



## Tamoanchan: In Search of the Origins of the Aztecs

*Jim Willis*

About 1,800 years ago, a group of people migrating from an unknown northern location began to settle in what is now called the Valley of Mexico. They are called Aztec, a name derived from the word Aztlán, which means "White Land," the "home of the seven caves." This might refer to their ancestral homeland. Its exact location is uncertain, but many anthropologists believe it to be in what is now northern Mexico, while others place it much farther to the north. They were a Nahuatl-speaking culture, who soon began to build an extensive system of canals and dikes, needed to control water levels for agriculture.

By 1428, Itzcoatl, their ruler, allied his people with Tlacopan and Texcoco, forming what is called the Triple Alliance, which controlled the nation until the arrival of the Spanish in 1519. That is the official version in most history books, but the narrative told by native Aztec historians is much richer, a lot more intriguing, and takes one back to ancient times.

### The Land of Red Rocks and Four Rivers

The *Tonalamatl of the Aubin Collection*, more commonly referred to as the *Aubin Codex*, reveals quite a different tale than what is commonly found in history books. In pictures and texts, it outlines a migration story that traces the Aztec nation all the way back to its roots in the almost mythical Aztlán, and concludes in 1608, after the Spanish invasion.

Surviving texts are written on European paper, so they are undoubtedly copies made by Spanish translators, a few of whom secretly wanted to retain whatever they could of Aztec tradition after their church had burned everything else of value. Still, the language used is alphabetic Nahuatl, a transliterated Aztec text, so the translators had



*Itzcoatl in the Codex Mendoza (Public Domain)*

obviously gone to the trouble of learning the language in order to record the story as accurately as possible. Presumably they received it right from the lips of Aztec elders.



*Page from the Codex Boturini depicting the departure from Aztlán (Public Domain)*

According to the codex, the Aztecs believed their ancestors came from the north, but not northern Mexico. It was someplace farther away than that, a land of red rocks that gave birth to four rivers. Some scholars place the location near Phoenix, Arizona, but that is just a guess. Red rocks are scarce by the time one reaches Phoenix, but continuing farther north, the journey leads to the Four

Corners country, the junction of Utah, Colorado, Arizona, and New Mexico. This area is right in the heart of the Canyon Lands.

Cecilio Orozco, of California State University, and Alfonso Rivas-Salmon, an anthropologist at the Universidad Autonoma de Guadalajara, believe this to be the mythical Aztec homeland. The "four rivers" refer to the Green, the upper Colorado, and the San Juan, which merge to become the lower Colorado River.



*The Aztec empire in 1519 during the reign of Moctezuma Xocoyotzin or Moctezuma II (Aldan-2/ CC BY-SA 4.0)*

## Clues in the Utah Rock Art

V. G. Nair, in his book *Buddhism in America Before Columbus*, relates the story of a priest named Quatu Zacca. He lived such a long life in a small house on an island in the Colorado River that the natives revered him as a god, entrusted to care over an ancient cave going back to the time of the ancestors of the Aztecs. He was appointed the Watcher, who would preserve the place until they returned to renew their empire. In this story, one encounters some native mythology that might confirm the Aztec legend.

When Professor Orozco and Rivas-Salmon went into the field to inspect the area, they discovered ancient paintings and pictographs on the canyon walls of Utah that are strikingly similar to symbols found on surviving Aztec calendars, but those samples of Barrier Canyon-Style Rock Art date back well before the 1200s. They go back in time to at least 502 BC, and maybe quite a bit before that. In other words, if the Aztecs settled in Mexico 1,800 years ago, their migration took some seven centuries to complete.



The Aztec god Quetzalcoatl as depicted in the Codex Telleriano-Remensis (16th century). (Public Domain)

In his book, *The Book of the Sun*, Professor Orozco states it very succinctly: "Utah is sitting on a treasure, a missing link in the prehistory of man in this hemisphere. It is right there on the canyon walls. Utah is the home of Quetzalcoatl." Most Utah archaeologists reject his findings. If they were to accept them, they would be forced to throw out what is commonly believed by

accredited experts, most of whom are academics of European ancestry, not Aztec elders. To make matters even more complicated, Orozco believes that the Utah rock art reveals a connection to the 4 and 8-year cycles of the planet Venus. Venus is often recognized in mythology as representing duality, because it is both the morning and evening star. It fits in perfectly with the opposing history of Quetzalcoatl and Cortés.

## Cataclysmic Events

The legends reveal that the ancestors of the Aztecs were forced from their homeland by what they called a "rain of fire." This cataclysmic event prompted a series of migrations. The people moved south to escape tumultuous conditions, believing they were led by spirit guides to travel

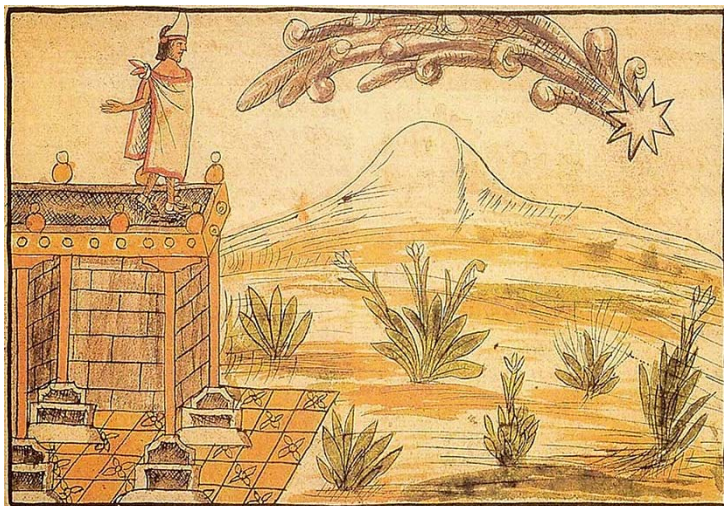
until they found an eagle fighting a serpent on a "barbed tree," perhaps a cactus. When they did, indeed, come across this exact sign, they settled down to build their capitol city, called Tenochtitlan. The modern Mexican flag features this event. The place where they settled is now Mexico City.

*Codex Mendoza depicting the coat of arms of Mexico (Public Domain)*



This raises some interesting questions. What if, like so many myths, there is a kernel of truth at the bottom of it all? Take, for instance the "rain of fire" that caused the initial migration. What was it? Some anthropologists who think outside the box associate it with what is now called the Younger Dryas Impact Event. 12,800 years ago, a segmented comet rained down fire on the earth from North America to Siberia, bringing on the Younger Dryas Ice Age which brought about the end of the megafauna all over the earth, as well as the Clovis Culture of humans. If so, the Aztecs are far more ancient than traditionally believed.

Aztec astronomy is noted by its intricate use of calendars. This was a skill they attributed to Quetzalcoatl, who is thought by some to be a survivor of a catastrophic event such as a "rain of fire" on the earth. Did this "rain of fire" which prompted the great migration coincide with the event that brought about the legend of Atlantis? Is it all connected? This theory does not sit well with academics. The Anasazi and Fremont cultures of the American Southwest are known for their accurate knowledge of the heavens, but here is evidence that the Aztecs may have preceded them by thousands of years.



*Diego Durán: A comet seen by Moctezuma, interpreted as a sign of impending peril. Codex Duran (Public Domain)*

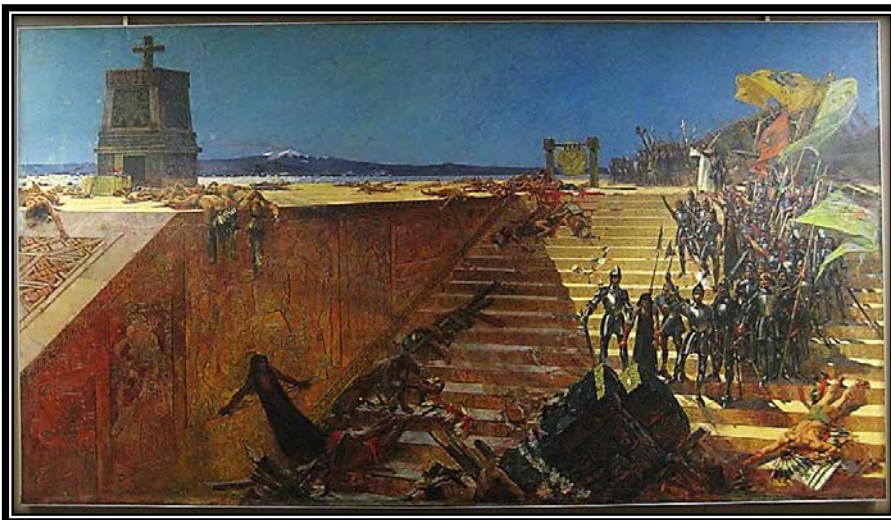
Academic prejudice aside, there are two obstacles to doing research in this area. First, the comet destroyed much of the traces of any early civilization that might have existed. It destroyed the Clovis Culture, for instance. This is a known fact. Could these people from *Aztlán* be survivors of the Younger Dryas Impact Event, as was Quetzalcoatl himself? The Aztecs would have been more primitive than the civilization of Quetzalcoatl. Indeed, they were probably Clovis people who still worked with stone implements. But if a more advanced civilization existed simultaneous with them, as more and more experts are beginning to suspect, this reinforces the idea that Quetzalcoatl was a missionary of sorts, who went forth following the cataclysm to spread the rudiments of an old knowledge, thereby prompting a new beginning for a renewed civilization.

Most academics reject this hypothesis. They speculate the exodus may have been prompted by two other events. According to Aztec legend, their southward migration began on May 24, 1064. Ten years before that date, there occurred a rare celestial event. It consisted of the super nova explosion which created the Crab Nebula. The Aztecs were gifted astronomers after they arrived in Mexico, and maybe before. If a brand-new star suddenly appeared in 1054 that outshone all others, only to dim and disappear a few months later, it would certainly have been seen as a prophetic symbol.

Then, in 1064, a volcanic explosion created the Sunset Crater in Arizona, obliterating hundreds of square miles of arable crop land. If this was where the Aztecs lived at the time, it would have reduced their ability to grow sufficient quantities of food. They had no choice, according to this theory. They had to move away. Then, in 1066, Halley's Comet appeared in the sky. Surely this would have been interpreted as an omen from the gods.

### **The Florentine Codex**

Whatever the cause, the migration was successful. When the scribes of Cortés described what they found at Tenochtitlan, they painted word pictures of a clean city, beautifully decorated and meticulously laid out, that housed more people in more comfort than the squalid, rat-infested cities of Europe. What they discovered, before the Spanish destroyed it, was a paradise.



*Depicting the Fall of Tenochtitlan, final battle of the Spanish conquest of the Aztec Empire in 1521 by William de Leftwich Dodge (1899) (Public Domain)*

This implies the second, almost unforgivable, obstacle to research. The Aztecs, unlike many ancient civilizations archaeologists are trying to understand, were a literate society. They wrote books, but representatives of the Catholic Church burned every textual record they could find, believing them to be pagan superstition and the work of the devil. Is it any wonder this information has been suppressed? It accuses the Catholic Church of a terrible historical sin, and rightly so. Once again, quoting Orozco: "*We must re-evaluate much of our thinking about the greatness and antiquity of Native American civilization.*"

As if this immoral travesty was not enough, in 1529, a Catholic priest named Fray Bernardino de Sahagún was sent to Mexico with a two-fold task. First, he was to convert the indigenous people. This was, after all, only eight years after Cortés brutally murdered many of them in order to establish complete control over the population by means of terrorism. By 1529, they were deemed ready to convert, or die. But there was a second prong to De Sahagún's attack. Rumors had surfaced that many Aztec legends were very similar to Jewish/Christian religious stories. Could it be that the Aztecs were familiar with the God of the Bible? If so, it would create problems, because the reason the Spanish church felt so ready to rule the Aztecs with a rod of iron was because the natives were considered sub-human pagans. Some theologians believed they did not

even possess souls. But what if they were God's creation, just like Europeans? How could the church justify treating their own in this fashion?

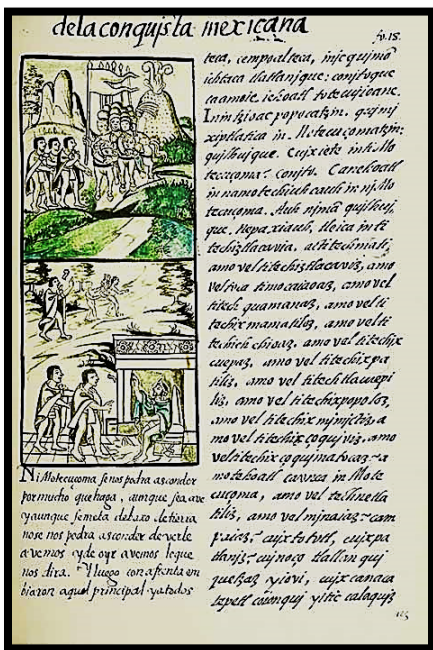


Image of Cortez's army advancing while scouts report to Moctezuma from the Digital Edition of the Florentine Codex created by Gary Francisco Keller (CC BY-SA 3.0)

De Sahagún decided that the best way to convert the people was to establish some common ground, so he wrote a book. The result was what is now called *Historia general de las cosas de nueva España* ("General History of the Things of New Spain"), commonly called the Florentine Codex. It tells the story of Nahua history,

religious beliefs, and culture, in the common language of the people, but it also includes a running commentary in Spanish.

One of the most intriguing sections of the book concerns Nahua migration mythology. They spoke of a mysterious place called Tamoanchan, which they claimed was, in effect, the birthplace of all Mesoamerican cultures. It was an Eden of sorts, a paradise from which they came, following a great flood. According to the *Codex*, the original inhabitants, the ancestors of the Aztecs, had come from the sea: *They say they came to this land to rule over it. They came from the sea on ships, a multitude of them, and landed on the shore of the sea, to the North. From there they went*

*on, seeking the white mountains, the smoky mountains, led by their priests and by the voice of their gods. Finally, they came to the place that they called Tamoanchan, and there they settled.* In other words, this story actually precedes the Aztec migration saga, taking it even further back in history. It seems to say that the ancestors of the Aztecs arrived on the east coast of the Americas, crossed the Apalachin mountains, the “smokey mountains,” and then continued west across the plains until settling in Tamoanchan, wherever that was.

## **Ubiquitous Symbology**

Unfortunately for De Sahagún, his illustrations let slip the fact that the Spanish soldiers were not paragons of Christian virtue. That caused a certain amount of embarrassment, so the book was never widely distributed. It is at this point that coincidence, if there is such a thing, might enter the picture. Some world-wide symbology is found in Aztec history: The Aztec ancestor's veneration of Quetzalcoatl and his association with the planet Venus is found in cultures as far distant as Egypt and Sumer. The Aztecs venerated the star Sirius, also called the dog star. Sirius is found in the constellation Orion. The belt stars of Orion are said to be represented by the positioning of the pyramids on the Giza plateau, among other places. Orion is also associated with Osiris, a principal deity of the Egyptians.

The eagle a soaring creature of the heavens and the serpent a slithering denizen of earth symbolize the duality of heaven and earth - spirituality and materialism. The eagle fighting the serpent, the heavens at war with the earth, formed the symbolic image that indicated to the early Aztec pioneers where they were supposed to settle down. The symbolism is plain to see. Spirituality is constantly engaged in a war with materialism. The earth is the battlefield.

All these images - the morning star; the battle between the creature of the heaven, the eagle, and creature of the earth, the serpent; the people being led to a new home, similar to the Exodus accounts found in many religions; the persecution that followed the initial migration - they all tell the same story, as recounted in numerous mythologies.

Could it be that the human race is still an unknowing pawn in a cosmic battle that continues beyond common perception? Were the ancestors of the Aztecs any different from the early Jews or the Sumerians, who have similar Exodus stories? Is something going on that is much bigger than is currently comprehended, and did the ancients understand it? Is the history of humankind a revelation of one, continuous battlefield of that war, being fought on planet Earth? Is that why so much of humankind's history is suppressed; to keep them from putting the pieces together? Is the past forgotten? Is the "battle between good and evil" more than a metaphor? Are humans pawns on a cosmic chessboard bigger than what can be perceived, and is it now our task to rise to the occasion, pulling ourselves up by our own intellectual bootstraps? It seems as though the Aztecs might have thought along these lines.

*Top Image: AI Generated image depicting Aztec warrior looking towards the setting sun – (ivan/Adobe Stock)*