

Crossing the forks

Denver has restaurants for every taste

by Thomas K. Fry and Kim S. Anderson



When we read in the *Denver Post* last spring that downtown Denver had added 99 new restaurants since 1993 (that's *new*, no replacements, please!), we knew that we had our

work cut out for us in preparing a guide to restaurants for ACRLX on March 15–18, 2001.

Dining out in Denver offers a wide range of choices. You'll have an incredible variety of cuisines and prices within a few-block radius of the convention center or your conference hotel. Those of you from either coast will find our food on a par with New York, D.C., Los Angeles, or San Francisco, with altitude, not attitude!

In this article we've tried to include our favorites, and the highest-rated restaurants. We start in the areas closest to the convention center and hotels, then include some unique Denver spots, next is LoDo—easily reached by foot or the 16th Street mall shuttle (free)—and finally two areas noted for dining (17th Avenue), strolling, and shopping (Cherry Creek North). You'll need a car, cab, or bus to reach the latter two locations, but the added expense is worth it.

Since restaurant hours change without notice, we've included their phone numbers for your convenience. Some, but not all, take reservations. All have non-smoking sections. Restaurants with an asterisk are commonly ranked among the city's ten best. Price key, food only, per person: \$=less than \$10, \$\$=\$10–\$20, \$\$\$=\$20–\$30, \$\$\$\$=\$30+.

Three good restaurant Web sites worth visiting are <http://www.5280.com/dining/html>, www.westword.com, and <http://www.restaurantshow.com>.

Downtown

• **Zenith**, 815 17th St. (303) 293-2322.

This is a reincarnation of the original Zenith, which some of you may remember from ALA Midwinter 1993. Chef Kevin Taylor is still in town and prepares modern, innovative Southwestern in a spacious and inviting dining room. Consistently good, intensely flavored food, and always great service. Noted for their corn soup and pork tamales. \$\$\$

• **Jou jou**, 1106 14th St. (303) 228-0770.

Another of Kevin Taylor's downtown restaurants, jou jou serves up classic American fare in a casual atmosphere. Roasted rosemary chicken with mashed potatoes is always good and comforting. Crowded after theater, but

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easily accessed for lunch or dinner, and very close to the convention center. \$\$\$

• **Ship Tavern at the Brown Palace Hotel, 321 17th St. (303) 297-3111.** The least expensive and most relaxed of the Brown's restaurants, serving great burgers, chicken pot pie, and other casual pub fare. Great bar, impeccable service, terrific atmosphere. \$\$

• **Panzano, 909 17th St. (303) 296-3525.** Located in the Hotel Monaco, Panzano serves modern, light Italian in a beautiful room. Try the Spinach salad and calamari appetizer for a good lunch. Reservations strongly recommended. \$\$-\$\$\$

• **Palettes, 100 W. 14th Ave. (303) 629-0889.** The restaurant in the Denver Art Museum, which is next door to the Denver Public Library, serves up wonderful nouvelle in a bright, airy, deconstructionist room. The art on the walls comes from the museum collection. Inventive salads, fish, and chicken dishes. Open for lunch only. \$\$ (Palettes Express serves sandwiches, soups, and salads—cafeteria style. \$)

• **Ilios, 1201 Broadway (303) 623-3663.** Located just a block south of the Denver Public Library, "Food of the sunny Mediterranean" is their motto. Generous portions, always fresh, upbeat service, bright kitschy dining room. The menu features mostly Greek food, but Italian and Spanish are also represented. They excel at turning tables efficiently, so you can get in and out fast if you're in a hurry. \$\$-\$\$\$

These next spots are a bit south of the Denver Public Library on Lincoln, which is a block east. They're within walking distance, but a cab may be a good idea.

• **Radex, 100 E. 9th Ave. at Lincoln (303) 861-7999.** Lively and noisy, upscale, with-it crowd enjoying terrific and reasonably priced, interesting entrees. Chef and owner Radek Cerny (see Papillon) has created a less-expensive and somewhat less intricate menu, but still wonderful tastes

and mostly attentive service. Rotisserie chicken with garlic mashed potatoes is always good and a bargain; large pasta selection. Reservations recommended. \$\$

• **Le Central, 112 E. 8th Ave. at Lincoln (303) 863-8094.** Denver's reasonably priced French restaurant is a favorite with locals. Country French menu changes frequently, but they always seem to have mussels, if that's your thing. Inexpensive wine list. Okay service. \$\$

• **Aubergine Café*, 225 E. 7th Ave. (303) 832-4778.** Located just a couple blocks east of Lincoln at 7th, Aubergine has innovative Mediterranean-inspired cuisine with an oft-changing menu. A small, intimate dining room makes this popular for couples and small groups. Small, but quality wine list, affordably priced. Reservations strongly recommended. \$\$\$ (The Mexican joint on



McCormick's Fish House and Bar

the corner, Benny's, is one of Denver's best, too, with great chips and salsa and enchiladas. \$)

Local atmosphere—A taste of Colorado

• **Denver Buffalo Company, 11th and Lincoln (303) 832-0880.** Buffalo steaks, buffalo prime rib, buffalo chili, buffalo burgers, buffalo ribs, buffalo meatloaf, buffalo sausage—all locally grown, plus beef, chicken, and vegetarian. This venerable spot has loads of atmosphere and great service. Try the red and green chili or the buffalo patty melt. \$\$

• **Rocky Mountain Diner, 800 18th St. (303) 293-8383.** Picture your basic diner menu with a Southwestern kick, in a Western diner motif. Very close to the conference hotels. Dwight Yoakum, Lyle Lovett, and Vince Gil on the sound system. Try the roast duck enchiladas, chicken fried steak, jalapeno cornbread, and venison chili. \$\$

• **Buckhorn Exchange, 10th and Osage (303) 534-9505.** Denver's most historic

Tour the Mile High City

Take advantage of your trip to Denver for ACRL's 10th National Conference, March 15-18, 2001, to explore Denver and its environs!

ACRL is offering a variety of tours on Wednesday, March 14, and Thursday, March 15. Scheduled tours include:

- **Colorado Springs—The Garden of the Gods and Air Force Academy**, Wednesday, March 14, 2001, 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

Experience the beauty of incredible sandstone rock formations and the Garden of the Gods at the U.S. Air Force Academy. Visit the Planetarium, the Cadet Chapel, and the Cave of the Winds—a 200-million-year-old rare geological formation that occurs nowhere else on earth. Visit the library at the University of Colorado in Colorado Springs and end your tour with a short reception.

- **Denver Historical Tour**—Wednesday, March 14, 2001, 9:30 a.m.-4:00 p.m.

Visit the state capital—all surrounded with marble and rose quartz walls and covered with a 24-carat dome. Visit two famous houses, Molly Brown's (of Titanic fame) and the Byers Evans house, an exquisite Italianate mansion built in 1883. Enjoy high tea at the Brown Palace, a national historic

landmark that is a remarkable example of Victorian architecture based on the Italian Renaissance. Stop at the Denver Mint operating since 1862 and still works around the clock.

- **Shop 'Til You Drop Denver Tour**—Wednesday, March 14, 2001, 10:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.

Here is your chance to shop Denver's #1 attraction—the prestigious Cherry Creek Mall and North Cherry Creek Shops, a small, fashionable village with quiet, tree-lined streets, outdoor cafes, flower gardens, and fountains. While there you will visit the world famous Tattered Cover Bookstore. If that's not enough, then on to Park Meadows Retail Resort, home to Nordstrom, Dillard's, Lord and Taylor, and more.

- **Ski Trips**—Wednesday, March 14, 2001, 7:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m. or plan your own multi-day trip before or after the conference

What would a trip to Denver be without skiing? Mountains and tall pines punctuate the landscape and the area around Keystone. One of the most popular resorts for families is sure to be a hit on this day trip, whether you are a skier or going along for shopping at the Silverthorne Outlet Stores.

restaurant, since 1893, with Liquor License No. 1, the Buckhorn isn't within walking distance, but it's a quick train ride away on Light Rail. It took us just five minutes from the Auraria station to the first stop south, then it's just across the street. Great steaks, chili; two could make a good sized meal from the Dutch Lunch (\$9.75) of bean soup, bratwurst, baby back pork ribs, beef brisket, German potato salad, and cole slaw. Terrific atmosphere. Be sure to check out the Buffalo Bill lookalike photos along with the elk, bear, deer, rattlers, etc. \$\$-\$\$\$

Cheap lunch

Sure, you can grab a burger at McDonald's, but you'll miss out on some inexpensive

and interesting grub. You've heard the maxim "good, fast, cheap—pick two" well this doesn't apply to the following lunch spots, most within a few blocks of the convention center. You get all three attributes with each.

- **Chipotle Mexican Grill, California St. between 16th and 17th (303) 615-5818.** Denver's best known and homegrown healthy-Mex burrito joint. (Other outlets all over the metro area.) Deconstructionist interiors contrast with the huge, one-pound-plus, made-to-order burritos. Ingredients include cilantro lime steamed rice, black or pinto beans, grilled chicken, pork or steak, cheese, salsa, sour cream, guacamole; in a large steamed flour tortilla. One burrito easily feeds two. \$

• **Library Tour**—Thursday, March 15, 2001, 8:30 a.m.–2:30 p.m.

Tour a joint-use library—the College Hill Library at Front Range Community College, a unique combination of public and academic libraries operated jointly by the City of Westminster and Front Range Community College—Westminster Campus (FRCC). Then on to the Jerry Crail Johnson Earth Sciences and Map Library, and next the main library at the University of Colorado at Boulder. This tour includes lunch at netLibrary.

• **Lower Downtown (LODO) Tour**—Thursday, March 15, 2001, 9:30 a.m.–2:00 p.m.

Denver is a charming combination of old and new. This tour delivers a glimpse of both with great commentary by a knowledgeable tour guide as your deluxe motor coach drives by historic Union Station and the Oxford Hotel. Stops will include Coors Field and the Tattered Cover Bookstore.

• **Taste of the Rockies**—Thursday, March 15, 2001, 9:00 a.m.–2:30 p.m.

Your visit to Red Rocks Park and Amphitheater will surely be a sight that you will be talking about for a long time as you stand amidst towering cliffs of red sandstone, rising hundreds of feet above

• **Water Course Foods, 206 E. 13th Ave. (303) 832-7313.** Open for breakfast and lunch, Water Course serves up a healthy vegetarian menu that's delicious. The buckwheat cakes and banana bread French toast are terrific. \$

• **Dozens, 236 W. 13th Ave. at Cherokee (303) 572-0066.** Also open for breakfast and lunch only, and pretty close to the convention center and the Denver Public Library, this place serves great pancake and egg dishes. Frequented by staffers from the City and County Building, and the occasional politician. \$

• **Pints, 221 W. 13th Ave. at Bannock (303) 534-7543.** Authentic English Pub with pretty good burgers, bangers and

you. You will also visit the grave site and museum of one of the Old West's most famous characters, Buffalo Bill Cody, and you will visit the famous Coors Brewery.

• **PASCAL: Tour of Remote Storage Facility**—Thursday, March 15, 2001, 8:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m.

Visit PASCAL (Preservation and Access Service Center for Academic Libraries), an off-site facility for storage of research materials for the Boulder, Denver, and Health Sciences Center Libraries along with the libraries of Denver.

• **The Grizzly Rose**—Saturday, March 17, 2001, 7:00 p.m.–11:30 p.m.

Enjoy this evening of good ol' country fun at The Grizzly Rose, voted the Country Club of the Year by the Country Music Association. Tap your feet to the live country music and learn all the latest line dances from two top dance instructors.

Full descriptions of the tours, as well as reservation forms, are available on the Web at <http://www.ceo-events.com/actours/acrltur1.htm>. Complete details about the 10th National Conference are available on the Web at <http://www.ala.org/acrl/denver.html>. Questions? Call (800) 545-2433, ext. 2515. See you in Denver, March 15-18, 2001!

mash, non-traditional fish and chips (salmon!). Right across the street from the Denver Public Library. Play some darts with your Black and Tan. \$

• **Playa Azul, 1500 Curtis St. (303) 825-4020.** This near-dive serves up pretty good, traditional Tex Mex. Try the homemade tamales, if they're available. Fresh home-cooked chips and superb salsa. The daily specials are a steal. Service is quick. \$

• **Mt. Everest, 1533 Champa St. (303) 620-9306.** Nepalese fare meets the west. The lunch buffet is a big draw, but the regular menu also has quality dishes, especially the curries. \$

• **Waboo's Fish Tacos, 1521 Blake St. LoDo (303) 623-0263.** San Diego-based

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and Baja-inspired Wahoo's is extremely popular for lunch with the mid-town office crowd. Grilled mahi mahi on a steamed corn tortilla with shredded cabbage, a tart sauce, salsa and shredded cheese, with black beans and rice on the side. Sprinkle on the Tapatio for more zip. Surf bum décor crosses the Rockies and becomes snowboarder. A bit more of a walk from the convention center, as are the following two spots, but worth it. \$

• **The Market, 1445 Larimer St. LoDo (303) 534-5140.** A casual, eclectic, cafeteria-style spot in the heart of Larimer Square. Great lasagne, good soups, and salads. Always filled with Auraria students, faculty, and staff. Crowded but tables turn quickly. \$

• **Lim's Mongolian BBQ, 1530 Blake St. (303) 893-1158.** The local weekly calls it "The best lunch under \$5." Piping hot skewers of vegetables and meat or seafood from the iron grill, served with steamed rice and a choice of sauces. The crabcheese wontons are mighty tasty, too. \$

LoDo

LoDo is short for Lower Downtown, the area just northwest of the conference hotels and convention center. It's a few blocks from each and is also easily reached via the 16th Street Mall Shuttle. A favorite destination of Denverites and Front Rangers out for a night on the town, LoDo has lots to offer the conference-goer.

• **Vesta Dipping Grill,* 1822 Blake St. (303) 296-1970.** The theme here is fusion of a variety of cuisines, with even more varied dipping sauces. You pick three from thirty sauces. Try the ceviche, which blends Asian with Mexican, or roasted half chicken with curry sauce and black pepper aioli. Wildly popular and highly regarded. Reservations strongly recommended. \$\$\$\$

• **Delbi Darbar, 1514 Blake St. (303) 595-0680.** One of Denver's finest Indian restaurants, and certainly the best in downtown. There is the traditional inexpensive buffet lunch. The dinner menu offers all your favorite curries and more. Reservations recommended. Vegetarian items. \$\$\$

• **Denver Chop House, 1735 19th St. (303) 296-0800.** Dine in the shadow of Coors Field. The grilled steaks and chops are popular with the local sports celebs. There's also a lobster pot pie you're not likely to find in your grocery's frozen foods section. Reservations recommended. \$\$\$

• **McCormick's Fish House, 1659 Wazee St. (303) 825-1107.** Located in the historic and restored Oxford Hotel, McCormick's offers 30 varieties of fresh fish and seafood in a dark, clubby atmosphere. Good beef and pasta dishes also available. A big draw is happy hour. \$\$\$

• **Dixon's, 1610 16th St. (303) 573-6100.** American and Southwestern fare in an upscale and relaxed atmosphere. Mile High Nachos with black beans and grilled chicken breast, Poblano Chile plate, and burgers; breakfast served all day. Noted for winning Denver's best margarita three years running, Dixon's also has more than a dozen single malt scotches to taste and their own mini micro brewery on premises. \$-\$\$

• **Las Delicias III, 1530 Blake St. (303) 629-5051.** Another good, fast, cheap Mexican joint. You can eat healthy as well as sinfully. Try the three tostadas plate for a quick, healthy, and inexpensive lunch, or splurge on one of the combos or great fajitas. They excel at turning tables quickly. \$-\$\$

• **Wazee Supper Club, 1600 15th St. at Wazee (303) 623-9518.** Don't be intimidated by the lowlife looks of this place. Stroll on in for some terrific pizza and two-for-one drink specials at happy hour. Be sure to check out the bar, which came out via wagon train from the east 100 years ago. While mainly a tavern, the ventilation is good enough to remove the cigarette smoke and not spoil your meal. \$-\$\$

• **Wynkoop Brewery 1634 18th St. (303) 297-2700.** The Wynkoop is Denver's original brewpub and remains one of our best. You'll enjoy their fresh brews and seasonal beers while you feast on pub fare

like shepherd's pie, the ploughman's platter, and bangers and mash (a British colleague noted that the sausages weren't authentic, they had meat in them!). Good beer batter onion rings, too. They also offer the state's biggest single-malt scotch selection. If you're so inclined, you can go upstairs and smoke a cigar in the expansive billiard hall. \$\$

Cherry Creek North

Denver's chi chi shopping, strolling and dining area, located four miles southeast of downtown, with 400 stores, 75 restaurants and 25 art galleries, is worth a visit. A number of Denver's best restaurants are in this area. If you do take the time to stroll around, you won't be disappointed in any of the restaurants, but we list a few of our favorites below.

In addition to dining, a good reason to visit Cherry Creek North is to experience the world-renowned Tattered Cover Bookstore which started here and still has its main inventory here (second store is in LoDo). The Tattered Cover Bookstore is housed in what was originally a department store. This generous space allows it to carry more than 300,000 titles, and it is staffed by 400 employees (not all of whom are working at the same time), so if you're looking for selection and service, look no further.

• **Fourth Story, 2955 E. 1st Ave. (303) 322-1824.** The Tattered Cover Bookstore's own restaurant, located on the fourth story of their building, featuring regional American fare, well prepared and served in a bookish atmosphere. It's not unusual to find regulars reading and munching alongside power lunchers, and, in the evening, romantic couples. A great view south and west over the city to the Rockies. Large selection of single malt scotches and one of the five best wine-by-the-glass offerings in town. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

• **Papillon Caf e* 250 Josephine St. (303) 333-7166.** On the western edge of

Cherry Creek North, Chef Radek Cerny has consistently produced a top ten restaurant ever since he opened in 1996. New French with Asian influences describes the food, all beautifully presented and well-served. Any of the fish dishes are excellent, but try the Rocky Mountain trout. Comprehensive and very expensive wine list. \$\$\$\$

• **Mel's Bar and Grill,* 255 Fillmore St. (303) 333-3979.** One of Cherry Creek's notable see and be seen spots, Mel's (named for owners Mel and Jane Masters)

is much improved over last year. Terrific atmosphere, attentive service; a Cal-Med menu with terrific risotto, grilled mahi mahi, superb pork loin, and great desserts. The booths can be noisy, so if you want to do some business here, ask for a table. \$\$-\$\$\$\$ Also a very reasonable lunch menu with most items under \$10.

• **Cherry Cricket, 2641 E. 2nd Ave. (303) 322-7666.** The Cricket is somewhat out of place in this list. It's almost a dive, but a really great dive. It's a neighborhood tavern with 120 beers and one ter-

rific burger; a pretty good Greek salad, too. If you don't like secondhand cigarette smoke, don't go in, or ask for the back room, but you won't get the local atmosphere. (How do those plumbers drink a bucket of Coronitas and install your water heater in the afternoon?) \$

Others worth a visit: Bistro Adde Brewster (power lunches), Cucina Colore (Italian Trattoria), Petras (Cajun), Chipotle Mexican Grill (one pound burritos, local chain), Chez Jose (ditto), Modena (family-style Italian), Piatti (Italian), Bandera (American), Bombay Clay Oven, Little Ollies (Chinese), Chinook Tavern (German, Continental), Eggshell (breakfast), 3rd Avenue Eclectic Burgers.

17th Avenue

Just about a mile east of your hotel is the start of the 17th Avenue dining area. It's



Wynkoop Brewery

near downtown, and many of Denver's larger hospitals, and hosts many of our city's finer eating experiences.

• **Strings,* 1700 Humboldt St. (303) 831-7310.** Consistently rated one of Denver's best. Impeccable service and imaginative presentations keep this restaurant among the most popular in town. The menu offers many pastas, a large selection of seafood, and also veal chops. Reservations strongly recommended. Free on-street parking, valet parking, vegetarian items. \$\$\$

• **Pasquini's Uptown, 1336 E. 17th Ave. (303) 863-8252.** Across the street from Strings and in a different socio-economic class, this pizza joint also bakes and sells, city-wide, some terrific bread. Noted for terrific calzones and pizzas. Very reasonable, decent service, always interesting local art for sale as decoration. Loud crowd on weekend nights. Cheap wine list—a bottle of Monte Antico Rosso for \$10 is one of their more expensive selections! No reservations. Free on-street parking. \$-\$\$

• **The Avenue Grill, 630 E. 17th Avenue (303) 861-2820.** One of our favorite neighborhood grills. You'll find an engaging '40s ambience and a diverse menu ranging from burgers (ranked as one of Denver's ten best) to pastas to gourmet specialties with an emphasis on seafood. They have a great wine list and a comfortable back bar. Reservations accepted. Free parking across the street. Vegetarian items. \$\$

• **Café Berlin, 2005 E. 17th Avenue (303) 377-5896.** When's the last time you had the perfect potato pancake topped with applesauce and sour cream, or perhaps a sumptuous schnitzel? This cozy little spot offers authentic German cuisine prepared with a lighter, healthier touch and features German beers and wines to compliment their fare. Reservations accepted. \$

• **Las Margaritas, 1033 E. 17th Avenue (303) 830-2199.** A fine local Mexican spot with (surprise) a wide variety of Margaritas. The portions are large and the ingredients fresh. Try the homemade tamales! Fun, friendly atmosphere and service. Late-night menu and two-for-one drink specials from 10 p.m. to 1 a.m. Sunday brunch from 10:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

Reservations accepted. Outdoor seating, free parking, vegetarian items. \$\$

More of Denver's best we couldn't bear to leave out

• **Tante Louise,* 4900 E. Colfax Avenue (303) 355-4489.** Tante Louise is not close to downtown or 17th Avenue, but one reviewer and his wife love this place for very special evenings and couldn't bear not including it. You'll find exquisitely prepared French food graciously served in a very intimate setting. It has been called Denver's most romantic restaurant. They also feature a wonderful wine list. Reservations strongly recommended. Closed Sundays. Valet parking, vegetarian items. \$\$\$

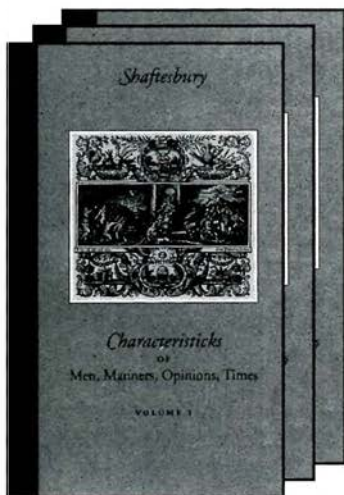
• **Barolo Grill,* 3030 E. 6th Ave. (303) 393-1040.** Wonderful Northern Italian served in an upbeat Italian countryside style room. Expert service, created in part by the chef/owner's habit of closing for two weeks every summer and taking the staff to Italy for a learning vacation. Very extensive Italian wine list. Valet or free on-street parking. Reservations required. \$\$\$

• **Highlands Garden Café,* 3927 W. 32nd Ave. (303) 458-5920.** Literally a neighborhood restaurant—it's in two converted houses—this place used to be called Today's Gourmet, and it still is gourmet. Imaginative, light, and healthy meals served in an intimate location. The food has been consistently excellent for a decade and the regular clientele keep coming back. Reservations required. \$\$\$

• **Bang!* 3472 W. 32nd Ave. (303) 455-1117.** Terrific American favorites like meat loaf and mashed potatoes, catfish, great desserts, reasonable prices. They recently moved across the street to accommodate increased demand. Open only for dinner, Tuesday through Saturday, 5–10p.m. No reservations. Beer and wine only. \$

• **My Brother's Bar, 2376 15th St. (303) 455-9991.** Noted for good and inexpensive burgers, this is a favorite spot for lunch with downtown workers and Aurarians. It's a hike, even from LoDo, but it is walkable. Right around the corner from the new REI Flagship store in the old Forney Railroad Museum building. Worth the walk, which takes you across the Platte River. \$ ■

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February 2001. Foreword, note on the text, Shaftesbury's index, index to this edition.

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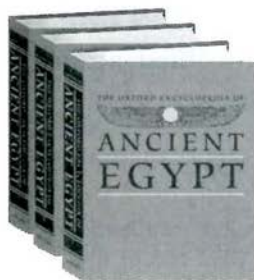
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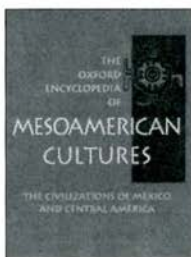
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