



Tlacaelel Remembered: Mastermind of the Aztec Empire (The Civilization of the American Indian Series)

Susan Schroeder Ph.D

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The enigmatic and powerful Tlacaelel (1398–1487), wrote annalist Chimalpahin, was “the beginning and origin” of the Mexica monarchy in fifteenth-century Mesoamerica. Brother of the first Moteuczoma, Tlacaelel would become “the most powerful, feared, and esteemed man of all that the world had seen up to that time.” But this outsize figure of Aztec history has also long been shrouded in mystery. In *Tlacaelel Remembered*, the first biography of the Mexica nobleman, Susan Schroeder searches out the truth about his life and legacy.

A century after Tlacaelel’s death, in the wake of the conquistadors, Spaniards and natives recorded the customs, histories, and language of the Nahuatl, or Aztec, people. Three of these chroniclers—fray Diego Durán, don Hernando Alvarado Tezozomoc, and especially don Domingo de San Antón Muñón Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin—wrote of Tlacaelel. But the inaccessibility of Chimalpahin’s annals has meant that for centuries of Aztec history, Tlacaelel has appeared, if at all, as a myth.

Working from Chimalpahin’s newly available writings and exploring connections and variances in other source materials, Schroeder draws the clearest possible portrait of Tlacaelel, revealing him as the architect of the Aztec empire’s political power and its military might—a politician on par with Machiavelli. As the advisor to five Mexica rulers, Tlacaelel shaped the organization of the Mexica state and broadened the reach of its empire—feats typically accomplished with the spread of warfare, human sacrifice, and cannibalism. In the annals, he is considered the “second king” to the rulers who built the empire, and is given the title “Cihuacoatl,” used for the office of president and judge.

As Schroeder traces Tlacaelel through the annals, she also examines how his story was transmitted and transformed in later histories. The resulting work is the most complete and comprehensive account ever given of this significant figure in Mesoamerican history.

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