



Death in Mesoamerica

Eduardo Matos Moctezuma

Edited and translated by Scott Sessions

With a foreword by David Carrasco

"This gem of a book explores the inseparability of life and death in Mesoamerican belief and practice. Combining his vast knowledge and experience in key sites and traditions throughout Mexico with a comparative analysis of the epic literature that forged the Catholic worldview confronting native religion, Eduardo Matos Moctezuma enables us to fathom Mesoamerican people's conceptions of their netherworld within the larger cosmos that extended far beyond their reach but not their imagination. The vivid imagery they created to depict that world, their gods and heroes, the heavens above, and the land of death below are masterfully examined in this thoughtful study that is sure to interest general readers and specialists alike."

—William L. Fash, Charles P. Bowditch Professor of Central American and Mexican Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University

"In ancient Mesoamerica, life and death were two sides of the same coin. Death was both a definitive end and closely related to vital matters concerning agriculture, time, fertility, and childbirth. In this concise yet thorough treatment, Matos leads us on a fascinating journey into the realm of the dead."

—Ximena Chávez Balderas, Anthropology Advisor, Office of the Attorney General of the State of Quintana Roo, Mexico

"With great lucidity, Matos takes us on a tour of the varied geographies of life after death conceived by Mesoamericans before and after the arrival of the Spanish conquistadors. The climax is an arrival in Mictlan, the lowest level of the underworld, a place of both decomposition and regeneration characterized by darkness, cold, and a foul smell."

—Leonardo López Luján, director of the Templo Mayor Project, Mexico City

"Eduardo Matos Moctezuma is one of the great champions of the dialogue between archaeology and literature to illuminate the past."

—Juan Villoro, writer, journalist, and member of Mexico's Colegio Nacional

"In a unique way, like Virgil in Dante's Inferno, Matos is our guide in many underworlds, a fellow pilgrim on the surface and in the purgatory just below. There is no better 'reader-interpreter' of the paradox of life and death in the cosmovision and ritual commitments of Mesoamericans."

—David Carrasco, Neil Rudenstine Professor of the Study of Latin America, Harvard University

Eduardo Matos Moctezuma is professor emeritus of Mexico's National School of Anthropology and History, coordinator of the Urban Archaeology Program and Templo Mayor Project, and member of the prestigious Colegio Nacional.



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