

Overview

Reseña

José Enrique Gómez Álvarez*

Velázquez, Lourdes. *The Anahuac civilization: philosophy, medicine and science.* Editorial University Notes, Mexico, 2019. 215 pp.

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The work of Dr. Velázquez could be described as an apologetic work. The book seeks to demonstrate and demystify some beliefs rooted around the Anahuac civilization. The author points out from the Introduction the convenience of using this term and not those of America or Mesoamerica.

The book is developed in eight chapters. They give an overview of the Anahuac culture. It seeks to unravel the anthropological, philosophical, theological assumptions that lead us to understand the practice of medicine. The author begins by distinguishing between civilization and culture. The Anahuac civilization encompasses multiple cultures: the Olmec, the Teotihuacan, and the Maya, among others. A common spirit unifies all: «The Anahuac civiliza-

* PhD in Philosophy from the University of Navarra. Master in Social Gerontology. Professor and researcher at CISAV. México. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8964-220>
E-mail: jegomezalvarez@yahoo.com
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tion and the cultures that arose from it, particularly the Nahuatl, find in the *toltecáyotl* the necessary conditions to make sense of their existence. The flower and song, art and poetry, are the tools to know the essential things of life on the spiritual path...» (p. 27).

In the first chapter, «Nahuatl philosophical thinking about divinity and the cosmos» (pp. 51-79), Dr. Velázquez summarizes the cosmogony of Anahuac. It highlights the difficulty of understanding all the divine manifestations of the *Ometeotl* principle as gods. It also shows how there is a true ontological thought not reducible to the religious. Chapter II, «The philosophical conception of man» (pp. 81-105), discusses philosophical anthropology where man is conceived as a dynamic self in the notion of «face and heart». The chapter also examines educational ideas, as well as part of ethics and the study of man's sense of death.

The following chapter, «The physical anthropology of the Anahuacas» (107-121), describes the hygienic habits, food and morphological descriptions of the inhabitants as historical sources have pointed out, highlighting the quality of hygienic measures and the balance of their power supplies that explain that their life expectancy was higher than in Europe of that time.

Chapter IV, «General characteristics of Nahuatl medicine» (pp. 123-151), explains very well how the medicine of the Anahuacas depended on its complete cosmovision. The author emphasizes that analogously to the West; medicine depended on assumptions not always based on what we would now call scientific medicine. One of the examples she points out is that of Astrology. One of the merits of the Nahuas was to always understand the disease in an individual perspective. «...For the Nahuas doctor and patient, the cause of the disease was always a personal individuality, whether natural or supernatural... in a broad sense, every disease originates in some divine way, and its cause must be found in a possible offense specifically towards the god of the place where the patient lives» (p. 145).

Chapter V, «The medical practice of the Nahuas» (pp. 153-180), focuses on the information available in the practice of medicine shortly before the Conquest period. In the classification of doctors are those of the priestly type and the ones the author calls «professionals». The Nahuas achievements were among others, the fact that women could practice medicine, because the role of midwives was of paramount importance in ancient Mexico.

Chapter VI, «Ethical and humanistic roots of the Anahuac technology» (pp. 181-191) discusses the scientific and technological advances of the Nahuas. In particular, the advances in time dating are mentioned. The next chapter, «The role of women in the Anahuac civilization» (pp. 193-197), attempts to revalue the role of women in the Nahuatl society. The book continues with «Human sacrifices, myth or reality?» (pp. 199-204), where the veracity of the sources about human sacrifices is discussed emphasizing the exaggeration of testimonies. The book ends with the Conclusions (pp. 205-208) where the author insists on the importance of the investigation of the cultural roots of Mexico: «We must recover the historical memory and know the truth about our great past. We must investigate what were the human values and principles that constituted the civilization that achieved, over many centuries, the most advanced degree of life in society that humanity has reached» (p. 208).

The conclusion pointed out, indicates the repetition or guiding thread of all the work: the value of the Anahuac culture. The great merit of the work is to compile in a single text the worldview of Anahuac combining the dissemination with the research. The discourse thus flows throughout the text, giving the overview of the Anahuac civilization. The book in terms of its weaknesses, is that due to the zeal to defend the value and weight of the cultures studied, *ad populum* expressions are sometimes abused in the use of superlatives when describing the achievements of the Anahuac civilization. Likewise, there are some statements that go beyond

the conceptual and are empirically very doubtful so when talking about healers it is said: «...but in particular they had the power to be able to emanate from their body the energy they transmit to their patients» (p. 104). It is clear that this type of statement requires another kind of support.