live in the *telpochcalli* (young men’s house) of their *calpulli*, or in a *calmecac* (elite school); and girls often moved out at marriage. If children were orphaned, they were most commonly reared by uncles and aunts. The orphan’s status in the household may have been a rung below that of the other children. A nephew or niece is described as one who “serves in another’s house, a servant; one who lives with others.” Specifically, a nephew or niece “sweeps the streets, serves, cleans the house, places things in order, arranges things, carries things, accepts reprimands patiently” (Sahagún 1950–1982, book 10:4). At an early age children began to bear the burden of household work; as they became adolescents they



(a)



(b)

Figure 4.1 Illustrations of everyday Mexica people and activities, showing Spanish stylistic influence: (a) noblewomen chatting (Historia General de las Cosas de Nueva España 1926:lámينا LXIX, illus. 83); (b) a harlot (ibid.:lámينا LXXI, illus. 108).



(c)



(d)

Figure 4.1 (continued) (c) a fisherman (ibid.:lámينا LXXII, illus. 133); (d) good, diligent farmers (ibid.:lámينا LXVIII, illus. 70).

would begin to orient more and more of their time and energy to demands made by the state and the many deities.

All relatives had culturally defined duties toward one another. They also had responsibilities and activities outside the household bounds, involving non-kin, the state, and the deities. This was particularly the case for male members of the society. For priests especially, each day was divided into nine units, providing a



(e)
Figure 4.1 (continued) (e) a lazy farmer (*ibid.*:lámina LXVIII, *illus.* 71).

temporal frame for their everyday activities. The divisions were of unequal length, and were marked in the temples by the offering of incense to the sun god:

And thus was incense offered: it was four times during the day and it was five times during the night. The first time was when the sun showed itself here. The second time was when it was time to eat. And the third time was when it was midday. And the fourth time was when the sun had already set.

And at night, thus was incense offered. The first time, it was when it was dark. The second time was when it was time to go to sleep. The third time was when the shell trumpets were sounded. The fourth time was at midnight. And the fifth time was near dawn. (*ibid.*, book 2:216)

The degree to which these divisions were significant to people other than priests is not known. However, Soustelle (1961:162) suggests that the temple activities may have signaled times for other events, such as council meetings or court proceedings.

Roughly associated with these periods, the usual Mexica daily round consisted of arising at dawn and setting immediately to work. In midmorning it was customary to have a light meal, consisting of a bowl of *atolli* (maize gruel) for commoners, and the highly prized chocolate for nobles. Following this break, the Mexica returned to work or play, enjoying the main meal at midday. During the heat of the day people would relax, and return to work or diversions for the remainder of the afternoon. It is likely that they enjoyed a brief evening meal, and then retired shortly after sunset. However, during the night, priests arose frequently to offer incense and devotion to the deities, and to sound shell trumpets from temple platforms. Also during the night, close watch was kept over the

cities for any possible military threat. The cities around Lake Texcoco were active places by both night and day.

Depending on one's social class, occupation, and age, this daily round varied somewhat. The activities of farmers and fishermen would have been particularly sensitive to the change of seasons (see Figure 4.1c-e). Although they did not meet every day, the high-ranking judges

would seat themselves at daybreak on their mat dais, and immediately begin to hear pleas. The judges' meals were brought to them at an early hour from the royal palace. After eating, they rested for a while, then returned to hear the remaining suitors, staying until two hours before sundown. (Zorita 1963:126)

The daily life of priests and their students living in the *calmecac* also varied from the customary round. Before dawn, all would arise and sweep the temple and its courtyard. Still before dawn, the elder youths went to gather maguey thorns, important in the late-night rituals in the temple. And just before dawn, some of the young men went to gather wood for the fires that burned throughout the night for the priests as they kept vigil. During the day youths worked at making adobes, cultivating fields, or constructing canals, while a few were left behind to guard the *calmecac* and to take food to those working outside the *calmecac*. At some unspecified time in the afternoon, all the *calmecac* residents engaged in penances and other religious devotions. It was undoubtedly at this time that much of the esoteric education associated with the *calmecac* went on. Beginning at dusk the priests took the maguey spines and carried them several miles to offer them as penance. Continuing from sunset to midnight, the priests, carrying pine torches and incense, offered their maguey spines and blew shell trumpets. At midnight everyone sleeping in the *calmecac* awoke and prayed, and the highest ranking priests bathed at that time.

In addition to the work involved in making a living, the Mexica enjoyed a number of diversions on a fairly regular basis. The sixteenth-century friar Alonso de Molina, in his massive Nahuatl dictionary, lists nineteen types of *juegos* (games), of which only four (chess, cards, and two games played with horses) were assuredly postconquest introductions (1970:73r). The Aztecs enjoyed diversions such as word games, pleasure games, ball games, and a game resembling pachisi (*patolli*). Most popular were the ball game and *patolli*. The ball game was an extremely versatile sport played for entertainment as well as for gambling and ritual purposes. The game was played on a ball court (*tlachtli*) that ranged from 100 to 200 feet long, with a line drawn across the center and two rings on either side (see Figure 4.2a). Tenochtitlan had two major ball courts; the one closest to the Great Temple (and now partially beneath the Cathedral) was approximately 165 feet long (Matos Moctezuma 2001:92). The game was played with a hard rubber ball and it was necessary for players to wear gloves, girdles, and hip guards made of deerskin. Even so, players were often badly bruised, and sometimes fatally injured, by the impact of the ball. The players would hit the ball back and forth with only certain body parts; Molina (1970:73r) specifically defines ball games played with hands, knees, and buttocks. Fouls were counted if the ball entered a team's back court, if a team failed to hit the ball across the center line, or if a player contacted the ball with an "illegal" part of the body. However, a team that managed to hit the ball through a ring

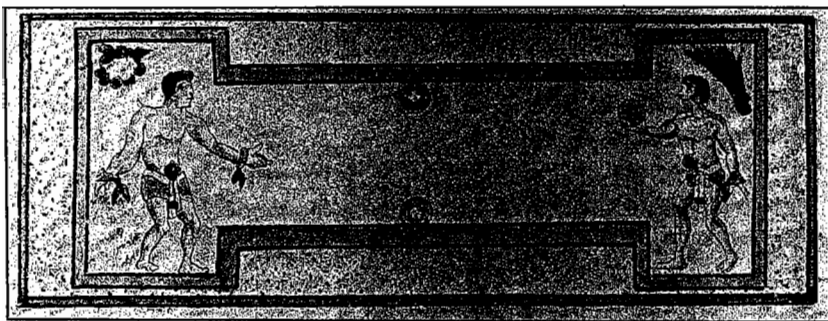


Figure 4.2a Aztec diversion: A colonial representation of the ball game. Note the jade necklace and precious feathers that were wagered (Book of the Gods and Rites and The Ancient Calendar, by Fray Diego Durán, translated and edited by Fernando Horcasitas and Doris Heyden. Copyright 1971 by the University of Oklahoma Press, publishing division of the University, plate 34).

supposedly won an immediate victory. The game required considerable dexterity and adroitness. It was particularly popular among the nobility, who were active players and wagered everything from precious gems to clothing, feathers, cacao, houses, fields, and slaves. Some persons, paupers, played and bet as a means of livelihood, and were rarely if ever prosperous:

They were forced to gamble their homes, their fields, their corn granaries, their maguey plants. They sold their children in order to bet and even staked themselves and became slaves. (Durán 1971:318)

These were clearly lively affairs, on the court and among the spectators. Music probably accompanied the events; small flutes, whistles, and drums were included in ball court offerings in Tenochtitlan (Matos Moctezuma 2001:94). In addition, ball games (or their aftermath) were occasions for human sacrifice, always spectacular events (*ibid.*:91).

Patolli (see Figure 4.2b) was an extremely popular game and was played much like pachisi. Beans, which served as dice, were marked with white dots to indicate numbers. Each player had six pebble counters that were moved on a board according to the throws of the dice. Some persons were apparently addicted to the game and to the gambling that usually accompanied it:

The gamblers dedicated to this game always went about with the mats under their armpits and with the dice tied up in small cloths . . . it was believed that they [the dice] were mighty . . . they spoke to them and begged them to be favorable, to come to their aid in that game. (*ibid.*:304)

It is understandable that patolli players would encourage the dice for, as in the ball game, very costly goods were wagered on this game: fine stones, feathers, elaborately worked clothing, fields, houses, and slaves. For extra luck, a serious player might turn his household grinding stone and griddle upside down and hang his pestle in a corner of the house (Sahagún 1950–1982, book 5:190). It comes as no surprise, then, to see Molina define patolli as a “game of luck”

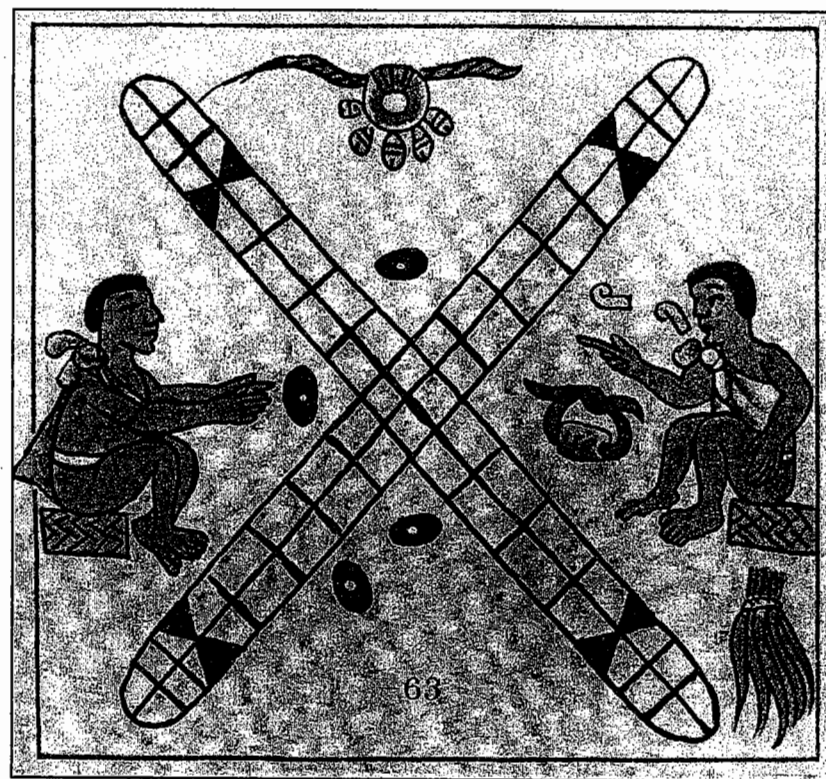


Figure 4.2b Another Aztec game—patolli. The four beans were used as dice, and stones were moved along the board. Costly goods such as necklaces and feathers were wagered on the game (Historia General de las Cosas de Nueva España 1926:lámينا XLVIII, illus. 63).

(1970:73r).

Special secular and religious events frequently interrupted the customary daily routines. The secular activities were geared mostly to adult males and consisted mainly of construction projects and daily services to rulers. Commoners, alternating among themselves, provided the labor for these projects and services on a regular basis (see Chapter 2). Warfare was the lot of all men, noble or commoner, and some campaigns could take men from their homes for years at a time. This, of course, involved adjustments on the part of all household members (see Chapter 5). Also punctuating the daily life of all Mexico were ceremonial activities. Some of these, like the eighteen monthly ceremonies of the solar year, were predictable. These events generally involved fasting followed by singing, dancing, feasting, and offerings (including sacrificial victims) to the deities. Not everyone participated in all these ceremonies with equal intensity. For example, children were especially important in the ceremonies of the third month, merchants were most active in rituals of the

ninth month, and young warriors and harlots took center stage by singing and dancing in the eighth monthly festival.

Besides the monthly festivals, less elaborate rituals were associated with the 260-day ritual calendar, or *tonalpohualli* (see Chapter 7). Like the monthly ceremonies, most of these rituals consisted of some fasting, dancing, singing, and feasting. But the focus of these rituals was on offerings to the deities. Gods were offered incense, flowers, perfumes, ornaments, and quails; their images were adorned with papers; and amaranth likenesses of them were made. Human sacrifices and bloodletting were also common aspects of these rituals. In some rituals everyone participated, such as the one on the day Four Movement, when all persons offered blood drawn from their ears to the sun. Other days emphasized certain occupations: Painters and weavers celebrated the day Seven Flower, merchants openly displayed their wealth on Four Wind, and those who gained their livelihoods from water (fishermen, water sellers) revered the goddess Chalchiuhtlicue on the day One Water (see Chapter 6).

Certain special unscheduled events also changed the pace of daily life. The dedication of a temple or the funeral or installation of a ruler required special ceremonies and services. These events normally took several days and involved elaborate, exciting, and time-consuming ceremonies. Extensive special provisions also were required for these occasions. For instance, to supply the banquets associated with the installation of the tlatoani Motecuhzoma Xocoyotzin in 1502, great loads of many types of animals, wild and domesticated birds, chiles, fish, fruit, and cacao were brought to Tenochtitlan daily by 1,000 macehualtin. These provisions were drawn from throughout the empire, and producing and transporting them would have required many people to take on additional activities.

Life cycle events also caused pauses in everyday routines. The major events celebrated were birth and the naming ceremony, entering and leaving the calmecac or telpochcalli (for males), marriage, old age, and death. The manner in which the Mexica passed through these crucial stages in the life cycle is treated in the next section.

LIFE CYCLE AND EDUCATION

Pregnancy and Birth

Childbearing was the essence of Mexica womanhood. As the man gained honor and renown by going valiantly into battle, so the woman gained honor and respect by bearing children. Her battle was comparable to the man's battle. If each battle was courageously fought and won, the prizes were handsome: special status and regalia for the man, the baby and respect for the woman. If the battle was lost, and each died honorably, outstanding rewards awaited them in the afterlife: The man followed the sun in its daily rise to the zenith; the woman accompanied the sun from its zenith to its descent in the west.

At the first realization that conception had taken place, a banquet was arranged. Numerous relatives of the father- and mother-to-be attended and enjoyed much eating, drinking, and displays of flowers and tubes of tobacco. This banquet was the setting for extensive orations and eloquent responses

among the elders, the pregnant woman, her husband, her parents, and her parents-in-law. The pregnant woman was especially reminded that she should thank the gods for the gift they had given her:

And speak not to thyself; say not: "Already I am carrying something; already I am this way; already I am pregnant." And do not become proud, do not become arrogant! Our lord will know of that within thee; he knoweth of things, he seeth within the rock, the tree. Soon something will befall thee; our lord will bring about for us the death of our child. (ibid., book 6:141-142)

Because the gods had favored her, she should take care to not in any way endanger or abort "the precious necklace, the quetzal feather" within her womb. A great deal of practical advice was transmitted on this occasion. The pregnant woman was not to lift heavy things, nor overdo enjoying the sweatbath, nor overindulge in sex. This last was considered particularly dangerous by the Mexica, for:

It is said: "Thou wilt die in childbirth. For this will cause the baby to be stuck . . . for it [the semen] exceedeth glue in adhesiveness. It is so adhesive, so viscous, that thou wilt thereby perish." (ibid.:143)

Additional precautions were advised for the duration of the pregnancy. The expectant mother was not to eat tamales that had become stuck to the cooking pot, for the baby would likewise adhere to her womb. She was not to walk about at night; but if she must, she was to place some ash, a pebble, or wormwood in her bosom to protect the child from night-wandering apparitions. She was restrained from gazing at a hanged person, lest her baby be born with the umbilical cord wound around its neck. Nor was she to look at an eclipse of the sun or moon, or at the rising moon, since this would cause the child to be harelipped. An obsidian knife placed in the woman's bosom, however, would provide protection from this last threat.

In the seventh or eighth month of pregnancy, the woman's relatives reassembled and again feasted. The purpose of this occasion was to hire and consult with a midwife. The midwife prepared a sweatbath for the pregnant woman, and massaged her abdomen to arrange the baby properly in the womb. In addition to the precautions already related, the midwife issued stern commands to the mother-to-be and her relatives: The expectant mother was to eat well and not to be denied anything she desired; she was not to sleep in the daytime; not to chew chicle; nor look at anything frightening, offending, or red. The Mexica felt that failure to observe these rules could result in a difficult birth, birth defects, stillbirth, or the death of the mother.

When the woman went into labor, the midwife tried to speed the process by bathing her in the sweatbath and having her drink an herbal expellent (*ciuapatli* root, *nopalli* leaves, or chia). If this did not succeed, some ground up opossum tail, reputed to be a powerful expellent, was given to her. If this also failed, the midwife suspended the woman, shaking and kicking her in the back. In some cases, this also failed to induce delivery, and the baby died in the womb. When this happened

the midwife inserted an obsidian knife within the woman. There she dismembered the baby; she drew it forth piece by piece. Thus the parent was yet relieved. (ibid.:157)

If the mother died giving birth, she was revered as a goddess. When her relatives went to bury her, they had to guard her carefully, since young warriors eagerly sought her middle finger and locks of her hair. These they would place on their shields when they went into battle to assure themselves of courage and success in capturing enemy warriors. Similarly, thieves tried to steal her left forearm, which reputedly assisted them in their "business."

When a baby was born, the midwife cut the umbilical cord and buried the afterbirth in a corner of the house. The umbilical cord of a baby girl was buried by the hearth, symbolizing her lifelong attachment to the home. A boy's umbilical cord was dried and later left on a field of battle, thereby dedicating him to service in warfare. The midwife then bathed and swaddled the infant. During all of this she spoke softly to the baby, welcoming it and introducing it to this rather pessimistic Mexica view of life:

Precious necklace, precious feather, precious green stone, precious bracelet, precious turquoise . . . Thou hast come to reach the earth, the place of torment, the place of pain, where it is hot, where it is cold, where the wind bloweth. It is the place of one's affliction, of one's weariness, a place of thirst, a place of hunger, a place where one freezeeth, a place of weeping. It is not true that it is a good place; it is a place of weeping, a place of sorrow, a place where one suffereth. (ibid.:176-177)

Shortly thereafter the infant and mother were visited by relatives, who welcomed the child with eloquent greetings and proclamations, and admonished the mother to be careful with herself and the baby (see Figure 4.3a). This visiting lasted up to 10 or 20 days. Also immediately following the birth the parents consulted with a soothsayer, who read the child's fate in the astrological book of days, or *tonalamatl* (see Chapter 7). He assessed the child's future according to the day and time of its birth, predicting whether the child would be honorable or disreputable, wealthy or destitute. The soothsayer also determined the day on which the infant should be bathed and named; particularly "good" days were chosen for this important ritual event.

The bathing ceremony took place in the early morning, with relatives of the baby present (see Figure 4.3b). While uttering speeches of dedication, the midwife ritually bathed the infant in the courtyard of the house. If the child was a boy, the midwife then offered him the paraphernalia of a warrior: a little shield, bow, and four arrows, along with a cloak and a loin cloth. If the child was a girl, the midwife gave her items symbolizing her future duties: a little spindle whorl, batten, basket, spinning bowl, skeins, and shuttle, as well as a skirt and tunic (ibid.:201). The child was then given a name and dressed. Young children went running off, shouting the new name to the community at large. The baby was carried inside to its cradle, and the adults enjoyed a great deal of feasting and drinking. If the household was a wealthy one, the event was done on a grand scale; if a poor one, the feasting was more modest (see Chapter 3).

Children were frequently named after the day of their birth, especially children of commoners. Names such as *Ome Coatl* (Two Serpent), *Macuilli Tochtl*



Figure 4.3a An elderly relative visits a new mother and child. The speech scrolls indicate that the visitor is offering greetings, admonitions, or other formalized speeches (Historia General de las Cosas de Nueva España 1926: lámina XXXI, illus. 85).



Figure 4.3b The bathing ceremony (ibid.:lámina XXVI, illus. 41).

(Five Rabbit), and *Nahui Cuetzpallin* (Four Lizard) were prevalent. Other names might be given, particularly among the nobility. For example, a girl might be named *Miauaxiuhtl* (Turquoise Maize Flower) or *Quiauhxochitl* (Rain Flower); a boy might bear a name such as *Itzcoatl* (Obsidian Serpent), *Quauhcoatl* (Eagle Serpent), *Quauhtlatoa* (Talking Eagle), or *Motecuhzoma* (Our Angry Lord). Fray Diego Durán speculates that the child who later became the ruler Motecuhzoma Xocoyotzin displayed a scowling countenance when being named and so was dubbed "Our Angry Lord" (1971:424). When the Spanish friars arrived in Mexico, they baptized natives and gave each a Christian name. The natives usually maintained at least part of their original name as a surname. In the colonial period, this syncretism produced names such as *Juan Icnoyotl* (John Misery), *Francisco Xico* (Francis Bee), *Juan Tzonen* (John Hairy), and *Pedro Tochtl* (Peter Rabbit) (Anderson, Berdan, and Lockhart 1976:84-85).

Childhood

In their earliest years of life, little was expected of children. They remained close to home in their parents' care. The good child is simply described as healthy, strong, and happy; the bad child as sickly, maimed, and violent in temperament. However, at about age 5 or 6, overt attempts were begun to educate and train children. It was crucial that nobles and commoners alike acquire the qualities of obedience, respect, and honesty. When walking about, noble boys were always to be accompanied by pages whose duty it was to assure the proper conduct of each noble child—to see

that his conversation should be proper; that he should respect and show reverence to others—(when) perchance he somewhere might chance to meet a judge, or a leading militia officer, or a seasoned warrior, or someone of lesser rank; or a revered old man, or a respected old woman; or someone who was poor. He should greet him and bow humbly. (ibid., book 8:71)

In addition to cultivating obedience, respect, and honesty, commoner boys were admonished to work diligently:

Do what pertains to your office. Labor, sow and plant your trees, and live by the sweat of your brow. Do not cast off your burden, or grow faint, or be lazy. (Zorita 1963:145–146)

These boys' duties and chores began early in life: At age 4 they were expected to help by carrying water, at age 5 by carrying bundles to market and by toting firewood, at age 6 by continuing to carry goods to the market and to assist by collecting grains of maize in the marketplace,¹ and at age 7 by fishing with a net. These types of activities apparently continued through age 14, for at ages 13 and 14 boys are at least still carrying firewood and fishing, as well as paddling canoes (see Figure 4.4). Under other conditions, a boy might have concentrated on cultivation techniques or the art of featherworking, rather than fishing.

An important way of instilling moral codes and practical knowledge was through admonitions. These lengthy orations inculcated the child with the Mexica view of the world as a painful and dangerous place, and offered advice on how to cope in such a world: Proceed always with moderation, humility, and diligence. The specific rules of etiquette described at the start of this chapter were also emphasized to the child to provide him or her with guidelines for behavior and survival in a world that offered only fear and pain.

Punishments for misbehavior were severe. The mildest punishment took the form of a scolding. The child might be compared to an Otomí, a people held in low regard by the Mexica:

Now thou art an Otomí. Now thou art a miserable Otomí. O Otomí, how is it that thou understandest not? Art thou perchance an Otomí? Art thou perchance a real Otomí? Not only art thou like an Otomí, thou art a real Otomí, a miserable Otomí, a green-head, a thick-head, a big tuft of hair over the back of the head, an Otomí blockhead. (Sahagún 1950–1982, book 10:178)

¹Sahagún says that “if they saw or came upon dried grains of maize lying scattered on the ground, then they quickly gathered them up. They said: ‘Our sustenance suffereth: it lieth weeping. If we should not gather it up, it would accuse us before our lord’” (1950–1982, book 5:184).

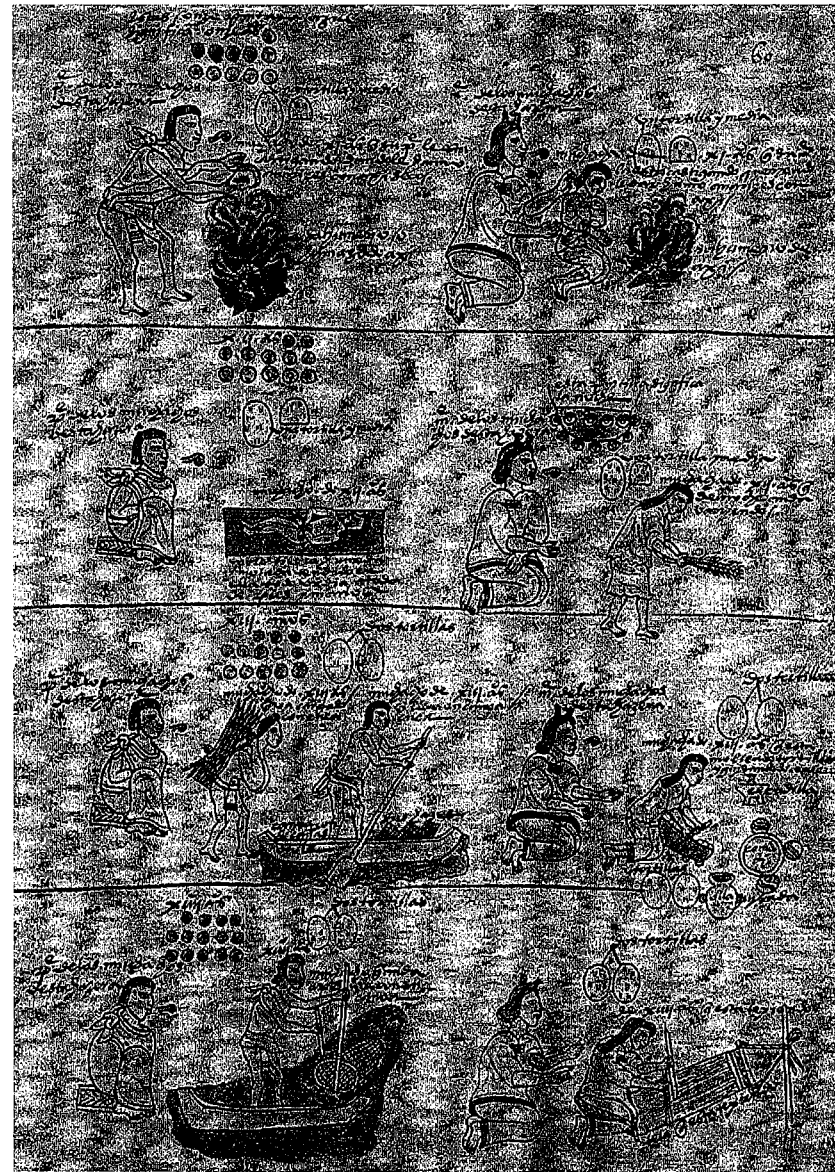


Figure 4.4 Punishment and training of children, ages 11 through 14 (Codex Mendoza 1938, vol. 3:folio 60).

If scolding failed to produce the desired results, more direct measures were employed. At age 8, a boy was warned about the use of maguey spines for punishment, and at age 9, the spines were used; at age 10, a boy might be beaten with a stick; at age 11, he might be held over a fire and forced to

inhale "chile-smoke"; and at age 12, he might be tied hand and foot and required to lie on a wet mat (see Figure 4.4).

A young boy's training, whether on a moral or practical plane, took place in a family context. Among the nobility, this instruction involved not only the polygynous family but also a wide array of nursemaids, pages, and servants. Whether noble or commoner, the father and grandfather were especially charged with the responsibilities of teaching, advising, admonishing, and punishing.

When a boy reached the age of 10, he began to grow a tuft of hair on the back of his head. He continued to wear this long tuft of hair until he succeeded in capturing an enemy warrior in battle, usually not at least until his teen years. It was considered shameful for a youth who had competed in several battles to still be wearing the tuft. At the very least, a youth risked being insulted by girls during the monthly celebration of Uey Toçoztli. If a youth spoke to a girl in the ceremonial procession, she might retort by saying:

Verily, he with the long (tangled) hair of a youth also speaketh! Dost thou indeed speak? Be thou concerned over how may be removed thy tuft of hair, thou with the long hair! Thou with the evil-smelling, stinking forelock, art thou not only a woman like me? (ibid., book 2:61)

These jeerings sparked the boys to more daring action on the battlefield, for it was painfully insulting to be called a "big tuft of hair over the back of the head."

The pattern for rearing girls was similar to that for boys, although the girls' activities were quite different. Beginning at age 4, girls were instructed in spinning, which apparently continued through at least age 10. By age 12, a girl's duties included the sweeping of the house and street at night. By 13, she knew how to grind maize, make tortillas, and prepare other foods; by 14 she had mastered the essential task of weaving. Certainly, by the time she was 14 years of age, a girl had gained considerable practice and proficiency in the essentials of her life's work: spinning, weaving, and cooking.

Girls, like boys, were instructed in the moral codes of Mexica culture. A girl was advised to be obedient, discreet, and chaste. Admonitions were the primary means of instilling these virtues; these were generally offered by her mother and other, elderly, female relatives. Her father, however, also took some responsibility for instructing his daughter, emphasizing prudence, chastity, and dedication to her future husband, and pointing out the skills she must acquire as preparation for marriage.

Between ages 12 and 13, some noble girls spent a year of service in the temples:

They lived in chastity and seclusion as maidens who had been assigned to the service of the god. Their only work was sweeping and sprinkling the temple and cooking the daily food for the idol and for the ministers of the temple. (Durán 1971:83)

As with boys, punishments for girls were severe. At age 8, a girl was warned about the use of maguey spines as punishment; at age 9, maguey spines might be applied to the girl's hands for some misdeed; at age 10, she might be beaten with a stick for spinning cotton poorly; and at age 11, she might be required to inhale "chile-smoke" (see Figure 4.4).

Formal Education

In Mexica society, education outside the home was primarily geared toward males. However, girls did attend the *cuicacalli* (house of song), and some noble girls underwent training as priestesses.

Apparently, males and females, nobles and commoners, all attended a *cuicacalli* between the ages of 12 and 15² (see bottom of Figure 4.5). The *cuicacalli* were adjacent to temples, and served both as the residences of instructors and as the school building. They were large edifices, elaborately decorated, with rooms surrounding an open courtyard where dances were performed.

At the *cuicacalli*, "Nothing was taught there to youths and maidens but singing, dancing, and the playing of musical instruments" (ibid.:289). Attendance and activities were highly regulated. Instruction began an hour before sunset; boys and girls were assembled in their *calpulli* by elderly men and women, and all proceeded to the *cuicacalli*. There the students danced and sang long into the night, under the watchful eyes of the instructors. Instruction in the *cuicacalli* served as an important means of transmitting knowledge and beliefs. Not only were song and dance essential to the proper performance of most religious rituals and ceremonies, but a vast amount of information was contained in the songs themselves. Religious in content, the songs praise the deities and tell of creation, of life and death, and of the relationships between mortals and the deities.

All noble boys, at least by age 15, attended the *calmecac* for their formal education³ (see top of Figure 4.5). The *calmecac* were attached to temples, and there were at least seven of them in Tenochtitlan alone. It is possible, however, that every major temple had a *calmecac* associated with it. Some of the *calmecac* provided highly specialized training. For example, the *calmecac* associated with the temple of Camaxtli (hunting deity) trained youths as skillful hunters; education at the temple of Tezcatlipoca (an omnipotent deity) was oriented toward preparing noble and common youths to become priests. In other *calmecac* youths were trained for a variety of futures, including the priesthood. The specific education received by a boy undoubtedly varied according to the *calmecac* he attended: Each deity had its own special set of ceremonies and ritual paraphernalia, and each placed different demands on the mortals dedicated to its worship. As a general idea of *calmecac* duties and activities, the account given earlier in this chapter may be taken as a guide. Much of the day and night were spent in hard physical work and penances. However, it was critical that the boys acquire a great deal of esoteric knowledge as well. They were taught

the songs which they called the gods' songs [that] were inscribed in books. And especially there was teaching of the count of days, the book of dreams, and the book of years. (Sahagún 1950–1982, book 3:67)

Orations, songs, histories, calendrics, and the interpretation of dreams and omens were committed to memory in the *calmecac*. It was essential that the

²Durán (1971:290) gives the ages of attendance as 12 to 14; the Codex Mendoza (1938, vol. 3:part III, folio 61) gives age 15.

³The sources disagree on the age at which boys entered the schools. The Codex Mendoza (1938, vol. 3:part III, folio 61) indicates age 15; Sahagún (1950–1982, book 8:71) gives age 10, 12, or 13; Zorita (1963:135) mentions age 5; and Torquemada (1969, vol. 2:222) age 5 or 6. Perhaps the age of entrance varied with the specific *calmecac* or course of study.



Figure 4.5 At about age 15, boys entered the *calmecac* (top) or the *cuicacalli* (bottom) (Codex Mendoza 1938, vol. 3:folio 61).

student learn the hieroglyphic writing system, for books were used in teaching the many arts—military, mechanical, astrological, religious, and legal (Durán 1971:293).

The martial arts were included in the *calmecac* curriculum. This instruction was critical, since a nobleman was expected to be skilled, courageous, and successful on the battlefield. This instruction began by at least age 15, and included some direct experience:

And then they took him to the wars. The seasoned warriors went taking great care of him, lest somewhere he might be lost. And they taught him well how to guard himself with a shield; how one fought; how a spear was fended off with a shield. And when a battle was joined . . . they taught him well and made him see how he might take a captive. (Sahagún 1950–1982, book 8:72)

Deviations from the approved pattern of activity were severely punished. Students were admonished by the priests, whose exhortations on a good and proper life sometimes failed:

If at times it appeared that one perhaps drank pulque, perhaps was given to women or committed a great (fault), then they went to apprehend him. No mercy was shown. He was burned, or strangled, or burned alive, or shot with arrows. If he sinned only lightly, they drew blood from his ears, his flanks, his thighs with maguey spines or with a (sharpened) bone. (ibid., book 3:66)

Faults deserving of the latter punishment would be failure to speak well or to greet others properly.

Formal education was also compulsory for commoner boys. By age 15, a boy was working and sleeping in the *telpochcalli* (young men's house) of his

calpulli. The major instructional emphasis of this school was military, for adult male commoners formed the backbone of the imperial military force. As in the *calmecac*, these boys spent a great deal of time at physical labor. They worked either in the *telpochcalli* itself, sweeping and laying fires, or in the community at large:

And they all went in a group where they did something—perchance they undertook the preparation of mud (for adobes), walls, agricultural land, canals. They went in a bunch or they divided into groups. And they went to the forest. They took . . . torches for the singing. (ibid.:56)

When a noble or commoner youth reached the age of 20, he was considered sufficiently educated to assume adult roles. He left his *calmecac* or *telpochcalli* and prepared for marriage.

Marriage

The establishment of marriage ties, in its ideal form, necessitated an elaborate and time-consuming procedure. The young man's parents took the first step in arranging the marriage. Among nobles,

(The father) said: "Poor is this, our youth. Let us seek a woman for him, lest he somewhere do something. He may somewhere molest a woman; he may commit adultery. For it is his nature; he is matured." (ibid., book 6:127)

A feast was then prepared by the parents, consisting of tamales, chocolate, and various sauces. Those who had been the youth's teachers were invited, and they ceremonially released the youth from their care. Only then, apparently, was there discussion by the youth's kin of the appropriate choice of wife. In actual practice, this may have been discussed at length prior to the initial events. Discussions may or may not have included the youth himself, whom the documents consistently exclude from any role in this ideal decision-making process.

Once a decision was made, elderly women who served as matchmakers went to the home of the chosen girl, arguing their case to the girl's parents. This procedure was repeated for several days, with no response expected (nor received) from the girl's parents. When (and if) an agreement was reached, the elderly male relatives of the young man consulted the soothsayers. These learned specialists determined the most appropriate day for the ceremony. Days labeled Reed, Monkey, Alligator, Eagle, and House were considered good days for any marriage ceremony (see Chapter 7). Elaborate preparations for the event were then made at the bride's home:⁴

Ground cacao was prepared, flowers were secured, smoking tubes were purchased, tubes of tobacco were prepared, sauce bowls and pottery cups and baskets were purchased. Then maize was ground. . . . Then tamales were prepared . . . perhaps three days or two days the women made tamales. (ibid.:129)

Invitations to the feast were offered to high-status, established persons, as well as to the groom's peer group. Etiquette at the ceremony appears to have

⁴This quotation undoubtedly describes the nature and extent of preparations for a marriage between nobles; marriages involving commoners would have been on a less extravagant scale.

been rigidly defined. First the “masters of the youths” from the schools arrived and ate and drank; then old men and women arrived and were provided with food, drink, flowers, and tobacco. Women then arrived carrying gifts of cloaks and maize. All day the guests ate and drank, and drank, and drank.

Toward sunset, the bride-to-be was bathed, decorated with red feathers and dyes, and placed on a reed mat in front of the hearth. The old men of the groom’s family then spoke to her:

Forever now leave childishness, girliness; no longer art thou to be like a child. . . . Be most considerate of one; regard one with respect, speak well, greet one well. By night look to, take care of the sweeping, the laying of the fire. Arise in the deep of night. Do not embarrass us; do not reject us as old men, do not reject thy mothers as old women. (ibid.:130)

After humbly enumerating her own inadequacies, the girl was carried by the groom’s female relatives to his house. The procession included kin of both the bride and groom, walking in two rows with some carrying torches (see bottom of Figure 4.6). This part of the ceremony gave the event a particularly public aspect, and has some appearance of “bride capture” by the groom’s relatives.

Arriving at their destination, bride and groom were placed on a mat in front of the hearth, the groom’s mother presenting gifts of clothing to her new daughter-in-law, the bride’s mother giving gifts, also of clothing, to her son-in-law. The matchmakers then reappeared, tying the couple together by their garments (see top of Figure 4.6). After being solemnly fed tamales, they were led by the matchmakers to a private room. The couple remained alone in this room for four days, guarded outside by the matchmakers, who did not refrain from indulging in copious quantities of pulque. The bride’s parents apparently also remained at the home of the groom during this period. The couple were not to consummate their marriage until the end of these four days. On the fifth day, elaborate festivities again took place, with feasting, dancing, and exchanges of gifts by in-laws. Both bride and groom were admonished and reminded of their new duties and responsibilities.

The documents do not indicate how often or to what extent these ideal arrangements were met. Undoubtedly, it often would have been difficult for many persons to strictly adhere to all the formalities. Surely commoners, having less wealth, had a more troublesome time than nobles in meeting the ideal requirements. Also, young pipiltin, or nobles, were allowed to have concubines before they married, with no obligation to marry a concubine. If a child were born under such an arrangement, the youth had to decide either to marry or to leave the girl. Some of these relationships, then, could result in marriage; whether the events and ceremony took the same form as the one described above is not at all clear.

With marriage bonds established, the young couple undertook expected adult responsibilities. Primary among these were the establishment of a household and the raising of children. Almost all women spent most of their adult lives maintaining home and hearth. Adult men served as heads of households and as leaders and participants in community activities. Their lives proceeded much as described in the opening section of this chapter. If a person survived the dangers of war and the sacrificial stone, the threats of illness, and the vagaries of accidents, he or she entered a stage in the life cycle that offered special rewards and responsibilities.

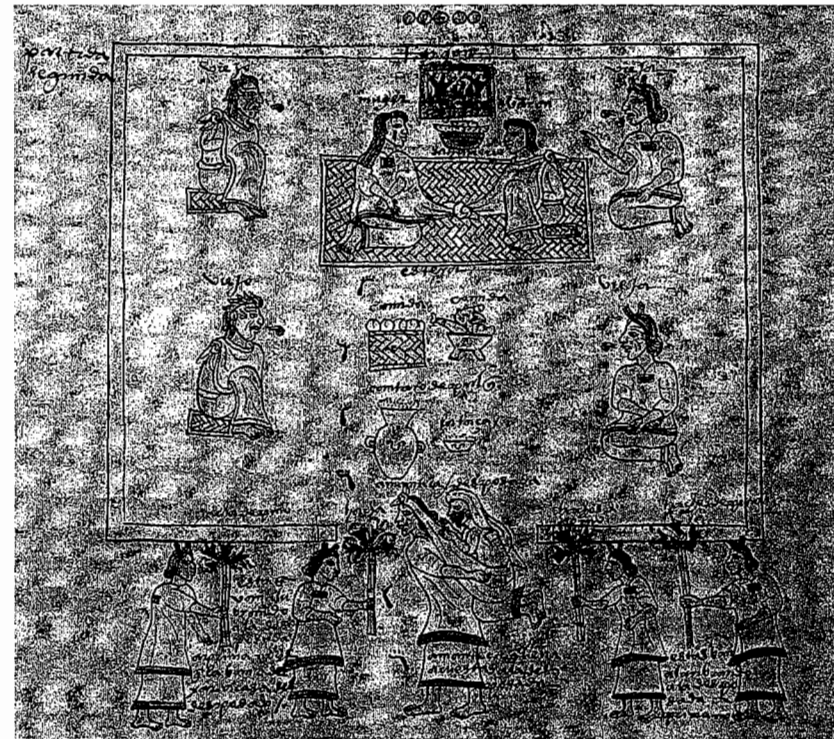


Figure 4.6 Aspects of the marriage ceremony. Above, the tying of garments before the hearth, accompanied by the admonitions of elders. Below, the groom’s female relatives carry the bride to the groom’s household (Codex Mendoza 1938, vol. 3:folio 61).

Old Age

With the onset of old age, a Mexica became white-haired, wrinkled, decrepit, and was frequently portrayed as acting childish. At extreme old age, a great-great grandparent was “one who trembles with age, a couger, a totterer” (ibid., book 10:5). It was important that, on reaching old age, a person leave behind a respected legacy. The honored great grandfather, for example, “leaves a good reputation, a good example,” and the respected great grandmother “is accorded glory, acclaim by her descendants” (ibid.). The elderly did not just look back at past deeds, but devoted themselves to managing households, teaching, advising, and punishing the young:

The good old man (is) famous, honored, an advisor, a rephender, a castigator, a counselor, an indoctrinator. He tells, he relates ancient lore; he leads an exemplary life. (ibid.:11)

Most of the admonitions delivered to young people were indeed offered by old men and women. Not all of these persons, however, took their responsibilities to heart. The “bad old man,” for example, was “a gaudy old man, a luxurious old man, an old fool, a liar. He invents falsehoods” (ibid.).

arrived from the places where he had friends. Gifts were brought to the dead man. (Durán 1971:122)

If a person died in distant parts—a merchant, for example—his family mourned him for four days. At the end of this period, the family members “washed their heads with soap. Thus it was said, the deceased was bathed; and thereby they destroyed and banished their grief” (Sahagún, 1950–1982, book 4:69). They then made a statue of bound pine logs in the deceased’s likeness, decorating it with paper ornaments. If he had died in battle, the statue was displayed in the calpulli temple for one day and then burned at midnight. If he died in some other, less glorious fashion, they displayed and burned his statue at his home, just before sunset (*ibid.*:69–70).

A variety of futures awaited the Mexica in the hereafter, again depending on the way in which they had died. The most exalted afterlife went to warriors and to women who had died bearing children. Warriors who died in battle or who had been sacrificed accompanied the sun on its journey from its rising to the zenith. After traveling with the sun for four years, they returned to earth as hummingbirds or butterflies (both being creatures that undergo life cycle transformations). Women who died in childbirth carried the sun on a feathered litter from the zenith to its setting. At sunset they delivered the sun to those who dwelt in Mictlan, the place of the dead (see Chapter 6). These same women then roamed about as *cihuapipiltin* or *cihuateteo*, women goddesses. They were greatly feared, for they might suddenly appear, especially at crossroads, and cause serious fright and bodily harm (*ibid.*, book 1:19).

Those who had been singled out by the water deities also enjoyed a happy afterlife. They lived in the comfortable and verdant gardens of Tlalocan, a divine place of happiness and ease (see Chapter 6).

Most Mexica, however, descended to Mictlan, a place of dark emptiness. This underworld was divided into nine layers, through which the deceased had to travel. The journey took four years, and the deceased was assisted by a yellow dog, his worldly possessions, and plenty of food, all cremated with him. Aid was also given by survivors, who made periodic offerings for the deceased. If the deceased was a nobleman, supposedly his servants were killed and cremated in order to prepare his food and serve him in the underworld. The deceased traveled through mountains, past a serpent and a green lizard, across eight deserts, over eight hills, through the “place of the obsidian-bladed winds,” and across the “place of the nine rivers,” finally arriving at the deepest layer. The place of the obsidian-bladed winds was believed to be the most difficult part of the journey. The deceased gained some measure of protection by covering themselves with the worldly possessions burned with them; this included everything from shields to spindles. Those who were destitute and poor in life had little protection here and suffered a great deal.

On the whole, nobles and those who upheld the ideals of Mexica life were given proper funerals and had relatively easy journeys through the land of the dead. Less funerary attention was given to those who were indigent, committed serious unforgiven crimes, or lived shameless lives; these suffered very painful journeys.

SOCIAL CONTROL AND LAW

Not all Mexica were always humble, hardworking, and law abiding as the statements on ideal behavior might suggest. While old men were charged with relating ancient lore, some lied. Farmers were to be diligent and productive, but some were lazy and negligent. Women, who were admonished to be chaste and virtuous, occasionally became harlots. And judges and officials were at times dishonest or accepted bribes. Some people committed adultery, became thieves, or committed homicide.

In general, wayward behavior was discouraged and controlled through the enculturation process. Frequent admonitions and exhortations served to instruct and remind individual Mexica of their roles, responsibilities, and proper behavior. When these means failed, the elders and other instructors might resort to threats of supernatural or physical punishments.

Threats of punishments from the supernatural invariably meant physical chastisement during the person’s lifetime. No threat of punishment after death could be invoked in Mexica culture, since the type of afterlife was determined primarily by how a person died, not by how he or she lived. Threats of punishments from the gods were most commonly used for religious affronts. For example, the god Macuilxochitl (Five Flower) would punish those who broke the rule of sexual abstinence during fasting by visiting them with venereal diseases, hemorrhoids, boils, and piles. Or if the god Omacatl (Two Reed) was not properly cared for and revered, he became angry and visited the offender with physical discomfort: “. . . he choked on his food, he choked on his drink, the food stuck in his throat when he ate. And if he walked, he stumbled, tripped, fell” (*ibid.*: 33). Or if the Tepictoton (Little Molded Ones) were offended by improper ceremonial observances, they would cause lame and misshapen limbs, or trembling feet, eyes, or lips. If a person were afflicted with these ailments, it was clear to everyone that he or she had irked the “Little Molded Ones.” And for the rites venerating the goddess Xochiquetzal (Flower-Quetzal Feather), all were to wash themselves in the rivers. The priests warned that:

Those who did not would suffer ills and contagious diseases, such as pustules, leprosy, and malformed hands. It was thought that these ills appeared because of sin and that the gods sent them as a vengeance. Through fear (of these ills) everyone, whether a child or a grown man, went to bathe at dawn. (Durán 1971:245)

The Mexica also had secular laws defining acceptable and unacceptable behavior, and legally sanctioned punishments for breaking the laws. The law was rigorous and strict, the punishments swift and severe. For seemingly mild misdeeds, such as improper speech or disrespectful behavior, a Mexica would customarily be pierced with maguey spines. If a Mexica sang poorly, danced out of step, or played a musical instrument out of tune, he would be imprisoned, and perhaps die there (Sahagún 1950–1982, book 8:56).

Drunkenness was believed to be at the root of much improper and criminal behavior. It caused quarrelling, boasting, and poverty. It led a person to commit adultery and to steal. No wonder, then, that public drunkenness was severely punished. A known drunken priest or official could suffer the death penalty. If a

high-ranking official became drunk, but without public disgrace, he merely forfeited his titles and office. Commoners were punished less severely for first offenses: Their heads were shaved in public and their houses demolished. A second offense resulted in the death penalty. Drunkenness was viewed as a serious offense, one that could lead to social discord and criminal behavior. Yet drunken behavior was explained fatalistically, being associated with the ritual day Two Rabbit: "It was said: 'So is his rabbit. Thus was his day sign; in this way did the wine gods manifest themselves on him'" (ibid., book 4:16).

Other serious crimes were adultery, thievery, and homicide. If a man and woman were caught in an adulterous act by the woman's husband, both were summarily stoned in the marketplace. If the adulterous couple was accused by hearsay, which was later verified, they were hanged rather than stoned. No one, noble or commoner, was spared these severe penalties. In one recorded case, Nezahualpilli, a ruler of Texcoco, sentenced one of his wives and her three current lovers to death. Rank had no privileges here, even though the woman was a daughter of Axayacatl, ruler of Tenochtitlan, and her lovers were all high-ranking nobles.

Stealing was less severely penalized, depending on the place and extent of the misdeed. If a person stole from a dwelling, he was placed in slavery to the person from whom he stole. If the victim did not wish this additional labor, he could sell the offender to someone else for the amount of the theft. If the theft took place in the countryside, or if a person repeatedly stole, the designated punishment was death (Alva Ixtlilxochitl 1965, vol. 2:188-189). Stealing reportedly could be achieved by casting spells or by flagrant robbery (Berdan 1998:263).

The act of killing or planning to kill another person was usually met with the death penalty. However, a person committing this crime might also be placed in bondage to the family of his victim: "The murderer was turned over to the widow or to the relatives of the deceased, (to be) forever a slave. He was to serve them and to earn a living for the children of the deceased" (Durán 1971:96). Additionally, if someone overpowered and kidnapped a child, selling him into slavery, the offender was hanged (Alva Ixtlilxochitl 1965, vol. 1:237). Murderers ("rash and disorderly"), highwaymen ("treacherous and stealthy"), and sorcerers (who transformed themselves into evil creatures of the night) might all perpetrate killings (Berdan 1998:263).

Other laws applied to land jurisdictions, the maintenance of status symbols, the responsibilities of high-ranking officials, and the duties of soldiers in battle. According to Texcoco law, which was generally accepted in the Basin of Mexico, land rights were closely guarded. Should someone move boundary markings on private lands, or take possession of some land, the stated penalty was death.

The laws were very specific with regard to status-linked rights. The use of clothing, ornamentation, and housing was all carefully regulated by law. Only the ruler could wear the finest cloaks; others wore specific styles of cloaks according to their rank. No undistinguished commoners could wear cotton cloaks; theirs must be made of maguey fiber. Likewise, commoners could not wear their cloaks below their knees unless their legs bore battle scars. Only nobles could wear ornate and expensive jewelry: lip plugs, ear plugs, nose plugs, bracelets, and necklaces. Only nobles could build houses of two stories. That is,

no one could pretend to be of a status he was not, and all statuses were legally defined and protected. The law stated that any violation of these statutes met with the sentence of death.

While high rank was protected, it also carried onerous responsibilities. As already seen, punishments frequently were more severe for the offending noble than for his peasant counterpart. Additional crimes and punishments were associated with prestigious occupations. The priest who lived in concubinage was executed; a tribute collector who collected too much also met with execution; and the judge who took bribes or provided special favors also received the death penalty.

Special laws applied on the battlefield. It was particularly important that a warrior obey a commander's orders; any disobedience resulted in death by beheading. Also, if one warrior took another's captive or gave his own captive away, the punishment was death by hanging (Alva Ixtlilxochitl 1965, vol. 2:189). A major goal of Aztec warfare was the capture of enemy warriors, and high rewards and status awaited those who were successful on the battlefield. It was considered important, therefore, that there be no abuses of this system. It should be kept in mind that the documentary accounts state severe penalties (for all types of crimes), but it is not really known to what extent they were exacted.

These laws and their associated penalties were an essential part of a complex governmental and legal bureaucracy. This political system, along with the extensive warfare and human sacrifice which accompanied it, is the subject of Chapter 5.