

**Aztec Codex Interpreted: New Window on Indigenous American and Latino Myth, Pilgrimage and City**

A recently resurfaced codex from the Aztec period in Mexico, the Mapa de Cuauhtinchan No. 2 (MC2), provides a richly detailed narrative of an ancient Mesoamerican odyssey from the mythical place of Aztlan to a splendid city at the center of the world. This pictorial story, relevant to both Aztec studies and contemporary Latino identity and politics was analyzed by an international team of scholars who published their interpretations in the newly released *Cave, City and Eagle's Nest: An Interpretative Journey through the Mapa de Cuauhtinchan No. 2*. (University of New Mexico Press, November, 2007).

To decipher the early sixteenth century codex, the Mexican American historian of religions David Carrasco, (Harvard University's Neil L. Rudenstine Professor of the Study of Latin America, with a joint appointment in the Divinity School and the Department of Anthropology) assembled experts in disciplines ranging from archaeoastronomy to ethnobotany and the history of religions. The team's work on the codex uncovered astonishing details about ritual sacrifice, sacred cities and indigenous gods, shedding new light on the struggles of Indigenous peoples to maintain their sacred identity during the centuries leading up to European contact and in the earliest decades after the Spanish conquest of Mexico. The project was conducted through the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies and the Moses Mesoamerican Archive and Research Project, which Carrasco co-founded and now heads.

The story, told in colorful pictorial format on a map, narrates an ancient indigenous odyssey from the cave of origins to the pilgrimage city of Cholula where the Chichimec warriors triumph in battle to save the city and are given blessings to travel on to found their own community. "With the interpretation of the MC2 comes new historical knowledge in a kind of first-person voice: more than relate their story in a one-dimensional fashion, the creators of the MC2 interwove details of daily life, regional conflicts, the legal system, and even reports on a flood and an earthquake that occurred",

states Dr. Carrasco.

The new discoveries in MC2 has broad appeal for mainstream audiences. It also holds special appeal for the Latino community because the mapa shows, as no other document does, the site of Aztlan, the place of the seven caves where the Aztec ancestors first emerged before they founded Mexico – Tenochtitlan. Dr. Carrasco noted; "We've been contacted by people interested in the MC2 from academics, community centers in Chicano neighborhoods, the National Gallery of Art, National magazines, television stations such as WGBH....People seem eager to learn about this newly found piece of aboriginal and colonial North American history. This community appeal likely has to do with the significance of the MC2, which is comparable to other famous codexes, and the Dead Sea Scrolls."

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