

BACKGROUND

The Great Temple of Tenochtitlán: Center and Periphery in the Aztec World.

By JOHANNA BRODA, DAVID CARRASCO, and EDUARDO MATOS MOCTEZUMA.
Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988. Notes. Figures. Photographs.
Glossary. Bibliography. Index. Pp. xiv, 184. Cloth. \$38.00.

The most important structure in the Aztec world was the Templo Mayor or Great Temple, situated in the heart of their capital, the city of Tenochtitlán. It symbolized Mexica political power and was the center of their horizontal universe, which consisted of four quadrants, divisions of the city, associated with four cardinal directions. It was also the center of their vertical universe, where the 9 levels of the underworld intersected the 13 levels above the earth. It was where the descent to the deepest level of the underworld, *Mictlán*, began; where the ascent to the highest level, *Omeyocán*, began. In short, it was their supreme sacred space, where their entire cosmology was symbolized.

The text of this book consists of three complementary essays, reflecting the difference in disciplines of the three authors—archeology, ethnohistory, and the history of religion. The core of the research on which the essays are based was a five-year interdisciplinary archeological project (1978–82) coordinated by Eduardo Matos Moctezuma. The excavations yielded over 7,000 ritual objects, many of them spectacular, all of them important for understanding the integration of religion, politics, and economy of the Mexica state. It is important to note that the offerings were not only Mexica in origin but also derived from their tributary provinces. By contrast, not a single offering derived from the Tarascan or Maya areas. Johanna Broda sifts the ethnohistoric evidence describing the Templo Mayor and its use. She also analyzes the more than 80 offering caches, and sheds important light on the cult of the rain and mountain deity Tlaloc, who had been prominent in Mesoamerica since preclassic times and whose worship still endures in Indian and peasant communities of modern Mexico. David Carrasco is concerned with “mythic space,” and sees mythic traditions integrating material and social structures. This is an interesting book and provokes our thinking about the role of symbolism in ordering Mexica society.

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