

God of the Month - Tezcatlipoca



Tezcatlipoca in the Codex Féjervary Mayer.

Name: Tezcatlipoca, "Smoking Mirror".

Parents: The original creator, the dual god Omoteotl "Two God", also known as Omecihuatl, "Two Lady" and Ometecuhtli "Two Lord".

Siblings: Omoteotl had four offspring, two of which were different aspects of the same god: Red Tezcatlipoca and Black Tezcatlipoca. The other two were Quetzalcoatl "plumed serpent" and, according to experts, either Tlaloc (rain god) or Huitzilopochtli (Aztec patron and war god).

Current abode: Luckily for him, Tezcatlipoca can be everywhere at one time, on earth, the heavens and in the underworld.

Favourite colours: Black and red. The title of "Smoking Mirror" linked Tezcatlipoca to obsidian, a black, volcanic stone whose shiny surface could be used as a mirror. The darkness of the obsidian mirror symbolised the black/dark aspects of his being. Tezcatlipoca's bellicose nature related him to red.

Tezcatlipoca was a creator...

According to the Aztecs, the world as we know it was created at the beginning of an age called the 'Fifth Sun'. The beginning of the Fifth Sun followed a catastrophic deluge that destroyed all things, both living and inanimate, pertaining to the previous age of the 'Fourth Sun'.

After the deluge there existed only a vast expanse of water, and in it swam a monstrous being, Tlalteotl, or 'Earth God'. She was covered in eyes and mouths and hunted throughout the vast ocean for living flesh.

Tezcatlipoca and Quetzalcoatl, his brother, were chosen to create

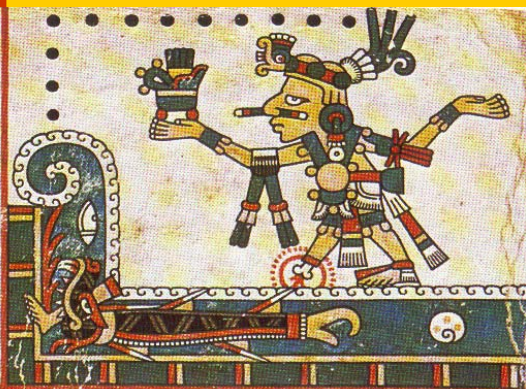
the new world of the Fifth Sun, so they turned into snakes and sought Tlalteotl in her watery depths. Upon finding her they tore her in two. However during the battle she bit off one of Tezcatlipoca's feet.

Defeated nonetheless, Tlalteotl had her bottom half thrown upwards by the brothers, thus forming the heavens. Her top half became the earth; her back was the mountains, and rivers ran down her sides.

Tlalteotl, earth goddess, was sacrificed for the good of mankind, who lived from her body: the earth and sky. Therefore, it was understood that she must be rewarded with sacrifice: the blood and hearts of men.



Tlalteotl portrayed in the Borbónico Codex.



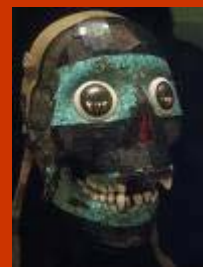
Tezcatlipoca, whose foot has been taken by Tlalteotl, earth goddess. Codex Féjervary Mayer.

Who was Tezcatlipoca for the Aztecs?

Tezcatlipoca represented celestial creativity and divine paternalism. He was the soul of the world, the creator of sky and earth, the lord of all things, both powerful and arbitrary. He was also the patron of all men who were rich - nobles, leaders, warriors and merchants - and probably the most 'important' god in the Aztec pantheon.

However, this didn't mean that he was always good and loyal to his people. He was willful, in a second giving or taking away riches, terrible illnesses and poverty. The Aztecs had to make sure that they pleased him, regularly praying, holding fasts, rituals, ceremonies and banquets in his honour. They did not want to see Tezcatlipoca in a bad mood!

Turquoise and obsidian mask thought to represent Tezcatlipoca. British Museum.



Tezcatlipoca Fact File



Tezcatlipoca as a jaguar or *océlotl*. Codex Borbonicus.

Thirteen day calendar sign:

Ce Ocelotl (1 Jaguar)

This birth sign brought little but bad luck. Men born under *Ce Ocelotl*, were likely to become war prisoners in foreign lands, womanisers or slaves, whilst women would commit adultery and suffer a life of hardship.

Sahagún's informers also attributed power to Tezcatlipoca in the thirteen day period of *Ce Miquiztli* (1 Death).

This was an auspicious sign to be born under if you were a dutiful and devout subject to Tezcatlipoca. If you weren't, however, a life of bad luck lay in store.



Ce Miquiztli

The *Ce Miquiztli* thirteen day period was the perfect time for great leaders, nobles, warriors and merchants to pray that Tezcatlipoca did not take away their fortunes. Commoners who begged hum-



Obsidian mirror, late post-classic (Aztec), Mexico City.

Day sign: *Acatl* or Reed

Festive Month: *Toxcatl* or 'Dryness'

This twenty day 'month' took place throughout May and involved a number of rituals that, in the most part, were dedicated to Tezcatlipoca. The ceremonies started once the *Ixiptla* or 'live image' of the god, in the form of a young man, was sacrificed. Over the next few days a statue of Huitzilopochtli, made out of dough, was worshipped and people made special offerings to this Aztec patron in their homes, killing quail in his honour. Later on, young women, holding cane and paper in their hands went, along with priests, and performed many dances, among which was *Tlanaua*, in which Huitzilopochtli was symbolically 'embraced' by them. To end the twenty days, another young man was killed, this time the live image of Huitzilopochtli, although he was considered to be far less important than Tezcatlipoca's counterpart.

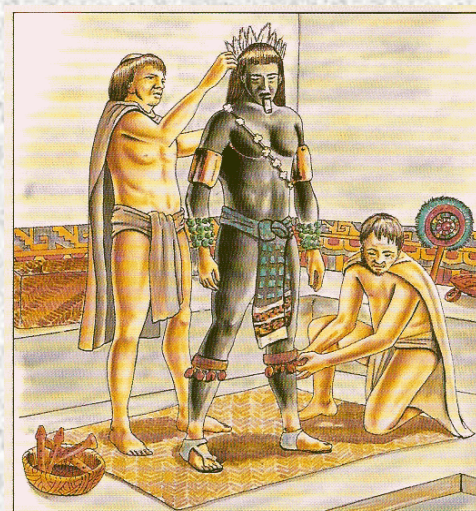
bly to Tezcatlipoca were equally as likely to gain favour from him, and be presented with wealth and good health.



Tezcatlipoca depicted in the Florentine Codex.

Mischievous or mean? Tezcatlipoca was hell-bent on destroying Quetzalcoatl and the Toltecs.

Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca, being 'creator' gods and direct sons of the original deity Ometeotl, constantly struggled against each other, contending for power. Alternating as regents of each of the five Ages, it was Quetzalcoatl who had become the solar deity during the Fifth Sun. In one of many episodes concerning the two brothers' rivalry, Tezcatlipoca came down from the heavens on a rope made of spider webs, chased and ousted Quetzalcoatl, now an old priest, from his home in Tollan Xicocotitlan (Tula). Using his great art of disguise, Tezcatlipoca targeted the inhabitants of Tollan for their loyalty to his brother. The Florentine Codex recounts the many harmful acts the deity inflicted upon the Toltecs, Huémac (their king) and Quetzalcoatl. In one, Tezcatlipoca, disguised as an old man, tricked Quetzalcoatl into drinking a potion to cure him of his oldness and infirmity. After consuming the liquid, Quetzalcoatl realised, too late, that it was *teómetl*, an alcoholic drink from the Maguey plant, and he became drunk, breaking his religious vows and thus provoking his exile and downfall.



Above, the preparation of Tezcatlipoca's live image or Ixiptla shortly before sacrifice. Raúl Cruz, Arqueología Mexicana, No.34.*

Tezcatlipoca's different names:

As *Titlacauan* or "We his Slaves" Tezcatlipoca represented a source of universal power, just like his identity as *Moyocoyatzin* or "Maker of Himself". In this role, the deity did everything that he wanted to as nobody, mortal or immortal, could stop him.

Nahua belief in Tezcatlipoca's potential to destroy and pull down the sky, killing all living things, served to gauge his position as possibly the most powerful of all Aztec deities. Other names such as *Nécoc Yaotl*, "Enemy", confirm his

Luxury, women, and god-like status...why not become Tezcatlipoca's 'live image' or *Ixiptla*? Only one hitch though...

Tezcatlipoca's *Ixiptla* was a young attractive man with not a scar on his body. He was chosen to be the god's own image and representative on earth for the space of a year from amongst the captives caught in Aztec campaigns abroad.

His abilities to learn music were remarkable, and during his time as Tezcatlipoca's 'living image' he was constantly accompanied by eight pages. Together they would roam the streets of Tenochtitlan at night, playing melancholy tunes on the flute. He would attend ceremonies and banquets laid out by nobles, and all those that met him in the street would prostrate themselves before him in reverence.

So where was the flaw in this idyllic lifestyle?

A year after the *Ixiptla* was chosen, he was sacrificed to mark the beginning of the spring Toxcatl festivities. Twenty days before this date, he was wed to four maidens representing goddesses. His sacrifice would take place without spectators, in a neglected temple far from the city centre. The *Ixiptla* slowly climbed to the temple's top of his own free will, breaking one of his flutes with each step upwards. Once with the priests, he was held, spread eagled, by four of them while their leader cut open his chest and pulled out his heart.

So you see, for us, being Tezcatlipoca's *Ixiptla* was not worth all the banquets in the world. Nevertheless, to be chosen for this role was considered by the Aztecs to be a great honour.



position as the 'sower of discord'. *Telpochtli* or "Male Youth", classed him as patron of the "*Telpochcalli*" school for commoners. Additionally, he was called *Yohualli Ehécatl*, "Night Wind", *Ome Acatl*, "Two Reed", and *Ilhuicahua Tlalticpaque*, Possessor of Sky and Earth.

A good time to be a slave...

During the thirteen day period of *Ce Miquiztli*, those families that owned slaves took them out of their bindings, washed, clothed and bestowed gifts upon them. They were looked upon as the children of Tezcatlipoca. If anyone treated a slave badly during this period, it was thought that he or she would be punished, losing all wealth or becoming sick with either leprosy, tumours, gout, scabies or dropsy. If slaves went missing, became free and prosperous, or a slave owner lost his fortune, it was all down to Tezcatlipoca. It was seemingly simple: humility would help achieve greatness or appease the deity and arrogance could secure his anger and, therefore, one's downfall. Tezcatlipoca wasn't anybody's faithful friend; he was just looking for a reason to wreck and ruin, or create and lavish. That was his nature.



A family of slaves illustrated in the Florentine Codex

Did Moctezuma really own a zoo?



Tezcatlipoca in the guise of a turkey or 'huexólotl'.

The last of the Aztec emperors, Moctezuma Xocoyotzin, housed a large collection of live animals, said by some to form a zoo, within the luxurious confines of his palace. Some investigators, however, think that these animals represented '*nahuatl*', the gods' animal representatives on earth. According to their theory, the animals would have been religious symbols, not mere amusements for the emperor and his entourage.

Tezcatlipoca, himself, was represented in various animal forms, as a coyote, lobster, monkey, turkey and vulture. In his regal form of jaguar, he represented darkness, earth and femininity. At the end of the First Sun or age, of which Tezcatlipoca was regent, Quetzalcoatl defeated him in one of their many battles, by turning him into a jaguar (then considered to be the most powerful animal in Mesoamerica).

Tezcatlipoca's statue:

Tezcatlipoca was always represented as a young god and some important elements of his human form can be found in the statue dedicated to his worship. Made of obsidian, it was adorned with rich robes, earrings of gold and silver, and from its lip hung a crystal with a feather inside it.

He wore a gold ornament with smoke curls etched on it, the smoke representing the pleas of suffering people.

Another interesting feature was on his left hand: another gold ornament as shiny as a mirror. It was called *itlachiaya* or 'his look-out', which meant that he saw all that happened in the world. Tezcatlipoca also symbolised justice, and in this guise he was portrayed sitting down on a cloth with small skulls and shin bones on it. His left hand held a shield and his right hand grasped four spears and a dart that was lifted up as if ready to be thrown forward in punishment.



The Plumed Coyote (*Cóyotl Ináhuatl*) was the patron of feather workers. He is carrying the glyph 'two reed' on his chest linking him to Tezcatlipoca. One of his animal forms was the coyote.

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Codices:

Codex Borbonicus, Codex Féjervary Mayer, Florentine Codex, Codex Magliabechiano.

*Images from a text by Dr. Alfredo López Austin "*Los ritos: un juego de definiciones*", p.10, Arqueología Mexicana, No.34.