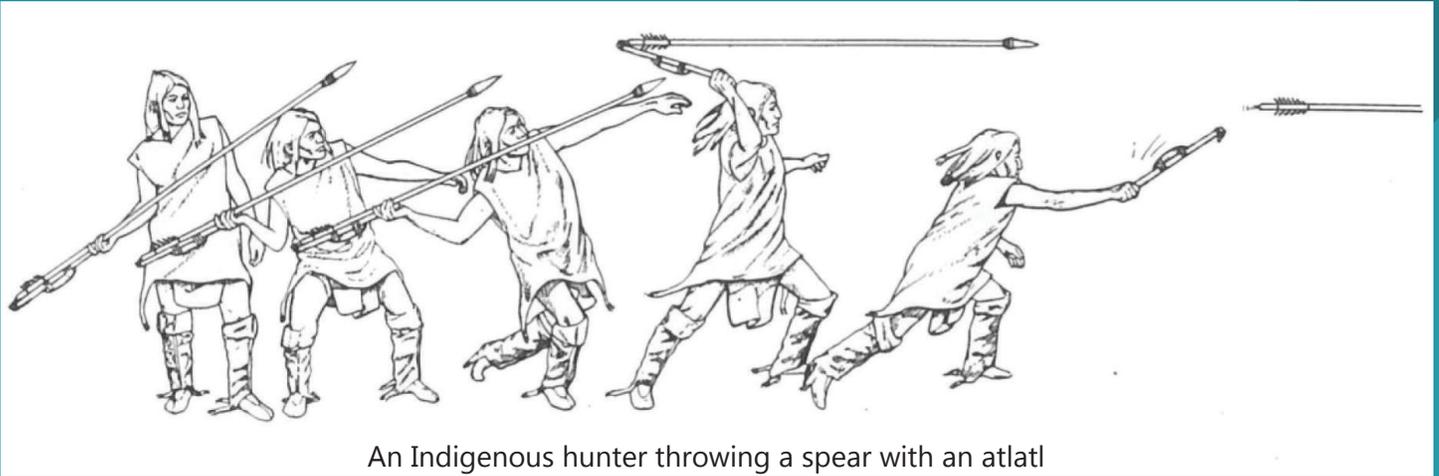


ANCESTRAL KNOWLEDGE: THE ATLATL



An Indigenous hunter throwing a spear with an atlatl

The word atlatl comes from Nahuatl, a language of the Mexica (Aztec) people. Though not unique to the Americas, it held great importance for the ancestors as a hunting weapon that helped the ancestors survive and thrive. As a weapon, the atlatl allowed the ancient ancestors to hunt large animals with great effectiveness and efficiency, while permitting them to remain a safe distance from dangerous prey. Despite its English name (spear thrower), the atlatl used flexible darts, rather than spears. The long dart was balanced at the end of the atlatl and launched toward prey. As the dart left the atlatl, force from the thrower's arm was transferred directly to it. The flexibility of the dart allowed it to bend as it flew, which allowed the dart to retain its force over distances. The atlatl increased the accuracy of the dart as well, allowing it to hit targets far more precisely.

By the time colonizers landed in the Americas, the atlatl had largely been replaced by the bow and arrow. However, the atlatl had a very important role for early ancestors by greatly increasing the success of hunting over thousands of years. This innovation contributed directly to the success of later generations of ancestors, laying the foundations upon which great communities were established.



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Top: An illustration of an Atlatl in action. Illustration by Donald Monkman (1996)

Bottom: Pan Saltz Caballeratos demonstrating atlatl useage. (2019)

