

Art of the Aztec Empire

LD 8: Interpreting Aztec Imperial Architecture

Introduction: Aztec imperial art and architecture was dominated by images of both Gods and deities inspired by supernaturals from throughout Mesoamerica and the Aztec provinces. Where depictions of the Gods were concerned, we have particularly good evidence that much of the clothing, iconography, and even the names of specific Gods had their origins among such groups as the Huastec peoples of the Mexican Gulf Coast. Architecture in turn was inspired by a host of styles and types, and this too in turn may be traced to diverse cultural origins throughout those provinces conquered by the Aztec. Today's lab will require you to identify those specific elements of architectural design and type that may be traced to the alien peoples and cultures of pre-Aztec Mexico.

Instructions: You are to assemble into teams, and your primary task is to select three Aztec sculpted monuments or buildings that your group will seek to interpret in terms of both ethnic origins or cultural affiliations, and iconographic or cosmological content. In order to do this, your professor will first review iconographic interpretations of the monolithic temples of Malinalco, Mexico. Having recorded some of his observations, you are then to review some of that content regarding the interpretation of "Moctezuma's Throne" (also called the "*Teocalli de la Guerra Sagrada*") located at <http://instructional1.calstatela.edu/bevans/art446-12-aztec/WebPage-Info.00049.html>.

1. Having done this, please select three illustrations, architectural diagrams, and or detailed photographs of Aztec art and architecture from the Internet, or from those materials provided by your instructor for this specific analysis. Copies of three Postclassic era codices have been provided for this purpose as they depict monuments as they may have looked in that time.
2. Using the attached Microsoft Excel template (where available), first summarize all of those primary and secondary iconographic and structural features noted by your group.
 - Does your monument include icons and symbols, such as supernaturally or cosmologically important numbers or attributes that permit an interpretation of the monuments symbolic importance?
 - Numerical Symbols: 2=Omeyoacan (Place of Duality); 4=Quadripartite Cosmos; 5=Olin or Fifth Sun, or Quincunx or World Center; 9=Underworld Strata (Mictlán); 13=Celestial Strata (Tonatiuh); 52=Year Cycle or Aztec Century.
 - Animal Counterparts: Eagle=Celestial; Jaguar=Terrestrial/Underworld; Rabbit=Moon / Pulque; Serpents=Fire, Water, Sky, Blood, Semen; Crocodile, Alligator, Caiman=Earth/Underworld Maw...
3. Identify the specific purpose or function for which the monument is thought to have been used.
 - In other words, is the structure or monument religious, political, utilitarian, or a combination of one or more particular functions?
4. Where possible, please identify those features of the monument that can be traced to non-Aztec or pre-Aztec origins.
 - How were you able to determine or trace the origins or affinities in question?
5. Upon having selected your monuments, you are to call over your professor to discuss whether or not the ethnic and cultural affinities of the monument have been correctly interpreted. Be prepared to ask questions and provide information that will permit the instructor to best assist you in the final analysis.

For more Aztec symbols, glyphs, and writing please see <http://www.azteca.net/aztec/nahuatl/writing.html>.