



Type: Magazine Article

Old America - The Toltecs (2)

Author(s): G.M. Ottinger

Source: *Juvenile Instructor*, Vol. 10, No. 8 (17 April 1875), pp. 87–88

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.

THE abbe Clavigero asserts that the Toltecs permanently settled in Mexico about the year 607 of the Christian era, and their supremacy lasted three hundred and eighty-four years.

Many historians think the Toltecs built in honor of the god Quetzalcoatl the celebrated pyramid of Cholula, but more modern research has demonstrated that Central America and Mexico have been subject to a series of political changes, caused by violent transfers of power from one people to another several times in the course of a long history. This has been indicated by the monuments, and the peculiarities of the inhabitants of the various districts, noticeable at the time of the conquest and still manifest to travelers who study the existing representatives of the old race and their dialects. Several distinct families or groups of language exist in communities widely separated. The most important was that which included the speech of Mayas, Quiches and Tzendals, which is supposed to represent the language of the original civilizers, the Colhuas. There were other dialects supposed to indicate Toltec communities, while farther south of Mexico, in Nicaragua, the Aztec speech was in use.

From the little that can be gleaned from the old books, it appears that the Colhuas preceded the Toltecs, and were the original founders of this old civilization. They found the country inhabited by a barbarous people, who lived by hunting and fishing, and had neither towns nor agriculture. They called them Chichimecs, which appears to have been a generic appellation for all uncivilized tribes. De Bourbourg says: "Under the generic name 'Chichimecs,' which has much embarrassed some writers, the Mexican traditions include the whole aboriginal population of the New World, and especially the people by whom it was first occupied at the beginning of time."

Some of the traditions state that the Colhuas came from the east in ships. Sahagun mentions that a tradition to this effect was current in Yucatan. They are always described as the people who first established civilization and built great cities. They taught the Chichimecs to cook food, cultivate the earth and adopt the ways of civilized life. The natives thus civilized are sometimes called Quinames.

The Colhuas are connected with a long and important period in the history previous to the Tottec ages. In some respects they seem to have been more advanced in civilization than the Toltecs. The events in their history relate chiefly to the Toltec alliance with the uncivilized Chichimecs of the mountains, and the subjugation of their great city, called Xibalba, the capital of an important kingdom of the same name. This kingdom is supposed to have included Guatemala, Yucatan, Tabasco, Tehuantepec, Chiapa, Honduras and other districts of Central America. Baldwin supposes it included all of Southern Mexico, and northward beyond the Tampico river. De Bourbourg says the ruins now known as Palenque appear to have been the city of Xibalba; but this is nothing but conjecture. Baldwin wisely says, "we may as reasonably suppose Copan, Quirigua, or some other old ruin to have been Xibalba." Tradition places their first settlements on the gulf, in Tabasco, between Tehuantepec and Yucatan, and it is

inferred that the Mayas, Quiches and some other old communities were descendants of the Colhuas, from their more highly developed language, and their written characters having a closer resemblance to those of the oldest inscriptions.

It is very probable that the Colhuas, Toltecs or Nahuas of the old books with the Aztecs were all substantially the same people. Baldwin says, "These unlike groups of language have not been sufficiently analyzed and studied to justify us in assuming that they did not all come from the same original source." Although distinct at the time of the conquest, there was not much difference in their religious ideas, their ceremonies of worship, their methods of building, or in the general character of their civilization. The same author infers that if the Toltecs and the Mound Builders of the United States were the same people, they probably went from Mexico and Central America to the Valley of the Mississippi at a very remote period as Colhuan colonies, and after a long residence there, returned so much changed in speech and other respects as to seem a distinct people.

One important fact we notice: the tradition concerning the landing of a foreign race, conducted by an illustrious personage who came from an eastern country. For this important information we are indebted to the abbe de Bourbourg's learned translation of the old Quiche manuscript called the "Popul-Vuh," which is an abridged reproduction of a very ancient Quiche book. The fragments of this history show how several centuries before the dynasty of the Quiches, Central America was inhabited by a highly civilized people; and distinctly says that Votan, with a colony came from the land of the Hivim or Evcí, being exiled by a cruel invasion of strangers, led there by their god. The description of Votan's voyage shows that these Evcí or Colubri sailed to the islands of the Western ocean, and, leaving there, after a lapse of several generations, they crossed the sea with seven vessels and came to a large island, which, according to Votan's description, is Cuba. Having embarked again, he sailed to a great continent, which, from the description, is undoubtedly Yucatan. Having penetrated into the interior of this country, he founded the kingdom of Quiche, and built the chief city, called Nachan. Ordonez maintains that the foundation of this kingdom was contemporary with the building of the Temple of Solomon, about one thousand years before the birth of Christ.

Keeping to these accounts, we find that these Evcí (who were exiled by the Hebrew people after their departure from Egypt), must have lived on the islands some five hundred years before Votan built his great city. But Votan clearly points out in his history that he found this vast country already inhabited by a civilized people, who had a religion, rites, laws, erudition and strong and flourishing cities; and also that this people were of common blood with the Evcí whom he took there himself.

According to the custom of primitive nations, as they gradually increased colonies of people were sent to the uninhabited districts both north and south. As the passage to the north was easier than to the south, which was impeded by the rugged peaks of the Andes, they ascended the numerous rivers flowing into the Gulf of Mexico, the Rio Grande, Rio Colorado, Rio Brazos, and more particularly, the Mississippi, peopling those immense regions of Texas, Louisiana, Florida, Georgia, the Carolinas, Ohio and Pennsylvania, even as far north as the lakes of Canada.

The history of Votan gives us undeniable proof that the earliest inhabitants of Central America were people of Upper Asia, who landed there centuries before the vulgar era. The

Evei of Votan reached there about one thousand years before it. Votan taught the people not only the art of hieroglyphic writing, but also the way to build those enormous pyramids, the ruins of which may still be seen in Mexico, temples which served at once both as tombs and as altars. The Aztecs were less advanced in many things than their predecessors. Their picture-writing was a much ruder form of the graphic art than the system of the Mayas and Quiches, and if the country had never in previous ages felt the influence of a higher culture, it would not now have ruined cities like Mitla, Copan and Palenque.

When tracing the chronology of the old books, we are thrown in doubt as to the value of dates when measuring historical periods. We, therefore, refer our readers to the Book of Ether and the first Book of Nephi, in the Book of Mormon, a careful reading of which may point to a more correct period and give us a more definite description of Votan's voyage. And I only refer for a correct solution of the teachings and the promised re-appearance of the "fair god," Quetzalcoatl, to the Book of Nephi the son of Nephi, page 456, Book of Mormon, (fourth European edition); and also to the Book of Alma, chapter xxx, for a confirmation of the "old books" when referring to the numerous migrations of families.

SECOND-HAND FOOD.

OUR last number contained a description of a method practiced in Paris by buying and selling food which at once graced the table of the rich. We promised to give in this number a sketch of a method of collecting and disposing of scraps of bread in that city.

This is done by a class of men whom we would call "second-hand bakers." They employ a number of ragged fellows, to wander everywhere through the city, and, particularly about luncheon-time, in the neighborhood of boys' schools, and to gather every scrap, crust and lump of bread they can find. The mammas of the boys carefully prepare nice lunches for their darling little sons in the morning, and give them strict charge about taking care of them, and to be sure and eat them at the hour appointed and not before. Many of them have no suspicion of the danger to which their loved ones are exposed. The dirty rascals of which we speak are on the watch. They know the boys' weak side. They persuade the boys to give them their luncheons, in whole or in part, for some trifle which they offer them. There is many a boy who would give away his dinner for a cheap toy—a few marbles, a top, &c., especially if the fellow who wanted to get his dinner could offer him the toy before he got hungry; for it is a common characteristic of boyhood not to think, when the stomach is full, that it will ever require filling again. Who ever knew a boy who was starting away just after a full meal to be absent over meal-time, who did not have to be almost forced to carry food with him? When they have a full stomach, one who did not know boys' nature might imagine they never knew the sensations of hunger; but let them miss a meal, and then! It is a sight to almost cure dyspepsia to see them eat. They are simply ravenous.

With their day's gleanings—probably dirty and inky and mouldy enough—these collectors return to their employers. They receive in payment for their services according to the amount of scraps they have collected, and their supper beside. The changes through which these crusts and scraps pass,

before they reappear to the public eye, are amazing. The choicest of them are separated from the rest, are dried in ovens, are afterwards rasped, and are then sold for the making of a certain soup, a favorite with the lower classes, called the *croute au pot*. But these bits are also put to another use. Probably those who dine at fine restaurants in Paris would not relish the description of the use to which they are put. They are cut up into tiny, triangular morsels, fried in butter over a hot fire, and sold to the restaurant keepers, who serve them up in that green-pea soup for which there is such a constant demand. We can assure you these morsels are nice eating; for we have eaten pea soup in which bread prepared in this way was served, though we do not know that it was this kind of bread. Should we visit Paris, and have this soup served to us, we would have some confidence as to the morsels of bread which floated in it having been procured in the manner we describe. But it would be in Paris, and a man must be verdant indeed who should expect to be sure of the cleanliness or the honesty of all that he eats in that gay capital, or, for that matter, in any other large city in Europe.

Having thus disposed of the choicer morsels, the "second-hand baker" puts all the rest of the day's gleanings—once known as bread—into a large mortar and pulverizes it. This he also sells to the restaurants. It is now the fashionable *chapelure blanche*, which is quite indispensable for entrees, and, when sprinkled over them, gives them a rich and crisp taste. If you were in Paris, and were to look into the windows of the little shops where they sell hams, tongues, sausages, and so on, you would see the same *chapelure blanche* sprinkled over them. But, after that part of the pulverized crusts which is fit for this purpose has been taken away, there yet remains in the mortar a powder too fine for *chapelure blanche*. This is cooked in the oven until it is black, then mixed with the thick, yellow French honey, and, some essence being added, is sold as an unfailing remedy for toothache, more popular, it is said, with the poor of Paris than any of the remedies of the doctors.

After reading this and the preceding sketch, you will doubtless think it is true that one-half of the world do not know how the other half live. But that is not all. The reading of these sketches should have the effect to make you think of the value of even a crust of bread. Of all people in the world the Latter-day Saints should be the most careful. They should let nothing go to waste. Many families in this country throw scraps of food into their swill barrels, out of which French housewives, if they had them, would make palatable and nutritious meals. The art of cookery is probably carried to greater perfection in France than in any other country; and flesh meat especially among the French people, is made to go a long way. On these points we, as a people, have much to learn.

SAFETY LIGHT.—In Paris, the watchmen in all magazines where inflammable or explosive materials are stored, use for illumination a light provided according to the following method: Take an oblong vial of the cleanest glass, put into it a piece of phosphorus about the size of a pea, upon which pour olive oil heated to the boiling point, filling the vial about one-third full, and then close the vial with a tight cork. To use it, remove the cork, and allow the air to enter the vial, and then recork it; the whole empty space in the bottle will then become luminous, and the light obtained will be equal to that of a lamp. If the light grows weak, its power can be increased by opening the vial and allowing a fresh supply of air to enter. Thus prepared, the vial may be used for six months.