

PREFACE

SEVERAL YEARS AGO, the manuscript of the first edition of this book was being completed. Since that time, continued research into the ancient past of Mexico and Central America has resulted in remarkable new finds and interpretations of existing information. Because of the popularity of the first edition of *Ancient Mexico and Central America*, it was necessary to do a new printing, and Thames & Hudson decided that it was appropriate to update the text to reflect changes in the field. And yet, while fascinating details have been added to our overall knowledge of this culture area, it is a great tribute to our collective body of scholarship that in general the story remains as told. Thames & Hudson and I present this second edition of *Ancient Mexico and Central America* so that readers may enjoy learning about new finds and new citations in the context of the original book's strong structure and excellent illustration program. We have been gratified by the positive response to the first edition, and particularly appreciate recognition by the Society for American Archaeology in honoring the book with their 2005 Book Award.

Five hundred years ago, in ancient Mexico and Central America, books also retold history. Other books told the future, and for the emperor of the Aztecs and their several million tribute-paying underlings, that future looked dark. Emperor Motecuzoma's mood became increasingly unsettled as reports reached him that aliens had landed in the outer reaches of his domain. So unnerved was he by phenomena entirely beyond his – and any other ancient Mexican's – experience that as the Spaniards neared his capital he abandoned his sacred commitment to the protection of his realm. The Spaniards marched up the causeway to his city, Tenochtitlan, and he welcomed them with fine gifts. He lodged them in a palace and then allowed himself to be taken into their “protective” custody, never to know freedom again.

PERHAPS EMPEROR MOTECUZOMA KNEW THAT RESISTANCE WAS, ULTIMATELY, FUTILE, THAT THE COLLIDING WORLDS, OLD AND NEW, WOULD CREATE A NEW GLOBAL ORDER, WITH OR WITHOUT HIS INTERFERENCE. WHAT IF HE HAD NOT BEEN SUCH A FATALIST? WHAT IF THE AZTECS HAD BEEN KINDLIER OVERLORDS AND THEIR VASSAL STATES HAD NOT ENTHUSIASTICALLY EMBRACED THE CHANCE TO OVERTHROW THEIR TER-

RORIZING MASTERS? WHAT IF THE EUROPEANS HAD NOT CARRIED DISEASES THAT WOULD DEVASTATE THE NATIVE POPULATION? WHAT IF THEY HAD NOT HAD GUNS AND ARMOR, WAR DOGS AND HORSES? WHAT IF EUROPE WAS NOT, ITSELF, UNDERGOING A REVOLUTION IN THINKING THAT WOULD USHER IN THE MODERN WORLD, WITH ITS QUEST FOR KNOWLEDGE, MARKETS, PROFIT, AND IDEOLOGICAL CONTROL?

Interesting though it is to ponder possible changes in the course of human history, it now seems that Motecuzoma's instincts were correct. His land, his culture, his people – all were assaulted by a tsunami of culture change, and the European perpetrators were intent on eradicating visible traces of native culture, and winning the hearts and minds of the people to the ways of Christianity. At the same time, the Spaniards felt protective towards their empire, closing out foreign influences and even visitors, and this was matched by a vigilance against freedom of thought within Spain and throughout its holdings.

Yet finally the forces of the Enlightenment broke through the carapace of conservatism, and in the 18th and early 19th centuries, movements for freedom of thought and of political activity gained ground in Middle America. Spanish Colonial governments were replaced by independent indigenous leadership, and the ancient cultures of the New World became the object of research and preservation. By the early 21st century, sophisticated research methods and a wealth of recovered information, informed by solid ecological and evolutionary theory, have restored the larger outlines of the historical process. The big picture grows more detailed every day.

This book is intended as a general overview of Mesoamerican culture history. It can serve as an introduction to the subject for those who know little or nothing about it, or as a resource volume for specialists who may be curious about Mesoamerican topics beyond those of their particular research areas. Of necessity, many details and even some regions have been left out. I hope that it provides sufficient and sufficiently accurate information so that those interested in learning more may do so.

My colleagues have generously provided advice, suggestions, contributions and corrections for this edition and the previous one. I gratefully acknowledge the contributions of Anthony Aveni, Christopher Beekman, Sue Bergh, Elizabeth Boone, James Brady, Beatriz Braniff, Linda Brown, Karen Olsen Bruhns, Richard Cavallin-Cosma, Napoleon Chagnon, Diane Chase, John E. Clark, Michael Coe, George Cowgill, Richard Diehl, Boyd Dixon, James Fitzsimmons, Kent Flannery, AnnCorinne Freter, Bridget Gazzo, David Grove, Gerardo Gutiérrez, Norman Hammon, Marion Hatch, Dan Healan, Kenneth Hirth, Dorothy Hosler, Stephen Houston, Maarten Jansen, Bryan Just, Rex Koontz, Leonardo López Luján, Joyce Marcus, Simon Martin, René Millon, Mary Miller, Virginia Miller, Claire Milner, Deborah Nichols, Joanne Pillsbury, Patricia Plunket, John Pohl, Helen Perlstein Pollard, Jeffrey Quilter, Jeremy Sabloff, William Sanders, Nicholas Saunders, Harry Shafer, Payson Sheets, Virginia Smith, Dean Snow, Barbara Stark, Rebecca Storey, Mike Tarkanian, Carolyn Tate, Karl Taube, Richard

Townsend, Javier Urcid, Barbara Voorhies, Phil Waynerka, Randolph Widmer, David Webster, and Eduardo Williams. Of course, I am responsible for the accuracy and pertinence of the content of this book.

The book's extraordinary design is the responsibility of the publishers, Thames & Hudson. Note the way the text flows around the many beautiful illustrations, the way the line art maintains a coherence of expression. If you open archaeology books at random in a bookstore or library, you will immediately distinguish Thames & Hudson projects from all the others by these traits, and I am grateful that my text and illustration program were again brought into print by Thames & Hudson. Colin Ridler, this book's developmental editor, has once more achieved an artful balance of encouragement of the author and enforcement of necessary production strictures. Sophie Mackinder oversaw the many details of this volume's completion. This second edition has been enhanced by the efforts of Geoff Penna, Lisa Cutmore, Mary-Jane Gibson, and Alison Hissey. I acknowledge once again essential help on the first edition by Susan Crouch, Rowena Alsey, Celia Falconer, Melissa Danny, Silvia Crompton, Susan Dwyer, Drazen Tomic, the sales and marketing team, and the late Wendy Gay.

Finally, I wish to thank the readers of this book for their very positive feedback – I much appreciate it.

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