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UNFINISHED

CHAPTER FIVE

The Ritual-Architectural Commemoration of Sacred History: The Memorialization of Mythico-Historical Episodes, Individuals and Places (*Priority II-B*)

> "It is the exceptional value that is conferred upon the "sacred history," ground and model of all human history, that is significant... If we examine a mythology in its totality we learn the judgment of the particular people upon its own sacred history. Every mythology presents a successive and coherent series of primordial events, but different peoples judge these fabulous acts in different ways, underlining the importance of some of them, casting aside, or even completely neglecting, others."
>
> Mircea Eliade, 1969[1]

> "It is the feeling of being embedded in great processes that began long before one's personal existence that leads people to express respect for the superhuman forces that created and maintain humanity, and to reflect commemoratively on events—real or imaginary—that gave rise to the social and political conditions of the present. In this way, they can establish shrines and monuments that express and anchor what Paul Ricoeur calls the "narrative identity" of a people or socio-political community."
>
> Maarten E.R.G.N. Jansen, 2009[2]

> "The participants in most, if not all, of these scribal traditions [of southwestern Mesoamerica] wrote on monumental architecture, either on single or multiple surfaces. Façades covered with inscribed orthostats; enclosures embellished with carved jambs, lintels, columns, or friezes; and open spaces punctuated by stelae formed the ensembles

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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] Mircea Eliade, "Cosmogonic Myth and 'Sacred History,'" *Religious Studies*, vol. 2, no. 2 (April 1967): 171-183; reprinted as chapter 5 in Mircea Eliade, *The Quest: History and Meaning in Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 72-87. This quote comes from page 81 of the reprinted version; all subsequent references to this work allude also to the reprinted version.

[2] Maarten E.R.G.N. Jansen, "Inauguración de templos y dinastías: La piedra grabada de Nuu Yuchi," en *Bases de la complejidad social en Oaxaca: Memoria de la Cuarta Mesa Redonda de Monte Albán*, ed. Nelly M. Robles García (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2009), 584; my translation.

> that integrated a host of practices. Apprehending the messages in such contexts required movement; the us the inscriptions symbolically reiterated past performances while at the same time served as a "script" for subsequent reenactments."
>
> Javier Urcid, 2011[3]

This chapter, the second of four on the substantive content of Monte Albán's ritual-architectural program, is devoted to asking and working to answer the question: *How and to what extent is the commemoration of sacred history (priority II-B) relevant to the design conception and subsequent experience of Monte Albán?* Opening the door to reflections on the role of both mythology and history in the design of the built environment, the chapter searches after the mythico-historical narratives that sustained the great Zapotec capital, especially those stories that informed the famed Danzante Wall and other public iconographic displays in the heart of the ancient city. More specifically, the encompassing term "sacred history" acknowledges that, in Mesoamerica, not unlike most traditional contexts, strictly mythical stories about the original creation of the world and the First People are melded with quasi-historical accounts of group migrations and village foundings, and then fused as well with unassailably historical records of the worldly exploits of armies and rulers.[4] The intermixing of myth and history, not only but especially in pre-modern contexts, is copious and strategic as both are fashioned into a single, unbroken narrative stream, a shared story that supports a community's collective memory of things that may or may not have actually happened. "Sacred history" is much more than an enumeration of the strictly historical.

That inevitable combining of what seems at first the fictive and the factual, which will be unmistakably apparent in the public monuments and iconography displays of Monte Albán,

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[3] Javier Urcid, "The Written Surface as a Cultural Code: A Comparative Perspective of Scribal Traditions from Southwestern Mesoamerica," in *Their Way of Writing: Scripts, Signs, and Pictographies in Pre-Columbian Mesoamerica*, eds. Elizabeth Hill Boone and Gary Urton (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 2011), 114.

[4] Eliade, "Cosmogonic Myth and 'Sacred History,'" 85, defines "sacred history" as "the fabulous epoch [between the creation of the world and historical time] when the ancestors were roaming about the land." In my use, the term is expanded in both directions to include the cosmogony proper and the mythico-historical events of the post-primordial era.

thereby raises a whole constellation of large and formidable questions: How do we understand the purported "trueness of myth"? And how does one navigate the endlessly debated relationship between myth and history? Where do widely affirmed assertions that all historical accounts, especially the sorts of state-sponsored ones that we encounter in the archaeological record, entail "a strategic tinkering with the past," leave us?[5] Why and how are claims to political privilege made more (or less) persuasive by embedding them in storiological narratives? What do Zapotec elites hope to accomplish by iconographic displays that mix precise historical dates and names with references to deities and otherworldly realms? Or are pre-Columbian Oaxacans completely oblivious to the differentiations between "historical fact" and "mythical fiction" that are so important to moderns?

Additionally, this line of questioning prompts us to explore in a decidedly skeptical fashion the complex relation between the preservation of "sacred history," which is invariably regarded as among the foremost of social and even spiritual responsibilities, and monumental architecture? Does moralizing British critic John Ruskin's mid-nineteenth-century declaration that "there are but two strong conquerors of the forgetfulness of men—poetry and architecture"[6] pertain in a context like Monte Albán? Do public buildings, statuary and iconographic displays have a special dexterity in fulfilling that mnemonic charge for an accurate recollection of the past? Or are those forms implicated in just the opposite insofar as large-scaled civic architecture and monuments are invariably shaped, twisted and distorted in ways that serve to canonize the elites' warped sense of their own accomplishments and legitimate right to rule? And do such deliberately manipulative ritual-architectural endeavors more often accomplish their political

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[5] I borrow the apt phrase "strategic tinkering with the past," to which I will return, from Bruce Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society: Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual, and Classification* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 21.

[6] John Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (New York: Noonday Press, 1971 [originally 1849]), 69-70. It is interesting to contrast Ruskin's attitude about the commemorative potential of architecture with the almost antithetical position of Russell Sturgis, "Address" in *American Architect and Building News*, 1890: "Architecture as a fine art has nothing to do with the arts of expression. . . the business of buildings is not to tell tales about the world… or of humanity, or of theology;" quoted by Stanley Abercrombie, *Architecture as Art* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1984), 125.

purposes? Or does that sort of messaging via public monuments simply engender resentment among audiences too savvy and themselves suspicious to accept those mythico-historical machinations?

Indeed, if an empirically accurate understanding of the ancient city is our goal, then we must come to terms with the startling, but too-little-discussed, realization that the largest share of Monte Albán's most elaborate public displays—most notably, but not only, the great Danzante Wall—were eventually ripped down, dismantled or covered over. Very often, it seems, "pictorial narratives" designed to induce respect and legitimacy, over time, engendered only disdain, resentment or indifference;[7] and thus understanding the incentives for smashing and erasing a public narrative is not less consequential than appreciating the motives that originally worked to disseminate that mythicized version of events. To be sure, the "sacred history" that sustained Monte Albán, and that was expressed in its public works of art and architecture, was subject to ongoing contestation and revision.

The Layout and Organization of the Chapter: From General Background, to Specific Background, to Hermeneutical Interpretations of Sacred History at Monte Albán

Regarding the logic and organization of the chapter, once again I position the properly hermeneutical pattern of questioning with respect to the commemoration of sacred history (priority II-B) at Monte Albán in the latter portion of the discussion, preceded by more broadly framed reflections on the topic. In preparation for the explicit discussion of several variations on the sacred history priority, I open with some very preliminary comments about the earliest

[7] As we will see, Javier Urcid frequently uses the term "pictorial narrative," along "composite narrative" and "narrative composition" to refer to the major public visual displays of Monte Albán, including the infamous Danzante Wall. The extent to which those public displays qualify as "narratives" is a topic to which I will return. Also, it is Urcid's work that brings to attention the extent to which nearly all of Monte Albán's grandest public displays were eventually ripped down, dismantled or covered over.

students of Zapotec writing, who imagined, rather differently than their Mayanist counterparts, that the content of ancient Oaxacan epigraphy was primarily historical rather than "religious." Then I undertake two complementary background blocks, which are aimed respectively at the two very different sorts of audiences I imagine for this project. The first set of sub-sections—"General Theoretical Background"—engages the work of five very different but broad-thinking scholars, only two with special interests in Mesoamerica, in order to put in place some touchstones with respect to largely and unwieldy topics like myth, history, narrative and social memory. These five theorists will also provide means of appreciating the inevitable disparities between the intended meanings of the public visual displays with which this chapter is concerned and the ways in which audiences actually understand and respond to such ostensibly narrative works of art. This general theoretical background thereby brings to the table elemental concerns about the processes and problematics of myth, history and storytelling that are positively pertinent to the study of ancient Monte Albán, but seldom broached in the standard academic literature on the site.

The second and much longer opening set of sub-sections—"Specific Oaxacan Background"—which is probably most useful for religionists not familiar with Monte Albán, provides a basic introduction to the three most conspicuous and heavily contested visual displays at Monte Albán: (1) the so-termed Danzante Wall, (2) the also dubiously-labeled "conquest slabs" on Building J, and (3) the inscribed monoliths that eventually serve as cornerstones on the South Platform. While there are countless avenues through which one might approach these questions about "sacred history" at the great capital, I take this theme as an occasion to explore more fully a major body of evidence that I have thus far barely engaged—namely, Zapotec writing and iconography. While, as noted last chapter, none of the pre-Columbian codices containing Zapotec writing has survived, there are, as we'll learn in this chapter, hundreds of extant inscribed stones within the Monte Albán archaeological record. This is a rich, if recondite, trove of information about the dynamics, history and, yes, religion (or cosmovision) of the ancient city; and as I turn attention to those hieroglyphic and iconographic materials, the ongoing contribution of epigrapher Javier Urcid assumes a leading position.

Urcid's intensive work on these topics—which frequently builds on the pioneering efforts of Alfonso Caso and is frequently at odds with the interpretations of Joyce Marcus, who has also devoted much attention to these epigraphic matters—presents daringly novel, albeit contestable, reinterpretations of all three of the high-profile cases. To be sure, Urcid's research is of singular importance in working through these issues. Nonetheless, rather than declare my allegiance to any particular perspective on these highly controversial questions, I will be more interested in considering the respective Monte Albán public narrative displays in relation to the broadly theoretical touchstones established in the previous set of sub-sections. This crosschecking of very general ideas and formulations with the highly specific Monte Albán materials will eventuate in a host of provocative suggestions and possibilities—but very little in the way of firm conclusions or hypotheses. That is to say, these two opening blocks—respectively on (a) the general theoretical and (b) the specific Oaxacan background—are a kind of preparation for the latter, more opinionated and strictly hermeneutical portion of the chapter. Again, then, some readers, especially Oaxacanist specialists already well versed in these controversies, may be inclined to skip over these blocks entirely.

In any case, following these broadly framed remarks, I turn again to *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture* for a pattern of questioning concerning four main variations on the ritual-architectural commemoration of sacred history, priority II-B: (1) ritual-architectural commemorations of cosmogony, or built embodiments of creation stories, which deserves a special category because it is so richly exemplified in Mesoamerica and Oaxaca; (2) ritual-architectural commemorations of mythical, mythico-historical or miraculous episodes; (3) ritual-architectural commemorations of mythical or mythico-historical individuals, deified ancestors among them; and finally (4) ritual-architectural commemorations of mythical places, sites or locations.[8] As in previous chapters, for each of those four variations on the theme I will proceed in the customary three steps by first providing brief cross-cultural exemplifications of the topic, then remarks on the topic's applicability to Mesoamerica at large, and then, thirdly and most

[8] Note that in this four-part pattern of questioning conforms precisely to the four sets of questions about the sacred history priority (II-B) that are laid out in "Appendix B: An Expanded Heuristic Framework of Ritual-Architectural Priorities."

fully, observations about the topic's more specific relevance to Oaxaca and Monte Albán. In this case, none of the four options is notable by its non-applicability to the ancient Zapotec capital. To the contrary, all four, I hope to demonstrate, direct attention to portentous aspects of the design and subsequent experience of the mountain city.

Again, the detailed Table of Contents provides a map as to the logic of the multiplex array of sections and sub-sections. And, as always, the chapter ends with Closing Thoughts that underscore important themes and locate them within the larger argument of this project.

A Preliminary History of Ideas about Zapotec Writing: From the Outset, Prevailing Assumptions of Historical rather than Mythological (or "Religious") Content

Enroute to my much more specific discussions of the public iconographic displays in the central portion of Monte Albán, I begin with some very preliminary comments on the earliest investigators and ideas concerning pre-Columbian, and especially Zapotec, writing and iconography. Writing—(in)famously included by V. Gordon Childe among his ten criteria for urban civilization in all contexts[9]—is, as we'll see shortly, assessed by some Mesoamericanists almost exclusively as "a propaganda tool of the state."[10] Others, however, with whom I will be much more inclined to agree, assert that, in ancient Mesoamerica, writing has wide range of different uses, but that, "Ultimately... the general function of writing was to create and perpetuate social memories, with many examples of inscribed material culture used to promote, integrate,

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[9] See, for example, V. Gordon Childe, *What Happened in History* (New York: Penguin Books, 1946); V. Gordon Childe, "The Urban Revolution," *Town Planning Review* 21 (1950): 3-17. Joyce Marcus, *Mesoamerican Writing Systems: Propaganda, Myth, and History in Four Ancient Civilizations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), xvii, 3, cites and refutes Childe's assertion with respect to writing by noting that not all early states (e.g., the Moche, Chimu and Inca of Peru) had writing. With respect to the qualified applicability of Childe's ideas to Mesoamerica and Oaxaca, see Kent V. Flannery, "Childe the Evolutionist: A Perspective from Nuclear America," in *The Archaeology of V. Gordon Childe*, edited by David R. Harris (London: University College Press, 1994), 101–19.

[10] Marcus, *Mesoamerican Writing Systems*, 7.

and guide a variety of ritual performances."[11] In that respect, the profuse polemics surrounding ancient Oaxacan writing and iconography, fascinating in themselves, will guide us to important insights about of the role of sacred history, mythology and narrative in the capital city.

The history of the study of Mesoamerican writing, a specialization limited until the 1970s to a few great pioneers, Alfonso Caso premier among them, passes through several stages; and once again developments in Oaxaca Studies stand somewhat at odds with more high-profile assessments of writing in the Maya zone. In Maya contexts, as the oft-rehearsed sequence of opinions goes, archaeologist-epigraphers Sylvanus Morley and J. Eric S. Thompson were the highly influential—but misguided—advocates for the view that Maya hieroglyphic writing, whether in codices or on stone monuments, was composed largely of the non-historical, cosmological and calendrical observations of fully peaceable and apolitical Maya astronomer-priests.[12] Instead of linking writing to the hierarchy-based politics of urbanism and competition between warring city-states, Morley and Thompson imagined a glyphic system that was consistent with their also ill-advised view that Mayas lived in "theocratic ceremonial centers" that were dedicated to benign worship of great cycles of time and celestial bodies.[13] Only in 1960, and against much resistance, did Russian-American Mayanist Tatiana Proskouriakoff initiate what would become the mainstream view by demonstrating that Maya inscriptions are largely historical and filled with references to actual conflicts, events and transitions of authority.[14] Since then, the overwhelming consensus has been that "most of the [Maya]

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[11] Urcid, "The Written Surface as a Cultural Code," 143.

[12] See, for instance, Michael D. Coe, *Breaking the Maya Code*, 3rd ed. (London: Thames and Hudson, 2012), chap. 5, "The Age of Thompson;" or Linda Schele and Mary Ellen Miller, *The Blood of Kings: Dynasty and Ritual in Maya Art* (Fort Worth: Kimbell Art Museum, 1986), 18-25.

[13] Coe, *Breaking the Maya Code*, 123-44.

[14] See, for instance, David Stuart and Stephen D. Houston, "Maya Writing," *Scientific American*, vol. 261, no. 2 (August 1989), 86, who attribute the "revolution" in the interpretation of Maya glyphs especially to the work of Yuri Knorozov, Heinrich Berlin and Tatiana Prosokoriakoff. Also see, Coe, *Breaking the Maya Code*, chap. 7, "The Age of Proskouriakoff: The Maya Enter History."

inscriptions are, after all, chronicles of specific rulers, marking their births, ascensions, rituals, conquests and deaths."[15] In brief, the pendulum swings from assertions that the content of Maya writing was preponderantly cosmological, mythological or "religious" to the opposite extreme that assesses the Mayas as focused quite fully on recording historical and political matters.[16]

Alternatively, Javier Urcid's very thorough review of the roughly contemporaneous history of ideas about Zapotec hieroglyphic writing presents a quite different trajectory.[17] Irrespective of "a bewildering confusion in conceptual categories and the concomitant terminology," Urcid's detailed overview produces no commentator who assesses ancient Oaxacan writing in ways that closely parallel the eventually-overturned ideas of Morley and Thompson.[18] Veering closest in that direction, Leopoldo Batres, who, during his 1902 excavations of Monte Albán, located at least 46 carved stones (numerous of which he promptly shipped to the National Museum in Mexico City), opined that the inscriptions deal with "legends in historical passages" or "historically religious reliefs;"[19] and Eduard Seler, arguably the most inclined to mythological, and thus ostensibly "religious," interpretations of Oaxacan

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[15] Stuart and Houston, "Maya Writing," 82.

[16] Marcus, *Mesoamerican Writing Systems*, 6-7, uses this metaphor of a "pendulum swing" between extreme and very different assessments of Maya writing, and suggests that her work—which addresses Aztec, Mixtec, Zapotec and Maya writing systems—represents the pendulum "swinging back part way" insofar as she replaces intimations that ancient Mesoamericans were concerned to record either otherworldly cosmological concerns or strictly empirical history with the blunt assertion that the similarities among these four Mesoamerican systems "lie in that fact that for all these cultures, writing was a propaganda tool of the state."

[17] 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), chap. 2, "The Study of Zapotec Hieroglyphic Wring: A Historical and Critical Overview," provides the through and exceptionally well-informed history of ideas about Zapotec hieroglyphic writing.

[18] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 29ff.

[19] Leopoldo Batres, *Exploraciones de Monte Albán* (México: Casa Editorial Gante, 1902), 15; quoted by Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writin*g, 31. Batres's choice of terms suggests that he saw the inscriptions as both "religious" and "historical," but he does not develop that distinction in any detail.

iconography, drew analogies from the richer body of Nahua mythology and language on his way to postulates about the essential linkages between native writing and the Mesoamerican calendar, which he opined had its origin in the Zapotec region.[20] Oaxacan-born statesman and historian Manuel Martínez Gracida, also at the turn of the century, complied an unprecedentedly large (but unpublished) corpus of the region's inscriptions, which he considered dealt with religion and mythology, though he granted them a historical dimension as well;[21] and British consul, collector and "dilettante archaeologist" Constantine Rickards, who in the 1910s published the earliest photographs of the many Oaxacan inscriptions, though largely avoiding speculation on their meanings, did make reference to "calendrical dates," "astronomical hieroglyphs," "deities," "priests" and "temples,"[22] while also holding open the possibility that they dealt with the events of local history.[23] In sum, all of these early enthusiasts of Zapotec writing, like Morley and Thompson, recognized an essential connection between the inscriptions and calendrics; but none of them, except perhaps Seler, pressed hard for the predominantly ahistorical, otherworldly or "religious" content of the Oaxaca inscriptions.

Alfonso Caso, the unrivaled standout in Urcid's survey of early and mid- twentieth-century ideas about Oaxacan hieroglyphic writing, was likewise persuaded from the outset both of the largely historical content of the inscriptions, and thus of the near equation of epigraphic

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[20] Regarding Seler's influential views about Oaxaca writing, see Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 32-33. Regarding his opinion that the Mesoamerican calendar originated in the Zapotec region, see 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), 25, 55.

[21] See Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 33-35.

[22] Constantine George Rickards, "Aspectos generales sobre lapidas y petroglifos del estado de Oaxaca," *Boletín de la Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística*, quinta época, 8 (1918), 19; and Constantine George Rickards, "Ligero estudio sobre unos tubos de barro con jeroglíficos encontrados en el estado de Oaxaca," *Anales del Museo Nacional de México*, cuarta época, 1 (1922); both quoted by Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 35.

[23] Rickards, "Ligero estudio sobre unos tubos de barro con jeroglíficos encontrados en el estado de Oaxaca," 49; cited by Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 35.

and calendrical studies. With Caso, the still-prevailing view that Zapotec inscriptions are foremost an expression of "native time reckoning" was solidly in place.[24] In his pioneering 1928 study, based largely on a corpus of 42 carved stones that Batres had hauled from Monte Albán to the National Museum and a dozen ceramic objects with incised or molded glyphs,[25] Caso established a classification of two groups: Oaxaca glyphs accompanied by numerals, which were therefore seen as dealing with the computation of time, and those without numerals, which he proposed were either ideograms or phonograms; but these too could have chronological significance.[26] Surmising that elaborately dressed individuals in the iconography represented deities or their impersonators while those with simple garments were mortals, Caso concluded that, while some otherworldly figures were depicted, the content of the inscriptions was preeminently of a historical or, perhaps more accurately calendrical, character.[27] In Urcid's summary of Caso's view of the content of Oaxacan iconography, which acknowledges what I will momentarily term "the mythicization of history":

> "Specific events, in which deities or human were protagonists, were recorded within the general frame of the Mesoamerican calendar… In one sense, the content was earthly, narrating dates, lives of individuals, and places of conquests; in another it was mythological, describing supernaturals and the dates when rituals were performed."[28]

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[24] On the phrase "native time reckoning," to which I will return, see, for example, John E. Clark and Arlene Colman, "Time Reckoning and Memorials in Mesoamerica," *Cambridge Archaeological Journal*, vol. 18, issue 1 (Feb. 2008): 93-99.

[25] The first of his two major contributions on Zapotec writing is 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. On this classic work as a contribution to the study of Zapotec writing, see Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 35-43; on the work's broader role in the evolution of Caso's ideas about Monte Albán, see Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, chap. 1, the section entitled "Disentangling the Mixtecs and Zapotecs: Epigraphic Analysis as a Crucial First Step."

[26] On Caso's two-part classification of all Zapotec inscriptions known in the 1920s, see Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 35-42. A phonogram is a symbol that represents a vocal sound.

[27] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 42.

[28] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 42-43.

Caso's second major contribution to the study of Zapotec writing, in 1947, which devoted more attention to the famed "conquest slabs" on Building J (to which I will return), did not alter his views about the inscriptions' essentially historical-calendrical content.[29] Thus, while never reechoing Morley and Thompson's intimations about starry-eyed pre-Columbian time-worshippers, Caso's approach did accentuate rather diminish the realization that, had there ever been a doubt, the decipherment of Zapotec hieroglyphs is inexorably linked to calendrical studies and indigenous means of conceptualizing time.[30]

Caso's path-breaking work, however, instead of laying the foundation for a subsequent consensus about Zapotec writing, eventuates in what Urcid generously terms "an entangled picture,"[31] wherein virtually every ensuing epigraphic specialist seems to represent a different point of view.[32] In Urcid's words,

> "Despite important contributions by Caso between 1928 and 1965, several problems remain unsolved. Subsequent scholars who dealt with [Zapotec writing and] calendrics incorporated few if any of Caso's conclusions in their studies. In other words, they all start practically from scratch and they all disagree with each other."[33]

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[29] Alfonso Caso, "Calendario y escritura de las antiguas culturas de Monte Albán," en *Obras Completas de Miguel Othón de Mendizábal*, vol. 1 (México: Talleres de la Nación, 1947): 113-144. On this work as a contribution to the study of Zapotec writing, see Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 43-47.

[30] Regarding the absolute centrality of calendar studies in making sense of the inscriptions at the Zapotec capital, note that, before turning to the particulars of the carved inscriptions of Monte Albán, Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, devotes chapter 3 to "Problems in Reconstructing the Zapotec Calendar," and a 167-page chapter 4 to "Analysis of Calendrical Glyphs."

[31] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 68.

[32] For a detailed review of epigraphic studies subsequent to Caso's 1947 work (including additional work by Caso), see Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 47-78. In a telling summation, Urcid, ibid., 78, writes, "Subsequent scholars who dealt with the calendrics incorporated few if any of Caso's conclusions in their studies. In other words, they all start practically from scratch and they all disagree with each other."

[33] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 78.

Nonetheless, in the very broad strokes and for the purposes of this inquiry into sacred history, on the one hand, Urcid's intellectual history does show that even before Caso, and then after him, "the great majority of authors…concede that the general content of the inscriptions is primarily historical."[34] And because the inscriptions positively deal with actual events, people and places—and perhaps because Oaxacanists do not want to reiterate the idealizing excesses of early Mayanists—the overcorrective case is frequently made that Monte Albán's public displays of Zapotec writing and iconography are avowedly "political" and not all "religious."

On the other hand, there is, also before and after Caso, a general acknowledgement that the historicity of Zapotecs inscriptions does not preclude allusions to otherworldly realms and supernaturals; no one can deny some measure of myth-history mixing in the Oaxacan iconographic displays. Moreover, it is unmistakable that the preoccupations with exact calendar dates pertain not only to the precise dating of military conquests and the biographies of rulers, but also to the equally meticulous timing of rituals.[35] That the public visual displays of Monte Albán so often represent, not worldly activities, but commemorative ceremonials gives them what I will call a kind of "meta-commemorative" status; that is, frequently the displays commemorate rituals that commemorate historical events. And furthermore, it has been, from the earliest epigraphic studies, apparent to Mesoamericanists working in all areas that the indigenous incentive to record historical events in empirically accurate ways is always in serious competition with the sort of "strategic tinkering with the past" that enables adjustments and a "chronological coercion."[36] In short, to prefigure a theme on which Paul Ricoeur elaborates, the

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[34] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 73.

[35] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 42-43.

[36] The correction, adjustment and manipulation of the Maya calendar, for instance, have been discussed at great length. Alfred M. Tozzer, *Chichén Itzá and its Cenote of Sacrifice: A Comparative Study of Contemporaneous Maya and Toltec*, Memoirs of the Peabody Museum vols. 11-12 (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1957), 36, 256, discusses Sylvanus Morley's observations about the "chronological coercion" whereby the katun date of 8 Ahau in the Maya calendar is repeatedly the recorded date for important events in Yucatan history; and Tozzer himself (ibid.) contributes several more examples of Toltecs, Itzás and Aztecs engaging in similar sorts of willful distortion, which he goes so far as to label "a mass compulsion neurosis." For more reflections on willful manipulations of the Maya calendar, also see, for instance,

goal of Monte Albán's visual displays has less to do with providing *an accurate chronicle of past events* than with fostering *a meaningful orientation in time*—and to that extent, the so-termed "narrative compositions" on display in the Main Plaza, by the definitions of the present work, most definitely concern both "sacred history" and "religion."

I. General Theoretical Background—
Five Approaches to Monte Albán's Narrative Displays:
Zapotec Writing, Myth, History and "Strategic Tinkering with the Past"

Detailed debates among experts in Mesoamerican epigraphy and calendrics, a kind of hyper-specialization within the field, are frequently daunting and difficult for non-specialists (like myself) to understand and assess; and thus on lots of those matters I willingly abstain. But to an outsider working to make sense of those highly technical details, it also becomes apparent that there is lack of theorizing with respect to the more general issues concerning "native time reckoning" as well as the broad categories of myth, history, narrative, social memory, storytelling and story-listening, as it were, which are all topics that will take us toward an appreciation of the ritual-architectural commemoration of sacred history, priority II-D. Accordingly, as a means establishing some theoretical touchstones to which I can return throughout the chapter, I open with five short sub-sections that engage a somewhat curious, but nonetheless compatible, quintet composed of: (1) historian of religions Mircea Eliade, (2) Oaxacanist epigrapher Javier Urcid, (3) hermeneutical philosopher Paul Ricoeur, (4) Mexican historian Enrique Florescano and (5) social theorist Bruce Lincoln. Though none of these scholars describes himself as a "reception theorist," and only two have special interests in Mesoamerica, I will contend that all present broadly methodological insights that coincide with

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Herbert J. Spinden, *A Study of Maya Art: Its Subject Matter and Historical Development* (New York: Dover Publications, 1975 [originally 1913]), 111, 140, and 143; J. Eric S. Thompson, *The Rise and Fall of Maya Civilization* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press), 177-178; Michael D. Coe, *Maya*, 3rd ed. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1984), 158-59; and Anthony F. Aveni, *Skywatchers of Ancient Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980), 187, 190, among other places, has discussed the willful distortion of empirical astronomical data by the ancient Mesoamericans.

and support the basic notion of "ritual-architectural reception histories" on which this project is based. Consider each in turn.

A. Mircea Eliade on "Sacred History": The Priority of Myth and the Inevitable Mythicization of Earthly and Political History

Again I begin with brief comments on one of those elemental issues that is so well-worked in Religious Studies as to require little comment for that audience, but that intrudes in very unhelpful ways on the interpretation of Monte Albán—namely, "the age-old conundrum" or "antique hall of mirrors" of the relationship between myth and history.[37] Yet another area in which popular prejudices about Greek mythology show themselves,[38] colloquial language in which "myth" is labeled as falsehood or that which lacks a basis in fact—e.g., "merely a myth"—contributes to the presumption that myth and history are antitheses; and thus responsible journalists, citizens and parents, for instance, assume that providing a "real" and accurate history of past events requires cleansing it of the exaggerations and distortions that myth contributes. Many scholars, however, succumb to the same artless dismissal of myth. In fact, given the pervasiveness of the oversimple supposition that myth and history are antipodes—i.e., two nearly opposite sorts of "false stories" versus "true stories"—it is not surprising that one of the fault lines in the history of ideas about the iconographic visual displays at Monte Albán is debate as to whether their content deals primarily with the otherworldly and "unreal" circumstances of myth and religion versus the opinion that what is represented are "real" historical peoples and events, circumstances that indeed "actually happened." According to that prevalent but indelicate resolution of the problem, "myth" refers to untruths that are made-up or imagined, while "history" involves bona fide episodes that "actually happened."[39] And thus, from that pedestrian

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[37] I borrow this apt characterization of the relationship between myth and history as "an age-old conundrum" or "antique hall of mirrors" from Gary Urton, *The History of a Myth: Pacariqtambo and the Origin of the Inkas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), 5.

[38] Eliade, "Cosmogonic Myth and 'Sacred History,'" 171, makes this observation about the inordinate influence of Greek materials on the ways that people understand myth.

[39] Demonstrating the continued currency of this standard affirmation of "history" and degradation of "myth" in Oaxacan studies, Marcus Winter, "Social Memory and the Origins of

view, empirically minded scholars ought search out the (real) historical elements of the visual displays and isolate them from the (unreal) mythical elements.

That common usage notwithstanding, religionists, anthropologists and historians have all weighed in with vigorous views that, however one conceptualizes the relationship between myth and history, the two are by no means plain opposites.[40] Both are narratives and, though notably different sorts of stories, they share much in common. Shortly I will turn to the work Marxist religionist Bruce Lincoln for persuasive comments on how, unquestionably, it is mythical narratives rather than historical ones that are most influential in swaying public opinion, and thus guiding socio-political processes—a perhaps counterintuitive view that will provide us some clues as to what Zapotecs hoped to accomplish via public displays of select episodes of their sacred history. But here I appeal to the earlier phenomenological reflections of Mircea Eliade, on a topic about which he wrote maybe more than any other, to reiterate three widely acknowledged points about the relations between myth and history.[41] Though familar fare

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Monte Albán," *Ancient Mesoamerican*, vol. 22, no. 2 (September 2011), 408, writes with respect to the infamous Danzante figures (discussed at length later this chapter), "As in modern times, memories of specific [historical] events and individuals transmitted verbally or even materialized with statuary last no more than a few hundred years before becoming vague, mythologized, forgotten, or erased," it is apparent that he regards as history as "true" and myth as "false." Of course, Winter is certainly not alone in that familiar, but much-too-simple, resolution of the relationship between (true) historical narrative versus (false) mythical narrative, especially in a context like pre-Columbian Monte Albán.

[40] For example, William H. McNeill, "Mythistory, or Truth, Myth, History, and Historians," in William H. McNeill, *Mythistory and Other Essays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 3-22, makes the case to his colleagues that even professional historians inevitably are—and thus should embrace rather than eschew—their role as makers of myth (or "mythistory"). In his effort to convince his more positivistic counterparts to alter their mission of "sticking to the facts," McNeill uses such provocative phrases as "the elastic, inexact character of truth" (p. 7), "one person's truth is another's myth" (p. 13), "pattern recognition of the sort historians engage in is the *chef d'oeuvre* of human intelligence," (p. 5) and "an appropriately idealized version of the past."

[41] Recall that in chapter 1 relative to the homology priority (I-A), where I relied very heavily on Eliade's work, I enumerated (primarily in footnotes) numerous Oaxacanists who appeal to his work, though, perhaps surprisingly, infrequently with respect to myth. The most notable exception of which I am aware (by the Oaxacanist with whom I credited the most nuanced understanding of Eliade) is Miguel Alberto Bartolomé, "Un mensaje político de los mitos: La

among students of myth and Religious Studies, each nonetheless reverses a casual assumption that not infrequently remains operative in Oaxacan Studies.[42]

First, and perhaps most obviously discomfiting, is Eliade's recurrent claim that myths are true, indeed truer than history. That is to say, on the respective truth status of the two categories, explicitly countering commonplace dismissals of myth, Eliade contends in countless works that, from the perspective of those operating with an "archaic consciousness," and thus among pre-Columbian Mesoamericans, myth, rather than fanciful and untrue, refers to stories that are, in the most profound sense, "true, real and exemplary."[43] All three terms are consequential, and thus Eliade argues:

> "In short, our best chance of understanding the structure of mythical thought is to study cultures where myth is a 'living thing,' where it constitutes the very ground of the religious life; in other words, where myth, far from indicating a fiction, is considered to reveal the truth par excellence."[44]

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mitología de privación en Oaxaca, México y América Latina," en *Cosmovisión mesoamericana: Reflexiones, polémicas y etnografías*, Alejandra Gámez Espinosa and Alfredo López Austin, coords. (México: El Colegio de México, Fideicomiso Historia de las Américas, 2015), 217-18, 241, where Bartolomé applies Eliade's notions of myth as exemplary to contemporary indigenous Oaxacans.

[42] On myth and its relationship to history, again providing perhaps the most subtle reflections among Mesoamericanists, 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), 317, reflects on "one of the most difficult problems of Mesoamerican historiography: how to approach texts in which it is hard to distinguish history from historical myths… Many of us historians have dealt with the topic of the fusion of history and historical myth, sometimes in general works, sometimes in studying the history of characters with a complex nature, such as Quetzalcoatl, the priest of Tollan." Noting that "the transitions from history to myth and myth to history are varied." (ibid., 318), he explores the topic in extended and complicating ways (ibid., 318-325).

[43] Arguably, his definitive discussion of myth comes in Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return, or Cosmos and History*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954); but the same perspective is apparent in simpler works such as Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper & Row, 1963); and Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (San Diego: Harcourt, Inc., 1959).

[44] Eliade, "Cosmogonic Myth and 'Sacred History,'" 171.

In Eliade's view, historical narratives recount things that happened, and to that are extent, if accurate, are true and perhaps interesting. But myth, especially stories of origin, acts as a kind of a selective filter—and thus for scholars as a kind of diagnostic—that records and reveals that which people hold most dear and regard as most true. Concomitantly, for Eliade, the profound truths of myths are "exemplary" insofar as they provide the paradigmatic models for how one can live a meaningful and "real" life.[45] In short, mythical narratives, better than historical ones, reveal "that which matters most."[46]

Second, for Eliade, as true, real and exemplary narratives, myths serve an informing and enlivening purpose in human existence and social life that merely historical narratives cannot begin to match. Over and again, he explains, and then illustrates with far-spaced cross-cultural examples, how myths, which his work invariably privileges over rituals, provide the patterns and "archetypes" for a meaningful "sanctified life" and for the "access to the sacred" that the *homo religiosus* craves.[47] In his view, myth is less something in which people *believe* than in which they *participate*. Where factually informed accounts of the past are *remembered* or "*thought about*," myths present precedents that are "*reiterated*" or "*reactualized*," patterns in which people participate existentially rather than just intellectually.

In that sense, where the characters and circumstances presented in historical narratives are "inaccessible" insofar as they are depicted as one-time (or time-bound) phenomena that recede farther and farther into the past, the protagonists and paradigmatic examples of myth are ever-present, and thus constantly relevant resources for living. Myths thereby satisfy existential needs that history can not. In fact, though Eliade is not inclined to accentuate the less savory

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[45] See also López Austin, *The Myths of the Opossum*, chap. 23, "How it Turns Out that Myth is True."

[46] This is, of course, an allusion to the working definition of religion as "that which matters most" that I laid out in the Introduction.

[47] See, for instance, Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, chap.1, "The Structure of Myths;" or Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, chap. 4, "Human Existence and the Sanctified Life."

ways in which myths support socio-political hierarchies and manipulations—concerns that I will address both later in this chapter and more in the next on the commemoration of temporal authority (politics, priority II-C)—he presents a cross-culturally pertinent scenario in which the prospects for a meaningful and purposeful life are nil without the structural support that mythical narratives provide. He observes that all people, in all contexts, depend upon myths. And, for him, that absolutely crucial nexus between a meaningful orientation and myth explains all of the "camouflaged" ways that the archaic mythical consciousness reasserts itself in the ostensibly secularized modern world.[48] Regarding the inability of any group to ever "out-grow" myth, Eliade writes:

> "It seems unlikely that any society could completely dispense with myth, for, of what is essential in mythical behavior—the exemplary pattern, the repetition, the break from profane duration and integration into primordial time—the first two at least are consubstantial with every human condition."[49]

Strictly historical narratives, however accurate and respected, can provide none of these existential rewards.

Third, therefore, having made a case for the extreme superiority of myth over history as a resource both for individual existence and for social life, Eliade enables us to see that, to be of practical service, empirical accounts of the past—including, for instance, those that are recorded in Monte Albán's public displays of carved stones—must, of necessity, by "mythologized."[50] Where "plain history," as it were, forces an onerous awareness of the ceaseless unidirectional movement of time, and even the inevitability of death, participation in myth, which is timeless and ever-present, enables, in Eliade's poignant phrase, an escape from "the terror of history."[51]

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[48] See, for instance, Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, chap. 9, "Survivals and Camouflages of Myths."

[49] Mircea Eliade, "The Myths of the Modern World," in Mircea Eliade, *Myths Dreams and Mysteries: The Encounter Between Contemporary Faiths and Archaic Realities*, trans. Philip Mairet (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1960), 31-32.

[50] See, for instance, Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, chap. 6, "Myth, Ontology, and History."

[51] See Eliade, *Myth of the Eternal Return*, chap. 4, "The Terror of History."

History oppresses while myth liberates and refreshes. At that juncture of his analysis, the two *are* near opposites. And thus, if records and recollections of the past are to be rewarding and inspiring, the merely historical protagonists and events must be mythologized; erstwhile people must be transformed from mere features of the bygone past into ever-present paradigmatic models. Individual leaders and their particular accomplishments must by matched and linked to larger, more universalistic and paradigmatic patterns, which helps to explain, for instance, why, as we'll see, those Zapotec monuments that record the worldly victories and ascensions of Oaxacan rulers include also otherworldly deities and manipulations of dates and timing. From an Eliadean frame, such selectivity and enhancements, which are inevitable, are not diminishments or "corruptions," which scholars must filter through in order to know "what really happened;" and nor are those manipulations of history merely signs of political profiteering. Instead, the ubiquitary "mythicization of empirical history," which accentuates some aspects and suppresses others, provides scholars opportunities to observe where peoples' highest priorities and deepest sensibilities lie.

Though the point may already be obvious, the abundant debate about the historical and/or mythical status of the life of Jesus provides an expedient illustration of the way in which "mythicization" can enhance rather than diminish empirical history. Where, for many lay Christians, the very suggestion of "a mythical Jesus" is offensive, or perhaps preposterous, as early as D. F. Strauss's *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* (1835-36), academic Christians were appealing to the workings of myth as means of making sense of a Bible that was filled with angels, demons and miracles that they could no longer accept as historically true in a normal sense;[52] and, by the 1970s, Christian theologian Norman Perrin could write, "one of the most hotly debated questions in New Testament scholarship has been how far and in what ways myth

[52] Norman Perrin, *The New Testament, An Introduction: Proclamation and Parenesis, Myth and History* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974), 21-22, discusses D. F. Strauss's nineteenth-century appeal to the category of myth as a means of mediating between "supernaturalist Christians," who insisted on the historicity of even the miraculous dimensions of the Bible, and "rationalist Christians," who were committed to the truth of the Bible but could not accept the historicity of angels, demons, miracles, etc.

may be used in connection with the texts of the New Testament."[53] Among Perrin's extended reflections on the topic, which appeal directly to Eliade, particularly pertinent is his suggestion that the New Testament, which (not unlike the Monte Albán pictorial narratives) combines a historical core with events of much less certain historicity, functions as the informing pattern for the lives of Christians around the world, not despite—but precisely because—the life and death of Jesus have been "mythologized." In Perrin's not-radical formulations, "myth interprets history" or "the myth is a vividly pictorial way of interpreting the history"[54] and, in other respects, "history itself functions as myth."[55] Accordingly, rather than treat to New Testament as a kind of corrupted historical document from which one needs to brush away all the mythical accretions in order to find "the truth," he explains that,

> "the general study of the history of religions, including Christianity, has shown that there is no discernible correlation between the factual element of history and the functioning adequacy of a myth, and we have already acknowledged that this is the case for Christian myth. Christian myths, like all myths, function precisely because they are myth…"[56]

In other words, then, while distilling the verifiably historical components of Jesus's life is a worthy exercise, to which Perrin and others have devoted considerable energy, he, like Eliade, forewarns us that such historicizing efforts shed very little light on what Jesus means to the lives of committed Christians—that is, to believers who constantly maintain that Jesus is an ever-present reality (i.e., a mythical figure, distasteful as some may find that term) rather than simply a notable person from the past (i.e., a strictly historical figure).[57]

For Eliade, and also for Norman Perrin, then, it is only via that process of "mythicization" that inaccessible historical narratives are transformed into both accessible resources for living and, therefore, highly revealing resources for scholars. Objective accounts

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[53] Perrin, *The New Testament, An Introduction*, 21.

[54] Perrin, *The New Testament, An Introduction*, 31-32.

[55] Perrin, *The New Testament, An Introduction*, 33.

[56] Perrin, *The New Testament, An Introduction*, 29.

[57] Perrin, *The New Testament, An Introduction*, 26ff.

of the past, of which there are none, might fuel intellectual curiosity, but they are not reliable records of a people's heartfelt concerns. Most obviously in non-modern contexts, all historical narratives are mythologized.[58] Invariably, cosmogonic accounts, for instance, fuse primordial (fantastical rather than factual) origins of the landscape and the First People with more the documentably historical origins of specific communities and social institutions; as Eliade says—and as the Oaxacan *lienzos* that I discuss shortly will demonstrate perfectly—taken all together, the fully mythical and mythico-historical are combined in ways "constitute a fairly coherent history."[59] And thus, he encourages us to appreciate that in essentially any context—certainly that of ancient Mesoamerica—what we encounter as "sacred history" is a complex amalgam of strictly mythical protagonists and circumstances with more fully historical ones. Moreover, rather than lament this commixture, in Elide's version of hermeneutical interpretation, if it is an understanding of another culture's "religious" outlook and ideals to which one aspires, it is far less significant to disentangle the historical and mythical strains than to appreciate the role that those mythico-historical narratives are playing in the collective social consciousness. For Eliade, the proper role of a historian of religions is to interpret rather than to "demythologize" or "demystify" those richly hybrid accounts.[60]

In short, then, Eliade (like me) is by no means indifferent to empirical historical accuracy, which he always positions as the crucial starting point of his interpretive endeavors. But his notion of "sacred history," which I borrow as the central theme for this chapter, is predicated on the realization that the informing narratives of a context like Monte Albán are

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[58] For a sensitive and relevant account of ways in which indigenous myth and history are combined into what he terms "mythohistory," see Urton, *The History of a Myth: Pacariqtambo and the Origin of the Inkas*, 39, 123, 126, 142. Especially helpful is Urton definition of myth (or mythohistory)as "a resource for the motivated construction of identity." Ibid., 126-28.

[59] Eliade, "Cosmogonic Myth and 'Sacred History,'" 174. For another presentation of ways in which archaic mythology is periodically "reactualized" as "sacred history," see Mircea Eliade, *Birth and Rebirth: The Religious Meanings of Initiation in Human Culture*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper & Row, 1958).

[60] On his unwillingness to demythologize or "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.

composed unequally of imagined and "happened" circumstances, which altogether function in the role of mythology. And thus the debate as to whether the narrative visual displays at Monte Albán are largely "mythical" and "religious," which is a small minority view, versus the general consensus that they are overwhelmingly historical, albeit in shrewdly selective ways, is noteworthy, but not the heart of matter. More rewarding, in his eyes (and mine), will be an appreciation of how those strongly historically informed narratives are serving as a Monte Albán mythology or guiding "sacred history."[61]

B. Javier Urcid on the "Contextual Approach": Reconstituting "Narrative Compositions" and Tracking the Reuse of Monte Albán's Inscribed Stones

A second touchstone and set of very useful heuristic formulations for this inquiry into the commemoration of sacred history (priority II-B) at Monte Albán emerge from Javier Urcid's more regionally pointed *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing* (2001), a dissertation-based work in which he explicates a dual method that will inform all of his subsequent work.[62] Critical that so

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[61] Recall, for instance, the way in which Miguel Bartolomé, "Un mensaje político de los mitos: La mitología de privación en Oaxaca, México y América Latina," en *Cosmovisión mesoamericana: Reflexiones, polémicas y etnografías*, Alejandra Gámez Espinosa and Alfredo López Austin, coords. (México: El Colegio de México, Fideicomiso Historia de las Américas, 2015), 217-18, 241, applies Eliade's notions of myth as exemplary to contemporary indigenous Oaxacans.

[62] It is notable that shortly in the wake of Urcid's dissertation-based *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing* (2001), he publishes on-line: Javier Urcid, *Zapotec Writing: Knowledge, Power and Memory in Ancient Oaxaca*, Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies, Inc. (FAMSI), 2005 (http//www.famsi.org/zapotecwriting/), which he introduces by writing: "Since the publication of 'Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing' (Urcid 2001) prevailing methodological constrains in pursuing issues concerning the phonetic decipherment of the script has prompted me to extend a broader semiotic cast onto the available inscriptions, focusing on their semasiographic component and exploring not only semiological relations between image and text but also paying particular attention to the physical backdrops by means of which writing was displayed. From such a perspective, the definition of 'decipherment' acquires a different meaning... The aim of this essay is therefore to highlight how the construction of knowledge (astronomical, calendrical, mantic, and scribal) was linked to the production of social memory and ultimately to political and economic power..." Ibid., 3. While I depend in this chapter foremost on the earlier *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, which is a more accessible entrée into the topic, on occasion—but admittedly without with great thoroughness, which would be more

many interpreters of Mesoamerican writing have proceeded without specifying their methods and assumptions, Urcid explains his reliance on two types of analyses, which he terms respectively "*the comparative method*" and "*the contextual approach*."[63] Regarding the former, he largely restricts himself to "internal glyphic comparisons" of the inscribed materials found in a localized region, namely central Oaxaca, and attributable to a single system.[64] Not at all inclined to cross-cultural comparison, Urcid, as a rule, regards comparisons even to other Mesoamerican writing systems as "secondary;"[65] but he is, as we'll see, very much committed to juxtaposing and connecting Monte Albán inscriptions with others from within the site. To that end, his "comparative method" depends upon gathering all of the extant Monte Albán inscriptions—which number into the hundreds, though many of them are now scattered into myriad different contexts both within and far from the site—into "a single catalogue," and then undertaking critical comparisons within that historically related oeuvre.[66]

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redundant than helpful to my purposes—I will make reference to this slightly later work, which covers many of the same themes though with sometimes different emphases. Also note that I will make fuller use of *Zapotec Writing* in chapters 6 and 7 in relation to the commemoration of politics (priority II-C) and, even more, the dead (priority II-D).

[63] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 23. More broadly, Urcid, ibid., 4, explains that, "The purpose of this book is threefold. [1] One objective is to present a sketch of how Zapotec writing might have worked—that is, its structural properties and its relationship to spoken language. [2] Another goal is to elucidate the ancient Zapotec calendrical system that so prominently figures in the inscriptions. [3] Finally, it explores the historical and social implications of what one of the most complete sets of inscriptions from the ancient city of Monte Albán [i.e., Programs A and B] apparently intended tended to convey." For a slight later take on "two alternative methods to study the [Zapotec] script," see Urcid, *Zapotec Writing*, 10-12.

[64] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 23-25, 63

[65] Though Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 23, notes that he, as a rule, regards comparisons between Zapotec and other Mesoamerica systems to be "secondary," there are many notable exceptions in his work. For instance, we will see later in this chapter how important those sorts of comparisons and consideration of broader Mesoamerica artistic conventions are, for instance, in his reassessment of the Danzante figures (and there too we will encounter some of Urcid's much less frequent applies to cross-cultural comparison). Also, explicitly comparative within (southwestern) Mesoamerica is Urcid, "The Written Surface as a Cultural Code," 111-48.

[66] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 24.

With respect to what that complete oeuvre of written materials entails, Urcid's strenuous efforts to assemble all of the available Zapotec iconographic evidence first lower expectations and then exceed them. He initially offers foreboding acknowledgements that that "one can assume that only a fraction of what was ever written has survived,"[67] and that "the number of available Zapotec inscriptions is relatively small compared with the known corpora of other Mesoamerican scripts."[68] But then, exceeding expectations of almost all students of Monte Albán, Urcid manages to locate nearly 600 inscribed objects from central Oaxaca, mainly stone monuments that are connected to the central area of the capital city.[69] Therefore, while we noted last chapter that no Zapotec codices have survived, and pre-Columbian writing on other perishable materials has long disappeared, Urcid does have at his disposal a very substantial fund of inscribed stones or "orthostats."[70] Indeed, he says, "the earliest evidence of Zapotec writing consists of large carved monoliths, each weighing several tons," which were found at the site and that "can be dated to between 500 and 300 B.C.—that is, the time of local transition from village life to urbanism and the threshold of state-level forms of social organization."[71] Fortuitously for our purposes, therefore, the evolution of this estimable corpus of inscribed stones, which developed over some 1400 years, begins and then runs parallel with the emergence and whole history of Monte Albán. Predictably, Urcid notes that, "examples of Zapotec script drop off dramatically after the tenth century A.D., a phenomenon undoubtedly related to the collapse of Monte Albán a century before."[72] At that point, the distinctively Zapotec writing style was replaced by "a later graphic system that is best exemplified by the surviving Mixtec codices and

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[67] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 1.

[68] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 5.

[69] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 5.

[70] In avoidance of some of the more loaded labels for Monte Albán's carved stones, Urcid frequently uses the term "orthostat," which is an upright stone or slab that either forms part of a structure or, after the fashion of a stela, is set in the ground.

[71] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 1.

[72] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 1.

lienzos that date from the fifteenth to the sixteenth centuries A.D."[73] But the almost 600 earlier Monte Albán examples provide Urcid a bountiful basis for his "internal glyphic comparisons."

Even more methodologically intriguing and consequential for the study of Monte Albán's sacred history is what Urcid terms "the contextual approach," which entails (re)locating the inscribed stones within the architectural contexts in which pre-Columbian Oaxacans would have encountered them. That aspiration, which I heartily support, brings to the fore two factors that are especially significant in the present discussion. First is his observation that "It is becoming increasingly apparent that most of the known Zapotec inscriptions on stone were part of *large narrative compositions* intended as architectural decoration, whether public, domestic, or mortuary."[74] I will explore in a moment the ramifications (and limitations) of this important claim that nearly all of these inscriptions were originally component parts of "large narrative compositions." But, second is Urcid's more daunting realization that

> "Many of these composite narratives were dismantled in antiquity, and the constituent blocks were used again to carve reliefs on the remaining plain surfaces or were simply integrated as construction material in subsequent architectural projects. Therefore, the configuration of the original narrative programs was obliterated."[75]

Not surprisingly, then, during the colonial era, long after the city's demise and abandonment, many of Monte Albán's inscribed stones were variously looted, collected and otherwise harvested in ways that leave them today not only in numerous museums and collections, but also embedded in churches, public buildings and houses in many villages and town throughout Oaxaca.[76] To be sure, Urcid's tracking of the variously reverential, pragmatic, imprudent and/or sometimes nefarious movements of these carved stones is fascinating.[77] But

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[73] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 4.

[74] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 25; italics added.

[75] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 25.

[76] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 25.

[77] Among the most compelling features of Urcid's work, as we'll see, is the way in which he reconstructs the "life-history" of many inscribed stones that were originally designed for use in

more germane still to his method and to our present project is the less obvious realization that during pre-Columbian times—that is, during the height of Monte Albán's status as a living capital—a very large share of the original narrative compositions in which the stones had been located were systematically dismantled and their components reused, often multiple times in multiple contexts within the city.

In fact, again startlingly—and too seldom acknowledged by previous researchers—to find these original narrative compositions largely or fully intact, even in the course of controlled Monte Albán excavations, is the rare exception. Far more often, the component parts had been, during various phases of the working capital's history, repurposed and thus relocated in "secondary locations;" and then, complicating matters more, many were moved additional times. In Urcid's apt image, "It is as if the pages of a book written in an unknown script were detached, torn into pieces, and then dispersed."[78] Accordingly, "the first level of application" of "the contextual method" entails the onerous task of, to the extent possible, reassembling these original narrative programs. In his words, "Only by putting the pages together and determining their sequence will the first step toward a comprehensive understanding of the inscriptions be gained."[79] Then subsequent steps involve, again to extent possible, determining "the sequence of events that each carved monolith underwent, from quarrying and uses within the sociocultural system to the final deposition as part of the archaeological record."[80] At every stage in the

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Monte Albán "composite narratives," but then are variously moved, re-carved, and reused in innumerable secondary contexts. An example of that version of reconstruction and contextualizing comes in his careful tracking of the fascinating, quirky but telling, "reception history" of a Zapotec stone mask in Javier Urcid, "La faz oculta de una misteriosa máscara de piedra," in *Sociedad y patrimonio arqueológico en el valle de Oaxaca: Memoria de la Segunda Mesa Redonda de Monte Albán*, ed. Nelly M. Robles García (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2002), 211-48; and an example of the same sort of efforts to recover the original architectural context, or track the "life-history," of a several-ton carved in the Oaxaca Regional Museum since 1928, comes in Javier Urcid, "A Peculiar Stone with Zapotec Hieroglyphic Inscriptions," *Mexicon*, vol. 17, no. 5 (October 1995): 89-92.

[78] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 25.

[79] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 25.

[80] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 25.

frequently complex succession of reuses, it is, in Urcid's view, crucial to interpret each inscribed stone, not as free-floating pieces, but within their wider "epigraphic contexts."[81] And, moreover, the hugely consequential fact that "Previous studies of Zapotec writing invariably have failed to recognize reuse," will provide the principal grounds on which Urcid delivers his radically different interpretations of many specific stones' original or "intended purpose."[82]

Excitingly, therefore, for those of us favoring a hermeneutical approach, Javier Urcid's "contextual approach" to the inscribed stones of Monte Albán is strongly resemblant to what I would term the composition of "ritual-architectural reception histories."[83] For me—in hearty support of Urcid's method of working at this point—this tack is highly consistent with the sort of "eventful" (rather than "objectifying") approach to works of art and architecture that sustains this entire project.[84] To apply my terminology to his project, Urcid is intent on chronicling the

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[81] Urcid, of course, has no illusions as to how difficult, frequently impossible, reconstructing those original narrative compositions is: "successful reconstruction [1] depends on the quality of the archaeological data and [2] requires that most or all of the constituent stones are available. Even if total reconstruction is not feasible, the [contextual] method's first level of application would prove useful in imposing interpretive limits. When the two necessary conditions are fulfilled, and the inscriptions can be viewed as narrative programs [thereby meeting the first goal of the contextual method], the second level of the contextual approach can be applied. This level refers to the epigraphic context. It focuses on specific patterns of glyphic arrangements, including [1] associations of particular signs, [2] substitutions of some glyphs for others, [3] recurrent sequences of signs, and [4] variations in the combinations of signs. It is though the study of epigraphic contexts that the signary of the script can be derived. It also can lead to elucidation of formats of texts and reading orders." Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 25.

[82] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 25. Though I find this formulation less helpful, elsewhere (in his Conclusions) Urcid, ibid., 409, maintains that "Understanding Zapotec hieroglyphic writing involves [three] different levels of decipherment. Given that the signs used in the script are largely pictographic, [1] the first level is the identification of what they represent. [2] The second layer entails elucidating the encoded speech; attaining this stage is being able to read the inscriptions in Zapotec. [3] The third level is comprehending what the message means."

[83] See Lindsay Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture: Experience, Interpretation, Comparison* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), vol. I, chap. 12, "Multifarious Revalorization: The Composition of Ritual-Architectural Reception Histories."

[84] See, for instance, Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, vol. I, chap. 3, "Conversation and Play: The Eventfulness of Architecture."

historical succession of "revalorizations," or revalorative uses, of the inscribed stones.[85] My own Gadamerian concerns for the "superabundance and autonomy" of art works stand somewhat at odds with his occasional intimation that an inscribed stone's significance in its original context constitutes its "real meaning," and thus that stones are "meaningless" in their secondary and subsequent relocations;[86] in those moments, his work is non-eventful and objectifying.[87] But, more importantly, his "contextual approach" does position us to appreciate that the very same stones, apparently far more often than not, participated in not just the one original or "intended" meaning, but in a succession of subsequent meanings that were *not* intended or anticipated by their makers.

Frequently, as I explain more fully later—again appealing to "the twofold pattern of meaning-making ritual-architectural events"—I will associate that pre-Columbian relocation of an inscribed stone from its initial or "primary location" to an ancillary context also with a kind of

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[85] On the conception of "revalorization," again see Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, vol. I, chap. 12; or Lindsay Jones, "Revalorizing Mircea Eliade's Notion of Revalorization: Reflections on the Present-day Reuses of Mesoamerica's Pre-Columbian Sites and Architectures;" in *Remembering/ Reimagining/Revalorizing Mircea Eliade*, eds. Norman Girardot and Bryan Rennie; a Special Issue of *Archaevs: Studies in the History of Religions* XV (Bucharest: Romanian Association for the History of Religions, 2011), 119-59.

[86] Though this may seem a quibble, my approach to "reception histories" require me to take some issue with, for instance, the claim of Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 25 (italicis added), that "Even though the messages carved on individual monuments might be self-contained, *the inscriptions are meaningless unless they are treated at least in the same physical sense as they were viewed by their creators*." While I will agree that inscribed stones wrenched from their original contexts will have drastically different meanings from those intended by their creators, I would insist that those stones are *not* entirely devoid of meaning.

[87] In other words, in those "objectifying" moments, Urcid implies that the (one and only) meaning of an inscribed stone is absolutely stable and perfectly consistent with the "intended meaning" of its maker; no other secondary meaning counts. Alternatively, from my hermeneutical view, the potential meanings of an inscribed Zapotec stone, not unlike other works of art or architecture, are "autonomous and superabundant," and therefore emerge ad infinitum in the respective contexts or "ritual-architectural events" (not all of which entail ritual per se). On this very basic point, see, for instance, Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, vol. I, chap. 2, "Dancing Menhirs: The Superabundance and Autonomy of Architecture." As Urcid's own work frequently shows, an inscribed stone from Monte Albán that is relocated in a Oaxacan village church or in a New York museum is by no means "meaningless."

"demotion" from the stone's original role as a "back-half" component of substantive content to something more like a "front-half component of allurement."[88] Nonetheless, to persist with terms that are common in the discussion of "reception histories," Urcid is writing something like the contextualizing "life-histories" or "biographies" of inscribed stones that lived complicated, transient and eventful lives.[89] And in that respect we have a very important methodological meeting of the minds, as it were.

C. Paul Ricoeur on Time and Narrative: "Emplotment," "Followability" and the Necessity of a Congruous Beginning, Middle and End

I introduce a third touchstone and third set of heuristic formulations via the perhaps unlikely pairing of Javier Urcid's detailed work on the inscribed stones of Monte Albán with hermeneutical theorist Paul Ricoeur's more sweeping remarks on the nature of narrative and, especially, on the essential relationship between storytelling and the experience of existing in time. Here I return to Urcid's first point relative to the contextual approach—i.e., "It is becoming increasingly apparent that most of the known Zapotec inscriptions on stone were part of large narrative compositions…"[90]—a proposition that has direct and profound ramifications

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[88] I discussed and utilized the notion of "the twofold pattern of meaning-making" last chapter in relation to the characteristic two-part configuration of pyramid-based temple sanctuaries at Monte Albán, and I will revisit that notion later in this chapter. But for a more general discussion of the topic, see Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, vol. I., chap. 4, "Order and Variation: The twofold Pattern of Ritual-Architectural Events."

[89] Actually, regarding the notion that Urcid's "contextual approach" leads him to write what he sometimes terms the "life-histories" or "ancient biographies" of particular inscribed stones, e.g., Urcid, "The Written Surface as a Cultural Code," 143. The language of the "life-history" of inscribed stones appears also in the jointly authored Javier Urcid and Arthur Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza and their Political Implications, 500 B.C.-A.D. 200," *Mesoamerican Plazas: Practices, Meanings, and Memories*, eds. Kenichiro Tsukamoto and Takeshi Innomata (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2014), 149-67. That notion of the "biography" or "life-history" or places and inscribed monoliths, which is very much in spirit of reception theory, finds a precedent in Arthur A. Joyce, "The Main Plaza of Monte Albán: A Life-history of Place," in *The Archaeology of Meaningful Places*, eds. Brenda J. Bowser and María Nieves Zedeño (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2009), 32-52.

[90] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 25.

for the consideration of the ritual-architectural commemoration of sacred history (priority II-B) at Monte Albán. In his view, Zapotec writing involves the combination of "*a logosyllabic system*," which refers to its linkage to spoken language insofar as the scribal system is partly "characterized by arrangements of signs in which each unit stands for words and perhaps, in certain contexts, syllables," and "*narrative pictography*," which refers to way in which the carved stones include "scenes depicting human figures engaged in some kind of activity."[91] Focusing attention on the latter, I am persuaded of the crucial importance of understanding Zapotec writing in relation to these "narrative pictographs" or "composite narratives." But there is also, I think, a demand for a fuller explication of just what qualifies as "narrative."

To that purpose, I appeal to the first volume of French philosopher Paul Ricoeur's landmark text, *Time and Narrative* (1984), for my operative definition of the term.[92] Readers of *Narrating Monte Albán: Seven True Stories of the Great Zapotec Capital of Southern Mexico*, which provides a prelude to the present work by enumerating the most prominent means of fashioning the history of the ancient city into a "narrative (re)construction"—that is to say, telling a compelling and coherent story of Monte Albán—will recall the use I made there of Ricoeur's work.[93] Engaging another elemental question, Ricoeur puts a finer point on the persistent and persuasive claim that people are, by nature, "storytelling creatures" by linking the two terms in his masterwork. He contends that "between the activity of narrating a story and the temporal character of human existence there exists a correlation that is not merely accidental but

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[91] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 4-5.

[92] Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

[93] See, for instance, the sub-section of the Introduction to Lindsay Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán: Seven True Stories of the Great Zapotec Capital of Southern Mexico*, entitled "'Emplotment,' 'Followability' and Understanding: Invariably Narrative Solutions to the Enigma of Archaeological Ruins." I consistently use "(re)construction" rather than simply "reconstruction" to hold in the spotlight the hermeneutical observation that all narrative rehearsals of history are, even when rigorously informed by empirical events, in very large part, imaginative "constructions."

that presents a transcultural form of necessity."[94] For Ricoeur, simply to exist in time, as all humans do, prompts people in all contexts to tell stories: "time becomes human time to the extent that it is organized after the manner of narrative."[95]

Ricoeur contends, in other words, that narrating is always connected with expressing and reinforcing one's orientation in time—and, in this respect, certainly ancient Oaxaca demonstrates the rule rather than an exception. For instance, to prefigure another theme to which I will return, it would come as no surprise to Ricoeur that, by the assessment of nearly all interpreters from Caso to Urcid, recording the precise calendrical dates of both historical events and rituals, and thereby expressing a distinctive Zapotec means of "time reckoning," are central features of nearly all of the Monte Albán visual displays that Urcid terms "composite narratives."[96] In the public inscriptions of Monte Albán, the essential connection between time and narrative is always front and center. Moreover, in an infrequent instance of a Oaxacanist citing Ricoeur, specialist in Mixtec codices and writing Maarten Jansen appeals to the French philosopher's notion of a "narrative identity" to explain why it is that indigenous Oaxacans invariably link and embed their very specific stories of the founding and history of their particular communities (i.e., events for which they can provide fairly accurate dates) within grander and more general cosmogonic stories about the original creation of the world and the First People (i.e., "events" that are far beyond the realm of the dateable). In Jansen's sapient surmise,

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[94] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 52.

[95] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 3.

[96] Note, in other words, that Urcid's *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing* (2001)—though, as we'll see, in many respects an iconoclastic and path-breaking inquiry into Oaxacan scribal traditions and especially the inscribed stones of Monte Albán—nonetheless shares this basic assumption of Caso and others that these inscriptions are, in very large part, devoted to the expression of a distinctive Zapotec means of "time reckoning." Thus for Urcid, like Caso, making sense of the Monte Albán inscribed stones depends foremost on disentangling the complexities of the ancient Zapotec calendrical system, and especially reconstructing the glyphic day list that figure so prominently in the inscriptions. See Urcid, ibid., chap. 3, "Problems in Reconstructing the Ancient Zapotec Calendar," and chap. 4, "Analysis of Calendrical Glyphs," which together constitute about 45% of the full work.

> "It is the feeling of being embedded in great processes that began long before one's personal existence that leads people to express respect for the superhuman forces that created and maintain humanity, and to reflect commemoratively on events—real or imaginary—that gave rise to the social and political conditions of the present. In this way, they can establish shrines and monuments that express and anchor what Paul Ricoeur calls the "narrative identity" of a people or socio-political community."[97]

Jansen's and Ricoeur's comments suggest, therefore, that creating the sort of a "narrative identity" that can unite, for instance, a diversified pre-Columbian city like Monte Albán, depends upon formulating foundation stories (or myths) that anchor one's particular community with respect to "the great processes" that gave rise to, and that sustain, the whole world. Only well-crafted stories of a certain sort can accomplish that community building. Not any story will do.

With respect to this basic question about why some foundation stories fail to generate an enthusiastic following and others succeed, Ricoeur, resonating with Eliade's work on the inevitable mythicization of history, poses the deceptively simple claim that an essential requirement of all compelling narratives is a congruous beginning, middle and end. What is required, in other words, is, in Ricoeur term, skillful "emplotment"—that is to say, the composition of a plotline or narrative progression in which a chronological sequence of events begins and then proceeds according to some coherent logic, which thus leads to a believable, if not altogether expected, conclusion. A satisfying story, Ricoeur says, requires a logically concordant start, a substantive mid-section, and a logically consistent final outcome:

> "[that is] the way in which the story receives overall coherence, the way in which it unfolds so that the end result or situation can be understood as the logical or at least plausible consequence of previously described situations or conditions."[98]

While the enumeration of disconnected facts (e.g., a strictly historical account) is informing, it is, according to Ricoeur, a well-wrought narrative alone—a sequence of linked

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[97] Jansen, "Inauguración de templos y dinastías," 584; my translation.

[98] Mark Pluciennik, "Archaeological Narratives and Other Ways of Telling," *Current Anthropology*, vol. 40, no. 5 (December 1999), 654, provides this summary of Ricoeur's position, which Pluciennik considers highly relevant to the composition of archaeology-based syntheses like those of Monte Albán that I am about to summarize.

events that is characterized by "followability"—that rewards audiences with "the pleasure of recognition," and thereby enables the sense that they have encountered insights that are important, true and worthy of their considered attention.[99] Isolated facts—like those, for example, that are communicated via an inscribed stone that has been dislodged from its wider storiological context—may present a measure of information; but, according to Ricoeur, "narrative followability" is an essential prerequisite to genuine understanding or, in a phrase from Bruce Lincoln's work that I will introduce momentarily, to "evoking sentiments."

Consequently, from Ricoeur's perspective, though he has little to say explicitly about archaeological ruins, long-abandoned sites like Monte Albán are the quintessential evocators, perhaps provocateurs, of storytelling. So-termed ruins, by nature, give people pause to reflect on enormous stretches of time, and on the disconcerting juxtaposition of stupendous success and total failure; every large-scaled ruin evokes comingled specters of inspiring creativity that was eventually followed by a disastrous collapse. Ruins force people to think about the visisitudes of time. Consequently, not only the pre-Columbian narratives that sustained ancient Mesoamerican cities, but also the modern-day stories *about* Mesoamerican ruins, including those synthetic narratives told by academics, invariably have the crucial three components of a beginning, middle and ending insofar as they are typically articulated in terms of a pre-Columbian origin, florescence and collapse. For all of its insidious distortions, the tendency to slot the history of every ancient Mesoamerican city into the infamous formula of pre-Classic, Classic and Postclassic owes in large part to the storiologically merits of that triadic template.

Ignacio Bernal's historical (re)construction of Monte Albán's history, for instance, is masterfully crafted—or "emploted"—as a coherent narrative insofar as he attributes every phase of the city's founding, success and failure to "cultural fusion."[100] In his account, the initial

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[99] On the "followability" of narrative, see Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. I, 152; on "the pleasure of recognition," see ibid., 49. And on the essential role of story-crafting or "emplotment," he writes, "This highlighting of the dynamic of emplotment is to me the key to the problem of the relation between time and narrative." Ibid. 53.

[100] For a synopsis and critical summary of Ignacio Bernal's narrative (re)construction of Monte Albán history, which requires collecting remarks from numerous of his works but most

impetus for the city depends upon the symbiotic "cultural fusion" between Oaxacans and Olmecs; then the short-lived Period II florescence is credited to a cultural fusion between Oaxacans and Mayas, while the grander Period III blossoming owes to a cultural fusion between Oaxacans and Central Mexicans. And, providing just the sort of logically coherent ending of which Ricoeur writes, Bernal attributes the collapse of the city to a converse of the same guiding theme wherein the Monte Albán elites turn inward, refuse to participate in additional cultural fusions, and thus atrophy and implode.[101] In short, the very same narrative theme—i.e., so-termed cultural fusion—accounts for the beginning, middle and end of Bernal's fully "followable" story of Monte Albán.[102] Likewise, Kent Flannery and Joyce Marcus present an eminently "followable" narrative (re)construction in which opportunistic leadership decisions, which always lead to "unexpected consequences," account for each Monte Albán's origin, florescence and collapse.[103] And Arthur Joyce too presents a very different version of events that Ricoeur would nonetheless also identify as a "followable narrative" insofar as the very same dynamics between elites and commoners, and the same investments in "sacred spaces" and ceremonial precincts, account for the founding, eventual success and then subsequent demise of Monte Albán.[104] In all these cases, and others, the story of Monte Albán is made compelling and

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importantly, Ignacio Bernal, "Archaeological Synthesis of Oaxaca," in *Handbook of Middle American Indians*, vol. 3: "Archaeology of Southern Mesoamerica," vol. ed. Gordon R. Willey, gen. ed. Robert Wauchope (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1965), 788-813, see Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, chap. 2, "Ignacio Bernal's Affirmation of Intercultural Admixing: Monte Albán as a Microcosm of Mesoamerica and Model for Modern Mexico."

[101] See Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, chap. 2, "Closing Thoughts: Monte Albán as a Microcosm of Ancient Mesoamerica and a Model for Contemporary Mexico

[102] Keep in mind that here I am assessing and championing the "narrative followability" and "emplotment" of Bernal's and others' renditions of Monte Albán, without commenting on the historical accuracy of those accounts.

[103] For a critical summary of the narrative (re)construction of Monte Albán history that emerges from Joyce Marcus and Kent V. Flannery, *Zapotec Civilization: How Urban Society Evolved in Mexico's Oaxaca Valley* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996), see Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, chap. 6, "Kent Flannery and Joyce Marcus's 'Actor-Centered' Story of Oaxacan Social Evolution: Charismatic Leadership and an Illusion of Control."

[104] For a critical summary of the narrative (re)construction of Monte Albán history that emerges primarily from Arthur A. Joyce, *Mixtecs, Zapotecs, and Chatinos: Ancient Peoples of Southern*

believable by a logically coherent beginning, middle and end; and, conversely, histories of Monte Albán that lack that sort of narrative coherence are not persuasive.[105]

Be that as it may, Javier Urcid, by contrast, sets the bar for what qualifies as "narrative" somewhat lower. When he addresses that question directly (which he seldom does), Urcid suggests that Zapotec writing is "narrative pictography" on the simple grounds that it "consists of scenes depicting human figures engaged in some kind of activity."[106] Nevertheless, as we move forward and appreciate some of the "composite narratives" at Monte Albán in which he (re)locates various inscribed stones, we will see that Ricoeur's criteria of "emplotment" and "followability" are relevant in the extreme. For instance, Urcid's surmises that various carved monoliths have been dislodged from their original narrative compositions and relocated in "secondary positions" are nearly always predicated on his discernment that the stones have been resituated in constellations that lack "followability" (a term he never uses), which is to say, the repurposed stones simply do not any longer form a coherent storyline. To cite an example that I later discuss in detail, virtually all of his predecessors from Caso forward took for granted that the cornerstones on the South Platform form a linked set, which had been simultaneously conceived and mounted as constituent elements of a unified political program; but Urcid realizes that together those cornerstone components actually contribute to no shared message. In his corrective view, instead of expressing a well "emploted" narrative (as Caso, Marcus and others assume), these monoliths, in the positions on the South Platform where archaeologists found them, are disjointed and unrelated; they no longer belong to any logically linked storyline—and thus it is apparent they had been relocated. Moreover, by the same token, Urcid's arguments for the "primary locations" of those monoliths and other stones are invariably contingent on

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Mexico (Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 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."

[105] Additionally, Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, provides critical summaries of narrative (re)constructions of Monte Albán history offered by John Paddock (in chap. 3), Richard Blanton (in chap. 4) and Marcus Winter (in chap. 5), each of which is assessed in terms of Ricoeur's notions of "emplotment" and "followability."

[106] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 4-5.

demonstrating that, in the original positions that he proposes, they do indeed together constitute a coherent, unified and "followable" narrative program.

In short, Urcid's highly specific approach to Zapotec writing reinforces two of Ricoeur's very broad claims about narrative. For one, Urcid's observation (which is shared by Caso and many others) that Zapotec writing is, in very large part, devoted to expressing calendar dates and a distinctive means of "native time reckoning" reinforces Ricoeur's basic premise about the essential relationship between narrative and consciousness about existing in time. Second and more specifically, Urcid's persistent recognition that most of Monte Albán's inscribed stones were eventually removed from the composite narrative displays of which they were originally a part depends upon discerning repurposed stones in configurations that lack what Ricoeur terms "narrative followability."

At any rate, with those key points about narrative in mind, consider next two more broadly methodological segues before returning to the more specific Monte Albán materials. The first concerns Mexican historian Enrique Florescano's remarks on ways in which the highly partisan foundational narratives expressed in colonial-era documents and *lienzos* support the notion of an "indigenous memory;" and the latter uses the work of social critic Bruce Lincoln to explore the prospect that the public narrative visual displays of Monte Albán probably told stories that only some audience regarded as credible and authoritative.

D. Enrique Florescano on "Indigenous Memory": Partisan Presentations of Origins, Ruler Genealogies and Boundaries in Primordial Titles and *Lienzos*

Fourth, then, I appeal to the work of Enrique Florescano, a prolific historian of Mexico with exceptionally wide interests that include the religious and mythical aspects of pre-Columbian Mesoamerica, for clues regarding three quite specific sorts of shared public narratives we might expect to encounter in a context like Monte Albán. As part of his ongoing studies of "the formation of the indigenous memory" in Mexico—and thus his refutation of the

thesis that native Mesoamericans lack "historical memory"[107]— Florescano engages a collection of colonial-era documents known as "primordial titles" (*títulos primordiales*) of which so-termed *lienzos* provide especially informing exemplars.[108] Though these are, in large part, post-Conquest legalistic and polemical documents intended to support the land claims of indigenous communities in the colonial courts of New Spain, Florescano makes the persuasive case in a widely-framed keynote lecture at the third Monte Albán Round Table Meeting (2002) that primordial titles and *lienzos* can, additionally, teach us a great deal that is relevant to the ancient capital with respect to public presentations of community origins, ruler genealogies and territorial boundaries.

Preeminent among the complex hybrid documents that Florescano addresses, *lienzos*, for which there are more extant examples from Oaxaca than any other region, are community-specific—or, more accurately, *altépetl*-specific—pictographic maps, often several feet square, painted on cloth, that recount a group's peregrinations to their present, predestined locale.[109] Though many scholarly accounts focus almost strictly on the utility of *lienzos* in the defense of indigenous land claims in Spanish colonial courts, these deliberately tendentious cartographic documents record an interlaced combination of myth and history in ways that work more broadly

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[107] Regarding high-profile assertions that pre-Columbian Mesoamericans lacked "historical consciousness," Octavio Paz, *Claude Lévi-Strauss o el neuvo festín de Edipo*, 5th ed. (México, D.F.: Editorial Joaquín Motriz, 1984), 83, writes, "From the Mexican high plateau to the tropical lands of Central America, for more than two thousand years, various cultures and empires succeeded one another and none of them had historical consciousness. Mesoamerica did not have history but myths and, above all, rites." In the context of a chapter entitled "History in the Time of Myth," López Austin, *The Myths of the Opossum*, 317, quotes—and challenges—this assertion.

[108] Enrique Florescano, "Los títulos primordiales y la formación de la memoria indígena en los pueblos de Nueva España," en *Estructuras políticas en el Oaxaca antiguo: Memoria de la Tercera Mesa Redonda de Monte Albán*, ed. Nelly M. Robles García (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2004), 285-314.

[109] Specifically on Oaxaca *lienzos*, maps and primordial titles, see Florescano, "Los títulos primordiales y la formación de la memoria indígena en los pueblos de Nueva España," 292-302; and Barbara E. Mundy, "Lienzos," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Mesoamerican Cultures*, ed. Davíd Carrasco (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), vol. 2, 120-23.

to reaffirm and authorize the ongoing existence of a particular polity in a particular place; that is to say, *lienzos* are instructive both to outsiders and community insiders. In that respect, *lienzos* match perfectly definitions of myth—or sacred history—as multivalent "charters" insofar as they are repositories of the collective social memory of the specific community that support not only existential identity and ethical values, but also socio-political interests.[110] And *lienzos* nearly always accomplish all those things by telling one continuous primordial-to-present story of the *altépetl's* origins and sacred history. In Jansen's and Ricoeur's terms, *lienzos* establish "narrative identities" and orientation in time by embedding the highly specific foundation stories of local communities within "great processes that began long before their personal existence."[111]

Though from sixteenth-century Puebla rather than Oaxaca, the fabulous *Mapa de Cuauhtinchan No. 2*, nearly seven feet wide by three and half feet tall, provides an instructive example of these community-specific maps.[112] This magnificent pictographic document depicts the primordial ancestors' original emergence into the earthly world from Chicomoztoc, the "Place of Seven Caves," and then—while bearing on their backs sacred bundles that "hold the essences and images of their deities"[113]—an event-filled pilgrimage through the ceremonial city of Cholula that leads to their eventual homeplace of Cuauhtinchan, the House of the Eagle, a town near the present-day city of Puebla.[114] It is a "migration to foundation" story that explains

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[110] The definition of myth as "charter" is most often linked to Bronislaw Malinowski, but it appears occasionally in the work of Eliade as well.

[111] Jansen, "Inauguración de templos y dinastías," 584; my translation.

[112] See *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).

[113] See, for instance, Elizabeth Hill Boone, "The House of the Eagle," in Carrasco and Sessions, eds., *Cave, City, and Eagle's Nest*, 37. For a fuller discussion of sacred bundles and deities, see, in the same volume, Guilhem Olivier, "Sacred Bundles, Arrows, and the New Fire: Foundation and Power in the *Mapa de Cuauhtinchan No. 2*," 281-313.

[114] See Davíd Carrasco and Scott Sessions, "Middle Place, Labyrinth, and Circumambulation: Cholula's Peripatetic Role in the *Mapa de Cuauhtinchan No. 2*," in Carrasco and Sessions, eds., *Cave, City, and Eagle's Nest*, 427-454.

how a convoluted series of travel, hunts, battles, alliances and abundant rituals together result in the divinely-assisted creation of a unique and unified community or *altépetl*.[115] As Elizabeth Boone says, painted histories such as the *Mapa de Cuauhtinchan No. 2* "retell and validate the greatness of their past and reconfirm their rights in the present."[116] Though the chronology of events, which combines the primordial and historical, can be vague, the spatial location of every episode, marked by a series of tiny footprints, is clearly identified in relation to hills, volcanoes, rivers and other still-recognizable environmental features; remembering where things happen is nearly as important as what happens.[117] Demonstrating what I termed last chapter a "locative" or "emplaced" tradition, these pictographic sacred histories meticulously correlate mythical places and the respective provinces of various deities with prominent features of the physical topography.[118]

In his broadly framed commentary on these complex hybrid *lienzos* and primordial titles, Florescano stresses their "non-objective," vigorously partisan, nature by explaining that,

> "These titles are bearers of an ethnocentric vision. Their authors' consider their *altépetl* as the heart of the world. The main subjects with which they deal are the communal lands and the inhabitants of the town, to the point that the outside is perceived only when it is linked to the people. The image that emerges from these documents is that of a community that came into existence in remote times and has since maintained its own

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[115] As Ann Clair Seiferle-Valencia, "Representations of Territorial Organization in the *Mapa de Cuauhtinchan No.2*," in Carrasco and Sessions, eds., *Cave, City, and Eagle's Nest*, 88 (italics hers), writes, "All of the representations of territory in the *MC2* depend heavily on the concept of the *altepetl*, which was commonly perceived and *represented* as a contiguous unit even when geographical reality was otherwise." On the significance of *altepeme* in the *Mapa de Cuauhtinchan No.2*, see also ibid., 82-83.

[116] Boone, "The House of the Eagle," 27.

[117] As Boone, "The House of the Eagle," 31, explains, "location is fundamental to the story of [*the Mapa de Cuauhtinchan No.2*], and the places are either described visually or named by place signs."

[118] Regarding the distinction, to which I have referred several times, between "locative" or emplaced religious orientations versus "utopian" religious orientations, see 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.

> lands and distinctiveness. Its inhabitants feel united to that territory and do not want that situation to change in the future."[119]

Florescano thereby helps us to see that a community's "sacred history" is both highly specific and, in aggressively concerted ways, "socially instrumental."[120] These are practical rather than abstract documents. Sacred history provides existential orientation, but also social identity (or "narrative identity"), or what Florescano terms, "the collective memory of the members of the *altépetl*;" and thus, especially apparent in the litigation-motivated *lienzos* are polemical and defensive arguments for a community's right to exist.[121] Every indigenous Mesoamerican community—whether in the colonial or pre-Columbian era, and whether a modest-size village or a major urban capital like Monte Albán—has its own unique and strategically sectarian sacred history, which both expresses and defends community interests. It is, then, not Oaxacan or Zapotec mythology writ large that we should expect to find in the archaeological and iconographic record of Monte Albán, but rather the much more site-specific—or better again, *altépetl*-specific—sacred history of this unique capital.

Furthermore, while Florescano explores the unique attributes of a number of these community-specific *lienzos* and "primordial titles," every one of which is linked to a particular landscape and a particular succession of events, he is especially struck by the way in which each of them addresses "three decisive aspects in the formation of the *altépetl*": (1) the specific foundation of the *altépetl*, which is, exactly as Eliade would urge us to expect, and as the *Mapa de Cuauhtinchan No. 2* beautifully exemplifies, invariably linked to the more general origins of the First People; (2) the origin and succession of the ruling lineage, which is invariably linked via genealogy to the *altépetl's* present leadership; and (3) the extent and limits of the territory that is regarded as the community's rightful possession, which invariably entails some specificity

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[119] Florescano, "Los títulos primordiales y la formación de la memoria indígena en los pueblos de Nueva España," 285; my translation.

[120] Momentarily I will elaborate on the term "social instrumentality," which I borrow from Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society*, 21.

[121] Florescano, "Los títulos primordiales y la formación de la memoria indígena en los pueblos de Nueva España," 313; my translation.

about the borders with respect to surrounding communities.[122] Throughout his presentation of the abundant and diverse primordial titles and *lienzos* not only in Oaxacan but in the Central Mexican and Maya regions, Florescano returns again and again to recognition of these same three elements: (1) the original founding of the *altépetl*, which is an event is that always featured "with great force" in the Oaxacan paintings," (2) the legitimate succession of the community's rulers, and (3) the *altépetl's* also legitimate territorial boundaries, a matter of the rightful possession of land, which remains by far the preeminent point of contention in frequently violent conflicts between contemporary indigenous Oaxaca communities.[123]

Consequently, when we turn more specific attention to the public visual displays of Monte Albán, irrespective of the innumerable variables separating pre-Columbian carved stones and colonial-era primordial titles and *lienzos*, we should expect to find expressions of these same three elements, which are, it seems, components of every community's otherwise highly particular sacred history.[124] And indeed, though with some notable permutations and uneven

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[122] Florescano, "Los títulos primordiales y la formación de la memoria indígena en los pueblos de Nueva España," 294. He repeats variations of these three-part formulation again and again in his keynote address, e.g., ibid., 300, 302 and 307.

[123] Florescano, "Los títulos primordiales y la formación de la memoria indígena en los pueblos de Nueva España," 294, 295, 299-300, reiterates this triad of primary concerns. Regarding the third of them, the crucial, often contentious matter of the Oaxaca indigenous communities clearly marking and then enforcing the "ethno-territorial boundaries" of one's community—usually with respect to hills, caves and other sacred places, which are frequently marked with crosses—is a recurrent theme in the work of ethnographer Alicia Barabas. See, for instance, Alicia M. Barabas, "Cosmovisiones y etnoterritorialidad en las culturas indígenas de Oaxaca," *Antipoda: Revista de Antropología y Arqueología*, núm. 7 (julio-diciembre 2008), 6-8; or Alicia M. Barabas, *Dones, duenos y santos: Ensayos sobre religiones en Oaxaca* (México, D.F.: Porrúa/Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2006), 22-23, 30, 37, 43, 50-59, 64, 82, 105-8, 112-20, 129-46. Presently in Oaxaca one hears frequently of violent clashes among indigenous communities that are nearly always connected to disputes over boundaries and land use.

[124] Focused on the primordial titles and *lienzos* of the Mixtec and Zapotec areas, Michel R. Oudijk and María de los Angeles Romero Frizzi, "Los títulos primordiales: Un género de tradición mesoamericana. Del mundo préhispanico al siglo XXI," *Relaciones: Estudios de Historia y Sociedad*, vol. 24, núm. 95 (2003): 17-48, for instante, also make the case that these colonial-era documents demonstrate the continuation of many pre-Columbian traditions.

emphases, we will encounter all three themes in the inscribed reliefs of the Zapotec capital. But before considering those specifics, I put in place one last broadly methodological touchstone.

E. Bruce Lincoln on "Evoking Sentiment" via Myth: Inevitable Discrepancies between Intended Meanings and Received Meanings

Fifth, then, before moving forward to greater specificity about the commemoration of sacred history (priority II-B) at Monte Albán, I draw on religionist and Marxist social theorist Bruce Lincoln for one last set of general terms and formulations that can assist in ascertaining just what sort of narratives the public visual displays of the capital are and, moreover, what empirical effects those displays may have had on pre-Columbian audiences. Here I revert from Ricoeur's broad designation of "narrative" to Eliade's more narrow preoccupations with "myth;" though where Eliade focuses on the existential rewards of myth, Lincoln directs attention to the more socio-political aspects of mythic discourse.

While I have noted the prevailing view that the "narrative compositions" of Monte Albán are largely historical insofar as they present people who lived and events that happened, no one suggests that these are merely documentary or "objective" accounts of history. Marcus, for instance, stresses the manipulative motives of all public displays, but also makes a helpful distinction between "vertical propaganda," in which elites work to influence the attitudes of commoners below them, versus "horizontal propaganda," wherein in elites endeavor to sway the opinions of other elites.[125] Urcid, by contrast, is among those who resist oft-repeated views that Zapotec writing was primarily a "propagandistic tool of the elite,"[126] or that the Main Plaza was foremost a "military showcase" designed to display Monte Albán's expansionist conquests, and thereby intimidate residents and visitors into compliance with political and economic demands of

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[125] See Marcus, *Mesoamerican Writing Systems*, 11-12, where she augments her notions of "vertical propaganda" versus "horizontal propaganda" with "agitation propaganda," which is vertical propaganda that is used to prepare the masses for war with a hated enemy, and "integration propaganda," which is aimed at stabilizing the current social order.

[126] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 63, as noted, associates this view, to which I will return repeatedly in this chapter and the next, primarily with Joyce Marcus.

the rulers.[127] But Urcid too concurs that the visual displays are deliberately self-serving and, in Lincoln term, "socially instrumental."[128] Just as Florescano's remarks about the strategic composition of primordial titles and *lienzos* suggest, no one disputes that the Zapotecs' depiction of largely historical events is framed in ways that support the interests of the framers. Even Eliade's decidedly apolitical comments about unfailingly "mythicized history" provide us a means of appreciating the consequences and rewards of "strategic tinkering with the past."[129]

His general agreement with Eliade notwithstanding, Lincoln, however, contributes an alternate and more skeptical solution to the old question of myth versus history. Most notably, his reflections on "discourse and the construction of society"—which are also much in the spirit of "reception theory"[130]—open a ways to appreciating the frequently extreme discrepancy between the meanings and messages intended by the designers of those narrative visual displays and the ways in which pre-Columbian audiences actually experienced and (mis)understood those pictorial works. Though again far too little discussed by Oaxacanists, there are certain to have been large variances between the "*intended meanings*" of public art and ritual-architectural events undertaken in Mesoamerican urban plazas and the "*received meanings*" of the diversified audiences in attendance. To cite an extreme case, one has to imagine that those histrionic public

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[127] See, for instance, Richard E. Blanton, *Monte Albán: Settlement Patterns at the Ancient Zapotec Capital* (New York: Academic Press, 1978; Clinton Corners, NY: Percheron Press, 2004), 39, 47, 58, 63.

[128] Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society*, 21.

[129] I borrow this apt phrase from Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society*, 21.

[130] The editor's Introduction to *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post Structuralism*, ed. Jane P. Tomkins (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1980), does a good job of demonstrates the diversity of approaches that find space under the umbrella of "reader-response criticism" or "reception theory." But for my purposes of extending the insights of reception theory from literature to architecture, I am especially indebted the works of Wolfgang Iser, e.g. his *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), and Han Robert Jauss, e.g. his *Towards an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982). For a summary of my views on the matter, I again cite Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, vol. I, chap. 12, "Multifarious Revalorization: The Composition of Ritual-Architectural Reception Histories."

presentations of Aztecs or Zapotecs that featured human sacrifice and displays of military force, which were presumably planned to threaten audiences into fearful compliance, quite often had precisely the opposite effect of engendering resentment rather than respect; and in instances of such counter-hegemonic responses, the unintended consequence was a less rather than more compliant general populace. Additionally, even more unassailable evidence that many pre-Columbian Oaxacan audiences, instead of passively acquiescent consumers of the messages that public art and ritual presented, were, in the language of reception theorists, "reading against the grain," comes in Urcid's demonstration that a very large percentage of these Monte Albán narrative displays were eventually dismantled and the stones scattered elsewhere.[131] The deliberate destruction of nearly every narrative composition that Urcid discusses is proof positive that the intended messages, if perhaps at one point persuasive, were subsequently rejected.

Rather than simply ignoring the inevitable discrepancies between the *intended meanings* of Monte Albán's narrative compositions and their *received meanings*, which is the commonest but also weakest approach, Lincoln presents a classificatory scheme that enables, even encourages, us to underscore those frequently subversive responses. In his view, in order to avoid the insidious (or just plain wrong) assumption that that narrative compositions have only one immutable meaning for all audiences, Lincoln argues that, "we would do better to classify narratives not by their content but by the claims that are made by their narrators and the way in which those claims are received by their audience(s)."[132] In other words, whether a narrative qualifies as history, myth, fable or legend is, for Lincoln, not a consequence of the subject matter per se, but of the standing that narrators and audiences assign to those accounts. As a means of differentiating between those four different sorts of narratives, Lincoln relies on three criteria: (1) *truth-claims*, which entail narrators purporting to describe things that actually happened; (2) *credibility*, which refers to whether or not those truth-claims are generally accepted by

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[131] Regarding widespread advocacy for "reading against the grain" or "resistant reading," which can be applied to critical assessments of visual culture as well as literature, see, for instance, *Ways of Reading*, 3rd ed., eds. David Bartholomae and Anthonly Petrosky (Boston: St. Martins Press, 1993).

[132] Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society*, 24.

audiences; and (3) *authority*, the key term, which refers to whether or not the truth-claims are regarded as not only accurate, but also "paradigmatic" in ways that "evoke sentiments" and "effectively mobilize a social group."[133]

That classificatory strategy leads Lincoln to a hierarchy among the four kinds of narrative, or storiological "discourse," in which, from bottom to top, the weakest type of stories are *fables*, which present themselves as fiction, and thus make no truth-claims, have no credibility and exercise no authority.[134] Next lowest on the scale, *legends* do purport to make some make truth-claims insofar as they address historical people and events, but they do so in ways that audiences do not find credible; and thus legends, like fables, exercise no authority. Lincoln's more notable distinction, however, comes between *history* versus *myth*, wherein he too undermines the common parlance to which I alluded earlier that historical narratives are the truest and strongest form of discourse, while myths are false and thus weaker. Alternatively, deploying his three criteria, Lincoln contends that *historical narratives* make truth-claims that are credible, but they have no authority insofar as they "engender no sentiment." For instance, when I pass by the 18 bronze statutes of "illustrious figures" from various Mexican states presently situated along the Calzada de la República of Oaxaca City, I am easily convinced that these were actual living people and that the inscribed dates of their births, deaths and military service are accurate; for me, those statues make empirical truth-claims that are fully "credible." But, for one completely unfamiliar with these local luminaries, the statues "evoke no sentiment;" the Mexican heroes stir no emotion, and thus incite no change of heart or social action. These are, in Lincoln's terminology and from my limited perspective, strictly historical not mythical

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[133] Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society*, 24-25. Lincoln, ibid., 9, explains that the two "paired instrumentalities" that allow discourse to shape and reshape society are "ideological persuasion" and "sentiment evocation," the latter of which refers to a kind of feeling or sensibility that is somewhat different from a reasoned thought or idea.

[134] Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society*, 25, Figure 1.3, "Classification of Narratives," concisely summarized this hierarchy of fable, legend, history and myth.

figures; they have no paradigmatic status and thus no "authority" (in Lincoln's technical definition of that term).[135]

By contrast, Lincoln, like Eliade, positions myth as far and away the most powerful and socially influential sort of narrative or social discourse—though he does so on somewhat different (but not incompatible) grounds. In Lincoln's view, myth, just like history, expresses truth-claims that audiences regard as credible; but where plain history evokes no sentiment, myth stirs people. Instead of a simple nod that they have been treated to an accurate historical account, myth "moves" people. Myth invokes a chill, a lump in one's throat or a sensation of excitement, loyalty, chauvinism or perhaps indignation and outrage that unadorned history does not. What audiences encounter in historical narratives is accepted as correct; but what they encounter in mythical narratives "has the status of paradigmatic truth,"[136] and is therefore opinion-changing and life-altering. Accordingly, in Lincoln's concerted thrust, unlike mere history, myth has "authority" insofar as it "effectively mobilizes a social grouping."[137] In other words, if a pre-Columbian Oaxacan audience encountering a Monte Albán narrative visual display is simply informed about past or present leaders and events, those reliefs are at that point, in Lincoln's rubric, merely *historical narratives*. But for audiences that are inspired, overcome either with enthusiasm, emotion or maybe resentment, those same narrative compositions qualify as *mythical narratives*. And only in those sentiment-inducing cases, will Monte Albán audiences be spurred to change their loyalties and lifestyles.

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[135] Of course, it is possible that the 18 "illustrious figures" on Calzada de la República do "evoke sentiment" among better informed audiences than me, in which case they do meet Lincoln's criterion of mythical (not just historical) figures. In any case, even from my limited perspective, notably differently is the response to the statue of Emiliano Zapata, not part of the set of 18 but of a similar style and scale, located just a few block away in a traffic circle at Blvd. Eduardo Vasconcelos and Curtidurías. The Zapata statue attracts far more attention than the others and periodically becomes the focus, inspiration and backdrop for some sort of social protest; in those occasions, the Zapata statue does "engender sentiment," and thus, by Lincoln's criteria, is transformed from historical to mythical.

[136] Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society*, 24.

[137] Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society*, 24.

Later I will link Lincoln's notion of "evoking sentiment" with my notion of "ritual-architectural allurement." But for now I end these general background reflections by noting that Bruce Lincoln's approach to discourse and myth has important ramifications for our consideration of the commemoration of sacred history (priority II-B) at Monte Albán that pull in two quite different directions.

On the one hand, Lincoln's critical perspective engenders a deep skepticism about how much we can really learn about religious life and priorities in Monte Albán from a focus on its public narrative displays. That is to say, his emphasis on the crucial role of audiences' recalcitrant and unruly receptions of various sorts of narrative discourses serves as a cautionary warning against simply conflating the predetermined (or intended) messages of elite-sponsored works of art and the unpredicted responses of non-elites to those works. Unquestionably, the discrepancies between messages sent and messages received are enormous. And, though Urcid is not uninterested in the audiences and varied responses to Monte Albán's visual displays,[138] his contextual approach, as we'll see, leads him in most cases to persuasive hypotheses about "the primary context" and "intended meaning" of those displays. Ascertaining the creative but unschooled responses of Oaxacan commoners, who apparently had little or no understanding of Zapotec writing, is, however, a no-less-important but far more difficult proposition. Consequently, while I complained throughout the previous chapter about the untoward idealization and reification of a Zapotec conceptions of divinity that were, in all likelihood, never stable and contradiction-free, the too-simple equation of the calculated (or intended) meanings of Monte Albán's public iconography and the empirical (or unintended) responses of pre-

[138] It is important to note that Urcid, to his credit, does, on occasion, explicitly do entertain the question "Who could be the audience to whom the pictorial narratives [i.e., the Danzante carvings on Building L-sub] were directed?" Javier Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra: el papel de la narrativas pictóricas en el desarrollo tempano de Monte Albán (500 a.C.-200 d.C.)," in *Monte Albán en la encrucijada regional y disciplinaria, Memoria de la Quinta Mesa Redonda de Monte Albán*, eds. Nelly M. Robles Garciá y Angel Iván Rivera Guzmán (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2011), 224.

Columbian audiences leads us to an equally untoward idealization. And, rather than a quibble, this is matter of enormous import.[139]

But, on the other hand, instead of diminishing the significance of the public visual displays, Lincoln's analysis actually accentuates their enormous importance as a uniquely revealing resource for understanding what actually mattered and happened in Monte Albán. He begins his analysis of discourse and the construction of society by accentuating the limits of "force," which he defines as "the exercise or threat of physical violence."[140] For Lincoln, the reliance on force or blunt coercion is "always is a stopgap measure, effective in the short run but unworkable over the long haul."[141] Thus Monte Albán elites might, in the short term, have been able to browbeat and control an insubordinate populace via brute intimidation; but, in the 1200-year history of this city, it is, according to Lincoln's analysis, only via the strategic manipulation of discourse—most of all sentiment-evoking mythical narratives—that elites would have been able to maintain social order and their privileged place within it. And in that sense, instead of just highlighting the inherent unreliability of elite-sponsored narrative displays as means of guiding public opinion, Lincoln's view urges us to be even more impressed that the incessant construction, dismantlement and reconstruction of these narrative compositions has to have been

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[139] Regarding the extreme gravity of this observation, note that, where Urcid's *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing* (e.g., 24-25) persuasively demonstrates the truly dire interpretive consequences of his predecessors' failure to recognize that nearly all Monte Albán's stones had been moved from their "primary locations" and thus dislodged from the original narrative compositions of which they were a part, a failure to acknowledge the inevitable discrepancies between "intended meanings" and "received meanings" has equally dire consequences for our empirical understanding of pre-Columbian Monte Albán. To be sure, contemporary contexts in which we can actually observe and interview people concerning their reactions to elaborately choreographed religio-political ceremonials and works of art always reveal indifferent, skeptical and cynical responses as well as affirmingly enthusiastic ones. No one imagines that every advertisement, whether of ideas or material goods, eventuates in a successful sale; even the best staged religio-political propaganda is only partially effective. And with respect to antagonistic rather that affirming responses to public art and ritual, we should not forget for a moment that perhaps every one of Monte Albán's elaborate visual narrative displays was eventually torn down and discarded.

[140] Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society*, 3.

[141] Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society*, 4.

among the most effective means of holding together an ethnically and religiously diverse urban constituency. The public visual displays—whose successive construction and dismantlement provide a means of writing, and then periodically re-writing, the "sacred history" of Monte Albán—while a very imperfect means of constructing and managing Zapotec society, were also, it seems, among the most highly influential means of doing just that.

II. Specific Oaxacan Background—
Three Prominent Narrative Displays at Monte Albán: The Danzante Wall, the Building J Conquest Slabs, and the South Platform Cornerstones

With this collection of five very different, broadly theoretical touchstones in place, I devote the next three blocks of sub-sections to much more specific background that, for readers not well versed in Monte Albán, introduces three of the city's most high-profile public visual displays: (1) the singularly acclaimed Danzante, or Dancer, carvings, especially those that were originally part of a huge 300-piece display on a basal wall on Building L-sub; (2) the also dubitably labeled "conquest slabs," dozens of which were found on Building J; and (3) the nine inscribed monoliths that were found emplaced as cornerstones on the South Platform. I do not mean to suggest that these celebrated cases—all three of which entail carved stone monoliths situated within monumental constructions in the southern end of the Main Plaza—are the only repositories of the city's foundational narratives; and my subsequent hermeneutical inquiry into the commemoration of sacred history (priority II-B) will not be strictly confined to these three examples. Writing and pictorial representations in elite domestic contexts, most notably the abundant narrative presentations that appear in painted tomb murals, for instance, provide another large collection of broadly sacred historical themes; but I will *not* address these works in any detail until chapter 7 on the ritual-architectural commemoration of the dead (priority II-D).

Nevertheless, then, though only a subset of the relevant data, the three cases I discuss here—each of which, as we'll see, actually entails not one but several different monumental visual displays—are, most definitely, the most conspicuous exemplars. And because such disproportionate attention has been paid to these three sets of civic displays, a focus on them

brings to the table a host of what I consider to be the most noteworthy issues with respect to memorializing sacred history at Monte Albán.

Organizationally, I approach each of these (sets of) visual displays in a roughly parallel three steps. First, in the spirit of the history of ideas, I inventory some of the most prominent older, mainly twentieth-century interpretations of each feature—but with a special, somewhat eccentric, concern for the extent to which these iconographic displays have (or have not) been interpreted by scholars as variously mythical, historical and/or narrative. Second, I turn in each case to the work of Javier Urcid, who guides us to something like a state-of-the-art, frequently very different interpretation of all three; as noted, Urcid imagines that all three cases involve, in their original configurement, "narrative compositions" or "pictographic narratives" that were later dismantled and, in several instances, repurposed (or "revalorized") in creative and improbable ways. Though his work constitutes a fresh starting point for all three instances, predictably in this field, even those Oaxacanists who are largely supportive of Urcid's revisionist views tend to qualify their endorsements in either small or large ways. Thus I look to his intensely detailed work with full awareness that none of these long-debated cases can be considered settled; all three remain controversial. And third, following those initial two steps—which require the summation of lots of basic information that is likely new to comparative religionists, but again perhaps tedious to Oaxacan specialists—I pave the way to the more interpretively venturous and assertive final portion of the chapter by considering each of the three visual displays in light of the five general theoretical touchstones established in the previous sections.

That crosschecking of Monte Albán specifics against broadly comparative terms like "mythicized history," "emplotment," "followability," "indigenous memory" and "sentiment-evoking discourse" will generate numerous issues about the variously mythic, historical and narrative quality of each visual display—but adduce very little in the way of firm conclusions or hypotheses. Consequently, keep in mind that these next sections too are preparatory, and therefore more concerned to broaden the range of interpretative options than to argue strongly for any of them. All this is, as noted, background to the subsequent, more opinionated and strictly

hermeneutical investigation of the ritual-architectural commemoration of sacred history, priority II-B.

A. The "Danzantes" as Sacred History: Considering and Reconsidering Monte Albán's First, Foremost and Most Infamous Narrative Display

In any discussion of Monte Albán's public visual displays, the so-termed Mura de los Danzantes, or Wall of the Dancers, wins every superlative.[142] This is the largest, the earliest, the most heavily studied, the most evocative of amateur and professional theorizing, and thus the most frequently misrepresented and still most controversial of any element at the site.[143] Some 300 of these signature carved stones or "orthostats" (the term favored by Javier Urcid) make up a very large share of the site's total extant epigraphic oeuvre;[144] and dozens of these distinctive carved slabs are found reused either as construction members or as visual displays in countless

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[142] Note that while virtually all Oaxacanist investigators, beginning even with Leopoldo Batres, express their discontent with the colloquial designation of these carved figures as "Danzantes" or "Dancers," and thus many of them are adamant in their avoidance of those terms, I continue to find those "folk terms" serviceable in directing attention to these orthostats.

[143] Regarding the crowded history of the discovery and on-site investigation of the Monte Albán Danzantes, John F. Scott, *The Danzantes of Monte Albán*, Studies in Pre-Columbian Art & Archaeology, no. 19 (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University, 1978), pt. I, 21-29, provides the to-that-point fullest recounting of the succession of explorers to encounter them. Largely informed by Scott's work, Heather S. Orr, "Danzantes Building L at Monte Albán," Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies, Inc. (FAMSI) website, (2002), 14-17, also has an extended account the history of the investigation of the Danzantes. Note, however, that the section on the history of discovery of the engraved monoliths provided in Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 174-77, by far supersedes those earlier accounts.

[144] I will note later that where Flannery and Marcus estimate the Danzantes at 80% of Monte Albán's total iconographic oeuvre, Urcid's more rigorous counting puts that number at 50%. Regarding the term "orthostat," an upright stone or slab forming part of a structure or set in the ground, was perhaps first applied to the Danzantes by Donald Robertson, "An Analysis of Monte Albán II Architecture," Topic 28 in *The Cloud People: Divergent Evolution of the Zapotec and Mixtec Civilizations*, eds. Kent V. Flannery and Joyce Marcus (New York; Academic Press, 1983), 105-6.

buildings throughout the Main Plaza.[145] Every visitor from the colonial era to the present—indeed, in all likelihood, every pre-Columbian traveler to the mountain capital from the era of its founding until its collapse—leaves Monte Albán more deeply impressed, and perhaps puzzled, by the haunting Danzantes than any other feature of the city. Only the spectacular siting of the city on a mountaintop can rival these carvings as something that aficionados of Mesoamerican ruins are liable to say that they have never seen at any other site.

The Danzante slabs provide, therefore, the very quintessence of "superabundant and autonomy works of art," destined to express not just one stable significance, but rather to participate in a succession of meanings wider, wilder and weirder than their creators could possibly have anticipated.[146] Never could the Danibaan phase (500-300 BC) Oaxacan designers of the Danzante carvings have imagined that their handiwork would be engendering such controversy and debate 2500 years after the carvings left their workshops. The somewhat rough hewn Danzantes enjoy (or endure), as Urcid will help us to appreciate, a remarkably complicated succession of pre-Columbian uses and reuses, some thoughtfully strategic and others uncaringly expedient; without question, no other objects are recycled within the site in such frequent, sometimes strategic and sometimes random ways. And then, long after the city's demise—once the Danzante orthostats are transformed into scholarly data—the same carved reliefs play leading, albeit very different, roles in virtually every hypothesized account of the city's history.

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[145] In a helpful section entitled "Uses of the Danzantes," Scott, *The Danzantes of Monte Albán*, pt. I, 30-41, enumerates in greater detail ideas about the reuse, relocation or what I term "revalorization" of these carved slabs and what Urcid terms "secondary" locations for the Danzantes. Scott describes their reuse: (1) elsewhere within the Building L complex during Period I; (2) on Mound J during Period II, where almost 60 of them are relocated; and (3) during the Period III Classic era, at several places around the Main Plaza, including: (a) Mound M, (b) System IV, especially Mound K, (c) the lower portions of the North Platform, (d) within the group around the Vértice Geodésico, (e) the South Platform, (f) Mounds G, H and I located in the center of the plaza, (g) the large Ball Court, (h) the Palace just to the south of Mound P, and (i) Mound Q. In many of those instances, the Danzantes stones were carefully positioned as cornerstones, centers of walls and stairways, or the bases of buildings in ways that prominently display their images; and in other instances they are used merely as construction stones in ways that ignore or hide their images.

[146] Regarding the "superabundance and autonomy" of art and architecture, see Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, vol. I, chap. 2.

These rigid monoliths, much too conspicuous for any commentator to ignore, are, ironically, perhaps Monte Albán's most elastic and flexible feature. No other component of the site better supports the sometimes-cynical notion that archaeological artifacts have the quality of Rorschach inkblots to which observers can assign whatever meaning occurs to them.

In any case, keeping in mind the question of if and how the Danzantes played a role in the commemoration of sacred history (priority II-B), consider first, the older history of investigation and interpretation. The initial spray of offhand speculations, based simply on their quizzical appearance, leads through the popular posit that they represent dancers and swimmers, through more studied conjecture in the 1940s and 1950s about Olmec interventions in Oaxaca to, by the 1960s, a prevailing assessment of the Danzantes as a kind of showcase of tortured captives who dared to contest the authority of Monte Albán. And while the great majority of those views are predicated on the assumption the craved figures depict human beings, suggestions that the anthropomorphic images are components of something like a mythical or mythico-historic narrative are much less well developed. Second, I review Urcid's stunningly different interpretation wherein the figures are reinterpreted as self-sacrificing protagonists in a kind of authorizing foundation narrative. And third, I consider ways in which ideas borrowed from Eliade, Ricoeur, Florescano and Lincoln can bring some nuance to Urcid's claim that the Danzantes were invariably situated within "pictorial narratives." Expect, however, no strong conclusions or hypotheses in these next few sub-sections.

1. Earlier Interpretations of the Danzantes: A Protean Resource for Every Twentieth-Century Narrative (Re)construction of Monte Albán

Speculation on the meanings of the enigmatic Danzante figures is commensurate with explorations of the wider site, and thus every generation of explorers presents opinions that mesh with their broader understandings—or perhaps misunderstandings—of Monte Albán and the peoples who built it. By way of a brief overview of early ideas on the site's most distinctive and conspicuous monoliths, consider in turn (a) predictably diverse opinions emerging in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, (b) the surprisingly atypical assessments of Alfonso Caso, and (c) the emergence in the 1960s of a seeming consensus that the oddly posed Danzantes

are tortured captives displayed publicly in order to intimidate pre-Columbian audiences into compliance with the military regime that controlled to Oaxacan capital.

a. Nineteenth and Early Twentieth-Century Views of the Danzantes: From Dupaix to Holmes Batres and Villagra

Essentially all early accounts of visits to the faintly understood ruins of Monte Albán pay special attention to that southwest portion of the Main Plaza where one encounters the fullest abundance of the so-termed Danzante carvings. When, in the late eighteenth century, for instance, amateur explorers and treasure-hunters, known only by the diggings they leave, take an interest in the fully overgrown and abandoned Monte Albán, they tunnel through the southeast corner of the "Temple of the Dancing Figures," later designated Buildings L-sub and L, which leads them to the revered façade;[147] and no subsequent investigator fails to recount his encounter with these distinctive carved stones. In 1806, Guillermo Dupaix, in the first written account of Monte Albán, describes reopening that tunnel and thereby exposing five of the monoliths that remained in their original positions in the bottom row of the six-tiered Danzante Wall. Not inconsistent with later supposals that the Danzantes depicted some sort of subordinated human beings, Dupaix describes those carved figures, which appear in the oft-reproduced drawings of his illustrator Luciano Castañeda, as "courtiers in mourning."[148] Juan B. Carriedo's 1840 description of Monte Albán alludes to the same tunnel and some of the same monoliths located by Dupaix; but, taking special note of their distinctive headwear, Carriedo describes them as

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[147] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 174-76, comments on this apparently late eighteenth-century tunnel, and then on the ways in which subsequent explorers, such as Dupaix and Holmes, misinterpret that tunnel as a pre-Columbian constructive element rather than a modern intrusion.

[148] *Expediciones Acerca de los Antiguos Monumentos de la Nueva España (1805-1808), por Guillermo Dupaix,* editado por José Alcina Franch, Colereión Chimalistac de libros y documentos acerca de la Nueva España, núm. 27 (Madrid: Ediciones José Porrúa Turanzas, 1969), 108-10; discussed by Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 163, 174. Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 283, n.2, has helpful comments on the frequently confusing fact that "there are several editions of Dupaix's account and they all contain different versions of the text and accompanying illustrations.

"characters with royal tiaras."[149] And, during a short visit in 1895, William Henry Holmes, also equipped with Dupaix's description, investigates what was subsequently labeled Buildings L-sub and- L and, like others impressed by the uniqueness of the Danzantes, commented on the "figures of men in very low, crude relief," which were executed in a style of work "decidedly unlike anything that I have seen elsewhere."[150] Holmes's commentary on the Danzantes (not a term he uses) is, however, confined to one paragraph and a sketch of two of their heads.[151]

In 1902, Leopoldo Batres, aware of Dupaix's earlier work in this portion of the site as well as that nearly a hundred years later by Fernando Sologuren and Francisco Belmar, does considerably more extensive excavations in the southwest corner of the Main Plaza where most of the Danzantes were found.[152] Equipped with a large team, Batres had "the thick woods at

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[149] Juan B. Carriedo, *Descripción de una Fortaleza Zapoteca, Oaxaca*, Manuscrito en cuartillas con 8 fojas y la portada, Atlas ron 10 láminas, Biblioteca Nacional de México, 1840; discussed by Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 163, 174.

[150] William Henry Holmes, *Archaeological Studies Among the Ancient Cities of Mexico*, publication 16, Anthropological Series, vol. 1, no. 1 (Chicago: Field Columbia Museum, 1895, 1897), pt. II, 223-24. Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 174-76, discusses Holmes and says he that, like Dupaix, was under the false impression a tunnel into Building L was a constructive element rather than an explorer's intrusion; Holmes, ibid., 220, does, however, opine, unlike Dupaix, that the tunnels into buildings atop the South Platform (i.e., Mounds SE and III) were made by "explorers and treasure hunters."

[151] Holmes, *Archaeological Studies Among the Ancient Cities of Mexico*, pt. II, 223, fig. 71, labeled "Colossal Heads in Low Relief." Also, by the way, among nineteenth-century explorers, it is disappointing that French expeditionary Désire Charnay, who apparently visited Monte Albán as early as 1858 and as late as 1882, and who took some the most significant early photos of the Mitla ruins, leaves us neither descriptions nor photographs of the Danzantes, which he is certain to have encountered. See Désiré Charnay, *The Ancient Cities of the New World, Being Voyages and Explorations in Mexico and Central America from 1857-1882*, translated by J. Gonino and Helen S. Conant (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1887), chap. 24, concerning his travels in Oaxaca, including Monte Albán, which he ascribed, as he had ruins from Tula to Copán, to a super-race of "Toltecs." Ibid., 499. Also regarding Charnay's encounters with Monte Albán, see Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 288.

[152] Broadly relevant to the present discussion of "sacred history," Batres, *Explorations of Mount Albán*, 20 wrote: "The myths of the prehistoric peoples of America constitute the most extensive field of research belonging to comparative mythology. It is extensive because so many elements

Monte Albán cut down" and cleaned much of Building L, thereby exposing a far larger portion of the original Danzante Wall on the façade of Building L-sub, as well as discovering more of the monoliths nearby.[153] Batres's excavations reveal the lower four of six original rows of figures on the initial iteration of the famous façade, all of which had been deliberately and completely covered over by the Pitao phase (350-550 BCE) or Early Classic era.[154] And though Batres's depictions of those orthostats—which he was observing in their original positions—are in some respects flawed, it is on the basis of his drawings that Urcid is able to reassemble about two-thirds of the 300-piece façade.[155] In that respect Batres's contribution is momentous. But aside from somewhat undeserved connections to the misnomers "Danzantes" and "Nadadores" (Dancers and Swimmers), the latter an appellation assigned to the prone figures that links them to apocryphal legends about an ancient lake that covered the Valley of Oaxaca,[156] Batres is not associated with any specific interpretations of the carvings' significance.[157] Also hesitant to

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are found in the formation of their mythologies, of which we know so little. Especially this is true of the Zapotecas, sunk in the darkest history of the ancient American peoples."

[153] See Batres, *Exploraciones de Monte Albán*, 28-31, or, in English translation, in Leopoldo Batres, *Explorations of Mount Albán, Oaxaca, Mexico*, 28-31, for brief comments on his exploration of the Danzante building. Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 176-77, explains in detail the extent of Batres's excavations and precisely which Danzantes he located.

[154] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 176, gives an explanation why Batres succeeded in uncovering the bottom four rows of the Danzante Wall but failed to discover the top two rows.

[155] Batres's sketches of the Danzante Wall, which record some 18 different carved stones, appear in Batres, *Exploraciones de Monte Albán*, plate no. 5, figs. 1-18, or, in English translation, in Batres, *Explorations of Mount Albán, Oaxaca, Mexico*, plate no. 5, figs. 1-18. Note, however, that recent facsimile editions of Batres's 1902 work, both in Spanish and English (e.g., published by Forgotten Books, Nabu Public Domain Reprints, and Kessinger Legacy Reprints) are missing all but one of these figures. Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 178-79, discusses Batres's materials on the Danzantes and, in that article, reproduces Batres's most important images.

[156] Though routinely associated with the "Dancers" and "Swimmers" designations, Batres, *Exploraciones de Monte Albán*, 28, explains that those labels, which he too never considered accurate, were used by the turn-of-the-century residents of the area; he simply repeated them.

[157] Though Batres's efforts to interpret the Danzantes are largely expendable, his shipoing of some of them to the National Museum is more consequential. In that regard, Batres, *Explorations of Mount Albán*, 32-33, describes his decision to transport "the most important monuments discovered" to the National Museum in Mexico City "except the large stone with the

offer much in the way of interpretative speculations, but nonetheless worthy of note, is Constantine Rickards who publishes among the earliest photos of a Danzante in 1910 with a caption inspired to the local tendency to attribute to Aztecs any otherwise unidentifiable features that read, "The Stone of the big Aztec."[158]

More willing to opine on the intent of the carvings, Agustín Villagra, in the context of a report to the International Congress on Americanists in Mexico City in 1939, offers what has been termed "the first serious analysis of the meaning of the Danzantes."[159] Among the few to entertain seriously the prospect that the horizontal figures were indeed swimmers who had demonstrated their natatorial prowess in an ancient Valley of Oaxaca lake,[160] Villagra eventually

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seated tiger carved on it. I left there [at Monte Albán] also three other stones with inscriptions near a group of dancers, and two others with dancing figures near those of the inscriptions. Besides all these there were others incrusted in the walls [i.e., the Danzante stones that remain in their original positions on the façade of Building L-sub] which, forming a square, are found on the southern side of the basement on which the buildings were discovered."

[158] Constantine George Rickards, *The Ruins of Mexico* (London: H.E. Shrimpton, 1910), photo following p. 100. Rickards, ibid., 106, notes that "The natives [of Oaxaca] call all ancient men Aztecs, when they cannot distinguish them by their real names."

[159] Scott, *The Danzantes of Monte Albán*, 22, commenting on Agustín Villagra, "Los Danzantes: piedras grabadas del Montículo L, Monte Albán, Oaxaca," *XXVII Congreso Internacional de* Americanistas: Actas de la Primera Sesión, Celebrada en la Ciudad de México en 1939, tomo II (México, 1939), 143-58.

[160] Heather S. Orr, "Danzantes Building L at Monte Albán," 15, writes that Agustín Villagra, who made drawings of most of the Danzantes in the 1930s while working in concert with Caso's excavations, "carried out the first serious analysis of the Danzantes and postulated a commemorative function for the sculptures on the basis of their identifying hieroglyphs… [and] Villagra seriously believed that the horizontal Danzantes were swimmers… However, Villagra eventually gave up this interpretation and postulated another, i.e., that Monte Albán art used two different types of representation: one explanatory (with glyphs) and one decorative (those without glyphs)—which would then presume that all of the Danzantes without glyphs had no meaning." See Agustín Villagra, "Los Danzantes: piedras grabas del Montículo L, Monte Albán, Oaxaca," *XXVII Congreso Internacional de Americanista*, tomo II (1939): 143-58. Also note that Ignacio Bernal, "Archaeological Synthesis of Oaxaca" (1965), 794-95, is perhaps the last serious scholar to entertain the widely circulated but geologically untenable proposition that, "Many millennia ago the Valley of Oaxaca was a great lake which gradually dried up." See too Ignacio Bernal, *Monte Albán, Mitla: Official Guide* (Mexico: Edimex, 1958), 1, from which this quote is taken.

rejected that solution in favor of an ingenious theory wherein all of Monte Albán's art, "from its beginning to end, used two types of representation: one explanatory, with accompanying hieroglyphs, and the other decorative, without hieroglyphs."[161] In his form-based evaluation, the key to the arrangement of the abundant figures, some but not all of which are accompanied with glyphs, lay in their orientation with respect to a centerline that crosses the middle of the longest Danzante stone (D-30) on which two supine figures are placed head to head.[162] Villagra's hypothesis that all of the figures on the Danzante Wall, many of which were absent or hidden from his view, are oriented toward this centerline—along with his premise that those without glyphs are merely "decorative"—are not born out by future investigations. But his broader premise that "the Danzantes on the Wall are commemorative, since many have hieroglyphs indicating their names"[163] is a proposition that, as we'll see, does have some traction with Urcid's contentions concerning the identification of specific individuals.

b. Alfonso Caso's Atypical Assessments: Mediating the Oaxacan but non-Zapotec Status of the Danzante Style

Predictably, Alfonso Caso has much more extensive comments on the Danzantes. But, while Caso is by far Urcid's most reliable precedent on many aspects of Zapotec hieroglyphic writing and calendrics, Caso's ideas about the Danzante figures are, surprisingly enough, rather more curious and less lasting.[164] From the outset, certain that these carvings belong to the very

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[161] Scott, *The Danzantes of Monte Albán*, 24, offers this summary of Villagra, "Los Danzantes: piedras grabadas del Montículo L, Monte Albán, Oaxaca," 158, and assesses it as "a two-fold division [that] is valuable to make." Nevertheless, Scott argues that for Villagra "to interpret the Swimmers, and all other Danzantes without glyphs, as merely decorative assigns too unimportant a role to art, and neglects the dramatic value of the smaller, groveling figures. In an early civilization, art has a definite meaning to convey, even when writing is simultaneously used." Ibid.

[162] See Scott, *The Danzantes of Monte Albán*, 22-24.

[163] Scott, *The Danzantes of Monte Albán*, 22, offers this summary of Villagra, "Los Danzantes: piedras grabadas del Montículo L, Monte Albán, Oaxaca," 155, 158.

[164] Regarding Caso's comments on the Danzantes and Building L in his respective seasonal reports on Monte Albán excavations, see: (1) Alfonso Caso, "Las exploraciones en Monte

earliest era of the city and never remotely impressed by intimations that they represent "dancers" or "swimmers,"[165] Caso, by the 1920s, came to the emphatic, if unlikely, conclusion that the Danzante carvings were of "a completely different style" from the other Zapotec inscriptions in the area;[166] and thus, troublingly, he declined even to mention them in his pathbreaking *Las*

Albán: Temporada 1934-1935" (México, D.F.: Instituto Panamericano de Geografía e Historia, 1935), reprinted in Alfonso Caso, *Obras: El México Antiguo: Mixtecas y Zapotecas*, vol. 2 (México, D.F.: El Colegio Nacional, 2002), 267-70; (2) Alfonso Caso, *Exploraciones en Oaxaca; quinta y sexta temporadas 1936-1937*, publicación núm. 34, Instituto Panamericano de Geografía e Historia (Tacubaya, D.F., México: Impreso en la Editorial "Cvltvra," 1938), reprinted in Alfonso Caso, *Obras: El México Antiguo: Mixtecas y Zapotecas*, vol. 3 (México: El Colegio Nacional, 2002), 5-7, 94; and (3) Alfonso Caso, "Resumen del informe de las exploraciones en Oaxaca, durante la 7a y 8a Temporadas 1937-1938 y 1938-1939," *Vigesimoséptimo Congreso Internacional de Americanistas*, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, SEP, tomo II (México, 1939), reprinted in Alfonso Caso, *Obras: El México Antiguo: Mixtecas y Zapotecas*, vol. 1 (México: El Colegio Nacional, 2002), 167-68, following p. 299, pls. 1 and 2. For a more thorough of tracking Caso's shifting ideas about the Danzantes and his eventual linkage of them to supposed Olmec influences, see 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," especially a sub-section on "Revising the Story of Early Monte Albán: Danzante Anomalies and Intimations of a non-Zapotec, non-Mixtec Third Party." Note, however, my opinion that Caso's narrative is the least "followable" of the seven that I address in *Narrating Monte Albán* (see chap. 1, the sub-section entitled "The Content of Caso's Story of Monte Albán: Four Unresolved Issues of Major Import") is to a significant degree related to Caso's lack of the sort of straightforward interpretation of the Danzantes that would give his story a clear and strong beginning, which it does not have.

[165] Actually, with respect to the history of ideas about Danzantes, it may be worth passing note that in a popular English-language piece—Alfonso Caso, "Monte Albán: An Archeological Zone of World-Wide Renown;" in *Mexican Art and Life*, no. 4 (October 1938): 307-311; reprinted in Alfonso Caso, *Obras: El México Antiguo: Mixtecas y Zapotecas*, vol. 1 (México: El Colegio Nacional, 2002), 143-152—Caso supposedly wrote, "those stone blocks carved in the semblance of human figures, commonly called 'Dancers' because they express movement with such perfect skill that one at once realizes that they *are* dancers, their outline is so pure and so full of life, and at the same time so natural, that in this sense they excel [sic] the cleverest creations of the Mayas and Aztecs." Ibid., *Obra* version, vol. I, 145. But the effusive praise of all things Zapotec in that article is so atypical of Caso's other writing, one has to doubt whether these are, in fact, his words or those of an editor-translator.

[166] Caso, "Las exploraciones en Monte Albán: Temporada 1931-1932" (México, D.F.: Instituto Panamericano de Geografía e Historia, 1932), publicación núm. 7; reprinted in Alfonso Caso, *Obras: El México Antiguo: Mixtecas y Zapotecas*, vol. 2 (México, D.F: El Colegio Nacional, 2002), 183; my translation.

esteles zapotecas (1928), which was, in principle, an attempt to locate, classify and interpret every one of the extant carved inscriptions from Monte Albán and associated sites.[167] Ascribing the Danzantes to outsiders was, then, a huge, if understated, qualification to Caso's axiomatic assertion that "Monte Albán was a Zapotec city."[168] In his official report on the 1931-1932 season, Caso hedged on the original intent of the famously distorted figures and avoided militaristic connotations in favor of suggestions that they may depict buffoons or jesters, perhaps indigenous "magnates," or maybe sick persons who had come to Monte Albán is search of a Lourdes-like cure.[169] Nonetheless, Caso continued to argue not only that these carved slabs had been salvaged from some older building, but also the unlikely view that they were the work of *other-than*-Zapotecs.[170] In his 1932 words, "Since [the Danzante carvings] do not represent the

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[167] Caso, *Las esteles zapotecas*. Though presumably based on his (erroneous) view that the Danzantes were not Zapotec, it is nonetheless curious that Caso's *Las esteles zapotecas* (1928), which included extensive comments on the connections between Zapotec writing and that of the geographically distant Mayas and Aztecs, has absolutely nothing to say about the infamous Danzante carvings, some of which were found literally leaning against the Monte Albán stelae with which that book is principally concerned. Caso, "Calendario y escritura de las antiguas culturas de Monte Albán," 113-144, likewise avoids interpretation of the meaning of the Danzantes and focuses instead on the so-termed "conquest slabs" of Building J.

[168] Caso, *Las esteles zapotecas*; *Obras* reprint, vol. 2, 51; my translation.

[169] Caso, "Las exploraciones en Monte Albán: Temporada 1931-1932;" *Obras* reprint, vol. 2, 184. That seasonal report forms the basis for the more popular Alfonso Caso, "Monte Albán, Richest Archaeological Find in America," *National Geographic Magazine* vol. LXII (October 1932), 487-512, reprinted in Alfonso Caso, *Obras: El México Antiguo: Mixtecas y Zapotecas*, vol. 1 (México, D.F: El Colegio Nacional, 2002), 49-84, which address the Danzantes with similar tentativeness but greater narrative fullness and flair: "Who were the authors of these writings [i.e., the glyphs on the Danzante slabs], and why did they prefer to show cripples in their sculptured stones?… Was it the intent to ridicule certain enemies? Or should we see in these sculptures a representation of the sick who came to the temple in which there was a god who performed miraculous cures? Could Monte Albán have been at one time a kind of Lourdes?" Ibid., 492-493 or *Obras* reprint, vol. 1, 57.

[170] Caso, "Las exploraciones en Monte Albán: Temporada 1931-1932;" *Obras* reprint, vol. 2, 184.

characteristics of Zapotec sculpture, I do not believe that they belong to the same civilization that constructed the Great [South] Platform."[171]

By his report on the fifth and sixth excavation seasons (1936-1937), during which Caso's team discovered 30 new Danzante sculptures and completed the reconstruction of Building L, he had begun to second-guess his earlier view that these carvings and the writing on them were of an early cultural origin, very different from that of the later Zapotecs.[172] And thus, seemingly more in dialogue with himself than anyone else, Caso then wrote:

> "The discovery of Zapotec hieroglyphics [in 1936], together with the figures of [30 more] Danzantes, is a fundamental fact that demonstrates the unity of culture during the first epochs of Monte Albán and belies the theories that held the absolute difference between the civilization of these dancers and the civilization called Zapotec."[173]

Eventually, in the early 1940s, Caso, in an ever-disputed solution that accentuated a distinctive physiognomy that seemed to resemble that of the colossal heads of the Gulf Coast region, attributed the peculiar style of the Danzantes to extensive interactions with an Olmec "mother culture."[174] Though always historically suspect, by that Olmec attribution, the purportedly

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[171] Caso, "Monte Albán, Richest Archaeological Find in America," *National Geographic* original, 492 or *Obras* reprint, vol. 1, 57. Note also that the sub-section entitled "Exploración en el montícuos L o de las Danzantes" in Caso, "Las exploraciones en Monte Albán: Temporada 1934-1935," *Obras* reprint, vol. 2, 267-70, provides basic information about the excavations of Building L, but expresses no opinion concerning the meaning or significance of the Danzante figures.

[172] Caso, *Exploraciones en Oaxaca; quinta y sexta temporadas 1936-1937*, *Obras* reprint, vol. 3, 1-143. Throughout, my citations to this work refer to the *Obras* reprint version; for instance, comments on work in the area of the Temples of the Danzantes during season 5 (1936), appears in the *Obras* reprint, vol. 3, 5-7.

[173] Caso, *Exploraciones en Oaxaca; quinta y sexta temporadas 1936-1937*, *Obras* reprint, vol. 3, 7; my translation.

[174] Regarding his ideas about an Olmec "mother culture," see Alfonso Caso, "Definición y extensión del complejo 'Olmeca,'" in *Mayas y Olmecas: segunda Reunión de mesa redonda sobre problemas antropológicos de México y Centro América* (México, D.F: Talleres de la Editorial Stylo, 1942), 42-46. Also see Alfonso Caso, "Existió un imperio olmeca?" in *Memoria del Colegio Nacional* vol. 5, no. 3 (1965): 11-60. Regarding the seemingly distinctive physiognomy of the Danzante figures, which was very influential in connecting them to the

foreign-inspired figures were then transformed from one of Caso's largest unsolved problems into the most high-profile evidence for his controversial theory about the Olmecs' unique influence across early Mesoamerica, Monte Albán included. And though it might seem to have been rhetorically useful in making his case, Caso does *not* develop the hypothetical corollary that the Danzante Wall was some sort pictographic narrative or "sacred historical" account of Olmec adventuring in Oaxaca.[175]

By the 1960s, when Caso wrote his overviews of Zapotec writing and the calendar and of Oaxacan sculpture and mural painting for the *Handbook of Middle America Indians*, he delivers his final thoughts on the still-puzzling Danzante carvings; but these summaries largely reconfirm rather than alter his views from the 1940s.[176] By this point, Caso was committed to locating all features of Monte Albán within his five-horizon framework and certain that the Danzantes constituted the outstanding attribute of Period I. Still, however, accentuating the extreme disparity between "the Danzante style" and subsequent Zapotec writing and iconography, he conceded that "we are not yet able to identify the people who built up this ancient [Period I] culture."[177] In his opinion, the plethora of two-dimensional Danzante reliefs, which "should be considered not as sculpture but as figures engraved in stone,"[178] can be divided into two chronologically successive types. The "first danzante type" does not depict the smaller toes and very seldom the big toe; fingers likewise are sometimes not apparent though the thumb always

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Olmecs, note that many popular works describe the carved figures as "negroid"—e.g., Frances Toor, *Frances Toor's Guide to Mexico*, 2nd edition (Mexico City: n.s., 1934), 166-167; and Leone and Alice-Leone Moats, *Off to Mexico* (New York and London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935), 117—but I do not find that term in Caso's own work.

[175] See also his remarks on the Danzantes in Caso, "Calendario y escritura de las antiguas culturas de Monte Albán," 17-19.

[176] 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), 931-47; and, in the same volume of the *HMAI*, Alfonso Caso, "Sculpture and Mural Painting of Oaxaca," 849-70.

[177] Caso, "Sculpture and Mural Painting of Oaxaca," 849.

[178] Caso, "Sculpture and Mural Painting of Oaxaca," 849.

is; and, more notably, "the figures have more motion than those of the second type and the postures have more variety."[179] The "second danzante type," which he considers "later than, or evolved from, the first," is engraved more deeply and better chiseled at the edges; and, among several physiognomic differences, the figures are more slender, the limbs longer and the facial features are marked by less prominent lips and more tattooing.[180] More significantly, though, Caso restates his controversial view that,

> "Without doubt [the danzante style] has close connections with the Olmec style of La Venta and Tres Zapotes, but it is still an individual and characteristic style which should not be confused with the southern style of Veracruz and Tabasco."[181]

In short, Caso perseveres with a strategic compromise wherein the anomalous Danzante style is a uniquely Oaxacan creation, but one that owes a crucial debt to the Olmec influences.

c. The Emergence of a Prevailing Consensus: Resigned and Revisionist Assessments of the Danzantes as Tortured Captives

Where Caso's oft-repeated insistence on the Olmecoid character of the Danzantes—a theory predicated on decisive but largely cooperative and non-violent interactions between Oaxacans and outsiders—always elicited a tepid response, it was followed by more general agreement about the essentially militaristic disposition of early Monte Albán. In general agreement with Caso, Ignacio Bernal, for instance, mitigated his colleague's claims about the "mother culture" status of the Olmec interlopers, but also attributed the seeming atypicality of the Danzante facial features to the "cultural fusion" between Oaxacans and Olmecs, a theme that,

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[179] Caso, "Sculpture and Mural Painting of Oaxaca," 851.

[180] Caso, "Sculpture and Mural Painting of Oaxaca," 853-54.

[181] Caso, "Sculpture and Mural Painting of Oaxaca," 854-55. Likewise, Caso, "Zapotec Writing and Calendar," continues to accentuate "the similarity between the danzante physical type and the Olmec physical type" (ibid., 931), and to postulate that "the Monte Albán I or danzante culture seems more closely connected with Veracruz and Chiapas than with the archaic cultures then flourishing in the valley of Mexico" (ibid., 932).

as noted, provides the ideal opening for his narrative (re)construction of Monte Albán.[182] To sustain the broader "emplotment" of his story of the capital, which was taking its final form in the 1950s and 1960s, required Bernal to reecho Caso's careful balance between using the Danzantes as his premier evidence of Monte Albán I's considerable debt to the Olmecs while, at the same time, insisting on the Oaxacans' sturdy autonomy from the wholesale control of any outsiders.[183] Bernal's "cultural fusion" leitmotif, in which the meeting of the two groups is a mutually beneficial symbiosis rather a forcible conquest of either over the other, led him, again like Caso, to minimize any interpretation of the Danzantes that was too fully militaristic.

Consequently, Bernal, only grudgingly it seems, eventually acquiesced to Michael Coe's (1962) much-publicized proposition that, "the Danzantes are nude because they represent captives and are exhibited in the usual Mesoamerican manner of representing unfortunate prisoners."[184] That is to say, reticence notwithstanding, Bernal did finally concede that, as Coe contended, the Danzantes "may be forerunners of the Period II figures [i.e., the "conquest slabs" on Building J], and may represent—though in a different way—a similar idea: war and victory."[185] Actually, however, interpretations of the Danzantes that assess them as commemorations of forcible conflict and victory via combat do not really match Bernal's deeper investments in a historical (re)construction featuring the fortuitous and largely cooperative fusion

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[182] Ignacio Bernal, *The Olmec World*, trans. Doris Heyden and Fernando Horcasitas (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969), 13-14, explains his "intermediate" position regarding the Olmecs' influential but not "mother culture" status; and regarding his extended comments on the much-debated relations between Oaxacans and Olmecs, two areas that he studied in depth, see Bernal, ibid., 152-154, including his opinion that, "The prevailing style of Monte Albán [in Period I], therefore, can be considered a variant of the Olmec and may be called the 'dancing figure style,' since the typical motif is to be found not only in stone but in clay and minor objects." Ibid., 167.

[183] For a summary of Bernal's opinions on the Olmec-Oaxaca interactions, see Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, chap. 2, the sub-section entitled, "Period I: The Early Ascent of Monte Albán: Indigenous Oaxacan Founders and Olmecoid Influences."

[184] Michael D. Coe, *Mexico* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1962), 95-96.

[185] Bernal, *The Olmec World*, 154-55, summarizing Coe, *Mexico*, 95-96.

of Oaxacan and Olmec interests; and thus Bernal tacit acceptance of that militaristic assessment left him with a problem that was never resolved.[186]

In any case, Coe's strongly militaristic reading of the Danzante imagery, which was likely influenced by his deep acquaintance with Maya materials, is routinely cited as the turning point that wins the day for the next cluster of much more explicitly politicized (re)constructions of Monte Albán.[187] In Coe's frequently quoted assessment,

> "The distorted pose of the limbs, the open mouth and closed eyes indicate that these are corpses, undoubtedly chiefs or kings slain by the earlier rulers of Monte Albán. In many individuals, the genitals are clearly delineated, usually the stigma laid on captives in Mesoamerica where nudity was considered scandalous. Furthermore, there are cases of sexual mutilation depicted on some Danzantes, blood streaming in flowery pattern from the severed part. To corroborate such violence, one Danzante is nothing more than a severed head."[188]

Again in this highly influential proposal the Danzante carvings are imagined as identifiable, albeit deceased, human beings—"undoubtedly chiefs or kings"—who, instead of positioned in the midst of any activity or any broader narrative, are arranged as a gallery of individualized but formulaic portraits. Nevertheless, even when interpreted as a largely static and interchangeable array of tortured and humiliated victims, the Danzante Wall could, with a little extra molding and shaping, be appropriated as perhaps the most vividly exemplary component in numerous warfare-featuring narrative (re)constructions of Monte Albán.

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[186] Avoiding the militaristic overtones to which he latter acquiesced, Bernal, *Monte Albán, Mitla: Official Guide*, 13, explains that Building L, in its earliest iteration, "consisted of a great talus decorated with rows of carved figures: a human being in a strange attitude was incised on each slab and it is to this strange attitude that the figures owe their name, the 'Dancers' [or Danzantes]."

[187] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 163-64, assembles numerous interpretations of the Danzantes (most of which I address here) that generally affirm Coe's impression of them as "dead captives."

[188] Coe, *Mexico*, 95-96. Noteworthy given their very different interpretations of the Danzante reliefs is the sidebar observation that Michael Coe was Javier Urcid's doctoral dissertation advisor at Yale, a work that latter appeared as *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*.

When in 1978, for example, Richard Blanton formulates his elaborate theory of Monte Albán as "a disembedded capital," he has none of Bernal's ambivalence about endorsing Michael Coe's macabre assessment of the Danzantes—but then reshapes it to his more specific explanatory purposes.[189] For Blanton, Monte Albán's Period Early I carved monuments, including but not limited to the Danzantes, were different from those of other contemporaneous (as well as earlier and later) Oaxaca sites insofar as they were "purely military in theme," and thus entirely absent of allusions to ritual or religion.[190] In Blanton's view, "the massive public display of what are likely to have been war captives" resembled earlier Oaxacan utilizations of this kind of "militaristic communication medium in carved stone;"[191] but the Building L-sub façade was innovative in executing that threatening ploy on an unprecedented scale.[192] Moreover and more interestingly, just as the general conception of Monte Albán was, in his view, atypical in its avoidance of any religious point of view that might alienate elements of the regional alliance, Blanton contends that the Danzante gallery—which he repeatedly terms a "military showcase" or "trophy-case"[193]—was also atypical in its complete avoidance of any of the religious, mythological or cosmological themes that grace most other Mesoamerican and

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[189] Blanton, *Monte Albán*, 35, quotes Coe's assessment of the Danzantes; and the Coe quote is repeated also in Richard E. Blanton, Stephen A. Kowalewski, Gary M. Feinman and Jill Appel, *Ancient Mesoamerica: A Comparison of Change in Three Regions* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 69-70; and Richard E. Blanton, Gary M. Feinman, Stephen A. Kowalewski and Linda M. Nicholas, *Ancient Oaxaca: The Monte Albán State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 62. For a summary of Blanton's assessment of the Danzante reliefs in the context of his wider (re)construction narrative, see Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, chap. 4, the sub-section entitled, "Monte Albán as a 'Military Showcase' and 'Frightening Display of Terror Tactics': A Familiar Argument."

[190] Blanton, *Monte Albán*, 39.

[191] Blanton et al, *Ancient Oaxaca*, 62.

[192] Blanton et al, *Ancient Oaxaca*, 62.

[193] On the recurrent description of the Danzante gallery as a "military showcase," see, for example, Blanton, *Monte Albán*, 39, 47, 58 and 63. And note, by the way, the choice of terms like "military showcase" and "trophy-case" suggests that the Danzante Wall sends a generalized threatening message about the dire consequences of resisting Monte Albán authority but that sort of interpretation does *not* suggest that of wall records a plotline of more specific episodes.

Oaxacan iconography. With that special areligious twist on the Coe's thesis, Blanton fashions the monoliths into consummate support for his theory of Monte Albán as "a disembedded capital" that was, in a kind of preemptory fashion, devoted to forestalling "external military threats" to central Oaxaca. Additionally, though without endorsing that full (re)construction, John F. Scott's *The Danzantes of Monte Albán*, which was published the same year as Blanton's *Monte Albán*, summarizes most of the previous ideas about the Danzantes before also lending his support to Michael Coe's "slain corpses" interpretation.[194]

Kent Flannery and Joyce Marcus's take on the Danzantes, while similarly reaffirming of Coe's interpretation—and thus in the broad strokes similar to Blanton's and Scott's—is again reworked in ways that recast the reliefs into frontline evidence for their decidedly different presentation of the "synoikism" that accounts for the origin and meteoric rise of Monte Albán.[195] They reecho Blanton in contending that, "When all 300-plus carvings of captives were still in place in the original stage of the Building L, it must have been one of the most awesome displays of military propaganda in all of Mexico;"[196] but they alter Blanton's rendition of events in a couple of notable ways. For one, where the protagonists of Blanton's disembedded capital narrative are accomplished statesmen concerned with the interests of the wider region, Flannery and Marcus's lead actors are thoroughly self-interested entrepreneurs, veritable thugs; and, for two, where Blanton stresses the ethnic and religious diversity of the capital's constituents, the Flannery-Marcus version argues for the ethnic homogeneity of Monte Albán's citizenry. But,

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[194] See Scott, *The Danzantes of Monte Albán* (1978), pt. I, 21-30.

[195] See Marcus and Flannery, *Zapotec Civilization*, chap. 11, "The Monte Albán Synoikism." Though they had written earlier about the significance of these carved stones (in not-inconsistent ways), here I am drawing primarily on the views that Marcus and Flannery present about the Danzantes in that 1996 work. For a summary of those views, see Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, chap. 6, the sub-section entitled "Yet Another Danzante Interpretation: Evidence of Single-Minded Militarism, Continuity with San José Mogote and Ethnic Homogeneity," from which I am borrowing for the present couple of paragraphs on the topic.

[196] Marcus and Flannery, *Zapotec Civilization*, 153.

yet again, they too can appeal to the protean Danzantes for apparent abutment of their revisionist views.[197]

To serve their altered views, Flannery and Marcus's (re)interpretation of the Danzante Wall has three distinctive aspects. First, they are as certain as Coe and Blanton that these carving humanoid figures depict "sacrificed captives," which thus provide evidence not only of abundant raiding but also an incentive for publicly humiliating and intimidating one's adversaries;[198] and they contend, moreover, that the hieroglyphic day-names beneath those carved figures, which presumably announce the identities of the vanquished enemies, provide a sure sign both that "The 260-day calendar clearly existed at this time," and, in fact, that the Rosario-era Oaxacans had already invented a form of writing.[199] Yet, where Alfonso Caso deployed these intellectual and artistic innovations as some of his strongest evidence of the gifted and sublime character of the ancient Oaxacans, the authors of *Zapotec Civilization*, take an almost antithetical interpretive tack by focusing on the martial content of this early writing as more purported proof of its creators' single-minded preoccupations with dominating and degrading their neighbors:

> "Like so many patterns of the Rosario phase, this first example of Zapotec writing appears in the context of chiefly competition. It appears that Zapotec writing was born of that competition, and went on in later times to become a weapon in the power struggle of rulers."[200]

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[197] Regarding similarities and differences between Blanton's and the Flannery-Marcus version's depiction of the leadership styles that obtained at Monte Albán, see Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, chap. 6, especially "Closing Thoughts: Three Leaderly Tensions of Specific and General Interest."

[198] Marcus and Flannery, *Zapotec Civilization*, 129-130.

[199] Marcus and Flannery, *Zapotec Civilization*, 130.

[200] Marcus and Flannery, *Zapotec Civilization*, 130.

Albeit a particularly glib exercise of the "action theory" perspective on which they rely, from that view, Marcus and Flannery can quickly dismiss even the invention of writing as yet another tool or "weapon" in the aggressive competition among individualistic, self-promoting leaders.[201]

Second, Flannery and Marcus remind us that earlier near-replicas of these Danzante slabs have been found at San José Mogote, which thereby bolsters their claim for that as the original home of the builders of Monte Albán.[202] And third, in the most novel dimension of their take on the Danzantes, they present the ill-named figures as more evidence of the ethnic homogeneity of the city's founders. In other words, despite the fact that the purportedly "Olmecoid" features of the persons depicted on these slabs had been one of the most oft-cited signs of strong outside influences during Monte Albán I, Marcus and Flannery are not persuaded that any of the images of brutalized figures qualify as "foreigners": "For various reasons, we do not think that the slain enemies on Building L [i.e., the figures in the Danzante carvings] came from the Basin of Mexico, the Gulf Coast, or the Central Depression of Chiapas."[203] In their analysis, "no hairstyle or ornament shown on the slain captives looks foreign to Oaxaca."[204] Furthermore, they opine that the hieroglyphic captions on the Danzante slabs—hieroglyphs that Caso had repeatedly claimed were of "a completely different style" from later Zapotec inscriptions[205]—"refer not to places but to *personal names*," and, in their surmise, "when a prisoner was identified by his

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[201] Earlier I noted both the view of Marcus, *Mesoamerican Writing Systems*, 15-16, that writing in Mesoamerica was foremost a propagandistic tool used by elites to legitimate and maintain their privileged position and Urcid's resistance to that extreme view. See, for instance, Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 62-63.

[202] Marcus and Flannery, *Zapotec Civilization*, 151-153. As noted earlier, Winter, "Social Memory and the Origins of Monte Albán," 396-97, 399-401, disputes the generally accepted notion that San José Mogote was the most direct precedent to Monte Albán, and enumerates five other issues that he has with Marcus and Flannery's account of Monte Albán's origins.

[203] Marcus and Flannery, *Zapotec Civilization*, 154.

[204] Marcus and Flannery, *Zapotec Civilization*, 154.

[205] See, for instance, Caso, "Las exploraciones en Monte Albán: Temporada 1931-1932," *Obras* reprint, vol. 2, 183.

personal name rather than a place glyph, he was a rival from within the same ethnic group."[206] That is to say, Marcus and Flannery contend that the lords of Early Monte Albán I were showcasing victories over their near neighbors rather than distant enemies.

In sum, there are numerous additional twentieth-century interpretations of the Danzantes, some of which will appear later in this chapter;[207] but it is the wide currency of the view that the carved figures are tortured captives, which is so ceaselessly repeated in both the academic and popular literature, that makes Javier Urcid's alternative appear as a truly shocking revelation. Casual and even semi-serious readers of the Monte Albán literature had been led to believe that this was one of those few settled issues—which, of course, it is not, either before or after Urcid's work. At any rate, with respect to the sacred history topic, note that both the earlier Olmec-indebted interpretations and the more recent militaristic theories take for granted that the models for these carvings are specific flesh-and-bones human beings, all men, some named and the rest presumably actual individuals; but none of those interpretations accentuates the "mythic" (or "mythicized history") quality of the reliefs, and none proposes that the façade presents a narrative in the Ricoeurian sense of a plotline with a beginning, middle and end. However, with Urcid's proposal that the Danzante Wall was one of Monte Albán's innumerable "narrative compositions" or "pictographic narratives" that prospect becomes somewhat more viable.

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[206] Marcus and Flannery, *Zapotec Civilization*, 154; their italics.

[207] See, for instance, the enumeration of different interpretations of the Danzantes in Orr, "Danzantes Building L at Monte Albán," 15-17, which is "a synopsis" of the fuller history of ideas about these sculptures in Scott, *The Danzantes of Monte Albán*, pt. I, 21-30. Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 163, 174-77, inventories earlier ideas about the Danzantes is a way that is fuller but also declines to repeat some of the sources cited by Scott. Not included in any of those reviews, and particularly notable among alternate views because it includes one of the few sustained discussions of the Danzantes to emerge in the wake of Urcid's radical reinterpretation, is Winter, "Social Memory and the Origins of Monte Albán," 393-409.

2. Javier Urcid's Alternative Interpretation of the Danzantes: Public Demonstrations of Devotion, Not Showcases of Military Prowess

I turn now to Javier Urcid's radically different reinterpretation of the infamous Danzante carvings; and yet again, enroute to my more theoretical points, I provide basic information that will be painfully obvious to Oaxacanists.[208] While Michael Coe's oft-cited two-page posit that the Danzante figures represent tortured victims of an aggressive Monte Albán military—frequently presented as a kind of bubble-busting de-romanticization of the political not religious motivations of ancient Zapotecs—constitutes one sort of turning point in the history of ideas about the infamous monoliths,[209] Urcid's intensely detailed, amply illustrated 75-page reassessment presents a significantly more propitious development in that intellectual history.[210] Though Oaxacanists never, it seems, allow a new interpretation to "win the day" and replace all alternatives, and abundant advocates for the captive warrior stance remain in place, Urcid's revisionist proposal does constitutes a new and very different point of departure.

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[208] My summary here depends primarily on the intensely detailed account in Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 163-237; but I draw also on the very brief though wholly consistent summary of "The Visual Program of Building L-sub" that appears in Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 152-57. Another concise and helpful summary of his views on the Danzante orthostats appears in Urcid, "The Written Surface as a Cultural Code," 114-17.

[209] Coe, *Mexico*, 95-96.

[210] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra: el papel de la narrativas pictóricas en el desarrollo témpano de Monte Albán (500 a.C.-200 d.C.)" (2011). Determined, in his reassessment of the Danzantes, "not resort to a selective method that only emphasizes a few examples to support an argument" (ibid., 226), Urcid seems to regard it as a virtue to abstain with respect to any thoroughgoing (re)construction of Monte Albán history, an ostensible "objectivity" that I regard as essentially impossible. Nonetheless, as we'll see, he eventually throws his support behind the narrative (re)construction of Monte Albán history proposed by Arthur Joyce and summarized in 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."

a. Recontextualizing the Danzante Orthostats: A 294-Stone Oeuvre as Components of "Not One but Several Narratives"

Continuing to rely, in somewhat modified ways, on the dual approaches outlined in his earlier work, Urcid's commitment to "an internal comparative method" requires him to take into account as many of the available Danzante stones as possible, which in this case entails a corpus of at least 294 known monoliths.[211] John Scott estimated their number at "about 320;"[212] by Flannery and Marcus's reckoning, "these carvings amount to 80 percent of the monuments known from the entire 1200-year heyday of the city;"[213] and, even by Urcid's more rigorous numeration, "this corpus represents approximately 50% of the epigraphic examples known so far in Monte Albán,"[214] every one of which he, in principle, hopes eventually to decipher.

Urcid's "contextual approach," also on full display in this reinterpretation, requires him to (re)locate all of these stones, to the extent possible, within the "narrative compositions" of which they were originally (or in their repurposed use) a part. He is able to fit 137 of the 294 extant orthostats into the pattern of the façade evident in Batres's 1902 drawing of the huge wall, which means that almost two-thirds of the original composition can be reconstituted;[215] but that leaves some 157 dislocated Danzante monoliths that he will work to resituate elsewhere and then

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[211] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 178. Full visual presentations of essentially all of the extant Danzante stones appear in two places: (1) Scott, *The Danzantes of Monte Albán,* pt. 2: Catalogue; and (2) Roberto García Mole, Donald Patterson, y Marcus Winter, *Monumentos Escultóricos de Monte Albán*, Kommission für Allgemeine und Vergleichende Archáologie des Deutschen Archaologischen Instituts Bonn, Band 37 (München, Germany: Verlag C.H Beck, 1986). Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 178 (my translation), expresses his reservations about both catalogs, most notably because they "present the monoliths as they were found in their non-primary contexts,"

[212] Scott, *The Danzantes of Monte Albán*, pt. I, 7.

[213] Marcus and Flannery, *Zapotec Civilization*, 153.

[214] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 226; my translation.

[215] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 177-78. Ibid., 177, fig. 11, is a reproduction of the drawing of the façade from Batres's 1902 work.

interpret. Those (re)contextualizing efforts lead Urcid—in a section entitled "Not One But Several Narratives"—to hypothesize that, while the largest share of these Danzantes stones had been part of the great display on the southeastern "basal façade" of Building L-sub, many others were originally part of five or six additional, roughly contemporaneous narrative programs located elsewhere within the Building L-sub complex;[216] and more still were, over a period of approximately a half century, situated in at least six more composite narratives elsewhere in the Main Plaza area.[217] In his view, no Danzante was originally conceived as a free-standing sculpture. Thus, while I focus here primarily on the great wall, be aware that Urcid is convinced of the Danzante stones' involvement in a dozen or more different narrative programs.[218]

As a requisite prelude to his iconographic analysis—and a vintage exercise in architectural reception history—Urcid ascertains five stages in the construction and rebuilding of Building L-sub and Building L, the latter which would eventually entirely cover over the smaller

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[216] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 187-90. Note that Urcid, ibid., 191ff., repeatedly uses the term "basal" to refer to the platform base, for instance, of Building L-sub; and thus he frequently refers to the Danzante Wall (a term he fastidiously avoids), which is attached to that southeast side of that platform base, as the "basal façade" (see ibid., 167, fig. 4A). While Building L-sub was, it seems, composed of one large basal platform with three mid-sized structures on top of that platform (see ibid., figs. 2 and 3), we are reminded of the characteristic two-part (lower substructure-upper sanctuary) structure of Monte Albán temples that figured large in the previous chapter on the divinity priority (II-A0, notably in sub-section entitled "Architectural Expressions of Divinity Attributes at Monte Albán: The Complementarity of Temple Substructures and Upper Sanctuaries." Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 153, fig. 9.2., provides an even clearer "hypothetical reconstruction" of Building L-sub as a single large base atop which are three structures, all of which presumably housed narrative compositions featuring Danzantes. Urcid does not, I think, ever refer to the mountain-like (or *altépetl*-like) quality of that Building L-sub basal platform, but this is an idea to which I will return.

[217] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 187ff.

[218] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 226 (my translation) writes, "To make the record clear, the hypothetical reconstructions discussed here include a minimum of 294 orthostats [i.e., the Danzante monoliths] recorded with human figures and deployed in a dozen or more narrative programs (five or six apparently associated with Building L-sub) during a period of approximately half a century."

and earlier structure.[219] The initial version of the former building, perhaps the first of Monte Albán's main structures, was constructed in what would become the southwest corner of the Great Plaza during the Danibaan phase (500-300 BCE), which in older nomenclature (that Urcid avoids) corresponds to early Monte Albán I.[220] Lending support to stock assessments that Monte Albán was a city without humble beginnings, it was on one side of the platform base of this first iteration of Building L-sub that the celebrated display of several hundred Danzantes was erected in its full and final form; and likewise, the other major narrative composition I will address, distributed across three structures located atop that main base, belongs to this initial period. During a second major construction stage in the Pe phase (300-100 BCE), which bridges the transition from Monte Albán I to Monte Albán II, the original platform of Building L-sub was enlarged to the north, and there is evidence of a series of residential units with crypts beneath them, but no sign that the main wall was significantly altered.[221] A third stage, the Niza phase (100 BCE-200 CE), roughly the mid-portion of Monte Albán II, entailed modifications and new stairways that did impinge at least on the lowest of the six main rows of the façade, and also reveals some relocations and reuses of orthostats from the initial period.[222] By this point, then,

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[219] For his detailed accounting of the five constructions stages of Buildings L-sub and L, including reconstruction drawings, see Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 167-74. Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 152-57, provide an attenuated summary of those five stages. Note also that, just as Urcid avoids the problematic label "Danzante," he explicitly avoids the older terms for the various ceramic phases (i.e., Formative to Early Classic to Late Classic or, even more problematical, the Monte Albán I, II, IIIA, IIIB-IV, V scheme) in favor of the "revised ceramic phases" that he charts on, for instance, Urcid, *Zapotec Writing*, 197 (a work not to be confused with Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*). While I appreciate Urcid's principled decision to avoid these older terms, I also recognize them as helpful in orienting non-specialist readers; and thus, in most cases, I insert those older terms either in the text or in footnotes.

[220] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 167. In older nomenclature, which Urcid avoids, the Danibaan phase (500-300 BCE) roughly corresponds to the transition from the late Middle Formative to the early Late Formative period or to early Monte Albán I.

[221] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra,"168. In older nomenclature, which Urcid avoids, the Pe phase (300-100 BCE) roughly corresponds to the Terminal Formative period or to the transition from late Monte Albán I to early Monte Albán II.

"the architectural history of Building L-sub became entangled with the life-histories of other buildings."[223]

Later, during a fourth construction stage, the Pitao phase (350-550 CE) or Early Classic era, with the city now in its prime as a regional capital, more radical transformations in Building L covered over the northern half of Building L-sub, including all of the engraved orthostats in the bottom row of the façade.[224] Though apparently the upper rows of the configuration remained visible, these developments mark the end of the famed façade as a full visual display. Also at this point, several of the monoliths were pried from their original locations and the reused in the base of the eastern façade of the new Building L platform; and, according to Urcid, "others were employed as constructive material for several contemporaneous architectural projects in other parts of the Main Square."[225] The fifth remodeling episode, carried out during the Peche or Early Xoo phase (550-700 CE), the era formerly termed the Late Classic or Monte Albán IIIB, involved enlargements of Building L, which apparently served as an elite residence,

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[222] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 169. In older nomenclature, which Urcid avoids, the Niza phase (100 BCE-200 CE) roughly corresponds to the Late Formative period or to the mid-portion of Monte Albán II.

[223] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 155.

[224] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 170-72. In older nomenclature, which Urcid avoids, the Pitao phase (350-550 CE) roughly corresponds to the Early Classic period or to Monte Albán IIIA.

[225] Of this fourth construction stage, Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 170 (my translation) writes, "The material that was used to fill and elevate the surface level included several of the engraved monoliths that were dismantled from the southeast façade. Other stones were taken and used as constructive material for several contemporaneous architectural projects or later realized in other places of the Main Square." Recall that in an earlier footnote I summarized a helpful section entitled "Uses of the Danzantes," Scott, *The Danzantes of Monte Albán*, pt. I, 30-41, which enumerates in greater detail ideas about the reuse, relocation or what I term "revalorization" of these carved slabs in numerous places around the Main Plaza and North Platform.

that would have completely hidden what remained of the original façade.[226] In short, Urcid's analysis refines but reaffirms the conventional view that in the acclaimed Danzante Wall was built all of one piece in the very earliest era of the city's history, and that it remained fully (and then partly) visible and largely intact for several hundred years before being dismantled, "harvested" and then completely buried.[227]

b. Discerning the Original Conception and "Reading Order" of the Danzante Wall: Exhibiting a Multi-Tiered Military Fraternity or "Sodality"

The sheer number of Danzante stones is staggering; moreover, no two are identical and there is a great variety of body postures. Most are standing upright, but many, the ones that prompted the designation of "swimmers," are horizontal. Nevertheless, Urcid agrees that the monoliths are notable as well for their extreme conventionality, nearly all of which depict just one male humanoid figure. Commenting on the "very canonical" features of these engraved figures, he specifies some dozen features that most have in common, including that the head is represented in profile, while the torso appears frontal; the body has a short or almost nonexistent neck, with a plump physiognomy; and the face is characterized by a broad nose and thick lips, with facial expressions featuring an open mouth, two exposed teeth and sometimes closed

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[226] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 172-74. In older nomenclature, which Urcid avoids, the Peche or Early Xoo phase (550-700 CE) roughly corresponds to the Late Classic period or to Monte Albán IIIB-IV.

[227] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 225, links the demolition and covering over of the both the main Danzante Wall and the related narrative programs to "an iconoclastic movement during the Niza or Early Tani phase (200 AD)," which means that those programs, the main façade included, were largely intact for something like 500-700 years. Consequently, depending on the sort of argument one is trying to make, it is possible to stress the long duration of the Danzante Wall. Or, if one accentuates the fact that the façade was partly covered in the Early Classic and fully covered by the Late Classic period, it is likewise plausible to make the case, as Winter, "Social Memory and the Origins of Monte Albán," 393, does, that "The wall was short-lived, partly dismantled within a few generations of its completion, and the carved stones reused, erasing the narrative's original significance. In contrast, elements of the city's core layout persisted at least until the end of the Late Classic as a template, remembered and repeated, sometimes with modifications at Monte Albán and elsewhere, of how a city should be."

eyes.[228] Most are apparently naked, but many wear a tight cap on their heads, sometimes with a bit of thin or braided hair showing; and other personal adornments that distinguish some of them include earmuffs, necklaces, "what appear to be jingle bells at the ankles" and, in a couple of cases, "markings that could indicate color painting or tattoos."[229] Many of them have volutes, flowery scrolls or other suggestions of flowing blood where their genital would be.[230] Of the 294 extant cases, at least 21 are accompanied by short inscriptions placed opposite, behind or across the torso.[231] There are a few representations of warriors as impersonators of the god of rain, but apparently no depictions of actual deities.[232] In several instances the bodies appear to be in motion, apparently participating in a ceremonial procession;[233] and most have some sort of military regalia though none appear to be wielding weapons.

Again in short, then, as potential repositories of "sacred history," the hundreds of Danzante orthostats—which seem all to have been created in roughly the same era and to the service of the same general ideology—are notable for a very narrow subject matter devoted overwhelmingly to individual human soldiers and quite completely devoid of supernaturals or non-anthropomorphic "mythological" creatures of any sort.

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[228] This is an attenuated paraphrase of Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 178-79.

[229] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 179; my translation. Additionally, Urcid, ibid. (my translation) notes, "The thumbs are generally well delineated, and the same seems to be the case for the rest of the fingers. [Some are represented in a way that] gives the impression of two right or left hands in the same character. Sometimes the feet are represented with anatomical precision, showing the pronounced curvature of the bow and the silhouette of the big toe. However, the other digits of the feet were never represented."

[230] See, for instance, Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 179, 189, 193, 196, 200, 207, 211, 216, 218.

[231] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 179.

[232] See, for instance, Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 189, 192, 196, 197, 202, 204, 220, 224.

[233] On intimations of processions, see, for instance, Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 186, 206; or Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 153.

Undertaking what he terms "the general exegesis of the narrative programs originally associated with Building L-sub,"[234] Urcid reechoes several standard assumptions about the Danzante Wall before venturing a reinterpretation that is an extreme departure from any that precede it. He, for instance, not unlike others, discerns the original arrangement of six rows of figures: the lowest, third and fifth display men in upright postures, while the figures in the intervening second, fourth and six rows are horizontal or prone.[235] But by radical, indeed alarming, contrast to prevailing postulates that all of the figures are tortured captives, and to that extent, largely interchangeable, Urcid contends that the basal façade presents the rank-ordered assemblage of a multi-tiered military fraternity or "sodality"—that is to say, they are the agents or perpetrators of Monte Albán militarism rather than the vanquished, arranged according to ascending tiers of "age-grades."[236] That is to say, reversing stock assessments, Urcid sees the Danzantes as revered rather than reviled figures, the soldierly winners not losers, as it were.

On that basic premise, Urcid discerns the clear depiction of a military pecking order in which the bottom row, presumably members of the youngest and lowest rank in the hierarchy, all face right; those in the third row, next in the ascending hierarchy, all face left; and the vertical individuals in the fifth row, who represent older and higher ranking members of the brotherhood, again all face right.[237] Complementarily, but very differently, the depiction of prone figures that constitute the second and fourth rows, "resorts to the pan-Mesoamerican convention of

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[234] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 192.

[235] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 167, 182

[236] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 220. Though without elaboration, Urcid, ibid., 163, does note that Román Piña Chán, *El lenguaje de las* Piedras (Campeche, México: Universidad Autónoma de Campeche, Coleeción Arqueología, 1992), 40-45, proposed that the Danzante carvings represent "members of a priestly organization with degrees of age whose leaders governed the affairs of the state;" and that would seem to constitute the closest precedent to Urcid's (re)interpretation. Urcid, ibid., 226 (my translation), does include Piña Chan among "the seminal observations made earlier by several scholars," which have influenced his view. For additional comments on Piña Chán's suggestion that the Danzante Wall depicts "an age-grade priestly organization," see also Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 68 and 75, fig 2.35, "Interpretation of Danzantes at Monte Albán according to Piña Chán (1992)."

[237] See, for instance, Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 154, fig. 9.3.

representing ancestors as horizontal figures above the living humans that are standing or squatting;"[238] and the unique sixth and topmost row is "the paramount tier of senior adults who seemingly formed a council of elders."[239] These elders, according to Urcid, are represented as "honorary warriors" who seem to be "members of the highest rank in the organization, who possibly formed a council with the prerogative of making political, religious, and military decisions."[240]

Having ascertained the logic that informs the hierarchical arrangement of some 300 constituent elements of the six-rowed façade, Urcid next determines "the reading order," something he is always intent on doing but that few of his predecessors address. That is to say, where earlier interpretations tended to treat the Danzante monoliths as independent and largely interchangeable specimens, Urcid's contention that the façade constitutes a "pictorial narrative" requires him to search out something more like, in Ricoeur's terms, a plotline with a coherent beginning, middle and end. In that respect, Urcid hypothesizes "a boustrophedon sequence" for the vertical characters in rows one, three and five, that is, a reading order that, starting with the bottom row, goes left-to-right, then proceeds up in a snake-like fashion to a right-to-left reading of the next row of upright figures, then a left-to-right reading of the upper row of erect figures.[241] Regarding the way in which that ascending back-and-forth reading protocol creates the sensation of an ascending ritual procession, Urcid and Arthur Joyce explain that,

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[238] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 153. Also, see Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 214, fig. 29, for images of ancestors represented in a prone position in various Mesoamerican pictographic traditions.

[239] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 153.

[240] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 220.

[241] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 183-85; see especially the hypothetical reconstruction of the façade (ibid., 183, fig. 14), which illustrates how the characters in rows 1, 3 and 5 follow a boustrophedon back-and-forth reading sequence. Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 154, fig. 9.3, also helps to clarify that this boustrophedon or snake-like reading sequence applies to the vertical figures but not the horizontal ones.

> "The young personages represented in the basal façade of Building L-sub were displayed in alternating rows, changing their direction so as to render their procession in a boustrophedon sequence that mimicked the ascent through the staircase leading to the upper structures."[242]

In other words, then, on points to which I will return momentarily, though apparently depicting something more like a ceremonial cavalcade than any specific battlefield episode, the façade definitely does present a sequential arrangement in which each individual stone, or at least each row, rather that interchangeable, finds its significance in relation to the full hierarchical configuration. And, to that qualified extent, the façade is, in the Ricoeurian sense, a "narrative composition." Moreover, supplementing the main composition, and in a sense contributing a different but complementary narrative, are carved stones along the southeast corner of the basal façade (thus at the left end of the six-tiered scheme) that, also read in a boustrophedon sequence from bottom to top, "appear to record the enthronement of two, perhaps three rulers throughout a span of forty-eight years."[243] And introducing another complementary storyline, though he cannot precisely place them in their original architectural context, Urcid notes four smaller and incomplete orthostats that make reference to decapitation.[244]

c. Refuting Standard Assessments of the Danzantes as Dead Captives: Depictions of Militaristic Victors rather than Victims

In any case, because Urcid's reinterpretation is such an extreme departure from previous interpretations of the Building L-sub façade—and though he does find significant a handful of stones that seem to represent victims of decapitation—it is worth noting the thoroughness with which he dismantles every one of the standard diagnostics that the Danzantes depict tortured

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[242] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 153. Essentially the same line appears in Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 183.

[243] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 154; fig. 9.3. See also Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 184-86, fig. 15.

[244] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 201-3, fig. 25. Also see Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 154-55, fig. 9.4.

captives or victims of human sacrifice.[245] Dismissing charges of degradation via nudity, for instance, he accentuates the array of earmuffs, headdresses, hairstyles, hats and ribbons tied to several parts of the body as well as citing other Mesoamerican cases that demonstrate nakedness is, in any event, by no means a certain sign of humiliation.[246] Refuting intimations of bound captives, Urcid writes,

> "It seems undeniable that the intention in almost all the early pictorial narratives of Monte Albán was to show the figures devoid of dress, but there is not a single example of a character who is tied up as are many captives, dead or not, in others Mesoamerican pictorial traditions."[247]

Repudiating old arguments about Olmeciod, "negroid" or non-Oaxacan facial features, Urcid contends instead that all of the figures are of the same local ethnicity.[248] Contesting incessant pejoratives about contorted, grotesque, awkward body postures, he dismisses those as "ethnocentric value judgments" that fail to appreciate artistic conventions for achieving "the illusion of movement," a corrective that supports his central claim that it is not combat but ceremonial occasions, frequently processions, that are being memorialized.[249]

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[245] The following footnotes provide citations to the dismantlement of these standard ideas in Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 205-15; but a concise summary of most of these points appears in Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 166-67, n. 2.

[246] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 206. Note, by the way, with respect to his version of "the comparative method," where Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 63, expressed his strong preference for "internal glyphic comparison," that is, comparison strictly within the Monte Albán corpus, and avoidance of "external comparisons" with other Mesoamerican cultures, which he considers "secondary," his dismantlement of all of the standard (he thinks wrong) diagnostics of the Danzantes as dead captives, benefits greatly from comparative appeals to wider Mesoamerican artistic conventions.

[247] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 207; my translation.

[248] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 220.

[249] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 205 (my translation), writes, "The characterizations that various authors make of the different positions [of the Danzantes] as 'elastic,' 'rare,' 'awkward,' 'distorted,' 'grotesque' or 'flaccid' are ethnocentric value judgments."

Other aspects of Urcid's reinterpretation also advance this crucial replacement of purported combat themes with ceremonial ones. Most notably, he disputes oft-reiterated charges that the volutes or flowery scrolls in the genital area of a majority of the figures signal castration and public humiliation, which he again regards as at odds with wider Mesoamerican practices and conventions; and, alternatively, Urcid seizes on the infamous embellishments in the figures' genitalia regions as a central feature of his argument—namely, that essentially all of the vertical figures are involved in ceremonial blood-letting, in which case the bleeding is a self-inflicted devotional exercise.[250] By the same token, he rejects clichéd claims that the open mouths of all of the figures and closed eyes of many of them signify that they are deceased by again invoking wider Mesoamerican usages of those motifs as a means of depicting emotive states such as dreaming, meditating, ecstatic trance or pain; and in that way Urcid adds more support to his argument that the figures are involved, not in public degradation, but self-initiated penitential blood-letting.[251]

Also before summarizing Urcid's interpretation of the main façade per se, I revisit quickly his success in resituating many of the dozens of Danzante slabs that were never part of that main composition within other roughly contemporaneous composite narratives that were displayed in three buildings on top of the original Building L-sub.[252] Foremost and reminiscent

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[250] See, for instance, Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 211, 216-18, 221.

[251] Urcid, Los oráculos y la guerra," 210-11.

[252] Though this somewhat simplifies the situation, because Urcid is able to resituate 137 of 294 known Danzante stones within the main façade, that leaves some 157 orthostats that he works to situate elsewhere. Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 226, summarizes his stance by noting that, "To make the record clear, the hypothetical reconstructions discussed here include a minimum of 294 [Danzante] orthostats recorded with human figures and deployed in a dozen or more narrative programs (five or six apparently associated with Building L-sub) during a period of approximately half a century. That implies that there are still many monoliths recorded to be discovered." That also implies that all of the Danzante orthostats are roughly contemporaneous in their original creation, and thus that all were conceived within the same general ideological conception. For extended and detailed comments on other narrative compositions that were in proximity of, but not connected to, the main wall visual display, see Urcid, ibid., 187-204; and for a more concise, in some respects clearer, review of the same material, see Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 152-57.

of various tiers of the main basal wall, he identifies four linked sets of these "left-over" Danzante stones: 28 orthostats featuring figures with tight-fitting caps, which he sees as "first degree" or low ranking young adults; 23 of characters with headdresses and/or pendants, which he identifies as "second degree" young adults; 15 with helmets and a type of "mouth mask" that "typifies the representations of the rain god," who are assessed as "third degree" or somewhat higher ranking young adults; and a fourth group of 10 monoliths with men who display the attributes of old age, which he recognizes as senior adults who formed "a council of elders."[253] Though Urcid refers to each of these four sets of stones as a "pictorial narrative," it is not until he shows how, hypothetically, the four contemporaneous groups—all roughly coeval with the great basal façade—were respectively situated within three rectangular enclosures atop Building L-sub that what he terms "a grand narrative" emerges.[254] This compound narrative, which spreads across three buildings on top of the shared basal platform of Building L-sub and which provides locations for another 76 of the previously stray orthostats, according to Urcid, refers to the same ranked "echelons of the sodality" and most of the same themes as the main basal façade. And thus the unified message of this multi-building ensemble displays the same strengthens and weaknesses as a "narrative" to which I will return in moment.

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[253] On all four groups, see Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 188-92; or Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 153.

[254] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 187, explains that these four sets of orthostats, like the great basal wall display, belong to the earliest phase of the city, the Danibaan phase (500-300 BCE); and thus he is confident that their placement in this configuration qualifies as "their primary context." Regarding the three structures on the platform of Building L-sub during this era, and the hypothetical placement of these four sets of carved monoliths on that triad of structures, see Urcid, ibid., 190-92, especially figs. 16-18 on ibid., 188-91. Also, as noted earlier, see Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 153, fig. 9.2, for a very clear presentation of the hypothetical reconstruction of what they explicitly term "the grand narrative depicting age-grade sodality on Building L-sub."

d. Urcid's Alternative: A Widened Understanding of War and the Memorialization of Ceremonial rather than Combat Themes

Finally, though Javier Urcid's very rich interpretation addresses far more than the one main façade, I turn now to the central features of his radical reinterpretation of the Danzante Wall. Also, though I am working at this point simply to represent fairly Urcid's view, to do that I find it helpful to separate "*the intended meaning*" of the basal façade from what I term its "*revalorative uses and receptions*," which seem to have begun almost immediately following its construction. That is to say, though he does not explicitly differentiate between these two aspects in the life-history of the Danzante Wall (and, as noted, he focuses overwhelmingly on the intended meaning of the façade), Urcid's analysis does suggest that, even during the era when the whole display was fully intact that—not unlike any superabundant and autonomous work of art—it began to be appropriated, extended and "revalorized" in ways that enabled meanings that exceed those of its designers' originally intended conception.

First, then, regarding his view of the originally intended meaning of the façade: As intimated earlier and explored more later, I contend that Urcid's own analysis undermines, or at least limits, his persistent designation of the Danzante Wall display as a "narrative." By his own evaluation, "The pictorial narratives in and on Building L-sub probably did *not* commemorate a single event;"[255] and while it is possible to ascertain a prescribed boustrophedon reading order, the six-rowed scheme does *not* really tell the sort of story that has a running plotline or that recounts a sequence of historical or mythical events. Instead of chronicling a course of events, either historical or mythical, the façade is a kind of schematic display, or diagrammatic roster, if you will, of the hierarchical configuration of Monte Albán's military fraternity. Nevertheless, beyond simply presenting the rank ordering of the various tiers of human soldiers, the configuration of the composition expresses a whole series of complex and culturally-specific presuppositions about not only war but also life, society and the reciprocal responsibilities of maintaining a healthy relationship with the gods. In that sense, less like an episodic narrative, the Danzante Wall is, in my view of Urcid's view, a kind of "cosmogram" (a term he never uses)

[255] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 224; my translation, italics added.

that expresses numerous Zapotec ideas and priorities. And, as my subsequent remarks will show, I regard that cosmogrammatic, not-really-narrative conception of the great Building L-sub façade as exceptionally significant.

At any rate, more specifically, Urcid stresses that, while the basic of theme of the façade certainly concerns the capabilities and organization of the military, he regards it as very important to appreciate that, in this pre-Columbian Oaxacan context, war was embedded in a wider understanding of the reciprocal relations—or a "divine covenant"—between humans and gods, which could be maintained only via human sacrifice.[256] Thus, having expressed his discontents with those who intimate (or expressly assert) that, for Zapotecs, war is a strictly utilitarian means of dominating peoples and territories, or that Zapotec writing was overwhelmingly a matter of political propaganda, Urcid embraces the view that,

> "war was part of a ritual cycle aimed at ensuring the well-being of communities. Therefore, another reason for engaging in military strife was capturing prisoners and offering them to reciprocate divine favors, including agricultural fertility (hence the impersonators of the rain god) and human fecundity (hence the explicit and implicit allusions to human sexuality) that would guarantee the biological perpetuation of society."[257]

Accordingly, based on this broader (anti-reductionist) understanding of war, elites commissioned Building L-sub and its massive wall, according to Urcid, not as means of brute intimidation, but rather as a demonstration of their uniquely important role in the maintenance of that primordial covenant, which benefits everyone associated with Monte Albán.[258] That is to say, while the

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[256] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 225, draws on the work of Arthur Joyce and Marcus Winter to make this link between warfare and a "divine covenant," though as I've noted elsewhere, Joyce borrows (and somewhat changes) the idea from John D. Monaghan, *The Covenants with Earth and Rain: Exchange, Sacrifice, and Revelation in Mixtec Society* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999). This will be a topic of major concern in chapter 10 relative to "the propitiation priority" (III-C).

[257] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 221.

[258] In other words, as noted previously, where Urcid works to abstain on the endorsement of one particular historical (re)construction of Monte Albán history, at this point, he is largely embracing the narrative (re)construction of Monte Albán history proposed by Arthur Joyce and

main motives for the wall are decidedly political and self-serving of elite interests, elites promote themselves, not by threats of violence against rivals, but by presenting a socio-hierarchical system in which the militia and rulers, by their warring (and ritualizing) activities, are actually serving the well-being of the whole Monte Albán community.[259]

Each of the six rows in the façade supports this widened understanding of war as, in Urcid's phasing, "part of a ritual cycle aimed at ensuring the well-being of communities."[260] Most unmistakably, the vertical figures in the first, and third and fifth rows, which represent the respective ranks in the military brotherhood, instead of depicted as fierce and haughty fighters—that is, as agents (or victims) of intimidation—are all shown as humble and devout stewards of the divine covenant who, by their willingness to undertake the trials of auto-sacrifice or blood-letting, exercise one of the primary means of maintaining reciprocal relations between people and gods.[261] A model Monte Albán soldier is not just one who is proficient in killing enemies, but one who acknowledges his obligations to divine benefactors. Tellingly then, it is the penitential ritual activities of soldiers rather than their heroic battlefield exploits that are most deserving of pictorial representation and memorialization;[262] and, in Urcid's revamping view, their infamous facial expressions connote, not that they are being tortued, but rather the combined pain and ecstasy that penile blood-letting entails.

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summarized in 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."

[259] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 225.

[260] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 221; my translation.

[261] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 216-218, argues that auto-sacrifice, and specifically bleeding of the penis, though seldom depicted in the Zapotec pictorial corpus, is a ritual activity widely documented both across ancient Mesoamerica and in Oaxaca. Also see Urcid., ibid., 221, concerning two figures in the first row who seem to have erect penises, which he reinterprets not as sexual arousal but rather as signs of their participation in "a sacred pact."

[262] While Urcid is direct in making the case that the Danzante Wall represented ceremonial activity rather than something like battlefield activity, he also implies that it is not one specific ritual that is being depicted, but rather "multiple recurring rituals." See Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 224; my translation.

Among these warriors, those that are represented as impersonators of the rain god, Urcid says, "imply that within the brotherhood there were military and religious roles wherein some warrior priests had the ability to attract or repel the clouds and rain."[263] Additionally, regarding the ancestors who are represented by the prone figures in rows two and four, Urcid interprets them as "the conduits" or channels through which oracles were made, thus improving the prospects for military success and ensuring that warring activities are undertaken at cosmologically propitious times.[264] The top row is composed of elders, some identified by their personal names, who are represented as "honorary warriors" and members of the highest rank in the organization, who possibly formed a council embolden to make not only military but also political and religious decisions;[265] these dignitaries too are on hand to see that war is conducted in socio-religiously responsible ways. And, in the only remnant of the old theme of humiliated captives that persists in Urcid's analysis, those four engravings that do show decapitated heads (but that were not part of the basal wall) "allude to the result of victorious military campaigns [and to] the capture and sacrifice of enemies."[266] But again, he suggests that, rather than plain bullying, "the slaughter of captives [was intended] to ensure the well-being of the community."[267]

In sum, then, on the intended meanings of the Danzante Wall, Urcid argues that, were the façade actually devoted to intimidating populations into compliance via public threats and terror

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[263] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 220; my translation

[264] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 218, 222, 224. I concede that Urcid's remarks about the invocation of ancestors and "ancestral spirits" for "the purposes of an oracle" is a feature of his argument I do not really understand.

[265] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 220, 224.

[266] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 218; my translation. Recall that Urcid, ibid., 201-3, does not settle on a "primary location" for those four images of decapitated heads, but he is inclined to think that three of them represent the same sacrificed leader, On the same four stones, see also Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 154-55.

[267] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 224; my translation.

tactics, that would be an aberration in the Mesoamerican world. Contrarily, however, his arguments about what the grand display does and does not represent depend heavily on demonstrating that these central themes of auto-sacrifice, reliance on ancestors for oracles, and the sacrifice of captives as means of honoring a sacred covenant, and thereby serving the full community, "were, of course, part of a pan-Mesoamerican phenomenon, one that persisted from the beginning of urban life, if not before, until the Spanish conquest."[268] And thus the deliberate intention of the visual display, in Urcid's surmise, involves a concerted effort to present a Monte Albán-specific depiction of themes that were more generally familiar and relevant across the entire Mesoamerican region.[269]

Having made this very compelling argument for the original conception of the famed façade, Urcid shifts in the last portion of his reinterpretation from the initially intended meaning of the Danzante Wall to its subsequent involvement—in my term, its "revalorative" usages—in the wider, multiple and evolving meanings of Building L-sub.[270] In other words, the basal façade is, on the one hand, highly detailed, explicit and prescriptive in referencing specific individuals and dates in unambiguous ways; but, the six-tiered composition, even as an unchanging physical form, is, on the other hand, like all substantial works of art, "superabundant and autonomous" in ways that enable its support and involvement of new meanings, including some not imagined by its creators.[271] This portion of Urcid's argument is much less fully developed because it is, as he

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[268] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 224; my translation.

[269] Note that by demonstrating all of these ways in which the uniquely huge and elaborate Danzante Wall depicts characteristically Mesoamerican themes and conventions, Urcid is illustrating a point about the juxtaposition of originality and conventionality (or strategic *un*originality) that I discussed at length in chapter 2 relative to the convention priority, I-B. See especially the sub-section entitled "Architectural Appropriations and Archaisms: The Virtues and Appeal of Unoriginality," which should help to explain how displaying those old conventions in the new city of Monte Albán works as strategy of ritual-architectural allurement.

[270] Again on the notion of "revalorization," see Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, vol. I, chap. 12.

[271] Again on the "superabundance and autonomy of works of art and architecture," see Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, vol. I, chap. 2.

himself notes, the intended meanings that most occupy his interest. And we can imagine many more sorts of occasions—again, in my terms, many sorts of "ritual-architectural events"—and thus many different meanings, in which the Danzante Wall would have participated over its several hundred-year history as a fixed visual display.

Be that as it may, Urcid does acknowledge the superabundance of the Danzante carvings when he makes the case that "Building L-sub, with its pictorial narratives, must have been polysemic"[272]—an argument for multiple meanings that he supports by underscoring three quite different but complementary functions of the structure: First and most obvious in relation to the hierarchical configuration of the main façade, he maintains that Building L-sub must have "constituted the headquarters (a 'men's house') of one of the most important political, religious, and military institutions during the early history of Monte Albán."[273] Second, based especially on the cornerstones discussed earlier, Urcid thinks that the Building L-sub "subsequently celebrated the enthronement of three rulers."[274] And, third, he argues somewhat more generally that the building worked to commemorate the expansive sense of the significance of war as a primary means not simply for maintaining and extending Monte Albán's political and military control of the region, but for ensuring a propitious relationship with the gods.[275] In other words, all three of these usages of the "polysemic" Building L-sub, in Urcid's very persuasive view, support and reinforce the broader initiative of demonstrating the military elite's singularly important role in the maintenance of a sacred covenant between people and gods that ostensibly serves the well-being of all classes in Monte Albán's hierarchical urban capital.

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[272] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 224; my translation.

[273] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 224; my translation.

[274] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 224; my translation.

[275] On this third point (which I may be misrepresenting), Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 224 (my translation), writes, "[Building L-sub] commemorates the war that honored both living and dead warriors, impersonators of the rain god, and a council of elders, some of whom were identified by their personal names."

In final sum, then, on Urcid's daringly different reinterpretation of Building L-sub and the Danzante orthostats, one need not embrace every aspect of his analysis to find in it a surfeit of ways in which, for my more idiosyncratic present concerns, the endlessly evocative visual display speaks to the ritual-architectural commemoration of sacred history (priority II-B) at Monte Albán. To that end, before moving to consideration of a couple of other much-debated visual displays at the Zapotec capital, I briefly venture some ideas about how the new starting point that Urcid provides with respect to the Danzante Wall might be extended via consideration of the broadly theoretical touchstones about sacred history supplied variously by Eliade, Ricoeur, Florescano and Lincoln.

3. The Danzantes as Narrative Sacred History: Open-ended Interpretive Clues from Eliade, Ricoeur, Florescano and Lincoln

Not every Oaxacanist shares Javier Urcid's confident surmise that, in the wake of his reinterpretation, "we can put to rest the pervasive notion among scholars that the native cognitive apprehension of the [Danzante] carvings was like seeing from above the outline of a dead body in a crime scene."[276] But, by dislodging the entrenched view of the Danzante Wall as a kind of instrument of terror, which would have made an experience of Period I Monte Albán primarily an occasion of fear and intimidation, Urcid does provide a new point of departure with respect to perhaps the site's most heavily debated feature. In order to pursue that fresh start—and see where it can take us with respect to the commemoration of sacred history (priority II-B)—I consider his hypothesis in relation to the broadly framed comments on the myth, history and narrative presented respectively by Eliade, Ricoeur, Florescano and Lincoln. Since my goal at this point is still generating ideas and interpretational possibilities, not yet in forming hypotheses or conclusions, I confine myself to a couple or three paragraphs on each of those theoretical touchstones.

First, how might Mircea Eliade's persistent emphases on cosmogony and the advantageous blending of history and myth pertain to the "composite narrative" of the Danzante

[276] Urcid, "The Written Surface as a Cultural Code," 114.

Wall? Though emerging very close to the historical founding of Monte Albán, it is difficult to connect the Danzantes with a story of the original creation of the world or of primordial migrations of the First People, which are themes that we will encounter elsewhere in these materials. Nevertheless, a case can be made that the main wall does presents something like a mythico-historical foundation story—a kind of urban cosmogony or narrative charter specially suitable for a city—the necessity of which was greatly enhanced by the fact that the young capital presented an unprecedentedly complex and diversified social formation. In Urcid's summarizing terms, the "compositive narrative" presented by the Danzante Wall "served primarily the purpose of fostering community identity in the face of a new development of urban life amid regional factualism and competition."[277] His assertion that the entire Building L-sub "was conceived as part of a master design"[278] comports with the notion that to authorize a new set of social alliances and hierarchical institutions required a new and clear cosmogonic substratum.

Whether the Danzante façade presents strictly historical circumstances, largely imaginary mythical circumstances, or some hybridized "mythistory" or "mythicized history" is a more complicated question. Crucial to Urcid's iconoclastic reinterpretation is that the six-tiered display commemorates not military victories in which soldiers showcase their combat mettle, but rather ceremonial activities in which military men demonstrate their deference to the gods via self-sacrifice.[279] Nonetheless, though largely ruling out the possibility that the façade records battle scenes, he introduces some ambiguity on the extent to which the Danzante Wall represents actual historical occurrences. As noted, he opines that "the pictorial narratives in [Building L-

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[277] Urcid, "The Written Surface as a Cultural Code," 117.

[278] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 224; my translation.

[279] Note that, from an Eliadean perspective, it is highly notably that Danzante Wall seems to be less the memorialization of actual battlefield episodes than of *ceremonial* commemorations of those combat episodes; and, in that sense, the wall is a kind of "meta-memorialization" or "meta-commemoration" (my terms not Urcid's), i.e., a pictorial commemoration of a ritual commemoration. This is a theme to which I will return later.

sub] probably did not commemorate a single event;"[280] but elsewhere he does intimate that the visual display was originally designed to memorialize a specific battle, which transpired very near the founding of Monte Albán. For instance, in the context of his technically complex discussion of the boustrophedon reading order of the basal façade and annual dates inscribed on the respective corners, he proposes that the events being recorded seem to have transpired over a span of 48 years or "a minimum of three human generations."[281] Pressing that prospect of historical specificity further, he suggests "the inscriptions [also on the corners] could refer to a dynastic succession of at least three specific rulers…"[282]

References on the façade to very specific historical people and circumstances notwithstanding, Urcid demonstrates also how depictions of those empirical events are laced and elaborated with allusions to transhistorical phenomena like the rain god and to ancestors who are "the conduits" or channels through which oracles were made.[283] In his phrasing—which at this point provides an excellent match with Eliade's notion of "mythologized history"—the façade "combines ephemeral instances of local historical events with permanent [or trans-historical] sacred propositions, which were considered natural, universal and eternal."[284] Even if the façade does record actually historical occurences (which it may), it is not the empirically accurate recounting of one-time events that matters so much as the presentation of timeless paradigmatic models; natural and supernatural boundaries are freely transgressed and merged. Moreover, where older proposals that the Danzantes are victims of human sacrifice make them cautionary anti-models, that is, patterns to be avoided, Urcid's interpretation of the hierarchy of the six-rows reveals how specifically named flesh-and-bone individuals can be transformed into what Eliade would see as enduringly paradigmatic, or mythically "archetypal," exemplars of the respective

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[280] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 224; my translation.

[281] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 185; my translation. Also see ibid., 224.

[282] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 185; my translation.

[283] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 218, 222, 224.

[284] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 224; my translation, which, in this case, alters the order (but retains the meaning) of his phrasing.

ranks in the military sodality. Historical particulars provide the then-young capital the basis for a religio-political foundation myth, but only by massaging those one-time (historical) happenings with timeless (mythical) truths is that model of a military-based rulership, whose activities honor a "sacred covenant" that ostensibly serves the general well-being of the wider community, made piquantly persuasive. In short, the Danzante Wall of Urcid's description is a vintage exemplar of Eliade's comments about the strategic interlacing of the factual and fantastical at issue in "mythicized history."[285]

Second, with respect to Paul Ricoeur, and especially ideas emerging from his *Time and Narrative*, I note first, in a very general vein, how the preoccupation with "native time reckoning," which seemingly informs all of Zapotec writing, is most definitely relevant to the Danzante Wall. It is apparently inconceivable to the Oaxacan designers of these monuments to represent notable events and people without assigning dates to them, thereby lending support to Ricoeur's basic premise that narrating is invariably about coming to terms with one's existential position in time. Everything and everyone that matters is, it seems, specifically dated. Moreover, Urcid's proposal that a primary role of the ancestors pictured in the second and fourth rows was to act as "conduits through which oracles were made," and thus to ensure that military campaigns (as well as rituals) were propitiously timed, suggests an urge to orientation with respect to the future as well as the past.[286]

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[285] Note, by the way, with respect to a much less compelling interpretation of the historical and/or mythical status of the Danzante Wall, Winter, "Social Memory and the Origins of Monte Albán," 408, first notes that "the complete narrative may have been on public display for no more than a few generations," and then writes, "As in modern times, memories of specific events and individuals transmitted verbally or even materialized with statuary last no more than a few hundred years before becoming vague, mythologized, forgotten, or erased." That is to say, if I understanding Winter correctly, he thinks that, in the early going—i.e., when people actually remembered who the figures in the wall display were—that the wall was "historical;" but once memory of the actual history faded, then the wall was diluted or "mythologized." Of course, that view of the myth-history dynamic could hardly be more distant from Eliade's (or mine).

[286] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 218; my translation. Also see ibid., 224, 227.

More specifically, though, I have already expressed ambivalence about the sense in which Urcid refers to all of these assemblages of Danzante orthostats as "narratives." The Building L-sub and L displays certainly do not tell the sort of event-filled stories that one encounters, for instance, in the obviously documentary murals of Bonampak, Cacaxtla or twentieth-century Mexico. Nonetheless, generously speaking, if what is required for narrative "followability" is a logically linked beginning, middle and end, then it is worth noting the relevance of that sort of composition to the Danzante Wall at two scales. First, at the scale of the full six-tiered façade, Urcid's hypothesis of a boustrophedon reading order suggests a guided engagement through the full display, zigzagging and ascending from the lowest ranking soldiers at the bottom to the top row of senior adults or a council of elders; and in the middle, as it were, compliant observers would have encountered lots of information about the hierarchical military fraternity.[287] Likewise at the scale of individual carved slabs, Urcid notes that the arrangement of some of the orthostats present "a syntactic format used throughout the historical trajectory of the Zapotec script that begins with an annual date… and ends with the glyph of a knotted bag."[288] Thus at that smaller scale, observers encounter something like formulaically (syntactically) constructed narrative vignettes (my term not Urcid's), each of which begins with an annual date and ends with a "Bag glyph," while the middle in-between expresses more substantive, "non-calendrical" content.[289]

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[287] As noted, Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 183-84, describes the apparently boustrophedon reading order of the whole façade; and Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 153-54, concisely summarizes that argument.

[288] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 184. Urcid addresses this more intricate possibility of a repeated or conventionalized "syntactic format" that begins with an annual date and ends with the glyph of a knotted bag or "Bag glyph" (or sometimes a "Fish glyph") at numerous points in his work. See, for instance, Urcid, ibid., 184-86; and Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 24, where he suggests that, "the standard sequence beginning with a year date and ending with the 'Fish' or the 'Bag' glyph closely reflects the syntax of the Zapotec language," and ibid., 417-24, where he addresses that conventionalized syntactic format more fully.

[289] I based this sentence on the comment of Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 424, "Furthermore, the possibility that the Monte Albán I texts [i.e., texts in the era of the Danzante Wall's construction] might represent an early version of the standard sequence, beginning with an annual date and ending with the 'Bag' glyph, suggests that their content is more than calendrics." This topic of "standard reading sequences" that end with the "Bag" glyph will reappear later in the chapter with respect to Urcid's analysis of a six-part reading sequence that

Accordingly, where earlier intimations that the Danzante slabs were largely interchangeable and randomly placed portraits of slain captives—in which case the basal façade was not at all narrative—Urcid gives us the more compelling impression that both the full façade and smaller components within it were purposefully ordered, and therefore prompted legible reading sequences. In short, the Danzante Wall and other Building L displays may not have the sort of "emplotment" that creates an episodic and suspenseful story; but these iconographic displays are nonetheless, in Ricoeur's sense, "followable."

Third, Enrique Florescano's broad remarks on "narrative identity" and the three sorts of mythic-historic themes that one encounters in nearly every community-specific *lienzo* prompt more clues about the Danzantes as commemorations of sacred history (priority II-B).[290] For instance, while the capital's rightful territorial boundaries (i.e., the third persistent theme Florescano that notes) does not seem to be addressed in the Danzante Wall, the façade does qualify as a kind of foundation narrative for the *altépetl* capital of Monte Albán (i.e., Florescano's first theme). And the wall display, moreover, presents visual support for the legitimate succession of the city's rulers (i.e., the second theme Florescano finds in nearly all *lienzos*). In fact, Urcid's revised view suggests a scenario in which, yet again, a time-honored and conventional concept—in this case, the idea that a community's prosperity depends upon maintenance of a reciprocal covenantal relationship with the gods—is juxtaposed with newer, perhaps unprecedented ideas about the specific sort of hierarchical military fraternity that is required to honor that covenant.[291] And in that way, the façade reconfirms Florescano's

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he discerns in nine columnar texts in Program A, which is the second of three (re)uses of the South Platform cornerstones.

[290] Florescano, "Los títulos primordiales y la formación de la memoria indígena en los pueblos de Nueva España," 294, 295, 299-300.

[291] The suggestion here is that because Monte Albán constituted an urban configuration of unprecedented scale and complexity, perhaps even Mesoamerica's first city, the hierarchical military sodality also constituted a new and innovative socio-political formation that therefore required solid grounding in older conventions, e.g., that of a "sacred covenant" between people and the gods.

observation that a primary component of essentially every "primordial title" and *lienzo*—which is to say, an essential component of every *altépetl's* sacred history—is the legitimation of the community's present leadership and system of polity by linking them to deeper origins and traditions.[292]

Additionally, regarding Florescano's emphasis of "indigenous memory," Urcid's reception-theory-like comments on both the deliberate destruction of the Danzante displays and the purposeful reuse of those same orthostats in other building projects speak to an intriguing paradox that links the-also-paired incentives to *forget* sacred history as well as to *remember* it. In other words, on the one hand, that all of the original Building L-sub Danzante displays were eventually, within a few hundred years, either dismantled or covered over by the larger Building L demonstrates a concerted effort to obfuscate and squelch the version of religio-military leadership for which the six-tiered façade was advocating. Urcid attributes that destruction to "an iconoclastic movement during the Niza or Early Tani phase (200 AD);"[293] and, more generally, it is apparent that before the civic authorities of Monte Albán could move forward with new (apparently more autocratic) systems of leadership and polity suitable to the growing capital, they had to eradicate the former system.

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[292] Additionally, along with the Danzante Wall's presentation of the structure of the hierarchical military brotherhood, the comments of Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 185 (my translation), about the inscriptions at the corners of the façade that "could refer a dynastic succession of three specific rulers" provide a perfect exemplification of the second theme that Florescano sees in nearly every primordial title and *lienzo*—i.e., an accounting of the origin and succession of the ruling lineage, which is invariably linked via genealogy to the present leadership.

[293] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 225; my translation. Recall that, in older nomenclature, which Urcid avoids, the Niza phase (100 BCE-200 CE) roughly corresponds to the Late Formative period or to the mid-portion of Monte Albán II. Regarding this "iconoclastic movement" that may have been responsible for the destruction of most of the Danzante displays, Urcid, ibid. (my translation), opines: "This event could be related to what Blanton, *Monte Albán*, 54-56, has characterized as a mini-collapse, when Monte Albán was reduced in its size and population, and when a series of defensive or control walls were built in the Northwest skirt of the settlement…"

In this violent effort at engendering a selective forgetting of the old military hierarchy—a deliberate rewriting of sacred history—the Danzante figures, on the one hand, lose all credibility and value, and thus many of them are found broken and simply discarded in the construction fill of newer structures. Yet, on the other hand, the fact that, as Urcid demonstrates, so many of the Danzante monoliths are strategically repositioned in new visual displays—contexts that rob the orthostats of their original meanings but afford them alternate meanings—suggests that the old carvings had a continuing value and prestige. In Urcid's words, "There is no doubt that these monoliths left a deep mark on the social memory of the subsequent inhabitants…"[294] Later I will have more to say about this quite common pattern of "revalorizing" old forms in new ways;[295] but for now, simply appreciate how the complex life-histories of the revered and then repudiated Danzante displays both reinforce Florescano's remarks about the crucial role of indigenous memory and also demonstrate the pragmatic necessity of sometimes abandoning various elements of one's sacred history. Exhorting the Zapotec populace to forget its sacred history was, at times, more urgent than helping them remember.

Fourth and finally, Urcid's reinterpretation opens ways of applying Bruce Lincoln's posit that only some narratives—by definition, *mythical* narratives—have the ability to "evoke sentiment" and thereby spur social change. Lincoln's rigorously suspicious outlook urges us to

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[294] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 226; my translation. Regarding three of the most prominent reuses of the Danzantes—all cases of what I would term "revalorizations"—Urcid, ibid. (my translation), notes: "[some of the Danzante orthostats were] incorporated into the corners of several of the platforms that lead towards the last version of the Main Square (e.g., in the North Platform, Building Q, and Building I); [other of the orthostats were used] to mark the axes (or the four corners) on the walkways around certain squares and on the steps leading to the surrounding precincts; [and other Danzante orthostats were used] to construct the small megalithic structures built on the base and the center of the steps that led to temples (e.g., in Temple 7 Venado and Temple M)."

[295] More specifically, later I will suggest that, in my rubic, the intriguing process wherein the original and specific meanings of the Danzante displays are deliberately dismantled or covered over (*and thus forgotten*), but their more general prestige remains intact (*and thus remembered*) corresponds to a very familiar pattern of "revalorization" wherein built forms that originally serve as "back-half" components of substantive content in twofold ritual-architectural events are later demoted to "front-half" components of allurement, which initiate rather than complete those architectural events.

look past the idealized "intended meanings" of the Danzante façade to consider also how various pre-Columbian audiences actually experienced and responded to the display. In this respect too, Urcid's reinterpretation challenges older hypotheses that promote the impression that, for a Period I visitor to the capital, the first and uniquely impactful experience would have been a confrontation with the threatening imagery of some 300 emasculated warriors, which supposedly dominated the Main Plaza. Urcid, however, directly poses the question "Who could be the audience to whom the pictorial narratives were directed?" and then delivers the iconoclastic reply that, "The fact that the narrative programs were part of a monumental edifice does not necessarily imply that they were designed to be seen by a large audience."[296] Instead of assuming that everyone who entered Monte Albán's ceremonial plaza was immediately overwhelmed by the grisly relief carvings, he suggests, alternatively, especially with respect to those Danzante displays that were presumably situated within three structures atop Building L-sub, that:

> "Based on the level of community participation in the places where military brotherhoods have operated in other parts of the world, and given the esoteric character of the ideology that underlies associated ritual practices, it seems more likely that access to the upper part of the Building L-sub was very restricted and reserved exclusively for certain members of the organization."[297]

In that case, while the main basal façade may or may not have been available to the general public, Urcid puts in doubt the standard view that the Danzante imagery was the overpoweringly dominant leitmotif that would have monopolized everyone's experience of the Period I Main Plaza. He forces us to consider that perhaps the elaborate militaristic displays were not, after all, intended for mass audiences. Moreover, Lincoln's Marxist perspective encourages us to keep in mind the strong possibility of counter-hegemonic readings wherein, even those observers who were deeply moved by the self-sacrificing Danzantes' facial expressions of comingled pain and ecstasy—in which case the reliefs really did qualify as

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[296] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 224; my translation.

[297] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 225; my translation.

sentiment-evoking mythic narratives[298]—may have been more repulsed than impressed by the intended meanings of the blood-letting warriors. In short, Lincoln's work reminds us that audience responses to the Danzante imagery, if much more difficult for us to ascertain than the prescribed messages of those carefully composed carvings, are also far more accurate barometers of what was actually happening in early Monte Albán.

In final sum, then, with respect to this deliberately inconclusive discussion of ideas about the infamous Danzantes, irrespective of all the speculation these figures have stimulated, the possibility that they are prime components in the ritual-architectural commemoration of Monte Albán's mythico-historical "sacred history" (priority II-B) has been broached, but not really addressed head-on. Javier Urcid's mutinous rejection of the "slain corpses" party-line, however, provides a fresh starting point to do just that. Though his careful work on "reading orders" allows us to ascribe something like a beginning, middle and end to the great Danzante Wall, as an example of a "followable narrative" and a "foundation myth" for the city, it remains somewhat tepid. Nonetheless, Urcid intimation that the circumstances early Zapotec elites regarded as most deserving of memorialization, albeit broadly militaristic, were not battlefield episodes, but rather self-sacrificing soldiers and ritual processions—that is, ceremonial rather than combat activities—presents a both surprising and fascinating eventuality that will be reinforced by the forthcoming discussion of two more of Monte Albán's most conspicuous visual displays. In Urcid's iconoclastic rereading of the Danzantes, the vanquishing of an enemy—or prowess in shedding of the blood of foes—is less worthy of public commemoration than the willingness of rank-and-file enlisted men to shed their own blood as a sign of deference to the

[298] If we recall the argument of Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society*, 24-25, that the decisive criterion that makes *mythic* narrative so much more powerful and socially constructive than *historical* narratives is their ability to "evoke sentiment," then we should also appreciated that the Danzante carvings are arguably among Mesoamerica's most emotion-inducing images. That is to say, while these figures have been frequently described as crudely executed, the facial expressions—which Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 211, 216, 218, interprets as an expression of the comingled pain and ecstasy consequent of blood-letting—would seem to be especially effective (and affective) in that regard, indeed more so than any other feature of Monte Albán's artistic and iconographic oeuvre. And the genital blood-letting enhances more still the visceral response that especially male audiences would have had to these figures.

gods and committedness to the well-being of the wider community. And thus, while the six-tiered visual display may (or may not) qualify as "mythicized history," it definitely does present a kind of cosmogrammatic exhibit of Zapotec ideas and priorities concerning the essential interconnections between war, ritual sacrifice and obligatory reciprocity with the gods.

In any case, though no Oaxacan iconography stimulates nearly so much debate as the fabulous Danzante Wall, consider next the spirited swirl of ideas and interpretations spawned by the so-termed "conquest slabs" on Building J, a set of finely carved stone panels that, as we'll see, may actually have constituted both Monte Albán's second and, eventually, its third major narrative display.

B. The Building J "Conquest Slabs" as Sacred History: A Second Major Narrative Display, Constructed to a Surprisingly Similar Purpose

The nearest rival to the Danzante Wall as a prominent Monte Albán visual display that therefore deserves extended discussion comes in the dozens of "incised glyphic slabs"—finely incised orthostats frequently termed "conquest slabs"—that are discovered on Building J, which sits in center of the south end of the Main Plaza only a few meters away from Buildings L-sub and L.[299] Recall that in chapter 3 on the astronomy priority (I-C), I discussed Building J, or Mound J, at some length, though with primary attention to its heavily debated astronomical

[299] Regarding another vexing nomenclature problem, rather than the oft-used, Caso-derived "conquest slabs," Scott, *The Danzantes of Monte Albán*, pt. I, 35, for instance, opts for the more neutral label "Incised glyph slabs" (his capitalization) to refer to these carvings and to distinguish them from the numerous Danzante carvings that are also relocated on Building J. Likewise, Javier Urcid and Arthur Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," present an alternate interpretation for which the timeworn label of "conquest slabs" is not suitable; and thus they too emphatically avoid that term in favor of the more neutral "the finely incised orthostats." While as in the case of the colloquial "Danzante" label, I appreciate the avoidance of the over-determined term "conquest slab," for my present purposes, I find the generic terms "incised glyphic slabs" and "the finely incised orthostats" confusing (because there are lots of other finely incised orthostats); and thus, for lack of a better alternative, I persevere here with the more prejudicial "conquest slabs."

alignments and significance.[300] Here I switch foci by concentrating on the abundant and also much-debated inscribed stones that grace this uniquely configured "arrow-shaped" structure, a collection of carvings that, by a surprisingly circuitous route, lead us to consideration of, what some will argue, "must have been the second grandest of the early architectural narratives from Monte Albán."[301]

Again my present goal is not firm hypotheses and conclusions, but rather to direct attention to some of the most notable information and opinions that can fuel the forthcoming hermeneutical inquiry into the ritual-architectural commemoration of sacred history (priority II-B). To that end, I proceed with a somewhat more concise rendering of the same three-step formula with which I addressed the Danzante orthostats—namely, (a) a brief review of some of the older ideas about the Building J "conquest slabs;" (b) a similarly brief summary of Javier Urcid and Arthur Joyce's alternate interpretation for these features, which again departs radically from previous assessments; and (c) some open-ended observations on how the larger perspectives of Eliade, Ricoeur, Florescano and Lincoln can inform a fresher understanding of apparently well-traveled carved orthostats that end up, eventually, on the facades of Building J.

1. Earlier Interpretations of the "Conquest Slabs": The Danzantes and Building J as Sequential Showcases of Military Triumphs and Threats

Because the Building L complex and Building J are quite near to one another and equally prominent, the early exploratory histories of the two structures feature many of the same

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[300] See the sub-section of chapter 3 on the astronomy priority (I-C) entitled "Building J at Monte Albán and Building O at Caballito Blanco: A Strategic Juxtaposition of Astronomic Allure and Political Content."

[301] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 157. As will become clear in the ensuing discussion, Urcid and Joyce's allusion to "the second grandest of the early architectural narratives from Monte Albán" actually refers to these "finely incised orthostats" (i.e., what come, after Caso, to be called "conquest slabs") in their *primary location* on the façade of a Period I (or Pe phase) structure rather than on the walls of the Period II Building J, which they regard as a *secondary location* of the same carved stones.

explorers and interpretive suggestions.[302] For instance, Guillermo Dupaix, during the same 1806 visit in which he encountered the Danzantes, explored what would come to be known as Building J, which he assessed as yet another tomb.[303] William H. Holmes, also directly after his account of the Danzantes, addresses this southernmost of the four structures in the center of the Main Plaza, which is feature "a" on his 1895 panorama drawing.[304] Though Holmes notes "considerable irregularities," he does not comment on the odd arrow-shape or skew of the building, which was at that point "covered with scrubby trees." His passing mention of "squarish [four foot high] blocks of slightly hewn stone" is, however, so it seems, an allusion to the "conquest slabs" (a term Holmes does not use); but his stronger interest is in the chamber on the side of the structure with a vaulted roof that, following Dupaix's lead, he thinks is "probably a tomb."[305]

Likewise, Leopoldo Batres, immediately following his 1902 comments on the Danzantes, briefly describes Mound J as "a sepulcher full of inscriptions" and compares the vault of the passageway through it with the roofs of the Maya buildings of Palenque.[306] Additionally, the 1910 description of antiquarian Constantine Rickards, who was impressed by same feature, also alludes to "a grave… the roof of which is made with standing stones;"[307] and he too mentions

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[302] Recall that in chapter 3 on the astronomy priority I have a sub-section entitled "A Brief History of Ideas about Building J: The Seeming Contradiction of Astronomic and Politico-Militaristic Purposes," which provides somewhat fuller information on older ideas about Building J, especially in the footnotes. Also note that Bernd Fahmel Beyer, *La arquitectura de Monte Albán* (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1991), 94-101, provides photos, detailed plans and basic information about Building J, including four building stages, but only perfunctory remarks about its iconography.

[303] Guillermo Dupaix, *Antiquites Mexicaines* (Paris: Bureau des Antiquites Mexicaines, 1834).

[304] Holmes, *Archaeological Studies Among the Ancient Cities of Mexico*, vol. 1, 221-22.

[305] Holmes, *Archaeological Studies Among the Ancient Cities of Mexico*, vol. 1, 222, fig. 70.

[306] Batres, *Exploraciones de Monte Albán*, 31-32. Apparently Building J is labeled as no. 6 on Batres's plan, though the absence of most of his drawings from the facsimile editions of his work leave me uncertain of that.

[307] Rickards, *The Ruins of Mexico*, 106. Rickards, ibid., notes the Building J passageway roof made of slanting stones "is very unusual in the graves in the part of the country."

four-foot-by-four-foot panels with stone carvings of humanoid figures that "the natives call Aztecs [but] that are really figures of a native race of warriors of which nothing is known."[308] Rickards, moreover, contributes a fascinating photo taken from the South Platform that shows the turn-of-the-century Main Plaza cultivated with neatly rowed crops while Building J is so fully overgrown that discerning either its iconography or actual shape would, at that point, have been difficult or impossible.[309] That overgrowth explains, in other words, why investigators in this era do not comment of the building's odd plan.

a. Alfonso Caso on Building J: Paired Astronomical and Militaristic Interests as Signs of Balanced Intellectual-Political Competence

Again, though, it is Alfonso Caso who initiates the more systematic excavation and interpretation of Building J, which he described in his report on the fifth and sixth seasons of Monte Albán exploration (1936-1937) as "the most important monument yet discovered."[310] Where, as we saw, Caso's haltingly and then slowly evolving opinions about the Danzantes were never widely affirmed, his ideas about what he designates as the Building J "conquest slabs" were more direct and much more generally accepted. Initially, owing to "a great similarity between the forms of these hieroglyphs and those that appear in a couple of the Danzante figures," Caso entertains the possibility that "Mound J was built by the [non-Zapotec]

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[308] Rickards, *The Ruins of Mexico*, 105-6. Rickards, ibid., 106, as noted, says that "the natives [of Oaxaca] call all ancient men Aztecs, when they cannot distinguish them by their real names;" and he too sometimes simply follows that convention.

[309] Rickards, *The Ruins of Mexico*, top photo following p. 108, labeled "View of the Mounds." A photo below that, labeled "The Passage of the Aztecs," depicts a couple of the "conquest slabs" (not a term Rickards uses) outside the entrance to the passageway into Building J. A photo on the top of the next page, labeled "Carved Stones," depicts another of the Building J carved stones; and a photo on the lower left of same page, labeled "Grave," depicts the same vault-roofed passageway of Building J that Holmes sketched.

[310] Caso, *Exploraciones en Oaxaca; quinta y sexta temporadas 1936-1937*, *Obras* reprint, vol. 3, 14-15; my translation.

civilization of the Danzantes or that which came immediately after;"[311] more importantly, however, he eventually assesses Building J as among the signal features of the Mayanoid-stimulated Epoch II's brief but spectacular "florescence in the arts."[312] Though few later Oaxacanists endorse the prospect of Maya influence, nearly all accept Caso's assignment of Building J to Period II. Moreover, as I explained in chapter 3, Caso rejects the opinions of Dupaix and other previous explorers that the passageway through the building was a tomb in favor of asserting that this feature, which was partly open to the sky, signaled that "it probably served for astronomical observations;"[313] and since then, the large majority of scholars, notable

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[311] Caso, *Exploraciones en Oaxaca; quinta y sexta temporadas 1936-1937*, *Obras* reprint, vol. 3, 15; my translation. That view, which Caso seems to have abandoned fairly quickly, would carry the odd consequence that Building J, like the Danzantes, was built by other-than-Zapotecs; but where Caso, as noted, eventually attributes the Danzantes to strong Olmec influences, he will eventually attribute Building J to Period II Mayanoid influences on the Oaxacans. It is also somewhat odd that Caso noted strong similarities between the Danzante carvings and those on Building J, but he did not acknowledge (at least at this point), as many scholars do, that actual Danzante carving were reused on Building J. For a thorough enumeration of the (59 different) Danzante carvings that are reused on Building J, usually as stuccoed over construction materials not visual displays, see Scott, *The Danazantes of Monte Albán*, pt. 1, 35-41; and ibid., pt. 2, J-41 through J-133.

[312] Caso, *Culturas mixteca y zapoteca*, 22; my translation. Though routinely referred to as a Period II feature, archaeologists associate at least three building stages with Building J, the first commencing before 250 BCE (i.e., in Period I), and the most recent dating to 500-700 CE (i.e., in Period IIIA). Aveni, *Skywatchers* (original 1980 edition), 267, acknowledges the help of Javier Urcid in determining that building sequence. Fahmel Beyer, *La arquitectura de Monte Albán*, 94-101, enumerates four (not just three) stages in Building J's construction sequence.

[313] Caso, *Exploraciones en Oaxaca; quinta y sexta temporadas 1936-1937*, *Obras* reprint, vol. 3, 13; my translation. Ibid., 14, fig. 16, is a photo of the same vaulted-roof passage depicted by Dupaix, Bartres, Holmes and others. On the alternate astronomic significance of that passageway, also see ibid., 20. Caso makes a slightly earlier reference to Building J as an "observatorio astronómico," in Caso, *Culturas Mixteca y Zapoteca* (originally 1936), 22; and I suspect there are other earlier references than that. Regarding the specific astronomical use of Building J, Fahmel Beyer, *La arquitectura de Monte Albán*, 94 (my translation), says that "Caso (1938) concluded that the Building J passage was not a tomb but an observatory. In this regard, Caso says there are points from which you can direct visuals to the places where the sun rises and sets during the solstices;" and Bernd Fahmel Beyer, "Las lápidas del Montículo J de Monte Albán y el surgimiento del estado en los valles centrales de Oaxaca," en *Anales de Antropología*, vol. 34 (2000), 82, repeats the same point. But I do not find any references to solstices in Caso's report.

exceptions notwithstanding, has been willing to grant that the oddly shaped Structure J did have a purposeful astronomical design.[314] Based, then, on this seeming demonstration of expertise in celestial observation, Caso utilizes Building J as supporting evidence of the artistic and intellectual accomplishments wherein "Epoch II of Monte Albán marked a new step in the development of the cultures of Oaxaca."[315]

While Caso waffled in the 1930s on whether the advances of Period II eventuated from symbiotic sharing between Oaxacans and pre-Maya peoples or violent conquest,[316] his interpretation of the Building J inscriptions accentuated the latter. During the 1936 and 1937 seasons, he locates 51 stones with inscriptions and is certain more will emerge in future investigations of the structure (which they do).[317] In his widely affirmed view, the inscriptions on these stones record "the names of towns that probably were conquered by Monte Albán; and on many of them the year and day of the event are indicated."[318] Later, in 1947, Caso elaborates on that interpretation by addressing what he sees as the three elements that comprise most of these incised panels: (1) in the center, a standardized stepped sign, essentially the same on all of the stones, which he interprets as the "hill," "cerro" or "place" glyph; (2) the upper part, which varies from case to case, which seems to provide a specific place name, presumably that of a particular vanished community; and (3) beneath the stepped sign, an inverted head, signifying

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[314] Regarding competing ideas about Building J's astronomical significance, see the sub-section in chapter 3 entitled "Building J at Monte Albán and Building O at Caballito Blanco: A Strategic Juxtaposition of Astronomic Allure and Political Content."

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

[316] Regarding Caso's shifting opinions as to whether the advances Period II were born of a violent conquest or more peaceable interactions between Oaxacans and Mayanoid peoples, see Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, chap. 1, the sub-sections entitled "Epoch II: Mayanoid Stimulus to a Great but Brief Florescence" and "Epoch II: Well-Balanced Zapotec Artist-Intellectual-Politicians."

[317] Caso, *Exploraciones en Oaxaca; quinta y sexta temporadas 1936-1937*, *Obras* reprint, vol. 3, 15.

[318] Caso, *Exploraciones en Oaxaca; quinta y sexta temporadas 1936-1937*, *Obras* reprint, vol. 3, 15; my translation. Photos listed as figs. 17-20, ibid., 15-18, provide specific examples of the "conquest slabs."

conquest or defeat or, more specifically, the heads of the dead rulers of the various conquered communities.[319] Some slabs also include a year, month and day, which seem to date exactly the respective military victories. And thus, taken as a whole, these components suggested to Caso that the carved panels were precise and specific historical records related to the conquest of certain towns in the surrounding Valley of Oaxaca.[320]

That apparent clarity of purpose notwithstanding, even in the 1930s Caso anticipated Urcid's emphasis on the complex construction history of Building J by noting that many of the conquest slabs were, during the city's prime, "largely destroyed by rainwater;" and then eventually, "the Zapotec covered the stones with a thick stucco coating."[321] Additionally, while Caso thinks the main theme of the carvings is memorializing specific military victories, he observes that, "In the upper part of this temple we find a jamb with the representation of Quetzalcoatl as Ehecatl, which is the first representation of this god that appears in the Zapotec sculpture," which is to say, the façade depicts otherworldly as well as terrestrial themes.[322] "But," Caso writes, "that carving of Quetzalcoatl is of a more recent style than the other stones of this mound,"[323] which speaks again to his acknowledgment that Building J had endured several substantial remodelings.[324] In sum, then, Caso's recognition of both astronomical and

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[319] Caso "Calendario y escritura de las antiguas culturas de Monte Albán."

[320] Joyce Marcus, "The Conquest Slabs of Building J, Monte Albán," topic 29 in *The Cloud People*, eds. Flannery and Marcus, 106-7, provides a helpful summary of Caso's interpretation of each of these three elements of the conquest slabs.

[321] Caso, *Exploraciones en Oaxaca; quinta y sexta temporadas 1936-1937*, *Obras* reprint, vol. 3, 19; my translation.

[322] Caso, *Exploraciones en Oaxaca; quinta y sexta temporadas 1936-1937*, *Obras* reprint, vol. 3, 19; my translation.

[323] Caso, *Exploraciones en Oaxaca; quinta y sexta temporadas 1936-1937*, *Obras* reprint, vol. 3, 19; my translation.

[324] Caso, "Zapotec Writing and Calendar" (1965), 936-40, offers his generally consistent final opinions on the Building J conquest slabs, most of which include "human heads in an inverted position below the glyphs for 'cerros' or hills" (ibid., 938). There he makes the somewhat strange claim that the inverted heads "represent the lords *or gods* conquered by Monte Albán" (ibid., 937; italics added). Again emphasizing (without completely reducing the meaning of the

politico-militaristic functions for Building J, and the iconographic commemoration of both earthly battles and supernaturals, make this structure, for him, an ideal demonstration of the Zapotecs' balanced proficiency in both intellectual and socio-political realms.[325]

b. Competing Interpretations of the Conquest Slabs: Strictly Politico-Militaristic Readings of as the Prevailing Alternative

Subsequent to Caso's two-pronged take on Building J—from which the Zapotecs emerge as well-rounded astronomer-intellectuals *and* soldier-politicians—scholars, depending on how they characterize the ancient Oaxacans, accentuate some permutation of either the structure's astronomic or its militaristic associations.[326] In the 1950s, artist and collector Howard Leigh, for instance, who prefers to see the Zapotecs' primary interests as more "religious" than militaristic, explicitly rejects the idea that the Building J inscriptions record historical matters, arguing instead that the inverted heads represent "celestial deities passing under the earth (the mountain glyph) in order to resume their heavenly procession the following day;"[327] and though serious

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inscriptions strictly to) earthly conquests, Caso notes that the glyphs of this era have "a more symbolic and ideographic character than a realistic or representative one" (ibid., 940); but, certain of the historical specificity of the inscriptions, he says, "There is no doubt, as we see in several danzante sculptures, that this system of writing also served to express names of people, and that the names were taken from the day names of the *tonalpohualli*, most probably that of the birthday of the individual..." (ibid., 940)

[325] Regarding the fact that Caso, seemingly by intentional contrast to Morley and Thompson's one-sided view of the Classic Mayas as great astronomers with neither politico-military interests nor talents, depicts the ancient Oaxacans as displaying a balanced proficiency in both intellectual and socio-political realms, see Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, chap. 1, the sub-section entitled "Technical Adjustments and Popular Enhancements: Answering the Exuberance of Mayanist Aficionados."

[326] Where most scholars, depending on how they characterize the Zapotecs, accentuate either the astronomic or the militaristic associations of Building J, Marquina, *Arquitectura prehispanica*, 328, is an example of one who reechoes both Caso's militaristic interpretation of the conquest slabs and the possibility of an astronomical motivation for the construction of Building J.

[327] Howard Leigh, "Zapotec Glyphs," *Boletín de Estudios Oaxaqueños*, núm. 2 (1958), 3-6. Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 49-56, summarizes—and largely dismisses—Leigh's brief remarks on the Monte Albán inscriptions.

epigraphers are unimpressed, John Paddock, who is also disinclined to stress the martial accomplishments of Monte Albán in any era, favors Leigh's more cosmological than political reading of the Building J glyphs.[328] Working to mediate those two seemingly contrastive emphases, Ignacio Bernal, who is, as noted, reticent about militaristic interpretations of the Danzantes, on the one hand, considers Building J most creditworthy for its display of astronomical interests and prowess.[329] But, just as he acquiesced to Coe's slain-captive view of the Building L figures, Bernal also concedes Caso' view that this structure's carved stone panels "probably are testimonials to successful campaigns of the lords of Monte Albán,"[330] which may both have continued, "though in a different way," the theme of war and victory that was expressed earlier via the contorted, seemingly tortured Danzante carvings and prefigured later stelae that also seem to commemorate military leaders and successes.[331] Again, then, Bernal is not fully successful in reconciling his depictions of ancient Oaxacans as the quintessentially cooperative collaborators with other peoples and their apparently more self-interested militaristic inclinations.[332]

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[328] Paddock, "Oaxaca in Ancient Mesoamerica," 119, mentions Howard Leigh's interpretation of the ostensibly mislabeled "conquest slabs" as an alternative to Caso's. Offering only qualified support for Caso's stance on the meaning of the stones, Paddock, ibid., 123, fig. 79 caption, describes, "Examples of the inscriptions on Mound J that Caso has tentatively identified as records of conquest." Recall also from chapter 3 that, based on personal communication cited in David A. Peterson, "Monte Albán Building J: An Hypothesis of Function," *Cuadernos de arquitectura mesoamericana*, núm. 18 (Marzo 1992), 31, Paddock apparently saw the Building J's 45% skew with respect to the other buildings of the Main Plaza as more purposeful than any alignment with respect to celestial bodies. And regarding the role of Building J in Paddock's broader (re)construction of Monte Albán history, see Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, chap. 3, the section entitled "Period II: The Certain Onset of the Early Urbanism: 'First-Generation' Civilization at Monte Albán."

[329] 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), 97.

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

[331] Bernal, *The Olmec World*, 154-55.

[332] Regarding other largely apolitical interpretations of the conquest slabs, Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 167, n. 3, direct attention to two relevant master theses: (1) Santiago V. Buigues, "Archaeology and Iconography of Monte Albán's Mound J," masters thesis, University of Calgary, 1993, argues that the slabs depict "the earth

Some later interpreters also challenge the strictly politico-military content of the Building J inscriptions. Archaeoastronomer Anthony Aveni, for instance, focusing on the structure's astronomic qualities to the near exclusion of the militaristic themes, discerns in the iconography "cross-sticks" that may have been used as instruments to sight stars.[333] Bernd Fahmel Beyer, reechoing in his own elaborate way my comments in chapter 3 on the strategic juxtaposition of "astronomic allure" and political content,[334] is among the few to present an interpretation in which the astronomical character of Building J and the militaristic content of its inscriptions are mutually supportive rather than independent or at cross-purposes.[335] And John Scott, not concerned with the astronomical alignments of Building J, focuses attention on almost 60 Danzante stones that were relocated on the façades of that structure.[336] Importantly, however,

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monster [the hill glyph] swallowing dead rulers [the inverted heads];" and (2) Nicholas Carter, "New Approaches to the 'Emblem' Monuments of Structure J at Monte Albán, Oaxaca, Mexico," master thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 2006, argues that the textual format found in the slabs "reads as so-and-so (a named individual) was at the mountain (Monte Albán) on such-and-such a date." Urcid and Joyce note, however, that both of arguments (wrongly) take for granted that the primary context for the finely incised orthostats was Building J.

[333] Anthony F. Aveni and Robert M. Linsley, "Mound J, Monte Albán: Possible Astronomical Orientation," *American Antiquity* vol. 37, no. 4 (Oct., 1972), 528; and Anthony F. Aveni, *Skywatchers: A Revised and Updated Version of* Skywatchers of Ancient Mexico (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 265, direct attention what they interpret as "cross-stick" astronomical devices in the Building J carved stone depicted by Marquina, *Arquitectura prehispanica*, 332, lám. 92. As noted by Damon E. Peeler and Marcus Winter, "Building J at Monte Albán: A Correction and Reassessment of the Astronomical Hypothesis," *Latin American Antiquity*, vol. 6, no. 4 (1995), 362, the work of Jansen and Pérez Jiménez, "The Ancient Mexican Astronomical Apparatus: An Iconographic Criticism" (1983), specifically challenges that interpretation of the crossed sticks.

[334] In chapter 3 relative to the astronomy priority (I-C), see the sub-section entitled "Building J at Monte Albán and Building O at Caballito Blanco: A Strategic Juxtaposition of Astronomic Allure and Political Content."

[335] Fahmel Beyer**, "**Las lápidas del Montículo J de Monte Albán y el surgimiento del estado en los valles centrales de Oaxaca," 81-104.

[336] Scott, *The Danzantes of Monte Albán*, pt. I, 40, fig. 22, provides a three-sided elevation drawing that illustrates exactly where each of 59 Danzante stones was (re)located on Building J; and Scott, ibid., pt. II, stones labeled J-41 through J-133, provides paired photos and drawings of

rather than suggest that older Danzante carvings and the newer "conquest slabs" had been displayed side-by-side, he concludes—because nearly all of the Danzantes were placed sideways, upside-down or in ways that hid their carved faces—that they were used merely as building stones, which were apparently stuccoed over rather than exploited from their images.[337] And, by contrast, Scott notes that the entire back section of Building J, the part shaped like an arrowhead, "contains forty-three of these Incised glyph slabs [i.e., conquest slabs] and no other style of relief carving."[338] In other words, while Scott ventures no opinion on the meaning of the conquest slabs, he does assert that they, unlike the recycled but obfuscated Danzantes, were the only sort of carvings that were actually open to public viewing on Building J.

Be that as it may, the far more prominent post-Caso interpretive tack is to soft-pedal Building J's debated astronomical functions and instead concentrate exclusively on the conquest slabs as top-tier evidence of the overwhelmingly politico-military forces that ostensibly account for Monte Albán's history. In the 1970s, Blanton, for instance, acknowledges the peculiar ground plan of Building J,[339] but he declines to affirm the astronomical alignments that Caso, Bernal and countless more recent commentators seize upon to applaud the mounting intellectual sophistication of the Period II Monte Albán residents.[340] Alternatively, Blanton stresses the

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each of those Danzantes that end up on Building J. It is notable that, in his account, the 59 Danzantes outnumber the 43 "Incised glyph slabs" (or conquest slabs) that he discerns on Building J.

[337] Scott, *The Danzantes of Monte Albán*, pt. I, 37, elaborates on his conclusion that "none of the Danzantes there were designed for those positions" by noting, "In many cases, they are rest on they sides or upside-down. Other [Danzante] carvings are merely used as building stones, with their carved faces hidden." He provides no example in which a Danzante was utilized as part of Building J's actual visual display.

[338] Scott, *The Danzantes of Monte Albán*, pt. I, 35.

[339] Blanton, *Monte Albán*, 47. Regarding the role of Building J in Blanton's broader (re)construction of Monte Albán, see Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, chap. 4, the section entitled "The Period II Retrenchment of Monte Albán: Weakened External Threats, thus Weakened Capital."

[340] Blanton, *Monte Albán*, 47, acknowledges that Aveni and Linsley, "Mound J, Monte Albán: Possible Astronomical Orientation," 528-40, "have now [in 1972] interpreted the building as an

continuity in purpose between the dozens of conquest slabs, which he agrees with Caso refer to specific military victories, and the earlier Danzante gallery. Transferring the very same descriptor from the older display to the newer one, he contends that, "Structure J appears to have been the Period II version of the military showcase, replacing or perhaps supplementing the [Period I] Danzantes building…;"[341] both façades were, in his phrasing, "frightening displays of terror tactics [that] would help to legitimate the early state's authority."[342] In Blanton's view, then, there can be no doubt that the new and different constructions were facilitating the same unwavering functions:

> "Obviously the Main Plaza continued, during the Late and Terminal Formative Periods [i.e., Periods Late I and II], to be the special area where the bulk of the community's monumental contruction [sic] was evident and where military successes were advertised."[343]

In the 1980s, Charles Spencer and Elsa Redmond, based largely on their work in the Cuicatlan Cañada of northern Oaxaca, also link the Building J stones to public commemorations of Monte Albán's military expansion during Period II.[344] Gordon Whittaker, in the context of

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astronomical observatory;" but, seemingly resistant to the then-new field of archaeoastronomy, Blanton is unwilling (in 1976) to affirm their conclusions.

[341] Blanton, *Monte Albán*, 47. Besides "military showcase," Blanton, *Monte Albán*, 63, also refers to Structure J as "a military trophy case." That he focuses so completely on the "conquest slabs" while essentially ignoring the astronomical features of Structure J (noting only that "some have interpreted the building as an astronomical observatory," ibid., 47) is a particularly clear instance of Blanton's determined effort to depict the ritual-architectural agenda of Monte Albán as more one-dimensional than others (myself included) imagine that it actually was. Nevertheless, Blanton does anticipate Urcid's view (discussed momentarily) insofar as he entertains the possibility that the conquest slabs may have "supplemented" the Danzantes, which is to say, the two displays may have partly coeval and complementary rather than simply sequential.

[342] Blanton et al, *Ancient Mesoamerica: A Comparison of Change in Three Regions*, 70.

[343] Blanton, *Monte Albán*, 47.

[344] See Charles S. Spencer, *The Cuicatlán Cañada and Monte Albán: A Study of Primary State Formation* (New York and London: Academic Press, 1982), 27-31; Elsa M. Redmond, "A fuego y sangre: Early Zapotec Imperialism in the Cuicatlan Cañada, Oaxaca," Memoirs of the Museum of Anthropology 16, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1983; Elsa M. Redmond and Charles

numerous publications on the hieroglyphs of Monte Albán (all formulated in advance of Urcid's work), debates details, but reaffirms Caso's basic notion that the inscribed tablets on Building J name vanquished towns in the Central Valleys of Oaxaca.[345] Whittaker too is overwhelmingly concerned with the earthly episodes and places that are referenced in the conquest slabs, and thus makes the case that the carved stones constitute "a propagandized record of Monte Albán's military victories in Periods I and II" without any mention of more broadly cosmological symbolism or of the possible astronomical significance of the odd-shaped structure.[346]

Likewise, the elaborate action-theory interpretation presented in Marcus and Flannery's *Zapotec Civilization* (1996)—consistent with their numerous earlier works that accentuate the preponderantly propagandistic purposes of writing and epigraphy—also reaffirms Caso's interpretation of Building J's militaristic iconography, which well matches their emphasis on

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S. Spencer, "From Raiding to Conquest: Warfare Strategies and Early State Development in Oaxaca, México," in *The Archaeology of Warfare: Prehistories of Raiding and Conquest*, eds. Elizabeth N. Arkush and Mark W. Alien (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006), 336-93; and Elsa M. Redmond y Charles S. Spencer, "Notas sobre el desarrollo político en el Valle de Oaxaca durante el Formativo Tardío: una perspectiva desde San Martín Tilcajete," 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), 139-61. Fahmel Beyer, "Las lápidas del Montículo J de Monte Albán y el surgimiento del estado en los valles centrales de Oaxaca," 83-85, has critical comments on Spencer and Redmond's interpretation.

[345] Gordon Whittaker, "The Zapotec Writing System," in *Supplement to the Handbook of Middle American Indians*, vol. 5, "Epigraphy," ed. Victoria Reifler Bricker (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992), 5-19. For Whittaker's comments specifically on the incised tablets of Building J, see ibid., 10-15. Earlier works of note include: Gordon Whittaker, "The Hieroglyphics of Monte Albán," PhD dissertation, Yale University (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1980); Gordon Whittaker, *Los jeroglíficos preclásicos de Monte Albán*, Estudios de Antropología e Historia, no. 27 (Oaxaca: Centro Regional del Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1981); and Gordon Whittaker, "The Tablets of Mound J at Monte Albán," in *Coloquio Internacional: Los indígenas de México en la época prehispánica y en la actualidad*, edited by Maarten E.R.G.N. Jansen and Ted J. J. Leyenaar (Leiden: Rutgers, 1982), 50-86. This last work corresponds to chapter 4 of Whittaker's unpublished dissertation.

[346] Whittaker, "The Zapotec Writing System," 14-15.

entrepreneurial and self-interested leadership styles.[347] They are, on the one hand, similar but more direct than Blanton in dismissing the prospect of astronomical alignments for which Aveni and Robert Linsley had recently argued, opining that "no one has yet been able to link its orientation to a specific star, planet, constellation, or other astronomical landmark."[348] Expressing her summarily skeptical view of Caso's timeworn claim that this was an observatory, Marcus wrote, "I can see no specific evidence to suggest an astronomical function for the building."[349] Yet, on the other hand, Marcus, having argued that that "Building J's lack of alignment vis-à-vis known temples in the Main Plaza might indicate that its functions were secular, not religious,"[350] also opines in 1983 that, "I feel that Caso's interpretation of these slabs [on Building J] is essentially correct."[351] Accordingly, she reechoes Caso's interpretation of the three-part formula on most panels—with a generic "hill" glyph, above which is a place-specific glyph and below which is an upside-down human head that signifies the dead ruler of the respective subjugated community.[352] However, contrary to Blanton's surmise that Period II had been an era of or "mini-collapse" or "retrenchment" in the city's boundaries, Marcus and Flannery see this as the era of Monte Albán's maximum territorial expansion, a kind of

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[347] See Marcus and Flannery, *Zapotec Civilization*, chap. 13, "The Emergence of the Zapotec State." For among Marcus's earliest articulations of largely consistent views on the Building J conquest slabs, see Joyce Marcus, "The Iconography of Militarism at Monte Albán and Neighboring Sites in the Valley of Oaxaca," in *Origins of Religious Art and Iconography in Preclassic Mesoamerica*, edited by H. B. Nicholson (Los Angeles: UCLA Latin American Center Publications, 1976), 125-39.

[348] Marcus, "The Conquest Slabs of Building J, Monte Albán," 106.

[349] Marcus, "The Conquest Slabs of Building J, Monte Albán," 106.

[350] Marcus, "The Conquest Slabs of Building J, Monte Albán," 106.

[351] Marcus, "The Conquest Slabs of Building J, Monte Albán," 107. Marcus, like numerous others, notes that, in addition to the much-discussed "conquest slabs," there are also numerous Danzante carvings in the lowest tier of Buildings J's walls, "but these were apparently reused simply as construction stones, and there is some evidence to indicate that they were covered over with stucco." Ibid.

[352] Marcus, "The Conquest Slabs of Building J, Monte Albán," 106-7, besides repeating Caso's interpretations of those three elements, notes also a fourth component in which, "Occasionally, a hieroglyphic text which in its most complete form included a year, month, and day, plus noncalendrical glyphs—perhaps relating to the date when certain places were subjugated."

Preclassic politico-military climax in advance of the Classic-era cultural florescence.[353] And, for them, the conquest slabs are a very explicit record of the subjected towns that define the territorial limits of the early (Period II) Zapotec state.

In sum, therefore, where Caso had used the paired astronomic and militaristic components of Building J as a warrant to congratulate Zapotecs for their balanced proficiency in both intellectual and politically strategic venues, the Blanton and Marcus-Flannery assessments of Zapotec accomplishments are considerably more one-sided. And the so-termed conquest slabs, which they never question had been designed explicitly for their display on Building J, provide perhaps their most definitive support for the eventually prevailing view wherein it is strictly politico-militaristic incentives that drive the evolution of Monte Albán.[354]

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[353] Regarding Flannery and Marcus's atypical hypothesis that Period II represented the era of Monte Albán's widest territorial control, a kind of surprising Preclassic political climax in advance of the city's Classic-era cultural florescence—a view very different from the conclusion of Blanton, *Monte Albán*, 41-44, that Period II represented an era of retrenchment in the city's boundaries—see Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, chap. 6, the subsection entitled "The Period II Transition from State toward Empire: Political Climax before Cultural Florescence." Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 165-66, capitalize on Blanton's notion that this era (the Nisa phase, 100 BCE-200 CE) weathered "a mini-collapse" as possible support for the notion that both the Danzante Wall and the original "conquest slab" display were targeted and dismantled in this era.

[354] By the way, while Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 157, write that both Whittaker and Marcus "assumed... that Building J had a single construction phase," Marcus, "The Conquest Slabs of Building J, Monte Albán," 107, does note, "Building J went through several construction phases, but the original building and the 'conquest slabs' apparently date to Monte Albán II." More importantly, however, just as Urcid and Joyce claim, Marcus never doubts that the conquest slabs had been designed specifically for their display on Building J.

2. Javier Urcid and Arthur Joyce's Alternative Interpretation of the "Conquest Slabs": A Visual Display Coeval and Complementary with the Danzantes

I turn now to Javier Urcid's again daringly different reinterpretation of the Building J "conquest slabs," a prejudicial term he fastidiously avoids.[355] Though less detailed and more tentative than his work on the Danzantes, he again mounts not a gentle course correction, but a sharp blow of the one of the fundamental assumptions on which all previous interpretations had been based. In another boldly revisionist proposal, augmented in this case by ideas from Arthur Joyce, Urcid flatly rejects the widespread assertion that "the finely incised orthostats" (the more neutral term for the conquest slabs that they favor) constitute a kind of Period II update of the same "frightening display of terror tactics" that had characterized the Period I Danzante Wall.[356] But, at the same time, while rejecting both the standard dating of these carved panels and the almost-never-questioned assumption of the "primary context" for which they had been expressly designed, Urcid and Joyce present a hypothetical scenario in which the "conquest slabs" and Danzante figures are actually linked in unprecedentedly intimate and interrelated ways.[357]

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[355] As noted earlier, Urcid replaces the problematic label "conquest slabs" with the more neutral (but generically vague) "finely incised orthostats." Note also that, by contrast to Urcid's extensive work on either the Danzantes (the previous example) or the South Platform cornerstones (the subsequent example), it is more difficult to point to a publication that provides his definitive view with respect to the Building J "conquest slabs." Invariably he cites the unpublished Javier Urcid, "Mound J at Monte Albán and Zapotec Political Geography during Period II (200 B.C.-A.D. 200)," paper presented at the 59th Annual Meeting of the Society for American Archaeology, Anaheim, California, 1994. But a more succinct and accessible summary of his radically revisionist view appears in Javier Urcid and Arthur Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza and their Political Implications, 500 B.C.-A.D. 200," *Mesoamerican Plazas: Practices, Meanings, and Memories*, eds. Kenichiro Tsukamoto and Takeshi Innomata (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2014), 157-64. It is on the latter article that I especially rely here.

[356] As noted, I draw the phrase "frightening display of terror tactics" from Blanton et al, *Ancient Mesoamerica*, 70.

[357] Disentangling the respective contributions of co-authors is invariably a dicey matter. Nonetheless, in the case of Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza and their Political Implications, 500 B.C.-A.D. 200," based on their other single-authored work, it is fairly clear that Urcid is leading the way with respect to the reinterpretation of the iconography of the three-component "glyphic formula" of the conquest slabs (i.e., ibid., 158-63)

Consequently, because they argue, as I will explain momentarily, that the similarly ill-named conquest slabs and Dancer reliefs were, in their original conceptions and architectural contexts, more coeval and complementary than consecutive—and that neither is the sort of bluntly intimidating record of territorial conquests that previous scholars have assumed—many of my observations about the Danzante visual displays as the ritual-architectural commemoration of sacred history (priority II-B) are transferable to "this second monumental narrative."[358] And again, though Urcid and Joyce's vigorously iconoclastic proposal, widely circulated only as of 2014, is less than fully persuasive to many Oaxacanists—and this one requires an even larger suspension of customary assumptions—it definitely does constitute a new starting point for understanding the status and meanings of the much-discussed Building J inscribed panels.

a. Recontextualizing the "Conquest Slabs": Contesting Building J as the Primary Location for the Finely Incised Orthostats

Once more it is Urcid's commitment to a "contextual approach" that attends to the "primary architectural context" in which these carved stones were located, and then their subsequent relocations, that opens the way to a radically different interpretation of them. Though accepting, albeit with significant qualifications, the standard assignment of Buildings L-sub and Building J respectively to Periods I and II, he positively repudiates the nearly ubiquitous assumption that the "conquest slabs" were originally designed for the Building J façades on which modern-day investigators found them. And, alternatively, Urcid presents a much more convoluted "life-history" of the panels wherein their placement on the last version of Building J may represent as much as their third reuse or fourth architectural context![359]

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while the argument that both the Danzante and "conquest slab" displays reflect a tension between "exclusionary and communal forms of authority" (i.e., ibid., 164-66) is an idea that emerges from Joyce's post-structural emphasis on the constantly contested and (re)negotiated power relations between elites and non-elites.

[358] Urcid and Arthur Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 158.

[359] In other words, by "three reuses or four architectural contexts" for the so-termed conquest slabs, I refer to Urcid and Joyce's suggestion that the carved panels were originally positioned on

Though Caso is typical in never questioning that the conquest slabs had been originally and explicitly designed for display on Building J, which he routinely terms a Period II structure, he does detect a fairly involved sequence in which the once-prized glyphic panels, over time, were eroded by rain and then eventually covered with stucco.[360] Urcid does not take issue with this eventual enshrouding of the formerly conspicuous images, but rather locates that episode in the latter portion of a much more serpentine "architectural reception history" (my term not his). Having enumerated five stages in the construction and rebuilding of the L-sub and L complex, he sees three main building episodes in the overlapping construction history of Building J. Each stage enlarges but retains the odd arrow-shape of the previous structure and, in his view, "the finely incised orthostats, many of them already fragmented and eroded, were reused beginning with the first version of the building."[361] The first, already-pointed and skewed version of Building J dates to the Tani phase (200-350 CE) or, in older terminology, the Transitional Monte Albán Period II-IIIA;[362] the second, somewhat larger and more elaborate permutation belongs to

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a Pe phase building (that I discuss momentarily) from which they were salvaged and reused on each of three successive iterations of Building J.

[360] See, for instance, Caso, *Exploraciones en Oaxaca; quinta y sexta temporadas 1936-1937*, *Obras* reprint, vol. 3, 19. Caso likewise acknowledges that Building J must have had multiple construction episodes and enlargements.

[361] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 158, fig. 9.6, is a drawing by Elbis Domínguez Covarrubias that illustrates the three main construction phases of Building J. This quote is from the caption to that figure. Also, note in that quote, as I will clarify momentarily, that they see the "finely incised orthostats" as being "reused" even in the earliest iteration of Building J.

[362] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 157. In older nomenclature, which Urcid avoids, the Tani phase (200-350 CE) roughly corresponds to the transition from Terminal Formative to the Early Classic or Transitional Monte Albán Period II-IIIA. Recall that Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 225, links the demolition and covering over of the both the main Danzante Wall and the related narrative programs to "an iconoclastic movement during the Niza or Early Tani phase (200 AD)," which suggests that the Danzante Wall was being dismantled in roughly the same era in which earliest iteration of Building J was being constructed.

the Pitao phase (350-550 CE), which corresponds roughly to the Early Classic or Period IIIA;[363] and Urcid locates Building J's third and last major construction episode, which eventuates in the presently visible home-plate ground plan and the introduction of the much-debated passageway through the structure, early in the Xoo phase (600-700 CE), that is, roughly the Late Classic or Period IIIB-IV.[364]

This three-stage construction sequence, then, reconfirms some familiar assumptions about the temporal relations between Building L-sub and Building J, but also leads to a major reconsideration of the relationship between the Danzante carvings and those that were found on Building J. As in most (re)constructions, this interpretation dates the earliest version of Building J several hundred years after the original construction of Building L-sub and the Danzante Wall, perhaps during the third construction phase of that complex, a remodeling that entailed modifications and new stairways that impinged on at least the lowest of the six main rows of the main Danzante façade. That is to say, Urcid and Joyce see Building J as emerging for the first time only after that point at which "the architectural history of Building L-sub became entangled with the life-histories of other buildings;"[365] and, moreover, they think the second and third enlargements of Building J came after the Danzante Wall was mainly or fully covered over. But none of these observations is drastically different from standard views about Building J as substantially later, though partially overlapping with Buildings L-sub and L.

What is, however, much more alarming—revelatory, in fact—is Urcid and Joyce's contention that the so-termed conquest slabs were actually designed for, and initially installed on, a completely different structure, which had been built hundreds of years earlier than any

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[363] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 157. In older nomenclature, which Urcid avoids, the Pitao phase (350-550 CE) roughly corresponds to the Early Classic period or Monte Albán IIIA.

[364] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 157. In older nomenclature, which Urcid avoids, the Peche or Early Xoo phase (550-700 CE) roughly corresponds to the Late Classic period or Monte Albán IIIB-IV.

[365] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 155.

version of Building J![366] In other words, again shockingly, they hypothesize that "the primary location" of the alleged "conquest slabs," and the composite narrative of which they were originally a part, were displayed on "a building that probably dated to the Pe phase (300-100 BCE),"[367] which was, therefore, at least partly contemporary with the fully-intact Danzante Wall.[368] But then, well in advance of the first permutation of Building J, this earlier structure—which has no formal designation because virtually no scholars know of its existence—was, apparently during the Period II flattening and paving of the Main Plaza, completely razed and removed.[369] Urcid and Joyce, in other words, directs attention to a presumably Period I structure of major proportions—which was built "either on the spot where Building J was eventually constructed or farther east, under what eventually became Building Q"[370]—that figures in no previous interpretation of the conquest slabs and that, furthermore, completely escaped the attention of archaeologists until the mid-1980s. And even then, it is only unpublished reports of limited excavations that provide any evidence that this ancient structure actually existed.[371]

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[366] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 162.

[367] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 157.

[368] Regarding the range of dates within which this building on which (Urcid and Joyce think) the "conquest slabs" were originally display, as I will explain in a moment, one possibility is that it was built during the Pe phase (300-100 BCE) and thus significantly overlapped with the fully-intact Danzante Wall. But Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 162, also entertain the possibility that this building was constructed after full or partial dismantlement of the Danzante Wall: "That is, the building with the finely incised orthostats could have been constructed based on recollections of Building L-sub and its associate narrative after the latter's had been substantially modified by the beginning of the Common Era."

[369] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 162.

[370] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 162.

[371] With respect to the slim evidence of this major but previously undiscovered building, Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 162, explain that, "limited excavations in the mid-1980s revealed evidence of a structure beneath the plaza and adjacent to the earliest version of Building J, although the architectural configuration and size of that earlier structure was not obtained (Marcus Winter, personal communication 1989)."

b. The Original Conception of the "Conquest Slabs": Another Ancestor Memorial and Tutorial about War, Sacrifice and Reciprocity

Certain evidence for Urcid and Joyce's revelatory proposals about a long-buried and quite fully forgotten Pe-phase building—which, they think, provided the original setting for a major composite narrative composed of dozens of finely incised orthostats that would come to be known as the "conquest slabs"—is limited. Many will doubt that such a structure, unseeable for two millennia, ever existed. The interpretive ramifications of this hypothetical scenario are, however, huge. Consider five linked consequences.

First, as a critique of previous interpretations, Urcid and Joyce, as noted, shatter the almost universally taken-for-granted assumption that the conquest slabs were in their original positions on Building J; and they venture instead that the initial design and creation of the famous conquest slabs is, shockingly enough, associated with a structure built in the Pe phase or Late Formative period—that is, a major edifice that overlaps significantly with the fully intact Danzante Wall, but that few scholars have even acknowledged and none has linked to these incised panels.[372] Accordingly, all previous interpretations, Caso's, Blanton's and Marcus's included, have, in Urcid and Joyce's view, failed to appreciate the crucial fact that, in their Building J reuses, the hieroglyphic stones had, centuries earlier, been wrenched from the "narrative composition" for which they were originally designed. And thus none of those earlier interpretations could possibly appreciate the initially intended meanings of the finely incised orthostats, which is, per usual, the component of their complex reception history that most interests Urcid.

Second, regarding questions of chronology, instead of the stock assessment that the Danzante Wall and the conquest slabs constitute respective Period I and Period II "military showcases"—that is, that they are sequential rather than contemporaneous—Urcid and Joyce

[372] As noted, the Pe phase (300-100 BCE), with which Urcid and Joyce associate the long-forgotten structure on which they think the "conquest slabs" were originally displayed, corresponds, in older chronological systems, to the latter portion of the Terminal Formative or to an era that bridges late Period I and early Period II.

make the novel proposal that the two displays were, in their original versions, "at least partially coeval" and, furthermore, "envisioned as complementary."[373] Though not specifying either an exact plan or location for the building on which the carved panels were originally displayed, they believe that "there are good reasons to assume that the narrative comprised of the finely inscribed orthostats formed the façade of a basal platform similar to that of Building L-sub."[374] In fact, Urcid and Joyce propose that "one may have been built directly in front of the other," in which case, audiences would, perhaps for as much as two or three centuries of the Pe phase, experienced both monumental narrative displays simultaneously and in tandem.[375] And they goes so far as to present a hypothetical (re)construction of the façade on this long-forgotten structure in which some 38 of the finely incised orthostats (though presumably there were more) were arranged in a purposeful configuration that, if quite different from the Danzante Wall in its execution, is notably similar in conception.[376]

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[373] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 162. As remarked in a previous note, they also entertain the possibility that this building was constructed somewhant later, i.e., "after [the Danzante Wall] had been substantially modified by the beginning of the Common Era." Ibid.

[374] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 162.

[375] To reiterate regarding the respective timing of the two displays, Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra,"168, dates the second major construction phase of Building L-sub, during which the Danzante Wall was fully intact and visible, to the Pe phase (300-100 BCE); and Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 157, note the building on which the finely incised orthostats were originally displayed also "probably dated to the Pe phase (300-100 BC)"—which allows them to assert (ibid., 165) that, "the two largest earlier narratives from Monte Albán could have been coeval during the Pe phase (300-100 BC)." Regarding the original position of second display in relation to the Danzante Wall, as noted, Urcid and Joyce, ibid., 162, propose that "one may have been built directly in front of the other, either on the spot where Building J was eventually erected or farther east, under what eventually became Building Q." Those two options are actually significantly distant from on another.

[376] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 163, fig. 9.10. Since that reconstruction drawing depicts only a portion of the hypothesized platform's façade decorated with finely incised orthostats, the 38 panels that are shown is only a portion of the considerably larger number of orthostats, which remains uncertain.

Third, Urcid and Joyce support their bold assertion that the two public narratives were originally conceived as a complementary pair by pointing out what they see as a number of similarities in their respective conceptions. Regarding commonalities in the arrangement of the orthostats on the two wall displays, they argue, for example, that the overall configuration of the Danzante Wall—wherein there are alternating rows of vertical figures (presumably humans) and horizontal figures (presumably ancestors) in which the size of the monoliths decreases from bottom to top, thereby signaling some sort of "ranked identity group"—is replicated in the second façade.[377] In other words, this second memorial again expresses something like the hierarchical military brotherhood that Urcid ascertains in the Danzante reliefs. Additionally, with respect to a less obvious similarity, they contend that, where the Danzante Wall "was decorated so that human figures covered the main surface, and texts covered the cornerstones," the second monumental display "reverses that relationship" so that it is the cornerstones that "had figural representations of rulers enacting sacrifice by decapitation" while "the rest of the façade's surface was covered with megaliths carved with texts."[378] But, more importantly and irrespective of the reversed use of wall surfaces and cornerstones, in either case, the main protagonists are a combination of fully historical soldiers, or "fallen heroes," and former rulers, which enable Urcid and Joyce to assert that the second façade, like the Danzante displays, was foremost "an ancestor memorial."[379]

And fourth, Urcid builds support for his and Joyce's contention that the second façade, not unlike the Danzante tableaus, refers to actual rulers of Monte Albán by delivering very different interpretations of each of the four basic elements of the individual conquest slabs.[380]

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[377] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 162.

[378] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 162. In candor, I find this claim that the second façade "reverses the relationship" between images and texts from that of the Danzante Wall to be among the most ingenious but least persuasive (or at least difficult to understand) components of their argument.

[379] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 157, 162.

[380] Regarding Caso's own interpretation of the Building J "conquest slabs," see Caso, "Zapotec Writing and Calendar," 936-40. One expeditious way to appreciate the differences between Caso's interpretation of the four components of each "conquest slab" and Urcid's alternative

Regarding those four respective components: (a) Where Caso persuaded nearly everyone that the central "hill glyph" featured on most of the slabs was a kind of generic symbol for community (or *altépetl*), Urcid maintains that the repeated hill sign is actually a reference to a specific sector of Monte Albán (i.e., the Main Plaza or the South Platform), which is graphically rendered as "Hill-diagonal bands-noseplugs."[381] (b) Where Caso held that the stone-specific inscriptions above that generic "hill glyph" refer to respective vanquished communities (i.e., that they are place-specific "toponyms" of defeated communities), Urcid insists that they refer instead to a particular human individuals' names (i.e., that they are person-specific "anthroponyms" of Monte Albán "fallen heroes" or "revered ancestors").[382] (c) Where Caso considered that the inverted heads with distinctive headdresses positioned below the hill glyph refer to the specific dead rulers of the vanquished communities (that is, deceased victims of Monte Albán's conquests),[383] Urcid suggests the inverted heads refer to "deceased heroes" (that is, victorious agents of Monte Albán's military conquests).[384] And (d) where Caso interpreted the calendrical glyphs that appear at the bottom of some of the slabs as the dates of specific conquests, Urcid contends that these are actually calendrical names that refer again to the same individuals referenced in the upper glyphs, who are being memorialized as distinguished military heroes or "revered ancestors."[385]

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interpretation of the same components, is to compare the summary of Caso's view provided by Marcus, "The Conquest Slabs of Building J, Monte Albán," 106-7, with the annotated diagram in Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 159, fig. 9.7.

[381] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 158-59.

[382] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 158-59, 162.

[383] Regarding a point to which I will return shortly, note that Caso, "Zapotec Writing and Calendar," 936 (italics added), somewhat complicates matters by writing that he believes the inverted heads that appear on most of conquest slabs "represent the lords *or gods* conquered by Monte Albán."

[384] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 158-59, 162.

[385] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 158-59, 162.

In other words, then, Urcid and Joyce make the majorly different assertion that the finely incised panels are *not*, as Caso and so many others have maintained, "toponymic" records of a particular places and dates of Monte Albán's military conquests, complete with visual depictions of the defeated and deceased enemy leaders. And, in lieu of that timeworn, still-widely-accepted interpretation, they propose that each carved slab is a person-specific "anthroponym" that refers, not unlike all of the specific individuals who are identified in the Danzante displays, to historical warriors and rulers of Monte Albán who have acquired the status of "honored ancestors."[386] That is to say, rather than a record of military conquests that stand as a threat to any who might dare to challenge the fast-growing capital's authority, the carved panels, at least in their original conception, refer to particular individuals from Monte Albán's past—an assertion that bolsters their central proposition that the second façade, no less that the Danzante displays, qualifies as an "ancestor memorial" that memorializes identifiable individuals who had distinguished themselves in the early history of the capital.[387]

Fifth and furthermore, another crucial similarity comes is their contention that the second major memorial, like Urcid's rereading of the Danzante Wall, presented not just historical and militaristic particulars, but also a kind of visual primer, or tutorial, on the broader connections between war, sacrifice and the prosperity of the entire Monte Albán populace. That is to say, both façades, they argue, enumerate not simply specifics about the respective ranks in a hierarchical military brotherhood or sodality, and not simply specific military victories and ruler accomplishments, but additionally a kind of visual expression of more general matters concerning "the sacred aspects of warfare, including divining the outcome of battles via contact with ancestors, autosacrifice, human sacrifice, and the commemoration of heroes."[388] And, accordingly, we might apply to the second display, albeit with somewhat greater tentativenesss, the previous argument that the Danzante Wall is less an episodic record of military triumphs than a kind of "cosmogram" (again my term not Urcid's or Joyce's) that expresses fundamental

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[386] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 159, 162.

[387] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 157, 159-62.

[388] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 165.

Zapotec ideas and priorities concerning the necessity of war and sacrifice as crucial means of maintaining obligatory, perhaps "covenantal," relations between humans and gods.[389]

c. The Dismantlement of the Original "Conquest Slab" Display: A Tension between Communal and Exclusionary Authority

Urcid and Joyce's supposition that the Danzantes and original "conquest slabs" were coeval and complementary public displays, which "differentially adhered" to same "glyphic formula,"[390] leads them also to a hypothesis concerning the deliberate and roughly contemporaneous dismantlement of the two monumental façades. This component of their co-authored proposal further sets it apart from stock interpretations of these relief sculptures as threatening "military showcases" by appealing to Joyce's wider "poststructural" (or "subaltern") proposition wherein every era in ancient Oaxacan social evolution depends in large part on constantly contested relations between elites and non-elites—ongoing renegotiations in which "commoners" exercise far greater "agency" and influence than is generally assumed.[391] That bottom-up presupposition, which informs every step of Joyce's version of Monte Albán history, further puts in doubt the prevailing assumption of Blanton, Marcus, Flannery and others that those public displays were initiated and designed by a domineering elite who used them as a kind

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[389] Regarding another similarity in the conception of the two monumental displays, Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 162, observe that, if one accepts their hypothetical reconstruction of the second display (see ibid. 163, fig. 9.10), then both displays "alternated rows of vertically and horizontally placed megaliths, with the size of the former decreasing toward the top of the façade." This too is an aspect of their argument that depends upon a hypothetical positioning of the respective incised panels that is plausible but particularly speculative.

[390] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 158.

[391] Regarding Arthur Joyce's reliance on what he terms a "poststructuralist" (or, in a perhaps more suitable term, "subaltern") theoretical orientation and a version of "action theory" that accentuates the agency and personal initiative, not simply of elite rulers, but even more of "commoners," see Joyce, *Mixtecs, Zapotecs, and Chatinos*, 27-32. For a critical summary of Joyce's reliance on that methodological outlook, see Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, chap. 7, the opening sub-section, "A First Guiding Narrative Theme: Accentuating the Agency and Non-Compliance of Commoners."

of threatening club to wield against a largely passive non-elite populous.[392] By that unsentimental interpretation—which accentuates the aggressively self-promoting agency of elites, but affords no similarly independent agency to the "common people" who, of course, made up the large majority of Monte Albán's population—both visual exhibits are one-sided expressions of a totalitarian, exclusionary form of authority.

The poststructural corrective offered by Joyce and Urcid, however, while concurring that the some aspects of the Danzante and conquest slab displays do indeed express that sort of exclusionary authority, maintain that totalitarian message is, at most, half the story, as it were. According to their subaltern-studies-informed view, rather than a wholesale affirmation of an autocratic rulership style wherein "essentially individualistic, self-interested, rational, and pragmatic elites" command and intimidate largely obedient non-elites,[393] both wall-sized memorials "point to a tension between exclusionary and communal forms of authority during the earlier history of the city."[394] More specifically, they see competing but unequal emphases wherein some aspects of both façades do express the much-publicized *elitist, ruler-dominating form of authority*, while the stronger emphasis, again in both cases, is actually on a *communal or*

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[392] Regarding Blanton's corrective presupposition that ancient Zapotecs ought to be seen as political pragmatists rather than artists or abstract thinkers, see Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, chap. 4, especially the sub-section, "Militaristic Preoccupations and Religious Neutrality: Monte Albán as an Anti-Sacred Place." And regarding even stronger premises concerning the central importance of the self-interested initiative of entrepreneurial Zapotec leaders, see, for instance, Marcus and Flannery, *Zapotec Civilization*, 29-32; their view is summarized in Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, chap. 6, a sub-section entitled "An 'Action Theory' Approach: Reimagining Zapotecs as Rational, Pragmatic, Self-Serving 'Social Actors.'"

[393] Marcus and Flannery, *Zapotec Civilization*, 31.

[394] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 164. In support of their discussion of "a tension between exclusionary and communal forms of authority" in early Monte Albán, Urcid and Joyce, ibid., cite Richard E. Blanton, Gary M, Feinman, Stephen A. Kowalewski, and Peter N. Peregrine, "A Dual-Processual Theory for the Evolution of Mesoamerican Civilization," *Current Anthropology* 37 (1996): 1-21.

cooperative mode of authority in which elites and non-elites are collaborators in meeting their respective roles in the maintenance of the sacred covenant between humans and gods.[395]

To put a finer point on that uneven tension, Urcid and Joyce, on the one hand, concede that the visual depictions of specific rulers, including some that are decapitated, speak to a despotic, top-heavy style of governance in which Monte Albán elites set and enforce their self-interested agenda; but, on the other hand, their discernment of more generalized themes—i.e., those aspects that lead me to label both façades as "cosmograms"—speak to a more communal or broadly populist form of authority in which elites succeed in enacting their agenda only when they enjoy the voluntary and enthusiastic support of non-elites.[396] In fact, though previous scholars have overwhelmingly foregrounded the exclusionary authority, Joyce and Urcid's iconoclastic rereading of the iconography guides them to conclude that the prevailing message of both the Danzante Wall and the original "finely incised orthostats"—which is to say, the version of socio-polity that led to Monte Albán's Period I ascent to prominence—is actually this more fully inclusive mode of socio-political cooperation in which the voices and contributions of all segments of society are crucial to the smooth functioning of the capital.[397]

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[395] Note (with respect to giving due credit) that while I link this acknowledgement of a "communal or cooperative mode of authority" especially to Joyce's "post-structural" emphasis on "the agency of commoners," the single-authored Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 225 (my translation, italics added), prefigures the notion of two competing modes of authority in the conception of the Danzante Wall when he writes: "The images and texts associated with [Building sub-L and its pictorial displays] point to a tension in the political process during the early history of Monte Albán. On the one hand, the hierarchical organization based on age grades implies *corporative governance*. On the other hand, the apparent mention of specific rulers and their military victories implies *more exclusive governmental strategies*." Note also, though, that Urcid cites Joyce in making that case, which is to say they have a meeting of the minds on this issue. On this same topic, see also Urcid, *Zapotec Writing*, 6 passim.

[396] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 165.

[397] In Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, chap. 7, the sub-section entitled "The Sequence of Events: Arthur Joyce's Historical (Re)construction," I summarize the way in which Joyce sees the ongoing contestation between elites and non-elites, and thus the tension between exclusionary and communal forms of authority, playing itself out first in the rise and collapse of San José Mogote and then, in very similar ways, in the rise and fall of Monte Albán.

It is, then, that focus on a lopsided tension between communal versus exclusionary forms of authority that provides Urcid and Joyce a means of explaining the roughly contemporaneous Niza phase (or Period II) dismantlements of the two great and complementary "monumental narrative displays," a deliberate destruction that is arguably as revealing as their original conceptions. Where many (re)constructions of the final collapse of Classic-era Monte Albán appeal to the notion of something like a popular (or peasant) rebellion against an overbearing elite,[398] Urcid and Joyce suggest that the early capital witnessed the opposite sort of dynamic wherein up-and-coming rulers rejected the public displays' advocacy for a broadly inclusive polity in favor a more autocratic and hegemonic arrangement, which heightened the control of elites and thereby disempowered non-elites. They opine, in other words, that the two coetaneous and complementary Pe-phase narrative displays became "simultaneously the target of a major internal iconoclastic upheaval during the Nisa phase (100 BC-AD 200),"[399] in large measure, because those displays expressed a collective mode of authority that increasingly imperious Period II rulers were no longer willing to tolerate. That is to say, while Joyce and Urcid relate this elitist insurgency to what Blanton characterized as a Period II "retrenchment" or "mini-collapse," they also see it as the sort of shift in which communal authority was aggressively supplanted by more exclusionary forms of authority in which the identities of specific hereditary rulers are more significant that generalized insights about war, sacrifice and covenant-keeping.[400] This was, in their description, an elitist not popular rebellion, in which case the Danzantes and finely incised orthostats (as Urcid and Joyce understand their originally intended meanings) were sending the wrong message, so to speak, and thus had to be erased from the urban landscape.

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[398] Caso and Bernal, for instance, both include popular resistance to an overbearing elite as among the leading factors that led to the demise of numerous Mesoamerican capitals, Classic-era Monte Albán included.

[399] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 165-66. For slightly earlier but fully consistent ideas about motives for the destruction of the Danzante Wall, see Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 225-26.

[400] As noted, Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 166, appeal to the notion of a Period II "retrenchment" or "mini-collapse" that appears in Blanton, *Monte Albán*, 54-56. But to connect that apparent contraction in Monte Albán's sphere of influence to a shift from communal authority to more exclusionary authority is more an idea of Joyce's than Blanton's.

d. Strategic Reuses of the "Conquest Slabs": Superabundant Orthostats and the Reconciliation of Two Antagonistic Interpretations

Finally, while Urcid and Joyce are most preoccupied with recovering the intended meanings of the finely incised orthostats in their primary location, I turn to what their analysis implies with respect to the secondary (as well as third and fourth) reuses of those monoliths as "conquest slabs" on the three iterations of Building J. On this topic—a vintage example of what I would term the "creative and interested revalorization" of the incised stones—my ideas are somewhat different from theirs.

In any case, regarding secondary (re)usages, while Urcid and Joyce maintain that the two most prominent monumental displays in early Monte Albán were destroyed for the same reasons and at about the same time, they also accentuate a major contrast, or "another binary opposition," in "the pattern of dispersal of carved orthostats" that were salvaged from each display.[401] On the one hand, the orthostats ripped from the Danzante façade were subsequently reutilized in host of very different building projects; and thus, as everyone notes, Danzante sculptures are found scattered in innumerable contexts around and beyond the Main Plaza.[402] On the other hand, however, the less numerous finely carved orthostats, which were rescued from their dismantled primary location, were resituated almost exclusively on the successive rebuildings of Structure J.[403] And while Urcid and Joyce are less expansive concerning the meanings of the old Pe-phase stones in their new (Period II and III) contexts, their comments are provocative. They suggest, for instance, that in this new setting the original meanings of stones, which are by-now hundreds of years old, are "poorly understood," a point of discontinuity that I would strongly

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[401] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 162.

[402] See Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 162; or Urcid, "Los Oráculos y la Guerra," 180, fig. 12.

[403] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 162, note that "the great majority of the known orthostats from the second program were reused in various rebuildings of Structure J," which they qualify by also noting that "only three finely incised slabs or fragments have been found elsewhere, all in nearby buildings such as the South Platform and System M."

accentuate.[404] But they also argue for an essential continuity in meaning, which is an assessment I find less persuasive. Their position is:

> "In terms of spatial configuration and 'affective power' accrued by then already ancient stones, the different versions of Building J appear to have acted [essentially like the original Pe-phase façade that displayed the same stones] as ancestor memorials analogous to a series of Classic period quadripartite architectural-complexes found at Monte Albán and other sites in the Oaxaca Valley."[405]

While it is plausible that the old stones were remounted on the arrow-shaped Building J in an effort to keep alive memories of the same revered ancestors—i.e., that there was a very strong continuity between their original and ancillary meanings—Urcid and Joyce's own work suggests (to me) that the antique orthostats were now being enlisted in a quite different socio-political agenda. That is to say, rather than argue for a kind of centuries-long fixity in the intended meanings of the finely carved orthostats, their proposal actually presents grounds for appreciating the complex succession of (re)uses of the finely incised orthostats as a quintessential exemplar of the "superabundance and autonomy" wherein one set of "art works" is, over time, expressive of very different meanings.[406] More specifically, while Urcid and Joyce

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[404] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 166.

[405] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 157. In several contexts, Urcid has described the sort of "quadripartite ancestor memorial" of which, he thinks, the finely incised stones remounted on Building J provide a prominent example. See, for instance, (1) Michael Lind and Javier Urcid, *The Lords of Lambityeco and the Collapse of Monte Albán: Political Evolution in the Valley of Oaxaca during the Xoo Phase* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2010), 308-9; (2) Urcid, "A Peculiar Stone with Zapotec Hieroglyphic Inscriptions," 87-92; or (3) Urcid, "The Written Surface as a Cultural Code," 122, where he writes, "This practice of carving composite narratives set in monumental platforms to publicly validate access to political power was geographically and temporally widespread throughout southwestern Mesoamerica..." Note also that later in this chapter I will discuss the proposal in Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 340, 345, that so-termed Program B, the initial use of the monoliths that were later (re)mounted as cornerstones on the South Platform, was situated in this sort of quadripartite structure. See ibid., 342, tab. 5.5, for an enumeration of the size and configuration of seven different *adoratorio* platforms of this general sort around Monte Albán; and see ibid., 345-47, figs. 5.50-5.52, for illustrations of this sort of quadripartite building.

[406] Yet again on the topic of the "superabundance and autonomy" of works of art and architecture, see Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, vol. I, chap. 2.

persuade me that the original intention of the old carved panels (like the Danzantes) is primarily the expression of a broadly collective mode of authority, which was dominant throughout the Valley of Oaxaca until the end of the Middle Formative, they are also persuasive in arguing that the deliberate destruction of those façades owes to the ascendancy of "a more exclusionary mode of authority," which emerges in the Late Formative.[407] And thus, rather than working to revive that collective style of governance, the Building J façades are explicitly designed to supplant it via the expression of that more authoritarian style of governance—one in which Caso's designation "conquest slabs" really is a suitable label.

In other words, to pose one interpretive option, it may be the case that the Period II designers of Building J had simply forgotten the original meanings of the finely carved orthostats, in which case the megalithic carvings were redeployed as the sort of "strategy of ritual-architectural allurement" that depends upon venerated but largely uniformed "deliberate archaisms," which I have addressed in numerous contexts.[408] More likely, however, is the prospect that those aspects of the finely incised orthostats that promoted a broadly "communal form of authority" were, in their Building J reuses, intentionally obfuscated by rearranging and reconfiguring them in ways that supported the emergence of a more autocratic mode of rulership. And in that respect, the successive (re)utilizations of those carved panels—specifically those that position them on the façades of an oddly pointed structure with seemingly astronomically significant alignments—constitute an excellent example of Irwin Panofsky's "principle of disjunction" insofar as the very same old stone forms were now afforded a decidedly new

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[407] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 165, contend with respect to the broadly successive predominance of communal and exclusionary modes of authority that, "Evidence from Early and Middle Formative sites suggest [sic] that earlier forms of political authority in the Valley of Oaxaca were largely communal with little evidence for powerful rulers until the end of the Middle Formative. Therefore, during the Late Formative, powerful nobles at Monte Albán [including, for instance, the builders of Building J] could have threatened the traditional authority of communal institutions."

[408] My fullest discussion of "deliberate archaisms," a term that I extract from the work of George Kubler, appears in chapter 2 on the convention priority (I-B) in a sub-section entitled "Architectural Appropriations and Archaisms: The Virtues and Appeal of Unoriginality."

meaning.[409] And that reconfigured meaning, unlike the original, is one that did comport more fully with the exclusionary forms of authority that came to dominate in Period II.

Furthermore, if one takes an interpretive tact that acknowledges this sort of "disjunction," then it is possible (though admittedly somewhat problematic) to build a case that mediates Urcid and Joyce's revisionist proposal with the older interpretations of the conquest slabs deriving from Caso's work.[410] Indeed, Urcid's own contextual approach—which underscores the often-extreme disparity between the meanings of iconographic carvings in their "primary context" versus in their "secondary contexts"—opens the way that sort of conciliation of explicitly antagonist interpretive camps. In fact, two quite different, but not irreconcilable, circumstances (or types of "ritual-architectural events") are at issue: For their part, Urcid and Joyce, are focused on the *primary context* and the *original conception* of the finely incised orthostats wherein the stones are the constituent elements of a Pe-phase visual display that, like the reinterpreted Danzante displays, accentuates a cosmologically-informed mode of communal authority. By contrast, previous interpreters from Caso forward, all of whom are oblivious as to that primary location, focus on what is actually a *secondary context* and *a derivative (or "revalorative") reutilization* of the same panels on Building J. And in that ancillary context, the recycled orthostats may actually be more deserving of the "conquest slab" label insofar as they express a more plainly militaristic and exclusionary mode of authority, perhaps supported by astronomical associations that were also not part of the stones' original conception.[411] In other

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[409] Recall that I discussed Irwin Panofsky's "principle of disjunction"—a concept that George Kubler, "Period, Style and Meaning in Ancient American Art," *New Literary History*, vol. 1, no. 2 (Winter 1970), 143-44, brings to bear on Mesoamerica—in chapter 2 relative to the convention priority, I-B.

[410] Perhaps the most obvious obstacle to arguing that both interpretations are somewhat correct comes in the discrepancy between the Caso-Marcus position that the conquest slabs are "toponyms," which refer to whole communities, versus the Urcid-Joyce argument that they are "anthroponyms," which refer to specific individuals. It is very difficult to see how both of those assessments could be correct.

[411] Recall that in chapter 3 relative to the astronomy priority (I-C), I made the case that the message of the conquest slabs was perhaps accentuated by the celestial alignments of Building J in a sub-section entitled "Building J at Monte Albán and Building O at Caballito Blanco: A Strategic Juxtaposition of Astronomic Allure and Political Content." And note, by the way, that

words, rather than conclude that Urcid and Joyce have correctly ascertained "the real and permanent meaning" of the incised orthostats while Alfonso Caso and Joyce Marcus are flat wrong, that discrepancy may reflect the fact that the two sets of scholars are actually focused on two very different segments in the life-histories of the same stones. And, in that sense, both may be presenting historically viable interpretations.

In sum, then, while that mediation of what seem at first to be antithetical interpretations may not content scholars in either camp, it is yet one more instance in which I will assert the Gadamerian principle of the "superabundance and autonomy" of works of art in ways that guard against assuming that such forms are locked, for all time, to one and only one meaning. But rather than replay again that old methodological saw, I guide the discussion back to the topic of the ritual-architectural commemoration of sacred history (priority II-B) by considering very briefly ways that the broader theorizing of Eliade, Ricoeur, Florescano and Lincoln can inform our appreciation of both the primary and secondary utilizations of the much-discussed "conquest slabs."

3. Original and Reutilized "Conquest Slabs" as Sacred History: Open-ended Interpretive Clues from Eliade, Ricoeur, Florescano and Lincoln

Because Javier Urcid and Arthur Joyce's very compelling proposal with respect to the primary architectural context of the finely incised orthostats accentuates the fundamental similarity in conception between that original Pe-phase façade and the coexisting Danzante Wall, many, indeed most, of my broader observations with respect to myth, history and narrative are transferable to this second case. Nonetheless, there are notable contrasts between the Building L-sub narrative displays and this second, monumental, roughly contemporaneous and correspondent exhibit. Firstly, the original Pe-phase wall display—composed, according to Urcid's hypothetical (re)construction, of a few dozen finely incised orthostats—is not nearly so

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Urcid and Joyce make no effort to connect the iconography of the finely incised orthostats, either in their original or secondary contexts, to astronomical considerations.

elaborate as the 300-plus orthostat Danzante Wall.[412] And, moreover, Urcid's and Joyce's commentary on what they term "this second most grand monumental narrative" is not nearly so thoroughgoing as Urcid's intensely detailed discussion of the more complexly configured Danzante displays. Accordingly, in both respects, this second example gives us far less to go on with respect to the ritual-architectural commemoration of sacred history (priority II-B) than does the Building L-sub façade.

Furthermore, general observations are complicated by my decision to hold open the possibility that Urcid and Joyce's hypothetical (re)construction of the Pe-phase architectural context in which the finely incised orthostats were originally displayed—even if it is completely correct—does not entirely nullify Alfonso Caso's interpretation of the reuse of those same stones hundreds of years later as "conquest slabs" on Building J.[413] In fact, though Caso and his successors mistook a secondary context for a primary one, I would describe (the various iterations of) the Building J façades as early Monte Albán's third, somewhat later (Period II) monumental narrative display. In this fascinatingly ironic case, the reclaimed and reconfigured carved panels constituted, almost assuredly, a more enduring and impactful public display than they had in their original architectural context. Yes, repositioned on Building J the incised orthostats come to mean something very different; but, no, they positively are not meaningless.

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[412] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 163, fig. 9.10, juxtaposes Urcid's hypothetical reconstructions of the Danzante Wall and the original Pe phase configuration of the finely incised orthostats in a way that demonstrates both (1) "a similar construction technique of alternating vertical and horizontal blocks that decrease in size from bottom to top" and (2) the far greater complexity of the Danzante display. That reconstruction drawing, which depicts only a portion of the façade decorated with finely incised stones, has just 38 orthostats; but the complete number of panels, certainly greater than that, remains uncertain.

[413] As noted, Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza, 157, date the original display of the finely incised orthostats to the Pe phase (300-100 BCE) and they date the three successive enlargements of Building J respectively to the Tani phase (200-350 CE), Pitao phase (350-550 CE) and early Xoo phase (600-700 CE)—and, therefore, even given those broad ranges, we can surmise that the "conquest slabs" were already several hundred years old when they were first remounted on Building J. Also, while there seems to be a major discrepancy between *the originally intended meaning* of the finely incised orthostats and *their intended meaning on Building J*, the implication is that in each of the three reuses of the old stones on successive enlargements of Building J the intended meaning was essentially the same.

To the contrary, the socio-historical impact of the revalorization, in all likelihood, supersedes the original.

Accordingly, scholarly debate over the Danzantes and conquest slabs actually presents us with not two but three exceptionally prominent public displays—each of which suggests somewhat different strategies and emphases with respect to the ritual-architectural commemoration of sacred history (priority II-B) in early Monte Albán. Keeping in mind, then, the very large discrepancy between *the originally intended meanings* of the finely incised orthostats and *their different but also intended meanings centuries later on the arrow-shaped Building J*, consider ways that theoretical insights from Eliade, Ricoeur, Florescano and Lincoln shed light on the visual depiction of historical and/or mythical narratives. And note that, because still my goal at this juncture remains generating ideas and interpretational possibilities, very brief comments inspired by each of those theorists will suffice.

a. Conquest Slabs as Mythicized History, Urban Cosmogony, Followable Narrative and/or an Announcement of Territorial Boundaries

First, with respect to the relevance of Mircea Eliade ample comments on the incentives and rewards for constantly reiterating one's paradigmatic sacred history, Urcid's hypothetical reconstruction of the Pe-phase architectural context of the finely incised orthostats is similar to the Danzante Wall in two respects. For one, regarding apparently universal preoccupations with origins and cosmogonies, as in the Building L-sub displays, it is, on the one hand, difficult to assess the Pe-phase façade (or the Building J reuse of those carvings) as the depiction of a cosmogonic story in the sense of the creation of the world or First People. But, on the other hand, also like the Danzante façade, Urcid and Joyce discern that this original façade depicts not just specific people and events, but also provides a more generalized articulation of "the sacred aspects of warfare, including divining the outcome of battles via contact with ancestors, autosacrifice, human sacrifice, and the commemoration of heroes"[414]—i.e., the wall display is, in my terms, a cosmogram. And that more encompassing message does allow us to assess the

[414] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 165.

agenda of the monumental relief as something like an urban cosmogony, which articulates how all social sectors of the young capital—elites and non-elites—are adhering to a primordial pattern wherein proper human behavior both in ritual and military ventures are consequential in maintaining a healthy working relationship between humans and the divine.[415] Also, for two, just as I argued that the Danzante Wall is a vintage exemplar of Eliade's comments about the strategic interlacing of the earthly and otherworldly at issue in "mythicized history," representations of fully historical rulers, places and events on the incised-orthostat façade are enhanced not diminished by their juxtaposition with allusions to transhistorical, supernatural entities and patterns.

In short, then, standard scholarly assessments that the incised orthostats constitute a top-down political ploy to support an exclusionary form of authority is *not* an appraisal that matches Eliade's ideas (or mine) about the estimable existential rewards of narrating one's sacred history. But Urcid and Joyce's alternate posit that the visual display additionally depicts the sort of communal authority in which the full and diverse citizenry of the capital are alerted to the cosmologically consequential nature of their actions does comport far more closely to Eliade's emphasis on the ontological rather than political recompense for constantly retelling the city's sacred history.

Second, applying Paul Ricoeur's comments on the nature of narrative to the finely incised orthostats prompts me too restate my hesitations about the extent to which any of these monumental public displays is really "narrative" in the sense of presenting a well "emploted" and "followable" story with a logically linked beginning, middle and end. Again, this second

[415] It is important note that among the most surprising and fascinating aspects of Urcid's reinterpretation of the Danzante façades is that there seems to have been a far greater interest in memorializing *ritual activities*—most notably, the willing autosacrifice of the naked and contorted members of the military brotherhood—than in recording worldly activities like success on the battlefield; but the memorialization of ceremonial occasions is much less prominent in his comments of the conception of the original Pe phase display of finely incised orthostats. That theme does reemerge later in the chapter in relation to the way in which ceremonial processions and, to a lesser extent, human sacrifices are prominent themes in the narrative compositions that Urcid terms Programs B and A (i.e., earlier uses the South Platform cornerstones).

wall-sized configuration of orthostats does not really have a clear storyline; and in the reuse of the carved slabs on Building J, wherein the panels are apparently rearranged in ways that do not respect their original conception, it is even more difficult to ascertain anything like a followable plotline. Nonetheless, Urcid's hypothesis that, in their primary location, these panels were arranged just like those on the Danzante Wall—that is, with alternating rows of vertical figures (presumably humans) and horizontal figures (presumably ancestors) that decrease in size from bottom to top—suggests that a similar sort of boustrophedon, ascending and zigzagging "reading order" applied here as well.[416] And if that is the case, the Pe-phase orthostat façade, not unlike the Building L-sub displays, may indeed have facilitated the guided engagement through a followable story of Monte Albán's origins and early history.[417]

Third, revisiting these incised orthostats in relation to Enrique Florescano's comments about the three sorts of mythic-historic themes that one invariably encounters in nearly every community-specific primordial title or *lienzo* elicits an observation that initially seems very promising, but then, upon closer inspection, is seriously mitigated. As just noted, Urcid's rereading of the Danzante displays imply that they do qualify as a kind of foundation narrative for the *altépetl* capital of Monte Albán (i.e., Florescano's first theme) and that they, moreover, present visual support for the legitimate succession of the city's rulers (i.e., the second theme Florescano finds in nearly all *lienzos*)—and both of those observations would apply as well to Urcid's take on the original exhibit of finely incised orthostats. Yet, also as noted, the Danzante

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[416] As noted, though without explicitly addressing the "reading order" of the original display of finely incised orthostats, their comments (e.g., Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 163) about a "construction technique [similar to that used in the Danzante displays] of alternated vertical and horizontal blocks that decrease in size from bottom to top" suggests that boustrophedon reading order applied here as well.

[417] Also, with respect to Ricoeurian notion that I discussed earlier (and will return to later) about the essential connection between the seemingly universal need to compose narratives and the also-universal human sensation of existing in time, note that Mary Ellen Miller, *The Art of Mesoamerica: From Olmec to Aztec* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986), 50-51, informed by Anthony Aveni's interpretation of the astronomical significance of Building J, writes, "Mound J is, then, one of the first buildings in Mesoamerica that we can consider a great chronographic marker. Its purpose was to acknowledge the passage of time, and—interestingly enough—it appears about the same time as the proliferation of the written calendar system..."

displays do *not* seem to express the third persistent theme—i.e., a clear statement of the capital's rightful territorial boundaries—and nor is that theme apparent in Urcid's hypothetical (re)construction of the original Pe-phase display of incised orthostats.

By contrast, however, standard (pre-Urcid) interpretations of the "conquest slabs" on Building J are nearly unanimous in asserting that the public announcement of the reach of Monte Albán's politico-military control is no less than the foremost agenda of those same carved panels. That is to say, the contention of Caso that the panel-specific inscriptions on the conquest slabs refer to the precise communities vanquished by the Monte Albán military—an interpretation seconded by everyone from Bernal to Spencer, Redmond, Whittaker, Blanton, Flannery and Marcus—presents that Period II public display as the very quintessence of Monte Albán's aggressively conspicuous articulation of the capital's territorial sphere of control.[418] However, wide confidence that the slabs enumerate Monte Albán's conquests, and thus boundaries of influence, notwithstanding, Urcid and Joyce's reassessment puts that stock interpretation doubly in doubt.

For one, we've noted Urcid and Joyce's insistence that, in their original conception, the incised stones were not toponyms (i.e., that they do *not* refer to specific conquered communities), but rather anthroponyms (i.e., that they refer to specific individuals, "fallen heroes" or "revered ancestors");[419] and, if they are correct about that, it is difficult to imagine that iconography originally intended to represent specific people could actually have been utilized in ways that allow it to refer to specific Oaxacan communities. Likewise, for two, while the intimation of

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[418] Of countless works to reaffirm Caso's interpretation of the conquest slabs as a record of the specific communities vanquished by Monte Albán, see, for instance: (1) Bernal, *The Olmec World*, 154; (2) Redmond and Spencer, "From Raiding to Conquest: Warfare Strategies and Early State Development in Oaxaca, México;" (3) Redmond y Spencer, "Notas sobre el desarrollo político en el Valle de Oaxaca durante el Formativo Tardío;" (4) Whittaker, "The Tablets of Mound J at Monte Albán;" and (5) Marcus, "The Conquest Slabs of Building J, Monte Albán," 107, which says, "one could suggest that the Building J stones represent 50-odd landmarks—'Hill of the Rabbit,' 'Hill of the Bird,' and 'Hill of the Chile Plants' are a few examples—that constituted the limits of Monte Albán's tribute territory in Period II."

[419] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 158-59, 162.

Caso and his successors is that the showcased victories represent relatively recent military triumphs, and thereby demark the current (Period II) territorial boundaries of the capital, Urcid and Joyce's reinterpretation presents the finely incised orthostats as already hundreds of years old when they were repositioned as "conquest slabs" on Building J. Accordingly, the historical specifics in those carved stones have to refer to people and events that transpired in the Pe phase, when the territorial control of the young capital was very different. And thus, in short, while the conquest slabs (as understood by Caso) present a superb example of the sort of flaunting of rightful territorial boundaries that Florescano sees as an essential part of nearly every community-specific sacred history, Urcid and Joyce seriously undermine that possibility.

Nevertheless, regarding Florescano's emphasis of "indigenous memory," Urcid and Joyce's proposal with respect to the deliberate and roughly contemporaneous destructions of the Danzante displays and the original incised orthostat display speaks directly to what I referred to earlier as the not-infrequent incentive to *forget* sacred history as well as to *remember* it. Here again we encounter a poignant example in which a once-revered message—in this case, the Period I promotion of an inclusive and collective form of authority—must be systematically erased from the urban landscape in order to make way for an alternate model of more exclusivist and autocratic authority, which apparent emerged in Period II.[420] This case, thereby, reminds us of the usually-overlooked fact that demolishing public displays is, for the scholarsly discernment of Zapotec investments and priorities, equally as significant as erecting them.

Fourth and finally, touching base with Bruce Lincoln's skeptical approach to the "sentiment-evoking" quality of mythical narratives redirects our attention from *idealized intended meanings* (with which Urcid is primarily concerned) to the *empirical audience receptions* of the finely incised orthostats, which are certain to have been highly diversified and frequently non-compliant. Two aspects of Urcid and Joyce's analysis are especially germane to

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[420] Though it may be a somewhat unlikely parallel, here I am reminded of John D. Barbour, *Versions of Deconversion: Autobiography and the Loss of Faith* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1994), where he makes the unassailable but often overlooked point that conversion to a new religious orientation requires, as a prerequisite, the absolutely crucial abandonment (or "deconversion") of major elements of one's current religious outlook.

this appreciation of disjunctions between the prescriptive meanings of the façades and non-compliant audience receptions of them. For one, where most interpretations simply conflate the intended meanings of the public displays with the way in which pre-Columbian audiences ostensibly understood them—as though the huge tableaus were tantamount to enormous billboards that articulate just one clear and unmistakable message—Urcid, after stressing the "polysemic" quality of the Danzante reliefs,[421] contends that the original configuration of finely incised orthostats also expresses "a tension between exclusionary and communal forms of authority."[422] Though in unequal measure, both contrastive notions are governance are built into these public displays. That is to say, this second monumental relief, like all superabundant works of art—and like all mythic narratives—have, by design, a measure of "indeterminacy," which enables multiple audience reactions to the very same iconographic display.[423] Thus where non-elite audiences can seize on the visual allusions to a collective mode of urban authority in which "commoners" are full and respected participants in the maintenance of a sacred human-divine covenant, elites can accentuate allusions to an autocratic mode in which they enjoy more complete (exclusionary) control. And there are, moreover, we can be sure, more thinly sliced group-specific reactions.

And for two, Joyce's unprecedented emphasis on the aggressive "agency" of commoners meshes well with Lincoln's Marxist emphasis on the frequently non-compliant, even antagonist, "proletariat" responses to the politico-economic manipulations of upper-class rulers. Especially relevant are Lincoln's comments about the inherent limitations of brute "force" or "threat of

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[421] See Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 224; or Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 165.

[422] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 164.

[423] With respect to the "indeterminacy" of art works and mythical narratives, recall that in chapter 3 relative to the astronomy priority (I-C), I appealed to Laurie L. Patton, "Cosmic Men and Fluid Exchanges: Myths of Arya, Varna, and Jati in the Hindu Tradition," in *Religion and the Creation of Race and Ethnicity: An Introduction*, ed. Craig R. Prentiss (New York and London: New York University Press, 2003), 181-96, for relevant comments on how, perhaps counterintuitively, the strength and endurance of mythical narratives depend upon an "indeterminacy" that allows those stories to be endlessly reinterpreted in ways that suit present occasions.

physical violence," which, he stresses, may work as an effective means of political control in the short-run, but never in the long-run.[424] In that respect, then, even if the concerted agenda of the Building J conquest slabs is, as so many interpreters argue, to browbeat and intimidate any who would dare to challenge Monte Albán's military and political supremacy, Lincoln urges us to remember that ritual-architectural messages that are perceived as bullying ultimatums are far more likely to solidify resistance among the lower classes than to engender respect for dominant rulers. Indeed, Joyce's recurrent foregrounding of the ongoing contestation between "hereditary nobles and communal organizations"[425] suggest that the sort of terror tactics that many attribute to both the Danzante reliefs and the conquest slabs would have done much more to foment rebellion than acquiescence among Monte Albán's non-elites. In short, then, Lincoln's work reminds us that a quest after "what was really happening" in early Monte Albán requires us to acknowledge the diversity of the always-selective and interested responses that the incised orthostats must have engendered among the urban capital's respective social constituencies.

b. General Methodological Lessons from the Specific Debate over the Building J Conquest Slabs: Indeterminacy and Revalorization

That said, to end this block of sub-sections with a methodological point, the large collection of approaches to the heavily-debated "conquest slabs" presents both a stellar example and a glaring anti-model for how I hope to be conducting this hermeneutical inquiry into the art, architecture and religion(s) of Monte Albán. On the one hand, a flagrant anti-model comes in those simplistic but prevalent discussions of the conquest slabs that proceed on the tacit triad of dubious assumptions (a) that these carved stones were originally designed for their positioning on Building J, a structure that had just one main construction phase; (b) that their pre-Columbian designers aspired to express one unmistakably clear and overwhelming political message; and (c)

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[424] On "force" or "the exercise or threat physical violence" as "always is a stopgap measure, effective in the short run but unworkable over the long haul," see Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society*, 3-4.

[425] See, among many relevant references, Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 165.

that essentially all pre-Columbian audiences accepted that intimidating message in a complete and compliant way.

On the other hand, a heartening methodological model comes in those interpreters who are willing to accept the broad outlines of the intensely convoluted "ritual-architectural reception history" of these finely incised orthostats that emerges from Urcid and Joyce's work, which rejects all three of those problematic assumptions. Alternatively, then, they present a highly instructive illustration of appreciating (a) that very few of Monte Albán's hundreds of extant carved stones were found in their "primary locations," and thus almost all of the iconographic monoliths participated in a complex succession of secondary, or in this case third and fourth, "revalorizations" where very different meanings obtained; [426] (b) that the deliberate conception of these stones, like other "religious symbols," is nearly always polysemic, multivalent or (in a positive sense) indeterminate;[427] and (c) as just noted, that pre-Columbian audiences, most notably the majority non-elites, were not passive conferees of those intended messages, but rather active "agents" who frequently responded to the prescriptive directives with skepticism, selectivity and sometimes complete dismissal.

In sum, therefore, if one continues to accepts those three timeworn and tacit assumptions (which I definitely will not), then the celebrated conquest slabs, even more than the ever-puzzling Danzante images, are a feature of Monte Albán architectural oeuvre that seems to provide direct and unassailable insight into the hyper-politicized agenda of the capital's rulers. The anti-romantic idea that the conquest slabs present an unambiguous visual ultimatum has, as we've seen, a very ample body of supporters. But if we acknowledge the fabulously eventful and messy "life-histories" of those polysemic and finely incised orthostats (as I insist that we must), then all easy answers are undermined and complicated. Indeed, there is an extreme

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[426] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 25.

[427] Recall from chapter 1 on the homology priority (I-A) my discussion of the always-multivalent status of "religious symbols," a point well made by Mircea Eliade, "Methodological Remarks on the Study of Religious Symbolism," in *The History of Religions: Essays in Methodology*, eds. Mircea Eliade and Joseph M. Kitagawa (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), 86-107.

disparity between mainstream assessments of the conquest slabs as nothing more than Period II politico-military propagandizing versus Urcid and Joyce's appreciation of them as iconographic works that endured a centuries-long succession of respectful prestige in the Pe phase, then complete rejection in the Nisa phase, and then strategic but poorly informed reappropriation during the Tani, Pitao and early Xoo phase rebuildings of Structure J. And that radical difference in assessments provides perhaps the most revealing microcosm of the variously simplistic versus nuanced approaches to the built forms of the Zapotec capital.

Be that as it may, as I aim, of course, for the more nuanced acknowledgement of messiness—which is also the much more empirical accurate approach—consider next the scholarly and historical sagas surrounding the South Platform cornerstones as a third, less prominent but still highly revealing case study. And following that block of sub-sections on these "cornerstones," I will turn finally to the properly hermeneutical exploration of the ritual-architectural commemoration of sacred history (priority II-B).

C. South Platform Cornerstones as Sacred History: A Third Case Study and a Third Collection of Public Narrative Displays

In the wake of discussions of the hundreds of Danzante carvings and dozens of Building J "conquest slabs," I turn now to a third case study and a third collection of iconographic public displays via consideration of a mere nine carved monoliths found along the basal walls and especially at the corners of the great South Platform. Though somewhat less conspicuous to the eyes of present-day visitors—the majority of whom pass right by remnants and replicas of these carved stones as they ascend the 44-step stairway to the premier viewing spot of the Main Plaza—the South Platform cornerstones have, as we'll see, been subject to intensely complicated and transient pre-Columbian life-histories before becoming the objects of scholarly contention nearly as thick and disputatious as the first two cases. Lamentably, here again, just as "Danzantes" and "conquest slabs" are very imperfect and misleading names, "South Platform cornerstones" is yet another misnomer for the orthostats that modern investigators found at the base of the great platform-mound; but I can find no better designation to hold attention on this

handful of heavily debated monoliths even in their long histories prior to eventually being affixed to the South Platform.

In any case, the South Platform, the second most massive structure at Monte Albán, is an enormous mound, with a base 140 by 110 meters that rises some 15 meters above the current level of the Main Plaza. Likely built over and capitalizing on a natural protuberance that defines the south end of that ceremonial precinct, [428] the South Platform epitomizes the conception of the full site insofar it is the sort of *altépetl*, or sacred water mountain, that is both discovered and constructed, which I discussed in chapter 1 relative to the homology priority (I-A).[429] And, in less obvious but not less important ways, the South Platform is the capital's largest-scale example of the sort of mountain-like substructure that, as discussed in chapter 4 relative to the divinity priority (II-A), may have been considered not only as a sacred place, but as itself an animate entity, indeed as the body of a god or goddess.[430] Formerly accessible via two stairways, only the northside one that remains visible today, the flattened top of the humongous mound is host to a relatively modest architectural complex composed of two main platforms, designated as Mound III and Mound SE, the latter known also as the Monument of Four Doors, which flank the south and west sides of a 40 by 40 meter plaza with a small, apparently

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[428] Marquina, *Arquitectura Prehispanic*, 318, for instance, makes the very plausible suggestion that the South Platform was built over a natural eminence. Fahmel Beyer, *La arquitectura de Monte Albán*, 102-6, provides basic information about the size, shape and investigatory history of the South Platform, along with plan and elevation drawings. And in the work on which I rely by far most heavily for the subsequent discussion, Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 281, fig. 5.2, also provides a plan and front elevation of the South Platform, which is based on Damon E. Peeler, *Mapa de Monte Albán*, contribución núm. 6 del Proyecto Especial Monte Albán 1992-1994 (Oaxaca: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1994). Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 284-87, figs. 5.3-5.6, also includes numerous much more detailed drawings of the South Platform cornerstones to which I refer later.

[429] In chapter 1 relative to the homology priority (I-A), see the sub-section entitled "Monte Albán as Heterogeneous Space and Hierophany: Discovered and/or Built Mountains of Sustenance."

[430] In chapter 4 relative to the divinity priority (II-A), see the sub-section entitled "Architecture Conceived as the Actual Body of a Deity: Buildings as Animate Entities and/or Physical Embodiments of a God or Goddess."

quadrangular structure at its center.[431] For present purposes, however, the features of greatest concern are the carved monoliths positioned at the four corners of the base of the final iteration of this enormous monument.

My discussion of these South Platform cornerstones, though dealing with a far smaller oeuvre of carved monoliths than the plentiful Danzantes and Building J conquest slabs, nonetheless follows the same three-part format: First, some comments about the early investigation and interpretation of the monoliths; second, a review of Javier Urcid's again very different interpretation of the life-histories and significance of these stones; and third, more venturesome, open-ended comments on what competing assessments of these cornerstones suggest to us concerning the ritual-architectural commemoration of sacred history (priority II-B).

1. Earlier Explorations of the South Platform Cornerstones: Modest Excavations, Questionable Reconstructions and Conflicting Interpretations

The South Platform is very near to the Building L complex and directly adjacent to Building J, and thus again all of the same early investigators of the Danzantes and "conquests slabs" provide the earliest published remarks on the huge pyramid, including the inscribed orthostats positioned at the corners of its base.[432] Guillermo Dupaix, for example, on the basis of his 1806 visit to Monte Albán and with the support of drawings by José Luciano Castañeda, contributes perhaps the earliest professionalized descriptions of the South Platform.[433] Though

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[431] The plan of the South Platform in Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 281, shows the largely forgotten secondary staircase on the west side of mound as well as the main stairway on the west side.

[432] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 283-98, provides a uniquely thorough "History of Explorations" of the South Platform from which I extract more modest comments (and add a few observations) that serve the present discussion of the ritual-architectural commemoration of sacred history (priority II-B).

[433] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 283-88, comments on the specific passages in *Expediciones Acerca de los Antiguos Monumentos de la Nueva España (1805-1808), por Guillermo Dupaix*, editado por José Alcina Franch, 107-15, where Dupaix mentions or describes

Dupaix is most preoccupied and detailed in his observations of Mounds III and SE atop the pyramid—and it is Dupaix's incorrect impression that four tunnels that penetrate the latter mound are construction features, not modern intrusions, that leads to the appellation Four-Door Monument—his report does reproduce one of the carved monoliths (later designated SP-7), which was apparently found at the foot of the platform.[434] In 1840, Juan Bautista Carriedo visited Monte Albán and made another rough drawing, which has not survived, of the same SP-7 monolith.[435] In 1855, José María García published a rudimentary sketch of the Main Plaza that depicts the South Platform as an elongated and narrow terrace, but he does not address the building's iconography.[436] A, in 1881, American Adolph Bandelier undertook a rushed trip to Monte Albán during which he made sketch of the Main Plaza in which the South Platform is mistakenly placed toward the north.[437]

Considerably more detailed and accurate depictions of the South Platform appear both on the plan drawing of the main portion of Monte Albán and in the famous "panoramic view of the summit remains" produced in 1895 by William Henry Holmes.[438] The latter is composed as

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the South Platform. And Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 290-91, figs. 5.8-5.9, reproduces the most notable images from Duxpaix's work, including a detailed drawing of monolith SP-7.

[434] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 288.

[435] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 288, 329. Caso, *Las esteles zapotecas*, *Obras* reprint, vol. 2, 58, assesses the drawings of these monoliths by José Luciano Castañeda and Juan Bautista Carriedo as so deficient as to provide no usable data.

[436] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 288, addresses José María García, *Descripción de algunos sitios del departamento de Oaxaca*, Boletín de la Sociedad Mexicana de Geograjía y Estadística, primera época 7 (1859): 268-275; and Urcid, ibid., 292, fig. 5.10, reproduces García's very rudimentary sketch of Main Plaza and South Platform.

[437] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 288-89, comments on the inaccurate sketch of Monte Albán's Main Plaza that appears in Adolph F. A. Bandelier, *Report of an Archaeological Tour in Mexico, 1881* (Boston: Cupples, Upham, and Company; and London: N. Trubner and Co., 1884), pl. 26, fig. 13.

[438] Holmes, *Archaeological Studies Among the Ancient Cities of Mexico*, pt. II, opposite 226, pls. 27 and 28. Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 289-93, comments on Holmes's depiction of the South Platform and observes that he, unlike Dupaix, recognized that the tunnels into Mounds III and SE were modern intrusions rather than pre-Columbian features.

though viewing the Main Plaza from a point in the sky above and to the south of the South Platform (not a designation that Holmes uses), which is thus prominent in the foreground of the panorama in ways that very correctly show the arrangement of Mounds III and SE, along with the small plaza and its central platform that are also on top of the pyramidal base.[439] But, by contrast to his accurate depiction of the main mound features, Holmes's allusions to the South Platform cornerstones are confined to comments about a (never published) sketch he made of the carving of a serpent's head, which is, he observed, "entirely distinct from that characterizing presentations of the Maya serpent."[440]

In short, then, though numerous nineteenth-century explorers notice and comment on some of the orthostats along the base of the large mound, none provides detailed interpretations of their content and nor do any speculate that those monoliths belong to some sort of linked set or narrative composition. Be that as it may, before returning in a moment to the much more strongly opinionated range of competing early and mid-twentieth century interpretations of the South Platform cornerstones, note a handful of especially noteworthy, indeed fascinatingly quirky, episodes in the excavationary history and physical relocation of these infamous monoliths.

a. The Excavationary History of the Cornerstones: Batres's Removal to Mexico City, Caso's Analysis and Acosta's Restoration

Once more it is the 1902 explorations of Leopoldo Batres that constitute the first documented excavation of the South Platform and the first studied consideration of the carved inscriptions at the great pyramid's four corners.[441] And once more, as in the case of the

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[439] Holmes, *Archaeological Studies Among the Ancient Cities of Mexico*, pt. II, 218, explains that he made that panorama drawing "from a sketch made from the summit of the central pyramid seen in the foreground of the view [i.e., the South Platform]."

[440] Holmes, *Archaeological Studies Among the Ancient Cities of Mexico*, pt. II, 220-21.

[441] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 293, does a very thorough job of working through the mistakes, inconsistencies and typographical errors in Batres's report to ascertain precisely what

Danzantes, Batres's contribution to the story of these cornerstones as "sacred history" is huge but also ambiguous, even conflictive. Locating some 46 carved monoliths at Monte Albán, far more than any previous explorer,[442] Batres is, on the one hand, singularly impactful in opening trenches at all four corners of the South Platform, thereby unearthing the eight carved stones known in Urcid's nomenclature as SP-1 through SP-8.[443] Though finding them largely indecipherable, Batres nonetheless assessed these as the finest examples of Zapotec iconography, and therefore promptly sent all but the first of those cornerstones to Mexico City for exhibition at the World's Fair and then permanent display in the National Museum, where they could join Aztec and other monuments in impressing much larger audiences, both Mexican and foreign, than were likely to make the trip to Oaxaca.[444]

Batres's extraction of the carved stones from the South Platform revealed that some of the monoliths have reliefs on several sides, not visible when mounted in the basal wall, which was a clue (to others if not Batres) that they had been reused and manipulated over time; and though there are inaccuracies in his account, fairly accurate drawings of all of those stones and their carved surfaces were made by a Oaxacan artist named Sabino Sorianao and published in

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cornerstones he discovered and which he sent to Mexico City. For more general comments on Batres's ideas about Zapotec writing, few of which stand the test of time, also see ibid., 31-32.

[442] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 31.

[443] See Batres, *Exploraciones de Monte Albán*, 32; and Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 293. Batres, Caso and others develop their own systems of numbering and referencing the carved stones of Monte Albán. But the most thorough referencing is that of Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 483-87, Appendix 2, "Key to the Designation of the Inscriptions and Their Provenience," where he outlines a system of his own making for identifying specific carved monoliths and their primary locations. For instance, "J" refers to inscribed stones from Building J, "S" to stones from the South Platform, and "SP" to stones from the South Platform corners.

[444] Batres, *Exploraciones de Monte Albán*, 32, says, "About the end of May [1902] I finished this successful exploration [in the area around the South Platform]. I brought to the city of Mexico the most important monuments discovered, except for the large stone with the seated tiger on it [a reference to SP-1]."

Batres's *Exploraciones de Monte Albán* (1902).[445] Additionally, Batres took a special interest in the so-termed Monument of Four Doors (Mound SE), where he, like Holmes, accurately discerned that the tunnels Dupaix attributed to pre-Columbian builders were actually modern excavations.[446] Also, besides generating a map of the Main Plaza that includes the South Platform—which he labeled "Plan of the Mystic City of Monte Albán"—Batres published a panorama drawing that is so similar to that of Holmes as to appear an (unattributed) reproduction of it.[447] But, on the other hand, as noted in a moment, Batres provides little in the way of enduring insight into the intended meanings or significance of the prized stones.

Alternatively, it is a very young Alfonso Caso who deserves credit for the first in-depth reflection on the South Platform cornerstones that, intriguingly enough, he encounters during the 1920s—that is, in advance of the start of his excavations at Monte Albán—not *in situ*, but in the Mexican National Museum.[448] In his seminal *Las esteles zapotecas* (1928), wherein he labels the eight key stones Esteles 1-8, Caso notes that Batres left the first one at Monte Albán but hauled the other seven to Mexico City.[449] These eight monoliths take first place among the some 40

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[445] See Batres, *Exploraciones de Monte Albán*, pls. 2-5, 18-19; and Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 293.

[446] Batres, *Exploraciones de Monte Albán*, 12.

[447] Batres, *Exploraciones de Monte Albán*, p. 1. By the way, disappointingly, Batres's map of the Main Plaza (along with numerous other illustrations) are missing from all three of the recent classic reprints of his *Exploraciones de Monte Albán*—i.e., those Spanish versions by (1) Kessinger Legacy Reprints and (2) Nabu Public Domain Reprints, and (3) the English version in the Classic Reprint Series, Forgotten Books—but the panorama, which is so similar to Holmes's panorama as to be a reproduction of it, is intact in all three of those reprint versions.

[448] Rickards, *The Ruins of Mexico*, 105, contends, "About twenty-eight of the big sculptured stones which have been found [at Monte Albán] have been removed to the National Museum in Mexico City;" but Caso, *Las esteles zapotecas*; *Obras* reprint, vol. 2, 53-66, a more reliable source, describes, for the purpose of that study, just 12 monoliths that Batres had hauled to the National Museum.

[449] Caso, *Las esteles zapotecas*, *Obras* reprint vol. 2, 53-61, addresses one-by-one and in detail the eight South Platform cornerstones discussed by Batres, the first of which (Estela 1 in Caso's nomenclature) remained in Monte Albán; but the other seven (Esteles 2-8) were, at that point, in the National Museum in Mexico City where Batres had shipped them. Shortly I will describe

carved monuments (all of the central Oaxacan inscribed stones known at that point) on which Caso's based his then-path-breaking assertion that, while Mixtecs had created all of the region's elaborate painted codices, it was Zapotecs who were responsible for these carved monoliths and indeed for the entire city of Monte Albán.[450] He provides new photographs and drawings of the seven stelae then in the museum; and where Batres offered little in the way of content analysis, Caso delivers one-by-one extended commentary on each of them that depends upon the important premise, to which I return momentarily, that the monoliths were indeed part of a unified set and thus single coherent visual display.

At any rate, once major on-site work does begin, the history of excavation at the South Platform is somewhat thinner than one might expect for what Caso describes as "the second most important building at Monte Albán."[451] The excellent 1926 topographic map of Mariano Tirado Osario, which appeared in Caso's *Las esteles zapotecas*, and Horacio Herrera's even better 1932 map, published in Caso's seasonal report for the first season (1931-1932), reveal a solid knowledge of the basic features of the huge platform and the structures on top of it.[452] But, concentrating his efforts on other aspects of the site, it was not until the fifth season (1936), during which he continued to devote fuller attention to the Temple of the Danzantes and

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how several of these monoliths (and casts of others) were returned to Monte Albán and, in 1958, Jorge Acosta, with some uncertainty, attempted to reposition several of them to the locations on the South Platform from which Batres had taken them.

[450] The first and arguably most important of the five main conclusions to Caso's *Las esteles zapotecas*, *Obras* reprint, vol. 2, 51 (my translation), is: "The stelae of Monte Albán, Zaachila, etc., which I now publish, bear a great resemblance to the funeral urns that have been found in the Zapotec region of the state of Oaxaca, and differ from all the codices known to date. Therefore, we must conclude that Monte Albán was a Zapotec metropolis and that not a single codex of that culture has been preserved." Regarding the seminal importance of Caso's *Las esteles zapotecas*, see Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, chap.1, the sub-section entitled "Disentangling the Mixtecs and Zapotecs: Epigraphic Analysis as a Crucial First Step."

[451] Caso, *Exploraciones en Oaxaca; quinta y sexta temporadas 1936-1937*, *Obras* reprint, vol. 3, 3; my translation.

[452] The 1926 topographic map of Mariano Tirado Osario appears in Caso, *Las esteles zapotecas*, *Obras* reprint, vol. 2, 90; and the 1932 topographic map of Horacio Herrera appears in Caso, "Las exploraciones en Monte Albán: Temporada 1931-1932," *Obras* reprint, vol. 2, 210.

Building J, that Caso assigned to Jorge Acosta concerted explorations of the South Platform. Though Caso describes this work as "preliminary and to be continued during the following years,"[453] Acosta's crew did the large-scale clearing and trenching necessary to determine the perimeter of the entire platform. Additionally, Caso notes that the discovery of "numerous carved stones of dancing type [i.e., reused Danzante orthostats] and some others of Zapotec style, which seemed to be utilized simply as building materials;"[454] and he published photos of S-1, the cornerstone Batres had described but left in place, and S-9, one not previously discovered.[455] Beyond that, though, there was, in the 1930s and 1940s, little new to report with respect to the South Platform or its associated carved monoliths.

Much more important, if inopportune, developments in the serpentine saga of the South Platform cornerstones did, however, transpire in the subsequent work on the South Platform conducted by Acosta in the 1950s. During the fourteen and sixteenth seasons (1954 and 1956), he undertook consolidation and reconstruction efforts that included rebuilding the main stairway and garnering indefinite information about possible construction sequences.[456] Then, during the eighteenth season (1958)—following a policy more consistent with Caso's view that pre-Columbian works are most suitably displayed to public audiences, not in museums, but in their

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[453] Caso, *Exploraciones en Oaxaca; quinta y sexta temporadas 1936-1937*, *Obras* reprint, vol. 3, 3-4; my translation.

[454] Caso, *Exploraciones en Oaxaca; quinta y sexta temporadas 1936-1937*, *Obras* reprint vol. 3, 3-4; my translation.

[455] See Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 294.

[456] See Jorge R. Acosta, "XIV temporada de exploraciones en la zona arqueológica de Monte Albán, 1945-1946," *Cultura y Sociedad*, vol. 1, núm. 2 (1974): 69-82; Jorge R. Acosta, "Exploraciones arqueológicas en Monte Albán: XVI temporada, 1948," *Cultura y Sociedad*, vol. 5, núm. 8 (1978): 1-11; and, for a brief summary, Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 294. Additionally, Joyce Marcus, "Teotihuacan Visitors on Monte Albán Monuments and Murals," Topic 53 in *The Cloud People*, eds. Flannery and Marcus, 175-76, provides an account of the problems connected with Acosta's repositioning of the monoliths in the South Platform. Marcus, ibid., 175, says, "Acosta evidently did not have Batres's original plan, and was uncertain where some of the stones had originally stood. He therefore set several according to 'aesthetic criteria' alone..." By contrast, Urcid's account suggests that Acosta did have Batres's somewhat flawed reports but not consult Caso's corrections of those reports.

ambient contexts—a decision was made to return to Monte Albán numerous of the monoliths that Batres had hauled to the National Museum in 1902. Rectifying some errors in Batres's report, Caso had ascertained where on the basal platform the respective monoliths had actually been found, a positioning that both Batres and Caso (incorrectly) accepted as original.[457] But when Acosta attempted to put back in place on the South Platform the actual SP-3, SP-5, SP-6, SP-7 and SP-8 stones, along with casts of SP-2 and SP-4 (the originals of which remained on display in Mexico City), he declined to consult Caso's work, and thus placed them in an order slightly different from that in which Batres had found them.[458]

Because the two corners on the south (or back) side of the South Platform were outside the area open to visitors, Acosta concentrated exclusively on the resetting the monuments on the northwestern and southwestern corners of the mound, that is, the corners facing the Main Plaza.[459] Particularly intriguing in the context of these rehabilitative efforts, at the northwestern corner, Acosta found a boxlike receptacle filled with objects including unmodified shells, worked jades and ceramic jars, which led him to seek and find similar stone boxes with very similar contents, also associated with Period IIIA, at the northeastern and southwestern corners.[460] Though never found, in all likelihood there was also a fourth of these offertory boxes

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[457] See Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 303, fig. 5.19, regarding the arrangement of the corner monoliths on the South Platform according to Caso, *Las esteles zapotecas*.

[458] See Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 304, fig. 5.20, regarding the arrangement of the corner monoliths on the South Platform according to Acosta, "Exploraciones arqueológicas en Monte Albán, XVIII temporada, 1958."

[459] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 294-97, recounts in great detail Acosta's challenges in trying to restore the cornerstones to their (supposedly) original locations on the South Platform; later (ibid., 307-10) Urcid addresses Acosta's hypotheses concerning the meaning of these inscribed stones.

[460] See Acosta, "Exploraciones arqueológicas en Monte Albán, XVIII temporada, 1958;" and Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 295. Urcid, ibid., 298, tab. 5.1, has a chart concerning the contents of the offertory boxes found at the northwest, northeast and southwest corners, as well as a plausible explanation that suggests why one at the southeast corner existed but was never found. Note also, with respect to a point about primary versus secondary locations to which I will return, that Caso, "Sculpture and Mural Painting of Oaxaca," 856-57, capitalizes on Acosta's discovery of these offertory boxes as a means of arguing (incorrectly I think) that the

or "votive caches"—which I will revisit relative to "ritualized building practices" in the chapter 10 on the propitiatory priority (III-C)—located beneath the southeastern corner. In any case, while replacing the monoliths on the northeast corner was straightforward, mistakes in Batres's report made it more difficult for Acosta to determine what went where on the northwestern corner, a problem that he resolved by reattaching SP-5 and SP-8, while leaving SP-6 and SP-7 freestanding nearby.[461] And, furthermore, the well-intentioned restoration endeavor was, as we'll see, additionally subverted in much more severe ways by Urcid's eventual discovery that, while Acosta was working to reposition the stones to the locations from which Batres had harvested them, this was *not*—as Batres, Caso and Acosta all (wrongly) assumed—the original pre-Columbian location for which the monoliths had been designed.

But, before turning back to that crucial problem about primary versus secondary locations, three more investigations of the South Platform deserve brief mention. In the 1960s, John Scott, who was primarily concerned with tracking the reuse of Danzante orthostats, directs attention to 16 of those found by Caso in 1938 scattered along the perimeter of the South Platform, where they were apparently positioned during Period III enhancements of the mound;[462] Scott opines, however, that "the most important positions [i.e., the corners]" are occupied, not by the recycled Danzantes, but by the ostensibly Classic-era monoliths described

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South Platform cornerstones were made expressly for their mounting in that position during Period IIIA: "The work recently done by Acosta (1958-59) clearly shows that Stelae 1-6 and 8 were erected in their respective locations *after* offerings of the handle-spout vessels, which are characteristic of Period IIIA, had been made in these places."

[461] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 295-97. Urcid, ibid., 300, also notes that, "Since Acosta's work, some of the original stones have been removed to the site museum and other have been replaced by casts." Ibid., 305, fig. 5.21, depicts the (somewhat problematic) arrangement of the corner monoliths on the South Platform as of 1988. Marcus, "Teotihuacan Visitors on Monte Albán Monuments and Murals," 175-76, considers that "[Acosta's] principal mistake was the placement of Stela 8 near the northwest corner, rather than the southwest corner." But Urcid, as we'll see, considers the whole venture flawed in much more serious ways than that one error.

[462] Scott, *The Danzantes of Monte Albán*, pt. 2, has photos of each of the 16 Danzantes relocated on the basal façade of the South Platform, which he labels S-1 through S-16. For summary comments, also see Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 297-98.

by Caso as stelea (i.e., the so-called cornerstones).[463] In 1978, Richard Blanton's survey of surface features and a system of walls associated with the South Platform led him to suggest that the structure had served as a temple to which access was carefully regulated.[464] And Marcus Winter, in the context of the Proyecto Especial Monte Albán 1992-1994, reconfirmed (a) that the northwestern corner of the plaza atop South Platform was at one point delimited by a wall, (b) that there were two or more major building episodes and (c) that there was a narrow, largely forgotten stairway ascending the eastern side of the huge platform.[465] None of those investigations, however, impinged in important ways on the understandings of the corner monoliths.

b. Early Twentieth-Century Interpretations of the Cornerstones: Batres's, Caso's and Acosta's Assessments

The twentieth-century interpretation of the South Platform cornerstones thus proceeded, not unlike that of the Building J conquest slabs, with the trusting if usually unstated (and almost certainly wrong) presumption that the locations in which modern explorers had found these carved monoliths corresponded more or less to the original pre-Columbian positions for which they had been designed. Additionally, nearly all interpreters operated with the much more enduring assumption that the content of the carvings was primarily historical, that is to say, this-worldly rather than otherworldly, mythological or "religious;" and, following Caso's work, most presumed that the individual stones all belonged originally to some sort of unified program. Moreover, also as in the case of Danzantes and conquest slabs, specific interpretations of these South Platform cornerstones were invariably couched in, and thus distorted by, various scholars' broader impressions concerning the disposition and priorities of the ancient Zapotec builders of Monte Albán. Always, as hermeneutical theorists predict, the small details of iconographic and

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[463] Scott, *The Danzantes of Monte Albán*, pt. 1, 41.

[464] Blanton, *Monte Albán*, 61-63, 99. For summary comments, also see Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 298.

[465] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 298, cites personal communication with Marcus Winter concerning these discoveries between 1988 and 1994.

epigraphic analysis give way to larger presuppositions about human nature, political authority and the modern-day lessons that one seems to be learning from the study of ancient Mesoamericans.

In Leopoldo Batres's work, for instance—where one finds almost antithetical references to pre-Columbian populations of Oaxaca both as "idolatrous prehistoric tribes [who] believed in witchery"[466] and as remarkably accomplished ancients who ought, therefore, to be embraced as the revered progenitors of modern Mexicans—the South Platform monoliths serve especially well in making the latter case. As Mexico's first General Inspector of Archaeological Monuments, Batres shares his patron and comrade Porfirio Diaz's confidence that the region's artifacts and ruins, if properly displayed, could be a front-line resource for enhancing modern Mexican pride and identity.[467] Frequently invoking Egypt as the premier gauge of comparative cultural sophistication, Batres seizes upon the hieroglyphic inscriptions of Monte Albán as the clearest evidence of "the genius of the Zapotecan race;"[468] and, among the site's iconography, the carved stones that he retrieved from the corners of the South Platform—far more suited to bolstering that analogy than were the crudely honed Danzante slabs—provide his finest exemplars of Egyptian-like hieroglyphic writing. Consequently, while Batres was convinced that "the true meaning of the symbols is lost"[469]—and while he analyzed the monoliths as independent rather than as a linked set—he did discern within them animal and human figures,

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[466] Batres, *Exploraciones de Monte Albán*, 26.

[467] Regarding Porfirio Diaz's—and thus Leopoldo Batres's—strongly held conviction that archaeological remains and ruins, if properly presented, could be signal resources for augmenting Mexican national identity, see, for instance, Luis Vázquez León, "Mexico: The Institutionalization of Archaeology, 1885-1942," in *History of Latin American Archaeology*, ed. Augusto Oyuela-Caycedo**,** Worldwide Archaeology Series 15 (Aldershot, Hampshire, England and Brookfield, Vt.: Avebury, 1994), 69-89. And note also that President Díaz presided over the expansion and renaming of the National Museum of Archaeology, History and Ethnography in 1910.

[468] Batres, *Exploraciones de Monte Albán*, 8.

[469] Batres, *Exploraciones de Monte Albán*, 35.

most of which appeared to be bound and therefore conquered personages,[470] which is to say, he saw their content as primarily "legends in historical passages" and only to a much lesser degree mythical and/or "theological."[471] In sum, though, for Batres, arguably the great significance of the cornerstones lay in their "resemblance to those of their kind in Egypt,"[472] which made them especially adept evidence of the advanced accomplishments of Mexico's indigenous ancestors.

While often dispraising Batres as an uncareful amateur, Caso, in his post-Porfiriato Revolutionary context, nonetheless imagined a similarly nationalist role for archaeology, albeit with vastly higher standards of historical rigor; and, to that end, Caso too afforded a special prestige to the impressively executed monoliths that his predecessor had culled from the South Platform and carried to the National Museum. Positioning these seven stones, along with the one Batres left at the site, as the leading evidence for his *Las esteles zapotecas* (1928), Caso recognized calendrical and non-calendrical repetitions among several of them that persuaded him they together were parts of a unified visual display, which he would eventually date to Period IIIA.[473] In fact, anticipating the sort of historical and militaristic reading he would later attribute

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[470] See Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 305

[471] While the not-extensive interpretive comments in Batres, *Exploraciones de Monte Albán* suggest that the "reliefs represent legends in historical passages" (p. 15)—that is to say, largely historical and human figures—he does note at least one relief sculpture "seems to represent the god of license" (p. 31).

[472] Batres, *Exploraciones de Monte Albán*, 17, describes an inscribed stelea (which I think is a reference to what is sometimes called the "Southwestern Stelae" located at the northwest corner of the South Platform) "the most important discovery I have made in Monte Albán... because of the resemblance it has to those of its kind in Egypt." Batres's allusions to what he sees as ancient Oaxacan parallels to Egypt, and thus signs of advanced civilization, are frequent in his work, e.g., ibid., 15, 17, 23 and 31.

[473] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 305-7, comments on the important conclusion of Caso, *Las esteles zapotecas*, *Obras* reprint, vol. 2, 60-61, that the South Platform cornerstones are part of a unified public display. Note, however, while Caso had at that point (in 1928) not yet arrived at his five-period chronology for Monte Albán, by the appearance of Caso, "Sculpture and Mural Painting of Oaxaca" (1965), 857, he was prepared to write, "I consider that these nine stelae located in the angles of the southern platform of Monte Albán were set up in Period IIIA, which corresponds fully to the Classic horizon."

to Building J conquest slabs, and nuancing Batres's observation about bound and thus apparently conquered personages, Caso noted in 1928 that,

> "When observing the eight stelae [or South Platform cornerstones]... we note six of them (2, 3, 5, 6, 7, and 8) represent prisoners with hands tied behind their backs, as if this structure had been built to commemorate the victories that Monte Albán accomplished over the different places named inside the "hill" glyph at the bottom of each of these stelae."[474]

Owing to his preoccupations with calendrics, Caso was confident that essentially all of the glyphs had a chronological significance in recording the year, month and day of the commemorated events,[475] which is to say, yet again he found evidence that, while specific places were being demarked, native time-reckoning was a matter of first importance. And while he was convinced that most of individuals depicted were mortals, Caso did interpret some of the elaborately dressed personages as deities or their impersonators.[476]

Jorge Acosta, along with his role in physically resituating the monoliths and replicas back onto the South Platform, also offered notable reflections on their content. More tentative than Caso, Acosta, who shared the general assumption that the content of the carvings was largely earthly and historical, questioned the supposed chronological value of all of the glyphs by asserting that some of them were toponymic insofar as they had "clear geographical referents" that indicated specific places rather than dates.[477] Also, though Acosta believed that the different

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[474] Caso, *Las esteles zapotecas*, *Obras* reprint vol. 2, 60-61; quoted by Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 307. Some 37 years latter, Caso, "Sculpture and Mural Painting of Oaxaca," 857, reaffirms his view that Stelae 2, 3, 5, 6, 7 and 8 all depict scenes in which a person is made a prisoner. At that point, besides stressing the militaristic theme, Caso opines that Stela 7 "also depicts, as do Stela 1 and the one known as the 'Plain Stela' [or Estela Lisa], a procession of priests..." Ibid.

[475] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 307.

[476] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 307.

[477] Acosta, "Exploraciones arqueológicas en Monte Albán, XVIII temporada, 1958." This paragraph relies heavily on the summary of Acosta's views on the South Platform cornerstones presented in Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 307-10.

headdresses denoted the rank and identity of various individuals, he "explicitly discarded as improbable" that the non-calendrical glyphs were personal names.[478] Moreover, anticipating two features of subsequent interpretations (to which I turn momentarily), Acosta noted, for one, that while numerous of the personages do seem to be bound captives, others who carry copal pouches and show no signs of weapons or forcible restraints appear to be "priests" who are paying homage to a ruler of Monte Albán who had the attributes and insignia of a god.[479] And for two, Acosta pointed out pictographs of buildings that shared representational similarities with temples in Teotihuacan iconography, an idea that proves central to some later interpretations.[480]

Moreover, having the advantage of seeing the monoliths out of place, which exposed carvings on their lateral sides that were hidden once they were mounted on the basal façade, Acosta broached the important, too-little-considered question of possible pre-Columbian reuses and repositions of the monoliths. Though generally accepting the uncertain assumption that he was replacing the stones to the primary locations in which they had been originally placed during Period IIIA, Acosta seriously entertained—but then argued against—the possibility that the stones "were used initially as lintels, that is, horizontally, and then vertically as stelae, which might account for the hidden reliefs on the narrow surfaces."[481]

In short, then, where Caso eventually arrived at the emphatic (though, as we'll see, very unlikely) conclusion that the cornerstones had been designed originally and expressly for

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[478] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 309.

[479] Caso, "Sculpture and Mural Painting of Oaxaca," 857, reechoes Acosta's conclusion that while several of the South Platform cornerstones depict captive prisoners, Stela 1, 7 and the one known as the "Plain Stela" [or Estela Lisa] depict a procession of priests.

[480] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 309.

[481] Acosta, "Exploraciones arqueológicas en Monte Albán, XVIII temporada, 1958," 29; quoted by Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 309.

inclusion in a Period IIIA public display on the base of the South Platform,[482] Acosta held open the possibility that the cornerstones might have been used elsewhere prior to their relocation there.[483]

c. Later Twentieth-Century Interpretations: Marcus's Hypothesis of Zapotec Diplomacy and Teotihuacan Acquiescence

Following a hiatus in new ideas about the South Platform monoliths, the 1980s saw occasional efforts to revive and extend Caso and Acosta's interpretations of them. Focusing exclusively on the epigraphy, and thereby ignoring the accompanying images, Gordon Whittaker, for instance, offered an analysis that reaffirmed Caso's view that all the glyphs have a chronological value that refers to a 26-year span (from a year 13 Tepatl in SP-1 to a year 13 Tochtli in SP-2).[484] Arguing for a correlation between the placement of the stones around the South Platform and their sequence in the 52-year cycle, Whittaker proposed a kind of intended right-to-left reading order, starting with SP-1 and ending with SP-2, which suggested to him,

> "the possibility that the Zapotecs ordered events to fit the close or beginning of a recurring four-year subcycle, in *a kind of ritual systematization of history*. Alternatively, it may simply be that they preferred to set down events at four-year intervals."[485]

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[482] As noted, Caso, "Sculpture and Mural Painting of Oaxaca," 857, writes, "I consider that the nine stelae located at the angles of the southern platform of Monte Albán were set up in Period IIIA, which corresponds fully to the Classic horizon."

[483] See Acosta, "Exploraciones arqueológicas en Monte Albán, XVIII temporada, 1958," 31; or Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 310.

[484] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 315-16, provides a concise and largely critical assessment of the ideas about the South Platform monoliths in Gordon Whittaker, "The Structure of the Zapotec Calendar," in *Calendars in Mesoamerica and Peru*, eds. Anthony F. Aveni and Gordon Brotherston, Proceedings of the 44th International Congress of Americanists, Manchester, 1982, BAR International Series 174 (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 1983), 101-33.

[485] Whittaker, "The Structure of the Zapotec Calendar," 120 (italics added); quoted by Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 315.

And Carey Rote, in a 1987 PhD dissertation, revived Acosta's consideration of the possibility that "stelae created in connection with the dedication of the South Platform... may have also been re-utilized from a previous context, since part of their imagery is hidden within the walls of the platform."[486] Attending more fully to the images as well as the epigraphy, and entertaining more seriously the identification of specific people and places as well as dates, Rote's proposal suggests that the stones were all part of a narrative display commemorating actual battles:

> "The places and individuals named on stela 1, 7, 8 and the Estela Lisa [SP-9] may relate to the imagery of 316 Zapotec military victories elsewhere on these monuments [SP-1, SP-2, SP-3, SP-5 and SP-6]. In fact, these may be the noblemen/warriors who aided in the conquest of these foreign sites."[487]

Those interpretive efforts notwithstanding, it was again Joyce Marcus who provides by far the most extended commentary of the South Platform cornerstones subsequent to the work of Caso and Acosta, but in advance of Javier Urcid's thoroughgoing reconsideration of them. In a series of publications in the 1980s and 1990s that add increasing specificity to her hypothesis, Marcus presents interpretations of these monoliths that in some respects affirmed and in others challenged the earlier ideas of Caso and Acosta.[488] Marcus, like most interpreters, accepts the problematic assumptions (a) that the South Platform had been built in a single stage, during

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[486] Carey Clements Rote, "Traditions in Pre-Columbian Funerary Art at Monte Albán and in the Valley of Oaxaca, Mexico" (PhD diss., University of Texas, 1987), 124; quoted by Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 316.

[487] Rote, "Traditions in Pre-Columbian Funerary Art at Monte Albán and in the Valley of Oaxaca, Mexico," 135-36; quoted by Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 316.

[488] Marcus directly addresses the South Platform cornerstones, among other places, in: (1) Joyce Marcus, "Zapotec Writing," *Scientific American*, vol. 242, no. 2 (1980): 50-64; (2) Joyce Marcus, "Stone Monuments and Tomb Murals of Monte Albán IIIa," Topic 42 in *The Cloud People*, eds. Flannery and Marcus (1983), 137-43; (3) Marcus, "Teotihuacan Visitors on Monte Albán Monuments and Murals" (1983), 175-181; (4) Marcus, *Mesoamerican Writing Systems* (1992), 325-29, 400-9; (5) Joyce Marcus, "A Zapotec Inauguration in Comparative Perspective," in *Caciques and Their People*, eds. Joyce Marcus and Judith Francis Zeitlin, University of Michigan Anthropological Papers 89 (Ann Arbor: Museum of Anthropology, 1994), 245-274; and (6) Marcus and Flannery, *Zapotec Civilization* (1996), 180, 217-21, 257, and 262.

Period IIIA,[489] and (b) that the monoliths had been found in the original context at which they had been placed at that time.[490] Inclined to attribute explicitly politically "propagandistic" motives to essentially all of Monte Albán's public displays, initially, Marcus opines, like Caso, that the frontal surfaces of these monuments—that is, the sole sides that would have been visible once the orthostats were embedded in the basal walls of the South Platform—"apparently depict Period IIIa rulers and their captives and conquests."[491] But where Caso identified a figure dressed as a jaguar standing on a hill sign as a "god" named 3 Jaguar, Marcus exercises her abiding conviction that "the Zapotecs did not have deities with names taken from the 260-day calendar"[492] to offer the alternative view that this was a human ruler.[493] Nonetheless, in that public display of military prowess, she sees the South Platform monuments as quite similar in conception to the Period II Building J conquest slabs and decidedly different from the later "genealogical registers" of Periods IIIB-IV.[494]

But, besides the frontal faces of these stones, Marcus takes a special interest in the notably different "hidden carvings" that appear on the edges of the monuments, that is, surfaces

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[489] Marcus, "Teotihuacan Visitors on Monte Albán Monuments and Murals," 175, for instance, explicitly notes that, "The building has not been fully explored, but Acosta's (1958-1959) excavations suggest that the South Platform is a huge pyramidal mound built in one stage during Monte Albán IIIa."

[490] The critical summary of Marcus's reading of the South Platform monoliths provided by Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 310-12, which reveals that she will be the principal nemesis of his interpretive alternatives, notes her acquiescence to these two untoward assumptions concerning the supposedly primary location of these monoliths.

[491] Marcus, "Stone Monuments and Tomb Murals of Monte Albán IIIa," 137.

[492] Marcus, "Stone Monuments and Tomb Murals of Monte Albán IIIa," 137. Recall that Marcus's frequently asserted opinion that ancient Zapotec religion was "animatistic" and absent the notion of personal deities was a recurrent theme in chapter 4 relative to the divinity priority (II-A). See, for example, the sub-section entitled "Ancient Oaxacan Animism and/or Animatism: Affirming Impersonal Super-natural Energies and Undermining Polytheism-Monotheism Debates."

[493] Marcus, "Stone Monuments and Tomb Murals of Monte Albán IIIa," 137.

[494] Marcus, "Stone Monuments and Tomb Murals of Monte Albán IIIa," 137-38.

that would have been unseeable once the stones were mounted in the South Platform basal walls. Indeed, the notion that the cravings on the broad surfaces of the cornerstones present one narrative program and those on the narrow edges of the same stones are a largely or wholly different narrative composition—an idea that, as we'll see, is reaffirmed by Urcid's hypothesis about the utilization of these stones in two previous architectural contexts, which he labels Programs A and B[495]—is crucial to her thesis. In any case, these eventually obscured inscriptions, Marcus thinks, "depict named personages from Teotihuacan visiting, and the associated dedicatory offerings [i.e., the offertory boxes Acosta found at the respective corners of the mound] suggest that the visit might have coincided with the completion of the South Platform."[496] Moreover, from the outset, Marcus believes that "the 'hidden' carvings in the corners of the South Platform all seem to relate to the same event," which she describes as follows:

> "eight persons wearing typical Teotihuacan headdresses, leave a place with temples decorated in typical Tetitla [or Teotihuacan] style, and arrive at a place called "the Hill of the Jaguar" [presumably Monte Albán] where they are greeted by a lord wearing a typical Zapotec headdress. These eight persons can be divided into two groups of four, and each group of four is mentioned on two of the [South Platform] corners."[497]

Later, by the 1990s, Marcus adds specificity to her interpretation by proposing that this auspicious event, which was commemorated on the "hidden inscriptions," was the inauguration into rulership and enthronement of a prominent Zapotec lord named on the frontal surface of SP-1 as 12 Jaguar.[498] In that case, the bound figures noted since Batres's era are not simply the

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[495] As will discussing in detail in the upcoming sections, Urcid attributes the carvings on the narrow (or "hidden") surfaces of the cornerstones to their original utilization as lintels in what he terms "Program B," and he traces the carvings on the broad surfaces to those same stones to their second (re)utilization as upright orthostats in "Program A."

[496] Marcus, "Teotihuacan Visitors on Monte Albán Monuments and Murals," 176.

[497] Marcus, "Teotihuacan Visitors on Monte Albán Monuments and Murals," 176.

[498] Marcus, *Mesoamerican Writing Systems*, 325-29; Marcus, "A Zapotec Inauguration in Comparative Perspective;" and Marcus and Flannery, *Zapotec Civilization*, 217-21. Also see Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 311-12.

causalities of combat, but rather distinguished enemies transformed into "a set of six elite captives for sacrifice" whose ritual immolation added heft and sanctity to the otherwise peaceful inauguration of the new Zapotec ruler to whom the eight named Teotihuacan ambassadors had come to pay homage.[499]

In sum, therefore, Marcus's two-pronged proposal accentuates the perplexing prospect, which had impressed both Caso and Acosta, that there was a fundamental disparity between the images caved on the broad frontal faces of the monoliths and those that were inscribed on the narrow edges or "hidden surfaces." More specifically, where the front surfaces, which are permanently visible to all, depict a threateningly militaristic message not very different from (her readings of) the Danzante and conquest slab displays, the "hidden inscriptions," which no one could see once the monoliths were emplaced in the South Platform wall, depict a considerably more subtle means of authorizing Zapotec authority. While the inaccessibility of the inauguration scene—and the fact that these images are depicted horizontally while the frontal images are depicted vertically—might seem to be sufficient warrant to hypothesize that the cornerstones had originally been part of some other display(s) in which the eventually concealed lateral surfaces were open to public view, Marcus does not make that argument. Alternatively and ingeniously, she appeals to a distinction between "*vertical propaganda*," which is generated by the elite and aimed at influencing the attitudes of commoners below them, versus "*horizontal propaganda*," which entails members of the ruling elite working to influence other members of the elite.[500] Relying on that contrast, to which I alluded earlier, Marcus contends that:

> "the scenes [on the frontal faces of the stones] of the ruler and his noble captives seem to have been *vertical propaganda,* writ large and meant to be seen from afar. The much tinier scenes of Teotihuacan visitors, hidden on the edges of the same stones, were

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[499] Marcus and Flannery, *Zapotec Civilization*, 218. The phrase "set of six elite captives for sacrifice" comes from Marcus, *Mesoamerican Wriing Systems*, 325.

[500] See Marcus, *Mesoamerican Writing Systems* , 11-12, where, besides "*vertical*" and "*horizontal*," she adds two more options to her typology of propaganda: "*agitation propaganda*" is "vertical propaganda [that] was used to prepare the masses for war with a hated enemy" and "integration propaganda" einvolves cases in which "the message was aimed at stabilizing the current order." On vertical versus horizontal propaganda, also see ibid, 437-40.

> evidently *horizontal propaganda* aimed at other nobles, such as those placing items in the offering boxes."[501]

On those grounds, then, Marcus can maintain the tripled (but doubtful) assertions that all of the "cornerstones" are (a) contemporaneous, (b) *in situ* and (c) components of one unified, if somewhat polysemic, narrative program. Additionally, she capitalizes on the qualitative difference between the frontal and lateral visual programs as a means of filling out her broader narrative (re)construction of Monte Albán history wherein every era is characterized by the propagandistic initiative of aggressively self-interested rulers—but, over time, entrepreneurial elites exercise their manipulations in notably different ways.[502] That is to say, where, in her view, the Period I Danzante and Period II Building J conquest slab displays depend on the deployment of terror tactics intended to intimidate audiences into compliance with Monte Albán's militaristic regimes, the Classic-era South Platform cornerstones, at least on their lateral sides, announce the important if surprising fact that even the lords of the great Teotihuacan, irrespective of the Central Mexican capital's vastly greater size and strength than its Oaxacan counterpart, acknowledge and accept the present leadership of Monte Albán.

Indeed, among the intriguing features of the Marcus-Flannery (re)construction of Monte Albán history is a Classic-era turn wherein, instead of continuing to rely strictly on brute force and an ever-expanding sphere of influence, Zapotec rulers undertake an equally self-interested policy of "consolidation" wherein they accept a decidedly smaller area of sway in order to attain more complete dominance of that which they do control.[503] That is to say, as the capital matures,

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[501] Marcus, *Mesoamerican Writing Systems*, 329; italics added.

[502] Regarding the ways in which those alternate strategies of legitimation figure into Marcus and Flannery's (re)construction of Monte Albán history, see Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, chap. 6, "Kent Flannery and Joyce Marcus's 'Actor-Centered' Story of Oaxacan Social Evolution: Charismatic Leadership and an Illusion of Control."

[503] Regarding their account of this Classic-era episode of considered consolidation and skilled diplomacy, see Marcus and Flannery, *Zapotec Civilization*, chap. 15; or, for a critical summary of this portion of their (re)construction of Monte Albán history, see Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, chap. 6, the sub-section entitled "The Period III "Golden Age" of the Zapotecs: Growing City, Shrinking State."

its rulers are, Marcus and Flannery maintain, willing to forego a substantial portion of their somewhat precarious territorial control in favor of a smaller but more securely held sphere of influence. Among the key features of this Period IIIA considered trade-off is the "skilled diplomacy" wherein Monte Albán rulers somehow manage to attain (or to give the pretense of attaining) the support of Teotihuacan, which could quite easily have squashed much smaller Oaxacan capital. And among the most compelling evidence for that astute political maneuvering comes in the program of the cornerstones that, in Marcus's view, commemorates not sheer battlefield supremacy, but rather a peaceful political event—namely, ceremonial confirmation of 12 Jaguar as the Zapotec capital's reigning authority—which coincided with dedication of the South Platform.[504] In short, while in the wake of Urcid's alternative hypothesis, Marcus's whole marvelously compelling explanation collapses like an elaborate house of cards, it wins very wide support in the 1980s and 1990s.[505]

In fact, numerous Mesoamericanists, especially non-Oaxacanists like Robert Santley and Clara Million, "have taken Marcus's interpretation of Teotihuacan ambassadors as fact."[506] Art historian Clemency Coggins, for instance, also accepts, and then extends, Marcus's cornerstone-based posit about powerful Teotihuacan emissaries acquiescing to Zapotec rulers to suggest that,

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[504] Marcus, "Teotihuacan Visitors on Monte Albán Monuments and Murals," 176, 180; Marcus, *Mesoamerican Writing Systems*, 325; and Marcus and Flannery, *Zapotec Civilization*, 217-19.

[505] Arguably the weakest part of Marcus's hypothesis, even in the assessment of readers not well versed in Zapotec hieroglyphs, is that requires us to image that the elaborate coronation scene, complete with its depiction of Teotihuacan emissaries, was featured in the one-time dedication of the South Platform, but then immediately inserted into the basal wall of the platform in a way that no one could ever again see it. In fact, in that sense, to broach a problem to which I will return, if that is the case, then this inauguration scene does not really qualify as "a public narrative display."

[506] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 312, n. 12, comments critically on the embrace of Marcus's interpretation of Teotihuacan ambassadors "as fact" by Robert S. Santley, "Obsidian Trade and Teotihuacan Influence in Mesoamerica," in *Highland-Lowland Interaction in Mesoamerica: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, ed. Arthur G. Miller (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1983), 81; and Clara Millon, "A Reexamination of the Teotihuacan Tassel Headdress Insignia," in *Feathered Serpents and Flowering Trees: Reconstructing the Murals of Teotihuacan*, ed. Kathleen Berrin (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1988), 125-27.

"The priestly Teotihuacanos carrying 'incense bags' may have gone to Monte Albán to learn how to measure the height of the sun and the seasons scientifically with an instrument, and how to transmit this privileged knowledge from one place to another."[507] And, in a more mixed assessment, Hasso Von Winning concurs with Marcus both that (a) cornerstones reflect "a political motive" and (b) that there is a notable discrepancy between the frontal surfaces, in which "bound prisoners are personifying defeated chieftains and their towns," versus the images on the "hidden" lateral surfaces, which depict a peaceful transfer of authority rather than plain military supremacy.[508] But Von Winning takes issue with Marcus's identification of Teotihuacan elements—specifically, the supposedly Teotihuacan "Tassel Headdress"—which leads him conclude, alternatively, that the ceremonial occasion being memorialized is that of priests of Zapotec affiliation paying homage to a Zapotec ruler or god.[509] In sum, though, qualifications of that sort notwithstanding, Marcus's "inauguration hypothesis" remains, even now, the interpretation of the ("hidden inscriptions" of the) South Platform cornerstones that lay audiences are most likely to encounter in their reading about Monte Albán. Predictably, however, Javier Urcid sees things very differently.

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[507] Clemency Coggins, "An Instrument of Expansion: Monte Albán, Teotihuacan, and Tikal," in *Highland-Lowland Interaction in Mesoamerica*, ed. Miller, 62. Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 312, n. 12, opines that Coggins's embrace of Marcus's view leads her to "go further astray."

[508] Hasso Von Winning, "The Hidden Low Reliefs at Monte Albán," *Masterkey*, vol. 57, no. 2 (1983): 57, 61. Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 315, observes that Von Winning does not clarify the reasons for the notable disparities between the frontal and lateral surfaces of the cornerstones; and, in that respect, Marcus, I think, is likewise without a compelling reason for this major difference. As I move forward, we will see why this is major, not trivial, matter.

[509] The concise and critical summary in Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 312-15, concerning Von Winning, "The Hidden Low Reliefs at Monte Albán," 57-62; and Hasso Von Winning, "Insignias de oficio en la iconografia de Teotihuacan," *Pantoc* 8 (1984): 5-54, reminds us that his interpretation of the South Platform cornerstones responds to Marcus's early work, but emerges before her specific (and debatable) identification of 12 Jaguar as the Zapotec being inaugurated in that display.

2. Javier Urcid's Alternative Interpretation of the South Platform Cornerstones: Reconstructing the Life-Histories of the Monoliths

Though I treat the South Platform cornerstones as my third case study, and though there is a generally chronological progression from the (Period I) Danzantes to the (Period II) Building J conquest slabs to the (Period IIIA) cornerstones, this is actually the first case that Javier Urcid, in his PhD dissertation, submits to his rigorous version of reworking.[510] Moreover, though Urcid builds his reinterpretation of the latter two cases on basis of some 300 Danzantes and dozens of finely inscribed "conquest slabs"—and this reassessment entails only nine so-termed cornerstone monoliths—his hypothesis concerning these monoliths is not less elaborate and revealing. Indeed, because these monoliths present the two usually-unavailable requirements for his manner of analysis—that is, the availability of a large share of the carved examples that formed part of a composite narrative (or, in this case, two unrelated narratives carved successively on the same monoliths) and quite sound archaeological data[511]—they win attention as the object of his initial and arguably fullest articulation of those two key principals that drive all of his work: (a) "the comparative method" or "internal glyphic comparisons" and (b) "the contextual method."[512] This is, then, the quintessential example of Urcid's abiding efforts to (re)construct the life-histories of individual stones by, to the extent possible, "tracing the trajectory from the moment the monoliths were quarried to when they finally became part of the archaeological record."[513]

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[510] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 279-408, a reworked 1992 PhD dissertation, devotes a 129-page chapter 5 to "The Carved Monoliths from the South Platform at Monte Albán." Note, by the way, while Urcid is adamant in his later work about avoiding the older ceramic phases defined by Caso and his colleagues—i.e., Periods I, II, IIIA, etc.—in favor of the revised ceramic phases of Danibaan, Pe, Nisa, etc., in this earlier work (e.g., *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 2001), on which I preponderantly draw in these sub-sections, he uses that older chronological scheme. Nevertheless, for chart that shows the relationship between those two chronological schemes, see, for instance, Urcid, *Zapotec Writing* (2005), 197, tab. 1.1.

[511] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 433.

[512] As noted, on "the comparative method" or "internal glyphic comparisons," see Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 23-25, 63; on "the contextual method," which I have addressed repeatedly, see ibid., 25.

[513] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 433.

Urcid's search after the origins and successive (re)utilizations of the South Platform cornerstones leads him to two hugely consequential revisionist observations: First, where nearly everyone accepts the 1928 posit of Alfonso Caso that the eight monoliths discovered by Batres along the base of the South Platform belong to a linked set—which suggests that they were all created contemporaneously and with some unified conception—Urcid contends that, "Despite an apparent pattern in the corner monoliths, the relationships between them seem anomalous."[514] Alternatively, he writes, "The distribution and positions of the other carved stones do not exhibit a pattern... Considering the stones as a group, their carvings present a wide range of thematic and stylistic variation."[515] And, moreover, "The stones also exhibit differential states of preservation. Several are mere fragments. Furthermore, the reliefs, whether in whole or fragmentary stones, show different degrees of obliteration."[516] That is to say, the supposedly coherent collection of nine cornerstones, rather than affiliated components of a single composition, is actually a hodgepodge of heterogeneous, damaged and non-contemporaneous remnants.

Moreover, for two, having dispelled the assumption that these orthostats were component parts of one programmatic work, Urcid retrieves a prospect that Acosta had entertained but then rejected—namely, that the monoliths had been used elsewhere in advance of their South Platform positioning. Embracing and elaborating on a possibility that nearly everyone in Acosta's wake was likewise willing to ignore, Urcid is absolutely certain: "(a) that the carved stones are not in a primary context; (b) that there are parts of several distinct narrative compositions; and (c) that these different programs pertain to different periods."[517] And those two correctives—which effectively nullify every interpretation that imagines the cornerstones as coeval elements of a single unified narrative program!—open the way to Urcid's drastically

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[514] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 316.

[515] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 316.

[516] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 316.

[517] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 316-17.

different interpretation of both the monoliths' initial conceptions and their subsequent "life-histories."[518]

a. Recontextualizing the South Platform Cornerstones: A Three-Stage Succession of Decidedly Different Reuses

Urcid, committed to the paradigm-rattling proposition that "all the carved stones embedded in the basal perimeter of the South Platform are apparently reused material pertaining to different epochs,"[519] therefore embarks on his characteristic initiative in trying to elucidate where, when and how the various monoliths had originally been displayed. First considering the wider mélange of some 33 old carved monoliths, the nine cornerstones among them, that were repurposed on the walls of the final version of the great platform-mound,[520] he surmises that they derive from "at least eight narrative compositions," all of which must have been carved, displayed and then dismantled at different points in Monte Albán's earlier history, "but whose constituent parts were eventually [re]used, among other things, in erection of the South Platform's basal body."[521] That preliminary part of his argument helps us to appreciate both the

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[518] Again, then, as in the cases of "Danzantes" and "conquest slabs"—prejudicial labels that Urcid is unwilling to use but that I find the most serviceable for referring to those two sets of carved stones—I persevere with the inaccurate term "South Platform cornerstones" to refer to this third set of monoliths even when those stones are emplaced within Programs B and A, that is, prior to their eventual reuse as "cornerstones" of the South Platform.

[519] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 317.

[520] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 283, notes that "So far, 26 [carved stones of different geological origins, shapes, sizes, and states of preservation] have been discovered in the wall of the first tier [of the South Platform] and 7 more as steps in the central staircase." Ibid, 284-87, figs. 5.3-5.6, show the precise locations on the South Platform of each of those 33, all-recycled carved stones.

[521] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 317. Ibid., 318, fig. 5.29, illustrates the eight narrative compositions of which he thinks the reused monoliths on the South Platform (the cornerstones not included) were previously a part: namely, (a) the Monte Albán I program from Building L (S-1); (b) another Monte Albán I program (S-4, S-15 and S-19); (c) a Monte Albán II program (SP-4a); (d) a second Monte Albán II program (S-10 and S-27); (e) a third Monte Albán II program (S-11 and S-16); (f) the Monte Albán II program from Building J (S-3 and S-18); and (g) a Monte Albán IIIA/B program (SP-4b). Perhaps more notable than the specific programs is

abundance of narrative displays that had graced the capital and this recurrent pattern wherein nearly all of those compositions—invariably built, unbuilt and then recycled—had endured a complex pre-Columbian life-history of multiple reuses within the living city of Monte Albán.

While reconstituting the "births" and "biographies" of the dozens of repurposed South Platform monoliths is intensely complicated, the situation becomes more manageable when Urcid turns his attention specifically to the nine cornerstones. Along with documenting the extensive and often eccentric way in which these corner orthostats have been moved around since Batres's initial discovery of them in 1902, Urcid's central premise is that, in their primary and secondary (re)uses, "two unrelated narratives [were] carved successively on the same monoliths."[522] He labels those two chronologically successive and quite fully independent narrative compositions "Program A" and "Program B."[523] These two hypothetical programs constitute, in other words, two (re)uses of the corner monoliths in advance of what he sees as their eventual tertiary or third (re)use—namely, that on the South Platform.

Though I will in a moment put a much finer point on each, those two imagined programs, in the broad strokes, correspond to the respective displays on (a) the wide frontal faces of the monoliths and (b) those on the narrow lateral faces of the so-termed "hidden carvings," which everyone since Caso has noted as decidedly different. Urcid contends that the carvings on the broad faces derive from Program A, in which the monoliths had been displayed as upright orthostats, while those on the narrower edges were originally parts of Program B, which used the same stones as horizontal lintels or roof slabs—but the two compositions were neither

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a realization concerning just how many narrative compositions came and went in the history of Monte Albán.

[522] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 433.

[523] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 334ff. Note that where Urcid uses the lowercase "program A" and "program B," for consistency with specific use of terms like "Danzante Wall," I capitalize the designations of these two specific, albeit hypothetical, Monte Albán narrative displays (except when I am quoting Urcid).

simultaneous nor even closely related.[524] Exploring the question of which use came first—Program A or Program B—Urcid initially entertains, but then argues against, a fairly straightforward three-stage chronological scheme wherein: (1) in their primary context, stones SP-1 to SP-8 are set as Program A in the façade of a building; at this point, only the wider frontal surfaces of the stones are carved. (2) In their secondary context, following the dismantlement of Program A, the five narrower sides of the same eight stones are for the first time carved and, along with one more newly carved stone (SP-9), those stones are reset as Program B in another structure. (3) Then, in their third and last context, following the dismantlement of Program B, "the constituent stones are reused, together with those discarded from Program A, as corner stones in the South Platform."[525] Though plausible, Urcid, for a host of reasons, discards this sequence of events.

Alternatively, the three-stage scheme that Urcid, on numerous grounds, finds more persuasive—in which Program B precedes rather than follows Program A—runs as follows: (1) In their primary context, SP-1, SP-7, SP-8 and SP-9 are set as Program B, placing them as the lintels or roof slabs of a quadripartite structure. (2) In their secondary context, following the relatively prompt dismantlement of Program B, during which all of the monoliths are somewhat damaged, three of them (SP-1, SP-7 and SP-8) are reused and carved anew on their broader surfaces. This set of reworked stones is complemented by four recently quarried or reused but plain blocks (SP- 2, SP-3, SP-5 and SP-6), which are also carved on their broadest sides. Once inscribed, all seven were positioned as the upright orthostats that constitute Program A.[526] (3) Finally, in their third context, following the dismantlement of Program A, in which the stones are further damaged, Urcid contends that:

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[524] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 345.

[525] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 350.

[526] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 350. Because, upon dismantling Program B, stone SP-9 broke badly and could not be used to carve a relief on its largest, finely textured surface, that stone was (re)used in Program A simply as construction material (i.e., with its carved surface embedded).

> "All are then reused as offertory markers in the corners of the last major phase of construction in the South Platform. During the tertiary context, the carvings would not have been visible because the monoliths most probably were covered by a thick layer of stucco."[527]

I will return shortly to this startling revelation that the nine repeatedly recycled cornerstones on the South Platform, rather than showcased, were, in their third iteration, stuccoed over. But consider first Urcid's willingness to assign actual as well as relative dates to each of the three (re)uses. On the relevant timing, he concludes, again on the basis of numerous factors, that

> "the lapse of time between the carving and setting of program B and the execution and erection of program A was not long. The structure with the roof slabs or lintels [i.e., program B] would have been dismantled after a relatively short existence. In this sense, the sequence of the [two] programs could be viewed as two successive episodes."[528]

That is to say, reconfirming long-held views that these carved stones were created during the Classic era, Urcid locates their initial conception and first two uses within late Period IIIA, a span approximately between 200 CE and 550 CE.[529] With respect to this quite tight timeframe, he writes, "the carving and placement of program B could have taken place sometime between a.d. 350 and 450. The execution and erection of program A followed soon after and could have occurred no later than a.d. 550."[530] While he thinks that Program A was on display somewhat longer than Program B,[531] he locates the third use of the stones, on the South Platform, a repurposing that apparently corresponds to the dedication of the final elaboration of that

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[527] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 350.

[528] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 358.

[529] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 358.

[530] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 358.

[531] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 406.

pyramidal base, also within Period IIIA, sometime between 500 CE and 800 CE or, in a more somewhat more precise estimate, between 600 CE 700 CE.[532]

At each point of his analysis, Urcid makes himself the toughest critic of this drastically different conception of the three main (re)uses of the cornerstones, and thereby, to his credit, introduces a plethora of qualifications and other "plausible alternatives." But, in the interest of exploring the ramifications of his hypothesis for the ritual-architectural commemoration of sacred history (priority II-B) at Monte Albán, my much-simplified summary is confined to the historical possibilities that Urcid considers the most likely, which are rearranged in a chronological fashion that, I hope, gives a fair sense of the three successive uses of these monoliths that he hypothesizes. Only after that three-part synopsis do I provide more broadly interpretive remarks.

b. The Cornerstones in their Primary Context—i.e., Program B: Horizontal Lintels Honoring a Deceased and a Living Ruler

According to Urcid, so-termed Program B presumably constituted the earliest, or primary, use of what come to be called the South Platform cornerstones.[533] Probably constructed sometime between 350 CE and 450 CE, this visual display presents a composite narrative recorded on the narrow lateral surfaces, which, in their eventual reusage on the basal walls of the huge mound, are termed the "hidden inscriptions." Although almost a third of the stones and

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[532] As I will note again later, Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 358, presents evidence that "the placement [of the program A stones] in the corners of the South Platform (tertiary context) occurred in period IIIb, sometimes between A.D. 500 and 800." But Urcid, ibid., 406, also presents the more precise suggestion that "The placement of the monoliths in the South Platform could have occurred sometime between a.d. 600 and 700 and could have been carried out by a distant successor of Lord 13F [i.e., the main protagonist and apparent commissioner of Program A]."

[533] As in the case of Program A, Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, addresses Program B in three intermittent steps, i.e., under the rubrics of: "The Monoliths as Narrative Compositions" (pp. 335-45); "Style and Iconography of the Narratives" (p. 351); and "Analysis and Interpretation of the Programs" (pp. 362-76). My short summary of Program B draws intermittently on all three of those sections.

their inscriptions are missing,[534] Urcid concludes that Program B was composed of just four carved monoliths—SP-1, SP-7, SP-8 and SP-9—which together provide a total of six surfaces for long and narrow reliefs.[535] Each of the half dozen carved panels features multiple personages, 16 in all, and all of whom Urcid sees as specific named individuals. This program is, however, complicated by the fact that two of the panels (SP-7a and SP-9) utilize pictographic representations of those individuals accompanied by glyphs while the other four panels (SP-1a/b and SP-8a/b) convey specific persons strictly via glyphs or "symbolic substitutions."[536] Still, this display, which seems to include neither animals nor deities, nor even deity impersonators, is, in very large part, a crowded array of distinctively clad, specifically named human beings.[537]

As will be true for Program A, there is a clear differentiation between "main" or "paramount personages" and much more numerous "secondary" or "subordinate figures." In the case of Program B, two prominent individuals, both seemingly seated atop a "Hill-Trispral" glyph that may refer to Monte Albán,[538] are, in Urcid's view, successive rulers of the capital: One of them, glyph 13N, whom is identified as 13 "Brush" or 13 "Soap Plant," appears as the older, apparently already-deceased ruler; and the other, glyph 5B, whom Urcid identifies as a noble named 5 Jaguar, depicted on SP-9 as a toothless old man wearing a very elaborate

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[534] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 362, 436.

[535] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 338. Ibid., 341, fig. 5.47, shows how the four stones that compose Program B—SP-1 and SP-8, which are both carved on two sides, and SP-9 and SP-7, which are carved on just one side—present six narrow carved surfaces. Note also that the final letter in his system of nomenclature, "SP-1a," for instance, refers to one carved side of that monolith while "SP-1b" refers to another side of the same monolith.

[536] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 351, 335-38.

[537] Regarding the possibility that any of the figures in Program B qualify as "deities," Acosta, "Exploraciones arqueológicas en Monte Albán, XVIII temporada, 1958," 20-21 (summarized by Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 309), points out that the ruler or *cacique* of Monte Albán to which five individuals (whom Acosta identifies as "priests") are shown paying homage had the attributes and insignia of a deity, "God 5F." But Urcid does not repeat that in his own interpretation of Program B.

[538] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 370.

headdress, is apparently his successor.[539] Both of these nobles (i.e., those associated respectively with glyphs 13N and 5B) are named three times in Program B.[540] Additionally, there are 14 secondary figures, each identified by a specific calendrical and personal name.[541] Those shown pictographically (on SP-7a and SP-9) are depicted in profile, showing two legs but only one hand, frequently holding a copal bag or offering.[542] Of these "subordinate personages"—whom Urcid thinks are "members of the city's elite, perhaps lineage heads of 14 of the 15 'barrios' of Monte Albán or rulers of subordinate communities"[543]—eleven are represented twice and three appeared only once.[544] Note, then, that, where Marcus and others have assessed these ancillary, copal-carrying figures as "Teotihuacan ambassadors" who made a long trip to endorse the inauguration of a Zapotec noble, Urcid identifies all 16 of the paramount and subordinate figures as Zapotec locals.

Regarding the "intended meaning" of Program B, again as in both programs B and A, the featured theme is not something like a battlefield episode, but rather ceremonial processions. Actually, in Program B, there are, Urcid thinks, six different processions: three that approach

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[539] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 351, 377. And because each of the personages is assigned both a calendrical and personal name, Urcid., ibid., 405, says, "therefore the names of the two main figures can be read, using sixteenth-century Zapotec, as Pelaache (5 Jaguar [glyph 5B]) and Pizopiya (13 'Brush' or 'Soap Plant' [glyph 13N])."

[540] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 367.

[541] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 405.

[542] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 351.

[543] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 405. Recall that it was Blanton, *Monte Albán*, 46, 63, 75-93, who made the suggestion that, by Period IIIB, Monte Albán some 15 identifiable residential districts, which remain intact until the city collapses; in several contexts, Urcid entertains that possibility. But note also that there is a major difference between the two possibilities that Urcid entertains here—i.e., that the subordinate figures in Program B are lesser elites from within Monte Albán versus that they are "rulers of subordinate communities [from outside Monte Albán]."

[544] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 367.

and three that depart from the prominent figures.[545] While both main personages are the foci of processional activity, their status is very different: "The representation of 13N [i.e., the older ruler] as a bust suggests that one set of secondary figures are paying homage to a deceased personage."[546] But, by contrast, the representations of 5B (i.e., the younger ruler) give no indication that he is dead; and thus, in the processions that approach him, "the secondary figures... appear to be paying homage and also leaving offerings."[547] This juxtaposition of a deceased ruler and a live one leads Urcid to propose that, "5B [i.e., 5 Jaguar] could have been the successor to 13N [i.e., 13 Brush or 13 Soap Plant] and the one who ordered the construction of the program to honor his immediate ancestor and to legitimize his descent."[548] In other words, though the processions trained on the deceased Lord 13N have a "preeminently funerary character," designed to honor a revered ancestor,[549] the more programmatic incentive of the full program was, according to this analysis, the legitimation of the current ruler who seems to have commissioned the display.[550]

Regarding the architectural context in which Program B was displayed, always a crucial part of Urcid's analysis, his proposal is complicated but provocative. Because the underside of SP-9 is finely finished but the top is not, and because of the configuration of carvings on SP-1 and SP-8, he concludes that all of these stones were, as Acosta considered but then discounted, originally used as a lintels or roof slabs that were carved only on their narrow sides.[551] That is to

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[545] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 338. Again see ibid., 341, fig. 5.47, concerning the respective directions of each of the six processions.

[546] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 367.

[547] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 376.

[548] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 376, 405.

[549] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 372.

[550] Summarizing this interpretation, Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 436, writes: "Program b includes the names 13N and 5B associated with paramount individuals, and the iconographic and epigraphic analysis suggests that the narrative program was commissioned by the ruler 5B to legitimize his position and pay homage to his predecessor [i.e., ruler 13N]."

[551] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 338.

say, where the same monoliths would later be used in Program A as upright orthostats, in their primary context (Program B), they were utilized as horizontal members, likely over the entrances to a quadripartite structure that sat in the center of an open courtyard.[552] While Urcid does not venture a specific location for Program B—and while he also entertains the less likely possibility that, given the "funerary character" of some of the processions, the carved stones might originally have been placed within "a large and special two-chambered tomb"[553]—he is quite specific about the sort of structure that he considers the most plausible architectural context for this narrative composition:

> "Most probably the monoliths were set in a quadripartite structure that had two entrances opposite each other from the outside and four internal accesses that led from an inner courtyard into four surrounding rooms. Two of the inscriptions could be seen as the entrances were approached. The other four carvings could be seen only after the inner courtyard had been reached."[554]

Urcid bolsters that possibility by observing that "At Monte Albán, there are several square low platforms [situated at the center of an open courtyard], the so-called *adoratorios*," the squat structure at the center of the Sunken Patio (Patio Hundido) perhaps foremost among them.[555]

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[552] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 340, 345.

[553] Regarding the alternate possibility that Program B was originally positioned, not in a quadripartite *adoratorio*-like structure, but rather in "a large and special two-chambered tomb," Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 342, presents Tomb 5 from Cerro de la Campana in Suchilquitongo as the nearest counterpart to the sort of tomb that he has in mind; and he notes (ibid., 372-76) that processions like those in Program B are also found in clearly mortuary contexts, for instance, on the murals in Monte Albán tombs 104, 105 and 112. But then, arguing against a tomb context for Program B, he writes (ibid., 372), "This, however, does not necessarily mean that the quadripartite structure with carved lintels was a tomb or directly associated with a tomb."

[554] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 405. Also see ibid., 340. Urcid, ibid., 346, fig. 5.51, and ibid., 347, fig. 5.52, depict how the Program B configuration could have been located at the four respective entrances to a quadripartite structure; and ibid., 345, fig. 5.50, depicts the clay model of a modest quadripartite building found in Temple B of the Vértice Geodésico on the North Platform, which strengthens his argument that Monte Albán had numerous quadripartite structures of this sort.

[555] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 340. Ibid., 342, tab. 5.5, inventories the size and configuration of seven different *adoratorio* platforms around Monte Albán, which allows him to

Indeed, the possibility that Monte Albán, and perhaps other sites, utilized this sort of quadripartite structure with a small interior courtyard, situated within a larger courtyard, as an architectural configuration designed expressly to display these sorts of politically motivated Zapotec inscriptions becomes a recurrent theme in Urcid's work.[556]

c. The Cornerstones in their Secondary Context—i.e., Program A: Upright Orthostats Memorializing Warfare, Capture and Sacrifice

By Urcid's reckoning, so-termed Program A constitutes the second utilization of the same monoliths. The structure with the carved lintels or roof slabs that composed Program B had, in his view, "a short relatively existence,"[557] probably on the order of 100 years, after which it was dismantled, apparently with the express intention of reusing the monoliths to carve another unrelated narrative—i.e., Program A, the glyphic elements of which are considerably better preserved than those of its precedent.[558] In the dismantlement process, SP-9 broke in such a way

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explore the question of whether the quadripartite structure that accommodated Program B may have had four, two or no stairways.

[556] See, for example, Urcid, "A Peculiar Stone with Zapotec Hieroglyphic Inscriptions," 89-91 (a 1995 article that actually predates *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*), where he hypothesizes the same sort of quadripartite structure, which frequently houses "ancestor memorials," as the architectural context for the large monolith presently in Oaxacan Regional Museum on which that article focuses; and ibid., 90, uses the same image that appears in Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 345, to help make the case. That image appears again in Lind and Urcid, *The Lords of Lambityeco and the Collapse of Monte Albán*, 308-9, fig 9.29, in the context of a discussion of a "hypothetical reconstruction of a quadripartite ancestor memorial." And, as noted earlier in the chapter relative to Urcid's discussion of Building J (see Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 157), in Urcid, "The Written Surface as a Cultural Code," 122, he writes, "This practice of carving composite narratives set in monumental platforms to publicly validate access to political power was geographically and temporally widespread throughout southwestern Mesoamerica..." Though without explicit reference to Program B, Urcid, ibid., 118, fig. 6.5, provides images of the sort quadripartite platform structure that he imagines was designed to display these sorts of politically motivated inscriptions.

[557] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 358, 405.

[558] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 405. As in the case of Program B, Urcid addresses Program A in three intermittent steps, i.e., under the rubrics of: "The Monoliths as Narrative

that made it unsuitable as a carving surface, and thus was reutilized simply as construction material.[559] The remaining three stones (SP-1, SP-7 and SP-8), however, together with four newly quarried or reused but plain blocks (SP-2, SP-3, SP-5 and SP-6), were carved on one of their largest respective surfaces (i.e., the undersides of those stones that had formerly been used as lintels or roof slabs, and thus carved on their narrow sides), and then set as upright orthostats in the façade of a freshly constructed building to form an entirely new composite narrative.[560] Importantly, while the old stones were prized for their well-dressed size and shape, the content of Program B, "by then irrelevant" in Urcid's view, was embedded and completely hidden from view in the new display;[561] no part of Program B's actual carvings was reused in Program A. Stones SP-2 and SP-6, which were intended as corners markers that defined the respective ends of the new narrative, were additionally carved on a second side (around the corner, as it were), thereby bringing the total number of linear vertical hieroglyphic texts to nine, all of which remain readable, and thus all of which are integral to Urcid's more copious interpretation of this display.[562] Side-to-side, the seven-stone configuration of Program A—which was built "no later than a.d. 550"[563]—spanned some 8.5 meters.[564]

Compositions" (ibid., 334-35); "Style and Iconography of the Narratives" (ibid., 351-58); and "Analysis and Interpretation of the Programs" (ibid., 376-405). My short summary of Program A draws intermittently on all three of those sections.

[559] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 405. Note more generally that Urcid, *Zapotec Writing*, 24, n. 19, offers the very reasonable opinion that: "The dismantling of memorials by successors may imply either usurpation in dynastic succession and the attempt to rewrite history, or acts of termination that ended the power vested on individuals as a prelude to its transference to the next legitimate heir."

[560] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 405. Urcid, ibid., 336, fig. 5-43, and 337, ibid., 5.44, provide diagrams of the hypothesized seven-stone, nine-surface Program A.

[561] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 405.

[562] Urcid 376, 405-6. More specifically, Urcid, ibid., 378, fig. 5.79, displays how the seven monoliths of Program A constitute a total of nine texts or "nine complete columnar inscriptions": "SP-1 has three; SP-6 has two; and SP-2, SP-3, and SP-5 have one each. The remaining text is actually distributed between SP-7 and SP-8." Ibid., 376.

[563] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 358.

There are both notable similarities and differences between the older and newer programs, both of which feature an array of specifically named individuals, all presumably historical persons who are of obviously disparate social stations. By contrast to the two "paramount personages" in Program B, Program A features just one uniquely prominent individual who is seated on a plush cushion, elaborately dressed, accompanied by ample paraphernalia and repeatedly identified by his calendrical name as 13F (Pizeela, 13 Night) or Lord 13F.[565] The only not-bound personage in the composition, Lord 13F was evidently another ruler of Monte Albán and, in fact, was the one who both dismantled Program B and who commissioned this new display.[566] Also unlike Program B, whose secondary personages were, in Urcid's view, very likely "members of the city's elite,"[567] the subordinate figures in Program

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[564] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 365, notes that, where roughly a third of Program B is missing, "most of the epigraphic and iconographic content of [Program A] is available. As reconstituted, the program provides several texts, and almost all are well preserved." Nevertheless, though basing his analysis of Program A on seven stones, Urcid, ibid., 334, acknowledges that other unfound stones may have been involved and that this set could have been related to other still unknown programs.

[565] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 334, 377, 436. Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 334 and 377, address the one and only seated and unbound figure in Program A. Urcid, ibid., 406, says, "This individual, identified by his calendrical name as 13F (Pizeela, 13 Night], was evidently another ruler of Monte Albán." Also see, ibid., 436. Note additionally that there are grounds for confusion insofar as Urcid identifies the one and only prominent figure in Program A as Lord 13F (see, for example, ibid., 392; 396, tab. 5.16; 399; 400, tab. 5.17; 404, tab. 5.18; 406, 433, 436) and he identifies the older already-deceased of the two rulers depicted in Program B as Lord 13N (see, for example, ibid., 366; 367; 368, tab. 5.8; 370; 376; 405; 407; 436)—and while there is apparently a line of succession from the already-deceased Lord 13N of Program B to the still-alive Lord 5B of Program B to Lord 13F of Program A (see ibid., 407), these are three different Monte Albán rulers.

[566] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 406. For more on Lord 13F (or Lord 13 Night) as both the dismantler of Program B and the instigator of Program A (though he makes no explicit use of those terms in this book), see Urcid, *Zapotec Writing*, 22-24.

[567] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 405. Recall Urcid's phasing that the subordinate figures in Program B are either "members of the city's elite, perhaps lineage heads of 14 of the 15 'barrios' of Monte Albán or rulers of subordinate communities [from outside Monte Albán]." If the latter is true, that mitigates this as a contrast between Programs B and A.

A, six of them, are depicted as "prisoners," bound by their arms and legs.[568] Like Program B, however, the composition portrays multiple processions in which these ancillary persons, either singly or in pairs, approach or depart the main figure.[569]

In short, notwithstanding the very important contrasts that Urcid's own analysis reveals (and that I will accentuate shortly), he concludes that, "stylistically the [two] programs are not very different... [and that] the differences between B and A appear to have been dictated by the shape of the carved surfaces and their intended architectural function."[570] Moreover, he notes that both have similarities to "another single carved stone that has also a processional format, the so-called Lápida de Bazán,"[571] though that much-discussed monolith seems considerably more similar to Program B than A.[572]

Regarding the intended meaning of Program A, yet again, then, irrespective of the abundance of apparent "prisoners" or "captives," the explicit theme appears to be, not militaristic campaigns, but rather numerous ceremonial processions—though I will almost immediately qualify that apparent similarity. Imagining an order different from that in which these seven

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[568] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 336, fig. 5.43, provides a diagram of the one paramount figure and the six secondary figures who are pictographically represented in program A. But Urcid, ibid., 399, also notes that two more captives are named but not pictured, thus bringing the total number of identifiable captives to eight.

[569] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 334-35, 406.

[570] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 357. In my view, which I will express more fully later, the fact Urcid identifies the subordinate figures in Program B as "members of the city's elite" (ibid., 405) and the subordinate figures in program A as "prisoners" or "captured enemies" (e.g., ibid., 397) lays the ground for seeing these are radically different sorts of visual displays.

[571] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 357.

[572] Marcus, "Teotihuacan Visitors on Monuments and Murals," 179, for instance, elaborates on Caso's suggestion that one of the figures on the Lápida de Bazán is a Teotihuacano, which makes this monolith notably similar to the "hidden" carvings on the South Platform, which she also thinks include representations of "Teotihuacan ambassadors" who approach Zapotec rulers in respectful rather than coerced ways. Urcid, recall, does not affirm the Teotihuacan identity of the figures in the "hidden carvings," but he does trace them back to Program B (not Program A).

stones are eventually (re)configured on the South Platform, Urcid considers that SP-1 constitutes the central and most important scene wherein the one uniquely prominent seated personage is wearing a jaguar outfit and an imposing headdress; that high status is additionally accentuated by prolific epigraphy.[573] To the right of that central stone, monoliths SP-7 and SP-8, in what, together with SP-1, seem to be elements of "a central procession," depict two secondary figures walking toward that seated individual.[574] These approaching persons wear less elaborate headdresses, have only loincloths, and are shown with their arms tied behind their backs; their legs also appear tied just below the knees.[575] Farther to the right, stones SP-5 and SP-6 show two more secondary personages with simple headdresses and loincloths who also have their arms tied in back and their legs tied just below the knees; the one on SP-6 also faces toward the seated dignitary, but the one on SP-5 faces the opposite direction, that is, away from the seated Lord 13F.[576] To the left of the central panel, SP-2 and SP-3 depict yet two more subordinate personages dressed in animal guises and headdresses who are also bound, though exclusively by the arms; the one on SP-2 faces (right) toward the center, but the person on SP-3 looks in the opposite direction, that is, away from the seated ruler.[577]

In brief, then, the seven-stone display of Program A, which uses no part of the Program B carvings, presents one paramount central figure, a Zapotec ruler named Lord 13F (i.e., Lord 13 Night)—both the protagonist and initiator of the display—who is flanked on his left by two lesser figures, presumably "captives" (one who faces toward him and one who faces away), and on his right by four lesser, also-bound figures (three of whom face him and one who looks in the opposite direction). In Urcid's view, the "sense of movement" and alternate directions of the

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[573] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 334. Again see ibid., 336, fig. 5-43, for a diagram of the full seven-stone Program A; and ibid. 355, fig. 5.58, provides a diagram of the main personage and accouterments surrounding him in SP-1.

[574] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 334, 351.

[575] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 334-35. Again, ibid., 336, fig. 5.43, provides details of the six secondary figures (and the one paramount figure).

[576] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 335.

[577] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 335.

lesser figures suggest, as was the case in Program B, "multiple processions in a single composition."[578]

In this case, however, the considerably fuller extant epigraphic and iconographic content of Program A,[579] which is absent for Program B, allows Urcid to draw more specific, albeit tentative, conclusions about the dating of the various processions, about their correlation with particular military episodes, and about the apparent celebration of two Calendar Round completions. In that respect, he presents Program A as "meta-commemorative" (my term not Urcid's) insofar as it commemorates ritual occasions (i.e., processions and human sacrifices), each of which itself commemorates a specific warfare event. In making that case, Urcid, in a particularly technical and qualified portion of his argument, undertakes an "epigraphic analysis" of Program A that leads him to propose a top-to-bottom, left-to-right "reading order" of the nine columnar texts.[580]

That supposed reading order—which gives this display a particularly apparent beginning-to-end narrative quality—is based on the observation that most of the vertical texts display a six-part "standard sequence" that runs as follows: It begins with (1) an annual date, followed by (2) a "Fish" glyph that appears to mean captive, which is followed by (3) "a toponymic compound with footprints" that refers to specific place names, then (4) a calendrical glyph that names the individual portrayed, then (5) a glyphic compound that refers to verbs or actions; and then each text ends with (6) a "Bag" glyph that could mean captor.[581] Moreover, while the actual nine

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[578] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 353.

[579] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 376.

[580] Exercising an especial level of tentativeness, Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 397, concedes that "the complex interrelationship between images and texts [in Program A makes] an overall interpretation of the narrative difficult."

[581] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 376-97, under the rubric of an "Epigraphic Analysis of Program A" discusses this six-part "standard sequence" in the nine vertical columnar texts in intensive detail. Ibid., 406, summarizes this matter of a standard sequence present in most of those nine texts. For another summary of the "standard sequence" in these texts, see Urcid, *Zapotec Writing*, 24-26.

military episodes, each of which would have included the capture of prisoners who were subsequently sacrificed, probably took place on a more sporadic schedule, they are recorded in Program A as "calendrically prescribed events at intervals that are multiples of 2 (4, 8, 12, 52)."[582] All those events are located with a total span of 60 years, roughly the lifespan of Lord 13F; and, furthermore, two of the recorded dates correspond to Calendar Round completions.[583] In this respect, Urcid is able to place the Program A narrative composition "within a cultural frame known from other parts of Mesoamerica: the celebration of period endings involving human sacrifice."[584]

According to Urcid's analysis, therefore, on the one hand, Program A is resemblant to the earlier program in the important sense that each was commissioned by the Zapotec ruler who is also its primary protagonist, in the latter instance, Lord 13F.[585] While it is not impossible that Lord 13F was an active as a military leader and/or ruler throughout the 60-year span in which all of the recorded events transpired—in which case he could have been the actual captor and sacrificer—more likely, some of the victories and sacrifices happened while he was in power but

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[582] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 399. Urcid, ibid., 397, notes that "In program A, both texts and images convey information about different times, although the various processions confronting the main personage could have occurred in the same built environment."

[583] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 399, goes so far as to propose that "Using the synchronologies of the Christian, Mixtec, and Zapotec calendars proposed by [Howard Cline, "Ancient and Colonial Zapotec and Mixtec Calendars: A Revisionist View," *The Americas*, vol. 31, no. 3 (1975): 272-288], the two consecutive Calendar Round completions commemorated in program A would have occurred on two of the following dates: year 13 Xoo (13 Earthquake) = a.d. 352, 405, 458, 511, or 564."

[584] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 436. With respect to the probably manipulated correlation of historical events and Calendar Round completions, recall, by the way, that the Danzante Wall also includes depictions of what seem to be "the enthronement of two, perhaps three rulers throughout a span of forty-eight years, *a chronological span rendered by means of Calendar Round dates*." Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 154; italics added.

[585] While Urcid describes Program B and Program A as "unrelated," keep in mind that he does discern a line of succession from the already-deceased Lord 13N of Program B to the still-alive Lord 5B of Program B to Lord 13F of Program A. See, for example, Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 407.

someone else was conducting warfare under his rulership.[586] In either case, Program A is similar to Program B insofar as a large share of both programs' relatively short careers as public visual displays corresponds to a time in which that memorialized protagonist was also a living presence within the capital. And, in both cases, when the protagonist-ruler died, the displays honoring them were apparently judged to be expendable. On the other hand, there is a stark contrast between the two programs insofar as the earlier Program B depicts "members of the city's elite,"[587] in perhaps obsequious but non-violent processions wherein they either pay homage to a recently deceased Zapotec ruler (Lord 13N or 13 Soap Plant) or offer deference and gifts to a present Zapotec ruler (Lord 5B or 5 Jaguar), while, by contrast, the later Program A illustrates bound captives of war, presumably from defeated communities outside of Monte Albán, who are compelled to approach a Zapotec ruler (Lord 13F or 13 Night) who is orchestrating their human sacrifice. That is to say, where Program B portrays the Monte Albán elite acknowledging the authority of the foremost among themselves, Program A seems to address the more plainly militaristic submission of external communities and individuals.

Finally, with respect to the architectural context of Program A, Urcid imagines a configuration very different from the four-entrance quadripartite structure that accommodated the narrow lintels or roof slabs of Program B, but quite similar to numerous monuments within the central area of Monte Albán. The cornerstones SP-2 and SP-6, which clearly demark the respective ends of the 8.5 meter array of seven upright monoliths, suggest to him a quadrangular or rectangular platform with at least one decorated exterior façade of the same length as the narrative composition, which was mounted as a wall display without any intervening stairway.[588] Mentioning an early version of Building H at the center of the Main Plaza as one contender for the context of Program A,[589] Urcid does, nonetheless, offer the following qualification:

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[586] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 400.

[587] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 405.

[588] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 335. Ibid., 337, fig. 5.44, provides a diagram of the hypothetical architectural setting for Program A.

[589] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 335, n. 18.

> "the hypothetical platform could have had one or two staircases located on undecorated sides. Perhaps other façades within the same platform or in superimposed tiers were also decorated, forming a still larger and more inclusive narrative composition."[590]

In any case, though Urcid thinks Program A and the building on which it was mounted "probably stood up longer than its predecessor," his dating suggests that this second program was on display little more than a couple centuries before it too was eventually dismantled.[591] And that sets the stage for the tertiary or third use, at which point the old monoliths are, at last, more properly termed the South Platform cornerstones.

d. The Cornerstones in their Tertiary Context—i.e., at the South Platform: "Offertory Markers" Instead of a Public Display

Ironically, Javier Urcid's take on the already-twice-used monoliths in their final pre-Columbian placement at the corners of the South Platform—long mistaken for their primary context—presents a decided anti-climax to the eventful life-histories of these incessantly debated carved stones. Throughout his work, he assembles countless examples from around Monte Albán in which older monoliths, which were originally part of wall displays, were later reused (or "revalorized") as cornerstones;[592] and, in this respect, the reutilization of the stones on the South Platform is by no means unique. Moreover, predictably discontent with intimations that this enormous platform had been constructed in a single building episode, Urcid proposes a more complicated sequence of construction episodes in which the earliest version of the South Platform dates to early Period IIIA (sometime between 200 CE and 400 CE), which is to say, the

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[590] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 335.

[591] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 362.

[592] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 358, notes that "At Monte Albán there is ample evidence that stones carved in early styles were reused as corner markers in later construction projects [including] the basal platforms of buildings M, IV, I, Q, North Platform, and 7V." Scott, *The Danzantes of Monte Albán*, 37, also alludes to cornerstones (along with centers of wall, bases of buildings and steps on the centerlines of patios) as one of the quite common reutilizations of those monoliths.

first iteration of the mound platform was contemporaneous with (or perhaps slightly earlier than) the creation of Program B "in an unknown locality around the Main Plaza of Monte Albán."[593]

Then, according to Urcid's version of events, "after a short span, program B was dismantled, and the structure with program A was erected [no later than 550 CE] in another unknown locality at the core of the city."[594] Though, as just noted, he thinks Program A "probably stood up longer than its predecessor," the date ranges he proposes suggest that this second program had a run of little more than 200 years before it too fell into disfavor and was disassembled.[595] To that point, there was no relation whatever between the carved stones in either display and the South Platform. But, shortly after the disassemblage of Program A, the stones were again recovered and this time (re)set on the final enlargement of the South Platform, during which "another staircase was added and the perimeter of the structure was enlarged."[596] Likewise during that last construction phase—sometime between 600 CE and 700 CE—offertory boxes that had been at the corners of the earlier and smaller version of the platform were retrieved, and some of their contents mixed with newer objects that were included in the offertory boxes that Acosta found at the corners of the South Platform in the 1950s.[597] By these calculations, then, the well-traveled cornerstones were on the order of 300 years old when they were (re)installed in their third and final context.[598]

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[593] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 362. Recall that Urcid, ibid., 358, opines that, "the carving and placement of program B could have taken place sometime between a.d. 350 and 450."

[594] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 362.

[595] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 362.

[596] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 362.

[597] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 362.

[598] Irrespective of the wide range of dates, the suggestion of Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 358, that the original Program B was constructed between 350 CE and 450 CE, together with his rough estimate that the final iteration of the South Platform was built between 600 CE and 700 CE (ibid., 406), allow a very rough estimate that the cornerstones were some 300 years old when they were installed on the South Platform.

However, though understated in his account, perhaps the most shocking aspect of Urcid's extensive discussion of these monoliths (in my view) is his contention that, even though the elaborately carved stones were emplaced in the very prominent corners of the South Platform, perhaps in the context of a ceremony that acknowledged the completion of the final renovation of that momentous structure, the cornerstones were never intended as a public display![599] To the contrary, recall that, in his wider remarks on the last version of the South Platform, Urcid enumerates at least 33 formerly carved monoliths, from as many as eight different dismantled narrative displays, that were affixed to the enlarged walls and staircases of the great platform-mound;[600] and essentially all of those were apparently immediately stuccoed over. This wide scavenging of old monoliths gives the impression that this was the sort of large-scaled project that rounded up a sizable share of the available cut stones primarily because of their serviceability as expedient facing materials rather than as valued iconographic displays. Unlike the old Danzante stones scattered along the basal walls of the new structure, numerous of which were mounted sideways or upside down,[601] and thus clearly harvested simply as construction materials, in Urcid's analysis, the nine stones recovered from the dismantled Program A received somewhat greater respect insofar as they were positioned at the four main corners of the South

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[599] Regarding the only brief attention to the tertiary or third (re)use of the cornerstones on the South Platform in Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, it is notable that in a 129-page chapter on "The Carved Monoliths from the South Platform at Monte Albán" (ibid., 279-408), which, as we've seen, includes intensive treatment of the use of those stones in their first context of Program B and in their second context as Program A, he devotes just one paragraph (on ibid., 406) explicitly to the incentives that account for the final (re)use of those monoliths on the South Platform. He does, however, prefigure that summary paragraph with earlier comments in a short section on "The Reuse of the Carved Stones in the South Platform" (ibid., 316-17) and a notable paragraph on the monoliths in their "tertiary context" (ibid., 350).

[600] As noted, Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 283, notes that, so far, at least 33 carved stones of different geological origins, shapes, sizes, and states of preservation have been found in the walls and stairways of the last iteration of the South Platform; and Urcid, ibid., 317, enumerates eight different narrative compositions from which these monoliths were harvested.

[601] Scott, *The Danzantes of Monte Albán*, pt. 1, 37. For an enumeration and photos or diagrams of 16 Danzante carvings, most in poor or broken condition, that were found on the final iteration of the South Platform, see Scott, *ibid.*, pt. 2, S-1 through S-16.

Platform in a more thoughtful configuration.[602] But—and this is a very large qualification—in his view, "by then, the content of the inscriptions (in both narrow and anterior surfaces) was probably irrelevant;"[603] and, therefore, the narrow reliefs from Program B were embedded in the basal wall in ways that made them unseeable and the large reliefs from Program A, he believes, "most probably were covered by a thick layer of stucco" rather than put on public display.[604] That is to say, shockingly enough, he contends that, in this last context, none of the famed corner monoliths was ever visible to pre-Columbian audiences.

This proposed, if counterintuitive, concealment of the old carvings—a seeming missed opportunity of the highest order—opens the way to at least three quite different ways of interpreting Zapotec rulers' incentive for the final reuse of the old monoliths as cornerstones on the newly refurbished South Platform, the third of which is most consistent with Urcid's own brief remarks on that matter. The first and most banal possibility is that old stones were indeed used strictly as utilitarian construction materials, in which case there was complete indifference as to the content of their carvings.[605] That sort of unidealistic reusage, then, qualifies less as the strategic "revalorization" of the old images and inscriptions than as a merely pragmatic scavenging of easily obtainable building materials.

A second possibility, which is the one that my chapter 2 discussion of the convention priority (I-B) and "the twofold pattern of ritual-architectural events" would lead us to expect, is predicated on the assumption (which Urcid undermines) that the carvings on the cornerstones, at

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[602] That is to say, the configuration of the nine stones on the corners of the South Platform conforms—partly but not fully—to the very deliberative arrangement of the stones on Program A.

[603] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 406.

[604] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 406. Urcid, ibid., 350, reiterates the same view that "during the tertiary context, the carvings would not have been visible because the monoliths were probably covered by a thick layer of stucco."

[605] This prospect of complete indifference about the content of the carvings is undermined by the fact that the monoliths were set up in ways that, albeit imperfectly, did respect the configuration of those nine stones in their earlier Programs B and A contexts.

least those on the broad frontal surfaces, were available to public view for some span of time before they were later stuccoed over. In that case, the repositioning of the old monoliths at the highly visible corners of the South Platform, not unlike reclaimed stones prominently displayed on numerous Monte Albán buildings, would provide another vintage instance of what I have described as "ritual-architectural allurement" via "deliberate archaism" (i.e., an exercise of one prominent version of the convention priority, I-B).[606] That is to say, though the specific content of the carved scenes may have been anachronistic—or even, to use Urcid's term, "irrelevant"[607]—still those images would have served an important function, like the frequent reuse of Danzante carvings, as antiquated and largely content-free reminders of a distinguished past, which thereby mediated "the old" and "the new, or the conventional and the innovative, and, accordingly, augmented, albeit in a more general than specific way, the legitimacy of current rulers' authority.[608] The fact that Urcid finds it likely that "the placement of the monoliths in the South Platform... could have been carried out by a distant successor of Lord 13F [i.e., the one prominent figure and the instigator of Program A]" lends yet more support to this possibility.[609]

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[606] In chapter 2 on the convention priority (I-B), see the sub-section entitled "Architectural Appropriations and Archaisms: The Virtues and Appeal of Unoriginality."

[607] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 406.

[608] Regarding the necessary juxtaposition of "the old" and "the new, or the conventional and the innovative, which is the central requirement of "the twofold pattern "of meaning-making ritual-architectural events, see Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, chap. 4.

[609] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 406. Recall also that Urcid (e.g., ibid., 407) discerns an apparent line of succession among (1) Lord 13N, the ruler who is depicted as already-deceased in Program B, (2) Lord 5B, the ruler who is depicted as still-alive in Program B and who initiated that display, and (3) Lord 13F, the protagonist and initiator of Program A; and now Urcid opines that the initiator of the final enlargement of the South Platform was also "a distant successor of Lord 13F." Accordingly, there may well be a continuing, albeit intermittent, line of descent among the Monte Albán rulers who initiated all three (re)uses of these carved monoliths; and if that is the case, it seems difficult to accept Urcid's suggestion that "the content of the inscriptions... was probably irrelevant." Ibid., 406.

Or, a third interpretive possibility, which more closely matches Urcid's own view, is that the incentive for incorporating the old Program A and B carvings into the new South Platform had less to do with impressing or manipulating pre-Columbian audiences than with the sort of ritualized building strategies that I will discuss at length in chapter 10 relative to the so-termed propitiation priority (III-C). By that logic, the recycled old carvings served a ritual-architectural function less like the visual displays of which they were formerly a part than like the offertory stone boxes that were buried at the corners of the monument during each of its major construction episodes. In that case, to use my rubric, the commemoration of sacred history (priority II-B) and political authority (priority II-C) cede to the propitiation priority (III-C), wherein, as we will appreciate in chapter 10, essentially every major construction project in Monte Albán was enhanced by offerings and caches that were crucial to the sanctification of the monument, but unseen once the buildings were complete.[610] And that possibility, which puts in doubt blunt assessments that all Zapotec writing and every major ritual-architectural project were intended as means of propagandistically manipulating public sentiments, suggests instead a more cosmological than plainly political motive for incorporating the timeworn old carved monoliths. In fact, if the South Platform cornerstones were immediately stuccoed over, then this is one of those instances that may suggest a ritualized construction project—in this case, an *altépetl*-like mountain pyramid—that was targeted primarily at divine rather than human audiences.[611]

Urcid intimates this propitiatory prospect when he argues that, irrespective of the by-then-irrelevance of the content of the inscriptions, "the reuse of the stones in the corners, the dedication of offertory caches underneath them, and their sprinkling with red paint on the bottom

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[610] Here I could add a footnote that directs attention to that sub-section of chapter 10 that addresses these sorts of offertory caches in various Monte Albán monuments.

[611] Recall that in chapter 4 relative to the divinity priority (I-A), in a sub-section entitled "Houses of God(s) at Monte Albán: Attracting and Accommodating Deities, Deified Ancestors and/or Impersonal Life Forces," I addressed the often overlooked possibility that deities (or deified ancestors) may sometimes have been conceived as the primary "clients" of Zapotec building projects. This theme will reemerge again in chapter 10 relative to "the propitiation priority" (III-C).

sides indicate that they still had a special value."[612] On that basis, he concludes that all of the old, never-to-be-seen-again monoliths were reused not as a visual display, but rather as "offertory markers."[613] And that plausible argument finds a precedent in John Scott's more venturous conjectures concerning the continuing value and prestige of antiquated old Danzante slabs, which were frequently resituated in unseeable (as well as seeable) contexts, including in the South Platform:

> "Because of their continued reuse [the old Danzante slabs] must have been considered carriers of powerful supernatural force—*mana*, to use the meaningful Polynesian word. As in many primitive societies, the placement of an object full of power in the base or at the corner of an important building insured spiritual favor. The subsequent disappearance of the reliefs under stucco surfacing, which probably covered most buildings, did not diminish their effect, since the gods and the builders knew they were there. The Danzantes served as a symbol of the antiquity and continuity of Monte Albán as a sanctuary."[614]

In short, by this interpretive line, the gods (or deified ancestors), and perhaps a select set of elite insiders, may have appreciated what Urcid calls "the spiritual favor" consequent of the embedded old carvings, but to the wider public they remained completely invisible.

Doubtful as that may be,[615] one cannot fail to see a telling irony insofar as—according to Urcid's again-radically iconoclastic deducements about the complex life-histories of the so-termed South Platform cornerstones and especially their immediate concealment in this tertiary context—all of the interpretations featuring the builders' politically strategic manipulations of Monte Albán audiences are predicated on a completely wrong assumption that this was a cunningly wrought public display. To the extreme contrary, if we are persuaded by Urcid's

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[612] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 406.

[613] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 350.

[614] Scott, *The Danzantes of Monte Albán*, pt. I, 37. Regarding this sort of unseeable reuse of old Danazante carvings specifically in the South Platform, see ibid., pt. I, 41.

[615] I consider this propitiatory explanation "doubtful," not as an *ancillary* explanation (which I agree that it is), but as a *complete* explanation that entirely precludes the use of the old stones on the corners of the South Platform as a public display.

fulsome analysis, neither were these monoliths in their repositioning at the corners of the South Platform a unified composite narrative, and nor were they even visible to any pre-Columbian human onlookers.

3. Programs B and A and the South Platform Cornerstones as Sacred History: Open-ended Interpretive Clues from Eliade, Ricoeur, Florescano and Lincoln

With the completion of this third case study among Monte Albán's most prominent and heavily debated public displays, and in advance of turning to the more explicitly hermeneutical consideration of several variations on the ritual-architectural commemoration of sacred history (priority II-B), I make one last lap through the theoretically broad insights of Eliade, Ricoeur, Florescano and Lincoln. With respect to the expression of history, myth and "mythistory" in the Zapotec capital, the juxtaposition of each these theorists and the specific example of the well-traveled South Platform cornerstones presents interpretive possibilities—as well as some very important qualifications—that are both similar to and different from those that emerge from parallel considerations of the Danzante and "conquest slab" visual displays.

Note, though, that while I am again deeply impressed by Urcid's revisionist version of events—especially his hypotheses concerning the primary and secondary uses of the eventual cornerstones in Programs B and A—I am unwilling to rule out entirely the possibility that those old reliefs were also strategically exhibited on the South Platform, at least for some period of time before they were eventually stuccoed over. And thus, besides engaging what Urcid's stance on the infamous corner monoliths suggests more broadly about the visual depiction of historical and/or mythical narratives at Monte Albán, I continue to find noteworthy clues in the earlier hypotheses, especially those of Joyce Marcus, which do presume that the recycled carvings were showcased at the South Platform, at least for a while. Accordingly, then, the next sub-sections appose the four broadly theoretical touchstones (i.e., Eliade, Ricoeur, Florescano and Lincoln) with three specific visual displays—Program B, Program A, and also the tertiary use of monoliths as cornerstones on the South Platform—even though Urcid himself largely rules out the possibility that the third of those qualifies as a public narrative display.

a. Weak Examples of Mircea Eliade on "Mythicized History": Time-bound rather than Timeless Narrative Compositions

First, consider the notably limited relevance of two large themes drawn from the work of Mircea Eliade. For one, yet again, the cosmogonic themes that Eliade sees as crucial to nearly all mythic expressions are *not* better expressed in Programs B and A than they are in the Danzante Wall or the two main iterations of the "conquest slab" visual displays (i.e., the original Pe-phase façade or the Building J reuse of those stones). Neither Program B or A, as Urcid presents them, has the character of a creation story that is linked to the origins of the world, the origins of the First People or even to the origins of Monte Albán. Urcid is careful to qualify his analysis of the overwhelmingly worldly and political content of these Zapotec iconographic compositions by noting, "Although the historical character of Zapotec inscriptions has been demonstrated, there is no reason to doubt that the script makes reference to other aspects of the Zapotec worldview. Of particular interest are those related to supernatural beings;"[616] but he provides little that would lead me to describe either Program B or A as a "cosmogram," which expresses the sorts of broadly cosmological allusions to transhistorical, supernatural entities and patterns that I argued are present especially in the Danzante Wall and perhaps, to a lesser extent, in the conquest slab façades. Instead of addressing the sweeping cosmogonic and precedent-setting patterns that would support what Eliade terms the "sanctified life," or a "religious mode of being in the world,"[617] these narrative compositions, so it seems, focus almost solely on this-worldly accomplishments of specific male rulers, especially their military triumphs, their genealogical successions, and thus their rightful superiority over other human beings. In short, the preoccupations with world origins, founders and "first times" that are central to Eliade's understanding of myth and sacred history are *not*, it appears, a pertinent priority in these cases.

For two, and even more worthy of note, Programs B and A of Urcid's description give us serious pause—considerably greater hesitations than in the previous examples—to invoke

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[616] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 440.

[617] See, for instance, Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, chap. 2, "Sacred Time and Myths," and chap. 4, "Human Existence and the Sanctified Life."

Eliade's notion of "mythicized history" in relation to the public displays of Monte Albán.[618] Indeed, arguably the central insight about Zapotec visual displays that Urcid reaffirms rather dismantles, which was in place even before the Caso era, is "the long-held view that the content of the inscriptions is preeminently historical," that is to say, they deal with actual people, places and events that one could have observed in ancient Oaxaca.[619] Immediately, though, Urcid qualifies that ostensibly documentary status by noting these iconographic compositions are "historical in terms of human life span and not of 'objective' history;"[620] no scholars imagine that these monumental compositions are entirely neutral or reliable records of the past. On the one hand, then, while these visual displays present lots of historically accurate information about the identities and careers of specific named individuals, the presentation of those empirical "facts" is, Urcid thinks, willfully manipulated in ways that conform to broader cosmological patterns—and, in that respect, these narrative reliefs do comport with Eliade's notion of the inevitable (and healthy rather than insidious) "mythicization of history."

Regarding the concerted non-objectivity of these narrative displays, Urcid's most poignant evidence is the extent to which Program A, for instance, instead of recording the inevitably sporadic dates of nine successful military campaigns, manipulates (or perhaps "mythologizes") the "historical record" so that those victories appear as "calendrically prescribed events at intervals that are multiples of 2 (4, 8, 12, 52)" and so that at least a couple of them correspond to Calendar Round completions.[621] That forfeiture of empirical accuracy in favor of coordinating (or giving the impression of coordination) between this-worldly activities and otherworldly cosmological rhythms—in Whitaker's apt phrase, "a kind of ritual systematization of history"[622]—is a sterling demonstration of the so-termed "mythicization of history."[623]

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[618] See, for instance, Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, chap. 6, "Myth, Ontology, and History."

[619] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 436.

[620] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 436.

[621] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 399.

[622] Whittaker, "The Structure of the Zapotec Calendar," 120; quoted by Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 315.

Additionally, Marcus's debatable "inauguration hypothesis" that "the hidden inscriptions" on the South Platform cornerstones depict the investiture of a specific Zapotec ruler (12 Jaguar), to whom ambassadors from the much more powerful capital of Teotihuacan supposedly traveled to pay homage, provides an even stronger example of the willful distortion (or "mythicization") of empirical events.[624] Marcus's own skeptical analysis of this possibility stresses the unlikelihood that the lords of Teotihuacan, who had nothing to fear from the vastly smaller capital of Monte Albán, would actually have been inclined to demonstrate subservience to any Oaxacan leader; and thus, quite likely, this never happened. But it is that same disparity in the power and prestige of the two capitals that also makes the presentation of such an eventuality, albeit largely fictive, a very potent expression of the legitimacy of the Monte Albán ruler. And thus, if we accept Marcus's proposal, this may well be a case of the extreme idealization (or "mythicization") of a scenario that, in fact, never actually transpired, at least not in the self-aggrandizing way that it is depicted on the cornerstone reliefs. That, then, could be the sort of "mythicization of history" that borders on wholesale fabrication.

On the other hand, however, Urcid's treatment of Programs B and A belie the notion that these narrative displays are, in any respect, deserving of the label of "mythic narratives" in the Eliadean sense of "true, real and exemplary stories" about "a primordial Time before time."[625] Eliade's account of the mythicization of history underscores the transformation of specific time-bound historical individuals into timeless mythical or "archetypal" models—in an

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[623] Recall that Urcid also discerns the manipulated representation of political events—specifically, the enthronement of two or three Zapotec rulers—so that they correspond to Calendar Round dates in the Danzante Wall. See, for instance, Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 154. And, as I will note momentarily, the same strategy is certainly at work in other of Monte Albán's public displays.

[624] See Marcus, *Mesoamerican Writing Systems*, 325-29; Marcus, "A Zapotec Inauguration in Comparative Perspective;" and Marcus and Flannery, *Zapotec Civilization*, 217-21. And recall that Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 310-12, provides a critical summary of Marcus's "inauguration hypothesis."

[625] See, for instance, Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*; Eliade, *Myth and Reality*; or the summary discussion of Eliade on myth and sacred history earlier in this chapter.

aforementioned example, New Testament stories transform the historical Jesus into a timeless Son of God who is, then, a permanent presence in the lives of believing Christians[626]—and that is *not* something that seems to be happening at all in these Oaxacan cases. Never in these reliefs do we encounter an allusion to the first ruler or founder of Monte Albán who establishes an abiding and paradigmatic "mythical archetype" for all subsequent rulers; reiterating the precedent-setting style and status of the original Zapotec sovereign, perhaps surprisingly, does *not* seem to among the operative strategies of legitimation. Instead, almost oppositely, Urcid describes how specific rulers (i.e., Lord 5B and Lord 13F) make themselves the protagonists of visual displays that they commission—self-glorifying compositions that may be persuasive public exhibits during their respective lifetimes but that, almost immediately following the demise of those rulers, become "irrelevant," and thus are dismantled and exploited exclusively for their utility as recyclable construction materials.

In sum, then, ancient Oaxacan public displays like Programs B and A that are judged expendable as soon as their creators expire—and that, thereby, suggest the only "history" worthy of serious consideration is relatively recent history—are a near-antithesis to the sort of permanent memorials that facilitate a return to "the primordial time of origins," or a "Time before time," which, for Eliade, lies at the very heart of the existential appeal of myth and ritual.[627] Consequently, Urcid's account of Programs B and A as egotistical compositions, which are trained on the life accomplishments of a seated ruler and which after a century or two are regretlessly disassembled and forgotten, provides far more support for the preponderantly propagandistic purposes of Zapotec writing (a position that Urcid continually puts in doubt) than for the relevance of Eliade's notion of the meaning-adducing "mythicization of history." The relatively short "shelf-lives" of Programs B and A, as it were, expose these as time-bound (or historical) rather than timeless (or mythic) narrative compositions.

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[626] Regarding the transformation of the time-bound historical Jesus into the timeless (mythical) Jesus Christ, earlier in the chapter I appealed to Perrin, *The New Testament, An Introduction*, 26, 31-32, who makes his case with explicit reference to the work of Mircea Eliade.

[627] See, for instance, Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, chap. 1, "Archetypes and Repetition," and chap. 4, "the Terror of History."

b. Strong Examples of Paul Ricoeur on "Followable Narrative": The Strategic "Emplotment" of Politico-Military Careers

Second, turning to ideas from Paul Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative*, while Urcid's hypothesized Programs B and A are quite poor exemplars of Eliade's notion of mythicized history, they (especially Program A) provide perhaps our best evidence so far for "followable narratives" that present logically linked beginnings, middles and endings.[628] As noted earlier, where most previous analyses interpret component elements of Monte Albán's visual displays in isolation, Urcid persistently works to ascertain the "reading order" of whole compositions. In the case of the uniquely large and complex Danzante Wall, for instance, recall that he discerns "a boustrophedon reading sequence," which guides observers through a snakelike ascent from the bottom row of the façade through to the upper rows; and via that back-and-forth, bottom-to-top visual pathway, we can appreciate the array of individual figures as a coherent and "followable" story.[629] And in the case of the original Pe-phase façade of "conquest slabs," though the evidence is much slimmer, Urcid hypothesizes the same sort of boustrophedon, ascending and zigzagging "reading order" wherein the respective panels are arranged with alternating rows of vertical figures (presumably humans) and horizontal figures (presumably ancestors) that decrease in size from bottom to top.[630] In both those cases, however, recall also how I expressed my

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[628] As discussed earlier in the chapter, with respect to what qualifies as a narrative, Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, presents "followability" (ibid., vol. I, 152) and "emplotment," that is, the composition of a plotline or scenario in which a chronological sequence of events begins and then proceeds according to some coherent logic, which thus leads to a believable, if not altogether expected, conclusion (ibid., vol. I, 49), as the essential criteria of a compelling and satisfying narrative.

[629] With respect to the boustrophedon reading order of the Danzante Wall, see, along with my discussion of the matter earlier in the chapter, Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 183-85; or Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 154, fig. 9.3, which also addresses the snake-like reading order of the Danzante façade.

[630] With respect to the less certain evidence that the Pe phase façade on which the "conquest slabs" were, according Urcid and Joyce, originally displayed also utilizes a boustrophedon reading order, see my comments on the topic earlier in the chapter and the remarks in Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 163, about this façade's use of a "construction technique [similar to that used in the Danzante displays] of alternated vertical and horizontal blocks that decrease in size from bottom to top."

hesitations with ascribing "narrative" status, in the Ricoeurian sense, to compositions that do not really have a sustained beginning-to-end plotline.

Now (or actually several years earlier) Urcid's search after the "reading orders" of Programs B and A does, however, lead him to present especially Program A as a coherent narrative composition that records the accomplishments of a particular leader, namely, Lord 13F. As just summarized, owing to the uniquely full extant iconographic evidence in Program A (much fuller than that for Program B), Urcid is able to reassemble and decipher nine vertical texts—which relate respectively to nine military campaigns in which Lord 13 (or some surrogate) vanquished a surrounding community and took select captives who were later sacrificed in Monte Albán.[631] Each of those nine texts, which are distributed across the façades of six side-to-side monoliths,[632] Urcid argues, conforms to a six-part "standard sequence" that begins with a date (which is frequently massaged to conform to regularized calendrical rhythms), but then also provides specifics concerning the site of the battle and the identity of the captives;[633] and, according to his epigraphic analysis, "the reading order of linear vertical texts... commonly begins from top to bottom and proceeds from left to right."[634] In this case, then, if I understand Urcid correctly, the nine respective texts of Program A present something like nine chapters, or nine chronologically successive episodes, in the ongoing story of Lord 13's military career—and that really is a storiological narrative, which would guide observers through the particulars concerning this ruler's greatest successes.

Moreover, though Urcid is able to describe the strategically presented content of Program A with unique thoroughness, his commentary suggests (to me) that this case is less special in its

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[631] See the extended "epigraphic analysis of Program A," in Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 376-97, which a diagram of those nine vertical texts at ibid., 378, fig.5.79.

[632] See Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 378, fig.5.79.

[633] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 406, provides a concise summary of his view of the six-part "standard sequence" in each of the nin columnar texts of Program A.

[634] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 378.

presentation of a clear storyline than in the exceptionally well preserved hieroglyphic texts that allow him to discern the particulars of that plotline. That is to say, while Program A provides arguably the best example of the labels "monumental narrative," "narrative composition" or "narrative pictography," which Urcid routinely applies (often too freely I think) to essentially all of Monte Albán's iconographic visual displays, his discussion of this composition strengthens his case that most of these façades do indeed constitute what Ricoeur would describe as carefully "emploted" and "followable" narratives.[635] Additionally, the way in which all nine of Lord 13F's military campaigns are reconfigured to conform with regularized intervals and/or Calendar Round completions provides excellent support for Ricoeur's broad premise that "between the activity of narrating a story and the temporal character of human existence there exists a correlation that is not merely accidental but that presents a transcultural form of necessity,"[636] and his even broader proposition that "time becomes human time to the extent that it is organized after the manner of narrative."[637] As in every one of these monumental compositions, expressions of "native time reckoning" are crucial. In this respect, Program A not only commands the Monte Albán citizenry to obey Lord 13F, but, moreover, provides that residents of the capital with a temporal orientation wherein their present situation is the consequence of a meaningful past. In short, though Program A is a decidedly weak example of a *mythic narrative* (in the Eliadean sense), it is an excellent exemplar of a *followable narrative* (in the Ricoeurian sense).

c. Uneven Examples of Enrique Florescano on "Indigenous Memory": Long-Standing, Mutually Supportive Means of Political Legitimation

Third, to touch base with the work of Enrique Florescano on "indigenous memory," Programs B and A, not unlike the Danzante and "conquest slab" displays, present strong examples of only two of "the three decisive aspects in the formation of the *altépetl*," which

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[635] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. I, 49, 152.

[636] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 52.

[637] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 3.

Florescano discerns in nearly all community-specific *lienzos* and "primordial titles."[638] Again, his first theme—the question of origins and the linkage of the particular *altépetl* community of Monte Albán to the ur-creation of the world or the First People, a topic that is prominently addressed in nearly every Mesoamerican *lienzo*—is *not* at all apparent in the highly specific Programs B and A. In these monumental displays, the deepest beginnings worthy of note seem to be located in the life-histories of Period IIIA rulers. By contrast, but also like the Danzante Wall and Building J conquest slabs, Florescano's second and third themes—i.e., the origin and succession of the ruling lineage, which is invariably linked via genealogy to the *altépetl's* present leadership, and a delineation of the extent of the territory that is regarded as the community's rightful possession[639]—do receive much fuller treatment.

With respect to these more overtly political themes, it is, however, worth making the more general observation that, between Urcid's and others' interpretations of the various Monte Albán public displays, we have by now encountered at least a half dozen markedly different visual strategies for legitimating Zapotec authority (none of which is positively verifiable, but all of which I will address next chapter relative to the ritual-architectural commemoration of politics, priority II-C). Though most of these heuristic options have clear associations with militarism and human sacrifice, and thus rely on visual demands for compliance that are violent, coercive and non-negotiable, others work to persuade via the presentation of ostensibly peaceful acknowledgements or transversals of power. And while each of the six alternatives may be most apparent in one or two of the visual compositions discussed thus far, every one of Monte Albán's major iconographic compositions actually deploys simultaneously several of these strategies.

In any case, beginning with the most oft-cited tactics, which are also the most explicitly threatening, (1) countless interpretations of the Danzantes as tortured captives accentuate the

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[638] Regarding the three themes most commonly present in Mesoamerican *lienzos* and "primordial titles," see Florescano, "Los títulos primordiales y la formación de la memoria indígena en los pueblos de Nueva España," 294, 300, 302 and 307.

[639] Florescano, "Los títulos primordiales y la formación de la memoria indígena en los pueblos de Nueva España," 294, 300, 302 and 307.

prospect of graphic displays that showcase the clout of Monte Albán's present regime by posing a generalized might-make-right ultimatum concerning the dire consequences of challenging Zapotec military muscle. And (2) conventional readings of the Building J conquest slabs present the possibility of similarly frightening military threats that are supported by a record of more specific military victories.

The other four visual means of buttressing Zapotec political authority are all "meta-commemorative"—that is, iconographic commemorations of ritual commemorations—insofar as they feature stone-carved depictions of ceremonial occasions or activities that are themselves commemorative of militaristic organizations or episodes.[640] (3) Urcid and Joyce's heavily revised view of the Danzantes and Pe-phase display of "finely incised orthostats, for instance, underscores the prospect of promoting a distinctive hierarchic socio-political scheme via the more nuanced display, not of military prowess, but rather of the self-sacrificing members of a age-graded military fraternity whose activities sustain a "sacred covenant" that ostensibly serves the interests of both elite and non-elite members of Monte Albán society.[641] (4) Urcid's account of Program A proffers another simpler sort of meta-commemorative display in which the bound captives of quite recent military victories are ceremonially paraded before a specific Zapotec sovereign (Lord F13) who subsequently sacrifices them;[642] in this option, specific military

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[640] Again, by the term "meta-commemorative" I refer visual displays that commemorate (or memorialize) ceremonial activities or occasions that are themselves ritual commemorations of more earthly, usually militaristic activities or occasions.

[641] See Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 216-24; Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 152-57; or the discussion of Urcid's reinterpretation of the Danazante Wall earlier in the chapter. Later in the chapter I will return to observations concerning the overwhelmingly, indeed surprisingly, disproportionate emphasis on depicting dozens rank-and-file soldiers but only a couple of rulers in the Danzante Wall—an imbalance that could be interpreted either as a forthright investment in communal authority or, as Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 225, and Urcid, *Zapotec Writing*, 154-55, suggests, a less genuine but more strategic "masking of exclusionary interests."

[642] See Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*¸ 397-405; or the summary of Urcid on Program A earlier in the chapter, i.e., the sub-section entitled "The Cornerstones in their Secondary Context—i.e., Program A: Upright Orthostats Memorializing Warfare, Capture and Sacrifice." Latter in the chapter I will return to suggestion of Urcid, *Zapotec Writing*, 154-55, that the more

successes are memorialized, but in more indirect, non-pictographic ways. (5) Marcus's take on the "hidden inscriptions" of the South Platform cornerstones, by contrast, suggests a visual stratagem featuring more peaceful processionary scenes wherein the inauguration of a Zapotec ruler is augmented by the endorsement of powerful Teotihuacan emissaries; aside from accompanying human sacrifices, this is, by her reckoning, the commemoration of a non-violent transfer of authority.[643] And (6) Urcid's analysis of Program B, the least overtly coercive of any display discussed so far, adds the possibility of authority reconfirmed via similarly peaceable ceremonial acts of obsequiousness wherein a procession of lesser Monte Albán elites acknowledges their loyal subservience both to a deceased Zapotec leader of higher rank (Lord 13N) and to his living descendant (Lord 5B).[644]

Unquestionably, then, though these six heuristic options suggest that the means for accomplishing it are manifold, the legitimation of rulers is, just as Florescano (and almost all scholars) would predict, a priority of the first order, apparently, in every Monte Albán public visual display, Programs B and A included. Indeed, the content of all of Monte Albán's façades (at least according to most interpretations) is notable far more for its politicized narrowness than for its exploration of a fuller spectrum of the practical and existential concerns of Zapotec life. The most evident exceptions to that strictly political content come in the extent to which the Danzante Wall, and perhaps the Pe-phase façade of finely incised orthostats, are

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overtly political agenda of Programs B and A, by contrast to the subtler Danzante Wall, represents a Classic-era "unmasking of

[643] See, among the relevant articles cited earlier, Marcus, "Teotihuacan Visitors on Monte Albán Monuments and Murals," 175-181; and Marcus, Marcus, "A Zapotec Inauguration in Comparative Perspective," 245-274. And for a reminder that the Danzante Wall also includes depictions of what seem to be "the enthronement of two, perhaps three rulers throughout a span of forty-eight years," see Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 154.

[644] See Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*¸ 372-76; or the summary of Urcid on Program B earlier in the chapter, i.e., the sub-section entitled "The Cornerstones in their Primary Context—i.e., Program B: Horizontal Lintels Honoring a Deceased and a Living Ruler." And be reminded that the Program B of Urcid's description refers to an earlier use of the same carved stones in which Marcus discerned Teotihuacan ambassadors attending the coronation of a Zapotec ruler.

"cosmograms;"[645] but that status does not, I think, apply to Program B or A. Nevertheless, Florescano's differentiation between political legitimation through the presentation of genealogical descent lines versus through the visual articulation of rightful territorial boundaries allows us to put a finer point on the ways in which those two Period IIIA monumental compositions demonstrate the continued reliance on timeworn strategies for the authorization of hegemonic control.

The first of those possibilities—wherein present Monte Albán rulers assert their right to rule on the basis of a hereditary continuity between themselves and their now-deceased but still venerated predecessors—is, to be sure, a long-standing practice. The juxtaposition of upright living human participants in the various ranks of an age-graded military fraternity or "sodality" and revered ancestors or "honored warriors" who are depicted in prone postures—which Urcid discerns in both the Period I Danzante Wall and the coeval Pe-phase façade of "conquest slabs"—signals that this sort of broadly genealogical means of legitimation was in place from Monte Albán's earliest eras.[646] And, therefore, the much simpler Classic-era Program B of Urcid's description, which was commissioned by a self-glorifying Lord 5B who juxtaposed himself with his deceased predecessor, Lord 13N, provides a model demonstration of the continuing use of a very well-practiced ploy. Moreover, anticipating my final point in this sub-section, Program B thereby deploys a kind of dual strategy of legitimation wherein, to use Weberian terms, the "personal charisma" that Lord 5B attains by showcasing his own battlefield successes is augmented by the "hereditary charisma" consequent of publicizing his genealogical

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[645] Regarding the notion of public visual displays as "cosmograms" (my term not Urcid's)—that is, that façades that express not just specific politico-military accomplishments, but also fundamental Zapotec ideas and priorities concerning the necessity of war and sacrifice as crucial means of maintaining obligatory, perhaps "covenantal," relations between humans and gods—see my remarks earlier in this chapter.

[646] Regarding the juxtaposition on the Danzante Wall of upright human figures and prone "ancestors," see Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 211-15, 218; and Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 153-54. And recall additionally that Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 185 (my translation), discerns other inscriptions on this façade that "could refer to a dynastic succession of at least three rulers," which likewise demonstrates the ploy of legitimation via the presentation of "a genealogical record."

connection to a deceased antecessor (i.e., Lord 13N).[647] The two means of self-promotion work in concert.

Additionally, regarding the latter of those possibilities—wherein rulers express publically the extent and boundaries of their rightful territorial control—this too, if we entertain Caso's still-widely-endorsed interpretation of the Period II Building J conquest slabs as a public record of the surrounding communities that Monte Albán had vanquished, is a long-worked means of asserting Zapotec political authority. And, therefore, when the Program A of Urcid's description presents a record of Lord 13F's nine greatest military victories, complete with details about which outlying communities he had subdued, that is both a piquant demonstration of Florescano's remarks about community-particular pictographic charters invariably specifying their rightful territorial boundaries of the *altépetl* and of the Classic-era deployment of a much older strategy of legitimation.

In sum, then, Programs B and A provide Period IIIA exemplifications of several pictographic and iconographic stratagems for building, buttressing and "naturalizing" the hierarchical structure of Monte Albán society that are both long-standing and mutually supportive. That is to say, while it is possible, for heuristic purposes, to cull from the scholarly commentary on Monte Albán visual displays at least a half dozen significantly different means of authorizing and reinforcing the legitimacy of Zapotec rulers, these are by no means incommensurable tactics. To the contrary, the Danzante Wall stands as a uniquely large and complex visual display that, if one includes the texts on the cornerstones as well as the main façade, arguably deploys variations on every one of the six options; and even much more modest monumental compositions like Programs B and A are made compelling and persuasive by the utilization of several overlapping, but mutually supportive iconographic and epigraphic devices. Indeed, it seems quite apparent that the designers of Programs B and A had at their disposal a

[647] Regarding the difference between "personal charisma" and "hereditary charisma" (and the "charisma of office"), see *Max Weber on Charisma and Institution Building: Selected Papers*, edited by S. N. Eisenstadt (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1968).

well-stocked supply of conventionalized visual contrivances, which they could recombine in various creative ways to fashion their self-aggrandizing façades.

d. Poignant Examples of Bruce Lincoln on Non-Compliant Responses: The Limits of Force and Elitist Coercion

Fourth and finally, Bruce Lincoln's skeptical insights concerning the invariably non-compliant responses of non-elite audiences to the prescriptive proclamations of ruling elites—ideas that merge with Joyce and Urcid's subaltern emphasis on the usually-underestimated agency of ancient Oaxacan "commoners"[648]—present a very important corrective to the standard ways in which we assess obviously self-interested public visual displays like Programs B and A. While, as noted, these compositions are poor examples of Eliade's content-based definition of mythico-historic narratives, recall that Lincoln's alternate criterion for what qualifies as "mythic discourse" depends, not on the subject matter of the narrative, but rather on a story's ability "to engender sentiment," and thereby "effectively mobilize a social group," something neither legends nor strictly historical narratives accomplish.[649] The "mythic" status of a narrative, for Lincoln, lies in the eye of the beholder, as it were. Accordingly, even if Zapotec audiences are persuaded that the militaristic accomplishments recorded in those Period IIIA façades are "credible" in the sense that they indeed happened, those facades will have no "authority," and

[648] Earlier in the chapter I discussed what Joyce, *Mixtecs, Zapotecs, and Chatinos*, 27-32, terms his "poststructuralist" approach to ancient Oaxacan history, though concerning the emphasis on the usually-underestimated agency of ancient Oaxacan "commoners," I think that approach is better termed "subaltern." That view is specifically applied to the Danzantes and Pe phase façade of "finely incised orthostats" (but not to Programs B and A) in Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 164-66. Regarding Arthur Joyce's reliance on what he terms a "poststructuralist" (or, in a perhaps more suitable term, "subaltern") theoretical orientation and a version of "action theory" that accentuates the agency and personal initiative, not simply of elite rulers, but even more of "commoners," see Joyce, *Mixtecs, Zapotecs, and Chatinos*, 27-32. For a critical summary of Joyce's reliance on that methodological outlook, see Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, chap. 7, the opening sub-section, "A First Guiding Narrative Theme: Accentuating the Agency and Non-Compliance of Commoners."

[649] See Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society*, 24-25, for this alternate means of differentiating "mythic discourse" from fable, legend or plainly historical narratives—a position that I summarized earlier in the chapter.

thus no socio-political impact, unless the onlookers are stirred or moved to feel as though these events are relevant to them in some consequential way.[650] To be effective in swaying public opinion, a narrative composition must evoke an affective, not just intellectualized, sensation of excitement, loyalty, patriotism, or perhaps indignation and outrage (which is to say, in my rubric, in order have any socio-political effect, the visual composition much be "alluring").[651]

Moreover, Lincoln's Marxist analysis cautions us to keep in mind that, rather than passive acquiescence to the assertions of elites about their rightful hegemony, people of lower socio-economic status—whom scholars generally agree, were *not* well versed in the subtleties of Zapotec hieroglyphic writing—even when they are moved by those propagandistic programs, are very likely to resist and reject claims that are obviously at odds with their non-elite self-interests. That is to say, even the most deliberatively wrought presentations of a ruler's greatness—for instance, those in Programs B and A—frequently fail to persuade popular audiences of those self-assigned claims to rightful hegemony. Again to the contrary, as I and reception theorists often note—but as most Oaxacanist interpreters are willing to gloss over—far more often than not, there are very significant discrepancies between "*the intended meaning*" of an institutionalized public display and its "*received meaning*," or actual impact on the diverse audiences experiencing it. As both all merchants and politicians know, not every solicitation eventuates in a sale; *messages sent* and *messages received* are two quite different matters. And if it is an empirical rather than idealized picture of Monte Albán to which we aspire (as indeed it is), then the half-literate, ragged, wrong and recalcitrant responses of non-elites are not less

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[650] Also see Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society*, 24-25, or my summary earlier in chapter, for his reliance on the carefully defined criteria of "truth-claims" (which entail narrators purporting to describe things that actually happened), "credibility" (which refers to whether or not those truth-claims are generally accepted by audiences), and "authority" (the key term, which refers to whether or not the truth-claims are regarded as not only accurate, but also "paradigmatic" in ways that "evoke sentiments" and "effectively mobilize a social group"). Where historical narratives meet only the first two of those criteria, myth alone meets all three.

[651] Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society*, 9, explains that the "sentiment evocation," with mythic discourse evokes but that history does not, refers to a kind of feeling or sensibility that is somewhat different from a reasoned thought or idea.

important than those of literate elites who do understand and appreciate the intricacies of Zapotec iconography and epigraphy.

Furthermore, Lincoln's comments concerning the always-limited effectiveness of "force," by which he means "the exercise or threat of physical violence,"[652] are highly salient with respect to predictions about which of Monte Albán's public visual displays might actually have succeeded in engendering the sort of compliance to which their creators aspired and which displays, more probably, simply incited resentment. Recall in this vein, Lincoln's cross-culturally based assertion that suzerains' reliance on force or blunt coercion is "always is a stopgap measure, effective in the short run but unworkable over the long haul."[653] That observation leads us, on the one hand, to doubt that the sort of "frightening displays of terror tactics" that many scholars imagine the Danzantes and Building J conquest slabs to be were actually, except perhaps in the short haul, an effective means of social control.[654] And, on the other hand, that Lincolesque stance also leads one to suspect that the sort of "polysemic narratives" that emerges from Urcid and Joyce's strongly revisionist interpretations of the Danzante Wall and the Pe-phase façade of finely incised orthostats—that is, narrative compositions that express "a communal, non-exclusionary form of authority" in which elites and non-elites play different but equally important roles in the maintenance of a divine-human covenant—are, of all the examples we have encountered, the ones most likely to have achieved their intended goals.[655]

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[652] See Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society*, 3-4.

[653] Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society*, 4.

[654] Again I borrow the phrase, "frightening displays of terror tactics" from Blanton et al, *Ancient Mesoamerica: A Comparison of Change in Three Regions*, 70.

[655] Recall, as discussed earlier in the chapter, that Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 164-66, argue the Danzante displays actually express "two potentially competing forms of authority—communal and noble [or inclusive and exclusionary"—and thus different socio-economic audience can find quite different messages in the same display.

Additionally, if we entertain Urcid and Joyce's proposal that those Period I visual displays were, by Period II, demolished primarily because of their advocacy for a communal conception of authority that increasingly totalitarian Zapotec rulers could not longer abide,[656] then we might assess the more exclusionary message of Building J conquest slabs, for instance, as a short-sighted attempt to assert greater hegemonic control that actually issued in a much less compliant, more resentful Monte Albán populace. In short, Lincoln guides us to believe that the most effective elitist strategies of manipulation are those in which non-elites do not feel as though they are being coerced, and thus to predict that forthright "terror tactics" are more likely to evoke fear and even rebellion than faithful approbation.

Though it is too simple to suppose that the less overtly coercive a narrative display is, the more socio-politically effective it will be, the realization that raw threats are never in themselves reliable as sustained tools of statecrafting does shed light on perhaps the most conspicuous difference between Programs B and A. While both those programs feature multiple processions of secondary personages before a high-ranking ruler, the subordinate figures in Program A are all bound prisoners, apparently on the way to their respective human sacrifices; and thus their capitulation to a Zapotec ruler (Lord 13F) is presented as an unwilling consequence of "force" in Lincoln's use of the term. This is, in other words, one more instance of the sort of overt coercion that may "evoke sentiments," but probably of resentment rather than heartfelt respect.

By contrast, recall that Urcid identifies the secondary figures in Program B as "members of the city's elite, perhaps lineage heads of 14 of the 15 'barrios' of Monte Albán or rulers of subordinate communities;"[657] these are, it seems, local (or semi-local) elites of lesser rank than Lord 5B, unrestrained men of status who approach the Zapotec leader with copal bag offerings as a demonstration of their ostensibly voluntary subordination to a person greater status. (Recall also that these are the figures that Marcus identifies as Teotihuacan ambassadors who endorse

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[656] See Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 165-66.

[657] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 405.

the coronation of a Zapotec noble.[658]) In this case, then, the grounds for deference to the Zapotec noble are pictured *not* simply as the consequence of intimidation or military defeat. Though outward appearances may obscure underlying intimidation, this is the most benignant, mutually respectful and violence-free pictorial scene of any we've discussed, which could signal the more amenable possibility that acquiescence to Zapotec authority does *not* depend on the humiliation and total disempowerment of subordinates. And this, therefore, may be an exercise of the more subtle "ideological persuasion," which is the sort of mythic discourse that really can, Lincoln argues, variously shape and shape "the construction of society."[659]

Be that as it may, the fact that Program B, not unlike Program A, was dismantled quite soon after the demise of its protagonist-creator undermines the too-simple proposition that the more genteel argument for Zapotec authority of the former display was either more effective or more enduring than its unmistakably martial counterpart. Neither the brusquely threatening message of Lord 13 F (i.e., Program A) nor the seemingly more politic persuasions of Lord 5B (i.e., Program B) had staying power beyond the reigns of those sovereigns. But Lincoln does nonetheless put us on notice that elite-sponsored mythico-historic compositions that simply browbeat and bully non-elites are not likely to have attained their desired goals, and thus we should *not* assume that the "intended messages" of those displays correspond to their actual "received messages."

e. Final Thoughts on Monte Albán's Three Most Prominent Narrative Displays: Respecting the Superabundance of Sacred Architecture

In final sum, then, with respect to this extended background discussion of Monte Albán's three most prominent and heavily debated narrative displays—the Danzante Wall, the Building J conquest slabs, and the South Platform cornerstones—I draw few specific conclusions and

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[658] See, among several sources cited earlier, Marcus, "Teotihuacan Visitors on Monte Albán Monuments and Murals" (1983), 175-181.

[659] On the combined necessity, or "paired instrumentalities," of "sentiment evocation" and "ideological persuasion," see Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society*, 9.

instead stress ways that these public monumental compositions demonstrate numerous of the very broad themes that sustain this whole project. Perhaps most poignantly, on the one hand, I certainly agree with Urcid and Joyce that the Danzante Wall and by extension, albeit it a lesser extent, all of the later and more modest public visual displays in this survey, were, by design, "probably polysemic with different components aimed at different audiences with various degrees of phonetic and semantic literacy."[660] Even in their intentional conception, the creators of these deliberately multivalent displays were working to send different messages to different social constituencies. On the other hand, though, I would stress much more strongly than do Urcid and Joyce that we cannot assume that any of these carefully crafted compositions actually succeeded in disseminating, especially to non-elite audiences, the propagandistic messages that they so urgently endeavored to send.

Consequently, I end this long survey of debate over the meanings and messages of Monte Albán's most prominent visual displays by reasserting yet again my fundamental hermeneutical proposition concerning "the superabundance and autonomy" of works of art and architecture and the only-seemingly-radical proposition that, indeed, strictly speaking, buildings and visual displays do *not*, in and of themselves, mean anything.[661] Meanings, whether religious or socio-political, are never inherent in works of art and architecture. Alternatively, so my reiterative claim goes, meanings always arise in the context of specific "ritual-architectural events," which entail the involvement of specific sorts of human participants in particular ceremonial occasions. And while this methodological stance may at first seems to frustrate and undermine any sort of definitive conclusions about the meanings of the Danzante Wall, Programs B and A, and all the

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[660] Note that Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 224, and Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza,"165, make this claim about the display's "polysemic" quality specifically with respect to the Danzante programs and then, in the latter article, extend that to the Pe phase display of finely incised orthostats (ibid., 157-64); but Urcid does not describe the more narrowly conceived, and more obviously authoritarian, Programs B and a as polysemic.

[661] Again on the "superabundance and autonomy" of works of art and architecture—which leads to the sometimes troubling Heideggerian proposition that built forms, in and of themselves, do *not* have meanings—see Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, vol. I, chap. 2.

rest, I will maintain that this is actually the route to a more empirically realistic understanding what was actually happening in the pre-Columbian Main Plaza of the great Zapotec capital.

In any case, with this paired general theoretical and specifically Oaxacan background in place, I now resume my more explicitly hermeneutical pattern of questioning with successive treatment of four variations on the ritual-architectural commemoration of sacred history, priority II-B.

III. Four Variations on the Ritual-Architectural Commemoration of Sacred History: Memorializing Cosmogonies, Episodes, Individuals and/or Places

This section marks the main break in chapter 5. Having devoted long blocks to preparatory background sections, first, on general theoretical approaches to Monte Albán's ostensibly narrative displays and, secondly, on the controversies surrounding the interpretation of three of the Zapotec capital's most prominent iconographic compositions, I turn at long last to the properly hermeneutical interrogation of the ritual-architectural commemoration of sacred history, priority II-B.[662] Here I return to the questions with which I began the chapter concerning a search after the mythico-historical narratives that sustained the mountaintop city and that, therefore, informed the conception of its built environment; and again I remind readers that by "sacred history" I follow Mircea Eliade in referring to unbroken sequence of events that connects the original creation of the world and the fabulous adventures of mythical ancestors and culture heroes in the "Time before time" together with the outstanding accomplishments of fully human protagonists in the post-primordial era.[663] In the "true, real and exemplary narratives" that

[662] Here I draw my pattern of questioning with respect to four main variations on the ritual-architectural commemoration of sacred history (priority II-B) as well as several other formulations and cross-cultural examples from Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, vol. II, chap. 18, "Sacred History: Myths and Miracles." Those four sets of questions appear also in "Appendix B: An Expanded Heuristic Framework of Ritual-Architectural Priorities."

[663] Recall that Eliade, "Cosmogonic Myth and 'Sacred History,'" 85, defines "sacred history" as "the fabulous epoch [between the creation of the world and historical time] when the ancestors

constitute sacred history, boundaries between history and myth, and between this-worldly and otherworldly, are deliberately conflated.[664] These stories, which usually draw in some uneven measure on the sources of inspiration, imagination and empirical occurrence, often run, with fits and starts, from the original creation of the world through to the present. Along the way, such seamlessly, roughly interwoven mythico-historic stories, provide the rationales, models, paradigms and patterns both for "how things are" and, even more importantly, for "how things ought to be." Consequently, the memory of one's sacred history—whether in archaic or modern-day cultures—is among the foremost of spiritual responsibilities.

That architects and builders, apparently in all cultural contexts, particularly where religious and public works are concerned, have accepted the challenge of, in one way or another, memorializing important episodes and individuals from their respective mythological and historical pasts has never been in doubt. Like the last chapter's discussion of the ritual-architectural commemoration of divinity (priority II-A), this one speaks to a topic that nearly all Mesoamericanists have acknowledged. The same early Western investigators who took for granted that the pre-Columbian constructions of Middle America must have commemorated native "gods" were similarly confident that figural elements in that architecture and decoration were, to borrow a phrase from William Henry Holmes, "undoubtedly mythologic" or "mytho-esthetic motifs."[665] Nineteenth-century explorer of Maya ruins, John Lloyd Stephens, for instance, always concerned to reign in the extravagant assessments of his less "scientific" antiquarian predecessors, risked no loss of credibility in his speculation that "each figure [in the so-called Governor's Palace at the site of Uxmal] was perhaps the portrait of some cacique,

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were roaming about the land." I have expanded the term in both directions to include the cosmogony proper and the mythico-historical events of the post-primordial era.

[664] In describing myth and sacred history as "true, real and exemplary," I again appeal to a point discussed earlier in the chapter, which is made again and again in Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*; Eliade, *Myth and Reality*; and Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*.

[665] Holmes, *Archaeological Studies Among the Ancient Cities of Mexico*, 196, uses the term "undoubtedly mythologic" to describe the architectural decoration at the Maya site of Palenque; and I borrow the term "mytho-esthetic motifs" from Victor Wolfgang von Hagen, *Frederick Catherwood, Archt.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950), caption to plate XV.

warrior, prophet, or priest, distinguished in the history of this unknown people."[666] No one questions that the collusion between the incentives to build and to remember the past, among the Mayas, Aztecs, Zapotecs and others, has been prolific.

Perhaps the most cross-culturally common constructional manifestations of those concerns to reenact and remember one's sacred history are countless stage-like arrangements whereupon sacred architectures co-opt the roles of museum, school and especially theater by facilitating the performance, and thus re-experience, of the dramas of myth and history. Where Bishop Landa, for instance, could, on the one hand, dismiss the low square stages or "dance platforms" that he observed in the remains of Chichén Itzá and nearly every pre-Columbian Yucatecan plaza with the condescending sixteenth-century surmise that these must had served as tribunes on which the "farces [of the Indians] were represented, and comedies for the pleasures of the public,"[667] we could, on the other hand, note as well that nearly all Christian churches, however diverse in other respects, Landa's included, are designed, to a considerable extent, as ritual-architectural "stages" for the reiteration and reenactment of the sacred drama of Christ's life and passion. Architecture, whether in indigenous and European contexts, very often abets the commemoration of sacred history primarily in an *in*direct fashion—that is, by providing the ritual context and supporting backdrop against which mythico-historical stories can be (re)told and (re)enacted again and again. And I will explore that possibility much more fully in chapter 8 with respect to what I term the theater priority, III-A.

Yet, in addition to this ancillary stage-setting function—which is, to be sure, amply demonstrated at Monte Albán—there are also many more direct and more ingenious ways in which various peoples have exploited architecture's rare potential for expressing and reiterating

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[666] John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Yucatan* (New York: Dover Publications, 1963 [originally 1843]), vol. 1, 96.

[667] Diego de Landa, *Relación de las Cosas de Yucatán*, trans. and ed. Alfred M. Tozzer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1941 [originally 1566]), 179. Likewise, Robert M. Carmack, *The Quiché Maya of Utatlán: The Evolution of a Highland Guatemala Kingdom* (Norman: Oklahoma University Press, 1981), 208-209, 284ff., discusses how the mythological dramas performed on such "plaza platforms" served political as well as entertainment functions.

the dramas of their respective sacred histories. Accordingly, in addition to amphitheatric settings for mythical dramas, consider in turn the following four variations on the sacred history theme, priority II-B: (1) ritual-architectural commemorations of *cosmogony*, (2) of mythological or mythico-historical *episodes*, (3) of mythological or mythico-historical *individuals*, and finally (4) of the *places* where mythological or miraculous events transpired. Again, I will proceed with a kind of telescoping agenda that addresses each of these four alternatives first as a broadly cross-cultural phenomenon, then as a practice evident across the whole of Mesoamerica, and finally as a ritual-architectural incentive that is more specifically relevant to Oaxaca and Monte Albán.

A. Ritual-Architectural Commemorations of Cosmogony: Constructional Embodiments of Creation Stories

Symmetry and balance among the various options in my morphology of ritual-architectural priorities is neither an expectation nor a goal. When applied to various contexts, some options and sub-options, as we've seen, are notable only by their absence of relevance; and others require considerable stretching and speculation in order to appear pertinent. By contrast, some alternatives, like this first variation on the sacred history priority (II-B)—that is, the ritual-architectural commemoration of cosmogony—are stupendously apparent in almost every cultural ambience in which we bring the question to bear. Though infrequently broached directly in relation to Monte Albán (an absence that proves something of a surprise), the very rich representation of the notion of built embodiments of creation stories in other contexts, including other Oaxacan sites, guides us to numerous ways in which this variation on the theme almost certainly was at work in the configuration of the ancient Zapotec capital.

1. Commemorations of Cosmogony as a Cross-Cultural Phenomenon: Building as a Reiteration of the Creation of the World

First, regarding built embodiments of cosmogony as a seemingly ubiquitous cross-cultural phenomenon, Mircea Eliade's incessantly repeated claim—that "*every construction or fabrication has the cosmogony as paradigmatic model.* The creation of the world becomes the

archetype of every creative human gesture"[668]—is certainly (and deliberately) an overstatement.[669] Nevertheless, the abundance and diversity of relevant cross-cultural instantiations does lend credence to that hyperbolic assertion. The erection of the Hindu temple, for example, Eliade's own archetypal example of this possibility, entails a construction process that is explicitly correlated (or homologized) with the cosmogonic myth of the dismemberment of the primordial body of *Purusa*, and thus with the symbolism of sacrificial death and rebirth. Repeatedly, therefore, the bringing into being of a new Hindu temple is described as "the re-creation of a continuing cosmic creation," or as the reiteration of the creation of the universe.[670]

Both Egyptian and Mesopotamian temples have likewise been interpreted as direct architectural embodiments of cosmogony: The temple of Atum-Re at Heliopolis, for instance, was, in consonance with Egyptian cosmogonic traditions, supposedly built to mark and depict the first mound to rise out of the watery abyss on which Atum-Re stood when he began the work of creation; likewise in Sumer, "the ancient temple of the god Enki at Eridu was reputed to be founded upon the *abzu* or primordial deep of the sweet waters."[671] And the pre-Columbian Incas, employing a very different strategy of architectural commemoration of cosmogony, fashioned a cult temple out of live rock at Pacaritombo (literally "Origin Lodge") to designate

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[668] Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 45; italics his.

[669] Note that, while the range of viable cross-cultural examples of this theme is immense, I draw most of these choices quite directly from Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, vol. II, chap. 18, a sub-section entitled "Cosmogonic Commemorations: Constructional Embodiments of Creation."

[670] See, among many relevant sources, Michael W. Meister, "On the Development of a Morphology for a Symbolic Architecture: India," *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 12 (Autumn 1986), 37.

[671] S.F.G. Brandon, *Man and God in Art and Ritual: A Study of Iconography, Architecture and Ritual Action as Primary Evidence of Religious Belief and Practice* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975), 92. Brandon, ibid., among many, also addresses the Egyptian case.

the emergence cave from which culture hero Manco Capac and his followers began their mythical journey to found the eventual imperial capital of Cuzco.[672]

Occasionally, the construction of Christian churches is similarly likened to the (re)creation of a cosmos out of chaos wherein, according to one interpretation:

> "The building materials, wood, brick or stone, correspond to the *hyle* or *materia prima*, the plastic substance of the world... The tools used to shape the crude materials accordingly symbolize the divine 'instruments' which 'fashion' the cosmos out of the undifferentiated and amorphous *materia prima*."[673]

And speaking to the ubiquity of this theme, commentator on landscape design, J. B. Jackson, extends the urge to participate in the origins of the world via architectural design even to configuration of homes in suburban America. Jackson ventures the not-implausible suggestion that the contemporary American fascination with green lawns and gardens, and with preserving wilderness areas, stems from an urge to participate in some fashion in the cosmogonic archetypal garden of Eden, "to restore as much as possible the *original* aspect of the landscape... [to retrieve] a golden age, a time of beginnings."[674]

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[672] Urton, *The History of a Myth: Pacariqtambo and the Origin of the Inkas*, provides a book-length exploration of the significance and history of the Incas' Pacaritombo origin myth. On Pacaritombo, also see, for instance, Burr Cartwright Brundage, *Two Earths, Two Heavens: An Essay Contrasting the Aztecs and Incas* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1975), 3-4, 38; and Father Bernabé Cobo, *Inca Religion and Customs*, trans. and ed. Roland Hamilton (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990 [originally 1653]), 12-17.

[673] Burckhardt, *Sacred Art in East and West*, 52. Mieke Bal, *Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 115, notes that the verb that describes the creation of gender in Genesis is the verb for construction that refers specifically to architecture and the construction of buildings, which suggests (to me) that every Judeo-Christian act of construction could, in some vague sense, be conceived as a reiteration of cosmogony. This notion of building as ritual raises questions that will be addressed more fully in chapter 23 in relation to "propitiation" (priority III-C).

[674] J. B. Jackson, *The Necessity of Ruins and Other Topics* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980), *s*, 19-35, 89-102, entertains this possibility.

There is, however, no shortage of more certain instances of the ritual-architectural commemoration of cosmogony that pertain not just to buildings but to whole cities. Urban geographer Paul Wheatley, for instance, who follows Eliade in asserting that "the construction rituals associated with capital (sacred) cities were, in the traditional world, commonly simulations of the cosmogony,"[675] finds an especially revealing example in the architectural arrangement of the moat-encircled Angkor Vat in Cambodia, which is an unmistakably direct expression of a Southeast Asian creation story. The balustrades of the causeway over the moat to the city gates of the Bayon, the twelfth- or thirteenth-century state temple of Mahayana Buddhist King Jayavarman VII that lies within the larger site, are formed by rows of giant stone figures who are holding an enormous nine-headed serpent that, in Buddhist myth, was used to stir or churn the world into existence. By virtue of the architectonic presence of these mythical protagonists, according to Robert Heine-Geldern, "the whole city [of Angkor Vat] became a representation of the churning of the primeval milk ocean by gods and demons, when they used the serpent king Vasuke as a rope and Mount Meru as a churning stick."[676] In Wheatley's comparative assessment, which prefigures my forthcoming comments on Monte Albán, "Although the Angkor complex is unusual in the quantity and explicitness of its symbolism, plastic representations [of cosmogonic scenarios] are not rare in the design of such ceremonial centers both in Asia and in Nuclear America."[677] And, moreover, as we will also see momentarily, Wheatley's discernment of a built reference to Mount Meru, the "cosmic

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[675] Wheatley, *The Pivot of the Four Quarters*, 444. The same quote appears in Wheatley, "City as Symbol," 10.

[676] Robert Heine-Geldern, *Conceptions of State and Kingship in Southeast Asia*, Data Paper no. 18 (Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1956), 19. Wheatley, *The Pivot of the Four Quarters*, 438, reiterates Heine-Geldern's assessment that, via the symbolism of the four gates to the Bayon, "the whole is in fact a representation of the [creation] myth..." I. W. Mabbett, "The Symbolism of Mount Meru," *History of Religions*, 23 (August 1983), 71, 82; and George Michell, *The Hindu Temple: An Introduction to Its Meaning and Forms* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1988), 23, are among many others who comment on the cosmogonic significance of the Angkor Vat balustrade. Also see Donatella Mazzeo and Chiara Silva Antonini, *Monuments of Civilization: Ancient Cambodia* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1978); and Joan Lebold Cohen, *Angkor: Monuments of the God-Kings* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1975).

[677] Wheatley, *The Pivot of the Four Quarters*, 438.

mountain" that constitutes both the *axis mundi* of Indian mythology and the ostensible site of the original creation of the world, provides another informing parallel to the configuration of ceremonial centers in Oaxaca and elsewhere in Mesoamerica.[678]

In sum, then, this is an option for which the fund of cross-cultural examples presents both an embarrassment of riches and an abundance of evidence for the redoubled rewards that derive from such practices. For one, conceiving the construction of temples, and indeed whole cities, as the reiteration of the gods' creation of the world enables the initial satisfaction of, as Eliade says, reenacting the paradigmatic precedents of the quintessential "first time." Often, as I discussed earlier with respect to the homology priority (I-A), to build a traditional city has been explicitly conceived as (re)creating an earthly microcosm of the full macrocosm.[679] And, for two, subsequently living in an urban configuration that has the character of an orderly cosmos enables the ongoing consequence of enriching all of the worshipful and even mundane activities that people undertake in that microcosmic context.[680] As we'll see in relation to Monte Albán, to build a ceremonial plaza "that symbolized the Zapotec version of the cosmos" is a preclusive reiteration of the cosmogony that provides the context, and thereby opens the way, to the ongoing and even more rewarding reiterative ritual performance, reenactment and commemoration of the cosmic creation.[681]

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[678] Wheatley, *The Pivot of the Four Quarters*, 437-38.

[679] In chapter 1 on the homology priority (I-A), see, for instance, the section entitled "Monte Albán as *Imago Mundi*: Macrocosmic Models, Microcosmic Cities and the Unification of Space and Time."

[680] Obviously, this notion of constructional reiterations of a cosmogony (the first variation on the sacred history priority, II-B) is very closely connected to building on earth, for instance at Monte Albán, an *imago mundi*, or microcosmic replica of the wider macrocosmos (the second variation on the homology priority, I-A, that I discussed in chapter 1).

[681] Joyce, *Mixtecs, Zapotecs, and Chatinos*, 134.

2. Commemorations of Cosmogony across Mesoamerica: Shared Themes and Group-Specific Stories of Origin

That ancient Mesoamerica, where the cycles of creation and destruction were a constant concern, is a context rich with variations on the ritual-architectural concretization of cosmogony has not gone unnoticed. Michael Coe, for example, hypothesizes that the reliefs of deity heads projecting from a sea scene on the Temple of Quetzalcoatl at Teotihuacan "represent the initial creation of the universe from a watery void through a series of dual oppositions."[682] Karl Taube likewise finds explicitly cosmogonic symbolism in the architecture of Teotihuacan—in each the Temple of Quetzalcoatl, the Pyramid of the Sun and in the Tepantitla murals—symbolism that he considers parallel to that of the Pueblo kivas of the American Southwest.[683] The cave paintings of Olmec creation scenes at Juxtlahuaca and Oxtotitlán in Guerrero, some of the oldest known in the New World, also evince the Mesoamerican propensity for enlivening and sustaining their cosmogonic traditions through art and architecture.[684] The famed Aztec Calendar Stone has, for decades, been recognized as "a record of the cosmogonic myth of the Aztecs and the creations and destructions of the world."[685] And art historian Richard Townsend, working in a particularly "eventful" mode, explores the intricately homologized relations between Aztec kingship, architecture, landscape, seasonal cycles and ritual movements, before concluding that:

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[682] Michael Coe, "Religion and the Rise of Mesoamerican States," in *The Transition to Statehood in the New World*, eds. Grant D. Jones and Robert R. Kautz, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 168.

[683] See Karl 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.

[684] Muriel Porter Weaver, *Aztecs, Maya, and Their Predecessors: Archaeology of Mesoamerica* (New York: Seminar Press, 1972), 63.

[685] Herbert J. Spinden, *Ancient Civilizations of Mexico and Central America*, third and revised edition (New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1928 [originally 1917]), 217.

> Indeed, the long [annual] pilgrimage of the kings to the mountaintop [of Mt. Tlaloc on the outskirts of the capital of Tenochtitlan] and its source of life, and their return with a boon to the cities of the Valley suggest the enactment of an ancient cosmogonic myth.[686]

Also with respect to the Aztecs, Davíd Carrasco, describing himself as "a historian of religions, sensitive to Mircea Eliade's emphasis on the overriding prestige of cosmogonic myth,"[687] searches after the actual creation-of-the-world story that supports the ritual-architectural conception of the Templo Mayor. To that end, Carrasco goes past the important linkage of the Templo Mayor to the myth of Huitzilopochtli's birth and the immediate sacrifice of his 400 brothers, a scenario that countless scholars describe as the mythic paradigm for large-scaled human sacrifice at the main temple of the Mexicas, in order to assert the less-well-appreciated relevance of the more explicitly cosmogonic myth of the Birth of the Fifth Sun.[688] That search for a deeper tradition of origins leads Carrasco to what he terms "a primordiality behind Tenochtitlan's primordiality,"[689] wherein the more ancient and general myth of the origin of the Fifth Sun via the self-sacrifice of the god Nanauatzin provides "the cosmogonic background for Huitzilopochtli's story."[690] Already in the older story, according to Carrasco, "creation of the cosmos... is directly tied to the sacrifice, not of one or a few deities, but to the

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[686] Richard Townsend, "The Mt. Tlaloc Project," in *To Change Place: Aztec Ceremonial Landscapes*, ed. Dávid Carrasco (Niwot, Colorado: University Press of Colorado, 1991), 30. Regarding Aztec cosmogonic conceptions, recall that 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), 397, writes, "We are reasonably well informed concerning the prevailing late pre-Hispanic central Mexican scheme of origins, although many significant gaps remain;" and then he enumerates (ibid., 397-402) "a basic cosmogonical sequential pattern... in which ten major episodes stand out with particular clarity."

[687] Davíd Carrasco, "Myth, Cosmic Terror, and the Templo Mayor," in Johanna Broda, Davíd Carrasco, and Eduardo Matos Moctezuma, *The Great Temple of Tenochtitlan: Center and Periphery in the Aztec World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 143.

[688] See Carrasco, "Myth, Cosmic Terror, and the Templo Mayor," 143-46, the section entitled, "In Cosmic Darkness: The Birth of the Fifth Sun."

[689] Carrasco, "Myth, Cosmic Terror, and the Templo Mayor," 144.

[690] Carrasco, "Myth, Cosmic Terror, and the Templo Mayor," 146.

increment in sacrifice that begins with one courageous warrior [i.e., Nanauatzin] and spreads to annihilate all the gods who have gathered at the divine center of the world."[691] That is to say, even in this earlier and more generically Mesoamerican story, "the unstable cosmos that is created depends on massive ritual killing and an increment in divine death."[692] And, in that sense, just as Eliade would predict, the infamous ritual reenactment of the Aztec-specific myth of Huitzilopochtli's birth and slaughter of his siblings at the Templo Mayor is actually patterned after an older and more properly cosmogonic story.[693]

One could, then, certainly illustrate more fully how Mesoamericans' deep investments in their creation stories find ritual-architectural expressions in every region, every era and at every scale, from the layout of whole cities like Teotihuacan and Monte Albán to the design of a diminutive Mixtec gold pectoral, which Alfonso Caso describes as "a document dealing with Mixtec ideas of cosmogony... which represents the universe as it was known to the natives of Mesoamerica."[694] Indeed, essentially every example that I presented in chapter 1 relative to the homology priority (I-A) under the heading of *imago mundis*, or "microcosmic replications of the macrocosm," presents some material expression of the persistent Mesoamerican urge to replicate the cosmogony.[695] Instead of reassembling specific illustrations, however, in the present context I find it more helpful accentuate the extent to which this is yet another topic that well demonstrates Alfredo López Austin's dual claim that the full superregion is united by a shared

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[691] Carrasco, "Myth, Cosmic Terror, and the Templo Mayor," 146.

[692] Carrasco, "Myth, Cosmic Terror, and the Templo Mayor," 146.

[693] Carrasco, "Myth, Cosmic Terror, and the Templo Mayor," 127, 146.

[694] 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. Recall that I described the Mixtec gold pectoral (see ibid., 924, fig. 55), among the items that Caso found in Monte Albán's Tomb 7, more fully in a subsection of chapter 1 entitled, "*Imago Mundis* at Monte Albán: Respecting and Replicating an All-Encompassing World Order."

[695] In chapter 1, see the various sub-sections under the broader section heading, "Monte Albán as *Imago Mundi*: Macrocosmic Models, Microcosmic Cities and the Unification of Space and Time."

cosmovision, but, at the same time, there is within that body of common presuppositions very considerable diversity among various regional and local groups. That is to say, Mesoamerican cosmogonies both conform to shared patterns and evince marked group-specificity.

First, regarding shared cosmogonic investments, there are, as best documented for Central Mexican and Maya regions, numerous common patterns among Mesoamerican creation stories. Frequently, as suggested by the preceding Teotihuacan examples, the act of creation is understood to begin in darkness and with a primordial sea. The Quiché Maya *Popul Vuh*, for instance, includes a description of how the gods Tepeu and Gucumatz, surrounded by a primeval ocean, engage in a dialogue that begins the act of creation; and then, through their speech, the earth and the mountains are raised out of the water.[696] Another recurrent theme, again famously featured in the *Popul Vuh*, is the successive creations of four fatally flawed races of humans prior to the eventually successful creation of people from maize. In an oft-cited Central Mexican iteration of that motif, four imperfect suns, each of which is presided over by a deity and race of people who are either destroyed or transformed into non-human creatures, precede Tezcatlipoca and Quetzalcoatl's successful creation of the earth by slaying a huge earth monster described either as a mythologic caiman or as the earth deity Tlaltecuhtli.[697] A third common scenario, to which the aforementioned Carrasco example alludes, involves creation via a primordial act of self-sacrifice like that in which Teotihuacan deity Nanahuatzin bravely hurls himself into a fire and is transformed into the Fifth Sun. And a fourth widely shared cosmogonic sequence has the protohuman ancestors emerging from the earth, most famously from Chicomoztoc, "the place of the seven caves," from which numerous Mesoamerican groups, including some Oaxacans, claim to have originated.[698]

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[696] Mary Miller and Karl Taube, *The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya: An Illustrated Dictionary of Mesoamerican Religion* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993), 68.

[697] Miller and Taube, *The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya*, 70.

[698] Miller and Taube, *The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya*, 70.

Alternatively, however, abundant commonalities notwithstanding, less obvious—and ultimately more informing about the situation in a socially complex urban capital like Monte Albán—is an appreciation of the diversity and group-specificity of Mesoamerican creation stories. Instead of claims that all of the superregion's peoples descend from one Genesis-like creation event, López Austin explains how community-specific cosmogonies are crucial in explaining and authorizing the multiplicity of indigenous groups, their different languages and the special protection that each of them is believed to receive from a tutelary god.[699] Explicitly contrasting Mesoamericans' willingness to accept that different human groups are the result of multiple creations with Christianity's "universal pretentions" and exclusivistic intolerance of alternate creeds and cosmogonies, he writes,

> "In the Mesoamerican religion, [unlike Christianity], it was held that peculiarities in belief and worship were normal within the whole of the different human groups. Each group had, from the time of creation, a tutelage god who shared his essence with his protégés, and their particular beliefs, their peculiar forms of worship, their language, their ethnic group, their profession, and their character were part and parcel of the heritage which said god had left behind to his children."[700]

For López Austin, this forthright acknowledgement that "religious affiliation was something innate"—which was the consequence of a group-specific cosmogony—explains both the tight bonds within one's own community and a readiness to accept, after the fashion of

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[699] Alfredo López Austin, *The Human Body and Ideology: Concepts of the Ancient Nahuas*, trans. Thelma Ortiz de Montellano and Bernard R. Ortiz de Montellano (Salt Lake City, University of Utah Press, 1980), vol. I, 242. Note, by the way, that López Austin, ibid., 237-44, with special attention to Nahau materials, parses the diversity of Mesoamerican creation myths in terms of five categories, the last of which most concerns me here: (1) Creation of the first human couple, (2) creation of the human generations who lived during each of the four eras called "suns," (3) creation of the first man and woman who lived during the Fifth Sun, (4) creation of the men and women who had the specific mission of making war to obtain human hearts and blood to offer to the Sun and (5) creation of different human groups by the patron gods.

[700] Alfredo López Austin, "Guidelines for the Study of Mesoamerican Religious Traditions," translated by Gabriel S. Torres, in *Beyond Primitivism: Indigenous Religious Traditions and Modernity*, edited by Jacob Olupona (New York: Routledge, 2004), 126.

Eliade's remarks about "the multiplicity of centers,"[701] that other communities have different but completely viable creation stories of their own.[702] Contrasting Christianity's endorsement of just one authoritative cosmogonic story to Mesoamericans' acceptance of many more particularistic community-creating cosmogonies, López Austin nevertheless concedes fairly frequent instances in which Mesoamerican religion, like Christianity, was utilized as a justification for hegemonic expansion;[703] but, more to the present point, he also contends that, unlike the widespread Christian use of forced religious conversion as a vehicle of inclusion, Mesoamerican campaigns to convert others of the exclusive truth of the conquerors' cosmogony are "non-existent."[704] In short, that the so-termed "hard nucleus" of Mesoamerican cosmovision accommodated a multiplicity of beliefs and practices is especially apparent in the superregion's plurality and specificity of cosmogonies.[705]

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[701] See, for instance, Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, 379.

[702] With respect, for instance, to numerous different groups that trace their origins to the revered cave of Chicomozotoc, López Austin, *The Human Body and Ideology*, vol. I, 243, writes, "Although the number seven appears constantly in the sources and, with it, human beginnings in Chicomoztoc, the different documents record different names for the various human groups. The births of these various groups are not thought to have taken place simultaneously. Each group was believed to have been born on a different date, a date that was a key to its history in the repetition of the cycles." Lines every similar to this about the particularistic origins of various Mesoamerican groups appear also in López Austin, *The Myths of the Opossum*, 314-15.

[703] López Austin, "Guidelines for the Study of Mesoamerican Religious Traditions," 126, invokes the Postclassic campaigns of the Mexicas and Tarascans as instances in which "Mesoamerican religion [like Christianity] was also utilized as a justification for hegemonic expansion."

[704] López Austin, "Guidelines for the Study of Mesoamerican Religious Traditions," 126.

[705] Concerning his emphasis on the diversity that exists with the "hard nucleus" of Mesoamerican cosmovision, recall the comment of 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), that 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 ..."

Consequently, then, as I turn now to the question of the ritual-architectural commemoration of creation stories specifically at Monte Albán, we need to keep in mind López Austin's comments about the comfortable coexistence of many different Mesoamerican cosmogonies. On the one hand, as we've seen, the Danzante Wall depictions of an age-graded military sodality, Building J's record of military victories, or the accomplishments of specific rulers that are memorialized in Programs B and A all speak to components of a sacred history that is, at least ostensibly, shared by the full population of Monte Albán; all these major public displays really do present substantive new messages that elites are endeavoring to impress upon the full populace of non-elites. On the other hand, though—and here I anticipate my forthcoming conclusions on this theme—we will *not*, I think, encounter at Monte Albán the official endorsement of a single cosmology.[706] To the contrary, just as I underscored last chapter, the tolerance for a wide plurality of seemingly incommensurate conceptions of divinity (priority II-A),[707] we can expect that the many different linguistic and socio-cultural communities that coexisted in the Zapotec capital also retained their more group-specific accounts of the creation of the world and, even more importantly, their community-specific connections to that initial world creation. In brief, many cosmogonic traditions coexist in Monte Albán.

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[706] Regarding the sense in which cosmogonies are a somewhat special case within the broader "sacred history" perpetrated in the public displays of Monte Albán elites, I will in upcoming sections argue that where prescriptive messages like those expressed in the Danzante reliefs, the so-termed conquest slabs, and Programs B and A belong to the back-half of Monte Albán's ritual-architectural program (because they present new substantive content), allusions to cosmogonies are more often components of allurement that belong to the back-half of Monte Albán's ritual-architectural program (because they present themes with which audiences are already familiar and much invested).

[707] In chapter 4, see, for instance, "Closing Thoughts: Discovering, Embodying, Housing and/or Expressing the Attributes of Many and Mixed Supernaturals."

3. Commemorations of Cosmogony in Oaxaca and Monte Albán: Four Clues to the Reiteration of Creation Stories in the Zapotec Capital

This hypothesis concerning the coexistence of numerous cosmogonic traditions within the multicultural Zapotec capital runs parallel to my conclusions concerning Monte Albán as the sort of socio-religiously diversified place that capitalized on, rather than squashed, numerous only-seemingly-incommensurate conceptions of divinity (priority II-A). In Miguel Bartolomé's very distinctive use of the term, the religious outlook of the Zapotec capital was "polytheistic."[708] But that acknowledgement of diversity also complicates the search after the relevance of this first permutation of the ritual-architectural commemoration of sacred history (priority II-A) at Monte Albán; and it, moreover, explains, I suspect, why we encounter only infrequent and very general scholarly comments on the ritualized reiteration of cosmogony trained specifically on Monte Albán. By contrast, however, the topic of creation myths and "the prestige of beginnings" does emerge with great frequency in the literature on the broader Oaxaca region, albeit in highly diversified ways. Accordingly, in the next four sub-sections, rather than present a direct thesis about the main means by which cosmogonies are expressed and memorialized in the monumental buildings and public displays of Monte Albán, I take the more indirect route of assembling "clues" as the importance and relevance of this theme via the consideration of four other Oaxacan contexts in which discussions of the expression of cosmogonies have occupied a somewhat higher profile.

Pursuant of that indirect strategy, consider the following perhaps unlikely quartet of touchstones: (1) comments about cosmogonies connected to sacred mountains that derive from Roberto Zárate Morón's reflections on contemporary and pre-Columbian beliefs and practices in

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[708] Here it is important to recognize that I allude to the very distinctive (re)definition of "polytheism" in 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), which I discussed, for instance, in a sub-section of chapter 4 entitled, "Oaxacan Polytheism Reimagined as "Multiple Experiences of the Sacred": Ethnographer Miguel Bartolomé's Contribution." This is a topic to which I will return in the Closing Thoughts of the present chapter.

the Tehuantepec region; (2) comments about cosmogonies and "the strategy of firstness" derived from Lynn Stephen's ethnographic observations in contemporary Teotitlán de Valle; (3) remarks about cosmogonies and the notion of "a sacred covenant," which depend most on John Monaghan's fieldwork in the Mixteca region; and then (4) comments that return us to this theme about the astute public endorsement of multiple cosmogonic traditions in a single architectural context, which derive from John Pohl's interpretation of lintel painting in the palace compounds of Mitla. In each case, I will use these allusions to other ancient and contemporary Oaxacan contexts to make some provisional suggestions about the means and motives for the ritual-architectural commemoration of cosmogony at pre-Columbian Monte Albán. I concede, however, that this indirect approach to the question of creation myths in the Zapotec capital is the sort of wide rhetorical arc that may well stretch the patience of some readers; and thus following those four sub-sections, I insert a fifth one that reiterates and summarizes those four clue-derived observations in ways that provide yet more evidence for my broader thesis about the sort of "polytheistic" perspective that informed the multicultural and multireligious Zapotec capital. Impatient readers are, then, invited to skip the next four sub-sections and resume with the one entitled "Reiterating Clues and Consequences: Monte Albán 'Polytheism' and the Acknowledgment of Diverse Cosmogonies."

a. Cosmogonies and Sacred Mountains: Recreating, and then Living in, an Orderly Microcosmos—Clues from Tehuantepec

Given the mountainous terrain of the Oaxaca region, it is not at all surprising that mountains figure large in Oaxacan creation stories. In an oft-cited passage from seventeenth-century Dominican friar Burgoa, Zapotecs considered themselves descendants of the rocks and caves;[709] and frequently Oaxacans link their origins to sites that conjoin caves and hills, "which

[709] Francisco de Burgoa, *Palestra historial* (1670), cited, for instance, by 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), 181. Also see Nader, "The Zapotec of Oaxaca," 350.

were considered the center and genesis of human beings and of life."[710] On that possibility, recall from the previous discussions of Monte Albán as an *altépetl* water-mountain relative to both the homology (I-A) and divinity (II-A) priorities, Roberto Zárate Morón's comments about the layered meanings of the sacred mountain Dani Guíaati (or Cerro Blanco) and the pictograph-rich cave beneath it known as *Ba'cuana* near the contemporary southern Isthmus town of Asunción Ixtaltepec. As noted in those previous chapters, he explains how Zapotec locals consider that mountain simultaneously as "the center of the world, the place where they join heaven, earth and hell,"[711] as itself the goddess and the great mother, with *Ba'cuana* [i.e., the cave] conceived as her feminine belly and womb which the Sun, which is conceived as male, introduces himself as her male counterpart,"[712] and as thus a place of healing on the summit of which local healers continue to conduct rites to restore the emotional and physical health of locals.[713] But even more germane to our present discussion, Zárate Morón observes additionally that Cerro Blanco was, and is, considered "a place of origins" insofar as it was

> "the first true mountain that emerged from the primordial waters on the inaugural day of the cosmos, which thereby symbolized the emergence of the earth and the creation of the three levels of the cosmos, the underworld, the terrestrial surface and the heaven."[714]

Bolstered by a book-length study of rock paintings in the *Ba'cuana* cave that depict "a myth of cosmogonic creation,"[715] Zárate Morón contends, in fact, that Cerro Blanco continues to be

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[710] Zarate Morón, "Símbolos prehispánicos y ritos contemporáneos de creación y nacimiento en el sur del Istmo de Tehuantepec," 181; my translation.

[711] Zarate Morón, "Símbolos prehispánicos y ritos contemporáneos de creación y nacimiento en el sur del Istmo de Tehuantepec," 177; my translation.

[712] Zárate Morón, "Símbolos prehispánicos y ritos contemporáneos de creación y nacimiento en el sur del Istmo de Tehuantepec," 194; my translation.

[713] Zárate Morón, "Símbolos prehispánicos y ritos contemporáneos de creación y nacimiento en el sur del Istmo de Tehuantepec," 180; my translation.

[714] Zárate Morón, "Símbolos prehispánicos y ritos contemporáneos de creación y nacimiento en el sur del Istmo de Tehuantepec," 178; my translation, italics added.

[715] Zárate Morón, "Símbolos prehispánicos y ritos contemporáneos de creación y nacimiento en el sur del Istmo de Tehuantepec," 181; my translation. See also Roberto Zárate Morón, *Un mito de creación zapoteca en las pinturas rupestres de Dani Guiaati: Asunción Ixtaltepec Oaxaca*

conceived as no less than the site of the original world creation, the place at which a perfect order first emerged from antediluvian watery chaos.[716]

While one might at first be dubious of the audacity whereby Isthmus Zapotecs imagine that one of their local hills is "the first true mountain," site of the creation of the whole world, historians of religions will be reminded of the multidimensional symbolism of Mount Meru, or Sumeru, to which I alluded earlier.[717] That sacred mountain is considered by a host of Asian peoples, on the one hand, as the fully mythical site of world creation, and therefore the center of all physical, metaphysical and spiritual universes, which is described in fantastical terms as many times higher than the diameter of the earth and as the pivot around which the sun and all planets revolve—a place "out there," so to speak.[718] But also, on the other hand, Mount Meru is the designation afforded to both numerous specific South and Southeast Asian mountains, along with countless Hindu, Buddhist and Jain temples, which take the mythical peak as their

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(México, D.F.: CONCULTA-INAH y Ayuntamiento de Ixaltepec, Oaxaca, 2003); and Roberto Zárate Morón, "Petrogilfos y pinturas rupestres en la región del Istmo de Tehuantepec," en *Historia del Arte de Oaxaca*, Arte prehispánico, vol. 1, coords. Margarita Dalton y Verónica Loera (Oaxaca, México: Instituto Oaxaqueño de las Culturas, 1997), 35-47

[716] Zárate Morón, "Símbolos prehispánicos y ritos contemporáneos de creación y nacimiento en el sur del Istmo de Tehuantepec," 178 (my translation) extends that connection between Cerro Blanco (or Dani Guíaati) by noting, "The first true mountain was also a symbol of fertility: the soil that contained the nutritive seeds and fertilizing waters that fed the first human beings."

[717] Mabbett, "The Symbolism of Mount Meru," 64-83. Recall that Mount Meru was among the featured examples in chapter 4 on the divinity priority (II-A), specifically in a sub-section entitled "Architectural Deity Bodies as a Cross-Cultural Phenomenon: Meru Temples, Effigy Mounds and Minoan Palaces as Embodiments of Divinity."

[718] Mabbett, "The Symbolism of Mount Meru," 66. Mabbett goes to special pains to demonstrate how Mount Meru is, on the one hand, a place "out there," as though it were situated far away in some mythical universe; but also, on the other hand, he insists (ibid., 68) that Meru is "in here" insofar as "to approach Meru is to change one's spiritual state; to arrive at the top is to transcend particularities of state altogether... [T]he central mountain is not just a physical entity 'out there.' As one ascends it and rise above it, it becomes an immaterial 'in here.'" To imagine that the approach to Monte Albán engendered a similar sort of change in consciousness is not, I think, farfetched.

architectural prototype.[719] Here again, then, we encounter a parallel to the willful acceptance of "a multiplicity of centers" wherein there is no contradiction in innumerable peoples imagining their home village or city as the center of the world;[720] and again we face that counterintuitive proposition wherein in humanly constructed platforms and temples take on all of the qualities of natural mountains and, in the Mesoamerican world, *altepeme*.[721] Zárate Morón is, in fact, explicit about that sort of transference of sacrality from the natural to the built environment when he contends that the architectural layout of the Postclassic Zapotec site of Guiengola in Tehuantepec, a site known also as Danyroó (Large or Old Hill), though by no means unique in this respect, provides a kind of physical materialization of the cosmogonic scenario wherein its built pyramids are also conceived as "the first true mountain" that emerged from the primordial waters at the very dawn of creation.[722] And while he uses the southern Oaxaca site of Guiengola as his prime example, Zárate Morón argues that this notion of architecturally recreating "the first true mountain" obtains also in Olmec ceremonial centers and, subsequently, innumerable other Mesoamerican cities.[723]

Accordingly, it requires only modest extrapolation to add to the amply multivalent meaning of the "found" mountain site and innumerable built mountain-platforms of Monte Albán

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[719] On Mount Meru specifically in relation to the organization of Asian urban capitals, see Wheatley, *The Pivot of the Four Quarters*, 428, 432.

[720] See, for instance, Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, 379.

[721] Regarding the extent to which built platform-mountains take on all of the qualities of natural water-mountains (or *altepeme*), see the sub-section in chapter 4 entitled "Architecture as the Body of a Deity at Monte Albán: The Interchangeability of Natural and Built *Altepeme* and the Sacredness of Substructures."

[722] Zarate Morón, "Símbolos prehispánicos y ritos contemporáneos de creación y nacimiento en el sur del Istmo de Tehuantepec," 178. See also Roberto Zárate Morán, *Zona Arqueológica de Guiengola* (México: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, n.d.)

[723] Zarate Morón, "Símbolos prehispánicos y ritos contemporáneos de creación y nacimiento en el sur del Istmo de Tehuantepec," 178.

which I discussed earlier,[724] the physical expression of a creation myth. I concur with Arthur Joyce that, at the largest scale, "the outline of the Main Plaza marked Monte Albán as *the mountain of creation*, a common concept in Oaxacan cosmology;"[725] and the same incentive to reproduce the creative ordering of the gods reappears also at innumerable smaller scales. Moreover, we benefit by again acknowledging a kind of two-stage, redoubled satisfaction wherein, first, the actual building of the comogrammatically ordered ceremonial plaza of Monte Albán presents a vintage instance of the Eliadean notion of architecturally reenacting the cosmogonic transformation of chaos into cosmic order; and then subsequently, once that encompassing world order is in place, living in such a microcosmic ambience enables the sort of "sanctified life" wherein human and social life proceeds according to the primordial patterns that afford otherwise mundane (profane) activities the status of sacred reenactments of the mythical precedents.[726]

b. Cosmogonies and Identity Construction: The Prestige of Beginnings and "Strategy of Firstness"—Clues from Teotitlán del Valle

Where Roberto Zárate Morón's discussion of Postclassic Guiengola provides an unmistakable analogue to the way in which Monte Albán was conceived as a both found and

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[724] Regarding the perhaps counterintuitive equation of natural mountains and built platforms, both of which have the status of *altepeme*, see, for example, the section of chapter 4 entitled "Architecture as the Body of a Deity at Monte Albán: The Interchangeability of Natural and Built *Altepeme* and the Sacredness of Substructures."

[725] Arthur A. Joyce, "Poder sacrificial en Oaxaca durante el Formativo tardío," 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), 104; my translation; italics added. Among numerous articles in which he makes similar points concerning the cosmogrammatic layout of Monte Albán, see, for example, 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), 199.

[726] On "the sanctified life" wherein all seemingly prosaic activities, "at the same time, share in transhuman life, that of the cosmos or the gods," see, for instance, Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 167ff.

built "mountain of creation," ethnographer Lynn Stephen's remarks on the strategic construction of identity among contemporary Zapotecs in the village of Teotitlán del Valle, 40 kilometers east of the ancient capital, furnishes a less direct, somewhat more eccentric clue as to the persistent "prestige of beginnings" and "first times" among indigenous Oaxacan communities. As noted, no theme is rehearsed more frequently in Eliade's work than the uniquely deep and wide preoccupation with origins, creation and first occurrences.[727] If myth lies at the heart of his conception of religion, cosmogony—stories not only about the beginning of the universe, but more specifically of people, of animals, of landscape features and also of human communities—are the myths that matter most. For Eliade, it is the primary impulse of the *homo religiosus* to get back to the beginning, the strong and perfect time of origins after which all of more regular historical time is but a replica.[728] And, in the more Mesoamerican-specific work of Enrique Florescano on "indigenous memory," we were reminded that no topic receives fuller treatment in village-specific "primordial titles" and *lienzos* than the episodes that link the foundations of particular communities to the deeper origins of the world and the First People.[729] He shows that, in the calculated construction of "narrative identity" and the defense of a community's rightful entitlements, nothing serves more potently than recounting the circumstances that led to "the first arrival" of the ancestors at the site that eventually becomes one's legitimate home-place. Pairing Eliade and Florescano alerts us, then, that claims to "being first" are not only mythical and existential investments of the highest order, but also "socially instrumental" strategies of asserting a community's general right to exist, and thus to its more specific politico-economic and territorial holdings.

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[727] See, for instance, Eliade, "Cosmogonic Myth and 'Sacred History,'" 75ff, where he summarizes the special prestige of cosmogony and "first times," which is a central theme throughout his work.

[728] See, for instance, Eliade, *Cosmos and History*, 27-33; or Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, chap. II, "Sacred Time and Myths."

[729] See Florescano, "Los títulos primordiales y la formación de la memoria indígena en los pueblos de Nueva España," 294, 295, 299-300.

Neither Eliade nor Florescano, therefore, would be at all surprised that when Stephen's analysis of the Teotitecos' creation both of a community museum, opened in 1995, and various webpages designed to support the work of Teotitlán's celebrated weaving cooperatives foregrounds a continuing Zapotec preoccupation with, to borrow her apt terms, "being first" or "the strategy of firstness."[730] Archaeologists concur that this heavily studied community, which is located in the Tlacolula arm of the Valley of Oaxaca, midway between Monte Albán and Mitla, has a viable claim both to a commensurate historical depth and a significant independence from either of those more prominent centers.[731] According to the Teotitecos' own timeline, which they support via local archaeology, as early as 800-400 BCE, that is, during the era of the initial founding of Monte Albán, Teotitlán already had some 150 residents who were the direct ancestors of vibrant Zapotec populations in every subsequent pre-Columbian, colonial and modern-day era.[732] This community may well, just as its residents assert, predate the great urban capital. Situated at the base a mountain currently called *Xibabets* (brother rock), site of a regional shrine that is mentioned in numerous ethnohistorical sources, Teotitlán's persistent efforts to emphasize its identity as "the 'first' Zapotec settlement in Oaxaca," if exaggerated, are not without a feasible historical basis.[733] At once acclaimed both for exceptional cultural conservativism and for liberal progressiveness, Teotitlán is distinguished by its scrupulous

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[730] Lynn Stephen, *Transborder Lives: Indigenous Oaxacans in Mexico, California, and Oregon* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007), 283, 291.

[731] See, for instance, Stephen A. Kowalewski, Gary M. Feinman, Laura Finsten, Richard E. Blanton, and Linda M. Nicholas, Monte Albán's Hinterland, Part II: The Prehispanic Settlement Patterns in Tlacolula, Etla and Ocotlán, the Valley of Oaxaca, Mexico, Memoir 23, Museum of Anthropology (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1989). Stephen, *Zapotec Women*, 196-97, notes that, "In 1993, [Teotitlán] community members in conjunction with archaeologists from INAH identified a major ruin underneath the Catholic church in the center of the community. Many people in the community already knew of the pyramid beneath the church… Locals now identify this site as the most important ceremonial center of their ancestors."

[732] Stephen, *Transborder Lives*, 284.

[733] Stephen, *Zapotec Women*, 113-15, has a brief but helpful section on "The Historical Religious Importance of Teotitlán: *Xiabets*, a Sacred Place." Also see Stephen, *Transborder Lives*, 283-85, for comments on ways in which various local archaeological finds are displayed in the museum in ways that situate the earliest settlements of Teotitecos within a larger timeline of ancient Oaxaca history beginning with Monte Albán I (800-400 BCE).

retention of traditional institutions and, at the same time, its singularly successful expansion of textile production for sale and export—and the community museum, located in the very center of town, provides a context for showcasing both virtues.

Accordingly, not so differently from the utilization of *lienzos* as a strategic means of telling one's community history in deliberately partisan ways that support a village's right to exist and maintain control over its territorial boundaries, the Teotitlán community museum, as Stephen explains, narrates of a version of Teotitlán history explicitly designed to accentuate their "originality and uniqueness."[734] Exercising a contemporary means of the "mythologization of history," the entrepreneurially astute Teotitecos fashion a version of "cultural memory" that draws on a patchwork of local archaeological finds, selective extracts and images from various outside sources and testimony from elders, which together enable them to present "an agreed-upon message."[735] In this respect, the Teotitlán community museum is more methodic and well-appointed, but not different from the museums created since the 1990s in a couple dozen other indigenous Oaxacan communities.[736] Teotitecos' special rhetorical edge, however, which is much strengthened by the historical viability of such a claim, is the assertion of "their identity as

[734] Stephen, *Zapotec Women*, 194-98, provides a brief overview of the original conception of Teotitlán museum. Stephens, *Transborder Lives*, 283-94, revisits the Teotitlán museum in ways that speak more directly to the themes I am emphasizing here. Also, by the way, though here I an alluding to the broader story that the whole museum tells, the Teotitlán museum, like numerous others in Oaxaca, includes colonial-era village-specific *lienzo*.

[735] Stephen, *Transborder Lives*, 283. "Cultural memory" is Stephen's term; but the "mythologicization of history" is Eliade's term, not Stephen's.

[736] More generally on the community museum program of the 1980s and 1990s, see Teresa Morales Lersch y Cuauhtémoc Camarería Ocampo, "Los museos comunitarios: estrategia para resguardar el patrimonio arqueológico" 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), 271-278; and Selma Holo, *Oaxaca at the Crossroads: Managing Memory, Negotiating Change* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 2004), chap. 1, "The Pueblos Speak for Themselves: Communitarian Museums."

the first major Zapotec settlement in Oaxaca," a community with more than 2000 years of continuous habitation.[737] In Stephen's assessment of the museum's main message:

> "The timeline and archaeological artifacts establish Teotitlán as a seminal place in Oaxaca and Teotitecos as people who can claim a long, place-based history in the state and the nation. "Being first" and being tied to a specific piece of geography have become fundamental aspects of a cultural memory that is deployed within the museum as well as by others who create messages about local history."[738]

Webpages designed to promote and sell the village's world famous textiles also trade heavily on the reiterative assertion that "Teotitlán was the first Zapotec population,"[739] and, in cases, go so far as to assert that "the first Zapotec ceremonial center was created in Teotitlán to honor the supreme being of the universe."[740]

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[737] Stephen, *Transborder Lives*, 283-29, enumerates and then elaborates on three three key emphases that are expressed both in Teotitlán's museum conception and in the websites created by numerous Teotitlán weaving cooperatives (the first of which I accentuate in the present discussion): (1) "being first" and emphasizing "their identity as the 'first' Zapotec settlement in Oaxaca;" (2) an emphasis on consistent cultural links to a precolonial past; and (3) and emphasis on "being Zapotec and part of a larger indigenous community."

[738] Stephen, *Transborder Lives*, 284.

[739] Stephen, *Transborder Lives*, 284ff.

[740] Stephen, *Transborder Lives*, 285, provides this excerpt of the general introduction of a website that she was asked to translate in 2004. Also note, by the way, that Teotitlán claims to best "the first major Zapotec settlement in Oaxaca" broach an infamous old question about when in the ancient history of the region one can discern cultural configurations that qualify as a distinctly "Zapotec" ethnicity. Regarding Caso and Bernal's avoidance of referring to Period I and Period II Monte Albán residents by the "ethnic label, Zapotecs," a topic that I discuss in the respective chapters of Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, see, for instance, Bernal, "Archaeological Synthesis of Oaxaca," 789. Additionally, regarding an intriguing, if eccentric circumstance that sheds light on the boundaries of manipulating history, Holo, *Oaxaca at the Crossroads*, 265-66, n. 15, mentions that, "some citizens of Teotitlán del Valle wanted their museum to be about the mythical tunnels linking Teotitlán with Monte Albán, rather than about their history. These tunnels have, however, never been found, and any evidence that they existed is so insubstantial that there could be no objects or material with which to tell or support a 'wished for' story as the basis for the museum."

That the Teotitecos' contemporary, business-savvy construction of an identity as "the first population" sheds light on the sense of self that obtained in the pre-Columbian capital of Monte Albán might at first seem a stretch. But these are two places that, in plainly historical terms, really do have a unique historical depth, which gives their assertions of "firstness" both a special prominence and a decided ring of truth. As discussed in chapter 2 relative to the convention priority (I-B), even more notable than the Monte Albán's estimable integration and synthesis of preexisting patterns from elsewhere in Mesoamerica is the city's unique standing as a place of innovation. A settlement of unprecedented scale and complex, this ancient city was, unquestionably, a place where many things were happening *for the first time*. Arguably the superregion's earliest city, with all that entails, Monte Albán has also been credited with the first hieroglyphic writing, the first use of a 260-day calendar count, the first monuments built of "great blocks of stone" and first stucco floors, along with the first circular columns and unprecedentedly wide balustrades and stairways.[741] Additionally, scholars have attributed to the Zapotec capital the first "conquest empire,"[742] first political conquest records and first system of naming rulers by their birth dates,[743] the first observatory and astronomically aligned buildings, the first elaborate tombs, and perhaps even, if we accept Ignacio Bernal's assessment of the unique contents of those crypts, "Another step that seems to have taken for the first time [at Monte Albán] is the representation of the gods."[744]

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[741] Recall that I discuss and source all of these (and other) claims to "firsts" at Monte Albán in a sub-section of chapter 2 entitled "Establishing Conventions: Monte Albán as a Site of Innovation, Mesoamerican 'Firsts,' Patterns and Prototypes."

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

[743] Joyce Marcus, "The Iconography of Militarism at Monte Albán and Neighboring Sites in the Valley of Oaxaca," in *The Origins of Religious Art and Iconography in Preclassic Mesoamerica*, ed. H. B. Nicholson (Los Angeles: Latin American Center, the University of California, Los Angeles, 1976), 137.

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

In sum, juxtaposing the long list of first-time innovations at Monte Albán, even if several of them are contestable, with the Teotitecos' shrewd cultivation of "a strategy of firstness"[745] urges us to appreciate the ancient Zapotec capital not only as "a mountain of creation" but, moreover, as a site for the unfolding of a whole series of very important "firsts." As in the case of Teotitlán del Valle, though on a vastly larger and more complex scale, the empirical historical realities of Monte Albán equip its citizenry with a fabulous cache of unique distinctions with which to construct their mythico-historical identity as a singular and highly original group. To be from Monte Albán bestowed one with a privileged sense of originality and "firstness."

Consequently, though this is a somewhat more tentative and generic point than the other three "clues" to the ritual-architectural commemoration of cosmogony in this set of sub-sections, we have to imagine that both the rulers and non-elites living in the capital city had a self-awareness, and likely a considerable sense of pride, that they were participating in something without precedent. Moreover, as we also observe among the Teotitecos, constructing an identity of firstness and originality has not only estimable existential rewards, but also serves very tangible socio-economic interests. Regarding the former, Eliade's phenomenological line of argument stresses the perhaps unsurpassed ontological satisfaction that people obtain by imagining themselves as "first people," reiterating cosmogonic events and thereby resituating themselves "at the beginning." But Florescano's more sociological discussion demonstrates how assertions of being "the first to occupy a particular space" is also the most tried-and-true strategy for asserting socio-political and territorial rights of a very practical sort. To present oneself as "first"—or as directly connected to the paradigmatic original—not only satisfies the existential urges of the *homo religiosus*, but also affords the sort of legitimacy, authority and perhaps "authenticity" with which, as we've seen, Zapotec rulers are eminently preoccupied.

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[745] Stephen, *Transborder Lives*, 291.

c. Cosmogonies and a Sacred Covenant: Human-Divine Reciprocity as the Raison d'Être of Life—Clues from the Mixteca

A third very different but also ethnographically based set of clues about the standing of cosmogonies in Monte Albán's ritual-architectural program emerges from the extended 1980s fieldwork of John Monaghan in the Mixtec Alta community of Santiago Nuyoo.[746] Among pertinent issues, Monaghan's account of a cosmogonic scenario in which the primordial ancestors of the present-day Nuyootecos enter into still-active "covenants with Earth and Rain" is especially worthy of note because of the protracted and provocative ways in which Arthur Joyce, and then others, have, as we've seen, extrapolated this notion of a human-divine contractual agreement into the pre-Columbian history of Monte Albán. Accordingly, while Monaghan's ethnography raises numerous topics connected to creation myths, and thus to this first variation on the commemoration of sacred history (priority II-B), I focus here on the matter of a so-termed covenant between people and gods, which was sealed in the "Time before time" but remains fully in force today, and what that sort of conditional contract suggests with respect to the ritual-architectural program of pre-Columbian Monte Albán.[747]

As noted earlier, among the crucial factors in making sense of Oaxaca creation stories, not unlike those of other Mesoamerican regions, is an appreciation of their specificity to particular communities, and thus their marked multiplicity and diversity. Though, in the 1960s, Laura Nader made the puzzling assertion that "the only anthropologist who has found and described a living Zapotec cosmogony and cosmology is [Roberto] Weitlaner," who studied

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

[747] Earlier I expressed my ambivalence about describing this reciprocal relationship among indigenous Oaxacans as a "covenant," a legalistic term that historians of religions can track to the ancient Near East, and that acquires very different valences in each Judaism, Christianity and Islam. See, for instance, Delbert R. Hillers, "Covenant," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Eliade, vol. 4, 134-37. And in chapter 10 relative to "the propitiation priority" (III-C), I will offer my fullest discussion of the issue, which will require returning to Monaghan's work.

Loxicha communities south of the Valley of Oaxaca,[748] she actually contributes to the view that essentially every Oaxacan village has elaborate stories of origin that explain both their local landscape features and the circumstances that brought a particular people to reside in that particular locale.[749] As López Austin persuades us, cosmogonies are, in other words, much more often community-specific than universalized or even regional. As Monaghan explains, for example, with respect to the people of Santiago Nuyoo,

> "Mixtecs, like other people, feel that different human groups are the result of multiple creations. In other words, they do not think a single act brought all people everywhere into being. What this means is that, for Nuyootecos, their emergence from Soko Usha [a mythic origin place that literally means "womb seven"] makes them unique, just as for other people of the region other kinds of origins make them unique."[750]

That is to say, rather than asserting broader ethnic affiliations like "Mixtec" or "Zapotec," indigenous Oaxacans, as a rule, are invested foremost in village-specific identities wherein "separate creations produced separate peoples."[751] In fact, again as Monaghan explains, "In the Mixteca Alta, people of different towns actually view themselves as distinct varieties of human beings."[752]

With that particularity in mind, Monaghan recounts several versions of the cosmogonic sequence of events in which Nuyooteco ancestors established, "in the distant past," ongoing

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[748] Laura Nader, "The Zapotec of Oaxaca," in *Handbook of Middle American Indians*, vol. 7, "Ethnology," part I, vol. ed. Evon Z. Vogt, gen. ed. Robert Wauchope (London: University of Texas Press, 1969), 351, makes this comment with reference to Roberto J. Weitlaner and Gabriel De Ciccio, "La jerarquía de los dioses zapotecos del sur," *Proceedings of the 34th International Congress of Americanists*, Vienna, 1962, 695-710.

[749] Nader, "The Zapotec of Oaxaca," 350-53.

[750] Monaghan, *The Covenants with Earth and Rain*, 202-3. Monaghan, ibid., 202, explicitly appeals to López Austin, *The Human Body and Ideology*, concerning the wider Mesoamerican applicability of this notion that different human groups understand themselves to be the result of different creations.

[751] Monaghan, *The Covenants with Earth and Rain*, 203.

[752] Monaghan, *The Covenants with Earth and Rain*, 203.

contractual agreements with Earth and Rain. According to the rendition of one of his indigenous informant-collaborators, those protohuman ancestors, whose agricultural labor was producing no good results, pleaded with the Earth, "Give us to eat, give us to drink, clothe us, because from the earth comes all we need, and thus is our lot."[753] Eventually the Earth acquiesced, at which point the planting efforts of the mythic progenitors began to come to fruition: "What corn seed! What bean seed! What squash see they sowed! 'Yaah! It is going to bear fruit!' they said." [754] By the same token, similar ancestral petitions were made to the Rain, without whose equally indispensible assistance plant growth was stunted and neither people nor animals could reproduce; and eventually the Rain also agreed to provide the assistance that was crucial to the prosperity of all earthly species, plants and humans foremost among them.[755] At one level, then, this mythic account, of which, according to Monaghan, even Mixtec children could provide accurate renditions, explains how Nuyootecos came to be agriculturalists rather than hunters.[756]

The apparent generosity of the Earth and Rain notwithstanding, every version of the cosmogonic story Monaghan encounters stresses the contingency of this divine assistance, and thus the heavy price incumbent upon entering into this "covenant of mutual obligation." Besides their utter dependency on the Earth, the ancestors of the Nuyootecos, so the story goes, also appreciated the pain that the scraping and digging of agriculture cause to the Earth, which led them to concede that they owe large recompose for that assistance; and since nothing else of theirs approaches the priceless value of the Earth's benefaction, the ancestors concurred that,

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[753] This quote comes from the rendition of creation story provided by Nuyooteco Tata Fausto Modesto Velasco, which is quoted by Monaghan, *The Covenants with Earth and Rain*, 204.

[754] Again this is the phrasing of Nuyooteco Tata Fausto Modesto Velasco, which is quoted by Monaghan, *The Covenants with Earth and Rain*, 205.

[755] Monaghan, *The Covenants with Earth and Rain*, 205.

[756] Monaghan, *The Covenants with Earth and Rain*, 208, 211.

upon death, human bodies would be buried and thereby returned to the Earth to which owed their existence.[757] According to Monaghan's description of the two-sided reciprocative arrangement:

> "... in the covenants, Earth and Rain suffer to feed people, and in return people must feed Earth and Rain with their bodies after death. In this way, death became a condition of agricultural production and civilized life. This is important because when Nuyootecos initiate contact with the gods through sacrifice, they base their communication on this primordial agreement. In every sacrifice I was able to observe, the sacrificer recited, at some point, the conditions of the covenants."[758]

In sum, then, this deceptively simple story of a mutual but uneven contractual relationship—which was established in "the true, real and exemplary primordial time"—encapsulates a whole host of Nuyooteco presuppositions about "the origins of moral life" and thus about what is truly important, that is to say, in my working definition of religion, about "that which matters most."[759] In Monaghan's assessment, the widely embraced cosmogonic narrative of the ancestors entering into a binding contract with Earth and Rain explains the complex dynamics of an agricultural lifestyle in ways that transform the otherwise merely toilsome labor of planting and harvesting into a purposeful religious duty.[760] Moreover, this primordial pact provides a mythic origin and explanation for death, which, as Eliade demonstrates, is a component of nearly every body of indigenous myth; given the reciprocal obligations, every natural or accidental human death acquires meaning insofar as it constitutes, not just the incidental end of life, but rather valued payment on a debt to Earth and Rain that can never be

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[757] The implication is that, prior to this mythic episode, (proto)humans did not die; and thus, in this sense, this story also provides an account of the origins of human death, an etiological episode that Eliade discerns in many bodies of mythology.

[758] Monaghan, *The Covenants with Earth and Rain*, 223. In Monaghan's apt summary, "[T]he same kind of [contractual or covenantal] agreement that the Nuyooteco ancestors made with the Earth was made with the Rain. In return for the prosperity that Rain brings, the rain may 'eat' human bodies, just as the Earth 'eats' them in return for the permission to sow. Thus the people who die during a storm or who have been 'burned' by a bolt of lightening are said to have been 'collected' by the Rain to meet the obligation that humans incurred through their agreement with it." Ibid., 207, n. 7.

[759] Monaghan, *The Covenants with Earth and Rain*, 207.

[760] Monaghan, *The Covenants with Earth and Rain*, 207.

fully absolved. Furthermore, however, while normal mortality provides a kind of routine debt maintenance, Monaghan also explains how ritual sacrifice—most poignantly, human sacrifice—is the premier means of servicing that covenantal obligation, the meeting of which is absolutely crucial to the well-being of all members of the community.[761] Indeed, the maintenance of proper relations with Earth and Rain, via both agricultural labor and more pointed ritual activities, is the very crux of a responsible, rewarding or, in Eliade's term, "sanctified" life.

At any rate, as to ways in which this Nuyooteco notion of a life made meaningful via the ongoing exercise of "covenantal obligations" might inform our understanding of the history and the ritual-architectural program of Monte Albán, Joyce and Urcid have, as we've seen, already discussed at length the wider relevance of the fact that,

> "Mixtec and Zapotec creation stories... describe the fundamental relationship between people and the divine as a sacred covenant that established relations of debt and merit between humans and gods, with sacrifice as a fundamental condition of human existence."[762]

In Joyce's broader account of Oaxaca social history, for instance, the appeal of natural mountaintops, which were "associated with rain and cosmic creation,"[763]and then the construction of "ceremonial precincts," owes largely to the status of both as privileged contexts in which to effectively and efficiently discharge a group's obligations to "communicate with the supernatural" or, more specifically, as befits this notion of a contractual relationship, to honor one's "covenantal" obligations to the gods and then to collect one's due rewards.[764] In his view,

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[761] See Monaghan, *The Covenants with Earth and Rain*, chap. 9, "Sacrifice and Kinship." The large matter of sacrifice is another that I will engage more fully in chapter 10 relative to "the propitiation priority" (III-C).

[762] Joyce, *Mixtecs, Zapotecs, and Chatinos*, 60. Here, among numerous places, Joyce makes explicit appeal to Monaghan with respect to the notion of "a sacred covenant."

[763] Joyce, *Mixtecs, Zapotecs, and Chatinos*, 61.

[764] Recall from my earlier summaries of Joyce's work (see, for instance, Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, chap. 7, a sub-section entitled "Sacred Spaces as Ritual Contexts: Negotiating Cosmological and Sociological 'Sacred Covenants'") that he sees public ceremonial plazas, arguably the first of which was built at San José Mogote, as serving two crucial functions: first, they provide the contexts necessary for maintaining "an ongoing relationship with the divine,"

nothing is more significant and rewarding to ancient Oaxacans than "their ongoing relationship to the divine."[765] Accordingly, Joyce recounts a pattern of urban genesis that plays out first at San José Mogote and latter at Monte Albán wherein a cosmologically proportioned ceremonial plaza was the primary attraction and catalyst for the meteoric rise of both capitals.[766] Though he stresses that, at Monte Albán, the timeworn notion of a cosmogonic agreement with the gods was enhanced with "a newly configured warfare and human-sacrifice-based covenant,"[767] he nonetheless argues that, when operating in a healthy fashion, as it were, the Main Plaza was a sacred space—or ritual context—in which elites and non-elites together collaborated in honoring "the sacred covenant," now especially via ritual sacrifice, in ways that benefitted all sectors of Monte Albán society.[768] This is, according to Joyce's version of events, when the sacred city and its ceremonial plaza were working best.

Moreover, as we also saw earlier, Urcid's radical reinterpretation of the Danzante displays, and to a lesser extent of the Pe-phase façade of finely inscribed orthostats, reinforces the notion that, in Monte Albán's early going, rulers and commoners alike were similarly committed to the maintenance of this human-divine covenant.[769] Rejecting stock interpretations of the Danzante carvings as agents of intimidation, Urcid argues alternatively that the infamous

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and, secondly, in a more sociological but not less vein, they provide the contexts for ongoing negotiation and contestation of elite-commoner interests.

[765] Joyce, *Mixtecs, Zapotecs, and Chatinos*, 63.

[766] See, for instance, Joyce, *Mixtecs, Zapotecs, and Chatinos*, 98ff., regarding the Early Formative construction at San José Mogote of "what was probably the first centrally located, community-wide ceremonial precinct in Oaxaca," which thereby set a precedent for what happened later at Monte Albán. For a summary of this segment of Joyce's (re)construction, see Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, chap. 7, a section entitled "The Origins of Monte Albán: Disillusionment, Commoner Agency, a Sacred Mountain and a New Religious Movement."

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

[768] See Joyce, *Mixtecs, Zapotecs, and Chatinos*, 139-41; or for a summary of his view on this point see Jones, Narrating Monte Albán, chap. 7, a section entitled "The Ascent of Monte Albán: Inclusive Sacred Space and Healthy Maintenance of the Social Contract."

[769] See the discussions of Urcid's views on both the Danzantes and so-termed "conquest slabs" earlier in this chapter.

Building L-sub facade expresses a conception of war, not simply as a means of territory-taking, but that was embedded in a wider understanding of the reciprocal relations—or "divine covenant"—between humans and gods, which could be maintained only via human sacrifice.[770] Consequently and counterintuitively, the enormous six-row display depicts a hierarchical military brotherhood that was devoted foremost, not to vanquishing enemies, but rather to the self-sacrificial and penitential blood-letting acts "that would guarantee the biological perpetuation of society."[771] In other words, while acknowledging that main motives for the Danzante Wall are decidedly political and self-serving of elite interests, Urcid reechoes Joyce's contention that the early rulers of Monte Albán framed their claims to legitimacy not on the basis of their excellence in military activities, but rather on their privileged role as "intermediaries to the divine" who were, therefore, indispensible in securing the favor of the gods and thus the prosperity of society.[772] In this early era, non-elites voluntarily acquiesced to the authority of elites because that was the most efficacious means of honoring the primordial pact, which they regarded as no less than the raison d'être of life.

By the same token, however, exactly as befits a well "emploted" narrative, Joyce explains the eventual decline and commoner-abandonment of Monte Albán also as a reflection of the necessity of synchronizing cosmogonic and lived realities—a synchronization that, in this case, was eventually undermined by the increasing exclusionary attitudes of elites. To summarize his view of the capital's demise with special attention to this covenant theme, Classic-era elites asserted increasingly autocratic control over the ritualizing in the Main Plaza, which thereby excluded non-elites from that very activity that had attracted them to the mountaintop city in the

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[770] Recall that Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 225, draws on Arthur Joyce and Marcus Winter, "Ideology, Power, and Urban Soeiety in Pre-Hispanic Oaxaca," *Current Anthropology*, vol. 37, no. 1 (1996): 33-47, to make this link between warfare and a "divine covenant," and thus is more indirectly indebted to Monaghan's work on the topic.

[771] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 221.

[772] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 225 (my translation), describes "The elites' elaboration and monopoly of an ideology centered on a primordial pact or covenant between humans and gods, and the commissioning of an architectural monument [i.e., Building L-sub] to promote the well-being of the community and exalting supreme and charismatic leaders…"

first place.[773] In that sense, while the physical layout of the Main Plaza remained faithful to the cosmogonic model—in Joyce's phrase, "a material symbol of the Zapotec cosmos"[774]—the activities that it hosted were not. And consistent with his emphasis on the underestimated agency of commoners, Joyce explains how non-elites, therefore, simply abandoned the capital in favor of smaller regional centers where they could resume their active participation in what they regarded as their ritual foremost obligations.[775] For non-elites, neglect of the reciprocal obligations contingent of their sacred history was not an acceptable option.

In short, then, though the late twentieth-century Nuyootecos share with Monaghan a cosmogonic scenario that they regard as uniquely their own, they actually present the sort of primordial pact that seems to have been in force, at least among non-elite constituencies, from the very beginnings to the final endings of Monte Albán.[776]

d. Cosmogonies and Socio-Political Integration: Virtues of Endorsing Multiple Creation Stories in One Context—Clues from Mitla

Finally, a fourth and very different clue as to the logic and logistics of commemorating cosmogony at Monte Albán emerges from John Pohl's hypothesis concerning the juxtaposition of three different cosmogonic traditions—Tolteca-Chichimeca, Mixteca and Zapotec—in the

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[773] Regarding Joyce's account of the collapse of Monte Albán, see Joyce, *Mixtecs, Zapotecs, and Chatinos*, 248-49, or, for a summary, Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, chap. 7, a sub-section entitled "The Collapse and Aftermath of Monte Albán: Short-Sighted Rulers, Recalcitrant Commoners and Resilient Sacred Space."

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

[775] For a summary of Joyce's (re)construction of Monte Albán's decline, see Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, chap. 7, the sub-section entitled "The Collapse and Aftermath of Monte Albán: Short-Sighted Rulers, Recalcitrant Commoners and Resilient Sacred Space."

[776] Note, by the way, that López Austin, *The Myths of the Opossum*, 316-17, has brief remarks concerning "covenant miracles" among pre-Columbian and contemporary Mesoamericans, which extend to "a group the right to the benefits [of certain sanctified places] and the obligation to take care of them."

lintel paintings of the North Group palace complex of Mitla.[777] As earlier as 1895, Eduard Seler proposed that various murals at Mitla depict creation myths, a view that he supported with his contention that the content of the wall paintings drew on the same fund of deities and myths as did the pictographic codices and ceramic objects, and thus that one media could be drafted into service for interpreting the others.[778] Pohl is, therefore, by no means unique in discerning cosmogonic themes in these Mitla façades. But his argument that multiple cosmogonic traditions are deliberately depicted in very close proximity to one another—the part of his thesis that is most pertinent to the present discussion—is predicated on at least three more distinctive assumptions about the status of Mitla and its ballyhooed geometrical and pictographic reliefs.

For one, Pohl's stance is contingent on the view that Mitla—which is compared in colonial documents to "a Vatican of the Zapotec people where disputes between noblemen were arbitrated by an oracular priest, called the *Vuijato* or 'great Seer'"[779]—was not the same sort of discrete, egoistic center of political authority as Zaachila, Tilantongo or, for that matter, Monte Albán. Thus, in Pohl's view, rather than advance the interests of one administrative capital, the

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[777] John Martin Deland Pohl, "The Lintel Paintings of Mitla and the Function of the Mitla Palaces," in *Mesoamerican Architecture as a Cultural Symbol*, edited by Jeff Karl Kowalski (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 176-97.

[778] 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). Recall that in chapter 4 on the divinity priority (II-A) I addressed Seler's explicit argument for "the unity of Mexican and Central American civilization" (ibid., 266-74), which emboldens him to appeal to Central Mexican and Mixtec sources to make sense of the Zapotec materials he encountered at Mitla and elsewhere. On the suitability of using "the picture writings" to interpret the friezes at Mitla, see ibid., 305, and then the section entitled "Explanation of the Wall Paintings" (ibid., 306-24). Note also that Seler refers to the palace complex that Pohl terms the "North Group" as "Palace I;" see, for instance, the "Plan of the Mitla Ruins," ibid., 250.

[779] Pohl, "The Lintel Paintings of Mitla and the Function of the Mitla Palaces," 177, appeals to Burgoa's *Geográfica Descripción*, Acuña's *Relaciones geográficas del siglo XVI*, and Córdova's *Vocabulario castellano-zapoteca* for references to Mitla as a place where an ocular priest, or "Great Seer," arbitrated disputes.

lintel paintings were part of an initiative "to communicate the doctrine of national unity represented by this remarkable religious authority [of Mitla];"[780] and, arguably, among the premier strategies for accomplishing that sort of regional unification was the presentation, indeed the near-superimposition, of several different cosmogonic traditions.

For two, while he focuses on the lintel paintings and not the acclaimed geometrical panels that are positioned directly above them, Pohl contributes the fascinating suggestion that those famed facades—which he, like nearly everyone else, concurs "undoubtedly derived from textile designs"[781]—also worked, as cloth designs do for the contemporary Tzotzil Maya weavers and embroiderers of Chiapas, as "mnemonic devices for storytelling."[782] Accordingly, though I won't pursue this line of his argument here, the geometric façades, which are infrequent but not absent at Monte Albán, provide a generally overlooked instance of the ritual-architectural commemoration of sacred history (priority II-B). And, for three, Pohl's analysis of the Mitla lintel paintings also depends upon reasserting his distinctive view that "textiles were produced and exchanged in an elite reciprocity economy that focused on palace feasting and drinking parties."[783] That is to say, by contrast to the sorts of site-specific civic ceremonies undertaken at most Oaxacan centers, Pohl believes that the enclosed Mitla palace compounds were designed first and foremost to host the ritualized use of alcohol and other intoxicants as "the means by

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[780] Pohl, "The Lintel Paintings of Mitla and the Function of the Mitla Palaces," 177.

[781] Pohl, "The Lintel Paintings of Mitla and the Function of the Mitla Palaces," 180.

[782] Pohl, "The Lintel Paintings of Mitla and the Function of the Mitla Palaces," 182, appeals to Walter F. Morris, Jr., *Living Maya* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1987), 109-12, to make the intriguing case that Mitla's geometric façades functioned after the fashion of "Tzotzil Maya women of neighboring Chiapas [who] employ geometric designs in textiles as mnemonic devices for storytelling."

[783] Pohl, "The Lintel Paintings of Mitla and the Function of the Mitla Palaces," 182. And for a fuller discussion of possibility that Mitla was site to "palace feating and drinking parties," also see John M. D. Pohl, *The Politics of Symbolism in the Mixtec Codices*, Vanderbilt University Publications in Anthropology, book 47 (Nashville: Vanderbilt University, 1994).

which petitioners communed with the ancestors whose advice was sought in resolution of disputes or the arrangement of favorable alliances."[784]

With these premises in mind, Pohl finds three of the five surviving fragments of lintel paintings at Mitla, all situated in wide but short recessed panels on the respective walls of the North Group palace compound, to be especially significant in terms of "overall story content."[785] All three depict cosmogonic scenarios for which he can find counterparts and corroboration in other sources including the Mixtec codices, Pueblan maps and the mythic traditions of Central Mexico. In other words, one cosmogony is Toltec-Chichimeca; as second is Mixtec; and the third creation story is more characteristically Zapotec. Consider quick remarks on each.

With respect to the first cosmogony, on the west wall, Pohl is informed by Seler's turn-of-the-century identification of the Central Mexican patriarch Mixcoatl-Camaxtli, the culture hero of the Tolteca-Chichimeca, "a confederation of peoples who claimed that their ancestors had been born from the seven caves of Chicomoztoc lying somewhere to the northwest of the Valley of Mexico."[786] Filling out the story by reference to the *Anales de Cuauhtitlan* and the *Codex Borgia*, Pohl recounts a cosmogonic plotline in which Mixcoatl-Camaxtli and his four hundred brothers, called the Mimixcoa, were leading their people to a promised land when they were attacked by a hideous demon call Itzpapalotl, the Obsidian Butterfly. She devoured all of them except Mixcoatl, who eventually returns and frees his brothers. Together they burn Itzpapalotl's body and rub her ashes on their faces, which accounts for the Mixtec references to

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[784] Pohl, "The Lintel Paintings of Mitla and the Function of the Mitla Palaces," 191.

[785] Pohl, "The Lintel Paintings of Mitla and the Function of the Mitla Palaces," 183. In other words, while there are five major building compounds at Mitla (the South Group, Adode Group, North Group, Group of the Columns and Arroyo Group), Pohl's analysis is confined to three of the four extant paintings in the North Group, each of which he thinks depicts a different cosmogony. He defers comment of the fourth painting of the North Group (on the south wall), which depicts a procession of five unnamed deities.

[786] Pohl, "The Lintel Paintings of Mitla and the Function of the Mitla Palaces," 183.

the Tolteca-Chichimeca as the *Sami Nuu* or people with burnt faces.[787] Although this painting is badly damaged, Pohl discerns enough of it to conclude that, "the west wall depicts the creation legend particularly associated with the Tolteca-Chichimeca kingdoms of the Valley of Mexico, Tlaxcala and Puebla, and, most notably for this discussion, in both Northern Oaxaca and the Mixteca Costa."[788] This is, in other words, a Central Mexican-born cosmogony that was eventually embraced by Oaxacan Mixtecs.

Pohl's analysis of the painting on the east wall of the North Group allows him to identify a second cosmogonic tradition, a narrative associated with the Mixtecs centered around the Valley of Nochixtlan, which describes how the first Mixtec kings were born from the trees that grew along the banks of the rivers in the Valley of Apoala in the Mixtec Alta.[789] Fuller versions of that storyline appear in numerous Mixtec codices, including the *Codex Vindobonensis* and *Codex Bodley*, which identify the first couple as Lord 1 Flower and Lady 13 Flower.[790] Finding in the east wall painting the same distinctive parrot-like helmets that the progenitor pair wear in the codices, Pohl considers that the depiction at Mitla of "the Apoala cosmogony," which was particularly venerated by the powerful royal house of Yanhuitlan in the Mixteca Alta, is connected to the Mixtec incursion into this more traditionally Zapotec territory.[791]

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[787] Pohl, "The Lintel Paintings of Mitla and the Function of the Mitla Palaces," 183. See ibid., 184, fig. 8.5, for images of the culture hero Mixcoatl-Camaxtli and the defeated Itzpapalotl from the *Codex Borgia*, which Pohl thinks match those in the painting on the west wall of Mitla's North Group.

[788] Pohl, "The Lintel Paintings of Mitla and the Function of the Mitla Palaces," 184.

[789] Pohl, "The Lintel Paintings of Mitla and the Function of the Mitla Palaces," 185.

[790] Pohl, "The Lintel Paintings of Mitla and the Function of the Mitla Palaces," 185. See ibid., fig. 8.6, for ways that Pohl matches images of Lord 1 Flower and Lady 13 Flower in the painting on the east wall of North Group with those in the *Codices Vindobonensis* and *Bodley*.

[791] Pohl, "The Lintel Paintings of Mitla and the Function of the Mitla Palaces," 185.

And with respect to the north wall, Pohl identifies a third, more characteristically Zapotec cosmogonic tradition.[792] This one shows a sequence in which gods carry on their backs two place signs, each of which includes a palace in front of which sits a figure associated with the Xochipilli-Cinteotl complex in the Central Mexican pantheon.[793] Pohl identifies the deity associated with the first place—Hill of the Turkey—as the god 7 Flower in the Mixtec codices, a great creator deity corresponding to Tonacatecuhtli in the Central Mexican pantheon; father of all the gods and lord of the 13th heaven, 7 Flower resided over a garden paradise, apparently now identified with Mitla, in which those who had led entirely pure lives were thought to enjoy a bounteous life after death.[794] The second place sign—Place of the Fruit Tree—which seems to refer to a bountiful orchard of fruit trees at Mitla that was destroyed by the Aztecs, is associated with *Bezelao* or 13 Flower, lord of the Zapotec netherworld and patron deity of Mitla.[795] Variously referred to in the colonial sources as the "prince of devils," "supreme universal god" or "god of hell," *Bezelao*-13 Flower may be a Zapotec version of the Central Mexican god Xochipilli-Cinteotl who, though more commonly considered a corn god, was "also known as the patron of ritual drinking and inebriation along with his consort Mayahuel, the goddess of maguey and pulque."[796] Accordingly, while ascertaining a narrative thread is more difficult in this case, Pohl thinks that both of the deities in this cosmogony are associated with the ritual use of mushrooms or other intoxicants as a means of communicating with the dead[797]—which are precisely the sorts of ceremonial practices he contends were undertaken in these Mitla architectural contexts.

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[792] Pohl, "The Lintel Paintings of Mitla and the Function of the Mitla Palaces," 186-91.

[793] Pohl, "The Lintel Paintings of Mitla and the Function of the Mitla Palaces," 186. It is notable that Pohl, ibid., 188-90, also correlates each of these two place names with respective geographic features in the Mitla area.

[794] Pohl, "The Lintel Paintings of Mitla and the Function of the Mitla Palaces," 187.

[795] Pohl, "The Lintel Paintings of Mitla and the Function of the Mitla Palaces," 190.

[796] Pohl, "The Lintel Paintings of Mitla and the Function of the Mitla Palaces," 190.

[797] Pohl, "The Lintel Paintings of Mitla and the Function of the Mitla Palaces," 187, 190.

Be that as it may, more to the present point than Pohl's ideas about the ecstatic character of the "palace feasting and drinking parties" that the Mitla palaces presumably hosted is the way in which he sees the close juxtaposition of (a) Toltec-Chichimeca, (b) Mixtec and (c) Zapotec cosmogonies facilitating a kind of socio-political unification. Though in this case, the pictographic commemoration of cosmogonies is functioning more like a strategy of ritual-architectural allurement than the presentation of new content (that is to say, as a feature of the front-half rather than the back-half of the ritual-architectural situation),[798] Pohl insinuates that all components of the diverse constituency that frequented Mitla would arrive there to find an acknowledgement of their own more particularistic cosmogonic traditions, which would thereby convince them of the overarching authority of this regional or "multinational," not site-specific, center. As he explains the multifaceted, unifying appeal of the North Group palace,

> "The different cosmogonies commemorated in the wall paintings would therefore have presented royal guests with religious allegories in keeping with the themes of factionalism and multinational decision making... [T]he depiction of cosmogonies around a palace courtyard that relate to the three most powerful Postclassic Oaxacan social groups metaphorically points to forms of social unity supervised by the Mitla oracle."[799]

In other words, consistent with his view that "the size and complexity of Mitla... reflects its position as a kind of national courthouse and not its authority as a political center dominating any significant portion of the Oaxaca region,"[800] Pohl depicts the abutment of three different cosmogonic traditions, all literally within easy sight of one another, as a ritual-architectural strategy of socio-political integration, conciliation or, in my term, "allurement":

> "The portrayal of the three Oaxacan cosmogonies further demonstrates that the site did not subscribe to any one of the several competing alliance corridors that defined Tolteca-Chichimeca, Mixtec, and Zapotec factionalism, but rather the oracle's palaces and courts represented a sacred space in which all were united and recognized as equals."[801]

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[798] Yet again, the twofold pattern of ritual-architectural events, see Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, Pt. II, "The Mechanism of Architecture."

[799] Pohl, "The Lintel Paintings of Mitla and the Function of the Mitla Palaces," 192-93.

[800] Pohl, "The Lintel Paintings of Mitla and the Function of the Mitla Palaces," 196.

[801] Pohl, "The Lintel Paintings of Mitla and the Function of the Mitla Palaces," 196.

That is to say—and I would contend that this is true also of the visual representation of creation myths at Monte Albán—the display of the respective cosmogonies does *not* serve to present new and unfamiliar content; this is *not* part of the back-half of the ritual-architectural program of the North Group. Alternatively, the depiction of these three different region-specific cosmogonic stories, with which the respective constituencies are already very familiar, serves primarily as front-half component that invites and "allures" those different cultural groups into the ritual proceedings and adjudications of disputes that are authoritative for all of them.[802] Moreover, as I explain momentarily, this very deliberate juxtaposition of multiple cosmogonic traditions—as opposed to the more dogmatic assertion of just one story of creation—provides a fourth and especially revealing clue as to how numerous group-specific cosmogonies were allowed to stand in the socially, ethnically and religiously diversified capital of Monte Albán.

e. Reiterating Clues and Consequences: Monte Albán "Polytheism" and the Acknowledgment of Diverse Cosmogonies

That said, I end this exploration of the first main variation on the ritual-architectural commemoration of sacred history (priority II-B) by briefly reiterating from the four previous sub-sections a tetrad of clues concerning the means and motives for the displaying creation stories at Monte Albán. It is, I contend, this fourth analogy—drawn from John Pohl's interpretation of Mitla's North Group lintel paintings—that is the most salient; and thus I give special attention to that alternative.

To recapitulate, I first looked to Roberto Zárate Morón's observations concerning Tehuantepec Zapotecs' appreciation of both natural mountains and built pyramids as "places of origin" in order to reinforce the sense in which Monte Albán was very likely considered as "a mountain of creation" or even "the first true mountain," a privileged status that did not, however,

[802] Also, though I will not pursue the topic here, I would contend that the celebrated geometric façades on the same Mitla palace walls are likewise functioning primarily as components of allurement (i.e., front-half elements of the ritual-architectural situation) and not as conveyors of new and previously unfamiliar content (i.e., back-half elements).

nullify the assignment of that status to other Oaxacan mountains. In this respect, then, the microcosmic conception of the city at large was one grand reiteration of a cosmogony. Second, I juxtaposed Lynn Stephen's observations about contemporary Teotitecos' astute reliance on "a strategy of firstness" as a calculated means of constructing their identity and the fact that pre-Columbian Monte Albán was the site of innumerable "firsts;" and, in this respect, I proposed that rulers and inhabitants of the Zapotec capital, in all likelihood, derived both abundant existential satisfaction and considerable socio-political cache by accentuating "the prestige of beginnings" and their "firstness" in many respects. Third, I reaffirmed the contentions of Joyce and Urcid that John Monaghan's observations about present-day Nuyootecos's commitment to a "human-divine covenant" are indeed relevant to the pre-Hispanic configuration and ritual use of Monte Albán's Main Plaza; from this frame, honoring that primordial pact was commoners' primary incentive for participating in the ritual life of the city and, eventually, their foremost reason for abandoning the increasingly exclusivistic capital. And fourth, I appealed to Pohl's thesis concerning the side-by-side placement of allusions to Tolteca-Chichimeca, Mixteca and Zapotec cosmogonic traditions in a single Mitla palace as a clue to the way in which Monte Albán also tolerated, and perhaps even celebrated, the coexistence of multiple group-specific stories of creation.

While I do believe that Pohl's analysis provides the most poignant intimations for understanding this aspect of Monte Albán's ritual-architectural program, to treat that tripled depiction of different cosmogonic traditions in one Mitla palace compound as a window into commemorations of cosmogony at the ancient Zapotec capital requires large qualifications of several sorts. For one, Pohl is describing a Postclassic era in which Mixtecs and Central Mexicans played a much larger and different role in the Central Oaxaca than either did during the Classic-era hegemony of Monte Albán; thus one would *not* expect that the particulars of these cosmogonic traditions he enumerates were present in the mountaintop Zapotec capital. And even more importantly, Pohl's description of Mitla as "a kind of national courthouse" is radically different from the more familiarly egoistical sort of religio-political and military capital that was Monte Albán. Monte Albán was a typically self-interested administrative center rather than the sort of special-function site for interacting with oracular priests that Mitla apparently was.

Nevertheless, the strand of Pohl's argument that accentuates Mitla's express commitment to accommodating a diversity of more religio-culturally specific views does comport with recurrent suggestions—which I strongly support—that the unprecedentedly large and complex urban configuration of Monte Albán was also challenged to accommodate a wide collection of more provincial cultural, and thus cosmogonical, views. As I have referenced repeatedly, Richard Blanton's notion of a "disembedded capital" supported by a "regional military alliance," for instance, presupposes that the rulers of Monte Albán, as a matter of pragmatic workability, declined to legislate the particulars of religious belief and practice in favor of creating the sort of "neutral" urban space that accommodated the ample religious diversity of its citizenry.[803] Urcid appeals to Blanton's notion of the heterogeneity of the capital's religio-social makeup to suggest that the subordinate personages approaching a single seated ruler, for instance in Program B, could be "members of the city's elite, perhaps lineage heads of 14 of the 15 'barrios' of Monte Albán" who are thereby exhibiting a kind of diversity-within-unity theme.[804] Additionally, later in this chapter I will introduce Maarten Jansen's reaffirmation of Urcid's cautioning that "no single, monolithic name for Monte Albán should be expected,"[805] and thus Jansen's assertion that the urban capital was a *sitio multiple*, or "a multiple site," which accounts for the fact that instead of allusions and place names that refer to the whole of Monte Albán, one more often encounters in the Mixtec pictographic documents references to specific geographical and/or

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[803] Regarding his hypothesis that Monte Albán was a "disemebedded capital" that owed its existence to a "regional military alliance" designed to forestall "external threats," see Blanton, *Monte Albán*, 33-40. Or see the summary of Blanton's hypothesis in Jones, *Narrating Mont Albán*, chap. 4.

[804] See Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 405, or my summary earlier in the chapter; and recall that Urcid opines that the subordinate figures in program B could be "members of the city's elite, perhaps lineage heads of 14 of the 15 'barrios' of Monte Albán" (which comports with Blanton's view) or, alternatively, they could be the "rulers of subordinate communities."

[805] Javier Urcid, "Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing," Ph.D. diss., Department of Anthropology, Yale University, 1992, 385; cited by Maarten Jansen, "Monte Albán y Zaachila en los Códices Mixtecos," 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), 76.

humanly constructed features of the wider urban configuration.[806] And most importantly of all, I am persuaded that Miguel Bartolomé's redefinition of indigenous Oaxaca "polytheism" as "receptivity to a multiple experience of the sacred and not just as the worship of a multitude of gods"[807] alerts to us not only to Monte Albán's acceptance of a diversity of conceptions of divinity, which I stressed last chapter, but also to a parallel diversity of group-specific cosmogonic traditions.

According to all of these interpretative formulations, Formative and Classic-era Monte Albán, though of a drastically different conception than Postclassic Mitla, was similarly a pluri-cultural, multi-religious entity that tolerated, or likely thrived upon, the integration of innumerable more particularistic outlooks. Each of the ethnic-linguistic factions that came to reside in the capital was presumably grounded in more discrete cosmogonic traditions, which, instead of competing alternatives, were respected as essential components of each of the city's socio-cultural affiliations. Consequently, as at Mitla, we should *not* expect to find at Monte Albán one authoritative, exclusionary cosmogony. This could explain, for instance, why in major public displays like the Danzante Wall, the Building J "conquest slabs" and Programs B and A we encounter specific episodes (e.g., military campaigns), institutions (e.g., hierarchical military brotherhoods) and rulers (e.g., Lord 5B and Lord 13F) that are relevant to the whole of Monte Albán; but never do we detect the dogmatic presentation of an authoritative Monte Albán cosmogony. Instead, as at Mitla, rather than authorities working to persuade residents and visitors of the correctness of one cosmogonic tradition at the expense of others—which would constitute the introduction of substantially new information in the back-half of a ritual-architectural program—the designers of Monte Albán (like those of Postclassic Mitla), I would maintain, capitalize on the diversity of not-mutually-exclusive cosmogonic traditions as

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[806] Maarten Jansen, "Monte Albán y el origen de las dinastías mixtecas," in *Memoria de la Primera Mesa Redonda de Monte Albán: Procesos de cambio y conceptualización del tiempo*, ed. Nelly M. Robles García (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2001), 153; my translation. I will explore this notion of Monte Albán as a *sitio multiple*, or "a multiple site," more fully later in this chapter.

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

components of allurement, which signal respect for the particularistic outlooks of the constituencies that together make up the whole of Monte Albán.

In short, to prefigure a point to which I will return in this chapter's Closing Thoughts, the co-existence of multiple cosmogonies at Monte Albán is notably different than the more homogenized and authoritarian presentation of other aspects of the city's official sacred history, for instance in the major public displays that I discussed earlier. Cosmogonies constitute a special case. That is to say, though our direct evidence concerning cosmogonies is admittedly thin—and, arguably, it is the absence of any authoritative creation story that is most revealing—I propose on the basis of clues from other Oaxacan contexts that allusions to cosmogonies at Monte Albán were a largely conservative practice that played a quite different role in the city's wider ritual-architectural program than did the more radical and prescriptive presentation of mythico-historical episodes and mythico-historical individuals to which I turn next.

B. Ritual-Architectural Commemorations of Mythic, Historic or Miraculous Episodes: Memorializing Otherworldly, This-Worldly and/or Ritual Occasions

Having argued that cosmogonies have a unique standing among the longer and larger sacred histories of which they are a part, I turn now to second and third variations on the theme by considering, in this set of sub-sections, the ritual-architectural commemoration of mythical, mythico-historical or miraculous *episodes*, and then, in the next set, commemorations of mythical, mythico-historical or miraculous *individuals*. While separating the commemoration of episodes and of individuals is, of course, an imperfect aspiration, I focus first on the memorialization of actions, incidents, occurrences or happenings, as it were, after which I will return to a more concerted concern for the protagonists involved in those mythico-historical incidents. And, as we'll see, it is with respect to these second and third variations on the sacred history priority (II-B) that I will circle back most directly to discussion of Monte Albán's three most prominent public displays, about which I had so much to say in the earlier "Specific Oaxacan Background" section.

In any case, with respect to the former possibility, again for strictly heuristic purposes, be forewarned that I will, when I turn to Mesoamerica, introduce a provisional three-part distinction among: (1) the ritual-architectural commemoration of *episodes that are situated in strictly mythical, otherworldly contexts*, and thus feature deities and cultural heroes rather than human beings; (2) the ritual-architectural commemoration of *episodes that are situated in more "normal" historical time*, and thus feature the outstanding exploits of human protagonists; and (3) the ritual-architectural commemoration of *ceremonial occasions (e.g., processions, inaugurations or human sacrifices)*, which I term "meta-commemorative," or "second-order commemorations," insofar as these are built forms or visual displays that memorialize ritual occasions that were themselves undertaken to memorialize mythico-historic occasions.

All three of those heuristic alternatives, albeit it in very uneven measure, are, I will argue, relevant to the ritual-architectural program of Monte Albán. But again observing a formulaic three-part approach to each category in my framework, I consider, first, commemorations of mythico-historic episodes as a broadly cross-cultural phenomenon and then, second, commemorations of mythico-historic episodes across Mesoamerica. Following those two steps I will address the theme with more specific attention to Oaxaca and Monte Albán.

1. Commemorations of Mythico-Historic Episodes as a Cross-Cultural Phenomenon: Remembering and/or "Reactualizing" Sacred History

That a great deal of "sacred architecture" is devoted foremost to the commemoration of momentous mythological and/or miraculous episodes in the careers of deities, culture heroes, saints and sovereigns is incontestable. Vivid and multifarious cross-cultural examples abound; and, for present purposes, especially relevant are those earthly building projects that are themselves conceived as architectural reiterations of mythical building episodes.[808] In these cases, which bear closely on the commemoration of cosmogonies, human builders, rather than

[808] Here I draw and augment examples from Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, vol. II, chap. 18, "Sacred History: Myths and Miracles," a section entitled "Memorializing Mythical and Miraculous Episodes: Occurrences as Recurrences."

exercising their personal originality and creativity—which are so often imagined as the criteria of excellence for the modern buildings of "celebrity architects"—aspire to constructional initiatives that mirror those of divine or mythical predecessors. Unoriginality, not innovation, is the mark legitimacy.

The periodic (re)construction and ceremonial dedication of the finely built *tongkonan* or family "origin houses" of the Sa'dan Toraja in Indonesia, for instance, are explicitly conceived, not as occasions of individuated self-expression, but rather as the duteous reiteration and commemoration of the construction of the very first *tongkonan* by their mythical ancestor Tangdilino.[809] By the same token, the thousands of times in which Navajos construct a hogan or traditional house are, in every case, imagined as building activities that reiterate the first, or primordial, hogan that was constructed by ancestors at that place from which they emerged from the earth.[810] In these cases, like the Indonesian ones, earthly constructions are made meaningful and legitimate via their *un*originality and faithful conformity to archetypal mythical models.

Or, to cite an even more prevalent alternative, rather than iterating again and again a building project understood to have transpired deep in some timeless primordial era or dimension, countless architectural constructions are undertaken to mark and memorialize one-time "historic" miracles, that is, remarkable events that transpired in otherwise unremarkable historical circumstances.[811] Of numberless Christian examples, Vierzehnheiligen, or the Basilica

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[809] See Roxana Waterson, "The House and the World: The Symbolism of Sa'dan Toraja House Carvings," *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 15 (Spring 1988): 37.

[810] On the logic and mythological underpinnings of Navajo hogans, see Peter Nabokov and Robert Easton, *Native American Architecture* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 324-37. Note also that the "building" of Navajo sandpainting rituals, similarly constructional though very different sorts of architectural events, not only recall, but actually rejuvenate, the *Diyin Dine 'e* and other deities by depicting and recounting their most significant episodes. On that possibility, see Gary Witherspoon, "Beautifying the World through Art," in *Native North American Art History*, eds. Z. P. Mathews and A. Jonaitas (Palo Alto, California: Peek Publications, 1982), 219; or Gary Witherspoon, *Language and Art in the Navajo Universe* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1977), 167ff.

[811] Note that, though I am not fastidious in observing this distinction, as a rule, I follow Perrin, *The Nature of the New Testament*, 27-28, in using "history" and "historical" to refer to

of the Fourteen Holy Helpers, for instance, is a German Catholic church built over the spot where, in 1445, a shepherd had a vision of the Christ child surrounded by fourteen other children, later interpreted as the Fourteen Saints in Time of Need who continue to dispense miraculous healings to pilgrims that visit this place.[812] The construction of the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe on the spot at which the Virgin Mary, in 1531, repeatedly appeared to reticent native Juan Diego, of course, provides the most conspicuous Mexican parallel.[813] Likewise in Islam, the Dome of the Rock, constructed on the summit of the Mount Moriah site already revered by Jews and Christians as the place where David had his altar and Solomon his temple, preserves the footprint of Muhammad and marks the spot where Muslims believe that the Prophet ascended, one night in (roughly) 620 C.E., with the archangel Gabriel on his eagle-winged horse to visit the seven heavens.[814] Moreover, the singularity of the Dome of the Rock

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everything that "actually happened in the past," while "historic" is more selective in referring to those persons and events that have an ongoing significance for subsequent generations. Accordingly, it is, also as a general rule, more accurate to say that Monte Albán's monumental displays, not unlike sacred art in most cross-cultural contexts, depict "mythico-*historic* episodes" rather than "mythico-*historical* episodes."

[812] See Alastair Laing, "Central and Eastern Europe," in *Baroque and Rococo Architecture and Decoration*, ed. Anthony Blunt (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 221-22. Another strong example of this sort comes in Laing's discussion of the pilgrimage church of the Wies (1746-54), the final masterpiece of Dominikus Zimmermann and the seat of one of the most enduring pilgrimages in Bavaria, which was built specifically to commemorate and perpetuate the miraculous event wherein a crude image of the Scourged Christ at the Column was seen to have shed tears. See ibid., 269.

[813] Of countless articles that bear on the mythic underpinnings of the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, see Roberto S. Goizueta, "Our Lady of Guadalupe: The Heart of Mexican Identity," in *Religion and the Creation of Race and Ethnicity: An Introduction*, ed. Craig R. Prentiss (New York and London: New York University Press, 2003), 140-51; and Davíd Carrasco, "The Virgin of Guadalupe and Two Types of Religious Experiences: The Personal Illumination and the Ceremonial Landscape," in eds. Matthias Riedl und Tilo Schabert, *Religionen–Die Religiöse Erfahrung/Religions–The Religious Experience* (Warburg, Germany: Königshausen u. Neumann, 2008), 99-113.

[814] See, for instance, Roger Friedland and Richard D. Hecht, "The Politics of Sacred Place: Jersualem's Temple Mount/*al-haram a-sharif*," in *Sacred Places and Profane Spaces: Essays in the Geographics of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, eds. Jamie Scott and Paul Simpson-Housley (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), 22ff.

notwithstanding, there is a sense in which every dome in the Muslim world works to recall and commemorate that episode of Muhammad's ascent to heaven (*miraj*).[815]

India provides further dramatic instantiation of the ritual-architectural commemoration of both mythical and miraculous episodes. Ritual theorist Fred Clothey, for example, terms a whole set of South Asian ceremonials (and their attendant architectural contexts) "theofests," that is, festivals designed explicitly to commemorate some aspect of a god's activity, to distinguish those ritual occasions from "ecofests," which commemorate some important agricultural or astronomical event.[816] Surinder Mohan Bhardwas is even more helpful in fine-tuning this morphological sub-option of "episode commemoration" when he notes an indigenous Indian distinction between, on the one hand, those sacred sites (*Asura Tirthas*) that are associated with (mythical) circumstances in which various Hindu gods destroyed demons and thus restored moral order, and, on the other hand, another type of sacred site (*Arsa Tirthas*), which are consecrated by virtue of the (miraculous) austerities, penances and sacrifices of human saints and sages.[817] Among the most spectacular exemplars of the first category, the elaborate Pallava-style relief carving of the Descent of the Ganges at Mamallapuram (near Madras), for instance, "fixes forever" the mythological moment when Siva permitted the life-giving waters of the Ganges to flow to earth, an episode that is punctuated and enlivened by a waterfall curtain that flows directly over the relief.[818] In Indian Buddhism, however, which is likewise thick with explicitly commemorative art and architecture, the paradoxically ordinary-exceptional status of Gautama

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[815] See, for instance, Titus Burckhardt, *Sacred Art in East and West: Its Principles and Methods*, trans. Lord Northbourne (London: Perennial Books, 1967), 112.

[816] Fred W. Clothey, *Rhythm and Intent: Ritual Studies from South India* (Madras: Blackie & Son, Publishers, 1983), 78.

[817] See Surinder Mohan Bhardwas, *Hindu Places of Pilgrimage in India: A Study in Cultural Geography* (Berkeley: University of California, 1973), 98. These are actually two options in a four-part scheme that Bhardwas outlines; he does not explicitly correlate these two options with "mythical" versus "miraculous" episodes.

[818] For some alternative interpretations of the relief at Mamallapuram, see Michael Edwardes, *Indian Temples and Palaces* (London: Paul Hamlyn, 1969), 61-64. Also see Mirsky, *Houses of God*, 52-54; and Michell, *The Hindu Temple*, 46-48.

make it more difficult to maintain any distinction between the ritual-architectural commemoration of human versus superhuman episodes: The rock-cut temples of Ajanta, for example, sheathed by magnificent narrative frescoes, are among innumerable Indian Buddhist configurations that preserve episodes in both the historical and "mystic" life of the Buddha.[819]

Turning west, there are, of course, thousands of European monuments memorializing significant (though not necessarily miraculous) religio-political episodes like, say, the Arch of Titus in Rome, which was erected about 70 C.E. on the Forum Romanum to commemorate the victory of Titus over the Jews.[820] Here we can note, however, that commemorative sacred art and architecture, particularly in specifically religious contexts, does considerably more than simply record or "fix" mythical and miraculous episodes, thus making them accessible to recall or intellectualized memory. Lots of interpreters insist, appropriately I think, that in addition to that documental function, the apprehension of various architectural configurations, especially in the context of ritual, can also provide means of *"reactualizing*" the relevant episodes. According to this oft-made argument, worshippers not only learn or remember what supposedly happened; they, moreover, are allowed to be present and to participate in those happenings, episodes that belong somehow to both the past and the present. In other words, recalling the familiar insistence of Mircea Eliade and many theorists that engagements with myth are not just occasions to recall, or "think about," past circumstances, but rather more meaningful opportunities to "relive" or "reactualize" those mythic episodes, lots of accounts insist that, in the ritual experience of commemorative architecture, mythico-historic *occurrences* are transformed into *recurrences*.[821]

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[819] See, for instance, Ernest Short, *A History of Religious Architecture* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1955), 89-90, 95; Michael Edwardes, *Indian Temples and Palaces* (London: Paul Hamlyn, 1969), 37-51; or Andreas Volwahsen, *Living Architecture: Indian* (New York: Grossett and Dunlop, 1969), 89-134.

[820] Among many relevant sources, Gottfried Richter, *Art and Human Consciousness*, trans. Burley Channer and Margaret Frohlich (Spring Valley, New York: Anthroposophic Press, Inc, 1985), 111-13, discusses the triumphal arch as Rome's major form of "self-expression" (and provides a picture of the Arch of Titus).

[821] On the oft-made point that people do not simply remember or "look back" to mythical episodes, but rather undertake the sorts of participatory "reenactments" or "reactualizations" that

Regarding architecture that facilitates the experiential reactualization of episodes from sacred history, M. E. Kenna, for instance, explains how the various entrances that the priest makes from the sanctuary into the body of the church during the course of the Orthodox liturgy allow the Eastern Christian congregation to witness, in a "symbolic" fashion, "the actual entrances made by Jesus during his earthly life—such as the entry into Jerusalem—as well as entrances that are spiritual interventions—such as the Incarnation."[822] In a similar vein, Howard Hibbard considers that the explicit intention of Bernini's theatrical Baroque sculpture-architecture was, in most cases, to freeze the climactic moment of some mythic or saintly story—but not simply in hopes of documenting such occurrences; instead Bernini's greater ambition was to (re)capture in art the emotion of that defining moment so that viewers could, for themselves, re-experience and participate in the sensibilities of the original protagonists.[823] And likewise, John Dixon astutely (and "eventfully") emphasizes that paintings like those of Michelangelo in the Sistine Chapel do not just provide a record of mythico-historical events; more poignantly, such paintings effect the possibility of a participatory reenactment of those sacred events. Accentuating this more-than-documentary aspiration, Dixon explains that the painting in the Sistine Chapel "is not simply a representation of the process of redemption... It is a translation of the redemptive action into a form that makes possible the participation of the worshipper."[824]

In sum, then, we can go past the unmistakable observation that architectural constructions in myriad cross-cultural contexts memorialize either the primordial activities of mythical

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enable them to "relive" or "to be present in" those occasions, see, for instance, Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, chap. 1, "Archetypes and Repetition."

[822] Margaret E. Kenna, "Icons in Theory and Practice: An Orthodox Christian Example," *History of Religions* 24 (May 1985): 360.

[823] Howard Hibbard, *Bernini* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1965). I will discuss Bernini's work more fully in chapter 8 in relation to the "theater priority, III-A."

[824] John W. Dixon, Jr., "The Christology of Michelangelo: The Sistine Chapel," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 55 (Fall 1987): 524.

ancestors or miraculous episodes that happened within more normal historical circumstances in order to pose two qualifications, both of which will be especially helpful in nuancing our appreciation of the relevance of this seemingly commonplace alternative at Monte Albán. For one, while there is no question that exhibiting noteworthy episodes of one's sacred history provides an educative experience akin to that afforded students and museum-goers, we need to appreciate that the incentives and rewards of the ritual-architectural commemoration of mythico-historic occurrences are, in many cases, far greater than simply recording an authoritative version of those incidents. As befits the experiential engagement with myth, beyond just presenting documentary renditions of the past, ritual-architectural depictions and retellings of mythic episodes provide (sometimes but not always) a means of participatory "reactualizing" or "reliving" those true, real and exemplary circumstances. Though I concede this will be difficult to demonstrate in the case of Monte Albán, it is a possibility that deserves our sustained attention.

And for two, while the commemoration of mythic and miraculous episodes may seem a ubiquitous feature of all sacred architectures, scholars working in several contexts—Mesoamerica included—have noticed major discrepancies both in the extent to which and the means by which various cultures memorialize narrative "mythistory" in art and architecture. Case in point, the Hindu architecture of Southeast Asia—Java and Cambodia particularly—is, generally speaking, assessed as more concerned with, and more adept at, depicting mythological episodes than is the Hindu architecture of India. Though acknowledging the surfeit of deity images and allusions to epic literature on many Indian temples, George Michell, for instance, appeals to the spectacular architectural embodiment of creation stories at Angkor Vat (mentioned above) in order to conclude that, "Striking among the qualities of Hindu temples outside India is their ability to create an architectural layout that embodies elements of myth."[825] And while such comparative characterizations are invariably debatable, as I turn next to the exemplification of this variation on the ritual-architectural commemoration of sacred history (priority II-B) across Mesoamerica, we will encounter parallel claims concerning supposed regional disparities in the relevance of this morphological option.

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[825] Michell, *The Hindu Temple*, 159.

2. Commemorations of Mythico-Historic Episodes across Mesoamerica: Uneven Enthusiasm for Depicting Narrative Sacred History

Rather than an exception to the cross-cultural norm, the superregion of Mesoamerica presents ample instances of pre-Columbian built forms that are expressly devoted to the commemoration of not only of mythic and miraculous episodes but, moreover, of fully historical happenings of note.[826] To revisit again the perhaps most oft-cited connection between a ritual-architectural configuration and a mythic episode, countless commentators rehearse the notion that the Aztecs' Templo Mayor was conceived as a built replica of the mythico-cosmic mountain of Coatepec, which thereby made the two-altar temple the perfect stage for periodic reenactments of the lurid story of Huitzilopochtli's birth. Thus where, as noted, Davíd Carrasco makes the case that the myth of the Fifth Sun's origin presents a deeply cosmogonic precedent for the Aztecs' "massive ritual killing,"[827] the more Aztec-specific story of the origins of their patron deity, who was born in full military regalia and then immediately slayed his traitorous 400 brothers and sister Coyolxauhqui, is presented time and again as the myth that explains the design and ritual use of the great pyramid.[828]

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[826] Note that while I use the terms "miracle" or "miraculous episodes" in a non-technical way to refer to extraordinary events that transpire in ordinary (historical) contexts, López Austin, *The Myths of the Opposum*, 312-13, in the context of a discussion of "history in the time of myths" and "irruptions of the divine," observes that "the ancient Nahua called a miracle *tlamahuizolli*. The word connotes admiration, wonder, perhaps even fear..." Then López Austin, ibid., 313-15, presents a "classification of miracles by the nature of their effects," which includes seven categories: (1) ritual miracles, which revitalize the course of history without transformation; (2) private miracles, which modify the life of individuals; (3) epic miracles, which modify the course of historical events; (4) founding miracles, which establish rights, institutions or towns; (5) originators of people miracles, which renew an origin myth whose effects have remained suspended during the creation of humans; (6) creating miracles, which create new classes during historic time; and (7) prophetic miracles, which leave their effects in suspense and have three different sorts (a) inaugural prophetic miracles, which prophesy important historical events (b) messianic prophetic miracles, which promise total transformation of human life; and (c) eschatological prophetic miracles, which announce the end of the world.

[827] Carrasco, "Myth, Cosmic Terror, and the Templo Mayor," 146.

[828] Among many to comment on the myth of Huitzilopochtli's birth as the rationale for large-scaled human sacrifice at the Templo Mayor, see, for instance, Davíd Carrasco, "Templo Mayor: The Aztec Vision of Place," *Religion* 2 (1981): 284-85; Johanna Broda, "Templo Mayor as

That is to say, pre-Columbian constructions that at first seem absurdly over-extravagant (like the Templo Mayor) and practices that initially seem intolerably egregious (like massive human sacrifice) become not only viable, but actually religiously mandatory obligations when a mythological precedent emerges. While skeptical scholars may suspect that such correlations with myth are little more than elitist rationalizations for the exercise of their socio-political self-interests, there is broad consensus that essentially all major Mesoamerican ritual-architectural complexes are informed and justified by their supposed conformity to archetypal mythological models. No building and no ritual that is perceived as the brand new invention of a merely human ruler can possibly serve its religio-political purposes and win the support of pre-Columbian audiences. Always mythological precursors and prototypes are essential.

Nevertheless, while agreeing that every major ritual-architectural configuration conforms to some mythological model (even if we may not have yet ascertained those particular mythic underpinnings), Mesoamericanists have hypothesized major regional discrepancies in the enthusiasm and aptitude for depicting in visual ways narrative sacred history. Most infamously, one of the premier means of supporting (the fiction of) a "polarity" or radical contrast between the pre-Hispanic peoples of the Maya zone and those of Central Mexico has been an imagined antithesis between their relative interests in illustrating sacred (and not-so-sacred) history.[829] Put bluntly (and in my rubric), prevailing stereotypes for most of the twentieth century held that cerebral, otherworldly Maya artists were obsessed with the cosmo-magical matters associated with the homology (I-A), astronomy (I-C) and divinity (II-A) priorities, and thus were wholly uninterested in depicting any storiological themes, least of all those that would record their leaders' military and political exploits. Classic Mayas, by this outdated assessment, cared little

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Ritual Space," in *The Great Temple of Tenochtitlan: Center and Periphery in the Aztec World*, Johanna Broda, David Carrasco, and Eduardo Matos Moctezuma (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 45; and the perhaps fullest exploration of the theme appears in López Austin y López Luján, *Monte Sagrado—Templo Mayor*, 236-54.

[829] See Lindsay Jones, "Conquests of the Imagination: Maya-Mexican Polarity and the Story of Chichén Itzá, Yucatan," *American Anthropologist*, vol. 99, no. 2 (June 1997): 275-90.

for commemorations of sacred history (priority II-B).[830] Machiavellian Mexicans, by contrast, ostensibly had precisely the opposite priorities, and thus produced an art that was dominated by highly particularistic (though also highly idealized) accounts of worldly events. On those grounds, then, the extensive artistic oeuvre of the pre-Columbian city of Chichén Itzá, for instance, imagined as a site where these two groups met head-to-head, was for decades bipartitioned into non-narrative components, which were assigned to indigenous Yucatecan Maya artists, and the more explicitly representational and informational art (also deemed more "secular")—especially murals depicting battle scenes and statues of well-armed warriors—which were credited to invading Central Mexican Toltecs.[831]

Though in hindsight that oversimple Maya-Mexican bipartitioning has proven distorting in the extreme, Mesoamericanists continue to contend, not inappropriately I think, that there are significant regional and "ethnic" discrepancies with respect to indigenous inclinations for artistic commemorations of narrative sacred history. Art historian John Graham, for instance, recognizes a great enthusiasm for recounting narratives in Izapan art (in the Chiapas-Guatemalan highlands), but a decided disinterest in storytelling among the arts of the Olmec and Lowland Maya.[832] In his assessment, for Izapan art, "the chief purpose seems to have been the depiction of narrative scenes often depending to a great extent on movement and dramatic action for their clarity and effect;" by contrast, Olmec art, which is preoccupied with monumentality and with full, swelling masses, and Maya art, which favors elite portraiture, are, Graham concludes, patentedly "non-narrative."[833]

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[830] I have at several points alluded to the early and mid-twentieth century stereotypes of the peaceful, astronomy-obsessed Classic Mayas, which were overturned in the 1980s by works such as Schele and Miller, *The Blood of Kings*.

[831] For a typical bipartioning of Chichén Itzá art into Maya versus Mexican (or Toltec), see, George Brainerd, *The Maya Civilization* (Los Angeles: Southwest Museum, 1954), 82-83, 93. Also see Lindsay Jones, *Twin City Tales: A Hermeneutical Reassessment of Tula and Chichén Itzá* (Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1995), chap. 1.

[832] John Graham, "Antecedents of Olmec Sculpture at Abaj Takalik," in *Pre-Columbian Art History: Selected Readings*, ed. Alana Cordy-Collins (Palo Alto: Peek Publications, 1982), 9-10.

[833] Graham, "Antecedents of Olmec Sculpture at Abaj Takalik," 9-10.

Generalizations like Graham's—including, for instance, posits of a Maya preference for elite portraiture over depictions of narrative action—suggest not indifference for artistic commemorations of sacred history (as older ideas had held), but that their priorities were more individual-specific than episode-specific. Moreover, where it may be, as Tatiana Proskouriakoff claimed in the 1950s, that, in Maya sculpture and architecture, "action is seldom depicted and always restrained in character,"[834] a wider study of Maya art would reveal, as I will note shortly, much greater enthusiasm for depicting thoroughgoing narrative sequences (both mythical and more strictly "historical") in other artistic genres, for instance, vase painting, codices and murals.[835] And, perhaps most importantly, because such assessments are usually based almost strictly on analyses of extant pre-Columbian art objects, largely disconnected from any ritual context, we ought to keep in mind that the associated performative movements, recitations and songs may have reflected quite different priorities. Still, the willingness to entertain seriously the possibility that commemorations of sacred history, and specifically of narrative episodes, might, in some contexts, be significant most by omission provides us a good hermeneutical example.

Be that as it may, a look to the most prominent examples of Mesoamerica's extensive tradition of mural painting enables an alternative way of addressing the uneven enthusiasm for exhibiting narrative sacred history—namely, via a ternary heuristic distinction, albeit an imprecise one, among the depiction of three quite different aspects of sacred history: (1) otherworldly episodes, (2) this-worldly episodes and (3) ritual episodes. Frequently all three of these morphological sub-options appear together. And though most of Monte Albán's painted murals are located in tombs—and thus I delay direct discussion of them until chapter 7 relative to the ritual-architectural commemoration of the dead (priority II-D)—momentarily I will address

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[834] Tatiana Proskouriakoff, *A Study of Classic Maya Sculpture*, Publication 593 (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1950), 4-5.

[835] Elizabeth P. Benson, *Maya World* (New York: Thomas G. Crowell Company, 1967), 83, makes the same argument that, "whereas Maya sculpture had a narrow range of subject matter, mural painting was apparently much freer and more telling."

how each of these thematic alternatives, albeit in very uneven ways, is present in Monte Albán's monumental visual displays.

In any case, the first sub-option—which entails the representation of deities and narrative sequences that have a decidedly "mythical" character insofar as the protagonists are other-than-human and the circumstances presumably belong to some otherworldly era or dimension—finds a prime exemplar in the marvelous murals of the Tepantitla complex at Teotihuacan. Described as "didactic, directing attention to the city's principal deities, especially the Great Goddess," the well-preserved Tepantitla murals present a scene of Tlalocan, an Aztec paradise dedicated to Tlaloc, the rain god, and visited only infrequently by mortals, in which lively, tiny figures frolic in bountiful springs that issue forth from a sacred mountain or *altépetl*, all beneath a huge image of the Great Goddess.[836] This is, in other words, an idealized otherworldly context, significant especially by its contrast to the mixed precarities of the earthly world.[837]

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[836] Mary Ellen Miller, "Murals," in ed. Carrasco, *The Oxford Encylopedia of Mesoamerican Cultures*, vol. 2, 350. Also see Mary Ellen Miller, *The Art of Mesoamerica from Olmec to Aztec* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986), 76-77; and Esther Pasztory, *The Murals of Tepantitla, Teotihuacan* (New York: Garland, 1974). Note additionally that Alfonso Caso, "El paraíso terrenal en Teotihuacan," *Cuadernos Americanos*, I, no. 6 (1946): 127-36 (cited by Kubler, *The Art and Architecture of Ancient America*, 66), interprets the Tepantitla mural scene as the souls of the blessed in the land of the Aztec rain god, Tlalcoan. But several interpreters, including Pasztory and Miller, caution against assessing the Tepantitla murals as an idyllic paradise by noting, along with the quaintly frolicking supernaturals, the depiction of human figures who are apparently being sacrificed or "fed" to the sacred mountain, with their blood flowing down and transforming into the life giving waters. On these Tepantitla murals, also see Eduardo Matos Moctezuma, "Configuration of th Sacred Precinct of Mexico-Tenochtitlan," in eds. Fash and López Luján, *The Art of Urbanism*, 428-29.

[837] Regarding my debatable utilization of the Tepantitla murals as an example of the depiction of an idealized otherworldly (mythological) context, 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), 56, notes that, "Those minature persons [in the Tepantitla mural] are all dressed and clearly belong to the Teotihuacan social and political world"—in which case these murals might seem to be a better example of the commemoration of this-worldly than otherworldly (mythological) circumstances. But Pasztory's wider comments suggest (to me) the scene is of a paradise to which Teotihuacanos aspire rather than a record of the world in which they actually live—in which case we can see the Tepantitla murals as presenting a kind of primordial (mythical) model rather than a this-worldly lived reality.

The second heuristic sub-option, which finds preeminent exemplification in the Maya murals of Bonampak and of Cacaxtla, entails depictions of veristic human figures operating in the normal world, so to speak. At the former site, the most sophisticated of any extant Maya Classic wall paintings portray interactions among literally hundreds of individual Maya lords, all presumably representative of actual historical individuals and most glossed with the specific dates. An indubitable example of Ricoeur's notion of narrative, the Bonampak murals present a sustained storiological sequence across three rooms.[838] Paintings in the first room show "a carefully constructed view of life at court;"[839] and Room 2, which was decisive in undermining older stereotypes of "the peaceful Maya," is devoted to a single battle scene in which dozens of combatants charge into the fray, banners and weapons held high, delivering and receiving blows as they dismember some enemies and take others captive.[840] Extraordinarily adept at rendering the contours and movements of the human body, these monumental works capture, like no others, "the spirit of agony and victory" that was experienced in the context of actual battles.[841] And at Cacaxtla, in the Valley of Tlaxcala hundreds of miles north of the Maya region, there is a roughly contemporaneous "Battle Mural" that has been assessed as "the most grisly to come to light in the ancient New World."[842] In Mary Miller description of the viciously one-sided

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[838] Explaining how the Bonampak murals depict a sustained narrative sequence across three rooms, Mary Ellen Miller, *Maya Art and Architecture* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1999), 174, opines that "the paintings are more visually narrative than any other Precolumbian work of art." Also see Mary Ellen Miller, *The Murals of Bonampak* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986). William A. Saturno, "Centering the Kingdom, Centering the King: Maya Creation and Legitimation at San Bartolo," in eds. Fash and López Luján, *The Art of Urbanism*, 129, is explicit (and typical) in arguing that the Bonampak murals depict "historical events" that legitimate the heir to the throne of Bonampak.

[839] Miller, "Murals," 351.

[840] Miller, *Maya Art and Architecture*, 174-75.

[841] Miller, *Maya Art and Architecture*, 171.

[842] Miller, "Murals," 351. Miller, ibid., dates both the Bonampak and Cacaxtla murals to the late eighth century.

combat between armies that are identified by distinctive physiognomies and regalia, Central Mexican warriors annihilate their apparently Maya adversaries:

> "Aggressors have cut one of their victims right in half; another crumples as he cradles his own entrails... In the grim toughness of the faces of the Central Mexican warriors, one reads the seriousness with which the painters treat their hardness. Yet some of the defeated Maya howl in agony: a standing noble (perhaps noble woman, based on costume) grasps the arrow stuck in his cheek as blood streams down the face."[843]

While Miller issues the important caveat that, "Like Bonampak's battle painting, the Cacaxtla painting is sometime mistaken for a snapshot of war rather than the carefully constructed ideological image that it is,"[844] these murals instantiate the second sub-option inasmuch as they depict humans protagonists acting on the earthly stage.

Additionally, however, regarding the third heuristic sub-option, while the Bonampak and Cacaxtla murals do provide detailed renditions of palace life and battlefield episodes, the former especially also supplies "the most realistic representations of many rituals known otherwise only from texts and laconic representations."[845] That is to say, more extensive than the record of daily activities or even specific battles is the depiction of the attenuate ceremonial practices that precede and follow those martial encounters. Reminiscent of the processional scenes in Programs B and A at Monte Albán, Bonampak's Room 1 shows a line of standing lords in white mantles approaching a royal family, including a small child, assembled on a large throne.[846] These subordinate figures are "presumably paying their taxes and cementing their loyalty to the royal family at the same time;"[847] and the text below notes an installation into office, possibly of the child, as well as noting the dedication of the building in 791 CE. The north wall of this first

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[843] Miller, *Maya Art and Architecture*, 181.

[844] Miller, *Maya Art and Architecture*, 180.

[845] Miller, Maya Art and Architecture, 171.

[846] Schele and Miller, *The Blood of Kings*, 158, plates 38b, 38c, 38d and 38e, show the paintings on the respective east, south, west and north walls of Bonampak's Building 1.

[847] Miller, *Maya Art and Architecture*, 172.

room also includes images of three principal lords preparing for celebration and dance, the actual performance of which is depicted on the south wall where Maya musicians and "regional governors" flank the dancers in ways that seem to be "attempts to represent sound itself in the drummer's hands fluttering hands."[848] Room 3, on the other side of the central battle scene, which is itself replete with images of captives being prepared for ritual sacrifice, is again devoted to ceremonial activities that have been described as "a final orgy of autosacrifice and captive dismemberment."[849] Here recalling images from the great Danzante Wall, "whirling lords have pierced their penises, and blood collects on the white diaper-like cloth at the groin while captives led in from the side are slaughtered at the center of the south wall."[850]

In other words, while Bonampak's Room 2 battlefield scenes may generate the most attention, the considerably larger share of the full composition is devoted to rendering, neither otherworldly nor worldly exploits and activities, but rather explicitly ceremonial enactments, or what I term second-order "meta-commemorative events," insofar as these are painted commemorations of ritual events that are themselves commemorative of the ceremonial events preceding and following the actual battle (which is likewise a highly ritualized occasion).[851]

In sum, to be sure, the highly elaborate murals of Tepantitla, Cacaxtla and Bonampak all include, in uneven measure, images of (1) deities and otherworldly episodes, (2) human beings involved in this-worldly episodes and (3) depictions of ritual episodes. These three heuristic possibilities are by no means discrete silos. Nevertheless, turning attention now to Monte Albán, differentiating among this triad of provisional alternatives will help us to see ways in which the

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[848] Miller, *Maya Art and Architecture*, 174.

[849] Miller, *Maya Art and Architecture*, 176.

[850] Miller, *Maya Art and Architecture*, 177.

[851] Schele and Miller, *The Blood of Kings*, 38, finetune the depiction of ritual by suggesting that Bonampak exemplifies a broader pattern wherein "the Maya focused attention on three moments in the continuous sequence of ritual experience: the inceptive, the progressive, and the completive."

ritual-architectural commemoration of various sacred historical episodes (priority II-B) is distinct within ancient Mesoamerica and, even more, within the wider history of religions.

3. Commemorations of Mythico-Historic Episodes at Monte Albán: Emphasizing Recollections of Earthly and Ceremonial Occasions

Imperfect as this three-part distinction among the ritual-architectural commemoration of (1) otherworldly episodes, (2) this-worldly episodes and (3) ritual episodes may be, it nonetheless provides a heuristic means of making some significant observations concerning both the history of ideas about Monte Albán and the exercise of the sacred history priority (II-B) in the ancient Zapotec capital. Revisiting the earlier discussions of the Danzante Wall, the Building J "conquest slabs," and Programs B and A with this line of hermeneutical questioning in mind, again brings to light the overwhelming and timeworn consensus, which is as old as the systematic study of the site, that Monte Albán's major public displays are largely "historical" insofar as they record the earthly activities of identifiable human beings rather than "symbolic" in the sense of depicting supernaturals and mythic storylines. In that sense, then it is option two—the commemoration of this-worldly episodes—that might seem to be the first priority.

But this prevailing agreement as to the largely historical content of these monumental displays, instead of resolving all debate, also forces to attention major qualifications of several sorts. Some caveats are obvious and predictable, but others are unanticipated and not yet sufficiently appreciated. Accordingly, after a first sub-section that reiterates the pervasiveness of the assumption of historicity, a second sub-section inventories four of the most important provisos to the plain recording of empirical historical occurrences; then a third sub-section concentrates on a fifth qualification, which I regard as the most signal exception to that primarily historigraphic emphasis—namely, the atypically large percentage of Monte Albán displays that are devoted to memorializing explicitly ceremonial occasions such as processions, inaugurations and human sacrifices. In addressing these matters I cannot help but prefigure the forthcoming discussion of the ritual-architecture commemoration of individuals; but, for now, I work to hold the focus on the commemoration of episodes and actions.

a. Prevailing Assumptions of "Historical" Content: An Overwhelming Preoccupation with Human Actors and Actions

By way of appreciating one of the few constants in the disputatious history of ideas about Monte Albán, consider first the tension between the first two typological sub-options: pictorial and iconographic depictions of *otherworldly mythic episodes* versus those of *this-worldly human and historical episodes*. On the one hand, as I illustrated in the extended background sections of this chapter, this is a commonplace query that has occurred to nearly every investigator since Guillermo Dupaix. But, other hand, it is a distinction that leads us to several major qualifications with respect the ways in which the public monuments of Monte Albán do—and do not—reflect the sorts of commemorations of sacred historical episodes that historians of religions observe in so many other cross-cultural contexts.

The nearly universal presumption that the highly distinctive Danzante figures, while weirdly postured and proportioned, depict mortal men rather than gods or mythic culture heroes provides perhaps the most telling evidence of the consensus. Recall that, in 1806, Dupaix, for instance, assessed the numerous Danzante carvings that he encountered as "courtiers in mourning;"[852] Juan B. Carriedo, in 1840, described them as "characters with royal tiaras;"[853] in 1895, William Henry Holmes, characterized them as "figures of men in very low, crude relief;"[854] and even the standard misnomers of "dancers" and "swimmers" presume they depict people. In 1902, Leopoldo Batres too assumed the Danzantes represent men not mythological beings, while the associated inscriptions deal with "legends in historical passages" or

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[852] *Expediciones Acerca de los Antiguos Monumentos de la Nueva España (1805-1808), por Guillermo Dupaix,* ed. Alcina Franch, 108-10; discussed by Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 163, 174.

[853] Carriedo, *Descripción de una Fortaleza Zapoteca, Oaxaca*; discussed by Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 163, 174.

[854] Holmes, *Archaeological Studies Among the Ancient Cities of Mexico*, pt. II, 223-24.

"historically religious reliefs;"[855] Constantine Rickards and Walter Lehmann followed indigenous locals in referring to them as "Aztec" warriors on the march;[856] and, in the 1930s, Agustín Villagra, paying special attention to the "hieroglyphs indicating their names,"[857] also surmised that the humanoid figures represent specific historical individuals.[858] Alfonso Caso's views on the Danzantes, while eccentric in many respects, likewise presumed the carved slabs portray human beings, whether buffoons, jesters, indigenous magnates or perhaps sick persons who had come to the mountaintop site in search of a cure.[859] All of the many scholars who accept Michael Coe's 1962 posit that the Danzantes are tortured captives, while less insistent on the individuated identity of the figures, are certain the orthostats represent humiliated humans.[860] And thus when, in the context of his 2011 stunningly iconoclastic reinterpretation of the Danzantes, Javier Urcid asserts that the distinctively postured images represent identifiable, once-living-and-breathing Oaxacan individuals that is a major point of continuity in his otherwise radically revisionist proposal.[861]

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[855] Batres, *Exploraciones de Monte Albán*, 15; quoted by Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writin*g, 31.

[856] Rickards, *The Ruins of Mexico* (1910) and Walter Lehmann, *Aus den Pyramidenstädten in Alt-Mexiko* (Berlin: Verlag von Reimar Hobbin, 1933), both cited by Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 163.

[857] Villagra, "Los Danzantes: piedras grabadas del Montículo L, Monte Albán, Oaxaca," 155, 158; discussed by Scott, *The Danzantes of Monte Albán*, 22.

[858] There are, by the way, only infrequent (and not well substantiated) suggestions that the Danzantes were women rather than men. For instance, German ornithologist and explorer Johann Wilhelm von Müller, *Reisen in den Vereinigten Staaten, Canada, und Mexiko* (Leipzig: F.A. Brockhaus, 1864-65), refers to them as "pregnant women;" and Karen O. Bruhns, "The Olmec Queens," *Yumtziloh*, vol. 11, no. 2 (1999): 163-189, calls them "Olmec queens." Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 163, cites both those sources.

[859] Caso, "Las exploraciones en Monte Albán: Temporada 1931-1932;" *Obras* reprint, vol. 2, 184.

[860] Coe, *Mexico*, 95-96.

[861] See Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 216-24.

Likewise with respect to the Building J "conquest slabs," Caso faces little resistance to his posit, first leveled in the 1930s, that the carved panels are precise and specific historical records that reference the conquest of particular towns in the surrounding Valley of Oaxaca.[862] For decades nearly all Oaxacanists reaffirm that aspect of Caso's interpretation while, by contrast, very few are persuaded by Howard Leigh's counter-assertion that the inverted heads on the carved panels represent "celestial deities passing under the earth (the mountain glyph) in order to resume their heavenly procession the following day," an alternative reading that does presuppose the depiction of an otherworldly narrative.[863] And again, when Urcid's finally puts in doubt the seldom questioned assumption that Building J was the primary location for the so-termed conquest slabs—which in his view were originally designed for a Pe-phase façade that was cotaneous and complementary with the main Danzante Wall—this a drastically divergent hypothesis that nevertheless retains the basic premise that the featured protagonists are a combination of fully historical soldiers, or "fallen heroes," and "actual rulers of Monte Albán" who are being venerating in "an ancestor memorial."[864]

Finally, the checkered history of interpretation of the "South Platform cornerstones," though presenting a series of ill-informed and discrepant alternatives, is predicated on the constant assumption that the main protagonists are human beings who are involved in entirely earthly activities. Concurring with Batres that there are several unmistakable images of bound prisoners, Caso, for instance, proposed in 1928 that the eight monoliths found along the base of the great platform mound belonged to a unified program that, not unlike the conquest slabs, "had been built to commemorate the victories that Monte Albán accomplished over the different

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[862] See Caso, *Exploraciones en Oaxaca; quinta y sexta temporadas 1936-1937*, *Obras* reprint, vol. 3, 15; and Caso "Calendario y escritura de las antiguas culturas de Monte Albán."

[863] Leigh, "Zapotec Glyphs," 3-6. Recall that Paddock, "Oaxaca in Ancient Mesoamerica," 119, is among the few to entertain seriously Leigh's interpretation, and that, by contrast, Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 49-56, summarizes, and largely dismisses, Leigh's brief remarks on the Monte Albán inscriptions.

[864] See Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 157-62.

places named inside the 'hill' glyph at the bottom of each of these stelae."[865] More tentative than Caso, Jorge Acosta concurred that content of the carvings was largely earthly and historical.[866] Joyce Marcus, as we saw, presented in the 1980s and 1990s a series of increasingly elaborate interpretations of the South Platform carvings—one set of which "apparently depicts Period IIIa rulers and their captives and conquests"[867] and another set that she sees as recounting Teotihuacan ambassadors lending their stamp of approval to the inauguration of a Zapotec lord[868]—but all of whom are identifiable human actors involved in temporal, even datable, historical activities. And when Urcid blasts all of those interpretations with his revolutionary and compelling proposal that these orthostats had actually been designed for and situated in much earlier Program B and A displays, which had nothing to do with the South Platform, even he does not challenge the standard assumption that both the subordinate and primary figures are human actors undertaking and recounting worldly activities.[869]

In sum, one fixed point in the otherwise tumultuous history of Monte Albán's major public displays is that they depict, overwhelming, this-worldly protagonists and events. In this respect, then, I simply reaffirm a predictable and unremarkable conclusion. However, rather than settling the issue of the means and motivations for the ritual-architectural commemoration of sacred history (priority II-B) at the ancient capital, that consensus opens the way to numerous less obvious observations and intriguing qualifications. And, for present purposes, I highlight five especially noteworthy stipulations, each of which lends greater specificity to the relevance of this priority at Monte Albán.

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[865] Caso, *Las esteles zapotecas*, *Obras* reprint vol. 2, 60-61; quoted by Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 307.

[866] Acosta, "Exploraciones arqueológicas en Monte Albán, XVIII temporada, 1958." This paragraph relies heavily on the summary of Acosta's views on the South Platform cornerstones presented in Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 307-10.

[867] Marcus, "Stone Monuments and Tomb Murals of Monte Albán IIIa," 137.

[868] Marcus, "Teotihuacan Visitors on Monte Albán Monuments and Murals," 176.

[869] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 279-408.

b. Four Qualifications: Authoritarian, Mythologized, Cosmogrammatic and Didactic Depictions of Historic Episodes

As noted, then, Eduard Seler's turn-of-the-century supposal that Oaxacan iconography was devoted primarily to supernatural, mythological and "religious" storylines was largely and permanently supplanted by assumptions that ancient Oaxacans were most of all intent on commemorating events that had actually happened on earth.[870] Yet, at the same time, along with the prevailing consensus that Monte Albán's iconographic displays are "historical" rather than "symbolic," the academic literature, also as noted, is replete with admonitions that these pictographic renditions of history are far from objective. Reechoing Enrique Florescano's comments on the role of colonial-era "primordial titles" and *lienzos* in "the formation of the indigenous memory," everyone agrees that these large-scaled public exhibits are highly partisan, deliberately polemical and aggressively "socially instrumental" renditions of the past.[871] The creators' defeats and setbacks, which no doubt happened, are seldom worthy of inclusion. In perhaps the most aggressively self-serving manipulations of history, or "strategic tinkering with the past,"[872] those reliefs that (seem to) depict powerful Teotihuacanos deferring to Zapotec rulers, in strong likelihood, represent events that never actually happened.[873] Accordingly, Florescano's observation that these colonial-era pictographic documents "are bearers of an

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[870] See, for instance, Eduard Seler, "Deities and Religious Conceptions of the Zapotecs," in Eduard Seler et al., *Mexican and Central America Antiquities, Calendar Systems, and History*, trans. Charles P. Bodwitch, Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 28 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1904), 302-5. And for remarks about Seler's broader influential views about Oaxaca writing, see Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 32-33.

[871] Florescano, "Los títulos primordiales y la formación de la memoria indígena en los pueblos de Nueva España," 285ff.

[872] Recall that I borrow this apt phrase from Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society*, 21.

[873] Here I refer to the afore-discussed (but contested) assertions in Marcus, "Teotihuacan Visitors on Monte Albán Monuments and Murals," that the "hidden carvings" among the South Platform cornerstones and the Lápida de Bazán represent Teotihuacan ambassadors deferring to Zapotec lords—a circumstance that Marcus acknowledges was either massaged by Monte Albán elites or perhaps even largely made-up.

ethnocentric vision"[874] certainly applies as well to Monte Albán's monumental displays. Always these stone panoramas are designed to support the interests of elites who are, after all, the only ones with resources and wherewithal to construct such elaborate, and thus expensive, public works.[875]

The unassailable selectivity and tendentiousness of Monte Albán's public displays has, however, numerous somewhat less obvious ramifications for how sacred history is both choreographed by elites and experienced by non-elites—of which I accentuate five. First, while I have argued that Monte Albán was the sort of pluricultural context that tolerated and even encouraged both an abundance of highly disparate conceptions of divinity and the viability of numerous different community-specific cosmogonies, the renditions of history in these iconographic works are authoritarian and homogenizing in the extreme. That is to say, rather than holding open numerous interpretations of past events, these displays enforce a single elitist and prejudicial version of those happenings. Thus where I suggested that ritual-architectural allusions to multiple cosmogonies may well have functioned as front-half components of allurement, these narrative depictions of post-cosmogonic segments of the sacred history are the very quintessence of back-half components of radical new information insofar as they present a prescribed version of events that carries with it a set of mandatory obligations. While these displays reflect specially elite interests, they are presented as unequivocally relevant and applicable to all segments of Monte Albán society. The insights and obligations expressed in

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[874] Florescano, "Los títulos primordiales y la formación de la memoria indígena en los pueblos de Nueva España," 285; my translation.

[875] Regarding the more general observation that among the foremost limitations of architecture as evidence for ascertaining religious sensibilities in a context like pre-Columbian Monte Albán is the large extent to which monumental constructions reflect the decidedly elitist priorities of those social constituencies that have the resources and wherewithal to build such structures, see Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, vol. I, chap. 9, "Studying Buildings by Decision or Default: Architecture's Evidential Promise." A fuller inventory of the workings of myth and ritual across the Zapotec capital would be more balanced; but the public displays are, in this respect, decidedly elitist and, in that respect, quite one-dimensional.

these pictographic works are not presented as simply viable alternatives, but rather as the non-negotiable truth of the whole city. This is official, canonical history imposed upon all.[876]

Regarding a second qualification, while the versions of history represented in the elitist wall displays are positively grounded in empirical events, the notion of "mythologized history" applies in two especially important ways. Javier Urcid speaks to both these means of massaging, manipulating or "mythologizing" these monumental façades when he writes,

> "Specific events, in which deities or human were protagonists, were recorded within the general frame of the Mesoamerican calendar… In one sense, the content was earthly, narrating dates, lives of individuals, and places of conquests; in another it was mythological, describing supernaturals and the dates when rituals were performed."[877]

For one, then, though we find in Monte Albán's carved tableaus nothing resembling the fully otherworldly paradise that is showcased in the Tepantitla murals, they are "mythologized" insofar as there are fairly abundant depictions of deities and deified ancestors. Consistent with frequent claims of the interpenetration of the natural and supernatural in indigenous contexts,[878] the primary concern for depicting earthly events does not preclude the inclusion of supernaturals—who are considered a integral part of the natural world, whether in the past, present or future. For instance, Caso's assertion that the main theme of the "conquest slabs" is memorializing specific military victories does not preclude his discernment of representations of

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[876] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 164-66, argue that the Danzante Wall and Pe phase façade of finely incised orthostats present a "communal" form of authority, which is in tension with more "exclusionary" forms of authority; but even if that is the case, the conception of those façades is authoritarian insofar as they represent the elite perspective on broadly collective, inclusive authority.

[877] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 42-43.

[878] Though I do not agree with her characterization of the problem, Kay Almere Read, *Time and Sacrifice in the Aztec Cosmos* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indian University Press, 1998), 32-35, for instance, takes issue with the application of "the dichotomy of the sacred and the profane" to Mesoamerican contexts, arguing instead that, for Aztecs, "the sacred" is a ubiquitous feature of "the ordinary and everyday world of the profane."

Quetzalcoatl in the god's guide as Ehecatl on the same façade.[879] Or on the Danzante Wall, notwithstanding prevailing references to very specific historical people and circumstances, Urcid demonstrates also how depictions of those empirical features are laced and elaborated with allusions to transhistorical phenomena like the rain god and to apotheosized ancestors who are "the conduits" or channels through which oracles were made;[880] and the same inclusion of transhuman authorities applies likewise to Urcid's hypothesized (re)construction of the Pe-phase façade of "finely incised orthostats."[881] In brief, while the depiction of gods is ancillary rather than primary, that human protagonists were working in concert with deities and divinized ancestors is an important component of nearly every display.

Moreover, for two, the empirical historical content of nearly all these wall displays is "mythologized" by the manipulation of dates in ways that position key events at calendrically significant times. Marcus, for instance, notes that, because Mixtecs and Zapotec rulers were more prone than those of other Mesoamerican peoples to rely on names taken from the 260-day calendar, they were also especially likely to "fudge their birthdays" so that they correspond to "lucky dates."[882] More specifically, Urcid asserts that the configuration of the main Danzante façade expresses the notion (whether empirically accurate or not) that battles were scheduled according to cosmologically propitious times, which thereby supports a widened understanding

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[879] See Caso, *Exploraciones en Oaxaca; quinta y sexta temporadas 1936-1937*, *Obras* reprint, vol. 3, 19. And Caso, "Zapotec Writing and Calendar" (1965), 936-40, in the context of his final opinions on the Building J conquest slabs, makes the somewhat strange claim that the inverted heads "represent the lords *or gods* conquered by Monte Albán" (ibid., 937; italics added). Also while Caso was convinced that most of individuals depicted were mortals, Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 307, comments on Caso's willingness to interpret some of the elaborately dressed personages in Monte Albán's visual displays as deities or their impersonators.

[880] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 218, 222, 224.

[881] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 157-62.

[882] On the naming of Mixtec and Zapotec nobles, as contrasted with Aztecs and Mayas, see Marcus, *Mesoamerican Writing Systems*, 202-10. The notion that many Mixtec and Zapotec rulers adjusted their actual birthdates to correspond with a "lucky" day from the 260-day calendar that fell or on or near their actual date of birth is a recurrent theme in that discussion; and the expression "fudged their birthdays" appears on ibid., 220.

of war as "part of a ritual cycle aimed at ensuring the well-being of communities."[883] Similarly, Gordon Whittaker's focus on the epigraphy of the South Platform cornerstones leads him to suggest "a kind of ritual systematization of history" wherein "the Zapotecs ordered events to fit the close or beginning of a recurring four-year subcycle," or, alternatively, even when that was not possible in actual practice, they opted to record those events as though they had adhered to calendrically efficacious four-year intervals.[884] Or adding even more specificity to that notion of "cosmocized chronology," Urcid argues that Program A presents nine of Lord 13F's military campaigns as though they were "calendrically prescribed events at intervals that are multiples of 2 (4, 8, 12, 52),"[885] at least two of which correspond to Calendar Round completions.[886] In sum, then, presentations of empirical history are manipulated and "mythologized" not only via depictions of the divine sponsorship of specific military episodes, but also via the (appearance of) strategic synchronizations of worldly activities and cosmologically consequential dates.

Regarding a third qualification, I reiterate here my hesitations in characterizing these public displays as "monumental narratives" in the Ricoeurian sense of "followable stories" with a logically linked beginning, middle and end in favor of appraising them as "cosmograms," which express in diagrammatic form numerous foundational Zapotec ideas and priorities. Unlike the almost cinematic realism of the battlefield scenes in Bonampak's Room 2 or Cacaxtla's "Battle Mural," the Monte Albán pictographic exhibits are *not* anecdotic historical narratives, but rather elliptical and graphic allusions to historic, especially military events;[887] the displays point

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[883] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 221; my translation.

[884] Whittaker, "The Structure of the Zapotec Calendar," 120 (italics added); quoted by Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 315.

[885] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 399. Urcid, ibid., 397, notes that "In program A, both texts and images convey information about different times, although the various processions confronting the main personage could have occurred in the same built environment." (The term "cosmocized chronology" is mine not Urcid's.)

[886] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 399.

[887] Recall, by the way, that, as an imperfect rule, I follow Perrin, *The Nature of the New Testament*, 27-28, in using "history" and "historical" to refer to everything that "actually happened in the past," while "historic" is more selective in referring to those persons and events

to historic events without actually depicting those circumstances. Consequently, irrespective of Urcid's persuasive comments about a prescribed "reading order" for each of these façades,[888] instead of free-standing or self-explanatory storylines that any onlooker could navigate, these visual displays are more like schematic mnemonic devices, the "reading" of which must be fleshed out by well-informed intelligentsia or raconteurs. Though they were in some respects legible to lay audiences, nuanced appreciation of these "public" works of iconography required a level of literacy that was, so it seems, confined to the upper classes.

Again the Danzante displays provide the most revealing example of the only-partly-narrative status of these polysemic iconographic creations. Urcid, for instance, argues, on the one hand, that "the pictorial narratives in and on Building L-sub probably did *not* commemorate a single event;"[889] the six-rowed scheme does *not* really tell the sort of story that has a running plotline or that recounts a sequence of historical or mythical events. Rather, on the other hand, instead of chronicling a course of events, either historical or mythical, the Danzante Wall is a kind of diagrammatic collage or roster, if you will, that outlines the specifics of a hierarchical military fraternity as well as a set of more general propositions concerning the necessity of war and sacrifice as crucial means of maintaining obligatory, perhaps "covenantal," relations between humans and gods.[890] According to Urcid and Joyce, the same constellation of priorities is evident in the Pe-phase façade of finely incised orthostats, which therefore also qualifies as a cosmogram.[891] By contrast, the reuse of those "conquest slabs" on Building J issues in a more plainly documentary record of "the names of towns that probably were conquered by Monte

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that have an ongoing significance for subsequent generations. It is, then, more accurate to say that the Bonampak and Cacaxtla murals depict "*historic* episodes" than "*historical* episodes."

[888] As noted earlier in the chapter, on the boustrophedon "reading order" of the Danzante Wall, which finds a parallel in the Pe phase façade of "the finely inscribed orthostats" (or "conquest slabs), see Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 183-85; and Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 153.

[889] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 224; my translation, italics added.

[890] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 221-25.

[891] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 157-64.

Albán,"[892] which is much less expansive in its treatment of the cosmological underpinnings of war and sacrifice, and therefore less aptly described as a "cosmogram." Still, however, the reliefs on Building J provide a highly elliptic, encyclopedic synopsis that alludes to the specific place and time of great victories without providing any of the Bonampak-like narrative details about how those victories were obtained. And that is likewise the case for Programs B and A where we encounter carefully dated references to the historic accomplishments of Lord 5B and Lord 13F without any storiological elaboration.[893] In short, the Monte Albán iconographic displays are not really well "emploted" narratives (in Ricoeur's sense), but they do provide schematic allusions to actual historical events.

Regarding a fourth qualification, while, as noted, historians of religions frequently insist that believing communities are intent not only on remembering their sacred histories but also "*reactualizing*" or "*reliving*" those "true, real and exemplary" episodes, I see that prospect as germane to Monte Albán's public displays only in highly attenuated ways. In a classic Eliade formulation, myths provide the narrative models that are reenacted in ritual; and ritual thereby becomes the paramount strategy whereby humans attain "access to the sacred" via periodic escapes from messy and mundane (profane) daily life into the perfection of "primordial (sacred) time."[894] In ritual, according to that Eliadean view, people not only "look back" on the precedent-setting "Time before time," but are, moreover, afforded the refreshing and enlivening possibility of existing, at least for the duration of the ceremonial occasion, in a timeless era. Often we are advised, for instance, that Christian communion is, beyond simply an occasion for remembering a long-ago event, an opportunity to "relive" and make oneself present at Jesus's mythico-historic Last Supper; and we noted how the conception of Aztec human sacrifice atop the Templo Mayor as a periodic reenactment of the mythic birth of Huitzilopochtli provides a

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[892] Caso, *Exploraciones en Oaxaca; quinta y sexta temporadas 1936-1937*, *Obras* reprint, vol. 3, 15; my translation.

[893] See Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, chap. 5, "The Carved Monoliths from the South Platform at Monte Albán," or my summaries of Urcid's interpretations of Programs B and A earlier in the chapter.

[894] Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, chap. 2, "Sacred Time and Myths."

quintessential Mesoamerican exemplar of that sort of ritualized resimulation.[895] Nevertheless, while I have full confidence that such participatory reversals of time were being experienced in other Monte Albán ritual venues, there is little warrant to imagine that sort of "escape from history" and "reactualization of the primordial past" in connection with these monumental iconographic works.

To the contrary, the literature on Monte Albán presents no clear counterpart to the famed Aztec story of their patron deity's birth and slaughter of his siblings as a kind of mythological model that is reenacted in Zapotec human sacrifice. Perhaps such a Oaxacan parallel does exist; but the extant data suggests that non-elite engagements with the public displays of Monte Albán have the more prosaic character of learning and remembering than experiential "reenactment." Deliberately partisan, these are didactic iconographic accounts that school pre-Columbian audiences in the particulars of the military hierarchy, the meticulously dated accomplishments of rulers, and the cosmological necessities of war and sacrifice; but these façades do not, it seems, provide an impetus for onlookers to "relive" the mythico-historic military triumphs of their ancestors. In fact, the meticulous dating of every episode and protagonist belies the notion that these displays, which definitely were expressions "indigenous time reckoning,"[896] were vehicles for participation in "the timeless." Consequently, while "reactualizing" rather than just remembering one's sacred history is a very important corrective in many contexts (other settings in the Zapotec capital included), I have to reaffirm standard assessments that these major public displays, albeit mythologized and tendentious, facilitate something more like a historical education than participatory flights into the primordial time.

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[895] See, for instance, Carrasco, "Templo Mayor: The Aztec Vision of Place," 284-85; or Broda, "Templo Mayor as Ritual Space," 45.

[896] See, for instance, see Clark and Colman, "Time Reckoning and Memorials in Mesoamerica," to which I alluded earlier in the chapter.

c. A Fifth Qualification: Emphases on the Meta-Commemoration of the Ritual Commemoration of Historic Episodes

A fifth observation to emerge from the tripartite heuristic distinction among ritual-architectural commemorations of otherworldly, this-worldly and/or ritual episodes—namely, ancient Oaxacans' exceptional enthusiasm for the third of those sub-options—deserves somewhat fuller comment. In fact, from the perspective of the broader comparative study of religion, the most distinctive feature of Monte Albán's public displays is a preoccupation with memorializing ceremonial occasions that supersedes that of monumentalizing either historical or mythological episodes. Indeed, while the pictorial depiction of ritual activities, especially processions,[897] is by no means rare within the wider history of religions, one is hard pressed to find either in Mesoamerica or in any cross-cultural context a larger share of iconography that is devoted to commemorating ceremonial performances.

Here we benefit from ritual theorist Ronald Grimes's appeal to literary theorist J. L. Austin's "speech-act theory" as a means of differentiating between that small set of rituals that are "performative" insofar as they actually accomplish something versus the much larger set of rituals that are like Austin's notion of "constatives" insofar as they simply refer to or describe social circumstances or events.[898] For our purposes, inaugurations or coronations provide the most salient example of the former category (i.e., "performative rituals") because, in the ritualized announcement that so-and-so is henceforth the king, that person actually becomes the king. In these cases, which conflate the later two sub-options in the tripartite heuristic distinction, the ritual performance actually corresponds to a this-worldly transformation wherein

[897] In chapter 8 in relation to "the theater priority" (III-A), under the heading of ambulatory modes of ritual-architectural presentation, I will return the topic of processions in cross-cultural, Mesoamerican and Oaxacan contexts.

[898] See Ronald L. Grimes, "Infelicitous Performances and Ritual Criticism," in his *Ritual Criticism: Case Studies in Its Practice, Essays on Its Theory* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1990), 191-209, draws on J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), in order to extend Austin's notion of "performative utterances" versus "constative utterances" into a distinction between "performative rituals" versus "constative rituals."

an individual is immediately elevated to the status of sovereign.[899] Weddings, or the confirmation of marital alliances, are likewise *performative rituals* that have the immediate this-worldly consequence of uniting two families or lineages.[900] By contrast, the lion's share of ceremonial activities—for instance, processions, the gifting of offerings to a ruler or god, the sacrifice of a captive or the autosacrifice of oneself—are "*constative rituals*" inasmuch as they are ritualized activities that do *not* eventuate in any immediately apparent this-worldly transformation. These sorts of rituals may commemorate or "seal" a worldly circumstance—say, a battlefield victory—but they do not in themselves accomplish that temporal achievement.

While, as always, it may be simpler to collapse Grimes's heuristic distinction between "performative rituals" versus "constative rituals," observing that contrast helps us to appreciate that great majority of sacred historical episodes that are represented in Monte Albán's iconographic displays are not depictions of worldly events, but rather of "constative" ceremonial occasions. In other words, to prefigure a point to which I will return at the end of this sub-section, in very large measure, the images being depicted in the Zapotec capital's monumental carved stone displays are second-order "meta-commemorations" insofar as they illustrate, not actual historical occurrences, but instead ceremonial occasions that are themselves first-order commemorations of historic circumstances that actually transpired earlier and in some other place.

In any case, it is again Urcid's revamped interpretation of the great Danzante Wall that provides the strongest evidence of the more general observation that, for Monte Albán elites,

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[899] Grimes, "Infelicitous Performances and Ritual Criticism," 194-95, explains that, where Austin defines "constative utterances" as those that simply describe something, "performative utterances" are those that do or actually accomplish something. For example, "I hereby name you Queen Mary" or "You are fired!" are "performative utterances" insofar as they actually accomplish those real-world transformations. By the same token, inaugurations or weddings are "performative rituals" that actually and immediately transform the social status of the lead participants.

[900] Regarding the visual commemoration of politically strategic marriage alliances among Mesoamericans, Zapotecs included, see Marcus, *Mesoamerican Writing Systems*, chap. 8, "Royal Marriages."

what is most deserving of pictorial memorialization is neither worldly accomplishments nor mythic stories but, instead, ceremonial occasions. The upright humanoid figures in the first, third and fifth rows of the façade—that is, the naked, oddly postured and seemingly castrated personages that have been subject to so much discussion—according to Urcid, do *not* have those distinctive postures, facial expressions and bloody genitals because they are tortured or deceased captives; alternatively, as we've seen, he assesses them as identifiable members of a hierarchical militia whose most outstanding attribute is their prowess, not in fighting, but rather in ritualizing, specifically ceremonial blood-letting.[901] That is to say, instead of acclaim earned by vanquishing their enemies on the battlefield—where we can be sure they were highly accomplished—these Monte Albán soldiers are deserving of respect and prestige foremost because of their willingness to undertake the painful autosacrifice that was required to maintain the sacred human-divine covenant.[902] Some are, moreover, represented as "impersonators of the god of the Rain," which "implies that within the brotherhood there were military and religious roles," including select warrior priests' who had a ritual facility for attracting or repelling the clouds and rain.[903]

Likewise the recumbent ("swimmer") figures in the second and fourth rows of the facade are, in Urcid's rereading, ancestors who serve in ritual roles as "the conduits through which the oracles were made" and battles were thereby scheduled at propitious times."[904] By the same token, the sixth row is "the paramount tier of senior adults who seemingly formed a council of

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[901] See Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 205-15; Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 166-67; or my summary earlier in the chapter.

[902] See Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 216-19. While the depiction of auto-sacrifice is perhaps a central feature of Urcid's reinterpretation of the Danzantes figures, and while he argues that "there is no doubt that autosacrifice played an essential role in ancient Oaxaca and had an astonishing continuity in the ritual life of the people, something that is evident in the archaeological record and documentary sources of the colonial era," he also alerts us that, "In comparison with the Maya or Mexican art, *auto-sacrifice as a theme of graphic representation is very infrequent in the late Zapotec pictorial corpus*. I only know of three examples that indirectly allude to such a practice..." Ibid., 216; my translation, italics added.

[903] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 220; my translation.

[904] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 218; my translation.

elders," that is, "honorary warriors" who now also contribute to ongoing warfare in ceremonial rather than corporeal ways.[905] Additionally, carved stones along the southeast corner of the basal façade "appear to record the enthronement of two, perhaps three rulers"[906] (which would, therefore, qualify as performative rather than constative rituals). And Urcid notes four smaller and incomplete orthostats with representations of decapitated heads that, via the illustration of the ritual sacrifice of captured enemies, "allude to the result of victorious military campaigns."[907] In short, then, while none of the dozens of different personages in the great Building L-sub tableau is depicted in prosaic or even militaristic activities—none have weapons—virtually all of them are involved in ritual practices or ceremonial support roles. And, furthermore, the rendering of bodies in motion, arranged in a zigzagging boustrophedon sequence, give the entire wall the appearance of a grand ceremonial procession.[908]

Regarding Monte Albán's second major visual display, Urcid and Joyce's iconoclastic hypothesis concerning the original use of the so-termed "conquest slabs" on a Pe-phase (or Late Formative) wall display, which was "at least partially coeval" and "envisioned as complementary" with the Danzantes, leads them to suggest that this was another "ancestor memorial" that was decidedly similar in conception to the slightly earlier Building L-sub façade.[909] Accordingly, while there are no depictions of self-sacrificing warriors of the graphic sort that appear on the Danzante Wall, Urcid and Joyce are able to argue that this largely forgotten Pe-phase composition was another visual expression of "the sacred aspects of warfare, including divining the outcome of battles via contact with ancestors, autosacrifice, human

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[905] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 153.

[906] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 154; fig. 9.3. See also Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 184-86, fig. 15.

[907] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 218; my translation. Also see ibid., 201-3, fig. 25, 224; and Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 154-55, fig. 9.4.

[908] On intimations of processions, see, for instance, Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 183, 186, 206; or Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 153.

[909] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 162.

sacrifice, and the commemoration of heroes."[910] More conventional interpretations of the conquest slabs as they appear in later iterations on Building J, however, provide weaker evidence of this preference for depicting ritual rather than overtly militaristic themes. From the perspective of Caso and the many who follow his lead in seeing the carved panels as schematic historical records related to the conquest of certain towns in the surrounding Valley of Oaxaca, these are the most plainly documentary monuments that, aside from possible depictions of sacrificed enemy leaders, do not really feature ceremonial activities.[911]

Be that as it may, essentially all of the otherwise disparate interpretations of the South Platform cornerstones are predicated on the assumption that they feature multiple ritual processions. Nuancing Batres's observation about bound, and thus apparently conquered, personages on these carved stones, Caso and Acosta, for example, both ascertain one procession that depicts humiliated captives being paraded before a Monte Albán lord and another procession of a very different, less threatening sort wherein figures who carry copal pouches and show no signs of weapons or forcible restraints appear to be "priests" who are paying homage to a ruler who had the attributes and insignia of a god.[912] Joyce Marcus likewise acknowledges two decidedly different agendas, aimed, she thinks, at different audiences—but both rely on the depiction of ceremonial processions. The first, on the broad surfaces of the stones, features a parade of cinched captives, which she sees as a Period IIIA exercise in "vertical propaganda,"

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[910] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 165.

[911] See, for instance, Marcus, "The Conquest Slabs of Building J, Monte Albán," 106-7, for a summary of Caso's interpretation of each of the four main elements of the conquest slabs, the third of which are upside down human heads that Caso regarded as the dead (sacrificed) rulers of subjugated places.

[912] See Caso, *Las esteles zapotecas, Obras* reprint vol. 2, 60-61; or Caso, "Sculpture and Mural Painting of Oaxaca," 857, where he reaffirms his view that Stelae 2, 3, 5, 6, 7 and 8 all depict bound captives being paraded before a Monte Albán ruler while Stela 7 "also depicts, as do Stela 1 and the one known as the 'Plain Stela' [or Estela Lisa], a procession of priests..." And for similar views that some of the "cornerstones" depict a procession of bound captives and others depict a procession of "priests" who are paying homage to a Monte Albán ruler, see Acosta, "Exploraciones arqueológicas en Monte Albán, XVIII temporada, 1958," or, for a summary of Acosta's views, Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 307-10.

directed to commoners, that is consistent with the Period II strategy of intimidation at play in the Building J conquest slabs.[913] By contrast, the depiction on the narrow faces (i.e., the "hidden" surfaces of the carved stones) of eight copal-carrying "Teotihuacano ambassadors" who had traveled to Monte Albán expressly to attend, and thereby lend their support to, the inauguration into rulership and enthronement of a prominent Zapotec lord named 12 Jaguar, is an exercise in "horizontal propaganda" aimed at other elites.[914] Thus, while both agendas are consistent with Marcus's wider view concerning the politically manipulative motives of all of Monte Albán's iconography and writing, she is arguing that, in exchanges between elites and other elites, the presentation of a diplomatic triumph—that is, a ceremonial endorsement from the powerful Central Mexicans—was judged to be the most expeditious means of legitimating authority. And Marcus accentuates the same sort of penchant for memorializing ceremonial encounters between Teotihuacan and Monte Albán rulers in her interpretation of the Lápida de Bazán, another carved slab that was discovered in Mound X.[915]

Additionally, when Urcid delivers his drastically different interpretation of the much earlier use of those carved stones respectively in Programs B and A he does not dispute the timeworn assertion that the featured theme in both cases is procession or, actually, numerous ritual cavalcades.[916] Rejecting the notion that the copal-carrying figures are emissaries from Teotihuacan in favor of their identification as subordinate Zapotec locals, he thinks that Program B depicts six different processions, some trained on deceased Lord 13N and others focused on

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[913] See Marcus, Mesoamerican Writing Systems, 328-29; or Marcus, "Stone Monuments and Tomb Murals of Monte Albán IIIa," 137-38.

[914] See Marcus, *Mesoamerican Writing Systems*, 325-29; Marcus, "A Zapotec Inauguration in Comparative Perspective;" or Marcus and Flannery, *Zapotec Civilization*, 217-21. Also see Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 311-12.

[915] Marcus, "Teotihuacan Visitors on Monte Albán Monuments and Murals," 179.

[916] Again see Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, chap. 5, "The Carved Monoliths from the South Platform at Monte Albán," or my summaries of Urcid's interpretations of Programs B and A earlier in the chapter.

living leader Lord 5B;[917] and Program A, in his view, depicts multiple processions of bound figures, again identified as Oaxacans, either approaching or departing a main figure, Lord 13F.[918] And thus for all that is unique in Urcid's reinterpretation, we are again presented with two more displays that are overwhelmingly devoted to the commemoration of ceremonial ambulations.

In sum, then, perhaps unexpectedly, the paramount episodes in Monte Albán's sacred history—which are, therefore, by far the most deserving of memorialization in monumental stone displays—are not battles or conquests, but rather the ceremonial occasions that confirm those worldly successes. Some of these liturgical episodes, most notably inaugurations, qualify as what Grimes terms "performative rituals" insofar as it is the ceremony itself that actually effects the socio-political transformation of an "ordinary" individual into a Monte Albán sovereign; these are historic as well as ritual occasions.[919] But most are, again in Grimes's terminology, "constative rituals" that confirm a military success or territorial takeover that happened earlier and elsewhere.[920] It is latter and much larger category that I designate as "meta-commemoration," or "meta-memorialization," insofar as the stone iconographic displays are second-order commemorations of ritual occasions that are themselves first-order commemorations of actual earthly episodes. And it is, moreover, I contend, highly notably that this sort of second-order memorialization makes up, far and away, the largest share of the substantive content of Monte Albán's monumental public displays.[921]

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[917] See Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 338 and 341, fig. 5.47, concerning the respective directions of each of the six processions depicted in Program B.

[918] See Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 334. Ibid., 336, fig. 5-43, is a diagram of the full seven-stone Program A; and ibid. 355, fig. 5.58, provides a diagram of the main personage, whom Urcid identifies as Lord 13A and accouterments surrounding him.

[919] On "performative rituals," a term that owes to J. L. Austin's notion of "performative utterances," see Grimes, "Infelicitous Performances and Ritual Criticism," 191-98.

[920] On "constative rituals," see Grimes, "Infelicitous Performances and Ritual Criticism," 194.

[921] Also, by the way, regarding the uneven selection of what sorts of ceremonial occasions to memorialize, Marcus, *Mesoamerican Writing Systems*, 325, makes the plausible assertion that, "During the Classic apogee of Zapotec civilization (perhaps A.D. 200-700), stone monuments

C. Ritual-Architectural Commemorations of Mythical or Mythico-Historic Individuals: Identifiable Rulers, Soldiers, Elders, Ancestors, Captives and Visitors

Turning now to the third main variation on the sacred history priority (II-B)—namely, the ritual-architectural commemorations of mythical or mythico-historic *individuals*—because of its extensive overlap with the commemoration of mythico-historic *episodes*, I can be much briefer. Likewise, this alternative draws us closer to the memorialization of deceased individuals of outstanding stature that will be a topic of concern next chapter in relation to "the politics priority" (II-C) and even greater concern in chapter 7 with respect to the commemoration of the dead (priority II-D). Nonetheless, I persist in the general-to-specific format that inventories this individual-memorializing variation first as a cross-cultural phenomenon, second as a practice that very unevenly present across Mesoamerican, and finally as a habitude that is exercised with great frequency ay Monte Albán.

1. Commemorations of Mythico-Historic Individuals as a Cross-Cultural Phenomenon: Memorializing Who They Are versus What They Did

While abundant sacred architectures are devoted to memorializing particular sacred historical episodes and happenings, in lots of other cases the priority is the acknowledgement of an individual character who played an especially significant role in those activities. Humans and human-like individuals are the most obvious foci of such commemorations; but deities, animals, personified plants and natural features and "other mythical beasts" are likewise relevant contenders. Though the distinction between individuals and their activities is nearly always blurry, it does bring to our attention an importantly different, if somewhat less frequent, morphological possibility.[922]

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rarely showed accession to the throne. Other themes—the conquest of places, the capture of prisoners, royal marriages, and genealogical records—were far more frequently recorded."

[922] I borrow most of the cross-cultural examples in this section from Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, vol. II, chap. 18, a sub-section entitled, "Mythicohistorical Personages: Ritual-Architectural Expressions of Exxcellence."

The Sikh shrines of India, for instance, are known as *Gurudwaras*, that is, doors or seats of the guru, because they are, in almost every case, associated with some particular individual sage or guru.[923] Thus, while early Sikh shrines did not conform to any specific architectural style—some were simply humble residences before a guru sanctified them by his visit or temporary residence there, and other much more elaborate (and more strictly commemorative) shrines were erected a long time after the spot was sanctified by the guru's presence—a shrine's connection to a specific sage was critical. Accordingly, rather than tracing any evolution in architectural style or construction technique, Sadar Surinder Singh Johar considers that the most significant principle of organization for his survey and comparison of Sikh shrines ought to be their respective associations with various renowned gurus—for instance, the shrines of Guru Nakak, the shrines of Guru Arjan Dev, the shrines of Guru Teg Bahadur, etc.[924]

Likewise, a number of Buddhist shrines seem to demonstrate less of a concern to commemorate specific episodes in the Buddha's career, either in his final lifetime or some other realm, say, in the way that those episodes are detailedly depicted in the storiological reliefs in the lower levels of Borobudur,[925] than to praise his person or, at any rate, his personal example (the Dharma). As Indologist Edward Conze notes, *caityas*, a general term for any Buddhist sanctuary or shrine, is "always connected with the person of the Buddha himself, although the connection may be a very indirect one..."[926] In that spirit, then, countless *stupas* or gravemounds (at least

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[923] Pardeed Singh Arshi, *Sikh Architecture in Punjab* (New Delhi: Intellectual Publishing House, 1986), 19-20.

[924] Sardar Surinder Singh Johar, *The Sikh Gurus and their Shrines* (Delhi: Vivek Publishing Company, 1976). Singh Arshi, *Sikh Architecture in Punjab*, 15, contends that because of this principle of organization Johar's work "acquired the character only of a mere inventory of Sikh shrines, and could not serve the need of an architectural study."

[925] Regarding the detailed reliefs of the life of Guatama at Borobudur, which I will address again in chapter 9 with respect to "the contemplation priority" (III-B), see, for instance, Hiram W. Woodward, "Borobudur and the Mirrorlike Mind," *Archaeology* 34 (November-December 1981): 40-47.

[926] Edward Conze, *Buddhism: Its Essence and Development* (New York: Harper and Row, 1951), 79. *Caityas* are similar to *stupas* though originally stupas contained relics of the Buddha while

originally) were constructed to house relics of the Buddha: One of the most famous temples of Indo-China, the Shwedagon Pagoda at Rangoon, for instance, was built specifically to enshrine eight hairs given by Gautama himself to two Buddhist merchants.[927] Subsequently, *stupas* were built to enshrine the remains of other Buddhist sages considered to have transcended the cycles of birth and death, though in these cases as well the most prominent association is apparently between a shrine and, ironically, a selfless individual rather than any specific episode or activity (aside from that of exemplary meditation).[928]

Likewise demonstrating the priority of a kind of cult of personality over that of commemoration of specific events and achievements, the reliquary geography of Late Medieval Europe, particularly in the wake of the post-Tridentine enthusiasm for miracles and relics, was overlaid with dozens of monuments dedicated to specific heroes and heroines of Catholic sacred history.[929] Recalling or reliving the particular eventualities by which a saint earned canonization, which in cases seem to have been nearly forgotten, frequently becomes less urgent than simply, via relics and remains, establishing a direct connection with that holy individual. Even the wide enthusiasm for visiting the Cappella della S. S. Sindome, for instance, which was built in northern Italy specifically to safeguard and display the Holy Shroud of Turin (in spite of the shroud's authenticity having been officially denied by the Church in the later Middle Ages), seems to be born more a generalized veneration for the "person" of Jesus than from any particular event, except perhaps the Resurrection.[930] Instantiating the contrast between this more

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caityas did not; over time, as the Buddha's relics became increasingly difficult to obtain the distinction gradually vanished. See Hirakawa Akira, "Stupa Worship," *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Eliade, vol. 14, 92-96.

[927] See Pe Maung Tin, "The Shwe Dagon Pagoda," *Journal of the Burma Research Society*, vol. 24, no. 1 (1934): 1-91; Short, *History of Religious Architecture*, 98.

[928] Short, *History of Religious Architecture*, 98.

[929] Anthony Blunt, Introduction in ed. Blunt, *Baroque and Rococo Architecture and Decoration*, 10; and Laing, "Central and Eastern Europe," in the same volume, 221, discuss the strong affirmation of saints and relics in the Council of Trent, and the consequent developments in architecture.

[930] Blunt, Introduction in ed. Blunt, *Baroque and Rococo Architecture and Decoration*, 10.

person-specific variation on the sacred history theme and "episode commemoration," in these cases, who Jesus is supersedes what Jesus did.

The morphological possibility of commemorating mythico-historic individuals rather than their specific accomplishments is perhaps illustrated more clearly by less explicitly religious, but exceeding common, life-like statues of military and political leaders, standing motionless, hands at their sides, in parks or in front of civic buildings. Likewise, Washington D.C.'s Lincoln and Jefferson Memorials, or the Washington Monument, are person-specific memorializing edifices that belong to the same morphological genre. This kind of individualized architectural commemorations, usually have more the character of lifetime achievement awards, as it were, than prizes won in a single occasion of glory or distinction. Personalistic monuments of this sort most often express, and then engender, a generalized admiration for the moral fortitude, honesty, strength of personality or wisdom in statecrafting of individual (mythico-) historic leaders without, however, placing in the foreground one specific incident that demonstrates those personal attributes.

Often architecture works, in other words, not unlike mythical narratives, as a forum in which to assemble, concentrate and personify—in one individual—a host of abstract qualities of excellence, thereby making those otherwise elusive qualities accessible to participation, imitation or perhaps "reactualization." Honesty, valor, integrity, incorruptibility, rectitude and perspicacity are, as idealized conceptions, too intangible to serve as practical guides for right behavior and decision making; but when personified in an individual, however fictively, those abstractions are transformed into tangible prototypes for ethical conduct and, in the cases of gurus, saints and saviors, for conducting one's worshipful life.

In some cases, then, those honored individuals who are "put on a pedestal" inspire or demand loyalty to a leader who is far greater than oneself and, to that extent, out of reach as a model for one's own behavior; thousands of statues of military and political leaders are conceived less as mythico-historical role models than as means of legitimating the ongoing authority of their descendants or of the institutions of which they were are part. Not infrequently, monuments of that sort are conceived as conduits through which "ordinary people"

can attain assess to otherwise inaccessible spiritual or material rewards. Other individual-focused ritual-architectural events can, however, have a more "true, real and exemplary" quality insofar as they enable worshippers to, in an important sense, identify with, and sometimes actually to become, the actors in one's respective sacred histories. Here again, then, we encounter this tension between simply remembering the heroes of old and, in a more participatory sense, "reactualizing" those revered personages by becoming more like them.

2. Commemorations of Mythico-Historic Individuals across Mesoamerica: Major Contrasts among Olmecs, Mayas and Teotihuacanos

It is generally accepted that, "In hieroglyphic texts from all regions of Mesoamerica, personal names are one of the most common entries."[931] Nonetheless, exploring this individual-specific variation on the sacred history priority (II-B) across Mesoamerican, one encounters abundant examples, but also major regional discrepancies. That variability in mind, consider in turn how differently Olmecs, Teotihuacanos and Classic Mayas approach the practice of singling out particular persons for ritual-architectural commemoration and recognition.

a. Olmec Colossal Heads as the Ritual-Architectural Commemoration of Mythico-Historic Individuals par Excellence

Among high-profile exemplars, though more sculptural than architectural per se, the colossal Olmec heads, often two meters high and weighing more than ten tons, provide a kind of emblematic exemplification of memorializing specific persons rather than any of their activities.[932] All of the 17 known examples display distinctive headgear, "protective helmets" with chin straps, which have led to ruminations that they represent either participants in a ceremonial ballgame, a prospect reinforced by rubber production in the Gulf Coast region, or

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[931] Marcus, *Mesoamerican Writing Systems*, 191.

[932] Esther Pasztory, *Pre-Columbian Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 28-30.

"warrior-kings," or perhaps both.[933] Only occasionally have the enormous heads been imagined to be deities, mythical beings or other sorts of supernaturals, all of which do seem to find expression in other Olmec objects.

Expressing the prevailing view that each colossal head represents a specific historical individual, Miguel Covarrubias, in his 1957 essay, "The 'Olmec' Problem," described the basalt sculptures as "powerful and sensuous, admirably realistic," "representing fat, youthful personages with Negroid features, wearing helmets rather like those for football."[934] Ignacio Bernal was, then, atypical, even in his era, when he took issue with the suggestion that these monuments were "raised to honor dead chieftains," and opined instead that,

> "I do not believe them to be portraits since they are almost alike and especially because the portrait—except among the Maya—seems not to have been characteristic of Mesoamerican art, which does not seek the reality of nature but an interpretation of it."[935]

George Kubler, by contrast, asserts the far more prevalent view that the colossal heads are "ideal portraits expressed in firm flesh, heavy muscles, and articulated profiles," which he locates within "a tradition of sculpture leading to the most faithful possible transposition of appearances."[936] And Esther Pasztory too is among the large majority that stresses "the remarkable naturalism of the three-dimensional figures" and reechoes the paired opinions that the heads are "commemorative portraits of Olmec rulers, probably the current ruler or his predecessor, and set up at an accession of funeral" and, moreover, that "they are probably made

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[933] See, for instance, Michael D. Coe, "The Olmecs," in Agustín Acosta Lagunes, Michael D. Coe, Felipe Solís, and Beatriz de la Fuente, *Museum of Anthropology of Xalapa* (Mexico City: Studio Beatrice Trueblood, S.A., 1992), 39-43.

[934] Miguel Covarrubias, *Indian Art of Mexico and Central America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957), chap. 2, "The 'Olmec' Problem," 50, 65.

[935] Bernal, *The Olmec World*, 56. Bernal, ibid., 56-57, likewise doubts that the colossal heads represent gods, "even though their fixed orientation suggests ritual connections," and suggests instead that "The heads may represent chieftains or warriors in a general sense."

[936] George Kubler, *The Art and Architecture of Ancient America*, 3d ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), 119, 125.

on the orders of the ruler himself or someone close to him."[937] In these respects, then, the famous Olmec sculptures of heads with no bodies are quintessential examples of the ritual-architectural commemoration of mythico-historic individuals that eschew entirely the explicit commemoration any sacred historical activity or episode.

Michael Coe concurs that, at great Olmec centers like San Lorenzo and La Venta, "the elite rulers commissioned gigantic portraits of themselves,"[938] before also stressing both the rarity of that self-commemorative practice in the pre-Columbian Americas and its reemergence among the Classic Maya. Coe contends that the Olmec heads, which were made sometime prior to 900 BCE, are, in fact, the earliest instance of ruler-specific monuments in the Western Hemisphere, which find clear counterparts only in the clay "portrait heads" of the Moche or Mochica on the Peruvian coast and then, 15 centuries later, among the Classic Maya.[939] In his view, Olmecs and Classic Mayas stand out among other Mesoamerican peoples for "a strong interest in the individual, as opposed to the faceless impersonality of pre-Spanish art in the rest of the New World;"[940] and Coe links that penchant for depicting particular persons to an also-shared concern for the principle of royal descent and legitimacy.[941]

Additionally noteworthy with respect to our present set of distinctions is Coe's contention that the colossal heads' presentation of specific rulers *irrespective of any activity* was eventually

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[937] Pasztory, *Pre-Columbian Art*, 29-30. Among many others to stress the Olmec heads' distinct, naturalistic and individuated features (and to affirm prevailing politicized interpretations), Ann Cyphers and Anna DiCastro, "Early Olmec Architecture and Imagery," in eds. Fash and López Luján, *The Art of Urbanism*, 28, describe the colossal heads as "ancestor ruler portraits."

[938] Coe, "The Olmecs," 36.

[939] Coe, "The Olmecs," 39, 57.

[940] Coe, "The Olmecs," 39.

[941] Coe, "The Olmecs," 43. By the way, regarding infrequent connentions between the Olmec colossal heads and Monte Albán, Caso, "Sculpture and Mural Painting," 855, writes: "In Monte Albán and Zimatlán we have found stone heads that are not fragments but complete sculptures and that recall the colossal Olmec heads, even though they are little larger than twice natural size. They were probably carved during Period II."

augmented with stelae that are "probably true chronicles carved in stone narrating or commemorating important deeds worth recording for posterity."[942] In his words,

> "As time went on, especially at La Venta and elsewhere, narrative relief carving predominates, above all on stelae. This seems to have been the result of an increasing Olmec interest in depicting real historical events in the lives of present or past rulers, a trend that was to culminate in Izapan and Classic Maya stelae later on."[943]

And furthermore notable for our present purposes is the fact that Coe's foremost example of this subsequent "narrative tendency"—namely, Monument 1 from the site of El Viejón in central Veracruz—depicts not daily life or battlefield scenes, but rather two elaborately dressed Olmec personages carrying scepters or ceremonial weapons as they approach one another in what appears to be "some kind of royal visit, or the celebration of a pact between two polities."[944] That is to say, in this Olmec context, not unlike at Monte Albán, it is ceremonial occasions that are, apparently, the most deserving of memorialization.

b. Teotihuacan as the Grand Counter-example to the Commemoration of Mythico-Historic Individuals

If the colossal heads of the Olmec and the plethora of identifiable figures on Classic Maya stelae provide indisputable examples of monuments devoted to memorializing the outstanding personages in their respective sacred histories, especially rulers, Teotihuacan stands, in this regard, as the grand counterexample. Indeed, while one can be positive that the largest and most powerful of all Mesoamerican centers had innumerable outstanding political and military leaders, there is a general consensus that the Central Mexican capital's approach to political rule, and thus to the pictorial representation of particular rulers, was characterized by an

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[942] Coe, "The Olmecs," 71.

[943] Coe, "The Olmecs," 44-46.

[944] Coe, "The Olmecs," 46.

extreme "impersonality."[945] Joyce Marcus, for instance, delivers the startling observation that, by extreme contrast to either Maya or Zapotec contexts, "We do not know the name of a single ruler at Teotihuacan, nor the name of a single place conquered by Teotihuacan."[946] In her view, which couches that asymmetry within a larger contrast in systems of government and disparate investments in writing among various Mesoamerican regions:

> "This is no denigration of Teotihuacan, but rather a comment on how different its system of government may have been [from those of the Mayas or Zapotecs]. Writing was not an important part of their strategy, and the glorification of individual rulers by carving their names and deeds in stone was of no apparent concern."[947]

For Marcus, then, who always imagines self-interested motives of ruling elites as the guiding factor in the configuration of their respective capitals, the absence of ritual-architectural commemorations of individual rulers at Teotihuacan is the consequence of "an oligarchic form of polity"—as opposed to system of governing based on hereditary dynasties that determined succession by royal blood lines—which, therefore, was not well served by singling out particular lords or leaders:

> "We might therefore consider the possibility that Teotihuacan had a form of government more oligarchic than either the Zapotec or Maya, one in which the monumental glorification of individual rulers was of low priority—a form of government, in other words, out of which the Toltec and Aztec states could logically have evolved."[948]

Esther Pasztory makes similar observations about the decided "impersonality" of Teotihuacan's art, which she, like Marcus, attributes largely to political factors and to the fundamentally propagandistic role of writing and public iconography. Enumerating a dozen

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[945] David Stuart, "'The Arrival of Strangers': Teotihuacan and Tollan in Classic Maya History" in *Mesoamerica's Classic Heritage: From Teotihuacan to the Aztecs*, eds. Davíd Carrasco, Lindsay Jones, and Scott Sessions (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2000), 489, to whom I will return in a moment, addresses "the 'impersonality' of political rule at Teotihuacan," especially by contrast to the Mayas' highly persomalistic approach.

[946] Marcus, "Monte Albán and Teotihuacan," 165.

[947] Marcus, "Monte Albán and Teotihuacan," 165.

[948] Marcus, "Monte Albán and Teotihuacan," 165.

central facts that "any interpretation of Teotihuacan needs to address," Pasztory underscores that "the rulers were not glorified in art..." and holds that, "While in southern Mesoamerica writing was developed to record dynastic history for all posterity in the permanent medium of stone, Teotihuacan left no such public inscriptions."[949] Likewise ascribing this absence to a distinctive governmental approach, Pasztory argues that "Teotihuacan had a non-dynastic political structure that little emphasized the personality of the ruler, except for the period of the building of the Cuidadela..."[950] In her view, "Teotihuacan could have been a low-profile dynastic state with officials suggested from certain families,"[951] though, also in her view, that is not a system that benefitted by glorifying particular rulers, either past or present.

But then Pasztory also makes a larger and more provocative claim that separates even farther Teotihuacan's indifference to the commemoration of rulers and their accomplishments from the highly contrastive approaches of Aztecs (and also of Olmecs, Mayas and Zapotecs). In her assessment, perhaps because the largely unprecedented phenomenon of Teotihuacan emerged in a context that presented no superior antecedent civilization, "Certainly no evidence can be found that Teotihuacan was as interested in the past as were the Aztecs. Throughout its existence the city seemed uninterested in recording and monumentalizing history."[952] Nothing like the Aztec strategy of gaining legitimacy by fashioning (or usurping) a connection to Toltec-Tollan forbearers obtains in Teotihuacan, which was actually the original source rather than a

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[949] Pasztory, "Teotihuacan Unmasked: A View Through Art," 46.

[950] Pasztory, "Teotihuacan Unmasked: A View Through Art," 52.

[951] Pasztory, "Teotihuacan Unmasked: A View Through Art," 52.

[952] Pasztory, "Teotihuacan Unmasked: A View Through Art," 46. Regarding the Aztecs as another, only slightly less stark contrast to what we observe at Monte Albán with respect to the pervasive ritual-architectural commemoration of mythico-historic individuals, Marcus, "Monte Albán and Teotihuacan," 165, writes, "The Aztec provide an interesting contrast [to Teotihuacan]: although rulers were recruited from hereditary nobility, they were in fact selected by a Council of Noble Elders, and rarely were stone monuments erected to individual rulers as the Maya or Zapotec might have done (the Stone of Tizoc is one of the few examples)."

derivative imitator of those Tollan archetypes;[953] Teotihuacan, so this argument goes, neither had nor required historical precedents. Consequently, it is not only the commemoration of outstanding individuals (i.e., the present variation on the sacred history priority, II-B) that is, according to Pasztory, largely absent from Teotihuacan, but also the wider concern for a showcasing any aspect of the past achievements of human beings. Alternatively, she contends that "Teotihuacan was extreme in seeming to invoke *only* nature and the cosmos to the almost total exclusion of everything historic or made by human beings."[954] Elaborating on that intriguing premise, Pasztory writes:

> "Other cultures [definitely including the Zapotecs] tended to represent the victims of conquest by depicting the persons conquered, who were often identified by a glyph naming them or their place of origin. This practice indicated that in most of Mesoamerica war, conquest and sacrifice were matters of ethnic identity. In contrast, the anonymous hearts in Teotihuacan art emphasize the act of sacrifice itself, without specifying the origin of the victim. Teotihuacan presents itself as a universal or cosmic place, not the home of [a] particular ethnic group or dynasty. Sacrifice and military activity are central to the state, but removed from history and subordinated to cosmic interpretation."[955]

Accordingly, while some might take for granted that the art and architecture of pre-Columbian Mesoamerica were most of all designed to flatter and glorify their elite makers—and inventories of Maya and Zapotec iconography are liable to reaffirm that supposal—Pasztory presents "the art of understatement" at Teotihuacan as a momentous counterexample in which "less is more."[956] On the one hand, she works to show that "the understatement proceeds... from

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[953] Regarding Teotihuacan as the origin of the Toltec-Tollan paradigm that was imitated by Aztecs and so many other Mesoamerican cultures, see Davíd Carrasco, *Quetzalcoatl and the Irony of Empire: Myths and Prophecies in the Aztec Tradition*, revised edition (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2001), 106ff.

[954] Pasztory, "Teotihuacan Unmasked: A View Through Art," 47; italics hers.

[955] Pasztory, "Teotihuacan Unmasked: A View Through Art," 48.

[956] Pasztory, "Teotihuacan Unmasked: A View Through Art," 58-59. Though it is somewhat odd to suggest that the path-breaking Teotihuacan was deliberately iconoclastic in this respect, Pasztory, ibid., 59, argues that "Such understatement and repetition creates an aesthetic of austerity and spareness that was revolutionary in the context of the more flamboyant traditions of most of Mesaomerica."

a political strategy of elite self-effacement and the concept of a collective ideology;"[957] but, on the other hand, Pasztory advances a skepticism more like that of Marcus when she writes, "I imagine that the [Teotihuacan] elite truly had power but chose to keep a low profile for the sake of political expedience and *the appearance of* a collective social contract."[958] In either case, though, Pasztory persuades us that Teotihuacan presents the paramount example of a Mesoamerican site at which the ritual-architectural commemoration of mythico-historic individuals is most notable as a non-factor.

c. Classic Maya Commemorations of Specific Teotihuacano Rulers Never Named in the Central Mexican Capital

Reechoing that assessment of Teotihuacan's impersonal approach, Mayanists William and Barbara Fash also extend the stark contrast in Teotihuacano versus Maya priorities to the Toltecs and Aztecs. In their judgment, where the depiction and glorification of individual rulers is arguably the leading attribute of Lowland Maya statuary and iconography, Central Mexicans are, in this respect, polar opposites:

> "The "cult of personality" that so obsessed the Maya rulers in their stone monuments never took hold in Classic period Central Mexico. The same "faceless, nameless" tradition of Teotihuacan was followed by the Toltec of Tula, Hidalgo, where ruler portraits in stone also shine by their absence. Among the Mexica, as well, rulers were deemed less worthy of the sculptor's and muralist's are than the gods and the days that bore their destinies."[959]

Therefore, when the Fashes enter the enduring and vigorous debate about the historical connections between Highland Central Mexicans and Lowland Mayas—a notion that Mayanists,

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[957] Pasztory, "Teotihuacan Unmasked: A View Through Art," 58.

[958] Pasztory, "Teotihuacan Unmasked: A View Through Art," 62; italics added.

[959] William L. Fash and Barbara W. Fash, "Teotihuacan and the Maya: A Classic Heritage," in *Mesoamerica's Classic Heritage: From Teotihuacan to the Aztecs*, eds. Davíd Carrasco, Lindsay Jones, and Scott Sessions (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2000), 449.

for decades, vehemently denied[960]—with progressive but controversial ideas about actual Teotihuacan incursions into the Maya zone, they accentuate that, "we should not be surprised that Teotihuacanos were loathe to have their likenesses carved in stone in the Maya world; the very idea went against their grain."[961] Advancing in compelling ways the once-verboten view that Central Mexicans did indeed play a seminal role in the formation of the major Petén area sites of Tikal, Copán and Kaminaljuyú,[962] Fash and Fash go so far as to contend that the founder of the Classic period Copán dynasty, K'inich Yax K'uk' Mo' (Sun-Faced Blue-Green Quetzal Macaw), who was referred to by his successors as "Lord of the West," actually had Teotihuacan origins.[963]

Of the myriad issues at stake in this increasingly persuasive possibility of a direct connection between Teotihuacan and Copán, particularly relevant for our present purposes is the prospect of a head-to-head confrontation between one group (the Petén Mayas) that is predisposed to highly detailed visual and epigraphic depictions of individual rulers and another (the Teotihuacanos) that is absolutely "loathe" to undertake person-specific monuments. In fact, that extreme contrast with respect to the ritual-architectural commemoration of mythico-historic individuals matches perfectly with the Fashes' well-supported surmise that, at Copán, there are no portraits of the apparently Teotihuacan-born ruler K'inich Yax K'uk' Mo' that were produced during his lifetime, but that later Copán rulers, who were intent on affirming their pedigree and affiliations with the great Central Mexican metropolis, were very willing to depict him on a number of monuments.[964] More specifically, they note that,

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[960] Fash and Fash, "Teotihuacan and the Maya," 434-41, provides a concise and helpful history of ideas about the much-debated topic of the timing and roles played by Teotihuacan in the origins, development and decline of Classic Maya civilization.

[961] Fash and Fash, "Teotihuacan and the Maya," 449.

[962] Fash and Fash, "Teotihuacan and the Maya," 441-50.

[963] Fash and Fash, "Teotihuacan and the Maya," 442, 446-50.

[964] Fash and Fash, "Teotihuacan and the Maya," 449.

> "Later [Copán] rulers portrayed K'inich Yax K'uk' Mo' with Storm God goggles over his eyes [i.e., a direct allusion to Teotihuacan] on a number of monuments: on Altar Q; on his portrait in the niche of the superstructure of Temple 16 by Ruler 16; on the ceramic figure from Tomb XXXVIII-4 beneath the Hieroglyphic Stairway by Ruler 13; and, in [Robert] Sharer's estimation, on the Teotihuacan-style polychrome pot from the Margarita Structure, by Ruler 2 or an immediate successor."[965]

All of those are, then, ritual-architectural commemorations of a specific individual that are consistent with Lowland Maya practices, but at odds with Teotihuacan avoidance of such person-particular images.

Mayanist David Stuart, who generally affirms the Fashes' remarks about K'inich Yax K'uk' Mo' and Copán, does even more to shed light on the fascinating irony wherein Teotihuacan rulers who go unnamed and unrepresented in their home capital are, when they venture into the Maya zone, explicitly named and, sometimes, visually depicted in public monuments.[966] Revisiting Tatiana Proskouriakoff's controversial hypothesis concerning "the arrival of strangers" in the Maya Lowlands of the late fourth century CE,[967] Stuart also argues the iconoclastic view that, during the early Classic era, that is, during the Mexican capital's florescence, Teotihuacanos actually intruded with considerable frequency into the Petén zone, where they played a direct, probably violent and certainly disruptive role in Maya polity and religion.[968] In the context of an intricate historical argument, Stuart pays special attention to two individuals prominent in the inscriptions of Tikal and Uaxactún, both of whom he thinks must

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[965] Fash and Fash, "Teotihuacan and the Maya," 449-50. Ibid., 448, fig. 14.4, shows the portrait of K'inich Yax K'uk' Mo' on Copán's Altar Q; and ibid., 451, fig. 14.5, shows images of K'inich Yax K'uk' Mo' on two different ceramic censor "effigy lids."

[966] David Stuart, "'The Arrival of Strangers': Teotihuacan and Tollan in Classic Maya History," in *Mesoamerica's Classic Heritage: From Teotihuacan to the Aztecs*, eds. Davíd Carrasco, Lindsay Jones, and Scott Sessions (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2000), 465-513.

[967] See Tatiana Proskouriakoff, *Maya History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993).

[968] Stuart, "'The Arrival of Strangers,'" 489, in fact, argues that the physical incursion of Teotihuacanos into the Maya zone was no less than "the single most important political or military episode of early Classic Maya history, when Teotihuacan established itself as a dominant force in the politics and elite culture of the central Petén."

have been Teotihuacan rulers operating in the Maya zone. The first figure, who is specifically named on Tikal Stela 31 (among numerous places in the area), is Siyak K'ah' (Smoking Frog), who seems to have arrived at the Maya site in 378 CE, and who is closely associated with subsequent Copán ruler, Nun Yax Ayin (Curled Nose/Snout), a personage that Proskouriakoff identified as a foreign king, or at least "one who consorted closely with highland people."[969] Analyzing the numerous explicit references to Siyak K'ah' at Tikal and nearby sites, Stuart writes,

> "On the face of the present evidence, I think there is no choice but to conclude that Siyak K'ak' is a foreigner, and that he may well be instigator of the Teotihuacan presence in the region of Tikal. If allowed to speculate, I would go so far as to view him as leader of a military force that overthrew Tikal's dynasty in 378, killing ruler Jaguar Paw and installing a new ruler, Nun Yax Ayin, in his place."[970]

Additionally, Stuart discusses the similarly specific iconographic allusions to another participant in Tikal history named Spear-Thrower Owl, who also constitutes "something of a disruptive element in the expected sequence of dynamic succession.[971] And again with due tentativeness, Stuart surmises that, "Although difficult to prove, one very real possibility to consider is that Spear-Thrower Owl was a ruler of Teotihuacan" who also intruded into the Petén and exercised considerable influence on local politics.[972]

In sum, then, although unlike the pictorial depictions of K'inich Yax K'uk' Mo' at Copán,[973] there are no known portraits of either Siyah K'ak' or Spear-Thrower Owl, both of

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[969] Proskouriakoff, *Maya History*, 11; cited by Stuart, "'The Arrival of Strangers,'" 472, and discussed ibid, 478-81. Regarding the relationship between the two rulers, Stuart, ibid, 479, writes, "We are forced to conclude from Stela 4 [at Tikal] that Siyah K'ak' [who apparently came from Teotihuacan] in some way dominated or sponsored Nun Yax Ayin [a more typically Maya ruler] at the time of the later ascension."

[970] Stuart, "'The Arrival of Strangers,'" 481.

[971] Stuart, "'The Arrival of Strangers,'" 481-87.

[972] Stuart, "'The Arrival of Strangers,'" 483.

[973] Regarding his reaffirmation of William and Barbara Fash's arguments about the representation of Yax K'uk' Mo' at Copán, see Stuart, "'The Arrival of Strangers,'" 490-98.

these Teotihuacan intruders into the Petén Maya zone are explicitly identified on several Tikal-area monuments by their unique "personal name glyphs"—an individual-specific identification that never happens at their homebase in Teotihuacan.[974] Ironically, therefore, Teotihuacan rulers who remain anonymous in Central Mexico are explicitly and prominently recorded for posterity in the Maya region. And while that paradoxical observation carries a raft of ramifications, with respect to the current discussion, it illustrates the major contrast between Teotihuacanos and Mayas (or Olmecs) with respect to this person-specific variation on the ritual-architectural commemoration of sacred history (priority II-B). Moreover, as I turn now to the relevance of that morphological option at Monte Albán, we will discover quickly that Zapotecs are, where this topic is concerned, far more like their Maya than Central Mexican counterparts.

3. Commemorations of Mythico-Historic Individuals at Monte Albán: Mitigated, Masked and/or Unmasked Authoritarian Priorities

Turning now to the ritual-architectural commemoration of individuals at Monte Albán, previous sections have demonstrated the abundance of specifically named and dated rulers that appear in the monumental displays of the Zapotec capital. Marcus, for instance, enumerates a couple dozen Zapotec nobles who are named on the stone monuments of Monte Albán and Xoxocotlán.[975] Urcid, while conceding that "little is known about the identity of the rulers who held political and economic power during the long history of the city," can also conclude that,

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[974] Sturat, "'The Arrival of Strangers,'" 483. Addressing as something of an aside the way in which the "foreignness" of the personal name glyphs of Spear-Thrower Owl in the Tikal region might have ramifications for our understanding of Teotihuacan, Stuart, ibid., 485-86, notes, "If these and other examples in Teotihuacan art are indeed personal name glyphs, as the Maya evidence would strongly suggest, our view of writing and its uses at Teotihuacan would change dramatically, as would our notion of the 'impersonality' of political rule at that site. Other names might conceivably exist, now recognized solely as categories of repeating 'motifs.' But speculations are best left for another time." That is to say, Stuart raises (but does not pursue) the possibility that Teoihuacanos had, after all, at least some willingness to undertake the ritual-architectural commemoration of specific individuals.

[975] See Marcus, *Mesoamerican Writing Systems*, 207, tab. 7.3, "Calendric Names of Zapotec Nobles on Stone Monuments from Monte Albán and Xoxocotlán," list 24 names, but note that 15 of those come from Lintel 2 of Xoxocotlán, which is to say only nine of the names come from Monte Albán monuments.

"for the span between 400 and 800 ACE [i.e., roughly the Classic era], there is evidence of at least 11 different [Monte Albán] rulers who financed their representations in stone monuments."[976] And all agree that, as progress in the decipherment of Zapotec writing continues, additional sovereigns personally named in the city's monumental narratives will emerge.

In this respect, then, there is no question that that Zapotecs have far more in common with the Classic Mayas' unremitting representation of specific rulers than with the wholly "impersonal" approach of the Teotihuacanos. And yet, while it is certain that Monte Albán rulers, at least by the Classic era, were very much predisposed to depicting themselves and their personal accomplishments in stone monuments, it is also worth noting in this section the similarly *individual-specific depiction of non-rulers*—that is, rank-and-file soldiers, ancestors, elders, ritual practioners, captives who are defeated and sacrificed, and perhaps other non-residents who figure in the sacred history of Monte Albán. Though, arguably, no "commoners" are ever depicted on stone displays, numerous classes of not-top-tier ruling elites do appear with great frequency. That is to say, along with the undeniable and never-overlooked incentive for using stone monuments to legitimate the authority of specific rulers, those monumental displays, at least in Monte Albán's earlier going, also commemorate the contributions of non-elites (or lesser elites), and thereby present "true, real and exemplary" models, not only for proper leadership, but also for proper followership, submission and even suitable obsequiousness.

With those less-discussed issues in mind, one final pass over Monte Albán's three most prominent (sets of) monumental public displays reveals both major differences with respect to this matter of depicting non-elites as well as elites, and thus a significant change over time in the predilection for displaying and identifying non-rulers. The apparent shift in priorities from the Formative-era Danzante Wall, which devotes the lion's share of its space to individualized

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[976] Urcid, *Zapotec Writing*, 21, explains that, "based on the postulate that jaguar imagery was symbolic of royal and noble elites, the occurrence of carved stones found in the monumental core of the Main Plaza that depict personages represented as jaguars accompanied by their calendrical names allow making several identifications." See ibid., fig. 2.3, for a list of "Some [11] of the rulers from Monte Albán represented as jaguars."

images of non-rulers, to Classic-era Programs B and A, which have a much narrower focus on the accomplishments of specific rulers, may speak to a genuine shift from decidedly communal forms of authority to more exclusionary forms. Or, as others contend, this may be simply a change in strategies for fostering approaches to Zapotec rulership that were, from beginning to end, highly authoritarian. In either case, consideration of this line of hermeneutical questioning leads us to find in the monumental public displays of Monte Albán at least three quite different models of elite leadership and, concomitantly, at least three quite different models of non-elite followership.

In other words, while the next three sub-sections are in lots of respects redundant with my previous remarks on these monumental displays, they do lead us to a fourth sub-section that presents some fresh insights about the paired modes of rulership and followership that obtained in different Monte Albán eras.

a. Identifiable Individuals on the Danzante Wall: Memorializing the Rank and File, Perhaps to Mask Authoritarian Control

Once again the great Danzante Wall, particularly in the exhaustive reinterpretation of Javier Urcid, provides the strongest evidence of the present theme—namely, the ritual-architectural commemoration of individuals other-than-elite political rulers. Were we to accept older and still-enduring partyline evaluations of the main Danzante figures as largely anonymous and interchangeable tortured captives, then the priority for displaying identifiable individuals is slim to none. Those interpretations, though often acknowledging the considerable variety of sizes, body postures, facial expressions and adornments among the Danzantes, assess the infamous carved figures as nameless, generic victims of warmongering, who together send a threatening message about Monte Albán's uncompromising military proficiency. From those outmoded views, one contorted captive is more or less the same as another.

By radical contrast, Urcid not only reverses stock interpretations by assessing the Danzantes as revered rather than reviled figures—proficient warriors not pitiable victims—but also suggests that each of them corresponds to a unique historical individual. He, for example,

while stressing the standardized, or "very canonical," features of these engraved figures and enumerating some dozen attributes that most have in common, also accentuates that no two of the dozens of the carved personages are identical.[977] While suggesting that the foremost identity of the vertical figures in the lowest, third and fifth rows of the great Danzante Wall is their shared membership in a particular tier of the age-grade hierarchical military brotherhood—and thus that each figure has the distinctive accouterments and insignia that signal his affiliation with one of the respective "echelons of the sodality"—Urcid's (re)construction of the basal wall façade of Building L-sub also illustrates the individuated features of every orthostat.[978] A few stand out as impersonators of the god of rain, or "warrior priests" who "had the ability to attract or repel the clouds and rain," but all are human rather than divine beings.[979] And while only some of the Danzantes have accompanying inscriptions that could make their personal identities explicit—"at least 21 characters are accompanied by short inscriptions placed opposite, behind, or across the torso"[980]—Urcid fuels the impression that each one of them is (in principle) a unique and identifiable individual.[981]

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[977] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 178-79.

[978] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 192, 206, 220. And see, for instance, the shared features but also individuated qualities of the figures in the bottom, third and fifth rows in the illustrations of the reconstructed Danzante Wall in Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 183, fig. 14; or Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations in Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 154, fig. 9.3 and 163, fig. 9.10.

[979] See, for instance, Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 189, 192, 196, 197, 202, 204 or 220, from which I take the quotation in this sentence. Or see Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 153.

[980] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 179. Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 154, likewise says, "Some of the figures [which in this case means both the vertical and horizontal figures] have brief glyphic captions that convey their names phonetically."

[981] Caso, "Zapotec Writing and Calendar," 940, in the context of his discussion of the glyphs on the "conquest slabs" (to which I turn next), notes that already evident in Monte Albán I and II is a system of writing in which, "There is not doubt, as we see in several danzante sculptures, that this system also served to express the names of people; and that the names were taken from the day names of the *tonalpohualli*, most probably that of the birthday of the individual, and were also expressed by other symbols that we have called surnames, a system used by the Mexicans

Moreover, and more directly to the emphasis of this section, we need to appreciate that the vertical Danzante figures are, even in Urcid's rehabilitative assessment, journeyman soldiers rather than rulers. They are persons of prestige and distinction, worthy of great respect; but they are not political elites. Instead, they are warriors or "enlisted men," if you will, albeit warriors for whom ceremonial blood-letting is no less crucial than fighting and captive-taking. And furthermore, to state the obvious, by their sheer numbers, these militia men constitute by far the largest share of the nearly 250 carved orthostats on the multi-tiered façade.

Additionally, the large majority of the other personages that Urcid identifies on main six-tiered portion of the Danzante Wall are likewise identifiable personages of great distinction, numerous of whom have apparently attained apotheosized or at least mythicized status—but nor are these figures "rulers" per se. Recall, for instance, that Urcid identifies the prone ("swimmer") figures that constitute the second and fourth rows as conforming to "the pan-Mesoamerican convention of representing ancestors as horizontal figures above the living humans that are standing or squatting;"[982] these "revered ancestors," he thinks, served as "the conduits" or channels through which oracles were made, thus improving the prospects for military success and ensuring that warring activities are undertaken at cosmologically propitious times.[983] These also-individuated horizontal figures were, then, (deceased) advisers, aids to ritualizing, or perhaps "ancestral spirits," rather than sovereigns.[984] And likewise, the kneeling figures in the unique sixth and topmost row constitute, in Urcid's view, "the paramount tier of

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and the Mixtecs." Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 162, reinforce that point.

[982] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 153. Also, see Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 214, fig. 29, for images of ancestors represented in a prone position in various Mesoamerican pictographic traditions.

[983] See Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 218, 222, 224.

[984] While these horizontal "ancestors" are presumably deceased humans (as opposed to the vertical Danzantes who are alive warriors), Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 153, also refers to them as "ancestral spirits."

senior adults who seemingly formed a council of elders."[985] These elders are, he contends, "honorary warriors" who seem to be "members of the highest rank in the organization, who possibly formed a council with the prerogative of making political, religious, and military decisions."[986] Thus these distinguished top-tier figures too, again each unique, and though they may have had more politicized roles, do *not* qualify as rulers.

Only when Urcid turns his attention to the texts inscribed in the cornerstones of the Danzante Wall does he discern any figures who merit the designation of actual rulers. Recall that in the southeast corner of the basal platform he finds stones with inscriptions that "appear to record the enthronement of two, or perhaps three rulers through a span of forty-eight years, a chronological span rendered by means of Calendar Round dates."[987] And although that might appear to be a kind of sidebar (both literally and conceptually) to the main agenda of the Danzante display, it allows Urcid to conclude that among the deliberately polysemic intentions of the Building L-sub configuration was "to celebrate the enthronement of three rulers."[988] Furthermore, recall that Urcid also locates four smaller and incomplete orthostats that show individuals sacrificed by decapitation, at least three of which are accompanied by hieroglyphic captions that may have "a nominative value."[989] But the fact that the same nominative glyph

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[985] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 153.

[986] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 220.

[987] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 154. Also see Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 185, where Urcid identifies those three Monte Albán rulers as 8 Water, 10 Water and 3 Tremor. And note additionally that Urcid, ibid., 225, finds a representation of one of these rulers repeated in the third row of soldierly orthostats (D-55), which suggests to him that "the ruling elite concealed their exclusive interests by placing their initiated members at the beginning of the grade system and proclaiming the promotion, like any other eligible person, through community service (including success in war)." Ibid; my translation. That observation thereby supports Urcid's argument, to which I turn momentarily, that the Danzante Wall, instead of expressing a genuinely communal form of authority, actually conceals, or "masks," the more authoritarian interests of the elites.

[988] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 224.

[989] See Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 203; and Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 154-55.

appears in all three of those cases leads him to suspect that "the stones only name a single sacrificial victim," that is, one specifically named enemy ruler who had been defeated and decapitated.[990]

In total, then, surprisingly enough, on a monumental façade composed of some 250 carved orthostats, dozens of which display apparently individuated members of four age-graded tiers in a hierarchical military sodality, there are, it seems, representations of only three or four rulers—two or three Monte Albán nobles and one defeated enemy ruler. And note also that this thrice-named beheaded ruler is the sole enemy or victim depicted in a display that is otherwise devoted strictly to the celebration of local heroes in Monte Albán's sacred history.

In sum, therefore, while we may agree with standard assessments that the Danzante Wall was, ultimately, an elite-initiated project designed to assert the special authority and privileges of that elite, it is crucial in the context of the present thematic discussion to foreground the enormous qualification that Danibaan-era elites did so with only limited depictions of themselves. This monumental public display is a fabulous demonstration of the ritual-architectural commemoration of specific individuals—but one that, startlingly, affords an overwhelming priority to the depiction of rank-and-file soldiers to the near exclusion of rulers. Moreover, with just one notable exception (a decapitated ruler that is depicted three or four times), the display is confined to the victors rather than the victims of Monte Albán's military exploits.

Be that as it may, Urcid's own work presents two quite different explanations for this extreme preference in showcasing the non-elite figures who actually shouldered the brunt of the fighting and ritualizing that were incumbent on Monte Albán militia men; and for rhetorical purposes, I exaggerate the difference between those two interpretive tacks, which are not really

[990] Again see Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 203; and Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 155.

mutually exclusive.[991] From the former, more "generous" vantage, this conspicuous unevenness comports with Arthur Joyce's earlier work and with Urcid and Joyce's co-authored contention that the Danibaan-phase (500-300 BCE) façade, unlike its later and more strictly authoritarian counterparts, expresses a genuine investment in a decidedly "collective" and inclusionary form of authority.[992] In support of that fully participatory governmental model wherein all classes of Monte Albán society embrace their respective roles in maintaining a human-divine sacred covenant—everyone must work together, so to speak—elites acknowledge that their prosperity is contingent on the cooperation and labor of commoners. And by that acknowledgement of interdependence and even humility, which entails giving credit where credit is due, if you will, the Danzante Wall fosters the continued non-elite cooperation on which the success of elites relies.[993] In this view, the Building L-sub façade expresses the genuine respect that elites had for non-elites.

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[991] Regarding the different but paired viability of these two interpretive approaches, the first relies on a kind of generous "hermeneutic of retrieval" while the latter deploys a more skeptical "hermeneutic of suspicion"—and in many contexts I have argued for healthy complementarity of looking at problems from both of those perspectives.

[992] By "Arthur Joyce's earlier work," I refer to his ideas about a genuine commitment to communal authority in early Monte Albán that appear, for instance, in 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; Joyce, "Sacred Space and Social Relations in the Valley of Oaxaca" (2004); and Joyce, *Mixtecs, Zapotecs, and Chatinos* (2010). Those ideas form the basis of my brief summary of Joyce's (re)construction of early Monte Albán in chapter 1, which is based on my fuller summary in Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, chap. 7, "Arthur Joyce's Alternate Starting Point: The Agency of Commoners and the Religiosity of Everyone." By contrast, recall that Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza" (2014), 164-66, takes a somewhat more skeptical stance by arguing not that the Danzante Wall is completely devoted to the expression of a communal form of authority, but rather that the Danibaan phase façade "points to *a tension between exclusionary and communal forms of authority*." Ibid., 164; italics added.

[993] Note that this prospect of Monte Albán rulers who express their genuine respect for, and dependence upon, the contributions of rank-and-file soldiers (who are willing and enthusiastic participants in the agenda of those elites) will constitute the first option in the three-part typology of modes of leadership and followership that I present in the final sub-section of this block on "Commemorations of Mythico-Historic Individuals at Monte Albán: Mitigated, Masked and/or Unmasked Authoritarian Priorities."

From an alternate, more skeptical interpretive frame, however, Urcid on occasion characterizes the agenda of the Danzante façade less as an honest and humble expression of the elite's actual sense of dependency on non-elites than as a manipulative "masking of inequities," which was designed to placate non-elites by giving them a false impression of greater respect than they actually enjoyed.[994] According to this warier view, which seems to reflect Urcid's more heartfelt assessment, the commissioning of the cunningly configured Danzante iconographic display is a vintage example of

> "ancient Oaxacan strategies that allowed some to increase their power, masking the resulting inequalities through the promotion of group identities, the latter of vital importance in the context of inter-community conflict and a new urban way of life."[995]

In other words, by this more suspicious evaluation, the disproportionate depiction of innumerable age-graded soldiers and almost no rulers is *not* really a forthright reflection of respect for the essential contribution of those regular recruits, but rather "a masking of exclusionary interests" that seduced Monte Albán's fighting men into continued faithful service.[996] I will return to this point shortly when I address the depiction of individuals in Programs B and A, which, in Urcid's view, reflects the certain "unmasking of exclusionary interests" that transpires in the Classic era. But first consider brief (and somewhat tentative) comments about the relevance of this variation of the sacred history priority (II-B) in relation to the so-termed "conquest slabs" that eventually (re)appear on Building J.

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[994] This more skeptical assessment of the relations between elites and non-elites constitutes the second option in the three-part typology of modes of leadership and followership to which the previous footnote alludes.

[995] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 225.

[996] Urcid, *Zapotec Writing*, 154-55, alluding to that one Monte Albán ruler who is identified both in a cornerstone inscription and in orthostat D-55 in the third row of rank-and-file soldiers (something that I referenced in a previous footnote), writes, "The masking of exclusionary interests through corporate interests in monumental settings that emphasize 'cosmic renewal' is evinced [among other ways]... by identifying some members of warrior sodalities and sacrificial victims by their personal names yet singling at the same time a few paramount individuals by their calendrical names," which is what he sees happening in the narrative program in Building L-sub.

b. Identifiable Individuals on the "Conquest Slabs": Uncertain Evidence of Memorializing Rulers rather than the Rank and File

Bringing this line of questioning about the ritual-architectural depiction of elite versus non-elite individuals to bear on debate surrounding Monte Albán's next most prominent set of public displays—those associated with the so-termed "conquest slabs"—raises some intriguing but also uncertain possibilities. Complicating matters is the strong likelihood that these same stones were deployed, hundreds of years apart, in two very different contexts. Remember, in other words, that, contrary to the assumptions of Alfonso Caso, and then nearly all subsequent interpreters, that the "conquest slabs" were originally designed in Period II for their display on Building J, where modern investigators discovered them, Urcid and Joyce make the iconoclastic case that the initial utilization of these "finely incised orthostats" was actually on the basal wall of a Pe-phase (300-100 BCE) monument that was subsequently obliterated, and thus has remained completely unknown to contemporary scholars.[997] In their view, you will recall, this "second grandest of the early architectural narratives of Monte Albán" was another "ancestor memorial," which was partly contemporary and largely complementary in conception with the Danzante Wall.[998] And moreover, though I expressed my skepticism about this opinion, they suggest that the old Period I stones performed a quite similar function in each of their subsequent reuses on the walls of three Classic-era iterations of Building J, all of which acted, in their view, as yet more "ancestor memorials."[999]

Notwithstanding the complexities of navigating those successive (re)utilizations of the same carved stones, one aspect of Urcid and Joyce's proposal raises a major and fairly

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[997] See, Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 157-64, or my summary f their position earlier in the chapter.

[998] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 157.

[999] On the three main construction phases of Building J, see Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 158, fig. 9.6. On the suggestion that "the [three] different versions of Building J appear to have acted as ancestor memorials analogous to a series of Classic period quadripartite architectural complexes found at Monte Albán and other sites in the Oaxaca Valley," see ibid., 157.

straightforward contrast to earlier interpretations of the "conquest slabs" in relation to the present theme. According to Caso's much-repeated assessment, each of at least 60 panels were individual-specific insofar as the inverted heads, each with a distinctive and elaborate headdress, that appear on most of the slabs refer to the dead rulers of particular vanquished communities, while accompanying (place-specific) toponymic and (time-specific) calendrical glyphs stipulate the respective site and date of the respective defeats.[1000] Whittaker, for instance, is among many to reaffirm that basic assessment of the component parts of the formulaic conquest slabs;[1001] and Marcus likewise reinforces the person-specific (and place-specific) status of each slab in her argument that together the panels provide an outline of the subjugated territorial limits of the Period II Zapotec state.[1002]

Urcid and Joyce, however, as noted earlier in the chapter, take issue with Caso's interpretations of all four of the main components of the conquest slabs—but in ways that actually accentuate rather than undermine the individual-specific quality of those orthostats. Recall that, in their revisionist view, which parallels Urcid's reassessment of the main Danzante figures, the inverted heads refer not to executed victims of Monte Albán militarism, but instead to "deceased heroes," that is, victorious agents of the capital's military conquests.[1003] Moreover, they reassess those glyphs that Caso saw as place-specific "toponyms" of defeated communities, alternately, as person-specific "anthroponyms" of the same "fallen heroes" who are depicted by the upside-down heads;[1004] and, furthermore, they replace Caso's assertion that the calendrical glyphs refer to the dates of specific conquests with the alternate proposal that these are actually

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[1000] Caso, "Zapotec Writing and Calendar," 936-40, presents Caso's final statement on the significance of the Building J slabs. And recall, by the way, that, as of 1937, some 51 "conquest stones" had been located and since then additional examples have come to light,

[1001] Whittaker, "The Zapotec Writing System," 12-13.

[1002] See Marcus, "The Iconography of Militarism at Monte Albán and Neighboring Sites in the Valley of Oaxaca," 123-39; Marcus, "The Conquest Slabs of Building J, Monte Albán," 106-8; and Marcus, *Mesoamerican Writing Systems*, 175-76, 394-400.

[1003] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 158-59, 162.

[1004] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 159-62.

calendrical names that refer again to the same individuals referenced in the upper glyphs.[1005] In that sense, then, Urcid and Joyce reinforce, and actually intensify, Caso's posit that the ritual-architectural commemoration of specific individuals is a major priority in the conception of the conquest slabs—though, just as in the Urcid's radical revision of the identity of the main Danzante figures, they challenge standard assertions of defeated enemies with counterassertions that the pictured personages are "revered ancestors," that is, the victorious locals rather than vanquished foreigners.

If that much is fairly obvious, assessing whether the "conquest slabs" participate in the propensity for depicting far more rank-and-file soldiers than elite rulers, which is definitely the case for the Danzante Wall, is a dicer matter. Resolution of that question depends upon ascertaining the more precise identity of these figures who are memorialized in the respective conquest panels. Though their individuality and historicity are not in doubt, whether they are political sovereigns, soldierly commanders or something else is much less certain. Urcid and Joyce contend that their upside-down heads and closed eyes connote that they are pictured as dead rather than alive;[1006] but from those authors' somewhat elliptical designations of them variously as "revered individuals from Monte Albán,"[1007] or as "'deceased,' 'fallen heroes,' or simply 'revered ancestors,'"[1008] one could again draw two quite different conclusions as to the socio-political status of these personages.

The first and usually taken-for-granted possibility is that the individuals in the conquest panels are deceased monarchs rather than proletarian military men parallel to those memorialized in the Danzante carvings. Caso occasionally complicates his opinion by writing, "I believe [they] represent the lords *or gods* conquered by Monte Albán;"[1009] but supporters of his

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[1005] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 158-59, 162.

[1006] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 162.

[1007] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 158.

[1008] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 162.

[1009] Caso, "Zapotec Writing and Calendar," 937; italics added.

interpretation nearly always assume these are human nobles, the dead rulers of subjugated places. And even critics Urcid and Joyce, while replacing their identification as foreign victims with that of homegrown heroes, make several observations that seem to reinforce the notion these figures are elite rulers instead of rank-and-file fighters. They, for instance, make the (not-altogether-persuasive) case that the Pe-phase façade on which the finely incises orthostats were originally displayed shares the same general conception as the Danzante Wall, but "reverses" the relationship between the main surface, where dozens of hierarchically ranked soldiers are depicted, and the cornerstones, which record the inauguration of two or three Monte Albán rulers.[1010] By that logic, the some 60 individuals (or probably more) that are depicted on that many conquest stones—i.e., those dozens of orthostats that make up the main surface of the Pe-phase façade—provide the vastly multiplied counterpart to the very slim depiction of rulers on the Danzante cornerstones. Moreover, based on the inverted heads' close association with the sign "Hill-diagonal bands-noseplugs," Urcid and Joyce suggest they may refer to "Hill-Lords."[1011] Furthermore, the fact that noseplugs were "sumptuary goods [that] were of exclusive use by nobles and rulers" reinforces the impression these are persons of higher status than soldiers in good standing, which lead Urcid and Joyce to opine that the figures were "Jaguar-Lords" or "actual rulers from Monte Albán."[1012] And if that is the case, then the latter façade is very different from the Building L-sub composition by its wholesale depiction of elite rulers to the apparent exclusion of "enlisted men" like those that dominate the Danzante Wall.

Nevertheless, a second, also-uncertain interpretive possibility both departs even farther from Caso's assertion about "deceased rulers" and assesses the respective Danzante and "conquest slab" displays as similarly invested in depicting distinguished, though not-elite, members of Monte Albán's military rather than rulers per se. The prospect that the numerous depicted and named individuals in the conquest slabs are "revered ancestors" in the sense of accomplished military men, but not rulers, is fueled by Urcid and Joyce's references to them as

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[1010] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 162.

[1011] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 158.

[1012] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 159.

"fallen heroes," and by their observation that one can ascertain various "categories of inverted heads... based on their elaborate headdresses [which] may signal some kind of ranked group identity."[1013] That eventuality makes the memorialized protagonists appear more like the three rows of age-ranked Danzante soldiers on the Building L-sub façade; but the fact that the conquest slab figures are clearly dead rather than live persons would make them more parallel to the horizontal figures in the second and fourth rows of the Danzante Wall, which Urcid identifies as "deceased ancestors."[1014] Either of those alternatives supports the less likely prospect that the persons in the conquest slabs are fighting men rather than rulers.

In sum, then, while it is easier (for me) to be impressed by the differences than the similarities between the respective Danzante and conquest slab displays, there are very notable parallels with respect to the present theme. On the one hand, we can be completely persuaded that the dozens of figures represented in the conquest slabs are unique historical persons; and that guarantees that the permutation on the sacred history priority (II-B) that entails the commemoration of specific individuals is very much at play in the conception of the finely incised orthostats. On the other hand, precisely identifying who these memorialized individuals are, and whether their identities remained apparent to public audiences from the original Pe-phase display to the much later iterations of Building J, is a question we cannot answer. And thus, for now, I cannot conclude whether the conquest slabs are similar to or different from the Danzante displays' highly conspicuous preoccupation with depicting non-rulers. But as I move next to brief comments about this theme in relation to Programs B and A that ambiguity is replaced by much greater clarity.

[1013] Urcid and Joyce, "Early Transformations of Monte Albán's Main Plaza," 162.

[1014] Urcid, "Los oráculos y la guerra," 218, 222, 224.

c. Identifiable Individuals on Programs B and A: Memorializing Rulers, Subordinates and Unmasked Authoritarian Control

The third most high-profile set of cases—those that involve the nine so-termed "South Platform cornerstones," the origins of which Urcid attributes to Programs B and A—while hardly without controversy, present far more certain information about the respective depiction of rulers and non-rulers in Classic-era Monte Albán. In Programs B and A—both of which, recall, feature numerous procession scenes—there are "paramount figures" who are clearly identifiable Monte Albán rulers and who, in fact, are probably the very same rulers who commissioned the respective displays. In Urcid's view, where the very limited depiction of rulers in the Danzantes compositions reflects "the masking of authoritarian control,"[1015] these obviously self-serving visual programs exhibit ruling elites who, by at least the fifth century CE, "fully unmasked their exclusionary interests."[1016] That Programs B and A are monumental narratives explicitly designed to legitimate specific rulers' interests is not in doubt. But, continuing to pursue this question of the memorialization of other-than-rulers, I take a special interest in the identities of the secondary or "subordinate figures," who actually occupy the majority of the space in each composition. As in my earlier remarks on these repeatedly recycled monoliths, I largely accept Urcid's thorough reworking of the three-stage life-history of the cornerstones, which I now revisit with the question of the depiction of non-rulers in the forefront.

First, recall that in their primary or original context—that is, Program B—the eventual cornerstones were part of a just four-monolith composition in which SP-1, SP-7, SP-8 and SP-9 were used as door lintels or roof slabs, and thus carved only on their long and narrow (edge) surfaces.[1017] A couple of those stones (SP-1 and SP-8) were inscribed on two of their narrow

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[1015] Urcid, *Zapotec Writing*, 154.

[1016] Urcid, *Zapotec Writing*, 155.

[1017] On Program B, see Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 335-45, 351 and 362-76; or see my summary remarks earlier in the chapter.

edges, which eventuates in a monumental display of six carved panels,[1018] that was composed, Urcid thinks, sometime between 350-450 CE (i.e., late Period IIIA) and then likely dismantled within a century.[1019] Those half dozen carved panels present 16 distinctively clad personages, all specifically named, involved in six different processions, three that approach and three that depart from two "paramount figures."[1020] Urcid identifies the first of those paramount figures as 13 Brush or 13 Soap Plant (i.e., Lord 13N), an older, apparently already-deceased ruler; and the other, a noble named 5 Jaguar (i.e., Lord 5B), depicted as an old but still-living man wearing a very elaborate headdress, is apparently Lord 13N's successor and the one who commissioned the monument, presumably both to honor his immediate ancestor and to legitimize his own rule.[1021] By contrast to what we see in Program A, Lord 5B is, thereby, validated primarily by who he is—namely, the genealogical heir to former leader Lord 13N—rather than for his own military accomplishments.

Regarding the 14 "subordinate figures" in Program B, each is also identified by a specific calendrical and personal name, and remember that most of them are depicted in profile holding a copal bag or offering.[1022] None carries weapons and none is bound or injured in any way; instead, of all the public displays I've discussed, this one is most absent of images of militarism, coercion or violence. Eight of these secondary persons are the elegantly dressed figures that Marcus identifies as named "ambassadors" from Teotihuacan who pay homage to a newly inaugurated Zapotec leader, in what is she sees as a diplomatic rather than military triumph.[1023]

[1018] See Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 338 and 341, fig. 5.47.

[1019] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 358.

[1020] Again see Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 341, fig. 5.47, concerning the respective directions of each of the six processions.

[1021] See Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 351, 376, 377 and 405.

[1022] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 351, 405.

[1023] See Marcus, "Teotihuacan Visitors on Monte Albán Monuments and Murals," 176; Marcus, *Mesoamerican Writing Systems*, 325-29; Marcus, "A Zapotec Inauguration in Comparative Perspective;" and Marcus and Flannery, *Zapotec Civilization*, 217-21.

And while Urcid rejects the notion that these distinguished but subordinate figures are foreign visitors, he entertains two quite different possibilities as to their indigenous Oaxacan identity: They may be "members of the city's elite, perhaps lineage heads of 14 of the 15 'barrios' of Monte Albán,"[1024] in which case they are lower-level nobles who nonetheless qualify as part of the capital's ruling hierarchy. Or, Urcid concedes, they may be "rulers of subordinate communities,"[1025] in which case they are outsiders who may have been defeated enemies, but, at this point, are being depicted more as compliant allies. In either case, given the absence of violent imagery in favor of elaborately dressed figures proceeding in dignified procession with gifts and offerings—that is, people of privilege who are respectfully acknowledging the greater privilege of Lords 13N and 5B—one might conclude that these figures thereby provide a "true, real and exemplary" model of civil obedience and followership, that is, properly humble acquiescence to the legitimate leader.

Regarding the second iteration of these stones (i.e., Program A), recall that Program B was, so it seems, dismantled after about a century—that is, not long after the demise of its protagonist, Lord 5B—with the express intent of harvesting monoliths (but no carved images) that could be reused in Program A. This second monumental composition was composed "no later than 550 CE" of three recycled plus four new stones, all of which were carved on one of their largest surfaces and then arranged as a row of upright orthostats.[1026] Both the destruction of the old display and the commissioning of the new one seems to have been undertaken by Program A's sole "paramount figure," another Monte Albán ruler who depicts himself seated on a plush cushion, elaborately dressed, accompanied by ample paraphernalia and repeatedly identified by his calendrical name 13 Night (or Lord 13F).[1027] The only not-bound personage in another composition that features multiple processions, Lord 13F is surrounded by six secondary

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[1024] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 405.

[1025] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 405.

[1026] On Program A, see Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 334-35, 351-58, 376-405, or my brief summary earlier in the chapter.

[1027] See Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 334, 377, 436.

figures who either approach or depart him—though, in this case, all of these subordinates wear less elaborate headdresses, have only loincloths, and are shown with their arms tied behind their backs and their legs bound just below the knees.[1028] Moreover, though Lord 13F is apparently a descendant of Program B's Lords 5B and 13N,[1029] he opts to build his credibility less on genealogical grounds than on nine well-preserved texts that record his successful military campaigns, all of which are arranged as though they corresponded to a calendrically significant dates.[1030]

Similarities notwithstanding, the militaristic tenor of Program A is, then, very different from the dignified demeanor of Program B. Instead of well-appointed "members of the city's elite,"[1031] or perhaps compliant rulers of outlying communities who appear as distinguished participants in the Program B processions, all of the secondary figures in Program A are depicted as bound "prisoners" or "captives" who are involved in what might better be termed a forced march than a procession.[1032] Presumably all of these subordinates are being escorted to their sacrificial deaths. In a sense, a step backward (or perhaps forward) toward more bluntly intimidating—and more completely "unmasked"—expressions of elite military authority, the cowed subordinates in Program A seem, therefore, to be models, not of voluntary cooperation (as in the case of Program B or even the Danzante Wall), but rather of entirely forced compliance with an uncompromising regime. In any case, irrespective of that important difference, Program

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[1028] See Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 334-35. Again, ibid., 336, fig. 5.43, provides details of the six secondary figures (and the one paramount figure).

[1029] See Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 407.

[1030] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 399.

[1031] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 405. Recall Urcid's phasing that the subordinate figures in Program B are either "members of the city's elite, perhaps lineage heads of 14 of the 15 'barrios' of Monte Albán or rulers of subordinate communities [from outside Monte Albán]." If the latter is true, that mitigates this as a contrast between Programs B and A.

[1032] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 336, fig. 5.43, provides a diagram of the one paramount figure and the six secondary figures who are pictographically represented in Program A. Remember, though, that Urcid, ibid., 399, also notes that two more captives are named but not pictured, thus bringing the total number of identifiable captives to eight.

A, though slightly more long-lived than Program B, was also deliberately demolished quite soon after the demise of its featured protagonist, sometime between 600 CE and 700 CE, this time so that the well-traveled orthostats could be reused in the basal wall of the newly refurbished South Platform. But, in this third and last iteration, if we accept Urcid's assessment (about which I have expressed some hesitations), the cornerstones were from the outset stuccoed over, and thus never worked as a public display.

d. Modeling Rulership but also Followership: Three Modes of Elite Leadership, Three Modes of Non-Elite Compliance

By way of summation, then, though pursuit of this question about the ritual-architectural commemoration of individuals—both rulers and non-rulers—in Monte Albán's most conspicuous monumental displays raises a tangle of unresolved issues, we can make a handful of general observations. It is certain, for example, that in this Zapotec context, far more like the penchant for person-specific monuments in the Maya world than the thoroughly "impersonal" approach of Teotihuacanos, the depiction of identifiable historical individuals is a major priority in every era. Moreover, while the depiction of specific Monte Albán rulers is a predictable emphasis throughout the history of the capital, the propensity for also picturing identifiable and named non-rulers—and thereby presenting paradigmatic models for proper followership as well as leadership—is equally notable, if much less often acknowledged. And furthermore, while every visual argument for the legitimacy of particular rulers also includes a correlative depiction of suitable compliance with that ruling authority, we observe substantial changes over time in both the approach to depicting rulers and non-rulers and the share of attention that is respectively afforded to each. Accordingly, as a means of summing up and reiterating, I extract from those transformations a provisional typology of three models of leadership, which also connote three different models of followership. Once again for heuristic purposes, I present these as more discrete options than they, in all likelihood, actually were.

The first option takes seriously the possibility, purported most fully in Arthur Joyce's (re)construction of the history of the capital, that Monte Albán's founding and early ascent really

did depend upon a widely shared investment in communal or inclusive authority.[1033] Recall that, in his rendition of the city's site-selection, disenchanted but spiritually inclined migrants from San José Mogote constituted "a new religious movement that engaged a broad spectrum of the people who set out to build a ceremonial center on the sacred hilltop;"[1034] in fact, the impetus for this movement, Joyce argues, is the combined discontent and agency of non-elites who feel excluded from the increasingly exclusivistic ritual proceedings of San José Mogote's elites. For this socially diverse but religiously common-minded constituency, the vacant mountain provided the most fortuitous site at which to recover and cultivate a reciprocal relationship with the divine that was understood as "a sacred covenant that established relations of debt and merit between humans and the gods, with sacrifice as a fundamental condition of human existence."[1035] And, in his view, the early success of Monte Albán, grander even than the founders anticipated, depended in large part on non-elites' genuine enthusiasm for participating in that collective undertaking.

Support for this possibility emerges from an empathetic ("hermeneutic of retrieval") reading of the Formative-era Danzante Wall wherein the highly disproportionate depiction of rank-and-file soldiers over rulers speaks to an inclusive socio-political formation in which the leaders who initiated the public display acknowledge that their power actually depends upon the fully cooperative contributions of all classes of society. In that case, as Joyce repeatedly asserts, rulers stake their claim to authority primarily on their supposedly privileged capability for

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[1033] Regarding Joyce's (re)construction of Monte Albán history, see, for example, Arthur A. Joyce, "The Founding of Monte Albán: Sacred Propositions and Social Practices," in *Agency in Archaeology*, eds. M. Dobres and J. Robb (London: Routledge, 2000), 71-91; or again see either Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, chap. 7, or the more concise summary of his view present in chapter 1 of the present work under the subtitle, "Arthur Joyce's Alternate Starting Point: The Agency of Commoners and the Religiosity of Everyone."

[1034] Joyce, *Mixtecs, Zapotecs, and Chatinos*, 131. On the prospect that "Monte Albán was founded by adherents of a new social and religious movement in reaction to the political crisis of the late Middle Formative," see also ibid., 141. And concerning his fuller ideas on the origins of Monte Albán, see Joyce, "The Founding of Monte Albán;" Joyce, "Sacred Space and Social Relations in the Valley of Oaxaca;" and Joyce, "The Main Plaza of Monte Albán."

[1035] Joyce, *Mixtecs, Zapotecs, and Chatinos*, 60.

interacting with the divine,[1036] while at the same time affirming that maintenance of the divine covenant requires the self-sacrificing ritualizing that all ranks of the multi-tiered military fraternity are exhibited as willing to undertake. From this view, the Building L-sub façade presents a paradigmatic model of followership in which non-rulers are respected and affirmed, and therefore profoundly and earnestly invested in "doing their part" to foster the success of a capital of which they understand themselves to be an integral part.[1037] By contrast to nearly all other (re)constructions, in Joyce's presentation, huge disparities in status and political power notwithstanding, the rulers and the ruled are truly interdependent and strikingly like-minded in their shared "religious" aspirations.

Moreover, according to this empathetic reading of the Danzante Wall, the terms of that cosmological agreement, which depends upon the contributions of all sectors of Zapotec society, are reinforced by visual allusions to the essential interconnections between war, sacrifice and prosperity—a set of underlying cosmological investments that led me to label the Building L-sub façade a "cosmogram."[1038] The complex and nuanced composition of the Period I display, as an expression of sacred history, presents not only a surfeit of specific soldierly heroes, identifiable elders and the datable inaugurations of two or three specific rulers, but also abiding ontological propositions about the essential requirements of war, sacrifice and human-divine covenantal obligations, that is to say, aspects of the Mesoamerican cosmovision that are, as befits mythology, understood as ageless and permanent. Indeed, as Eliade and many others have remarked with respect to the appeal of "lithic architecture" from Stonehenge-like megaliths to granite tombstones, memorializing people, events and ideas in stone is a means fostering a sense

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[1036] See, for instance, Joyce, *Mixtecs, Zapotecs, and Chatinos*, 62.

[1037] Instead of forced compliance, 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), 213, writes that, in his view, "commoners gave their allegiance to Monte Albán and its rulers and relocated to the hilltop center in large numbers because they found the symbolism of the sacred mountain and the ritual performances in the Main Plaza to be compelling.".

[1038] See my comments earlier in the chapter on "cosmograms," (a term that neither Joyce nor Urcid use).

of timelessness and endurance.[1039] And thus the Danzante relief, by contrast to the transient and time-bound messages of Programs B and A, endeavors to express everlasting truths about necessary interdependency of rulers and followers. And while it has been unfashionable, at least since the 1970s, to endorse the seemingly romantic notion of humble Zapotec rulers who feel a genuine sense of respect for, and even interdependent reliance on, non-elites, I would not rule this out as an empirical option that may have indeed have animated early Monte Albán.

The second option—which rejects the possibility of bona fide two-way respect between leaders and followers—emerges from a more skeptical ("hermeneutic of suspicion") reading of the Danzante Wall wherein the disproportionate depiction of enlisted men and ancestors, rather than present-day rulers, is interpreted, in Javier Urcid's term, as a kind of "masking of exclusionary interests."[1040] By that leerier assessment, the understated representation of rulers is a strategic and somewhat condescending political ploy, not a forthright expression of elite-commoner interdependence; and thus while the Danzante reliefs do model cooperative and voluntary followership, wiser minds, presumably some Monte Albán non-elites among them, would realize that those militia men were actually being exploited rather than honestly appreciated. Various sociological and/or Marxist presuppositions about the general workings of politically informed indoctrination support this notion of elites who propagate a religious ideology (e.g., concerning a human-divine covenant) of which they themselves are not really convinced, but which is highly serviceable in manipulating credulous commoners. In this very widespread, if somewhat cynical, assessment of the leadership-followership dynamics, rulers can be congratulated for disguising (or "masking") their actual authoritarian motives in ways that engender the sort of "false consciousness" among non-elites that is highly effective in securing Monte Albán's control over the region.

[1039] On the ostensibly timelessness of stone monuments and architecture, see Mircea Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas*, vol. 1, *From the Stone Age to the Eleusinian Mysteries*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), chap. 5, "Megaliths, Temples, Ceremonial Centers: Occident, Mediterranean, Indus Valley." I will revisit this notion of timeless stone construction in chapter 7 with respect to the ritual-architectural commemoration of the dead, priority II-D.

[1040] See Urcid, *Zapotec Writing*, 154-55; or Urcid, "Los oráculos y la Guerra," 225.

While Program A will present the most clear exemplar of the third option—that is, fully "unmasked" authoritarian leadership—Program B provides a kind of in-between example that demonstrates a less subtle version of the sort of propagandistic "masking of exclusionary interests" that Urcid sees in the Danzante composition.[1041] In Program B, on the one hand, as regards leadership, a living sovereign, 5 Jaguar or Lord 5B, makes himself the unmistakeable focal point of the public display in ways that promote the legitimacy of his own hegemony, especially via showcasing his genealogical descent from now-deceased 13 Soap Plant or Lord 13N. On the other hand, as regards depictions of followership, all 14 of the specifically named subordinates, who may be either lesser Monte Albán elites or rulers from surrounding communities, are depicted as distinguished and important persons in their own right, who approach Lord 5B with gifts and offerings in ostensibly voluntary and respectful ways.[1042] This façade thereby models a version of followership in which subordinates have been persuaded of the rightful hegemony of the ruler and, consequently, acquiesce to his authority with purportedly unforced self-effacement.[1043] That is to say, Program B, though promoting a more overt (less "masked") mode of exclusionary rulership wherein a living sovereign promulgates his own hegemony via heredity, nonetheless also displays a model of respectful followership in which subordinates willingly acknowledge and submit to that leaderly authority. Here again the depiction of identifiable individuals serves to extol an image of supposed mutual respect between rulers and ruled.

By contrast, the third and most thoroughly "unmasked" version of authoritarian leadership and followership emerges in Program A, wherein a Monte Albán sovereign celebrates

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[1041] Actually, in Urcid's own remarks on the matter (e.g., Urcid, *Zapotec Writing*, 154-55; or Urcid, "Los oráculos y la Guerra," 225), Program B belongs with Program A as examples of the "fully unmasked exclusionary interests" undertaken by the ruling elites of Monte Albán by 400 CE, not with the Danzantes as an example of "masked authoritarian control."

[1042] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 367, 405.

[1043] Remember that it is the distinguished but willingly subordinate figure in what Urcid calls Program B that Marcus, "Teotihuacan Visitors on Monte Albán Monuments and Murals," identifies as Teotihuacano ambassadors.

himself and his military accomplishments in ways that coerce rather than cajole compliance. Here again the living leader who commissioned the display, 13 Night or Lord 13F, positions himself as the unique focal point;[1044] but in this most egocentric and condescending of cases, all of the specifically named subordinates in the processionary scenes are depicted as bound captives or prisoners—to that extent, not really "followers" at all—who are being led to their sacrificial deaths.[1045] This composition is the most acerbic but perhaps also the most honest in exhibiting a mode of authority in which the relationship between Monte Albán rulers and their subordinates is one of mutual disdain, maybe even hate. While this is the latest of the visual displays under discussion, it is also the most vivid exemplar of the sort of "force" or "threat of physical violence" that Bruce Lincoln argues "always is a stopgap measure, effective in the short run but unworkable over the long haul."[1046] Nonetheless in this Classic-era monumental exhibit, the incentive for depicting specifically named persons—both the ruler who initiated a self-glorifying display of himself and a representative sampling of his cowed subordinates—obtains; and still, numerically and in terms of space, non-rulers substantially exceed sovereigns. This is an unambiguous visual statement both about who is in change and how non-elites, whether lower ranking locals or defeated non-locals, have no choice but to submit to that authority. Here even the pretense of mutual respect is abandoned.

Moreover, the much simplified agenda of the Program A, not unlike that of Program B, also largely abandons the enunciation of timeless cosmological themes about the interrelations between war, sacrifice and divine-human covenantal obligations in favor of plainly historical, in fact, almost contemporary, events and people. Lord 13F supports his legitimacy primarily via the presentation of nine of his relatively recent military triumphs, the dates of which are massaged to conform to calendrically significant dates.[1047] But just as Program B was razed after about a century, Program A is, Urcid thinks, dissembled quite shortly after Lord 13F's demise so

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[1044] See Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 334, 377, 436.

[1045] See Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 334-35 and 336, fig. 5.43.

[1046] Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society*, 3-4.

[1047] See Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 376-97.

that that its stones (but not its carved images) could be utilized in the final refurbishment of the South Platform.[1048] That is to say, suggesting a kind of pragmatic anti-sentimentality, once those rulers who commissioned monuments to themselves have died, their self-serving public displays are almost immediately expendable, and thus dissembled so that their component orthostats can be harvested for reuse in newer contexts. Instead of Building L-sub-like visual enunciations of timeless mythological and cosmological themes about war, sacrifice and human-divine covenantal obligations, Programs B and A are completely timebound. In that sense, while there is a "mythologization" of historical events to match calendar endings, the rulers are *not* really transformed into enduring paradigms of rulership that can inform future generations. Instead, Lords 5B and 13F are impressive but ephemeral actors in empirical events that barely merit the designation "sacred history."

In sum, then, with respect to this third main variation on the sacred history priority (II-B), the ritual-architectural commemoration of mythico-historical individuals at Monte Albán—especially, but by no means only rulers—is, more like Mayas than Teotihuacanos, very much in evidence during all eras of the great Zapotec capital. But, over time, those personalized depictions are put to the service very different, variously, mitigated, masked and unmasked models of authoritarian leadership and followership.

D. Ritual-Architectural Commemorations of Mythico-Geographic Places, Sites or Locations: The Enduring Significance of the Once-Great Zapotec Capital

I turn now to the fourth and final principal permutation of the sacred history priority, II-B—that is, the ritual-architectural commemorations of *mythico-geographic places, sites or locations*. Where consideration of the closely interrelated memorialization of mythico-historic *episodes* and *individuals* led us back to Javier Urcid's revisionist ideas about Monte Albán monumental narrative displays, studied reflection on this last main variation on the theme leads us, instead, as we'll see, to ethnohistorian Maarten Jansen's fascinatingly unfamiliar rendition of the city's Postclassic decline and then rebirth, insights that depend especially on Jansen's

[1048] See Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 358, 405.

thoughtful discernments of references to Monte Albán in the Mixtec codices. In this case, it is neither mythico-historic occurrences nor personages, but rather the enduring prestige of the mountaintop site itself that is, centuries after Monte Albán had ceased to function as a working capital, being memorialized and revalorized.

Yet again, enroute to these Oaxaca-specific observations, I pursue this line of hermeneutical questioning, first as a cross-cultural phenomenon, then as a practice that reappears across the superarea of Mesoamerica, and finally as another point of entry to appreciating the particulars of Monte Albán history and religion(s).

1. Commemorations of Mythico-Geographic Places as a Cross-Cultural Phenomenon: Memorializing the Revered Real Estate of Sacred History

Countless scholars of indigenous peoples comment on the intimate relations between particular features of the natural landscape and storytelling and, to that extent, with what I term "sacred history." To borrow a frequently quoted phrase that Keith Basso credits to Western Apache horseman Dudley Patterson, "wisdom sits in places."[1049] Ethnographer and rancher Basso, based on his emphatically local study of Western Apaches' place-names, concedes the more general point that, from the perspective of indigenous peoples the world over, "places possess a marked capacity for triggering acts of self-reflection, inspiring thoughts about who one presently is, or memories of who one used to be, or musing on who one might become."[1050] Navajo assertions that their myths and stories are "spatially anchored" to specific locations in their territorial homeland, for instance, are, Basso says, reechoed in West Apache claims that "all these places have stories" and, consequently, it is the land itself that "makes the people live right."[1051] Likewise, as noted in chapter 4, Australian Aborigines, owing to the extreme contrast

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[1049] Keith H. Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language among the Western Apache* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), 121ff.

[1050] Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places*, 107.

[1051] Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places*, 45-47, attributes the phrase "spatially anchored" to Harry Hoijer's comments on Navajo engagements with the landscape, but argues (ibid., 45) that

between almost no permanent architectural constructions and their intensely nuanced familiarities with essentially all features of the natural landscape in which they reside, are often cited in relation to the linkage of ecological features with mythological beings and stories. [1052] Amos Rapoport, for example, reechoes Basso's sentiment by noting that, for Aborigines, "Every individual feature of Ayer's Rock is linked to a significant myth and the mythological beings who created it. Every tree, every stain, hole and fissure has meaning."[1053]

Ethnographic observations of this sort of correlation of natural features and mythistory, which could be multiplied ad infinitum,[1054] point to a fourth main variation on the sacred history priority (II-B)—namely, the ritual-architectural commemorations of mythico-geographic places, sites or locations. In these cases, even more important than the memorialization of mythico-historic episodes or their main actors is the urge simply to mark and to establish direct contact with the supposed site—the geographical location—of a mythical or miraculous occurrence. This morphological sub-option involves circumstances in which physical places, often irrespective of attendant narratives, come to be revered in and of themselves. Sometimes, in

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"Hoijer could just as well be speaking of the Western Apache." Basso, ibid., 61, attributes the claim that the land occupied by Western Apaches "makes the people live right" to native woman Annie Peach.

[1052] In chapter 4 relative to the divinity priority (II-A), see the sub-section entitled "Divination of the Natural Landscape as a Cross-Cultural Phenomenon: The Buildingless Sacred Space of Indians and Aborigines."

[1053] Amos Rapoport, "Australian Aborigines and the Definition of Place," in *Shelter, Sign, and Symbol: An Exploratory Work on Vernacular Architecture*, ed. Paul Oliver (Woodstock, N.Y.: Overlook Press, 1977), 42.

[1054] Among many works that could be used to fill out this notion of indigenous peoples' linkage of landscape features and storytelling, consider, for instance, Belden C. Lane, *Landscapes of the Sacred: Geography and Narrative in American Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988); *Senses of Place*, eds. Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso (Sante Fe: School of American Research Press, 1996); *The Anthropology of Landscape: Perspectives on Place and Space*, eds. Eric Hirsch and Michael O'Hanlon (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); Christopher Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape: Places, Paths and Monuments* (Oxford, UK: Berg Publishers, 1994); and *Archaeologies of Landscape: Contemporary Perspectives*, eds. Wendy Ashmore and A. Bernard Knapp (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1999).

other words, the significance of "*the where*" of sacred history can transcend even "*the what*" or "*the who*."[1055]

Searching after cross-cultural instantiation of this alternative eventuates in a wealth of diversely instructive built forms and ritual practices, the most outstanding of which invariably involve pilgrimage or, sometimes, migration.[1056] In a very relevant turn of phrase, Indologist and comparativist Diana Eck, for instance, describes how, at the pilgrimage site of Banaras, or Varanasi, on the Ganges, "mythology becomes geography;" irrespective of layers of stories and ontological explanations for the significance of "the City of Light," simply to be there, especially to die at that efficacious place, is what matters most.[1057] Many pilgrimage journeys to the presumed site of a mythical or miraculous event, not only in India but in many traditions, are, in fact, motivated less by an interest of reiterating or even remembering particular sacred historical personages or circumstances, which may indeed have been largely forgotten, than by rather more pragmatic concerns: to touch the magically potent earth or relics, to drink the restorative water, to petition for health and fertility, to fulfill vows or, as in the case of pilgrimages to oracles, to solicit advice and information.[1058]

This fascination primarily with the real estate of sacred history is apparent at any number of pilgrimage sites: Lourdes, Mecca and the great shrine of the Virgin of Guadalupe outside

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[1055] It is noteworthy that the sort of commemorations of the *places* of sacred history being described here is also very relevant to Eliade's notion of "hierophanies" or "hierophanic places," which was addressed in chapter 1 in relation to the homology priority (I-A).

[1056] The priority of *place* over that of sacred historical *episode* or *personage* is evident, for instance, (a) at those pilgrimage sites that multiple traditions esteem, but for quite different reasons, as in the respective Jewish, Christian and Muslim enthusiasm for the site of Jerusalem; and (b) at those many pilgrimage sites like Chalma in Mexico, for instance, which are usurped by conquering peoples (in this case, first by the Aztecs then by the Spaniards) who explain the significance of the same place in terms of quite different sacred stories, but to which pilgrims continue to flock largely irrespective of the new explanations.

[1057] Diana Eck, *Banaras: City of Light* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 256.

[1058] Of course, pilgrimage is an exceedingly complex phenomenon that participates in virtually all the categories in my framework of ritual-architectural priorities.

Mexico City are only the most spectacular of hundreds of strong examples. As participants in this morphological sub-option (among others), each of these famous destinations owes its original prestige to some sequence of exceptional events—a sequence of events that remains always important—and the stories of those circumstances are very well known even before pilgrims leave home. Few new details regarding the apparitions of virgins at Lourdes and Guadalupe, or Abraham's and Sarah's movements at Mecca, are liable to be learned by making those respective trips. Moreover, like nearly all major pilgrimage sites, each of these places attracted major devotional attention long in advance of the emergences of the Christian and Islamic traditions that come to claim them as their own. And thus, in each case, there is, as perhaps best encapsulated in the Hajji's reiterative prayer upon arriving at the precinct on the Ka'bah—"I am here, Lord. I am here"[1059]—an affective, trans-intellectual need for direct contact with the geographical site that supersedes and outlasts the present orthodox explanations of the significance of the place. No canonical exposition of the history and meanings of pilgrimage destinations captures the existential attraction that faithful feel for these esteemed places.

Often, then, ritual-architectural design solutions take their characteristic forms with the express purpose of facilitating this sort of grassroots fascination for visitation and taction with the physical evidence and miraculous precincts of one's sacred history. The formative power of popular, often unruly and theologically problematic, pilgrimage to Rome, for instance, has ramifications at every scale of the built environment: At the relatively small scale of the architectural elements, the annular crypt, which became a hallmark of early medieval church building, first arose as a device to make St. Peter's relics visible and easily accessible to pilgrims, yet safe from handling and abuse.[1060] At the level of buildings, the characteristic basilica form was adopted by Christians in sixth-century Rome as the direct and ingenious

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[1059] Of many bibliographic sources that include the Hajji's celebratory assertion upon reaching Mecca—"I am here, Lord, I am here. I am here; no partner hast Thou. I am here..."—see the *Risala* of Ibn Abi Zayd al-Qayrawani quoted in *Islam*, edited by John A. Williams (New York: George Braziller, 1961), 115-18.

[1060] Richard Krautheimer, *Rome: Profile of a City* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 85-86.

architectural solution to the problems caused by floods of pilgrims.[1061] And at a regional scale, Richard Krautheimer has shown that paraliturgical pilgrimage, particularly in the adept hands of Gregory the Great, was perhaps *the* decisive force in Rome's ascension to political and religious hegemony, and in the contouring of medieval Europe generally.[1062]

Furthermore, besides the obvious (and enormous) set of instances in which people feel compelled to journey to the site of some exceptional sacred historical event, the urge to commemorate the geographical places of, to use William McNeill's term, "mythistory" likewise manifests itself in a variety of creative strategies for somehow transferring the miraculous power of that place elsewhere or, in a sense, "bringing the place home."[1063] Pilgrims routinely carry away reproductions of miracle-working images, water or amupullae filled with substances associated with the site in hopes that they might somehow maintain contact with that powerful place.[1064] And Ronald Grimes provides an even more graphic image of this urgent desire to

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[1061] Krautheimer, *Rome*, 85-86.

[1062] Krautheimer, *Rome* , 82-87. Similarly on the socio-political import of pilgrimage, Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 51ff., discuss how the Spaniards successfully exploited pilgrimage fervor in their missionary agenda in Mexico, an example to which I return next sub-section. Turner and Turner, ibid., 234, also discuss how the "pilgrimage ethic" in Europe, with its emphasis on "holy travel" and the benefits flowing from such travel, may well have helped to create the communications networks that later made mercantile and industrial capitalism a viable national and international system. Furthermore, Otto von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral: Origins of the Medieval Concept of Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956), 6-7, for instance, discusses the important role of pilgrimage in the growth of cities, marketing systems and roads in Europe. Likewise, pilgrimage plays an absolutely crucial role in Paul Wheatley's theory of urban genesis in *The Pivot of the Four Quarters*, chapter 3. And for roughly parallel comments regarding the very important socio-cultural implications of pilgrimage in India, see, for instance, Surinder Mohan Bhardwaj, *Hindu Places of Pilgrimage: A Study in Cultural Geography* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 7; and David G. Mandelbaum, *Society in India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), vol. 2, 402.

[1063] See McNeill, *Mythistory and other Essays*, 3-22.

[1064] See, for instance, David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 128.

literally lay hands (or feet) on the geographical context of one's sacred history in his description of those contemporary pilgrims who journey to the small New Mexican village of Chimayo to obtain dirt, which they then bring home to eat (a practice termed geophagy) and to mix with saliva to make the sign of the cross on their children's foreheads. In Grimes's interpretation, "space becomes objectified as land. . . *tierra del Santo* [sacred soil]... and insofar as space becomes objectified as land one can 'carry space' back with him in the form of a jar of dirt."[1065]

Albeit a radically different historical context, the same sort of fascination with the turf of sacred history is demonstrated in a more explicitly architectural fashion by the exploits of St. Helen, the mother of Constantine the Great. According to legend, Helen returned from Jerusalem with a shipload of earth from Mount Calvary upon which Christ had shed his blood at the Crucifixion. Helen supposedly placed that venerable dirt on the floor of her room, until it eventually came to underlie the chapel dedicated to her in the Basilica of Santa Croce at Rome.[1066] By virtue of what Irving Lavin calls the "topographical transfusion" of Jerusalem to Rome (or what I might connect with homologizing architecture, priority I-A), that chapel itself, the whole basilica and all of Rome are understood to be the second Jerusalem, in fact, "the truer Jerusalem" where the Lord was crucified a second time in Peter.[1067]

In Hinduism, to borrow both Surinder Mohan Bhardwaj's phrase and assessment, this "transferring of sanctity" from a mythologically significant place to somewhere else is "a quite frequent phenomenon."[1068] Thus, where the sacred abode of Siva may, in some mythico-

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[1065] Ronald Grimes, *Symbol and Conquest: Public Ritual and Drama in Sante Fe, New Mexico* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1976), 71.

[1066] See, for example, Irving Lavin, *Bernini and the Crossing at St. Peter's* (New York: New York University Press, 1968), 34-35.

[1067] Lavin, *Bernini and the Crossing at St. Peter's*, 25. Lavin, moreover, contends that Bernini's design for the Crossing of St. Peter's is a continuation of that "topographical transfusion" so that St. Peter's likewise *becomes Jerusalem*, the place where salvation was achieved and is continually renewed. Ibid., 35.

[1068] Bhardwaj, *Hindu Places of Pilgrimage*, 86.

geographical sense, lie at the origin of the Ganges in the Himalayas (specifically at Mount Kailasa), Bhardwaj explains that,

> "the quality of sanctity of the Ganga and of the Himalayas seems to have been transferred in part to other rivers and other mountains respectively. Every mountain top can be a local abode of Siva or his consort Sakti. Every river can be a local Ganga."[1069]

And, in perhaps the most spectacular—and most specifically architectural—manifestations of this urge to "bring home" the places of one's sacred history, whole buildings and even towns have, on occasion, been reproduced elsewhere. In the fifteenth century in the town of Varallo in Piedmont, Italy, for instance, Friar Minor Bernardino Caimi orchestrated the construction of a whole series of chapels (some 45 are extant at this point), which, complete with remarkably lifelike statues and paintings, replicate the most famous sites of the Holy Land and depict in stunning detail scenes of Christian sacred history from Eden to the Crucifixion and burial of Jesus. According to David Freedberg,

> "[Caimi's] aim was to evoke, in a natural setting, the holy places he himself had visited, Bethlehem, Nazareth, Mount Tabor, and Jerusalem, and especially the various sites of the Passion--Gethsemane, Mount Sion, and Golgotha."[1070]

By virtue of this incredible effort in architectural replication, Varallo, in an important sense, *becomes* the Holy Land and visitors are allowed not simply to remember or recall Christ's Passion but to relive and participate in it—to be there once again—in a most palpable sense.

Other more modest versions of Caimi's spectacular facsimile were subsequently constructed around northern Italy.[1071] The notion of creating a "New Jerusalem," albeit less verisimilitudinously, has been embraced also by Christians from Calvin, to the Puritans, to the

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[1069] Bhardwaj, *Hindu Places of Pilgrimage*, 86.

[1070] Freedberg, *The Power of Images*, 192.

[1071] See Freedberg, *The Power of Images*, 196-200.

Mormons.[1072] And, in South America, Padre Cicero Romao Batista, himself a reputed miracle worker, undertook a project that rivals Caimi's ambitious play on this theme when early this century he initiated the construction of an elaborate facsimile of Jerusalem at Juazeiro, Brazil, complete with a Via Sacra (the Rua do Horto) by which hundreds of thousands of pilgrims continue to make their entry into the city.[1073]

In short, while indigenous correlations of the natural topography and sacred history may be worthy of special note in this respect, any number of religious traditions, including present-day traditions, present fabulous examples of the variation on priority II-B in which affection for a specific geographical place outstrips considered attention even to the specific mythico-historical events and personages that are associated with that site.

2. Commemorations of Mythico-Geographic Places across Mesoamerica: Respecting Where They Are and Where They (Supposedly) Came From

Assuredly, bringing this line of questioning to bear on the superarea of Mesoamerica evokes many issues. Nonetheless, I settle on a mismatch of two topics because each provides useful background for looking more specifically to the ritual-architectural commemoration of mythico-geographic places in relation to Monte Albán. The first is a brief reminder of the paired importances of pilgrimage and migration as two quite different ways of acknowledging the special significance and prestige of particular mythico-geographic places. And the second, which, like migration, speaks to the topic of "where they (supposedly) came from," is the uniquely prominent endurance and potency of the mythico-historic paradigm of the fabulous Toltecs and their equally fabulous city of Tollan. Though in somewhat eccentric ways, both topics will reemerge in subsequent discussion of the Mixtecs' intrepid appropriation of the

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[1072] On Puritans and Mormons attempts to create "New Jerusalems" in America, see, for instance, Lane, *Landscape of the Sacred*, 103-24.

[1073] See Candace Slater, "The Literature of Pilgrimage: Present-day Miracle Stories," in *Latin American Pilgrimage*, edited by N. Ross Crumrine and Alan Morinis (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), 181-83.

declining Zapotec capital of Monte Albán as their own place of origins and site for a Quetzalcoatl cult center.

a. Pilgrimage and Migration: The Religious Experience of Personified Landscapes and of Places One May Never Have Visited

First, while here again I risk restating the obvious, usually-reiterative pilgrimages and usually-one-time migrations—which entail similarly intimate, but notably different, sorts of engagements with special places—lace every era and region of Mesoamerican history.[1074] Regarding the former, in the most high-profile of examples, few extended discussions of the paramount Mexican pilgrimage destination—the site of the Virgin of Guadalupe's 1531 appearances to the indigenous Juan Diego—fail to link the enormous attraction of this supreme site of Catholic sacred history, Tepeyac, just north of Mexico City, to the fact that this was, for generations earlier, the pre-Columbian site of devotion to Tonantzín, the Aztec mother goddess.[1075] As noted in several of the cross-cultural examples, that specific pilgrimage sites have an apparently intrinsic appeal that persists irrespective of the more transient and specific stories and sacred histories that are ascribed to those places is widely acknowledged.[1076]

[1074] For seven case studies of pilgrimage in the Mesoamerican region, most of which deal with colonial and contemporary phenomena (and none with Oaxaca), see *Pilgrimage in Latin America*, eds. Crumrine and Morinis, chaps. 3-9.

[1075] Of countless relevant sources, see, for instance, Richard Nebel, *Santa Maria Tonantzín, Virgen de Guadalupe: Continuidad y transformación religiosa en México* (México, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1995); and Miguel León Portilla, *Tonantzin Guadalupe: Pensamiento náhual y mensaje cristiano en "Nican mopohua"* (México, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económico, 2000).

[1076] Note, by the way, that the apparently intrinsic, and thus resilient, appeal of various places, which thereby become places of pilgrimage, is a major topic in relation to Mircea Eliade's ideas about "hierophanies" as those sites at which "the sacred irrupts into the profane," thereby creating permanently "sacred places." In chapter 1 relative to the homology priority, see the sub-section entitled "Monte Albán as Heterogeneous Space and Hierophany: Discovered and/or Humanly Constructed Mountains of Sustenance."

Davíd Carrasco's thoughtful history-of-religions interpretation of the Guadalupe phenomenon puts a finer point on that observation when he maintains that a visit to the shrine entails "two qualitatively different types of religious experience."[1077] By his rereading, the famed circumstance demonstrates not only the sort of personally transformative religious experience that comes in a face-to-face encounter between the indigenous Juan Diego and the divine Guadalupe, but also "the religious experience *of and within a ceremonial landscape* ritually designed for collective religious awareness."[1078] Accentuating that both the hill of Tepeyac and the nearby colonial city of México qualify as *altepeme* water-mountains, Carrasco argues that the experience at and of Tepeyac transforms pilgrims "by not only what is happening to them and what they are doing but also *by the very places they occupy during the encounter*."[1079] That is to say, the Mexican pilgrim's dual religious experience of Tepeyac demonstrates, for one, as is frequently pointed out, a kind of transference of devotional reverence for the Aztec Tonantzín to the Catholic Guadalupe, both of whom are understood to have a special connection to this place; but, moreover, for two, as Carrasco is more distinctive in bringing to the fore, pilgrims likewise experience an equally significant engagement with the actual landscape, which remains perpetually potent even in the tumult of colonial times. In his words,

> "In what I take to be a Mexican style of religious experience..., Juan Diego becomes aware of the transcendent power of not only the Virgin of Guadalupe but also of the *hill [or altépetl] teeming with sacred images, lights, sounds and presences*. This combination of being filled with a "dosage" of the goddess *and* hill reflects a long-

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[1077] Davíd Carrasco, "The Virgin of Guadalupe and Two Types of Religious Experience: The Personal Illumination and the Ceremonial Landscape," in *Religions—The Religious Experience*, edited by Matthias Riedl and Tilo Schabert (Würzburg, *Germany:* Königshausen & Neumann, 2008), 99-118.

[1078] Carrasco, "The Virgin of Guadalupe and Two Types of Religious Experience," 99; italics his.

[1079] Carrasco, "The Virgin of Guadalupe and Two Types of Religious Experience," 100; italics his.

> standing indigenous type of religious experience in Mexico that was central to the way the Nahuas designed their religious topography."[1080]

In short, Carrasco's nuanced comments on Guadalupe help us to appreciate that, from the perspective of the Mesoamerican cosmovision, which is at play in both pre-Columbian and colonial times, pilgrimage involves not simply journeying to places as a means of engaging a deity who resides there (though, that is frequently an important part of the motivation), but, furthermore, an opportunity to engage the supereminence of the place (likely an *altépetl*) itself. The Catholic Virgin may have replaced the Aztec goddess as the explicit object of pilgrims' attention, but the deeper allure and significance of the physical site of Tepeyac remains intact. And in that respect, all of the remarks last chapter about the personification and/or divination of natural "architectural" features of the Mesoamerican landscape are again germane.[1081]

Victor and Edith Turner's comparative study of Christian pilgrimage, which devotes considerable attention to Mexico, makes the same point about the resilient appeal of various Mesoamerican pilgrimage destinations irrespective of concerted efforts by Spanish Catholics to eradicate the pre-Columbian deities and stories associated with those places in favor of more suitably Christian associations. Parallel to Roman authorities' exploitation of popular pilgrimage fervor that I discussed last sub-section, the Turners note that, "it did not take the [New Spain] missionaries long to realize that pilgrimage was an effective instrument for maintaining regional cohesion, and their earlier misgiving gave way to enthusiastic support;"[1082] and thus, in many instances, Christian martyrs and saints were strategically substituted for the indigenous deities.[1083] Perhaps their strongest case is Chalma, a small Central Mexican village but major pilgrimage center that had already undergone this sort of deliberate substitutionary replacement

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[1080] Carrasco, "The Virgin of Guadalupe and Two Types of Religious Experience," 102; italics his.

[1081] In chapter 4 relative to the divinity priority (II-A), see especially the sub-section entitled "The Personification and/or Divination of Natural "Architectural" Features of the Landscape."

[1082] Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, 51.

[1083] Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, 52.

wherein Aztecs, upon conquering the area, removed from the main cave shrine the native Otomís' divine pair Old Father (Mixcoatl-Otonteuctli, "Cloud Serpent") and Old Mother (Xochiquetzal-Nohpyttecha, "Most Precious Flower"), and replaced them with their own Aztec war god and patron deity Huitzilopochtli.[1084] And then, once Spaniards occupied the area, they followed suit—with a strategy that the Turners see as precisely parallel to that of the nearly contemporaneous replacement of Tonantzín with the Virgin of Guadalupe at Tepeyac—by replacing the image of Huitzilopochtli with that of the Christ of Chalma. Eventually Augustinians fill out the new Christian associations with a miracle story in which Fray Nicholas de Perea, in 1537, led some Indians to the cave of Chalma whereupon,

> "they discovered the sacred image of our Sovereign Redeemer, Jesus Christ crucified, placed on the same altar where the detestable idol had stood before. The idol, smashed to the ground and reduced to fragments, was serving as a footstool to the divine feet of the [new] sacred image."[1085]

And thus, irrespective of the alternate sacred history in which Jesus Christ literally smashes and usurps the place of the indigenous "idol," the long-revered cave of Chalma persists as a major pilgrimage destination. What Carrasco terms the "transcendent power" of the landscape itself remains intact.[1086]

In other different but similarly instructive cases, apparently pessimistic that they would be able to effect that sort of transformation of official significances, the Spanish Catholic ploy was to stigmatize rather than expropriate traditional places of devotion, especially caves; and thus friars not infrequently redesignated those sites as haunts of the devil. Among prominent examples, Elsie Clews Parsons's extensive comments about the so-renamed "Devil's Cave," or Sus Giber, on the outskirts of Mitla demonstrate, on the one hand, the Catholics' considerable success in persuading the Mitla Zapotecs of the 1920s and 1930s of the extreme dangers of

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[1084] Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, 54.

[1085] Augustinian father Joaquin Sardo's 1810 book on the devotion to Our Lord of Chalma; quoted by Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, 56.

[1086] Carrasco, "The Virgin of Guadalupe and Two Types of Religious Experience," 102.

visiting this traditional locus of devotion, and, on the other hand, Catholics' lack of full success in stigmatizing the cave insofar as some Mitleyones continued to visit and worship there, as many persist in doing today.[1087] Likewise in Oaxaca, Ubaldo López García describes how a long-venerated grotto in the Mixtec village of Santiago Apoala, despite similarly being stigmatized and renamed by Spaniards "the devil's cave," remains even now a highly revered locale, especially for healers who consider this a uniquely propitious place at which to undertake their curative and propitiatory practices.[1088] López García recounts, for instance, how a novice Mixtec, who was trapped atop the local mountain they call Kawa Laki at the base of which is this cave, was unable to descend until he called for the assistance of a wiser elder, Tiburcio Jiménez, better known as Vuchu Vaju, "who was the one to help the young man, because he knew how to climb the rocks and *how to talk to the sacred places*."[1089] Here again, then, we are confronted with indigenous beliefs in the abiding personification of features of the landscape, which (or actually *who*) can be both demanding as well as generous and beneficent. Places talk, listen and negotiate.[1090]

[1087] For extensive comments about the ambiguous status of Mitla's "Devil's Cave, of Sus Giber, in the 1920s and 1930, see Elsie Clews Parsons, *Mitla: Town of the Souls and Other Zapoteco-Speaking Pueblos of Oaxaca, Mexico* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1936), 210, 220, 289, 314, 340-42, 370, 454, 509, 512, 520-21, passim. Regarding evidence of still-continued devotional activitiy at the Mitla cave, see Alicia M. Barabas, Marcus Winter, María del Carmen Castillo, y Nallely Moreno, "La Cueva del Diablo: creencias rituales de ayer y hoy entre los zapotecos de Mitla, Oaxaca", en *Suplemento del Diario de Campo, Boletín de la Coordinación Nacional de Antropología* (México, D.F.: Conaculta-INAH, 2005).

[1088] See Ubaldo López García, "Conceptualización vernácula en lugares sagrados," 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), 195-209.

[1089] López García, "Conceptualización vernácula en lugares sagrados," 207; my translation, italics added.

[1090] Here I am reminded of the remarks by Molly H. Bassett, *The Fate of Earthly Things: Aztec Gods and God-Bodies* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015), 22-23, on which I relied in chapter 4 relative to the divinity priority, II-A, concerning "the animate cosmovision" of ancient and contemporary Mesoamericans wherein mountains are 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."

In any case, while one-time migrations are quite a different sort of sacred journey from reiterative pilgrimages, they too speak to the commemoration of mythico-geographical places in ways that can advance our understanding of this morphological option relative to Monte Albán. On this topic, I need not repeat all that I said in previous remarks about the village-specific *lienzos*, which nearly every community in Oaxaca and elsewhere have. But remember that those deliberately tendentious documents not only authorize specific communities connections to the specific landscapes in which they permanently reside; *lienzos*, moreover, invariably illustrate the sorts of foundation stories wherein present-day communities understand themselves to have come originally from "some other place," frequently Aztlán or some other lauded mythical homeland. Few Mesoamericans actually dwell permanently in their origin places. And while this pan-Mesoamerican tendency for tracing one's origins to a place different from that at which the community presently resides raises a host of important issue, in anticipation of the forthcoming discussion of Mixtecs' Postclassic embrace Monte Albán as a place of origins, I simply note the unassailable observation that, frequently, that supposed origin place, which becomes so important in a group's sacred history and thus their socio-political identity, is *not* a place to which they have any actual historical connection. Often and ironically, a community's authorizing mythico-geographic place of origins, from which they supposedly migrated, is a place they have never even visited and which, in fact, may not even exist in an empirical way.

b. The Mythico-Historical Paradigm of the Toltecs and Tollan: Appropriating Origin Places and Urban Pedigrees Not One's Own

Second, before considering how Monte Albán comes, in the Postclassic era, to occupy this crucial but apocryphal status as both a place of origins and a model of urban excellence for Mixtecs, I revisit quickly the widespread appropriation of the Toltecs' marvelous city of Tollan as a defining component of the sacred histories of numerous Mesoamerican urban centers. In what would, by the Classic era, become a preponderantly urban world, orientation with respect to animated natural features was augmented by orientation with respect to the mythico-historic cities, again frequently irrespective of an actual historical connection those paradigmatic cities; and, unquestionably, as noted several times earlier, the paramount example involves those many

pre-Columbian centers that connect their destinies and urban configurations to the esteemed paradigm of the city-dwelling Toltecs and their fabulous metropolis of Tollan. In the present discussion, cursory comments on the topic are enough to build some momentum to consideration of the complex ways in which that paradigm, which at first seems entirely irrelevant to Monte Albán, eventually snakes its way into the late history of the Zapotec capital.

The historicity and earthly correlate to the effusive traditions of Tollan and the Toltecs, about whose marvelous accomplishments one learns, for instance, in Fray Bernardino de Sahagún's *Florentine Codex: General History of the Things of New Spain* (1569), is among Mesoamerican studies most enduring debates.[1091] As early as the nineteenth century, advocates such as Désiré Charnay for the literal-minded position that the celebrated Toltecs were a fully historical "super-race," responsible not only for Teotihuacan but likewise a very large share of Mesoamerica's most monumental architecture,[1092] faced equally adamant, but vastly more skeptical, views like those of Daniel Brinton, who are argued that "the story of the city of Tollan and its inhabitants, the Toltecs, as currently related in ancient Mexican history, is a myth, not history... the Toltec empire is a baseless fable."[1093] For decades, it seemed obvious to scholars

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[1091] On Aztec perceptions of the fabulously accomplished Toltecs and Tollan, see 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 3, "The Origin of the Gods," chap. 3 (pp. 13-15). For a broader surveys of the relevant ethnohistorical sources on the Toltecs and Tollan, see Carrasco, *Quetzalcoatl and the Irony of Empire*, chap.1, "The Sources: From Storybook to Encyclopedia;" and H. B. Nicholson, *Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl: The Once and Future Lord of the Toltecs* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2001.

[1092] See Charnay, *The Ancient Cities of the New World*, chaps. 4-6. Note, though, that despite being an arch-voice for literally historical interpretations of Toltec exploits, even Désiré Charnay, "The Ruins of Central America," *North American Review* 131 (1880), 131, 191, conceded that "Toltec" was also a more generic label "applied to every indigenous tribe that has left behind any monumental traces of its presence." In that vein, also see Charnay, *The Ancient Cities of the New World*, 83, where he acknowledges Francisco Javier Clavijero's contention that references to "Toltec" also mean "architect" and "artificer" in a more general sense.

[1093] Daniel G. Brinton, *Essays of an Americanist* (Philadelphia: Porter and Coates, 1890), 83-85. For more on the same views, also see, Daniel G. Brinton, "Were the Toltecs a Historical Nationality?" *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, vol. 24, no. 126 (July-December, 1887), 229-41.

that the uniquely huge Teotihuacan had been the primary historical base of the Toltecs; but, by the 1940s, the archaeologists reached a kind of official, but never fully persuasive, consensus that the mythical city of Tollan actually corresponded to the earthly city of Tula rather than Teotihuacan.[1094] By the 1980s, however, Davíd Carrasco was making himself the most prominent spokesperson for the now-prevailing view that the mythical city of Tollan, rather than corresponding to any single geographical or historical site, is a "paradigm of urbanism and urban authority," which, he maintains, first arose at the site of Teotihuacan.[1095] Summarizing his view, Carrasco contends that, "In short, a Classic religious tradition was developed in Teotihuacan, which was imposed upon and adapted by many other city-states."[1096]

Carrasco's frequently-cited analysis keys on Paul Wheatley's Eliade-informed model of "urban genesis" to argue that the momentous transformation from village to urban life happened in Mesoamerica first at the site of Teotihuacan; and thus it was in the great Central Mexican capital that the model of a cosmo-magical city that mirrored the structure of the wider universe first took shape.[1097] With explicit reference to the same notion of "sacred history" that informs this whole chapter, Carrasco contends, moreover, that it was one form of the ubiquitous and multidimensional god Quetzalcoatl—namely, that of the man-god (*hombre-dios*), priest-king Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl—who initiated and inspired all of the innovations in the paradisiacal city.[1098] So wonderful was the city of Tollan in imagination of the Aztecs that they described it

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[1094] For overviews of the scholarly debate over the historical status of Tollan and the Toltecs, see Carrasco, *Quetzalcoatl and the Irony of Empire*, 72—76; Jones, *Twin City Tales*, 44-52; and Elizabeth H. Boone, "Venerable Place of Beginnings: The Aztec Understanding of Teotihuacan" in *Mesoamerica's Classic Heritage*, eds. Carrasco, Jones, and Sessions, 376-83.

[1095] Carrasco, *Quetzalcoatl and the Irony of Empire*, 72-74. Carrrasco, ibid., 106, says directly, "I think Teotihuacan was the first Tollan."

[1096] Carrasco, *Quetzalcoatl and the Irony of Empire*, 117.

[1097] See Carrasco, *Quetzalcoatl and the Irony of Empire*, chap.2, "Quetzalcoatl and the Foundation of Tollan."

[1098] On Quetzalcoatl as what Alfredo López Austin terms an *hombre-dios*, or man-god, see Carrasco, *Quetzalcoatl and the Irony of Empire*, 87-90, 103. Appealing explicitly to the Eliade's essay "Cosmogonic Myth and 'Sacred History'" on which I rely, Carrasco, ibid., 77, writes," I

to Sahagún as a context of intelligence and abundance in which corn emerged from the ground in variegated colors, the birds never sing out of tune, surplus corn stokes the fires, and the priest-king Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl presides with perfect justice and insight over the indefatigable Toltecas, or *Tlanquacemilhuime*, "they that crook the knee all day without every tiring."[1099]

In Carrasco's view, "the Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl of Tollan tale," which was widely known across Mesoamerica, presented the sacred historical narrative and paradigmatic model that informed the conception and self-assigned identity of a host of urban centers that emerged in the wake of Teotihuacan's eighth-century collapse.[1100] He explains how, for instance, Cholula, Tula, Xochicalco, Chichén Itzá and Tenochtitlan all astutely configured themselves as "Other Tollans," which thereby allowed them to claim rightful descent from the singularly splendid Toltecs. As noted earlier in the chapter, Mayanists David Stuart, William Fash and Barbara Fash explain how the cache of connecting one's urban center to the Toltec heritage stretched even into the Maya zone, so that the Toltec-Tollan paradigm was prominently in evidence at Tikal, Uaxactún, Copán and other Petén centers.[1101] And thus the Aztecs, who provide the fullest accounts of their supposed Toltec heritage—but also the group with the weakest claim to any historical connection to Teotihuacan—are only the latest and most aggressive of countless groups who usurp for themselves a cherished lineage and pedigree to which they actually had no special historical connection.[1102] All this had been discussed at length.

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contend that the Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl of Tollan tale is the central thread of a genre of archaic historical thought called sacred history."

[1099] Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, book 3, "The Origin of the Gods," chap. 3 (pp. 13-15).

[1100] See Carrasco, *Quetzalcoatl and the Irony of Empire*, chap. 3, "Other Tollans."

[1101] See Stuart, "'The Arrival of Strangers': Teotihuacan and Tollan in Classic Maya History;" and Fash and Fash, "Teotihuacan and the Maya: A Classic Heritage."

[1102] See Carrasco, *Quetzalcoatl and the Irony of Empire*, chap. 4, "The Return of Quetzalcoatl and the Irony of Empire."

Monte Albán, however, is a notable, if understandable, absence from Carrasco's account of the dissemination of the Toltec-Tollan paradigm.[1103] On the one hand, matters of chronology might seem to eliminate entirely the relevance of the Quetzalcoatl-Tollan tale to the conception and organization of the Zapotec center. With securely dated 500 BCE origins, Monte Albán was a flourishing urban center centuries in advance of the emergence of Teotihuacan, which belies the assumption that the Central Mexican center was site to Mesoamerica's initial "urban genesis." Monte Albán's initial conception, while sometimes attributed to "an imported template [that] comes from the Mixe-Zoque area, probably La Venta or highland Chiapas,"[1104] does not owe to later-emerging layout of Teotihuacan. And while the nature of "a kind of 'special relationship' between Teotihuacan and Monte Albán, one that was 'closer and of a different kind' than relations between Teotihuacan and other foreign cities,"[1105] continues to be a matter of debate and disagreement, Monte Albán cannot, by any stretch, be assessed as yet one more "Other Tollan." Nonetheless, on the other hand, as Maarten Jansen's work on Mixtec codices will guide us to see, there may well be a belated and indirect way in which the Feathered Serpent, and to that extent to paradigm of Tollan, eventually does intrude upon the history of Monte Albán.

At any rate, in sum with respect to the broadly Mesoamerican commemoration of mythico-geographic places, I have been selective in foregrounding two general themes that can inform the subsequent and more specific discussion of Postclassic Mixtec conceptions of Monte Alban. First, while the persistent phenomenon of *pilgrimage* demonstrates an incentive to travel

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[1103] For only passing comments on Monte Albán, see Carrasco, *Quetzalcoatl and the Irony of Empire*, 52, 117-18.

[1104] Marcus Winter, "Social Memory and the Origins of Monte Albán," *Ancient Mesoamerican*, vol. 22, no. 2 (September 2011), 393. I discussed this debatable proposal more fully in chapter 2 relative to the convention priority, I-B.

[1105] René Millon, *Urbanization at Teotihuacan, Mexico*, vol. 1, *The Teotihuacan Map*, part 1: Text (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1973), 42; quoted in Marcus and Flannery, *Zapotec Civilization*, 233. I discussed this debated and frequently reinterpreted notion of a "special relationship" between Teotihuacan and Monte Albán, for instance, in a chapter 3 sub-section entitled "Period III Teotihuacan Influences Reassessed: Architectural Archaism Both to Display Connections and Announce Independence."

to and directly engage apparently intrinsically and thus permanently sacred places, the similarly prevalent phenomenon of *migration* (and the sorts of migration stories one encounters in village-specific *lienzos*) demonstrate the less obvious incentive to connect oneself with revered places of origin irrespective of never actually visiting those places. That is to say, while often the commemoration of mythico-geographic places entails making oneself physically present there, not infrequently it entails eulogizing a distant origin place. And second, while this line of questioning urges us to remember Mesoamericans' deep attachments to natural features of the landscape, the widespread efforts to emulate the urban Toltecs reminds us also that, again not infrequently, the mythico-geographic places of highest repute are human-constructed cities such as Tollan, again irrespective of dubious historical connections to that paradigmatic capital. With both those qualifications in the background, I turn now to a more specific discussion of the ways in the largely-abandoned site of Postclassic Monte Albán was embraced (or "revalorized") by Mixtecs as their own place of origin and paradigmatic urban model.

3. Commemorations of Mythico-Geographic Places in Oaxaca: Marten Jansen on Postclassic Monte Albán as a Mythic Model and Resource for Mixtecs

Pursuing this fourth and final, place-specific permutation on the sacred history priority (II-B) specifically with respect to Monte Albán could take us in many different directions. Lots of promising options. The cosmo-magically strategic placement of the Zapotec capital atop an *altépetl* water-mountain, for instance, makes the founding of Monte Albán, I argue, an even stronger exemplar of Wheatley's model of "urban genesis," wherein genuine cities emerge from "centers of ritual and ceremonial," than the Teotihuacan developments to which he and Carrasco appeal.[1106] And that the physical site of Monte Albán was revered as an intrinsically powerful place by locals and visitors during its flourishing as a working capital (i.e., during the Formative and Classic eras, so-termed Periods I, II and IIIA) is incontestable. But these are dynamics that I have already addressed. Accordingly, I take this occasion to explore circumstances about which I have, thus far, had much less to say—namely, the unique prestige that the site continued to

[1106] Wheatley, *The Pivot of the Four Quarters*, 225.

enjoy in the Postclassic era (i.e., Period IIIB-IV), that is, long after the city's prime as a powerful political capital.[1107]

To that end, I rely in the next sub-sections primarily on ethnohistorian Maarten Jansen's provocative, evolving and ongoing work with respect to references to and depictions of Monte Albán in Mixtec pictorial manuscripts, most of which were produced during the Postclassic period.[1108] Jansen's work, which contributes both to the interminable debate concerning the original name(s) of Monte Albán and to the endlessly debated relationship between the Zapotecs and Mixtecs,[1109] provides a fascinatingly detailed and unfamiliar rendition of the capital's demise

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[1107] Regarding "what really happened" in and around Monte Albán during the Postclassic era, recall that each of the main historical (re)constructions treated in Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, describes this era in a decidedly different way, and it is disagreement with respect to the role of Mixtecs that presents perhaps the greatest discepancies.

[1108] For a succession of Maarten Jansen's ideas concerning the representation of Monte Albán in Mixtec codices, see the following four sources: (1) Maarten Jansen, "Monte Albán y Zaachila en los Códices Mixtecos," 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), 67-122; for my present purposes, this first article is the most helpful. (2) Maarten Jansen, "Monte Albán y el origen de las dinastías mixtecas," in *Memoria de la Primera Mesa Redonda de Monte Albán: Procesos de cambio y conceptualización del tiempo*, ed. Nelly M. Robles García (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2001), 149-64; this second article is largely consistent with the first, but adds the hypothesis of a Postclassic Mixtec "crisis cult" at Monte Albán, which I will discuss shortly. (3) Maarten Jansen and Gabina Aurora Pérez Jiménez, *Encounter with the Plumed Serpent: Drama and Power in the Heart of Mesoamerica* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2007), which revisits these themes in a much broader context and provides (in chapter 4) a fuller account of the Mixtec "crisis cult" at Monte Albán. And (4) Maarten Jansen, Dante García Ríos, y Ángel Iván Rivera Guzman, "La Identificación de Monte Albán en los Códices Mixtecos: Nueva Evidencia," Paper presented at the VI Monte Albán Round Table Conference, Oaxaca, Mexico, 2011, https://www.academia.edu/14848692/La_identificación_de_Monte_Albán_en_los_códices_mixtecos_nueva_evidencia._2012_, visited 6-5-2019; this article, as the title suggests, presents some "new evidence," but does not alter the larger conclusions that most interest me.

[1109] Recall that in chapter 1 relative to the homology priority (I-A), I addressed (especially in a long footnote) a tip of the iceberg of debate on the original name of Monte Albán; and in the respective chapters of Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, I demonstrated the extreme diversity of opinions concerning the Mixtec role (or lack thereof) in the rise, florescence and especially collapse of Monte Albán.

and denouement. Moreover, though something of a non-sequitur with earlier portions of the chapter, Jansen's work revives several broader themes foreshadowed in previous sections. He provides, for instance, ways seeing that a version of the Quetzalcoatl-Tollan tradition is, after all relevant to Monte Albán; that Mixtecs undertake a kind of "spatial anchoring" of their sacred history that entails, like the Aztecs, appropriating connections to an "origin place" (i.e., Monte Alban) with which they have only limited historical connections; and, perhaps most germane of all to the present morphological option, Jansen presents the possibility that Monte Albán was perceived a *sitio multiple*, or "multiple site," composed of many rather than just one mythico-geographic places of renown.

a. The Enduring Prestige of Collapsed Cities: Toward an Alternate Account of the Zapotec Capital's Demise and Denouement

In broad-framed comments directly pertinent to the present theme, Jansen precedes his highly specific remarks about Mixtec codices with a reminder that,

> "Large metropolises and ceremonial centers often continue to have an important presence in memory and ideology long after they have been abandoned or have lost their function as a reigning governmental authority or as the center of a political structure at a given time."[1110]

In his view, while Rome probably provides the most prominent example of a site that "retained great ideological and artistic importance even after its fall as an imperial capital," Jansen contends that the same continuing prestige is evident in the case of Postclassic Monte Albán. In his surmise:

> "Although the situations [of ancient Rome and ancient Oaxaca] are not identical, we have reason to think that Monte Albán continued to be present in Oaxacan memory until long after its boom in the Classic—taking into account the continuity of population in the same area."[1111]

[1110] Jansen, García Ríos, y Rivera Guzman, "La Identificación de Monte Albán en los Códices Mixtecos: Nueva Evidencia," 6; my translation.

[1111] Jansen, García Ríos, y Rivera Guzman, "La Identificación de Monte Albán en los Códices Mixtecos: Nueva Evidencia," 6; my translation.

Additionally, while Jansen acknowledges that, from a wider Mesoamerican frame, it is the archetypal city of Tollan and the Toltecs that win first place as "ideological ancestors who set the example of civilization and empire building," he contends also that, "in Postclassic Oaxaca, the memory, however vague, of Classic-era Monte Albán had a similar effect."[1112] In that attenuated sense, Monte Albán does come to function as an "Other Tollan." And while he concurs that reuse of Tomb 7 long after Monte Albán had ceased to function as a working capital provides the best-publicized archaeological evidence for that continuing Postclassic prestige, Jansen builds his case for the ongoing—indeed, in many respects, enhanced—repute of Monte Albán primarily on the abundant accolades and allusions to the site in the Mixtec codices, that is, texts that were not only composed after the political decline of the Zapotec capital but, moreover, authored by peoples who had not really played any central role in building or sustaining the formerly-powerful mountaintop city. In plainly historical terms, the Mixtecs' intimate connections to Monte Albán, not unlike the Aztecs' expropriation of a Toltec pedigree to which they had scant historical claim, are fabrications that, as we'll see, serve both political but also religio-existential purposes.

Jansen, then, reechoing and nuancing a theme to which I have frequently alluded, stresses how Monte Albán, even subsequent to its collapse as an actual site of political and military influence, continued to enjoy great cache and influence in the imaginations of Oaxacan peoples, especially Mixtecs. He accepts the conventional archaeology-based views (a) that the collapse of Monte Albán was gradual rather than sudden, (b) that "the real waning of Monte Albán's power had set in as early as A.D. 800,"[1113] and (c), furthermore, that "during the ninth century the effective power of that state and of Monte Albán as its capital was dissolved and lost."[1114] But then, in the context of the first Monte Albán Roundtable (1998), Jansen contributes an additional,

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[1112] 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), 3.

[1113] Jansen and Pérez Jiménez, *Encounter with the Plumed Serpent*, 130.

[1114] Jansen, "Monte Albán y el origen de las dinastías mixtecas," 160.

highly original, if admittedly speculative, chapter to the Postclassic history of Monte Albán, which is based on his intensely detailed reading of the Mixtec codices.

Jansen takes issue with oft-repeated intimations that the Zapotec capital, following an incremental decline, was an abandoned place, or maybe a "necropolis" visited only occasionally by Mixtecs and others who buried their dead there. Alternatively, he posits that, even in the first half of the tenth century, Monte Albán remained "an important site... that was still home to noble families, a scene of rituals and a source of prestige."[1115] Arguing that the ongoing significance of the largely abandoned Postclassic site was far more layered than the standard characterization of a hallowed burial ground, Jansen maintains that,

> "although the empire had already disappeared, the pattern of ideological relations seems to have continued for at least 100 years. At the beginning of the tenth century, Monte Albán still had some of its old prestige, and ceremonies of supraregional importance were still being held there."[1116]

And, in fact, even with the sixteenth-century arrival of Spaniards, by which time Zaachila had usurped Monte Albán's role as the Zapotec capital, and the old city lay within a territory controlled by the Mixtecs of Cuilapan and Xoxocotlan, "Monte Albán seems still to have retrained some religious importance; still the memory of its former glory and importance was intact."[1117]

b. A Mixtec "Crisis Cult" at Monte Albán: The Belated (Postclassic) Arrival of Quetzalcoatl and the Toltec Heritage

Jansen, moreover, gets quite specific about the sorts of political structures, belief systems and ceremonial activities that, he thinks, were in operation among the poorly maintained edifices of the declining capital. Furthermore, while we have noted how the Zapotec capital's emergence

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[1115] Jansen, "Monte Albán y el origen de las dinastías mixtecas," 159.

[1116] Jansen, "Monte Albán y el origen de las dinastías mixtecas," 160; my translation.

[1117] Jansen, "Monte Albán y Zaachila en los Códices Mixtecos," 67-68; my (loose) translation.

earlier and independent of its Central Mexican counterpart make the Teotihuacan-derived paradigm of the Toltecs and Tollan largely irrelevant in the Formative and Classic-era developments at Monte Albán, Jansen's proposal presents the intriguing possibility of an indirect and belated arrival of a version of the cult of Quetzalcoatl in the Postclassic era. Jansen adds this substance and detail to Postclassic activities in the old capital by arguing, especially on the basis of his reading of the *Codex Nuttal*, that, instead of simply a necropolis or non-operative place revered in memory, the heavily depopulated mountaintop was site to an innovative and vigorous religio-political movement for which a Mixtec leader, Lord 9 Wind 'Quetzalcoatl,' was the culture hero and divine founder.[1118] According to this text-based hypothesis, devotees of Quetzalcoatl, the Plumed Serpent, revered in various manifestations across Mesoamerica (the Mixteca included), but not previously prominent at Monte Albán, found in the dilapidated old capital a new site at which to establish his cult.[1119] That is to say, while the widely decimated old traditions of Quetzalcoatl and the Toltecs had been filtered through the lens of the Aztecs, which whom the Mixtecs had extensive interactions, a remade version of the Quetzalcoatl-Tollan paradigm does, at last, reach Monte Albán.

In other words, while Jansen's primary initiative is a clarification of Mixtec history, he contributes a fascinatingly unfamiliar rendition of Monte Albán's decline as a religio-political capital that features the emergence of a Quetzalcoatl "crisis cult" or "millennial movement," which both capitalizes on "a society in disarray," and then leads to the final demise of the once-great Zapotec city.[1120] The ethnohistorically-derived sequence of Postclassic events that Jansen

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[1118] See Jansen, "Monte Albán y el origen de las dinastías mixtecas," 160; or Jansen and Pérez Jiménez, *Encounter with the Plumed Serpent*, 123.

[1119] Qualifying the way in which the cult of Quetzalcoatl was both new and old to Monte Albán, Jansen, "Monte Albán y el origen de las dinastías mixtecas," 160, n. 16 (my translation), writes, "Of course, this cult was not limited to the Mixtec, nor did it originate there. The classic reliefs [of Monte Albán] show the same sacred bundle [i.e., the accouterments of Quetzalcoatl] in the rites of the [Zapotec] kings. It is not, therefore, the introduction of something entirely new, but a new form, a new concretization of the existing religious life.

[1120] See Jansen, "Monte Albán y el origen de las dinastías mixtecas," 160; or Jansen and Pérez Jiménez, *Encounter with the Plumed Serpent*, 123.

extracts from his reading of numerous Mixtec codices—radically different from any other account of Monte Albán's waning years—is neither easily summarized nor, in its copious details, particularly relevant to the present discussion.[1121] Nonetheless, in very brief, according to the venturous (re)construction that Jansen sketches in his original article, and then fills out in Maarten Jansen and Gabina Aurora Pérez Jiménez, *Encounter with the Plumed Serpent: Drama and Power in the Heart of Mesoamerica* (2007), this Quetzalcoatl cult, which has "an ecstatic, visionary character," was already well established in Apoala (or *Uta Tnoho*), a small Mixtec Alta village that nevertheless has enormous prestige as "the place of origins" of the Mixtec dynasties.[1122] Eventually, however, at some point during Monte Albán's tenth-century political descent—that is to say, during precisely the sort of "tense time of social upheaval" in which "millennial movements" are most prone to flourish[1123]—"the cult was taken to that site and adapted by the lords there."[1124]

While one can imagine quite plainly sociological explanations for the crisis cult's (re)emergence in an already-discombobulated and vulnerable Monte Albán, the Mixtec codices present a more "supernaturalist" story of the movement's (re)founding in the ancient capital. According to the mythistory recorded in those Mixtec pictographic documents, the new religious movement began when visionary priest and leader of the Quetzalcoatl cult, Lord 12 Wind or Smoke-Eye, descended from heaven into the ancient Zapotec capital. In Jansen's synopsis of the

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[1121] Jansen, "Monte Albán y el origen de las dinastías mixtecas," 160-62, provides an elliptical account of this very convoluted sequence of events, all of which are addressed in much fuller detail in Jansen and Pérez Jiménez, *Encounter with the Plumed Serpent*, chap. 4.

[1122] See Jansen, "Monte Albán y el origen de las dinastías mixtecas," 160; or Jansen and Pérez Jiménez, *Encounter with the Plumed Serpent*, xi, 80, 161.

[1123] Jansen and Pérez Jiménez, *Encounter with the Plumed Serpent*, 123, 317, n. 10, appeal to the Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974) with respect to the connection between "crisis cults" or "millennial movements" and "the tense time of social upheaval," which obtained in Postclassic Monte Albán.

[1124] Jansen, "Monte Albán y el origen de las dinastías mixtecas," 160; my translation.

Mixtec description of the auspicious (otherworldly) origins of this religious orientation in Monte Albán:

> "Lord 12 Wind brought this form of worship and religious experience [to Monte Albán] from the Place of Heaven… He arrived after fulfilling his priesthood in the sanctuary on the Cavua Caa Andevui of Yuta Tnoho [i.e., the Mountain of Heaven near Apoala, where in the time of darkness and mystery the primordial Ancestors had manifested themselves and built their home], carrying with him the Sacred Bundle of the culture hero Lord 9 Wind 'Quetzalcoatl.'"[1125]

At that point, then, the devotees of the religious orientation formerly and simultaneously centered at Apoala in the Sierra Mixteca appropriated Monte Albán as an additional "sacred place of origins." This provides, in other words, a mythico-historical rationale for the Mixtecs' deep veneration of Monte Albán, a site with which they actually have quite limited historical involvement. Subsequently, again according to various Mixtec codices, a plethora of precedent-setting events—especially the births of "founders" and marital unions of other mythico-historical figures and, thereby, the origins of various Mixtec dynastic lineages—are understood to have transpired here at Monte Albán.[1126]

Furthermore, according to Jansen's (re)construction of events, the introduction of this new religious outlook spurred a conflict between its adherents, the Allies of Apoala (i.e., Mixtecs), and the older order, or Stone Men (i.e., Zapotecs), who were remnants of Monte

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[1125] Jansen and Pérez Jiménez, *Encounter with the Plumed Serpent*, 123. I borrow the gloss of Cavua Caa Andevui of Yuta Tnoho, also known as Kaua Kaandiui, that I insert into the quote from ibid., xi-xii.

[1126] See, for instance, Jansen and Pérez Jiménez, *Encounter with the Plumed Serpent*, 123ff. Regarding other examples of the sort of strategic marriage alliances undertaken by the Mixtecs, Nigel Davies, *The Toltec Heritage: From the Fall of Tula to the Rise of Tenochtitlan* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980), goes into great detail concerning the mixed veracity and manipulation of genealogies in Central Mexico following the fall of Tula; and Davies, ibid., 239, 288, 292, 294 and 338, discusses many examples of strategic marriage in Mesoamerica. Coe, *The Maya*, 117, discusses manipulated genealogies in Yucatán; and ibid., 148-49, Coe addresses the Mixtecs' contrivance of an extensive series of nuptial unions that eventually resulted in the entire aristocracy being a single family. Farther afield, Harold Osborne, *Indians of the Andes: Aymaras and Quechuas* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1952), discusses "the selective manipulation of remembered history" in South American contexts.

Albán's waning-but-not-altogether-defunct Classic-era religio-political hierarchy.[1127] In the ensuing conflict, Jansen says,

> "the Allies [of Apoala], by defeating the Stone Men [of Monte Albán], became the first lords, the founders of new local dynasties. The dawn of the new era was celebrated with ceremonies of the New Fire in the four directions of the Mixteca."[1128]

At that point (around 1000 CE), in the wake of the Allies' victory, two preeminent Mixtec dominions emerged, each led by the powerful founder of a new local dynasty: Lord 8 Wind, one of the members of the Apoala Alliance, took possession of key places in the Nochixtlan-Yanhuitlan valley and established a center at Yuñudahui; and the leader of a competing faction, Lord 9 Wind, or Death of the Stone Men, who was credited with defeating the old guard at Monte Albán, established a stronghold in Tilantongo.[1129] Over time, however, when conflict broke out between the two, Tilantongo was victorious; and later it was the extraordinary career of the famed Lord 8 Deer that made Tilantongo the political and ideological center of the Mixteca. Contemporaneous with these eleventh-century events in the Mixtec region, the final flickerings of Monte Albán's once-immense political influence were extinguished, though its prestige in the religious imaginations of Oaxacans remained intact. In Jansen's surmise, "Monte Albán had already been reduced to a site of fame but no real influence in the Mixteca. It was a site of oracles attended by priests ('long hairs') of Zaachila, the new central Oaxaca locus of Zapotec power."[1130]

In sum, then, even if one has difficulty accepting the convoluted sequence of Postclassic events that Jansen and Pérez Jiménez present—a skepticism that prevails among most Oaxacanist archaeologists—their intensive exegetical efforts serve our present purposes by

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[1127] On the Stone Men, remnants of Monte Albán's Classic-era religio-political hierarchy, see Jansen, "Monte Albán y el origen de las dinastías mixtecas," 160; and Jansen and Pérez Jiménez, *Encounter with the Plumed Serpent*, 133-41.

[1128] Jansen, "Monte Albán y el origen de las dinastías mixtecas," 161; my translation.

[1129] Jansen, "Monte Albán y el origen de las dinastías mixtecas," 161.

[1130] Jansen, "Monte Albán y el origen de las dinastías mixtecas," 161; my translation.

demonstrating the singular role that the declining Monte Albán played in the Mixtecs' recounting of their sacred history. And thus I turn back now to the present topic wherein a superannuated Zapotec site with which Mixtecs have only limited historical connections is appropriated (or "revalorized") as their own timeless place of primordial origins for the Mixtec dynasties.

c. Monte Albán' as a "Multiple Site": The Plurality and Specificity of Geographic and Constructed Features within the City

With respect to the featured role of the old Zapotec capital in the Mixtec codices, a highly notable qualification in Maarten Jansen's work—a theme reechoed by Javier Urcid (to which I alluded earlier)—is that Monte Albán was perceived as a *sitio múltiple* or "a multiple site."[1131] Consequently, rather than allusions and place names that refer to the whole of the ancient city, one frequently encounters in these Mixtec pictographic documents references to more specific geographical and/or humanly constructed features of the wider urban configuration. In other words, while Jansen does identify many ethnohistorical references to Monte Albán *in toto*—for instance, as "the hill of the palaces of the lords and the graves,"[1132] or as a place of origins or "the dawn of history,"[1133] and, therefore, "an 'established place' (in the primordial era)" or "birthplace"[1134]—he is even more impressed by the greater particularity of most Mixtec references to the by-then-inoperative Zapotec capital. Indeed, observing that "the absence of a single name that corresponds to the total of Monte Albán is notable," Jansen explains that, "instead we find abundant references to the more specific components of the archaeological remains and to a series of place names for the different hills and summits that surround the main

[1131] Jansen, "Monte Albán y el origen de las dinastías mixtecas," 153; my translation. In this context, Jansen bases his assertion that Monte Albán is a *sitio múltiple* or "a multiple site" especially on its representation in the Codex Nuttall.

[1132] Jansen, "Monte Albán y Zaachila en los Códices Mixtecos," 72; my translation.

[1133] Jansen, "Monte Albán y Zaachila en los Códices Mixtecos," 82; my translation.

[1134] Jansen, "Monte Albán y Zaachila en los Códices Mixtecos," 86; my translation.

site."[1135] While the absence of an encompassing name is at first surprising, he contends (and I would strongly accentuate) that,

> "This is not strange in view of the complex character of the site. It is even likely that Monte Albán from its foundation was not conceived as a homogeneous urban unit, but as a combination of different senorial houses (*tecpan*) and private temples."[1136]

More specifically, in views that support my contentions about Monte Albán as site to numerous different conceptions of divinity and cosmogony, Jansen argues that,

> "the set of different place-names [associated with Monte Albán] probably corresponds to a coexistence of different elite residences or manor houses (*casas señoriales*) in a complex political organization, as is often seen in Mesoamerica, known as a segmented state or compound people (*estado segmentado o pueblo compuesto*)."[1137]

To bolster that view, Jansen appeals to Urcid's conclusion, based on his analysis of the monumental visual displays discussed earlier in the chapter, that "the different 'hill' glyphs associated with the prominent figures [for instance] in programs B and A, as well as the data in the Mapa de Xoxocotlan, indicate that no single, monolithic name for Monte Albán should be expected."[1138] Alternatively, in Urcid's opinion, with which Jansen concurs, the various mountains and subdivisions within the broader archaeological site—e.g., Monte Albán proper,

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[1135] Jansen, "Monte Albán y Zaachila en los Códices Mixtecos," 75. In this quote, I have slightly altered Jansen's phrasing in order to accentuate rather than change his point.

[1136] Jansen, "Monte Albán y Zaachila en los Códices Mixtecos," 75-76; my translation.

[1137] Jansen, "Monte Albán y el origen de las dinastías mixtecas," 153; my translation.

[1138] Javier Urcid, "Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing," Ph.D. diss., Department of Anthropology, Yale University, 1992, 385; cited by Jansen, "Monte Albán y Zaachila en los Códices Mixtecos," 76. For a similar point, to which I will allude momentarily, also see Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 407, where he writes in connection with his analysis of Programs B and A: "The two toponymic glyphs [i.e., the toponymic glyph associated with Lord 5B in Program B ('Hill-Trispiral') and the toponymic sign associated with Lord 13F in program A ('Hill V-shaped')] refer to different architectural features or geographic sectors within the city. The archaeological site subdivisions (Monte Albán proper, Atzompa, El Gallo, Monte Albán Chico, and others) could have had their own toponymic glyphs. Such a possibility is reinforced by data in the 1771 Mapa de Xoxocotlan..., where several landmarks in Monte Albán are individually identified."

Atzompa, El Gallo, Monte Albán Chico and others—could have had their own toponymic glyphs.[1139]

Though the details in this part of his analysis can be daunting, for Jansen, two colonial-era documents, both of which incorporate many pre-Columbian Mixtec conventions, are especially important in reaffirming this tendency of the Mixtecs to engage (or revalorize) the once-powerful metropolis, not simply as a single site of generalized prestige, but as what he and Urcid term a "multiple site" and that I would appreciate as "a multivalent, superabundant and autonomous ritual-architectural resource."[1140]

First is the Xoxocotlan Map of 1771, a colonial painting of which there are several extant versions, that is composed from the perspective of Xoxocotlan, a then-Mixtec community that is situated just to the east of Monte Albán, indeed at the foot of the ancient capital.[1141] Despite the fact that "the place names were probably copied from older ones by people who no longer knew the Mixtec language and thus made several mistakes,"[1142] this map, in Jansen's (1998) view, provides "the clearest pictorial representation of [Monte Albán]."[1143] Exploring the much-debated identifications of numerous features of the map in great detail, Jansen concludes that, rather than representing the ancient capital as a single peak, there are "numerous references both to specific components of the archaeological remains and to a series of place names for the

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[1139] Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 407.

[1140] See, for instance, Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, vol. I, chaps 2 and 12.

[1141] For an image of the Xoxocotlan Map of 1771, see Jansen, "Monte Albán y Zaachila en los Códices Mixtecos," 69; and for his fuller (1998) discussion of this colonial document, see ibid., 68-76. Briefer comments appear in Jansen, "Monte Albán y el origen de las dinastías mixtecas," 151-53. And Jansen, García Ríos, y Rivera Guzman, "La Identificación de Monte Albán en los Códices Mixtecos," 7-9, describes (in 2011) not only the Xoxocotlan Map of 1771, but other versions from 1718 (all presumably derived from the same common original), which nonetheless reinforce his original observations about the plurality and specificity of allusions to various built and natural features of Monte Albán.

[1142] Jansen, "Monte Albán y Zaachila en los Códices Mixtecos," 70; my translation.

[1143] Jansen, "Monte Albán y Zaachila en los Códices Mixtecos," 68; my translation.

different hills and summits."[1144] In that vein, he explains that, "at the top of the map Monte Albán is represented as a chain of mountains, among which the Walled Hill of the Jaguar (*Cerro Amurallado del Jaguar*) stands out."[1145] Then, revisiting the issue in 2011 and focusing on an older version of the map, drawn in 1718 but presumably based on the same common original, Jansen is able to identify nine distinct place names for the various hills in the chain, including Hill of the Building and the Lord (*Cerro del Edificio y del Señor*), which he considers a reference to Main Plaza of Monte Albán.[1146] This first document, in other words, makes explicit that, for Mixtecs, the "multiple site" of Monte Albán was, at once, one place and many places.

The second especially revealing document is another Mixtec painting, *El Escudo de Cuilapan*, that is, the Shield or Coat of Arms of Cuilapan. Produced at a site just six kilometers south of Monte Albán that was, during the Classic era, under the control of the Zapotec capital, but that, by the colonial era (when this painting was executed), was the focus of an independent Mixtec city-state.[1147] Discerning references to the cardinal directions as viewed from that Mixtec

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[1144] Jansen, "Monte Albán y Zaachila en los Códices Mixtecos," 75; my translation. Also see Jansen, "Monte Albán y el origen de las dinastías mixtecas," 152. And note, by the way, that that Jansen, "Monte Albán y Zaachila en los Códices Mixtecos," 68, 70, 73, 74, 86, 106; Jansen, "Monte Albán y el origen de las dinastías mixtecas," 152, n. 2; and Jansen, García Ríos, y Rivera Guzman, "La Identificación de Monte Albán en los Códices Mixtecos," 9, along with Urcid, *Zapotec Hieroglyphic Writing*, 407, acknowledge and largely reaffirm the identification of numerous of Monte Albán's specific architectural and geographical features in the Xoxocotlan Map provided by Mary Elizabeth Smith, *Picture Writing from Southern Mexico, Mixtec Place Signs and Maps* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973).

[1145] Jansen, García Ríos, y Rivera Guzman, "La Identificación de Monte Albán en los Códices Mixtecos," 9; my translation.

[1146] Jansen, García Ríos, y Rivera Guzman, "La Identificación de Monte Albán en los Códices Mixtecos," 10-12. On the identification of one of the features of the Mapa de Xoxocotlan with the Main Plaza, see also Jansen, "Monte Albán y Zaachila en los Códices Mixtecos," 70.

[1147] For an image of *El Escudo de Cuilapan*, or the Coat of Arms of Cuilapan, see Jansen, "Monte Albán y Zaachila en los Códices Mixtecos," 77; and for his fuller discussion of this colonial document, see ibid., 76-83. Jansen, "Monte Albán y el origen de las dinastías mixtecas," 152, provides much briefer but consistent comments on the Coat of Arms of Cuilapan. And see also Jansen, García Ríos, y Rivera Guzman, "La Identificación de Monte Albán en los Códices Mixtecos," 7-9, for reiteration of most of the same points about this painting.

bastion, Jansen thinks the Coat of Arms of Cuilapan, on the one hand, depicts the actual colonial-era locales of respective Mixtec, Zapotec, Aztec and Spanish loci of power in the Valley of Oaxaca;[1148] in this respect, Mixtecs are responding to the practical exigencies of their current situation. On the other hand, however, "these prosaic depictions of the political realities of this moment contrast with more exuberant references to the glorious past of Monte Albán, a site associated with the very dawn of history;"[1149] in this respect, Mixtecs, after the fashion of Eliade's *homo religiosi*, are orientating themselves with a perceived place of world origins, which lies outside of both normal geographical space and historical time. The painting thereby demonstrates the Mixtecs of Cuilapan working simultaneously on two levels as they navigate the socio-political precarities of their colonial situation, but, at the same time, are cultivating an existential connection to the both mythical place and time that the remains of Monte Albán have come to represent.

Jansen finds a particularly salient clue to the Mixtecs' expansive understanding of Monte Albán in the image of a sunrise in the Coat of Arms of Cuilapan. This solar image, by his reading, "not only serves to indicate the east, but also connotes a reference to a primordial era according to the Mesoamerican symbolism that describes the founding of kingdoms as 'the time the sun first came out."[1150] In that sense, Monte Albán is being identified by Mixtecs as the earthly but also otherworldly context—that is, both a primordial place *and* time—which hosted not just the beginnings of human history, but also subsequent primal events that account for a whole host of Mixtec political-ceremonial practices and structures.[1151] This second document, in

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[1148] Jansen, "Monte Albán y Zaachila en los Códices Mixtecos," 82.

[1149] Jansen, "Monte Albán y Zaachila en los Códices Mixtecos," 82; my translation.

[1150] Jansen, García Ríos, y Rivera Guzman, "La Identificación de Monte Albán en los Códices Mixtecos," 8; my translation. In the same vein, Jansen, "Monte Albán y Zaachila en los Códices Mixtecos," 78 (my translation) maintains that this sun in the Coat of Arms of Cuilapan "is a reference to the first sunrise, the primordial dawn that is the watershed between sacred, mythical time (*nuu naa*, 'the dark time'), and historical time."

[1151] Jansen, "Monte Albán y Zaachila en los Códices Mixtecos," 78. Additionally, a jaguar painted atop a hill that sit beneath that sun seems to be both a known symbol of the courage and power of warriors and kings and a reference that allows Jansen, García Ríos, y Rivera Guzman,

other words, sheds light on the redoubled ways in which the ancient city is being credited as (a) the site of human origins in general, (b) the site at which Lord 12 Wind, or Smoke-Eye, descended from heaven to initiate the cult of Quetzalcoatl, and, moreover, (c) as site to innumerable divine marriages, and thus the origins of numerous more specifically Mixtec ruling dynasties and institutions. In this document, Monte Albán, the context that scholars will come to award so many "firsts," is being affirmed by Postclassic Mixtecs as a place of origins par excellence.

d. Monte Albán's Status in Mixtec Codices: A Dying City Transformed into a Living Resource and Timeless Place of Origins

In sum, then, while my discussions of the earlier variations on the sacred history priority (II-B) focus on ways in which Zapotec rulers and residents of Monte Albán commemorate mythico-historical episodes and individuals, Maarten Jansen's work directs attention to a twist in perspective wherein the site of the ancient city itself is being commemorated, or actually expropriated, by Mixtec outsiders. In this case, Zapotecs and their capital are more the objects of revalorative activities than the agents of revalorative commemoration. And yet, while Jansen's detailed ethnohistorical analysis may seem at first to take us afield of the present concern for the ritual-architectural commemoration of sacred history, it actually emboldens us to answer the question as to whether or not the morphological option of memorializing mythical places, sites or locations is relevant to Monte Albán with a resounding yes. Indeed, Jansen's discussion of the Postclassic activities of Mixtecs provides specific reaffirmation of at least a half dozen broad themes and countless general formulations to which I have alluded already in relation to this variation on the sacred history priority.

"La Identificación de Monte Albán en los Códices Mixtecos," 9 (my translation), to conclude that "in this painting, Monte Albán is represented as the Walled Hill of the Jaguar (Cerro Amurallado del Jaguar) or more simply as "Cerro Jaguar." Also on the identification of Monte Albán in this painting as "Cerro Jaguar," which coincides with the Ocelotepec of the Xococotlan Map, see Jansen, "Monte Albán y Zaachila en los Códices Mixtecos," 78.

The first is Jansen's reechoing of Urcid's ideas about Monte Albán as a *sitio multiple*, or "multiple site," a highly provocative notion that reinforces my broader hypotheses concerning the extensive internal diversity of the urban capital. Having appreciated that two colonial documents—the Map of Xoxocotlan and the Coat of Arms of Cuilapan—provide a kind of key to a coherent set of place names that are all part of the larger constellation of Monte Albán, Jansen hypothesizes that numerous references in the pre-Columbian Mixtec codices also refer to various geographical and architectural features of the old Zapotec capital. Sometimes, he concludes, these are allusions to Monte Albán in general. In the *Codex Zouche-Nuttall*, for instance, as in the Map of Xoxocotlan, the depiction of a throne, a toponymic reference to Monte Albán as "the Place of the Throne" (*Lugar del Trono*) "sums up the main function of Monte Albán as a place of legitimation of power."[1152] More often, however, Mixtec codice allusions to Monte Albán refer to specific built features that one can still identify within the archaeological site (e.g., the Main Plaza, palaces, tombs, platforms, urns and "treasures") and to toponyms that refer to specific elements of the wider natural geography of the complex we now call Monte Albán.[1153] For Mixtecs, the "multiple site" of Monte Albán is, at once, one prestigious place and many mythico-geographic places of note—a multivalence that makes the mythico-geographic site a vastly richer and more flexible resource for Mixtec revalorizations.

Second, Jansen's analysis demonstrates that for the Mixtecs' sacred history to be compelling even to themselves required what author of *Wisdom Sits in Places*, Keith Basso, refers to as "spatial anchoring."[1154] No sacred history can be allowed to float without solid, if frequently fictive, geographical moorings; mythical events, as recorded, for instance, in *lienzos*, are made vastly more credible by assigning them specific locations. As Basso writes, "places

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[1152] Jansen, "Monte Albán y el origen de las dinastías mixtecas," 153. Additionally with the help of the Mapa de Xoxocotlan, Jansen, ibid., 149, identifies the sign of Monte Albán in general as "Mount that Opens-Insect-Enclosure of Reeds" (*Monte que se abre-insecto-recinto de carrizos*).

[1153] Jansen, "Monte Albán y Zaachila en los Códices Mixtecos," 120-21, provides a pointed summary of 12 place name references from Mixtec codices (specifically from the Nuttall, Seiden, Vindobonensis, Colombino, Becker and Bodley Codices) that refer to various geographical and/or architectural features of the wider site of Monte Albán.

[1154] Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places*, 45-47.

possess a marked capacity for triggering acts of self-reflection, inspiring thoughts about who one presently is, or memories of who one used to be, or musing on who one might become;"[1155] that is to say, attachments to fixed of places orient people with respect to their pasts, presents and futures. And in the respect, the Mixtecs reconfigurement of their narrative traditions in a way that locates many of the key events at the eminently solid site of Monte Albán (a) legitimates those past circumstances, (b) authorizes their present activities, and (c) allows Mixtecs to exercise future aspirations to "what they may become." Reechoing the fundamental insight that storytelling (or myth-making) is ultimately a response to "the temporal character of human existence,"[1156] Jansen's own Ricoeur-inspired remarks speak to the existential and socio-political rewards of attaching—or "anchoring"—oneself to a place like Monte Albán that has a kind of bottomless historical depth:

> "It is the feeling of being embedded in great processes that began long before one's personal existence that leads people to express respect for the superhuman forces that created and maintain humanity, and to reflect commemoratively on events—real or imaginary—that gave rise to the social and political conditions of the present. In this way, they can establish shrines and monuments that express and anchor what Paul Ricoeur calls the "narrative identity" of a people or socio-political community." [1157]

Third, the Mixtecs' cagey exploitation of the waning Zapotec capital provides a vintage instance of Mesoamericans' recurrent willingness to manipulate events and expropriate places in ways that constitute a particularly aggressive example of what Eliade terms "the mythologization of history,"[1158] what Bruce Lincoln calls "strategic tinkering with the past,"[1159] or of Gary Urton's notion that myth-making is foremost "a resource for the motivated construction of

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[1155] Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places*, 107.

[1156] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 3, 52, as discussed earlier in the chapter..

[1157] Jansen, "Inauguración de templos y dinastías," 584; my translation. Recall that I used this as one of the epigrams at the outset of the chapter.

[1158] See, for instance, Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, chap. 9.

[1159] Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society*, 21.

identity."[1160] Regarding this lack of compunction about filtering and massaging empirical realities, Jansen stresses, for instance, that while the Postclassic Mixtec authors of these codices are involved in ongoing contestation with Zapotecs—and while they know full-well that Monte Albán was a Zapotec capital—rather than acknowledge any ethnic distinction, Mixtecs claim the ancient city as their own place of origins, "an unforgettable setting for solemn ceremonies."[1161] Mixtecs rewrite history in ways that present Monte Albán as completely and unambiguously theirs rather than someone else's.

Fourth and closely related, the Quetzalcoatl crisis cult's embrace of Monte Albán as a Mixtec place of origins that compliments rather than displaces the prestige of the traditional origin place of Apoala, moreover, reechoes Eliade's comments about tolerance for "a multiplicity of world centers."[1162] Expropriating the ancient Zapotec city and reconfiguring their mythistory so that many crucial events—especially the births of "founders" and important marital unions and, thereby, the origins of various Mixtec dynastic lineages—are understood to have transpired in the primordial place-time context of Monte Albán reinforces rather compromises the Mixtecs' longer and deeper attachments to the mythico-geographic sites in their western Oaxacan homeland.[1163] In fact, to borrow the Hinduism-informed phrase of Surinder Mohan Bhardwaj, the Mixtec, rather than cancelling or overshadowing their long-revered sacred places in the Mixteca region, succeed in "transferring the sanctity" of Apoala to Monte Albán.[1164]

[1160] Urton, *The History of a Myth: Pacariqtambo and the Origin of the Inkas*, 126-28.

[1161] Jansen, "Monte Albán y el origen de las dinastías mixtecas," 153. Regarding the Mixtec codices' avoidance of any ethnic distinction between Postclassic Mixtecs and the Classic-era Zapotec builders of Monte Albán, see ibid., 157.

[1162] See, for instance, Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, 379.

[1163] Jansen, "Monte Albán y Zaachila en los Códices Mixtecos," 121. Regarding the births and marriages of Mixtec ancestors that are presented as though they happened at Monte Albán, also see Jansen, "Monte Albán y el origen de las dinastías mixtecas," 153-57.

[1164] Bhardwaj, *Hindu Places of Pilgrimage*, 86.

In a fifth and even more basic theme, Jansen's account of Mixtec investments in the site of the old Zapotec capital likewise reaffirms what Davíd Carrasco terms "the transcendent power of the landscape."[1165] Just as we see with respect to the hill of Tepeyac, the cave of Chalma and so many other instances in which Spanish Catholics work to erase the indigenous meanings while at the same time exploiting the permanent allure of traditional pilgrimage destinations, the physical location of Monte Albán has a kind of independent, seeming intrinsic and thus enduring potency that persists irrespective of the exceptionally complex succession of human activities in that place. For Postclassic Mixtecs, the by-then-millennium old socio-political circumstances that were addressed in the Formative-era Danzante Wall and earliest iterations of the "conquest slabs" are, it seems, quite fully forgotten. The self-serving display of the military accomplishments of specific Monte Albán rulers who built Program B and A, not unlike the astronomical referencings built into Building J and the "astronomical commemoration complex" composed Buildings P and H,[1166] are, it seems, of no consequence to the Mixtecs. By the Postclassic era, all those particularistic, once-urgent meanings and significances have fallen by the wayside while "the transcendent power" of Monte Albán's physical location endures and is perhaps even enhanced.

Finally, then, Jansen's ethnohistorically-based (re)constructions bring us full circle to the theme that animates this entire study of Monte Albán—namely, "the superabundance and autonomy of sacred architecture," which, in this case, includes both Zapotec monumental constructions and "the architecture" of the natural landscape surrounding the ancient city.[1167] While we observed time and again the vigorous efforts of Classic-era Zapotecs to rip down,

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[1165] Carrasco, "The Virgin of Guadalupe and Two Types of Religious Experience," 102.

[1166] Galindo Trejo, "Alineamientos calendario-astronómicos en Monte Albán," 276-82, relies on Bernd Fahmel Bever, "Monte Albán: integración en una ciudad plural," tesis doctoral en arquitectura (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1990), from which he draws the notions of a "horizontal observatory" and "astronomical commemoration complex." Galindo Trejo also relies on Fahmel Bever, "El complejo de observación cenital en Monte Albán," 529-45.

[1167] Again, on "the superabundance and autonomy of sacred architecture," see Jones, The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture," vol. I, chap, 2.

dismantle and cover over the monumental narrative displays of their predecessors—and thereby rewrite the sacred history of the site—by the Postclassic era, nearly all of those public exhibits had fallen into disrepair. And with the Mixtec Allies of Apola's defeat of the remnants of the old Zapotec order (i.e., the Stone Men), the last vestiges of the Zapotecs' self-serving understandings of their once-great capital were eradicated. At that point, while the immense prestige of the mountaintop locale remained intact, Mixtecs were afforded a largely blank slate on which to rewrite again their own self-interested sacred history of the site, an opportunity that they seized upon with great creativity and energy. At this point, then, the old built forms of the Main Plaza and the North Platform were assigned new meanings, which—in a quintessential demonstration of "the superabundance and autonomy of sacred architecture"—bore only faint resemblance to "the intended meanings" of their original Zapotec architects. In final sum, Monte Albán was a "multiple site" not only in its constellation of innumerable specific built and natural features, but also in the many different sacred histories that this one mythico-geographic location inspired.

IV. Closing Thoughts:
An Inventory rather than an Argument Concerning the Ritual-Architectural Commemoration of Sacred History

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