OUTLINE OF
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Allurement via Conventionalized Architecture: Innovation, Imitation and Deliberate Archaisms at Monte Albán *(Priority I-B)*

> "Art [in India and elsewhere, and especially hieratic art] is by definition essentially conventional (*samketita*)… Conventionality [in art] has nothing to do with calculated simplification… or with degeneration from representation."
>
> Ananda Coomaraswamy, 1934[1]

> "The Zapotecs—no matter what they adopted or where they adopted it from—were bold and original artists, who impressed their spirit on everything they created, revealing in it a will to art that is rooted in the architectonic and that tends toward the monumental. Zapotec art is not Maya art, nor is it Teotihuacan. It is Zapotec."
>
> Paul Westheim, 1965[2]

> "Disjunction, which is a mode of renovation, may be said in an even wider frame of reference to happen whenever the members of a successor civilization refashion their inheritance by gearing the predecessor's forms to new meanings, and by clothing in new forms those old meanings which remain acceptable... Continuous form does not predicate continuous meaning, nor does continuity of form or of meaning necessarily imply continuity of culture."
>
> George Kubler, 1970[3]

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* Note that I have managed the footnotes in ways that respect "the first citation" (which is thus a full bibliographical citation) *in this chapter*, irrespective of whether that work was cited in a previous section. Also, to avoid confusion in this typescript, I have retained the quotation marks on all quotes, including those that are formatted as block quotations.

[1] Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *The Transformation of Nature in Art* (New York: Dover Publications, 1934), 24-25.

[2] Paul Westheim, *The Art of Ancient Mexico* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1965), 224. The ideas in this book were formulated somewhat earlier than the 1965 publication date suggests insofar as Westheim (1886-1963), a German-born student of art history under Heinrich Wöelfflin, lived in Mexico from 1941 until the end of his life. The book, originally written in German, was translated into Spanish by Westheim's wife and collaborator, Mariana French, and appeared as *Arte Antiguo de México* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1950).

[3] George Kubler, "Period, Style and Meaning in Ancient American Art," *New Literary History*, vol. 1, no. 2 (Winter 1970): 143-44; those lines appear in a reprinted version of that important article in *Ancient Mesoamerica: Selected Readings*, ed. John A. Graham (Palo Alto, California: Peek Publications, 1981), 22.

This chapter is devoted to asking and answering the question: How and to what extent is the so-termed convention priority (I-B) relevant to Monte Albán? Recall that, as outlined in *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, I use "convention" to refer in the broadest strokes to ritual-architectural configurations that conform to codified architectural prescriptions and/or historically conventionalized patterns.[4] Though still concentrating on strategies of allurement, the focus shifts now from orientation in relation to "cosmic" models and archetypes to orientations that respect historical and cultural precedents. Here the watchwords are fidelity to standardization, adherence to canonized rules, guides and traditions, along with the strategic borrowing and/or reworking of other peoples' styles and approaches. Exploration of the convention priority (I-B) allows us to see how Monte Albán was a place of exceptional and unprecedented innovation—but, at the same time, a place whose ritual-architectural agenda was deeply and diplomatically tied to the faithful replication of long-standing conventions and prestigious precedents.

Art historian George Kubler, who was determined to locate specific works of pre-Columbian art and architecture with respect to their historically linked antecedents and successors—that is, to reunite parent works and their offspring, as it were—provides among of our strongest clues for ascertaining the relevance of the convention priority (I-B). Foundational to Kubler's approach is his insistence that no work of art or architecture, Mesoamerican or otherwise, is wholly without precedent: "every important work of art can be regarded as a historical event… a replica or a variant of something made a little time ago."[5] To that extent, all significant architecture is "conventionalized." That is to say, according to Kubler, because all art and architecture arise within the confines of a tradition, each single work is a participant in a

[4] Regarding the broader category of conventionalized architecture on which the chapter is based, see Lindsay Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture: Experience, Interpretation, Comparison* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), vol. II, chap. 15, "Convention: Codified Prescriptions of Order (Priority I-B)."

[5] George Kubler, *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), 2, 33.

"linked sequence of replications."[6] Thus, from his perspective, even more important and rewarding than contextualizing a work of architecture with respect to the social, political or economic contingencies of its setting—an endeavor that, according to Kubler, risks neglecting the specifically aesthetic dimension of that architecture[7]—is the task of contextualizing the individual work with respect to other historically related antecedent and ensuing works of architecture. Kubler, therefore, endeavors to reconstruct historically related chains or sequences in art and architecture that are linked either by instances of what he terms "renascence" (that is, a persistence or reassertion of tradition over time) or "deliberate archaism" (that is, artists' and builders' self-conscious imitation of earlier art and architectural forms).[8]

Kubler, in other words, encourages us to search after both the historically linked predecessors and descendents of specific works of architecture at Monte Albán. But for present purposes, as I continue to focus on "strategies of allurement" and the "front-half" of the ritual-architectural situation, my primary concern is especially with the historical precedents to Monte Albán's architecture—that is, the extent to which the Zapotec capital is, by design, *not* completely original. For all its innovation, Monte Albán, in order to be alluring, had to be respectful of earlier and better established ways of building and ritualizing and, in that respect, was a highly "conventional" place.

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[6] Kubler, *The Shape of Time*, 33, says "historically only those situations related to one another by the bonds of tradition and influence are linked as a sequence."

[7] Regarding this insistence on the autonomy and irreducibility of art (which is parallel to some historian of religions' continued insistence on the autonomy and irreducibility of religion), for instance, George Kubler, *Art and Architecture in Ancient America*, 3rd edition (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), 34, says that anthropological conclusions about a culture never fully account for its works of art "because aesthetic activity lies in part outside culture."

[8] On "archaism" and "renascence," concepts that Kubler borrows from Erwin Panofsky, see, for example, Kubler, "Period, Style and Meaning in Ancient American Art," 143-44; and also see Kubler, *Art and Architecture in Ancient America*, Introduction. Note additionally that while I have glossed Kubler's use of the term "archaism" as "deliberate archaism," I do so in order to accentuate rather that alter his view that this refers to an intentional process of imitating earlier forms and styles.

Indeed, the twofold mechanism of ritual-architectural events, as noted, requires that strikingly new and unfamiliar content (that is, the "back-half" of the occasion), if it is be perceived as viable and compelling, must be preceded and complemented by a component of order, stability, familiarity and reliability. The meaning-making of architecture, as Gadamer argues, depends upon the juxtaposition of order and variation, reassurance and surprise or, in the language of hermeneutics, familiarity and "strangeness."[9] In Heidegger's dense but important formulation, the essential pairing is between "revealment and concealment," "the pandemic interwovenment of disclosure and hiddenness," the showing and sharing of some elements while strategically holding back and hiding others.[10] In plainer terms, to get their point across, so to speak, the designers of Zapotec ritual-architectural events had first to issue a sufficiently familiar, legible and persuasive invitation to compel participation in the proceedings; without first putting prospective ritual participants at ease, and engendering a sense of confidence and legitimacy, ceremonial occasions had no prospect of success in communicating their novel and prescriptive messages. Entertaining in succession three complementary strategies for fashioning that sort of invitation to participate, the previous chapter explored how homologized architecture (priority I-A) can help to provide that requisite component of allurement; the next chapter considers how astronomically aligned architecture (priority I-C) also abets in that regard; and this present chapter inventories ways in which conventionalized architecture (priority I-B) acts in support of inviting, and sometimes coercing, the committed participation in Monte Albán's ceremonial occasions.

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[9] For Gadamer's stance on the necessary juxtaposition of familiarity and "strangeness" or "the half-revealed and half-concealed," see, for instance, Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Relevance of the Beautiful," in *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, trans. Nicholas Walker, ed. Robert Bernasconi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 31-34.

[10] See, for example, summary of Heidegger's dense but important claim that "the truth of a work of art [or architecture] is always such an opposition of revealment and concealment. The two belong necessarily together…" in David E. Linge's Introduction to Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. and ed. David E. Linge (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), liii.

THE LAYOUT OF THE CHAPTER: REFLECTIONS ON THE INNOVATION AND/OR UNORIGINALITY OF MONTE ALBÁN, THEN INQUIRIES CONCERNING THREE VARIATIONS ON THE CONVENTIONALITY THEME

As regards the agenda and layout of this chapter, I begin with brief comments on how the convention priority (I-B), while complementary, is significantly distinct from the homology priority (I-A); and to that end I enumerate the three quite different variations on the conventionality theme to which I will return later in the chapter. Then come the two principal but asymmetrical components: First is a set of background observations about an abiding tension wherein Monte Albán is often characterized, on the one hand, as a place of remarkable uniqueness and innovation, the supposed site of many of Mesoamerica's most prized "first" occurrences, versus the Zapotec capital's similarly viable depiction, on the other hand, as the premier crossroads of ancient Mesoamerica, "a place in-between" that links the Central Mexican with the Maya zone, and thereby is most notable for borrowing and admixing elements drawn from both those areas. With those contrastive emphases on innovation versus imitation in mind—and as another small contribution to the history of ideas about Monte Albán—that extended introduction inventories ways that the Zapotec capital has been credited variously with breaking conventions, establishing conventions and reworking conventions.

Second, following that preliminary discussion, the main body of the chapter continues my pattern of hermeneutical questioning with successive consideration of the relevance to Monte Albán of each of the three variations on the conventionality priority.[11] The respective results are decidedly uneven. The first alterative, which concerns adherence to universalistic design principles and "sacred geometry," is a promising but not very well documented line of inquiry. The second alternative, which concerns design canons understood to have delivered by the gods, is the least relevant, and therefore dispatched most quickly. But the third option, which broaches what Kubler terms "deliberate archaisms," because that variation on the theme both presents the

[11] Note that the three main variations on the convention priority (I-B) that I address in this portion of the text conform precisely to the three main variations on the convention priority that are laid out in "Appendix B: An Expanded Heuristic Framework of Ritual-Architectural Priorities."

most interpretive promise and raises the most complex historical problems, will get the most extended attention. This topic, because it requires reflection on the who, when and why of Monte Albán's innumerable interregional interactions, also demands fairly extensive review of the raft of competing opinions on Olmec, Maya and Teotihuacano involvements in Oaxaca, which entails more intellectual history that some will find laborious and at bit beside the point. But the chapter ends again with "Closing Thoughts" that summarize key points, revisit the larger argument and, in this case, clarify what this topic of conventionality (priority I-B) teaches us about the "religion" of Monte Albán.

I. Specters of Familiarity and Legitimacy: Homology (I-A) and Conventionality (I-B) as Complementary but Distinct Strategies of Allurement

Architecture, a venue for great creativity, is also a rule-bound profession. In fact, because architecture, especially of the monumental sort that one encounters at Monte Albán, requires very large expenditures of labor and expense, which thus militate against the individualized and idiosyncratic in favor of the collective and orthodox, it is, among all the arts, arguably the most subject to conventionality. The wide bounds of experimentation and personalized expression enjoyed by sculptors and painters do not, generally speaking, apply to architects. But if all substantial architecture, to some considerable extent, adheres to standardization, codified prescriptions and/or historical precedents—and thus demonstrates, to some extent, an exercise of the convention priority (I-B)—there are nonetheless many ways of conceptualizing the status of those standards of convention.

As a means of surveying the broad category, note that, in the cross-cultural, cross-disciplinary survey of conventionalized architecture, three sorts of claims to the authority of standardized design stipulations and rules emerge as most conspicuous: (1) rhythms and proportions that are understood as inherent in the structure of the universe and discernible, for instance, in the workings of nature and mathematics, which ought then be replicated in one's architecture; (2) ritual-architectural prescriptions that a deity, variously conceived, has commanded or decreed, which ought then to be observed in one's designs and constructions; and

(3) ritual-architectural techniques and conventions that have been established by prestigious forebears, "the Ancients" as it were, or perhaps by highly respected neighbors, which, therefore, provide forms and design elements that are desirable to replicate in one's own architecture. Heuristically distinct but not mutually exclusive alternatives, these three permutations on the conventionality theme are more often compatible and reinforcing than antagonist.

Moreover, the wider boundaries between homologized architecture (priority I-A) and these three variations on conventionalized architecture (priority I-B), both of which serve primarily as components of ritual-architectural allurement, are fluid and permeable. But the differences are important. Where homology, as presented last chapter, refers to architectural configurations that are understood to replicate cosmic or otherworldly patterns, "convention" directs attention to configurations and design precedents that have been "discovered" by earlier generations or by other peoples, and then canonized by tradition. If conventionality rather than homology was the leading priority for the architects of Monte Albán, then the Main Plaza would have been conceived less as a kind of three-dimensional representation of the universe, that is, as a microcosmic reflection of the macrocosm, than as the reflection of a commitment to replicate traditionally validated standards of proportion, style, form and structure.

This distinction between homologized architecture (I-A) and building programs that take conformity to the standards of convention as their first priority (I-B)—and even more the *experience* of these two modes of ritual-architectural orientation—is, though, hardly absolute.[12] More likely, the pair marks two points on a single (perhaps developmental) continuum.[13] Often,

[12] If one operates with a radical constructivist view, for instance, then a compelling case could be made that *all* historical apprehensions of architecture, including those that I addressed with respect to the homology priority (I-A) are "conventionalized," that is, that no apprehensions are really objective or "natural" per se insofar as all reflect cultural and historical contingencies. Still, I will be arguing that the morphological distinction between homology (priority I-A) and convention (priority I-B) is heuristically useful.

[13] It is very plausible that these three sorts of related options—(1) homologized architecture based on heavily empirical observations, (2) rationalized compliance with abstract principles and (3) rote conformity to codified prescriptions—constitutes a general pattern of historical development; but thus far I am not comfortable positing it as such. Morphological comparison suffices for now.

for instance, meticulous systemizations of space and proportion that arise originally from the direct, largely empirical observations of geometry, music, human anatomy or nature, sky phenomena, or maybe even from some divine revelation, actually owe their lasting prestige to processes of historical amplification and canonization. Orientation in these latter cases, then, has less to do with (even supposed) replications of the cosmos (that is, homology, priority I-A) than with claims to be "doing it as it has always been done" (that is, convention, priority I-B). Yet, even in those many contexts in which, eventually, rote conformity to conventionalized codes and specifications comes to matter most, the operative mode of ritual-architectural instigation continues to depend upon the presentation of an aura of reliability, stability and incontestably legitimate order. In each of the sorts of orientational procedures along this spectrum, the ideals (or at least appearance) of world harmony, of correspondence between disparate realms of existence, and of synchronization with the prevailing rhythms of the universe are paramount.

Nevertheless, the contrast between these first two morphological categories is significant. Where the builders of, say, a Mesoamerican pyramid that replicates the structure of a mythical mountain, a choice exemplum of the homology priority (I-A), express their confidence and commitment to world harmony by actually constructing a microcosmic duplicate of the cosmic prototype, participants in this second type of orientational strategy (convention, priority I-B) make their bid for legitimacy by conformity to abstract principles or design conventions that, often even by their own admission, carry the authority granted by history and tradition. In sum, as two different morphologically distinct modes of allurement, "homologized architectures" are prestigious and reliable because they (appear to) conform to a supernatural, cosmological scheme; "conventionalized architectures," by contrast, are prestigious and reliable because they (appear to) conform faithfully to rules and principles that enjoy some historically sanctioned pedigree. Both alternatives are clearly at work in the layout of Monte Albán; and again concrete examples will provide the best explication of the difference.

When, later in the chapter, I turn to successive consideration of the three variations of the conventionality theme, I will provide fuller descriptions of each. But consider first—as an exercise in the history of ideas or academic "receptions" of Monte Albán as "an enduring work of architecture"—some preliminary reflections on the competing views that Monte Albán was an

iconoclastic phenomenon, largely without precedent, that demonstrated extreme departures from previous conventions versus assessments of the Zapotec capital as a kind of compiler and master synthesizer of artistic and architectural conventions from across ancient Mesoamerica.

II. Background Observations—Dual Distinctions of Innovation and Imitation: Competing Ideas about Unprecedented Inventions and/or Repurposed Conventions at Monte Albán

There is a basic tension that looms throughout this entire inquiry into the relevance of conventionalized architecture (priority I-B) at Monte Albán. Intriguingly and at times puzzlingly, the great Zapotec capital, along with the entire Oaxaca region, is frequently characterized, on the one hand, as a place of exceptional independent invention, Mesoamerica's premier context of innovations and "firsts." And, on the other hand, Monte Albán is likewise frequently depicted almost oppositely, as a triumph in mixing and melding that is most notable for its extensive and strategic borrowings from innumerable non-Oaxacan groups. While tension between innovation and imitation may at first seem the sort of generic observation that is applicable to almost any substantial context, I will argue that very few places, and no others in Mesoamerica, are so often—and with such good cause—ascribed this pairing of attributes.

Writing at the turn of the century, Eduard Seler, for instance, finds ways to argue, at once, that Oaxacan is both typical and unique. A precursor to Paul Kichhoff in arguing that, "the whole region of ancient Mexican-Central America civilization is a conspicuous example of what Adolph Bastian calls a 'geographical province,'" Seler signals that tension when he begins a discussion of the essential unity of superarea by noting, and then qualifying, the premise that, "The Zapotecs and their kindred were a nation unrelated to the Mexicans."[14] Four decades later,

[14] Eduard Seler, "The Wall Paintings of Mitla: A Mexican Picture Writing in Fresco," in Eduard Seler et al., *Mexican and Central America Antiquities, Calendar Systems, and History*; translated under the supervision of Charles P. Bodwitch; Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 28 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1904), 266. This quote appears in a section entitled "Unity of Mexican and Central American Civilization," ibid., 266-74. This very important work was originally published as Eduard Seler, *Wandmalerein von Mitla: Eine Mexikanische Bilderschrift in Fresko* (Berlin: A. Asher, 1895).

British researcher C. A. Burland repeats the by-then-widespread opinion that, "Of all the tribes in civilised Mexico, the Zapotecs differed most widely from the cultural norm of the rest."[15] Again, then, William Henry Holmes was prescient for remarking in the late nineteenth century, first, on the extent to which the building arts, metal work and ceramics of Oaxaca are, in many respects, "strongly individualized… remarkable for the originality of many of their features;"[16] of Monte Albán specifically, he opines, "In style the work [of Oaxacans] is decidedly unlike anything that I have seen elsewhere."[17] And then, contrariwise, Holmes also underscores the extent to which the cultures of Oaxaca are "thought to have been influenced somewhat decidedly by other pre-Columbian groups."[18]

In the century since Seler and Holmes, Monte Albán has often been commended for its seemingly unique feats in autonomous innovation—Mesoamerica's earliest true city, which sprang up whole-cloth without any discernable precedent! Monte Albán was, we are told, "the first urban center in Oaxaca that, due to its location and complexity, formed as *a totally different space from the previous assemblies in the valley*."[19] And nearly as often the Zapotec capital has been acclaimed for its openness to imitation and skill in synthesis—the blended, and thus

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[15] Continuing with the opinions of that era, Cottie A. Burland, *Art and Life in Ancient Mexico* (Oxford: Bruno Cassier, 1948), 56, writes, "Linguistically [the Zapotecs] had no linkages with other peoples; their clothing too was different, the women wearing a poncho instead of a blouse, the men often wearing a long kind of gown when they grew elderly. Their head-dress and ornaments seem to have been far more fantastic than those of the Aztecs."

[16] William Henry Holmes, *Archaeological Studies Among the Ancient Cities of Mexico* (Chicago: Field Columbia Museum, 1895, 1897), 211. More thorough in his investigation of Mitla than Monte Albán, Holmes, ibid., 229, was struck there by "many novel features—a result due in part, no doubt, to the isolation of the people and peculiarities of their environment."

[17] Holmes, *Archaeological Studies Among the Ancient Cities of Mexico*, 224.

[18] Holmes, *Archaeological Studies Among the Ancient Cities of Mexico*, 211. The only specific group for which Holmes suggested a Oaxaca influence was "the Nahuas."

[19] Marcus Winter y Miguel Bartolomé, "Tiempo y espacio en Monte Albán: la construcción de una identidad compartida," en *Memoria de la Primera Mesa Redonda de Monte Albán: Procesos de cambio y conceptualizacion del tiempo*, ed. Nelly M. Robles García (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2001), 66; my translation; italics added.

decidedly unoriginal, amalgam of numerous cultural traditions that intersect at the crossroads of Mesoamerica.

Though vastly better informed on the particulars than either Seler or Holmes, Ignacio Bernal provides the paramount case of a Oaxacanist who, in a sense, wants it both ways. Accordingly, I key on Bernal's work throughout this chapter, including in these introductory sections. The first set of sub-sections—"Establishing Conventions"—assembles accolades for Monte Alban's purportedly singular capacity for inventiveness, and thereby breaking with old conventions and establishing new ones. By contrast, the latter introductory section—"Reworking Conventions"—engages the Oaxacans' seemingly unique adeptness at borrowing, admixing, synthesizing and, thereby, embracing but always refashioning earlier ritual-architectural conventions. (Impatient readers might skip these introductory sections on intellectual history entirely and jump to the consideration of "Hermeneutical Interrogations—Three Variations on the Convention Priority.")

A. Establishing Conventions: Monte Albán as a Site of Innovation, Mesoamerican "Firsts," Patterns and Prototypes

While Bernal would emerge as the preeminent voice depicting ancient Oaxacans as master melders and intercultural synthesizers, he also managed to lead the way in highlighting the large extent to which Monte Albán was a site of unique and independent invention, an urban creation, it seemed to him, without precedent or parallel. For Bernal, one place is simultaneously the nonpareil of imitative borrowing and of original invention! And, in this sense, ironically, the Zapotec capital is both highly conventional and a boldly iconoclastic defier of convention. Bernal has, though, as we'll see shortly, lots of supporters in this dual commendation.

1. Purported Originality: First-time Urbanism, Writing, Calendrics, Stone Construction, Tombs, Urns and Deity Depictions

Ignacio Bernal, seriously entertaining before rejecting the prospect that Monte Albán ought to be considered the "mother culture" of the entire superarea,[20] proposes at least a half dozen major ways in which the designers and builders of Monte Albán were "the first" among all Mesoamericans. Subsequent discoveries at nearby San José Mogote in the 1970s, which come too late to figure into Bernal's reckoning, present historical antecedents that usurp several of these seminal accomplishments;[21] but his claims for Monte Albán's extreme originality nevertheless continue to be more often repeated than challenged. Regarding Monte Albán's earliest period, Bernal contends, for instance, that

> "hieroglyphic writing in Oaxaca preceded Olmec glyphs. Consequently, writing is to be found in Monte Albán earlier than in the Metropolitan [Gulf Coast] region… and we would be led to conclude that, based on our present knowledge, Monte Albán is the cradle of writing in Mesoamerica."[22]

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[20] See Bernal, *The Olmec World*, 167.

[21] On the role of San José Mogote as the crucial historical precedent to Monte Albán, a status not appreciated until the 1970s but now accepted by most all Oaxacanists, see Marcus and Flannery, *Zapotec Civilization*, chaps. 7-10. Subsequent to those discoveries, ironically enough, numerous of Monte Albán's claims to "firsts" actually fall to the much smaller and lesser known site of San José Mogote. Marcus Winter, "Social Memory and the Origins of Monte Albán," *Ancient Mesoamerican*, vol. 22, no. 2 (September 2011): 399-400, argues the minority opinion that San José Mogote is not an important precedent for Monte Albán.

[22] Bernal, *The Olmec World*, 156. Reiterating that view, Ignacio Bernal, *Ancient Mexico in Colour* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968), 14, says: "Writing, on any appreciable scale, appears for the first time on stone at Monte Albán. Did the people of the Valley of Oaxaca invent this most important instrument of civilisation? It is hard to know, but they were certainly the first to use it…" And Bernal, ibid., 24, repeats again that, "Indeed, as far as we know, it is at Monte Albán that writing appears for the first time; it may therefore have been invented by the predecessors of those Zapotecs who were later to live in this region." With respect to the oft-made claim that writing originated in Oaxaca, Javier Urcid Serrano, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, Studies in Pre-Columbian Art and Archaeology, no. 34 (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2001), 1, somewhat complicates the question, but then reaffirms the earlier (less fully informed) views of Seler, Caso, Bernal, Marcus and others that, "As far as currently known, Zapotec writing constitutes one of the earliest scribal traditions in Mesoamerica; it also has one of the longest evolutionary trajectories… The site [of Monte

Additionally, though not willing to label the inhabitants of Monte Albán "Zapotecs" until Period III,[23] Bernal believed that "these [Period I] ancestors of the Zapotecs seem to have been not only the inventors of writing and of the calendar, but the first people to build monuments of stone; so in a way they were also the originators of architecture."[24] Though the equation of stone building with the origins of architecture per se raises problems, his somewhat more modest

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Albán] was undoubtedly the main center of intellectual activity for scribes and the point from which the script spread to other parts of Oaxaca and Mesoamerica."

[23] Regarding Caso and Bernal's avoidance of referring to Period I and Period II Monte Albán residents by the "ethnic label, Zapotecs," see, for instance, Bernal, "Archaeological Synthesis of Oaxaca," 789.

[24] Bernal, *Ancient Mexico in Colour*, 14. Alfonso Caso, "Zapotec Writing and Calendar," *Handbook of Middle American Indians*, vol. 3, "Archaeology of Southern Mesoamerica," vol. ed. Gordon R. Willey, gen. ed. Robert Wauchope (London: University of Texas Press, 1965), 931, reiterates his long-held view that, rather than in the Maya zone, "Writing and the calendar in the Zapotec region [and specifically in Period I Monte Albán] are the most ancient that have been found in Mesoamerica." As early as 1891, Eduard Seler had argued (correctly according to Caso, ibid., 945) that the Zapotec calendar was Mesoamerica's oldest; see Eduard Seler, "The Wall Paintings of Mitla," in Eduard Seler et al., *Mexican and Central America Antiquities, Calendar Systems, and History*; translated under the supervision of Charles P. Bodwitch; Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 28 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1904), 266. Regarding the much-debated origins of Mesoamerican writing, Gene S. Stuart, *America's Ancient Cities* (Washington D.C.: National Geographical Society, 1988), 122, for instance, is among the many who follow Caso and Bernal in concluding that "Some of the earliest writing in the New World appeared at Monte Albán. Certainly the first true literary texts have been found there. Those hieroglyphs carved on stone slabs [i.e., the Period I Danzante carvings] tell of the city's rise to glory." Regarding the similarly much-debated origins of the Mesoamerican calendar, Doris Heyden and Paul Gendrop, *Pre-Columbian Architecture of Mesoamerica* (New York: Electa/Rizzoli, 1975), 55, for example, rely primarily on Bernal to argue that "One of Mesoamerica's most outstanding intellectual contributions, the calendar round, formed of two simultaneous calendrical wheels—one the 365-day solar calendar and the other a 260-day religious and probably agricultural calendar, coinciding to create a 52-year 'century'—was brought to a working development at Monte Albán before the Christian era." Directing attention to the hieroglyphs on those Danzante carvings as evidence of both writing and the calendar, Michael D. Coe and Rex Koontz, *Mexico: From the Olmecs to the Aztecs*, fifth edition (London: Thames & Hudson, 2002 [originally 1962]), 93, concur that, "Whereas we have little evidence for writing and the calendar in the Olmec area, there is abundant testimony of both of these in Monte Albán I, when come our first true literary texts in Mexico. These are carved in low relief on the Danzantes themselves and on other slabs. Numbers were symbolized by dots and bars, although a finger could substitute for a dot in the numbers 1 and 2…"

assertions that the makers of the Period I Building of the Danzantes were the first Mesoamericans both to use "great blocks of stone" and stucco floors have greater traction.[25] More specifically, he suggests that "the earliest structure on the North Platform [at Monte Albán] displayed a serpent carved in stucco on its façade—perhaps the first appearance of this material in Mesoamerica."[26]

Further accentuating Monte Albán's singular originality, Bernal presents the enormous claim that Mesoamerica's very first tombs appeared in Period I Monte Albán.[27] Assigning eight specific examples to this initial era, he says that,

> "[The tombs of Period I Monte Albán] are not simply holes dug in the earth but actual structures. They are very simple, with none of the elaborations of later times; these tombs are rectangular excavations enclosed by stone walls and covered by flat roofs formed of stone slabs…"[28]

Additionally, the famous funerary urns that are found in those tombs are, Bernal thinks, fully original inventions, which lead him to yet another huge assertion concerning Mesoamerica's earliest depictions of various deities:

> "Another step that seems to have been taken for the first time in Oaxaca is the representation of the gods. From this early period [i.e., Monte Albán I] ten deities were sufficiently well characterized so that they can be easily identified: Cocijo (the rain god), a jaguar divinity, Quetzalcoatl, the young god with the helmet of a bird with a flat beak, Xipe, the opossum deity, perhaps the old god with the helmet of a bird with a broad beak, and the old god Two Tiger."[29]

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[25] Bernal, *The Olmec World*, 156, considers the earliest iterations of the Building of the Danzantes as the first use of "great blocks of stone;" but as noted next, he locates the first use of stucco on the North Platform.

[26] Bernal, *The Olmec World*, 156, n. 113.

[27] Bernal, *The Olmec World*, 156.

[28] Bernal, *The Olmec World*, 156.

[29] Bernal, *The Olmec World*, 158. Also see Alfonso Caso and Ignacio Bernal, *Urns de Oaxaca* (México, D.F.: Memorias del Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia II, 1952); reprinted in Alfonso Caso, *Obras: El México Antiguo: Mixtecas y Zapotecas*, vol. 3 (México: El Colegio Nacional, 2002), 145-697.

I will return in chapter 4 on the commemoration of divinity (priority II-A) and chapter 7 on the commemoration of the dead (priority II-D) to the controversial topic of these so-termed funerary "urns" as supposed depictions of gods. But suffice it for now to note that, for Bernal, they constitute yet one more momentous demonstration of path-breaking innovation at Monte Albán:

> "This representation of gods is a fundamental characteristic of Mesoamerican ceremonialism. We have nothing like it any site prior to or contemporaneous with Monte Albán I. It would almost seem that the gods were invented here."[30]

Indeed, to ascribe to the residents of Monte Albán Mesoamerica's very first depictions of deities is a very bold assertion.

2. Reaffirming and Extending the Originality of Monte Albán: Posturing and/or Prestige via Claims to Being First

Certain to have been strongly influenced by Bernal's writing on Monte Albán, American journalist Helen Augur, who, in the 1950s, extended her wide travels to Oaxaca, likewise made herself a champion and publicist for the apparently unique achievements of the area. Expecting to find the more celebrated Mayas the progenitors of most pre-Columbian intellectual and cultural breakthroughs, she shared her surprised realization that:

> "Unless future excavations in Middle America change the picture… Monte Albán will stand as the *earliest full revelation of a great Indian civilization on our continent,* a culture which was already, centuries before Christ, fully formed, many-sided, and noble. It was the herald of the amazing high culture developing among the peoples of Middle America, the first of the brilliant galaxy of sacred cities: Uaxactún, Palenque, Teotihuacan, La Venta, Cholula, Xochicalco, El Tajín."[31]

In Augur's effusive but not uniformed view, the Zapotecs of Monte Albán were leaders rather than followers, innovators rather than imitators, who, "centuries before the first dated Maya

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[30] Bernal, *The Olmec World,* 158.

[31] Helen Augur, *Zapotec* (Garden City, New York: Dolphin Books, Doubleday & Company, 1954), 102; her italics.

stone," had "already worked out the calendar which was eventually adopted all over Middle America… a mother system of chronology."[32] Moreover, she attributes to Zapotecs "the earliest observatory so far found in the New World, and the only one of its kind."[33] And she suspects that Monte Albán qualifies as "the earliest ceremonial city," but is certain that its residents were "superb engineers, stone carvers, and potters, and they had a written language…"[34]

Leading Oaxacanist scholars themselves, as we've seen, are not less inclined than non-academics to promote the import of their area of specialization by enumerating "firsts." John Paddock, for example, determined in the 1960s to raise the profile of the region, graces the dust jacket of his *Ancient Oaxaca: Discoveries in Mexican Archeology and History* with a stress on the insufficiently appreciated extent to which Oaxacans constitute "the first city dwellers in America" and "a third major civilization," not less accomplished than the better known Aztecs or Mayas. Then he supports that claim by venturing that:

> "Among other things, it appears probable that the Indians of Oaxaca were [1] the first American to domesticate plants, [2] the first to practice writing, [3] the first to live in cities, and [4] the first to fashion the sort of conquest empire that we now associate with the Aztecs..."[35]

Thirty years later, Joyce Marcus and Kent Flannery take a similar tack in supporting their assertion that, "in the case of Oaxaca, 'cradle of civilization' is more than a phrase," by arguing that,

> "Though less well studied than the Aztec or Maya, the Zapotec produced one of the first civilizations in ancient Mexico. They were among the first Native Americans [1] to build

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[32] Augur, *Zapotec*, 106.

[33] Augur, *Zapotec*, 102.

[34] Augur, *Zapotec*, 102-6.

[35] Quote from the dust jacket of *Ancient Oaxaca: Discoveries in Mexican Archeology and History*, ed. John Paddock (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1970, originally 1966). The claim that Oaxacans of Monte Albán constitute "the first city dwellers in America" appears on page 99.

> astronomically oriented buildings; [2] to use adobe, stone masonry, and lime plaster; [3] to carve hieroglyphic inscriptions; and [4] to achieve urban status."[36]

Elsewhere Marcus pushes the enumeration of Oaxacan first accomplishments even further by observing that,

> "Monte Albán showed the first Mesoamerican use of [1] the 'emblem glyph' or place sign, [2] the bar-and-dot system of numeration, [3] the 260-day ritual calendar, [4] the first political conquest records, and [5] the system of naming rulers by their birth dates. Many of these developments anticipated the 'indigenous' developments of the Maya region by at least 500 years. The impact and antecedent role of this early urban and militaristic civilization on other Mesoamerican civilizations have been greatly underestimated…"[37]

Again and again, then, scholars and non-scholars link Monte Albán's significance with its originality, and thus with its presumed willingness to break with conventionality. For modern commentators, to do what no previous culture had done before is among the highest measures of impressiveness and importance.[38] But that is, as I'll note momentarily, only half the story in the case of Monte Albán.

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[36] Joyce Marcus and Kent V. Flannery, *Zapotec Civilization: How Urban Society Evolved in Mexico's Oaxaca Valley* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996), 12.

[37] Joyce Marcus, "The Iconography of Militarism at Monte Albán and Neighboring Sites in the Valley of Oaxaca," in *The Origins of Religious Art and Iconography in Preclassic Mesoamerica*, ed. H. B. Nicholson (Los Angeles: Latin American Center, the University of California, Los Angeles, 1976), 137. Regarding the huge claim that Zapotecs were originators of the 260-day calendar, which is subsequently utilized across all of Mesoamerica, Damon E. Peller and Marcus Winter, *Sun Above, Sun Below: Astronomy, Calendar, and Architecture at Monte Albán and Teotihuacan* (Oaxaca: Instituto Oaxaqueño de Culturas e Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2010), 27, write, "If Zapotecs were the first in Mesoamerica to use the calendar, as appears to be the case, they and not the Mesoamericans at Izapa, Paso de la Amada, or elsewhere at that latitude in the Soconusco region, may have been the inventors of the 260-day Mesoamerican ritual calendar." I will revisit this issue Zapotecs being the originators or among the many imitators of the 260-day count in chapter 3 relative to the astronomy priority (I-C).

[38] Arguably, the quintessential instance of a Mesoamericanist arguing for the fabulousness of the people he studies on the basis of "firsts" (by which he usually means the first among Mayas) comes in a no-holds-barred chart enumerating "The Author's Selection of Fifty Maya Superlatives," in Sylvanus Griswald Morley, *The Ancient Maya* 2nd edition (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1947), 447-49.

3. More Architectural Innovations: Plaza Scale, Colonnades, Two-Roomed Temples, Ballcourts, TPA's and Wide Stairways

First, though, note that likewise in the realm of more strictly architectural features, Monte Albán is also credited with a host of "first-time" constructional features. Following the initial Period I burst of creativity that, Bernal thinks, issued in the earliest building with large blocks of stone and the first use of stucco, Period II (roughly 100 BCE to 300 CE) actually produces substantially more architectural innovations. It is during this era, as the capital continues to enjoy fast growth and thus mounting resources, that the Oaxacans undertook the herculean task of leveling, paving and establishing the unprecedentedly huge parameters of Main Plaza, thereby providing the general aspect that one sees today.[39]

Also emerging in this period is the distinctive use of columns. Walter Krickeberg, for instance, maintained that the temple pyramids at Monte Albán are "the first Mesoamerican structures to use circular columns—at first built up of masonry, later monolithic—to form colonnades, to support the ceilings of large rooms and to divide wide doorways."[40] Where Tula is usually designated as the first use of great colonnades in Mesoamerica, a feature that reappears at Chichén Itzá, Doris Heyden and Paul Gendrop argue that the monumental porticos that mark access to Monte Albán's North Platform provide an earlier—perhaps the earliest—precedent.[41] And Henri Stierlin concludes that those huge stone posts, which he assigns to Period II, represent "a primary achievement in the field of town planning":

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[39] For a standard assessment of Period II developments, see, for instance, Jorge R. Acosta, "Preclassic and Classic Architecture of Oaxaca," *Handbook of Middle American Indians*, vol. 3, "Archaeology of Southern Mesoamerica," vol. ed. Gordon R. Willey, gen. ed, Robert Wauchope (London: University of Texas Press, 1965), 817-24.

[40] Walter Krickeberg in Walter Krickeberg et al, *Pre-Columbian American Religions* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), 20.

[41] Heyden Gendrop, *Pre-Columbian Architecture of Mesoamerica*, 176, for instance, comment on the columns at the south end of Monte Albán's North Platform, along with the Building of the Columns at El Tajín, as precedents to Tula's extensive use of columns.

> "The columns are without a doubt a Zapotec invention and date from Monte Albán II (shortly before the Christian era). They are one of the most important innovations of this civilization. They do not stand freely in space, but are always connected by some means to a wall, although they do not actually touch it. On the north platform, where they attain colossal proportions, their function is unusual: instead of merely shortening the lintels surmounting the entrance to a temple or palace, they combine here to form a kind of triumphal arch in three parts, giving access to a square courtyard situated some 9.9 feet lower and measuring 165 by 165 feet."[42]

Period II likewise gives birth to several new types of buildings that would later become standardized insofar as they were frequently replicated at the Zapotec capital and elsewhere. Perhaps most noteworthy is the earliest iteration of the two-room temple form, which would be repeated dozens of times in Classic-era Monte Albán;[43] but Joyce Marcus hypothesizes, moreover, that stone masonry palaces, other "special-function structures" such as the highly distinctive arrowhead-shaped buildings, and I-shaped ballcourts—all of which would also become prototypes for future constructions—similarly made their maiden appearances in the Main Plaza during Period II.[44] All of these features, while suitably termed innovations, are also,

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[42] Henri Stierlin, *Ancient Mexico* (Cologne, Germany: Benedikt Taschen Verlag, 1968), 134.

[43] Though she discussed the characteristic two-room temple form in numerous contexts, see, for instance, Joyce Marcus, "Early Architecture in the Valley of Oaxaca: 1350 B.C.-A.D. 500," in *Mesoamerican Architecture as a Cultural Symbol*, ed. Jeff Karl Kowalski (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 68, 74. On two-room, Period II temples, also see Cira Martínez López, "La residencia de la tumba 7 y su templo: elementos arquitectónico-religiosos en Monte Albán," in *Religión de los Binnigula'sa'*, Víctor de la Cruz y Marcus Winter, coords. (Oaxaca, México: Fondo Editorial, IEEPO, 2001), 243-44. In fact, in this important article, the first apart of which is focused on reassessing Tomb 7 in the wake of the Monte Albán Special Project (1992-1994), but in the latter portion Cira Martínez López provides a unique thorough inventory of all (31) of Monte Albán's known "temples," arranged by period and "type," along with a similarly thorough accounting of all of the offerings found in each temple. I will revisit this very helpful article again, especially in relation to the block of chapters in Part III, which deal with "Ritual Context: The Presentation of Ritual-Architectural Events."

[44] Marcus, "Early Architecture in the Valley of Oaxaca," 68-69. Also see Joyce Marcus, "How Monte Albán Represented Itself," in *The Art of Urbanism: How Mesoamerican Kingdoms Represented Themselves in Architecture and Imagery*, eds. William L. Fash and Leonardo López Luján (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2009), 93-95. Regarding an additional, little-discussed Period II architectural innovation, if David A. Peterson, "Monte Alban Building J: An Hypothesis of Function," *Cuadernos de arquitectura mesoamericana*, núm. 18 (Marzo 1992): 29-36, is correct in his iconoclastic hypothesis that Building J was a very early version of the sort of "wind temple" that later becomes quite

as I'll argue, distinctive iterations of characteristic Mesoamerican forms that were being utilized elsewhere. The very prominent ballcourt in the northeast corner of that plaza, for instance, while displaying the influence of earlier ones from other regions, as well as similarities to several eventually found at Atzompa and in later Oaxaca Valley sites, has been judged "a landmark in this evolution."[45] That ballcourt, thereby, provides a particularly clear instance of Monte Alban's facility for appropriating old conventions and then reworking them in ways that establish new conventions. Imitation and innovation are, at every turn, paired priorities.

Be that as it may, especially notable from Period IIIA or the Early Classic era (roughly 250-600 CE) is the emergence of the highly standardized, oft-repeated configuration that Marcus Winter terms the Temple-Patio-Altar (or TPA),[46] which would eventually, in the Postclassic era, be replaced by the similarly standardized ensemble that Cira Martínez López labels the Temple-

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common elsewhere in Mesoamerica (see., ibid., 34-35), then that may constitute another Monte Alban "first."

[45] Stierlin, *Ancient Mexico* (1968), 138, presents the now-debatable position that, "We can trace a successive development of the [ball court] form from those at La Venta, simply marked out by two parallel embankments, to the ultimate form found at Chichén Itzá, Tula, and later, on Aztecs sites. The Monte Albán form is a landmark in this evolution because of its relationship with, on the one hand, the Mayan game and, on the other hand, with civilizations on the high plateau." Regarding other, now-discredited ideas on the status of the ball game at Monte Albán, see, for instance, the comments of Westheim, *The Art of Ancient Mexico*, 222, n. 2, on the work of Walter Lehmann, *Aus den Pyramidenstadten Mexikos* [1933]), "a disciple of Seler and an eminent connoisseur of Mesoamerican cultures, who cites as one of the proofs of the 'Maya influence' the [then-supposed] lack of ball games at Monte Albán. It was believed then that the ball game was unknown in the Old Empire and that the Toltecs introduced it in Yucatan. Meanwhile, ball courts have been discovered in Copán, Palenque, and Yaxchilán. At any rate, Lehmann's argument fell by the wayside upon the discovery of a ball court at Monte Albán in 1936—three years after the publication of his book."

[46] See Marcus Winter, "Templo-Patio-Adoratorio: un conjunto arquitectónico no residencial en el Oaxaca prehispánico," *Cuadernos de Arquitectura Mesoamericana*, vol. 7 (l986): 51-59. In Winter's surmise, so-termed TPA's are a characteristic Zapotec form that date from the Classic period, beginning around 300 CE; and then they are reproduced in innumerable Zapotec-influenced sites through the preconquest period, ending in 1519 CE. Regarding the status and possible function of TPA's or "systems," see, for instance, David Peterson, "Zapotec Systems," *Cuadernos de arquitectura mesoamericana*, núm. 18 (Marzo 1992): 3-12, who argues that their primary function may well have been rites of human sacrifice.

Residence-Patio-Altar (or TRPA), wherein temples are essentially fused with residences.[47] Also originating in Period IIIA, when the Central Mexican influence prevails, is the distinctive use of the Teotihuacan *talud-tableros* motif (to which I will return later in the chapter), which appears on many of this era's structures.[48] Again Heyden and Gendrop suspect that "the new and complex Toltec version of the *tablero* [which appears at Tula] perhaps derived from certain forms found in Monte Albán or Xochicalco;"[49] and thus in that respect as well Monte Albán was both innovative and exemplary for subsequent cultures.

Even more conspicuous is Monte Albán's Classic-era use of uniquely wide staircases, that on the North Platform apparently the broadest in all of Mesoamerica.[50] Stierlin goes so far as to suggest that,

> "The widths of the staircases at Monte Albán are perhaps its most striking feature—more so than those of Teotihuacan. They are a dominant and recurring theme in Zapotec architecture. Every building, whether temple or palace, is preceded by these great flights of stairs."[51]

And George Kubler, similarly impressed by the uniquely broad stairways, seconds the view that, "Another principal device of the architects of Monte Albán was the wide balustrade, far more generously proportioned than in other Mexican or Maya styles of Classic date."[52] In his view,

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[47] See Martínez López, "La residencia de la tumba 7 y su templo," 248, 267.

[48] For a standard assessment of Period IIIA's Teotihuacan-influenced architectural innovations, see Acosta, "Preclassic and Classic Architecture of Oaxaca," 824-30.

[49] Heyden and Gendrop, *Pre-Columbian Architecture of Mesoamerica*, 177-78.

[50] Oft-repeated is the position of Pál Kelemen, *Medieval American Art: Masterpieces of the New World Before Columbus*, third revised edition (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1969), vol. I, 45, that "the great stairway of thirty-three steps at the north end of the plaza is believed to be the widest in all pre-Columbian America. It is nearly 125 feet broad and 40 high. The ramp here becomes a primary feature..."

[51] Stierlin, *Ancient Mexico*, 137.

[52] Kubler, *The Art and Architecture of Ancient America*, 160.

> "The balustrades of Monte Albán are immense ramps, quite unlike the linear borders of Teotihuacan, Tajín, or the central Maya stairways. At the north barrier-mound, for example, the ramps occupy almost two-fifths of the width of the great stairway mound, and at the ball-court, the west stair ramps are each about half the width of the centre flight. This west mound was enlarged at least four times. When the stairs were lengthened, the balustrades were widened."[53]

Additionally, the complex evolution of Monte Albán tombs and funerary sanctuaries (to which I will return in chapter 7) is innovative and original in every period. The simple rectangular roofed tombs of Period I—which Bernal presents as Mesoamerica's very first tombs—lead eventually to much more elaborate cruciform plans and "a purely Zapotec style of vault" wherein two stone blocks are positioned at a steep angle, so that they touch and support one another at the top.[54] So uniquely abundant and highly wrought are the funerary structures by Period III that, arguably, "even without the ruins of religious and civic buildings, the overwhelming number of carefully built and decorated tombs would secure for Monte Albán a particular place in medieval American history."[55] Moreover, the famous funerary urns (another feature to which I will return) represent, as Bernal noted, among the most distinctive signatures of Monte Albán. And likewise, regarding the unique abundance of painted murals in numerous of the tombs, "Taken as a body, the mural art seems to show an indigenous regional Mesoamerican style. It surely is Oaxacan in origin, although it may share certain ideas and conventions in common with other Mesoamerican cultures."[56]

In sum, then, on this topic of architectural originality, though the art historical exercise of ascertaining unique features and "firsts" is invariably uncertain, even where Monte Albán is assessed as importing and then refashioning earlier styles, there is no denying that the Zapotec capital was a site of innumerable innovations and inventions, many of which came subsequently

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[53] Kubler, *The Art and Architecture of Ancient America,* 160.

[54] Stierlin, *Ancient Mexico,* 139.

[55] Kelemen, *Medieval American Art,* vol. I, 46.

[56] Richard E. W. Adams, *Prehistoric Mesoamerica,* third edition (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005), 268.

to serve as prototypes for other ritual-architectural programs.[57] In numerous respects, Monte Albán was with precedent; and, in numerous other respects, it set precedents

B. Reworking Conventions: Monte Albán as a Place of Crossing, Borrowing, Admixing and Synthesizing

The abundant accolades for Monte Albán's extreme originality notwithstanding, those praises are counterpoised by nearly as frequent emphases on its highly synthetic and, to that extent, *un*original disposition. That is to say, if, on the one hand, Monte Albán wins credit as a place of exceptional innovation and independence—it is, in that sense, a paragon of anti-conventionality—the Valley of Oaxaca is, on the other hand, almost as often depicted as the crossroads or "clearinghouse" of Mesoamerica, a place in-between, located on, as I've noted, the knot of the bowtie of Mesoamerica formed by Central Mexico to the northwest and the Maya region to the southeast. Frequently Oaxaca is pictured less as a final destination than as a bridge or pass-through, and, in that alternate sense, the meeting-place of many conventions.

Alfonso Caso, for instance, was relentless in arguing both sides insofar as he insisted, on the one hand, that Zapotecs and Mixtecs deserve far more recognition as "independent peoples who had developed a culture in some respects superior to that of the Aztecs and Mayas," but, at the same time, Caso repeatedly made the case that, "these two distinct and mutually antagonistic races probably constitute the link which united peoples of the central plateau with those of Yucatan and Central America."[58] As the narrow isthmus, the mandatory crossing-point uniting the two main sectors of Mesoamerica, Oaxaca bore the imprint of both. And in that respect, the

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[57] In sum, though several of these seem more generic than unique to the Zapotec capital, Stierlin, *Ancient Mexico*, 133 (italics added), contends that "the buildings at Monte Albán reveal *architectural elements peculiar to the Zapotecs*, and it is immediately apparent that a greater variety exists here than at Teotihuacan. There are eight principal forms: The pyramid, the temple combining pyramid and courtyard, the portico, the palace with patio, the ball-court, the observatory, and the tomb, sometimes surmounted by a funerary chapel."

[58] Alfonso Caso, "Monte Albán, Richest Archeological Find in America," *National Geographic Magazine* vol. LXII (October 1932), 489.

region of Monte Albán is not unique but typical; in Bernal's phrase, "Oaxaca is one of the zones most characteristically Mesoamerican."[59]

One minority stance assesses Oaxaca's medial position in the superarea as a kind of shortcoming, which diminishes its region-specific accomplishments. In that view, Oaxaca presents a weaker and derivative third case, which, "alongside these two clearly defined high cultures of Mesoamerica… exercised less influence and had strong ties with the Maya and Teotihuacan."[60] From that dismissive perspective, "this [Oaxacan] culture shows strong ties with Teotihuacan as well as with the Maya, although it is impossible to say whether Oaxaca depended exclusively on foreign cultures..."[61] Pushed to an extreme, that outlook depicts Zapotecs as habitually unimaginative borrowers and Monte Albán as a kind of blank slate on which numerous other groups leave their respective marks.[62]

Far more commentators, however—again Ignacio Bernal headmost among them—apprise Monte Albán's intermediate positioning as a virtue that helps to account for the

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[59] Bernal, "Archaeological Synthesis of Oaxaca," 788.

[60] Friedrich Katz, *The Ancient America Civilizations* (Edison, New Jersey: Castle Books, 2004 [first published in German in 1969]), 72.

[61] Katz, *The Ancient America Civilizations*, 72.

[62] By the way, writing in the nineteenth century—that is, when Mitla was a high-profile travel destination but Monte Albán remained completely obscure—American politician, Congregationalist minister, newspaper editor and popular anthropological writer John D. Baldwin, *Ancient America, In Notes on American Archaeology* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1871), 117-21, makes this intriguing observation about Oaxaca's medial location: "Lying between two great groups [by which he means the Yucatec Maya and the southern Maya] entirely different in architecture of their original buildings, this Mitla assemblage of stone and structures possesses peculiarities belonging neither to those of Yucatan to the N.E., nor to those of Central America to the S.W. Though from its geographic position [Oaxaca and Mitla] should form a connecting link between the two great systems, yet [Mitla] does not, but stands out peculiarly conspicuous for its singularities of architecture and ornament." Also by the way, directing attention to one more way in which Oaxaca is a place in-between, Oliver Sacks, *Oaxaca Journals* (Washington, D.C.: National Geographic, 2002), 48, who admires the region for its biological diversity and especially its distinctive ferns, comments on "Oaxaca as a uniquely rich botanical borderland where plants of northern origin, like these pines, mingle with South American plants that have migrated north."

Zapotecs' worldly-wise engagements with other groups; Oaxacans needn't even travel to experience a very wide swath of Mesoamerica's cultural diversity. Recall that, according to Bernal's artfully crafted historical (re)construction of Monte Albán, in Period I, Oaxacans benefit enormously by their associations with Gulf Coast-based Olmecs; in Period II, it is interactions with southern Mayanoid (or pre-Maya) peoples that stimulate a cultural and artistic florescence; and in Period IIIA, Zapotecs learn and borrow from Teotihuacanos in an even more extensive manner that lifts Monte Albán to its highest cultural and artistic accomplishments.[63] In all these cases, Oaxacan involvements with non-Oaxacans are depicted by Bernal as voluntary, self-confident, discerning, and thus salutary for all parties. But then, regarding the creative and cultural decline that begins in Period IIIB, at which point "it appears that Zapotec culture turns in on itself and becomes detached from the stream of events in Mesoamerica," the absence of any outside catalyst sends Monte Albán into a self-induced tailspin.[64] Bernal posits, in fact, that "this complete introversion was responsible for the marked aesthetic and technical decadence of Period IV."[65]

By this account, which, as we'll see, engenders lots of historical skepticism, a willingness to engage other cultural and artistic traditions was the primary impetus to Monte Albán's spectacular success; and, conversely but consistently, it was an unwillingness to accept outside stimuli that led to the capital's atrophy and decline. The notion of cross-cultural borrowing or, in Bernal's phrase, "cultural fusion"[66]—a facility for admixing at which he sees Oaxacans as the

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[63] Regarding Ignacio Bernal historical (re)construction, see Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, chap. 2, "Ignacio Bernal's Affirmation of Intercultural Admixing: Monte Albán as a Microcosm of Mesoamerica and Model for Modern Mexico."

[64] Ignacio Bernal, "Archaeological Synthesis of Oaxaca," *Handbook of Middle American Indians*, vol. 3, "Archaeology of Southern Mesoamerica," vol. ed. Gordon R. Willey, gen. ed. Robert Wauchope (London: University of Texas Press, 1965), 805.

[65] Bernal, "Archaeological Synthesis of Oaxaca," 805.

[66] Of many places that Bernal reiterates his view that "I wish to emphasize the circumstances that the bearers of all or almost all of the high cultures [of Mesoamerica] were made up of two or more groups which fertilized one another during their coexistence," see Ignacio Bernal, *The Olmec World*, trans. Doris Heyden and Fernando Horcasitas (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969), 28.

unsurpassed masters—is depicted in the most positive light. That sort of hybridized intercultural sharing—which, by the way, makes Monte Albán's history a perfect analogue for modern Mexican mestizo identity[67]—invariably leads to creativity and vitality; and, inversely, cultural isolationism has the certain consequence of degeneracy and stagnation. Monte Albán is, in short, according to Bernal, Mesoamerica's premier example of the virtues of cultural hybridity, fusion, synthesis or, in that sense, a kind of blended "conventionality."

Numerous authors reecho (or anticipate) versions of Bernal's notion that Oaxacans are the unrivaled masters of cultural admixing who learn how to emulate and borrow—but without forfeiting their independence. Writing in the 1920s, Thomas Athol Joyce, for instance, though exhibiting the lack of historical knowledge in that era, opined on the basis of commonalities in sculpture and architecture both that "the Zapotec tribes of Oaxaca... appear to have been the channel of communication between the Maya and the Mexicans," and yet, they were "an ancient people, with artistic traditions of their own."[68] Exemplary of that balance is "the Zapotec potter" who, according to Joyce,

> "while accepting inspiration from outside, has not been dominated by it, but has turned it to his own use in the production of works of art which are 'characteristic' in the sense that they bear the unmistakable stamp of his own peculiar psychology."[69]

In the 1960s, Walter Krickeberg, though also holding numerous now-untenable historical opinions, accentuated rather than undermined his praise of the Oaxacan capital's inventiveness by observing that "cultural currents from many major centres in Mesoamerica—La Venta, Teotihuacan and the Maya cities—meet and unite at Monte Albán."[70] Helen Augur too reinforced rather than rescinded her commendations of the Zapotecs' supreme originality by

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[67] Regarding Bernal's (re)construction of ancient Monte Albán as a perfect analogue for modern Mexican hybrid identity, see Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, chap. 2, "Closing Thoughts: Monte Albán as a Microcosm of Ancient Mesoamerica and a Model for Contemporary Mexico."

[68] Thomas Athol Joyce, *Maya and Mexican Art* (London: The Studio, 1927), 43-44.

[69] Joyce, *Maya and Mexican Art*, 99.

[70] Krickeberg in Krickeberg et al, *Pre-Columbian American Religions*, 22.

praising as well their capabilities for interacting and borrowing. In her view, "Owing to its central position, Oaxaca has always been the clearing house for the arts and ideas of Middle America, and its people still show their cosmopolitan heritage."[71] Because of its distinct geography, "Oaxaca was the first great cultural crossroads of the continent," an intermediary position for which the Zapotecs were ideally suited:

> "The Zapotec temperament explains much: the gift for harmonious relations with all sorts of people, for acting as persuaders and moderators. To say that the Zapotecs are born middlemen is to diminish them; they are people of real strength and amazing stability who dominate by virtue of these qualities but use the Chinese art of accommodation, which is a very different thing from compromise."[72]

Likewise Stierlin, while seconding Bernal's (contestable) opinion concerning "definite connections between the 'Danzantes' and some Olmec reliefs," insisted that the infamous stone carvings were not simply derivative or imitative of Gulf Coast styles; instead, Stierlin concludes that "the stylistic homogeneity" of the Period I buildings as well as the stelae "indicates original inspiration, exceeding simple imitation."[73] And Kubler also presents Monte Albán's place in-between as a fortuitous condition of possibility that complicates and enriches rather than diluting its artistic and architectural program:

> "Oaxaca is the most central region of all the regions of ancient Mesoamerica, having neighbors to west, north, east, north-east, and south-east, and overland communications to all these regions, fixing Oaxaca as the least marginal or peripheral territory of pre-Columbian archaeological history."[74]

Additionally, Paul Westheim has a more extended and nuanced take on Monte Albán's dual status as an innovator and imitator. On the one hand, Westheim, a German art historian who lived in Mexico from 1941-1963, acknowledges that the Zapotecs borrowed lots of elements from different peoples. Consistent with the prevailing ideas of his day, Westheim, for instance,

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[71] Augur, *Zapotec*, 27.

[72] Augur, *Zapotec*, 154.

[73] Stierlin, *Ancient Mexico*, 137.

[74] Kubler, *The Art and Architecture of Ancient America*, 155.

attributes much of the inspiration for Monte Albán I to Olmecs;[75] and he has no doubt that "As the Zapotecs adopted various elements from Teotihuacan, it is certain that they also acquired suggestions coming to them from the Maya sphere…"[76] But, on the other hand, in his efforts to present extensive borrowing and imitation as a strength rather than weakness, Westheim makes two emphatic claims. For one, Monte Albán is *not*, he insists, "eclectic," a version of imitation that he associates with a lack of design focus and consistency:

> "Whole centuries and different epochs collaborated to erect Monte Albán. The buildings of the Zapotec era [for him, Period III] give us the impression that generation after generation followed a single plan. A single spirit, a single creative intention, a single artistic *ethos*, presided over the construction of this city during its different stages. Tradition that never degenerated into eclecticism, that remained alive because the zeal for monumentality and greatness of the artistic concept remained alive."[77]

And, for two, Westheim insists that Monte Albán was *not* "derivative," which would have entailed a kind of surrender of artistic autonomy that Zapotecs never allowed. Carefully parsing his words, he contends that, irrespective of drawing on Nahuas and Mayas for inspiration, "fundamentally this was not a matter of 'influences.'"[78] Appealing to theories of artistic borrowing from Thomas Joyce's *Maya and Mexican Art* (1926), Westheim contends that the Zapotec architect,

> "while accepting inspiration from outside, has not been dominated by it, but has turned it to his own use in the production of works of art which are 'characteristic' in the sense that they bear the unmistakable stamp of his own peculiar [Zapotec] psychology. What [Thomas] Joyce states with respect to the ceramics can be applied to the architecture, and perhaps with greater emphasis…"[79]

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[75] Westheim, *The Art of Ancient Mexico*, 212-13.

[76] Westheim, *The Art of Ancient Mexico*, 221.

[77] Westheim, *The Art of Ancient Mexico*, 202.

[78] Westheim, *The Art of Ancient Mexico*, 221.

[79] Westheim, *The Art of Ancient Mexico*, 221-22.

Accordingly, Westheim, yet another with deep appreciation of Monte Albán's design and construction, finds a way to affirm both the Zapotecs' status as imitators of a highly qualified sort and innovators of a highly impressive sort:

> "The Zapotecs—no matter what they adopted or where they adopted it from—were bold and original artists, who impressed their spirit on everything they created, revealing in it a will to art that is rooted in the architectonic and that tends toward the monumental. Zapotec art is not Maya art, nor is it Teotihuacan. It is Zapotec."[80]

And much more recently, Marcus Winter, though acknowledging that Monte Albán was "a pristine city" insofar as it arose quickly on a previously unoccupied cluster of hilltops, states bluntly (albeit unpersuasively) that the conception of the capital was a based "an imported template" borrowed from somewhere else:

> "While local factors contributed to Monte Alban's origins, the architectural expression of the city's core, consisting of a main plaza with leaders' dwellings on each side and a ceremonial precinct at one end, comes from the Mixe-Zoque area, probably La Venta or highland Chiapas."[81]

In short, the arguments for Monte Albán's paired uniqueness and unoriginality continue to emerge.

In sum, accordingly, for this entire introductory discussion, countless commentators acknowledge—and then, albeit requiring occasional rhetorical gymnastics, find ways to

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[80] Westheim, *The Art of Ancient Mexico*, 224.

[81] Winter, "Social Memory and the Origins of Monte Albán," 393. On the notion of "an imported template," see ibid., 402-3, where he ventures that, "Use of La Venta or the Middle Formative Chiapas model [at Monte Albán] implies that someone, probably one or several Zapotecs from highland Oaxaca or Mixe-Zoques from the southern Isthmus, saw and remembered the La Venta layout," and then presumably endeavored to reproduce it at the nascent capital of Monte Albán. I concede to finding Winter's argument in this case highly unpersuasive, not least because he proceeds without any apparent awareness of the large literature on urban genesis whereby the features of Monte Albán's Main Plaza configuration that he enumerates and then attributes to "an imported template" (ibid., 402) are a perfect demonstration of the organizational principles that Paul Wheatley, *The Pivot of the Four Quarters: A Preliminary Enquiry into the Origins and Character of the Ancient Chinese City* (Chicago: Aldine, 1971), chap. 3, "The Nature of the Ceremonial Center," finds emerging independently in numerous "traditional cities" about the world.

mediate—the tension between Monte Albán as a fabulously innovative one-of-a-kind place and its paired distinction as the embracing amalgam of innumerable non-Oaxacan as well as more local influences. Especially before the discoveries of San José Mogote antecedents, Mesoamerica's clear winner in the competition for the most first-time innovations is also Mesoamerica's premier example of the virtues of cultural hybridity, fusion and synthesis.[82] That Monte Albán—arguably more than any other site in the entire superarea—combines radical innovation and repurposing imitation, among other things, complicates assessment of the relevance of the so-termed convention priority (I-A). Thus keep that paradoxical tension in mind, as I move next to successive consideration of the pertinence at Monte Albán of each of the three variations on the conventionality theme.

III. Hermeneutical Interrogations—Three Variations on the Convention Priority (I-B): Universal Proportions, Divine Directives and/or Deliberate Archaisms

Persuaded that innovation and imitation can collaborate as well compete, I turn now to more specific inquiries into the relevance of each of the three variations on the conventionality priority (I-B). Again working from the general to the specific, for each alternative, I will briefly introduce the permutation with reference to some instructive cross-cultural examples; then I will consider that permutation's relevance to the broader Mesoamerica region, and finally its more particularistic pertinence at Monte Albán. As forewarned, replies to these three lines of inquiry are asymmetrical in the extreme, the third providing the most promising interpretive avenue, which therefore gets the fullest treatment.

[82] Note, by the way, Winter, "Social Memory and the Origins of Monte Albán," besides making an iconoclastic argument that Monte Albán owns its basic urban conception to an "imported template" that probably comes from La Venta or highland Chiapas by way of the Mixe-Zoque area (ibid., 393, 402-3) also makes a vigorous argument that San José Mogote was *not*, as the currently prevailing view goes, an important precedent to Monte Albán's urban layout (ibid., 399-400).

A. Universalistic Proportions and Conventionalized Rules: Magic Numbers, Sacred Ratios and Geometric Formulas

The first variation on the conventionality theme (priority I-B) entails constructions or construction processes that conform to universalistic principles and proportions that are (understood to be) inherent in the structure of the universe and thus observable in all sorts of natural phenomena.[83] This frequently involves the replication in architecture of abstract laws of measure and proportion—for instance, sacred ratios, magic numbers, secret rhythms or geometric formulas—that have been adduced variously from studies of plants, animals, weather or the movements of stars and planets. Or sometimes universalistic formula and "correct proportions" emerge from measurements of human anatomy, from analyses of sound and music, and/or from mathematical and geometrical calculations. While, in principle, this version of architectural conventionality is rooted in conformity to the rhythms and realities of nature, as a practical matter, it usually entails following the standardized stipulations and guidelines that have been articulated in various authoritative, not infrequently esoteric, sources. This is rule-bound architecture par excellence.

1. Universalistic Proportions as a Cross-Cultural Phenomenon: Italian Rulebooks, Chinese *Feng-Shui* and Indian *Silpa Sastras*

Among the clearest examples of this sort of appeal to purportedly universal proportions from the broader history of religions comes in the Western tradition of building manuals that begins with Roman architect, engineer and author Vitruvius's *Ten Books of Architecture*. Endeavoring to draw up "definite rules" as a means of disclosing "all the principles of the art [of architecture]," [84] Vitruvius provides such meticulous, rigidly prescriptive guidance as:

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[83] For fuller discussions and exemplifications of each of these three variations on the convention priority (I-B), see Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, vol. II, chap. 15, "Convention: Codified Prescriptions of Order."

[84] Marcus Vitruvius Pollio, *The Ten Books on Architecture*, trans. Morris Hicky Morgan (New York: Dover Publications, 1960), 4.

> "In the Doric, the symmetrical proportions are distinguished by the following rules… The aperture of the doorway should be determined by dividing the height of the temple, from floor to coffered ceiling, into three and one half parts and letting two and one half thereof constitute the height of the aperture of the folding doors…"[85]

A reworking of Vitruvius appears in Leon Battista Alberti's *De re aedificatoria* (*On the Art of Building*, 1485), the most prestigious in a distinguished line of Italian rulebooks that includes, among others, the hugely influential sixteenth-century manuals of Serlio, Vignola and Palladio.[86] All these compendia of building standards are based on "first principles of Nature" that, though operative everywhere (and ultimately the consequence of "God's perfect creation"), are most easily discerned in the workings of geometry, the harmonic tones of music and the dimensions of human physiology. Careful scrutiny of those realms reveals intensely detailed prescriptions of proportion and style—immutable laws of design—which are then put to the service of working architects via these formulaic handbooks. That is to say, by this codification, recondite abstractions are translated into eminently practical tools for the sort of "proper building" that expresses, like one of Alberti's facades, "the harmony of all parts in relation to one another."[87]

A salient Asian exemplification of this version of conventionalized building comes in the axiomatic specifications outlined in the Chinese geomantic practice of *feng-shui*, literally "wind and water." This entails, as Jeffery Meyer explains, "diagnosing" the topography of the potential site of a grave, a building or a city, and then "prescribing"—in consultation with such ritual and divination texts as the *Zhou Li* ("The Rites of the Zhou Empire") and the *Yi Jing* ("Book of

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[85] Vitruvius, *The Ten Books on Architecture*, 117. I quote here only a small portion of Vitruvius's intensely detailed prescriptions for proper proportioning in the Doric order.

[86] Regarding Sebastiano Serlio's *Tutte l'opere de architecttura* (1531-51), see Sebastiano Serlio, *The Five Books of Architecture* (New York: Dover Publications, 1982), which is an unabridged reprint of the 1611 English edition of this work. Regarding Giacomo Barozzi da Vignola's rulebook, *Regola delli Cinque Ordini d'Architettura* (1562), see William R. Ware, *The American Vignola*, 5th ed. (Scranton, New Jersey: International Textbook Company, 1923). And Andrea Palladio's treatise, *I quattre libri dell'architettura* (1570), is available in English as Palladio, *The Four Books of Architecture* (New York: Dover Publications, 1965).

[87] See, for instance, Joan Gadol, *Leon Battista Alberti: Universal Man of the Early Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969).

Changes")—how best to harmonize the vital energies or "cosmic breaths" (*ch'i*) consequent of these new constructions with the energies inherent in the existing natural and built features.[88] In addition to establishing favorable sites and pleasing architectural configurations, *feng-shui* is, moreover, a method for discerning the causes of human illness and suffering; and thus, beyond simply aesthetic considerations, adherence to traditional orientational prescriptions is, in this case, a very pragmatic strategy for the avoidance of danger and the enhancement of health and prosperity.[89]

Likewise, though equally detailed South Asian building manuals, the *Silpa Sastras*, lead to traditional Indian city plans that, according to Nelson Wu, "differ in every respect" from the *feng-shui* informed Chinese walled city,[90] the ancient Hindu science of building (*vastu sastra*) does, nonetheless, provide more marvelous instantiation of this first version of rigorously conventionalized building.[91] Like *feng-shui*, or even Japanese *hogaku* (literally "direction-angle"), the principles of *vastu sastra* obtain with respect to domestic as well as explicitly religious constructions, at all architectural scales and in all phases of the construction process.[92]

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[88] See Jeffery Meyer, "*Feng-shui* of the Chinese City," *History of Religions* 18 (November 1978), 139-50, who emphasizes especially the *Lo-ching chieh* in his discussion of *feng-shui* handbooks. Also see, for instance, Else Glahn, "Unfolding the Chinese Building Standards: Research on the *Yingzao fashi*" in Nancy Shatzman Steinhard et al, *Chinese Traditional Architecture* (New York: Chinese House Gallery, 1984), 47-58; and Nelson I. Wu, *Chinese and Indian Architecture: The City of Man, Mountain of God, and the Realm of Immortals* (New York: George Braziller, 1963), 36-44.

[89] At that point, then, the convention priority (I-B) is especially closely aligned to what I will describe in chapter 10 as the "propitiation" priority (III-C).

[90] Wu, *Chinese and Indian Architecture*, 114, n. 2.

[91] See, for instance, Michael W. Meister, "Measure and Proportion in Hindu Temple Architecture," *Interdisciplinary Science Review*, vol. 10, no.1 (1985), 248-58.

[92] Paul Oliver, *Dwellings: The House Across the World* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), 167-69, for instance, describes the reliance on rules of the *sastras*, or Hindu manuals, in the preparation of the site of a contemporary Indian house, and then notes the seemingly obvious parallels in Chinese *feng-shui and* Japanese *hogaku.* Oliver's Introduction in *Shelter, Sign and Symbol: An Exploratory Work on Vernacular Architecture*, ed. Paul Oliver (Woodstock, New York: Overlook Press, 1977), 15, has a brief discussion of Chinese planning and the *K'ao-kung Chi* or "code book of words" in the *Li Chi*, which expounds design canons that apply to town as

Moreover, irrespective of the profoundly divergent epistemologies, the prescriptions for correct temple proportioning in the *Silpa Sastras* are strikingly similar in tone to those in the treatises of, for instance, Vitruvius and Alberti. Note, for instance, one among countless relentlessly detailed passages in the *Silpa Prakasa: Medieval Orissan Sanskrit Text on Temple Architecture* that reads:

> "Hear in what manner the various parts of the [Hindu] shrine are disposed. Adding together the sides (breadth and width) of the shrine, the produce of that operation in numbers multiplied by three, and that number divided by four: the result in *angulas* determines the height of the wall-base in the form of a *vithi-pitha* (plain base) on all four sides (of the temple)."[93]

In brief, then, this first variation on the convention theme—which, not surprisingly, survives most prominently in institutionalized buildings such as governmental headquarters, post offices and schools—issues in built constructions whose "allure" and plea for legitimacy are based on their apparent adherence to universalistic principles of proportion that were "discovered" long ago and then codified as historically canonized standards of architectural design. Though ostensibly about respecting the rhythms of the universe, this initial alternative is, in practice, primarily about conformity to conventionalized rules.

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well as temple organization. Also, Andreas Volwahsen, *Living Architecture: Indian* (New York: Grosset and Dunlop, 1969), chap. 2, for instance, discusses the application of traditional building principles at the level of each the house, village and city.

[93] Ramacandra Kaulacara, *Silpa Prakasa:Medieval Orissan Sanskrit Text on Temple Architecture*, trans and annotated by Alice Bonner and Sadasiva Rath Sarma (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966), 83. In her Introduction to this manual, Bonner contends that it was apparently transcribed some time in the eighteenth century. (An *angula* is a unit of measure equal to one finger's breadth or eight barley corns.) K. V. Soundara Rajan, *An Invitation to Indian Architecture* (New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann, 1984), 19-20, 32, for instance, cites and comments on the intense detail of similar *Silpa Sastra* passages; and Fred W. Clothey, *Rhythm and Intent: Ritual Studies from South India* (Madras: Blackie and Son, Pvt Ltd., 1983), *Rhythm and Intent*, 183-84, likewise discusses the *Silpa Sastras* in helpful ways.

2. Universalistic Proportions in Ancient Mesoamerica: Promising Reassessments and Mounting Evidence

That ancient Mesoamericans had something like a tradition of sacred geometry and magic numbers, which is reflected in their monuments, has been a topic of abundant speculation and debate. Advocacy for that prospect has been especially strong concerning the Maya, long celebrated for their accomplishments in calendrics and numerology; and spirited pursuit of this possibility has been particularly prominent among non-mainstream enthusiasts of the field, numerous of whom promise to "unlock the secrets of the Mayan and Aztecs calendars."[94] Making one's way through this semi-academic literature on pre-Columbian calendric machinations and prophecies—much of which maintains, albeit in quite different ways, that those esoteric matters are expressed, and thus preserved, in the architecture of the region—frequently requires straddling between the provocative and the preposterous, a vintage challenge in balancing one's open-minded hermeneutic of retrieval with a more skeptical hermeneutic of suspicion.

Be that as it may, there has been additionally more disciplined pursuit into this version of conventionalized Mesoamerican architecture. Archaeoastronomer John Carlson, for instance, after scouring the pre-Columbian data explicitly in search of "sacred ratios" and measuring schemes that parallel those of the Chinese geomantic tradition of *feng-shui*, was forced to conclude that "the presence of these factors in Mesoamerica is, at best, speculative."[95] Carlson

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[94] R. T. Kaser, *Mayan Oracles for the Millennium* (New York: Avon Books, 1996), on the cover, promises to "unlock the secrets of the Mayan and Aztecs calendars." Though this is not the place to engage the large body of popular writing on Mesoamerican wisdoms, a handful of exemplars, all of which make large claims concerning pre-Columbian numerology and geometry, includes José Argüelles, *The Mayan Factor: Path Beyond Technology* (Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions/Bear & Company, 1987); Peter Tompkins, *Mysteries of the Mexican Pyramids* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976); Hunbatz Men, *Secrets of Mayan Science/Religion* (Rochester, Vermont: Bear & Company, 1989); and Adalberto Rivera A., *The Mysteries of Chichén Itzá: The First Guide to the Esoteric Function of the Temples and Pyramids of Ancient Chichén Itzá* (Panama: Universal Image Enterprise Inc., 1995).

[95] John B. Carlson, "A Geomantic Model for the Interpretation of Mesoamerican Sites: An Essay in Cross-Cultural Comparison," in *Mesoamerican Sites and World-Views*, ed. Elizabeth Benson (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1976), 202.

does nevertheless anticipate that, "since the Classic Maya had a penchant for numerical complexity coupled with arithmetic exactitude, we may yet discover complex geometrical and mathematical relationships in their site plans and architecture."[96] Architect Horst Hartung, with explicit reference to Carlson's search after geomantic-like principles in Mesoamerica, opines that "Monte Albán could be a good example for a study."[97] And promising progress along those lines comes in the prolific work of Anthony Aveni and Hartung, which, as we'll see next chapter, frequently focuses on astronomical alignments, but, in other cases, postulates the existence of arcane and precise pre-Columbian systems of "radians," "multiple orthogonal axes" and "conceptual lines" that intersect in right angles, form isosceles triangles and converge on noteworthy points.[98]

For example, regarding the not-quite-squared positioning of the four range structures that compose the Nunnery Complex at Uxmal, Aveni and Hartung take issue with J. Eric S. Thompson's (1974) conclusion that "variation [in the layout of the Nunnery quadrangle] arises from sloppiness… Divergence of one wall from another presumably resulted from the inability of the Maya to lay out right angles."[99] Alternatively, while they concede that there is little of astronomical significance in the Nunnery layout (that is, the astronomy priority, I-C, is *not* important), they contend that the complex is an inward-looking exercise in orientation with respect to abstract principles of geometry (that is, an expression of this first version of the convention priority, I-B). In an argument reminiscent of debate about the apparent asymmetries

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[96] Carlson, "A Geomantic Model for the Interpretation of Mesoamerican Sites," 202.

[97] Horst Hartung, "Monte Albán in the Valley of Oaxaca," in *Mesoamerican Sites and World-Views*, ed. Elizabeth P. Benson (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 1981), 53. Hantung, ibid., 53-54, qualifies his optimism for finding geomantic-like principles at Monte Albán by noting, "I am more inclined to present an interpretation of spatial relations [at Monte Albán] than the 'cosmic forces' of geomancy."

[98] Anthony F. Aveni and Horst Hartung, "Precision in the Layout of Maya Architecture," in *Ethnoastronomy and Archaeoastronomy in the American Tropics*, eds. Anthony F. Aveni and Gary Urton (New York: New York Academy of the Sciences, 1982), 71-77.

[99] J. Eric S. Thompson, "Maya Astronomy," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London, Series A*, vol. 276 (1974), 94; quoted in Aveni and Hartung, "Precision in the Layout of Maya Architecture," 64.

of Monte Albán's Main Plaza, Aveni and Hartung hypothesize that what might appear as "misalignment" was actually the deliberate consequence of a more subtle orientational scheme in which it is sightlines from the various doorways, not the range structure themselves, that intersect at right angles.[100] In their reconsideration, alignments that at first seemed shoddy and haphazard turn out to be numerologically nuanced and precise in the extreme.

Undertaking analogous reassessments at other Maya sites, Aveni and Hartung contend, moreover, that "Similar interbuilding relationships that [like those at Uxmal's Nunnery] may have been governed by geometrical considerations are found to occur at Tikal, Copán, and Chichén Itzá."[101] At Tikal, for instance, Peter Harrison has ascertained, as just one of several geometrically significant configurations, "A series of interconnected integral right triangles reflect a series of relationships among numerous structures centered around the South Acropolis."[102] And at Chichén Itzá, Luis Arochi, albeit in debatable ways, hypothesizes a host of ways in which the Castillo not only expresses numerous calendrical and astronomical references (that is, expressions of the respective homology, I-A, and astronomy, I-C priorities), but, moreover, is a "geometrical pyramid" insofar as the monument conforms also to more strictly geometric proportions (that is, an expression of this variation on the convention priority).[103]

In short, revisiting the city plans of major sites, not only in the Maya zone but across Mesoamerica, with this set of questions in mind provides more and more support for the notion

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[100] Aveni and Hartung, "Precision in the Layout of Maya Architecture," 71-76.

[101] Aveni and Hartung, "Precision in the Layout of Maya Architecture," 76. For similar sorts of conclusions at other sites, see Horst Hartung, "Alignments in Architecture and Sculpture of Maya Centers: Notes on Piedras Negras, Copán and Chichén Itzá," *Ibero-Amerikanische Archiv*, neue folge (Berlin: Colloquim Verlag Berlin, 1986), 223-40.

[102] Peter D. Harrison, *The Lords of Tikal: Rulers of an Ancient Maya City* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1999), 173, fig. 108. For hypotheses about additional geometrically significant interbuilding relationships at Tikal, also see Harrison, ibid., 176, fig. 111; 188, fig. 120; 189, fig. 121; and 191, fig. 123.

[103] See Luis E. Arochi, *La Pirámid de Kukulcán: Su simbolismo solar* (México, D.F.: Panorama Editorial, S.A., 1987), chap. 3, "Geometríc piramidal."

that many pre-Columbian buildings and configurations were designed according to numerological and geometric schemes. Frequently the results, which critics complain can depend as much on the imaginations of contemporary researchers as ancient architects, are controversial; but recognition of the importance of this permutation on the convention priority (I-B) continues to mount.

3. Universalistic Proportions at Monte Albán: Omnipresent Rhythms Expressed in Calendars and Architecture

Though attracting only a small share of the interest Maya numerology has generated, Zapotecs—routinely credited with developing the calendar system that served as the prototype for all others in Mesoamerica[104]—have not fully escaped the imaginative theorizing of non-mainstream investigators. Nonetheless, skepticism has to be the first reaction when an aficionado of Egyptian and Sumerian measuring systems opines, for instance, that several of Monte Albán's plazas and buildings have dimensions that seem to correspond to round numbers of "Sumerian feet," a measure of 13.2 inches,[105] or that the Zapotecs deliberately leveled the mountaintop to a height of 1320 feet above the valley floor, which "is remarkable because 1320 ft is 1200 Sumerian feet, or 800 Sumerian cubits, or 480 Sumerian yards or 240 Sumerian double yards of 10 shusi…"[106] Serious Oaxacanists will not be convinced that these coincidences constitute evidence that Monte Albán is one of the few places in which a formerly global system

[104] On the Zapotec origins of the Mesoamerican calendar, which I will discuss at greater length in chapter 3 concerning the astronomy priority (I-C), see, for instance, Joyce Marcus, *Mesoamerican Writing Systems: Propaganda, Myth, and History in Four Ancient Civilizations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 95; or Damon E. Peeler, "Los orígenes zapotecos de la astronomía y los calendarios mesoamericanos," en *Monte Albán: Estudios Recientes*, Marcus Winter, coord., contribucíon núm. 2 del Proyecto Especial Monte Albán 1992-1994 (Oaxaca de Juárez: Centro INAH-Oaxaca, 1994), 55-61.

[105] Jim Allen, "Monte Albán cubits and measurement units," 2009; http://www.atlantisbolivia.org/monteAlbáncubits.htm; accessed 3-3-2018.

[106] Allen, "Monte Albán cubits and measurement units."

of measurement, "which seems to have become fractured and dissipated throughout the world," can still be detected.[107] That approach to Monte Albán's geometry is, in short, not persuasive.[108]

Owing to the prominence of geometric forms at Mitla (which are far rarer but not entirely absent from Monte Albán), that site has a much longer history of inquiry into questions of magic numbers and sacred proportions;[109] and yet, for all that has been written about these fabulously distinctive facades, which seem to have native textiles as their most direct precedents, it is difficult to produce even one convincing interpretation of the deeper "religious" meanings of their geometrical disposition.[110] In fact, it is somewhat amusing that two centuries ago a duly

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[107] Allen, "Monte Albán cubits and measurement units," contends that the measurements [that he made at Monte Albán] enable us to reconstruct "a system of measurement which seems to have become fractured and dissipated throughout the world with Mexico remaining one of the places where all the various aspects of this system can still be detected."

[108] Peeler and Winter, *Sun Above, Sun Below*, 9, by the way, note, on the one hand, that they have found no standard Monte Albán "meter" or measuring unit; but they also note, on the other hand, that "It is the ratio, the proportion, that is significant [for the sorts of systematic dimensioning they ascertain in Monte Albán's ballcourts, stairways, etc.], not the unit of measure." A shorter Spanish-language version of that booklet (18 pages instead of 31 pages) appeared as Damon E. Peeler y Marcus Winter, *Tiempo sagrado, espacio sagrado: astronomía, calendario y arquitectura en Monte Albán y Teotihuacan*, contribución núm. 1 del Proyecto Especial Monte Albán 1992-1994 (Oaxaca de Juárez: Centro INAH-Oaxaca, 1993).

[109] Alfonso Caso, "Las exploraciones en Monte Albán: Temporada 1934-1935" (México, D.F: Instituto Panamericano de Geografía e Historia, 1935); reprinted in Alfonso Caso, *Obras: El México Antiguo: Mixtecas y Zapotecas*, vol. 2 (México, D.F: El Colegio Nacional, 2002), *Obras* reprint, 176, notes (how the discovery during those seasons of numerous Mitla-like features at Monte Albán, including parallels to the famed geometric facades, forced him to the revised conclusion that, "We can now say, to the contrary of what was formerly affirmed, that *there is nothing in Mitla that cannot be found in Monte Albán, although sometimes in rudimentary form*, which verifies that Monte Albán was the place from which came the elements that later would form the characteristics of Mitla." Ibid., *Obras* reprint, 177; Caso's italics, my translation.

[110] Regarding the much-discussed meanings of the famous geometrical Mitla reliefs: W. H. Holmes, *Archaeological Studies Among the Ancient Cities of Mexico* wrote, 250, for instance, wrote, " It is not impossible that all of the motives were symbolic and served to suggest to the builders some mythologic conceptions to the building or place. I have even been led to surmise, in view of the universality of the symbolism of in the native art, that possibly the decorated panels extending around the buildings represent the marking of the body of a serpent deity, and that the doorways, with their teeth-like pillars stand for the mouth of the creature." Howard Leigh, "Further Discussion of Oaxaca Archaeology: A Reply to Mr. Paddock," *Boletín de*

skeptical Alexander von Humboldt, who wrote about but never visited Oaxaca, was cautioning those antiquarian travelers who were "justly struck with the great analogy between the [geometrical] ornaments of the palaces of Mitla and those employed by the Greeks and Romans" against converting that observation into hypotheses of historical connectedness between the two continents.[111] In Humboldt's level-headed view,

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Estudios Oaxaqueños, no. 8 (1958), 4, considered that the Mitla designs could be symbols of the earth, sky, cardinal directions, clouds and lightening. Kelemen, *Medieval American Art*, vol. I, 50, concludes regarding the famous reliefs at Mitla that, "The patterns in their strict geometric build-up seem to be derived from textile designs. The complete absence of human, animal, and plant motifs is noteworthy…" Rosemary Sharp, "Architecture as Interelite Communication in Preconquest Oaxaca, Veracruz, and Yucatan," in *Middle Classic Mesoamerica A D 400-700*, ed. Esther Pasztory (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 158-71, provides a more political interpretation of the intricated geometric motifs, especially "the *greca* tradition." Kubler, *Art and Architecture in Ancient America*, 175, considered that different *greca* designs may represent the place names of "different Mixtec principalities" or city-states. And John Martin Deland Pohl, "The Lintel Paintings of Mitla and the Function of the Mitla Palaces," in *Mesoamerican Architecture as a Cultural Symbol*, ed. Kowalski, 180, reaffirms that the Mitla facades "undoubtedly derived from textile designs" and provides a long list of previous interpreters before offering at least three compelling, if venturesome, hypotheses concerning the logic of this geometric decoration, none of which really speaks to the convention priority (I-B): (1) "The intentional abstraction and consequent ambiguity in the fretwork… relates them to the most powerful spirit forces of agriculture and fertility in Mesoamerican thought;" (2) the fact that contemporary indigenous people, notably the Tzotzil Maya, "employ geometric designs in textiles as mnemonic devices for storytelling" suggests a similar purpose at Mitla; and (3) that, Pohl believes, textiles produced and exchanged in an elite reciprocity economy "focused on palace feasting and drinking parties," suggests one more possible pre-Columbian use of the Mitla facades. Ibid., 182. Recall also the persuasive semiological analysis of the "stepped fret" motif, which is so prominent in the Mitla reliefs, as an efficient depiction of the "water mountain" or the "altépetl" concept provided by Robert Markens, "El significado de la greca escondada en la imaginaría prehispánica de Oaxaca: Una base del poder político," *Cuaderno del Sur, Revista de Ciencias de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social (CIESAS)*, año 18, núm. 35 (Julio-Diciembre, 2013), 60-70, and discussed last chapter relative to the homology priority (I-A). Michael Lind, *Ancient Zapotec Religion: An Ethnohistorical and Archaeological Perspective* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2015), 112-14, concisely reviews most of these alternate interpretations of the Mitla facades. In any case, I will revisit the possible meanings of these geometric Mitla facades in chapter 9 in relation to the contemplation priority (III-B).

[111] Alexander de Humboldt, *Political Essay on the Kingdom of New Spain*, translated from the original French by John Black (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, Paternoster-Row, 1811; reprinted New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1966), vol. II, 238-39. On the sidebar issue of Humboldt's (non)presence in Oaxaca, Bernal, "Archaeological Synthesis of Oaxaca," 791, for instance, notes that, irrespective of recurrent references to the contrary, "Humboldt never went to

> "We must not forget, that under almost every zone (as I have elsewhere endeavored to demonstrate) mankind takes a pleasure in a rhythmical repetition of the same forms which constitute the principal character of all Grecques, meanders, labyrinths, and arabesques."[112]

Again, however, as in the Maya zone, there have been more disciplined inquiries into the issue of Zapotec numerology and geometry. Focused on the Northern Sierra region of Oaxaca, José Alcina Franch, for instance, in the context of his mid-twentieth century studies of the Zapotec calendar, ascertained a tradition of "sacred numbers," which is reflected, among elsewhere, in the respective duration and timing of various acts of purification and "penance" required in advance of important ceremonies:

> "The number of days in which this type of abstinence, fasts or baths is practiced is quite variable, but always falls in fixed periods such as 3, 5, 7, 9 and 13, of which some are recognized as sacred numbers, in a traditional way. The highest frequency, however, corresponds to the period of three days (24 times), followed by periods of 7 days (ten times) and 13 days (seven times). A period of six days and another of 20 days seem totally exceptional."[113]

That the same "sacred numbers" asserted themselves in Oaxacan architectural design seems eminently feasible. And Alfredo López Austin, though without singling out Oaxaca on this issue, comments on Mesoamerican cosmovision's adherence to "a structured, geometric universe—like a great machine—dynamized by the circulation of divine forces and people who

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Oaxaca;" and a look at the route of Humboldt's Mexico travels (e.g., http://geo-mexico.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/humboldt-route-1024x680.jpg; accessed 3-8-2018), which began in Acapulco on March 22, 1803, and ended at Veracruz on March 7, 1804, confirms that he did not pass through Oaxaca.

[112] Humboldt, *Political Essay on the Kingdom of New Spain*, 238-39.

[113] José Alcina Franch, *Calendario y religión entre los zapotecos* (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1993), 130-31; my translation. Alcina Franch, ibid., 5, explains that, drawing on both ethnohistorical and ethnographic sources, "This book is mainly concerned with the study of Zapotec culture in a region of the Northern Sierra of Oaxaca during the seventeenth century…"

follow the path of the cosmic apparatus,"[114] in ways that provides an even stronger clue as to why particular numbers and geometric proportions enjoy a privileged status:

> "Symmetry and sacred numbers are strict organizational bases, even for the gods. The multiple calendrical wheels order the succession of events, while, paradoxically, their combinations lead to ever-changing evolution. Colors are ubiquitous symbols of geometry. In sum, the cosmic structure becomes obsessive in human expressions."[115]

Mesoamericans' non-Western confidence in the heterogeneity of space, and thus of time, adduces to the notion that, just as every day in a calendar round has a unique disposition, some numbers and some proportions will have a power that others do not. Moreover, if architectural planning according to "sacred numbers" and proportions is a means of eliminating the idiosyncrasies of individual human designers, it, furthermore, mitigates against the gods asserting their specific interests, a point that resurfaces momentarily in relation to the second variation on the convention priority (I-B). The architecture of Monte Albán is, in this respect, vigorously and deliberately *im*personal. As López Austin helps us to see, in Mesoamerican design, universal rhythms matter; personal preferences, including those of the gods, are, in principle, far less important.

Likewise, the subtle unification of calendrical time and architectural space at Monte Albán hypothesized by Damon Peeler, Marcus Winter and Miguel Bartolomé, discussed last chapter in relation to the homology priority (I-A) and next chapter in relation to astronomy (priority I-C), speaks also to this first variation on the convention priority (I-B). In relation to homologized architecture, I emphasized especially the characteristically Mesoamerican urge to integrate seemingly disparate aspects of reality like space and time, or celestial rhythms and

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[114] Alfredo López Austin, "Sobre el concepto de *cosmovisión*," en *Cosmovisión mesoamericana: Reflexiones, polémicas y etnografías*, Alejandra Gámez Espinosa y Alfredo López Austin, coords. (México: El Colegio de México, Fideicomiso Historia de las Américas, 2015), 28; my translation. By the way, this is one the few instances in which López Austin uses the (anachronistic and problematic) metaphor of "a great machine" to characterize the Mesoamerican view of the cosmos. In the same article (ibid., 29), he describes the Mesoamerican universe as "a huge fractal system, which gives coherence to its parts and rules both divine and human actions."

[115] López Austin, "Sobre el concepto de *cosmovisión*," 28-30; my translation.

social practices, into what Eliade and López Austin describe as "an all-encompassing system." But when interrogated through the lens of conventionalized proportionality, rather than microcosmic homologies, we can detect a somewhat different rationale for this practice of replicating calendrical units of duration in architectural measures of width, breath and height.

Regarding that "time-space unification," recall that, as Winter and Bartolomé explain, at Monte Albán, "the inhabitants, or rather the specialist astronomers," operated with three overlapping time counts: a 260-day ritual calendar, the 365-day solar calendar and a 584-day calendar based on the cycles of Venus; and, as a means of "turning time into space," each of those counts was replicated in the dimensions of and distances between various constructions in the center of the city.[116] The sizing of the Main Plaza, the dimensions of the principal ballcourt, Building J and the widths of the grand stairways at the north and south ends of the Main Plaza, for instance, all, according to Winter and Bartolomé, reflect those three cycles of time;[117] in their

[116] Perhaps the earliest explicit comment on the spatialization of the these three calendrical numbers appears in Damon E. Peeler, "Los orígenes zapotecos de la astronomía y los calendarios mesoamericanos," en *Monte Albán: Estudios Recientes*, Marcus Winter, coord., contribucíon núm. 2 del Proyecto Especial Monte Albán 1992-1994 (Oaxaca de Juárez: Centro INAH-Oaxaca, 1994), 55-61; and his plan drawing of the Main Plaza (ibid., fig. 1, 57) is useful in clarifying specifically where they are relevant. In any case, see Marcus Winter, "Religión de los *Binnigula'sa'*: la evidencia arqueológica," in *Religión de los Binnigula'sa'*, Víctor de la Cruz y Marcus Winter, coords. (Oaxaca, México: Fondo Editorial, IEEPO, 2001), 68; and Winter y Bartolomé, "Tiempo y espacio en Monte Albán," 67. Winter makes similar points about these three overlapping calendars in Marcus Winter, "La religión, el poder y las bases de la complejidad social en Oaxaca Prehispánica," en *Bases de la complejidad social en Oaxaca: Memoria de la Cuarta Mesa Redonda de Monte Albán*, ed. Nelly M. Robles García (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2009), 515. And for additional reflections on the sizing of Monte Albán's ballcourts and stairways, which seems to express both astronomically-based and more strictly geometrical proportions, see Peeler and Winter, *Sun Above, Sun Below*, 4-9.

[117] Winter y Bartolomé, "Tiempo y espacio en Monte Albán," 67 (my translation and my italics), qualify that correspondence by noting, "The three cycles of time (260, 365 and 584 days) were *used in proportions (not in specific units)* to draw some distances; for example, [1] the length of the ball courts, [2] the width of some stairways in the Main Plaza, as well as [3] the dimensions of the Main Plaza." Regarding the geometrical proportioning (as well as astronomical references) in Building J, which may be confined to the 260- and 365-day counts, see Peeler and Winter, *Sun Above, Sun Below*, 12, 26; for a diagram that helps to clarify the not-obvious way in which they see the 260-to-365 ratio is reflected in the ground plan of Building J—which requires considering *the full triangle* that formed by extending the sides of *the truncated triangle* footprint

words, "temporal notions were projected towards spatial notions, configuring a shared unit of meaning."[118] They note, moreover, that all three of these calendrical cycles are ultimately "derived from observations of the sky," and to that important extent are based on cosmic or celestial rhythms.[119] And, furthermore, Winter directs attention to less apparent ways in which such principles of proportionality, not unlike the logic of homologized architecture, could have been operating at many scales when he maintains that, not just individual buildings and intrasite relationships, but also "the distances between Monte Albán and San José Mogote, and Monte Albán and Dainzú are in calendrical proportions."[120]

Interpreted as an expression of the homology priority (I-A), this coordination of calendars and architecture is, as noted, part of an initiative to fashion Monte Albán into a microcosm that conforms to the structure of the macrocosm, and thereby to demonstrate that time, space, celestial movements and social practices all belong to a unified and integrative system. But interpreted alternately as an expression of conventionalized proportionality (this first version of priority I-B), it is less accurate to say that "time was transformed into space" than to note that purportedly all-embracing rhythms discovered via celestial observations were applied both to the creation of calendars and to the proportioning of architectural spaces. In fact, it is conceivable that pre-Columbian calendars, roughly like counterparts to Renaissance buildings manuals or Indian *Silpa Sastra* texts, played an intermediary role by translating the "data" about universalistic principles derived from empirical observations of celestial movements into tangible building prescriptions. Calendars are, in that sense, not so much the bottom line, as it

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of the actual building until they meet out in the open space of the Main Plaza—see, ibid., 14, fig. 9. I will discuss this again in chapter 3 relative to the astronomy priority (I-C).

[118] Winter y Bartolomé, "Tiempo y espacio en Monte Albán," 67; my translation.

[119] See Winter, "Religión de los *Binnigula'sa'*: la evidencia arqueológica," 68-69; or Peeler and Winter, *Sun Above, Sun Below*.

[120] Winter, "Religión de los *Binnigula'sa'*: la evidencia arqueológica," 64; my translation. Peeler, "Los orígenes zapotecos de la astronomía y los calendarios mesoamericanos," 59-61, provides similar comments about the (seeingly) calendrically significant distances between sites in the Valley of Oaxaca. Peeler and Marcus Winter, *Sun Above, Sun Below*, 24, expresses some second thoughts about those distance relations between Monte Albán, San José Mogote and Dainzú.

were, which need to find expression in architecture, as yet one more realm in which all-pervasive rhythms and proportions are respected and expressed. In other words, once ascertained from empirical observations, numbers like 260, 365 and 584 are "conventionalized" insofar as they become formulaic prescriptions on which designers and builders rely. Indeed, as Winter and Bartolomé suggest, both astronomical cycles and the calendrical particulars are privileged knowledge, which are nonetheless rendered into more workman-like guidance for the actual construction of Monte Albán's buildings.[121]

[121] Also with respect to the prospect that the "calendrical proportions" utilized at Monte Albán were actually based on historically established conventions rather than on newly undertaken astronomical observations, and therefore reflect political and "ideological" as well as cosmological concerns, Winter y Bartolomé, "Tiempo y espacio en Monte Albán," 67 (my translation) write: "The use of calendrical proportions in the distances between Monte Albán, San José Mogote and Dainzú—which were occupied from the Rosario phase or before [i.e., before the founding of Monte Albán]—leads us to ask if the proportions were not elaborated [i.e., conventionalized] prior to the foundation of Monte Albán, and the construction of its structures determined by those distances. Perhaps it was for this reason that in Epoch I large columns were built in the city as measuring points referring to other areas… In Period II these measurement columns were replaced by ball courts that had similar meaning…" Additionally with respect to the priority of conventionalized over strictly observation-based proportions and alignments, Jesús Galindo Trejo, "Calendario y orientación astronómica: una práctica ancestral en la Oaxaca prehispánica," en *La pintura mural prehispánica en México*, Beatriz de la Fuente, coord., vol. III, Oaxaca, tomo III (México, D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 2008), 342, besides reconfirming that 260, 365 and 584 are consequential calendrical numbers that figure in the sizing and aligning of Monte Albán buildings, discusses as well the related sacred numbers of 13, 52, 73 and a 65-day count, a Cociyo, four of which equal 260 or one *piye*. More to the present point, Galindo Trejo, while concurring that the Zapotec calendar was ultimately based on careful empirical observations of the sky—that is to say, the calendar was based on "the order of nature [that] could only come from the gods" (p.341)—suggests that once the particulars of the calendar were established, they became sacred and authoritative in their own right. Thus, in his counterintuitive conclusion, he writes, "*In a certain sense, the Mesoamericans [including the Zapotecs at Monte Albán] do not direct buildings to a special direction, but rather towards a given moment [as determined by the calendar]; the time was more important than the direction*." Ibid., 345; my translation, italics added. Or, to rephrase this provocative hypothesis in my rubric, orienting buildings toward actual celestial phenomena (i.e., exercises of the astronomy priority, I-C) is actually less important than orienting buildings with respect to the numbers and day-counts—that is, "sacred precepts of the calendar"—that have been conventionalized over time (i.e., exercises of the convention priority, I-B). In chapter 3 on the astronomy priority (I-C), I will pay fuller attention to Galindo Trejo's extensive comments on "calendrical-astronomical alignments" at Monte Albán.

Likewise, the same interpretive adjustment would give us pause to think somewhat differently about the notion discussed last chapter concerning the possible correspondence of the Monte Albán's layout to a human body—wherein the North Platform is the decision-making head, the Main Plaza is the arms and torso that puts those decisions into effect, and the South Platform is the feet that supports the entire enterprise.[122] Again, the homology line of questioning (priority I-A) leads us to see Zapotec conceptions of human physiology as yet another kind of microcosm that is overlaid on the microcosmic layout of the city; and I find that interpretation persuasive. But again hermeneutical pursuit of instances of the convention priority (I-B) urges one to ask if what is happening at Monte Albán might actually be more similar to the exemplars of Alberti or to the makers of the *Silpa Sastra* manuals, both of whom fastidiously study and measure human bodies in order to determine universalistic proportions and principles that were then codified in texts as a means of operationalizing them in practical building projects. That is to say, while careful observations of celestial bodies are seemingly the best venue in which to identify such ubiquitously-relevant principles, sky phenomena are not the only means of access to those insights. Additionally, the measurements of human bodies, along with studied examinations of other natural species and processes—activities in which we can be certain that pre-Columbian Oaxacans made themselves quite expert—all become resources for ascertaining "universalistic principles" that are then conventionalized, disseminated and put to service in architectural construction. In short, that ancient Oaxacans had something akin to conventionalized building rulebooks and manuals is entirely plausible.[123]

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[122] See Ubaldo López García, "Conceptualización vernácula en lugares sagrados," in *Sociedad y patrimonio arqueológico en el valle de Oaxaca: Memoria de la Segunda Mesa Redonda de Monte Albán*, ed. Nelly M. Robles García (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2002), 292, for a discussion of contemporary Mixtec conceptions of the human body and cosmos that makes no direct reference to Monte Albán. And recall also the comments from Raúl Matadamas, "La arqueología y el presente en las comunidades oaxaqueñas," in *Sociedad y patrimonio arqueológico en el valle de Oaxaca: Memoria de la Segunda Mesa Redonda de Monte Albán*, ed. Nelly M. Robles García (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2002), 120, cited last chapter, concerning indigenous Oaxacan conceptions of hills and mountains as human bodies with heads, bodies and feet.

[123] Regarding parallels at Monte Albán to the sorts of geometrical interbuilding relationships and sightlines that Aveni, Hartung and others point out at various Maya sites, it is worth noting that in some published versions of the impressively accurate (and frequently reprinted) topographic site of Monte Albán that Alfonso Caso commissioned in the 1920s he superimposes, without explicit explanation, numerous sightlines between structures in the Main Plaza as if to signal

In sum on this first variation, then, I note repeatedly that all of the orientational priorities explored in these first three chapters are more often mutually supportive means of allurement than antagonists; and, methodologically speaking, it is always easier to collapse rather than maintain the fine distinctions among them. But even where the distinctions seem persnickety and somewhat strained, there is *heuristic utility* in trying to appreciate homology (priority I-A) and convention (priority I-B) as two somewhat different means of making Monte Albán alluring, inviting and compelling. At any rate, consider next a second variation on the conventionality theme that is, it seems, much less germane at the Zapotec capital.

B. Divinely Initiated Directives: Design Stipulations (Ostensibly) Delivered by God(s)

The second generalized variation on the convention priority (I-B) involves ritual-architectural configurations that conform to axiomatic requirements that are, instead of built into the structure of the universe, delivered by divine revelation or decree. These are rules of architectural design understood to have been proclaimed by god(s), so to speak. And thus in these cases, adherence to the pertinent stipulations owes more to faithfulness and obedience, or perhaps an effort to placate or please a god, than to careful observation and measurement. If seldom considered and difficult to document at Monte Albán, this alternative, which depends on particular conceptions of divine agency, is nonetheless widely relevant in many contexts.

(what he sees as) interbuilding relationships and alignments. A version of the plan first appears *without the sightlines* in Alfonso Caso, *Las esteles zapotecas* (1928), or, in its reprinted version, Alfonso Caso, *Obras: El México Antiguo: Mixtecas y Zapotecas*, vol. 2 (México, D.F.: El Colegio Nacional, 2002), 89. A version of the same plan *with the sightlines drawn in* appears, for instance, in Alfonso Caso, *El tesoro de Monte Albán* (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1969), 17.

1. Divine Directives as a Cross-Cultural Phenomenon: Design Standards in the Quran, Torah and Bible

As a cross-cultural phenomenon, this second alternative, wherein architectural prescriptions are mandated by a god, may be variously recorded in personal testimony, oral tradition and/or sacred scripture. In Islam, for instance, there is a strong, diversified and continuing exemplification of the first variation on the convention priority (I-B) in which Sufism especially relies on a vibrant tradition of "symbolic and qualitative mathematics" for innumerable architectural design solutions like those in the dome of Shaykh Lutfullah Mosque or the colonnade of Maydan-i-Shah in Isfahan, Iran, both of which are conceived as reiterating celestial, universal rhythms and proportions.[124] And famously apparent, for instance, in the Dome of the Rock, the strategic manipulation of basic geometrical shapes—circles, squares and octagons or, in three dimensions, cubes and conical or spherical domes—is evidenced as well in virtually all Muslim regions and eras.[125]

Additionally, however, Islamic materials are heuristically helpful in bringing to our attention this second permutation on the conventionality theme wherein ritual-architectural conventions are revealed by a god. Instead of being adduced primarily via observations of nature or mathematical calculations, in some cases, Muslim design standards and proportions are (understood to have been) delivered directly by Allah, "the perfect builder of heaven and other

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[124] Nadar Ardalan and Laleh Bakhtiar, *The Sense of Unity: The Sufi Tradition in Persian Architecture*, Publication of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, no. 9 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 96. Ardalan and Bakhtiar provide extensive remarks and examples relative to architectural (especially Persian) manifestations of Sufi conceptions of "the mathematics of proportion." See especially ibid., 21-31, where they accentuate the difference between a traditional Muslim "symbolic and qualitative mathematics" and Renaissance mathematics; and ibid., 96, where they address the specific cases of the dome of Shaykh Lutfullah Mosque and the colonnade of Maydan-i-Shah.

[125] Regarding the very heavy reliance on geometrical schemes in Islamic architecture, specifically at the Dome of the Rock, see Titus Burkhardt, *Art of Islam: Language and Meaning* (London: World of Islam Publications, 1976), 9-14; and for a whole series of relevant remarks and examples of geometry and proportionality in Islamic architecture, see, ibid., chap. 4, "The Sphere and the Cube."

constructions in paradise," and then recorded in sacred scripture.[126] The general, divinely sanctioned layout of the mosque, for instance, was laid down in the Quran so that, in those instances, conformity to architectural prescriptions constitutes, moreover, a willful act of submission to Allah (thus merging the priority of adherence to convention, I-B, with that of the commemoration of divinity, II-A).[127]

In Judaism, though matters of proportioning and geo-mathematical design are considerably less prominent, this divinely-inspired variation on the conventionality theme in which a god, in this case Yahweh, delivers the design directives that are subsequently recorded in scripture, finds additional direct parallels. Both the Torah itself and the *halakhic* (religious-legal) literature address in detailed fashion innumerable "religious commands with a spatial import," including, for instance, explicit advice on the boundaries of the land of Israel; Sabbath restrictions on travel; urban, village and agricultural land usage; ecological and environmental issues; the construction of buildings suitable for the provision of specific religious functions; and even building details such as the plan, window placement and location of houses and synagogues so as to avoid "visual damage."[128] Moreover, as Yossi Katz's researches confirm, such Jewish spatial and architectural policies ought to—and do—remain operative in the erection and organization of Orthodox neighborhoods and settlements during the modern era and even to the present.[129]

And among Christianities, besides the Western tradition of building manuals like Alberti's, Eastern Orthodox churches, and especially the icons so prominent in those contexts, if

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[126] Ahmad Ghabin, "Architecture and Building According to the Quran," *WEI International Academic Conference Proceedings; Antalya, Turkey* (January 14-16, 2013), 38.

[127] See, for instance, Burkhardt, *Art of Islam*, 70.

[128] See Yossi Katz, "The Jewish Religion and Spatial and Communal Organization: The Implementation of Jewish Religious Law in the Building of Urban Neighborhoods and Jewish Agricultural Settlements at the Close of the Nineteenth Century," in *Sacred Places and Profane Spaces: Essays in the Geographics of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, eds. Jamie Scott and Paul Simpson-Housley (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), 3-7.

[129] See Katz, "The Jewish Religion and Spatial and Communal Organization," 6-16.

they are to be efficacious in transmitting divine grace to human devotees, must be configured according to traditional formulas.[130] But in the Bible too one encounters design stipulations that are authoritative, not because of they are inherent in the universe, but because they are (understood to have been) delivered directly by God, who, like Allah, is himself frequently described as an architect. In Exodus, for instance, God not only commands, "Let them construct a sanctuary for Me, that I may dwell among them,"[131] but likewise delivers specific instructions such as:

> "Moreover you shall make the tabernacle with ten curtains of fine twisted linen and blue and purple and scarlet material; you shall make them with cherubim, the work of a skillful workman… And you shall make the altar of acacia wood, five cubits long and five cubits wide; the altar shall be square, and its height shall be three cubits."[132]

Moreover, there are Biblical references concerning God's prescriptive commands to avoid the use of iron tools in the building of worship places and to compensate construction workers fairly for their labor.[133]

In short, then, as a cross-culturally relevant option, each of the Abrahamic traditions presents circumstances in which God takes not simply a general interest in architectural design but, furthermore, presents highly detailed provisions that are authoritative first and foremost as the prerogative and command of a deity. No other rationale is required to make these legitimate rules, which ought, therefore, to be followed in human constructions.

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[130] See, for instance, Margaret E. Kenna, "Icons in Theory and Practice: An Orthodox Christian Example," *History of Religions* 24 (May 1985): 345-68. Also see Paul Hetherington, *The "Painter's Manual" of Dionysius of Fourna* (London: Sagittarius Press, 1974), which speaks to rules and canons of proportion for Orthodox iconography and church design, for which patrons likewise claim divine inspiration.

[131] Exodus 25: 8-9.

[132] Exodus 26: 1-37; and Exodus 27:1.

[133] Regarding the avoidance of iron tools, see, for instance, Exodus 20:25, 1 Kings 6:7 and Joshua 8:31; and regarding the proper treatment of laborers, see, for instance, Jeremiah 22:13-14.

2. Divine Directives in Mesoamerica and Monte Albán: Unexplored Possibilities and Debated Conceptions of Divinity

Whether ancient Mesoamericans, and specifically pre-Columbian Oaxacans, adhered to architectural design directives understood to have been delivered by the gods is a thorny, little-discussed possibility. That the most prominent cross-cultural exemplars of this alternative come from monotheistic Abrahamic traditions is telling of the fact that only certain conceptions of divinity—most obviously the notion of a commanding anthropomorphic god who intervenes in the affairs of humans—are really suited to deliver such design stipulations; and this thus raises the vexatious question as to the extent to which ancient Mesoamericans did or did not have "gods" who exercised that sort of personal prerogative over people's activities, including their building projects. Indeed, as we will see in chapter 4 on the divinity priority (II-A), the single most hotly debated aspect of ancient Zapotec religion, and perhaps even contemporary indigenous Oaxaca religions, concerns the status of the supernatural entities; and that contentious issue ripples through numerous of the categories in my morphology of ritual-architectural priorities. Without preempting my fuller comments on the vigorous debate as to whether ancient Oaxacans were believers in humanlike gods or impersonal supernatural forces, or perhaps some combination of the two, here, as a kind of sampling, I briefly enumerate five alternate stances on the topic, each of which has ramifications for the relevance of this second variation on the convention priority (I-B). All of these are alternatives to which I will return later.

First, at one end of the spectrum is the insistence, which is most often associated with Joyce Marcus, that ancient Oaxacans were fully or largely "animatistic" insofar as they conceived of divinity strictly in terms of impersonal supernatural powers or energy—notably the "sacred life force" known as *pèe* ("wind," "breath" or "spirit")—rather than with reference to the pantheon of personal gods that is usually attributed to them.[134] If one embraces that non-anthropomorphic stance, then the question of "gods" who decree rules of design is essentially

[134] Of numerous possibilities, see, for instance, Joyce Marcus, "Zapotec Religion," Topic 97 in *The Cloud People*, eds. Kent V. Flannery and Joyce Marcus (New York: Academic Press, 1983), 345-51; or Joyce Marcus and Kent V. Flannery, *Zapotec Civilization: How Urban Society Evolved in Mexico's Oaxaca Valley* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996), 19ff.

null, a complete non-applicability of this variation on the convention theme that is, in itself, noteworthy.

Be that as it, those scholars who accept some version of the more traditional view that pre-Columbian Zapotecs, irrespective of animatistic tendencies, also believed in anthropomorphous gods with various provinces of authority represent a very wide spectrum of opinions. As a second option, for instance, if one affirms the position articulated in the quote by Alfredo López Austin earlier in this section wherein deities, not much differently from humans, are subject to the universalistic rhythms of the universe—in his words, "symmetry and sacred numbers are strict organizational bases, even for the gods"[135]—then, as noted, the first variation on the convention priority (I-B) is very important, but this second sub-category is largely irrelevant. According to this take on Mesoamerican conceptions of divinity, gods, like humans, are compelled to comply with rather than to create generalized design specifications.[136]

A third way of depicting indigenous conceptions of divinity comes in the position that Arthur Joyce borrows from John Monaghan's ethnography, *The Covenants with Earth and Rain: Exchange, Sacrifice, and Revelation in Mixtec Society*,[137] wherein ancient Oaxacans operated with a kind of "sacred covenant" or contractual agreement "that established relations of debt and merit between humans and gods, with sacrifice as a fundamental condition of human existence."[138] If one accepts that characterization, then the prospect that elements of Monte

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[135] López Austin, "Sobre el concepto de *cosmovisión*," 28; my translation. As I will discuss in chapter 4 on the divinity priority (II-A), Alfredo López Austin, "Los ritos: un juego de definiciones," *Arqueología Mexicana*, vol. VI, no. 34 (1998): 4-17, addresses head-on the much-debated question of impersonal versus personal conceptions of divinity, and concludes that both are at play in most Mesoamerican contexts.

[136] Though the notion that god(s) are either subject to or impressed by the perfect proportioning of earthly architecture may, at first, seem farfetched, see Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, vol. II, 61-62, for parallels in both Hinduism and Orthodox Christianity

[137] John D. Monaghan, *The Covenants with Earth and Rain: Exchange, Sacrifice, and Revelation in Mixtec Society* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999).

[138] Arthur A. Joyce, *Mixtecs, Zapotecs, and Chatinos: Ancient Peoples of Southern Mexico* (Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 60. It is perhaps worth noting some slippage in Joyce's characterization of eve-of-the-Conquest Oaxacan religion insofar as he sometimes

Albán were built in conformity to (what were considered) the express wishes or commands of a god may be somewhat stronger. And yet, while the debatable choice of referring to this human-divine accord as a "covenant" suggests something more like the two-way legalistic arrangement between humans and a personalistic god that operates in Judaism,[139] neither Joyce nor Monaghan, it seems, discerns among indigenous Oaxacans anything resembling the sort of directives for architectural design for which Yahweh is credited in the Torah and *halakhah* legal texts.

Fourth, if one extrapolates into the pre-Columbian context, Miguel Bartolomé's posit that, "All the [contemporary] religious configurations of Oaxaca, including the so-called local 'popular' Catholicisms, can be considered polytheistic inasmuch as the referents of sacredness and worship are manifold,"[140] then the possibilities for applicability of this version of the convention priority (I-B) are not much better. Nuancing his qualified use of that loaded term, which is informed by Pedro Carrasco's influential assertion of polytheism among the Mexica, Bartolomé explains that

> "The multiple experience of the sacred, as I have called polytheism, does not involve multiple worship of independent deities, but their articulation in terms of the preexisting

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intimates that the foremost priority is challenging and interacting with an *impersonal* "vital force that animated all 'living' things" (e.g., p. 56), yet much more often he relies on the notion of a "sacred covenant" between humans and the divine, a metaphor that suggests Oaxacans were conceiving the divine in *more personal, anthropomorphic* ways. Though the two alternatives are perhaps not mutually exclusive, at this point, students of religion are more likely to embrace the former than the latter.

[139] On the notion of covenant, which is more prominent in Judaism than in Christianity or Islam, see Delbert R. Hillars, *Covenant: The History of a Biblical Idea* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1969); or, for a brief overview, Delbert R. Hillars, "Covenant," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, 1st ed., ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan, 1987), vol. 4, 134-37.

[140] Miguel Alberto Bartolomé, "Elogio del politeísmo: las cosmovisiones indígenas en Oaxaca," in *Bases de la complejidad social en Oaxaca: Memoria de la Cuarta Mesa Redonda de Monte Albán*, ed. Nelly M. Robles García (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2009), 629; my translation.

> whole or system [characteristic of indigenous Oaxacan religions], since all are lived expressions of the same sacredness."[141]

He contends, in other words, that pre-Columbian Oaxacans adhered to a "flexible and agglutinant" version of polytheism that enabled the fairly comfortable and efficient colonial-era incorporation of Christian elements in ways that maintained and reproduced, rather than compromised, their long-established "operative cultural logics."[142] And while this broadly polytheistic conception, according to Bartolomé, also stresses the importance of "reciprocal interchanges that are maintained with the sacred,"[143] it does not, as one might expect, present multiple anthropomorphic "gods." Consequently, here again, the prospect of deities mandating the specific architectural configuration of worship spaces is, it seems, quite fully irrelevant.

Or alternatively, a fifth option comes in Víctor de la Cruz's contrastive argument that Zapotec religion is more suitably assessed as monotheistic. In his (not-widely-shared) view, attributions of polytheism to the Zapotecs are based on language and translation errors of "the multiple names and forms of Pitao," which are actually many invocations of the same supreme creative deity, "who evolves ideologically and iconographically from one stage to another in the history of the Mesoamerican religion with different titles."[144] De la Cruz argues that, while faulty linguistic knowledge has led to the erroneous posit of many gods, Zapotecs' subtle ideas about divinity, not less than Christians' adherence to the notion of the Trinity, are best characterized as "monotheistic."[145] That assertion, which may be more a polemical argument for

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[141] Bartolomé, "Elogio del politeísmo: las cosmovisiones indígenas en Oaxaca," 633; my translation.

[142] Bartolomé, "Elogio del politeísmo: las cosmovisiones indígenas en Oaxaca," 634, 637; my translations.

[143] Bartolomé, "Elogio del politeísmo: las cosmovisiones indígenas en Oaxaca," 624, 634; my translation.

[144] Víctor de la Cruz, "Los múltiples nombres y formas de Pitao," in *Bases de la complejidad social en Oaxaca: Memoria de la Cuarta Mesa Redonda de Monte Albán*, ed. Nelly M. Robles García (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2009), 577; my translation. Note, by the way that de la Cruz is criticizing a conception of "Zapotec polytheism" that is very different from the nuanced version of polytheism that Bartolomé describes.

[145] de la Cruz, "Los múltiples nombres y formas de Pitao," 580.

parity between Zapotec religion and Christianity than a historical corrective, takes us in the direction of a kind of Oaxacan supreme being, divine essence, Godhead or perhaps what Mircea Eliade terms a "*deus otiosus*" who, though eminently powerful, withdraws to some remote locale from which to preside over the larger contours of life, destiny and death without, however, taking an active interest in more prosaic human activities, presumably building projects among them.[146] And thus, even if this is an accurate representation of indigenous Oaxacan conceptions of divinity, it does not speak to the sort of engaged personal god who would be prescribing architectural rules and guidance.

In sum on this second permutation of the convention priority (I-B), then, pursuit of the possibility that elements of Monte Albán's architecture were constructed in conformity to dictates from gods draws us into the quagmire of ancient Oaxacan conceptions of divinity. But, irrespective of how one resolves that controversial issue, there is, at present, very little warrant to see this as important priority in the Zapotec capital's ritual-architectural program. Recall, though, that heuristic questions answered in the negative are also instructive as to the guiding principles that do account for Monte Albán's built environment; and it is, moreover, not unimaginable that future study could produce more affirming replies.[147] Be that as it may, look next to a variation on the theme that has far more certain interpretive promise.

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[146] See Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (London: Sheed and Ward, 1958), 38-50.

[147] For instance, the passing comment of Bruce G. Trigger, "Monumental Architecture: A Thermodynamic Explanation of Symbolic Behaviour," *World Archaeology* 22 (1990), 122, that those who commissioned monumental constructions "would have viewed theological goals, such as serving and winning the favour of the gods, as being highly practical," which is quoted by Ivan Sprajc, "Astronomy, Architecture, and Landscape in Prehispanic Mesoamerica," *Journal of Archaeological Research*, vol. 26 no. 2 (2018), 237, signals a presumption that this is a priority Mesoamerican architecture. But this is an instance in which cross-cultural comparison could mislead rather than inform us.

C. Architectural Appropriations and Archaisms: The Virtues and Appeal of Unoriginality

With the third and very different variation on the convention priority (I-B)—epitomized by George Kubler's apt term "deliberate archaisms," that is, artists' and builders' self-conscious imitation of earlier works of art and architecture[148]—we turn to an alternative that is much more clearly relevant to the ritual-architectural program of Monte Albán. This more straightforward and cross-culturally pervasive variation on allurement via conventionality entails the willful and strategic imitation of built forms, configurations or motifs, borrowed from esteemed predecessors or contemporaries, often at a considerable remove in either space or time. "Real" historical descent lines are not required, and the models may or may not be "real" historical people. The authority—and thus "allure"—of deliberately derivative ritual-architectural styles and practices of this sort depend less from their correspondence to universal cosmo-magical rhythms or to divinely decreed design requirements than, to accentuate a third option, from their apparent correspondence to patterns employed by prestigious human or mythico-historic exemplars.[149] This is imitative architecture that, by contrast to the sort of covert plagiarism that tries to obscure the fact of something borrowed, makes patentedly clear that prototypical models are being replicated. This sort of ritual-architectural design places a premium on *un*originality.

I again proceed with very brief comparative instantiation of this permutation, followed by similarly brief consideration of its broadly Mesoamerican applicability, before addressing directly ways in which this alternative is relevant, albeit somewhat differently, in several of Monte Albán's main periods.

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[148] On "archaism," see, as noted earlier, Kubler, "Period, Style and Meaning," 143-44 (or pages 20-22 in the reprinted version of that article); and Kubler, *Art and Architecture in Ancient America*, Introduction. And note again that in glossing Kubler's term as "*deliberate* archaism" I am working to preserve rather than subvert his use of the concept.

[149] This version of the convention priority (I-B), then, again broaches on the matter of ritual-architectural commemoration of sacred history (priority II-B), which I will discuss in chapter 5.

1. Architectural Appropriations and Archaisms as a Cross-Cultural Phenomenon: Legitimacy via Imitation and Standardization

Cross-cultural examples of ritual-architectural programs that, in one way or another, encourage and commend unoriginality are common in the extreme. Occasionally outsiders, say, invaders or conquerors, coerce the replication of their art and architecture; but more prevalent and pertinent as a mode of ritual-architectural allurement are instances of voluntary, indeed enthusiastic, copying of architectural forms other than one's own. The phenomenon of deliberate and unmasked imitation of prominent precedents is, in fact, so widespread that brief comments are enough to make the general point.

The exceptionally long and complex architectural reception history of Hagia Sophia, for instance, demonstrates constant maneuvering to share in its prized pedigree.[150] During its career as an Eastern Orthodox cathedral, it served as the primary model for countless Christian churches; and then, following the Muslim conquest of Constantinople when it was transformed in 1453 into an Ottoman mosque, it became the supreme prototype for innumerable other 15th and 16th century mosques. Concerns about appearing derivative were far outweighed by the rewards of establishing a connection, however historically tenuous, with the famed Hagia Sophia. By the same token, so many Sikh temples have been directly modeled after the Golden Temple at Amritsar in north India that it has been described as "the sheet anchor of the stylistic index of the entire range of Sikh architecture."[151] Again, specters of inordinate conformity and predictability cede to the appeal of demonstrating one's participation in a highly esteemed tradition.

Likewise, virtually all Theravada Buddhist wats in Thailand, irrespective of individual differences in layout and style, so closely adhere to the same design principles, multi-tier roof profiles and color schemes that their function as Theravada temples is immediately recognizable.

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[150] Bissera V. Pentcheva, *Hagia Sophia: Sound, Space, and Spirit in Byzantium* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2017).

[151] Pardeep Singh Arashi, *Sihk Architecture in Punjab* (New Delhi: Intellectual Publishing House, 1986), 142.

Deviation from that extreme standardization would to put at risk their privileged status, and, accordingly, the few commercial buildings that dare to borrow those distinctive temple elements, because such secular usages dilute and jeopardize the hard-earned prestige associated with those features, are subject to harsh criticism.[152] As in the previous examples, aspirations to the unique, though in lots of modern contexts the first priority, are anathema. That these Thai temple constructions are directly patterned after a timeworn formula is intended and perceived as a strength rather than weakness.

Along with explicitly religious buildings, institutional architecture—where the need to appear serious and worthy of respect is paramount—is not only, as noted earlier, a prime venue for the use of universalized proportions such as Doric columns and façades (that is, the first permutation the convention priority); but also, at least as important is this third permutation of deliberate and strategic imitation. Though an imperfect generalization, American city halls, court houses, governmental offices, libraries, schools and museums all have characteristic appearances that largely conform to, rather than subvert, expectations about the sorts of public functions and authority that are wielded in these places. Note, for instance, the uniformity among state capital buildings wherein that of Texas is only the nearest duplicate among numerous, indeed the great majority, that replicate in unmistakable ways the domed design of the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C. Replication of the tried-and-true connotes reliability.

Similarly urgent to exude a sense of reliability, during the second half of the 19th century, countless emergent American colleges sought out the services of Frederick Law Olmsted, "the father of American landscape design," and then from the 1895 to 1950 that of Olmstead's sons, to design campuses that would, among other things, authorize their schools as high quality and dependable institutions. Together these works totaled more than 350. Though each had distinctive features, all of them, like Thai temples, conformed to principles and conventions that made them immediately recognizable as college campuses. In fact, a side-by-side inventory of

[152] Less noteworthy as an example of deliberate and strategic imitation is a case like that of the Bibi-ka-Maqbara ("Tomb of the Lady'), built in 1679 in Aurangabad, India as a mausoleum for Aurangzeb's wife, Rabia-ud-Daurani, which is indelicately described as "the poor man's Taj Mahal" because it is an unabashed rather than clandestine attempt at replicating its lovelier and more famous precedent.

the Old Main structures featured in many of those plans, original buildings that in most cases have been carefully maintained to the present, are startlingly similar. Moreover, the campus of Yale University, for instance, among the many on which Olmstead worked and not unlike other Ivy League schools, deliberately reiterates the eminent architectures of Oxford and Cambridge, which adds yet another layer of credibility.[153] Though perhaps ironic for sites of higher education, the new and different carries none of the cachet of participating in a strongly standardized pattern. School authorities must, at least as a first step, answer parent and student expectations as to what college should look like, before eventually working to undermine and expand those preconceptions.

To enumerate more examples is easy but unnecessary insofar as these already remind us of the twofold structure of ritual-architectural events wherein any ("back-half") attempt at demonstrating novelty and innovation, for example in university pedagogy, must be grounded in an alluring ("front-half") component that removes all doubt about the heft and reliability of the institution. Even Alberti's claim to legitimacy, his careful anatomical and arithmetical studies notwithstanding, was based largely on a presumed continuity with Vitruvius and "the Ancients."[154] In sum, there is little doubt that, especially in religious and institutional contexts, standardization and the imitation of prestigious precedents—intentional and highly visible archaisms—are both the most common and most foolproof means of giving one's architecture an air of respectability and "allure."

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[153] Tom Wolfe, *From Bauhaus to Our House* (New York: Pocket Books, 1981), 56, for instance, describes how, in the 1940s, Yale undertook "a building program of vast proportions that turned the campus into as close an approximation of Oxford and Cambridge as the mind of man could evise on sorth notice in southern Connecticut."

[154] Alberti, *The Ten Books of Architecture*, is filled with explicit appeals to Vitruvius and "the Ancients."

2. Architectural Appropriations and Archaisms in Mesoamerica: Respect for Predecessors and/or Expedient Strategies of Allurement

No exception to this widely cross-cultural pattern, ancient Mesoamerica is thick with unmistakable instances of anachronistic and cross-regional architectural imitation. Again, though coerced replication is worth consideration, it is the abundance of voluntary and strategic replications of others' architecture that most concerns us here. On this topic, pre-Columbian art historians, Kubler foremost among them, perhaps because they are stifled on so many other fronts—for instance, making reliable judgments about the precise usages of ancient structures—have been tireless in documenting and debating who copied whom.[155] And yet, irrespective of this preoccupation with what Kubler terms "linked sequences,"[156] or what I have described as reuniting parent works with their siblings and offspring, Mesoamericanists have been much less assiduous in discerning *the indigenous logic of such imitation*, which is the topic I am working to address here.

On this elemental question of *motives for copying*, while it might at first blush appear incontestable that the imitation of an earlier (or sometimes contemporary) group's art and architecture is motivated primarily by a sense of appreciation and respect for those peoples, the Mesoamerican evidence puts that seemingly simple reply in doubt. Certainly, conventionality and ritual-architectural imitation—as a mode of existential orientation—does position one between a respected past and a expectant future; and, in that sense, copying earlier art forms does seem to express an actual affinity and perhaps even reverence for the parent cultures that are embraced as models. Nevertheless, a closer look as some instances of deliberate archaism in Mesoamerica frequently impresses one with just how poorly informed (or perhaps just indifferent) the copiers were with the empirical realities of the peoples and contexts they utilized

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[155] Regarding the heuristic merits and limitations of such efforts, see Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, vol. I, chap. 10, the subsection on "Organization by Tradition: Reuniting Architectural Parents and Offspring" (pp. 166-67). Also see Herbert J. Spinden, *A Study of Maya Art: Its Subject Matter and Historical Development* (New York: Dover Publications, 1975 [originally 1913]), 175, where he develops a distinction between "the archaistic" and "the truly archaic" in Maya art.

[156] Kubler, *The Shape of Time*, 33.

as paradigmatic resources and models. As noted, "real" historical descent lines are not required, and the models may or may not be "real" historical people. But these decidedly uninformed reusages—that is, reuses that replicate formal elements without, however, transferring into the new contexts the substance and meaning of those forms—lead one to suspect that, in ancient Mesoamerica, so-termed archaisms, as a rule, have much less to do with expressions of deference and respect for predecessors (or contemporaries) than with cagey strategies of ritual-architectural allurement.

For example, in many cases, distinguished building styles or sculptural techniques were merely copied with little modification, or sometimes imperfectly synthesized with additional well-known pictographic elements into some sort of eclectic iconographic program that reflects little or no understanding of their original usages. Eric Thompson, for instance, described how, in the Río Bec area, the reverence for antique hieroglyphic stelae was so uninformed that most of the old blocks of inscriptions were re-erected upside down and in ridiculous combinations.[157] And yet, even in their cannibalized decontextualization, those stelae could function as components of allurement that, perhaps ironically, added a kind of heft and legitimacy to their appropriators.

More intriguing with respect to my morphology are those circumstances in which urban alignments that originate as empirical, "functional" astronomical references (thus exemplifying the astronomy priority, I-C), are subsequently imitated, sometimes centuries later, in contexts where those traditionally revered systems are totally irrelevant to empirical celestial phenomena. That is to say, the alignments simply do not work in relation to the sky and landscape features of their new contexts; and thus, these cases evince the convention priority (I-B) superseding that of working astronomical alignments (I-C). An orientational pattern uniquely relevant to the Honduran skies of Copán, for example, was duplicated at several other Maya sites where the same celestial views would not have been possible.[158] Or, even more famously, the 15°28' east-

[157] J. Eric S. Thompson, *Maya Archaeologist* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), 260.

[158] On astronomically informed alignments at Copán, see Anthony F. Aveni, *Skywatchers: A Revised and Updated Version of* Skywatchers of Ancient Mexico (Austin: University of Texas

of-north orientation of Teotihuacan, which, according to Aveni's surmise, probably originated in response to the movements of the Pleiades with respect to the mountains surrounding that particular site, was mimicked as a non-operative alignment by a whole family of sites, including several built hundreds of miles away in mountainless Yucatan, nearly a millennium after the collapse of Teotihuacan.[159] Here as well, though the privileged sightlines and visual effects orchestrated in its original Teotihuacan context simply do not occur in those other places, status and credibility are, it seems, enhanced through replicating the by-then-conventionalized alignment.[160]

The remarkably eclectic ceremonial plaza of Chichén Itzá, for instance, provides another sort of example that is similar to and, as we'll see, different from Monte Albán in even more intriguing and direct ways. In the same way that Monte Albán enhances the intrinsic allure of its natural mountaintop setting with extensive homologized building (i.e., exercises of the homology

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Press, 2001), 250-59. On the debated prospect of "nonfunctional copies" of the working solar observatory at the Maya site Uaxactún, see ibid., 291-92.

[159] On his (debated) proposal concerning the Pleiades and Teotihuacan's 15°28' alignment, see Aveni, *Skywatchers*, 227-28. Regarding what he terms "the 17° family as nonfunctional imitations following the tradition established by Teotihuacan architects and astronomers," see Aveni, *Skywatchers*, 234. E. Wyllys Andrews, "Dzibilchaltún," in *Supplement to Handbook of Middle American Indians* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), vol. 1, 330-31, for instance, discusses the imitation of the 17° east-of-north Teotihuacan alignment at Dzibilchaltún in northern Yucatan. Also note that, in chapter 3 on the astronomy priority (I-C), I will discuss the alternate explanation of Teotihuacan's skewed orientation presented in Peeler and Winter, *Sun Above, Sun Below*, 15-22.

[160] By the same token, Aveni, *Skywatchers*, 234, presents Franz Tichy's aerial surveys, which show that, even in the 1970s (and probably now) agricultural fields in Central Mexico are laid out according to "alignment families" of 7°, 17° and 26° east of north that, while seemingly based on long-forgotten astronomical observations, persist as valued orientational conventions. Reflecting the same sort of shifting ritual-architectural priorities, as we'll see next chapter when I engage a bold hypothesis ventured in Peeler and Winter, *Sun Above, Sun Below*, 26-27, there is warrant to believe that the eventually pan-Mesoamerican 260-day "sacred calendar" owes its origin to Oaxaca-specific celestial observations (i.e., a vintage instance of the astronomy priority, I-C), which were non-operative and largely forgotten in all of the other contexts—which is to say, all of the other regions of the superarea—where that 260-day cycle was subsequent embraced and integrated into their respective ritual-architectural programs (i.e., a similarly perfect exemplification of the convention priority, I-B).

priority, I-A), we saw last chapter how Chichén Itzá augments its already-alluring placement adjacent to the Sacred Cenote, a natural feature of famously hierophanic properties as an entryway to the realm of the gods, with heavily homologized constructions of which the calendrically referenced Castillo is the prime example.[161] But then, in what I describe as another layer of strategies of allurement—a ploy that reflects this third variation on the convention priority (I-B)—Late Classic Yucatan Maya architects collect within the plaza surrounding the microcosmic Castillo, architectural "archaisms" or allusions drawn from an exceptionally wide inventory of earlier and distant Mesoamerican contexts. Specifically, as Kubler argues, Chichén Itzá's so-termed "Toltec Maya" architecture actually entails intentional allusions not only to the Toltec capital of Tula, which is the most unmistakable source, but also Teotihuacan, numerous Maya sites such as Uaxactún, Tikal, Palenque and Uxmal, and even Monte Albán and Mitla.[162] Via this sort of "architectural syncretism," the designers of Chichén Itzá, a pilgrimage destination that attracted people from across Mesoamerica, thereby enabled, to the extent that this "strategy of instigation" worked, even far-travelling visitors to find something familiar, relevant and thus alluring to them, in the highly cosmopolitan ceremonial plaza. As I have argued elsewhere, this sort of imitation and assemblage of largely disconnected architectural elements—a kind of *de*contextualization and then *re*contextualization—expropriates features that may have, in their original contexts, served as components of substantive content (i.e., in the "back-half" of those ritual-architectural events) and now "demotes" them, in their imitative

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[161] Here I draw on the interpretation of Chichén Itzá, and particularly the discussion of its "strategies of ritual-architectural allurement," presented in Lindsay Jones, *Twin City Tales: A Hermeneutical Reassessment of Tula and Chichén Itzá* (Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1995), 377-89.

[162] With respect to abundant different precedents for the so-labeled "Toltec Maya" architecture of Chichén Itzá, George Kubler, "Chichén Itzá y Tula," *Estudios de Cultura Maya*, 1 (1961), 47-79, both rejects the then-standard argument that Toltecs from Tula had imposed their architectural forms on the Yucatec Maya and argues, alternatively, that the site is, owing to the initiative of those Maya, much more cosmopolitan and eclectic than the traditional comparison only with Tula permits. For a summary of Kubler's stance considering innumerable different "parent culture" sources for the abundant "intentional archaisms" at Chichén Itzá, Monte Albán among them, see Jones, *Twin City Tales*, 383-84. Also, Donald Robertson, *Pre-Columbian Architecture* (New York: George Braziller, 1963), 41, for instance, notes parallels between the Chichén Itzá's Castillo pyramid and, not only Tula architecture, but also that of Teotihuacan and Monte Albán.

reuse, to components of allurement (i.e., elements that serve in the "front-half" of Chichén Itzá's ritual-architectural program).[163]

Whether that sort of self-serving appropriation and redeployment of earlier art forms and styles connotes respect or disrespect for one's predecessors is debatable. But it does, in either case, provide a distinct sort of exemplification of Erwin Panofsky's "principle of disjunction," which is based on observations about the ways in medieval and Renaissance architects frequently reused—but deliberated altered the meanings of—Classical art forms.[164] Kubler invokes that principle to caution that Mesoamerican artistic and architectural features retrieved from earlier contexts almost never retain their original meanings (though scholars too frequently assume that they do).[165] Whether due to ignorance, indifference or, much more likely, willful manipulation of the kind that Panofsky accentuates—wherein "members of a successor civilization refashion their inheritance by gearing the predecessor's old forms to new meanings"[166]—Kubler reiterates my recurrent insistence that "continuous form does not predicate continuous meaning."[167] He, in other words, provides another way of calling to our attention that, in my rubric, architectural

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[163] See, for instance, Jones, *Twin City Tales*, 389.

[164] On the "principle of disjunction," see Erwin Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1969).

[165] For a concise summary of how that Panofsky's "principle of disjunction" applies to Mesoamerica, see Kubler, "Period, Style and Meaning in Ancient American Art," 143-44. Kubler's complaint that Mesoamericanists too often presume an inordinate continuity between art forms and their meanings comes in the context of his arguments against reliance on "ethnographic analogy" where he contends that, "The idea of disjunction not only makes every ethnological analogy [for instance, relying on Sahagun's sixteenth-century descriptions of Aztec rituals to interpret thousand-year-earlier Teotihuacan forms] questionable, by insisting on discontinuity rather than its opposite wherever long durations are under discussion, but it also provides a serviceable explanation for the most complex mechanisms of cultural change." Ibid., 144. Regarding his highly qualified agreement with Kubler's stance on ethnographic analogy, see Alfredo López Austin, *The Myths of the Opossum: Pathways of Mesoamerican Mythology*, trans. Bernard R. Ortiz de Montellano and Thelma Ortiz de Montellano (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993), 107, 355-57.

[166] Kubler, "Period, Style and Meaning in Ancient American Art," 143, offers this summary of Panofsky's position.

[167] Kubler, "Period, Style and Meaning in Ancient American Art," 143.

features that were in their original contexts substantive elements (i.e., "back-half" components) are, when they are reused, usually reconfigured as components of allurement (i.e., "front-half" components). Transplanted old architectural forms may or may not be less important in that very common sort of repurposing, but they definitely are serving a very different function in the wider ritual-architectural agenda of their new contexts.

Be that as it may, unquestionably the most prominent and high-profile set of instances of intentional archaism in ancient Mesoamerica involves efforts among numerous peoples to connect themselves to the esteemed mythico-historic Toltec tradition. Providing his resolution of the infamous "Tollan problem," Davíd Carrasco, for example, argues that the much-touted Toltec capital does not correspond to any single geographical or historical site, but rather is "a symbolic city," indeed "a paradigm of urbanism and urban authority," which first arose at Teotihuacan but was then disseminated across the breadth of Mesoamerica.[168] For him, it is a tradition "firmly grounded in the urban situation;" and Quetzalcoatl, the Feathered Serpent in his guise as the Toltec priest-king, is "the founder, organizer, and ruler of an ideal type of city."[169] Accordingly, in the wake of Teotihuacan's collapse, numerous other Late Classic and Postclassic cities—including Xochicalco, Cholula, Tula, Chichén Itzá and, most prominently, the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan—each claimed rightful descent as the "new Toltecs;" and thus, in order to express and sustain that claim to distinction (to which none of them was, in strictly historical terms, deserving), they arranged the layout of their respective cities according to the widely circulated descriptions of Tollan.[170] In all these cases, the strategic manipulation of the built environment in these "other Tollans"—vintage instances of architectural archaism—provided the

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[168] See Davíd Carrasco, *Quetzalcoatl and the Irony of Empire: Myths and Prophecies in the Aztec Tradition*, revised edition (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2001), 64-65, 72-73.

[169] Carrasco, *Quetzalcoatl and the Irony of Empire*, 64.

[170] On attempts by numerous pre-Columbian cities to appropriate the Tollan pedigree, see Carrasco, *Quetzalcoatl and the Irony of Empire*, chap. 3, "Other Tollans." It is important to appreciate—as should become more clear in my closing thoughts at the very end of this chapter—that the wide influence of "the Tollan paradigm of urbanism" described by Carrasco applies only to Late Classic and Postclassic contexts, which is to say, it does *not* apply to the early stages of Monte Albán, which actually precede the emergence of Teotihuacan as a genuine city.

paramount means of making persuasive to themselves and others their connection to that revered tradition.[171]

In the quintessential case of the Aztecs, for instance, desperate to overcome a specter of illegitimacy consequent of their speedy ascent from mercenaries to masters of Central Mexico, their shrewd imitations of Toltec art and architectural forms, which constituted by far the most highly regarded of available mythico-historic models, proved to be among their most expedient strategies for fashioning a distinguished pedigree, even where no actual bloodlines existed.[172] Less widely eclectic but not less strategic than the Maya strategies of allurement undertaken at Chichén Itzá, the grand ceremonial precinct of Tenochtitlan presented, instead of something brand new, which may have intensified alienation and resentment, unequivocal replicas of familiar and highly respected Toltec architecture. Accordingly, visitors to Tenochtitlan were forced to acknowledge, in Gadamer's term, a "continuity of tradition," or perhaps even a "self-recognition" or homecoming of sorts,[173] which, again to the extent this plagiaristic ploy worked, required even reluctant spectators to give serious consideration to the religio-political program of Aztec civic ceremony, however objectionable it may at first have appeared.[174] Moreover, on the

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[171] Though again their comments apply only to the very broad influence of the mythico-historical Tollan paradigm of socio-political organization (which they think would be better designated as "the Zuyuan system") during the Late Classic, Epiclassic and Postclassic eras—that is to say, too late to have been of consequence in Monte Albán—also see Alfredo López Austin and Leonardo López Luján, "The Myth and Reality of Zuyuá: The Feathered Serpent and Mesoamerican Transformation from the Classic to the Postclassic," in *Mesoamerica's Classic Heritage: From Teotihuacan to the Aztecs*, eds. Davíd Carrasco, Lindsay Jones and Scott Sessions (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2000), 21-84. This article is an abbreviated English translation of Alfredo López Austin y Leonardo López Luján, *Mito y realidad de Zuyuá: Serpiente emplumada y las transformaciones mesomericanas del Clásico al Posclásico* (México, D.F.: El Colegio de México, Fideicomiso Historia de las Américas, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1999).

[172] On the Aztecs' astute expropriation of Toltec artistic and religious traditions, see Carrasco, *Quetzalcoatl and the Irony of Empire*, chap. 4.

[173] Regarding the ritual-architectural fabrication of a "continuity of tradition," see, for instance, Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, vol. I, chap. 5, "Allurement and Coercion: The Front-half of Ritual-Architectural Events."

[174] I explore at some length the prospect of a similar, though more widely eclectic, program of ritual-architectural allurement at the pre-Hispanic capital of Chichén Itzá, in Jones, *Twin City Tales*; see especially pp. 377-89.

question of motivations for copying, Carrasco's hypothesis concerning "the irony of empire"—wherein the upstart Aztecs initially embraced the Tollan paradigm as a pragmatic means of gaining legitimacy, but then eventually, even when elements of that contrived heritage had become a liability, found themselves unable to shed their assumed identity[175]—speaks again to the sense in which incentives for copying can be, at once, politically expedient and profoundly heartfelt.

I will in my Closing Thoughts return to this question of Mesoamerican models for urbanism, and particularly to the consequences of Monte Albán emerging in advance of the formulation of the sort of well-circulated paradigm for city life that the Quetzalcoatl-Tollan tradition provides. But simply note for now how the appropriation and intentional archaism of earlier and sometimes contemporary architectural forms constitute a highly prevalent strategy of allurement across ancient Mesoamerica, especially in its urban centers. And with that in mind, consider next some variations on how this third version of the convention priority (I-B) is—or is not—relevant to the more specific case of the Oaxacan capital.

3. Architectural Archaisms and Appropriations at Monte Albán: Doubtful Historical Scenarios but Redoubtable Heuristic Options

By radical contrast to the supposedly complete self-induced cultural isolation to which Sylvanus Morley, back in the 1930s, attributed the excellence of the Classic Maya—a kind of laboratory-like cultural containment that, he argued, also made the Maya ideal objects of scientific study—Alfonso Caso repeatedly attributes the successes of the Monte Albán to exactly the opposite: namely, the verve with which Oaxacans entered into a series of stimulating exchanges with other peoples, cultures and ideas.[176] In fact, as we've seen, Caso maintains, and

[175] Again see Carrasco, *Quetzalcoatl and the Irony of Empire*, chap. 4, "The Return of Quetzalcoatl and the Irony of Empire."

[176] Regarding the extreme contrast between Sylvanus Morley's praise of the Classic Mayas on the grounds that they represented an isolated and uncontaminated, laboratory-like context for scientific study versus Caso's affirmation of the way in which Zapotec excellence depended upon thoughtful and strategic interactions with other Mesoamerican peoples, see Alfonso Caso, "Monte Albán: An Archeological Zone of World-Wide Renown;" in *Mexican Art and Life*, no. 4

then Ignacio Bernal amplifies, that, throughout their long history, Zapotec originality and creativity had invariably thrived rather than suffered from their interactive relations with other Mesoamerican cultures.[177] More specifically, Caso and Bernal, as mentioned earlier, explained Monte Albán's arc from origins to ascendancy in terms of three successive waves of outside stimulation: a Period I Olmec influence, a Period II Maya influence and a Period III Teotihuacan influence. Though the three stimuli were conceived as very different from one another, evidence for each was adduced not only from the ceramic record but also from distinctive art and architectural forms, which fit the broad characterization of "archaisms" or appropriations.

Since the Caso-Bernal era, however, the historical viability of the ways in which they were thinking about Olmec and Maya influences in Oaxaca have been challenged and, by now, largely (but not fully) dismissed;[178] and while the Teotihuacan-Monte Albán connection remains uncontestable, the nature of that relationship continues to be very much contested. We are, at this point, consequently, for each of those three cases, dealing with very uncertain historical circumstances, to put it mildly. Nevertheless, each of the three presents an importantly different variation on the broader theme of architectural appropriation and imitation; the section title, "Doubtful Historical Scenarios but Redoubtable Heuristic Options," is, I think, apt. Accordingly, with all due skepticism about the empirical particulars, consider in turn, versions of

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(October 1938): 307-11; reprinted in Alfonso Caso, *Obras: El México Antiguo: Mixtecas y Zapotecas*, vol. 1 (México, D.F: El Colegio Nacional, 2002), 143-52. And see the discussion of that popular article in Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, chap. 1, the section entitled "Alternative Routes to Cultural Excellence: Maya Isolationism versus Zapotec Interactivity."

[177] Regarding the tendency of Caso, Bernal and their contemporaries, more than either their scholarly predecessors or successors, "to emphasize external stimuli from other regions of Mesoamerica as key forces that promoted cultural transitions in the Valley of Oaxaca," see Gary M. Feinman, "The Last Quarter Century of Archaeological Research in the Central Valleys of Oaxaca," *Mexicon*, vol. 29, no. 1 (February 2007), 3.

[178] For instance, though the piece appears more like a maverick article than a movement, Winter, "Social Memory and the Origins of Monte Albán" (2011), 393-409, in one article, revives the unfashionable idea that the initial urban conception of Monte Albán, rather than an homegrown Oaxacan idea, owed both (or, actually, either) to the influence of Olmec La Venta or Maya highland Chiapas. In either case, rather than a direct Olmec or Maya influence on Monte Albán, Winter suspects that the ideas were mediated through the Mixe-Zoque southern Isthmus area. Ibid., 402, 407-8.

deliberate archaism that emerge first from old hypotheses about the Olmec influences, then from supposed Maya influences, and finally from the still-uncontestable Teotihuacan influences at the Zapotec capital. In each case, my ongoing concern for the history of ideas about Monte Albán requires attention to the (often tedious) tangle of competing views on the pertinent empirical particulars.[179]

a. Period I Olmec Influences Reassessed: Appropriation and Disjunction, Old Forms Emboldened with New Meanings

Regarding the first case, the Olmecs' role—or lack thereof—at Monte Albán remains a matter of extreme historical uncertainty. After years of deliberating about who was responsible for the Period I Danzante carvings and glyphic inscriptions, which he felt certain were not of indigenous Oaxacan origin, Caso, by the early 1940s, was willing to attribute them to an extensive Olmec influence.[180] His always-debated resolution, ingeniously enough, allowed the Zapotecs to retain most of their prestige as the founders of Monte Albán while, nevertheless, ceding to the Olmecs numerous of the capital's major innovations, the earliest writing and the calendar among them. In fact, Caso emerged as the premier spokesperson for the view that the Olmecs were not only Mesoamerica's oldest civilization, but, moreover, "This great [Olmec] culture, which we encounter in ancient levels, is without a doubt the mother of other cultures, like the Maya, the Teotihuacano, the Zapotec, that of El Tajín, and others."[181]

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[179] Readers can be forewarned that forthcoming sub-section on "Architectural Appropriations and Archaisms at Monte Albán: Doubtful Historical Scenarios but Redoubtable Heuristic Options" provides (over)long remarks about debates concerning outside influences to Monte Albán respectively during Periods I, II and III.

[180] Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, chap. 1, charts the long and slow course to Alfonso Caso's eventual embrace in the early 1940s of the view that it was Olmecs who provided that seminal "foreign influence" during Period I Monte Albán. See especially the subsection entitled "Epoch I: Prefiguring an Olmec Role in the City's Founding."

[181] Alfonso Caso, "Definición y extensión del complejo 'Olmeca,'" in *Mayas y Olmecas: segunda Reunión de mesa redonda sobre problemas antropológicos de México y Centro América* (México, D.F: Talleres de la Editorial Stylo, 1942), 42. Also see Alfonso Caso, "Existió un imperio olmeca?" in *Memoria del Colegio Nacional* vol. 5, no. 3 (1965): 11-60.

Bernal, who did extensive work in the Gulf Coast region as well as Oaxaca, while declining to endorse their "mother culture" status, not only reaffirmed a crucial role for the Olmecs in Monte Albán's early development, but also, in the 1960s, fleshed out their supposed contribution in much fuller ways. Adopting an "intermediate" position,[182] he maintained that, while the original site selection, founding and architectural conception of the mountaintop city were purely Oaxacan achievements, the Olmecs appeared shortly after that to make major—and salutary—contributions to Monte Albán's rapid rise during the so-termed Phase I-C of Period I.[183] I will return momentarily to the venturous nuances with which he describes the Olmec-Oaxaca relationship; observe for the moment, however, his contention that, although the two cultures are related in a number of ways, "they are separate entities and neither actually copied the other."[184] Discussing the matter in numerous contexts, Bernal insisted, in other words, both on the Oaxacans' considerable debt to the Olmecs, but also on their autonomy from wholesale or coerced Olmec influence.[185]

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[182] Bernal, *The Olmec World*, 154, summarizes the major alternatives on the Olmec "mother culture" controversy. Finding his place within those alternatives, Bernal, ibid., 13, nuances what he means by an "intermediate" position as follows: "Actually I believe that the first signs of civilization are to be found on the Gulf Coast, in the area I call 'Metropolitan Olmec.' These first signs of civilization occur not only there but also at sites such as those in the highlands of Guatemala, which are not tropical and thus possess an entirely different habitat, even though they may be contemporaneous with the efflorescence of the Olmecs." As Philip Drucker wrote in his review of Bernal's *The Olmec World*, *American Anthropologist* 73 (1971): 1410, "Bernal never associated himself with any of the extremist interpretations of culture growth of the [Olmec] area…"

[183] Of numerous places that Bernal addresses the Olmec role at Monte Albán, see Bernal, *The Olmec World*, 12-13, 87, 152-56 and 167; Ignacio Bernal, "Archaeological Synthesis of Oaxaca," in *Handbook of Middle American Indians*, volume 3: "Archaeology of Southern Mesoamerica," vol. ed. Gordon R. Willey, gen. ed. Robert Wauchope (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1965), 799; and Ignacio Bernal, *Monte Albán [and] Mitla: Official Guide*, trans. Pablo Martínez del Rio (Mexico: Edimex, 1958), 2. For a fuller summary of Bernal's historical (re)construction of Period I, see Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, chap. 2, the section entitled "Mitigating the Mother Role of Olmecs: Oaxacan Autonomy from and Indebtedness to Gulf Coast Peoples."

[184] Bernal, *Ancient Mexico in Colour*, 14.

[185] Bernal, *The Olmec World*, 154.

Though Bernal's assertions about the large and fortuitous Olmec contributions were endlessly repeated by art historians and non-Oaxacanists, virtually no specialists in the area ever fully accepted either Caso's or his stance on the issue.[186] Even their colleague John Paddock, while tacitly acknowledging that Olmecs were influential in Period I, consistently positioned pre-Hispanic Oaxacans as independent innovators who had little impetus to borrow anything from Olmecs or, as we'll see, from Mayas or even Teotihuacanos, peoples who were, Paddock maintained, in no sense their superiors.[187] Richard Blanton likewise provides a thoroughgoing (re)construction of Monte Albán in which the Olmecs play no significant role.[188] Flannery and Marcus explicitly reject the notion that any region of Mesoamerica was "the 'mother culture' from which the others sprang,"[189] and, in direct contrast to Caso and Bernal, take special pains to dismiss the notion that the Olmecs played a disproportionate part in the formation of Oaxacan society.[190] Marcus Winter too declines to afford the Olmecs a special role in his 1992 account of the early stages of Monte Albán; alternatively, he underscores the appearance in Oaxaca during this era of "a group of pan-Mesoamerican symbols" that, while perhaps especially prominent in

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[186] Collaborator and colleague of Caso and Bernal, Jorge R. Acosta, "Preclassic and Classic Architecture of Oaxaca," 814, is among those who do accept the position that, in Period I Monte Albán, "As much from pottery as from other artistic products, it is clear that we are dealing with people closely related to the 'Olmecs' of Veracruz-Tabasco."

[187] Remarking that the proximity of the Olmec and Oaxaca areas makes "certain strong resemblances" between the two entirely predictable, Paddock, "Oaxaca in Ancient Mesoamerica," 91-95, is content to observe that, "We cannot yet say which one came first, or which one (if, indeed, either) played the dominant role in their borrowing and lending." For the broader context of those comments, see Jones, *Narrative Monte Albán*, chap. 3, especially the section entitled, "Period I: The Early Ascent of Monte Albán: The Founding and Maintenance of 'an Enormous Work of Art.'"

[188] On Blanton's (re)construction of Monte Albán history, see Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, chap. 4.

[189] Marcus and Flannery, *Zapotec Civilization*, 120.

[190] Marcus and Flannery, *Zapotec Civilization*, 138. Marcus and Flannery, ibid., 120, contend that each Oaxaca and the Gulf Coast area had its own agenda, its own "tastes," its own trajectory and, presumably, its own entrepreneurial, decision-making leaders: "We see [Zapotecs and Olmecs] as 'sister cultures' that arose simultaneously through many of the same processes, although we also believe that those processes were accelerated by the fact that all were in contact with each other."

the Gulf Coast region—and thus often (mis)construed as distinctly Olmec—actually occur throughout Mesoamerica.[191] Later, however, in 2011, Winter takes an iconoclastic stance by reengaging the old notion that the initial urban conception of Monte Albán did owe greatly to La Venta.[192] Arthur Joyce represents the current mainstream view when he also rejects earlier claims that Olmec influences were a major factor at Monte Albán, and is content to observe that, "exchange placed Mixtecs and Zapotecs in at least indirect contact with the Olmec… [but] whether the Olmec-style designs reflect more intensive forms of interaction such as the spread of a religious cult is difficult to assess."[193] And Javier Urcid, who provides by far the most thoroughgoing reassessment of the so-termed Danzante figures, which are always presented as the crux of the Olmec contribution, does not regard the hypothetical Olmec connection as sufficiently feasible even to refute.[194]

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[191] Marcus Winter, *Oaxaca: The Archaeological Record* (Oaxaca, Mexico: Carteles editors, P.G.O., 1992 [originally 1989]), 28

[192] Very differently from his 1992 synthesis, Winter, "Social Memory and the Origins of Monte Albán" (2011), 393, 398-402, rejects the prevailing notion that Monte Albán's urban conception owes to the nearby Oaxaca precedent of San José Mogote and appeals to a notion of "social memory" to argue instead that the layout of the city center owes to an "imported template" probably from La Venta, but perhaps from the Middle Formative Chiapas site of Chiapa de Corzo. In an earlier note I expressed how unpersuasive I find this proposal.

[193] Joyce, *Mixtecs, Zapotecs, and Chatinos*, 95.

[194] Javier Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra: el papel de las narrativas pictóricas en el desarrollo temprano de Monte Albán (500 a.C.-200 d.C.)," en *Monte Albán en la encrucijada regional y disciplinaria: Memoria de la Quinta Mesa Redonda de Monte Albán*, eds. Nelly M. Robles García y Ángel I. Rivera Guzmán (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2011), 163-237. Note that, though pursuing the matter here would over-complicate the present discussion (and thus I will return to it in chapter 5 on the sacred history priority, II-B), vigorously contested views of the Danzante Wall demonstrate, among many things, the broader contestation between seeing Monte Albán, even in Period I, as unique versus as seeing it as highly conventional (or unoriginal). In short, the widely embraced view that the Danzante Wall is, in the term of Blanton, *Monte Albán*, 39, 47, 58, 63, "a military showcase" that intimidates onlookers by depicting humiliated captive warriors or victims of human sacrifice presents that visual display as something highly (though not fully) without precedent. By contrast, the complete rejection of that view by Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 205-7, depends in large part on demonstrating the failure to appreciate the Danzante Wall's utilization of innumerable pan-Mesoamerican conventions for depicting soldiers involved, for instance, in penitential blood-letting rites. Again, note that I will revisit this issue more fully in chapter 5.

In short, though virtually no scholars any longer endorse the decisive, if somewhat different, historical roles that Caso and Bernal assigned to the Olmecs, they replace those older opinions with uncertainty rather than any similarly strong alternative. Probably the wisest course is, then, to join them in skirting the issue; as a historical problem, Olmec-Oaxaca connections remain a swamp. Nevertheless, irrespective of their very unstable historical moorings (no small qualification!), Bernal's extended comments on the Olmecs' role at Monte Albán do provide a strong example of one noteworthy sort of architectural archaizing, appropriation and "disjunction." Thus I review quickly how he contrasts the two groups, describes their supposed interaction and, thereby, exemplifies that important heuristic variation on the theme.

Regarding the contrast between the two principal parties, Bernal, always determined to afford dignity and sophistication to all of Mexico's pre-Columbian progenitors, paints both Oaxacans and Olmecs in flattering but different lights.[195] Having worked extensively in both areas, he is able to hypothesize that Monte Albán I, the era of the purported Olmec influence, is broadly contemporaneous with Olmec II, which corresponds to the efflorescence of the premier Gulf Coast sites of San Lorenzo and La Venta.[196] In his account, the remarkably influential Olmecs—who had somehow managed to spread their forgetive art styles and ideas across Mesoamerica without ever resorting to violence—are, then, depicted as completely secure and self-sufficient, not at all in need of outside stimuli. By contrast, the Period I Oaxacans of Bernal's imagination (who, recall, he is not yet willing to call Zapotecs), are pictured as highly ambitious up-and-comers, who were "more advanced in some aspects but behind in others compared to the Olmec;"[197] Monte Albán was, for instance, "leading in such important aspects

[195] Regarding Bernal's (like Caso's) persistent attempt to present all pre-Columbian peoples is a broadly positive light, see Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, chap. 2, "Closing Thoughts: Monte Albán as a Microcosm of Ancient Mesoamerica and a Model for Contemporary Mexico."

[196] Though there is considerable slippage in that dates that Bernal assigns to these periods in various contexts—he usually designates Monte Albán I as about 900-300 BCE and Olmec II is 1200-600 BCE—he is sometimes willing to describe them as "contemporaneous," e.g. Bernal, *The Olmec World*, 108, 110 and 151-52.

[197] Bernal, *The Olmec World*, 152.

as writing, the calendar, and architecture."[198] Therefore, by no means needy or insecure in the way Aztecs are frequently depicted, and certainly not the passive victims of outsiders' manipulations, the Oaxacans have innovative talents that are matched by an openness and curiosity, which makes them highly receptive to the new ideas that the Olmecs present. They are, Bernal implies, more culturally inquisitive and hungry, if you will, than their Gulf Coast counterparts.

Regarding the nature of their interaction, unlike those archaisms that draw on long-ago and far-away peoples, this is presented as a face-to-face exchange between two secure and accomplished groups, neither, we are supposed to believe, with strongly militaristic or expansionist inclinations. The forcible imposition of ideas in either direction is explicitly ruled out; neither group is a supplicant nor conqueror of the other; all borrowing is voluntary, and thus selective and self-serving. Nonetheless, for reasons not entirely clear even to Bernal—and this is arguably the most startling feature of his argument—the exchange is completely one-sided. For their part, the Oaxacans, as evidenced foremost in the infamous Danzante figures, partake so fully of Olmec styles that Bernal concludes,

> "The prevailing style of Monte Albán [in Period I], therefore, can be considered a variant of the Olmec and may be called the 'dancing figure style,' since the typical motif is to be found not only in stone but in clay and minor objects. I believe it falls within the general Olmec tradition…"[199]

But then Bernal, not unlike numerous others, leaps through rhetorical hoops to explain how this extensive indebtedness does *not* qualify as "Olmec colonialism" nor even as "imitation" per se: "The [Period I] Oaxaca style with its sphere of influence cannot be called 'Colonial Olmec' but Olmecoid in a sense. Monte Albán possessed a creativity and an individuality of its own."[200] He is emphatic, in other words, that Period I Oaxacans were independent and sturdy enough to borrow extensively from the Olmecs without forfeiting or even compromising their

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[198] Bernal, *The Olmec World*, 167. On his view that Monte Albán was site of Mesoamerica's earliest writing, also see ibid., 156; and Bernal, *Ancient Mexico in Colour*, 14, 24.

[199] Bernal, *The Olmec World*, 167.

[200] Bernal, *The Olmec World*, 167.

homegrown tastes and values;[201] and thus the happy result was a hybridized style that nonetheless preserves the integrity of the Oaxacan original. Borrowing from and intermingling with Olmec culture, we are told, greatly enhanced rather than diminished the estimable cultural and artistic inventiveness of native Oaxacans.[202]

For their part, however, the apparently self-secure Olmecs take absolutely nothing in return from Oaxacans who are, Bernal thinks, their superiors in terms of writing, time-keeping and fine architecture. This leads Bernal to the perplexing generalization that, "[Monte Albán] was a culture which did not diffuse and whose products, style, and knowledge rarely left its confines. I cannot claim to understand the reasons for this but archaeology indicates clearly that it is so."[203] Oddly, though this is only a sidebar to his main argument, Monte Albán is, he concludes, an insatiable importer of artistic and cultural influences who exports virtually nothing.

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[201] For instance, Henri Stierlin, *Ancient Mexico*, a volume in the Architecture of the World series (Cologne, Germany: Benedikt Taschen Verlag, 1968), 137-38, follows Bernal in acknowledging that "there are obvious signs of Olmec influence in the earliest forms of Monte Albán and culture" while, at the same time, highlighting "the often highly original character of Zapotec architecture [even in Period I]." Like Bernal, suggesting a version of architectural archaism and appropriation in which the Oaxacans were fully in command of what forms and formal conventions they borrowed from Olmecs, and how they used them, Stierlin provides these summary comments about Period I: "There are definite connections between the 'Danzantes' and some Olmec reliefs; yet the stylistic homogeneity of Monte Albán stelae indicates original inspiration, exceeding simple imitation. Theirs is a developed art, with definite and firmly established rules. Each figure—whether upright, crouching, crawling on all fours, or about to leap—is invariably presented with the head in profile. The faces and silhouettes are depicted with only a few lines, a striking feature. The figures are sometimes shown with beards, unusual for the clean-shaven race. Many of them are wearing large circular earrings, similar to those found in Zapotec tombs." Ibid.

[202] Accentuating the same assessment in a different context, Bernal, "Archaeological Synthesis of Oaxaca," 799, writes: "We do not for a moment suggest that Monte Albán I culture was a simple copy or product of the archaeological Olmecs, but rather that the fundamental elements were the same and that there was some acculturation between the two during their development, although each produced its own individuality until they separated entirely in the subsequent stages."

[203] Bernal, *The Olmec World*, 167.

In sum, then, on the reputed Olmec connection, the prospect of completely cordial if radically asymmetrical cross-cultural interaction that leads to the creation of a gigantic wall of over 300 Danzante carvings—an enormous public display that even Bernal had to concede was likely designed to commemorate "victory and war"[204]—presents too many historical kinks to smooth out.[205] That the peaceable interplay between two non-competitive groups eventuated in a gargantuan stone-wall showcase of past Oaxacan exercises of torture, and thus public threats about future exercises against any who would dare to challenge them (a stock interpretation of the Danzante wall that I will revisit later), simply does not make sense. This cannot have happened.

Be that as it may, the improbable scenario does exemplify a significant and distinctive variation on architectural archaism at Monte Albán that, in all likelihood, did frequently happen—namely, the appropriation by a strongly independent and pro-active group of widely known formal elements to which they deliberately assign new and very different meanings. Even by Bernal's assessment, what Oaxacans took from Olmecs were formal elements and perhaps some formal conventions; always the supposed "Olmeciod" character of the Danzantes is predicated fully on their appearance and not all on their ostensibly militaristic content, which seems starkly at odds with standard characterizations of the peaceable Olmecs. And that assertive version of artistic borrowing thereby provides a prime instance of Panofsky's and Kubler's "principle of disjunction" insofar as Oaxacans, it seems, appropriated esteemed Olmec forms—which they then put to the service of a kind of politicized public art that Olmecs themselves would never create.

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[204] Bernal, *The Olmec World*, 154-55, summarizes Michael Coe's interpretation that "the Danzantes are nude because they represent captives and are exhibited in the usual Mesoamerican manner of representing unfortunate prisoners;" and then concurs that those Danzantes "may be forerunners of the Period II figures [i.e., the "conquest slabs" on Building J], and may represent—though in a different way—a similar idea: war and victory."

[205] As we'll see in chapter 5 relative to "the sacred history priority (II-B)," the whole question of the character and meanings of the Period I Danzante figures, which are the supposed essence of the Olmec contribution, is an interpretive minefield of its own.

Regarding motives for copying, this is, in other words, the sort of architectural archaism that, rather than an expression of respect for Olmecs, is largely a self-serving strategy of ritual-architectural allurement via the presentation of a grandiose exhibition (supposedly of defeated enemies) too irresistibly graphic for any visitor to the Period I capital to ignore. Moreover, even if the Gulf Coast Olmecs were *not* the primary models for these iconographic and architectural imitations, and even if one is persuaded by Urcid's iconoclastic argument that the Danzantes are *not*, after all, captive victims,[206] this deliberately disjunctive sort of copying seems certain to have been undertaken by Monte Albán designers of every era. In short, even if the old Olmec historical plotline is *not* at all convincing, it does nevertheless issue in a heuristic possibility that is deserving of continued consideration.

b. Period II Mayanoid Influences Reassessed: The Importation of Generalized Inspiration and Cosmological Conventions

The second purported instance of external influences at Monte Albán—that of a Maya-influenced Period II, a short span from about 100 BCE to 300 CE—presents similarly daunting historical problems, but quite a different sort of architectural appropriation and archaism. By the 1930s, Caso, basing his opinion primarily on parallels in the ceramic evidence from the two areas, argued for Period II involvements with what he would variously term Mayas, "pre-Mayas" or "Mayanoid" peoples from Belize and the Petén region of Guatemala.[207] In his early reflections on the issue, Caso depicts a fairly smooth transition in which both local components and Olmec influences from the previous era are retained while, at the same time, alternative influences from the Maya zone stimulate "a great florescence in the arts."[208] Later—based

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[206] See Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra: el papel de las narrativas pictóricas en el desarrollo temprano de Monte Albán (500 a.C.-200 d.C.)," which I will revisit at length in chapter 5.

[207] Caso, *Culturas mixteca y zapoteca*, 21; my translation. On Caso's evolving view of Period II, see Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, chap.1, the sections entitled, "Epoch II: Mayanoid Stimulus to a Great but Brief Florescence," which summarizes his 1936 stance, and "Epoch II: Well-Balanced Zapotec Artist-Intellectual-Politicians," which summarizes a more popular 1938 presentation of the issue.

[208] Caso, *Culturas mixteca y zapoteca*, 22; my translation.

especially on his hypothesis that the juxtaposition of place-name glyphs and upside-down human heads in the carvings on Building J, among the most prominent constructions of this era, record Monte Albán II's military victories—he suggests instead that the Mayanoid impositions came via violent conquest.[209] In either case, he points to increasingly elaborate tombs with more realistic and beautiful urns, to marked advances in the system of glyphs and writing and, among numerous architectural advances, to the uniquely shaped Building J, which suggests an adeptness at astronomical observation,[210] as evidence of "a second period of great splendor."[211] Nevertheless, even in Caso's view, though spectacular, this burst of Maya-stimulated creativity was brief and elitist insofar as its fruits were limited largely to the Main Plaza area of the city.[212]

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[209] Regarding Caso's position on the nature of the Period II intrusion, Paddock, "Oaxaca in Ancient Mesoamerica" (1966), 119, explains: "Some time ago Caso suggested that the Monte Albán II style might possibly have been imposed in the Valley of Oaxaca by conquest… As possible evidence, he cited the upper-class and ritual character of Monte Albán II traits, their relatively sudden appearance in Oaxaca, and the presence of certain inscriptions in Monte Albán II style consisting of a place glyph with a head upside down below it… As Caso pointed out, this might be a statement of the conquest of the place named…" On his interpretation of the Building J "conquest slabs," also see Caso, "Monte Albán: An Archeological Zone of World-Wide Renown," *Obras* reprint, 147.

[210] Caso, *Culturas mixteca y zapoteca*, 22.

[211] Caso, "Monte Albán: An Archeological Zone of World-Wide Renown," *Obras* reprint, 145-47.

[212] Caso, *Culturas mixteca y zapoteca*, 22; my translation. With respect to the widespread opinions in the 1930s of Maya influences in the Oaxaca area that issue from Mayanists rather than Oaxacanists, Mayanist Herbert J. Spinden, "The Royal Tombs of Southern Mexico," *The Brooklyn Museum Quarterly*, vol. 19, no. 2 (April 1932), 61, notes, "The basic character of Zapotecan art doubtless go back to much earlier times and, indeed, appear to be founded on Maya conventions of the First [Maya] Empire." Herbert J. Spinden, *Ancient Civilizations of Mexico and Central America*, 3rd and revised edition (New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1928 [originally 1917]), 156-63, elaborates more fully on what he sees as Zapotec culture and Monte Albán's "profound endebtedness" to the Maya. Thomas Athol Joyce, *Maya and Mexican Art* (1927), 43-44, 99-100, is another to reiterate the then-prevalent view that Zapotec art, architecture and ceramics owe much to the Maya, who are nonetheless never simply imitated. Regarding the famous Zapotec funerary urns, for example, Joyce, ibid. 99, writes, "Maya influence is obvious in the delicate modeling of human features, and the skilful use of feather-designs; yet [as quoted earlier], the Zapotec potter, while accepting inspiration from outside, has not been dominated by it, but has turned it to his own use in the production of works of art, which are 'characteristic' in the sense that they bear the unmistakable stamp of his own peculiar psychology."

In this case as well, Bernal, though without the elaboration he gives to the Olmec connection—and again more inclined to argue for cooperative rather than coercive intercultural exchanges—concurs, albeit it in qualified ways, with Caso. He initially reaffirmed not only the Mayaland origin[213] and the short-lived, elitist nature of this foreign-born influence, but also Caso's idea that, "The [Mayanoid] carriers of Period II culture (at least at Monte Albán) were an aristocracy made up of chieftains or priests who imposed their ideas upon others."[214] Later, however, Bernal expressed doubts that this had been a forcible "conquest," and thus relabeled the "imposition" a "mingling;"[215] and, by his authoritative academic synthesis for the *Handbook of Middle American Indians* (1965), he had recast the Period II interaction between indigenous Oaxacans and Mayanoid immigrants as a symbiotic admixing or "cultural fusion."[216] Moreover, rather than attribute the stimulus strictly to Maya peoples, Bernal accentuated both the continuing Olmec influence during this era as well as "the first Teotihuacan influences [which] may have arrived before the older traits had been assimilated."[217] In that rendition—which is much more consistent with his broader (re)construction of Monte Albán's history—the Mayanoid southerners, instead of bullying the Oaxacans, provide a fresh catalyst to cultural creativity; these immigrants "brought or invented many elements of their own but went on using

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[213] Bernal, "Archaeological Synthesis of Oaxaca," 801. On the supposed Guatemalan origin of the Period II "newcomers," also see, for example, Bernal, *Monte Albán, Mitla: Official Guide*, 2.

[214] Bernal, *The Olmec World*, 161. That quote continues, "At the same time [the Mayanoid interlopers] did not constitute a majority sufficiently strong to wipe out the ancient culture [which had lots of Olmec influences], which continues to thrive among the masses. Thus, in his view, where the Olmec influence had been widely embraced, this Maya influence "seems to have flourished in relatively few sites in the Valley of Oaxaca and in almost none outside." Ibid.

[215] On Bernal's view of Period II—including his shifting depictions of the Maya influence as variously a "conquest," an "imposition," a "mingling" or, in his latest versions, a cooperative intercultural exchange—see Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, chap.2, the section entitled, "Period II: The Continuing Ascent of Monte Albán: A Combination of Oaxacan Receptivity and Mayanoid Stimulation."

[216] Bernal, "Archaeological Synthesis of Oaxaca," 800.

[217] Bernal, *The Olmec World*, 161.

others that were characteristic of the previous period."[218] And the native Oaxacans, instead of being conquered, persevere as the main actors who, just as they had in Period I, operate from a position of strength and openness, which allowed them to borrow in thoughtful and selective ways from numerous sets of outsiders—including Olmecs, Mayas and Teotihuacanos—all of whom are very different from them.[219] Again in this storyline, rather than resisting new ideas and practices, Oaxacans welcome and encourage outside influences from not just one but numerous areas.[220]

Again, however, Caso's ideas about a Maya-influenced Period II, along with Bernal's qualified affirmation, were oft-repeated but seldom completely endorsed by Oaxacan specialists.[221] Paddock, for instance, pays lip service to the notion that Period II was "Mayanoid

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[218] Bernal, "Archaeological Synthesis of Oaxaca," 800.

[219] Though, in his view, the formerly-powerful Olmecs were by now losing importance at home in the Gulf Coast "Metropolitan zone," Bernal mentions three comingled sorts of Olmecoid influence that continue in Monte Albán II: It persisted as a "substratum" inherited from earlier inhabitants of the city (Bernal, *The Olmec World*, 166); it was reinforced by outlying Oaxacan groups who had earlier embraced Olmecoid elements, which they now brought to the capital (Bernal, "Archaeological Synthesis of Oaxaca," 801); and "the [Mayanoid] newcomers added certain Olmec influences which were still alive but which did not necessarily proceed from the Metropolitan zone (Bernal, *The Olmec World*, 166)."[219] Furthermore, presaging the crucial role that Central Mexicans will play in Monte Albán's Classic era, Bernal considers Monte Albán II to be the period that showed "the first influences from Teotihuacan," a fourth cultural influence that would not really be integrated or "assimilated" until Period III-A (Bernal, "Archaeological Synthesis of Oaxaca," 800). On Teotihuacan influences in Monte Albán II, also see Bernal, *The Olmec World*, 161.

[220] It is notable that when Bernal provides quicker and more casual renditions of Oaxaca history—for instance in his accompaniment to the photographs in Bernal, *Ancient Mexico in Colour* (1968)—he can essentially leave out this Monte Albán II era of Mayanoid influence, which is less crucial to his story than either the preceding Olmec influence in Monte Albán I or the Teotihuacan influence in Monte Albán III. In a synoptic case like that, he settles for a three-part account of Preclassic (Monte Albán I) to Classic (Monte Albán III) to Postclassic (Monte Albán IV).

[221] Again, Caso and Bernal's collaborator, Acosta, "Preclassic and Classic Architecture of Oaxaca," 817, accepts their subsequently contested view that, "Around the end of the 3d century B.C. [i.e., at the onset of Period II] new people arrived and settled in Monte Alban. Pottery and certain architectural characteristics proclaim that they came from the south, from Chiapas or Guatemala."

influenced," and that this era "brought some wonderful works of art into being, and in a style frequently quite different from that of period I;"[222] but, consistent with his view that Monte Albán was a fully Oaxacan accomplishment, he does not afford the Maya a consequential contribution to this or any other era.[223] In his 1992 synthesis, Winter depicts the transition from so-termed Period I to Period II, both part of the Early Urban Stage in his rubric, as a continuous rather than disjointed era of impressive growth and development, but likewise attributes to Mayas no specially important part in the ongoing developments;[224] later, however, Winter does revive the possibility of significant Maya influences on Monte Albán.[225] Also for Blanton, Mayas, like Olmecs, are non-factors in his version of events.[226] Notably, however, Blanton, while in general agreement with Caso and Bernal about which main structures, including Building J, belong to this era, discerns via his rigorous settlement studies a "slight decline" in population as well as some narrowing of the city's boundaries and some apparently defensive

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[222] Paddock, "Oaxaca in Ancient Mesoamerica," 120. On Paddock's view of Period II, in which Mayas play no special role, see Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, chap. 3, the section entitled "Period II: The Certain Onset of the Early Urbanism: 'First-Generation' Civilization at Monte Albán."

[223] In Paddock's view, Mayas at no time are strongly influenced by or influential in Oaxaca. Even for later eras, Paddock, "Oaxaca in Ancient Mesoamerica," 234, note 20, says, "the dazzling achievements of the Early Urban Mayas seem in general to have been very remote and exotic for their contemporaries west of Tehuantepec."

[224] Winter, *Oaxaca: The Archaeological Record*, 55-56. On Winter's view of this era, see Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, chap. 5, the section entitled "[Periods I and II] The Early Urban Stage—Monte Albán's Origin and Ascent: Urban Genesis via Environmental Appeal and Commercial Acumen."

[225] As explained in a previous footnote, Winter, "Social Memory and the Origins of Monte Albán" (2011), 393, 398-403, rejects the prevailing notion that Monte Albán's urban conception owes to the nearby Oaxaca precedent of San José Mogote and argues instead that the layout of the city center owes to an "imported template" probably from La Venta, but perhaps from the Middle Formative Chiapas site of Chiapa de Corzo. Thus while a Maya influence on Monte Albán seems to be Winter's second choice in this not-persuasive proposal, he is also connecting that possible Maya influence to the original conception of Monte Albán and not to a Period II remodeling. In short, this article does not signal a significant revival of interest in Maya influences on Monte Albán.

[226] On Blanton's view of Period II, see Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, chap. 4, the section entitled "The Period II Retrenchment of Monte Albán: Weakened External Threats, thus Weakened Capital."

wall constructions, adjustments that lead him to describe this as a time of "retrenchment" in which "we may infer that Monte Albán's military dominance over the region was weak or nonexistent."[227] That is, following the breakneck acceleration of the capital's size and influence during Period I, both its population and military ascendancy seem, according to Blanton, to have lagged somewhat during Period II.[228]

For their part, Flannery and Marcus, are, like Winter and Blanton, unwilling to afford the Maya any unique role in their account of Period II Monte Albán; but, in surprisingly stark contrast to Blanton, especially because their rely on the same settlement data, they assess this as no less than the era of Monte Albán's great regional hegemony, and thus the stage in which the Zapotec capital can make its strongest claim to have controlled an "empire."[229] In their view, where state-level status may or may not have been achieved during Period I, "During Monte Albán II there can no longer be any doubt that Oaxaca society was organized as a state, and an expansionist state at that."[230] Thus, where Winter claims that Monte Albán never attained statehood and Blanton characterized Monte Albán II as a time of "retrenchment" wherein weakened external threats resulted in a weakened capital, the Marcus-Flannery version counters

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[227] In 1978, Blanton, *Monte Albán*, 41-44, provides a detailed explanation of why some interpretations of his survey data suggest a "slight decline" in Period II population while other interpretations of the same data suggest a slight increase over Period Late I. He concludes, ibid., 44, "there is no definitive reason for adopting either the higher or lower figures, but I favor the lower values…" Thus, in 1978, he estimates the Period II population to have been "roughly 9650 to 19,300 as a maximum [as opposed to his estimates of roughly 10,200 to 20,400 for Late I]." Blanton, *Monte Albán*, 44.

[228] Blanton, *Monte Albán*, 54. Summarizing his view of Period II, Blanton, *Monte Albán*, 108, says, "All this seems to suggest that, for a while at least, there had been an attempt to increase the city's self-sufficiency, and defense from invaders may have been a problem…" He makes similar summary comments about Period II, at ibid., 55. The prospect that the Period II city was *de*creasing in size in response to endemic invaders, of course, seems plausible; but that scenario also stands somewhat at odds with Blanton primary narrative theme wherein the stronger the external threats, the stronger the capital became.

[229] Regarding Marcus and Flannery's atypical account of the extensive control Monte Albán enjoyed during this period, see Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, chap. 6, the section entitled "The Period II Transition from State toward Empire: Political Climax before Cultural Florescence."

[230] Marcus and Flannery, *Zapotec Civilization*, 172.

with a presentation of Period II as the era in which Monte Albán's sustained surge led to by far the widest sphere of influence that the city ever enjoyed.[231] As I noted in *Narrating Monte Albán*, so discrepant are these respective assessments of Monte Albán II that readers of the alternate versions have to wonder if these archaeologist-authors are really describing the same 300-year period.

Arthur Joyce, who, like Winter, is inclined to see so-termed Periods I and II as one continuous era of growth and expansion, reviews the hotly debated issue of Monte Albán's relations with surrounding areas during this era, before concluding that,

> "Monte Albán may have periodically gone to war with people in neighboring regions and perhaps even conquered some communities outside the Oaxaca Valley, but the evidence at present does not support the hypothesis that Monte Albán controlled a substantial empire."[232]

Alternatively, instead of a kind of wholesale embrace of authoritarian and exclusionary leadership styles, Joyce's account of early Monte Albán provides a more healthily contested and socially inclusive picture wherein nobles and commoners are collaborating in the ongoing construction and maintenance of a ceremonial center wherein all can play their respective roles in honoring the "sacred covenant;"[233] and it is that shared urge for "interaction with the divine" that accounts for the very extensive "place-making" and elaboration of the Main Plaza that he too sees as blossoming at this point. That is to say, in his account, this is the stretch in which Oaxacans capitalized on their already highly alluring *altépetl*, water-mountain locale and

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[231] Marcus and Flannery, *Zapotec Civilization*, 206, explain that, if by "empire" one means a state that "incorporates people other languages and ethnic groups," then it is plausible to argue that Monte Albán, still in advance of its Period III prime, was the capital of a Period II "Zapotec empire," though one of modest proportions as compared, for instance, to the subsequent Aztec empire.

[232] Joyce, *Mixtecs, Zapotecs, and Chatinos*, 155.

[233] Joyce, *Mixtecs, Zapotecs, and Chatinos*, 139.

undertook major efforts to transform the site into the sort of supreme *imago mundi* that I described last chapter.[234]

Notably, however, while Joyce concurs that this building boom was highly ambitious, it was not, he opines, remarkably innovative. Rather than a distinctly new point of departure, Monte Albán's Main Plaza represents, for him, both a "further 'scaling up' of public architecture and ritual performance" undertaken earlier at nearby San José Mogote;[235] and, moreover, it is a construction agenda that is, as we saw last chapter, highly consistent with the broader Mesoamerican cosmovision that Alfredo López Austin argues was taking hold during this era.[236] Instead of a completely independent invention, Joyce sees abundant evidence that "the founders of Monte Albán drew on established ideas from other parts of Mesoamerica."[237] He contends, for instance, that the earliest iterations of the Main Plaza, by 100 BCE, "appropriated ideas about sacred space" from far-flung Formative-era centers like the Olmec site of La Venta, Chalcatzingo in the Valley of Morelos and Chiapa de Corzo in Chiapas, despite the fact that all those were in decline when Monte Alban was being founded.[238] Indeed, Joyce's intimations of external influences on the heavily homologized architectural enhancements of this era help us to

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[234] On Joyce's characterization of the modifications to the Main Plaza during this era, see Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, chap. 7, the sections entitled "Monte Albán as "Sacred Space": An *Axis Mundi, Imago Mundi* and Site for Ritual Reenactments of Cosmogony" and "Elite and Non-Elite Cooperation: An Inclusive Great Plaza and a Preclassic "Golden Age" of Monte Albán."

[235] Joyce, *Mixtecs, Zapotecs, and Chatinos*, 297, note 7, explains his reliance on more recent revisions of the ceramic sequence developed by Alfonso Caso and his colleagues, and thus his non-use of Caso's timeworn five-part scheme. Nonetheless, in the interest of facilitating cross-comparisons of Joyce's (re)construction with the earlier versions we've discussed ,I have in a few cases reinserted that old terminology, that is, Periods I-V.

[236] Alfredo López Austin, "El núcleo duro, la cosmovisión y tradición mesoamericana," en *Cosmovisión, Ritual e Identidad en los Pueblos Indígenas de México*, Johanna Broda y Félix Báez-Jorge, coords. (México, D. F.: Consejo Nacional para las Culturas y las Artes, 2001), 47-65.

[237] Joyce, *Mixtecs, Zapotecs, and Chatinos*, 139.

[238] Arthur A. Joyce, "Sacred Space and Social Relations in the Valley of Oaxaca," in *Mesoamerican Archaeology: Theory and Practice*, eds. Julia A. Hendon and Rosemary A. Joyce (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 201.

see Period II Monte Albán, not as a specially Maya-influenced development, but rather as the emergence of a working ceremonial precinct that is fully consistent with the cosmological conceptions and "structure or matrix of thought" that were emerging across the entire "cultural superarea."[239]

To sum up, then, with respect to this old question of special Mayanoid influences during the much-debated Period II phase, there is a large disparity between, on the one hand, the wide consensus that this was a time of enormously ambitious architectural innovation and enlargement of the Zapotec capital. Virtually everyone is in agreement, for instance, with Caso's and Bernal's original opinion that this was the era in which Monte Albán builders undertook "the titanic feat" of leveling and expanding the Main Plaza, as well as adding the principal ballcourt, and the astronomically-aligned Building J.[240] Moreover, nearly all concur with Bernal that the architectural enhancements of this era were

> "distinguished by great stone structures, at times almost Cyclopean in style, and also by columns built of a number of stones, and by a special kind of pottery which includes, for instance, four-legged vessels, fresco decoration and the earliest great urns."[241]

Furthermore, as I've noted, numerous other seminal innovations—including the endlessly replicated two-room temple form, stone masonry palaces, the distinctive use of circular columns and increasingly elaborate tombs—also belong to this epoch. And yet, on other hand, virtually no contemporary scholars are inclined to follow Caso's original intimations, about which even

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[239] See López Austin, "El núcleo duro, la cosmovisión y la tradición mesoamericana," 58; or the section in the Introduction entitled "Peripheral Differences and Central Similarities: Ancient and Present-day Participants in "the Hard Nucleus."

[240] See, for instance, Bernal, *The Olmec World*, 161; or Bernal, *3000 Years of Art and Life in Mexico*, 97.

[241] Bernal, *Monte Albán, Mitla: Official Guide*, 2. Regarding affirmations of Bernal that these developments belong to Period II, see, for instance, Heyden and Gendrop, *Pre-Columbian Architecture of Mesoamerica*, 176; and Stierlin, *Ancient Mexico* (1994), 134-35.

Bernal had exercised doubts, that these innovations can be attributed uniquely or even primarily to "the impositions of Mayanoid peoples."[242]

That said, irrespective of their very different perspectives, Winter, Blanton and Joyce all encourage us to recast so-termed Period II, not as a time of specifically Maya-borne contributions, but rather as an era in which Monte Albán was increasingly involved with, and likely challenged by, many non-Oaxacan groups. Even Flannery and Marcus, while always insisting that the most decisive factors in Oaxaca social evolution are overwhelmingly local, likewise stress the importance of trade relations between Oaxacans and peoples in numerous other regions, the Maya zone among them—interactions that lead them to conclude that no Mesoamerican rank society, Monte Albán's included, arose in isolation: "all borrowed ideas on chiefly behavior and symbolism from each other."[243]

Bernal's intimations that Olmec influences persisted while Maya influences mounted and Teotihuacan influence emerged actually do, then, seem like a more suitably inclusive

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[242] Regarding what features of Monte Albán's art and architecture may actually be distinctively "Maya-like," Westheim, *The Art of Ancient Mexico*, 222, argues that, "In Zapotec art there are various elements that can be considered of Maya origin: [1] the bars that represent the number five, [2] the false arch, [3] stylization of the feathered headdresses, and [4] especially the steles. But we must not attach too much importance to isolated details, objects, and motifs. To be able to speak of artistic influences and artistic dependency, we must ascertain the will to art and the direction in which it operates." Though Westheim contrasts Maya steles and Zapotec steles (both of which he thinks were adopted from the Olmecs) in ways that I will later revisit and contest, he addresses—via his notion of "the will to art"—something like "the principle of disjunction" when he asks and answers the question: "Are Maya steles and Zapotec steles identical, then? Only in their exterior form: it is in each case a monolithic slab whose faces are decorated with representations or glyphs in relief, and it is erected in the vicinity of a temple or an altar. But beyond this… we have said that the Maya stele is a glorification or auto glorification of the *halach-huinicoob* [i.e., politics, II-C, is the prevailing priority]. The Zapotec steles (assembled in Caso's book, *Las estelas zapotecas*) are nothing of the sort. As in the tomb paintings, mythico-religious happenings, the myths of the gods, and divinity feats are represented [i.e., the prevailing priorities are sacred history, II-B, and divinity, II-A]." Ibid., 222-23. Also see Bernd Fahmel Bever, "Una reevaluación de los elementos 'mayas' de Monte Alban," en *Memorias del I Congreso Internacional de Mayanistas* (México: CEM-Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1989).

[243] Marcus and Flannery, *Zapotec Civilization*, 119.

characterization of this "Late Preclassic" (or "Terminal Formative") period. The medially positioned, progressive and fast-growing Monte Albán was, at this point, not an exception, but a full participant in what Paul Kirchhoff termed "a common history which set [Mesoamericans] apart from other tribes of the continent,"[244] or what López Austin would describe as

> "similarities in productive techniques, forms of social and political organization, conceptions about the structure of the cosmos and many other practices, beliefs and institutions whose resemblance derives from intense and prolonged interaction."[245]

Oaxacans were, by now, both adherents and active contributors to the essential unity and continuity—that is, to the shared cosmovision—that obtained across the entire geographical breadth of Mesoamerica, from the northern frontier to the Maya Lowlands.[246] And it was this dynamic, ongoing engagement with the ideas and material culture of others that was, almost certainly, most impactful in the way that Oaxacans shaped their own urban ambience.[247]

Consequently, we are likewise encouraged to imagine a different and more diffused sort of ritual-architectural appropriation—the least perfect match to what Kubler intends by

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[244] Paul Kirchhoff, "Mesoamerica: Its Geographical Limits, Ethnic Composition and Cultural Characteristics," trans. Norman McQuown from *Acta Americana*, vol. I, no. 1 (1943): 92-107; reprinted in *Ancient Mesoamerica: Selected Readings*, ed. John A. Graham (Palo Alto: Peek Publications, 1981), 1-10. This quote comes from page 3 of the reprinted version.

[245] Alfredo López Austin, "El núcleo duro, la cosmovisión y tradición mesoamericana," en *Cosmovisión, Ritual e Identidad en los Pueblos Indígenas de México*, Johanna Broda y Félix Báez-Jorge, coords. (México, D. F.: Consejo Nacional para las Culturas y las Artes, 2001), 48; my translation.

[246] Regarding Oaxaca's and Monte Albán's participation in the broader Mesoamerican region during the Preclassic era, see, for instance, Alfredo López Austin and Leonardo López Luján, *Mexico's Indigenous Past*, trans. Bernard R. Ortiz de Montellano (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), 83-86.

[247] Though it may be an eccentric example, it is worth noting that Samuel Lothrop, *Zacualpa: A Study of Ancient Quiché Artifacts*, publication no. 472 (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1936), fig. 71, reported that two objects of very probable Peruvian manufacture were found at Monte Alban, one a golden crown with a golden plume inserted in it of typical late Chimu style. Cited by Alfred Kidder, "South American Penetrations in Middle America," in *The Maya and the Neighbors*, eds. Clarence L. Hay, Ralph L. Linton, Samuel K. Lothrop, Harry L. Shapiro, and George C. Vaillant (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc., 1973), 458.

"archaism"—wherein Oaxacans, still largely independent and outward-looking, were drawing on inspirations from similarly growing centers not only in the Maya zone but also the Gulf Coast and Central Mexico. Where the Period I Main Plaza had been limited largely to the first iterations of the Danzante Building and a couple of other major constructions, it was, as Joyce Marcus reminds us, with the onset of Period II, that is by 100 BCE, that "the outlines of a master plan had begun to emerge."[248] This was the stage in which Oaxacans came to the idea of a grand (and heavily homologized) overall plan for the hilltop settlement, which continues to impress visitors today. It was, then, in this span that the designers of Monte Albán both drafted on—but also made their distinctive innovations to—the characteristic pyramid, temple, courtyard, stairway, ballcourt, observatory, tomb and stelae forms that were being utilized across Mesoamerica.

In short, by contrast to (or, more likely, in addition to) the reduplication of specific forms from Olmecs, Mayas or anyone else, this era suggests a more generalized version of architectural appropriation that entails the importation of broad patterns, resilient core insights, "structuring agents"—or, in the context of the present discussion, "ritual-architectural conventions"—that were, if expressed in unique ways, nonetheless fully congruent with the *núcleo duro* or "hard nucleus" of Mesoamerican cosmovision.[249] In fact, I wager that this sort of distinctively local adaptation of very widely shared cosmological conventions, and thus characteristically Mesoamerican built forms, was a leading priority not only Period II but throughout the entire duration of the Monte Albán's history.

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[248] Joyce Marcus, "How Monte Albán Represented Itself;" in *The Art of Urbanism: How Mesoamerican Kingdoms Represented Themselves in Architecture and Imagery*, eds. William L. Fash and Leonardo López Luján (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2009), 77; also see Joyce Marcus, "Early Architecture in the Valley of Oaxaca: 1350 B.C.-A.D. 500;" in *Mesoamerican Architecture as a Cultural Symbol*, ed. Jeff Karl Kowalski (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 58-75.

[249] López Austin, "El núcleo duro, la cosmovisión y la tradición mesoamericana," 59.

c. Period III Teotihuacan Influences Reassessed: Architectural Archaism Both to Display Connections and Announce Independence

With consideration of the Period III Teotihuacan influences at Monte Albán we move onto somewhat more secure, if still very much-debated, historical terrain and positively onto a more unambiguous demonstration of George Kubler's notion of deliberate archaisms. Consistent with their view of the oft-times efficacious effects of interactive relations among Mesoamerican cultures, Caso and Bernal locate Monte Albán's fullest flowering during Period IIIA, or the Early Classic (roughly 250-600 CE), which was, they believed, also the era in which the reciprocal exchanges between Oaxacan and other groups—above all, intensified interactions with Teotihuacanos, but also continued involvements with Olmecs and Mayas—were most apparent.[250] In praise of the Epoch III Zapotecs' impressive blend of discerning imitation and determined originality, Caso wrote, "The arts of writing, pottery, sculpture and the cutting of jade, all show traces of alien influences, but Monte Albán in turn stamps its own ideas on Teotihuacan and the Maya cities."[251]

More specifically, by 1936, Caso was asserting that Monte Albán's Epoch III florescence (prior to his distinction between Periods IIIA and IIIB) was precipitated primarily by a "double influence" wherein mounting involvements with Teotihuacan, which was simultaneously flourishing in the Mexican Altiplano, was paired with continuing influences from the great Maya cities of southeast Mexico and Central America.[252] The again-fortuitous and largely non-violent interaction among Teotihuacano, Maya and Oaxacan components melded into a distinctive

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[250] Regarding Caso's evolving views of the Period III Teotihuacan-Monte Albán relationship, see Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, chap. 1, the section entitled "Epoch III: A Grander Teotihuacan-Stimulated Florescence" for his 1936 stance and the section entitled "Epoch III: Oaxacan Excellence Born of Cultural Symbiosis" for a more popular 1938 treatment of the issue.

[251] Caso, "Monte Albán: An Archeological Zone of World-Wide Renown," *Obras* reprint, 148. Caso's colleague Acosta, "Preclassic and Classic Architecture of Oaxaca," 829-30, concurs in general Caso, but offers the more qualified assessment that, "In sum, architecture in this period advanced a long way technically, but lost freedom of expression and became rigidly subject to the rules and canons of religious necessity which were then fashionable."

[252] Caso, *Culturas mixteca y zapoteca*, 22-23.

Zapotec outlook that prompted what Caso assessed as "indubitably the highest splendor of the city."[253] Bernal, though stressing that the Teotihuacan component was, at this point, far and away the most significant, underscored even more strongly that it was this four-part Oaxaca-Olmec-Maya-Teotihuacan synthesis that gave birth to a unique Zapotec art and architectural style, and perhaps a unique Zapotec identity.[254] After this, he does refer to the inhabitants of Monte Albán as Zapotecs; and it is, moreover, highly notable that, even in its origin and originality, the distinctly Zapotec style—"a new culture of its own"[255]—was predicated not on the preservation of cultural or ethnic purity, but rather on an admixture of influences. Borrowing the forms and conventions of others was, for Zapotecs, a willful tactic rather than a compromise.

While invariably an advocate for Monte Albán, Bernal was nonetheless fully aware that Teotihuacan was in this era vastly larger and more powerful than its Oaxacan counterpart; this cannot have been an equal partnership. But still he continues to depict Oaxacans as fully independent actors who manage their interactive affairs in more diplomatic than militaristic ways. He adds to his scheme a Transitional II-IIIA phase (roughly 100 BCE-200 CE) in which elements of the Teotihuacano and Zapotec cultures are simultaneously present in the city without, however, being well integrated; there is during this interim, a "grouping of elements of two cultures to form a transition without fusion between them…"[256] Eventually there was a full "cultural fusion," though, in his view, Oaxacans are always the final arbiters of their own fate in a transregional interaction that included neither violence nor coercion, a picture of cooperative

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[253] Caso, *Culturas mixteca y zapoteca*, 23; my translation.

[254] Bernal, "Archaeological Synthesis of Oaxaca," 801-2. Regarding Bernal's views on the Teotihuacan-Monte Albán relationship, which he addresses in numerous contexts, see Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, chap. 2, the sections entitled "Period IIIA: Early Classic Monte Albán: Teotihuacan Influences and the Origins of Zapotec Culture" and "Period IIIB: Late Classic Monte Albán: Teotihuacan's Demise and the Zapotecs' Theocratic Successes and Excesses."

[255] Bernal, "Archaeological Synthesis of Oaxaca," 802.

[256] Bernal, "Archaeological Synthesis of Oaxaca," 801. On this "transitional [II-IIIA] stage on the way to the Zapotec culture (100 BC-AD 200)," also see Bernal, *3000 Years of Art and Life in Mexico*, 97; and note that even as early as Bernal, *Monte Albán, Mitla: Guiá official* (1957), 3, he included this transitional phase in his Monte Albán narrative.

interplay that was bolstered by the discovery of a permanent "Oaxaca barrio" in Teotihuacan. In Bernal's words:

> "We do not believe that Oaxaca was part of a possible Teotihuacan empire, because we are dealing with cultural influences which did not produce the Zapotec culture but merely modified it. Indeed most of the basic traits and those which endured were of local origin."[257]

In other words, the Period IIIA Oaxacan leaders again emerge as active borrowers, self-confident and pliable enough to be receptive to external stimuli without compromising the integrity of their homegrown styles, beliefs and practices.[258] In fact, Bernal's description of Early Classic Monte Albán's creative admixing and synthesis is nearly tantamount to a second founding of the great mountaintop capital.

Moreover, within the context of this description of the Early Classic Monte Albán, Bernal directs attention to what is, without question, the city's most prevalent and high-profile instance of deliberate archaism—namely, the Zapotecs' ample and inventive use of Teotihuacan *talud-tablero* (or slope-and-panel) elements. That is to say, while Caso and Bernal relied also on ceramic evidence and evolving tomb styles to make their case, the Period IIIA pattern of pro-active borrowing was most unmistakable in the Oaxacans' selective integration of Central Mexican features into their own style of monumental building—preeminently, the *talud-tablero* form, which became an important and highly visible element in nearly all of the buildings of this era. Again in Bernal's words, the new and different architecture of Monte Albán IIIA,

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[257] Bernal, "Archaeological Synthesis of Oaxaca," 802.

[258] Regarding the nature of the Teotihuacan influence at Monte Albán (and also in Veracruz, Chiapas, Guatemala, and the West of Mexico), Bernal, *Teotihuacan*, 49, writes, "There, even though we find a strong Teotihuacan influence, it is an influence exerted over a local culture which did not lose its basic characteristics, although it did assimilate a great number of Teotihuacan elements." Occasionally Bernal does make statements that suggest Period IIIA Teotihuacan influences *replaced* rather than *supplemented* earlier Olmecoid and Mayanoid influences; for instance, Bernal, "Archaeological Synthesis of Oaxaca," 802, says, "The only outside influence to be seen in Period IIIA comes from Teotihuacan; for the first time Monte Albán is connected with central Mexico rather than with the regions to the south and the southeast." But more often he gives the impression that, with the onset of Monte Albán IIIA, all of these outside influences "fused," and that formulation better serves his persist emphasis on the fortuitous consequences of cultural admixing.

> "directly derived from Teotihuacan, uses the slope and panel [or *talud-tablero*] design; but it is far more than a variant, let alone a copy. It is an architecture of local inspiration even if it has borrowed elements from elsewhere. Thus, the vertical panels of the temples in Monte Albán run uninterruptedly round the entire building, whereas in Teotihuacan each one is closed at the corners to form a complete frame."[259]

Again, then, Bernal insists that borrowing is not copying. Instead of simply replicating Teotihuacan forms, the Early Classic architects of Monte Albán are highly discerning in mining the great Mexican capital for ideas and inspiration they can utilize in designs that are uniquely their own. In his surmise, "Although the main outlines of the platforms are surely influenced by Teotihuacan, they have special features which enable us to speak hence forth of a Zapotec architecture."[260] Always the Zapotecs of Bernal's description are committed to selective appropriation and creative refashioning rather than rote imitation.

Though these are views that have far more resilience than Caso's or Bernal's ideas about Olmecs or Mayas—indeed, no one will dispute there is an important connection between Teotihuacan and Monte Albán—the range of opinions concerning the particulars of the relationship between the two contemporaneous capitals has been and remains wide. Among dissenters on the details, Paddock, for instance, who conducts excavations in Tlailotlacan, the famed Oaxaca barrio at Teotihuacan, in 1966 that reaffirm this was, at least to some extent, a two-way affiliation, is reticent to give Teotihuacanos any significant credit for Monte Albán's excellence; but in that way, he too adamantly reaffirms that Oaxacans were never subordinates to the Central Mexicans.[261] Blanton, whose settlement studies reveal that, at this point, Monte

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[259] Bernal, *Ancient Mexico in Colour,* 36.

[260] Bernal, "Archaeological Synthesis of Oaxaca," 803. Moreover with respect to this judicious pattern of procuring elements from Teotihuacan, which, by his descriptions, is more aptly termed strategic appropriation than copying, Bernal, ibid., concludes that, "Exactly the same appears to apply to the mural paintings, which, at Monte Albán, have been found in tombs." By contrast, writing and calendrics, areas in which the Oaxacans were presumably already far ahead of Teotihuacanos, "continue on their own lines…" Ibid.

[261] See Paddock, "Oaxaca in Ancient Mesoamerica," 126-27; and John Paddock, "The Oaxaca Barrio at Teotihuacan," Topic 52 in *The Cloud People*, eds. Flannery and Marcus, 170-75. Or, for a more general overview of his views concerning Teotihuacan's limited contributions to Monte Albán, see Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, chap. 3, the section entitled "Minimizing

Albán had just a third the area and only a quarter the population of Teotihuacan, argues that the Mexican capital was much more influential as "an external threat" than as a direct cultural stimulus.[262] Most strongly at odds, Marcus Winter, in the wake of the Monte Albán Special Project (1992-1994), comes to the iconoclastic opinion that, at the beginning of the Classic period, as part of a broader pattern of imperial domination by Teotihuacan that stretched to regions as distant as the Maya sites of Kaminaljuyú in Guatemala and Tikal in the Petén lowlands, forces from the Central Mexican capital actually conquered, occupied and controlled Monte Albán.[263] And Arthur Joyce, while conceding that "the possibility of hegemonic domination cannot be entirely excluded," opts for the moderate (and Bernal-like) position that, "I think the evidence is more consistent with reciprocal economic and political relations between the rulers of Monte Albán and Teotihuacan."[264] But never in Joyce's version of events, this era

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Teotihuacan's Role: Monte Albán IIIA Success as a Thoroughly Zapotec Accomplishment." On the so-termed Oaxaca barrier at Teotihuacan, also see Michael W. Spence, "Tlailotlacan, a Zapotec Enclave in Teotihuacan" in *Art, Ideology, and the City of Teotihuacan: A Symposium at Dumbarton Oaks, 8th and 9th October 1988*, ed. Janet Berlo (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1992), 59-88.

[262] On Blanton's views concerning Teotihuacan's large but indirect influence on Period III Monte Albán, see, the Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, chap. 4, the section entitled "Teotihuacan's Crucial Role in Monte Albán's Florescence: A Military Threat, not a Cultural Stimulus."

[263] See Marcus Winter, "Monte Albán and Teotihuacan," in *Rutas de intercambio en Mesoamerica*, ed. Evelyn C. Rattray (Mexico, D.F.: University Nacional Autónoma de México, 1998), 153-84. On numerous places that Winter addresses this issue, also see Marcus Winter, Cira Martínez López, y Damon E. Peeler, "Monte Albán y Teotihuacan : cronología e interpretaciones," en *Los ritmos de cambio en Teotihuacan: Reflexiones y discusiones de su cronología*, Rosa Brambila y Rubén Cabrera, coords. (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1998), 461-75; Winter, Marcus, Cira Martínez López, y Alicia Herrera Muzgo T., "Monte Albán y Política e Ideología," en *Ideología y política a través de materiales, imágenes y símbolos*, Memoria de la Primera Mesa Redonda de Teotihucacán, editado por María Elena Ruíz Gallut y Jesús Torres Peralta (México, D.F.: Conaculta, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2002), 627-44; and Peeler and Winter, *Sun Above, Sun Below*. Next chapter in relation to the astronomy priority (I-C) I will discuss at some length the iconoclastic and fascinating ideas about Zapotec influences on the layout of Teotihuacan that are presented by Winter and Peeler in this last work.

[264] Joyce, *Mixtecs, Zapotecs, and Chatinos*, 205.

included, are Zapotec involvements with or debts to peoples outside of Oaxaca, either positive or negative, determinative factors.[265]

Marcus and Flannery, frequent critics of Bernal, in this case present a view very consistent with their predecessor's wherein Period IIIA architecture demonstrates a deliberate and astute utilization of Teotihuacan forms.[266] Though relying on much of the same data from which Blanton deduced that Teotihuacan was most consequential as the prime "external threat" that stimulated the Period III florescence of Monte Albán, they envision the connection between the two centers in a very different way. On the one hand, though continuing to insist on the priority of local Oaxaca factors, Marcus and Flannery accept the conventional assessment that Monte Albán III and Teotihuacan had extensive interactions; also, they rely on Blanton's figures to remind us that Teotihuacan, which of course had expansionist ambitions of its own, underwent "spectacular growth" during the second century CE (that is, toward the end of Monte Albán II), and thus in Period IIIA would have been "many times larger than Monte Albán."[267] They agree that, during the Early Classic, Teotihuacan and Monte Albán were by no means equals. Nonetheless, choosing their words carefully, Marcus and Flannery contend that the great Mexican capital exercised different sorts of influence in different regions of Mesoamerica, only one of which applied to the Oaxaca capital: "[1] Teotihuacan *colonized* areas as far away as Matacapan [on the Veracruz Coast]; [2] *established an enclave* at Kaminaljuyú [in the Guatemalan highlands]; and [3] *sent ambassadors to visit* both Monte Albán and the Lowland

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[265] On Joyce's (re)construction of (what others term) Period III, in which Teotihuacanos play only a marginal role, see Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, chap. 7, the section entitled " [Period III] Classic-era Monte Albán: Increasingly Exclusive Sacred Space and Breaches of the Social Contract."

[266] On this portion of their (re)construction, see Marcus and Flannery, *Zapotec Civilization*, 217-21; or see Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, chap. 6, the section entitled "Reassessing the Teotihuacan-Monte Albán Connection: 'Skilled Diplomacy' and the Pretense of Support." Additionally, for a relevant article that will be discussed more fully in chapter 5 relative to the sacred history priority (II-B), see Joyce Marcus, "Teotihuacan Visitors on Monte Albán Monuments and Murals," Topic 53 in *The Cloud People*, eds. Flannery and Marcus, 175-81.

[267] Marcus and Flannery, *Zapotec Civilization*, 231.

Maya."[268] They thereby join the majority in soundly rejecting suggestions that Teotihuacanos exercised any coercive authority on Monte Albán.[269]

At the same time, however, Marcus and Flannery accentuate Monte Albán's autonomy in ways that directly contradict Blanton insofar as they intimate that the Oaxaca capital would have attained an equally grand climax during Period III even if Teotihuacan had never existed.[270] For them, the fortunes of the Zapotec capital always depend overwhelmingly on local Oaxaca Valley dynamics in which Teotihuacan plays only a peripheral role. In their version, somewhat implausible as it may seem (but like Bernal's and even Paddock's), Zapotec leaders, irrespective of being severely overmatched by Teotihuacan, have full control in choreographing the nature and extent of the much larger Central Mexican capital's involvement in their city. Where Teotihuacan "colonized" and presumably conquered many territories, and where Period III Zapotecs established an enduring neighborhood at Teotihuacan, they describe the Teotihuacano presence at Monte Albán as that of "visiting ambassadors." [271] That is to say, rather than dominating or settling in the Zapotec city, Teotihuacan, according to this view, occasionally sent emissaries who approached the Oaxacan capital with the sort of respect and discretion that they would afford an equal (which Monte Albán certainly was not). Marcus and Flannery support this counterintuitive claim of mutual respect by stressing the "skilled diplomacy" of the Zapotec leadership[272] and by citing the widely-quoted surmise of Teotihuacan scholar René Millon that, while the Zapotecs were only one of many groups to establish residential barrios in the capital,

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[268] Marcus and Flannery, *Zapotec Civilization*, 231; italics added.

[269] Marcus and Flannery, *Zapotec Civilization*, 233, opine that, "Through it all, there is no evidence that Monte Albán and Teotihuacan ever went to war with one another."

[270] See, for example, Marcus, "Teotihuacan Visitors on Monte Albán Monuments and Murals," 175-81.

[271] In the context of their discussion of the "Oaxaca barrio" at Teotihuacan, Marcus and Flannery, *Zapotec Civilization*, 223, note that "No comparable barrio of Teotihuacanos has ever been found at Monte Albán."

[272] Marcus and Flannery, *Zapotec Civilization*, 243.

"there was a kind of 'special relationship' between Teotihuacan and Monte Albán, one that was 'closer and of a different kind' than relations between Teotihuacan and other foreign cities."[273]

There are for both modern scholars and for pre-Columbian visitors of to Period III Monte Albán two especially persuasive lines of evidence in support of this cordial if somewhat unlikely Teotihuacan-Oaxaca relationship: iconography and architecture. Both reveal strategies of allurement. First regarding the iconographic evidence, a carved stone monument known as the Lápida de Bazán, found in the fill of a later temple mound, provides, according to Marcus and Flannery's analysis, the most tangible evidence that Period III Zapotec leaders, though militarily outclassed, managed to persuade Teotihuacan rulers that it was in their best interest to exempt Monte Albán from their imperial ambitions. While exercising due suspicion that the monument may actually represent an aspiration rather than a reality, Marcus and Flannery write:

> "We interpret the Lápida de Bazán as the record of a 'summit meeting' between the representatives of two great cities 350 km. apart. It was presumably through diplomatic agreements like this that Monte Albán and Teotihuacan remained at peace with each other, while both expanded against weaker ethnic groups."[274]

Additionally, four iconographic monuments embedded in the corners of the South Platform of the Main Plaza that, again in the (debated) interpretation of Joyce Marcus, likewise depict the same sort of interregional accord. These so-termed South Platform cornerstones, which Javier Urcid interprets very differently (in ways that mitigate the Teotihuacan influence), will subject of extended discussion in chapter 5 relative to "the sacred history priority (II-B)."[275]

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[273] René Millon, *Urbanization at Teotihuacan, Mexico*, vol. 1, *The Teotihuacan Map*, part 1: Text (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1973), 42; quoted in Marcus and Flannery, *Zapotec Civilization*, 233. Marcus and Flannery, ibid., note that "Most archaeologists assume that the people of the Oaxaca barrio [at Teotihuacan] were middlemen in some kind of trade between the two regions. Clear evidence of commodities traded, however, has yet to be found…" Paddock, "The Oaxaca Barrio at Teotihuacan," 175, cites the same Millon quote, but then puts his own spin on the nature of "the special relationship" between Teotihuacan and Monte Albán.

[274] Marcus and Flannery, *Zapotec Civilization*, 233. Marcus, "Teotihuacan Visitors on Monte Albán Monuments and Murals," 179, provides earlier but consistent remarks about the supposed meaning of the Lápida de Bazán.

[275] Regarding Urcid's very different and intensely detailed (130-page) reinterpretation of the South Platform cornerstones, see Javier Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*. Studies in Pre-

Nonetheless, according Marcus's still-widely accepted reading (which I will follow Urcid in rejecting), together those four carved orthostats record a high-ranking Teotihuacan delegation visiting and collaborating with a Monte Albán ruler. In the assessment of López Austin and López Luján, for instance, who likewise argue for harmonious rather than acrimonious relations between the two capitals:

> "Two of the eight figures wear tasseled Teotihuacan headdresses, indicating their high rank. The peaceful nature of their mission [to Monte Albán] is clearly shown by the complete absence of weapons, and by the fact that they carry a bag of copal (a ritual object) and some gifts."[276]

I will return in chapters 5 and 6 (i.e., relative to the sacred history, II-B, and politics, II-C, priorities) to the substance or "back-half" content of these much-debated iconographic monuments. But, in the present discussion (and if we abide for now Marcus's interpretation of them), they are notable as ancillary components of allurement, which reinforce the legitimating impression, which assuredly Monte Albán sovereigns wanted to make, that their Oaxaca capital enjoyed a partnership rather than subservience to the much more powerful Teotihuacan.

Be that as it may, the less contested evidence of Monte Albán's resourceful rather than acquiescent connection to its more powerful neighbor comes, just as Bernal had argued, in the strategic appropriation—and then manipulation—of Teotihuacan's trademark *talud-tablero* architectural configuration. Indeed, the Zapotecs' integration of a new version of the Central Mexican slope-and-panel design into nearly all the main Period IIIA structures is a paramount exemplification of calculated architectural archaism. Among numerous researchers to reaffirm Bernal's view that the Oaxacan variation on this motif was "far more than a variant, let alone a

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Columbian Art and Archaeology, no. 34 (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2001), chap. 5, "The Carved Monoliths from the South Platform at Monte Albán." Also, in my chapter 5 relative to the sacred history priority (II-B), see the extended discussion under the heading "The South Platform Cornerstones as Sacred History: A Third Case Study and a Third Collection of Public Narrative Displays."

[276] López Austin and López Luján, *Mexico's Indigenous Past*, 158. Regarding their assessment of the largely cooperative Classic-era relations between Teotihuacan and Monte Albán, also see ibid., 109, 122. (And note, by the way, these authors continue to support Joyce Marcus's interpretation of the South Platform cornerstones rather that shifting support to Javier Urcid's very different (2001) interpretation, which I take up and support in chapter 5.)

copy,"[277] Heyden and Gendrop, for instance, likewise argue that, irrespective of the extensive use of the *talud-tablero* form, "it does not appear that the *tablero* was ever slavishly copied by the Zapotec builders. They knew how to imbue this Teotihuacan suggestion with a spirit that better met their own architectural needs."[278] Donald Robertson too emphasizes that the Monte Albán use of the form is distinct both from the Teotihuacan original and from the way in which that convention was reused at Tula or other sites.[279]

In sum, then, as a quintessential instance of self-interested architectural archaism, Monte Albán's allusions to Teotihuacan are deliberately conspicuous rather than understated or obscure. Though imaging more Machiavellian motives than does Bernal, Marcus and Flannery also reecho his view that the Zapotecs' heavy and heavily reworked use of *talud-tablero* was orchestrated completely from the Oaxacan side. In their account, Monte Albán III rulers did not simply stave off Teotihuacan, but, moreover, found ways—especially via architecture and supporting iconography—to capitalize on their (largely fictive) relationship with a city much greater than their own. Accordingly, the ample Teotihuacan allusions in the public art and

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[277] Bernal, *Ancient Mexico in Colour*, 36.

[278] Heyden and Gendrop, *Pre-Columbian Architecture of Mesoamerica*, 66. Explaining more fully how the Oaxaca (re)use of the *talud-tablero* form is similar but different from its Central Mexican prototype, Heyden and Gendrop write, "In Teotihuacan, the uncompromisingly horizontal frames of the *tableros* always rise from a short *talud* and usually run clear around the base, stopping at the stairways, where narrow *alfardas*—generally with projecting dadoes—serve as an element of transition. In Monte Albán, on the other hand, there emerged a rich variety of *tableros*—among them the famous 'scapulary' type, almost invariably formed by a broken panel with a second one sitting on top of it, thus creating an overhanging double molding on the upper part." Ibid.

[279] On the innovative reuse of the *talud-tablero* motif at Monte Albán, Robertson, *Pre-Columbian Architecture*, 21, writes: ""*Taluds* and *tableros* [at Monte Albán] remind one of the complexities of Tula design rather than the forthright rectilinearity of Teotihuacan. *Tableros* at Monte Albán are made on two overlapping planes and seem to hang where the ends are dropped in step fashion at the corners. They are distinct from the later compound *tableros* of Tula, however, because of their lack of relief sculpture. Although the overlapping planes of the Monte Albán *tableros* do not create such great contrasts of light and shade as the moldings and niches of El Tajín, the geometric relationships they establish are certainly more subtle." Also note, by the way, that Kubler, "Chichén Itzá y Tula," 76, argues, against the mainstream view, that the use of the *talud-tablero* at Chichén Itzá more resembles the use of that motif at Monte Albán than the way it is used at either Teotihuacan or Tula.

architecture are not signs of weakness, as though the Zapotec leaders had been forced to compromise their autonomy and acquiesce to the demands or tastes of a foreign power; and nor are they expressions of admiration for the Central Mexicans. Quite to the contrary, these unmistakable visual references to Teotihuacan are, for Marcus and Flannery, not unlike Bernal, evidence of yet another characteristically self-promotional means whereby the rulers of Monte Albán III reasserted their supremacy over Oaxacan commoners and even more over other Oaxacan nobles who would dare to challenge their authority. In short, Monte Albán's distinctive refashioning of the Central Mexican slope-and-panel convention was a perfect expression of connectedness to, but independence from, Teotihuacan, a strategy of ritual-architectural allurement that was also a strategy of state-crafting.

IV. Closing Thoughts: Conventionalized Architecture as a Strategy of Ritual-Architectural Allurement

Last chapter on the homology priority (I-A) revealed Monte Albán as a unique and stupendous exemplar of ritual-architectural allurement via homologized architecture. Every variation on that theme—from heterogeneous space to built expressions of the *imago mundi* concept and the symbolism of the center—finds truly magnificent exemplification in the capital's microcosmic layout atop an *altépetl* cosmic mountain. The results of this reconnaissance of variations on the convention priority (I-B)—together with reflections on the enduring tension between innovation and imitation at Monte Albán—are also revealing, but less remarkable.

These two-part Closing Thoughts, nevertheless, first summarize the mixed outcomes of that three-stage inventory of conventionality alternatives. Then the final sub-section provides more broadly framed comments concerning what this survey, which may seem a largely art historical exercise, reveals about the "religion" of Monte Albán. And on that topic, I issue a quick reminder of the important but limited role of conventionality as a complementary strategy of ritual-architectural allurement before addressing ways in which Monte Albán's dual penchant for innovating and imitating is both a cause and consequence of the existential "religious" challenges that come with living in one of Mesoamerica's earliest urban centers.

A. Complementary Means of Averting the Ephemeral and Idiosyncratic: The Mixed Results of an Inventory of Conventionality Alternatives

Now more than two millennia old, Monte Albán's buildings, the quintessence of enduring works of architecture, were built to last. Yet even when these structures were brand new, they, not unlike many religious constructions, were conceived and presented as timeless, exempt from the vicissitudes of merely human leaders or transient political regimes. Rather than attributed to any individual or human group, the legitimacy, appeal—and, yes, allure—of their designs depend upon exuding a sense of permanent and transhuman authority. Building according to cosmic models (i.e., homologized architecture, priority I-A) provides one avenue toward accomplishing that; and conventionalized architecture (priority I-B), in its various permutations, presents other means of evading any impression of the ephemeral, idiosyncratic or unserious. All of the variations on the conventionality theme work to forestall impressions of transience or frivolity. But, as we've seen, not all of those alternatives are equally applicable to the ritual-architectural program of Monte Albán.

For instance, pursuit of the first variation on the theme—architectural configurations at Monte Albán that conform to universalistic principles and proportions that are understood to be inherent in the structure of the universe—leads to comingled optimism and provocations. On the one hand, comparative religionists find in virtually every tradition architectural constructions that are informed by geometrical formula and rules of proportioning; and, especially owing to the Zapotecs' leadership in calendrics, several lines of inquiry encourage us to believe they had well developed traditions of conventionalized building prescriptions roughly parallel to those in, for instance, Vitruvius's *Ten Books of Architecture*, Italian Renaissance rulebooks, Chinese *feng-shui* manuals and Indian *Silpa Sastras*. Sightlines superimposed on Alfonso Caso's impressively accurate topographic map of Monte Albán from the 1920s suggest he may already have been suspecting geometric interbuilding relations of this sort.[280] Increasingly well documented geometric systems at numerous sites, especially in the Maya zone, enhance the likelihood that

[280] In a footnote earlier in this chapter I alluded to the sightlines that Alfonso Caso superimposes on a topographic plan drawing of the central part of Monte Albán. For a version of that plan that includes those sightlines, see Caso, *El tesoro de Monte Albán*, 17.

fuller traditions of sacred geometry were at work in pre-Columbian Oaxaca as well. And the rigorous studies of Marcus Winter, Damon Peeler and Miguel Bartolomé concerning the integration of calendrical time counts into the architectural dimensioning and spacing of several Monte Albán constructions provide certain evidence that this sort of rule-based proportioning was indeed an important priority for ancient Oaxacan designers. On the other hand, though, their provocative work seems only a beginning to what we may hope to find in this respect.

Although one expects the discernment of additional geometrical formula and relationships, juxtaposing detailed work like that of Winter and Bartolomé with more broadly framed cross-cultural analogies already evokes two noteworthy and related points concerning the experiential import of such conventions. First is the possibility, mentioned earlier, that the calendrics of Monte Albán served not only as a pre-Columbian means of recording time, but, moreover, operated like the prescriptive manuals of building that are so important for the design of religious structures in countless other traditions. That is to say, apparently abstract and rarified calendars may also have played a very practical role insofar as they transformed the universalistic principles that had been gleaned from observations of sky phenomena and other elements of nature into tangible prescriptions that were then conventionalized, disseminated and put to service in actual architectural construction.

And second, while the particulars of such calendrical and proportioning systems, not unlike those of the *Silpa Sastras* or *feng-shui*, assuredly do constitute highly restricted, sometimes even secret knowledge, builders and theorists from those traditions clear to Alberti, Thomas Aquinas and Le Corbusier argue that the efficacious effects of "correct proportioning" are *not* dependent upon an explicit awareness of the requisite rules and principles.[281] To the contrary, countless sources insist that the experiential effect—and, thus again, the allure—of the forms that result from those recondite conventions are impactful for all elements of society. No preparatory training is required to enjoy what Alberti termed "the honest pleasure of the mind"

[281] Regarding array of different claims made concerning the "common people's" *experience* of architecture that is proportioned according to universalistic principles, see Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, vol. II, 59-62, a section entitled "Experiencing Proportionality: The Transformative Consequences of Conventionality."

that even the unschooled experience in the face of carefully apportioned works of art and architecture.[282] And thus rather that assume that the admittedly esoteric symbolism of magic numbers, sacred ratios and geometric formulas was lost on "the masses" who presumably frequented the ceremonial occasions in the Main Plaza, we can appreciate that numeric symbolism as a practical and highly effective means of enriching those occasions.

By contrast, queries into the second variation on the conventionality theme—Monte Albán ritual-architectural configurations that conform to axiomatic requirements understood to have been delivered by god(s)—provide a model instance of almost entirely negative replies. This topic, as we saw, draws us into the tangled controversy about pre-Columbian Oaxacan conceptions of divinity and debate as to whether their ideas about the supernatural were anthropomorphic versus impersonal, polytheistic versus monotheistic, or unified throughout the population versus very different among elite and "commoner" social constituencies. And yet, none of the ample resolutions of that problem leads one to believe that ancient Zapotec designers were acting in obedience to what they imagined to be design stipulations that god(s) had imposed upon them. Where, in the Abrahamic traditions, God frequently mandates precise architectural specifications, and, in Hinduism, for instance, often temples are built expressly in ways designed to please or appease a deity,[283] there are, it seems, no close parallels in the case of Monte Albán. I nevertheless continue to entertain that possibility.

Also by contrast, queries about the third variation—architectural configurations that take their form in response to the deliberate imitation of prestigious predecessors or contemporaries—present resoundingly positive replies. In fact, this line of hermeneutical questioning issues in not just one but three notably different, again not-mutually-exclusive permutations on Kubler's notion of "deliberate archaism." Though, as we've seen, the specific hypotheses about Monte

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[282] In regard to Alberti's ideas about the transformative potential of art and architecture, see David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 44-47.

[283] The notion of sacred architecture built expressly to placate or please a deity will resurface both in chapter 4 in relation to the divinity priority (II-A) and in chapter 10 in relation to the so-termed propitiation priority (III-C).

Albán's extensive interregional interactions ventured by Alfonso Caso and Ignacio Bernal have been largely dismissed, the ensuing polemics speak to each of these alternate sorts of imitation and borrowing. For one, prevailing skepticism about Period I Olmec influences nonetheless leaves in place the fully viable possibility that Monte Albán designers exemplified Erwin Panofsky's "principle of disjunction" by appropriating other cultures' art and architectural *forms* to which they assigned new *meanings*. This sort of pro-active, appropriative manipulation, whether of Olmec forms or someone else's, would not have been confined to Monte Albán's initial era.

For two, discussion of Period II Maya influences, though also generally discounted, nevertheless directs attention to Monte Albán's dynamic participation in the emergent and evolving "hard nucleus" of Mesoamerican cosmovision via ongoing commercial and diplomatic relations with numerous peoples from across the entire cultural region. This continuous engagement with the ideas and material culture of others was, in all likelihood, the most effectual catalyst to ritual-architectural imitation and appropriation. It was, for instance, during this Late Preclassic era that Oaxacans embraced and then integrated into their emergent ceremonial precinct such familiar pan-Mesoamerican elements as temples with pyramid bases, a ballcourt, wide staircases, an observatory and stelae, all tried-and-true features to which they added their own innovations such as two-room temples, round columns and, eventually in the Classic era, the Temple-Patio-Altar configuration, which were likewise then repeated as standardized forms. In this way, all that was radically new and different about Monte Albán was couched within decidedly familiar and characteristically Mesoamerican conventional elements. Just as the highly conventionalized design of American college campuses alerts visitors immediately that they have stepped onto the grounds of serious educational institution, even first-time visitors to the Main Plaza would have been instantly aware that they had entered a religio-civic space of gravity and substance.

And for three, the much-debated relationship between Monte Albán and Teotihuacan—and especially the eventually ubiquitous Oaxacan reutilization of the *talud-tablero* form—provide the most unambiguous exemplification of intentional archaism. Positively outsized and militarily surpassed by their much larger Central Mexican contemporary, the designers of Period

IIIA Monte Albán, it seems, turned a potential threat to their autonomy into a ritual-architectural asset. Instead of pretending complete disconnectedness from Teotihuacan, and thereby absenting from their ceremonial plaza any allusion to the Altiplano capital, they did precisely the opposite by expropriating the Mexicans' signature slope-and-panel feature, and then altering and repeating it in ways that made it a signature of Early Classic Monte Albán.

As a perfect demonstration of the convention priority (I-B), this Oaxacan expropriation of Teotihuacan *talud-tablero* forms is, on the one hand, imitation of the most deliberately conspicuous sort. In the same way that Christian and Muslim allusions to Hagia Sophia or Sikh references to the Golden Temple at Amritsar are effective and alluring only if their emulation of the prestigious prototype is apparent, Oaxacans seized upon the most unmistakable of Central Mexican markers to display their perhaps-fictive bilateral partnership with Teotihuacan; and then they deployed iconographic displays of supposed summit meetings that reinforced the impression of a mutually respectfully working relationship between the two centers. But, on the other hand, by their extensive refashioning of the *talud-tablero* motif, they also signaled their ongoing independence from Teotihuacan, which also may or may not have comported with the historical reality. Whether assessed as artistic subtlety, political subterfuge or both, this is architectural archaism par excellence.

B. Conventionality and the Religion of Monte Alban: Allurement and the Socio-Existential Challenges of Early Urbanism

Finally, where the exploration of the homology priority (I-A) bore directly on the topic of religion in the sense of orientation and "a mode of being in the world," what this discussion of conventionalized architecture (priority I-B) reveals about the religion of Monte Albán requires somewhat more elaboration. Two quite different sorts of replies are in order. Thus, following brief and now-predictable comments about conventionality as a mode of ritual-architectural allurement, I end with more venturous reflections on how the dynamic of innovation and imitation that runs through this entire chapter is connected with the "religious" challenges of living in one of Mesoamerica's earliest urban centers.

1. Conventionality, Unoriginality and Allurement: Affirming the Important but Limited Role of Architectural Conventions

At this point, it is, I hope, quite obvious that all of these variations on the convention priority (I-B) work simultaneously and conjointly with the similarly numerous variations on the homology priority (I-A) as "strategies of ritual-architectural allurement." Together these strategies collaborate in making Monte Albán the supremely impressive and alluring place that it must have been. Essentially everything I have discussed in this chapter, like the previous one (and the next chapter), belongs, then, to the so-termed "front-half" of Monte Albán's ritual-architectural program. All of these conventionalized features—from the standardized forms of pyramids, ballcourts, stairways and stelae to the *talud-tablero* motif—are explicitly, deliberately and, in a sense, proudly, *un*original. Moreover, while many of these components are technically impressive and not unelaborate, they are, in the broader frame, largely absent of "religious" content and the sort of messaging on which I will focus when the discussion turns to the "back-half" of the ritual-architectural situation and thus to the commemoration of divinity (priority II-A), sacred history (II-B), politics (II-C) and the dead (II-D). To search after the "religious meanings" of these highly conventionalized forms is especially futile. Alternatively, to appreciate the religious significance of such oft-repeated elements requires acknowledging the vital, but also but quite restricted, role that conventionalized built forms play in the context of Monte Albán's wider ritual-architectural program.

In other words, like homologized architecture (priority I-A), constructions that reflect the convention priority (I-B) in any of its permutations—from universalistic principles, to divinely delivered sanctions, to the appropriation of prestigious forebears or contemporaries, or perhaps to all of those simultaneously—serve primarily as means of preparing the way or "instigating" ritual-architectural events. They issue invitations, or sometimes imperatives, to participate rather than communicating information. Accordingly, again like the homology priority (and, as we'll see next, like astronomically informed configurations, priority I-C), adhering to the architectural standards of tradition seldom, if ever, constitutes the total raison d'être of a ritual-architectural program. And thus, just as I ended last chapter with cautions against mistaking homologized features such as an urban layout designed as a "little cosmos," a ceremonial precinct conceived

as an *axis mundi*, or even the placement of the city atop an *altépetl* "hill of sustenance" as the substance or main message of Monte Albán's ritual-architectural program, I now reissue that warning with respect to obviously conventionalized design elements.

Far more often, such formulaic features work primarily in a preliminary fashion to cultivate an impression, often deserved, of credibility, legitimacy or pedigree, which convinces people that the religio-civic proceedings undertaken here and the pronouncements delivered in those ritual occasions carry the force of history and tradition. Such time-tested forms, as I've reiterated, mitigate any impression of the ephemeral or idiosyncratic. In these cases, the predictable and unsurprising—that is, *the conventional*—are precisely what is required to fashion a persuasive invitation to consider seriously the less predictable insights and directives that are communicated in the ensuing ritual-architectural events.

2. Compulsory Reorientation and the Lack of Precedents: Engaging the "Religious" Challenges of Early Urbanism

Lastly, its crucial role as a strategy of allurement notwithstanding, conventionality, along with the tension between imitation and innovation—which, I concur, is uniquely intense in the case of the Oaxacan capital—also bears on the religion of Monte Albán in larger and less obvious ways that are connected with the site's status as one of Mesoamerica's earliest urban centers. The mountain site's oft-repeated distinction as the region's very first city is debatable; but there is no question that it was at the leading edge not only in terms of writing and calendrics, but also monumental construction and urban design. Never before had any group built a ceremonial precinct nearly on the scale of the Main Plaza; and never before had a center enjoyed such rapid growth, expansion that seems to have far exceeded the expectations of its founders, who are now widely agreed to have been migrants from the nearby site of San José Mogote. But that the new settlement grew so quickly in the early stages also posed unprecedented challenges.

In that respect, one cannot stress too strongly the profound demands and ramifications of being at the forefront of what would become an overwhelmingly urban world. As urban geographer Paul Wheatley persuades us, the transition from village to city is not less momentous

than the emergence of agriculture; the onset of urban life is, he contends, one of a small handful of the most jarring circumstances in human history. According to his theory of "primary urban genesis," a phenomenon that transpires worldwide just seven times, Mesoamerica one among them, the emergence of pre-industrial, "traditional cities" is invariably preceded by their fruition as pilgrimage or ceremonial centers.[284] And while Wheatley focuses primarily on the emergence of Teotihuacan, his model actually fits better Arthur Joyce's account of Monte Albán's founding by disenfranchised settlers from San José Mogote whose initially "religious" motivations for maintaining "an ongoing relationship with the divine" blossom into a socially complex and politically powerful urban capital.[285]

For Wheatley—whose perspective, as we saw last chapter, is strongly indebted to Mircea Eliade—to live in a city constitutes not only an unprecedented socio-hierarchical situation, which thus demands distinct innovations in social organization and infrastructure; urban life, moreover, poses a "religious" problem insofar as it requires a new and distinct orientation, an alternate "a mode of being in the world," very different from that which obtains in pre-urban village

[284] On the processes of "primary urban genesis," see Wheatley, *The Pivot of the Four Quarters*, chap.3, "The Nature of the Ceremonial Center." It is notably that while Wheatley considers Mesoamerica to be one of the seven contexts of "primary urban genesis," and he make that case primarily on the basis of Teotihuacan (see ibid., 234-35), he notes also that, "at much the same time temple enclaves [some of which would evolve into cities] began to appear in other parts of Mesoamerica," Monte Albán among them. Ibid., 234. Note also that, in the terminology of Paddock, "Oaxaca in Ancient Mesoamerica," 111-12, Monte Albán is one the very few "first generation" civilizations, a site of "Early Urbanism," which refers to cities like Teotihuacan and Monte Albán that emerge directly from village forms. By contrast, much more common "Late Urbanism" is derivative of Early Urban cases and thus refers to cities like Cholula, El Tajín, Xochicalco and Tula, all of whom emerge in Teotihuacan's wake, or the cities in the Mixteca region, which Paddock sees as derivative of Monte Albán. Ibid., 175, 183ff, 210. For details and complications connected with this distinction, see the account of Paddock's view in Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, chap. 3, the section entitled "Period II: The Certain Onset of the Early Urbanism: 'First-Generation' Civilization at Monte Albán."

[285] See, for example, Joyce, Mixtecs, Zapotecs, and Chatinos, chap. 5, "From Village to City: The Founding and Early Development of Monte Albán." For a short summary of this portion of Joyce's (re)construction, see that which I provided last chapter; or see the fuller summary in Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, chap. 7, the sections entitled "[Periods I & II] The Ascent of Monte Albán: Inclusive Sacred Space and Healthy Maintenance of the Social Contract" and "[Period III] Classic-era Monte Albán: Increasingly Exclusive Sacred Space and Breaches of the Social Contract."

contexts. In that sense, then, the residents of early Monte Albán were forced into a kind of compulsory innovation and reorientation. Moreover, by their inventiveness—and the fast growth spurred by their success in creating an uncommonly alluring ceremonial center atop an *altépetl* cosmic mountain—they actually exacerbated their predicament. This truly was, more than the San José Mogote migrants could have anticipated, "a new religious movement."

Early Monte Albán's socio-political and ritual-architectural challenges were, furthermore, vastly intensified by the fact that it had so few clear precedents and prototypes. Its 500 BCE founding transpired in advance of the emergence of the subsequently great Maya centers and several hundred years before major construction had even begun at Teotihuacan. Formative-era centers like the Olmec site of La Venta, Central Mexican Chalcatzingo and Mayanoid Chiapa de Corzo seem likely to have been important inspirations for the earliest version of the Main Plaza;[286] from the very start, innovation was laced with interregional imitation. But even the Period II elaboration of that precinct into much the same size and conception that visitors see today occurred roughly contemporaneously with Teotihuacan's earliest constructions, and thus generations in advance of "the paradigm of urbanism and urban authority" that, according to Davíd Carrasco, first arose at the Central Mexican capital before being eventually serving as the guiding template for so many later urban capitals.[287] Monte Albán is *not*, in its essential conception, modeled after Teotihuacan or, for that matter, any other Mesoamerican city.

Most Oaxacanists now agree that San José Mogote provided the nearest and most direct model for the layout of the Main Plaza as a religio-civic ritual space. And Joyce's account (as summarized last chapter) makes a compelling case that both the rapid rise and the eventual demise of Monte Albán mirrored a pattern established at San José Mogote wherein an inclusive, well-functioning ceremonial precinct fostered the growth of the capital until such time that elites overstepped their authority and broke "the social contract" by restricting access to the revered

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[286] Joyce, "Sacred Space and Social Relations in the Valley of Oaxaca," 201.

[287] See Carrasco, *Quetzalcoatl and the Irony of Empire*, chap. 2, "Quetzalcoatl and the Foundation of Tollan."

precinct, thereby alienating the populace who simply left for more amenable alternatives.[288] But in the wake of Monte Albán meteoric growth and expansion, San José Mogote, whose maximum population was on the order of some 1400 residents,[289] proved to be a very limited exemplar. Its size, social complexity and regional impact were dwarfed by Monte Albán. Accordingly, the new capital was compelled to look farther and wider for models and inspiration. Necessity was, in this case, the mother of innovation *and* imitation.

In other words, later in Mesoamerican history, once the region had become what Carrasco terms a fully urban world—"a world organized by hundreds of carefully planned ceremonial centers and scores of monumental, even majestic cities and city-states"[290]—precedents and patterns of city life were well established. Most notably, for all of the Late Classic and Postclassic "other Tollans" that Carrasco discusses, the Teotihuacan-born tradition of the fabulously accomplished Toltecs provided a thoroughgoing and widely-known template; those centers had at their disposal a full-blown model of urbanism that—to revisit the old question of motives for ritual-architectural imitation—served dual political and existential purposes. For Xochicalco, Cholula, Tula, Chichén Itzá and, most poignantly, for the Aztecs of Tenochtitlan, modeling their cities after the mythico-historical Toltecs provided a pragmatic policy-making means of persuading both the citizenry and outside competitors of the legitimacy of their urban bases of temporal power; but adhering to that example, as the apt phrase "the irony of empire" teaches us, was far more than a strictly political ploy. Additionally, the Tollan paradigm, in the sense of Eliade's emphasis on the existential rewards of reiterating "mythical archetypes," also afforded those "other Tollans" the heartfelt self-understanding—that is, the distinctly urban sort of "religious orientation"—required to make sense of and to meet one's

[288] See Joyce, *Mixtecs, Zapotecs, and Chatinos*, 197-226.

[289] Joyce, *Mixtecs, Zapotecs, and Chatinos*, 84, 121. Marcus Flannery, *Zapotec Civilization*, 125, estimate the Rosario phase population of San José Mogote at "about 1000 persons," after which, during Monte Albán's initial ascent, it lost population.

[290] Davíd Carrasco, *Religions of Mesoamerica: Cosmovision and Ceremonial Centers*, second edition (Long Grove, Illinois: Waveland Press, 2014), xvi.

obligations as full participants in city life.[291] The Aztecs, for instance, were, then, furnished an obvious, largely ready-made means of engendering "the feeling of being embedded in great processes that began long before our personal existence."[292]

Early Monte Albán, by sharp contrast, had no such well defined and widely circulated models at its disposal. Its rulers were, therefore, in much larger measure, starting from scratch, so to speak, in executing the design of an urban ceremonial center for which there was no well-mapped blueprint. As both neophyte and path-breaking urbanites, the Oaxacans were forced into radical innovation. But also consistent with their persistent depiction as highly assertive cultural borrowers and synthesizers, they undertook, as we've seen, abundant "archaisms" by sometimes appropriating specific forms to which they assigned new meanings, by frequently fashioning their own specific renditions of generalized insights from the widely shared Mesoamerican cosmovision and, eventually, once historical circumstances allowed it, by cultivating the impression of a close relation with the great Teotihuacan. In short, capitalizing on their position as "a place in-between," they made the most of all of the imitable resources that were at their disposal.[293]

In final sum, then, the San José Mogote migrants were, it seems, on a trajectory toward urbanization, and their original home may, by some criteria, already qualify as a small city, perhaps even Mesoamerica's first. Nonetheless, when that status emerged full-force in Monte

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[291] I will explore in chapter 5 under the rubric of sacred history (priority II-B) the way in which the configuration of Monte Albán adheres to more strictly mythical models; but I stress here the absence of the sort of earthly urban models that later Mesoamerican cities enjoyed.

[292] I borrow, and use somewhat out of context, this apt phrase from Maarten E.R.G.N. Jansen, "Inauguración de templos y dinastías. La piedra grabada de Nuu Yuchi," en *Bases de la complejidad social en Oaxaca: Memoria de la Cuarta Mesa Redonda de Monte Albán*, ed. Nelly M. Robles García (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2009), 584; my translation.

[293] By contrast to the Late Classic Chichén Itzá, for instance, whose highly eclectic ceremonial plaza I have, as noted earlier, argued in Jones, *Twin City Tales*, 377-89, contains—as one of its premier means of ritual-architectural allurement—allusions to countless of other ceremonial centers across the full reach of Mesoamerica, Monte Albán had a much narrower spectrum of available of models and resources on which to draw.

Albán, the Oaxacans faced, along with unprecedented socio-political and logistical challenges, an existential "religious" exigency for which they could not have been prepared. Their dilemma finds an apt if perhaps unlikely parallel in the way that historian of religion Charles Long describes the momentous "discovery" of America and Native Americans as a "religious crisis" not just for indigenous peoples, but for Europeans—because it drastically undermined their well-established Eurocentric sense of the world and their place in it, and therefore required Europeans to find an alternate and very different "orientation."[294] Similarly, the newly urban inhabitants of Monte Albán faced not only vast socio-bureaucratic challenges, but also a "religious" predicament insofar as they could not simply transfer their village orientation into the city context. Along with the estimable logistical challenges of their massive undertaking, they needed a new "mode of being in the world."

The "religious" turning point of greatest consequence is not, then, the initial founding of Monte Albán, which does have great continuity with San José Mogote. Alternatively, the most vexing religious challenge emerges in the growth spurt that eventuates in the Period II ritual-architectural design of the Main Plaza in ways that would be subsequently enhanced, though, in its principal parameters, never drastically altered. The uniquely long list of "firsts" with which Monte Albán is credited—from hieroglyphic writing and calendars; to tombs, funerary urns, mural art and depictions of deities; to stone construction, stucco, adobe, lime plaster, colonnades, two-roomed temples and specially wide staircases—is a consequence of mandatory inventiveness, augmented by a perhaps uniquely assertive approach to interregional borrowing, as they came to terms the existential vicissitudes of early urban life. In short, the commingled innovation and imitation for which Monte Albán has been so often commended was a dual strategy for enhancing the ritual-architectural allure of the Zapotec capital, but also a means of meeting the religious challenges posed by life in one of Mesoamerica's earliest urban centers. Besides constructing the premier ceremonial center of their era, these Oaxacans were, to a significant extent, fashioning a new "religious orientation."

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[294] Charles H. Long, "Conquest and Cultural Contact in the New World," in *Significations: Signs, Symbols and Images in the Interpretation of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 97-113. See especially ibid., 101, concerning "the ways in which the ['discovery' of the] New World brought about a new orientation of European consciousness."