Symbolism and ritual, including ritual cannibalism, accompanied the sacrifices. The balance between sacrifice motivated by religion and sacrifice motivated by terror is still under debate. The Aztecs had other religious concerns besides sacrifice. They had a complex mythology that explained the birth and history of the gods and their relation to humans. Religious symbolism infused all aspects of life. The Aztecs had a cyclical, fatalistic view of history; they believed the world had been destroyed before and, despite the sacrifices, would be again.

**Tenochtitlan, the Foundation of Heaven.** The Aztecs believed their capital to be a sacred space. The great metropolis of Tenochtitlan had a central zone of palaces and temples surrounded by residential districts and markets. Its design, craftsmanship, and architecture were outstanding. By 1519, the city covered five square miles and had 150,000 residents. The island city was connected to the lakeshores by four causeways and was crisscrossed by canals. Each city ward was controlled by a kin group (calpulli) who maintained temples and civic buildings. Tribute and support came to the imperial city-state from allies and dependents.

**Feeding the People: The Economy of the Empire.** Feeding the Aztec confederation depended both on traditional agricultural forms and innovations. Conquered peoples lost land and gave food as tribute. In and around the lake, the Aztecs developed a system of irrigated agriculture. They built chinampas, artificial floating islands, that permitted the harvesting of high-yield, multiple yearly crops. Aztec peasant production and tribute supplied the basic foodstuffs in each community apportioned land among people, nobles, and temples. There were periodic markets for exchange. The great daily market at Tlatelolco was controlled by a merchant class (pochtecta) that specialized in long-distance trade. The Aztecs had a state-controlled mixed economy: tribute, markets, commodity use, and distribution were highly regulated.

**Aztec Society in Transition.** The society of the expanding Aztec Empire became increasingly hierarchal. Calpulli organization survived, but different social classes appeared. Tribute from subject peoples was not enough to maintain the large Aztec population.

**Widening Social Gulf.** By the sixteenth century, the seven original calpulli had expanded from kinship groups to become residential groupings including neighbors, allies, and dependents. The calpulli performed vital local functions in distributing land and labor and maintaining temples and schools. During wars, they organized military units. Calpulli were governed by councils of family heads, but all families were not equal. During Aztec expansion, a class of nobility (pipiltin) had emerged from privileged families in the most distinguished calpulli. The nobles controlled the military and priesthood. Military virtues infused all society and were linked to the cult of sacrifice; they justified the nobility's predominance. Death in battle ensured eternal life, a reward also going to women dying in childbirth. The social gulf separating nobles from commoners widened. Social distinctions were formalized by giving the pipiltin special clothes and symbols of rank. The imperial family members were the most distinguished of the pipiltin. A new class of workers resembling serfs was created to serve on the nobility's private lands. They held a status above slaves. Other groups, scribes, artisans, and healers, constituted an intermediate social group in the larger cities. Long-distance merchants had their own calpulli, but restrictions blocked their entry into the nobility.

**Outline Stearns Pages 252-260**

I. The Aztecs suffered extraordinary setbacks due to an insufficient technological base.