# Discussion

## What Did Mesoamerican Commoners Think about "Pre-Sunrise Things"?

MICHAEL E. SMITH
Department of Anthropology, University at Albany,
SUNY, Albany, N.Y. 12222, U.S.A.
(mesmith@csc.albany.edu). 23 VII 02

Hamann (CA 43:351-82) has made a positive contribution to our understanding of social memory and attitudes toward the past in Mesoamerica. I want to correct a minor error in his discussion of the Aztec case and explore a larger shortcoming of his approach brought to light by that error. Hamann's model does not account sufficiently for the role of social class in structuring attitudes and behavior concerning the past. It is my contention that rulers and elites were far more deeply involved with "pre-Sunrise things" in ancient Mesoamerican societies than were commoners. The error I wish to correct concerns the locations of the four Teotihuacan-style platforms in the Aztec capital Tenochtitlan. Hamann (p. 357), citing Umberger (1987:87-88), states that two of the platforms were located outside of the walled "sacred precinct," where the commoners of Tenochtitlan would have seen them (and understood their significance). But all four platforms were in fact located within the walled precinct and not in the "public" area of the city at all. Umberger reports their locations with respect to the streets of modern Mexico City, but it is clear that those locations fall within the confines of the Aztec sacred precinct (Marquina 1960:pl. 2).

This minor point is important because Hamann's erroneous placement of the platforms constitutes the sum total of his evidence for engagement with the past by Aztec commoners. He is trying to make the point that concern with the past was not just a restricted, elite phenomenon in Aztec culture. He asserts, "Teotihuacanreferencing materials were embedded in the background fabric of daily life in the Mexica capital" (p. 356). But commoners rarely if ever entered the sacred precinct, which was not the setting for "daily life" for anyone except possibly a few high priests. The palaces of the Mexica kings were located not within the precinct but adjacent to it (contra Hamann, who calls the sacred precinct "palace-filled" [p. 356]). Most or all of the ancient and archaizing objects from Tenochtitlan have been recovered from the sacred precinct.

Permission to reprint items in this section may be obtained only from their authors.

Umberger (1987) documents the political use of archaizing sculptures and architecture by the Mexica rulers to legitimize their imperial rule. The four Teotihuacan-style platforms were material manifestations of ideological production by the Mexica state. Brumfiel (1998) argues persuasively that this and other imperial ideology originating in the sacred precinct was targeted not at commoners but at the lower-ranking nobility of the Basin of Mexico, whose members gathered periodically in the precinct for ceremonies and feasts. Whereas members of the Aztec nobility were probably familiar with the styles of Teotihuacan, Tula, and other ancient cities, it is unlikely that commoners (other than those who lived close to the ruins of these cities) could also recognize the styles or appreciate their ideological significance. The absence of archaizing art outside of elite contexts is a key question here and one that would repay more attention. In my own excavations at Aztec sites located on top of or near earlier sites, the only case of an identifiable ancient object incorporated into an Aztecperiod settlement is a stone block carved with a serpent taken from the Epiclassic city of Xochicalco and incorporated into an elite structure adjacent to the central temple at the provincial town of Cuexcomate (Smith 1992). Furthermore, it is my experience that modern Mesoamerican peasants living in the vicinity of monumental archaeological zones such as Teotihuacan, Xochicalco, and Copan have little appreciation of or special feeling for these ruins or the past they represent.

Hamann is correct that appreciation for ancient objects was a widespread phenomenon and an important cultural trait in Mesoamerica. It may be that in some settings commoners participated in this domain, as in his discussion of Chachoapan. But Mesoamerican practices and beliefs that were culturally important and geographically widespread were not necessarily equally shared by commoners and elites. R. A. Joyce (2000) points out that many of the traits used traditionally to define Mesoamerica as a culture area—traits common to most ancient Mesoamerican cultures—were aspects of elite culture. The beliefs and practices associated with "pre-Sunrise things" as discussed by Hamann provide another example of this pattern. Further research on this topic involving greater attention to issues of social class is clearly needed, but Hamann is to be congratulated for bringing this topic to scholarly attention and for advancing our understanding of it.

### Reply

#### BYRON HAMANN

Department of Anthropology and Department of History, University of Chicago, 1126 E. 59th St., Chicago, Ill. 60637, U.S.A. (behamann@midway.uchicago.edu). 9 IX 02

Smith points out an unfortunate error of detail: all four of the Teotihuacan-style platforms were indeed located within the Serpent Wall of the ceremonial precinct of Tenochtitlan. I see now that I misread Umberger's reference to the current location of one of these temples in the garden of the Museo Nacional de Antropología. If (as Cowgill recommended) I had read López Lújan's study of the Mexica recovery of Teotihuacan (1989:14, 37–42) earlier, I could have caught this error.

However, Smith misrepresents the role of these temples in my argument and overstates the implications of his correction. He claims that "Hamann's erroneous placement of the platforms constitutes the sum total of his evidence for engagement with the past by Aztec commoners." This is simply not the case. On p. 356 I describe a number of ways in which references to Teotihuacan extended outside of the ceremonial center and thus entered into the spaces of elite and nonelite "daily life." To repeat: According to one source, the ruler of Tenochtitlan (and a retinue of priests) traveled to Teotihuacan every 20 days to perform sacrifices; this would have involved a procession from his palace (not located in the ceremonial center, another useful Smith correction) through the streets of the city and across the causeways to the mainland. The grid layout of the streets of Tenochtitlan formed a constantly visible reference to Teotihuacan; the same is true of the Teotihuacan-referencing twin temples at the summit of the Great Temple (a summit which, as Brumfiel [1998:6] notes, would have risen above the Serpent Wall and been visible throughout the city). Finally, although the majority of Teotihuacan-referencing portable objects have been found within the walled precinct, at least one archaizing statue—an image of a cihuateotl—was found at the corner of 16 de Septiembre and Isabel la Católica (Umberger 1987:86). This, according to Marquina, is a location two blocks outside of the ceremonial precinct's walls (1960:pl. 2). That this statue was found with four other *cihuateotl* images suggests that the location of their discovery corresponds to the location of their display in the pre-Conquest city. In sum, my argument that Teotihuacan-referencing materials were located throughout the city, in spaces where commoners would have encountered them, is not affected by my mislocation of the Red Temples. My basic argument remains unchanged: "The point of these examples—processions, buildings, streets, statues—is that references to Teotihuacan were numerous and not limited to the ceremonial precinct. Teotihuacan-referencing materials were embedded in the background fabric of daily life in the Mexica capital" (p. 356).

Smith is correct, however, in noting that the highest

density of Teotihuacan references was inside the walled precinct, and this raises two connected questions. Did commoners have access to the iconography displayed in this area? And what can we say about the intended audiences of the rituals performed in this sacred space? Issues of class relations and the ideologies that mediated those relations are an important concern of my study, and so the following paragraphs address both questions.

Smith follows Brumfiel (1998) in arguing that the eliteperformed ceremonial-precinct rituals were directed to an audience of other elites. According to Brumfiel, the goal of the "imperial ideology" enacted within the Serpent Wall was to bind together the elite class so that they could "control subordinates through direct coercion" (p. 3). She goes so far as to claim that commoners were "excluded" from its confines and thus from the iconographic symbolism of its temples (p. 7). This claim is suspect. Although we do have at least one 16th-century source describing the elite-to-elite rituals that Brumfiel emphasizes (Durán, cited in Townsend 1979: 53), we also have at least one 16th-century source describing large-scale commoner religiosity within the Serpent Wall. Writing of the annual Panquetzaliztli ceremony, Sahagún (1950-82[1547], vol.9:65) recounts how the commoners ("maceoalli") gathered before the Great Temple as Moctezuma looked on: "And the common folk massed together, indeed all came to watch. They were spread out verily everywhere, seating themselves in the temple courtyard. None ate; indeed evervone fasted. . . . And Moctezuma remained seated by a wooden column on a seat with a back rest, which was on his ocelot skin carpet." Panquetzaliztli was an annual ceremony dedicated to the god Huitzilopochtli—the god who defined the Mexica as an ethnic group (Boone 1989: 31-41; Clendinnen 1991:142-43; Durán 1977[1576-79]: 457–60). Given the importance of Huitzilopochtli in creating community identity, it is not surprising that, once a year, the people of Tenochtitlan (from the maceoalli to the *tlatoani* himself) came together in the center of their city to honor their patron god (cf. Hamann, p. 354). At least once a year, Tenochtitlan's commoners would have seen the iconographic richness inside the Serpent Wall. Smith's claim that "commoners rarely if ever entered the sacred precinct" is challenged by Sahagún's account.

Of course, our evidence for the participation of commoners in sacred-precinct practices comes from a document written decades after the conquest of Tenochtitlán, but the same is true for our evidence of elite-to-elite audiences. It is therefore useful to turn again to the iconography displayed inside the Serpent Wall. The previous paragraph suggested that the worship of Huitzilopochtli was not limited to elite-to-elite audiences. If we consider the meanings of Tlaloc, Huitzilopochtli's companion in the twin shrines of the Great Temple, we find another religious concern in which commoners and elites would have been equally invested. This concern is agriculture, and, since the covenantal implications of agriculture were a focus of my article, I end on this topic.

It is only in the past decade that we have begun to see

the central importance of agricultural symbolism in the long-term structure of Mesoamerican cosmology (Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993; Florescano 1999; A. Joyce 2000; Miller and Samayoa 1998; Monaghan 1990, 1995; Taube 1995, 1996). An important feature of this cosmology was the idea of sacred covenants. Aztec cosmology shared in these covenantal beliefs (pp. 357, 361); recent studies have revealed the importance of agricultural-covenantal imagery in Aztec religion generally and in the iconography of the Great Temple specifically. Graulich notes that the Aztecs described the bloodsoaked bases of their temples as "banquet tables" where the earth goddess Tlaltecuhtli could feast on her covenantal due (Graulich 1997:163; Thévet 1905:29). Taube (1996) and Miller and Samayoa (1998) have described the complex symbolism of rain, maize, and sacrifice in the iconography of the Tlaloc shrine at the summit of the Great Temple. Unfortunately, the obsession of Western scholarship on Aztec religion with the militaristic gore of Huitzilopochtli's worship (Boone 1989) has meant that Tlaloc and his agricultural implications have been marginalized. Brumfiel's blood- and warfare-filled account of "Aztec imperial ideology" continues this intellectual exclusion. She focuses on Huitzilopochtli and never once mentions Tlaloc (even though, according to Durán, "these two gods were always meant to be together, since they were considered companions of equal power" [1977(1576–79):75]). I am not claiming that the militarized worship of Huitzilopochtli was unimportant. Rather, I am pointing out that half of the story of the Great Temple's iconography—its interest in agricultural fertility, as materialized by Tlaloc's shrine—has been marginalized. This agricultural emphasis is important for my current argument because here it is impossible to separate elite and commoner religious practice. All members of society depended on the products of agricultural labor, and covenantal ideology argued that both classes of society were needed for the production of crops. Elites worked by offering sacrifices to earth and rain to insure their cooperation; commoners worked in fields and hearths. This is not to say that different classes and factions had the same interpretations of their participation in agricultural production or of any shared concern. As I emphasized in both my article and my reply to the comments, one of the reasons I discussed Chan Kom was that it allowed me to consider how interpretations of the past could be contested—an issue that the limits of Aztec and Mixtec sources made it difficult to explore (pp. 365-66, 377-78). And it is on this point that Smith and I are in fundamental agreement. Research on social class and on the conflict of elite and nonelite ideologies is of central importance for our understanding of Mesoamerican society.

### References Cited

- BOONE, ELIZABETH H. 1989. Incarnations of the Aztec supernatural: The image of Huitzilopochtli in Mexico and Europe, *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 79(2): 1–107.
- BRUMFIEL, ELIZABETH M. 1998. Huitzilopochtli's conquest: Aztec ideology in the archaeological record. *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 8:3–14.
- CLENDINNEN, INGA. 1991. Aztecs: An interpretation. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- DURÁN, DIEGO. 1977(1576-79). Book of gods and rites and the ancient calendar. Edited and translated by Doris Heyden and Fernando Horcasitas. New York: Orion Press.
- FLORESCANO, ENRIQUE. 1999. The myth of Quetzalcoatl.
  Translated by Lysa Hochroth. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- FREIDEL, DAVID, LINDA SCHELE, AND JOY PARKER. 1993. Maya cosmos: Three thousand years on the shaman's path. New York: Morrow.
- GRAULICH, MICHEL. 1997. Myths of ancient Mexico. Translated by Bernard R. Ortiz de Montellano and Thelma Ortiz de Montellano. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- HAMANN, BYRON. 2002. The social life of pre-Sunrise things: Indigenous Mesoamerican archaeology. Current anthropology 43:351–82.
- JOYCE, ARTHUR A. 2000. "The founding of Monte Albán: Sacred propositions and social practices," in *Agency in archaeology*. Edited by M. Dobres and J. Robb, pp. 71–91. London: Routledge Press.
- JOYCE, R. A. 2000. "High culture, Mesoamerican civilization, and the Classic Maya tradition," in *Order, legitimacy, and wealth in ancient states*. Edited by J. Richards and M. van Buren, pp. 64–76. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- LÓPEZ LÚJAN, LEONARDO. La recuperación mexica del pasado teotihuacano. Mexico City: INAH.
- MARQUINA, I. 1960. El templo mayor de México. Mexico City: INAH.
- MILLER, MARY, AND MARCO SAMAYOA. 1998. Where maize may grow: Jade, chacmools, and the Maize God. Res 33:
- MONAGHAN, JOHN. 1990. Sacrifice, death, and the origins of agriculture in the Codex Vienna. *American Antiquity* 55: 559-569.
- SAHAGÚN, BERNARDINO DE. 1950–82(1547–85). Florentine Codex: General history of the things of New Spain. 13 vols. Edited and translated by Arthur J. D. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press Santa Fe: School of American Research.
- SMITH M. E. 1992. Archaeological research at Aztec-period rural sites in Morelos, Mexico. Vol. 1. Excavations and architecture. University of Pittsburgh Memoirs in Latin American Archaeology 4.
- TAUBE, KARL. 1995. "The rainmakers: The Olmec and their contribution to Mesoamerican belief and ritual," in *The Olmec world*. Princeton: Art Museum, Princeton University.
- ——. 1996. The Olmec maize god: The face of corn in Formative Mesoamerica. *Res* 29/30:39–81.
- THÉVET, ANDRÉ. 1905. Histoyre du Mechique. Edited by Edouard de Jonghe. Journal de la Société des Américanistes de Paris 2:1–41.
- TOWNSEND, RICHARD. 1979. State and cosmos in the art of Tenochtitlan. Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks.
- UMBERGER, EMILY. 1987. Antiques, revivals, and references to the past in Aztec art. Res 13:62–105.