



RELIGIONS

Mesoamerican religions

Development of new inter-religious tools



This Publication is part of the project Development of new Inter-religious tools

Development of new Inter-religious tools is a project financed under Key Action 2, Capacity building in the field of youth under Western Balkans Window by European Commission, within Erasmus + Youth in Action Program.

Project partners: NGO Iuventa (Serbia); Associazione TDM 2000 (Italy); Beyond Barriers - Pertej Barrierave (Albania); BEES (Austria); Intercultura Dinan (France); United Societies of Balkans (Greece); Batman Fen Lisesi Mezunları Derneği (Turkey); Föreningen Framtidsåget (Sweden); Better Life In Kosova (Kosovo); Crveni Križ NOVO SARAJEVO (Bosnia and Herzegovina); Nvo Prima (Montenegro)

Prepared by: Nongovernmental organization "IUVENTA"



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

"The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein."

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS 3

MESOAMERICAN RELIGIONS 5

➤ **AZTEC RELIGION..... 6**

➤ **MAYA RELIGION 9**

 ❖ **LACANDON RELIGION 13**

➤ **MIXTEC RELIGION 16**

➤ **OLMEC RELIGION 20**

➤ **PUREPECHA RELIGION..... 21**

➤ **TOTONAC RELIGION 22**

➤ **ZAPOTEC RELIGION 23**

MESOAMERICAN RELIGIONS

Mesoamerica is a term used to describe the region roughly corresponding to modern day Mexico and Central America which was inhabited by various societies before Spanish colonization following the famous discovery by Christopher Columbus.

Ancient Meso-American religion refers to a variety of beliefs, practices, and rituals of the people of Central America and Mexico before the arrival of the Spanish in the 1500s C.E. These religious practices are representative of the great Meso-American civilizations including the Olmec, Mayan, and Aztec peoples. Though the dates of origin of these ancient traditions are difficult to determine, archeological research indicates evidence of religious artifacts dating back to the 16th century B.C.E.

These ancient Meso-American religious traditions were based on an annual calendar with its accompanying ritual cycle. All over Mesoamerica there were identical calendrical systems which guided the functioning of religious rituals in function of which religious rituals were performed.

Great variety of belief and practice existed among the ancient Meso-American peoples including various forms and levels of the afterlife, each with its own deity.

The religious rituals and practices were governed by priests educated in genealogy and astronomy. These priests were often exquisitely adorned with jewels, feathers, and ornaments of many colors, and many had dual roles as diviners.

There was a complex priestly hierarchy.

Rituals performed included various kinds of offerings such as animals, flowers, food and human sacrifices. Self-sacrifice also played an important role.

These traditions had a variety of temples and pyramids used in worship and as tombs.

The temples were built in a basically similar architectural pattern, truncated pyramids with sanctuaries on top.

The use of idols (particularly in the form of animals) was common among the various forms of this religion.

Pantheon

The Mesoamerican pantheon includes dozens of gods and goddesses in addition to the major deities described below.

Tlaloc (Aztec) / Chaac (Maya) / Dzahui (Mixtec) / Cocijo (Zapotec) - Chief rain god; deity of water, fertility, rain, and storms, also with mountain associations. Recognizable by his goggle-like eyes and distinctive fangs.

Quetzalcoatl (Aztec) / Kukulcan (Yucatec Maya) / Q'uq'umatz (K'iche' Maya) - Plumed Serpent; god of wind, priests, merchants, and the link between the earth and the sky.

Tezcatlipoca (Aztec) - "Smoking Mirror"; guileful omnipresent deity of cosmic struggle, feuds, rulers, sorcerers, and warriors; the jaguar is his animal counterpart.

God K (Maya) - Some similarities with Tezcatlipoca, but also connected with lightning and agriculture, and exhibits serpentine features.

Huitzilopochtli (Aztec) - Preeminent god and tutelary deity of the Aztecs in Tenochtitlan, where his temple with adjoined Tlaloc's atop a great pyramid constituting the dual Templo Mayor. Deity of the sun, fire, war and the ruling lineage.

➤ AZTEC RELIGION

The Aztec religion is the Mesoamerican religion of the Aztecs.

Aztec religion developed in the capital city of Tenochtitlán in the Valley of Mexico between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries ce. The Aztec religious tradition combined and transformed a number of ritual, mythic, and cosmic elements from the heterogeneous cultural groups who inhabited the central plateau of Mesoamerica.

The Aztec religion was polytheistic and involved a large and ever increasing pantheon of gods and goddesses. The Aztecs often adopted gods from different cultures and allowed them to be worshiped as part of their pantheon.

Religion was part of all levels of Aztec society with each level having their own rituals and deities.

Principal Beliefs

The Aztec people worshipped over 1,000 gods. They believed that the sun fought darkness every night and rose to save mankind. They believed the earth was flat. They also believed in 13 heavens and 9 hells.

In the Ancient Aztec religion, it was believed that the gods controlled all life from the birth of a baby until the death of an older person. Therefore, the Aztecs had to please the gods. The Aztecs would conquer other lands and use some of the captives as human sacrifices to please the gods. They felt that keeping the gods happy would result in good crops, good weather and sunny days. The Aztecs never took the gods for granted. One of the ways in which the Aztec people tried to please their God's was through human sacrifice, they believed that if they fed the sun blood, it would rise again the next day.

The Aztecs strongly believed in the afterlife. It was the way the Aztecs died rather than the way they lived that determined whether they would go to the sun god or go to the dark and dismal underworld. If a person died a normal death, his or her soul would have to pass through the nine lives of the underworld before reaching Mictlan, the realm of the dead. A warrior who died in battle or a woman that died in childbirth would go straight to the sun god in the sky.

Supernatural powers and Deities

The Aztec people had an extremely complex pantheon. It is believed that the Aztec's worshipped over 1000 gods, and these gods were divided into different categories, or groups. With each group being responsible for one aspect of the universe, such as; the heavens, the rain, fertility and agriculture, and finally war and sacrifice. The people had many agricultural gods because their culture was based heavily on farming.

They believed in the balance of the natural world, the processes that make life possible (like the rain or solar energy) and that the destiny of people depended on the will of these gods.

While some deities were benevolent, others had terrifying characteristics.

Among the many God's there are certain deities that stand out and have become more important, or significant, in the ancient religion.

The most important celestial entities in Aztec religion were the Sun, the Moon, and the planet Venus (both as "morning star" and "evening star") - all of these bearing different symbolic and religious meanings as well as associations with certain deities and geographical places - whose worship was rooted in a significant reverence for the Sun and Moon, whose natural functions are truly of immense importance to life on Earth.

The patron god of the Mexica tribe of Tenochtitlan was the Sun god Huitzilopochtli who

represented war and sacrifice. Other important gods included Tlaloc, supreme god of the rain and by extension a god of earthly fertility and of water; Tezcatlipoca, associated with a wide range of concepts; and Quetzalcoatl ("feathered serpent"), the god of wind, sky and star who was associated with learning.

Each of these gods had their own shrine, side-by-side at the top of the largest pyramid in the Aztec capital Mexico - Tenochtitlan - Tlaloc and Huitzilopochtli were both worshipped here at this dual temple, while a third monument in the plaza before the Templo Mayor was devoted to the wind god Ehecatl.

The many gods of the Aztecs can be grouped into complexes related to different themes. Some gods embodied aspects of nature. A large group of gods were related to pulque, drunkenness, excess, fun and games. Other gods were associated with specific trades. Many gods had multiple aspects with different names, where each name highlighted a specific function or trait of the god. Occasionally, two distinct gods were conflated into one, and quite often deities transformed into one another within a single story. Aztec images sometimes combined attributes of several divinities.

The concept of Teotl is central to the Aztecs. The term is often translated as "god", but may have held more abstract aspects of divinity or supernatural energy akin to the Polynesian concept of Mana.

Rituals

The ancient Aztec religion was based solely around pleasing their gods and gaining rewards in return for this. Important facet of Aztec religious practice was human sacrifice, usually carried out for the purpose of nourishing or renewing the Sun or other deity (or to otherwise appease it), thus ensuring the stability of the universe. The Aztec people believed that in order to sustain the smooth running of the universe, they needed to offer human blood to the gods. They believed that the sun would not rise each day without the offering of blood. The main way in which they would do this was through an ancient ritual whereby the human sacrifice would be taken to the top of a temple and laid backwards over a stone by four priests. A fifth priest would then take a ceremonial knife, made of flint stone and slice open the abdomen of the sacrifice, through their exposed diaphragm. The priest would then grab the heart and tear it out of the body, still beating, and place it in a bowl held by a statue of the honoured god. The body would then be thrown down the temple stairs, landing at the base of the pyramid. Whilst this ritual took place, the audience to the ceremony would stab, pierce and bleed themselves as a means of auto-sacrifice, therefore further worship to the gods was obtained. The Aztecs were one of the first organised civilisations to practice these rituals; so that is why their meaning of life is seen as a rather primitive and extreme belief system.

Another important aspect of Aztec ritual was the impersonation of deities. Priests or otherwise specially elected individuals would be dressed up to represent a specific deity. A person with the honourable charge of impersonating a god was called "ixiptlatli" and was regarded as an actual physical depiction of the god until the inevitable end when the god's likeness had to be killed as the ultimate sacrifice under great circumstance and festivities.

As with the impersonation of gods, Aztec ritual was often a reenactment of a mythical event which at once served to remind the Aztecs of their myths but also served to preserve the world by repeating the important events of the creation.

The most spectacular ritual was the New Fire ceremony which took place every 52 years and involved every citizen of the Aztec realm, during this commoners would destroy

house utensils, quench all fires and receive new fire from the bonfire on top of Mt. Huixachtlan, lit on the chest of a sacrificed person by the high priests.

Aztec Priests

The Aztec priest was called tlamacazui in Nahuatl language which means giver. The priests main role is to give the gods their appropriate offerings by leading the sacrifices and rituals. Due to the importance of religion in the Aztec civilization, priests were respected just like nobility and considered very important members of society. The priest did however had to live very religious lives that involved fasting and penances, and there are even times when they had to take some of their own blood during sacrificial rites.

In contrast, there were also some religious personalities in the Aztec society that were not affiliated with priesthood. These figures were the black magicians, people who belong to occults, witchdoctors and the like.

The Aztec temples and religion

Aztec temples were basically large pyramids with flat tops, constructed by the Aztecs to offer up sacrifices to the gods and they were a very important part of the Aztec religion. The temples had small stone tables upon which sacrifices, mostly human, were made and offered. The base of the pyramid housed offerings or rooms for priests or sacrifices to stay.

The most important of the Aztec temples was found in the centre of Tenochtitlan and is known as the Great Temple. It was a double pyramid dedicated to 2 different gods. One was built for the god Huitzilopochtli and was led by the high priest Quetzalcoatl Totec Tlamacazqui, this temple was called Coatepetl which means snake mountain. The second temple was constructed for the god Tlaloc led by the high priest Quetzalcoatl Tlaloc Tlamacazqui.

Sacred space

The temples were very religious places and were built in the center of the cities. Any large decision was a sacred time for the aztecs because politics and religion were so closely connected in their culture. In the temple were pools that were used for spiritual cleansing of the body. Tenochtitlan was a sacred place for the Aztecs because it was the city that was built where the God Huizilopochtli told them to build it this is where the templo mayor was built as well.

Death

Death was very important to aztecs and a big part of their religion. They believed that the way you died determined where you would end up. If you died in war or giving birth you automatically went to heaven. For many other reasons of death they believed you had to travel through the underworld first.

The Aztec world consisted of three main parts: the earth world on which humans lived (including Tamoanchan, the mythical origin of human beings), an underworld which belonged to the dead (called Mictlan ("place of death")), and the upper plane in the sky. The earth and the underworld were both open for humans to enter, whereas the upper plane in the sky was impenetrable to humans. Existence was envisioned as straddling the two worlds in a cycle of birth, life, death and rebirth.

After death the soul of the Aztec went to one of three places: the sun, Mictlan, or Tlalocan. Souls of fallen warriors and women that died in childbirth would transform into hummingbirds that followed the sun on its journey through the sky. Souls of people who died from less glorious causes would go to Mictlan. Those who drowned would go to Tlalocan.

Calendar

The Aztec religious year was connected mostly to the natural 365-day calendar, the *xiuhpohualli* ("yearcount") – which followed the agricultural year. Each of the 18 twenty-day months of the religious year had its particular religious festival – most of which were connected to agricultural themes.

➤ MAYA RELIGION

The traditional Maya religion of Guatemala, Belize, western Honduras, and the Tabasco, Chiapas, and Yucatán regions of Mexico is a southeastern variant of Mesoamerican religion. As is the case with many other contemporary Mesoamerican religions, it results from centuries of symbiosis with Roman Catholicism. When its pre-Spanish antecedents are taken into account, however, traditional Maya religion already exists for more than two millennia as a recognizably distinct phenomenon. Before the advent of Christianity, it was spread over many indigenous kingdoms, with all their own local traditions. Today, it coexists and interacts with pan-Mayan syncretism, the 're-invention of tradition' by the Pan-Maya movement, and Christianity in its various denominations.

The most important source on traditional Maya religion is the Mayas themselves: the incumbents of positions within the religious hierarchy, diviners, and tellers of tales, and more generally all those persons who shared their knowledge with outsiders (such as anthropologists) in the past and continue to do this until today.

Traditional Maya religion, though also representing a belief system, is often referred to as *costumbre*, the 'custom' or habitual religious practice, in contradistinction to orthodox Roman Catholic ritual. To a large extent, Maya religion is indeed a complex of ritual practices; and it is, therefore, fitting that the indigenous Yucatec village priest is simply called *jmen* ("practitioner").

Among the main concepts relating to Maya ritual are the following ones.

Ritual topography and calendrical mapping

The Mayan landscape is a ritual topography, with landmarks such as mountains, wells and caves being assigned to specific ancestors and deities. As in the pre-Hispanic past, an important part of ritual takes place in or near such landmarks, in Yucatán also around karstic sinkholes (*cenotes*). Ritual was governed not only by the geographical lay-out of shrines and temples, but also by the projection of calendrical models onto the landscape. The main calendars governing ritual were the divinatory cycle of 260 days, important for individual rituals, and the year of eighteen months (the *Haab'*) determining the pace of the public feasts which, together with the elaborate New Year celebrations, have been described for the Yucatec kingdom of Maní by Diego de Landa

OFFERINGS AND SACRIFICES

PRIESTHOOD

The traditional Maya have their own religious functionaries, often hierarchically organized, and charged with the duties of praying and sacrificing on behalf of lineages, local groups, or the entire community. In many places, they operate within the Catholic brotherhoods (or '*cofradías*') and the so-called civil-religious hierarchy (or '*cargo system*'),

organizations which have played a crucial role in the preservation of pre-Spanish religious traditions.

PURIFICATION

Purificatory measures such as fasting, sexual abstinence, bathing, and (especially in the pre-Spanish past) confession generally precede major ritual events. In 16th-century Yucatán, purification (exorcism of evil spirits) often represented a ritual's initial phase. The bloodletting-rituals may also have had a purificatory function. More generally, purification is needed before entering areas inhabited by deities. In present-day Yucatán, for example, it is customary to drink standing water from a rock depression at the first opportunity upon entering the forest. The water is then spat on the ground, and thus renders the individual 'virginal', free to carry out the business of humankind in the sacred forest.

PRAYER

Maya prayer almost invariably accompanies acts of offering and sacrifice. It often takes the form of long litanies, in which the names of personified days, saints, angels (rain and lightning deities), features of the landscape connected with historical or mythical events, and mountains are particularly prominent. Its importance is highlighted by the fact that Maya communities in the northwestern highlands of Guatemala have a specialized group of 'Prayermakers'. Prayers, with their hypnotizing scansion, often show a dyadic couplet structure which has also been recognized in Classic period texts.

PILGRIMAGE

Through pilgrimages, which create networks connecting places regionally as well as, over larger distances, Maya religion transcends the limits of the local community.

There were many different Gods that the Mayan people worshiped and all gods had a good and bad side. The major God of the Mayan people was Izamna, who was known as the fire and earth God as well as being a creator. Kulkan was also an important God to the Mayan people and is featured on many of their temples as a feathered serpent. Chac was another very important God because he was known as the god of rain and lightning. Bolon Tzauab was a great and significant God only to the royal people because only they could make contact with him.

The various Mayan leaders also took on the role as pastor or preacher to the people and were the only ones besides the priest who could make contact with all the different Gods. When these leaders would die they would be buried with many beautiful gifts and placed in big and lavish style tombs as their final resting place.

The Mayan people were also big believers of the afterlife; believing that the soul never died but instead continued on a dangerous journey in the after world. They believed in a heaven, but thought that it was reserved only for those who died at childbirth and the men and woman who were used as sacrifices to the Gods. They believed in human sacrifices because they felt that it was the only means of contact with the Gods. Sacrificing life was their way of feeding the Gods and receiving their blessings, and they feared that if they did not sacrifice humans, they would be severely punished. At the ceremonies the person being sacrificed had his or her own heart ripped out and burned as a way of showing the Gods the ultimate respect.

The Mayan people also thought that everyone had an animal spirit born with them. They thought that the same exact soul placed in them as a human being was also placed in an animal when they were born. It could have been any animal from as small as a mouse to as big as an elephant, either way this was their belief and they were very passionate about

it and believed in very much. The Mayan people also believed that they could turn into these animals that shared their human spirit. Even though the Mayans believed that most people could not choose the animals they shared their spirit with, they believed that the kings were the exception to this rule. They believed that all kings would share their spirits with the jaguar which was a highly respected and loved animal by the Mayan people.

In a lot of the Mayan art work the kings are often shown wearing big elaborate jaguar helmets. The Mayans did things such as bloodletting to connect with the animals that shared their spirit, this seemed as very extreme to me but to the Mayan people this was a normal part of their every day worship. This was very unmoral to me because they would actually cut themselves and bleed because they believed it not only connected them to the animal spirit but also to the gods that they loved and worshiped. At the end of the day we can learn a lot from the Mayan people and the way they worshiped.

MAYA RELIGION TODAY

Today's Maya are descended from one of the great civilizations of the Americas. They live in the same regions of Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador, and Honduras as their ancestors and retain many of their ancient traditions.

LANGUAGE

Most Maya today speak Spanish. The two Mayan languages of the Classic period, Yucatecan and Cholan, have subdivided into about thirty separate languages, some of which are not mutually intelligible. The most widely spoken are Mam, Quiché, Kekchí, and Cakchiquel.

FOLKLORE

The greatest body of Mayan tradition is contained in the Popol Vuh, an ancient text first transcribed into Latin and later translated into Spanish that preserves both sacred and secular lore. According to its creation myth, the gods made three different attempts at creating human beings before they had a version they were satisfied with. The first beings, which were made of mud, were destroyed because they had no brains. The next ones were made of wood and proved deficient because they were without emotions and thus could not properly praise their makers. Finally the correct material—maize (corn)—was found, and perfect beings were fashioned. Ultimately deciding to protect them by limiting the extent of their knowledge, the gods decided to damage their eyes so they could not see too much, and the resulting beings were the first Maya.

RELIGION

The traditional religions of the Maya, in which astrology and ancestor worship both played a role, were based on a system of beliefs that included the world, the heavens, and an unseen underworld called Xibalba. When Spanish missionaries introduced Catholicism to their regions, the Maya tended to add it onto their existing religion, creating a unique brand of "folk Catholicism." Their traditional gods that belonged to the natural world, such as corn, rain, and the sun, became associated with Christian saints, and various rituals and festivals were transmuted into forms approved by the church.

MAJOR HOLIDAYS

Most holidays currently observed by the Maya are the holy days of the Christian calendar. Many of their observances, however, still have characteristics of the traditional nature worship of their ancestors. The most important celebrations are generally Holy Week (the week leading up to Easter in late March or early April) and Christmas (December 25). The Maya living in the Chamula region of Chiapas are known for their five-day Carnival

celebration, called Crazy February, whose Christian significance (the period preceding Lent) coincides with the older observance of the five "Lost Days" at the end of the Maya solar calendar. Religious societies called cargos sponsor the festivities, which include ceremonial dances, feasting, processions, and ritual reenactments of both religious and historic events.

rites of passage

Major life transitions (such as birth, puberty, and death) are marked by religious ceremonies, many of which combine Christian and ancestral traditions.

living conditions

Housing varies among the different regions and groups of Maya. The Mam, who live in southwestern Guatemala and southeastern Chiapas, live in houses with adobe walls, small shuttered windows, roofs of tile or corrugated metal, and a floor of hard-packed dirt. The K'iche' in the Guatemalan highlands build rectangular houses with double-pitched tile roofs and walls of adobe, thatch supported by boards or poles, or other materials. Increasing numbers live in more modern homes built from brick or lumber with tin roofs. Maya folk medicine includes the ministrations of ritual healers called curanderos and female herbalists who may double as midwives. Common cures include prayers, offerings, herbal remedies, and sweat-baths.

The main means of transport for most Maya is the bus. Buses in Maya areas may be crowded as early as 4:00 or 5:00 am, often with people traveling from remote villages to the larger market towns. By late afternoon and evening there are fewer travelers on the road. Trains in the Maya regions - like those in many parts of Central and South America - are generally slow, old, and unreliable. In some areas, boats are used for public transportation.

family life

Both nuclear and extended families are found among the Maya. Couples generally marry in their late teens or early twenties. Traditionally, all marriages were arranged, but since the 1950s it has become increasingly common among some groups for young people to choose their own mates. In arranged marriages, contact may be initiated by the couple, followed by negotiation between the two families. Gifts are generally exchanged, and in some cases the bride's parents receive a payment to compensate them for having raised her. Couples often have both civil and religious ceremonies, and they may live with the groom's parents until their first child is born.

Family structure may alternate between nuclear and extended, with the addition of newly married couples who will eventually leave to establish their own homes, or elderly parents who come to live with the family when it becomes hard for them to manage on their own.

clothing

The Maya wear both modern Western-style clothing and traditional garb (although the latter is more commonly worn by women). Men generally wear trousers and sport shirts or guayaberas— dress shirts with decorative tucks worn outside the belt in place of a jacket. Women wear either traditional woven and embroidered clothing, or stylish dresses and skirt-and-blouse outfits. Traditional women's attire includes the huipil (plural: huipiles), a long, sleeveless tunic; the quechquémitl, a shoulder cape; and the enredo, a wrap-around skirt. Maya garments are commonly decorated with elaborate and colorful embroidery. The designs, which include humans, animals, and plants, often have some religious significance, and every Maya group and village has its own distinctive patterns

of decoration. The decorative designs for huipiles are often said to appear to women in their dreams. Men often wear the traditional tunics over store-bought shirts. Fajas are sashes that hold garments in place and also serve as pockets.

❖ LACANDON RELIGION

The Lacandon are one of the Maya peoples who live in the jungles of the Mexican state of Chiapas, near the southern border with Guatemala. Their homeland, the Lacandon Jungle, lies along the Mexican side of the Usumacinta River and its tributaries. The Lacandon are one of the most isolated and culturally conservative of Mexico's native peoples. Almost extinct in 1943, today their population has grown significantly, yet remains small, at approximately 650 speakers of the Lacandon language.

Throughout their history the ritual practices and beliefs of the Lacandon have shifted and evolved. Change has seemed more explicit as contact with the outside world has increased. As a culturally conservative group of Native Mesoamericans, the Lacandon have maintained characteristics unique to themselves, including certain religious customs, despite the encroachment and influence of the outside world since the early 16th century.

Though they are the Lacandon are culturally conservative, they were never isolationist as they had continued contact and trade with other Native Mesoamericans throughout their history. However, the Lacandon have been very secretive about their religious rituals throughout ethnographic history, which has led to many mysteries about the meanings and origins of certain rituals and beliefs.

Lacandon are not an entirely homogeneous group. Significant differences may be found in ritual behavior related to geographic differences of Lacandon villages. Lacandon villages are small and dispersed throughout the jungle in Chiapas. A further geographic divide is evident between the Lacandon in lowland Chiapas near the Maya ruins of Bonampak and Yaxchilán and the highland Lacandón who reside closer to Lakes Naja and Metzabok within the jungle. Lacandon who reside in the southern part of the Chiapas jungle have been more exposed to outsiders, are more aggressive than their highland counterparts, have slightly different dress, and adopted the Christian faith more quickly.

Religious practitioners

The Lacandon refer to themselves as Hach Winik, or “real people” and report that they are descendants of the Maya. While the Lacandon share a history with the Maya, many of their religious practices are not found among the ancient Maya or other Maya groups. The Lacandon may identify a particular man in a village who has shown extensive ritual knowledge or ability as a healer or religious leader who then performs religious ceremonies. However, basic offerings and incense burning is performed by all male heads of household and generally theirs is an egalitarian society as far as leadership.

Ceremonies usually have only male participants and are for a myriad of reasons including; feeding a particular god, a fertility rite, to help with agriculture, and frequently in response to illness. As contact from outsiders increased so did the occurrence of disease among the Lacandón, and with that more rituals focused on healing. The prominence of particular Gods also increased with the influx of outsiders including a God the Lacandon recognize specifically for foreigners among other things.

Gods

Deities include K'akoch, the god responsible for the creation of earth, sun, and other gods (who came from the bak nikte' or flower named *Plumeria rubra*) though, does not interact with anything human. Sukunkyum is the god said to have come first from the *Plumeria* flower and is reportedly in charge of the underworld and judging people's souls as well as taking care of the sun (when it disappears into the west) and the moon (during the day). Hachäkum is the younger brother of Sukunkyum and the most important deity because he created the jungle, animals, and man and woman (he needed his wife's help for this). In the generation below Hachäkum, there are various mediating gods, such as his son Tuub (T'up) and his son-in-law Ah Kin ('Priest') Chob. Mensäbäk is the god of rain and is therefore very important to the Lacandón. Mensäbäk can be traced back to the prehispanic Maya god Yum Chac, also a god associated with rainfall. Inexplicably, a maize deity, present among all other Mayan groups, seems to be missing. There are also gods associated with thunder and lightning (Hahanak'uh), earthquakes (Kisin), war and disease (Ak K'ak'), and more recently, Äkyantho', the god of foreigners, has become more prominent. This god, Äkyantho', is described as a light-skinned god that wears a hat and carries a pistol, is responsible for trade, medicine, diseases, some animals (horses for example), metal tools, and also had a son named Hesuklistos (Jesus Christ) who is supposed to be the god of foreigners. This is expressive of the Lacandón cultural conservancy and adaptability in that they fit new gods into their world view. They recognize that Hesuklistos is a god but do not feel he is worthy of worship as he is a minor god.

Ceremonial buildings, sacred places, and objects of ritual practice

Most Lacandon villages have a God House where ceremonies take place. Some are located near the religious leaders abode or close to the home of a well-respected or elderly male. Some villages hide the God House away from the village in the jungle so that outsiders are unable to find them. Often these sites are also guarded and even shielded with vegetation so that the rituals performed inside cannot be seen. The God House is built very low to the ground so that it is hard to see into and it is oriented to North, South, East, and West with the entrance on the east side where it faces toward Maya ruins and the sunrise. Inside the God House are the necessities used for various ceremonies. These include drums suspended in the ceiling so they don't touch the ground until they are needed for ritual song and dance; a fire starter traditionally consisting of a fire drill (two sticks) and more recently a lighter, matches or flint; benches to sit around; ceramic bowls for preparing and eating ritual meals or offerings; a conch shell "trumpet" to announce the beginning of a ceremony for both villagers and the gods; a large hollowed trough to make the alcohol Balché for ritual consumption; and most importantly the God House contains rubber characters, incense nodules (made of copal), and ceramic God pots used to burn the offerings for the rituals. Sacred places included caves (where the sun went to the underworld each night), Maya ruins where the Gods had once resided, next to rivers, rock outcroppings or particular places in the jungle (there would not be any cutting of vegetation in these areas). These places are often remote, secret, and not to be viewed by outsiders.

God pots

God pots are small ceramic bowls that have the head and face of the deity they represent attached to the rim of the pot, often with the head tilted back so that incense or offerings may be placed directly on it. These pots are fired in the open and coated with a mixture of

clay, lime, and water and then painted with red or black dyes. The pots have specific masculine or feminine designs including whether the head had straight (male) or braided (female) hair and whether the pot was striped (male) or checked (female). Each God pot was made for a particular deity or ritual and if they remained in good condition they sometimes were given from father to son. When a god pot became full with incense, burnt offerings, or was broken, there would be a renewal ceremony to replace it. The old pot would be taken to a sacred place and left and then new ceramic incense burners and figurines were made (usually to be discarded later) as they created a new pot to take the place of the old.

Pilgrimage

The Lacandon used to make pilgrimages to sacred places, such as caves and ancient Maya ruins. They would communicate with the deities and conduct rituals at these locations by burning incense in the god pots and leaving offerings. There are many caves along the shores of Lake Mensabäk that contain shrines dedicated to specific gods. When new god pots were made, there was a renewal ceremony in which the old ones would be ritually disposed of in these caves. The Maya ruins were believed to be the home of the gods, and when a new god pot was created, a stone from one of the ruins was placed in the center of the vessel to represent the body of the god.

Cloths

As we say there are two distinct groups of Lacandon. The two groups differ slightly in customs and clothing and speak slightly different dialects. These cultural differences were most likely the result of different cultural influences over time, as well as isolation from each other. The most recognizable difference between the two groups is how they look and dress. The Northern Lacandon men have long hair with their bangs cut. They wear white tunics called xikul that extend to their knees. The women keep their hair long, generally braided with ribbons or bird feathers. The women wear colorful skirts underneath their tunics. The Southern Lacandon men and women dress in identical ankle length tunics and wear their hair long, parted in the middle. Today, many people of the younger generation now prefer to wear western clothes, and cut their hair short following western styles.

Family life, houses, ...

Until the late 20th century, when housing patterns changed, Lacandon settlements were widely dispersed within the people's territory. Families lived singly or in small clusters in the jungle. Each household was made up of a husband, several wives, children, and extended family. Besides the house, there would be several other structures for storage, as well as animal pens and a god house. The houses consisted of wood posts supporting a thatched roof; there were no walls and floors were dirt. A clearing called the milpa was used for farming. Traveling between family clusters took about one day on foot. A cluster of households was not a permanent unit, but rather changed as young men and women got married and others split off to create new homes and clusters.

By the mid-1970s, government policies were encouraging families who still lived by themselves to join one of the three major villages. Houses in these villages now have concrete floors and walls, and thatched or tin roofs. In addition, as many Lacandon converted to Christianity, they abandoned their polygamy for monogamous relationships, allowing additional wives to marry single men.

➤ MIXTEC RELIGION

The Mixtec, or Mixtecos, are indigenous Mesoamerican peoples of Mexico inhabiting the region known as La Mixteca of Oaxaca and Puebla as well as the state of Guerrero's Región Montañas, and Región Costa Chica, which covers parts of the Mexican states of Oaxaca, Guerrero and Puebla.

The Mixtec region and the Mixtec peoples are traditionally divided into three groups, two based on their original economic caste and one based on the region they settled. High Mixtecs or mixteco alto were of the upper class and generally richer; the Low Mixtecs or "mixteco bajo" were generally poorer. In recent times, an economic reversal or equalizing has been seen. The third group is Coastal Mixtecs "mixteco de la costa" whose language is closely related to that of the Low Mixtecs; they currently inhabit the Pacific slope of Oaxaca and Guerrero. The Mixtec languages form a major branch of the Otomanguean language family.

In pre-Columbian times, a number of Mixtecan city states competed with each other and with the Zapotec kingdoms. The major Mixtec polity was Tututepec which rose to prominence in the 11th century under the leadership of Eight Deer Jaguar Claw, the only Mixtec king who ever united the Highland and Lowland polities into a single state. Like the rest of the indigenous peoples of Mexico, the Mixtec were conquered by the Spanish invaders and their indigenous allies in the 16th century. Pre-Columbia Mixtecs numbered around 1.5 million. Today there are approximately 800,000 Mixtec people in Mexico, and there are also large populations in the United States.

In pre-Columbian times, the Mixtec were one of the major civilizations of Mesoamerica. Important ancient centres of the Mixtec include the ancient capital of Tilantongo, as well as the sites of Achiutla, Cuilapan, Huajuapán, Mitla, Tlaxiaco, Tututepec, Juxtlahuaca, and Yucunúdahui. The Mixtec also made major constructions at the ancient city of Monte Albán (which had originated as a Zapotec city before the Mixtec gained control of it).

At the height of the Aztec Empire, many Mixtecs paid tribute to the Aztecs, but not all Mixtec towns became vassals. They put up resistance to Spanish rule until they were subdued by the Spanish and their central Mexican allies led by Pedro de Alvarado.

Mixtecs have migrated to various parts of both Mexico and the United States. In recent years a large exodus of indigenous peoples from Oaxaca, such as the Zapotec and Triqui, has seen them emerge as one of the most numerous groups of Amerindians in the United States. Large Mixtec communities exist in the border cities of Tijuana, Baja California, San Diego, California and Tucson, Arizona.

Mixtec communities are generally described as trans-national or trans-border because of their ability to maintain and reaffirm social ties between their native homelands and diasporic community.

The Mixtecan languages (in their many variants) were estimated to be spoken by about 300,000 people at the end of the 20th century, although the majority of Mixtec speakers also had at least a working knowledge of the Spanish language. Some Mixtecan languages are called by names other than Mixtec, particularly Cuicatec (Cuicateco), and Triqui (or Trique).

The Mixtec religion was characterized by being polytheistic and animist; Mixtecas believed in several gods who represented the forces of nature and considered that people possessed spirit, reason for which they believed in life after death and honored their ancestors.

The priests or shamans called Yaha Yahui had a high social status in the Mixtec society and were deeply respected for their supposed ability to transmute into animals and for their supernatural powers.

The Mixtecs had a god practically for each natural phenomenon so we will now mention the most important.

- Dzahui : God of rain and patron of the Mixtec people. It shares characteristics with Tláloc that is its equivalent for Teotihuacan, Toltec and Mexico.
- Huehuetéotl : God of fire.
- Cohuy : God of corn, took care of the crops of this sacred food.
- Yozotoyua : God of the merchants, he helped them in the commerce.
- Nitoayuta : God of generation or fertility. He assured the offspring.
- Tonatiuh : Sun god, they owed him that agriculture existed.
- Mictlantecuhtli : God of death and master of the Underworld.
- Qhuav : God of hunters
- Totec: Creator of man, animals and plants

WORSHIP, DIETIES

Mixtec religion worshipped the forces of nature including life, death and an afterlife. The deities were represented with images associated with war, the sun, human sacrifice, fertility, rain, wind, air, etc.. The sun was the deity held in the highest esteem. Humans were obligated "to maintain the balance among men, nature, and the supernatural world through conscious acts of private and social ritual".

Principal gods besides those recounted above, included ones associated with the planets, war, health, fertility, weather, etc. Each community had its own deity associated with it and there is no hierarchy particularly apparent in the supernatural universe, unlike the Aztec religion.

Religious activity centered around temples, hermitages, and shrines in urban areas and caves, rivers, rocky promontories, mountaintops, and abandoned settlements elsewhere. The temple might also have what the Spaniards described as an "oracle" and "idols". The death deity is sometimes shown cutting the heart out of the loser of a ball court game.

BLOOD SACRIFICE

Blood sacrifice from the ears and tongue, and bird feathers were sometimes offered. Dances were sometimes given. Human and animal sacrifices were sometimes made including heart sacrifices.

CALENDAR

The development and use of a calendar for astrological and divination purposes is illustrated by the lore surrounding the calendar round of 52 years and the yearly cycles. New fire ceremonies indicated a renewal of the world. People originally emerged from a natural world that was already existing. There is no sequential creation, destruction, and recreation cosmology like the Maya.

ETHNIC

Ethics and good conduct was not particularly associated with religion and the conduct of the supernatural deities did not provide "models" of conduct as in some other cultures. Military wars of conquest, and captive sacrifice were justified by the religion which was interwoven with the control of the society by elites and promoted social unification with the construction of large public temples and building projects.

HOME

A traditional Mixtec home is rectangular, composed of small rooms. It will have only one

entrance that opens onto the yard, not the street. Windows, if any, are small. The kitchen is separate, and if it is a structure, it is often made of wood. Running water and electricity, if the home has them, have usually been financed by migrants who have worked abroad. Indoor plumbing is not common, even in small towns; outhouses are built in yards at a distance from the main house. Homes are sparsely furnished.

DRESS

Western-style dress is seen most commonly now for men and women, girls and boys. Men have all but abandoned the white muslin pants and shirt adopted during the colonial period, except for very special occasions. Older women and some very young girls may continue to wear traditional style dress consisting of a skirt and a huipil (long or short blouse). The exact style and color vary considerably from one town and region to the next. However, almost all Mixtec women continue to wear the classic black and white or navy blue and white rebozo (shawl) at all times, just as a standard item for Mixtec men continuous to be the short-brimmed, woven palm hat.

DIET

The Mixtec diet is based on corn and corn products, beans, chile, tomatoes, and other traditionally cultivated crops of their ancestors. In addition to being farmers, the Mixtec are gatherers, so their diet includes wild greens, fish, crustaceans, frogs, insects, fungi, hare and deer. They also routinely eat wheat, rice, and noodle products. Some Mixtecs now distinguish between an "Indian diet" (traditional foods) and a "Mestizo2 diet" (more processed foods and meat). "Junk food" is also increasingly popular. For reasons of poverty and lack of availability, many Mixtecs' diet is nutritionally deficient. In many semiarid regions, for instance, the basic dish is simply tortillas and salsa; even beans may not be eaten on a daily basis.

FAMILY/FAMILY LIFE

The smallest social unit is the nuclear family: father, mother, and children. Sons who marry may build their homes on their parents' property or close by. As parents age, they may move in with a son (usually) and his family. Orphaned brothers, sisters, nieces, or nephews may also live with them.

Traditional, intact Mixtec families are patriarchal in structure. The father is the family's head and is responsible for decision-making and overall support of the family; he works the family's parcel of land, tends the animals, and supplements the family income by hiring out as an agricultural or other wage worker. The mother's main responsibilities include taking care of her husband, children, and home; they may also assist their husbands in the fields. Migration has disrupted traditional patterns of family life and gender roles. Women who find themselves on their own for many years at a stretch are more frequently taking on roles traditionally fulfilled by male family members

SPIRITUAL LIFE.

The Mixtec have an ancient, extremely rich and complex spiritual life. Many of these beliefs continue to exist, in syncretic fashion, alongside Roman Catholicism and, increasingly evangelical Christian faiths, with no apparent contradictions. According to traditional Mixtec belief, all things, living or inanimate have a spirit (also known as animism).

GREETINGS

Greetings and expressions of courtesy are extremely important in Mixtec culture. Even a chance encounter with a stranger calls for a polite greeting and a handshake. Failing to acknowledge some is not only considered rude, it characterizes the individual, literally, as

an ignorant brute as the Mixtec ascribe certain types of behaviors to animals, others to humans. Coming up on friends in the street or arrival at someone's home require length and elaborate inquiries after health and family members.

The Mixtec, like many other peoples of Oaxaca, embrace the concept of mutual or reciprocal help. Da'an is a Mixtec word akin to the meaning to offering or gift. It is appropriate to provide the host of a large party, for example, with a da'an of several cases of beer or soft drinks.

TEQUIO

Tequio is service to the community, and traditionally is required of all male members. Tequio is taken extremely seriously; even those who have migrated to other parts of Mexico or the United States are expected to return home to meet this obligation. It is becoming somewhat more common for women who remain at home to fulfill this service.

CELABRATIONS

The most important celebrations among the Mixtec mark key life moments (baptisms, funerals or weddings) and observances on the Catholic liturgical calendar. Arguably, most important at the community level is the celebration of the town's patron saint day. Preparations for the elaborate festivities may begin a year in advance with the selection of a mayordomo to host, and finance (with the assistance of family members and friends) many of the central activities. It is a profound honor to be selected mayordomo, a position of great responsibility and political significance. Community members living abroad make every effort to return home for this event. The multiple-day celebration includes fireworks, masses and processions to honor the patron saint, dancing, equestrian events and of course, lots of eating and drinking. A second, extremely important annual event is Dia de los Muertos (Day of the Dead), All Saints and All Souls Days (November 1,2) on the Catholic liturgical calendar. On this day, families honor their dead by setting up altars in the home replete with their loved ones favorite earthly foods, drink and other pleasures, photos and other memorabilia. They participate in candlelight processions to the cemetery, where tombs have been cleaned and decked with marigolds and candles, to hold an all-night vigil.

MARIAGE

Parents traditionally selected mates for their children. Often people married before they were sexually mature. Today, marriage occurs much later, and the young people involved have much more influence over the decision about who and when to marry, although the older pattern can still be found in some areas. Bride-wealth payments are made, and in some places can amount to the equivalent of several years' wages. Bride-service, with residence by the groom in the father-in-law's house, is also required in some areas. Community endogamy is the predominant pattern, although members of the growing Mixtec middle class are as likely to marry someone outside their community as they are to marry an insider. Polygyny is practiced by wealthy individuals. Residence is usually virilocal. When divorce occurs, the woman returns to her parents' or brothers' households. If it occurs relatively soon after marriage, a portion of the bride-wealth must be repaid. The Mixtec people believe in no sex until marriage which foreshadows the Catholic religious views. This is referred to as fornication.

➤ OLMEC RELIGION

The religion of the Olmec people significantly influenced the social development and mythological world view of Mesoamerica. Scholars have seen echoes of Olmec supernatural in the subsequent religions and mythologies of nearly all later pre-Columbian era Mesoamericans cultures.

The first Mesoamerican civilization, the Olmecs, developed on present-day Mexico southern Gulf Coast in the centuries before 1200 BCE. The culture lasted until roughly 400 BCE, at which time their center of La Venta lay abandoned. The Olmec culture is often considered a "mother culture" to later Mesoamerican cultures.

There is no surviving direct account of the Olmec's religious beliefs.

The fundamental pattern of Olmec belief seems to have centered on the worship of numerous high gods or supernatural forces that controlled the universe and sanctioned the human sociopolitical structure. Human interaction with them required complex rituals in temples and other sanctified places, and could be achieved only by religious specialists whose personal qualifications or social position qualified them for the task. The belief system they served included a pantheon, a cosmology that explained and structured the universe, and a set of ritual activities that expressed the cosmology.

Olmec religious activities were performed by a combination of rulers, full-time priests, and shamans. The rulers seem to have been the most important religious figures, with their links to the Olmec deities or supernaturals providing legitimacy for their rule. There is also considerable evidence for shamans in the Olmec archaeological record, particularly in the so-called "transformation figures".

Researchers believe the Olmec people to have centered their religion around five key aspects: specific cosmology, deities who controlled the natural world, shamans and rulers who were intermediaries between such deities and the common Olmec people, rituals centering around ideas of the cosmos led by this ruling class, and sacred sites. Because they believed their rulers to be relatives of their supernatural gods, they were held at a level of high respect. Giant stone heads were made to look like these kings and rulers as a way of honor and worship. Because of this, religion dictated the politics and much else of Olmec life. Though no buildings that can be specifically identified as places of worship have been discovered, one most commonly accepted as a religious complex is known as Complex A La Venta. Here, man-made places considered sacred to the Olmec such as ball courts and temples can be found. Religious rituals were practiced in such places. Remains of bones serve as evidence that they may have practiced human sacrifices as offerings to their gods, which influenced later civilizations such as the Mayans and Aztecs, to do so as well. With the Olmec being the first Mesoamerican civilization, the aspects of their culture set the scene for the rest of Mesoamerican societies to come. Religion, being an aspect of culture of which their daily lives were dominated, held strong influence among the Olmec and the consequently with civilization such as the Maya. Their complex religion and ways of sacrifice that later civilizations adopted, were first seen with the Olmec.

The Olmecs were polytheistic, believing in many gods who controlled the natural forces of life. These gods took on human-like forms but had a more frightful quality through also showing mixtures of feline, reptile, and bird-like features. Their religion centered around eight gods: the Olmec Dragon, the Bird Monster, the Shark Monster, the Banded-Eye god, the Maize God, the Rain Spirit, the Were-Jaguar, and the Feathered Serpent.

➤ PUREPECHA RELIGION

Like their northern counterparts, the Purepechan religion relied on human sacrifice to their many gods and goddesses as a means to reap blessings and favor and to demonstrate devotion. The Purepechan religion includes a realm for the sky, the Earth, and an afterlife for the dead down below. Each realm was controlled by three deities whom were held above lesser deities inside the religion.

Priests of the religion were arranged in a hierarchy with a high priest supported by lower priests who all wore tobacco gourds to mark their station in the society as religious leaders. The holy place inside of the Purepechan Empire was along the Pátzcuaro basin, and pyramids were erected for all of the major deities at Tzintzuntzan and Ihuátzio.

The culture of the Purépecha people was polytheist.

List of some deities:

- Curicaveri - Sun god
- Cuerauáperi - Creation goddess
- Xarátanga - Water god
- Cuitzeo - War god
- Auicamine - Evil goddess
- Pehuame - Birth goddess (advocation of Cuerauáperi)
- Jurhiata - (advocation of Curicaveri)

Inside modern day Mexico can still be found Mexicans of Purepechan descent, whose culture is distinctive from other groups inside Mexico. Populated mainly in the state of Michoacán, their native home land, the Purepechan tribe has a religion and history that is different from their more well known Aztec brethren. Among the people of Mexico, the Purepechans and their magnificent artwork contributes greatly to the spirit of the country and the fabric of what makes Mexico what it is.

Currently there are groups that have migrated purépechas and settled in other states of Mexico and Jalisco, Guanajuato, Guerrero, State of Mexico, Mexico City, Colima and Baja California and in the United States or other neighboring countries such as Canada and Greenland where it engaged in fishing activities. The core activities of most purépechas are agriculture, livestock, pottery, fishing and making various crafts and costumes of their culture.

Many traditions live on, including the "Jimbari Uexurhina" or new year that is celebrated on February 1.

The celebration has traditional indigenous and Catholic elements. The community lights a fire called the chijpiri jimbari or "new fire" as part of a ceremony that honors the four elements. Mass is also celebrated in the P'urhépecha language.

The Purépecha language is spoken by nearly 200,000 people in Mexican state of Michoacán.

The Purepecha people are well known for creating colorful, decorative folk art, much of it consisting of intriguing and charming sculptures from the native clay in the area. Hand painted in vibrant colors, the majority of these sculptures combine traditional indigenous motifs with Christian beliefs to create genuinely unique works of art.

Much of the artistic output created by the Purepecha is devoted to the Day of the Dead festival, held all throughout Michoacán with a particular focus on the city of Pátzcuaro.

The city offers best-known and most popular celebrations of the entire state, as well as an excellent opportunity for the indigenous Purepecha people to exhibit and sell their crafts.

➤ **TOTONAC RELIGION**

WORSHIP

Totonacs worshiped a great number of gods and they had a hierarchy, in descending order: the main gods, the secondary gods, the owners, the lesser owners and the gods of the underworld. There were a total of 22 gods of traditional culture.

DIET

There is a total absence of comals, metates and manos meaning the Totonacs did not eat tortillas; however, even though corn was grown it did not form a large part of their diet. The Totonacs ate fruit, most notably zapotes, guavas, papayas, plantains and avocados. Men hunted and fished shark, turtle, deer, armadillo, opossums, and frogs. Women raised turkeys and dogs. Peasants as well as nobles ate corn porridge in the morning. Lunch was the main meal of the day and consisted of manioc, bean stew or even a rich meat sauce for the nobles. Fish and seafood as well as game was eaten by both nobles and farmers. The agave provided liquor.

CLOTHING

Totonac women were expert weavers and embroiderers; they dressed grandly and braided their hair with feathers. The Franciscan friar Bernardino de Sahagún stated that, in all aspects of their appearance, the women were "quite elegant", women wore skirts (embroidered for the nobles) and a small triangular poncho covering the breasts. Noble women wore shell and jade necklaces and earrings and often tattooed their faces with red ink. Married women wore their hair in the Nahuatl fashion while peasant women wore their hair long. Likewise, the noble men dressed well, adorning themselves with multicolored cloaks, loin cloths, necklaces, arm bands, lip plugs and devices made of the prized quetzal feathers. Hair was kept long with a thick tuft of hair on the top tied up with a ribbon.

HOUSING

Houses were generally thatched and had an overhang. They were rectangular in shape. The Totonac People reside in the states of Veracruz, Puebla, and Hidalgo. They are one of the possible builders of the pre-Columbian city of El Tajín, and further maintained quarters in Teotihuacán (a city which they claim to have built). Until the mid-19th century they were the world's main producers of vanilla.

Today, approximately 90,000 Totonac speakers reside in the region.

Most present-day Totonacs are Roman Catholic. However, their Christian practice is often mixed with vestiges of their traditional religion, a notable instance being la Costumbre, a survival of an old rite of sacrifice in which various seeds are mixed with earth and the blood of fowls and dispersed over the planting fields.

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

Marriage was traditionally arranged by both families. Preferably, a high "price" was paid for the bride, in goods or the groom's labor. When this was not possible, couples eloped

and negotiation of payment followed. A church-sanctioned marriage is an ideal today, but the cost of a wedding feast deters many couples.

Domestic Unit. The ideal domestic arrangement is a nuclear family living near the relatives of the husband. Extended families spanning at least three generations are also common. The practice of polygamy, which is considered a symbol of wealth, is diminishing because of the efforts of both Catholic priests and Protestant preachers.

Inheritance. Customarily, among the Totonac of the northern Sierra de Puebla, upon a man's death, his land is inherited by his eldest son. Among coastal Totonac, a father bequeaths land to all sons equally. Direct inheritance from father to daughter is highly exceptional.

Socialization. From infancy, a child is educated by the extended family. All children must go to elementary school, but what is taught there is not always adequate to meet the needs of the communities. Bilingual education has rarely been fully implemented.

➤ ZAPOTEC RELIGION

Like most Mesoamerican religious systems, the Zapotec religion was polytheistic. Some known deities were Cocijo, the rain god (similar to the Aztec god Tlaloc); Coquihani, the god of light; and Pitao Cozobi, the god of maize.

The pre-Hispanic Zapotec perceived their universe as consisting of the center surrounded by four quarters, each with a certain color and supernatural attributes. Time was viewed as cyclical, not linear, and the Zapotec believed in gods associated with various natural elements, such as rain. The Zapotec rain god was worshiped in the northern sierra region until the mid-twentieth century.

Traditionally, the Zapotec engaged in numerous rituals associated with their farming activities. Lightning, Cosijo, was seen as alive; the powerful deity was offered human blood, quail, dogs, human infants, and war captives in exchange for rain.

Zapotec deities were predominantly associated with fertility or agriculture. Both male and female deities are represented, differentiated by costume. Males are depicted wearing breechcloths with or without capes, while females are depicted wearing skirts. There is some evidence of worship of deities not directly associated with Zapotec culture, such as the Teotihuacan Feathered Serpent, Butterfly God, and rain god; and the Nahuatl god of spring Xipe Totec.

It is believed that the Zapotec used human sacrifice in some of their rituals.

The Zapotec used dedication rituals to sanctify their living spaces and structures.

Presently, the Zapotec follow a form of Catholicism wherein saint worship plays a dominant part and pre-Hispanic beliefs have become fused with Catholicism. The Zapotec worldview includes a cast of supernaturals: witches, male and female devils, images of Christ (as a child and as an adult), and animal guardians (tonos). At birth, each person acquires his or her tono (e.g., a mountain lion). An unbaptized person risks becoming a nahual—an animal form assumed in the state of possession.

Aside from Catholic priests, specialized Zapotec ritual leaders, hechiceros, also conduct

certain ceremonies, including offerings of flowers, food, poultry blood, mescal, money, cigarettes, and prayers at occasions such as weddings, funerals, and house initiations.

The religion of the Zapotec is Roman Catholic, but belief in pagan spirits, rituals, and myths persists, to some extent intermingled with Christianity.

The compadrazgo, a system of ritual kinship established with godparents, is important.

Modern Zapotec mark major life-cycle events such as baptism, communion, marriage, and death with ceremonies in the church and in their homes. Important ceremonies occur on Todos Santos (All Saints' Day) and on the patron saints' days in each community.

The Zapotec have an impressive repertoire of remedies and cures. Members of both sexes are curers, but only women are midwives, and only men mend bones. Illness may be attributed to improper religious conduct, soul loss, envy, anger, the evil eye, fright (susto or espanto), and witchcraft.

The Zapotec distinguish between ordinary death and sudden violent death; in the latter, the deceased's soul does not make the transition to heaven. A distinction is also made in the death ritual for married and unmarried persons.

Most Zapotec communities are endogamous, although this is by custom, not by rule, and there are exceptions in most locations. Monogamy is generally practiced. The Zapotecs have two types of marriages either free union which is between two people that lacks any publicly recognised bond, or church marriage. You can't get a divorce by a catholic church, but sometimes they can separate and take other spouses. A pregnancy can often prompt a marriage, it's either by common law or the church.

The most common residence pattern is patrilocal for young couples, but neolocality sometimes follows patrilocal, perhaps after the birth of the first child. Less commonly, residence may be matrilocal; for example, when a bride lacks brothers, her husband may come to live with her and assist his father-inlaw in the fields.

Clothing ranges from traditional (particularly for women) to modern. Traditional dress for women consists of a long skirt, long overtunic (huipil), and a shawl or wraparound headpiece. Male dress, when not modern, consists of wide, loose trousers; loose shirt, sometimes with pleats; sandals; and straw or wool hat.

The first part of the paper discusses the importance of understanding the cultural context of the research. It highlights the need for researchers to be sensitive to the values and beliefs of the communities they are studying. This is particularly important in the field of education, where cultural differences can significantly impact learning outcomes.

The second part of the paper focuses on the methodology used in the study. It describes the qualitative approach adopted, which involves in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. The researchers aimed to explore the experiences and perceptions of the participants, rather than testing a specific hypothesis.

The third part of the paper presents the findings of the study. It discusses the themes that emerged from the data, such as the role of family in education and the influence of community norms. The researchers found that there were significant differences in the way that different cultural groups viewed education and the role of the teacher.

The fourth part of the paper discusses the implications of the findings for practice. It suggests that educators should be aware of the cultural context of their students and tailor their teaching accordingly. This might involve using different teaching methods or incorporating cultural knowledge into the curriculum.

The final part of the paper concludes the study and offers some thoughts for future research. It suggests that further exploration of the cultural context of education is needed, particularly in the area of teacher education.

