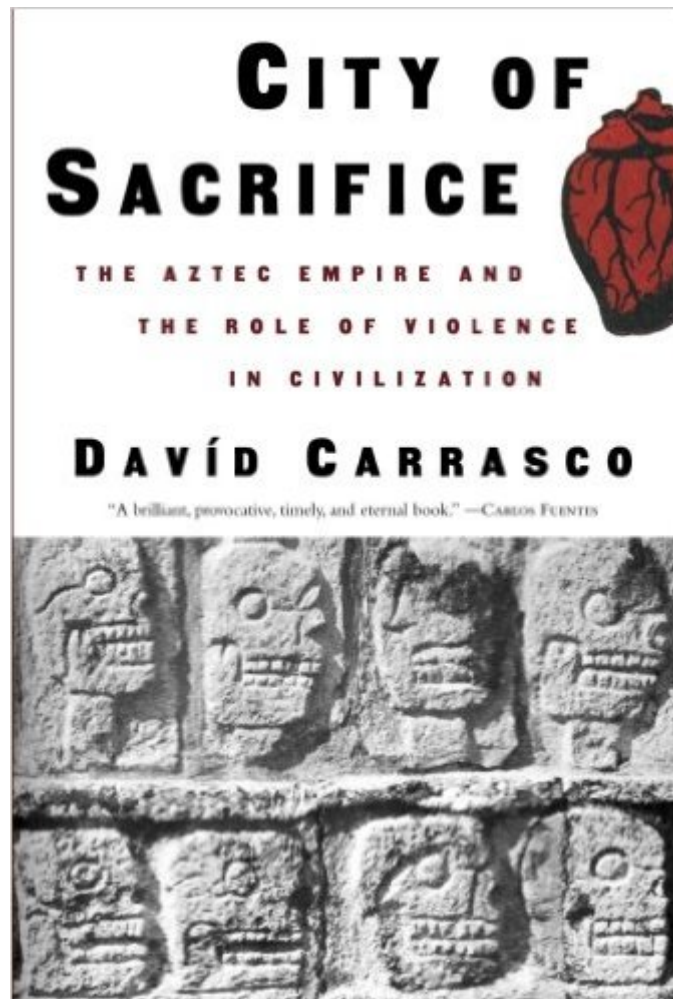


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City Of Sacrifice: The Aztec Empire And The Role Of Violence In Civilization



Synopsis

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.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The 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-visus", "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").

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