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SBS 348 Interpreting Mesoamerican Codices

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Relating to question 2:

At first glance it was hard to interpret most of what was going on in the pictures from the codices. The codice that I picked was Zuuche-Nuttall. The first and most recognizable element that stood out immediately was the animals. Each animal was unique but seemed to correspond with a certain person. The second element would have to be the tiny animal skulls or heads attached with dots. Again these symbols popped up everywhere as if to explain a certain detail about that part of the picture you are looking at. The third element is the people themselves but each person always was decorated with different colors and patterns as well as clothes, so we never really know if they are all the same person. The fourth element is a collection of recognizable objects that are small and seem insignificant but are actually informative in a big way. These include shells, jars, gears, scepters, pokeballs, etc. They are scattered all about the codice but my main guess was it had some relationship that details that part of the picture. Finally the last element that I noticed was a stick or dart that has been stuck into different objects. Sometimes it's a person with a dart in them and other times it is an altar or building with a dart sticking out. Interesting enough though was that every dart had the exact same coloring and pattern which is definitely not a coincidence.

Relating to question 1:

After careful observing and researching the Spanish translations it became much clearer to what the codice was about. Plus we had help from the Professor. The pages specifically looked at was one through eight. In short those pages described some events that the Deer Jaguar Clan

experienced. As you progress through the pictures, it shows how Deer Jaguar sent his warriors to conquer many people and place hence little darts stuck in everything. At the same time, animal heads as name plaques helped show the names of the different lords that were captured, conquered or allied with. Many of the small detailed objects tell of the type of area or city that was conquered as well. The Deer Jaguar Clan defeated many sites which are represented by hills and some of these locations were across rivers which had water as a detail in the codice. That's about it in a nut shell.

Relating to question 3:

An assessment of the culture that made the manuscript based on the five elements mentioned above has to start with that they were very in to nature. From so many animal motifs and use for sacrificial rituals, it is only to clear to realize that this culture held a high appreciation to the animals around them. Also, most of the names attained by the people were of animal origin as well.

Another aspect of the culture was the amount of emphasis on conquering hills and people. Much of the codice points to a militaristic and feudal culture. This is supported by the many darts stuck into everything. There seemed to be always the way of war in the air for the people but it was part of the system that makes their culture unique.

The tiny animal skulls were of importance as well for the culture because they drew so many of them to make sure the reader would know exactly who the conquered people or things belonged to. This again fits with the notion of a militaristic society with another emphasis on recording their triumphs.

The tiny objects that are found everywhere tells me that the culture paid attention to detail and many of those objects help distinguish differences and similarities between the groups of people living at those times. It could be a sense of writing down technological feats that others had or hadn't learned.

The last element that fits this militaristic type of living is the darts that are everywhere. This culture clearly wants to preserve the records of mighty rulers that have conquered many things. It is a culture that seems to believe in prestige and royalty. And to do that, the rulers of each city try to one-up each other. In my humble opinion, I think the culture was the first example of the battle of egos.

Three Questions of my Own

1. Are any of the codices related to everyday activities of people that are not of royalty? Is there a codice that tells stories of how an aqua duct is made, how a temple is built, how children play?
2. How did the Maya or Aztec store the manuscripts? Were they in caves, libraries, royal rooms?
3. Did all artists agree on what should represent what when writing and painting? Was there conflicts or commissions that were different?