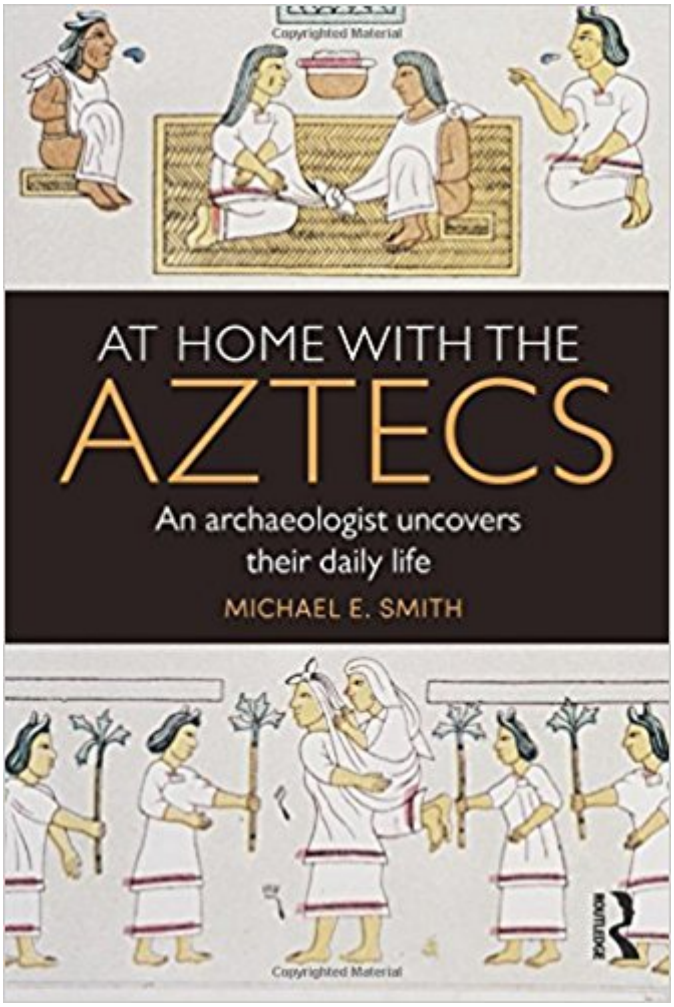
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At Home With The Aztecs: An Archaeologist Uncovers Their Daily Life



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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, SmithÃ¢â ¬â„¢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

*** Winner of the Society of American Archaeology 2017 Book Award - Popular *** "Resisting the trappings of Ã¢â ¬Ëœmonumental archaeologyÃ¢â ¬â„¢Ã¢â ¬â œ a fixation on kings, priests, pyramids, and bloody ceremonies that has for so long dominated scholarly discourse Ã¢â ¬â œ Michael E Smith instead focuses on the life of the Ã¢â ¬ËœordinaryÃ¢â ¬â„¢ Aztec, diving into trash heaps and exploring households in order to investigate the humble communities that actually made up the largest part of Aztec society... Through his remarkably engaging narrative, Smith often

weaves personal anecdotes and methodological insights, drawing the reader into the hot Mexican dirt right alongside him."Ã¢â ¬â ¢ Current World Archaeology "Smith is one of the preeminent authorities and archaeologists of the Aztec, and his compassionate rendition in this instance is a welcome contribution. In this eminently readable, engaging account, he weaves a wondrous archaeological tapestry of the unsung heroes and prosperous peasant communities whose resilience, determination, and cultural knowledge stand in stark contrast to the myths and misgivings that today cloud the interpretation of thousands of years of Mesoamerican civilization and civility. Summing up: Essential"Ã¢â ¬â ¢ R. G. Mendoza, CHOICE Reviews

Michael E. Smith is one of the leading international authorities on the Aztecs, with extensive experience excavating at Aztec sites. He is currently a Professor of Archaeology in the School of Human Evolution and Social Change at Arizona State University.

This wonderful book gives the reader real insight into two fascinating subjects: the lives of the people of Mesoamerica many centuries ago, and the life of a practicing archeologist. Michael Smith writes with extraordinary clarity about both topics, in ways that illuminate both the everyday lives of the ancestors of many contemporary Mexicans, and the academic profession he (and his wife) practices.This is a book for anyone interested in learning about the ways in which the people of Mexico lived their lives before the coming of the Europeans. And it is a book for anyone interested in learning the ways in which todayÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s scholars learn about the past. Highly, highly recommended.

Fast Delivery! Great Price!

The book was interesting and provided clear and insightful information, though I wish the author included site maps and location maps to help orient readers into where in the empire he was working.

Written by a close friend - do not care to review

I really, really enjoyed reading this book. It is a great illustration of how academic research can be turned into an entertaining and personal narrative, while still incorporating the archaeological knowledge learned from many hours (years, really) of field and lab work in a very approachable

manner. I think of this book as the Mesoamerican-version of a realistic Indiana Jones movie, it has a bit of everything: drama, action, comedyÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â¦and, of course, lots of archaeology! I had the pleasure of meeting the author (Michael Smith) and the opportunity to talk with him after having read his book. He really wrote this book as he tells his stories in person. This makes his book really approachable and accessible to everyone, through a very eloquent and clear narrative.As a person of Mexican descent, who no longer lives in Mexico, this book made me reminisce about my time growing up there, made me crave for some authentic and exquisite Mexican food (especially the glorious hand-made tortillas on the comal, yum!!), and made me feel proud of my own cultural heritage. Smith portrayed contemporary Mexico and the Mexican people very accurately and holistically. On a similar note, he shared a lot of information about my ancestors and the pre-Columbian past of Central Mexico through a unique lens: by showcasing the every-day lives of the Aztec peasants (commoners).As an archaeologist who also studies the Aztec society, I found that this book is a good balance between story-telling and the educational content shared about Aztec archaeology. Smith articulates, in simple and clear terms, the basics of what archaeological field and laboratory work entail so that anyone can understand it (especially someone unfamiliar with the field of archaeology). He provides excellent illustrations and examples of how archaeologists are able to make interpretations about the past via the physical remains left behind by ancient peoples (a.k.a., their garbage!). This book opened up another set of aspects to consider in my own research about the Aztec society and how the everyday life of people living outside the Aztec capital (Tenochtitlan) may have looked like. This book will certainly benefit and influence my own research!I already bought a copy for my father, heÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s not an archaeologist so through SmithÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s narrative, he will get to learn in more detail what I do for a living and how I do it. "At Home with the Aztecs" described in three words: Authentic, personal, and witty. I recommend it without reservation.

Michael Smith begins his new book, ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“At Home With the Aztecs: An Archaeologist Uncovers Their Daily Life,ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• by discussing what the Aztecs werenÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢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 ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“slaves toiling under the whip of a cruel overseer to build the pyramids and other monuments demanded by ancient despotic kings,ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• Smith, professor of anthropology in the School of Human Evolution and Social Change at Arizona

State University, writes. ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“But this is a highly inaccurate picture.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•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.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“It was a little bit surprising to me,ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• said Smith, director of the ASU Teotihuacan Laboratory in Mexico City. ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“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.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•Cover of Michael Smith's book about life among the Aztecs.The book explores three stories simultaneously: the title subject; what itÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s like working on a dig in Mexico; and his experiences raising two daughters while uncovering ancient towns.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“I thought should try something for a popular audience,ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• Smith said. An agent and a writing coach told him he needed more stories in the book. ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Well, I thought, ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã ËœWorking down in Mexico with my kids for 15 years, I have lots of stories,ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• he said. ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“I asked my wife. I asked my kids. I learned a lot of things I didnÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t know.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•Brush fires, bureaucracy, stray dogs, political turmoil, shotgun-wielding landowners, and chronic pediatric gastrointestinal distress were a few challenges Smith surmounted during his fieldwork, work which brought surprises and not a few pleasures.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Our scientific pursuit of ethnoarchaeology required that we participate in fiestas in Tetlama and eat handmade tortillas (not to mention mole and other tasty foods). We did this partly to gain insight into Aztec food practices (really!) but mainly to enjoy Mexican food at its best.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•Empire-wide trade meant Aztecs had goods from all over. Smith includes tidbits that give a picture of household life. Salt produced in the Valley of Mexico was packed in distinctive rough pottery jars, somewhat like the Provencal clay crocks herbes de provence come in today. The salt was shipped out and purchased in outlying areas like those excavated by Smith. ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“As they used up the salt, people broke pieces off the jar (to better get at the remaining salt), and these sherds are abundant in all the middens.)ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•SmithÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s work doesnÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t focus on monumental archaeology, which studies pyramids and palaces, but rather household archaeology, which examines daily life like cooking tortillas, eating dinner and mending clothes.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Commoner life was simply not recordedÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• by either Aztecs or Spaniards, leaving Smith to piece together what it was like.Human sacrifice was not part of Aztec daily life. It was ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“a state spectacle engineered by nobles and priests.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• Ordinary people had as much to do with human sacrifices as they do today

planning presidential inaugurations or the Super Bowl.(To get human sacrifice out of the way entirely, Smith points out the Spanish exaggerated human sacrifice as a way of justifying the conquest. Some modern writers have claimed it didnÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t exist at all. It certainly did exist; archaeology has proven ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“beyond a doubtÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• it existed, Smith writes. No one knows to what extent it existed, however. ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Did they sacrifice 10 victims a year, 100, or a 1,000? We simply cannot say,ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• he writes.)Archaeology, as Smith reveals, is an interdisciplinary field. He reveals how he applied sociological studies of post-Great Depression Oklahoma farm families and Nobel-winning economics to measuring the wealth of Aztec households. Architecture and urban design come into play as well.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Any archaeologist anywhere is going to be interdisciplinary,ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• Smith said. In Mexico he worked with specialists in bones, plants and pottery. ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“They just have to be. But itÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s only at places like ASU where itÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s truly interdisciplinary. ItÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s a real emphasis on the kind of archaeology we do here.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•He also applied local knowledge. Excavating a village called Cuexcomate in Morelos, he hired dozens of local farmers to help with the digging. One mystery was what had happened to the walls atop the foundation walls they were clearly excavating. There werenÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t enough stones around to build all the way up to the roofline. ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“I actually had students count loose rocks around one set of houses to confirm this ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â • not my most popular order,ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• he writes.The mystery of what had happened to the walls was discussed during a lunch break one day. One of the oldest workers said, ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Any idiot knows these walls were foundations for adobe bricks!ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• Many walls in the adjacent modern village of Tetlama were built the same way. ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“This hypothesis was later confirmed when we found fragments of adobe bricks in the excavations,ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• Smith writes.Aztec commoners had fewer freedoms and less control of their government than the ancient Greeks, but much more than their counterparts in ancient Egypt or Babylon. That relative freedom and city-state governments that provided a fair return of services ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“were key ingredients in the success of the Morelos communities.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•The towns Smith excavated were socially solid. They used what we now call New Urbanist principles of permanence over transience, and of sociability and sustainability.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Perhaps these Aztec communities offer lessons in successful community design,ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• he writes. ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Five hundred years ago, these Aztec communities were doing things that experts recommend for the improvement of communities and neighborhoods today. ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â| These ancient Aztec farmers didnÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t need

experts to tell them how to improve their communities. They figured this out on their own.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•Smith said his findings reinforce the importance of neighborhoods throughout history. The Aztec form of community organization was the calpolli (also written as calpulli). It was a union built by neighbors from the bottom up to achieve common goals. Today it would be called a grassroots neighborhood association.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“(Neighborhoods) are one of the few things in history all cities have,ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• Smith said. ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“(Capolli) was something invented by the Aztecs to make their society work for them. Today neighborhoods are important. TheyÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ve been important in any city thatÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s ever existed for humankind. ThatÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s one message (of the book).ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•The book exemplifies ASUÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s approach to scholarship thatÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s promoted and valued.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“ItÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s really distinct from the way archaeology is done at other places,ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• Smith said. ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“ThereÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s a real emphasis on looking at things from other perspectives, bringing in other disciplines, high-risk research projects. The whole atmosphere here and working on other projects allowed me to rethink these results I got from the excavations. A lot of the story I tell about these households and communities is based on re-thinking the evidence.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•

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