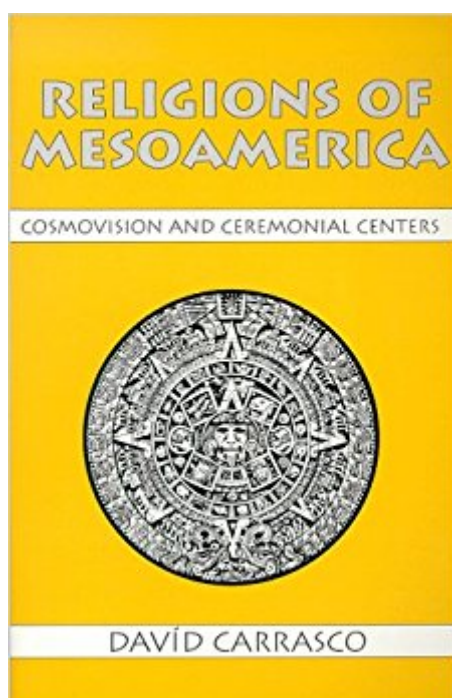


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Religions Of Mesoamerica: Cosmovision And Ceremonial Centers (Religious Traditions Of The World)



Synopsis

Engaging exploration of religious expression in Mexico! Highly regarded scholar David Carrasco provides an overview of the history of Mesoamerican cultures and vividly describes their religious forms, structures, myths, and prevailing "cosmology"--the Mesoamerican view of time and space and its ritualized representation and enactment. Carrasco details the dynamics of two important cultures--the Aztec and the Maya--and discusses the impact of the Spanish conquest and the continuity of native traditions into the post-Columbian and contemporary eras. Integrating recent archaeological discoveries in Mexico City, he brings about a comprehensive understanding of ritual human sacrifice, a subject often ignored in religious studies.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Clear, crisp and engaging...Carrasco conveys the long-term vitality of religious expression in Mexico and celebrates the creative potential of the human imagination." -- William B. Taylor, professor of history, University of Virginia --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

An introduction to the native religions of Mexico and Central America from a foremost scholar in the field. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Mexican-American Harvard Divinity School Professor David Carrasco has accomplished the near-impossible. This beautifully written, short book (159 pages) explains clearly and systematically key elements of Mesoamerican religious thought. It is a superb introduction to Mesoamerican culture graced by simple illustrations that convey important meanings. I bought this book hoping to find an explanation for the ritual violence that was an integral part of Mesoamerican culture. I was not disappointed. Carrasco patiently, systematically lays the foundation, stone by stone, for us to understand rituals grounded in a cosmic understanding that "...cosmic order comes from conflict and sacrifice." But that's not all. After taking us through key elements of Mesoamerican religious thought, Carrasco invites us to consider "Colonialism and Creativity

A great read

Carrasco's writing is amazing. You'll find none better.

This book was an assigned text in a class I took on Latin American history. It covers the view of the world, in a spiritual, religious and philosophical sense, as adopted by the Aztecs, Mayans, and several other groups in the area now known as Mexico and Central America. The author explores this world view as it existed prior to Columbus, and in the proceeding centuries as influences such as Christianity seeped in. The author cites many primary and secondary sources, such as ancient Native American texts, journal entries from early Spanish explorers, and oral histories of Native Mexicans. The book is more than a religious studies text; it also explores the history of contact between the Spanish and the natives, and shows how this contact changed the worldviews of the Native Americans.

Religions of Mesoamerica is a decent overview into the spiritual structure of the indigenous peoples of that area as presented by conventionally accepted archeology. But the book is poorly put together as the main topic of the book, cosmology is not broached until page 52, that's a quarter of the way through. The author should have defined his terms early. Yes at page 19 in the intro he introduces the concepts of worldmaking, worldcentering, and world renewing, but does not anchor these into a coherent view consistently throughout the text. You definitely get the impression that you are dealing with an outsider, an archeologist, who presents the standard archeological presumptions and biases. In the section on the Aztec the author regurgitates the standard view of the Aztec as bloodthirsty savages. This is an old line, really smokescreen, left over from the conquest. But even

with this blemished theme the author does not go off the deep end into presumptions of blood and gore as he did in *City of Sacrifice: Violence From the Aztec Empire to the Modern Americas*. The major missing constant from an authentic and genuine study of the spiritual urgings of the entire region is the important role of shamanism and specifically entheogenic plants. The deep visions behind the cosmovision are undoubtedly a combination of ceremony, privations, yes bloodletting, and especially hallucinogens. A primary figure from the Aztec culture, Xochipilli, the god of 'flowers' is replete in deep meditation no doubt supported by a combination of entheogenic plants carved on the base on which he sits. Archeology tip toes around this subject as much as they do the cycle nature of time and the probable alternate truth of human origins. Both Terence McKenna's *Food of the Gods: The Search for the Original Tree of Knowledge A Radical History of Plants, Drugs, and Human Evolution* and Graham Hancock's *Supernatural: Meetings with the Ancient Teachers of Mankind* present an honest and open-minded examination into the likely sources of ancient wisdom in the world. If you are new to the subject of the book then I would not start with this one. I would start at *Mexico: From the Olmecs to the Aztecs, Sixth Edition* which is a superior work. And if you want to really get into MesoAmerican cosmovision then the best place in print is Laurette Sejourne's *Burning Water: Thought and Religion in Ancient Mexico* (if you can get the Thames & Hudson copy it is a little larger and easier to read than the Shambhala version).

The application of worldmaking, worldcentering and worldrenewal as a way to understand the role of activities within any cultural system is a brilliant idea, although not applied cross-culturally in Mr. Carrasco's book. I have used these concepts to explore other cultures and ideas and have found it quite interesting. It is a way of understanding something on unique grounds. Every culture, every human being, I think, employs this type of process in his/her view of things. The book, not only for its content, but also the way it introduces and organizes ideas is really worth merit and worth reading.

In terms of understanding the way the human creature perceives the world around it, Carrasco offers a set of tools from which to build a nearly universal understanding of far more than just Mesoamerican belief systems. The need found in one religious system is universal to others because they serve the same basic human need. World-centering, world-renewing and world-making are all done in every system of religious or philosophical belief. Carrasco's study of Mesoamerican belief is detailed and fascinating. It can lead one into a much larger view of the world.

I was delighted to find this book, as the author does a marvelous job of explaining the religions of complex cultures such as the Olmecs, Toltecs, Aztecs and Mayans in a way that is thoughtful and easy to read. Unlike several other similar texts, this is not boring. Nor do you need to be an anthropologist to enjoy or understand this text. It opens up fascinating worldviews to the average reader. I highly recommend it. Good chronology included.

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