

AZTEC ICON #10 – MICTLANTECUHTLI, Lord of the Land of the Dead



MICTLANTECUHTLI

MICTLANTECUHTLI, Lord of the Land of the Dead, *{meek-tlan-te-kooH-tee}*, is the most prominent of several deities of death, 5th lord of the night, and 6th lord of the day. His worship apparently involved ritual cannibalism. (Counter-intuitively, skulls and skeletons were symbols of fertility, health, and abundance.) His wife is Mictlancihuatl. Souls who die normal deaths have to climb eight hills and cross nine rivers in four days to reach Mictlan, the Land of the Dead, an empty place of darkness, dust, and vile insects. Souls of heroes, warriors, sacrificial victims, or those dying in childbirth join the sun-god Tonatiuh in his idyllic Fourth Heaven, and those who drown go to Tlaloc's Eighth Heaven, the paradisiacal Tlalocan.

SOURCES

The Lord of Mictlan frequently appears as a stylized skeletal figure, as in the selected images below. However, I chose to depict him in the icon as a naturalistic skeleton with traditional regalia.



BORBONICUS

BORGIA

FEJERVARY-MAYER

LAUD

Less frequent are images of his wife Mictlancihuatl, as in the Magliabecchi example, which I also drew as a skeleton. In the vignette with her, Ehecatl comes from the Vindobonensis model cited earlier.



MAGLIABECCHI

RIOS

TELLERIANO

VATICANUS

Other details in the icon reflect various images in the codices as well. The central temple with centipede is based on the Vaticanus example with its owl replaced by a Laud-style image and accompanied by a Vaticanus scorpion. The psychopomp Xolotl and companion dog are also drawn from Vaticanus. The little souls struggling over the hills and swimming the rivers to Mictlan are mostly from Vindobonensis.



VATICANUS

LAUD

VINDOBONENSIS