

# Introduction to the Symposium

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Desert Botanical Garden

There is a Spanish saying—"I speak two languages, I live two lives." I have enjoyed living in two provinces. There are three other lives I can mention; the first is my pre-*Agave* period, the second, my *Agave* life, and thirdly my post-*Agave* life. It is proving hard to get free of agaves, as I had hoped to do when my *Agave* monograph was published. It seems that the mothering arms of Mayahuel will not release me. I am so old now that my birthdays seem to come several times a year. Last year, Manuel Puebla, a good steroid man (agaves are high in steroid precursors), gave me some pills to help me reach 140 years of age. Briefly, I looked forward to my third life, but ALAS! an inspector at the border took those pills away from me!!

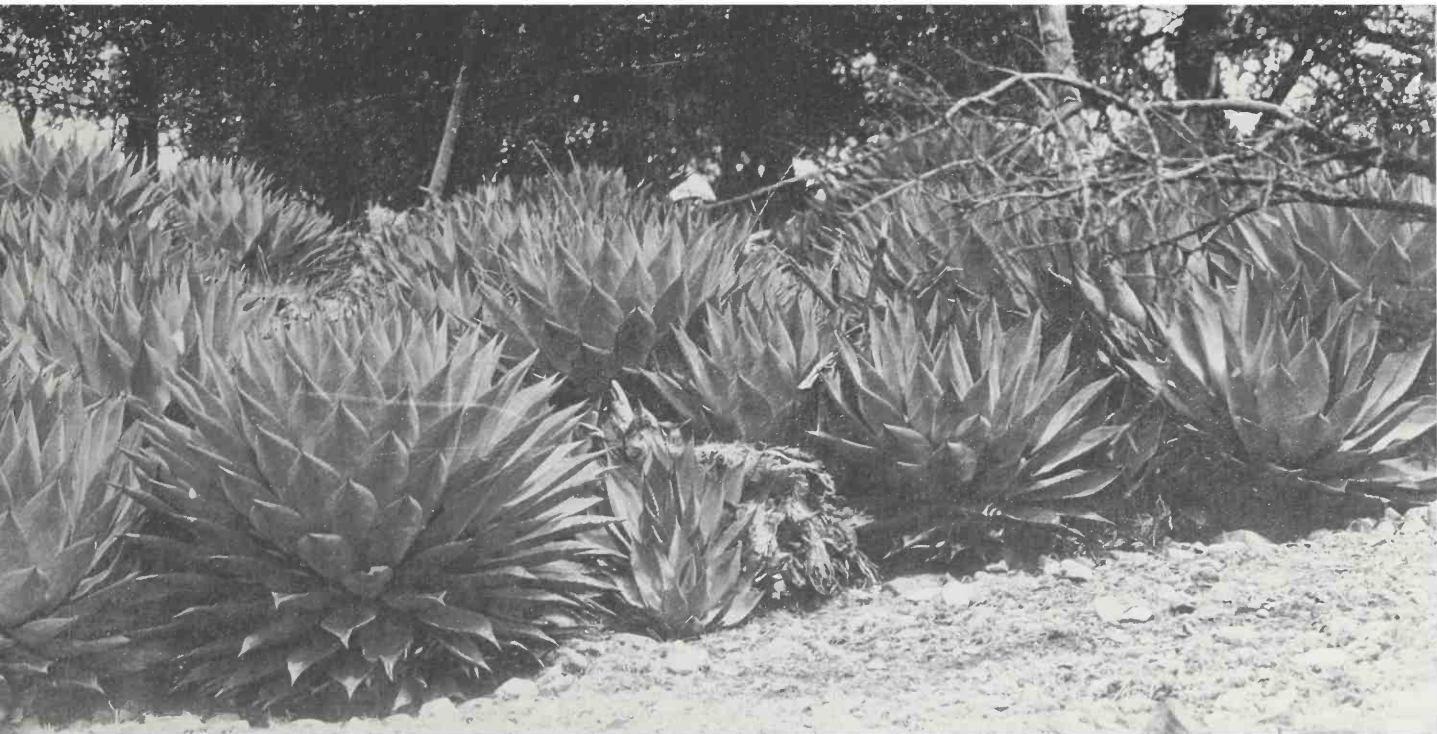
You can imagine the great satisfaction I feel in seeing all you *Agave* students here. You can all carry on as I lay off, each in your own individual way, and you will collectively exceed my work. How fortunate that we can practice the greatest endowment given to man; the pleasure of learning and imparting that learning to fellow men; young and old alike. It

can be a hunger that never distresses, it may be periodically allayed, but is a renewable personal resource, like the air we breathe, an ethereal nourishment better than a shot of tequila.

With this symposium I see some surcease from my *Agave* predicament. You are all going to write the next chapter, the chapter I intended to write, but never did—Current Research on Agaves, or some such title. It will be better than I could have done, because little of it existed when I laid down the *Agave* burden. New facts, perspectives, and I hope new ideas will appear with your endeavors. You will not only finish an unwritten chapter, but you are starting a new volume of Agaveology.

I find it very suitable that Mexico was first to put on an *Agave* symposium, because it has been the center of the *Agave* world since long-ago prehistoric times. We are fortunate that Dr. Manuel Robert is with us here, as he led the first *Agave* symposium in Mérida, Yucatán, in November of 1981. I must also mention Dr. Frank Crosswhite of the Boyce Thompson Southwestern Arboretum, who is playing a major role by publishing your contributions to this *Agave* Symposium in the excellent young journal *Desert Plants*. This journal is published at the Arboretum by the University of Arizona, which is also opening its own centennial celebration, even as our Arizona State University is soon closing its own. So, this delicate cooperation between our sister universities gives a fuller insight into the educational matrix than the rivalries engendered by athletic competition.

With the assistance of our fellow Mexican biologists, we reach out beyond our political borders and step forth into the world. My idealism might lead me to hope for a world led by scientists rather than by lawyer-politicians, who sadly are fated to deal with the contentions of men. Let us stick to our own last, the agaves, which, for all we know, may be better organisms than ourselves. I have met them and the only trouble they showed was with myself. *Adelante Magueyeros!!*





**Frontispiece.** *Agave sebastiana* on the island of San Benito del Oeste, Baja California Norte, has a rather low ratio of leaf length to width (see Table 2). In *Agave*, leaf shape and rosette configuration can be correlated with environmental factors. See text for explanation. Photo by Martha Ames Burgess.