

World Prehistory

LD3: Picturing the Past

Description: Archaeology, exploration, and illustrations of ancient monuments have always walked hand in hand. Since the advent of photography and the development of its widespread appeal through the 1830s and 40s, photography and illustration have been deployed to picture the past. Your objective today will be to examine and study an ancient screen-fold codex, or portfolio of photographs of ancient monuments, with an eye to interpreting the culture that they depict. After your review and analysis of said images, you and your group are to respond to questions via the Discussion Forum in an effort to interpret the culture, society, and belief systems of the civilization under study.

Portfolio Instructions : You and the members of your team of three to five participants will review the contents of a portfolio or screen-fold codex consisting of photographs and or illustrations pertaining to an ancient civilization or world regional tradition. You will have about 25 minutes to review the images, so please study the images carefully with the following considerations in mind?

1. Please be prepared to describe, discuss, and interpret those elements pertaining to clothing and those styles and traditions they convey. What type of information is conveyed by the clothing in so far as social status, religious belief, ritual paraphernalia, utilitarian or domestic activity or gender roles, and cultural identity?
2. Characterize the culture or civilization that produced the objects, features, or monuments illustrated. What specifically can you say about the culture, lifestyles, and traditions of the people depicted via those images selected from the portfolio?
3. What materials were likely used to manufacture the objects, features, or monuments depicted in the portfolio images?
4. Given the items or features pictured, what do you believe that you can say about the age or antiquity of the culture or cultures in question?
5. Were you an 18th century explorer, it is likely that you would be working from what limited knowledge existed for the civilizations depicted, and as such, you would likely find it necessary to compare your finds to that of other world civilizations or traditions. What traditions do you believe are most comparable to the items under study?

Codex Instructions: If you have selected a screen-fold codex for your study and interpretations, then you will be working from a manuscript very likely produced by the people who created the culture depicted. Please respond to the same considerations, and questions, noted above for the purposes of guiding your analysis of the images depicted within the codex proper. Finally respond to the following two questions:

1. How might photo interpretation, or the study of historic illustrations, best serve archaeologists attempting to garner an interpretive edge for a culture or tradition as yet well interpreted?
2. How might that iconography and or muralism encountered in ancient screen-fold codices and or murals best serve the effort to interpret and explain ancient cultures and civilizations?