

1519 / The One Reed Year

DRAFT July 19

Notes:

- Italicized text is material I added to give a fuller view of the Aztecs and of your work. Please make sure it is ok.
- Numbers after a paragraph refer to its word count.

At entry:

Twin brothers Scott and Stuart Gentling share a lifelong fascination with the Aztec world as the gold-hungry Spanish encountered it in 1519. The Spanish soldier Bernal Díaz del Castillo responded to his first sight of the city in his memoirs, writing, "These great towns and temples ... rising from the water, all made of stone, seemed like an enchanted vision. ..." Nevertheless, the small Spanish army and their native allies completely destroyed Tenochtitlán, the Aztec capital, then used its foundation stones to support construction for Mexico City.

Despite several 16th-century descriptions of the city, few people today have a sense of Tenochtitlán as a whole or of its Sacred Precinct. The Gentlings undertook the challenge of reconstructing the plan of the Sacred Precinct based on current archaeological evidence coupled with their studies of the descriptions of the monthly ceremonies choreographed within it.

AZTEC GODS AND THE DESCRIPTIONS

These paintings and models seek to recapture the beauty, richness, and extensive complexity of Aztec civilization as it appeared during the reign of Motecuhzoma II (1502 – 1520). The artists choose specific views of the Aztec capital that cumulatively provide a keen sense of place and society. 197

See Yellow
Sheet
page 2

Sixteenth-century Aztec historians interpreted the Spanish arrival and victory according to their cyclical ^{in sense of the seasons, their history, and the passage of time.} ~~calendar~~. For them, 1519 was the One Reed Year. Long ago, their hero ^{who may have been both man and god} Quetzalcoatl ~~had~~ departed in a year One Reed, disappearing toward the east. They saw the arrival of strangers in this year as the outcome of an inevitable pattern of events. This allowed the Aztec historians to explain the defeat of their nation as pre-ordained by the cosmic cycles. However, it is increasingly clear that many native beliefs and customs have survived or have blended with European attitudes to create the vibrant Mexico of today. 100

Typescript of Stuart's discussion of the artwork

NORTH ROOM

East wall

Note: Somehow I failed to get a recording that explains the wall with the plans of the Sacred Precinct. Help!

We are using:

Marquina 1951 (page 11)

Alcocer (page 8-9)

Marquina 1960 (page 13)

"Official" Sacred Precinct model (pages 20 - 21)

Nuremburg map

Scott's revised Nuremburg map (page 29)

Scott's plan (page 32)

Gentling Plan of Sacred precinct (page 28)

North Wall

Page 60

The images displayed on this wall are digital prints made from drawings that Scott Gentling made in sketchbooks. They depict the sights the Spanish conquerors might have seen along the route from the Gulf Coast to the highland city of Mexico-Tenochtitlan.

Page 60

Scott created a series of views of the first big urban areas that the Spanish encountered along the east coast at a place called Cempoala, a city of 20,000 houses.

Page 63

As they proceeded into the highlands, the Spanish arrived at other small cities with skullracks and temples, like the one depicted in the drawing titled Zautla.

Page 67 and 66

As they approached Tlaxcala, whose inhabitants later would become allies of the Spaniards in the fight against Mexico-Tenochtitlan, they reported seeing finely plastered houses and small temple structures. Looking at Scott's drawing of Tizatlan, the crowded

Tlaxcalan capital, you get some idea of the urban density of some of these cities. *The general feeling of the country, however, was primarily rural, with sparsely populated farming areas. Houses in the country side were not crowded, but widely spaced apart with kitchen gardens and orchards.*

Page 74,75, 70-71

After Tlaxcala, the Spanish proceeded towards Mexico by going through the great mercantile city of Cholula. *loosely* The Cholollans were allied to the Aztecs, whose ambassadors sought to use them in a plot to trap the Spaniards. The Cholullans invited the Spaniards to stay as their guests and meanwhile prepared for a battle. Eventually the Spaniards detected the plot and turned the tables. (townsend)

Cortés surrounded the Cholulan chieftains and nobility at the base of the Temple of Quetzalcoatl, at Cholula, shown here. To put down the insurrection the Spanish killed *mostly nobles* over 4,000 inhabitants. After that they left, unhindered, toward Mexico.

Page 82

As they departed the city of Cholula and got closer to the mountains, they saw other prosperous cities. The weather began to change as they ascended into the pine ranges. *many of their* Quite often their Cempoallan allies, who were coastal people, died from the cold.

Page 82

The mountain drawing is a hypothetical view looking toward the eastern side of Popocatepetl on the way to the Pass of Cortés: *the cold passage between the volcanoes*

Popocatepetl and Ixtaccíhuatl. *In the middle ground is a small temple enclosure with sleeping quarters for the important merchants. Note the pile of pine wood behind the walled enclosure to the right hand side of the road*

Page 83

Descending from this high pass into the Valley of Mexico, the Spanish expedition would have seen a view of a *distant system of interconnected lakes ringed by mountain ranges*. Their destination, city of Mexico-Tenochtitlan, is barely visible situated on an island in the far western part of the lake (the upper left hand corner of the drawing).

Page 83

Finally, after journeying through many cities, including Ixtapalapa, where they spent the night, they ventured out ^{ON TO} ~~into~~ the great north-south causeway called the Ixtapalapa causeway. This drawing provides a view as if you were standing on the causeway, looking north. About five miles away, the great city of Mexico-Tenochtitlan begins to appear in view.

Page 86

As the Spanish proceeded toward Tenochtitlan, they came to a fortress called Acachinango, made of two towers, bordering the sides of the gates and surrounded by a low wall. It was here, later, during the Siege of Mexico, that Cortés, the Spanish, and their 6000 Tlaxcallan allies made their camp. The view here is looking ^{to} the north. The city is still about a half mile away.

6,000 allies
went to Mexico
with Cortés but
Cortés had not
made his camp
see list of
allies

when he returned to the Indian Mexico after his escape on Lake Texcoco, when he returned he had thousands more allies than the original 6,000.

Page 87

In these drawings, we are closer to the city of Tenochtitlan. Scott depicted what might have been a gate at a place called Xoloco. It was on the southern shore of the island on which the city of Tenochtitlan was located. It was here at this entrance to the island of

See notes
in yellow
sheets

the island that Motecuhzoma came to meet Cortés. Slightly on the other side of the gate is the small temple of Toci in the region of women, a place called Tocititlan. You see a small (*shrine?*) guardian house in which an idol was placed, dressed in the skin of a sacrificed woman. People adorned the shrine with fresh green boughs to honor the end of the festival of Ochpaniztli, *a harvest ceremony that honored the earth goddesses*. Beyond the shrine, you are looking north towards the Great Temple, still far off in the distance.

Page 90 – 91

Finally, *the Gentings' reconstruction of the route of Cortés brings us to the ritual heart of the city, a walled area called the Sacred Precinct which housed the Great Temple and many others*. In this scene, the viewer stands in front of ^{*the ceremonial*} ~~great (impressive?)~~ gate to the Palace of Motecuhzoma off to the right. On the left you see the southern Eagle Gate, the main entrance from the Ixtapalapa Road into the Sacred Precinct of Tenochtitlan.

MAIN ROOM

P7

This painting shows what the Spanish ^{*may*} ~~must~~ have seen on their entrance on the to the island city of Tenochtitlan. This is the fortress-gate at Xoloco, at which the Aztec ruler Motecuhzoma greeted Cortés as he first entered the city. Townsend said they met at Uitzillan. Please explain about the towers and wall. Or should we mention the gift exchange? *See yellow sheet for explanations*

P 2

In this distant view of the lake of Mexico, you can see the Valley of Mexico and the Aztec capital, Tenochtitlan, very faintly in the far distance.

P18

This 1980 painting of Tlatelolco provides a sense of the urban nature of the Aztec world. Tlatelolco, on the northern part of the island, was the sister city of Tenochtitlan. This view overlooks the northern road called the Cuepopan road. It leads out of Tenochtitlan to where the roads divide at a place called Amaxac. One road led to Tepeyac, then a shrine to the goddess Tonantzin and now the location of the shrine of the Virgin of Guadalupe. The other road went to the great market at Tlateloco. 89

P 8 and P1 Palace of M

This large view and the smaller one to the left reveal what the Gentlings think the Palace of Motecuhzoma might have looked like. It is based on several sources, including archaeological excavations and 16th century painted documents. These include the Map of Quinantzín, which shows a Texcocan palace. ^{a Hueytecpan calli} This provides an idea of

Also, the Nuremberg map, painted for Cortés, shows the Palace of Motecuhzoma as having three patios. Motecuhzoma's palace served as a seat of government rather than a private residence. *Today, the National Palace of Mexico, which also serves as a seat of government, occupies this site.* 100

The model of the Sacred Precinct



model of Sacred Precinct

Need a text.

said to contain 78 buildings, including two ballcourts, several skullracks, and temples to all the principal deities.

P9

This *sweeping* view of the Sacred Precinct gives us some idea of the distribution of buildings. Scott constructed the scene as if we are standing close to the western wall of the Precinct looking east. In the background is the Templo Mayor, or Great Temple, a single pyramidal platform that supports the twin temples of Huitzilopochtli and Tlaloc. In front of the Great Temple, a Tzompantli, a rack on which the skulls of sacrificial victims ^{STARS - perhaps of the Milky Way.} were displayed, forms a screen of skulls. *This represented...*

In the right background you can see the great mountains of the eastern range.

P 3 The Great Pyramid (Templo Mayor)

Founded on a sacred site—possibly where the Aztecs beheld the omen of the eagle on the cactus—the Great Temple or Templo Mayor was amplified by each Aztec ruler. In the

One Reed Year ^{the first year} ~~it~~ reached a height of about 115 feet. This man-made mountain supported ^{adding another 45 feet to the height of the whole structure} two temples. The northern one (on the left) was dedicated to Tlaloc, the deity of fertilizing

AND Foodstuffs (plants)

? Tlaloc?

see note on yellow sheet.

89

* See yellow pages

rain. Within the temple stood a sculpture filled with seeds of all the cultivated plants. The body of the pyramid contained thousands of artifacts placed as offerings. These came from all parts of the Aztec empire and included coral from the oceans, jaguar skeletons, and antique sculptures. The Tlaloc side of the pyramid represented the Mountain of Sustenance. The south temple was dedicated to the Aztec tribal deity Huitzilopochtli. He led them out of their homeland, Aztlan, to this location to found their city. On the way he was reborn at Coatepec, Snake Mountain, to Coatlicue, the snake-handed earth goddess of the Valley of Mexico. When her previous children threatened to kill him, he leapt out of the womb fully armed and slew them instead. This side of the pyramid represents Coatepec. Here sacrificial victims were dispatched. 200
This structure was the center of the Aztec world and served as an architectural symbol for "atl-tepetl," literally "water-mountain," a metaphor for "city." 22

P 21

The Gentings created their unique view of the eastern section of the Sacred Precinct based on the studies that inform their model. In the foreground, the painting shows the Teotlalpan, a cactus garden constructed to replicate the desert lands of the Aztec' wandering ancestors, called Chichimecs. Behind that is the conical-spired Temple of Mixcoatl, who was the ancient ^{hunting + warrior} culture hero or ^{progenitor} supernatural leader of the Chichimec people. Behind these structures looms the east façade of the Great Temple with its dual shrines to Tlaloc and Huitzilopochtli. 85
Mixcoatl = Quetzalcoatl = Culture hero

P6

An Aztec myth guided the foundation of their capital. According to the legend, the Aztec tribal deity, Huitzilopochtli, would send a sign to tell them when it was time to end their 200 years of wandering and to establish a permanent settlement. The sign would consist of an eagle perched atop a cactus in the midst of a lake. *This combination of signs to symbolize the meeting of heaven and earth appears on Aztec monuments and on the modern flag of Mexico. The Gentlings have combined their skill at painting birds with the elements of this mythical scene.* 90

P11

Temples at Malinalco. *An unusual rock-cut shrine existed at this remote site southwest of Mexico. It possibly served as a precinct of the Knights of the Sun. Today the roof and most of the paint have eroded. The painting shows that the temples were stuccoed, brightly painted, and decorated with fir branches. Blood from a sacrifice drips down the stairway.* 57

P5

These shallow-drafted Spanish brigantines were constructed in Tlaxcala, on the east side of the mountains, then disassembled and carried across the mountains by the Tlaxcalans. They served as one of Cortés' best instruments in subduing Tenochtitlan. These thirteen ships allowed the Spanish to thoroughly blockade the island and to weaken the Aztec resistance, which endured only 78 days. 55

The scene is set ^{between} the southern causeway.

P 19 and 20

w/

A Spanish medal made by Christoph Veiditz serves as the basis for the portrait of Cortés.

This hypothetical portrait of Cuauhtemoc shows him crowned with the turquoise diadem called the *xiucopilli*, worn by all Aztec rulers.

SOUTH ROOM

Coatlan

This group of drawings shows the Gentlings' particular interest in an area that they propose dominated the north side of the Sacred Precinct. *In their plan, the great north-south road leading into the Sacred Precinct terminated at the Coatlan, the most sacred part of the Sacred Precinct.* In the Gentling reconstruction, the Coatlan was an enclosure of sacred structures surrounding a temple to Cihuacoatl, the Aztec mother goddess, earth goddess, and goddess of war. *It was the place of beginnings and endings.*

The whole area is dedicated to her forces of creation and destruction. "Coatlan" means *literally* "place of snakes," *— or place of life (and death) and life* and the snake is an Aztec symbol of the life force. As such it was the *the great mother* place of the goddess Cihuacoatl, who was known as snake woman or serpent woman. 47

It seems to correspond to other similar sacred enclosures at other sites in central Mexico. Implied a place set apart from other religious precinct because of its extreme sacredness. Being in the north it related to the North Star, the fixed star in the firmament, around which all the other stars moved. Because of its stillness and permanence, the Aztec considered it very powerful. 63

Sahagún mentions the existence of Coatlan, and her temple, called Tlillan, Place of Darkness. This place was the beginning and ending of things—the womb and the tomb. It was the *most sacred* of the sites visited during the complex ceremony of coronation for Aztec rulers. In fact, when the person selected to be the next ruler entered the Coatlan, he was said to have died. His emergence from this precinct was considered his rebirth as king.

P10

This painting shows a very fancy palace to the south of Mexico City near Chalco. We see a beautifully laid out Aztec compound of only one story, unlike the really deluxe two-story palaces. It is decorated with symbols of spring and the joy it brings. The floors are painted and furniture is simple. Outside you can see part of an Aztec formal garden and a small pavilion of branches, used for festivals. A small sculpture of a monkey is associated also with festivals and song.

P4 Cuicacalli

This is a House of Song, a room in the houses of the well-to-do for gathering, celebrating, for having festivals. On the walls is a painting of the god Huehucoyotl, the old god of music and song, who is playing a drum.

P17 Canal scene in a residential area southeast of the Sacred Precinct.

People are poling their canoes through the canals. On both sides are houses that turn their backs to the street. All are built around ^{under} courtyards.

P12 Aztec patio

This painting shows the interior of one of these houses that turn their backs on the street. Inside are small structures surrounding a central courtyard. Sometimes as the family grew, other courtyards might be added. These might become maze-like structures. In these patios most of the daily activities occurred. In inclement weather, people gathered under the porticos. The windowless rooms were rather dark and principally used for sleeping.

Black and white

S-8

Stuart says "I have done these black and white drawings over the years to illustrate a particular carving style or Aztec symbols. This great jaguar cuauhxicalli, found about 1900, served for burning incense and sometimes to receive the hearts of sacrificial victims. I surrounded the jaguar, a symbol of the night, with half-open eyes, which symbolize stars. The jaguar was ~~not only~~ a symbol of the underworld, ^{His} but his spots stood for the stars of the night sky."

(both beneath the earth or underworld and the night sky overhead. The jaguar was the natural of Tezcatlipoca (best translated in my opinion - as "spirit mirror" (Stone)).

S-2

This is a study of a sculpture of the god Tlaltecuhltli, god of earth, who had claws and whose joints were seen as so-called "demon faces." Out of his mouth comes a sacrificial knife, which probably symbolizes ^{ON ONE LEVEL} the constant thirst of the earth for hearts and blood.

S-5

For this image, Stuart drew a tiny Aztec clay model that shows the god Xolotl in the form of a dog sitting outside his temple. The circles in the façade of the temple represent the night sky and its stars. This god was known to inhabit dark places and to have the power to descend into the Underworld to do errands for the gods. Often thought of as ^{as} Venus, the ^{evening} star of the west, Xolotl is the twin brother of Quetzalcoatl.

S4

This is the underside of the Aztec sculpture of a rattlesnake. The Aztec often carved a ^{as a complete model} sculpture "complete"—that is, the parts that can't be seen as well as those that are visible. The coiled body of the upper side of this snake sculpture gives a wonderful impression of movement towards the center. The Aztec thought of the center as the place of power and authority.

S-6

Another drawing represents a similar but different Aztec sculpture. It probably graced ^{from platforms} the ~~base~~ of a temple. The very fact that a snake is a creature that can inflict death and can renew its skin every year made it a powerful symbol of fecundity and also death. It's a symbol of the life force itself.

P13

This needs work...it rambles around and doesn't quite make the point of "seemingly contradictory" symbols to the average viewer.

The Aztec honored a host of deities each identified with the various aspects of nature and the cosmos. The roles of these deities overlapped. In creating an altar or shrine, the Aztec often grouped together sculptures representing (or containing) the spirits of different realms or natural processes to create a set of complementary forces or deities.

This painting of a hypothetical temple interior contains a series of seemingly contradictory images. We see sculptures of a rattlesnake and a goddess with a skeletal face and whose body is composed only of a ribcage. While the snake refers to the life force, the goddess represents the Goddess of Death in one of her many guises, perhaps as a Cihuateotl a sky goddess. Alternatively, if this sculpture represents the wife of the God of Death, Mictlantecuhтли, her name would be Mictacatihuatl. She sits on an altar of skulls and crossbones, which symbolize the night sky. The altar cloth is made of feathers. On the floor before her are scattered marigolds and various cups of offerings and a large greenstone sculpture of a rattlesnake. Stuart considers this to show an Aztec Coatlan, a place of serpents. The two coiled serpents on either side of the armless goddess represent her power to strike out. They act as her own arms, as seen in the colossal statue of Coatlicue (in the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City) whose hands become serpent heads.

The skull with the flint in its mouth possibly represents a stellar being. In Aztec art, stars are depicted as skulls with bright, wide open eyes and often shown with flints in their mouths. Flint was thought to originate in heavens and fall to earth.

P 15 ↑ These Goddesses seem to show us that the Cosmos really
 ↑ forms the great Ultimate and distinctive power that we
 ↑ essentially feminine. Absolutely primal. Remember the Great

This also lacks a point or summarizing statement.

Stuart's composition shows the five night-goddesses called the Cihuateotls. These are women who died giving birth to their first child. The Aztec honored them as warriors. The Cihuateotls helped other women in childbirth. They accompanied the sun, where they joined it at noon and followed it down to the place of sunset in the west. When the sun sank below the horizon, these goddesses did not follow, but scattered around the earth, making mischief and playing havoc with the general population. They were particularly powerful and crossroads so their temples were erected at crossroads. Behind the sculptures is a large painted relief of one of these descending goddesses. In front of the altar, Stuart placed flowers and the remains of beheaded quail. The skulls and crossbones represent the night sky. In the center panel of the altar is the Sun about to descend into the earth, which is represented by the teeth and the broad band of red.

P 14. This stellar night-goddess, the Cihuateotl is seated. Her hands are raised in a gesture of attacking –*probably directed toward humans who venture near the crossroads at night.*

then expressing in the best possible way, born to the Golden Rule, "the good of the world is the good of the individual." She said we are all just one, and that we must all be good, or else we are all bad.

P16. Stuart depicted this Cihuateotl on an altar with skulls and crossbones. The offerings were made to the spirit resident in the statue.

SCULPTURE OF Ehecatl.

Aztec frequently modeled simple figures on which they displayed costumes that pertain the various gods. The figure itself was less important than the costume. The Gentlings have reconstructed such a costume, using many of the authentic materials with which such costumes would have been made, including gold and featherwork.

This figure wears the costume of the god Ehecatl. In Aztec art, Ehecatl wears a conical helmet or cap that comes from the Huastec region (the Gulf Coast). He carries quetzal plumes on his shield. The mask he wears is called a buccal mask. When it is unadorned, this figure has its mouth wide open in such a way that it is clear that it wore a buccal or mouth mask, like those associated with the wind god, Ehecatl. Winds were thought to have malevolent or healing qualities. This figure had a cavity up the back in which a pole was placed. Thus this figure adorned a scepter and was probably carried by a priest from a temple to a patient's house for a curing ceremony. A hole from the back of the head through the mouth allowed the priest to blow breath or wind through the figure of Ehecatl in order to cure a patient. 205