

possible to find something that will support any particular argument. My point is that one can trace a line through time from ancient to modern people and their practices for any given site, but that doing so is a form of essentialization that ignores the great complexity and variability in Maya culture at any given time. Nonetheless, I found this collection to be stimulating and believe others will find it so as well.

PATRICIA A. URBAN, *Kenyon College*

The Myth of Quetzalcoatl: Religion, Rulership, and History in the Nahua World. Alfredo López Austin, translated by Russ Davidson with Guilhem Olivier. Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2015, 264 pp. \$32.95, paper. ISBN 9781607323907.

Reviewing a book that has been so influential to the field of Mesoamerican research for more than forty years is a curious task. Written in 1973 by one of the field's most prominent scholars, this treatise on the perplexing nature of the entity known as Quetzalcoatl goes far beyond this goal. The text is much more ambitious, for it not only endeavors to explain the nature of the deity and those closely identified with him, it also seeks to clarify the functions of myth, the reasons for contradictions between myths, and how political structures and lineage factored into Mesoamerican mythologized history. This first translation of the text into English from Spanish is a gift to all those engaged in precolumbian history, as it reveals the origins of much contemporary Mesoamerican scholarship, even as the present-day reader is keenly aware of newer data that offers some challenges.

As the first five chapters make clear, this book is not meant as an introductory text for those unfamiliar with the myths of Quetzalcoatl. Instead, López Austin takes us through a historiography of the various theories of Quetzalcoatl at a lightning pace. He moves from the early colonial period when the Spanish spuriously identified the precolumbian figure as a Christian who preceded them in the New World to Daniel Brinton's suggestion that Quetzalcoatl represents an archetypal myth in the Americas of the victory of day over night. This concise summary of the literature also mentions the scholarship of the 1960s and 1970s that argued for a historic, human identity for Quetzalcoatl.

In the sixth chapter López Austin begins with his own interpretations, first reasoning that communities had patron deities linked to kinship groups. Typical of his expansive objectives, he takes a structuralist approach, categorizing these patrons dualistically as male and female, sky and earth. A master of the ethnohistoric literature that followed the Conquest, López Austin's ideas are firmly rooted in literary sources. De-

livered in a fragmentary manner, allusions to these sources will present a challenge to those not equally well read on colonial Aztec accounts; moreover, while many terms unique to Mesoamerica are explained, a fair number appear without clarification, again appealing more to specialist than outsider. Although indigenous imagery occasionally anchors an argument, those wanting to infuse this literary approach with more recent scholarship would do well to consider the work of Elizabeth Hill Boone, where visual analysis of the codices exposes individual, historical strategies that may not be quite as transparent in the literature.

After establishing the cyclical nature of time in Mesoamerica, López Austin turns his lens on one of the most challenging problems about Quetzalcoatl and other figures like him: the question of whether they are historical men or supernatural gods. He answers this question synthetically by explaining that the man-god or *hombre-dios* was a fundamental characteristic of Mesoamerica. The argument extends that historical figures took on the names of their patron deities, and almost like a possession, they served as a human receptacle for the god. Because the human vessel released the god upon death, a new human actor could adopt the supernatural essence; thus figures like Quetzalcoatl could live for centuries, surpassing the normal lifespan of a human being. In this, he joins with a number of scholars, such as Marshall Sahlins and his study of the Hawaiian Islands, to suggest a model where history infuses a cyclical and mythical vision of the world.

To conclude, he offers a speculative model of the rise of urbanism in which less-developed peoples on the frontier first engaged with the urban through economic exchanges and then adopted the patron deities and religion of the urban areas as they established themselves as independent urban entities. Epigraphic and archaeological research conducted since this book's original publication offers some counter evidence to this latter argument. Hieroglyphic translations have given the field a nuanced vision of the strategies employed by the Classic period rulers, and rather than war as a late development, much current scholarship has disclosed that conquest warfare was a common occurrence throughout Mesoamerican history.

Hence, for scholars not inclined to wade through this dense scholarship in Spanish, this book rewards them with a thought-provoking model of mythologized history that continues to be relevant today because the nature of Quetzalcoatl is still not completely within our grasp. Those looking to contribute to this discussion now have a resource for better understanding how we got here, a foundation for moving the dialogue forward.

ANNABETH HEADRICK, *University of Denver*