Anthropology 3812, Section 10 - Fall 2014  
Power and Violence in New World Societies:  
The Aztecs of Mexico  

Time and Place: Tuesday and Thursday, 3:45-5:00, OM 312  
Instructor: Dr. Jeffrey Blomster  E-mail: blomster@gwu.edu  
Office: 303 HAH (2110 G St.), 4-4880  
Office Hours: Thursday, 11:00-1:00, or by appointment.  

Both vilified as savage cannibals through the self-interested accounts of the 16th-century Spanish invaders and utilized as a tool in the national identity of contemporary Mexico, the Aztecs (or Mexica) present a fascinating series of contrasts and contradictions. Too often known solely for warfare and human sacrifice, the Aztecs produced some of the most naturalistic art and reflective poetry that have survived the Spanish Conquest. We will focus throughout the semester on the importance of power in Aztec society and how the normalization of violence created a form of social cohesion central to the state. To address this theme, we explore a variety of topics related to the Aztecs: their origins; family and class structure; gender relations; land tenure; concepts of the body and medicine; the use of art in imperial ideology; and the role and organization of such societal institutions as the school and market. We will focus on Aztec political organization and its close links to religion and cosmology.  

Different types of sources exist on the Aztecs, including traditional anthropological and archaeological materials as well as Aztec art and architecture and colonial-era ethnohistoric documents. Whenever possible, surviving documents and works of art from the Aztecs themselves will be combined and contrasted with recent archaeological research to present a comprehensive and holistic perspective.  

Learning Outcomes:  
- introduce the student to the unique Aztec achievement and legacy;  
- understand the sophisticated and complex nature of Aztec ideology and philosophy;  
- be able to read and understand indigenous texts and art;  
- contrast attitudes about warfare, sacrifice and violence, and see how violence was used to integrate Aztec society;  
- study the Aztec approach to urbanism;  
- compare concepts of gender roles and relations;  
- show how different types of evidence, in this case ethnohistorical, art historical, and archaeological, can complement and challenge each other;  
- encourage critical thinking about major issues regarding the Aztec, from the scope and nature of sacrifice to the integration of diverse populations into a multi-ethnic empire.  

Graduate Students:  
Graduate students are welcome in this class, but will have extra readings. Please see me for additional information.  

Academic Integrity and Ethics:  
All students will work individually on all assignments unless otherwise instructed. Students are expected to adhere to the GW Code of Academic Integrity. It states: “Academic dishonesty is defined as cheating of any kind, including misrepresenting one’s own work, taking credit for the work of others without crediting them and without appropriate authorization, and the fabrication of information.” For the remainder of the code, see: http://www.gwu.edu/~ntegrity/code.html.
Students with extra challenges:
Any student who may need an accommodation based on the potential impact of a disability should contact the Disability Support Services (DSS) office at 202-994-8250 in the Marvin Center, Suite 242, to establish eligibility and coordinate reasonable accommodations. If a student anticipates such accommodations, please advise me immediately. Keep in mind that reasonable accommodations are not provided retroactively.
Also, the University Counseling Center (UCC) offers 24/7 assistance and referral to address students' personal, social, career, and study skills problems. Call them at 202-994-5300.

Security:
In the case of an emergency, if at all possible, the class should shelter in place. If our building is impacted, follow the evacuation procedures for the building.

Textbooks:
There are five textbooks required for this class, available at the bookstore and on reserve at Gelman:

Lecture/Discussion Schedule:
Note: last name refers to textbook author; all other readings are on Blackboard.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topics, Readings and Assignments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>08/26</td>
<td>The Aztecs in Mexico: An Introduction to pre-Aztec Mesoamerica</td>
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<td>08/28</td>
<td>Power, Violence and the Aztecs: Themes, Sources, and the Nahuatl Language</td>
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<td>Díaz del Castillo, pp. 156-183.</td>
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<td>09/02</td>
<td>The Search for Aztec Origins.</td>
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<td>Smith, pp. 30-46. + Discussion: Migration Narratives: History? Ritual Performance?</td>
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<td>Smith, Michael. The Aztlan Migrations of the Nahuatl Chronicles: Myth or History? <em>Ethnography</em></td>
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<td>09/04</td>
<td>The Aztecs Ascendant: Creation and Spread of the Aztec Empire.</td>
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<td>Hodge, Mary. When is a City-State? In <em>The Archaeology of City-States: Cross-Cultural Approaches</em>,</td>
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09/09 Becoming Aztec, from Birth to Death: Family, Enculturation and Gender Roles.  
Discussion: Aztec gender concepts; the roles, and sacrifice, of women.  
Carrasco, Chap. 7.

09/11 Aztec Social Organization and Society: Calpolli, Class and Education.  
Smith, Chap. 6.  
Discussion: Class and Power in the Aztec State.  

09/16 Tribute and the Structure of the Triple Alliance.  
Smith, Chap. 7.  
Discussion: The Economy of Empire and the Importance of Tributary Provinces.  
Berdan, Frances. The Tributary Provinces. In Aztec Imperial Strategies, edited by Berdan et al., 1996.  
Dumbarton Oaks.

09/18 The Aztec Economy: Agriculture, Diet, and Industry.  
Smith, Chaps. 3 & 4.  
Discussion: Relationship between the Earth and Humans.  

09/23 The Commercial Economy: Markets, Trade and the Pochteca.  
Smith, Chap. 5.  
Discussion: Understanding Aztec markets and trade.  

09/25 Aztec Urbanism and Political Organization at Tenochtitlán.  
Smith, Chap. 8.  
Discussion: City as Symbol.  
Carrasco, Chap. 1.

09/30 Aztec Imperialism I: Codex Mendoza. Student Presentations.  
Discussion: Imperial Landscapes beyond the Valley of Mexico.  

10/02 Codex Mendoza: Student Presentations.  
Díaz del Castillo, pp. 40-89.  
Codex Mendoza Essay Due!

10/07 Aztec Warfare and Conflict.  
Discussion: Warriors, Charisma, and Battlefields.  
Carrasco, Chap. 5.  
10/09 Exam 1.

10/14 Aztec Cosmology and Cosmogony: The Creation of the Universe.
Smith, Chap. 9.
Discussion: Aztec Cannibalism – ecological necessity or cosmic jaws?
Carrasco, Chap. 6.

10/16 Aztec Religion: The Ritual Calendar and the Priesthood.
Read: Smith, Chaps. 10 & 11.
Discussion: The “fearful symmetry” of Aztec Ritual.
Carrasco, Chap. 3.

10/21 The Supernatural and Aztec Deities.
Discussion: the nature of Aztec gods; was there an Aztec “pantheon?”
Research Paper Topics Due!

10/23 Aztec Human Sacrifice: Power, Performance and Violence in Tenochtitlán.
Díaz del Castillo, pp. 439-447.
Discussion: To Change Place—Toxcatl and the Sacrifice of Tezcatlipoca.
Carrasco, Chap. 4.
Discussion: The evidence for Aztec sacrifice.

10/28 The 5 Suns: A Sacred History of Ancient Mexico. (Film)
Díaz del Castillo, pp. 90-130.

10/30 Day of the Dead; no class.

11/04 Legitimacy and Power in Aztec Art.
Smith, pp. 263-271.
Discussion: State and Cosmos in Aztec Art.
Townsend, pp. 23-70.

11/06 Ceremonial Landscapes: the Templo Mayor and the Sacred Mountain.
Smith, pp. 220-229.
Discussion: Templo Mayor/City of Sacrifice.
Carrasco, Chap. 2.

Smith, pp. 271-277
Discussion: Morality and Sexuality.

11/13 Aztec Concepts of the Body, Sickness and Medicine.
Discussion: Sickness and Morality?

11/18  Toltec Envy and the Aztecs in a Postclassic Mesoamerican System.
Discussion: Aztec Archaizing?
Discussion: Postclassic Shared Intellectual Culture?

11/20  Exam 2!

11/25  Arrival of the Strangers I: Spanish Perspectives.
Díaz del Castillo, pp. 131-155, 184-262.
Discussion: Colonial Gender Roles and Understanding Malinche.
Díaz del Castillo, pp. 418-438.

11/27  Thanksgiving break; no class.

12/02  GWU make up day; no class.

12/04  The Arrival of the Strangers II: Aztec Perspectives and the end of Tenochtitlán.
Discussion: Contrasting attitudes and narratives of the Spanish and Aztec
Leon-Portilla, pp. 3-144.
Díaz del Castillo, pp. 263-310.

12/09  Final papers due in Anthropology Department by 4:30 pm!

Course Requirements and Policies:
-Attendance, Participation and Policies
It is critical that students attend class; part of the course grade will be comprised of the student’s informed participation in discussions. If a class is missed when an assignment is due, it must still be submitted that day unless there has been a prior agreement. Late assignments turned in without prior arrangements will lose 1/3rd of a letter grade for each late day. Be especially prepared to comment on the reading(s) listed under the discussion topic for each class.

-Double jeopardy
If you are scheduled to discuss articles on the same day that another assignment is due, this is double jeopardy—thus, you have an automatic extension until the next class for that other assignment, allowing you to focus on your in-class presentation.

-Examinations
Rather than the traditional midterm and final, there will be two equally weighted examinations given at 6-week intervals. These exams will require knowledge of the material from class lectures, discussions, film, and readings. The instructor must be notified BEFORE the exam if a student will not be able to take it at the scheduled time.

-Essays
*Tlatoani Essay.* At some point in the semester, each student will serve as “article tlatoani” (or discussant) for an assigned discussion article. In class, be prepared to present a 5-10 minute
overview of the article, briefly citing its content, and particularly critiquing it – point out its strengths and weaknesses. Prepare at least one question for your fellow students to consider/discuss in class; you must post this question on the Blackboard website 24 hours before class. One week after you fill this role in class, you will submit an essay that summarizes and critiques the article. You are free to include insights stimulated by class discussion (which is why you have a week to complete this). At least half of your essay should focus on the strengths and weaknesses of the article, and how it ties in with the overall themes of the particular day’s readings/class. This exercise should both develop critical thinking and hone your writing. The essay should be 5-6 pages long.

_Codex Mendoza Essay/Group Presentation._ Students will be assigned – in groups of 3 – a particular page of the _Codex Mendoza_, an important early ethnohistoric document. In class presentations on September 30th and October 2nd, students will point out the various tribute items and quantities that the Aztecs received on their page, and will identify from where the tribute came. Students will provide a brief overview of the place generating the tribute, and a history of their relationship with the Aztecs. Students must answer the question – how was their region integrated into the Aztec empire? Students should combine the information presented in _The Essential Codex Mendoza_, on reserve at Gelman, with additional research on their specific region and its Aztec-related history. Much of the necessary information can be found in Appendix 4 in _Aztec Imperial Strategies_, also on research.

Each group will divide the work as follows:
1. Background/overview/brief history of province/region;
2. Identification of each object on your Mendoza page, indicating both localities and tribute, and if tribute is local;
3. Model how your region was incorporated into the Aztec Empire.

While students will present their results to the class in a 15-minute (maximum!) presentation, each student in the group will submit their own 5-page essay (not including bibliography and illustrations) on this topic. Students may opt to present an essay that only focuses on their part of the project, or may write a synthesis that incorporates all three aspects of the presentation. Make sure you practice your class presentation so it does _NOT exceed 15 minutes_. Students must use powerpoint – or some other visual system – in order to show their Mendoza page and any other relevant images. Color images (although small) of pages not shown in color in _The Essential Codex Mendoza_ can be found in Kurt Ross’ edition of _The Codex Mendoza_, also on reserve.

Based on the number of students in the class, several may be asked instead to present on similarities/differences in the Aztec and Spanish documents we read in the last weeks of class.

**Research Paper**

Students will write a 12–15 page research paper (not including bibliography, illustrations and title page) on any topic related to the Aztecs, exploring an issue in depth. The student is encouraged to develop his or her own topic, and should consult with me at any point in this process. Students should develop a _thesis statement_, which they then support through well-organized presentation of data. A brief outline (a paragraph or two) and preliminary bibliography (4 or 5 sources not including the textbooks or Blackboard articles) must be submitted on October 21st and approved by me. The paper must be an original, solo-produced work with normal margins, and should not rely on undocumented internet sources. You may use on-line journals, but no anonymous websites. I have no preference for which style you use in the bibliography and within-text references/citations, as long as you are consistent. The final paper should document that you have consulted 15 or more sources, which may include class readings. Research papers must be turned in by 4:30 pm on December 9th at the Anthropology Department office (2110 G St.). I will be happy to accept early submissions and comment and critique drafts of your paper that are turned in a week before the deadline.
Extra Credit
There are 2 ways to obtain extra credit points for this class. Students may do both!
1. Throughout the semester, discoveries and controversies involving Aztec archaeology will certainly occur. Simply bring in a copy of the article, from a newspaper or magazine (the article must be at least 3 paragraphs long). Links to websites are not acceptable. You may do this once.
2. We are fortunate to be in Washington, DC, where there are several Aztec objects on display in two locations: Dumbarton Oaks in Georgetown and the Kislak Collection, Library of Congress. Simply write a brief 1 to 2 page description of an object and your response to it; please include a photograph (you can take pictures without a flash) in your report. 2 points.

Grading for the Course:
Grades will be calculated based upon the following weighted distribution:
- Tlatoani and Mendoza essays - 20% (10% each)
- Exams 1 and 2 - 40% (20% each)
- Research Paper - 30%
- Participation - 10%

The standard University system will be used to assign letter grades as follows: A = 92-100; A- = 90-91; B+ = 88-89; B = 82-87; B- = 80-81; C+ = 78-79; C = 72-77; C- = 70-71; D+ = 68-69; D = 62-67; D- = 60-61; F = 0-59.

Important Dates:
- 9/30 and 10/02: Mendoza group presentations
- 10/02: Mendoza essays due
- 10/09: Exam 1
- 10/21: Paper Topics due
- 11/20: Exam 2
- 1209: Research paper due in Dept. Office by 4:30 pm!!