



Type: Magazine Article

Old America - The Toltecs

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Source: *Juvenile Instructor*, Vol. 10, No. 7 (3 April 1875), pp. 80–81

Published by: George Q. Cannon & Sons

Abstract: Series of articles dealing with archaeological, anthropological, geographical, societal, religious, and historical aspects of ancient America and their connections to the Book of Mormon, which is the key to understanding “old American” studies.

Old America.

BY G. M. O.

THE TOLTECS.

It is impossible to know anything to a certainty in regard to the people of ancient America, as all, or nearly all of the old books are lost or destroyed. The few annals preserved furnish but vague and dreamy outlines of the past. Here and there a faint gleam of light breaks the obscurity, only sufficient to show at different periods in the history a reasonable and passable outline.

When Cortez subjugated Mexico the Aztecs had been in power more than two centuries. Extensive ruins and splendid monuments of art attest that a highly civilized people had, centuries before, occupied Anahuac. This race had not only peopled Mexico proper, but also Central America, and doubtless South America, as traces of a like civilization are found in these localities. Most of the ancient history of the Aztecs relates to ages previous to their time, and chiefly to their predecessors, the Toltecs. But, according to these writings, the country where the vast ruins are found was occupied at different periods by three distinct peoples, the Chichimecs, the Colhuas, and the Toltecs or Nahuas.

Jefferies supposes the Toltecs arrived in Anahuac in the year 648, A. D. Baldwin, more properly, asserts that they came into the country about one thousand years before the Christian era; and it appears their supremacy ceased and left the country broken up and divided into small states two or three centuries before the arrival of the Aztecs.

The knowledge of astronomy and the correct measurement of the year known to Montezuma's people were methods adopted from and formerly in use among the Toltecs. "And," says Baldwin, "it is not reasonable to refuse to give some attention to their chronology, even while doubting its value as a means of fixing dates and measuring historical periods." De Bourbourg says: "In the histories written in the Nahuatl language, the oldest certain date is nine hundred and fifty-five years before Christ." This is the oldest date in the history of the Toltecs which has been accurately determined; and he arrives at this date by the following calculation, which is quoted from the "Codex Chimalpopoka," one of the oldest American books still preserved: "Six times 400 years, plus 113," previous to the year 1558 A. D. This is given as a date of the division of the land by the Toltecs; that is, a division was made 2513 years previous to 1558 A. D., or in the year 955 B. C. The Toltecs issued, if this date be accepted, more than a thousand years before the Christian era, from a country called Huehue-Tlapalan, somewhere at a distance to the northeast, undoubtedly the Ohio and Mississippi valleys.

Sahagun learned from the old books and traditions that the Toltecs came from a distant north-eastern country. He mentions a company that settled near the Tampico river, and built a town called Pauuco. De Bourbourg finds an account of this or another company preserved at Xilanco, an ancient city, situated on an island between Lake Terminos and the sea. This city was famous for its commerce, intelligence and wealth. The company came from the north-east, it is said, to the Tampico river. It consisted of twenty chiefs and a large company of people. Torquemada also found a record, which describes them as a people fine in appearance, industrious,

orderly and intelligent; also that they worked in metals and were skillful artists and lapidaries.

All the accounts say the Toltecs came at different times by land and sea, in small companies, and always from the north-east. This can only be explained by supposing they came from the mouth of the Mississippi river along the coast, and by land through Texas. But the country from which they came was invariably Huehue-Tlapalan. Cabrera and Torquemada say the name of the country was simply Tlapalan; but that they called it Huehuc (old) to distinguish it from three other Tlapalans which they founded in their new kingdom; and it seems not improbable that the old Tlapalan was the country of our Mound Builders.

In connection with the account of the Toltec migration another circumstance is mentioned: that Huehue-Tlapalan was invaded by the Chichimecs (meaning barbarous aboriginal tribes, united under one leader). Baldwin gives a statement, a little condensed, of this transaction: "There was a terrible struggle, but, after about thirteen years, the Toltecs, no longer able to resist successfully, were obliged to abandon their country to escape complete subjugation. Two chiefs guided the march of the emigrating nation. At length they reached a region near the sea, named Tlapalan-Conco, where they remained several years. But they finally undertook another migration, and reached Mexico, where they built a town called Tollanzinco, and, later, the city of Tullan, which became the seat of their government." This Chichimec invasion is placed at a period in the chronology of the old native books long previous to the Christian era.

According to the manuscript of Don Juan Torres, grandson of the last king of the Quiches, the Toltecs descended from the house of Israel, who were released by Moses from the tyranny of Pharaoh. This story runs as follows:

After they had fallen into idolatry, to avoid the reproofs of man, they separated from him (Moses), and, under the guidance of Tanub, passed from one continent to the other, landing at a place called the "Seven Caverns," a part of the kingdom of Mexico, where they founded the city of Tula. From Tanub sprang the kings of Quiche and the first monarchs of the Toltecs.

The Toltecs were the most celebrated nation of Anahuac; they always lived in a social manner, collected into cities under government of regular laws. Their superior civilization and skill in the arts were adopted by all the civilized nations of Mexico. They were not very warlike, preferring the civilization of the arts to the exercise of arms. If not the inventors, they were at least the reformers of the admirable system of the arrangement of time, which was adopted by the nations of Mexico. Boturini gleaned from their ancient histories that during the reign of one of their kings, Ixtalcuechahuac, a celebrated astronomer named Huematzin, by the king's consent, assembled all the wise men of the nation, and with them painted that famous book called Teomoxth, or Divine Book, in which were represented, in plain figures, the origin of the Indians, their dispersion after the flood and confusion of tongues at Babel, their journey in Asia, their first settlement in America, the founding of their kingdom—as well as its progress to that time; also a description of the calendar, their mythology and mysteries of their religion, moral philosophy, in fact, all that appertained to their history, religion and manners.

The same author says that the eclipse of the sun, which happened at the death of our Savior, was marked in their paintings in the year 7. Tochtli, and that some learned Span-

iards have compared their chronology with ours, and have found that they reckoned from the creation to the birth of Christ 5199 years, which corresponds with the Roman calendar.

Clavigero says: "Upon reading Boturini, I set about comparing the Toltecan years with ours, and I found the thirty-fourth year of Christ, or the thirtieth of our era, to be the 7. Tochtli."

Their religion was idolatrous, and they appear to have been the authors of the greater part of the mythology of the Aztecs; but they never practiced those barbarous and bloody sacrifices which became afterwards so common among the other nations.

Sometime about the year 1052 A. D., the Toltecan monarchy concluded. Previous to this, direful calamities happened to them: for several years heaven denied them rain, the earth, the fruits and the air were filled with mortal contagion, and consequently the greater part of the nation perished. The wretched remains sought relief to their misfortunes by scattering themselves over the territory south and north of their kingdom. After the destruction of the Toltecs, for nearly a century, the land remained solitary and almost entirely deserted.

(To be Continued.)

THOMAS TOPHAM.

THOMAS TOPHAM, born in London about 1710, and brought up to the trade of a carpenter, though by no means remarkable in size or outward appearance, was endowed by nature with extraordinary muscular powers and for several years exhibited wonderful feats of strength in London and the provinces. The most authentic account of his performances was written by the celebrated William Hutton, who witnessed them at Derby. "We learned," says Mr. Hutton, "that Thomas Topham, a man who kept a public house at Islington, performed surprising feats of strength, such as breaking a broomstick of the largest size by striking it against his bare arm, lifting three hogsheads of water, heaving a horse over a turnpike-gate, carrying the beam of a house like a soldier does his firelock, and others of a similar description." However belief might at first be staggered, all doubt was removed when this second Samson came to Derby, as a performer in public.

The regular performances of this wonderful person, in whom was united the strength of twelve ordinary men were such as the following: Rolling up a pewter dish, seven pounds in weight, as a man would roll up a sheet of paper; holding a pewter quart at arm's length, and squeezing the sides together like an egg-shell; lifting two hundredweights on his little finger, and moving them gently over his head. The bodies he touched seemed to have lost the quality of gravitation. He broke a rope that could sustain twenty hundred-weight. He lifted an oaken table, six feet in length with his teeth, though half a hundred-weight was hung on the opposite extremity. Weakness and feeling seemed to have left him altogether. He smashed a cocoa-nut by striking it against his own ear; he struck a bar of iron, one inch in diameter, against his naked arm, and at one blow bent it into a semicircle.

"Though of a pacific temper," says Mr. Hutton, "and with the appearance of a gentleman, yet he was liable to the insults of the rude. The hostler at the Virgin's Inn, where he resided, having given him some cause of displeasure, he took one of the kitchen spits from off the mantel-piece, and bent it round the hostler's neck like a handkerchief; where it excited the laughter of the company, till he condescended to untie it.

This remarkable man's fortitude of mind was by no means equal to his strength of body. Like his ancient prototypes he was not exempt from the wiles of a Delilah, which brought him to a miserable and untimely end—August 10, 1749.

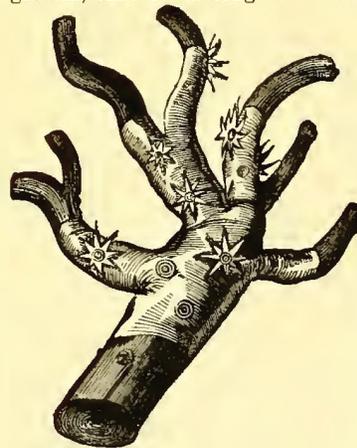
CORAL.

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THERE is much that is suggestive of thought to the observer of nature in the structure of these corals and their application in effecting changes in the form of the earth. The coral-bearing area of the Pacific ocean is said to be twelve million square miles in extent; a space nearly as large as that of the continent of Africa, or of America and Europe. Then we have abundant evidence of the formidable area of coral operations in the earlier period of world-forming, as seen in the vast deposits of limestones, almost entirely formed by ancient corals. And all this work is brought about by organisms of a very low type, that differ very slightly from the most primitive types. As to the reef-building species of polyps, they so nearly resemble vegetables in their form of growth, that for a long time they were not suspected to be animals. They increase by a process of budding.

Dana says:

"The bud commences as a slight prominence on the side of the parent. The prominence enlarges, a mouth opens, a circle of tentacles grows out around it, and increase continues until the young finally equal the parent in size. Since in these species of corals the young do not separate from the parent, this budding produces a compound group."



CORAL OF COMMERCE.

From this it is easy to understand that while the polyps exist as separate individuals, they are closely connected by coralline substance and the living tissues. After a time the masses of coral matter below have no living creatures in them; they become dead or deserted, the living matter being on the surface. The interstices gradually get filled in with particles of lime, precipitated from the water, and other earthy material held in suspension by the ocean. In some places sand and sediment thrown down actually interferes with the growth of the colony of polyps; they are killed and the reef becomes barren. This is one reason why the coral island or "Atoll" is frequently a mere reef instead of a level surface; perhaps crescent-shaped with an opening through which ships can sail into it; or a complete circle in the center of which is a lagoon shut off from the ocean.

In this article it will be impossible to name all that is curious about the tiny architect that has done so much in world building, the limestones of our quarries and of most of our canyons abound in evidences of the former existence of corals in immense multitudes, as the entire mass is composed of different varieties of these polyparies, or dwellings of the ancient polyps.

If you would have a thing kept secret, never tell it to any one; and if you would not have a thing known of you, never do it.