

Aesthetic and plastic values of (maya-aztec) civilizations (Analytical Study)

Prof. Saleh abdelmoaty

graphic, fine arts, luxor university

saleh548@hotmail.com

Assist. Prof. Dr. Waleed Abdallah

Graphic - fine Arts - Luxor university – Luxor

waleed2507@yahoo.co.uk

Assist. Lect. Al Shaimaa Al Sayed Baghdady

Assistant Teacher –Graphic Department-Faculty of Fine Arts

-Luxor University

Sheimabaghdadii@yahoo.com

Summary:

Central America is one of the most important regions known for the multiplicity of civilizations, which includes a group of peoples that have similar cultural and historical ties concerned with astronomy and the movements of stars in addition to the complex writing systems recorded in manuscripts and on the walls of temples.

Artistic topics focused mostly on religious or social and political issues or deities, the social system relied on various formations that were characterized by an increasing degree of social and political complexity, and their richness with art symbols, icons and complex writings in addition to extensive knowledge of astronomy and it can be seen in different forms of arts.

Goals were reached that were related to the existence of the gods in order to fulfill the tasks revealed by these gods, and the artist began to go to the essence of things to learn and reflect on the existence of the universe, and to give thanks to the gods, and that appeared in a variety of arts among architecture, drawing, manuscripts and sculpture, until that it reached the point of collapse and gradually came under Spanish colonial rule, destroying a large part of this culture. The excavations, drawings, and murals that were found in the archaeological sites have proven that these people achieved their strongest prosperity, the texts relating to the "Aztec" can be applied to the lifestyles of ancient cities so this discovery has made it possible to establish a close relation between writings and works of arts.

Research importance:

The importance of the research focuses on the civilization that originated in Central America, as it is a region on which its lands originated, one of the most important civilizations that left a scientific and artistic legacy that contributed in enriching the human civilization with the aesthetic and plastic values found in the symbols and writings of the peoples of Central America.

Research problem(Essence):

Given the impact of plastic art and its artistic value on political, social, cultural, economic, and ideological history in the Mayan and Aztec civilizations, they are a source of artistic changes

and fluctuations that are evident in the associated formative treatments that were affected by the successive periods in those civilizations that express the culture of each historical era.

The research problem is summarized in the following question:

-Did reading and deciphering the Mayan and Aztec civilizations play a role in understanding the artistic and intellectual data of these two civilizations?

The research aims to:

-Focus on the Central American region and the most important civilizations that arose on its lands.

-Study and extract the aesthetic values of symbols and plastic elements in the arts of civilizations of Central America.

-Examining the aesthetic and plastic values involved in these civilizations.

Research Assumptions:

The researcher assumes that:

-There is an important influence of the Maya and Aztec civilizations on the various international arts movement.

-The role of plastic arts for the Maya-Aztec civilizations in inspiring creative elements of new visual items for graphic artists.

Research boundaries:

The research provides artistic study

First: Time limits: The study is concentrated in time between the periods 1800 BC-1521 AD.

Second: Spatial boundaries: the place is located in Central America in that period.

Research method:

Research follows the historical analytical approach:

The study is based on the historical analytical method, which dealt with identifying the history of the civilizations of Central America and its most important artistic features.

Maya Civilization:

Mayan civilization was established in northern Guatemala and parts of Mexico, where the tropical forests and these areas are the home of the Mayan Indians who reached its climax in the year 700 BC, and the arrival of the Spanish and Europeans in the Americas caused the destruction of this civilization.

The traditional civilization of the Maya people emerged and became a complex civilization from 300 CE-900 CE when the major politically independent cities were established in the eighth and ninth century AD, the classical "Maya" civilization began to decline due to war and internal revolts on the ruling class and nobles, and the Spanish began controlling the lands of the Maya within the limits of 1520 AD, and some areas resisted desperately and the last of the "Maya" kingdoms of Itza, which were not subject to the Spanish until 1697 AD.

The ancient "Mayan" civilization, which was distinguished by archaeologists, began in the late pre-classical period and extended until the end of the classical era. The late classical period

(which focused in the central and southern Maya region) is the apex of the Mayan civilization and is characterized by the expansion of civilization, art and architecture.

At the end of the late classical period, the sites in the southern and central lowlands witnessed a decrease in population and cultural activity; On the contrary the population in the northern sites increased and became prosperous.

The Maya civilization is divided into four main periods

1-The pre-classical period: 1800-2000 BC to 250 AD

The Maya people developed their first civilization in the pre-classical period, characterized by civilized societies and language development. The people gained experience and began making pottery and small figurines made of clay. War appears to have intensified during this period, as evidenced by the weapons and began depicting rulers as warriors, the emergence of mass graves and beheaded structures Figure (1).

2-The classic period 250 CE-900 CE

This period was marked by the pinnacle of large-scale construction and also characterized by urbanization, the registration of archaeological inscriptions, and was called the golden period of the Mayan Empire and demonstrated important intellectual and artistic development, especially in the southern lowlands.

3-The post-classical period 900 CE-1500 CE

During the ninth century the central lands of the Maya people suffered from a major political collapse, which was the abandonment of cities and the end of dynasties and ruling families and also the shifting of activity entirely to the north. This collapse was accompanied by the cessation of archaeological inscriptions and architectural construction.

4-The era of conquest of the Spanish 1517-1697 CE

From 1517 to 1519 AD, three separate Spanish missions arrived to the Yucatan coast for the purpose of research and exploration, and these missions participated in a series of battles with the Mayans.

Shortly after the first exploratory expeditions to the region, the Spanish began several attempts to subdue the Mayans, and several military campaigns were organized, and in 1697 AD "Martín de Urzúa" (1653-1715 CE) (Spanish leader) launched an attack on the last independent Maya city.



Fig. (1) Bonampak murals, representing war scenes

Mayan texts and writings:

The Maya people followed a complex writing system similar to hieroglyphs and they wrote down their observations, their astronomical calculations, the calculation of the calendar, the writing of their lineages and their history, and the writing was a mixture of symbolic images that represented complete words that could be read and spoken, Figure (2), and also the first written inscriptions appeared of Maya "before the year 250 AD in the "Petén" region (an archaeological area north of Guatemala), beginning the classic period of Mayan history, where hundreds of texts were found on the frescoes and walls of the caves.



Fig (2) The hieroglyphic language of the Mayans

Mayan Codex:

The Mayan manuscripts are the main source in uncovering and knowing the facts of information related to this civilization from historical and colonial events, including religious rituals and astronomical events, which were organized in the form of tables and lists that include important dates and numbers in addition to texts and images that explain the period of rule and the transfer of power from ruler to the next till the last one, as well as legendary events associated with the gods ,and other topics such as determining the appropriate days to perform rituals, which were used for religious ritual purposes.

The Madrid codex:

This manuscript remained for a long time in the form of two separate manuscripts known as "Troano" and "Cortesianus", but in the year 1880 AD, the French scholar" Leon de Rosny" discovered that both represented sections of one manuscript.

The "Madrid" manuscript contains 56 leaves that collect Mayan beliefs about the four original directions and the deities (Figure 3) with information on the celebration of the New Year and detailed calendars of the 260 days of the year.



Fig (3) The corn god (left) and the rain god, Chac-Madrid manuscript

Mayan arts:

Maya culture and art spread in its first era in most of its lands in a regular manner, and the art, architecture, mathematics, engineering, and astronomy reached a great degree in these cities. The Mayan people lived in an advanced society that flourished in Central America long before the Spanish arrived, they built temples and major buildings, and their religion was based on multiple deities.

Mayan murals:

Wall paintings in Central America are filled with religious and political meaning and are sometimes accompanied by interpretative hieroglyphs that are sacred phrases, filled with intricate symbolism.

Artists implemented symbolic religious scenes associated with the underworld, fertility, and star cycles, along with events related to ruling families or military events (Figure 4).



Fig (4) Murals of Bonampak

Mayan Calendar:

The complex Mayan calendar relied on the idea that time is circles. Which means, in a nutshell, that time repeats itself, so it is from the events of the past that have already occurred, the events of the future can be predicted and they are codified in "Chilam Palam" which is a collection of handwritten books attributed to a priest who predicted the arrival of the Spanish (Figure 5).



Fig (5) The Book of Chilam Balam

Mayan collapse:

In about 850 AD, the Maya civilization began to collapse after centuries of prosperity and domination, and its people began to abandon their major cities little by little and their civilization and great glory declined, and since the Mayans are like many ancient civilizations that were heavily dependent on agriculture to develop their economic strength, and support for the workforce. Thus, the decrease in the percentage of crops as a result of the drought wave led to a decrease in the workforce, and hence weakening political influence, which ultimately led to social disintegration and collapse.

Aztec Civilization:

The Aztec people are a group of tribes that inhabited central Mexico, sources indicate that they are located somewhere northwest of the Valley of Mexico, and they call this home their name as "Chicomoztec, meaning the Seven Caves. "Mexica" is referred to as "Metzliban," meaning "Moon Lake.

The Aztecs excavated the ruins and relics, recovered the ceramics and executed stone carvings and precious masks that they presented as offerings to the gods.

Aztec codex:

By the time the Aztecs came to power, books and writing in general were centuries old in Central American civilization, and because the books were made of deer skin or bark leaves, few of them escaped the destructive powers of time and climate

The Aztecs had various types of books and the most common among them was the "Tonalamatl" (Divine Calendar) book that priests use to predict and explain the will of the gods, and these daily signs and drawings were used to craft horoscopes and distinguish the future (Figure 6).

Aubin codex:

It is an illustrated textual history of the Aztecs for their departure from "Aztlán" during the Spanish conquest to the early Spanish colonial period from 1519-1521 AD, ending in 1607 AD consisting of 81 leaves with an area of approximately 11 x 15 cm, and they are read from left to right and from top to bottom figure (7).



Fig (6) Codex Borbonicus, the Aztec sacred calendar.

Aztec arts:

Aztec designs varied due to influences from a variety of other cultures in the Valley of Mexico from the tribes that had existed in northern Mexico that had come and settled since the sixth century, as they brought cultures combined with different experiences.

As for the designs applied to clothes, mosaics, and other sculptures, they were usually executed in very bright colors, and the brightness of the colors in the clothes often distinguished the upper layer from the general people's clothing (Figure8).



Fig (7) Aubin manuscript

Collapse and conquest of the Spaniards:

Central American scholars and legends consider it one of the main reasons for the rapid collapse of the Aztec Empire.:

-The Aztec people used to worship the god "Qetzalquatel", the god of wisdom and art who descended from heaven and lived on earth among people and began to teach them wisdom and art, and kept ruling over them and managing their affairs for several generations. And the Aztec peoples continued to yearn for his return and waited for him to appear again, but he did not return.



Fig (8) Exchikati script National Library - France

As well as the Spanish conquest and the resulting destruction and burning of the country, in addition to the epidemics that spread with the emergence of the new world, this civilization was defeated and destroyed in a relatively very short time, and it was completely analyzed in favor of the Spanish conquest.

The aesthetic values of symbols and plastic elements in the arts of civilizations of Central America and their impact on contemporary arts:

Arts, along with humanities, are considered as the cornerstone for the prosperity and progress of any human civilization in various aspects of life, and arts in different fields such as drawing, architectural art, design, sculpture, visual arts, and other arts, they certainly represent the nucleus of the industry of an advanced and civilized society where it leads to civilized prosperity, and there is an amazing bond between the arts and sciences, they both work in a very parallel line and develop as the other develops.

The history of human civilization has been known through the drawings discovered by various fossils and monuments, and this is considered the first nucleus of art, which confirmed the first beginnings of human civilization as most of the monuments represent art itself, and if we look at the development of civilizations we will find a difference in the artistic style to distinguish each civilization from the other, and that differentiates religions, cultures, languages and customs.

All the original cultures of the ancient civilizations of Central America, such as: Olmec, Toltec (one of Central America Civilizations), Maya, Zapotec and Aztecs, are distinguished by the uniqueness and diversity of their forms and their artistic data.

The most important results:

- Demonstrating the ability of the plastic arts and its artistic value, this played an important role in drawing and shaping the cultural identity of the Maya and Aztec civilizations.
- Architecture in the Mayan and Aztec civilizations holds many historical and architectural values, and these plastic values still remain to this day, a witness to the history of the value of those civilizations.
- Exploiting human energies and social awareness among the most important principles of preserving the plastic values of any civilization.

The most important recommendations:

- Focusing on art localization cultures through mechanisms that have become more powerful now, such as, various social media platforms or the plastic arts sector of the Ministry of Culture, in order to spread the heritage and cultural identity of each civilization.
- It must be emphasized that the interest in plastic studies and heritage, which aims to increase the vast amount of knowledge that no one can absorb in all its aspects, it should be taken care of.
- The necessity of implementing artistic and cultural programs with sustainable development plans in order to develop the urban community while preserving the cultural identity of that civilization to support and revitalize the tourism movement and thus support the economy and society.

References:

- (1)-Francis.F. Berdan -2004-The Aztecs of Central Mexico an Imperial Society-2nd Edition-Thomson-Wadsworth-The Belmont
- (2)-Francis F. Berdan-1997- Patricia Rieff Anawalt- The essential codex Mendoza (University of California Press. Ltd. London-England
- (3)-Harri Kettunen- Christophe Helmke-2011- Introduction to Maya Hieroglyphs Twelfth Edition-XVI European Maya Conference-Copenhagen- Department of American Indian Languages and Cultures-Institute of Cross-cultural and Regional Studies-University of Copenhagen-In association with The National Museum of Denmark& Wayeb.
- (4)-Charles Philips-2008-The Art&Architecture of the Aztec &Maya- An Illustrated Encyclopedia of the Buildings, Sculptures and Art of the Peoples of Mesoamerica
- (5)-Early American Civilizations Maya, Aztec, and Inca -2014- Core Knowledge Foundation

(6)-Jakub špotak-2015-The Paris Codex: Complex Analysis of an Ancient Maya Manuscript
(Dissertation- Department of Comparative Religion

(7)-Micheal John Grofe-2007-The serpent series percession in the Maya Dresden Codex-PhD
of Philosophy-California institute of integral studies –San Francisco-university of Miami-