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Pattern Research Project: Emblems of Colonialism - Mudejar Bookcase

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Mudejar Bookcase



pattern research project

colonialism + the americas

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ides 521 + 651
12.1.20

table of contents

> pattern introduction

> place + time

> people + culture

[use within the interior]

> tools + materials

> pattern design

> analysis

> realizations + reflections

> references

pattern introduction

colonizer

SPAIN

location

PUEBLA, MEXICO

date produced

MID-18TH CENTURY

item type

DESK/BOOKCASE

collection

MFA BOSTON

dimensions

87"H x 41"W x 26.5"D

materials

INLAID WOOD, INCISED + PAINTED BONE, MAQUE,
METAL (hardware)

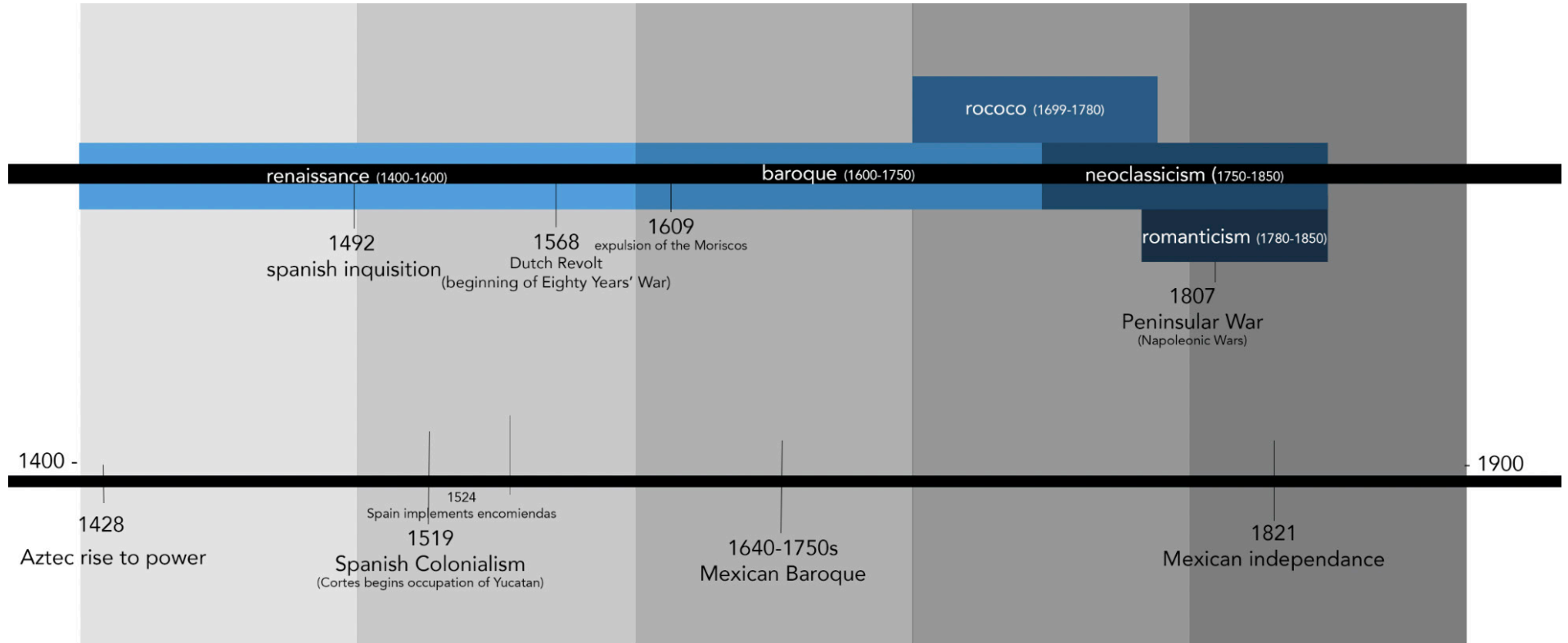
pattern motif

MUDÉJAR (exterior)
CHINOSERIE MAP (interior)



- Exterior: elaborate, geometric inlay of incised bone and wood in a Hispano-Moresque style
- Interior: painting in gold on a red background, and, on the doors, maps of an extensive hacienda in Veracruz drawn in an indigenous style, reminiscent of early colonial maps of Mexico by native artists, but with distinct Eastern influence

place + time



"New Spain"

- Puebla, Mexico was the second largest city in New Spain. Located between Veracruz and Acapulco and close vicinity to the cosmopolitan capital of Mexico City allowed it to grow quickly and prosper with increased importance on industry and agriculture during 17th century

people + culture

- 18th century, possibly commissioned by Pedro José Ovando de Rivadeneira or a member of the Gaspar Miguel de Osorio y de Cervantes family, Mexico
- Wealthiest families in colonial Spanish America wanted to legitimize their place in imperial system proving noble lineage and "limpieza de sangre" = "purity of blood" - excluded Jewish + Moorish heritage;
- used the arts and decoration to show growing wealth locally
- dominant trade position as a central access point to the East -- many of the wealthy plantation owners had homes in the city. They had furniture imported from Europe and also commissioned local craftsmen - show of wealth and status enhanced with materials (imports indicated heritage)
- Indigenous people were subject to Catholic missionaries as colonial occupation expanded through Latin America/South America
- 16th century introduced African slavery, which replaced the declining indigenous population (that was also gaining more protection/freedom with 1542 laws)
- 17th century Puebla - location facilitated frequent travelers and traders from all cultures; mixture of ideas
- Puebla buildings were strongly influenced by Baroque architecture in Europe
- The form of this cabinet is based on an early 18th-century English design for what was then called a 'desk and bookcase' and is now more often called a 'bureau'. This type of furniture spread across Europe and from various European states to their colonial territories. The very practical form had a long life and was popular, for instance, in the newly independent Unit-



tools + materials

wood/inlay

bone inlay

- indigenous tropical species such as cedar and likely rosewood
- Moorish technique of inlaid design in wood, bone, shell, and ivory adopted in Mexico in 16th century
- techniques dating back to Egyptian
- inlay = designs cut/carved into wood substrate/form, bone (or veneer) inlay pieces cut + sanded, hand applied with animal glue, then further decoration through engraving/incising and/or painting
- often used bone to mimic more expensive Ivory inlays found in the East; also often combined with mother of pearl in similar pieces during Mexican Baroque



Nasrid tradition of micromosaic inlay that flourished in Granada under Muslim occupation. The inlay was traditionally made of small pieces of ivory, bone and various woods chosen for their colours. The technique actually dated back to the Caliphal period (929-1031)

maque

the red background for the interior is likely maque (from the Japanese word for lacquer, maki-e)

- adds to durability (+ aesthetics when colored)

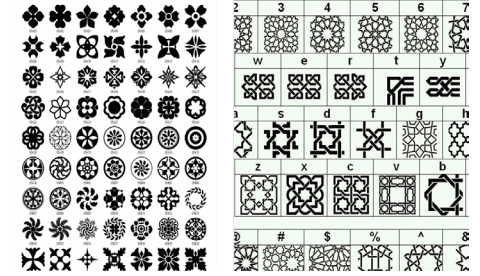
a resin created using local materials - (greasy substance from the aje larvae and/or oil from the chia seed were mixed with powdered minerals)

pattern design

> EXTERIOR

- grids
- repeats
- colors
- spacing

- Hispano-Moresque = patterns of uniform size+shape used on furniture and boxes into the 19th century; intricate patterns, often lacking a central focal point
- overall patterning nonsymbolic, so acceptable to Spanish
- no singular stylistic vocabulary -- many combined at least 2 cultures/ styles to fill surface
- Continued tendency to fill empty space with a variety of forms using a minimum of accent permeated all styles of Mexican art
 - * Baroque Mexico = exuberant geometric + floral motifs
 - * Rococo decoration = inspired by Mannerists elements (scallops, ovals, trapwork)
 - * Neoclassicism invaded Mexican art in late 18th century = classical motifs multiplied and broken up



several multiples of 8
several multiples of 4

- larger sections - importance of borders?
- repeated shapes? fractals of central design?
- no central design? no hierarchy
- repeated in motifs below?
- shapes?
- symmetrical
- play on scale
- repetition



pattern design

> INTERIOR

Extensive hacienda scenes of a Veracruz plantation, painted in a way that recalls early colonial maps drawn by indigenous artists and depicting descendants of enslaved or free people of African descent

- Painted in a striking red and gold *chinoiserie* style, in keeping with an achinadotradition in which Latin American artists borrowed and embellished Chinese and Japanese styles of furniture, china, silver, and textiles that had been imported from Manila to Acapulco during the 250 years of the Manila Galleon trade.

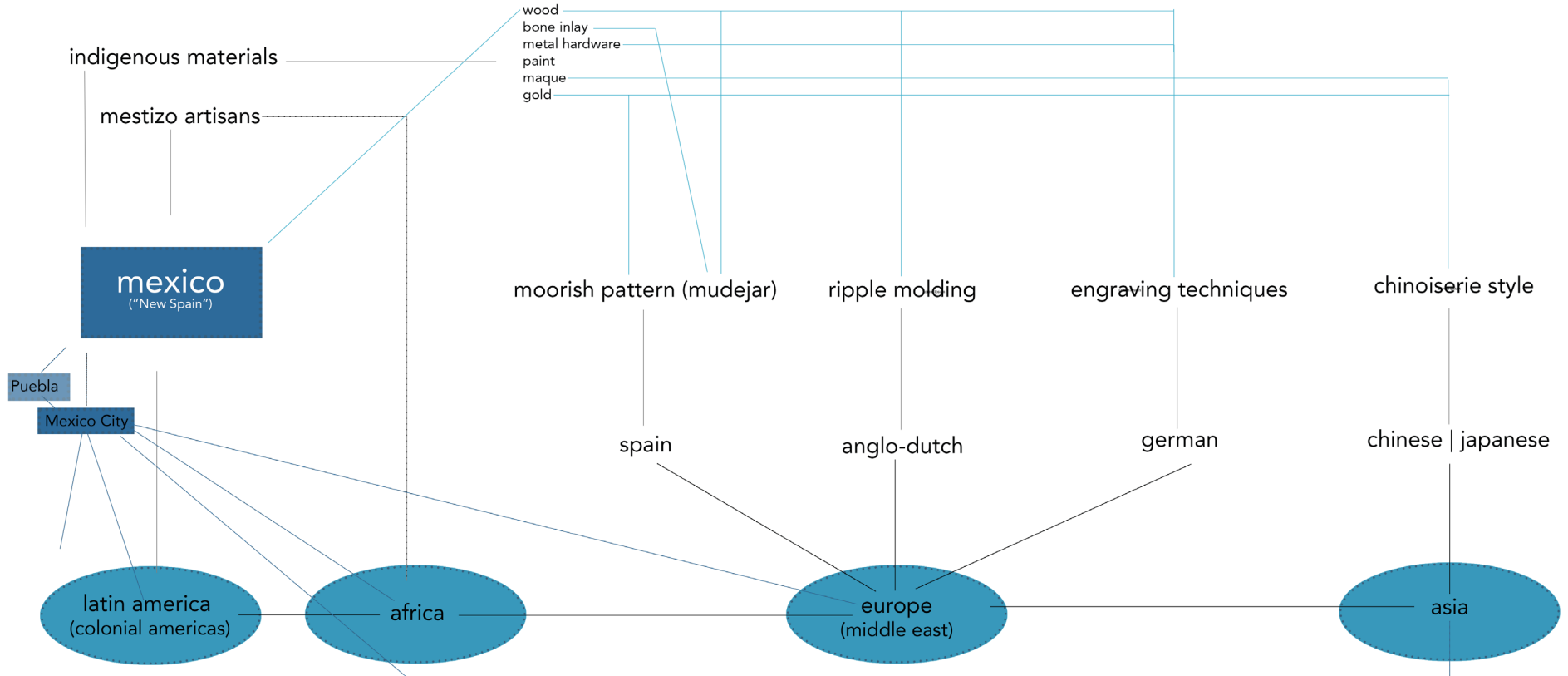


symbols = Nahuatl hieroglyphs

- representing towns and estates, rivers, and mountains.
- plantation life that include ranchers and farmhands, among them free blacks or enslaved men
- mythical warriors, unicorns, elephants, reindeer, birds, and lions



analysis



- early center for global trade and vibrant economy in New Spain ; mixture of various cultures and growing wealth in the Americas
- European colonizers distracted by wars at home helped locals thrive and ultimately lead to independence
- consequences of independence?

realizations + reflections

- Mexico was much more cosmopolitan and critical to global trade than previously thought; this piece signifies there was influence from all four major continents and combined with local/traditional characteristics
- Interests to study further:
 - > Do these geometric designs really have no other significance like other art of the time-- linking it to religion or other types of identity aside from aesthetics?
 - > further research into what materials were imported for furniture production
 - > traditional hand craft training/evolution with local labor changing given the wide range of materials used
 - > implications of independence on the colonies
 - > further research into specific Asian influences on the interior and how it was translated through the Aztec hieroglyphs

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