

**Philip P Arnold.** *Eating Landscape: Aztec and European Occupation of Tlalocan.*  
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In keeping with the current trend of many professionals to laud the benefits of "thinking outside the box," Philip Arnold approaches Mesoamerican religious history from such a perspective. In his book, *Eating Landscape*, he explores the ritual significance of Tlaloc and its representation of the relationship between the Aztecs and their lands. In this pursuit, Arnold makes use of the post-modern tool of "epoche," the attempt to "bracket . . . one's own categories" in order to "effectively enter into meaningful relationships with those who have rendered the world in other ways" (p. 11).

The author seeks to respond to a single question, "How do people meaningfully occupy the land" (p. 1)? For Arnold, the answer can be found in three steps, and I quote: "First, distinctive inhabitants necessarily develop a "hermeneutics of occupation," or an understanding of an appropriate relationship to the material world. Second, an interpretation of particular lands substantiates and challenges assumed understanding held by people who inhabit meaningful places. Third, particular kinds of interpretations of other beings

(humans or others) are generated from different hermeneutical perspectives" (p. 1). How, indeed.

After the introduction, the book proceeds through discussions of Mesoamerican "symbolic" landscape, rituals for Tlaloc, the ritual cosmology of Tlaloc, the interpretive legacy of conquest, Sahagun and some concluding remarks concerning violence, and "Todorov's analysis of the movement from pre-Columbian to Spanish colonialism as being one from sacrificial to massacre cultures" (p. 234).

Irrespective of one's views of post-modernism or the so-called "New Cultural History" of Latin America, there are several problems with this volume. First, the postmodern methodological approach is seemingly born of an inability to gain an understanding of the topic through more traditional approaches or sources. Put another way, it is transparent that there is insufficient historical evidence to permit an understanding of the changing relationship between men and land of the sort Arnold seeks to attain. Perhaps this is in part a result of the utter scarcity of Spanish or post-conquest Nahua sources consulted. To argue,

as Arnold does, against the utility of such sources because of the cultural filters (or barriers) either present to a modern understanding of the pre-conquest period is ultimately to give a very selective reading to theoretical underpinnings of history on the one hand and hermeneutic phenomenology on the other.

One might argue for example, that if, as Arnold suggests, there is insufficient historical evidence to answer a given question, the problem is as likely to exist with the question as with the evidence, if not more so. Conversely, if we are to assume with Arnold that only hermeneutics offer a path to understanding Tlaloc and Aztec land, would we not be better served to focus on interpreting the role and intent of the author of the questionable, or tainted, text (the Dasein), rather than acting to reinterpret (or remake?) the text itself?

That Arnold chooses to focus on "texts," albeit in English translation, with certain post-modern tools ultimately yields a monograph both critical of the Spanish and apologetic of the Aztecs. Moreover, the resulting work offers various arguments, methodological approaches and conclusions which are less than certain to stand the test of time.

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