

## AZTEC HUMAN SACRIFICE: FACT OR FICTION?

### DISTORTION AND BIAS OF AZTEC SOURCES

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#### PROBLEM OF SOURCES

There are a series of problems with the sources that have been used heretofore for the interpretation of pre-Columbian cultures and their respective worldview:

(a) Forced confessions secured by torture by the Santo Officio or Inquisition. These were used as evidence of human sacrifice or other defamatory and/or accusatory issues. This practice had already been in place in Old Spain since 1122 and more recently during the times of Columbus, was secured by secret application by Queen Isabela after Castilla and Aragón were unified via the marriage of Isabela and her cousin Fernando. This was subsequently transported to the Americas with Bishops as the enforcers of the Inquisition (e.g. Diego de Landa in Yucatán, Juan de Zumárraga in New Spain.). There was in place the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* , an index of prohibited or censored Works in addition to the establishment of the headquarters for censorship and alteration of documents, known as the *Consejo de las Indias* or Council of the Indies. One must remember that all of these strategies had already been used successfully in Spain against Jews and Moors i.e. accusations of human sacrifice (Jews) torture, forced confessions and death as early as 550 A.D. with the Councils of Toledo. The alteration of documents or the invention of history via defamation was well established before the coming to the Americas. It was these same procedures that were transported to the Americas and used against all Native cultures.

#### DISTORTION AND/OR ALTERATION OF WORLDVIEW VIA POST CONQUEST CODICES

The first objective of the military (Conquistadores) was to get rid of the infrastructure comprised of governmental leaders and Scientific/Spiritual guides of Society. Those that escaped the massacres (25 million wiped out in the first 40 years) were largely children and women. The women were used as sexual objects and the children were instructed by the clergy to forget their culture, ideas, worldview and sacred symbols. (Hegemony) They even instructed the children to stone their elders and or parents if they mentioned any of their ancient knowledge. The latter was seen by the church as noble and dignifying for they as children would become martyrs! The church since the middle Ages had been following the dictum of St. Augustine i.e. if it is not within the

Church, it is within the realm of the Devil. Ergo it is heretical ...ergo it is to be condemned. This is enforced violently by the **Santo Oficio** or Inquisition. Beyond stoning and burning of millions of innocent people, largely because they were different, the Church' second objective was to do away with their writings. The first Bishop of New Spain, Juan de Zumárraga thus will burn priceless pre-Columbian codices in his own patio for ten days, with the malicious intent of wiping away the pre-Columbian worldview. Moreover, by 1521, King Charles the V of Spain decrees that all documents written in New Spain must be reviewed by the Ecclesiastical and Inquisitorial Councils and these included all Codices that were written by Christianized natives under the auspices of the Church. Thus, these new altered writings reflecting the views of the Inquisition became the history for future historians, anthropologist, arqueologists and Art historians.

These censored and changed sources became the official version of Native American society.

#### METHODS OF PROSELYTISM—LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL APPROPRIATION

This refers to the supplanting of native ideas and culture with new concepts that fit the new religious paradigm. One way was to take a native word in their Nahuatl and change the original meaning with a concept that heretofore was totally foreign to the native language and culture. These went into the first dictionary by Molina and into the codices. Western concepts of the devil, hell, sin, miracle, punishment by God, human sacrifice, tribute, slavery, elitism, aristocracy, monarchies, prostitution, serfs, machismo, witches or witchcraft, avarice, exploitation, profit, empires, royalty, polytheism, cannibalism, Imperialism, serfdom, were some of the ideas that were incorporated into the codices by the Inquisition, concepts that were totally foreign to pre-Columbian Native American societies. The examples abound:

*Teococoliztli*—original-*enfermedad terrible* (bad sickness); changed meaning—punishment by God

*Tlatlacolli*---physical damage or deterioration of a sore; changed meaning—Sin

*Tlaccatecolotl*—man of wisdom; changed meaning –Devil

*Mictlan*-----the realm of repose, 13th stage on the energy level; changed meaning—Hell

*Koatl*-----energy, life, creation, wisdom, knowledge; changed meaning---Evil

*Ometeotl*---duality within Nature, all living forms; changed meaning the two Gods

*Techichi*---a quadruped mammal (eaten by Spaniards) now extinct, prized for its taste; changed meaning Dog.

*Nochtli*---(tuna or prickly pear) ; confused meaning----fig

*Vexollotl*---*guajolote* or turkey today; changed meaning rooster, then peacock (*pavo*)

Other misrepresentations and misnomers exist— *Ketzalkoatl*—used in countless ways mostly to justify the Conquest—even the Christ was to return as *Ketzalkoatl* and the Spaniards as the ones confused supposedly as Christ! In the first place, *Ketzalkoatl* is not a God as Academia would like to think. It is a cosmic natural force that imbues all humans with the creative energy to think, to create i.e.

intelligence. It is also a title meaning highest attainment of wisdom and knowledge (as was Christ). E.g. *Ce Acatl Topilzin*-Toltec ruler and Guide. The seed of the cacao was described symbolically as *yollotl* and *eztli* or heart and blood. This symbolic representation refers to of what we now know as Chocolate, and taken in its pure form had uplifting and therapeutic qualities. (Endorphins). The highly metaphoric Nahuatl of the Nations confederated under the Confederation of Anahuac, of which the *Metzicahs* were only one group, often used the imagery of heart and blood but in a spiritual sense. Westerners to the contrary generally deal with a literal and pictorial language; herein lies most of the mistranslations and misinterpretations regarding their culture.

#### PROBLEM OF AUTHENTICITY AND INTERPRETATION OF CEREMONIES

One of the most important ceremonies that took place in the courtyard of the Major Pyramid in *Meztziko Tenochtitlan* was the Festival of *Panquetzaliztli* (pantli-banner, quetzal-precious, to pick up or the essence of picking up small banners) in honor of the cosmic force that gives us the will to create and overcome adversity i.e. *Huitzilopochtli*. This is the same celebration that is attributed to Bernal Díaz del Castillo who in gruesome detail describes human sacrifice that he is supposedly seeing. The problem is that he is caught in a lie as German Ethnologist Peter Hassler discovers for he is not geographically in Metziko-Tenochtitlan where this is supposed to be taking place but rather 7-8 kilometers away! If indeed he actually wrote it. All ceremonies that are sacred have to do with the cosmic forces of Nature and their relationship to all living things on Earth. The two principle sciences that serve as a base are Astronomy and Mathematics. It has to do with the various manifestations and cycles that affect man and woman on Earth. With respect to this supposedly infamous celebration, academics first have to understand the Cosmogony and Cosmology of the Confederated Anahuakan Nations. Every action on earth is a scientific understanding and reflection of the cosmic universe. And as such *Ketzalkoatl*, *Tezkatlipoka*, *Huitzilopochtli* and *Camaxtli* are mere natural manifestations of the Principle of Duality or *Ometeotl*. (Which are cosmic forces that impregnate us with Intelligence, Memory, Will and Strength.) The fiesta of *Panquetzaliztli* was celebrated by the general populace over a period of nine days. Like most celebrations, theatre, dance and song along with symbolism are the central activities that celebrate the concept of Will, here represented by *Huitzilopochtli* in a enormous effigy made of the following materials: *Chicalotl* a mexican eatable vegetable (also medicinal), the dough made of *Huatli* (today known as amaranth in your Health Food Store), mixed with sweet wild honey and finished off with an eatable seed called *Tzoalli*. After constructing the effigy, it became part of a mobile theatre that covered five different areas in what is now Mexico City i.e. *Tlaltelolco*, *Popotla*, *Chapultepek*, *Iztapalapa*, and *Xoloko*. Two principle groups participate in this moving spectacle: The *pochtekas* (merchants) and the *Tenochkahs* or citizens of *Tenochtitlan*. The *Pochtekas* will represent the runners or *Paynal* whose objective is to keep the people in front in constant movement; these are followed by the effigy of *Huitzilopochtli*. During this moving spectacle there will be theatre enacted recreating historical events e.g. for the merchants, the recreation of difficulties that they have experienced with foreign tribes, how they would send scouts

to check activity with the *aoyizques*, for example. Along the way there were recreations of skirmishes and battles. In other stations there would be dance and song in which all participated. There would be exchanges of gifts of flowers and food. After going through five distant neighborhoods known as *Kalpulli*, the effigy of *Huitzilopochtli* would be placed in a special enclosure while special dignitaries would preside in a symbolic ceremony. One of the Spiritual Guide Sages represented *Ketzalkoatl* or Wisdom/Intelligence, followed by eight others all of which represent the distinct levels of society i.e. civil, military and spiritual. After homage was paid, each one advanced with their *tepuztopilli* or small lances (*dardos*) to the effigy and sliced pieces of the body of the effigy, which were to be distributed among all the participants. This activity was known as *teocualo* or the magnificent partaking of the (Symbolic) representation of the protector of people...and it was eaten so that it could become part of each one of the participants. During these nine days there were abundant flowers, dances, songs and 365 different regional foods for all to enjoy. The body of *Huitzilopochtli* was eaten by all but in the imaginative minds of scandalous friars it was human sacrifice but as can be seen, it was the body in the effigy of cosmic force of Will that was eaten by all the participants, it was a body made of grain, honey and vegetables garnished with the sweet seed of *Zoalli* which was also used to make candy.

When an elder native was asked about eating human flesh, he smiled and asked the interrogator if he knew what *Iztkuintli* was. He relates the story that has been passed on for generations about an incident in which toddlers were playing among *Iztkuintli*. He says that the Spanish did not tolerate toddlers playing with *Iztkuintli* so they would often shout “fuera de aquí escuincles”! He obviously was referring to what they called dogs but somehow *escuincle* (the current mexicanism) was confused and deformed in colonial society to mean a young toddler. The *Iztkuintli* was not a dog as Jesuit researcher Clavijero asserts but a *Techichi*, not of the canine family. The *Techichi* was a succulent delicacy during those times. But because the Spanish used the word *escuincle* (dog) instead of the correct word of *Techichi*, linguistic deformation set in and soon the friars were saying that children were being eaten roasted when in fact it was the savory and succulent *Techichi*. It was so delicious that Jesuit writer Clavijero states that in fact, it was the Spanish that ate them to extinction when there was a meat shortage in the Indies.

One last example of Confusion and Distortion has to do with the word *Nenetzin*. Among other scandalous gossip going around in early colonial New Spain was that there was some Fly Tortas mixed in blood that were being eaten. The so called blood was none other than a red natural dye found in *semilla orillaroja* that is red and the delicious *tortas* were not made of flies but of *Nenetzin*. The meat that was eaten was none other than the delicious meat of the mushroom called *Nenetzin*.

Additionally, specious knowledge of the native Anahuakan Nahuatl or language led many Spanish interpreters to confuse words that were close in sound but distant in meaning. Case in point is the confusion of *Pipiltin* and *Pipiltzin*. In the writings of Cortes' *Relaciones...*, there appears the lack of linguistic knowledge between these two words. It was said that in a festival there was the eating of *Pipiltin* or *pollitos de aves* or young chicks. The Spanish *Nahuatl* or interpreters in *Nahuatl*, according to Native Scholar Eulalia Guzmán, interpreted in their way thinking that *Pipiltin* (young aviary

chicks) was the same as *Pipiltzin* (sons and daughters of governing heads). Finally, much of what is said about the culture of the confederated Anahuakan nations originates from the work of Friar Bernardino de Sahagún also known as the Florentine Codex. Bernardino de Sahagún was severely criticized and persecuted by his own order for dealing with “Indian culture”. They saw it as a total waste of time and thus they took away all of his native informants; he was left to deal with a voluminous work by himself. We now know and have further proof of the tampering and altering of his work via a quote of his in which he confesses that his work is being changed by the Church officials. He says the following about his work:

*“ There were corrections made (by the Church) since in the first draft, there were things that were placed or inserted, that in effect were badly placed or falsely placed and other things that were omitted that were glaring omissions. ”*

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PROBLEMS OF HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL DISTORTION DUE TO  
POLITICS, RELIGION AND MEDIEVAL SUPERSTITION

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### ORIGINS

The idea of human sacrifice for the Spanish originates in the Western Historical legacy (Greco-Roman) as evidenced by the multiple Greek Gods, the idea of sacrificing to them and the degenerate Roman sport of sacrificing humans in the Coliseum. Moreover, references in the Bible of human sacrifice came into the thought paradigm of Western culture, notably during the middle Ages with the sanctimonious and institutionalized killing of millions of people through the Inquisition or Holy Office. This is the background and worldview that the Spanish project when they encounter cultures in the Americas that were totally different from theirs.

### SOURCES

The sources that have been used to promote human sacrifice among Native peoples by Historians, Anthropologists and Latin-American Specialists are not pre-Columbian. They are the writings either of Christianized natives under the tutelage of the Roman Church (Florentine Codex or Sahagun's work) or Chronicles by soldiers and clerics that have been part of massacres of millions of Native peoples (Bernal Diaz del Castillo, Cortés, López y Gómara et al) and who are moreover, under the control of ecclesiastical Councils of the Inquisition that censored all materials written, specifically by the *Consejo de las Indias* in 1550. German ethnologist Peter Hassler points to some of the lies or inventions by the Spanish, particularly with Bernal Díaz del Castillo (*Historia verdadera de la Nueva España*). Bernal Díaz del Castillo describes in gruesome detail the human sacrifice that he says he is witnessing in the *Templo Mayor* in *Meziko Tenochtitlan* (Mexico City currently). What Peter Hassler discovers is that geographically Bernal Diaz del Castillo is in the *Real de Tlacopan* that is 6-8 kilometers from Mexico City! Thus, as Hassler notes, he is caught in a lie, obviating any veracity to his chronicle. The controlled propaganda of defamation aimed at Native peoples, not only attempts to justify the atrocities of the Spanish but it is a program that had already been tried successfully in Spain against the Jews. Here, wood engravings carved by Church officials showed Jews carving up children in a table for human sacrifice. Thus, the Roman Church's defamation of Jews becomes part of the political/ religious plan not only for the expulsion of Jews from Spain but also is used in the same manner against the Natives in the Indies and New Spain. This scenario will be continued in Central America and South America.

## SPANISH MEDIEVAL CULTURAL BACKGROUND

Research indicates unequivocally that the worldview of the Spanish during Conquest is directly linked to the medieval world of fable, fantasy and superstition. (See Luis Weckmann, "Spain transmitted to America many of her Medieval Accomplishments.") The Spanish in their chronicles describe people with square heads and one eye in their forehead, Cyclops and many other monsters. All of this is narrated affirmatively and as proof with the gossip fabrication of "*oir decir*" (I hear tell). This '*oir decir*' was part of the literary legacy of fantasy in Spain and can be traced back to the Medieval European Chronicles of the XV and XVI centuries.

## INQUISITIONAL "PROOF"

Much of the "proof" given by clerics include forced confessions secured by torture via Ecclesiastical Inquisitional tribunals. In Yucatán, the Alcalde Mayor Don Diego Quijada admitted that confessions were largely secured by the "force of confession that continued until the answers satisfied the interrogator". This was further corroborated by the German priest, Friedriche Spee Von Langenfeld. Moreover, Fray Francisco de Toral stated that "what was said about sacrifices were all lies and was often done to liberate themselves (i.e. the Native victim) from torture. These confessions were further used by Bishop Diego de Landa as "proof" of human sacrifice in his now famous *Relación de las Cosas de Yucatán*. What is not generally stated in textbooks is that he was the official Inquisitor for Yucatan. A Bartolomé de la Casas, known as the defender of the Natives, attacks the inventions of Chronicler López-Gómara. He states that López-Gómara not only did not see any human sacrifice but also merely repeats gossip from his employer Cortés. Bartolomé de las Casas further states that this is the "language of the Spanish who write of horrible deeds with the intention of defaming the various Native Nations to excuse, the violent cruelties, thefts and massacres that they have made as never before seen."

## ARCHEOLOGY

According to a Cultural Anthropologist in the field, Archeologists and Art Historians need to have better backgrounds in the study of Cultural Anthropology. Too often when an archaeologist discovers a skeleton, he/she immediately assumes human sacrifice, without knowing the autochthonous cultures, their philosophy and metaphysics. They rely on the only perspective that they know, i.e. the Greco-Roman Cultural legacy to interpret a non-Western Culture and Society. In the *Cenote Sagrado* of Chichén Itzá, archeologists have found human skeletons and have assumed that these were sacrificial victims. What is lacking in their background is the autochthonous cultural history and philosophy that would have given them the understanding that Springs, Lakes, Mountains and *Cenotes* are seen as Sacred. The *Cenote*

in Chichén Itzá instead was a Sacred Burial Place for venerable citizens such as heroic figures of war or Governing Heads that died a natural death. Hassler notes that European Cathedrals throughout Europe have skeletons buried within them. He poses the question: Does this presuppose human sacrifice?

## SYMBOLIC VS LITERAL INTERPRETATION

Researcher Jill Leslie Furst notes that interpretations made to the *Codice Vendobonensis Mexicanus I* are literal and erroneous. In it there is a picture of a woman with her head separated from the rest of her body. The literal interpretation is that she has been decapitated and is a victim of human sacrifice. Furst points adamantly that this symbolically is a representation *not* of a woman but the maguey plant that is cut cyclically and is celebrated in ritual, song and heretofore is depicted ideographically in this Codex. In many codices, there are numerous human heads that represent numbers and not humans literally as Westerners would like to assume.

## APPROPRIATION OF MEANINGS OF WORDS

Spanish ecclesiastical officials found themselves with the problem of not finding *Aztekah Nahuatl* words that projected concepts of Satan, Hell, Purgatory, Evil or Human Sacrifice. Not only were there no institutions for the former in Native society but there was no vocabulary for these Western Christian concepts. The closest word to the concept of dying or being killed was *Tlacamictiliztli* which literally means the essence of a human dying. In Native cultures, this was used when a person suffered either a natural death or a death in war. These were the only two types of death that were permitted i.e. heroic death and natural death. Homicide and Suicide was strictly forbidden. The root *mictia* means to die or be killed as in war. The Spanish conveniently appropriated the word and changed its meaning to human sacrifice to justify their inventions and defamation.

It is interesting to note that when the Spanish killed it was not used with the meaning of human sacrifice but was used in its original meaning of dying or being killed as in war.

## PHILOSOPHY

The idea of offering sacrificial victims as in the Greco-Roman legacy is absurd in pre-Columbian philosophy and metaphysics. To Native autochthonous cultures, all Life is Sacred including Rivers, Mountains, Birds, Insects, and Mother-Earth etc. They understood that they were the Guardians of Mother Nature and all life within it. To curtail human life goes against the Native principle of reincarnation for it prevents the natural evolution and the potential of greatness of the Spirit not only for the Individual but also for the Nation as a whole. Western concepts of Invasion/ Conquest, theft, adultery, violent abuse of women, social caste systems, plutocracies and institutional religions were non-existent in the autochthonous communal and non-materialistic cultures of the Americas. Not knowing the philosophy of autochthonous cultures is one of the central problems for Westerners today in Academia.

## FIGURATIVE VS LITERAL INTERPRETATION

Chocolate was considered one of the most highly prized and honored drinks among the Aztekahs. The chocolate that was prepared by the Nations of the Confederation of Anauak was not the sugary and watered down version used in current society. It was served full strength and was even bitter but it provided an excellent therapeutic effect that impacted the Spirit and Heart ( *In Yolloitl, In Ixtli*). The seed of *Cacao* that was exchanged in the *Tianquiztli* or Market Place was known as *Yolloitl Eztli*, or in literal translation, Heart and Blood to denote its connection to one's Spirit/Heart ( *Yolloitl*) and Energy (Eztli). As can be seen this is not only figurative but one that places the seed of the *Cacao* at a symbolic level connecting it to one's Spirit on a metaphysical plane.

## RITUALS

In the famous ball courts of Native America, anthropologists, Art Historians et al., have conveniently reiterated the Roman Coliseum ritual of sacrificing the losers. The ceremony in pre-Columbian America was known as *Tlachtli* to the Aztekahs and *Ulamatizin* as a ceremony which was connected to their understanding of the Cosmos, i.e. their Astronomic, Philosophical and Metaphysical conception of the Universe. Most rituals whether in Dance or in Ball Games represent planets from Constellations or the cycles of Nature for Agriculture; they can be symbolic representations for measurement and time. The court represented the Universe and the Four Directions with its exact positioning according to the Science of Astronomy and Mathematics and it depicted the cyclical interplay within Nature between the Moon and the Sun, the Day and the Night not as conflicting phenomena but as complimentary generators of Energy, Life and Movement. Thus, the Ball Court becomes the stage for the Theatre of

the Universe and provides a platform for understanding Nature and the Universe. In New Zealand, Aborigines have preserved this metaphysical paradigm and moreover cannot understand why Westerners have to have winners and losers in ball games. As one Aborigine queried: Why must there be losers? In these ancient communal societies, sharing is primordial and competition is non-existent in their philosophy. Thus, there are no winners and losers. One either plays for the joy of it or commemorates the cycles of life in ceremonial play. Thus, the Western idea of a loser that has to be punished or killed is an unfortunate concept that is deep in the psyche of Westerners and as such, does a great disservice to the understanding of autochthonous pre-Columbian Cultures. As Peter Hassler states “It is incomprehensible how anthropologists can state as proof that the losers of a ball game were killed when they do not even know the rules of the game or the understanding of the ritual.” Once again, not knowing the philosophy is at the core of the problem for Academicians and Researcher





