

questions. Using archaeological and ethnological evidence of traits shared by cultures around the Pacific Basin, he posits that the wider the spread and the greater the distance from the source, the more ancient the traits should be. He proposes three basic waves of migration, using a set of traits to define each wave.

As traits of the First Wave, he cites the use of cup and groove markings (vulva and phallus) in stone, the bullroarer (earth spirits), white feather down (semen), and face and body painting (“attracting the beneficent and warding off the malign”), positing great antiquity for these because of their wide distribution.

Whereas the First Wave emphasized the earth and fertility, Second Wave iconography was marked by “emphasis on the regions above the ground . . . The tree or pole, with its phallic and axial connotations, became the focus of Second Wave religious philosophy,” leading to awareness of the celestial realm at the top. The Second Wave was typified by consciousness of the spirit in things above the earth rather than in it. Material traits included paper and wooden masks—tree products.

“The key to Third Wave symbolism is astronomy-astrology,” when the movements of the heavens became perhaps more important than those of the earth, and orderly systems were developed for understanding and recording celestial phenomena. Old graphic signs like the circle were given new meaning as cosmological symbols, and new signs like the swastika were invented.

Those who have worked with these symbols will undoubtedly have quibbles—with designations of categories, meaning shifts, and so forth—and the material perhaps does not always fit perfectly; but this does not detract from the worth of the book. It is an admirable proposal on an important subject.

There is, moreover, another, more philosophical, level in this book: it concerns the attempt to understand basic questions of how things happen, how cultures and cosmology evolve, how man makes and uses symbols, and how we read evidence for these processes.

On both levels, it is a stimulating book.

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*The Phoenix of the Western World: Quetzalcoatl and the Sky Religion.*

By BURR CARTWRIGHT BRUNDAGE. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1981. Map. Figures. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Pp. xvi, 349. Cloth.

Among the several attempts to put together what archaeology and the written sources of indigenous tradition can tell us about the god

Quetzalcoatl, Burr C. Brundage's newest book stands out for its unexpected approach, imagination, and some fresh insights—"aimed at the reader of literature as well as the scholar" (p. xv). Resurrecting the title of a manuscript by the Mexican Baroque savant Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora, *The Phoenix of the Western World*, the author anticipates somehow the character of his "contemplation of Aztec religion" (p. 3). His first idea was "to present only the god Quetzalcoatl, the Feathered Serpent, to the reader." As "Quetzalcoatl kept vanishing into the images of the other gods, and those gods into others . . ." (p. 9), however, the idea of shifting "from research on a single god to that on a religion . . ." was born and accepted in the author's mind.

According to Brundage, Quetzalcoatl is the key figure of a "sky religion." Three other "religions" developed also in Mesoamerica: those of "fire" (with Xiuhtecuhtli as the central deity), of "earth" (with the Goddess of the Earth and Tlaloc), and of Tezcatlipoca (a religion "completely indifferent to nature"). After introducing this highly speculative hypothesis, Brundage confesses that "we do not know how deep down in Mesoamerican time are buried the roots of the sky religion, nor for that matter do we know how old are the other three" (pp. 10–11).

Quoting from the myths, legends, and other testimonies, Brundage establishes a great variety of associations, some of them rather speculative, to elucidate the nature of Quetzalcoatl, the "polymorphous god." Taking as a point of departure a clarification of the meanings of the "sky dragons," he comes to discover "the centrality of Quetzalcoatl" (p. 69). Then he goes on to consider the multiple roles played by the god, describing his polymorphic presences, loosely referring to them as "avatars." Quetzalcoatl appears as a demiurge, culture hero, ancestor, priest, god of warriors (!); he establishes a cosmic order; he has to do with the underworld and also with Tezcatlipoca, the god of one of "the other three religions."

The specifically celestial nature of Quetzalcoatl (he is the god of the "sky religion") is derived from his ultimate origins: he replaced and supplemented the ancient sky dragon. And as "sky was more changeable, more permeable than earth" (p. 290), so "the Phoenix of the Western World" made up for all sorts of "avatars" and possible forms of acting.

Space limitations prevent me from entering into a closer evaluation of this book, one more in the series of those conceived to know more about Quetzalcoatl. I consider it fair to repeat that this is an unexpected contribution, at times speculative, "an extended essay," indeed, a reflection of the author's excitement "in the act of acquiring knowledge" (p. xv).

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