



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

By David Carrasco

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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 Meso American 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.

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Editorial Review

Review

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. Davíd Carrasco now demonstrates a shattering, unsentimental truth: civilizations themselves are born and maintained by violence. —Carlos Fuentes

About the Author

Davíd 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.

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