

EAGLE FEATHER RESEARCH INSTITUTE



LATEST NEWS

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INDIGENOUS INFLUENCES: AZTEC & MAYAN IMAGERY

Mexic-Arte Museum in Austin, Texas recently featured an exhibit that displayed Mexico's indigenous past and influences. Claudia Zapata, curator of the Mexic-Arte exhibit collected artifacts dating as far back as 1500 BC. The sources are from private collections from the Austin and San Antonio area as well as vast holdings from the University of Texas. While the intent to show some of the grandeur of the pre-Columbian past, the descriptions by the journalist for the local paper are typical of the distorted Western understanding of the ancient past. Unfortunately, it is not limited to one journalist; rather it encompasses the whole academic community in the Western world. This is because the history was written by the invaders whose mission was the total hegemony of the Native society. In short it was written from a Greco-Roman perspective and worldview. Incredibly, after 500 years, dominant culture in the Western world still holds on to the bias that was begun by the Sancto Officio or the Inquisition.

Before make critical commentary, let us consider the characterization and cultural assumptions that are being made:

- The cover page for the Sunday magazine features a pre-Columbian sculpture with the headliner as Mexico's original rock stars
- A quote by the curator: "Most people don't know that when they are looking at the Mexican flag, they're looking at the Aztec creation myth."
- Another quote by the journalist: "According to Aztec legend, the gods told the tribe to build a city where they saw an eagle perched upon a nopal the was growing out of rock submerged in water....they called the city Tenochtitlan, today it's Mexico City."
- The exhibit includes an elaborately carved piano commissioned by President Porfirio Díaz for the 1900 Paris Exposition. It is emblazoned with pre-Columbian images including an eagle capturing a serpent.

- Aside from exhibit of jewelry, there are painting and drawings e.g. artists Roberto Montenegro and Miguel Covarrubias from 1920. “Montenegro paints Cuauhtemoc, the last Aztec king in vaguely cubist style.”
- There is reference to small carved stone figures representing the classic style of the Olmec...dating as far back as 1500 B.C. “The seated figures sport stylized features that are both catlike and infantile//miniature version of the colossal stone heads found in the Mexican state of Veracruz and Tabasco and that reflect the Olmec belief in a mystic race that was half human, half jaguar.”
- B Horror movies of the fifties were shown. “Attack of the Aztec Mummy,” “Curse of the Aztec Mummy,” “The Robot vs. the Aztec Mummy.”

Research has clearly shown that these pre-Columbian cultures were the most advanced in mathematics and Astronomy including the fields of agronomy, biology and medicine. To describe their hieroglyphs and sculptures as representative of Rock Stars is not only inane but representative of the ignorance and disrespect there is for sacred objects. With respect to the second point, looking at the flag and its contents does not in anyway point to creation myths. It points to the establishment of their last place of residence, notably the founding of *Meztziko Tenochtitlan*. In terms of chronological pre-Columbian time, this is modern history. If you must refer to creation myths, you need to discuss the content in what is loosely called “*Leyenda de los soles*” where various cyclical stages involving humans is drawn in a symbolic manner. In terms of roots, you refer to the information in the *Tira de peregrinación*. There is moreover, reference to “the gods” which is so typical of Westerners since they inherited in their history and cultural legacy the idea of multiple gods from the Greco-roman cultures. Because pre-Columbian cultures were so advanced in science, there is no room for multiple gods or superstitions. They understood in a profound manner how life functions in this planet, the cycles and inner workings of Nature. There were ceremonies to give thanks to those life giving forces that sustain us. They were not gods in the Western sense but merely natural forces and they paid homage to them and saw them universal laws which are sacred to the existence of both the human, animal and mineral world. While the description of the eagle perched in a cactus is accurate, there is no explanation regarding the addition of a serpent held by the eagle as it appears in the current Mexican flag. This was a colonial insertion in a country that was ruled by the Inquisition for three hundred years. The idea of the serpent for pre-Columbian cultures is radically different from the Western Judeo-Christian concept. To the West it is a negative symbol. To the pre-Columbian cultures as well as the Eastern cultures it is a positive symbol. It is not something you kill. It does not belong because it is the symbol of intelligence and wisdom in pre-Conquest times. The elaborately carved piano no doubt was done by colonial natives that were seen and treated as slaves during the reign of the infamous dictator Porfirio Díaz. This was a time when both the U.S. and the elite in Mexico spoke of the mass annihilation of the Indian and Porfirio Díaz was pandering to that colonial thinking group. The next point refers to Cuauhtemoc as the last Aztec king. Nothing could be more inaccurate since there are no monarchies, no Queens or Kings in their governmental structures. They had a decentralized democratic structure that operated on three levels, local,

regional and national. There was no one ruler. They operated out of Councils which had representatives from the three levels of government. The person that spoke for the Councils was chosen for his communication skills although he or she had to have a vast educational background and vision to be a governing official. Another governing head at the top had administrative functions. Two because of the universal law they understood...duality in Nature, male and female, positive and negative, night and day etc. Thus, their society was formed under a universal law paradigm. The Olmec reference to small carved stones resembling the megalithic stone heads with reference to the Olmec belief that there was a race half human and half Jaguar is nothing but colonial type of thinking and interpretation. Any reference to imagery whether in codices or sculpture must be made at the symbolic level. And only Native *Maestros* that have an understanding of the cosmology and philosophy from the Native perspective understand the real significance. With regard to the B horror movies, this is just the imitation of Hollywood in terms of exploitation films. The last great cycle for film making in Mexico was in the forties. With the exception of a few notable films, it has been profit oriented producing degrading imagery of an important pre-Columbian past. While Mexic-Arte is to be congratulated for reaching out to the public with the great wonders of the ancient pre-Columbian world, it needs to consult with the real maestros, the modern *Tlamatinimi* and release in advanced printed form the correct linguistic markers that more accurately depicts the ancient past.

For a native understanding of Native Americans in both continents, see the work entitled *Two Worlds in Collision: Native American and Western Worldviews*. See also the outlines showing the myth of human sacrifice in pre-Conquest times. This is found under the category of Articles. Thank you. We appreciate your interest and support.

Happy and Insightful Reading,

Arnoldo Carlos Vento, PhD
Executive Officer

