Abstract:

Many Nahua (contemporary Aztec) living in northern Veracruz, Mexico, continue to follow aspects of their ancient religion firmly rooted in pre-Hispanic traditions. Nahua religion is pantheistic in nature in that the cosmos itself is the deity, and human beings, the natural world, and the realm of the spirits are all aspects of a single, seamless sacred unity they call totiotsij. Nahua world view creates a congruence between humans and the natural environment that is difficult to understand for people who share a general Euroamerican orientation to nature. In their cognized model of the environment, the Nahua use the human body as the key metaphor for linking people with their natural surroundings. The earth, sky, water, seeds, crops, and human beings are conceived to share a similar bodily physical form, affirming at a profoundly spiritual level that they are all in fact aspects of an indivisible unity. The slash-and-burn production cycle fits the Nahua into a system of exchange with the key elements of the environment conceived as spirit entities. The spirits provide the conditions for food and life for people in return for respect and valued offerings dedicated during elaborate rituals. Offerings include tobacco, corn meal, and beeswax candles, but by far, the most valued of all items is blood. Blood contains chicahualistli, the force and power of life, and spirits depend on it so that they will be able to supply ritual participants with corn and the other crops they require to sustain their lives.