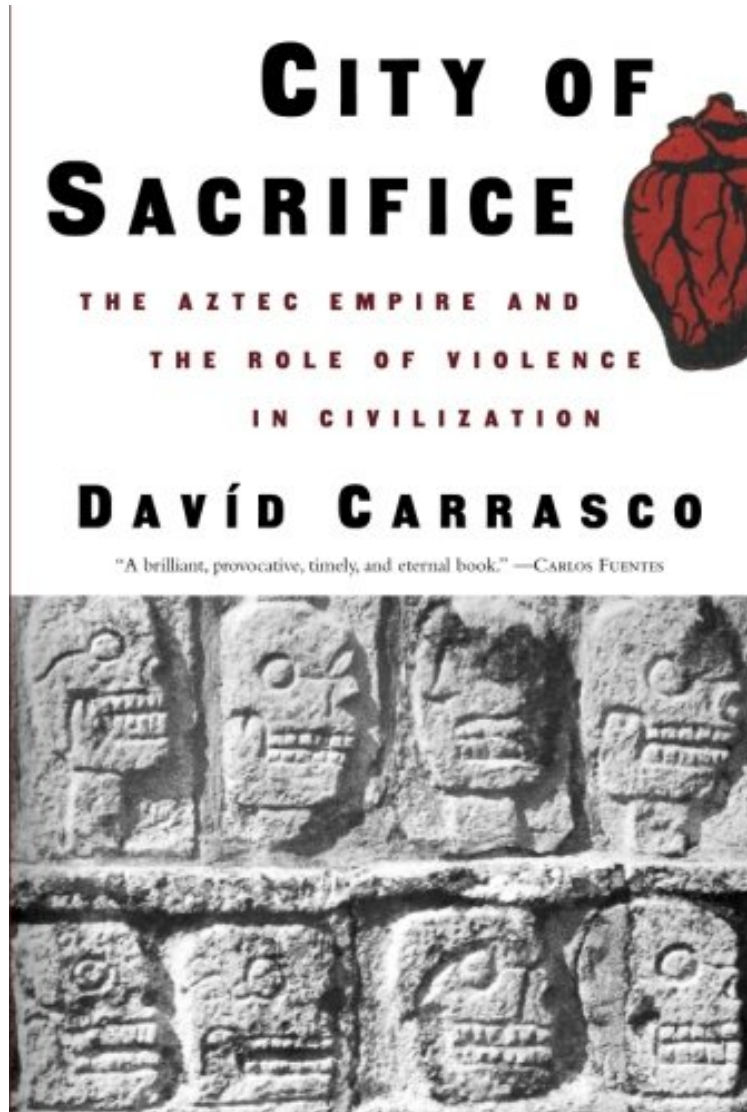


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# City of Sacrifice: The Aztec Empire and the Role of Violence in Civilization

David Carrasco

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David Carrasco : **City of Sacrifice: The Aztec Empire and the Role of Violence in Civilization** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised City of Sacrifice: The Aztec Empire and the Role of Violence in Civilization:

16 of 19 people found the following review helpful. Impenetrable Academic JargonBy CebesThe author rightly points out that scholars have largely avoided the topic of Aztec sacrifice, no doubt for political reasons (for fear that

describing the horrible brutality of these practices might appear to be a justification for the European conquest). It is thus good to see someone face the topic directly. Nonetheless the book is a disappointment. Carrasco is addicted to unnecessary pseudo-technical jargon: "locative cosmology", "ortho-visual", "orientatio", "heterogeographical," etc., and to such mind-numbing phrasings such as "forefronting the locative nature of the city's final narrative." It is a challenge to choose the worst-written sentence in this book, so I'll pick two: "In this book, I extend the meaning of orientatio to include both the discovery and organization of central place and the sacrificial performances that have the power to reorganize, redistribute, and regenerate the central place as a culturally and politically meaningful environment." "The text and its interpretations suggest a redirecting of terms toward an expansion of categories to join a hierarchy of meaning to a unity of meaning when exploring synesthesias in urbanized societies." Unfortunately, all too often bad writing is an indicator of sloppy thinking. The author seems to spend as much time telling us what he will accomplish in this book as actually accomplishing it (he constantly announces that he will "carry the discussion further" or "gain some insight" or provide a "new understanding" or "enlarge our understanding"). The book does present some interesting facts about the practice of Aztec human sacrifice, but in the end, the interpretations are rather thin (and of course couched in pseudo-profound lingo, e.g. "alignments are viewed as integral but subordinate to larger symmetries"). Nor does the book live up to its pretentious subtitle: "the role of violence in civilization." The author contributes little to a general theory of this profound issue. In sum, I would say that this book's performative narrative insufficiently forefronts a synesthetic orientatio of the Aztec cosmovision.

9 of 10 people found the following review helpful. interesting Aztec ritual and cosmic geometry  
By Christopher D. Hampson  
In *City of Sacrifice*, David Carrasco explains his picture of Aztec cosmology by describing various Aztec rituals and traditions, drawing on his archaeological experience as well as his interpretation of Aztec art and myth. We may begin and end the book uncomfortable with human sacrifice, but Carrasco's understanding of the worldview behind it puts it in some perspective. I find this work to be valuable first as a description of Aztec practices. Carrasco's accounts of the major Aztec festivals are interesting and enjoyable (the chapter titles include "Give Me Some Skin" and "Cosmic Jaws") although often macabre. I appreciate that Carrasco has worked on the archaeological dig in Ciudad de Mexico and understands firsthand the primary sources-- artifacts, remains, sculptures, paintings-- that form our basis of understanding for Aztec culture. Second, I enjoy Carrasco's picture of Aztec cosmology, a cosmology that has lines (both vertical and horizontal) as well as a center, a periphery, and a lynchpin between the worlds. This is clearly the influence of Mircea Eliade, one of my favorite theorists of religion. Thinking of religion in terms of cosmic geometry is a really interesting exercise, and enables us to envision how others have ordered the world around them. You will want to pick up "The Sacred and the Profane" by Eliade as a companion read to Carrasco.

5 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Brilliant and unflinching  
By Mexican scholar 1973  
The other reviews have been misguided and quite frankly wrong: they disliked the book because it talks about Aztec society without blinders or coddling. They dislike the Aztecs and have unjustly given negative and lukewarm reviews of a tremendous anthropological study. I would recommend this book to anyone who wants an account of Aztec religious practices that isn't filtered through heavy lenses to make an often gritty and violent society more palatable.

At an excavation of the Great Aztec Temple in Mexico City, amid carvings of skulls and a dismembered warrior goddess, David Carrasco stood before a container filled with the decorated bones of infants and children. It was the site of a massive human sacrifice, and for Carrasco the center of fiercely provocative questions: If ritual violence against humans was a profound necessity for the Aztecs in their capital city, is it central to the construction of social order and the authority of city states? Is civilization built on violence?  
In *City of Sacrifice*, Carrasco chronicles the fascinating story of Tenochtitlan, the Aztec capital, investigating Aztec religious practices and demonstrating that religious violence was integral to urbanization; the city itself was a temple to the gods. That Mexico City, the largest city on earth, was built on the ruins of Tenochtitlan, is a point Carrasco poignantly considers in his comparison of urban life from antiquity to modernity. Majestic in scope, *City of Sacrifice* illuminates not only the rich history of a major Mesoamerican city but also the inseparability of two passionate human impulses: urbanization and religious engagement. It has much to tell us about many familiar events in our own time, from suicide bombings in Tel Aviv to rape and murder in the Balkans.

A brilliant, provocative, timely, and eternal book.... We know that power, whatever its origin--sacred, natural, ethnic, contractual, or democratic--is an expression of violence. David Carrasco now demonstrates a shattering, unsentimental truth: civilizations themselves are born and maintained by violence. Carlos Fuentes  
About the Author  
David L. Carrasco is professor of history of religions at Princeton University. Author and editor of many books, he is editor in chief of the Oxford Encyclopedia of Mesoamerican Cultures. He lives in Princeton, New Jersey.