

Synopsis

At Home with the Aztecs provides a fresh view of Aztec society, focusing on households and communities instead of kings, pyramids, and human sacrifice. This new approach offers an opportunity to humanize the Aztecs, moving past the popular stereotype of sacrificial maniacs to demonstrate that these were successful and prosperous communities. Michael Smith also engagingly describes the scientific, logistic and personal dimensions of archaeological fieldwork, drawing on decades of excavating experience and considering how his research was affected by his interaction with contemporary Mexican communities. Through first-hand accounts of the ways archaeologists interpret sites and artifacts, the book illuminates how the archaeological process can provide information about ancient families. Facilitating a richer understanding of the Aztec world, Smith's research also redefines success, prosperity and resilience in ancient societies, making this book suitable not only for those interested in the Aztecs but in the examination of complex societies in general.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Michael Smith begins his new book, *At Home With the Aztecs: An Archaeologist Uncovers Their Daily Life*, by discussing what the Aztecs weren't: blood-mad maniacs compulsively slicing off heads or miserable faceless slaves dying on vast construction projects. Those splash-page illustrations in National Geographic of thousands of workers toiling on pyramids? The common view of ancient civilizations, from the Aztecs to the Egyptians, is that non-elites were slaves toiling under the whip of a cruel overseer to build the pyramids and other monuments demanded by

ancient despotic kings," Smith, professor of anthropology in the School of Human Evolution and Social Change at Arizona State University, writes. "But this is a highly inaccurate picture." Ordinary Aztecs were well-to-do. They had nice things: bronze bells and needles, crystal jewelry, musical instruments. Noble households had nice things, too; they just had more of them. And everyone wanted the latest styles from Tenochtitlan. "It was a little bit surprising to me," said Smith, director of the ASU Teotihuacan Laboratory in Mexico City. "I began with the sort of typical view that these farmers were downtrodden, and serfs or slaves. Finding evidence of a very prosperous, high quality of life was pretty surprising to me." Cover of Michael Smith's book about life among the Aztecs. The book explores three stories simultaneously: the title subject; what it's like working on a dig in Mexico; and his experiences raising two daughters while uncovering ancient towns. "I thought should try something for a popular audience," Smith said. An agent and a writing coach told him he needed more stories in the book.

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