



Goddess of the month... Xochiquetzal (Quetzal Flower)

Xochiquetzal, the goddess who seduced a priest and then turned him into a scorpion as a mark of her power, was no soft touch! She incarnated youth, love and beauty and was amorously pursued by several Aztec gods. Emblemed by flowers and colourful feathers, Xochiquetzal was patroness of lovers and prostitutes. Unlike other fertility goddesses, she encouraged sexual union as a means of pleasure, not repro-



Xochiquetzal as a synthesis of Tonacacihuatl. Codex Telleriano Remensis.

humans of sins that weren't necessarily of a sexual nature. Wife of the water god, Tlaloc, and consort to the creator deity, Tezcatlipoca, Xochiquetzal lived in the Aztec paradise of Tamoanchan. She was widely worshipped and many great rituals were made in her honour; from incredible acts of sacrifice to sombre confessions. Read on to find out more about our fifth "God of the Month" ...



Xochiquetzal is pronounced Sho ■ chi ■ ket ■ sal

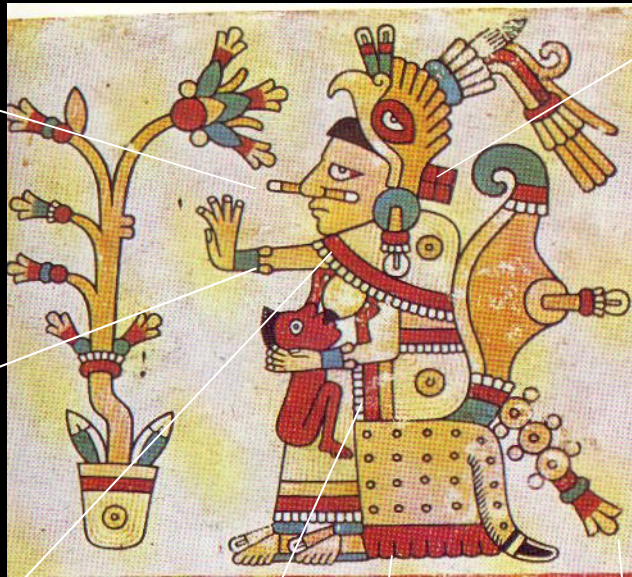
This name comes from two Náhuatl words: **Quetzalli** (quetzal [a bird of splendid feathers] or precious feather), and **Xóchitl** (flower).

Myth has it that Xochiquetzal was a creator of humans as well as intermediary between them and the gods. Frequently referred to as a facet of the female divine goddess, Tonacacihuatl, from whose womb the first four Aztec gods were born, Xochiquetzal witnessed the creation of gods and humans. Although she was a mother herself, this goddess never grew old and always appeared in the full bloom of youth. Xochiquetzal extended her patronage to many humans, mainly lovers, prostitutes, weavers and craftspeople. According to the historian, Noemi Quesada, this was because they could make pleasure or objects that were beautiful to behold. The picture opposite from the Codex Borgia shows two people in sexual union.



Xochiquetzal in codices...

How would you recognise Xochiquetzal when looking in a codex?



Noseplug.
Xochiquetzal is also known to wear a nose ornament in the shape of a half moon, like the one below.



Often depicted wearing luxurious clothing, Xochiquetzal also sports many gold ornaments.

Quechquémitl, a short, woven 'poncho' type garment.

Cuéitl, or skirts. Quetzalcóatl wore skirts of many colours.



Jaguar throne. An elevated seat with a jaguar skin on top indicated it belonged to a god.

This headdress typifies Xochiquetzal. It is of a Quetzal bird, whose beak hovers above the goddess' forehead. On other occasions Xochiquetzal wears a crown of flowers.



This is the Aztec symbol for flowers. Opposite the goddess there is a pot out of which emerge two sacrificial knives and a tree of flowers. It could be the Xochitlicacan,



Xochiquetzal Fact File

Names: Xochiquetzal (Quetzal Flower), Tetetoinnan ("Our Mother" after who many goddesses of fertility were named).
Tonacacihuatl (female aspect of the divine couple, Ometéotl).

Origin: The worship of Xochiquetzal probably came from Oaxaca or Tabasco on the Gulf coast of Mexico. Mythically, this goddess was born and dwelled in the godly paradise of Tamoanchan, one of thirteen Aztec heavens.

Family: Once married to Piltzintecuhtli (also called Xochipilli) and then Tlaloc, Xochiquetzal became Tezcatlipoca's lover. She is also the mother of Cintéotl, corn god.

Special festivities: Atamalqualiztli - A large ceremony dedicated to the harvest. It took place during harvest once every eight years.
Tepeilhuitl (also known as Hueypachtli) - the thirteenth festival month of the solar calendar. This festivity also celebrated the gods of pulque, a sacred alcoholic drink made from the Maguey cactus.
Xochihuitl - the second ceremony of the 260 day ritual calendar.

Sacred day sign: 1 Flower (Xóchitl).

Links to other deities: Xochiquetzal was a female fertility goddess. Similar to Tlazoltéotl, who represented sexual excess and child birth, both goddesses were confessors to their worshippers and presided over ritual cleansings. She was also akin to Chalchiuhtlicue, lady of land locked waters, and was sometimes portrayed with water flowing from her body. Her male equivalent was Xochipilli (Piltzintecuhtli), god of games, music and love.

Dependents: craftspeople, artists, lovers, ahuiánime (priestesses who took part in sexual rituals).



Above, Xochiquetzal, left, and a priestess seduce a single warrior.



Xochitlicacan, the tree of life. Telleriano Remensis.

As a paradise, Tamoanchan was not fluffy clouds and trimmed lawns. In fact it had a killer breeze of obsidian knives and a tree that represented the entire world!

Xochiquetzal's home was also that of many other gods in the Aztec pantheon. Although this was also where the first humans, Cipactonal and Oxomoco, were created, Tamoanchan was off limits to humankind, which was fated to spend its days on earth. Tezcatlipoca, crafty and defiant creator of the earth, could travel between worlds at his will. Xochiquetzal herself was born there, made from two hairs on her husband, Piltzintecuhtli's, head. However, she spent time on earth listening to and absolving the crimes of humans.

Although Tamoanchan has been described in codices as the "country of cold, delicate and frozen gusts". It was also the home of a tree called "Xochitlicacan", The Flowering Tree, whose every bloom was an amulet of love.

Xochiquetzal's forgiving side.

Aztec religion was not so wholly separated as we think from sixteenth century Catholicism. For instance, spiritual cleanliness was achieved by both religions through self sacrifice, abstention and confession.

Aztec goddesses of fertility such as Tlazoltéotl and Xochiquetzal played important roles in this purification process. Every year, around harvest, men and women flocked to Xochiquetzal's temple, where they confessed sins ranging from sexual crimes to robbery.

Sinners would enter the temple with as many pieces of straw as crimes they had to confess. After piercing a hole in their tongue, they would pass each straw through the opening and then throw them backwards onto the floor.

The priests gathered all the bloody straws and cast them onto a fire of purification. So although nobody but the goddess would ever know what these sins were, people nearby could count how many had been committed by the amount that landed on the floor!

Absolved, those who had confessed returned to their communities and purified themselves by bathing in rivers and springs.



Xochiquetzal in her guise of confessor.

The Tenochca Morning Herald

Breaking news! Quetzal Flower's got seductive power!

Last month the nation's most beautiful goddess, Xochiquetzal, was taken from her home in the western paradise of Tamoanchan, also the residence of her young son Cintéotl, husband Tlaloc, and ex husband Piltzintecuhtli.

Most shocking about her recent abduction is that her kidnapper is the infamous Tezcatlipoca. He declared to our reporters that he had taken her to his cold dark kingdom in the north and dared anybody to come and get her! Most recent accounts of his lands, coined "place of the divine dead", say that they are virtually rotten. Who could blame Tlaloc for not going to her rescue? After all, Tezcatlipoca could very well be the most powerful god around!

A surprising turn of events, however, took place this morning in Tamoanchan. Xochiquetzal was returned unharmed by the cad-like Tezcatlipoca. For now, she will resume her life of leisure, surrounded by helpers and maidens who give her everything her heart desires. Relief doesn't begin to describe what she must be feeling! The last time Tezcatlipoca got his hands on earth goddess, Tlaltecuhli, he ripped her in two and flung her apart!

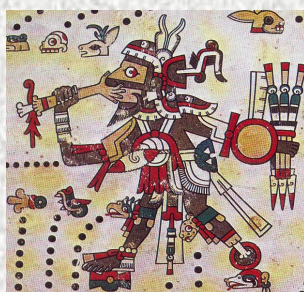
Unfortunately for us, Xochiquetzal will no longer be seen on earth as she has now vowed never to leave home again.

In an interview this afternoon, she declared, "As long as I have music and dance I will be happy. Oh, yes, and I love to spin and weave colourful new designs. All I ask is that the charlatan, Tezcatlipoca, leave me in peace!"

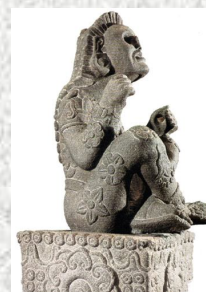
Scandalous allegations have arisen amongst the press, leading us to believe that Piltzintecuhtli could, in fact, be Tezcatlipoca in disguise. He is known to have a penchant for goddesses of fertility, so Xochiquetzal must stay aware!



Tlaloc



Tezcatlipoca



Xochipilli, also known as Piltzintecuhtli.

Who said it was all water, tamales and no fun? There was a lot more to the Atamalqualiztli festivities than eating corn cakes!

The festivity of Atamalqualiztli (The Eating of Water Tamales [corn cakes]) was a grand affair. Every eight years, for eight days as Autumn drew to a close, this ceremony was held. The great temple of the city became the focus of attention and was decked with flowers, trees and wooden poles were adorned with roses.

The main theme of this special occasion revolved around the kidnap of Xochiquetzal by Tezcatlipoca, her subsequent pregnancy and the birth of her son, Cintéotl. During this eight day period, all Aztecs were obliged to eat corn cake made only from water, with no salt, meat or vegetables.

In one ritual, children dressed as hummingbirds and butterflies wound their way amongst the bouquets, their vibrant colours and the original design of each costume intended to draw the crowds' attention. The creatures went from tree to tree pretending to suck the nectar from the flowers before them.

Shortly after, emerging from the inside of the temple, came priests dressed as the Aztec gods. They spread out and began to 'hunt' the butterflies and



The festivities of Atamalqualiztli. Primeros Memoriales.

hummingbirds. This activity only drew to a halt upon the arrival of the final god, Xochiquetzal. To each of the gods she offered the perfume of the incense she carried, along with garlands of roses. After honouring them, she sat amidst the bushes and trees of flowers whilst her many attendants danced happily in front of the spectators.

The dance they performed was apparently the largest, most important of its kind and it symbolised the sexual union between flowers

and the birds and insects that delicately draw the pollen from between their petals. A harvest festivity, Atamalqualiztli strove to secure the germination and healthy grow of future crops.

According to Durán, a sixteenth century friar, the ceremonial roses and trees that adorned Huitzilopochtli's temple symbolised the paradise of Tamoanchan. The image above shows the tree of life, Xochitlicacan, which was cut by Xochiquetzal and spelt the end of immortal life to the rest of the gods. The butterflies and hummingbirds surrounding the tree represented divine warriors who had died in battle. During much of the ceremony, Xochiquetzal knelt by Xochitlicacan, and wove with a loom attached to her waist. Nearby, the water gods, called Tlaloques, gambolled in the water.

This scene is reminiscent of the month of Ochpaniztli, where the goddess mother, Toci, weaves in the market place. Also closely related to Atamalqualiztli was the ceremony of Xochihuitl, that fell on the day 1 Flower each ritual year.

This was a special occasion for craftspeople such as sculptors, weavers, and smiths, who were patronised by Xochiquetzal. They offered a female captive, the goddess' living image, to her temple for sacrifice. Once her heart had been taken from her chest, she was flayed and her skin placed upon a priest who, pretending to be her, went to the steps of the temple and began to weave. Craftspeople, dressed as monkeys, dogs and felines, danced before him and shook their tools of trade.

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Codices::

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