



In the Age of the Fifth Sun: Jacques Soustelle's Studies of Aztec Religion

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which aims at an essentially different reality, i.e., “the otherness.”

The qualifications and attributes are manifestations of the experiences which are expressed through language so that the cultural meanings of the theophanic being may be revealed. In the case of the moon, we have noted that it is a being which can be perceived by the eye, although with a look which shows its different profiles. The recalling of past and present events, the kinesthesia of the brightness and the movements in the celestial regions are singular images upon a background of co-references which refer to the flow of subjectivity (Landgrebe 1968: 64).

The estimations are also co-references that focus on the theophanic being from a time-space perspective: in the past, by means of the qualifications surrounding them, among which courage predominates; in the present, they are what is perceived visually, in the way of phenomena or experiences, because they make part of the feeling as a structure of being-in-the-world and make the moral intellection possible; in the future, because they drive forward, by virtue of the duty-to-be which arises from the axiomatic power of the “otherness.” The space aspect is the being “there” in the night sky and the constant paradigmatic presence.

The set of assessing co-references elevates the ethical theophany in its exemplary aspect, thus presenting it as a referential qualitative prototype provided with an ontological-existential dimension. We can assert that with the moon the Siriono cosmovision “has chosen its own hero” (Heidegger 1980: 416).

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In the Age of the Fifth Sun

Jacques Soustelle's Studies of Aztec Religion

Aleksandar Bošković

Introduction

History of the study of ancient Mesoamerican civilizations was always marked by the presence of exceptional scholars. Right along with their research, they also included materials related to

the methodological problems, their personal views and opinions, and every single contribution is by itself and within itself also a history of the time period when research has been conducted.

We can relate in a similar way the work of the great French ethnologist Jacques Soustelle (1912–1990), but his work should also be put in a broader context. By the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, the German scholar Eduard Seler was already conducting extensive research related to the ancient cultures of Pre-Columbian Mexico. Two magnificent volumes by the Norwegian doctor and explorer Carl Lumholtz on the ethnography of northern Mexico were published in 1902 and 1903. Initial archaeological excavations were conducted in the Valley of Mexico by the Mexican archaeologists, beginning with Leopoldo Batrés, and, in the 1920s, Manuel Gamio (always way ahead of his time) was publishing his magnum opus, the multi-volume “Población del valle de Teotihuacán.” The political aspects of indigenismo in Mexican administration contributed to the publication of numerous ethnohistorical sources from the Colonial period. The movement did not last very long, but it permanently influenced people like Angel Ma. Garibay K., Alfonso Caso, Ignacio Bernal, Pedro Armillas, and, a little bit later, Miguel León-Portilla. In France, meetings of the Société des Americanistes have grown into the International Congress of Americanists, and its publication, *Journal de la Société des Americanistes*, has become one of the leading publications in the field. The ethnology of ancient Mexico was dominated by eminent scholars like Paul Rivet.

In the early 30s Soustelle’s research was oriented primarily towards ethnology and linguistics, profoundly influenced by his already solid academic background (at the age of 20 he became a professor of philosophy). From 1932 to 1934 he spent most of the time in the field, and this research resulted in the monumental work on the Otomí from central Mexico, an essay on the Lacandons from Chiapas, and a lecture “Mexique, terre indienne.” This lecture was given in conjunction with the exhibition in the Ethnographical Museum in Paris. The exhibition drew attention of his four years older colleague, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and permanently diverted his focus to Latin (esp. South) America.

Along with Paul Rivet, Soustelle became one of the founders of the new Musée de l’Homme, where he became co-director. In 1939, he gave a lecture sponsored by the Collège de France (Chaire d’Antiquités américaines, Fondation Loubat), “La pensée cosmologique des anciens Mexi-

cains (Représentation du monde et de l’espace),” which was published a year later.

During World War II he was actively engaged in Gen. de Gaulle’s Résistance; in 1945 he became minister of information, and afterwards minister of the colonies in the French government. But, while all this witnesses his enormous energy and the need to speak up his opinion, it is only a short break in his scholarly career. Maybe still the most influential single-volume book on the Aztecs, “La vie quotidienne des Aztèques à la veille de la conquête espagnole,” was published in 1955. Various articles on the certain aspects of the Aztec religion appeared in 1953 (Respect aux dieux morts), 1961 (L’Etat mexicain et la religion), 1966 (Dieux terrestres et dieux célestes dans l’antiquité mexicaine), and 1974 (Aztec Religion). “La pensée cosmologique . . .” and all these articles were published in 1979 in the single volume, “L’Univers des Aztèques.” Naturally, Soustelle was in charge of the entries on Mesoamerican religions in the “Dictionnaire des religions” under the direction of Rev. Paul Poupard in 1984.

Even from this brief introduction, it is obvious that studies dealing with the Aztec religion form significant part of Soustelle’s work. That is why I will concentrate only on this part, ignoring his linguistic contribution, works on the art in the 60s, and more recent volumes on the Olmec (1979) and the Maya (1982).

2. The Role and Function of Religion

For Soustelle, religion primarily has to do with cosmology. Both the structure and the title of his first major ethnographical work support this view. “La pensée cosmologique . . .” begins with the description of the birth of the present world, according to the Colonial period manuscript, “Historia de los Mexicanos por sus pinturas.” This is followed by the myth of the four suns of the Aztec world, according to another Colonial period text, “Anales de Cuauhtitlán.” Then comes a brief description of the several important deities (Quetzalcóatl, Cihuateteo, Huehuetotl, Tlaloc), as well as the myth of birth of the Mexica Aztec tribal god, Huitzilopochtli. There are a lot of etymology and ritual-influenced explanations involved, as shown in the following paragraph:

Le sort normal d’un guerrier, c’est d’offrir des victimes aux dieux, puis de tomber lui-même sur la pierre à sacrifices. Il devient alors, dans les cieux, un compagnon de soleil: Sahagún écrivait, sous la dictée de ses informateurs indigènes: «Le coeur du prisonnier, ils l’appellent précieuse <tuna> de l’aigle

(*quauhnochtli*). Ils l'élèvent vers le soleil, prince de turquoise (c'est-à-dire: de feu), aigle qui monte; ils le lui offrent, ils l'en alimentent. Et, après l'offrande, ils le placent dans la calebasse de l'aigle (*quauhxicalli*): et, les prisonniers sacrifiés, ils les appellent les gens de l'aigle.» Devenus compagnons de soleil, les guerriers sacrifiés le suivent dans la première moitié de sa course, depuis l'Est jusqu'au Zénith, chantant et agitant leurs armes. Au bout de quatre ans, ils se transforment en oiseaux-mouches, et reviennent sur la terre. On comprend, dès lors, pourquoi Uitzilopochtli, «l'oiseau-mouche de la gauche», c'est-à-dire du Sud, est à la fois un dieu solaire et la divinité guerrière par excellence (Soustelle 1979a: 101–102).¹

A significant part of his work is also dedicated to the representations of days and colors, as well as the symbolism connected with the specific cardinal points. Emphasis on the time and space as the two fundamental parts that delimit human creative and symbolic activity is also present. It is interesting to note that there are also a great deal of comparisons, both within Mesoamerica and cross-culturally; in the table of colors and cardinal points, the examples are taken from the Maya from Yucatán, Zuni, Tewa, China, and Aztecs. (This passion for comparisons will much later lead Soustelle to postulate the existence of the Aztec goddess Chalchihuitlicue, on the Relief 1 from Chalcatzingo, 2000 years before the rise of the Aztec state [1979b: 183]!)

Both in his most famous work, “La vie quotidienne des Aztèques” (see Chapter III, especially part “Une religion impériale” [1955: 189–194]), and in the articles written during the 60s (especially “L'Etat mexicain et la religion” [1979a: 21–36]), there is a considerable emphasis on the social component of religion. Religion is always perceived as something within the society itself, and something that influences that society in a variety of ways.

This is connected with the philosophical concept of the human being as a practical being, whose symbolic activity changes and re-models the world around him/her. We are what we do.² Since living in the community is a characteristic of all human beings, it is necessary to further understand the relationship between religion and society. For Durkheim, religion is an extensive symbolic system that enables social life by expressing and

keeping the social feelings or sentiments and values. Lessa and Vogt go a little bit further when they perceive the explanation and the expression of ultimate values of society as the primary function of religion. For Durkheim, the ultimate function of religion and its “collective representations” is the establishment of the social solidarity among the members of the community, in such a way that, in some sense, by worshipping the deities society worships itself. It is not a mere coincidence that one finds numerous references to Durkheim in Soustelle's writings. It is only through understanding the society itself that we can understand the Aztec religion. Or, as put at the beginning of his article for the Encyclopædia Britannica: “La religion aztèque est constituée par la mythologie, les croyances et les pratiques du peuple de l'empire aztèque du Mexique pré-cortésien” (Soustelle 1979a: 37).

3. The Principle(s) of Duality

Therefore, it is not difficult to conclude that Soustelle does not give a definition of the Aztec religion – he is much more interested in its function within the society, in the rituals connected with cults³ of the various deities, and the human effort to systematize the whole world of symbols that surrounds her/him.

On the cover of “L'Univers des Aztèques,” there is a scene from the “Codex Borbonicus” (p. 22), showing Quetzalcóatl in the ritual dance with Tezcatlipoca.⁴ According to the 16th century manuscript (Histoyre de Mexique), these two gods split in two the ancient earth goddess Coatlicue (in another myth, mother of Huitzilopochtli), and create the world from the parts of her body (for the elaborate interpretation of the whole event, see Bonifaz Nuño 1986). The opposition Quetzal-

1 For the sake of convenience, all the works published in “L'Univers des Aztèques” are quoted from that single volume.

2 And it is easier to understand why Soustelle always insisted on living according to one's own principles – even if it meant spending years in an exile (1961–1968) [for further biographic references, see Duverger 1991]. His beliefs are incorporated in the collection of essays on the ancient Mexico (Soustelle 1967).

3 I use the word “ritual” for the actions that, performed in the right way, ensure the harmonious functioning of the family or the group of people. After it is performed for the first time, the purpose of the ritual is in its eternal repetition. Within the broader community (state or society), this smooth functioning is ensured by the “cult.” Therefore, the main difference between the two is in the level of generalization; if the ritual is supposed to ensure a good harvest, the cult ensures the functioning of the whole universe. For the definitions and models related to Mesoamerica, see Brundage 1985: 4 ff.

4 Actually, they represent two 26-years periods (of 365 days each), and they are both depicted as the “Lords of the night.” For the reference to this scene, see Nowotny in “Codex Borbonicus” 1974: 18–19.

cóatl/Tezcatlipoca is sometimes perceived as one of the fundamental oppositions of ancient Mesoamerica. A single lord of duality, Ometeotl, is considered by Carrasco to be “the fundamental divine power in central Mesoamerican religion” (Hinnels 1984: 241). Dual creator gods that also stand for the opposite forces of nature (light/darkness; earth/sky) are known from a variety of religious traditions, and in the Valley of Mexico this dualism is especially strengthened by the fact that there was a dual shrine on the top of the Aztec Templo Mayor – there was a temple dedicated to the solar (sky) god, Huitzilopochtli, and one dedicated to the water (earth) god, Tlaloc.

It is not clear whether this constitutes the actual proof of the importance of dualism in Pre-Columbian Mesoamerica, or the researchers enter their own distinctions (since from the early childhood we are taught to think and perceive the clear-cut and distinctive categories). In his article on the earth and sky gods of ancient Mexico, Soustelle wrote:

Tout phénomène humain est singulier. Il n'est donc pas question de déduire des faits mexicains des lois générales applicables à d'autres temps et à d'autres lieux. Mais la succession des événements dans cette partie du monde offre une riche matière à la réflexion de l'ethnologie et même du philosophe, parce qu'elle permet d'étudier comme en laboratoire les actions et réactions réciproques de sociétés qui correspondent à deux modes de vie fondamentaux de l'humanité: celui des nomades chasseurs et collecteurs et celui des cultivateurs sédentaires (Soustelle 1979a: 83).

But the oppositions multiply and it seems unclear, for example, how to interpret the different aspects of Quetzalcóatl (who is both the Morning Star and the Evening Star, but also Merchant God, Wind God, and connected with the Underworld as Yoalli Ehecatl). There are differences even in the interpretations of the well-known myths, such as the one of the slaying of Coyolxauhqui; some authors (Hultkrantz 1979; León-Portilla 1987) suggest that she was slain accidentally (that is to say, she was on her way to warn Huitzilopochtli); while others (Carrasco 1987) “read” the myth as it was written down, describing her as the leader and inspirer of the 400 Southerners in their attempt to kill Huitzilopochtli. The opposites are also present in the representation of Huitzilopochtli's and Coyolxauhqui's mother, Coatlicue, in the Museo Nacional de Antropología in Mexico, described as “diosa de la tierra, del nacimiento y de la vejez, misterio del origen y del fin, antigüedad y feminidad” (Justino Fernández in León-Portilla 1971: 575).

Finally, there is a clear expression of this prin-

ciple from the following lines from vol. VIII, fol. 175, of the “Textos de los Informantes Indígenas”:

Y sabían los toltecas
que muchos son los cielos,
decían que son doce divisiones superpuestas.
Allá vive el verdadero dios y su comparte.
El dios celestial se llama Señor de la dualidad, Ometecuhtli,
y su comparte se llama Señora de la dualidad, Omecihuatl,
Señora celeste;
quiere decir:
sobre los doce cielos es rey, es señor
(León-Portilla 1971: 485).

However, the phrase “el verdadero dios” is very indicative of the time when these lines were written down – it was already a time of the “true god” and “true religion.” To what extent is this concept influenced by Christianity and the need to “rationalize” the deities and present them in a way that the foreigners (Spaniards) can understand them remains open to debate. As Soustelle would point out, understanding Aztec religion was the key to understanding the Aztecs themselves.

This is a revised version of a paper presented at the 47th International Congress of Americanists in New Orleans, on July 10, 1991. It is dedicated to Professor Esad Ćimić, dean of religious studies in Yugoslavia, on the occasion of his 60th birthday.

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The Archaic Ontology of the Hopi Indians

On John Loftin's Interpretation of Hopi Religion

Armin W. Geertz

The recent publication of John D. Loftin's "Religion and Hopi Life in the Twentieth Century" (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991 – xxi + 168 pp., price: \$ 19.95) calls for a more careful and detailed analysis than a shorter review would allow. John Loftin is a lawyer and teaches at the Department of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. His book is partly based on a doctoral dissertation written in 1983 and on six summers of fieldwork among the Hopis. The author claims that no comprehensive and systematic interpretation of Hopi religion exists in the literature. This lack stems in part, according to Loftin, from the fact "that the Hopi have been investigated mostly by anthropologists, who have tended to interpret the Hopi religious orientation as it relates to social structure and material culture" (xiv). The truth of the matter is

that a comprehensive and systematic interpretation of Hopi religion *does* in fact exist. And it is written by an anthropologist! I am referring to Richard M. Bradfield's work "A Natural History of Associations" (London 1973), which Loftin knows well, since he refers to it often in his book. Loftin's claim is peculiar to historians of religions influenced by the Chicago school and the recently deceased, world famous Mircea Eliade. Eliade was of the opinion that religion cannot be adequately interpreted through what he considered to be the *reductionisms* of the social sciences. Religion must be studied with the help of a special transhistorical empathy which only historians of religions are capable of experiencing, and the results of their studies must contribute to a type of humanistic revivalism which Eliade believed is essential to the salvation of modern humanity from its existential malaise. This basic position is evidenced in a large number of studies inspired by or directly influenced by Eliade and his closest pupils.

1. Archaic Ontology

How do Eliadeans study religion? They proceed from a series of *a priori* assumptions of which two are particularly essential. First of all, there is the concept of the dialectics of the sacred. To be human is to be religious. *Homo sapiens* is *Homo religiosus*. Religious humans live their lives in terms of transcendent exemplary models, where the inevitable tension between the historicization of the sacred and the remythicization of the historical are played out in many, mostly dramatic, forms. Eliade conceived of these factors in reified terms. For him, the Sacred is a "metacultural and transhistorical" phenomenon coextensive with human nature, and, therefore, not all religious experience is historically determined. Thus, "essential religious structures" cannot be demonstrated as having been created by certain societies at certain historical moments. These societies have simply provided the opportunity for the manifestation of forms of the Sacred. Eliade's well-known morphology of the Sacred provides categories for studying these manifestations. Eliade was aware of the historical nature of the documents, but he never resorted to explaining the specific historical and social factors of the dialectic because he was more interested in delineating the nature of non-historical structures than in explaining their historical manifestations. Thus, as anthropologist John Saliba pointed out, Eliade's model is a "descending model" which deletes the human dimension of religion (1976: 140).