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Introduction: Aztec Ceremonial Landscapes

This book, generated by the scholars' conference "Aztec Ceremonial Landscapes" held at the Museo del Templo Mayor in Mexico City, is both a culminating point and a moment of transition in the study of Mesoamerican religions. It marks the completion of a cycle begun ten years earlier when the first international conference of scholars met at the University of Colorado in Boulder to reflect on the astonishing discoveries of the Coyolxauhqui stone and other ritual objects at the Templo Mayor in Mexico City. This volume also reflects a transition in theoretical discussions about the character of sacred spaces in the core area of the Aztec Empire. Since that first meeting and during collaborative discussions at numerous seminars, we have altered our point of view from focusing on a "centered mass"—that is, the Templo Mayor—to surveying a "sensitive grid"—that is, numerous interrelated ceremonial centers in the Basin of Mexico; thus the title of this volume: *To Change Place: Aztec Ceremonial Landscapes*. This emphasis on a change of place refers not only to how Aztec priests, warriors, rulers, and commoners changed social and symbolic place through movement and ritual action, but also how a working group of scholars, benefiting by the interaction of numerous disciplinary approaches, have developed elements of a new interpretive framework for the study of the dynamics of Aztec centers and peripheries. In this introductory essay, I want to describe the intellectual context for, and action of, the 1989 conference in Mexico City as well as the contents of this book.

THE SETTING

In that most remarkable of first novels by a young genius, Carlos Fuentes wrote about Mexico City in *Where the Air Is Clear*, that it was a

city witness to all we forget, city of carnivorous walls, . . . city of motionless pain, city of immense brevities, city of fixed sun, city up to its neck in water, city of merry lethargy, city of twisted stinks, city rigid between air and worms, city ancient in light, old city cradled among birds of omen, . . . city of the violated outrage, city of resigned market plazas, city tempested by domes, city woven by amnesias, bitch city, hungry city, sumptuous villa, . . . city of the true image of gigantic heaven.¹

It was in the heart of this prodigious, exploding city where the air is seldom clear, this city with endless cities and ceremonial centers pulsating within it, that our conference was held June 18–24, 1989. Hosted by Eduardo Matos Moctezuma, director of the Museo del Templo Mayor, and supported by García Moll, director of the Instituto Nacional de Antropología, our participants benefited by being together in the landscapes of museums, libraries, mountaintop centers, and the archaeological wonders of this “city of the true image of gigantic heaven.” It was a significant development in the history of our collaboration to return together to the actual site of the excavation of the Great Temple of Tenochtitlan. Working together in Mexico enhanced the development of our ideas during the conference. Ten years earlier, in October 1979, many of the same scholars participated in the first conference, “Center and Periphery: The Great Temple and the Aztec Empire,” at the University of Colorado in Boulder to discuss the exemplary role of the Templo Mayor in the organization and expansion of Aztec urbanism. Those discussions focused on the temple and economic tribute, human sacrifice and ideology, spatial symbolism in Teotihuacan and Tenochtitlan, magical flight and Mesoamerican cosmology. Our work, inspired by Proyecto Templo Mayor under the superb guidance of Eduardo Matos, uncovered some answers but more questions about the history and character of Aztec religion, social organization, and art.² Now, ten years later, our seminar group had the luxury of reflecting on those discoveries, questions, and problems within the jewel of a museum that housed so many of the objects, symbols, masterpieces, and fragments that were, in the words of Fuentes, “witness to all we forget.” Within this setting, which served as our home base during the seminar, we were joined by new colleagues from Mexico, the United States, and Japan. Alfredo López Austin, who had participated in our original seminar in Boulder, rejoined the group and contributed greatly to our discussions. We were also pleased to include Professor Javier

Noguez from the Colegio de México, whose work on the formation of the cult of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Tepeyac assisted us in our field trip to the site. From the Museo del Templo Mayor, we benefited by the reports of new discoveries at Tlatelolco given by Juan Román Berrelleza and Salvador Guil'liem Arroyo. Lawrence Sullivan, a historian of religions whose work on South American religions provided a rich comparative relief, joined us for the first time. We were especially honored to welcome the historian of religions Professor Michio Araki and three graduate students from the University of Tsukuba in Ibaraki Prefecture, Japan. Their participation was a symbol of the process of deprovincialization in methodology and in comparisons with Asian cultures that is part of our seminar experience.

This enriched geographical, urban, and collegial setting was accompanied by new programmatic aspects to our 1989 conference. Previously, in 1987, a group of fifteen Aztec specialists and historians of religions gathered to discuss a selected group of seminal articles representing present views on Aztec ceremonial center/state organization in order to consider new avenues of research into the dynamics of center and periphery in the central Mesoamerican urban tradition. That conference, "Consultation on the Future of Aztec Studies: Center and Periphery in the Mexica World," strove to nurture a working group of scholars who would interact for a decade by focusing on a set of research problems of common interest within the field of Aztec studies. Up to this point, our work had been directed by the compaction of Aztec art, religious symbols, political authority, and military power within the centered mass of the Templo Mayor. Now, our goal was to shift the perspective in Aztec studies and look at Tenochtitlan, the Templo Mayor, and the consolidation of the Mexica worldview from the perspective of the periphery, from the points of view of such places as Texcoco, Tlatelolco, Mt. Tlaloc, Tlaxcala, and the ceremonial centers in between. As a means of laying out new lines of inquiry we focused an intensive discourse and debate on six articles considered both innovative and problematic in the study of Aztec social history and religious expression. These included Anthony Aveni's model of center and periphery dynamics in Aztec, Mayan, and Incan cultures; Johanna Broda's analysis of the puzzling manifestations of the Tlaloc cult at the Templo Mayor; Richard Townsend's seminal study of coronation ceremonies; Cecelia Klein's analogy of sin, social control, and human entrails; Jerome Offner's picture of the Texcocan empire; and David

Carrasco's model of Aztec symmetry in astronomical, imperial, and ceremonial traditions. This method of interpretation — that is, the use of seminal works to stimulate discussion and criticism — resulted in an abundant set of correspondences about center and periphery including:

- Center = Centroid or “the city that can be said to epitomize the pattern of society at large”
- = The human body conceived as the nexus of cosmic forces on the terrestrial level
- = The Templo Mayor as the pivot of the Mexica ceremonial and political/economic world
- = The life and paraphernalia of the ruler as the quintessential expression of sanctified authority
- = Tlatelolco as the focus of new research and comparisons with Tenochtitlan
- = Texcoco as the heart of aesthetic and legal innovations
- = Markets that combine redistribution and ceremonial exchange (between humans, and between humans and gods) in order to regulate internal and external relationships

These correspondences on the symbolism of the center were accompanied by correspondences to the geography and concept of the periphery:

- Periphery = Distant societies and geographical areas (including seas) that served as resources for political and ritual symbolism in the capital
- = Battlefields, specifically chosen spaces of combat and ritual where explosive political relationships were transformed and negotiated
- = Plants and soils from outlying regions utilized in market exchange and religious/medical practices; these materials reflect the diverse ecological niches of Mesoamerican landscapes
- = Frontiers — that is, the social and symbolic limits to political order and within cosmovision; these frontiers occasionally functioned as buffer areas for exchange and conflict
- = Astronomical markers on the edges or within sight of the ceremonial centers, which functioned as sight lines or symbols of celestial events on the horizon
- = Oceans; as the excellent display at the Museo del Templo Mayor shows, the oceans and marine animals were valued objects and symbols integrated into the floor of the *axis mundi*.

The 1987 seminar identified three types of dynamics between these centers and peripheries that animated the Mexica world, including the energy and action of the marketplace, the symbolism and action of warfare, and the ritual performances that mapped out the ceremonial world. It was posited that the ceremonial performances of the Aztec calendar presented a moving image of the entire society, centroid and center-periphery dynamics.

The 1988 conference, "Performance as Place: Aztec Centers, Aztec Action," began to combine research and theoretical materials in new ways. First, following our decision to shift our attention beyond the Templo Mayor, we benefited by the new discoveries of Proyecto Tlatelolco, cosponsored by the Instituto Nacional de Antropología in Mexico and the Mesoamerican Archive at the University of Colorado. The excavation yielded remarkable ritual burials of humans, pottery, obsidian, animals, musical instruments, and clay figurines. Eduardo Matos Moctezuma presented the results of two seasons of excavations at the start of the 1988 conference. "Excavaciones Recientes en Tlatelolco" was exhibited to over 1 million people in 1988 at the Museo del Templo Mayor in Mexico City. It was also exhibited October 1989 to January 1990 at the Museum of Natural History in Denver under the title "Lord of the Wind: Aztec Offerings at Tlatelolco, Mexico." The seminar also combined a critical analysis of a series of seminal works on ritual and cultural performance with original research from the Valley of Mexico.³

At the end of this conference, it was decided to form several subgroups (Tlatelolco, Atl Caualo, Toxcatl, Pulque and Pulque Gods) to gather reliable descriptions of specific ceremonial activities and their relations to sacred places. Eduardo Matos invited the working group to meet at the Museo del Templo Mayor for the 1989 conference. Six months before the conference and after consultation with members of the group I outlined our upcoming task in Mexico:

Our assignment is to focus on a group of ceremonies described, pictured, and carved in the primary sources as a basis for interdisciplinary reflection and development of our model of center-periphery dynamics. I suggest that we organize our discussions under the notion of "ceremonial landscape," a landscape marked, mapped, and rejuvenated by complex sets of performances that communicated knowledge about the social and symbolic order of the Aztec world and its sacred foundation. This entire landscape, consisting of geographical, social, and architect-

tural terrains, was subjected to a conscious design, systemic pattern, or cosmivision. I approach these terrains and performances with the notion of a metamorphic vision of place signifying the physical exuberance and symbolic transformations within ceremonies that cover large and diverse territories. From a continued study of sources it seems evident that not just ritual but most of Mexica social life can be viewed as sets of performances communicating an urbanized, hierarchical way of life. These public performances gave life to the ceremonial landscape and helped the world breathe with meaning.

This approach to Aztec society and ritual through the conception of a ceremonial landscape animated by a metamorphic vision of place draws upon the works of Paul Wheatley, Clifford Geertz, Victor Turner, and Richard Schechner. It combines the earlier emphasis on “place” with the new fashion to be attentive to “performance.” As we approached the Mexico City meeting it became evident that our working group was “changing place” in the sense that we saw the Aztec city and ceremonial centers not only as a symbol but also as a series of performances. The emphasis had switched from the “center” to the “ceremonial” in the phrase *ceremonial center*. Further, unlike our previous emphasis on either the Templo Mayor or on viewing the Templo Mayor from the perspective of the periphery, we were now interested in ceremonial centers of various kinds and various places. It is to the scholarly action, part ceremonial and part spontaneous, that took place in the center of the “city ancient in light” that I now turn.

THE ACTION AND THIS BOOK

Our Mexico City meetings began with three presentations by the Tlatelolco working group led by Eduardo Matos Moctezuma. Together with Juan Román Berrelleza and Salvador Guil'liem Arroyo, the team presented several probing interpretations concerning the “chueco” *chacmool* discovered at Templo Mayor in 1989, and the skeletal materials recently discovered in Tlatelolco. We were also presented with a description of the mythic dimensions of the newly discovered mural of Tlatelolco, a rare moment in Aztec archaeology. The excitement accompanying these presentations was reminiscent, although on a smaller scale, of the electricity surrounding the earlier reports of treasures found during the excavation at the Templo Mayor.

Our sharing of these discoveries was followed by David Carrasco's keynote address, "To Change Place: Tezcatlipoca, the Lord of Everywhere." Carrasco showed how his exploration into the ceremonial patterns of the festival of Toxcatl revealed a conception of spatial order and transformation that challenged both the conceptions of center and periphery developed in previous work.

This was followed by a well-integrated series of presentations by the Atl Caualo group consisting of Anthony Aveni, Edward Calnek, Phil Arnold, and Michio Araki, who opened up the spatial and symbolic character of the first month of the year when children, or "human paper streamers," were sacrificed on a number of mountaintops around the Valley of Mexico. These presentations showed that a remarkable sense of coordination of research and discussion had developed during the year. The presentations were enhanced by the remarks of Michio Araki, who made several tantalizing comparisons with the "land of the dead" symbolism in Japanese religions. One of the interesting possibilities that emerged was that Atl Caualo, with its prodigious displays and disguises and its long-distance pilgrimages to ceremonial precincts on mountaintops, symbolically cosmicized the *entire ceremonial landscape* of the Mexica during the first month of the year.

Following the first day of reflection on the discoveries at Tlatelolco and the research on Atl Caualo, we visited the shrine of Guadalupe on Tepeyac and traveled to the base of the nearby preconquest site of Yoaltepec to gain a sense of continuity and change in mountain ceremonial centers. We continued on to the unique ceremonial landscape of Teotihuacan where, under the guidance of Anthony Aveni, Doris Heyden, and John Hoag, we had the experience of not just traveling to, but feeling enveloped within, this unique imperial city.

On Wednesday, our conference began with Charles Long's response to Victor Turner's article, "Pilgrimages as Social Processes." Utilizing Loren Eiseley's idea that originality comes, in part, from reading the works of others, we revived the archive's practice of reflecting critically on a seminal article on ritual performance and landscape. In his article, originally published in the *History of Religions Journal* as "The Center Out There: Pilgrim's Goal," Turner saw pilgrimage as a rite of passage whose goals included both the experience of "communitas" and the liminal encounter with the sacred at the pilgrimage center. Significantly, Turner included a section on the pilgrimage and cult of Guadalupe at Tepeyac.

In my view, his article set the stage for new understandings of a ceremonial landscape. In Aztec religion, something akin to a liminal encounter with the sacred takes place at *many locations* on the way to the pilgrimage center as well as at the final destination. Through comparative examples, Long emphasized that while we are studying the Aztec case, it is valuable to reflect on the general human meaning of ceremonial movements through space. It was also valuable to hear Long reflect eloquently about the Aztec merchant class, the *pochteca*. In his view, the Aztec practice of economic exchange is a complex example not only of social dramas but also of symbolic metamorphosis.

Peter van der Loo provided a rich response and critique of Turner's model in his description of the Tlapanec pilgrimage, dedicated to rain deities, in which he participated several years earlier in northeastern Guerrero.

The reflection on social dramas gave way to Johanna Broda's gestalt of the Valley of Mexico. Her presentation was a remarkable synthesis of many years of work and collaboration and revealed the different ways that the Mexica took possession of the landscape. The Mexica accomplished a domestication of space through the creation of ideal, reciprocal relationships linking ethnic groups to gods to landscape to ritual to tradition to ancestors. Broda surveyed, with unusual depth, a number of mountaintop sites and suggested an enriched methodology for future studies.

Lawrence Sullivan's response was a poetic meditation on the "spectral" cultures of the Valley of Mexico. He helped us imagine what could be seen during ritual movements through the ceremonial landscape in the Valley when the air was clear!

This exchange was followed by Alfredo López Austin's presentation on historical tales and creation mythology from peoples within the Basin of Mexico. His paper about the relations of mythology to history and the human body was built on his recent rare achievement, *The Human Body and Ideology*.

Another working group, consisting of Henry B. Nicholson, Robert Bye, and Jose Cuellar, focused on the "Oclli Cults: Then and Now." This group addressed a number of issues, including the problem of understanding continuity and change in the use of oclli from Tetzco to Los Angeles, and raised the question of how we come to know ancient ritual practices of drinking given the impact of colonialism on the evidence and the fact that we are so involved in the present. Nicholson presented a detailed

summary of his intensive research on the oclli cults including rich descriptions of the costumes of oclli gods and their significance. This was followed by Bye's presentation on the ethnobotanical perspectives of pulque. In his presentation he identified the process of fermentation in plants, which resonated with our concern for change and metamorphosis in ritual life. This was especially true in his identification of the different capacities of pulque both to nurture and to transform life in the forms of visions and ritual prayers. The theme was carefully relocated to the present-day use of pulque, tequila, and pulquerías by Cuellar (Dr. Loco), who surveyed historical patterns of drinking in Mexican and Chicano communities and drew our eyes to the issue of drinking and social conflict in contemporary times. The relationship of conflict, the control of conflict, and the ceremonial nature of conflict were all addressed by Cuellar, whose work also raised, by implication, the political significance of the extreme numbers of drinking establishments in certain Mexican and Mexican-American communities.

Elizabeth Boone's presentation on migrations and pilgrimages indicated a watershed in the ability of working group members to learn from one another. Her discussion of ritual and pictorials showed, in a novel fashion, how metamorphosis and movement in time and space was artistically depicted by the Mexica. She noted how she had initially recognized significant distances between Aztec art historians, archaeologists, and historians of religions in their approaches to Mexica culture and religion, and had wondered if a fruitful discourse would develop between different disciplines. Her innovative interpretations of pre- and postcontact pictorials demonstrated that she had creatively integrated what was originally strange to her work.

On Thursday, we went back into the field under the guidance of Robert Bye and Edelmira Linares, who escorted us to the community of Santa Catarina del Monte where we spent the day with a Nahuatl-speaking family involved in the contemporary cult of pulque. This enabled us to reflect again on continuity and change in a ceremonial landscape.

On Friday morning Felipe Solís, then curator of the Sala Mexica at the Museo Nacional de Antropología, presented an illustrated lecture on the new investigations at Mt. Tlaloc, where he, Richard Townsend, and others are doing a survey, excavation, and interpretation of this supremely important mountaintop site. Their work related the forms of the smaller objects (pottery and sculpture) to the form of the mountain, and suggested

that we focus more on the feminine symbolism at Mt. Tlaloc and other sites.

Jorge Klor de Alva enlarged our understanding of the Mesoamerican and colonial concept of "body." In Klor de Alva's work, the body becomes a ceremonial center as well as a political entity, especially during the colonial process. In the complicated atmosphere of the sixteenth century, as seen in Klor de Alva's work, the Nahua world of bodies has a prolific series of references including the mind, the *altepetl*, the *cofradía*, the mountain, and the family. The European colonial experience aimed to control, snatch away, and transform the entire native body and conceptions of the body, to replace them with European conceptions of body and social world.

In response, Cecelia Klein developed the "hermeneutics of suspicion" theme evident in both Cuellar and Klor de Alva, to ask us to sharpen our methodologies and heighten our skepticism concerning how much we were projecting contemporary ideas onto the Nahuas of sixteenth-century Mexico and the colonial period.

Our conference continued with Doris Heyden's concise study of Tezcatlipoca's festival, focusing on the juxtapositions of dryness/rain and the transformation of seasonality in Aztec ritual. Jane Day responded by asking both Carrasco and Heyden to consider further the substratum of shamanism or at least shamanic elements underlying so much of the Toxcatl materials.

The Mexico City conference ended with Lawrence G. Desmond's entertaining research on "Chichen Itza and Uxmal, 1878–1989: A Photogrammetric Comparison." Desmond's contributions to the history of the Mesoamerican Archive, as well as to the history of photography in Mesoamerican ceremonial centers, are unique and deeply appreciated.

While all of these presentations are not included in this volume, the Mesoamerican Archive contains a complete audio archive of all proceedings from the 1979, 1987, 1988 and 1989 conferences.

This book has been divided into three sections. Part I, "New Discoveries at El Templo Mayor, Tlatelolco, and Mt. Tlaloc" presents three essays describing and interpreting new evidence from the center of the Aztec ceremonial landscape and one focusing on the great "center out there," Mt. Tlaloc. Eduardo Matos's chapter contains a tentative interpretation of the meaning of the "chueco" chac-mool and indicates how archaeology

can assist in clarifying debates, such as the “hot” and “cold” debate of López Austin and George Foster, which have been largely carried on in relation to ethnohistorical sources. Juan Román Berrelleza presents his recent research on the skeletal remains found at Tlatelolco and presents a hypothesis on the ceremonial and symbolic uses of children in the Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl cult. Salvador Guílliem Arroyo explores the rare, painted mural found on the Templo Calendarico at Tlatelolco, relating the imagery to the ethnohistorical descriptions from the sixteenth century. Part I is completed by Richard Townsend’s report of the Mt. Tlaloc investigation.

Part II, “Aztec Ceremonial Landscapes,” focuses on the spatial, symbolic, and ritual dimensions and the deities of the ceremonial landscape that stretched from Tenochtitlan to Chalco, Zacatepec, Tepeyac, Aztlan, and even Mictlan. Here we offer David Carrasco’s interpretation of a metamorphic vision of place in Toxcatl; Anthony Aveni’s concentrated description of Atl Caualo and its archaeoastronomical implications; Johanna Broda’s prodigious overview of a number of ceremonial places; Elizabeth Boone’s illumination of migration, myth, and performance in a wide range of pictorials; Alfredo López Austin’s comparison of Tetzcoacan myths of half-men who descended from the sky; Henry Nicholson’s consolidation of the octli cult; and Doris Heyden’s work on Tezcatlipoca and Toxcatl as a cipher of transformations in seasons of the landscape. While some of these chapters concentrate on specifics, all of them show the benefits of the serious, interdisciplinary discussions carried on not only during the summer conferences in Boulder, but throughout the last several years in Mexico, at Colgate University, at Dumbarton Oaks, the University of Chicago, and many other places. They reflect what has been called the “Archive on Wheels,” another example of a metamorphic vision of place and scholarship.

Part III, “Changing Voices,” contains responses to the chapters in the first two parts and reflects both original research and dialogue with major ideas of the conference. Part III addresses such issues as the earth as an eating landscape in Philip Arnold’s chapter, responding to Aveni’s work; the ceremonial landscape as a spectral world, a world of visions and mirrors of society and symbolism in Lawrence Sullivan’s response to Broda; local knowledge as a test of theory in Peter van der Loo’s dialogue with Long and Turner; and shamanism as the primordial landscape of the Tezcatlipoca cult in Jane Day’s response to the ideas discussed by Heyden

and Carrasco. Jorge Klor de Alva's work on modern anthropology and the colonization of mind and bodies raises critical questions about method and theory in the study of ceremonial landscapes of all types.

A special feature of this book are the rarely seen photographs of new discoveries at Tlatelolco, including the new chac-mool from the Templo Mayor, the mural on the Templo Calendarico, and the ritual remains from the excavation in front of the Ehecatl Temple.

While we celebrate this book as the product of the interaction of place, dialogue, and ideas in the Mexico City conference, it is clear that new challenges have appeared. As we complete a decade of collaboration among the Proyecto Templo Mayor, the Museo del Templo Mayor, and the Mesoamerican Archive and Department of Religion at the University of Colorado, it is not so much that we have achieved something excellent but rather that we have worked to prepare ourselves for new questions, harder work in the field and libraries, sustained discussions, and, perhaps, significant discoveries. And this is best, for as one writer on transformations, sacred spaces, alignments, and moving places wrote, "The readiness is all."

DAVID CARRASCO
MEXICO CITY AND BOULDER

NOTES

1. Carlos Fuentes, *Where the Air Is Clear* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1960), pp. 4–5.
2. Participants in the 1979 conference at the University of Colorado included José Arguellas, Pedro Armillas, Johanna Broda, David Carrasco, Edward Calnek, José Cuellar, Wilfred Gingerich, Richard Hecht, Doris Heyden, John Hoag, Alfredo López Austin, Eduardo Matos Moctezuma, Henry B. Nicholson, Esther Pasztory, Payson Sheets, Paul Shankman, William B. Taylor, and Paul Wheatley. Also participating from the Department of Religious Studies were Frederick Denny, Ira Chernus, Robert Lester, and Rodney Taylor.
3. A more detailed description of the developments leading up to this publication appear in *The Imagination of Matter: Religion and Ecology in Mesoamerican Traditions*, ed. David Carrasco (Oxford: BAR International Series no. 515, 1989). A number of original articles by participants included in that work helped set the stage for the formation of this volume.