

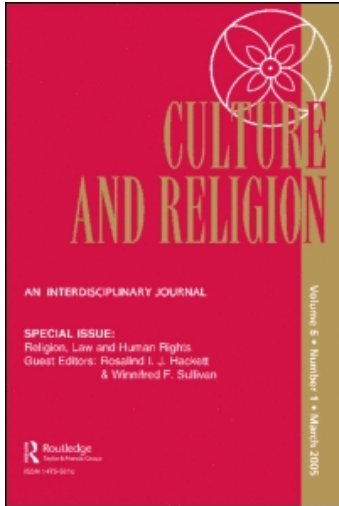
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Zapotec sacred places, enduring and/or ephemeral: Reverence, realignment and commodification at an archaeological-tourist site in Southern Mexico

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Zapotec sacred places, enduring and/or ephemeral: Reverence, realignment and commodification at an archaeological-tourist site in Southern Mexico

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The abundant and rightfully famous archaeological ruins of Mexico, besides attesting to the grand achievements of pre-Columbian Mesoamerican culture, also serve as foci for the preservation and/or reaffirmation of contemporary indigenous religion and identity. Additionally, those same ancient ruins have been, in many instances, tidied up and reconfigured variously as outdoor classrooms and museums for the dissemination of a narrative of Mexican national identity, as the country's premier tourist attractions, and thus as sites eventually prized far more as engines of economic development than as educational or religious contexts. Where indigenous peoples are often imagined as passive victims in this commodification of their sacred sites, the case study featured in this article, namely, the twentieth century management of the internationally renowned Zapotec site of Mitla, Oaxaca reveals a native community playing a very active role, arguably the lead role, in the exploitation of the economic potential of its famed ruins. Indeed, the Mitleyenos' entrepreneurially astute reconfiguration of their local sacred geography, a realignment that balanced unprecedented economic challenges with on-going devotional commitments, suggests that the designation of various sites and buildings as 'sacred', albeit an extremely pressing matter, is also much more contingent and more transient than is generally assumed.

Keywords: architecture; space; archaeology; Mesoamerica; tourism; indigenous

The Ruins of Mitla, among the most interesting and most accessible of the Mexican ruined cities, are well deserving of a visit. They lie about 25 M.S.-E. of *Oaxaca City*, in the town of *San Pablo Mitla* . . . A good walker can make the outward trip in 7 h, visit the ruins by twilight of the same day and return at his leisure the day following. He will be able to register many pleasant impressions of the Indians and their country life that will be impossible on a quick trip over the road. At present, parts of the road are not practicable for automobiles . . .

T. Philip Terry (1909).¹

1. The archaeological-tourist experience: Guides, vendors and spectres of authenticity

In a scene repeated each morning at the famed archaeological ruins of Chichén Itzá, tourists arrive by the busload from Cancun and other beach resorts along the

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so-called Maya Riviera, which lies on east coast of Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula, in order to take in the most heavily visited of all pre-Columbian cities of the Maya.² Marketed alongside – and thus oddly parallel with – scuba diving and snorkelling, swimming with dolphins, flamingo gazing, spicy nightlife and cuisine, a visit to the Maya ruins is at present a near-mandatory component of any vacation to these Caribbean resorts. In a scene reminiscent of the awkward matching of boys and girls at a junior high school dance, tourists exiting their buses and vans encounter a battery of guides, strategically positioned to intercept the visitors as they approach the entry to the ruins. Competition to pair up with travellers that show the greatest pecuniary potential is intense; and because each day the scene is virtually identical, the guides' skills in assessing and courting prospective clients, along with the pecking order among themselves, are very well honed.

For their part, the tourists arrive with a wide spectrum of interests and knowledge about the ruins and the Maya. For some, the visit is culmination of a long-held dream and very considerable reading, while others know almost nothing of the place or the indigenous peoples of Mesoamerica. 'Religio-cultural tourism' to all of Mexico's major archaeological sites has spiked in the past couple decades, and thus many travellers bring fulsome expectations of spiritual enhancement to their visit of the ancient pilgrimage centre. Indeed, each spring equinox since the 1980s, tens of thousands venture to Chichén Itzá in order to witness the play of light and shadow on the site's main pyramid, an ingeniously choreographed astro-architectural effect that, according to stock interpretations, depicts the mythical flying serpent, Quetzalcoatl, descending from the sky; and, year round, metaphysically predisposed enthusiasts arrive with expectancy of participating in the special energy that the place ostensibly has to offer.³ Yet, for many other travellers, the archaeological jaunt is simply an obligatory interruption of their more recreational diversions, an excursionary counterpart to thumbing through the *National Geographic* magazine.

1.1 Guide–tourist relations: Real fakery and the rewarding illusion of authenticity⁴

Whether making the trip to Chichén Itzá as enthusiastic or malcontent students of Mesoamerican prehistory, tourists, as they listen to these guides – the great majority of whom assuredly are of Yucatec Maya ancestry – invariably make the not improbable surmise that they are being treated to an 'authentic' commentary on the ruins insofar as visitors imagine that they are hearing stories and explanations that have been passed down through the generations of Maya people who have lived in this region for hundreds, maybe thousands of years.⁵ Irrespective of the abundant guidebooks and scholarly literature, an account of the ruins delivered directly from an indigenous Maya speaker has special appeal and manifestly greater credibility.

Nonetheless, and irrespective of the genealogical connection between the pre-Columbian Maya builders of the ruins and present day Maya guides, the spectre

of special knowledge is largely an illusion. Instead of reiterations of enduring oral traditions, the Maya docents' renditions of the ruins' origins and uses, fascinating as they may be, depend almost entirely on the work of non-indigenous scholars, albeit subjecting that scholarship to sometimes very venturesome and creative retellings. That is to say, Chichén Itzá, not unlike the great majority of southern Mexico's most prominent ruins, had already been long abandoned and quite fully overgrown by the time of the Spaniards' sixteenth-century arrival in the area, and thus the ancient monuments were not less enigmatic to the colonial era indigenous populations than they were to the Europeans. Granted the Indians held the constructions of their forbearers in a very high esteem and they had a wealth of traditions about the meanings and messages that reside in those ancient buildings; but by the nineteenth century, when antiquarian explorers began to take a more concerted interest in these ruins, local indigenous people could provide almost no reliable information as the empirical history of these monuments. As in the case of the Zapotec ruins of Mitla, Oaxaca (discussed more fully below) will bear out, for accurate chronologies, credible reconstructions and even ideas to the original usages of the old monuments, resident native communities, whether in the Maya zone or Oaxaca, have had to depend, just like everyone else, on the unfolding researches of archaeologists, ethnohistorians and epigraphers, i.e. professionalised scholarship that did not really hit a stride until well into the twentieth century.

Accordingly, rather than being spokesmen for enduring oral traditions, the Maya guides at Chichén Itzá and other prominent sites are union members, credentialed graduates of government-sponsored training programmes. Irrespective of their ostensibly free-wheeling demeanours, the only seemingly loose entrepreneurial context in which they operate is vigilantly regulated in ways that respect seniority, that carefully correlate the numbers of guides allowed on duty with the volume of tourist traffic and that reflect intensely complex webs of reciprocity, favouritism and influence peddling. In other words, while these native guides, many of whom have worked at numerous different sites, may owe a reverent appreciation of the ruins to their upbringings, they have acquired their specific knowledge of these places largely from accreditation programmes wherein they read, learned and were tested on the academic literature, the great majority of which has been produced by non-indigenous and, in the case of most Maya sites, non-Mexican scholars.

Consequently, for one who is familiar with the abundant but not overwhelming literature relative to these archaeological sites, it is usually quite easy to ascertain the sources on which a guide's oral rendition is relying; and it is likewise unmistakably apparent that the choice of sources depends far more on the narrative appeal of respective versions than on a commitment to cutting edge scholarship. At Chichén Itzá, for instance, guides continue to rely primarily on the work of American and British archaeologists writing in the 1940s through the 1970s, not, I think, because they are unaware of more current academic developments in the field – indeed, at least some of these local guides are deeply curious and marvellously well informed. Instead, the large gap between guide speak and state-of-the-art scholarship is, one

suspects, a consequence of the fact that those outmoded works both present more compelling storylines than do newer works and because the older literature depicts the pre-Columbian Maya in glowingly romantic ways that conform more fully than does contemporary scholarship to the expectations of tourists.⁶ If such racy and riveting stories are also more counterfactual, that is a concession the guides are quite willing to make. That is to say, these archaeological cicerones are part public educators but even larger part entrepreneurs and raconteurs whose success in making a living depends far more upon their performative prowess and their skill in building a congenial rapport with their client-tourists than on fidelity to historical accuracy. Their selectiveness in sources and their explanatory manipulations are more strategic than uniformed.

On the one hand, then, most tourists quite seriously misconstrue the cross-cultural exchange in which they find themselves as they stroll through the ruins with a native chaperone. The open-air lecture, which is subject to extensive poetic licence and constant improvisation, is not 'authentic' in the sense that visitors imagine. Were clarity about what is 'real' and what 'fake' the principal criterion of customer service, then travellers are being cheated in these guide-tourist transactions. Yet, on the other hand, the local escorts are providing precisely the sort of travel experience to which most casual tourists aspire, and, in that sense, they are giving patrons their money's worth, as it were. The guides joke among themselves that were they to administer a quick test at the end of their hour or two reconnaissance of the ruins, even the most interested tourists – the ones who had asked lots of detailed questions about dates, names and the meaning of symbols – would fail miserably. There is a kind play at scholarship and learning going on here, a performance on both sides of the exchange: the guides, who work for tips, are only too happy to play along in the pseudo-academic charade; really they are afforded no other choice. And the tourists play at being historians and archaeologists. Their ostensible thirst for accurate information about pre-Columbian culture and history, which could be sated much more efficiently at home in a library, is secondary to the experiential sensation of 'being here' in the remote site of an even more remote ancient way of life. In that avocational fieldwork initiative, it is the cultivation of an *aura* of authenticity – which may in the end be the guides' greatest skill – that is crucial. 'Authenticity', that is to say, is a judgement of audiences, a rewarding sensation that one is engaging the true and real, rather than a quality that inheres in the old buildings.

1.2 Real and fake replicas: Vendors and the virtues of unoriginality

In any case, if Chichén Itzá still wins pride of place as the most Disney-like of Mesoamerican ruins, the quintessence of a long abandoned pre-Columbian capital that was (re)constructed and (re)developed with more touristic than academic motivations,⁷ the experience of visitor-customers is choreographed with similar scrupulousness at nearly all of Mexico's largest archaeological sites. At Teotihuacán, Xochicalco, Cholula and Tula in the central Mexican plateau,

at Palenque, Uxmal and Tulum in the Maya zone, along with, as we'll see momentarily, Mitla and Monte Albán in Oaxaca, one encounters decidedly unique atmospheres. Each site attracts an idiosyncratic clientele, a distinctive mix of foreign versus Mexican visitors, lone seekers versus large school groups and economy-minded backpackers versus well-heeled seniors. It is truly fascinating to see how the respective landscapes, histories and proximity (or lack thereof) to large indigenous populations, urban areas and/or beach resorts transform each of these different ruins into a veritable world unto itself. No two are remotely the same. Yet, in all these celebrated archaeological destinations, there are variations on the same sort of courtship between guides and tourists, and parallel sorts of contrivances of authenticity.

Moreover, at each of these well-worked venues, visitors will find themselves likewise running a gauntlet of vendors, who hawk objects and apparel that cross a very full gamut from the artful to the absurd, the pseudo-archaeological to the entirely irrelevant, the sublime to the silly.⁸ To be sure, vendors are an even more ubiquitous and more persistently pestering presence than tour guides. Thus, at a site like Teotihuacán, where these sellers are infamously aggressive, visitors constantly find themselves the object of a sort of stalking behaviour, wherein strolling merchants lie in wait around the ruins while they make their studied assessments about who might actually buy what they're selling. Selecting a promising target, these self-employed dealer-artists initiate a rote spiel in which, as a standard opener, they first represent their masks, pipes or figurines as replicas, but 'authentic replicas' insofar as they are faithful copies of pre-Columbian objects that they themselves have duplicated. These facsimiles, many of which are quite impressively crafted, are, at least ostensibly, fakes of a 'real' sort inasmuch as they are *unoriginal* works, pre-Columbian designs that have been recreated by contemporary local artisans. But then, invariably, these prowling pitchmen will change their tone of voice, and dig deeper into their bags to come up with objects that they will represent as '*muy auténtico*', that is to say, 'completely authentic' pre-Columbian items. Again, the status of fake versus real is put in doubt; yet since it is illegal to sell genuinely antique artefacts, the level of confidentiality – and likewise the prices – quickly ascend. Not surprisingly, the (supposedly) real thing is pricier if invariably less polished.

By the same token, along with these roving vendors, the points of entry to every site will have innumerable tables manned by stationary sellers with a wild collection of merchandise, everything from masks and rings to bracelets, beads, Buddha statues, candles, coffee mugs, key chains and sunglasses. Here, you are much less likely to encounter objects that are being represented as 'fully authentic' (because it would be too easy to be caught to the authorities). Nonetheless, one is greeted with an abundance of pre-Columbian inspired replicas and maybe rip-offs, some of which are represented as 'authentic fakes', insofar as they are locally made versus other phonier pieces that are 'inauthentic' to the extent that they are foreign made in China or elsewhere; credibility and value, in these instances, are correlated with provenance rather than age or style. Additionally, there are many miniaturised models of specific pyramids or stelae for which there is no claim

to authenticity inasmuch as they are specifically labelled as *'recuerdos'* that is, souvenirs carrying the name of Chichén Itzá, Palenque or Monte Albán that are frankly represented as souvenirs, keepsakes that, not unlike the omnipresent monogrammed tee-shirts and caps, gain their status simply via a direct but superficial association with the place.

In summary, the experience of a Mexican archaeological-tourist site entails navigating countless layers and veils of (in)authenticity, some flimsy and transparent but others opaque and virtually impenetrable. Given the collusion of honest errors and deliberate deceptions, to sort out the real from the fake, the historical from the make-believe, the authentic from the counterfeit – indeed, even to stabilise what those terms mean in these contexts – is practically impossible. But nor, as a more sustained look at the shifting attitudes towards the ruins of Mitla during the early twentieth century will show, is that sort of studious elimination of illusions and empirical inaccuracies a priority either for visitors or, even less, for the local caretakers of those sites. To the contrary, the scholarly incentive to recover of 'what really happened', and perhaps thereby to cut through all fakery at these pre-Columbian sites, is but one small component of the ongoing, indeed ever mounting, prestige and allure of these travel destinations. For most tourists, the abstruseness of the ruins' histories, the often glib narrations of guides and even the sparing with vendors contribute to their holiday get-away into another world; and for the local residents whose prosaic livelihoods depend on the flow of visitors in and out of these archaeological showplaces, absenting the ruins of the fictive and the fake is even less of a concern. As the specific case of Mitla – a site that owns the debatable distinction of Mexico's very first modern day archaeological-tourist development – well demonstrates, locals' very large investments in these ruins are considerably more pragmatic.

2. The unique and uniquely revealing case of Mitla, Oaxaca

The renowned ruins of Mitla constitute a unique case in numerous respects.⁹ Spanish cleric Fray Martín de Valencia, who visited them in 1533, i.e. very shortly after the initial arrival of Europeans in Oaxaca, considered that these were 'edifices more worth of seeing than anything in New Spain';¹⁰ and 300 years later, Bancroft (1874–76), in his *Native races*, rehearsed a still widely held view that these ruins ought to be assessed as the finest in all of Mexico.¹¹ In the surmise of German explorer Alexander von Humboldt, who at the start of the nineteenth century was the first to bring this region of Mexico to the attention of a wide European public,

What distinguish the ruins of Mitla from all of the other remains of Mexican architecture are six porphyry columns, which are placed in the midst of a vast hall, and support the ceiling. These columns [are] almost the only ones found in the new continent...¹²

J.D. Baldwin's *Ancient America* (1871), however, delivers the more widely shared opinion that the unique prestige of the Mitla ruins depends primarily on their decoration rather than their architectural design or mode of construction:

What is most remarkable, interesting and striking in these monuments, and which alone would be sufficient to give them first rank among all known orders of architecture, is the execution of the mosaic *relievos* – very different from plain mosaic, and consequently requiring more ingenious combination, and greater art and labour.¹³

That is to say, instead of steep pyramids or carved stelae, the extant remains of a mid-sized pre-Columbian Zapotec city at Mitla earn their acclaim most of all by the abundant geometric facades, panels of fretted decorations that grace the several clusters of long and low rectangular ‘palaces’, which are arranged to create a series of enclosed courtyard spaces.¹⁴ Professional expeditionaries like Frenchman Désiré Charnay, who in 1858 was the first to photograph these remains, concurred that the facades were ‘exquisite’, but also commented that, ‘the ruins of Mitla bear no resemblance with those of [central] Mexico or Yucatan, either in their ornamentation or mode of building . . .’.¹⁵ Likewise, amateur travellers such as American publicist Frederick A. Ober, who in 1882 termed Mitla’s palaces ‘the crowning achievement of those ancient people’, judged that, ‘No ruins in Mexico, probably none in America, are more elaborately ornamented, in their peculiar style, than these’.¹⁶ That some 150 of the extraordinary, beautifully fashioned mosaic panels survive, no two exactly alike, goes far in accounting for the site’s enduring fame. That numerous large cruciform-shaped tombs, likewise coated with copious geometrical ornamentation, lie beneath these courtyard structures accounts for the name Mitla or, in Nahuatl, ‘Mictlan’, which means ‘Place of the Dead’.

The long admired site of Mitla is located in the state of Oaxaca, a distinctive region of Mesoamerica that lies in-between the more widely known central Mexican cultures of the Teotihuacanos, Toltecs and Aztecs to the northwest and the Maya zone to the south and east. So abundant are the pre-Columbian remains in this intermediate area that the oft-repeated assertion that essentially all of Oaxaca qualifies as an archaeological site is only partly in jest; and, along with the adjacent state of Chiapas, this is the portion of Mexico that presently has the highest percentage of indigenous peoples, who constitute more than half the population. Zapotecs and Mixtecs are the largest of the numerous native groups in what is routinely termed ‘the most ethnically complex of Mexico’s thirty-one states’. Despite near perfect weather and more than 300 miles of beautiful Pacific coastline, Oaxaca was much slower than Yucatan to transform its mellow fishing villages into major beach resorts, though large government-sponsored development projects ensure that transformation is very much underway; most notably, Huatulco is touted (or lamented) as ‘the next Cancun’. Enormous potential notwithstanding, Oaxaca remains very near the bottom with respect to per capita incomes, which has precipitated extensive out-migration in recent years. Accordingly, the remittances sent home by Oaxacans living in the USA, along with tourism, are today far and away the region’s two most important sources of revenue.¹⁷ At present, nearly everyone in Oaxaca, indigenous or non-indigenous, depends, either directly or indirectly, on one or both of these two revenue streams.

In that stressed economic climate, the exceptionally close linkage between archaeology and tourism – a tight pairing that has, for better or worse, been crucial

in determining both which of Mexico's sites are explored and then how they are subsequently managed – remains very much intact, especially in Oaxaca. At the same time, ironically enough, Mitla's fortunes as a travel destination have significantly declined, at least in relative terms. From the sixteenth century all the way until 1931 – when Alfonso Caso's discovery of the sumptuous Tomb 7 treasure at Monte Albán set off an explosion of research and development at that nearby site¹⁸ – Mitla was everyone's primary Oaxaca destination while, according to guidebooks of the day, 'unless the traveller [sic] is interested in archaeological remains, the journey [to Monte Albán] will hardly repay him'.¹⁹ These days, however, Mitla is a second-tier archaeological-tourist site, considerably overshadowed by the much larger and more glamorous Monte Albán, which lies atop a mountain some 30 km to the west. In terms of the scale and abundance of buildings, the scenery, the extent of (re)construction and the respective visitor facilities and site museums, Mitla is dwarfed by its illustrious neighbour; Monte Albán, which was a much larger and more important place in pre-Columbian times, is again, at present, unquestionably the more impressive of the two sites. Moreover, in 1987, Monte Albán was designated as an UNESCO World Heritage Site, reconfirming that ancient capital as today's premier archaeological attraction in the region and consigning Mitla to the status of an optional side-trip that attracts far fewer visitors.

Though having lost a significant measure of its former prestige, Mitla's history as a travel destination remains considerably deeper and richer than that of Monte Albán. Mitla is, in fact, a privileged case, more interesting and more revealing of the dynamics of archaeological tourism than the larger and currently more heavily visited mountaintop site for a couple of major reasons. For one, following the abandonment of the once great capital of Monte Albán about 850 CE, that site was never again substantially inhabited; thus, to the very limited extent that colonial-era Spaniards took any interest in Monte Albán, they were poking around vacant and overgrown mounds. The Mitla that the earliest Europeans encountered was, by contrast, a working Zapotec settlement, a live town rather than a dead ruin. Moreover, because the Spanish 'conquest' of the Oaxaca area, Mitla included, was, unlike the famously violent confrontation between conquistadors and Aztecs, a largely 'peaceful penetration', many aspects of Zapotec life were allowed to continue largely uninterrupted throughout the colonial period.²⁰ Even until the mid-nineteenth century, with the occasional exception of one mestizo priest, no non-Indians lived in Mitla; and, though occupying a prominent place on the Oaxacan tourist trail, and thus in lots of respects an atypically cosmopolitan place, Mitla remains today an overwhelmingly Zapotec community. In short, at no major archaeological site are the current residents in a stronger position to claim direct descent from the pre-Columbian builders of the local ruins.

For two, while in lots of cases, newly arriving Spaniards simply demolished the native structures and then scavenged the building stones for their own European-style construction projects, Mitla also provides the prime instance in which parts and wholes of the pre-Hispanic structures were retained and

integrated into colonial buildings. Most famously, Mitla's Catholic Church, the Iglesia of San Pablo, shares walls with adjacent pre-Columbian palaces, which were reclaimed for stables and storehouses; and indeed the entire colonial-era town was built directly over the ancient Zapotec city. Thus, even now, ruins are literally everywhere throughout and underneath the town, with countless modest houses and stores incorporating pre-Columbian walls and foundations. Though the full interspersion of ancient structures and contemporary life have won Mitla the dubious distinction of 'the largest laboratory of deterioration in Mexican archaeology',²¹ here the claim to have ruins in one's backyard is literal rather than metaphorical. Among major archaeological sites, Mitla, then, has a unique continuity both in terms of its residents and its architecture.

2.1 *Elsie Clews Parsons: Ethnography, assimilation and modernisation in an archaeological-tourism zone*

As a lens into the dynamics of archaeological tourism, the case of Mitla is, moreover, much enhanced by the existence of Elsie Clews Parsons' fabulously ambitious ethnography, *Mitla: Town of the souls and other Zapoteco-speaking pueblos of Oaxaca, Mexico* (1936), which is based on fieldwork she did there on three trips between 1929 and 1933. Following years of study and residence among the Pueblo Indians of the American Southwest, Parsons, towards the end of a remarkable career that included among countless recognitions serving as the first woman president of the American Anthropological Association, turned her interest and ample energies to the Zapotec village of Mitla.²² Charles Leslie, a student of Robert Redfield whose year in Mitla during the mid-1950s formed the basis of his own much more narrowly focused *Now we are civilized: A study of the world view of the Zapotec Indians of Mitla, Oaxaca* (1960), provides the following suitably affirming assessment of the monumental work that issued from those efforts:

Parsons' book, written in the comprehensive tradition of folkloristic ethnology, contains a prodigious number of ethnographic observations assembled in omnibus chapters with such titles as 'Economic Life', 'Lore and Tales', 'Government', and 'Religion'. It does not possess any well defined theoretical orientation, but, reflecting its author's wide experience, patience and sympathy for village life, it is one of our most intimate records of life in a Mesoamerican community...²³

Parsons' 600-page ethnography is, of course, dated in lots of respects, both methodologically and in its characterisations of Mitleyeno life, ways and attitudes. Upon travelling to Mexico, Parsons was able to write to her close associate, Fran Boas, 'At last, *real* Indians, in psychology and culture!'.²⁴ Yet, irrespective of the thrill of seeming to witness a level of 'authenticity' unavailable to her in the USA, it was not the ostensibly pure and uncontaminated dimensions of native life that most captured her attentions, but rather, exactly the opposite.²⁵ Though noting Mitla's remarkable socio-cultural continuity through most of the colonial and post-independence eras, Parsons comments continually on the

innumerable and fast examples of ‘Hispanicisation’ and/or ‘Mexicanisation’ that she observed in the Zapotec town just before and after 1930; with each visit, she finds Mitla more deeply enmeshed with the processes of ‘modernisation’, which thus becomes one of the central themes of her account.²⁶ Given the pace of change that she is describing, it is surprising, then, that when one juxtaposes Parsons’ 80-year-old treatise with the early twenty-first century realities of Mitla – and when one consults face-to-face with elderly Zapotec residents who actually remember Parsons²⁷ – the overwhelming sensation is how little rather than how much has changed.

In short, Parsons’ prodigious study, which I can mine for the remainder of this article, captures Mitla at very interestingly transitional point in the town’s career as one of Mexico’s earliest and thus most long-lived archaeological-tourist destinations. By her era, already a corner had been turned, which required Mitleyenos to constantly reassess and reconfigure their relations to the famous ruins amidst which they lived. Accordingly, Parsons’ account of their manoeuvrings is especially revealing, as I hope to show, of numerous tensions that continue to be felt in the way that contemporaneous indigenous communities interact with pre-Columbian ruins, not only at Mitla but elsewhere.

2.2 *Five contemporaneous – and competing – perspectives on Mitla’s ruins*

Focused on contemporary life, Elsie Parsons devotes almost none of her attention to Mitla’s internationally acclaimed ruins; archaeology is not on her beat. Aside from noting that, by the early 1930s, local residents had grown quite accustomed both to the famous old monuments and to the stream of visitors that they attracted, her comments on the pre-Columbian features of the town – and on tourism *per se* – are sparse. Nonetheless, the remarks that she does provide are helpful and telling in the extreme. For instance, almost inadvertently she distinguishes between five contemporaneous but very different attitudes towards the Mitla ruins. These five respective constituencies were, at this point, not only in strong disagreement about the status and proper management of these ruin, but also they were in direct competition.

Two of the constituencies were natives. First is the Mitleyenos, i.e. the Zapotec residents of Mitla who, in Parson’s day, made up the entire population of the roughly 2500-person village; today’s estimates are about 7500. Having long taken the ruins for granted, their fervent belief in special associations between the old edifices and their dead ancestors did not prevent them from routinely plundering the site for building materials; though always admired, for generations the ruins were treated more as a stockpile of cut stone than as a cultural resource. As well as hosts to travellers, the Mitleyenos were themselves acclaimed travellers and traders; Mitla, famed also for its textiles, was a town based on trade, and Parsons is highly impressed and sometimes bemused at the extent to which the affairs of buying and selling, bargaining and business, dominate the villagers’ lives.²⁸ In that respect, she reaffirms the assessment

that appears in every scholarly and casual commentary on Mitla, whether old or brand new, of the villagers' burning preoccupations with money and with the assignment of a monetary value to every object and activity (and nothing that one experiences there today puts a lie to that assessment). By 1930, these were pragmatic, 'modernising' Indians, open and game for social and technological innovation and, in Parsons' view, on the whole notably indifferent to the maintenance of traditions; preservation as such, either of customs or the ruins, was not among their priorities. Only recently, according to Parsons – i.e. in the first couple of decades of the twentieth century as outsiders took an ever greater interest in the ruins – were the Mitleyenos awakening to an appreciation of just what an extraordinary cultural, and even more economic, resource they had in their midst.

Second, Parsons addresses at length the so-termed Serranos, which is a generic label for the various indigenous peoples including but not limited to the Mixes and Zapotecs who live in the mountains surrounding Mitla. In her account, these mountain Indians are routinely described as much more 'conservative', much more attached to 'the old ways', though in 1930, they, like the Mitleyenos, would virtually all have been self-identifying as Catholics. For Parsons, the Serranos provide excellent clues as to earlier beliefs and attitudes that formerly prevailed in Mitla, but it was apparent also that, 'The [Mitla-based] Zapotec look down upon the Mixes', and she herself describes them as 'small folk, of unprepossessing countenance and manners, dull looking as a rule, and unresponsive'.²⁹ Not well positioned to exploit the economic potential of the ruins, the mountain Indians' ardent fondness for the old monuments was more strictly devotional and cosmological, though seemingly not less pragmatic. The Serranos are, as we'll see, the group whose regular visits to the Mitla ruins are most deserving of the labels a 'pilgrimage' to a 'sacred place'.

A third perspective, present only between the lines in Parsons' ethnography, is that of non-native tourists, who were in her day mainly Mexicans from other parts of the republic, though already a significant number of American and European tourists were coming to Mitla. There was just one hotel in town, the storied Quero family inn where Parsons herself resided, and the great majority of these foreign visitors, then as now, made the 30-km trip to and from the city of Oaxaca de Juarez in the same day. It is measure of this group's generally casual investment that such a rushed itinerary would afford them only an hour or less for their entire look-see of the ruins, a speedy schedule that remains par for the course today.³⁰ D.H. Lawrence, for instance, a 1925 visitor to Mitla whose great affection for Oaxaca owed very little to the region's ruins, provides us an especially well documented account of the standard day-trip to Mitla undertaken by many foreign tourists in this era.³¹ Not atypically, food, snapshots, souvenirs and interpersonal intrigues all seem to have played considerably larger roles in Lawrence's jaunt than any sort of spiritual, or even historical, connection to the pre-Columbian structures. By and large, these non-native tourists are more akin to picnickers than pilgrims.

The Catholic Church, another only tangential interest of Parsons', represented a fourth, very different and rather more urgent attitude towards the ruins. On the one hand, so complete was the Catholic hold over the community that, irrespective of intermittent efforts at Protestant proselytism, in 1930 Parsons was able to locate a total of 'one professed Protestant in town', a fellow named Valentino who was raised by an American family on the nearby Isthmus of Tehuantepec.³² Today, there are numerous Protestant congregations in Mitla, including Baptists, Presbyterians, Seventh Day Adventists, Jehovah Witnesses, Mormons and various non-denominational '*evangélicos*'; but in Parsons' time, the Catholics, mainly Dominicans, still enjoyed a near-monopoly. On the other hand, Church officials remained, as they had for centuries, far from completely successful in eradicating the native religious commitments of the Mitleyenos, much less those of the Serranos; and, from the Church's view, any devotion in and to Mitla's ancient monuments constituted evidence of an unhealthy continuation of 'pagan' affinities. Accordingly, as we'll also see, Catholic officials persist in working either to appropriate or, in some cases, stigmatise the various pre-Columbian buildings and sites of devotion in the area.

Fifth and finally, though yet again somewhat afield of Parsons' primary interests, her work sheds light on the mounting realisation of the Mexican federal government, a stakeholder who was usually at more at odds than in synch with the Catholic Church, that pre-Columbian ruins such as those at Mitla, if properly configured, could be of enormous use in the creation and dissemination of a unifying national story, a civic creation myth of sorts. Porfirio Diaz, president of Mexico from 1876 to 1880 and from 1884 to 1911 (between 1880 and 1884, he was governor of his home state of Oaxaca), was the first to seize in a large way on this untapped resource for the promulgation of a suitably inspiring Mexican national identity. To that end, in 1885, Diaz created the post of General Inspector of Archaeological Monuments, to which he appointed his comrade-in-arms, Leopoldo Batres, a notorious character whose subsequent activities would have a tremendous impact on the status of the Mitla ruins.³³ Though only modestly trained in archaeology, and thus despised by more rigorously scientific practitioners of the just-emerging field, Batres was fully prepared to make himself the robust supporter both of Diaz's version of nationalism and Diaz's grand aspirations for the modernisation of Mexico. Pursuant of this dual initiative, Diaz and Batres were, on the one hand, concerned to celebrate in all possible ways Mexico's pre-Columbian indigenous past. They wanted to bring into the spotlight – and to claim as the rightful heritage of modern Mexico – the great cultural accomplishments of the Toltecs, Aztecs, Mayas and Zapotecs; and they recognised that archaeological sites, along with museums, provided the pre-eminent contexts in which to showcase those ancient achievements and to knit them into current Mexican national consciousness. Yet, on the other hand, given his commitments to 'modernity', Diaz, himself an Oaxaca-born mestizo, was infamously impatient and intolerant of contemporary indigenous life, which emerged for him as among the foremost – and

most embarrassingly visible – obstacles to the sort of ‘progress’ towards modernity to which he aspired.³⁴

2.3 Leopoldo Batres: Nationalist agendas, rambunctious (re)construction and open-air museums

Though Mitla presented the awkward juxtaposition of what was, from President Diaz’s view, the very best and the worst of Mexico – namely, fabulous ruins juxtaposed with a live native community – it is another signal of the Zapotec ruins’ standing that they were nonetheless selected as the site for Batres’ very first large-scale renovation project.³⁵ Undeterred by his more scholarly critics, Batres muscled everyone else out of the picture, especially non-Mexican archaeologists and of course the Indians, and in 1900 initiated at Mitla a rambunctious pattern of excavation and (re)construction that he would reiterate at numerous other sites.³⁶ Instead of exploration in pursuit of recovering historical information, Batres, as Diaz’s faithful instrument, endeavoured to transform Mitla (and other sites) into something like outdoor museums – or open-air forums of public instruction – wherein the Mexican government could strut the accomplishments of pre-Columbian culture, which were then explicitly construed as among the deep roots of mestizo identity.

To that end, Batres overhauled several of Mitla’s dilapidated main structures via venturesome (re)building strategies that included the insertion of heavy metal reinforcements, which remain conspicuously visible today. Accuracy and attention to detail mattered much less than the (re)creation of the sort of grandiose general effect – and affect – that would impress visitors not so much with the specifics of ancient history as with the magnitude of Mexico’s ancestors’ achievements in art and engineering, a lesson that Diaz and Batres hoped to share both with their countrymen and foreigner visitors to Mitla. Capitalising on Mitla’s proximity to Oaxaca’s capital city and, even more on the abundance of uniquely opulent geometric façades – features that conformed perfectly with ‘the ideal pattern of the American beauty’³⁷ – Batres choreographed an image of Mexico’s ancient ancestors that accentuated their endowments, whether real or contrived, as great artists and perhaps mathematicians rather than as warriors or religious fanatics. Not unlike the National Museum in Mexico City, which Diaz also commandeered to the same patriotic purposes,³⁸ Mitla’s new archaeological tourist precinct was designed to engender a sense of Mexicans’ confidence and pride as the descendants of what must have been a sophisticated and sublime civilisation.

As a kind of final touch – and a public assurance that these ruins belong to the Mexican people at large – Batres mounted into the most prominent part of the Hall of the Columns a carved inscription, also still visible, in which he both took personal credit for the restoration work and delivered a dire warning against any further dismantlement or defacement of the Mitla ruins. The final line of the stone sign, which was aimed far more at local Mitleyenos than at would-be looters

from outside, threatened that anyone who vandalised or damaged the ruins in any way, 'would be consigned to the federal authority so that he is applied the corresponding penalty'.³⁹ Urgent to enact Diaz's agenda with all due speed, Batres then rushed off to similarly zealous renovation projects at other major sites, notably Teotihuacán and Xochicalco.

2.4 Fake (re)construction and real benefits: Batres' ambiguous, occasionally fortuitous legacy

The blustering Leopoldo Batres thereby makes himself a difficult person to defend; and it is not surprising that he is, these days, doubly condemned for his injudicious approach to archaeology and for his extreme condescension towards the Indians.⁴⁰ His rash efforts both destroyed large amounts of historical data and left us with a (re)constructed ruin in which it is virtually impossible to ascertain which portions are pre-Columbian and which twentieth-century repairs; at Mitla 'the real' and 'the fake' are hopelessly entangled. Moreover, his patronising threats towards the Mitleyenos and his unsubtle expropriation of the ruins into a national mythology seem, in hindsight, the very epitome of neo-colonial imperialism. His bullying placard made unmistakably clear that local opinion about management of the ruins counted for almost nothing; the federal government had seized control of this site. Furthermore, the notion that Mitla's ruins might constitute a 'sacred place' and thus deserve a reprieve from aggressive gentrification – a protestation that one would definitely encounter today if not then⁴¹ – is not the sort of concern that seems even to have occurred to Batres. More interested in squashing than supporting indigenous religious sensibilities, the Inspector of Monuments worked to extricate the artistically sublime character of the ruins from their 'superstitious' associations.

Unpalatable personality and easy target that Batres may be, it is nevertheless important to appreciate that the legacy of his Mitla project was, from either the perspective of scholars or Mitleyenos, actually complex and ambiguous, but not fully without fortuitous consequences. Eventual doyen of Oaxaca archaeology, Ignacio Bernal, for instance, surmises that despite his being

self-taught and doing his explorations without the benefit of any technical skill and without making a serious study of the subject . . . it is to the enthusiasm of Batres that we largely owe the present practice of re-forging traditional links with the past through the study of Mexican ruins.⁴²

Even Alfonso Caso, who would bring infinitely higher standards of historical rigour to Oaxaca archaeology in the 1930s and 1940s, had to concede that Batres' (re)construction work did avert the ongoing abuse and dilapidation of Mitla's structures;⁴³ and, of late, some scholars even contend that Batres' rebuilding techniques, which have lasted a century, were actually very impressive for their day.⁴⁴ Additionally, for better or worse, Batres established (or perhaps reinforced) a tradition of 'governmental archaeology' – an approach that has public education rather than more strictly academic goals as its primary incentive – which would

come to dominate Mexico's official management to its pre-Columbian monuments, and thereby guarantee exceptionally close bonds between archaeology and tourist development.⁴⁵ The so-termed Mexican School's version of excavation and restoration that Caso would spearhead for the next four decades, though the very antithesis of Batres' freewheeling style in so many ways, was not less nationalistic insofar as it was equally invested in reaching wide non-professional audiences, and thus in fashioning ancient cities into archaeological-tourist sites that would simultaneously inspire Mexicans and impress foreign nationals.

More specifically, it was Batres' extensive repair work that solidified Mitla's distinction as, in all likelihood, the most widely known and most visited site in Mexico during the early twentieth century, a measure of celebrity that is difficult for today's tourists to imagine. Following her countrywide junket in 1901, travel writer and gentlewoman Ethel Tweedie, for instance, who toured Mitla with no less than Batres himself, surmised that, among Mexico's ample ancient monuments, 'those at Mitla are probably the finest specimens'.⁴⁶ In 1910, at a time when the Great Plaza of Monte Albán still being cultivated just like the surrounding farmlands and Chichén Itzá was well-known but still largely undeveloped, Constantine George Rickards, British vice-consul in Oaxaca and an amateur archaeological enthusiast who had photographed all of the most prominent sites, opined that, 'The ruins of Mitla, or Mictlán as they are called by the Nahoas [sic], are perhaps the best known ruins in Mexico'.⁴⁷ Though *National Geographic* would eventually devote vastly greater attention to the Classic Maya sites, at this point Mitla was still sparing for first place in eyes of general American audiences and prospective travellers. Two lavishly illustrated articles on Oaxaca that appeared in that venue, respectively in 1910 and 1927 – i.e. prior to Caso's 1931 discovery of Tomb 7, the spectacular find that would launch Monte Albán's renown far ahead of Mitla's – provided prolix praise for the recently refurbished monuments of Mitla and only cursory comments about the larger but still-overgrown neighbouring site.⁴⁸ By the same token, *Terry's Mexico: Handbook for travellers* (1st edition, 1909), the incomparably influential guidebook on which D.H. Lawrence and generations of foreign travellers relied, devoted an ample and detailed section to an 'Excursion to the Ruins of Mitla', but dispatched the bigger and more accessible Monte Albán in one small paragraph, a disparity that remained through the editions of the 1940s.⁴⁹ As Lawrence's biographer put it, 'The ruins of Mitla were still the thing for visitors to Oaxaca to see in the 1920s'.⁵⁰ In summary, it was not the extent of the ruins, but the extent of the (re)construction, the packaging rather than the actual archaeo-historical prize that did most to attract tourists. Fake buildings, it seems, could exude a greater sense of authenticity, and thus greater public interest, than real ones.

Furthermore, Batres' renovations, however incautious and self-promoting, do constitute a very significant turning point in attitudes towards the preservation of Mexico's, and specifically Oaxaca's, archaeological patrimony – not only from Euro-American but also native Mitleyeno perspectives.⁵¹ Tweedie, for instance, who was a personal guest of Porfirio Díaz during the Oaxaca leg of her 1901

journey (and who later became his hand-chosen biographer), levelled a charge that was familiar among that era's foreign visitors when she chastised both Indians and mestizos for their neglect of Mitla's fabulous old buildings, edifices that she considered 'Mexico's proudest possessions' and 'greatest attractions'.⁵² In *Mexico as I saw it*, a travelogue that is alternately pithy and baldly racist, Tweedie mused, for example, that the contemporary Mexican native 'is lazy, owing to the climate, and is often no more than an animal, sometimes with instincts less noble and brave. He is happy, for he knows no better'.⁵³ In her view, then, there ought to be neither surprise nor hope of rectifying the fact that Indians themselves have always been woefully inept stewards of the ruins, a negligence nowhere more evident to her than at the picked-over monuments of Mitla. Her condescending lament, however, extended also to non-native Mexicans' apathy towards the ruins insofar as she pined, 'What a pity it is that Mexico has no society – such as we have in England – for the preservation of her ancient buildings'.⁵⁴ Yet, for Mrs Tweedie, these double-barrelled insults actually served as a prelude to roundly commending her escort Batres and even more Diaz, over whom she gushes at every opportunity, for their enlightened if belated initiatives in restoring and protecting the ancient buildings.⁵⁵

2.5 Ancient buildings versus early twentieth-century residents: History, ethnicity and entrepreneurialism

In addition to sparking unprecedented commitments to conservation, ironically enough, the federal appropriation of the ruins, together with the increased presence of pretentious foreign visitors such as Ethel Tweedie, also worked as a very significant transformation on the way that Mitleyenos viewed their local ruins. The Zapotec villagers came to realise that they had *not* been appreciative caretakers, and nor had they recognised the full potential of the ruins. The Mitla monuments, in Elsie Parsons' 1930 surmise, 'have probably always attracted pilgrims from the surrounding country; but it is the modern tourist, Mexican or foreign, who has given the townspeople a more sophisticated awareness of their value and of the need for preservation'.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, the Mitleyenos' heightened appreciation and shifts in perspectives were not the ones that Tweedie would have hoped for nor that we might image. Again, Parsons' work is salient in both confirming and undermining expectations about how the early twentieth-century Zapotecs were interacting with the ancient buildings.

On the one hand, despite acknowledging the liberal looting of previous generations, Parsons observes that, predictably enough, the Mitleyenos of her era did take a significant measure of pride in the ruins: 'The *ben giech*, the people of the pueblo, are proud of their monuments and, ignoring the uncertainties of archaeologists, the townspeople associate the ancient buildings with a pre-Spanish position of social ascendancy'.⁵⁷ Yet, on the other hand, much less predictable are their replies to Parsons' queries about the origin and builders of the ancient structures. Instead of the seemingly obvious – and almost certainly

accurate – assertion that these edifices had been constructed by their direct Zapotec ancestors, they locate the construction of the ruins in what Parsons terms a ‘Golden Age’, a kind of mythical era prior to the emergence of the sun and the moon, a long-ago epoch in which the huge stones were light as feathers and thus easily moved in position.⁵⁸ That is to say, instead of claiming the prestige of direct descent from the builders of the ruins – and thus contending that control over the old monuments is their rightful inheritance – they pass the credit to primordial proto-humans who, once the sun and moon did appear, fled beneath the earth and turned to stone, the condition in which ‘the old ones’ continue to reside today.⁵⁹ Parsons likewise records a second layer of traditions, which she considers to be ‘comparatively recent importations into the folk lore’, wherein Mitleyenos again decline credit for the great buildings by advancing the historically untenable notion that the Mitla ruins were built by the illustrious Aztec ruler, Moctezuma.⁶⁰ In connection with this version, she encounters a still widespread belief that Montezuma and his Aztec dancers return every New Year’s Eve to Mitla to dance in one of the wide open plazas, and that visitors fortunate enough to see them are likely to be rewarded with a sack of gold.

In Parsons’ account, then, the Mitleyenos’ valuation of the ruins amidst which they live was startlingly uniformed and even more puzzlingly self-deprecating. They seemed to be simply giving away their illustrious birthright. Consideration of three large topics – history, ethnicity and commerce – allow us to put a finer point on how their attitudes were fluctuating, but also remaining steady in relation to the ever-increasing flow of tourists.

For one, with respect to history or perhaps historical consciousness, it is apparent that the Mitleyenos of this era, even Parsons’ most knowledgeable Mitleyeno ‘informants’, did not have any reliable historical information about the builders, nor the timing, nor the circumstances that originally gave rise to these edifices. That is to say, troublesome as this may sound, there was apparently no historically dependable oral tradition, no inter-generational transmission of ancestral knowledge concerning when and by whom these monuments had been built. In fact, to her own great surprise, Parsons could not find anyone in town who even had reliable information about the origins of the seventeenth-century Catholic Church in Mitla, let alone about the pre-Columbian ruins. Just like the Yucatec Maya in the vicinity of Chichén Itzá, the Zapotec residents of Mitla have ample narrative traditions about the ruins but virtually no accurate information about the buildings’ creation or creators. Bluntly put, the pragmatic and forward looking Mitleyenos of Parsons’ day apparently neither knew nor expressed much interest in the empirical history of the ruins – aside perhaps from a desire to deliver workable replies to tourists, who did profess to be rather more concerned with such matters. Moreover, because Batres’ inexpert manner of working also largely ignored these historical questions, his project had precipitated almost no progress in this respect. Mitleyenos, like everyone else, would have to wait for Alfonso Caso to work out the pre-Columbian chronology of the Valley of Oaxaca.

For two, regarding ethnicity or ethnic identity, which is an especially complex topic in this context, Parsons' account reveals a startling indifference with respect to Mitleyeno's assertions of continuity between themselves and the builders of the ruins. Where twenty-first century native communities (including indigenous Oaxacans) turn summersaults to assert genealogical affiliations with, and thus their fair share of control over, pre-Hispanic ruins and sites with which they have only tangential historical connections,⁶¹ these Zapotecs – by embracing the notion that Mitla's edifices had been built by 'an earlier creation than mankind'⁶² – essentially abdicated a nearly incontestable claim to one of Mesoamerica's most prized sets of ruins. The alternate Mitleyeno narrative tradition, which attributed the ruins to Montezuma and the Aztecs, a group with whom Zapotecs had more historical antagonisms than affinities, appears to have been something like a 'Montezuma-slept-here story', i.e. a strategic (but not very effective) attempt to enhance the prestige of the ruins by manufacturing a fictive connection between the Mitla buildings and the most famous of pre-Hispanic leaders.⁶³ That story, it seems, had its greatest appeal and endurance among the Serranos, whom Parsons observes flocking to the ruins on New Year's Eve in hopes of seeing Montezuma and of collecting the apocryphal sack of gold.

Yet, in hindsight, the promotion of either foundation story – narrative traditions that emerged prior to the Mitleyenos' subsequent savvy in capitalising on their privileged association with the ruins – has to be assessed as a self-defeating error in judgement insofar as these accounts played right into the hands of Batres and Diaz, who always accentuated the enormity of the gap between the grand achievements of pre-Columbian natives and the impoverished abilities of their contemporary counterparts. Eventually, the Mitleyenos would begin to make the case (albeit with limited success) that, owing to their ethnic continuity with the builders, it is local residents who ought to enjoy a proprietary claim to the local ruins and, moreover, that the persistence of their cultural identity is intimately tied to the preservation of the ruins. Fashionable as these claims are today, they are certainly not ideas that Batres would have supported and, surprisingly enough, there are no signs of those identity-based arguments in Parsons' account.

For three, regarding commerce and entrepreneurialism, if Batres' renovation project did little to engender historical or ethnic consciousness among the turn-of-the-century Mitleyenos, he did set off a charge with respect to the economic potentialities of the ruins. In other words, though it is far easier to accuse Diaz and Batres themselves of a heavy handed ideological opportunism than a financial exploitation of the ruins, it was nonetheless with respect to an appreciation of the potential earning power of the monuments, if you will, that their initiative appears to have made the greatest impression on the Mitla villagers. As noted earlier, a theme that surfaces over and over in Parsons' account is the villagers' extreme preoccupation, and thus skill, in engaging virtually every occasion as an exercise in buying and selling. In her assessment,

Mitla is a business town. Trade permeates its whole life; price is of supreme interest to your young and old, women and men, the poor and the well-to-do. The expression of this interest is very direct, and from our point of view quite shameless... The Mitleyeno is price-minded. Money costs enter into the evaluation of things and of experience to a degree I have never found equaled in any other society, including the most plutocratic societies.⁶⁴

Accordingly, given that their town had attracted a modest stream of travellers throughout the colonial era, Mitleyenos were already adept at greeting each of these visitors as a target for the sale of some sort of goods or services; and with Batres' improvements both in the presentation of the ruins and national publicity of them, that trickle of tourists had begun to flow faster and faster.

Thus, while Parsons was not interested in tourism *per se*, her ethnography is replete with allusions to ways that Mitleyenos treated the sound of incoming vehicles as a kind of alarm to 'rush out of their houses to sell the tourists belts, white cotton croquet work, baskets, *ídolos*, and the copper pieces called "hoes";⁶⁵ ways that Zapotec parents capitalised on the realisation that children were far more effective beggars than were adults;⁶⁶ and ways in which virtually every Mitla household variously wove, carved or cooked merchandise that they would hawk to tourists. Likewise, she explains, e.g. that, once it became apparent that tourists would pay hefty sums for the small stone figurines or *ídolos* that everyone found scattered in their yards and fields, the supposed magical properties of those objects were largely superseded by their mounting economic values;⁶⁷ and, along with the escalating traffic in these 'real' artefacts, already by 1909, we encounter warnings about 'the pseudo-antiques offered for sale at the ruins'.⁶⁸ Parsons thus reveals that the full spectrum of authentic, replicate and fully fake souvenirs was already available. Additionally, just as the Maya guides were learning at Chichén Itzá, self-trained Mitleyeno chaperones had, it seems, realised that tourists were much more interested in an encounter with 'an authentic Indian' and a good story of the ruins than with historical facts they would likely forget before lunch. In short, with Batres' efforts, the seeds of Mitla tourist industry opened into full blossom; by the 1910s, nearly all cylinders of the marketing machine that one witnesses today at Mitla had begun to fire.

Moreover, and even more ironically, the infamously bigoted Batres would come to enjoy an excellent reputation among the Mitleyenos; almost three decades after he had finished his restorations, Parsons encountered Zapotecs still boasting about their roles as labourers working under the General Inspector of Monuments.⁶⁹ Because, once hastily completing his work at Mitla he dashed off to other projects, Batres had, almost inadvertently, created a wide open entrepreneurial space. A token presence of government employees remained on duty, seemingly more to prevent vandalism than to provide any information to tourists or to regulate commercial activities; yet, in advance of any concerted federal strategy for managing the ruins, Batres had left the newly refurbished archaeological-tourist site largely in the hands of the local Zapotecs.⁷⁰

In the early 1930s, i.e. directly in the wake of Parsons' fieldwork, Alfonso Caso, though focusing his energies primarily on Monte Albán, would begin a new and very different wave of government-sponsored archaeological work at Mitla;⁷¹ and it was Caso who would play the lead role in the 1939 creation of Mexico's National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH), which almost immediately took over control of the Mitla ruins.⁷² By any standard, Caso and INAH's vastly more careful approach to archaeology was paired with a vastly more progressive and respectful (if perhaps still patronising) attitude towards the indigenous Oaxacans. Yet, with greater historical rigour, also came much greater policing. By contrast to the previously lax regulation, under INAH's auspices, the ruins were transformed into a much more fully and formally monitored research-exhibition precinct, complete with fences, entry fees, non-native staff, credentialed guides and, perhaps most irksome to the locals, ample restrictions on the sale of goods and services. Thus, at present, among the most common sentiments among Mitleyenos, the overwhelming majority of whom continue to owe their livelihoods to tourism, are commingled feelings of very deep of resentment against INAH – which many despise as no less than an occupying power in their midst – and great nostalgia for that post-Batres, pre-INAH era of only loosely regulated commercialism.

In any case, if the present situation with respect to the INAH-controlled ruins lies outside the purview of this article, a fuller appreciation of the dynamics of the archaeological-tourist environment that emerged in the wake of Batres' work requires returning to one of Elsie Parsons' favourite subjects, namely, the mountain-dwelling Serranos who were keen to make pilgrimages to the ruins both before and after those renovations.

3. Pilgrims versus tourists: Five 'sacrosanct places' in the Mitla area

While in lots of situations, tourists and pilgrims may be heavily overlapping categories, in the context of Elsie Parsons' allusions to the visitors to Mitla during the late 1920s, these are two completely distinct, non-intersecting constituencies. Linked by very little other than a shared enthusiasm for visiting the ruins, these two sets of travellers along with the Zapotec townspeople, the Mexican government and the Catholic Church, fill out the slate of the era's five key stakeholders in the ancient monuments. The tourists are, as we've noted, Mexican, American or European visitors, the great majority of whom do not even stay overnight in Mitla. Like D.H. Lawrence, most tourists in this era, not unlike today, simply make a day-trip to Mitla from Oaxaca de Juarez. While hardly homogeneous, as a rule they approached the ruins with some mix of cultural, historical or maybe recreational expectations. They are operating more with curiosity, or perhaps a sense of obligation to see the renowned ruins of Mitla, than with expectations of spiritual transformation or reward. Though Parsons seems more inclined to avoid than engage this set of travellers, it is apparent from her account that there were more and more tourists coming to Mitla at this point, and

that Mitleyenos were getting more and more astute about how to cash in on those invariably affluent visitors.

The so-termed pilgrims, by stark contrast, are Serranos, i.e. Zapotecs, Mixes and other indigenous people who live in the mountains near Mitla. They are self-described Catholics or, as anthropologists have described them, adherents to a distinctive version of 'folk' or 'syncretistic Catholicism' insofar as they also remain very much invested in their indigenous belief systems and practices. Resilient in their attachments to 'the old ways', the Serranos seem to engender a kind of ambivalence among the more worldly townspeople insofar as, on the one hand, the mountain folk 'keep the faith', as it were, yet, on the other hand, Parsons also provided numerous instances of the Mitleyenos mocking the mountain Indians both for their antiquated outlook and their extreme poverty. Though they would rather not, the modernising Mitleyenos, it seems, have to admit that they see much of themselves in the rustic and superstitious Serranos. Be that as it may, while the Serranos approach the ruins of Mitla with much more urgent and more 'cosmomagical' expectations than do the non-native tourists,⁷³ they also bring far fewer resources and are, therefore, far less lucrative targets for the entrepreneurial efforts of the local residents.

In any case, Parsons mentions five 'sacrosanct places' that, at least in previous eras, a Serrano pilgrim to the Mitla area would have felt compelled to visit or, in her terms, 'might go with candle and copal [or incense offerings]'.⁷⁴ Though New Year's Eve constituted the primetime for visitation of these five locales, i.e. Mitla's Church of San Pablo, the Lake of White Water, so termed Devil's Cave, the main ruins and the Cross of Miracle – all had year-round appeal. Together these five sites, all within a half dozen kilometres of the town centre, constitute not only a kind of 'sacred geography' for the Mitla region but, moreover, a worthy inventory, almost a laboratory, of the many different ways that an unremarkable place can become – and then cease to be – a 'sacred place'. That is to say, in this span before and after 1930, the relative appeal of each of these five long-esteemed spots was very much in flux as each of the five sets of stakeholders jockeyed to assert its respective interests at the archaeological-tourist site. In fact, so revealing is the fluctuation and contestation relative to these five sites that I can organise the remainder of this article with respect to successive comments about the transitional status of each of them.

3.1 Catholic Indians and fluctuating sacred geographies: Supernatural and/or natural incentives for change

Given that essentially every native Oaxacan – Mitleyeno or Serrano – that Parsons describes self-identifies as a Catholic, it is not surprising that, by the 1920s (and probably much earlier), the first and foremost site of visitation for the Indian pilgrims to the region was Mitla's church of San Pablo. Here, they would have enjoyed a welcoming reception from the mestizo priest, who was largely acquiescent to their pastiche of native and Catholic beliefs and fully in support

of this component of their pilgrimage circuit, wherein the Indians paid their respects to San Pablo and the other assembled saints. A semi-elaborate, mid-sized structure, the church of San Pablo enjoyed a special distinction by being built directly into the main ruins, and thus, atypically, was a few blocks away from the centre of town; but in most respects it was not unlike thousands of other Mexican churches.

What is more notable in Parsons' account – especially with respect to the flex and flux in this sacred geography – is her discovery that the church of San Pablo, while for decades the sole church in town, was actually Mitla's second Catholic Church. The original church, located nearer to the main plaza, on the other side of the small river that cuts through town and so nearly forgotten that she describes it as 'quasi-prehistoric', had apparently been dedicated to San Nicolás.⁷⁵ According to tradition, however, the statue of San Pablo from that sanctuary had thrice miraculously relocated itself across the river to the site of the second church, until eventually, apparently sometime in the late 1600s, Mitleyenos acquiesced to San Pablo's demands and built the new church dedicated to him at the spot that the saint himself had selected. By Parsons' era, memory either of the older church, obliterated aside from the fragment of one wall that had been incorporated into the newer market structure, or the fact that San Nicolás had been the village's original patron saint had almost completely vanished. To put it bluntly, the Mitleyenos, never slaves to tradition in Parsons' account, had simply moved on. Ostensibly responding to the *trans*-natural initiative of San Pablo, they had so fully rearranged their spatial and spiritual loyalties that neither the townspeople nor the Serranos showed any signs of nostalgia for their earlier church or their former tutelary saint.

In any case, the second privileged pilgrimage destination in the Mitla area that Parsons mentions is the Lake of White Water (also termed the Serpent's Pool), a small natural reservoir slightly south of town that previous generations had revered as a sacred lake.⁷⁶ A rare feature in the largely waterless Valley of Oaxaca – a distinction that probably explains the origin of La Laguna de Agua Blanca's special prestige – and by the late 1920s, this lake had dried up and thus lost all of its allure. For Parsons' informants, it was already a kind of fading memory; and, at present, almost no one has any recollection whatever of this lake. In other words, this was an instance in which the sacred geography of Mitla was changing and being reconfigured not as a rejoinder to either divine or human machinations, but instead in response to a natural, ecological process.

3.2 Devil's Cave: The appropriation and/or stigmatisation of sacred places

Third, Parsons' discusses at much greater length the so-called 'Devil's Cave' (la Cueva de Diablo), which is located some 3 or 4 km East of town. This is a telling case in another respect. Of innumerable caves in the area, this one, sometime in the deep past, had been singled out by natives of the region as a site deserving of special veneration, and thus it was also subsequently targeted by colonial-era

Dominicans as a site requiring special antipathy. Very often, as Spanish Catholics worked to replace indigenous religious sentiments with their own, they relied on a strategy of appropriating or seizing traditional sacred places and then reassigning them some new Christian significance; and Parsons is scarcely the first to observe with a bit of cynicism that, when in doubt, these Spaniards invariably mounted a cross on every manmade or natural hill for which the Indians expressed a special fondness.⁷⁷ Parallel instances of this sort of colonial expropriation of indigenous sacred places occur all over Mexico, though perhaps the most glaringly unmistakable example is at Cholula where Spaniards obliterated the native temple atop Mesoamerica's largest pyramid only to erect in its place a church dedicated to Nuestra Señora de los Remedios. By the same token, at Mitla, an identical strategy of architectural confiscation accounts for what Parsons calls 'the ugly brick-built calvary', a rectangular structure finished in 1671, complete with three crosses, atop the town's last remaining pre-Columbian pyramid, a construction ploy that reassigned that long-exalted place a new role in the story of Christ's crucifixion.⁷⁸

In other instances, however, Spanish Catholics were unable to find ways to appropriate sacred places and reassign them Christian significances, in which case their alternate strategy was simply to stigmatise those places and that is what seems to have happened in the case of the old grotto that they renamed 'Devil's Cave'. In the words, apparently recognising that this cave was a major focus for just the sorts of 'pagan' devotional practices that the Dominican friars were working to stomp out, they renamed it and began to circulate all sorts of stories about what a dangerous place this was, and what dire consequences one would befall anyone who dared to visit it. By Parsons' account, this campaign to stigmatise Devil's Cave had been quite effective insofar as Mitleyenos were shocked and surprised that she had the temerity, or perhaps plain ignorance, to actually go and visit the dangerous cave, a place that very few of them would dare to frequent.⁷⁹ Nonetheless, on the other hand, the fact that Devil's Cave even now continues to be a place to which lots of people bring offerings of flowers and candles, and at which twenty-first century indigenous healers continue to undertake *limpias* (or 'spiritual cleanings'), signals that the efforts to stigmatise the place were far from fully successful.⁸⁰ Yet, in any case, the long-disputed status of this cave provides us an instance in which the sacred geography of Mitla was subject to ongoing realignment and flux, not because of ecological changes, but in response to deliberate religio-political manipulations and then, it seems, equally vehement resistance to those manipulations.⁸¹

3.3 *The early twentieth-century Mitla ruins: Conflicting usages and conflicted sentiments*

The fourth site of special pilgrim interest to which Parsons refers is Mitla's main ruins, which in the late 1920s would have looked essentially as they did when Batres completed his renovations nearly three decades earlier. Though largely unconcerned with recovering the 'real' pre-Columbian usages of these buildings,

Parsons does describe what amounts to a competition between the various devotional, pedagogical and commercial activities that were transpiring in the ruins during her stay in Mitla. Again, almost inadvertently, her comments shed very considerable light on two sorts of tensions, both of which reflect the extent to which the site was undergoing a profound transformation.

For one – with respect to an ongoing tension between the Catholic versus ‘pagan’ religious sensibilities of precisely the sort I have just been discussing – Parsons makes passing reference to a cross that had (previously) been prominently positioned on the west end of the main body of ruins, and thus very near to the church of San Pablo, which is, remember, located directly adjacent and even amidst the ruins. According to her very reasonable conjecture, ‘it is probable that the cross was erected to divert attention from the ruins as a shrine’;⁸² this was, in other words, yet another attempt at appropriation as the local Dominicans continued to do all they could to undermine native beliefs that this site and these old buildings had some special efficacy. But then Parsons notes as well that, while this was ‘usually an effective device’ whereby the priests could manipulate the devotional attentions of the Indians, ‘in this case it failed, for the cross had been removed and the *subterráneo de muerto*, the underground place of death, is still visited as a shrine by pilgrims . . .’⁸³ That is to say, in the 1920s, the main ruins, just like Devil’s Cave, persisted as the site of head-to-head contestation in which the Catholic Church was very actively – but only partially successfully – working to discourage vestiges of pre-Columbian worship in favour of cultivation of more suitably Christian affiliations. If the raising of the cross at this key spot signalled concerted attempts by Catholics to integrate this section of the ruins into their own cosmology, the subsequent removal of cross reveals that there was also some strong resistance to that redefinition. In other words, the ubiquitous tension between Catholic and ‘heathen’ religious orientations, which would be present since the earliest arrival of Spaniards in the area, was being played out yet again in the Mitla ruins.

For two, even more significant – and more site-specific – is the way that Parsons’ comments illumine the mounting tension between the utilisation of the Mitla ruins as a pilgrimage destination, and thus a site of religious devotion, versus the site’s use (or actually range of various uses) as an archaeological-tourist zone. Though this tension may scarcely have existed prior to Batres refurbishments, by the 1920s, these two largely incommensurable conceptions of the place were headed for certain collision. While the dynamics of this clash of interests pertain to the ruins as a whole, the tensions crystallise in the competing attitudes towards the so-called ‘Column of Death’ (sometimes termed the ‘Pillar of Death’ or even ‘Pillar of Life’), a large stone column positioned at the crossing point of one of the numerous cruciform-shaped tombs that lie beneath the main buildings in the Mitla ruins.⁸⁴ It is important and ironic to note that, during the pre-Columbian prime of these buildings, that Column of Death, which actually stands within one of the subterranean tombs, would have been inaccessible and completely out-of-sight; indeed, it would have been inside an underground crypt, surrounded by bodily

remains and other funerary accoutrements. In the wake of the Batres' major remodelling, however, the formerly hidden pillar was not only visible and accessible by a small stairway, it, in fact, emerged as the very focal point of attention for the entire complex!⁸⁵ That is to say – because pre-Hispanic audiences would not even have been able to see, let alone touch, what was much later was labelled the Column of Death – we can be certain that none of the colonial and modern-era utilisations of this architectural feature are remotely consistent with the 'real' or 'authentic' pre-Columbian usages. All of the competing usages of Parsons' day were 'fakes' or, in more affirming terms, creative 'revalorisations'.⁸⁶

Be that discontinuity as it may, before and during Parsons' era, we can note three starkly different but simultaneously operative attitudes towards the Column of Death, which signal three very different conceptions of the ancient structures more generally. First, the Serrano pilgrims revered this stone post as the most sacred place in the whole ruins, perhaps in the entire Valley of Oaxaca, i.e. the premier site at which to leave their offerings and make their petitions to the gods and to the dead. Parsons observes that, despite ever more restrictions against doing so, the pilgrims insisted on visiting this tomb and leaving their offerings of flowers, candles and sometimes sacrificed chickens directly at the foot of the so-termed Column of Death.⁸⁷ Theirs was a sort of devotional behaviour that – though assuredly a radical departure from the original ritual use of this building⁸⁸ – nonetheless perfectly exemplifies Mircea Eliade's comments on propitiatory practices at sacred pillars in India and elsewhere, centrally located architectural features that are conceived as 'axis mundis' in the sense of points of ontological transition at which human beings can break through, or cross over, into *trans-human* realms and interact with gods or, more likely in this case, with deceased ancestors.⁸⁹ Indeed, Mitla was, as Parsons notes, 'referred to in the mountain towns as the middle of the world, *mitad del mundo* . . .'⁹⁰ Moreover, even into the 1930s, the Serranos subscribed to an old (but hardly pre-Columbian) tradition that to physically hug this column would mean certain death; according to most versions, persons who did embrace the pillar would not live through the night.⁹¹ One encounters numerous variations on this theme and, as we'll see momentarily, numerous attitudes towards its veracity. But, by all accounts, the Serranos of this era continued to take the aged warning very seriously.⁹²

Foreign tourists, by contrast, provide a second, nearly antithetical perspective on both the Column of Death and the timeworn prognosticatory practice. F.A. Ober, for instance, a traveller and amateur historian from Massachusetts who visited Mitla in 1882, rehearses the standard line that the pillar owes its name to 'a tradition that whoever embraces it will die before the sun goes down'.⁹³ But then the American goes on to demonstrate how, instead of trepidation, the widely circulated ultimatum provided an ideal opportunity for tourists to mock the natives and their silly superstitions: 'To the horror of our Indian guides, each in our party took particular pains to embrace the pillar most affectionately, and still we live'.⁹⁴ Another equally unscholarly nineteenth-century traveller, Prussian soldier, Gustavo von Tempsky, similarly noted that the pillar had earned its name 'because

even the present Indians believe that whosoever among them embraces this column must die in a short time after'.⁹⁵ Yet, unlike Ober, he attributes the natives a measure of rationalisation inasmuch as he explains that, 'This belief does not extend to other races than themselves, because they have frequently seen white persons trying the experiment without any evil result'.⁹⁶ Shades of difference notwithstanding, the tourist accounts of this era are markedly positivistic insofar as they abound with praise for the artistic and technical excellence of the pre-Columbian buildings, but almost never afford the ruins any inherently sacred or magical quality. These early tourists, so it seems, share few of the mystical inclinations of today's 'New Age' tourists-pilgrims. To the contrary, these foreign travellers invariably seized upon the Pillar of Death not simply as whimsical diversion, but likewise as an impetus to note a double difference: first they accentuate the seeming enormity of the gap between the sublime ancients and the highly superstitious present-day natives, but then likewise they accentuate the equally wide gap between their own modern-mindedness and the ostensibly antiquated credulousness of those Indians.

In any case, if Serranos and tourists held nearly antithetical opinions on the innate efficacy of the Mitla ruins, Parsons' Mitleyeno informants displayed a third stance, which is not so much a compromise as a pragmatic and uneven oscillation between the two poles. Commenting constantly on the Mitla residents' embrace of modern ways and ideas, she observes that, by 1930, the ruins were no longer visited for religious reasons 'except by the mountain pilgrims'.⁹⁷ Parsons is somewhat surprised, then, that in reply to her interrogations about the status of column-hugging tradition, she encounters otherwise-progressive Mitleyenos who persist in concurring with the Serranos that this is a reliable diagnostic of how long one is going to live.⁹⁸ Additionally, even among those villagers who dismiss this specific practice, she collects a host of 'other legends about the monuments [that] are taken more seriously by Mitleyenos, even the sophisticated',⁹⁹ all of which belie the fact that the townspeople had fully lost confidence in the religious potency of the ruins. The townspeople told Parsons not only that the ruins were the burial site of the ancient Zapotec 'kings', but, moreover, that, after death, 'the souls, *las animas*, of all Zapotec people, from valley and mountain come to Mitla, "their earth-strong pueblo" (*shtipgiechlu*)'.¹⁰⁰ Even today, it is not uncommon for Mitleyenos, like the Serranos of a century past, to profess their continued belief that these old monuments remain the best place to communicate with the dead.

Yet, aversely, Parsons also encounters a more sceptical – and increasingly larger – body of opinion wherein local residents have come to appreciate the Column of Death divinatory legend, not as a heed-worthy warning, but as just the sort of quaint Indian lore that tourists love to hear about. For these more progressive Mitleyenos, performative iterations of folktales about pillar-based predictions of death provide the growing contingent of guides both a quirky concession with which to entertain tourists and an occasion to join with those foreign visitors in the fun of ridiculing the gullible Serranos. Parsons describes the transitioning view this way:

The tradition about the Column of Death is passing, under the showmanship of the guardians of the monuments, from pilgrim lore into tourist lore. I have seen little groups of pilgrims at the fiesta of San Pablo, valley people, not Serranos, take their arm measures with jokes and laughter much as the Blarney stone is kissed by the tourist.¹⁰¹

To be sure, the balance was tipping in the direction of scepticism, and the main ruins' primary utilisation was shifting from devotional to touristic. Nevertheless, Parsons' wider depiction of the villagers' commingled commitments to the past and the future, together with their deft flexibility and pragmatism, leads us to suspect there were Mitleyeno tour guides who belittled Serrano beliefs and practices during the day and then participated in them during the evening. In the 1920s and 1930s, the desanctification of the ruins was well underway but far from complete.

3.4 The Cross of Miracle: From boundary marker to pilgrimage destination

If, by the late 1920s, religious enthusiasm for Mitla's ruins was fading and narrowing, that decline was more than matched by swelling enthusiasm for the Cross of Miracle, the fifth and last 'sacrosanct place' that Parsons addresses. Also termed the cross of petitions or sometimes just the cross of Mitla, this simple stone cross, perhaps a dozen feet high, is situated in a wide open field a couple of hundred meters off the highway, about 5 km south of town.¹⁰² It too provides a wonderfully instructive instance of how unremarkable places and built forms can become sacred insofar as the so-termed Cross of Miracle was originally constructed as a boundary marker between the township of Mitla and that of Matatlán, a village just to the south. In other words, originally, the cross was a completely utilitarian marker, placed in this spot to resolve a boundary dispute between the two villages. Albeit a cross, the surveyor's benchmark had no special religious significance.

Up the hill above the monument, there are some very modest ruins and a tiny cave, a mere 10 feet deep, but these are commonplace features that do not suggest that this had been the site of any consequential pre-Columbian religious activity. That is to say, it is difficult to make the case that the site selection of the Cross of Miracle was another instance of strategic appropriation of a long-revered place; instead, its location seems to have been arbitrary but then highly opportune, arguably even providential. Once the cross was in place, stories began to circulate about miraculous events that were happening in the vicinity, and the exceptionally fortuitous way in which prayers and petitions offered from this spot were especially likely to be granted.¹⁰³ Among numerous reputed benefits, especially prominent were reports of childless couples who became pregnant immediately in the wake of a visit to the cross.¹⁰⁴ Then, apparently, as more people visited the cross and more stories of miracles and successful petitions circulated, yet more people came and even more stories circulated, until, by Parsons' era, word-of-mouth momentum had propelled the cross of petitions into first place among the region's pilgrimage destinations. During a time at which the

Lake of White Water had dried up, Devil's Cave had been largely stigmatised and devotion at the Mitla ruins was increasingly restricted by the demands of tourism, the Cross of Miracle was emerging as the area's liveliest and most appealing destination both for local and Serrano devotees. Moreover, the renown that the Cross of Miracle was accumulating during the 1920s and 1930s has remained very much intact so that now – some 80 years later – this persists as a site of major pilgrimage devotion, especially but not exclusively on New Year's Eve.

The seemingly self-propelled ascent of the Cross of Miracle to prominence was, of course, neither so spontaneous nor so apolitical as it might at first appear. To be sure, if by 'fake' one means fabricated and deliberately manipulated, then the climbing reputation of the Cross of Miracle may have been based on forces that were more phoney than real. Be that as it may, it is certainly no coincidence that the ascending stature of the Cross of Miracle corresponded with the transformation of the Mitla ruins from a primarily devotional to an overwhelmingly touristic site. Indeed, it required a very odd convergence of interests among the usually antagonist stakeholders in the Mitla ruins – a perfect storm of modest proportions – to effect this metamorphosis. Accordingly, I can end this article with one last inventory of the ways in which the distinctive and competing perspectives of each of the five constituencies most interested in the Mitla ruins participated, either wilfully or inadvertently, in realigning the early twentieth-century sacred geography of the Mitla region.

3.5 Agreement among antagonists: The segregation of devotional and touristic activities

First, the Serrano pilgrims, the strongest holdouts for the religio-magical efficacy of the ruins, were, in Parsons' era, intent of visiting both the ancient structures and the Cross of Miracle. Her account, which catches pilgrimage to the ruins at a fascinating midpoint between welcoming support and total prohibition, suggests, however, that the pilgrims' devotional routines were encountering ever stiffer resistance not simply from the Church but even more from the Mexican government. With respect to the placement of offerings in the cross-shaped cavity that contained the Column of Death, Parsons' informants tell her, for instance, that, 'Formerly, before it was prohibited by the federal department, the candles were placed on a boulder [sic] in the northern arm of the underground cruciform structure, the *cruceo*, or at the ends of the east and west arms'; and the villagers recall a now obsolete practice wherein pilgrims 'used to write out the story of recent events in the family and place the paper around a candle, as a message to the dead'.¹⁰⁵ The transitional status of the mountain Indians' visitations to the ruins is even more evident when Parsons explains, 'On New Year's Eve [of 1930], I found a group of about twenty pilgrims outside the *crucero* in talk with the custodian, who was telling them not to burn candles, only to deposit flowers.'¹⁰⁶ While negotiations for access to the ruins continued, the Serranos' bargaining position was growing weaker and weaker.

If Serrano pilgrims were being just barely tolerated at the ruins, they were, nevertheless, finding an increasingly more hospitable reception outside of town at the Cross of Miracle, where a full array of support services was emerging. Parsons was especially impressed by the way in which visitors would augment their petitionary prayers by making miniaturised domestic scenes – complete with tiny replicas of tethered animals, loaded burros, beehives, roosting poultry, ample supplies of corn and swing cradles that signalled a hope for more children – which were fashioned out of pebbles and placed on the ground all around the cross.¹⁰⁷ On New Year's Eve in 1930, along with at least 300 of these 'prayer-images', she observed more than 200 pilgrims who spent the entire night lighting candles, blowing incense in the four directions and praying for the realisation of the sort of domestic prosperity represented in these diorama-like offerings; and, though New Year remains the day of the highest traffic, it is fascinating to find near the base of the stone cross at all times of the year, even in the twenty-first century, examples of these sorts of visual wish-lists that are virtually identical to those depicted in Parsons' ethnography. In short, though the Serranos were pawns rather than decision makers in this realignment of the sacred geography, by 1930, they were, it seems, well on the way to embracing the Cross of Miracle as the alternate climax of their Mitla-area pilgrimages.

Second, the Catholic Church, though, as we've seen, far less than fully effective in its manipulations of the native Oaxacan devotional and spatial affinities, would have been a great supporter to a reconfiguration of pilgrimage destinations that shifted attention away from the main ruins and out to the Cross of Miracle. For Dominicans intent on doing everything they could to kill religious enthusiasm for the pre-Columbian structures, the Cross of Miracle presented a benign, happily proximate alternative. The fact that this place, unlike either the ruins or Devil's Cave, was apparently without any long-running religio-magical prestige actually made it a vastly more healthy option than either of those two sites; and thus the Catholic authorities would have strongly encouraged both Serranos and Mitleyenos to participate in devotions at the cross of petitions. Church authorities likely had some ambivalence about the sort of unruly and recondite para-liturgical activities that transpired at the cross, many of which seem very far from orthodox Christianity; yet by occasionally offering masses immediately at the cross, priests exercised a new variation on their timeworn appropriative strategy that came, in this case, with their public seal approval for worship at the Mitla–Matatlán boundary marker.

Third, the Mexican federal government, so often at odds with the Catholic Church on these matters, would not only have been similarly supportive of this redirection of pilgrimage affinities, it would, moreover, have been in a far stronger position to effectuate that sort of realignment. As noted, Leopoldo Batres' turn-of-the-century renovations, which qualify as Porfirio Diaz's own version of strategic appropriation, were, in large part, a determined attempt to transform the ruins into a kind of open-air museum wherein they could showcase the splendour of pre-Columbian civilisation and build the case – to both foreign and domestic audiences – that those ancient achievements were an essential

component of Mexico's national identity. With the start of the decade-long Mexican Revolution in 1910, President Diaz was deposed and thus Batres' formidable influence eliminated; and in 1931, Alfonso Caso would discover the spectacular Tomb 7 at Monte Albán, which set in motion the events wherein that site would eclipse Mitla as the region's premier archaeological attraction and INAH would eventually take over the management of all of Oaxaca's ruins. Yet, for all that was to change during these decades with respect to government policies towards ruins, the nationalistic notion that these pre-Columbian remains belong to the republic at large rather than to any local community, indigenous or otherwise, remained fully intact. Moreover, Caso would remain as fully convinced as Batres had been that, as the most visible component of the country's rich cultural patrimony, ruins such as Mitla were also Mexico's foremost educational contexts, sites at which recreational vacations could be enriched not simply with a healthy dose of cultural history, but also a heightened appreciation of Mexico's impressive past and thus promising future.

Given that sort of dually didactic and patriotic agenda, it is a little surprise that the government overseers of the Mitla ruins were charged to do all they could to protect – or perhaps sanitise – the touristic experience by diverting the Serrano pilgrims away from the main ruins to the outlying Cross of Miracle. From a logistical perspective, pilgrimage traffic was messy, and the deposit of candles and sacrifices in the vicinity of the Column of Death fell under the heading of just the sort of defacement that Batres' infamous placard prohibited. Parsons' account shows these devotional activities were being seriously curtailed in the 1920s and, as the ruins came under INAH management, were, it seems, fully outlawed by the early 1940s.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, from an ideological and exhibitory perspective, given the commitment to present Mexico's bright, promising and fully modern future, the very last thing that ought to be on display to tourists were the anachronistic rites of Serrano pilgrims. Though Mexicans are not averse to using indigenous people as tourist attractions, in a choreographed context where the featured narrative was an essential link between a splendid pre-Columbian past and similarly splendid Mexican future, the worshipful Serranos were apparently considered a distraction rather than an enhancement, an anomaly that belonged neither to the idealised antiquity nor to the unfolding of modernity. Accordingly, though for very different reasons, the Mexican government found common cause with the Catholic Church in a deliberate initiative to quite fully segregate touristic activities, which would continue on in the ruins, from religio-pilgrimage activities, which would be averted out of town to the Cross of Miracle.

Fourth, the Mitleyenos, again for their own very different reasons, joined the undeclared coalition of advocates for the segregation of touristic and pilgrimage destinations. Rather than enthusiasm for Mexican patriotism or antagonism towards Serrano devotionalism, or even a commitment to protect the cultural heritage of their Zapotec ancestors, the villagers' support for the sort of archaeological-tourist site that the government espoused was a characteristically pragmatic exercise of Mitleyeno self-interest. Their notoriously well-honed

aptitude for preying on tourists was already evident in G.F. von Tempsky's 1854 recollection that his 'meditations' in the ruins had been interrupted by 'a swarm of pretty little Indian girls . . . all offering little idols of clay or sandstone for sale;' and the itinerant German noted as well that, 'Each family in that village possesses a little store of these commodities, which they sell to travellers [sic] for coppers'.¹⁰⁹ Batres' renovations intensified both the flow of tourists, and thus spiked the commercial competition, as evidenced in Parsons' description of groups of native women who, at the sign of any new arrival, hurried from their houses in hopes of being the first to make the solicitations that tourists were subsequently to hear again and again during their swing through Mitla. Parsons, moreover, provides an amusing ethnographic moment when she describes how her inquiries into the religious significance of the *ídolos* or small stone figurines that she observed on nearly everyone's home altars were actually just being stored there for easy access in the event that a gullible tourist in search of an 'authentic' artefact happened along.¹¹⁰ Parsimonious Serranos would, of course, have known better than to pay money for trinkets that were commonplace in the local fields or for guide service through an area that they themselves knew very well; but the combined naivety, curiosity and wealth of foreign travellers made them far more lucrative targets for the wheeling and dealing on which the townspeople thrived. Accordingly, if steering the peso-wise Serrano pilgrims off to the Cross of Miracle had the effect of enhancing Mitla's tourist traffic – which it assuredly did – then the Mitleyenos would have been the strongest supporters of the revised alignment. As we'll conclude in a moment, the townspeople's religio-spatial commitments were certainly flexible enough to accommodate such an astute business decision.

Fifth and finally, tourists, while providing most of the fuel for the economic engine that kept Mitla running either before or after Parsons' era, remain largely oblivious to the Cross of Miracle, and thus to the contestations between it and the main ruins. Travelogue accounts from the nineteenth and early twentieth century by the likes of von Tempsky, F.A. Ober and Ethel Tweedy, all of whom provide extensive reflections on Mitla's ruins and the surrounding area, give no evidence that they visited or were even told of the Cross of Miracle; nor does a much more serious antiquarian like Désiré Charnay, who visited Mitla in 1858 and again in 1882, despite his penchant for digressions on all matters of special interest, make any mention of the cross of petitions in his commodious chapter on Mitla.¹¹¹ The editions of the uniquely thorough *Terry's Mexico: Handbook for travellers* that appeared between 1909 and the late 1940s, which had a full and detailed section outlining visit-worthy sites on an excursion from Oaxaca de Juarez to the Mitla ruins, made no mention of the Cross of Miracle. Only a small minority of more recent guidebooks mention the cross, and those that do, suggest that it would merit a visit only in the context of 'the unusual and colourful New Year's Eve fiesta'.¹¹²

The short shrift is, however, not too surprising. If, as the guidebooks say, the stupendous Mitla ruins 'can be easily explored in one hour',¹¹³ then the Cross of Miracle would provide perhaps 3 min of stimulation, not greater than that afforded

by the thousands of other small roadside shrines. For international tourists, the place has little appeal. Nevertheless, as the renown of the Cross of Miracle grew through the twentieth century, it attracted, besides Serranos and Mitleyenos, more and more people from across Mexico, indigenous and mestizo persons who do blur the categories of pilgrim and tourist. A couple of very modest hotels were built alongside the cross to accommodate the upsurge in patrons; and a few atypical foreign visitors joined the growing New Year's festival.¹¹⁴ But for that very large percentage of outside travellers who spend less than a full day in the Mitla region, both the Cross of Miracle and the forces that brought it to prominence would remain entirely invisible. In short, tourists, like Serranos, have been pawns rather than decision makers in judicious reconfiguration of the area's sacred geography.

4. Conclusions: Indigenous co-conspirators in the desanctification of a pre-Columbian ruin

While the early twentieth-century manipulations of Mitla's religious topography are replete with lessons about the large topics of sacred space, ritual, tourism and authenticity, I end with just three modest and interrelated conclusions. The first concerns the Mitleyenos' role as protagonists in the commodification of the Mitla ruins. Especially in our present era wherein, suitably enough, there is growing indignation about innumerable instances in which indigenous peoples in Mesoamerica and elsewhere have been deprived access to their own traditional lands and sites of worship,¹¹⁵ it is entirely possible to imagine the management of the Mitla ruins as yet another egregious circumstance wherein the native Zapotec inhabitants had their prized sacred site essentially stolen from them, misappropriated, against the Indians' will, by the federal government. A closer look reveals, however, that, rather than passive victims, the Mitleyenos of Parsons' era were actually the prime movers in the commercialisation of the site; the townspeople went far past acquiescence in the transformation of the ruins into an archaeological-tourist zone to become the strongest promoters of the plan. Indeed, given the unanimous consensus of every visitor that the Zapotec villagers' main mantra was, as Parsons put it, 'Price, price, price! Instead of a ritual, a price list! A ritual of price!',¹¹⁶ it is tempting to let the pendulum of accusation swing in the opposite direction by assessing these Mitleyenos as simply crass merchandisers, greedy – and maybe 'irreligious' sell-outs whose sole motivation was economic self-interest. That reproach, however, also oversimplifies and homogenises their motivations and outlook.

The jumble of contradictory replies to Parsons' queries about the status of those plentiful *ídolos* is, for instance, actually a telling indicator of an intermediary, pliant and transitional position that had Mitleyenos pulled simultaneously in at least three directions. She does, as just noted, receive one set of glib replies that the *ídolos* are worthless aside from their value as a kind of commodity that could be peddled to rich and trusting tourists, an attitude that

seems at first like just more proof of the villagers' shrewd lack of sentimentality and their commitment to nothing other than fiscal opportunism.¹¹⁷ It is this intense preoccupation with the affairs of business, and a seeming willingness to reduce the significance of every object and situation to its monetary value that many commentators read as the Mitleyenos' embrace of modernity and secularism.¹¹⁸ Alternatively, however, a second set of replies indicates the pervasiveness of the townspeople's continued agreement with the Serranos that these *ídolos* actually do possess enduring magical properties so that the old figurines can, for instance, 'whistle on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, also that they can rattle about', and, moreover, that some of them have the power to grant prayerful requests.¹¹⁹ Pre-Columbian cosmomagical sensibilities remain very much alive in this community. And a third set of replies demonstrate that most Mitleyenos had likewise been persuaded to some significant degree by the stigmatising rhetoric of the priests that '*ídolos* are malos, bad', and thus good Catholics, which the villagers imagined themselves to be, ought to avoid storing these agents of 'black magic' in and around their homes.¹²⁰

In other words, the Mitleyenos' multi-tiered conception of the *ídolos* – not unlike their wider conception of the ruins – reflected a kind of tripartite but not well synthesised set of commitments, respectively, to their indigenous cosmology, to Catholicism and, moreover, to that which Parsons called 'A ritual of price' or what Charles Leslie termed 'the acquisitive society', i.e. a 'religion' of entrepreneurialism, a distinctive set of beliefs, practices and institutions that were commensurate with the proper functioning of 'the lively commercial activity of their town'.¹²¹ Irrespective of the seemingly inconsistent presuppositions on which these respective views are based, the townspeople had come to a workable, if uneven and somewhat untidy accommodation of all three; thus, ramping up their marketing activities required no compromise of religious convictions. As Leslie would write of the Mitleyenos that he came to know in the 1950s, 'Nothing seemed to enter the minds of our friends more spontaneously and with a greater sense of reality or appropriateness than the thought of money'.¹²² That is to say, theirs was a kind of additive, pragmatic and highly flexible epistemology insofar as they were able to supplement rather than supplant their already strategic double embrace of traditional religion and Catholicism with a modernising, seemingly secular notion of the *ídolos* – and the ruins – as commodities that could, indeed should, be aggressively marketed according to the ethics and reasoning of their entrepreneurial (religious) orientation. Shifting the devotional attentions of themselves and others away from the ruins in order to capitalise on the economic potential of their foremost resource entailed neither qualms of conscience nor any sort of conversion. If the most prudent business decision required them to transfer the worshipful attentions of themselves and the Serranos away from the famed pre-Columbian structures out to the Cross of Miracle, then that was a modification they could very easily accommodate. In summary, yes, the Mitleyenos were deeply and enthusiastically implicated in the commodification of the main ruins;

but, no, that savvy and willing co-conspiratorial role in giving the main ruins over to tourism did not entail any serious ‘selling out’ of their religious commitments.

4.1 *The contingency of sacred spaces: Five cases in point*

A second, somewhat more general conclusion concerns the big and baggy category of sacred space. In that respect, the early twentieth century convolutes and intrigue associated with Mitla’s sacred geography undermine the still pervasive contention that, especially from the perspective of indigenous peoples, the religious potency of a site is an innate and permanent condition, which ought, therefore, be respected for time immemorial. While scholars of religion, as a rule, have come to accept that the ‘sacredness’ of places and buildings is a situational and contingent designation, the alternate argument that ‘real’ sacred places are discovered rather than created, which is to say, their special status is intrinsic and timeless, remains – or actually is increasingly prevalent – in more popular and more explicitly politicised contexts. Though a dubious historical stance, insisting on the inherent sacrality of a place can be a very effective political ploy. In a situation like contemporary Oaxaca, for instance, where there is a heated debate about how most responsibly to manage the state’s pre-Columbian remains and who is entitled to make those decisions about the ‘cultural patrimony’ – and here the vigorously contested site of Monte Albán is an even more trenchant example than Mitla – one hears constantly the argument that because the mountaintop Zapotec capital (ostensibly) *was* a sacred site in pre-Columbian times, then we are compelled to recognise that, irrespective of undue commercialisation, it presently *is* a sacred site and, moreover, that it *will forever remain* a sacred site, which ought therefore to be afforded suitable deference.¹²³ Furthermore, while the ‘once a sacred site always a sacred site’ proposition is routinely represented as an indigenous notion – and thus a principle that ought therefore to be respected in order to respect native peoples – the fluctuations in Mitla’s religious topography, together with the Mitleyenos’ agile flexibility in both accommodating and orchestrating those fluctuations, provide excellent demonstration that, from the perspective of this indigenous people, the religious prestige of places by no means is static and once-and-for-all.

Five cases in point, the variously rising and declining prestige of the ‘sacrosanct places’ that Elsie Parsons’ brings to our attention reveals both the great extent to which, even within a span of a few decades, the sacred geography of Mitla was dynamic and constantly shifting as well as the myriad forces that expedited those shifts. The evaporation and thus loss of interest in the Lake of white water, for instance, shows a major adjustment precipitated by ecological factors; equivocation about the otherworldly affiliations of Devil’s Cave and the main ruins provide only the most obvious exemplifications of the sorts of oscillations that arose in response to religio-political factors such as concerted Dominican attempts to manipulate native religious affinities; and there is no question that many adjustments, notably the ascendance of the Cross of Miracle,

were consequent of primarily economic factors and a profit motive that maximised the earning potential of the ruins. The interactivity of those five places alone tells a story of constant improvisation, rebalancing and realignment.

Moreover, we ought to appreciate that the five sites traditionally prized by pilgrims are only a portion of what is at issue in the Mitla's multi-dimensional and mercurial religious landscape. Besides the main ruins, there are innumerable other pre-Columbian constructions in the area, most notably the aforementioned Calvary and a large system of ancient walls just outside of town to the west termed the Fortaleza (or La Muralla), both of which are additional contested sites on which Catholics planted crosses; the Pantheon or town cemetery, has long been a site not just of burial but of lively daily devotional activity; and nearly all Mitla homes have domestic altars, which thus constitute more private but not less important components of the town's sacred geography. Likewise, visitor accounts reconfirm that Mitleyenos are constantly orchestrating processions – for weddings, funerals, saint's days, Christmas, Easter or other holidays – which depend upon more temporary sanctifications of the town's streets and sidewalks; during Holy Week, for instance, palm branches are strapped to lampposts and the 14 stations of the cross are fashioned at various points around the village in preparation for a whole series of public processions wherein the entire town is temporarily transformed into a ritual context. Furthermore, where Parsons could locate just one Protestant in 1930, Mitla is today stippled by churches, schools and compounds built by at least a half dozen different sorts of *evangelicos*, a blanket term for all of the non-Catholic Christians who are a fast growing presence in the community.

In summary, on this second point, the still modestly sized village of Mitla has a topography of 'sacred places' that is complexly checkered and constantly changing, as the Zapotec townspeople continually reassess their religious commitments, and thus continually realign their investments in the ample local options. The wide assortment of different places to worship presents these canny Indians with another sort of marketplace. Perhaps not so surprisingly, then, in response to my queries about how today's Mitleyeno Catholics and Protestants interact, how often they intermarry and how villagers navigate between the solicitations of all of these different versions of Christianity, Zapotec businesswoman Luciéna González Quero opined on the basis of her eight decades of life in Mitla that, in her experience, 'You know, it is very easy for people to change their religions.'¹²⁴ In short, if Mitla's history teaches us that religious leanings, particularly in a post-colonial situation like this one, are, in the main, neither neatly synthesised nor stable, the gyrations of the region's sacred geography likewise remind us that the prestige of various sites of devotion is even more variable and inconstant.

4.2 The fake and the real in contemporary Mitla: The elusiveness of authenticity

A third and final conclusion concerns the interplay between 'the fake' and 'the real' at present day Mitla, a situation that bespeaks what might be termed the

elusiveness of authenticity. If, as noted earlier, the experience of every Mexican archaeological-tourist site entails manoeuvring through countless layers and veils of (in)authenticity, some transparent but others virtually impenetrable, at contemporary Mitla those pretexts are notably sheer and unconvincing. And thus, if, as noted earlier, authenticity is not a quality that inheres in persons, places or old buildings, but instead is a rewarding sensation that one is engaging the true and real, then that pleasing impression has become ever more fleeting at Mitla. Today, Mitla's whole archaeological-tourist ambience, by now one of Mexico's oldest, shows its age in the way that audiences' acclimation to current-day cinematic special effects can consign older movies to the quaint and kitschy rather than the realistic. The sensibilities and standards of travellers have changed faster than those of their Oaxacan hosts. Like an antiquated zoo that declined to keep pace by upgrading from sterile old cages to more aesthetically pleasing, and presumably more realistic, habitats, Mitla is falling out of step with the presentation of ancient Mesoamerica that one encounters at other more gentrified and more progressive sites. No tourists arriving at Mitla will be visiting their first archaeological zone, and thus once arriving here – if they are to be persuaded that any of what they see, learn or buy is 'real' – it will require an especially generous suspension of disbelief.

The sense of an encounter with the reality of the archaeo-historical past, for instance, will meet several obstacles. Where, virtually all other sites utilise the system of smooth versus pebbled mortar joints developed by Alfonso Caso in order to make unmistakably clear which portions of the standing architecture are original and which were (re)built by archaeologists, at the Mitla ruins, which were (re)constructed in advance of that system, the heavy metal I-beams that Batres inserted a century ago continue to beg questions from every visitor, children included, about which elements are old and which new. Accordingly, nearly everyone is left doubting that what they are observing here is 'authentic' pre-Columbian architecture. Moreover, in the matter of museums, Mitla is even further behind. In the past 15 years, nearly two dozen indigenous Oaxaca communities, none of which have local ruins remotely as impressive as Mitla's, have taken advantage of an INAH-sponsored programme to design and build their own communitarian museums wherein 'the pueblos speak for themselves' about their histories, traditions and identities; at Mitla, however, despite a richer history and a vastly larger archaeological collection, the local museum, which had been housed in the former hotel where Parsons lived, has been entirely closed for years.¹²⁵ Thus, where other sites – say, Xochicalco, Monte Albán and the Templo Mayor – have built cutting-edge museums that include elaborate displays of academic publications and videos, in Mitla, it is, at present, tough to get any historical information or to buy even a site pamphlet.

Furthermore, where many of Mesoamerica's main ruins, notably Palenque and the nearby Monte Albán, are situated within gorgeously scenic landscapes, which contribute greatly to auras of awe and mystery as tourists reflect upon what life in these ancient cities must have been like, at Mitla, the main ruins sit within

a fenced, parched, almost treeless precinct that does not afford an escape even from the sight or sound of passing traffic. This tight site lacks any of the remote and serene crannies that are abundant at nearly every other archaeological zone, which helps to explain both the speed with which most visitors past through and the comparative lack of interest that 'New Age' enthusiasts have taken in the once-pre-eminent destination of Mitla. Those hoping for a moment of solitary reflection in order to effect an empathetic meeting of the minds with the ancients will, in the main, find present day Mitla disappointing.

If contemporary visitors to Mitla have serious difficulty imagining that they've laid hands on either the real history or architecture of this pre-Columbian city, the prospect of acquiring an object or artefact that feels 'authentic' is similarly daunting. The competition between Mitleyeno vendors that Parsons observed has escalated to absurd levels as literally dozens, perhaps hundreds, sell almost exactly the same items; indeed, at no site (except perhaps Tulum) is there greater disproportion between the archaeological substance and the commercial trappings. At most major sites, the actual archaeological zone affords some respite from vendors; but here, after buying an entry ticket, one is channelled directly into a corridor of countless concessionary booths before reaching the main ruins; shopping is compulsory. Directly adjacent to the ruins, more than 100 stalls are racked up side-by-side around a huge bus lot; more stands are clustered indoors in a Mercado de Artesanías, arguably the town's fanciest building; and every street on the 2 km stretch between the main highway and the main ruins is lined with still more shops. Yet, irrespective of the enormous volume of merchandise, a very small percentage of the goods make even the pretence of authenticity in the sense of items truly connected either with the pre-Columbian past or with contemporary indigenous life.

Surveying the super-redundant inventory, even dilettantes of Mesoamerican culture history are amused by the plentiful anomalies wherein tee-shirts and tapestries labelled 'Mitla, Oaxaca' are decorated with Maya monuments and Aztec iconography; and the veritable orgy of apparel depicting Pancho Villa, Che Guevara and Subcommander Marcos, along with a host of cartoon, sports and stereotypically Mexican images that are similarly unconnected with Mitla, seem designed to make the catalogue of offerings as generic as possible. A few tables continue to hawk replicas of ancient figurines; the fine weaving that is still produced in this village is available for those who search it out; and lots of items incorporate designs from Mitla's famous geometric facades. But, for the most part, presumably as sellers have recalibrated their wares to match prevailing tourists' tastes, supposals of authenticity have ceded to the trade in souvenirs, baseball caps, mescal, mugs, jewellery and toys that bear no special connection to Mitla's ruins or inhabitants. Inundated by the tacky-tacky and mass produced, connoisseurs of 'real' pre-Columbian art and archaeology will feel compelled to look elsewhere.

Even the human relations in this quintessentially touristic environment are outstanding for their feel of disingenuousness and inauthenticity. In the context

of his nuanced exploration of the worldview of the mid-twentieth century Zapotec residents, Leslie concluded that Mitla's marketplace was 'a grand arena in which townspeople practiced the art of lying'.¹²⁶ Prescribed rules regulated the 'minor lies' and 'gross lies' that pass among the local citizenry; but lying to outsiders – especially proffering those cunning untruths that eventuate in material gain – was considered not a vice but a virtue, which demonstrated cleverness and superior judgement of people.¹²⁷ Either naïve Serranos or differently naïve tourists were fair game. According to Leslie, for Mitleyenos, manipulating and taking advantage of either was a source of humour and prestige as well as profit, which thus enhanced rather than detracted from one's reputation.

A half-century later, as this dimension of Mitla's archaeo-commercial ambience has also intensified rather than dissipated, one encounters a kind of hyperbole of hucksterism in which, here too, the veils of authenticity are exceptionally thin. That they have been marked for exploitation, construed as pigeons rather than persons, is painfully obvious to all tourists; very few are persuaded that the shopkeepers' pretensions of friendship and flattery represent 'real' Mitleyeno sentiments. Though it is usually a very low-stakes game (at least from tourists' perspective), the non-stop solicitations of Mitla's sellers engender wariness and mistrust; the default assumption is, just as Leslie surmised, that one is being lied to, confronted with deliberate attempts to inflate and obfuscate the value of the merchandise, prices that are fake even for phoney goods. Characterised by mutual exploitation, duelling condescensions and stereotyping objectifications on both sides, the interactions between day-trippers and Zapotec vendors are personal encounters of the most insincere sort; and the more sustained interactions that would undermine those facile first impressions are disappointingly infrequent. Whether the negotiation is couched in feigned respect, jocularity or genuine good will, no discerning tourist can imagine that participation of one of these hurried bargaining sessions constitutes even the beginning of a 'real' human connection with the people of Mitla. Once again, a satisfying sense of authenticity proves elusive.

In summary, whether one is in quest of insight into Mesoamerica's history, art, architecture or indigenous peoples, the recommendation tendered by T. Philip Terry in the very first edition of his *Guidebook for Travellers* – namely that, 'The Ruins of Mitla, among the most interesting and most accessible of the Mexican ruined cities, are well deserving of a visit'¹²⁸ – remains as accurate today as when it was originally penned in 1909. At Mitla, a persuasive aura of authenticity may be difficult to find, but the real fakery of archaeological tourism remains very much on display.

Notes

1. See Terry (1909, 534–35). This is the first edition of what was the preeminent travel guide for Mexico throughout the first half of the twentieth century.
2. Regarding the museumification and commodification of the archaeological-tourist site of Chichén Itzá, see Castañeda (1996).

3. Owing both to the site's proximity to Mexico City and to the fact that the first day of spring happens to correspond with a national holiday celebrating the birthday of Benito Juárez, even larger crowds, estimated at more than 80,000, have visited Teotihuacán on the past couple of spring equinoxes.
4. An early version of this article was delivered at the 2009 annual meeting of the American Society for the Study of Religion, which was trained on the topic of 'The Fake and the Real', a title that helps to explain the preoccupation with those terms in this heavily revised iteration of those comments.
5. The question of (in)authenticity in relation to tourist destinations has been subject to what one anonymous reviewer of this article aptly termed 'a huge and raging debate' at least since the first appearance in 1976 of MacCannell (1999), 3rd ed. MacCannell's suggestion that the experience of tourists often depends upon 'staged authenticity', wherein locals perform their authentic culture for tourists is piquantly relevant to the slickly developed sites of Chichén Itzá and Monte Albán, Oaxaca, both of which are UNESCO World Heritage Sites. By contrast, the much smaller, rougher and more unkempt (but, as we will see, still heavily commodified) ruins at Mitla, Oaxaca – i.e. the principal focus of this article – because Mitla is somewhat 'off the beaten path', provide better exemplification of MacCannell's observations about those tourists who seek to a more authentic experience in the 'back regions' of the places they visit. Though there is no space in the present article to engage fully the fascinatingly snarled question of the (in)authenticity and tourism, the irony of hoping to encounter greater 'cultural purity' and authenticity at Mitla should become apparent. For a more nuanced treatment of the question, see Wang (1999) and Urry (1990), who argue that the idea of a search for authenticity as the basis for tourism is mistaken. For a very helpful overview of the literature on authenticity as it pertains to heritage sites, also see Kolar and Zabkar (2007).
6. Regarding the continuing appeal of these older versions of the history of Chichén Itzá, irrespective of their empirical inaccuracy, see Jones (1997).
7. On the history of the investigation and configuration of Chichén Itzá as both an archaeological and tourist destination, see Jones (1995), Ch. 1 and 2. Castañeda (1996, 121, 128) makes the explicit and apt analogy between Chichén Itzá and Disneyland; and, though without special attention to archaeological sites, Little (2004, 35–42, 45–6) comments at some length on parallels between Disney theme parks and Maya tourist destinations in Guatemala.
8. Regarding the culture of indigenous vendors surrounding these sites, see Castañeda (1996) and Little (2004). The latter study focuses on creation and selling of handicrafts in Guatemala and it is not specifically concerned with that activity in connection with archaeological sites; but the lion's share of issues are relevant as well to Mexico's archaeological tourism.
9. See Robles y Moreira (1990).
10. Fray Martín de Valencia quoted in Terry (1909, 540).
11. See Bancroft (1874–76, 389).
12. See von Humboldt (1811, 239–40). With respect to the fake and the real, it is worth noting, for one, that despite the fact that countless works refer to Humboldt's travels in Oaxaca, an impression reinforced by his own manner of writing on the region, he, in fact, never visited that part of Mexico; and, for two, despite the distinctiveness of the columns at Mitla, there are actually fair number of other Mesoamerican sites that also have columns.
13. See Baldwin (1871, 117–22).
14. Kubler (1984, 169–77), for instance, provides a summary view of Mitla's buildings and decoration.
15. See Charnay (1973, 501, 504).

16. See Ober (1885, 531).
17. Regarding the importance and historical depth of tourism in Oaxaca, see, for instance, the large and glossy government-produced volume, *Historia del Turismo en Oaxaca, Siglo XX: libro conmemorativo* (Oaxaca, México: EducArte, Educación pap w1 Siglo XXI, AC, 2007). Also see Robles y Moreira (1990, 34–38).
18. On the discovery of Tomb 7, which catapulted Monte Albán to world attention, see Caso (1932, 487–512; 1969).
19. Terry (1909, 534), 1st ed. The discrepancy between dismissive one-paragraph treatment of Monte Albán, alongside Terry's 10 pages of exuberant recommendations for an 'Excursion to the ruins of Mitla', remained intact from the first edition (1909) all the way through the 1947 edition.
20. Parsons (1936, 2), for instance, notes that, especially by contrast to the violent conquest of the Aztecs, 'in the south [including Oaxaca], conquest was not by war but by "peaceful penetration"'.
 21. See Robles y Moreira (1985).
22. Three book-length biographies address Elsie Clews Parsons' remarkable career in sociology, folklore and anthropology: Hare (1985), Zumwalt (1992), and Deacon (1997), which provides the fullest account of Parsons' time in Mitla.
23. Leslie (1960, 1). Additionally, Deacon (1997, 348–50), summarises largely favourably reviews of Parsons' *Mitla* by no less than Franz Boas, Gladys Reichard, Oliver LaFarge, Clark Wissler and Melville Herskovits.
24. A 1932 letter from Elsie Clews Parsons to Franz Boas that is quoted both by Deacon (1997, 335) and Zumwalt (1992, 281), which actually refers to the Huichols that Parsons encountered in Tepic, Nayarit, rather the Zapotecs of Oaxaca.
25. Parsons' work can be considered, among other things, an early and large contribution to the still-ceaseless debate about the most suitable ways to address the hot button issues of syncretism and hybridity. In her Preface, she explains that

For the most part, the analysis is concerned with acculturation, with what the Indian culture took from the Spanish rather than with assimilation, which is a reciprocal process and would include what the early Spaniards took from the Indian in the development of both Spaniard and Indian in modern Mexico. (Parsons 1936, ix)

And, especially in a long final chapter entitled 'Indian or Spanish?', she is famously preoccupied with working to sort out which Mitleyeno traits are (really) native and which European derived. Nonetheless, it would not be fair, I think, to accuse Parsons of imaging that Mitleyenos, by trafficking in the practices and amenities of modern life, are risking becoming 'less real' or even 'less authentic'.

26. Parsons refers *often* to the 'modernisation' of Mitla, *sometimes* to the 'hispanicisation' of the town and *occasionally* its 'mexicanization'. Parsons regards all of these as largely interchangeable processes and none of them as improvements: 'Better hygiene and sanitation, that is the only form of modernisation I ever wish for this happy and otherwise well-endowed community' (ibid., 432).
27. Especially notable in this regard is lifelong Mitla resident Luciéna González Quero, born in 1925, who was the owner-operator of the Hotel Zapoteca, one of Mitla's three current hotels, until her death in 2008. A descendant of Angélica Quero y Toro – who was owner-manager of La Sorpresa, the famous hotel where Parsons had lived, and one of two persons to whom Parsons dedicated her ethnography – Señora González Quero was much accomplished both in business and travel, having, for instance, made two trips with her husband to Jerusalem. Though a very

- young child during Parsons' time in Mitla, she remember her and had owned a copy of Parsons' book, which she'd loaned to someone who failed to return it. She was able to identify and provide commentary on every person in Parsons' dozens of photographs from 1929 to 1931, as well as providing confirming recollections on a host of Parsons' observations. My understanding of Mitla is tremendously enriched by conversations with Señora González Quero during the summer of 2007.
28. For a couple of the numerous places that Parsons comments on Mitleyenos' irrepressible curiosity about how much everything costs – from her sandals and beads to her hotel accommodation and plane ticket – see Parsons (1936, 12–3, 106).
 29. See Parsons (1936, 365).
 30. In a 2007 conversation, Zapotec hotel owner and student of human nature, Luciéna González Quero volunteered her own typology of tourists' relative investments in the Mitla wherein, according to her studied view, Europeans lingered the longest in the ruins and sometimes even made sketches of the famous reliefs; Americans lingered less long and spent the great share of their time taking photographs; and Mexican tourists, about whom she was most dismissive, rushed through the ruins quickly in order to devote most of their time to the concessions of food and souvenirs. She noted also that, aside from a few maintenance workers, virtually no Mitleyeno resident ever entered the precinct of the main ruins, not least because locals, like everyone else, would be required to pay an admission fee of about three dollars.
 31. For comments and photos of D.H. Lawrence's one-day trip to Mitla, see Parmenter (1984, 171–75).
 32. See Parsons (1936, 260). For other, usually passing references to Protestantism, see *ibid.*, 127, 206, 425, 454, 465–66, 482 and 530.
 33. For a usefully critical assessment of Leopoldo Batres' approach, see Vázquez (1994, 69–89).
 34. On Porfirio Díaz's plans for the modernisation of Mexico in general and Oaxaca in particular, see Overmeyer-Velázquez (2006).
 35. For a summary of Batres' activities at Mitla between 1900 and 1902, see Robles y Moreira (2004, 54–66). Also see the archaeologist's own summary in Leopoldo Batres, *Reparación del edificio de las Columnas en Mitla, México* (1908).
 36. With respect to the Batres' exclusion of other archaeologists from his Oaxaca projects, most notably British archaeologist Alfred Maudslay, see Schávelzon (2005). Though Batres was the dominating figure in this period, it is notable that American archaeologist Marshall Saville was also conducting excavations at Mitla between 1900 and 1902. On his efforts, see Robles y Juárez (2004, 56–57) and Saville (1898, 350–62).
 37. For astute comments on the criteria of selection whereby Mitla was chosen as the site for Batres' first large project, see Schávelzon (2002, 25–28).
 38. Regarding the exercise of Díaz's nationalistic agenda in the expansion and reorganisation of Mexico's national museum, see Solís (2001, 33) and Pérez (2001, 27).
 39. A photo of the full inscription appears, for instance, in Robles y Juárez (2004, figura 34, 57).
 40. For largely but not wholly critical comments concerning the Leopoldo Batres' still-on-going legacy, see, for instance, Vázquez (1994, 72–73).
 41. Regarding the widely circulated objection that Oaxaca ruins are 'sacred places', a status that ought to supersede their development as touristic destinations, see, for example, de la Cruz (2002, 145–56).
 42. See Bernal (1980, 149–50).

43. See Caso and Rubín de la Borbolla (1936); reprinted in Caso (2002, 349–437).
44. See Schavelzon (2002, 26–27).
45. Vázquez (1994, 69–70) discusses Leopoldo Batres' crucial role in connection with the third of three distinct models of archaeology – academic, museographic and governmental – all of which were present in Mexico in 1910. But then Vázquez León also delivers a critical assessment of the eventual monopoly of governmental archaeology in Mexico, a nationalist dominance not characteristic of archeology in the USA, where the three modes continue to coexist.
46. See Tweedie (1901, 399). Besides Batres, remarkably enough, Tweedie was joined on the same excursion to Mitla also by Mexican antiquarian Fernando Sologuren and American archaeologist Marshall Saville; see *ibid.*, 398. Moreover, besides touring Mitla with that esteemed trio, Tweedie (1906, 291–94), describes an earlier visit (in either 1883 or 1884) with her 'hero' Diaz himself.
47. Rickards (1910, 87). Rickards provides great photos of Mitla as it appeared at the period (*ibid.*, 87–99) and as well as images of the overgrown mounds and cultivated plaza of Monte Albán during the same era (*ibid.*, 108–11).
48. Zimmerman (1910, 1002–19) and Corey (1927, 501–53).
49. Terry (1909, 534–41), 1st ed.
50. See Parmenter (1984, 171–72).
51. With respect to historical as well as current debates about the management of Oaxaca cultural patrimony, especially its abundant ruins, see a collection of views in Robles García, ed., *Sociedad y patrimonio arqueológico en el valle de Oaxaca*.
52. See Tweedie (1901, 400–01).
53. See Tweedie (1901, 142).
54. See Tweedie (1901, 400).
55. Tweedie (1901, 396, 400) and (1906, 291) delivers similar comments about how Mexico had severely neglected its ruins, but that 'All of this is now [1906] changed under the wise *régime* of the present President [i.e. Porfirio Diaz]'. Schávelzon, 'Historia de la conservación en el valle de Oaxaca', 26–29, likewise argues that the work of Batres and 'the positivism of the Porfiriato' constituted a crucial turning point in Mexican attitudes towards the preservation its ruins.
56. See Parsons (1936, 1).
57. See Parsons (1936, 1).
58. On the belief that the Mitla monuments had been built prior to the emergence of the sun and the moon, see Parsons (1936, 1, 220–21, 289, 327, 454–55).
59. See Parsons (1936, 327).
60. Regarding the tradition that Montezuma had built the Mitla monuments, to which he and his dancers returned on New Year's Eve, see Parsons (1936, 221, 298). The quoted line comes from *ibid.*, 504.
61. See, e.g., de la Cruz (2002, 145–56).
62. See Parsons (1936, 289). It is worth noting that there is an on-going debate among archaeologists with respect to the relative contributions of Zapotecs versus Mixtecs in the construction of the ancient city of Mitla, and more debate with respect even to the suitability of those ethnic labels in pre-Hispanic times; but those controversies were not a factor in the Mitleyeno attribution of the ruins to (non-Zapotec) 'old ones'.
63. This is my suggestion rather than Parsons'.
64. See Parsons (1936, 12–13).
65. See Parsons (1936, 401).
66. See Parsons (1936, 88).
67. On the growing traffic in artifacts, see, for instance, Parsons (1936, 217–20), where she notes, 'Why *ídolos* should have a commercial value is more mysterious to the

Mitleyeno who has been selling *ídolos* for years to visitors to Mitla than that they should have some magical property' (ibid., 220).

68. See Terry (1909, 538), 1st ed.
69. See Parsons (1936, 431).
70. Terry (1909, 537), 1st ed., for instance, comments on 'Government experts [who] guard the ruins, make restorations, and check vandalism'; and Parsons (1936, 1), notes that 'there are custodians, appointed by the federal department in charge of national monuments'. But Luciena Quero recalled that, during her childhood in the 1930s, three specific men (whose names she recalled), all Mitleyenos, patrolled the ruins nightly. That is to say, the government appointed custodians were, it seems, local Mitleyenos rather than outsiders.
71. Regarding Alfonso Caso's own work at Mitla as well as his critical comments on earlier archaeology there, see, for instance, Caso (1939, 188–209); reprinted in Caso (2002, 187–210).
72. On Caso's leading role in founding INAH, see, for instance, Vázquez (1994, 78).
73. I borrow the term and usage of 'cosmomagical' from the discussion of the centrifugal and centripetal influence of pilgrimage centres that appears in Wheatley (1971), Ch. 3.
74. See Parsons (1936, 232–33). One of Parsons' key Mitleyeno informants, Eligio Santiago, provided a map of the Mitla region (between pages 232 and 233) that, though not precisely to scale, includes all five of these 'sacrosanct places'.
75. See Parsons (1936, 8).
76. For her very brief comments on the Lake of White Water (la Laguna de Agua Blanca), see Parsons (1936, 233). The site of the former lake is marked on both Map I (ibid., 232), and Map II (ibid., 288).
77. See Parsons (1936, 520–21).
78. See Parsons (1936, 8).
79. See Parsons (1936, 520–21).
80. Regarding the status of visitation to Devil's Cave during his fieldwork in Mitla in 1953–54, Leslie (1960, 16, 95, n. 3), comments on an intriguing ambivalence wherein in Mitleyenos seemed, on the one hand, to concur that the devil (whose existence they often explicitly denied) had some special association with cave, which made it a place to avoid. Yet, on the other hand, purportedly, for some townspeople this association had actually enticed them to visit the cave 'to petition the devil . . . and thereby gain wealth' (ibid., 16). Though Leslie (ibid., 95, n. 3) says that

No one admitted to us having gone to the caves for the purpose of making any kind of petition, but when we visited the caves ourselves we found candles, bits of paper and other objects which had been used in rituals.

Precisely the same items could be found there today.

81. Devil's Cave was never difficult to reach; but it is intriguing that with the rerouting of the highway heading east out of Mitla, a major project that is presently underway, Devil's Cave will soon be quite literally on the shoulder of the main road. How this extreme ease of access will affect the devotional status of the cave remains to be seen.
82. See Parsons (1936, 287).
83. See Parsons (1936, 287). Parsons, who also includes that former cross on her detailed foldout map of the village (i.e. map II, following page 288), was not able to learn the precise circumstance either of the erection of this Christian cross in the ruins or of its removal.

84. Kelly (2001, 232–37), and the widely read *Lonely Plant Guide* (2004, 729), *Mexico*, 9th ed., for instance, describe this feature as the ‘Column of Life’, terminology that appears on various old and new maps of Mitla.
85. For oft-reproduced drawings and photographs that show the condition of the so-called Column of Death as it appeared in 1895, see Holmes (1897, 268–70). Highly judicious in his speculations as to the functions and meanings of pre-Columbian built forms, Holmes simply labels it as the ‘round column’ that supports ceiling stone. Conceivably, then, the Pillar of Death was open to view and touching prior to Batres’ work at the site; but positively, it was accessible in the wake of his work. Rickards (1910, 91), has an excellent photo of what he terms, ‘the Pillar of Death’ as it stood about 1910. At present, the Pillar of Death is walled off with a waist-high wooden fence so that visitors can look but not hug.
86. Regarding the notion of ‘revalorisation’, by which I mean creative and interested (mis)uses of preexisting architectural forms, see Jones (2000), Ch. 12.
87. For an enumeration of several different devotional practices that Serranos undertook in the vicinity of the Column of Death, see Parsons (1936, 287–88, 524–25).
88. Though here I am stressing discontinuity between pre-Columbian and early twentieth-century ritual usages of Mitla ruins, Parsons, appropriately enough, also stresses the very considerable continuity when she writes, for instance, ‘No observer of Mitleyenos could doubt that feeding the dead or observing ritual of offerings and prayer to the dead who have become helpful spirits were pre-Columbian Zapotecan traits . . .’ (ibid., 524–25).
89. See, for instance, Eliade (1959, 32–42). By the way, for a first-hand account of Eliade’s own impressions of Mitla, which he visited with Laurette Séjourné in 1965, see Eliade (1977, 255–58).
90. See Parsons (1936, 1). In other words, Parsons (ibid., 1–2) implies that the Serranos’ two principal, and closely related, motivations for making pilgrimage to Mitla were (a) it was conceived as the center of the world and (b) it is the preeminent place to interact with the ‘souls’ of both ancient dead Zapotec kings and recently departed Zapotec people, thus the subtitle of her book, ‘Town of the Souls’. Additionally, however, Parsons (ibid., 289) rehearses other ‘lore’ about the ruins, especially those traditions that feature an ostensible connection between the ruins and Montezuma, which suggest the primary motivation for pilgrimage was to acquire a sack of gold.
91. Parsons (1936, 288) provides a couple of alternate explanations of the ‘Column of Death’ designation:

To this column, it is believed in town, the victim was bound for sacrifice, but the column probably gets its name from the belief that it serves as indicator for death. Embrace the column and if your fingers meet, your death is imminent.

In other words, in Parsons’ account, Indians would hug the pillar and then calculate their remaining time to live based on the distance between their two hands, an augur that seems to put persons’ with long arms at a decided disadvantage. In most other versions, the story is simplified to suggest that any hugging of the pillar will eventuate in death.

92. Regarding the allure of the Mitla ruins to Serrano pilgrims, besides their affection for the so-called Column of Death, Parsons (1936, 289) describes them as especially invested in the belief that persons who are lucky enough to see Montezuma and his Aztec dancers return to Mitla on their annual New Year’s Eve will be rewarded with a sack of gold. This tradition seems to be both more

recent and more overtly materialistic than the Serrano's interaction with the Column of Death.

93. See Ober (1885, 537).
94. See Ober (1885, 537).
95. See von Tempsky (1858, 251).
96. See von Tempsky (1858, 251). See Rickards (1910, 87), for one more allusion the Pillar of Death.
97. See Parsons (1936, 233).
98. See Parsons (1936, 288).
99. See Parsons (1936, 289–93).
100. See Parsons (1936, 1–2). On the Mitleyenos' close correlations of the ruins and the dead, also see, *ibid.*, 207ff.
101. See Parsons (1936, 288–89).
102. Parsons (1936, plate XXX, 119) provides a photo of the Cross of Miracle as it appeared about 1930. Since then, the cross has been enclosed in a small, three-sided structure, but otherwise looks exactly the same, completely with the sorts of decorative garlands shown in Parsons' photo.
103. With respect to the enthusiastic receptivity of indigenous Mesoamericans to cross forms, which facilitate a sense of great continuity between native and Christian religious commitments, see Callaway (1990, 199–231). Though the Mitla cross is not among the many specific examples that Callaway discusses, her foremost example is the church of Nuestra Señora de la Soledad in Oaxaca City (*ibid.*, 199–203, 226) and she gives special attention to 'miracle working crosses' in the Oaxaca region (*ibid.*, 207ff.).
104. See Parsons (1936, 233, n. 1).
105. See Parsons (1936, 287–88).
106. See Parsons (1936, 288).
107. See Parsons (1936, 233–37). For a detailed sketch of one of these miniaturised domestic prayer images that was fashioned at the base of the Cross of Miracle, see *ibid.*, figure 8, 234.
108. See Parsons (1936, 287–88).
109. von Tempsky (1858, 354). Similarly, though explicitly describing himself as a (self-trained) archaeologist and not a tourist, American Louis H. Aymé (1882), recalls, '... during my stay [in Mitla in 1881] I was constantly pestered by women and children bringing me idols, etc. to buy'.
110. See Parsons (1936, 217–20).
111. See Charnay (1973), Ch. 24.
112. For instance, Norman (1962, 1965, 292), which is very different, much shorter and less prone to cultural digressions than the original, adds a short paragraph that explains, 'The Zapotecs of Mitla celebrate an unusual and colorful New Year's Eve fiesta at the Cruz de los Pedimientos (Cross of Petitions) which stands outside of town on a stone base ...'.
113. Terry (1909, 537), 1st ed.
114. The brief account of the 1953 New Year's celebration provided by Leslie (1960, 77) for instance, includes a passing reference to foreign tourists who were in attendance; and at present, accounts of the Cross of Miracle and its New Year celebration circulate among the print and electronic cultural tourism literature.
115. As demonstrated by Glass (1995, 152–86), the appropriation of the Black Hills, especially because of the explicit incentive of touristic development, provides one very high profile case in point. However, even more relevant in my own thinking about these matters are ongoing attempts by indigenous people and their supporters

- to (re)claim control over central Ohio's Newark Earthworks, a major complex built by the Hopewell culture between 100 BCE and 500 CE – it is one of 14 sites nominated in January 2008 by the Department of Interior for potential submission by the USA to the UNESCO World Heritage List – that is presently occupied by a private golf course and country club. Predictably, the notion that, respectively, the Black Hills and the Newark Earthworks constitute 'sacred places' has been central to efforts to (re)claim them.
116. See Parsons (1936, 445). Leslie (1960, 5) quotes and reaffirms Parsons' assessment of the Mitleyenos striking preoccupations in buying and selling.
 117. See, for example, Parsons (1936, 217–18, 220).
 118. It is, for instance, a central component of Charles Leslie's argument that, from the Mitleyenos' own view of themselves (in the 1950s), their vigorous activity in entrepreneurial activities was no less than 'the most obvious confirmation of the notion that they were civilized'. See Leslie (1960, 67–77). For a fuller explanation of that observation, see especially, Leslie, *ibid.*, Ch. 1 and 4.
 119. See Parsons (1936, 217–8).
 120. See Parsons (1936, 218). Where one Catholic view required condemnation of *ídolos*, Parsons (*ibid.*, 217), alludes to other instances in which Dominican warnings about the spectral quality of the old figurines were processed in such a way that townspeople embraced the view that 'an *ídolo* may be referred to as a [Catholic] saint or even given the name of particular saint'.
 121. See Leslie (1960, 68).
 122. See Leslie (1960, 68).
 123. See, for instance, de la Cruz (2002, 145–56).
 124. Paraphrase from a 2007 conversation between myself and Luciéna Gonzáles Quero.
 125. Regarding the impressive story of Oaxaca's communitarian museums, 19 of which I have personally visited, see Holo (2004), Ch. 1. Rumours circulate that the Mitla museum will reopen, but as of 2008 it had not.
 126. See Leslie (1960, 70).
 127. See Leslie (1960, 26–27, 68–71).
 128. Terry (1909, 534), 1st ed.

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