



Wouter Tempelman

Contact details

Wouter Tempelman

Klikspaanweg 57

2324 LZ Leiden

e-mail: wouertempelman@gmail.com

Telephone: +31620945463

Cover Picture: Symbol of the Franciscan Order at the former Franciscan monastery of Tepeapulco (Tempelman 2013).

The Time between Us and Them

Distortion and image-forming of the Post-Classic and 16th Century Mexica at the
Templo Mayor and current indigenous communities

Author: Wouter Tempelman

Student number: s0900567

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Supervisor: Prof. Dr. M.E.R.G.N. Jansen

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1.1 Motive

The motive for the present research stems from the observation that in archaeology material, people, or ideas are studied in order to better reconstruct a society or settlement that lived at some time in the past. The 'object' that is analysed is often native to a region and time far apart from that in which the archaeologist lives and reconstructs that particular object. The archaeologist is thus very much embedded in his surroundings while the object of analysis was also embedded at the time of its creation or formation. When the 'object' is taken out of its original context, no longer directly linked to the environment in which it is created, it attains a different use and meaning. It is now embedded in another environment. The archaeologist who studies the material is embedded in his or her environment in the sense that he or she uses analytical terminology, culture period-terminology, and various sorts of methods that are inherent to a scientific approach. This distance between archaeologist and object can create problems with coming to an accurate reconstruction of the true meaning of the object which is sought in archaeological research.

Mexican pre-conquest societies have often been reconstructed by studying indigenous living cultures in the present day to find analogies to their pre-conquest ancestors in subjects like ritual ceremony, ontology, and worldview. These studies have often been approached with methodologies based on early colonial documents that extensively describe pre-conquest life of the indigenous population. One of the most used documentations from the 16th century is the *Historia General de las cosas de Nueva España* from the author Bernardino de Sahagún. This manuscript is used to a great extent, and for this reason it is proposed here as a research tool to study the embeddedness of the 16th century manuscripts left by Bernardino de Sahagún, and the adaptation of this in archaeological reconstruction of the Templo Mayor in the Mexica (Aztec) capital Tenochtitlan by archaeologists. As an additional, yet crucial part, it is sought to implement an own ethnography in a Nahua (Nahuatl speaking) community in the present day in order to discuss how the scientifically embedded terminology affects the descriptions of indigenous ritual in contrast to terminology that would be proposed in the argumentation of this thesis.

The problem that is stated thus is that the archaeology of the Mexican past has used the 16th Century documents left by Sahagún (whose content will be explained further on in this thesis) more or less indiscriminately in their representation of Pre-conquest life. It is not that archaeologists do not acknowledge this problem, for if that was the case, this would be an easy thesis to write due its unilateral condemnation of a biased Mesoamerican archaeology as a whole. Sahagún scholars like Walden Browne (Browne 2000) have addressed the position of Sahagún in the representation of the Mesoamerican past. But what has not been addressed is in what form these interpretations and incorporations of Sahagún have

affected the reconstructions created by archaeologists and anthropologists of the Pre-colonial past of the Mexica-Aztec of Central Mexico that still resound in