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Cover

Aztec-style pitcher from a Late Postclassic burial offering in Morelos

This vessel (22 cm in height) was excavated in 1976 by the Xochicalco Mapping Project, directed by Kenneth G. Hirth (2000). It is one of seven vessels found as offerings associated with a burial of three individuals on Terrace 85 (Burial 3), one of the lower residential terraces at Xochicalco. The ceramics and the context indicate that Burial 3 dates to the Early Cuauhnahuac phase (A.D. 1350-1440, the first part of the Late Postclassic period), prior to the conquest of Morelos by the Triple Alliance Empire. Hirth excavated several other Late Postclassic burials on Terrace 85, suggesting that Xochicalco may have served as a cemetery for Postclassic peoples long after its abandonment as an Epiclassic urban centre. Excavations at the Epiclassic urban settlements of Teotenango and San Miguel Ixtapan in the State of Mexico have also located intrusive Postclassic cemeteries (Piña Chán 1975; Rodríguez G. and García S. 1996). Unlike Terrace 85 at Xochicalco, the Postclassic burials at the latter sites were placed in the centres of the Epiclassic cities, amidst the monumental public architecture.

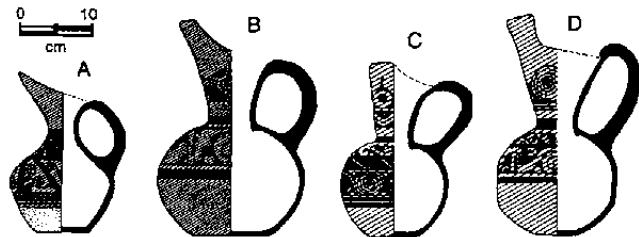


Fig. 1. Polished redware pitchers from Late Postclassic burials in Morelos. A: From Burial 3, Terrace 85, Xochicalco (see front cover); B: from a burial at Coatetelco (Arana Alvarez 1984b); C: from Temimilcingo; D: from an unknown Morelos site; E: from a burial at Olinitepec (Canto Aguilar 1993). Vessels C and D are part of the Dubernard Collection in the Museo Cuauhnahuac in Cuernavaca, Morelos. (Drawings by Michael E. Smith, from Smith 2003a).

The form and decoration of this pitcher are typical of pitchers excavated at Aztec-period sites in the Basin of Mexico, the Toluca Valley, Puebla, Tlaxcala, and other parts of Morelos. Figure 1 illustrates this pitcher (A) and four other examples from Morelos. In addition to their placement in burials, pitchers like this were also used in the houses of nobles and commoners alike. Redware pitcher sherds are a rare but consistent component of domestic ceramic assemblages from excavated houses at the Morelos sites of Cuexcomate, Capilco, and Yautepec (Smith 1992; Smith 2003). Polished redware cups (in several different shapes) are another rare but consistent ceramic form at these sites, and polished redware bowls are a much more common form at Aztec-period sites in Morelos and other parts of highland central Mexico.



Fig. 2. Illustration from the Florentine Codex of a drunken noble with his pitcher of an unspecified drink, most likely pulque (Sahagún 1950-82; Bk. 10, Fig. 26a). (Drawing by Jennifer Wharton).

Pitchers, along with other ceramic vessels such as jars, bowls, plates, and long-handled censers, are regularly depicted in the Central Mexican codices. Most often, such vessels appear in feasting scenes, either in public ritual or domestic contexts (Fig. 2). Pitchers in the codices are also shown in more mundane activities such as bathing and irrigating fields, as well as in toponyms and personal names. In all such depictions, pitchers are plainly finished without any of the decorations that occasionally occur on other vessels; there

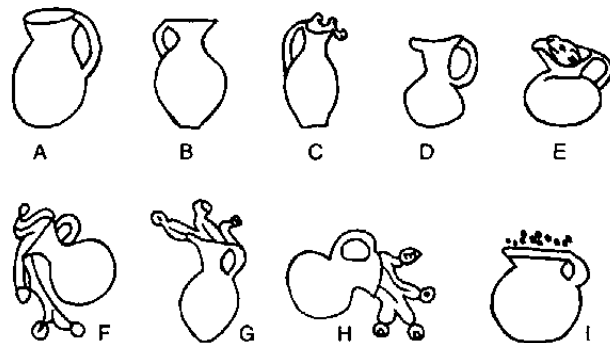


Fig. 3. Pitchers from Central Mexican codices and pictorial sources. C, F, G, and H have signs for water; I has dots that represent pulque; and E contains a captured water mammal. B is a pitcher paid in tribute, and G is a sign for tribute in domestic labor. H is part of a toponym (for Tlaahuililpan). A: Codex Azcatitlan, lám. 4 (Barlow 1995); B: Codex Kingsborough, f. 219v (Valle, 1995); C: Durán (1967: Vol. 1, Plate 6); D: Codex Telleriano Remensis, f. 46r (Quiñones Keber 1995); E: Florentine Codex, Bk. 11, Fig. 234 (Sahagún 1950-82); F: Florentine Codex Bk. 4, Fig. 11; G: Códice Osuna, f. 479-17v (Códice Osuna 1947); H: Codex Mendoza (1992: f. 27r); I: Primero Memoriales, f. 252v (Sahagún 1993).

are no illustrations of elaborately decorated pitchers like the vessel on the cover.

The pitchers illustrated in the codices appear in a variety of forms. They can be spouted or unspouted, flat or round-bottomed, tall and narrow or short and globular (Fig. 3). Most often, pitchers – regardless of their form – are depicted containing water. They are also shown, less frequently, as serving vessels for pulque (most pulque vessels in the codices are plain jars and bowls identified with the *yecamiztli* symbol). Central Mexican codices are a rich source of information on the uses of ceramic vessels and other material objects excavated by archaeologists. It is likely that the polished redware pitcher on the cover was used to serve water and/or pulque, perhaps at feasts (Smith, Wharton and Olsen 2003).

Cover photo by Michael E. Smith

Text by Michael E. Smith and Jennifer Wharton

Back Cover

Decorated serving vessels from Postclassic burial offerings in Morelos

These painted ceramic vessels were associated with Postclassic burial offerings excavated at sites in the western part of the state of Morelos. The tall jar (30.5 cm in height) was excavated in 1976 by the Xochicalco Mapping Project, directed by Kenneth G. Hirth (2000). It is one of twenty vessels found as offerings associated with a burial of seven individuals (Burial 1) on Terrace 85, one of the lower residential terraces at Xochicalco. The ceramics indicate that Burial 1 dates to the Temazcalli phase (A.D. 1200–1350), the local western Morelos manifestation of the Middle Postclassic or Early Aztec period. This jar (piece no. XV-40 in the catalog in Smith 2003) is an example of the “Tlahuica polychrome jar” type. The Tlahuica polychrome style is a distinctive white-based polychrome ceramic style common in western and central Morelos during the Middle and Late Postclassic periods (Smith 2003a; Smith n.d.). Burial 1 also contained miniature jars, Tlahuica polychrome bowls, a polished redware bowl, and various plain bowls, jars and basins. Other grave goods included manos and metates, spindle whorls, obsidian blades, three copper/bronze bells and one tiny copper/bronze dog.

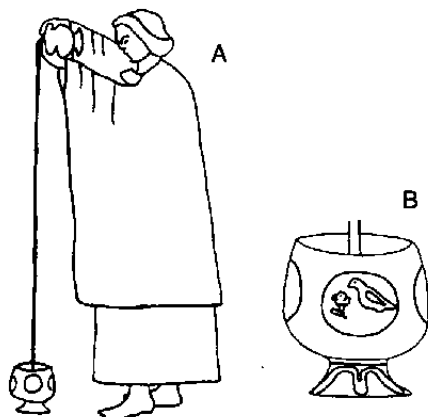


Fig. 4. Woman pouring cacao from one vase into another (Códice Tudela 1980:2r). A: traced from Códice Tudela (1980:2r); B: traced from Batalla Rosado (1999:fig. 130.s).

The red vase (mouth diameter of 13 cm) was excavated in the early 1970s by Raúl Arana Alvarez at Coatetelco. Arana uncovered a number of burials and offerings associated with a ballcourt at Coatetelco, one of the few well preserved Aztec ballcourts (Arana Alvarez 1984a). These offerings, like most of the architecture at Coatetelco, date to the Cuauhnahuac (Late Postclassic) period, A.D. 1350–1520+. The vase (piece no. CV-14 in the catalog in Smith 2003a) is an example of the polished redware (*guinda*) type. Polished redware serving vessels are common throughout central Mexico in Middle and Late Postclassic times. Approximately half of the more than 200 ceramic vessels in the ballcourt offerings were miniature plain vessels, and approximately one-quarter of the vessels were polished red incurved cups. The remaining vessels include plain and decorated bowls, spinning bowls and spindle whorls, long-handled censers, and several polished redware pitchers and vases, including this one. These offerings may represent the material remains of some kind of feasting event associated with a funeral and/or a ballgame (Smith, et al. 2003a). Polychrome jars and redware vases are low-frequency ceramic types at the many commoner and elite Aztec houses I have excavated at various sites in Morelos.

Polychrome jars like vessel XV-40 were probably used for carrying and storing water. Although jars are commonly depicted in the Aztec codices (with a variety of uses), polychrome jars are rarely shown. This may be due to the fact that painted jars, although regular parts of Postclassic ceramic assemblages in Morelos and the Toluca Valley, were rare in the Basin of Mexico. The polished redware vase was probably used to serve cacao, a common use for these vessels in the codices. At the beginning of the Códice Tudela (1980:2r), for example, a woman pours cacao from one vase into another to produce froth (fig. 4A). The form and decoration on the lower vase (fig. 4B) are very close to vessel CV-14. The main difference is the motif inside the circle: the Tudela figure shows a bird with a flower, whereas the vessel has a butterfly element.

These excavated ceramic vessels provide information on a variety of economic, social, and iconographic topics. They support the contention of Dorie Reents-Budet (1994) that the scholarly value of properly excavated and documented archaeological objects is far higher than unprovenanced objects, many of which may have been looted.

Photographs and Text by Michael E. Smith

From the editor's desk

The year 2003 is a hallowed period for *mexlcon*. With this issue we begin the celebration of our 25th anniversary and we have been thinking about ways in which we could mark the event appropriately. One rather visible sign of the momentous occasion will not have escaped your attention – the colourful cover with its rich display of Aztec ceramics. Coincidentally this is also to a large degree the Year of the Aztec, marked in Great Britain and Germany by the important exhibition titled succinctly ‘Aztecs’. And equally coincidentally, we are inaugurating a new series of essays on the current state of Mesoamerican studies, each written by a leading scholar in a special area of interest. These invited

essays, known as *Perspectives on Mesoamerica*, will appear at irregular intervals from now on. Our first invited author is the archaeologist Michael E. Smith (State University of New York at Albany), who is also the kind donor of the photos adorning our front and back covers. One of the foremost scholars working on Aztec civilization today, Michael Smith has added great breadth to Aztec studies by the emphasis he has placed on the imperial provinces, rather than focussing narrowly on Tenochtitlan. His review of the field through the eyes of an archaeologist will provide us with a much-needed perspective on the state of the art in an area traditionally dominated by text-based studies. We at *mexicon* sincerely thank him for this valuable contribution.

Gordon Whittaker
Editor

Perspectives on Mesoamerica

A Quarter-Century of Aztec Studies

Michael E. Smith

mexicon was founded in 1979, the year after the Coyolxauhqui stone was uncovered in Mexico City. That discovery initiated the Templo Mayor project, one of the most important research projects in the history of Aztec studies. The twenty-five years since 1979 have witnessed tremendous progress not only in the archaeology of Tenochtitlan, but in all of the disciplines and scholarly approaches included under the rubric 'Aztec studies.' In this article I review some of the important discoveries and advances during this interval. The overarching trend has been an expansion in the domain of what scholars call 'Aztec.' The scope of our understanding of Aztec civilization has expanded geographically – outward from Tenochtitlan – as well as socially – throughout the social hierarchy.¹

What people (if any) should be called 'Aztecs'?

The term 'Aztec' has too many meanings. It refers minimally to a time period, an empire, several pottery types, and an art style. These meanings are all clearly defined by specialists and useful within specific domains of scholarship, but they often cause confusion. The term is most widely used, however, as an ethnic label: 'the Aztecs.' But just who should be included here? While not a neologism, Aztec was not used as an ethnic or political label at the time of the Spanish conquest. Barlow (1945) points out that its widespread usage began in the eighteenth century with Clavigero, and was widely promoted in the nineteenth century by Prescott's popular book on the Spanish conquest.

Some scholars view Aztec as synonymous with Mexica and believe the label Aztecs is best confined to the inhabitants of the imperial capital Tenochtitlan. Alfredo López Austin (2001), for example, devotes an encyclopedia entry under the term Aztec to a description of the Mexica of Tenochtitlan, a usage also followed by Clendinnen (1991) and others. In contrast, I have argued that Aztec should include all of the Nahuatl-speaking peoples of highland central Mexico between the twelfth century A.D. and the Spanish conquest (Smith 2003b: 3–5). To justify this usage I cite James Lockhart's (1992: 1) use of the term 'Nahuas' for their direct

descendants after the conquest. But this wider definition also has its problems, most notably in the elimination of Central Mexican peoples who did not speak Nahuatl. There were many speakers of Otomi and other Otopamean languages in Postclassic highland Central Mexico, and these peoples were important players in the Aztec social and political landscape (Nava L. 2002). Few scholars call these peoples 'Aztecs,' but there is little theoretical or empirical justification for eliminating them from consideration in scholarship on Postclassic Central Mexico.

Perhaps it is time to move beyond 'ethnic' interpretations of the past, which can lead to sterile debates about which people were 'Aztecs' and which people were not. Our time is better spent focusing more on historical and cultural processes (of which ethnicity is certainly one type).² For the purposes of this article I define 'Aztec studies' as scholarship on the post-Toltec societies and cultures of highland Central Mexico, regardless of whether the people spoke Nahuatl or not. The past quarter-century of Aztec studies makes it abundantly clear that the relevant geographical scope for scholarship must be far wider than the shores of the island of Tenochtitlan.

The geographical scope of Aztec society

The year 1979 marked the publication of *The Basin of Mexico: Ecological Processes in the Evolution of a Civilization* (Sanders, et al. 1979), a synthesis of several decades of innovative archaeological survey fieldwork directed by William Sanders and Jeffrey Parsons. Among the many seminal contributions of this research – such as documenting Aztec settlement patterns for the first time, identifying a major population explosion during Aztec times, and reconstructing the agricultural landscape – one finding for the Aztec period stands out. The surveys reveal a uniform material culture at Aztec-period sites throughout the entire Basin of Mexico. From the heart of Tenochtitlan to the rural edges of the Basin, people used the same kinds of pottery vessels,

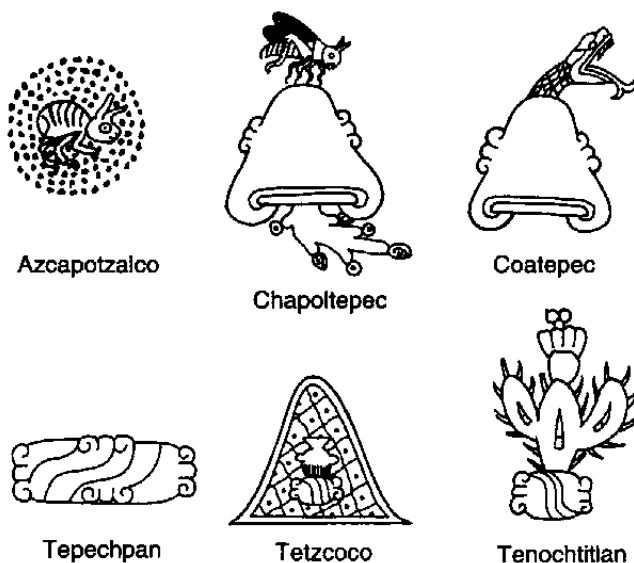


Fig. 5. Toponyms in Aztec codices from different towns in the Basin of Mexico. A, B, and C: Codex Boturini (Tenochtitlan); D: Tira de Tepechpan (Tepechpan); E: Codex Xolotl (Tetzaco); F: Codex Mendoza (Tenochtitlan); after Boone (2000:fig. 25). For principles of Aztec writing and glyphs, see Prem (1992) and León-Portilla (1982).

stone tools, and other domestic implements, and people lived in the same basic kinds of houses (nobles in palaces built on raised platforms and commoners in small ground-level adobe-wall structures).

Further scholarship on codices, sculptures, and monumental architecture (e.g. Pasztory 1983) also finds a general uniformity of expression within the Basin of Mexico (Fig. 5). These results are hardly surprising: in 1964 Charles Gibson identified a basic regularity in local social and political patterns throughout the Basin from his analyses of Spanish-language administrative documents. Archaeological fieldwork at Aztec sites outside of Tenochtitlan expanded greatly after 1979, revealing a pattern of economic variation within the Basin. For example, craft production was quite intensive at Otumba but minimal at Huexotla, and intensive agricultural methods varied according to environmental setting (see citations in Hodge 1998). This economic diversity flourished within a setting of relative cultural and linguistic uniformity. In fact, there is little basis for distinguishing the residents of Tenochtitlan (the Mexica) from the other peoples of the Basin of Mexico on the basis of material culture or forms of social organization.

The publication of Richard Andrews's *Introduction to Classical Nahuatl* (Andrews 1975) initiated a significant expansion in linguistic scholarship, and there are now a number of excellent analytical dictionaries and grammatical works on the Aztec language (e.g. Campbell 1985; Lockhart 2001). The Copenhagen Nahuatl Dictionary Project, directed by Una Canger, is producing a computerized database that will facilitate a wide range of scholarship. Training in Classical Nahuatl is now offered at a number of universities; of particular note is Jonathan Amith's Yale Nahuatl Summer School. Paralleling the findings of Aztec archaeology, ethnohistory, and art history, research on Nahuatl linguistics shows that the relevant spatial scale is the central Mexican highlands, not just Tenochtitlan. Although spatial variation in Classical Nahuatl is a current topic of study, studies comparing regional variants to social and cultural patterns identified in other types of data (e.g. Whittaker 1988) are still in their infancy. A related area with great promise is the analysis of Nahuatl toponyms in the codices (Dyckerhoff and Prem 1990; León-Portilla 1982). Research in Central Mexican Otopamean languages has also accelerated recently (Lastra de Suárez 1992; Muntzel 1990; Nava L. 2002; Valiñas 2000), illustrating the nature of linguistic and cultural variation in Aztec Central Mexico.

The past quarter-century also has seen an expansion in documentary and archaeological research outside of the Basin of Mexico. The publication and analysis of Nahuatl-language administrative documents has revolutionized our understanding of the *altepetl*, the *calpolli*, and other aspects of local social organization. Research by James Lockhart (1992), his students, and colleagues shows that many of the social and cultural patterns first identified in the Basin of Mexico also characterize Conquest-period societies in the Toluca, Cuernavaca, and Puebla regions. Furthermore, Lockhart identifies a contrast between 'western Nahuatl' (in the Basin of Mexico, Toluca, and Morelos) and 'eastern Nahuatl' (in Puebla and Tlaxcala) patterns of social organization, a distinction whose contours are only starting to be explored (e.g. Chance 2000). Archaeological fieldwork at

Aztec-period sites in these areas has lagged behind documentary research, but my own excavations in Morelos have turned up a mixture of distinctive local patterns – such as decorated ceramic styles and commoner house construction methods – and traits shared with sites in the Basin of Mexico. The latter category includes basic food-preparation technology, items for domestic ritual – such as ceramic figurines (Fig. 6) – and the ground plans of palaces (see Smith 2003b). Polished redware ceramics, one of the finest and most elaborate Aztec wares, were widely manufactured and extensively traded so that it is often difficult to distinguish Morelos vessels – such as the pitcher illustrated on the cover of this issue – from those excavated in the Basin of Mexico.

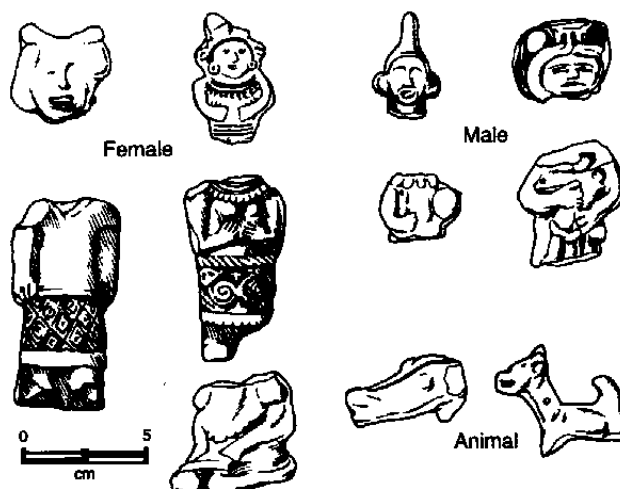


Fig. 6. Ceramic figurines from commoner houses at Yautepec, Morelos. These objects were produced in Morelos, but they are nearly identical in form and style to ceramic figurines from the Basin of Mexico; drawings by Ben Karis.

The relevant spatial scale for Aztec studies, however, is even wider. The Triple Alliance (or 'Aztec') empire extended far beyond Central Mexico and incorporated many non-Nahua peoples. The empire has been the subject of extensive documentary analysis (Berdan, et al. 1996; Carrasco 1996; Hassig 1988) and limited archaeological fieldwork (Smith 2003b). This research shows that developments at Tenochtitlan cannot be understood without consideration of events and processes in the outer provinces of the empire. Capital and provinces were integrated not just through the administrative and economic channels of empire, but also through shared stylistic expression and intellectual culture (Boone 2003). For example, Aztec-style codices were produced in all parts of the empire (Table 1). Beyond the borders of the empire, it is difficult to justify the label 'Aztec studies.' Nevertheless, the dramatic Late Postclassic increases in commercial, stylistic, and intellectual exchange bind the entire area of Mesoamerica into a single interaction zone or world system, and scholarship on Aztec society needs to take this wider context into account (Smith and Berdan 2003).

The Social Hierarchy

Just as the past twenty-five years have seen an expansion in our knowledge of the geographical scope of Aztec society, so too has this period witnessed a parallel expansion in knowledge on the social scope of Aztec society, from the highest noble to the lowest provincial peasant. The Templo

Table 1. Recent facsimile editions of Aztec codices
(published since 1995)

Codex	Citation
1. Tenochtitlan:	
<i>Codex Azcatitlan</i>	(Barlow and Graulich 1995)
<i>Codex Telleriano-Remensis</i>	(Quiñones Keber 1995)
<i>Código Tributos de Coyoacán</i>	(Batalla Rosado 2002)
<i>Histoire mexicane depuis 1221 jusqu'en 1594</i>	(Medina González 1998)
<i>Ordenanza del Señor Cuauhtémoc</i>	(Valle 2000)
2. Basin of Mexico:	
<i>Código de Santa María Asunción</i>	(Williams and Harvey 1997)
<i>Código de Tepetlaoztoc</i>	(Valle 1995)
<i>Tira de Tepechpan</i>	(Noguez 1996)
3. Highland Central Mexico:	
<i>Código de Huexotzinco</i>	(Hébert, et al. 1995)
<i>Código de Tepoztlán</i>	(Brotherston 1999)
<i>Código Techialoyan de San Pedro Tototepac</i>	(Noguez 1999)
<i>Código Xiquipilco-Temoaya</i>	(García Castro 1999)
<i>Lienzos de Tepeticpac</i>	(Aguilera 1998)
4. Outer Imperial Provinces:	
<i>Código de Xicotepac</i>	(Stresser-Péan 1995)

Mayor Project, directed by Eduardo Matos Moctezuma, has provided some of the best data on the upper end of the social hierarchy. From its inception in 1978, this project has been unusually productive in generating research on a wide variety of topics, all related to the central temple of Tenochtitlan (Fig. 7). We now have a much clearer idea of the forms and histories of the Templo Mayor, its offerings, and nearby structures such as the Eagle Warriors House.

The ideological and cosmological significance of the Templo Mayor has been the subject of research by many scholars (including Eduardo Matos Moctezuma, Anthony Aveni, Johanna Broda, Elizabeth Brumfiel, Edward Calnek, David Carrasco, Michel Graulich, Doris Heyden, Alfredo López Austin, Leonardo López Luján, and others), and this work has stimulated a more general concern with Aztec myth, cosmology, and ideology (for Templo Mayor research, see Boone 1987; López Luján 1993; Matos Moctezuma 1999). The Templo Mayor Project has also helped stimulate excavations in other parts of Mexico City, most notably the ceremonial precinct of Tlatelolco (e.g., Guilliem Arroyo 1999). This archaeological work has been matched by documentary research on the capital city (Rojas 1986). Other aspects of Aztec elite culture have been illuminated by studies of codices, sculptures and other media (e.g. Boone 2000; Nicholson and Quiñones Keber 1983; Pasztory 1983).

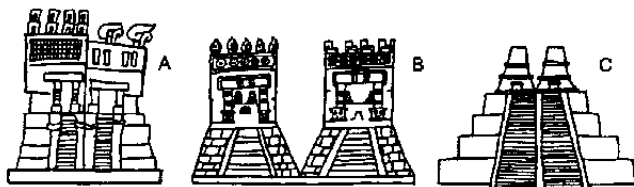


Fig. 7. Three views of the Templo Mayor of Tenochtitlan. A: *Codex Telleriano-Remensis*, f.39r (Quiñones Keber 1995); B: Durán (1967: vol. 2, lám. 29); C: adapted from Marquina (1964: lám 55); drawings by Jessie Pellerin.

By expanding the spatial scope of Aztec documentary research beyond the Basin of Mexico, the work of Lockhart (1992) and others has greatly clarified many aspects of social hierarchy and relations among nobles and commoners. Many Nahuatl-language documents provide direct windows into the lives of provincial commoners with a level of detail unknown twenty-five years ago (see Box). A different window into these same lives is provided by my excavations of commoner houses at a number of sites in Morelos. The Yautepec house shown in Figure 8 was probably inhabited by a family not unlike that of Elotl and Tlaco (see Box). The excavation of trash deposits behind this and other houses provides additional details on commoner activities and conditions. Their inhabitants were not isolated peasants, but rather active participants in regional marketing systems: they had access to many diverse imported goods, including obsidian, salt, and decorated ceramics from the Basin of Mexico, bronze tools from the Tarascan empire, and obsidian and ceramics from many other parts of highland Central Mexico. These people also participated in wider stylistic networks, as shown by their clay figurines (Fig. 6), serving vessels (see cover photo), censers, and other objects. Most of these commoner houses in Morelos were arranged into patio groups quite similar to the patio groups of the Classic period lowland Maya area (Johnston and Gonlin 1998).³

Problems to Resolve

The great expansion in Aztec scholarship since 1979 has led to a diversity of research issues, themes, and approaches, a detailed discussion of which is beyond the scope of this article. Instead, I want to step back and mention two larger problems that currently hinder Aztec scholarship. First, archaeologists and art historians have failed to compile and publish basic catalogs and descriptive data on Aztec material culture. Why is there no corpus of Aztec stone sculpture, metal objects, ceramic vessels, figurines, turquoise mosaics, or any other category of object? These items are scattered among museums and storage facilities in many countries, greatly hindering research. Those of us who work with such Aztec material objects lag behind scholars of codices and documents in terms of publication of basic data. Since 1979 numerous excellent photographic facsimiles of the major Aztec codices have been published (see Table 1 for the most recent of these) and many useful transcriptions of Aztec documents have appeared (e.g. Cline 1993; Hinz, et al. 1983). Furthermore, the *Guide to Ethnohistorical Sources of the Handbook of Middle American Indians* (Cline 1975) is now being updated (Oudijk and Castañeda de la Paz n.d.-a; Oudijk and Castañeda de la Paz n.d.-b).

A second problem that plagues Aztec studies is scholarly provincialism. In one form of provincialism, practitioners of various methodological approaches fail to consult data from other approaches or else they use such data in uncritical or simplistic ways. Too many archaeologists have a poor understanding of the documentary data and art historical methods and too many ethnohistorians and linguists fail to use archaeological data well (if at all). Another kind of provincialism is even more detrimental to the advance of Aztec scholarship. Many U.S. scholars ignore relevant work by Mexicans published in Spanish, and many Mexicans seem unaware of key scholarship published in English. Furthermore, too

chicuecally

y nical icha / ayac mocatequia / mochiti / a° moquatequia
y nican icha / ytocha / ellotl- / yn içivauh / ytocha / tlacv –
ayac / ypilçi / yz ca ycauh / yn ellotl- / ytocha vallivtl-: ya
cepovalxivtl- / y nemi / yz ca ytex / yn ellotl- / ytocha
queçallatl- / yn içivauh / ytocha / tlacv / ya nauhxitl- [sic]
maque / yz cayn imil caxtolmat- yn ellotl- matlacmatl-
quichiva / yn itex / Ahu iz ca / yn itequih / y napovaltica
/ quicava çeçvutl- y cuauh-navacayotl- / no çe çotl-
tequicuachtl- ça ya yo / atle canavac / atle totolli atle
tototetl-atle cacavatl- / atle ma ytla yva / macuilticate / yn
icha / ça cecni

Eighth house

Here is the home of some people of whom no one is baptized. All are unbaptized. Here is the home of one named Elotl. His wife is named Tlaco. He has no children. Here is Elotl's younger sibling named Hualihuitl, now twenty years old. Here is Elotl's brother-in-law named Quetzalatl. His wife is named Tlaco. They have been married four years. Here is his field: 15 matl. Elotl works 10 matl and his brother-in-law works 5. And here is his tribute: every 80 days he delivers one quarter-length of a tribute cloak. That is all; no narrow cloaks, no turkey hens, no turkey eggs, no cacao, nothing else whatsoever. Five in his home, just by themselves.

Entry from a Nahuatl-language census from the town of Cuauhchichinollan, Morelos, 1540s (Cline 1993:136)

many scholars in both the U.S. and Mexico fail to cite our European colleagues. The recent addition of English-language text to the magazine *Arqueología Mexicana* helps in a small way, but much more needs to be done – in both student training and professional infrastructure. There is no central journal, publication series, institution, conference, or venue that integrates the various methodological approaches and national research traditions in Aztec studies. The closest existing works are the annual journal, *Estudios de Cultura Náhuatl* and the *Nahua Newsletter*. These are important publications, but neither is comprehensive enough to integrate the current diversity of the field. Perhaps it is time to start a journal, newsletter, web site, or other form of scholarly production dedicated to Aztec studies. It would have to be bilingual or multilingual, truly international in scope, diverse in coverage, and timely – something like an Aztec *mexicon*.



Fig. 8. Commoner house excavated at Yautepec, Morelos (photograph by Michael E. Smith).

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Gordon Whittaker for inviting me to write this paper, and for his editing. He also helped with citations to German-language publications and comments on Nahuatl linguistics. Elizabeth H. Boone and Michel R. Oudijk provided helpful citations on recent codex research.

Endnotes:

- (1) Due to limitations of space it is not possible to cite all or even most of the publications relevant to the themes discussed in this paper. I refer the reader to a number of recent works with extensive bibliographies on Aztec research (Boone 2000; Carrasco 1999; Carrasco 1996; Graulich 1994; Hodge 1998; León-Portilla 1992; Lockhart 1992; Matos Moctezuma 1999; Nicholson and Quiñones Keber 1994; Pasztory 1983; Smith 2003b; Smith and Berdan 2003; Townsend 2000).
- (2) There is a strong desire today to view the ancient past in ethnic terms. People frequently ask archaeologists, for example, about the ethnic identity of the people of Teotihuacan – were they Aztecs or Toltecs or Mayas, or what? People are generally not satisfied with my standard answer: these were simply the inhabitants of Teotihuacan and we don't know what language they spoke or what ethnic label – if any – is appropriate. My textbook (Smith 2003b) furnishes another example. When I suggested several possible titles, the publisher informed me that the book must be called 'The Aztecs' because it was part of a series called 'The Peoples of America.' I was not allowed to change the title, nor could I add a subtitle. Siân Jones (1997) discusses some of the complexities and pitfalls of ethnic interpretations of the past.
- (3) Given some of the striking similarities between Aztec and Classic Maya social patterns – from patio groups to city-states (Grube 2000) – it is surprising that more Mayanists do not consult Aztec ethnohistorical data for models and analogues to help understand Classic Maya social organization. To take just one example, the common assumption that Classic Mayan patio groups were inhabited by kin groups might be questioned when considered in light of our detailed knowledge of the non-kinship relationships that often structured membership in Aztec patio groups (Carrasco 1976; Smith 1993b).

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ZUSAMMENFASSUNG: Dieser Aufsatz gibt einen Überblick über die wichtigsten Fortschritte in der Aztekenforschung des letzten Vierteljahrhunderts, von der Entdeckung des Coyolxauhqui-Steins im Jahre 1978 bis heute. Nach einer Diskussion der Termini "aztekisch" und "Azteken" wird die geographische Ausdehnung unseres Bildes der Welt der Azteken, von einer bisherigen Überbetonung von Tenochtitlan zu einer balancierten Berücksichtigung des ganzen Reiches, skizziert. Am Schluß steht eine Besprechung einiger Probleme, die einen weiteren Fortschritt in Aztekenstudien etwas zurückhalten.

RESUMEN: Este artículo es una reseña breve de algunos avances en los "estudios Aztecas" durante el último cuarto-siglo, desde el descubrimiento de la piedra de Coyolxauhqui en 1978 hasta 2002. Empiezo con una discusión de la palabra "Azteca." Luego investigo la expansión geográfica en nuestra concepción del mundo Azteca, desde Tenochtitlan hasta los límites del imperio. Al final, discuto algunos problemas que afectan las investigaciones del mundo Azteca.

News and Notes

United States trying to return artifacts from Guatemala

NEW YORK/BOSTON (The New York Times/The Boston Globe). In January 1998 26 Precolumbian stone and ceramic artifacts from the Peten Lowlands and the southern Guatemalan coast were brought inside suitcases to Miami by two persons who described the artifacts on Customs forms as "30 artifacts and two books packed into 10 boxes." Because no required official permission from the Guatemalan government to take them out of the country existed, U.S. Customs agents promptly seized the artifacts as cultural patrimony of Guatemala. The collection of pottery and figurines, dated between 500 and 1200 A.D. and valued at \$165,000, was then taken to a vault in the basement of Customs' headquarters inside the World Trade Center. The pieces survived the September 11, 2001, terror attacks, and were found months afterward by crews sifting through the rubble. They are now in a Miami warehouse. No information was given why the artifacts remained stored in New York for so long. With the intent of returning them to Guatemala the American Justice Department took the first steps toward legally taking ownership of the artifacts recently, but the two importers who have not been charged yet by prosecutors have hired attorneys to fight to keep the pieces in the United States. A conclusion has not yet been reached.

Alleged evidence for Olmec origins of Mesoamerican writing

NEW YORK/WASHINGTON D.C. (New York Times/Science). At the end of last year a team of archaeologists led by Mary E. Pohl of Florida State University in Tallahassee discovered near the Olmec centre of La Venta, Tabasco, Mexico, a cylinder seal and fragments of a carved greenstone plaque bearing glyphs. These artifacts date to c. 650 B.C. and therefore predate other known examples of early Mesoamerican writing for more than 300 years. According to Mary E. Pohl, Kevin O. Pope of Geo Eco Arc Research, Aquasco, and Christopher von Nagy of Tulane University, New Orleans, who have discussed this important finding in a recent article (see: *Science*, Vol. 298, Number 5600, Issue of 6 December 2002, pp. 1985–1987) the artifacts reveal that key aspects of early script were already present in Olmec writing: the combination of pictographic and glyphic elements to represent speech, the use of the sacred 260-day calendar, and the connection between writing, the calendar, and kingship. The authors suggest that Mesoamerican writing originated in the polity of La Venta.

Among specialists this interpretation has been discussed controversially. While some scholars reacted to the new findings with excitement, others reacted with justifiable caution, questioning the glyphic elements as examples of true writing, as opposed to iconography. Michael D. Coe of Yale University, for example, stated that until much more evidence of Olmec writing was uncovered this interpretation would remain speculative. The image on the cylinder seal, which has the size of a human fist and apparently was used as a roller stamp, shows a bird. Two glyphs emanate from the bird's beak, suggesting speech scrolls. The authors of the *Science* article interpret the glyphs as 3 Ajaw and "King". 3 Ajaw is known as a day in the sacred calendar and could also have functioned in this context as the personal name of a king. In their report Pohl, Pope and von Nagy attempted to identify other glyphs on fragments of the plaque that was found in refuse deposits at the site of San Andres, three miles from La Venta.

Xipe Totec statue found in situ in El Salvador

SAN SALVADOR/BERKELEY (Paul E. Amaroli/Karen Olsen Bruhns). Life- to near life-sized ceramic statues of the Mexican deity Xipe Totec appear in the early Postclassic throughout Mexico and Mexican influenced areas. Although a fair number of these statues are known, only three have had good provenience data: the Mazapan Phase (Early Postclassic) statue excavated by Sigvald Linné in 1934 in the ruins of a structure above the Xolalpan Palace in Teotihuacan, an Early Postclassic statue excavated by Manuel Torres in Veracruz at Piedras Negras (also known as Madereros) near Cerro de las Mesas, and, more recently, a Postclassic statue found with another, of an anthropomorphic bat deity, in Tezoquipan, in Central Mexico. However, in the early months of 2002 an additional statue of Xipe was found in central El Salvador.

The archaeological site of Carranza is located approximately 1 km south of the large urban site of Cihuatán, of which it may have been a suburb. The site is located on the floor of the Acelhuate Valley and all but two of its structures have been destroyed by agricultural activities, mainly the

mexicon

