

The Origin of Quetzalcoatl

Quetzalcoatl was said, like Horus in Egyptian mythology and Apollo and Adonis in Greco-Roman mythology, to be born of a virgin.

Nātus Amatlānī, dīvīnae stirpis alumnus
 35 Coelestī iussū faustā dē virginis alvō.
 Hīc excultus avō, Mūsīs exercitus ultrā,
 Crēvit adōlescēns. Nōn illō iustior ullus
 Vir fuit aut Superum quisquam nec amantior aequī.
 Et bonus et sapiens et iam mātūrior annīs
 40 In Tūlam mīgrāsse ferunt, caput orbis avōrum
 Toltēcā ditiōne potens. Hīc pinguis olivae
 Praetendēns rāmum veniam pācemque rogābat:
 “Parcite mancipiō bellōque arcēre cruentō
 Hostilēs turbās. Et caede et sanguine foedā
 45 Sācrificō; mītēs, prohibēte piācula rītū.
 In frātrēs cohibēte minās, hostisque catervās
 Post aciēs concors foedus trādūcat ad artēs.
 Nūminis effectum placitīs, animantibus orbis
 Sanctius omnigenīs et coelō dēbita prōlēs,
 50 Hūmānum genus ēmeritōs sibi poscit honorēs.”

TRANSLATION

Born at Amatlan, offspring of a divine seed
 From the favored womb of a maiden by order of the gods.
 Reared here by his grandfather, further educated by the Muses,
 The young man grew. No man was more just than he,
 Nor was anyone more loving of the justice of the gods.

Both good and wise and already more mature than his years
 They say he migrated to Tula, capital of the world of the ancients,
 Powerful with Toltec authority. Here, extending the branch of rich olive
 For peace and pardon he asked: "spare the helpless and keep the hostile
 throngs
 From bloody slaughter. Both with sacrificial slaughter and
 with foul blood; being gentle, prohibit sacrifices from the rite.
 Withhold threats against brothers and hostile crowds.
 After battle, let a harmonious treaty lead to arts.
 Created by the decisions of divine power, more sacred offspring
 Of all living things and one owed to eternal heaven,
 The human race demands for itself its earned honors."

GRAMMAR AND WORD USE QUESTIONS

1. From lines 37 and 38, give and translate two examples of litotes (see Appendix 3).

Non iustior "none more just"; *nec amantior* "nor more loving."

2. Explain the syncope (see Appendix 3) in line 40 and translate the word.

Migrasse stands for migravisse "to have migrated (traveled)."

3. The last word in line 44 looks very much like a word in line 47. Translate both words.

Foeda "foul"; *foedus* "treaty."

4. Give and translate a figure of speech in line 50.

Genus poscit "the race demands"—personification.

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. In what three ways do Quetzalcoatl's beginnings resemble those of many classical mythological figures?

He was born of a maiden and a god, he was brought up by relatives other than parents, and he was taught by Muses.

2. Name four good qualities the youth Quetzalcoatl possessed.

He was just, wise, good, and mature.