

# COLNAGHI



*Knife Blade (Tecpatl)*

Aztec, Late Postclassic Period,  
ca. 13<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century

Flint

height 21.6 cm; 8 1/2 in.

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Provenance:  
Collection of Salomon Hale (1897-1964);  
thence by descent.

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LONDON

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The present artwork is an Aztec knife blade known as a *tecpatl*. These stone blades are typically leaf-shaped, with two blade edges and two broad, flat sides which taper to points or rounded ends on either side. The blades are designed to be inserted into handles made of wood, bone, or various other materials, which sometimes survive. Traditionally these blades are associated with human sacrifice, but they were also part of the armaments of the elite jaguar warriors and were used in short-range combat.

There are numerous mythical and religious associations with these blades in Aztec culture, owing both to the manufacture and use of the *tecpatl*. The *tecpatl* is one of the most important and ubiquitous symbols of Aztec mythology, associated with a number of important deities, and has multiple uses in the symbology of the Aztec calendar.

The present *tecpatl* is made of a white flint, though blades were also made from black, red, and green obsidian. White flint seems to have been particularly prized, however, as most pictorial representations of *tecpatl* show the knife as white with a red tip, indicating a white stone that has been bloodied.

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Comparanda:



New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art,  
1994.35.461.



New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art,  
00.5.1045.