

Michel Graulich. *Myths of Ancient Mexico*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997. xiii + 370 \$32.95, ISBN 978-0-8061-2910-5.



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Graulich has set about a comprehensive analysis of Mexica myths. The name of the work, however, promises that the analysis will cover all of "ancient Mexico." This distinction, I believe is important. While Graulich focuses on Mexica myths, he does so fully conscious of the myths of surrounding people and of the myths of modern-day people. In general, Graulich first approaches a Mexica myth, then looks to the Toltec heritage for a link to the myths of that culture. Once this is done, he then analyzes the myth in the context of the Maya and other neighboring people in an attempt to come to a better understanding of underlying principles at work. If one accepts this as a valid methodology, then Graulich succeeds at what he has attempted. If one might quibble with the methodological approach, there is little one can do, for Graulich is unrelenting in his approach.

This book is divided into eight chapters, plus rather a lengthy introduction and conclusion. The introduction gives a brief overview of research into Mexica myths, a general introduction into the succession of civilizations in Mesoamerica, and a

look at the analysis of myths in other regions of the world. Graulich takes as his point of departure a comment by Claude Lévi-Strauss that one could not use Mesoamerican myths paradigmatically without a long and systematic analysis. It is just such an analysis which Graulich endeavors to accomplish.

The first chapter of the book discusses the sources upon which modern scholars rely for the Pre-Columbian myths. Graulich is quite thorough in his analysis of these sources, dividing them into pre-Hispanic and colonial. The colonial documents are further segregated into Nahuatl, and other native language sources, and Hispanic. In this section Graulich notes that he will rely most heavily on the documents known as the *Leyenda de los soles* and the *Historia de los mexicanos por sus pinturas*. In spite of a fairly substantial corpus of material on the pre-Hispanic Mexica, very little directly relates to myths, and what does is fragmented, disjointed, confused, and taken out of its original context. Thus the analysis which Graulich undertakes must perforce be a systematic analysis wherein all possible relationships can be exam-

ined and the pieces fitted together. Likewise the fascination of colonial authors with Quetzalcoatl, their perceptions of similarities in garden paradises at the beginning of times, floods, and other seeming parallels to Christianity also attracted attention. Graulich notes that these must be approached extremely cautiously. He concludes this chapter with an analysis of the general structure of the Mexica calendar system, the endless working of the tonalpohualli and the tonalamatl. At the conclusion of this chapter, Graulich presents the critical piece upon which much of his analysis is based: "The mythologies of Central Mexico and of the Quiche are almost the same, as I shall prove" (p. 44). From this supposition, Graulich then allows himself to incorporate the Popul Vuh as another text upon which to draw for understanding the mythologies of the Mexica. Graulich, basing his hypothesis on the work of Robert Carmack, posits that the Quiche were either themselves descendants of Central Mexicans, or their leadership was "either Toltec or strongly Mexicanized." He further notes that "Their myths go back to a common Mexican source, preceding the migration ..." (p. 44).

The second chapter concerns the various creation myths which Graulich identifies among the Toltecs, Mexica, and Quiche. As noted earlier, he utilizes the Quiche myths to provide elements for the deeper understanding of the fragmentary myths of the Mexica. Within these various myths Graulich encounters several essential elements. Central to the myths is a transgression which occurs in an enchanted or paradisiacal place, called Tamoanchan; in this transgression, there is a guilty party, there is an injured party, and a result or consequence. The original couple, Omēteotl, made up of Ome Tecuhtli and Omecihuatl, created this primordial place. Not all of the myths have the full compliment of elements, but can all be categorized using this schema. The generic myth has many common similarities to the Adam and Eve myth of the Bible. The female personage, Tlazolteotl, was deceived by Tezcatlipoca, disguised

as a bird, to pick the precious flower. As a consequence of the action the lesser gods are expelled from Tamoanchan and evils and misfortunes are introduced into the world. The picking of the flower, for Graulich, serves as a metaphor for sexual transgression. He then describes the image of the universe of the Mexica as a place surrounded by water, with an overarching firmament. The sun in its course is only a true sun in the morning, in the afternoon it becomes a false sun, a reflection of the true sun. The Morning Star is the harbinger of the new day. These elements become important later in Graulich's analysis to explain important features of Mexican periodicity.

The "Legend of the Suns" forms the core of the third chapter. Those familiar with Nahua legends know that the world has undergone four epochs, or suns, prior to the present, the fifth. Each of these epochs, or suns, was an incomplete or flawed creation of the world. Each came to a cataclysmic end. The current epoch will end with violent earthquakes. While the basic elements of this myth are common among those studied by Graulich, the exact details vary. Several myths in his corpus speak of only four suns or epochs, not the Nahua five. While earlier epochs end with floods, destructions by jaguars or monkeys, they do not always correlate exactly to the same epoch: first, second, etc. Within this structure is the relationship of each epoch or era to a single day, each is related to a sun. The Nahua day, according to Graulich, begins with the dawn and lasted until the next dawn. Each epoch, then also relates to one of four elements, earth, wind, fire, and water. Each of the four creations is also related to one of the cardinal directions. The fifth sun was associated with the direction of center and the element of movement. Graulich also posits that each epoch marks the rule of either Tezcatlipoca or Quetzalcoatl.

The renewal which occurs with each epoch is the subject of the fourth chapter. The details of the ends of the epochs and the beginnings of the

new epochs, for Graulich tend to echo the great beginning legends, involving transgressions and consequences. Moreover sexual imagery also appears in the renewal myths, especially the use of the fire drill to re-kindle fire. The fire drill was a metaphor for the sex act. In each case, order replaces chaos, and culture replaces nature. Mankind is created by grinding the bones of the former men and mixing with ashes and sacrificial blood. Other similar myths refer to men made of maize and water, Graulich posits. In this way, the several different myths converge. Maize and bones come to resemble one another. In one myth, Quetzalcoatl drops the precious bones, and they are pecked by quail, in the same way the quail peck at the planted seeds of maize. Humans are made of maize and nourished by maize. Bones nourish maize, since it grows more abundantly where people are buried. The myth also introduces the notion of indebtedness. Men were created from the sacrificial act of the gods doing penance. The gods were expelled from the original place, and thus are doing penance to the primordial couple.

From this, Graulich then expounds upon the creation of the fourth sun, identified by the Mexica as the fifth sun. He specifically compares the Mexica and Toltec version with that in the Popul Vuh. At a simple narrative level the two do not seem to be closely related. Nevertheless, Graulich is able to decipher many common threads in each. The Mexica version is well known. The Gods gathered at Teotihuacan while all was still darkness. Two chose to immolate themselves and be transfigured into heavenly orbs of light. One was Nanahuatl, the "Pimple One," the other, Teciztecatl, "He of the Conch Shell." They were distinct opposites, one handsome, the other ugly, one wealthy, the other poor. In the end the ugly one, Nanahuatl, took the plunge first and became the greater light, the handsome one, Teciztecatl, was fainthearted, took the leap of immolation second, and eventually became the moon. Nanahuatl is associated with Quetzalcoatl, Teciztecatl with

Tezcatlipoca. The two also become associated with a cultural change with the sun of Nanahuatl being a sun of the agriculturalist, not the nomadic warrior.

The myth in the Popul Vuh is dramatically different. In this myth cycle, the central figures are Hero Twins, Hunahpu and Xbalanque. They set out to destroy the sons of the first family, a family of giants, the children of whom are Zipacna and Cabracan. Graulich associates Zipacna with the Nahuatl *cipactli* or lizard earth-monster. Cabracan is descriptively associated with Tezcatlipoca. In the first myth the two also overthrow the Lord of the preceding era, seven Macaw, and become the sun and moon of the new era. The second episode begins with the uncle and father of the twins: Hun Hunahpu and Vucub Hunahpu. The brothers disturb the lords of the underworld, Xibalba, with the noise of their ball game. There ensues a series of challenges between the brothers and the lords. The brothers are killed: one buried, the other decapitated and his head hung on a tree in Xibalba. Nevertheless, he impregnates the daughter of one of the lords of the underworld. The girl, Xquic, went to the over-world and delivered her twin sons, Hunahpu and Xbalanque. These grow to avenge the deaths of their father and uncle. The Twins have a stormy relationship with the paternal grandmother. To assuage her they plant a maize field, and in so doing discover their father and uncle's ball game equipment. So they began to play. Again the Lords of Xibalba are outraged by the noise. While the Twins triumph in all of the trials in which the lords challenged them, they are finally captured, but avoid death through their own skills, and in the process defeat the underworld lords. In their adventure they establish the alternation of light and dark, and of the dry and rainy season. They plant corn in the center of their house. It reflects the progress of their adventure in the underworld. When they die, it withers, when they revive it sprouts.

In these adventures, Graulich sees parallels to the Mexican myths. The heroes defeat various opponents, including monkeys, an army of four hundred, some giants, and the lords of the underworld. They mark a transition from one epoch to another, from a nomadic existence to a sedentary one. The heroes establish the daily and agricultural cycles, as well as the sun and moon, just as do the creators at Teotihuacan. In all these ways, both in terms of isolated detail and in terms of larger mythic projection, the myths of the Popul Vuh, then, can be seen as a reflection or parallel to those of the Mexica.

The creation myths of the Toltec and the histories concerning Quetzalcoatl are held by Graulich to be but variants on the creation myths of the fourth sun, as previously outlined. This topic forms the core of the sixth chapter. In very general terms, Quetzalcoatl, or Topiltzin (Our Prince, or Our Revered Child) as he was also known, is the ruler of the Colhua. He assumes the throne by defeating his uncle, who had slain his father, Totepeuh (Our Conqueror). Topiltzin finds the bones of his dead father and inters them in a temple. During the interment, a usurper threatens to overthrow Topiltzin, but is defeated and thrown from the temple. Topiltzin then leads his people to found Tula and Tulancingo [New or little Tula]. Tula is a center for artisans of all types and a great center of learning. While the Colhua had practiced animal sacrifice, during Topiltzin's reign there is a movement to begin human sacrifice. As a result of this, Topiltzin is forced out of the city and goes off to the east. He dies two years later, but many years later is succeeded by his son Huemac. The earliest commentators, starting in the sixteenth century, took this to be an actual historical account of the political history of Tula. Graulich outlines the development of modern thought, which has now come to associate the Tula of the legends with the archeological site in modern-day Tula, Hidalgo. Graulich does not accept the myth as historical.

Graulich then analyzes some of the founding myths of the Mexica. Central to many of these is the leader Mixcoatl, who in some sources is identified with Totepeuh, the father of Quetzalcoatl. In the Mexica foundation and migration myths, Mixcoatl variously defeats the 400 Mimixcoa (the many Mixcoatl) and other ogres, including Itzapalotl (Flint Butterfly). These myths refer generally to the abandonment of nomadic gather ways and the adoption of sedentary agriculture. Graulich finds parallels for Iztapapalotl in the old earth goddesses of the earlier Chichimeca people as well as in Maya mythology. Mixcoatl in one set of legends encounters Chimalman, a female warrior who abandons her weapons, and faces his onslaught naked. Yet Mixcoatl is unable to conquer her. He later "discovers" arrows and is able to defeat her, and subsequently bed her. The child which she bears is Ce Acatl (One Reed) Quetzalcoatl. Chimalman also appears in some of the Quiche myths as the wife of the giant being, seven Macaw, mother of Zipacna and Cabracan. These legends then seem to converge on the founding of the Toltecs, wherein the leader, Totepeuh, or Mixcoatl, has a son, Topiltzin, or Quetzalcoatl.

The Quetzalcoatl legends of the Toltecs also are more mythic than historic, for Graulich. He finds direct correlations between the stories about Quetzalcoatl and the Hero Twins of the Popul Vuh. The most central is that of the son avenging the death of his father, a death caused by the boy's uncle. The expulsion of Quetzalcoatl from Tula is seen by Graulich as an absolute parallel of the expulsion from the primordial paradise. It is Quetzalcoatl's son, Huemac, who is portrayed in the myths as the individual who violates the sanctions, thus representing sexual lust, homicide, and other negative actions. Quetzalcoatl's role as transgressor is far more complicated. Graulich notes that Quetzalcoatl in some legends reputedly got drunk and had sexual intercourse with his sister. The fall of Tula then is associated with the transgressions of Quetzalcoatl and the excesses of Huemac, his son. Lastly, Quetzalcoatl's migration

to the east allows him to become one with Venus, the Morning Star. Upon his death, he is cremated, immolated, to rise as the Morning Star. In so doing, it is also a repetition of other myths wherein Quetzalcoatl goes to Mictlan, the (Land of the Dead) only to emerge later.

In the seventh chapter, Graulich then returns to the Mexica founding and migration myths to compare them with the myths already analyzed. Scholars generally agree that the earliest Mexica history is a legend probably composed after 1427 when the group had succeeded in throwing off the domination by the Tepaneca of Atzacapotzalco and had established themselves as leading power in the Valley of Mexico. They needed a new history in accord with their new status. Nevertheless, most scholars have also accepted a general historicity about the migration legends. For Graulich the place of origin, Aztlan, is another manifestation of Tamoanchan, or Culhuacan, a paradisaical place of origin, and a bit of the current reality, Tenochtitlan itself. Nearly every event narrated along the migration can be related to some other similar feature within the creation myths that Graulich has already summarized. The migration myth was then just the working out of this creation history for the Mexica, looking at their current reality and working backward. The founding myth, when the Mexica were expelled to the swamps in Lake Texcoco, is for Graulich merely a repetition of the transgression--expulsion motif already seen.

In the last chapter, Graulich then turns to Mexica notion of the other-world. He introduces this by analyzing the three other-worlds offered by Sahagun: The Paradise of Tlaloc (Tlalocan), the Heaven of the Sun (In ichan tonatiuh ilhuicac), and the place of the Dead (Mictlan). Individuals were assigned to an afterlife not as a result of what they did during their life, but as a result of the circumstances of their death. Warriors who died in battle went to the Heaven of the Sun, those who drowned or were struck by lightning went to

Tlalocan. The former become the stars at night while the latter are related to the tlaloque, demi-gods of water. Both, in some myths become associated with the generally negative tzitzimime, which are frightening spirits. Great warriors, mythic warriors, are transformed into sky-bearers, keeping the firmament separate from the land, a role also symbolically taken by the ruler. For Graulich these transitions are symbolic of the course of the day, wherein stars can become spirits. By extension, the afterlife is like yet another epoch, or sun, with a transgression and expulsion. It is all but one day, metaphorically speaking. While there was not a moral sense in the determination of an afterlife, as noted, the afterlife was not without its moral implications. While the circumstances of death determined the possible eventual afterlife, one also had to deserve that afterlife. The warrior who had not lived a proper life would not go to the Heaven of the Sun if killed in battle, but would go to the generic Mictlan. Through sacrifice, penance, and proper living one could be morally prepared for the afterlife.

In his conclusion, Graulich then recapitulates the main points of his work. In essence he sees the mythologies of the Mexica, Toltec, and Quiche Maya as inter-related. They tell in greater or smaller versions of the cyclic creation of the earth, its population, the transgressions of the inhabitants, and their expulsion from the place of creation. Each of these creations is called a sun and related metaphorically to an actual day, beginning at dawn, when the true sun rises. At midday the true sun is replaced by a false sun, a ruler replaced by a false ruler. Discord occurs and the world is plunged into the darkness of night. The sun is born from the darkness of the night and the Morning Star. So, too, is the life-cycle: the child is born in the morning from the underworld of darkness. Midday is matrimony, evening is night, death and birth are expulsion from paradise.

Graulich's arguments are well-reasoned, but must be followed with exquisite care. To fully en-

joy this work, it is helpful to be rather fully familiar with the various collections and cycles of myths. Some scholars will question his inclusion of Quiche myths for the interpretation of Mexica myths. Oftentimes similarity is sufficient for Graulich to assume relatedness, which will cause many to question his methods. It is a work which must be closely examined.

Once these caveats have been presented, one cannot help but marvel at the breadth of the arguments which Graulich presents. In making some sense of the convoluted Quetzalcoatl myth cycles, he is to be credited. As well, recognition of the ever-repeating cyclical nature of the myths, across different cultural groups, is also a major accomplishment. This book will cause many to continue in the path of Graulich, Alfredo Lopez Austin, and Nigel Davies to reexamine the myths of ancient Mexico to reinterpret them in light of metaphoric rather than historic reality. In deed, many introductions to Mexica history will need to be rewritten in light of Graulich's conclusions, to either support him or debunk him. At this point one must concur that Graulich has accomplished what he set out to do: a systematic examination of ancient Mexican myths.

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