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Eyeing the Other: The Indigenous Response in Mexico

Tequitqui: The survival of Aztec symbols and styles. Also known as Mestizo or hybrid style.

Glyph: System of symbols that meant things to the Aztecs. Through these they could represent places, times, names, and information. It is not phonetic. They survive into the colonial era in carving and painting.

Alteptl: A kinship group or community that is related to a particular place or type of craft. It is a representation of identity. a glyph for an altepetl looks like a mountain over a spring. The plants or animals on the altepetl indicate which community it refers to.

Nahua: Aztec peoples. After the Spanish arrived, the Aztec state collapsed, so this is the correct term. The language they speak is Nahuatl.

Feather mosaic: Major Aztec craft. Feather painting, as it was also known, was the most important art-form for the Aztecs. There was a huge trade relating to bird feathers. People learned how to do this at the Calmecac. They were applied to headdresses and costumes, as well as large tapestries. The workshops that made these were acquired by the Franciscans, who used them to make religious images.

Any Aztec books we have were made just before the conquest. For the Aztecs, writing and painting is the same. The people who produced these were called picture-writers. The codexes produced are very linear with a limited colour scheme. Elements are placed next to one another in a mosaic-like fashion. Calmecac was the university that trained people to make these. It also trained them as priests. Elements from these codexes were later applied to colonial art.

Early depictions of the Virgin Mary can be compared to Cihuacoatl, the snake deity of fertility and midwives.

The Franciscans tried to take aspects of Aztec culture to connect with the Nahua and convert them. They used costumes, poetry, and music to create prayers in an Aztec manner. They also tried to create their own glyphs through testerian catechisms, which wasn't terribly successful.

Aztec culture survived through the metamorphosis of materials. Deities such as Centeotl would be made out of corn paste, orchid bulbs, twigs, and turkey feathers. Natives were encouraged to make Christs out of the same material. These artworks were usually very gory.

The imperial symbol of the Aztecs was an eagle on a cactus with a snake in its mouth.

The World Tree eventually looked like the Christian cross before the Spanish.

Indigenous Map of Huaxtepec

Maps were some of the earliest works to come out of native communities in the colonial period. They were used to claim land rights. The Spanish would accept this type of map as an official document. Because of this, it contains both Spanish and indigenous elements.

Towns are represented by little churches.

Trees and churches are done in one-point perspective, and look very European.

Huaxtepec was an ancient Aztec village that was Christianized.

The duality of Huaxtepec is represented by the large church and altepetl.

The altepetl is shaded and looks realistic, but represents the legitimacy of the town in an Aztec way.

The rivers are extremely Aztec. They are created out of squiggly lines and scrolls. They are not integrated into the European, one-point perspective.

The rivers are what make this very land sacred, and are therefore drawn in an Aztec manner. The name is also sacred, and is therefore done as an altepetl.

Bilingual Date Glyph at Mission Church at Cuilapan

From an early mission church built by natives.

Built at the site and out of the materials of their old temple.

Dated in both actual glyphs and numbers.

Date glyphs are Mixtec. Mixtec were people oppressed by the Aztec, so it's a bit different than actual Aztec glyphs.

Right side shows the day the church was completed. This side doesn't contain the Spanish date.

Huejotzingo Mission Church, Portal with Aztec Depiction of Water

Rivers in particular survived as a form of Aztec symbolism.

Tequitqui Portal

Flat, deeply carved in low relief, with different elements that are like a mosaic.

None of the symbols are Aztec, but the style is native.

There is a difference between stylistic and symbolic tequitqui.

Battle of Aztec and Chichimec Warriors

The Aztec word for Chichimec means 'dog person'.

Depiction of someone the Aztecs have defeated in the past.

Placed in a marginal area, where the Spanish wouldn't have noticed it.

Renaissance border taken from a Bible.

Extraordinary that this was allowed, and that it survived.

Absolutely nothing to do with the Europeans.