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Michael D. Mathiowetz and Andrew D. Turner, eds. 2021. *Flower Worlds: Religion, Aesthetics, and Ideology in Mesoamerica and the American Southwest*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.

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What is a flower world? The essays in this volume respond to and expand upon Jane Hill's influential 1992 article "The Flower World of Old Uto-Aztecan," in which Hill identified "a complex system of spirituality centered on metaphors of flowers" as a key component of "the cultural repertoire of many of the prehistoric and historic peoples of the [United States] Southwest and Mesoamerica" (Hill 1992, 117). Relying primarily on songs and other kinds of texts, Hill emphasized shared themes of shifting chromatic brilliance, birds, butterflies, flowers, and flames, often associated with spirit lands and "timeless worlds parallel to our own" (Hill 1992, 127). This essay has proved generative for a whole range of subsequent studies of archaeological, colonial, and modern cultures (Burkhart 1992; Hays-Gilpin and Hill 1999; 2000; Taube 2004), and this volume continues in this productive vein, with a range of studies of ancient and contemporary flower worlds.

This volume emphasizes two key refinements of Hill's framework. First, in contrast to the unitary Flower World that Hill described, from the title onwards, this book affirms that there were multiple flower worlds, locally-specific and culturally-dependent manifestations of a shared set of ideas (Oswaldo Chinchilla-Mazariegos is credited by several authors for stressing this distinction in the seminar that preceded the volume). From this emerges the realization that, appropriately enough, there are no stable characteristics that are shared by all the elusive and ever-shifting flower words; instead, Hill and Hays-Gilpin's work serves to identify a polythetic list of traits that may signify the presence of a flower world complex. Second, multiple authors stress the importance of treating flower worlds as real

rather than metaphorical. Indigenous voices, especially prominent in the first section of the book, are central in refining this characterization in ways that resonate with Indigenous philosophies of monism that are quite distinct from the European intellectual tradition.

The volume is bookended by an insightful forward and epilogue by Kelley Hays-Gilpin, Hill's collaborator on several subsequent important articles about the flower worlds of the United States Southwest, in which she reflects on her collaboration with Hill and stresses both the power and the limitations of their framework (Hill unfortunately did not live to see this volume's publication). An introduction by the editors surveys the geographical and chronological extent of flower worlds. The volume is divided into two parts, the first on contemporary flower worlds and the second on historical manifestations. In the latter section, the chapters are presented in roughly chronological order, primarily concentrating on material evidence from archaeological cultures, with a single chapter on colonial New Spain. In spite of the interdisciplinary nature of the topic, the vast majority of the volume's contributors are anthropologists.

In the first section, the volume foregrounds contemporary Indigenous experience, featuring essays about flower worlds among modern Nahua, Wixárika (Huichol), Yoeme (Yaqui), and Hopi communities. As the editors rightly assert,

> Breakthroughs in understanding the archaeological expressions and meanings of flower worlds simply could not be accomplished without integrating knowledge and histories embedded in the ethnohistorical and ethnological record of these cosmologies in conjunction with the Indigenous oral traditions, ritual practices, and lived experiences of descendant communities who continue to engage the flower worlds (p. 22).

In his essay on "Flower World in the Religious Ideology of the Contemporary Nahua of the Southern Huasteca, Mexico," Alan R. Sandstrom stresses the implications of Nahua philosophical monism for the study of flower worlds: in Nahua ritual (one term for which is *xochitlalia*, or "to lay down flowers"), flowers and other ritual objects are not metaphors but embodiments: "they reveal or unconceal divinity, that is, they are object-subjects that are vehicles embodying aspects of *totiotzin* [divinity]. They lead people to glimpses of what lies beyond their own sense impressions. Far from being lifeless things, ritual objects disclose deity and are animate entities

that are themselves agents" (p. 47). Johannes Neurath likewise stresses how flower worlds, like the Wixárika *Wirikuta*, should be understood in their "ontological and relational complexity" (p. 66), describing how the goal of *peyote* seekers is to learn to see like *peyote*, in order to become *peyote*-people, or *hikuritamete*. He also stresses the more sinister side of the Wixárika flower world, emphasizing the hardships involved in the peyote quest, and also the ways that communities manage the risks that *peyote*-people bring back to the non-initiated after their journeys.

In an essay on the Yoeme *sea ania*, Felipe S. Molina and David Delgado Shorter bring to bear a variety of different strategies to explain the various *aniam*, or worlds, of the Yoeme, which exist alongside the mundane world that we all perceive. The *aniam* are "both physical and immaterial realms" (p. 84) and "dimensions, places of encounter, states of being, or fields of power" (p. 72). Molina and Shorter stress the agency of the *aniam* to manifest at times and places of their own choosing: "In such cases, 'worlds' might not always be the best translation unless we expand our understanding of 'world' to include something (or someone) with the ability to appear or not" (p. 72). Deer and flowers, which both make present an ethos of sacrifice, are central to the Yoeme flower world: "Located by most Yoemem in the east, beneath the dawn, the *sea ania* refers to the world of flowers, the beginning of life, and the result of hard work. The *sea ania* is the home of the actual embodiment of sacrifice, the deer" (p. 79). Molina, a Yoeme deer singer, presents and analyzes a deer song as a way of learning about the *sea ania*, and Molina and Shorter both offer also personal anecdotes about their encounters with this world, writing, "we also want to accentuate the real and present nature of the *sea ania*. The flower world is not simply metaphorical or symbolic. We have both seen the *sea ania* and stood within that realm" (p. 84).

In the final chapter of this section, Dorothy K. Washburn analyzes "Flower World Concepts in Hopi Katsina Song Texts," stressing both continuities and differences from other known flower worlds. She emphasizes the importance in distinguishing when flower worlds are being invoked as an emic or an etic concept. As Washburn observes,

> it is notable that nowhere have Hopis explicitly, either in discussions with me or in katsina song texts, used the term "flower word" or "flowery world." Further, Hopi katsina song does not celebrate the idea that Hopis at death will go to a flowery paradise, such as that conceived by the Aztecs, for example. Rather, for the

> Hopis, the concept of a flower world refers to the perfection of their lives in their utopian past which they must constantly strive to achieve in their present lives. Katsina songs are focused on encouraging Hopis to live by the moral imperatives of this past perfected paradise, when everyone worked together harmoniously and lived a life of mutual caring and respect (p. 89).

Washburn also cites Philip Tuwaletstiwa's characterization of the flower world as an internalized place "where goodness is ever present, dreams can sprout, grow, and emerge. It is a place where men's and women's spiritual lives can become manifest. It is a metaphor for the creative and collective unconscious" (p. 89).

Together, these four chapters are one of the most significant contributions of this volume. In describing four contemporary flower worlds, each quite different from the others, they provide a kind of richness and nuance not always possible to achieve with archaeological sources, and in many ways quite different from the ancient flower worlds described in subsequent chapters. The specificity of the Wixarika quest to become *peyote* is quite different from the deer songs that present the Yoeme *sea ania*, which are in turn quite distinct from the utopian past of Hopi *katsina* songs. None precisely resemble the flower-filled Aztec afterlives we know from sixteenth-century textual sources. It is also striking how few traces these contemporary flower worlds might leave in the archaeological record, as they are principally embodied by song, dance, and perishable offerings. Yet guided by these contemporary examples, we can begin to appreciate the things that we cannot know about ancient flower worlds from the material record alone.

In the second section of the book, the material analyses are especially edifying. In her chapter, Cameron McNeil presents the results of microbotanical analysis of pollen remains from tombs at the Maya city of Copan, where she argues that "flowers and flowering plants were used by the Classic period Maya to actualize paradisiacal places of creation, fecundity, and power imbued with the perfume of flowers" (p. 129). Her essay focuses on four kinds of pollen that occurred repeatedly in ritual contexts: pollen from maize plants, cattail reeds, the coyol palm, and a kind of flower known as *esquisuchil*, *ik'al te*, or the popcorn flower (*Bourreria huanita*). These four plants, all of which have yellow or white flowers or inflorescences, evoke a rich set of associations and relationships. Most apparent is the juxtaposition of maize, the plant of sustenance, agriculture, and civilization, with

cattail reeds, wild plants that thrive in watery environments, and also bring to mind the powerful urban archetype of Tollan. That maize pollen or flowering maize stalks were brought into the tombs suggests attention to maize at many different points in its life cycle, which McNeil effectively connects to representations of maize deities in Copan sculpture. Equally interesting is the nature of the coyol palm as an import to the Copan region from the Maya heartland, and the long-lasting importance of *esquisuchitl* as a flower associated with ritual, amply documented in sixteenth-century Nahua sources such as the *Florentine Codex*. McNeil also highlights the medicinal uses of this plant, as well as its potential associations with death and the Classic Maya idea of a white flowery breath soul. McNeil's meticulous study lets us imagine the tombs of Copan as flowery and aromatic places, full of ephemeral symbolism, and hints at exciting possibilities for future investigation.

Davide Domenici, in his chapter on the uses of colors in Mesoamerican codex painting, highlights the prevalence of organic colorants in Nahua and Mixtec codices produced before the Spanish invasion. Combining summaries of the results of non-invasive analysis of codices in Europe through the MOLAB project with readings of key sixteenth-century texts, Domenici emphasizes the chromatic brilliance of plant-based pigments as well as their symbolic valences. Organic pigments, he argues, building on the work of Diana Magaloni Kerpel and Élodie Dupey García, were imbued with *tonalli*, and also resonated with Nahua and Mixtec ideas of flowery speech, poetry, and song. Domenici concludes that "The production of colors and the painting of pictorial manuscripts, far from being a 'mere' technical enterprise, was thus a culturally charged activity strictly related to the codices' performative contexts" (p. 276). Yet at the same time, he is careful to note the absence of such a profusion of organic pigments in Maya codices, suggesting important variation in the associations between flower worlds and writing across Mesoamerica.

Differences among flower worlds are also central to the essay by Oswaldo Chinchilla Mazariegos, which explores what happens when flower worlds collide. Examining the Teotihuacan-style *incensarios* produced along the Pacific Coast of Guatemala, he detects traces of two distinct conceptions of a flowery world: one with a long tradition along the Pacific Coast and the other corresponding to the Central Mexican city of Teotihuacan. Noting in particular the prevalence of female representations in association with imagery related to maize, sustenance, and water on these *incensarios*

and on earlier Pacific Coast materials, he contrasts this local conception with the highland association of flowers, birds, butterflies, warfare, and male gender. At the same time, he considers how Teotihuacanos may have understood the lush environment of the Pacific Coast, where the ample presence of cacao, quetzal birds, and butterflies must have resonated with ideas about flower worlds. By treating flower worlds as locally and culturally specific, Chinchilla Mazariegos allows for a productive investigation of the effects of intercultural contact.

A focus on flower worlds as elite phenomena unifies several of the articles about Central Mexico. Examining the period after the fall of Teotihuacan, Andrew Turner argues that flower world imagery can be detected in the art of Cacaxtla, Xochicalco, Ojo de Agua, and other sites, with an especially strong association with the ballgame at Xochicalco. For Central Mexican elites during the Epiclassic period, he argues, "flower world was a source of legitimacy" and also a source of conflict, as "flower world ideology fueled interpolity conflict by promoting militarism through competition over access to wealth and the glorification of the deceased who fell in battle" (p. 168). Yet in contrast to Chinchilla Mazariegos' nuanced account of different flower worlds, Turner seems to assume a single, stable flower world at these diverse and multicultural sites, without giving much consideration to how the Epiclassic centers might have transformed the Teotihuacan conception of a flower world in different ways. The association of bird, bat, and butterfly imagery with the ballgame at Xochicalco and Plazuelas seems to be a particularly notable transformation of Teotihuacan practice that requires further consideration.

In "The Flower World of Cholula," John Pohl examines representations of Xochipilli and related deities including Macuilxochitl, Piltzintecuhtli, Chicomexochitl, Tonacatecuhtli, Centeotl, and Ixtlilton in the ceramics of Early Postclassic Cholula, arguing that these deities, sometimes considered marginal in the Aztec pantheon, were in fact essential to pan-Mesoamerican elite culture as patrons of craft production and elite feasting. In the following chapter, Ángel González López and Lorena Vázquez Vallín consider incursions of the flower world into particular scenarios of offerings and architectural sculpture at the Mexica Templo Mayor. In contrast to the associations of flower worlds with craft and feasting described by Pohl in the previous chapter, González López and Vázquez Vallín emphasize flower world as a battlefield, one with strong mythical resonances with both the creation of the present sun and the glorious lives of Toltec ancestors. Yet

like Pohl and Turner, they also emphasize the elite nature of flower world ideology.

The essays focusing on Mesoamerica's northern boundaries take slightly different approaches. In his chapter, Michael Mathiowetz explores the presence of flower worlds in northwest Mexico and the United States Southwest. Although maize agriculture arrived in the region from Mesoamerica in the third and second millennia BCE, Mathiowetz argues that many traits of Mesoamerican flower worlds are not strongly present in the archaeological record of the region until c. 900 CE. He proposes two key moments where what he identifies as a Mesoamerican ideology spread to the north. The first, associated with the Aztatlán culture c. 900 CE, emphasizes the consumption of cacao, floral imagery, and solar ritual. Another major change, he suggests, occurs with the site of Casas Grandes after 1200 CE. Although not without its challenges, the effort to bring chronological and causal precision to the evolution of flower worlds is much appreciated. Continuing the focus to regions beyond Mesoamerica's northern borders, Karl Taube contributes a focused and useful essay on cicadas as a metaphor of emergence in Mimbres, Ancestral Puebloan, and Hopi art. Identifying previously overlooked images that are inspired by careful observation of insect behavior, Taube demonstrates the multisensory appeal of the cicada as a creature that is good to think with, from the powerful symbolism of the way that it burrows out of the earth and ascends flowering stalks to the all-encompassing sonic environment that cicadas create upon emergence.

Concluding the volume, James Córdova considers the importance of flowers in the origin story and cult of the Virgin of Guadalupe, demonstrating the tenacity with which flower world ideologies survived after the Spanish invasion. Coming directly after Domenici's essay about the ways in which Mesoamerican codex traditions might be described as flower painting, many aspects of the Guadalupe story take on new resonance. For example, the way that the Virgin's image was literally painted in flowers, resulting from the impression left by the roses that Juan Diego had gathered in his cloak, seems especially significant in the light of what we now know about the importance of flowers as colorants in traditional Mesoamerican painting techniques. Córdova also considers Juan Diego's subsequent gesture of offering the cloak full of flowers to the bishop-elect as deeply meaningful, continuing Nahua traditions of offering flowers to Indigenous nobles. In sum, Córdova concludes, "Mesoamericans' intricate knowledge of

creation, divinity, nobility, and beauty as related through flowers made meaningful the story and image of Guadalupe in a way that Spaniards and others not versed in the Indigenous flower world could certainly appreciate but not fully comprehend as an Indigenous audience might" (p. 299).

The essays in this volume affirm the diversity and deep significance of flower worlds in Mesoamerica and the United States Southwest. The juxtaposition of contemporary and historical flower worlds is especially valuable for the questions that it provokes about the complexity of ancient scenarios. In light of what we know about the real variety of flower world traditions among contemporary Indigenous groups, a tendency in several essays to retroject very specific elements of Aztec belief deep into the past may require further examination. Instead, one might want to turn the question around: how is it that the Aztecs came to have two, or perhaps even three, distinct flower worlds? At different points in the text, authors cite as models Tamoanchan, with its flowering tree shrouded in the mists of creation; Tlalocan, the lush paradise in which the rain god's dead spent their afterlives, and Ichan Tonatiuh Ilhuicac, the bright, desert-like paradise to which warriors went after their deaths on the battlefield (López Austin 1994 is of course the classic study here). Do we see here an accreted history of contact and conquest, where the Aztecs appropriated other cultures' flower worlds? Or might multiple flower worlds have been more common throughout Mesoamerican history, and how might that affect, in turn, to the kinds of interpretations advanced in this book? Yet as Dorothy Washburn cautions:

> The use of analyst-created terms to describe ineffable aspects of the worlds of Indigenous peoples is fraught with difficulty [...]. While Mesoamerican peoples, beginning even in the Formative period, certainly referenced flowers in their songs and images of flowers appeared everywhere in their material world...we do not know whether they conceptualized these flowers as making up a cosmological entity they might have called their "Flower World" (p. 100).

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