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Miguel León Portilla. *Time and Reality in the Thought of the Maya*

Elpidio Laguna

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are felt to lose much of their meaning;" 2) "the fact that many of the
texts were collected by Spanish missionaries or their catechized native
assistants makes them even more suspicious, as these collectors were
likely subject to various kinds of Euro-Christian influence." León Porti-
lla's indication that for him as well as for his critics the sources remain the
same, brings his further arguments (interspersed throughout the book)
to the arena of comparative analytical methodologies rather than into,
and away from, a futile discussion of the "authenticity" of texts that
actually either supports or questions any conclusions based on them for
modern scholarship, whether they come from linguistics, textual anal-
ysis or colonial discourse analysis. If the sources can be questioned be-
cause they are mediated by (European) alphabetically inscribed codes or
by "Euro-Christian (ideological) influence," implying that no true ren-
dition of Aztec thought and culture can be extricated from them, then,
no sensible claim can be laid that an alternate critical analysis will have
access to the thought and worldvision of a purportedly "pure," pre-in-
scribed informer, who will be surmised as unmediated in his delivery of
information by the experience of the conquest and his internalization
of the modes of inscription and ideology of the interrogant.

But León Portilla, again, in his characteristic a-polemical attitude,
does not claim this common problem as a legitimization for his conclu-
sions or the well-earned "authority" of his work. Throughout the book
he re-evaluates his sources, brings into this re-evaluation the concerns
and criticisms of fellow scholars (even in the addition of two updated
Appendices), incorporates valid contributions formulated by his critics,
and offers us, once again, a challenging and honest view of Aztec
thought and culture.

Elpidio Laguna

Miguel León Portilla. *Time and Reality in the Thought of the Maya*. 2nd.
enlarged edition. Foreword by Sir J. Eric S. Thompson, Appendix by
Alfonso Villa Rojas. Translated by Charles L. Boiles, Fernando Horcas-
tas and the Author. Norman and London: University of Oklahoma

One would expect that this book would be seriously affected by León
Portilla's involvement in the past twelve years with the toils of being a
representative of his country and a diplomat in other countries. Fortu-
nately for everyone, it is not so. Besides the revised and updated original
text, this edition is physically (and qualitatively) doubled by Appendix A,
"The concepts of space and time among the contemporary Maya" by
Alfonso Villas Rojas, and Appendix B, "Recent contributions to the
theme of this book" by the author himself.

Villas Rojas's contribution projects the text, and the scholarship, to
afford the reader a healthily "presentist" perspective from the realm of
cultural anthropology, without falling into the snares of collusive judg-
ments due to imprecisions of socio-historical appreciations. There is no
risk of running aground here in the shoals of historical "present-centredness." Villas Rojas's text, without ever being coercive to the reader, brings the reader to realize that just as the archeo-Mayanist searches for clues and traces into the splendorous Mayan past, so does the ethnohistorian who observes contemporary Mayan communities. The situation (that of the archeo-Mayanist and the ethnohistorian) is one where science seeks knowledge of "reality," and reality shows itself to be a pluri-axial metaphor of Time.

As is customary in León Portilla's scholarly trajectory, critical and polemic issues are brought to the surface, compared and contrasted with the most recent scholarship to the time of publication, and re-integrated into what León Portilla introduces with the assertion: "once again I join the 'dialogue' of those concerned with time and space in the thought of the Maya," a dialogue he rejoins in order to bring his research to a disciplinary parity with current developments in the knowledge of the notions of time and space in a fascinating civilization.

Yet, it seems to me, there is a larger problem that this book addresses in an indirect way, one not as fascinating as it is troubling. Mayan studies, like so many other fields of study in the human sciences, are becoming fragmented. Mayanists from different countries, due to circumstances that restrain or limit their way of doing research, are reduplicating efforts and their knowledge is progressively becoming an in-bred discourse. When León Portilla surveys "nooks and crannies" of hypotheses about the notions of time and space in Mayan civilization he seems to be rearranging different views into a more cohesive corpus of consensus. The reason is that, for instance, US Mayanists, European and Latin American Mayanists seem not to be reading each other's investigations, so that each regional group of scholars is doing all the work by themselves, all over again. Even in this extradisciplinary aspect, this book has a message to offer us. If Mayan studies become nationally circumscribed, we will have in a couple of decades as many Mayan civilizations as there are nation-bound mayanists.

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A COMPARATIVE TEXT


This is a textbook. It is somewhat difficult to call it an introductory textbook, because the average or even the fairly well-informed American high-school graduate would find himself hopelessly out of his depth in these studies. In effect it is a textbook for an honors-program introduction to non-Western civilizations. It is also a good refresher for