Mexika Militarism and Blood Sacrifice:
Explorations on the Formation of a Discourse and Epistemology of Denial

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> But as we will soon discover, the idea that our ancestors practiced human sacrifice is not only absurd, it is a calculated lie which was carried out and promoted by the Spanish propaganda machine.
>
> Kurly Tlapoyawa, 2003

> Let us hope that the silenced and unheard voices of those whose blood fed the appetites of the Mexica Gods of war and sacrifice will again be afforded the opportunity to speak to us through the spiritual veil that shrouds, and the scholarship that illuminates, this dark but hallowed and mournful past of the human condition.
>
> Ruben G. Mendoza, 2001a

Introduction

New and controversial perspectives on Mesoamerican militarism, blood sacrifice, and cannibalism have emerged in the wake of archaeological discoveries at a number of ancient Mesoamerican sites and centers that serve to extend this culture of violence into the depths of remote antiquity (Faulhaber 1965; Niederberger 1987; Pijoan Aguadé and Mansilla Lory 1997). Moreover, recent investigations at the ancient metropolis of Teotihuacán, Mexico (Sugiyama 1995), the acropolis centers and conquest polities of Cacaxtla, Tlaxcala, and Xochicalco,

Morelos (Mendoza 1992), Alta Vista, Zacatecas (Pickering 1985), and the Classic Maya sites of Bonampak, Mexico (Miller 1986), and Tikal and Dos Pilas, Guatemala (Demarest, Rice, and Rice 2004), further affirm the Classic and Epiclassic affinities of a pan-Mesoamerican complex of war and sacrifice once thought to represent a predominantly Postclassic (ca. 900-1521 c.e.) pattern of conflict and violence centered on Toltec and Mexica Aztec[1] patterns of military statecraft and imperial expansion (Schele and Miller 1986; Diehl and Berlo 1989). Despite the evidence at hand, and an equally formidable body of new data and interpretations from the Proyecto Templo Mayor, a revisionist denial-based movement is afoot whose primary orientation and objective is the dismantling and discrediting of centuries of scholarship bearing on the role of mass human sacrifice and religious violence among the Mexica Aztec specifically, and Mesoamerica and the Americas more generally (Mendoza 2001b).

Figure 1: ABOUT HERE

Mesoamerican Map of Sites Mentioned in Text

In an effort to address lingering questions regarding the role, extent, and antiquity of mass human sacrifice among the Mexica Aztec, this study examines both traditional (or culturally relative) sources of documentation, such as Spanish colonial and indigenous accounts and primary archaeological or forensic sources, and recent revisionist critiques bearing on the question of human sacrifice in Mesoamerica.[2] Concomitantly, in an effort to shed further light on recent perspectives regarding the antiquity and or extent of human sacrifice and religious violence in Mesoamerica, three primary questions are necessarily addressed herein. First, what

analytical and interpretive critiques do both traditionalists and revisionists alike generally advance in order to support or refute purported claims for the nature and extent of blood sacrifice among the Mexica Aztec? Second, given the nature of the aforementioned critiques, what primary sources exist to document the Mexica Aztec and pre-Aztec antiquity of blood sacrifice, human heart excision, and religious violence in central highland Mesoamerica? Finally, where the archaeological evidence is concerned, what specific contextual criteria, and diagnostic indicators, exist to support a formal forensic analysis of the evidence for human sacrifice in central highland Mesoamerica?

In an effort to address recent post-Processual, post-Modern, millenarian revivalist, and or nationalistic arguments to the contrary, this paper will proceed through a critical reappraisal of that evidence currently available for demonstrating the prevalence and antiquity of war and ritual violence in ancient Mesoamerica. In so doing, this review will seek to weigh the merits of those interpretive perspectives, and that ethnohistorical and archaeological evidence, increasingly brought into question by a growing contingent of millenarian revisionists and devotees of the neo-Mexica "denial" movements that have coalesced at home and abroad in recent years.[3] Finally, this paper will conclude with a review of emerging forensic applications and archaeological approaches that offer to radically alter prevailing methodologies in the analysis and interpretation of sacrificial sites and remains in Mesoamerica and beyond.

The Neo-Mexica Revisionists

As an archaeologist with a long-standing scholarly interest in ancient and modern Mesoamerica, I have often been challenged (by both students and colleagues) to address the reliability and or veracity of 16th-century colonial accounts attributing human sacrifice,

cannibalism, and religious violence to the Mexica Aztec and other Mesoamerican peoples (Preciado 1995). For some Chicana/o university students, and Mexican and Amerindian nationalists alike, that corpus of ethnohistory, archaeology, and other scholarly research that serves to document the prominent and "disproportionate" role played by religious violence, and the martial arts, within Mesoamerican empires is taken to represent a more Eurocentric, sacrilegious, deceitful, and or hegemonic and colonialist discourse. Accordingly, one need not go far to search for contrarian claims that mass human sacrifice was a fabrication of the Spanish colonial propaganda machine. In fact, the writings of University of Zurich ethnologist Peter Hassler (1992a, 1992b, 1992c) now fuel a Neo-Mexica revisionist discourse whose contention it is that evidence for pre-Hispanic blood sacrifice, and any and all other related forms of religious violence in Native America, are suspect. Hassler (1992a) argues that such works represent the byproducts of a long-standing pattern of political fiction now construed to constitute an entrenched aspect of scholarly agendas, fomented predominantly by archaeologists and anthropologists, intent on discrediting and denigrating the Mexica Aztec and other Amerindian communities.

Hassler (1992b) further contends, "after careful and systematic study of the sources, I find no sign of evidence of institutionalized mass human sacrifice among the Aztecs. The phenomenon to be studied, therefore, may be not these supposed sacrifices but the deeply rooted belief that they occurred." This has in turn prompted what I have come to term the Neo-Mexica revisionist school of thought (Mendoza 2001b) that argues, according to revisionist historian Tlapoyawa that "the idea that our ancestors practiced human sacrifice is not only absurd, it is a calculated lie which was carried out and promoted by the Spanish propaganda machine" (Kurly

Tlapoyawa 2003: 1). Where Mexico and the US Southwest is concerned, adherents of the Neo-Mexica school of thought now prosthelyze and promulgate their respective beliefs in both transnational and inter-American venues via Azteca dance groups, social clubs, online discussion forums, and public workshops and lectures led by self-proclaimed Amerindian "elders" from Mexico City and beyond. In addition, the formation of such advocacy groups, and revitalization movements, as the International Confederation of Kalpultin, the Mexica Eagle Society, Quinto Sol, and the Centro de Cultura Pre Americana all play varying roles in the promotion and promulgation of the neo-Mexica revisionist perspectives under study.

Figure 2: ABOUT HERE

Centro de Cultura Pre Americana Ceremonies in Ichcateopan, Guerrero

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Figure 3: ABOUT HERE

Paying Homage at the Tomb of Cuauhtémoc, Ichcateopan, Guerrero

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In their efforts to discredit the seemingly insurmountable body of evidence for the existence of mass human sacrifice in Mesoamerica, the Neo-Mexica revisionists espouse a loosely formulated analytical framework intent on bringing into question and refuting those scholarly findings brought to the fore by anthropologists, archaeologists, ethnohistorians, and ethnologists regarding the question of human sacrifice and warfare in Mesoamerica (Sahagún 1950-69; Scarduelli 1981; Duverger 1983; Boone 1984; Robicsek and Hales 1984; Couch 1985;

Sugiyama 1995; Read 1998; Carrasco 1999; Guilliem Arroyo 1999; and López Alonzo, et al, 2002; among others). While most anthropologists and ethnohistorians would find little point in addressing the claims of such devotees of the denial movement and other millenarian revisionists, the reality is that such ultra-revisionist perspectives are rapidly gaining ground on college and university campuses across the US, Latin America, and Europe (e.g., Centro de Cultura Pre-Americana; or the Mexika Eagle Society). As such, our respective failure to address this emerging discourse and pan-American dialectic is akin to disregarding Michael Harner's (1977) study regarding state-sponsored Mexica Aztec cannibalism. Harner's thesis ultimately found a broad and diverse following in the international community.

In a presentation delivered before a meeting of philosophers of science convened at the University of Colorado in the fall of 1991, behavioral archaeologist Lewis Binford argued that answers to some of the most pressing scientific and cultural issues of the modern age necessarily lie at the polemical interface or dialogical flashpoint beyond which lies only dogmatic retrenchment and or the zealots fervor. While seemingly absurd, the questions posed by the Neo-Mexica revisionists do bear consideration if for no other reason than that the data upon which we base many of our scientific assumptions about the prevalence of Mexica Aztec human sacrifice and religious violence is necessarily flawed and or limited by our systematic oversight of those potentials inherent in the data available and at our disposal in new and emerging forms of discourse and forensic analysis. For this and many other reasons, I frame the balance of this discussion of a Mexica Aztec iconography of holy war and religious violence against the backdrop of those Neo-Mexica revisionist challenges and questions that continue to vex prevailing interpretations regarding the place of human sacrifice and warfare in Mexica Aztec

society. As a flashpoint of competing epistemological constructs, I contend that a measured assessment and analysis of the Neo-Mexica revisionist school of thought necessarily constitutes yet another point of departure for revisiting those dimensions of the "evidence" long argued to document religious violence, and mass human sacrifice, among Amerindian peoples in Mesoamerica and beyond.

Precepts of the Imponderable

Having briefly touched upon the work of Hassler (1992a) and the musings of Kurly Tlapoyawa (2002), I would now like to reframe those questions raised by each of these individuals in their efforts to discredit a monumental scholarly discourse spanning five centuries of scholarship on Mexica Aztec human sacrifice. Taken together, most of these "precepts of the imponderable" are easily dismissed as uninformed or misguided, while others necessarily pose stinging indictments about the way Mesoamericanists go about their respective business of interpreting the Amerindian past (Rosenberg 1997). If, as noted by Daniel Cooper Alarcón (1997: xv), "Transculturation…implies a cultural interaction that forces us to consider the important role played by marginal or colonized peoples in the production of discourses about them," then clearly, this assessment necessarily devolves from an attempt to frame a transcultural analysis that invites into the fray the contested discourses of the historically marginalized and the scientifically marginal; the culturally dispossessed and the academically suspect.

Metaphorical Referents

A key point of departure for Peter Hassler (1992a) and the Neo-Mexica revisionists centers on the traditional, read institutional, approach to the interpretation of the iconography of Late Postclassic cultures of highland central Mexico. According to Hassler (1992b), the flowery

and metaphor-laden language of the Mexica – Nahuatl and related languages – was the substance and source of those otherwise sanguinary and graphic depictions contained within such pre-Hispanic screen-fold codices as the Codex Borgia (Anders, Jansen, and Reyes García 1993). Hassler (1992b) contends that the Borgia, which comes replete with images of the castration of the maguey or Teometl agave along side images of human heart excision and decapitation, have been grossly misinterpreted by ethnohistorians and epigraphers. In countering the evidence from the Borgia, Hassler (1992b: 2) argues, "Until now, scientists have started from a position of believing the lies and hearsay reports and interpreting the archaeological evidence accordingly. The circularity of such reasoning is obvious. There are plenty of possible interpretations of the images of hearts and even killings in these artifacts. They could depict myths or legends. They could present narrative images – allegories, symbols, and metaphors. They could even be images of ordinary executions or murders." Hassler (1992b), of course, does not stop there and proceeds to argue that any and all witness testimony from the Hispanic contact era is tainted by virtue of the coercive and brutal machinations and methods of the Holy Office of the Inquisition, which initiated proceedings in New Spain in the mid 16th century. The interpretive work of Jill Leslie Furst (1978) is cited as providing evidence of the extent to which metaphorical referents are used in pre-Hispanic iconographic contexts to convey otherworldly, and less than literal, conceptualizations of both cosmic terror and earthly forces. The beheading of the goddess Mayahuel is as such interpreted from the standpoint of its metaphorical referent agave, thereby implying that Mayahuel's decapitation or "sacrifice" merely symbolizes the castration of the agave plant required for the production of pulque and aguamiel.

Ultimately, the logic of such an argument is not without fundamental merit, although, one must be prepared to view the pre-Columbian past through the prism of that body of magical realism that today pervades a significant element of the folk and popular literatures of Latin America and the Chicano Southwest. From this latter standpoint, the argument is once again not without merit, although the argument rapidly breaks down as the discourse of magical realism itself withers under the onslaught of that iconographic ensemble, and growing constellation of relics and artifacts that constitute the archaeological assemblage of such sites as the Templo Mayor.

Contextual Evidence and Analysis

Where the Gran Teocalli, Huey Teocalli, or Templo Mayor is concerned, Leonardo López Luján (1994) provides an unprecedented archaeological treatment centered on the detailed contextual and cosmological analysis and assessment of those cached materials recovered archaeologically within the substructures of the monument under consideration. Said analysis provides confirmation of that which could not have been falsified by virtue of its recovery from the very time capsules and ritual caches left to posterity by the Mexica Aztec themselves.

Despite the presence of "mass" human burials deposited, and or cached, within the substructures of the Templo Mayor (e.g., Offering 48); and the recovery of a variety of decapitated human heads that retained the first cervical vertebrate (thereby, providing incontrovertible evidence that such crania were not collected subsequent to skeletonization); one is nevertheless left to ponder the paucity of such remains given period claims that the Mexica Aztec sacrificed tens of thousands of captives atop the monument in question. Even López Luján (1994: 200) is ultimately reduced to speculate on interpretations for human sacrifice on the

basis of negative evidence for cut marks on the bones of forty-two children (between the ages of 2 and 7) deposited within Offering 48 of the Templo Mayor.[4] In so doing, he acknowledged that "after a microscopic inspection, no signs of cut marks were found on the bones, leading to the conclusion that the children had their throats cut" (López Luján 1994: 200; Emphasis mine).[5] Clearly, such an interpretative leap would appear to defy logic, and provide the sort of epistemological fodder that continues to fuel the neo-Mexica revisionist cause; particularly as this pertains to the ongoing tendency to assume, a priori, that all such "ritual" deposits were the product of blood sacrifice and religious violence.

Magical Realism and Revisionist Metaphors

Of course, the Neo-Mexica revisionists do not stop with the discourse of metaphorical or magical realism as this applies to that violence depicted in the codices, or exemplified by the recovery of cached offerings of human bone. Accordingly, Tlapoyawa (2003) goes on to argue that the Catholic mass is one such instance in which archaeologists would be at a loss to explain the archaeological and documentary evidence. Using an analogy drawn from Catholic rites specific to the ritual consumption of the body and blood of Christ, Tlapoyawa paints yet another surrealist image for our studied consideration. According to Tlapoyawa (2003: 4), the metaphorical referents interpreted by archaeologists with current frameworks of analysis and discourse could just as easily lead astray any archaeologist who exhumes "multiple images of men being nailed to crosses, a decorated altar and "sacred" texts which speak of bizarre rituals in which followers of this faith consume the flesh and blood of another." Tlapoyawa (2003) goes on to project those necessary and sufficient conclusions likely to be drawn by contemporary archaeologists seeking to frame the interpretation of the decontextualized Catholic mass in

question within the relativist framework of the times; that being that the "archaeologist would report that the worshippers crucified their victims on crosses, then placed the dead body on the altar where it was quickly divided up and eaten by the worshippers – blood dripping from the chalices as they drank it down. Whatever was left of this poor soul was then taken out back and buried."

So, clearly, Neo-Mexica revisionists draw upon the discourse and logistical frameworks of both metaphor and magical realism in their efforts to reframe the meaning and interpretation of pre-Hispanic documentary and archaeological evidence. While seemingly fanciful and misguided, the Neo-Mexica revisionists argue that the interpretation of pre-Hispanic iconography, symbolism, and ritual context, by anthropologists, epigraphers, iconographers, and archaeologists is essentially misguided by virtue of a priori assumptions and Eurocentric cultural frames of analysis that fail to account for Mexica Aztec and other pre-Columbian systems of iconographic and symbolic representation. To that end, virtually any and all allegedly sanguinary depictions of human sacrifice or mutilation from the codices or murals of pre-Hispanic Mesoamerica are interpreted by way of a different lens and framework of analysis by the revisionists in question. According to revisionist historian Andres Fernandez Gatica (2003: 3), the Plains Indian Sun Dance – in which initiates engage in an auto sacrificial rite that results in the mutilation and mortification of the flesh – can just as easily be misinterpreted to represent a form of religious violence. Moreover, Fernandez Gatica (2003: 3) reminds us that none of the participants in the Sun Dance believe that the rite comes close to constituting a sacrifice of any kind, particularly as those participants who come away with torn flesh and shredded muscles do so of their own free will in a rite dedicated to the sun and the forces of nature.[6]

Dissecting the Diatribe

The revisionists draw on a far broader argument and body of critique in order to advance their claims. These assessments, while not wholly original to the Neo-Mexica revisionist perspective, nevertheless serve as fundamental underpinnings of their very public arguments against what anthropologists, archaeologists, and ethnohistorians have to say about the pre-Hispanic past. Revisionist historian Néstor Martínez has summarized some key concerns in his paper titled "Contra la deformación histórica-cultural" (Martínez 2003: 2-5). Martínez (2003: 2-5) frames a number of concerns regarding the ethnohistorical and archaeological data and their respective frames of analysis that underlie both academic and popular perspectives on Mesoamerican human sacrifice.

Interpretive Preconceptions. Those accounts attributable to Christian (read Spanish Catholic) missionaries and their Hispanicized Indian converts are deemed tainted by association, missionary agendas, and European preconceptions. To this end, Martínez cites the doubts of anthropologist Evans Pritchard in his assessment of the reliability and veracity of firsthand accounts and chronicles so often relied upon by ethnohistorians and archaeologists. The role of religious fanaticism and the ongoing efforts to extirpate idolatry are cited as key to why such accounts merely serve to perpetuate a "separate reality" regarding the question of human sacrifice identified with the Amerindian traditions of the Americas.

Extant evidence for those sacrificial rites attributable to the Mesoamerican ballgame, for instance, is rejected outright as constituting a minimalist basis for interpretation as little is known of the game or its practitioners. Of course, what we now know of the ball game far exceeds what

Martínez would have us believe is available in the way of ethnohistorical chronicles and archaeological evidence (Scarborough and Wilcox 1991).

Much of the Neo-Mexica revisionist perspective draws on the problematic or potentially questionable nature of eyewitness testimony from the period of the Spanish conquest of the Mexica Aztec. Any number of critiques from this perspective necessarily relies on the accounts of Hernán Cortés (1967), Bernal Díaz del Castillo (1982), and Diego de Landa (1978), among others. The neo-Mexica revisionists, in turn, discredit each for any one or more of the following concerns pertaining to the nature of eyewitness testimony. First, whereas both Hernán Cortés and Bernal Díaz del Castillo provide firsthand accounts regarding the sacrifice of their companions in the initial rout of the Spanish by the Mexica, their detailed accounts of how the bodies were mutilated by way of human heart excision are brought into question due to the fact that these accounts are based on observations made from a point some 8 kilometers distant from the temple precinct in which said rites were performed. Those details provided could not have been obtained from that vantage point, thereby providing the basis for an argument that the accounts of Bernal Díaz del Castillo (1982) and Hernán Cortés (1967) are based on hearsay, or constitute an outright fabrication of the facts. Where Diaz del Castillo is concerned, his testimony is further impeached by virtue of the fact that his memoirs were written some five decades after the incidents described were allegedly observed. Finally, where Diego de Landa (1978) is concerned, his reputation for desecrating and destroying Maya texts and ordering the pillage of Maya civilization is used to impeach his testimony as wholly biased against any and all cultural attributes not recognizably Christian.

Figure 4: ABOUT HERE

Diego Rivera's Depiction of the Spanish Conquest of the Mexica Aztec, Mexico City.

While the revisionists address key points of contradiction with respect to the colonial sources in question, they nevertheless posit the perpetuation of the fallacy that any and all references to Mexica Aztec human sacrifice necessarily devolve almost exclusively from the writings of these three early Spanish colonial chroniclers. While this may well prove to be the case for the writings of William H. Prescott (Prescott and Kirk 1873), and those who followed his lead in crafting second-hand accounts of the conquest, the revisionist argument fails to acknowledge other period accounts such as those of Francisco López de Gómara (López de Gómara and Ramírez Cabañas 1943 [1519-1540]), Bernal Díaz del Castillo (1956 [1517-1521]), Chimalpahin Cuauhtlehuanitzin (1997 [1579-1660]), Fernando Alvarado Tezozomoc (1944 [1598]), Jerónimo de Mendieta (Mendieta, García Icazbalceta, and Rubial García 1997 [ca. 1585]), and other 16th century chroniclers relating the accounts of period peoples. They further contend that all subsequent accounts were based on these earlier accounts, and as such, are necessarily secondary resource documents of little value to establishing the veracity of human sacrifice in Mesoamerica. Moreover, the revisionists neglect to account for the writings of a much broader range of treatments from the same era; including those of Fray Diego Durán (1984) and Fray Bernardino de Sahagún (1950-69), whose respective works were barred from publication or distribution by the Spanish authorities for the better part of the colonial era.

Relativist Critiques. In this instance the relativist critiques of the revisionists draw on both an extreme, and decontextualized cultural relativism (and or environmental determinism)

that often verges on a form of ontological relativism. Others argue that human sacrifice would have fouled or destroyed the putatively "delicate" ecology of the Basin of Mexico. Where Diego de Landa's (1978 [1566]) observations[7] on the use of cenotes or sinkholes by the Yucatecan Maya for sacrificial rites – in which victims were hurled into the murky waters below – is nevertheless deemed unlikely by the revisionists, particularly as the Maya necessarily relied on cenotes as the prime source of drinking water short of that available from rainfall. Martínez (2003: 2-5) argues that the otherwise sophisticated Maya would have known better than to have fouled or polluted their primary source of fresh water. The archaeological evidence available from the dredging of the sacred cenote of Chichen Itza, for instance, has recovered a wide assortment of jade (Proskouriakoff 1974) and metal (Lothrop 1952) offerings, including both ritual and elite material culture, and human skeletal remains of young women and aged men (Coggins 1992). While the skeletal remains do not in and of themselves build a case for ritual human sacrifice identified with the so-called "Well of Sacrifice," they do nevertheless call into question the charge that the cenote in question was not used for the dumping of human remains. Of course, only the acquisition of a solid lineup of radiocarbon dates identified with said skeletal materials would in effect confirm whether or not the deposition of human remains within the well was an activity contemporaneous with the use of the well by the Itzá Maya of Chichén in circa 800 to 1200 c.e. Despite claims to the contrary, "water for practical purposes was available from the Xtoloc Cenote in the center of Chichén Itzá where one could descend to the water level by two masonry staircases…[and]…chultuns that caught rainwater are found throughout the site" (Weaver 1993).

Attribution of Use Function. The widespread tendency for archaeologists and tour guides to attribute specific use functions to the otherwise unidentified or unknown civic-ceremonial purposes of specific monuments – such as those identified with the masonry platforms of Tizatlán, Tlaxcala, Mexico – remains a key point of contention for the Neo-Mexica revisionists. Perhaps, rightly so, the general tendency to proclaim functional and social attributes where none have been formally documented, or irrefutably established, is a critique that comes from both ends of the spectrum, and is therefore a legitimate source of concern for both archaeologists and revisionists (Rosenberg 1997). The use of misguided caption information, as in the case cited by the Centro de Cultura Pre Americana (2003: 3) for the Regional Museum of Jalapa, Veracruz, is but one case in point. In that instance, the cleft head gear of the Olmec were-jaguar was interpreted in the museum caption to represent a case of cerebral excision; and the Centro de Cultura Pre Americana has used this and related cases since 1993 to promote their revisionist views and alternative insights.

An Epistemology of the Absurd

In their position paper regarding the question of human sacrifice, the Centro de Cultura Pre Americana has noted that it has regularly sent representatives to canvas a variety of Mexican archaeological zones and museum sites in an effort to bring into question captioned information and tour narratives that imply that specific monuments were used for blood sacrifice. Their mandate is to more fully interrogate purported "evidence" for human sacrifice by ancestral peoples. Their respective challenge lies with posing questions that undermine extant "traditionalist" archetypes that belie what they believe to constitute otherwise Eurocentric, and racist, perspectives emanating from much of the academic and foundational scholarship on

Amerindian peoples in the Americas. One point of departure has been to introduce questions about whether or not archaeologists and other scholars have taken to employing scientific, physical anthropological, and forensic approaches in further interrogating extant evidence for blood sacrifice in Mesoamerican contexts.

One group has taken to interrogating archaeologists, docents, and curators of Mesoamerican sites and collections with questions about whether or not serological or blood residue analysis has been conducted on monuments purportedly used in sacrificial rituals. According to the Centro de la Cultural Pre Americana (2003) report, site interpreters or docents at Tizatlán, Tlaxcala, have noted that a blood serum analysis was in fact undertaken, and thereby served to confirm the existence and evidence for blood sacrifice in those contexts. Where the Tizatlán murals are concerned, the Centro in turn brought into question the lack of damage to the murals from the large amounts of human blood that would have coated the monuments in question. Again, in this instance, archaeologists and on-site interpreters have proven largely unprepared to address or dismiss contrarian and revisionist claims that bring into dispute the use of specific monuments, such as the *Cuauhxicalli* or "Eagle Vessel", for the bloody rites of human sacrifice attributed to them all in one context or another. Where the tour guide of Tizatlan is concerned, Martinez (2003: 3) acknowledges that: "Al preguntarle si su información tenia que ver con la tradición de Tlaxcala contestó que no, que era la versión que los antrópologos y arqueólogos que habían estado investigando en este lugar le habían enseñado…" This latter statement points to the social reproduction of community knowledge based on second-hand accounts and literal interpretations of archaeological and documentary evidence in turn taken to represent "scientific" findings and interpretations. The fact that archaeologists and

ethnohistorians, art historians and museum curators, hold such beliefs or advance such interpretive frameworks would appear to constitute a form of self-fulfilling validation and legitimation sui generis.

Figure 5: ABOUT HERE

Reproduction of the Ocelotl Cuauhxicalli of México Tenochtitlán

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Human Heart Extraction. One particularly salient point of departure used by revisionists to discredit extant views on Mesoamerican human sacrifice and religious violence centers on the manipulation of archaeology and the physical (as opposed to social) sciences to interrogate and undermine existing anthropological discourse. An example brought into play by Martinéz (2003: 3) concerns the technical and physical feasibility of extracting the human heart from the chest cavity with a blow from a "flint" (read chert or obsidian) axe or knife blade. Despite the fact that Francis Robicsek and Donald Hales (1984) contend that bilateral transverse thoracotomy (which entails parting the sternum and opening both pleural cavities) would have been the most effective method of heart extraction; the revisionists draw directly on the review published by Robicsek and Hales (1984) to dispute the technical feasibility of human heart excision with stone tools used in said manner. Robicsek and Hales (1984: 78-85) in fact reviewed the limitations inherent in several differing potential methods of human heart excision, including (a) midline axial sternotomy, (b) the left anterior intercostal approach, (c) bilateral transverse thoracotomy, and (d) the transdiaphragmatic approach. It was their respective analysis, and their specific

discussion of the limitations of each approach, that provides the essential basis for the Martinéz (2003) critique.

The revisionists in this instance make such claims without recourse to surgical expertise other than that noted. According to Martinéz (2003: 3), only five primary surgical methods may effect the successful excision of the human heart, and these entail the (a) breaking or parting of the sternum; (b) opening the abdomen below the rib cage with a knife; (c) opening the rib cage with a knife and specialized grips or expanders; and (d) dissecting the cartilage between the ribs and sternum with a knife. Martinez contends that the first procedure noted requires recourse to a "circular saw" and or a chisel and hammer; thereby implying that stone tool using peoples would not have had the technological capability or surgical skills necessary to engage human heart excision like that documented for the Mexica Aztec.

Twenty Seconds to Immortality. An experimental simulation of human heart excision conducted for a Discovery Channel production titled Unsolved History: Aztec Temple of Blood (2002) essentially demonstrated the ineffectiveness of attempting to part the human sternum with a chert or flint hand axe or knife. On the other hand, the same simulation, using an anatomically and synthetically accurate medical reproduction of a human torso, nevertheless illustrated that the transdiaphragmatic approach, eschewed by Robicsek and Hales (1984: 78-85), was in fact the most effective means by which to extract a human heart from an anatomically accurate synthetic torso. This latter approach in fact revealed that a skilled surgeon or ritual specialist could excise the still-beating human heart within a time frame of 17 to 20 seconds.

Using said findings as a pretext for generating a discussion on the question of human sacrifice in Mesoamerica; on 19 April 2004 I posted a message to the Aztlan-L

(AZTLAN@LISTSERV.LOUISVILLE.EDU) listserv discussion forum, which explicitly requests that listserv participants refrain from initiating discussions concerned with Mesoamerican blood sacrifice. The rationale, as noted via the Aztlan-L registration confirmation receipt, is that said topic generally elicits an emotional and or visceral response, and thereby produces an inordinate amount of email that bogs down the listserv. Because my research interest in this regard was oriented to the question of human sacrifice, I nevertheless felt that the Aztlan-L listserv was a necessary and appropriate venue for such a discussion. The discussion soon commingled with that of the Nahuat-L Listserv located at NAHUAT-L@LISTS.UMN.EDU. Needless to say, while the responses did not effectively bog down the listservs in question, I was nevertheless met with a flurry of predictable, and not so predictable, responses ranging from "this topic is no longer relevant," through to the perennially popular eco-cultural challenge about how such a scale of putative human sacrifice would have disturbed the delicate ecology of the Basin of Mexico. Ultimately, after several such challenges, and at least one vitriolic attack that alleged racism on my part for focusing on the theme of Amerindian blood sacrifice, one high-ranking neo-Mexika (danzante) respondent nevertheless expressed appreciation for the discussion in which I asserted my concerns for the outlandish claims, denial movement orientations, and revisionist perspectives in question (Cuauhtlecoc Cuahtla'tohuac Quetzalcoatl, Personal Communication, April 20, 2004). According to Cuauhtlecoc Cuahtla'tohuac (2004), some radical revisionists of the neo-Mexika camp continue to pass themselves off as "spiritual" people, and use this as a pretext for informing "first generation Mixteco-speaking kids that nahuatl is their REAL language, and that if they do not learn it they can never be indigenous people!!!"

Primitivist Critiques. Ironically, Martinéz (2003: 3) draws on "primitivist" critiques in order to argue that the pre-metal using or "stone age" peoples of Mesoamerica were not technically or metallurgically equipped to perform such surgical maneuvers without recourse to metal implements.[8] Tlapoyawa (2003: 4) echoes this logic by stating "even with modern surgical technology, such an operation requires a scalpel and a rib spreader…such a task would have required two strong men pulling on either side of a man's rib cage to create an opening wide enough to get at the heart." In this instance, the whole of Amerindian civilization is reduced to a primitivist state in an effort to demolish "partisan" arguments that seek to undermine the neo-Mexika perspectives in question.

Heart Excision By Analogy. If the Matamoros, Mexico, cult killings of 1985 through 1989 are any indication, then the act of excising the beating heart of a living victim can in fact be accomplished by a single individual with only the most basic of surgical instrumentation. According to journalist Edward Humes (1991) who documented the phenomenal evolution and violent demise of the Matamoros cult and its leader, Adolfo Constanzo, human heart excision, cannibalism, and the taking and displaying of human trophies and internal organs were all undertaken for the purposes of invoking supernatural protection for the cult's trafficking of drugs across the US-Mexico border. The Matamoros cult killings were essentially the product of the cult's pathological obsession with witchcraft, and the Palo Mayombe variant of Santeria, that in this instance resulted in the death and mass burial of some twenty-five people, and the disappearance of many more who remain unaccounted for.

The cult leader convinced his followers that only those sacrificial victims who died under the most horrific and frightening conditions were suitable as supernatural guardians. According

to Humes (1991: 1), "It was important that the offering die in confusion and pain and, most of all, in fear. A soul taken in violence and terror could be captured and used by the priest, turned into a powerful, angry servant that would wreak horrible revenge on the priest's enemies." Ironically, the Matamoros cult would initiate its own demise with the torture, heart excision, and dismemberment of a drug lord who failed to scream before having his blood drained into one of four cauldrons of blood and human body parts maintained by the cult for the purposes of conjuring supernatural forces. This failure led to the torture and sacrifice of an American whose death was more vigorously investigated and prosecuted, thereby exposing the cult and its altar of blood and gore. Although this latter human sacrifice took place on 13 March, 1989, the religious executioner in question conducted himself without the assistance of those others deemed necessary by Neo-Mexika revisionists to assist in the extraction of the heart and life force of a living, breathing, victim.

Calculating the Totality of the Holocaust

Hernán Cortés (1967 [1519-1540]) documented the execution of some 4,000 captives per annum in his efforts to calculate the sheer number of sacrificial victims dispatched in Mexico Tenochtitlan in any given year. Despite this number, and other similar evidence from the period of the conquest, scholars and skeptics alike have questioned more recent estimates of the sheer number of victims dispatched on the altars of México Tenochtitlán. More typically, the sheer magnitude of religious violence identified with the ritual killing of some 20,000 to 80,000 war captives for the consecration of the Templo Mayor is cited when discussions of body counts come into play. While recounting the often cited ritual execution of some 20,000 to 60,000 [sic](or 80,400)[9] Huastec war captives (Leonardo Lopez Lujan 1994: 283), Tlapoyawa (2003: 4)

asserts that "this means that roughly one person was sacrificed every six seconds, non-stop for 96 hours straight."[10] The implication here is that this would have been a physical and logistical impossibility, and that such scenarios only serve to impeach the accounts of the Spanish regarding the aforementioned ritual slaughter at the Templo Mayor. Documentation pertaining to the massive blood sacrifice in question generally indicates that twenty individual groups of executioners were dispatched throughout the civic-ceremonial precincts of México Tenochtitlán in order to conduct the immolations in question. According to López Luján (1994: 283), on the first day of the festival of Tlacaxipehualiztli in the year of 1487, immolations dedicated to the consecration of the Templo Mayor entailed the simultaneous deployment of some twenty individual groups of executioners, including the Huey Tlatoani Ahuitzotl, and the Lords Tlacaelel, Nezahualpilli, and Totoquihuatzin conducting sacrificial rites with their respective cadres of assistants.[11] Tlapoyawa necessarily overlooks this observation in his efforts to promote the logistical impossibility of conducting the feat in question during the four-day period cited from firsthand accounts.

Figure 6: ABOUT HERE

Mass Immolation at the Templo Mayor from the Codex Telleriano Remensis

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While many of the aforementioned arguments are easily dismissed within "all-knowing" academic and professional circles, what then can we construe as the primary and secondary sources of evidence minimally necessary for dissecting the diatribes in question? And, given what some elements of the public construe as an outright fabrication or distortion of the

Amerindian past, what should be our point of departure for arriving at an assessment of that evidence minimally necessary to substantiate the prevalence of mass human sacrifice during the Late Postclassic apogee of Mesoamerican civilization?

By contrast, those who actively seek to challenge such revisionist perspectives tend to view them as largely sentimental, romanticized, and for the most part as misinformed and politicized cultural fictions without merit worthy of response (Rosenberg 1997). Our ongoing failure to address such popular misconceptions or messianic worldviews has in turn allowed for the perpetuation and expansion of such views across university campuses here and abroad. How then do we reconcile extant evidence for otherwise extraordinary levels of conflict and violence within a culture that created what was otherwise a uniquely civil society, producing brilliant works of art, poetry, philosophy, technology, and statecraft? What role did religion, or the Mexica Aztec elite, play in the origin and perpetuation of the ritualized violence in question? And ultimately, by what yardstick do we measure and assess that evidence that for so long has framed our perspectives on Mexica Aztec ceremonialism and human sacrifice?

Occam's Razor Versus Tlapoyawa's Axe

Occam's Razor, which is that scientific tenet identified with "parsimony" – or the effort to procede on the basis of an "economy of explanation" in building and testing hypotheses, is seldom practiced in the context of revisonist arguments attempting to countermand established perspectives on ritual sacrifice in Mesoamerica. In fact, all too often, neo-Mexica arguments and alternative hypotheses are frought with a level of ambiguity and complexity that raises more questions than can be resolved on the basis of an economy of explanation. As such, I argue that aspects of those epistemological tenets espoused by neo-Mexica revisionists may be assessed for

validity, and thereby interrogated, within the context of a framework based on those precepts of argumentation held standard in both the physical and social sciences for interpreting the world about us. Approached in this way, a number of those extant neo-Mexika revisionist arguments and perspectives reviewed in the foregoing section of this analysis are necessarily seen to exhibit a degree of coherence necessarily dependent on (a) communal reinforcement, (b) ontological relativity, and (c) logical fallacies, including, but not limited to ad hominem (abusive and circumstantial), reductio ad absurdum (ridicule or self contradiction), ad ignorantium (argument from ignorance), and ad verecundiam (appeal to authority) argumentation and logical fallacies.

Knowledge Creation. Central to the arguments of the neo-Mexika revisionists are questions about who controls such dimensions of the epistemological experience identified with (a) knowledge creation, (b) knowledge management, and (c) knowledge transfer. For neo-Mexika revisionists, virtually all scholarly discourse on the subjectmatter of Mexica Aztec human sacrifice and religious violence has been coopted by the hegemony of colonial imperialism, eurocentrism, and academic racism. As such, the very production of knowledge, or its creation, is brought into question as a result of the biases of those primary sources (including Fray Bernardino de Sahagún) whose ultimate agenda was "pagan" conversion. Efforts to refute Sahagún's (1950-69) narratives concerned with human sacrifice and religious violence are thereby brought into question via ad hominem (circumstantial) attacks on Sahagún's cultural and religious ideology and affiliations.

Knowledge Management. Where knowledge management is concerned, we are forced to contend with ad hominem attacks (abusive and circumstantial) based on the purported scholarly biases, agendas, and character of those scholars and institutions that have taken to managing

primary resource documents and archaeological and historical contexts that serve as repositories for said knowledge. Managers of such knowledge, and thereby, potential targets of the neo-Mexica diatribe, range from historic site tour guides and promoters through to archaeologists, ethnohistorians, museum curators, college instructors, and Chicano Studies faculty and programs not seen to support the neo-Mexika perspective. In this latter context, neo-Mexika argumentation subsumes ad hominem (abusive and circumstantial) through ad absurdum, ad ignorantium,[12] and ad verecundiam[13] forms of discourse and legitimation.

Knowledge Transfer. Where knowledge transfer is concerned, neo-Mexika revisionists argue that it is precisely this dimension of the epistemological construct where authentic and intended meanings are ultimately transformed into a bifurcated academic and political, popular and hegmonic, discourse that serves to promote the idea that the Mexica Aztec indulged human sacrifice and religious violence on a horrific scale. By so doing, knowledge transfer – which remains infinitely maleable by virtue of its respective mediation via both formal (academic) and informal (public) discursive networks – necessarily serves as a vehicle for the legitimation and promulgation of eurocentric perspectives. As such, for the neo-Mexica revisionist school of thought, knowledge transfer from primary source to secondary recipient, from authentic cultural context to popular forum, and thereby media, is necessarily seen to represent a garbled, misguided, and hybrid communication that only serves to promote colonialist perspectives and imperatives; and, the denigration and subordination of Amerindian culture and civilization. Whether professed in the works of Tlapoyawa (2003), or Hassler (1992a, 1992b, 1992c), or within any number of those position papers and group pronouncements representing the International Confederation of Kalpultin (2000) or allied groups, it is this latter dimension of the

epistemology of violence and human sacrifice most directly responsible for fueling the passions of the neo-Mexika revisionists.

Given the aforementioned revisionist critiques, as well as the acknowledgement that extant epistemological and interpretive frameworks, and longstanding scholarly assumptions, about the scale of Mexica Aztec religious violence require reappraisal and refinement, what then can be said to constitute that necessary and sufficient data and relevant interpretive approach minimally necessary for legitimately and objectively assessing the questions at hand?

A Prehistory of Blood Sacrifice

While I profess no illusions regarding the prospects of ever precisely nailing down the visceral roots and shoots of that family tree that ultimately spawned the sacrificial complex of war, blood sacrifice, decapitation, mutilation, and human heart excision that so eloquently framed the modus operandi of the Mexica Aztec civic-ceremonial complex; I do believe that we stand at the threshold of a body of forensic sciences and archaeological methods that promise conclusive findings and results where the question at hand is concerned. Forensic and physical anthropological approaches now available will permit investigators to more precisely, and unequivocally, identify or assess the primary evidence for key elements of that behavioral complex ultimately woven together into that crimson tapestry of violence and bloodshed that serves as the scorecard for this analysis. To that end, the following discussion, by contrast, will identify those fundamental dimensions of the cult of blood sacrifice that have roots in remote antiquity, and at the same time, provide a context for understanding the formulation and reformulation of the Mexica Aztec cult of war and blood sacrifice, and those revisionist perspectives that have surfaced in recent years.

Archaeological Texts and Contexts

Why, after some five hundred years, does the question of human sacrifice, cannibalism, and warfare among the Mexica Aztec continue to engender so much contention; [14] and, in turn, come into question from a panoply of diametrically opposed points of view? Despite what appears on its face to constitute a formidable body of evidence, our failure to address the variability of the archaeological and cultural contexts that produce the "evidence" continues to provide a point of departure for those who bring said evidence into question. Ultimately, I contend that much of the prevailing discourse regarding ritual human sacrifice and militarism in Mesoamerica remains shrouded in both nationalistic, and culturally relative, frameworks of analysis that hinder, or render seemingly unnecessary, further analysis of the sort advocated here.

Despite years of scientific study devolving from the recovery of (a) human trophies exhumed from the Templo Mayor, (b) from within and beyond the central precincts of the Zocalo in Mexico City, and (c) from Mexica Aztec sites both in and beyond the Valley of Mexico, little has been done to address some of the most problematic questions that remain with respect to the subject of ritual human sacrifice in Mexica Aztec society. In fact, despite the academic community's initial reactionary stance to Michael Harner's (1977) proposal that the Mexica Aztec state promoted human sacrifice in an effort to feed what he characterized as a protein-deficient, and thereby, cannibalistic, population; little has been done in the years since to systematize the forensic analysis and identification of those phenomena that allegedly constitute prima facie evidence for ritual human sacrifice. Among those questions brought to mind by Harner's largely ill fated, or should we say, politically sensitive arguments, is the question of what ultimately became of the physical remains of so many ritually dispatched and cannibalized

human beings? Where are the mass burial grounds, the bone beds, and or the recycled byproducts of the horrific experience in question? And, what effect, if any, would such a massive scale of carnage have had on the putatively "delicate ecology" of the Basin of Mexico?

Serological Analysis

During the course of this study, I was necessarily drawn to arguments advanced by the revisionists that sought to bring into question the paucity of forensic studies and evidence for human sacrifice among the Mexica Aztec. The very questions raised by the neo-Mexica revisionists in particular, it would seem, provide a point of departure for further interrogating the evidence and accounts of human sacrifice by the Mexica Aztec. As a result, I have begun to question the paucity of blood serum or serological studies and analysis conducted to date on those "offerings," cult objects, and architectural features recovered from within the Templo Mayor? Given extant technologies and methods for detecting human blood serum in contexts dating back some 90,000 years, the fact is that little to no such work has been conducted with an eye to determining whether or not the observations of the conquistadores, as per the quantities of human blood let in such contexts, might be confirmed or denied on the basis of blood protein or serological testing and analysis.

Responding to my call for just such an approach (Mendoza 2003), Elizabeth Boone (Personal Communication, November 19, 2003) noted that Leonardo López Luján had in fact conducted such an analysis on buried features from primary contexts identified with the Templo de las Aguilas of México Tenochtitlán.[15] The Templo de las Aguilas located immediately north of and adjacent to the Templo Mayor, produced positive results for residual human blood serum recovered from a thick dark layer of organic material coating two elaborate ceramic braziers

identified with the deity Mictlantecuhtli (López Luján and Mercado 1996). Despite this fact, Elizabeth Boone nevertheless noted that blood residues recovered from within the interior spaces of the complex in question might be the result of auto-sacrificial blood letting by individual priests; and not the byproduct of ritual human sacrifice. One other detractor voiced the opinion that any and all human blood proteins recovered from architectural features located within the main civic-ceremonial precinct of México-Tenochtitlán may in fact be the result of Mexica blood drawn by the weapons of the Spanish conquistadores who attacked the city in 1521 (D. M. Urquidi, Personnal Communication, January 15, 2004). Once again, we are left to consider the potential benefits and limitations of just such an approach.

Contextual Criteria. Where the limitations of the foregoing assessment are concerned, I would contend that serological analysis of Mexica Aztec era materials should be constrained to those contexts and specimen types most intimately and uniquely anchored to any and all purported rites of ritual human sacrifice conducted in México Tenochtitlán. To that end, I propose that three specialized categories of cult materials and objects hold the greatest potential for eliciting relevant serological results that are both contextually, and functionally, isomorphic with the act of ritual human sacrifice, and particularly, human heart excision. These include:

(a) The sacrificial blocks upon which human victims were purportedly splayed during the rites of human heart excision (Matos Moctezuma 1984: 141, Fig. 6);

(b) Chert and obsidian daggers or tecpatl knives deposited by the hundreds within the dedicatory caches recovered from within the substructures of the Templo Mayor (López Portillo, León Portilla, and Matos Moctezuma 1981: 270-271);[16]

(c) Cuauhxicalli "Eagle Vessel" cauldrons or anthropomorphic representations allegedly employed as repositories for human hearts and blood (Orozco y Berra 1877);[17]

And,

(d) Monolithic basalt and andesite representations of the primary deities of the Mexica Aztec pantheon of gods and supernaturals upon who's respective images the blood and hearts of sacrificial captives were smeared.[18]

While one other viable source for the recovery of serological samples lies with the architectural facings of Mexica Aztec monuments; the extent to which such monuments retain their original (porous) lime plaster or stucco, and painted surfaces, will clearly play a role in whether or not such residues are likely to be recovered. And, where architectural features produce traces of human blood residues, the investigator is left to question whether or not the blood derives from human sacrifice, or, auto sacrificial rites and rituals. On the other hand, the aforementioned cult objects (i.e., sacrificial blocks, knives, basins, and idols), like those recovered from within other more recent sacrificial contexts, hold the greatest likelihood for retaining their original serological patina or signature, as well as their undisputed, and contextually specific, ritual associations with the practice of human sacrifice, heart excision, and decapitation.

Figure 7: ABOUT HERE

Monolith of the Mexica Earth Goddess Coatlicue

Figure 8: ABOUT HERE

Skull Wall or Tzompantli from the Templo Mayor of México Tenochtitlán

Clearly, any thoroughgoing consideration of the evidence for ritual human sacrifice by the Mexica Aztec must consider both the contextual (ritual) and forensic (trace element) evidence, particularly as one cannot override the other in so far as such an analysis is concerned. Serological evidence, without a consideration of associated archaeologically recovered features, artifacts, and deposits is unreliable as an indicator of human sacrifice in and of itself. By contrast, in situ forensic evidence – particularly that identified with the osteological or taphonomic analysis of cut marks, "pot polish," blunt force trauma, flayed limbs, impaled heads, and other modifications to human bone – holds the greatest promise for resolving questions regarding the nature and extent of human sacrifice in México Tenochtitlán and beyond. To that end, it should be noted that John Verano (2001) and colleagues (Benson and Cook 2001) have published a critically significant framework of analysis for pursuing the question of just what constitutes archaeological evidence for ritual human sacrifice in that region. Before closing this study, I will turn briefly to a consideration of those forensic and archaeological approaches to ritual human sacrifice now being deployed in ancient Peru and South America as a base line for pursuing similar efforts in Mesoamerica. At the same time, I will in turn integrate recent findings from Mesoamerica in order to demonstrate that such approaches are now taking root in Mesoamerican contexts as well.

Assessing the Evidence for Ritual Sacrifice

In a recent anthology devoted to ritual sacrifice in ancient Peru (Benson and Cook 2001), John W. Verano ventured an analytical framework for the interpretation of forensic evidence from those sites deemed to contain sacrificial offerings. Verano's study, and those of Steve Bourget (Chapter 5) and Donald Proulx (Chapter 6), document findings from the Peruvian archaeological sites of Huaca de la Luna on the North Coast of Peru, and the lower Río Grande de Nasca Valley. Each reviews that body of evidence recovered from sites that clearly contain a significantly better record of preservation than that typically characteristic of archaeological sites and deposits from Mesoamerica. Given the innovative contextual and forensic studies undertaken, and the inherent potentials for future studies elsewhere, I close with a review of new and emerging approaches to the study of ritual human sacrifice in Peru and Mesoamerica.

Forensic Archaeology and Analysis

John Verano's (2001) analysis of the evidence for ritual human sacrifice in Peru provides yet another new, and potentially powerful, means by which to interrogate the primary data and discourse for ritual sacrifice in Mesoamerica. Verano (2001: 167) begins his assessment with a question: "How is human sacrifice identified archaeologically? This is an important issue, because preconceived notions can lead to distinctly different interpretations of archaeological data. Human sacrifice implies the intentional offering of human life. The way in which sacrificial victims are dispatched may leave recognizable skeletal or soft-tissue evidence, but this is not always the case. Distinguishing between natural and induced death in archaeological remains is often difficult." Verano (2001) has essentially proposed a forensic framework for just such an analysis, and has in turn articulated the limitations for such an approach.[19]

That body of forensic and contextual evidence deemed minimally sufficient to demonstrate the presence or absence of human sacrifice, as distinguished from archaeological remains, necessarily subsumes a number of key indicators. Verano (2001) in fact distinguishes between natural and induced death as indicated by remains recovered from the archaeological record, and acknowledges that skeletal and soft-tissue evidence may or may not always be discerned in such contexts. Complicating factors such as "postburial disturbance" may elucidate or cloud determinations of whether or not those remains examined are those pertinent to primary versus secondary offerings, or human sacrifice versus post-mortem trophy collection and or modification. As such, careful consideration of the contexts within which human remains are recovered are key to assessing their primary versus secondary nature, in situ or post burial disturbance, and the ritual or non-ritual source of the deposits under study. In both Peruvian and Mesoamerican contexts, the superimposed layering of human remains, and their prolonged exposure to the elements, may be correlated with projectile point and blunt force trauma, dismemberment, decapitation, cannibalism, isolated limbs and articulated elements, trophy taking, and perimortem or postmortem mutilation.

Figure 9: ABOUT HERE

Double Immolation and Decapitation of Children from Cholula, Puebla

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Mesoamerican Cannibalism. The methodological basis for a forensic approach to the analysis and interpretation of cannibalism from human remains derived from ritual contexts has been deployed with varying results in Mesoamerica. In fact, drawing on forensic analysis and

reconstruction of three distinct Mesoamerican site collections, Carmen María Pijoan Aguadé and Josefina Mansilla Lory (1997) have determined that the sites of (a) Tlatelcomila, Tetelpan, D.F. (500-300 b.c.e.), (b) Electra, Villa de Reyes, San Luis Potosi (350-800 c.e.), and (c) Tlatelolco (1337-1521 c.e.), Mexico, all contain collections of human remains bearing primary evidence for perimortem violence and cannibalism, human sacrifice (in the form of defleshed, dismembered, butchered, and cannibalized human bone), and, a concomitant ritual specialization identified with said activities. Pijoan Aguadé and Mansilla Lory (1997: 236-237) conclude, "From these three samples, we can propose that human sacrifice and cannibalism were interrelated to each other, both dating to deep antiquity in Mexico." They further acknowledge, "Based on the archaeological evidence, the distribution of human bones, and the indications of violence left on them, there can be little doubt that cannibalism and human sacrifice were long prevalent in ancient societies in Mexico." It should be noted, however, that patterned cut marks on human long bones, and disarticulated (dismembered) remains from mass burials, were a primary point of departure for past studies that similarly concluded that evidence for cannibalism was in order (Preciado 1995; Ojeda Díaz 1990; Guilliem Arroyo 1999; Pijoan, Mansilla, and Pastrana 1995).

Butchering Patterns. Patterned cut marks specific to the cutting of muscle attachments for the defleshing of bodies has in turn been documented by Pijoan Aguadé and Mansilla Lory (1997), Pijoan, Mansilla, and Pastrana (1995), and Pijoan, Pastrana, and Maquivar (1989) within multiple contexts from the site of Tlatelolco, Mexico. They interpret the evidence from Tlatelolco, a satellite settlement under the political domination of Mexico-Tenochtitlán, to represent extensive evidence for ritual cannibalism at the heart of the Mexica Aztec Empire. This fact leads Verano (2001) to infer that similar evidence -- for the defleshing of human

remains -- recovered from both Plaza 3A and 3B at Huaca de la Luna, Peru. Recent investigations at Cantona, Puebla, Mexico, indicate a pattern of human bone modification similar to that identified at Tlatelolco, Mexico; with the exception that a sizeable sample of human bone (N = 200) from Cantona in turn provides indications of boiling sans "pot polish" (Talavera, Rojas, and García 2001: 37). Pot polish, it should be noted, is thought to result from the prolonged mixing, or stirring, of fleshed bones in ceramic vessels as indicated for human bone identified by White (1992) from archaeological remains recovered from prehistoric sites in the American Southwest.

According to the meticulously crafted and insight-filled treatise by Jorge Talavera, Juan Martín Rojas, and Enrique García (2001: 37), of the 505 individual human and non-human bones examined from otherwise much larger deposits identified at Cantona, specimens include (a) 27 human crania with cut marks, (b) 3 human mandibles with cut marks at muscle attachments, (c) 23 long bones with cut marks at muscle attachments, (d) 200 human bones subjected to boiling, (e) 111 carbonized calcified human bones, (f) 58 percussion fractured human bones, and (g) 83 animal bones with cut marks and related treatments. Those patterns indicated from said findings prompted the investigators to conclude that "Todo lo anterior nos lleva a suponer que la interpretación más probable que puede darse a los diferentes tratamientos culturales observados en los materials osteolólogicos es que se trata de los despojos de víctimas sacrificadas, habiendo sido los cadavers desmembrados intencionalmente como preludio a la ingestion ritual de carne humana" [All of this leaves us to suppose that the most probable interpretation that can be given for all of the different cultural treatments observed in the osteological materials is that it concerns the dispatch of sacrificed victims, the cadavers having been intentionally dismembered

as a prelude to the ritual ingestion of human flesh"; Translation Mine]. In addition to the primary findings noted, the investigators in question also noted a distinct pattern in the disposition and interment of human remains bearing the aforementioned indications. According to Talavera, Rojas, and García (2001: 38), human remains were subsequently (a) buried as fill in structures, (b) deposited as offerings in civic-ceremonial areas, and (c) strewn throughout domestic trash dumps in one limited sector of the site thus far subjected to archaeological investigation. This and other indications derived from the archaeological recovery of such remains led the project archaeologist, Angel García Cook (1994: 65) to conclude that "se manifiestan de manera importante los rituales y ceremonias religiosas […] que demuestran el complejo ceremonial llevado a cabo: decapitación, mutilación, desmembramiento, etcetera…" (cf., Talavera, Rojas, and García 2001: 38). It should be noted, however, that Epiclassic (ca. 600-900 c.e.) Cantona encompasses some twenty-five to thirty square kilometers of documented occupation debris. As such, much work remains to be done in order to get at a comprehensive archaeologically defined understanding of the settlement and occupants in question.

Bone Modification. Cut marks, fractures, and related indicators of perimortem and postmortem bone modification and or trauma, perimortem injuries, and postmortem treatment, are critical to the analysis and interpretations noted (Sánchez Saldaña 1972; López Alonso, Lagunas Rodríguez, and Serrano Sánchez 2002). The presence or absence of still articulated upper cervical vertebrate are in turn taken to represent primary indices of whether or not a deposit of human crania constitute the dispatch of "freshly decapitated individuals" (Verano 2001: 168; Brown, Silverman, and García 1993). Cut marks to the anterior surfaces and transverse processes of the first through fourth cervical vertebrate may represent the slashing of

the throat versus complete decapitation (Verano 2001: 178). Concomitantly, such trauma to the throat rarely produces cut marks on the intervertebral joints and spinous processes, as is generally the case in instances of decapitation (Verano 2001: 181). While manual strangulation may result in the fracture of the hyoid bone, Ubelaker (1992) acknowledges that strangulation with ligatures seldom results in such damage.

Associated artifacts, such as ligatures (Uhle 1903; cf. Verano 2001: 168), projectile points, bifacial knives, prismatic blades, and wooden clubs (Bourget 2001: Figure 5.18) provide corroborating evidence for human sacrifice. Recent studies at both Cantona, Puebla (Talavera, Rojas, and García 2001), and other early sites within the Basin of Mexico (Pijoan Aguadé and Mansilla Lory 1997), provide distinct case studies in which forensic archaeologists and physical anthropologists have undertaken the experimental determination of stone tool use and taphonomic, or bone weathering and modification, studies in an effort to ascertain the origins and significance of cut marks, striations, and other modifications to human bone. By examining the microscopic indicators of lithics use wear and cutting marks resulting from actions consonant with the butchering of animal or human bone with stone tools, specialists have more effectively begun to identify the specific tool types and or behavioral indices that produce specific cut marks or striation patterns as per butchering activities (Talavera, Rojas, and García 2001).

In their paper concerned with the tzompantli, or skull rack, of Tlatelolco, Mexico, Carmen Maria Pijoan Aguadé and Josefina Mansilla Lory (1997) have published the results of an analysis of some 170 human crania recovered in direct association with said feature. The crania in this instance all bore 5.0 to 8.5 centimeter wide bilateral perforations through each aspect centered on the parietal and temporal areas of the skull (Mendoza 2004: 5). Microscopic

analysis of cut marks identified with each cranium ultimately determined that each had been decapitated in its perimortem state, and that each skull was flayed and perforated with stone tools so as to open the cranial vault for the insertion of wooden varas or beams for suspension from the skull rack in question (Sánchez Saldaña 1972). Finally, the presence of human anti-serum or blood protein on any one or more of the aforementioned tools or weapons recovered in direct association with modified or disarticulated human remains, provides yet another point of departure for corroborating evidence for the interpretations in question. In the case of Bourget's (2001: 110) recovery of a wooden mace from Tomb 1 at Huaca de la Luna, Peru, immunological analysis of a thick black substance that completely coated the wooden tool in question was found to react to the presence of human anti-serum or blood.

Figure 10: ABOUT HERE

Impaled Human Crania from the Skull Wall or Tzompantli of Tlatelolco, México

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Figure 11: ABOUT HERE

Human Burial Replete with Projectile Points from Cacaxtla, Tlaxcala, Mexico.

Mass Interments. Multiple burials, in which disarticulated human remains are recovered in primary contexts, coupled with sampling patterns that indicate age or sex-based selection or massing, are essential to documenting the presence or absence of intentional or ritual killings en masse. The biometric measurement of human skeletal remains may in turn provide a point of

departure for assessing ethnic and regional differences obtaining between those killed, and those within whose territory the remains were recovered. Perhaps a more reliable indicator of regional differences in skeletal populations, as attested to in recent studies from Mesoamerica and Peru, is that that centers on the isotopic analysis of bone collagen (Verano and DeNiro 1993) in efforts to determine dietary differences from skeletal remains. One recent such study from Mesoamerica succeeded in tracing the non-local origins of a single Maya lord ("18 Rabbit" or "18 Images of the War Serpent"; cf., Van Cleve 2003) from Copan, Honduras, to Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula. This latter effort promises significant new revelations if applied to skeletal remains from ritual and civic-ceremonial contexts in Mexico-Tenochtitlán and Tlatelolco, in particular.

Mutilation and Exposure. Postmortem mutilation and or prolonged exposure to the elements, and thereby, the absence of formal mortuary rituals, is in turn cited by Verano (2001: 171) as evidence that the victims in this instance were sacrificial victims; particularly given the fact that the remains are generally those of individuals or groups not deemed to merit proper care in their treatment upon death. Verano (2001: 173) cites the "surface weathering" of human remains and the presence of evidence for scavenging insects from a mass burial of some 14 individuals from the defensive trench at Pacatnamu, Peru, dated to circa A.D. 1100 to 1400. In another context, reference is made to the "sun bleaching" of human bone at Huaca de la Luna, Peru.[20] In Mesoamerica, Angel Garcia Cook (1976; 1994) and Beatriz Leonor Merino Carrión (1989) have identified several such mass interments in Epiclassic and Postclassic era deposits recovered from a number of sites located along the so-called "Teotihuacan Corridor" of the region of Tlaxcala, Mexico (Mendoza 1992).

Finally, the iconographic or text-based evidence, and ethnohistorical tradition, for human sacrifice must in turn be correlated with that evidence recovered from the archaeological record. The iconography and ethnohistory necessarily serve to corroborate past human practices, and at the same time, inform the interpretation and interrogation of the evidence at hand. In this latter regard, the first hand accounts of Spanish soldiers and missionaries are particularly relevant, and that irrespective of the political or cultural biases that may accrue in any number of cases so documented.[21]

Figure 12: ABOUT HERE

Human Heart Excision and Beheading from Mural Recovered at Cacaxtla, Tlaxcala, Mexico.

Conclusions

This exploration of the primary and secondary evidence for ritual human sacrifice in Mesoamerica clearly raised many more questions than it sought to resolve. While the realm of forensic science now promises to bring some degree of clarity to our interpretation and assessment of the evidence for early human conflict and violence in the Americas, lingering epistemological and methodological questions and criteria, and nationalistic and revisionist agendas, will necessarily frame much of the writing, analysis, and interpretation yet to come. Given the many questions that this study has addressed, and the many more as yet unresolved, I will close by restating several key questions for consideration and debate:

(a) Does there exist a body of prima facie forensic evidence to contest or support recent claims by neo-Mexica revisionists (e.g., Tlapoyawa, 2002; Mendoza, 2001; 2003) that

contact era first hand accounts and Spanish documentation for the existence of human sacrifice in Mesoamerica are little more than a fabrication of Spanish conquistadores and clerics?

(b) If, in fact, we can demonstrate that blood sacrifice was a matter of fact among such groups as the Mexica Aztec, do we not now have access to a sufficient body of osteological and forensic evidence to specify the forms of blood sacrifice that may have been practiced (e.g., human heart excision, decapitation, etc.)?

(c) Given both popular lore, and neo-Mexica revisionist claims that if, in fact, human sacrifice was practiced, it was only another more radical form of auto-sacrifice in which only those self-selecting or volunteering were given over to the gods; can either blood residue studies, DNA analysis, or bone collagen studies settle the matter of who specifically was targeted for such a politically or spiritually consecrated rite?

And, finally,

(d) Considering revisionist claims that the practice of surgically excising the human heart from a living, breathing, victim is not technically, or surgically, feasible with stone tools (or other more modern methods that require specialized instruments), how then might the Matamoros cult killings of the 1980's (wherein a single individual or cult leader accomplished the same task unassisted by attendants) provide yet one additional "ethnographic" analogy necessary and sufficient to lay this portion of the debate to rest?

Given the many questions that remain unanswered, and the many assumptions that both scholars and the lay public make about virtually every pre-Columbian platform mound and artifact recovered on the Mesoamerican landscape, how then can scholars and the lay public begin to fruitfully and effectively interrogate that evidence, and those questions, that continue to

vex both Amerindian communities and Americanist scholars alike? Ultimately, I would contend that irrespective the forum or format within which arguments are framed for or against the evidence for ritual human sacrifice in the Americas, both the emergence of a forensic approach to the archaeological evidence, and the coincident growth of the neo-Mexika denial movement, each promise to push the envelope of discovery and discourse identified with this seemingly endless and often dark and tragic exploration into the depths of the human spirit.

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Notes

[1] For the purposes of this paper, I use the term "Mexica Aztec" to identify the ethnic and cultural presence that dominated the Basin of Mexico through the 15th and early 16th centuries. I acknowledge, however, that whereas the term "Mexica" was one with which the people in question self identified, the term "Aztec," on the other hand, was the term applied by those who saw the Mexica as outsiders from Aztlán. The conjoined terms, therefore, constitute an effort at melding both emic and etic descriptors into a singular source of ethnic identification. Similarly, because those who seek the revitalization of Mexica Aztec culture, and those others who constitute the neo-Mexika revisionist contingent, have taken to using the term Mexika as opposed to Mexica, I opt here to use neo-Mexika as but one additional point of distinction between the Mexica of old and the Mexika of the modern age. In point of fact, the term Mexika more closely approximates the orthography.

[2] In an earlier study, I contend that extant archaeological and ethnohistorical sources amply indicate that key elements, and broader behavioral and political dimensions, of the Mexica Aztec war complex and cult of blood sacrifice may be traced to otherwise early or Classic era (ca. 300-850 c.e.) patterns of internecine warfare, pan-Mesoamerican or "international" conflict, and military rituals centered on human heart excision and decapitation (Mendoza 1992).

[3] See Deborah E. Lipstadt's (1994) work -- titled Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory -- for a primer on the broader dimensions and associations of those denial movements spawned by right-wing neo-Nazi groups in the United States and beyond.

[4] David Carrasco's (1999: 2) encounter with the disarticulated remains of some 42 "sacrificed" children buried in the foundations of the Great Temple of Mexico-Tenochtitlan appears pivotal to his current perspective (Román Berrelleza 1990). His friend and colleague Eduardo Matos Moctezuma, Chief archaeologist of the *Proyecto Templo Mayor*, introduced him to the sacrificial deposit, with the exclamation that "here is something beautiful and profound in its terror." Carrasco writes, "my academic deadpan about cities and sacrifice cracked into a tight grimace ... [and]... I felt a visceral response that relocated my attention from ideas to feelings, from my head to my stomach and heart, for I was a father of a young child and I wondered what possible creative hermeneutic turn I could spin onto this scene" (cf., Mendoza 2001: 47).

[5] Despite the fact that López Luján (1994: 201) provides a persuasive argument for the association of Offering 48 with the cult of Tlaloc -- the Lord of Rain, "Earth Wine" or octli -- one is nevertheless left to consider the greater likelihood that the victims in question were all drowned. Nevertheless, López Luján (1994: 201) argues that the forensic evidence points to the idea that the victims each had their throats slashed.

[6] By this same logic, the bloody consequences of the Mesoamerican ball game – known as tlatchtli to the Mexica or pok'ta'pok to the Maya – are popularly interpreted to entail the self-sacrifice, or auto sacrifice, of the captain or commander of "winning" team. Whereas the popular "interpretation" of the game has it that the most noble and valiant, and most able team captain offered himself up for human heart excision and subsequent decapitation, recent

advances in Maya epigraphy now afford an insiders perspective and discourse on the matter. To that end, epigrapher Linda Schele emphasized the role of captured Maya kings and lords who were prepped for the day of their date with the ball court by way of rituals of degradation; and ultimately, defeat within the context of what now reads as a combat sport with very real consequences to the dismemberment and decapitation of both royal blood lines and the kings who came to embody said frameworks of authority.

[7] According to Diego de Landa (1978: 50), "At times they threw the victims alive into the well at Chichén Itzá, believing that they would come forth on the third day, even though they never did see them reappear." Diego de Landa goes on to note other more or less esoteric forms of sacrifice, including genital mutilation, arrow sacrifice, and human heart excision, which have all since been identified in both epigraphic and iconographic contexts from a wide variety of Classic and Postclassic Maya sites.

[8] He follows this logic by painting a picture that would leave even the most accomplished flintknapper aghast at the prospect of being the "flintknapper" to the executioners and priests of the Templo Mayor.

[9] Leonardo López Luján (1994: 483-484) acknowledges that figures cited for this singular event by varying sources differ by the tens of thousands. Whereas the Anales de Cuauhtitlan (1975: 58) report 80,000 sacrificial captives dispatched on that first day of Tlacaxipehualiztli;

Torquemada (1969: v. 2, 168) cites the figure of 60,000; whereas the Códice Telleriano-Remensis (1964-1967: pl. 121; see also, Quiñones Keber 1995) reports 20,000 victims.

[10] This assessment appears to have originated with those calculations published by González Torres (1985: 248; cf., López Luján 1994: 483-484) who states "If this had been so, calculating twenty places in which they made one sacrifice after another, without stopping, during ninety-six hours, there would have been forty-seven deaths an hour, which means that the Mexica priests were more skillful at killing than the mechanized abattoirs in modern developed countries."

[11] According to López Luján (1994: 283), "At the top of the Templo Mayor, Ahuitzotl, assisted by five priests, began to sacrifice the first group of prisoners, who were lined up along the Itztapalapa highway. In the Cuauhxicalli, Tlacaelel and five helpers took out the hearts of the captives in a line going toward the Tetzcoco landing. Nezahualpilli, lord of Acolhuacan, and five priests…were in the Yopico, slaying prisoners lined up along the Calzada de Tepeyacac. Totoquihuatzin, Huey Tlatoani of the Tepanec, and his five assistants…were in the Huitznahua Ayauhcaltitlan with a line of humans along the Tlacopan road. Sacrifices were held simultaneously at sixteen other places in the city."

[12] False because it has not been proven true; particularly as it has not been proven true to those espousing the neo-Mexica frame of reference and interpretation.

[13] Appeal to authority or an argument from authority that necessarily relies on reference or deference to religious books, scholarly publications, or academic or spiritual teachers and related authority figures.

[14] According to the editors of the Aztlan-L listserv, which hosts Mesoamerican topics of interest, one of those topics that the list prefers not to host is that concerned with human sacrifice. According to the editors, this and related topics tends to produce a highly charged emotional, and should we say, visceral, response that only serves to bog down the listserv and detract from other noteworthy topics of interest to the Mesoamericanist community of scholars and devotees.

[15] I would like to acknowledge Rex Koontz (Personal Communication, January 22, 2004), who provided the reference to the López Luján and Mercado (1996) paper that cites said evidence. Koontz specifically noted, "Leonardo Lopez Lujan did find evidence of human blood coating the two Mictlantecuhtli monumental ceramic figures in the House of the Eagles."

[16] In an earlier paper (Mendoza 1994), I proposed that a specific subset of those chert or obsidian daggers recovered from within the deposits of the Templo Mayor held the greatest likelihood for producing evidence of having been used in those rites identified with human heart excision. It was, and remains, my contention that those daggers that bear the affixed mosaic eyes and teeth of the deity to which they were dedicated, were in fact daggers anointed or used to draw forth the sacred life force, souls, and blood of sacrificial victims. Given their many

associations with sacrificial rites and deities within the codices, I argue that the faces depicted on the blades necessarily represent the respective weapon's acquisition of the life force, soul, or heart of the offering dispatched by that very blade or tool.

17 According to Edward Humes (1991), sacrificial basins – consisting of a cauldron or *nganga* -- were similarly used in a modern context by the high priest and executioner of the Matamoros cult killings that took place in the period from 1983 through 1989. In this latter modern context, the sacrificial basins or cauldrons held both animal and human remains, including human hearts, brains, and dismembered animal and human body parts. Apparently, the cult leader and his followers believed that the cauldrons in question served as receptacles and sources for otherworldly and supernatural powers derived from the captured "souls" of those immolated during sacrificial rites. This use of said basins approximates their use in Mexica Aztec ritual contexts (Sánchez 1885).

18 According to López Luján (1994: 283), "Ministers and the faithful used the blood to anoint the supports, thresholds, and walls of the temples, as well as the rooms and the lips of the sacred images." This fact is significant in that a number of the monuments exhibited within the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City should bear trace elements or residues from the practices in question.

19 Where the recovery of primary forensic evidence within Mexica Aztec, and related, cultural contexts is concerned, Mesoamericanists are clearly hampered by the variable rates of

preservation indicated for many of the sites of the central Mexican highlands. The development of massive modern urban centers in the Basin of Mexico presents yet another significant challenge for the recovery of primary evidence specific to the question of human sacrifice. Mexica Aztec mortuary practices centered on the cremation of the dead further complicate recent efforts at recovering representative samples of human remains from primary contexts. As such, we are clearly at a loss to adequately weigh the merits of a forensic approach in Mesoamerican versus Peruvian contexts, particularly given the variable and contrasting rates of preservation that characterize each region. Whereas, in Peru, soft-tissue and fibers is often recovered largely intact, this is only rarely the case in Mesoamerica archaeological contexts. As such, we are necessarily constrained to focus our attention on the contextual and ritual associations of associated material cultures, as Leonardo López Luján (1994) has done, or direct our attention to the analysis of human bone and its modification as Carmen María Pijoan, Josefina Mansilla, and Alejandro Pastrana have done (Pijoan, Mansilla, and Pastrana 1995).

[20] The recovery of rope bindings to the ankles and wrists of some of the victims from Huaca de la Luna were taken to provide further corroboration that the individuals in question were subjected to ritual human sacrifice.

[21] Even so, one of my former students, a self-professed Mexika revisionist and danzante, objected quite emotionally to transparency images of the battle murals and sacrificial scenes at Cacaxtla, Tlaxcala, Mexico, when these were presented by way of a slide show in a university classroom at the California State University, Monterey Bay. The student in question argued that her "maestro" or "elder" had declared such images little more than fabrications and forgeries.