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Orientation and Allurement:
The Instigation of Ritual-Architectural Events at Monte Albán

> "Monte Albán was a city of the gods… The site is incomparably magnificent. Imagine a great isolated hill at the junction of three broad valleys; an island rising nearly a thousand feet from the green sea of fertility beneath it. An astonishing situation... Few architects have had such a sense of austerely dramatic grandeur as these temple builders… And few have been given so free a hand."
>
> Aldous Huxley, 1934[1]

> "… what amazes above all in this sacred city is the thought that directed the construction: the distribution of the buildings is not haphazard, but governed by a plan that was perfectly worked out and executed."
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> Alfonso Caso, 1936[2]

> "What makes Monte Albán's Great Plaza so beautiful? Not just its location atop an elongated hill with steep sides, nor the apparent informality in the arrangement of its different structures set along the edges of the hilltop… Topographical limitations forbid extension of the Plaza, but the overwhelming spatial scale and unity of its simple architectural works of stone with geometrically decorated panels needs no addition. Its important feature is its negation of topography and natural environment; temples and palaces set a framework in which each new building sacrificed its individuality for the unity of the whole."
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> Jorge E. Hardoy, 1964[3]

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* Note that I have managed the footnotes in ways that respect "the first citation" (which is thus a full bibliographical citation) *in this section*, irrespective of whether that work was cited previously in this book. Also, to avoid confusion in this typescript, I have retained the quotation marks on all quotes, including those that are formatted as block quotations.

[1] Aldous Huxley, *Beyond the Mexique Bay* (New York and London: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1934), 260-61.

[2] Alfonso Caso, *Culturas mixteca y zapoteca*, El Libro de la Cultura (Barcelona: Editorial González Porto, 1936); reprinted in Alfonso Caso, *Obras: El México Antiguo: Mixtecas y Zapotecas*, vol. 5 (México: El Colegio Nacional, 2002), 579-631. This quote comes from the original version, pages 38-39, or from the *Obras* reprint version page 608; my translation.

[3] Jorge E. Hardoy, *Pre-Columbian Cities*, trans. Judith Thorne (New York: Walker and Company, 1973 [Spanish original, 1964]), 109.

Monte Albán, routinely assessed as "one of the most splendid civic spaces created by man, and certainly the most beautiful in Mesoamerica,"[4] lacks an iconic building that stands for the entire site like Chichén Itzá's Castillo, Palenque's Temple of the Inscriptions, El Tajín's Pyramid of the Niches, Teotihuacan's Pyramid of the Sun or Tenochtitlan's Templo Mayor. It is, instead, the overall conception of the Main Plaza that seems to capture best the essence of the ancient Oaxacan capital, which explains why areal photographs of the site, panoramic views never enjoyed by Monte Albán residences, provide the preferred images for both academic and tourist promotional literature. Nearly always, visitors' first and most lasting impressions are of the mountaintop siting and the entire pre-Columbian ensemble rather than any of its individual architectural elements.

When, for instance, in 1895, American explorer and archaeologist William Henry Holmes visited Monte Albán, on horseback and entirely alone, it was, he wrote, "the most romantic feature of my trip to southern Mexico."[5] The ancient city, subject to that point only to the injudicious diggings of collectors and treasure hunters, was fully overgrown aside from its Main Plaza, which was being repurposed as a conveniently flat maize field. And yet, the overall unity of conception of "the city in the sky," as Holmes termed it, was immediately apparent:

> "The quadrangular grouping of structures was almost universal, the four substructures consisting of oblong pyramids, one or two of which were of commanding height and the others low and narrow... Nothing remains to tell the story of the elevation, the roof and the embellishment... [Nevertheless] orientation seems to have been considered with much care, as but a few structures fail to conform with approximate accuracy to the points of the compass, no matter what the character and trend of the sites occupied."[6]

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[4] Hardoy, *Pre-Columbian Cities*, 109.

[5] William Henry Holmes, *Archaeological Studies Among the Ancient Cities of Mexico* (Chicago: Field Columbia Museum, 1895, 1897), 216.

[6] Holmes, *Archaeological Studies Among the Ancient Cities of Mexico*, 226. His phase "the city in the sky" appears on the same page.

The hastily prepared, but quite accurate and endlessly reproduced panorama drawing of the "summit remains" of Monte Albán that Holmes made on his short visit continues to be invoked as evidence of a cohesive plan that encompassed all of the Main Plaza's architectural elements.[7]

I. A Uniquely Unified Architectural Conception: The Materialization of an All-Encompassing Master Plan

Subsequent to Holmes' historic reconnaissance, once a fairly secure chronology of the site began to emerge, among the few major points of general consensus was that Monte Albán had been founded about 500 BCE on a mountain that previously had never been site any significant human habitation. It was, so the widely shared view goes, a fabulous city with no humble beginnings. And consequently, scholars have, for generations, marveled at the prospect of an immense capital that was, it seemed, laid out, from the very beginning—indeed in advance of the beginning—according to a thoroughly comprehensive master plan. Only five years into his path-breaking excavations, Alfonso Caso, in 1936, in the very first synthesis of Oaxaca archaeology, set the tone by writing:

> "Probably where the ancient Oaxacans showed most fully their capabilities as planners and builders was in Monte Albán, because here they transformed completely the mountain and covered it from top to bottom with constructions. Temples, palaces, ball games, tombs, underground tunnels, drainage systems, stairs, ramps and terraces make Monte Albán one of the most important archaeological sites in America. But what amazes above all in this sacred city is the thought that directed the construction: the distribution of the buildings is not haphazard, but governed by a plan that was perfectly worked out and executed. This is especially evident in the Great Plaza, which is closed by two enormous temples on the north and south, which alone could constitute an acropolis in another city."[8]

Fellow archaeologist Eduardo Noguera seconded Caso's appreciation of the ancient capital's comprehensive design by noting,

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[7] Holmes' suitably famous panorama diagram of "the summit remains of Monte Albán" appears originally in his *Archaeological Studies Among the Ancient Cities of Mexico*, 226.

[8] Caso, *Culturas mixteca y zapoteca*, 38-39; my translation. Or, in the reprinted version, Caso, *Obras: El México Antiguo*, vol. 5, 608; my translation.

> "The archaeological city known today as Monte Albán deserves the greatest admiration. It is located on a mountain that was transformed to build tombs, palaces, ball games, stairways, ramps and underground. All these constructions were built as part of a preconceived plan, which can be seen in the great square located on the summit of the mountain that is bounded to the north and south by two enormous temples."[9]

And even lay observers, not versed in the pertinent historical background, like British novelist Aldous Huxley, who visited the site in 1933—that is, just a couple of years after the start of Caso's work, and thus when restoration efforts were only beginning—have been most impressed by the overall unity of the architectural assemblage. In Huxley's surmise,

> "at Monte Albán, [the Zapotecs] allowed nothing to get in the way of the architects. Here should be no hole-and-corner sacred place, no slummy confusion of little shrines and temples; but one huge architectural complex informed from end to end by a single artistic idea and overwhelmingly impressive, as only a unified work of art can be."[10]

Art and architectural historians have been similarly unanimous in sharing the assessment of Ignacio Marquina that "the monumental disposition of the buildings," not alone but together, "must have produced a great effect."[11] Donald Robertson, for instance, opined that Monte Albán "has a dominant plan" insofar as "It is organized around a great rectangular central plaza closed on the north and south ends by raised platforms, and on the east and west sides, by ranges of buildings..."[12] Jorge Hardoy answers his own question, "What makes Monte Albán's Great Plaza so beautiful?" by accentuating the "negation of topography and natural environment," which makes the plaza "an enclosed space with virtually no views of the valleys that surround the hill on three sides… in which each new building sacrificed its individuality for the unity of

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[9] Eduardo Noguera, "Cultura Zapoteca," en *México Prehispánico: Culturas, deidades, monumentos*, Antologia de *Esta Semana-This Week*, 1935-1946, ed. Emma Hurtado (México, D.F.: Rafael Loera y Chavez, 1946), 238; my translation.

[10] Huxley, *Beyond the Mexique Bay*, 262.

[11] Ignacio Marquina, *Arquitectura prehispanica* (México: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1950), 312, 316; my translation.

[12] Donald Robertson, *Pre-Columbian Architecture* (New York: George Braziller, 1963), 37.

the whole."[13] Doris Heyden and Paul Gendrop reaffirm Hardoy's assessment that Monte Albán presents "the impression of something finished, something that cannot be continued either in extension—due to the topographical limitations—or in intention, in view of the stupendous scale and the magnificent oneness achieved."[14] Then Heyden and Gendrop offer their own complementary opinion that,

> "In addition to its extraordinary setting, Monte Albán's main appeal lies in a feeling of completeness that reaches into the very heart of its ceremonial center—namely, the Great Plaza, which lies bounded on the north and south by two immense platforms. This 'unity in diversity' is so evident that at first glance, from any angle of the plaza, it is precisely the whole that impresses us."[15]

Additionally, Ignacio Bernal merges the accolades of archaeologists and art historians for the fully unified design of Monte Albán by asserting that,

> "Not only is the view superb but in their design the main plaza and the buildings that surround it are certainly to be counted among the masterpieces of Mesoamerican architecture. Today the stucco and paint with which the stone-work was covered and the temples on top of the pyramids have all disappeared, but the splendid symmetry remains, the perfect proportions, the sense of perfection and permanence that only rarely is to be found anywhere in the world."[16]

In short, no individual building draws the rave reviews that are heaped over and over on the comprehensive conception of Monte Albán. And that remarkable unity persuades Arturo Oliveros, and nearly everyone else, that the design and building of the capital had to have been subject to "advance planning."[17] In Marcus Winter's surmise, "the standardized orientation of

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[13] Hardoy, *Pre-Columbian Cities*, 109.

[14] Jorge Hardoy, *Ciudades Precolombinas* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Infinito, 1964), 134-35; quoted in Doris Heyden and Paul Gendrop, *Pre-Columbian Architecture of Mesoamerica* (New York: Electa/Rizzoli, 1975), 60.

[15] Heyden and Gendrop, *Pre-Columbian Architecture of Mesoamerica*, 60.

[16] Ignacio Bernal, *Ancient Mexico in Colour* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968), 36.

[17] Arturo Oliveros, *Guia de Monte Albán* (Mérida, Yucatán, México: Codice Ediciones, 1996), 13-14.

buildings" suggests strongly that "they had an ideological schema at Monte Albán since its foundation… a preconceived plan accepted by all."[18]

II. Deviations from Perfect Regularity: Unavoidable, Inadvertent and/or Purposeful Asymmetries

Oft that this proposition is repeated, that Monte Albán's remarkable unity of design was conceived in advance of even the earliest buildings does seem an implausible exaggeration. Providing a useful corrective, Joyce Marcus complicates the conventional line and presents a more believable alternative when she argues that it was not until Period II (100 BCE-200 CE) that Oaxacans came to the idea of a grand overall plan for the hilltop settlement.[19] She reaffirms that, previously, the mountain had not been site to any significant settlement; and thus when some 2000 people, in all likelihood migrating from nearby San José Mogote, abruptly moved to the lofty location shortly after 500 BCE, that did constitute a momentous new beginning. She also reminds us, however, that in the initial era, Period I (500-100 BCE), the new residents went to work on domiciles, a defensive wall and (at least) three major buildings—a structure below the North Platform, Building K, and Building L on which some 300 of the notorious Danzante relief carvings were displayed.[20] All three of those constructions were located in ways that took advantage of natural stone outcrops and all had roughly cardinal orientations, but none was

[18] Marcus Winter, "La religión, el poder y las bases de la complejidad social en Oaxaca Prehispánica," en *Bases de la complejidad social en Oaxaca: Memoria de la Cuarta Mesa Redonda de Monte Albán*, ed. Nelly M. Robles García (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2009), 509; my translation. On the overall orientation of the site, also see Bernd Fahmel Beyer, "El empleo de una brújula en el diseño de los espacios arquitectónicos en Monte Albán, Oaxaca, México: 400 a.C.-830 d.C.," *Revista Española de Antropología Americana*, 23 (1993): 30-40.

[19] See Joyce Marcus, "Early Architecture in the Valley of Oaxaca: 1350 B.C.-A.D. 500;" in *Mesoamerican Architecture as a Cultural Symbol*, ed. Jeff Karl Kowalski (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 58-75; and Joyce Marcus, "How Monte Albán Represented Itself;" in *The Art of Urbanism: How Mesoamerican Kingdoms Represented Themselves in Architecture and Imagery*, eds. William L. Fash and Leonardo López Luján (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2009), 77-110.

[20] See Marcus, "How Monte Albán Represented Itself," 79, figure 2.

positioned in any clear relationship to the others. That is to say, ambitious beginnings notwithstanding, these earliest residents, in her view, "probably had no master plan for converting the mountaintop into an orderly city with a symmetrical layout."[21]

While somewhat deflating the old story about an all-embracing preconceived plan, Marcus nonetheless does believe that by 100 BCE, that is, with the onset of Period II, "the outlines of a master plan had begun to emerge."[22] At that point, the Zapotecs did embark on a comprehensive design that conveyed "an impression of unrivaled majesty and calm beauty,"[23] something they accomplished via a threefold plan that entailed leveling and paving with white plaster a huge area that would be delimited by impressive monumental structures, controlling access to that space and, thereby, "creating an overall semblance of perfect symmetry."[24] It is, she notes, this symmetrical arrangement, conceived some two millennia ago, that, even today, "most tourists first note when they enter the Great Plaza."[25]

Be that as it may, if Monte Albán, among all of Mesoamerica's major archaeological sites, has perhaps the most remarkably regular and unified layout, there are, nevertheless, many

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[21] Marcus, "How Monte Albán Represented Itself," 77.

[22] Marcus, "How Monte Albán Represented Itself," 77.

[23] Marcus, "How Monte Albán Represented Itself," 78, borrows this phrase from the 1969 INAH site guide to Monte Albán, 8.

[24] Marcus, "How Monte Albán Represented Itself," 78-79. Art historian Bernd Fahmel Bever, "Monte Alban: historia de una ciudad," *Arqueología Mexicana*, Agosto-Septiembre, vol. I, núm. 3 (1993), 25 [my translation], also detects the lack of a unified design conception in (early) Period I, but the emergence of "a greater intent on integrating all of the space of the principal plaza" in Period II (or perhaps in the later part of Period I). He borrows ideas from Sonia Lombardo to suggest that where the earliest buildings were not unified, by Period II, "there was a necessity of adopting a mode of urban life in which each new structure sacrificed its individuality to conserve the unity of the group." In his argument, the Period II emergence of astronomy as a more important priority than it had been in Period I also contributed a much more unified Main Plaza.

[25] Marcus, "How Monte Albán Represented Itself," 79.

conspicuous deviations from exact symmetry and cardinal orientation.[26] Where the nearly forgotten 1896 plan of Monte Albán made by American physician A.H. Wheeler, for instance, simplifies and sanitizes the layout by imposing on it a perfect cardinal axiality,[27] the frequently reproduced and far more accurate topographic maps on which Alfonso Caso relies—those produced by Ing. Mariano Tirado Osario in 1928 and by Ing. Horacio Herrera in 1932—reveal both general adherence to a primary north-south axis, but also lots of more specific exceptions.[28] Most notably, the two huge staircases at the respective south and north ends of the plaza are neither centered nor of equal breadth; the three central structures, Buildings G, H and I, are not really in the geographic center of the plaza; many individual structures are skewed significantly from the broader axial alignment; and, most unmistakably, the arrow-shaped Building J, positioned at a nearly 45 degree angle from the other major structures, appears as a deliberate slap in the face of symmetry.

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[26] Marcus Winter y Miguel Bartolomé, "Tiempo y espacio en Monte Albán: la construcción de una identidad compartida," en *Memoria de la Primera Mesa Redonda de Monte Albán: Procesos de cambio y conceptualización del tiempo*, ed. Nelly M. Robles García (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2001), 66-67 [my translation], observes that, "It is noteworthy that Monte Albán has an orientation that is unique in Mesoamerica: the Main Plaza and buildings are oriented with respect to the cardinal points, 3 degrees from north-south/east-west. This orientation appears to be distinct from the Olmec of 8 degrees north of the east, as well as from the Teotihuacán orientation, about 16 degrees south of the east." I will revisit this issue in chapter 3 on the astronomy priority (I-C).

[27] That idealized plan appears in A.H. Wheeler, MD, "Oaxaca and its Surroundings, As a Field for Archaeological Research," *Popular Science News* (February 1896): 35. Wheeler's simplified, seldom reproduced map appears in Daniel Schávelzon, "Un observatorio no observado? Un edifico de Monte Albán según los primeros arqueólogos." *Estudios Mesoamericanos*, nueva época 9 (julio-diciembre 2010), 77.

[28] The impressively accurate 1928 plan drawing of Monte Albán by Ing. Mariano Tirado Osario appears, for instance, in Alfonso Caso, *Las esteles zapotecas* (1928), or, in its reprinted version, Alfonso Caso, *Obras: El México Antiguo: Mixtecas y Zapotecas*, vol. 2 (México, D.F.: El Colegio Nacional, 2002), 89. And the frequently reproduced 1932 "Plano topografico de Monte Albán antes de la exploration," which is attributed to Ing. Horacio Herrera and signed by Director of the Monte Albán Explorations, Alfonso Caso, appears, among many places, in Alfonso Caso, *El tesoro de Monte Albán* (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1969), following page 16.

Art historian George Kubler, who describes the Main Plaza as "an asymmetrical cluster of pyramids," likewise observes that,

> "The plaza looks entirely regular, but the symmetry of the sides is only approximate; the intervals between platforms vary greatly, and the main angles are either acute or obtuse. The idea, rather than the exact measure, of a rectangular enclosure is conveyed. These variations from geometric regularity suggest the archaeology of the site…"[29]

When, in the 1970s, Richard Blanton undertakes unprecedentedly thorough and precise measurements of most surviving structures, including modest residences away from the Main Plaza, he discovers many more small and large deviations from perfect regularity, several of which suggest shifting orientational priorities over time.[30] And yet, if such inconsistencies are apparent to all careful observers, the actual causes and motivations of those variances are subject to considerable debate.[31]

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[29] George Kubler, *The Art and Architecture of Ancient America*, 3d ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), 156. Glossing the last line of this quote, Kubler, ibid., concludes that, "The oldest edifices on the western side of the plaza (e.g., the Danzante Temple) share an orientation some degrees south of east, while the other three sides of the plaza face the cardinal points more squarely, and probably belong to a later campaign of construction."

[30] Richard E. Blanton, *Monte Albán: Settlement Patterns at the Ancient Zapotec Capital* (New York: Academic Press, 1978) [Percheron reprint, 2004], 44-46, provides a long and detailed list of observations regarding the "spatial organization" or orientations of Monte Albán buildings and how that changed over time. For instance, "During the coding of the terrace data I noticed a tendency for those mound groups in the areas of the site occupied only during the Classic period to have orientations predominantly 4 to 10° west of magnetic north. On the contrary, those mound groups on Monte Albán proper where there was occupation during Periods Late I and II more often have orientations within 2 or 3° of magnetic north… This may reflect the fact that during the Late and Terminal Formative Periods the preferred orientation for buildings was such that they now have close to a north-south magnetic orientation that now appear as some degrees west of north... Since the predominant orientations of the buildings [in the Main Plaza], as well as the orientation of the Main Plaza as a whole, are roughly magnetic north-south today, it is arguable that it was during those periods that the orientations preferred were those that today are north-south." Ibid., 45. Among many other specific observations, Blanton also notes that, "It was apparently so important to orient rooms in what now appears as west of north, during the Classic Period, that it was done even if the platform mound upon which the building sat was oriented differently…" Ibid., 46.

[31] With respect to deliberate asymmetry, note that Paul Wheatley, *The Pivot of the Four Quarters: A Preliminary Enquiry into the Origins and Character of the Ancient Chinese City* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing, 1971), while commenting at length about the persistent configuration of ceremonial centers in innumerable cross-cultural contexts with respect to

A. Asymmetry as a Consequence of Indifference: Dual Commitments to Axiality and Organic Site Plans

From one view, the asymmetries at Monte Albán are a consequence of indifference about axial regularity. Architect Alejandro Mangino Tazzer, for instance, holds that, while pre-Columbian builders were capable of "incredible precision," they "created an organic architecture integrated with the nature of their environments."[32] In his view, which is informed by a special interest in the Maya zone,

> "[Among all pre-Columbian sites] only the great Teotihuacan cared for a square line in its urbanism and architecture; it is the exception. Generally speaking, Mesoamerican architects did not worry in the least about the 90° stroke, an indifference that is attested by their buildings and ensembles…"[33]

In this respect, numerous scholars contrast the rigid grids characteristic of cities built on the flat ground of Central Mexico, preeminently Teotihuacan, with the more "organic" layouts of Lowland Maya rain forest sites—and then they position Monte Albán as a kind of intermediate case. Hardoy, for example, maintains that "Monte Albán and Xochicalco represent two transitional examples in the urban art practiced by the Maya and that of the Teotihuacan culture

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axiality and the cardinal directions (ibid., 423-27), also observes, ibid., 441-42, that "within the grandiose unity of the axialized dispositions of the cult centers there was often a tendency to deflect the axis to one side... This defection of the axis, while conserving the geometric organization of the whole [apparent, for instance, in the layout of Teotihuacán] is also evident in the layout of Monte Albán, Mitla, Cempoala, and Xochicalco, at Ixkúnin Guatemala, and elsewhere. Although its significance is not fully understood, there can be no doubt that it was important factor in the design of several Mesoamerican cult centers."

[32] Alejandro Mangino Tazzer, *Arquitectura Mesoamericana: relaciones espaciales*, 2 ed. (México, D.F.: Editorial Trillas, 2006), 190; my translation.

[33] Mangino Tazzer, *Arquitectura Mesoamericana: relaciones espaciales*, 190; my translation. Tazzer's book-length study of Mesoamerican architecture—the work of an architect who endeavors to take into account "the spatial conception of the natives" that, in his view, archaeologists routinely neglect (see ibid., 151)—draws on examples from across the region, but especially from the Maya zone, which he seems to privilege in his generalizations about Mesoamerican architects' supposed indifference to 90° angles.

and its heirs."[34] And Mary Ellen Miller also sees Monte Albán as an in-between case insofar as, on the one hand, most of the Classic-era structures at Monte Albán, which is to say most the constructions one observes today, do conform to "approximate bilateral symmetry;" but, "unlike the plan at Teotihuacan, they do not radiate from a central point but rather frame the negative space of the plaza."[35] On the other hand, while the Oaxaca capital, like numerous Maya sites, does have "a plan designed to reproduce the rhythm of the natural land forms," its generally north-south orientation suggests to Miller "an axial orientation far more than the organic site plans of Maya cities."[36] From these views, then, supposed departures from perfectly squared alignments simply reflect a kind of hybrid Oaxacan investment in both typically Central Mexican and typically Lowland Maya orientational priorities.[37]

B. Asymmetry as a Defect to be Masked and Covered Over: Topographic Obstacles and Technical Solutions

A second alternative assesses Monte Albán's orientational irregularities as a problem or failing, presumably due to geographic irregularities and technical limitations, which later Zapotec architects did their very best to cover over. Donald Robertson, for instance, foregrounds the fact that the central spine of the buildings in the Main Plaza, though roughly north-south,

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[34] Hardoy, *Pre-Columbian Cities*, 112.

[35] Mary Ellen Miller, *The Art of Mesoamerica: From Olmec to Aztec* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986), 84.

[36] Miller, *The Art of Mesoamerica*, 84.

[37] Though most scholars hold that the layout of Monte Albán has more in common with Central Mexican than Maya sites, Walter Krickeberg in Walter Krickeberg et al, *Pre-Columbian American Religions* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), 21, ventures the opposite view when he writes: "Although the great period of Monte Albán was roughly contemporary with Teotihuacán, the two sites are laid out quite differently. There is, however, a close relationship between the plan of Monte Albán and that of the Classic Maya centres, and the resemblance is enhanced by the presence, in front of the temples and in the courtyards or plazas, of inscribed stelae similar to those at Copán and Quiriguá. Some of the stelae are rectangular, one is round, and inscriptions and reliefs appear on one or two sides or all round them. The bar-and-dot system of numerals—although not the hieroglyphic script—is the same as that used by the Maya…"

does not line up either with the two pyramids on the South Platform or, moreover, with the stairway and the central buildings of the North Platform. While this anomaly likely derived from an inability to overcome the natural topography, Robertson hypothesizes heroic efforts to later rectify or "mask" the problem:

> "This discrepancy is masked at one end by the off-center staircase of the South Platform and, at the other, by the colonnaded entrance porch, or propylaeum, of the North Platform. The two staircases leading to the propylaeum are not on the major axis either, nor even a single axis. A plausible explanation is that the propylaeum was built to mask the deviation of the major axis between the major plaza and the sunken plaza of the North Platform."[38]

Paul Westheim likewise describes the imperfect north-south axis as "a defect" and even "a crime against art by Zapotec standards," which apparently arose due to technological constraints. But then, Westheim too congratulates later indigenous architects for rectifying, or at least mitigating, that unfortunate lapse in symmetry by configuring the structures on the North Platform in a way that "avoided the disagreeable impression of an unaxial, asymmetrical ensemble and gained a ground plan richer in accents, more audacious, more grandiose, and yet no less severe…"[39] Additionally for Westheim, the seriously skewed Building J also was apparently the unfortunate choice of an early era, which precipitated a number of remedial adjustments that brought the Main Plaza somewhat more fully into line with the Zapotecs' supposed "love of spatial unity."[40] And in Ignacio Bernal's phrase, the ancient architects' skill in overcoming the irregularities imposed by the natural topography constitutes no less than "a solution worthy of Le Corbusier."[41]

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[38] Robertson, *Pre-Columbian Architecture*, 37.

[39] Paul Westheim, *The Art of Ancient Mexico* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1965), 205.

[40] Westheim, *The Art of Ancient Mexico*, 204.

[41] Ignacio Bernal, "La cerámica preclásica de Monte Albán;" unpublished masters thesis, Escuela Nacional de Antropología e Historia, México, n.d. [1946], 8; quoted by Marcus, "How Monte Albán Represented Itself," 81.

These ingeniously corrective remodelings—along with several others that Robertson detects[42]—eventuate in an urban layout that may be more tricky than truly symmetrical. But, nevertheless, Westheim concludes that, "A better conceived and more inspired plan would be hard to visualize;"[43] and Robertson maintains that "one can see at Monte Albán the hand of an architect of genius who attempted to bring the whole site into a pattern of axial unity, overcoming the irregularity that reigned [prior to these rehabilitative modifications]."[44] From this view, then, the desired goal was indeed perfect symmetry or, where that proved unattainable, the clever cultivation of an appearance of absolute symmetry.

C. Asymmetry as a Deliberate Juxtaposition of Order and Variation: Purposeful Deviations from Perfect Regularity

A third and more compelling set of views applauds the seeming irregularities as deliberate and purposeful, an exercise in the sort of "planned uncertainty" that transformed static predictability into more a more fluid and dynamic composition.[45] Henri Stierlin, for instance, is adamant that the deviations from strict axiality in the Great Plaza area are not random or inadvertent, but rather the result of highly sophisticated astronomical considerations, which trumped plainer investments in perfect symmetry.[46] More affirming still, Jorge Hardoy applauds Monte Albán's "flexible order" or, what he terms, "the apparent informality in the arrangement of its different structures set along the edges of the hilltop."[47] In his appreciative assessment,

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[42] See Robertson, *Pre-Columbian Architecture*, 37-38.

[43] Westheim, *The Art of Ancient Mexico*, 205.

[44] Robertson, *Pre-Columbian Architecture*, 37.

[45] Regarding ways in which the strategic juxtaposition of order and variation in architecture can be informed by musicologist Leonard B. Meyer's notion of "planned uncertainty" as the crucial criterion for "great music," see Lindsay Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture: Experience, Interpretation, Comparison* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), vol. I, 61-67, 87-89.

[46] Henri Stierlin, *Ancient Mexico* (Cologne, Germany: Benedikt Taschen Verlag, 1968), 133.

[47] Hardoy, Pre-Columbian Cities, 109.

> "The main axis of the majority of these structures [in the Main Plaza] has a pronounced deviation from an exact east-west orientation. In its freedom of conception, Monte Albán's Plaza is closer to the Maya civic-ceremonial complexes than to the monumental, rigid impression which guided the urban design of Mexico's central plateau cultures."[48]

And Paul Gendrop likewise commends the subtlety of a plan, including the prominent placement of the arrowed-shaped and skewed Building J, that deliberately undermines strict conformity to a four-quartered grid:

> "Unlike Teotihuacan, where symmetry generally reigns, here [at Monte Albán] a single axis of composition does not exist, but instead the buildings are arranged in a flexible order, and an intuitive sense of exterior space takes the place of symmetry. We note, for example, how the unusual location of a pointed building [Building J], whose orientation breaks with the dominant axes of the other structures, is absorbed by skillful placement of the buildings that stand in the center of the plaza."[49]

Impressed by the strategic pairing of order and variation, Gendrop considers that the decided heterogeneity of various buildings in the Main Plaza "is offset by certain architectural elements which provide a note of unity."[50] In his words:

> "There is a subtle combination of broad *alfardas*—a low reinforcement of, or projection to, each side of a stairway—with local variants of *tableros* whose characteristic broken lines provoke a play of shadows particularly effective in emphasizing the massiveness of the structures. These interesting elements, of proportions that vary in relation to the volume of each building, in fact constitute a species of 'common denominator' that serves to integrate buildings into the group and, at the same time, underline their individual volumes."[51]

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[48] Hardoy, *Pre-Columbian Cities*, 112.

[49] Paul Gendrop, *A Guide to Architecture in Ancient Mexico* (México, D.F.: Minutiae Mexicana, 1974, 1982), 35.

[50] Gendrop, *A Guide to Architecture in Ancient Mexico*, 36.

[51] Gendrop, *A Guide to Architecture in Ancient Mexico*, 36. Less certain about the motives of deliberate asymmetry, American investigator Louis H. Aymé, *Notes on Mitla, Oaxaca, Mexico: With Plans and Measurements of the Ruins* (Worcester: Press of Chas. Hamilton, 1882), 18, comments on the lack of perfect alignments in the palaces and plazas of Mitla, which he visited in 1881: "In a word, careful attention has been paid to make the whole asymmetrical. The effect in the matter of ornament is bizarre and striking, in the architectural position of the buildings, rooms, and parts of rooms; it is only revealed on measurement. In Chichen-Itza, Uxmal and Kabah, on the contrary, we find the most perfect symmetry. This asymmetry of Mitla is not

According to these scholars, then, who provide the most persuasive explanations of Monte Albán's deviations from regularity, Zapotec architects added life, interest—and what I will term "allure"—via the juxtaposition of overall orderliness and more individuated digressions from predictable regularity.

III. The Rewards of (Appearances of) Perfect Symmetry: Cosmo-magical and/or Political Incentives for Orientation

The layout of Monte Albán—which both capitalizes on and "negates" its mountaintop setting—deserves credit, therefore, as exceptionally orderly, but also subtle, complex and "flexible." And if one accepts the near-equation of religion and orientation outlined in the Introduction, these design decisions were, moreover, profoundly "religious." There are, however, at least two very different ways that we might understand the Monte Albán architects' urge to meticulous orientation, both of which one can find in various portions of Joyce Marcus's work.[52] While both connote broadly religious motives, one emerges from an empathetic "hermeneutic of retrieval" and the other from a more skeptical "hermeneutic of suspicion."

A. Designing for the Gods: Cosmo-Magical Incentives for Monte Alban's Symmetrical Layout

The first option, which still deserves much fuller attention than it has received, accentuates what Marcus terms "the ancient Zapotec mind,"[53] what Alfredo López Austin calls

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accidental I am certain, but made designedly; what that purpose was I do not know. M. Desire Charnay tells me that he has observed the same thing at Palenque…"

[52] Regarding the presence of these two quite different approaches within Joyce Marcus' own work, see the sub-section on "Mediating pre-Hispanic Oaxacans' Strangeness and Familiarity: The Practicality of 'the Ancient Zapotec Mind'" in Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, chap. 6.

[53] See, for example, Joyce Marcus and Kent V. Flannery, *Zapotec Civilization: How Urban Society Evolved in Mexico's Oaxaca Valley* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996), 18-21.

"the hard nucleus of the Mesoamerican cosmovision,"[54] what Mircea Eliade refers to as "archaic consciousness,"[55] or what urban geographer Paul Wheatley, with reference to the cardinal and axial layout of pre-industrial cities in China, Mesoamerica and elsewhere, terms "astrobiological thought" and "a cosmo-magical basis."[56] From this view, the designers and builders of Monte Albán operated with a set of cosmological presuppositions decidedly different from those of modern Westerns; and thus their guiding incentive was to fashion a ceremonial plaza that really was in synch with cosmic rhythms and trans-natural priorities. In this respect, on which I will elaborate in chapter 1 under the rubrics of "homology" and "homologized architecture" (priority I-A), the Main Plaza was designed, first and foremost, for the gods, as it were. Constructing such a well-ordered architectural environment was, as Eliade and Wheatley repeatedly insist, a religious act insofar as it arose from a sense of cosmic responsibility—that is, an effort to replicate, and thereby sustain, the structure of the universe—the completion of which provided an intense sense of meaning and existential satisfaction. From this perspective, otherworldly priorities, which may or may not comport with the more temporal concerns of Monte Albán's rulers, prevail.[57]

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[54] As discussed in the Introduction, see, among many possibilities, Alfredo López Austin, "El núcleo duro, la cosmovisión y tradición mesoamericana," en *Cosmovisión, Ritual e Identidad en los Pueblos Indígenas de México*, Johanna Broda y Félix Báez-Jorge, coords. (México, D. F.: Consejo Nacional para las Culturas y las Artes, 2001), 47-65.

[55] Of numerous alternative discussed in chapter 1, see Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (San Diego: Harcourt, Inc., 1959), 14-16.

[56] See Paul Wheatley, "City as Symbol," inaugural lecture delivered at University College London, November 20, 1967 (London: H.K. Lewis & Co., 1969); or Wheatley, *The Pivot of the Four Quarters*, 411-19. Though very strongly influenced by the work of Mircea Eliade, Wheatley, ibid., 414-16, borrows the term "astrobiological thought" from René Berthelot.

[57] Note that the empathetic view of Eliade and Wheatley operates with the characteristically phenomenological view of epoché that "suspends judgment" or holds open, without insisting upon, the prospect that the "sacred realities" or supernatural forces to which ancient Zapotecs were responding may indeed have some genuine ontological status. The alternate, more skeptical view, to which I turn next, relies upon the characteristically (atheistic) social scientific assumption that Zapotec "gods" other supernatural entities were strictly socio-cultural constructions, without any actual ontological status.

B. Designing for Human Audiences: Political Incentives for Monte Alban's Symmetrical Layout

By contrast, the second and more skeptical alternative, which is dominant in work co-authored by Joyce Marcus and Kent Flannery along with that of most other recent commentators on Monte Albán, accentuates (as noted in the Introduction) the extent to which ancient Zapotecs were astute and decidedly self-interested political actors, who operated with priorities that are, even from a modern Western perspective, entirely "normal" and largely "secular." Rather than risk exoticizing ancient Mesoamericans by attributing to them an "archaic" or starry-eyed impracticability, these authors adopt an alternate point of departure wherein the leaders and designers of Monte Albán were,

> "'actors' who are conceived as essentially individualistic, self-interested, rational, and pragmatic. These actors go after what they want, and what they want are things that are materially and politically useful for them, given the cultural and historical situations in which they find themselves."[58]

From that demystifying frame, instead of embracing a sense of responsibility to synchronize one's built environment with cosmic rhythms and divine dictates, the Zapotec elite, not unlike modern political leaders, had far more worldly and pragmatic aspirations. Rather than conformity to "astrobiological or "cosmo-magical" principles, their design goal was to create the thoroughly persuasive impression that their capital was an authoritative and legitimate seat of political power. From this view, to which I will return in chapter 6 on "the politics priority (II-C)," the magnificently well-ordered Main Plaza was the Period II rulers' most commanding and compelling means of announcing a new political order and, Marcus suspects, a new religious orientation.[59] But, in this assessment, the ambitious building initiative was aimed at human audiences rather than at the gods; and thus, with that anthropomorphic public in mind, actual symmetry was far less important than *an appearance* of symmetry.

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[58] Marcus and Flannery, *Zapotec Civilization*, 31.

[59] Marcus, "How Monte Albán Represented Itself," 81, 106.

In Marcus's view, then, while the overwhelmingly political motives of Monte Albán's rulers and planners remained essentially the same over time, the strategy of asserting their authority changed. During Period I, prior to the emergence of a unified plan, the dominant feature of the Main Plaza was the display of literally hundreds of the so-termed Danzante figures, which, according to prevailing interpretations (that, in chapter 5, I will follow Javier Urcid in challenging), represented defeated adversaries whose tortured and humiliated images presented a dire warning to any visitors who might dare to resist the dominion of the newly ascendant lords of Monte Albán.[60] In Period II, once the Oaxacan rulers enjoyed greater confidence and security, "the time was right to embark on an impressive campaign of public construction," and the Zapotec elites, at that point, commissioned the impressively unified Main Plaza.[61] That is to say, according to Marcus's analysis, the same pragmatic priorities persisted, but the means of bureaucratic control shifted from blunt intimidation via the grisly display of vanquished captives, which was dismantled and covered over, to a more subtle presentation of the right to rule via a thoroughly ordered, and thus indubitably legitimate, civic center.[62] Marshalling parallels in better documented contexts, Marcus recounts, for instance, how Egyptian ruler Akhenaton, five years into his reign, "decided to build an entirely new royal city at a new location."[63] Purportedly designed to honor Aten, the Sun Disk, the imposing new Egyptian capital exemplifies how "master plans can be implemented by rulers with new religious beliefs" in order to demonstrate their conformity to "the correct order of the universe" and, thereby, their deserved hegemony.[64]

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[60] Marcus, "How Monte Albán Represented Itself," 95-96.

[61] Marcus, "How Monte Albán Represented Itself," 89. Note that, as recounted in Jones, *Narrating Monte Albán*, chap. 6, among the distinctive features of the historical (re)construction presented in Marcus and Flannery, *Zapotec Civilization*, 172-207, is the atypical view that Monte Albán enjoyed its greatest growth spurt and maximal regional influence during Period II rather than the so-termed Classic era, Period IIIA and IIIB.

[62] Marcus, "How Monte Albán Represented Itself," 96.

[63] Marcus, "How Monte Albán Represented Itself," 81.

[64] Marcus, "How Monte Albán Represented Itself," 81-82.

In sum, while Marcus cautions against imagining that Monte Albán's grand plan was in place from the very beginning, she likewise maintains that, once the "overall semblance of perfect order" was implemented in Period II, it was apparently easier "to add to that template than to create a new one..."[65] Accordingly, "later rulers and regimes did not dramatically alter the master plan, but instead invested more labor into building larger palaces, tombs, and monumental temples to venerate noble ancestors."[66] And thus, from this assessment, the main contours of the Main Plaza remained intact through Periods IIIA and IIIB-IV (200 CE-900 CE) until the very end of Monte Albán's 1200-year run as a dominant regional capital. In short, according to this second interpretive option, the ostensibly cosmo-magical design of the central precinct served largely political ends for well over a millennium.

IV. Part I Agenda—Complementary Strategies of Allurement: Homology (priority I-A), Convention (priority I-B) and Astronomy (priority I-C)

These cosmological and political lines of interpretation are, of course, not entirely incompatible; and both connote the workings of religion. Joyce Marcus herself notes that the imposition of a master plan at Monte Albán probably served the threefold purpose of: (1) accentuating orderliness and a new beginning and, thereby, (2) legitimating a policy of "political propaganda," as well as (3) providing a suitably grand plaza in which to conduct "new kinds of rites."[67] But for my heuristic purposes, it will be important to differentiate between, on the one hand, the means and motives by which Monte Albán designers established an aura of legitimacy, which persuades audiences to take seriously the "ritual-architectural events" that transpire there, and, on the other hand, the sorts of messages, meanings and information that are presented in those ceremonial occasions. I have described the former component, which is the topic of the three chapters of Part I—on, respectively, homologized architecture (priority I-A), conventionalized architecture (priority I-B), and astronomically-aligned architecture (priority I-C)—variously as "allurement," "strategies of ritual-architectural instigation" and the "front-half"

[65] Marcus, "How Monte Albán Represented Itself," 106.

[66] Marcus, "How Monte Albán Represented Itself," 106.

[67] Marcus, "How Monte Albán Represented Itself," 106.

of the twofold ritual-architectural program.[68] And, by contrast, the latter component, the topic of the four chapters of Part II, concerns the more specific content—variously, notions of divinity (priority II-A), sacred history (priority II-B), political authority (priority II-C), and commemorations of the dead (priority II-D)—that are communicated in the "back-half" of the ritual-architectural program.[69]

In short, then, having established that fundamental distinction between *the strategies of allurement* that initiate ritual-architectural events (i.e., the front-half of the twofold mechanism of architecture) and *the substantive meanings, message and information* that are transacted in those ritual-architectural occasions (i.e., the back-half of the twofold mechanism), the next three chapters concentrate on the former.

A. Three Key Propositions: The Priority of Orientation, the Paired Discovery and Enhancement of Place, and the Ritual Activation of Otherwise Static Architecture

As we've seen, irrespective of considerable disagreement concerning the intentions behind Monte Alban's famously unified layout, essentially every commentator from William Henry Holmes forward has commended the Zapotecs' estimable orientational prowess. And, in fact, those recurrent accolades for the systemic and largely symmetrical configuration of the ancient city reinforce three general propositions for which I argued in *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*,[70] all of which will be relevant across the triad of chapters in Part I on "Orientation and Allurement: The Instigation of Ritual-Architectural Events."

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[68] Regarding the relationship between these two components of the ritual-architecture situation, see Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, vol. I, chap. 4, "Order and Variation: The Twofold Pattern of Ritual-Architectural Events." On the first of those components, see ibid., vol. I, chap. 5, "Allurement and Coercion: The Front-half of the Ritual-Architectural Situation."

[69] On the second of those two components, see Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, vol. I, chap. 6, "Transformation and Productivity: The Back-half of the Ritual-Architectural Situation."

[70] See Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, vol. II, 31.

- First, acknowledgements of Monte Albán's unmistakable orderliness support the broad contention that orientation, or the human quest for a "place" in the world, is *the* fundamental religious question in traditional, and perhaps, all cultures.
- Second, the mountaintop site-choice reaffirms that the selective validation of the natural environment, together with the architectural manipulation of that ambient landscape, are the two principal agencies for discovering and then enhancing the order of one's surroundings.
- And third, the extent to which virtual every commentator presumes, rightly I think, that the Main Plaza was intended primarily as a context for elaborate ceremonies[71] comports with my contention that carefully choreographed rituals—what I term "ritual-architectural events"—are, as Johanna Broda and others imply, the most fortuitous occasions in which the harmonious and homologized organizations that are embedded in Mesoamerican spatial arrangements are released, unveiled and introduced into the life-worlds of the ritual participants and spectators.[72] In short, the meanings of sacred architecture emerge only in ritual.

This third point deserves special emphasis because, while commentators on Monte Albán consistently acknowledge that the carefully composed built forms are indispensably related to ritual, scholars too often continue to describe the meanings and significance of those architectural features apart from their performative ritual contexts. That is a "non-eventful" approach that I will try to avoid.

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[71] Even Marcus Winter, who at points advances the minority view that Monte Albán's Main Plaza served primarily as a market—see, for example, Marcus Winter, *Oaxaca: The Archaeological Record* (Oaxaca, Mexico: Carteles editors, P.G.O., 1992 [originally 1989]), 36—elsewhere, as we'll see, joins the consensus that this space was host to large-scaled public ceremonies.

[72] Johanna Broda, "Astronomy, Cosmovision, and Ideology in Pre-Hispanic Mesoamerica," in *Ethnoastronomy and Archaeoastronomy in the American Tropics*, eds. Anthony F. Aveni and Gary Urton (New York: New York Academy of Sciences, 1982), 93-97, 102-3.

B. Two Key Qualifications: Orderly Architecture as (Only) a Point of Departure and Discernments of Three Sorts of Harmonious Architecture

In a more contentious vein, however, these first three chapters also offer two major challenges or refinements to recurrent praises of Monte Albán's grandly symmetrical design. First—and this is the most important qualification—despite the crucial role that well-ordered architecture plays in providing people with a sense of orientation, a point well taken in the literature on Monte Albán, I will insist that almost no ritual-architectural events are exhausted in the simple presentation of generalized world order. Rather, the initial presentation of unity, harmony and order, which has been so amply appreciated at the Zapotec capital, most often functions as the strategy that *allures* ritual participants from what Hans-Georg Gadamer terms their "spoilsport" status into the role of active participants, or "players," in the religio-architectural game.[73] Presentations of cosmic order get the ritual proceedings started, as it were, but they are the prerequisites rather than climaxes of those occasions.

In other words, still on this first qualification, I will insist, and remind readers frequently in the course of Part I, that demonstrative fidelity to cosmic order functions *not* as the sum of most (or maybe any) architectural events, but, more often, as the requisite, conservative component that invites—or, in cases, demands—serious consideration of the more substantive component of the ensuing ritual-architectural occasion. Cultivating a sensation of orientation and cosmic order, which has primarily to do with fostering a sense of confidence and legitimacy, is only preparatory to the ritual articulation of the very specific privileges, liabilities and responsibilities that are concomitant with one's particular "place" in that world order. The theme of "architecture as orientation," accordingly, is linked throughout these first three chapters with the notion of *ritual-architectural allurement*, that is, with the so-termed "front-half" of the twofold structure of ritual-architectural events.[74] (And, as noted, the four subsequent chapters of

[73] On transforming passive and reticent spectators or "spoil-sports" into active "players" in ritual activities, see Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. W. Glen-Doepel (London: Sheed and Ward, 1975), 92ff.; or Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, vol. I, chap. 5.

[74] As noted, see Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, vol. I, chap. 5, "Allurement and Coercion: The Front-half of the Ritual-Architectural Situation."

Part II on "Commemoration, Messages and Meanings: The Content of Ritual-Architectural Events" will address the substantive information or the "back-half" of sacred architectural events.[75])

The second major challenge stems from a complaint that, while the language of "orientation," "correspondence," "parallelism," "harmony," "microcosm," etc. permeates, as it should, the literature on sacred architecture at Monte Albán and elsewhere, the boundaries and valences of those terms are disturbingly imprecise. In the interest of somewhat greater precision, then, these initial three chapters differentiate between three types of orientation, or three sorts of "harmonious architecture," or, perhaps most accurately (because it admits to the inevitable interpenetrability of the three variations on the theme), three sorts of orientational priorities. In other words, chapters 1, 2, and 3 explore the respective relevance at Monte Albán of three alternative catalytic instigatory strategies, three sorts of ritual-architectural allurement, which are labeled with the following three code terms: "homology" (priority I-A), that is, orientation via the correlation of disparate realms of existence; "convention" (priority I-B), that is, orientation via conformity to codified architectural prescriptions or historically conventionalized patterns; and "astronomy" (priority I-C), that is, orientation via ritual-architectural synchronization with sky phenomena.

In each case, the subsequent message (or "back-half") of the Zapotec ritual-architectural events wins its audience, or earns its hearing, by a display of respect and fidelity to the cosmic order. The presentation of harmonious orientation works, thereby, to certify that the architectural events staged at Monte Albán are harbingers of "real," viable alternatives, and not simply occasions for promoting idiosyncratic, authoritarian or expendable special interests. Always the layout of the city must (appear to) conform with cosmic rhythms rather than merely human predilections. But, in virtually no case is that announcement of orderly orientation the sum or culmination of the ritual occasion. This point, I hope, will become clear in the "Closing Thoughts" at the end of each of these first three chapters.

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[75] Again as noted, see Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, vol. I, chap. 6, "Transformation and Productivity: The Back-half of the Ritual-Architectural Situation."

Finally, I remind readers that, as throughout this morphological analysis of the religion(s) of Monte Albán, the lines of this Part I tripartite division constantly blur and occasionally dissolve. And I am well aware that for many readers who are deeply interested only in the specifics of Monte Albán, all of this talk of ritual-architectural events and priorities will seem more a distraction than a clarification. Perhaps, though, pulling things apart in this artificial fashion may help even that audience, eventually, to put together more nuanced and critical assessments of the various strategies of ritual-architectural allurement that were at work in the great Zapotec capital. Be that as it may, consider in turn each of the variations on the theme—homologized architecture, conventionalized architecture and astronomically-aligned architecture.