

Everyday Life of the Aztecs



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In 1519 Hernando Cortes and the Spanish army landed on the east coast of Mexico. From that moment the Aztecs became a part of European history. This book is an attempt to reconstruct Mexican life on the eve of the Conquest, using both archaeological evidence and early documentary sources. It draws on the writings of the men who took part in the Conquest, and saw with their own

eyes the city of Tenochtitlan before its destruction: Cortes letters to Emperor Oaaraes q, ~f~er~d~ ~D~at ~C~titk~, b,~t~t~ de Tapia, Francisco de Aguilar, and an anonymous soldier. Warwick Bray has created an intimate portrait of the Aztec peoples and civilization, a rich culture which lacked the arch, the wheel, iron tools, and alphabetic writing, and had a strange religion rife with idolatry and human sacrifice.

Aztec history falls naturally into three phases: the period of wandering, 1168-1325; consolidation in the Valley of Mexico, 1325-1440; expansion and conquest, 1440-1521. The period of wandering ended by the founding of Tenochtitlan. For this period the only documentation is the form of legends. The second phase was a period of confusion when the new states in the Valley had not yet achieved a balance of power. Petty kingdoms, consisting sometimes of only one city and rarely of more than three or four important towns, squabbled among themselves to extend political influence, to squeeze even heavier taxes from tributary towns, or to gain a little more territory here or there. The victors could now dictate terms to

the other states of the Valley, and the situation was formalized in the Triple Alliance, a treaty between Tenochtitlan, Texcoco and Tlacopan, which provided for mutual defense and a

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