RECENT WORKS ON AZTEC HISTORY

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FLORENTINE CODEX: INTRODUCTIONS AND INDICES. By ARTHUR J. O. ANDERSON and CHARLES E. DIBBLE. (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1982. Pp. 137. $35.00.)

FLORENTINE CODEX, BOOK 2: THE CEREMONIES. By ARTHUR J. O. ANDERSON and CHARLES E. DIBBLE. (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1981. Pp. 247. $45.00.)

THE PHOENIX OF THE WESTERN WORLD: QUETZALCOATL AND THE SKY RELIGION. By BURR CARTWRIGHT BRUNDAGE. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982. Pp. 349. $17.50.)

CODEX EN CRUZ. By CHARLES E. DIBBLE. *Atlas* in separate volume. (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1981. Pp. 68. 2 volumes. ($45.00.)

THE TOLTEC HERITAGE: FROM THE FALL OF TULA TO THE RISE OF TENOCHTITLAN. By NIGEL DAVIES. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980. Pp. 401. $17.50.)

THE AZTECS: A HISTORY. By NIGEL DAVIES. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973. Pp. 363. $15.95 hardcover, $7.95 paperback.)

This group of books deal with the Aztecs, the Nahuatl-speaking people from the Basin of Mexico who dominated much of Mesoamerica at the time of the Spanish Conquest. Because the Aztecs were a literate civilization, a host of documents exist describing their lifeways, customs, and history. These records fall into three categories: codices, pictoglyphic books transcribed before or directly after the conquest; anales, transcriptions of oral interpretations written in Spanish or Nahuatl using alphabetic script; and descriptions of the conquest and the period immediately following, generally written by Spaniards. Two of the volumes reviewed here, the *Florentine Codex: Introductions and Indices* and the *Florentine Codex, Book 2*, are anales compiled by Fray Bernardino de Sahagun that describe Aztec customs. The *Codex en Cruz* is a document written in pictoglyphic script recounting the history of the Aztecs' principal ally, Texcoco. *The Toltec Heritage* and *The Aztecs*, both written by ethnohistorian

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Nigel Davies, present the history of the Basin of Mexico from the fall of Tula, an earlier civilization from which the Aztecs claimed cultural descent, to the Spanish Conquest. In contrast, *The Phoenix of the Western World* looks at the sky religion of Quetzalcoatl, one of the four interwoven, yet distinct, faiths of the Aztec people.

The Florentine Codex is an exceptional document that was compiled by Sahagun in early postconquest times. It deals with all elements of Aztec life: their gods and ceremonies, the origin of the gods, soothsayers, omens, rhetoric and moral philosophy, cosmology, the nobility, merchants, the common man, the natural environment, and the conquest. *The Florentine Codex* consists of thirteen parts: an introductory volume and twelve books, each devoted to a different aspect of Aztec society. The first volume reviewed here, *Introductions and Indices*, contains Sahagun's prologues, plus several essays by Arthur Anderson and Charles Dibble on Sahagun's life, the history of the codex, the date of its composition, and other related topics. Anderson and Dibble rightly point out that Sahagun was the true father of modern ethnography. He was the first scholar to use interviewing as a method of data collection, and he was careful to check contradictory information by interviewing different informants, often several times. The second volume, *Book 2: The Ceremonies*, describes the sequence of Aztec ritual. The first nineteen chapters summarize the feasting calendar, while the next nineteen present the details of ritual and debt-payment rendered during each feast. Also included is an appendix that gives information on different temples, infrequently held ceremonies, modes of autosacrifice, the giving of offerings, lists of temple personnel and their functions, and transcriptions of prayers and songs. Both volumes are published in double-column format, the right in Spanish or Nahuatl, the left in English. The serious student thus has the opportunity to refer to the original text, not simply to translations or descriptive summaries.

The *Codex en Cruz* is a history of the Basin of Mexico as events were understood and recorded in Texcoco and in two neighboring subject towns, Tepetlaoztoc and Chiauhtla. The first chapter presents the history, description, and interpretation of the codex. The *Codex en Cruz*, Dibble concludes, was probably transcribed by an inhabitant of Chiauhtla within thirty years after the conquest. The transcriber was thoroughly familiar with the history of the Texcocan realm, as is shown by the fact that the events depicted and their dates generally correspond with those reported elsewhere. The document, which was written on *amatl* paper, is organized in fifty-two-year units beginning in A.D. 1402. Each cycle or unit is divided into four quarters of thirteen years, each of which consists of a column that contains historical information rendered in hieroglypic form. The next four chapters present this information, as interpreted by Dibble. Each chapter discusses a fifty-two-year cycle. Oc-

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casionally columns are blank, which means that no event of particular significance occurred during the year in question. Most of the events described concern conquests and royal births, accessions, marriages, and deaths. Many of the glyphs discuss the political history of Tenochtitlan, the Aztec capital and Texcoco's major ally. Cross-references abound, many of which have been reproduced from other ethnohistoric sources. Full reproductions of several copies of the *Codex en Cruz* are published in the *Atlas*, a separate volume that accompanies the text.

While the *Codex en Cruz* and *Florentine Codex* are ethnohistoric accounts describing local events, *The Phoenix of the Western World*, *The Toltec Heritage*, and *The Aztecs* are more synthetic works. *The Phoenix* is a general essay on the great pre-Columbian god, Quetzalcoatl, and his powerful cult of priests. Burr Cartwright Brundage points out that Aztec religion was actually a mixture of four faiths: that of fire, centered around the god Xuihteuctli; that of the earth and its principal deity, Tlaloc, the rain god; that of Tezcatlipoca; and that of Quetzalcoatl. The religion of the feathered serpent, Brundage contends, is probably of Gulf Coast derivation because representations of Quetzalcoatl or his avatars occur there earlier than in other parts of Mesoamerica. Moreover, this religion apparently was an elite class cult, with only limited participation by commoners. Brundage first discusses the sky religion in general terms: its juxtapositioning with the earth cult; its origin and spread; the role of Quetzalcoatl as the night sky; his role in creation; and his place in Mesoamerican religious thought. Pre-Columbian man believed that Quetzalcoatl was a polymorphous deity, and Brundage devotes an entire chapter to his many manifestations as demiurge, culture hero, and ancestor. Quetzalcoatl's avatar, Ehecatl the wind god, is also discussed in detail. Brundage looks at Quetzalcoatl the priest, sacrificer, and sorcerer, at the feathered serpent as god of the warriors, and at his relationship with the underworld and the deity Xolotl. *The Phoenix* concludes with an examination of Quetzalcoatl's principal adversary, Tezcatlipoca. Virtually the entire chapter is devoted to the conflict between the two deities in Tula, Quetzalcoatl's subsequent flight to Cholula, where his religious cult was firmly established, and his later arrival in Yucatán. Brundage points out that sometimes the myth involves the acts of real persons, at other times the deeds of the deity. The informed reader with a background in archaeology will often disagree with the interpretations that Brundage offers, divorced as they are from what is known about the prehistory of Mesoamerica. The lay reader, on the other hand, may well become inundated by the details of the text, where Brundage frequently presents different versions of the myths and legends.

The Toltec Heritage and *The Aztecs* describe the history of the Basin of Mexico from the collapse of Toltec civilization to the fall of Tenochtitlan and the Aztec empire. In recounting Aztec history, Nigel Davies relies

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almost exclusively on ethnohistoric records and documentary accounts over which he has excellent control. The first installment of this history, *The Toltec Heritage*, deals with the period from A.D. 1175 to 1428 when the Aztecs, with Texcocoan aid, toppled the Tepanec empire of Tezozomoc of Azcapotzalco. Davies begins by considering the Toltec diaspora and the Chichimec-Teochichimec invasions from the northern frontier, giving special attention to the Tepanec, Acolhua, and Mexica (Aztec) migrations. Davies examines the story of the great Chichimec chieftain, Xoltl, and finds that the ethnohistoric accounts of his empire are largely apocryphal, belonging more to legend than to ethnohistory. He also documents the history of Tenayuca and Culhuacan and concludes that these centers were the last bastions of Toltec civilization following the abandonment of Tula. Davies then looks at the Mexica migration into the Basin of Mexico, their arrival at Chapultepec on the western shore of Lake Texcoco, their expulsion by a coalition of city-states, their captivity in Culhuacan, and the founding of first Tenochtitlan and then Tlatelolco. The next chapter deals with the formation of the Tepanec empire under Tezozomoc, the Xaltocan and Texcocan wars, and the rise of the Aztecs as an ally of Azcapotzalco. Davies also describes the history of Chalco, the third claimant to power over the Basin of Mexico, and the war between Chalco and the Tepanec-Mexica alliance during the reigns of the first three Aztec monarchs, Acamapichtli, Huitzilihuitl, and Chimalpopoca. *The Toltec Heritage* ends with a description of the Tepanec-Mexica war and the defeat of the last Atcapotzalcan king, Maxtla, at the hands of the Aztecs, Texcocans, and a few dissident groups of Tepanecs.

The Aztecs begins where *The Toltec Heritage* left off. Although there is some overlap in subject matter, the bulk of Davies's narrative deals with the imperial period, beginning with the road to conquest initiated by Moctezuma Ilhuicamina. Davies concludes that much of the Aztec expansion must be attributed to this great monarch. The contributions of Nezahualcoyotl, king of Texcoco, are also described, especially the role he played as counsel to Moctezuma. The feats of two later Aztec emperors, Ahuitzotl and Moctezuma Xocoyotzin, are also commented upon extensively. *The Aztecs* concludes with a detailed examination of the Spanish Conquest and its immediate aftermath. Davies correctly points out that Moctezuma's belief that Cortez was the god Quetzalcoatl come to regain his realm was probably a postconquest invention and that his seemingly cowardly attitude toward the Spaniards was primarily the result of the invaders' superiority in tactical organization and weaponry. Although Davies focuses mainly on history, he frequently includes information on social structure, religious practices, economic and commercial activity, and imperial organization. The empire, he maintains, was merely a collection of tributary provinces that supplied sumptuary goods for the support of the elite establishment. Davies suggests that local

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rulers were generally left in undisputed control of their kingdoms so long as yearly tribute quotas were met. This lack of political integration apparently had as much to do with Cortez's successes as any advantage in equipment and organization that the Spaniards enjoyed.

Why did the Aztec empire develop, and once formed, why did it take the shape it did? These are issues that the codices do not address as descriptive accounts of the history of the Basin of Mexico. Similarly, Brundage's concern is with the Aztec mind, with the plethora of beliefs that formed the sky religion and how that knowledge was related to other bodies of Aztec ideo-religious thought. Nigel Davies, however, deals with these topics, especially in *The Toltec Heritage*, his most recent work. He argues that civilizations are the result of complex underlying causes involving several factors. He believes that "an interplay of religious and material factors, combined with an urge for lavish display that cannot be viewed solely in terms of economic gain" was the principal reason why the Aztecs began their road to conquest. Moreover, cities that had carved out imperial domains before the Mexica expansion were those that contained different ethnic groups with different cultural heritages. The Mexica, Davies submits, were a blend of indigenous Chinampa folk, Chichimecs, Teochichimecs, Tolteca-Chichimecs, and Toltecs, to name a few strains. A resulting kind of a cultural hybrid vigor was apparently an element behind the empire-building process. These cultural traditions derived from the northern frontier. Davies argues that environmental desiccation in early postclassic times caused a contraction of the northern agricultural frontier, and with this contraction came infiltrations by various cultural groups that previously had earned a living by simple farming or hunting and gathering. The empire being such a fragile entity is attributed to factional rivalry among the rulers of different centers. This rivalry was largely due to the heavy tribute that conquered cities were required to pay. According to Davies, before the rise of Tenochtitlan, each petty ruler "waged an endless struggle to impose tribute on his neighbors; and when successful he exacted a heavy levy. . . . The Aztecs repeated this pattern on a vaster scale, and the history of their empire is one long record of rebellions arising from attempts to avoid their tribute levy and of reconquest, often leading to the imposition of an even larger levy" (p. 344).

Regrettably, the scenario that Davies paints explains little of the history of the Basin of Mexico. First, the suggestion that civilizational development depends, even in part, on variety in cultural heritage is patently absurd. Would Davies claim that the Metropolitan Opera owes its existence to ethnic barrios on New York's lower side? I feel sure that he would not. General developments such as empire formation should be explained by polythetic sets of generic causes common to the class of phenomena. All empires known to history have formed in the wake of

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severe economic crises at home; the system that is successful in empire-building is the one that maintains some combination of technological, demographic, organizational, and transportational advantage over the others. This process accounts for the formation of the Sumerian, Persian, Athenian, Roman Ottoman, British, Japanese, and American empires. In all cases, imperial organization also involves marked inequities in wealth distribution and economic power, with most goods flowing up the administrative hierarchy. Peasant-produced goods in the provinces were procured cheaply. These goods were subsequently transformed into more costly consumables by imperial monopolies for ultimate sale throughout the provincial domain. This process served to concentrate wealth in the imperial capital and its immediate hinterland and to keep the provinces economically depressed, thereby improving the fitness of the heartland of the empire.

Second, I question the notion so often recounted by the documentary sources that various populations migrated into the basin immediately after Tula's collapse. Although the native records are in general agreement on this issue, the archaeological record unfortunately is not. Nowhere is there any overwhelming body of evidence documenting mass migrations on the scale that Davies suggests. During periods when the basin was unified as a single polity, the general pattern involved large, primate urban centers, with most of the rural population residing within a short radius of the political capital. During the late Toltec period (A.D. 950–1200), the northern basin was the preferred locus for settlement because Tula, the major center, was located only a few kilometers to the northwest. In contrast, during the Early Aztec period (A.D. 1200–1400), when the region was politically fragmented, populations were confined to areas containing dependable hydraulic resources, and the northern basin, including the Tula region, was largely unoccupied. According to Davies, a shift to drier rainfall conditions is indicated. Although the transition from late Toltec to early Aztec did involve rearrangements in population distribution, the distances traveled were not particularly great. Moreover, population levels during the transition remained relatively stable. The evidence thus indicates that the demographic shift was mainly a local phenomenon and that if the shift involved immigrants from the northern frontier, their numbers were small. Their impact on the history of the Basin of Mexico was therefore very small. Support for mass migration rests on Davies's claim that late Toltec pottery in the southern basin, the ceramic complex known as Aztec I, is contemporary, yet quite distinct from the Toltec-Mazapan materials found at Tollan Phase Tula and other sites in the northern basin. Davies interprets this claim as evidence that users of a new ceramic complex moved into central Mexico during postclassic times, but his use of these data is faulty. Chronometric dating of Mazapan and Aztec I deposits

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indicates that the two complexes were not contemporary. Rather, the Mazapan complex precedes Aztec I by several centuries. The variability noted reflects stylistic change through time, not migrations of new ceramic-using peoples into the region.

Davies's failure to explain Aztec imperial development stems from his ignorance of the archaeological record of the postclassic period plus a particularistic perspective that accounts for organizational developments in unique cultural historical terms. In my opinion, mainstream patterns in organizational behavior should be explained by sets of relational statements that stipulate classes of structure and the conditions under which classes of behavior will be expected, irrespective of time or space. All civilizations are problem-solving entities. The problems solved by the state, the political apparatus governing decision-making in civilizations, are of two types. On the one hand, all civilizations experience economic stress, and that stress frequently derives from environmental disturbances that upset the agricultural sector of economy. A basic adaptive strategy of preindustrial states, then, is to even out, to energy average fluctuations in the agricultural economy, especially in settings where environmental stress is uncertain or unpredictable. This process may be accomplished in a number of ways: by intensification of the agrarian support base; by diversification of the economy; by increases in the spatial scale of the political unit, or by all three. On the other hand, because occupancy of political offices always involves preferred access to state coffers, added material advantages frequently accrue to persons holding decision-making positions. Political elites thus will often engage in highly self-serving behavior to maintain dominance. This tendency means that certain segments of the top-ranking socioeconomic stratum will be alienated in favor of political clienteles and that government positions will be highly sought after. Disenfranchised elites, however, must be placated for the state effectively to buffer problems affecting the agricultural economy. The solution to this problem is the establishment of a tributary domain aimed at extracting sumptuary goods, with the goods so obtained redistributed to dissident nobles as sociopolitical conditions dictate.

I agree with Nigel Davies that rivalry among elites in various cities was a uniformitarian condition affecting political behavior in pre-Hispanic times and that the primary reason why rivalry existed was because of large tribute levies. I do not agree that tribute was obtained mainly to subsidize lavish elite displays or that this tendency was caused by inherent compulsion or urges. As I have pointed out, the establishment of tributary domain is principally a function of political exigency. In addition, elite goods were not the only form of tribute extracted because the Mexica also obtained significant amounts of basic foodstuffs from conquered territories. The tally in foodstuffs was considerable, amounting

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to tens of thousands of tons of material annually. This tribute was always supplied by provinces within a 150-kilometer radius of Tenochititlan because of the high cost of overland transport. This grain was used in a variety of system-serving and self-serving ways, including the maintenance of the nobility, rewards to distinguished merchants, artisans, and soldiers, and the support of the general population of the capital. The Aztec roadway system mirrored Tenochititlan's tributary requirements; the transportation system was designed to facilitate the bulk movement of goods to and from the capital, and most of its construction occurred after the empire was established.

I attribute Tenochititlan's being the political capital and the Basin of Mexico the seat of imperial power to scale differences in population distribution. During pre-Aztec times, population densities were fairly even throughout central Mexico. Although the political systems centered at Tula and Teotihuacan were somewhat larger than their neighbors, these states enjoyed no great demographic advantage over units in neighboring Puebla-Tlaxcala, Morelos, and the Valley of Toluca. Demographic parity, I submit, played an instrumental role in inhibiting imperial development of the Mexica type. Teotihuacan and Tula, however, controlled one key resource—obsidian—and their monopoly over obsidian production and distribution constituted a basis for extracting significant amounts of goods from large hinterlands. During the Aztec period, in contrast, the population of the Basin of Mexico grew at a rate greatly exceeding that in neighboring regions. This development was made possible by the widespread adoption of raised field or chinampa agriculture by the inhabitants of lakeshore towns in the basin, an innovation that permitted marked demographic growth. In the basin, those cities that were major power centers, Chalco, Xochimilco, Azcapotzalco, Culhuacan, Xaltocan, and Tenochtitlan, had a subsistence base that was firmly rooted in raised-field agriculture, and Tenochtitlan in turn had access to the largest chinampa district within its local environs. This situation meant that once the transition to chinampa agriculture began, the potential for the Mexica to grow numerically far outstripped that of other cities in the basin. Hence arose the eventual domination of the Aztecs over other polities in the basin and the ultimate preeminence of the basin over other parts of Mesoamerica.

The six books reviewed here primarily discuss descriptive history. Davies's approach, however, is grounded in ethnic heritage and vitalism, and therefore seems to me far from satisfying. The alternative explanation that I have sketched accounts for the trajectory of Aztec history in nomothetic rather than particularistic terms. This criticism does not imply that the research strategy pursued by Aztec ethnohistorians is wholly inadequate because their objective frequently is simply to recount or sometimes to reconstruct sequences of events that are portrayed in the

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documentary sources. In most instances, that history narrates great deeds done by great men, primarily nobles. While this aim is a legitimate scholarly endeavor, history is more than a descriptive chronicle of past events. The sequences themselves need to be explained. There is obviously still much to do in this regard.

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