

Art of the Aztec Empire

LD 3: Aztec and Mesoamerican Art Identifications

Introduction: The ability to identify the artistic influences of major art traditions on the traditions of later or greater civilizations is incumbent on one's ability to identify the creations of particular peoples and their artistic and architectural expressions. Today's lab will examine the elements of style and symbol that provide clues to the identification of Mesoamerican artistic traditions as understood by archaeologists and art historians. In our efforts to get acquainted with major Mesoamerican artistic traditions, we will also seek to identify specific elements of art and culture derived from earlier civilizations that ultimately make their appearance and reappearance in Aztec art and culture.

Instructions: In order to fully identify the culture(s) (and cultural context) of the primary Mesoamerican artistic traditions reviewed by your instructor, you should be prepared to draw upon the Lab Deliverable 4 (Map Exercise) materials for the identifications in question. Professor Mendoza will provide a visual overview of Mesoamerican art history based on 35mm transparencies and Internet sources. This will be followed by a randomized review of selected images or subsets of images from the "Mesoamerican Art" slide show presented earlier. Please use the Art History website at <http://witcombe.sbc.edu/ARTHamericasoceania.html#general> for reference. As Professor Mendoza projects individual images, it will be up to you and the members of your group or cohort to identify the following key characteristics of the items illustrated:

1. *Cultural Affiliation:* What characteristics allow for the artifacts identification with a specific culture?
2. *Material Type:* What is it about the artifact that allows you to identify its material type?
3. *Provenience or Provenance:* What characteristics or cultural associations provide clues to the origins or likely point of recovery of this specific artifact?
4. *Iconography and Symbolism:* What symbolic or iconographic content present in the artifact is most readily identified or interpreted? What content is least likely to be identified or interpreted?
5. *Technology and Manufacture:* Identify the likely means by which the artifact in question was created or manufactured. What methods of manufacture were employed in the artifacts creation? What are your assumptions based on as per mode of manufacture or technology employed?
6. *Heirlooms and Influence:* What cultural characteristics or artistic features pertaining to earlier traditions (e.g., Olmec) serve as likely sources of influence on the artifact in question? How might these influences have been transmitted over the course of hundreds of miles and thousands of years?
7. *Ceremonial or Utilitarian Function:* What specific function (ceremonial or utilitarian) might the artifact in question have served at the time of its creation? How can you be sure of its original use?
8. *Cultural Parallels:* Please compare and contrast at least two sets or subsets of images pertaining to specific cultures and discuss how said collections might be construed as related or comparable. What is the basis for your assumption that the collections are comparable?