

ANTHROPOLOGY 553.01
THE AZTECS AND THEIR PREDECESSORS

Instructor

Dr. Kevin Johnston

Office: 113B Lord Hall

Phone: 292-0006; email: johnston.213@osu.edu

Office Hours: Monday 1:00-4:00 PM, and by appointment

Place and Time

M W 9:30-11:18 AM, Cunz Hall, Room 168

Texts (Available at university-area bookstores)

Berdan, Frances F.

2005 *The Aztecs of Central Mexico: An Imperial Society*. Thomson Wadworth, Belmont, CA.

Coe, Michael, and Rex Koontz

2003 *Mexico: From the Olmecs to the Aztecs* (5th edition). Thames and Hudson Press.

On Electronic Reserve, Main Library

- All other class readings.

Course Description

Anthropology 553.01 examines the non-Maya civilizations of ancient Mesoamerica—including the Aztecs and their predecessors, the Olmecs, Toltecs, Mixtecs, and Zapotecs—as revealed by archaeological and textual sources. In recent years, the pace of Mesoamerican archaeology has quickened, and, thanks to the discovery of new sites and breakthroughs in epigraphy, archaeologists have developed new insights into the Mesoamerican past. In this class we examine those insights.

We start with the Mesoamerica's so-called "mother culture" and the region's first complex society: the Olmec. Topics include Olmec religion and worldview, the emergence of kingship, and the geographical spread of "Olmecism" (the adoption of Olmec symbols by non-Olmec peoples).

After examining Preclassic cultural developments elsewhere in Mesoamerica, we turn our attention to the great Classic-period urban and economic center, Teotihuacan. As research by archaeologists and art historians recently has demonstrated, Teotihuacan was a great military power, and its art links militarism to important natural, including cosmic, forces.

Next we examine the Zapotecs, who inhabited the bottomlands of the Valley of Oaxaca, and the Mixtecs, who inhabited rugged mountains west of the Valley. The expansion of the Zapotec military empire, centered at Monte Alban, is documented in their art and writing. The Mixtec are renowned for the colorful and intriguing picture-writing system, which we will examine and attempt to decipher. Two classes are devoted to Mixtec writing.

In the last section of class we examine the Aztecs of central Mexico, who during the 14th and 15th centuries developed Mesoamerica's largest and most powerful empire. After examining the origins and evolution of the Aztec state, we turn our attention to its remarkable political and economic organization. In readings and discussions we investigate how Aztec warfare functioned as a religious institution. Class concludes with a consideration of the impact of the Spanish Conquest on the native peoples of Mesoamerica and their continued quest for cultural survival.

Format

The course meets twice week at a regular time for structured sessions with the entire class. Class meetings will combine lecture, discussions, visual presentations, and exercises. Group discussions will be held, and several classes will be devoted to group exercises.

Reading Assignments

The number of pages of reading assigned each week ranges between 50 and 100 (average is approximately 70). Students will be expected to have done the reading in order to engage in discussion and to answer questions. Each student must complete the readings on the dates indicated in the syllabus, i.e., *before attending class*.

Readings for this course consist of two required texts available at the University Bookstore. Supplementary readings will be placed on Electronic Reserve at the Main Library Website [<http://library.ohio-state.edu/search/r>].

Evaluation Criteria

Final grades will reflect each student's performance of written examinations, in-class and take-home assignments, and class participation. Written examinations will be based upon lectures, films, assigned readings, and class discussions and assignments.

The various components of class performance are weighted as follows:

Mid-term examination.....	40%
Final examination.....	45%
Class discussions, assignments, attendance.....	15%

Examinations

There are two examinations—a mid-term and a final. The mid-term exam counts as forty percent of the final grade. The final exam counts as forty-five percent of the final grade. The exams are composed of objective (e.g., identification, matching, multiple choice, and sentence completion) and short essay questions.

The mid-term exam emphasizes materials covered during classes 1 through 9. The final exam emphasizes material covered during classes 10 through 19, but it will include questions that require use of knowledge and information acquired during the entire course. Students are expected to master information from the lectures, handouts, films, and textbooks; exam questions are drawn from all four.

Examination dates:

Mid-term exam..... April 25, Monday, in class

Final exam..... June 8, Wednesday, 9:30-11:18 AM, in class

Makeup exams will only be offered for legitimate absences. In all cases, a request for a makeup exam must include, but is not limited to, a dated and signed letter from the student stating his/her reason for absence. Students requesting a makeup exam must speak with the instructor within 48 hours of the scheduled examination time. We encourage you to discuss your exam needs and other learning needs with the instructor *ahead of time*. If you experience a legitimate emergency and miss a lecture, ask another student to go over his/her notes with you, then ask your instructor to clarify any issues or questions that you may have.

Grading

A (95-100); A- (90-94); B+ (86-89); B (83-85); B- (80-82); C+ (76-79); C (73-75); C- (70-72); D+ (65-69); D (60-64); F (Below 60)

Participation in class discussions, assignments, and attendance will count for 15 percent of the final grade, so being prepared for class is highly advised.

Student Responsibility

Attendance is required and chronic absence will be noted. Disruptive behavior will be penalized. Students are held accountable for the content of the instructor's lectures and expected to master relevant material in the text. The student is advised to keep up with the reading assignments. Incompletes will be considered only in extreme cases.

Please turn off cell phones, beepers, and other electronics *before* arriving in class.

Policy On Academic Misconduct

All students should become familiar with the rules governing alleged academic misconduct. All students should be familiar with what constitutes academic misconduct, especially as it pertains to plagiarism and test taking. Ignorance of the rules governing academic misconduct or ignorance of what constitutes academic misconduct is not an acceptable defense. Alleged cases of academic misconduct are referred to the proper university committees. Do your own work!

Note: When the instructor is unexpectedly absent, you will find this information posted on the departmental website. Students should consult the website during inclement weather to check for possible class cancellations or delays. Please do not call the department; instead, check the website.

<http://monkey.sbs.ohio-state.edu/news.htm>

THIS PUBLICATION/MATERIAL IS AVAILABLE IN ALTERNATIVE FORMATS UPON REQUEST. FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT MS. Jean Whipple, DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY, 292-4149.

Anyone who feels that they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability MUST contact me to arrange an appointment AS SOON AS THE QUARTER BEGINS. At the appointment we can discuss the course format, anticipate your needs and explore potential adaptations to meet your needs. I rely on the Office for Disability Services for assistance in verifying the need for accommodations and developing accommodation strategies. YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR SEEKING AVAILABLE ASSISTANCE FROM THE OFFICE OF DISABILITY SERVICES 292-3307, PRIOR TO OR AT THE BEGINNING OF THE QUARTER

COURSE SCHEDULE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

WEEK 1. INTRODUCTION

CLASS 1. March 28

Introduction

Readings: Coe and Koontz, Chapter 1, pp. 11-19

CLASS 2. March 30

Geography; Earliest Occupation; The Olmecs

Film: *The Excavation of La Venta*

Readings: Coe and Koontz, Chapter 4, pp. 41-60

WEEK 2. THE OLMECS

CLASS 3. April 4

Olmec religion and rulership—iconography

Readings: Coe and Koontz, Chapter 5, pp. 61-100

CLASS 4. April 6

Film: *The Spirit World: Religion and Ideology*

Readings, Electronic Reserve: Kent Reilly, "Art, ritual, and the Olmec world," pp.369-399.

WEEK 3. RELIGION DURING THE LATE PRECLASSIC

CLASS 5. April 11

La Mojarra, Izapa, Abaj Takalik, and Kaminaljuyu; The Mesoamerican Calendar System

Readings, Electronic Reserve: John Pohl, "Izapa." In *Exploring Mesoamerica*, pp. 31-40.

CLASS 6. April 13

Teotihuacan

Readings: Coe and Koontz, Chapter 6, pp. 101-130

Readings, Electronic Reserve: George Cowgill, "State and society at Teotihuacan," pp. 300-323.

WEEK 4. TEOTIHUACAN AND THE EPICLASSIC

CLASS 7. April 18

Epiclassic: Xochimilco, Cacaxtla, El Tajin

Readings: Coe and Koontz, Chapter 7, pp. 131-148

Readings, Electronic Reserve: John Pohl, "Cholula," pp. 162-172.

CLASS 8. April 20

The Zapotecs

Readings, Electronic Reserves: Richard Blanton et al., *Ancient Mesoamerica*, pp. 50-55, 69-105

WEEK 5. THE MIXTECS

CLASS 9. April 25

Mid-Term Exam

CLASS 10. April 27

Mixtecs: Geography, Archaeology, and Chronology

Readings: Coe and Koontz, Chapter 9, pp. 175-189

WEEK 6. MIXTEC WRITING

CLASS 11. May 2

Mixtec picture writing.

Readings, Electronic Reserves: Elizabeth Boone, "Aztec Pictorial Histories: Records Without Words," pp. 50-76.

- John Pohl, "Mitla," pp., 182-192

CLASS 12. May 4

Mixtec writing: In-class exercise

WEEK 7. THE TOLTECS AND EARLY AZTECS

CLASS 13. May 9

Tula and the Toltecs

Readings: Coe and Koontz, Chapter 8, pp. 149-174

CLASS 14. May 11

The Origins and Evolution of the Aztec Empire

Readings: Berdan—Chapter 1, pp. 1-19

WEEK 8. THE AZTECS

CLASS 15. May 16

Aztec Political and Economic Organization

Readings: Berdan—Chapters 2 & 3, pp. 20-50, 51-60.

CLASS 16. May 18

Aztec Militarism and Writing

Readings: Berdan—Chapters 3 & 5, pp. 60-72, 106-125.**CLASS 17.** May 23

Aztec Religion

Film: *The Fifth Sun**Readings:* Berdan—Chapter 6, pp. 126-140.**WEEK 9. THE AZTECS****CLASS 18.** May 25

The Spanish Conquest

Readings: Berdan—Chapter 8, p. 167-197.**WEEK 10. THE SPANISH CONQUEST AND ITS AFTERMATH**May 30—*Holiday, No Classes***CLASS 19.** June 1

Final Exam Review

Readings: Coe and Koontz, pp. 225-235.**Final Exam: June 8, Wednesday, in class; 9:30-11:18 AM**