

Grammar School “Stevan Jakovljević”, Vlasotince

# **A Comparison of Aztecs and Romans**

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# A comparison of Aztecs & Romans

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## 1. Abstract

The history of the two of the biggest and best known empires, Roman and Aztec, has always been magical and truly remarkable. The Aztec empire began with a message from God Huitzilopochtli commanding the Aztec people to leave their hunting grounds and move to land, and on the other hand, the Roman Empire began its rise under the rule of the human being, Emperor Augustus.

### a) Aztec Empire

After two hundred years of searching, the Aztecs settled on the swampy island in Lake Texcoco in the Valley of Mexico after the end of the Classic Period in Mesoamerica. Aztecs soon began to improve their agriculture methods and to trade with more powerful and more civilized tribes. Later they formed alliances with two other tribes forming a powerful triple alliance. In the next years, Aztecs began to conquer neighbouring tribes and expand the size of their empire, until it covered the southern third of Mexico and the northern part of Guatemala. After couple of years, Spanish arrived on the shores of the Central Mexico. They brought with them horses and weapons which Aztecs have never seen before, which only improved their manner of living.

### b) Roman Empire

Roman Empire began to extend when Emperor Augustus ended the chaos and fighting over leadership that was made after Julius Caesar's assassination. By A.D 17 the size of the Roman Empire had grown to its largest size. It reached into Britain, Northern Africa, Spain and Syria. After all, conquered areas have delivered great amounts of taxation and resources, which made of this empire real perfection. Two main reasons that the empire began to collapse were problems with their boarder and political problems. First, the boarder problem existed because the empire was so big that it had not enough guardians to defend it from invading barbarians. Second problem occurred because many generals and politicians tried to gain control of the empire, which lead to its destruction.

### Rezime

Istorija dva najveća i najpoznatija carstva, Rimskog i Asteškog, oduvek je bila magična i zaista izvanredna. Asteško carstvo je odpočelo porukom boga Huitzilopochtli koji je naredio Asteškom narodu da napuste svoja lovišta i presele se na kopno, dok je sa druge strane, Rimsko carstvo otpočelo svoj napredak pod upravom ljudskog bića, cara Avgustina.

#### Asteško carstvo

Nakon dvesta godina traganja, Asteci su se skrasili na močvarnom ostrvu na jezeru Texcoco u Meksičkoj Dolini nakon završetka klasičnog perioda u Mezoamerici. Asteci su uskoro počeli da unapređuju svoje poljoprivredne metode i da trguju sa moćnijim i civilizovanijim plemenima. Kasnije su oformili savez sa još dva plemena formirajući moćan trojni savez. Tokom sledećih godina, Asteci počinju da osvajaju susedna plemena i da proširuju veličinu svog carstva, sve dok nije pokrivala trećinu južnog Meksika i severni deo Gvatemale. Posle nekoliko godina, Španci su stigli na obale Centralnog Meksika. Doneli su sa sobom oružje i konje koje Asteci nikada nisu pre videli, što je samo poboljšalo njihov način življenja.

#### Rimsko carstvo

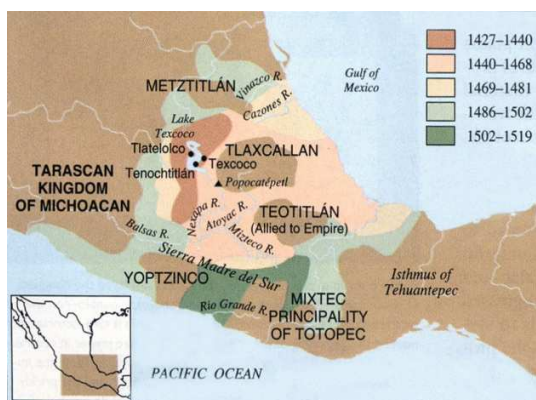
Rimsko carstvo je počelo da se širi kada je car Avgustin prekinuo kaos i borbu za prevlast koja je nastala nakon ubistva Julija Cezara. Do 17 veka nove ere veličina Rimskog Carstva je poraslo do svoje najveće moguće veličine. Doseglo je do Britanije, severne Afrike, Španije i Sirije. Posle svega, osvojene teritorije su donele velike količine poreza i resursa, što je dovelo ovo carstvo do savršenstva. Dva glavna razloga zbog čega je carstvo počelo da se ruši su bili problemi sa granicom i politički problemi. Prvo, problemi sa granicom su postojali zbog toga što je carstvo bilo toliko veliko da nije imalo dovoljno čuvara da ga brani od varvara koji su upadali. Drugi problem je izbio zbog mnogih generala i političara koji su pokušavali da preuzmu kontrolu nad carstvom, što je dovelo do njegovog uništenja.

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### 2. Position of the Empires

The Aztec civilization was an empire that controlled large parts of what is today Central America from the 14th until the 16th century. It should also be noted that only a certain number of ethnic groups were actual Aztecs, though many other groups became a part of the Aztec civilization. The capital city of the Aztec empire was Tenochtitlan (Tenochca, pronounced “te-noch-ka”), and this city was located on the Lake Texcoco island. The Valley of Mexico (pronounced "me-shee-ka") was considered to be the heart of the Aztec empire, and in addition to the capital city being located here, the Triple Alliance could be found here as well. By the year 1520, the empire was estimated to contain as much as 20 million people. (picture no.1)



(picture no.1)



(picture no.2)

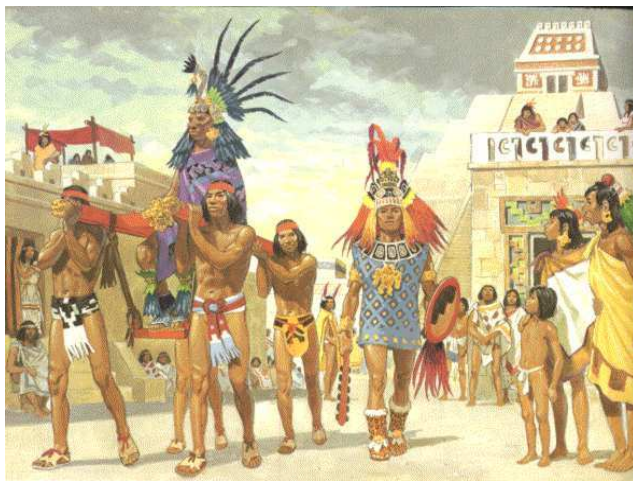
The city of Rome still exists, and it is testament to the great civilization that once existed there. It was a union of territories in Central Europe during the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period under a Holy Roman Emperor. The Empire's territorial extent varied over its history, but at its peak it encompassed the Kingdom of Germany, the Kingdom of Italy and the Kingdom of Burgundy; for much of its history the Empire consisted of hundreds of smaller sub-units, principalities, duchies, counties, Free Imperial Cities, as well as other domains. Despite its name, for most of its history the Empire did not include Rome within its borders. (picture no.2)

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### 3. Society

The fact that shows how amazing Aztecs society, and the one which impressed me very much was that they had an idea of free education for all children, no matter which class they belonged to. We can see that some of the most modern civilizations still have that barrier in education. However, society was carefully divided into three classes with the top most being nobility, followed by the commoners and then the slaves. The nobility ('pilli') enjoyed certain privileges as they were nobles by birth. Priests, warriors and artisans who earned their rank were also considered to be a part of this class. They were in charge of the most important political positions and controlled the society's fiscal resources. The leader was known as *tlatoani* (picture no.3) and he was usually nobility. The second class was of the commoners ('macehualles') who carried out the daily work, and those were mostly the farmers and traders. They were eligible to own land collectively as a family or as a clan but could not own the land individually. Commoners made the majority of the Aztec population, and between them could be noticed variations in wealth and status, mainly because they could rise to the position of a 'pilli' by virtue of skill and gallantry in warfare. Slaves were on the lowest step of the Aztec society. They



had no rights, but there was a chance for them to buy back their freedom. While some of them were criminals or war prisoners who were punished, others sold their children and themselves because of the economic hardships. The slave wore a wooden collar around his neck which could indicate either ill treatment by the owner or bad behavior by the slave. He could gain freedom only by running inside the ruler's palace.

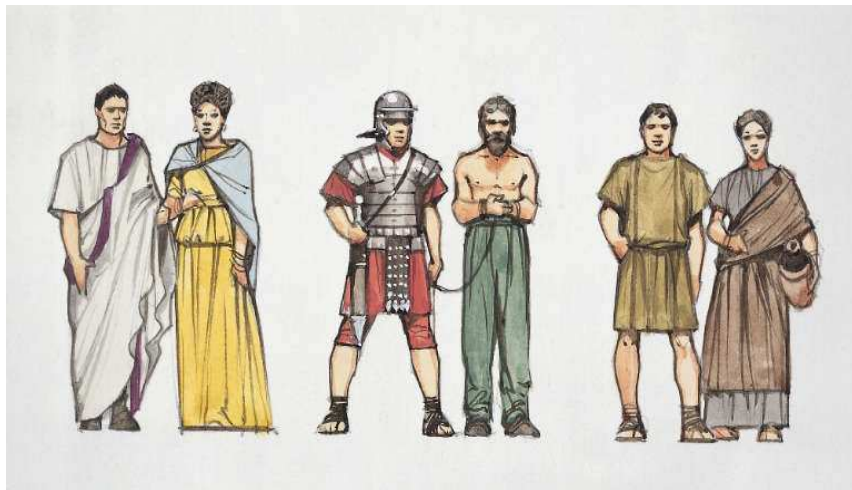
(picture no.3)

The term "Roman" is used to describe a group of people who were members of the ancient Roman civilization. (picture no.4) Their society was quite structured, and both genders knew their main obligations. While young men were encouraged to learn a trade or join the army, women's main duty was to create a stable families and family relationships. The majority was illiterate (unable to read or write), but people who were in wealthy and political circles used to write in order to record the greatness of the empire. The Romans believed in slavery, and slaves were considered to be property. If the owner of a slave allowed them to become free, they would automatically become citizens of Rome. Slaves were obtained during warfare, a bankrupt citizen could sell himself into slavery, and the paterfamilias could sell any of his children into slavery as well. The

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homes of the rich were filled with slaves and the more slaves a man owned the greater was his status and prestige in Roman society. They served them as hairdressers, footmen, messengers, accountants, tutors, secretaries, carpenters, plumbers, librarians, and goldsmiths. Some of them possessed high status jobs and served as doctors, architects, managers of business. There existed some who educated slaves, and the slaves who were members of the imperial bureaucracy. Slaves were often considered as form of property, who were, by inheritance, gift, or purchase. But if a master had been murdered, all his slaves were put to death without trial. This notion was also applied to those slaves of a master who committed suicide. Some masters were kind and just, others were not. Second level of society made citizens, and those who were considered citizens of Rome had a number of rights, but it was possible to lose their citizenship. The status of Roman women were interesting, too. They were in a better position than slaves in a number of ways, but they could not vote or hold public office. Some laws prohibited women from buying any luxury items such as jewelry or fancy clothes; they could not buy anything that cost any amount of money. Women were also able to attend religious festivals, and could also attend amphitheater events like gladiatorial matches and circuses. There is even evidence that women fought as gladiators, but they were not allowed to be seen on stage as actors. Women of all economic levels shared one overwhelming and pervasive role and responsibility, no matter the social position they possessed: that of child bearer. Description of a woman named Veturia gives a good example: she was married at eleven, gave birth to six children, and died at twenty-seven. Women were expected to have as many babies as they could because they were never sure how many of the children would reach maturity.



(picture no.4)



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### 4. Education

Education, at least in the early years, was the responsibility of the parents. The father would teach the sons, and the mother the daughters. Later, Aztecs had a segregation system for boys and girls and two separate schools for children from the upper class as well as a separate school for the commoners. Boys were taught how to fight as well as military history, myths, religions, war songs etc. The girls had a separate curriculum of learning the trades required for having a family as well as cooking and other crafts. (picture no.7) Children of the noble class attended a *calmecac*, a school for noble children that was attached to the temples. *Calmecac* pupils also had extra religious duties, as well as lessons in history, astronomy, poetry, and writing. The *Macehualtin* (literally "workers": trades-people, peasants) children attended a local school, called *telpochcalli*. Discipline was often harsh, but harsh punishments would be in store for the older child, as he was prepared for the harsher realities of Aztec life.



(picture no.7)



(picture no.8)

Rome did not have any public education in the early time. Within the family children learned the basic techniques of farming, developed physical skills for war, learned Roman traditions and legends. However, in the second and third centuries B.C., contact with the Greek world during the Macedonian Wars stimulated new ideas and education. The wealthiest classes wanted their children exposed to Greek studies, especially rhetoric and philosophy, in order to make them fit for successful public careers, and to serve Rome as administrators, officials, and perhaps even members of the Senate. The very wealthy ones provided Greek tutors for their children. (picture no.8) A sound knowledge of Greek was positively essential and schools taught by professional scholars began to emerge, but the Romans already had the example of Plato's Academy and Aristotle's Lyceum. For the less wealthy there were private schools in which Greek educated slaves would instruct students.



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### 5. Clothing

The Aztec clothing can be defined as the various forms of attire that were worn by the Aztecs and other Mesoamerican peoples that lived in the Aztec Empire and it was quite similar to some groups in Mexico and Mesoamerica. The most basic form of clothing that an Aztec could wear is the breechcloth called "*maxtlatl*" (the breechcloth was a type of Loincloth that would be comprised of a piece of material. This piece of material would normally be in the shape of a rectangle, and it would be placed between



(picture no.9)

the thighs of the person who wore it. It would be held together by either a belt or string. The primary purpose of the breechcloth was to conceal the genitals, and by itself, it didn't provide a great deal of protection against either the sun or parasites.). The women wore a blouse, which was called the "*huipilli*", they also wore a skirt called the "*cueitl*". Another form of clothing that was very important to the Aztec was sandals. Only the men of the nobility would wear sandals, and many of the commoners didn't wear much foot wear. Feathers played an important role to the Aztec, and the rich feathers worn by the ancient Aztecs have become world famous. Jewelry was of great importance, and the large amount of gold was worn by the Aztecs.

Roman clothes were made of wool, spun into cloth by the women of the family. Later on the richer people had slaves to do this work for them. If you could afford to buy clothes, you could buy linen, cotton or silk, which was brought to Rome from other parts of the Empire. They used either a chemical called sulphur or urine for washing clothes because they did not have soap powder. Only male citizens of Rome were allowed to wear togas made of wool. Togas were very expensive because of the large amount of material needed to make them and were very heavy. It was draped around the body and over one arm. It was the law that all citizens wore togas for public events. The tunic was worn under the toga by men. It was made by sewing two pieces of wool together to make a tube with holes for the arms. It was belted at the waist and just covered the knees indoors. The Romans wore open-toed sandals. Men were only allowed to wear one piece of jewelry - a ring that was used to make a mark in wax for sealing documents.



(picture no.10)

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### 6. Gods

The Aztecs named and worshiped nearly 1000 Aztec gods. Two the most important gods in Aztec religion were Aztec Gods called *tēōtl* and *tēixiptla*. *Tēōtl* represented the so called "Aztec God", the impersonal force, the power behind the world. *Tēixiptla* was a physical manifestation of Aztec God. Another one was the *Huitzilopochtli*. This was the sun and war god. Aztec God of *Huitzilopochtli* became the main deity in Aztec religion after the founding of Tenochtitlan in the 14th century. The story goes that *Huitzilopochtli* directed the Aztec people when they fled and were looking for a place to settle. Legend tells us the story that *Huitzilopochtli* killed his nephew, Cópil, and threw his heart on the lake, then made a cactus grow out of his heart. This was the cactus that appeared to the Aztec people together with the snake and the eagle and was the site on which Aztecs built their capital city. One of the important Aztec gods was named *Tlaloc*. (picture no.11) *Tlaloc* was the god of rain. Especially farmers were very careful to please this god so that could grow good crops and not experience drought, which was a common occurrence in the area. According to Aztec religion, it took the gods 5 tries to create the world.



( picture no.11)

The Pantheon, the temple in Rome, was named after the word used for the entire collection of all the Roman gods. The Romans believed in many different gods and goddesses. For everything imaginable they had a god or goddess in charge. Mars was the



(picture no.12)

god of war. A Roman soldier would most likely pray to Mars for strength in battle. Minerva was the goddess of wisdom, intelligence and learning; Jupiter was King of the Gods (picture no.12), Juno was Queen of the God... For each of the gods and goddesses the Romans built temples. The people regarded the temple as a sacred and holy place. The temple was surrounded by colonnades. A flight of odd-number stairs led to the entrance. Only priests were allowed inside the temples. When people wanted to thank a god or goddess they brought gifts of animals for sacrifice to the temple. Sacrificial animals included cattle, pigs, and sheep.

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### 7. Art & language

The easiest way to understand Aztec people is to learn something about their language. *Nahuatl*, the principle language of the Aztecs, means exactly "a person who is from Aztlan." This would mean that the Aztecs were actually from Aztlan, and this was their first home. It was used to describe all the people who were connected to the Triple Alliance and the state. Like the Mayans, the Aztec developed a form of pictorial representations, which were used for purposes like calculations, chronicles, diaries, and history. Ancient Aztec art was primarily a form of religious expression and the main cause of the art was paying tribute to their gods. These beautifully crafted designs are still admired today. Aztec art such as pictographs, paintings and warrior drawings can still be seen on the walls of their temples.(picture no.17) Aztec architecture was particularly impressive, featuring enormous temples set upon high pyramids. They also produced jewellery in gold, jade, turquoise...



(picture no.17)



(picture no.18)

Roman art is generally defined as much more than the art of the city of Rome; rather, it is the art of Roman civilization from Romulus to the Emperor Constantine, and covers a period of more than 1,000 years. As Roman domination spread through Italy, Europe and the Mediterranean, Roman art absorbed this Etruscan style and the Etruscan influence included temple architecture, sculpture, portraiture and wall painting. (picture no.18) Rome was also deeply influenced by the art of the Hellenistic world, which had spread to southern Italy and Sicily through the Greek colonies there. Plutarch wrote that before Rome's conquest of Greek Syracuse in Sicily, "Rome neither had nor even knew of these refined things, nor was there in the city any love of what was charming and elegant".



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### 8. Government

The Aztec government was unlike other systems of government during the time. In fact, it was more of a system of tribute in which conquered cities paid respect to the Aztec empire. (picture no.20) In return, these conquered cities tended to show an increase in their own economic welfare. The most likely reason for this phenomenon was because the Aztec rulers had better forms of communication and roads built in the areas they conquered, similar to those found in Tenochtitlan. This, in turn, helped these areas increase their ability to trade goods. In addition to paying tribute to the Aztec king through respect, however, these conquered cities also paid tribute in the form of money. In this way, the ancient Aztec government became both rich and powerful. Initially, only the upper class of these cities suffered financially under the Aztec government.



(picture no.20)

Rome, in its earliest days, was governed by kings. However, Ancient Rome was to develop its own form of government that allowed the Romans to govern themselves. In



(picture no.19)

one sense, for a society that used its feared army to conquer other nations and reduced people to slavery, Citizens of Rome would gather at an assembly to elect their own officials. The chief officials of Rome were called consuls and there were two of them. The consuls governed for a year. If they did not live up to expectations, they could be voted out of office at the next election. Competence was rewarded and incompetence punished. In addition to consuls, there were other elected officials – judges, magistrates and tax collectors being some of them. (picture no.19) Since the Romans did not want one man to make all of the laws, they decided to balance the power of the government between three branches: the executive branch, the legislative branch, and the judicial branch.

### 9.The end of the Empires

There's little doubt that the ritual Aztec sacrifice contributed to the fall of the Aztec Empire, and in more ways than one. First, killing thousands of people, whether your people or your neighbours, simply can't be good for a society. The loss of people is a loss that can't be calculated. And although the Aztecs certainly weren't the first people ever to sacrifice humans, the fact that they did and the incredible number they sacrificed led to the hatred of some of the surrounding peoples. The powerful city-state of Tlaxcala was one of these. Many of their own had been sacrificed, and in the end they joined the Spaniards to fight the Aztecs. It may be that the Spanish simply were an excuse to start what was already an inevitable civil war. Lastly, it's believed that the horror of human sacrifice highly motivated the Spaniards to conquer what they considered an evil culture. Soon after the Spaniards arrived in the city of Tenochtitlan, they made a spectacular discovery in the palace, Moctezuma's treasure house. By demolishing a wall that had been freshly plastered, a room piled high with gold jewellery, gold blocks and gold plates was revealed. Despite this remarkable find, the Spaniards were still uneasy. They knew they were not truly welcome in this city. The battle for the city began on 1<sup>st</sup> June 1521. The hostile forces demolished the city and made a new city from scratch but in Spanish style.

There were several reasons for the fall of the Roman Empire. Each one interweaved with the other. Many even blame the initiation of Christianity for the decline. Christianity made many Roman citizens into pacifists, making it more difficult to defend against the barbarian attackers. For years, the well-disciplined Roman army held the barbarians of Germany back. Then in the third century A. D. the Roman soldiers were pulled back from the Rhine-Danube frontier to fight civil war in Italy. This left the Roman border open to attack. Gradually Germanic hunters and herders from the north began to overtake Roman lands in Greece and Gaul (later France). Then in 476 A. D. the Germanic general Odacer or Odovacar overthrew the last of the Roman Emperors, Augustulus Romulus. From then on the western part of the Empire was ruled by Germanic chieftain. Roads and bridges were left in disrepair and fields left untilled. Pirates and bandits made travel unsafe. Cities could not be maintained without goods from the farms, trade and business began to disappear. And Rome was no more in the West.

### 10.Conclusion

The Aztec and the Roman empires are two great empires that were at the top of political power during their respective ancient times. Ancient civilizations had many of the same things to contend with. Wars, famine, plague, and a prevailing sense of mystery and curiosity about the workings of the cosmos prevailed in ancient cultures. Despite the difficulties of living life in often hostile environments and without much of the knowledge those people never felt a lack of self-confidence. I have examined the ancient Aztecs and the Roman Empire and compared their religions, governments, laws, and social class structure; even though there are some enormous differences many facts are important similarities which make them almost identical: their struggle for survival, fight for justice and their destruction in order to be free. And beside the fact that both, Roman and Aztec Empire, existed in different times, had their own religions, and in the end, their own legends, we cannot say that it is impossible to compare it because they have some very important things in common. Their magnificence, amazing history and enormous legacy they left us in inheritance. All we have to do is to keep it safe and make sure that history of ancient civilizations will leave many future generations amazed by glorious legends of these two empires.



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