

Mictampa cont'd Dec 31, 1992

One of the exciting functions of Aztec art is that there are many ways of looking at ~~the~~ ~~same~~ a single work, that as layer, ^{is} added upon layer of meaning ~~and~~ a rich comprehension emerges which seems even greater than the object which inspired it. What looks almost ~~so~~ simple designwise to us is actually the product of ~~of centuries~~ a hyperdistillation of visual and conceptual ideas ~~laminated over centuries~~ "likenesses" which took centuries to achieve. The meanings of a work are always inclusive and resonant to a purpose, and although they ^{often} rightly ~~after~~ defy rigid definition they do not defy comprehension. In fact that is their goal. We may be in the presence of mysteries but we are not confronting secrets. This sounds contradictory in a way but it is not. My ~~above~~ use above of the word ^{is something} ~~likenesses~~, a word I am very fond of when discussing ^{this} ~~after~~ art. Whether the ideas expressed have been derived from direct, ^{concrete} ~~visual~~ experience or ~~are~~ are the result of the most abstract conceptualization they ^{seem} ~~are~~ always expressed as likenesses.

So when I look at one of these skeletal torsos topped by a skeletal and living head. I also see the likeness of a round temple with the ribs functioning as alfordas and the head as ~~its~~ chapel ~~to the concept of the sculpture~~. The base of this sculpture is a skirt or ~~drift~~ or incising band of scrolls all meaning the depths of the earth and the earth as foundation with its navel formed by the space

the word for
between two skulls facing each other. Navel
in nahuatl is Tlalxico which implies a ^{cosmology} ~~recess~~
vessel sunk into the earth, and this nahuatl was
also one of the place names for the precinct of
the temple of Mictlampa. ~~That~~

That this greenstone sculpture was found not
far from the front steps of the temple of
Huizilopochtli and Tlaloc may indicate
that it occupied an important place in one
of these temples where it functioned as a ~~model~~
portable model of the Mictlampa concept
penetrating ^{partaking of} the realm and identity of another god.

This idea of the model and its importance
cannot be over emphasized. It too is another
way of saying "likeness" and the principle extended
literally into every expression of Aztec life and
thought.

Just as the Capitol City ^{of Tenochtitlan} expressed ^{its} being as a
^{and likeness} model of the universal cosmic order, so too
were each and every temple a further, yet smaller
expression not only of this entire order but of
a particular deity's function and identity ^{within it} ~~as a~~
~~part of it~~. The universal and particular partaking
of the same likeness. By extension the idols of
the gods and their living representatives, their likenesses,
their ^{human} ~~epitomes~~ were models ~~models~~ and embodiments
of the inseparable ideas of universe and myth viewed
as focal points of particular identity prescribed by
cult to certain movements and places, few of which were absolute.

Archaeologists have turned up thousands of small dirty figurines and from time to time ~~come upon~~ ^{about} small clay models of Temples themselves. Small enough to be portable these must have functioned as important religious relics ^{and} the valued remembrances of sacred pilgrimages. Every household contained at least one family shrine where these small models were tended with their customary devotions as part of everyones daily life. ~~Thus a constant~~ ^{constant} awareness of the presence and influence of the gods was always with them ~~in all things~~.

Even in what we call ~~the~~ ^{the} applied arts or crafts this concept of the model ~~expressed its rich and varied~~ ^{expressed itself in} countless rich and varied ways. It is well known that the laws governing the wearing of ~~certain~~ ^{certain} particular clothing and ⁱⁿ embellishments were rigidly enforced.

Costume among the Aztecs as with so many other ancient ^{world} cultures was a language in itself. The ^{status} ~~status~~ of any individual was instantly recognizable to all even when one might wear his own personal devices and regalia. Every detail of clothing, feather work head gear, jewelry, ^{hair} ~~tattooing~~ or facial and body paint had its meaning and message in which "likenesses" exerted their pervasive influence.

We often see in modern painted reconstructions of Aztec scenes people dressed in their colorful

finery as part of everyday street wear.

From what I can gather from the primary sources what we would see if we were to be suddenly transported to the ancient capitol on an ordinary nor feast day, would be somewhat different view. We would be struck primarily by the basic simplicity of both male and female dress. I am referring to the upper classes now.

In spite of the lyric arrogance we have read about and their ~~boasting~~ ^{of festivities} moments of boasting usually ~~at feasts~~ ^{in the context} involving drinking in which this was allowed and even expected and in spite of the ornate clothing we ~~see~~ ^{hear} described by the conquerors as being part of the adornment ^{or the} of ambassadors they encountered or worn on the part of the elite of the various towns who came out to meet them. These were all rather out of the ordinary experiences. In truth on ordinary days in the great towns, even the elite dressed with simplicity. Any kind of ~~beautiful~~ ^{arrogance} ~~or~~ outward show was severely ~~frowned~~ ^{frowned} upon.

~~as an insect~~ ^{as an insect} by all classes. You were what you were by Tezcatlipocas unknowable whim and to presume in any way in ~~ones~~ ^{your} behavior ~~was a slight~~ ^{was a slight} was to court misery.

But the fineness of the craftsmanship of these simple clothes and the quality of the materials used were all the message that was required. ~~However~~ ^{with its large} the warriors ^{around the back} topknot, the red thread binding the red tassels that hung down the back - each one for a captive taken in battle. ~~The sun~~ ^{The sun} and certain items of jewelry quietly spoke

the status of the individual. This humility extended throughout their ~~system~~ of manners as well.

A gentleman was expected to be articulate, soft spoken and deferential to anyone who might venture to speak with him whether it be king or ^{commoner} ~~temone~~.

his demeanor was always to ^{be} one of evenness - never showing surprise in particular or any other strong emotion.

He was to walk in a way that never betrayed haste or slackness, but again an evenness of purpose and a quiet self possession, that ~~was not~~ ~~anger~~ ~~ance~~.