

BOOK NOTE

The Aztec Myths: A Guide to the Ancient Stories and Legends. By Camilla Townsend.
New York: Thames and Hudson, 2024. Pp. 208. \$25.95 cloth.
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A general overview of the myths of the Mexica and other Nahuatl speaking peoples, this work forms part of a series that includes myths of the Egyptians, Chinese, and Norse. These works are written for the general reader, although specialists may well enjoy them.

Townsend strives to make the Mexica world intelligible. She notes that the “Aztecs” properly should be called the Mexica and provides a rudimentary guide to the pronunciation of Nahuatl words. Similarly, she uses the common spelling of many Nahuatl words. Scholars should note that there is debate about this orthography. The ruler, or *tlahtoani* (*tlatoni* in the book), at the time of the Spanish invasion of 1519 is rendered Moctezuma (the common Spanish spelling), rather than Montezuma (in English), or Moteuczoma (the accepted Andrews–Campbell–Karttunen (ACK) orthography from Nahuatl).

The volume is replete with teaching moments, which Townsend eagerly embraces. She corrects many popular myths about the Mexica, such as sacrifice, by placing it in a respectful context of Mexica, and Nahua, religious belief. She might have also described the immolation of human captives as execution because in most instances the victims were captives of war or other transgressors. This would have placed Mexica execution more in the context of similar European rituals such as burning at the stake, disembowelment, drawing and quartering, or beheading.

Ostensibly focusing on the myths of the Mexica, this book is in reality a great primer on Mexica history, culture, and religion. It could easily be assigned in the classroom as a beginning textbook on the “Aztecs.”

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