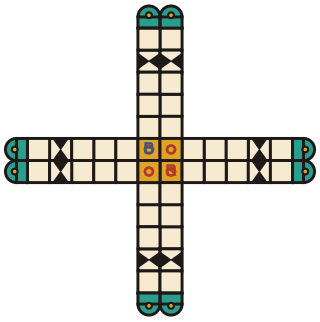
Patolli: The Aztec Bean Game

Name _____

Read about a game played across Mexico and Central America.



A patolli board, drawn from reconstructions of the Aztec game.

Long before the Spanish arrived, people across Mexico and Central America played a race game called patolli. More than 1,000 years ago, Maya people cut patolli boards into the plaster floors and benches of their palaces and temples. By the 1400s it was a favorite game of the Aztecs, who are also called the Mexica.

The board was painted on a woven mat, in the shape of a cross. Instead of dice, players threw five large beans, each marked with a white dot on one side, and moved small colored stones around the track. The name patolli comes from the Aztec word for these beans.

Patolli was a gambling game. Before they played, people bet blankets, jewels, food and other treasures, and some players lost everything they owned. Gamblers carried their rolled-up mats with them and asked Macuilxochitl, a god of games and fun, to bring them luck.

After the Spanish conquered the Aztec Empire in 1521, priests saw the game as part of the Aztec religion. They banned patolli and burned the mats and beans. What we know comes from descriptions written by Spanish friars such as Diego Duran, so the rules people play today are a reconstruction.

Questions

1. Which people cut patolli boards into the floors of their palaces and temples?

2. What did players throw instead of dice?

3. Name two things people bet when they played patolli.

4. Why are the rules people play today called a reconstruction?