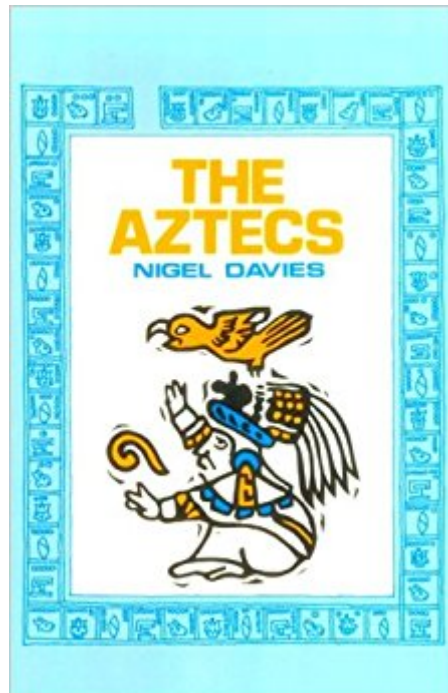




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The Aztecs, A History



Synopsis

When Hernan Cortes entered the Valley of Mexico in 1519 he found there a highly developed society whose sophistication and grandiose barbarity astonished the conquistadors. The Aztecs, as the people of the valley became generally called, are one of the most fascinating and exotic of the ancient civilizations of the New World, and they have captured the imagination of the world ever since the first reports reached Europe. Much has been written about their downfall at the hands of the Spaniards and about their ritual and social customs. Most people know something of Montezuma II, but few know of his equally remarkable predecessors, among them Tizoc, Ahuitzotl and Montezuma I, whose conquests made the empire. Nigel Davies, the author of scholarly works on the subject, has now written for the general reader an absorbing narrative history of the Aztec people. Starting from their obscure nomadic beginnings, concealed in a thick layer of myth and tradition, he unravels the complex story of their rise to power, of dynastic battles and feuds. The balance of power in the Valley of Mexico was always precariously based on treaties and federations, and Mr. Davies describes in enthralling detail the political situation which made it possible for a handful of armed Spaniards to overcome the mighty Montezuma. He writes from the Aztec point of view, showing how their social and political life was disrupted by the arrival of Europeans and how the great Aztec nobility gradually dwindled into insignificance. This book is a major historical achievement, bringing together many complex strands into a single compelling story.

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Customer Reviews

When Hernan Cortes entered the Valley of Mexico in 1519 he found there a highly developed society whose sophistication and grandiose barbarity astonished the conquistadors. The Aztecs, as the people of the valley became generally called, are one of the most fascinating and exotic of the ancient civilizations of the New World, and they have captured the imagination of the world ever since the first reports reached Europe. Much has been written about their downfall at the hands of the Spaniards and about their ritual and social customs. Most people know something of Montezuma II, but few know of his equally remarkable predecessors, among them Tizoc, Ahuitzotl and Montezuma I, whose conquests made the empire. Nigel Davies, the author of scholarly works on the subject, has now written for the general reader an absorbing narrative history of the Aztec people. Starting from their obscure nomadic beginnings, concealed in a thick layer of myth and tradition, he unravels the complex story of their rise to power, of dynastic battles and feuds. The balance of power in the Valley of Mexico was always precariously based on treaties and federations, and Mr. Davies describes in enthralling detail the political situation which made it possible for a handful of armed Spaniards to overcome the mighty Montezuma. He writes from the Aztec point of view, showing how their social and political life was disrupted by the arrival of Europeans and how the great Aztec nobility gradually dwindled into insignificance. This book is a major historical achievement, bringing together many complex strands into a single compelling story.

Davies' book was first published in 1973, and it reads as such. More modern scholarship shies away from making value judgements referring to a culture as "barbaric" or "war-like" yet such pejoratives are not uncommon in *The Aztecs: a history*. In terms of the overall content, I found *The Aztecs* (Third Edition) (Ancient Peoples and Places) to be both better written and reflective of more recent scholarship. Where Davies excels (and Townsend falls short) is in the detailing of the arrival of the Spanish and the conquest of the Aztec empire. Sadly, this comprises only the last few chapters, but it is also the strongest part of his history. For those with familiarity with the Nahuatl and Aztec culture and history, this is a pass, Townsend's *The Aztecs* a better survey for those seeking an introduction.

This is one of the better books written on the pre-columbian history of Anahuac (Mexico). The only negative comment I have regards the book's title. The people of Tenochtitlan did not refer to themselves as "Aztec," but as Mexica. Aside from this, Davis is an excellent writer and his text reads more like a novel than a "history book." Highly recommended as an introduction to Mexica

history.

Admittedly it has been some time since I read this book but I purchased the book, specifically, to help me in my study of the Aztecs in preparation for my writing my own novels, "Skull Rack" and "Hummingbird God" about the Spanish Conquest of the Mexica. I found the book a useful tool but no more so than a number of other histories I read. This is, perhaps, inevitable in that there has been so much history/archaeology written on this fabulous subject. Interestingly, this is precisely I wrote my story as novels. I reckoned that there were people who could never be induced to read a history. Some of these people, however, might just be lured into reading an exciting, blood-soaked and golden novel. In so doing, it is my sincere belief, they will learn the history of a long-lost people and an incredible conquest. RB

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