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CHAPTER FOUR

The Ritual-Architectural Commemoration of Divinity: Contentious Academic Theories but Consentient Supernaturalist Conceptions (*Priority II-A*)

> "All Greek sacred architecture explores and praises the character of a god or group of gods in a specific place. That place is itself holy and, before the temple was built upon it, embodied the whole of the deity as a recognized natural force. With the coming of the temple, housing its image within it and itself developed as a sculptural embodiment of the god's presence and character, the meaning becomes double, both of the deity as it nature and the god as imagined by men."
>
> Vincent Scully, 1962[1]

> "It would not be an exaggeration to say that the Mexican Indian lived for his gods. For this reason, almost all the objects which have been preserved are [for] ritual or show a form strongly affected by the religious sense."
>
> Alfonso Caso, 1936[2]

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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 chapter. 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] Vincent Scully, *The Earth, the Temple, and the Gods: Greek Sacred Architecture*, revised edition (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979 [first edition 1962]), 1-2.

[2] Alfonso Caso, *Culturas mixteca y zapoteca*, El Libro de la Cultura (Barcelona: Editorial González Porto, 1936), 25; John Paddock's translation. This much-quoted section on "The Zapotec Culture" reappears, for instance, as Alfonso Caso, "Los dioses zapotecos y mixtecas," en *México Prehispánico: Culturas, deidades, monumentos,* Antologia de *Esta Semana-This Week*, 1935-1946, ed. Emma Hurtado (México, D.F.: Rafael Loera y Chavez, 1946): 519-525. Also, by way of guiding introductory quotes, I would pair Caso's obersvation about the centrality of "gods" with cautions about the difficulties of ascertaining them provided by Wigberto Jiménez Moreno, "De Tezcatlipoca a Huitzilopochtli," *Actes du XLII^e^ Congrès International des Americanistes, Septembre 2-9, 1976, Paris*, vol. 6 (1979), 27; quoted by Víctor de la Cruz, "Los múltiples nombres y formas de Pitao," 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), 571: "To decipher indigenous thinking about the gods and their origins requires great patience. If one does not want to fall into error or confusion, one must be wary of conclusions reached hurriedly..."

> "The concept of a religion, with a unified orthodoxy and coherent creed, is characteristically articulated only when one group is attempting to validate its truths according to the terms of another... Indeed, Mesoamerican people have produced the most recognizably theological works in the sixteenth century, during their initial encounter with Christianity, and more recently, as they confront aggressive Catholic and Protestant movements."
>
> John D. Monaghan, 2000[3]

This chapter, the first of four on the substantive content of Monte Albán's ritual-architectural program, is devoted to asking and answering a question that perhaps more than any other deserves a book of its own: *How and to what extent is the expression or commemoration of divinity (priority II-A) relevant to the design conception and subsequent experience of Monte Albán?* As outlined in *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, the so-termed "divinity priority" refer to very wide range of options from the deification of "unbuilt" features of the natural landscape to built forms that are variously conceived as the actual body of a deity, as the residence of a deity, and/or as physical expressions of the attributes of a deity.[4] Construing "divinity" and "theology" in the broadest terms, this pattern of questioning concerns as well supernatural entities and life forces that are not deities per se, but also a matter of major concern at the great Zapotec capital. It is no surprise that this is, by far, the longest chapter.[5]

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[3] John D. Monaghan, "Theology and History in the Study of Mesoamerican Religions," in *Supplement to the Handbook of Middle American Indians*, vol. 6, Ethnology, vol. ed. John D. Monaghan, gen. ed. Victoria Reifler Bricker (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), 25.

[4] Regarding the broader category of ritual-architectural commemorations of divinity 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. 17, "Divinity: Bodies, Abodes, and Abstractions (Priority II-A)."

[5] Regarding the inordinate length of this chapter, note that, were one simply to omit the first block of the chapter on the history of ideas about Zapotec divinity conceptions, then the latter block more properly on the ritual-architectural commemoration of divinity (priority II-A) has a scale roughly commensurate with the other chapters.

The Driving Questions: Characteristically Mesoamerican and/or Uniquely Oaxacan Ideas about Supernatural Entities and Life Forces

Who and what are the gods of Monte Albán? Unquestionably this is the single most high-profile topic of debate in the study of ancient Zapotec religion. On the one hand, very often the operative assumption has been that ascertaining what gods the ancient Zapotecs worshipped is the passkey to understanding the religion of Monte Albán. No other problem attracts nearly so much attention as how best to navigate the profusion of names and images of deities that emerge from the ethnohistorical, archaeological and ethnographic sources. Who are all these gods? How are they related to one another? What status did these gods enjoy? And yet, on the other hand, some Oaxacanists adamantly dispute the very notion that Zapotecs had anthropomorphic deities. Virtually no one contests the claim that ancient Zapotecs were "religious;" and no one argues that they were atheistic. But the ostensibly obvious corollary that they worshipped many gods is, as we'll see, far from incontestable. Could this have been a religion without gods? Were the inhabitants of Monte Albán polytheists, monotheists, monists, pantheists, animists, animatists or none of the above?[6] Did the rulers and residents of the great Zapotec capital believe in many gods, one god or no gods?

Additionally, at least five more sets of crucial questions inform every step of the inquiry into the relevance of the divinity priority, II-A. For one, yet again evoking debate concerning the uniqueness versus typicality of Oaxacan culture, did ancient Zapotecs adhere to conceptions of divinity essentially like those of all Mesoamericans? Or did the residents of Monte Albán subscribe to more distinctive and unique theological precepts?[7] Can we accept the widespread view expressed, for instance, by Ignacio Bernal, that, "It would appear that all through Mesoamerican history the same gods, with local minor differences, were worshipped in all the

[6] While I will address advocates for each of these six positions, I find no one arguing that ancient Zapotecs were atheists.

[7] Note that, just as I occasionally use "anthropology" in a generic sense to mean ideas and conceptions of the human, I use "theology" in a generic sense to refer to ideas and conceptions of divinity, which may or may not include "gods" and which may or may not be articulated in some systematic way.

areas?"[8] For two, did Monte Albán elites and "commoners" operate with the same conceptions of divinity? Or did, as many scholars maintain, the "state religion" of the rulers, which was practiced in the public spaces of the capital, differ profoundly from the devotional practices undertaken in non-elite and domestic contexts? For three, were Zapotec divinity conceptions largely stable over the city's long history? Or again as many Oaxacanists maintain, were there very significant changes in the number and disposition of the gods that were worshipped in the respective Formative, Classic and Postclassic eras? And likewise with respect to continuity and change, do contemporary indigenous communities provide reliable clues of pre-Columbian attitudes about supernaturals? Or do they only mislead us?

Even more subtle methodological questions entail, fourth, irrespective changes over time and diversity among different social constituencies, can we accept the usually unstated presumption that, at some point in the Oaxacan past, all of the conceptions of divinity existed as a thoroughgoing and largely consistent theological "system"? Or is it the case, as most comparative religionists and ethnographers would suspect, that indigenous Oaxacans were highly flexible, largely pragmatic, invariably situational, and thus not altogether consistent in their adherence to what Miguel Bartolomé terms "a multiple experience of the sacred"?[9] And fifth, since we have to accept that not all divinity conceptions are equally prone to inspire cults and outward ritual devotion, which dimensions of the ancient Zapotecs' multifaceted investments in

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[8] Ignacio Bernal, *Ancient Mexico in Colour* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968), 35. Among many who share Bernal's opinion about the essential sameness of gods across Mesoamerica, Víctor de la Cruz, "Cambios religiosos en Monte Albán a fines del periodo Clásico," en *Estructuras políticas en el Oaxaca antiguo: Memoria de la Tercera Mesa Redonda de Monte Albán*, ed. Nelly M. Robles García (México: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2004), 161 (my translation), posits "the existence of a basic Mesoamerican religious community, which resulted from a long historical process... so that many times the same god, with different names—for example, the rain god Tlaloc in the central highlands and Cocijo of the *binnigula 'sa'* [or Zapotecs]—was worshiped from one border to the other of Mesoamerica." De la Cruz credits this idea to Wigberto Jiménez Moreno, "*Estratigrafía y tipología religiosas*," en *Religión en Mesoamérica*, XII Mesa Redonda (México: Sociedad Mexicana de Antropología, 1972), 31.

[9] Miguel Alberto Bartolomé, "Elogio del politeísmo: las cosmovisiones indígenas en Oaxaca," 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), 606; my translation.

various supernatural entities were amply expressed in material forms, specifically, in architecture? And which dimensions of indigenous theology were never embodied in built forms, and thus remain thinly represented or even invisible in the archaeological record?

To be sure, if, as we saw last chapter, ascertaining pre-Columbian astronomical alignments proves very difficult, recovering ancient ideas about gods, spiritual forces and ultimate realities from two-millennia-old architectural remains is an even more uncertain proposition. Nonetheless, I dare to say that, in the ensuing discussion, I will engage, if not definitely answer, every one of these aforementioned interrogatories.

A Two-Block Agenda: The History of Ideas about, then the Ritual-Architectural Expression of, Ancient Zapotec Conceptions of Divinity

In any case, to make progress on this daunting collection of queries, this long chapter is divided into two quite separate components. I regard the second as more important, but the first as mandatory background, especially for non-Oaxacanists. The first principal block—undertaken in the spirit of a hermeneutic of suspicion—reviews the very rich history of competing ideas about ancient Zapotec conceptions of divinity. For many, this may seem too wide a detour into the deep weeds of older ideas about the identity (or complete absence) of Zapotecs gods. But for scholars versed in the general history of religions though not well acquainted with Oaxacanist studies, these interminable debates over "what gods did they worship at Monte Albán?" exemplify incautious deployments of the field's most controversial terms—namely, animism, polytheism and monotheism. Likewise, this history of ideas demonstrates a search after "the real Zapotec pantheon" that demonstrates, in egregious and naïve ways, the insidious problems of essentializing, reifying and idealizing "indigenous religion." And thus for comparative religionists, much this Oaxaca-specific wrangling will appear as little more than the rehashing exemplification of several of the most notorious methodological debates in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century study of religion, especially concerning the perils of unilinear evolution and essentialism. In that respect, the Oaxacanist particulars, I hope to demonstrate, speak to many more general aspects of the academic study of religion.

Moreover, while countless Oaxacan studies open with a perfunctory overview of the relevant names and sources, as an outsider trying to make sense of these matters, I have felt a need to go deeper. Consequently, like those finicky elementary school math teachers who incessantly demand that their students present not just final results, but also the process by which they arrived at their conclusions, I make explicit my means of disentangling the past hundred years of debate about Zapotec conceptions of divinity. Or, in an even less flattering analogy, this lengthy first half is like a low-scoring soccer match in which the ball is kicked around the field ad-infinitum in hopes that the rewards of the game are not confined simply to a few goals or, in this case, only a few certain conclusions.

Be that as it may, this opening exercise in intellectual history will crisscross the relevant literature in two ways. Following a brief discussion of the profoundly different approaches to "other peoples' gods" undertaken by social scientists versus more humanities-oriented phenomenological historians of religions, I first inventory proponents for the respective views that Zapotec religion was variously polytheistic, monotheistic or animistic. Here I am especially concerned to locate Mesoamericanist, and especially Oaxacanist, debates about indigenous conceptions of divinity with respect to theoretical disputes in the broader history of academic Religious Studies. The latter portion of this first block then revisits many of the same issues via consideration of the three main sorts of sources on which those scholarly ideas about Zapotec conceptions of divinity are based—(1) ethnographic studies of present-day indigenous religious ideas; (2) ethnohistorical interpretations of the colonial-era texts by Dominican friars and Spanish authorities, which have been singularly influential in enumerating the supposed gods of ancient Oaxacans; and (3) the archaeological record, most notably the reliance on the signature Zapotec funerary urns as a means of determining the evolving slate of Monte Albán deities. Reliance on each of these points of departure prompts intense but different disagreements.

Especially Oaxacan specialists are liable to find this extended historiographical discussion unoriginal and unnecessary; and they are invited to skip it entirely. But again, as a student of the general history of religions, I see this as crucial spadework that ferrets out presuppositions and readies us to appreciate the problematics of what is at issue in the manifold and seemingly contradictory ways in with indigenous Oaxacans conceive of supernaturals;

moreover, it resembles no review that I have found elsewhere in the literature. A focus on ideas about Zapotec supernatural investments will teach us again that the strength of Oaxacan studies lies in dealing with detailed issues, not in theoretical breadth and clarity, especially where religion is concerned. In short, though, all of Part I is background, included especially for non-Oaxacanists, that sets the stage for Part II's more proper hermeneutics of Monte Albán architecture.

The more constructive second main block of the chapter—undertaken in the spirit of a hermeneutic of retrieval—will, then, appeal to the four-part pattern of questioning laid out in chapter 17 of *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture* on "Divinity: Bodies, Abodes, and Abstractions (Priority II-A)" and summarized here in that portion of "Appendex B: An Expanded Heuristic Framework of Ritual-Architectural Priorities" that deals with the divinity priority (II-A).[10] While conventional discussions of "the worship of gods" at the Zapotec capital have focused overwhelmingly on the third alternative, I widen the inquiry by considering four possibilities, all of which are represented in important but notably different ways in the Monte Albán materials: (1) the personification or divination of the natural "architectural" features of the landscape; (2) architectural forms that are conceived as the actual body of a deity; (3) architecture that is conceived as an abode, residence or house of a deity or divine presence; and (4) architecture that is conceived as a built expression of the attributes of a divinity. For each of those four options, I will proceed with my usual three-stage formula by first instantiating the theme in the cross-cultural history of religions, second in the broader Mesoamerican region, and thirdly and most thoroughly with respect to the specific context of Monte Albán.

Again detailed subtitles in the Table of Contents reveal the order and logic of the many-layered two-block discussion; and, yes, impatient readers might disregard completely the opening big block on the history of ideas about Oaxacan divinity conceptions and jump to the consideration of "Four Variations on the Ancient Zapotec Ritual-Architectural Conceptions of

[10] Note that, in this chapter, like some but different from others, my four-part pattern of hermeneutical questioning concerning the divinity priority (I-A) follows quite precisely the four-part pattern for that priority that is outlined in "Appendix B: An Expanded Heuristic Framework of Ritual-Architectural Priorities."

Divinity." In this case, there is an interim set of "Summary Thoughts and Methodological Cautions on the Study of Ancient Zapotec Divinity Conceptions" at the end of the historiographical first half; and, as always, the chapter ends with Closing Thoughts that summarize the key issues and locate them in the larger argument of the work. There I present conclusions about the multiplicity and complementarity of supernaturalist conceptions at Monte Albán that will inform the rest of the work.

I. The History of Ideas about Ancient Zapotec Conceptions of Divinity: Phenomenological versus Social Scientific Approaches to Other Peoples' God(s)

Concerned always with methodological self-consciousness (and at the risk of losing one set of readers at the very outset of this eventually more specific discussion), I preface my reflections on the divinities and divinity conceptions of Monte Albán with a historian of religions' brief comments on a much more elemental set of questions that, in these materials, usually goes unexamined: *Just who and what are these Oaxacan gods? What status—ontological, social and otherwise—can we attribute to the divinities of indigenous Oaxacan peoples? Do they really exist?*

How scholars in various fields assess indigenous peoples' claims with respect to God, gods and other supernatural entities exposes one of the fundamental dividing lines between the respective approaches of phenomenological historians of religions and social scientists.[11] For

[11] Regarding this fundamental difference between the respective approaches of social science versus the discipline of the history of religions (i.e., *Religionswissenschaft*) to religion and especially to "religious experience," I am informed, for instance, by comments in the "Methodological Prolegomena" to Joachim Wach, *The Sociology of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944, 1971), 1-17, where he explains why his phenomenological history-of-religions based work is fundamentally different from Max Weber's *Sociology of Religion* (1922) or Emile Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912), despite the fact that all three broadly cross-cultural works cover much the same ground. Wach, ibid., 13-14, for instance, takes issue with "psychological theories of [religious experience's] purely subjective (illusionary) nature which are so commonly held among anthropologists." Their social scientific views are predicated on the non-existence of "the Holy;" and thus, what Rudolf Otto termed "the experience of the Holy" is interpreted (or dismissed) as a fundamental

social scientists—which in this very broad designation includes the great majority of Mesoamericanist archaeologists, anthropologists, art historians and epigraphers, the lion's share of whom approach the indigenous people they study with a large measure of empathy and respect—the so-termed "gods" and other transnatural agents are "social constructions." Occasionally we encounter materialist perspectives that suggest that elite pre-Columbian constituencies, as a means of socio-political control, put forward conceptions of god(s) in which they themselves do not really believe as a means of manipulating more naïve masses who do actually have faith in those supernatural agents. From that stance, the "gods" we encounter in Monte Albán iconography and urns are deliberately contrived fictions. Far more often, however, the operative assumption—reminiscent of Emile Durkheim's famous quip that "religion does not know itself... Religion knows neither what it is made of, nor what needs it satisfies..."[12]—is that ancient Oaxacan "gods" are actually the products of largely unconscious socio-psychological processes in which all segments of society are implicated. Supposed gods are not the result of lies or naivety nor, in this view, products of deliberative intellectual synthesis, but rather derive from what Durkheim terms "an immense co-operation," a gradual and experiential process in which all members of society participate, but none are fully cognizant.[13] Consequently, gods are, from that vantage, "social constructions."

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misrecognition or "illusion" concerning "the stimulus" of religion. Wach, ibid., 14, says, "This stimulus we [historians of religions] would, however, characterize quite differently." And then he explicates the tenants of a phenomenological approach wherein critical scholars of religion, instead of beginning with a dismissal of the ontological reality of the "gods" and supernatural entities that indigenous people (Christians included) claim to be experiencing, hold open (which is not to say insist upon) the possibility that those divinities may indeed truly exist. While Wach's treatment of the matter is dated, it does nonetheless continue to speak to the fundamental methodological divergence between social scientists (like most mainstream Oaxacanists) and historians of religions (like myself) with which I begin this chapter on Zapotec conceptions of divinity (priority II-A).

[12] Emile Durkheim quoted in *Durkheim on Religion,* ed. W.S.F. Pickering (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), 251. Recall that I used this quote in the Introduction to this work.

[13] Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life,* trans. Joseph Ward Swain (New York: The Free Press, 1965 [originally 1912]), 29. Actually, to put a finer point on Oaxacanists' unspoken assumptions about the acquisition of investments various supernaturals, as we come to appreciate the multiplicity of different Zapotec divinity conceptions, the prevailing assumption, for better or worse, will seem to be that the "animatistic" strain in Oaxaca religion was acquired

According to that very familiar, usually taken-for-granted social scientific starting point, Mesoamerican gods are, then, figmental suppositions, or perhaps "illusions," that, while they enjoy the fully sincere and committed confidence of their indigenous devotees, have no actual ontological or "real" being. Even scholars with personal faith investments of their own that include belief in the reality of God(s) frequently feel compelled to undertake their academic work on the basis of a scientistic premise that "gods" are the merely imaginary consequences of world views or cosmovisions.[14] At present one of the liveliest sub-fields in Religious Studies comes in those neurobiological and cognitive approaches that have revived interest in the old question of why people believe in gods; but cognitivists too, as a rule, proceed on the assumption that gods, spirits and souls are, in their term, "CPS-agents" or "culturally postulated supernatural agents" rather than entities that exist "out there" in the universe.[15] In fact, to attribute to pre-Columbian gods some more solid existential status would be, in the view of most mainstream Mesoamericanists, to cross over into the domain of some sort of faith-based theology, and thereby deny the social scientific premises that afford one's work scholarly credibility. The prevailing and mandatory working assumption of Durkheimians and cognitivists is that, while

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via these sorts of unconscious socio-pychological processes while the more plainly polythesistic belief in gods is something that elites deliberately impose on non-elites.

[14] In other words, I moderate my blunt characterization of their stance by noting that some "religious" social scientists, with personal supernaturalist investments of their own, may concede that indigenous beliefs in supernaturals are social-constructed responses to supernatural realities that do indeed exist; but, in most cases, they nonetheless feel compelled to undertake their academic work with largely atheistic assumptions.

[15] Among numerous works by these authors, Robert N. McCauley and E. Thomas Lawson, *Bringing Ritual to Mind: Psychological Foundations of Cultural Forms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), may deserve the most credit for popularizing the acronym "CPS-agents" to refer to "culturally postulated supernatural agents.? But there is presently a veritable explosion of work on neurobiological and cognitive approaches to the study of religion that explore questions like that addressed in Iikka Pyysiainen, *Supernatural Agents: Why We Believe in Souls, Gods, and Buddhas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009). A rare work, to which I refere in a momento, that makes preliminary attempts to bring this cognitive approach to bear on Oaxacan materials is Manuel Esparza, "De naguales, vírgenes madres y demás seres extraños: lo racional de esos conceptos," 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), 555-69.

indigenous peoples (or, for that matter, any people with religious commitments) invariably "misrecognize" the imaginal status of the "gods" they worship, we academic outsiders can recognize those imaginary constructions "for what they actually are."[16] To caricature that social scientific stance, which of course has many permutations, the debate over what gods they worshipped at Monte Albán is, then, actually something like: *To what sorts of mistaken illusions did ancient Oaxacans adhere?*

Phenomenological scholars of religion, by contrast—notoriously fragmented among their own ranks, but most of whom tend to locate their academic work more in the humanities than social sciences—conceptualize the status of other peoples' deities quite differently. Working to thread a needle, as it were, between theology and social science, between faith claims and adiamorphic skepticism, some phenomenologists persist with Mircea Eliade's proposition that the phenomenon of "religion" is autonomous, "irreducible" or *sui generis*, which is to say, religion is a genuine human response to a "Sacred"—which may well actually exist.[17] For Eliade, then, "religion" constitutes a unique and special case that cannot be "reduced" to something else, say, to social, psychological or political processes.[18] And thus, for scholars of

[16] I borrow the term "misrecognize" from historian of religions Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 82. Recall that in the Introduction I discussed Bell's notion of "misrecognition," which she extracts from the sociological perspectives of Durkheim and Pierre Bourdieu, but which also finds apt parallels in Louis Althusser's notion of "a sighting in an oversight" or Paul DeMan's discussion of "blindness and insight."

[17] In works such as Jeffery J. Kripal, *Authors of the Impossible: The Paranormal and the Sacred* (Chicago and London: University of Press, 2010), that author makes himself perhaps the most high-profile advocate for reviving the currently unfashionable notion, advocated by Mircea Eliade, that academically critical scholars of religion not only can, but must, acknowledge, or at least entertain seriously, the ontological reality of the supernatural and paranormal phenomena they study. See especially, ibid., 17-23, on "Restoring a Lineage."

[18] Regarding claims to the *sui generis* or unique, and thus "irreducible," status of religion, about which he writes in many contexts, see, for example, Mircea Eliade, "The History of Religions in Retrospect: 1912 and After," in his *The Quest: History and Meaning in Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 25, 34-36. While Eliade is often described (or accused) of insisting on the actual ontological status of "the Sacred," I see him as operating with the more characteristically phenomenological stance of "bracketing" or holding open the possibility that the so-termed Sacred, and thus "the gods," may (or may not) have some genuine ontological standing.

that persuasion, the History of Religions (or *Religionswissenschaft*) is a unique discipline whose academic credibility depends upon the critical ability to describe and interpret other peoples' religions in ways that do *not* hold their theological conceptions accountable—or "reduce" them—to Eurocentric standards of reason and rationality.[19] In this view, the skill and expertise of a historian of religions lies precisely in operating with those assumptions, categories and methods that enable both empirical rigor and, at the same time, a "non-reductive," non-judgmental description and interpretation of the religious views under consideration. In this empathetic and self-deprecating, but nonetheless rigorously empirical (not philosophically speculative) view, it is the religious community rather than outside scholars who "really recognize" what is going on.[20]

Phenomenologists, then—precisely like archaeologists in their commitment to ascertain "what really happened" in a historical context like pre-Columbian Monte Albán—aim to accomplish that by holding open the possibility that the supernaturalist claims of the people they study do indeed correspond to something true, real and not simply socially imagined. One crucial component of phenomenological approachs entails, in other words, a respect for the "intentionality" of religion, which is to say, a willingness to accept the prospect that so-termed religious experiences—including engagements with "the gods" of one's cultural context—are experiences of something real (i.e., the "intentional object"), which is uniquely, irreducibly religious, and thus "supernatural" or "trans-natural."[21] In the older history of the History of

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[19] On this subtle point, see, for instance, Charles H. Long, "A Look at the Chicago Tradition in the History of Religions: Retrospect and Future," in *The History of Religions: Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. Joseph M. Kitagawa (New York: Macmillan, 1985), especially 94-102. Or, on his unwillingness to "demystify" the indigenous people that he studied, see Mircea Eliade, *Ordeal by Labyrinth: Conversations with Claude-Henri Rocquet*, trans. Derek Coltman (Chicago: university of Chicago Press, 1982), 136-37.

[20] Phenomenological historians of religions frequently accentuate empirical history, as opposed to philosophical speculation, as both the starting-point and the ultimate goal of their academic work. Phenomeologists, thereby, share with archaeologists the ultimate objective of simply describing and interpreting "what actually happened" in a context like pre-Columbian Monte Albán.

[21] For a concise discussion of how the phenomenological approach differs from social scientific approaches, see Douglas Allen, "Phenomenology of Religion," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2nd ed., ed. Lindsay Jones (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), vol. 10, 7086-101. On the

Religions, commitments to that sort of "phenomenological epoché," or "bracketing" or "suspension of judgment," as to the existence or non-existence of the supernatural entities with which people claim to be interacting in religious experiences was facilitated, for instance, by: Rudolf Otto's terminology of the "Numinous," "the Holy," or "the wholly Other;" by Joachim Wach's use of "Ultimate Reality;" by Eliade's category of "the Sacred;" or by Gerardus van der Leeuw's reliance on the language of "a strange, 'Wholly Other' power that intrudes into life."[22] All these are categories and methodological strategies that were designed to facilitate an academically critical—but also empathetically open—engagement of the viability of believers' claims to the existence of the supernatural, which actually may exist.

Arguably the dominant view in Religious Studies during the 1960s and 1970s, phenomenological approaches, especially in the 1990s, came under persistent criticism. With a wave of polemical, frequently neo-Marxist or Foucauldian, scholarship focused on questions of religion in relation to class, race and gender, these deliberately empathetic approaches were disparaged for positioning scholars more as "caretakers" and apologists for the religions they study rather than as "critics" who expose the socio-political forces that many consider root causes for those religions.[23] Nonetheless, in Religious Studies, where preoccupations with explicitly politicizing approaches still prevail, strains of phenomenology that proceed from the

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use of "phenomenological epoché" or 'bracketing" as a means of respecting the "intentionality" of religious experience, see ibid., 7088.

[22] Again see Allen, "Phenomenology of Religion," 7090-93, for apt summaries of how the quite different approaches of those scholars are characteristically phenomenological. Note also that by capitalizing these terms, like the difference between "god" and "God," these scholars accentuate the sense in which, in their view, "the Holy," "Wholly Other," etc. refer to something that actually exists "out there," as it were. And note, moreover, as a fairly liable two-part diagnostic generalization, that *every* phenomenologist of religion relies on some category like "the Holy" or "the Sacred" or *no* scholar who is other-than-a-phenomenologist utilizes such a category to refer to the object of religious experience or devotion (which is, by the way, why it is both odd and noteworthy that a Oaxacanist archaeologist like Arthur Joyce frequently utilitizes the category of "the sacred").

[23] See, for instance, Russell T. McCutcheon, *Critics not Caretakers: Redescribing the Public Study of Religion* (Albány: State University of New York Press, 2001), which denounces phenomenological approaches, most notably that of Mircea Eliade, as insufficiently suspicious means of simply replicating the socio-political distortions that religions invariably perpetrate.

assumption that the paranormal and supernatural are indeed "real" both persist and emerge anew;[24] and various movements in anthropology have likewise made the case that the most academically responsibility tack is serious consideration, rather than immediate dismissal, of other peoples' theological claims.[25] Thus while phenomenology, broadly construed, has certainly been an embattled approach in recent decades, it remains a viable, even resurgent, way of operating.[26]

At any rate, though this is not the context for fuller discussion of the profoundly different the approaches of social scientists and humanistic phenomenologists of religion, I do strongly urge, as a matter of methodological responsibility, much greater self-consciousness about what Oaxacanists think they are talking about when discussing Zapotec "gods" and "supernatural entities." *How, for instance, does a seemingly unanimous respect for pre-Columbian cultural accomplishments square with a general, if usually unstated, dismissal of their theological investments? Are we willing to accept the debate over alternative Zapotec conceptions of divinity as simply a question of which "wrong reading of reality" they embraced? Do Mesoamerican supernaturals have no ontological standing aside from "social imaginaries"?* While the majority seems to regard endorsements of the actual existence of such transnormal phenomena as either irrelevant, or perhaps threatening, to their critical scholarly work, for a smaller minority, the viability of genuinely understanding Mesoamerican religions depends

[24] See, among many arguments for the continued viability of a phenomenology of religion, Bryan S. Rennie, *Reconstructing Eliade: Making Sense of Religion* (Albány: State University of New York Press, 1996; Kripal, *Authors of the Impossible*; or Whitley Stieber and Jeffrey J. Kripal, *The Super Natural: Why the Unexplained Is Real* (New York: TarcherPerigee, 2017).

[25] See, for instance, among many possibilities, Jean-Guy A. Goulet and Bruce Granville Miller, eds., *Extraordinary Anthropology: Transformations in the Field* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007); or Theodore S. Petrus, "Engaging the World of the Supernatural: Anthropology, Phenomenology and the Limitations of Scientific Rationalism in the Study of the Supernatural," *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology*, vol. 6, ed. 1 (May 2006): 1-12; https://doi.org/10.1080/20797222.2006.11433909; accessed 2-8-2019.

[26] In Mesoamerican studies, the prolific work of Dávid Carrasco, not himself given to extended discussion of his methodological presuppositions, is the strongest example of a historian of religions working within the phenomenological tradition of Joachim Wach, Mircea Eliade, Charles H. Long and others.

heavily upon holding open that possibility. And while, routinely, there is productive collaboration between scholars who operate in these highly contrastive camps, there are, in Oaxacan studies, occasions of conflict when the two perspectives collide.

One finds, for instance, in the Monte Albán Round Table volumes allusions to a telling exchange between the two scholarly views concerning the *nahuals*, or protective animal spirits, that many indigenous Oaxacans claim to possess.[27] On one side were mainstream scholars proceeding with the familiar but unspoken assumption that *nahuals* or animal spirits are "social constructions" or, bluntly stated, notional entities that do not really exist. But, on the other, more empathetic side, an indigenous scholar felt compelled to object strongly—on the grounds that he himself had 14 "protective animals"!—that this prevailing social scientific perspective commits an "ethnocentric error" in assuming that such beliefs are simply culturally inculcated self-deceptions. For most participants the intervention was, it seems, a quaint digression; but it gave at least one Oaxacanist scholar pause to reflect at length in a subsequent Round Table on how scholars—when addressing supermundane realities in which they themselves do not actually believe—can responsibly mediate only-seemingly-antithetical commitments to academic rigor and empathetic understanding.[28]

In short, then, there is no likelihood of consensus on this matter. But because the elemental assumptions have major consequences for one's interpretive conclusions, we should be mindful that while a majority of Oaxacanists regards it as a social scientific, albeit unannounced, imperative to reject and expose the fictive status of supernatural entities, a smaller set of researchers, especially the growing number of indigenous scholars, who also claim academic

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[27] Esparza, "De naguales, vírgenes madres y demás seres extraños: lo racional de esos conceptos," 555-56, in the context of a paper that applies contemporary neurobiological and cognitive theories of religion to Oaxacan materials, alludes to this exchange concerning the existential status of "protective animals," which apparently took place at the third Monte Albán Round Table in 2002.

[28] Esparza, "De naguales, vírgenes madres y demás seres extraños," 555-56, explains that this paper was specifically motivated by the earlier Monte Albán Round Table exchange and more generally by an attempt to reconcile indigenous beliefs in supernatural phenomena like *naguals* with what cognitive scientists are learning about the functioning of the human mind, especially in relation to the acquisition of religious ideas.

respectability, insist, perhaps with greater vehemence, on the ontological reality of such entities.[29] And the phenomenological stance, from which I work, occupies a tenuous middle ground by contending that our best chances of understanding indigenous Oaxacans depends upon "bracketing," or entertaining seriously via a kind of epoché, the possibility that the myriad conceptions of divinity that one encounters among these communities and in this literature very well may correspond to supernatural beings and forces that do actually exist.[30]

A. Competing and Complementary Conceptions of Ancient Zapotec Religion: Many Gods, One God and/or No Gods

Disagreement over the status of ancient Zapotec religion—based primarily on contrastive evaluations of the way in which Oaxacans conceptualized divinity—is frequently, albeit too simply, presented as an irreconcilable bifurcation between two schools of thought. Michael Lind, for instance, situates his own extended work on the topic by noting, "There have been basically two different approaches to Zapotec religion."[31] In his appraisal of the very lopsided

[29] Another topic that exposes the wide gulf between social scientific and phenomenological approaches concerns differing views about the status of "space spaces." Where most Oaxacanists assume that the "sacred" status of various places derives from socio-historical processes, one encounters still-persistent claims that some features of the Oaxacan landscape—the mountain on which Monte Albán sits, for instance—truly are imbued with supernatural energy or perhaps are themselves deities (a notion to which I will return). On the latter possibility, see, for instance, Víctor de la Cruz, "Monte Albán, ¿espacio sagrado zapoteco o sólo sitio turístico?," en *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), 151 (my translation), where he argues, with direct reference to Eliade, that, "sacred spaces are not the result of human choice, but, rather, places where extraordinary manifestations of the supernatural powers have occurred."

[30] By the way, since I will return momentarily to colonial-era Dominicans who are so influential in the ways that modern scholars understand Zapotec gods, it is worth noting that these pre-modern Catholic friars, while they distained the indigenous deities, many of which they attributed to the devil, were, so it seems, also willing to accept the genuine ontological existence of those (devil-derived) deities. Ironically then, Dominicans like Juan de Córdova and Gonzalo de Balsalobre, unlike the modern scholars who rely on them, may have been describing Zapotec "gods" to which they attributed genuine, not just socially-constructed, existence.

[31] Michael Lind, *Ancient Zapotec Religion: An Ethnohistorical and Archaeological Perspective* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2015), 6. Earlier Michael Lind, "La religión estatal de

diversity of opinions, he says, "Most experts regard Zapotec religion, like Aztec religion, as being characterized by a pantheon of gods and a hierarchical priesthood."[32] He attributes this view to a distinguished lineage that includes Eduard Seler,[33] Alfonso Caso and Ignacio Bernal,[34] Heinrich Berlin,[35] Joseph Whitecotton,[36] Thomas Smith Stark[37] and Adam Sellen (all of whom I address later in the chapter).[38] And Lind adds himself to that list.

Monte Albán y los sacerdotes de Cociyo de Lambityeco," 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), 20-21, made the same case, with reference to the same scholars, that "Two different interpretations of the Zapotec gods have been set forth."

[32] Lind, *Ancient Zapotec Religion*, 6-7.

[33] 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), 243-324. Original German edition: Eduard Seler, *Wandmalerein von Mitla: Eine Mexikanische Bilderschrift in Fresko* (Berlin: A. Asher, 1895).

[34] Alfonso Caso and Ignacio Bernal, *Urnas 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 be citing the reprinted version of this important work.

[35] Heinrich Berlin, *Las antiguas creencias en San Miguel Sola, Oaxaca, México* (Hamburg: Hamburg Museum of Ethnology and Prehistory, 1957). This important work, to which I will return, was republished in Heinrich Berlin, Gonzalo de Balsalobre, y Diego de Hevia y Valdés, *Idolatría y superstición entre los indios de Oaxaca,* 2nd ed. (Mexico City: Ediciones Toledo, 1988), 9-89.

[36] Joseph W. Whitecotton, *The Zapotecs: Princes, Priests, and Peasants* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1977).

[37] Thomas C. Smith Stark, "Dioses, sacerdotes y sacrificio: una mirada a la religión Zapoteca a través del *Vocabulario en Lengua Zapoteca* (1578) de Juan de Córdova," in *Religión de los Binnigula'sa'*, Víctor de la Cruz y Marcus Winter, coords. (Oaxaca, México: Fondo Editorial, IEEPO, 2002), 89-195.

[38] Adam T. Sellen, *El cielo compartido: dedides y ancestros en las vasijas efigie zapotecas* (Mérida, México: UNAM, Centro Peninsular en Humanidades y Ciencias Sociales, 2007).

On the alternate side, Lind identifies just one singularly important spokesperson in Joyce Marcus who flatly rejects the standard assessment that ancient Zapotecs had either a "pantheon" or personal "gods" who, after the fashion of Greco-Roman deities, enjoyed various spheres of control. In Lind's summary of that minority stance, "Marcus, however, opposed this traditional view. Although acknowledging a hierarchical priesthood, she regards Zapotec religion as animatistic... 'because it attributed life to many things we consider inanimate.'"[39] Shortly I will revisit Marcus's rejection of the standard quest after a kind of legislative body of anthropomorphic deities who exercised authority over diverse aspects of Zapotec life in favor of the notion that they operated with a non-anthropomorphic concept of *pèe* or *p*è, an unseen energy or "sacred life force," present in all things, that endows all inanimate beings and nature with "the great breath."[40]

While this blunt two-part division of views about ancient Zapotec conceptions of divinity, as we'll see, oversimplifies the range of alternatives, it does speak to a wider and absolutely crucial debate in Mesoamerican studies concerning the suitability, or lack thereof, of the notion of "god(s)." Indeed, among the most enduring and vexing questions in the field, arguably since the sixteenth-century arrival of Spaniards in the area, has been whether or not the Aztecs and other peoples indigenous to the region had "gods" or "goddesses," and, if so, how best to characterize them. Invariably, discussions of the issue begin by noting that the classically-educated Spanish friars who authored the tendentious chronicles on which contemporary students of pre-Columbian religion continue to rely—foremost among them, Fray Bernardino de Sahagún's uniquely influential *Florentine Codex*—found their most serviceable analogies in the Greco-Roman non-Christian "pagans" with whom they were familiar. And thus they presumed that Aztecs operated with a "pantheon" of largely anthropomorphic "deities," each controlling a particular sphere such as rain, war, wind, fire or fertility, not so differently from ancient Greek and Roman supernaturals (as those Spanish priests [mis]understood them).

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[39] Lind, *Ancient Zapotec Religion*, 7, quoting Joyce Marcus, "Zapotec Religion," Topic 97 in *The Cloud People: Divergent Evolution of the Zapotec and Mixtec Civilizations*, eds. Kent V. Flannery and Joyce Marcus (New York: Academic Press, 1983), 345.

[40] Marcus, "Zapotec Religion," 345.

Critically-minded Mesoamericanists, Oaxacanists prominent among them—especially those who ascertain indigenous beliefs in more impersonal supernatural agents and entities—have, however, long been ill at ease with that Eurocentric characterization of pre-Columbian conceptions of divinity. Recounting debate at the 1976 meeting of the International Congress of Americanists in relation to the interpretation of Mixtec codices, art historian Nancy P. Troike, for instance, explained that,

> "The nature of the Mixtec supernaturals was a major topic of consideration, for codex specialists had become increasingly dissatisfied with the term "deity," a word used for many years to describe all apparently nonhuman personages depicted in these manuscripts. The discussion rapidly determined that the Mixtec word *ñuhu* probably held the key to understanding the Mixtecs' own concept of supernaturalism. The term is not yet clearly understood, but it appears to encompass several types of supernatural beings, including those that might be considered "gods," spirits and dead ancestors, and in certain cases even living humans; each type may have had different roles, powers, abilities, and responsibilities."[41]

Troike continues by noting that, while "the [Mixtec] concept of *ñuhu* was compared to that of [the better-known Polynesian notion of] *mana*," participants in that 1976 meeting reached a consensus that, pending greater clarity on a snarl of indigenous terms for dynamic cosmic forces and entities, "the terms 'deity' and 'god' should probably be eliminated."[42] But then, invariably, those duly cautious methodological warnings were followed by grudging acquiescence that, imperfect as those weathered labels may be in this context, scholars have no

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[41] Nancy P. Troike, "Fundamental Changes in the Interpretation of the Mixtec Codices," *American Antiquity*, vol. 10, no. 2 (1978), 179. That article is reprinted in *Ancient Mesoamerica: Selected Readings*, ed. John A. Graham (Palo Alto, California: Peek Publications, 1981), 277-95, where this quote appears on pp. 282-83. Note that Troike's, like Joyce Marcus's, objection to the term "god" is actually two-pronged: For one, it obfuscates beliefs in more impersonal supernatural entities (as I will discuss later in the chapter) and, for two, the term "god" also distorts Oaxacan preoccupations with ancestor worship directed to defied rulers (which is a topic that, while discussed in this chapter, I will address more fully in chapter 7 relative to the commemoration of the dead, priority II-D).

[42] Troike, "Fundamental Changes in the Interpretation of the Mixtec Codices," 179 (reprint version, p. 283). Maarten Jansen, "Introduction" in *The Shadow of Monte Albán: Politics and Historiography in Postclassic Oaxaca, Mexico*, edited by Maarten Jansen, Peter Krofges, and Michel R. Oudijik (Leiden: Research School CNWS, School of Asian, African, and Amerindian Studies, 1998), 5, discusses how the Mixtec term *ñuhu*, too often glossed simply as "deity," "can have at least three different meanings: 'earth,' 'fire,' and 'deity.'"

workable alternative to talking about pre-Columbian "gods" and "goddesses"—and so the timeworn nomenclature and distortions persist.

Comparative religionists have to applaud this deep skepticism about the insidious extrapolation of Western assumptions and categories into depictions of indigenous conceptions of divinity; and indeed, historians of religions will be the first to warn that the labels "polytheism," "monotheism" and "animism" are heavily freighted with Eurocentric baggage. For students of the longer history of the study of religion, all three terms have complex histories that are especially implicated in now-outdated unilinear evolutionary theories of religion.[43] Most (in)famously, British "founder of anthropology," E. B. Tylor, who had toured Mexico at age 24 in 1856,[44] proposed a version of fixed-stage evolution wherein the "origin of religion" resides in animism or "the doctrine of souls," which, he maintained, is subsequently supplanted by fetishism, then idolatry, then polytheism and finally monotheism, which will ultimately give way to the fully mature atheistic-scientific outlook of Tylor and his European colleagues.[45] While contemporary scholars are universally dubious of Tylor's attempt to locate every culture he encounters somewhere in this ladder-like developmental scheme, all of the terms—which do enjoy continued usage—remain entangled in that set of evolutionary presuppositions.[46] And

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[43] For an overview of the history of evolutionary approaches to the study of religion, see, for example, James Waller, Mary Edwardsen, and Martinez Hewlett, "Evolution: Evolutionism," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2nd ed., ed. Jones, vol. 5, 2913-17.

[44] Edward B. Tylor, *Anahuac or, Mexico and the Mexicans, Ancient and Modern* (London: Longman, Green, Longman and Roberts, 1861), largely a well-wrought travelogue, recounts Tylor's tour from England to Mexico via Cuba with fellow Quaker, ethnologist and archaeologist Henry Christy, during March-June of 1856, thus at age 24, that is to say, well in advance of his theorizing on animism and religion. Along with Mexico City, Tylor visited and describes the major archaeological sites of Teotihuacan, Xochicalco and Cholula; but he did no go to Oaxaca.

[45] The literature summarizing and criticizing E. B. Tylor's evolutionary approach is immense. For a point of departure, see Eric J. Sharpe, "Tylor, E. B.," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2nd ed., ed. Jones, vol. 14, 9424-25.

[46] I should note the currently prevailing view (with which I agree) that the problem is not so much with application of any notion of evolution to the study of religion and culture, but rather the continued application of some version of "unilinear" or "fixed-stage" evolutionary. Indeed, the present abundance of cognitive and neuro-biological approaches to religion—see, among countless alternatives, *Religion and Cognition: A Reader*, ed. D. Jason Slone (London: Equinox,

thus, all of those categories have been subject to decades of debate by both religionists and anthropologists.[47]

Consequently, I proceed now to consider the Oaxaca-related history of ideas in which each of these general categories—most notably, polytheism, monotheism and animism (or animatism)—has been proposed as a solution to the problem of indigenous Mesoamerican conceptions of divinity. And in so doing, I hope to demonstrate again just how often seemingly Oaxaca-specific controversies are actually microcosms of much more generalized theorizing and debates in the broader history of Religious Studies and Anthropology.

1. Ancient Oaxacan Polytheism: Greco-Roman Analogies and the Prevailing Presumption of a Pantheon of Personal Gods

That indigenous Mesoamericans, and thus ancient Oaxacans, were "polytheists" was, for early Spanish chroniclers, a foregone conclusion. As noted, Catholic priests, who were uniquely diligent in documenting the indigenous belief systems they aspired to eradicate, were equipped, along with their deep Christian investments, with Classical educations that made the "pagan" traditions of Greeks and Romans the obvious reference point for their discernments of native Mesoamerican religions. Exemplifying their skewed understandings of pre-Christian polytheistic ancient Mediterranean deity conceptions, Fray Sahagún, for instance, undertook a textbook example of overdetermined comparative religion by proposing that, "[the Aztecs'] Huitzilopochtli was another Hercules," "Tezcatlipoca... is another Jupiter," "Chicomecoatl is

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2006)—entails a revival of evolutionary approaches. And, in Oaxacan studies, advocates for what they term "evolution without stages," Joyce Marcus and Kent V. Flannery, *Zapotec Civilization: How Urban Society Evolved in Mexico's Oaxaca Valley* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996), 30-31, 236ff., explain their explicit rejection of writing Oaxaca history in terms of generalized, fixed and predictable "cultural stages," but nonetheless advocacy for the sort of "practice theory" that enables an account of "social evolution" that uses specific changes in social and political institutions as the key milestones.

[47] For an overview of a particularly egregious application of unilinear evolution to Mesoamerica, see the account of Lewis Henry Morgan's over-determined designation of the Aztecs as "middle barbarians," in Benjamin Keen, *The Aztec Image in Western Thought* (New Bruswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1971), chap. 12, "Montezuma's Dinner."

another goddess Ceres," "Chalchiuhtlicue is another Juno," "Tlazolteotl is another Venus," and "Xiuhtecuhtli is another Vulcan."[48] These were, then, late medieval Spanish distortions of Classical Greek antiquity, redoubled by even more flagrant misrepresentations of Mesoamerican divinities. And yet, as I will eventually note with respect to the more Oaxaca-specific colonial sources, these doubly dubious writings of Spanish friars continue to be regarded as the most authoritative resources for scholarly depictions of the "gods" of the Aztecs, Zapotecs and other Mesoamerican peoples.[49]

For our purposes, it is worth making a distinction between conventional attributions of Mesoamerican polytheism as the "belief in many gods" and reimagined views of polytheism, informed especially by ethnography, that expand the term to include "multiple experiences of the sacred," which I will regard as a very salient corrective.

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[48] Bernardino de Sahagún, *Florentine Codex: General History of the Things of New Spain*, trans. and eds. Arthur J.O. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble (Sante Fe: School of American Research and the University of Utah, 1950-1982), book 1, vol. 1, 43-56. 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), 105, is among many who use this example to comment critically on "Those Spaniards [who] thought the proper way to understand polytheism was to relate it to classical Greek antiquity."

[49] Certainly the clearest enumeration of Zapotec gods to that point is provided in Alfonso Caso, *Las esteles zapotecas*, Publicación de la Secretaría de Educación Pública (México: Monografías del Museo Nacional de Arqueología, Historia y Etnografía, 1928); reprinted in Alfonso Caso, *Obras: El México Antiguo: Mixtecas y Zapotecas*, vol. 2 (México: El Colegio Nacional, 2002), 3-171. (For this work I will be citing page numbers from the reprint version.) At the outset of that work (ibid., 11-19), Caso first assembles and works to correlate the Zapotec deities mentioned in the sixteenth-century writings of Juan de Córdova and the *Relaciones Geográficas* and the seventeenth-century work of Gonzalo de Balsalobre; and then in a two-page chart that perfectly illustrates my present point (ibid., 12-13), Caso matches up side-by-side Aztec and Maya deities with their supposed Zapotec counterparts.

a. *Conventional (and Qualified) Views of Polytheism as Belief in Many Gods: Aztec Deities Extrapolated to Oaxaca*

With unchallenged confidence that the Aztecs had "an extensive pantheon of individualized deities" providing the paradigmatic case,[50] the assumption of Mesoamerican polytheism—based on either implicitly or explicitly evolutionary presuppositions—was, then, firmly in place when the more disciplined study of ancient Oaxacan culture gets underway in the early twentieth century.[51] In the 1930s, Alfonso Caso, for instance, an expert on Aztecs as well as Oaxaca, rehearsed a four-stage Tylorian evolutionary scheme wherein, first, "the most primitive people" are advocates of magic (or perhaps animism) rather than religion per se, and therefore fear and worship natural forces without formulating the notion of personal gods.[52] In

[50] See, for instance, Henry B. Nicholson, "Religion in Pre-Hispanic Central Mexico," in *Handbook of Middle American Indians*, vol. 10, "Archaeology of Northern Mesoamerica," part I, vol. eds. Gordon F. Ekholm and Ignacio Bernal, gen. ed. Robert Wauchope (London: University of Texas Press, 1971), 408ff., for perhaps the most thorough commentary on "the remarkably crowded pantheon of individualized deities [that] was believed [by the Atzecs] to control the various spheres of the universe."

[51] The long-operative assumption that Aztec religion was polytheistic gained greater academic heft in an influential paper, Pedro Carrasco, "Las bases sociales del politeísmo mexicano: los dioses tutelares," *Actes du XLII Congrés Internacionales Américanistes* vol. 6 (Paris: Société des Américanistes, 1979), 11-17, where he explicitly affirmed that polytheism was one of the outstanding features of the Mexica religion. In his view, the plurality of deities was strongly informed by social and occupational groups, each of which had its own "patron deities": "All activities and ranks of human society are replicated in the divine in the existence of patron gods for each activity and group that performs it: natural activities such as childbirth, sexual activity and disease; all of the arts such as agriculture, hunting, fishing, weaving, etc .; also war, commerce, the priesthood, and the government. All these activities have patron gods that are the province of the guilds, neighborhoods or ranks that practice them." Ibid., 11; my translation. Among the many that appeal to this article, Johanna Broda, "Observación y cosmovisíon en el mundo prehispánico," *Arqueología Mexicana*, vol. 1, no. 3 (agosto-septiembre 1993), 6 (my translation), follows Pedro Carrasco in her assessment that, "The Mexica religion… was polytheistic. Polytheism that contained a classification of the cosmos personified in a multitude of deities..."

[52] Alfonso Caso, *The Religion of the Aztecs* (México, D.F.: Editorial Fray B. de Sahagún, n.d. [original Spanish version, 1936]), 7-8, presents this four-part evolutionary scheme (without any explicit reference to E. B. Tylor). Alfonso Caso, *The Aztecs: People of the Sun*, trans. Lowell Dunham (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958), which is an expanded version of *La*

the second stage—where, according to Caso, polytheism emerges—"every people that has achieved a certain degree of cultural advancement, personifies its religious sentiments in gods and imagines them as possessing human traits, while these gods are invested simultaneously with supernatural powers."[53] In the third stage, as insight into the divine grows more subtle, "the conception is reached that everything in existence is subject to the action of two antagonistic principles, locked in eternal struggle (Dualism)."[54] And in the fourth and highest rung on the evolutionary ladder, according to Caso, "these two apparently opposed principles blend into a single one, which is the cause and explanation of everything (Monism, Monotheism)."[55]

Caso concedes that this magic-polytheism-dualism-monism/monotheism evolutionary scheme does not apply universally; and he notes both that, even as Aztec society advanced, "magic and the idea of certain hidden and impersonal forces held an important place in the minds of the people" and that some exceptional thinkers were developing more monotheistic notions. But he nonetheless concludes that, "At the time of the Spanish Conquest, the Aztecs had a polytheistic religion based on a number of personal gods, most of which had personally defined traits."[56] For Caso, the phrase "pantheon of gods" was a completely suitable designation.[57]

Later we will encounter occasions in Caso's own work, especially his writing that was directed to general audiences—where he was more intent of displaying the intellectual

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religión de los aztecas (1936), 3-6, opens with a four-page section on "Magic and Religion" that presents a slightly nuanced version of the same scheme.

[53] Caso, *The Religion of the Aztecs*, 8, credits German psychologist Wilhelm Wundt for this notion of the inevitable personalization of religious sentiments.

[54] Caso, *The Religion of the Aztecs*, 8.

[55] Caso, *The Religion of the Aztecs*, 8.

[56] Caso, *The Religion of the Aztecs*, 8. See also, Caso, *The Aztecs: People of the Sun*, 7.

[57] Of countless works by others that take for granted that the Aztecs (and thus Zapotecs) were polytheists with a pantheon of gods generally similar to those of Greece, Rome and Egypt, see Lewis Spence, *The Gods of Mexico* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1923), which especially indebted to Eduard Seler's work and to Cottie A. Burland, *The Gods of Mexico* (London: Eyre & Spottiswood, 1967).

sophistication of pre-Columbian Mexicans—that celebrate the supposed monotheistic aspects of Zapotec religion.[58] But, in the main, he was willing to assign to Zapotecs the same polytheistic status as Aztecs, at which point the primary task was, then, to identify the particular "personal gods" who populated their pantheon. As we'll see, there are a few colonial-era sources that address specific Zapotec deities, notably the writings of Dominicans Juan de Córdova and Gonzalo de Balsalobre; and, in advance of Caso's efforts, Eduard Seler, who was also persuaded that pre-Columbian religion was fundamentally polytheistic, presented a path-breaking article entitled "Deities and Religious Conceptions of the Zapotecs" (1895, 1904), which mined Fray Córdova's sixteenth-century writings to ascertain the names and characteristics of numerous specific Zapotec deities.[59] Nevertheless, owing to the far more extensive priestly accounts for the Aztecs, together with a wealth of pre-Columbian Nahau and Mixtec codices that were filled with deity images but for which no Zapotec counterparts have survived, the enumeration of specific Aztec gods provided a kind of prototype that strongly informed both Seler's and Caso's

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[58] See, for instance, the remarks on Zapotec monotheism in Caso, *Culturas mixteca y zapoteca*, 25-26, which I will discuss later in this chapter.

[59] The somewhat confusing status of Eduard Seler's path-breaking article "Deities and Religious Conceptions of the Zapotecs" (1895, 1904), which I cite frequently, deserves note. It is a 27-page component of a larger piece (too-narrowly) entitled "The Wall Paintings of Mitla: A Mexican Picture Writing in Fresco," which Seler presented at the 11th International Congress of Americanists in October 1895 in Mexico City, and which was originally published in German as a 58-page book, Eduard Seler, *Wandmalerein von Mitla: Eine Mexikanische Bilderschrift in Fresko* (Berlin: A. Asher, 1895). An English translation of the full work appeared as "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), 247-324. This is a collection of 24 translated papers, nine by Seler (of which "The Wall Paintings of Mitla" is one) and 15 others by Ernst Wilhelm Förstemann, Paul Schellhas, Carl Sapper and E.P. Dieseldorff. Additionally, it appeared the same year as a freestanding article: Eduard Seler, "Deities and Religious Concepts of the Zapotecs," *Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin*, no. 28 (1904): 284-305. Because of the singular importance for the study of Zapotec religion of the section of Seler's work entitled "Deities and Religious Conceptions of the Zapotecs" (ibid., 284-305), a Spanish translation of that section was included—with the title "La Religión de los Zapotecos"—as the first chapter in *La religión de los binnigula'sa'*, Víctor de la Cruz y Marcus Winter, coords. (Oaxaca: Fondo Editorial, Instituto Estatal de Educación Pública de Oaxaca, 2002), 3-44. And because of the importance of this section of the article, which is by no means confined either to Mitla or to wall paintings, I will cite it in my footnotes and bibliography as a free-standing piece: Eduard Seler, "Deities and Religious Conceptions of the Zapotecs."

subsequent identification of Zapotec gods. Explicitly arguing for what he termed "the unity of Mexican and Central American civilization"[60]—and thus for the viability of extrapolating Aztec deities into Oaxacan contexts—Seler, for instance, opined with respect to the Zapotec-specific deities he was identifying:

> "In their meaning and application these designations were very likely similar to the Mexican [gods] Totecuyo, Tloquê Nanaquê, Uhuicauâ, Tlaticpaquê, Yonalli Ehecatl, and the like, that is, they were, like these, used to a certain extent as a general appellation of the deity, and probably also in addressing the different deities, or as attributes to name them by."[61]

Frequently, then, for better or worse, the identification of Zapotec deities has proceeded largely via matching them to their supposed and more fully documented Aztec counterparts.

Less common has been the correlation of Zapotec gods to counterparts in the Maya zone, where the presumption of polytheism likewise prevailed, but where the qualifications are even more noteworthy than the general rule. Eric Thompson, for instance, before itemizing a long list of "the major Maya gods" offered the large caveat that,

> "we may first rid ourselves of certain misconceptions by noting that in our field the term *pantheon* should not be taken in its strictly Greek sense. The idea of a general assembly of gods finds no place in Maya theology, and the visions of the behavior of the very carnal gods of Greece and Rome that the word conjures up would have been rated by the Maya as conduct totally unbecoming divine beings."[62]

Working to mitigate the legacy of transferring Eurocentric prejudices about Greco-Roman "pagans" and "pantheons" into Mesoamerican contexts, Thompson, moreover, presents an incisive list of thirteen "outstanding characteristics of Maya gods," features that he thinks they "share in large part with the gods of the neighboring peoples of Middle America," thus Zapotecs

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[60] See a section in Eduard Seler, "The Wall Paintings of Mitla," entitled "Unity of Mexican and Central American Civilization," 266-74.

[61] Seler, "Deities and Religious Conceptions of the Zapotecs," 284.

[62] J. Eric S. Thompson, *Maya History and Religion* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970), 198; his italics.

included.[63] Employing the seemingly oxymoronic term "impersonal gods," he undermines a whole set of assumptions by observing that few Maya gods had human form, but most blended anthropomorphic and animal features; that instead of fully good or evil, most had a dual aspect insofar as they could be both benevolent and malevolent; that instead of free-roaming agents, many were connected with the deification of specific days and other time periods; that, instead of constituting a neat hierarchy, many Maya gods were depicted in redundant and inconsistent ways that allowed them to belong to diametrically opposed groups; that instead of stable entities, many morphed and merged with alien deities; that instead of fully otherworldly beings, many were actually deified human ancestors; that the boundaries between inanimate objects with indwelling spirits and the rank of deities were permeable and shifting; that a single god frequently had multiple manifestations with accompanying names so that impression of a vast multitude of gods has been frequently overstated; and that irrespective of the multiplicity of gods, there was evidence among the ruling class of "something approaching monotheism."[64] For Thompson, "pantheon of gods" was, therefore, at best, a problematic label for Maya conceptions of divinity;

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[63] Thompson, *Maya History and Religion*, 198-200.

[64] The actual list of "outstanding characteristics of Maya gods" presented by Thompson, *Maya History and Religion*, 198-200, is, to paraphrase: (1) Few gods are in human form; most show a blending of human and animal features. (2) There is a quadruplicity of gods, each of the four assigned to a different world direction and world color, yet at times mystically regarded as a single being in a way reminiscent of the doctrine of the Trinity. (3) The gods had a duality of aspect. Gods could be both benevolent and malevolent. (4) The gods were indiscriminately marshaled in large categories so that a god could belong to two diametrically opposed groups. (5) There is overwhelming importance of the numerous gods connected with all time periods, and deification of days and other time periods. (6) Inconsistencies and duplication of functions arise from the imposition of alien concepts by the hierarchy on the simpler structure of nature gods worshiped by peasant communities. (7) The gods had the ability to merge with alien deities, as the moon goddess with the Virgin Mary; the sun god, to a lesser extent, with Jesus; and the Chacs with archangels and saints of the Roman Catholic church. (8) A cult deifying clan ancestors seems to have proliferated in the post-Classic period. (9) Inanimate objects were endowed with indwelling spirits which sometimes achieved the rank of deities. (10) Animals were worshiped; the jaguar is an example. (11) A divine social order patterned on a mundane one developed, with minor gods as messengers and servants and a chief of a group of four deities as their leader. (12) A single god may have had various manifestations with accompanying distinctive names. (13) There is some evidence for something approaching monotheism among the ruling class during the Classic period.

and, by the assessment of Víctor de la Cruz, suitably I think, essentially all of Thompson's reservations apply as well to deity conceptions among the *binnigula'sa'* or Zapotecs.[65]

Nevertheless, twentieth-century Oaxacanists have been, generally speaking, far less circumspect in their imaginings of Zapotec polytheism. On this matter, most simply fall into line with Eduard Seler's singularly influential precedent in assuming, especially on the basis of the colonial-era writings of Dominicans, that pre-Columbian Zapotecs had a pantheon of gods, the specifics of which scholars could eventually discern from a combined reliance on provocative ethnohistorical sources (codices as well as priestly writings) and the more definitive results of archaeology.[66] Ignacio Bernal, for example, as will become more apparent when I discuss his collaborations with Caso in ascertaining deities images in Monte Albán's abundant and famous funerary urns, took for granted that ancient Oaxacans, at least those who resided in cities, were polytheists. Based on that assumption, paired with his confidence that all Mesoamerican peoples worshipped essentially the same gods, albeit with different names, Bernal contends that it is archaeological evidence that can do most to clarify the particulars of the gods that prevailed in the different eras of Monte Albán history:

> "It is through such urns that we have come to know the principal Zapotec gods, among them, Quetzalcoatl, god of the wind; Xipe, god of springtime and patron of jewelers; Xochipilli, god of flowers and song; the goddess 13 Serpent; Cocijo, the god of rain; and the companion gods. The polytheistic religion they represented was organized by a hierarchy with the Huijatoo or High priest at its head."[67]

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[65] Víctor de la Cruz, *El pensamiento de los* binnigula'sa'*: cosmovisión, religión y calendar con especial referencia a los* binnizá (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2007), 214-15.

[66] Sigvald Linné, *Zapotecan Antiquities*, Ethnographical Museum of Sweden, Stockholm, New Series, Publication no. 4 (Stockholm, Sweden: Borkförlags Aktiebolaget Thule, 1938), 77, for instance, expresses the standard confidence that Seler's discernment of the outlines of Zapotec pantheon of gods from the colonial sources, especially Juan de Córdova, would eventually be fleshed out via "by later works—mainly arcaheological fieldwork."

[67] Ignacio Bernal, *3000 Years of Art and Life in Mexico as Seen in the National Museum of Anthropology, Mexico City* (New York: Harry N. Abrahams, 1968), 98.

John Paddock too, relying especially on Caso and Bernal's identification of ceramic figures as various deities, stayed the course by concluding that Zapotec elites and non-elites were similarly polytheists:

> "[Period IIIB] Monte Albán was a place electric with the presence of the gods. These gods were the very forces of nature with which the peasants are so respectfully intimate. Lightening-rain was respected by a tiger-serpent. The mysterious powers of more realistic animals—serpent, vampire bat, opossum, mountain lion, owl—were all called upon to bridge the conceptual gap and make possible objective representations (as animals) of the abstract forces of the universe…"[68]

And Arturo Oliveros, another among many archaeologists to restate what he regarded as an entirely non-controversial point, writes of Monte Albán: "In principle, it can be said that this society had a polytheistic devotion, neither more nor less complicated than that of many other corners of Mesoamerica."[69]

Additionally, most twentieth-century art historians entered the vigorous debate concerning identification of the specific gods that had prevailed in various eras and areas of the Zapotec capital with the same unqualified assumption of polytheism. Doris Heyden and Paul Gendrop, for example, reaffirm that Monte Albán elites were polytheists who worshipped essentially the same gods as other pre-Hispanic Mesoamericans. And thus, working to correlate central Oaxacan gods with their better known Aztec and Maya counterparts, they were able to assemble the following list:

> "The most important gods of the Zapotecs were [1] Xipe Tótec, who is said to have originated on Oaxaca's Pacific coast and who was the god of the earth's fertility and patron of jewelers; [2] the rain god Cocijo, called Tlaloc in the central region, Tajín in Veracruz, and Chac in the Maya area; [3] "Thirteen-Serpent," the mother goddess; [4] Pitào Cozobi, lord of corn, called Yum Kax among the Maya and Centéotl in the central

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[68] John Paddock, "Oaxaca in Ancient Mesoamerica," part II in *Ancient Oaxaca: Discoveries in Mexican Archeology and History*, ed. John Paddock (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1970 [originally 1966]), 153. Paddock, ibid., 168-73, figs. 174-88, relying on the interpretations of Caso and Bernal, reproduces more than a dozen ceramic figures that have been identified as gods.

[69] Arturo Oliveros, *Guia de Monte Albán* (Mérida, Yucatán, México: Codice Ediciones, 1996), 22; my translation.

> plateau; [5] Quetzalcoatl, the wind god, shown with a duck's beak in the central area and with a serpent's mask in Oaxaca, name Kulkulkán by the Maya; [6] Xochipilli, god of flowers, song and dance; [6] a bat god; and [7] a nameless fire god, equivalent to Teotihuacan's Huehuetéotl and the Aztec Xiuhtecuhtli."[70]

b. *Oaxacan Polytheism Reimagined as "Multiple Experiences of the Sacred": Ethnographer Miguel Bartolomé's Contribution*

More recently, while most Oaxacanists have been willing simply to accept polytheism as an indisputable certainty, ethnographer Miguel Bartolomé, in 2009, provides perhaps the most nuanced and self-conscious embrace of the category. Though focused on colonial-era and contemporary Oaxacan religion—and though qualifying the term with a thoroughness that makes it quite a different matter—he contends, in an article entitled "Praise of Polytheism: The Indigenous Cosmovisions of Oaxaca," that "All the 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."[71] But, imposing major qualifications that resonate with those presented 40 years earlier by Eric Thompson, Bartolomé rejects the equation of polytheism with a well-ordered "pantheon" or general assembly of stable and hierarchically arranged personal gods.[72] Alternatively, he concurs with Alfredo López Austin (to whom I return shortly) that the pre-Hispanic societies across Mesoamerica operated with

> "religions of recognized polytheism [insofar as] they are based on the conception of a diversified world, full of contradictions and opposing elements that cannot come from a divine source in which these contradictions, diversities and oppositions are not inherent..."[73]

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[70] Doris Heyden and Paul Gendrop, *Pre-Columbian Architecture of Mesoamerica* (New York: Electa/Rizzoli, 1975), 58.

[71] Bartolomé, "Elogio del politeísmo: las cosmovisiones indígenas en Oaxaca," 629; my translation.

[72] Bartolomé, "Elogio del politeísmo: las cosmovisiones indígenas en Oaxaca," 602, n. 3, explicitly comments on the Greco-Roman origin of the term "pantheon" and its unsuitability to the version of indigenous Mesoamerican "polytheism" that he is describing.

[73] Alfredo López Austin, "El mestizaje religioso, la tradición mesoamericana y la herencia mitológica," en *L'homme et la société*, núm. 93, año XIII (París, 1989), 43 (my translation); quoted by Bartolomé, "Elogio del politeísmo: las cosmovisiones indígenas en Oaxaca," 603, n. 4.

On those grounds, Bartolomé accentuates the extreme contrast between "the repressive and totalitarian character of Christian monotheism" versus the "plasticity of indigenous polytheistic conceptions," which are far more tolerant of ambiguity, apparent contradictions and situation-specific reciprocal interactions between humans and an ever-evolving assemblage of gods and less personal supernatural entities.[74] By his redefinition—which I will repeatedly reaffirm—polytheism entails "receptivity to a multiple experience of the sacred and not just as the worship of a multitude of gods."[75]

That is to say, Bartolomé accentuates the distinctiveness of the sorts of "gods" embraced in Oaxacan polytheism by contrasting them with the fundamentally different assumptions of Christian monotheism. Where the monotheism of "revealed religions" supports a moral principle in which humans are cast into a struggle between good and evil, which depends upon the clash of "good deities (gods) and bad deities (demons)," in the pliable polytheism of Mesoamericans, according to Bartolomé, "Whether native deities are positive or negative depends on the context and compliance with the principles of balanced reciprocity governing relations with them."[76] Owing to that flexibility and openness to "multiple experiences of the sacred," indigenous Oaxacans have demonstrated "a special adaptability to the colonial

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Regarding his nuanced views on Mesoamerican polytheism and "pantheons," see also, among many alternatives, López Austin, *The Myths of the Opossum: Pathways of Mesoamerican Mythology*, 104, where he writes: "We must have an overall understanding of the ancient concepts of the divine and know that the order of legitimacy was distributed throughout the cosmos. To understand the rules of the pantheons is to understand the principles of Mesoamerican cosmovisions. [1] The discovery of rules and [2] their application to the ordering of information are two processes of mutual clarification."

[74] Bartolomé, "Elogio del politeísmo: las cosmovisiones indígenas en Oaxaca," 628; my translation.

[75] Bartolomé, "Elogio del politeísmo: las cosmovisiones indígenas en Oaxaca," 606; my translation.

[76] Bartolomé, "Elogio del politeísmo: las cosmovisiones indígenas en Oaxaca," 618; my translation.

confrontation"[77] that accommodates Christianity and Christian deities (Jesus, the Virgin Mary, saints, etc.) in ways that enable them to persist in their fundamentally polytheistic outlook: "The addition or appropriation of deities reinforces the cosmological order of society, instead of displacing or abolishing it, assigning new powers to it."[78] And thus while Bartolomé stresses how that sort of malleable and situational pragmatism continues to serve Oaxacan communities even now, the implication, which I strongly support, is that same flexibility had also enabled pre-Columbian Zapotecs to operate with a version of polytheism in which, instead of acquiescence to a fixed hierarchy of gods, "every god is a god of the moment; a god's position in the hierarchy and his action always depend upon the circumstances."[79]

In sum, Miguel Bartolomé, by preserving the notion of polytheism but rejecting the assumption of a fixed pantheon of gods, provides a very important corrective to which I will return time and again. As should become clearer in the forthcoming discussion of indigenous monotheism, "polytheism" continues to carry strongly pejorative valences—i.e., generally speaking, to assess native Oaxacans as monotheists is a means of accentuating their intellectual sophistication, while assignments of polytheism do just the opposite. It is, then, somewhat concerning that Bartolomé's heavy revision of the category of polytheism also seems to be a concerted rehabilitation of a term that he persuades us is so seriously misleading. Indeed, his overhaul and expansion of the category is so deep and so extensive that continuing to describe this indigenous outlook as "polytheism" seems to me an imprudent choice. He really is describing something very different from the standard designations of Mesoamerican polytheistic beliefs in many gods; and that alternate assessment would, I think, benefit from an alternate term (though neither Bartolomé nor I have one to suggest).

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[77] Bartolomé, "Elogio del politeísmo: las cosmovisiones indígenas en Oaxaca," 629; my translation.

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

[79] Bartolomé, "Elogio del politeísmo: las cosmovisiones indígenas en Oaxaca," 618; my translation.

Nevertheless, as should also be apparent going forward, I regard Bartolomé's ethnographically-informed adjustments of the timeworn old term as exceptionally helpful and impactful in understanding the diverse expressions of the ritual-architectural commemoration of divinity (priority II-A) at Monte Albán. This is, I think, a signal contribution. And, moreover, his heavily qualified depiction of an orderly but not rigidly systematic Mesoamerican polytheism that acknowledges not just belief in many personal gods but also "multiple experiences of the sacred"—which is to say, *multiple conceptions of divinity*—becomes even more persuasive when we see in the forthcoming discussion the rigidity with which contemporary Oaxacanists cling to older and simpler notions of polytheism. In fact, it is the endurance of plainer posits of polytheism that guide scholars into the fundamental methodological error—a kind of academic snipe-hunt, if you will—of assuming that there was, at some point in ancient Oaxacan history, a fixed and wholly contradiction-free ur-pantheon of Zapotec gods, if only we could find it and identify its constituent deities. But as Bartolomé suggests, and I strongly agree, those sorts of rigidly structured Oaxacan pantheons are nearly always "constructions of the ethnographer" rather than accurate depictions of native views.[80]

2. Ancient Oaxacan Monotheism, Monolatry and/or Monistic-Pantheism: Diverse Arguments for Belief in a Supreme Being or Principle

While polytheism among Zapotecs, like Aztecs, has forever been the dominant assumption, assertions of a monotheistic, or perhaps monistic, strain in indigenous Oaxacan religion—that is, belief in some sort of uncreated Creator God or Divine Principle, that stood alongside (or perhaps above) the pantheon of more anthropomorphic gods—have a wide and deep, albeit checkered, history. Though the means of arriving at those assertions have varied wildly, in nearly all of these arguments, monotheism is imagined as a minority opinion among natives that complements rather than replaces the dominant polytheistic view. And even more importantly, this review of very mixed variations on the monotheistic theme ought to remind us that these ostensibly academic categories, all of which are entangled in older theories of unilinear evolution, are by no means neutral designations. Most notable here, while nearly all assessments

[80] Bartolomé, "Elogio del politeísmo: las cosmovisiones indígenas en Oaxaca," 602; my translation.

of indigenous Mesoamericans as polytheists (except for that of Bartolomé) carry negative or condescending valences, every one of the very mixed assignments of monotheism to native peoples carries with it a kind of congratulatory commendation. Monotheism invariably connotes an intellectual sophistication and perspicuity that polytheism does not.

a. Christianity-Derived Pre-Columbian Monotheism: Faith-Based Posits of Quetzalcoatl as Saint Thomas, Apostle of Jesus

First, one dubious but oft-repeated line of argument for pre-Columbian monotheism, which unfortunately may cast doubt on all of the weightier academic claims, derives from the more faith-based than historical proposition that Mesoamericans had been exposed to Christianity long before the arrival of Spanish Conquistadors and friars. According to this pious postulate, some 15 centuries in advance of the Spaniards' landing in the New World, Mexico had been visited by Saint Thomas, the apostle of Jesus Christ, who met with considerable success in his efforts to preach the gospel to native populations. Frequently traced to Don Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora (1645-1700), one of the first great criollo intellectuals, or to Italian-born Lorenzo Boturini Benaducci (1698-1749), another antiquary of New Spain, this fantastical but enduring thesis attributed seemingly more-than-coincidental parallels between the rites and customs of Indians and those of the Catholic Church—including an apparent native belief in the Trinity—to an equation of Quetzalcoatl, depicted as a white man with a long beard from the East, with none other than Saint Thomas.[81] Dominican Fray Servando Teresa de Mier (1765-1827) extended the Christocentric legend to even more bizarre proportions wherein Aztec patron god Huitzilopochtli was the god-man Redeemer, born of a virgin Aztec goddess Coatlicue who was identified was the Virgin Mary, while the Smoking Mirror Tezcatlipoca was assigned the status of Supreme Being.[82]

[81] Keen, *The Aztec Image in Western Thought*, 192, for instance, discusses Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora's widely influential thesis that "the god Quetzalcoatl was no other than the Apostle Saint Thomas, who had visited Mexico ages before and introduced the Christian faith by his preaching." On Boturini's also influential version of this theory, see ibid., 231.

[82] On Fray Servando Teresa de Mier's influential but even more fantastical rendition of the story that Saint Thomas had brought Christianity and thus monotheism to ancient Mexico and to the Incas of Peru, see Keen, *The Aztec Image in Western Thought*, 304. Keen, ibid., discusses Carlos

This Aztec-based supposition finds a specifically Oaxaca counterpart in Dominican author José Antonio Gay's still widely read *Historia de Oaxaca* (1881), where he follows Sigüenza in proposing that "Saint Thomas, one of the apostles of Christ, crossing Asia, arrived in the country of Anahuac, and preached the Gospel in it."[83] In Gay's rendition—which provides unmistakable demonstration of both the positive valences associated with monotheism and the negative ones connected to polytheism—the original pre-Hispanic Christian conversion ushered in by Saint Thomas was eventually supplanted by "the grotesque superstitions," "absurd cult of idols" and "stupid polytheism" that Spaniards encountered in the sixteenth century.[84] But beneath those atrocities, the friars also discerned among Oaxacan natives a "worship directed mainly in honor of a Supreme God, purely spiritual and foreign to all matter, who was designated by the name... the Soul of the World (*anima del mundo*)."[85] Commending the astute Indians who had retained this monotheistic view, and thus the potential for Christianization among the rest, Gay explained:

> "This Supreme God was the creator of heaven and of the earth, the lord of the universe, by whose providence all things were governed, whose justice was paid to each according to his works, and in whose essence all things lived and moved. This invisible god had various attributes that were made sensible by means of images... which vulgar natives transformed into deities; but the most cultured and enlightened native people are not as stupidly polytheistic as the conquerors claimed."[86]

María Bustamente, a disciple of Mier's, as another to propagate this theory. And Keen, ibid., 238-39, also notes Mariano Veytia (1718-1780), who follows the tradition of Ixtlilxóchtil and other Texcocan writers, as yet another very influential proponent of the Saint Thomas story and thus of the notion that early Toltecs believed only in a supreme being whom they called "Creator of all Things."

[83] José Antonio Gay, *Historia de Oaxaca*, sexta edición (México, D.F: Editorial Porrúa, 2006 [originally 1881]), 65; my translation.

[84] Gay, *Historia de Oaxaca*, 65, 73; my translation.

[85] Gay, *Historia de Oaxaca*, 73; my translation, his italics. He attributes this view especially to Franciscan friar Juan de Torquemada (c. 1562-1624), missionary and historian of the Aztecs.

86 Gay, *Historia de Oaxaca*, 73; my translation.

Moreover, rather than simply preposterous, Gay's argument for indigenous monotheism becomes pertinent to our present discussion because he—like most contemporary Oaxacanist scholars—relies primarily on Fray Juan de Córdova's *Vocabulario en lengua zapoteca* (1578), to which I turn shortly, as his main authority for Zapotec conceptions of divinity. In his best attempt to summarize Córdova's impression that these ancient monotheistic beliefs had very considerable endurance in Oaxaca, Gay writes:

> "it can be seen that if the Zapotecs admitted various spirits (*espíritus o genios inferiores*), they were careful not to attribute divinity to them, since they subordinated them to the uncreated spirit, to the infinite being, creator of all things, the spirit par excellence, Pitao, as they called it."[87]

Be that as it, more scholarly credible claims for pre-Columbian Mesoamerican belief in a "Supreme Being"—which, though often indebted to Fray Córdova, of course, absent any credit to Saint Thomas—are quite common. Consider, then, a few of most prominent monotheism-related contentions and controversies.

b. "Primitive Monotheism," "High Gods" and "Monolatry": Mesoamerican Resonances of Wider Academic Debates

Numerous more academically viable views, which I will connect in a moment to the posit of a "primitive monotheism" (or "*urmontheismus*"), concur that Mesoamerican beliefs in a supreme being are exceptionally old, but attribute that theological stance to entirely indigenous dynamics and thought processes. Swedish Mesoamericanist Sigvald Linné, for instance, opined in the 1930s that belief among the Zapotecs and other Mesoamerican peoples in an uncreated creator deity, not directly associated with a pantheon of more personal gods, "is of a very archaic character."[88] In Linné's judgment, among the Aztecs, Ueuteotl, the Old God, fits this profile of a uniquely powerful and knowing god whose image "has been found under circumstances that point to great antiquity, and he appears to be the oldest identifiable of the Mexican deities."[89]

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87 Gay, *Historia de Oaxaca*, 78; my translation.

88 Linné, *Zapotecan Antiquities*, 78.

89 Linné, *Zapotecan Antiquities*, 78.

Caso and Bernal likewise support the notion of Zapotec belief in a "creator god who has no beginning" that not only has a parallel in the Aztec Tloque Nahuaque, but, moreover, was, in both cases, "inherited from previous cultures."[90] From these perspectives, a version of monotheism is an essential component of a very deep substratum of Mesoamerican (and Oaxacan) religion, embraced by all segments of society, that precedes subsequent beliefs in numerous deities with more particularistic dispositions.

This line of argumentation, which, as we'll see, has resonances in current Oaxacanist studies, again reflects early twentieth-century claims and debates in the broader history of religions and anthropology with respect to religio-cultural evolutionism.[91] American anthropologist Paul Radin's *Primitive Religion* (1937), for instance, begins a chapter on "Monolatry and Monotheism" by noting that, "No aspect of primitive religion has been more frequently discussed during the last decade than the question as to whether in primitive religions there already existed a belief in a Supreme Being."[92] Then Radin, who wrote at length about Oaxacan folklore,[93] rehearses the standard genealogy of the problem wherein Scottish scholar Andrew Lang's *The Making of Religion* (1898) issues a direct challenge to the then-influential theory of E. B. Tylor that animism was the origin of religion; Lang propounded, alternatively,

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[90] Caso and Bernal, *Urnas de Oaxaca*, reprint 700.

[91] For a concise and helpful overview of the succession of ideas about indigenous beliefs in "supreme beings" and "high gods," see Lawrence E. Sullivan, "Supreme Beings," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2nd ed., ed. Jones, vol. 13, 8874-79, the section on "Scholarly Ideas."

[92] Paul Radin, *Primitive Religion: Its Nature and Origin* (New York: Dover Publications, 1957 [originally 1937]), 254.

[93] See, for instance, Paul Radin and Aurelio M. Espinosa, *El folklore de Oaxaca, recogido por Paul Radin y publicado por Aurelio M. Espinosa* (New York: Escuela Internacional de Arqueología y Etnología Americanas/The Hispanic Society of America, 1917). In criticism of this work, López Austin, *The Myths of the Opossum*, 16, says: "A milestone in the study of indigenous oral tradition because of its extent and novelty, the work is, nevertheless, defective. The texts, gathered without rigor and most of them reworked, are inauthentic."

the theory of "the high gods of low races" wherein that belief in supreme beings was already present among the very simplest tribes, notably those of aboriginal Australia.[94]

Again according to standard geneaologies of the issue, that prospect prompted German ethnologist and Roman Catholic priest Wilhelm Schmidt, in *The Origin and Growth of Religion* (1931), to collect evidence of "primitive monotheism" in traditional cultures of Oceania, Australia, Asia, Eurasia and the Americas.[95] Like Lang, and even more inclined to attribute nuance and sophistication to the mindsets of native peoples, Father Schmidt rejected Tylor's evolutionary premise that an original animism was eventually superseded by polytheism and then monotheism; he argued instead that among the very oldest cultures of humanity, hunter-gatherers, belief in a supreme deity was primary until it was contaminated, distorted and blurred by more animistic and "magical" ideas.[96] According, then, to Lang's and Schmidt's de-evolutionary views—which again present monotheism as a commendable alternative to less palatable polytheism or animism—Mesoamericans need not wait for the arrival to European Christians to encounter a basically monotheistic outlook; and nor is indigenous monotheism the late-emerging invention of an intellectual elite.

Radin, author also of *Primitive Man as Philosopher* (1927), for his part, concurred with Schmidt that belief in a supreme being was indeed present in many archaic contexts, but then issued the very strong qualification that such conceptions were largely confined to a select group of shamans, medicine-men and priests, and were not, therefore, widely shared by the community

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[94] Radin, *Primitive Religion*, 254-58. Also see Andrew Lang, *The Making of Religion*, 3rd edition (London: Longmans, Green, and Co. 1909 [originally 1898]); and Andrew Lang, *Myth, Ritual, and Religion*, vol. I (London: Green, and Co. 1913), chap. 1, which includes sections on "Belief in Spiritual Beings" and "Objections to Mr. Tylor's Definition."

[95] Radin, *Primitive Religion*, 254-55, 259. And see Wilhelm Schmidt, *The Origin and Growth of Religion: Facts and Theories*, trans. H. J. Rose (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1972 [originally 1931]).

[96] Regarding his criticism of E. B. Tylor's view, see Schmidt, *The Origin and Growth of Religion*, chap. 7 on "Animism;" and regarding his alternative proposal, see Schmidt, ibid., chap. 16 on "The Nature, Attributes and Worship of the Primitive High God."

at large.[97] Instead of the tribe-wide monotheism imagined by Lang and Schmidt, Radin maintained that,

> "Actually a really consistent and completely purified conception of a Supreme Deity, i.e., true monotheism, [is found] only in those few tribes where it has, as among the Polynesians and Ewe, become the special belief of a priestly group in a society based on classes, or among the Dakota, where it represents the speculation of a fraternity of priests that been consciously selected to be the custodians of certain esoteric knowledge and esoteric rites."[98]

This somewhat more limited view of monotheism wherein it is confined to atypically reflective religious specialists, an option on which I elaborate in a moment, finds lots of support of among Mesoamericanists in the Maya and Oaxaca as well Aztec regions. And, in Radin's case, that large qualification leads him to the conclusion, with which I agree, that, in indigenous contexts,

> "Monotheism, strictly speaking, is, in other words, extremely rare. What we have is monolatry [i.e., the worship of one god without the denial of the existence of other gods], and this is essentially a merely a form of polytheism."[99]

It is, therefore, noteworthy that the large majority of attributions of an ancient Mesoamerican monotheism are, as Radin suggests, more properly, "monolatry" insofar as they refer to belief in a supreme being that is situated alongside, or sometimes in the midst of, a much broader polytheism. Such lofty figures or "high gods," often sky gods, are, in other words, not holders of the dominant position in a pantheon or divine hierarchy, but rather supernatural entities of a more impersonal and remote sort who, in a sense, "yield the mythical stage to more active beings whose personalities are more clearly delineated."[100] Recall, for instance, my remarks in chapter 2 on Mircea Eliade's notion of a high god or "*deus otiosus*" who, though eminently powerful, withdraws to some remote locale from which to preside over the larger

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[97] Radin, *Primitive Religion*, 256-57.

[98] Radin, *Primitive Religion*, 259. Radin's view thereby supports both the notions that was a deep-seated inclination toward monotheism and that monotheism was really honed and embraced by an elite intelligentsia.

[99] Radin, *Primitive Religion*, 259.

[100] Sullivan "Supreme Beings," 8872.

contours of life, destiny and death without, however, taking an active interest in more prosaic human activities, presumably building projects among them.[101] These transcendent figures play little or no role in mythology. In fact, frequently they have more the character of a divine source—that is to say, more like a place than a personality, an "It" more than a "He"—as in much-debated Lakota conceptions of Wakan Tanka, or the non-anthropomorphic Great Mystery, who, rather than a human-like actor in myths, is conceived as an unifying life-force or "summation of all the other gods."[102] Or among the Aztecs, Ometéotl, described by Henry B. Nicholson as "the personification of godhead in the abstract... a typical 'otiose high god,'" is not the leading figure in a pantheon of gods, but rather "an all-pervading divinity" of which every other Aztec deity was merely an aspect.[103]

Be that as it may, especially important for my interests in ritual-architectural concerns, high gods of this sort, while the objects of prayer, do not, like other more personal gods, inspire cults or rites, and, therefore, are largely absent of any artistic or architectural expression. Notions of a supreme being, if they enjoy considerable currency among native peoples (which I suspect they do), are, then, as countless scholars will reaffirm, seriously underrepresented in the archaeological record.

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

[102] Regarding the much-debated character of Wakan Tanka, Raymond J. DeMallie, "Lakota Belief and Ritual in the Nineteenth Century," in *Sioux Indian Religion*, eds. Raymond J. DeMallie and Douglas R. Parks (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 30-32, discussed Wakan Tanka or the Great Mystery, not as a god per se, but as the source and inexhaustible repository of "*wakan*," the universal creative force that imbues as forms of creation. For DeMallie's subtle and extended discussion of the problem one gets the impression that the original and quite fully impersonal conceptions of Wakan Tanka acquired more anthropomorphic qualities in the colonial context as native peoples did their best to explain their beliefs in the Great Mystery in more tangible terms that Euro-Americans could understand.

[103] Nicholson, "Religion in Pre-Hispanic Central Mexico," 411.

c. Elite-Formulated Monotheism and Monistic-Pantheism: Supreme Beings as the Esoteric Preserve of an Intelligentsia

At any rate, where few Mesoamericanist insist on something like a deep-seated "primitive monotheism," many do position indigenous monotheistic views as a quite late and sociologically limited phenomenon wherein an elite intelligentsia adopts belief in a supreme being as a concerted alternative to the polytheism of the wider population. Among the generally polytheistic Classic Mayas, for instance, Eric Thompson discerned a "near-monotheism" connected with worship directed to Itzam Na, or "Iguana House," that, in his view, was confined largely to the upper classes, perhaps as "the outcome of efforts of the ruling class to identify themselves with this supreme power."[104] And among the Aztecs, Miguel León-Portilla provides perhaps the fullest commentary on a monotheistic proclivity for which the first of two related and most oft-cited lines of evidence is the poignant and reflective writing of Mexica poet-king Nezahualcóyotl.[105] Lamenting the lack of satisfaction in transitory earthly things, military conquests included—and expressing skepticism about the anthropomorphic Aztec gods to whom the wider populous made propitiations and sacrifices—the introspective ruler of Texcoco espouses instead the supreme and unchanging "Giver of Life" who endowed with vitality and movement all that exists, and who thus stands above and outside of the pantheon of more personal gods.[106] And a second favored topic in Nezahualcóyotl's deeply philosophical poems and hymns is Ometéotl, literally the "Two God," or supreme God of Duality, in whose paired forms as the male Ometecuhtli and his consort Omecíhuatl is simultaneously "mother and father

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[104] Thompson, *Maya History and Religion*, 200, 232-34. As we'll see momentarily, de la Cruz, *El pensamiento de los* binnigula'sa', 214-15, argues that this monotheistic strain applies also to the *binnigula'sa'* or Zapotecs.

[105] See, for instance, *Native Mesoamerican Spirituality: Ancient Myths, Discourses, Stories Doctrines, Hymns, Poems from Aztec, Yucatec, Quiché-Maya and Other Sacred Traditions*, ed. Miguel León-Portilla (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 241-53.

[106] On Nezahualcóyotl, see Miguel León-Portilla, *Pre-Columbian Literatures of Mexico*, trans. Grace Lobanov and the author (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1969), 88-89; or Miguel León-Portilla, *Aztec Thought and Culture*, trans. Jack Emory Davis (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), 59, 72-75.

of the gods," who is the omnipresent and eternal sustainer of the earth who embodies a Central Mexican principle of "the essence of things" or the supreme creative deity.[107]

On those bases, León-Portilla too attributes to a small segment of metaphysically-inclined Aztec thinkers conceptions of monotheism that "run parallel" to the polytheism of "the popular religion of the Nahuas."[108] And on the same grounds, German Americanist Hermann Beyer had, in 1910, gone so far as to hypothesize that Aztecs attained a monistic-pantheistic vision of the cosmos, that is, a belief more frequently associated with Hinduism than either Christianity or indigenous religions that reality is identical with divinity or that everything is part of an all-encompassing, immanent God or Divine Principle. In Beyer's assessment,

> "the blatant polytheism which confronts us in ancient Mexico is simply a symbolic reference to natural phenomena. The minds of the priests and wisemen had already conceived religious and philosophical ideas of a much more highly advanced level. The two thousand gods... were, in the minds of the wisemen... really manifestations of only one God."[109]

To the chagrin of some current Aztec scholars, the arguably romanticizing notion that Mexicas subscribed to something like a pantheistic or perhaps even "universal-perennial" outlook reappears, for instance, in the work of Arild Hvidtfelt and others, like Richard

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[107] On Ometéotl, see, for example, León-Portilla, *Aztec Thought and Culture*, 80-103; or Nicholson, "Religion in Pre-Hispanic Central Mexico," 410-11.

[108] León-Portilla, *Aztec Thought and Culture*, 70-71.

[109] Hermann Beyer, "Das aztekishe Götterbild Alexander von Humboldt," in *Wissenschaftliche Festschrift zu Enthüllung des von Seiten S. M. Kaiser Wilhelm II, dem Mexicanischen Volke zum Jubiläum, seiner Unabhängigkeit Gestifteten Humboldt-Denkmals*... (Mexico City: Müller hnos., 1910), 116; quoted by León-Portilla, *Aztec Thought and Culture*, 89. Keen, *The Aztec Image in Western Thought*, 34-36, elaborates on Hermann Beyer and others, like León-Portilla, who see a monotheistic or pantheistic strain in Aztec religion including, for instance, popular American writer John Draper in 1863 (ibid., 386-87) and Mexican archaeologist and historian Eulalia Guzmán in 1858 (ibid., 482). But Keen (ibid., 35) also alludes to Frances Gillmor, *Flute of the Smoking Mirror: A Portrait of Nezahualcóyotl, Poet-King of the Aztecs* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1949), 170, who explicitly maintains that "to call Nezahualcóyotl a monotheist... is incorrect."

Townsend, who follow his lead.[110] Also Burr Brundage, in the context of an elaborate explanation of "the principle of divine transformations" wherein ostensibly individual Aztec gods "existed in a continuum of divine beings, all of whom were linked in an wavering pattern of transformations," argues that this "suggests a type of pantheism where the pantheistic essence splits and assumes various masks, each identifiable and unmistakable."[111] But Brundage is also emphatic that, "this concept is not in any sense to be confused with monotheism, as if one god... split into four forms for easier service and comprehension."[112] In short, the notion that a version of monotheism arose, perhaps independently among esoteric metaphysical thinkers in each of the great Mesoamerican traditions, persists as still-controversial proposition.

d. Debates over Monotheism in Oaxaca: Congratulatory Contentions of a Zapotec Supreme Being and Minority Critics

Looking now to Oaxacan contexts, nearly all of these wider academic debates about the origins and extent of indigenous monotheism resonate in more particular debates about ancient Zapotec religion. Again, though contentions that the religions of Zapotecs, Mixtecs and others in the region are fully and strictly monotheistic are rare—and usually offered, it seems, as a kind of polemical affirmation of the sophistication of indigenous Oaxacans—recognition of a monotheistic, or perhaps monistic-pantheistic, tendency that somehow complements the retinue of more anthropomorphic gods is very common. Here again, though usually in more subtle

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[110] For instance, Molly H. Bassett, *The Fate of Earthly Things: Aztec Gods and God-Bodies* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015), 46-47, whose work I will discuss shortly, attributes the root of what she sees as an untoward tendency to idealize Aztec religion as "close to the pantheistic spirit world," not to Beyer, but to a 1956 dissertation, Arild Hvidtfelt, *Teotl and Ixiptlatli: Some Central Conceptions in Ancient Mexican Religion, with a General Introduction on Cult and Myth* (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1958). Among numerous scholars to follow Hvidtfelt's lead, Richard F. Townsend, *State and Cosmos in the Art of Tenochtitlan, Studies in Pre-Columbian Art and Archaeology* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University, 1979), in Bassett's view, "adds a touch of the universal-perennial" to that already-pantheistic view.

[111] Burr Cartwright Brundage, *The Fifth Sun: Aztecs Gods, Aztec World* (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1979), 51-53.

[112] Brundage, *The Fifth Sun*, 51.

ways, the old but enduring unilinear evolutionary premise that monotheism constitutes an advance over polytheism continues to show itself.

By far most prominent are the assertions of a Zapotec "Supreme Being" that can be traced to writings of sixteenth-century Dominican chronicler Fray Juan de Córdova. I noted earlier how José Antonio Gay seized on intimations of monotheism in Córdova's endlessly cited *Vocabulario en lengua zapoteca* for support of the faith-based theory of Apostle Saint Thomas' early visit to the Americas.[113] But mainstream scholars too are much impressed that, along with references to numerous more personal gods, Córdova's text provides some 18 different expressions for an omnipotent "Creator Deity," most of which, like the Aztec god of duality, are presented as pairs or couplets that seem to express a kind of paradoxical undefinability and supremacy. Establishing a uniquely influential precedent, Eduard Seler, in 1904, linked these terms from Córdova to a timeless Zapotec divinity, which Seler sees as similar to the Nahua creator deity whom he glosses with such terms as "the Great Beginning and Source," "the All-Powerful Seed" and the "Engenderer of All Things."[114] That prospect was subsequently accepted by most Oaxacanists, from Alfonso Caso and Ignacio Bernal,[115] to Sigvald Linné,[116] José Alcina Franch,[117] Joseph Whitecotton[118] and Thomas Smith Stark,[119] among others. Caso, for instance, exemplified the enduring, Córdova-influenced view in 1936 when, in one of his

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[113] Gay, *Historia de Oaxaca*, 65, 73.

[114] Seler, "Deities and Religious Conceptions of the Zapotecs," 284; quoted by Lind, *Ancient Zapotec Religion*, 16.

[115] Caso and Bernal, *Urnas de Oaxaca*, reprint 359.

[116] Linné, *Zapotecan Antiquities*, 78, see the notion of a an uncreated creator god as widespread in Mesoamerica, but connects the currency of that idea among Oaxacanists to Córbová's *Vocabulario en lengua zapoteca*.

[117] José Alcina Franch, "Los dioses del panteón zapoteco," *Anales de Antropología* 9 (1972), 13-14. Note that this article is reprinted as chapter 5 of José Alcina Franch, *Calendario y religión entre los zapotecos* (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1993).

[118] Whitecotton, *The Zapotecs*, 165.

[119] Smith Stark, "Dioses, sacerdotes y sacrificio: una mirada a la religión Zapoteca a través del *Vocabulario en Lengua Zapoteca* (1578) de Juan de Córdova," 95-110.

more popular works, he presented a defense of Zapotec monotheism that was, even by his own standards, somewhat inflated:

> "The Zapotecs worshipped a supreme god who was above all the other deities; this god was the creator. He was referred to under several names: Coqui-Xee, Coqui-Cilla, Pije-Tao, etc.; and it was said that he was uncreated, without beginning or end. Subordinated to this principal deity were other gods having specific attributes… Many of these gods, and others we have not mentioned, seem to have been only aspects of the principal deity, and therefore Zapotec polytheism was more apparent than real."[120]

Given the vehemence of Caso's stress on monotheism in this context—which is almost certainly connected to his efforts to show the Zapotecs in a flattering light, especially when addressing a general audience—one might expect the "Supreme God" theme to be a stronger presence in his other work on Zapotec religion.[121] Nonetheless, his occasional argument for a prominent monotheistic strain within an otherwise polytheistic Zapotec outlook is yet another topic on which Caso's views are reaffirmed by most subsequent Oaxacanists.

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[120] Caso, *Culturas mixteca y zapoteca*, 25-26; Paddock's translation. The polytheistic Zapotec gods "having special attributes" but whom are "subordinated to this principal deity" that Caso mentions in this context are: "Copichja, the sun; Cocijo, lightning; Cozaana and Nohuichana, god and goddess who created men and animals; Pitao Cozobi, the god of maize; Pitao-Xoo, the god of earthquakes; Pecala, the god of sleep, love, and lechery; Coqui-Bezelao and Xonaxi-Quecuya, god and goddess of the dead, who were worshipped principally in Liobaa or Mitla, the holy place where kings and priests were buried." Ibid.

[121] Regarding possible motives for Caso's somewhat atypically vigorous presentation of Zapotec monotheism in *Culturas mixteca y zapoteca* (1936), recall that in Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, chap. 1, "The Unfolding of Alfonso Caso's Story of Monte Albán: From Tales of Discovery to a Five-Stage History of the Zapotec Capital," I provide fuller comments on the nature of that 70-page landmark text. Not only was this the very first synthesis of Oaxaca archaeology; it is also a work aimed at general audiences, which was, in 1942, as John Paddock, Introduction to *Boletín de Estudios Oaxaqueños*, nos. 21-22-23 (August 19, 1962): ii, notes, republished in "a series of volumes intended to provide Mexican schoolteachers with simple but sound teaching materials." (Paddock provides an abridged English translation of *Culturas mixteca y zapoteca* in the same volume.) Prefiguring the discussion Víctor de la Cruz's even more vigorous argument that Zapotec religion was monotheistic and *not* polytheistic (in the next section of this chapter), I strongly suspect that Caso, especially in his more popular writing, was intent on accentuating the intellectual sophistication of ancient Zapotecs, and stress on monotheism aided him in that initiative.

In the 1970s, the description of "Zapotec Religion and World View" presented by anthropologist and ethnographer Joseph Whitecotton, for example, reaffirms Seler's and Caso's views concerning a pronounced Zapotec monotheism, but in ways that actually provide an even more perfect exemplification of Radin's postulate concerning monolatry.[122] Grounding his opinion more in the seventh-century account of Gonzalo de Balsalobre than that of Córdova, Whitecotton concludes, on the one hand, that "Zapotec religion consisted of a complex pantheon of deities, interconnected in various ways, who mirrored aspects of human reality;"[123] and he concedes that, "Zapotec religion appears from those lists [that appear in the work of Balsalobre] to be little more than a complex, baffling, polytheism. To be certain, it was that."[124] But then, on the other hand, Whitecotton also finds ethnohistorical evidence of what appears to him to a kind of primitive monotheism insofar as "All deities were but aspects, attributes, or refractions of a supreme force or principle, Coqui Xee or Coquixilla, He or 'It' without 'beginning or end, the unknowable one.'"[125] In ideas that are not inconsistent with a persistent thread in Caso and Bernal's work, Whitecotton surmises,

> "Xee was an abstract concept suggesting "infinity," "unknowable," or simply "above." Sometimes He or "It" was also called Pijetao, the "great time," for Pije meant "time" and tao, "great." He also was designated as Pije Xoo, "the source of time," as he governed the "thirteen," the thirteen gods of the Zapotec sacred calendar. Most gods could be represented in material forms or idols, and their image was the same as the deity. But this supreme force was not like ordinary gods or forces, for he had no image or material manifestation."[126]

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[122] Whitecotton, *The Zapotecs*, 157-72. Where parts of Whitecotton's analysis are trained on contemporary Zapotecs, this discussion of "Zapotec religion and world view" comes in the context of his discussion of "Patterns of Post-Classic Zapotec Culture and Society." He, by the way, at no point uses the term "monolatry."

[123] Whitecotton, *The Zapotecs*, 157.

[124] Whitecotton, *The Zapotecs*, 165.

[125] Whitecotton, *The Zapotecs*, 165.

[126] Whitecotton, *The Zapotecs*, 165. In support of this view, he cites Córdova's *Vocabulario en lengua zapoteca*, 141, and Caso and Bernal, *Urnas de Oaxaca*, reprint 359.

Whitecotton, like Caso, then, may display an inclination to apologize for the Zapotecs' "complex, baffling, polytheism" by accentuating this seemingly more intellectually nuanced monotheistic dimension. But Whitecotton is, in any case, one more who reminds us that the Oaxacans' deeply held beliefs in an unknowable "Supreme Force" are, unlike their polytheistic investments, not something that is well represented in their art, architecture and material culture.

Again then, Arturo Oliveros aimed simply to restate the common wisdom when he wrote in a 1996 Monte Albán guidebook that, irrespective of a predominant polytheism, "The belief in a supreme deity—a dual creator of the universe, of men and their social relations—was imbricated in all the activities of daily life."[127] And even Joyce Marcus concedes,

> "While I would not describe the Zapotecs as monotheistic, they did recognize a supreme being who was without beginning or end, 'who created everything but was not himself created,' but he was so infinite and incorporeal that no images were ever made of him and no mortal came in direct contact with him."[128]

In other words, while adamant in her rejection of the notion that the Zapotecs had a polytheistic pantheon of gods, and apparently unpersuaded that monotheism is a helpful designation, Marcus, nevertheless acknowledges the Zapotec belief in an uncreated creator deity for whom "there is little in the way of archaeological evidence."[129] In fact, for Marcus, this "Zapotec supreme being," for whom no "idols" were ever made, is "the one supernatural who might be considered a 'deity' in our terms."[130]

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[127] Oliveros, *Guia de Monte Albán*, 22; my translation.

[128] Marcus, "Zapotec Religion," 345. She notes that she had voiced that opinion earlier in Kent V. Flannery and Joyce Marcus, "Formative Oaxaca and the Zapotec Cosmos," *American Scientist*, vol. 64, no. 4 (1976): 374-83; and she would subsequently restate it in numerous articles.

[129] Joyce Marcus, "Archaeology and Religion: A Comparison of the Zapotec and Maya," *World Archaeology*, vol. 10, no. 2 (1978): 172-91; reprinted in *Ancient Mesoamerica: Selected Readings*, ed. John A. Graham (Palo Alto, California: Peek Publications, 1981), 297-311. For this important article, I will be citing pages from the reprinted version; for instance, the present quote comes from the reprint 299.

[130] Marcus, "Archaeology and Religion," 300.

Not all Oaxacanists are, however, willing to concede this ostensibly indigenous belief in something like an unrepresentable supreme being or godhead. By contrast to this wide scholarly acceptance that, for Zapotecs, not unlike Aztecs and Mayas, there was, at least among an atypically reflective intellectual elite, a monotheistic strain, Michael Lind, for one, exemplifies a persistent skepticism when he endeavors "to set the record straight regarding uncritical references to an uncreated Zapotec 'creator deity.'"[131] An arch advocate for a polytheistic pantheon of gods, Lind suggests that it was Córdova, and likely Spanish friar-chroniclers working in all of these areas, who either interjected this supposed monotheism into their descriptions of indigenous belief systems, or perhaps accurately represented the already-altered beliefs of native people who had been for over 50 years exposed to Christianity.[132] But, in either case, for Lind (and a few others), purported claims to pre-Columbian monotheism represent something like a virus that, implanted by sixteenth-century chroniclers, has continued to infect contemporary accounts of ancient Zapotec religion.[133]

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[131] Lind, *Ancient Zapotec Religion*, 15-16.

[132] Raymond J. DeMaille, "Lakota Belief and Ritual in the Nineteenth Century," in *Sioux Indian Religion: Tradition and Innovation*, eds. Raymond J. DeMaille and Douglas R. Parks (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 25-43, for instance, gives the impression that, among the Lakotas, the tendency to transform a fully impersonal Wakan Takan, or "Great Mystery," into a more personal "Grandfather Spirit" owed especially to Native Americans working, presumably in good faith, to make their indigenous beliefs comprehensible to Euro-Americans (who could not conceptualize a fully impersonal God); and then eventually, Native Americans themselves began to accept those more anthropomorphic conceptions of the originally non-anthropomorphic Wakan Tanka. One can imagine similar processes in colonial-era Mesoamerica.

[133] Lind, *Ancient Zapotec Religion*, 16, concludes summarily that, "It may be safely assumed that [the references to a supreme being in Córdova] do not refer to these creator deities but instead describe the Christian deity. Also see ibid. 17-18. Frank H. Boos, *The Ceramic Sculptures of Ancient Oaxaca* (South Brunswick and New York: A.S. Barnes and Co., Inc., 1966), 20, also looks to Córdova's work for support the notion of strain of Zapotec monotheism, but Boos too notes persistent suspicions that these intimations of Zapotec monotheism had been inspired by the teachings of the missionaries.

e. Víctor de la Cruz's Polemical Zapotec Monotheism and John Monaghan on a Pervasive Mesoamerican Monistic-Pantheism

Finally, I end these ruminations over Oaxacan monotheism with quick reiteration of two more direct and sustained, albeit very different, arguments for pre-Columbian indigenous investments in a "Supreme Being" or, in the second case, a "Supreme Principle of Being." Though they are not at all similar nor related, both are worthy of note in the present discussion.

First, though most Oaxacanists, as we've seen, accept a compromise stance of monolatry (without using that term) wherein a narrowly embraced monotheistic strain coexists with a more popular polytheism, poet-linguist Víctor de la Cruz's make the vigorous and more unilateral argument that Zapotec religion in general is best described as monotheistic and *not* polytheistic.[134] Discontent that Pedro Carrasco's 1976 affirmation of many gods among the Mexica—which "seemed to exclude altogether the idea of a supreme creator god in the Mesoamerican sphere"[135]—has been so fully embraced and extended into other sub-regions, including Oaxaca, de la Cruz counters that, "despite the prevailing theory of polytheism, linguistic information has been found that supports the idea of monotheism."[136] To make that case, de la Cruz cites references to belief in "a Supreme Creator Deity" not only in the colonial-era writings of Fray Córdova on Zapotecs and also those of Fray Bernardo de Lizana on the Yucatán Maya.[137] And he reminds us that Eric Thompson, for instance, besides identifying innumerable "major gods" of the Maya, also points out a reference in the Motul dictionary, composed about 1590 CE by the Maya scholar Ciudad Real, which reads, "Hunab Ku: Only live

[134] de la Cruz, "Los múltiples nombres y formas de Pitao," 571-82. The actual meeting of the Fourth Round Table was in 2004.

[135] De la Cruz, "Los múltiples nombres y formas de Pitao," 571; my translation.

[136] De la Cruz, "Los múltiples nombres y formas de Pitao," 571; my translation.

[137] De la Cruz, "Los múltiples nombres y formas de Pitao," 572-73.

and true god. He was the greatest of the gods of Yucatán. He had no image because they said that, being incorporeal, he could not be pictured."[138]

In marshalling support of earlier acknowledgements of pre-Columbian beliefs in one supreme god, de la Cruz likewise reaffirms Eduard Seler's advocacy for a theory similar to monotheism (again without using the term) when Seler postulated "the cult of a Mesoamerican solar deity as the Supreme God present as early as the Preclassic era."[139] De la Cruz also quotes the 1910 stance of Hermann Beyer with respect to a monotheist (or monist-pantheistic) tendency among the Aztecs to which I alluded earlier:

> "In the figure of [Aztec creator and fertility god] Tonacatecutli we find the principle of monotheism: He is the old creator god, who resides in the thirteenth heaven, and from there sends his influences and his heat, by means of which children are born in the womb of mothers."[140]

And de la Cruz appeals, moreover, to Radin's observation that "no one seriously denies today [in 1927] that many primitive peoples believe in the existence of a supreme creator."[141]

Though reaffirming all those precedents, de la Cruz, a native Zapotec speaker who represents that more empathic (not strictly social scientific) conception of indigenous divinities

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[138] Thompson, *Maya History and Religion*, 203. De la Cruz, "Los múltiples nombres y formas de Pitao," 572, cites this reference but does not include Thompson's allusion to the suggestion of Ralph Roys that "Hunab Ku was an early post-Conquest invention, although there may [earlier] have been some vague idea o fan all-powerful god who was not portrayed." Ralph Roys quoted in Thompson, *Maya History and Religion*, 203.

[139] In support of this assertion, de la Cruz, "Los múltiples nombres y formas de Pitao," 573, cites Eduard Seler, *Comentarios al Códice Borgia*, vol. I, cap. 2, p. 155. But also see Seler, "Deities and Religious Conceptions of the Zapotecs," 284-305.

[140] Hermann Beyer, "El ídolo azteca de Alejandro de Humboldt," en *Mito y simbolismo del México antiguo*, editado por Carmen Cook de Leonard (México: Sociedad Alemana Mexicanista, 1965), 398 (my translation); quoted by de la Cruz, "Los múltiples nombres y formas de Pitao," 579-80.

[141] Paul Radin, *Primitive Man as Philosopher* (New York and London: Appleton and Company, 1927), 282; quoted by de la Cruz, "Los múltiples nombres y formas de Pitao," 574.

that I discussed at the outset of this chapter, actually builds his case for indigenous Oaxacan monotheism primarily on linguistic grounds. He argues, in short, that innumerable names for the same Zapotec divinity that appear in the ethnohistorical sources—e.g., Córdova's references to "the multiple names and forms of Pitào"—have been, as a consequence of faulty linguistic knowledge, mistaken for many gods. Postulating, especially with reference to Seler, the existence of an omnipresent solar god, de la Cruz contends that the supposedly discrete pre-Hispanic gods are actually "spatio-temporal manifestations of one supreme creator deity, whether in unitarian, dual or multiple forms."[142] Instead of the many gods (mis)identified by scholars working in different areas, all of those permutations are, in de la Cruz's view, actually "the same God, who evolves ideologically and iconographically from one stage to another in the history of the Mesoamerican religion with different titles."[143] And he concludes, therefore, that,

> "neither were there so many [indigenous Mesoamerican] gods nor were the causes of their conception only natural and socioeconomic because, actually, there were multiple invocations of the same God via different names derived from the linguistic and ethnic plurality of Mesoamerica and from the different eras of a shared Mesoamerican history."[144]

And then, foregrounding both the Christian Trinity and the countless saints endorsed by Catholics, de la Cruz delivers his coup de grace by contending that Zapotec religion is not more polytheistic—or less monotheistic—than Christianity:

> "To call Mesoamerican religions polytheistic on the basis of the many names and invocations of the same solar god is also to consider the Catholic religion as a polytheist because Christians make reference to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit... as well as to Our Lord Jesus Christ, Lord of Mercy, Lord of the Three

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[142] De la Cruz, "Los múltiples nombres y formas de Pitao," 578; my translation.

[143] De la Cruz, "Los múltiples nombres y formas de Pitao," 577; my translation.

[144] De la Cruz, "Los múltiples nombres y formas de Pitao," 579-80; my translation. Note with respect to de la Cruz's more empathetic (not strictly social scientific) stance, when he argues that "neither were there so many gods nor were the causes of their conception only natural and socioeconomic" he is making the "anti-reductionist" claim that the Zapotec god(s) were *not* simply "social constructions." In other words, part of his argument seems to be that pre-Columbian Zapotecs believed in a one supreme creator deity because such a being, in fact, exists.

> Falls, etc., along with the saints who replaced the patron gods of indigenous peoples."[145]

In sum on this first article of note, de la Cruz's advocacy for indigenous monotheism is, then, perhaps deliberately, more persuasive as a polemical argument for the oft-denied parity between Zapotec religion and Christianity than as a historical corrective. Where nearly all of the claims to pre-Columbian monotheism inventoried here, Alfonso Caso's included, have as an ancillary subtext accentuating the intellectual sophistication of ancient Zapotecs, de la Cruz is direct and emphatic in his assertion that indigenous Oaxacan religio-ontological investments are not less monotheistic—and thus not less nuanced and respect-worthy—than those of Christians. Ironically, however, even if we accept that point, it is an expostulation that may actually reinforce rather than undermine the Eurocentric Tylorian evolutionary biases that it is in strict monotheism that one finds the most culturally advanced conceptions of divinity. Be that as it may, de la Cruz's argument does bolster the viability of Oaxacan counterparts to the generative and incorporeal Aztec Ometéotl, a supreme deity who resides above and outside the pantheon of more tangible and active deities.

Secondly, operating on a very different axis and building his argument on the basis of ethnographic rather than ethnohistorical sources, Oaxacanist fieldworker John Monaghan makes the case for a pervasive Mesoamerican "monistic-pantheism," which will prove far more useful in my explorations of the ritual-architectural commemoration of divinity (priority II-A) at Monte Albán. Though describing an outlook quite similar to what I will discuss momentarily under the rubric of "animatism,"[146] Monaghan explicitly argues that Nuyootecos, the Mixtec villagers with whom he lived for nearly three years, "are monists in the sense that they feel the human body,

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

[146] Revealing of the imprecise usage and slipperiness of all of these generalized categories, it is noteworthy that Monaghan, "Theology and History in the Study of Mesoamerican Religions," 26, cites Joyce Marcus's argument for the "animatistic" orientation of indigenous Oaxacan religion (which I address later in this chapter) as support of his claim that it is "monistic" or "monistic-pantheistic."

the gods, nature, and society to be animated by the same sacred force."[147] In his assessment, these indigenous Oaxacans, even the lay folk among them, adhere to a "monistic-pantheistic orientation" based on the proposition that reality is a unified whole with a single divine principle responsible for all aspects of the cosmos—in short, that all is One. And thus they subscribe to a non-dualistic theology in which "distinctions between creator and created, the spiritual and the material, the source and its particular expressions are unimportant."[148]

For Monaghan, however, the Nuyootecos' belief in "the fundamentally undifferentiated nature of things" is more typically Mesoamerican than distinctively Oaxacan. He too explicitly reaffirms Hermann Beyer's contention that Aztecs were better described as pantheistic than polytheistic;[149] and, by way of extending that proposition to the whole of Mesoamerica, he assembles literally dozens of examples to support his contention that, "Unlike the Judeo-Christian tradition, where god is a unique and transcendent divinity, in Mesoamerica the universe is not distinct from divinity."[150] Nevertheless, at the same time—in lines that reinforce

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

[148] Monaghan, *The Covenants with Earth and Rain*, 137. According to Monaghan, "Theology and History in the Study of Mesoamerican Religions," 26, "This monistic orientation [which is based on the proposition that reality is a unified whole with a single divine principle responsible for the nature of the cosmos] would contrast with a thoroughgoing dualism, where reality is divided into fundamentally opposed entities (good and bad, heaven and hell, spirit and body, mind and matter), or pluralism, which would hold that no single system or view of reality can account for all the phenomena of life." Also note, by the way, that Monaghan uses interchangeably "monism" (strictly speaking, the belief that only One Being exists) and "pantheism" (frequently defined as the notion that all is God).

[149] Monaghan, "Theology and History in the Study of Mesoamerican Religions," 27, not only explicitly reaffirms Hermann Beyer's 1910 assertion that Aztecs had a monistic-pantheistic orientation, he finds permutations of the same outlook across Mesoamerica and, moreover, presents ample bibliographic support for his contention that "there is [in 2000] emerging agreement as to a pantheistic orientation in Mesoamerican religion..."

[150] Monaghan, "Theology and History in the Study of Mesoamerican Religions," 26-28. On that basis, Monaghan, ibid., 27, directs attention to suggestions of significant parallels between Mesoamerican religion and Hinduism made by Alan R. Sandstrom and Pamela Effrein Sandstrom, *Traditional Papermaking and Paper Cult Figures of Mexico* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1986), 278-79; and Monaghan, ibid., 28, also points out parallels between

Bartolomé's important observation that Mesoamericans, more pragmatic than systematic, rely on with a "religion without theology"[151]—Monaghan concedes that, "While it is undeniable that religion in Mesoamerica has a monistic emphasis, it is not so thoroughgoing that it excludes other orientations."[152] Again I applaud the qualified and conglomerate, rather than strict and exclusive, application of any of these generalized labels.

In sum on Monaghan's proposal, then, though his stance might at first seem somewhat off-topic, it actually provides an apt means of summing up both the marked limitations and possibilities that postulates of monotheism and/or monism have for making sense of the design and layout of Monte Albán. On the one hand, the previous set of scholarly opinions and ideas force us to concede that even if pre-Columbian Zapotecs did, as de la Cruz insists, have a monotheistic (or better monolatrous) belief in an uncreated creator god, a proposition I accept, that theological strand did not impinge strongly on the physical layout of Monte Albán's ceremonial precinct—for a couple of reasons. For one, as we are forewarned repeatedly, the supreme being in whom Zapotecs presumably believed was, in Marcus's phase, "so infinite and incorporeal that no images were ever made of him and no mortal came in direct contact with him."[153] As Whitecotton says, where the polytheistic gods "could be represented in material forms or idols," and would therefore have been major factors in the city's art and iconography,

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monistic K'iche' Maya perspectives and Buddhist thinkers Chuang Tzu's and Nagarjuna's critiques of dualistic thinking.

[151] Bartolomé, "Elogio del politeísmo: las cosmovisiones indígenas en Oaxaca," 602. Regarding similarities and differences between the very well-informed positions of Bartolomé and Monaghan, while they agree that indigenous Oaxacan religions accommodate multiple perspectives, Bartolomé , ibid., 614, explicitly takes issue with Monaghan's suggestion that Oaxacans hold a monistic view that absents the distinction between natural and supernatural, contending instead that "the systems of native categories emphasize this distinction…" That is to say, where Monaghan argues that Mixtecs, for instance, operate with "the conception of the unity of the divine with different manifestations" (and thus he calls them "monists"), Bartolomé, as we saw, stresses indigenous appreciation of "the multiplicity of the sacred" (and thus he attributes to them a qualified sort of "polytheism").

[152] Monaghan, "Theology and History in the Study of Mesoamerican Religions," 28.

[153] Marcus, "Zapotec Religion," 345. As noted, Marcus subsequently restates this position in numerous articles.

"this supreme force was not like ordinary gods or forces, for he had no image or material manifestation;"[154] and thus it is largely absent from the architectural-archaeological record. And, for two, virtually all advocates for a notable strain of pre-Columbian monotheism share some version of Radin's view that, "it represents the speculation of a fraternity of priests that been consciously selected to be the custodians of certain esoteric knowledge and esoteric rites,"[155] an elitism that exacerbates more still monotheism's non-presence in the ritualizing of the wider populace. Consequently, on both those grounds, as my eventual conclusion will show, I am prepared to admit that belief in a supreme being, even if an important aspect of Zapotec religion, did little to inform either in the original design conception or the subsequent experience of Monte Albán's ritual-architectural program.

On the other hand, two features of Monaghan's stance account for that fact I will, by contrast, find the pervasive Mesoamerican monistic-pantheism that he describes to be a highly significant factor in both the original design and the subsequent experience of Monte Albán's monumental built forms. First, Monaghan does not present that outlook as the special preserve of the elite. Instead, the "monistic-pantheistic orientation" he describes is a widely shared indigenous sensibility something like, but different from, Eliade's notion of "the archaic consciousness" or López Austin on "the hard nucleus of Mesoamerican cosmovision;" and thus I am persuaded that all social constituencies at Monte Albán, albeit perhaps to varying degrees, participated in this mindset.

Second, and even more effectual for my analysis, is Monaghan's crucial qualification that, "While it is undeniable that religion in Mesoamerica has a monistic emphasis, it is not so thoroughgoing that it excludes other orientations."[156] That non-exclusionary premise is precisely in accord both with Bartolomé's emphasis Oaxacans' openness to "multiple experiences of the

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[154] Whitecotton, *The Zapotecs*, 165. In support of this view, he cites Córdova's *Vocabulario en lengua zapoteca*, 141, and Caso and Bernal, *Urnas de Oaxaca,* reprint 359.

[155] Radin, *Primitive Religion*, 259. Radin's view thereby supports both the notions that was a deep-seated inclination toward monotheism and that monotheism was really honed and embraced by an elite intelligentsia.

[156] Monaghan, "Theology and History in the Study of Mesoamerican Religions," 28.

sacred" and with the ideas about the complementarity of numerous very different conceptions of divinity that I will stress in my Closing Thoughts on the ritual-architectural commemoration of divinity (priority II-A) in pre-Columbian Monte Albán. That is to say, Monaghan does not present pantheistic-monism as *the* unique or exclusive conception of divinity that rules out Zapotec polytheism, animatism or even monotheism of a more Abrahamic-looking sort. Instead, his more modest, and consequently much stronger, proposal is that pantheistic-monism is one among a constellation of divinity conceptions that was simultaneously in play at Monte Albán—which is exactly the position for which I advocate.

In any case, rather than go farther down that interpretive road for now, I turn to discussion of the paired possibilities of animism and animatism that, in a different way, undercut both sides of the timeworn monotheism-versus-polytheism debate.

3. Ancient Oaxacan Animism and/or Animatism: Affirming Impersonal Supernatural Energies and Undermining Polytheism-Monotheism Debates

For critical-minded scholars of religion, the paired categories of "animism" and "animatism" raise bright red flags; and thus again broader methodological debates shed light on Oaxaca-specific controversies. In yet another of those disciplinary disconnects between Religious Studies and Mesoamerican Studies to which I allude in the Preface, by the 1980s, historian of religions Kees Bolle, for example, could write that "The theories of animism and animatism are difficult to take seriously in the present time."[157] And still, in Oaxacan studies,

[157] Kees W. Bolle, "Animism and Animatism," *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2nd ed., ed. Jones, vol. 1, 363. Bolle's first edition (1987) entry was reprinted in the second edition. The fuller quote reads, "The theories of animism and animatism are difficult to take seriously in the present time, given the psychological sophistication that has come to be taken for granted in intellectual circles since Freud." By the same token, with respect to the latter term, Gregory D. Alles, "Dynamism," *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2nd ed., ed. Jones, vol. 4, 2540, contends that animatism or "religious dynamism" "contributed to the waning of the evolutionistic animism then prevalent [at the beginning of the twentieth century] and exerted a great deal of influence on both the study of religions generally and the study of certain cultural areas, but in the end it succumbed to criticism. In its classic form it finds no advocates today. Some of its elements, however, persist with varying degrees of vitality."

animism and its partner, animatism—descriptors that are frequently but inaccurately used interchangeably—continue to be pertinent terms of debate.

Frequently, the terms animism and/or animatism are invoked primarily to discount them. Committed to the empirical and specific, Miguel Bartolomé, for instance, is wary of the application of any "generic ethnological categories such as 'fetishism,' 'totemism,' 'animism,' 'shamanism,' etc.," to indigenous Oaxacan religions, and he is specially singles out

> "some authors who have characterized participants in ancient local traditions as "animists," resorting to postulates of E. Tylor formulated in the late nineteenth century and conceived to designate supposed evolutionary stages in his *Primitive Culture* (1871), rather than to characterize specific religious systems."[158]

Bartolomé tags Joyce Marcus and Kent Flannery as the prime exemplars of that transgression;[159] but his use of the term "animists" (in Spanish, "*animistas*") contributes to the slippage between "animism" (the term associated with E. B. Tylor, which Marcus and Flannery never use) versus "animatism" (a term usually linked to R. R. Marett,which Marcus does frequently use). And, as noted, Michael Lind, aiming his sights at the same target, takes every opportunity to reject the provocative premise, discussed in a moment, that Zapotec religion was fully "animatistic" and not all polytheistic.[160]

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[158] Bartolomé, "Elogio del politeísmo: las cosmovisiones indígenas en Oaxaca," 604-5; my translation. Note, by the way, that it is ironic that I here accuse Bartolomé of a problematic conflation of animism and animatism, and thus a kind of false accusation against Marcus and Flannery, because I actually find this article, and especially his refinement of category "polytheism," among the most methodologically nuanced treatments of indigenous Oaxaca conceptions of divinity.

[159] In this respect, Bartolomé, "Elogio del politeísmo: las cosmovisiones indígenas en Oaxaca," 604-5, specifically cites Marcus and Flannery, *Zapotec Civilization*, 23 (though it is actually on page 19 that they write "Zapotec religion was animatistic").

[160] See, for instance, Lind, *Ancient Zapotec Religion*, 6-7. Speaking also to the polarizing tenor of the debate, Javier Urcid, *Zapotec Writing: Knowledge, Power and Memory in Ancient Oaxaca* (2005) http//www.famsi.org/zapotecwriting/, 44, n. 40, in a work that otherwise makes no mention of "religion," inserts a footnote explicitly to reject Marcus's position by writing, "I do maintain that Zapotec religion included—at least from the Late Formative on—an array of deities that were commensurate with the ritual calendar and the mantic arts…" Urcid's characterization of Marcus as "imposing the western dichotomy of 'natural' and 'supernatural'… [and] resorting in addition to a unilineal evolutionary paradigm…" (ibid.) is, however, in my view, less than fair

a. Animism versus Animatism: Differentiating Between and/or Conflating Two Timeworn Terms

Some histories of ideas find it very important to differentiate between "animism" and "animatism" both as academic categories and as quite different empirical phenomena; and other scholarly treatments conflate them. According to standard genealogies determined to differentiate between the two designations, E. B. Tylor employed "animism"—"the belief in a supernatural power that organizes and animates the material universe" or, more simply, "belief in spiritual beings"—to refer to the assumption that the earliest form of religion was characterized by ideas concerning a plurality of spirits and ghosts.[161] Attributing the emergence of animistic beliefs to the thinking processes of "primitive man," whom he assessed as fully rational, Tylor proposed that explanation-seeking early humans, vexed especially by the puzzling realization that deceased persons continued to (re)appear in dreams, had arrived at the rational (though wrong) conclusion that people have enduring "souls." And eventually archaic peoples, in Tylor's view intent on finding reasons to account for otherwise mysterious phenomena, extended that rational misconception to beliefs that animals, plants and also rattles, rocks, mountains, etc. are all "animated" by souls or spirits—and, in that sense, humans live in a fully "animistic" world.[162]

Animatism depends on somewhat different, actually simpler presuppositions. Where, as noted, Andrew Lang challenged Tylor's evolutionary scheme by positing a version of archaic monotheism, or "high gods among low races," that preceded animism, British ethnologist R. R. Marett, in 1900, issued a different sort of challenge to "the soul-concept" in which he argued that animism, though it did exist, was preceded on the evolutionary ladder by "animatism," which was also termed "dynamism" (from the Greek *dunamis*, "power, energy") or sometimes

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and accurate. As we'll see, Lind and Urcid are alike in rejecting Marcus's basic premise about Zapotec "animatism," but accepting much that she says about Zapotec ancestor worship.

[161] See, among many alternatives, Bolle, "Animism and Animatism," 362-68.

[162] See , chap. XI, "Animism," in E. B. Tylor, *Religion in Primitive Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958); originally published as chapters XI-XIX of E. B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture* (London: John Murray, 1871).

"preanimism."[163] Generalizing the Melanesian concept of *mana* or "impersonal spiritual energy," Marett's theory of animatism "points to a thing, situation, or state of affairs that is enlivened or animated, but not [as in Tylor's theory of animism] in any individual, soul-like manner."[164] That is to say, Marett rejected as "an unnecessary hypothesis" the notion that something tangible like a person, animal, plant, rock or mountain is personified or "animated" insofar as it is host to some sort of immaterial "spirit" or "soul;" and he argued, alternatively, for the simpler view that, from the perspective of "the savage," people, animals, plants and otherwise inanimate objects are themselves endowed with certain powers, which were both impersonal and supernatural.[165] In short, Marett's posit of "animatism" is predicated on observations that native peoples regard as living—or animate or animated—objects and phenomena that we moderns consider as inanimate or "lifeless;"[166] but a belief in souls and spirits is not always present.

b. Qualified Affirmations of Animism: Alfredo López Austin on "Animistic Entities" and "Animistic Centers"

Precision in the use of this pair of timeworn terms is notoriously lacking and probably, at this point, irretrievable; moreover, some religionists find both conceptions present in E. B. Tylor's own work.[167] In the interest of methodological clarity, it is, however, worth noting that

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[163] Eric J. Sharpe, "Preanimism," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2nd ed., ed. Jones, vol. 11, 7372-74.

[164] Bolle, "Animism and Animatism," 363.

[165] See Alles, "Dynamism," 2540-45.

[166] Here I borrow the formulation of Robert A. Lowie, *Primitive Religion* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 1948 [originally 1924]), 134-35, another who rehearses E. B. Tylor's theory of "animism" before eventually presenting Marett's terminological and corrective notion of "animatism," which Lowie regards as a more salient alternative.

[167] Regarding treatments that acknowledge a slippage and kind of overlap in the terms "animism" and "animatism," Sharpe, "Preanimism," 7372, for instance, draws attention to "the double meaning of the word animism in Tylor's *Primitive Culture*," wherein animism proper is "a belief in spiritual beings" while Tylor also refers to the belief in the "animation" of animals, plants, and natural objects, which he proposed to call "animatism." Because (though this is usually

assertions of both animism and animatism appear in the literature about indigenous Mesoamerican religion. Regarding a particularly nuanced and extended treatment of the former possibility, Alfredo López Austin, in *The Human Body and Ideology*, which is focused on the ancient Nahuas but presents insights into the broader Mesoamerican cosmovision, considers it important to differentiate between "animistic entities" and "animistic centers," particularly those located in human bodies.[168] He concurs that, "the words *souls, spirits, animas* all lack precision;"[169] and he notes, moreover, that references to animistic entities as "souls" (a term he continues to use in qualified ways) are nearly always the consequence of colonial-era Christian influence.[170] Nevertheless, he stresses that the cosmos of ancient Mesoamericans was permeated—in fact, "loaded"—with impersonal but specific and qualitatively different sorts of supernatural powers, "animistic entities" or "vital fluids" that traveled through the tiers of the universe in dynamic and orderly ways.[171] Though none of these "vivifying forces" is exclusive to humankind, at key moments such as conception, birth, the first exposure to fire and sunlight, or at points of special achievement in life, these fluid-like energies entered and came to reside in various parts of the human body.[172]

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overlooked) Tylor uses both terms, it may then be accurate to accuse to Joyce Marcus of utilizing a "Tylorian" concept; but I do not find that a particular damning accusation.

[168] Alfredo López Austin, *The Human Body and Ideology: Concepts of the Ancient Nahuas*, 2 vols., trans. Thelma Ortiz de Montellano and Bernard R. Ortiz de Montellano (Salt Lake City, University of Utah Press, 1980), 181. I must concede that this is not a portion López Austin's work that I find particularly clear or persuasive.

[169] López Austin, *The Human Body and Ideology*, 181; his italics.

[170] For instance, López Austin, *The Human Body and Ideology*, 206, cautions that, "The concept of *tonalli* in ancient times was not the equivalent of 'soul' in Western terms. From colonial times on, the expression 'loss of soul' was used because of Christian influence."

[171] On the structure and dynamics of the Mesoamerican universe, see López Austin, *The Human Body and Ideology*, 52-68. Also, note that in other contexts, e.g., López Austin, *The Myths of the Opossum*, 108, he uses "animistic forces," which accentuates the impersonal nature of what he elsewhere labels as more thing-like "animistic entities."

[172] López Austin, *The Human Body and Ideology*, 236. Here I am indebted also to the apt summary of López Austin's stance in Davíd Carrasco, *Religions of Mesoamerica: Cosmovision and Ceremonial Centers*, second edition (Long Grove, Illinois: Waveland Press, 2014), 52-53.

López Austin draws on Nahua terms for the three most important of those enlivening, "animistic" forces. He says that *tonalli*, an animating entity that provides vigor and the energy for growth and development, was concentrated especially in the head and hair; *teyolia*, which provides emotion, memory and knowledge, was concentrated in the human heart; and *ihiyotl*, which provides bravery, desire, hatred, love and happiness, was understood to be concentrated in the liver.[173] As he explains,

> "The various psychic functions of the three entities go from the more rational of the *tonalli* to the more emotional of the *ihiyotl*, and the most important functions are those associated with the central entity, the *teyolia.* All three must operate harmoniously to produce a sane, mentally balanced and moral person. Disturbance of any one of them affects the other two."[174]

Describing *teyolia*, *tonalli* and *ihiyotl* as three "different kinds of souls" (as López Austin and those following his stance occasionally do) oversimplifies the situation.[175] Nonetheless, the notion that people were conceptualized as receptacles whose distinct character was a consequence of the presence and proportions of these three animating entities—which could also be offered to the gods as a form of "debt payment," for instance, in warfare or human sacrifice—does, then, suggest a qualified sort of animism, which is applicable to Oaxaca as well as Central Mexico.[176]

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[173] López Austin, *The Human Body and Ideology*, 236.

[174] López Austin, *The Human Body and Ideology*, 181. He explains that, "The *teyolia* is inseparable from the living human being, but the *tonalli* leaves the organism in both normal and abnormal ways and returns to it spontaneously or can be recovered through therapeutic procedures. Some human beings emanate dangerous *ihiyotl* under set conditions." Ibid.

[175] The reappearance of the term "soul" in innumerable different traditions lays the ground for many superficial comparisons and misunderstandings. Note that *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2nd ed., ed. Jones, vol. 12, 8530-71, for instance, has a block of nine separate entries on "Soul: Concepts In Indigenous Traditions," "Soul: Ancient Near Eastern Concepts," "Soul: Christians Concepts," etc., which accentuate just how differently "soul" is conceptualized in different traditions.

[176] For a discussion of the animism that draws directly on López Austin and makes specific application to Oaxacan contexts, see the section on "Animism, tonalism and nagualism" in de la Cruz, "Las creencias y prácticas religiosas de los descendientes de los *binnigula'sa*,'" 313-20. And here I should note that I am *not*, in the present discussion, providing due attention to the very important notions of tonalism and nagualism.

Additionally, in *The Myths of the Opossum*, López Austin assembles numerous examples of an impersonal dimension of Mesoamerican cosmovision that is even more reminiscent of Tylorian "animism." Here he explains that, along with beliefs in more personal gods, numerous mid-twentieth-century ethnographers discern persistent beliefs that everything from higher mammals down to trees, plants and stones was "animated" in the sense of having a "soul."[177] Three among his numerous examples are: William Madsen's observation that modern (1950s) Nahuas say, "God gave souls to animals, trees, stones, mountains, rivers and also to creeks. Everything God made has a spiritual soul, because nothing can exist without a spirit;"[178] Charles Wagley's conclusion that, according to the (1950s) Otomis of the Sierra Madre Oriental, "[corn] like all cultivated plants, possesses a 'soul,' that of a very highly respected deity;"[179] and Evan Vogt's surmise that present-day (1970s) Zinacantecos in Chiapas "believe that many natural phenomena, all the animals, and even some manufactured objects have innate souls," and, accordingly, "The most important interaction in the universe is not between persons, nor between persons and objects, but among the innate souls of persons and material objects."[180] In short, though López Austin is duly wary about Christianized references to "souls," all these, and many other, twentieth-century ethnographic reports, for better or worse, do speak to an indigenous

[177] López Austin's work reinforces awareness that the Mesoamerican notion of "souls" (a concept to which I am not affording due attention in this discussion) is important, multifaceted and culturally-specific, but also notoriously imprecise. In an attempt to provide some precision, López Austin, *The Myths of the Opossum*, 112, 114, uses the three-part formulation of "invisible and impalpable" supernaturals or "causes" that differentiates among (1) "gods," which are presumably personal, (2) "forces," which are presumably impersonal, and (3) "souls," which apparently constitute a unique third category. On the complexity Mesoamerican conceptions of "souls," which López Austin suggests is a Christianized designation of an indigenous conception, also see ibid., 116. And see a section on "The Soul" in Monaghan, "Theology and History in the Study of Mesoamerican Religions," 28-29.

[178] William Madsen, *The Virgin's Children: Life in an Aztec Village Today* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1960), 126; cited by López Austin, *The Myths of the Opossum*, 114.

[179] Charles Wagley, *Santiago Chimaltenango: Estudio antropológico-social de una comunidad indígena de Huehuetenango*, trans. J. Noval (Guatemala: Seminario de Integración Social Guatemalteca, 1957), 2, 25; cited by López Austin, *The Myths of the Opossum*, 114.

[180] Evan Vogt, *Tortillas for the Gods* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 18-19; cited by López Austin, *The Myths of the Opossum*, 116.

conception of divinity that is more properly (or less improperly) referred to as "animism" rather than "animatism." And that would presumably apply in Oaxaca as well as other Mesoamerican regions.[181]

c. A "Spectrum of Animacy": Molly Bassett on Shades of Gray in Native Discernments of Animate versus Animate Entities

Likewise noteworthy, though veering farther from belief in souls, and thus closer to animatism per se, is the work of religionist Molly Bassett, which I will also find very helpful in my analysis of ritual-architectural commemorations of divinity (priority II-A) at Monte Albán. She complicates the frequent observation that, where Westerners subscribe to a black-and-white bifurcation between that which is animate (like people and animals) versus that which is inanimate (like rocks and plants), indigenous Mesoamericans attribute animate status to many additional features of the perceptible world.[182] Focused on Aztecs and drawing on López Austin,

[181] Regarding the current unfashionableness of the term "animism," Oaxacanist John Monaghan, "Theology and History in the Study of Mesoamerican Religions," 45, n. 13, suggests (in 2000) that "anthropologists appear to be moving away [from the term 'animism'], not because it fails to reflect some of the reality of Mesoamerican belief and practice, but because it is used in such variable ways (e.g., for evolutionarily 'primitive' religions, for the belief that certain places and things have special powers because they have souls, for the pantheistic concept of a world soul)." Regarding the continued, if qualified, use of the term "soul" by Mesoamericanists, see ibid., 28-29. Also, note that ethnographer Alicia Barabas, who very often appeals to the López Austin on these matters, makes frequent use of the term "territorial animistic entities" (*entidades anímicas territoriales*) with reference to the outlooks of contemporary indigenous Oaxaca. See, for example, Alicia M. Barabas, "Cosmovisiones y etnoterritorialidad en las culturas indígenas de Oaxaca," *Antipoda: Revista de Antropología y Arqueología*, núm. 7 (julio-diciembre 2008), 2-5, where she directs attention to Nurit Bird-David, "'Animism' Revisited: Personhood, Environment, and Relational Epistemology," *Current Anthropology*, vol. 40, no. S1 (1999): S67-S91.

[182] Bassett, *The Fate of Earthly Things: Aztec Gods and God-Bodies* (2015). Compartively speaking, Bassett's remarks about alternative cultural decisions concerning what is animate and what is inaimante brings to mind Asianist Robert Sharf's ongoing work on the decidedly non-Western ways in which Buddhist philosophers conceptualize the boundaries between animate and inanimate "objects." See Robert H. Sharf, "Is Nirvāṇa the Same as Insentience? Chinese Struggles with an Indian Buddhist Ideal," in *India in the Chinese Imagination: Myth, Religion, and Thought*, eds. John Kieschnick and Meir Shahar (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 141-70.

Bassett integrates analyses of the pertinent ethnohistorical sources on Aztecs with her own fieldwork among contemporary Nahua speakers in the Huastec region of Veracruz in order to explore what *teotl* (usually translated as "god") meant in Aztec religion and how, via ritual, *teteo* (gods) come to be present in *teixiptlahuan* (localized embodiments of gods).[183] That interdisciplinary strategy leads Bassett to what she terms a five-part "spectrum of animacy,"[184] which presumably speaks to an indigenous means for assessing the ontological status of every element of the world.

Acknowledging shades of gray, as it were, according to this all-encompassing taxonomy, which is a kind of sliding-scale that is neither fixed nor static: *teteo* (deities) are considered fully animate; heavenly bodies that move, like the sun and moon, are somewhat less animate; and motionless rocks and stones are completely inanimate. But other features of the natural world like water, fire, clouds, wind and mountains (which, as we'll see, are judged to animate on the basis of some different criteria) fall somewhere in-between the extremes of high animacy and complete inanimacy. Moreover, in the context of "ritual manufacture," some inanimate objects like paper cutouts and bundled reeds are, via human ritual activities, changed into highly animate entities.[185] Most notably, in the context of the annual Chicomexochitl rites that Bassett observed in Veracruz, effigies made of store-bought paper are ontologically transformed into venerable living deities who are then regarded as "family members" and thus fed, clothed and conversed with throughout the subsequent year.[186] In an apt phrase, she notes how this human (ritual) manufacture of gods from mere prosaic paper "confounds common conceptions of [the] immanence and transcendence [of gods]."[187]

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[183] Bassett, *The Fate of Earthly Things*, 3. Bassett, ibid., 46-47, mentions a 1956 dissertation, Arild Hvidtfelt, *Teotl and Ixiptlatli: Some Central Conceptions in Ancient Mexican Religion*, as an earlier and oft-cited inquiry into the meanings of the Aztec terms *teotl* and *teixiptla*; but Bassett regards Hvidtfelt's likening of *teotl* to the Polynesian concept of *mana*, which numerous scholars replicate, as more problematic than helpful.

[184] Bassett, *The Fate of Earthly Things*, 12

[185] Bassett, *The Fate of Earthly Things*, 14.

[186] Bassett, *The Fate of Earthly Things*, 21.

[187] Bassett, *The Fate of Earthly Things*, 25.

Furthermore, while Bassett is, on the one hand, cautious to note that "the animate cosmovision of modern Nahuas is not that of the Aztecs," she, on the other hand, presents the "spectrum of animacy" as a kind of "folk taxonomy," which implies that Mesoamericans of all social classes, perhaps in all regions, were making these considered decisions about what is inanimate and what animate.[188] That is to say, she describes a Mesoamerican "perception of the world as fundamentally and pervasively animate" that was *not*, like monotheism, the sole preserve of elite intellects, but rather a commonly shared mindset like the monist-pantheistic orientation described by Monaghan. And on those grounds, I will find Bassett's "spectrum of animacy" especially useful in making sense of the perceived animacy of both the natural and constructed mountains that are so prominent in the cityscape of Monte Albán.

d. Affirming Zapotec Animatism (and Deified Ancestors) while Rejecting Zapotec Gods: Joyce Marcus's (Over)Correction

In any case, Joyce Marcus—who, in Oaxaca studies, is far and away the most high-profile advocate for this line of argument—though frequently (and incorrectly) accused of attributing "animism" to ancient Zapotecs, is actually, by self-description, a proponent of "animatism."[189] In fact, Marcus takes as her point of departure Robert H. Lowie's *Primitive*

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[188] Bassett, *The Fate of Earthly Things*, 373.

[189] Religionists will note, for instance, in an article that treats carefully the Oaxaca specifics, Adam T. Sellen, "Storm-God Impersonators from Ancient Oaxaca," *Ancient Mesoamerica*, vol. 13, no. 1 (Spring 2002), is among those who repeatedly (pp. 3, 6, 17) describes Marcus's position as "animism" rather than "animatism," though once (p. 10), he slips in the latter term. (As noted shortly, in the same article Sellen makes the more serious error of using "pantheistic" when he actually means "polytheistic.") Also, Marilyn A. Masson, "El Sobrenatural Cocijo y poder de linaje en la antigua sociedad Zapoteca," *Mesoamérica* 41 (Junio, 2001), 6-7, both muddies and clarifies Marcus's insistence on impersonal rather personal Zapotec conceptions of divinity. On the one hand, Masson invokes E. B. Tylor's work on "the doctrines of animism" as a means of characterizing Marcus's position, thereby conflating "animism" and "animatism," only the latter of which Marcus herself uses to describe her stance. On the other hand, though to suggest that Marcus misuses Tylor is specious, Masson, ibid., 6 (my translation), uses the term "doctrines" in the plural to remind readers that "Tylor distinguished between 'wild' animism and 'inferior' animism as opposed to 'higher' animism, where the latter two include the use of idols and gods." In her view, which is another sort of commentary on (and demonstartion of) the

Religion (1924) in which Lowie explicitly rejects Tylor's "soul-concept" in favor of Marett's animatism corrective wherein objects and features of the landscape are "personified," but without the assumption that they are occupied by some sort of "soul" or "animating spirit."[190] Nowhere in the her profilic writing, I think, does Marcus appeal directly to E. B. Tylor's formulation of animism; alternatively, she follows Lowie's Marett-informed descrition of animatism, which leads her to assert an indigenous Oaxacan perspective in which,

> "Man did come into contact with a wide variety of natural and supernatural phenomena, and because the Zapotec attributed life to many things we consider inanimate, anthropologists might characterize their religion as a form of *animatism*."[191]

From this view, religion—indeed all of life—is devoted, not to worshipping personal gods, but rather to cultivating, especially via ritual, reciprocal relationships between humans and those impersonal natural and supernatural forces and vital energies that permeate the world.[192] This is religion without gods. And, irrespective of her somewhat tentative use of "animatism" in the previous quote, Marcus is willing to assign the term, and that reciprocal sensibility, also to the Mayas, and thus seemingly other Mesoamerican peoples as well.[193]

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imprecision with which these terms have been applied to Oaxaca materials, Tylor's own work on alternate types of animism provides a kind of sliding evolutionary scale in which "belief in souls" and "belief in gods" are not fully oppositional possibilities. And that will prompt Masson to paired and qualified endorsements of both Marcus and Caso in a way that anticipates the sort of "both/and" arguments that I endorse next section.

[190] Lowie, *Primitive Religion*, 133-34.

[191] Marcus, "Archaeology and Religion," 299 (italics hers), citing Lowie, *Primitive Religion*, 133-34. In fact, note that the phrase, "attributed life to many things we consider inanimate," is taken verbatim from Lowie's endorsement of animatism. Ibid., 134.

[192] Note that throughout this discussion of animatism there is kind of awkwardness in language wherein "natural" forces and phenomenon are, from an animatistic perspective, attributed "supernatural" status. For instance, as Marcus repeatedly works to clarify: "It should be borne in mind that while lightening is a 'natural' force in our cosmology, it was a great *supernatural* force in the [animatistic] Zapotec cosmos." Joyce Marcus, "Rethinking the Zapotec Urn," Topic 43 in *The Cloud People*, eds. Flannery and Marcus, 144, n. 1; italics hers.

[193] See, for instance, Marcus, "Archaeology and Religion," 305, 311.

Notably, however, instead of a slight adjustment or addendum to earlier depictions of ancient Oaxacan religion as polytheistic, Marcus present this "animatistic" outlook as a wholesale—indeed, incommensurate—alternative to prevailing views about Zapotec investments in more personal gods. In a sense summarizing my previous two sections (i.e., those, respectively, on assertions of polytheism and monotheism), she and Flannery maintain that "Complex societies, such as chiefdoms and states, have often been assumed to have one of two kinds of religions—either monotheism or an elaborate [polytheistic] pantheon of gods and goddesses, often in human form."[194] But then Marcus ands Flannery dismiss the adequacy of either as a description of ancient Oaxacan religion because both are "preconceptions [that] are the result of our Greco-Roman bias and do not fit the religions of most prehispanic civilizations."[195] By the 1970s, Marcus settles on an animatistic resolution to what she sees as a false polytheistic-versus-monotheistic dilemma; and because this matter is so absolutely foundational to the way in which one understands essentially all aspects of Zapotec religion, she repeats the following iconoclastic position in the introductory sections of numerous subsequent articles and books:

> "In fact, the Zapotec did not have an anthropomorphized pantheon... [Alternatively] perhaps the most crucial concept in Zapotec religion was that of *pè* (written *pèe* in the sixteenth century, pronounced *be* by today's Zapotec). Variously translated as 'wind,' 'breath' or 'spirit,' *pè* was the vital force that made all living things move. Anything that moved was thus alive, to some degree sacred, and deserving of respect: animals, human beings, clouds, lightning, earthquakes, the 260-day ritual calendar and the foam on the top of a cup of stirred hot chocolate are examples of things which possessed *pè*."[196]

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[194] Joyce Marcus and Kent V. Flannery, "Ancient Zapotec Ritual and Religion: An Application of the Direct Historical Approach," in *The Ancient Mind: Elements of Cognitive Archaeology*, eds. Ezra B. W. Zubrow and Colin Renfrew (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 57.

[195] Marcus and Flannery, "Ancient Zapotec Ritual and Religion," 57.

[196] Marcus, "Archaeology and Religion," 299; her italics. Perhaps the earliest of the numerous contexts in which she makes this unwavering case for an animatistic view of Zapotec religion is Flannery and Marcus, "Formative Oaxaca and the Zapotec Cosmos" (1976), especially p. 376. Other writings that repeat verbatim this argument about the absence of a Zapotec pantheon of gods and the presence of an animatistic outlook include Marcus and Flannery, "Ancient Zapotec Ritual and Religion" (1994), 57-60; and Marcus and Flannery, *Zapotec Civilization*, 18-21.

Marcus, then, tends to lay the blame for persistent misrepresentations of Zapotec religion less with the uniquely influential colonial-era writings of Fray Juan de Córdova, who is predictably distorting, than with scholarly interpreters of his work, who should know better. In other words, where the abundant references in Córdova's *Vocabulario castellano-zapoteca* (1578) to *pitào* have most frequently been translated as a "sacred animated being" or "god," Marcus insists that *pitào* actually refers to "great spirit, breath, or wind"—that is, to an impersonal rather than personal supernatural force.[197] In her view, the replication of this Spanish Catholic distortion by contemporary scholars has eventuated not only in the misconception that Zapotec religion had something akin to a "pagan pantheon of gods," but, moreover, has quite fully obfuscated the importance of ancestor worship, which she regards as absolutely central for the ancient Zapotecs. (The deification of human rulers is another highly controversial topic that will reappear later in this chapter, and then get much fuller attention in chapter 7 relative to the ritual-architectural commemoration of the dead, priority II-D).

In any case, having committed herself to the stance that Zapotec religion was fundamentally "animatistic" and not at all polytheistic, Marcus's voluminous comments on the topic proceed with a fastidious avoidance of the terms "gods" or "deities" (except in quotes when addressing Spanish colonial uses of those terms). As noted, in her perhaps over-corrective opinion, allusions to a "Zapotec supreme being [constitute] the one supernatural who might be considered a 'deity' in our terms."[198] For Marcus, it is impersonal rather than personal conceptions of divinity that prevail.

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[197] Marcus, "Zapotec Religion," 345. Lind, *Ancient Zapotec Religion*, 14-15, summarizes the crucial difference between linguist Thomas Stark Smith's translation of *pitáo* as "sacred animated being" or "god," a view with which he and most Oaxacanists agree, versus Marcus's view that *pitáo* actually consists of two words—*pi* [or *pè*], which means "spirit, breath or wind," and *tao*, which means "great"—and thus should be translated as "great spirit, breath or wind."

[198] Marcus, "Archaeology and Religion," 300.

4. Coexistent Personal and Impersonal Supernatural Entities: Multiplicity and Not-Mutual Exclusion among Zapotec Divinity Conceptions

Very few—if any—questions are more impactful for how we understand the religion of Monte Albán than this matter of personal versus impersonal supernatural entities. For her part, Joyce Marcus is, on the one hand, highly successful in bringing attention both to the underestimated pervasiveness of non-anthropomorphic supernatural forces in ancient Oaxacan religion and to the neglected topic of ancestor worship. But by contrast to, for instance, Monaghan's more tempered claim that monistic-pantheism is one among the numerous ways that ancient Mesoamericans conceived of divinity, Marcus presents Oaxacanists with a kind of ultimatum to side either with animatism or polytheism. And, in that respect, she largely unsuccessful in persuading her colleagues that appreciating either the animatistic strain of ancient Oaxacan religion or the underestimated role of deified Zapotec rulers requires a total rejection of all personal deities.[199] Indeed, most Oaxacanists are inclined to see Marcus's complete dismissal of any Zapotec gods as an overcorrection that, instead of illuminating, pushes into the dark what they continue to regard as an absolutely crucial feature of Monte Albán religion.[200]

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[199] Of many Oaxacanists to reject Marcus' view of animatism as a view that completely eliminates the conventional prospect of a Zapotec pantheon of gods, I noted earlier Lind, *Ancient Zapotec Religion*, 6-7; and Urcid, *Zapotec Writing*, 44, n.40.

[200] As noted, Marcus also extends her ideas about a thoroughgoing "animatism" that precludes the existence of a "pantheon of gods" into the Maya zone, where Mayanists, not unlike Oaxacanists in this regard, are more inclined to see this as an overcorrection than a revisionist stance they can fully embrace. Specific debates of the issue come in, for instance, Stephen Houston and David Stuart, "Of Gods, Glyphs, and Kings: Divinity and Rulership among the Classic Maya," *Antiquity* vol. 70, no. 268 (1996): 289-312; David Stuart, Stephen Houston, and John Robertson, "Classic Mayan Language and Classic Maya Gods," in *The Proceedings of the Maya Hieroglyphic Workshop: Classic Mayan Language and Classic Maya Gods*, March 13-14, 1999, ed. Phil Wanyerka (Austin: University of Texas Department of Art, 1999), 1-216; and Karl Taube, *The Major Gods of Ancient Yucatán*, Studies in Pre-Columbian Art and Archaeology no. 32 (Washington, D.C: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1992).

a. Alfredo López Austin's "Both/And" Solution to the Divinity Question: Mediating the "Two Great Categories of Supernaturals"

Once again, though, it is Alfredo López Austin who, in the context of a short but influential article on types of rites and ritual, provides perhaps the most direct and frequently quoted resolution to the problem of impersonal versus personal conceptions of divinity, both of which he is certain are strongly represented in the cosmovision that obtains across Mesoamerica.[201] Though constantly mindful of Eurocentric distortions of indigenous conceptions, for López Austin, an appreciation of dynamically circulating "animating entities" such as *teyolia* and *tonalli* by no means disqualifies the existence also of a multitude of more human-like divine agents. Like most others, he too acknowledges widespread pre-Hispanic belief in a "Supreme God" who is frequently (but not always) depicted as too powerful and remote to be moved by the rites, prayers or offerings of humans.[202] Moreover, in other writings, López Austin enumerates "the great differences" among as many as seven disparate sorts of Mesoamerican supernatural entities, which complicates (or enriches) considerably the oversimple choice between just two options.[203] But, perfect for our present purposes, his

[201] Alfredo López Austin, "Los ritos: un juego de definiciones," *Arqueología Mexicana*, vol. 6, núm. 34 (noviembre-diciembre 1998): 4-17. Here I am mining this article for comments concerning personal versus impersonal supernatural entities; latter I will revisit this important little piece for its helpful "classification of rites." Ibid., 17. Among numerous Oaxacanists who appeal to this article as a compromise solution to debate over personal versus impersonal Zapotec conceptions of divinity are: Lind, "La religión estatal de Monte Albán y los sacerdotes de Cociyo de Lambityeco," 21; Lind, *Ancient Zapotec Religion*, 8-9; and Cira Martínez López, "La residencia de la Tumba 7 y su templo: elementos arquitectónico-religiosos en Monte Albán," en Víctor de la Cruz y Marcus Winter, coords., *La religión de los binnigula'sa'* (Oaxaca: Fondo Editorial, Instituto Estatal de Educación Pública de Oaxaca, 2002), 222, 249, 255. I will elaborate on Martínez López's appeal to this article later in the chapter.

[202] López Austin, "Los ritos: un juego de definiciones," 9 (my translation), notes that some documentary sources depict "the Supreme God" as an exception who cannot be moved by the prayers or offerings of humans, but the same sources also record prayers directed to the Supreme God, "which indicate that, in practice, people have some hope of being heard by him."

[203] For instance, emphasizing the "great difference" between these alternatives, López Austin, *The Myths of the Opossum*, 112, enumerates what amounts to a seven-part typology of supernatural entities in which he contrasts [1] those being known strictly as gods with [2] the supreme, ubiquitous god, lord of all existence, often called the Only God; [3] the minor gods, which include dwarf guardians of springs or carriers of water jugs among the clouds; [4] human

primary concern in this concise article is with the similarities and differences between "two great categories" of "supernatural entities": impersonal supernatural forces versus personal gods.[204]

Regarding similarities, in López Austin's view, impersonal supernatural forces and anthropomorphic gods are, in the minds of traditional Mesoamericans, alike in four important respects: (a) both are composed of a substance that is imperceptible to humans under normal waking conditions; (b) both have an origin prior to the creation of the perceptible world; (c) both are "agents" insofar as both exercise effective action on the perceptible world; and (d) the effective actions of both "can be captured or affected to a greater or lesser extent by human beings," especially via rites.[205] That is to say, unlike the so-termed Supreme Being who is largely inaccessible, both the fluid-like "animistic entities" and the more personal gods stand in an interactive and reciprocal relationship with humans that is serviced most of all through ritual practices. In fact, by his definition, all rites are "patterns of conduct directed at supernatural entities;"[206] and because there are strictly established obligations on both sides, the neglect of proper ritualizing can lead to disastrous consequences.[207]

Regarding the differences between the two large sets, "gods" stand apart from impersonal supernatural entities because of two attributes: (a) "a personality so similar to that of humans as to enable them to understand the expressions of people and to have a will capable of being affected by human actions," and (b) "a capability to exercise by their will effective action on the perceptible world."[208] Where gods have human-like dispositions and emotions that enable them to be variously angry, jealous and generous—qualities that are exemplified by their conduct in

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souls, or the parts of human souls associated with animal companions; [5] the souls of rocks (and probably of other features of the landscape); [6] more fully impersonal forces circulating throughout the universe; and [7] "the power of merchandise to be sold…"

[204] López Austin, "Los ritos: un juego de definiciones," 9.

[205] López Austin, "Los ritos: un juego de definiciones," 8.

[206] López Austin, "Los ritos: un juego de definiciones," 6; my translation.

[207] López Austin, "Los ritos: un juego de definiciones," 12.

[208] López Austin, "Los ritos: un juego de definiciones," 9; my translation.

the context of myths—active but impersonal forces, of which, as we've seen, there are numerous qualitatively different sorts, have more the character of personalityless electricity, liquids or bodiless energies. Also, along with prominent and powerful deities such as the Aztecs' Tlaloc and Quetzalcoatl, who seem to have counterparts in nearly all of Mesoamerica's urban centers, López Austin's inventory of "an enormous plurality of gods" includes yet more minor deities such as "small guardians of fountains, streams, plants, mountains, etc."[209] And thus, consistent with most descriptions of a Zapotec pantheon, he contends that, "the gods are imagined with great ties among themselves, especially of a hierarchical nature, which means that the most powerful deities have under their command armies of [supernatural] servants or vassals."[210]

Ritual, then, takes centerstage in López Austin's analysis of the problem. While presumably, one's daily affairs—say, in planting, harvesting, hunting, honey collection, trading, traveling and building—are subject to obligatory interactions with personal *and* impersonal supernatural entities,[211] he presents ritual as the paramount means by which people maintain their obligatory reciprocal relationships with both sorts of divine agents. And, although López Austin enumerates a half dozen different categories of ritual, the most crucial subdivision in his "classification of rites" is between those that are aimed at impersonal supernatural entities versus those that are directed to personal gods.

Regarding the former—that is, rites that engage non-anthropomorphic supernatural forces and agents, of which divination is the most prominent (but not all-encompassing) alterative—López Austin maintains that these are *not* intended to establish communication with those entities (since communicating per se with non-personal forces is a kind of anathema); rather, the

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[209] López Austin, "Los ritos: un juego de definiciones," 9; my translation.

[210] López Austin, "Los ritos: un juego de definiciones," 9; my translation. Regarding this point about extensive hierarchical ties between the gods, here López Austin flirts with, but does not quite endorse, the notion that pre-Columbian divinity conceptions were arranged in a fully coherent, contradiction-free "system," which is the sort of reifying view with which I will take issue in the "Summary Thoughts and Methodological Cautions on the Study of Ancient Zapotec Divinity Conceptions."

[211] López Austin, *The Myths of the Opossum*, 112.

goal of these divinatory practices is to gain information or "to know the occult," especially in regard to future circumstances.[212] In these cases, "officiants do not seek to create a personal bond, for they simply break into a sacred realm to observe or act upon it."[213] By contrast, rites that do invoke personal gods are designed to establish "an interpersonal relationship, a communication with the divinity or divinities to whom they are addressed."[214] Appealing, with due reservations, to a very old (and somewhat problematic) distinction between "religion" and "magic," López Austin demarks two variations on this theme;[215] but, in either case, though, the ritualists cultivate a kind of give-and-take relationship with the human-like supernatural agents.[216]

b. Interim Conclusions and a Way Forward: Acknowledging, at a Minimum, Six Different Zapotec Conceptions of Divinity

López Austin's "both/and" argument for the co-existence of personal and impersonal supernatural entities is, for most present-day Oaxacanists, largely an exercise in preaching to the choir, so to speak. Already most Oaxacanists, irrespective of Michael Lind's characterization of a kind of insurmountable partisan divide among advocates for polytheism versus proponents of animatism, express a willingness to affirm the coexistence of both options. Nevertheless, López

[212] López Austin, "Los ritos: un juego de definiciones," 16 (my translation), while stressing their usually non-communicative intention, is careful both to avoid equating all rites directed at impersonal supernatural entities with divination and to note that "nor are all divinatory rites impersonal."

[213] López Austin, "Los ritos: un juego de definiciones," 16; my translation.

[214] López Austin, "Los ritos: un juego de definiciones," 16; my translation.

[215] Regarding "religious rites," López Austin, "Los ritos: un juego de definiciones," 16 (my translation), says participants adopt "an attitude of submission and subordination [to the gods]," and thus the watchwords are propitiation, conciliation and supplication. Alternatively, practioners undertake "magical rites," with a sense of equality or even superiority over supernatural beings in which acquiescence gives way to an element of manipulation and coercion. Ibid.

[216] Later—especially in chapter 10 on the propitiation priority (III-C)—I will revisit in a more critical fashion this unsure distinction between religious versus magical rites.

Austin's oft-quoted exposition does prompt a quick summation of the previous discussion of not-mutually-exclusive polytheistic, monotheistic and animatistic Zapotec conceptions of divinity before moving forward. The debates concerning each, which may at first seem to be controversies very specific to the Oaxacan materials, actually, as I've worked to demonstrate, reflect much broader trends and debates in the history of Religious Studies and Anthropology.

For instance, first, regarding polytheism, irrespective of well-warranted complaints about the unsuitability of applying the notion of a Greco-Roman pantheon of gods to indigenous contexts, colonial-era presumptions of Zapotec polytheism persist as the prevailing scholarly view, though with various qualifications and nuances. Of the numerous correctives, I find Miguel Bartolomé's remarks about "the plasticity of indigenous polytheistic conceptions" and Oaxacans' "receptivity to a multiple experience of the sacred and not just as the worship of a multitude of gods" to be, by far, the most helpful.[217] In fact, Bartolomé provides such a thorough (and thoroughly compelling) reconceptualization of the category that to describe it as "polytheism" is, I think, misleading. But, nevertheless, his position about multiplicity and pragmatic improvisation of indigenous views, in a strong sense, sets the tone for all of my subsequent comments about the ritual-architectural commemoration of divinity (priority II-A) at Monte Albán.

Second, regarding monotheism, assertions that Zapotecs were, at least in part, monotheists raises specters of Schmidt's "primitive monotheism" and the Lang's old case for "high gods of low races," along with suspicions of endemic Christian distortions; and claims for indigenous monotheism are, it seems, frequently presented primarily as polemical arguments for the sophistication of native peoples. Nonetheless, the notion of Zapotec monolatry—that is, belief in a supreme being or uncreated creator god that complements rather than cancels beliefs in a plurality of gods—remains a compelling option. This component of Zapotec divinity conceptions, however, owing to its invariably elitist affiliations and to the unrepresentablity of supreme beings, has only small ramifications for matters of ritual-architectural design; and thus it will not figure large in my analysis of Monte Albán. Also, though the compelling prospect of a

[217] Bartolomé, "Elogio del politeísmo: las cosmovisiones indígenas en Oaxaca," 606, 628; my translation.

Mesoamerican monism or monistic-pantheism often finds its way into discussions of indigenous monotheism, that more Hindu-like than Christian-like possibility—wherein, unlike belief in a transcendent divinity, "the universe is not distinct from divinity"[218]—actually represents a fundamentally different way of conceiving of divinity and reality. While the nondualistic notion that "all is One" may seem abstract, I will argue that this outlook, which was not confined the intelligencia, does impinge far more than monotheism, on the design and experience of the great Zapotec capital.

Third, somewhat imprecise attributions of animism and animatism, while even more entangled with old evolutionary theories, direct attention to a Zapotec conception of divinity at least as significant, if harder to document, than their beliefs in more personal gods. Moreover, while we have to be much impressed by the realization that Zapotecs attributed animate and "alive" status to many features of the natural and humanly constructed world that Westerns see as completely inanimate, I will find great heuristic utility in the prospect that Mesoamericans of all social classes assessed various of those elements to be "*somewhat* animated."[219] Moreover, in the context of discussing Joyce Marcus's arguments for animatism, the important topic of apotheosized Zapotec rulers and royal ancestor worship made a kind of backdoor entrance into the present discussion. Though that is a topic I will not address it head-on until chapter 7, the realization that many supposed Zapotec "idols" and "gods" are actually representations of deified royal ancestors who served as intermediaries between people and other supernatural forces provides yet another oft-overlooked (until recently), but nonetheless major, component of the collage of Oaxacan divinity conceptions.

In sum, then, though I treat the history of ideas about Zapotec conceptions of divinity under three broad headings—polytheism, monotheism and animism/animatism—we actually arrive at twice that many major alternatives. That is to say, notwithstanding the catchphrase that

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[218] Monaghan, "Theology and History in the Study of Mesoamerican Religions," 26-28. As noted earlier, on that basis, Monaghan, ibid., 27, directs attention to suggestions of significant parallels between Mesoamerican religion and both Hinduism and Buddhist thinkers Chuang Tzu's and Nagarjuna's critiques of dualistic thinking.

[219] Bassett, *The Fate of Earthly Things*, 25; italics added.

"There have been basically two different approaches to Zapotec religion,"[220] with respect to conceptions of divinity, we must acknowledge the simultaneous relevance at Monte Albán of, at a minimum, six notably different options: (1) innumerable anthromorphic gods or "old school polytheism," if you will, (2) a *dios otiose*-like supreme being, (3) fully impersonal supernatural forces and entities, (4) "somewhat animated" entities, (5) a monistic-pantheism outlook that embraces the oneness of All, and (6) deified Zapotec rulers and ancestors. Furthermore, it will be a crucial part of my argument that these are not a half dozen scholarly means of explaining the same one conception of divinity, nor even one layered but largely contradiction-free theological system. Alternatively, I will contend that these are, in Bartolomé's phrase, "multiple experiences of the sacred," which coexist without ever being fully synthesized into a single fully coherent framework.

Again, though, rather than go farther down that interpretive avenue for now, I undertake a second set of background sub-sections that inventory the respective ethnographic, ethnohistorical and archaeological evidences on which Oaxacanist scholars have based their ideas about ancient Zapotec ways of conceiving of the divine. This section rehearses many of the same ideas and conversies about Oaxaca divinity conceptions that I have addressed already, though in somewat different ways. And thus again, impatient readers are invited simply to leap ahead to the second main block of the chapter—" Four Variations on the Ancient Zapotec Ritual-Architectural Commemoration of Divinity"—which provides a more properly hermeneutical inquiry into the very uneven ritual-architectural expression of each of those six divinity conceptions.

B. Competing and Complementary Sources on Ancient Zapotec Conceptions of Divinity: Ethnography, Ethnohistory and Archaeology

How do we know anything about the conceptions of divinity that obtained in the working capital of Monte Albán? On what basis have scholars arrived at their strong but diversified opinions about these elusive matters? Continuing, then, with a second arc in this history of ideas

[220] Lind, *Ancient Zapotec Religion*, 6. Earlier (2011), Lind, "La religión estatal de Monte Albán y los sacerdotes de Cociyo de Lambityeco," 20-21, made the same case, with reference to the same scholars, that "Two different interpretations of the Zapotec gods have been set forth."

about ancient Zapotec conceptions of divinity, I assay next, in turn, the strengthens and weaknesses of the three main kinds of resources—ethnographic, ethnohistoric and archaeological—on which academic theories about the gods, goddesses and animatistic spirits of Monte Albán have depended. The present question is not *What do these varied sources tell us about Zapotec religion?* but rather the much narrower query, *How does each of the three sorts of sources inform scholarly ideas about Zapotec divinity conceptions?* Though it is commonplace to argue for conjoined interdisciplinary reliance on all three—and the monadnock figures of Eduard Seler and Alfonso Caso, though neither is a fieldworker per se, provide prototypical examples of that sort of tripled threat—every Oaxacanist tends to privilege one domain of data over the others, and each body of evidence has evoked its own controversies. And though, as we'll see, it is the ethnohistorical sources that have been the most influential in this respect, and archaeology the next most instrumental, it is, I will argue, ethnography that is actually the most revealing of ancient Zapotec divinity conceptions.

The next three sub-sections, then, constitute an uneven three-part set. Because scholars have devoted so much attention to analyzing the references to Oaxacan deities in the colonial-era writings of Dominican friars, I will allot by far the largest share of the discussion to the ethnographic sources of Juan de Córdova, Gonzalo de Balsalobre and Francisco de Burgoa, along with the so-termed *Relaciones Geográficas*. But I precede the discussion of those Spanish chronicles with a shorter remarks on the prospects for relying on the ethnography of contemporary Mesoamericans as means of ascertaining ancient conceptions of divinity. And I follow the long section on ethnohistorical sources with a briefer account of the efforts to identify ancient Zapotec deities via archaeology, most notably through analysis of Monte Albán's suitably revered funerary urns. That whole discussion leads to a interim set of "Summary Thoughts and Methodological Cautions on the Study of Ancient Zapotec Divinity Conceptions" before finally turning to consideration of so-termed priority II-A, the ritual-architectural commemoration of divinity.

1. Ethnographic Sources and Zapotec Conceptions of Divinity: The Post-Contact Vulnerability of Gods and Resilience of Animistic Forces

How much can contemporary indigenous Mesoamerican communities, overwhelming composed of self-described Christians, teach us about pre-Columbian conceptions of divinity?[221] And how do the present religious investments of native Mesoamericans mislead us about the religio-ontological attitudes of their ancient predecessors? For compelling clues about the mixed promise and problems of relying on the ethnography of colonial-era and contemporary indigenous communities as a resource for understanding pre-Columbian Mesoamerican divinity conceptions, we can turn yet again to Alfredo López Austin.[222] First he stresses discontinuity by reminding us that the concerted evangelization of Mesoamerican societies began more than four and a half centuries ago and that "even where conversion seemed to be more nominal than real, there were profound changes in religious concepts;"[223] López Austin, therefore, describes contemporary indigenous belief systems as "marginal, dominated, rural religions."[224] Reechoing postcolonial religionist Charles Long's insight that the "contact zone," in addition to all of the socio-economic and political travail, precipitates a "crisis of orientation" and thus a "religious crisis,"[225] López Austin labels these as "invaded religions, over which the Catholic and

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[221] For an overview of late-twentieth-century enthography in the region, see John D. Monaghan and Jeffrey H. Cohen, "Thirty Years of Oaxacan Ethnography," in *Supplement to the Handbook of Middle American Indians*, vol. 6, "Ethnology," ed. John D. Monaghan, with the assistance of Barbara W. Edmonson (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), 150-78.

[222] Though he addresses this topic in many contexts, especially helpful is a three-chapter discussion of "The Nature of the Gods" in López Austin, *The Myths of the Opossum*, 104-54.

[223] López Austin, *The Myths of the Opossum*, 105.

[224] López Austin, *The Myths of the Opossum*, 109.

[225] See 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), especially 101, concerning "the ways in which the ['discovery' of the] New World brought about a new orientation of European consciousness;" and recall how I made use in the Closing Thoughts of chapter 2 on the convention priority (I-B) of that notion of a "religious crisis" to describe the challenge of coming to coming to terms with the unprecedented urban situation of early Monte Albán. Here I am addressing the more obvious way in which colonialism presented

Protestant churches wield control," which must, of necessity, have undergone major transformations.[226]

But then, consistent with his emphasis on an enduring "hard nucleus" of Mesoamerican cosmovision, and thus his endorsement of a qualified version of "ethnographic analogy,"[227] López Austin counters with a very optimistic assessment of the complementarity of ethnographic fieldwork-based and ethnohistoric written sources:

> "in spite of the changes, since present-day native religions are part of a Mesoamerican tradition, they convey unique ways of looking at the world. These ways cannot automatically interpret the remote past, but they can shed light where the historians of the early colonial period are obscure."[228]

In López Austin's view, which at this point reechoes that of Oaxacanist ethnographer Miguel Bartolomé, irrespective of traumatic challenges and changes, these contemporary communities are equipped with a set of core insights and guiding principles that enable them to reinterpret, re-assemble and reinvent themselves and their religious orientations in ways that do have great continuity with the past.[229]

Nevertheless, revisiting his observation that the Mesoamerican world was filled with both personal gods and impersonal cosmic forces, López Austin accentuates just how differently each of those broad classes of supernatural entities fared in the colonial situation.[230] As he writes, "What constitutes religion is very heterogeneous, not only in terms of the diversity of elements,

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a "religious crisis" for indigenous Mesoamericans who were compelled to reconfigure, among other things, their multifaceted conception of divinity.

[226] López Austin, *The Myths of the Opossum*, 109.

[227] See, for instance, López Austin, *The Myths of the Opossum*, 107, 355-57.

[228] López Austin, *The Myths of the Opossum*, 105.

[229] See Bartolomé, "Elogio del politeísmo: las cosmovisiones indígenas en Oaxaca," 629ff.

[230] López Austin, *The Myths of the Opossum*, 104.

but also in terms of the kinds of resistance of said elements to social changes."[231] Though here I risk a more blunt bifurcation than López Austin actually poses, the personal gods, which he emphasizes were subject to both "the rules of the pantheons" and the broader "principles of Mesoamerican cosmovision," were largely the preserve of the elite ruling classes and state religions.[232] Moreover, he stresses that, in pre-Columbian contexts, the identity of the major gods of the pantheon was intimately correlated with workings of the calendar system: "time was divine and it permeated everything... Time was gods in succession, and the power of the gods over the earth was influenced by time."[233] He goes so far as to assert that, for ancient Mesoamericans, "Time and god are one," and thus individual gods were indissolubly identified with their respective calendar dates.[234] Thus while he concurs with Joyce Marcus that the calendar, "one of the most solid and elaborate creations of Mesoamerica," was "rooted in politics,"[235] López Austin also emphasizes the more broadly existential consequences of these culture-specific means of timekeeping so that, in pre-Hispanic urban settings, "the calendar strongly permeated all aspects of human existence; it was one of the obsessions of Mesoamerican thought..."[236]

At the same time, however, López Austin stresses how the intimate connection between the calendrical personal gods and pre-Columbian structures of hegemonic political authority also made these the most vulnerable conceptions of divinity. As noted last chapter in relation to the astronomy priority (I-C), the calendar—and the hierarchy of gods associated with it—were among the most visible aspects of indigenous religion, which were, therefore, also objects of the most concerted suppression by Spanish evangelizers. And, consequently, at present,

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[231] López Austin, *The Myths of the Opossum*, 108.

[232] López Austin, *The Myths of the Opossum*, 104.

[233] López Austin, *The Myths of the Opossum*, 117.

[234] López Austin, *The Myths of the Opossum*, 121.

[235] López Austin, *The Myths of the Opossum*, 108.

[236] López Austin, *The Myths of the Opossum*, 108.

> "One of the most noteworthy differences between Mesoamerican religious thought and that of natives today is its relationship to the calendar, a fundamental system in the past that is almost absent today... Today derivations of [the traditional calendar] can be found here and there—in Guatemala, Chiapas, Oaxaca—helping people to face the forces of destiny, but these are mere shadows of the robust pre-Hispanic omnipresence."[237]

On the one hand, then, while the demise of the traditional calendar does not entail the complete eradication of the ancient gods, it does, according to López Austin, signal the sort of radical transformation that makes colonial-era and present-day deities, for researchers, unreliable representations of their pre-Hispanic counterparts. In other words, he agrees with Bartolomé that, "Indigenous religions today retain a rich polytheism in which the diversity and changes in the world are explained by many and varied gods;"[238] but, in the colonial situation, once disconnected from their pre-Columbian calendrical and institutional moorings, the formerly reliable gods are perceived as acting in still-powerful, though much less predictable ways: "their capricious nature stands out."[239] And while the altered role and disposition of the personal gods in colonial versus pre-Columbian circumstances raises a host of fascinating problems—including native peoples' deliberate rejection of the now-burdensome old state gods[240]—most important for our present purposes is López Austin's cautionary note that,

> "We will not find the gods today as fossilized, mummified, and anachronistic. The gods [of contemporary indigenous communities] are gods created in the remote past, but they are also gods today, recreated day by day."[241]

And to that extent, he concedes that ethnography presents a quite limited resource for our understanding of something like the pantheon of Classic-era Monte Albán.

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[237] López Austin, *The Myths of the Opossum*, 108.

[238] López Austin, *The Myths of the Opossum*, 110.

[239] López Austin, *The Myths of the Opossum*, 110.

[240] López Austin, *The Myths of the Opossum*, 109, makes the fascinating observation that, in colonial contexts, "After the destruction of their ancient institutions, their own heritage, Mesoamerican religion [most notably, that component composed of the state-sponsored personal gods] was burdensome to the people."

[241] López Austin, *The Myths of the Opossum*, 108.

On the other hand, impersonal supernatural entities fared far better in the colonial situation. López Austin accentuates that, in the face of European intrusions, those forms of indigenous religious observance that did not require the outward forms of monumental architecture, the calendar and the accouterments of state authority—and which did not, therefore, "betray the faithful to colonial authorities"[242]—enjoyed far greater perseverance: "Fields, springs, mountains, and homes are still inhabited by invisible beings similar to ancient ones..."[243] Those more unobtrusive aspects of the pre-Columbian conceptual system, less overtly identified as "pagan religion," that dealt, for instance, with the use of tools and agricultural labor, matters of health and the human body, or with family relationships, "remained under domestic protection and were passed along at the warmth of the hearth. They remained by the fire in the sacred family bundles."[244] Thus, where the governmental structures of the state and the calendar—and thus the associated personal gods—were largely stamped out,

> "In these safe, family settings it is still possible to find information revealing an ancient concept, scarcely mentioned in the old testimonial documents; or, more significantly, a concept of the organization of the world, a way of understanding and working in it."[245]

In support of the contrastive measure of continuity with respect to the sorts of non-anthropomorphic supernatural entities that sustained these more private and prosaic activities, López Austin collects innumerable examples of contemporary investments in "animistic forces," several of which I quoted earlier in the chapter.[246] And his own work on fluid-like animistic entities such as *tonalli* and *teyolia* perhaps best demonstrates how ethnographic-based insights can enrich the understanding of pre-Columbian beliefs and practices.[247] Additionally, I note that

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[242] López Austin, *The Myths of the Opossum*, 108.

[243] López Austin, *The Myths of the Opossum*, 105.

[244] López Austin, *The Myths of the Opossum*, 108.

[245] López Austin, *The Myths of the Opossum*, 108.

[246] López Austin, *The Myths of the Opossum*, 114-16.

[247] See, for example, López Austin, *Ideology and the Human Body*, 22-28. Molly Bassett, *The Fate of Earthly Things*, discussed earlier, provides another more recent and very compelling example of the way in which insights derived from ethnography and participation in the rites of

both Molly Bassett's hypothesis of a "spectrum of intimacy" [248] and John Monaghan's posit of a pervasive Mesoamerican monistic-pantheistic orientation[249] are insights born largely of ethnographic fieldwork; and both of these also belong to the impersonal, apolitical side of indigenous religion, which has allowed them to persevere in contemporary contexts. Moreover and maybe more surprising, the forthcoming discussion of the *Relaciones Geográficas* will persuade us that the Oaxacan worship of deified ancestors survives and perhaps is even strengthened in the colonial era. And, furthermore, we should remember that it is ethnography that does the most to alert us to the multiplicity of coexisting divinity conceptions that obtain in the pliable and pragmatic "religion without theology" of indigenous Oaxacan communities.[250]

In sum, then, I will have more to say about the special role of ethnography in the "Summary Thoughts and Methodological Cautions" that follow this history of ideas. And later I will specifically challenge the blunt correlation of personal gods with "state religion" and impersonal supernatural entities with "domestic religion"—as though those were two completely, or even largely, separate spheres in ancient Monte Albán. But there is no question that those aspects of pre-Columbian belief and practice that could persist "out of sight," primarily in residential and occupational contexts, demonstrate vastly greater continuity than do calendrical and state-based personal deities. Nevertheless, if far and way the greatest deficiency of ethnography concerns knowledge about the pantheon of anthropomorphic gods, that is precisely the greatest strength of the writings by colonial-era Dominican friars—to which I turn now.

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contemporary Nahuatl-speaking indigenous communities, in this case in Veracruz, greatly enhances her understanding of pre-Columbian Aztec conceptions of divinity.

[248] Bassett, *The Fate of Earthly Things*, 12

[249] Monaghan, *The Covenants with Earth and Rain,* 137ff.; and Monaghan, "Theology and History in the Study of Mesoamerican Religions," 26.

[250] Bartolomé, "Elogio del politeísmo: las cosmovisiones indígenas en Oaxaca," 602.

2. Ethnohistoric Sources and Zapotec Conceptions of Divinity: Four Fraught but Fortuitous and Fecund Bodies of Colonial-Era Writings

A second major body of evidence, the pertinent ethnohistorical sources—that is, written records from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—while likewise products of the colonial "contact zone," present very different strengthens and weaknesses as resources for the recovery of pre-Columbian conceptions of divinity.[251] Religionists, who traditionally have devoted the bulk of their energies to learning languages and interpreting "sacred texts," are perhaps the most deeply implicated in the presumption that one can *really* know another's religion only via the careful study of their written works.[252] According to that entrenched bias, art, architecture, archaeology and even ethnography are, at best, "mute texts," which only imperfectly express what is explicit and thus recoverable in alphabetical texts.[253] Mesoamericanist scholars, while far more adept at interpreting the sort of non-literary material evidence on which they are forced primarily to rely, likewise participate in this textual bias insofar as they have frequently seized upon those scarce written records that do exist—in the case of Oaxaca, the fairly abundant

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[251] Among numerous places, helpful summaries of the available documentary or ethnographic sources for the study of Zapotec religion appear, for instance, in Howard F. Cline, "Ethnohistorical Regions of Middle America," *Handbook of Middle American Indians*, vol. 12, "Guide to the Ethnohistorical Sources," Part One, vol. ed. Howard F. Cline, gen. ed. Robert Wauchope (London: University of Texas Press, 1972), 173-75; Whitecotton, *The Zapotecs*, 85-88; Marcus and Flannery, "Ancient Zapotec Ritual and Religion," 57; Víctor de la Cruz, *El pensamiento de los* binnigula'sa', 40-45; and most thoroughly, Lind, *Ancient Zapotec Religion*, chaps. 2-3.

[252] Frequently I have argued that the fundamental reason for the very limited interest of scholars of religion in Mesoamerican studies is precisely the paucity of the sort of written records that religionists regard as crucial to exercise their primary skills as interpreters of alphabetical texts. On scholars of religion's inordinate reliance on written sources, see, for instance, Lawrence E. Sullivan, "'Seeking an End to the Primary Text' or 'Putting an End to the Text as Primary,'" in *Beyond the Classics? Essays in Religious Studies and Liberal Education*, eds. Frank E. Reynolds and Sheryl L. Burkhalter (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 41-59.

[253] Anthropologist Clifford Geertz is the most prominent voice on the prospect that we can understand various non-literary aspects of culture by imaging and interpreting them as "texts." On the mixed merits of that once-fashionable prospect, see, for instance, Mark A. Schneider, "Culture-as-Text in the Work of Clifford Geertz," *Theory and Society*, vol. 16, no. 6 (Nov., 1987), 809-39.

writings of Dominican friars—as the very strongest, maybe the only, resource with which to untie the Gordian knot of pre-Columbian religion. In that sense, then, the four bodies of colonial-era writings that I inventory in the next sub-sections have constituted not ancillary, but instead the leading, evidence with respect to the beliefs and ideas of pre-Columbian Oaxacans. For better or worse, these ethnohistorical documents—far more than any ethnographically or archaeologically-derived evidences—have been the most determinative in the formation of scholarly ideas about Zapotec conceptions of divinity.[254]

In my three-term subtitle, I first describe these colonial documents as "fraught." In that respect, every academic account of the relevant ethnohistorical sources rehearses the deep irony that missionary chroniclers—scholarly friars and priests who, on the one hand, deplored and endeavored to eradicate the indigenous beliefs and practices they described—on the other hand, provide our best resources for documenting ancient Zapotec religion. The quintessential occasion for a highly skeptical hermeneutic of suspicion, "It is necessary that we read the works of Burgoa and other Spanish authors," as specialist on these Oaxacan colonial documents, Judith Francis Zeitlin, advises, "both for what they tell us, and for the topics on which they are silent."[255] She warns that,

> "The vision of the Spanish chroniclers like Burgoa was filtered by the preoccupations of their patriarchal education and by the prejudices of the Christian exclusivity… Researchers generally recognize this limitation, but may not always be so aware of other more discreet biases. Along with the issues that Spanish chroniclers explicitly address in these texts, we must also understand the agenda of each author and how his position in the complex and dynamic world of New Spain affected his decisions concerning what he wrote about and how."[256]

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[254] Picking the four bodies of ethnographic material on which I concentrate here is obvious. Though, of course, lots of additional relevant colonial-era documents exist, every Oaxacanists will agree that these four have been the most influential in determining the direction of thinking about Zapotec religion.

[255] Judith Francis Zeitlin, "Interrogando el pasado a través de perspectivas históricas y arqueológicas," 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), 650; my translation.

[256] Zeitlin, "Interrogando el pasado a través de perspectivas históricas y arqueológicas," 650; my translation.

I could not agree more. As Zeitlin and a generation of Mesoamerican historians collectively known as the New Philologists caution us, we must be constantly diligent regarding the legalistic, churchly and/or self-serving purposes of all of these Spanish-speaking authors, none of whom is plainly concerned to provide an objective account of indigenous religion.[257] No one disagrees with Michael Lind that, "the problem of identifying the Zapotec gods from colonial documents is enormous."[258]

Yet, in the second two terms of that subtitle, I describe the same documentary sources as "fortuitous" and "fecund." Fraught as these documents are, Joyce Marcus, for instance, concedes the limitations of archaeological sources for understanding ancient Zapotec religion, and thus makes herself a strong advocate for a version of "the direct historical approach" that capitalizes on the insights that colonial written sources alone can provide:

> "In the New World, ethnohistory is our bridge to the past; without it one could not even [1] glimpse prehistoric cosmology, [2] interpret ancient buildings, [3] understand the contexts of ritual paraphernalia, or [4] analyze the ethnography of long-dead [Zapotecs]."[259]

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[257] On the New Philologists across Mesoamerican studies, see Matthew Restall, "A History of the New Philology and the New Philology in History," *Latin American Research Review* vol. 38, no. 1 (2003): 113-34; and with respect to the application of those critical insights to Oaxacan studies, see Judith Francis Zeitlin, "Locating the Hidden Transcripts of Colonialism: Archaeological and Historical Evidence from the Isthmus of Tehuantepec," in *Bridging the Gaps: Integrating Archaeology and History in Oaxaca, Mexico*, eds. Danny Zborover and Peter C. Kroefg (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2015), 363-90.

[258] Lind, "La religión estatal de Monte Albán y los sacerdotes de Cocijo de Lambityeco," 20; my translation.

[259] Marcus, "Archaeology and Religion," 298. I have substituted "Zapotecs" in this quote, which actually refers to "long-dead Panamanians." As discussed in Marcus and Flannery, "Ancient Zapotec Ritual and Religion: An Application of the Direct Historical Approach" (and in my Introduction), the "direct historical approach" refers to reliance on ethnohistoric (and ethnographic) evidence in the interpretation of an archaeological site, especially where one can demonstrate direct historical continuity between the respective contexts.

Though written with a host of motives that do not include a fully accurate empirical description of the pre-Columbian world, these mainly Dominican documents nevertheless provide, in many respects, our very best chances of obtaining that.

Be that as it, particularly on the matter of using these documents to discern Zapotec gods and other supernatural entities, every scholarly account is prefaced with forewarnings not only about the Spanish Catholics' explicit commitments to Christian missionizing but, moreover, their less overt but equally prejudicial familiarity with Classical Greco-Roman religion, "which served as their model for an 'idolatrous' religion."[260] As we are reminded time and again, "[the Dominican friars'] subconscious paradigm for 'pagan' beliefs" led them both to fixate on a supposed Zapotec "pantheon of gods" and to largely ignore the more impersonal supernatural entities and the important role of royal ancestor worship.[261] And moreover, where ethnographic sources are far less reliable with respect to the calendric-based orthodoxy of the elite than in bringing to light the enduring beliefs and practices of domestic and occupational spheres, these ethnohistoric sources reverse that inequation insofar as, "Clearly... what the Spaniards were describing was *Zapotec state religion*;" from these colonial-era writings, we learn "much less about the household ritual conducted by commoners."[262] It is, in short, the preponderant influence of these sources that accounts for the prevailing presumptions about a polytheistic pantheon of Zapotec gods.

All these problems notwithstanding, four sets of colonial-era documents have proven uniquely influential in the formation of scholarly ideas about Zapotec religion: in chronological order, (1) the sixteenth-century philologically-focused writings of Fray Juan de Córdova, (2) the roughly contemporaneous and multi-authored Spain-sponsored surveys known as the *Relaciones Geográficas*, (3) the seventeenth-century Inquisition records of Fray Gonzalo de Balsalobre, and (4) the slightly later and much larger Oaxacan histories of Fray Francisco de Burgoa. For each of these four bodies of writing I will provide (a) very brief background concerning the author's

[260] Marcus, "Archaeology and Religion," 299.

[261] Marcus, "Archaeology and Religion," 298-99.

[262] Marcus and Flannery, "Ancient Zapotec Ritual and Religion," 71; italics theirs.

biography and the Oaxacan context in which the work was composed, (b) a description of the actual texts, and (c) perhaps most importantly, some remarks on the scholarly reception and utilization of each body of texts.

While similar in the broad strokes, each of these sets of colonial-era writings reflects a significantly different agenda, and thus each poses different interpretive challenges and eventuates in a significantly different slant on ancient Zapotec religion. Accordingly, I will stress the individuality and contrasts among the four respective cases. And because all of this is preparatory to my consideration of the pertinence of the ritual-architectural commemoration of divinity (priority II-A) at Monte Albán, instead of comprehensive accounts of these sources, I telescope my concerns with respect to what each leads scholars to believe about Zapotec deities and supernaturals. Very important to me and probably all completely new information for most scholars of comparative religion, I concede that these next four sub-sections may seem especially superfluous to veterans of Oaxacan studies.

a. The Gods of Fray Juan de Córdova's Vocabulario (1578): A Prim Pantheon or an Uneven Assemblage of Supernatural Entities

For students of ancient Zapotec religion, Fray Juan de Córdova, born in 1503 in Spain of noble parents, is challenged only by Burgoa as the most-cited Oaxacan colonial author, "a must-have source for all those who are interested in the pre-Hispanic Zapotec culture."[263] Though the details of his biography are some debated, Córdova first served as a soldier in Flanders before, in 1540-1542, accompanying conquistador and explorer Vázquez de Coronado to New Mexico in search of the renowned riches of Cíbola.[264] Following his extended military service, in 1543,

[263] Smith Stark, "Dioses, sacerdotes y sacrificio," 92. Whitecotton, *The Zapotecs*, 87, for instance, opines that "Taken together [Córdova's *Vocabulario castellano-zapoteca* and *Arte en lengua zapoteca*], comprise an encyclopedic account of Zapotec culture, even though there are problems of interpreting them, especially from a linguistic point of view, since the friar was not a trained linguist."

[264] For very helpful comments (and notice of some contradictions) on the biographical information on Juan de Córdova, see Wilberto Jiménez Moreno, "Fr. Juan de Córdova y la lengua Zapoteca," Introduction to Fray Juan de Córdova, *Vocabulario castellano-zapoteca*, edición facsimilar, introducción y notas por Wigberto Jiménez Moreno (México, D.F.: Instituto

Córdova switched vocations and he entered the Dominican Order in Mexico City. And, in 1547, he was sent to Oaxaca where a life devoted to Christian evangelizing would provide him numerous posts and the occasion to become among the earliest Europeans to acquire a fluency in Zapotec language.[265]

Córdova's linguistic accomplishments built on those of his superior, Fray Bernardo de Alburquerque, the first Dominican to learn Zapotec, who had arrived in Mexico around 1535 and who, by 1540, was the Vicar of Tehuantepec and later of Oaxaca.[266] Joining Alburquerque in the convent of Antequera (modem Oaxaca City), the former soldier Córdova was, in the phrasing of nineteenth-century historian of Oaxaca, José Antonio Gay,

> "a man of the world, experienced in battles of the passions, who was thus sought by the greatest sinners, certain that their wickedness would not astonish one who had been a soldier before becoming a friar. He was more than fifty years old when [about 1550] he undertook the study of the Zapotec language, which he acquired with perfection..."[267]

Nacional de Anthropologia e Historia, 1942 [originally 1578]), 9-12. Basic biographical information on Córdova also appears in José Antonio Gay, *Historia de Oaxaca*, sexta edición (México, D.F: Editorial Porrúa, 2006 [originally 1881]), 332-35; and in Francisco de Burgoa, *Geográfica Descripción de la partes septentrional del Polo Artico de la America y nueva Iglesia de las Indias Occidentales*, publicaciones del Archivo General de la Nación, vols. 25 y 26 (México: Talleres Graficos de la Nacion, reprinted 1934 [originally 1674]), 219-26. Also see, Fray Esteban Arroyo, *Los dominicos, forjadores de la civilización oaxaqueña* (Oaxaca: n.p., 1958); and Juan José Rendón, "Nuevos datos sobre el origen del Vocabulario en lengua zapotec del Padre Córdova," *Anales de antropología*, vol. 6 (1969), 115-30.

[265] Jiménez Moreno, "Fr. Juan de Córdova y la lengua Zapoteca," 9.

[266] On the biography of Fray Bernardo de Alburquerque, the first Dominican to learn Zapotec and Córdova's foremost teacher of the language, and Fray Gregorio de Beteta, the other of the first two Dominicans in Oaxaca, see Jiménez Moreno, "Fr. Juan de Córdova y la lengua Zapoteca," 13-15.

[267] Gay, *Historia de Oaxaca*, 334 (my translation), attributes this assessment of Córdova to Burgoa. Concurring with Burgoa's and Gay's stress on Córdova's extreme austerity, Jiménez Moreno, "Fr. Juan de Córdova y la lengua Zapoteca," 12, quotes a chronicler contemporary of Córdova's, Fray Hernando Ojea y Franco, "Libro Tercero de la Historia Religiosa de la Provincia de México de la Orden de Sto. Domingo" (1608), who wrote: "[Córdova was] 'of more than average height, lean, good-looking, and bald.' He always wore wool and simple shoes (*alpargatas de cordeles*)... He got up at three in the morning, walked always on foot; there was not in his cell 'more than a cross and three light blankets on the bed.' He was never idle, but

After a brief visit to Spain during 1556, Córdova was appointed Vicar of Huexolotitlán in the Mixtec region in 1559; and in 1561, after another trip as procurator to Spain, he was commissioned by Alburquerque to assist in the Inquisitorial process in Tehuantepec, where local people had been discovered practicing "idolatrous rites."[268] Irrespective of some discrepancies in the dates, he was elected Provincial in Yahuitlán about 1568. But, though described as "working actively for the benefit of the Indians with whom he was sweet and affectionate,"[269] Córdova was, in 1570, deposed from that post for "excessive vigor," apparently because of tensions with his fellow priests rather than with the Indians, after which he was reassigned to the Zapotec village of Tetícpac in the Valley of Tlacolula and later to nearby Tlacochahuaya.[270] It was in these two central Oaxacan villages that he seems to have done the largest share of the work on his Zapotec dictionary and grammar, which therefore reflect the dialects of the Tlacolula Valley and not those of Zapotecs in the surrounding mountains.[271] Eventually, following the 1578 printing of his two great works, an octogenarian Córdova was (according to

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reading or praying. He was very sober and chaste, courteous and charitable, and he practiced fasting and discipline."

[268] Jiménez Moreno, "Fr. Juan de Córdova y la lengua Zapoteca," 10.

[269] Gay, *Historia de Oaxaca*, 332; my translation.

[270] See Jiménez Moreno, "Fr. Juan de Córdova y la lengua Zapoteca," 11; and Marcus and Flannery, "Ancient Zapotec Ritual and Religion," 57. Gay, *Historia de Oaxaca*, 333, briefly describes the circumstance in which Córdova's "extreme stiffness fatigued other friars," who made complaints again him in Yahuitlán on October 7, 1570, which subsequently led to his deposition and eventual reassignment to the role of resident in the convent of Tlacochahuaya, "where he lived until his death."

[271] See Joseph W. Whitecotton and Judith Bradley Whitecotton, *Vocabulario zapoteco-castellano*, Vanderbilt University Publications in Anthropology, no. 39 (Nashville: Vanderbilt University, 1993), 416; or Leonardo Manrique Castañeda, "El Zapoteco de Fray Juan de Córdova," *Anuario de Letras: Lingüística y Filología*, vol. 6 (1966): 203-10. Jiménez Moreno, "Fr. Juan de Córdova y la lengua Zapoteca," 9-18, makes it clear that, while Córdova's work would become by far the most famous, he had both Dominican predecessors (most notably Fray Bernardo de Alburquerque) and numerous contemporaries who also acquired expertise in Zapotec language.

some accounts) given an honorable position in the convent of Oaxaca City where, at age 92, he died in 1595.[272]

Córdova's two key works are a grammar, *Arte en lengua zapoteca* (1578),[273] and the far more famous 432-page dictionary, *Vocabulario castellano-zapoteca* (1578),[274] which is frequently described as no less than "the main source used in studies of Zapotec religion."[275] Committed to preaching the gospel in the vernacular language, he intended these works largely as aids to fellow Dominicans in doing that; thus, while they were composed with similar evangelical motives, Córdova's treatises have none of the reach of Sahagún's roughly contemporaneous *General History of the Things of New Spain*. Nonetheless, besides the primarily linguistic thrust, *Arte en lengua zapoteca* has abundant information about the Zapotec calendar and their methods of reckoning time; and the *Vocabulario castellano-zapoteca* has short but valuable comments on the rites and beliefs of the Zapotecs, including Córdova's enumeration

[272] Jiménez Moreno, "Fr. Juan de Córdova y la lengua Zapoteca," 12 (my translation), writes that Córdova "was buried in one of the three graves that are on the base of the altar of [the Oaxaca Dominican church]." Alternatively, Gay, *Historia of Oaxaca*, 334, says "Córdova was assigned as a resident to the convent of Tlacochahuaya... where he died at almost one hundred years of age, being buried in San Pablo de Oaxaca." Adolph F. Bandelier, "Juan de Córdova," *Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. Charles Herbermann, vol. 4 (New York: Robert Appleton, 1913), follows Gay in presenting the alternate view that Córdova, "following the notification of his deposition [for inordinate severity in 1570], retired to his convent at Tlacochauaya in Oaxaca, where he died [in 1595] after twenty-five years spent in retirement and in the study of the Zapotecan language and the customs of the natives."

[273] Fray Juan de Córdova, *Arte en lengua zapoteca* (Morelia, México: Pedro Balli, 1886 [originally 1578]).

[274] Fray Juan de Córdova, *Vocabulario castellano-zapoteca*, edición facsimilar, introducción y notas por Wigberto Jiménez Moreno (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Anthropologia e Historia, 1942 [originally 1578]). The same work appears as Fray Juan de Córdova, *Vocabulario en lengua zapoteca*, edición facsimilar, Ediciones Toledo (México: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1987 [originally 1578]).

[275] Lind, "La religión estatal de Monte Albán y los sacerdotes de Cocijo de Lambityeco," 17; my translation.

of the names and dispositions of numerous Zapotec deities—which is the component of his work most discussed by present-day scholars (and most relevant to my present purposes).[276]

Regarding a kind of delay in the eventually preeminent reliance on Córdova's *Vocabulario castellano-zapoteca* to identify the Zapotec gods, Wilberto Jiménez Moreno's introduction to the 1942 facsimile edition stresses "its extraordinary rarity," noting that, prior to that reprinting, only two incomplete copies and fragments of another were known, so that few researchers had been able to consult it.[277] It is not, then, until the mid-twentieth century that this work is widely available.[278] Centuries earlier, fellow Dominican Burgoa's *Geográfica Descripción* (1674) did include effusive comments on Córdova's eventful career, which stress, for instance, his seamless transition from disciplined soldiering to an exceptionally austere approach to his life as a priest, and the controversial circumstances of his deposition, which Burgoa assesses as a sign of uncompromising diligence rather than irresponsibility. In his words, "Fray Córdova's circumspection and modesty were so great that even the Indians were impressed by this great enemy of idleness who made use of all hours of the day... His ardent heart kept him always watching over his flock..."[279] And Burgoa praises even more Córdova's

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[276] In his reworked doctoral dissertation, Víctor de la Cruz, *El pensamiento de los* binnigula'sa'*: cosmovisión, religión y calendar con especial referencia a los* binnizá (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2007), 22-36, discusses the problems and prospects of relying on Juan de Córdova's writings as a source for the study of Zapotec religion. De la Cruz, ibid., 209-69, devotes chapter 3, to an enumeration and discussion of "the deities of the Classic and their predecessors in the Preclassic" that depends overwhelmingly on Córdova's *Vocabulario castellano-zapoteca*, which he complements with archaeological and ethnographic sources.

[277] Jiménez Moreno, "Fr. Juan de Córdova y la lengua Zapoteca," 7.

[278] Regarding the limited, but eventual access to Córdova's *Vocabulario castellano-zapoteca*, I note at very points in the text that, in 1895 Seler, "The Wall Paintings of Mitla," 273, refers to his reliance on what he describes as "the careless reprint which is the only extant edition of the Grammar of Father Juan de Córdova." Alfonso Caso, *Las esteles zapotecas* (1928), reprint 11 (my translation), laments that "I have not been able to check Dr. Seler's translations [of Córdova]... because the only complete copy that is known of that vocabulary is precisely the one that Seler owned." But Caso and Bernal, *Urnas de Oaxaca* (1952), reprint 669 (my translation), is able to report, "We have now been able to consult the Córdova *Vocabulary*, which formerly belonged to Dr. Seler and from which he obtained his information."

[279] Burgoa, *Geográfica Descripción*, 222-23; my translation.

tenacity in learning the Zapotec language, which left him "a consummate and eminent expert of it." By his appraisal,

> "Córdova's *Vocabulario* is so large and so copious that, after these many years, it seems miraculous... that a man could have had so full a command of a barbaric language that there is no word missing... and today, after one hundred and twenty years, all the ministers to the Zapotecs rely on it..."[280]

But Burgoa does not, it seems, engage the substance of Córdova's comments on Zapotec gods and religion.[281]

By contrast, yet another Dominican authored work, José Antonio Gay's *Historia de Oaxaca*, first published in 1881 and much-read to this day, makes greater use Córdova's *Vocabulario* in his endeavor to tell the history of the region from its very first populations. Though citing him with none of the frequency that he does Burgoa, it is precisely with respect to the topic of "Zapotec Divinities" that Gay looks to Córdova's tome; and, as noted earlier in the chapter, Gay manages to utilize Córdova as support for the priestly view that the Apostle Saint Thomas had brought to the Americas belief in One True God, which then persisted in a permanent if corrupted monotheistic strain in indigenous Oaxacan religion.[282] To that end, Gay paraphrases the same enumeration of transhuman agents in Córdova's work on which later scholars will capitalize:

> "Pitao Cocobi was the spirit of abundance and of the harvest, and Pitao Cociyo of the rains; Pitao Cozaana presided over fishing and hunting, and Pitao Xoo earthquakes; three spirits, Pitao Zey, Pitao Yaa and Pitao Pee, mitigated misfortune and misery; and three more, Pitao Peczé, Pitao Quelli and Pitao Yaaye, poured out riches and pleasures among men; Pitao Pecala was the angel that inspired dreams and Pitao Peeci was the spirit of omens and predictions (*auspicios*)."[283]

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[280] Burgoa, *Geográfica Descripción*, 222; my free translation.

[281] Regarding his two main works: in Burgoa, *Geográfica Descripción*, the only references to Córdova (pp. 219-26) speak to these biographical matters; and in Burgoa's other main work, *Palestra historial* (which I discuss shortly), there are, it seems, no references to Córdova.

[282] See Gay, *Historia de Oaxaca*, chap.5, sec. 8, "Divinidades zapotecas," 77-81.

[283] Gay, *Historia de Oaxaca*, 78 (my translation), with a footnote to Córdova's *Vocabulario*.

But then Gay specifically, atypically and flatly denies that Zapotecs were polytheists, maintaining instead that all of the preceding "spirits" (*espíritus o genios inferiores*) enumerated by Córdova were subordinated to "the uncreated spirit, to the infinite being, creator of all things, the spirit par excellence, Pitao, as they called it."[284] And in an ironic prefigurement of Joyce Marcus' iconoclastic claim, Gay contends that this supreme being is the only Zapotec supernatural that deserves the title "god."

Be that as it may, the much more important academic engagement with Córdova's *Vocabulario castellano-zapoteca* begins with Eduard Seler who, along with his wife and collaborator Ceacilie Seler-Sachs, made his first of six highly productive trips to Mexico, Oaxaca included, in 1887.[285] Besides *Arte en lengua zapoteca*, from which Seler would draw his most important information about the Zapotec calendar,[286] he personally managed to secure what he describes as "the careless reprint that is the only extant edition of the Grammar of Father Juan de Córdova;"[287] and that albeit flawed text thereby proved crucial in his path-breaking article, "Deities and Religious Conceptions of the Zapotecs" (1895, 1904). Seler opens the piece by opining that,

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[284] Gay, *Historia de Oaxaca*, 78; my translation.

[285] Ma. Teresa Sepúlveda y Herrera, *Eduard Seler en México* (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1992), 7, 19-40. Regarding the Oaxaca leg of Seler's 1887 trip to Mexico, see ibid., 22-23.

[286] 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), 33, comments on the primary role that Córdova's *Arte en lengua zapoteca* played in Seler's influential article on the ancient Mesoamerican calendar: Eduard Seler, "The Mexican Chronology, with Special Reference to the Zapotec Calendar," 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), 13-55.

[287] Seler, "The Wall Paintings of Mitla," 273. Seler's imperfect version of Córdova's *Vocabulario* was one of the rare copies of the manuscript referenced by Jiménez Moreno," Fr. Juan de Córdova y la lengua Zapoteca," 8.

> "The Zapotec dictionary, by Father Juan de Córdova... forms a chief source of information concerning the immediate religious conceptions of the Zapotecs, the forms of the gods which were worshipped by them and to which they turned in every time of need and for the satisfaction of all their desires... I give here the names and the Spanish expression of which they are supposed to be a translation, according to the dictionary of Father Juan de Córdova."[288]

From Seler's work forward, Córdova's text would be invoked as the premier authority in making the case for, and specifying the major components of, Zapotec polytheism. [289] It is notable, however, that when, for instance, Alfonso Caso undertakes work on his *Las esteles zapotecas* (1928), he does have a copy of Córdova's *Arte en lengua zapoteca*, from which he extracts abundant information about the Zapotec calendar;[290] but Caso cannot lay hands on a copy of Córdova's even more important *Vocabulario*, and thus is forced to rely on Seler's summary and translations of the deity names. Accepting the singular importance of a text that he could not yet locate, Caso laments,

> "I have not had the possibility of consulting Father Córdova's *Vocabulario zapoteco*, on which these translations are based, because the only complete copy that is known of that vocabulary is precisely the one owned by Seler."[291]

Though forced to depend at this point on Seler's second-hand work, Caso nevertheless begins *Las esteles zapotecas* by reiterating all of the gods mentioned by Córdova, which he

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[288] Seler, "Deities and Religious Conceptions of the Zapotecs," 284. In the context of the present discussion it is worth noting that in this classic article, besides Córdova's *Vocabulario*, Seler also cites Córdova's *Arte en lengua zapoteca* and Burgoa's *Geográfica Descripción*; but he does not use the work of Gonzalo de Balsalobre, which I discuss later in this chapter.

[289] Urcid, *Zapotec Hierogyphic Writing*, 47-48, discusses native Zapotec speaker from Tehuantepec, Wilfrido C. Cruz, *El tonalamatl zapoteco: Ensayo sobre su interpretación lingüística* (Oaxaca de Juárez: Imprenta del Gobierno del Estado, 1935), as one who engaged Córdova's *Vocabulario* in ways that led him concur with most of Seler's translations, "having only a few points of contention."

[290] Though Caso's reliance on Córdova's *Arte en lengua zapoteca* goes back to the 1920s, see 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), 942-43, for a concise summary of what he regards as that work's most salient information about Zapotec calendars and timekeeping.

[291] Caso, *Las esteles zapotecas*, reprint 11; my translation.

meticulously correlates with those mentioned by Fray Gonzales de Balsalobre and in the *Relaciones Geográficas*, texts that Caso did have in hand.[292] And when Caso and Bernal go to work on their *Urnas de Oaxaca* (1952), by which time they had acquired Seler's copy of Córdova's dictionary-treatise, they make even more extensive use of that source.[293] Indeed, in that later work, they explain that "When grouping the urns, we have tried to give them the names that are indicated for the Zapotec gods in Juan de Córdova's *Vocabulario*...,"[294] a strategy for which they cite as their only strong precedent Seler's work (along with Caso's previous efforts).[295]

However, in the wake of Caso and Bernal's influential work and the much wider availability of the text after 1942 facsimile edition, nearly all scholars from Roberto Weitlaner to Frank Boos, José Alcina Franch, Joseph Whitecotton and Michael Lind will follow their lead in presenting Córdova's *Vocabulario* as the most authoritative rendering of the Zapotec gods, to which Balsalobre provides by far the most important complement. Even Marcus, who disputes that the "deity lists" of either Córdova, or later Balsalobre, actually refer to a pantheon of gods—in her view, "what we are dealing with here is the Zapotec way of addressing the life force within these phenomena [of rain, earthquakes, etc.], which were of the animate, supernatural

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[292] See Caso, *Las esteles zapotecas*, reprint 11-19.

[293] On their acquisition of Seler's copy of Córdova's *Vocabulario*, see Caso and Bernal, *Urnas de Oaxaca*, reprint 669.

[294] A fuller version of that quote from Caso and Bernal, *Urnas de Oaxaca*, reprint 150 (my translation), is, "When grouping the urns, we have tried to give them the names that are indicated for the Zapotec gods in the *Vocabulario* de Córdova when the identification is easy, or with the calendar names that appear on some of the urns." In other words, while Caso and Bernal (ibid., 669) explain that they are informed also by the alternate names of the gods provided by Balsalobre and Burgoa, to whom I turn attention momentarily, they give priority to Córdova's work.

[295] Caso and Bernal, *Uras de Oaxaca*, reprint 669, besises noting that they now (1952) have obtained Seler's copy of Córdova's *Vocabulario*, they also note that Caso made substantial use of Córdova's work in his *Las estelas zapotecas* (1928), so that may qualify, along with Seler's 1895 article, as the earliest scholarly reliance on Córdova to identify Zapotec gods.

forces of the Zapotec universe"—nonetheless agrees that "both lists must be accounted for in any general model of Zapotec religion."[296]

Regarding the specifics of the supernatural entities in Córdova's *Vocabulario*, though, in the wake of Seler's seminal article, we are routinely told that the Dominican identified a Zapotec "pantheon" of somewhere between 9 and 18 gods.[297] Linguist Thomas C. Smith Stark's unprecedentedly detailed analysis of the text, however, relieves us of the erroneous impression that the sixteenth-century author describes something akin to a council of roughly parallel governor-like personal gods who, resembling a carefully selected presidential cabinet officers, cover in a comprehensive fashion all of the major aspects of human life and society.[298] In fact,

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[296] Marcus, "Zapotec Religion," 349. Summarizing her assessment of Córdova's work, she writes, "I believe that Córdova actually understood Zapotec cosmology better than any writer of his time, and his list [of "gods"] truly deals with important sacred or supernatural phenomena, although I would stop short of calling them gods." Ibid. Note also that Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, while not so directly fixed on this question of Zapotec gods, affords Córdova's two works a singularly important role in his studies of the Zapotec calendar and inscriptions. As Urcid, ibid., 23, explains, "There are other colonial Zapotec vocabularies and grammars… but my exclusive reliance on the works of Córdova stems from the fact that his is the earliest European documentation of Zapotec day names."

[297] It appears to me that Seler, "Deities and Religious Conceptions of the Zapotecs," 301-2, enumerates, following his long remarks about the uncreated creator god, seven other gods that are mentioned "with their functions, but without further particulars as to their position or importance in the system of worship." But Caso, *Las esteles zapotecas*, reprint 16-17, originally enumerates 18 gods that he sees Seler as extracting from Córdova's *Vocabulario*. And by the careful reading of Córdova undertaken by Smith Stark, "Dioses, sacerdotes y sacrificio," 95, to which I return in a moment, Córdova identified "at least nine gods;" quoted, for instance, by Lind, "La religión estatal de Monte Albán y los sacerdotes de Cocijo de Lambityeco," 22.

[298] Thomas Smith Stark's "Dioses, sacerdotes y sacrificio: una mirada a la religión Zapoteca a través del *Vocabulario en Lengua Zapoteca* (1578) de Juan de Córdova" (2002), a uniquely intensive linguistic analysis of the text, has a triple emphasis on (1) gods, (2) priests and (3) sacrificial acts; but I am for the moment concerned only with the first of those. Also, Smith Stark, ibid., 93, cites Eduard Seler, "Deities and Religious Conceptions of the Zapotecs" (1904) as the most important of the following noteworthy studies of the gods of the Zapotecs, all of which rely heavily on Córdova's *Vocabulario*: Caso and Bernal, *Urnas de Oaxaca* (1952); Roberto Weitlaner y Gabriel de Cicco, "La jerarquía de los dioses zapotecos del sur," en *Congreso Internacional de Americanístas* XXXIV (1962): 695-710, reprinted in *Los zapotecos de la Sierra Norte de Oaxaca: Antología etnográfica*, Manuel Ríos Morelos, comp. (Oaxaca: CIESAS-Oaxaca e Instituto Oaxaqueño de las Culturas, 1994), 231-51; Marcus, "Zapotec Religion" (1983), 345-51; Guido Münch Galindo, "La teogonía zapoteca y sus vestigios en

Smith Stark's article stands presently as the definitive study of the sixteenth-century dictionary. And, in my view (if not Smith Stark's own), perhaps the most revealing outcome of his meticulous analysis is to expose just how diversified and asymmetrical the array of Zapotec supernaturals Córdova presents really is. Instead of a panel of nine roughly commensurate deity figures, what Smith Stark really describes is a set of nine highly heterogeneous special cases. To make that point, consider briefly a handful of the abundant particulars that very thorough (108-page) review provides.

Fully aware of the need to filter through Córdova's Eurocentric biases and Christianizing motives,[299] Smith Stark notes, for example, that his *Vocabulario* has 24 entries under the word god (or *dios*), all ostensibly references to pre-Hispanic deities; and he reconfirms that nine gods stand out in the text, "although the number of different names of gods is much greater."[300] Then, however, after unpacking Córdova's comments on "the generic name for 'god,'" variously spelled *pitào*, *pitòo* or *bitao*,[301] Smith Stark devotes 15 pages to demonstrating the disproportionate attention afforded the first of those nine most prominent deities—namely, *Cozàana*, who (or which) is manifest in the pair *Pitào cozàana*, "God of Animals and Hunting," and *Cozàana tào*, "Creator of Everything."[302] Smith Stark locates some 18 different expressions connected to this pair; and comparative religionists will be reminded of Muslims' enumeration of 99 names for the one god Allah when he records Córdova's references to *Cozàana* variously as "Creator," as "Something Grand," "Old Tail," "Everything," "the Sun and Great Begetter," "the

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Tehuantepec," *Anales de antropología*, vol. 20, tomo 2 (1983): 39-63; Guido Münch Galindo, *La organización ceremoníal de Tehuantepec y Juchitán* (México, D.F.: Instituto de Investigaciones Antropológicas, UNAM, 1999); and Alcina Franch, *Calendario y religión entre los zapotecos* (1993).

[299] Though mindful of the evangelical motives that account for *Vocabulario en lengua zapoteca*, Smith Stark, "Dioses, sacerdotes y sacrificio," 91 (my translation), nonetheless argues that it is possible to use the text—especially the portions that are in the Zapotec language—in a way that allows "a better understanding of the concepts expressed from the point of view of the Zapotecs and thus to some extent counters the general Spanish bias of the work."

[300] Smith Stark, "Dioses, sacerdotes y sacrificio," 93.

[301] Smith Stark, "Dioses, sacerdotes y sacrificio," 93.

[302] Smith Stark, "Dioses, sacerdotes y sacrificio," 95-110,

Patriarch and Initiator of Lineages" or as "the One Who Founds the Lineage," "King above the Lineage," or "Great Judge" or "Great Ruler."[303]

That is to say, though situated as the first on the list of the nine "gods" that Córdova addresses, this non-anthropomorphic supreme being *Cozàana*—the fulsome treatment of which both Gay and Víctor de la Cruz, for instance, can invoke as support for their respective notions of a Zapotec monotheism[304]—is fundamentally different from the eight subsequent and more personal deities.[305] Moreover, besides identifying these nine major deities, Córdova complicates the constellation of alternatives by also describing an intermediate class of supernatural entities, which he terms "little people," ghosts, fairies and goblins (*duendes, fantasmas, hados y trasgos*).[306] And the heterogeneity of options is intensified more still by references to the fully impersonal supernatural forces that enabled Marcus to present Córdova's text as evidence of her view that Zapotec religion is overwhelmingly animatistic.[307]

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[303] Smith Stark, "Dioses, sacerdotes y sacrificio," 96-102, 110; my translation. He suspects (ibid., 102, my translation) that "These last two expressions, the great judge and the great ruler, sound quite Western and may reflect Christian influence," which is to say, he assesses the others as indigenous to Zapotecs. Lind, *Ancient Zapotec Religion*, 17, who assesses this initial deity on the list quite differently from Smith Stark, nonetheless provides a table enumerating the 18 alternate names for the Zapotec deity Cozaana in Córdova's *Vocabulario*.

[304] See Gay, *Historia de Oaxaca*, 78; and de la Cruz, "Los múltiples nombres y formas de Pitao," 572. It is notable and somewhat surprising that Víctor de la Cruz, a native Zapotec speaker from the Tehuantepec region (Juchitán de Zaragoza) who frequently raises philologically-based complaints about the interpretations of other Oaxacanists, instead of criticizing Córdova's work, tends to regard it as fully authoritative.

[305] One might suspect also that Córdova's disproportionate attention to this supreme being is a consequence of his own theological interests and pattern of questioning to his Zapotec "informants."

[306] See a section on "Other Supernatural Beings," in Smith Stark, "Dioses, sacerdotes y sacrificio," 136; my translation.

[307] Of numerous places that Joyce Marcus addresses Córdova's work, see, for instance, Marcus, "Archaeology and Religion," 300; and Marcus and Flannery, "Ancient Zapotec Ritual and Religion," 57.

In any case, continuing down the roster of the nine "gods" most prominent in Córdova's dictionary, the slate of deities is, in my view, much more notable for its diversity than its symmetry. The second entry, *Pitào pezèelào*, for instance, is also anomalous insofar as Smith Stark translates it as "Gods of Hell," in the plural, which "may indicate that there was a whole class of gods known as *pezèelào*, or it could be the influence of Christianity and the idea of Satan as the chief of the legions of fallen angels."[308] The third is *Pitào xòo*, which means "God of Earthquakes or Tremors," but Córdova mention this option only one time.[309] Fourth, *Pitao huichàana* or the "Goddess of Children," is the only one of the nine that seems to be predominantly female, but Smith Stark can find no clear meaning for that name.[310] Fifth, *Coquì lào*, the "God of Chickens" or "Hen God," oddly specific compared to the others, is, Smith Stark notes, curious for two reasons:

> "[For one], the name does not refer unequivocally to any specific bird. It seems [instead] to say 'king face.' [And, for two,] there were no domestic chickens as we know them today before the arrival of the Spaniards, who brought them from Spain."[311]

Filling out the oddly uneven assemblage, sixth, *Pitào piizi* or the "God of the Omens"—which has complementary manifestations in *Pitào quille Pitào yage*, "God of Profits, Joy, Luck, Wealth and Good Fortune," and *Pitào zii Pitào yàa*, "God of Miseries, Losses and Misfortunes"—is one of the gods most frequently mentioned in Córdova's *Vocabulario*.[312] Number seven, *Pitào cozòbi*, which is translated as "God of the Harvest," has meanings associated with scrubbing, filing, grinding, etc., but, perhaps surprisingly, Smith Stark does not see any terms that have a clear relation to food or crops.[313] Eighth, *Pitào xicàla*, the "God of Dreams," is connected to words for sleep in the sense of a state of being asleep, but also the

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[308] Smith Stark, "Dioses, sacerdotes y sacrificio," 111; my translation.

[309] Smith Stark, "Dioses, sacerdotes y sacrificio," 113-14.

[310] Smith Stark, "Dioses, sacerdotes y sacrificio," 114.

[311] Smith Stark, "Dioses, sacerdotes y sacrificio," 115; my translation.

[312] Smith Stark, "Dioses, sacerdotes y sacrificio," 120-26.; my translation.

[313] Smith Stark, "Dioses, sacerdotes y sacrificio," 127.

mental activity that occurs during sleep wherein people acquire special knowledge.[314] Ninth and last, *Cociio* (frequently spelled *Cocijio*), the "God of Rain," is, according to Smith Stark and others, "one of the most important gods of the Zapotecs, who has clear analogues in other Mesoamerican groups and who can be identified iconographically in the numerous archaeological contexts."[315] Also somewhat surprisingly given Córdova also extended comments on the 260-day calendar, none of these gods is explicitly correlated with a specific calendrical unit.[316]

Michael Lind, who labors long in coming to terms with the particulars, concurs that "Smith Stark's analysis of the deities in Córdova is substantially correct."[317] But where Smith Stark had deliberately confined his linguistic analysis exclusively to Córdova's writing, Lind invokes some additional colonial-era documents to reassess various components of Córdova's *Vocabulario* in ways that allow him to identify an additional five deities.[318] Nonetheless, Lind's

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[314] Smith Stark, "Dioses, sacerdotes y sacrificio," 127-129.

[315] Smith Stark, "Dioses, sacerdotes y sacrificio," 130; my translation.

[316] As noted by Smith Stark, "Dioses, sacerdotes y sacrificio," Córdova discusses the 260-day calendar in his other main work, *Arte en lengua zapoteca*, 201-12.

[317] Lind, *Ancient Zapotec Religion*, 15.

[318] Lind, *Ancient Zapotec Religion*, 16-22, enumerates the following 14 deities, which he summarizes in a table (ibid., 15) entitled "List of Prehispanic Zapotec deities from Córdova's *Vocabulario*": (1) Huetexi Pea, the god who measured the world [this is a deity that does not appear on Smith Stark's list of nine]; (2) Pitao Cozaana, the god who created animals and fish, god of the hunt, creator deity and consort of Huichaana [this is a component of the first deity on Smith Stark's list]; (3) Pitao Huichaana, the goddess who created men and fish, goddess of procreation and children, creator deity and consort of Cozaana [this is the fourth deity on Smith Stark's list]; (4) Pitao Copiycha, the sun god [this is a component of the first deity on Smith Stark's, i.e., Cozaana, but Lind sees it as a separate deity]; (5) Cociyo, the rain god (this is the ninth deity of Smith Stark's list); (6) Pitao Cozobi, the god of grain fields or maize [this is the seventh god on Smith Stark's list]; (7) Pitao Pezeelao, god of the hereafter [this is the second god on Smith Stark's list]; (8) Pitao Xoo, god of earthquakes [this is the third god on Smith Stark's list]; (9) Pitao Peeze, god of omens [this one component of the sixth god on Smith Stark's list]; (10) Pitao Paa, god of merchants, wealth, good fortune, and happiness [this is another component of the sixth god on Smith Stark's list]; (11) Pitao Ziy, god of misery and misfortune [this is another component of the sixth god on Smith Stark's list]; (12) Pitao Xicala, god of dreams [this is the eighth god on Smith Stark's list]; (13) Pixee Pecala, god of love and lechery [this is a

expanded and reordered list of 14 deities, aside from eliminating the notion that Zapotecs believed in some sort of uncreated creator god (which Lind regards as a Christian corruption), does not result in a more orderly and balanced "pantheon" or general assembly of gods. And while everyone affirms that there is an important connection between these deities and the calendar, Caso's original observation that "of the gods mentioned by Córdova, only a few seem to have calendric names" has stood the test of time.[319]

In sum, Fray Juan de Córdova's *Vocabulario castellano-zapoteca* (1578), routinely touted as the preeminent source of any kind on the Zapotec gods, presents nothing resembling a tidy and systematic pantheon of gods; and, unlike Balsalobre, he connects none of these Pitào with specific segments of the 260-day calendar. Moreover, as Smith Stark cautions, Córdova makes no claim to comprehensiveness:

> "The nine gods I have found mentioned in Córdova are certainly not the only ones recognized by the pre-Hispanic Zapotecos and who worshiped them. Moreover, the treatment they receive in the dictionary is necessarily schematic and partial; it can not reliably reflect its place in the Zapotec cosmovision."[320]

In that sense, the inventory is more eccentric than exhaustive; and, furthermore, one has to be struck by the non-parallel, highly variegated mélange of personal, semi-personal and fully impersonal supernatural entities that emerge from the friar's suitably famous dictionary.[321] In short, Córdova's work does add weight to the notion that Zapotecs conceived of divinity, among other ways, in terms of personal deities. But, in my view, it does even more to reinforce the

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component of the eighth god on Smith Stark's list]; and (14) Coqui Lao, god of turkey hens [this is the fifth god on Smith Stark's list].

[319] Caso, *Las esteles zapotecas*, 17; my translation.

[320] Smith Stark, "Dioses, sacerdotes y sacrificio," 184; my translation.

[321] A counterargument to my stress on the variegated and asymmetrical assemblage of gods comes, for instance, in Linné, *Zapotecan Antiquities*, 77, who contends, "The Zapotecan pantheon contained numerous members, although it was naturally not of such a motley character as that of the Aztecs who, like the Roan, incorporated the deities of subdued peoples with their own."

redefinition of indigenous Oaxacan polytheism as "receptivity to a multiple experience of the sacred and not just as the worship of a multitude of gods."[322]

b. The Gods of the Relaciones Geográficas *(1579-1581): Spanish Surveys, "Idols," Local Patron Deities and Natural Spirits*

A second body of colonial-era written sources that has been influential in recovering Zapotec divinity conceptions, roughly contemporaneous with the composition of Juan de Córdova's *Vocabulario*, is the collection of some three dozen *Relaciones Geográficas*, or geographical reports, that were assembled in Oaxacan villages between 1579 and 1581.[323] These site-specific documents, most of which are less than 15 pages, are responses to an elaborate 50-item questionnaire, initiated by King Philip II of Spain and administered by Spanish officials, or sometimes priests, throughout New Spain. Ethnohistorian Howard Cline notes that, by contrast to "only a small body of colonial chronicles, religious or secular... Oaxaca is quite remarkable also for its large corpus of *Relaciones Geográficas*, both texts and maps."[324] Elsewhere Cline notes that, "With 38 *Relaciones*, six of them 'lost,' Oaxaca ranks second only to Yucatán as the

[322] Bartolomé, "Elogio del politeísmo: las cosmovisiones indígenas en Oaxaca," 606; my translation.

[323] For basic background on these *Relaciones Geográficas*, see Howard F. Cline, "The Relaciones Geográficas of the Spanish Indies, 1577-1648," *Handbook of Middle American Indians*, vol. 12, "Guide to the Ethnohistorical Sources," part one, vol. ed. Howard F. Cline, gen. ed. Robert Wauchope (London: University of Texas Press, 1972), 183-242. A facsimile edition that collects 22 *Relaciones Geográficas*, by different authors undertaken in different Oaxacan communities between 1579 and 1581 (most less than 15 pages long), is available as Francisco del Paso y Troncoso, ed., *Relaciones geográficas de la diócesis de Oaxaca: manuscritos de la Real Academia de la Historia de Madrid y del Archivo de Indias en Sevilla, Años 1579-1581*, tomo IV, *Papeles de Nueve Espana, segunda serie* (Mardrid: Sucesores de Rivadeneyra, 1905); facsimile Edition, Nabu Public Domain Reprints. A second important collection of these sixteenth-century documents from various Oaxacan communities is René Acuña, *Relaciones geográficas del siglo XVI: Antequera*, 2 vols. (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1984). See also Douglas Butterworth, "Relaciones of Oaxaca of the 16th and 18th Centuries," *Boletín de Estudios Oaxaqueños*, núm. 23 (1962): 35-55.

[324] Cline, "Ethnohistorical Regions of Middle America,", 173.

modern state with the most such documents."[325] Frequently these reports depended on consultation with the oldest male members of a community, but the thoroughness with which the form was completed varies greatly. To be sure, these too are highly fraught sources that reflect the biases of questioners and responders as well as abundant honest miscommunication. And yet, as we'll see, these are in some respects the most unaffected and revealing colonial sources on Zapotec gods (and deified ancestors) that we have.

With respect to my special purposes, these bureaucratic documents, instead of encyclopedic surveys, provide only limited information about religious beliefs and practices in the indigenous communities they survey. The 50 sets of questions, ostensibly based on Spanish colonial efforts to govern the area more effectively, deal primarily with administrative and very practical queries about local topography, natural resources, plants, animals, soil quality, mineral deposits and water accessibility. They also address house types, schools, health care, markets and trade, governmental structures, fortifications, modes of war and tribute obligations; and they provide valuable information about demography, languages, village founders and place names.[326]

Nevertheless, regarding religion, broadly speaking, most of the *Relaciones Geográficas* do engage three matters of note. First, concerns about the state of missionization efforts in the various communities evoke specific queries about the Catholic churches in each town, the number of endowed churches offices and allotments for clergymen's salaries, along with parallel questions about the existence, founding, Order and residential population of any monasteries or

[325] Cline, "The Relaciones Geográficas of the Spanish Indies, 1577-1648," 219. Cline, ibid., 221-24, has a complete list and maps showing the Oaxaca towns in which *Relaciones Geográficas* were assembled. (Lind, *Ancient Zapotec Religion*, 24, says that "about twenty-four of these *relaciones* have survived and been published;" but there are actually a few more than that in the three collections Lind cites.)

[326] The opening entry to *Relaciones geográficas de la diócesis de Oaxaca,* Francisco del Paso y Troncoso, ed., 1-7 (my translation), which is entitled "Instructions and memorandum of the reports that have to be made for the description of the Indies, which his Majesty [King Philip II of Spain] commands to be done, for the good government and ennoblement of them," enumerates the 50 sets of questions on which these reports were based. Questions 14, 16, 21, 34 and 35 bear most directly on matters of religious beliefs and practices. Cline, "Ethnohistorical Regions of Middle America," 234-37, repeats (in English) a 1577 version of the same 50 questions, noting how these were in a few cases modified in a 1584 version.

convents.[327] When priests are involved in conducting the survey, this portion may (or may not be) be more elaborate. Second and fortuitously for my particular interests, questions about local topography and outstanding natural features such as mountains, volcanoes and caves evoke, almost inadvertently, fairly abundant information about venerated sacred places and the largely impersonal supernatural agents that are believed to inhabit them.[328] I will return momentarily (and later in the chapter) to this serendipitous trove of popular divinity conceptions. And third, only one question, embedded in a presumptuous query about "to whom villagers were subject when they were heathens," asks "What forms of worship, rites, and good or evil customs did they have?"[329] But most of the *Relaciones Geográficas* answer this query briefly or not at all. And, again as we will see, while there is no question that explicitly inquires about "gods" or supernaturals, these topics do emerge in very notable, if usually sketchy ways.[330]

In fact, limited and tendentious as these Spanish reports are, they can advance our understanding of Zapotec conceptions of divinity in at least three important ways. First, irrespective of the absence of direct questions about indigenous gods, the *Relaciones* are embraced by some scholars as a means of corroborating, clarifying and sometimes undermining the more extensive remarks about Zapotec gods in the works of Córdova and Balsalobre.[331] In

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[327] See questions 34 and 35 in Cline, "Ethnohistorical Regions of Middle America," 236.

[328] See especially questions 16 and 21 in Cline, "Ethnohistorical Regions of Middle America," 235-36.

[329] This is question 14, which Cline, "Ethnohistorical Regions of Middle America," 235, notes was part of the 1577 questionnaire, but for some reason was omitted from the otherwise very similar 1584 version.

[330] Jean Starr, "Zapotec Religious Practices in the Valley of Oaxaca: An Analysis of the 1580 'Relaciones geograficas' of Philip II." *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies* vol. 7, no. 2 (1987): 368, opines (with debatable optimism) that, "No Zapotec codices appear to have survived... and so the *Relaciones* are, in effect, the only Indian the only Indian accounts of Zapotec religion in existence." But that brief discussion does not really advance this question of Zapotec conceptions of divinity.

[331] Rejecting rather than affirming these efforts to correlate the "deities" mentioned respectively in the *Relaciones Geográficas* and Córdova's work, Marcus, "Rethinking the Zapotec Urn," 146, argues that, "These two sixteenth-century sources... clearly deal with separate phenomena, although both claim to list gods populating the Zapotec cosmos."

the 1920s, Alfonso Caso, for instance, worked to correlate references to deities scattered in the various *Relaciones* with the more sustained remarks of Córdova and Balsalobre;[332] and later in their *Urnas de Oaxaca*, Caso and Bernal revisit that attempt at using the village-specific reports to synthesize one authoritative deity list.[333] Likewise, Frank Boos, among the many who follow Caso and Bernal's lead in these matters, extracts from several of the *Relaciones* eleven deity names that, in his view, "are probably the same as [those] reported by Córdova and Balsalobre but which may have been distinct gods."[334]

Though in far more rigorous and thorough ways, Michael Lind also mines these documents for what they reveal about Zapotec deities and, more specifically, how they substantiate, subvert and/or supplement the deity lists that emerge from Córdova and Balsalobre.[335] Focused especially on comments concerning the continuation of "heathen ways" in these sixteenth-century native communities, Lind assembles abundant allusions in various of the reports to "idols" made of stone, wood or pottery that are presumed to represent Zapotec gods, and other references to more human-looking "idols" that were "stones carved in the manner of persons" with "very ugly faces" and "different names."[336] The 1580 *Relación* from the central Oaxacan community of Tecuicuilco, for instance, says:

> "They worshiped, all these natural people [or idols], the Devil in the figure of a statue, [which were] made of wood and stone, which they called gods. And they had a very great sum of them, varied by different names: some for health, and others for good

[332] See Caso, *Las esteles zapotecas*, reprint 15-19.

[333] See Caso and Bernal, *Urnas de Oaxaca*, reprint 673-76.

[334] Boos, *The Ceramic Sculptures of Ancient Oaxaca*, 20-21. I would be more inclined to see these eleven additional deities as village-specific patron gods, which explains why they do not appear in the works of Córdova or Balsalobre.

[335] In Lind, *Ancient Zapotec Religion*, see the thoroughgoing section on "Zapotec Deities in the *Relaciones Geográficas*," 22-30, which comments on the very uneven address of indigenous religion in these documents.

[336] See Lind, "La religión estatal de Monte Albán y los sacerdotes de Cocijo de Lambityeco," 22, where he is thorough and specific about the *Relaciones* from which he takes these references.

> seasons, and others for rain, and women for childbirth. And finally, for all human needs, a god was invoked to remedy them."[337]

Based on references of that sort, Lind is able to assemble the names and descriptions of 20 different "gods" mentioned in the Oaxaca *Relaciones Geográficas*, a couple with Nahuatl titles and the rest with Zapotec names. Somewhat surprisingly, though, only two of those—Cociyo (who is mentioned just once in the *Relaciones*) and Pitao Pezeelao (mentioned in four communities)—are deities that appear in Córdova's contemporaneous work.[338] To that list of native-named gods, Lind can add ten more Zapotec deities with Spanish names.[339] Alternate appellations and spellings exacerbate identification problems; but he thinks that references, for instance, in the *Relación de Nexapa*, a town 100 kilometers southeast of Oaxaca City, to entities such as the God of Waters, God of Wind, God of Sowing, God of Fishing, God of Childbirth, God of War and God of Peace, for the most part, "can be correlated with deities listed by Córdova."[340] Nevertheless, in light of his yeoman (but arguably futile) efforts to arrive at an authoritative list of ancient Zapotec gods by synthesizing all of the available sources, Lind is especially struck by the large number of these deities that are *not* included by Córdova: "Eleven different deities are mentioned in the *Relaciones* that have no counterparts in Córdova's list."[341] The suggestion is, in other words, that many of the "gods" mentioned in these regional reports are area-specific or even village-specific, which leads to my second point.

Secondly, then, the *Relaciones Geográficas*, by virtue of the fact that they are vignette samplings from numerous discrete village contexts, prompt the observation of Spanish

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[337] Francisco Villagar, "Relación de los Pueblos de Tecuicuilco," in Acuña, ed., *Relaciones geográficas del siglo XVI: Antequera*, vol. 2, 91 (my translation); quoted by Lind, "La religión estatal de Monte Albán y los sacerdotes de Cocijo de Lambityeco," 22.

[338] For an enumeration of 20 Zapotec deities with indigenous names that are named in the *Relaciones Geográficas*, see Lind, *Ancient Zapotec Religion*, 26-27, table 2.3.

[339] For an enumeration of "Zapotec deities named in Spanish in the *Relaciones Geográficas*," see Lind, *Ancient Zapotec Religion*, 29, table 2.4.

[340] Lind, *Ancient Zapotec Religion*, 28.

[341] Lind, *Ancient Zapotec Religion*, 29.

interrogators that, "each village had as its patron, a god whom, over all others, they revered."[342] That is to say, instead of simply reconfirming the relevance to the wider region of the deity lists provided by Córdova or Balsalobre, each of which was recorded in just one Oaxacan locale, the diverse questionnaire replies bring to our attention—better than any other source—the important, but invariably perplexing, matter of "patron deities."[343]

Regarding this thorny topic of localized patron or tutelary deities, H. B. Nicholson, for instance, while focused on the Aztecs, notes that, alongside the more generalized deities of the pantheon,

> "An important feature of Mesoamerican religion in general was the concept of a special tutelary relationship between a certain deity, the *abogado* as the Spanish writers usually phrased it, and a particular socio-political group. The size of these patronized entities ran the whole gamut of the socio-political spectrum, from extensive provinces (or, rarely, entire ethnic-linguistic divisions) to small intracommunity sectors *(calpulli, tlaxilacalli,* etc.)."[344]

In other words, while the best known example, Huitzilopochtli, was the group-specific patron deity of the Aztecs at large, various smaller Mexica socio-political units and communities had their own tutelary gods. There were, for instance, occupation-specific patrons deities of

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[342] Villagar, "Relación de los Pueblos de Tecuicuilco," 91 (my translation); quoted by Lind, "La religión estatal de Monte Albán y los sacerdotes de Cocijo de Lambityeco," 22.

[343] Among numerous places that he addresses the topic of "patron gods" or "particularized divine essences," see, for example, Alfredo López Austin, "E1 núcleo duro, la cosmovisión y la tradición mesoamericana," en eds. Johanna Broda y Félix Báez-Jorge, *Cosmovisión, ritual e identidad de los pueblos indígenas de México* (México: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes/Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2001), 47-65. Also, Víctor de la Cruz, "Los múltiples nombres y formas de Pitao," 576, has interesting comments on how these village-specific "patron deities" or "tutelary gods" eventually become "the present patron saints of the towns, such as San Jerónimo Tlacochahuaya, Santos Reyes Nopala, San Bartolo Coyotepec, San Martín Mexicapam and a long list of the 570 municipalities of the state of Oaxaca." Bartolomé, "Elogio del politeísmo: las cosmovisiones indígenas en Oaxaca," 625-26, also draws on López Austin to discuss how these pre-Columbian patron deities were transformed into the particular Christian saints that were embraced by various Oaxacan communities.

[344] Nicholson, "Religion in Pre-Hispanic Central Mexico," 409.

metallurgists, featherworkers, painters, curers, fisherman, merchants, warriors, etc.[345] And there were, among other tiers of relevance, patron deities of specific *tonalpohualli* calendrical days with whom individuals born on those days apparently felt a special affinity.[346]

By the same token, in Oaxaca, the deities mentioned in the *Relaciones Geográficas* but not by Córdova indicate, in the opinion of Joseph Whitecotton and others, not errors or omissions in the Dominican friar's list, but rather that each of these Oaxacan communities "ascribed a particularly important role in its pantheon of gods to a local patron deity," who was of little or no consequence in other villages.[347] By Whitecotton's reading of these reports, "Major ceremonies were held in honor of this [local patron] deity, with whom the individuals of the community felt a particular affinity."[348] Lind generally shares that view; and thus, for him, the realization that "the village-specific deities named in *Relaciones* are those of the patron gods of different peoples"[349] serves a double purpose. For one, it explains the discrepancies between the gods identified in these reports and in Córdova's work by forcing Lind to concede that different Oaxacan villages do indeed worship somewhat different deities, not simply the same deities with different names. And, for two, though I note momentarily how he hedges his bets on what exactly the abundant "idols" in the *Relaciones* represent, the prominence of so-termed village-specific patron deities provides, in Lind's view, like Whitecotton's, yet more evidence in support of his insistence on the existence of "a pantheon of Zapotec gods"—and thus likewise yet more evidence controverting Marcus's claim to Zapotec animatism, which Lind takes every opportunity to dispute.[350]

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[345] Nicholson, "Religion in Pre-Hispanic Central Mexico," 430.

[346] Nicholson, "Religion in Pre-Hispanic Central Mexico," 410, 430.

[347] Whitecotton, *The Zapotecs*, 157. Whitecotton, ibid., 157-59, draws on various *Relaciones* to provide some specific examples of which and how patron deities were worshipped in various Oaxacan communities.

[348] Whitecotton, *The Zapotecs*, 157.

[349] Lind, "La religión estatal de Monte Albán y los sacerdotes de Cocijo de Lambityeco," 22; my translation.

[350] Lind, "La religión estatal de Monte Albán y los sacerdotes de Cocijo de Lambityeco," 22 (my translation), says that "the patron gods of different peoples" that one encounters in the

For her part, Marcus too is impressed by the proliferation of village-specific patron deities in the *Relaciones Geográficas*—especially those that are described as "stones carved in the manner of persons" with "very ugly faces" and "different names"[351]—though, for her, these are by no means counterevidence to her animatism hypothesis. Instead of roughly parallel village-specific entries into a more widely shared pantheon of gods (the existence of which she denies), Marcus sees the abundant *Relaciones* references to "idols" as addressing a very different and separate phenomenon, which is actually a far more accurate and important feature of Zapotec religion.[352] In fact, these human-like "idols" are, in her view, among the strongest evidences of her complementary premise that colonial-era Spaniards' preconceptions about Greco-Roman-like "gods" also completely blinded them as to the considerably more significant royal ancestor worship wherein revered human leaders (*coqui* or "male rulers") were defied following their deaths, and then perceived as intermediaries between the people and supernatural forces.[353] She contends that the "patron gods" are village-specific because they are apotheosized individuals who had actually lived in those communities:

> "It seems unlikely to me that all these personages were gods, or that so many towns in so small an area had such different gods... It is more likely that what the Spaniards saw were the stone or wooden images of deceased rulers of those communities, who were

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Relaciones Geográficas "support the existence of a pantheon of Zapotec gods in the sense of López Austin in the place of the impersonal supernatural forces proposed by Marcus." But, as noted, the supposed irreconcilability of López Austin's and Marcus's respective views is ill-stated insofar as López Austin's major interest in patron gods does nothing to diminish his claims concerning the existence of both personal and impersonal supernatural entities.

[351] Villagar, "Relación de los Pueblos de Tecuicuilco," 91 (my translation); quoted by Lind, "La religión estatal de Monte Albán y los sacerdotes de Cocijo de Lambityeco," 22.

[352] See Marcus, "Rethinking the Zapotec Urn," 146.

[353] See Marcus, "Zapotec Religion," 348-49, where she cites several specific *Relaciones Geográficas* in support her general premise concerning the underestimated importance of royal ancestor worship among Zapotecs.

> honored as semidivine and sacrificed to in their roles as interceders with the supernatural."[354]

For Marcus, then, the "idols" recorded in the *Relaciones* are, as we'll see, counterparts to famous Zapotec funerary urns, which she also sees as deified human rulers rather than fully superhuman gods.[355]

Marcus's assessment of these village-specific patron gods as apotheosized humans is reinforced by that of Nicholson who writes,

> "Frequently the patron deity was merged with the 'deified tribal ancestor' or 'first founder,' usually portrayed as a notable participant in the early history of the group. These ostensibly deified ancestral founder-leaders were usually referred to by the generic term *altepeyollotl*, "heart of the community," or *altepeteotl*, "community god."[356]

Like Nicholson, Whitecotton, while advocating for the notion of a Zapotec pantheon of gods, also lends support to this view, when he writes, "It is quite probably that inhabitants of a particular community, who often took their names from their patron deity, felt that the deity was their ancestor."[357] And, perhaps surprisingly, Lind too, while emphatically rejecting Marcus's claims for a thoroughgoing animatism and unwilling to accept her argument for the priority of ancestor worship over the worship of anthropomorphic gods, actually finds this component of Marcus's argument "very persuasive."[358]

In fact, Lind assembles numerous specific examples in the Oaxacan *Relaciones* that clearly show specific communities worshipping "deified *coquis*" whose prestige is confined to

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[354] Marcus, "Zapotec Religion," 348-49, who stresses "It seems particularly unlikely that personages with calendric names [mentioned in the *Relaciones*], especially male-female pairs with titles like Coqui and Xonaxi, were gods."

[355] See Marcus, "Rethinking the Zapotec Urn," 144-46.

[356] Nicholson, "Religion in Pre-Hispanic Central Mexico," 409.

[357] Whitecotton, *The Zapotecs*, 157.

[358] Lind, *Ancient Zapotec Religion,* 30.

that village alone.[359] But then, fashioning a kind of slippery compromise solution, which acknowledges some royal ancestor worship but preserves the priority of more fully personal gods, Lind maintains that "half of the deities cited in the *Relaciones* probably refer to deified *coqui*."[360] The other half of the "idols," in his concessionary view, are more properly "gods" who were never people. In other words, while Lind is emphatic that all of the supernatural agents referenced in Córdova's (and Balsalobre's) writings are pantheon gods and *not* deified ancestors, he is willing to accept that at least some of the abundant references to idols in the *Relaciones* do refer to worship of deified *coquis* who are acting as "intermediaries with the deities."[361] But, apparently aware that this compromise is not altogether persuasive, Lind notes also that, the role of deified ancestors in Zapotec religion "remains to be explored more fully;"[362]

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[359] Lind, *Ancient Zapotec Religion*, 30-33. On the *Relaciones* as the strongest evidence for "nobles invoking deceased and deified *coqui* as intermediaries with deities," also see ibid., 95, 342. Regarding Lind's qualified acceptance of Marcus's stance on royal ancestor worship but wholesale rejection of her views on animatism, he writes, "By and large, the *Relaciones* also partially support Marcus's hypothesis that following death, *coqui*, the rulers of the city-states, could be deified and invoked as intermediaries to intercede with powerful Zapotec deities but not, as Marcus contends, with impersonal supernatural forces." Ibid., 33. For an earlier version of the same opinion, see Lind, "La religión estatal de Monte Albán y los sacerdotes de Cocijo de Lambityeco," 22.

[360] Lind, *Ancient Zapotec Religion*, 33.

[361] In his (not very persuasive) compromise solution, which concedes the presence of some royal ancestor worship but preserves the priority of pantheon gods, Lind, *Ancient Zapotec Religion*, 95-96, writes: "It is stated [for instance, in the *Relación de Oclototepeque*] that they treated the deceased *coqui* as if he were a god, but later it becomes evident that they were invoking him to intercede with the deities—although which deities and for what purposes during that period of time remains unknown."

[362] Lind, *Ancient Zapotec Religion*, 95. In his concluding summary, Lind, ibid., 342, again affirming the *Relaciones* as the strongest evidence concerning the role of ancestors in Zapotec religion, writes, "Much remains to be discovered about the role of elite ancestors in Zapotec religion. It seems clear that they were invoked to legitimize the role of the ruling class to intercede with deities when the community faced as crisis. At such times, nobles and priests in public ceremonies invoked the ancestors to intercede with the deities to end the crisis." Note, though, that in Lind's nomenclature (see, for instance, ibid., 95-96), deified *coquis* are "intermediaries with gods," but they are not themselves "gods."

and the question of the apparently close but not identical relationship between deified *coquis* and "patron gods" adds yet more uncertainty.[363]

That said, the contrast between the two positions is by no means clear-cut. Where Marcus sees the "idols" that permeate the *Relaciones* as village-specific deified ancestors or "semidivine" agents who mediate between the general population and "animate, life forces,"[364] Lind's position, which is more difficult to ascertain, seems to be that these apotheosized human rulers are like a lower class of "gods" who mediate between people and the higher, similarly personal gods of the pantheon.[365] But, in either case, it is the collection of these snapshot-like *Relaciones Geográficas*—rather than the more extensive single-site accounts of Córdova and Balsalobre, which were collected all in one place—that best reveal the importance and pervasiveness of localized divine ancestors and/or "patron deities."[366]

In any case, a third way in which these *Relaciones Geográficas* are specially helpful in appreciating alternate Zapotec conceptions of divinity—one that reaffirms Marcus's animatistic stance but that Lind largely ignores—comes in reply to Spanish queries about "mountains,

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[363] The question of patron deities relation to deified *coqui* is murky. As noted, Lind, "La religión estatal de Monte Albán y los sacerdotes de Cocijo de Lambityeco," 22 (my translation), says that "the village-specific deities named in *Relaciones* are those of the patron gods of different peoples;" and Lind, *Ancient Zapotec Religion,* 33, says that the *Relaciones* "suggest that each city-state had a patron deity." But he also notes that the god Pitao Peezeleo is "the overwhelming favorite, cited [as their patron deity] by as many as nine different city-states in and around the Valley of Oaxaca," which to say, while every village has a patron god, they are not exactly village-specific. In fact, Lind goes so far as to suggest (ibid., 350) that, "Pitao Pezeelo appears to be a Zapotec patron deity in the same manner that Lord 9 Wind was the Mixtec patron deity and Huitzilopochtli was the Aztec patron deity." And thus where Marcus implies that deified *coquis* and "patron gods" may be one-and-the-same, Lind presents them as two very different matters.

[364] Marcus, "Zapotec Religion," 348-49.

[365] See, for instance, Lind, Ancient Zapotec Religion, 32.

[366] Marcus, "Zapotec Religion," 349, notes that while lots of the *Relaciones* associate "deities" with human ruler titles like *coqui* ("male ruler") and *xonaxi* ("female ruler"), Córdova never makes that connection, which is to imply that, while the *Relaciones* distort the matter of royal ancestor worship, Córdova misses it entirely.

volcanoes, caves, and all the other remarkable and admirable things in nature."[367] Fortuitously, these seemingly prosaic geography questions frequently issue in responses that reconfirm the notions of hierophanic and heterogeneous landscapes described by Mircea Eliade as "discovered not made" and, moreover, the sorts of supernatural agents and forces that inhabit such places.[368]

José Alcina Franch, for instance, collects numerous references in these documents not only to so-termed "lords of the hills," but also to "the identification of the hills or the summits of the mountains [themselves] as divinities;"[369] and he links these local mountain divinities to what Walter Krickberg identifies as "the god of the earth and the caves [which] is common to most of the Mexican people of the south."[370] Retrieving examples from of the *Relaciones* of at least fifteen different Oaxacan communities—and reminding us of the notion of an *altépetl* water-mountain[371]—Alcina Franch is especially impressed by the prevalence of sixteenth-century beliefs that "certain deities resided on some hills, but in many other cases the name of the mountain is equivalent to the name of the deity, or the hill is the deity itself."[372] And he explains, moreover, how, in the Sierra Norte town of Yazona, among numerous exemplars, offerings of stones, feathers, roosters and dogs were made "to the same hill where, according to their tradition, the god that their ancestors worshiped resided."[373] I will return later in the chapter

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[367] Most evocative in this respect is question 21. See Cline, "The Relaciones Geográficas of the Spanish Indies, 1577-1648," 236.

[368] Regarding hierophanic and heterogeneous space, which I discussed in chapter 1, see, for instance, Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (San Diego: Harcourt, Inc., 1959), 20ff.

[369] Alcina Franch, "Los dioses del panteón zapoteco," 32; my translation.

[370] Walter Krickeberg, Hermann Trimborn, Werner Müller, and Otto Zerries, *Pre-Columbian American Religions* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968), 55; cited by Alcina Franch, "Los dioses del panteón zapoteco," 32.

[371] Regarding the notion of an *altépetl* water-mountain or "hill of sustenance," which I discussed at length in chapter 1, see, for example, Xavier Noguez, "Altépetl," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Mesoamerican Cultures*, ed. Davíd Carrasco, vol. I, 12-13.

[372] Alcina Franch, "Los dioses del panteón zapoteco," 32; my translation.

[373] Alcina Franch, "Los dioses del panteón zapoteco," 32; my translation. For more pertinent examples, see ibid., 32-38.

to this version of the ritual-architectural commemoration of divinity (priority II-A) for which these Spain-sponsored geographic reports provide the strongest evidence.

At any rate, in sum on the *Relaciones Geográficas* as potential evidence for each of the main sorts of Zapotec conceptions of divinity, advocates for indigenous monotheism, who find such strong support in Córdova's *Vocabulario*, encounter in these village-specific surveys only occasional corroborative references like that in the *Relación de Nexapa* to "the principal God of all the Gods" (*Dios principal de todos los Dioses*).[374] But, to the contrary, those scholars who are inclined to make arguments for any of the other main alternatives—e.g., Zapotec polytheism, Zapotec royal ancestor worship, or Zapotec animatism—can all manage to massage from the *Relaciones* backing that reinforces their respective views.

c. The Gods of Fray Gonzalo de Balsalobre's Inquisition Records (1656): Esoteric Deity Lists and a Pretense of Systematic Coherence

I turn now to a third main body of colonial-era writings. Composed some 80 years after Juan de Córdova's *Vocabulario*, the seventeen-century writings of another Dominican, Fray Gonzalo de Balsalobre, constitute, by some assessments, "our greatest and most explicit information" about Zapotec beliefs and practices.[375] Indeed, for those in search of a tidy and complete list of 13 Zapotec gods, correlated with the main segments of the 260-day calendar, Balsalobre's writing might seem to provide the perfect passkey. I will argue, though, that the pretense to have at last located a systematic and coherent register of all the main deities is, instead of a bonanza, a kind of fool's gold and an inducement to just the sort of reification of "Zapotec religion" I am working to avoid.

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[374] Bernardo Santamaría and Juan de Canseco, "Relación de Nexapa" (1580), in *Relaciones geográficas de Oaxaca*, Paso y Troncoso, ed., 34; cited by Lind, *Ancient Zapotec Religion*, 28, who thinks references to "the principal god of all the gods" may correspond to the so-named "god of all gods" or "God Thirteen;" but recall that Lind tends to see any intimations of monotheism as signs of Christianization.

[375] Alcina Franch, *Calendario y religión entre los zapotecos*, p. 95; my translation.

While the biographical particulars are slim, we know that from 1634 to 1665 Balsalobre served as curate and priest in San Miguel Sola (today Sola de Vega) in the Sola Valley about 80 kilometers southwest of the Valley of Oaxaca.[376] Although it is difficult to imagine that it required 20 years working as a cleric in southern Oaxaca to make this discovery, we are told that, around December of 1653, Balsalobre became aware of the "startling fact" of the active survival in his parish of certain native beliefs and practices that had purportedly out at the time of the Conquest.[377] At that point, assisted by his brother, mercedarian friar Pedro de Trujillo, Balsalobre embarked on a five-year investigation of the "idolatrous practices" that persisted among the Zapotecs in the region.[378] The ensuing documents were intended, then, not as a scholarly presentation of Zapotec history or theology, but rather as a means of exposing—and forestalling—the continuation of "pagan religion" by extracting "confessions" from both Zapotec priests and ordinary parishioners. And thus, if all of these colonial-era writings are composed with an air of condescension and disdain toward indigenous religion, those produced by the self-described "diligent Deputy of the Inquisition" are especially adversarial.[379]

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[376] For basic (but not ample) biographical information on Fray Gonzalo de Balsalobre (sometimes spelled Balzalobre), see Heinrich Berlin, *Las antiguas creencias en San Miguel Sola, Oaxaca, México* (1957), 7-11; James H. Carmichael, "Balsalobre on Idolatry in Oaxaca," *Boletín de Estudios Oaxaqueños*, núm. 13 (1959), 1-12, which is reprinted in *The Roman Catholic Church in Colonial Latin America*, ed. Richard E. Greenleaf (New York: Knopf, 1971), 138-47; Richard E. Greenleaf, "The Mexican Inquisition and the Indians: Sources for the Ethnohistorian Author(s)," *The Americas: A Quarterly Review of Inter-American Cultural History*, vol. 34, no. 3 (January, 1978), 330-31; Whitecotton, *Zapotec Religion*, 159-165; or Lind, *Ancient Zapotec Religion*, 37-49.

[377] Carmichael, "Balsalobre on Idolatry in Oaxaca," 139.

[378] Berlin, *Las antiguas creencias en San Miguel Sola, Oaxaca, México*, 7.

[379] On the one hand, Berlin, *Las antiguas creencias en San Miguel Sola, Oaxaca, México*, 9-10 (my translation), concedes that Balsalobre, like other Inquisitors, was working to extract "confessions" concerning villagers' involvements in religious practices that he considered deplorable and also that Balsalobre obtained his most noteworthy information from Diego Luis while the Zapotec priest was confined in the ecclesiastical prison. But, on the other hand, Berlin, ibid. (my translation), also opines that, "Considering the cruelty with which idolatry was punished at that time, the penalties imposed by the priest of Sola really should be considered as minor… The declarations of caciques and governors were taken in secret and aside from economic punishments, only clearly ecclesiastical punishments were imposed on them, such as attending some Masses, reciting special rosaries, etc." Regarding Diego Luis specifically, "we do not know the punishment that was applied." Ibid.

Balsalobre's Inquisition records are region-specific but not village-specific. They name 61 Zapotec "wise men," "teachers," "diviners" or "priests" (*letrados*, *maestros máximos* or, in the native term, *colanis*) who, specially versed in the ancient traditions, practiced in 20 different communities, principally around Sola de Vega, but also in the neighboring Ejutla, Miahuatlán and Coatlán Valleys; and he collects reams of "confessions" as to their beliefs and practices from across this area.[380] Among that long list of expert practioners, Balsalobre's foremost "informant," likewise among his principal antagonists, is "an incorrigible but venerable Zapotec priest" from Sola de Vega named Diego Luis.[381] When first imprisoned for his idolatrous abuses in 1635, Diego Luis, who was apparently born about 1570, provided Balsalobre with a list of 13 main deities that, unlike Córdova's rendering, were correlated with the divisions of the sacred calendar; and then, in 1654, when imprisoned again, Diego Luis, by that time over 80 years old, supplied Balsalobre a somewhat different list of 13 deities.[382] These two formulaic "declarations," which are actually "confessions" or denunciations from an incarcerated old Zapotec priest—a get-out-of-jail pass, if you will—come to be regarded, as I'll note momentarily, as the most authoritative presentation of the Zapotec pantheon of gods.[383]

Be that as it may, it is noteworthy that Balsalobre discovers nearly all of these seventeenth-century Zapotec priests or "diviners," like Diego Luis, relying on "magical books" that contained the ancient sacred calendar, which they used in conjunction with the Zapotec

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[380] Berlin, *Las antiguas creencias en San Miguel Sola, Oaxaca, México*, 11-12, 19; Lind, *Ancient Zapotec Religion,* 16-17, names and provides information on 61 specific priests of *colanis* in the Sola area that emerge from Balsalobre materials.

[381] Berlin, *Las antiguas creencias en San Miguel Sola, Oaxaca, México*, 11-12, 19; Lind, *Ancient Zapotec Religion,* 38-39.

[382] For a side-by-side juxtaposition of the deity lists provided by Diego Luis respectively in 1635 and 1654, see Berlin, *Las antiguas creencias en San Miguel Sola, Oaxaca, México,* 12.

[383] Regarding uncertain speculations as to the mindset and motivations of Diego Luis for making his confessions, see Berlin, *Las antiguas creencias en San Miguel Sola, Oaxaca, México*, 12.

deities to perform their ritual activities and to deliver prognostications about the future.[384] In fact, possession of one of these divinatory manuals—which were said to contain "the teaching of thirteen gods that govern the thirteen twenty-day times of the year"[385]—seems to have been the principal criterion for operating as a ritual practioner.[386] The Sola documents record between 20 and 25 Zapotec ritual books in circulation; but Balsalobre—providing a Oaxacan counterpart to Franciscan Diego de Landa's infamous torching of Maya codices—burned them all, so that none survives.[387] Nonetheless, as John Paddock, for instance, observes,

> "Balzalobre's clear testimony to the existence of Zapotecan codices, either pre-conquest or copied from pre-conquest ones, seems to remove any doubt regarding the existence of Zapotec documents analogous to the well-known Mixtec ones."[388]

Yet, while it is likely that these colonial-era ritual books, hybrid colonial texts insofar as most are written in Zapotec but with Spanish orthography, would provide the most direct link to pre-Columbian traditions—including the most authoritative presentation of the calendrically-ordered

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[384] See Berlin, *Las antiguas creencias en San Miguel Sola, Oaxaca, México*, 16-21; or Lind, *Ancient Zapotec Religion*, 37.

[385] Berlin, *Las antiguas creencias en San Miguel Sola, Oaxaca, México*, 18; my translation.

[386] Berlin, *Las antiguas creencias en San Miguel Sola, Oaxaca, México*, 16; makes the intriguing observation that, "In fact, several people asked Diego Luis to get them a copy of his book and he provided it without hesitation, for the small price of one peso or six tomines." And Berlin notes that women as well as men, if in possession of one of these books, could act as a ritual practioner.

[387] Berlin, *Las antiguas creencias en San Miguel Sola, Oaxaca, México*, 17-19, enumerates the owners and specifics of 20 these books, though likely more were in circulation at the time. Colonial rather than pre-Columbian documents, these seventeenth-century books, which Berlin describes one-by-one in detail, were written in Zapotec using Spanish orthography but without glyphs denoting the day signs or images of the deities. While Balsalobre burned many of the books, in other instances, their Zapotec owners burned them, apparently as a sign of recanting the old ways. But references, for instance, to Diego Luis "always keeping a copy for future use" preserve hope that some may yet be rediscovered.

[388] John Paddock quoted in James H. Carmichael, "Balsalobre on Idolatry in Oaxaca," *Boletín de Estudios Oaxaquenos*, núm. 13 (Mexico City College, 1959), 1. Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 89, calls attention to the fact that Seler, "The Mexican Chronology, with Special Reference to the Zapotec Calendar," 271, deduced that Córdova's assistants must have shown him a codex.

gods—we are, lamentably, forced to rely instead on the Diego Luis's imperfect and inconsistent recollection of what those codices contained.[389] The book-burning of Balsalobre provides in that respect the quintessence of the Dominicans' ironically paired destruction and documentation of indigenous Oaxacan religion.

In any case, regarding Fray Balsalobre's own writings, he assembles the most egregious—that is, what he considered the most "highly condemnable superstitions" rather than the most typical—of the abundant confessions he had acquired into a short (roughly 50-page) book entitled *Relación auténtica de las idolatrías, supersticiones, vanas observaciones de los indios del obispado de Oaxaca* ("An Authentic Account of the Idolatries, Superstitions, and Vain Observances of the Indians of the Bishopric of Oaxaca"), which was published in 1656.[390] Once in circulation, this book began to "produce effects" insofar as it prompted other priests to intensify their efforts against idolatry.[391] This work is, then, more specifically trained on religion, but also more explicitly polemical, than either Córdova's dictionary or the state-sponsored *Relaciones Geográficas*. Additionally, much more voluminous supporting documents

[389] Regarding Diego Luis's recollections of the specific ritual book on which he relied, see Berlin, *Las antiguas creencias en San Miguel Sola, Oaxaca, México*, 16-19.

[390] There are numerous full and partial reprintings of this work. See, for instance, Gonzalo de Balsalobre, "Relación auténtica de las idolatrías, supersticiones, vanas observaciones de los indios del obispado de Oaxaca," *Anales del Museo Nacional de México*, vol. 6 (1892 [originally 1656]): 225-60; or Gonzalo de Balsalobre, "Relación auténtica de las idolatrías, supersticiones, vanas observaciones de los indios del obispado de Oaxaca," in Heinrich Berlin, Gonzalo de Balsalobre, y Diego de Hevia y Valdés, *Idolatrías y superstición entre los indios de Oaxaca* (México D.F.: Ediciones Toledo, 1988), 91-135. It is, for instance, reprinted in Francisco Paso y Tronosco, *Tratado de las Idolatrías, Supersticiones, Dioses, Ritos, Hechicerías, y Otra Costumbres Gentílicas de las Razas Aborigenes de México*, tomo II (México, 1953), 338-90. And Carmichael, "Balsalobre on Idolatry in Oaxaca," 1-12, provides an English translation of parts of Balsalobre's tract that deal specifically with idolatry and sorceries. A reprint of Carmichael's translated excerpt appears in Greenleaf, *The Roman Catholic Church in Colonial Latin America*, 138-47. Also available is a 63-page version, Gonzalo de Balsalobre, *Relación auténtica de las idolatrías* (Barcelona: Red Ediciones S.L., 2014 [originally 1656]). Or, for an on-line version of the full text, see: http://issuu.com/bibliotecazapoteca/docs/relacion_balsalobre

[391] Berlin, *Las antiguas creencias en San Miguel Sola, Oaxaca, México*, 7-10, describes how Balsalobre's work became enmeshed in the complex seventeenth-century struggles between civil and ecclesiastical authorities over control of the Indians (a tension that impinges was well on the roughly contemporaneous work of Francisco de Burgoa).

assembled by Balsalobre have also survived in archives. Thus when, in the 1950s, Heinrich Berlin, in the context of a fuller and more academic study of the ancient religious beliefs of the Sola Valley Zapotecs, undertook the most thorough study of Balsalobre's work, he analyzed not simply the priest's published text but also at least 13 volumes of that ancillary material.[392] And, consequently, it is actually on Berlin's *Las Antiguas Creencias en San Miguel Solá, Oaxaca, México* (1957), a model of how an ethnohistorian can reconstruct native beliefs and practices from the records of Inquisition trials,[393] that most subsequent scholars, even now, rely for their engagements with Gonzalo de Balsalobre.[394]

As to Zapotec conceptions of divinity in the Balsalobre corpus, everyone seizes on the 1635 and 1654 deity lists provided by incarcerated informant Diego Luis. References in this corpus to less personal supernatural entities (or to royal ancestor worship) receive far less, if any, attention.[395] Berlin, who joins the consensus in taking for granted that Zapotecs had a pantheon

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[392] Heinrich Berlin, *Las antiguas creencias en San Miguel Sola, Oaxaca, México* (Hamburg: Hamburg Museum of Ethnology and Prehistory, 1957). This work is republished in Heinrich Berlin, Gonzalo de Balsalobre, y Diego de Hevia y Valdés, *Idolatría y superstición entre los indios de Oaxaca*, 2nd ed. (Mexico City: Ediciones Toledo, 1988), 9-89. This is the edition that, for instance, Lind cites; but throughout, I am citing page numbers from the 1957 edition.

[393] Greenleaf, "The Mexican Inquisition and the Indians: Sources for the Ethnohistorian Author(s)," 330, provides this characterization of Heinrich Berlin's *Las antiguas creencias en San Miguel Sola, Oaxaca, México* (1957).

[394] Lind, *Ancient Zapotec Religion,* 38, for instance, says, "I will follow the more complete study of Berlin but with references to Balsalobre's original study as well."

[395] While the scholarly discussion of Balsalobre's materials focuses overwhelmingly on the question of a pantheon of gods rather than impersonal supernatural forces and entities, there are references here, as in the *Relaciones Geográficas*, to worship at outlying mountains and caves. Alcina Franch, *Calendario y religión entre los zapotecos*, 170 (my translation), for instance, repeats reports that Balsalobre "demolished the idols that they had among the mountains and very high sierras [of the Sola Valley] and in them placed the symbol of the Holy Cross; such has been his zeal in this matter that all the Indians have great fear…" Also note that Berlin's description of these "magical book" informed rites (described earlier) is a nearly perfect match to the sort of rites that, according to López Austin, "Los ritos: un juego de definiciones," 16, engage non-anthropomorphic supernatural forces and agents (as opposed to personal gods), of which divination is the most prominent alterative and "gaining information" about future circumstances is the most prominent goal. Unquestionably, Balsalobre was operating in an environment in which broadly "animatistic" beliefs (and ancestor worship) were in play.

of gods, notes the strong similarities but also significant differences between Diego Luis's paired declarations, each of which contains two feminine and eleven masculine deities.[396] But then, because of the fuller indigenous names and absence of clearly Christianized allusions to "God the Father" and "Lucifer" that appear in the earlier version, Berlin argues that the later list "seems to be more correct and represents the order in which the thirteen gods of each day were revealed as calendrical gods."[397] Accordingly, most often repeated is Diego Luis's 1674 list, which reads as follows:

1. Liraaquitzino ("God 13," god of all the 13 gods)
2. Licuicha Niyoa (God of Hunters)
3. Coqueelaa (God of Riches, Wealth)
4. Locucui (God of Maize, Food)
5. Leraa Huila (Devil, God of Hell)
6. Nohuichana (Goddess of River, Fish, Pregnancies, Births)
7. Lexee (God of Sorcerers, Thieves)
8. Nonachi (God of Illnesses)
9. Locio (God of Thunderbolts, or Lightning Flashes, that send the water for the cornfields)
10. Xonatzi Huilia (Woman of the Devil, to whom they sacrifice on behalf of the sick and dead)
11. Cosana (God of Ancestors, in deep water, to whom they light candles and burn copal before fishing)
12. Leraa Queche (God of Medicine)
13. Liraa Cuee (God of Medicine)[398]

Alfonso Caso's *Las esteles zapotecas* (1928), for instance, repeats this list verbatim.[399] And Joyce Marcus duplicates the same bakers-dozen roster with the observations that, while Diego Luis (unlike Córdova) was explicit in correlating these deities with the calendar, "none of the names appear to contain numbers between 1 and 13;" and, even more notably, Marcus

[396] Berlin, *Las antiguas creencias en San Miguel Sola, Oaxaca, México*, 12-13.

[397] Berlin, *Las antiguas creencias en San Miguel Sola, Oaxaca, México*, 13; my translation.

[398] This precise list appears in Berlin's *Las antiguas creencias en San Miguel Sola, Oaxaca, México*, 12; but I have borrowed the translated descriptors from the list presented in Marcus, "Zapotec Religion," 349.

[399] Caso, *Las esteles zapotecas*, reprint 14-15.

observes that "there is minimal overlap with the 24 deities in Córdova."[400] Moreover, while this orderly inventory of calendrical deities suggests much more strongly the prospect of a neat pantheon of gods than does Córdova's hodgepodge of dissimilar gods, Marcus is predictably dubious about the anthropomorphic status of any of these figures. Thus, reechoing her doubts about Córdova's "deity list," she cautions that,

> "I suspect the list given by Balsalobre may represent the series of natural forces that influenced the 13 sacred numbers of the 260-day calendar, and helped to give each day its special character; whether they should really be called gods is open to debate."[401]

By contrast, José Alcina Franch, who, as noted, acknowledges as well the pervasiveness of impersonal supernatural forces and entities associated with sacred caves and mountains, is much more willing to accept Diego Luis's 13-item list as an accurate accounting of the anthropomorphic gods of the Zapotec pantheon.[402] Like most scholars, Alcina Franch also sees Balsalobre as reaffirming a monotheistic (or monolatrous) strain in Zapotec religion, insofar as the first entry on both of Diego Luis's lists—Liraaquitzino, "God 13" or "the God of all the 13 gods"—he thinks, corresponds to the "Supreme God" discussed at length by Córdova.[403]

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[400] Marcus, "Zapotec Religion," 349.

[401] Marcus, "Zapotec Religion," 349.

[402] Here again, the key article is Alcina Franch, "Los dioses del panteón zapoteco" (1972), which is reprinted as chapter 5 in Alcina Franch, *Calendario y religión entre los zapotecos*.

[403] Regarding the general consensus that this first entry on both of Diego Luis's lists—"God 13"—was a "supreme god" parallel to that discussed at length by Córdova, Berlin, *Las antiguas creencias en San Miguel Sola, Oaxaca, México*, 13, says that this was "a highly esteemed god, intervening occasionally in all aspects of life… It must have been something like a supreme god." Alcina Franch, *Calendario y religión entre los zapotecos*, 13, who agrees that this God 13 was "the supreme god of the Zapotec pantheon," notes that, in the wider Balsalobre corpus, God 13 is variously named as Leta Aquichino, 13 Leraquichino, Liraaquitzino, Liraachino, Liraqui Chinese, Leraaquichino. And even Lind, *Ancient Zapotec Religion*, 41, while maintaining his minority view that all references to indigenous monotheism are actually signs of Christian influence, agrees that this first god on Diego Luis's lists corresponds to "Córdova's Huetexi Pea—presumably, the god who measured the sky and the four quarters of the earth—but this is uncertain." On this only-tentative correlation, also see Lind, ibid., 55-57.

But Alcina Franch goes farther in endorsing the prestige and accuracy of Diego Luis's 1654 list. In his sweeping view, the Zapotec pantheon of gods is a central component of "a unitary religious structure, which lasts through time and is reflected in a multitude of local variations," the Sola Valley just one among them.[404] That is to say, Alcina Franch, whose own fieldwork is focused on the region of Villa Alta in northern Oaxaca, insists that "the complex world of the Zapotec divinities starts from the base of a fairly complete and coherent core," which, as evidenced in its abundant parallels to Aztecs and other peoples, probably reflects a deep "Mesoamerican substratum."[405] Emboldened by this confidence that all of the variations that one encounters in these various Oaxacan region-specific colonial-era sources are "mere variations of an essentially similar pattern, which survives through time and manifests itself in the whole area of the so-called Zapotec culture,"[406] Alcina Franch undertakes a comparative analysis that synthesizes all of the available ethnohistoric, ethnographic and even archaeological evidences into a single pan-Zapotec pantheon of 13 gods.[407] And tellingly but not surprisingly, that synthetic exercise leads him to a list of 13 "main gods" that is identical to Diego Luis's 1654

[404] Alcina Franch, "Los dioses del panteón zapoteco," 9; my translation.

[405] Alcina Franch, "Los dioses del panteón zapoteco," 14; my translation.

[406] Alcina Franch, "Los dioses del panteón zapoteco," 9; my translation.

[407] Alcina Franch, "Los dioses del panteón zapoteco," 10ff.

list.[408] It is, then, little wonder that Alcina Franch champions Balsalobre's writing as "our greatest and most explicit information" about Zapotec beliefs and practices.[409]

Again by contrast, Frank Boos, lawyer-turned-student of the Zapotec urns (to which I return shortly), though operating in much less circumspect ways, is similarly willing to grant Balsalobre the final authority in ascertaining a highly systematic deity list that, in Boos's view, is transferable into the pre-Columbian Monte Albán context. In his less scrupulous view, which makes no apparent use of Berlin's nuanced work and does not appeal directly to Diego Luis's famous declarations,

> "The deities described by Balsalobre fall into four categories: (1) Gods associated with the Zapotec calendars; (2) Gods of life and death; (3) Gods associated with sustenance; and, (4) Gods associated with events which constitute normal life."[410]

Then, uncritically accepting the notion of a chocked-full pantheon of gods and absenting all of the indigenous names, Boos fills out each of those four categories with a total of more than a dozen Zapotec deities, also ostensibly based on Balsalobre.[411] Though this copious outline,

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[408] See the chart on Alcina Franch, "Los dioses del panteón zapoteco," 39, which summarizes the 13 main Zapotec gods alongside the 13 main Mexica gods. That chart is reprinted in Alcina Franch, *Calendario y religión entre los zapotecos*, 118. While at points he stresses the abundant parallels between the Zapotec and other Mesoamerican parallels (e.g., Alcina Franch, "Los dioses del panteón zapoteco," 19, 38), in the end, he notes what he sees as the extreme differences—"there is not even a relative parallelism with regard to the order of the two series" (ibid., 39)—between the respective Zapotec and Mexica pantheons. Whitecotton, *The Zapotecs*, 159-65, by the way, is another who assumes there is a general unity among the beliefs and practices in various regions of Oaxaca, and thus he too uses the Balsalobre materials as a kind of cross-check and supplement that helps in recovering "the major deities in the Zapotec pantheon." On the specific correlation of the major deities among (1) Valley Zapotecs, (2) Sierra Zapotecs, (3) Southern (or Sola Valley) Zapotecs and (4) Aztecs, he produces a chart (ibid., 168), which is drawn from Alcina Franch, "Los dioses del panteón zapoteco," but that changes the order and shortens the list from 13 to ten.

[409] Alcina Franch, *Calendario y religión entre los zapotecos*, p. 95; my translation.

[410] Boos, *The Ceramic Sculptures of Ancient Oaxaca*, 19.

[411] Ostensibly based on Balsalobre's work, Boos, *The Ceramic Sculptures of Ancient Oaxaca*, 19, presents the following scheme: "[I] *The Gods of the Calendars* were those which the "wise men" or "teachers" consulted concerning the "ruling of their year"... and consisted of (1) a deity which was the "supreme and indescribable god;" (2) the God of the Fate of Mankind, of

which few Oaxacanist scholars endorse, provides him an expeditious means with which to organize more than 3,700 Zapotec urns that Boos locates in museums and collections throughout the Americas and Europe, it also may stand as the paramount instance of reifying a falsely systematic Zapotec theology. An unenviable distinction, to be sure.

Yet again by contrast, Michael Lind—who, like Alcina Franch, endeavors to compare and synthesize the details of all of the pertinent sources into one supposedly authoritative scheme—takes a far more rigorous approach to the Balsalobre materials. Leery that Diego Luis was "less than truthful with Balsalobre in naming the thirteen Zapotec deities that ruled the day numbers of the sacred calendar," Lind nonetheless reaffirms Berlin's view that the elderly priest's 1654 declaration provides the most reliable deity list.[412] But once more Lind's goal (about which I am highly dubious) is to fashion a more generalized, pan-Zapotec and canonical list by working to correlate the deities that were "confessed" to Balsalobre in the Sola Valley

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auguries, divinations, and portents; (3) the God of the Infernal Regions; (4) the Goddess of Hell, who was his consort; (5) the God of the Departed; and, (6) the God of Dreams. [II] *The Gods of Life and Death* consisted of (1) a deity which was the "supreme and indescribable god;" (2) the God of the Fate of Mankind, of auguries, divinations, and portents; (3) the God of the Infernal Regions; (4) the Goddess of Hell, who was his consort; (5) the God of the Departed; and, (6) the God of Dreams. [III] *The Gods Associated with Sustenance* were (1) the God of Lightning and Rain; (2) the God of Abundant Sustenance and Ample Harvest; (3) the God of Thanksgiving for the Good Harvest; (4) the God of the Planting of the Nopal Cactus; (5) the God of the Cutting of the First Chili; and, (6) the God of the Gathering of the Cochineal Insects. [IV] *The Gods Associated with the Events of Normal Life* exhibit a warm and human quality and in the order of affairs of life were (1) the Goddess to whom the newly wedded couple made sacrifice; (2) the God of the building of a new dwelling; (3) the Goddess of fecundity of a wife; (4) the God to whom a husband prayed when about to enjoy coition with a wife; (5) the Goddess of successful childbirth; (6) the God of the successful rearing of children; (7) the God of sickness, remedies, medicines and cures; (8) the God of old age and death." While Boos follows the lead of Caso and Bernal in nearly all matters, I do not find them (or anyone else) using this formulation of Zapotec deities.

[412] Lind, *Ancient Zapotec Religion*, 46, agrees that "Berlin correctly views the second list as the more accurate one," noting also that, "But inconsistencies occur even in the second list..." Lind, ibid, 40-41, provides a chart that compares Diego Luis's two lists; and he, ibid., 39, suggests several reasons why they may be different, the most likely being "the fact that nearly every given Mesoamerican deity had a variety of functions, manifestations, and even names and alter egos." Lind, "La religión estatal de Monte Albán y los sacerdotes de Cocijo de Lambityeco," 18-23, provides somewhat earlier but consistent comments on Balsalobre.

during the seventeenth-century with those that Córdova identified in the sixteenth-century Valley of Oaxaca. And to that synthetic comparison Lind adds two more ethnohistoric sources: the deities listed in seventeenth-century documents from the Sierra Juárez in northern Oaxaca that are analyzed by Alcina Franch and David Tavárez, and those in a sacred calendar from Totomachapan, southwest of Oaxaca City, which is analyzed by Ron van Meer.[413]

Lind's meticulous cross-checking of these sources (and a couple others) leads him to the bold, maybe brash, premise, not unlike Alcina Franch's, that "From an analysis of sixteen- and seventeenth-century documents, a pantheon of major Zapotec deities can be defined."[414] Somewhat differently, however, Lind settles on twelve principal deities, all of which appear in multiple ethnohistoric documents and all but one of which is on Diego Luis's famous 1654 list.[415] All but a different one of the 12 is also present in Córdova's *Vocabulario*.[416] While this may feel like a rewarding conclusion—and the cross-checking even allows Lind, ironically enough, to correct what he sees as Diego Luis's slightly flawed list—it also presents the disconcerting prospect that not one colonial-era source is fully credible in presenting "the real Zapotec pantheon." This is, in other words, a less blatant, more nuanced version of Boos's reification of an idealized, presumably pre-Columbian Zapotec pantheon of gods that no actual

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[413] Taking Diego Luis's 1654 deity list as his starting point, Lind, *Ancient Zapotec Religion*, 37, 41ff., explains his efforts to synthesize the deities described in Córdova and Balsalobre with those in Alcina Franch, "Los dioses del panteón zapoteco;" Alcina Franch, *Calendario y religión entre los zapotecos*; David Tavárez, "Nicachi Songs: Zapotec Ritual Texts and Postclassic Ritual Knowledge in Colonial Oaxaca," *FAMSI* (2005) http://www.famsi.org/reports/02050/02050 Tavarezoi.pdf; and Ron van Meer, "Análisis e interpretación de un libro calendárico zapoteco: el manuscrito de San Antonio Huitepec," *Cuadernos del* Sur, vol. 6, no. 15 (2000): 37-74.

[414] Lind, *Ancient Zapotec Religion*, 55.

[415] See the Table 3.2, "Summary of Zapotec deities," in Lind, *Ancient Zapotec Religion*, 56-57.

[416] Also, Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 99-103, though focusing more what these documents reveal about Zapotec calendars than gods per se, provides an account of the deity lists provided by Diego Luis, which Urcid compares to those from Córdova. See Urcid, ibid, 104, Table 3.15, for a side-by-side comparison of the 13 gods from Diego Luis and the Nahua series of 13 Lords of the Day; and Urcid, ibid., 105, Table 3.16, for a side-by-side comparison of the list of gods derived from Córdova's *Vocabulario* and the 13 gods that Balsalobre received from Diego Luis.

Zapotec individual, at least in the seventeenth century, was able to articulate.[417] And the proposal of a fully consistent Zapotec theology—that may (or may not) have existed in the ritual books, but was otherwise unbeknownst even to Zapotec priests—is a vintage instance of just the sort of the essentialism that contemporary scholars of religion are so determined to avoid.[418]

While that complaint raises important theroretical problems to which I return repeatedly (especially in the "Summary Thoughts and Methodological Cautions" at the end of this first major block), noteworthy before leaving Balsalobre is a line of argument in Berlin's work that reechoes López Austin's comments about the special vulnerability of state-sponsored gods and calendars in the face of Christian missionizing. In Berlin's seemingly non-controversial view, even in pre-Columbian times, though knowledge of the metaphysics of Zapotec religion (by which he means knowledge of these pantheon gods) was "essentially esoteric and limited to priests,"[419] the full Zapotec citizenry did know the main attributes of the major gods, not only because their public temples and the officiating priests were "in sight of all," but because "the

[417] Regarding the disconcerting notion of a scholar presenting a synthesized, idealized or "corrected" version of an indigenous religion that is not fully familiar to any member of the native group, later in the chapter I will discuss the parallel case of James R. Walker, physician on the South Dakota Pine Ridge Reservation from 1896 to 1914, whose famous book, *The Sun Dance and Other Ceremonies of the Oglala Division of the Teton Dakota* (1917), collects a synthesized version of Lakota mythology that, while removing all of the seeming inconsistencies from the many versions of the stories that Walker collects, eventuates in a contradiction-free corpus of myth that, ironically and problematically, is familiar to no Lakota.

[418] Though this is a subtle methodological issue, I note that by "essentialism" (which is closely associated with "reification"), I refer to complaints, since the 1980s very common among scholars of religion, about a false confidence that "universal essences" really exist and are somehow retrievable. On those grounds, religionists would object to the frequent assumption that Christianity, for instance, has some sort of context-free essence so that all of countless historical variations of Christianity can be measured against an "essentialized" (or "reified" or 'idealized") notion of what Christianity "really is." By the same token, throughout this Monte Albán project I will resist the usually-taken-for-granted notion that there is a "real Zapotec religion," which perhaps existed in the Classic era, against which we can measure the "corrupted" or "less-than-real" Zapotec religion of the colonial period. Though that essentialist assumption is most apparent in the work of José Alcina Franch and Michael Lind (and perhaps most successfully avoided in the work of Miguel Bartolomé), it is a methodological error committed by many Mesoamericanists.

[419] Berlin, *Las antiguas creencias en San Miguel Sola, Oaxaca, México*, 12; my translation.

faithful also had effigies of the same gods in their houses, and directed prayers to them."[420] In the Christianized colonial context, however, and especially in the face of Inquisition efforts—where worship of these calendrically-based gods was, of necessity, "practiced occultly without true fervor and without the splendor of external worship"—that gulf in knowledge between ritual experts and laity was, in Berlin's surmise, seriously exacerbated.[421]

Accordingly, while the competence of Zapotec priests that Balsalobre encountered was significantly compromised, and imperiled more still by the destruction of the ritual books, "the knowledge that the ordinary people had of the ancient pantheon was," according to Berlin, "extremely restricted."[422] In assessing this situation, Berlin, unlike contemporary ethnographers such as Bartolomé, who stress the continuity and even enhanced ingenuity of post-Conquest indigenous religion,[423] presents the older, perhaps still-prevailing position that colonial-era indigenous communities practiced "a decadent religion," in ever more serious disrepair as it departed ever farther from the original pre-Columbian religion, which was presumably widely understood, largely absent of contradictions and thus smooth functioning. In short, according to these familiar (albeit problematic) assessments, the "highly corrupted" colonial-era Zapotec religion that emerges from the Balsalobre materials, for all its distortions, provides a uniquely

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[420] Berlin, *Las antiguas creencias en San Miguel Sola, Oaxaca, México*, 12; my translation.

[421] Berlin's *Las antiguas creencias en San Miguel Sola, Oaxaca, México*, 12; my translation. Actually Berlin makes the broader (problematic) claim that, "If as a general rule in any religion, the knowledge of metaphysics is essentially esoteric and limited to priests, it was all the more so in a decadent religion, practiced occultly without true fervor and without splendor of external worship…" Ibid.; my translation.

[422] Berlin, *Las antiguas creencias en San Miguel Sola, Oaxaca, México*, 12; considers this "lack of exact knowledge among the general populace" as both the primary explanation for the apparent contradictions in the confessions elicited by Balsalobre and the primary rationale for relying on testimony of priests rather than laity. But he also emphasizes that even those ill-informed "ordinary Zapotecs" still did have sufficient confidence in the traditional gods and the now "underground" old ways to seek out consultations with the priests, and to follow their guidance in times of need.

[423] See my comments earlier in the chapter about Bartolomé's argument for a version of Zapotec "polytheism" and "receptivity of multiple experiences of the sacred," which remained intact throughout the colonial era and even now.

valuable resource for reconstructing a more pure, fully systematic and authentic pre-Columbian Zapotec religion.

In sum, while seldom mined for information about impersonal supernatural forces and entities or about ancestor worship,[424] the Balsalobre materials present, so it at first seems, a boon to recovery of an authoritative Zapotec pantheon of gods. Nevertheless, plausible as the set of assumptions presented by Berlin and reaffirmed, for instance, by Alcina Franch and Lind may sound, religionists would issue strong cautions against denigrating colonial-era religion as debased or "decadent," as though it were simply a faint copy of "the real Zapotec religion," which supposedly obtained, for instance, at Monte Albán. That is to say, while the Balsalobre corpus, and especially Diego Luis's neatly-numbered deity list, first seem to provide exactly the Ark-like solution to the Zapotec divinity conundrum for which scholars had been searching so long, these Inquisition-driven ethnohistorical materials may also make the largest contribution to the untoward tendency to reify and essentialize pre-Columbian "Zapotec religion" as a fully coherent, contradiction-free theological system—which I am persuaded it never was.[425] Although this sort of paired, but problematic, deprecation of indigenous religion in the "contact zone" and corresponding idealization of pre-Columbian religion is by no means unique to Oaxacan studies (and shortly I will discuss precisely the same distortions in the study of Lakota religion), it is tendency against which we need to be on guard throughout this project.

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[424] While discussion of the Balsalobre materials usually focuses overwhelmingly on the enumeration of the gods in a supposed Zapotec pantheon, the wider corpus of materials on seventeenth-century religion in the Sola Valley discussed by Berlin *Las antiguas creencias en San Miguel Sola, Oaxaca,* also does present less discussed but highly useful materials on indigenous engagements with the "heterogeneous space" of the natural landscape, and thus with less personal supernatural forces and entities. Likewise, were one to reread those materials with an eye to royal ancestor worship, there is evidence to be had.

[425] In other words, frequently the two-pronged presumption that emerges from the Balsalobre body of ethnohistoric materials is, on the one hand, that colonial-era Zapotecs were involved in what Berlin terms "a decadent religion" insofar as even priests were poorly informed about their own traditions, which were by then debased and fragmented; but, on the other hand, as a corollary, pre-Columbian Zapotecs—for instance, at Monte Albán—are credited with "a more pure and uncontaminated religion" wherein priests and laity alike were well-informed about a religious system that was fully congruous, legible to all and largely absent of inconsistencies (i.e., an idealized view of Monte Alban religion that I am orking to avoid).

d. The Gods of Fray Francisco de Burgoa's History of Oaxaca (1670): Antagonistic, Sanitized and Informing Interest in Indians

A fourth eminently influential ethnohistorical resource—the seventeenth-century writings of yet another Dominican priest, Fray Francisco de Burgoa—while undeniably the most important colonial source on numerous features of Zapotec religion, is far less useful and influential than Córdova, the *Relaciones Geográficas* or Balsalobre on this topic of conceptions of divinity (priority II-A). Consequently, Burgoa will not figure large in my analysis this aspect of Monte Albán's ritual-architectural program. And consequently, I present here a very attenuated treatment of Fray Burgoa that focuses on what he does contribute concerning Zapotec divinity conceptions. Yet, because Burgoa will be so important in subsequent chapters—more important than Córdova or Balsalobre—I do provide comments on his biography and writings, along with some observations about the scholarly use and reception of his work, that are parallel to those of the other two Dominican writers.

Born into a wealthy Spanish family in 1606 in Antequera, Oaxaca, a direct descendant of the first conquistadors of the province, Burgoa took his final vows as a Dominican in 1629.[426] During a career that overlaps with that of Gonzalo de Balsalobre, the much more famous Burgoa had, by 1649, embarked on the first of two stints as Provincial of the Province of San Hipólito, a role that entailed participation in the general assembly of his order at Rome in 1656. He returned to Mexico with the title of Vicar General for the Order in New Spain; and he served also as a member of the Inquisition of Spain and as Commissary and Inspector of Libraries of New Spain, positions that afforded him access to scores of missionary reports and ecclesiastical judgments in which such incidents were transcribed. In 1662, he again became Provincial of Oaxaca. In that

[426] For older, oft-reiterated biographical information on Burgoa, see, for instance, Adolph F. Bandelier, "Francisco Burgoa," *Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. Charles Herbermann, vol. 3 (New York: Robert Appleton, 1913). Also see Ernst J. Burrus, S.J., "Religious Chronicles and Historians: A Summary with Annotated Bibliography," *Handbook of Middle American Indians*, vol. 13, "Guide to Ethnohistorical Sources, part two," vol. ed. Howard F. Cline, gen. ed. Robert Wauchope (London: University of Texas Press, 1973), 156-57. And for more current and fuller information, see Judith Francis Zeitlin, "Locating the Hidden Transcripts of Colonialism," 366-71. Also see María de los Angeles Romero Frizzi, "Burgoa, Francisco de," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Mesoamerican Cultures*, ed. Carrasco, vol. 1, 106-7.

post he made an effort to visit many parts of Oaxaca, paying special attention to indigenous antiquities, legends, institutions, beliefs and ritual practices; and eventually he acquired fluency in both Mixtec and Zapotec, with the aim of writing a thoroughgoing history of Oaxaca, a goal that, despite his long labors, was never completed in its entirety.

Nonetheless, where Juan de Córdova's *Vocabulario* (with which, as noted earlier, Burgoa was well aware) was based primarily on the Valley of Oaxaca and his near-contemporary Balsalobre's commentary on idolatrous practices was focused on the Sola Valley region, Burgoa's histories are much more widely framed both geographically and thematically.[427] Prior to his death at Teopozotlán (a.k.a. Zaachila Yoo) in 1681, by which time he was highly respected, Burgoa served as Vicar in Zaachila, the former capital of the Zapotecs, presumably where he did much of his writing. Living within a few kilometers of the overgrown ruins of Monte Albán, which attracted little attention at that point, he certainly must have visited the site, but never explicitly mentions it.[428] He does, however, write a great deal about the living Zapotec town of Mitla, which is among the most frequently cited segments of his work.

With respect to his major writings, Burgoa composed two massive works—invariably described with qualified commendation as "prolix yet valuable treatises"—which he conceived as a single work, though they differ in their respective contents.[429] Despite never being fully finished, together they stand as the first substantial historical texts on the area written in Spanish by a Oaxaca-born resident. His *Palestra historial* or *Historia de la Provincia de San Hipolito de*

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[427] As noted earlier, comments about Córdova's career and *Vocabulario* appear, for instance, in Burgoa, *Geográfica Descripción*, 219, 221-24, 226. By contrast, though the career of Burgoa overlaps with that of Balsalobre, I am not aware of any reference they make to one another in their respective writings.

[428] Ignacio Bernal, *A History of Mexican Archaeology: The Vanished Civilizations of Middle America* (London: Thames and Hudson, Ltd., 1980), 45, for instance, comments on the fact that "Burgoa does not mention Monte Albán," which was attracting very little attention at that point, but has extensive comments on the buildings, priests and worship at the living Zapotec town of Mitla. As I will note momentarily, Leopoldo Batres has the impression that Burgoa did visit Monte Albán, though never mentions it by name.

[429] Burrus, "Religious Chronicles and Historians," 157.

Oaxaca, del Orden de Predicadores ("History of the Province of San Hipolito of Oaxaca, of the Preachers Order"), published in 1670, is a typical chronicle that focuses on the activities of the Dominican order in Oaxaca.[430] It begins with the arrival in 1526 of Dominicans in Mexico City, and shortly thereafter their appearance in Oaxaca. He rehearses, usually in highly flattering ways, the lives of many missionaries already biographized in the more broadly framed work of Dominican historian Augustín Dávila Padilla;[431] but Burgoa emphasizes their apostolate in numerous areas of Oaxaca even before formal establishment of the Province of San Hipolito in 1592. Irrespective of the uniformly eulogistic focus on missionaries, scattered through the work are important bits of information on numerous Oaxacan indigenous groups and practices.

Far more influential for subsequent Oaxacanists is Burgoa's *Geográfica Descripción de la partes septentrional del Polo Ártico de la America y nueva Iglesia de las Indias Occidentales* ("Geographic Description of the Northern Parts of the Arctic Pole of America and the New Church of the West Indies"), which was published in 1674.[432] *Geográfica Descripción*, which has two volumes and 80 chapters, also details the histories of the Dominican monasteries and the work of their friars among the Indians, but with much less attention to biographical detail than his *Palestra historial.* Again the data run to about mid-seventeenth century. This ceaselessly

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[430] Francisco de Burgoa, *Palestra historial*, Publicaciones del Archivo General de la Nación, vols. 23-24 (México: Talleres Gráficos de la Nación, reprinted 1934 [originally 1670]); also available as Francisco de Burgoa, *Palestra historial de virtudes y ejemplares apostólicos fundada del celo de insignes héroes de la sagrada orden de predicadores en este nuevo mundo de las América en las indias occidentales*," tereca edición (México: Editorial Porrúa, S.A., 1989 [originally 1670]). A more detailed index for this work appears as Grace Metcalfe, "Indice de la Palestra Historial," *Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City Boletín,* vol. 17, no. 4 (1946): 1-22.

[431] On Agustín Dávila Padilla, O.P. (1562-1604), see Burrus, "Religious Chronicles and Historians," 155-56.

[432] Francisco de Burgoa, *Geográfica Descripción de la partes septentrional del Polo Ártico de la America y nueva Iglesia de las Indias Occidentales,* publicaciones del Archivo General de la Nación, vols. 25 y 26 (México: Talleres Gráficos de la Nación, reprinted 1934 [originally 1674]); also available as Francisco de Burgoa, *Geográfica Descripción,* vol. 2 (México: Editorial Porrúa, 1989 [originally 1674]). A more detailed index for this work appears as Grace Metcalfe, "Indice de la Geográfica Descripción," *Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City Boletín,* vol. 17, no. 4 (1946): 1-31

quoted work, which draws on some of the same materials used for his earlier chronicle of the Dominican order, intersperses missionary history with native oral histories and firsthand observations of many sites and regions. Like the short village-specific *Relaciones Geográficas*, Burgoa's text includes abundant information about economic activities, community organization, food sources, flora, fauna and insects, etc.; and, not surprisingly, Burgoa devotes abundant attention to religious beliefs and practices, though, "he presents topics that challenge neither the prevailing hegemony of Catholicism nor the Dominicans' monopoly on religious affairs in these doctrinal matters."[433] His sweeping but incautious mix of resources make *Geográfica Descripción* "an unrivalled font of information about Oaxaca's native communities in the seventeenth century and about native history as it was transmitted and understood 150 years after the Spanish conquest."[434]

Regarding the use of Burgoa's *Geográfica Descripción* as a resource for the study of pre-Columbian religion—again, a purpose for which the text was not really intended—virtually every scholar expresses an equivocal blend of appreciation and skepticism. To rely on it requires an especially judicious hermeneutical exercise in separating wheat from chaff. Already by the mid-nineteenth century in first place as the most influential documentary source on Oaxaca's indigenous culture, religion and history, Burgoa's work—and especially his oft-referenced comments about much-visited Mitla—was inspiring mixed reviews as both indispensible and problematic.[435] For instance, French explorer Désiré Charnay, who visits Mitla in 1859 and again in 1882, relies on the authority of Burgoa to opine that "the original name of Mitla was

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[433] Zeitlin, "Locating the Hidden Transcripts of Colonialism," 368.

[434] Zeitlin, "Locating the Hidden Transcripts of Colonialism," 366. Additionally, Burgoa published a number of sermons and wrote *Situación Astronomica de la Panoramica de Santo Domingo de Oaxaca* (Astronomical Situation of the Panoramic of Santo Domingo) and an unpublished work entitled "Itinerario de Oaxaca a Roma y de Roma a Oaxaca" (Itinerary from Oaxaca to Rome and from Rome to Oaxaca), apparently inspired by his 1656 trip to Rome.

[435] For instance, Bernd Fahmel Beyer, "Cuatro siglos de interpretación de la arquitectura monumental prehispánica del Valle de Oaxaca, 1580-1984," en *Cuadernos de Arquitectura Mesoamericana*, vol. 7 (1986), 10, based on what he sees as Burgoa's second-hand and unreliable descriptions of Mitla, expresses skepticism that Burgoa ever visited Mitla (which seems to me unlikely given its fame and proximity to Oaxaca City).

Liobaa or *Yobaa*, the 'place of tombs;'" but Charnay finds Burgoa's description of the site so inaccurate that he doubts that the friar ever visited Mitla (which he certainly must have).[436] Reconfirming the high repute of Burgoa's work in 1880, Adolph Bandelier wrote that *Geográfica descripción* "is regarded... as the leading work on Oajaca. I have never seen it—it is exceedingly rare;"[437] but by his *Report of an Archaeological Tour in Mexico, 1881*, in the context of a discussion of Mitla, Bandelier, finally having located the famous text, complains about "the confused and diffuse tales of Burgoa," which he nevertheless continues to see as "valuable, though not absolutely reliable on several topics."[438]

American civil engineer Louis H. Aymé, who made measurements of the Mitla ruins in 1881, apparently pleased that he had wrangled a copy of the then-elusive manuscript, devotes a quarter of his report to a five-page quote of *Geográfica Descripción*, which he considers "the earliest description of Mitla... in the highest degree valuable and interesting, and generally correct," but also wrong in some particulars.[439] Less critical, Mexican Inspector of

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[436] Désiré Charnay, *The Ancient Cities of the New World, Being Voyages and Explorations in Mexico and Central America from 1857-1882*, trans. J. Gonino and Helen S. Conant (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1887), 508 (italics his), who cites Burgoa, "Description Géographique," chap. 58. On Charnay's (doubtful) surmise that "It is probable that Burgoa never visited Mitla, for he only mentions one palace, whereas eight were still standing in his time," see Charnay, ibid., 511.

[437] Adolph F. A. Bandelier, "Notes on the Bibliography of Yucatán and Central America: Comprising Yucatán, Chiapas, Guatemala (the Ruins of Palenque, Ocosingo, and Copan), and Oaxaca (the Ruins of Mitla)," in *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society, October 21, 1880* (Worcester: Press of Chas. Hamilton, 1881), 116.

[438] Adolph F. A. Bandelier, *Report of an Archaeological Tour in Mexico, 1881* (Boston: Cupples, Upham, and Company; and London: N. Trubner and Co., 1884), 324. Bandelier nonetheless appeals to Burgoa's *Geográfica descripción* on ibid., 268, 269, 272—where he notes that "the main authority for these tales [about pre-Columbian Oaxaca] is, of course, Burgoa, *Geográfica Descripción*—273, 284, 302-3 and 320-21. (The quote "valuable, though absolutely reliable on several topics," actually comes from the little biographical article, Bandelier, "Francisco Burgoa.")

[439] In Oaxaca to assist in the construction of the railroad, Louis H. Aymé, *Notes on Mitla, Oaxaca, Mexico: With Plans and Measurements of the Ruins* (Worcester: Press of Chas. Hamilton, 1882), 5-9, notes Bandelier's inability to locate the text in 1880 and quotes a translation by Stephen Salisbury of Burgoa's *Geográfica Descripción*, vol. II, part 2, chap. 53. Regarding his assessment that Burgoa's account of Mitla is generally correct but wrong on some

Archaeological Monuments Leopoldo Batres opens a 1902 account of his work at Monte Albán by quoting a bizarre, Biblically-informed section of *Geográfica Descripción* in which Burgoa suggests that the huge mounds of (what seems to be) Monte Albán were created by "Our Lord" following the flood.[440] More typical, even in lay sources, is the equivocation expressed in the first *National Geographic* article on Oaxaca, which, in 1910, assesses Burgoa's account of the Mitla ruins as "an interesting and valuable description, although not strictly accurate in every particular."[441]

Again it is Eduard Seler's too-narrowly-titled *Wall Paintings of Mitla* (1895, 1902), which contains his seminal article on Zapotec deities and religious conceptions, that establishes a new standard for the suitably discriminating use of Burgoa's writings.[442] Constantly his heavy

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particulars, see Aymé, ibid., 16-17. In the same era, Hubert Howe Bancroft, *The Native Races*, vol. IV, *Antiquities* (San Francisco: The History Company, Publishers, 1886), 375, in his section on the ruins of Oaxaca, which were are that time "only slightly known to explorers," capitalizes on Burgoa's *Geográfica Descripción* for "mention and slight description of the burial places, caves, temples, etc., of the natives, some of the seen by the author."

[440] Leopoldo Batres, *Explorations of Mount Albán* [sic], *Oaxaca, Mexico* (México: Gante St. Press, 1902), 5-6, credits this Biblically-informed quote about the formation of impressive mounds in the Valley of Oaxaca—which begins, "Our Lord left them, after the deluge, in this muddy and leveled earth, a very large cleft with several crests of more than two hundred paces in width..."—to Burgoa, *Geográfica Descripción*, page 197. Though, as noted, Caso and Bernal both maintain that Burgoa never visited, or at least never wrote about, Monte Albán, Batres, ibid., 6, concludes, "As the reader may see by the above quotation, Burgoa's record seems to have been a reference to Mount Albán [sic], although he does not state its name."

[441] Jeremiah Zimmerman, "Hewers of Stone," *National Geographic Magazine*, vol. 21, no. 12 (December, 1910), 1019, is only half correct in noting that "Father Burgoa... saw these buildings at the time of the Spanish conquest and when they were in far better preservation than today..."

[442] Regarding Eduard Seler's numerous visits to Mitla, on all of which he was accompanied by his wife and collaborator Cecilia Sachs, their initial 11-day reconnaissance of the site came in 1881 during the first of six trips from Germany to the Americas. (Just prior to that they visited for the first time Monte Albán and other central Oaxaca sites with prominent doctor and antiquity collector Fernando Sologuren.) This seems to be the trip on which Seler assembled most of the material on which he based "The Wall Paintings of Mitla," which includes his seminal "Deities and Religious Conceptions of the Zapotecs." The detailed account of their travel itineraries in Sepúlveda y Herrera, *Eduard Seler en México*, 19-40, apprises us that the Selers visited Mitla again during their second expedition in December 1895; again during their fourth trip (September 1904-January 1905); and yet again they visited Monte Albán and Mitla

reliance on *Geográfica Descripción* (he seldom cites *Palestra historial*) is appreciative but heavily qualified. Seler, on the one hand, sees the source as uniquely important,

> "because it contains the account of an eyewitness who saw the monuments [of Mitla] when they were still in a tolerably intact condition, furnished still with the roof, which is now entirely gone; [and] because this passage is the only one I know of, dating from ancient times, which gives an explanation concerning the purpose and significance of the different buildings."[443]

That singular import is enhanced, moreover, because, like the then-scarce Córdova text that Seler managed to secure, Burgoa's tome was "extremely rare,"[444] which provides Seler's justification for quoting nearly the same long passage reproduced by Aymé.[445]

On the other hand, Seler's attention to details leads him to constant corrections concerning Burgoa's inaccurate formal descriptions of Mitla structures.[446] While frequently in accord with Burgoa's comments about the function of Mitla's temples, tombs and palaces, Seler challenges some of those; and though he sometimes accepts Burgoa's reconstructions of

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during their fifth, longer but less-well-documented trip (August 1905-October 1907). Nonetheless, irrespective of these all these trips to and through Oaxaca, aside from "The Wall Paintings of Mitla," almost none of Seler's enormous oeuvre (except for important work that addresses Mixtec codices) is trained on Oaxaca.

[443] Seler, "The Wall Paintings of Mitla," 249-52, provides a long quote from Burgoa's *Geográfica Descripción*, chap. 53. Though not identical with the passage quoted by Aymé, *Notes on Mitla, Oaxaca, Mexico*, 5-9, it comes from the same chapter.

[444] Regarding the extreme rarity of Burgoa's *Geográfica Descripción*, and thus limited use that scholars of this generation could make of the text, Seler, "The Wall Paintings of Mitla," 252, notes that, "In spite of much inquiry, I have heard of no library in Germany or Austria which contains the work." Though cited with some frequency at least since the mid-nineteenth century, it is telling of the limited availability of Burgoa's *Geográfica Descripción* that Linné, *Zapotecan Antiquities* (1938), 172, introduces a very thorough 16-page bibliography on Oaxaca sources, which includes Burgoa's *Palestra historial*, with a note lamenting that, irrespective of its "very great importance treating of the Zapotecs, I unfortunately have not had access to... Burgoa's *Geográfica Descripción*." Even now, it is, puzzlingly, far simpler to locate a copy of *Palestra historial* than the more important *Geográfica Descripción*.

[445] Seler, "The Wall Paintings of Mitla," 252.

[446] See, for instance, Seler, "The Wall Paintings of Mitla," 253-55.

historical events, others he contests as "not at all authentic."[447] Additionally, Seler reaffirms a good deal of what Burgoa says about the Zapotec priesthood and even ritual practices, including human sacrifice;[448] but when Seler's interest turns to the specifics of the calendar and the Zapotec gods, he looks far more often to Córdova than to Burgoa.[449] And when he undertakes the interpretation of the more specific meanings and "mythologic content" of the Mitla murals, which he regards as the climax of this study, Seler eschews almost any reliance on either of these Dominican authors.

Subsequent scholars likewise find ways to navigate Fray Burgoa's bloated prose and incessant detours into the accomplishments of Dominicans via carefully qualified use of his writings. Alfonso Caso, for instance, laments that "for the region of Oaxaca, information from the first chroniclers is almost completely absent," which makes "the relatively extensive information on the ancient history of the indigenous people of Oaxaca" in Burgoa's work, "if not the only source, the fundamental one" for students of the area.[450] Joseph Whitecotton complains about his "constant digressions and citations of Biblical stories" and the inconsistencies that arise from his indiscriminate mix of legends, previous authors and his own eyewitness impressions, but nonetheless describes Burgoa as "the nearest Oaxacan counterpart" to Bernardino de Sahagún or Alonso de Zorita, who left detailed accounts of the native culture and society of the Aztecs.[451] For Whitecotton,

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[447] See, for instance, Seler, "The Wall Paintings of Mitla," 261.

[448] See, for instance, Seler, "The Wall Paintings of Mitla," 275-79. Particularly notable is Seler's refutation (ibid., 277-78) of later Oaxaca historians such as José Antonio Gay and Manuel Martinez Gracida who, "apparently from a sentiment of patriotism," deny that Zapotecs performed human sacrifices in favor reaffirming Burgoa's express statement (*Geográfica Descripción*, chap. 58) that Zapotecs, "while not so fond of carnage as the Mexicans," did indeed, on some infrequent occasions, perform human sacrifices "with special solemnity and elaborate ceremonies." Seler, ibid., 278, marshals confirming evidence of Burgoa's view on infrequent Zapotec human sacrifices from Córdova's *Vocabulario*.

[449] Seler, "The Wall Paintings of Mitla," 266ff.

[450] Caso, *Culturas mixteca y zapoteca* (1936), *Obras* reprint 584; my translation.

[451] Whitecotton, *The Zapotecs*, 87-88.

> "Burgoa's accounts remain the primary chronicles for Oaxacan history during the pre-Spanish as well as the early Colonial period, even though he, like most Spanish chroniclers, frequently failed to differentiate between data he collected and those that were borrowed or copied from other sources."[452]

Michael Lind is less charitable in noting that Burgoa's uniquely famous works, which he quotes with great regularity, concentrate so fully on recording (and eulogizing) the history of Dominicans and their missionization efforts that "Only incidentally does he refer to the Indians and their religious beliefs."[453] José Alcina Franch, by contrast, refers to "the excellent pen of Burgoa" and finds abundant ways to capitalize on his observations of colonial-era Zapotec religious beliefs and practices.[454] But Ernst J. Burrus, in a wide survey of colonial-era historians, offers this more characteristically ambivalent assessment:

> "Of all the chronicles mentioned in this survey, the two by Francisco de Burgoa easily hold first place for inflated style and bombastic phraseology, especially the opening remarks to various chapters. Yet for the important area of Oaxaca, and the numerous subjects he treats, Burgoa's works are indispensable and irreplaceable sources."[455]

A less conflicted Ignacio Bernal alludes to "the customary clumsy style" of Burgoa's writing and describes him as "insufferable," apparently irked most by his tendency to interpret indigenous Oaxacan monuments with reference both to the Bible and to buildings elsewhere in the world.[456]

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[452] Whitecotton, The Zapotecs, 87.

[453] Lind, *Ancient Zapotec Religion*, 701, n.1. Lind, like Seler and most others, frequently cites Burgoa's *Geográfica Descripción*, but seldom if ever, refers to *Palestra historial*. Also, instead of seconding Lind's description of Burgoa's interest in Indian religions as "incidental," which implies a kind of neutrality, I am persuaded by Judith Zeitlin (cited momentarily) that Burgoa's primary agenda of depicting Dominican conversion initiatives as more successful than they actually were required him to address Indian religious beliefs and practices in ways that are better characterized as "strategic" or, in her term, "sanitized."

[454] Alcina Franch, *Calendario y religión entre los zapotecos*, 133; my translation. Alcina Franch is among the few who cites both Burgoa's *Geográfica Descripción* and *Palestra historial*.

[455] From Burrus, "Religious Chronicles and Historians: A Summary with Annotated Bibliography," 156.

[456] Bernal, *A History of Mexican Archaeology*, 39, 127. 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

Equally aware of Burgoa's excesses, Marcus and Flannery nevertheless consider, as do nearly all Oaxacanists, his two books easily the most important complement to those of Córdova, Balsalobre and the *Relaciones Geográficas* as colonial-era sources that "supply important data on Zapotec religion."[457]

Ethnohistorian Judith Francis Zeitlin, while also underscoring Burgoa's "frustrating penchant for turgid pious digressions,"[458] provides a more subtle evaluation of the priestly and colonial climate in which Burgoa operated, and thus of the mixed merits of his work as a scholarly source on indigenous cultural and religious practices. On the large downside, Zeitlin explains that, along with the same prejudices of Christian exclusivity that inform all of these colonial writers, Burgoa wrote in the context of civil authorities' more specific attempts to weaken the clerical base of the Dominicans, which required him "to emphasize the great effort and success achieved by his missionary order in the salvation of Oaxaca's native souls."[459] His goal of glorifying the accomplishments of past and current Dominican missionaries compelled him to present the native populations of his time as docile and obedient converts, and, at the same time, to avoid entirely mention of major events like the native rebellion of 1660 in Tehuantepec, which would have provided occasion "to question the image of good spiritual guidance that the Dominicans wanted to promote."[460] As Zeitlin explains, we must be wary, then, that Burgoa presents "a sanitized portrait" of the beliefs and practices of indigenous communities that are, in fact, considerably less orderly, compliant and far down the path of Christian conversion than he leads us to believe.[461] For his purposes, all indigenous colonial-era

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Texas Press, 1965), 791, provides this more typically mixed, if less candid, assessment: "All things considered, Fr. Francisco de Burgoa is the most valuable chronicler of Oaxaca, in spite of his many faults."

[457] Marcus and Flannery, "Ancient Zapotec Ritual and Religion," 57.

[458] Zeitlin, "Locating the Hidden Transcripts of Colonialism," 366.

[459] Zeitlin, "Locating the Hidden Transcripts of Colonialism," 386.

[460] Zeitlin, "Interrogando el pasado a través de perspectivas históricas y arqueológicas," 650; my translation. Zeitlin, "Locating the Hidden Transcripts of Colonialism," 386, makes the same point.

[461] Zeitlin, "Locating the Hidden Transcripts of Colonialism," 386.

religious practices must be depicted either as "incidents of continued idolatry unmasked by zealous missionaries" or, contradistinctly, as "examples of pious converts demonstrating true Christian zeal."[462] And that tendency can lead him to obfuscate precisely the endurant pre-Columbian beliefs and practices that most interest students of ancient Oaxaca.

On the more limited upside, however, Zeitlin also argues that subsequent scholars actually benefit from Burgoa's "external perspective," an "outsider's vision" like our own that prompted him to explain indigenous institutions and practices that insider participants would feel no need to address and might not even notice.[463] In that sense, Burgoa's labored and redundant accounts of native ways are actually an asset.

Given all these uneven tradeoffs, Burgoa's abundant but always parochial depictions of indigenous religion—which are far stronger on ritual practices and on the activities of the hierarchical native priesthood than on their belief systems per se—are much less helpful in ascertaining Zapotec conceptions of divinity than any of the previous three ethnographic sources. In Burgoa's *Palestra historial* and the more useful *Geográfica Descripción* we find nothing so direct as Córdova's or Balsalobre's enumeration of their gods, and arguably less certain evidence than that in at least some of the *Relaciones Geográficas*. Consequently, Burgoa's work will prove much more valuable in my subsequent discussions of the ritual-architectural commemoration of political authority (politics, priority II-C) and various aspects of the presentation of ritual-architectural events (priorities III-A, III-B, III-C and III-D) than in the present discussion of the expression and commemoration of divinity (priority II-A).

Be that as it may, advocates for each of the main alternate schools of thought concerning Zapotec conceptions of divinity once again can summon from Burgoa's lumbering *Geográfica*

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[462] Zeitlin, "Locating the Hidden Transcripts of Colonialism," 367. As Zeitlin, ibid., 368, explains, "[In Burgoa's work] aspects of prehispanic ritual practice are described freely, but in contexts that serve either to explain some prognostication of the eventual Spanish conquest of the Zapotecs and the appearance of friars in their midst, or to provide background on discovered acts of idolatry by nominally Christian Indians."

[463] Zeitlin, "Interrogando el pasado a través de perspectivas históricas y arqueológicas," 649.

Descripción what they regard as supporting evidence for their respective opinions. Those who are adamant that Zapotecs operated with a polytheistic pantheon can highlight Burgoa's allusions to specific deities like the God of Maize,[464] or his identification of various priests as *cope vitoo* or "guardians of the gods,"[465] or as *vijanas*, a term he translates as "dedicated to the gods."[466] Or, perhaps most obviously useful in this regard are Burgoa's boundless descriptions of sacrifices and petitions being offered to anthropomorphic "idols." Lind, for instance, draws on his account of a circumstance in which Zapotec priests undertook autosacrificial bloodletting and smeared blood on "four green stone idols in the shape of men, although deformed and with frightening features," as definitive evidence that Zapotecs worshipped "gods having human attributes as opposed to being impersonal supernatural forces."[467]

Alternatively, those who are insistent on a more animatistic view of ancient Oaxacan religion wherein impersonal life forces prevail over personal gods can also find some apparent support in Burgoa. Useful in that respect are his innumerable descriptions of sanctuaries located outside of villages in caves, along rivers, on rocky promontories and mountaintops—all conceived as places of special "access to the sacred" or, by his description, "oracles" at which

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[464] Burgoa, *Geográfica Descripción*, vol. 2, 268-69; cited by Lind, *Ancient Zapotec Religion*, 90.

[465] Burgoa, *Geográfica Descripción*, vol. 2, 350; cited by Whitecotton, *The Zapotecs*, 147, who notes that this is one of three types of Mitla priests among which Burgoa distinguishes.

[466] Burgoa, *Geográfica Descripción*, vol. 2, chap. 58, 167; cited by Seler, "The Wall Paintings of Mitla," 277, and by Lind, *Ancient Zapotec Religion*, 80.

[467] Lind, *Ancient Zapotec Religion*, 88-89, comments this account from Burgoa, *Geográfica Descripción*, vol. 2, 90-91. In this case, Burgoa is recounting a sixteenth-century rite that he himself did not witness. Lind, *Ancient Zapotec Religion*, 9, appeals to the same Burgoa example as an instance of the sort of "descriptions [that] clearly indicate that Zapotec idols looked a lot like humans and fit both Nicholson's characterization of them as anthropomorphic deities and López Austin's description of gods having human attributes as opposed to being impersonal supernatural forces." Lind, ibid., 49-51, elaborates and provides more examples in which Burgoa reports on "multitudes of statues of deities among the Zapotecs," which were variously made of stone, wood, ceramic or metal. And, to make his point, on at least four occasions Lind uses essentially the same phrase "Unfortunately, Burgoa fails to identify the deities represented by the stone idols..." Ibid., 88, 89 (twice), and 92.

people are afforded special favors, cures and knowledge.[468] And Joyce Marcus, for instance, can interpret Burgoa's vivid accounts of Mitla priests (the *uija-tao* or "great seers") effecting a trance state, perhaps with the aid of hallucinogens, in order to exercise "their chief function of consultation with the supernatural on important matters," not as occasions to enter into conversation with personal gods, but rather as initiatives in facilitating the flow of spiritually potent but inanimate forces and energies.[469]

Likewise, those inclined to accentuate royal ancestor worship can appeal to Burgoa's many references to Mitla as a burial ground for the highest-ranking Zapotec nobility who continued to exercise influence long after their deaths.[470] Also useful in support of the notion of the worship of apotheosized humans is his description of the mountain sanctuary above Tehuantepec dedicated to Pinopiaa, apparently a goddess of the earth, who, according to tradition, was a daughter of the Zapotec king Cocijo-eza who had been changed into stone after her death and then memorialized with a much-visited cone-shaped white statue.[471] Or advantageous to the same purpose is Burgoa's recounting of the elaborate burial of a great priest, Coquitela of Choapa, whose body, he tells us, "was carried with great pomp of jewels, gold, choice blankets and other precious items, and deposited in a mountain sepulcher along with live

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[468] Of abundant examples of worship spaces at outstanding features in the Oaxacan landscape, Burgoa, *Geográfica Descripción*, vol. 1, 276, describes an "oracle" outside the Mixtec village of Achiutla, an example that is cited by Seler, "The Wall Paintings of Mitla," 293, and discussed by Ronald Spores, "Mixtec Religion," Topic 96 in *The Cloud People*, eds. Flannery and Marcus, 343. A Zapotec counterpart to this Mixtec "oracle" comes in Burgoa, *Geográfica Descripción*, chap. 53, at which point he describes a very ancient sanctuary atop a rocky crag opposite the houses of the ancient and famous village of Teotitlan, where, in the paraphrase of Seler, "Deities and Religious Conceptions of the Zapotecs," 296, "an idol uttered oracles in a terrific, rumbling voice, which sounded as if it came from the depths of the earth; and this idol was said 'to have come from heaven, in the form of a bird, in a luminous constellation.'"

[469] Both Marcus, "Zapotec Religion," 350, and Marcus and Flannery, "Ancient Zapotec Ritual and Religion," 60, discuss Burgoa's comments about "the *uija-tao* or 'great seer' who had as his chief function the consultation with the supernatural on important matters."

[470] See, for instance, Burgoa, *Geográfica Descripción*, vol. 2, 121-25, 165-75, 338-59.

[471] Burgoa, *Geográfica Descripción*, chap, 71; cited by Seler, "Deities and Religious Conceptions of the Zapotecs," 301.

Indians to serve him in the Elysian Fields of the afterlife"[472] In short, Burgoa's wide-ranging work—which draws together a very uncareful conglomeration of legends, previous accounts and eyewitness testimony, all filtered through his seventeenth-century Dominican lens—provides an enormous, overstocked and somewhat sloppy warehouse that might be accessed in support of any number of different Zapotec conceptions of divinity.

In final sum, then, on the broader promise and precarities of depending on colonial-era ethnographic sources to distill pre-Columbian Zapotec conceptions of divinity—and of relying on those scholars who have relied so heavily on these xenophobic writings—Judith Zeitlin offers advice that merges with my own persistent concerns about essentializing or reifying "ancient Zapotec religion." In reply to her own question, "How appropriate are these Spanish reports as instruments for understanding the pre-Hispanic past?" Zeitlin cautions:

> "Obviously we need to be careful when we use a source like Burgoa, who wrote 150 years after the Conquest. Much had changed in indigenous society during the period after the devastating decline in population and social and economic dislocations. We should not "essentialize" the Zapotec and Mixtec cultures by assuming that there was some sort of common stock of eternal values and beliefs that were not contaminated by colonialism…"[473]

In other words, because they seem, at first, to provide the most direct answers to our questions about Zapotec theological conceptions, the greatest danger of reliance on these hybrid colonial texts is a kind of seduction into believing that they teach us more than they actually do. Especially the neat deity lists of Córdova and Diego Luis, because they provide orderly and explicit (which is not to say empirically correct) replies to our questions about Zapotec religious beliefs that neither ethnography nor archaeology can match, have fostered the (mis)impressions both that pre-Columbian Zapotecs had a balanced and contradiction-free pantheon of gods and that we can recover that canonical theological system—neither of which I think is the case. Again prefiguring my interim "Summary Thoughts and Methodological Cautions" to this large

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[472] Burgoa, *Geográfica Descripción*, vol. 2, 151; quoted by Alcina Franch, *Calendario y religión entre los zapotecos*, 166-67; may translation.

[473] Zeitlin, "Interrogando el pasado a través de perspectivas históricas y arqueológicas," 650; my translation.

historiographical block, as the most explicit, most influential and most determinative sources on Zapotec conceptions of divinity, these priestly writings are also the most prone to guide us into a falsely essentialized picture of pre-Columbian Zapotec religion.

Be that as it, consider next, as a final and more succinct component of this historiographic survey, ways in which ideas about ancient Zapotec conceptions of divinity emerge from the non-literary material evidence—especially the suitably famous funerary urns—on which archaeologists have relied so heavily to ascertain the gods of Monte Albán.

3. Archaeology and Zapotec Conceptions of Divinity: Funerary Urns as Gods, Priests, Companions, Royal Ancestors and/or "Open Sites"

While it is, then, the Eurocentric and convoluted colonial-era writings of Dominicans that are first and foremost responsible for still-prevailing ideas about Zapotec conceptions of divinity, Oaxacanists eventually look to archaeology for the material evidence that can, they suppose, confirm or refute these ethnohistorically derived suppositions. Sigvald Linné's terse trajectory of the field in 1938, more resigned than enthusiastic, remains surprisingly accurate:

> "Our knowledge of Zapotecs' ancient religion, ceremonies and pantheon is founded on works composed by Roman Catholic priests, such as Juan de Córdova in the 16th century, Francisco Burgoa and Gonzalo de Balsalobre in the succeeding century... Seler has analyzed the early statements—often vague and ambiguous—and has by comparative studies endeavored, so to speak, to develop the pictures of various deities and their functions. It is only in certain cases that by later works—mainly archaeological fieldwork—it has been possible to supplement his version."[474]

Flawed as this version of hypothesis-making and testing may be, the tenuous deity lists of Córdova and Balsalobre have been the generative sources, while the material remains have been treated as supplemental and corroborative in fleshing out a supposed pantheon of gods.[475]

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[474] Linné, *Zapotec Antiquities*, 77.

[475] 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), 505-6, has a somewhat different, not altogether incompatible, way of assessing the respective merits of ethnography, ethnohistory and archaeology in

And while many features of the architectural and archaeological record shed light on Zapotec theological beliefs, on the matter of divinity conceptions, one genre of archaeological evidence—the celebrated (perhaps misnamed) Zapotec funerary urns—has been, for better or worse, by far most influential. There are to be sure many other pictorial and material representations of gods (or maybe royal ancestors) at Monte Albán—mural paintings and even more the ample iconographic evidence, for instance, will garner much more attention in subsequent chapters—but in the context of this historiographical discussion about the formation of ideas concerning Zapotec gods, urns deserve a special place. If perhaps not the best evidence for ascertaining Zapotec divinity conceptions, urns are nonetheless, during the twentieth century, the most high-profile. In Ignacio Bernal's resolute assertion, to which I will return, because no other source material is nearly so thorough or so reliable in this regard, "It is through such urns that we have come to know the principal Zapotec gods…"[476] In fact, in hyperbolic (or perhaps overhyped) praise of the innovation that the "urns" make, Bernal writes,

> "This representation of gods [on the funerary urns] 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."[477]

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recovering ancient Zapotec religion. In his view, ibid. (my translation), "Religion, like other cultural elements, changes through time. While the ethnographic and ethnohistorical data and help us to build models for interpreting the past, *only through the archaeological evidence we can trace the origins and follow changes in the religion*." That is to say, in his view, archaeology is the strongest evidence, even for the study of religion (and thus for conceptions of divinity), while "Ethnographic research and ethnohistoric frequently feed [or contribute to] archaeological studies." Ibid., 505; my translation. While I might agree with Winter that this is the way that research in the pre-Columbian past *should* proceed, I do not think archaeology actually has had this primary role in the history of the formation of ideas about Zapotec conceptions of divinity.

[476] Bernal, *3000 Years of Art and Life in Mexico*, 98.

[477] Ignacio Bernal, *The Olmec World*, trans. Doris Heyden and Fernando Horcasitas (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969), 158. Recall that I cited this passage in chapter 2 relative the convention priority (I-B).

Stupendously abundant in the central Oaxaca region and largely absent elsewhere, even in the Mixtec area, by general assent, "the funerary urn is in the Zapotec world what the stele is for the Old Maya Empire: the typical sculptural form."[478] When Frank Boos manages to locate, classify and photograph over 3700 extant Oaxaca vessels for his enormous *The Ceramic Sculptures of Ancient Oaxaca* (1966), "very few of which had been previously published," he is well aware that this an abridged catalogue.[479] At a site that is without an iconic building, these masterfully honed clay receptacles, rivaled only by the Danzante figures, are the most "characteristic" and most photogenic feature of Monte Albán.[480]

Running the gambit from lovely to fierce and frightening to cute, most of these "ceramic effigies" depict humanoid figures, with disproportionately large heads and small bodies, though

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[478] Paul Westheim, *The Art of Ancient Mexico* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1965 [originally 1950]), 220, stressing the urns' unique association with Zapotecs, continues, "Perhaps it is not by chance that much sculpture has been found in the Mixtec region, but until now [i.e., the 1940s], no funerary urn."

[479] Boos, *The Ceramic Sculptures of Ancient Oaxaca*, 13.

[480] Regarding the most important early works on Zapotec urns—which demonstrates their wide acclaim—most of which are much stronger in their photographs than text, Caso and Bernal, *Urnas de Oaxaca*, reprint 149 (my translation), observe that "We can practically say that in all the books dealing with ancient Mexican art, there are valuable representations of urns." They make special note of the excellent photographs and descriptions in Sigvald Linné, *Zapotecan Antiquites* (1938); and they note Eduard Seler's "Zapotec Priesthood and Ceremonials" and "Deities and Religious Conceptions of the Zapotecs," which are both part of *The Wall Paintings of Mitla* (1904). Additionally, they cite: Walter Lehmann, *L'Art Ancient du Mexique* (Paris: G. Crès, 1922); Th. W. Danzel, *Mexiko II* (Munchen: Folkwang-Verlag, 1923); Ernest Fuhrmann, *Mexiko III* (Hagen and Darmstadt: Folkwang, 1922); Thomas Athol Joyce, *Maya and Mexican Art* (London: The Studio, 1927); Constantine George Rickards, "Monograph on Ornaments on Zapotec Funerary Urns," *Journal de la société des américanistes*, tomo 30, no.1 (1938): 147-66; Adolph Basler and Ernest Brummer, *L'Art Precolombien* (Paris: Librairie de France, 1928); Alden J. Mason, "Zapotec Funerary Urns from Mexico," *The Museum Journal*, vol. 20, no. 2 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1929): 176-201; Pál Kelemen, *Medieval American Art*, 2 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1943); Salvador Toscano, *Arte precolmbiano de México y de la América Central* (México: Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, UNAM, 1944); Cottie A. Burland, *Art and Life in Ancient Mexico* (Oxford: Bruno Cassier, 1948); and Paul Westheim, *Arte antiguo de México* (México: México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1950). Also very significant earlier works on urns are those of Marshall Saville, which I address momentarily, and Caso's own *Las estelas zapotecas* (1928).

many are stylized animals. Many have elaborate headdresses, pectoral ornaments and jewelry, and lots of them are clearly wearing masks.[481] Assessed during the colonial era as "heathen idols," legions of them were destroyed and others became a favorite prize of looters and collectors so that thousands of known examples are without provenance and fakes are abundant.[482] Eventually, however, during the decades of Alfonso Caso's explorations of Monte Albán and surrounding sites, hundreds are found *in situ* during controlled excavations, usually in tombs, or even more often in antechambers or niches above tombs, but occasionally in temples and caches as well.[483] Frequently they are discovered in groups, often with four surrounding one in the center, a kind miniaturized pivot-and-four-quarters configuration that well instantiates the homology priority (I-A). Arguably, the conventional term "urn" is a misnomer insofar as it implies a uniformity of funerary function about which there is still no agreement.[484] Caso and Bernal, whose *Urnas de Oaxaca* (1952) is generally regarded as the gold standard on the topic, expressly reject the term "cremation urn" since these vessels never contain human bones or

[481] Boos, *The Ceramic Sculptures of Ancient Oaxaca*, 17-19, provides a very helpful account of the "visual conventions" that provide him a systematic means of "reading" and classifying them. In his view, "The ceremonial headdress, or *tocado*, worn by a figure was given paramount importance because it carried the reference or allusion to the nagual or deity empitomized by the piece while also announcing the status of the wearer." Ibid., 17.

[482] Determined to locate every Oaxaca urn, Boos, *The Ceramic Sculptures of Ancient Oaxaca*, 15-16, addresses both the matter of extensive private collections and abundant falsifications. Ironically, Marcus Winter, "Another Fake on Genuine," *Codex Filatélica: Mesoamerican Archaeology Study Unit*, vol. 12, no. 2 (1986): 9-11, draws attention to a fake "Jaguar God" urn on page 290 of Boos's book.

[483] Cira Martínez López y Marcus Winter, *Figurillas y silbatos de cerámica de Monte Albán* [Ceramic Figurines and Whistles of Monte Albán], contribución núm. 5 del Proyecto Especial Monte Albán 1992-1994 (Oaxaca de Juárez: Centro INAH-Oaxaca, 1994), 8 (my translation), note, that, from late Period II, urns are frequently found in the medium and high status tombs of Monte Albán, but figurines are seldom found in those tombs, "which implies that figurines and urns had different functions and meanings. Urns are less common and are not frequently found, as figurines are, in household trash dumps. For this reason, the figurines seem to have been for domestic use and relatively disposable in comparison with the urns."

[484] Masson, "El Sobrenatural Cocijo y poder de linaje en la antigua sociedad Zapoteca," 3, for instance, is among many to make this point.

ashes;[485] rather they are invariably found empty, which suggests they may have been filled with organic materials or water.

In fact, because *Urnas de Oaxaca* is unquestionably the watershed work on these celebrated and debated vessels, I organize this three-part discussion, first, with comments about the urns in advance of that work, then in that work, and then subsequent to Caso and Bernal's seminal study. Again this brief history of ideas about so-termed urns is idiosyncratic and narrow insofar as I focus strictly on their privileged role in theorizing Zapotec conceptions of divinity. In chapter 7 on the commemoration of the dead (priority II-D), I will undertake a fuller and more "eventful" treatments of the ritual uses of these ceramic effigies; and in chapter 10 on the propitiation priority (III-C), I will return to the revealing irony that such engaging works of art were nearly always stashed in subterranean vaults where no human could see them. For now, though, I term these urns "open sites" in the Foucauldian sense (or "floating signifiers" in Claude Lévi-Strauss's term) insofar as, even more than a periphrastic publication like Burgoa's, advocates for all of the major stances on Zapotec supernaturals have been able to appeal to the omnifarious urns as ostensibly confirming evidence of their own partisan view.[486]

In the most prominent debate, it is again Joyce Marcus who issues the iconoclastic stance. From the prespective of Eduard Seler, and then Caso and Bernal's *Urnas de Oaxaca*, along with a majority that continues to support the polytheistic paradigm, the urns not only represent "gods," they are the most effective diagnostic in discerning how many and which deities were being worshipped in each of Monte Albán's main periods. As noted previously and subsequently, Bernal has no doubt that, "It is through such urns that we have come to know the

[485] Caso and Bernal, *Urnas de Oaxaca*, 10; reprint 148. Though usually empty, a few have been found to contain the remains of bird bones, and there is a great deal of evidence for the reuse of the urns, many of which show considerable wear when found *in situ.*

[486] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London and New York: Tavistock/Routledge, 1974), xiii, writes "I should like this work to read as an open site. Many questions are laid out on it that have not yet found answers; and many of the gaps refer to earlier works or to others that have not yet been completed, or even begun." Nuanced by many theorists, the notion of a "floating signifier" or "empty signifier" can be traced to Claude Lévi-Strauss, "Introduction à l'oeuvre de Marcel Mauss," in Marcel Mauss, *Sociologie et Anthropologie* (Paris: Presses universities, 1950).

principal Zapotec gods."[487] Contrarily, however, Marcus extends her rejection of that polytheistic orientation into a much-discussed counterproposal that the urns are not deities, but deified human rulers who were foci of the royal ancestor worship that, while central to pre-Columbian Zapotec religion, was entirely missed by the Spanish chroniclers. Also again, though, as we'll see, a simple deity-versus-ancestor binary oversimplifies the tangle of opinions as to what these ceramic vessels teach us about Zapotec supernaturals.

a. Pre-Caso and Bernal Ideas about Urns: Deity Effigies, Purely Human Types, Animals, and/or Apotheosized Rulers

Well in advance of Caso and Bernal's studied treatment of the urns—and indeed in advance of reliance on any ethnographic source—these vessels were a major topic of discussion. Because, at the turn of the century, most of the vessels were acquired without certain provenance and none were assigned secure dates, they were assessed solely on their formal appearance; and thus based primarily on their conformity to or deviation from a veristic human countenance, the prevailing assumptions was that some of the urns represent otherworldly deities, but others are mere people and earthly creatures. Among the earliest to address these ceramic containers in a scholarly fashion, Marshall Saville, for instance, "a second-tier figure in the history of American archaeology,"[488] based his opinions on explorations that he undertook between 1898 and 1902 at

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[487] Bernal, *3000 Years of Art and Life in Mexico*, 98.

[488] Andrew K. Balkansky, "Saville, Boas, and Anthropological Archaeology in Mexico," *Mexicon*, vol. 27, no. 5 (Oktober 2005), 90. Regarding the debated career of Marshall Saville and especially his methodologically-based disputes with Columbia University colleague, Frans Boas, Donald E. McVicker, "The Matter of Saville: Frans Boas and the Anthropological Definition of Archaeology," in *Rediscovering Our Past: Essays on the History of American Archaeology*, ed. Jonathan E. Reyman (Aldershot, England: Avebury, 1992), 147, describes Saville as a wayward collector who "lacked vision." By contrast, however, Balkansky, "Saville, Boas, and Anthropological Archaeology in Mexico," 86-91, has a more appreciative assessment wherein "Saville reflects the major trends of his time, but it was a matter of Saville's preference for a museum-based archaeology that put him at odds with Boas." Balkansky, ibid., 88, besides commenting at length on Saville's contentious relationship with Boas, also notes some interactions that he had with Seler, with whose work Saville must have been well acquainted. Though this is not place for extended discussion of the discrepancies between Saville and Boas' (or Eduard Seler's), it is relevant to the present discussion to note that where Saville considered archaeology to be a field of its own, Boas (and Seler) argue, in their own ways, for a more

numerous central Oaxacan sites, including Mitla where he conducted more than 40 excavations, Xoxocotlán, and "the unexplored ruin" of Monte Albán where he worked in partnership with Leopoldo Batres.[489] Writing just in advance of Seler's "Deities and Religious Conceptions of the Zapotecs," Saville concluded, as would Seler, that, by and large, the urns are "effigies of deities." In some frequently quoted lines, Saville proposed that, "It is probable that these urns represent deities, and that they were placed near the tombs to guide the spirits of the deceased on their journey to the other world."[490] But Saville also noted that "the funeral urns... generally represent a human figure sitting cross-legged, although animal figures are not uncommon;"[491] and to that extent, he considered that at least some depict ordinary human beings and biological species.

Mayanist art historian Herbert Spinden was another whose interpretation of the Oaxaca urns does not rely on any of the ethnohistorical sources. Spinden both makes the case that "In Zapotecan funerary urns a close connection with Maya art can easily be demonstrated,"[492] and, 50 years in advance of Marcus's proposal, anticipates the prospect that at least a share of the

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anthropological archaeology wherein there is a much fuller integration of archaeological, ethnohistorical and ethnographic evidences.

[489] In an 1898 letter written from Chiapas, where flies, monkeys and mud had him regretting he had ever left New York, Saville wrote, "under such adverse circumstances... I concluded to leave Chiapas at once and go to the state of Oaxaca and work at Mitla, and an unexplored ruin nearby called Xoxo," which is presumably a reference to Monte Albán. Saville to Jesup, 28 January 1898; quoted by Balkansky, "Saville, Boas, and Anthropological Archaeology in Mexico," 87.

[490] Marshall Howard Saville, "Funeral Urns from Oaxaca," *The American Museum Journal*, vol. 4 (1904), 59, 60. Though making some general observations about abundant symbols of water, tigers, bats, owls and corn, Saville does not venture any more specific guesses as to what deities the urns may represent.

[491] Saville, "Funeral Urns from Oaxaca," 54. For a slightly earlier work, see also Marshall H. Saville, "Exploration of Zapotec Tombs in Southern Mexico," *American Anthropologist* 1 (1899): 350-62.

[492] Herbert J. Spinden, *Ancient Civilizations of Mexico and Central America*, third and revised edition (New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1928 [originally 1917]), 159. It is perhaps noteworthy that the frontspiece of this comprehensive survey is a photo of "a funerary urn from a Zapotecan tomb."

vessels represent deified human rulers. Combining those two hypotheses in his interpretation of "the royal tombs of Oaxaca," Spinden goes so far as to suggest that,

> "In Mexico and Central America a belief in the apotheosis of rulers arose out of a theocratic form of government. During life the ruler was a spokesman of divinity and at death he became a god on his own account or was merged into the personality of a godhead. This idea originated among the Mayas early in our Christian era."[493]

In Spinden's view, the originally-Maya notion of the apotheosis of human rulers who were then depicted in art "made a deep impression upon [many] neighboring tribes... [but] perhaps the strongest reaction was upon the Zapotecs."[494] From that debatable historical posit one might suspect that Zapotec urns first depicted fully divine figures—perhaps the gods of a complex pantheon—but came later, once more fully theocratic forms of government emerged, to represent deified humans.[495] At any rate, suggesting a range of variation in what the urns depict, Spinden proposes that,

> "many of these built-up figures clearly represent human beings while others represent grotesque divinities or human beings wearing the masks of divinities. The purely human types have a formal modeling in high relief, the head usually out of proportion to the rest of the body... As for the divine types the jaguar and a long-nosed reptile are the most common. The latter has a human body and may possibly be an adaptation of the Mayan Long-nosed God."[496]

In other words, uncertain historical hypotheses of Maya influences aside, Spinden, instead of concluding that all of the urns represent supernaturals, implies a kind of three-part typology wherein some Zapotec urns are "purely human types," others are "divine types" (or "grotesque divinities"), and in-between are "human beings wearing the masks of divinities," who may or may not be apotheosized rulers.

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[493] Herbert J. Spinden, "The Royal Tombs of Southern Mexico," *The Brooklyn Museum Quarterly*, vol. 19, no. 2 (April 1932), 56.

[494] Spinden, "The Royal Tombs of Southern Mexico," 56-57.

[495] Spinden implies, but does not explicitly propose, this evolution of the urns from deities to apotheosized human rulers.

[496] Spinden, *Ancient Civilizations of Mexico and Central America*, 159-60.

Again, though, it was Eduard Seler who provides the most influential, but not unchallenged, take on the famous urns. From his very first travels to Oaxaca in 1888, during which he connected with major antiquity collector Fernando Sologuren,[497] Seler was impressed with "the remarkable great figure vases, distinguished by gigantic head ornaments and a peculiar conventionalized face."[498] These plenteous anthropomorphic vessels were foremost among the "images of stone" that Seler described as "an abundant and unsophisticated source of information, which ought to give us the key to the mythical conceptions of the Zapotecs."[499] Seler—who always contended (unlike Saville, for example) that it was not only acceptable but actually crucial to integrate the archaeological and ethnohistorical sources[500]—made the immediate

[497] Regarding Fernando Sologuren's large and important collection of Oaxaca urns and other antiquities, which was sold to the Mexican National Museum in 1907, see Adam T. Sellen, "La colección arqueológica del Dr. Fernando Sologuren," *Acervos: Boletín de los Archivos y Bibliotecas de Oaxaca*, vol. 7, núm. 29 (Otono-Invierno, 2005): 4-15. Because Sologuren was a physician and avid collector but not an author, it is difficult to know what meaning he assigned to the urns. Nonetheless, an uncertain clue comes in the travelogue of British gentlewoman Ethel Brilliana Tweedie [a.k.a. Mrs. Alec Tweedie], *Mexico as I Saw It* (London: Macmillan, 1911 [originally 1901]), 384, who says after Sologuren showed her some of the urns, "They are not beautiful, indeed in many cases one might truthfully say they are hideous; but as the types vary very much, the Doctor thinks that they were meant to represent the person buried in the tomb." Mrs. Tweedie is somewhat more appreciative of the urns she sees during a 1901 visit to Mitla on which she was triplely accompanied by no less than Sologuren, Marshall Saville and Leopoldo Batres. Ibid., 397-419.

[498] Seler, "Deities and Religious Conceptions of the Zapotecs," 302, summarizes his earlier article specifically on the urns: Eduard Seler, *Die sogenannten sakralen Gefasse der Zapoteken* [The So-called Sacral Vessels of the Zapotecs], Veröffentlichungen aus dem Königlichen Museum für Völkerkunde, Band I, Heft 4 (Berlin, 1890), 182-88. That earlier article is quoted, for instance, by Rickards, "Monograph on Ornaments on Zapotec Funerary Urns," 153.

[499] This comment from Seler, "Deities and Religious Conceptions of the Zapotecs," 302, actually refers to the broader category of "images of stone" in which he includes "especially those of [1] pottery, [2] the large and small figures, [3] the figure vessels [i.e., the urns, though he seems never to use that subsequently standand term], [4] the pottery whistles and [5] small pottery heads, found in great numbers in the country."

[500] Though Seler did little fieldwork per se, Sepúlveda y Herrera, *Eduard Seler en México*, 15 (my translation), notes that, for Seler (who was like Boas but unlike Saville in this respect), not only ethnohistory, but also "ethnography and archaeology were the same thing; he said that they only differed in their methods of work, but not in the object and the ends of research."

assumption that these humanoid containers depicted the same gods both described by Fray Córdova and displayed in the pictographic codices.[501] Based on his assumption that the same basic pantheon of gods was in play in all of these sources, instead of trying to match up the urns with the deities obliquely described in Córdova's writings, Seler looks in this case to the more visually accessible deity representations in the Vienna Codex and the Borgia Codex—in his terms, "the crowded Olympus of the picture writings"—to ascertain which specific gods the urns depict.[502] And Seler likewise assumes that the pottery whistles and small figurines, which he encounters in great abundance in museums and in the field, also depict deities, though they—unlike the more widely diversified urns or vessels—are restricted to depictions of the old creative god (fire god), the earth goddess, Tepeyollotl, and perhaps a war god.[503]

Subsequent to Seler but still in advance of Caso and Bernal's momentous *Urnas de Oaxaca*—which is likewise predicated on the assumption that the urns overwhelmingly depict deities—there are numerous attempts to impose some significant organization of the thousands of specimens that challenge that basic premise. Art historian and museum administrator E. P. Richardson, for instance, not expert in Mesoamerican studies but thoroughly enraptured with "the remarkable combination of explosive energy and coherence which Zapotec plastic art achieved," in the 1930s, partitions the urns into two basic types: Those that do depict supernaturals, like the Bat God, versus others that "give the effect of a genre portrait" by illustrating more strictly human subjects, like one that "shrewdly narrates the character of a bouncing, nervous, fussy, talkative old man."[504] And Sigvald Linné, who devotes the largest share of his *Zapotecan Antiquities* (1938) to photos and descriptions of funerary urns, explicitly

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Consequently, it was, in his view, perfectly suitably to interpret the urns with respect to the available written sources, i.e., colonial documents and codices.

[501] That the vessels represented human beings or apotheosized human rulers are not possibilities that Seler engages, but nor does he explicitly rule those out.

[502] Seler, "Deities and Religious Conceptions," 302-5. Aside from commenting (ibid., 302) that "they were probably all buried vessels," Seler does not comment on the use or context of the urns.

[503] Seler, "Deities and Religious Conceptions," 305.

[504] E. P. Richardson, "Zapotec Pottery Sculpture," *Parnassus*, vol. 4, no. 3 (March 1932): 48-49.

contests Seler's intimation that "the urns exclusively represent gods, which does not appear very probable."[505] While conceding that these vessels are "speaking a language to which we do not possess the key," Linné opines that "the urns may be divided into two main categories, viz. anthropomorphous and zoomorphic;"[506] and because the former category is far more numerous, he classifies those with respect to body postures such as crossed-legged, bent-up knees, seated, standing, etc. But with stronger relevance to our present point, Linné also proposes "a more 'theological' ground for classification" that holds open the possibility that some with "naturalistic faces" depict human beings, some with masks could be the priests or "servants" of particular deities, which leaves only a portion of the urns that represent deities per se.[507]

In short, then, though Seler prefigures the stance of Caso and Bernal that the ceramic vessels are largely depictions of deities, several commentators of that early era were presenting contrary views in which a large share of the urns depicted individual people, some that, as Spinden suggests, may have been understood to be apotheosized human rulers.

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[505] Linné, *Zapotecan Antiquities*, 100. Caso and Bernal, *Urnas de Oaxaca*, reprint 150, single out Linné's work, which included photographs and descriptions of the urns in the Paulson Collection of the Ethnographic Museum of Sweden, as an especially important work to which they refer with some frequency.

[506] Linné, *Zapotecan Antiquities*, 102.

[507] Linné, *Zapotecan Antiquities*, 102. Regarding additional attempts to impose order on the abundance of diversified urns, writing in the same year as Linné, antiquarian photographer and British vice consul in Oaxaca, Constantine George Rickards, "Monograph on Ornaments on Zapotec Funerary Urns" (1938), 147-65, in a profusely illustrated but disjointed article, quotes both Seler and Saville's opinion that "it is probable that these urns represent deities...," and Spinden's view that some urns represent gods and others are "purely human types." But rather than take a strong stance on their meaning, Rickards, ibid. 153ff, accepting the posit of Spinden and Thomas Athol Joyce, *Maya and Mexican Art* (1927), 99-100, that Zapotec urns display a strong "Maya influence," proposes a more appearance-based (and more eccentric) two-part division of all of them between (1) "urns in which the features of the faces have slanting eyes and other characteristics of distinct Maya influence" and (2) "urns which are entirely Zapotec in their characteristics." Also worthy of note from this era is J. Alden Mason, "Zapotec Funerary Urns from Mexico," *The Museum Journal*, vol. 20, no. 2 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1929): 176-201.

b. Caso and Bernal's Urnas de Oaxaca *(1952): Stunningly Specific Hypotheses on the Evolution of the Zapotec Pantheon*

Alfonso Caso and Ignacio Bernal, then, though they establish an unprecedentedly high bar with respect to the documentation and dating of the ceramic vessels, demonstrate strong continuity with Seler's stance when they presuppose that the great majority of the urns represent the various gods of a Zapotec pantheon. Already in his *Las estelas zapotecas* (1928), Caso was, as noted, working to correlate the references to deities in Córdova, the *Relaciones Geográficas*, Balsalobre and Burgoa with the archaeological evidence, particularly the stelae and urns, which he had concluded are "products of the same [Zapotec not Mixtec] culture."[508] That is to say, Caso, like Seler, considered that the same Zapotec gods are being depicted in all of these very different Oaxaca source materials, which is made all the more important because of the absence of any Zapotec codices comparable to those deity-filled pictographic documents in the Mixtec, Maya and Aztec regions.[509] And, relying on the same assumption for their *Urnas de Oaxaca*—though, by this point, actually having secured Seler's copy of Córdova's *Vocabulario castellano-zapoteca*[510]—Caso and Bernal are explicit that "when grouping the urns, we have tried to give

[508] In the 1920s, even before he had done any excavation at Monte Albán (and when there was still a question as to whether Monte Albán had been created by Zapotecs or Mixtecs), Caso, *Las estelas Zapotecas*, reprint 5 (my translation), had concluded that, while the Oaxaca codices were Mixtec not Zapotec, "the funerary urns have always been attributed to the Zapotecs, and they are only to be found within the limits of the zone inhabited by them." In the same work (ibid., 11-19), Caso correlates the deity references in Córdova, Balsalobre and the *Relaciones Geográficas* to arrive at a list of Zapotec gods that he can correlate also with those of the Aztecs and Mayas.

[509] Caso, *Las estelas Zapotecas*, reprint 7.

[510] As noted, for his work on *Las estelas zapotecas* (1928), Caso did have copies of numerous *Relaciones Geográficas*, the writings of Balsalobre and Burgoa, and Córdova's *Arte en lengua zapoteca*, which provided him lots of information on the Zapotec calendar; but he did *not* have Córdova's *Vocabulario castellano-zapoteca*, the only copy of which he knew still remaining in the hands of Eduard Seler, on whom Caso was forced to rely. See Caso, *Las estelas zapotecas*, reprint 11. But in Caso and Bernal, *Urnas de Oaxaca*, reprint, 669 (my translation), they note, "We have now been able to consult the Córdova *Vocabulary*, which formerly belonged to Dr. Seler..."

them the names that are indicated for the Zapotec gods in Juan de Córdoba's *Vocabulario* when identification is easy, or with the calendaric names that appear on some of the urns."[511]

On that basis, Caso and Bernal arrange all of the hundreds of urns "and similar objects"—the large majority of which they had personally excavated, and thus were able to assign relative dates—in relation to a dozen main categories, most with several sub-categories: (1) *Cocijo* and other associated deities; (2) the corn complex, which includes the Bat God, Pitao Cozobi and two others; (3) the "companions," who were presumably human attendants to the gods; (4) snake gods, which includes Quezalcoatl and three others; (5) gods with a helmet or bird mask; (6) the old "2 Tiger" god; (7) gods with two little glasses on their backs; (8) the god "5 Turquoise"; (9) the god Xipe-totec; (10) the opossum god; (11) the goddesses, of which there are six main types; and (12) the whistles, which also seem to depict gods.[512] Altogether, aiming for a thoroughly comprehensive classification of "all the urns that we know,"[513] their sub-divisions within those dozen main headings enable them to identify some 43 different types, most but not all corresponding to specific gods.[514]

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[511] Caso and Bernal, *Urnas de Oaxaca*, 11; reprint, 150; my translation. Caso and Bernal, ibid., reprint, 669-73, provide their specific enumeration and commentary on the deity names provided by Córdova, which, in cases, they correlate also with deity names in Balsalobre. Then, ibid., 673-77, they follow that with an enumeration of gods (including village-specific patron deities) mentioned in the *Relaciones Geográficas*, which they also correlate with Córdova's and Balsalobre's deity names.

[512] Caso and Bernal, *Urnas de Oaxaca*, reprint 151-52.

[513] In a book with 527 numbered figures, Caso and Bernal, *Urnas de Oaxaca*, reprint 150, explain that they "take into consideration all the urns that we know," the largest share of which are in the National Museum of Mexico but many of which are in other museums, and to that giant fund of examples they add all the urns they have obtained from excavations at Monte Albán, which have the great advantage of being assigned at least relative dates.

[514] Laboring on the specifics in a way that enables him to find some contradictions in Caso and Bernal's work, de la Borbolla, "Las 'urnas' de Oaxaca," 601-4, reorganizes their data into a five-page "chronological table" that inventories the presence or absence of each of 43 gods in each of the main Monte Albán periods. Boos, *The Ceramic Sculptures of Ancient Oaxaca*, 17, too commends the "accuracy"of Caso and Bernal's classification of the urns, and thus organizes more than 3700 urns and braziers into essentially the same 44 primary categories (the first 41 of which refer explicitly to gods), which he subdivides into 138 subcategories.

On the one hand, then, it is unfair to suggest, as is frequently intimated, that Caso and Bernal saw every one of the urns as a deity representation.[515] Besides actual gods, they too conclude that many of the urns were human priests wearing the masks and costumes of gods; and they also discern a special and voluminous category of urns they call "companions" (or *acompañantes*), which they assess as more clearly human figures that accompanied the deceased in his or her tomb.[516] It is fair, however, to say that Caso and Bernal designate none of the urns as royal ancestors; and nor do they address in any direct way the notion of impersonal supernatural energies in relation to these buried vessels. Nevertheless, on the other hand, for Caso and Bernal, by far the greatest payoff, if you will, of the fabulous fund of urns that they had been able to locate *in situ*, and thus attribute relative dates, comes in the vessels' presumed status as a diagnostic of how many and what gods are being worshipped in each of Monte Albán's main periods. Their single-minded chronologic agenda does not really engage the artistic merits of the vessels, and nor do they do much to address the ritual use of the urns (as I will in chapter 7 on commemoration of the dead, priority II-D). And, consequently, critics who aspire to a more rounded interpretation of the ceramic objects make the case that the proper title of Caso and Bernal's fabulously ambitious work, which analyzes not only urns but also whistles, braziers and "all manner of earthen objects," should actually have been *The Identification of the Gods of Oaxaca*.[517]

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[515] On the one hand, Westheim, *The Art of Ancient Mexico*, 219-20, is among those who enlist Caso and Bernal as support of a kind of monolithic stance wherein the "'funerary urns' [are] ceramic works in the form of divinities, on whose rear side was a vessel intended, in all probability, for the burning of copal. The urns are usually of Cocijo, whose hieroglyph is the Zapotec year sign… Representations of other deities are also common: Xipe, of the maize goddess, and of the goddess of 'Seven-Serpent.'" But, on the other hand, Miguel Covarrubias, *Indian Art of Mexico and Central America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957), 154, for instance, is more accurate using Caso and Bernal's work to support the view that, rather than depicting only gods, "the urns represent personages, deities, or animals..."

[516] Caso and Bernal, *Urnas de Oaxaca*, reprint 149.

[517] Daniel F. Rubín de la Borbolla, "Las 'urnas' de Oaxaca;" review of Alfonso Caso and Ignacio Bernal, *Urnas de Oaxaca*, *Historia Mexicana*, vol. 2, no. 4 (April-June, 1953), 597-98, makes this suggestion for a change in the title of the work.

Be that as it may, this telescoped approach to the urns as data about gods does embolden Caso and Bernal to venture an audaciously blunt set of conclusions concerning the period-by-period elaboration of the Zapotec pantheon. In Bernal's startling specific synopsis: For Monte Albán I, with *Cocijo*, "the God of Water," as the most important among them, "we know 10 gods, all masculine if we do not include the figurines of naked women."[518] For Period II, the only era in which *Cocijo* may be absent, "we know representations of 15 gods, of which one is feminine; there may have been another goddess (8Z)."[519] For the Transitional Monte Albán II-IIIA period, when they see the fundamental characteristics of the full Zapotec pantheon emerging, "18 gods have been found, four of them feminine."[520] In Period IIIA or the Early Classic, the first point at which, in their view, one can speak of a Zapotec culture proper, "a greater variety of gods is represented on the urns, 30 or possibly 31, of whom 7 are feminine... On the urns the faces, which are very regular, serene, and sometimes very beautiful, are balanced; the ornaments are not excessive."[521] In Period IIIB, the era of both the climax and the decline of Monte Albán,

> "The funerary urns became exuberant in decoration, which is sometimes more prominent than the god himself; the faces of the gods became stereotyped; and all the pottery began to show the characteristics of mass production so clear in Period IV. The process of 'industrialization' is seen not only in lack of individuality but also in quantity. Thirty-nine gods are represented in Monte Albán IIIB, eleven being feminine. Their faces are

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[518] Bernal, "Archaeological Synthesis of Oaxaca," 798. In the view of Caso and Bernal, the earliest urns seem to appear in Period Ic; and they see Cocijo, "the god of water," as the most important in this and every era except Period II. Note also, while I am here drawing summary quotes from Bernal's 1965 synthesis in *The Handbook of Middle American Indians*, the fuller treatment of "the gods of the urns in different periods" appears in Caso and Bernal, *Urnas de Oaxaca*, reprint 677-88, where they name the specific deities they assign to each Monte Albán period.

[519] Bernal, "Archaeological Synthesis of Oaxaca," 801. See Caso and Bernal, *Urnas de Oaxaca*, reprint 679-81.

[520] Bernal, "Archaeological Synthesis of Oaxaca," 801. See Caso and Bernal, *Urnas de Oaxaca*, reprint 681-83.

[521] Bernal, "Archaeological Synthesis of Oaxaca," 803. See Caso and Bernal, *Urnas de Oaxaca*, reprint 683-85.

> heavy, impassive, and with no feeling of movement. The noses are frequently aquiline; the eyelids are heavy."[522]

And in the decadent final era, while Bernal does not settle on a precise number of gods, he observes that, "Pottery of Period IV is abundant although of indifferent quality, as though carelessly mass-produced. Urns, more standardized than ever, are often found in groups of five identical examples, or four identical and one different..."[523] Finally, "there are no urns in Period V."[524]

In candor, from the perspective of a historian of religions, this painstaking exercise in dating, counting and gendering the gods of Monte Albán is astounding in its overconfidence. Nevertheless, given this tour de force in unprecedented specificity about the transformations of the Zapotec pantheon, it is little surprise that more appreciative evaluators conclude, "The authors have not only achieved their purpose, but have been able to identify a very respectable number of gods, their characteristics and their variants and evolutions."[525]

c. Ideas after Urnas de Oaxaca*: Deities, Alter Egos, Royal Ancestors, Deity Impersonators and/or Calendrical Patron Gods*

Predictably, then, especially given such a venturously specific set of hypotheses, *Urnas de Oaxaca* had (and has) both its champions and detractors. Effusive in his praise of Caso and Bernal's accomplishment, Frank H. Boos, a Detroit lawyer who in the 1950s develops a passion

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[522] Bernal, "Archaeological Synthesis of Oaxaca," 806. See Caso and Bernal, *Urnas de Oaxaca*, reprint 685-88, where they explain why they treat Periods IIIB and IV together.

[523] Bernal, "Archaeological Synthesis of Oaxaca," 807-8.

[524] Alfonso Caso and Ignacio Bernal, "Ceramics 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), 895.

[525] de la Borbolla, "Las 'urnas' de Oaxaca," 597; my translation. Note, by the way, that, in the wake of Caso and Bernal's excavations, the next presentation of additional discoveries of urns at Monte Albán comes in Carl Kuttruff, "Figurines and Urn Fragments from the Monte Albán Survey," Appendix VIII in Richard Blanton, *Monte Albán: Settlement Patterns at the Ancient Zapotec Capital* (New York: Academic Press, 1978), 379-402.

for the Zapotec urns, for instance, accepts virtually everything that they say about the acclaimed clay objects. Then Boos undertakes to scour all of the museums and private collections in the Americas and Europe for thousands of specimens that are not addressed in *Urnas de Oaxaca*, which he photographs and classifies in his own even larger *The Ceramic Sculptures of Ancient Oaxaca* (1966) according to essentially the same 44 "primary categories," the first 41 of which refer explicitly to gods that are known via Córdova and the other colonial-era writings.[526] While Boos follows the partyline, he also brings to the fore "the all-important and pervasive nagual (*nahualli*) concept," which complicates and enriches the presumption of simple one-to-one correspondences between urns and gods. By his explanation,

> "It was a common belief of the peoples of Mesoamerica, including those of the Oaxacan culture, that destiny bestowed on each person at birth a personal guardian spirit or alter ego [i.e., a *nagual*]. They also believed that each god had an alter ego or personal spirit through which the deity manifested himself... When a person's guardian spirit coincided with the *nagual* of a god, that deity became the person's protector for life, while the person became a lifelong member of the god's cult."[527]

According to Boos, the *nagual* or "alter ego" is "the pervading concept [that, in the urns] controlled all portrayals of personages and deities."[528] The *nagual*—often embodied as an animal such as a serpent, bat, lizard or owl, but sometimes as a flower, ear of maize or perhaps a natural phenomenon such as an earthquake or the east wind—was, Boos explains, frequently displayed on the headdress in the form of a mask, which thereby becomes the most identifying feature "because it carried the reference or allusion to the nagual or deity epitomized by the piece."[529] While his contention about the central role of *nagual* alter egos complicates matters

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[526] Boos, *The Ceramic Sculptures of Ancient Oaxaca*, 17, subdivides his 44 primary categories into 138 subcategories. Boos's work is, by the way, dedicated to Caso and Bernal, "without whose initial labors this book could not have taken form..."

[527] Boos, *The Ceramic Sculptures of Ancient Oaxaca*, 17. He complicates the matter more still by noting, "Unless we constantly bear in mind that not only each personage but also each god had his *nagual* and that *a nagual itself had a nagual*, the figures on these vessels must remain incomprehensible." Ibid., italics added.

[528] Boos, *The Ceramic Sculptures of Ancient Oaxaca*, 17.

[529] Boos, *The Ceramic Sculptures of Ancient Oaxaca*, 17.

(as it should), Boos sees the urns as a mix of the supernaturals identified by Córdova and Balsalobre and portraits of individualized human beings whose linkages to one another and to those gods depend upon shared *naguals*.[530]

By diametric contrast to Boos and other admirers of *Urnas de Oaxaca*,[531] it is again Joyce Marcus who is most emphatic that this monumental achievement in identifying the deities of Monte Albán is built on sand, so to speak. Another oft-quoted article, "Rethinking the Zapotec Urn" (1983), reiterates her repudiation of the basic presupposition of a pantheon of personal gods. And thus, not unlike the uncompromising demand that emerges from her stance on animatism not gods, instead of a gentle corrective, her position, which in its strict form is still a minority view, condemns *Urnas de Oaxaca* as a giant impediment to an accurate understanding of Zapotec religion insofar as it celebrates one conception of divinity that does not actually exist, and thereby obfuscates two others—divinized royal ancestors and impersonal supernatural energies—that are really the heart of the matter.[532] From her perspective, zero of the urns are gods; and to imagine that they are simply replicates the Greco-Roman-derived misconceptions of

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[530] According to Boos, *The Ceramic Sculptures of Ancient Oaxaca*, 22, while the largest proportion of the urns depict the God of Rain (Cocijo), the next largest category is the "Companion" urns that depict individualized "men and women of all ages, from very young to ancient, and in varying degrees of lavishness of raiment and jewlery." He thinks these companions could be priests and priestesses, or perhaps "devotees of a god;" but he makes no reference to the notion of deified royal ancestors.

[531] Gordon F. Eckholm, Review of Alfonso Caso and Ignacio Bernal, *Urnas de Oaxaca* (1952), *American Anthropologist*, New Series, vol. 55, no. 4 (October 1953), 594, for instance, describes the book as "undoubtedly the most important contribution to the study of Mexican religions, art, and related subjects that has appeared in many years." And Laurette Séjourné, "Identificacion de una diosa zapoteca," *Anales del Instituto Nacional de Antropologia e Historia*, vol. 1, núm. 36 (1955), 111, assesses *Urnas de Oaxaca* as "an admirable synthesis," which thereby provides a basis from which she can make the case that a particular anthropomorphic image that represents Nohuichana, the patron goddess of cotton mentioned by Balsalobre, who "corresponds to the Maya Ixchel, and to the Aztec Tlazolteotl, the two fundamental feminine deities of the best-known Mesoamerican pantheons." Ibid., 114; my translation.

[532] Marcus, "Rethinking the Zapotec Urn," 146, does acknowledge that, rather than interpreting all of the urns as gods, Caso and Bernal see some of them as priests wearing the costumes of gods or others as human "companions" who accompanied the deceased in his or her tomb.

Córdova and Balsalobre.[533] Alternatively, consistent with her iconoclastic posit that the abundant references to village-specific "idols" in the *Relaciones Geográficas* depict, not gods, but "deceased rulers of those communities, who were honored as semidivine and sacrificed to in their roles as interceders with the supernatural,"[534] Marcus writes,

> "In my opinion, a substantial number of these urns depict humans, probably deceased ancestors of the occupant(s) in the tombs, or persons with masks, showing the attributes associated with great supernatural forces such as lightning. I believe this depiction of deceased ancestors accounts for... the fact that the inventory of names varies from period to period and site to site, in a way that would be unlikely if they were indeed deities."[535]

In other words, Marcus sees the urns as depicting apotheosized (or semidivine) rulers—or deceased human ancestors—whose masks and accouterments demonstrate an animatistic channeling of "great supernatural forces such as lightning." But, with few or no expectations, the humanoid vessels depict people not gods.

Certainly, as we've seen, Marcus is not the first to opine that many of the urns represent individualized human beings rather than gods; and in Herbert Spinden's ruminations of an originally-Maya notion of the apotheosis of human rulers we find an antecedent to her contention that lots of the vessels depict defied human rulers of Monte Albán and other communities.[536] But besides advancing her emphasis on royal ancestor worship, Marcus's alternate take on the

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[533] Seconding the view that *Urnas de Oaxaca* replicates the Eurocentric mistakes of the colonial writers, Kent V. Flannery, "Ignacio Bernal: 1910-1992," *American Antiquity*, vol. 59, no. 1 (January 1994), 75, describes the book as "a monograph-length compendium of Oaxaca ceramic sculpture [that] attempted to interpret prehistoric funerary urns in the light of sixteenth-century data on Zapotec religion." Additionally, Marcus, "Rethinking the Zapotec Urn," 146, objects that, "I can find no evidence that the Zapotecs had anthropomorphized female deities, but such hairstyles may well have been worn by royal females who were later venerated."

[534] Marcus, "Zapotec Religion," 348-49.

[535] Marcus, "Rethinking the Zapotec Urn," 144.

[536] It is plausible that Joyce Marcus's work in the Maya area before she began concentrating on Oaxaca contributed to her emphasis on Zapotec royal ancestor worship (and impersonal supernatural power). Regarding her comparison of the two areas, recall Marcus, "Arcaheology and Religion: A Comparison of the Zapotec and Maya" (1978), where she presents one of the earliest versions of her arguments on theses topics.

urns, especially her counterproposal with respect to the irrefutably abundant allusions to lightening on these vessels, also reinforces her complementary insistence on the Zapotecs' animatistic not theistic orientation. Regarding the uniquely numerous containers with the imagery of lightening—objects that Caso, Bernal and Boos (mis)identify as depictions of Cocijo, the God of Rain—Marcus contends that "There is no reason to believe that the Zapotec ever conceived of lightning in anthropomorphized form, and I suspect that many of these urns actually depict persons wearing masks or headdresses that refer to attributes of *Pitào Cocijo.*"[537] In other words, rather than intimate that Zapotecs worshipped the god Cocijo (in the way that Greco-Romans supposedly worshipped their deities), she thinks the plentiful "Cocijo urns" actually reflect an indigenous animatistic logic wherein, "when one wanted to invoke 'the great spirit within lightening,' he used the expression *Pitào Cocijo*," a term that referred not to a personalized deity but to the supernatural, albeit impersonal, "great spirit" or power to bring rain and thereby contribute to the growth of corn.[538]

In the wake of these vigorously polemical remarks, subsequent interpreters of the urns invariably articulate their own stances with respect to the (only seemingly) diametrically opposed positions of Caso and Bernal versus that of Marcus.[539] Art historian Arthur Miller, for instance, in the context of his study of Oaxacan painted murals, many of which were located in precisely the same tombs from which Caso and Bernal retrieved urns, finds a way to lend most of his

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[537] Marcus, "Rethinking the Zapotec Urn," 146. She, by the way, makes no reference to *nagual* concept in relation to the urns. Other places in which she addresses urns include Marcus, "Archaeology and Religion;" and Joyce Marcus, *Women's Ritual in Formative Oaxaca: Figurine-making, Divination, Death and the Ancestors*, Memoirs of the Museum of Anthropology, no. 33 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1998).

[538] Marcus, "Rethinking the Zapotec Urn," 146. On her view as to the non-anthropomorphic meaning of *Pitào Cocijo*, see also Marcus, "Zapotec Religion," 349; and Marcus and Flannery, "Ancient Zapotec Ritual and Religion," 58-60.

[539] John F. Scott, "The Role of Mesoamerican Funerary Figures," in *Arte Funerario: Coloquio Internacional de Historia de Arte*, vol. 2., ed. Beatriz de la Fuente (México, D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1987), 14; cited by Sellen, "Storm-God Impersonators from Ancient Oaxaca," 3, broadly summarizes three main currents of thought on the Zapotec vessels: (1) they represent deities; (2) they represent participants in rituals, sometimes including deity impersonators; and (3) they represent shamanistic spirits. Of those, it is the second attracts the greatest current attention.

support to Marcus's revisionist proposal about the depiction of deified rulers without, however, fully discounting the older view that some of the urns, like some anthropomorphic images in murals, may depict deities.[540]

Also addressing the conflict in opinions head-on, anthropologist Marilyn Masson, in a reassessment of the Zapotec effigy vessels, specifically those that represent Cocijo—a supernatural that, in her mediating view, appears in multiple guises as a formal deity (i.e., Caso's view), as the embodiment of lightening (i.e., Marcus's view), and as the spirit companion of powerful individuals (i.e., Boos's emphasis)—reaffirms Miller's compromise stance that "the categories of deified god and ancestor were not mutually exclusive."[541] In Masson's reinterpretation, the abundant Cocijo images "reflect rituals frozen in action, indicating ancestor communication and the transformation of humans into *Cocijos*, or vice-versa;"[542] and that leads her to the broader assertion that, "In Mesoamerican religions, the dividing line between ancestors and gods was often erased. Many ancestors were deified and even had the ability to become certain recognizable deities."[543] Due skepticism about over-determined Greco-Roman analogies notwithstanding, "These formal aspects of the Cocijo entity suggest to the author that Caso and Bernal, and later Whitecotton, were right in calling him a deity."[544] In Masson's view, then,

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[540] Arthur G. Miller, *The Painted Tombs of Oaxaca, Mexico: Living with the Dead* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 98. Somewhat surpisingly, Miller's highly regarded study, aside from the remarks cited here, is absent of comments on the infamous urns, many of which were found right alongside the murals. In any case, his work will become very important in chapter 7 on the ritual-architectural commemoration of the dead (priority II-D).

[541] Masson, "El Sobrenatural Cocijo y poder de linaje en la antigua sociedad Zapoteca," 8; my translation.

[542] Masson, "El Sobrenatural Cocijo y poder de linaje en la antigua sociedad Zapoteca," 1; my translation.

[543] Masson, "El Sobrenatural Cocijo y poder de linaje en la antigua sociedad Zapoteca," 8; my translation.

[544] Masson, "El Sobrenatural Cocijo y poder de linaje en la antigua sociedad Zapoteca," 6; my translation.

Marcus's interventions, which shed light on aspects of animism (or actually animatism)[545] and ancestor worship largely overlooked by her predecessors, do not preclude the older view that, "The Zapotecs shared a polytheistic religious structure with other societies that had reached the state level in Mesoamerica, including the Mixtecs, the Aztecs and the Mayas."[546]

Additionally, Adam Sellen, who addresses the Zapotec urns in numerous contexts, presents alternate hypotheses to which I will return concerning their possible ritual usage; but on the narrower topic of what the effigy vessels suggest about Zapotec conceptions of divinity, he too advances a "both/and" solution not unlike Masson's. Capitalizing on the work of Javier Urcid concerning the identity of the entities in the Zapotec calendar day-name list, Sellen contends that,

> "the deities displayed on the urns are the same patron deities that correspond to the Mesoamerican layered conception of the cosmos, 9 for the underworld and 13 for the sky-world; these two important series play a central role in Mesoamerican religion and ritual, and are inextricably linked with time reckoning and divination. In summary, our position is that Zapotec effigy vessels represent ancestors who are impersonating deities represented in the ancient calendar."[547]

Sellen thereby embraces, in a qualified manner, Marcus's identification of the effigy vessels as royal ancestors, while at the same time arguing that, "in my opinion, Caso and Bernal's deity model should be modified rather than completely discarded."[548] In fact, despite (an apparently inadvertent rather than purposeful) mischaracterization of Caso and Bernal's stance as

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[545] I noted earlier that Masson, "El Sobrenatural Cocijo y poder de linaje en la antigua sociedad Zapoteca," 5-6, is among those who mischaracterize Marcus's position as "animism" rather than "animatism."

[546] Masson, "El Sobrenatural Cocijo y poder de linaje en la antigua sociedad Zapoteca," 6; my translation.

[547] Adam T. Sellen, "Zapotec Funerary Urn from Oaxaca," *Mexicon*, vol. 28, no. 5 (Oktober 2006): 82. Here he is summarizing ideas that he presents more fully in Sellen, "Storm-God Impersonators from Ancient Oaxaca."

[548] Sellen, "Storm-God Impersonators from Ancient Oaxaca," 3.

"pantheistic,"[549] Sellen's very detailed work on the urns lead him also to the broader conclusion that assessments of Zapotec religion as polytheistic and animatistic are not mutually exclusive.[550]

In sum, fuller discussion of the endlessly-debated effigy vessels, even if we stick just to this question of their role in ascertaining deity conceptions, while perhaps warranted, would take us too far afield from the present discussion.[551] Instead, suffice it to note, in the spirit of "open

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[549] For instance, Sellen, "Storm-God Impersonators from Ancient Oaxaca," besides the fairly benign mischaracterization of Marcus's view as "animism" rather than "animatism" (e.g., pp. 3, 6, 17), make the more serious mischaracterization of Caso and Bernal's view as "pantheistic" (the belief that all of reality is identical with divinity) rather than "polytheistic" (belief in many gods) (e.g., pp. 3, 17), terms that are by no means interchangeable. He repeats the latter error in Adam T. Sellen, "Sowing the Blood with the Maize: Zapotec Effigy Vessels and Agricultural Ritual," *Ancient Mesoamerica*, vol. 22, no. 1 (Spring 2011), 72. Sellen, "Storm-God Impersonators from Ancient Oaxaca," 8, does speak to the intriguing prospect of a Mesoamerican pantheism (not polytheism) when he makes a passing suggestion that the Oaxacan practice of "deity impersonation" may resemble that of "the supreme devotee" in Hinduism "who both serves god and embodies the god he serves… in which [case] the human being can be considered equivalent to the material image of a deity." But those remarks do not come in connection with any concerted attempt to differentiate between Oaxacan polytheism versus pantheism.

[550] Here I give Sellen the benefit of the doubt insofar as what he actually says is, "In my opinion, the Zapotec religion can be seen as *pantheistic* [by which I think he actually means "*polytheistic*" in the sense that Caso and Bernal use the term] as well as *animistic* [by which I think he means "*animatistic*" in the sense that Marcus uses the term]." Sellen, "Storm-God Impersonators from Ancient Oaxaca," 8; italics added.

[551] For instance, Marcus Winter addresses the urns in numerous contexts. See, for instante, Marcus Winter, "Oaxaca prehispánica: una introducción," en *Lecturas históricas del Estado de Oaxaca*, Marcus Winter, comp., vol. I, Epoca prehispánica (México: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia y Gobierno del Esatado de Oaxaca, 1990), 89-90 (my translation), where he writes, "It is important to distinguish between a great power or god and the symbolic representation of that power… Zapotec urns may well have functioned as symbols and not as objects of worship themselves. Some urns can represent leaders or priests, who have acquired special powers. By donning a mask, the individual represented by the urn is personifying extra or suprahuman strength." Additionally, 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, 2002), 72 (my translation), has some ideas about urns, including "Some have suggested that urns represent human beings, but it is clear that in Periods I and II of Monte Albán describe special beings, not entirely human, and therefore, possibly representations of gods. Human representation in religion should not be surprising, since many groups represent their gods as human beings (in the Catholic religion, for example,

sites" (or "floating signifiers"), that the very same ceramic objects that provided Caso and Bernal their strongest evidence for an elaborate Zapotec polytheism, and that provided Marcus yet more confirming evidence for her ideas about Zapotec animatism and royal ancestor worship, are now providing scholars means of accentuating the plurality of divinity conceptions that seem to have resided under the encompassing umbrella of "Zapotec religion." Never indisputable evidence of anything, the singularly suggestive and abundant urns—even more available to reinterpretation than the ethnohistoric or ethnographic sources—are certain to be recruited and reworked into every theory of Monte Albán's supernatural investments.

C. Summary Thoughts and Methodological Cautions on the Study of Ancient Zapotec Divinity Conceptions: Idealization, Reification and False Systematization

At its end now, what has this extended history of ideas taught us about past and present scholarly studies of Oaxacan supernaturals? Does the cornucopia of competing contentions engender optimism or despair about ever arriving at empirically accurate conclusions? How, in the wake of all this disagreement about perhaps the central issue in the Zapotec religion, can we move forward in reflecting on ritual-architectural expressions and commemorations of divinity (priority II-A) at Monte Albán?

With the extreme discrepancy of views about the infamous funerary urns, in place at least since the 1980s and with no consensus in sight, this protracted review of competing ideas about Oaxacan conceptions of divinity seems to circle back to where it began—i.e., to a deadlock between two irreconcilable views of ancient Zapotec religion. One feels, at first, compelled to choose a side. Like betting simultaneously on all the horses, it may seem the weakest of resolutions to argue that advocates of Zapotec polytheism, monotheism, monistic-pantheism, animism, animatism and royal ancestor worship are all partially correct. Are all of these theoretical labels are merely heuristic frames that together speak to the empirical complexity and diversity of pre-Columbian Zapotec theological conceptions that were in play at Monte Albán?

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the main figures are Jesus Christ, Mary, and the saints)." Also on the urns, see Winter, "La religión, el poder y las bases de la complejidad social en Oaxaca Prehispánica," 512-17.

In short, yes. Numerous contemporary interpreters of the urns and other features of Zapotec religion, instead of claiming one alternative that completely cancels the viability of the others, provide exemplars for capitalizing on the array of contentious perspectives without throwing one's full scholarly weight behind any single stance. And that is my plan as well. When undertaken with self-consciousness, maintaining allegiances to many models, even those that contradict one another, provides, I maintain, the most methodologically reliable means of arriving at historical hypotheses.

Be that as it may, these two-part "Summary Thoughts and Methodological Cautions" are a kind of interim theoretical reflection and refocusing before moving forward to the heart of the chapter. Again the perspective of a comparative historian of religions shows itself; and again this is the sort of methodological digression that I regard as very important but that many will be inclined to skip over. For those readers who do undertake to continue on, the first sub-section spells out what I see as the largest obstacle—and the two foremost fallacies—that impinge on reaching an empirically accurate understanding of ancient Zapotec divinity conceptions to emerge from this historiographical review. Then the second sub-section presents a solution and ways forward.

To clarify that most daunting obstacle—and the so-termed fallacies of purity and typicality—I take the somewhat unlikely step of appealing to parallel problems in ascertaining Lakota ideas about supernaturals, which should forewarn us against being seduced into a neatly systematic, but oversimplified and essentialized, view of "real Zapotec religion." And to propose constructive alternatives, having commented on the respective contributions of ethnographic, ethnohistorical and archaeological evidences, I will make the case that it is the first of those that does most to help us avoid those convenient but simplistic reifications. That is to say, while the colonial written sources have been by far the most influential in forming scholars' ideas about Zapotec divinity conceptions, and while archaeological evidence, especially the urns, has been more instrumental in elaborating on the shifting slate of Monte Albán gods, it is actually ethnography—which brings to the fore "the multiple experiences of the sacred" in which

Zapotecs participate[552]—that supplies the most promising means of moving forward in considering a wide range of variations on the ritual-architectural commemoration of divinity (priority II-A) at Monte Albán. But first I turn to the more strongly theorized Lakota materials as a means of clarifying the insidious problem.

1. The Main Obstacle: Imagining Neat Systematization Instead of Accepting Messy Empirical Accuracy—Lakota Parallels

Unique as the sources and challenges of ascertaining and respecting Zapotec multiple conceptions of divinity are, we can find clues for ways to proceed—and a rationale for holding aloft multiple theoretical models—in the more heavily worked materials on Lakota religion. Consider, for illustration sake, the stark contrast between the widely-read autobiographical accounts of two Lakota *wicasa wakan*, or "medicine men," both composed in conjunction with Austrian-born Richard Erdoes. This first is by John Fire Lame Deer, born on the South Dakota Rosebud Reservation in 1903, and the latter is by his son, Archie Fire Lame Deer, born there as well in 1935.[553] Deceptively simple trade books, both are hybrid products of the latter-day colonial situation inasmuch as they are co-authored *by* Indians, but written primarily *for* non-Native audiences. And though both are more popular than technical works, the extreme differences in their respective presentations of Lakota cosmology and supernaturals are telling and instructive of very serious academic problems.

In the earlier, rich and rambunctious life history—*Lame Deer: Seeker of Visions* (1972)—we encounter a dizzying surfeit of seemingly inconsistent replies to the question: *How do the Lakotas conceive of divinity*? By John Fire Lame Deer's account, the Lakotas, at times, seem to be Greco-Roman-like polytheists insofar as he recounts exploits of mythological figures

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[552] Bartolomé, "Elogio del politeísmo: las cosmovisiones indígenas en Oaxaca," 629; my translation.

[553] John (Fire) Lame Deer and Richard Erdoes, *Lame Deer: Seeker of Visions* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1972); and Archie Fire Lame Deer and Richard Erdoes, *Gift of Power: The Life and Teachings of a Lakota Medicine Man* (Santa Fe: Bear and Company Publishing, 1992).

such as White Buffalo Calf Woman, bringer of the "seven sacred rites;" Tate, the Wind; Wi, the sun; Hanwi, the moon; Inyan, the Rock;[554] and Iktomi, the "smart-ass" trickster.[555] At other points, the Lakotas emerge from this book as Abrahamic-like monotheists who believe in a supreme god Wakan Tanka, who is described as "The Grandfather Spirit," a benevolent gift-giver, active helper, fair judge and creator of humankind and all things.[556] But pages later, a candid and reflective John Lame Deer intimates something closer to Lakota monism with his insistence on Wakan Tanka's non-anthropomorphic, incomprehensible and imperfect essence of which everything else is a part; Wakan Taka is, he says, an "It" rather than a "He," a "Great Mystery" (or perhaps "Great Mysterious") that is explicitly "*not* like a human being," "*not* like an old man with a beard," "*not* like a white god" but "something like the Holy Trinity."[557]

Also, however, *Lame Deer: Seeker of Visions* presents seeming support for Lakotas as animatists comes in the authors' explanations of the world as permeated by a good, scary and "sweet scent" known as *wakan* or *woniya waken*, which is translated as "holy air" or a sacred presence.[558] But then, intermittently, we are introduced to slightly more anthropomorphic "guardian spirits," helpful "lady spirits," happy "dancing spirits" and mischievous "*yuwipi* spirits," who show themselves in bright sparks of light, little voices without bodies or "furry hands" that one feels in the dark.[559] Along the way, John Lame Deer also talks about "spirits of the dead," that is, *nagi*, or "roaming souls or essences," or *wanagi*, who are "frightening, whistling ghosts."[560] And throughout this free-wheeling narrative we are reminded that the Lakotas regard as "sacred" elements of the natural world such as thunder, lightening, stones,

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[554] See, for example, J. Lame Deer and Erdoes, *Lame Deer*, 20, 101, 119, 198 and 241-44.

[555] J. Lame Deer and Erdoes, *Lame Deer*, 21-22, 123 and 165.

[556] See, for example, J. Lame Deer and Erdoes, *Lame Deer*, 20, 96, 127, 134, 146-47 and 199.

[557] See, for example, J. Lame Deer and Erdoes, *Lame Deer*, 29, 68, 102-3, 116, 146, 170, 187, 197, 200 and 229.

[558] See, for example, J. Lame Deer and Erdoes, *Lame Deer*, 51, 100 and 103.

[559] See, for example, J. Lame Deer and Erdoes, *Lame Deer*, 123, 135, 149-50 and 172-86.

[560] See, for example, J. Lame Deer and Erdoes, *Lame Deer*, 6, 27-28, 36 and 101.

trees and animals so that "the spiritual and commonplace are one," "to us, all life is sacred," and thus *mitakuye oyasin*, "all my relatives," is the constant refrain.[561]

By extreme contrast to this unsystematic mishmash of supernatural beings and forces, the autobiography of John Fire Lame Deer's son, Archie, another Lakota holy man—*Gift of Power: The Life and Teachings of a Lakota Medicine Man* (1992)—while ostensibly reaffirming everything that his father says, presents, by way of a summary of Lakota religion, a fastidiously tidy, "chart of what you might call Lakota cosmology, a 'map' of the Sixteen Great Mysteries."[562] A creative effort to smooth out apparent contradictions, in this perfectly symmetrical half-page diagram, mythological figures, planets, animal species, ghosts, deities and cardinal directions are all arranged in a neat eight-point star and circle configuration, which depicts Wakan Tanka's encompassment of everything. To be sure, the polished, broadly pantheistic schematic, while well-considered, has none of the richness of his father's unaffected candor in referencing the multifarious conglomeration of supernaturals in which Lakotas believe. Readers of both narratives have to find the cosmology chart, if clear, pedantic and sterile. And, obviously designed to communicate to a non-native readership, it is doubtful that any Lakotas of any era would find the slick scheme a familiar or even comprehensible depiction of their spiritual investments.

Archie Fire Lame Deer's cosmological diagram is, however, a perfect exemplification of Oaxacanist John Monaghan's unassailable contention, quoted at the opening of this chapter, that, especially among indigenous peoples, "the concept of a religion, with a unified orthodoxy and coherent creed, is characteristically articulated only when one group is attempting to validate its truths according to the terms of another."[563] This important observation is the ground of persistent and very persuasive claims that, prior to the requirement of explaining themselves to outsiders, indigenous peoples like Lakotas and Zapotecs had no "religion" per se, only

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[561] See, for example, J. Lame Deer and Erdoes, *Lame Deer*, 35, 96-97, 107, 109, 111, 125, 128, 155-56, 167-68, 171 and 229.

[562] A. Lame Deer and Richard Erdoes, *Gift of Power*, 252-53.

[563] Monaghan, "Theology and History in the Study of Mesoamerican Religions," 25.

customary ways of thinking and acting. And even in the twentieth-century, when called upon to be a spokesman for his people, Archie's first incentive is to make Lakota "religion" appear compelling and cogent, not naïve and chaotic, to non-Indian readers. But likewise, as Monaghan and others recognize—and as Archie's antiseptic outline demonstrates—that native systematization, and the effort to be understood across cultural boundaries, come at the heavy price of simplification and erasure of competing conceptions that might cloud the main message.[564]

Furthermore, where the sorts of systematization that emerge from a mutually respective collaborative exchanges like that between Archie Lame Deer and empathetic co-writer Erdoes are certain to be somewhat idiosyncratic and simplified, far more severe are the distortions that issue from the antagonistic colonial encounters between a proselytizing Fray Córdova and his subordinated Zapotec "informants." Or, more problematic still are the "testimonies" that emerge from the Inquisitorial context in which the incarcerated Diego Luis presented his famously influential deity lists to Fray Balsalobre; fear of prosecution is not an incentive to provide elaborately textured accounts of the beliefs one is being compelled to reject. Thus while Oaxacanists are, for the most part, suitably mindful of the distortions that result from the overdetermined questions of Classically-educated Dominican friars, we need to appreciate that native responses are also self-distorted, if you will, in the sense that Zapotecs themselves had to reframe and simplify their divinity conceptions in order to provide replies that are comprehensible and acceptable to their Christian interrogators.[565] And consequently, while

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[564] By the same token, anthropologist Raymond J. DeMallie, "Lakota Belief and Ritual in the Nineteenth Century," in *Sioux Indian Religion*, eds. Raymond J. DeMallie and Douglas R. Parks (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 28-29, for instance, argues persuasively that while pre-Columbian Lakotas conceived of Wakan Tanka in thoroughly impersonal ways as something like "the Great Incomprehensibility," it was in their efforts to communicate their belief systems to non-Native Christians—that is, in the context of the colonial "contact zone"—that they reframed Wakan Tanka in more anthropomorphic (Christian-like) terms such as the "Great Grandfather Spirit" or frequently, as in John Fire Lame Deer's case, with reference to the Trinity or Holy Ghost. One has to suspect that, among the Zapotecs, the same transformation of pre-Columbian impersonal conceptions of divinity to more personal (Christian-like) conceptions in the colonial era was play.

[565] Another excellent demonstration of this pragmatic necessity of indigenous peoples much simplifying their religious beliefs when trying to explain them to outsiders, ethnographers

orderly deity lists and symmetrical diagrams may provide the most seemingly satisfactory replies to one's non-native questioners—safest, it must have seemed to Diego Luis, to give the Inquisitors what they want—one must concede that it is unsystematic, chaotic presentations like John Fire Lame Deer's (and perhaps like those in the *Relaciones Geográficas*) that are actually the more empirically accurate. In these cases, more ragged and inconsistent is also more historically truthful and right.

To continue the Lakota analogue, even more informing with respect to the insidious consequences of Oaxacanist scholars' (over)reliance on colonial-era writers are the efforts of amateur anthropologist James R. Walker, who served 18 years as the agency physician on the Pine Ridge Reservation (1896-1914).[566] Far more scientist than proselytizer, Walker assigned to himself the well-intentioned task of recovering and recording what he saw as the heavily-corrupted, soon-to-be-extinct religious beliefs and practices of the Lakotas. Pursuant of his official role as a health care provider, Walker, though formally charged with combating the influence of tribal medicine men, quickly realized that he had to work jointly rather than at odds with his traditional Lakota counterparts; and, to that end, he was eventually initiated into their

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included, comes in the saga surrounding the classic Marcel Griaule, *Conversations with Ogotemmêli: An Introduction to Dogon Religious Ideas* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965); originally published in 1948 as *Dieu d'Eau*. Griaule explains how, during his first 15 years of working with the Dogon, he heard only diluted and childish accounts of their traditional African religion; and thus he was astounded by the nuance and complexity of the cosmology and theological ideas that he eventually heard from Dogon elder Ogotemmêli. When Griaule inquired why he had not been given this more sophisticated version much earlier, Ogotemmêli explained that his Dogon counterparts knew that Griaule was, to that point, simply not capable of understanding the subtleties of their ideas. The Dogon considered Griaule childlike in his knowledge of these matters, and thus they had no choice but to provide him childish versions.

[566] James R. Walker's own classic work is *The Sun Dance and Other Ceremonies of the Oglala Division of the Teton Dakota*, Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History, vol. XVI, part II (New York: The American Museum of Natural History, 1917). But more accessible are the critically annotated volumes: James R. Walker, *Lakota Belief and Ritual*, eds. Raymond J. DeMaille and Elaine A. Jahner (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980); and James R. Walker, *Lakota Myth*, ed. Elaine A. Jahner (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983). Note also that here I am summarizing ideas presented in Lindsay Jones, "White Myths about American Indian Mythology: Reflections on the Lakota Story of 'When the People Laughed at *Hanwi*, the Moon;'" *Area Studies: Bulletin of the Graduate School of Area Studies, University of Tsukuba* [Japan], vol. 17 (March 31,1999), 124ff.

secret Buffalo Society, composed at that point of as few as five members, who provided him access to an esoteric body of knowledge known to only a few (male) Lakotas.[567] Based on his very close relationship with this handful of thoughtful and inventive elders, holy man George Sword principal among them—i.e., the Lakota counterparts to Diego Luis and other Zapotec "wise men" or *colanis*—Walker smoothed out and synthesized all of the fragmentary and inconsistent versions of what he was told into the coherent and contradiction-free religious system that, *in his imagination*, had been intact prior to the incursions of Euro-Americans.[568] In his own very revealing description of his manner of managing and eradicating all of the inconsistencies that he encountered, Walker explains,

> "While no Indian has been able to give me the complete mythology in a systematic way, I have gotten quite a complete system of it piece-meal which I am attempting to systemize in a manner approved by the older Indians who are probably as good authority on it as exists."[569]

Via that method of cutting, pasting and cross-checking—and based on the errant assumption that religions are discrepancy-free "systems"—Walker assembled all of the "fragments" of Lakota myths and contradictory descriptions of Lakota supernaturals into *The Sun Dance and Other Ceremonies of the Oglala Division of the Teton Dakota* (1917), which even now is generally considered the fullest and most authoritative source on nineteenth and early twentieth-century Lakota religion and myth.[570]

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[567] For a concise overview of the relevant biographical information, see DeMaille and Jahner's "James R. Walker: His Life and Work;" Part One of Walker, *Lakota Belief and Ritual,* 3-61. In their view (ibid., xxxii), sometime around 1898, "Walker in effect became a holy man himself," a privileged status that goes far in explaining the tone and license that he would exert in his recordings and formulations of Lakota traditions.

[568] On Walker's especially close relationship with Buffalo Society member George Sword, see Elaine Jahner's comments in Walker, *Lakota Myth,* 41-52.

[569] James Walker's letter to Clark Wissler, a prominent anthropologist from the American Museum of Natural History in New York who provided considerable guidance and support for Walker's "ethnographic" work (May 28, 1911); quoted both in Walker, *Lakota Belief and Ritual,* 30; and Walker, *Lakota Myth,* 7.

[570] It is fascinating to note that while Walker could find no living Lakota who was familiar with all of the myths he recounted, subsequently Lakotas and well as scholars relied on his written account to "recover" their own traditions, and in that kind of feedback loop, his classic "The Sun

Singularly influential (and, in that respect, like Córdova's writings), Walker's efforts at synthesis and "correction" nonetheless demonstrate, in even more stark terms, the same two fundamental methodological missteps that we have seen time and again in the scholarly disputation over Zapotec conceptions of divinity—what I have termed elsewhere the fallacies of "purity" and "typicality."[571] On the former, while Walker believed that he was witnessing firsthand the final demise of a once-rich native religion, he was also (over)confident that he could distil from that debased context a more pristine and coherent set of pre-Columbian beliefs and practices, that is, a largely congruous Lakota religious system that was not only "pure" in the sense of free from Christian corruptions, but also longstanding and relatively stable prior to the colonial encounter. And on "the fallacy of typicality," while Walker believed that the general population had by then largely forgotten many of their own traditions, he was (over)confident that the old men of the Buffalo Society provided the most reliable means of recovering ideas that had once been "typical" of the broader Lakota society. Subsequent and more critical scholarship, which has accentuated the exceptionally creative inventiveness, but by no means typicality, of this tight clique of five free-thinking Indian elders, exposes Walker as wrong on both counts.[572] And I would wager that Oaxacanists have made exactly the same two methodological errors.

2. A Way Forward: Acknowledging Zapotecs' "Multiple Experiences of the Sacred" and Avoiding the Fallacies of Purity and Typicality

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Dance and Other Ceremonies of the Oglala Division of the Teton Dakota" (1917) has served (and still does serve) as a ritual manual and self-fulfilling prophecy for contemporary Indians. The heavy reliance of Zapotec-scholar Víctor de la Cruz on Córdova's *Vocabulario castellano-zapoteca* to acertain "authentic" Zapotec divinity conceptions (see, for instance, de la Cruz, "Los múltiples nombres y formas de Pitao") may provide a Oaxacan parallel of this sort feedback loop.

[571] Jones, "White Myths about American Indian Mythology," 118-21.

[572] Foremost on the critical rassessment of James Walker's meticulous but highly essentialist mode of operation are Jahner's Introduction to Walker, *Lakota Myth*, Jahner, ed., 1-40; and the editors' "James R. Walker: His Life and Work," in Walker, *Lakota Belief and Ritual*, DeMaille and Jahner, eds., 1-61.

That is to say, though these Lakota materials may seem to take us far afield, I would maintain that they actually point precisely to the two most troubling methodological presuppositions that a scholar of religion finds glaring in the literature on Zapotec conceptions of divinity. In fact, James Walker's classic work, great accomplishment that it may be, is, for our purposes, a vividly cautionary (negative) example insofar as it is a paramount instance of the essentialism, or idealized reification, of a Lakota religious orientation that, in all likelihood, was never stable, never contradiction-free and never universally shared by all tribal members.

First on the so-termed "fallacy of purity." Since the emergence of "postmodern" sentiments in the 1980s—which issue an impassioned call "to reject the abstract, general and universal in light of the concrete, specific and particular"[573]—religion specialists have been relentless in their protestations against the timeworn textbook practice of depicting "world religions" like Christianity, Islam and Buddhism as thoroughly coherent, doctrinally faithful systems of belief and practice that exist independent of any specific historical context.[574] According to this anti-essentialist critique, even religions with canonical sacred scriptures are dynamically changing, and thus highly diversified and, in many respects, internally inconsistent. And, therefore, no religion can be adequately captured in the sort of perfectly ordered system that Walker presumed was the truest and most respectful way to render the Lakota religion that he held in such high, albeit idealized, regard.[575]

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[573] Cornel West, "The New Cultural Politics of Difference," in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, eds. Russell Ferguson, Martha Gever, Trinh T. Minh-ha and Cornel West (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1990), 577.

[574] See, for instance, Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); or Timothy Fitzgerald, "Hinduism and the World Religion Fallacy," *Religion* 20 (1990): 101–118.

[575] In other words, as a broad generalization, religious studies (like anthropology) had, by the 1990s, made "the postmodern turn," wherein progressive religionists were intent on "pluralizing by highlighting the contingent, provisional, variable, tentative, shifting and changing" (West, "The New Cultural Politics of Difference," 577). From that "postmodern" perspective, James Walker provides a kind of caricature of the positivist modern outlook wherein every inconsistency in Lakota mythology and religion is assessed as an error (perpetrated by the post-contact situation), which he must therefore correct in order present the tradition in its supposed pre-contact purity and perfectly systematic consistency. While that outmoded "scientistic"

Moreover, where indigenous traditions are concerned, the emphasis on the perpetual reinvention of religious traditions has been even greater. In relation to these native contexts especially, the broadly postmodern incentive to "historicize, contextualize and pluralize by highlighting the contingent, provisional, variable, tentative, shifting and changing"[576] has been a constant, if overdue, refrain. As Miguel Bartolomé, Monaghan and nearly all ethnographers accentuate, even the "most pure" Indian outlook, while faithful to some endurant general principles (e.g., the "hard nucleus" of Mesoamerican cosmovision), is always characterized by fluidity or "plasticity," case-specific improvisation, and thus a very wide spectrum of diverse perspectives.[577] More pragmatic than ideological or systematic, these are, we're now told, "religions without theology."[578] When, for instance, H. B. Nicholson opines with respect to the frustrations in laying hold of a fully systematic Aztec divinity conception that, "no integrated 'family of gods' structure appears to have ever been worked out, nor, seemingly, has any very

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tendency may be a sign-of-the-times in Walker's early twentieth-century work, a disturbingly similar tack is apparent in those Oaxacanists who work to smooth out all of the seeming contradictions and errors in the Zapotec deities mentioned by Córdova, Balsalobre and the *Relaciones Geográficas,* and thereby arrive at an authoritative pre-Columbian pantheon of gods.

[576] West, "The New Cultural Politics of Difference," 577.

[577] See, for instance, Bartolomé, "Elogio del politeísmo: las cosmovisiones indígenas en Oaxaca," 606-7, for an endorsement of Alfredo López Austin's notion of a "hard nucleus of Mesoamerican cosmosivion" paired with an emphasis on the "plasticity" and "dynamism" of indigenous Oaxacan religious traditions. And recall, for instance, the comment of Monaghan, "Theology and History in the Study of Mesoamerican Religions," 28, that, "While it is undeniable that religion in Mesoamerica has a monistic emphasis, it is not so thoroughgoing that it excludes other orientations."

[578] Bartolomé, "Elogio del politeísmo: las cosmovisiones indígenas en Oaxaca," 602. Regarding similarities and differences between the very well-informed positions of Bartolomé and Monaghan, while they agree that indigenous Oaxacan religions accommodate multiple perspectives, Bartolomé , ibid., 614, explicitly takes issue with Monaghan's suggestion that Oaxacans hold a monistic view that absents the distinction between natural and supernatural, contending instead that "the systems of native categories emphasize this distinction…" That is to say, where Monaghan argues that Mixtecs, for instance, operate with "the conception of the unity of the divine with different manifestations" (and thus he calls them monists), Bartolomé, as we saw, stresses indigenous appreciation of "the multiplicity of the sacred" (and thus he attributes to them a qualified sort of polytheism). At that point, as I've noted, Bartomolé's continued reliance on the well-worn term "polytheism" is somewhat misleading.

neat hierarchical ordering of rank and power ever been formulated,"[579] the most plausible explanation is that no such fully systematic pre-Columbian theological scheme ever existed, except perhaps among a tiny cadre of atypically intellectualizing Aztec thinkers. And thus aspirations to map the authoritative beliefs and practices of an ostensibly "pure" pre-Columbian Zapotec religion, before it was "corrupted" by Christianity, are certain to be thwarted. In that sense, we make a very basic methodological mistake in assuming that so-termed "Zapotec religion" was ever contradiction-free and unchangingly stable, even in the short run.

And second, regarding "the fallacy of typicality," we have to accept that the elderly Zapotec men on whom the Dominican friars overwhelmingly relied, even if their thoughts on divinity were recorded by Córdova and Balsalobre with perfect accuracy, were, like the handful of male elders on whom Walker depended, exceptions rather than the rule. Every tradition has its innovative systematic thinkers like George Sword, Nezahualcóyotl or Diego Luis; but their masterfully sapient metaphysical and theological formulations, however compelling to academic Western audiences, are by no means representative of the epistemological outlooks of the broader communities in which scholars (myself included) claim to be most interested. Moreover, the broad range of diverse outlooks in a hierarchical urban context like Monte Albán exacerbates the problem.

Just as Archie Fire Lame Deer's and the Buffalo Society's systematizations of Lakota religion were creative, but deliberately simplified, pragmatic efforts to communicate across cultural boundaries, and especially to impress Christian critics, the formulations of the Zapotec men on whom colonial-era chroniclers—and then modern scholars—have relied so heavily, may indeed be our fullest and most palpable translations of indigenous Oaxacan religious investments into an idiom that Europeans can understand. But to synthesize, hone and "correct" all of the "fragmentary" references to deities in Córdova, Balsalobre and the *Relaciones Geográficas* into a single seamless and authoritative list of Zapotec gods—a kind of fossilized freeze-frame snapshot of their pantheon—is to commit precisely the same essentializing error of James

[579] Nicholson, "Religion in Pre-Hispanic Central Mexico," 409.

Walker.[580] And thus to rely on that sort of idealized formulation as representative of the conceptions of divinity that were operating among all social classes during the twelve-century duration of Monte Albán as living city is too large a compromise for my present purposes.

Scholars of religion may be especially sensitive to these problems of essentialism and reification, but Oaxacanist ethnohistorians and archaeologists too have, at least in principle, been mindful of the problem. Nearly every sustained discussion of Juan de Córdova's and Gonzales de Balsalaobre's comments on Zapotec calendars and deities acknowledges the very large qualification that "clearly... what the Spaniards were describing was *Zapotec state religion*; we know much less about the household ritual conducted by commoners."[581] Though presumably aspiring to finer subdivisions, Marcus Winter, for instance, issues constant reminders of the radical differences between Monte Albán's "public religion" and the domestic or "private religion" of its non-elites;[582] and, together with his archaeology-informed attempts to chart changes in the religion of Monte Albán over time, difficult as that may be, these are (with qualifications I note momentarily) major steps in the right direction.[583] Even Caso and Bernal's

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[580] Though I have noted José Alcina Franch and Frank Boos as a couple of the most obvious (of many) offenders of this sort of essentialization, Michael Lind's *Ancient Zapotec Religion* (2015) provides, as we've seen, the most obvious current example of this methodological transgression.

[581] Marcus and Flannery, "Ancient Zapotec Ritual and Religion," 71; italics theirs.

[582] For instance, in two especially important articles, Marcus Winter makes a fundamental distinction between "public" religion and domestic or "private" religion, and then concentrates on the former: Winter, "Religión de los *Binnigula'sa'*: la evidencia arqueológica," 50ff.; and Winter, "La religión, el poder y las bases de la complejidad social en Oaxaca Prehispánica" (2009), 504ff. Note also that, in both these articles, he places "gods" at the center of his account insofar as he begins in both cases with the Merriam-Webster definition of religion as "a personal or institutionalized system of beliefs and practices related to the supernatural or the gods."

[583] In regard to changes over time, the same two articles cited in my previous footnote are especially notable: Winter, "Religión de los *Binnigula'sa'*: la evidencia arqueológica," 45-88, pays special attention to changes in religion across the wider Oaxaca region—including the emergence of standardized representations of gods and other supernatural beings—across the respective Hunting and Gathering, Village, Urban and City-State stages. And Winter, "La religión, el poder y las bases de la complejidad social en Oaxaca Prehispánica," 503-27, is a complementary article that focuses more directly on the changes in religion at Monte Albán across, by the periodization he uses here, eight successive periods.

urn-based assessments acknowledge constant fluctuations in the pantheon of Monte Albán from, by their uncertain tallies, just 10 gods in late Period I, to 15 deities in Period II, some 30 in Period IIIA, to a high of nearly 40 gods in Period IIIB, before standardization and shrinkage of the slate of deities set in during the city's Period IV decline.[584] And Michael Lind, irrespective of his problematic efforts to synthesize and distil something like an authoritative Zapotec pantheon "as it existed around the time of the Spanish Conquest," affirms that "a great many changes are evident between the Late Classic and Late Post Postclassic Zapotec religion."[585] In brief, even those for whom the holy grail, so to speak, is a clear picture of the fully mature pantheon of prime-time Zapotec elites do not imagine that as a comprehensive description of *the* Monte Albán conception of divinity.

In relation, then, to constructive solutions and approaches, while respecting changes over time and diversity within every era are aspirations of all Oaxacanists, it is ethnography that provides the most efficacious clues for how to move forward to an embracive exploration of ritual-architectural expressions of divinity (priority II-A) at Monte Albán. As Bartolomé suggests (and as I have seconded), rigidly structured Oaxacan pantheons are most often "constructions of the ethnographer" rather than accurate depictions of native views.[586] As Elsie Clews Parsons observed in early twentieth-century Mitla, and as ethnographer Laura Nader would reaffirm, in post-contact Zapotec communities, where the pragmatic accumulation of divinity conceptions continues, "Gods, the saints, and the spirits of the dead, *las animas*, and the Virgin all form the pantheon."[587]

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[584] Bernal, "Archaeological Synthesis of Oaxaca."

[585] Lind, *Ancient Zapotec Religion*, xvii.

[586] Bartolomé, "Elogio del politeísmo: las cosmovisiones indígenas en Oaxaca," 602; my translation.

[587] Elsie Clews Parsons, *Mitla: Town of the Souls and Other Zapoteco-Speaking Pueblos of Oaxaca, Mexico* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1936), 204-31; quoted by Laura Nader, "The Zapotec of Oaxaca," in *Handbook of Middle American Indians*, vol. 7, "Ethnology," part one, vol. ed. Evon Z. Vogt, gen. ed. Robert Wauchope (London: University of Texas Press, 1969), 351.

Accordingly, therefore, while the timeworn scholarly labels of polytheism, monotheism, monism, animism and animatism are all imperfect descriptors of the empirical complexity that obtained in the Zapotec capital—and while the pretense of a fixed pantheon of gods is limiting—Bartolomé's redefinition of polytheism as "receptivity to *a multiple experience of the sacred* and not just as the worship of a multitude of gods" provides, I contend, the most promising alternative.[588] Not unlike the way in which Lakotas assign a positive valuation to the uncertainties that the natural world invariably presents and to the mysterious incomprehensibility of Wakan Tanka, and not unlike John Fire Lame Deer's messy pastiche of Lakota supernaturals, pre-Hispanic societies across Mesoamerica operate with what Alfredo López Austin terms,

> "religions of recognized polytheism [insofar as] they are based on the conception of a diversified world, full of contradictions and opposing elements that cannot come from a divine source in which these contradictions, diversities and oppositions are not inherent…"[589]

In Mesoamerican cosmovisions, contradictions and inconsistencies, including among their supernaturals, are not "errors" that must be eradicated, but enlivening facts of life.

In sum, then, it is another distortion of the scholarly literature that gives the impression that in the working capital of Monte Albán these diverse Zapotec conceptions of divinity were in competition—which they were not. The *academic theories* of monotheism, animatism, ancestor worship, polytheism and pantheism definitely are in tension; but the *empirical phenomena* they purport to explain coexist very comfortably—sometimes because, as we'll see, the alternative divinity conceptions operate in mutually supportive ways and probably more often because they

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[588] Bartolomé, "Elogio del politeísmo: las cosmovisiones indígenas en Oaxaca," 606; my translation, italics added.

[589] Alfredo López Austin, "El mestizaje religioso, la tradición mesoamericana y la herencia mitológica," en *L'homme et la société*, núm. 93, año XIII (París, 1989), 43 (my translation); quoted by Bartolomé, "Elogio del politeísmo: las cosmovisiones indígenas en Oaxaca," 603, n. 4. Regarding his nuanced views on Mesoamerican polytheism and "pantheons," see also, among many alternatives, López Austin, *The Myths of the Opossum*, 104, where he writes: "We must have an overall understanding of the ancient concepts of the divine and know that the order of legitimacy was distributed throughout the cosmos. To understand the rules of the pantheons is to understand the principles of Mesoamerican cosmovisions. [1] The discovery of rules and [2] their application to the ordering of information are two processes of mutual clarification."

simply subsist in non-intersecting orbits. "Coexisting" conceptions of divinity is frequently a truer phrase than "complementary" conceptions. I would, in fact, contend that Zapotec investments in supernaturals are layered and patched together in ways that leave the whole always patchy and unpolished. As we learn from ethnologists, theological contradictions were, in lots if instances, simply allowed to stand.

Likely Monte Albán elites were intent on advancing the status of new gods that were added to their official pantheon, which was internally quite consistent; and it is even more likely that various elite families worked to promote the prestige of their respective deified royal ancestors over those of other families. But, in the main, these different perspectives were accepted as consentient rather than mutually exclusive. Neither the official gods of the "state religion" of the Main Plaza nor the royal ancestor worship that we will associate with the temple-patio-altar (TPA) complexes was intended to replace older and more animatistic outlooks; and, contrary to standard formulations, nor were the sentiments of "domestic religion" confined to outlying residential contexts. Monte Albán did not have two different religions, practiced by different social constituencies in different parts of the city. Instead, as I will stress in the Closing Thoughts of this chapter, traditional animatistic ideas, especially about the animacy of *altépetl* water-mountains, and ideas about more personal gods and apotheosized ancestors were strategically juxtaposed in the characteristic pyramid-based sanctuary configuration of literally dozens of Monte Albán temples. Instead of a zero-sum game that required abandonment of old divinity conceptions in favor of new ones, there was an accumulation of diverse spiritual investments in which apparent inconsistencies were allowed to stand.

Consequently, when Dominicans undertake the sort of totalitarian proselytizing and "religious conversion" that requires Zapotecs to abandon older ways of conceiving of divinity for alternate Christian ones, those friars posed an unprecedented challenge. But the colonial-era and present-day indigenous response to a hegemonic Christianity, as Bartolomé's fieldwork-based assertions reaffirm, demonstrates yet again the well-practiced pragmatism and strategies of "addition or appropriation," that enable Oaxacans to incorporate not just of new deities, but decidedly new conceptions of divinity in ways that "reinforce the cosmological order of society,

instead of displacing or abolishing it."[590] And thus, in order to avoid the fallacies of either purity or typicality, we need to appreciate that, yes, academic theories of Zapotec religion stand in stark opposition to one another; but as historical phenomena in the urban capital of Monte Albán, I would assert that all of those manifold ways of conceiving of supernaturals and divinity coexisted quite amicably, indeed in more often complementary than antagonistic ways.[591]

With that sort of pluralism in divinity conceptions in mind, I turn now to the second major block of this chapter, and thus move from background historiographical considerations to a more original exploration of four quite different variations on the ritual-architectural commemoration of divinity (priority II-A), all of which I will argue are amply and ingeniously expressed in the pre-Columbian context of Monte Albán.

II. Four Variations on the Ancient Zapotec Ritual-Architectural Commemoration of Divinity: Unbuilt Divine Landscapes or Built God Bodies, Abodes and Abstractions

At very long last, I turn now to the more constructive exploration of the commemoration of divinity (priority II-A). The historiographic exercising, stretching and calisthenics end; and the actual hermeneutically interpretive game begins. That is to say, instead of the skeptical reiteration of older ideas and controversies about ancient Zapotec conceptions of divinity, I shift now to a more empathetic, venturesome and original hermeneutic of retrieval in hopes of presenting some fresher observations concerning the ritual-architectural facilitation of rewarding

[590] Bartolomé, "Elogio del politeísmo: las cosmovisiones indígenas en Oaxaca," 633; my translation. In this case, I augment Bartomolé's assertion that, as part of their "special adaptability to the colonial confrontation," indigenous Oaxacans appropriated new "deities" to new "conceptions of divinity," which is, I think, faithful to the spirit of his argument.

[591] Too-simple food analogies can quickly distort matters, but adding even the most delicious new dishes to one's diet does not, as a rule, spoil one's taste for long-loved cuisine. And to imagine the alternate sorts of divinity conceptions discussed in this chapter as offerings on a buffet that might be selectively sampled and commingled in all sorts of combinations, some more palatable than others, is certainly a more apt metaphor than analogies to contemporary religo-ideological conflicts in which certain segments among Jews, Christians and Muslims simply cannot tolerate the coexistence of theological conceptions different from their own.

interactions with supernaturals at Monte Albán. For lots of readers, this is the actual beginning of the chapter. In order to address four respective variations on the theme—and not unmindful of the ironic parallel between my point of departure and that of the Classically-educated Dominican friars—I take my organizational cue from architectural historian Vincent Scully's highly regarded but also controversial, *The Earth, the Temple, and the Gods: Greek Sacred Architecture* (1962).[592]

Vincent Scully opens the way to our current topic by maintaining that "all Greek sacred architecture explores the character of a god or group of gods."[593] With that bold claim as his basis, his expansive treatment of the historical development of the Hellenic architectural tradition presents, not just one way of imagining the relations between buildings and supernaturals, but actually a whole series of variations on the ritual-architectural commemoration of divinity (priority II-A). Moreover, Scully's work serves our purposes especially well by virtue of his uncommon respect for what I term "the eventfulness of architecture."[594] He frames or "problematizes" his inquiry, in other words, not simply in terms of the formal appearance and supposed meanings of ancient Greek built forms, but also in terms of the religious disposition that spawns a particular architectural form, the ceremonial occasion of its use and, particularly, the integration of the built form with the surrounding landscape. He argues that together these four elements—(a) the physical work of architecture, (b) the human mindset that created the work, (c) the ritual use of the work and (d) the natural landscape in which the work is situated—constitute the appropriate unit of study, or what Scully refers to as "one ritual whole."[595] And

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[592] Vincent Scully, *The Earth, the Temple, and the Gods: Greek Sacred Architecture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962).

[593]Scully, *The Earth, the Temple, and the Gods*, 1.

[594] See Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, vol. I, chap. 3, "Conversation and Play: The Eventfulness of Architecture."

[595] Scully, *The Earth, the Temple, and the Gods*, 56. In addition to this laudable sensitivity to religious dispositions, ceremonial usages, and thus the "eventful" character of architecture, Scully makes the appealing suggestion that sacred architecture (like myth and ritual) is involved in a "double reconciliation"—i.e., reconciling the human with his physical environment, and also reconciling the earthly realm with the realm of the gods. Ibid., 47, 55.

that formulation, like few others provided by architectural historians, closely resembles what I term a "ritual-architectural event."[596]

According to Scully's "critical history of Greek sacred architecture,"[597] the development of the region's sacred architecture emerges as a four-part series of expressions and explorations of the relationships between nature (or the landscape), humanity and divinity—between "the earth, the temple and the gods."[598] Posing an atypical, but exceptionally apropos argument that architecture, not written texts, constitutes the most informing evidence for understanding Greek (and perhaps other cultures') theological ideas, Scully contends that each major change in architectural conception is mirrored by a corresponding shift in Greek conceptions of divinity.[599] And, for my present purposes, each of these four Greek-specific pairings of a particular architectural conception with a particular divinity conception likewise evokes consideration of a more generalized way in which built forms can express and advance a distinctive understanding of things supernatural. That is to say, I draw on the four main moments in Scully's historical analysis to formulate my own four more generic variations on the ritual-architectural commemoration of divinity (priority II-A).

Briefly summarized, those four specific historical stages, together with the more generalized heuristic options that they evoke, are as follows: The first phase entails not building per se, but rather what Scully sees as a Stone Age penchant for searching out a specific conjunction of natural topographic features that included a double-peaked or "two-horned"

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[596] On my concept of a "ritual-architectural event," see Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, vol. 1, chap. 3, "Conversation and Play: The Eventfulness of Architecture."

[597] Scully, *The Earth, the Temple, and the Gods*, xiv.

[598] To be fair, I should note Scully is not nearly so blunt as I am in describing these as "four stages" in the historical development; but I am working for accuracy in my representation of his position.

[599] Scully, *The Earth, the Temple, and the Gods*, 6, bolsters his argument for the uniquely revealing correspondence between architecture and ideas about supernaturals via appeal to Walter Otto's seminal *The Homeric God: The Spiritual Significance of Greek Religion* (1929).

mountain, which was identified with earth goddess;[600] that highly specific site selection criterion thereby speaks also to the more general prospect of the "personification" or "divination" of fully natural features of the landscape. In the second phase, the siting, orientation and design of Bronze Age Minoan palaces are all coordinated in such a manner that the humanly-constructed building was literally, even magically, identified with the actual body of the earth goddess; that thereby speaks to the more general but not-obvious possibility of built forms that are conceived, in visceral ways, as themselves deities.[601] In a third phase, Homeric Age Greek temples express a movement away from the conception of a magical unity between the goddess and the built form that had dominated Minoan planning in favor of a conception of divinity that was characterized by a plurality of personal gods who, aside from immortality and fantastic power, were not too different from human beings;[602] and this more plainly polytheistic view is expressed in temples that, instead of representing the actual body of the god(dess), house or accommodate the presence of a god. Then, in the fourth and culminating phase, the Classical Greek temple, "the ultimate refinement of the Stone and Bronze Age tradition,"[603] according to Scully, reflects a turn toward abstraction wherein, rather than temples that simply house a deity, the architectural forms are conceived as "articulated sculptural bodies," and as such, evocations and commemorations of a deity's most noteworthy attributes.[604]

While Scully's fulsome treatment of the historical evolution of Greek architecture provides marvelous exemplification of these four morphological options stretched out on a timeline, the much-discussed multivocal symbolism of the Hindu temple provides a vivid model of how the same heuristic options can also be simultaneously present in a single monument or context—as I will argue was the case at Monte Albán. Like its Greek counterpart, the Hindu temple, as George Michell explains, "is designed to bring about contact between man and the

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[600] See Scully, *The Earth, the Temple, and the Gods*, 11ff.

[601] See Scully, *The Earth, the Temple, and the Gods*, 11-24.

[602] Scully, *The Earth, the Temple, and the Gods*, 35.

[603] Scully, *The Earth, the Temple, and the Gods*, 64.

[604] Scully, *The Earth, the Temple, and the Gods*, 55.

gods; it is here that the gods appear to man."[605] Thus, quite obviously, even to Western observers, the Hindu temple is, in one sense, like the Homeric Age Greek temple, a "house of god," that is, an earthly residence where the gods, usually manifest in the form of an anthropomorphic image, make themselves visible and accessible to human devotees.[606] Additionally, however, Hindu temples can likewise be identified with the divinity in a much more direct sense—thus, at that point, functioning more like Minoan palaces than preclassical temples. In other words, to draw again on Mitchell, "the [Hindu] temple is not only a place of worship but also an object of worship. The divinity that is revealed within the sanctuary may also be revealed in the very fabric of the temple itself."[607] Furthermore, the Hindu temple likewise participates in the more abstract expression of the attributes of divinity with which Scully credits the Classical Greek temple; in that sense, the building itself is a kind of theological statement of the "otherwise hid" nature of Hindu divinity. Therefore, though placing less emphasis on the first option of deified landscape features, Nelson Wu, for instance, exactly argues for the simultaneous relevance of the other three possibilities when he contends that the Hindu temple is at once *the dwelling*, *the body* and "*the notion* of God."[608]

In short, then, Hindu temples present the plausibility of the coextensive pertinence of the same four variations of the ritual-architectural commemoration of divinity (priority II-A) that emerge from Vincent Scully's compelling account of transformations in the history of Greek sacred architecture: namely, (1) the personification or divination of natural, rather than humanly constructed, "architectural" features of the landscape, (2) architecture conceived as the body of a

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[605] George Michell, *The Hindu Temple: An Introduction to Its Meaning and Forms* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1988), 60.

[606] Michael W. Meister, "On the Development of a Morphology for a Symbolic Architecture: India," *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, vol. 12 (Autumn 1986): 33, for instance, comments on relatively late emergence of the conception of Hindu temples as sites to "house images of divinity;" and he then traces that development with special concern for the differences between North and South India.

[607] Michell, *The Hindu Temple*, 62; italics added.

[608] Nelson I. Wu, *Chinese and Indian Architecture: The City of Man, Mountain of God, and the Realm of Immortals* (New York: George Braziller, 1963), 21; italics added.

god, (3) architecture conceived as the abode of a god, and (4) architecture conceived as the abstract representation of a god's attributes.[609] As always, I stress that these are four heuristic (not evolutionary and not mutually exclusive) options—components in a pattern of hermeneutical questioning—that, in their application to specific historical contexts like pre-Columbian Oaxaca, overlap and intersect in complex ways. These are useful rather than "true" formulations. And, as a means of exploring the relevance of obvious and less-than-obvious variations on the so-termed divinity priority (II-A) to Monte Albán, I will follow my usual pattern by considering each of the four, first, as cross-cultural phenomenon in the broader history of religions, then as a feature of Mesoamerica writ large and, finally and more specifically, as a component of the ritual-architectural program of the Zapotec capital.

Moreover, throughout this survey of the four major variations on the theme I will be cautious and attentive to the crucial observation—which will reemerge in the Closing Thoughts—that, among ancient Oaxacans, the crowded cast of supernatural entities and life-forces is complex and less than fully consistent or systematic. And again, the detailed Table of Contents provides an expeditious outline of the formulaic logic of the various categories and innumerable sub-categories, and thus a guide to the portions of the text that could be most significant to selective readers.

A. The Personification and/or Divination of Natural "Architectural" Features of the Landscape: Unbuilt Foci for Interacting with the Divine

The first of my four variations on the ritual-architectural commemoration of divinity (priority II-A) entails the personification and/or divination of natural "architectural" features of the landscape. With this consideration of the "unbuilt" sacred architecture of nature—stones,

[609] Note that this arrangement of four main variations on the divinity priority (I-A) precisely conforms to the four sets of heuristic questions that appear under that priority in "Appendix B: An Expanded Heuristic Framework of Ritual-Architectural Priorities." Also, by the way, I should note that while the latter three of these morphological options are frequently acknowledged in the relation to Hindu temples, the first possibility—which concerns the apprehension of natural rather than humanly constructed forms—is less relevant in most accounts of Hindu architecture.

trees, lakes, crags, caves and especially mountains—we are reminded yet again of the Eliadean topics of "heterogeneous space," "hierophany" and discovered rather than constructed sacred places that figured large in chapter 1 on the homology priority (I-A).[610] But the emphasis here is on how these naturally occurring topographic features reflect and respond to ancient Oaxacan conceptions of divinity.

Scully, as noted, accentuates how, in advance of any human constructional activity, the site selection and orientation of Bronze Age Cretan palaces depended on finding those specific topographic configurations that were "already sacred" insofar as they had the following three attributes: (a) an enclosed, womb-like valley of varying size in which the palace could be set, an element that he terms a "Natural Megaron;" (b) a gently mounded or conical hill that would lie on a north-south axis with the subsequently built palace; and (c) of paramount importance, a higher, double-peaked or cleft mountain some distance beyond the hill but on the same axis, that is to say, a natural occurring geological feature that resembled "a pair of horns, but it may sometimes also suggest raised arms or wings, the female cleft, or even, at some sites, a pair of breasts."[611] Though that triple conjunction of enclosing valley, mounded hill and "sacred horned mountain" was rare, Scully observes that "All the landscape elements listed above are present at Knossos, Phaistos, Mallia, and Gournia, and in each case they themselves—and this point must be stressed—are the basic architecture of the palace complex."[612] In other words, this is a tripled landscape configuration that was sought after and then, when discovered, was embraced, before anything was built there, as a kind of architectural expression of divinity or, more specifically, of the great goddess, the central object of veneration in Minoan religion.

Eventually, once a structure was added to the already-sacred context, the natural and built features, according to Scully, worked work in unison—as "one ritual whole"—to create a means

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[610] With respect to the notion of "unbuilt architecture," I also draw inspiration from Robert Harbison, *The Built, the Unbuilt and the Unbuildable* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992).

[611] Scully, *The Earth, the Temple, and Gods*, 11.

[612] Scully, *The Earth, the Temple, and Gods*, 11.

of engaging the earth goddess.[613] But crucial in demonstrating this first variation on the ritual-architectural commemoration of divinity (priority II-A) is the realization that, even prior to any human building, already the foundational elements of the architectural context were in place. In Eliadean terms, this is *found* or *discovered* sacred architecture, naturally occurring but supernaturally charged hierophanic components of the heterogeneous landscape.[614] And while, as Scully demonstrates, numerous ecological features may contribute to the configuration of such intrinsically potent places for interacting with supernatural entities and energies, I will, in anticipation of my discussion of Monte Albán, pay special attention to the inherent sacrality of mountains.

1. Divination of the Natural Landscape as a Cross-Cultural Phenomenon: The Buildingless Sacred Space of Indians and Aborigines

Frequently we are reminded that indigenous religious traditions are "locative" or "emplaced," that is to say, these are outlooks on the world that are irrevocably connected to a specific geographical locale, and thus intimately linked to particular natural landscapes.[615] Unlike "world religions," which ostensibly are relevant and "true" across all sorts of environmental contexts, indigenous religions, so this argument goes, belong to particular ecological climes and terrains. These situated religions are not, we're told, transferable to other places, at least not without extreme compromises and complications.

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[613] Scully, *The Earth, the Temple, and the Gods*, 11, writes: "All these forms, both the natural and the constructed, can be shown to relate to what we otherwise know of Minoan religion and its dominant goddess, so that the natural and the man-made create one ritual whole, in which man's part is defined and directed by the sculptural masses of the land and is subordinate to their rhythms."

[614] See, for instance, Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 20ff.

[615] See, for instance, Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*. Jonathan Z. Smith, "The Wobbling Pivot," in his *Map Is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993 [originally 1978]), 88-103, is one of several articles in which Smith accentuates how Eliade's famed model of sacred space is predicated on attention to emplaced or "locative" religious orientations (and thereby tends to neglect "utopian" worldviews in which attachment to particular places is *not* such a crucial matter).

On those grounds, Native North American groups, for instance, riled against the naivety, even cruelty, of a Euro-American rationale for forced relocation wherein nineteenth-century Indians were told that they were free to continue their traditional religious beliefs and practices—albeit in a totally different sort of environment. But, as so many Native scholars have emphasized, "Indigenous Nations are empowered by their rootedness in particular places."[616] Redoubling frequent comments about Plains Indians' intimate, familial and reciprocal relationships to buffalo, Sean Connors explains that northwestern Karuk, Yurok and Hupa peoples' "relationship, dependency upon, or gratitude for the salmon were as deep and strong as the waters of the Klamath River itself."[617] In the phrasing of Jace Weaver and Laura Adams Weaver,

> "These indigenous cultures and religious systems are geo-mythological. That is to say that they are shaped by the geography from which the people originated and in which they found themselves—the environment, the climate, the landscape. They are rooted in the land—and not the land in some generalized, fungible sense, but in the land they regard as theirs."[618]

And thus the spiritual and ontological consequences of being disconnected from those ancestral natural habitats that are so much a part of what being human is about are even more dire than universalistic White perspectives realized. From an Indian perspective, not just animals, but also trees, hills, caves and watercourses have the character of animate personhood and kin. And thus, for many indigenous groups, "to be" means "to be in some *particular* place."[619]

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[616] Graham Harvey, editor's Introduction to *Indigenous Religions: A Companion,* ed. Graham Harvey (London and New York: Cassell, 2000), 16.

[617] Sean M. Connors, "Ecology and Religion in Karak Orientations toward the Land," in *Indigenous Religions*, Harvey, ed., 149.

[618] Jace Weaver and Laura Adams Weaver, "Indigenous Migrations, Pilgrimage Trails, and Sacred Geography: Foregrounds and Backgrounds to the *Mapa de Cuauhtinchan No. 2*," in *Cave, City, and Eagle's Nest: An Interpretive Journey through the* Mapa de Cuautinchan No. 2, eds. Davíd Carrasco and Scott Sessions (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007), 336.

[619] Frequently employed to make this point about the place-based nature of North American traditions is Keith H. Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Knowledge among the Western Apache* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), which argues that, owing to an intimate relationship between language and landscape in the Western Apache

Irrespective of very different culture-specific conceptions of divinity, the personification and/or divination of landscape features reappears in countless far-spaced contexts. As Scully asserts, in ancient Greece, clefted or double-peaked mountains, which gave the appearance of a pair of horns, a symbol of the earth mother's active power, or perhaps an embodiment of the *mons Veneris* of the Earth, "mother of all," were prized as natural ritual contexts in which to interact with the great goddess, "upon whose continued presence life depended."[620] Also suggesting an equation of places (either built or unbuilt) and divinity, Spanish Jesuit missionary Father Bernabé Cobo, for instance, was fascinated and disturbed by the way that the seventeenth-century Indians of Peru seemed to use the same two terms—*vilca* and *guaca*—"to mean not only any god or idol, but also all places of worship, such as temples, graves, and any other place that was venerated and where sacrifices were made."[621] Though puzzling to Cobo, for these indigenous South Americans, the god and the place were nearly interchangeable. "Primitive" (pre-Buddhist) Japanese are likewise credited with a personification or divinization of natural features insofar as they identified trees and rocks with various deities; and thus with respect to certain Japanese shrines (or *iwakura*), like that of the Takimatsuri-no-kami and the Okitama-no-kami, we hear that "the deity resides in a rock or in stones, and there are no

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culture, their traditional social ethics are inseparable from the places themselves. Among countless other scholars to accentuate Indians' essential relationship not simply to nature in general but to particular landscapes, George E. Tinker, "An American Indian Theological Response to Ecojustice," in *Defending Mother Earth: Native American Perspectives on Environmental Justice*, ed. Jace Weaver (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2003), 163-64, writes, "This foundational metaphor of spatiality in Indian cultures also begins to clarify the extent to which Indian spirituality and Indian existence are deeply rooted in attachment to the land and to specific territories in particular. Each nation has some understanding that it was placed into a relationship with a particular territory by spiritual forces outside of itself and thus has an enduring responsibility for that territory, just as the earth, especially the earth in that particular place, has a filial responsibility toward the people who live there."

[620] Scully, *The Earth, the Temple, and the Gods*, 10, 11, 14.

[621] Father Bernabé Cobo, *Inca Religion and Customs*, translated and ed. Rowland Hamilton (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), 10. Father Cobo, not surprisingly, has a very difficult time understanding indigenous conceptions of divinity. Regarding, for instance, extreme Inca veneration for a "crag" beside which was constructed the great sanctuary of Titicaca, see ibid., 96-97.

sanctuary buildings at all."[622] And Australian Aborigines, also more inclined to discover than to create sacred spaces, seemingly define every natural feature of their territory by the presence and activities of mythic beings so that, according to Ronald M. Berndt, "in a sense, such land not only locates but also identifies a particular deity, the one is a necessary condition of the other."[623]

In fact, Australian Aborigines—because they have so little humanly-constructed architecture juxtaposed with such a strong and complex "sense of place"—provide perhaps the best exemplum for this first morphological variation on the divinity priority (I-A). Amos Rapoport's reflections on Aborigines' "definition of place," for instance, observe that these itinerate hunter and gatherers might at first seem to be a "non-architectural people" insofar as they build almost no permanent structures; and yet Rapoport contends that "the Australian aborigines were most definitely able to establish a sense of place which was independent of any buildings which they might have constructed."[624] In his surmise, while Europeans tend to characterize the Australian landscape as uniform and formless, from an Aboriginal view, every standing stone, sandhill, cave, waterhole, tree and rocky outcrop prompts a creation story, and thus an awareness of the continued existence of the mythical ancestral figures or Dreamtime heroes who created it. All these "natural features" serve as "permanent and symbolic assurances of the presence of the Dreaming [and Dreamtime beings] which are the very ground of being and keep the world going."[625] In other words, according to Rapoport, Aborigines, instead of building cities, fences and monuments to mark their sacred places, personify or, in his term, "humanize" the features of the natural landscape, which is, therefore, as we hear in relation to many

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[622] Kenzo Tange and Noboru Kawazoe, *Ise: Prototype of Japanese Architecture* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1965), 39. In these case, though, it would appear that the rock is conceived more as the *abode* of the deity than as its actual body, in which case it actually belongs to the third main variation on the ritual-architectural commemoration of divinity (priority II-A).

[623] Ronald M. Berndt, "Identification of Deity Through the Land: An Australian Aboriginal View," in *Approaches to Iconology*, eds. Hans G. Kippenberg, et al (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1985-86), 267.

[624] Amos Rapoport, "Australian Aborigines and Definition of Place," in *Shelter, Sign and Symbol: An Exploratory Work on Vernacular Architecture*, ed. Paul Oliver (Woodstock, New York: Overlook Press, 1977), 50.

[625] Rapoport, "Australian Aborigines and Definition of Place," 43.

Amerindian groups, "alive" and "peopled" by the mythological, Dreamtime figures who are credited both with having created the local topography and continuing to reside there.[626] In Rapoport's surmise:

> "Aborigines do not move just in a landscape but in a *humanized realm saturated with significations*... rather than defining sacred space by building aborigines do it in other ways. By making each natural feature significant they obtain *the coincidence of the mythical and physical landscape which distinguishes places from each other and establishes a system of special places*."[627]

Exemplifying the priority of space over time with which many native groups are credited, "The Dreaming, when things were made, is not just in the past but also in the present. 'All space is here, all time is now'—all appears symbolically and becomes operative through ritual."[628] Moreover, in an observation that especially resonates with the Oaxaca materials, Rapoport contends that, from an Aboriginal view, "The whole world is a single entity the main characteristic of which is reciprocity."[629] And in order to honor and service their side of those reciprocal obligations, Aborigines periodically retrace the routes of the Dreamtime heroes or beings, and thereby temporarily re-enter the Dreamtime.[630]

In sum, then, with respect to the cross-cultural exemplification of this first possibility, Australian Aborigines present an extreme case because they build so little, but nonetheless personify or "humanize" the natural environment with such thoroughness. From their perspective, "The mythical landscape is superimposed over the physical landscape and they coincide at natural features;"[631] and it is at those select natural features that they have their most

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[626] Rapoport, "Australian Aborigines and Definition of Place," 43.

[627] Rapoport, "Australian Aborigines and Definition of Place," 45; italics his.

[628] Rapoport, "Australian Aborigines and Definition of Place," 43.

[629] Rapoport, "Australian Aborigines and Definition of Place," 43.

[630] Rapoport, "Australian Aborigines and Definition of Place," 46.

[631] Rapoport, "Australian Aborigines and Definition of Place," 44.

intense and rewarding reciprocal interactions with the Dreamtime beings.[632] And, moreover, by that fascinating exemplification of a buildingless sacred architecture, they open a line of questioning that I can next bring to bear on Mesoamerica and Oaxaca.

2. Divination of the Natural Landscape in Oaxaca and Monte Albán: Three Ways of Understanding the Relations between Mountains and Divinity

The proposition that nearly all indigenous religious orientations are embedded in specific natural landscapes—with which people have dynamically reciprocal relations—finds especially strong support in ethnographer Alicia Barabas's fascinating discussion of the way in which the ethno-linguistic diversity among the contemporary indigenous communities of Oaxaca might also be described as "ethno-territoriality."[633] In her analysis, it is their situatedness in distinctive micro-landscapes within the region that accounts for the 16 different ethnolinguistic groups' notably different permutations on the broader Mesoamerican cosmovision; though, in every case, communities have complex and obligatory reciprocal interactions with natural features that they understand to be alive (i.e., personified or divinized) in ways that make "the sacred territorial entities that populate the geographical environment" friends, relatives or sometimes enemies.[634]

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[632] Reechoing Scully on the Greeks' complete integration of built and unbuilt elements, Rapoport, "Australian Aborigines and Definition of Place," 47 (italics his), explains that the few permanent monuments that Aborigines do construct "are not buildings or other constructions *added* to the landscape but part of that landscape involving at most a rearrangement or reassembly of some of its elements."

[633] Barabas, "Cosmovisiones y etnoterritorialidad en las culturas indígenas de Oaxaca," provides a concise account of two key themes: (1) "ethno-territoritiality," or the correlation of community-specific Oaxacan cosmovisions with the respective landscapes in which those communities live; and (2) the logic of "balanced reciprocity" or "the ethic of the gift" (*la ética del don*) that obtains not only among families, neighbors, authorities and human communities, but also between people and features of the natural landscape that are understood to be animated in ways that make them also friends, relatives and sometimes enemies. Both those important themes are developed more fully in Alicia M. Barabas, *Dones, duenos y santos: Ensayos sobre religiones en Oaxaca* (México, D.F.: Porrúa/Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2006), especially chaps. 1-4. My fullest discussion of Barabas's fascinating exploration of these two themes will come in chapter 10 relative to what I label the propitiation priority, III-C.

[634] Barabas, "Cosmovisiones y etnoterritorialidad en las culturas indígenas de Oaxaca," 4; my translation.

In Barabas's view, the reciprocal exchanges between people and a geographical environment that is replete with "territorial animistic entities"—exchanges that participate in the complex logic of gift-giving between people and deities—provide the basis both for social identity and for the maintenance of individual and group well-being.[635]

Barabas's far-reaching observations about "ethno-territoriality" and the dynamically reciprocal relations between indigenous Oaxacans and environmental features (to which I will return later) guide us to the somewhat more specific question of the relationship between gods and topography in Mesoamerica, and especially in the rugged terrain of Oaxaca. While the notion that native Oaxacans see the ambient topography as "animated" and/or "divinized" is frequently repeated and widely affirmed, in most cases, those affirmations are also frustratingly imprecise with respect to just how it is that mountains and gods are related. Ethnographer Andrés Medina Hernández's account of the centrality of water and mountains in contemporary Nahua cosmovisions, for instance, is, on the one hand, provocative and helpful in appreciating how *altépetl* water-mountains and divinities are interrelated in the wider Mesoamerican world and thus at Monte Albán:

> "The water and the mountains are two fundamental referents in Nahua farmers' perception of the landscape. The mountains are living entities to which are attributed loving and contentious relationships; their heights establish a hierarchy among them; this explains their condition as cosmic axes that connect three spatial levels, the sky, the earth, and the underworld; it is through the hills that one may enter into communication with the entities that inhabit them and that powerfully affect human existence.[636]

Persuasive as these comments are, on the other hand, in that one concise quote, Medina Hernández collapses three sub-variations on the relations between mountains and divinity that I will, for heuristic purposes, differentiate among: (1) mountains as "cosmic axes that connect three spatial levels, the sky, the earth, and the underworld;" (2) mountains as "inhabited by

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[635] On the complex logic of gift-giving between people and deities, see Barabas, *Dones, duenos y santos*, chap. 4, "La ética del don. Los sistemas indígenas de reciprocidad" (The Ethics of Gift-gving: Indigenous Systems of Reciprocity).

[636] Andrés Medina Hernández, "La cosmovision nahua actual," en *La religion de los pueblos nahuas*, ed. Silvia Limon Olivera, (Madrid: Editorial Trotta, 2008), 195; trans. Bassett, *The Fate of Earthly Things: Aztec Gods and God-Bodies*, 22.

[supernatural] entities that powerfully affect human existence;" and (3) most poignantly, mountains as themselves as "living entities to which are attributed loving and contentious relationships."

All three of these interpretive possibilities—each of which, upon closer scrutiny, implies a profoundly different sort of relationship between mountains and deities—have been implied by various scholars' work on Oaxacan and Monte Albán. But it is third, least obvious alternative that best comports with this first variation on the commemoration of divinity (II-A), which deals with the actual divination or personification of unbuilt mountains; and thus I will address that option most fully. Nevertheless, consider very brief comments on the less perfect relevance of the first two possibilities before I turn attention to that third and most interesting alternative.

a. Mountains as "Cosmic Axes": Access to the Realm of the Gods and/or Maintenance of a Human-Divine Covenant

The first and perhaps most frequently noted possibility is that mountains are "cosmic axes," and thus "points of access" from this earthly world to gods who reside in some "otherworld." Most prominently, as we've seen, in Mircea Eliade's classic formulation, the very first priority of *homo religiosi* in pursuit of a meaningful mode of being in the world is "access to the sacred," and orientation with respect to mountains (and caves) is most definitely among the most effective and most common means of attaining that.[637] Having suggested that no fully rewarding human sense of being is possible without an ongoing connection to the realm of the gods, Eliade likewise maintains that no meaningful orientation is possible without orientation with respect to a center or *axis mundi*—of which mountains provide the most poignant exemplar:

> "Since the sacred mountain is *an axis mundi* connecting earth with heaven, it in a sense touches heaven and hence marks the highest point in the world; consequently the territory that surrounds it, and that constitutes "our world," is held to be the highest among countries."[638]

[637] See, for instance, Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, 99-100.

[638] Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 38.

While to make my present critique requires a somewhat blunt reading of Eliade's classic formulation, we should note that his way of phrasing the matter implies that, from the perspective of traditional peoples, the gods, who did populate the terrestrial world during the primordial era or mythical *illud tempus* of creation, do not any longer reside on earth. Now the gods, though still very active, dwell in some otherworldly realm, most presumably in the sky, though some reside in the underworld to which caves provide the primary access. Consequently, Eliade's scheme leads us to believe that *homo religiosi* value mountains not as residences of deities or as themselves divine entities, but rather as "points of access"—like ladders, ropes, staircase passageways or "sites of ontological transition"—through with humans might be afforded a connection with gods who live elsewhere.[639]

In the specific case of Monte Albán, it is the work of Arthur Joyce, the first to apply the notion of *axis mundi* to the Zapotec capital in a sustained way, that we see the plausibility of this initial way of understanding the relation between Oaxaca mountains and the gods. While seldom employing formulations that suggest the summit and Main Plaza of Monte Albán constitute the actual residence of gods, or that the sculpted mountain was itself considered a deity, Joyce repeatedly asserts that such high-sited ceremonial precincts are the premier venues for the cultivation and responsible maintenance of "an ongoing relationship with the divine."[640] In Joyce's view, both the successes and failures of San José Mogote, and later Monte Albán, are contingent not simply on accessibility to resources or defensive capabilities, but even more on their appeal as places at which elites and commoners can play their complementary roles in maintaining "contact with the divine."[641] Accordingly, though here again I risk too-simple

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[639] Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, 378.

[640] Among numerous relevant articles, see Arthur A. Joyce, "The Founding of Monte Albán: Sacred Propositions and Social Practices," in *Agency in Archaeology*, eds. Marcia-Anne Dobres and John Robb (London: Routledge, 2000), 71-91; and 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), 192-216.

[641] For a summary of Joyce's stance on Monte Albán as a sacred space and *axis mundi* (where I note, by the way, that Joyce never explicitly credits Eliade for his interpretation), see Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, chap. 7, "Arthur Joyce's Poststructural Rereading of Oaxacan Social History: A Story of Sacred Spaces, Rituals and the Agency of Commoners."

summation of a more complex argument, Joyce repeatedly asserts that Oaxacans' primary and deliberate motivation for ritualizing—sacrifice included—was to "communicate with the supernatural" or, more specifically, as befits his notion of a contractual relationship, to honor one's "covenantal" obligations to the gods and then to collect one's due rewards.[642] Later in chapter 10 on the propitiation priority (III-C), I will express some ambivalence about this reliance on the Abrahamic, especially Jewish, notion of a contractual give-and-take arbitration between humans and deities (a legalistic or bargaining metaphor that Eliade would *not* apply to the "archaic consciousness"). But for now, the key point is that this view implies that mountains provide the channel of communication for a kind of long-distance interaction with divine negotiating partners who presumably dispense their favors only if they are pleased with the petitions of people. In this scenario, coarsely summarized, mountains enable access to very anthropomorphic gods who live far off in the otherworld.

b. Mountains as Deity Residences: Unbuilt Hill Homes to Water Serpents and Other Supernatural Entities

A second way of understanding the relations between mountains and divinity comes in Medina Hernández's non-controversial claim that "it is through the hills that one may enter into communication with *the entities that inhabit them* and that powerfully affect human existence."[643] Here the seemingly obvious premise is that some supernaturals—who, like people, exist in relation to, but somewhat independent from, the natural environment—reside not in some ethereal otherworld, but either in or on the earthly mountains; and thus frequently we hear that, to interact directly with the gods and to have the best chance of a favorable response to one's propitiations, people need to ascend to those high places. There is, of course, a profound

[642] As I noted in chapter 1 relative to the homology priority (I-A), Joyce is not explicit concerning the way that he regards the category of "the sacred," which he uses interchangeably with "the divine" and occasionally "the supernatural." One can imagine that he adheres to the social scientific position that "the sacred" is a cultural construction rather than an ontological reality; but his usage of term, perhaps surprisingly, is actually similar to that of phenomenologists who exercise epoché or "bracketing" insofar as they withhold judgment on the question of the existence or non-existence of "the sacred."

[643] Medina Hernández, "La cosmovision nahua actual," 195; Bassett's translation, my italics.

difference between ascending a mountain in order to have a kind of face-to-face encounter with a supernatural (i.e., the present option) versus relying on mountains as a axis-like conduits through which people contact far-off divinities (i.e., the previous option). Nevertheless, rather than make explicit that important distinction between deities who are understood to reside in the celestial otherworld (or subterranean underworld) versus those more earth-based supernatural entities—like the ones that, in Medina Hernández's term, actually "inhabit" mountains—most commentaries on Mesoamerican sacred mountains simply conflate the two contrastive options.

Case in point, Oaxacanist Robert Markens, in the context of a protracted and persuasive discussion of the still-underappreciated significance of sacred mountains in the rise and fall of Monte Albán and other pre-Columbian cities, largely supports the first (*axis mundi*) interpretation, but also lends tacit support to this second possibility.[644] Taking Cerro Danush, the impressive hill at the base of which lies the present-day Zapotec village of Macuilxóchitl, midway between Oaxaca City and Mitla, as his primary example, Markens invokes the relevance of the *altépetl* water-mountain concept and reaffirms the former heuristic possibility when he writes that, from the perspective of contemporary residents, sacred mountains like Danush "are hollow and serve as liminal points that link the underworld with the terrestrial world and the firmament."[645] He reinforces his support for the first option by submitting evidence that this conception of water-mountains extends back into the Preclassic era, and by explicitly concurring with Arthur Joyce that the appeal of Monte Albán depended in large part on its mountain site

[644] Robert Markens, "La transición del Clásico al Postclásico en el Valle de Oaxaca: hacia las causas y consecuencias de una crisis política," 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), 489-529. The first portions of this article are a quite technical discussion of Postclassic ceramics; but then, noting that "there are few studies that consider [the symbolism of sacred mountains] for the pre-Hispanic past of the [Oaxaca] region" (ibid., 515; my translation), Markens provides more venturesome comments on the topic. Recall that appealed to this work in chapter 1 relative to the homology priority (I-A).

[645] Markens, "La transición del Clásico al Postclásico en el Valle de Oaxaca," 517; my translation. Recall from chapter 1 that he explores the same example more briefly in 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): 67-81.

providing a privileged point of access to supernaturals who resided in some otherworldly celestial realm.[646] But also, albeit without much elaboration, Markens exemplifies this second option with his comments about the beings, objects and activities that are understood to occupy that hollow space inside of such mountains.

Markens says of Cerro Danush, for instance, that "It is common belief that a snake is the owner or guardian of the hill and its abundance;"[647] and, in that sense, the mountain is an actual domicile to one sort of supernatural. He notes also "the popular idea that that the hill contains a treasure in the form of gold coins," though he thinks that is "probably a distortion of the concept of natural abundance of the physical environment that was introduced by the Spaniards after the conquest."[648] Much more germane, though, are Markens's very brief comments about enduring beliefs in "a large feathered serpent" who resides permanently inside the watery Cerro Danush, but who "leaves the hill for a few hours on the eve of the New Year."[649] To invoke an example of which I will make more in the next section, we find corroboration for this idea that Oaxacan *altepeme*, or "hills of sustenance," were inhabited by amphibious supernaturals in Roberto Zarate Morón's observation that current residents of the southern Isthmus of Tehuantepec believe, with respect to their local mountain of Cerro Blanco, that, "A lizard that lives in the belly of the mountain is the representative of the feminine and the moon and is fertilized by the sun, thus creating life and human beings, that is, the Binnizá or Zapotecs, the first daughter of the lizard."[650] Moreover, in the context of his attempts to provide deeper and wider evidence for the presumably pan-Mesoamerican notion of "inhabited" sacred mountains, Markens directs

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[646] Markens, "La transición del Clásico al Postclásico en el Valle de Oaxaca," 523.

[647] Markens, "La transición del Clásico al Postclásico en el Valle de Oaxaca," 517; my translation

[648] Markens, "La transición del Clásico al Postclásico en el Valle de Oaxaca," 517; my translation.

[649] Markens, "La transición del Clásico al Postclásico en el Valle de Oaxaca," 515.

[650] Roberto Zarate Morón, "Símbolos prehispánicos y ritos contemporáneos de creación y nacimiento en el sur del Istmo de Tehuantepec," en *Estructuras políticas en el Oaxaca antiguo: Memoria de la Tercera Mesa Redonda de Monte Albán,* ed. Nelly M. Robles García (México: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2004), 194; my translation.

attention to the much-discussed mural of Tepantitla in Teotihuacan, which depicts what is sometimes termed the paradise of Tlaloc or Tlalocan. In that Classic-era Central Mexican mural,

> "The central motif is a large hill from the base of which flow two streams of water in which fish and other animals associated with water appear. Plants of the rivers also sprout. Above the rivers and on both sides of the mountain, dozens of tiny people appear carrying out a wide variety of activities of daily life."[651]

In that case, then, the watery spaces inside *altepeme* are not just deity residences, but microcosmic worlds unto themselves where deities, but also otherworldly people, plants and animals, undertake a host of special and very mundane activities.

At any rate, imposing on Markens's analysis a distinction that he himself does not make, he implies that sacred mountains like Cerro Danush, Cerro Blanco—and also Monte Albán—served a kind of double duty in the divination of natural features (priority II-A). For one, as Eliade and Joyce imply, *altepeme* provide points of access to celestially-based supernaturals (e.g., the sort of gods with whom people maintain a covenantal relationship); but also, as this second alternative suggests, natural mountains sometimes serve as well as residences for other sorts of on-site supernaturals (e.g., amphibious creatures like the great feathered serpent).[652]

c. Mountains as "Animate Entities": Obligatory Reciprocity with Earth Goddesses, "Lords of the Hills" and "Thunder-Talkers"

A third way of understanding the relationship between mountains and gods—wherein mountains are themselves conceived either as "animate entities" or actual deities—is more subtle and, I think, more important; and thus I afford it fuller attention. Medina Hernández directs

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[651] Markens, "La transición del Clásico al Postclásico en el Valle de Oaxaca," 518; my translation.

[652] Additionally, though I will not pursue the topic in the present discussion, which focuses on mountains, the rich tradition of cave oracles—that is, natural topographic features that are understood to house deities with special prognosticatory powers—also belongs to this sub-variation on the commemoration of divinity (priority II-A).

attention to this more intriguing possibility with his pregnant suggestion that, for Mesoamericans, "mountains are living entities to which are attributed loving and contentious relationships."[653] Moving past the notions of mountains as points of access to far-off deities or as residences of on-site deities, this alternative thus resonates more directly with Vincent Scully's comments about the actual equation of naturally occurring womb-like valleys and "two-horned" mountains with the Minoan goddess of the earth. And in the Mesoamerican and Oaxacan materials there are many variations on this fascinating prospect of obligatory and reciprocal relationships with "living mountains." Consider four, again not-mutually-exclusive, takes on the topic.

For one, a fairly straightforward exemplification of this alternative comes in Roberto Zárate Morán's layered interpretation of the sacred mountain of Dani Guíaati (or Cerro Blanco), near the southern Isthmus town of Asunción Ixtaltepec, together with the pictographic paintings in a cave known as Ba'cuana, which is situated on that mountain.[654] As for Australians, the symbolism of the cave paintings demonstrates, according to Zárate Morán, that these unbuilt natural features are associated with a set of mythological episodes that explain both the creation of the landscape and the human Binnizá or Zapotecs who occupy that area;[655] and, in that sense, Cerro Blanco is conceived both as *a place of origins* insofar as it was "the first true mountain that emerged from the primordial waters of the inaugural day of the cosmos" and as *the center of the world* or "the place where heaven, earth and hell are joined."[656] Also, as just noted, Cerro

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[653] Medina Hernández, "La cosmovision nahua actual," 195; Bassett's translation.

[654] Roberto Zarate Morón, "Símbolos prehispánicos y ritos contemporáneos de creación y nacimiento en el sur del Istmo de Tehuantepec," en *Estructuras políticas en el Oaxaca antiguo: Memoria de la Tercera Mesa Redonda de Monte Albán*, ed. Nelly M. Robles García (México: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2004), 175-203. I discussed this article in chapter 1 on the homology priority (I-A) in a sub-section on "*Altépetl* as a 'Water Mountain' or 'Hill of Sustenance': The Existential Allure of Cosmic Mountains."

[655] Zárate Morón, "Símbolos prehispánicos y ritos contemporáneos de creación y nacimiento en el sur del Istmo de Tehuantepec," 175.

[656] Zárate Morón, "Símbolos prehispánicos y ritos contemporáneos de creación y nacimiento en el sur del Istmo de Tehuantepec," 177-78; my translation, italics added.

Blanco is understood to be home to a preternatural life-giving lizard.[657] But even more to the present point, Zárate Morán contends that "what is most impressive in those stories are references to the groans and moans of a woman that come from the mountain and were heard in the town of Asuncion Ixtaltepec."[658] That is to say, the mountain is conceived not simply as the site of cosmogonic mythical events and the continuing residence of deities, but is, moreover, in the eyes of indigenous locals, itself an active and living deity. As Zárate Morán says, "the sacred mountain of Cerro Blanco was and is considered as *the goddess and the great mother*, with Ba'cuana [i.e., the cave within the mountain] conceived as her feminine belly and womb into which the Sun, which is conceived as male, introduces himself as her male counterpart."[659] And thus, for those who enter into a cooperative relationship with Cerro Blanco, the mountain is also *a place of healing* on the summit of which local curers continue to conduct rites that, with the help of the great goddess, restore the emotional and physical health of locals.[660]

For two, writing 30 years earlier, José Alcina Franch's work on the intimate relations between deities, mountains and caves also advances the prospect of personified and/or divinized natural features—but, at the same time, forewarns us that this sub-variation on the theme applies only to some of the manifold Zapotec genres and conceptions of divinity transversed earlier in this chapter.[661] On the one hand, Alcina Franch, as I've noted, is among those who synthesizes the deity lists derived from Córdova and Balsalobre into an authoritative "Zapotec pantheon of gods;" and he thereby identifies some 13 "principal gods" who were presumably widely shared

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[657] Zárate Morón, "Símbolos prehispánicos y ritos contemporáneos de creación y nacimiento en el sur del Istmo de Tehuantepec," 194.

[658] Zárate Morón, "Símbolos prehispánicos y ritos contemporáneos de creación y nacimiento en el sur del Istmo de Tehuantepec," 176; my translation.

[659] Zárate Morón, "Símbolos prehispánicos y ritos contemporáneos de creación y nacimiento en el sur del Istmo de Tehuantepec," 194; my translation, italics added.

[660] Zárate Morón, "Símbolos prehispánicos y ritos contemporáneos de creación y nacimiento en el sur del Istmo de Tehuantepec," 180.

[661] Alcina Franch, "Los dioses del panteón zapoteco" (1972), 9-43. Recall that this article was reprinted as chapter 5 of Alcina Franch, *Calendario y religión entre los zapotecos* (1993); but I cite page numbers from the original version.

across the region.[662] But these "main deities," while perhaps associated with respective calendrical periods, are *not*, in his description, identified with just one particular place; and therefore, these deities are *not* directly pertinent to this sub-variation on the divinity priority (I-A). Nevertheless, on the other hand, by his additional attention to "other Zapotec deities," "local deities" and, specifically, "lords of the hills" (*señores de los cerros*)—that is, "gods that seem to be the spirits of some concrete places" (*los espíritus de algunos lugares concretos*)—Alcina Franch provides a host of relevant examples of the identification of topographic features not simply with the domiciles of deities or access points to deities who reside in otherworldly realms, but with those supernaturals themselves.[663] And, as also foreshadowed earlier, it is not the works of Córdova or Balsalobre, but rather the village-specific *Relaciones Geográficas*, that provide by far the most compelling, if usually elliptical, support for his contention that "The identification of the hills or the summits of the mountains as divinities is general for the entire northern region of Oaxaca and perhaps for the entire Zapotec culture area."[664]

Capitalizing on Walter Krickeberg's earlier observation that, "the Zapotec jaguar god… is a close relative of the earth and cave god common to most southern Mexican peoples… [who is known by] very similar names such as 'heart of the kingdom,' 'heart of the place,' etc.,"[665] Alcina Franch speaks directly to the equation of unbuilt natural features and gods by clarifying that, "certain deities resided on some hills, but in many other cases the name of the mountain is equivalent to the name of the deity, or *the hill is the deity itself*."[666] Then, in a section on "Lords of the Hills" where he assembles numerous illustrations from various *Relaciones Geográficas* of community-specific affiliations with particular local god-mountains, he notes, for example, that,

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[662] See Alcina Franch, "Los dioses del panteón zapoteco," 12-29.

[663] See Alcina Franch, "Los dioses del panteón zapoteco," 29-34.

[664] Alcina Franch, "Los dioses del panteón zapoteco," 32; my translation.

[665] Walter Krickeberg, "Mesoamerica," in Krickeberg et al, *Pre-Columbian American Religions* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968), 55; cited by Alcina Franch, "Los dioses del panteón zapoteco," 32. Krickeberg, ibid., that this Zapotec jaguar god, who is closely associated with the earth and caves, "appears in the Aztec pantheon as Tepeyollotli ('heart of the mountain'). He was an oracular god whose voice was the echo."

[666] Alcina Franch, "Los dioses del panteón zapoteco," 32; my translation, italics added.

in the Sierra Norte town of Yazona, offerings of stones, feathers, birds and dogs were made "to the same hill that was, according to their tradition, the god that their ancestors worshiped."[667] Another *Relacion* reports how, in the nearby Oaxaca town of Yalagui, they worshiped a high place "that they identified with the lord of the hill of Yalagui."[668] More famously and somewhat more generally, both colonial documents and contemporary accounts show that residents of more than 15 towns traveled to the divine hill and cave of Sempualtepeque (or Cempoaltépetl) in the Mixes' territory, which they approached with a mix of "fear and reverence;"[669] and, here again paying special attention to the framing of the prayers and petitions that people offered on these summits, Alcina Franch stresses not simply the generalized association between hills and gods, but "*the true divinity of the hill*."[670] In short, then, while in many of these examples an "idol" representing some divinity (or eventually a cross) was erected on the hilltop or in the cave, these cases reecho the sparse building of the Australian context—and thereby perfectly exemplify the present morphological sub-option—insofar as it is the natural topography of hills and grottos, not any humanly-constructed forms, that are providing both the context and the primary object of their devotion.

For three, while Alcina Franch's distinction between mountains and caves as mere residences of gods (or points of access to gods) versus the actual equation of hills and divinities is difficult to dispute, other Oaxacanists—notably John Monaghan—work to put a finer point on the ways in which the natural topography is "divinized." Though his subtle stance is not easily summarized, recall that Monaghan rejects the timeworn posit of a bluntly polytheistic worship of individuated deities in favor of a claim that the Nuyoo Mixtec-speakers with whom he lived, like other Mesoamericans, adhere to a "monistic-pantheistic conception of deity" wherein "the

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[667] Alcina Franch, "Los dioses del panteón zapoteco," 32; my translation. For each of the examples of "lords of the hills," Alcina Franch provides a citation to the Archivo General de Indias, Sevilla (AGI) that clarifies which specific *Relaciones Geográficas* he is drawing on.

[668] Alcina Franch, "Los dioses del panteón zapoteco," 32; my translation.

[669] Alcina Franch, "Los dioses del panteón zapoteco," 32.

[670] Alcina Franch, "Los dioses del panteón zapoteco," 33; my translation, italics added.

universe is not distinct from divinity."[671] Stressing the fundamentally non-Western nature of native presuppositions, he contends that, "If the Christian God created the universe apart from Himself, in Mesoamerica the universe emerges from the deity."[672] Given this "non-theistic outlook," Mesoamericans are, however, vexed by what Monaghan terms "the pantheistic problem": "If the sacred is infinite and formless, how can it be objectified and worshiped? The danger is that the 'all' shades into 'nothing.'"[673] At first blush, then, a pantheistic perspective seems to undermine the special prestige of any particular place or feature of the ambient environment.

But, according to Monaghan, Mesoamericans educe a creative, distinctively indigenous resolution to the theological paradox that, if everything (and everywhere) is sacred, then nothing (and nowhere) is sacred. He proposes that, in Mesoamerica, "there is an area-wide focus on surfaces," which challenges the Western presumption that "the real truth" invariably lies "beneath the surface."[674] In perhaps his most vivid example of that counterintuitive proposition, Monaghan explains how in the infamous case of Xipe Totec, wherein the Aztec deity is portrayed as a naked man wearing a flayed human skin, we Westerns are inclined to identify the god with the living human (who is beneath the surface) and to view the enshrouding skin as a merely external thing; but from the Mesoamerican focus on surfaces, the god Xipe Totec *is* the

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[671] Monaghan, "Theology and History in the Study of Mesoamerican Religions," 26.

[672] Monaghan, "Theology and History in the Study of Mesoamerican Religions," 27.

[673] Monaghan, "Theology and History in the Study of Mesoamerican Religions," 29.

[674] Monaghan, "Theology and History in the Study of Mesoamerican Religions," 29. Though it may seem an unlikely parallel (and it is not a connection he himself makes), Monaghan's difficult remarks on a decidedly non-Western, Mesoamerican "focus on surfaces" is reminiscent of the argument in Mont Redmond, *Wondering into Thai Culture or Thai Whys and Otherwise* (Bangkok: Redmonian Insight Enterprises, 1998), wherein Westerners' persistent bafflement with Theravada Buddhist Thai culture frequently derives from a Eurocentric attempt to find a supposedly "true" significance "below the surface" when, in fact, according to Redmond, ibid., 4-5, for Thais, "appearance is all... life is pure surface." Counterintuitively, the truest reality is "on the surface" rather than "beneath the surface."

dead but not lifeless, enveloping skin.[675] By stressing that the essence lies on (rather than beneath) the surface, Monaghan reechoes other scholars' surmises that the cluttered codex depictions of endlessly morphing and merging Mesoamericans gods reveal that a deity's identity actually depends more on their only-seemingly-superficial attire and accouterments than on a fixed body.[676] In these depictions, what the gods are wearing and carrying *is* who they are; and with changes of garb, regalia and accessories they can become someone or something else.

That is to say, from this understanding of the characteristically Mesoamerican view, "what makes a god a god is the 'skin,' the 'bark,' the 'head,' the 'face,' or the 'mask'... These surfaces might be wooden or stone images, but also places, such as caves..., altars, lakes, rocky outcroppings, and hilltops."[677] In other words, with respect to on-the-surface versus beneath-the-surface relationships, or what Monaghan calls "part/whole relationships," the Earth is the generalized "whole" in the sense of the elemental force of the universe, while mountains are specific "parts," "places" or "surfaces," which nonetheless correspond to the whole. Working to link this abstruse pantheistic outlook to the veneration of particular mountains, he writes,

> "In some areas, mountains are said to have grown out of the body of the Earth so that just as the organs and limbs of a body are both distinct and united in a larger whole, so too are the gods. The landscape itself serves as a model for the particularity of the gods, as every god has a place and every place has a god.... Thus streams, rivers, lakes, large stones, swamps, cliffs, and indeed all features of the landscape may have their owner. These are often spoken of as doorways to the owner's house and may be marked by crosses or other signs."[678]

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[675] Monaghan, "Theology and History in the Study of Mesoamerican Religions," 29. To support this "pantheistic" interpretation of Xipe Totec, Monaghan appeals to Arild Hvidtfeldt, *Teotl and Ixiptlaltli: Some Central Conceptions in Mexican Religion*, 140; and Alfredo López Austin, *Hombre-dios: Religión and Política en el mundo náhuatl*, 119. 2a. ed. (México, D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1989 [originally 1973]), 119.

[676] Regarding complicating and fascinating observations about Mesoamerican (especially Aztec) deities shifting identities in connection to their attire or regalia, see, for instance, Nicholson, "Religion in Pre-Hispanic Central Mexico," 408ff., on the "diagnostic insignia" of Aztec gods; or Brundage, *The Fifth Sun*, 50-56, on "the masks of god" and "the principle of divine transfiguration."

[677] Monaghan, "Theology and History in the Study of Mesoamerican Religions," 29.

[678] Monaghan, "Theology and History in the Study of Mesoamerican Religions," 29, n. 12.

Thus at the risk of oversimplifying what Monaghan is working to describe, individual Oaxacan mountains, rather than independent or anthropomorphic deities, are "parts" of the "whole" Earth, and to that extent they are points of contact, or perhaps "stand-ins," for the infinite and formless unity of the All. From a monist-pantheistic view, every particular mountain participates in the essential oneness of nature and divinity.

Fourth and finally, an alternate and perhaps more accessible means of understanding the sense in which the "unbuilt architecture" of mountains and caves enjoy a divine status comes in Molly Bassett's so-termed "five-part spectrum of animacy,"[679] a native organizational system that assesses the relative "aliveness" of everything in the world. Here the notion of *personified* natural features is perhaps more suitable than *divinized* unbuilt architecture. Remember that Bassett's work also challenges oversimple intimations of Greco-Roman-like polytheism by discovering among contemporary Nahua communities in Veracruz, and thus presumably among pre-Columbian Aztecs (and maybe Zapotecs), an all-inclusive "folk taxonomy" wherein, at one pole of the spectrum, ordinary rocks and stones are fully inanimate and, at the opposite endpoint, deities (*teteo*) are fully animate. Other "somewhat alive" features of the natural world like water, fire, clouds, wind and mountains fall somewhere in-between the extremes of complete inanimacy and high animacy.[680] While not, as Joyce Marcus does, entirely eliminating the possibility of belief in personal gods, Bassett's work thereby prompts us to replace the too-blunt question *Is the mountain a deity?* with a more nuanced query: *To what extent is the mountain animate?* And then her work also provides clues for how to address that knotty issue.

Where Bassett's Nahua-speaking Veracruzan "informants" cite movement as one of the key signs of an animate status—which explains why clouds, fire and water are appreciated as

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[679] Bassett, *The Fate of Earthly Things*, 12.

[680] In the five-part "spectrum of animacy" provided by Bassett, *The Fate of Earthly Things*, 12, mountains, along with water, fire and wind, belong to the third tier—which is to say, mountains are "less animate" than the gods, stars, sun or moon, but "more animate" than people and animals.

"quite animate"—fixed mountains are designated as animate on the basis of other criteria.[681] When contemporary Nahuas proclaim that "Yes, the mountain is alive," they support that contention by noting that mountains, like people, have not only physical bodies but also anthropomorphic sensory capabilities and susceptibilities.[682] Mountains, for instance, are understood to require food so that one should never approach them without bringing offerings; and, even more significantly, mountains' animacy is bolstered by their status as "thunder-talkers" or "talk-makers" insofar as, according to native explanations, "When it thunders, it is as if this hill also answers. It also responds. That's the way the hill is."[683] In other words, mountains listen as well as talk so that, according to this Nahua woman, when "we hear thunder and its echo, what we are hearing is one hill speaking and another replying."[684]

Thus, while occasionally both Bassett and her Nahua collaborators revert to the plainer language that mountains are "homes" or "residences of the gods,"[685] which might imply that hills serve a largely neutral housing function, she also presents the much more interesting, and I suspect more accurate, formulation that mountains are conceived as highly animate, and thus invested with both person-like and god-like qualities.[686] Bassett writes:

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[681] Regarding movement as a foremost sign of animacy, it is worth noting that, while mountains do not move, the notion of *altépetl* water-mountains suggests that inside of mountains there are dynamically moving fluids.

[682] Bassett, *The Fate of Earthly Things*, 24.

[683] Bassett, *The Fate of Earthly Things*, 22-23, quoting one of the native women with whom she interacted in Veracruz.

[684] Bassett, *The Fate of Earthly Things*, 23.

[685] See, for instance, Bassett, *The Fate of Earthly Things*, 23.

[686] Bassett, *The Fate of Earthly Things*, 23, appeals to Bruno Latour, *On the Modern Cult of Fetish Gods* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), to make the case that, for contemporary Nahaus, mountains are also "fetishes," which leads Bassett, ibid., to argue that, "These mountains traverse the (super)natural because their community forms them and is formed by them, fabricates them and is made by them, and enchants them and, yes, is enchanted by them. These thunderous entities are, quite literally, 'talk-makers.' They talk, and they are the subject of talk." The notion that people interact with mountains as speaking and listening "conversation partners" is, moreover, precisely consistent with Hans-George Gadamer's notion of dialogical

> "Rather than demarcate the animate god living on or in the mountain from the inanimate mountain, for instance, they describe the *totiotzin* [or god] as the mountain, the mountain as the *totiotzin*, the mountain as a mountain, and the mountain-talk as echoing thunder. Their designation of these entities' animacy derives from their observation of the ways in which [the mountains] relate (socially) and communicate."[687]

By that part of Bassett's description, both the language of "divinized" and "personified" mountains are highly applicable. And because mountains are living, communicative, even social entities, relationships with them are, as Medina Hernández notes, "loving" but also contentious and, moreover, mutually reciprocal.[688] There are obligations on both sides: "When there is thunder, [the mountains] answer. When they don't answer, when there is no answer, it's because we haven't fed them."[689] Yes, mountains are "hills of sustenance," but their sustenance is not free.

d. Divination of the Unbuilt Mountain of Monte Albán: Natural Altepeme *as Themselves Deities and "Animated Entities"*

In final sum, then, with respect to the first of my four main variations on the ritual-architectural commemoration of divinity (priority II-A)—the divinization and/or personification of unbuilt natural landscapes, especially mountains—the extreme relevance of this heuristic option to the great capital of the Zapotecs is incontestable, but also complicated in several respects. Monte Albán, as I have mentioned so often, is, on the one hand, Mesoamerica's premier example of a major urban center built atop a natural, god-given mountain; but, as noted with similar frequency, the ambient topography on which the city is situated was so thoroughly manipulated and resculpted as to strain the designation of that mountaintop as an "unbuilt" natural feature. Monte Albán's summit is both natural *and* man-made. Though expressing a

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interaction (e.g., between people and works of architecture) to which I allude repeatedly in this work.

[687] Bassett, *The Fate of Earthy Things*, 23.

[688] Medina Hernández, "La cosmovision nahua actual," 195; quoted by Bassett, 22.

[689] Bassett, *The Fate of Earthy Things*, 22, quoting another of her Nahua collaborators.

geo-mythological "sense of place" as intense as that of the buildingless Australian Aborigines, Monte Albán is the quintessential exemplar of a sacred space that was both found or discovered, and then humanly constructed.[690] And in that respect, the Zapotec capital is also a superb exemplar of Vincent Scully Greek-based observation that "the landscapes and the temples together form one ritual whole… and must therefore be seen in relation to one another."[691]

But, focused here on the "found" features of Monte Albán's setting, I contend that each of the three generalized sub-variations on the relationship between natural topographic features and divinity is applicable—though in quite uneven ways. First, certainly the mountain site comports to the familiar Eliadean notion of an *axis mundi* or point of ontological transition that affords access to gods who presumably reside in celestial (or subterranean) realms, and thus Monte Albán's unbuilt hilltop provides a privileged site for the ongoing maintenance of "a human-divine covenant." Secondly, though seldom fleshed out in any rigorous way, there is general assent that the raw mountain, even prior to any construction, was "inhabited" by various supernatural entities and energies, and to that extent, was a deity residence.

But third and, for me, far more poignant is the decidedly non-Western proposition that the ambient *altépetl* was itself "an animate entity." In that respect, Roberto Zárate Morán helps us to see how the water-mountain may well have been perceived as "the goddess and the great mother;" José Alcina Franch alerts us that, where the divinization of such high places has little to do with "the pantheon of main Zapotec gods" enumerated by Córdova and Balsalobre, it vividly exemplifies the pan-Oaxacan preoccupation with local "lords of the hills," which is amply documented in the village-specific *Relaciones Geográficas*; John Monaghan goes further in challenging the conventional presumptions of polytheism by stressing a monistic-pantheistic indigenous outlook in which veneration for Monte Albán's mountain is a means of acknowledging the essential oneness of nature and divinity; and Molly Bassett's "spectrum of

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[690] Recall that Monte Albán's paired status both a *found or discovered* and *humanly-constructed* sacred space was among the foremost points in the Closing Thoughts to chapter 1 on the homology priority (I-A).

[691] Scully, *The Earth, the Temple, and the Gods*, 20.

animacy" urges us to appreciate the unbuilt mountain as a living being and conversation partner that people engaged in a reverent but also pragmatic pattern of obligatory reciprocity.

In brief, then, the powerful political capital of Monte Albán was made vastly more powerful (and alluring) by its emplacement atop a living divinity. Even before one outcrop was leveled or one temple-stone laid, this was a highly propitious site for the expression and commemoration of divinity (priority II-A). That in mind, consider next, the first of three more specifically architectural means whereby the already-divinized landscape of the Zapotec capital was enhanced.

B. Architecture Conceived as the Actual Body of a Deity: Buildings as Animate Entities and/or Physical Embodiments of a God or Goddess

The second main variation on the commemoration of divinity (priority II-A) speaks to the more specifically architectural, but perhaps not more obvious, circumstance in which built forms are conceived as the actual body of a deity. In these cases, for which Scully again provides extensive Minoan illustrations, built forms are equated or "literally" identified with (the body of) a divinity, most prominently, a goddess of the earth. Student of Asian sacred architecture Nelson Wu, for instance, anticipates the upcoming third and fourth variations on the divinity theme when he notes that the triplely significant Hindu temple is conceived at once as *the dwelling of God* (option three) and as an expression of "*the notion"* or *abstract attributes of God* (option four); but Wu, like Scully, addresses this present second option when he explicitly contends that the Hindu temple is also "*the body of God*."[692]

In any case, again the same three-step pattern obtains: First, I look to the symbolism of Asian Meru temples, North American "effigy mounds" and Minoan sacred architecture as points of entry for brief cross-cultural exemplification of this heuristic option. Then the ample tradition of so-termed earth-monster temples in the Maya zone will provide the most vivid demonstration

[692] Wu, *Chinese and Indian Architecture*, 21.

of this as a broadly Mesoamerican phenomenon. And thirdly, I turn back to Oaxaca and Monte Albán where this important prospect has been, so it seems, little discussed.

1. Architectural Deity Bodies as a Cross-Cultural Phenomenon: Meru Temples, Effigy Mounds and Minoan Palaces as Embodiments of Divinity

To entertain the not-obvious heuristic alternative of built forms that *are* divinities requires one to adopt expansive notions of both architecture and deity. While strictures against idolatry largely eliminate this equation of buildings and god(s) as an acceptable possibility among the Abrahamic traditions, Asian and indigenous contexts present greater promise.

Indeed, perhaps the most instructive cross-cultural example of the inobvious prospect of a building that is itself a god comes with the multidimensional and much-discussed symbolism of Mount Meru, the five-peaked "cosmic mountain" of Hindu, Jain and Buddhist cosmology, which is considered to be the center of all physical, metaphysical and spiritual universes. In the phrasing of I. W. Mabbett,

> "[Mount Meru] stands at the center of the universe, constituting a framework of coordinate system for a total [Hindu, Jain or Buddhist] cosmography. With it, layers of symbolism are mutually superimposed, for it is no mere static point: it is bedded in the mythology of ascent into the sacred and the quest for the center."[693]

In Eliade's phrasing, "the summit of the cosmic mountain is not only the highest point of the earth; it is also the earth's navel, the point at which Creation began."[694] In one sense, then, Mount Meru is an otherworldly and fantastical place, which belongs to the realm of myth; but, at the same time, countless South and Southeast Asian temples that take Mount Meru as their prototype are understood to acquire all of the qualities of the mythical model, including an identification with *Purusa*, the "Cosmic Man" or Universal Principle that is eternal,

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[693] I. W. Mabbett, "The Symbolism of Mount Meru," *History of Religions*, 23 (August 1983), 64.

[694] Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return, or Cosmos and History*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954), 16; quoted by Mabbett, "The Symbolism of Mount Meru," 64.

indestructible, all-pervasive and whose sacrifice by the gods created all life.[695] As I. W. Mabbett explains,

> "'There is a cycle of these forms, the tree, mountain pillar and human body, ever changing into each other.' The temple can be any or all of them; at Khajurajo [in north India], temple, Meru, and *Purusa* symbolism are mutually superimposed, with the *amalaka* [i.e., the notched stone disk that sits atop a Hindu temple] representing the sun-door at the summit of Meru, the door to heaven, and the dome of the skull of the universal man, *Purusa*."[696]

Pertinent to the present discussion, Mabbett goes on to explain,

> "Clearly, a [Meru] temple or shrine was not thought of as a static lifeless mass; it was a manifestation of vital energy... The *stupa* too must be seen in this light. The shrine or cult object at which the otherwise inaccessible divinity was worshipped turned into the divinity in person." [697]

In short, then, irrespective of the snarl of issues connected to the intensely layered symbolism of Mount Meru, we find here perhaps the history of religions' most oft-cited example of human constructions that are considered not simply ambient places or architectonic vessels through which to interact with deities, but actually themselves divinities or animated entities.[698]

The so-termed effigy mounds of North America, for example, earthen constructions devoid of interior space, which thus may seem more like huge sculptures than architecture per se, provide a very different, less subtle (and less certain) illustration of this theme. By contrast to

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[695] *Purusa* is complex concept variously defined as the "Cosmic Man," Self, Consciousess and Universal Principle, and to that extent a divinity; but I would not want to imply that it is "god" per se.

[696] Mabbett, "The Symbolism of Mount Meru," 73. Mabbett takes the first sentence of that quotation from F.D.K. Bosch, *The Golden Germ: An Introduction to Indian Symbolism* (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1960), 151.

[697] Mabbett, "The Symbolism of Mount Meru," 75.

[698] Given that Meru temples are frequently conceived as embodiments of *Pursua*, the Cosmic Man whose sacrifice by the gods created all life, I will revisit this example next chapter relative to the ritual-architectural commemoration of cosmogony, one variation on the sacred history priority, II-B.

even more numerous geometrical earthen mounds, these representational raised piles of dirt and stones, countless of which were built in what is now the north-central United States during the Woodland Period (350-1300 CE), earn their designation as "effigies" by their shapes as stylized snakes, birds, bears, deer, bison, lynx, panthers, "water spirits" and sometimes people.[699] The paramount exemplar is the Great Serpent Mound of southern Ohio is a quarter-mile long but, at its tallest portions, just one-meter high; this earthen construction is the replica of a winding snake with a mouth opening over an oval feature that may be an egg or, by other assessments, the sun or a frog, which is either being eaten or disgorged.[700] Ripe for all sorts of interpretations, that the Serpent Mound represents the body of a god, mythological figure or totemic clan animal—and thereby was conceived as a living organism—is a viable possibility.[701]

Similar interpretations are likewise plausible for the infamous Nazca Lines or geoglyphs of Peru, created between 500 BCE-500 CE, that, though even less obviously architectural insofar as most are trenches rather than mounds, depict enormous zoomorphic designs of hummingbirds, spiders, fish, monkeys, lizards, dogs and humanoids.[702] Nonetheless, the easy identification of

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[699] Regarding effigies mounds, which would benefit from a strong history of religions study, see, for instance, Ron Cockrell, *Figures on The Landscape: Effigy Mounds National Monument Historic Resource Study* (Omaha, Nebraska: National Park Service, Midwest Regional Office, 2003).

[700] See, for instance, Lloyd St. Alcorn, *The Serpent Mound* (New York: New York American Library, 1989); Robert Fletcher and Terry Cameron, "Serpent Mound: A New Look at an Old Snake in the Grass," *Ohio Archaeologist*, vol. 38, no. 1 (1988): 55-61; or William F. Romain, "Symbolic Associations at the Serpent Mound," *Ohio Archaeologist*, vol. 41, no. 3 (1991): 29-38. Long identified as an Adena site (1000 BCE-1 CE), then reassigned to the Fort Ancient Culture (ca. 1070 CE), recent dating efforts have, ironically, made the origin date of the Serpent Mound more rather than less uncertain. Also the nature and extent of the monument's astronomical alignments is subject to debate.

[701] Nonetheless, the Serpent Mound's positioning atop a high bluff, with vistas that are especially impressive in the largely flat Ohio terrain, does make it certain that, again as Scully would urge us to appreciate, the experience of the humanly-constructed monument together with the natural landscape must have constituted, in his phrase, "one ritual whole."

[702] See, for instance, *The Lines of Nazca*, ed. Anthony F. Aveni (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1990); and Anthony F. Aveni, *Between the Lines: The Mystery of the Giant Ground Drawings of Ancient Nasca, Peru* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000).

these enormous ground sculptures as animal species that figure large in the mythology of the region does not insure that those physical forms were, as this heuristic option dictates, identified in direct or literal ways with mythological or divine beings. In brief, the Nazca geoglyphs, like the North American effigy mounds, are a somewhat dicey demonstration of this variation on ritual-architectural commemoration of divinity (priority II-A).

Much more revealing, therefore, than these giant earthen sculptures are the unambiguously architectural Minoan palaces that, according to Scully's analysis, were sited, oriented and designed so that the building was literally, even magically, identified with the actual body of the earth goddess. By his evaluation—which challenges readers to avoid descending too quickly to a "house of god" default explanation—in these cases, the architectural fabric actually *was* the goddess.[703] Thus, while humanly constructed, the Cretan palace had, as Nikos Kazantzakis agrees, a life and personality of its own: "this palace [at Knossos] grew and proliferated in the course of time, slowly, like a living organism…"[704] Reinforced by and integrated into the broader landscape features, especially horned mountains, the Minoan temples built at Knossos, Pahistos, Mallia and Gournia, though each is unique, all were designed so that "the whole palace became the body [of the goddess], as the earth itself had been in the Stone Age."[705]

Hypothesizing the ritual usage of these Minoan palaces in ways that resonate with that of the Maya earth monster temples to which I turn next, Scully proposes that "processions might have entered the low, dark, cave-like shrine of the goddess with its enclosed stone pillars, flanked by offering pits and marked with the double axes."[706] That processual movement from the outside light into the dark cavern shrine constituted a return to the womb-earth, which

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[703] Scully, *The Earth, the Temple, and the Gods*, chap. 2.

[704] Nikos Kazantzakis, *Report to Greco*, trans. P. A. Bien (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965), 149, contrasts Cretan architecture with that of mainland Greece. Also see, Morton P. Levitt, *The Cretan Glance* (Columbus: The Ohio State Press, 1980), 7-8.

[705] Scully, *The Earth, the Temple, and the Gods*, 12.

[706] Scully, *The Earth, the Temple, and the Gods*, 12.

enabled a sense of new life and renewal as one exited back out into the ordinary daylight.[707] In fact, Scully presents the intriguing possibility that worshippers, by occasionally spending a full night in these goddess temples, experienced an even more intense sensation of symbolic death and then revitalizing rebirth:

> "To sleep within such a goddess shape, as the votaries apparently did at Malta and the whole population obviously did at Gournia, would itself have been a ritual act, an analogy for the actual death which would have implied its own kind of immortality since it meant a return to [the great goddess]..."[708]

In short, then, Scully describes a circumstance in which the physical architecture facilitates not simply an opportunity to communicate with the great goddess of the earth, but rather more viscerally and more profoundly, to actually (re)enter her divine body and, thereby, periodically to be born anew.

2. Architecture as the Body of a Deity in Mesoamerica: Symbolic Death and Rebirth at Maya Earth-Monster Temples and Southwestern Kivas

Looking now to the Mesoamerican superarea, though it is not easy to find counterparts to the huge scale and representational earth-drawing of North American effigy mounds or Peruvian Nazca Lines, there are numerous rough and much smaller parallels that do suggest the possibility of built embodiments of deities (or maybe mythological figures). While seldom developed as a distinct interpretive option, the prospect that works of art and architecture might have been understood not just as figurative evocations of supernaturals, but as actual deities, has occasionally been at least intimated by Mesoamericanists. Among timeworn allusions to the notion of sculptural-architectural "theomorphs" or architectonic deities, a hundred years ago Herbert Spinden, for instance, interpreted the famous "zoomorphic boulders" of Copán and Quirigua as Maya gods and culture heroes in "the form of grotesque reptile, bird and mammal

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[707] As Scully, *The Earth, the Temple, and the Gods*, 17-18, explains, "Entering either the Maltese temples of the site of Gournia would doubtless have meant a return to the goddess and issuing forth a kind of renewal or rebirth."

[708] Scully, *The Earth, the Temple, and the Gods*, 13.

composites;"[709] later, Michael Coe reassessed the same carvings as "crouching earth monsters or sky deities with humans seated among their snake like coils."[710] Pál Kelemen judged an elaborately sculpted portal at Copán to be a "sky monster," which thus presents the opportunity for entry into a building interior that, like a Minoan palace, provides the experience of an otherworldly religio-cosmic realm.[711] And anthropomorphic statuary like the abundant Atlantean-figure support pillars of varying sizes at Tula, Chichén Itzá and later Tenochtitlan might simply depict mythical world-bearers (or maybe human warriors), but they also could have been conceived as the very live presence of those cosmological beings. But whether any of these cases really qualify as animate deity bodies is far from certain.

On a larger scale and a considerably stronger contender for the architectural embodiment of divinity, the fact that the entire layout of the Olmec ceremonial center of La Venta seems to depict a gigantic jaguar mask has prompted the suggestion that the full complex may have been identified with a feline deity.[712] Or even more relevant are Esther Pasztory's expansive remarks about "the Goddess" whom she regards as, far and away, the most important deity at Teotihuacan.[713] Noting that this Goddess figure "emerges most clearly in mural paintings," Pasztory accentuates the curious way in which the deity is often shown in parts.[714] Perhaps most notably, she appears in the murals of Tepantitla as "a benevolent being" who oversees an earthly paradise into which she dispenses water, seeds and jade treasures.[715] But, in other murals, the

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[709] See Herbert J. Spinden, *A Study of Maya Art: Its Subject Matter and Historical Development* (New York: Dover Publications, 1975 [originally 1913]), 15-16.

[710] Michael D. Coe, *The Maya* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1993 [originally 1966]), 90.

[711] See Kelemen, *Medieval American Art,* vol. I, 61.

[712] See Muriel Porter Weaver, *The Aztecs, Maya, and Their Predecessors: Archaeology of Mesoamerica* (New York: Seminar Press, 1972), 54.

[713] Esther Pasztory, "Teotihuacan Unmasked: A View Through Art," in *Teotihuacan: Art from the City of the Gods*, edited by Kathleen Berrin and Esther Pasztory (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1993), 46, 54-57.

[714] Pasztory, "Teotihuacan Unmasked," 54-55.

[715] Pasztory, "Teotihuacan Unmasked," 55.

Goddess is represented only by elegant hands giving gifts or as a mouth full of teeth from which streams of water emerge; and there are also many depictions of disembodied eyes, which "seem to be the eyes of nature in general and the perhaps of the Goddess in particular who presides over it."[716] In sum—and in ways that show notable parallels to Scully's comments about Minoan palaces that were literally, even magically, identified with the actual body of the earth goddess—Pasztory surmises that,

> "Thus this Goddess was envisioned as a personification of nature, and yet immanent *in* nature, signified by all of her body parts scattered about. In their painted apartment compounds the people of Teotihuacan were living in this paradise on earth which was, literally, the body of the Goddess... This may be how the city was envisioned—as the sheltering body of a divinity."[717]

In this case, then, while Pasztory builds her argument about the uniquely important status of the Goddess primarily on the basis of Teotihuacan's (two-dimensional) murals, she is led to a conclusion wherein the (three-dimensional) architectural fabric of the entire Central Mexican capital was conceived, at least plausibly, as "the sheltering body of a divinity."

Additionally, here prefiguring an important theme on which I will elaborate next section, recall the persistent phenomenon among Mesoamericans who, instead of siting their communities atop a natural *altépetl* (as in the cases of Monte Albán or Xochicalco), select largely flat urban locations (as at Teotihuacan, Cholula and Tenochtitlan), and then built pyramids that were constructed and conceived as water-mountains, every bit as potent as their naturally occurring counterparts.[718] In those prevalent cases of humanly-constructed *altepeme*, all of the variations on unbuilt mountains as "animate entities," or living beings, which I discussed last section, become relevant The prospect that these pyramids themselves could have been seen as actual deities is intimated, for instance, by Johanna Broda who considers that, "on

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[716] Pasztory, "Teotihuacan Unmasked," 55.

[717] Pasztory, "Teotihuacan Unmasked," 55-56; italics hers.

[718] Recall of examples of these sorts human-constructed *altepeme* at Teotihuacan, Cholula, Tenochtitlan and Copán that were enumerated in the chapter 1 sub-section entitled "*Altépetl* as a City-State or Territorial Political Unit: The Hegemonic Utility of Cosmic Mountains."

the mythological level the Templo Mayor, the sacred mountain [of the Aztecs], was the earth itself, the earth as a voracious monster devouring human victims and blood."[719]

Be that as it may, far more direct and more explicitly architectural parallels to Scully's interpretation of Minoan palaces—and to the Hindu equation of whole buildings with divinities—appear in the rich Mesoamerican tradition of "theomorphizing architecture." Outstanding in this respect are the serpent-mouth or dragon-throated temples of the Río Bec-Chenes and Puuc Maya regions of Central Yucatán, wherein entire buildings were fashioned into enormous deity masks, complete with eyes, noses and tooth-lined doorways, a luridly elegant effect that Paul Gendrop describes as "mythical surrealism."[720] Suggesting a kind of "triple identification," Eric Thompson argued that these anthropomorphic, face-like temples were, in one sense, architectural reiterations of the Maya conception of a house-like universe (thus foregrounding a microcosmic or homologized building agenda, priority I-A) and, at the same time, architectural representations of the celestial creator deity, Itzam Na or Iguana House, "the greatest god of the Yucatec Maya" (in that case, instantiating also this version of divinity commemoration, priority II-A)."[721] If one accepts Thompson's (previously noted) posit of a monotheistic (or monolatrous) strain in Maya religion, this may be one of the rare instances in

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[719] Johanna Broda, "Templo Mayor as Ritual Space," in Johanna Broda, David Carrasco, and Eduardo Matos Moctezuma, *The Great Temple of Tenochtitlan: Center and Periphery in the Aztec World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 64, bases her assessment of the Templo Mayor as a voracious earth monster particularly on the iconography of Cihuacoatl-Coatlique-Coyoxauhqui and on the Tlaltecuhtli representations on relief stones.

[720] Paul Gendrop, "Dragon-Mouth Entrances: Zoomorphic Portals in the Architecture of Central Yucatán," in *Third Palenque Round Table, 1978, part 2*, ed. Merle Greene Robertson (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980), 138-50, describes the stylistic variation and geographical distribution of dragon-mouth entrances. He is in general accord with Eric Thompson that the facades of Central Yucatán temples represent Itzam Na, "the multifaceted creator god;" and Gendrop likewise accepts the traditional assessment that the long-nosed masks that are typically associated with these facades are representations of Chaac, the Maya god of rain.

[721] Thompson, *Maya History and Religion*, 200, 232-34, in the context of his discussion of "the major gods of the Maya pantheon" as well as a "near-monotheism," which I discussed earlier, addresses the figure of Itzam Na. The phrase "triple identification" is my term for Thompson's suggestion that there was a (homologizing) equation of Itzam Na, the Maya universe and the serpent-mouth temples.

which a supreme being, who are usually considered too remote and ethereal to inspire any artistic representation, is actually embodied in a work of architecture.

More current Maya research, which put in doubt the intimation that Itzam Na stood at the head of a Maya "pantheon" of "gods" (not a view that Thompson ever actually held), leads to alternative suggestions that the dragon-throated temples of Central Yucatán were not embodiments of a supereminent creator god, but rather representations of an "earth monster," or of the earth itself—a prospect that makes them an even closer morphological parallel to the Minoan palace's conception as the body of the earth goddess.[722] Imagining a symbolic equation between the earth (or earth-deity) and architecture, Elizabeth Benson, for instance, hypothesizes that these distinctive structures facilitated what I might term a "serpent-mouth temple event," which is remarkably similar to the ritual use of Minoan temples imagined by Scully.[723] In Benson's hypothesis, an entry into the mouth-doorway amounted to a kind of symbolic death as one is swallowed up by the earth monster, and thus transported into a "cosmologically defined world;" but then, upon exiting through the architectural god mouth, the ritual participant "re-enacts the ancient emergence from the primordial cave, from the earth."[724] And thus, not unlike the metaphorical sense in which the Maya king "sprouted" in the "Copán Temple 22 event" that I discussed in chapter 3 relative to the astronomy priority (I-C), ritual participants experience the catharsis of rebirth.[725]

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[722] For instance, Marcus, "Religion and Archaeology," 299-305, brings her skepticism about the existence of a Zapotec "pantheon" of personal "gods" to bear on the Maya zone as well. And, more specifically with respect to these sorts of "earth-monster" temples, Daniel Schavelzon, "Temples, Caves or Monsters? Notes on Zoomorphic Facades in Pre-Hispanic Architecture," in *Third Palenque Round Table, 1978*, part 2, ed. Robertson, also addresses the controversial status of Maya "deities" and specifically Thompson's assessments of the supereminence of Itzam Na.

[723] Elizabeth P. Benson, "Architecture as Metaphor," in *Fifth Palenque Round Table, 1983*, vol. 7, ed. Virginia M. Fields (San Francisco: Pre-Columbian Art Research Institute, 1985), 183-88. Benson apparently sees her interpretation as complementary rather than antithetical to Eric Thompson's earlier interpretation. Note also that Benson's intimations the ritual use of serpent-mouth temples reiterates "the ancient emergence from the primordial cave" also bears directly on the commemoration of sacred history (priority II-B).

[724]Benson, "Architecture as Metaphor," 185.

[725]Benson, "Architecture as Metaphor," 185.

Finally, before turning attention to possible parallels in Oaxaca and Monte Albán, given recent and persuasive arguments that the American Southwest ought to be included in the Mesoamerican cultural sphere—archaeologist Stephen Lekson, for instance, contends with respect to the pre-Columbian pueblos of northwestern New Mexico, that "Chaco was a garden-variety Mesoamerican *altépetl*… remarkable only in its location on the far northern frontier"[726]—much-discussed kivas also deserve brief mention. These usually circular subterranean rooms, built caves if you will, are understood as places from which the primordial ancestors emerged from the underworld onto earth. And thus here again, the ritualized descent into and reemergence from these underground kivas, as Karl Taube has suggested, resemble the pattern of symbolic death and then rebirth evinced at, for instance, Teotihuacan's "cave of origin."[727] In fact, in a book-length treatment of Southwestern Pueblo architecture that reiterates the crucial integration of natural and built forms into "one ritual whole," Scully himself helps us to see how, instead of simply mnemonic devices for remembering one's foundation stories, or even habitats housing the still-living mythological ancestors, kivas are divinized architectural spaces that really are the body of a god(dess).[728]

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[726] See Stephen H. Lekson, "Hopewell and Chaco: The Consequences of Rituality," in *The Newark Earthworks: Enduring Monuments, Contested Meanings*, eds. Lindsay Jones and Richard D. Shiels (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2016), 112.

[727] Karl A. Taube, "The Teotihuacan Cave of Origin: The Iconography and Architecture of Emergence Mythology in Mesoamerica and the American Southwest," *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 12 (Autumn 1986): 51-82, explicitly suggests parallels between the symbolism and usages of Southwest kivas and Mesoamerican constructions.

[728] Vincent Scully, *Pueblo: Mountain, Village, Dance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 15-20. Also and much more generally, anticipating an unfavorable reception of my own comparative efforts with respect to Monte Albán, I note that the very harsh reviews of art historian Scully's book by southwestern specialists—especially his efforts to draw parallels between ancient Mediterranean and Southwestern Pueblo ritual and architecture evoke charges of "unbridled romanticism"—demonstrate how, in the main, little patience archaeologists have for alternative interpretational approaches to sites for which they feel a kind of intellectual ownership.

3. Architecture as the Body of a Deity at Monte Albán: The Interchangeability of Natural and Built *Altepeme* and the Sacredness of Substructures

With consideration of the relevance to Monte Albán of the heuristic possibility of architecture that is conceived as the actual body of a deity, we again encounter a line of interpretation that has been little traveled. We must ask, then, whether this is a problematic oversight or simply tacit acknowledgement that this was *not* an important ritual-architectural priority in the Zapotec region. Regarding Oaxacan sculptural "theomorphs" like the "zoomorphic boulders" of Copán and Quirigua, already a tepid exemplar of this sub-variation on the theme, there is at the base of the eastern mound in Patio 4 at Yagul, a rough-hewn 1.5 meter tall by 1.8 meter long stone replica of what some see as a "frog-effigy," with a cavity on its back that could have been used by a rain or water cult, that presents the most outstanding example.[729] But that formerly stucco-covered and painted sculpture—which Michael Lind identifies, alternately, as a jaguar similar to those carved by the Aztecs, who used the receptacle on its back as a receptacle for the hearts of human sacrifice victims[730]—is, it seems, most notable by its apparent uniqueness in the Oaxaca area. There are no similar sculptures at Monte Albán. And while there are references to Zapotec earth monsters,[731] neither are there any structures at Monte

[729] Tourist literature—e.g., "Monte Albán, Yagul, and Mitla Archaeological Sites–Oaxaca Valley, Mexico," posted in "Mexico: Archaeological Sites, Culural Travel, UNESCO, March 23, 2011"—identifies this Yagul zoomorphic sculpture as the Rana Reina (frog queen), which intimates its association with a rain or water cult.

[730] Lind, *Ancient Zapotec Religion*, 201-4.

[731] For instance, Alfonso Caso, "Lapidary Work, Goldwork, and Copperwork from 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), 926, notes the depiction of "the earth monster whom the Mexicans called Tlaltecuhtli" on the lower portion of an elaborate gold pectoral or breastplate that he found in Tomb 7. And Marcus and Flannery, "Ancient Zapotec Ritual and Religion," 62-63, note that even as early as 1150-850 BCE there are designs on Oaxacan pottery that suggest "a dichotomy between sky and earth, with sky represented by lightning (the 'fire serpent' or 'sky dragon') and earth represented by the 'were jaguar' or 'earth monster.'" But because they see this sky-earth dichotomy is more pan-Mesoamerican than specifically Oaxacan, they are explicit in noting that, "It would therefore not be accurate to refer to these early motifs as representing a specifically 'Zapotec' deity."

Albán that provide obvious counterparts to the earth monster or dragon-throated temples that are so prevalent in the Río Bec-Chenes and south Maya regions.[732]

One might conclude, therefore, that this second variation on commemoration of divinity priority (II-A) is completely irrelevant at Monte Alban; and that non-applicability would be informing in and of itself. Alternatively, though, a focus on the intriguing interchangeability of natural *altepeme* and built *altepeme*, to which I alluded earlier, provides a means of seeing just how important this permuation of the divinity priority actually was in the ritual-architectural program of the Zapotec capital. In pursuit of that possibility, recall that, in discussions of the meaning and significance of *altepeme* water-mountains, two points are, initially, quite surprising: First, one is struck with how little important the difference between innate mountains and their humanly constructed counterparts actually is. In that respect, Eduard Matos Moctezuma, for instance, remarks on how the massive Pyramids of the Sun and the Moon provide Teotihuacanos with fabricated "world centers" that are every bit as revered as Cerro Gordo or any of the ambient peaks in the nearby Sierra de Patlachique;[733] and Geoffrey McCafferty comments similarity on Cholula's Great Pyramid as "an earthen pyramid, a 'man-made mountain,' [built] over a spring," whereby "the ancient Cholultecas physically created an *altépetl*, or 'water-mountain,' the fundamental concept of central Mexican polity."[734] Likewise Broda's

[732] Though it is not really a close parallel to the earth monster temples of Maya region, note that 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, describes the possible ritual usage of the two-room temple, or *yohepée*, which emerges in Monte Albán Period II and then is frequently replicated after that, in ways that very broadly reecho the notion of a staged symbolic death and rebirth. Marcus's emphasis, however, is on the exclusivistic access to that second interior room rather the symbolism of rebirth; and, in their formal aspects, these *yohepée* do not have the sort of stylized facial features that have supported the identification of the Maya structures as earth monster temples.

[733] Eduardo Matos Moctezuma, "Configuration of the Sacred Precinct of Mexico-Tenochtitlan," 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, 2009), 424-25.

[734] Geoffrey G. McCafferty, "Tollan Chollan and the Legacy of Legitimacy During the Classic-Postclassic Transition," in *Mesoamerica's Classic Heritage: From Teotihuacan to the Aztecs*,

interpretation of the Templo Mayor, an architectonic mountain built on the flat basin of Lake Texcoco, as "the earth itself, the earth as voracious monster devouring human victims and blood" advances the observation that a completely "artificial" pyramid can function equally as effectively as a natural topographic feature to be a community's foremost *altépetl*.[735] Perhaps unexpectedly, built *altepeme* are, so it seems, in no sense inferior to natural ones.

Secondly, discussions of water-mountains, especially in relation to large urban centers, invariably acknowledge the coexistence of multiple *altepeme*. That is to say, the *altépetl* as a conception of polity entails, in its most basic form, an integrated community whose members understand themselves to exist in relation to the religious and governmental authority that resides on a single mountain;[736] the previous example of the modest Zapotec village of Macuilxóchitl sited at the base of Cerro Danush provides a model example.[737] But when the concept is extended to larger city-states or urban capitals, we frequently hear of orientation with respect to more than one prized water-mountain. Matos, for example, describes how Teotihuacan's Pyramid of the Sun and Pyramid of the Moon both somehow "symbolized the center of the universe and represented sacred mountains and their potential as an *altépetl* ('water-mountain'), positioned within the community as deposits of water and grain to be used for sustenance."[738] And Barbara Fash's remarks about the way in which various temple-pyramids at Copán and other Maya sites were identified by their iconography as "human-made mountains," which provide both an important source of water and sustenance as well as "an axis of communication

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eds. Davíd Carrasco, Lindsay Jones, and Scott Sessions (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2000), 344.

[735] Broda, "Templo Mayor as Ritual Space," 64.

[736] See, for instance, Kenneth G. Hirth, "The *Altépetl* and Urban Structure in Prehispanic Mesoamerica," in *El urbanismo en Mesoamerica—Urbanism in Mesoamerica*, eds. William T. Sanders, Alba Guadalupe Mastache, and Robert H. Cobean (México City and University Park: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia and Pennsylvania State University, 2003), 69; or Bernardo García Martínez, "El *altépetl* o pueblo de indios: Expresión básica del cuerpo político mesoamericano," *Arqueología Mexicana* VI, vol. 32 (julio-agosto 1998): 58-65, both of which I referenced earlier in chapter 1.

[737] Markens, "La transición del Clásico al Postclásico en el Valle de Oaxaca," 517ff.

[738] Matos Moctezuma, "Configuration of the Sacred Precinct of Mexico-Tenochtitlan," 424-25.

with the gods and ancestral spirits," likewise implies that Mayas oriented themselves simultaneously with respect to innumerable major and minor water-mountains.[739] Here too we encounter ease rather than anxiety with respect to what Eliade terms "a multiplicity of centers."[740]

With those two points in mind, it is important, therefore, to see Monte Albán as not just a religio-political center built atop one enormous water-mountain (which it is), but also as a complex, social stratified and hierarchical, even multicultural, urban capital whose Main Plaza is composed of a plentiful collection of wholly or largely artificial "sacred mountains" of varying scales, importances and primary constituencies. Indeed, in yet another irony, the ascent to the Main Plaza culminates in a sensation of being on a flat place rather than on a peak; as Jorge Hardoy and others have noted, instead of simply exploiting the panoramic vistas, an important feature of the precinct's conception is "its negation of topography and natural environment"[741] so that, instead of looking out over the natural horizon, one's gaze is actually directed to an array of symmetrically arranged artificial mountains. Thus while I stressed earlier the site's exceptional unity of conception[742]—which, unlike the ceremonial plazas of Chichén Itza or Tenochtitlan, does not fix attention on just one central pyramid—here (and again in my Closing Thoughts) I note as well as a kind of conglomerate conception in which one encounters a whole constellation of artificial mountains and centers.

The South Platform, itself a hybrid natural-artificial mountain, presents the most obvious example of a secondary mountain located atop the primary mountain; but all of the so-termed temple-palace-altar (TPA) complexes feature mountain-like architectural bases. Cira Martínez

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[739] Barbara W. Fash, "Watery Places and Urban Foundations Depicted in Maya Art and Architecture," in *The Art of Urbanism*, Fash and López Luján, eds., 236.

[740] Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, 379.

[741] Jorge E. Hardoy, *Pre-Columbian Cities*, trans. Judith Thorne (New York: Walker and Company, 1973 [Spanish original, 1964]), 109.

[742] See the introduction to Part I entitled "Orientation and Allurement: The Instigation of Ritual-Architectural Events at Monte Albán."

López, employing pyramidal bases as one of her primary criteria for determining which of Monte Albán's buildings qualify as "temples," identifies a couple dozen structures in the Main Plaza that have voluminous platforms or mountain-like bases, with stairways leading up to sanctuary spaces.[743] And, to the extent that the entire North Platform constitutes another hybrid natural-built mountain, the Geodesic Vertex Group, the highest part of the site, is a set of three built mountains atop a platform mountain that is itself atop the main mountain.

While to label all of these humanly constructed "mountains" as *altepeme* probably lays too heavy (or too light) a burden on the concept, the interchangeability of natural and constructed forms, together with the acceptance of a multiplicity of centers, does avail these constructions to the same status as "animate entities" that we observed in relation to natural mountains. That observation, moreover, prompts the again-counterintuitive proposition that Monte Albán's abundant temple substructures, rather than simply utilitarian pedestals that give their respective sanctuaries a lift, as it were, might actually be the "most sacred" features of those structures. And furthermore, to prefigure another point to which I return in the Closing Thoughts, the transference of the veneration of natural mountains onto these constructed mountain-like temple substructures suggests the perseverance of traditional animatistic conceptions of divinity alongside (or maybe beneath) the more plainly polytheistic conceptions advanced by the "official religion" of Monte Albán elites.

At any rate, by that logic, each of the four previously mentioned means of conceiving of natural mountains as "animate entities" may apply also to the numerous pyramidal bases, or "built mountains," of the great urban capital. First, in the same way that Robert Zarate Morán contends that "the sacred mountain of Cerro Blanco was and is considered as the goddess and the great mother,"[744] that sort of goddess-hill identity, especially for the uniquely massive South Platform, is not implausible. Second, if, as Richard Blanton suggests, Monte Albán was the sort of "disembedded regional capital" in which respective parties in the alliance were largely

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[743] Martínez López, "La residencia de la tumba 7 y su templo," 239, 241, 247ff.

[744] Zárate Morón, "Símbolos prehispánicos y ritos contemporáneos de creación y nacimiento en el sur del Istmo de Tehuantepec," 194; my translation, italics added.

allowed to retain their own religions and identities—recall, for instance, his proposition that the 14 main buildings around the Main Plaza may correspond to 14 *barrios* or neighborhoods, and thus 14 ongoing community-specific socio-religious orientations[745]—then one might imagine something like a transference into the shared capital of the community-specific patrons deities, or "lords of the hills," that José Alcina Franch says were actually identified with the physical mountains in outlying villages.[746]

Third, John Monaghan explains that his proposal of an indigenous resolution of "the pantheistic problem" via "an area-wide focus on surfaces" applies also to humanly constructed "surfaces [that] might be wooden or stone images,"[747] which implies that the abunadant pyramidal bases too might be conceived as are "parts" of the "whole" earth. From the monist-pantheistic view he hypothesizes, every particular mountain—whether found or constructed—participates in the essential oneness of nature and divinity; every built platform, however large or small, *is* the entire earth. And fourth, with respect to Molly Bassett's "spectrum of animacy," were Oaxacan city dwellers, especially those with a strong recollection of their more rural roots, to assess the relative "aliveness" of Monte Albán's many artificial *altepeme*, those residents may well have concluded that such mountain-like pyramidal bases fall somewhere closer on the spectrum to fully animate *teteo* (deities) than to completely inanimate stones. In fact, because, in Bassett's analysis, the notion of "thunder-talking" mountains is so important in their attributions as living beings and reciprocal conversation partners, the very abundant allusions to lightening that grace so many of Monte Albán's temple decorations add plausibility to the status of these built features as animate entities.[748]

In sum, then, while consideration of this second main variation on the ritual-architectural commemoration of divinity (priority II-A) leads to an especially high level of speculation, the

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[745] Blanton, *Monte Albán*, 63.

[746] Alcina Franch, "Los dioses del panteón zapoteco," 32ff.

[747] Monaghan, "Theology and History in the Study of Mesoamerican Religions," 29.

[748] For one set of opinions on the prominence and evolution of symbols of lightening at Monte Albán, see, for instance, Marcus, "Zapotec Religion," 346-47, subsection on "Lightening."

prospect of architectural forms that are themselves conceived as animate entities—and, to that extent, "divinized" or "personified" architectural forms—presents intriguing, largely unconsidered interpretive possibilities. Moreover, these are possibilities that accentuate the survival of broadly animatistic divinity conceptions beside (or beneath) plainly polytheistic conceptions—including in the most public, not just residential, parts of the city. Most specifically, this interpretive tack suggests that the mountain-like substructures of a couple dozen of Monte Albán's temples, which are usually dismissed as nothing but utilitarian foundations, may actually have been the most sacred (and alluring) components of those constructions. Just as the entire Zapotec capital was situated atop a nature-built living water-mountain, the capital's most intense worship spaces were invariably situated atop human-built pyramidal bases, which might also have been conceived as living beings. That is to say, where the notion that buildings have personalities and intrinsic powers is, from Western views, at most a kind of poetic metaphor, this line of hermeneutical questioning urges serious consideration of something more like the Hindu logic of investing statues and whole buildings with the actual presence of a deity.[749] Not unlike the huge pyramidal bases of the Templo Mayor and Chichén Itzá's Castillo—both of which have been recognized as "sacred mountains," and thus living divinities as well as places that divinities frequent—all of the large and modest pyramidal bases at Monte Albán may also deserve that distinction.

At any rate, by contrast to that possibility of "divinized built forms," which has been largely ignored in studies of Monte Albán, consider next an interpretive stance that has been more overworked than overlooked.

C. Architecture Conceived as the Abode of a Deity or Divine Presence: "Houses of God" as an Overworked But Undertheorized Possibility

With this third variation on the ritual-architectural commemoration of divinity (priority II-A)—built forms conceived as "houses of god(s)"—I move from the inobvious to the most

[749] In the next sub-subsection on cross-cultural exemplifications of the notion of a "house of god(s)," I will enumerate a whole series of means and rites by which deities and divine presences are "installed" or lured into humanly-made structures, statues or images.

prevalent of default explanations for making sense of sacred architecture. Usually paired with the similarly prevalent presumption of a polytheistic pantheon of personal gods, the notion that monumental built forms in ancient Mesoamerica, or elsewhere, were designed and experienced as places that people could go and meet with their deities is a prospect that escapes no one. Nonetheless, obvious and benign as this alternative may seem, considerably more self-conscious reflection on the guiding assumptions and ensuing ramifications of this overworked rather than underrepresented alternative is warranted. Consider, therefore, first, a sampling of the very rich cross-cultural literature on works of architecture that are designed to serve as habitations of deities. Secondly, I provide brief reflections on the prevalent but thinly theorized application of that idea to pre-Columbian Mesoamerican structures. And thirdly, I bring this line of questioning to bear specifically on Monte Albán.

1. Houses of God(s) as a Cross-Cultural Phenomenon: Accommodating Deities in Earthly Replicas of Otherworldly Habitations

Again Vincent Scully's very specific critical history of Greek sacred architecture provides inspiration for disciplined thinking about this generalized heuristic option—so-termed "houses of god(s)." Charting the developmental stages following Mycenaean palatial civilization, Scully describes how, in the preclassical or Homeric Age (approximately 1200 to 800 BCE), changed conceptions of divinity were mirrored by changes in the architectural conception. As "the magical concept of participation in the goddess" that had dominated Minoan-Mycenaean planning was supplanted by a more patentedly polytheistic conceptions of very human-like deities such as Zeus, Hera, Demeter, Athena, Artemis and Apollo, the notion of palaces that embodied the actual presence of the great goddess was similarly supplanted by a more plainly residential conception of sacred architecture.[750] According to Scully, by this era—which is the stratum of ancient Mediterranean religion that most informed the Classically-educated Franciscan and Dominican friars in New Spain—"many old Hellenic gods have acquired personalities, are engaged in strife with one another, and seem to differ from men only

[750] Scully, *The Earth, the Temple, and the Gods*, 35.

in two particulars: they have power and they cannot die."[751] These temperamental supernaturals are variously compassionate and competitive, loyal and fickle, virtuous and vain, powerful but persuadable; and anthropomorphic deities of that sort need a place to live. Stressing the radical departure from goddess-embodying architectural forms, Scully explains that, "By now the more complete Greek view of divinity required something else: the temple enclosing its image. Thus the temple placed upon the earth was no longer the house of a chief or king but *the house of a god*."[752] Now temples, instead of built embodiments of divinity, present interiors spaces and enclosures where deities are understood to reside. Bluntly put, now the god or goddess is *at* the temple but no longer literally identified with it.

The same apperception that works of sacred architecture are foremost divine dwellings, of course, reappears in countless cross-cultural contexts, though with notable differences. Architectural historian J. G. Davies, for instance, observes that, not only do the Greek term *naos*, from *naio* ("to dwell in"), and the Latin *domus dei* ("god's home") imply this sort of residential function; the same is true also for the Hebrew *beit Elohim* ("house of God") and in Sanskrit, *devalaya*, which also means a residence of god.[753] Likewise, as I will discuss momentarily, the standard translation of the Aztecs' term for their pyramid-temples, or *teocallis*, has been "god-houses" and, among Yucatec Mayas, the word for temple, *k'u na*, means "god (sacred) house."[754] Additionally, the Hindu temple, as George Michell explains, "is designed to bring about contact between man and the gods; it is here that the gods appear to man."[755] Thus, quite obviously, even to Western observers, Hindu temples are, in one sense, like the Homeric Age Greek temple,

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[751] Scully, *The Earth, the Temple, and the Gods*, 41.

[752] Scully, *The Earth, the Temple, and the Gods*, 43; italics added.

[753] J. G. Davies, "Architecture," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 1st ed., ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan, 1987), vol. 1, 382-92.

[754] See, for instance, Jeff K. Kowalski, "Temple Complexes," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Mesoamerican Cultures: The Civilizations of Mexico and Central America*, ed. Davíd Carrasco (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), vol. III, 194.

[755] Michell, *The Hindu Temple*, 60.

a "house of god," an earthly residence where the gods, usually manifest in the form of an anthropomorphic image, make themselves visible and accessible to human devotees.[756]

But the South Asian context also especially exemplifies two somewhat more precise themes that will reappear in our analyses of this theme in Mesoamerica and at Monte Albán. First is the requirement to construct the sort dwelling to which a god might be lured, and then visited and propitiated, or maybe entertained as a royal guest—an incentive that takes innumerable forms. A very humble variation on that ploy is evident, for instance, in the dilapidated shelter, decorated only with a cheap eight-by-ten inch print of the goddess Durga via which a solitary ascetic summons and worships the deity;[757] in that case, it is presumably the sincerity of the intention rather than the opulence of the domicile that impresses the god(s). The same concern for summoning and sheltering the divinity likewise, however, engenders those magnificently elaborate temples such as the huge rock-cut temples at Ellora, which are built as replicas of Shiva's mythological mountain home of Kailasa with the expectation that the god will come to reside there and to dispense his favors on the builders and patrons.[758] Or, in other cases, the expectation of divine recompense is less apparent (or at least less direct) than a motive simply to provide a built environment in which the resident deity can be pampered by some extreme demonstration of hospitality: At Tiruanaikka near Tiruchirapalli in Tamil Nadu, for instance, Siva, who is *abhiseka-priya* (fond of ritual bathing), is indulged by an *anda-deul* (or

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[756] Meister, "On the Development of a Morphology for a Symbolic Architecture: India," 33, as noted, contends that, "Temples to house images of divinity developed relatively late in India…" He then traces that development with special concern for the differences between North and South India.

[757] See, for instance, David Miller, "Religious Institutions and Political Ethics in Bhubaneswar," in *Transformation of a Sacred Town: Bhubaneswar, India*, ed. Susan Seymore (Boulder: Westview Press, 1980), 83.

[758] See, for instance, Andreas Volwahsen, *Living Architecture: Indian* (New York: Grosset and Dunlop, 1969), 140-41. The temple at Nachna was likewise patterned after Shiva's Mount Kailasa; see Meister, "On the Development of a Morphology for a Symbolic Architecture," 35. And Michell, *The Hindu Temple*, 69, explains how a temple patterned after a celebrated mythological mountain like Kailasa or Meru, "becomes an architectural facsimile of the sacred places of the gods, providing for the worshipper the merit that would be his through an actual visit to the mountains."

sunk-shrine) temple in which the sanctum floor is laid below the level of the water table so that it is nightly flooded and then manually baled out before worship each morning.[759]

Secondly, then, often, as in the architectural re-creation of Siva's mythological home of Mount Kailasa at Ellora—another exemplum for which I will note Mesoamerican parallels—the building is constructed as an earthly replica of some celestial divine dwelling, a this-worldly home away from the deity's otherworldly home. The Temple of Solomon, for example, is described in the *Letter to the Hebrews* (8:5, 9:23) as "a copy and a shadow of the heavenly sanctuary" and as "copies of the heavenly things."[760] From a medieval Christian view, the Gothic cathedral was "truly the house of God," which, according to Wim Swan, "was conceived as no less than the earthly embodiment of the heavenly Jerusalem."[761] And the ziggurat form of ancient Babylonia, evincing a similar deity sheltering function, is routinely described as a representation of the celestial hill upon which the Babylonian gods were supposed to dwell, crowned with a temple in which a god was supposed to lodge when he came to earth for the service of humanity.[762] Likewise, in Japan, the *yama*, or model mountain, is an architectural replica of the deity's otherworldly dwelling place, "constructed to receive the deity temporarily;"[763] and also in Japan, Richard Pilgrim's account of the concept of "*ma*," or the

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[759] K. V. Soundara Rajan, *An Invitation to Indian Architecture* (New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann, 1984), 22-23, gives examples of several *unda-deul*, sunk-shrine type temples. A morphological parallel comes in those ancient Egyptian "toilet ceremonies" in which "each morning the cult image was aspersed, censed, anointed, vested, and crowned." See Davies, "Architecture," 387.

[760] See Baruch A. Levine, "Biblical Temple," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 1st ed., ed. Eliade, vol. 2: 202-17.

[761] Wim Swan, *The Gothic Cathedral* (New York Doubleday & Company 1969), 51.

[762] Ernest H. Short, *A History of Religious Architecture* (Whitefish, Montana: Kessinger Legacy Reprints, [originally 1925]), 19-20.

[763] Fred Thompson and D'Arcy Fenton, "'Matsuri': the Binding of Secular and Ceremonial Space in Kakunodate, Japan," *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 13 (Spring 1987): 140, describe two sorts of *yama*, both of which are understood to temporarily house the deity: *okiyama*, the big mountain, which is a stationary construction, and *hiki-yama*, the pulling mountain, which is a mobile wagon that is pulled around the town. Also, blending the second and third variations on the architectural commemoration of divinity (priority II-A)—that is, *bodies* of god and *abodes* of god—Tange and Kawazoe, *Ise: Prototype of Japanese Architecture*, 33, explain how, from a

pregnant empty space between solid volumes into which Shinto designers try to lure or direct *kami* energy, provides a rarer instance (again with Mesoamerican analogues) in which it is an non-anthropomorphic divine energy rather than a god per se that is attracted into the ritual-architectural context.[764]

Notwithstanding abundant cross-cultural examples of gods feeling "at home" in architectural structures, the sense in which the deity (or divine presence) is actually present in these "divine dwellings" (or in the image or statue that the dwellings house) is also conceived in a variety of very different ways. Often, elaborate rituals are performed to induce the deity to come into, or to reside in, humanly constructed forms, whether buildings, statuary or paintings. In the case of Tibetan Buddhist monasteries, for example, not only does the Lamaist word for temple, "*Lha-k'an*," mean "God's house,"[765] but also, more specifically, individual rooms throughout the monastery are regarded as habitations or shelters for specific deities. Thus, as Romi Khosla explains, after each sacred room is built, elaborate ceremonies are conducted to invite the deity to inhabit its dwelling place. The room can only have a religious function if the deity is considered to be present; if the Tibetan deity chooses to depart from its dwelling place then the senior Lama is compelled to rebuild the temple.[766]

Art historian David Freedberg collects a wide and fascinating sampling of consecration rites wherein inanimate constructed objects and statues are imbued with life: In ancient Egypt, for instance, (as in Babylonia or Sumer and Assyria) the final stage in making an image of a god consisted of "the rite of the Washing and Opening of the mouth" whereby the image was

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very early period, Japanese used rice straw ropes (*shimenawa*) to delimit sacred areas, which, presumably, "both signified the space occupied by the deities and symbolized the deities themselves."

[764] See Richard B. Pilgrim, "Intervals (*Ma*) in Space and Time: Foundations for a Religio-Aesthetic Paradigm in Japan," *History of Religions* 25 (1986): 255-77. This is an example that I will revisit in chapter 11 relative to the sanctuary priority (III-D).

[765] See L. Austine Waddell, *Tibetan Buddhism* (New York: Dover Publications, 1972), 287.

[766] Romi Khosla, "Architecture and Symbolism in Tibetan Monasteries," in *Shelter, Sign, and Symbol*, Oliver, ed., 81.

identified and invested with the life of that divinity; and, in a parallel fashion among Theravada Buddhists of Ceylon, the fashioning of a statue of the Buddha culminates with the painting of the eyes, the *netra pinkama* or "eye-ceremony"—"the very act by which it is brought to life."[767] Similarly, Ananda Coomaraswamy explains how in Hinduism, on the completion of an image, its eyes are "opened" by a special and elaborate ceremony; thus it is clearly indicated that the image is to be regarded as if animated by the deity.[768] And, drawing on a more proximate circumstance, Fred Clothey recounts the performance of the *pratistha*, a Hindu ceremonial process by which icons "can be embodied with the fullness of the divine," in which the deity Venkatesvara was physically transported from India and resituated in his new home in the Penn Hills Temple at Pittsburgh.[769]

This perception of the deity's actual presence in a temple accounts, then, for those Hindu architectural events in which divine images are washed, fed or caressed—all pampering practices that the resident gods are said "to enjoy."[770] Such extremely anthropomorphic conceptions are, however, hardly unique to India. Again in ancient Egypt, scholars consider that prior to the establishment of the Pharaonic dynasty (about 3200 BCE), no doubt every town had its own "house of the god" where the deity was believed to dwell, and where prayers, lustrations, offerings and gifts were made to the god on a daily basis.[771] Or, in Greek oracle temples, the

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[767] David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 82-85. Actually Freedberg's entire fifth chapter, "Consecration: Making Images Work," is very relevant to the present discussion.

[768] Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *The Transformation of Nature in Art* (New York: Dover Publications, 1934), 156.

[769] Fred W. Clothey, *Rhythm and Intent: Ritual Studies from South India* (Madras: Blackie and Son, Pvt Ltd., 1983), 186-200.

[770] Coomaraswamy, *The Transformation of Nature in Art*, 157, works to counter stereotypes that Hindus are either a great deal more (or less) superstitious than Westerners by noting that, even in India, "the image *per se* is not [typically regarded as the] God nor angel, but merely an aspect or hypostasis (*avastha*) of God, who is in the last analysis without likeness (*amurta*), not determined by form (*arupa*), trans-form (*para-rupa*)."

[771] E. O. James, *From Cave to Cathedral: Temples and Shrines of Prehistoric, Classical, and Early Christian Times* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1965), 99.

god, Apollo in the case of Delphi, was considered sufficiently present (at least in certain seasons) that he could be consulted about important personal and political questions.[772] The extent to which Greek statuary of the gods were invested with life, and thus potentially dangerous as well as beneficent, is even more apparent in the abundant stories and representations of the chaining of the stone images of Ares, Hera, Dionysus and other Greek deities to prevent their escape or transfer of residence (a circumstance that is, in a sense, parallel to the Aztecs' capture and enslavement of deity images).[773] And, in the same vein, whether assessed as passionate conviction or facile sentimentality, there is certainly no shortage of accounts, both antique and brand new, of Christian images (both three and two dimensional) speaking, weeping and waving.

In sum, then, the colloquial phrase "houses of god" at first seems the simplest and most straightforward means explaining the function of an ostensibly religious structure, whether in Mesoamerica or somewhere else. But even where the idea of "housing" deities is accurate, it is also the sort of imprecise interpretive solution that raises almost as many questions as it answers.

2. Houses of God(s) in Mesoamerica: *Teocalli* God-Houses, Supernatural Clients and One-to-One Correlations of Deities and Temples

From their earliest arrival, Spaniards glossed *teocalli*, the Aztec term for their temples, as "deity (divine) houses" and their Yucatec Maya counterpart, *k'u na*, as "god (sacred) houses;"[774] and thus, in the literature on Mesoamerica, the notion that pre-Columbian temples are "houses of god(s)" is very amply represented, even taken-for-granted—but decidedly undertheorized.[775] On this heuristic option especially, the much stronger discussions in other religio-cultural traditions

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[772] As a place to begin with respect to the oracle at Delphi, see, for instance, Jan Bremmer, "Delphi," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 1st ed., ed. Eliade, vol. 4: 277-78.

[773] On the history of chaining images and statues, see Freedberg, *The Power of Images*, 74-77.

[774] Kowalski, "Temple Complexes," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Mesoamerican Cultures*, ed. Carrasco, vol. III, 194.

[775] William H. Prescott, *History of the Conquest of Mexico* (New York: The Modern Library, n.d. [originally 1843]), 45, for example, assembles numerous colonial-era sources for his discussion of "the Mexican [Aztec] temples—*teocallis*, 'houses of God,' as they were called..."

about what exactly is at issue in ostensibly providing an architectural accommodation for a deity raise questions that, in Mesoamerica, have barely been broached. In search of somewhat greater clarity and precision with respect to the commonplace, but by no means self-evident, assertion that Aztec, Maya and Zapotec gods "live" in temples, here I provide brief comments on four ancillary topics, all of which will reemerge in the subsequent inquiry into supposed "deity domiciles" at Monte Albán.

The first topic involves more careful consideration of the ways in which only some of the hypothesized indigenous conceptions of divinity are actually well matched to the clichéd designation of Mesoamerican "houses of gods(s)." Of the four most-discussed alternatives we encounter in the Oaxaca materials[776]—monotheism, animatism, polytheism and ancestor worship, all of which I see as simultaneously relevant to Monte Albán—the posit of an indigenous monotheistic strain is the least promising insofar as it frequently entails explicit rejection of the possibility that an all-powerful but remote supreme being, or "*deus otiosus*," can be confined to a built residence.[777] Here, the same reasons that many (but hardly all) Jews, Christians and Muslims take issue with itimations that an omniscient and omnipresent God resides in a some particular earthly locale or structure militate against conceiving of any built form as "the house of God."

Likewise, the view that Mesoamericans adhere to animistic or animatistic conceptions of divinity at first seems little promising insofar as the notion that impersonal life forces, or sacred energies, "need a place to live" also strains the residential metaphor. But in that case, as just

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[776] Simply for clarity sake, note that the four main alternative conceptions of divinity to which I refer here are (1) monotheism/monolatry, (2) animism/animatism, (3) polytheism in the sense of belief in a pantheon of personal gods and (4) royal ancestor worship as stressed by Joyce Marcus. I do not, however, intend that as an exhaustive list of the viable possibilities.

[777] Frequently we are told that supreme beings or "*deus otiosus*" (discussed earlier) are absent any artistic representation and, aside from generalized prayers, any ritual propitiations. See, for instance, Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, 38-50. But even if monotheism, in principle, rules out the possibility of God taking up residence in some particular work of architecture, we ought to remember also the tellingly common ways in which Christians can imagine their churches as "the house of god," in which case this heuristic option is relevant, albeit in a qualified way.

noted, the concerted efforts of Japanese Shinto priests, for example, to lure *kami* energy into their ritual-architectural contexts demonstrates the plausibility of imagining that free-flowing sacred energies can indeed "inhabit" architectural spaces and built structures, either permanently or intermittently.[778] López Austin's extensive comments about Nahuas channeling "animating entities" such as *teyolia*, *tonalli* and *ihiyotl* into ritual contexts provide a Mesoamerican counterpart;[779] and that the Zapotec two-room temple, which is so abundant at Monte Albán and then other Oaxacan sites, is defined as a *yohopèe*, or "house of the vital force," suggests that attracting vital energies or life forces (e.g., *pèe*) into built structures, at least for the duration of the ceremonial proceedings, is likely a major priority, albeit one that is somewhat at odds with the rubric of deity domiciles. [780]

Be that as it may, far more obvious, and thus more common, is the pairing of the idea of "houses of god(s)" with the assumption of anthropomorphic supernaturals who need and enjoy the sort of earthly accommodation that trope implies. The posit of a polytheistic pantheon of very humanoid Olympian gods such as Zeus, Hera, Demeter and Athena, like that which Scully describes for the Homeric Age Greek context—and thus like that which Franciscans Bernardino de Sahagún or Diego de Landa, or Dominican friars Diego Durán, Córdova, Balsalobre and Burgoa attribute to indigenous Mesoamerican peoples—provides by far the most prevalent match to the assertion of deity residences. Consequently, as I note momentarily with respect to the pervasive assumption of one-to-one deity-temple correlations, if a first overdetermined question of early Spanish clerics was *What gods do the Aztecs or Zapotecs worship?* among the next most common, not less problematic question was *To what god is this or that temple dedicated?* Moreover, while some scholars, notably Joyce Marcus, counterpoise that sort of

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[778] Thompson and Fenton, "'Matsuri': the Binding of Secular and Ceremonial Space in Kakunodate, Japan," 140.

[779] López Austin, *The Human Body and Ideology*, 181ff.

[780] On the *yohopèe*, or "house of the vital force," see, for instance, Marcus and Flannery, "Ancient Zapotec Ritual and Religion," 60-61, along with other Marcus sources. Regarding the important prospect of attracting impersonal vital energies into Monte Albán ritual-architectural contexts, I will touch on that in the next section, but then address it more fully in chapter 11 relative to the sanctuary priority (III-D).

fully supernatural gods with divinized human rulers as two antithetical alternatives (which I and most Oaxacanists do not think they are), apotheosized ancestors are at least as suitably "housed" in temple sanctuaries as their always-divine counterparts. And thus, when I move next to the Monte Albán segment of this discussion, we will encounter persuasive evidence that both always-divine gods and deified royal ancestors were understood to be "residing" in various urban temples.

A second point concomitant of the "house of god(s)" metaphor involves taking much more seriously the extent to which Mesoamerican designers really did see gods, rather than human users, as the foremost clientele for their architectural creations. Prevailing materialist interpretations, which stress the utilization of religious ritual, and thus temples, as instruments of political persuasion and propaganda, imply, seemingly commonsensically, that the primary audience of such occasions and buildings is the human participants and observers. But numerous of the cross-cultural examples—like the enumerable Hindu temples that are designed expressly to please and pamper finicky but esteemed deities—suggest, alternatively, that the first concern of designers can be to fashion the sort of architectural ambience that gods, not people, appreciate. Just as Spanish architect Antoni Gaudi, for instance, supposedly replied to complaints that his opulent Sagrada Familia was too expensive and too slow in its completion that "my client is God, who is in no hurry,"[781] one might anticipate parallel rejoinders from pre-Columbian designers. Moreover, that such a large proportion of Mesoamerica's finest and most extravagant "works of art" are secreted away in underground tombs and offerings, completely inaccessible to human view, reaffirms that pre-Columbian architects and craftsmen were, in many instances, genuinely more intent on impressing their divine rather than human patrons.[782]

Moreover on this second point, the possibility that Mesoamerican designers really did imagine they were working to please divine clients—a prospect that, I concur, skeptical

[781] Gaudi's potentially apocryphal response is cited, for instance, by Margot Hornblower, "Heresy or Homage in Barcelona," *Time*, January 28, 1991, p. 92. Also see James John Sweeney and Josep Lluis Sert, *Antoni Gaudi*, rev. ed. (New York: Praeger, 1970).

[782] This is an obvious but very important observation that I revisit more fully in chapter 10 relative to the propitiation priority (III-C).

interpreters may dismiss as mere sentimentalizing—furnishes a means of understanding other common features of pre-Columbian cities. Perhaps most notably, the abundance of cross-cultural examples in which the earthly habitats of gods are understood to be attractive and welcoming to deities insofar as they replicate the god's heavenly habitation provides yet another warrant both for the microcosmic character of essentially all Mesoamerican ceremonial precincts and for situating nearly all temple constructions atop mountain-like pyramid bases. Again while materialist assumptions would stress the affective and utilitarian advantages of positioning Mesoamerican temples up high on artificial *altepeme*, the just-cited examples of South Asian architects' replication at Ellora of Siva's mythological home of Mount Kailasa,[783] the Jerusalem Temple's conception as "a copy and a shadow of the heavenly sanctuary,"[784] and Babylonian ziggurats' recreation of the celestial hill upon which their gods supposedly dwell[785] all reflect a more idealistic incentive to attract deities to commodious earthly structures where they will "feel at home," as it were. Very possibly, it is the gods, or maybe royal ancestors, that Zapotec architects most aspired to impress.

As Karen Bassie-Sweet notes that, "When the Maya built a temple or pyramid near or on a cave site or water shrine, they were creating a house that replicated the deity's home at the mythological mountain, thus duplicating a cosmological concept;"[786] and, by the same token, urban contexts had to be configured in ways that were "familiar" to the gods, and thus worthy of their habitation. Accordingly, while in chapter 1 relative to the homology priority (I-A) I presented the layouts of the ceremonial precincts of Tenochtitlan, Monte Albán and other urban capitals as, in an Eliadean sense, reflections of *homo religiosi's* urge to replicate on earth a downsized replica of the universe at large, the present line of questioning urges us to see that microcosmic design initiative as something that appeals most of all to the gods (or royal

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[783] Volwahsen, *Living Architecture: India*, 140-41.

[784] See Baruch A. Levine, "Biblical Temple," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 1st ed., ed. Eliade, vol. 2: 202-17.

[785] Short, *A History of Religious Architecture*, 19-20.

[786] Karen Bassie-Sweet, *At the Edge of the World: Caves and Late Classic Maya World View* (Norman: University of Okalhoma Press, 1996), 117.

ancestors) themselves—who thus, pre-Columbian designers hope, are inclined to come there and participate in the ritual-architectural proceedings.

Thirdly, the cross-cultural evidence on humanly-constructed deity habitations urges us to greater precision on the very difficult challenge of describing the extent and ways in which Mesoamericans understood deities (or divinized ancestors) to be actually present in pre-Columbian ritual-architectural contexts. The incessant Christian accusations that Mesoamericans were "idolaters," while an unreliable depiction of indigenous epistemology, does suggest that, for native peoples, anthropomorphic statuary and also two-dimension carved images did not just invoke, or "stand for," the idea of the deities (or royal ancestors) who were represented, but rather were themselves animated and "alive." The oft-cited case of Aztecs not just "housing" the deity images of peoples that they subdued, but confining those images in a specially designed sanctuary where the "gods" of conquered peoples were installed as slaves in cells, niches and, in some cases, wooden cages,[787] for instance, matches Freedberg's poignant observations about Greek statues that were sufficiently "alive" that they needed to be chained so they would not run away.[788] In both cases there is a very literal identification between material objects and deities. Likewise, the abundant references in the *Relaciones Geográficas* to Oaxacan villagers worshipping anthropomorphic "idols," which in those cases were almost certainly deified ancestors rather than gods per se, suggest material objects that were considered living beings.

Continuing on this third point, the Greek, Egyptian and especially Hindu literature about ritual means of opening the mouth or eyes of statues, and thus investing those objects with life and divinity, provide some provocative leads as to how this transference of a divine presence into a man-made stone object may have worked. Molly Bassett's extended comments about the process by which contemporary Nahua people, during the course of Chicomexochitl rites, ritually transform ordinary (inanimate) store-bought paper into *itztoc tlatecmeh*, or animate deities who are conceived as living beings and even family members, provide more culturally-

[787] See, among many possibilities, Burr Cartwright Brundage, *Two Earths, Two Heavens: An Essay Contrasting the Aztecs and the Incas* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1975), 80.

[788] On the history of chaining images and statues, see Freedberg, *The Power of Images*, 74-77.

specific clues.[789] And John Monaghan's also ethnographic-derived suggestions about a "monistic-pantheistic conception of deity" and "an area-wide focus on surfaces" provide another way of understanding how the material representations of a deity can be construed as the actual living deity.[790] This important topic, however, remains one that begs for much fuller attention.

Fourth, a much less elusive corollary of the frequent identifications of Mesoamerican structures as "houses of god(s)" is the assumption of one-to-one correlations between particular deities and particular works of architecture. Again Scully's accounts of the deity-specific Homeric Age Greek temples of, for instance, Hera Demeter, Artemis, Aphrodite, Apollo and Zues is informing;[791] and again the very familiar problem about how one anthropomorphic god can be present in many places at once rears its head (and then gets glossed over). If the general Aztec term for their temples, *teocalli*, was translated as "god house," then discernment of which specific gods resided in each structure was an obvious next step. Answering that expectation, the twin altars of the Templo Mayor were unmistakably identified with patron deity Huitzilopochtli and god of rain Tlaloc. Though the list of similarly certain correlations is short, the circular temple in front of that main pyramid was likewise unambiguously pegged as the Temple of Quetzalcoatl, as were round temple structures in other contexts; and a structure situated to the south of the Templo Mayor was identified as the Temple of Tezcatlipoca, the Smoking Mirror. Though with much less certainty, at Teotihuacan, the Pyramids of the Sun and Moon are often identified respectively with Tlaloc and Chalchihuitlicue, the goddess of lakes and streams.

In sum, all four of these topics raise important questions and qualifications concerning the overworked designation "house of god(s), which deserve far greater attention in Mesoamerican contexts than they have received. For instance, regarding this fourth point, as I turn now to specific consideration of "divinity domiciles" at Monte Albán, we will encounter again both the same expectation of deity-specific correlations with particular temple

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[789] Bassett, *The Fate of Earthly Things*, 21ff.

[790] Monaghan, "Theology and History in the Study of Mesoamerican Religions," 29ff.

[791] Scully, *The Earth, the Temple, and the Gods*, chaps. 4-8.

constructions and the same largely frustrated efforts to establish with certainty those god-temple correspondences.

3. Houses of God(s) at Monte Albán: Attracting and Accommodating Deities, Deified Ancestors and/or Impersonal Life Forces

Do the constructions of Monte Albán participate in the well-worn notion of "houses of god(s)"? Were particular deities understood to reside in particular buildings and built forms? How are gods, royal ancestors and other supernatural life forces understood to be present in the ritual-architectural contexts of the great Zapotec capital?[792] Cira Martínez López's eminently helpful, if understated, contribution to a 2002 edited volume on the religion of the *Binnigula'sa,'* or Zapotecs, provides a point of departure, indeed a full frame, for pursuing the relevance of these lines of questioning to Monte Albán.[793] Though the title of the article suggests that was undertaken chiefly to clarify specific questions about the construction sequence and uses of the buildings associated with Tomb 7 a half century after the renowned crypt's original discovery, it is the more general agenda of the piece that actually serves our present purposes. In fact, capitalizing on abundant, then-new information from the Monte Albán Special Project 1992-1994 (PEMA), Martínez López goes far past that particular Tomb 7 problem to provide among the fullest inventories of essentially all of the site's main "temples"—a feature that, in her view, is discernable, formally, by substantial pyramidal bases and, functionally, by their primary role in facilitating religious ritual.[794]

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[792] Though Bartres's ideas on these matters are not substantial enough to warrent much consideration, it is perhaps worth noting in the present context that Batres, *Explorations of Mount Albán* [sic] (1902), 14, wrote "Unfortunately in Mount Albán there exist no buildings dedicated to the dwelling of the gods." Batres, ibid., 32, does, however, opine that tombs or "basements" of Monte Albán did serve as "the houses of the gods."

[793] The full citation to this important article, which I cited earlier, is: Cira Martínez López, "La residencia de la tumba 7 y su templo: elementos arquitectónico-religiosos en Monte Albán," en Víctor de la Cruz y Marcus Winter, coords., *La religión de los binnigula'sa'* (Oaxaca: Fondo Editorial, Instituto Estatal de Educación Pública de Oaxaca, 2002), 221-72.

[794] Martínez López, "La residencia de la tumba 7 y su templo," 239, takes her definition of a Mesoamerican temple from Paul Gendrop, *Diccionario de Arquitectura Mesoamericana* (México: Editorial Trillas, 1977), 197 (my translation): "a public or private building dedicated to

Among those Oaxacanists who calm the loud dispute over personal versus impersonal Zapotec conceptions of divinity by appealing explicitly to Alfredo López Austin's "both/and" argument, Martínez López maintains that,

> "the temple and other constructions such as the altars were made to revere or worship "supernatural entities"—whether personal gods or impersonal life forces—which are notable for their role as protectors of the people as well as guides and oracles for all aspects of life."[795]

Supporting her generalizations with meticulous specifics, she observes that, in central Oaxaca, temples have either one or two rooms, and many but not all have circular columns; and some, as we'll see shortly, are situated in public or communal contexts while other temples are situated in private or residential settings.[796] But, by her definition of the category, all temples have large substructures with stairways to an upper sanctuary, and all serve primarily to facilitate interactions with "supernatural entities." By those criteria, Martínez López is able to locate a total of 31 Monte Albán "temples"—just one for Period I, three for Period II, one for Period IIIA, and 26 that she can date to Period IIIB or the Xoo Phase.[797] Though the offerings buried beneath these structures, which she analyzes with great thoroughness, come from all periods, her

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the exercise of a particular religious cult. In Mesoamerica, it is usually made by a voluminous platform, a stepped pyramidal base or elevated construction, which is called a pyramid."

[795] Martínez López, "La residencia de la tumba 7 y su templo," 222 (my translation), appealing to López Austin, "Los ritos: un juego de definiciones," which I discussed earlier, and also Carlos Martínez Marín, "Santuarios y peregrinaciones en el México prehispánico," en *Religión en Mesoamérica XII Mesa Redonda* (México: Sociedad Mexicana de Antropología, 1972), 161-78.

[796] Martínez López, "La residencia de la tumba 7 y su templo," 222, 254, relies on Pedro Carrasco, "Ceremonias públicas paganas entre los mixes de Tamazulapan," en *Fuentes etnológicas para el estudio de los pueblos ayuuh (mixes) del estado de Oaxaca*, ed. Salomón Nahmad Sittón (Oaxaca: Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social-Oaxaca e Instituto Oaxaqueño de las Culturas, 1994), 387-95, for the contention that here are two main types of religious practice: public or communal activities versus private activities, which are manifested in domestic or residential contexts.

[797] See Martínez López, "La residencia de la tumba 7 y su templo," 242-48, including Table 1 (ibid., 244-46), which enumerates all 31 of these Monte Albán temples.

remarks on Monte Albán temples are, then, overwhelmingly based on the disproportionately Classic-era extant evidence.

Regarding the correlation of these temples with specific deities or other supernatural entities, Martínez López's work reflects a very important wider discrepancy in the materials on Monte Albán. On the one hand, there is frequently the intimation that, as is supposed for the Aztecs, there are deity-specific temples. She, for instance, concludes from her exhaustive study of temples at the Zapotec capital and surrounding areas that, "from the Classic period forward, there was a diversity of gods *for which their respective temples were built*."[798] And with reference to the three temple structures in the center of the Main Plaza (Buildings G, H and I), she suggests that, because of their central location and the unique amount of open space around them, these three temples "likely had a different use, and perhaps accommodated the largest crowds, which allows one to think that possibly they were built or dedicated to worship *the most popular or most important gods*."[799] That is to say, she reaffirms the wide assumption that various gods had "their respective temples" and makes the logical inference that the most widely revered deities were worshipped in these most prominent of public temples. Neither Martínez López nor other Oaxacanists are inclined to argue that all of the gods were, on various occasions, worshipped interchangeably in any or all of the temples.

On the other hand, there has been very little success and few hypotheses wherein specific deities are matched in a one-to-one fashion with particular Oaxacan temples. Archaeologically, the fact that all of the statuary and accouterments from the temple sanctuaries, which are themselves frequently gone, were looted long before systematic investigations began exacerbates the problem. And ethnohistorically, neither Córdova or Balsalobre, nor interpreters who reply on their deity lists, make specific correlations between gods and temples. In their exhaustive *Urnas de Oaxaca*, even Caso and Bernal, irrespective of their highly specific enumeration of the numbers of gods and goddesses that were present in each of the main periods—including, for example, their claim that, during Period IIIB, there were "30 or possibly 31 [different gods], of

[798] Martínez López, "La residencia de la tumba 7 y su templo," 256; my translation, italics added.

[799] Martínez López, "La residencia de la tumba 7 y su templo," 255; my translation, italics added.

whom 7 are feminine"[800]—do not venture any direct correspondence between specific deities and specific temples.

Likewise, Martínez López hedges on this sort of one-to-one god-temple correlation. Relying heavily on Caso and Bernal's data as well as the newer PEMA excavations in which she participates, she does an intensely thorough inventory of all of the offerings in the tombs beneath the 31 structures that she identifies as temples, which leads her to conclude that "the most frequent objects found associated with the temples are the urns of Cociyo and companions, most of which date from the Xoo phase."[801] More specifically, Martínez López is willing to identify numerous objects in the subterranean offerings as deity representations: She mentions, for instance, "an urn of Goddess 8Z" (beneath the temple of Building P), "an urn of a god with a snake mask" (beneath the temple of Building I), "an urn of the goddess 13 Serpent" (beneath the temple of Edificio I Romano), "a glass with a human head of Xipe" (beneath the temple of Edificio II), etc.[802] But those results are not sufficient for her to hazard any hypotheses about any specific correspondences between particular deities and "their respective temple constructions."

Notwithstanding that due tentativeness, Martínez López's reliance on a distinction between "public versus private" temples and religious practices, which she credits to Pedro Carrasco,[803] does lead her to somewhat greater specificity about divinity-temple correlations—a set of hypothetical correspondences that I would extend yet further. In fact, irrespective of that two-part dichotomy, she actually presents something more like a continuum of inclusive versus exclusivistic temple-based ritual-architectural events. Four options emerge, all of which entail

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[800] Bernal, "Archaeological Synthesis of Oaxaca," 803. See Caso and Bernal, *Urnas de Oaxaca*, reprint 683-85.

[801] Martínez López, "La residencia de la tumba 7 y su templo," 249-50; my translation. The fact that Caso and Bernal identify 31 Period IIIB deities and Martínez López idenified 31 temples (26 of them dated to Period IIIB) is, it seems, simply a coincidence.

[802] Martínez López, "La residencia de la tumba 7 y su templo," 250-54; my translation.

[803] Martínez López, "La residencia de la tumba 7 y su templo," 222, 254-55.

ritual that are, she thinks, performed by "specialists," but for qualitatively different audiences. At the inclusive, public end of the spectrum are the centrally located Buildings G, H and I, with enormous open spaces in every direction, which, as just noted, may have been "built or dedicated to worship the most popular or most important gods."[804] Next and somewhat less inclusive are other public temples, presumably those situated about the sides of the Main Plaza, which Martínez López contends, "were used to worship the gods or natural forces, and thereby to obtain benefits for the community."[805] These temples were, then, presumably dedicated to gods that were revered by the wider population.

Third and farther toward the exclusivistic, private end of the spectrum are those sanctuaries that are situated within temple-patio-altar configurations (TPA's), notably so-termed System IV and System M, which constitute the outstanding, most thoroughly explored examples of numerous such "ritual-ceremonial precincts" at Monte Albán.[806] She assesses these near-to-the-center but restricted-access complexes as "elite residences" where "the formalization of religious ritual space also suggests the existence of specialized personnel and the close relationship between religion and politics."[807] Embracing in a qualified manner the hypothesis of

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[804] Martínez López, "La residencia de la tumba 7 y su templo," 255; my translation.

[805] Martínez López, "La residencia de la tumba 7 y su templo," 266; my translation.

[806] On temple-patio-altar configurations (TPA's), Martínez López, "La residencia de la tumba 7 y su templo," 241, appeals to Marcus Winter, "Templo-Patio-Adoratorio: un conjunto arquitectónico no residencial en el Oaxaca prehispánico," en *Cuadernos de Arquitectura Mesoamericana*, núm. 7 (1986): 51-59, perhaps the earliest of several contexts in which he addresses what he sees as "a non-residential architectural pattern" that, in his view, was designed instead as "a ritual-ceremonial precinct." Besides the thoroughly explored Systems IV and M, Winter notes quite similar configurations both at numerous surrounding sites, foremost System 195 at Lambityeco, and in still-to-be-explored areas within Monte Albán.

[807] Martínez López, "La residencia de la tumba 7 y su templo," 265; my translation. On ways in which temple-patio-altar (or temple-patio-adoratorio) configurations (TPA's) "may have functioned as a ritual-ceremonial precinct," a topic that I address more fully at several points in this work, see also Winter, "Templo-Patio-Adoratorio," 51-59, which is among the first published uses of the term. Regarding the TPA's position on a spectrum of public-to-private, Winter, ibid., 51 (my translation) notes, "the space of the patio is relatively restricted without being clandestine or hidden." In this article, Winter makes no remarks concerning the sorts of divinities that were worshipped in TPA's, which is my present concern.

Joyce Marcus, Martínez López suggests that, in these TPA's, the veneration of deified ancestors supersedes that of deities per se, and thus the rewards of worship probably had more narrowly targeted beneficiaries. In regard to these TPA cases, she writes, "Temples in private settings appear in some elite residences with the aim of venerating or commemorating the ancestors of families and asking for the welfare of living relatives."[808] These are, then, so it seems, sites at which to worship urban counterparts to the village-specific patron deities or deified ancestors who are referenced in so many of the *Relaciones Geográficas.*

Finally at the most exclusive end of (what I see as) the public-to-private spectrum, Martínez López discusses the Geodesic Vertex Group, which includes an open space surrounded by five quite different temples (i.e., Building D, the Temple of Two Columns, the Temple of Two Doors, Building E and Building VG), a configuration that she concurs with others, "stands out for its location in a restricted and inaccessible place."[809] But, where Blanton, among others, maintained that this North Platform complex, the highest in the city, was a residence to the especially elite, and thus its temples were "used exclusively by the royal family"—in which case the most prominent supernaturals would have been, as in the case of TPA's, divinized ancestors—she offers a decidedly different interpretation. Alternatively, Martínez López proposes that,

> "the restriction of the public [from the Geodesic Vertex Group] could also be due to the fact that these temples were dedicated to gods that are venerated only by the priests, or that the temples were for the exclusive use of the some select group of priests."[810]

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[808] Martínez López, "La residencia de la tumba 7 y su templo," 266; my translation. Like Winter, she notes the parallel between Monte Albán TPA's and Mound 190 of Lambityeco, which has been identified as "the Temple of Cociyo" and linked to "the ancestor cult."

[809] Martínez López, "La residencia de la tumba 7 y su templo," 255; my translation. Here she notes that "Flannery mentions that Richard Blanton (without reference) considers that Temples E, D and VG were used exclusively by the royal family," and then, pointing out a little discrepancy as to whether this was a primarily ceremonial or residential space, specifies that Blanton, *Monte Albán*, 61, considers that these buildings were "residences of the elite."

[810] Martínez López, "La residencia de la tumba 7 y su templo," 256; my translation.

In that case, then, it is again gods rather than apotheosized human leaders who are being "housed" in the temples, though these are presumably deities of more esoteric than popular devotion.

In sum, though I am inclined for the present discussion of "houses of god(s)" to stretch Cira Martínez López's very careful and cautious work farther than she may want to go, she provides a means of seeing that, yes, Monte Albán temples definitely do participate in this most hackneyed of interpretive alternatives—but in complex, multiple and overlapping ways. To reiterate, she begins by appealing to López Austin's both/and solution of the question of personal-versus-impersonal Zapotec conceptions of divinity, which holds open the possibility that Monte Albán temples accommodated interactions not only with anthropomorphic gods but also impersonal supernatural energies and life forces.[811] In her interpretation, which I support, Zapotec animatism and polytheism coexist quite comfortably.[812] Likewise, she at least intimates that there were deity-specific (or maybe deity-dominate) temples in which one god held first place, which again seems correct to me; but she finds inadequate information to venture hypotheses as to any particular correlations between specific structures and their primary gods.

Moreover, in her final comments, Martínez López again explicitly appeals to López Austin, this time for a both/and argument that the veneration of fully supernatural gods of the sort one learns about from Córdova and Balsalobre in no way precludes similarly fervent, but probably more restricted and group-specific, veneration of deified ancestors.[813] And

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[811] In this respect, Martínez López, "La residencia de la tumba 7 y su templo," 222, appeals to López Austin, "Los ritos: un juego de definiciones."

[812] Martínez López, "La residencia de la tumba 7 y su templo," 265 (my translation), though acknowledging the viability of animatistic interpretations, concludes that, "By the presence and a high diversity of temples, the religion [of Monte Albán] was possibly polytheistic." Note, by the way, that she bolsters that assessment with reference Smith Stark, "Dioses, sacerdotes y sacrificio: una mirada a la religión Zapoteca a través del *Vocabulario en Lengua Zapoteca* (1578) de Juan de Córdova," which appears in the same edited volume and which I discussed earlier in the chapter.

[813] In this respect, Martínez López, "La residencia de la tumba 7 y su templo," 255, 266, specifically cites Alfredo López Austin, "Los rostros de los dioses mesoamericanos," *Arqueología Mexicana*, vol. IV, no. 20 (julio-agosto 1996), 9; and Alfredo López Austin,

furthermore, in what may be her most signal contribution, she does suggest specific spatial loci—even specific temples—in which the worship of fully supernatural gods was foremost (e.g., the temples at the center and around edges of the Main Plaza) and others which "housed" revered deified ancestors (e.g., the temples within TPA complexes). Finally, the prospect that the Geodesic Vertex Group hosted esoteric gods who appealed only to an elite segment of the priesthood, the most venturous part of her analysis, presents one more way in which Monte Albán temples were "houses of gods," a term that she, by the way, never uses.[814]

In short, where the previous line of questioning about works of architecture as the actual bodies of gods directed attention to the divine nature of the mountain-like substructures on which every temple sits (i.e., the analogue to Scully's remarks on Minoan palaces as embodiments of the earth goddess), this alternative (which is the analogue to Homeric Age Greek "houses of gods") enables the conclusion that the upper sanctuary spaces were indeed the domiciles, or earthly homes, for several sorts of Zapotec supernaturals. Most definitely, then, Martínez López's analysis, supports the notion that the characteristic two-part temple configuration—which positions the premier sanctuaries, or "deity domiciles," atop humanly-constructed *altépetl* mountain bases—entails far more than choreographing convenient sightlines for human onlookers. Deities and royal ancestors too appreciate this universe-emulating microcosmic design, which situates their sanctuaries on top of man-made mountains, thereby providing the gods (and sometimes royal ancestors) earthly habitations that reproduce their celestial homes.

Turning now to a fourth and final heuristic variation on the ritual-architectural commemoration of divinity (priority II-A)—built forms that are designed to display the attributes of a god—should help us to see how those lower and upper components of Monte Albán's temples work together to create worship spaces that are compelling both to human devotees and to the gods (or royal ancestors) themselves.

"Herencia de distancias," en *La cultura plural: homenaje a Italo Signorini*, editado por Alessandro Lupa y Alfredo López Austin (México, D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autómorna de México y Universita Degli Studi di Roma "La Sapienza," 1998), 65-66.

[814] Martínez López, "La residencia de la tumba 7 y su templo," 256.

D. Architecture Conceived as a Built Expression of the Attributes of Divinity: Evoking "Otherwise Hid" Qualities of God(s) and Ultimate Reality

With the fourth and final main variation on the commemoration of divinity (priority II-A)—architecture that is conceived as a built expression of the attributes of divinity—I return to another avenue of questioning that has been seldom trafficked in Mesoamerican studies. Again I draw inspiration from Vincent Scully's developmental history of Greek sacred architecture and also from Nelson Wu's comments about the Hindu temple's tripled conception not only as *the actual body of God* (the second main heuristic option) and *the dwelling of God* (the third main option), but, moreover, "*the notion of God*" (this fourth, more rarified morphological alternative).[815]

Reechoing Wu's triad of significances, which are coextensively applicable to Hindu temples, Scully, as we've seen, presents moments along a timeline that leads to the culminating conception of the Classical Greek temple. In the historical development that Scully documents, the literal identification of Bronze Age Minoan palaces with the body of the earth goddess was displaced by preclassic Greek temples that served as abodes for the anthropomorphic Homeric Age deities; and then that residential design conception was eventually supplanted by Classical Greek temples, which facilitate interactions between "the earth, the temple and the gods" in a very different way. This culminating design solution is, Scully opines, "a kind of ultimate refinement of Stone and Bronze Age tradition."[816] By contrast to a Homeric Age emphasis on interior space and the attempt to create an appropriate and welcoming environment for deities,

> "The [Classical Greek] temple, on the other hand, and especially the Doric temple, may become a fully sculptural entity, placed in many kinds of terrain and expressing its god by its own sculptural qualities: so making his character, otherwise hid, externally visible."[817]

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[815] Wu, *Chinese and Indian Architecture*, 21.

[816] Scully, *The Earth, the Temple, and the Gods*, 64.

[817] Scully, *The Earth, the Temple, and the Gods*, 46.

Rather than god-bodies or god-houses, Classical temples are, in Scully's surmise, "purely sculptural" structures that, in subtle and abstract ways, display and thereby reveal the essential attributes or characteristics of a god.

Stressing its unprecedented innovation, and thus profound departure from earlier spatial conceptions, Scully explains that Classical Greek temples are not designed to accommodate the entry of either people or gods; they are "not scaled to human use… the temple's scale is purely abstract, thus purely sculptural."[818] These temples, he says, therefore, have two outstanding qualities: First is this abstract rather than human scale; and, second, they are "sympathetically proportioned as an integral being," which is to say "[they have] the quality of appearing as a single body made up of many parts and therefore potentially active…"[819] The Classical Greek temple is "one thing… one integrated whole."[820] These temples are no longer "a constructed container of space;"[821] no one goes inside. As "a mid-space element, not primarily a space-enclosing shell," the temple is "designed not spatially but sculpturally."[822] The sculptural building is not, however, a literal depiction of the god; it is not representational in that direct sense, but rather is an abstract built expression, or evocation, of the essential, "otherwise hid" attributes of the god. This sort of temple does not, consequently, facilitate a direct engagement between human devotees and the god; in these case, there is nothing like a human-deity conversation. Instead, as I understand Scully, the Classical Greek temple evokes an awareness of that which is most important and distinctive, but perhaps not immediately apparent, about the god. And in that sense, the architecture works like a kind of built theology, a critical study of the nature of the divine.[823]

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[818] Scully, *The Earth, the Temple, and the Gods*, 62.

[819] Scully, *The Earth, the Temple, and the Gods*, 63.

[820] Scully, *The Earth, the Temple, and the Gods*, 63.

[821] Scully, *The Earth, the Temple, and the Gods*, 55.

[822] Scully, *The Earth, the Temple, and the Gods*, 61.

[823] Though I make my best efforts to depict fairly Scully's elaborate, sometimes difficult, discussion of the Classical Greek temple, I concede that my remarks may not be fully consistent with what he intends.

Note, however, that while this fourth heuristic option takes inspiration from Scully nuanced remarks on the Classical Greek temples—structures that are, in the main, dedicated to one particular deity—the notion of "divinity" at issue here is considerably wider than gods per se. Besides personal deities, this line of hermeneutical questioning applies as well to the ritual-architectural expression of "divinity" in the sense of ideas about all manner of supernatural matters, especially precepts concerning Ultimate Reality. This heuristic option, in other words, addresses the prospect of a kind of "architecturally expressed theology" without, however, imagining that theology is the exclusive preserve of intellectuals or elites. In many instances, this material expression of abstractions and metaphysical insights complements a tradition's written theology and doctrines as, for instance, in the architectural expression: (a) of the Dharma or sacred teaching of Buddhism, (b) of Hinduism's universal principle of Purusha, or the "cosmic man," or (c) of the profoundly paradoxical Christian doctrine of the Trinity. All these are culturally-specific conceptions of divinity that are expressed both in writing and in architectural designs. But in other instances—at, I will argue, Monte Albán, for example—the architecture and physical layout give expression to theological conceptions and metaphysical insights for which there are no corresponding (extant) texts. In those cases, the architecture is not an ancillary, but rather the foremost means of expressing a culture's deepest, perhaps otherwise unstated, theological convictions.

In any case, yet again, cross-cultural exemplification of this oft-overlooked possibility informs remarks on its potential applicability to Mesoamerica at large, before I return attention to the specifics of Monte Albán.

1. Cross-Cultural Architectural Expressions of Divinity Attributes: Ostensible Strictures against Idolatry and Real Representations of God

Cross-cultural consideration of this fourth, more abstract variation on the ritual-architectural commemoration of divinity (priority II-A)—design solutions like those that Scully sees in the Classical Greek temple or that Wu sees in Hindu architectural expressions of "the notion of God"—leads us into the intricate problems of iconoclasm, aniconism and doctrinal

proscriptions against representing God (however conceived). Particularly striking in this respect are innumerable categorical denials, from widely spaced religio-cultural contexts, that God can be, in any especial sense, present *in* a building, let alone *is* the building. Though, empirically speaking, this may be an empty category—because theoretic claims to such radical avoidance of images of the divine are almost never sustained on-the-ground, as it were—contenders for inclusion in this aniconic tendency are nonetheless many.

Most prominently, the Abrahamic religions—Judaism, Christianity and Islam, in their manifold versions—by virtue of a shared insistence on the unity and transcendence of God, and thus an (ostensibly) deep enmity for idolatry, are each vexed by the awkward challenge of *commemorating* God without *depicting* God.[824] The Bible and the Mishna, for instance, both deliver strong prohibitions against any anthropomorphic representation of God, and, consequently, many Christians, like Jews in this regard, argue strenuously that "the church is *not* a house for the deity; rather, they insist, it is a house for the *people* of the deity," a meetinghouse for the community of the faithful.[825] Some, though hardly all, Christians would, in fact, go so far as to insist that:

> "It can hardly be too strongly emphasized that the only good reason for building a church is to provide shelter for a worshipping community, a place where the Church, in the biblical sense, may offer to God the one "full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.""[826]

Islam, even more often, is credited with the total avoidance of deity images and, in some Muslim traditions, images of the Prophet, a prohibition that, in principle, also serves to affirm the transcendence of Allah, "since the Divine Essence cannot be compared with anything

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[824] I will address more fully these matters concerning ambivalence in the Abrahamic traditions about the mixed utility and dangers of art and architecture in chapter 9 relative to the so-termed contemplation priority (III-B).

[825] See, for instance, Davies, *Temples, Churches and Mosques*, 91.

[826] Peter Hammond, *Liturgy and Architecture* (London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1960), 154. Hammond's quotion in that quote is to the Book of Common Prayer.

whatsoever."[827] Strange morphological bedfellows, some tribal contexts—for instance, the Maori, the Nupe of Western Africa and the Australian Walbiri—have been credited with a similarly complete avoidance of visual imagery.[828] And likewise, even in India, we routinely (though now, it seems, inadvisably) hear about "an aniconic period" in early Buddhism in which images of the historical Buddha Sakyamuni were entirely prohibited. By that familiar (but debatable) view, subsequent worship of anthropomorphic Buddha figures is almost strictly a result of foreign Greek influences, and is nearly always glossed as compromising the original purity of the tradition.[829]

Theological imperatives and anthropological reports of iconographic abstinence notwithstanding, closer consideration of each of these historical contexts reveals that the alleged aniconism is almost never realized in actual practice. Highlighting the discrepancy between orthodox injunctions and empirical practice, David Freedberg's *The Power of Images*, in fact, makes a compelling argument for some sort of fundamental human predisposition for representing that which is important, "an ever-present impulse to image," so that "the will to image figuratively—even anthropomorphically—cannot be suppressed."[830] Exploring the seemingly pan-human tension between "our need for images" and "our fear of images," Freedberg contends that the widely circulated notion that certain cultures (usually monotheistic or "primitively pure" cultures) totally avoid images in their art and architecture is actually a

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[827] Titus Burckhardt, *Sacred Art in East and West: Its Principles and Methods*, trans. Lord Northbourne (London: Perennial Books, 1967), 101. The Qur'anic doctrine of *tawhid* regards Allah as utterly transcendent and totally distinct from the natural world He has created and, consequently, no facet of human existence or of nature—least of all a painting or statue—can be identified with Allah. Freedberg, *The Power of Images*, 451, n. 4, provides useful bibliography on the issue of Islamic strictures against images.

[828] See Freedberg, *The Power of Images*, 56.

[829] Regarding the (re)statement of that familiar view, see, for instance, Minoru Ooka, *Temples of Nara and their Art*, trans. Dennis Lishka (New York: Weatherhill and Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1973), 40. More interestingly, Susan L. Huntington, "Early Buddhist Art and the Theory of Aniconism," *Art Journal* 49 (Winter 1990): 401-8, whose work I will address momentarily, argues persuasively that there was, in fact, no "aniconic period" in Buddhist art.

[830] Freedberg, *The Power of Images*, 55.

fiction, "a deep and persistent historiographical myth," which seldom if ever corresponds to the actual historical reality. He argues that, "abstinence from figuring the deity does occasionally occur, but for the rest the notion of aniconism is wholly untenable."[831] Alternatively, in Freedberg's view, "objects of worship and veneration are inevitably visualized; such visualizations must then be made real and material; and that in turn reinforces the ever-present impulse to image."[832]

Accordingly, if we look past doctrinal prohibitions against figurative imagery and past arguable academic accounts of aniconically "pure" contexts, and concentrate instead on more fully empirical interactions with buildings, we discover that each of these purportedly iconoclastic traditions, rather than exempting itself from participation in the ritual-architectural commemoration of divinity, actually demonstrates particularly creative and subtle permutations on priority II-A.[833] Regarding, for instance, the widely circulated postulate of a complete avoidance of anthropomorphic images of Sakyamuni in early Buddhist art, there is now controverting evidence that images of the Buddha were made and worshipped from the very beginning.[834] Art historian Susan Huntington's compelling work on the intellectual history of that notion suggests, in fact, that there really were no doctrinal proscriptions against the creation of such works and that the notion of a "pure," strictly aniconic early Buddhism is largely a Western construction (or maybe aspiration), based on a "misunderstanding of the thematic

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[831] Freedberg, *The Power of Images*, 54. In the same vein, Coomaraswamy, *The Transformation of Nature in Art*, 162, stresses that "iconolatry" is not an ignorant or useless practice fit only for spiritual children; instead, it is the expression of "a human necessity."

[832] Freedberg, *The Power of Images*, 55.

[833] For instance, Freedberg, *The Power of Images*, chap. 4, also presents evidence that controverts the claim of pure aniconism in each of these contexts. Also, note that historian of religion Marilyn Waldman, personal communication, observes that, among the Abrahamic traditions, claims to aniconism are nearly always *self-descriptions* (though she, like Freedberg here, also regards those claims as nearly always empirically fallacious); with that in mind, she makes the suggestion that such claims may actually be *strategically comparative statements*, which serve to announce the superiority of one's god over others—bluntly put, "your god(s) can be confined in an image or building, but our God cannot."

[834] See Huntington, "Early Buddhist Art and the Theory of Aniconism," 401-8.

content of the art [of that period]."[835] Nonetheless, the ever-presence of images should not be allowed to dissuade us from taking seriously Buddhist claims that those anthropomorphic statues and images facilitate neither the worship of the person nor the divinity of the Buddha; rather those images communicate to worshippers the Buddha's teaching or his example, the Dharma—an eventuality that suggests that Buddhist temples are not "houses of god" per se, but, in this more subtle variation on priority II-A, ritual-architectural expressions (or commemorations) of Ultimate Truth.

Or, in Islam, despite categorical prohibitions against any depiction of divinity that might detract (or distract) from Allah's transcendence, it is quite clear that the (super)nature of divinity is, nevertheless, regularly, if somewhat indirectly, addressed in Muslim art and architecture. According to Lois Ibsen al Faruqi, for example, while "the Muslim artist is never involved with a depiction, however stylized or abstracted, of God Himself," Muslim art most assuredly does attempt to "disclose an intuition" of the nature and transcendence of God.[836] She says that, in Islam,

> "the aesthetic realm, the beautiful, is that which directs attention to Allah… This transcendence-obsessed culture sought, through the creation of the beautiful, to stimulate in the viewer or listener an intuition of, or an insight into, the nature of God and of man's relation to Him."[837]

Moreover, the aniconic attitude typically afforded to Jews, not infrequently (mis)characterized as "a people who lacked artistic inclination," similarly masks a more ambivalent attitude toward the potentiality for artistic and architectural commemorations of

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[835] Huntington, "Early Buddhist Art and the Theory of Aniconism," 406. She traces the history of "the traditional aniconic theory" to its first explicit articulation by twentieth-century scholar Alfred Foucher.

[836] Lois Ibsen al Faruqi, "An Islamic Perspective on Symbolism in the Arts: New Thoughts on Figural Representation" in *Art, Creativity, and the Sacred: An Anthology in Religion and Art*, ed. Diane Apostolos-Cappadona (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1984), 164-78. This notion that art and architecture can "disclose an intuition" raises questions that will be addressed below in chapter 9 with respect to the "contemplation priority" (III-B).

[837] al Faruqi, "An Islamic Perspective on Symbolism in the Arts: New Thoughts on Figural Representation," 170-71.

divinity.[838] Besides the prohibitions in Exodus 20: 4 against idolatry—"You shall not make a carved image for yourself…"—the Torah likewise describes in detail an elaborate "tent of the presence," which the Israelites were to build as a cultic center for God's worship. Thus, according to some Jewish traditions, the Temple of Solomon, for instance, was built in conformity to divine directives revealed to David as a fixed dwelling place for the *Shekhina*, "the Divine Presence on earth," for which Moses had prepared a moveable dwelling.[839] If presumably "only metaphorical," the residential imagery is unmistakable.

Early Christians also strenuously resisted any intimation that God's divine presence could be contained within an earthly architectural form. In their view, which seems to accuse Jews of claiming to "house" God, the built Temple of Solomon was to be replaced by "the body of Christ."[840] Nevertheless, in Christianity as well, endemic controversy over how best to observe strictures against idolatry and, simultaneously, to capitalize on the unique potentialities of art and architecture issues in, among other consequences, a variegated spectrum of creative solutions to the problem of the ritual-architectural commemoration of divinity (priority II-A). Compare, for instance, the profound differences in the relationships between built form and Christian divinity in each: (a) the Byzantine church, which affirms the Neo-Platonic notion that spiritual power might actually be present in material objects such as icons;[841] (b) the Gothic cathedral, whose explorations of light and height, in a somewhat less direct fashion, accentuate the remote majesty and maybe fearful judgment of God;[842] and (c) the Quaker meetinghouse, which, in all its

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[838] On the ambivalence of Jewish attitudes toward art, see David Altshuler and Linda Altshuler, "Judaism and Art" in *Art, Creativity, and the Sacred*, ed. Apostolos-Cappadona, 155-63.

[839] See Burckhardt, *Sacred Art in East and West*, 48-49.

[840] Burckhardt, *Sacred Art in East and West*, 49.

[841] Regarding explicit and profound differences between the Eastern church's receptivity to the Neo-Platonic notion that spiritual power can actually be present in material objects such as icons or even buildings and, by contrast, the official Roman view, which held that the images were not in themselves holy, so that any veneration before an image of Christ is in reality a veneration of Christ and not of the image, see, for instance, Staale Sinding-Larsen, *Iconography and Ritual: A Study of Analytical Perspectives* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget AS, 1984), 103.

[842] The experience of Gothic cathedrals will be explored more fully in chapter 9 with respect to the "contemplation priority" (III-B).

simplicity, "witnesses to a being who is to be known in the midst of life, who is not separate, whose dwelling is within humankind, offering fellowship."[843] In all these cases, and many more, distinct interpretations of Christian theology are being expressed, and thus advanced, via the thoughtful design of ritual-architectural contexts.[844] Architectural design *is* theology.

In short, even the most ballyhooed of ostensible examples of the complete unwillingness to depict God in art and architecture, when examined more closely, reinforce David Freedberg's contentions about an irrepressible human "will to image figuratively—even anthropomorphically—[that] cannot be suppressed."[845] People in no context, so it seems, can resist "an ever-present impulse to image."[846] Not only Classical Greeks and Hindus, by also Buddhists, Muslims, Jews and Christians—and also, as I will argue momentarily, pre-Columbian Mesoamericans—are simply unwilling to forgo the unique capabilities that art and architecture provide for expressing their "religious" investments, which by the operative definition in this work, is that which matters most to them.

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[843] Davies, "Architecture," 390.

[844] Consider also two more obvious but informing Christian examples: First, regarding the cross-shaped plan of so many medieval European basilicas, Burckhardt, *Sacred Art in East and West*, 49-50, explicitly notes a parallel between the architecturalization of the Hinduism symbolism of Purusha, the "cosmic man" and universal principle of creation, and the Christian church design wherein "the head [of the crucified Jesus] corresponds to the apse with its axis to the East, His outstretched arms are the transepts, His torso and legs are at rest in the nave, His heart lies at the principle altar." And second, another parallel to the way in which Classical Greek temples commemorate the attributes of specific deities comes in those many church designs that express and celebrate the Christian conception of divinity, that is, the Trinity. Among countless examples of that, Sinding-Larsen, *Iconography and Ritual*, 92, explains how, in the medieval mosaic program at San Marco in Venice, the three main cupolas "are probably meant as an allusion to the three persons in the Trinity and illustrate the Concept of the Church in a universal sense as being 'full of the Trinity.'"

[845] Freedberg, *The Power of Images*, 55.

[846] Freedberg, *The Power of Images*, 55.

2. Architectural Expressions of Divinity Attributes in Mesoamerica: Strategic Manipulations of Light, Geometry and Sheer Size

To define with precision ways in which pre-Columbian Mesoamerican architecture expresses and/or evokes "otherwise hid" attributes of the gods and/or Ultimate Reality is difficult and uncertain. In chapter 1 relative to the homology priority (I-A), I explored at some length how built configurations in Oaxaca and elsewhere express the "hard nucleus" of the Mesoamerica cosmovision—a term that encompasses native cosmological conceptions of the universe, anthropological conceptions of the human condition, and theological conceptions of things supernatural. And while I concede that those three realms of concern are inextricably interknit, I also have to admit also that it is cosmology that tends to dominate that discussion. The recurrent theme of the unification of time and space, of calendars and architectural dimensioning at Monte Albán and other sites, is a prime case in point.[847] But architectural expressions of a distinctive "native theology" are harder to ascertain. How is it that Mesoamerican architecture presents a kind of built, non-verbal theology that does not just depict gods, but summons to the minds of onlookers the most essential attributes of divinity? How do built form work to communicate, even to popular audiences, abstruse theological conceptions and metaphysical ideas?

In pre-Columbian Mesoamerica, strictures against representing gods are uncommon, but not unheard of. Predictably, they arise most often in connection with a purported monotheistic-monolatrous strain. The Aztec Ometéotl, supreme God of Duality whose paired forms as the male Ometecuhtli and female Omecíhuatl are simultaneously "father and mother of the gods," is often singled out as the sole Mexica divinity for whom no images were made, either because

[847] Regarding the unification of calendrical time and architectural space at Monte Albán, a theme that I discussed somewhat differently in each of the first three chapters, see, for instance, among numerous relevant possibilities, Winter, "Religión de los *Binnigula'sa'*: la evidencia arqueológica," 67-68; and Marcus Winter y Miguel Bartolomé, "Tiempo y espacio en Monte Albán: la construcción de una identidad compartida," in *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), 59-72.

none was worthy or none necessary.[848] Likewise, the uncreated creator god of the Zapotecs described by Córdova, which only some accept as a fully indigenous phenomenon, is routinely presented as the unique exception among Oaxacan deities insofar as the supreme deity was "so infinite and incorporeal that no images were ever made of him and no mortal came in direct contact with him."[849] And Aztec philosopher-ruler-poet Nezahualcóyotl, for instance, in efforts to give material expression to his metaphysical discourses about an "Unknown, Unknowable Lord of Everywhere," supposedly built an entirely empty temple in which no images were displayed and no blood sacrifices of any kind were allowed.[850] But this last case—not unlike the Islamic ingenuity in evoking the attributes of an unrepresentable Allah, or perhaps like Shaker commitments to simplicity—actually is a top-tier demonstration of the present morphological option insofar as, while no graphic image could express Nezahualcóyotl's elusive conception of divinity, he was able to evoke that hermetic notion via a completely empty architectural form. Again, for Nezahualcóyotl, architectural design *is* theology. Nevertheless, in the main, Mesoamerica is, it seems, a context in which the seemingly pan-human "impulse to image" is allowed free and full expression.[851]

Accordingly, because the most revealing cross-cultural exemplars of this initiative to elicit via architecture the evanescent but essential qualities of divinity arise as creative means of navigating, maybe circumventing, doctrinal strictures against representing God, this alternative may be largely superfluous in a decidedly not-aniconic Mesoamerican ambience. Nonetheless, my largely Abrahamic examples do prompt consideration of at least three major means of indirectly, but very effectively, evoking the attributes of divinity via architecture that are

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[848] On Ometéotl, again among many alternatives, see, for example, León-Portilla, *Aztec Thought and Culture*, 80-103; or Nicholson, "Religion in Pre-Hispanic Central Mexico," 410-11.

[849] Marcus, "Zapotec Religion," 345. Recall the discussion of this Zapotec uncreated supreme being earlier in this chapter.

[850] As noted earlier in the chapter, on Nezahualcóyotl, see, among many alternatives, León-Portilla, *Pre-Columbian Literatures of Mexico*, 88-89; or León-Portilla, *Aztec Thought and Culture*, 59, 72-75.

[851] Freedberg, *The Power of Images*, 55.

definitely at work in pre-Columbian Mesoamerica, all of which have notable exemplifications at Monte Albán. Consider the three options in turn.

First, Gothic cathedrals' rightful renown for manipulations of light as the supreme means of expressing the ethereal transcendence of God suggest another means of appreciating all of those choreographed celestial effects that I discussed in chapter 3 relative to the astronomy priority (I-C). Alongside the simple, not untenable, possibility that Mesoamericans conceived the sun, moon, planets and stars as themselves deities, we might consider as well more subtle ways in which the perpetual but predictable movement of those celestial bodies, their conspicuous visibility but unreachable whereabouts, and especially their light-emitting qualities, speak to the paired accessibility and inaccessibility of the divine. Consequently, all of those pre-Columbian efforts to orchestrate seasonal views of sky bodies—most notably at Monte Albán, the helical rising of Capella from Building J and the progressive movements of the sun as viewed from Building P—may present not just expressions of Mesoamerican time-space cosmological concerns, and not just politically cunning means of manipulating public sentiments. These ritual-architecturally choreographed celestial effects may also work to evoke more specifically theological reflections about divinities who are at once engaged with, but also seemingly invulnerable, to earthly human affairs.

Second, strategic uses of geometry and proportionality in numerous sacred architectures leads us to reconsider how the abundant Mesoamerican counterparts may be not just willful replications of space-time cosmological notions (which they certainly are), but also means of expressing something more subtle about the nature of divinity. The embrace and incredible elaboration of geometry by which Islamic architects masterfully avoid any depiction of God while at the same time "disclosing an intuition" of the nature and transcendence of Allah, for instance, may find Mesoamerican analogs in the preoccupations with "sacred numbers" and correct proportioning discussed earlier in relation to the convention priority (I-B).[852] Among the most high-profile examples, the hexagonal Dome of the Rock, completely devoid of any figurative images, is a rigorous, exactly symmetrical exercise in *ad quadratum* geometry, which

[852] al Faruqi, "An Islamic Perspective on Symbolism in the Arts," 164-78.

thereby instantiates, without representing, the perfection of God.[853] And thus those readers who were, for instance, was left somewhat puzzled about the rewards that account for the elaborate and labor-intensive space-time correlations into the layout of Monte Albán—such as the innumerable reiterations of a 260: 365 ratio and the so-termed Zapotec triangle, which may have been replicated in Teotihuacan[854]—might consider that meticulous proportioning also as an effort to superimpose a perfect order on a troublingly less than perfectly symmetrical landscape. And in that way, the meticulous proportioning of Monte Albán's buildings and spaces is a kind of public theological statement that acknowledges the disorder as well as order that is characteristic of their world. Yes, at Monte Albán too, architectural design *may be* theology.

And third, sheer size, perhaps the most widespread and oft-deployed means by with which architects evoke the power and majesty of the divine, certainly obtains in Mesoamerica. The humungous pyramids of Teotihuacan and Cholula provide the most unmistakable examples of George Vaillant's proposition that the pyramid-temples of Mesoamerica, were "seldom intended to house congregations," but instead were "true monuments to the glory of the gods."[855] Medina Hernández notes also that, where natural mountains are concerned, "their heights establish a hierarchy among them."[856] And indeed, though the point may be too obvious to deserve mention, we should take note of the kind of over-sizing and over-building characteristic of all Mesoamerican urban centers, which eventuated in structures that remain significantly intact hundreds of years after their abandonment. Big, tall and eminently durable built forms connote profound respect. In chapter 10, relative to the propitiation priority (III-C) and the

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[853] Titus Burkhardt, *Art of Islam: Language and Meaning* (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom, 2009 [originally 1976]), 13.

[854] In chapter 3 relative to the astronomy priority (I-C), see my discussion of the proportional ratios and so-termed "Zapotec triangle" that are built into Monte Albán's architectural layout, which is informed especially by the work of Damon E. Peeler 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).

[855] George Vaillant, "The Architecture of pre-Columbian Central America," *Natural History*, vol. 34, no. 2 (1934): 118-21.

[856] Medina Hernández, "La cosmovision nahua actual," 195; trans. Bassett, *The Fate of Earthly Things: Aztec Gods and God-Bodies*, 22.

notion of building itself as ritual, I will explore the sense in which many works of architecture are most impressive for the tremendous outlay of labor, and thus the apparent sacrifice and commitment, that was required to erect them. But in the present context, simply note the inarguable fact that hugeness and height are perhaps the most common means of architecturally expressing a sense of the transcendence of the divine.

In sum, then, without question, (a) strategic manipulations of light, (b) geometry and (c) sheer size are all pertinent priorities in "disclosing intuitions" about the nature of divinity in the ritual-architectural programs of numerous Mesoamerican sites, Monte Albán included. Nonetheless, looking ahead to the next section, rather than flesh out those strategies more fully, I will focus alternatively on how consideration of this fourth variation on the commemoration of divinity (priority II-A), and especially the conception of it premier exemplar, the Classical Greek temple, can enrich our understanding of the characteristic pyramidal-based sanctuary configuration of the temples of the Zapotec capital.

3. Architectural Expressions of Divinity Attributes at Monte Albán: The Complementarity of Temple Substructures and Upper Sanctuaries

Experience shows that a comparison, however qualified, between Classical Greek temples and the "temples" of Monte Albán is certain to irk most Oaxacanists. Be that as it may, rather than hopes of demonstrating any simple sameness between the two cases, I capitalize on Vincent Scully's rich, arguably idiosyncratic, interpretation of those Classical Greek forms as a means of raising a largely neglected set of questions about the ritual-architectural expression of Mesoamerican theological ideas and concerns. Indeed, here again the present version of the hermeneutical method proves its mettle by bringing into view a way of understanding the architecture of the site not, I think, previously considered—namely, the ways in which the built forms of Monte Albán present a kind of material, that is to say, non-verbal and non-literary, expression of the Zapotec conceptions shifting, divergent and multiple interactions with supernaturals. I argue that the same dynamic is apparent at two quite different scales—that of individual temples and, then again, at the scale of the entire central city.

The first and smaller scale concerns the sort of theological conceptions expressed by the characteristic two-part temple configuration, repeated at Monte Albán more than 30 times, which is composed of pyramid mountain-like bases and upper sanctuaries.[857] Recall the way in which the conclusions with respect to the previous two variations on the commemoration of divinity (priority II-A) entail appreciations of those two respective components of the characteristic temple form: The discussion of architecture conceived as the actual body of a god led to an appreciation of the degree to which built *altépetl* pyramid sub-structures themselves are as fully animated and "alive" as their natural counterparts; and the discussion of architecture as the residence or abode of a deity directed attention, by contrast, to the raised sanctuaries as venues in which to display particular gods and royal ancestors. Now, with consideration of works of architecture that are conceived as sculptural expressions of the attributes of divinity, we can better appreciate the complementarity of those two elements, which together form, in Scully's phrase, "one thing… one integrated whole."[858] Moreover, in my rubric, the two-part substructure-sanctuary pairing of Monte Albán temples provides an excellent exemplum of the "twofold pattern" that characterizes what I have termed "the mechanism of ritual-architectural events."[859]

Consider, therefore, how each of those two elements—i.e., pyramidal bases and upper sanctuaries—participates in that strategic twofold pairing. In this frame, the mountain-like substructure of the temple form is the component of "allurement" or the "front-half" of the ritual-architectural situation.[860] This is the conservative or traditional constituent, which invites participation by presenting something familiar, reliable and thus widely appealing. Compelling and multivalent as these artificial *altepeme* or "hills of sustenance" are, they are, as noted so

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[857] See Martínez López, "La residencia de la tumba 7 y su templo," 242-48, including Table 1 (ibid., 244-46).

[858] Scully, *The Earth, the Temple, and the Gods*, 63.

[859] See Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, vol. I, chap. 4, "Order and Variation: The Twofold Pattern of Ritual-Architectural Events."

[860] See Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, vol. I, chap. 5, "Allurement and Coercion: The 'Front-half' of the Ritual-Architectural Situation."

often, by no means unique to the Zapotec capital. To the extreme contrary, their prestige and "allure" resides in their pan-regional ubiquity; these pyramid-bases are, in a colloquial phrase, "old news." As argued in chapter 1 relative to the homology priority (I-A), every people in every part of Mesoamerican orients themselves with respect to these water-mountains. Each one of them enables a spatially located community identity, but, as a morphological type, they are largely interchangeable. All social constituencies and visitors to pre-Columbian Monte Albán would have been, then, thoroughly well-acquainted with this most widely shared feature of the Mesoamerican cosmovision; and to that extent, the conventionalized pyramid bases mark these temples as legitimate rather than aberrant. These mountain-like platforms, though themselves specially "animated entities," are generic rather than specific, conventional rather than innovative, reassuring rather than challenging, venerable but unremarkable.

On the other hand, the upper sanctuaries of Monte Albán's temples provide the component of substantive content, the "back-half" of the twofold pattern.[861] These upper rooms, and more still the contents of those sanctuaries, are specific rather than generic, innovative rather than conventional, "strange" rather than familiar, venerable *and* remarkable. Most obviously, the two-room temples that were "invented" here in Period II, and then replicated repeatedly, are a specifically Zapotec feature; but, more to the present point, each of the gods or royal ancestors that are "housed" in these sanctuaries has a specificity that stands in contrast to the universality of the mountain substructures. If we follow (the spirit of) Caso and Bernal's hypotheses about an ever-evolving cast of Monte Albán deities, there was, over the capital's long history, a kind of revolving door of increasingly more gods; always, albeit over long stretches of time, there were newly introduced gods, with others rotating out of favor.[862] Or if we accept the not-mutually-exclusive proposition that royal ancestors were the featured divinities in many of the sanctuaries, especially those located in TPA's, these are even more specific figures, perhaps divine adversaries in a kind of competition with one another for family-based control of the city's affairs. In short, the substructures are reliable, unchanging and "alluring," while the substantive

[861] See Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, vol. I, chap. 6, "Transformation and Productivity: The 'Back-half' of the Ritual-Architectural Situation."

[862] See Caso and Bernal, *Urnas de Oaxaca*, especially the Conclusion, reprint 669-89; or Bernal, "Archaeological Synthesis of Oaxaca," both discussed earlier in this chapter.

content displayed in the sanctuaries challenges devotees to engage something (or someone) particular, less fully familiar and thus, at least in some cases, contentious.

That is to say, together the substructures and sanctuaries—neither very rewarding nor persuasive in itself—provide the juxtaposition of order and variation, or "allurement" and substantive content, that I, following the lead of many theorists, have argued is crucial to the making of meaning.[863] In the Gadamerian sense of dialogical hermeneutics, the *altépetl* substructures start or "instigate" the meaning-making ritual-architectural conversation by persuading onlookers that this is an occasion of heft and legitimacy, thus worthy of their attention; and, by contrast, the divinities in the sanctuaries provide the more content-rich meanings and messages of those dialogical architectural events.[864] This is a purposeful pairing like the Templo Mayor's twin altars to the pan-Mesoamerican rain god Tlaloc, who is familiar, appealing or "alluring" to all audiences, and the Aztec-specific patron deity of Huitzilopochtli, who presents the shock and awe that visitors to Tenochtitlan's ceremonial occasions are challenged to accept. As with the calculated conjoinment of the generic Tlaloc and Aztec-specific patron Huitzilopochtli, the Zapotecs' melding of upper sanctuaries atop mountain-like substructures created a fully unified formal feature, the meaningful effect of which is much greater than the sum of its parts.

In other words, though Monte Albán's temples in no obvious way resemble those of the ancient Mediterranean, they do have a similarly unified conception. Not unlike Scully's observation that all of the carefully cut and treated surfaces that together compose the Classical Greek temple "were covered at last with a hard coat of blazing white stucco" so that it was apprehended not as many parts but as "one thing, a single sculptural unit," Zapotec substructures and sanctuaries too were welded into "one integrated whole."[865] And even more relevant is

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[863] See Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, vol. I, chap. 1, "Lineages and Legacies: The Universality of Hermeneutical Reflection."

[864] See Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, vol. I, chap. 3, "Conversation and Play: The Eventfulness of Architecture."

[865] Scully, *The Earth, the Temple, and the Gods*, 64.

Scully's contention that the grand innovation of Classical Greek temples was not something completely unprecedented, but rather a thoughtful interweaving of long-established traditions and a radical new spatial conception. Reechoing the view that it is precisely this juxtaposition of the conventional and the innovative that is required to make any work of art or architecture meaningful, he explains that,

> "[the Classical Greek temple] was a union of the most ritually conservative, intellectual, and physical of attitudes, and it makes the Greek temple one of the most illuminating products of that dialogue between mind and matter through which all works of art are created…"[866]

By the same token, the *altépetl*-based Zapotec temples—themselves theological statements—worked to present new conceptions of divinity, and thus new religio-political grounds of authority, by juxtaposing their community-specific deities with the most completely revered and non-controversial of Mesoamerican traditions, the water-mountain. Conjoining the partisan divinity conceptions of Monte Albán with the unassailable imagery of *altepeme* in the two-part temples made those theological innovations viable to a wide audience.

Secondly, but only briefly—because I will address this more fully in the impending Closing Thoughts—the same sort of juxtaposition of the tried-and-true *altépetl* form with innovative new theological concepts was likewise in play at the scale of the entire city center. Remembering here the important and oft-made point that, at Monte Albán, "temples and palaces set a framework in which each new building sacrificed its individuality for the unity of the whole,"[867] we can appreciate that, just as the individual temples both of Classical Greece and central Oaxaca were configured as unified wholes, the entire conception of the Zapotec capital has a wholistic conception that few other Mesoamerican sites can match.[868] No single architectural feature like Chichén Itzá's Castillo or Tenochtitlan's Templo Mayor draws the

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[866] Scully, *The Earth, the Temple, and the Gods*, 64.

[867] Hardoy, *Pre-Columbian Cities*, 109.

[868] Recall that Monte Albán's exceptional unity of conception, on which numerous commentators have remarked, was the foremost point of the Introduction to Part I, "Orientation and Allurement: The Instigation of Ritual-Architectural Events at Monte Albán."

immediate and unchallenged attention of visitors to the Main Plaza. Instead, it is the entire ensemble of dozens of monumental structures, not any of its individual architectural elements, that patrons are compelled to engage. And, in that sense—albeit at a vastly large scale—the entire city center, not unlike its individual temples, qualifies as "one thing… one integrated whole." Notwithstanding my continued stress on the city's accomodation of many conceptions of divinity, I insist that Monte Albán was, an important respect, one urban ceremonial complex atop one enormous natural *altépetl*, which fulfills magnificently that crucial role of ritual-architectural allurement.

Again, then, it is an appreciation of the twofold juxtaposition of order and innovation, the old and the new, characteristic of all meaning-making that supports my interpretation. With that crucial twofold pattern in mind, I will next, after some reiteration of the main points of the second large block of this chapter, close this long chapter by arguing that the whole of Monte Albán is, as this fourth variation on the commemoration of divinity (priority II-A) urges us consider, a ritual-architectural expression of a theological standpoint or, actually, a whole array of not-altogether consistent standpoints on things supernatural.

III. Closing Thoughts: Discovering, Embodying, Housing and/or Expressing the Attributes of Many and Mixed Supernaturals

With respect to methodological admonitions and advice, the second large block of this chapter—"Four Variations on the Ancient Zapotec Ritual-Architectural Commemoration of Divinity"—has made a kind of circle. It began in the wake of "Summary Thoughts and Methodological Cautions on the Study of Ancient Zapotec Divinity Conceptions" that implicated both earlier and current Oaxacanist scholars in the same untoward tendencies for idealization, reification and false systematization that are so blatantly apparent in James Walker's classic treatment of Lakota religion.[869] And, by way of constructive advice for avoiding the so-termed fallacies of purity and typicality, I urged special attention to Miguel Bartolomé's ethnographical-

[869] See comments earlier in the chapter on Walker, *The Sun Dance and Other Ceremonies of the Oglala Division of the Teton Dakota* (1917).

based proposition that indigenous Oaxacans, presently, and thus presumably in pre-Columbian times, instead of working to smooth out every apparent contradiction in their conceptions of things supernatural, operate with a pragmatic pliability and openness to "multiple experiences of the sacred."[870] By Bartolomé's assessment of their "religion without theology,"[871] observing balanced and obligatory reciprocal relations with both personal gods and impersonal life forces is, for indigenous Oaxancans, a matter of first importance; but honing the sort of contradiction-free system of belief that Walker (falsely) attributes to the Lakotas is not.[872] I contended that John Fire Lame Deer's messy mishmash of non-anthropomorphic and humanoid supernaturals certainly provides a much truer empirical picture of indigenous divinity investments than does either Walker's hyper-systematic synthesis of Lakota belief or Archie Fire Lame Deer's sterile schematization of a Lakota pantheism.[873]

At any rate, now these Closing Thoughts complete that circle and return to those same methodological precepts by offering a promised, but not yet delivered, view of prime-time Monte Albán in which, rather than one hegemonic state-sponsored conception of divinity that overpowered all competitors, the capital city tolerated, and even encouraged and exploited, something much more like "multiple experiences of the sacred." Here again I maintain that, while academic theories of ancient Zapotec divinity conceptions are frequently at loggerheads, the historical phenomena they purport to describe could, it seems, coexist in amicable, often coadjuvant and interdependent ways at Monte Albán. In the Zapotec capital, conceptions of divinity were accumulative and, while not completely consistent, nor were they antagonistic or antipathetic.

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[870] Bartolomé, "Elogio del politeísmo: las cosmovisiones indígenas en Oaxaca," 629.

[871] Bartolomé, "Elogio del politeísmo: las cosmovisiones indígenas en Oaxaca," 602.

[872] Bartolomé, "Elogio del politeísmo: las cosmovisiones indígenas en Oaxaca," 618.

[873] See comments earlier in the chapter comparing the respective father and son autobiographical accounts of John Fire Lame Deer and Richard Erdoes, *Lame Deer: Seeker of Visions*; and Archie Fire Lame Deer and Richard Erdoes, *Gift of Power: The Life and Teachings of a Lakota Medicine Man*.

The second of two final sub-sections presents this hypothesis concerning the general ritual-architectural conception of Monte Albán as one large and encompassing, though not altogether unifying, exercise in the accommodation of dynamic and divergent means of interacting with supernaturals. But first, the initial sub-section provides some rhetorical momentum by very briefly reiterating the ample applicability of all four of main variations on the commemoration of divinity priority (II-A), which I have just discussed.

A. Ritual-Architectural Commemorations of Divinity at Monte Albán: The Ample Applicability of All Four Variations on the Theme

All four of the main permutations of the ritual-architectural commemoration of divinity (priority II-A) enumerated in the latter half of this chapter are, in copious and ingenious ways, exemplified in the design and layout of the ancient Zapotec capital. And while that quaternary of options is roughly correlated with four stages in the diachronic critical history of Greek sacred architecture presented by Vincent Scully, it is actually the Hindu temple's simultaneous material expressions of *the body of god*, *the house of god* and "*the notion of god*" that much more accurately corresponds to the situation at Monte Albán.[874] Instead of proposing that the respective alternatives emerge successively across the long history of the Zapotec capital, I am arguing that all four main permutations were mutually relevant—indeed, masterfully expressed—in the mature conception of the Zapotec capital, certainly by Period IIIB and likely by Period II when the final boundaries of the Main Plaza were established.

I recapitulate least briefly with respect to the first variation on the theme—the personification and/or divination of natural "architectural" features of the landscape—because this, in so many ways, provides the foundation for all the rest. When making sense of Monte Albán's ritual-architectural conception, Scully's emphatic insistence that elements of the ambient natural environment—along with the built forms, mindsets of the builders, and ritual uses of those forms—are the four absolutely crucial components that together constitute "one ritual

[874] See comments earlier in the chapter on Michell, *The Hindu Temple*, 62; and Wu, *Chinese and Indian Architecture,* 21.

whole" could not be more apropos.[875] If we allow for somewhat wider and more diversified conceptions of divinity, his posit that all Greek architecture is an exploration of relationships between "the earth, the temple and the gods," is, I think, fully applicable to the Oaxacan context.[876] In support of that premise, I noted Mesoamericanist scholars' wide acknowledgement of the sacrality of *altépetl* water-mountains, but also their imprecision in describing mountains variously as "cosmic axes" that facilitate interactions with far-off gods;[877] as habitats where gods, water serpents, "lords of the hills," "spirits of concrete places" and other supernaturals reside;[878] or, in the option that I most strongly affirm, as themselves "animate entities."[879] The notion that mountains are, in a very important sense, "alive" cannot be overstated.

Moreover, I accentuated and then elaborated on José Alcina Franch's poignant proposition that, from the perspective of indigenous Oaxacans, "certain deities resided on some hills, but in many other cases… *the hill is the deity itself*"[880] in order enumerate three somewhat more specific, but again not-mutually-exclusive, proposals: (a) that natural hills are embodiments of "the goddess or great mother;"[881] (b) that mountains are "surfaces" that correspond to the whole Earth and even the infinite All;[882] and (c) that mountains are "thunder talkers," *totiotzin* (or gods) who both speak and listen, and thus, as with other social beings and

[875] Scully, *The Earth, the Temple, and the Gods*, 56.

[876] Scully, *The Earth, the Temple, and the Gods*, 1, 20.

[877] See, for instance, Joyce, "The Founding of Monte Albán: Sacred Propositions and Social Practices," 71-91; or Joyce, "Sacred Space and Social Relations in the Valley of Oaxaca," 192-216.

[878] See, for instance, Markens, "La transición del Clásico al Postclásico en el Valle de Oaxaca," 515; Zarate Morón, "Símbolos prehispánicos y ritos contemporáneos de creación y nacimiento en el sur del Istmo de Tehuantepec," 194; and Alcina Franch, "Los dioses del panteón zapoteco," 29-34.

[879] Bassett, *The Fate of Earthly Things*, 23ff.

[880] Alcina Franch, "Los dioses del panteón zapoteco," 32; my translation, italics added.

[881] Zárate Morón, "Símbolos prehispánicos y ritos contemporáneos de creación y nacimiento en el sur del Istmo de Tehuantepec," 194.

[882] Monaghan, "Theology and History in the Study of Mesoamerican Religions," 29.

family members, people enjoy loving but also contentious reciprocal interactions with mountains.[883]

These various perspectives on the "animacy," "aliveness" and the "true divinity" of Mesoamerican mountains thus lend strong support to a deep and enduring animatistic strain among Oaxacans, which remained fully operative in the urban context of Monte Albán. If by "animatism" one means belief solely in fully impersonal supernatural energies (and not in gods per se), that thesis is partly repudiated by persistent tendencies to attribute to mountains personalities, and thereby the status of both social and supernatural beings with whom human beings stand in a relationship of obligatory reciprocity. Mountains are, in an important sense, personal gods. Nonetheless, these deep affections for mountains do not, it seems, have any direct connection to the highly anthropomorphic conceptions of "a pantheon of gods" like that which comes to us through the writings of colonial-era Dominican authors Juan de Córdova or Gonzalo de Balsalobre; the more personal and officially sanctioned gods that those authors describe emerge, thrive and decline in a different orbit, as it were. In other words, then, even among residents of the urban capital, there was an abiding affection for, and "personification" of, mountains that, so it appears, operated largely independent from (but not necessarily at odds with) beliefs in the official gods of the state religion.

Second, with respect to much less-discussed prospect of built architecture that is conceived as the actual body of a deity, I stressed both the near-interchangeability of natural and humanly constructed *altepeme* and the acceptance, especially in large pre-Columbian cities, of numerous coexisting *altépetl* centers. Together the commensurate prestige of man-made sacred mountains and "the multiplicity of centers" enable a kind of transference of all of the enlivening and alive qualities of ambient mountains to the pyramid bases that support essentially all of Monte Albán's temples, of which there are, by Period IIIB, dozens. The primary natural mountain on which the city was located was, then, the foundation atop which a host of "artificial" *altépetl* water-mountains were eventually constructed. And built forms too, most especially the mountain-like substructures of temples, support the continued exercise, now in a

[883] Bassett, *The Fate of Earthly Things*, 23ff.

fully urban context, of all of the broadly animatistic sensibilities that were in place long before the emergence of cities in Oaxaca.

Third, with respect to the more well-worn possibility of architecture conceived as the residence of a deity or divine presence, I keyed on Cira Martínez López's use of Pedro Carrasco's distinction between public and private ritual contexts in order to intimate a kind of continuum between highly inclusivistic worship contexts in the Main Plaza and those ritual contexts that were much more exclusive and restrictive.[884] The former, wide-open ceremonial contexts, which are focused on the centrally located Buildings G, H and I and on the temples that surround the Main Plaza, are the best contenders for sites that "housed" the fully supernatural pantheon gods of the sort identified by Córdova or in the deity lists of Diego Luis recorded by Balsalobre. And temples situated with the more exclusive TPA's, or elite residence complexes, provide the strongest candidates for having accommodated deified royal ancestors, likely of the sort recorded in the *Relaciones Geográficas*, who were connected with each of those prominent families.

And fourth, with respect to architecture conceived as a built expression of the attributes of divinity—that is, a kind of architecturally-expressed theology—I combined observations from the previous two options to argue that two-part Monte Albán temples, like Classical Greek temples in this respect, are "one integrated whole," which is made meaningful in large part because of the complementarity of the pyramid bases and upper sanctuaries. At that point, I appealed to a basic premise from *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture* concerning "the twofold mechanism of ritual-architectural events," which, in this case, is exemplified by the juxtaposition of the mountain-like platforms and crowning sanctuary spaces.[885] Where the artificial *altépetl* substructures constitute the component of "allurement," which invites participation and ensures the legitimacy of the rituals undertaken there, the upper rooms, whether housing pantheon gods or deified ancestral rulers, provide the component of substantive content;

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[884] Martínez López, "La residencia de la tumba 7 y su templo," 222, 254-55.

[885] See Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, vol. I, chap. 4, "Order and Variation: The Twofold Pattern of Ritual-Architectural Events."

and together the two elements instantiate the meaning-making mechanism that one observes in sacred architectures the world over. Moreover, in the context of that discussion, I promised to expand later on the way in which the same twofold pattern that makes these individual temples compelling and meaningful (a term I do not use lightly) applies also to the broader conception of the entire city center. And thus I now end this chapter by fleshing out that interpretive proposal somewhat more fully.

B. Contentious Academic Theories but Complementary Historical Phenomena: Meaning-Making Juxtapositions of Alternate Divinity Conceptions

I contend, then, that there is an important, albeit imperfect, analogy between the symbolic conception of the individual pyramid-based temples at Monte Albán and that of the entire mountain-based city at large. Irrespective of obvious disparities in scale, both individual temples and the whole city are configured in ways that can be interpreted in relation to the twofold pattern characteristic of all meaningful and productive experiences of sacred architecture. And though the substantive content and meanings transmitted in Monte Albán ritual-architectural events concern a range of matters from divinity (priority II-A), to sacred history (priority II-B), to politics (priority II-C) and the commemoration of the dead (priority II-D), I have been concerned in this chapter only with the first of those. But keep in mind that all of this talk about gods is just one slice of "religion."

Having stressed the sense in which Zapotec temples, like Classical Greek temples, have a unified conception, I ground this qualified temple-city analogy, on the one hand, in the exceptional, oft-observed unity of conception—in which no single feature overwhelms all the rest—that characterizes the entire Main Plaza portion of the city. Recall, among countless roughly parallel assessments, Alfonso Caso's contention that Monte Albán was unified "by a plan that was perfectly worked out and executed." [886] In Jorge Hardoy's phrase, the ceremonial precinct displays "a framework in which each new building sacrificed its individuality for the

[886] Caso, *Culturas mixteca y zapoteca*, *Obras* reprint 608; my translation.

unity of the whole."[887] And in Aldous Huxley's more impressionistic commendation, at Monte Albán, there is "no slummy confusion of little shrines and temples; but one huge architectural complex informed from end to end by a single artistic idea and overwhelmingly impressive, as only a unified work of art can be."[888] Unlike urban capitals constructed on flatter terrain where a growing city center could meld into its periphery, Monte Albán's hilltop siting mandated "a 'unity in diversity' so evident that," according to Doris Heyden and Paul Gendrop's equally affirming evaluation, "at first glance, from any angle of the plaza, it is precisely the whole that impresses us."[889]

But, on the other hand, besides accentuating the sense on which the whole of Monte Albán's ceremonial complex was, like the Classical Greek temple conception, "one thing," I qualified that analogy by stressing as well the Zapotec capital did *not* present a single hegemonic or exclusionary conception of divinity. As a regional capital, with an unprecedentedly wide reach and influence, the designers had to make their city relevant and compelling to not just one, but many audiences. In that sense, it is crucial to appreciate the embracive capital also as a socially complex, multicultural and thus multi-religious, urban space—indeed, a contender for Mesoamerica's very first city—that, instead of demanding just one universally shared sensibility about supernaturals, tolerated and even encouraged "multiple experiences of the sacred." The full panorama of Monte Albán, nowadays best appreciated by areal photos, has the quality of "an integrated whole" or "a single sculptural unit,"[890] an enormous built theological statement—but one that is, religious speaking, encompassing rather than totalitarian. Unlike individual temples that tend to advance a prestige of a single god or deified royal ancestor, the full ceremonial precinct presents, I contend, a pluralistic theological posture that reaffirms a shared "hard

[887] Hardoy, *Pre-Columbian Cities*, 109.

[888] Aldous Huxley, *Beyond the Mexique Bay* (New York and London: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1934), 262.

[889] Heyden and Gendrop, *Pre-Columbian Architecture of Mesoamerica*, 60.

[890] Scully, *The Earth, the Temple, and the Gods*, 64.

nucleus" of all Oaxacans, while accommodating a very wide range of very different conceptions of divinity.[891]

With respect to this arc in my discussion, which stresses the diversity of religious views that Monte Albán accommodated, it is, ironically, the narrative (re)construction of Monte Albán's emergence and history that affords religion the smallest role—namely, that of Richard Blanton—that actually provides the most support for the present interpretive conclusion.[892] An elaborate hypothesis originally set forth in his *Monte Albán: Settlement Patterns at the Ancient Zapotec Capital* (1978), Blanton argues that Monte Albán, positioned on a centrally located mountain otherwise poorly suited for a large settlement, was expressly founded, and then sustained, as the shared administrative capital of a "regional military alliance," which was devoted to forestalling "external threats" to which any of the individual partners in that coalition would have been highly vulnerable.[893] Irrespective of—or actually because of—its lack of appeal in practical ecological respects, the previously uninhabited site was the ideal location for what Blanton terms a "disembedded capital," that is, a deliberately disengaged or "neutral" urban space, which arose in response to, and then declined in the absence of, the threat of invaders from outside the central Oaxaca Valley.[894] According to this hypothetical scenario, unlike more numerous and normal "primate centers," Monte Albán was a "special function community" whose sole and unwavering raison d'être was to coordinate and administer the affairs of this

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[891] I am arguing, in other words, that the Zapotec capital at large exemplifies, at a much large scale than individual temples, the fourth variation on the commemoration of divinity (priority II-A), i.e., the whole city is a built expression of the attributes not of one god, but of an indigenous theology that encompasses numerous more specific conceptions of divinity.

[892] For a critical summary of Blanton's historical (re)construction, see Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, chap. 4, "Richard Blanton on Monte Albán as a 'Disembedded Capital': A Story of Militarism, Regional Cooperation and Religious Neutrality."

[893] Blanton, *Monte Albán*, 37-39.

[894] Blanton's earliest expositions of the notion of a "disembedded capital" come in Richard E. Blanton, "The Origins of Monte Albán," in *Cultural Change and Continuity*, ed. Charles Cleland (New York: Academic Press, 1976); and Richard E. Blanton, "Anthropological Studies of Cities," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 5 (1976), 255-58. But by far the most famous treatment appears in Blanton, *Monte Albán* (1978), chap. 2.

"panregional polity," which in return supplied the city's practical requirements.[895] And, pursuant of that calculated military-political initiative, rather than impose on all of the regional partners one dominant religious perspective—or one conception of divinity—which would have engendered resentment, Monte Albán, as a matter of political expediency, adopted a policy of "religious neutrality." Aside from this strategic abstinence, religion is a non-factor in Blanton's original historical (re)construction; and he is, in fact, explicit in noting that "there was no state church or single deity associated with the [Monte Albán-based] military confederation."[896]

In later revisions of Blanton's disembedded capital version of events, religion plays a larger role, which accounts for the unique abundance of objects and imagery associated with the cult of Cocijo, "the Zapotec representation of lighting-clouds-rain," whose symbols were prominently displayed both in the ceramic and public art of Monte Albán.[897] Though still affording religion only a peripheral part in largely politically motivated decision-making, revisions co-authored by Blanton go so far as to propose that, "The increasing frequency [beginning during Period Late I] of vessels that may have been used for ritual feasting reflects the rise of a new religious and ritual system…"[898] By contrast to earlier assertions about disciplined neutrality in religious matters, a 1999 rendition of Blanton's basic hypothesis argues

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[895] Blanton, *Monte Albán*, 37. As described in Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, chap. 4, in Blanton's well-formed story of Monte Albán, the capital's function as a "special function community" accounts for both its rise and decline. Because Monte Albán existed solely to forestall external threats, of which Teotihuacan eventually constituted the foremost, in Blanton's account, once the Central Mexican capital falls, Monte Albán loses its raison d'être and also collapses.

[896] Blanton, *Monte Albán*, 81.

[897] Richard E. Blanton, Gary M. Feinman, Stephen A. Kowalewski, and Linda M. Nicholas, *Ancient Oaxaca: The Monte Albán State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 105. For a summary of Blanton and co-authors' later revisions of his 1978 interpretation, in which religion plays a larger but still very modest role, see Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, chap. 3, the sub-section entitled, "Later Revisions to the Saga of Disembeddedness: From Regional to Interregional Perspectives."

[898] Blanton et al, *Ancient Oaxaca*, 105. Regarding their (tellingly) interchangeable use of the terms "religion" and "ideology," note that what is described on ibid, 105, as "a new religious and ritual system" is termed on ibid., 128, "the new ideological system."

that, for the entire history of the capital, and indeed throughout the entire geographical reach of the capital's influence, the Monte Albán elite were vigorous in their promulgation of a particular, albeit generic, religious position:

> "With the growth of the Valley of Oaxaca state of Period I, Cocijo imagery was promoted at all levels of society, from the households in smaller communities to the most important rituals carried out in their temples and in the houses of the powerful families at the most important centers, including Monte Albán."[899]

In Blanton's later view, then, devotion of Cocijo was evident among all social classes and apparent in all parts of the city, from the publically shared Main Plaza to the private residences of both elites and non-elites.

Though this at first seems a radical shift in perspectives, the revised hypothesis, actually, is largely consistent with Blanton's original, if somewhat overstated, position concerning the capital's astute commitment to religious neutrality. While he and his collaborators, at points, refer to the cult of the Cocijo as a "new ideological system,"[900] they are considerably more persuasive in depicting the all-pervasive embrace of Cocijo as the astute appeal to a kind of already-widely-shared religious common denominator, as it were, than as the promotion of any distinctive partisan position. By their assessment, which I share,

> "The Cocijo cult was a universalizing ideology that was not particular to a single place, dynasty, or segment of society. The cult was based on older, widely shared beliefs, but in Period I Cocijo was magnified into the most important supernatural force. His cult subsumed the earlier symbolism of fire-serpent and earthquake under a unifying concept of fertility and renewal."[901]

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[899] Blanton et al, *Ancient Oaxaca*, 107. Also see ibid., 128, where they elaborate on their contention that, "We think that the promulgation of the Cocijo cult helped to legitimate the new authority at Monte Albán…"

[900] Blanton et al, *Ancient Oaxaca*, 128.

[901] Blanton et al, *Ancient Oaxaca*, 105-7. On the one hand, the description of the Cocijo cult as "a universalizing ideology," which therefore presumably unified the various populations within the influence sphere of Monte Albán, affords to Cocijo a role something like the unifying role that has been attributed to Quetzalcoatl, who is depicted with such prominence at sites like Xochicalco, Tula and Chichén Itzá. On the use of devotion to Quetzalcoatl as a means of integrating otherwise disparate Mesoamerican groups, see, for instance, Alfredo López Austin and Leonardo López Luján, "The Myth and Reality of Zuyuá: The Feathered Serpent and

In other words, to use my rubric, rather than a "back-half" component of substantive content and challenging new information, so-termed the cult of Cociyo is, in actual fact, a component of allurement insofar as it, like the symbolism of *altépetl* water-mountains, was something with which all peoples of the Oaxaca region were already eminently familiar and comfortable. To associate the new capital with the old symbolism of Cociyo, rather than requiring anything remotely like a "conversion experience," reassured all affiliates of the regional alliance that the capital was grounded on beliefs long held in all of their individual communities. Devotion to Cociyo, like the *altépetl* imagery to which it is linked, is general not specific, conventional not innovative, familiar not strange, and thus alluring not challenging.

One need not, then, embrace all of the particulars of either Blanton's original or revised hypotheses in order to find in them support for the notion that Monte Albán was, in Heyden and Gendrop's phrase, an expression of "unity in diversity,"[902] which again can be illuminated with reference to the twofold pattern characteristic of all meaning-making circumstances, ritual-architectural events included. Perfunctory rituals, of which Monte Albán surely hosted a thousands, deserve that pejorative designation because they present nothing new, and thus they change people and opinions in no important way; such fully foreseeable ceremonial occasions are, as countless theorists maintain, "neutral with respect to meaning."[903] By contrast,

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Mesoamerican Transformations from the Classic to 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. On the other hand, as is persuasively argued in Davíd Carrasco, *Quetzalcoatl and the Irony of Empire: Myths and Prophecies in the Aztec Tradition*, revised edition (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2000), chap. 2, Quetzalcoatl seems to have been a distinctively *urban* symbol, while the discussion of Cocijo in Blanton et al, *Ancient Oaxaca*, 105-7, implies that the Zapotec god was equally relevant to urban and non-urban contexts.

[902] Heyden and Gendrop, *Pre-Columbian Architecture of Mesoamerica*, 60.

[903] I borrow the phrase "neutral with respect to meaning" from music theorist Leonard B. Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning in Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956); and Leonard B. Meyer, "Meaning in Music and Information Theory," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 15 (June 1957): 412-21. But in Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, vol. I, chap. 4, "Order and Variation: The Twofold Pattern of Ritual-Architectural Events," I assemble theorists

meaningful and "productive" rituals, in the Gadamerian sense, are those in which something conventional and familiar (like the symbolism of *altépetl* mountains and Cociyo) is juxtaposed with something challenging, controversial and less-than-immediately evident (like the sectarian pantheon gods of the state religion or the deified ancestors of elite families).[904] Both components—and, in this case, both very different sorts of divinity conceptions—in a sense, need one another.

That is to say, ritual-architectural events that present either fully familiar or fully unfamiliar conceptions of divinity are certain to be, with respect to meaning-making, failures. Regarding the former, Monte Albán rituals confined to veneration of water-mountains and Cociyo lack what Adrian Stokes terms "the bite" that is required to make art works and performances meaningful and productive.[905] No ancient Oaxacan needs to be persuaded of the "truth" and potency of animated mountains or of Cociyo. The simple reiteration of already-affirmed insights, like Leonard B. Meyer's comments on the banality of perfectly predictable music, neither interests nor impresses anyone.[906] That sort of meaningless ritual (which is very common) "evokes no sentiments;"[907] nothing new is learned; no challenge is issued. Rituals that simply reinforce what people already take for granted are as underwhelming as jokes without a punch line. But, on the other hand, rituals that exclusively feature unfamiliar state gods and other peoples' royal ancestors, if simply foisted and forced on a populace, are much more likely

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from numerous disciplines who support this basic notion that "meaning-making" depends upon the juxtaposition of the conventional and innovative, familiar and unfamiliar, or old and new.

[904] On Gadamer's notion of the "productivity" of hermeneutical experience and understanding, see Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. W. Glen-Doepel (London: Sheed and Ward, 1975), 100ff.; or Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, chap. 6, "Transformation and Productivity: The 'Back-half' of the Ritual-Architectural Situation."

[905] Adrian Stokes, *Smooth and Rough* (London: Faber & Faber, 1951), 59.

[906] Meyer, "Meaning in Music and Information Theory," 412-21.

[907] I borrow the phrase, "to evoke sentiments," which will play a more prominent role next chapter relative to the ritual-architectural commemoration of sacred history (priority II-B), from Bruce Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society: Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual, and Classification* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), chap. 1, "Myth, Sentiment, and the Construction of Social Forms."

to be rejected than accepted. Entirely new divinities without adequate cultural mooring are certain to be perceived variously as baffling, irrelevant or illegitimate. In those cases too, no meaning is transacted; "nothing takes." In brief, in order to successfully "make meaning" via ritual-architectural events, the new needs to be embedded in the old.

Accordingly, with the twofold process of meaning-making in mind, we can accept Blanton's scenario to the extent that it persuades us both of the heterogeneity of peoples and religious perspectives that Monte Albán brought together and of the unique prominence of Cociyo across all periods and social constituencies; but we can also put a finer point on the sort of religious pluralism that sustained the Zapotec capital. From that frame, to argue, as the debate between Oaxacanists in the antagonistic camps of Joyce Marcus and Michael Lind suggests, that there is an irreconcilable choice between animatism or polytheism—or, more specifically, to maintain that ancient Zapotecs were animatists *not* polytheists—is yet another instance of misrecognizing elements that actually belong to the "front-half" of the ritual-architectural program for those that belong to the "back-half." And likewise, the frequent assertion that Monte Albán had two religions—a "state religion" in which belief in personal gods prevailed and a "domestic religion" in which more animatistic tendencies retained sway—is another version of the same error.

Returning to the analogy between individual temples and the city's wider ritual-architectural program, I contend that, at both scales, impersonal and personal divinity conceptions were not just coexistent, but also complementary, mutually supportive and even vitally interdependent. As predicted, built expressions of the monotheistic conception of divinity, to which we suspect at least some small segement of the population subscribed, are difficult to ascertain. The broadly animatistic and polytheistic perspectives, however, though occupying fundamentally different roles in the ritual choreography of the religio-political capital, were crucial factors in the design of the main ceremonial precinct. Where Bartolomé leads us to believe that accumulation of multiple conceptions of divinity is simply the characteristic indigenous Oaxacan way, Blanton presents the capital's policy of religion tolerance as a matter of political expediency. But, either way, as befits the twfold pattern of successful meaning-making, in order for the elites of Monte Albán to make persuasive both their radically new urban

social configuration, and the new gods that supported it, that sweeping innovation had to be grounded in timeworn and trusted conventions, including timeworn conceptions of divinity.

In final sum, therefore, contentious academic theories about ancient Zapotec conceptions of divinty can mislead as well as inform us. As the long and ongoing history of ideas about Zapotecs' diversified investments in supernaturals that preceded this discussion of variations on the ritual-architectural commemoration of divinity (priority II-A) showed, scholars, still displaying the essentializing inclinations of James Walker, have an inclination to hypothesize dominant, largely consistent and thus incomensurate theological conceptions that, it seems, are much less important to indigenous Oaxacans. The fallacies of purity and typicality persist. But as the rulers and designers of Monte Albán apparently knew full well, if their pantheon of personal deities and their special interests in apotheosized ancestors were to enjoy prestige and authority, those new gods had to join rather than replace the deeply held animatistic beliefs and presuppositions of their constituents. In brief, at Monte Albán, the imposition of one autocratic and exclusive conception of divinity was neither an aspiration nor an accomplished outcome.