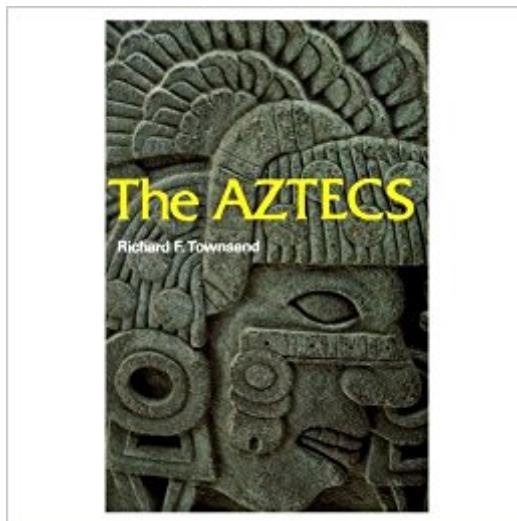


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The Aztecs (Ancient Peoples And Places)



Synopsis

Recounts the Spanish conquest, describes Aztec culture and beliefs, and surveys findings from recent archaeological excavations.

Book Information

Series: Ancient Peoples and Places (Book 107)

Hardcover: 224 pages

Publisher: Thames & Hudson; First Edition edition (July 1992)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0500021139

ISBN-13: 978-0500021132

Product Dimensions: 0.8 x 6.5 x 10 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.5 pounds

Average Customer Review: 3.6 out of 5 stars 13 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #281,125 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #36 in Books > History > Ancient Civilizations > Aztec #216 in Books > Textbooks > Social Sciences > Archaeology #299 in Books > Textbooks > Humanities > History > Latin America

Customer Reviews

While studies of Aztec art, architecture, and religion have appeared at regular intervals, general textbooks have been infrequent. Thus, this comprehensive, exceedingly well-researched volume has merit, especially since it seeks to instruct rather than argue. The author's engaging prose breathes new life into even the most overworked topic--for example, the tale of Cortes's march to Tenochtitlan, repeated countless times, yet told here with novel freshness. Townsend, curator of the Art Institute of Chicago's department of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas, draws on new information and analyses from many fields of original research to create a strong competitor for Brian Fagan's excellent survey (The Aztecs, Freeman, 1984), the most recent general text. Highly recommended for the general reader as the best available introduction to a complex subject.- William S. Dancey, Ohio State Univ., Columbus

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Fine scholarly history of the Aztecs from their 12th-century Toltec origins through the 16th-century Spanish conquest by Cortés. How was it that, landing on the Tabasco Coast in 1519, Hernán Cortés and his 500 soldiers--sons with no inheritance, failed planters, ex-gold-miners, freebooters--were able utterly to defeat Motecuhzoma, Aztec king and most feared

ruler in Mesoamerica, and by 1521 conquer the Aztec confederation of city- states, with their population of 350,000? Here, Townsend (Curator, Department of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas/Art Institute of Chicago) draws from archaeological discoveries, Spanish records, and recent scholarship to explain the Conquest of Mexico and to illumine less generally known aspects of Aztec history: the everyday lives of kings and commoners; the interlocking calendars and festivals through which priests controlled their subjects; and the 400-year line of warrior/conquerors before Motecuhzoma. Ironically, the Aztec ritual of human sacrifice--in which the hearts of defeated warriors were torn beating from their bodies--contributed to the defeat of Motecuhzoma's own warriors: While Cortés's men fought to kill, Aztecs attempted to capture enemies for sacrifice. Elsewhere, Townsend's discussion of Aztec schooling reveals the depth of Aztec culture. There were two classes of schools--one for commoners, the other for nobility. In both, boys and girls were taught rhetoric, history, ritual dancing, and singing; in the calmecac for future leaders, the curriculum included law, architecture, arithmetic, astronomy, and agriculture. Interestingly, despite the Aztec success in the building arts and in supplying food for large cities, they had no beasts of burden--everything was transported by water or by human porters; horses were introduced by the Spanish. A substantial history of satisfying scope and depth. (Illustrations--140--not seen.) -- Copyright ©1992, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

Townsend's *The Aztecs* provides a great introduction to one of the great Mesoamerican civilizations. Opening with the Spanish arrival and eventual conquest of the Aztec empire, he then goes back to explore how the Aztecs - who were at the zenith of their power when Cortez arrived in 1519 - became such a powerful state, and how this led to their eventual demise. The complaints I have are rather nit-picky: I struggled with the Aztec names (of places, of titles, of deities, of rulers); I also wish he had gone into more detail about social heirarchy and especially gender relations. To be fair, the book is meant to be an introduction - and as such, it exceeds expectations. While Townsend leans a bit heavily on political history, he devotes time to urban culture of the Aztecs - the importance of Tenochtitlan as a religious as well as commercial center; and entire chapters discuss Aztec artisans and farmers, another family and education, and a fascinating chapter on Aztec religion. Still, much of the book centers on the founding, growth and expansion of the Aztec empire and the role (both culturally, politically and religiously) that warfare played in this. In fact, Townsend makes a very convincing case that "The Aztecs had mastered the arts of war but not those of government" which eventually led to its destruction at the hands of the Spaniards. Matters of historical controversy are readily admitted (always appreciated, and too often not so forthrightly

addressed in historical introductions), and splendidly cited using primary sources from both Aztec and Spaniard. For those seeking a great starting place in understanding Mesoamerican civilization, this is the book I would recommend.

everything great

Good for the Aztec virgin. Used as a primer, an introduction, to the great mesoamerican culture, the Aztecs. Written with no fat or pretension. Great buy, fair price, good edition, nice paper.

i got this thinking it was have picture, i was goign to use it as a reference for my tattoos i was getting. but it's very interesting with tons of information about the aztecs.

Now in a revised and updated third edition, *The Aztecs* is an in-depth history of this legendary civilization native to ancient Mexico. Exploring the influence of the cultures that preceded the Aztecs (Xochicalco and Tula), *The Aztecs* reveals breakthroughs in hieroglyphic cryptology (pictographic and phonetic elements combine in Aztec script similar to conventions in Classic Maya writing) and delves into what the latest discoveries (such as that of the twelve-ton monolith of the goddess Tlaltecuhtli) have to tell us about the Aztecs. Black-and-white and a handful of color photographs illustrate this excellent reference, thoroughly accessible to readers of all backgrounds and particularly recommended for public and college library collections.

From the standpoint of an interested amateur, the first edition of Dr. Townsend's book "The Aztecs" was the best scholarly-but-general presentation of the Aztec civilization, culture, life, religion, art, and history available. The book was comprehensive and vastly informative but never -- thanks to excellent writing -- dull. This new edition differs in several slight but important ways from its predecessor. Most of the first edition's numerous and helpful halftone illustrations are retained, but a few have been deleted and a few added (total of three more in the new edition). Changes in the text for the most part reflect recent archeologic and ethnohistoric findings; references are dated to 1999. The extent of changes is not, however, striking, and certainly does not render the first edition obsolete, merely out of date in some details. As is inevitable in any text of this breadth, there are a few minor quibbles and changes that might be made in subsequent editions: for example, what stairway are those statues leaning against in Fig. 121? (answer: the Great Temple) It remains that this is THE book to read if you are interested in the Aztecs; it forms a solid basis for all other reading

in the field. Second best is Michael E. Smith's monograph with the same title, which is also recommended. Dr. Smith's work tends to emphasize the day-to-day life of the Aztec villagers and peasantry, whereas Dr. Townsend focuses more on the grand sweep of cities, nobility, and empire. I prefer the latter, but if I were teaching a course I'd assign both books.

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