

## Luisa Martínez Leal The Aztec Paper and their Graphic Art Books

To keep a record of their trade and conquest, the Aztecs needed precisely written tribute-lists.

Paper fashioned into rolls, about nine metres long, was used by the scribes, to record the profits of conquest. Paper folded like a miniature screen, formed the sacred books called *tonalamatl* (which were preserved in library form in the Aztec archives). And finally, paper became itself an important article of tribute.

In one of the most famous of tribute-charts of Moctezuma II, the Codex Mendoza we find a significant item:

“Twenty-four thousand reams of paper are to be brought yearly to the storehouses of the ruler of Tenochtitlan.” These are now about 480,000 sheets. Judging by the standards of a primitive civilization, this is an enormous amount of paper.

The Aztecs made two kinds of paper, *Amate* and *Agave* papers. *Amate* was so much more resistant than *Agave* which had a papyrus like consistency.

The Books of the Aztecs were entirely pictorial. Events, dates, names, and ideas were all conveyed through conventionalized images.

Aztec art and science grew up and developed while they had painting and pictographic writing as their aids.

Their writing signs were not phonetic, but symbolic.

The image-based system was a composite and flexible one in which pictograms, ideograms and logograms could all be combined. As the Aztecs conquered peoples from different language groups, this efficient pictorial system made it possible for the educated to read documents without having a common spoken language.

The pictographic symbols became of the utmost importance in primitive Mexican sacred books which were beautiful works of art.

Keywords:

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