

Nahua Indians of Guerrero, Mexico





Amatl:

the sacred paper of the pre-Hispanic peoples.

This paper was so important to the community, that in spite of intense repressive measures by the Spaniards, it has continued to survive and is still used to connect the unseen world with the seen.



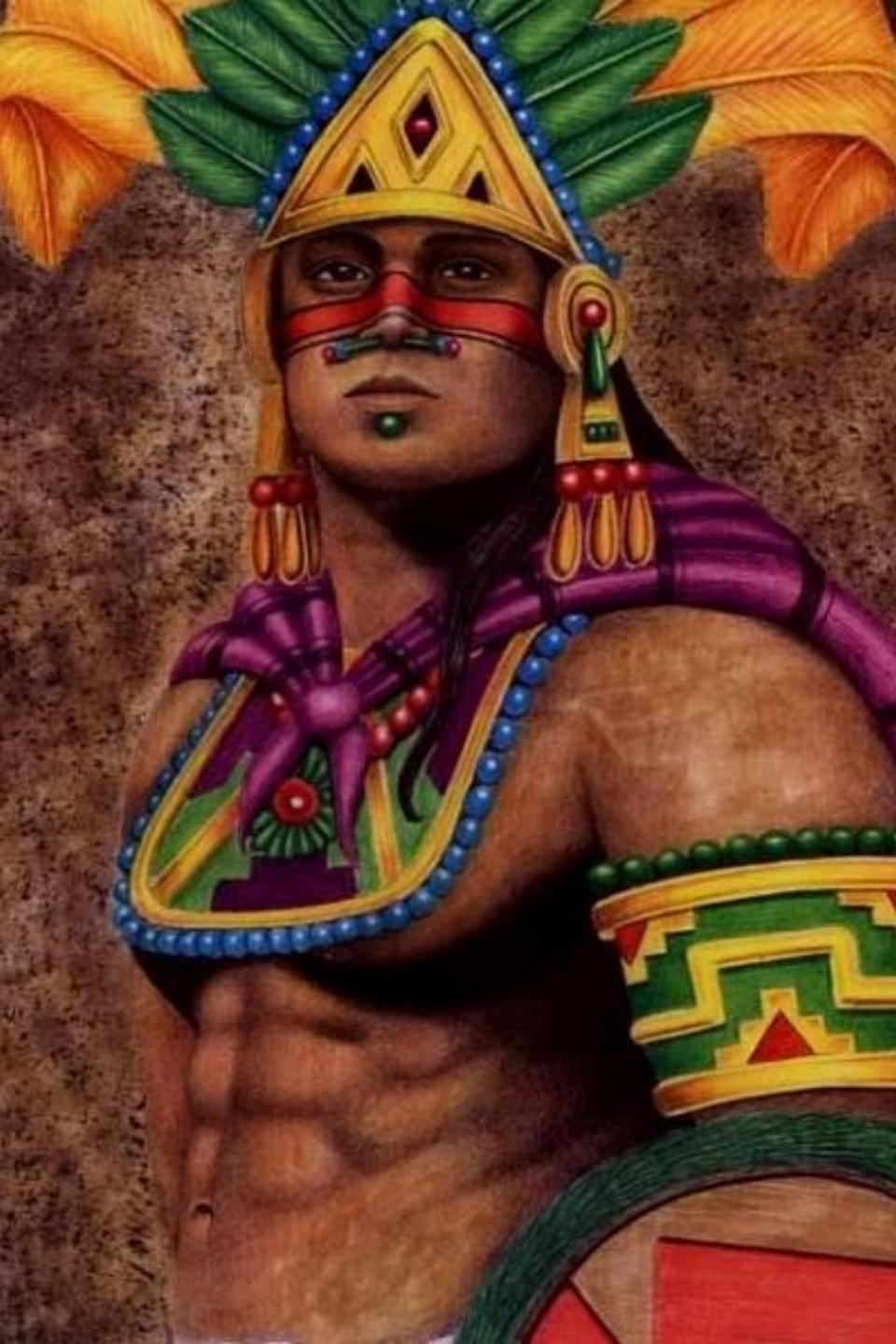
Paper was sacred to both the Mayans and the Aztecs.

It was the medium on which their history and discoveries were chronicled.

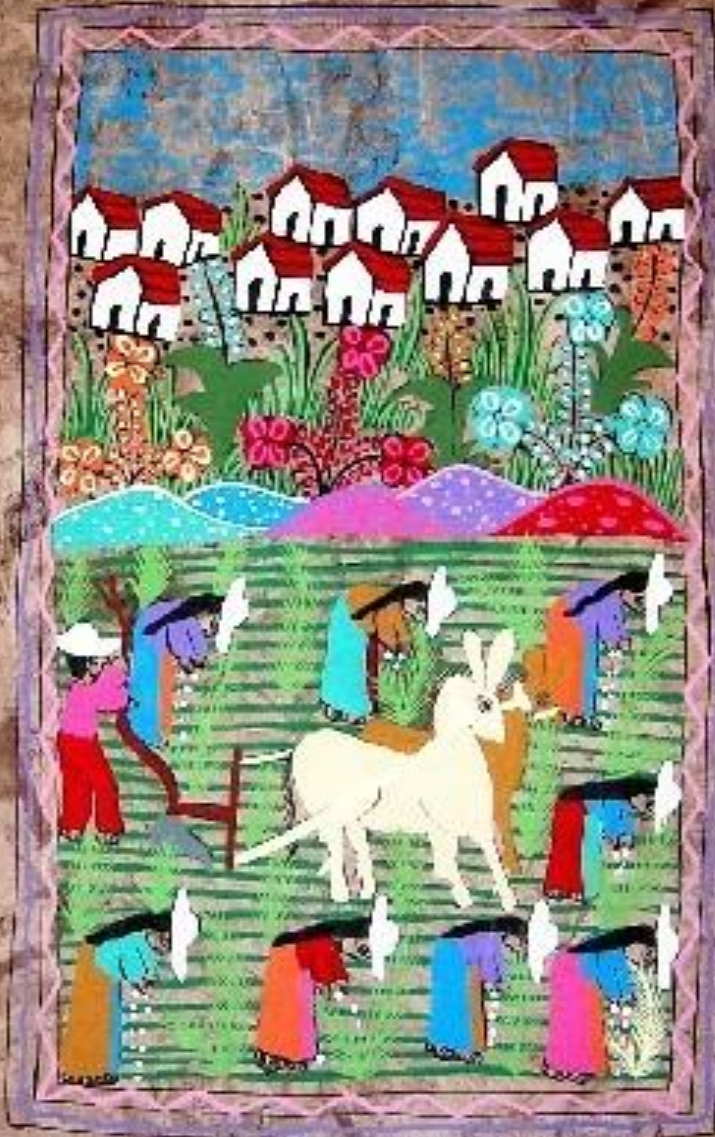
It kept their records of trade and tributes.

It filled their libraries with documents for future generation to witness.

And of no less importance, it was used in every religious ceremony as an intermediary between the people and the gods.



Records show that in 1507, when Montezuma had to prepare for the New Fire Ceremony, a ritual of renewed life that took place every 52 years, he ordered a million sheets of *amatl* to be delivered to Tenochtitlan to insure that the ceremony would be successful and to avoid the wrath of the gods. The finest and whitest paper was set aside for writers and painters, for chronicling events, and for placating the gods. Once these needs were met, the remaining paper was given to the people for their personal use in rituals.



The town priests weren't happy with the sacred reverence in which the native population held their *amatl*.

They prohibited the art of papermaking, and the papermakers were brought to trial.

Shortly after, the traditional process of making *amatl*, the Nahuatl word for paper, which has come down to us as *amate*, was thought to have become extinct.



In 1901, an anthropologist named Frederick Starr headed an expedition into some remote regions of Mexico to record Indian customs and practices.

It was during one of his excursions that he learned that the craft of papermaking had survived and was being made in the Otomi village of San Pablito, Hidalgo.



The Otomis still prepared the paper from the bark of the ficus and the bark of the mulberry tree - brown paper from the ficus and white paper from the mulberry - just as they had done in pre-Columbian times.

The process had remained in tact through the centuries. And in spite of the dangers involved, these people had continued their rituals.



Today three major Indian groups of the Huasteca region - the Nahuatl, Otomi, and Totonaca - still make the *amate* paper.

Bark paper, or *papel amate*, is produced by hand in the state of Puebla by Otomi Indians using bark from the mulberry or fig trees.

The mulberry tree creates off-white paper, while the fig tree creates much darker paper.



Men peel the bark from the trees and women make the paper.

They wash the bark and boil it in a large pot with ashes or lime for several hours until softened.

It is then laid in lines on a wooden board.





Next the crafters beat it with a stone until the fibers fuse into a paste.

The paste is molded and left to dry in the sun.

The paper is very strong and has a beautiful textured surface like the bark of a tree.







The paper finds its way to the Nahua Indians of southern Mexico who have excelled for several generations at painting bright village and wildlife scenes on the hand-made paper.

What do you see in this artwork?



What is the subject of this artwork?



What is the artist drawing
our attention to the most?



Characteristics Of Mexican Bark Painting

Border	Colorful flowers
Stacked shapes	Birds
Repetition	Deer
Unusual size relationships	Rabbits
Bright colors	Village scenes
Black outlines	Religious scenes
	Every day stories of the community such as fishing, hunting and harvesting.

