

Any detailed discussion of the meanings of types and symbolism must be reserved for another time. However, I would like to offer a few insights which might be helpful.

isomorphism
cycles
dualities
iconography
secular world
Models
(Symmetrical
Interrelationships
Magic)

First of all, because of assigning specific meanings to a work of ^{religious} type art. As products of a remarkably ^{holistic} view of a world in which everything ^{was} permeated with spirit, the creations of Aztec artists are to us sometimes frustratingly multivalent. Every object no matter how humble, no matter how grand was invested with many levels of meanings.

possibly
part of
a broader
paraphrase

Artists were highly esteemed in Aztec society as the spiritual heirs of the fabled fathers and for their skills in translating the spirit world into form and matter. To accomplish this in the creation of complex monumental sculpture and ritual objects it is possible that many of the most important artists were directly connected to the priesthood. There may ^{even} have been Templo workshops since many idols were so magically charged and sacred that no ordinary mortal could touch them or even come into their presence.

The iconography displayed on ^{ornate} sculptures, patterns, jewelry and ritual costume, found on all the visual arts was literally a special kind of language. The many designs appearing in Aztec creation functioned as necessary formulas to enhance the sacredness of the object and to provide the necessary ^{ritual} context. Common sense tells us that the people who

used these objects already, knew what they were ^{made} for. The ~~basic~~ symbolic imagery found on words of art, the symbolic program of you will, had to be included to invest the object ^{itself} with its own specific power. It was not even necessary that such imagery be visible to the viewer. This explains why many surviving Aztec sculptures have important imagery carved on their undersides. The earth gods carved on the ^{undersides} ~~undersides~~ of important monuments were a regular part of their iconographic formula. Before cremation the bodies ^{of the} rulers were ^{always} dressed in several layers of ritual clothing of various dities according to a rigid formula to enhance the corpse's sacrosanct and connect it to the gods.

Pattern utensils offer us another insight. Scholars still debate whether or not the ornamentation carved ^{or} painted on ^{other} plates, cups, pitchers etc is purely ornamental, that much past classic designs may have once had meaning but had become purely ^{or mostly} decorative clichés.

One motif in particular seems to be dismissed by scholars as primarily decorative ^{or} and as ubiquitous as to be almost devoid of meaning. This is the well-known stepped fret design, the Xicalcoliuhqui. I never ceased to be amazed at how few scholars know the significance of this very important symbol or even care. Its meaning may be modified when used in various contexts but its essential symbolic importance seems to be the

same. The Key to understanding the design
lies in its name "X'icalcolahuqui" which
is literally translated as "Twisted Gourd".
Xicalli is a word describing gourds, cups,
bowls and other containers. Most importantly,
it is related to the word "xictli" ^{which} means
"navel." In fact the home of Xuhlecalhli
the fire god, patron of rulers and ~~queens~~
was called "Tlalxico" the navel ^{in center} of the
earth's surface.

word The word "colingui" is derived from the
Nolua which ^{not only} means "curved" it also
can be translated as ancestor. The shape
for the ^{city} ancestral city of Culhuacan is that
of a mountain such a curving peak
rather like a phrygian cap.

The Xicalcolahuqui design is used
to decorate ceramics because each container
is a symbolic center. The same is true
of temple platforms likewise decorated. Even
the royal robes of Aztec rulers, the Xuehualpictli,
associated the king with the god of fire ~~who~~
is always at the center ^{on the rising of the sun} of his kingdom.
The spiral part of the Xicalcolahuqui design illustrates
movement to or from the center the point
where heaven, earth and the underworld
meet. The Aztec Mundi.

The famous mosaic decorations of
the Royal Palace of Mitla covered with
Xicalcolahuqui designs defines the palace as
none of the earth, place of ancestors and
royal authority. The discovery of tombs beneath
the palace is further proof that the palace is
a Tlalxico.

red can refer to fire, or to blood. Blue can refer to water but
when colored turquoise might refer to the blue planes
of Xicla teacahla. Green refers to precious jade. all are
Another common design is the so-called shiny
Chalchukuilt, the circle within a circle.
©, known as a symbol for preciousness.
This is a symbol for which context is
everything. Simultaneously it refers to water.
Sometimes to fire. Color is important.
As a quincunx a large central circle
bordered by four smaller circles signifies
jade or preciousness.

This symbol is probably derived
from eyes and the eyes' association with
things that shine. Mirrors at Teotihuacan
show streams of water enhanced with
eyes which to be sure ^{emphasize} the shiny
^{or spirit} of the stream but are most likely
used to illustrate the shiny quality of
the stream, water itself.

Thaloc

Stars are often depicted as half
opened eyes, the half-lidded eyes alluding
to night and death but not divorced
from their shining context. The Sun is also
depicted as a disk of concentric circles
decorated with rings of circles emphasizing
shining light and preciousness. Mirrors are similarly
decorated. The Aztec mirror in the
British Museum is composed of concentric
circles ^{representing an open eye} on the mirror's reverse.

I hope that my brief discussion of
two well-known symbols can give you
some idea of the nature of Aztec symbolism
and the problems of interpreting the Aztecs.

But turquoise green

Possible objects

Chuitzoll

3 Skulls

Large vehicle skull

Skull with Tecpatl in nose

Stone skull (Chichimec skull)

Hunch back (Xalatl) sculpture

Two stone heads

1) Red Stone head

2) "Thrombocyte" head

Xapu Totu Straw head

Pulque cups

Bronzes + Tlemantls