

AZTEC RELIGION AND WARFARE:
Past and Present Perspectives

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- THE AZTECS: PEOPLE OF THE SUN.* By ALFONSO CASO. Translated by LOWELL DUNHAM. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958. First paperback printing, 1988. Pp. 123. \$16.95 paper.)
- SMOKE AND MIST: MESOAMERICAN STUDIES IN MEMORY OF THELMA D. SULLIVAN.* 2 volumes. Edited by J. KATHRYN JOSSERAND and KAREN DAKIN. (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports International Series 402, 1988. Pp. 763.)
- THE HUMAN BODY AND IDEOLOGY: CONCEPTS OF THE ANCIENT NAHUAS.* 2 volumes. By ALFREDO LOPEZ AUSTIN. Translated by THELMA ORTIZ DE MONTELLANO and BERNARD ORTIZ DE MONTELLANO. (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1988. Pp. 449, 315. \$65.00.)
- THE GREAT TEMPLE OF THE AZTECS: TREASURES OF TENOCHTITLAN.* By EDUARDO MATOS MOCTEZUMA. Translated by DORIS HEYDEN. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988. Pp. 192. \$29.95.)
- THE GREAT TEMPLE OF TENOCHTITLAN: CENTER AND PERIPHERY IN THE AZTEC WORLD.* By JOHANNA BRODA, DAVID CARRASCO, and EDUARDO MATOS MOCTEZUMA. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987. Pp. 184. \$38.00.)
- THE AZTEC TEMPLO MAYOR: A SYMPOSIUM AT DUMBARTON OAKS, 8TH AND 9TH OCTOBER 1983.* Edited by ELIZABETH HILL BOONE. (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1987. Pp. 513. \$40.00.)
- AZTEC WARFARE: IMPERIAL EXPANSION AND POLITICAL CONTROL.* By ROSS HASSIG. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988. Pp. 404. \$29.95.)
- LOS DESPOTAS ARMADOS: UN ESPECTRO DE LA GUERRA PREHISPANICA.* By JOSE LAMEIRAS. (Zamora: El Colegio de Michoacán, 1985. Pp. 229.)

Why do the Aztecs attract more than their share of scholarly attention? Some investigators must be drawn by the sensationalism of Aztec religion or lured by the drama of confrontation between Aztec and Spaniard. Others cannot resist the intricacy and beauty of Aztec iconography

and symbolism. Still others are attracted to the quality of Aztec ethnohistory, which features lengthy native accounts of political intrigue, systematic surveys of local human geography, and encyclopedic descriptions of Aztec culture by early European observers. The large corpus of Aztec materials offers formidable intellectual challenges as well as ample opportunities for professional development.

Has the volume of Aztec scholarship improved general understanding of Aztec culture? A comparison of the new paperback edition of Alfonso Caso's *The Aztecs: People of the Sun*, thirty years after its first appearance, with a series of more recent studies allows scholars to survey what has changed in Aztec studies and what has not.

Caso's popular account of Aztec religion is a remarkably effective synthesis of two sources of information. One source consists of the sixteenth-century accounts of Aztec religion compiled by Spanish friars working in Mexico (Bernardino de Sahagún, Diego Durán, Gerónimo Mendeita, and their colleagues). The other source is the iconography of gods and rites in Aztec sculpture and pictorial manuscripts. Appealing and instructive illustrations from the native codices, redrawn by Miguel Covarrubias, enable the reader to follow closely Caso's discussion of religious iconography.

Caso presents a wide range of topics: the organization of time and space, creation myths, major deities of the Aztec pantheon, conceptions of afterlife, calendrical ceremonies and human sacrifice, ritual dances and games, the priesthood, and the role of religion in the rise and fall of Aztec civilization. Caso supplies information to meet Western definitions of religion but also adds topics that Westerners would not normally think of as religious (such as the ballgame called *patolli*). The presentation is topical, including Caso's discussion of Aztec deities, in which each god is revealed as a composite of elements of iconography, myth, augury, and ritual. The lack of integration is noticeable even to Caso, who attributes it to the very nature of Aztec religion: "Aztec religion was in the vast majority of concepts a collection of ideas and practices derived from much older theogonic concepts and ritual practices" (p. 10).

In lieu of a coherence of ideas, Caso achieves thematic unity by following the example of Ruth Benedict's *Patterns of Culture* (1934). He presents Aztec culture as a more or less consistent pattern of emotion and action. Caso frequently refers to a single tenet of Aztec religion: the need of humans to nourish the gods with human blood and human hearts, in which he finds the mainspring of Aztec culture.

Caso leaves no doubt that religion was the dominating, driving force in Aztec history: "their entire existence revolved around their religion and . . . there was not a single act, public or private, that was not tinged by religious sentiment" (p. 8). Religion provided the motive for Aztec imperial expansion. The Aztecs, soldiers of the sun and collab-

orators of the gods, "kept up a constant expansion of their territorial conquests, until their leaders had carried the power of Tenochtitlan to the Atlantic and Pacific coasts" (p. 94). But religion also imposed a fatal limitation on Aztec development. The Aztecs lacked "a progressive ideal that would have led them to conceive of life as something more than an invariable, meticulous repetition of ceremonies in honor of the gods" (p. 96). Religion took the place of technical invention, and when the conquest took the Aztecs by surprise, they fell before a more progressive Western culture.

How does Caso's approach compare to more recent scholarship? *Smoke and Mist*, a collection of forty essays by as many authors analyzing Mesoamerican language and culture, presents several differences worthy of comment. One is the increased emphasis on historiography. The first quarter of *Smoke and Mist* contains historiographic studies of the very sources that Caso utilized most: Sahagún, Durán, and the *Codex Borbonicus*. The questions considered include the European models for the illustrations in Sahagún's works (Ellen Taylor Baird), the circumstances surrounding the production of the Madrid manuscript of Durán's *Historia* (Elizabeth Hill Boone) and the Vienna manuscript of Cortés's second "Carta de relación" (Wayne Ruwet), the sources of ethnographic information in Durán's "Libro de ritos" and "Calendario antiguo" (Stephen Colston) and in Alonso de Molina's "Confesionario mayor" (Charles Dibble), and the original provenance of the pictorial *Codex Borbonicus* (H.B. Nicholson). Such questions indicate an increased awareness that texts embody perspectives. Ethnohistorical documents were once regarded as either more or less reliable. Now they are read as palimpsests that bear the imprints of native informant, Western interrogator, copiest, and publisher, each having a perspective resulting from locale, gender, class, and history. Current trends in literary and cultural analysis argue strongly for careful consideration of textual construction,¹ and scholars of Aztec culture seem to have taken this lesson to heart.

Second, these essays witness the utilization of new sources of information on Aztec culture. In *Smoke and Mist*, ten of the forty essays deal with various aspects of the Nahuatl (Aztec) language. This proportion is certainly appropriate in a collection dedicated to Thelma Sullivan, a major Nahuatl scholar whose essay "Tlaloc: A New Etymological Interpretation of the God's Name and What It Reveals of His Essence and Nature" (1972) sparked important advances in understanding this important Aztec deity. As demonstrated in essays by Jonathan Amith, Richard Andrews, and Doris Bartholomew and Earl Brockway, not only etymology but grammar and semantics can enhance understanding of the Nahuatl worldview. A second newly utilized source of information are legal documents from the colonial period. Wills, bills of sale, land grants, and lawsuits contain statements of principle and a record of actions that

express the native view as applied to the novel circumstances of colonial administration. Susan Kellogg's essay on Aztec kinship and gender particularly demonstrates the value of such documents.

Third, several essays diverge from Caso's position that the Aztecs were passive human receptacles for an autonomous and dominating religion. Rather, religion (and other aspects of culture) are viewed by these essayists as manipulable, serving discernible individual or class interests. Cecelia Klein makes this argument most forcefully, offering evidence that Cihuacoatl and her cult were not simply adopted into the Aztec pantheon but were appropriated as a sign of victory over the Chinampaneca. Betty Ann Brown and Franke Neumann arrive at a similar conclusion regarding the adoption of the god Otontecuhtli and the feast of Xocotl Huetzi into the Aztec ritual calendar. In other essays, Esther Pasztor proposes that Tlaloc was taken into the Aztec pantheon to symbolize the legitimacy of Mexican hegemony, and Emily Umberger argues that the year dates assigned to the events of Aztec history were also chosen with an eye to validating Aztec rule.

Several essays indicate that manipulating culture to serve particular interests continued into the colonial period. Eloise Quiñones Keber argues that in the sixteenth century, the political and militaristic role ascribed to Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl was deemphasized and his priestly and penitential image was stressed because Christian priests sought native exemplars of their own social roles. James Lockhart points out that the change from Nahuatl to Spanish record keeping in native communities in eighteenth-century Mexico was less a matter of newly acquired language skills and more a question of operating effectively in a shifting local power structure. Regarding prehispanic Mexico, Frances Berdan explains that the goods handled by long-distance merchants are predictable given the merchants' desire to maximize profits under conditions of high transport costs. Berdan does not find it necessary to relate this choice to prevailing religious norms or cultural view.

All these essays make an effort to connect Aztec beliefs and practices to the social and ecological structures that made up Aztec life. The essays exemplify the entry of Marxist concepts of consciousness and ideology and ecological notions of adaptation and rational choice into Aztec studies. The result is that Aztec religion and culture now appear less arbitrary and particularistic and that the Aztecs seem not quite as exotic as they appear in Caso's book. The lack of integration that Caso found in Aztec religion is still recognized, but in these more recent essays, it is attributed to the heterogeneous and dynamic character of Aztec social life. As Kline observes, "No state-level society is uniform in ideology any more than it is in any other sphere. The very complexities and internal conflicts of such systems mandate a multiplicity of ideas and values. Beliefs, moreover, are constantly shifting in an expanding, increasingly

stratified society, and total inversions of function and meaning can occur' (*Smoke and Mist*, p. 250).

Many of the notable traits of scholarship in *Smoke and Mist* also characterize Alfredo López Austin's remarkable *The Human Body and Ideology*, now available in a fluid, very readable translation by Thelma Ortiz de Montellano and Bernard Ortiz de Montellano. The book's purpose is to describe Aztec concepts of the human body, its structure, and operation and to explain these concepts by reference to the society that produced them.

The Human Body and Ideology relies on three sources of data. The first is sixteenth- and seventeenth-century accounts of Aztec beliefs by chroniclers such as Sahagún, Francisco Hernández, Hernando Ruiz de Alarcón, and Jacino de la Serna. These accounts provide information on native astrology, herbal lore, shamanism, and sorcery. The second category of sources are Nahuatl word lists, principally those compiled by Sahagún and Molina, that name parts of the human body. The terminological structures and the etymology of individual words provide clues to Aztec concepts of the body and bodily functions. Third are accounts of the beliefs of contemporary Mesoamerican peoples, both Nahua and non-Nahua speakers, by ethnographers such as Hugo Burgos Guevara and Norma Flores Mota, George Foster, Antonio García de León, Calixta Guiteras Holmes, William Holland, Isabel Kelly, Michael Kearney, Oscar Lewis, William Madsen, Robert Redfield, Diana Ryesky, Alfonso Villa Rojas, Roberto Williams García, and Charles Wisdom. While López Austin's use of linguistic data is in line with current trends, his heavy reliance upon ethnographic evidence is unusual.

To what extent can ethnographic information be used in studies of pre-Hispanic peoples? Has the pre-Hispanic worldview been preserved through four and one-half centuries of social change? López Austin justifies his use of ethnographic data by arguing that ideology changes slowly among people who have been dominated by coercion and minimally integrated socially with the dominant group. Such conditions, he claims, have prevailed in the Indian communities of Mesoamerica. López Austin also argues that ideological change most often occurs through introduction of new elements that do minimal violence to the elements of the older orthodoxy. This process permits older images, ideas, and beliefs to persist even as their position within the ideological system shifts.

The presentation of these arguments is too brief to be entirely convincing, however. Also brief is the discussion of the guidelines developed by López Austin for using ethnographic sources in historical studies. What is ultimately persuasive is López Austin's use of ethnographic materials to illuminate otherwise obscure passages of the ethnohistoric record. He employs ethnography to particular advantage in the sixth chapter of his book, which describes Nahua concepts of animistic entities.

The animistic entities *tonalli*, *teyolia*, and *ihiyotl* constitute the core of Aztec beliefs about the human body. These vital forces direct life-giving processes and psychological functions such as cognition, inclination, and emotion. López Austin is able to show how these core concepts inform Aztec beliefs about birth and death, individual temperament, life cycle, illness and curing, sin and purity, sorcery, blood sacrifice, and cannibalism. In doing so, López Austin finds a coherence in Aztec beliefs that was not revealed either by Caso's more topical treatment of Aztec religion or by the shorter essays in *Smoke and Mist*. The definition of these core concepts and the deft demonstration of their implications for other areas of belief constitutes a major achievement. *The Human Body and Ideology* should be read by all who wish to understand the Mesoamerican worldview.

López Austin also succeeds admirably in demonstrating how beliefs about the human body buttressed Aztec social structure.² These beliefs provided a foundation for Aztec moral values and social control. They postulated physical differences between slaves and free men, young and old, men and women, nobles and commoners, thus providing the ideological basis for systems of kinship, gender, and social hierarchy. According to López Austin, this ideological function was crucial because in agrarian states such as the Aztec empire, where production is organized by peasant families who enjoy direct access to land, social inequality is maintained more through ideological domination than through physical coercion. The survival of the Aztec state therefore depended on a system of ideas that convinced commoners that they owed their physical integrity to the same vital forces that created elites and required the performance of elite ritual functions.

Two questions arise here as with any presentation of the dominant ideology thesis. One is, did the Aztec belief system inherently favor the ruling class? Was it fundamentally and logically a system that postulated social inequality rather than an egalitarian order? And second, if it was not inherently nonegalitarian, then to what extent did a nonegalitarian version of the belief system gain currency?

The answer to the first question seems to be that there was nothing inherently nonegalitarian in the Aztec belief system. This answer is López Austin's own, and it is borne out by many bits of evidence demonstrating the capacity of the Aztec belief system to generate resistance as well as conformity. For example, during the eighteenth century, a belief in the need to balance the *tonalli*'s heat by cooling the body prior to physical exertion gave rise to the custom of resting and drinking pulque before starting work. The consternation that this custom caused in an eighteenth-century Spanish observer is patent:

Although men throughout the world agree on the custom of resting after laboring, in this nation it is just the opposite: the natives rest before working,

following a custom so depraved and unreasonable that at a time when they all have to work, either at their own crops, or in rendering great obligatory personal services, or when making long journeys they are persuaded, either by the Demon or by a bad custom introduced in ancient times, that if, before beginning their labors, they become intoxicated, they will be stronger and more vigorous for the work awaiting them. (Serna, as quoted in López Austin, *The Human Body and Ideology*, p. 261)

To what extent, then, did a nonegalitarian ideology prevail? López Austin's materials suggest that the dominant ideology was widely accepted, but they largely convey the views of the native elite. A systematic review of sixteenth-century descriptions of life crisis ceremonies for commoners, folk customs, and folk sayings might reveal that commoners' beliefs and values were not much affected by the nonegalitarian propaganda of the Aztec ruling class. Thus the importance of ideology in maintaining the Aztec elite remains in question.

The Aztec Great Temple served as the center of state-sponsored religious activity. Its excavation between 1978 and 1982 provided much physical evidence of the belief systems and worldview of the Aztec elite. This evidence is described and analyzed in three recent publications. In *The Great Temple of the Aztecs*, Eduardo Matos Moctezuma, the heroic director of these excavations, describes what was found. Archaeologists uncovered a great temple mound, sixty-two meters square at the base, which had been constructed in seven major stages over the course of two hundred years. The temple was adorned by several pieces of monumental sculpture and was accompanied by more than a hundred buried offerings containing over seven thousand artifacts. Shrines to Tlaloc and Huitzilopochtli were preserved atop the temple mound dating to the oldest phase of construction. The mound was flanked by smaller buildings, five of which were excavated.

Matos's monograph provides a clear, well-organized description of these spectacular finds and also discusses their meaning. Further interpretation is to be found in *The Great Temple of Tenochtitlan* by Johanna Broda, David Carrasco, and Eduardo Matos Moctezuma and in *The Aztec Templo Mayor* edited by Elizabeth Hill Boone. The former consists of three long interpretive essays by each of the coauthors. The latter is a collection of sixteen shorter papers presented at the 1983 Dumbarton Oaks symposium on the Great Temple. The range of theoretical positions represented in these books resembles that in *Smoke and Mist*, not surprising given the fact that several authors contributed to both volumes.

Matos uses a heavily materialist framework of analysis. For example, he argues that the Great Temple was dedicated to Tlaloc, the god of rainfall, and Huitzilopochtli, the god of war, because religion is grounded in daily experience. Because agriculture and tribute were the mainstays of the Aztec economy, they were the natural foci of religious concern. The

importance of warfare is also reflected in much of the imagery of the Great Temple. The temple recreates Coatepec, the place where Huitzilopochtli, the sun, first triumphed over his siblings, the forces of darkness (the moon and stars). According to Matos, this symbolism demonstrates how religion often links activities of great economic importance to larger cosmic processes, in this case joining warfare and the solar cycle. At times, Matos seems to regard Aztec religion as an expression of popular consciousness, but he is also sensitive to the question of ideological dominance. The imagery of Huitzilopochtli's triumph not only celebrated warfare but announced to subject peoples the invulnerability of the Aztec army and its patron deity.

Several other authors perceive in the materials of the Great Temple efforts to communicate the elite ideology. Broda suggests that the successive enlargements of the temple glorified Aztec imperial expansion. Carrasco proposes that the recurring theme of center and periphery in Great Temple architecture and ritual demonstrated and legitimated the dominance of the imperial capital. Klein concludes that the images of autosacrifice in the Great Temple precinct publicized a new ruler's victory in warfare and his fitness to govern. Umberger suggests that the dated plaques from the Great Temple commemorate both historical events and the beginnings of solar cycles; the dates thus equate the ascendancy of the Aztecs with the appearance of the sun.

This wave of Marxist interpretation has provoked some opposition. Essays by López Austin and Richard Townsend both argue that the Great Temple materials are no simple projection of economic structures or utilitarian purposes. López Austin reaffirms that culture (a system of inherited beliefs and symbols) is an idiom through which social action must be channeled. He argues that at times, culture shapes action in historically important ways.

Townsend asserts that the Great Temple and its ritual should not be regarded solely as efforts to legitimate and perpetuate the ruling class: "They were also expressions of other, deeply human experience and needs . . . to which the aesthetic sense is fundamental" (*The Aztec Temple Mayor*, p. 407). From this position, one might retreat into some form of idealist culture history or elaborate the emotional and aesthetic processes by which ideological rituals and artifacts interact with daily experience to create specific forms of consciousness among elites and commoners. It is not clear, however, which direction Townsend recommends.

Berdan analyzes the exchange institutions that may have brought to Tenochtitlan the exotic products deposited at the Great Temple. Tribute was important, but long-distance trade and market exchange probably also played a role. Berdan explains how the organization of the Aztec economy necessitated trade and markets as well as tribute collection. Again, Berdan does not find it necessary to account for Aztec economic behavior by reference to either ideology or cultural norms.

One approaches the Great Temple publications with the expectation that archaeology will yield new perspectives and insights on the Aztecs. It is therefore disappointing to find much that is familiar. The familiar mode of analysis may be due to the fact that art historians and ethnohistorians have had the first say on the Great Temple materials. Aside from Matos, only two archaeologists contributed to these publications. Juan Alberto Román Berrelleza describes Offering 48, a chamber containing the remains of forty-two children sacrificed to Tlaloc. Carlos Javier González González analyzes the Mezcala style figurines that were deposited in thirteen of the offerings. Both refer to ongoing analyses of the physical evidence that promise very interesting results. The skeletal remains of the young sacrificial victims are being analyzed to determine their social class, and the stone from which the Mezcala figurines were carved is being analyzed to determine its point of origin.

From these material analyses, archaeologists will be able to reconstruct behavior that the documents do not record. How did the Aztecs choose the children to be sacrificed to Tlaloc? Did the elite contribute their own offspring to serve the ends of ideological dominance? Or did commoners bear the costs of child sacrifice as they did those of the other activities of the state? Were the Mezcala figurines truly the product of Guerrero craftsmen, acquired by the Aztecs through tribute or trade? Or were they Aztec copies of Guerrero figurines produced in Classic times, another instance of archaicism in Aztec iconography already evident in the Aztec production of "Toltec" sculpture and "Teotihuacan" masks? Materials analysis is clearly one contribution that will be made by archaeology to Aztec studies.

Archaeology might also contribute information obtained from the study of association and context. The location of objects relative to each other provides many clues to behavior, meaning, and function. Yet this source of information is not fully exploited in the Great Temple publications. The tendency seems to be to select single elements of the Great Temple assemblage for detailed examination, while neglecting bigger chunks. It is almost as if Aztec scholars, having studied unprovenanced objects of art for so long, find it difficult to operate on a larger scale. The essays of Johanna Broda are the most striking exception to this neglect of broader contexts. Her analysis of the Great Temple offerings makes excellent use of the full range of contents and location to build an interpretive understanding of this aspect of Aztec ritual that is totally unaccounted for in documents.

Archaeology can also provide a new perspective for viewing the historical sources. For example, Broda notes that although the Great Temple was topped by two shrines, Tlaloc imagery prevails in the offerings. This finding is unexpected, given the emphasis on Huitzilopochtli in the documents. Why does this difference exist? Do the Great Temple

excavations reveal an earlier stage in the evolution of the Aztec pantheon while the contact-period documents represent a later stage? Was ritual activity at the Great Temple intended for communicating with the masses while the documents recorded information to be conveyed to the elites? Were the authors of the documents or their informants intentionally suppressing information about Tlaloc's cult? Archaeology poses new questions about the historical record. Given the current historiographic emphasis in Aztec studies, the questions raised by archaeology are sure to receive further attention.

When turning from recent studies of Aztec language, religion, and worldview to two studies of Aztec warfare, the change in analytical framework is at first startling. Both Ross Hassig in *Aztec Warfare* and José Lameiras in *Los déspotas armados* offer a perspective based on practical reason or rational choice similar to that of Berdan.³ The emphasis here is not on the culturally specific assumptions, categories, and symbols that underlie human behavior but on the calculation of the costs and benefits of different courses of action given specific ecological and social circumstances.

Hassig provides a detailed examination of how the Aztecs prosecuted wars and the history of their military expansion. Drawing information from sixteenth-century chroniclers such as Sahagún, Durán, Hernán Cortés, and Bernal Díaz del Castillo, Hassig describes Aztec military training, rank, logistics, weapons, tactics, and conventions of disengagement. He also traces the development of the Aztec military system. Hassig shows a fine sensitivity to the organizational and operational necessities of military actions and the material constraints that existed in native Mesoamerica. His discussion is peppered with explanations of Aztec military practices couched in terms of practical advantage. Even the highly conventionalized "flower wars," Hassig argues, served practical ends. They enabled the Aztecs to keep strong opponents occupied while the Aztecs attended to campaigns elsewhere in the empire, at the same time wearing strong opponents down to prepare them for eventual conquest.

Lameiras's *Los déspotas armados* covers much the same ground as Hassig's work in describing how the Aztecs organized and prosecuted wars. It differs in exploring the linkages between warfare and the emergence of strong, centralized states (despotisms). According to Lameiras, pre-imperial Aztec society was composed of several social segments (agriculturalists, fishermen, merchants, and warriors) that were relatively evenly balanced in power. In these early times, some Aztecs were mercenaries, making war to supplement the inadequate subsistence base. Tribute wealth from these early campaigns strengthened the hand of the military in Aztec society and enabled it to control the government. Military dominance also created growth in other segments of the Aztec economy. For

example, hydraulic agriculture developed as the Aztecs used the labor and raw materials of conquered peoples to build agricultural *chinampas* (ridged fields) and water-control devices. Commerce prospered with the construction of canals and causeways to facilitate transportation and with the opening of distant trade routes and markets for Aztec merchants. These economic advantages consolidated the military's control of the state apparatus. Militarism as an ideology and a cultural value was promoted by the ruling military clique to insure their continued political dominance: "la poderosa ideología postulante de la necesidad de obtener con guerras víctimas para aplacar con sangre la sed de Huitzilopochtli—el sol—debe ser referida . . . a la estructura política que la creó, en buena medida bajo la presión de las guerras de carácter instrumental" (p. 85). Both these studies view human behavior as rooted in practical advantage that is rationalized and legitimated *ex post facto* by cultural invention. The contrast with Caso's interpretation of Aztec behavior could not be more extreme.

There is nevertheless some common ground between these rational choice analysts and the more recent scholars of Aztec religion and iconography whose work has been reviewed. It seems that ideology is an important bridging concept between culture and practical reason. On the one hand, ideology supplies a "practical" reason for producing religious ritual, works of art, and so on. This production can be understood as an effort to prescribe in emotionally and aesthetically striking ways courses of action that favor its sponsor. On the other hand, the concept of ideology implies that humans perceive the world only through a socially negotiated framework of rationality and symbolic meaning. Whatever the advantages of Aztec warfare, they were recognized and evaluated according to a culturally specific calculus. It is the task of analysis to reveal both the interests served by cultural invention and the cultural pathways through which "rational" choices are made. Judged by the works included in this review, discussions of "cultural" products such as religion and art now commonly consider the questions of perspective and intent. Discussions of "practical" activities such as exchange and warfare have not gone very far in presenting native understandings of these activities. López Austin has succeeded in performing both tasks within a single analytical framework, and for this reason, his work holds special interest.

Aztec studies, as reflected in the eight works discussed above, are experiencing a state of healthy ferment. A growing interest in historiography has enabled Aztec scholars to use traditional sources of information with greater precision. Studies of Aztec language, Aztec archaeology, colonial legal documents, and contemporary cultures are all contributing useful new information. Analysis proceeds from a spectrum of theoretical stances. At one extreme are those who explain Aztec behavior as guided by a cost-benefit calculus. At the other extreme are those who follow Caso

in taking a cultural historical point of view. In the middle are those who study how cultural understanding encodes experiential knowledge. Because this middle ground exists, analysis from any point on the current spectrum enriches the entire community.

NOTES

1. For overviews of this issue, see James Boone, *Other Tribes, Other Scribes: Symbolic Anthropology in the Comparative Study of Cultures, Histories, Religions, and Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); James Clifford, "Introduction: Partial Truths," in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, edited by J. Clifford and G. E. Marcus (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986); and Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984).
2. Important discussions of the relationship between conceptions of the human body and social structure include Victor Turner, "Encounter with Freud: The Making of a Comparative Symbologist," in *The Making of Psychological Anthropology*, edited by G. D. Spindler (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978); Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction* (New York: Random House, 1978); and Susan Kus, "Taking Symbols Seriously," paper presented at the CNRS/NSF Seminar "Symbolic, Structural, and Semiotic Approaches in Archaeology," Bloomington, Ind., 5–10 Oct. 1987.
3. *Practical reason* is a term coined by Marshall Sahlins, *Culture and Practical Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976). Rational choice theory is discussed in A. Heath, *Rational Choice and Social Exchange* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).