

history. Yet the results were the same—massive depopulation.

The trend in recent years has been to raise population estimates of many regions of the New World. In contrast, an interesting archeological study (reported on in Verano and Ubelaker) was conducted by Betty Meggers in the Amazon basin. Meggers concludes that early explorers' accounts of large populations in the region must be exaggerated; she sees little evidence of dense settlement along the Amazon. She suggests a population of not more than 2 million for Amazonia. As George Milner points out in his contribution to Verano and Ubelaker, only archeology will give us new evidence to narrow the considerable range of population estimates for the New World.

These three volumes contain some of the very best scholarship on pre-Columbian populations and disease and the effects of Old World disease on New World peoples. It is refreshing to see so many scholars with diverse backgrounds working on common problems. These volumes bring together demographers, archeologists, physical anthropologists, pathologists, geographers, ethnohistorians, sociologists, and historians, each with a different perspective. The results are significant, but, as with any scientific endeavor, the final word is yet to be written.

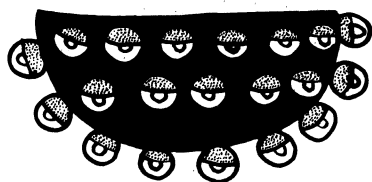
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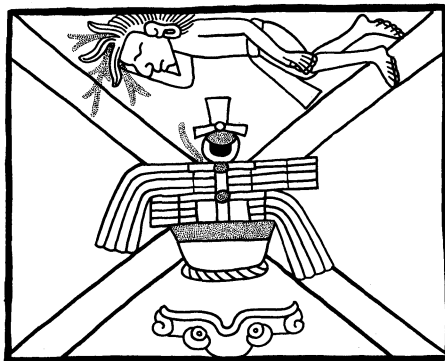
Mesoamerican Pantheon

The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya. An Illustrated Dictionary of Mesoamerican Religion. MARY MILLER and KARL TAUBE. Thames and Hudson, New York, 1993 (distributor, Norton, New York). 216 pp., illus. \$34.95.

Casual visitors to the fantastically rich mythological landscape of Mesoamerica will soon find themselves without bearings: the names of supernatural beings occur in bewildering variety, and the diversity of cosmological and ritual concepts reflects the ethnic variety of the culture area. Thank heaven—or heavens, if we are to invoke the Mesoamerican notion of multiple cosmic layers—that Mary Miller and Karl Taube have decided to write this book. *The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya* offers a unique compendium of terms and their explanations, ranging from examples in the later, Aztec religious system to earlier, Classic Maya



"The Aztec sign for the starry night, Codex Mendoza, 16th c." [From *The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya*]



"A cave sign, a bowl with brooms and copal, and the body of a probable executed criminal, placed with crossroads, Codex Laud, Late Postclassic period. In Mesoamerican thought, crossroads were widely considered to be dangerous places that provided access to the Underworld." [From *The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya*]

beliefs, which have come increasingly into focus as the decipherment of Maya glyphs continues apace. The erudition here is unmatched, at least as it regards religion, by any other comprehensive book on Mesoamerica.

Much of the volume consists of an alphabetical listing of terms and concepts, so that, for example, "Cocijo," a label for a supernatural from the Zapotec culture that is associated with lightning and rain, appears on the same page as a reference to "Coatepec," an important location in Aztec mythology. The reader searching for a single, flowing explication of Mesoamerican religion has come to the wrong book—this is a work of reference that should be coupled with some of the standard textbooks on Mesoamerica. Nonetheless, the introductory chapter offers one of the tidiest and most concise treatments yet written of religious symbolism in the region. Emphases include the shamanistic element of sacred iconography as well as the elaborate metaphors that likened, say, maize and humans; Miller and Taube make the point that these metaphors do not always have rigid or exclusive referents but form part of a shifting poetic vocabulary. Other patterns, such as those of structural replication and the use of divine charters for state policies, also receive their due.

As usual for Thames and Hudson, the



"A monkey scribe dancing with a mirror, detail from a Late Classic Maya vase. The monkey scribes appearing in Classic Maya iconography are now known to be early forms of Hun Batz and Hun Chuen of the *Popol Vuh*" or "council book," the "most important surviving sacred book of the Quiché Maya." [From *The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya*]

book displays high standards of design and production, something sadly lacking in the products of many university presses these days. The many fine illustrations, nowhere overreduced or muddled by coarse screening, are grouped in the outside columns of right-hand pages, yielding a book that is well illustrated but not cluttered. More important than its overall look, however, is the fact that *Gods and Symbols* offers something that is at once old and new. In contrast to the current vogue of emphasizing cultural diversity rather than religious commonalities in Mesoamerica, Miller and Taube weave throughout this full, cultural dictionary the conviction that scholars should not narrow their focus but should instead amplify it, through controlled comparisons between Aztec and Maya and between Mixtec concepts and those of Central Mexico. In this they build on the legacy of Eduard Seler, who set a formidable standard of knowledge that only a few modern specialists can match. With this work Miller and Taube provide both a Baedeker to the uninitiated and, on a more scholarly level, compelling testimony in favor of shared religious features in ancient Mesoamerica. If I have one criticism it is that readers might have enjoyed more discussion of controversy and dispute, particularly in the introductory essay or in the otherwise useful appendix describing sources and the history of research. Such spice would have enlivened further an already tasty mix.

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