



## God of the Month: Tlaloc



Tlaloc shown with a jaguar helm. Codex Vaticanus B.

Tlaloc, lord of celestial waters, lightning flashes and hail, patron of land workers, was one of the oldest and most important deities in the Aztec pantheon.

Archaeological evidence indicates that he was worshipped in Mesoamerica before the Aztecs even settled in Mexico's central highlands in the 13th century AD.

Ceramics depicting a water deity accompanied by serpentine lightning bolts date back to the 1st century BC in Veracruz, Eastern Mexico. Tlaloc's

antiquity as a god is only rivalled by Xiuhtecuhtli the fire lord (also Huehuetotl, old god) whose appearance in history is marked around the last few centuries BC. Tlaloc's main purpose was to send rain to nourish the growing corn and crops. He was able to delay rains or send forth harmful hail, therefore it was very important for the Aztecs to pray to him, and secure his favour for the following agricultural cycle. Read on and discover how crying children, lepers, drowned people, mountaintops and caves were all important parts of the symbolism surrounding this powerful ancient god...



Tlaloc vase. Templo Mayor, Mexico City, Mexico.

### Starting at the very beginning: Tlaloc in Tamoanchan.

Right at the beginning of the world, before the gods were sent down to live on Earth as mortal beings, they lived in Tamoanchan, a paradise created by the divine being Ometeotl for his deity children.

Tlaloc, among the other Aztec deities, enjoyed the eternal beauty and abundance of this place: Tamoanchan 'breathed life'.

Tlaloc was married to the beautiful young goddess Xochiquetzal (Quetzal Flower). She represented fertility, sexuality and youth. Because of her beauty the creator deity Tezcatlipoca desired her and, in a flagrant act of disrespect to both Ometeotl and Tlaloc, he carried out a stunt not unusual to his deceptive nature: he stole Xochiquetzal for himself.

After his loss, Tlaloc did not remain a bachelor for long; he married another goddess called Chalchiuhtlicue who was patroness of earthly waters like rivers and springs. The couple, along with their helpers the Tlaloque, controlled the world of water and the agricultural cycle's rainy season.

Xochiquetzal in the Codex Telleriano Remensis



### Watery Deaths

Aztecs who died from one of a list of the following illnesses or incidents were thought to be sent to the 'earthly paradise' of Tlalocan. There, they would meet and live with the family of water related deities.

- DROWNING**
- LIGHTNING STRIKE**
- DROPSY**
- LEPROSY**
- SCABIES**
- GOUT**

- ACHES AND PAINS**
- PEOPLE WITH STUNTED GROWTH**  
(they were thought to be small in size like Tlaloc's helpers, the Tlaloque)
- THE PHYSICALLY DISABLED**



# Tlaloc Fact File



**Name:** Tlaloc or Tlaloc Tlamacazqui

Related to the ancient storm god of Teotihuacan and regent of land workers.

**Age:** Disputed. Some sources indicate that he was one of the four original creator gods made by the supreme being Ometeotl; his brothers were the two Tezcatlipocas (Red and Black) and Quetzalcoatl. Others state that Ometeotl's four sons were Tezcatlipoca, Xipe Totec, Huitzilopochtli and Quetzalcoatl, and that Tlaloc was created afterwards.

**Marital Status:** Married to the goddess Chalchiuhtlicue, lady of terrestrial waters including rivers, springs, and seas. His first wife was the goddess Xochiquetzal who symbolised youth, beauty and sexuality.

**Place of abode:** The fourth level of the heavens; the earthly paradise of Tlalocan. He also dwelled on mountain tops and inside caves. Karl Taube describes these caves as "miraculous treasure houses filled with wealth and prosperity". Tlaloc is also present in rain and lightning.

**Day sign:** Ce Mazatl or 1 Deer. A male born under the sign of Ce Mazatl was "timid, weak-spirited and faint-hearted" and "could not hear thunder or see lightning without being terrified." (López Austin:1998)



**Trecena sign** (seventh of twenty thirteen day periods in the 260 day ritual calendar): Ce Quiáhuitl or 1 Rain.



**Regency:** Tlaloc presided over the Third Sun or Age (4 Rain or Nauhquiáhuitl): During this Sun humans ate aquatic seeds (Currently, we live in the Fifth Sun and eat corn). The Third Sun was destroyed by a rain of fire that gave way to the Fourth Sun which was governed by Chalchiuhtlicue.

**Festivities:** As a god related to water and agriculture, Tlaloc was worshipped in more than one of the twenty day 'months' that dominated the 365 day solar calendar. Some of the months he received offerings were Atlcahualo, Tozoztontli, Etzalqualiztli and Atemoztli.



'Atlcahualo' the first 'month' of the year. Codex Vaticanus A.



## Come and live in the paradise of Tlalocan!

*Plenty of water features, the very best food, beautiful landscapes, a virtual paradise for you and your family\*.*

\*Conditions apply: Those who are interested in moving to Tlalocan must be chosen by Tlaloc (Coordinator and god) or his assistants. They must also plan to die in the near future from a water related illness, accident or condition. Collect a leaflet at a temple near you or call 0800TLALOC TEL.

Once dead, those who were thought to travel to the land of Tlalocan were not cremated like the majority of people. Instead, they were buried. Seeds were planted on their faces, blue paint covered their foreheads along with carefully placed pieces of paper. Their bodies were dressed with paper, and a digging stick used for sowing seeds was placed in their hands.

Their souls went to the watery paradise of Tlalocan where they received nothing but the very best. They could take their pick of food from amongst amaranth, corn, squash, tomatoes, green beans, and flowers.

One's eligibility to dwell in Tlalocan did not depend on whether you were well behaved during your lifetime. What determined the matter were your personal traits. According to Alfredo López Austin, a devotee of Tlaloc would spend his afterlife in Tlalocan. Similarly, he who hoarded jade stones (these were symbolic of water to the Aztecs) would infuriate the god, be punished by a water related death, and experience a swift transferral to the aforementioned paradise.

Gods were allowed to choose their subjects, kill them and whisk them off to their personal realms at will. The solar deity Tonatiuh took warriors and women killed in childbirth to dwell in the paradise that followed the sun across the sky. Mictlantecuhtli and Mictlancihuatl chose and took a large amount of Aztecs to the underworld.

Ruled by Tlaloc and Chalchiuhtlicue, Tlalocan was also home to their four helpers, the Tlaloque, who were in charge of controlling rain.



The Tepantitla mural in Teotihuacan. It shows scenes from Tlalocan.

# Take a look at Tlaloc...

What symbols help define this main Aztec deity in different codices? Here, you can find a few of the physical traits and personal objects that will help you to recognise him in any situation. Let us present Tlaloc...

## His Head

### **Feather headdress.**

The style can change according to different representations (A).

### **Cape**

Sometimes he wears a cape ending in a jaguar head (B).

### **Necklace of jade or Chalchihuite.**

Jade was a symbolic representation of water. Chalchiuhtlicue's name meant 'she of the jade skirt'.

### **Dots on his face**

This meant that sage seeds were planted there (C).

### **Colour**

His face can be blue, black and sometimes 'dirty' yellow in colour. These colours might be interpreted to show the blue of water, the black darkness of a cave and the yellow of ripe corn. (A, D)

### **Goggle eyes, Jaguar teeth and Snake fangs.**

Tlaloc and his round eyes (A, B, D, G) date back to the classic period in Teotihuacan where he was one of the prominent gods. This was around 600AD, 800 years before the Aztecs started to depict him in their codices. The goggle effect around his eyes that you can see comes from two intertwined serpents whose fangs come down at the sides of his mouth before curling upwards. Additionally, the wavy white pointy teeth that shoot down out of his month have been interpreted as Jaguar fangs. Tlaloc was considered to be part jaguar (unlike his Mayan Chac equivalent). The rumbles of thunder that came from the sky were thought by the Aztecs to be its roar; it was, after all, the most powerful feline in Mesoamerica.

In picture J it is possible to see a snake tongue curling out from underneath one of Tlaloc's fangs.

Pictures.

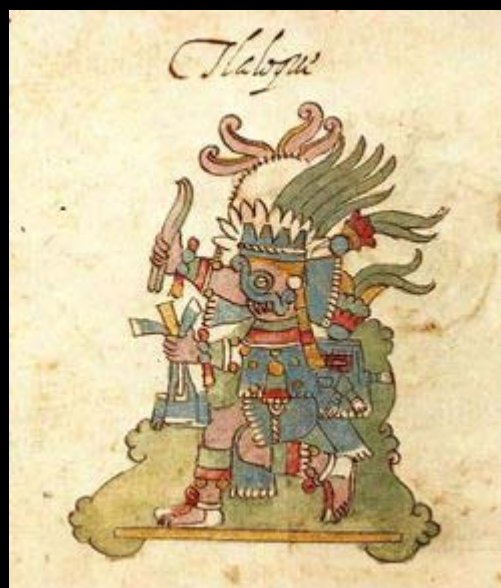
A: Tlaloc in the Codex Vaticanus A.

B, D, and K: Tlaloc in the Codex Vaticanus B  
C, E, and F: Fragments from the Florentine Codex.

G, I and J: Fragments from the Codex Laúd.

H: The Earth Monster devouring a human in the Codex Laúd.

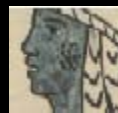
L: Cultivators in the Florentine Codex



A



B



C



D



E



F



G



H



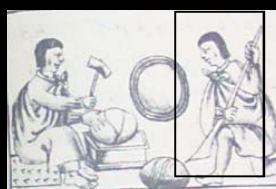
I



J



K



L

## What did he wear?

### **Copper bells around his ankles**

This was a common adornment for both gods and people. They were special instruments that marked the rhythm in ritual dancing (A).

### **A Cloak of dew**

Tlaloc would sometimes sport this garment. Pictographically, it provided the viewer with a symbolic link to water.

### **Truss or 'maxtlatl'**

that had a column-like 'tongue' hanging down (K).

**Water lily shield** (E) and thick reed staff .

**Light cotton sandals** (F).

### **Digging stick**

In some representations he is shown holding a digging stick. With this the Aztecs sowed crops in an irrigated field (L).

### **Rubber drops**

Tlaloc's clothes were often 'stained' with rubber drops that signified rain droplets (I).

## Important symbols...

### **Mountain temple**

As you can see in the main picture, Tlaloc is seated upon a green mound. It signifies his main temple on top of Mount Tlaloc. Mountains and caves were places highly related to rain and water (A).

The mountain in picture A is covered with lizard skin. In Aztec history the lizard or earth monster is linked to the beginning of the world, the earth and underworld. In picture H, the earth monster's jaws are open wide in a metaphor for an opening into a cave or the underworld.

# Meet the family

Unlike the free spirits of Huitzilopochtli and Tezcatlipoca, Tlaloc doesn't act alone. He has a rather powerful family that helps him both seasonally and all year round. Meet Tlaloc's family...



This sacred box contains images of the Tlaloque. Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City, Mexico.

## The Tlaloque

Tlaloc could show himself in different guises. Four of these were called the Tlaloque. They were seen both as parts of Tlaloc and deities in their own right. They brewed rain in vats on mountaintops from whence they also sent out lightning and thunder.

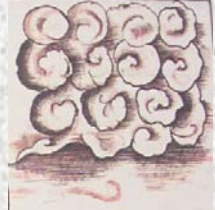
They were the multiple spirits of mountains and 'powerful weather phenomena'. Each of them was a different colour: blue, white, yellow or red. They appear in this stone box, in the picture to the left, crouching in the position of the earth monster Tlalteotl.

## Chalchiuhtlicue

Was a patroness of birth and her powers lay close to running waters.

In pictographic resources her skirt was made of jade stones from which water often flowed. She presided over the day sign 5 cóatl (5 snake) and the trecena Ce ácatl (1 reed). In her manifestation of Acuecuyotl she was the ocean goddess. As Ahuic she became the tips of breaking waves.

Tecciztécatl, lunar deity, was the son of Tlaloc and Chalchiuhtlicue. Huixtocihuatl, goddess of salt, was Tlaloc's daughter.



Above, a cloud, Florentine Codex, book VII. Below, Chalchiuhtlicue in the Codex Tonalamatl of the Pochtecs.



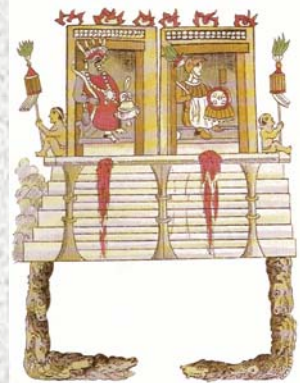
## Pyramids, mountaintops and deep caves: shrines to Tlaloc

### Tenochtitlan's Main Temple

The second chapel on top of the main pyramid at Tenochtitlan was dedicated to Tlaloc. Both his chapel, and Huitzilopochtli's next to it, faced west. There was also another temple called Epcóatl dedicated to the Tlaloque. Sacrifices and rites took place in these temples.

Nonetheless, the Aztecs believed Tlaloc resided in mountain caves. He was known by his subjects as 'the provider' but, depending on how the rains that came forth from within his mountain home went during a certain year, he could be known as a miser too. It is appropriate then, that his chapel in Tenochtitlan's pyramid was called 'mountain abode'. Many rich offerings were regularly placed before it, especially those linked to water such as jade, shells and sand.

To the west of the main pyramid, on the present day Mount La Malinche, were two giant statues of Tlaloc and Chalchiuhtlicue. Mount Tlaloc, the jewel in the crown of Tlaloc's places of worship, was situated directly east of the pyramid. It was exactly 44 miles away and a long road connected the two places of worship. On it was a shrine containing stone images of the mountain itself and other neighbouring peaks. The shrine was called Tlalocan, after the paradise.



Tenochtitlan's main temple. Tlaloc's chapel is on the left. Tovar Manuscript.



Tlaloc seated on his mountain throne, Codex Borbonicus.

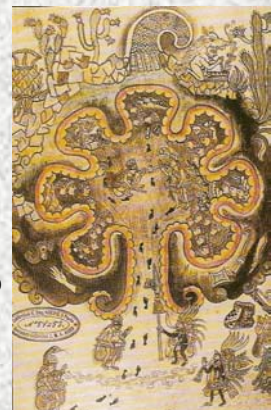
Also to be found inside its walls were four pitchers containing water. Each pitcher would bring a different fate if used on crops: one would bring forth a good harvest, another would rot it, the third would dry the harvest out and the final one would freeze it. Sacrifices that took place here were thought to favour early rains.

As you might have already noted, Tlaloc did not only dwell in temples and on mountain tops. He lived in moist, fertile, and secluded caves too. According to the chronicler Durán, Tlaloc had the additional name of 'Path Under the Earth' or 'Long Cave'.

Investigators such as Doris Heyden suggest that the little passages that lead off of the main caves underneath the Sun Pyramid in Teotihuacan could have been used to house the bodies of children that were sacrificed to

this god each year.

At an excavation elsewhere, the burial chambers of seven infants placed in a circle inside a cave were found. The centre of the cave roof was open and let in rain. There were also storing facilities thought to have once been grain deposits. The archaeologist who worked on this site, Linda Manzanilla, equated the caves, water, children's bodies and grain with the mythical Tlalocan; the Tlaloque who lived there were small, like children, and it was abundant with both water and grain. Out of Tlalocan's opening came the rain, seeds and new life and into it came the dead and retreating rain clouds.



The seven caves of Chicomoztoc from which emerged the Aztec nation. Historia Tolteca Chichimeca,

# The Tenochca Morning Herald

Read our full page spread. The latest news on Tlaloc worship and why you should stay away from water!

## Nail-bitingly terrifying - the rituals dedicated to Tlaloc according to 16th century friar, Bernardino de Sahagún

The water gods required constant worship. They controlled the waters of the world and the all important seasonal rains.

To try and secure plentiful rain, great ceremonies were held and sacrifices took place in honour of these gods several times a year.

Here are the summarised descriptions of some of the ceremonies that were practised during three 20 day periods ('veintenas') in the solar calendar.



Tlaloc in the Codex Ixtlilxochitl

The first was called 'Atlcahualo' and was celebrated from the 12th of February until the 3rd of March.



The 'raising of the poles' and the sacrifice of children in the month of Atlcahualo. Primeros Memoriales, f.250r.

Dedicated to the Tlaloque, this 'veintena' involved the sacrifice of many children on sacred mountaintops. The children were beautifully adorned, dressed in the style of Tlaloc and the Tlaloque. On litters strewn with flowers and feathers; surrounded by dancers, they were transported to a shrine and their hearts would be pulled out by priests.

If, on the way to the shrine, these children cried their tears

were viewed as signs of imminent and abundant rains. Children who did not weep could have their fingernails torn off in order to achieve this effect. Every Atlcahualo festival, seven children were sacrificed in and around Lake Tetzaco in the Aztec capital. They were either slaves or the second born children of nobles.

Similarly the festival of Tozoztontli (24<sup>th</sup> March - 12<sup>th</sup> April) involved more child sacrifice. Additionally, offerings were made in caves. The flayed skins of sacrificial victims that had been worn by priests for the last twenty days were taken off and placed in these dark, magical caverns.

The winter 'veintena' of Atemoztli (9<sup>th</sup> December- 28<sup>th</sup> December) was also dedicated to the Tlaloque. This period preceded an important rainy season and so statues of them were made out of amaranth dough. Their teeth were pumpkin seeds and their eyes, beans. Once these statues were adorned, offered copal and fine scents and prayed to, food was presented before them.

Afterwards their doughy chests were opened, their 'hearts' taken out and, finally, their bodies cut up and eaten. The ornaments with which they had been adorned were taken and burned in peoples' patios. On the final day of the 'veintena' people celebrated and held banquets.

## All the swimming lessons in the world won't get you out of this mess!

*According to the Aztecs, if you drowned, it wasn't by chance...*

Whoever died a watery death did so for one of two reasons: either they were such devout subjects that the Tlaloque gods, assistants to Tlaloc, selected them as worthy inhabitants of their earthly paradise Tlalocan, or they had hoarded precious jade stones, an action which angered the Tlaloque gods enough to kill them with one of the afflictions mentioned in the 'watery illnesses' section.



Drowning. Florentine Codex Book XI.

No one dared to touch the body of a drowned man because only Tlaloc's



Drowning. Florentine Codex Book XI.

priests were worthy of having contact with such a divine entity (divine because it now belonged to a god).

On touching a body that was on its way to Tlalocan, a normal person could guarantee he would be

'drowned or stricken with

gout'. A deceased person who had been carried off to Tlalocan and wanted a relative to join him could get him drowned or hit by lightning. Because of this, some relatives took 'great care to avoid bathing.'

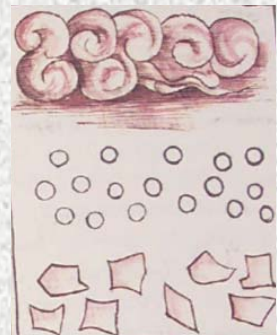
Investigators believe that Tlaloc's power extended beyond what appeared to be the merely willful acts of killing humans and controlling the weather.

His power was a unique substance that took possession of whatever it impregnated.

In other words, those who came into contact with Tlaloc's domain, like he who touched a drowned person, the relatives

of someone killed by his acts, or a person who treasured his precious jade stones: all these people would be subject to the fate that Tlaloc allocated them.

They were touched by and saturated with his power. Only Tlaloc's priests, who usually control this power, were free from the threat of his will - and only provisionally.



Watery elements depicted in the Florentine Codex, book VII.

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