

The Region of the North

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Of ~~all~~ the four Cardinal points orienting the
terrestrial plane, ^{world} there is one so primal ^{in its influence} in its
influence, ^{and} so ^{awesome} ~~supreme~~ ^{terrible} ~~in its~~ ^{supremacy} ~~supreme~~ power that it could be said of it that all ^{the} ~~the~~
other directions and centers and even those ^{other} different
levels of the upper and lower worlds were in some
way shaped by it and took on ^{each} their peculiar and
particular character as a result of their relationship
with it.

All ~~origins~~ ^{had their beginning there}, beneath
the ~~northern~~ ^{great} ~~star~~ ^{northern} ~~star~~ ^{star} it was into the great northern
fire shrine at Teotihuacan that the postulated god
Minauatzin cast himself to blaze forth as the
brilliant new fifth sun ^{initiating} ^{by his example} ^{with its upper} ^{movement}
the creation of a new cosmos and paradigm ^{created}
and ~~sustained~~ ^{sustained} by the sacrifice ^{by} ^{the} continuous
sacrifice of ~~men~~ ^{men} and ~~birds~~ ^{birds}.

And it was from here in the north, from Coatlán
the place of life that the great sacred celestial
way began, moving south ^{across the earth} ~~across the world~~ ^{the earth}
giving and establishing the first ~~of the~~ world axis.
This ^{and} passage way for all wanderers, celestial divine
celestial and human. ~~This~~ was the sun's seasonal
road and the way of the ancestors ^{of} warriors and
merchants - ce Coatl ~~Malinche~~ ^{Malinche}.

In terms of pervasive influence no other city of ancient
mexico was more widely venerated than this one. To the Aztecs
this was the place where gods were created initiating the
era of the fifth sun - their era and the last creation in
a sequence of five all of which had ended in destruction by one of the primary
elements

In the drawing we stand in the middle of the road that
some say was first called by the spanish the way of the dead,
although it is more likely that they learned this from the natives
who lived nearby. since they had no reason to call it ~~this~~ ^{by any name}.

We stand looking north to where the road ends ~~at the~~
~~the so called~~ ~~the temple of the moon~~. and our story begins

We are standing in the middle of the great sacred north-
south road ^{at Teotihuacan} looking north to ^{the place where it both terminates} ~~where this prime apical~~
~~way terminates and begins at the foot and begins~~. It
opens into a large ceremonial square, the center of
which marked the ^{the location of the sacred fire} ~~spot~~ ^{according to Aztec myth} the puffed
god Nanauacatl threw himself in a sacrificial act that
was to transform him into the brilliant new fifth sun and set
in motion the final age of the Cosmos. The other gods
followed ~~followed~~ this unworthy ones example and were
themselves renewed as the myth unfolded.

I mention just these few ~~facts~~ ^{points} because ^{even in}
its briefest ~~state~~ ^{both the particular} expression this myth contains the essence ~~of~~
the meaning of this particular ~~place~~. Here in the city of
the gods where the sacred ~~terminates~~ ^{terminates} and our story begins.

our search

We begin here at Teotihuacan near the terminus
of the great North South sacred ~~road~~^{way} looking north
toward the great fire shrine which stood at the base
of the what is called today the temple of the moon.

According to Aztec legend, the gods assembled at this place
for the purpose of deciding ~~among themselves which~~
one it ~~would be~~^{who} ~~which~~ among them ^{who} would volunteer
~~to immolate himself~~^{for immolation} in the fires of Xiuhtecuhtli and
by this sacrifice initiate the fifth and final cosmic
age. The other four "suns" had been ^{previously} destroyed by one of
the primal elements of wind fire ^{water} ~~the~~ primarily because of a certain incompleteness
or rather, a lack of ~~the~~ a proper symbiosis between the creators
and the created. When the great gods hesitated at
this prospect the lowly diseased and mutilated god
Manahuatzen, covered with sores and dressed
in rags stepped forward and threw himself
into the brazier. In a sudden rush and explosion
of light the fifth sun was born ^{the principle} of sacrifice

By his ^{action} sacrifice the missing element, ~~in the relationship~~
~~was~~ had been introduced into the world. Later, when
man was created and given ^{the} burden of this
Conception of the divine, this first lesson and model
and ~~the~~ end of ~~of~~ his own sacrificial obligations
to the ~~to~~ its maintenance and to his own ^{this} had been
his first lesson. It was to become the driving
force in Aztec thought.

But here we are concerned with ^{other} beginnings

and

particularly ~~structural~~ ^{spacial + temporal} with the basic organization of cosmic ~~and~~ ^{temporal} structure.

^{at these} ~~most~~ ^{organization began} Much is known about these principles and about how cities were planned to reflect them, being for the most part planned upon the primary ~~types of~~ ^{from the} north south and east west apes and the completion of these four Cardinal points ~~the~~ ^{center} with that point ~~for~~ marking their intersection.

This center although of great importance can be somewhat misleading because of a natural impulse ^{our} to see a dominance in the one point that the two apes share in common. But there is a much greater ~~entity~~ ^{entity} ~~of principle~~ ^{of principle} which must be considered, one which is that even more primal in its influence and sheer power, ^{at preexisting} ~~than~~ ^{other} any temporal conception of structure ~~and one and one which pre~~ ^{temporal} which followed it

But there is a much greater entity we must consider, one which pre-existed all other temporal forms ^{of} ~~and~~ organizations, and one so primal in its influence and ^{sheer} power that literally all that exists does so because of it. Issue this we have to look to the night sky to that one fixed point in the heavens about which every thing else revolved, the north star

In a cosmos and world in constant flux this unique fixed center became the perfect source and ^{in heaven + on earth} center, ~~it became~~ a place where all things emerged and returned.

It is no wonder that its orientation dictated the

the creation an land of the most important of the two axes the north-south sacred way.

The drawings on these pages are of cities known to have been influential on the Aztecs or, like Cempoala to have been part of the a similar heritage.

One can see at a glance the dominance of the north-south road in each of ^{these} ~~them~~ and notice also how each ~~of these roads~~ terminates in an important temple complex. These temples were all about origins.

Since this book is about the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan and more particularly about its ~~central ceremonial~~ ~~ceremonial~~ ^{the organization of its central ceremonial} precinct it is appropriate for us to begin as they would ^{have begun} at the terminus of their north-south axis at a place that could be no other than the complex of Coatlán. ~~There are so many clues to its being here~~

~~There are many clues to its ^{appearing precisely} ~~appearance~~ here, enough to satisfy even the most skeptical not the least of which is the earliest map of the city~~

~~When the ^{mistake in the orientation of the temple square} Nuremberg map of 1524 is corrected to fit by inverting it to conform with the known site it will be seen that the north-south road does indeed end at an entrance way with three doorways. This will be discussed later in the section on Coatlán.~~

at the northern extremity of this enclosure was the temple of Cihuacoatl called the tlilan ^{the place of gloom} because no light was allowed to enter it. This was the great womb

and tomb of the earth where all life was generated
and to which it returned upon death ~~to~~ to dissolution
in the underworld ~~and eventual recycling in an~~
and less cycles of creation and destruction.

Here in the front ~~stage~~ hall before the closed idol Chamber
~~po~~ burned a perpetual fire in a large brazier built
into its floor. It was from this place that all other
fires were taken to the various temples when needed.

This marked it for special veneration since not
even in the temple of Xintecuhtli just to the west
of Tullan did fire burn constantly.

Even the stars were born here in the depths of
the earth to the goddess Citlalique, another aspect
of Cihuacoatl. The darkness which surrounded
these ~~idols~~ ^{or deities other idols} in Tullan was the personification ^{and presence} of the
greatest the most powerful of all the gods ^{the Great God}, Tezcatlipoca
which ^{perhaps} expresses the ultimate in origins since this
god created himself.

Continuing the concept of beginnings and endings
There is Xintecuhtli the old and venerated god of Fire.
whose temple ^{within the compound lay on the western side}
No ceremony could take place without first acknowledging
his presence. All meals and all drinking feasts
began with offering the first morsels or drops of
drink to him. He presided over the conception of children
and at their baptisms ~~there~~ when they were first passed
through ^{over} the fire. It was he, as the fire of cremation who
liberated their spirits at the end ^{of creation}.

Two other primary structures should be noted.

The first on the precincts Eastern side consisted of a small palace where the ^{chosen} ~~next~~ candidate for rulership did penance at the time of his coronation, it's a kind of death and rebirth. It was here also that he would retire upon the advent of the great festivals often with fellow rulers of the triple alliance to do the required four days of fasting and penance.

The other structure we must know is the Coacales the sacred prison ^{rooms} ~~rooms~~, located between the Itllan and the ~~Itzamal~~ the fire gods temple.

Here were housed the ~~the~~ as hostages, the captured gods of conquered peoples. That the king would keep these powers within his own house was ~~not~~ ~~on no one~~ a lesson lost on no one and a source of great prestige in the land.