Within 200 years, the Aztecs of central Mexico transformed themselves from humble wandering nomads to builders of the largest empire in pre-Hispanic Mesoamerica. The Aztecs were able to construct their vast empire in a relatively short period of time through strategic alliances, military conquest, and the spread of ideology through which they portrayed themselves as both innovators and inheritors of older Mesoamerican traditions. This course will explore the ways in which Aztec art conveys complex religious beliefs, history, and imperial goals through a variety of media including stone, ceramic, gold, feather work, and paper. We will begin with a consideration of the major cultures that preceded and influenced the Aztecs before focusing in depth on art and architecture from the imperial capital, Tenochtitlan, and from neighboring areas and cultures. Our investigation will include a close study of the Codex Borgia, the most significant pre-Hispanic Central Mexican document, in order to learn to read Aztec signs and imagery and understand the ceremonial calendar. Through analysis of archaeological discoveries, Contact-era and Colonial-period written accounts, and modern scholarship, we will discuss topics including mythology, the calendar, writing, warfare, performance, human sacrifice, the Spanish Conquest, and modern conceptions and misconceptions about the Aztecs.