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Excursus: Quetzalcoatl: A Malleable Mythology

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Abstract: The LDS fascination with the Aztec deity Quetzalcoatl, perhaps more popularly known as the "white god," has very deep roots. No less a figure than Church president John Taylor, wrote of Quetzalcoatl: "The story of the life of the Mexican divinity, Quetzalcoatl, closely resembles that of the Savior; so closely, indeed, that we can come to no other conclusion than that Quetzalcoatl and Christ are the same being. But the history of the former has been handed down to us through an impure Lamanitish source, which has sadly disfigured and perverted the original incidents and teachings of the Savior's life and ministry."

Excursus:
Quetzalcoatl: A Malleable Mythology

The LDS fascination with the Aztec deity Quetzalcoatl, perhaps more popularly known as the "white god," has very deep roots. No less a figure than Church president John Taylor, wrote of Quetzalcoatl: "The story of the life of the Mexican divinity, Quetzalcoatl, closely resembles that of the Savior; so closely, indeed, that we can come to no other conclusion than that Quetzalcoatl and Christ are the same being. But the history of the former has been handed down to us through an impure Lamanitish source, which has sadly disfigured and perverted the original incidents and teachings of the Savior's life and ministry."[1]

In this statement, the two conceptual facets of the LDS literature on the subject of Quetzalcoatl as an evidence for Christ in America are clearly stated. The first is the faith-affirming declaration that there is, in the historical records, evidence that corroborates an important and transcendental event recorded in the Book of Mormon. The second is that this evidence has been somehow corrupted so that the correlation is not obvious, although it may still be discovered amid distorted remembrances.

In the case of the Quetzalcoatl material, the potential remembrance is to the most important event that took place on the American continent. Standing in the way of an absolute corroboration of that event is an incredibly complex set of texts which, in President Taylor's words, have "sadly disfigured and perverted the original incidents." Sorting through these potential distorted remembrances is notoriously difficult. Joseph L. Allen, Ph.D., whose doctoral dissertation examined (favorably) the evidence for the remembrance of Christ's visit in the textual sources, states: "On many occasions it is difficult, if not impossible, to determine whether the Spanish chroniclers were writing about human beings who were named Quetzalcoatl or whether the chroniclers were indeed referring to the myths and legends that date back to the god Quetzalcoatl."[2] Diane E. Wirth, lecturer on Mesoamerican iconography, expresses the same regret:

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[1]John Taylor, *Mediation and Atonement* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1882), 201, on *GospeLink 2001*, CD-ROM (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000).

[2]Joseph L. Allen, *Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon* (Orem, Utah: SA Publishers, 1989), 165.

> When we read the writings of the natives themselves, and those of the early Spanish historians, we find it difficult to reach the core of the Quetzalcoatl saga—it appears almost timeless. Even more difficult to sort out is a time period for the various Quetzalcoatls: the time when they lived. Does the historical source refer to a man who took upon himself this popular name, or does the record refer to the deity of Quetzalcoatl? We also have to account for mutations in the Quetzalcoatl tradition over the centuries as well as a possible "Christian gloss" added by over-zealous Catholic priests.[3]

Is there a real remembrance of Christ's visit to the Americas as recorded in the Book of Mormon hiding behind the mutations and Christian glosses that Wirth mentioned? Unraveling the mythology and history of Quetzalcoatl is unquestionably a complex and difficult riddle. Books have already attempted to unravel portions of the tales; but as John Sorenson notes, the whole remains "a complex, uncompleted task."[4] Fortunately, the task of determining whether a remembrance of Jesus Christ hides in the native lore is a much more limited and better-defined question than attempting to understand the whole history and development of the Quetzalcoatl mythology.

The Unreliability of Parallels

"Prove all things," counseled Paul. "Hold fast that which is good" (1 Thes. 5:21). Determining what "good" is in this context is establishing a theoretical framework that will help sort through the textual material on Quetzalcoatl and determine relevant data. Without a reasonable theoretical grounding, we may not recognize the answer even should we find it.

I begin, however, with a method that I definitely do not recommend but which has been pervasive in both LDS and non-LDS examinations of the Quetzalcoatl material. It is typically not even stated as a method but is simply assumed. The method is known as parallelism, or comparison lists.

Right after President Taylor's statement with which I opened this excursus, he quotes Lord Kingsborough, an Irish antiquarian, who presented his information—repeated by Taylor—in the form of implicit parallels: "For Mexican mythology, speaking of no other Son of God, except Quetzalcoatl, who was born of Chimelman [Chimalman], the virgin of Tula (without man), by His breath alone, by which may be signified his word or will, when it was announced to Chimelman, by the celestial messenger, whom He dispatched to inform her that she should conceive a son, it must be presumed this was Quetzalcoatl, who was the only son. . . . "[5]

Lord Kingsborough is referencing legitimate aspects of the Quetzalcoatl tale but using a vocabulary that makes a correlation to Christianity much more obvious than that of the original tales. I will examine his specific correlations below, but the

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[3]Diane E. Wirth, *A Challenge to the Critics: Scholarly Evidences of the Book of Mormon* (Bountiful, Utah: Horizon Publishers, 1986), 135–36.

[4]John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book/Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1985), 327.

[5]Taylor, *Mediation and Atonement*, 201–2.

point here is the method. Rather than examining the lore, Lord Kingsborough presents only his own conclusions. Those conclusions are presented in terms that further his assumption of a Christian content to the tales. That is the problem with this methodology: The researcher creates a list of items that are reportedly "parallels" between the two cultures, or in this case, two figures. The more items on the list, the stronger the apparent connection. Even though the lists and the comparisons can appear compelling, they are essentially artificial. They are parallel because they have been made to look parallel, not because they really are. Tracing an actual genetic/historical relationship between two cultures or figures is a complex task which parallel lists inevitably oversimplify.

The artificiality of this method is most easily seen in a comparison list that wasn't created to show that there really was a connection between two figures, but only to demonstrate how Bernardino de Sahagún (1500–1599), the great ethnographer of Central Mexico, might have seen one. When Sahagún attempted to explain Quetzalcoatl to his readers, he called him "another Hercules." Historian Burr Cartwright Brundage wished to explain why Sahagún might have chosen that particular Greek god. Neither Sahagún nor Brundage believed that there was any actual connection between the two, only some similarities. Brundage uses parallels to highlight the similarities:

> Both Hercules and Quetzalcoatl were demigods with mortal bodies; Hercules was the son of the sky god Zeus somewhat as we have derived Ehecatl [Quetzalcoatl] from the sky dragon. Both were twins. . . . Both Hercules and Quetzalcoatl were renowned for strength, violence and sexual prowess, and both excelled as founders of lineages in far places. Their names as first ancestors were taken with great seriousness. Hercules' feats of strength are well known. Quetzalcoatl was regularly invoked to give a worker strength in ground breaking, tree cutting, quarrying, and so forth. He was the "manly god." Both gods were peripatetic, and once for a short time in his eleventh labor, Hercules held up the sky, as Quetzalcoatl did. Both descended into the underworld, where Cerberus the dog monster can be precisely matched with Xolotl the dog monster [a companion to Quetzalcoatl]. Finally in a climax of wonderful coincidence both heroes build funeral pyres and cast themselves into the flames, each to ascend into the heavens, Hercules as an immortal, Quetzalcoatl as the morning star.[6]

Brundage's list pulls similar items from the rich lore surrounding both mythical figures, as do parallel lists for Jesus Christ and Quetzalcoatl. Brundage's list displays extrapolations from the data without quoting the data. What is important is the *appearance* of similarity, an appearance that Brundage highlights by how he shapes his descriptions. It is true, for instance, that Cerberus and Xolotl are both supernatural dogs, but Cerberus is Hercules's antagonist while Xolotl is Quetzalcoatl's companion.[7] Their role, origin, and purpose in each tale is therefore

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[6]Burr Cartwright Brundage, *The Phoenix of the Western World: Quetzalcoatl and the Sky Religion* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1981), 100–101.

[7]Mary Miller and Karl Taube, *An Illustrated Dictionary of the Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1993, 190), "Although living in intimate proximity to humans, the dog breaks on a daily basis many basic social conventions observed by people; perhaps for

completely different. Nevertheless, the correspondence list is designed to highlight (and create) similarities, not to examine the differences.

The use of parallels or a correspondence list to demonstrate a connection between Jesus Christ and Quetzalcoatl suffers from these same methodological problems. The creator of the lists manipulates the data until the presentation itself creates the parallel rather than any real connection between the two. That method must be discarded and the conclusions of any author presenting such a list, explicit or implicit, should be regarded with suspicion.[8]

Oral Tradition to Text

To date, the most rigorous analysis of the Quetzalcoatl material has borrowed the assumptions and methods of a historian. To the extent that our task begins and ends with texts, this is important and necessary. The Book of Mormon is inherently and self-consciously a text. The evidence for the Quetzalcoatl legends is primarily found in texts that were written in Western scripts after the conquest. However, the problem is not so much in texts, but in the nearly one thousand years of oral tradition that lie between the original plates of the Book of Mormon and the reappearance of texts following the Spanish Conquest. The cultures of Central Mexico did not have writing systems that encoded texts. Their painted books, which scholars call codices, served as mnemonic devices to support an oral tradition.[9] In the days immediately prior to the conquest, the heaviest burden of transmitting the Quetzalcoatl material was carried by oral tradition. Thus, our historical efforts require an awareness of oral tradition and how it works, not just an analysis of the texts postdating the conquest.

Jan Vansina, professor of anthropology and Vilas Professor of History at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, describes the difference between texts and traditions:

> The task of a historian working with written documents starts when he or she finds or takes up such a document and begins to read it. There is no relation at all between the

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this reason, dogs were considered filthy and immoral in Mesoamerica. The canine god Xolotl embodies many of the characteristics ascribed to them. This Central Mexican god appears to have served as the *nahualli* or double, of Quetzalcoatl in his descent to the underworld to retrieve the bones of mankind."

[8]Allen, *Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon,* 159, presents precisely such a correspondence list. He includes thirteen items, none of which is accompanied by the texts upon which he suggests they are based. I will not examine them directly, though the topics he covers are examined in this discussion below.

[9]Joyce Marcus, *Mesoamerican Writing Systems: Propaganda, Myth, and History in Four Ancient Civilizations* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), 54:

> Like other Mesoamerican writing systems, Aztec writing was a mixed system, containing pictographic, phonetic, and logographic or ideographic elements. The percentage of each type of sign or element was what varied through time. For example the writing system might be characterized as 70 percent pictographic, 20 percent logographic, and 10 percent phonetic at one time; and it might be 50 percent pictographic, 30 percent logographic, and 20 percent phonetic at another. . . .
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> Aztec writing, perhaps to a greater extent than the more ancient Zapotec, Maya, and Mixtec writing systems, seems to have included a high percentage of pictograms.

> historian on the one hand and the ready-made document that confronts him or her on the other. Hence the classical rules of evidence are straightforward. What is this document both physically and as a message? Is it an original, written by the person who composed it? Is it authentic, truly what it claims to be, or is it a forgery? Who wrote it, when, or where? Once the answers to these questions are known an internal analysis of the content can proceed. As long as they are not known one does not know to what any analysis of content [must] relate. So the analysis of the document itself comes first.
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> But to historians dealing with oral tradition the situation is very different. Some of these are indeed faced with a piece of writing that claims to be the record of a tradition. The usual questions must be asked, but will refer only to the record not to the tradition itself. In most cases, however, the relationship of the historian to the document is totally different. He or she did not find the piece of writing, but rather created it. He or she recorded a living tradition.[10]

Although Vansina was discussing the topic in generalities, his description defines the very situation we find in Mesoamerican studies. Our best sources are texts, but they are texts that purport to encode oral tradition. The opening statement of the *Historia de los Mexicanos por sus pinturas* (the "History of the Mexicans [Aztecs] from their Paintings"), written in Spanish by an anonymous author before 1535, portrays that very situation: "By the characters and writings that they use, by the accounts of the old ones and those who in the time of their paganism were priests and rulers, and from the sayings of the lords and principal men, who were taught the law and were raised in temples so that they dispense [the law], gathered together before me and bringing their books and figures, which, as they demonstrated, were ancient and many of them have the greater part daubed with human blood, it appears. . . . "[11]

After this introduction, the *Historia* author begins to discuss the native gods. For questions of methodology, the important information is that the written text is the result of what a Spaniard understood from a variety of sources and then wrote down. We are not reading a single account of the information. We are not hearing what a native would have said. We are hearing what a Spaniard extracted from multiple accounts and recorded. This author, just as Vansina suggests, has participated in the creation of the lore that we read. This combination of text and oral tradition requires that we create a basic methodology that will appropriately interpret the available material.

A Threefold Examination

As a basic theoretical framework, the task of attempting to trace any information about Quetzalcoatl to the appearance of the Messiah in the Book of Mormon must pass through three types of critical examination:

1. What the text itself states (or what can be deduced by internal evidence) about authorship, date, and relative value.

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[10]Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 33.

[11]Ángel María Garibay K., ed., *Historia de los Mexicanos por sus pinturas*, in *Teogonía e Historia de los Mexicanos* (Mexico City: Editorial Porrúa, 1973), 23; translation mine.

2. The writer's relationship to the information being recorded.

3. The oral process that might point to the earlier figure or event that we are attempting to discover.

The first level of the various texts that we will be considering, examining the historical questions surrounding the texts themselves, has been remarkably well treated by Henry B. Nicholson, a professor of anthropology at the University of California, Los Angeles. In 2001 he finally updated his 1957 Ph.D. dissertation on the sources for one aspect of the Quetzalcoatl material, publishing under the title *Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl: The Once and Future Lord of the Toltecs* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2001). Nicholson presents a comprehensive set of documents related to a particular aspect of the Quetzalcoatl material, the figure of Quetzalcoatl as a deity functioning on earth. For each text, he provides the textual background and a synopsis of the information it contains. At the end of the work he extracts his conclusions. The analysis in his dissertation was so exacting that it has been the standard reference source even during the nearly forty years between the dissertation and its publication.[12] I will therefore rely on his work for that level of analysis.

Oral traditions are affected by two important types of changes: forgetting and expansion. Julius Krohn, a Finnish scholar and founder of the Finnish method for folklore research, discusses these two influences on oral tradition:

> If we observe the laws whose effects are recognizable in the manifold modifications of the original form of a tradition, we encounter first the influence of faulty memory. . . . The gaps can . . . be stopped with meaningless fillers. . . .
>
> The antithesis of forgetting, the tendency toward expansion, either is caused by the very act of forgetting or emanates from an urge to spontaneity. Additions to a tradition can be either new inventions or borrowings from some other context.[13]

Thus, a true remembrance of Christ's visit must have some connection to the event recorded in the Book of Mormon, although some elements may have been forgotten and others added. However, if all of the content is "forgotten" and virtually everything appears to be "added," then we may reasonably deduce that there is no connection to the original and we are dealing with a different tradition entirely.

Vansina provides a caveat. The type of oral tradition that best describes what should form the basis of a remembrance of the Book of Mormon event is a "group account": "Group accounts are the typical 'oral traditions' of many authors. They are the oral memories of groups such as villages, chiefdoms, kingdoms, associations, and various kinship groups."[14] He warns:

> Group traditions can be created quite rapidly after the events and acquire a form which strikingly makes such a tradition part of a complex of traditions. After this, and in

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[12]Alfredo López Austín, "Prologue," in Henry B. Nicholson, *Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl: The Once and Future Lord of the Toltecs* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2001), xviii.

[13] Kaarle Krohn, *Folklore Methodology: Formulated by Julius Krohn and Expanded by Nordic Researchers*, translated by Roger L. Welsh (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), 64–65, 71. The text is based on lectures given by Julius Krohn.

[14]Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History*, 19.

> due course of time, such accounts undergo further change. In general they tend to become shorter and be single anecdotes. As new accounts enter into the storehouse of change further changes occur in individual traditions as well. The whole corpus of group accounts is constantly and slowly reshaped or streamlined. Some items acquire greater value. As the corpus grows, some items become repetitive or seem to have symmetrically opposed meanings or mnemonic streamlining occurs. Collective memory simplifies by fusing analogous personalities or situations into one. . . .
>
> This process continues to the point that most accounts are lost or fused into each other beyond recognition.[15]

The thousand years during which the processes of forgetting, expansion, and fusion affected the Book of Mormon event should warn us against easy optimism about finding any remaining thread that can be traced all the way back to the original group tradition.

From Native to Spaniard: Through the Mirror, Darkly

The second level of analysis, the examination of the relationship of the text's author to the native oral tradition, is perhaps the most critical aspect of analysis. The Quetzalcoatl information was written after the conquest in a language and a script that did not exist in the New World prior to the conquest. By definition, we are not in possession of a single text that does not show some influence from the Spanish who conquered either militarily or religiously. The least influence was the script taught to native converts. The most was a participation from the Spanish so heavy in recording native lore that they created a new lore out of it.

Robert Carmack, professor of anthropology at the State University of New York, Albany, discusses the problem of post-conquest native documents: "In varying degrees, all native documents show evidence of Christian influence. This points to acculturation, but also suggests another important purpose of the documents—they are pleas to the Spaniards to relax colonial demands, in exchange for the natives' acceptance of an faithfulness to Christianity. In many cases the missionaries taught the natives to merge their migration stories with the Biblical story of the dispersion of the Israelites from Babylon."[16] Inadvertently or by design, at the interface between native traditions and Spanish texts, mutations of the native material were easily inserted. From those beginnings, a third, hybrid form easily emerged. Failing to recognize that fact cripples any effort at recovering authentic native material.

One of the most fascinating and long-lived transformations of native lore was the Quetzalcoatl material. As early Spanish priests and religious writers attempted to understand the new cultures and religions around them, they began to develop

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[15]Ibid., 21.

[16]Robert M. Carmack, *Quichean Civilization: The Ethnohistoric, Ethnographic, and Archaeological Sources* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 21. See also Brant A. Gardner, "Crucible of Distortion: The Impact of the Spanish on the Record of Native Oral Tradition," http://frontpage2k.nmia.com/~nahualli/Quetzalcoatl/crucible.htm (accessed May 2007), for more information on the ways in which Spanish writers altered native oral traditions.

their own myth: that Quetzalcoatl had actually been the wandering apostle Saint Thomas, who was reputed to have taken Christianity to India. One of the earliest proponents of this myth about the New World was Fray Diego de Durán (1537–87), who barely contains his enthusiasm for the discovery of early Christianity among the natives:

> The great deeds and wondrous acts of Topiltzin[17] [Quetzalcoatl], his heroic acts, are famed among the Indians. These deeds are of such renown and remind one so much of miracles that I dare not make any statement or write of them. In all I subject myself to the correction of the Holy Catholic Church. But even though I wish to adhere to the Holy Gospel of Saint Mark, who states that God sent the Holy Apostles to all parts of the world to preach the gospel to His creatures, promising eternal life to all baptized believers, I would not dare affirm that Topiltzin was one of the blessed Apostles. Nevertheless, the story of his life has impressed me greatly and has led me and others to believe that, since the natives were also God's creatures, rational and capable of salvation, He cannot have left them without a preacher of the Gospel. And if this is true, that preacher was Topiltzin, who came to this land.[18]

Ironically, the methodology used to reshape Quetzalcoatl into Saint Thomas was by parallels—the same method that modern LDS authors use in attempting to link Quetzalcoatl and Jesus. Jacques Lafaye, professor of Latin American history at the Sorbonne, describes part of the process of transformation from native god to Christian saint: "The use of a Christian vocabulary to depict Topiltzin's piety ('cell,' 'pray,' 'penance,' 'oratory'), and the mention of traits such as 'abstemious,' 'given to fasting,' 'genuflection,' had to impress Durán's contemporary readers. Add his statement that 'the exploits and prodigies of Topiltzin' had 'the appearance of miracles,' and the picture of a Christian Topiltzin takes very clear shape."[19]

Lafaye remarks: "Reading Durán, one gets the impression that years, even decades, separate him from the pioneer missionaries. Unlike them, he does not set himself the task of writing the history of the ancient Mexicans and their beliefs; he is intent in *interpreting* it as the history of his adopted country. By no accident it is precisely in Durán that we encounter the first great literary mutation of the figure of Quetzalcoatl."[20] He continues: "Later writers would complete his portrait of an apostolic Quetzalcoatl."[21]

Unfortunately, many LDS authors not only use the same methodology that led to this myth but often base their conclusions on Spanish authors whose writings already show the Christianization process. Of course, the Quetzalcoatl of their

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[17]"Topiltzin" is a description used as a name. The literal meaning is "our son" but as used, it meant "my lord." It is frequently used as an alternate name for Quetzalcoatl. I suspect that Durán used "Topiltzin" rather than "Quetzalcoatl" because "our lord" reinforced his perspective of Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl as a Christian missionary.

[18]Diego de Durán, *Book of the Gods and Rites and the Ancient Calendar*, translated and edited by Fernando Horcasitas and Doris Heyden (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), 59.

[19]Jacques Lafaye, *Quetzalcoatl and Guadalupe: The Formation of Mexican National Consciousness, 1531–1815*, translated by Benjamin Keen (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1974), 158.

[20]Ibid., 157.

[21]Ibid., 159.

documents looks very Christian and therefore appears to be remembrances of Christ in the LDS version of the Spanish myth of Saint Thomas.

Finally, after the work of reconstructing the native texts from their in-Spanish manifestations, we have the task of attempting to trace through the oral mutations a discernible thread leading back to the Book of Mormon event. An actual connection must be specific and distinctive. The more vague and nonspecific, the less value it has in establishing that any tale collected after the conquest had its ultimate roots in Christ's literal appearance as recorded in the Book of Mormon.

Divide and Conquer

One of the problems in dealing with the Quetzalcoatl material is that even the best reconstructions of native legend covers multiple aspects or personages. Quetzalcoatl was both a god operating in the heavens and a deity on earth, associated in Aztec mythology with the legendary city of Tula (the Hispanicized name), also called Tollan (the Nahuatl name). This is considered to be the site known as Tula Hidalgo, located fifty-two miles (84 km.) from Mexico City. Nicholson separated the material for the two versions of Quetzalcoatl, labeling the heavenly deity "Ehecatl Quetzalcoatl" or "Wind Quetzalcoatl" and the king in Tula as "Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl," or "Our Son/Lord, Quetzalcoatl." He attempts primarily to reconstruct a possible historical figure, the Tula-king, Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl, from the legends.[22]

I would add a third category to Nicholson's based on my own examination of the same texts: the heavenly god, the deity on earth, and the mortal king in Tula. Although there is always fuzziness in oral traditions, the particular father assigned to a given aspect of Quetzalcoatl is a useful clue about which of the three versions is being discussed.[23] Following Nicholson, I use Ehecatl Quetzalcoatl for the first, the deity in heaven. Because Nicholson was interested in the reconstruction of a plausible historical figure behind the Quetzalcoatl legends and myths, I use Nicholson's Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl to designate the mortal king in Tula. I adopt Ce Acatl Quetzalcoatl ("One Reed Quetzalcoatl," or "Ce Acatl," another of the names associated with Quetzalcoatl in the texts, indicating a calendar date) to indicate the deity on earth. The father of Ehecatl Quetzalcoatl is Tonacatecuhtli, "Lord of our flesh," of Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl is Mixcoatl "cloud serpent" (and his analog, Camaxtli), and of Ce Acatl Quetzalcoatl is Totepeuh "Our Lord."

In addition to the legends and myths recorded in the texts, archaeology has identified iconography associated with the figure. *Quetzalcoatl* is a Nahuatl term. *Quetzal* is a bird native to Guatemala with very long (and highly valued) green tail feathers; *coatl* means "serpent." The typical translation, influenced by the Mesoamerican artistic representation of a serpent with a covering of feathers, is "feathered serpent." Although the texts that record the language of the legends and

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[22]Nicholson, *Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl*, xxii, 3.

[23]Brant A. Gardner, "Quetzalcoatl's Fathers: A Critical Examination of Source Materials," http://www.ku.edu/~hoopes/aztlan/tripart.htm (accessed May 2007).

myths are necessarily post-conquest, the iconography of the feathered serpent may be seen in archaeological and therefore historical contexts. The reconstruction of mythical material is therefore perhaps aided, although sometimes complicated, by this layer of iconographic information that may guide our attempts to push the Quetzalcoatl legends back in time.

The ability to separate the three aspects of Quetzalcoatl helps clarify the complexity of the textual material. For the purpose of determining a possible connection between the Book of Mormon and the post-conquest texts, I examine each of the three bodies of folklore, according to the Quetzalcoatl persona.

Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl: King in Tula

The easiest aspect of Quetzalcoatl to discard as a possible remembrance of Jesus Christ is that of Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl, the mortal king in Tula. Richard A. Diehl, professor of anthropology at the University of Missouri-Columbia and one of the principal archaeologists of the site accepted as ancient Tula some fifty-two miles southeast of Mexico City, dates the Toltec (meaning Tula or Tollan) culture: "In modern archaeological parlance the term Toltec has acquired a chronological meaning, and we often speak of a 'Toltec period,' that time between A.D. 900 and 1200 when Toltec civilization reached its peak."[24] There is no way to fix the dates for Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl's reign in Tula, but Nicholson estimates it at ca. A.D. 1000.[25] Because the Book of Mormon had ended about six hundred years earlier, information specific to Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl cannot be a remembrance of Book of Mormon events.

Also related to the Toltecs is the distribution of the iconography. Although the image of the feathered serpent is often given as a reason for associating the legends with Jesus Christ,[26] the spread of the image and name throughout Mesoamerica has no discernible connection to the Book of Mormon account. The deity appears under the name Kukulkan among the Yucatec Maya and Gugumatz among the Quiché Maya. The presence of the same name among both Yucatec and Quiché Maya suggests a common origin. That common origin, however, appears to be related to the Toltec era since it cannot be traced to an earlier period. The most interesting evidence for the late diffusion of the idea comes from the very names by which the deity is known in these different regions and languages.

The Yucatec form is *kukul-kan* ("quetzal-serpent"). The Quiché form is *gugumatz* ("quetzal-serpent"). These both are obviously translations of the meaning found in the Nahuatl name, *quetzal-coatl* ("quetzal-serpent"). Even though *kukul-* and *gugu-* appear different, they are the same word and come from the same Proto-

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[24]Richard A. Diehl, *Tula: The Toltec Capital of Ancient Mexico* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1983), 14.

[25]Nicholson, *Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl,* 273–74.

[26]Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, 326. Allen, *Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, 159; Bruce W. Warren and Thomas Stuart Ferguson, *The Messiah in Ancient America* (Provo, Utah: Book of Mormon Research Foundation, 1987), 3–5. Terry J. O'Brien, *Fair Gods and Feathered Serpents* (Bountiful, Utah: Horizon Publishers, 1997), chs. 5–8, covers several similar myths.

Maya word. They have followed different sound shifts that mark the differences between Yucatec Maya and Quiché Maya. The word for "serpent," however, is completely different. The Yucatec word retains the Proto-Maya **kan*, while the Quiché word became current after the split that led to the separate languages. Lyle Campbell, professor of linguistics at the University of Utah and an expert on Mesoamerican linguistics, has worked on a reconstruction of Proto-Maya, the ancestor language to the various descendant languages that are presently spoken. He documents a major split into an Eastern Mayan (where Yucatec is classified) and Western Mayan (where we find Quiché).[27] Because both words for the god include the word for "quetzal" but follow the normal sound shifts of their respective languages, it is reasonably certain that both languages have translated *quetzal-coatl*, rather than inheriting the word from an older form of the Maya language. The difference between *kan* and *matz* tells us that the translation occurred after the Eastern Maya/Western Maya split.[28] Campbell does not date this split between the eastern and western linguistic families, but archaeologist Susan Toby Evans dates the divergence to around A.D. 1000.[29] This date fits with the archaeological evidence of the expanded influence of Toltec culture around this time period. The linguistic dispersion of the name is part of the Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl mythology and is not related to the Book of Mormon.

LDS scholars have accepted that this version of Quetzalcoatl had no relevance to the Book of Mormon, even while holding out hope that a different version of the story might corroborate the Messiah's appearance. Joseph L. Allen writes: "From the time of Christ to the Conquest of Mexico, many priests and royalty were given the name of Quetzalcoatl. . . . One such culture hero, named Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl and born c935 A.D., left a trail from the Mexico City area to the Yucatán."[30] David A. Palmer, a chemical engineer with an interest in the Book of Mormon and Mesoamerica, concluded: "Unfortunately, the traditions and legends of the ancient life god have become closely intertwined with those legends surrounding the life of Ce Acatl Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl [Palmer is using these names from the tradition, not in the sense that Nicholson and I use them]. He was the tenth-century king of Tula who abandoned the city with a retinue of followers and traveled to the Gulf Coast, promising to return. It is now believed that he continued on to the Yucatan where he took over such cities as Chichén Itzá."[31] If examining the texts discloses

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[27]Lyle Campbell, *Quichean Linguistic Prehistory*, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PUBLICATIONS IN LINGUISTICS, No. 81 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 101.

[28]The form *kan* appears in a much larger number of Mayan languages and suggests that it is the ancestral term, with *matz* being a later loan word. Linguist William Norman, personal conversation, first pointed out this information to me in the late 1970s.

[29]Susan Toby Evans, *Ancient Mexico and Central America: Archaeology and Culture History* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2004), 432.

[30]Allen, *Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, 160.

[31]David A. Palmer, *In Search of Cumorah: New Evidences for the Book of Mormon from Ancient Mexico* (Bountiful, Utah: Horizon Publishers, 1981), 191. See also Paul R. Cheesman, *The World of the Book of Mormon* (Bountiful, Utah: Horizon Publishers, 1984), 37.

that events or stories are related to either this person or this timeframe, they must be excluded from consideration as remembrances of the appearance of the Messiah as recorded in the Book of Mormon.

Ehecatl Quetzalcoatl: The Deity in Heaven

A connection between Quetzalcoatl as a deity in heaven should be a more fruitful location for finding connections between Ehecatl Quetzalcoatl and Jesus Christ. Book of Mormon people understood that the Messiah was Yahweh come to earth. (See "Excursus: The Nephite Understanding of God," following 1 Nephi 11.) The distinction between Ehecatl Quetzalcoatl (deity in heaven) and Ce Acatl Quetzalcoatl (deity on earth) therefore has immediate salience as a conceptual parallel.

As a deity in heaven for the Aztecs, Ehecatl Quetzalcoatl was considered the god of wind, which is the meaning of the name *ehecatl*. Sahagún's native informants describe this aspect of the god: "Quetzalcoatl—he was the wind, the guide and roadsweeper of the rain gods, of the masters of the water, of those who brought rain. And when the wind rose, when the dust rumbled, and it crackled and there was a great din, and it became dark and the wind blew in many directions, and it thundered; then it was said: '[Quetzalcoatl] is wrathful.'"[32]

There is currently no explanation for how the wind god became associated with what is considered to be a much older symbol, the feathered serpent. This feathered serpent iconography is important throughout Mesoamerican history. The earliest associations of the feathered serpent, which have been dated to 900–400 B.C., appear to deal with the earth's fertility, not with the wind as harbinger of rain.[33] By A.D. 200, when the Temple of the Feathered Serpent was built in Teotihuacan, the imagery apparently added an ominous tone. In addition to retaining an aspect of fertility and regrowth, the symbol from that time on takes on strong military associations. Saburo Sugiyama, an archaeologist with the Aichi Prefectural University, Japan, reports: "Both the archaeological and the artistic evidence indicate that the [feathered serpent's] associations with the military and with sacrifice were paramount in this structure."[34] Sugiyama reports the evidence for human sacrifice: "Five important burial pits were encountered, on the north and south for the Pyramid of the Feathered Serpent, including two multiple burials with lithic, shell, and bone offerings. The discovery of thirty-nine individuals, which

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[32]Bernardino de Sahagún, *General History of the Things of New Spain: Florentine Codex,* translated by Arthur J. O. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble, 13 vols. bound in 12 vols. (Salt Lake City: School of American Research and the University of Utah, 1975), 1:3.

[33]Enrique Florescano, *The Myth of Quetzalcoatl*, translated by Lysa Hochroth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 4. Richard A. Diehl, *The Olmecs: America's First Civilization* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2004), 102, notes that the Olmec dragon (not the feathered serpent) was the fertility symbol. However, he notes that the imagery associated with the Olmec dragon appears to have transformed into the later Quetzalcoatl rather than the Olmec feathered serpent.

[34]Saburo Sugiyama, "Rulership, Warfare, and Human Sacrifice at the Ciudadela: An Iconographic Study of Feathered Serpent Representations," in *Art, Ideology, and the City of Teotihuacán,* edited by Janet Catherine Berlo (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1992), 209–10.

stratigraphically correspond to the time of the construction of the temple around A.D. 150 or a little later, some with their hands joined behind their backs as if they had been tied, seems to indicate that human sacrifice was being carried out at the Ciudadela."[35] The Ciudadela is a large enclosure at the center of the city which could hold 100,000 persons; the Temple of the Feathered Serpent is one the buildings forming the open courtyard.

These associations were unexpected. LDS literature attempting to correlate Jesus Christ and Quetzalcoatl typically points to the Temple of the Feathered Serpent as an indication of the antiquity of the association between Christ and the feathered serpent. Sorenson does not clearly state this connection but implies it by illustrating his discussion of Quetzalcoatl with a photograph of this temple's façade.[36] LDS author Jerry L. Ainsworth has suggested that Teotihuacan was a sacred city influenced by the people of Ammon. He also illustrates his discussion with a photograph of the Temple of the Feathered Serpent.[37] In Joseph L. Allen's book, he captions a similar photograph: "[The] Temple of Quetzalcoatl at Teotihuacan showing the serpent motif associated with the god Quetzalcoatl. Dates to A.D. 200. The legends of Quetzalcoatl in relation to the resurrection are associated with Teotihuacan."[38]

The best current evidence for the iconography of the feathered serpent suggests that we should not expect it to have any connection to Jesus Christ. As a symbol of the renewal of vegetation and fertility, it existed long before the brass plates were bought to the Americas.[39] This means that it could not be a

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[35]Ibid., 220.

[36]Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon,* 327.

[37]Jerry L. Ainsworth, *The Lives and Travels of Mormon and Moroni* (Mabank, Tex.: PeaceMakers Publishing, 2000), 134–35. Ainsworth is aware of Sugiyama's discovery but dismisses its significance. On page 131 he comments in a footnote:

> Although there is no evidence of a military presence in the construction of Teotihuacan, two hundred warriors were found buried (possibly sacrificed) in the Temple of Quetzalcoatl. I offer two possible explanations for these warriors. First of all, the people of Ammon were certainly not the only people who lived in Teotihuacan in 200 B.C., two hundred and fifty years after its settlement. Just as there are people of all religious persuasions in Salt Lake City, Utah, so there would have been people of a variety of religious persuasions at Teotihuacan. Second, it is entirely possibly [sic] that the people of Ammon made war illegal in this land. Just as Alma 30:10 indicates that people were punished "unto death" for crimes, it is possible that these warriors suffered such a sentence. The Book of Mormon does not tell us the methods used to carry out capital punishments.

Ainsworth is trying hard to retain his perception of Teotihuacan as a place of peace, but archaeological evidence contradicts that assumption. Not only does the evidence of the sacrificial burials and iconography of the Temple of the Feathered Serpent oppose Ainsworth's explanation, but the historical evidence of expanding Teotihuacano militarism is a marked opposition to the assumption of a city of pacifists. For more information on Teotihuacan, see Helaman, Part 1: Context, Chapter 3, "The Gadianton Robbers in Mormon's Theological History: Their Structural Role and Plausible Identification."

[38]Joseph L. Allen, *Sacred Sites: Searching for Book of Mormon Lands* (American Fork, Utah: Covenant Communications, 2003), 91.

[39]Diehl, *The Olmecs*, 15, discusses the Olmec of the La Venta period, 900–400 B.C.: "The prominent role agricultural and fertility deities played in the Olmec pantheon is striking. This is no surprise given the importance farming played in Olmec subsistence, but it marks the oldest extant evidence for these

remembrance of the brazen serpent on the pole, related in Numbers 21:8–9 (referenced in Hel. 8:14–15).[40] The earliest associations with agricultural fertility have only the most strained relationship to the Messiah through the concept of resurrection. However, the idea the living plant growing from the "dead" seed is so widespread as to be virtually universal.[41]

The later (at least post A.D. 200) iconographic meanings are dominated by a militarism and sacrificial symbolism that are antithetical to the Messiah. For example, the Yucatec Maya city of Chichén Itzá, located on the tip of the Yucatan Peninsula, flourished after A.D. 900. Its Quetzalcoatl iconography is prominent, manifesting an emphasis on militaristic expansion and the legitimization of political power.[42]

If the iconography does not carry any discernible connection to the Book of Mormon's Messiah, do any of the legendary materials associated with Ehecatl Quetzalcoatl provide such a link? Some LDS authors have thought so. Joseph L. Allen suggests: "Both Christ and Quetzalcoatl were recognized as creator of all things."[43] Diane Wirth more recently emphasized the god's creator role: "The Maya accounts corroborate the acts of creation in a somewhat different manner because they were recorded by another culture, but they still present a pan-Mesoamerican mythological paradigm. Finally, we possess legends in 16th-century manuscripts declaring Quetzalcoatl as the Creator."[44] She includes Quetzalcoatl's role both in creating the world and creating humankind as remembrances of the Savior.[45]

Two elements of the Ehecatl Quetzalcoatl material can be tested for a Book of Mormon connection. The first level of analysis helps to focus on the most valuable

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deity concepts in Mesoamerica and thus stands as a major Olmec contribution to Mesoamerican culture."

[40]Various LDS authors have used the event recorded in Numbers 21:8–9 to explain why the Messiah would be associated with a serpent in Mesoamerican iconography. See Wirth, *A Challenge to the Critics,* 138; Allen, *Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon,* 161; Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon,* 329; O'Brien, *Fair Gods and Feathered Serpents*, 226; Warren and Ferguson, *The Messiah in Ancient America*, 138–39; Palmer, *In Search of Cumorah*, 191; Milton R. Hunter, *Christ in America* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1959), 121–23; and Milton R. Hunter and Thomas Stuart Ferguson, *Ancient America and the Book of Mormon* (Oakland, Calif.: Kolob Book, 1950), 210–11.

[41]Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religions*, translated by Rosemary Sheed (Chicago: Meridian, 1963), 98.

[42]Florescano, *The Myth of Quetzalcoatl*, 162–63. David Carrasco, *Quetzalcoatl and the Irony of Empire: Myths and Prophecies in the Aztec Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 141, also notes: "Chichén Itzá is a fruitful place to study the continuity and change of Quetzalcoatl's significance for the city tradition because here we see extensive blending of Toltec with Mayan iconography and architecture and the creation of new symbolic forms. For instance, the feathered serpent's plumes are spread throughout the architecture and history of the city. However, in a number of instances we see a clear association of Quetzalcoatl with human sacrifice, a conspicuous break with what we know about the Quetzalcoatl of Tula."

[43]Allen, *Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, 159.

[44]Diane E. Wirth, "Quetzalcoatl, the Maya Maize God, and Jesus Christ," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 11 (2002): 8.

[45]Ibid., 9.

accounts; but dealing with the second and third levels of analysis (the relationship of the writer to the traditions and the possible relationship of the tradition to Christ) requires a better understanding of the native lore than these brief descriptions.

As far as can be determined, Mesoamerican cultures shared a common creation myth that might have been elaborated in slightly different ways but which kept the basic outline.[46] According to the creation myth, the current world was the result of repeated creations and destructions. Each previous creation was associated with a both a deity and a "sun." The mythological story is traditionally called "The Legend of the Suns." Some versions of the myth have only four suns, with the current world being the fourth. The Aztecs apparently added a fifth sun for the current world, following the four previous suns.[47] In each of the previous suns, the world and its inhabitants were defective. Each made progress toward creating human beings, but the inhabitants during those suns were less than human. Only the current sun succeeded in making full humans.

In the Aztec version of the myth, each previous sun was created by either Quetzalcoatl or his nemesis Tezcatlipoca (*tezcatl*, mirror, *ipoca* "it smokes," or Smoking Mirror), who is considered to be Quetzalcoatl's brother.[48] One of the most concise versions of this creation is found in the aforementioned *Leyenda de los Soles* ("Legend of the Suns"), because the anonymous text begins with this story. It was written in 1558 in Nahuatl and is considered to be a good representation of the native understanding of their mythology:

> [The first sun]
>
> This sun was 4 Jaguar: it was 676 years. These people, who lived in the first age, were eaten by jaguars in the time of the sun 4 Jaguar, and what they ate was 7 Straw. That was their food.
>
> [The second sun]
>
> This sun is named 4 Wind. These people, who lived in the second [age], were blown away by the wind in the time of the sun 4 Wind. And when they were blown away and destroyed, they turned into monkeys. All their houses and trees were blown away. And the sun also was blown away.
>
> And what they ate was 12 Snake. That was their food.
>
> It was 364 years that they lived, and only one day that they were blown by the wind, destroyed on a day sign 4 Wind. And their year was 1 Flint.
>
> [The third sun]
>
> This sun is 4 Rain. These people lived in the third one, in the time of the sun 4 Rain. And the way they were destroyed is that they were rained on by fire. They were changed into turkeys.
>
> And the sun also burned. All their houses burned.

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[46]Alfredo López Austín, Leonardo López Luján, and Saburo Sugiyama, "The Temple of Quetzalcoatl at Teotihuacan: Its Possible Ideological Significance," *Ancient Mesoamerica* 2 (1991): 93.

[47]Brant A. Gardner, "Reconstructing the Ethnohistory of Myth: A Structural Study of the Aztec "Legend of the Suns," in *Symbol and Meaning beyond the Closed Community: Essays in Mesoamerican Ideas*, edited by Gary Gossen (Albany: Institute for Mesoamerican Studies, State University of New York at Albany, 1986), 20–21, 28–29.

[48]Garibay K., "Historia de los Mexicanos por sus pinturas," 23–24.

> And it was 312 years that they lived. But when they were destroyed, it rained fire for only one day.
>
> And what they ate was 7 Flint. That was their food. And their year was 1 Flint. And it was on a day sign 4 Rain. And when they died they were children. Therefore today they are called the baby children.
>
> [The fourth sun]
>
> This sun is named 4 Water. And for fifty-two years there was water.
>
> These people lived in the fourth one, in the time of the sun 4 Water. And it was 676 years that they lived. And they died by drowning. They turned into fish.
>
> The skies came falling down. They were destroyed in only one day.
>
> And what they ate was 4 Flower. That was their food.
>
> And their year was 1 House. And it was on a day sign 4 Water that they were destroyed. All the mountains disappeared.
>
> And the water lay for fifty-two years.
>
> And when their years were complete, when Titlacahuan [another name for Tezcatlipoca] gave a command to the one called Tata, and to his wife, who was called Nene. He said to them, "Put aside your cares. Hollow out a big cypress, and when it's Tozoztli [April] and the skies come falling down, get inside."
>
> And so they got inside. Then he sealed them in and said, "You must eat only one of these corn kernels. Also your wife must eat only one." Well, when they had eaten it all up, they went aground.
>
> It can be heard that the water is drying. The log has stopped moving. Then it opens. They see a fish. Then they drill fire and cook fish for themselves.
>
> Then the gods Citlalinicue and Citlalatonac looked down and said, "Gods, who's doing the burning? Who's smoking the skies?"
>
> Then Titlacahuan, Tezcatlipoca, came down and scolded them. He said, "What are you doing, Tata? What are you people doing?"
>
> Then he cut off their heads and stuck them on their rumps, and that way they were turned into dogs.[49]

This version lays out the basic organization of the myth and the idea that each "sun" left some remains of the inferior creations. What it does not do is include the roles of Ehecatl Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca. Other texts fill in that gap. One of the earliest sources for Aztec mythology is an anonymous Spanish document that has been given the name *Historia de los Mexicanos por sus Pinturas* (History of the Mexicans According to Their Paintings). This source appears to have been written prior to 1535.[50] Cortés conquered the Aztecs in 1521, so this document collects information during a time when numerous natives who recalled their mythology were still alive. It is the source mentioned above that was written from the natives who brought their books to assist in the retelling. The following gives some of the flavor of the creative tension between Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca:

> Returning to the giants who were created in the time when Tezcatlipoca was the sun, it is said that, as he stopped being the sun, they perished, and the tigers [jaguars] finished them off and ate them so that not a single one survived. These tigers were created in the following manner:

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[49]John Bierhorst, trans., *History and Mythology of the Aztecs: The Codex Chimalpopoca* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992), 142–44.

[50]Nicholson, *Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl*, 4.

> After thirteen times fifty-two years, Quetzalcoatl became the sun and he removed Tezcatlipoca, because he hit him with a great staff and knocked him down into the water and there he made himself a tiger and came out to kill the giants. . . .
>
> And Quetzalcoatl remained sun for another thirteen times fifty-two years, which are 676 years, at the end of which Tezcatlipoca (being a god) made of himself, as could his other brothers, whatever he cared to. Therefore he walked about as a tiger [jaguar] and he kicked Quetzalcoatl and knocked him down and he ceased to be the sun, and such a great wind came up and all of the people, save those who remained in the air, became monkeys and simians.[51]

Applying our three levels of analysis to these myths, we find that they are appropriately vetted as part of native lore. The texts have reasonable historical transmissions. In the case of *Leyenda de los Soles*, the author is a native, writing in his own language using a European script. In the case of *Historia de los Mexicanos por sus Pinturas*, we also have a text that comes very early and explicitly from native informants, although it is a collection of information as the recorder understood it. In both cases, however, the native legends seem authentic.

The final question is whether anything in these legends might contain a reference to the Book of Mormon account or to the experience with the Messiah. As both Allen and Wirth point out, Ehecatl Quetzalcoatl is a creator-god. However, Ehecatl Quetzalcoatl is not a creator without Tezcatlipoca. Both are equally responsible for creation. In addition to requiring two creator-gods, the myth records multiple failed creations by those same deities, who are violently antagonistic to each other, repeatedly destroying the other's work. Ehecatl Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca are both destroyer-gods as much as they are creator-gods. If we were to apply Krohn's ideas of forgetting and expansion as alterations to the Aztec oral tradition, we would have to say that both processes have been so effective here that nothing of the original remained, if that original ever had anything to do with the Book of Mormon. These are simply different legends, following a different logic. They have nothing to do with the Judeo-Christian God or his creation. They become "parallel" only through the use of loaded vocabulary, just as Lafaye suggested for Durán, as discussed above.

What of the raising of the heavens that Wirth mentioned? The best source for this myth comes from a document entitled *Histoyre du Méchique*, a later (ca. 1575) French translation of a now-lost Spanish original. The author is not known, but it appears that he took at least some material from the lost work of Fray Andrés de Olmos, one of the original twelve priests sent to Mexico in 1527. The probable date of the Spanish composition is 1543.[52]

> Two gods, Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca, came down from the heaven to the goddess Tlaltecutli, who was filled in all of her joints with eyes and mouths, with which she would bite like a savage animal.

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[51]Garibay K., *Historia de los Mexicanos por sus pinturas*, 30; translation mine. I have regularized the spelling from Tezcatlipuca to Tezcatlipoca. The Nahuatl vowel commonly written /o/ had a value somewhere between /u/ and /o/ and therefore these letters vary with the transcriber and the way he or she heard the vowel.

[52]Nicholson, *Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl*, 12.

> And before they came down there was water, and no one knows who created it. Over it the goddess walked.
>
> Seeing this, the gods said "The earth must be created."
>
> And saying this, they both changed into two great serpents, the one of which seized the goddess by the right hand and the left foot and the other the left hand and the right foot.
>
> They tightened around her such that they made her split in two, the half with the shoulders they made the earth and the other half they raised to the heavens.[53]

It is even more difficult to find a way to connect this myth of the raising of the sky to the Christian God than with the creations of the previous world. It is, however, similar to other mythological themes of the separation of the earth from the sky.[54] As part of his folklore discussion, Krohn notes that important clues to its history are the geographic distribution and the direction of diffusion.[55] Based on the ideological similarities of the Aztec tale with those of the Old World, I would hypothesize a relationship to a very old layer of shamanic religion that traveled with the migrants to the New World. Of course, that suggestion requires much more evidence to substantiate it, but it presents a much stronger connection than the simple statement that Christ created the earth.

The last correlation suggested as a possible connection between the Savior and Quetzalcoatl lies in the story of the creation of humankind for the fifth sun. Wirth asserts that two themes are parallel: "a deity assisting the dead; a deity shedding blood to save mankind."[56] The story she references comes from *Leyenda de los Soles*,[57] which I quote below from Bierhorst's translation:

> Then Quetzalcoatl went to the dead land, and when he came to the dead land lord, the dead land lady, he said to him, "I've come for the precious bones that you are keeping. I've come to get them."
>
> Then he said, "To do what, Quetzalcoatl?"
>
> And he answered him, "It's because the gods are sad. Who will there be on earth?"
>
> The dead land lord replied, "Very well. Blow my conch horn and circle four times around my precious realm." But his conch horn was not hollow.
>
> Then he {Quetzalcoatl} summoned worms, who hollowed it out. Then bumblebees and honeybees went in. Then he blew on it, and the dead land lord heard him.
>
> Then the dead land lord answered, "Very well, take them!" But he said to his messengers, the dead land people, "Spirits, go tell him he has to leave them here."
>
> But Quetzalcoatl said, "No, I'm taking them forever."
>
> And then his nagual[58] said to him "Tell them 'I'll leave them [with you].'"
>
> Then he said to them, he shouted to them, "I'll leave them [with you]!" and he quickly ascended.

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[53]Ángel María Garibay ed. and trans., *Histoyre du Méchique*, titled in translation: *Historia de México*, in *Teogonía e Historia de los Mexicanos* (Mexico City: Editorial Porrúa, 1973), 108; translation mine.

[54]Elizabeth Wayland Barber and Paul T. Barber, *When They Severed Earth from Sky: How the Human Mind Shapes Myth* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004), 87.

[55]Krohn, *Folklore Methodology*, chs. 7, 17.

[56]Wirth, "Quetzalcoatl, the Maya Maize God, and Jesus Christ," 15.

[57]Ibid., 9.

[58]Also written *nahual*, or *nahualli*, and indicating Xolotl, the dog god, Quetzalcoatl's companion.

> Then he takes the precious bones. The male bones are in one pile, the female bones are in another pile. Then Quetzalcoatl takes them, wraps them up, and comes carrying them off.
>
> Again the dead land lord said to his messengers, "Spirits, Quetzalcoatl is really taking the precious bones away. Sprits, go dig him a pit." Then they went and dug it for him.
>
> So he fell into the pit, stumbled and fell, and quail frightened him and he lost consciousness.
>
> Then he spilled the precious bones, and the quail bit into them, nibbled them.
>
> And when Quetzalcoatl came to, he cried. Then he said to his nagual, "My nagual, how will they be?"
>
> And he said to him, "How will they be? They've been ruined. Let them go that way."
>
> Then he gathered them together, picked them up, wrapped them. Then he carried them to Tamoanchan. And when he had brought them, the one named Quilaztli, Cihuacoatl, ground them up. Then she put them into a jade bowl, and Quetzalcoatl bled his penis on them.
>
> Then all the gods, who have been mentioned, did penance: Apanteuctli, Huictlolinqui, Tepanquizqui, Tlallamanac, Tzontemoc, and number six is Quetzalcoatl.
>
> Then they said, "Holy ones, humans, have been born." It's because they did penance for us.[59]

Wirth completely understands that this tale is not easily associated with Jesus Christ. She concludes: "The entire legend, with all its strange details, sounds pagan to the Christian world, but latter-day Saints hear echoes of the saving work of Jesus Christ among departed spirits."[60] In contrast, I suggest that Mormons, as Christians, clearly hear the same paganism as other Christians. Are there really echoes here? From my perspective, the echoes exist only in the summary, not in the tale. The tale itself is, as Wirth notes, pagan. The themes are pagan. The logic is pagan. The literary structure follows pagan rather than biblical forms. Ehecatl Quetzalcoatl creates the first humans of this era, the quail-pecked bones explaining our frailties. Christ visited the dead long after the creation. Ehecatl Quetzalcoatl gives life by autosacrifice, piercing his own penis so that blood would fall on the bones and regenerate them through the sacred contact with his holy essence. Christ died for our sins, not to create us. The thread that Wirth uses to connect Ehecatl Quetzalcoatl and Jesus Christ is a completely modern one. It is a new myth that is extracted from, but not actually related to, the Aztec mythology before the conquest.[61]

Ce Acatl Quetzalcoatl: The Deity on Earth

I have made a distinction between Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl of Tula and Ce Acatl Quetzalcoatl, whom I see as a liminal category of god, one who retains divinity but whose actions occur on earth and in the time of legends. H. B. Nicholson made no

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[59]Bierhorst, *History and Mythology of the Aztecs*, 145–46. The square brackets are Bierhost's, the French brackets mine.

[60]Wirth, "Quetzalcoatl, the Maya Maize God, and Jesus Christ," 9.

[61]Wirth also draws a parallel between Quetzalcoatl and Jesus Christ through the phrase "bread of life," defining the tale of how Ehecatl Quetzalcoatl provided humankind with corn. This example is as strained as the idea that Ehecatl Quetzalcoatl's autosacrifice was "similar" to an event from Christ's life. The myth itself shows no traces of Western or biblical content. Wirth created the similarity by applying the label to the meaning of myth. Ibid., 9.

such distinction, and the aspects of the legend that I consider part of the deity-on-earth version were events that he reconstructed as part of the mythology attached to the Toltec king. Nicholson examined all available texts—a total of forty-one—that have substantive information pertaining to the legendary figure and which he analyzes from the perspective of the first level of analysis, or discovering the value of the text as a text.[62]

After the careful and exhaustive examination of the recorded information about the version I call Ce Acatl Quetzalcoatl, he summarizes the essential elements of what he calls the "basic tale":

> 1. *Birth:* Father: Mixcoatl, or variant (Camaxtli . . .), a semidivine conqueror, possibly the earliest important quasi-historical figure in Central Mexican tradition, founder of the Toltec power. . . .
>
> Mother: Chimalma(n), [*chimal*, "shield" *man*, "hand"] or variant . . . , identified in two sources as a native (chieftainess?) of (Teo)huitznahuac, apparently conquered by Mixcoatl/Camaxtli. A miraculous conception seems to have been a genuine variant—and her death in childbirth may also have been an integral episode of the basic tale. . . .
>
> 2. *Youth:* Only one source specifically names his grandparents as those who raised him. Another specifies a person with the name of the earth goddess, Cihuacoatl/Quilaztli, as playing that role. His father's death at the hands of his uncles (only variant, his brothers) may also belong to the basic tale. His search for his father's bones, his burial of them, and his erection of a temple (Mixcoatepetl) to his progenitor's memory—and, after a struggle, his disposal of his malevolent uncles, led by the usurper Atecpanecatl (Apanecatl)—also seem to have been well-established episodes in the basic tale.
>
> 3. *Enthronement:* The exact manner of his accession to the supreme political and priestly office among the Toltecs varies considerably. . . .
>
> 4. *Apogee:* The details of his beneficent, quasi-theocratic rule in Tollan vary, but the general pattern is the same. His role as chaste, penitent arch-priest and religious innovator (particularly autosacrificial rites) is clearly fundamental. His generally pacifistic bent and aversion to human sacrifice are certainly more common than his contrasting role as a military conqueror. However, the two may not have been absolutely irreconcilable within the framework of pre-Hispanic Mesoamerican ideology. His culture-hero role does not seem to be as important as is often assumed—although his teaching of certain skills and crafts is emphasized in some accounts. His "invention" (reform, modification?) of the calendar was probably basic. His celibacy fits his role as sacerdotal archetype—but is frequently omitted. His skill as a sorcerer (*nahualli*) is occasionally made explicit but more frequently implied. . . .
>
> 5. *Downfall:* This episode, like the preceding, varies considerably in details, but the different versions compare well in overall pattern. Tezcatlipoca, sometimes with associates, as Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl's chief antagonist is unquestionably basic. The precise motivations for their confrontation is not always made very clear, but, aside from the pure malevolence of the "Smoking Mirror," a conflict of cults with differing attitudes toward human sacrifice is mentioned in two of the core sources and might be implied in others. Precedent to his flight, Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl's destruction and/or burial of his treasures appears to have been fundamental. . . . The "breaking of his vows" episode—with possible

[62]Nicholson makes no distinction between the texts and the folklore that they encode. Thus, his analysis is heavily oriented to the understanding of the material that would be parallel to a reconstruction of a textual history rather than an oral history. While I see this as an important distinction, it does not change the summaries he makes of the tales, only some of the conclusions he draws from his study.

> sexual overtones—that constitutes the climax of his conflict with Tezcatlipoca and dramatically underscores the latter's final triumph is only clearly present in one core account but is described with such a wealth of detail that it might qualify as basic. . . .
>
> 6. *Flight:* After abandoning Tollan and his high office Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl's long trek to the Gulf Coast is highlighted in all six of the core accounts—as well as in most of the others—and constitutes one of the most fundamental elements of the tale, although the details vary enormously. . . .
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> 7. *Death or Disappearance:* The fate of Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl after reaching Tlapallan displays two principal variants, both apparently basic: (1) disappearance, often across the sea, and (2) death and subsequent cremation. The transformation of Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl's soul into the planet Venus is also common enough to be considered fundamental. [63]

Little in this list stands out as a potential correlation to Jesus Christ. Nicholson did not see any and does not discuss any element as a remembrance of any figure earlier than the Toltec king of approximately A.D. 1000. Nevertheless, since so many have proposed elements of the Quetzalcoatl mythology that parallel the Book of Mormon, it behooves us to examine some of those elements to see if Nicholson missed anything.

1. Ce Acatl Quetzalcoatl as a "White" God. Although no aspect of Quetzalcoatl is more familiar than his description as a "white god," Nicholson does not reconstruct that element as part of his reconstruction of the Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl (my Ce Acatl Quetzalcoatl) basic myth. Nevertheless, it is precisely as a "white god" that President John Taylor made his correlation to Jesus Christ. Perhaps Nicholson didn't reconstruct it as an element of the Ce Acatl Quetzalcoatl myths because it is so difficult to find in the source texts. The idol that represented Quetzalcoatl was always painted black. The *Florentine Codex* reports that "his face was thickly smeared with soot."[64]

The best possibility for a "white" Quetzalcoatl is that he is associated with the cardinal direction associated with the color white. Anthropologists Mary Miller and Karl Taube explain the color associations of the Mesoamerican directions: "The identification of colors with directions is most fully documented among the ancient Maya, who had specific glyphs for the colors red, white, black, yellow, and green. In the Yucatec Maya codices, these colors are associated with east, north, west, south and center, respectively. . . . Like the Maya, Central Mexicans appear to have identified white with the north and yellow with the south."[65]

Historia de los Mexicanos por sus pinturas records an unfortunately abbreviated version of the four sons of a heavenly god and goddess, the four Tezcatlipocas. Only two give their particular colors, and Quetzalcoatl is not one of them:

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[63]Nicholson, *Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl*, 250–52. I have removed information that is more interesting to the specialist than relevant to this overview. I have not removed any of his numbered elements nor any of the critical information that comprise those elements.

[64]Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, 1:3.

[65]Miller and Taube, *An Illustrated Dictionary of the Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya*, 65.

> This god and goddess engendered four sons:
>
> The oldest they named Tlatlauhqui Tezcatlipoca, and those of Huexotzinco and Tlaxcala, who held this one to be their principal god, called him Camaxtle: This one was born all red.
>
> They had the second son, whom they called Yayauhqui Tezcatlipoca, who was the best and the worst, and he was more powerful and able than the other three, because he was born in the middle of all: this one was born black.
>
> The third was called Quetzalcoatl, and as another name, Yohualli Ehecatl.
>
> The fourth and smallest was called Omitecutli and by another name, Maquizcoatl and the Mexicans [Aztecs] called him Huitzilopochtli, because he was left-handed. He was held by the Mexicans [Aztecs] to be their principal god.[66]

This tale appears to have undergone some changes or was perhaps garbled by the Spanish recorder. Huitzilopochtli was indeed the principal god of the Mexica but was not considered to have been one of the four brothers. He appears to be a later addition to the mythology as the Aztecs attempted to elevate their own tribal god to a more prominent place in the common Mesoamerican pantheon. The source shows the associations of the deities with the colors but does not correlate Quetzalcoatl with "white." Nevertheless, that is the most likely association.

A god who is "red" because of his association with a direction is not particularly interesting. A god who is "white" in a parallel relationship to a world direction is similarly not particularly interesting. While the association with directions can give us the probable reason that Quetzalcoatl was considered "white," the popularity of the "white god" comes because of the Western insistence that "white" must be a skin color. It would really be remarkable if the Mesoamerican deity on earth were Caucasian rather than Native American. That is the way the popular myth "reads," but it cannot be an accurate representation of pre-conquest mythology.

The Aztecs did not share the Western preoccupation with skin color. Miguel León-Portilla, professor emeritus at the Institute for Historical Research, National University of Mexico, quotes Alvarado Tezozomoc, a native nobleman (who wrote no earlier than 1609, a date found in the manuscript "Mexican [Aztec] Chronicle"): "Their [Spaniards'] skin is very white, more so than ours."[67] Another of the very few Nahuatl references to the Spaniards' skin color also appears in the Florentine Codex: "And they covered all parts of their bodies. Alone to be seen were their faces—very white. They had eyes like chalk; they had yellow hair, although the hair of some was black. Long were their beards and also yellow; they were yellow bearded."[68] The Spaniards' "very white" skin receives no more attention than the fact that they covered all parts of their bodies—as amazing to the natives as the natives' comparative undress was to the Spaniards—and less than their long, yellow beards. It is interesting that they remark on the "yellow" beards, even though it is

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[66]Garibay K., *Historia de los Mexicanos por sus pinturas*, 23–24; translation mine.

[67]Miguel León-Portilla, *Visiones de los Vencidos* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1972), 12; translation mine.

[68]Sahagún, *Florentine Codex,* 12:19.

much more likely that most of the Spanish beards would have been darker rather than blond. They were remarkable because they were different from the nearly universal black hair of the Aztecs. However, their skin color was no more interesting or remarkable than the color of their hair. There is no mythology of the "yellow-hair god." The Western recreation of the myth plays on our fascination with skin color, not native categories. Evidence that there was nothing special about skin color comes from the description of the blacks who accompanied the Spanish. Sahagún's informants do describe their conquerors as gods: "And thus had Moctezuma provided for he thought them gods; he took them for gods; he paid them reverence as gods. For they were called and named 'gods came from the heavens.' And the Black ones [African slaves] were said to be black gods."[69] This passage clearly ascribes godhood to the Spaniards but not because of their skin color. The African blacks accompanying the party were also considered to be gods.

As part of the encyclopedic collection of material in the *Florentine Codex* and in the section describing the parts of the body, the informants give the following terms for types:

Eoatl	skin
teoaio	our skin
topaneoaio	our outer skin
iztac	white
tlatlactli	ruddy
chichiltic	chili-red
iaiactic	swarthy
cacatzactic	black
teceoac	chalky[70]

There is no indication that any version of Quetzalcoatl would have been white-skinned, only "white" in comparison to his black, red, and yellow brothers. It is also important to note that white, rather than communicating purity, represented death in Mesoamerican culture, as it does in several Asian cultures. (See commentary following 3 Nephi 11:8.)

2. Quetzalcoatl as bearded. A distinguishing physical contrast between the natives and Spaniards was the natives' relative beardlessness. A bearded god might therefore be considered unusual (as were the "yellow-bearded" Spaniards noted above). In modern versions of the Quetzalcoatl tale, the beard is one of the most frequent indicators suggesting that Quetzalcoatl must have been foreign.[71] Unlike other elements of the Ce Acatl Quetzalcoatl mythology, this one appears to have

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[69]Ibid., 12:21. The phrase is "*auh in tlilique teucacatzactic mjtoque*." *Teucacatzactic* more likely means "dirty/dark gods." Nahuatl distinguishes between "black" (*tlil*) and "dark/dirty" (*cacatza*).

[70]Ibid., 10:95.

[71]Hunter, *Christ in Ancient America*, 17; Cheesman, *The World of the Book of Mormon*, 30; Clark V. Johnson, "Prophetic Decree and Ancient Histories Tell the Story of America," in *Jacob through Words of Mormon: To Learn with Joy*, edited by Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1990), 133.

firm roots in native lore. Sahagún's sixteenth-century informants say, "His beard was long, exceedingly long. He was heavily bearded."[72] So well-known was this element that, by 1615, Fray Juan de Torquemada could state: "This was held as very certain, that he was of good disposition . . . bearded. . . . "[73]

The sources report a variety of beard colors: to Torquemada, blond; to Bartolomé de Las Casas (a Dominican priest, died 1566) black; and to Diego de Durán, red and graying.[74] Such variations probably signal that the color was not part of pre-conquest lore. Nevertheless, beards really were part of the pre-conquest Mesoamerican religious tradition and are frequently depicted in pre-conquest Mesoamerican art. However, these same native depictions prove that, while there was a native emphasis on bearded figures, the beard was not unique to Quetzalcoatl and is not even diagnostic for Quetzalcoatl, meaning that Quetzalcoatl may be painted and recognized without a beard.

Prior to the arrival of the Spanish, the Aztec had many books to which scholars have applied the term "codex," even though the native form does not fit the technical definition of a codex. In the Old World, the codex form indicated pages sewn together along a spine. The Mesoamerican codex was a long section of bark paper, or sometimes deer hide, that was covered in white paint as a background and was fan-folded. The reader of a New World codex would open the fan-fold pages and see at least two pages side by side. Painters of the codices often took advantage of this form and created visual texts that should be read by treating two "pages" as a single text. The paintings covered both sides of the codex. The whole would be flipped over to read the other side in the same way.

Among the Maya, these codices include hieroglyphs that could encode sentences and longer texts. In the larger number of preserved codices from Central Mexico, there is no script that consistently encodes language in the paintings. They consist of pictograms and rebus drawings that give clues to the meaning. In this system, the actors on the pages are identified by two types of characteristics. In many cases, their name (given as a date in the calendar and consisting of a number and a noun, such as "8 Deer") is attached by a line or by simple proximity to the person named. Even without the attached name, however, most of the deities can be identified by the visual "code" of distinctive body or facial paint, specific items of clothing, and certain accompanying cultural items. Much as different military uniforms can readily distinguish the branch of service, the visual clues of the individual gods declared their identity. The first book of the *Florentine Codex* gives a brief description of the various Aztec gods, and each one is given the set of

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[72]Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, 3:13.

[73]Juan de Torquemada, *Monarquía Indiana*, 3 vols. (Mexico City: Editorial Sálvador Chávez Hayhoe, 1943), 2:255.

[74]Ibid., 1:255; Bartólome de Las Casas, *Apologética Historia Sumaria*, edited by Edmundo O'Gorman, 2 vols. (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1967), 1:644; Diego de Durán, *Historia de las Indias de Nueva España*, edited by Ángel María Garibay K., 2 vols. (Mexico City: Editorial Porrúa, 1967), 1:9.

accoutrements that identify him or her. For example, they describe Quetzalcoatl: "And thus was he bedight: he had a conical ocelot-skin cap. His face was thickly smeared with soot. He was adorned with [spiral] wind and mesquite symbols. He had a curved, turquoise mosaic ear-pendant. He wore a gold neckband of small sea-shells. He had the quetzal-pheasant as a burden on his back. He had ocelot anklets with rattles. He wore a cotton bone[-ribbed] jacket. He carried the shield with the wind-shell design. He had the curved [inlaid] spear-thrower and also foam sandals."[75]

Other features identify Quetzalcoatl on the codices. While numerous features might be associated with Quetzalcoatl, not every depiction uses them all. Each painter selected among the available clues used for a particular painting. This ability of the visual representation to indicate the painting's subject is relevant to our understanding of how beards functioned in pre-conquest art.

The Codex Nuttall, reportedly sent to Spain in 1519, had been composed in the Mixtec culture of Central Mexico at an unknown date prior to the conquest. It shows several bearded figures: male 13 Reed, male 1 Death, male 4 Jaguar, male 10 Rain, and male 10 Grass. Male 9 Wind, the name attached to the figure who is painted with the iconography identifying Quetzalcoatl (named male 9 Wind in Mixtec codices), is not bearded. Therefore, in the Codex Nuttall, beards are certainly part of the iconographic representations of various figures, but not for male 9 Wind (who combines the aspects of Ehecatl Quetzalcoatl and Ce Acatl Quetzalcoatl).[76]

Two companion codices were painted for the Spanish after the conquest. They use more Western artistic conventions, but the layout and content are native. Both cover the same information in the same order, but one has two sections that are not in the other. They are known as the Codex Telleriano-Remensis and the Codex Ríos. The Telleriano-Remensis contains the date of 1563 and the Ríos 1566, so they were painted no earlier than those dates.[77] In spite of being post-conquest productions, they appear to contain pre-conquest information in their painting along with the obviously post-conquest glosses (one written in Spanish and one in Italian).

The Telleriano-Remensis has two drawings of figures that can be identified as Quetzalcoatl. One is actually labeled "Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl" in Spanish. Neither representation of Quetzalcoatl is bearded. The Codex Ríos shows one depiction of Quetzalcoatl for which there is no analog in the *Telleriano-Remensis*. In that drawing, a bearded Quetzalcoatl is on top of a pyramid, wearing a long cape with a pattern of crosses on the fabric.[78]

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[75]Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, 13.

[76]Zelia Nuttall, ed., *Codex Nuttall* (New York: Dover Publications, 1975). For male 13 Reed, see p. 7; male 1 Death, p. 10; male 4 Jaguar, p. 14; male 10 Rain, p. 14; male 10 Grass, p. 15; and male 9 Wind, p. 15.

[77]Nicholson, *Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl*, 61–62.

[78]"Codex Telleriano-Remensis," in *Antigüedades de México: Basadas en la recopilación de Lord Kingsborough*, analysis and interpretation by José Corona Nuñez, 4 vols. (Mexico City: Secretaria de Hacienda y Crédito Público, 1964), 1:180 [11 in Ms], and 1:187 [10 in Ms]. See also "Codex Ríos," in

Not only is the beard itself more widespread than popular designations of the "bearded white god" would suggest, but there are also indications that Mesoamericans sometimes used false beards. The *Annals of Cuauhtitlan* (originally written in Nahuatl, probably ca. 1545–55[79]) describes Quetzalcoatl at Tula: "Immediately he made him his green mask; he took red color with which he made the lips russet; he took yellow to make the facade; and he made the fangs; continuing, he made his beard of feathers."[80] The *Codex Borgia,* an undated, but pre-conquest, document from Central Mexico, shows Quetzalcoatl on plates 56 and 73, masked and wearing a beard of what appears to be yellow feathers.[81]

The first level of analysis evaluates a text's possible ability to contain pre-conquest lore. In this case, the post-conquest texts have corroboration in pictographic codices produced prior to the conquest or copied shortly thereafter, in the case of the Telleriano-Remensis and the Río. The sources allow us to confidently reconstruct the presence and psychological importance of beards prior to the conquest.

The second level of analysis, that of oral tradition, provides no evidence whatsoever of a tie to the New World visit of Jesus Christ. Beards were an important category for multiple pre-conquest figures, so the presence of a beard on Quetzalcoatl is not nearly as foreign as the post-conquest texts make it appear. Next, the beard is not even diagnostic of Quetzalcoatl. Therefore, the beard is not even a firm oral tradition category associated with any Quetzalcoatl figure.

The final issue is that the Book of Mormon pays no attention to beards. The sole appearance of the word is in 2 Nephi 17:20 in a passage from Isaiah.[82] Assuming that the Nephites were not naturally bearded, they still did not remark on the beard that Jesus wore during his appearance to them. Quetzalcoatl as the "white, bearded" god is perhaps his most common modern depiction, but neither designation appears to be an important association with Quetzalcoatl prior to the conquest. Certainly neither points to the Book of Mormon's record of the Messiah's visit to the Nephites in Bountiful.

3. Quetzalcoatl and the myth of the return. An important element of the Quetzalcoatl myth, allowing much of its reshaping to accommodate its Christianizing, was the

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Antigüedades de México: Basadas en la recopilación de Lord Kingsborough, analysis and interpretation by José Corona Nuñez, 4 vols. (Mexico City: Secretaria de Hacienda y Crédito Público, 1964), 3:29 [Vol. 7 in the manuscript].

[79]Nicholson, *Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl,* 39.

[80]"Anales de Cuauhtitlan," in *Codice Chimalpopoca,* edited by Primo Feliciano Velázquez (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1975), 9; translation mine. Bierhorst, *History and Mythology of the Aztecs,* 32–33, has a different translation directly from the Nahuatl text: "And so he did it, this featherworker, this Coyotlinahual. First he made Quetzalcoatl's head fan. Then he fashioned his turquoise mask, taking yellow to make the front, red to color the bill. Then he gave him his serpent teeth and made him his beard, covering him below with cotinga and roseate spoonbill feathers.

[81]Gisele Díaz and Alan Rogers, eds., *The Codex Borgia* (New York: Dover Publications, 1993), 22, 5.

[82]Based on a text search for all forms of "beard" in *GospeLink 2001*, CD-ROM (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000).

motif of Quetzalcoatl's return. As with "white" and "bearded," the idea that Quetzalcoatl promised to return is an indelible aspect of the modern version of the tale. It is part of what we all know and is typically referenced without documentation. Sorenson repeats this part of the tale: "[Quetzalcoatl] departed mysteriously with the promise that he would return someday." Sorenson also gives the typical evidence for this aspect of the tale: "The success of Cortez in conquering Mexico stemmed in part from Aztec hesitancy to oppose him whom they believed to be that returning Deity."[83]

Similar to "white" and "bearded," this well-known aspect of the tale is problematic. When Nicholson summarized the basic Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl tale (my Ce Acatl Quetzalcoatl), he made no reconstruction of a promise to return. I agree with his reconstruction. It is absolutely certain that the original lore contained a section on Quetzalcoatl's departure (Nicholson's Section 5: "Flight"), but the corresponding promise to return is absent from all but one native source, and that one reference is problematic (see below). Rather, the promise to return is inextricably connected to Spanish accounts.

Those accounts begin at the very beginning of the Spanish presence in the New World. When Cortés entered the capital city of the Aztecs, Tenochtitlan,[84] he made one of the most remarkable and fateful meetings of cultures in the history of the World. For the first time, a representative of a European nation met the ruler of the largest political domain in the New World. It was not only an encounter of cultures but also an encounter of languages. Cortés spoke no Nahuatl. Motecuhzoma (anglicized to Montezuma)[85] spoke no Spanish. A Spaniard who had been captured by and lived with the Maya, spoke Maya to a native woman, known as Marina, apparently a native speaker of Nahuatl who was sold to a Maya village after a family misfortune.[86] Marina translated from Maya into Nahuatl. In this monumental meeting of cultures, communications between the two important figures went through two different translators and three languages.

Cortés indicates no difficulty with communication. In fact, he is very clear about the content of this meeting. In a letter written in 1520 to the king of Spain (published in 1522), he "quotes" Motecuhzoma's welcoming speech:

> For a long time we have known from the writings of our ancestors that neither I [Motecuhzoma], nor any of those who dwell in this land, are natives of it, but foreigners who came from a very distant land and likewise we know that a chieftain, of whom they

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[83]Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, 326.

[84]Modern Mexico City was built on the site of Tenochtitlan. When Cortés arrived, the city occupied an island in a large lake. Bridges provided the only access, sections of which could be removed to improve the city's defenses. The lake has since been drained and the entire area is occupied by the modern city.

[85]The name of this important Aztec king is spelled in several ways, attempting to approximate the Nahuatl pronunciation. A rendition that may be closer to the Nahuatl would be Mo-tek^{w}-soma. The unvoiced *w* (^{w}) creates the transliteration problems.

[86]Hugh Thomas, *Conquest: Montezuma, Cortés, and the Fall of Old Mexico* (New York: Touchstone Books, 1995), 172.

> were all vassals, brought our people to this region. And he returned to his native land and after many years came again, by which time all those who had remained were married to native women and had built up the villages and raised children. And when he wished to lead them away again they would not go, nor even admit him as their chief; and so he departed. And we have always held that those who descended from him would come and conquer this land and take us as their vassals. So because of the place from which you claim to come, namely from where the sun rises, and the thing you tell us of the great Lord or king who sent you here, we believe and are certain that his is our natural Lord, especially as you say that he has known of us for some time.[87]

This passage is remarkable—perhaps too remarkable, considering the number of translations Motecuhzoma's words endured before reaching Cortés and the passage of nearly a year before the speech was recorded. A. R. Pagden, professor of history at the University of California, Los Angeles, comments on its doubtful authenticity: "Both this speech and the one that follows would seem to be apocryphal. Motecuzoma could never have held the views with which Cortés accredits him. Eulalia Guzmán, a Mexican anthropologist (1890–1985), has pointed out the biblical tone of both these passages and how their phraseology reflects the language of the Siete Partidas [law code of Alfonso X[88]]. Cortés is casting Motecuzoma into the role of a 16th Century Spaniard welcoming his 'natural [divinely appointed] Lord,' who in this case has been accredited with a vaguely Messianic past."[89] Pagden suggests that a similar tale seems to have been current in the native culture but that it was probably not faithfully reproduced in this record.[90]

Furthermore, Cortés's description does not fit the Quetzalcoatl motifs. In Cortés's report, a foreign leader brings his people to this land. They intermarry; and when he asks them to leave, they refuse. None of these elements matches the Quetzalcoatl lore, although there are points of similarity. However, the result of seeing the Spanish as foreordained to conquer Mexico was so effective that this story of a returning god was spread wherever the Spanish entered new territory. Historian Jacques Lafaye comments: "The prophecy of Quetzalcoatl was a specific Mexican instance of a belief common to the majority of the Indian peoples, the belief that men from the East would come to dominate them. Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca heard of it during his trek across the Southwest; Gómara cites it for Española; the Chibchas, the Tupi of Brazil, the Guaraní of Paraguay, had similar

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[87]Hernan Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, translated by A. R. Pagden (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1971), 85–86.

[88]Written between 1251 and 1265, the Siete Partidas are the law code of Alfonso X, "el Sabio" (the wise). It is "generally considered the most important law code of the Middle Ages (and largest legislative compilation since Roman times)." Suzanne H. Peterson, "The Legislative Works of Alfonso X, el sabio," http://faculty.washington.edu/petersen/alfonso/lawtrans.htm (accessed May 2007).

[89]Cortés, *Letters from Mexico,* 467.

[90]Ibid., 467. Thomas, *Conquest,* 406, exercises a similar caution: "Whether the myth of Quetzalcoatl, or Tezcatlipoca, or any other deity, did or did not exercise a decisive influence over Montezuma's judgments we may never know. But he was exceptionally superstitious, even for a Mexican. He certainly seems, at the very least for a time, to have toyed with the idea of identifying Cortés with a lost lord who vanished into the east. But this identification did not necessarily implicate Quetzalcoatl."

beliefs. In different regions of the New World the Spaniards were taken for 'Children of the Sun.'"[91] Such a widespread pattern indicates either a pan-American myth[92] or a Spanish convenience, justifying their arrival and conquests. Although I have not done serious work on the myth of the other native peoples throughout South America, it seems more reasonable to me that the Spanish brought the myth with them, rather than discovering it in virtually the same form all of these diverse locales. I base this conclusion on the nature of the transformation that appears in the Quetzalcoatl myth of the departure, which metamorphoses into a prediction of the coming of and conquest by the Spanish.

This transformation from the myth of departure to the prophecy of the Spanish Conquest is evident early. Even Sahagún's native informants make the connection between the Spanish and the returning god. In their description of the first meeting of Central Mexicans with the Spaniards while Cortés was still embarked, they mention the myth of the return: "Thereupon they went into the water. They entered the boats; they took to the water. The water folk rowed them. And when they had drawn near to the Spaniards, then before them they performed the earth-eating ceremony at the prows of the boats: they thought it was Quetzalcoatl Topiltzin who had come to arrive."[93] They also describe what they report to have been Motecuhzoma's reaction:

> And then the year changed to the companion to follow, thirteen Rabbit. But the year [Thirteen] Rabbit was about to come to an end, was at the time of closing, when [the Spaniards] came to land, when they were seen once again.
>
> And then [the stewards] hastened to come to inform Moctezuma. When he heard of it, then he speedily sent messengers. Thus he thought—thus was it thought—that this was Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl who had come to land. For it was in their hearts that he would come, that he would come to land, just to find his mat, his seat [the symbols of rulership].[94]

A historian who handles Nahuatl, James Lockhart, believes Sahagún's passage is questionable: "As to the well-aired notion of Cortés being supposed to have been the god Quetzalcoatl returning, the suspect first portion of Book 12 contains the only such references in the Nahuatl corpus (to the best of my knowledge)."[95] Although Sahagún's informants typically provide excellent information and do so in Nahuatl, they learned to write their language in the priests' schools and were being taught and indoctrinated into Catholicism and Spanish culture.[96]

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[91]Lafaye, *Quetzalcoatl and Guadalupe*, 151.

[92]This appears to be the position taken in David G. Calderwood, *Voices from the Dust: New Insights into Ancient America* (Austin, Tex.: Historical Publications, 2005).

[93]Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, 12:5.

[94]Ibid., 12:9.

[95]James Lockhart, *The Nahuas after the Conquest: A Social and Cultural History of the Indians of Central Mexico, Sixteenth through Eighteenth Centuries* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1992), 20,

[96]J. Jorge Klor de Alva, "Sahagún and the Birth of Modern Ethnography: Representing, Confessing, and Inscribing the Native Other," in *The Work of Bernardino de Sahagún: Pioneer Ethnographer of Sixteenth-Century Mexico*, edited by J. Jorge Klor de Alva, H. B. Nicholson, and Eloise Quiñones

For the myth of the return on the first level of analysis (understanding the texts themselves), Nicholson could not find the data to firmly reconstruct the return as part of the basic myth. The element is clearly a part of the mythology but only of the post-contact version. Franciscan Fray Toribio de Benavente, nicknamed Motolinía, "the poor one," wrote about A.D. 1536–43. He initially mentions Quetzalcoatl's return and the arrival of the Spanish without specifying a prophecy that included the Spaniards:

> This Quetzalcoatl, said the Indians, was a native of the pueblo called Tulla, and he left and built the provinces of Tlaxcalla, Huexucinco, Cholollа, etc., and after he left for the coast of Couatzacualco and there disappeared, and always they awaited his return, and when they saw the ships of the don Hernando Cortés, and the Spaniards that conquered this land, seeing them come at the sail, they said that now came their god Quetzalcoatl, who brought temples through the ocean, but when [the Spaniards] disembarked they said that they were many gods, which in their language is *quiteteuh*.[97]

However, in another passage, Motolinía clarifies that the Spaniards' coming was the fulfillment of Quetzalcoatl's return. An angel miraculously appeared to a native before the conquest and said: "Have strength and confidence, and do not fear, for God of the heaven will show you mercy, and say to those who now sacrifice and spill blood, that very soon they will cease the sacrifice and spilling of human blood, and that soon will come those who are to command and govern in this land."[98]

This passage has strong elements of Christian propaganda, casting doubt on its historical authenticity. Not only is it an angel (a being who has no Aztec counterpart) who appears, but his admonition to "have strength, confidence, and do not fear" echoes the "fear not" language typical of biblical angels. The text of the "revelation" is also clearly self-serving for the Spaniards.

The purpose of Quetzalcoatl's return as it appears in most sources is a prediction of the *Spaniards'* arrival—which is not the same thing as predicting Quetzalcoatl's return. As the return motif became increasingly Hispanicized, it

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Keber, Vol. 2 of STUDIES ON CULTURE AND SOCIETY (New York: Institute for Mesoamerican Studies, State University of New York at Albany, 1988), 34–35:

> Unlike the case of the narratives on the other that preceded it, where ethnographic authority was founded primarily on the observing and questioning author, because of the dialogical methods Sahagún employed in composing his ethnographic corpus, authorship and authority must be primarily attributed to the informants and trilingual native scholars, the *colegiales,* who worked with him and who were once students and later teachers in the Colegio de Santa Cruz in Tlatelolco. Because of their role in the formation of the text, along with their Europeanized vision, the corpus includes the fullest record available of the natives' own reconstruction of their culture and natural history. Thus, since the *Historia general* and the other texts written by Sahagún in collaboration with his Nahua assistants permit us to piece together native images of pre- and, to a great extent, post-Contact reality, they are a critical source of information in the key features of the Nahua conceptualization of themselves and their world.

[97]Toribio de Benavente, or Motolinía, *Memoriales o Libro de las cosas de la Nueva España y de los naturales de ella*, edited by Edmundo O'Gorman (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1971), 81; translation mine.

[98]Ibid., 214; translation mine.

more strongly justified the conquest—even its excesses. By A.D. 1579–81 when Diego de Durán composed his history, he has Quetzalcoatl instructing his people before his departure:

> . . . and delivering to them [of Tula] a large discourse, he prophesied the coming of a strange people from the Eastern parts who would land in this place, with strange clothes of different colors, dressed from head to foot, and with coverings on their heads, and that this punishment was to be sent them from God in payment of the poor treatment which they had given him, and the agony he had suffered. With this great punishment, small and large would perish, not being able to escape from the hands of these his sons; that they were to come to destroy them, even though they were to hide in caves and in the caverns of the earth, and from there they would be taken and there they would go to persecute and kill these people.[99]

Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl, a later native chronicler (ca. 1600–40, writing in Spanish), echoes the same idea that the conquest was retribution for sin: "[Quetzalcoatl] said that in coming times, in a year which would be called ce acatl he would return, and then his doctrine would be received and his children would be Lords and possess the land, and that they (the Indians) and their descendants would suffer many calamities and persecutions."[100]

Durán also presents an interesting variation, unique to him, in which the prophesied return includes not only the Spaniards' triumphant arrival but justification for their greed:

> [From a speech given by Moctezuma] I have provided jewels and precious stones and feathers so that you may take them as a present to those who have arrived in our land, and I very much desire that you discover who is the lord and principal among them, to whom I want you to give all that you carry, and discover for certain if they are our ancestors, named Topiltzin, or by another name, Quetzalcoatl, who our histories say left this land and left the saying that they were to return to reign in this land, he or his children, to possess the gold and silver and jewels which he left hidden in the hills and the rest of the riches that we now possess.[101]

Using the basic concepts of the transmission of oral tradition, we can trace the trajectory of the myth of the return. The departure of Quetzalcoatl from Tollan was an important part of the native lore cycle, but its importance was unconnected to a direct promise to return. The original tale depicts the organization of the post-Tollan world.[102] When Sahagún's informants relate this part of the cycle, they mark events on the journey with the transformations that occurred there:

> Then he came to arrive elsewhere, at Quauhtitlan [place of trees]. A very thick tree stood [there], and it was very tall. He stood by it. Thereupon he called forth for his mirror. Thereupon he looked at himself; he saw himself in the mirror; he said: "Already I am an old man." Then that place he named Ueuequahtitlan [Old-Quauhtitlan]. Thereupon he stoned, he threw many stones at the tree. And as he threw the stones, the stones indeed

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[99]Durán, *Historia de las Indias de Nueva España*, 1:11; translation mine.

[100]Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl, *Obras Históricas*, 2 vols., edited by Alfredo Chavero (Mexico City: Editora Nacional, 1952), 1:20; translation mine.

[101]Durán, *Historia de las Indias de Nueva España*, 2:507; see also p. 514; translation mine.

[102]Because Nicholson is concentrating on the reconstruction of the myth's historical core, he focuses on the journey and does not discuss the mythic function of the post-Tollan journey.

> went into it in various places, were stuck to the old tree in various places. Just the same has it continued to exist; thus it is seen. Beginning at the foot, [the stones] extend rising to its top. . . .
>
> Once again he came to rest elsewhere. Upon a stone he sat. He supported himself on it with his hands. . . .
>
> And as he supported himself on the rock by his hands, they sank deeply; as if in mud did the palms of his hands penetrate. Likewise his buttocks, as they were on the rock, likewise sank, submerged deeply. They are clearly visible, so deeply are they pierced [in the rock]. Hence the place was named Temacpalco ["place of the hand-stone seat"].
>
> And then he went off. When he came to reach a place named Tepanoayan [crossing-place] there was water. Water was coming forth; it was very wide, broad. [Quetzalcoatl] laid stones; he made a bridge. Then he crossed over it, and then he named it Tepanoayan.[103]

The text continues with similar events along the journey. In the original myth, this part of the tale functions as a description of the current world. Tula, or Tollan, functioned like the Garden of Eden for Aztec mythology. It was a wonderful, ideal place, but it was lost. The tale of Quetzalcoatl's journey to the sea orders the Aztec "lone and dreary world." However, since Mesoamerica's concept of time was cyclical, all events return. Therefore, the departure at least implied a return, thus enabling the post-conquest development of this part of the myth.

After the conquest, Cortés injects a new element into the native mythic consciousness. The remarkable arrival of strange men from the East was predicted, inevitable, and destined to overthrow the Mesoamerican world order. This Spanish mutation of the myth was so strongly attached to the political motives and historical reality of the conquest that it eventually fed back to the natives themselves, as witnessed by Sahagún's informants. Nevertheless, the particular forms of the myth that are visible in the literature demonstrate that they are additions made through the influence of the clash of cultures that was the conquest of New Spain.

However, this element of the tale is post-conquest and cannot be reconstructed as an element of the pre-Columbian version of the tale. Therefore, it cannot have any relationship to the Savior's promise of his second coming.

4. Quetzalcoatl's virgin birth. The most "Christian" suggestion in Nicholson's reconstructed tale is that Quetzalcoatl had a "virgin birth" (mentioned in his first element). This has been an aspect of the Ce Acatl Quetzalcoatl tale that has been seen as a very strong indication of a link to Christianity. Joseph Allen lists this as one of the significant parallels between Quetzalcoatl and Jesus Christ: "Both Christ and Quetzalcoatl were born of virgins."[104]

The association between a virgin birth and Christianity was, unsurprisingly, important for the early Spanish writers. Father Gerónimo de Mendieta (1525–1604), a Franciscan missionary, reports a conversation between a Spanish priest and an old Indian about an indigenous sacred book:

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[103]Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, 3:33–35.
[104]Allen, *Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, 159.

> And when this priest asked the Indian what the book contained of his doctrine, he did not know how to reply in particular, but from what he responded, if that book had not been lost, [the priest] would have seen how the doctrine which he taught and preached to them and that which the book contained were the same. . . . Also he said that they knew of the destruction by the flood. . . . They knew also of the mission of the angel to Our Lady, by a metaphor, saying that a very small object like a feather fell from the heavens, and a virgin picked it up and placed it over her womb whereupon she became pregnant.[105]

Aztec mythology appears to have a category of miraculous births that post-contact authors have labeled "virgin births." In Aztec mythology, however, the virgin birth was not unique to Quetzalcoatl. The particular tale that Mendieta related describes the birth of the Aztec tribal deity Huitzilopochtli, not any version of Quetzalcoatl. That tale is reported by Sahagún's informants:

> To Uitzilopochtli the Mexicans paid great honor.
>
> Thus did they believe of his beginning, his origin. At Coatepec [serpent mountain place], near Tula, there dwelt one day, there lived a woman named Coatl icue ["serpent her-skirt"], mother of the Centzonhuitznaua [the four hundred Huitznahua]. And their elder sister was named Coyolxauhqui.
>
> And this Coatl icue used to perform penances there; she used to sweep; she used to take care of the sweeping. Thus she used to perform penances at Coatepec. And once, when Coatl icue was sweeping, feathers descended upon her—what was like a ball of feathers. Then Coatl icue snatched them up; she placed them at her waist. And when she had swept, then she would have taken the feathers which she had put at her waist. She found nothing. Thereupon by means of them Coatl icue conceived.[106]

Ce Acatl's birth is similarly miraculous, but is a very different story. *Leyenda de los Soles* preserves the story of Ce Acatl Quetzalcoatl's conception and birth:

> And then Mixcoatl [cloud-serpent] goes off to make conquests in Huitznahuac. Meeting the woman Chimalman [shield-hand], he lays down his shield and positions his darts and his dart thrower. She just stands there naked, no skirt, no blouse. And having sighted her, Mixcoatl shoots her repeatedly.
>
> He shot one at her and it just went over her. She ducked.
>
> The second time he shot at her, it went by on one side. She just dodged.
>
> The third time he shot at her, she caught it in her hand.
>
> The fourth time he shot at her, she made it pass between her legs.
>
> And when Mixcoatl had shot at her the fourth time, he turned around and went away. And the woman ran and hid in a cave, she went into a gorge.
>
> And again Mixcoatl adorned himself and got darts. And then he went and looked for her again, but he couldn't find her. Then he killed some of the Huitznahua women, and the Huitznahua women said, "Let's go down and get her."
>
> They said to her, "Mixcoatl is looking for you. Because of you, he's killing your sisters."
>
> And so they fetched her, and she came to Huitznahuac. And Mixcoatl went again and met her, and again she stands there, exposing her crotch. And he lays down his shield and his darts. And again he shoots at her.

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[105]Gerónimo de Mendieta, *Historia Eclesiástica Indiana*, 4 vols., (Mexico City: Editorial Sálvador Chávez Hayhoe, 1945), 1:538; translation mine.

[106]Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, 1:1–2.

> Again a dart went over her, and one passed by her side, and she caught one in her hand, and one went between her legs.
>
> After that he took hold of her, and he lay beside this woman from Huitznahuac, this Chimalman. And with that she became pregnant.
>
> Now, when he was being born he gave his mother great pain for four days. And so, he was born, this Ce Acatl.
>
> And no sooner has he been born than his mother dies.[107]

From this element of the lore cycle, we can unravel the interface between the Spanish recorder and the native tale-teller, who relates tales from the native category of miraculous births. However, in the Spanish report that summarizes rather than quotes these tales, the friars apply their own worldview to the native category through a Christian vocabulary.

Does this element represent a remembrance of Jesus Christ? It is extremely doubtful. It isn't unique to a single deity, but represents a theme widely known from world mythology.[108] The Nephites probably knew that Jesus would be born of a virgin, although that information is found only in 1 Nephi 11:13–20, a record which appears to have been unknown by most keepers of the large plates. (See commentary accompanying Words of Mormon 1:3.) Furthermore, they experienced the Messiah as a resurrected being in his glory. If a remembrance was passed on, surely it would have been to that very memorable event, not to his birth, however, miraculous, on another continent.

5. Ce Acatl Quetzalcoatl's white robe. John Sorenson remarks: "By some accounts, Quetzalcoatl wore a long white robe. The 'white robe' worn by the resurrected Christ is unique, a garment not otherwise mentioned among the Nephites."[109] Francisco Cervantes de Sálazar, rector of the National University of Mexico at its inception in 1551,[110] had a similar opinion of Quetzalcoatl's clothing: "He was never dressed but in a robe of white cotton, well girded to the body and so large that it covered the feet, for greater modesty."[111] Textual analysis of this part of the legend suggests that it is not uncommon in the descriptions of the later Spanish writers, but absent in the versions written by the natives themselves. Nicholson notes that Quetzalcoatl's companions are specifically mentioned as wearing a *xicolli*.[112] The *xicolli* was a short, sleeveless, sewn garment worn by the upper classes.[113] Because these garments typically reached the knees and were often different colors, they do not seem to be the garment described for Quetzalcoatl.

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[107]Bierhorst, *History and Mythology of the Aztecs*, 153.

[108]Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, BOLLINGEN SERIES XVII (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1973), 297–314, esp. 311–14, which summarizes the story of Coatlicue.

[109]Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, 326.

[110]"Francisco Cervantes de Sálazar," *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*, http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francisco_Cervantes_de _Salazar (accessed May 2007).

[111]Francisco Cervantes de Sálazar, *Crónica de Nueva España*, 2 vols. (Madrid, Spain: Hauser y Menet, 1914), 1:36.

[112]Nicholson, *Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl*, 106.

[113]Patricia Rieff Anawalt, *Indian Clothing before Cortés: Mesoamerican Costumes from the Codices* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1981), 131.

Another possibility is a white cotton *tilmatli,* a long, draped garment tied at the shoulder. Only the highest ranks could wear a *tilmatli* that reached their ankles. (See commentary accompanying 3 Nephi 6:15.) The paintings that accompany Diego de Durán's history show Quetzalcoatl in a white *tilmatli*.[114]

The lack of comment on Quetzalcoatl's clothing in the earliest native sources strongly suggests that it is an element that entered the lore after the conquest. It appears to have been based on a native type of clothing that was reserved for nobility and therefore not common. Nevertheless, the transformation began very early. The *Relación de genealogía* is, according to Nicholson, "a document prepared in 1532 by unnamed Franciscan friars at the petition of Juan Cano, one of the *primeros conquistadores* [first conquerors], to legitimize, by tracing her pedigree back to the Creation, the claim of his wife, Doña Isabel (Tecuichpo, the famed, oft-wed daughter of Moteuhzoma II), to what he considered her lawful patrimony."[115] The *Relación* actually states that the clothing of those who accompanied Quetzalcoatl was "like the dress of Spain."[116] With due consideration to Sorenson's opinion, it does not appear that the Savior's white robe was sufficiently spectacular to have generated this legend. It has more reasonable roots in native dress.

6. Quetzalcoatl's aversion to human sacrifice. Nicholson's reconstruction is a less than a ringing endorsement of this particular correlation to a potential Christian figure: "[Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl's] generally pacifistic bent and aversion to human sacrifice are certainly more common than his contrasting role as a military conqueror." Perhaps justifying Nicholson's caution, the pacific Quetzalcoatl appears clearly and early in the legends. A passage attributed to Andrés de Olmos illustrates the standard version of Quetzalcoatl's religion: "He never admitted sacrifices of the blood of humans nor of animal, but rather only of bread and roses, flowers and perfumes, and of odors. [Also] he watched and prohibited with much efficacy wars, thefts, murders and other harms which they did to each other. Whenever wars were mentioned before him, or other evils concerning the wrongs of men, he would turn his face and cover his ears so that he would neither see nor hear them."[117]

Parts of this theme also appear in texts written by natives. Sahagún's informants did not mention human sacrifice but did instruct: "You shall offer him, you shall sacrifice before him only serpents, only butterflies."[118] In the *Annals of Cuauhtitlan* the conflict over human sacrifice becomes the reason for Quetzalcoatl's departure from Tula:

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[114]The art is reproduced in Durán, *Book of the Gods and Rites and the Ancient Calendar*, 323.

[115]Nicholson, *Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl*, 9.

[116]"Relación de la Genealogía y linaje de los Señores," in *Nueva Colección de Documentos para la Historia de México,* edited by García Icazbalceta (1891; rpt., Nendeln/Liechtenstein: Kraus Reprint, 1971), 3:263–80.

[117]The ascription to Olmos is made because of the similar passages in three later histories that appear to have had access to Olmos's work. Slightly differing versions of this passage occur in Las Casas, *Apologética Historia Sumaria,* 1:644; Torquemada, *Monarquía Indiana*, 2:50; and Mendieta, *Historia Eclesiástica Indiana*, 92.

[118]Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, 10:160.

> Well, it is told and related that many times during the life of Quetzalcoatl, sorcerers tried to ridicule him into making the human payment, into taking human lives. But always he refused. He did not consent, because he greatly loved his subjects who were Toltecs. Snakes, birds, and butterflies that he killed were what his sacrifices always were. . . .
>
> Then they tell how Quetzalcoatl departed. It was when he refused to obey the sorcerers about making the human payment, about sacrificing humans. Then the sorcerers deliberated among themselves, they whose names were Tezcatlipoca, Ihuimecatl, and Toltecatl. They said, "He must leave his city. We shall live there."[119]

The similarity in these accounts concerning the items sacrificed (snakes, birds, butterflies) seems to be tapping a common indigenous theme. Countering this reputed pacifism, however, are other parts of the Ce Acatl Quetzalcoatl legend (which Nicholson includes in element number 2, "Youth"). The *Histoyre du Méchique* provides a version of Ce Acatl Quetzalcoatl's conflict with his brothers:

> [Quetzalcoatl's brothers] returned to look for Quetzalcoatl and they made him believe that his father had been changed into a rock, persuading him also that he sacrifice and offer something to this rock, such as lions, tigers, eagles, little animals, butterflies, for he would not be able to find these animals. And as he did not wish to obey them, they wanted to kill him, but he escaped from among them and climbed a tree, or something like it, on top of that same rock and shot arrows at them and killed them all. Having done this, others came seeking him with honors and they took the heads of his brothers and emptied the skulls to make drinking cups.[120]

The parallel text from *Leyenda de los Soles* involves his uncles, but the details clearly present a variant of the same story:

> Now, Ce Acatl's uncles, who are of the four hundred Mixcoa, absolutely hated his father, and they killed him.
>
> And when they had killed him, they went and put him in the sand. . . .
>
> Then his uncles are furious, and off they go, Apanecatl in the lead, climbing quickly.
>
> But Ce Acatl rose up and broke his head with a burnished pot, and he came tumbling down.
>
> Then he seizes Zolton and Cuilton. Then the animals blow [on the fire]. Then they sacrifice them.
>
> They cover them with hot pepper, cut up their flesh a little. And after they've tortured them, they cut open their breasts.[121]

This is a far cry from the Quetzalcoatl who covered his eyes and ears so as not to be reminded of death. As Nicholson notes, one element in the lore cycle strongly repudiates human sacrifice. However, two of the earliest and best sources specifically describe Ce Acatl Quetzalcoatl being personally involved in killing and either imply or state sacrifice.

The first level of analysis presents mixed results in the types of texts that present this theme. Some of them are the very texts that have, for other themes, been deemed representative of native pre-contact themes. However, this is a point

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[119]Bierhorst, *History and Mythology of the Aztecs*, 31.
[120]Garibay K., *Histoyre du Méchique*, 113–4; translation mine.
[121]Bierhorst, *History and Mythology of the Aztecs*, 154.

where I see the interface between Spaniard and native worldviews becoming an integral part of the lore's development. Oral tradition is a living entity in a community. It responds to the changes in social conditions. That is why it changes over time. In this case, I see the pacific aspects of the Quetzalcoatl tale resulting from heavy Spanish influence. The Spanish made it clear that they did not condone human sacrifice. As Robert Carmack noted above, the documents "are pleas to the Spaniards to relax colonial demands, in exchange for the natives' acceptance of a faithfulness to Christianity."[122] I see the pacifist theme as an addition to the oral tradition that was made as a reaction to and as an accommodation with the Spanish Conquest. In Central Mexico, the native response to the Spanish aversion to human sacrifice was to claim that Quetzalcoatl had refused human sacrifice and that some other devil had made them do it.

In other cultural areas of Mesoamerica, the same forces produced the same results, but with a very interesting twist. For at least one native reporting in 1581 from Mérida, Yucatan, the scapegoat for Maya idolatry was Quetzalcoatl himself: "It is said of the first inhabitants of Chichen Itza that they were not idolaters until Ru ralcan [Kukulcan, the Maya translation of the meaning of Quetzalcoatl] the Mexican captain entered these parts. This one taught them idolatry and the necessity, as they say, he taught them to idolatrize. . . . [Before] they had heard of a creator of all things, of the creation of the heaven and of the earth, and of the fall of Lucifer, of the immortality of the soul, of heaven and of Hell and of the universal flood."[123]

The general characteristics of this passage are identical to those from Central Mexico. The reworked myth presents the following picture: The former native religion had been very close to Catholic Christianity, but a devil taught them a false religion and made them fall from the truth. Both Central Mexico and the Maya lands were under the same pressures of the conquest, which produced similar results in the recorded form of their lore on human sacrifice. However, where Quetzalcoatl is the hero in Central Mexico, he is the devil for the Maya. The trajectory of change fits with the other changes evident in the lore.

Quite apart from the fact that I do not see the aversion to human sacrifice as a pre-conquest element of the Ce Acatl lore cycle, it is also difficult to see as a remembrance of the Savior's appearance. One could certainly make a case that the Nephites were opposed to human sacrifice (Morm. 4:21), but Christ had not made it a subject of his preaching. If it were pre-conquest and if it were a remembrance of anything in the Book of Mormon, it would not be to Jesus Christ's visit.

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[122]Carmack, *Quichean Civilization*, 21.

[123]Cristóbal Sánchez, "Relación de Tecuato y Tepacan 1581," in *Colección de Documentos inéditos relativos al descubrimiento, conquista y organización de las antiguas posesiones Españoles de Ultramar*, 25 vols. (Madrid: Establecimiento Tipográfico Sucesores de Ribandeneyra, 1898), 11:121; translation mine. The informant was Gaspar Antonio Chi. Nicholson reports that Chi was "born about 1531 at the Tutul Xiu capital of Mani, . . . [and] was connected with the ruling dynasty of that place on his maternal side." Nicholson, *Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl*, 220.

7. Quetzalcoatl and crosses. Allen suggests that "the cross was a symbol to both Christ and Quetzalcoatl."[124] Jacque Lafaye notes that one of the original conquistadors, Bernal Díaz del Castillo, remarked on the "Christian" crosses in native art. Lafaye describes how the native symbols quickly became Christian:

> Bearers of a strong Judeo-Christian tradition, [the early Spaniards] focused attention on a symbol, the cross, that had significance for them, but they exaggerated its importance and gave it an erroneous interpretation. Coming from a closed, exclusive spiritual world, they could not conceive that a cross could have an origin or meaning other than that of the Christian cross. Thus they combined and reduced the crosses of ancient Mexico, which differed greatly from each other, to their own cruciform pattern and interpreted them as signs of a previous evangelization. In reality, the cross on Quetzalcoatl's mantle, a Saint Andrew's cross, symbolized the dual principle which had created both gods and men. At the foot of the temple of Ehecatl, at Calixtlahuaca, is a funerary monument whose design also is cruciform. Thus a kind of law of frequency began to operate that associated Quetzalcoatl and the cross in Spanish minds.[125]

The pre-conquest cross also symbolized the world tree.[126] In other words, the cross itself was certainly pre-contact. What differed was the meaning associated with it. The Christian implication of the cross was entirely post-contact. As a connection to the Book of Mormon, it also fails. The cross imagery that became so important for the New Testament writers had no impact on the New World believers in Christ. There was no reason to transform the symbol of death into a symbol of the resurrection. Not only did the New World cross have no association with Quetzalcoatl but it should not have had one to the resurrected Messiah. (See commentary accompanying 1 Nephi 11:32–36.)

8. Quetzalcoatl and native baptism. Allen suggests that "both Christ and Quetzalcoatl taught the ordinance of baptism."[127] There is a pre-contact context for part of this assertion. Anthropologists Mary Miller and Karl Taube summarized the information on Mesoamerican infant baptism:

> When the first Spanish priests arrived in New Spain, they were surprised to find native forms of baptism, in this case the ritual bathing of infants and children. In Yucatán, according to Diego de Landa, a native priest sprinkled male and female children of approximately three years of age with water from a serpent-tailed aspergillum. In addition, one of the principal citizens of the community anointed the children with water from a moistened bone. Landa notes that this rite cleansed and purified the children, an important function of baptism. . . .
>
> The Aztec rite was also associated with purification, to remove any pollution acquired from the parents. During the ritual bathing, the infant was named and presented with the tools necessary for adult life.[128]

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[124]Allen, *Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, 159.

[125]Lafaye, *Quetzalcoatl and Guadalupe*, 154.

[126]David A. Freidel, Linda Schele, and Joy Parker, *Maya Cosmos: Three Thousand Years on the Shaman's Path* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1993), 251–52.

[127]Allen, *Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, 159.

[128]Miller and Taube, *An Illustrated Dictionary of the Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya*, 44.

In the Aztec rite, Quetzalcoatl is mentioned, along with two goddesses. This is the recorded prayer given at the time of a child's baptism:

> Oh eagle, oh tiger [jaguar], oh valiant man, my grandson! You have arrived in this world. You have been sent by your mother and your father, the great lord and the great lady.
>
> You were born and conceived in your house, which is the place of the supreme gods of the great lord and the great lady which are over the nine heavens; You were given mercy by our son [*topiltzin*, as the meaning of the word rather than as a name] Quetzalcoatl, who is in all places; now, join with your mother the goddess of water who is named Chalchiuhtlícue and Chalchiutlatónac.[129]

Although Quetzalcoatl is invoked, he is invoked only in Central Mexico, not among the Maya or elsewhere. No native text claims that he introduced baptism. Quetzalcoatl's name is also invoked in the various witchcraft spells recorded by Hernando Ruíz de Alarcón, a parish priest at Atenango, Guerero, whose work was completed in 1629.[130] Thus, the invocation of Quetzalcoatl's name should not be taken as an indication that he had innovated any particular practice.

This correspondence comes close to making a connection to the Book of Mormon because there was a rite that could be called baptism among the pre-conquest Mesoamericans and there was also baptism among the Nephites. However, there is no indication that the Mesoamerican rite was initiated by the god Quetzalcoatl. The form of the Mesoamerican baptism was sprinkling, which we would not expect from the Nephite mode of baptism, which was unquestionably immersion. Finally, the Nephites had practiced baptism since the days of $Nephi_1$; and while the Savior recontextualized it, he did not teach it to them as a new practice.

9. Quetzalcoatl and Christ's association with a new star. Allen claims that "a new star is associated with both Christ and Quetzalcoatl."[131] He references, without citing, the *Annals of Cuauhtitlan*. This is the myth from that source:

> Now, this year, 1 Reed, is when he [Quetzalcoatl] got to the ocean, the seashore, so it is told and related. Then he halted and wept and gathered up his attire, putting on his head fan, his turquoise mask, and so forth. And as soon as he was dressed, he set himself on fire and cremated himself. And so the place where Quetzalcoatl was cremated is named Tlatlayan [land of burning].
>
> And they say as he burned, his ashes arose. And what appeared and what they saw were all the precious birds, rising into the sky. They saw roseate spoonbills, cotingas, trogons, herons, green parrots, scarlet macaws, white-fronted parrots, and all the other precious birds.
>
> And as soon as his ashes had been consumed, they saw the heart of a quetzal rising upward. And so they knew he had gone to the sky, had entered the sky.

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[129]Bernardino de Sahagún, *Historia General de las Cosas de Nueva España*, 4 vols. (Mexico City: Editorial Porrúa, 1969), 2:206.

[130]Hernando Ruíz de Alarcón, *Aztec Sorcerers in Seventeenth Century Mexico: The Treatise on Superstitions*, edited and translated by Michael D. Coe and Gordon Whittaker (Albany: Institute for Mesoamerican Studies, State University of New York at Albany, 1982), 105, 123.

[131]Allen, *Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, 159.

> The old people said he was changed into the star that appears at dawn. Therefore they say it came forth when Quetzalcoatl died, and they called him Lord of the Dawn.
>
> What they said is that when he died he disappeared for four days. They said he went to the dead land then. And he spent four more days making darts for himself. So it was after eight days that the morning star came out, which they said was Quetzalcoatl. It was then that he became lord, they said.
>
> And so, when he goes forth, they know on what day sign he casts light on certain people, venting his anger against them, shooting them with darts. If he goes on 1 Alligator, he shoots old men and old women, all alike.[132]

Both Christ and Quetzalcoatl may be associated with a star, but there is a difference—a big difference.

A Cautionary Tale

One last statement deserves examination. Wirth claims: "The writing of Juan de Córdova regarding the light that emanated from a powerful man, and the account in the Popol Vuh of the sun's being like a person may stem from Christ's visit to the Americas."[133] Wirth does not mention the source for the Juan de Córdova tale, but it provides an important cautionary tale for our acceptance of faith-promoting stories that appear to connect Jesus Christ and Quetzalcoatl. Wirth is referring to a story that is recounted in two volumes with which Bruce Warren was involved. The first is Bruce W. Warren and Thomas Stuart Ferguson, *The Messiah in Ancient America* (1987), an "updated" version of Ferguson's *One Fold, One Shepherd* (first edition 1958, revised 1962) that the family commissioned Warren, an archaeologist, to do after Ferguson's death. The second is Blaine M. Yorgason, Bruce W. Warren, and Harold Brown, *New Evidences of Christ in Ancient America*, which states:

> Juan de Córdova, a Spanish friar in Oaxaca, recorded the following account just a few years after the coming of Cortes. As part of a discussion of one of the day signs in the ritual calendar of ancient Mesoamerica, he describes the eighteenth one, a flint blade which is sometimes called the solar beam. This passage has recently been translated into English in Tony Shearer's *Beneath the Moon and Under the Sun,* which introduces it with this commentary:
>
> > Here is one of the strangest glyphs among the twenty. It is, if investigated, one of the best clues for superior beings reaching us from another planet.
> >
> > Among the oldest glyphs, this one comes to earth from another planet. The tenochs [a term which refers to the Aztecs] thought it came from the sun. Earlier uses of it suggest that it came from the northern sky, perhaps from the northeastern sky, and could be seen in broad daylight; so the story goes.
> >
> > A story was told to the Spaniards shortly after the Conquest in Oaxaca. . . . On the day we call Tecpatl [the Aztec name for the day sign "fling knife"] a great light came from the northeastern sky. It glowed for four days in the sky, then lowered itself to the rock; the rock can still be seen at Tenochtitlan de Valle in Oaxaca. From the light there came a great, very powerful being, who stood on the very top of the rock and glowed like the sun in the sky. There he stood for all to see, shining day and

[132]Bierhorst, *History and Mythology of the Aztecs,* 36.
[133]Wirth, "Quetzalcoatl, the Maya Maize God, and Jesus Christ," 15.

> night. Then he spoke, his voice was like thunder, booming across the valley. Our old men and women, the astronomers and astrologists, could understand him and he could understand them. He (the solar beam) told us how to pray and fixed for us days of fast and days of feasting. He then balanced the "Book of Days" (sacred calendar) and left vowing that he would always watch down upon us his beloved people.[134]

This story is amazing—clearly the best example of a parallel between Christ's appearance in the Americas and legendary memory. The details about a deity who instructs the people to fast and pray and who establishes a sacred calendar are arguably elements of the Quetzalcoatl myth. The miracle recorded in the rock is well attested. The rest of the text, however, has no support in either the native sources nor any of the later Spanish authors.

The online *Catholic Encyclopedia* provides the following details for Juan de Córdova, the putative author of this text:

> Born 1503, at Cordova in Andalusia, Spain, of noble parents; d. 1595 at Oaxaca, Mexico. . . . In 1543 he entered the Dominican Order at Mexico, and was sent to Oaxaca in 1548, where he acquired the Zapotecan idiom and ministered to the Indians. . . . His knowledge of the language was thorough, and he composed a "Vocabulario de la Lengua Zapoteca, ó Diccionario Hispano-Zapoteco" (Mexico, 1571, or, according to Ycazbalceta, 1578). The "Arte en Lengua Zapoteca" appeared in 1578 at Mexico. Besides the linguistic part, this book contains a short but valuable note on the rites and superstitions of the Zapotecan Indians, and an equally important account of their method of reckoning time.[135]

The Zapotec are a different linguistic and ethnic group from the Aztecs and the Maya and reside in the state of Oaxaca, Mexico.

I examined Juan de Córdova's two published works and found nothing resembling this passage. There are no known manuscripts related to these publications. I also examined Tony Shearer's *Beneath the Moon and Under the Sun*,[136] the source of the translation quoted in the two books mentioned, and referenced in Wirth's article. Shearer is a poet/novelist. His works are artistic recastings of material he has gleaned from his historical readings. *Beneath the Moon and Under the Sun* is a literary work that borrows and develops Mesoamerican themes. There are no quotations, no citations. Although Shearer references a Juan de Córdova, there is no indication in his work that he is familiar with the historical Juan de Córdova or his actual writings.

Even Shearer notes that he is unorthodox in his approach. In his *Lord of the Dawn*, a poetic novel about Quetzalcoatl, he has a note: "To the Reader: If you are

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[134]Warren and Ferguson, *The Messiah in Ancient America*, 2, and Blaine M. Yorgason, Bruce W. Warren, and Harold Brown, *New Evidences of Christ in Ancient America* (Provo, Utah: Book of Mormon Research Foundation, 1999), 139. The introduction and quotation are nearly identical, with a comment ("Cordova's account then follows") splitting the quotation from Shearer just before "Among the oldest glyphs. . . . "

[135]"Juan de Córdova," *Catholic Encyclopedia,* http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04360b.htm (accessed May 2007). See Juan de Córdoba (1503–95), *Vocabulario en lengua çapoteca* (Mexico City: Ediciones Toledo, 1987); and his *Arte del idioma zapoteco* (1886; rpt., Mexico City: Ediciones Toledo, 1987).

[136]Tony Shearer, *Beneath the Moon and under the Sun* (Albuquerque, N.M.: Sun Publishers, 1975), 71–72.

a scholar of Pre-Columbian history you are no doubt scratching your head and wondering what I'm up to."[137] He gives no direct answer.

Larry S. Ferguson, Thomas S. Ferguson's son, wrote the introduction to Warren and Ferguson's book which includes this second-hand story about Tony Shearer:

> Darrell Stoddard, a former archaeology student at Brigham Young University and ardent student of the *Book of Mormon,* related the following enlightening story:
>
> "In about 1970 in Espanola, New Mexico, I met Tony Shearer (a noted author and lecturer of ancient Mesoamerican civilizations). At that point in his life, he was involved in giving Hispanics and Indian people a sense of self-esteem by revealing to them their glorious past, i.e., the high cultures of Mesoamerica from which they came. When he learned I was a Latter-day Saint (he was not), he went into his bedroom and brought out a *Book of Mormon* that he kept on the nightstand by his bed.
>
> "He then related a fascinating incident which occurred while he was at an archaeology site in Mexico with one of Mexico's foremost archaeologists. He explained they had just unearthed a doorway to a Mayan temple. They discovered on the lintel over the doorway a sculpted figure of an old man with a long beard (long beards are not typical of American Indians). The archaeologist then turned to Shearer and exclaimed, 'Oh my hell, what will the Mormons do when they see this?'
>
> [Stoddard continues to quote Shearer:] "Archaeologists make fun of the *Book of Mormon,* while nearly everything they uncover confirms it. I keep the *Book of Mormon* next to my bed and read it almost daily. I take it with me to Mexico while studying archaeology and history there."[138]

The Mexican archaeologist's comment is amusing, and Mormons well deserve it. Shearer's comment, however, is revealing. Although Shearer is not a Latter-day Saint, his description of the descending figure bathed in light is so tightly parallel to the account in the Book of Mormon that he obviously drew it from that book and merely attributed it to Juan de Córdova. Given the nature of Shearer's work, such use is well within poetic license. But it is the most ironic of circular reasoning in the Warren and Ferguson context—a scholarly attempt to prove Christ's appearance in the Americas. It becomes academically dangerous if it continues to be quoted, as has apparently happened in Wirth's article.

Old Things Are New Again

The meeting of cultures resulting from the conquest of Mexico brought ardent Christians into contact with ardent pagans who very soon had reason to want to please their new Christian masters. Out of this crucible of intense religious feeling, a synthesis emerged that was espoused by sympathetic Spanish priests. The idea quickly developed that, although the Native Americans were clearly a fallen people, they had previously known Christianity. The Spanish religious imagination linked the stories of Quetzalcoatl to the figure of Saint Thomas. In Lafaye's description:

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[137]Tony Shearer, *Lord of the Dawn* (Healdsburg, Calif.: Naturegraph Publishers, 1971), 196.

[138]Larry S. Ferguson, "Introduction," in Bruce W. Warren and Thomas Stuart Ferguson, *The Messiah in Ancient America* (Provo, Utah: Book of Mormon Research Foundation, 1987), viii.

> The identification of Saint Thomas as the apostolic missionary of the New World was based on an apocryphal text, the *Acta Thomae*. But the identity of the apostle was basically unimportant; men sought the traces of an "apostle type," so to speak. The European vision of an apostle was that of a Semite with long thick hair and beard, dressed in a long white tunic, and holding an apostolic staff in his hand. The apostle typically conducted himself like a Spanish missionary of the sixteenth century, but—this was a specific feature—he proved the truth of the religion he preached by prodigies and miracles. As might be expected, the principal Christian symbols, crosses in particular, were associated with his traces.[139]

The identification of Jesus Christ as the source of New World Christianity is based on a book in which I affirm faith, the Book of Mormon. However, while faith hopes for historical justification, it will not be found in the Central Mexican mythology of Quetzalcoatl. The LDS fascination with Quetzalcoatl is based in documents from history, but the connections are to the Saint Thomas literature, not the Book of Mormon.

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[139]Lafaye, *Quetzalcoatl and Guadalupe*, 185.