

# Pre-Hispanic fashion in the 20th century

*Kaloniko*

## Maxtlatl

Maya, Olmec, Aztec, Chichimec, Zapotec and Totonac are some of the names of peoples and tribes who have left their mark on the history of Mexico. By learning about these civilizations we deepen our knowledge of Mexico's rich and varied wardrobe.

We know from the clay figurines found at Tlatilco (state of Mexico) that in ancient times men as well as women wore only short skirts and loincloths. Complementing their flimsy outfits, they wore necklaces and used many adornments in their long hair. Over time these simple garments became more elaborate, using paint and embroidery for ornamentation. Eventually social classes came to be distinguished by the clothing they wore.

Priests were one of the principal hierarchies. In some cases their clothing consisted only of two pieces. The first was the *maxtlatl* (loincloth) made of a piece of woven cotton, which passed between the legs and was knotted at the waist. On occasion they used a wider and longer piece of cloth with the same function. The other article of clothing was the *tilmatli* (cape), a large cloth knotted at the neck, long enough to reach the feet—the same length as the priests' hair, which Cortés' chroniclers described as long, tangled and malodorous. This was the case only for the priests, since

the rest of the Totonac population described in these chronicles was very much given to bathing—so much so that it is reported that many died when a smallpox epidemic broke out during the Conquest, since they were unwilling to give up the custom of taking a daily bath.

"Maxtlatl" is the name I gave to the model I have designed for you. I extracted the basic element of priestly garb in order to design a bathing outfit made from coarse cotton cloth, adorned with a contrasting color band in the *maxtlatl* style. The outfit is complemented by a leather bangle or anklet, an accessory whose popularity is currently growing in Mexico.

## Quetzalli

The priesthood's simple wardrobe became more complex in the case of the Quetzalcóatl, Tecaxtlipoca, Tláloc, Chachihuitlicue, Taxoltéotl-Mixcoatla and Xipe-Tote cults, whose representatives were outstanding personalities who dressed in great splendor. Some of them displayed their cruelty in their clothing, as in the case of the worshippers of Xipe-Tote (Our Lord of the Flayed Skin), who dressed in skin flayed from a slave and adorned themselves with pearls, jade, turquoise, obsidian, coral and gold. Nose, mouth and ear plugs were commonly used.

Another key hierarchy in ancient Mexico was the warrior caste. It must

have been spectacular to see the knights wearing the images of the ferocious animals whose attributes they wanted to acquire. Thus we have the ocelot, eagle, coyote and tiger knights. The full range of living colors was elegantly worn, creating harmonious combinations which gave the appearance of a rainbow. Quetzal, macaw, crane, eagle and heron feathers were an integral part not only of their clothing but also of their armor and breastplates.

Ambassadors were also prominent personages distinguished by the magnificence of their clothing, in accord with the rank of the king or ruler they represented.

I have used ideas from warriors' clothing to produce a present-day model inspired by the original colors and sash design. The bag, made of jute cloth with feather trim, is in the shape of a shield. A leather anklet complements the outfit. The model is called "Quetzalli."

## Jaguar

The pyramids of Teotihuacan, temples dedicated to the Moon, the Sun and Venus, are attributed to the architectural genius of the Totonacs, the conquering people of the Teotihuacan empire which was born at the same time that the Christian epoch began. When they lived in the eastern part of Mesoamerica, the Totonacs were sober in their clothing, but upon



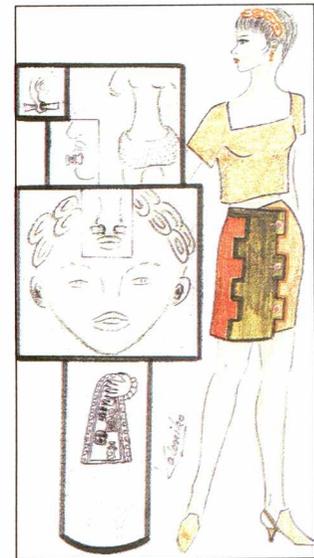
Maxtlatl



Quetzalli



Jaguar



Yacualli

moving inland their customs assimilated to those of the other inhabitants of the central regions.

Thus we see their kings, like other rulers in this area, wearing outfits designed in the best of taste: a white shoulder cape called a *xiuhtlmatli*, bordered with red feathers and seashell designs. The loincloth (*maxtlatl*) was white, with red designs; the sandals were in matching colors. When the chosen color was yellow, the entire outfit harmonized with this hue; the same held true if the favored tone was green or blue.

The headdresses of some kings and princes were real delights to the eye, combining such a variety of feathers that they created a color range attractive to one and all. In public ceremonies they used a golden crown studded with precious stones, called *copilli* or *xiuhuitzolli*.

The figure displayed here shows a king dressed in a shoulder cape (*ocelotlmatli*) made of jaguar skin bordered in feathers. The belt is also made of jaguar skin, matching the sandals. A crown and feather headdress complement this attire, which provided me with the idea for a

modern outfit based on a midi dress and short jersey wool cape. The outfit is decorated with a *maxtlatl*-style sash.

#### Yacualli

In all civilizations, man has sought to modify his appearance, and ancient Mexico was no exception. Its customs reflect a powerful desire for change.

The men of Mexico's eastern zone, where the Totonacs lived, were in the habit of shaving with obsidian razors. The women used mirrors of polished stone. Men were tattooed and painted themselves with *chapotote* (tar), while it was stylish for women to blacken their hair with seeds from the mamey fruit.

High-status men carried fans made from very rich, long and wide feathers, while women of the upper classes entertained themselves by smelling the bouquets of flowers which they carried. Women of the lower classes adorned their necks with beads made from baked clay, wood, bone or shell, while richer women wore necklaces of jade, amethyst, amber, rock crystal, jet, pyrite and gold. Men wore breastplates depicting deities.

Earrings were worn by men as well as women; the chronicles

describe their use as follows: "...[the Totonacs] are somewhat dark people who have perforated the lower part of the ear, where they place jewelry made of pearls and gold." As for the men, "...they make holes throughout the area between the outer margin of the lower lip and the roots of the lower teeth.... In the largest lip hole they place a delicate sheet of silver the inside of which holds up the protruding part; this adornment is round, and thick as a finger." This is a description of the so-called *bezote* or lip plug.

"Manicure for ladies." Actually there wasn't a sign saying that at the entrance to some hut; but the paintings at Teotihuacan lead us to believe that special care was given to the fingernails, since we see drawings of hands with nails that have been polished and painted red, as well as faces with eyes, eyebrows and lips adorned with make-up.

I designed the "Yacualli" model for you under the inspiration of Aztec sashes. I made it in nubuck and leather, in mix-and-match colors. The skirt buttons in front and the short blouse is simply cut ✕