Mesoamerican Civilizations: Aztec and Non-Mayan

OSHER 435-001

Times: 1:30 PM – 3:00 PM
Location: Commander's House, Fort Douglas
Instructor: Mauricio Mixco

Course Overview

The Mayan world deserves a course of its own; here we trace the development of non-Mayan Mesoamerica by exploring the cultural unity of this vast region despite its extreme diversity of languages and cultures. We assess the contributions over 2-3 millennia of such dazzling cultures as the Olmec, Mixtec, Zapotec, Tarascan, Totonac, Toltec, concluding with the Aztec. We examine cultural links between Mexico, Central America and South America as we delve into the principles of glyphic writing, religious iconography and beliefs. All of this is discussed in the context of the geography and ecology of Mexico.

Suggested Texts:

Proposed Schedule of Topics:
Week 1: Archaic Mesoamerica, its Physical Settings and Earliest Development;
   Extreme Diversity of Unrelated Language Families

Week 2: Formative Period: Setting the Pattern; The Gulf Coast "Mother Culture;"
   Olmecs; Farmers, Villagers, Warriors, Merchants and Priests: Early Cultures of Central Mexico and Pacific Coast; Teotihuácan: Urban Climax: Pyramids, Palaces & Apartments;
   Earliest Hieroglyphics

Week 3: War & Trade: Puebla/Tlacalla Valley; Oaxaca: Zapotecs, Mixtecs; the Basin Again: Tula & the Toltecs; the Chichén Itzá Connection.

Week 4: Michoacán/Jalisco: Tarascans; Plausible South American Contacts; Oaxaca: Monte Albán; Earliest Aztecs on the Lakes: Rags to Riches

Week 5: Rise of the Aztec Hegemony: Tenochtitlan & the Triple Alliance; Merchants and Warriors; Human Sacrifice & the “Flowery Wars”

Week 6: The Fierce & Gentle Mexica/Aztec Social Order: Law, Poetry, Art, Religion