

Cambridge Elements

Elements in Ancient and Pre-modern Economies

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THE AZTEC ECONOMY

Frances F. Berdan

California State University, San Bernardino



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477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
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The Aztec Economy

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Frances F. Berdan
California State University, San Bernardino

Author for correspondence: Frances F. Berdan, fberdan@csusb.edu

Abstract: This Element provides a synthesis and updated examination of the Aztec economy (AD 1325–1521). It is organized around seven components that recur with other Elements in this series: historic and geographic background, domestic economy, institutional economy, specialization, forms of distribution and commercialization, economic development, and future directions. The Aztec world was complex, hierarchical, and multifaceted and in a constant state of demographic growth, recoveries from natural disasters, political alignments and realignments, and aggressive military engagements. The economy was likewise complex and dynamic and characterized by intensive agriculture, the exploitation of nonagricultural resources, utilitarian and luxury manufacturing, wide-scale specialization, merchants, markets, commodity monies, and tribute systems.

Keywords: Aztecs, ancient economies, ancient trade, land and labor, tribute

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Contents

1 Space and Time in the Aztec World	1
2 Domestic Economy	11
3 Institutional Economy	29
4 Specialization	51
5 Forms of Distribution and Commercialization	59
6 Economic Development	78
7 Future Directions	82
References	84