

8 words / line
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8 pages

approx 200 words per page

Approx: 1,600 words this essay

On November 16, 2000 at 7 o'clock in the evening I had the honor - and terror - of delivering a paper on my twin brother Scott's and my Aztec researches to a gathering of Mexican archaeologists, anthropologists, artists and scholars of other disciplines. The place was El Aire Gallery, a wonderful Barragan designed building in the suburb of Tizatlan southwest of downtown Mexico City.

The place, the time, and the people made that event an exciting culmination of almost forty years of our personal search to simply see for ourselves how the long-vanished MexicaAztec capital city of Tenochtitlan may have appeared to the first Europeans who looked on in ^{amazement} wonder and wrote down what they saw. Our gathering was but nine days past the four hundredth and eighty-first anniversary of Cortez's arrival at Tenochtitlan and his meeting with the emperor Motecuzohma Xocoyotzin. That year of 1519 was the year One Reed of the native calendar. An auspicious time. It was the year of the predicted return of the god Quetzalcoatl.

The man who was to introduce me to the audience that evening and who moderated the lively discussion which followed my talk was Eduardo Matos Moctezuma, director of the the Museo Templo Mayor and himself a distant relation of the great Motecuzohma. As an artist I was further pleased to learn that El Aire gallery was built in what had once been the garden of Rosa and Miguel Covarrubias and that the daughter of Diego Ribera now lived

390 words per page - Scott's essay - 3 page numbers = $1\frac{1}{2}$ sheets

- Stuart's essay - 4 page numbers = 2 sheets

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next door in the Covarrubias house. El Aire was truly on sacred ground.

Both Miguel and Diego have long been heroes of ours. As Mexican artists with international reputations they played a major role in bringing the riches of ancient meso-american art and culture to a wider world audience through their own art and, especially in the case of Covarrubias, through serious groundbreaking research. Artists have always made major contributions to world archaeology since its beginnings as a discipline in the early nineteenth century.

Unfortunately I was too nervous and had little time to appreciate these interesting connections as I contemplated presenting to an audience of Mexicans, many of them experts, Scott's and my plan of the sacred religious precinct of Tenochtitlan called the Templo Mayor. Our concept was in many ways in conflict with the model of the "Great Temple" offered by the Museo Nacional de Antropologia y Historia and the model at the Museo Templo Mayor. As I worked with the slide projectionist and hastily shuffled my papers I took small comfort in knowing that the models in these two important museums also differed from each other.

I was not just nervous; I was exhausted as well. I had eaten only a snack for the entire day before coming to the gallery and had gotten no rest at all. From 9 o'clock that morning I had been on a dream tour of the major Aztec

archaeological digs in and under the colonial buildings surrounding the huge excavations of the great Temple. The Templo Mayor investigations had been carried out by Eduardo Matos and his team since 1978 when sewer workers discovered a major Aztec monument, the stone of Coyoxauhqui, while doing street repairs. All these places were off-limits to the public. But today as a guest of Eduardo Matos and Jose Alvaro Barrera Rivera, the archaeologist actually in charge of the digs, I had experienced the unique opportunity of finally being able to test our own vision of the Templo Mayor with the excavations of some of the actual structures. These, inspite of our intense research, had often ultimately been a matter of guesswork.

It was truly a day of emotional highs and lows. From morning until late afternoon I explored under the Great Cathedral of Mexico, the National Palace, the colonial house of the Marqueses de Apartado and other important sites. I saw with my own eyes definite confirmation of many of our ideas. But before I could pat Scott and myself on the back, I saw evidence that also contradicted elements of our plan and so much that was simply inconclusive. Such is usuually the frustrating result of urban archaeology, especially in a great and busy place like downtown Mexico City that only permits limited investigtions.

Later that evening at El Aire Gallery, just before my talk, I was uncomfortably aware that there just was no time to digest what I had seen that day or to make needed alterations. Carmen *in my speech*

Parra, the gallery's owner and a well-known Mexican artist in her own right, had convinced me to read my speech from the Spanish translation ~~that~~ her staff had prepared for me. As I skimmed through the pages, I could not stop thinking that I was about to deliver my paper to an audience with Barrera and his colleagues in attendance and I now had major doubts.

My instincts, however, told me not to deliver a ~~warning~~ caveat. That might negate much of the exciting confirmation of our theories. I had seen that day that the great temple of Tezcatlipoca did face west as we had ^{thought} ~~guessed~~ and not north as the museums had shown. The ballcourt near the western gate of the sacred precinct did indeed run from east to west as we thought and not north to south according to the official view. There were other tantalizing clues that we were basically correct in our conclusion that there was a great northern precinct or courtyard at the end of the north to south road, ^{which} ~~which~~ cut off the avenue's access to the northern gate to create the most sacred part of the Templo Mayor, ~~It was called~~ the Coatlan.

These are not simple technical observations. They go to the heart of the meaning of the Templo Mayor and how it functioned as a man-made model of the cosmos, a calendar in stone, and a mnemonic stage upon which the cyclical ceremonies of the seasons and major events in Mexico myth and history were reenacted.

After Eduardo Matos ~~Moctezuma~~ introduced me to the audience,

I thanked the people for coming and offered Scott's apology for not being able to attend. The atmosphere of the place was muy simpatico. In spite of my nervousness I felt that the audience really wanted me to do well. As I read my speech ^{the my} an assistant flashed slide images of our models, drawings and paintings upon the large white wall behind me. The oohs and ahhs from the spectators were gratifying though it was unnerving to see out of the corner of my eye that Eduardo Matos was furiously scribbling notes as I spoke. My presentation lasted one hour and twenty minutes and had only one linguistic gaff which provoked much good-natured laughter. I can remember that as I read it to the audience - without having rehearsed - my essay seemed so much more beautiful in Spanish.

When I finished, there was loud, enthusiastic applause, a standing ovation in fact. The enthusiasm, I thought at the time, was probably as much for me delivering my paper in Spanish as for what I had to say. Professor Matos then stood up and gave a twenty minute critique, much of which I could not clearly understand. This was followed not by questions from the audience as I had anticipated but by statements from various scholars, some supporting many of Scott's and my conclusions, others rigorously disagreeing. All of course in Spanish. It did not seem appropriate to make a reply. This was a conferencia after all. I had voiced my views. Now it was time for others to give theirs. The atmosphere continued to be more cordial

than critical, and I could see that the people who had braved the Mexico City traffic to hear a gringo tell them about their own past - a risky thing to do in culturally sensitive Mexico - were grateful and appreciative of the huge efforts Scott and I had made in our studies.

Later that evening as the conferencia morphed into an informal party, I was approached by an elderly mexican gentleman, elegantly dressed, whose name I unfortunately do not recall. He thanked me in Spanish, but noticing my fatigue continued the conversation in English. He seemed knowledgeable, and listened patiently as I told him of my archaeological tour that day and how it was making me doubt some of my former conclusions and perhaps even whether or not what Scott and I had done was ~~not~~ in some ways a waste of time. Such uncertainties had always plagued us.

He put his hand on my shoulder and gently admonished me, saying that he too was a life-long student of pre-Colombian cultures. He said that it was the nature of our search for truth that what we achieve, if we achieve anything, represents only a step or two on a long ladder leading to greater knowledge and understanding. In his nearly sixty years of study he had been witness to an incredible explosion of knowledge which had rendered some of his hard-won theories obsolete, while ~~others~~ ~~seemed confirmed~~. As he saw some of his cherished ideas overturned, not once had he thought that his search had been

a waste of time.

" To see how far we have come, " he said, " just imagine the gulf of silence that existed between a forgotten Aztec past and that day in 1790 when two of the Aztecs' greatest monuments, the now famous Calender Stone and the gigantic statue of the goddess Coatlicue, were dug up by street workman in the southeast corner of the Zocalo plaza. Most Mexicans of Spanish descent cared not for the indian past. The ^Mmestizos and the people of pure indigenous blood observed only a few of the ancient customs but rarely knew why they did. All was mystery"

He went on to say that for more than two and a half centuries native Mexican peoples had been told ~~unceasingly~~ that they had been saved from a savage and barbarous life, that everything native was mean and perverted. If as scholars our search for knowledge has any purpose other than simple curiosity, it is perhaps to restore some measure of respect for cultures that were already ancient and wonderfully developed when Europeans discovered the so-called New World.

The Mexican gentleman thanked me for rightfully praising past scholars. I had called them the giants upon whose shoulders Scott and I now stood. He also expressed gratitude for our work and that the sheer number of our paintings and drawings had given him a wonderful vision of Mexico's past that he had not had before. * It made little difference to him or should to us if some of the details of our vision would change as we

learned more; the big picture we were creating seemed right to him and was well worth ^{it} ~~the~~ effort. And the model we had constructed of the Templo Mayor, though also subject to ^{possible} change, seemed to offer an excellent opportunity to understand the nature and orientation of Aztec religion and myth as we now understand them.

I could not have expressed our aims better. Through Scott's models, through our paintings, drawings and collections of original Aztec and Mixtec art we want to bring you, the viewer, along with us and share with you at least some of the marvelous visions that exist in our mind's eye as a result of nearly forty years of research. If we can convey a feeling of the time, then for those who want to know more, the knowledge will follow. It is not the purpose of this exhibition to explain our project in depth. If we can leave our audience with that sense of wonder which overwhelmed the eyes of the first Spaniards to behold the great city of Mexico-Tenochtitlan in all its splendor, then we will have faithfully done our job.

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