

# ARH: 6918- Aztec Art

Derek Burdette, Ph.D., Assistant Professor  
University of Florida, Fall 2021 (3 credit hours)

Room: FAC 201

Periods: T | Period 6 - 7 (12:50 PM - 2:45 PM); R | Period 7 (1:55 PM - 2:45 PM)

Final exam: 4/27/2022 @ 5:30 PM - 7:30 PM

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**Course Description:** This course examines the integral role that art and architecture played in the Aztec empire (1325-1521 ce) and its immediate aftermath. We will examine the history, religion and politics of Mexico's greatest empire, while thinking critically about how the Aztecs have been re-imagined by conquistadors, archeologists and academics since the conquest. To do so, we will look at a variety of artforms, including architecture, monumental stone sculpture, manuscripts, and feather arts.

To start, we will trace the rise of the Mexica (as the Aztecs knew themselves) as a political power in the basin of Mexico, paying close attention to how the built environment and visual arts helped to bolster their growing empire. We will also look at the connections between the arts and religion, studying both major temples, ritual actions, and divinatory manuscripts that can help us understand the role of art and devotion in Mesoamerican society. Lastly, we will consider the role of writing and manuscript traditions in the Aztec world, before turning our attention to the lasting legacy of Aztec culture. Throughout the whole course, we will think reflexively about how we come to know the things we think we know. We will consider the strengths and weaknesses of archeological evidence, colonial ethnographic materials, and contemporary theoretical and nationalistic readings of historical materials. Through this process we hope to learn more about the Mexica and their lasting legacy in contemporary society.

## **Required Readings:**

There are two required textbooks for the course, as well as several chapters and articles available on our Canvas page. The textbooks are:

Brumfiel, Elizabeth and Gary Feinman eds.. *The Aztec World*. New York: Abrams, 2008.  
(ISBN-10: 0810972786)

Díaz, Gisele and Alan Rodgers. *The Codex Borgia*. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1993. (ISBN-10: 0486275698)

## **Grading:**

- 10% Attendance
- 20% Manuscript Assignments
- 25% Research Project
- 20% Midterm Exam
- 25% Final Exam

**Attendance (10%):** Attendance is extremely important for this class, as many of our learning outcomes can only be achieved by attending class and participating fully in the lecture and discussion. You will be allowed *two* un-penalized absences, which assumes that you will need a day here or there because you are sick, etc. For each subsequent absence you will lose 2 points from the “Attendance and Participation” portion of your final grade. Excused absences still count as absences, so please plan accordingly. Also, note that excessive absences are grounds for receiving a failing grade for the class, and failure to sign in (if you are late, for example) will be counted as an absence.

**Manuscript Assignments (20%):** During the first half of class you will have two assignments that help you interact with the main manuscript traditions in Mesoamerica: histories and religious manuscripts. These assignments are designed to help you understand the structures of the manuscript traditions as well as the symbolic grammars that made them work.

**A Personal History- Mesoamerican Style (10%)**

For this assignment you will choose one of the three Mesoamerican genres of histories (Cartographic, Res Gestae, and Annals) and produce your own biographical history using that form. We will learn about these genres in class (week 4), studying their formats and individual manuscripts. You will then have a week to complete your own history, which will be due (in class) on **Thursday, February 3rd**. For your history, you will need to conform to the standard stylistic rules of the genre you choose and demonstrate your understanding of the manuscript tradition and the basic principles of Aztec glyphic communication. Although you won't be graded on artistic quality, effort will be a part of the evaluation. More details regarding the assignment will be forthcoming.

**The Codex Borgia: Almanac Research Project (10%)**

For this assignment we will learn to read the basic almanacs of the Aztec/Mixtec divinatory manuscripts. We will study the divinatory almanacs in class (week 8), becoming familiar with their basic form and function. Although you will be limited in your readings by your status as a “novice,” using several supplemental resources regarding Aztec divination and religion you should be able to provide a basic reading of one single scene from the almanac (that associated with your birthday). We will assign aspects to research during week 6 and then in week 8 you will be enlisted to work together to decipher and read from the Codex Borgia. Your individual research projects are due on **Thursday, Feb. 24**. More details regarding the assignment will be forthcoming.

**Research Project (25%):** Graduate students will NOT complete the research project required for the undergraduates in class. Instead, they will research and write an approximately 15 page paper on a topic of their choice that is related to class.

**Midterm (20%)/ Final Exam (25%):** Graduate students will NOT complete the midterm and final exams in class. Instead, they will compose a synthesis of each half of the class- pulling out major themes addressed in the course and the artworks and readings that engage them. (This exercise assumes that they will dedicate roughly a page to each week in class- and that they will find an additional reading- NOT read in class to enrich each theme they have articulated). More detailed information will be forthcoming.

### **Grading Scale**

Grades are tabulated on a 100-point scale and a letter grade is assigned as follows:

-----	94–100 A	90–93 A-
87–89 B+	84–86 B	80–83 B-
77–79 C+	74–76 C	70–73 C-
67–69 D+	64–66 D	60–63 D-
59 and below F		

If you have questions about how grade points are assigned by the University, go to:  
<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>

### **Reminders and Requirements**

**UF Requirements and Policy:** Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found at:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>

**Statement Regarding the Honor Pledge:** UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Honor Code ([sccr.dso.ufl.edu/process/student-conduct-code/](https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/process/student-conduct-code/)) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel.

**Accommodations:** I, along with the rest of the University community, am working to create inclusive learning environments. Please notify me if there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in disability-related barriers to your participation as soon as possible, and we can work to find a solution. Note that

students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, [www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/](http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/)) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

**Diversity Statement:** The intent is that we explore the content of this course in a way that is respectful of diversity: gender identity, sexuality, ability, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, nationality, religion, and culture. The intent is also to present content that explores diverse points of view, which might be challenging. Maintaining a respectful environment will be our responsibility. The intent is that students from all diverse backgrounds and perspectives be well-served by this course and that the diversity that the students bring to this class be viewed as a resource, strength and benefit. Your suggestions are encouraged and appreciated.

**Changes to the Syllabus:** While this document provides guidelines for the class, I do reserve the right to change the syllabus at any time during the semester if the need arises. Each class is different, and sometimes it takes some tweaking to get the right readings, topics, and assignments. Being flexible with the syllabus allows us to get it right.

#### **Notes on Technology and Communication**

- **Communication and Respect:** We all must strive to be good communicators to make this class successful. This means listening respectfully to others in class (faculty and students) and engaging in respectful conversation. It also, perhaps just as importantly, means maintaining professional standards while communicating via email and outside of class. With that in mind, please use formal, respectful, and professional standards when corresponding via email. This means beginning emails with a formal greeting, employing proper grammar, and avoiding unprofessional colloquialisms.
- **Laptop computers:** It is my preference that you use a paper notebook, so as to limit the distractions and the barriers between myself and you all. That being said, I understand that many students prefer to take notes on their laptops. This is fine, as long as everyone is respectful and stays on task. If at some point during the semester, laptops distract from our collective task of looking at and talking about art, I will revise the policy.
- **Cell Phones:** Please refrain from texting during class. If it becomes a problem, I will simply ask you to put your phone away. If it happens repeatedly, I will ask you to leave class and mark you absent for the day.
- **Canvas:** Please make sure that you are familiar with our course site on Canvas so that you will have access to announcements, assignments and readings, and pptx presentations and study guides.

- **Course Evaluations:** Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/> . Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluer.com/ufl/> . Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/> .

**In Class Recordings:** Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal educational use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. Specifically, students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor.

A “class lecture” is an educational presentation intended to inform or teach enrolled students about a particular subject, including any instructor-led discussions that form part of the presentation, and delivered by any instructor hired or appointed by the University, or by a guest instructor, as part of a University of Florida course. A class lecture does not include lab sessions, student presentations, clinical presentations such as patient history, academic exercises involving solely student participation, assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), field trips, private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the faculty or lecturer during a class session.

Publication without permission of the instructor is prohibited. To “publish” means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless of format or medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third party note/tutoring services. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040 Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code.

**COVID-19 Recorded Course Statement:** Our class sessions may be audio-visually recorded for students in the class to refer back and for enrolled students who are unable to attend live. Students who participate with their camera engaged or utilize a profile image are agreeing to have their video or image recorded. If you are unwilling to consent to have your profile or video image recorded, be sure to keep your camera off and do not use a profile image. Likewise, students who un-mute during class and

participate orally are agreeing to have their voices recorded. If you are not willing to consent to have your voice recorded during class, you will need to keep your mute button activated and communicate exclusively using the "chat" feature, which allows students to type questions and comments live. The chat will not be recorded or shared. As in all courses, unauthorized recording and unauthorized sharing of recorded materials are prohibited.

**COVID-19 Practices:** In response to COVID-19, the following practices are in place to maintain your learning environment, to enhance the safety of our in-classroom interactions, and to further the health and safety of ourselves, our neighbors, and our loved ones.

- If you are not vaccinated, get vaccinated. Vaccines are readily available at no cost and have been demonstrated to be safe and effective against the COVID-19 virus. Visit this link for details on where to get your shot, including options that do not require an appointment: <https://coronavirus.ufhealth.org/vaccinations/vaccine-availability/> (Links to an external site.). Students who receive the first dose of the vaccine somewhere off-campus and/or outside of Gainesville can still receive their second dose on campus.
- You are expected to wear approved face coverings at all times during class and within buildings even if you are vaccinated. Please continue to follow healthy habits, including best practices like frequent hand washing. Following these practices is our responsibility as Gators.
  - Sanitizing supplies are available in the classroom if you wish to wipe down your desks prior to sitting down and at the end of the class.
  - Hand sanitizing stations will be located in every classroom.
- If you are sick, stay home and self-quarantine. Please visit the UF Health Screen, Test & Protect website about next steps, retake the questionnaire and schedule your test for no sooner than 24 hours after your symptoms began. Please call your primary care provider if you are ill and need immediate care or the UF Student Health Care Center at 352-392-1161 (or email [covid@shcc.ufl.edu](mailto:covid@shcc.ufl.edu)) to be evaluated for testing and to receive further instructions about returning to campus. UF Health Screen, Test & Protect offers guidance when you are sick, have been exposed to someone who has tested positive or have tested positive yourself. Visit the [UF Health Screen, Test & Protect website](#) (Links to an external site.) for more information.
  - Course materials will be provided to you with an excused absence, and you will be given a reasonable amount of time to make up work.
  - If you are withheld from campus by the Department of Health through Screen, Test & Protect you are not permitted to use any on campus facilities. Students attempting to attend campus activities when withheld from campus will be referred to the Dean of Students Office.
- Continue to regularly visit [coronavirus.UFHealth.org](https://coronavirus.UFHealth.org) and [coronavirus.ufl.edu](https://coronavirus.ufl.edu) for up-to-date information about COVID-19 and vaccination.



# Course Schedule

## **Week 1: Introduction to Class and the Aztecs**

TR January 6: Class Introduction

## **Week 2: How to Imagine an “Aztec” History of Art**

T January 11: Sources and Perspectives: How to Study the Aztecs?

- Smith, “The Aztecs of Mesoamerica,” 1-29.

TR January 13: Reconsidering Art History’s Approach to Aztec Art

- Carolyn Dean, “The Trouble with the Term Art”
- Esther Pasztory, “Aesthetics and Pre-Columbian Art”

## **Week 3: The History of the Mexica and Tenochtitlan**

T January 18: Migration and the Origins of an Empire

- *The Aztec World*, ch. 1, Hicks, “Mexica Political History.” 5- 21.
- *The Aztec World*, ch. 7, Smith, “The Aztec Empire.” 121-136.

TR January 20: Mexico Tenochtitlan- The City and its Society

- *The Aztec World*, ch. 4, Sanders, “Tenochtitlan in 1519: A Pre-Industrial Megalopolis.” 67- 85.
- Díaz del Castillo, *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain* (selection)

## **Week 4: Pictorial Manuscripts and Painted Histories**

T January 25: Manuscript Traditions and Mexica Histories

- *The Aztec World*, ch. 10, Boone, “Aztec Writing and History.” 179-194.
- Elizabeth Boone, “Introduction: Writing and Recording Knowledge,” in *Writing Without Words*, 3-26.

TR January 27: Painted Histories in Mesoamerica

## **Week 5: Colonial Manuscripts and “Aztec Pictography”**

T Feb 1: Pictorial Manuscripts as Ethnohistorical sources

- Boone, *Descendants of Aztec Pictography* (Austin: UT Press, 2021) Selection
- Magaloni Kerpel, *Colors of the New World* (selection)

TR Feb 3: Manuscripts Continued

- **Personal History Due- Reading in Class**

## **Week 6: Mexica Religion and the Arts**

T Feb 8: Mexica Religion

- Carrasco, “The Religion of the Aztecs,” in *Religions of Mesoamerica*, 75-112.
- Bassett, Molly. “Divining the Meaning of Teotl.” In *The Fate of Earthly Things*,

89–129. University of Texas Press, 2015.

TR Feb 10: Religion Continued

- Codex Borgia- Almanac Pages assigned in class for research due on the 24<sup>th</sup>.

### **Week 7: The Templo Mayor**

T Feb 15: The Aztec Templo Mayor- The Center of an Empire

- Matos Moctezuma, "Symbolism of the Templo Mayor," 185- 209.
- Additional Reading TBD

TR Feb 17: Templo Mayor Continued

- *The Aztec World*, ch. 8, López Austin and López Luján, "Aztec Human Sacrifice." 137- 152.
- Dodds Pennock, "Mass Murder or Religious Homicide"

### **Week 8: Divinatory Manuscripts and the Codex Borgia**

T Feb 22: The Aztec Calendar and Divinatory Manuscripts

- Elizabeth Boone, "Time, the Ritual Calendar, and Divination," in *Cycles of Time and Meaning in the Mexican Books of Fate*, 13-32.

TR Feb 24: Codex Borgia- In Class Presentations of Almanac Research Projects

- **Almanac Research Projects Due- Presenting in Class**

### **Week 9: Midterm Exam**

T March 1: Prepare for Midterm Exam

TR March 3: Midterm Exam In Class

### **Week 10: Spring Break: No Class**

### **Week 11: Research Project**

T March 15: Object Selection and Initial Research Stages

TR March 17: Research Process Continued

### **Week 12: Coatlicue- A Case Study**

T March 22: The Coatlicue Image

- Boone, "The 'Coatlicues' at the Templo Mayor, 1999 " *Ancient Mesoamerica* 10 (2): 189-206.
- Klein, A New Interpretation of the Aztec Statue Called Coatlicue, 2008

TR March 17: The Coatlicue Image Today

- Chicana perspectives. Reading TBD
- **Part 1 of Research Project (Object and Formal/Visual Analysis) Due**

### **Week 13: State Propaganda and the Tlatoani**

T March 29: Monuments to the Tlatoani: The Solar Disks and the Teocalli

- Umberger, "Art and Imperial Strategy in Tenochtitlan," 85-108.

TR March 31: The Aztec Calendar Stone, New Fire Ceremony and Aztec Time

- Villela, Robb and Miller, "Introduction," in *The Aztec Calendar Stone*, 1-41.

### **Week 14: Aztec Feather Arts and Luxury Goods**

T April 5: Turquoise and Lapidary works?

- Pillsbury, Joanne. "Luminous Power: Luxury Arts in the Ancient Americas." In *Golden Kingdoms*, 1-13.
- McEwan, Colin, Andrew Middleton, Caroline Cartwright, and Rebecca Stacey. *Turquoise Mosaics from Mexico*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006.

TR April 7: The Feather Arts and Aztec Society

- *The Aztec World*, ch. 6, Nichols, "Artisans, Markets, and Merchants." 105- 120.
- Fane, "Feathers, Jade, Turquoise and Gold," in *Images Take Flight*, 101-117.
- Riedler, "Materials and Technique of the Feathered Shield Preserved in Vienna," in *Images Take Flight*, 331-341.

### **Week 15: Aztec Arts After the Conquest and**

T April 12: The Mexica after 1521

- *The Aztec World*, ch. 11, Rodríguez-Alegría, "The Aztecs After the Conquest." 195- 208.
- ComiCon Video

TR April 14: Share and Reflect Upon Research Projects

- **Part 2 of Research Project (biblio and social/cultural analysis) Due**

### **Week 16: Final Exam Prep**

T April 19: Final Exam Prep

**FINAL EXAM: Wednesday 4/27 @5:30- 7:30pm**