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Johanna Broda, David Carrasco, and Eduardo Matos Moctezuma. The Great Temple of Tenochtitlan: Center and Periphery in the Aztec World

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Winetrout's comparison between Toynbee's "Universal State" and the efforts of the Trilateral Commission, will perhaps be viewed by some as too contrived to have merit, while others may think the envisioned role of China as the saviour of civilization is more in line with the thinking of a "visionary" than a prophet. Some may even find fault with the repetition that occurs within the various essays in Winetrout's text, although such is common in collections of this nature. The Toynbee critics will also find fault with Winetrout's organization of the text, which includes, in true Toynbee fashion, a series of "Annexes" after each essay, that provide the reader with additional elaboration on the central theme of each chapter. While the Winetrout text may receive criticism from various sources, it has merit. Winetrout is successful in introducing a Toynbee that is quite distinct from "Toynbee the historian." Winetrout successfully provides the reader with insight into the ecumenical interest and scholarship of Arnold Toynbee. He is successful in penetrating the eclectic mind of a "generalist" and demonstrating that there is more to the study of civilization than the recording of the deeds of individuals. He successfully focuses attention on sources that only a precious few scholars have read and in the process demonstrates the polygonal nature of Arnold Toynbee's research. Winetrout based his research on the "dialogue volumes," which included such items as the "Toynbee-Ikeda Dialogue," "Surviving the Future," "Toynbee on Toynbee," "An Historian's Conscience," and, perhaps to the chagrin of the purist, even references to Toynbee's *Playboy* interview.

In conclusion, perhaps the most laudable thing that can be said about Winetrout's efforts is that I strongly suspect Toynbee would have approved of the work and if the subject of a eulogy approves, then who is to find fault?

Wayne M. Bledsoe

**INTERPRETIVE ARCHAEOLOGY**


This collection of three essays discusses the excavation and significance of the Templo Mayor (Great Temple) of Tenochtitlan, discovered by construction workers in Mexico City in 1978. These essays use divergent intellectual approaches to explore the connections between the symbolism of the temple, its architectures (it was expanded some seven times), the offerings it contained, and the symbolic, political, and economic structure of the Aztec empire. The discussion of the temple presents a rare opportunity to juxtapose archaeological and ethnohistorical materials since there are accounts recorded by Spanish explorers in the early sixteenth century. All three authors use these
accounts and reports of the excavation to illuminate each other. The text is enhanced by the black and white plates of the objects discussed in the essays. A glossary of Nahuatl terms and pronunciation guide is a valuable addition for readers not closely familiar with Mesoamerican terms. These essays provide several angles from which to examine the Great Temple, yielding a broad view of this religious and ceremonial center of the Aztec Empire.

One must read with care, however, because the reports of the excavation are far from complete. Thus, all conclusions are contingent on further analysis of the site. Furthermore, recent discussions of core-periphery relations use the terms “center” and “periphery” in several different ways (Champion 1989; Chase-Dunn 1988; Rowlands 1987; Strassoldo 1980). Here their meanings derive from Mircea Eliade’s analyses of myth and religion. These parallel, yet not quite convergent meanings, may be a source of confusion, but do provide stimulation for rethinking the conceptualizations of “center” and “periphery.”

Because of the nature of the collection it is most useful to discuss each essay in turn. The collection opens with David Carrasco’s useful introduction and summary. He contextualizes the essays both in terms of Mesoamerican civilization, disciplinary debates, and the process of excavation. He indicates that the terms “center” and “periphery” are used on three different “planes of reference”: (1) geographic-ecological; (2) sociopolitical; (3) symbolic (p. 3). In political economy and world-system theory their use overlaps the first and second uses. The temple itself reflects the symbolization of space and society by Aztec elites. In a parallel way, the temple also symbolizes, indeed, constructs sacred space.

The collection seeks to demonstrate three major themes about the Great Temple: (1) it was the “axis mundi” of the Aztec world; (2) it was an “imago mundi” in the Aztec “cosmovision” (a term, discussed below, broadly similar to “world-view”); (3) it was the center of the world in the sense that it structured action in the Aztec capital. The essays achieve these goals by examining and interpreting the temple itself, and by using the temple “as a lens to see the social reality behind it and penetrate deeper into the socioeconomic, political, and symbolic structure that characterized the Aztec empire” (p. 5). The customary précis of the essays is especially useful because it weaves the almost self-contained essays into a larger whole. If there is a criticism to be leveled at this structure, it is that Carrasco did not try to bring it all together in a concluding chapter. But such an effort may have been premature given the exploratory nature of the three essays.

Eduardo Matos Moctezuma was General Coordinator of Proyecto Templo Mayor which conducted the excavation of the Great Temple. His essay traces the history of discoveries that led to the excavation, linking this to general research on Aztecs in Mexico. He summarizes the seven stages of development of the temple under Aztec rule and provides the first published summary of the offerings found in various locations in
the Great Temple. He also analyzes the two sets of symbolisms that the temple represents. First, the Great Temple is actually twin temples dedicated to two important Aztec gods: (1) Tlaloc, god of rain, water, and agricultural production; and (2) Huitzilopochtli, god of war, conquest, and tribute. This structure is then analyzed in terms of both the history of Aztecs and their mythology. Second, the Great Temple is the symbolic integrator of the two sources of Aztec wealth: (1) agricultural and craft production; and (2) tribute paid by subject communities. The many offerings are both symbols of submission to Aztec rule, and evidence of integration of peripheral communities into the empire.

Johanna Broda, a major figure in Mexican anthropology and a noted authority on the Aztecs, analyzes the Great Temple as ritual space. Professor Broda seeks to demonstrate that in addition to the more-or-less obvious state functions of the temple—legitimation of Aztec elite's political power—the temple and its buried offerings derive from ancient, pre-Aztec cosmological traditions. Her analysis of the over 7,000 offerings found in more than 100 different caches within the temple is used to explore Aztec "cosmovision." Cosmovision in "Spanish and German usage, denotes the structured view in which the ancient Mesoamericans combined their notions of cosmology relating to time and space into a systematic whole. This term is thus somewhat more specific than the English terms 'cosmology' and 'worldview' " (p. 108, note 1).

It is difficult to do justice to the subtlety and insight of Broda's analysis without repeating it entirely. Two themes will serve as examples. First there is the analysis of the water, mountain, underworld, and fertility symbolism. In Mesoamerican symbolism, mountains are thought to contain water, and hence are its source. This water is connected to the sea since the earth is thought to float upon the sea. This domain of water, which is crucial to agriculture is also an underworld and domain of the dead. This symbolism is not arbitrary:

This cosmovision was inspired by and received a continuous reinforcement from the natural environment of Mesoamerica, a volcanic territory with conspicuous mountain peaks where the rain-bringing clouds assemble. Clouds and fog also gather in the steep valleys and canyons of the broken landscape. Caves are another particularly frequent feature of this country... (p. 97).

This interpretation is supported by contemporary ethnography that finds similar beliefs among various villagers in Mesoamerica, documented in a postscript to this chapter.

The second theme is that of human sacrifice. Professor Broda points out that there are several types of human sacrifices, associated with different gods. The most common was the heart sacrifice for victims offered to the sun. Victims offered to maize goddesses were decapitated, others were thrown into pools or locked in caves (p. 70). There were also child sacrifices aimed at propitiating Tlaloc and renewing rains.
Children were sacrificed because they symbolized the dwarf servants of Tlaloc (p. 88). Victims were chosen because of physical resemblance to the rain gods (p. 95). The most elaborate sacrifices occurred in association with expansions of the temple: “The sacrifices of war prisoners in connection with these amplifications clearly had the effect of demonstrating the power of the conquerors. It was political power transformed into supernatural power by means of sacrifices (p. 66, emphasis in original). That Aztec leaders invited both leaders of subject communities, and hostile leaders to these sacrifices supports this interpretation.

Offerings, like sacrifices, were made in several ways toward different ends. Offerings were made: (1) in caches; (2) inside urns; and (3) inside walls and floors. Analysis of these offerings remains too preliminary to establish firm patterns of association. The presence of small fish replicas inside caches suggests connection with Tlaloc-water-sea symbolism. Some other offerings are probably symbols of tribute from peripheral areas. The discovery of a Toltec mask points to an effort to connect Aztec gods with older gods. Future studies of these offerings promise further insight into Aztec cosmovision.

In the final chapter Professor Carrasco explores the linkages between myth, terror, and the Great Temple. He uses myth as a key to uncovering “the central paradigms of orientation and control” of culture. The Great Temple is thus a puzzle and a scandal. The puzzle is the plan of arrangement of its parts; the scandal is human sacrifice, especially the considerable increase in scale of sacrifice in the last eighty years of the Aztec empire. He uses Paul Wheatley’s (1971) insight that traditional cities were organized as symbols of the cosmic order, as his major analytic tool.

Specifically, Tenochtitlan is the center of the world: a floating city is the capital of the greatest earthly empire, the earth is land floating on the sea. The Great Temple is the center of the city. Further insights are gained by exploring the myth of Huitzilopochtli’s birth. According to the myth a woman, Coatlicue, becomes pregnant. Her sister, Coyolxauhqui, leads her four hundred brothers up the hill of Coatepec to avenge their honor by killing her. Coatlicue is warned, and gives birth to Huitzilopochtli who slays the brothers and dismembers Coyolxauhqui (Matos retells the myth pp. 49-55). This myth is reflected in the structure of the temple and the stone symbolizing the dismembered Coyolxauhqui found at the foot of the steps to Huitzilopochtli’s temple (shown on the dustjacket and plate 1). In this myth is also found the mythical justification for the sacrifice of captives and the upsurge in human sacrifice.

It is here that Carrasco’s account is especially insightful. He begins by examining the many types of sacrifice, elaborating on Broda’s account. He points out that the Aztec empire was very fragile and subject to disruption by rebellion either with the elite at Tenochtitlan or by peripheral subjects. This promotes greater levels of sacrifice both to propitiate the gods and to demonstrate the empire’s power. This is a classic example of “Romer’s Rule,” that a major change (evolution)
occurs in order to conserve an existing way of life. Thus, the ancient practice of sacrifice expanded in order to preserve Aztec dominance and especially the cosmological order which justified it, and was not a response to a protein deficiency as argued by Harner (1977) and Harris (1977). Finally, Carrasco notes that Aztec survivors of the Spanish conquest could use the same myth as an cosmic explanation of their defeat: a failure in sacrifices was a failure to kill the four hundred brothers, who in the form of Spaniards, finally succeeded in their attack.

This collection is singularly appropriate for review in the centennial of the births of Pitirim Sorokin and Arnold Toynbee because of the place of ideology in the form of myth in the rise and fall of a civilization. While the authors, Carrasco in particular, tend to favor the ideational side of the debate over the primacy of material conditions or ideas in the processes of change, they are not dogmatic in their stance. Rather, all explore the ways in which material conditions—trade, tribute, warfare—and mythology can be used to illuminate the understanding of the other. Collectively they contribute to our understanding of the complex workings of civilizations.

These essays re-examine old questions, open new questions, and suggest—at least implicitly—many comparisons with other civilizations. The explorations of the connections between material and ideological culture are incisive and stimulating. The eclectic use of evidence—from archaeology, ethnohistory, mythology, pre-columbian art, and anthropology—is refreshing. Members of ISCSC and readers of Comparative Civilizations Review will find this an interesting and rewarding volume.

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Bibliography


