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Quetzalcoatl

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Abstract: A series of brief comments in which the author presents archaeological findings, architectural notes, and myths and legends that deal indirectly with the Book of Mormon. Dibble discusses the wheel, ancient irrigation methods, metals, Mexican and Mayan codices, Quetzalcoatl, ancient buildings, and numerous other related items. The eighteenth part covers Quetzalcoatl.

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QUETZALCOATL

By CHARLES E. DIBBLE
Roosevelt Fellow, Institute of International Education

QUETZALCOATL means "Quetzal-serpent" or "feathered serpent." But the feathers of the Quetzal bird were highly precious and thus the word "quetzal" came to mean "something precious." "Coatl" means serpent, but it also means twin. Even in Spanish, as spoken today in Mexico, "cuate" means a close companion. Hence, Quetzalcoatl, by extension, means "precious twin." In Mexican mythology the planet Venus in the morning hours represented Quetzalcoatl, and when the star appeared in the west it represented his twin brother, Xolotl.



QUETZALCOATL, ACCORDING TO THE BORGIA CODEX

In another legend Quetzalcoatl, who was also known as Ce Acatl, because he was born during a year called Ce Acatl, left his people and promised to return in a year of the same name. When the Spaniards arrived in Vera Cruz in 1519 (according to the Aztec calendar the year was Ce Acatl—1 Cane) there was no doubt but that the Toltec god, Quetzalcoatl, had returned to claim his kingdom.

Quetzalcoatl was a benefactor; he was god of the wind which brought rain; he was god of life. He taught the natives the art of working precious stones, weaving multicolored fabrics and feather mosaic. He introduced auto-sacrifice, discovered maize, taught the Indians astronomy, and gave them a calendar.

Quetzalcoatl was an old creator god and thus, in some representations, he wore a beard. According to one tradition he went down to the world of the dead, gathered the bones of past generations, and by nourishing them with his own blood, a new generation of men was created.