City-states or village-states do not exist in isolation, but function within an interactive network of relationships with others, manifest in alliances, conflicts, exchanges and other contacts. Each polity has its place within the geographical and historical consciousness of the ‘city-state culture’, the landscape of sovereign communities. The Homeric songs are a good example of such a shared landscape and memory, in which diverse communities, peoples and lineages could relate to a unifying grand narrative. A wealth of toponymic references to islands, regions and tribes, towns, mountains, rivers and springs, with their evocative epithets, anchor the story in space. The audience is thus situated in a world – be it real, fabulous or sacred – in which it can orient itself and with which it can identify. The rocky Skylla and the fatal whirl-pool of Charybdis, located at both sides of the northern end of the Straits of Messina, Italy, which separates Sicily from Calabria, become hallmarks of the Odyssey as a life-voyage, while the longed for island of Ithaka with its Cave of Nymphs and Fountain of Arethousa, just as the brilliant snow-capped Olympus, the oracle of Zeus at Dodona with its Sacred Oak, the fortified palace at Mycene, the city of Thebes with its seven gates, and so many others, all become places of significance, orientation and destiny in the Greek epic universe. The same may be said about sites such as Tintagel in Cornwall, England, with its ruined castle on top of a steep cliff overlooking the rocky ocean shore, beaten by waves of foam and thunder, with the cave of Merlin down below, echoing with the legends of King Arthur.

Sacred Time, Sacred Space

The ancient world of Ñuu Dzaui held similar points of reference: sacred caves and mountain tops, lineage shrines of special prestige, towns that

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1 Hansen 2000 presents a comparative analysis, while, for example, Tilley 1994 and Ingold 2000 offer inspiring discussions of landscape and its conceptual-experiential value for archeology (see also Geurds 2007).
had played their role in history or excelled because of wealth or prowess in war. The literary text, formal discourse or ‘parangón’ (sahu) painted in Codex Yuta Tnoho contains a long section of place signs and dates, which, as we saw above, has baffled many interpreters. It starts on p. 47 with an impressive image of Lord 9 Wind ‘Quetzalcoatl’, the divine Bringer of Culture, carrying the waters of Heaven to the mountainous world of Ñuu Dzaui. We read it in Sahin Sau (the dialectal variant of Dzaha Dzaui in modern Ñuu Ndeya, Chalcatongo) as follows:

Te iha ñahnu, iha Koo Sau
nikuundiso andu jiin nducha,
te suan niskuun sau,
niskuun viko
nuu taka yuku, taka kava,
taka yucha, taka yoso,
nuu ndihi nuu, ndihi teyu
ja kayoo nuu Ñuu Sau,
te nijahaya kuia ii, kiu ii,
viko ñuu, nuu nikandukoo
shranu nuu anahan,
yuhi yucha kuka,
nuu nana chii ñuhu
taka ja kaichaku,
nenduu nducha kahnu,
nuu kana tihínu,
nducha ñuhu,
nuu yaa kiti nducha ja sihu,
kiti shraan ja janu vehe,
ja jahnu itu, ja jahni ndiyi,
yuku Ñuu Sau,
nuu ja kaa tiyuu vita nene,
sani kuu ishi nducha
te sani kuu tuun,
nuu yaa ñuhu ndehyu ini,
mahínu ndekuun ichi andu,
Ndíhi taka itu, yuku, yoso,
ja juhni yoho, ja sa-unuu,
ndíhi ja indii chii andu,
sani kuu ndava veheyo, sihin
veheyo,

And the Great Lord Plumed Serpent took charge of the heavenly waters and so caused the rain to fall, the seasons to come, for all the mountains, all the rocks all the rivers, all the plains all the towns and nations that constitute Ñuu Dzaui; thus he established the holy years and days, the feasts, for the towns founded in the beginning, in the past, for those on the banks of rivers full of gold, where from the depth of the earth all living creatures sprouted, for both oceans, with waves covered with foam, for the sacred water (Pacific Ocean) where the horrific hurricane dwells, the monster that demolishes the houses, destroys the fields and kills the people, for the mountains of Ñuu Dzaui, which form a circle around, in harmony, peaceful and soft as fur, as down-ball feathers, in the centre of which the Spirit lives, stretching towards the four directions, for all lands, mountains, plains bound together and unified, for all that rises and has Heaven as its roof beam