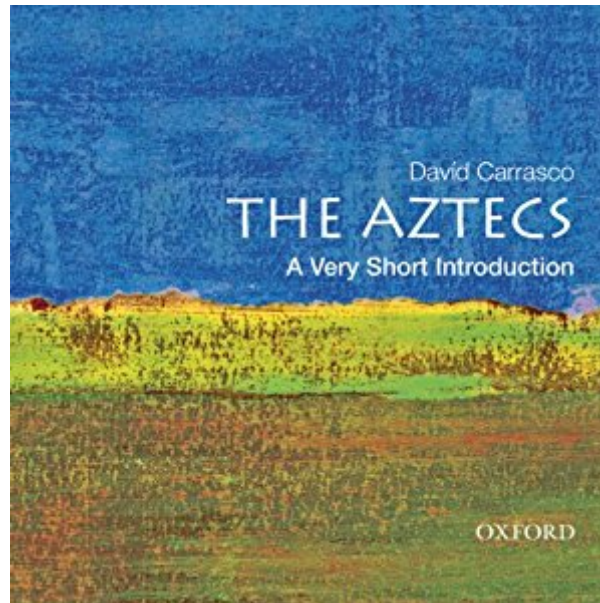


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The Aztecs: A Very Short Introduction



Synopsis

This Very Short Introduction employs the disciplines of history, religious studies, and anthropology as it illuminates the complexities of Aztec life. Readers meet a people highly skilled in sculpture, astronomy, city planning, poetry, and philosophy, who were also profoundly committed to cosmic regeneration through the thrust of the ceremonial knife and through warfare. David Carrasco looks beyond Spanish accounts that have colored much of the Western narrative to let Aztec voices speak about their origin stories, the cosmic significance of their capital city, their methods of child rearing, and the contributions women made to daily life and the empire. Carrasco discusses the arrival of the Spaniards, contrasts Aztec mythical traditions about the origins of their city with actual urban life in Mesoamerica, and outlines the rise of the Aztec empire. He also explores Aztec religion, which provided both justification for and alternatives to warfare, sacrifice, and imperialism, and he sheds light on Aztec poetry, philosophy, painting, and especially monumental sculpture and architecture. He concludes by looking at how the Aztecs have been portrayed in Western thought, art, film, and literature as well as in Latino culture and arts.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book has a lot of good information, but it's not where I'd recommend starting. Carrasco spends too much time on the history of European-Western perceptions of the Mexica, even discussing Erich von Danekin's crackpot alien theories at one point. Since most of these European-Western perceptions are totally ignorant, as Carrasco agrees, they waste valuable space in this short book. Maybe I'm not the target audience for this book, but if you're reading this review, you probably aren't

either. Carrasco sometimes engages in long passages of weasel words like this: "That the Aztecs practiced ritual human sacrifice is beyond doubt, but it is also clear that Spanish chroniclers exaggerated the numbers and purposes of these sacrifices as a strategy to justify their own conquests and prodigious violence against Mesoamerican men, women, and children. Scholarship also reveals that many ancient cultures including the Romans, Greeks, Japanese, Chinese, Africans, Andeans, and Egyptians practiced human sacrifice, often in very large numbers. Even though the Aztec image in Western thought ranks them as the biggest sacrificers in the world, there is no substantial archaeological or documentary proof that they ritually killed more people than other civilizations." Carrasco then spends twenty pages talking about Mexica human sacrifice, far more than you'd find on most introductory books on the Romans, Greeks, etc. You can't have it both ways. (Likewise, he announces "Mexica" as more accurate than "Aztec" at the beginning of the book but goes on to use "Aztec" anyway.)

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