

Pre-Columbian Literature of Mexico. By MIGUEL LEÓN-PORTILLA. Translated by GRACE LOBANOV. Norman, 1969. University of Oklahoma Press. Illustrations. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Pp. xiii, 191. \$5.95.

Originally published in 1964, this work has been supplemented and translated for a wider reading public. As far as it goes in providing a representative sampling of ancient Mesoamerican literature in its diverse forms, this book is successful. It offers a survey of pre-Columbian literary sources and points out some of its rich imagery and subtle expressions of sentiment. The selections make clear the ancient Mesoamerican's uniqueness, even as they affirm his oneness with the wider world of humanity, so that the reader acquires a number of distinct impressions, although in a rather amorphous montage.

The historicity of some of those impressions, however, may be open to challenge, because the author did not integrate and interpret a number of his selections with the actual time sequence and content of the historical record. Most of the ancient literature that comes down to us is wrapped in chronological associations and contemporary contexts which had much to do with its content and the sensibilities it conveys. An altogether false impression is not only possible but probable if a myth or a poem is presented out of its total context.

For example, the myths concerning Quetzalcóatl or Huitzilopochtli associated with the period of Aztec hegemony are almost invariably charged with a political significance that may well negate their overt expressions of moral or philosophical truth, in whole or in part. To put it another way, can one take seriously, as efficacious example of its moral value, one of Quetzalcóatl's sublime litanies when it is mouthed by a priest engaged in wrenching out a human heart? I would also suggest, parenthetically, that the institution of human sacrifice is treated in this work with considerable naïveté.

In my opinion this book would have been more useful and instructive had its author included some discussion of the complex problems inherent in these literary sources, problems which cast doubt on the possibility of restoring the long-sought "ancient mind." It is not my purpose to repeat here what I have written on this subject elsewhere, but it does seem essential to point out that there are great disparities between the ancient Nahuatl tradition and later representations of it, beginning with the works of Franciscan scholars in the sixteenth century. The reader needs to be made aware of the problems so that he can more properly evaluate the images and im-

pressions which these sources so abundantly convey. If Nahuatl studies are to flourish meaningfully in the realm of historiography and historical analysis, the materials on which they are based must be treated as the prime historical sources that they are.

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Pre-Columbian Art of Mexico and Central America. By HASSO VON WINNING and ALFRED STENDAHL. New York, 1969. Harry N. Abrams. Illustrations. Maps. Tables. Notes. Bibliography. Pp. xv, 388. \$35.00.

With the collaboration of two leading aficionados of ancient Indian art, Harry Abrams Inc. has published a handsome though expensive picture book. The great majority of the pieces, never before illustrated, were sold through the Stendahl Galleries of Los Angeles, one of the most reliable dealers in fine Mesoamerican art. The choice of objects for this book, made by Alfred Stendahl, reflects types available to American collectors, such as clay figures, especially from western Mexico, but includes few monumental pieces. The quality of the reproductions is satisfactory, although many of the black-and-white photographs are blurry from being overenlarged. Also the painting out of many backgrounds occasionally results in cropping the outlines of a piece. The numerous color plates did not require touching up since they were posed against simple backgrounds, the colors of which are overly bright. In addition, printing errors often intensify either red or blue. Nonetheless, these illustrations provide an excellent reference source for examples of Middle American art in North American collections.

The voluminous material is divided by period and area into six chapters: the Formative period, western Mexico, the Classic period in Mexico, the Postclassic period in Mexico, the Maya area, and lower Central America. Each chapter contains an introduction to the cultural context of the art by Hasso von Winning, a prolific writer of short articles on Mesoamerican art, who is at present associated with the Southwest Museum of Los Angeles. His text is generally accurate and well written, presenting commonly-accepted opinions on each culture. More recent information has occasionally been overlooked or reluctantly incorporated, depriving the text of real authority.

Some inaccuracies in dating mar the text. Large hollow clay figures first appear in the Early Formative period at Tehuacán, San Lorenzo,