Farmers, Feathered Serpents and Royal Baths: Political Economy and Early Water Management in Central Mexico

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Water was a life-sustaining force invested with symbolic and material significance by prehispanic people of Central Mexico. They managed water to sustain themselves, their social relations, and the cosmic forces who created the universe. This paper looks at irrigation from a political economy perspective to discuss ideas about social production and how stratification encourages agricultural change, including innovations and landscape modifications. Parallels are considered between the changing landscape of cultivated and irrigated fields and stratification and the development of a sacred and symbolic landscape where ritual water management was important and agricultural metaphors were invoked to express concepts of rulership in the early Teotihuacán state.