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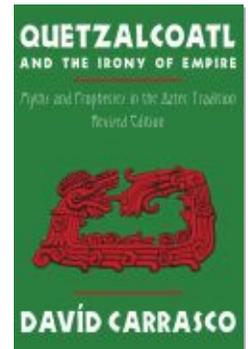
Quetzalcoatl and the Irony of Empire

Published by University Press of Colorado

Quetzalcoatl and the Irony of Empire: Myths and Prophecies in the Aztec Tradition, Revised Edition.

Rev. ed. ed. University Press of Colorado, 2001.

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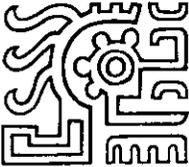
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The Sources: From Storybook to Encyclopedia

QUETZALCOATL IN THE PRIMARY SOURCES Text and Context

These religious documents are at the same time historical documents; they are an integral part of different cultural contexts.

Mircea Eliade



The historian of religions working with primary sources representing Mesoamerican religions is faced with a distinctly complex relationship between the texts and their contexts. Not only is he faced with the problem of understanding the usual idiosyncratic influences of indigenous cultural and historical realities upon the origin, contents, and purposes of these sources, but also with the problem of understanding the influences of a foreign, conquering culture upon the bulk of the primary evidence. The documents that record events under the dynasties of the Aztecs, their neighbors, and precursors reflect not only the world views, beliefs, and artistic styles of ancient Mexican society, but also the world views, beliefs, and millennial dreams of the dynamic conquest culture of New Spain. To use Mircea Eliade's phrase in a way he did not intend, the religious documents from Mesoamerica are a part of at least two different cultural contexts, the pre-Columbian and the colonial world of New Spain.¹

It is not that authentic pre-Columbian material is unavailable to the scholar because of the oppressive strategies of conquering Spaniards. But the student of pre-Columbian cultures needs to practice a special form of the "hermeneutics of suspicion" when addressing and using those documents classified as primary sources. "Hermeneutics of suspicion" means

that before we display a "willingness to listen" and try to make something meaningful out of the material available, we must ask penetrating questions about the nature, reliability, and intentions of the material itself.² Reading the evidence shows that the impact of Spanish colonial processes generated a heated, pressurized, dangerous social atmosphere which penetrated the sixteenth-century transmission of indigenous historical and religious traditions to the extent that almost all of the available documents contain alterations in the picture of pre-Columbian life. This does not eliminate the possibility of interpreting creatively, if cautiously, the evidence about Quetzalcoatl and the pre-Columbian city, but it does require that we postpone interpretation until we have examined the historical and hermeneutical circumstances that affected the transmission of information about pre-Columbian life. We find ourselves faced with a perplexing situation. On the one hand, it is clear that a thick Spanish, colonial, Christian gloss has been brushed across the ideas, beliefs, symbols, and dramas of ancient Mexican culture. At times, the evidence seems distorted, confused, and inconsistent. Our attempt to understand and interpret pre-Hispanic religion is thwarted by what one scholar calls "an acute consciousness of what may have been lost."³ On the other hand, it appears that significant segments of authentic pre-Hispanic culture can be discerned and understood in an illuminating fashion. Through the gloss, indigenous images and patterns show themselves in an engaging manner.

A close look at the primary sources reveals that during the sixteenth century there were important changes in the types of documents that carried the evidence about ancient Mexico. The scholar is faced with a broad spectrum of sources; at one end we have the pre-Columbian storybook, which consists of elaborately painted scenes depicting Indian genealogies, calendars, wars, rituals, and creation myths. At the other end we have the same material presented in European style prose histories (in one instance in encyclopedic form), often with Christian polemics and interpretations inserted. These changes reflect, to some degree, the social dynamics of the colonial culture. Social, religious, and political developments in New Spain altered the style and content of those documents that are today classified as primary sources. This dynamic literary situation demands our attention and caution so that we can realistically assess the degree of European manipulation and the persistence of authentic pre-Columbian beliefs. In the short section that follows, I briefly summarize the influences the conquest had on the transmission and destruction of the pre-Columbian world view in the sixteenth century. Then we shall look at the specific documents that carry important evidence about the Toltec tradition and Quetzalcoatl. Thus, our account of the

textual meanings of Quetzalcoatl and city begins by using what Robert McC. Adams calls a contextual approach, which formulates "a series of structured summaries or syntheses, rather than confining analyses to fragmentary, isolated cultural components."⁴ As will be clear, Quetzalcoatl's role in the history of Mesoamerican cities can best be discovered through combining a synthetic outlook with "a tolerance for ambiguity" found in all the primary sources. It is through the combination of suspicion, synthesis, and tolerance that one is free to practice a creative hermeneutics in Mesoamerican studies.

Conquerors and Apostles

In 1535 the apostolic inquisitor of Mexico, Juan de Zumárraga, ordered the collection and destruction of the pictorial libraries belonging to the Nahuatl cultural capital Tezcoco. Tradition tells us that the abundance of existing manuscripts, when gathered together, formed a mountain-heap in the local marketplace. In a Christian ceremony marked by a religious fervor aimed at wiping out Indian idolatry, the brilliant intellectual and artistic treasures of ancient Mexico were committed to the flames and became ashes. Although this particular story may be apocryphal,⁵ it is a fact, bitter to the minds of scholars, that of the scores of pictorial manuscripts extant in Mexico in 1519 showing the histories, genealogies, cosmologies, and cartographies of the ancient culture, only sixteen remain today.⁶

The destruction and defacing of ancient Mexican symbols and images was by no means restricted to the picture books. The earliest conquerors, priests and soldiers alike, saw the destruction of the symbols of the indigenous religion as one of their purposes. Hernán Cortes's march from Villa Rica de la Vera Cruz to Tenochtitlán was punctuated with the removal, destruction, and whitewashing of religious monuments, idols, and images. Temples were whitewashed, idols were broken and crosses were set up in their place. This process was often characterized by symbolic and structural superimposition of Spanish Christian forms. Consider Bernal Díaz del Castillo's report of an amusing event that took place in the Aztec capital soon after the arrival of the Spanish troops. Moctezuma had invited Cortes and his inner circle of officers and priests to visit the major ceremonial pyramid located in the center of the city. The scene supposedly took place on the summit of the "great Cue" in Tlatelolco. Díaz del Castillo writes:

Let us leave this and return to our captain who said to Fray Bartolome de Olmedo, who happened to be nearby him, "It seems to me, Señor Padre, that it would be a good thing to throw out a feeler to Montezuma as to whether he would allow

us to build our church here," and the Padre replied that it would be a good thing if it were successful, but it seemed to him that it was not quite a suitable time to speak about it, for Montezuma did not appear to be inclined to do such a thing.⁷

In the end Moctezuma's inclinations worked to enhance the Spanish conquest and the superimposition of Spanish Catholic forms became a common practice in many cities and towns that contained important ceremonial centers. The material and spiritual conquest of the Mexican kingdom was partially accomplished by the destruction of indigenous monuments, books, images, and symbols.

The Spanish effort to eliminate Indian symbols and images was successful enough that scholars debate whether we should lament the extinction of pre-Columbian cultural forms or study their fragmented survivals. Aztec society was so seriously wrecked that colonial historians were faced with reconstructing parts of a dead civilization. A careful examination of the art motifs in sixteenth-century Mexican art and architecture has led the distinguished art historian George Kubler to lament, "nearly all symbolic expressions of native origin were suppressed by the colonial authorities as well as by native leaders whose position depended upon conforming obedience." There were a number of distinctive dimensions to the conquest of Mexico. One was speed. Kubler summarized the situation: "One generation after the conquest of Mexico, by 1550, a great colonial state stood upon the ruins of Indian civilization. The rapid creation of this ordered polity was beset by factional disputes, contradictory methods, and the familiar struggle for power."⁸ Seldom, if ever, has a developing civilization, with its economic, political, and spiritual processes intact and alive, ended with such sweeping finality. Although important vestiges of pre-Columbian life continued into the sixteenth century, indeed some survive today, the complex processes that constituted the native literary tradition, its manuscript art, and the political, religious, and economic systems of Aztec society were used for Spanish gain or destroyed altogether. As Kubler has noted, the confrontation of Spaniard and American Indian "produced a reaction violent enough to strip apart the symbolic system from the practical behavior of an entire continent." But it is important to be aware that the many fires and purification rituals of the conquerors were ignited as part of a much larger plan of cultural alteration, a plan to gain control of the content and transmission of the ancient world view in order to transform it. One does not have to read far into the documents to see that the Spaniards had more in mind than the destruction of dead men's thoughts lingering in the screenfolds. The fires of Zumárraga destroyed the brilliant colors and signs of the Nahuatl picture books—

they became black ashes. But the event symbolized a more profound, if less dramatic, change—a kind of literary conquest that was central to the transformation of world views. We refer to the intense and intricate changes in the documentary evidence that took place during the last three-quarters of the sixteenth century. These changes, as we shall see, were directed by religious and cultural preferences that resulted not merely in the evolution of one kind of document into another, but in the transmutation of one general form and style into a radically different form and style. And the content was changed as well on more than a few occasions.

In the decades immediately following the fall of Tenochtitlán, another strategy concerning the indigenous historical and religious traditions operated in the minds of the colonizers. Along with the campaign to eliminate idolatrous documents, to “put an end to everything indigenous, especially in the realm of ideas, even so far as to leave no sign of them,”⁹ there developed a movement to collect, reproduce, and interpret selected parts of the native pictorial and oral tradition so that they could be used (a) to inform European society, especially the Spanish court and literate public, about the natives of New Spain, (b) to organize the developing colonial society, and (c) to enhance the missionary work of New World Mendicants and insure the effective conversion of the natives who had so abruptly become a part of Spanish colonial society. In each instance, the native pictorial and oral tradition was revived and the results are immensely valuable for our understanding of pre-Columbian life and religion.

The conquest of Mexico was one aggressive part of the Iberian project to expand its hegemony beyond the known world. One result of this amazing adventure was, surprisingly, a reorientation in world view that, in cartographic terms, saw the growing outline of America replace Jerusalem as the symbolic center of the world.¹⁰ The enchanting places and inhabitants of the Indies were the focus of tremendous curiosity and confusion in Spain. This led to a flurry of published accounts and histories of the explorations, discoveries, and conquests, as well as descriptions of the societies that had been subdued. In this context, there was an effort to produce documents “more satisfying to the Europeans and make them more readable to one not versed in the native traditions.”¹¹ This resulted in the limited but enthusiastic encouragement of Indian painters still conversant with the pre-conquest picture-writing tradition to reproduce picture books that would attract and please European eyes. The best example of this can be seen in the work sponsored by the greatest patron of the native artists, the viceroy of Mexico, Don Antonio de Mendoza, an enthusiastic collector of native “curios.” Called by one scholar a “Renaissance Maecenas,” Mendoza noted that the ravages of the conquest had

destroyed countless native artifacts and had effaced the craft traditions that generated them.¹² He responded in the 1540s by hiring native artists and establishing them in workshops where they could fabricate "curios" for his own collection and for King Charles I of Spain. One of the most beautiful and revealing pictorial documents composed under his patronage was the *Codex Mendoza*, which consisted of seventy-one folios bound at the spine in the manner of European books, but painted largely in the native style. Picture pages alternate with Spanish translations of the pictographs and ideographs. Although the pre-Columbian mode of pictorial representation had been altered somewhat in this document, authentic Aztec patterns of symbolic thought, tribute collection, and daily life were presented, making this codex extremely valuable for interpreting Mesoamerican urbanism. In this manner, the ancient tradition was revived and Spanish understanding of Aztec life increased.

In New Spain the task of building a new system forced both the colonizers and the colonized to utilize the indigenous maps, tribute records, land claims, and genealogies in order for Spanish political and administrative order to be imposed and maintained in such a rapidly changing society. In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the new colonial communities, a research effort was ordered by Philip II of Spain. He had a series of questionnaires sent to the colony, compelling the local administrators of each town and region to compile organized descriptions of native society. A large number of *Relaciones Geográficas* and *Descripciones* were compiled, each requiring a map or *pintura* of the local community's geography.¹³ These maps carried vestiges of the native pictorial tradition and served to reanimate the art in local situations. These administrative documents are invaluable for understanding the geography, political organization, and social character of parts of pre-Hispanic Mexico. In several instances, they provide illuminating views of religious traditions including beliefs about Quetzalcoatl and the Toltecs.

The great stimulation for the transmission of native beliefs and pictorial and oral traditions into the colonial period came from the friars who were committed to transforming Indian consciousness.¹⁴ It is from the documents generated through contact with Mendicant institutions that we draw a great deal of information about pre-Columbian religion and the city. Within the charged political atmosphere of the developing colony, the Mendicant orders had immense influence on all parts of life. The most influential religious order was the Franciscan. Along with the Dominicans and Augustinians, they became the guardians, teachers, and spokesmen for Indian peoples. They planned the new towns, built the churches, and controlled the formation of the new social order. These Christian missionaries were

driven by an especially intense spiritual vision. They wanted to establish a new world and new church in America that would imitate the primitive church of the Apostles of Christ. This apostolic mission was symbolically initiated in 1524, when twelve Franciscans were ceremoniously welcomed by Cortes in Mexico City to begin the evangelization of the New World. This illustrious moment was memorialized in a mural at the convent of Huejotzingo, where the Apostolic Twelve kneel in prayer before a cross set up in Mexico. These original New World apostles and their brothers spread out rapidly to set up missionary centers in the major Indian towns. An intense millennial attitude inspired some of these friars to work speedily with the Indians so that the gospel would finally be spread to all members of the human race and the Kingdom of God could be realized on earth.¹⁵ However, following the initial claims of large-scale instant conversion of the Indians to Christianity, it became clear that Indian religious attitudes continued to influence all aspects of Indian life. Within a decade after the military conquest, a number of priests realized that the spiritual conquest would be a long-term process, and they took the approach of learning about Indian religion and life so that it could be effectively transformed. This approach of learning about pagans in order to transform them resulted in the discovery of a wealth of pre-Columbian beliefs and practices.

This apostolic strategy and the research that accompanied it were legitimated by a patronage system, the *Patronato Real*, which gave Catholic priests the power to exercise total control and authority over the Indians, holding them in "protective custody until the time when their spiritual and temporal maturity should have arrived."¹⁶ This mission was officially authorized by the pope who dispensed power to the Spanish Crown to assign the task of evangelization to its chosen missionary groups. One expression of this patronage system was the establishment of a college, El Colegio de la Santa Cruz, in Tlatelolco, that attempted to train Indian students in the doctrines of the Christian religion and in the classical educational system of the Spanish Renaissance. Here, as elsewhere, the priests not only trained Indian youth, but also used them and their contacts to gain deeper views into the pagan religion. The priests became the patrons of Indian education and of recording the guarded expressions of the pre-Columbian world view. Interaction with the native priests who survived the conquest and the native students who transcribed their statements greatly stimulated a number of Mendicants like Toribio de Motolinía, Bernardino de Sahagún, and Andrés de Olmos, all of whom produced books with rich and detailed information about pre-Columbian society. Still, these works must be approached cautiously because most of the informants were from urban centers and had already undergone

some acculturation to Spanish Christianity. Also, in some cases the scribes who recorded the statements and memories of Aztec life were trained by the Spaniards. Complicating the accuracy of the documents further, different local traditions were often lumped together in the final versions. Yet, a remarkable amount of valuable information about pre-Columbian life can be mined from these sources.

One important result of these approaches was the extensive and often intricate change in the documentary evidence generated during the sixteenth century. One embryonic expression of colonial alterations is reflected in the *Codex Kingsborough*, where we are presented with two maps drawn in colonial terms, representing the same general landscape, but in two radically different ways. One map, the unfinished pre-Columbian style map (folio 208r), was the model for the other (folio 209r). The earlier map consists of roads and place signs done in the native pictorial style, whereas the second map, showing the same space, has been radically transformed into a landscape painting with natural images of forests, mountains, and hills, a practice not seen in pre-Columbian pictures of space. In the native style map we have, according to Donald Robertson, "signs of nature," while in the colonial map we have a Renaissance "image of nature."¹⁷ This development suggests two different orientations to space and its qualities. The more native style map, like other storybooks, with their place signs, fantastic animals, empty spaces, human and divine figures in communication, was used as a text for oral stories about events that took place at special locations imbued with power and significance. In the second map, done for the European eye, the same space was transformed into a lush landscape, a garden of the New World, where man and nature had no discernible pattern of interaction. Much more than a style of painting was lost in this transformation: a way of perceiving the powers of space and the telling of stories about these powerful spaces was replaced by comforting images of a fresh, attractive world of nature.

This kind of change was intensified when the "images of nature" were further translated into prose descriptions of nature, gods, history, rites, and politics—indeed all aspects of pre-Columbian life. Often, it is the end product of this process of transformation that we must trust for interpreting Mesoamerican religion. Indeed, in a recent highly respected bibliography of Mesoamerican religions, it is stated that "the best single source for the study of ancient Mexican religions is Sahagún's *General History*,"¹⁸ which is a prose Spanish and Nahuatl account of pictorial and oral traditions originally done in the native style. Cartoonlike Renaissance versions of the native pictures accompany parts of the text. A literary conquest has brought about the evolution of one kind of document into another and the transmutation

of the general form and style into another. Donald Robertson has divided this process into three steps. First, there were picture books done in the native style without prose commentary. Second, the conquest produced documents with pictorial events glossed in Spanish, Nahuatl, or French. Third, prose works appeared that occasionally included Europeanized pictorials.

The result of this process is a hazardous field of evidence characterized by a pervasive dichotomy.¹⁹ The division in its most general sense consists of pre-Columbian archaeology and storybooks on the one hand, and post-Columbian storybooks and prose works painted and written by Indians or Spaniards on the other. Within this dichotomy is a series of types of documents that reflect both Spanish influence and pre-Columbian attitudes, practices, and beliefs. More specifically, the present study will rely on seven types of documents, which include (a) pre-Columbian storybooks that escaped destruction, (b) post-Columbian storybooks generated through Spanish patronage and independently by Indians with Spanish glosses, (c) early prose works in Nahuatl and Spanish, largely anonymous, (d) prose writings of descendants of Indian elites, (e) letters and histories by Spanish witnesses of the conquest and its aftermath, (f) priestly writings best represented by Sahagún's works, and (g) archaeological evidence. All of these types of "texts" contain native pictorial or historical traditions, or both, though the degree of European influence varies significantly. In what follows I will discuss briefly the types and character of pre-Columbian storybooks since, strictly speaking, they constitute "the primary source." The bulk of this chapter will trace the transformation from storybook to encyclopedia by focusing on those works that contain important information about Quetzalcoatl as god and god-man. In this manner, our suspicions will be both confirmed and illuminated and our awareness of Quetzalcoatl's meaning will begin to expand.

The Storybooks

Form of Writing. If we attempt to identify the primary sources for the study of Quetzalcoatl and the ancient city, it becomes apparent that we are dealing, in part, with literary echoes. But, instead of just facing the problems of identifying a shout that grows fainter, we must face the phenomenon of other voices picking up the shouted word and re-shouting it, adding on and leaving off tones and timbres according to their particular capacity, education, and purpose. Johanna Broda's study of ethnohistorical sources concerning ancient Mexico reveals emphatically that a few of the earliest colonial sources, which depended on storybooks, were copied by later writers who changed the context of the earlier material.²⁰ More original material—already a combination of both clear and vague allusions, mythical acts, and

historical events—was seriously changed in its context and significance according to the interests of later authors. Her study makes it clear that it is more accurate to speak of primary source material within works rather than to label them primary sources.

Behind these distortions in the colonial sources is the original pre-Columbian form of transmission, the pictorial sign and the oral interpreter. These two elements constitute, in pure form, the primary source, or what Jill Leslie Furst calls "the final authority." She notes that when the chronicler diverges from the pictorial material, "the pictorial version must take precedence—the manuscript as the presumably faithful rendition of the oral tradition, must be the final authority."²¹ It is this combination of painted images explained by the oral specialists that leads to the use of the term "storybook" here. The pre-Columbian pictorials were not used by merely looking at the pictures, but also by explaining them verbally and telling the stories they depicted. In her fine analysis of picture writing from ancient southern Mexico, Mary E. Smith claims that the Mixtec codices "may be considered as possible prototypes of the lost pre-Columbian manuscripts of the Valley of Mexico,"²² and she notes that in some of these documents we witness dynastic histories focusing on the genealogies and achievements of Mixtec rulers from major towns and cities. It appears that pre-Columbian storybooks were part of the art of the ruling classes and contained stories painted and understood by very few individuals, usually the priestly sons of noble families who memorized the stories and pictorial conventions of their culture.

While Jill Furst's claim about the "final authority" is ideally accurate, it is not always relevant because the majority of the documents have no related pictorial tradition. Prose works usually exist independent of pictorial images. Yet, in spite of the rupture of the conquest, it is apparent that certain symbols, metaphors, and traditions from the indigenous system of storytelling and writing have persisted through time and conflict. It is clear that the majority of sixteenth-century scholarship done under Spanish patronage depended heavily, though with a variety of methods and intentions, on extant painted manuscripts and their *nahuatlato* interpreters. While this heartens us with its suggestion of authentic nearness to the primary source, the problem of echoes comes into play when we realize that most of the painted manuscripts were destroyed or lost after the "translation." The problem intensifies when we remember that the Mesoamerican writing system, symbolic forms, and types of history were different from those of the documents in which we place the burden of our interpretation. Still, the recent systematic analysis of ethnohistorical sources in the *Handbook of Middle American Indians* has settled on the

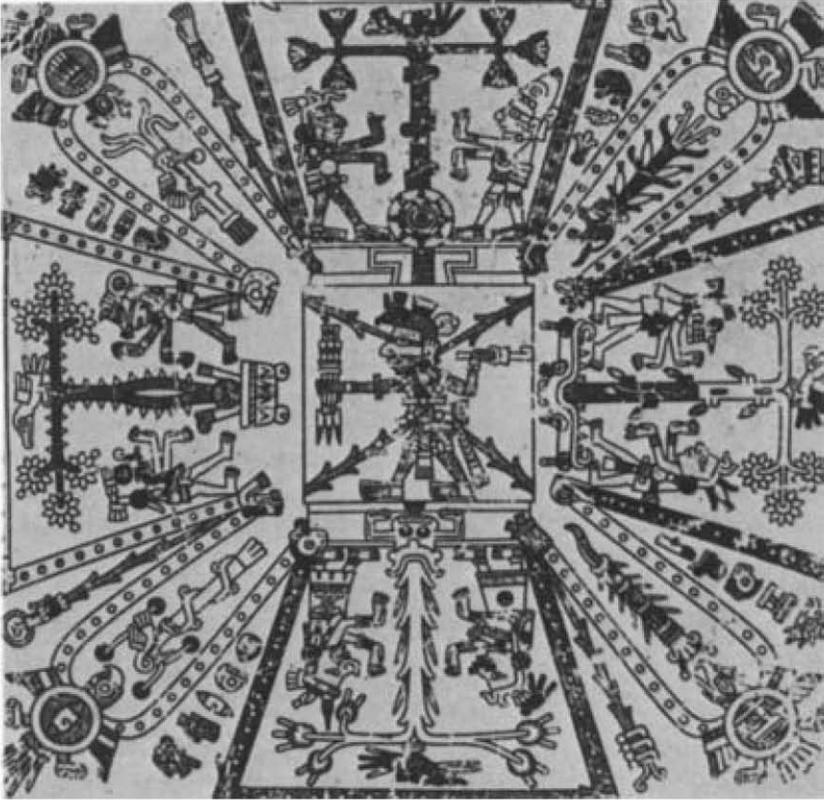


FIG. 1. This image, from the Codex Fejérváry-Mayer, presents a typical Mesoamerican view of the cosmos as divided into five major sections corresponding to the four quarters and the center. Each quarter contains a cosmic tree and bird flanked by the deities of that direction. The fire god occupies the center.

judgment that in spite of all the disruption of the pre-Columbian literary tradition, “probably a gross compatibility” exists between the surviving texts and the types and quantities of original documentation.²³

This writing system, studied seriously since 1849, has been named the Mixteca-Puebla tradition, referring to stylistic and iconographic forms that appeared in parts of Mesoamerica around the tenth century and most clearly articulated in the storybooks from the Puebla and Mixtec regions. This pictorial system is found in two types of sources: (a) a series of storybooks of both preconquest and postconquest composition, and (b) low relief sculpture carved in such famous structures as the Aztec calendar stones, the Tizoc stone, the Teocalli de la Guerra

Sagrada, as well as sparse examples of wood or bone fragments and smaller stone objects. The system is partially understood because it was flourishing at the time of the conquest and continued to be used in numerous ways throughout the sixteenth century. Some of the surviving examples are glossed in Spanish or in indigenous languages, principally Nahuatl.

I. J. Gelb's lucid *Study of Writing* is helpful to our understanding of these primary sources in two ways, first, through its classification of writing systems and, second, through the comments on the evolution of writing. Gelb defines writing and its relationship to forms of speech through a descriptive and comparative method. His analysis of writing systems from different parts of the world and different eras in history, including ancient America, led him to recognize that though writing can be defined as a "system of human intercommunication by means of conventional visible marks," there exist radical differences in the forms of writing. On one end of the spectrum is the semasiographic writing system in which "pictures convey the general meaning intended by the writer . . . who can express meaning directly without an intervening linguistic form," and on the other end is the phonographic writing system, which exists when phoneticism and syllables of speech are central.²⁴ Roughly speaking, these two forms are equivalent to the dichotomy of pre-Columbian storybook and post-Columbian encyclopedia.

Gelb's second relevant point is that there is no smooth emergence of one form of writing from the other. There is a great difference between the stage of writing where notions are communicated by signs having a loose connection with speech and the "phonographic stage (expressing speech)." In the former system, a loose relationship between writing and speech fosters the independence of picture writing from phonetic forms, an independence which is lost in the developed systems of writing where phonetics reduces signs and pictures to written substitutions for its spoken counterparts. It seems that, in spite of the confusing labels for Mesoamerican writing systems (ikological, elliptical, symbolic, descriptive, representational), we are dealing with a semasiographic system consisting principally of two types of messages. First, we have pictographs where the images of the objects referred to are used individually or in a series to tell something in general terms.

Animals, plants, birds, mountains, streams and trees are recognizable as such; the scenes depicted are comparable to photographs of dances, processions, self-castigation, sacrifice or battles. Gods, goddesses or priests and common people are rec-

ognizable by their actions, their postures, their clothing, painting and headdress.²⁵

In other words, we have images of the things themselves.

Second, we have ideographs in that images of objects stand for ideas associated with the images. For instance, the picture of a flower could represent a flower as a pictograph, while as an ideograph it could mean sacrificial blood. The image of a bundle of reeds would likely signify a bundle of reeds as a pictograph; but a tied bundle of reeds appearing as an ideograph can refer to the end of a great fifty-two-year calendrical period. Usually ideographs and pictographs occur on the same page.²⁶ In all cases, these signs form narrative drawings, that is, drawings whose meanings are communicated through the oral telling of the picture sequences. The already noted independence of picture writing from speech forms resulted in a creative leeway in interpretation for specialists. It is clear from the available sources that these specialists had a "penchant for varying place names and name signs, employing different graphemes and grapheme combinations to produce the same result."²⁷ One good illustration of the ambiguity and richness of this system is given in Jill Leslie Furst's discussion of Mixtec star symbolism. She notes that the image of stars in the *Codex Vienna* is a representation of human eyes, reflecting a pun on the Mixtec word for star.²⁸ This ideographic pun is further complicated by the fact that Mixtec languages are tonal and more precise meanings depend in part on pitch. Through careful comparison of interior evidence of *Codex Vienna* star symbols, she demonstrates how one single image could have been used, by a skillful teller of stories, to mean "the chief or head (e.g., the most important) eye of the heavens, an object that moves and returns to its proper place—and that in doing so, marks the passage of time." Complex metaphorical meanings are embedded in these apparently simple signs. This complexity and ambiguity is perhaps behind the report of the translator (from picture to Nahuatl to Spanish) of the *Codex Mendoza*, that the Indian interpreters of the pictures in the document argued so intensely over a number of images that he had only ten days to prepare his manuscript before it was to be sent from Mexico to the court of Charles V.

It is apparent that a phonetic subsystem was developing within the narrative drawing system, specifically in personal and place names. Although the extent of phoneticism is contested, it seems likely that an indigenous phonetic system was developing during late Aztec times, a system which, along with its more stable picture-writing system, was abruptly stifled and transformed by the conquest. Concerning the rupture caused by this development, Robert Ricard

notes, "In whatever way it was done, the introduction of the Latin alphabet for the transcription of native tongues was a revolution in the intellectual history of Mexico, the importance of which cannot be exaggerated."

The Documents. Picture writing in the native style is found in codices that, in Mesoamerican studies, include complete documents or isolated pages, cloth paintings or European style manuscripts containing indigenous material and symbolic conventions, in an indigenous style. These codices are sometimes referred to as *mapas* or *pinturas*. The basic format is called the *tira*, which consists of long, narrow strips of native paper or animal hides, glued together, with drawings and paintings on them. The most typical form is the screenfold, a large accordion-pleated *tira* with a series of paintings that can be read in a number of directions, sometimes indicated by guiding lines. Third, we have the roll, a *tira* that has been rolled rather than folded. This type is rare, though there is at least one, the *Selden Roll*, which has important information about Quetzalcoatl on it. Finally, there are *lienzos*, which consist of large sheets of picture writing on cotton or maguey cloth sewn together. Although no preconquest *lienzos* still exist, there is no doubt that they were abundant in pre-Hispanic Mexico.

There are sixteen pre-Columbian documents still in existence. While the exact provenance of these surviving gems is often in doubt, the following summary can be made. Five ritual calendrical manuscripts which form the celebrated *Borgia* group are known to have originated somewhere in the Puebla-Tlaxcala region. They survived, perhaps, because they were sent to Europe during or soon after the conquest, before zealous priests and officials could get possession of them. Six historical-genealogical manuscripts survive from the western Oaxaca region and are known generally as the *Nuttal* group screenfolds. From the extremely brilliant lowland Maya culture, we have only three surviving ritual-calendrical screenfolds known as *Codex Dresden*, *Codex Paris*, and *Codex Madrid*. From the central Mexican region, where the destruction of manuscripts was most intense, we have two disputed pre-Columbian ritual calendrical works, the *Codex Borbonicus* and the *Tonalamatl Aubin*. The history of all these documents is as obscure as some of their meanings. We know that twelve reached Europe in the first half of the sixteenth century; two of these were sent by Cortes before the conquest ended. Two others probably remained in Mexican libraries, passing from collection to collection until they emerged in the Boturini collection in 1743. Two others were kept hidden in Indian communities until the end of the nineteenth century.

For a sampling of the dispersal of these primary sources, let us note when and where a few emerged into public awareness:

- Codex Borgia*, Cardinal Stephano Borgia, Rome, 1792–97
- Codex Fejérváry-Mayer*, Gabriel Fejérváry, Pest, Hungary, 1829
- Codex Laud*, William Laud, Oxford, England, 1636
- Codex Vienna*, King Emmanuel I of Portugal, Portugal, 1521
- Codex Paris*, Bibliothèque imperiale, Paris, 1829–37
- Codex Colombino*, Local Cacique, Tututepec, Oaxaca, 1717²⁹

The Obsession with Time. One of the problems facing the historian of religions results from the fact that the various forms and content of the “original vehicles” did not die out after the conquest. In fact, much of what we know about the original vehicles comes from colonial documents that carry pre-Columbian materials. H. B. Nicholson points out that picture manuscripts produced under Spanish patronage, “despite their post-conquest date, . . . are often of the greatest value to the student of late Pre-Hispanic culture.”³⁰ This has caused confusion and controversy about the principles of composition of preconquest narrative drawings. Nevertheless, one of the distinctive characteristics of storybook composition was the interest in, indeed, the obsession with time, its shape, and meaning. This obsession with time is also evident on the calendar stones, sculpture, and architecture of the various ceremonial centers of ancient Mexico. Together, these texts reflect the intense involvement in marking, measuring, and deciphering the patterns of celestial and social events. Consider the “Introductory Letter” by Motolinía:

the Indians observed close order in reckoning time—days, weeks, months and years—and also feasts, as will appear later. Similarly, they related in figures the achievement of victory and the conduct of wars; the succession of chief lords, weather conditions and noteworthy signs in the heavens; and general epidemics; at what time and under which lord these things occurred; and all the lords who took a leading part in subjugating New Spain up to the time that the Spaniards arrived.³¹

This observation by one of the more alert Spanish priests reflects several important characteristics about the Aztec preoccupation with time. Time was closely observed and measured in varying units. These units were used to depict stories of human and natural phenomena. There was a special concern for sequences of events that revealed the nature of destiny. Although it is not true that all the storybooks were dominated by this obsession, it is accurate that the two dominant types of picture writing, the ritual-divinatory and the historical-geographical, reflect a peculiar form of what Alexander Marshack calls “time-factored thinking.”³² We will see in the books discussed here

stories about the vital processes and relationships that animate and renew society and the gods.

The ritual-calendrical manuscripts, which include the *Borgia Codex*, the *Tonalamatl Aubin*, *Codex Borbonicus*, and the three Mayan screenfolds, reflect the ingenious attempt to measure, worship, and control time—a special characteristic of Mesoamerican religions. Paul Wheatley notes in his comments on the development of the sciences in urban cultures that “It was in the realms of Nuclear America . . . that the most complex and accurate of all calendrical systems was devised.”³³ The manuscripts of this category were “primarily devoted to religion and the calendar, and such related topics as divination and



FIG. 2. The Aztec Piedra del Sol reflects the five-part cosmology applied to the conception of the ages of the universe. Each of the four cosmic eras surrounds the central or fifth (Aztec) age, known as 4 *nahui ollin*, represented here with the god in the center; his tongue is a sacrificial knife. Courtesy of Lawrence G. Desmond.

religious ceremonies, and the systematic depiction of gods of the native pantheon."³⁴ Within this category we find three types of documents, each with a different ordering of cosmic and human time: First was the *tonalpohualli*, a 260-day cycle with 20 named days and 13 signs, known in book form as the *tonalamatl*. This type of book was the favorite target of the missionary priests. It served as the basis for prophecy, determined the favorable and unfavorable days, and was the source for names given to children. Second was the eighteen-month festival calendar, which organized "fixed" ceremonies with an eighteen-month, twenty-day count to form the solar year. Third was the calendar wheel, found only in colonial sources that contain both the divinatory and solar cycles. These manuscripts also carried related mythological and cosmological information not restricted to calendar ritual.

The historical-genealogical manuscripts have three orientations: time, place, and event. Running throughout all three is the presence of time-factored thought. Robertson notes that sources both before and after contact are ordered as year-to-year accounts of families, dynasties, and towns. The narratives are presented in linear composition in *tira* or screenfold with pictured events attached to dates or clustered dates by extended lines. Even when a map composition dominates the *tira*, the narrative consists of the history of a family that occupied that space. Time-factoring, though less prominent, is still fundamental. And when we come across event-oriented manuscripts, we are dealing with genealogical narratives covering many generations. In each case, the emphasis on sequence is present. Although it is undoubtedly true that other types of primary sources, such as economic and ethnographic records, existed in ancient America, the evidence suggests the same influence of time-factored thinking. Economic records include the historical notations of tribute relationship and the ethnographic documents have Indian life cycles woven throughout.

In my view, one of the important relations expressed in these books is the relation between ancient or mythic events and future or prophetic events. Whether in the cosmogonic myths, which tell of the universe's origins, or in the sacred history of the Toltec tradition, we see the focus on sequences of events, loaded with sacred meanings, which were set in motion in a remembered past, are enacted in the present, and will lead toward an expected repetition in the future. There is a special connection between the myths and the prophecies. This time-factored attitude permeates all the documents to various degrees, and, as the testimony of the storybooks will show, it influences the Aztec perception of Quetzalcoatl's meaning, especially the

Aztec interpretation of the events related to the coming of the Spaniards to Tenochtitlán.

The Testimony of the Storybooks

Not surprisingly, the surviving storybooks provide little evidence of Quetzalcoatl's significance in pre-Columbian society. Since the great majority of pre-Columbian storybooks are from the Mixtec region, the Toltec and Aztec traditions are barely represented in the pictorials.³⁵ There is, however, apparent reference to the Quetzalcoatl tradition in two pictorials containing Mixtec genealogies. In these pre-Columbian sources, figures that seem to have a clear relationship to Quetzalcoatl as god and god-man demand our attention.

It is probable that there was some contact between Toltec culture and Mixtec, and this apparently resulted in the exchange of mythical and historical traditions between the two culture areas.³⁶ Two related Mixtec prose sources, the *Descripción Geográfica* of 1674 and the *Origen de los Indios del Nuevo Mundo*³⁷ of 1606, contain stories about the deities El Corazon del Pueblo and 9 Ehécatl (9 Wind, a flying serpent), whose careers are reminiscent of the Toltec god and high priest Quetzalcoatl. These similarities are explicit in a cosmogony portrayed in the *Codex Vienna*, repeated in the *Codex Nuttal*,³⁸ and appearing in the postconquest *Selden Roll*.³⁹ The most complete version is in *Codex Vienna*, folios 49a–38c. This section of the codex, apparently a sacred genealogy, depicts in magnificent detail, the birth of a culture hero, his ascension to heaven, investiture by the Creative Pair, descent to earth, and raising of the heavens. Apparently the figure 9 Ehécatl (called by at least one commentator 9 Ehécatl Quetzalcoatl)⁴⁰ is the figure from whom Mixtec rulers claim their descent. The hero 9 Ehécatl is born from a stone knife and is followed by the birth of sixteen males representing his different guises and powers as a shamanic healer, painter, singer, recorder of history, ritual expert, and warrior, among others. He ascends to heaven, where he confers with the Creative Pair, who instruct him in his mission and show him the elaborate paraphernalia of his future career. Then, elaborately dressed in his sacred costume, which includes a truncated cap, red buccal mask, a shell pectoral, feather bundle, and flowered weapons, he is given four decorated temples and descends to earth on a rope. He is accompanied by two companions, Fire Serpent and Descending Eagle, diving head first to earth. A bird sacrifice is performed in his honor. He confers again with the Creative Pair and then performs the amazing act of lifting the heavens, revealing the earth as a hilly, fertile place with rivers and turbulent water and nine place signs, six of which have divinatory dates. Under the instruction of the high gods, he has created cosmic and ceremonial space.⁴¹ A similar scene de-

picturing another figure, 12 Ehécatl, in his flight and descent in *Codex Nuttall* has led Jill Furst to suggest that the creation scenario of the *Codex Vienna* is a prototype for the events in the *Nuttall*. I am inclined to favor an interpretation along the lines suggested by H. B. Nicholson, that we are presented with a story depicting one widespread indigenous pattern of the creation of a culture hero and his divinely ordained creative power. The story and its painted elements are strikingly similar to the careers of Quetzalcoatl-Ehécatl and Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl from the central plateau. The details of this pattern of world creation, including a) the miraculous birth of the hero, b) his ascent and conference with the Divine Pair, c) the costumes worn, d) the raising of the sky to reveal the earth and create an age, and e) the presence of four special buildings along with the cosmic dive of related deities, are all duplicated in fragmentary form in a large number of other pictorial and prose sources concerning the Toltec god and godman. Cautiously, we can suggest that we have a pre-Columbian example of a widespread cosmogonic tradition depicting the creation of terrestrial space, the original ceremonial center, and legitimate authority—all symbolized in the career of Quetzalcoatl or one of his doubles.

The second category of primary documents is the post-Columbian storybook done in the native style which conveys pre-Columbian historical and cosmological traditions. Some of these documents were commissioned by Spaniards in the manner already described and some were generated independently by Indians, as, for instance, the prototype for the *Codex Telleriano-Remensis*⁴² and the *Codex Vaticanus A*.⁴³ A third document that shares this native character is the *Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca*.⁴⁴ Though several dozen similar documents exist, these three contain significant material on Quetzalcoatl and will be discussed briefly.

The history of two of the documents—the *Vaticanus A* and the *Telleriano-Remensis*, which are storybooks with written annotations—demonstrates in an astonishing way the complex relationship between text and context summarized here. Consider the following steps in the pictorial and prose composition of these two important pieces, which were copies of a pre- or post-Columbian pictorial document that was subsequently lost. Apparently, a copy of the original was made in Mexico around 1563 and later taken to Europe, where it was eventually named the *Telleriano-Remensis*. The copy consists of three parts, and it was compiled using several other documents as well as the prototype. The annotations explaining the pictorial material were done in three different hands. The prototype of the *Telleriano-Remensis* copy was sent to the Vatican library and copied again; this copy became known as *Vaticanus A*. This important source contains

two sections missing entirely from the *Telleriano-Remensis*. The *Vaticanus A* was copied after 1569. The prototype for both codex copies was lost! The annotations on the *Vaticanus A* were done by at least two scribes who copied an earlier Italian translation of a Spanish text. To complicate the situation, the final annotations were done by a Spaniard who had an imperfect knowledge of Italian. It appears that we have two copies of an early post-Columbian storybook, probably itself a copy of a pre-Columbian storybook, which was never, as far as we know, seen by European eyes. As Henry Nicholson has demonstrated in his invaluable discussion of these sources,⁴⁵ the paintings that serve as the basis for the written narrative, along with the more acculturated pictures in the *Florentine Codex*, are the only coherent group of native style illustrations of the Toltec priest-king still available. In spite of heavy Christian additions to the text, these works constitute, along with some of the stone carvings at Tula, the closest thing we have to the "final authority" about Quetzalcoatl.

Taking these two documents together,⁴⁶ the Quetzalcoatl material reveals the intimate relationship that existed between the Toltec hero Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl and the deity Quetzalcoatl, sometimes called Quetzalcoatl-Ehécatl. Following an account of the creation of the world and its organization, Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl (it is stated in the commentary that he was named after "the other Quetzalcoatl," meaning the god) is divinely conceived and born to the virgin Chimalman. The engenderer was the creator sky god Citlallatonac-Tonacatecuhtli. As an adult, Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl sees that Tollan is suffering from a famine and degradation, and he initiates new ritual practices to end the famine and gain divine pardon for his people who have committed errors. The famine ends and he is appreciated for his ritual bloodlettings, which are imitated by the people. He constructs four temples that become famous: the House of Nobles, the House of the Common Man, the House of the Serpent, and the Temple of Shame. He also invents round temples. One of his fervent disciples, Totec, carries out several penitential adventures following his frightening dream experiences. Then, the two lead a group of devotees from Tollan, boring a tunnel through a mountain in which some of his followers are turned to stone. Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl arrives in Tlapallan and disappears over the water, telling his people not to mourn too much because he will return and that a bearded people will eventually rule in the land. It is noted that this belief, heightened by the coincidence of his birth on the day 1 Reed and the arrival of the Spaniards in Mexico in the year 1 Reed, encouraged the Indians to think Quetzalcoatl had returned. When the hero died, he ascended to heaven and became the Morning Star and was identified as Tlahuizcalpan-tecuhtli. In other parts of the two documents it is noted that Topiltzin

Quetzalcoatl was also the god who created human life and the world and was the wind god who was worshiped in the city of Cholula. (Throughout this book, the pre-Columbian city of Cholollan will be referred to both as Cholollan and as Cholula, its modern name.) The connection with Cholula, as Eloise Quiñones Keber has shown, was elaborately referred to in the glosses for the fourth, fifth, and ninth trecena periods.⁴⁷ In one case, Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl was celebrated at a great feast in this city on the special days 7 Reed and 1 Reed once every fifty-two years. Elsewhere we find that a Topiltzin–Morning Star cult was celebrated in Cholula, suggesting that a fusion of the culture hero and deity Ehécatl and Morning Star developed. From her analysis of these documents, Keber shows that the commentators were making active interpretations of the storybooks and not merely copying what was already before them. She writes, “from its first written expression, the tale of Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl can be seen in a continuous state of flux, meshing legendary, historical and mythological elements from both the native and Christian European traditions.”⁴⁸

Remembering the story line in the *Codex Vienna*, we can see some striking similarities and additions to our scenario. As in the *Codex Vienna*, this culture hero is miraculously born, this time by the union of a deity with a Toltec virgin. He is a ritual expert whose sacrifices become models for the populace and, as in the *Vienna*, he is associated with four important temples which organize his ceremonial center and activities. A clearly unique episode occurs when he leaves Tollan and dies in Tlapallan, after announcing that he will one day return—this is related to the Spanish conquest. His identification with deities, including Quetzalcoatl, Ehécatl and Tlahuizcalpantecuhtli, is important and will be repeated elsewhere.

A third colonial pictorial source, also with accompanying comments, this time in Nahuatl, is the *Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca*. Probably copied from a pre-Hispanic storybook before 1546, it contains three short but important references to Quetzalcoatl and expands our view of his significance in space and time. We first hear of the Toltec deity Quetzalcoatl during an account of a mighty conflict which brings about the fall of Tollan.⁴⁹ One of the warring groups within Tollan, the Nonoalco-Chichimeca, prepares to abandon their city, but on the night before their flight they hide all the treasures of Quetzalcoatl and guard them carefully. A second reference appears during the flight of the other faction, the Tolteca-Chichimeca, fifteen years later. Their high priest Coenan is sent to the city of Cholollan⁵⁰ to plead with the deity Ipalnemouani, “Through Whom All Live,” to allow his people to relocate there. He performs special rituals before the great shrine and, surprisingly, Quetzalcoatl answers, telling him that his people

are welcome. The identity of this deity changes, however, when Coenan returns to Tollan to report his success and informs his followers that it was Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl who promised them a new home. Inspired by the oracle's welcome, the Tolteca-Chichimeca leave Tollan and eventually arrive in Cholollan.

Again, we have an explicit identification of Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl with the deity Quetzalcoatl and a clear statement that both were significant sacred figures in Cholollan. This Cholollan location is expanded in the third reference to Quetzalcoatl, where it is stated that his shrine in that city made it a truce center for warring factions who periodically made peace and visited the ceremonial center to attend religious festivals. Truces were not always successful, however, for it is stated that one of the enemies of the Tolteca "shot the face of Quetzalcoatl" and initiated a new war in Cholollan.⁵¹

A number of other post-Columbian storybooks, although they do not carry the Quetzalcoatl tradition, contribute to our understanding of Mesoamerican cities and the pre-Columbian conception of legitimate authority. These include the splendid *Codex Mendoza* and the pictorial histories *Codex Xólotl* and *Codex Azcatitlan*.

If all we had to work with were the storybooks from pre- and postconquest times, we could make the following profile. Quetzalcoatl the deity, in his manifestations as Morning Star, Creator God, and Wind God, is clearly related to the culture hero Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl. The latter was divinely born and became a sacred figure in Tollan and Cholollan as a result of ritual actions, establishment of four temples, his flight from Tollan, and his death. His promise to return led to his identification with the Spaniards during the conquest. When we hazard the identification of this figure with the career of 9 Ehécatl in the *Codex Vienna*, we see striking similarities. Basically, Quetzalcoatl is the divinely ordained creator of life, ceremony, ceremonial structures, and social authority. Let us move into the prose sources to see if these connections and meanings can be illuminated.

Transitional Prose Sources

During the early decades of the colonial period, at least five documents were produced which contained significant information concerning Quetzalcoatl. We call these documents transitional prose documents; that is, early postconquest accounts, written in prose Nahuatl, Spanish, or French, which were based to a large extent directly on pre-Columbian and post-Columbian storybooks. One important fact that distinguishes these from the former documents is the almost total absence of pictorial images, although it is clear that in several cases the prose translator had pictures before him. The five relevant works are the *Anales de Cuauhtitlán*, the *Leyenda de los Soles*,

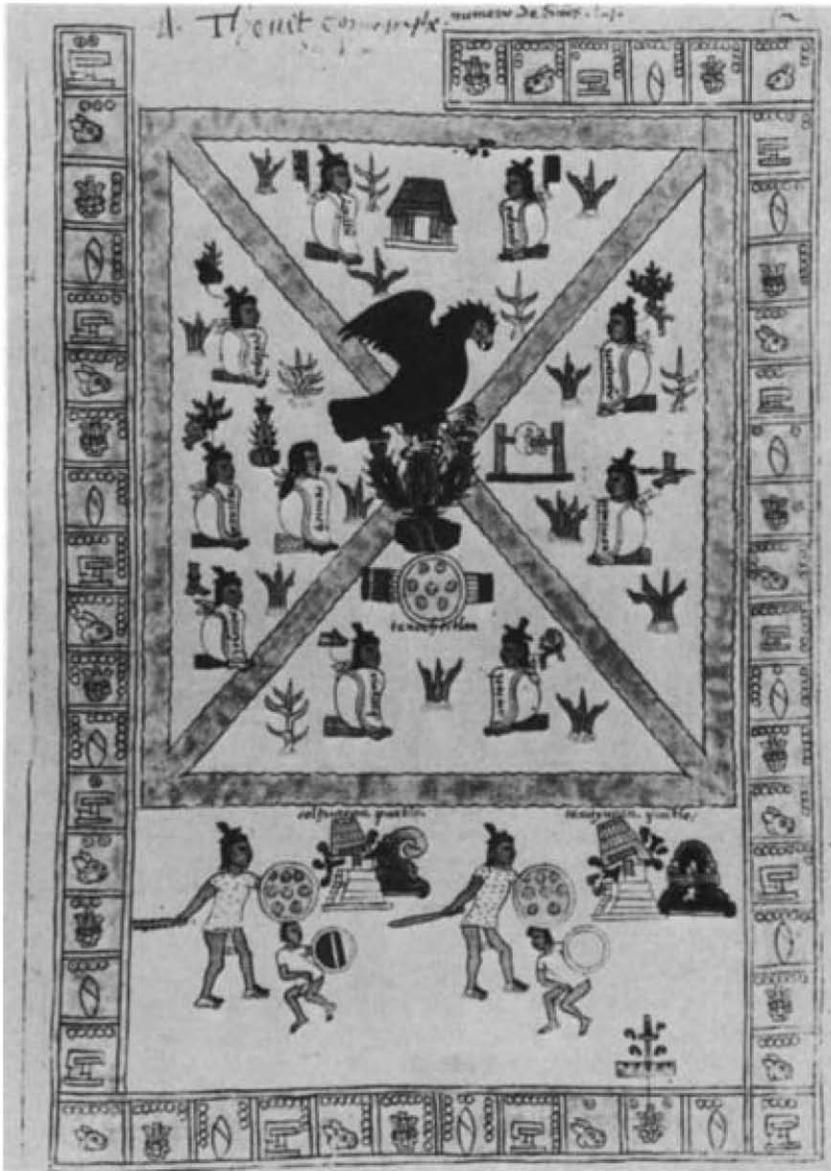


FIG. 3. The frontispiece of the *Codex Mendoza*, depicting the founding of Tenochtitlán, reflects the application of the Aztec cosmology to the spatial order of the capital. In the center of the four sections of the city is the image of the Aztec god perched on the cactus growing from a rock in the lake of Mexico. The human action below the central section represents Aztec conquests of nearby towns.

the *Historia de los Mexicanos por sus pinturas*, the *Juan Cano Relaciones*, and the *Histoyre du Mechique*.

An extremely valuable document, the *Códice Chimalpopoca*, contains two rare and beautiful sources, the *Anales de Cuauhtitlán* and the *Leyenda de los Soles*, which are based on different preconquest storybooks and are written by anonymous hands. The *Anales*, completed by 1570, consists of a number of interwoven local histories from major towns and cities in the Valley of Mexico and the basin of Puebla, including Tezcoco, Tenochtitlán, Chalco, Tula, Tlaxcala, and Azcapotzalco. Robert Barlow's intense analysis of this Nahuatl document⁵² shows that it is based on ancient songs, storybook images, memories of old men in Cuauhtitlán, two written sources from Tezcoco and Chalco, and other unknown sources. It emphasizes the tradition of Cuauhtitlán, a city founded after the fall of Teotihuacán in the tenth century, and includes an account of the rise and fall of Tula.

A full, lyrical, and confused version of the Quetzalcoatl tradition confronts the reader in the *Anales*. Quetzalcoatl, under the sign 7 Ehécatl, creates human beings from ashes in an early sequence. "He had them made and raised them." This scenario is greatly expanded in the *Leyenda* version. Later in the source, a full-blown account of Ce Acatl Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl's career is offered, providing us with an invaluable look at the indigenous appreciation for the Toltec king. This account includes such important events as his miraculous birth when Chimalman swallowed a precious stone, his search for and reburial of his father's bones, his installation as king in Tollan, and the construction of his four temples.⁵³ Then, in a new scenario, he prepared for an ecstatic flight through intense ritual action and communicates, as in the *Codex Vienna* scene, with the Creative Pair above the ninefold heavens. His kingdom is portrayed as an ideal natural and social landscape, and he is described as the discoverer of valuable stones, feathers, cotton, and birds. Also, he is a marvelous craftsman. He begins to build a great temple with feathered serpent columns, but cannot complete it. This paradise crumbles through the tricks of his rival Tezcatlipoca who, angry that the king will not sacrifice humans, leads him to drunkenness and an apparent incestuous episode with his sister Quetzalpetlatl. Stricken with grief, Quetzalcoatl departs from Tollan and arrives at Tlapallan-Tlatlayan, where he sacrifices himself by fire and is transformed into the Morning Star. The story ends with the summary: "Such was the life, in its entirety, of him who was called Quetzalcoatl. He was born in 1 Reed. And also he died in 1 Reed and so it is reckoned he lived for fifty-two years. And so it is finished, in the time, in the year 1 Reed."⁵⁴ This account, adding marvelous details of his sacred career, stresses that a conflict about human sacrifice was one of the major causes for his downfall. It is also im-

portant to note here that the historical survey which runs throughout the work positions the rise and the zenith of Aztec power purposely in line with Quetzalcoatl's Tollan, suggesting this figure's importance in Mesoamerican traditions of legitimate rule.

The companion document, the *Leyenda de los Soles*, presents a fuller account of the god Quetzalcoatl's creative acts and offers a short version of the hero Ce Acatl's career. (Ce Acatl, Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl, and Quetzalcoatl, when referring to a human being, all refer in my view to a single historical individual or mythical hero.) This Nahuatl document, written by a Spanish-educated Indian, was completed by 1558. It contains a sacred history of the Aztec world from the point of view of Tenochtitlán's surviving elites and was constructed free of priestly direction. It is apparently a concise commentary on several pictorial codices in the possession of the writer. One page includes a rough diagram of Topiltzin seated on a ruler's throne surrounded by the four temples of his ceremonial center, apparently copied from the original storybook. The document is especially important because it consists of poetic fragments which were most likely recited and sung in the *calmecacs* of Aztec society and its precursors.

During the cosmogonic sequences, Quetzalcoatl is chosen by a group of deities to travel to the land of the dead and recreate human life. His cosmic dive results in a dramatic confrontation with the Lords of the Underworld and he is miraculously successful in his quest.⁵⁵ Later on, he participates in the creation of man's most important food, corn.

Referred to later as Ce Acatl, the culture hero follows some of the lines of his career in the *Anales* version, with an account of his unusual birth and the recovery of his murdered father's bones, but it differs in its emphasis on the vicious revenge sacrifice of his uncles. And Ce Acatl is pictured as a ruler of Tollan who becomes a military conqueror, eventually reaching Tlapallan, where he falls sick, dies, and is burned on a funeral pyre. This simpler account is followed by a description of the Aztec royal dynasty and their conquests.

The most appealing and picturesque transitional prose document is the *Historia de los Mexicanos por sus pinturas*, written before 1536. There is circumstantial evidence that the famous Franciscan priest and linguist, Andrés de Olmos, translated it from a surviving storybook which was originally attached to the prose commentary. It may well be the earliest account we have of an official Aztec history of the world. Myths of creation swing into dramatic motion, a motion which seems unique in its shape. Quetzalcoatl, one son of the Creative Pair, shares in the creation of the universe, the destruction of different ages, and the arrangement of the earth. He is one of the two deities who lift the sky to reveal the earth. He bleeds himself in penitence,

gets kicked out of heaven, and in one sequence casts his own divine child into the sacrificial fire in order to create the sun.⁵⁶ He is a cosmic tumbler in a circus of eccentric divinities.

Following this cosmogony, there is an account of Ce Acatl of Tula who as a youth distinguished himself as a great warrior and religious hermit. He emerges from seclusion to construct a wonderful temple where he performs rituals and worships until he is cast out of Tula. He travels to Cholula and finally to Tlapallan, where he dies. In the last sections of this document there is a clear effort made to link the Aztecs with the Toltec remnant residing in the city-state of Culhuacán, suggesting again the Aztec perception that Tollan's priestly ruler was the founder of legitimate rule in Mexico.

An unusual work, *Libro de oro y tesoro indico* contains thirteen documents, two of which, the *Origen de los Mexicanos* and the *Relación de la genealogía y linaje de los señores que han senoreado esta tierra de la Nueva España*, provide important early evidence of Quetzalcoatl's significance for dynastic succession in central Mexico. Called the *Juan Cano Relaciones* by Nicholson because a *primero conquistador*, Juan Cano, commissioned a Franciscan friar to trace the pedigree of his Indian wife Doña Isabel, daughter of Moctezuma II, back to the creation of the world, these two documents contain important variants of Quetzalcoatl's career, copied from a common prototype.⁵⁷ Both documents demonstrate that the ruling dynasty of Tenochtitlán traced its heritage through the rulers of Culhuacán to Ce Acatl Topiltzin of Tollan. Compiled in 1532, the *Relación* is one of the earliest accounts we have of preconquest history, going back to the eighth century, and the prototype was obviously based on storybooks. It has a detailed version of the Toltec kingdom under the influence of "Topilci," who is the son of a murdered lord whose bones he recovers. He builds a ceremonial center and makes Tula a great capital. A controversy about human sacrifice disturbs his kingdom because he is in favor of sacrificing snakes and butterflies, but not human beings. Forced out of his kingdom, he arrives in Tlapallan, where he dies. The account notes that he dressed in the manner of the Spaniards and continues with a discussion of subsequent dynasties focusing on Culhuacán.

A fifth source, the *Histoyre du Mechique*, completed by 1543, contains at least two chapters of sacred history originating from central Mexico. It is a French copy, in the hand of André Thevet, of a lost Spanish original based on pre- and post-conquest storybooks. Quetzalcoatl of the Toltecs appears here after a description of the creation of the world. His parents are the deities Camaxtli and Chimalman. His mother dies in childbirth. Details of his family struggle emphasize the problem of finding a successor for his murdered father. Quetzalcoatl, worshiped as a god, reigns in Tollan until the god Tezcatlipoca

comes and brings about the god-king's downfall. The source records the important migration of the Quetzalcoatl cult to Cholula, where a great temple is built, and shows once again that this tradition was important in at least one other pre-Aztec city-state. Finally, the hero is cremated and the smoke from his body becomes the Morning Star.⁵⁸

From these transitional prose sources we see the confirmation of the storybook testimony—Quetzalcoatl is remembered as a creator-god who is intimately related to a human figure named Ce Acatl Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl. The deity creates human life and is a central figure in the cosmogony. We get the general impression that the rulers of Aztec Tenochtitlán traced their power in some form to the Quetzalcoatl tradition of Tollan. This tradition emphasizes the recovery of the hero's father's bones, his experience as a warrior, ecstatic priest, ruler, and builder of ceremonial centers which are usually organized around one or four temples. We see new detail concerning the priest-king's idyllic realm: his defeat by enemies, his flight through Cholula to Tlapallan, and his transformation into the Morning Star.

Mestizo Sources

A fourth category of evidence consists of those manuscripts authored by descendants of preconquest royalty who, like their most celebrated example, Alvarado Tezozomoc, had access to extant picture writings, oral informants, and some written narratives containing information about pre-Columbian religion and life. We include here Tezozomoc's *Cronica Mexicana*, Diego Muñoz Camargo's *Historia de Tlaxcala*, and Juan Bautista Pomar's *Relación de Tezcoco*.

Generally, these histories represent what I call a mestizo point of view, marked by striking cultural ambivalences and an obvious mixture of motives and goals. While only two of these writers were mestizos, all wrote their works combining Indian and European points of view. On the one hand they display a tendency to glorify their respective Indian families, ties, and towns with nostalgic appreciation of "the good old days," while on the other hand they praise Spanish Christianity and condemn the pagan system of human sacrifice and sometimes Indian morality in general. In one case, we see an author embellish stories to justify the massacre of Indians by Spaniards.

Alvarado Tezozomoc was of full-blooded Indian royalty, the son of a postconquest *tlatoani* and Moctezuma's daughter. His rustic narrative displays a sensitive pride in the feats and life-styles of Aztec warrior-kings, but he rigorously criticizes Aztec sacrifice and shows a warm appreciation for some aspects of Spanish Christianity. Completed in 1598, the *Cronica Mexicana* is filled with references to the deity Quetzalcoatl and the Toltec priest-king Quetzalcoatl which cannot be fully summarized here. Suffice it to note that Quetzalcoatl

appears in relationship to kingly prestige and power. In a rare reference to the foundation of the Aztec city, we are told that the Mexica built their first shrine to Huitzilopochtli, but it was made of materials associated with Quetzalcoatl.⁵⁹ Also, Quetzalcoatl is mentioned as the first king to have his image carved in the gardens of Chapultepec, a royal custom repeated up to the time of Moctezuma Xocoyotzin.⁶⁰ At least one king is reminded at his coronation that Zenacatl y naxitl Quetzalcoatl was the first lord to sit on the throne.⁶¹ The throne, he is told, is on loan to the new king, but will someday be returned to the one it belongs to. Finally, Tezozomoc clearly recounts the story of Moctezuma's fear that Quetzalcoatl has returned to rule in Tollan when word of the advancing Spaniards reached Tenochtitlán.⁶² The fuller accounts of these events will appear in the interpretive sections to follow.

Juan Pomar, a mestizo, was the great-grandson of Tezcoco's famous philosopher-king Nezahualcoyotl on one side and a Spaniard on the other. He was well-educated and he consulted Indian elders, ancient sayings, and extant storybooks in order to present a glorious image of his ancestors' kingdom as a golden age of art, politics, and religion in the *Relación de Tezcoco*. At least one authority has claimed that Pomar's work is "by far the richest ethnographic description that is known."⁶³ While this is true, it must be noted that his work is also marked by a search for Christian parallels in the illustrious events of his family's past and sustained criticism of paganism as false religion. He reported that his famous ancestor's religious revolution of the middle fifteenth century had similarities to Christianity, which from his viewpoint, living in sixteenth-century New Spain, made Nezahualcoyotl a unique genius indeed. In this regard he argued that the cities of Tenochtitlán and Tlacopán borrowed the superior laws and cultural forms of Tezcoco but invented the terrible ritual of human sacrifice themselves and imposed it on the great cultural capital of the Nahua world.

In a small but significant reference, Pomar discusses the priesthood of Tezcoco and notes that the high priests, called "Quetzalcoatl," opened the chests of sacrificial victims. These ritual specialists were respected like great lords and his discussion of the priestly lifestyle suggests that Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl was apparently the priestly archetype for more than one city in the Valley of Mexico.⁶⁴

Diego Muñoz Camargo was the mestizo son of a Spanish conquistador and an Indian woman. He married into Tlaxcalan nobility and held a number of powerful administrative posts in the Spanish government in Tlaxcala. He was aggressive in his treatment of Indians and his periodic cruelty did not go unnoticed by Spanish authorities. Benjamin Keen writes, "His involvement in the factional struggles of

the Indian community resulted in a royal order demanding the expulsion from Tlaxcala of Muñoz Camargo and some other mestizos 'for their abuse of the Indians and for setting a bad example,' but evidently the order was not carried out."⁶⁵

Muñoz Camargo tells us that a Tlaxcalan deity, Quetzalcoatl, was revered throughout New Spain. We also read that a human Quetzalcoatl, born to Coatlicue and Mixcoatl Camaxtli, became a great leader and was respected like a god. Later we find that the Toltecs established two sacred cities—one at Teotihuacán, dedicated to the sun and moon, and one at Cholula dedicated to the evening star Quetzalcoatl.⁶⁶ In the second book, we see Muñoz Camargo's feelings about the Indians and Quetzalcoatl come clear, when he discusses the Spanish massacre of Indians at Cholula. He notes that the Indians of Cholula had great faith and confidence in the great deity Quetzalcoatl, but that this bloodthirsty deity, especially hungry for the blood of children, failed miserably to help his people when faced with the true god of the Spaniards.⁶⁷ In his description of the massacre that ensued, he invented a vicious attack by the Cholulans on a messenger from Cortes as a means of justifying the terrible slaughter of Indians that followed.

The additional information that appears in these sources strengthens the link between Aztec kings and Quetzalcoatl of Tollan. Specifically, we have another reference that Moctezuma thought that Quetzalcoatl might be returning in the guise of the Spaniards. Moreover, Quetzalcoatl's significance in Tezcoco as the title of the priestly office is established and we find another mention of his powerful position in Cholula. We see the intimate relationship between Quetzalcoatl the god and Quetzalcoatl the man throughout the *Historia de Tlaxcala*.

Spanish Letters and Descriptions

An indispensable though suspect group of sources includes some of the letters, histories, and accounts written by Spaniards who were witnesses of the conquest and members of the early colonial society. Rarely were these documents based on storybooks, and they demonstrate, in their focus and attitude, the extent of Spanish intervention in Aztec society and its sixteenth-century image. Yet, that Hernán Cortes, Bernal Díaz del Castillo, and Andrés de Tapia were eyewitnesses of the city, religion, and society they conquered makes them unusually valuable sources for reconstructing late Aztec religion and the meaning that Quetzalcoatl held at the time of the conquest. Between the seeing and the telling, however, they injected complex political and literary agendas such as the desire, in the case of Cortes, to aggrandize himself before the king; or the attempt, in the case of

Díaz del Castillo, to establish himself as the most accurate and brilliant scribe of the conquest; or the effort, in the case of local magistrates, to fulfill through the *Relaciones* the requirements of Philip II's questionnaires.

The earliest conquest reference to Quetzalcoatl appears in the celebrated Second Letter that Cortes wrote to King Charles I in 1520. For us its principal value lies in Cortes' report of two nearly identical speeches by Moctezuma, who, following a direct reference to his own storybook tradition, welcomed Cortes as the representative of an ancient Indian hero, "our natural lord," who created Indian culture, left the land, and returned years later, only to be rejected by his people. The hero departed, but the people expected his descendants to return and establish his rule again.⁶⁸ In these speeches, the Spanish king is identified as the true lord of the land and the people are invited to obey Cortes. Though Quetzalcoatl's name is not mentioned, it seems likely that Moctezuma is referring to the Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl tradition. This letter is a strong basis for the argument that the Toltec hero was appreciated as a paradigm of rulership in Tenochtitlán and that this paradigm influenced the Aztec's initial reception of the Spaniards.

Andrés de Tapia, one of Cortes's captains, wrote the *Relación sobre la conquista de Mexico* sometime before 1552.⁶⁹ As an official in Cholula immediately following the conquest, this rugged soldier is probably reflecting a Cholulan perspective. In his account we are told that "Quetzalcoate" was the founder of that great city and was remembered and appreciated for having refused to sacrifice human beings. He was also famous for having built wonderful ceremonial structures, including temple pyramids, and for ordering peaceful coexistence.

The importance of Quetzalcoatl in Cholula is elaborated in Gabriel de Rojas's composition *Relación de Cholula* of 1581. It is reported, in response to various questions, that "Quecalcoatl" founded the city, which was called "Tullam Cholullan Tlachuihaltepetl." Further, the principal rulers lived in the central temple called "Quecalcoatl," which was revered throughout the land. The supreme importance of this center and Quetzalcoatl is reflected in the statement, "the Indians from all parts of the land came for their devotions on pilgrimages to visit the temple of Quetzalcoatl—because this was the city that was venerated like that of Rome in Christianity and Mecca to the Moors."⁷⁰

These three sources, although filled with Spanish mischief, have enriched our picture of Quetzalcoatl. The impact on Moctezuma of the prophecy of Quetzalcoatl's return is elaborated in a full and flowing narrative. Furthermore, we have the reference to Quetzalcoatl's prohibition of human sacrifice, his cult in Cholula, and the statement that Cholollan was also called Tollan.

Priestly Writings

In his comments on ancient Mesopotamian literary sources, Leo Oppenheim writes,

references to literary *topoi*, historical facts, and historical situations are so densely interwoven that the historian is not only faced with philological difficulties but also with the far more complex problems of style and literary influence as they mold and distort the report for specific purposes.⁷¹

A similar situation faces the historian of religions working in the ancient Mesoamerican society where, as we have seen, the authors of most of our primary sources, "manipulate the evidence, consciously or not, for specific political and artistic purposes."⁷² Nowhere is this clearer than in the final category of written texts, the priestly writings, of which Sahagún's encyclopedia is the finest example. In all the texts by Mendicants, we see the strong influence that a foreign world view, with its set of ideological requirements, had on the different reformulations of an ancient indigenous world view. The final stage in the transformation from storybook to encyclopedia was set, not just by the individual genius of Sahagún, but by a handful of priest-historians whose evangelical commitments, linguistic abilities, and personal interaction with Indians and their surviving traditions encouraged the refinement of a systematic method for gathering information and the application of European principles of ordering that information. Sahagún's monumental twelve-volume work, which carries important accounts of the Quetzalcoatl tradition, can best be understood and appreciated if we survey first the other priestly historians who preceded him, worked alongside him, and followed him. In this section I will discuss the invaluable works of the Franciscan "school" of writers, including Motolinía and Andrés de Olmos, before focusing on Sahagún's *Florentine Codex* and finally reviewing the works of the Dominicans Diego Durán and Diego de Landa.

The earliest extant document produced by the Franciscans was authored by Fray Toribio de Benavente (hereafter referred to as Motolinía, the Indian name he adopted), one of the original twelve Franciscans who arrived in Mexico in 1524. Motolinía's ministry was characterized by an intimate association with Indian communities in many key parts of New Spain during the heyday of New World evangelization. In fact, he participated in the initial plans to build a uniquely integrated farming community near Cholula which would restore the Christian faith to its original purity and purpose. He held important administrative posts in various communities including the office of *ministro provincial* in Mexico from 1548 to 1551. Commissioned in 1536 to write a history of notable things concerning the Indians

and the Franciscan mission in the New World, he produced an important original document, now lost, of which we have two versions, the *Historia de los Indios de Nueva España* and the *Memoriales*.

In a sense, Motolinía is the founder of the Franciscan ethnographic tradition. To collect his information, he used sustained and careful personal observations of Indian life, for which he felt a combination of disdain and admiration. He held interviews with the most informed Indians in his parishes and attempted to record these interviews carefully. Whenever he could, he interviewed the owners of storybooks or individuals who understood the paintings. He was greatly admired by later writers, at least six of whom used large sections of his works in their accounts. Johanna Broda has summarized his contribution accurately: "Above all, the great value of his work consists not so much in the systematic summary of material but in the originality and authenticity of his data, collected at an early date by a man intimately familiar with the Mexican conditions of the first colonial period."⁷³

Motolinía's works present a summary of Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl's early life in Tollan, emphasizing his innovative ritual bloodlettings, preaching, chastity, and fasts. He was appreciated as a model by his people, "for since that time many in this land began to fast." The narrative relates the episodes of Quetzalcoatl's death, transformation into the Morning Star, and the fact that his prophesied return led to his identification with the Spaniards. At another point in the text, Quetzalcoatl's temples are again important, only now in an intriguing new way. The text reads:

This god of air, they called in their language Quetzalcoatl . . . he was a native of Tollan, and from there he set out to build up certain provinces. But he disappeared and the Indians always hoped that he would return. Hence, on the arrival of the ships of the Marques del Valle, Don Hernando Cortes, who conquered this New Spain, the Indians seeing them in the distance, coming by boat, they said their god was coming and when they saw the white and high sails, they said their god was bringing his *teocallis* [temples] over the sea.⁷⁴

Earlier, in Motolinía's Introductory Letter, there is a direct reference to Quetzalcoatl's paradigmatic relationship to the rulers of Mexico. Speaking of Quetzalcoatl, he says, "From him, they say, descended the people of Colhua, the ancestors of Moteuczoma, lords of Mexico and Colhuacán. It is said that the Indians considered Quetzalcoatl one of their principal gods, calling him god of the air. Everywhere they erected innumerable temples in his honor, set up his image and painted his figure."⁷⁵ Elsewhere it is noted that Quetzalcoatl had special influence in Cholula, a city "like Rome" where great and long

rituals were performed in his honor. We also find references to Topiltzin's or Quetzalcoatl's transformation into the Morning Star.⁷⁶

Motolinía's work is especially significant for the identification of Cortes's ships with those four buildings that have been part of our survey ever since the *Codex Vienna* pictures and the direct tie of the Toltec hero to the rulers of Tenochtitlán. Again, Cholula appears to have been a religious capital.

The process of sensitively researching the Indian world view begun by Motolinía was carried forward by the methodological research of his colleague Andrés de Olmos. Olmos, whose specific works are still difficult to identify, applied his humanistic training, with his deep interest in classical languages, to the task of understanding Indian life. He became known as the best Nahuatl student of his day. Commissioned in 1533 to write about the antiquities of Mexico, Tezcoco, and Tlaxcala, he described the ritual and political beliefs, practices, and institutions of many different cities and towns. His concern for method is reflected in the personal interviews he held with Indians whom he encouraged to report on the meanings of their artworks and storybooks. He produced a protoencyclopedia which systematically described a wide range of elements in pre-Columbian life and thought. The original work and at least three copies were sent to Spain and were subsequently lost. Later he wrote a great summary of his work, using old rough drafts and memory. Parts of this summary appear in the *Histoyre du Mechique* and the *Historia de los Mexicanós por sus pinturas*, and in the *Codex Tudela* before it was also lost. Olmos's influence on others has been great and he served as a source for writers like Bartolomé de las Casas, Geronimo de Mendieta, and many others. He knew Sahagún well; they taught together at the Colegio de la Santa Cruz.

The material concerning Quetzalcoatl which can be attributed to Olmos's research (not including the works just mentioned) is reflected in the borrowed material found in the works of Las Casas and Mendieta.⁷⁷ Abstracting his works from those sources, we see that Quetzalcoatl is the greatest deity of Cholula because of the wonderful actions of the human being Quetzalcoatl, who taught the populace metallurgy, forbade human sacrifice, and preached a peaceful existence. His city Cholula was a truce center for all peoples, including enemies. Although other rulers were invited to set up their shrines in this central city, Quetzalcoatl was clearly recognized as the greatest "Lord" of all. There is also a reference to Quetzalcoatl's flight to his original homeland with four leaders and his promise to return in the future with bearded white men who would rule Mexico. It should be stated that when evaluating Olmos's contribution to our picture of Quetzalcoatl, we must express appreciation for the wonderful ma-

terial which appears in all documents which he authored in part or as a whole.

Sahagún's Encyclopedia

In order to make an accurate general evaluation of the relevant testimony in the *Florentine Codex*, it is necessary to consider the social and religious atmosphere in which Sahagún worked, his specific purposes, the methods he used, and his results. Such a task would take volumes, and numerous studies have been and are being carried out. In what follows, we summarize the best research on Sahagún, with special gratitude to Alfredo López Austin for his unique essay, "The Research Method of Fray Bernardino de Sahagún: The Questionnaires."⁷⁸

All of the religious orders working in New Spain tended to see the land and the natives as the setting for a grandiose drama of evangelization. They hoped, in different degrees, to convert souls as well as take control of the traditions in the storybooks in order to accomplish the greatest conversion in world history. This commitment is summarized by J. L. Phelan in his fascinating study *Millennial Kingdom of the Franciscans*:

But before the age of Discovery, Christianity was geographically parochial, confined to a rather small part of the world. Under the impact of this realization in the sixteenth century, a dazzling vista opened up. Christianity for the first time could implement its universal claims on a world-wide basis. The gospel could be brought to all peoples and all races. It could be global as well as universal. To those of mystical temperament this possibility appeared as a vision which was so blinding and radiant that its fulfillment must inevitably foreshadow the rapidly approaching end of the world. It seemed to these mystics that after all the races of mankind had been converted, nothing further could happen in this world; for anything else would be an anticlimax.⁷⁹

Bernardino de Sahagún's view of his apostolic responsibilities was less millennial than most, but conversion of the natives was still his central goal. He felt strongly that in order to cure the Indians of their "sins of idolatry, idolatrous rites and beliefs, omens and superstitions," it was absolutely necessary to know "from what disposition and cause the sickness proceeds . . . the preacher should know the vices of the republic in order to direct his teaching against them."⁸⁰ Therefore, he set out to write a grand handbook, or encyclopedia, that would inform Christian priests of the nature and character of pagan religious practices. He also hoped to encourage a young generation of Indians to reject the teachings of their forefathers as well

as the life-style of the corrupt Spanish conquistadors and embrace a true Christian existence. In order to bring this about, he set out to do three things: (a) to know as much as possible about Indian religions, (b) to create a Nahuatl vocabulary to assist in the effective preaching of the Gospel, and (c) to lay the documentary basis for an accurate appraisal of the character of Nahuatl culture. His sniping Christian eyes were always aimed at the falsehoods of indigenous religion and the "great carelessness and culpable ignorance" displayed by his fellow priests toward Indian religion. For instance, in his appendix to book 4, *The Soothsayers*, he presents an extended and harsh critique of Motolinía's "very great lie" concerning the Indian calendar. Picking out lines, sentences, and paragraphs from Motolinía's description of the calendar, Sahagún works to demolish the tolerant attitude toward the Indian's "Count of Years" found in his predecessor's books. Elsewhere, at the end of book 5, *The Omens*, he cannot constrain himself from adding a final word of condemnation—

These superstitions harm the Faith, and therefore it is well to recognize them. Only these few have been recorded, though there are many more. But diligent preachers and confessors should seek them out, in order to understand them in confessions and to preach against them; for they are like a mange which sickeneth the Faith.⁸¹

Sahagún's rare accomplishments were enhanced by the students he taught at the Colegio de la Santa Cruz. In Tlatelolco a generation of elite Indian youngsters were taught the classics of the Greco-Roman tradition, Latin and Nahuatl script, and were initiated into the doctrines and mysteries of Spanish Christianity. These students also became Sahagún's informants and his collaborators in research. The crucial research elements of storybooks, Indian interpreters, and Spanish priests utilized by Motolinía and Olmos were now strengthened by the addition of trilingual Christian Indian students who could assist in the verbatim transmission of knowledge from storybook to encyclopedia.

The Method. Sahagún's *Historia General* was guided by the organizing principles set forth in ancient and medieval encyclopedias. Apparently inspired by Flavius Josephus's *Antiquities*, Aristotle's *History of Animals and the Parts of Animals*, and principally Pliny's *Natural History* and Bartholemew de Glanville's *On the Properties of Things*, the Franciscan used the precedent of medieval hierarchies, which ordered knowledge by beginning with divine things, descending to consider humans and animals, and ending with plants and minerals. He researched the Mexican world according to the European model and



FIG. 4. The colonial image of Tenochtitlán's foundation reveals the influence of European styles and attitudes on the native pictorial tradition. From Diego Durán's *Historia*.

made his own shifts in this hierarchy in his final manuscripts. As his research progressed, he realized the immensity of what was being lost and he encouraged the natives to speak in their own fashion about their world view. This encouragement led to treasures of information, but also to his occasional loss of control of the project.

Sahagún developed what is called today the "Interview round table agreement method" and used it in all the sites of his research.⁸² This method depended on two types of documents and three kinds of people. The documents were a guiding questionnaire, now lost, constructed by Sahagún, and native pre- and postconquest storybooks brought to the interviews by the informants. The participants at the sessions were Sahagún, his native trilingual students, and elderly native informants and interpreters who had lived in preconquest society and could articulate the older traditions. Sahagún's questions, knowledge of the language, and attitude, along with the presence of bicultural students, evoked the expression of the native concepts and nuances. He used this approach in three different centers over a decade. He worked first in Tepepulco, second in Tlatelolco, and finally in Mexico City. In each location the interpretations of the storybooks were recorded in Nahuatl. When it came time to compile the evidence from these three centers, he cross-checked and compared the responses to discover consensus and incongruity. Thus, the direction of information went from Sahagún's questions to native informants interpreting the storybooks speaking in Nahuatl to colonized Indian scribes recording the responses in Nahuatl which were later translated

into Spanish. He remarked about native participation, "The Mexicans added and amended many things in the twelve books as they were being copied." The multiple sites of Sahagún's research produced a series of documents and versions of documents that were finally integrated after complex evolution into the *Historia General*, consisting of twelve books, completed in Nahuatl in 1569. This first complete version of the *Historia* has never been found. Later, however, Sahagún and his assistants produced a lavishly illustrated, bilingual, Nahuatl and Spanish version that was carried to Spain in 1580, eventually reaching Florence—and this is accordingly known today as the *Florentine Codex*.

The results of Sahagún's work are both marvelous and uneven. On the one hand, he can justly be called the "leading pioneer in American ethnography," and be deeply appreciated for transcending the trends of his time and training. On the other hand, his work contains limitations, distortions, and failures. The great praise due this indefatigable priest should not deflect us from noting several limitations of his work, because this will help us develop the accurate and balanced picture necessary for any effective hermeneutics of suspicion. We know, for instance, that some of his sources were inadequately informed about such topics as Indian cosmology and cosmography, and it is possible that this was deliberately the case. López Austin's analysis of the questionnaires and the resulting dialogues and monologues reveals that on occasion Sahagún meddled with some native responses in a limiting way and also failed to pursue obviously important lines of information. For instance, it appears that in the gathering of the sacred hymns from the elders, Sahagún gave them great freedom of expression. But unlike many other situations where he probed and asked for clarification, he failed to explore the meaning of these important statements. López Austin notes that this "may be due in part to his inexperience as a text collector, but undoubtedly he was strongly motivated by his aversion to material he judged diabolical." The priest had a difficult time in his research on natural astrology, which resulted in book 7, a volume that López Austin calls a "personal failure." Sahagún probed the Indian understanding of astronomy from his European point of view and was clearly upset when the Indians responded with statements about sun worship, celestial monsters, and that "the star arrow worms dogs and rabbits." In the text, Sahagún made disparaging remarks about the vulgarity of the Indian view of astrology, causing López Austin to write that

He could not be more unjust. This book is a personal failure. . . . If he attacks the Indians for their low level of understanding, they must have felt the same way about his intelligence when confronted with questions which considered ingenuous in their lack of knowledge. If Sahagún had under-

stood something about the clash of ideas, perhaps his book would be one of the best sources on the cosmic vision of the Nahuas, discussing the upper to lower floors, the course of the stars through them, the supporting trees, information that is seldom available from other sources.⁸⁴

Sahagún's Quetzalcoatl. But this and other scattered failures are admirably balanced by a string of successes; for example, the material in relation to Quetzalcoatl is both rare and comprehensive. Sahagún's work uncovered stories and traditions about Quetzalcoatl that involve almost all the themes and roles we have seen in the other works. To name just three important entries, to be used in detail later, Quetzalcoatl's role as creator deity and his part in the drama of the creation of the fifth sun are described in fine detail. References to Quetzalcoatl's relation to the priesthood, childbirth, and the *calmecacs* are found in different parts of the codex.⁸⁵ Sahagún's persistent probes also uncovered one of the most complete accounts of the Toltec tradition about Quetzalcoatl in Tollan.⁸⁶ Perhaps most important for our study is the detailed identification of Cortes with Quetzalcoatl found in the twelfth book, "The Conquest."⁸⁷ Not enough can be said here about the relevant material on the feathered serpent, but it will be used thoroughly on the pages that follow.

A comment is needed concerning the references in book 12 which show that Moctezuma thought Cortes was Quetzalcoatl. This extremely important account was collected decades after the events described. Sahagún and his trilingual students apparently gathered this version from the elders of Tlatelolco. These elders, while clearly within the Aztec hegemony, represented a position somewhat critical of the Aztec elite who conquered them nearly a century before. This has led some scholars to argue that this identification of Quetzalcoatl may have been a *post eventum* fabrication by rivals to expose a hysterical Moctezuma's failure of nerve. If we follow this reasoning, what are we to make of the almost identical picture appearing in Cortes's letters, written long before this account was gathered? In my view, what we have is not a politically motivated fabrication, but a *post eventum* elaboration of the actual identification of Cortes with Quetzalcoatl by members of the Aztec elite in 1519. The belief in Quetzalcoatl's return, as shown in a number of other sources, had such a strong grip on the Aztec mind that even decades after the events described, it was used to communicate the persistence of the Aztec commitment to certain cosmological patterns of destiny. While it is possible that the Tlatelolcans may have elaborated this belief, I do not think they could have fabricated it.

Diego Durán

The apostolic strategy of conquering the Indian spirit by first knowing its attachments was pursued with particular fervor by the Dominican priest and writer, Diego Durán. Durán's evangelical research efforts produced three works of lasting value, *History of the Indians of New Spain*, *Book of the Gods and Rites*, and *The Ancient Calendar*. His intense commitment to change Indian beliefs is reflected in these comments from his works. In *Book of the Gods and Rites*, we read:

I am moved, O Christian reader, to begin the task of [writing this work] with the realization that we who have been chosen to instruct the Indians, will never reveal the True God to them until the heathen ceremonies and false cults of their counterfeit deities are extinguished, erased. Here I shall set down a written account of the ancient idolatries and false religion with which the devil was worshiped until the Holy Gospel was brought to this land. Fields of grain and fruit trees do not prosper on uncultivated rocky soil, covered with brambles and brush, unless all roots and stumps are eradicated.⁸⁸

And in his *Ancient Calendar*:

Not only today but in the past we have known of old men who were proselytizers, soothsayers, wise in the old law, who taught and are still teaching the young folk, who are now being educated. They instruct them in the count of days, and of the years, and of the ceremonies and ancient rites. . . . Owing to this suspicion I was encouraged to produce this work, moved only by the zeal of informing and illuminating our ministers so that their task may not be in vain, worthless. . . . In order to administer the sacraments, one needs more knowledge of the language, customs, and weaknesses of these people than most people think.⁸⁹

Like his Franciscan counterparts, Durán sought out surviving elders and their picture books and made strenuous efforts to talk with anyone who had some understanding of pre-Columbian traditions. Yet his descriptions of Aztec life are riddled with Christian polemics and attacks on Indian idolatries. Still, his works contain some vital information concerning Quetzalcoatl's significance for the Aztec dynasties. Among the many references to Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl and Quetzalcoatl we find the intriguing story (also found in Tezozomoc's *Cronica Mexicana*) of Moctezuma's visit to Chapultepec to view his carved effigy. He is told that this custom began with Quetzalcoatl and the suggestion is that a direct link existed between the Toltec king and Aztec royalty.⁹⁰ The *Book of the Gods and Rites* begins with a chapter on Topiltzin where we are informed that the Aztecs derived their

ceremonial order from the great king in Tula.⁹¹ Topiltzin's wonderful reputation as preacher and his miraculous acts led the Dominican to suggest that he was possibly an ancient Christian apostle who carried the Gospel to the New World centuries before the Spaniards came. Moreover, we find in his *History* elaborate references to the identification of the Spaniards as Quetzalcoatl by Moctezuma plus the fascinating detail that when the Spaniards sent biscuits for the Aztec king to eat, he had them sent to be buried in the temple of Quetzalcoatl in Tula.⁹²

Brief mention must be made of Diego de Landa's invaluable work, *Relación de las Cosas de Yucatan*, which carries information about the Quetzalcoatl tradition in the Mayan region.⁹³ Diego de Landa worked in Yucatan from 1549 to 1563 and had excellent exposure to the native traditions, which he violently tried to stamp out. In 1563, he was summoned to Spain to defend his harsh inquisitorial treatment of Indians. Acquitted of all charges, he returned to Yucatan as its bishop in 1573 and remained there until 1579. His work is the most valuable we have for this region and is often compared with Sahagún's *Historia*, although it has nothing of the depth and breadth of that work. The principal value of this study lies in the description of a conquering Toltec Quetzalcoatl, who established himself as the ruler of Chichén Itzá and built a magnificent ceremonial temple to the feathered serpent deity. A small kingdom was organized under the guidance of this priest-king who introduced heart sacrifice into the region. In a confusing set of references, we are also told of another Toltec invasion, probably several hundred years later, also led by Quetzalcoatl, who established his capital in Mayapan.

Comments on the Archaeological Evidence

Paul Westheim, in his important book, *The Art of Ancient Mexico*, makes an interesting archaeological interpretation. He notes that the main pyramid at Tenayuca, located near Mexico City, is circled by interwoven bands of serpents and fifty-two gaping serpent heads. The image implies that the pyramidal structure is generated out of the body of the serpent, as though it is "magically sprouting from the earth."⁹⁴ Although this interpretation can be challenged, there is no doubt that serpent symbolism and more specifically feathered serpent symbolism is spread throughout the architecture of ceremonial centers in Mesoamerica. Carved and painted images of Quetzalcoatl appear on murals and monoliths, accompanying deities, priestly figures, warriors, and astronomical glyphs. Apparently, some of the round pyramids of the Classic and Post-Classic centers are represen-

tations of this dynamic sacred being. Fray Motolinía, in a section called "Temples of the Demon," notes:

There were also some houses or temples of the demon which were round, some large and others smaller, according to the size of the town. The entrance was like that of a cave and on it was painted the mouth of a frightening serpent with terrible fangs and teeth. . . . These houses . . . were round and low and had a sunken floor. . . . They were dedicated to the god of wind, who was called Quetzalcoatl.⁹⁵

In the six urban centers to be examined, we find the meaningful coincidence of Quetzalcoatl's image ornamenting the central pyramid temple complexes of the ceremonial centers. The implication of this coincidence is that not just the pyramidal structure, but also the institutions that gave these cities their authority and coherence were in various degrees generated by Quetzalcoatl. In these initial comments on the archaeological evidence, I will briefly describe the feathered serpent images carved on the pivotal shrines of these cities.

Serious and significant archaeological research did not begin in Mexican cities until the second decade of this century with Manuel Gamio's controlled excavations of Teotihuacán during the Mexican Revolution. Since those early excavations, powerful strides have been made by several generations of Mexican, German, French, and American teams. They have worked at major and minor sites throughout Mesoamerica using coordinated field excavation techniques and literary evidence to fill in the static picture that archaeology yields. As a result of these advances it is possible to identify artistic sequences, trace the origins and flow of sculptural styles, recognize urban building innovations, and discuss the evolution of deity representations, especially in the Classic and Post-Classic periods. When we turn to the archaeological record concerning the Quetzalcoatl tradition, the evidence is spectacular; nowhere is this more striking than in Teotihuacán, the earliest of our great ceremonial centers and the subject of a stunning publication, *Urbanization at Teotihuacán, Mexico: The Teotihuacán Map*.⁹⁶ This imperial center of the high plateau, which developed and flourished between around 100 B.C. and A.D. 750, is known to us almost totally through the archaeological record, and the feathered serpent's fantastic zoomorphic image not only impresses but also confronts the observer. This confrontation is most evident in the Pyramid of the Feathered Serpent located in the middle of the Ciudadela, where Quetzalcoatl's image shares the architectural stage with another deity, probably Tlaloc. The magnificent strength of the feathered serpent cult reflected in this image has inspired the anthropologist Charles Margain to admire this pyramid as an example

of "aesthetic factor" at work in the construction of a "significant and valuable world" that was crucial to human life in Teotihuacán. Apparently, the artists, engineers, and architects of Teotihuacán cooperated to express their refined visions and exquisite sensitivity in making this building; it is a fine example of "complete integration. True plastic integration exists when no single element of its composition, pictorial, sculptural, architectural—can be added or subtracted. The Temple of Quetzalcoatl demonstrates this, even in its present ruined state."⁹⁷

A frieze consisting of alternating giant carved stone heads of Quetzalcoatl and possibly an early version of Tlaloc adorns the structure. Quetzalcoatl's head deserves added comments because in it we see the divine grin of this ancient deity, a grin flashed in other centers, as we shall see. It is a monumental, jutting visage with open jaws displaying thick, white, carved teeth beneath what were once obsidian eyes. The head emerges from a bouquet of feathers that join it to the body. A thickly stylized body undulates horizontally along the pyramid over and under various shell figures. In this earliest of great capital cities, perhaps the original Tollan of the sources, Quetzalcoatl was clearly appreciated as a great sacred power. We shall return to this structure and its wonderful ornaments in chapter 3.

While the same exuberant claim for "true plastic integration" cannot be made for the Quetzalcoatl temples in the "other" Tollans, it does appear that each ceremonial center is symbolically integrated by shrines adorned with plumed serpent imagery. A similar coincidence of plumed serpent and central shrine appears in Xochicalco, where Quetzalcoatl's image almost totally dominates the pivotal structure. In this much smaller tenth-century site, which was probably a significant part of Teotihuacán's empire, we find Quetzalcoatl related to a surprising variety of artistic motifs and styles from Monte Alban, Teotihuacán, El Tajín, and lowland Mayan cities. The iconography on the numerous stone structures of this hilltop fortress suggests that Xochicalco was at least an aesthetic crossroads in Mesoamerica and achieved a distinct sense of cultural integration. This accomplishment is partially reflected in the rare and astonishing Temple of Quetzalcoatl, which crowns the highest terrace of the city. Surrounding this temple is a magnificent feathered serpent frieze, consisting of a huge, tense undulating feathered serpent, again with his divine grin, passing over and under the bodies of Mayan priests and calendar signs, symbolically weaving together and supporting the figures and their meanings. In this case, Quetzalcoatl functions as a dominant leitmotif.

In Tula, we have a more complex relationship between Quetzalcoatl and ceremonial center. The controversy surrounding this city's identification with the grand Tollan described in the *Anales de Cuauhti-*

tlán reflects some of the difficulties of understanding Quetzalcoatl's role in Mesoamerican urban traditions. The feathered serpent's image does not dominate the iconography of Tula, but there are Quetzalcoatl images on some of the major buildings and sculptured figures in and near the primary ceremonial center. In the written sources, however, it is abundantly clear that the main temples were associated with both the deity Quetzalcoatl and the ruler Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl. One of the more elaborate temple pyramids in Tula's main plaza apparently has images of Quetzalcoatl's role as the morning star, causing Ignacio Marquina to name it the Temple of Tlahuizcalpantecuhtli. Feathered serpents also appear on the small heelcap decorations of the sandals worn by the great stone Atlantean warriors that stood on top of one pyramid. In the nearby Burnt Palace, small colorful, feathered and cloud serpents decorate cornices and banquet friezes. Moreover, the east altar of Mound 3 contains the feathered serpent in the apparent position of a patron deity to warrior figures. A pottery vessel from Tula, now located in the Vienna naturhistorisches Museum, has a similar image. Desiré Charney reported that he saw a feathered serpent image on the ball-game ring during his work in Tula. There are two possible images of the historical priest-king Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl appearing at the site. One is on a pillar discovered by Jorge Acosta in the 1941 excavations, where we have a warrior with an unusual helmet mask decorated with an eagle head and a full beard. The name glyph above the figure appears to be the feathered serpent, leading H. B. Nicholson to conjecture that this may be a carving of the historical individual who bore the title Quetzalcoatl. The second image appears on the Cerro de la Malinche about a mile from the main center. High on a hillside, on a rock wall facing the ceremonial center, is a finely carved figure of what appears to be a priest or warrior (partly defaced) who is drawing blood from his ear. A magnificent undulating serpent appears vertically behind and above the human figure. The date 1 Reed appears to the right of the figure. Although it seems that this figure was carved later than the apogee of Tollan by Aztec artists, this in no way detracts from the possibility that it may be an effigy of Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl.

Recently, Eloise Quiñones Keber, impressed with the possibility that the Aztecs had this image carved long after the fall of Tula, has come up with the suggestion that this effigy "might be seen as part of the attempt on the part of Aztec rulers to provide their youthful dynasty with a historical validation of political legitimacy by connecting it to Toltec forebears."⁹⁸ This seems quite possible when we remember that the Aztec custom of carving effigies of rulers at Chapultepec originated with Quetzalcoatl. In this case, the suggestion is that they returned to the archetypal city to sacralize their dynasty. Re-

ardless of whether Tula is the Tollan of the sources, it is evident that the feathered serpent was important enough to be embedded in stone throughout the ceremonial center.

The Toltec colonial capital of Chichén Itzá located far to the southeast is a refined version of Tula's artistic style mixed with indigenous Mayan architectural features. Among the many stunning buildings of this marvelous center, at least three buildings, the small Temple of the Jaguars on the east side of the mammoth ball court, the great Temple of the Warriors, and El Castillo or the Temple of Kukulcan, contain significant images of the feathered serpent. The latter structure dominates the center of the sacred enclave where the feathered serpent grins at the bottom of the stairways leading up to the shrine. Within view of this commanding pyramid is the Temple of the Warriors, which has the unusual characteristic of being decorated with numerous upside-down feathered serpents guarding the great doorway. These carvings and other smaller images of the feathered serpent found throughout the center demonstrate that Toltec culture, with its fascination for Quetzalcoatl, reestablished itself in this Mayan center and they will prove to be valuable data for our analysis of Quetzalcoatl's power at the periphery of the Mexican urban tradition.

These traces are also found, in much less impressive fashion, in Cholollan, the religious capital of Mesoamerica, where the archaeological record has suffered from ill-planned and poorly organized excavations. Yet in the major ceremonial courtyard at the base of the largest pyramid in the world, we find what appear to be prominent feathered serpent images on two altars.⁹⁹ In our discussion of this longest inhabited center in America we will rely much more heavily on the testimony of the written records.

The shattered ruins and reconstructed models of Tenochtitlán's great ceremonial compound suggest that the feathered serpent tradition was effectively intermeshed with the symbolic landscape of Aztec syncretism. Quetzalcoatl was honored by a fine round pyramid, referred to earlier by Motolinía. It was apparently situated directly in front of the Templo Mayor, where the shrines of Tlaloc and Huitzilopochtli towered above the sacred landscape. As we will suggest later, the spatial relationship of these three shrines demonstrates that the power and meaning of Quetzalcoatl for the Aztec capital, while persistent, has changed. Quetzalcoatl is also found on the central shrine in the form of great grinning serpent heads guarding the base of the stairways leading up to the shrine of Huitzilopochtli. Further, it appears that the entire ceremonial precinct, occupying a square space of about 440 meters on each side, was surrounded by a *coatepantli* or serpent wall, which according to Jorge Hardoy was decorated with hundreds of feathered serpent heads. The feathered serpent

images found on Aztec stones are too numerous to discuss at this point, but they will receive further attention, particularly at strategic points in chapter 4.

DESIGNS OF QUETZALCOATL

Ce Acatl Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl, son of Iztacmixcoatl and Chilmalma, was born, at least to human beings, in the Central High Plateau of Mexico in the year 843 or in 895 or in 935 or in 947 or in 1156. . . . Born? Well, following detailed studies of the sources, it is possible to negate his existence or affirm that he died in Uxmal, in the Pyramid of the Advino on the 4th of April in 1208, at six in the evening, Yucatan time.¹⁰⁰

The intriguing array of evidence described here suggests that the painted, carved, and written images of Quetzalcoatl reflect certain major cosmological concepts, cultural paradigms, and historical events that had significance during a long period of pre-Columbian history. The puzzling arrangements of powers and meanings which characterize the tales, myths, and stories of Quetzalcoatl are perhaps accurately represented in the feathered serpent's distilled artistic image, the stepped fret with its antagonism, striking ambivalence, and flowing arcs. It seems clear that we are faced with a situation similar to the one summarized by Clifford Geertz as a "multiplicity of conceptual structures, many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another, that are at once strange, irregular and inexplicit, and that the ethnographer must contrive somehow to grasp and then render."¹⁰¹

When dealing with the Quetzalcoatl tradition of ancient Mexico, scholars are in a similar position to the one exclaimed upon by Sherlock Holmes:

HOLMES: My dear Watson, this is a most unique case!

WATSON: Unique? How's that Holmes?

HOLMES: Most unique indeed! Instead of being faced with too few clues, we are given too many. We have a puzzle with too many pieces in it.

This ancient Mexican conundrum has led scholars to interpret and redesign its shape and meaning in marvelous, insightful, confused, and sometimes laughable ways. It must be stated that these scholarly designs of the feathered serpent reflect the intellectual ingenuity of scholars as much as the sybilline power of the pre-Columbian symbol. It is rare indeed when we feel, with exhilaration, that the two expressions are close together. The scholarship on Quetzalcoatl is full of inventiveness, contrivance, and fabrication, and the studies of Quet-

zalcoatl are a fascinating topic in themselves. Intellectual paradigms, artistic intuition, and schools of thought have been applied to the evidence, resulting in strikingly divergent portraits of this major Mexican symbol. It is necessary, in the face of this meeting of intellectual paradigm and indigenous data, to be both suspicious and appreciative of the major studies on this figure. The following short summary of three dominant streams of interpretation will describe the general outline of each approach and focus briefly on the finest renditions of its lines. We will benefit from previous discussions by Alfonso Caso and Alfredo López Austin, who organized the major studies on the Toltecs and Quetzalcoatl into three categories:¹⁰² the diffusionist, symbolic, and historical designs of this ancient, fantastic figure.

The diffusionist design is the picture that has Quetzalcoatl originating outside ancient Mexico in a Christian, oriental, or other foreign culture. Special reference will be made to the scientific diffusionist approach of Alexander von Humboldt, whose expansive and ornate work helped set the stage for later scholars impressed with the possibility of transoceanic connections.

The symbolic design is an attempt to understand the category of myth as testimony to the religious imagination. Quetzalcoatl was a mental creation symbolizing (a) human perceptions and interactions with forces of nature or (b) the conscious and sometimes unconscious search for spiritual wholeness and integration. Special reference will be made to the works of Eduard Selser, Laurette Séjourné, and Miguel León-Portilla.

In the historical design scholars propose that Quetzalcoatl of Tolan was a historical individual whose biography can be discerned by stripping away miraculous elements in the evidence. Detailed versions of the historical approach appear in the writings of Jiménez Moreno, Paul Kirchhoff, H. B. Nicholson, and Alfredo López Austin.

Diffusionist Design

The most persistent and popular interpretation of Quetzalcoatl speculates that the culture hero and his deity migrated to ancient America from a foreign country. This earliest of interpretations was generated in response to the crisis of knowledge felt in European countries and transplanted European communities resulting from the discovery and conquest of America. Faced with lands and peoples never mentioned in the authoritative, geographical and theological works of the Old World, scholars, clergy, and citizens alike made strenuous attempts to place the age of discovery within the context of meaning provided by the biblical, Greek, and Renaissance classics. Writing of these efforts, Lewis Hanke notes that "even before the first decade had passed, these plumed and painted peoples, so er-

roneously called Indians, had become the principal mystery which perplexed the Spanish nation, conquistadores, ecclesiastics, crown, and common citizens alike. Who were they? Whence came they?"¹⁰³ The first waves of Spaniards were intrigued by the presence of Indian crosses, rituals of confession and baptism, and stories of an ancient lord who preached a wonderful message in the land, gave the people a new religion, left, and promised to return. When versions of this story suggested the preconquest presence of a religious genius who made a marvelous impact on cities and towns, two theories arose concerning his significance. Either clerics were faced with proof of evil supernatural influences of the devil who had misled the Indians into their false and terrible beliefs, practices, and idolatries, or they had proof of a redeeming contact from early Christianity in the form of an apostle whose missionary activities were recorded in the stories.

Consider the hopes of the Dominican priest Diego Durán, who, upon hearing of a mysterious ancient book in the possession of a village near Popocatepetl, hurried to the spot in hopes that he would find "the Holy Gospel in Hebrew." He was told that the book was originally given to the villagers by Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl, but that it had been destroyed a few years earlier because the Indians could not read it. Distraught at this loss, Fray Durán held out the belief to the end of his life that Quetzalcoatl was most likely the wandering Saint Thomas and that he had visited the New World centuries before. This interpretation of a foreign missionary, Quetzalcoatl, was elaborately developed during the seventeenth century in such books as *Pluma Rica Nueva Fenix de America* by Manuel Duarte and *Finix de Occidente: Santo Tomás Apóstol hallado con el nombre de Quetzalcoatl entre las cenizas de antiguas tradiciones conservadas en piedra, teoamoxtles tultecos y en cantares teo chichimecos y mexicanos* by Sigüenza y Góngora.

The idea that some of the attractive elements in pre-Columbian religion had been disseminated from the Old World was eventually refined and changed by the amazing work of Alexander von Humboldt, whose theories and conclusions influenced generations of natural scientists and opened new intellectual channels for students of Mexican culture. His influence can be seen in such important scholars as William Prescott, Walter Krickeberg, and Robert Heine Geldern.

Between 1794 and 1804, Humboldt traveled six thousand miles throughout the Americas in order to study the natural and cultural history of the New World. This robust genius applied the scientific method in the best manner of the German intellectual tradition to describe and understand the artifacts and peoples he encountered. Partially inspired by the writings of Johann Wolfgang von Herder, he made connections and traced relationships between different cultures

within and beyond the New World. His splendidly illustrated *Vues de cordilleres et monuments de peuples indigenes de l'Amerique* recorded the presence of pyramids, picture books, pottery, ceremonial centers, plus stories of Quetzalcoatl that suggested to him that some ancient contact had been made between Asian cultures and the Indians.¹⁰⁴ While Humboldt was not sure that the great ruler Quetzalcoatl was a foreigner, it seemed to him likely that some of the wonderful elements of that marvelous kingdom were transmitted from Asia. A careful look at Humboldt's work reveals that he was debating with himself the idea of cultural diffusion against the notion of independent invention of these civilizational elements. Humboldt's genius—for he was called an academy in himself—provided some of the tools and legitimation for later studies of cultural diffusion, most recently articulated by the Vienna school of ethnology.

Symbolic Design

The scholarly designs of Quetzalcoatl took a celestial turn in the dense and intricate works of the so-called German school, which appeared toward the end of the nineteenth century. Led by the genius of Eduard Selser, this group of thinkers argued that the category of myth could not be reduced to historical events and transoceanic journeys. Rather, myths were symbolic expressions of the ancient imagination, and the Quetzalcoatl myths reflected the ancient appreciation of the dynamics and beauty of natural phenomena. This antihistorical approach was forcefully stated by Daniel Brinton in his essay, "Myths Are Not History": "Let it be understood, hereafter, that whoever uses these names (Itzamna, Quetzalcoatl) in a historical sense betrays an ignorance of the subject he handles, which were it in a better known field of Aryan or Egyptian lore, would at once convict him of not deserving the name of scholar."¹⁰⁵

Brinton argued that myths were "spontaneous productions of the mind, not reminiscences of historic events" and that Quetzalcoatl's story was one example of a widespread Indian hero myth personifying the luminous scenarios of nature which impressed archaic peoples in their appearance, movement, contrasts, disappearance, and continual return. Translating Quetzalcoatl as "Admirable Twin," he suggested that the colors and elements of Quetzalcoatl's costume were symbols for the dazzling lights that inspired the beholder. The splendid Tollan was certainly not "the little town of Tula" but the brilliant object and motion of the glowing sun.

Eduard Selser, a genius who did broad studies on Mesoamerica, developed this perspective by using the methods gleaned from his knowledge of comparative linguistics, ethnography, and archaeology. Part of Selser's great contribution lies in his skillful and often successful

analysis of storybooks such as the *Tonalamatl Aubin*, *Codex Borgia*, and the *Codex Vaticanus A*, and his pioneer translations of Sahagún's early Nahuatl manuscripts. His rigorous comparative approach resulted in the first serious opening of the West to the meanings and figures in the pre-Columbian pictorial tradition.¹⁰⁶

For Selser, Quetzalcoatl's meaning is rooted in natural phenomena, especially water. The pictures he analyzed suggested that the ancient priesthoods proclaimed Quetzalcoatl to be the primordial creator of the world and the maker of human life. This grandiose concept sprang from a more archaic notion about *quetzalcoatl*s—mythical serpent beings who symbolized the moisture and life produced by the new rains that poured after the long dry season. Quetzalcoatl's original mythical meaning was as the active agent of water that gave life in its most basic forms. This mediating capacity between drought and fertility was elaborated in Mexican thought when Quetzalcoatl took the form of Ehécatl, the god of wind who precedes the coming of rain. Selser saw the theme of religious mediation elaborated in the stories of Quetzalcoatl's manifestation as the great priest-king who initiated civilization and mediated between the gods and man. Thus, there was a historical dimension to the stories about the great ruler, but they also contained metaphorical statements about creativity at natural and cultural levels. While other deities, such as Tlaloc, the rain god, remained natural forces throughout Mesoamerican religion, Quetzalcoatl became a special human being with social and cultural significance, making this deity a very distinctive one. A rain-dispensing god and a rain-making priest were joined in a special combination to become the center of Mesoamerican civilized life.

The advances of Selser and his students have never been matched in Mesoamerican studies. But another group of scholars has developed the view that the myths about Quetzalcoatl and the archaeological images of the feathered serpent represent the spiritual and psychological genius of ancient Mexican culture. In particular, Laurette Séjourné argues that Mesoamerican history was highlighted by a poetic age of creativity which was centered in Teotihuacán. She believes that ancient Mexican culture suffered a great anxiety of transcendence which led to the degraded Aztec practice of terror through massive human sacrifice. This degradation was preceded by a beautiful spiritual vision of the human being achieving liberation through heroic self-sacrifice, a vision embodied in the Quetzalcoatl tradition. Séjourné feels that the two Quetzalcoatl, the priest-king and the creator-deity, represent the majestic lines of an archetype of spiritual liberation acted out in Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl's self-sacrifice in Tlapallan and in Quetzalcoatl's cosmic dive into the underworld to reclaim the bones of ancestors to create human life once more.

Quetzalcoatl's career was a metaphor of transcendence and a model of liberation that guided the golden age of ancient American civilization.¹⁰⁷

A similar spiritualist approach has been articulated by Miguel León-Portilla, who portrays Quetzalcoatl as the personification of wisdom. This magnificent role was achieved by both the god Quetzalcoatl and the culture hero Quetzalcoatl. The latter penetrated the heavens in a great ecstasy and established the ritual means for the religious virtuosi to commune with the highest forces of the universe, realizing the title of *tlamantini*. The deity Quetzalcoatl constantly revealed the high gods' creative intentions in giving life to the universe in its various forms. Quetzalcoatl was the creative spirit who originated agricultural and human life as well as the cultural spirit that discovered the profound meanings of life.¹⁰⁸

Historical Design

The third and dominant scholarly design is the historical one that focuses on the outline of Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl's biography and the identification of the earthly city where he reigned. Most of these scholars benefit from the euhemeristic theory of religion, that gods were once kings or heroes whose great achievements encouraged their deification in myth. Myths, in this approach, were considered reminiscences of human events and even historical stages. Vigorously antidiffusionist in their approach, these historians have attempted to find the historical Quetzalcoatl camouflaged in myth.

Among the early exponents of this design were the Jesuit Francisco Clavigero, Orozco y Berra, and Alfredo Chavero. All three saw Quetzalcoatl as a human being who represented indigenous cultural values and articulated religious meanings during a pivotal period of Mesoamerican history. Orozco y Berra, called the first scientist of Mexican civilization, saw the mythical conflicts of Tezcatlipoca and Quetzalcoatl in Tollan as accounts of the struggle between two religious traditions. Alfredo Chavero went so far as to construct the first decent detailed biography of the Toltec king. Amazingly, both Chavero and Orozco y Berra arrived at their insights without the Sahagúntine corpus, which had not yet been rediscovered.

These insights and methods have been used with unusual skill by H. B. Nicholson, whose amazing source analysis has yielded a reasonably clear picture of the biography of Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl. This biography, embedded in sources from all over Mesoamerica, is likened to a seven-act play including the birth, childhood, rise to power, reign, downfall, death, and promised return of the Toltec hero. According to Nicholson, Quetzalcoatl's significance for subsequent cultures was as a religious innovator. Forced to leave his city, he

disappeared from history, but his fame led to his transformation into a priestly archetype. In time and memory he was confused with several preexistent deities, primarily Ehécatl.

Twentieth-century historians received the benefit of Paul Radin's *The Sources and Authenticity of the History of the Ancient Mexicans*, in which he demonstrates that the scribes and rulers of ancient Mexico had a pronounced historical sense expressed in a variety of types of history. Not only were the ancient Mexicans aware of change, said Radin, but they actively and consciously produced it. Their culture underwent profound social developments including the transformations from a nomadic tribal culture to an urban civilization, and these changes were recorded in their writings and oral traditions. Radin's proof of an authentic historical sense in ancient Mexico marked the beginning of an era of confidence in the task of reconstructing Mesoamerican history on the basis of documents.

Within this context, historians and anthropologists took up the problem of identifying Tollan in geographical space. The problem they faced most directly was the tremendous disparity between the archaeological evidence at Tula and the marvelous descriptions of the great Tollan. The Sociedad Mexicana de Antropología organized a six-year study of the evidence culminating in a conference highlighted by a debate between parties arguing for Tollan Xicocotitlán and Tollan Teotihuacán. While some voiced their vote for Teotihuacán (and the issue has not been finally settled), the majority of scholars favor the position articulated by Wigberto Jiménez Moreno, who studied all types of evidence, including folklore in contemporary Mexico, to reconstruct the life of Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl and to identify his city. He identified places and natural settings near Tula that were described in myths and demonstrated the similarities in the ceramic styles between Chichén Itzá and Tula. This elder statesman of Mesoamerican studies also made the wise suggestion that Tula was a synonym for "metropolis."¹⁰⁹

Jiménez Moreno and Paul Kirchhoff, working from the same sources, carried the debate to a more detailed level when they attempted to identify exactly when Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl's reign in Tollan took place. Jiménez Moreno argued that Quetzalcoatl was the founder of Tollan, while Kirchhoff favored the position that he was the last ruler and that, further, the historical record goes back only to the end of Tollan in the eleventh century.¹¹⁰ It is clear that this question will never be settled, given the present evidence.¹¹¹

The splitting of the historical Quetzalcoatl from the mythical Quetzalcoatl has been shrewdly reversed in the illuminating work of Alfredo López Austin, who discusses Quetzalcoatl as the quintessential Hombre-Dios of Mexico. Hombre-Dioses, says López Austin, were

extraordinary individuals whose religious ecstasies and knowledge, which included the power to carry, keep, and speak for the tribal god, made them living authorities in the many migrating communities. With the development of Classic cities, these figures mediated the social, economic, and spiritual transformations characteristic of the urban process and became the rulers of civilized centers. Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl was a sterling example of this transformed Hombre-Dios and was appreciated as the paradigm of new leadership. He was the keeper and spokesman for the Quetzalcoatl deity whose existence had been significant since the time of Teotihuacán.

Recently, the historical significance of the Quetzalcoatl tradition has received a vibrant and compelling interpretation by Jacques Lafaye, whose *Quetzalcoatl and Guadalupe: The Formation of Mexican National Consciousness, 1531–1813* focuses on the colonial sources about Quetzalcoatl and the uses that priest and *campesino* made of the Aztec god-hero during the critical years when Mexico was striving for its own identity as a nation. What is particularly valuable in this work is the way in which the author shows how historical memory and myth-making processes were woven together to make Quetzalcoatl a symbol for political and social legitimacy. It is an essay in what Lafaye calls “intra-history” and shows how both Quetzalcoatl and the image of Guadalupe have a persistent relevance in the modern Mexican imagination.¹¹²

Remembering that a line can be understood as a point that moves, we have attempted to identify the original points of Quetzalcoatl in the different scholarly sketches of this symbol and then trace whatever movement was most clearly described in the major studies. The diffusionists saw Quetzalcoatl’s point of origin outside of America, moving across the ancient landscape into Mexico. The symbolists located Quetzalcoatl’s origin either in the rhythms of the sky or in the depth of the human spirit. This original inspiration moves brilliantly through the celestial and terrestrial landscapes or through the spiritual universes of human beings in quest of liberation. The historicists identify Quetzalcoatl originally in Mexican events when he moves gallantly in the drama of social development and change before being swept up into an imaginary flight along the arc of the morning star. As we turn to the present interpretation, it is clear that the full meaning of this mesmerizing design and figure eludes us still.