

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: THE OLD NEW WORLD: UNEARTHING
MESOAMERICAN ANTIQUITY IN THE ART OF
THE UNITED STATES, 1839-1893

Angela Susan George, Doctor of Philosophy, 2011

Dissertation directed by: Professor Sally M. Promey
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Through a series of case studies, this dissertation examines how and why artists in the United States imagined Mesoamerican antiquity between 1839 and 1893. The artists whose work I consider most closely include Frederick Catherwood, Peter F. Rothermel, Emanuel Leutze, George Martin Ottinger, and George de Forest Brush; works by other artists play supporting roles or amplify the observations made in this project. The decades in which I situate my study were key in the development of the United States' geographic borders and national identity as well as in the foundation of archaeological investigation in Mesoamerica. During the period under question, ancient Mesoamerica provided a "usable past" for many in the United States. Since little was known of the pre-Hispanic cultures of the region, Mesoamerican antiquity served as a palimpsest upon which a number of narratives could be written. As this dissertation reveals, ancient Mesoamerica resonated differently with various individuals and groups in the United States. The Mesoamerica that existed in the U.S. imagination was at once savage, exotic,

advanced, and primitive, inhabited by a population assigned a similarly disparate and ultimately contradictory range of traits. Representations of Mesoamerica were not fixed but eminently variable, shaped to serve the exigencies of many historical moments. As such, these images reveal as much about the nineteenth-century United States as they do about the people and places depicted. Ultimately, I demonstrate that these images conveyed multivalent and often ambivalent attitudes about Mesoamerica, views that emphasized the importance of the Mesoamerican past as well as the presumed preeminence of the United States' future.

THE OLD NEW WORLD: UNEARTHING MESOAMERICAN ANTIQUITY
IN THE ART OF THE UNITED STATES, 1839-1893

by

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgments		iii
List of Figures		vii
Introduction		1
Chapter One	“Entering abruptly upon new ground”: Frederick Catherwood and the Introduction of Mesoamerican Antiquity into U.S Visual Culture	25
Chapter Two	Repainting the Past: Scenes of the Conquest of of Mexico Created by Peter F. Rothermel and Emanuel Leutze	60
Chapter Three	Picturing “Old America”: Mesoamerican Antiquity and the Latter-day Saint Artist George Martin Ottinger	85
Chapter Four	Fashioning Artistic Tradition: George De Forest Brush’s “Aztec” Paintings	121
Conclusion		152
Figures		156
Bibliography		255

List of Figures

- 0.1 Reading room of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts, circa 1893. Photograph from the collection of the American Antiquarian Society.
- 0.2 Henry N. Sweet, photograph of the portal from the site of Labná, 1888-1891. Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University.
- 0.3 Map of Mesoamerica. From Mary Ellen Miller, *The Art of Mesoamerica*, 3rd edition (New York and London: Thames and Hudson, 2001), 12-13.
- 0.4 “Peintures Hieroglyphiques.” From Alexander von Humboldt, *Vues des cordillères et monumens des peuples indigènes de l’Amérique* (Paris: F. Schoell, 1810), plate XXVI.
- 0.5 “Relief en Basalte, representant le Calendrier Mexicain.” From Alexander von Humboldt, *Vues des cordillères et monumens des peuples indigènes de l’Amérique* (Paris: F. Schoell, 1810), plate XXIII.
- 0.6 Richardo Almendariz, Palace Tower at Palenque. From Antonio del Río, *Description of the Ruins of an Ancient City: discovered near Palenque, in the Kingdom of Guatemala ...*, trans. Paul Felix Cabrera (London: H. Berthoud, and Suttaby, Evance, and Fox: 1822).
- 0.7 José Luciano Castañeda, “El Palacio, Mitla.” Reproduced in Edward King, Lord Kingborough, *Antiquities of Mexico* (London: R. Havell, 1831), IV: plate 29.
- 0.8 “Elevation de la Pyramide de Kingsborough” (west façade of the Pyramid of the Magician, Uxmal). From Jean-Frédéric Waldeck, *Voyage pittoresque et archéologique dans la province d’Yucatan pendant les années 1834 et 1836* (Paris: Bellizard Dufour et cie., 1838), plate 10.
- 0.9 Pyramid of the Magician, Uxmal. Photograph by Martin Gray.
- 0.10 Désiré Charnay, “Palace of the Nuns, Chichen Itza,” 1859. From Désiré Charnay, *Cités et ruines américaines* (Paris: Gide, 1863).
- 0.11 Temple of the Sun at Palenque and a Japanese Temple. From Désiré Charnay, *The Ancient Cities of the New World* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1887). Reproduced in R. Tripp Evans, *Romancing the Maya* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 123.
- 1.1 Frederick Catherwood, *Colossi of Memnon – Statue of Amen-Hotep III –*

- Thebes*, circa 1833. The British Museum, London. Reproduced in Victor von Hagen, *Frederick Catherwood, Archt.* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1950, n.p. [figure 6].
- 1.2 Frederick Catherwood, plan of Jerusalem, July 1835. Reproduced in Stephen Olin, *Travels in Egypt, Arabia Petraea, and the Holy Land* (New York: Harpers, 1844).
 - 1.3 Frederick Catherwood, “Plan of Copán.” From John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1841), I: n.p. [facing page 133].
 - 1.4 Frederick Catherwood, Stela H at Copán. From John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1841), I: n.p. [facing page 149].
 - 1.5 Alfred Maudsley, photograph of Stela H at Copán, 1885. The Brooklyn Museum of Art, Brooklyn, New York.
 - 1.6 Frederick Catherwood, reverse of Stela H at Copán. From John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1841), I: n.p. [facing page 150].
 - 1.7 Frederick Catherwood, north and west sides of Altar Q at Copán. From John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1841), I: n.p. [facing page 142].
 - 1.8 Frederick Catherwood, south and east sides of Altar Q at Copán. From John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1841), I: n.p. [facing page 142].
 - 1.9 Frederick Catherwood, top of Altar Q at Copán. From John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1841), I: 141.
 - 1.10 Frederick Catherwood. “Xampon.” From John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Yucatan* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1843), II: n.p. [facing page 124].
 - 1.11 Frederick Catherwood. “Gymnasium, Chichen Itza.” From John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Yucatan* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1843), II: n.p. [facing page 303].
 - 1.12 Frederick Catherwood, Stela C at Copán. From John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1841), I: n.p. [facing page 155].

- 1.13 Frederick Catherwood. *Broken Idol, at Copán*. Color lithograph in Frederick Catherwood, *Views of Ancient Monuments of Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan* (New York: Bartlett and Welford, 1844), plate IV.
- 1.14 Frederick Catherwood. “Map of Journey in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan.” From *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1841), I: n.p. [facing page 9].
- 1.15 *Oval Tablet*, circa 650. Palenque, Mexico. Reproduced in Esther Pasztory, *Pre-Columbian Art* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 52.
- 1.16 William Caddy, “Figures in bas-relief on stone in center wall, Building F,” 1840. Reproduced in David M. Pendergast, ed., *Palenque: The Walker-Caddy Expedition to the Ancient Maya City 1839-1840* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967), plate 30, figure 1.
- 1.17 Frederick Catherwood, “Oval Bas Relief in Stone.” From John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1841), II: n.p. [facing page 318].
- 1.18 Frederick Catherwood, “Ruins of a Building Called the Palace, Palenque.” From John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1841), II: n.p. [facing page 310].
- 1.19 William Caddy, “Plan of the Palace at Palenque,” 1840. Reproduced in David M. Pendergast, ed., *Palenque: The Walker-Caddy Expedition to the Ancient Maya City 1839-1840* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967), plate 13.
- 1.20 Frederick Catherwood, *Interior of the Principal Building at Kabah*. Color lithograph in Frederick Catherwood, *Views of Ancient Monuments of Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan* (New York: Bartlett and Welford, 1844), plate XVII.
- 1.21 Frederick Catherwood, “Gateway at Labná.” From John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Yucatan* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1843), II: n.p. [facing page 54].
- 1.22 Frederick Catherwood, “Castillo, Chichen Itza.” From John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Yucatan* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1843), II: n.p. [facing page 312].
- 1.23 Frederick Catherwood, steps leading up the Castillo at Chichen Itza. From

- John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Yucatan* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1843), II: 313.
- 1.24 Frederick Catherwood, interior of temple atop the Castillo at Chichen Itza. From John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Yucatan* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1843), II: n.p. [facing page 317].
- 1.25 Frederick Catherwood, “West Front of the House of the Dwarf. Uxmal.” From John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Yucatan* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1843), I: n.p. [facing page 312].
- 1.26 Frederick Catherwood, “Stucco Bas Relief at the Palace, Palenque.” From John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1841), II: n.p. [facing page 311].
- 1.27 Frederick Catherwood, details of Egyptian sculpture from Thebes and Karnak. From John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1841), II: n.p. [facing page 441].
- 1.28 Frederick Catherwood, reverse of Stela A at Copán. From John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1841), I: n.p.
- 1.29 Frederick Catherwood, side of Stela A at Copán. From John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1841), I: n.p. [facing page 158].
- 1.30 Frederick Catherwood, “Outer Corridor of No. 1, Casas de Piedra, Palenque.” From John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1841), II: n.p. [facing page 342].
- 1.31 Frederick Catherwood, *Las Monjas, Chichen Itza*. Color lithograph in Frederick Catherwood, *Views of Ancient Monuments of Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan* (New York: Bartlett and Welford, 1844), plate XXI.
- 1.32 Frederick Catherwood, *Ornament Over the Principal Doorway, Casa del Gobernador*. Color lithograph in Frederick Catherwood, *Views of Ancient Monuments of Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan* (New York: Bartlett and Welford, 1844), plate IX.
- 1.33 Frederick Catherwood, *Portion of La Casa de Las Monjas, Uxmal*. Color lithograph in Frederick Catherwood, *Views of Ancient Monuments of Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan* (New York: Bartlett and Welford, 1844), plate XV.

- 1.34 Frederick Catherwood, *Portion of the Building; Las Monjas, Uxmal*. Color lithograph in Frederick Catherwood, *Views of Ancient Monuments of Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan* (New York: Bartlett and Welford, 1844), plate XIV.
- 1.35 Frederick Catherwood, *Back of an Idol, at Copan*. Color lithograph in Frederick Catherwood, *Views of Ancient Monuments of Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan* (New York: Bartlett and Welford, 1844), plate III.
- 1.36 Frederick Catherwood, *Temple, at Tuloom*. Color lithograph in Frederick Catherwood, *Views of Ancient Monuments of Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan* (New York: Bartlett and Welford, 1844), plate XXIV.
- 1.37 Frederick Catherwood, “Palace at Palenque.” From John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1841), II: n.p. [facing page 309].
- 1.38 Frederick Catherwood, “View from la Casa de las Monjas, Uxmal, Looking South.” Engraving in John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Yucatan* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1843), I: n.p. [facing page 305].
- 1.39 Frederick Catherwood, “Casa del Gobernador.” Engraving in John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Yucatan* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1843), I: frontispiece.
- 1.40 Frederick Catherwood, “Stone Ornament on Façade of Building.” Detail from an engraving of the House of the Governor at Uxmal in John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1841), II: n.p. [facing page 428].
- 1.41 Frederick Catherwood, ornament from the façade of the House of the Governor, Uxmal. Engraving in John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Yucatan* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1843), I: 168.
- 1.42 Frederick Catherwood, “Kabah, Figure on Jamb of Doorway.” Engraving in John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Yucatan* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1843), I: n.p. [facing page 412].
- 1.43 Frederick Catherwood, “Kabah, Figure on Jamb of Doorway.” Engraving in John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Yucatan* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1843), I: n.p. [facing page 413].
- 1.44 Frederick Catherwood, “Kabah, Carved Beam of Sapote Wood.” Engraving in John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Yucatan* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1843), I: n.p. [facing page 405].

- 1.45 Frederick Catherwood, *General View of Kabah*. Color lithograph in Frederick Catherwood, *Views of Ancient Monuments of Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan* (New York: Bartlett and Welford, 1844), plate XVI.
- 1.46 Robert Duncanson, *Mayan Ruins, Yucatan*, 1848. The Dayton Art Institute, Dayton, Ohio.
- 1.47 Frederick Catherwood, “Portion of the Western Range of Building, Monjas, Uxmal.” Engraving in John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Yucatan* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1843), I: n.p. [facing page 303].
- 1.48 Frederick Catherwood, “Kabah. Front of the 1st Casa.” Engraving in John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Yucatan* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1843), I: n.p. [facing page 387].
- 1.49 George Martin Ottinger, *Xampon, Yucatan*, 1865. Museum of Church History and Art, Salt Lake City, Utah.
- 2.1 Peter F. Rothermel, *De Soto Discovering the Mississippi River*, 1843. St. Bonaventure University Art Collection, St. Bonaventure, New York.
- 2.2 Peter F. Rothermel, *Cortez’s First View of Mexico*, 1844. New-York Historical Society, New York.
- 2.3 Peter F. Rothermel, *The Surrender of Guatemozin*, 1845. Kennedy Galleries, Inc., New York.
- 2.4 Peter F. Rothermel, *Cortés before Tenochtitlan*, 1846. Lowe Art Museum, University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida.
- 2.5 Peter F. Rothermel, *Cortez’s First View of Mexico* (detail of Cortés), 1844. New-York Historical Society, New York.
- 2.6 Peter F. Rothermel, *Cortez’s First View of Mexico* (detail of cavaliers), 1844. New-York Historical Society, New York.
- 2.7 Peter F. Rothermel, *Cortez’s First View of Mexico* (detail La Malinche), 1844. New-York Historical Society, New York.
- 2.8 Peter F. Rothermel, *Cortez’s First View of Mexico* (detail of featherwork mantle), 1844. New-York Historical Society, New York.
- 2.9 Diego Velázquez, *Surrender at Breda*, 1634-1635. Museo del Prado, Madrid.

- 2.10 Emanuel Leutze, *The Storming of the Teocalli by Cortez and His Troops*, 1848. The Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut.
- 2.11 Emanuel Leutze, Detail of *The Storming of the Teocalli by Cortez and His Troops*, 1848. The Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut.
- 2.12 Emanuel Leutze, Detail of *The Storming of the Teocalli by Cortez and His Troops*, 1848. The Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut.
- 2.13 Emanuel Leutze, Detail of *The Storming of the Teocalli by Cortez and His Troops*, 1848. The Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut.
- 2.14 Emanuel Leutze, Detail of *The Storming of the Teocalli by Cortez and His Troops*, 1848. The Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut.
- 2.15 Emanuel Leutze, Detail of *The Storming of the Teocalli by Cortez and His Troops*, 1848. The Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut.
- 2.16 Frederick Catherwood, Las Monjas at Chichen Itza. From John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Yucatan* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1843), II: n.p. [facing page 203].
- 2.17 Frederick Catherwood, Stela A and altar at Copán. From John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1841), I: n.p. [facing page 154].
- 2.18 Constantino Brumidi, *Frieze of American History*, United States Capitol, Washington, DC.
- 2.19 Constantino Brumidi, *Cortez and Montezuma at Mexican Temple*, 1877 (after a design completed in 1859). United States Capitol, Washington, DC.
- 3.1 George Martin Ottinger, *The Last of the Aztecs*, 1866. Museum of Church History and Art, Salt Lake City.
- 3.2 George Martin Ottinger, *The Last of the Aztecs* (detail), 1866. Museum of Church History and Art, Salt Lake City.
- 3.3 Savage & Ottinger, Salt Lake City, circa 1865. Utah State Historical Society, Salt Lake City.
- 3.4 Frederick Catherwood, “South East Angle of Monjas, Uxmal.” From John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Yucatan* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1843), I: 186.
- 3.5 Frederick Catherwood, “Tuloom. Front of the Castillo,” 1843. Engraving

- from John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Yucatan* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1843), II: n.p. [facing page 390].
- 3.6 José Luciano Castañeda, Palace at Palenque, 1805-1808. Reproduced in Edward King, Lord Kingsborough, ed., *Antiquities of Mexico*, vol. V (London: R. Havell, 1831).
 - 3.7 George Martin Ottinger, *Reclining Woman*, circa 1880. Brigham Young University Art Museum of Art, Provo, Utah.
 - 3.8 Detail from the Codex Mendoza, sixteenth century. Reproduced in Frances F. Berdan and Patricia Rieff Anawalt, eds., *The Codex Mendoza* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), folio 60r.
 - 3.9 Codex Boturini (folios 1 and 2), circa 1530. Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City.
 - 3.10 “Ancient Aztec Chart, Showing Lehi’s Travels.” From George Reynolds, *The Story of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Jos. Hyrum Parry, 1888), 25.
 - 3.11 George Martin Ottinger, *Papantzin Explaining Her Dream to Montezuma*, 1884. Museum of Church History and Art, Salt Lake City.
 - 3.12 George Martin Ottinger, *Baptism of Limhi*, 1872. Reproduced in George Reynolds, *The Story of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Jos. Hyrum Parry, 1888), 113.
 - 3.13 “The Ceremony of Baptism.” From Henry Mayhew, *The Mormons: or Latter-Day Saints* 3rd ed. (London: National Illustrated Library, 1852), 297.
 - 3.14 J. J. Cornish of the Church of Latter-Day Saints baptizing Guy Hartnell on August 8, 1909. Photograph by A.R. Ellis. From the collection of the Wexford County Historical Society, Cadillac, Michigan.
 - 3.15 William Armitage, *The Glorious Appearing of Jesus to the Nephites* Reproduced in George Reynolds, *The Story of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Jos. Hyrum Parry, 1888), n.p.
 - 3.16 John Held, Sr., *Prophets Preaching to the Jaredites*, circa 1888. Reproduced in George Reynolds, *The Story of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Jos. Hyrum Parry, 1888), 463.
 - 3.17 George Martin Ottinger, *Discovery of the Records of the Jaredites*, circa 1872-1888. Reproduced in George Reynolds, *The Story of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Jos. Hyrum Parry, 1888), 105.

- 3.18 Frederick Catherwood, detail of ornament over doorway of building at Ocosinco (or Tonina). From John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1841), II: n.p.
- 3.19 George Martin Ottinger, *Destruction of Zarahemla*, circa 1872-1888. Reproduced in George Reynolds, *The Story of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Jos. Hyrum Parry, 1888), 249.
- 3.20 Benjamin West, *Death on the Pale Horse*, 1817. Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia.
- 3.21 George Martin Ottinger, *Moroni Raises the "Title of Liberty,"* circa 1872-1888. Reproduced in George Reynolds, *The Story of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Jos. Hyrum Parry, 1888), 185.
- 3.22 Minerva Teichert, *Mosiah Discovers Zarahemla*, circa 1950. Museum of Art, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.
- 3.23 Arnold Friberg, *Samuel the Lamanite on the Wall*, 1957. Museum of Church History and Art, Salt Lake City, Utah.
- 3.24 John Scott, *Jesus Teaching in the Western Hemisphere*, 1969. Museum of Church History and Art, Salt Lake City, Utah.
- 4.1 George de Forest Brush, *An Aztec Sculptor*, 1887. National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.
- 4.2 George de Forest Brush, *The Sculptor and the King*, 1888. Portland Art Museum, Portland, Oregon.
- 4.3 George de Forest Brush, *The Potter*, 1889. Present location unknown. Reproduced in Nancy K. Anderson, *George de Forest Brush: The Indian Paintings* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2008), 78.
- 4.4 George de Forest Brush, *The Weaver*, 1889. Terra Foundation for American Art, Chicago, Daniel J. Terra Collection.
- 4.5 Exhibit containing casts of Mesoamerican antiquities obtained by Désiré Charnay, United States National Museum (now the Smithsonian Institution), circa 1885. Photograph from the Smithsonian Institution Archives, record unit 95, box 43, folder 23, negative number 2526.
- 4.6 Jean-Léon Gérôme, *Diogenes*, 1860. Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, Maryland.

- 4.7 George de Forest Brush, *Monte Orizaba, Jalapa, Mexico*, n.d. (circa 1880). Private collection, Dublin, New Hampshire.
- 4.8 George de Forest Brush, *An Arapahoe Boy*, circa 1882. National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.
- 4.9 George de Forest Brush, *A Young Shoshone*, 1882. Private collection.
- 4.10 George de Forest Brush, *Mourning Her Brave*, 1883. Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma.
- 4.11 Cover of *Our Continent* with seal designed by Louis Comfort Tiffany, volume I, no. 16 (May 31, 1882).
- 4.12 George de Forest Brush, “Housed it Safe with Two Beldams Dire,” circa 1885. Reproduced in John Vance Cheney, “How Squire Coyote Brought Fire to the Cahrocs,” *Century Magazine* 29, no. 3 (January 1885): 393.
- 4.13 Stone of Tizoc, Aztec, Late Postclassic. National Anthropology Museum, Mexico City.
- 4.14 Stone of Tizoc. Photograph in Désiré Charnay, “The Ruins of Central America,” *The North American Review* (October 1880): 316.
- 4.15 Lawrence Alma-Tadema, *Phidias and the Frieze of the Parthenon, Athens*, 1868. Birmingham Art Gallery, Birmingham, England.
- 4.16 Lawrence Alma-Tadema, *Sculpture*, 1877. Collection of George Wildenstein, New York, New York.
- 4.17 Jean-Léon Gérôme, *The Antique Pottery Painter: Sculpturae vitam insufflat pictura*, 1893. The Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Canada.
- 4.18 Tatiana Proskouriakoff, reconstruction drawing of the inner sanctuary in the Temple of the Cross, Palenque. Reproduced in Tatiana Proskouriakoff, *An Album of Maya Architecture* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 2002), 11.
- 4.19 Frederick Catherwood, “Adoratorio or Altar, Casa No. 3.” From John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1841), II: n.p. [facing page 142].
- 4.20 Frederick Catherwood, “Bas Relief on Side of Door of Altar.” From John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1841), II: n.p. [following page 352].

- 4.21 George de Forest Brush, *The Sculptor and the King* (pictured with original frame), 1888. Reproduced in Eli Wilner, ed., *The Gilded Edge: The Art of the Frame* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2000), 115.
- 4.22 Frederick Catherwood, detail of *Portion of La Casa de Las Monjas, Uxmal*. Color lithograph in Frederick Catherwood, *Views of Ancient Monuments of Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan* (New York: Bartlett and Welford, 1844), plate XV.
- 4.23 Detail of the original frame for George de Forest Brush's *The Sculptor and the King*, 1888. The Portland Art Museum, Portland, Oregon.
- 4.24 George de Forest Brush, *The Indian and the Lily*, 1887. Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Arkansas.
- 4.25 Frederick Catherwood, "Bas Relief on Side of Door of Altar." From John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1841), II: n.p. [facing page 353].
- 5.1 The Aztec's Village, World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893. Paul V. Galvin Library Digital History Collection, Illinois Institute of Technology, Chicago, Illinois.
- 5.2 Casts of Yucatan Ruins at the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893. From *Glimpses of the World's Fair* (Chicago: Laird and Lee Publishers, 1893), n.p.
- 5.3 Cast of arch from Labná at the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893. Library Photo Archives, The Field Museum, Chicago, Illinois.

Introduction

We call this country the new world. It is old! Age after age, and one physical revolution after another, has passed over it, but who shall tell its history?

– Benjamin Norman, *Rambles in Yucatan* (1842)¹

Yucatan and Central America are thickly covered with gigantic ruins of pyramids and walled cities. Do the American people fully realize the fact, that here in our own country we have the most stupendous ruins of cities upon the face of the globe? That some of our ruined structures of Cyclopean masonry are higher than those of Thebes? That we have pyramids, too, greater than many of those of Egypt?

– Albert Welles Ely, “Ruins of Central America and Yucatan,” *De Bow’s Review of the Southern and Western States* (July 1850)²

Throughout the nineteenth century, as the United States expanded westward, U.S. Americans grew increasingly interested in the history of the North American continent.³ Mesoamerican antiquity, in particular, received enthusiastic attention after news of the discoveries of pre-Hispanic ruined cities and monumental artworks in Mexico and Central America reached the United States. From the 1830s onward, countless newspaper articles, best-selling books, exhibitions, pageants, prints, and

¹ Benjamin Norman, *Rambles in Yucatan* (New York: Henry G. Langley), 173.

² Albert Welles Ely, “Ruins of Central America and Yucatan,” *De Bow’s Review of the Southern and Western States* 1, no. 1 (July 1850): 47.

³ In this study, I avoid using the term “America” as synonym for the United States and “American” as its adjectival form. In the nineteenth century both terms were regularly applied to the United States, to North America as a whole, and to the entire Western Hemisphere. Thus, in an effort to avoid ambiguity, I use “United States” in place of America and “U.S. American,” or simply “U.S.,” as its adjectival form. For an analysis of the nineteenth-century use of the term “America,” see Esther Allen, “This is Not America: Nineteenth-Century Accounts of Travel between the Americas” (Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1991), 72.

paintings highlighted the subject, which was cast as “American antiquity.”⁴ During a period when many in the United States sought cultural distance from Europe, the material remains and chronicles of the Maya and Aztecs offered an alternative heritage, one firmly rooted in North American soil.

Among those intrigued by Mesoamerican antiquity were the members of the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester, Massachusetts. Founded in 1812 on the eve of the age of expansionism, at its inception the Society’s focus was continental rather than national, stating its “immediate and peculiar design” was to “discover the antiquities of our own Continent, and by providing a fixed and permanent place of deposit, to preserve such relics of American Antiquity as are portable.”⁵ In an effort to construct a cultural pedigree worthy of the United States’ emerging status as the continent’s dominant political power, members of the Society sought New World antiquities on par with Old World discoveries in Italy, Greece, and Egypt.⁶ By the 1880s the group’s headquarters at Antiquarian Hall featured a collection of “old specimens of the arts of Mexico” as well as a “revolving case of photographs of

⁴ This term was used throughout the nineteenth century to denote antiquities found throughout North America. For example of the term used in this manner, see “American Antiquities,” *The New Yorker*, December 16, 1837.

⁵ The national rhetoric began to include such phrases as “our own continent” during this period of manifest destiny and expansionism. American Antiquarian Society, “Petition to the Legislature of Massachusetts by American Antiquarian Society, December 3, 1812,” in *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society, 1812-1849* (Worcester, MA: American Antiquarian Society, 1912), 2.

⁶ As many scholars have discussed, nineteenth-century Europeans were eager to use the archaeology of the Old World to corroborate and construct their own historical narratives. Mary Louise Pratt, for example, observes that through excavations in Egypt, Europeans “were reconstructing a lost history through, and as, ‘rediscovered’ monuments and ruins.” Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 134. For a similar phenomenon with Europeans and Mediterranean archaeology, see A. Bernard Knapp and Emma Blake, eds., *The Archaeology of Mediterranean Prehistory* (Malden, MA and Oxford, England: Blackwell Publishing, Ltd., 2005), 4.

Central American antiquities,” a cabinet devoted to “Yucatan relics,” and a large plaster cast of a portal from the Maya site of Labná, which the Society displayed in a reading room adorned with marble busts of George Washington and Benjamin Franklin, Sir Walter Raleigh’s tobacco box, a vial of tea from the Boston Tea Party, and a double chair once owned by John Hancock (figs. 0.1, 0.2).⁷ Hence, the desire to create august historical narratives together with an awakening consciousness of the continent’s cultural landscape ushered in an era when many in the United States looked to “American antiquity” with increasing interest.

My dissertation describes and analyzes this interest in “American antiquity” by examining artworks with Mesoamerican subjects created in the United States between 1839 and 1893. The artists whose work I consider most closely include Frederick Catherwood, Peter F. Rothermel, Emanuel Leutze, George Martin Ottinger, and George de Forest Brush; works by other artists play supporting roles or amplify the observations made in this project.⁸ The decades in which I situate my

⁷ American Antiquarian Society, “Report of the Council, May 29, 1839,” in *ibid.*, 375.; and American Antiquarian Society, *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society at the Semi-Annual Meeting Held in Boston, April 18, 1945* (Worcester, MA: American Antiquarian Society, 1947), 9-12. Edward H. Thompson made the cast in 1886-1887 by for the then-president of the American Antiquarian Society, Stephen Salisbury, Jr. It was installed in Antiquarian Hall in 1887.

⁸ In this study I focus on a limited group of artists that produced ancient Mesomaerican subjects during the nineteenth century. However, the artists examined in this dissertation were not the only individuals in the United States to paint the subject. Other artists who created scenes of Mesoamerican antiquity include Charles Hitchcock (*Montezuma’s Last Smile*; circa 1848), Thomas Hicks (*An Aztec Princess*; circa 1851), Charles Dormann Robinson (*Ruins in Central America*; 1877), James MacDonough (*Ancient Central America – A Morning Sacrifice*; circa 1888), and Alfred Baker (*The God of Silence*; circa 1893). For Hitchcock, see Sotheby’s New York, *Latin American Art*, sale November 17, 2004, lot. 90. For Hicks, see Mary Bartlett Cowdrey, ed., *National Academy of Design Exhibition Record, 1826-1860* (New York: J.J. Little & Ives, Co., 1943), I: 227. For Robinson, see Oakland Museum, *Tropical: Tropical Scenes by the 19th Century Painters of California* (Oakland: Oakland Museum, 1971), 44. For MacDonough, see Maria K. Naylor, ed., *The National Academy of Design Exhibition Record, 1861-1900* (New York: Kennedy Galleries, Inc., 1973), 589; and “The National Academy: Ideal and Genre Pictures,” *New York Times*, May 6, 1888. For Baker, see “The National Academy,” *New York Times*, March 24, 1893.

study were key in the development of the United States' geographic borders and national identity as well as in the foundation of archaeological investigation in Mesoamerica. My project begins in the years following Mexican and Central American independence, when travelers flowed into the newly accessible region and returned with fantastic accounts and images of enigmatic ancient sites that inspired artists in the United States.⁹ I conclude my study in the late nineteenth century, when the interest in Mesoamerican subjects among U.S. artists waned.¹⁰

In the nineteenth century, ancient Mesoamerica provided a “usable past” for many in the United States.¹¹ Since little was known of the pre-Hispanic cultures of the region, Mesoamerican antiquity served as a palimpsest upon which a number of narratives could be written. As this dissertation reveals, ancient Mesoamerica

⁹ Prior to losing its colonies in Mexico and Central America in 1821, Spain jealously guarded the wealthy colony of New Spain (or Nueva España), refusing to allow any country to trade with it or allow any non-Spaniard to enter or travel within the region. Adrian Locke, “Exhibitions and Collectors of Pre-Hispanic Mexican Artefacts in Britain,” in *Aztecs*, ed. Eduardo Matos Moctezuma and Felipe Solís Oguín (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2002), 80.

¹⁰ While few U.S. artists painted images with Mesoamerican subjects in the 1890s and early 1900s, the subject did not disappear completely. Indeed, Mesoamerican imagery reappeared in U.S. artistic culture after 1910, especially in the architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright, Robert Stacy-Judd, and other proponents of the Mayan Revival style. In addition, Mesoamerican influence resumed in the early twentieth century during a period of artistic exchange between Mexico and the United States, with U.S. artists such as Marsden Hartley traveling to Mexico and Mexican artists such as José Clemente Orozco and Diego Rivera traveling to the United States. These twentieth-century developments, however, are beyond the scope of this dissertation. For Wright, see Barbara Braun, *Pre-Columbian Art and the Post-Columbian World: Ancient American Sources of Modern Art* (New York: Abrams, Inc., 1993). For the Mayan Revival style, see Marjorie Ingle, *Mayan Revival Style* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989). For the period of artistic exchange between the United States and Mexico in the early twentieth century, see Helen Delpar, *The Enormous Vogue of Things Mexican* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1992) and Laurance P. Hurlburt, *The Mexican Muralists in the United States* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989).

¹¹ The literary critic Van Wyck Brooks coined the term “usable past” in a 1918 essay in which he lamented what he perceived as the poverty of U.S. American culture. Brooks suggested that the nation could remedy this situation by inventing a usable past, a national heritage, as European nations had done. See Van Wyck Brooks, “On Creating a Usable Past,” *The Dial* 64 (April 11, 1918): 337-341.

resonated differently with various individuals and groups in the United States. The Mesoamerica that existed in the U.S. imagination was at once savage, exotic, advanced, and primitive, inhabited by a population assigned a similarly disparate and ultimately contradictory range of traits. Representations of Mesoamerica were not fixed but eminently variable, shaped to serve the exigencies of many historical moments. As such, these images reveal as much about the nineteenth-century United States as they do about the people and places depicted.¹² Through a series of case studies, my dissertation examines how and why artists imagined Mesoamerican antiquity. Ultimately, I demonstrate that these images conveyed multivalent and often ambivalent attitudes about Mesoamerica, views that emphasized the importance of the Mesoamerican past as well as the presumed preeminence of the United States' future.

While this project focuses on artworks produced by artists in the United States, U.S. American artists were not the only individuals to create images of ancient Mesoamerica during the nineteenth century. As Stacie G. Widdifield has discussed, several nineteenth-century Mexican artists produced representations of Mesoamerican antiquity or incorporated motifs from ancient Mesoamerican art into their paintings.¹³ These artists, like those in the United States, frequently were inspired by archaeological publications, which provided a rich trove of information

¹² As Walter Benjamin noted, "history is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogeneous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of now." Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (Glasgow: Fontana/Collins, 1973), 263.

¹³ Stacie G. Widdifield, *The Embodiment of the National in Late Nineteenth-Century Mexican Painting* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1996).

and imagery. In her scholarship, Widdiefield explores the connections between archaeology and the fine arts in Mexico as well the links to issues of nationalism and identity.¹⁴ In nineteenth-century Mexico, paintings with ancient Mesoamerican subjects were frequently part of an effort to present the pre-Hispanic past as the basis of Mexican national identity. Indeed, as Widdiefield and a number of other scholars have investigated, this effort became a major government endeavor during the Porfiriato.¹⁵ This point marks an important distinction between nineteenth-century images of Mesoamerican antiquity created in the United States and those produced in Mexico, as U.S. artists did not work as part of a state-sponsored effort to root the United States in the ancient Mesoamerican past. As this dissertation shows, individual artists in the United States cast the Mesoamerican past as “American antiquity” for a variety of reasons. Each chapter of this project examines the work of a single artist or a related group of artists who worked at a specific time and place in order to shed light on these various reasons.

Previous Scholarship

This dissertation expands on the work of a number of scholars, most notably R. Tripp Evans, Robert Aguirre, and Katherine Manthorne. Evans’ *Romancing the*

¹⁴ Widdiefield maintains that images of ancient Mesoamerica “irrupted in the face of foreign control and foreign intervention as well as when the state needed to cohere its citizens.” Ancient Mesoamerican imagery in nineteenth-century paintings can be distinguished from the Indigenism of the twentieth-century Mexican muralists in that the former depicted ancient themes within a clearly European academic style. By contrast, the Mexican muralists were not only interested in ancient Mesoamerican themes, they were also captivated by pre-Conquest aesthetics. See Widdiefield, *The Embodiment of the National*.

¹⁵ For an examination of how Mexicans interpreted the indigenous past as the basis of nationhood, see Christina Maria Bueno, “Excavating Identity: Archaeology and Nation in Mexico, 1876-1911” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Davis, 2004); and David Brading, *The Origins of Mexican Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

Maya: Mexican Antiquity in the American Imagination 1820-1915 examines the early history of Mesoamerican archaeology as well as the varying agendas of several nineteenth-century figures who invented or distorted archaeological information in order to position the Mesoamerican past as the cradle of North American civilization.¹⁶ Another cultural study, Aguirre's *Informal Empire: Mexico and Central America in Victorian Culture* considers the motives behind Britain's interest in Mesoamerica in the decades following Mexican and Central American independence. Aguirre investigates the British engagement with Mesoamerica in light of the country's interest in the region's natural resources, arguing that the absorption of pre-Hispanic materials into museum collections, novels, and visual representations was the "cultural work" of the "larger political and economic strategy historians call informal imperialism."¹⁷ In *Tropical Renaissance: North American Artists Exploring Latin America 1839-1879*, Manthorne examines the "awakening inter-American consciousness" that developed in the early decades of the nineteenth century, inspiring a large number of artists to travel to Central and South America.¹⁸ Like Evans and Aguirre, she analyzes the varied frameworks that shaped and stimulated nineteenth-century interest in the region, drawing connections between the cultural and the political, the artistic and the economic. Whereas Manthorne

¹⁶ R. Tripp Evans, *Romancing the Maya: Mexican Antiquity in the American Imagination 1820-1915* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004).

¹⁷ Robert Aguirre, *Informal Empire: Mexico and Central America in Victorian Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), xv. Aguirre's impressive work both as a scholar and a teacher has inspired me since I was an undergraduate student in several of his classes in the department of English at the University of California, Los Angeles.

¹⁸ Katherine Emma Manthorne, *Tropical Renaissance: North American Artists Exploring Latin America 1839-1879* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989), 3.

briefly addresses the work of Frederick Catherwood, which I consider in my first chapter, her research focuses primarily on representations of South American landscapes rather than on images of Mesoamerican antiquity.

Dissertation Contribution

While several scholars have considered the unprecedented interest in Mesoamerican antiquity that arose in the nineteenth century, to date there has been no extended examination of representations of ancient Mesoamerica produced by nineteenth-century artists in the United States. Weaving together material from art history, history, cultural studies, and Mesoamerican historiography, my project analyzes how and why artists imagined ancient Mesoamerica and presented it as an essential part of the United States' past. Overall, with this study I hope to add to present-day U.S. self-understanding, as the nineteenth-century attitudes about Mesoamerican antiquity embodied in these artworks continue to resonate, serving as the foundation for U.S. impressions of Mexico and Central America today.

Ancient Mesoamerica: An Overview

The ancient cultures of Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador, and the western portion of Honduras occupied a region known to scholars today as Mesoamerica (fig. 0.3).¹⁹ First articulated in 1952 by the anthropologist Paul Kirchhoff, ancient Mesoamerican cultures are defined by shared features and cultural practices, the most distinctive of which is a sophisticated calendrical system based on

¹⁹ The information in this section derives from two sources, Michael D. Coe, *Mexico: From the Olmecs to the Aztecs* 4th ed. (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1994) and Mary Ellen Miller, *The Art of Mesoamerica* 3rd ed. (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2001).

a 260-day cycle.²⁰ Other commonalities include hieroglyphic writing, bark-paper or deer-skin books, an extensive knowledge of astronomy, a ballgame resembling soccer played in a special court, the practice of human and autosacrifice, and a pantheistic religion.²¹

Ancient Mesoamerican cultures developed from about 2000 B.C.E. until the Spanish Conquest in the early sixteenth century. During the period under question in this study, 1839 to 1893, the ancient Mesoamerican sites and objects best known within the United States were those of the Zapotecs, the Maya, the Teotihuacanos, the Toltecs, and the Aztecs.²² The Zapotecs flourished from circa 600 B.C.E. to circa 1519 C.E. in what is today the Mexican state of Oaxaca.²³ In this mountainous region the early Zapotecs were forced by the scarcity of resources to develop early agriculture and probably the earliest writing and calendrical systems in Mesoamerica. Based at the fortified city of Monte Alban, the Zapotecs ruled over the region for over a millennium. At Mitla, another early political and commercial center, the Zapotecs built structures decorated with elaborate and intricate fretwork and stone mosaics.

²⁰ Paul Kirchhoff, "Meso-America," in *Heritage of Conquest: The Ethnology of Middle America*, edited by Sol Tax (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1952), 17-30. For an explanation of the calendrical system, see Miller, *Art of Mesoamerica*, 38-41.

²¹ Coe, *Mexico*, 11.

²² The term "Aztec," which derives from Aztlán, the legendary ancestral home of the Nahua people, is technically incorrect. "Mexica" is the more proper designation, as this was the name by which the indigenous people called themselves at the time of the Spanish Conquest. I use the term Aztec in this dissertation, however, since it was the one used in the United States in the nineteenth century. For more on this subject, see Benjamin Keen, *The Aztec Image in Western Thought* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1971), xvii.

²³ I do not mean to imply here that these cultures perished after the Conquest, as the descendants of these cultures still thrive today in Mexico and Central America. For example, roughly 2.5 million Maya currently live in the region.

The ancient Maya emerged circa 400 B.C.E. and reached their height during the “Classic” period of roughly 250 C.E. to 900 C.E.²⁴ The Maya region consisted of the Yucatán Peninsula and parts of Tabasco and Chiapas in present-day Mexico, as well as modern Guatemala and Belize, and the western part of what is today known as Honduras and El Salvador. Made up of several separate, yet interrelated, polities, the ancient Maya established a number of sites, including Copán in Honduras, Tikal and Quiriguá in Guatemala, Palenque in Chiapas, and Uxmal, Chichén Itzá, Labná, Sayil, and Tulum in Yucatán.

In central Mexico, Teotihuacan also developed in the Classic period and the large site dominated the Valley of Mexico. The most populous city in the Western Hemisphere at its peak, with an estimated two hundred thousand inhabitants, Teotihuacan prospered from about 100 B.C.E. to 700 C.E. After the fall of Teotihuacan, the Toltec civilization controlled central Mexico from about 1000 C.E. to 1200 C.E. Based at the city of Tula, in the present-day Mexican state of Hidalgo, the Toltecs were described by later cultures as master artisans and scientists, and as creators of culture. The Aztecs traced their origins to the Toltecs, who they replaced as the dominant culture in central Mexico in about 1300 C.E. The Aztec civilization ruled over a large empire from its capital at Tenochtitlán, which thrived until the arrival of the Spanish in 1519. Several conquistadors and early missionaries made

²⁴ Twentieth-century archaeologists developed a chronological framework for Mesoamerican cultures, which were divided into Formative (or Preclassic), Classic, and Postclassic periods. As many scholars have noted, this framework derived from a particular theoretical perspective that originated in the nineteenth century, the theory of cultural evolution. From that perspective, the Classic period was seen as the highest point of cultural complexity, rising from its initial roots in the Formative period and declining after its peak in the Postclassic period. While archaeologists have moved away from the assumptions underlying this chronology, the terms are still in use today. See Rosemary A. Joyce, “Mesoamerica: A Working Model for Archaeology,” in Julia A. Hendon and Rosemary A. Joyce, eds., *Mesoamerican Archaeology: Theory and Practice* (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 14-17.

detailed accounts of the Aztecs, and consequently they were the best-known ancient Mesoamerican culture in the centuries after the Conquest.

Knowledge of Mesoamerican Antiquity after the Conquest

The Spanish Conquest was accompanied by an almost total destruction of indigenous historical texts as well as the deaths of oral historians due to diseases introduced by Europeans. In addition, the Spanish demolished numerous indigenous “pagan” structures and artworks, such as those at Tenochtitlán and Cholula.²⁵ Much of the surviving information on pre-Hispanic Mesoamerica, therefore, derives from ethnographic accounts written by sixteenth-century Spaniards such as Hernán Cortés, Bernal Díaz del Castillo, Diego Durán, and Bernardino de Sahagún.²⁶ Yet, as Keen notes, the Spaniards viewed Mesoamerica through the lens of Catholic European

²⁵ At the time of the Spanish Conquest, Cholula was second only to Tenochtitlán as the largest city in central Mexico. When Cortés’ army arrived in the city in 1519, Cholula had 365 temples, one for each day of the year. The Spanish razed these structures and later replaced them with dozens of churches. Tenochtitlán met a similar fate after the Conquest, with the Spaniards destroying much of the city, burying all monumental sculptures, and burning numerous pre-Hispanic codices. Andrew Coe, *Archaeological Mexico*, second edition (Emeryville, CA: Avalon, 2001), 104.

²⁶ Cortés and several of his soldiers recorded accounts of the Aztecs and other indigenous groups, although most of these early accounts remained in archives for decades and were not widely available until the nineteenth century. See Hernando Cortés, *Five Letter of Cortés to the Emperor*, trans. J. Bayard Morris (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1962). In 1632, Bernal Díaz del Castillo wrote a particularly vivid account of his experiences serving as a *rodadero* (swordsman and shield bearer) under Cortés. See Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *The Conquest of New Spain*, trans. John M. Cohen (New York and London: The Penguin Group, 1963). In addition to these two sources, several sixteenth-century chroniclers produced accounts of the Aztec civilization. The Dominican friar Diego Durán spent his youth in Texcoco and Mexico City before entering the priesthood in 1556. Durán’s three books on the Aztecs, which he based on pictorial histories and interviews with Aztec historians, are the most complete historical account of these people. See Diego Durán, *The History of the Indies of New Spain*, trans. Doris Heyden (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994). The Franciscan friar Bernardino de Sahagún traveled to New Spain in 1529. Like Durán, he collected information on the Aztecs from a number of sources, employing a team of indigenous assistants and artists. Sahagún produced several accounts of Aztec culture, the most informative of which is today called the *Florentine Codex: General History of the Things of New Spain*, ed. and trans. Arthur J.O. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble, 12 vols. (Santa Fe and Salt Lake City: School of American Research and University of Utah Press, 1950-1982).

traditions and “measured Aztec civilization with Spanish yardsticks.”²⁷ Moreover, the information handed down from the Spanish was far from complete, as they knew little about several ancient cultures. For example, the high point of the Maya civilization had occurred centuries before the Conquest, and the ruined cities of the Maya were located far from later colonial settlements.²⁸ Thus, in the centuries following the Conquest, fragmentary and often unreliable information remained regarding the origins, histories, and relative chronologies of ancient Mesoamerican civilizations.²⁹

As accounts of ancient sites and cultures located in Mesoamerica began to appear in the United States and Europe in the early nineteenth century, most individuals knew very little about ancient Mesoamerican cultures. This information vacuum led many to speculate wildly as to the age, origins, and possible relationships of New World cultures to those of other civilizations, such as the ancient Egyptians, the Israelites, the Japanese, and even the mythological people of Atlantis.³⁰ At the dawn of the nineteenth century, even the terminology for ancient Mesoamerican cultures in use today had not been established. For most of the

²⁷ Keen, *The Aztec Image*, 56.

²⁸ Evans, *Romancing the Maya*, 12.

²⁹ The importance of understanding the chronology of Mesoamerican cultures cannot be overstated. As the Mesoamericanist Mary Miller recently observed about archaeological investigation in the nineteenth century, “as long as a chronology wasn’t settled, neither was anything else.” Mary Miller, “The Shifting Now of the Pre-Columbian Past” (A.W. Mellon Lecture in the Fine Arts, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, April 18, 2010).

³⁰ I discuss the proponents of these theories in the section that follows as well as in several chapters of this dissertation. For an extensive discussion on the various theories of the origin of the indigenous peoples of North America, see Robert Wauchoppe, *Lost Tribes and Sunken Continents: Myth and Method in the Study of American Indians* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975).

century, U.S. Americans called the ancient peoples of Mesoamerica “Indians,” “ancient Mexicans,” or “Ancient Americans,” rather than their specific cultural designations. The term “Aztec,” which was first proposed by Alexander von Humboldt in the early nineteenth century, was not widely used in the United States until William H. Prescott popularized the term in his 1843 work, *History of the Conquest of Mexico*.³¹ The term “Maya” was not regularly used to describe the ancient Maya until after 1876, when Hubert Howe Bancroft used the term in the fifth volume of his *Native Races of the Pacific States of North America*.³²

Major Sources on Mesoamerican Antiquity in the Nineteenth Century

The majority of nineteenth-century U.S. American artists who produced images of Mesoamerican sites and cultures never viewed the antiquities and landscapes they pictured firsthand.³³ Instead, they relied heavily on written descriptions and illustrations, from which they drew information and inspiration. The ancient Mesoamerican cultures and objects most commonly represented in

³¹ “Mesoamerica: Mexico” in Michael S. Werner, ed., *Concise Encyclopedia of Mexico* (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 2001), 368. William H. Prescott, *History of the Conquest of Mexico*, 1843, reprint, with an introduction by James Lockhart (New York: Modern Library: 2001).

³² Hubert Howe Bancroft, *Native Races of the Pacific States of North America*, vol. 5 (New York: D. Appleton and Co, 1876), 135. Before Bancroft’s work, the term “Maya” was occasionally used to describe the modern indigenous people of Yucatán, Chiapas, and parts of Central America. However, it was not regularly applied to the ancient people who built the ruined cities located in the region. For an example of the term used to describe contemporary indigenes but not the ancient culture, see Frederick Catherwood, *Views of Ancient Monuments in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan* (New York: Bartlett and Welford, 1844), n.p. [introduction]. For an example of the term “Maya” used to describe the ancient Maya, see “American Hero Myths,” *The Literary World*, May 19, 1883.

³³ Of the artists described in this project, only Frederick Catherwood is certain to have visited ancient Mesoamerican sites. As a young man, George Martin Ottinger docked in Central American and Mexican ports aboard a whaling ship, yet he made no mention of traveling inland to view ancient sites in his journal or in his later published writings. George de Forest Brush’s passport records indicate that he visited Mexico in the 1880s, sailing out of the port of Veracruz, yet no information survives as to the itinerary of his trip. For Ottinger, see chapter three of this dissertation, and for Brush, see chapter four.

nineteenth-century artworks, therefore, were those described and pictured in published accounts. Moreover, the use of books and articles, and the corresponding lack of direct knowledge of objects and sites, led many nineteenth-century artists to excerpt and combine elements from various sources to produce fanciful recreations of Mesoamerican antiquity that bore little resemblance to actual monuments and sites. In the following paragraphs, I describe the sources most often consulted by nineteenth-century U.S. artists. This survey covers only a very small portion of the total works published in the nineteenth century, and thus I do not intend it as a full treatment of the subject.³⁴

In the centuries following the Spanish Conquest of Mexico, Hispanic scholars produced only sporadic writings and few illustrations of ancient Mesoamerican sites and objects, a small number of which were available outside of Spain and Spanish America.³⁵ The earliest accounts of Mesoamerican antiquities to reach an audience in the United States were those written by the Prussian naturalist and explorer,

³⁴ For extensive bibliographies of sources on Mesoamerica that were available in the nineteenth century, see John Finley Freeman, "Manuscript Sources on Latin American Indians in the Library of the American Philosophical Society," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 106, no. 6 (December 12, 1962): 530-546; and C. Harvey Gardiner, "Foreign Travelers' Accounts of Mexico, 1810-1910," *The Americas* 8, no. 3 (January 1952): 321-351. For an in-depth examination of early illustrated accounts of Mesoamerican antiquities, see Evans, *Romancing the Maya*, Keen, *The Aztec Image*, and Michael D. Coe, *Breaking the Maya Code* (New York and London: Thames & Hudson, 1992).

³⁵ Late eighteenth-century accounts that incorporated descriptions of Mesoamerican antiquities include the following: Francesco Saverio Clavigero, *Storia antica del Messico* (Cesena: G. Biasini, 1780-1781); José Antonio de Alzate y Ramírez, *Descripción de las antigüedades de Xochicalco ...* (Mexico City: Zuñiga y Ontiveros, 1791); and Antonio de León y Gama, *Descripción histórica y cronológica de las dos piedras que con ocasion del Nuevo empedrado que se está formando en la plaza principal de México ...* (Mexico City: Felipe de Zuñiga y Ontiveros, 1792). For an extended treatment of these sources, see Ignacio Bernal, *A History of Mexican Archaeology* (New York and London: Thames and Hudson, 1980).

Alexander von Humboldt.³⁶ Humboldt, along with his companion, the French botanist Aimé Bonpland, traveled unhindered throughout New Spain from 1803 to 1804 after receiving rare permission to do so from the Spanish Crown.³⁷ An expert in geology and mineralogy, Humboldt published numerous volumes describing the flora, fauna, topography, geography, meteorology, political economy, and history of the Spanish colonies.³⁸ Humboldt's 1810 work, *Vues des cordillères et monumens des peuples indigènes de l'Amérique*, contained descriptions and images of several ancient Mesoamerican sites and monuments, including the Palace at Mitla and the Pyramid at Cholula, as well as selections from pre- and post-Conquest codices, which he referred to as hieroglyphic paintings (fig. 0.4). Humboldt also included illustrations of three colossal Aztec works, the Coatlicue sculpture, the Stone of Tizoc, and the Calendar Stone (fig. 0.5).³⁹ Humboldt's focus on these three

³⁶ The scholarship on Humboldt is quite vast. The most useful sources that examine Humboldt's travels in New Spain include Wolfgang-Hagen Hein, ed., *Alexander von Humboldt: Life and Work*, trans. John Cumming (Ingelheim am Rhein: C.H. Boehringer Sohn, 1987) and José Miranda, *Humboldt y Mexico* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico, 1962). For Humboldt and Aztec antiquities, see Eloise Quinones Keber, "Humboldt and Aztec Art," *Colonial Latin American Review* 5, no. 2 (December 1996): 277-297. For a critical examination of Humboldt and early travel writing, see Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*.

³⁷ Humboldt and Bonpland spent a year in New Spain after their epic journey through Spanish-ruled South America that had begun in 1799.

³⁸ Alexander von Humboldt, *Voyage aux régions équinoxiales du nouveau continent, fait en 1799, 1800, 1801, 1802, 1803 et 1804, par Al. De Humboldt et A. Bonpland ...*, 35 vols., (Paris: G. Dufour et Cie., 1805-1834). This immensely popular work generated several variations and translations, including, *Vues des cordillères et monumens des peuples indigènes de l'Amérique* (Paris: F. Schoell, 1810), which was published as a folio volume. Excerpts of this work were published in English as *Recherches, Concerning the Institutions and Monuments of the Ancient Inhabitants of America, with Descriptions and Views of Some of the Most Striking Scenes in the Cordilleras*, 2 vols., trans. Helen Maria Williams (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme & Brown, 1814).

³⁹ The sculpture of Coatlicue was unearthed in Mexico City on August 13, 1790, but it was later reburied. The sculpture was unearthed in 1803 when Humboldt request to view the sculpture, yet after his departure it was again reburied. Mexican officials unearthed the Coatlicue sculpture for the last time in 1824. Bernal, *History of Mexican Archaeology*, 85.

sculptures established them as the first works in the Aztec canon, and later publications on Mexican antiquities unfailingly included images of them.⁴⁰

In the decades following Mexico and Central America's independence from Spain in 1821, information about Mesoamerica became available in unprecedented quantities in the United States. In fact, as R. Tripp Evans notes, more publications devoted to Mesoamerican antiquities appeared in the two decades following Mexican independence than had been produced during the preceding three centuries under Spanish rule.⁴¹ Many of these works consisted of travel narratives written by those who journeyed through seemingly exotic lands that were largely unfamiliar to most in the United States, and several of these publications attracted a wide readership.

In 1822, Antonio del Río's report of his 1787 expedition to the Maya site Palenque was translated and published in London as *Description of the Ruins of an Ancient City: discovered near Palenque, in the Kingdom of Guatemala ...*.⁴² Del Río had traveled to the site at the request of the Spanish Crown in order to investigate rumors of a mysterious ancient stone city and to collect material for the Royal Cabinet of Natural History in Madrid.⁴³ The Guatemalan artist Ricardo Almendáriz accompanied del Río, and he made numerous drawings on site (fig. 0.6). According to the Mayanist George Stuart, del Río's illustrated report was the first substantial

⁴⁰ Keber, "Humboldt and Aztec Art," 293. For example, Brantz Mayer's 1844 book includes a discussion and illustrations of the three works. See Brantz Mayer, *Mexico as It Was and as It Is* (New-York: J. Winchester, 1844).

⁴¹ R. Tripp Evans, 10.

⁴² Antonio del Río, *Description of the Ruins of an Ancient City: discovered near Palenque, in the Kingdom of Guatemala ...*, trans. Paul Felix Cabrera (London: H. Berthoud, and Suttaby, Evance, and Fox: 1822).

⁴³ Coe, *Breaking the Maya Code*, 73-74.

Mesoamerican archaeological report created, and the 1822 English translation was the first published description of Palenque.⁴⁴

Guillermo Dupaix's 1834 publication, *Antiquités mexicaines*, also described Palenque as well as the site of Mitla in Oaxaca.⁴⁵ Dupaix's work was the most extensive study of Mesoamerican monuments to date and included numerous illustrations created by José Luciano Castañeda, a professor of architecture and drawing in Mexico City. Regarding the origins of the antiquities, Dupaix proposed that citizens of Atlantis had built the sites described in his book. Despite this far-fetched theory, Dupaix's work, along with del Río's earlier report, generated intense interest in Palenque and inspired John Lloyd Stephens and Frederick Catherwood to visit the site in 1840.⁴⁶

Edward King, Lord Kingsborough, a wealthy Irish aristocrat, advanced Mesoamerican scholarship by financing, compiling, and editing the nine-volume *Antiquities of Mexico*, which he published in London between 1830 and 1848.⁴⁷ This work contained facsimiles of almost all known Mesoamerican manuscripts, along

⁴⁴ George Stuart, "Almendáriz, Ricardo," in Arthur Dunkelman, ed., *The Jay I. Kislak Collection at the Library of Congress* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 2007), 156.

⁴⁵ Guillermo Dupaix, *Antiquités mexicaines: Relation des trois expéditions du capitaine Dupaix, ordonnées en 1805, 1806, et 1807, pour la recherche des antiquités du pays, notamment celles de Mitla et de Palenque; Accompagnée des dessins de Castaneda ...* (Paris: J. Didot, 1834).

⁴⁶ Stephens discusses both early explorers of Palenque in chapter XXXIII of his 1841 work. See John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travels in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan*, 2 vol. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1841), I: 408-411.

⁴⁷ The nine volumes cost Kingsborough about forty thousand pounds to produce, which led to his eventual bankruptcy and death in a debtor's prison. See, Edward King, Lord Kingborough, *Antiquities of Mexico* (London: R. Havell, 1830-1848). The biographical information on Kingborough here derives from Sylvia D. Whitmore, "Lord Kingsborough and his Contribution to Ancient Mesoamerican Scholarship: The *Antiquities of Mexico*," *The Pari Journal* 9, no. 4 (Spring 2009): 8-16.

with copies of drawings from Dupaix's *Antiquités mexicaines* and commentaries by Kingsborough (fig. 0.7).⁴⁸ The *Antiquities of Mexico* was an important resource for those who could afford the expensive volumes, as they featured material from private collections that were largely inaccessible, such as the Vatican Library and the royal libraries of Berlin, Dresden, and Paris.⁴⁹ Like Dupaix, Kingsborough speculated on the origins of the ancient Mesoamericans, proposing that the indigenous people were direct descendants of the Lost Tribes of Israel.⁵⁰

Jean-Frédéric Waldeck published his work, *Voyage pittoresque et archéologique dans la province d'Yucatan pendant les années 1834 et 1836*, in Paris in 1838.⁵¹ Waldeck received financial support for his expedition from Kingsborough and, like his patron, Waldeck advanced fanciful theories about the ancient Mesoamericans' connections to Old World cultures, in this case to the Egyptians and the Phoenicians. As von Hagen and Evans have observed, many of Waldeck's

⁴⁸ Kingsborough hired the Italian artist Agostino Aglio to make watercolor copies of all known ancient Mesoamerican codices in the libraries of Europe.

⁴⁹ Although rare, several individuals in the nineteenth-century United States had access to Kingsborough's work, including John Lloyd Stephens, William H. Prescott, and George Martin Ottinger. For Stephens and Catherwood, see Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America*, II:453. For Prescott, see William H. Prescott to Henri Ternaux-Compans, July 15, 1839, *The Correspondence of William Hickling Prescott, 1833-1847*, ed. Wolcott, Roger (New York: Da Capo Press, 1970), 80. For Ottinger, see chapter three, note fifty-seven in this dissertation. In addition to these copies in private collections, by 1853 a copy was held in the Astor Library in New York City. See J. J. Ampere, "M. Ampere in New York," *Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature, Science and Art* (June 1853): 266.

⁵⁰ See Kingsborough's essay entitled "Arguments to show that the Jews in early ages colonized America" in volume six of the *Antiquities of Mexico*.

⁵¹ Jean-Frédéric Waldeck, *Voyage pittoresque et archéologique dans la province d'Yucatan pendant les années 1834 et 1836* (Paris: Bellizard Dufour et cie., 1838). For a discussion of Waldeck's long and colorful career, see chapter 4 in Robert L. Brunhouse, *In Search of the Maya: The First Archaeologists* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1973).

illustrations of Maya structures resemble Egyptian antiquities.⁵² For example, in his image of the Pyramid of the Magician at Uxmal, which he called the *Pyramide de Kingsborough*, Waldeck renders the elliptical structure as a four-sided building with sharp corners in the manner of Egyptian pyramids (figs. 0.8, 0.9). In spite of his tendency to “Egyptianize” the Mesoamerican monuments, Waldeck’s publication drew attention to Mesoamerican antiquity and encouraged later travelers.⁵³

John Lloyd Stephens’ two books on Mesoamerica, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan* (1841) and *Incidents of Travel in Yucatan* (1843), as well as Frederick Catherwood’s *Views of Ancient Monuments in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan* (1844), inspired many later artists and were arguably the most influential nineteenth-century works on Mesomerica published in the United States.⁵⁴ These works, which I examine in chapter one, described and pictured sites and objects found in the Maya region of Mesoamerica and brought Mesoamerican antiquity to the forefront of the public imagination.

Another influential text, William H. Prescott’s *History of the Conquest of Mexico* (1843), also popularized ancient Mesoamerica, especially the histories of the

⁵² Victor von Hagen, *Frederick Catherwood, Architect* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950) 54, and Evans, *Romancing the Maya*, 41-42. Many early readers viewed Waldeck’s text with suspicion. In a letter to Fanny Calderón de la Barca, William H. Prescott noted, “I really am afraid to rely on them [Waldeck’s illustrations and descriptions]: he talks so big, and so dogmatically, and so I don’t know how, that I have a *soupçon* he is a good deal of a charlatan.” William H. Prescott to Fanny Calderón de la Barca, December 5, 1840, *Correspondence of William Hickling Prescott*, ed. Wolcott, 186-187.

⁵³ John Lloyd Stephens and Frederick Catherwood carried a copy of Waldeck’s *Voyage pittoresque* on their first Mesoamerican expedition in 1839-1840, and Stephens discusses Waldeck’s observations in his 1841 publication. See, John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Yucatan*, 2 vol. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1843), I: 297; and Stephens, *Incidents of Travels in Central America*, I: 409, 413, 470, 476, 525, 538.

⁵⁴ Frederick Catherwood, *Views of Ancient Monuments in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan* (New York: Bartlett and Welford, 1844).

Aztecs and of the Spanish Conquest. While Prescott's best-selling work was not illustrated, it contained vivid descriptions of ancient monuments in Central Mexico, including the Templo Mayor, Montezuma's Palace, and the Calendar Stone in Tenochtitlán, the Pyramids of the Sun and Moon in Teotihuacan, the Pyramid at Cholula, and, in an appendix, the Maya sites of Palenque and Uxmal.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, two individuals generated renewed interest in Mesoamerican antiquity, the U.S. American antiquarian Augustus Le Plongeon and the French explorer Désiré Charnay. Le Plongeon spent twelve years in Yucatán with his wife, Alice, where the couple photographed, surveyed, and excavated Maya ruins.⁵⁵ In a prolific series of articles and books that he began publishing in the late 1870s, Le Plongeon revealed his speculative ideas on the genesis and diffusion of the ancient Maya civilization.⁵⁶ According to Le Plongeon, the Maya region was the cradle of all world civilizations, and the ancient Maya had migrated from Mesoamerica and westward across the Pacific, to East Asia, India, Mesopotamia, and finally, Egypt.

Inspired by the travels of Stephens and Catherwood, Charnay undertook four expeditions to Mexico and Central America between 1857 and 1886.⁵⁷ Charnay's travels were regularly covered in newspaper and magazines in the United States, and

⁵⁵ For a study of the Le Plongeon family, see Lawrence Gustave Desmond and Phyllis Mauch Messenger, *A Dream of Maya: Augustus and Alice Le Plongeon in Nineteenth-Century Yucatan* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988). See also Brunhouse, *In Search of the Maya*, 137-149, and Evans, *Romancing the Maya*, 126-152.

⁵⁶ For a complete list of Augustus Le Plongeon's publications, see Desmond and Messenger, *A Dream of Maya*, 138-139.

⁵⁷ For an examination of Charnay's career, see Keith F. Davis, *Désiré Charnay: Expeditionary Photographer* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1981).

the explorer published a series of books describing his expeditions.⁵⁸ Charnay became one of the first explorers to use photography to document Mesoamerican sites and monuments, and he included forty-nine plates of architecture and sculpture from Mitla, Chichén Itzá, Palenque, and Uxmal in his 1863 work, *Cités et ruines américaines* (fig. 0.10).⁵⁹ Composed of individually printed plates, Charnay's photographic album proved prohibitively expensive. In 1887 he produced an affordable volume illustrated with engravings and published in the United States as *The Ancient Cities of the New World: Being Voyages and Explorations in Mexico and Central America from 1857-1882*.⁶⁰ In this book, Charnay divulged his theory that all Mesoamerican civilizations had derived from the Toltecs, a Mesoamerican culture that, he believed, had originated in Asia and had arrived in North America in about 1000 C.E. via the Bering Strait. As proof of his far-fetched theory, Charnay illustrated a temple from Palenque next to a structure from Japan in order to demonstrate the connection between Maya and Japanese traditions (fig. 0.11).⁶¹

⁵⁸ For a complete bibliography of Charnay's works, see *Ibid.*, 201-203. Charnay published a twelve-part series describing his travels in Mexico in the *North American Review* in the 1880s. See Désiré Charnay, "Ruined Cities of Central America," *North American Review* (August 1880-December 1880; January, February, May, June, October 1881; April, July 1882).

⁵⁹ Désiré Charnay, *Cités et ruines américaines* (Paris: Gide, 1863).

⁶⁰ Désiré Charnay, *The Ancient Cities of the New World: Being Voyages and Explorations in Mexico and Central America from 1857-1882*, trans. J. Gonino and Helen S. Conant (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1887). Charnay first published this work in France as *Les Anciennes villes du Nouveau monde. Voyages d'explorations au Mexique et dan l'Amérique centrale par Desire Charnay, 1857-1882* (Paris: Hachette, 1885). To illustrate the U.S. edition of this work, Charnay used engravings made from his photographs as well as engravings by Catherwood that previously appeared in John Lloyd Stephens' two works on Mesoamerica.

⁶¹ Evans, *Romancing the Maya*, 121.

Overview of the Project

The chapters that follow proceed chronologically, although my intention is not to create a linear narrative, nor do I intend the project to provide a comprehensive coverage of the subject. Instead, I use a case study method in which each chapter examines representations of Mesoamerican antiquity created by a single artist or a related group of artists. These images not only illuminate the concerns of the individual artist working at a specific time and place, they also illustrate the changing role Mesoamerican antiquity played in the nineteenth-century United States. Throughout the project I employ an interdisciplinary studies approach, combining standard art-historical methods of formal and iconographic analyses with cultural history. In each chapter I contextualize works of art by considering the historical and cultural issues surrounding Mesoamerican antiquity at the time the works were made. In addition, I consider what, if anything, the artists themselves had to say about ancient Mesoamerica.

The first chapter of my dissertation examines representations of Maya sites and antiquities created by the New York-based panoramist Frederick Catherwood. After traveling to Yucatán, Chiapas, and Central American between 1839 and 1842 with the writer John Lloyd Stephens, Catherwood produced illustrations for Stephens' two books, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan* and *Incidents of Travel in Yucatan*, as well as for his own work, *Views of Ancient Monuments in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan*. These publications introduced Mesoamerican antiquity into the U.S. visual consciousness and constructed an image of a North American tradition with ancient roots like those

Europeans claimed in Greece and Egypt. Through a close reading of Catherwood's images, which include panoramic views, site plans, maps, and details of antiquities, I explore how the artist presented the Mesoamerican past for U.S. consumption.

During the 1840s, in the midst of the U.S.-Mexican War and in the wake of the publication of William H. Prescott's enormously popular book, *History of the Conquest of Mexico*, a number of artists produced history paintings depicting scenes of the Conquest of Mexico. Chapter two focuses on a group of these works produced by two of the best-known history painters in the United States in the mid nineteenth century, Peter F. Rothenmel and Emanuel Leutze. Created at a time when many in the United States considered the nation the culmination of Western civilization, with expansion across North America the final step in the unfolding of that historic destiny, these images depicted the Mesoamerican past as a prologue to the U.S. American present in order to justify the nation's expansionist goals. These scenes, however, did not always function merely as unreflective validations of the nation's present and future goals, and instead they often resonate with the political, social, and religious concerns that accompanied westward expansion in the mid nineteenth century.

The third chapter of my project examines a series of paintings produced by the Utah-based artist George Martin Ottinger. A member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Ottinger completed dozens of canvases illustrating Mesoamerican scenes after settling in Salt Lake City in 1861. Framing Ottinger's work within the discourse of nineteenth-century Mormon theology, which held that ancient Mesoamericans were related to the church's Israelite ancestors, I explore

how Ottinger's paintings encoded the beliefs, values, and attitudes of contemporary Mormons and forged a tradition of Mormon visual culture that continues today.

The fourth chapter of my dissertation centers on two canvases created by George de Forest Brush in the 1880s, a decade in which interest in Mesoamerican increased among the general U.S. American public. At this time the character of ancient Mesoamerican cultures came under debate, with the evolutionist views of social scientists replacing those of earlier amateur archaeologists and romantic historians. In this chapter I examine Brush's depictions of ancient Mesoamerican artists in *An Aztec Sculptor* (1887) and *The Sculptor and the King* (1888). Analyzing these works in light of Brush's search for a truly North American artistic heritage, I explore how Mesoamerican antiquity provided Brush with a "usable past," a distinctly New World tradition with ancient roots like those contemporary Europeans located in ancient Greece and Rome. However, Brush's representations of Mesoamerican artists, which at first seem to uphold ancient Mesoamerican artistry, are ultimately ambivalent and relegate them to a lower stage of artistic evolution.

Chapter One

“Entering abruptly upon new ground”: Frederick Catherwood and the Introduction of Mesoamerican Antiquity into U.S. Visual Culture

The mass of the rural population consists of a nation of aborigines ... Unfortunately for the antiquarian they are totally without historic traditions, nor is their curiosity excited by the presence of the monuments amongst which they live, to more than an indistinct feeling of religious romance and superstitious dread.

– Frederick Catherwood, *Views of Ancient Monuments of Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan* (1844)¹

In all our journey through this country there were no associations. Day after day we rode into places unknown beyond the boundaries of Yucatan, with no history attached to them, and touching no chord of feeling.

– John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Yucatan* (1843)²

Between 1839 and 1842 the artist Frederick Catherwood accompanied the author John Lloyd Stephens on two arduous journeys through the Maya region of Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatán.³ Accounts of these expeditions, written by Stephens and illustrated with engravings by Catherwood, became instant best sellers in the United States. *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan* appeared in May of 1841, and by the fall of that year it had sold over twenty thousand copies.⁴ In his review in *Graham's Magazine*, Edgar Allen Poe called the

¹ Catherwood, *Views of Ancient Monuments*, n.p. [introduction].

² Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Yucatan*, II:163.

³ While I use the term “Maya” in this chapter to describe the ancient culture that built the Mesoamerican ruins explored by Stephens and Catherwood, the two travelers did not use the term to describe the builders of the sites. As I explain in the introduction to this dissertation, the designation was not regularly used to describe the ancient Maya until after 1876. For more information on this subject, see the introduction to this dissertation, pages 11-12.

⁴ Victor von Hagen, *Maya Explorer: Johns Lloyd Stephens and the Lost Cities of Central America*

text “a magnificent one – perhaps the most interesting book of travel ever published.”⁵ Stephens authored a second book, *Incidents of Travel in Yucatan*, in 1843, and it received a similarly enthusiastic reception. “Consider these superb volumes on the ruins of Yucatan,” wrote a reviewer in the *United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, “within a month who has not devoured them at ease in the quiet possession of his or a borrowed copy?”⁶ In addition to the two works written by Stephens, in 1844 Catherwood produced his own publication, an annotated volume of twenty-five color lithographs of Mesoamerican sites and antiquities entitled, *Views of Ancient Monuments of Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan*.⁷ With these works, Stephens and Catherwood introduced ancient Mesoamerica to the

and Yucatan (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1947), 197.

⁵ Edgar Allen Poe, “Review of New Books,” *Graham’s Magazine* (August 1841), 91.

⁶ “The Yucatan Ruins,” *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* 12, no. 59 (May 1843): 491. Stephens’ two books on Mesoamerica were issued in inexpensive editions that were aimed at middle class readers, and thus they were more easily accessible than the costly limited edition publications on Mesoamerican antiquities produced by Kingsborough, Dupaix, and Waldeck. In fact, reviewers often commented on the affordability of Stephens’ books. For example, one writer noted that “they are afforded for a sum which can be expended for the purposes of entertainment and instruction, by the great majority of intelligent people, without inconvenience.” “Stephens’s New York: Central America,” *The New World* (June 26, 1841): 417.

⁷ Catherwood published his work in both London and New York in 1844. As von Hagen relates, Catherwood originally envisioned the publication, which was to be titled *American Antiquities*, as a much more ambitious project. Modeled on Audobon’s *Birds of America*, it was to be an elephant folio edition with over one hundred color illustrations and to include essays by Alexander von Humboldt, William H. Prescott, and Albert Gallatin. Catherwood worked with Stephens on the proposed project, yet the pair failed to find enough subscribers at \$100 each to finance the publication. Eventually Catherwood decided to produce a much more modest work himself, of which he issued only 300 editions. Consequently, Catherwood’s publication reached a much smaller audience than Stephens’ two works on Mesoamerica. See von Hagen, *Maya Explorer*, 259-261.

U.S. American public and launched an “archaeological epidemic” in the United States.⁸

Several individuals have critically examined Stephens’ travel narratives, which scholars today consider classics of the genre. Hinsley maintains that Stephens’ texts presented Mesoamerican antiquity as a “New World Classical” so that the United States could claim it as part of its North American cultural inheritance.⁹ This cultural claim staking, he argues, was part of a larger effort by the United States to exert economic and political control over the continent.¹⁰ Evans contends that Stephens aimed to dismantle prior European studies of Mesoamerican ruins that proposed their creators had originated in the Old World so that the United States could remove the antiquities and absorb Mesoamerica’s rich cultural heritage.¹¹ Jennifer L. Roberts also analyzes Stephens’ “nineteenth-century imperialist and positivist rhetoric,” arguing that his narrative presents the indigenous people of Yucatán “as indifferent to their own history” in order to legitimize removal

⁸ Samuel Foster Haven, *Address from the Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society for 22 October 1877* (Worcester, MA: American Antiquarian Society, 1877), 8, quoted in Manthorne, *Tropical Renaissance*, 92.

⁹ Curtis M. Hinsley, “In Search of the New World Classical,” 105.

¹⁰ Curtis Hinsley, “Hemispheric Hegemony in Early American Anthropology, 1841-1851: Reflections on John Lloyd Stephens and Lewis Henry Morgan,” *Proceeding of the American Ethnological Society* (1985): 28-40. For an examination of nineteenth-century travel writing and the connection between cultural inquiry and economic and political aims, see Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*.

¹¹ Evans, *Romancing the Maya*, 45. Evans argues that Stephens intended to counter the arguments made by earlier European explorers (such as Del Río, Waldeck, and Dupaix) that the creators of the Mesoamerican monuments originated in the Old World or in Asia. For information on these three explorers, see the introduction to this dissertation.

of antiquities from the region as part of a larger effort to assimilate Mesoamerican history into the United States' historical narrative.¹²

In contrast to Stephens' text, Catherwood's illustrations have received little critical attention, especially by art historians.¹³ While many Mesoamericanists and archaeological historians have discussed Catherwood's images, most have characterized them as highly accurate images of antiquities rather than as subjective representations of Mesoamerica.¹⁴ In this chapter I examine Catherwood's published illustrations, which were the first widely available images of Mesoamerican sites and monuments in the United States. These representations not only introduced Mesoamerican antiquities into the U.S. visual consciousness, they worked in tandem with Stephens' text to *produce* Mesoamerica for nineteenth-century viewers. What information did Catherwood's illustrations convey? How, if at all, did they operate

¹² Jennifer L. Roberts, "Landscapes of Indifference: Robert Smithson and John Lloyd Stephens in Yucatan" *The Art Bulletin* (September 2000): 2-4. Victor von Hagen also wrote extensively on Stephens, yet his 1947 biography of the writer is largely hagiographic and does not examine Stephens with the same degree of acuity as more recent scholarship. See von Hagen, *Maya Explorer*.

¹³ Hinsley does not examine Catherwood's images, and while Roberts and Evans discuss Catherwood's work, both focus primarily on Stephens' texts. A few scholars of nineteenth-century U.S. American art, including Katherine Manthorne and Angela Miller, have addressed Catherwood's images, yet none has done so in depth. This chapter is nevertheless indebted to the work of Hinsley, Roberts, Evans, Manthorne, and Miller. See Manthorne, *Tropical Renaissance*, 96-98; and Angela Miller, "'The Soil of an Unknown America': New World Lost Empires and the Debate Over Cultural Origins," *American Art* 8, no. 3-4 (Summer/Fall 1994): 8-27.

¹⁴ Since his illustrations were made before many sites and objects deteriorated due to the passage of time or because of human actions, Catherwood's images have served as invaluable documents for later Mesoamericanists. As the Mayanist Sylvanus Morley states, in Catherwood's work, "details are shown ... with such clarity and precision that they have been of great assistance ... and in some cases they record details of carving that have subsequently become obscured." Sylvanus Morley, *The Ancient Maya* 3rd ed. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1956), 460. See also von Hagen, *Frederick Catherwood*, 62-63; Coe, *Breaking the Maya Code*, 93-94; Bernal, *History of Mesoamerican Archaeology*, 121-122; Esther Pasztory, *Pre-Columbian Art* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 11-12; and Mary Ellen Miller, *Maya Art and Architecture* (New York and London: Thames and Hudson, 1999), 12-13.

with Stephens' rhetoric to claim the antiquities for the United States? What impact did the artist's images have on U.S. American visual culture? Through an examination of Catherwood's Mesoamerican works, which include panoramic views, plans, maps, and details of sites and monuments, I explore how the artist presented Mesoamerican antiquities for those in the United States. As this chapter details, Catherwood's illustrations showed viewers that Mesoamerican ruins bore favorable comparison with those from the Old World. Yet at the same time, the artist's images highlighted the unique characteristics of the ancient artworks, and in this way he underscored their autochthonous origin. By paralleling the achievement of Old World monuments, Mesoamerican antiquities conferred on North America a distinctive identity and endowed it with an august prehistory, making the continent no longer the epigone of Old World sophistication. Lastly, by suggesting that this heritage lacked modern caretakers, Catherwood's images conveyed the idea that it was open to appropriation by those in the United States.

Frederick Catherwood: Early Life and Travels

Born in Hoxton, England in 1799, Catherwood trained as an architect under Michael Meredith, from whom he learned the elements of draftsmanship, architecture, and surveying.¹⁵ After completing his training in 1820, Catherwood studied at the Royal Academy of Art, where he attended lectures given by John Soane. According to Catherwood's biographer, Victor von Hagen, Soane introduced the artist to the work of Giovanni Battista Piranesi, which inspired Catherwood to

¹⁵ Catherwood served an apprenticeship under Meredith from 1815 to 1820. Von Hagen, *Frederick Catherwood*, 10-12. Unless otherwise noted, the biographical information on Catherwood presented in this chapter derives from this source as well as von Hagen, *Maya Explorer*.

travel to Rome in 1822 to sketch and measure classical architecture. After making studies and paintings of ruins in Italy, he traveled to Greece in 1823 and Egypt in 1824.¹⁶ In Egypt, Catherwood met Robert Hay, who later hired him to serve as a draftsman on his ambitious archaeological expedition that aimed to investigate, survey, and draw every ancient site along the Nile.¹⁷ Catherwood remained with Hay's team for several years, during which he honed his skills as an expeditionary artist, surveying sites and buildings, creating topographical views, and completing detailed drawings of ruins at Thebes, Hierakonpolis, and Edfu, among other sites (fig. 1.1).¹⁸ After leaving Egypt in 1833, Catherwood journeyed through the Levant, where he created a map of Jerusalem (fig. 1.2) and sketched and surveyed monuments, including the Dome of the Rock and the ruins of Baalbec and Petra.

In 1834, Catherwood returned to London, where he found employment with Robert Burford, the owner of a panorama rotunda in Leicester Square. Catherwood worked with Burford to create several panoramas based on his sketches, including *View of the City of Thebes with the Temple of Karnak*, *Jerusalem*, and, *View of the Ruins of Baalbec*.¹⁹ While delivering a lecture at the panorama, Catherwood met

¹⁶ In Sicily, Catherwood painted *Mt. Etna from the Ruins of Tauramina*, which he exhibited at the National Academy of Design in 1839. According to von Hagen, Thomas Cole praised the painting and it inspired him to paint a similar scene, *Mount Aetna from Taormina*, when he visited Sicily in 1844. See von Hagen, *Frederick Catherwood*, 21-22.

¹⁷ Hay employed several artists and scholars to assist him on his expedition, which took place from 1824 to 1828 and from 1829 to 1834. On his travels, Hay amassed an invaluable collection of drawings and plans of Nilotic monuments, which are today kept in forty-nine volumes in the British Museum, along with his letters. Ann Rosalie David, *The Experience of Ancient Egypt* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2000), 98.

¹⁸ For additional images of Egypt created by Catherwood, see Peter A. Clayton, *The Rediscovery of Ancient Egypt: Artists and Travelers in the 19th Century* (New York: Portland House, 1990), 169-171.

¹⁹ For Catherwood and the panorama of Jerusalem, see "Burford's Panorama of Jerusalem," *The Museum of Foreign Literature, Science, and Art* (August 1835): 200.

John Lloyd Stephens, a young lawyer from the United States who had recently completed travels through Europe, Anatolia, the Levant, and Egypt, which he would later describe in two travelogues.²⁰

Catherwood immigrated to the United States in 1836 and settled in New York, where he established a partnership with the architect Frederick Diaper.²¹ Two years later he opened a panorama rotunda at the corner of Prince and Mercer Streets, near George Catlin's Indian Gallery and an exhibition of Audobon's *Birds of America*.²² At his panorama, Catherwood displayed views of Jerusalem, Thebes, and Niagara Falls, which he had purchased from Burford.²³ In New York, Catherwood renewed his acquaintanceship with Stephens, and the two indulged their mutual interest in antiquities by perusing publications on the subject in the well-stocked

²⁰ Stephens graduated from Columbia College in 1822 and practiced law in New York for twelve years before a health crisis led him to take up traveling in order to recuperate. For a biography of Stephens, see von Hagen, *Maya Explorer*. For Stephens' travels in Europe and the Near East, see John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Egypt, Arabia Petraea, and the Holy Land* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1837), and John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Greece, Turkey, Russia and Poland* (New York: Harper and Brothers 1838).

²¹ One of Catherwood's business cards from this period survives in the collection of the New-York Historical Society. It reads, "F. Catherwood, Architect, No. 4 Wall-Street, New York." See Frederick Catherwood, misc. mss. file, New-York Historical Society.

²² Von Hagen, *Frederick Catherwood*, 47-52. For information on Catherwood's New York panorama, see John Davis, *The Landscape of Belief* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 59-65. For the 1838 opening of Catherwood's panorama, see "The Panorama," *Parley's Magazine* (January 1, 1838): 95; "New Panorama," *The Knickerbocker* (June 1838): 571; and "The New Panorama," *The New-Yorker* (June 23, 1838): 222. See also Stephen Oettermann, *The Panorama: History of a Mass Medium*, trans. by Deborah Lucas Schneider (New York: Zone Books, 1997), 317-323. For Catlin's Indian Gallery, see Peter Matthiessen, ed., *North American Indians* (New York: Penguin Books, 1989), xv; and George Gurney and Therese Thau Heyman, eds., *George Catlin and His Indian Gallery* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian American Art Museum, 2002).

²³ The account book of Catherwood's panorama provides detailed information on the business. See Frederick Catherwood, Account Book November 1838 – October 1841, New-York Historical Society.

bookshop owned by John Russell Bartlett.²⁴ Bartlett claimed to have sparked Stephens' interest in Yucatán and Central America by showing him Waldeck's *Voyage pittoresque* as well as several other publications on Mesoamerica.²⁵ Stephens soon decided to mount an expedition to the region in order to gather material for another travelogue, and he asked Catherwood to accompany him. While Stephens had not traveled with an artist on his earlier voyages through Europe and the Near East, he likely decided to bring one on his expedition to Mesoamerica after seeing how images enhanced the prose descriptions in Waldeck's work. Moreover, most readers in the United States were unfamiliar with Mesoamerica, and of those who had heard accounts of the ruins in Mexico and Central America, many expressed skepticism at the idea that indigenous people could have built such spectacular monuments and cities.²⁶ Thus, Stephens must have concluded that

²⁴ Bartlett partnered with Charles Welford in 1837 to establish Bartlett and Welford, Antiquarian Booksellers. The firm also published several works, including the U.S. edition of Catherwood's *Views of Ancient Monuments in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan* (1844). Bartlett's interests and activities were far-reaching: he authored nineteen books; he formed the American Ethnological Society with Albert Gallatin in 1842; from 1850 to 1853 he undertook a commission by President Taylor to establish the boundary line between Mexico and the United States; and he later served as Secretary of State of Rhode Island. For more on Bartlett, see von Hagen, *Maya Explorer*, 70-72, and John Russell Bartlett, *Personal Narrative of Explorations and Incidents in Texas, New Mexico, California, Sonora, and Chihuahua* (New York: D. Appleton, 1854).

²⁵ John Russell Bartlett, Journal, 37-40 [no date], facsimile in the John Lloyd Stephens Collection, New-York Historical Society. Stephens' two works on Mesoamerica contain references to Waldeck as well as to Bernal Díaz del Castillo, Clavigero, Humboldt, Del Río, Kingsborough, and Dupaix. See the introduction of this dissertation for a discussion of the works by these authors.

²⁶ Stephens' earlier publications were sparsely illustrated. *Incidents of Travel in Egypt, Arabia Petraea, and the Holy Land* contains eighteen engravings, and his *Incidents of Travel in Greece, Turkey, Russia and Poland* has thirteen. In contrast, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan* has seventy-seven engravings and *Incidents of Travel in Yucatan* contains one hundred twenty.

At the time of Stephens and Catherwood's first expedition, many within the United States held that no indigenous groups had developed beyond the level of a tribal society. In his 1841 work, Stephens quotes William Robertson's well-known 1777 publication, *History of America*, in which Robertson traces the history of New Spain. Robertson states that the pyramid at Cholula was "a mound of earth, without any steps or facing of stone," and concludes, "there is not, in all the extent of

Catherwood's illustrations would be useful in conveying the character and extent of Mesoamerican antiquities in a way that written descriptions alone could not.²⁷ For his part, Catherwood agreed to join the expedition out of enthusiasm for archaeological research as well as to make sketches for a proposed panorama of a Mesoamerican scene.²⁸

Shedding Light on Mesoamerican Antiquities

Stephens and Catherwood completed two expeditions to Mesoamerica, the first from October 1839 to July 1840 and the second from October 1841 to June 1842.²⁹ On the first voyage the pair departed New York on the brig *Mary Ann* and arrived at the British settlement of Belize City on the Bay of Honduras.³⁰ Stephens

that vast empire, a single monument or vestige of any building more ancient than the conquest." See Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America*, I: 97. The idea that the ancient Mesoamericans were at best semi-civilized persisted well into the nineteenth century and was advanced most notably by the ethnologists Albert Gallatin and Lewis Henry Morgan. See Albert Gallatin, "Notes on the Semi-Civilized Nations of Mexico, Yucatan, and Central America," *Transactions of the American Ethnological Society* I (1845): 1-352; Bruce G. Trigger, *A History of Archaeological Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 120; and Keen, *The Aztec Image*, 349-350.

²⁷ In 1842 one writer noted that the Mesoamerican monuments were so strikingly new that written descriptions alone could not express their unique characteristics. He states, "no language can, without the aid of engravings, or other copies, convey adequate and correct ideas of these ruins." Review of *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan*, by John L. Stephens, *Southern Quarterly Review*, January 1842, 246.

²⁸ In his journal, Bartlett states, "Mr. Catherwood had great enthusiasm in anything pertaining to architecture, and was an ardent lover of the picturesque and of archaeological researches. Mr. Stephens made him a favorable offer to accompany him to Central America, which offer he at once accepted." Bartlett, Journal, 39 [no date]. The contract between Stephens and Catherwood survives in the John Lloyd Stephens Papers, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

²⁹ They departed on their first trip on October 3, 1839 and returned on July 31, 1840. Their second trip took place from October 9, 1841 to June 17, 1842.

³⁰ Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America*, I: 9. The British settlement in the region originated in 1638, when settlers arrived in the area near the Belize River. They were attracted by region's natural resources, especially mahogany and logwood, the latter of which was used in the production of a dye needed by the woolen industry in England. In 1836, after the emancipation of Central America from Spanish rule, the British claimed the right to administer the region around Belize City, which was known as the settlement of Belize until 1862, when the British declared it a

and Catherwood then traveled roughly three thousand miles through the present-day countries of Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, and Mexico, where they visited and surveyed the ruins of Copán, Quiriguá, Iximché, Utatlán, Huehuetenango, Toniná, Palenque, and Uxmal. At Uxmal, Catherwood contracted a severe case of malaria, which forced the travelers to cut short their expedition and return to the United States. After Catherwood recovered, they returned to the Yucatán Peninsula the following year to complete their trip. Over the course of roughly eight months they visited an astonishing forty-four sites, including Mayapán, Uxmal, Nohpat, Kabah, Sayil, Sabacche Labná, Kewik, Nohcacab, Xlapak, Dzibilnocac, Chichén Itzá, Tulum, Izamal, and Aké.³¹

On their initial expedition, Stephens and Catherwood first encountered ancient ruins at Copán, a Maya site set in the lush Copán Valley at the southeastern edge of Mesoamerica.³² Entering the deserted ceremonial center, which was enveloped in tropical foliage and populated solely by howler monkeys, the travelers were amazed at what they discovered: “architecture, sculpture, and painting, all the arts which embellish life” had once flourished at the site.³³ Indeed, Copán’s

British colony and officially named it British Honduras. For the history of Belize, see Peter A.B. Thomson, *Belize, A Concise History* (Oxford: MacMillan Caribbean, 2005).

³¹ Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Yucatan*, II: 444.

³² Stephens and Catherwood were not the first non-indigenous visitors to the site, as an Irishman who used the *nom de guerre* Juan Galindo explored Copán in 1834. Galindo presented his description of the site, which was not illustrated, to the Royal Geographical Society of London in 1835. In the United States, the American Antiquarian Society published Galindo’s description of Copán. See Juan Galindo, “The Ruins of Copán in Central America,” in *Archaeologia Americana: Transactions and Collections of the American Antiquarian Society* vol. 2 (Worcester: American Antiquarian Society, 1835), 543-550. For details of Galindo’s life, see Brunhouse, *In Search of the Maya*, 31-49; and Elizabeth Carmichael, *The British and the Maya* (London: Shenvall Press, 1973), 14-15. For Stephens’ extensive account of Copán, see *Incidents of Travel in Central America*, I: 96-160.

³³ *Ibid.*, I: 105.

impressive monuments, Stephens recounted, “put at rest at once and forever, in our minds, all uncertainty in regard to the character of American antiquities.”³⁴

In a routine Stephens and Catherwood would follow at each of the archaeological sites they explored, they began their work at Copán by directing indigenous laborers to clear the site of overgrown foliage in order to “lay it open to the rays of the sun.”³⁵ Catherwood then measured the area using a surveyor’s theodolite, and from his calculations he created a plan of the ruins (fig. 1.3). The explorers uncovered the site’s three main courts, as well as the bases of several pyramidal structures. At the northern end, in the Great Plaza, Stephens and Catherwood discovered many large “idols,” or figural stelae, which depict the former rulers of Copán.³⁶ Catherwood marked the location of each stela and several other sculptures found at the site on his plan, and in this way readers could use the plan with Stephens’ descriptions to imaginatively tour the site from the comfort of their homes in the United States.

With the ruins cleared and surveyed, Catherwood next set about drawing the stelae and other monuments located throughout the site (fig. 1.4). At first, he

³⁴ Ibid., I: 102.

³⁵ Ibid., I:118. As Roberts notes, Stephens often used light as a metaphor for historical knowledge. This knowledge, Stephens implies, was not available locally, but had to be brought about by the modern Euro-American traveler. See Roberts, “Landscapes of Indifference,” 545.

³⁶ Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America*, I:102. In Classic Maya society, the stela was an important medium through which the ruler elite conveyed historical information. Stelae usually depict portraits of rulers, which are accompanied by hieroglyphic texts recording the rulers’ identity and actions.

struggled to depict the deeply carved, visually dense sculptures.³⁷ According to Stephens, the “designs were very complicated, and so different from anything Mr. Catherwood had ever seen before as to be perfectly unintelligible. The cutting was in very high relief and required a strong body of light to bring up the figures.”³⁸ Much to his frustration, the artist found “the subjects so entirely new” that his initial drawings “failed to satisfy.”³⁹ Soon, however, Catherwood “mastered the difficulty” of capturing the intricate details of the monuments by employing a camera lucida, an optical device used as a drawing aid that he learned to use on his travels in Egypt.⁴⁰

A comparison of Catherwood’s steel engravings with nineteenth-century photographs of the same monuments illustrates his achievement in representing the elaborately carved artworks (fig. 1.5).⁴¹ The artist’s image of Stela H at Copán is a meticulous rendering of the monument, and it captures the ornate details of the regalia worn by the figure as well as the various textures of the carved stela’s surface. In general, Catherwood’s Mesoamerican images are marked by an all-over clarity and lack of detail-obscuring shadows, the latter of which appear to the naked

³⁷ Monuments at Copán are deeply carved due to the nature of the locally available stone, a volcanic tuff, which is easy to carve yet weather resistant. Miller, *The Art of Mesoamerica*, 134.

³⁸ Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America*, I:117-118.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, I:120.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, I:121. According to von Hagen, Catherwood used a camera lucida while in Egypt. See von Hagen, *Frederick Catherwood*, 32. Catherwood used the camera lucida to create drawings on both expeditions in Mesoamerica. On the second trip, however, he also brought a daguerrotype to create images. None of Catherwood’s daguerrotypes are known to survive today, and they were likely lost during the devastating fire at Catherwood’s panorama that occurred on the night of July 29, 1842. See Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Yucatan*, I: 100-105, 175; and “Destruction of the Rotunda by Fire,” *New York Herald*, July 30, 1842.

⁴¹ The British explorer Alfred Maudslay, who visited the site in 1885-1886, made these photographs, which are some of the earliest of Copán. For information on Maudslay, see Ian Graham, *Alfred Maudslay and the Maya* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002).

eye and are also evident in nineteenth-century photographs of the same monuments. The artist's precise, visually legible style resulted from the use of the camera lucida, an apparatus that projects an image of an object the user wishes to draw through a prism and onto a piece of paper, allowing him to make a tracing-like copy.⁴² This device enabled Catherwood to break down complex images into small segments on lined paper, and then to carefully draw the details of the monument section by section, rather than as a whole. Stephens relates that Catherwood used the instrument to create drawings throughout their expeditions, noting, "Mr. Catherwood made the outline of all the drawings with the camera lucida, and divided his paper into sections, as to preserve the utmost accuracy of proportion." This working method resulted in "true copies of the originals" in terms of scale and complexity.⁴³

Using the camera lucida, Catherwood often drew artworks from several angles in order to document the overall appearance of individual monuments. The first volume of *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan*, for example, includes engravings of both the obverse and reverse of Stela H at Copán (figs. 1.6). Catherwood also made five images – of the four sides as well as the top – of Altar Q, a monument that depicts the dynastic history of the sixteen rulers of Copán (figs. 1.7, 1.8, 1.9). This method of presenting information about the antiquities reflects Catherwood's training as an architect as well as his experience with the Hay expedition in Egypt, as nineteenth-century expeditionary artists often

⁴² "Camera lucida," in Gerald W. R. Ward, ed., *The Grove Encyclopedia of Materials and Techniques in Art* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 75.

⁴³ Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America*, I: 137.

employed the approach, which derived from the conventions of architectural drawings.⁴⁴

In many of his Mesoamerican works, Catherwood combines his hyperclear style with a sense of romanticism, the latter he likely absorbed during his studies at the Royal Academy of Art in London.⁴⁵ His image of a moonlit ruined structure at Xampon, for instance, conveys a sense of the decline of an ancient, enigmatic culture (fig. 1.10). The impressive stone edifice has been abandoned and reduced to a crumbling ruin, overrun by trees and clinging vines and populated solely by wild dogs. In his depiction of the ballcourt at Chichen Itza (fig. 1.11), Catherwood sets the scene under a stormy sky, a dramatic bolt of lightning enlivening the desolate landscape. The artist's rendering of Stela C at Copán also expresses a romantic sensibility (fig. 1.12). Here, the figure's serene expression as well as the seeming permanence of the stone contrasts with its state of dilapidation. Catherwood included a color lithograph of the same scene in his 1844 solo publication, *Views of Ancient Monuments of Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan* (fig. 1.13). In the later version he demonstrates an even greater sense of romanticism by adding a dramatic bolt of lightning in the background, wind-blown foliage, tangled vines, and a leaping deer in the left foreground.

⁴⁴ Roger Balm, "Expeditionary Art: An Appraisal," *Geographical Review* 90:4 (October 2000): 592.

⁴⁵ Evans, *Romancing the Maya*, 50, 52; and Miller, "The Soil of an Unknown America," 22. When Catherwood studied at the Royal Academy in 1820, the lecturers included Henry Fuseli, J.M.W. Turner, and John Soane. See von Hagen, *Frederick Catherwood*, 10-11. As Roger Balm notes, many nineteenth-century expeditionary artists were strongly influenced by the Romantic movement, and expeditionary art of the period often blended "the aesthetic with the scientific." Balm, "Expeditionary Art," 591-592.

Catherwood made hundreds of watercolors and pen and ink drawings on his two expeditions with Stephens. He later used these original works to create the illustrations for his and Stephens' books. While the artist's images of Mesoamerican sites and monuments reached their largest audience as steel engravings in Stephens' two works and as color lithographs in his solo publication, he considered his original watercolors and pen and ink drawings not merely as illustrations, but as works of art in their own right.⁴⁶ Indeed, Catherwood exhibited nine watercolors of Mesoamerican scenes at the National Academy of Design in 1845, and he showed a "Portfolio of Central American Views" at the American Art-Union in 1847.⁴⁷

The Competition for Ruins

Embarking on the first expedition, Stephens emphasized that he and Catherwood were "entering abruptly upon new ground" by traveling through Mesoamerica to investigate "the field of American antiquities."⁴⁸ Yet both men were well aware of previous European expeditions to the region, including those by Waldeck, Del Río, and Dupaix.⁴⁹ More correctly, then, Stephens and Catherwood undertook the first U.S. expedition to explore Mesoamerican antiquities, a subject

⁴⁶ Manthorne, *Tropical Renaissance*, 96.

⁴⁷ Catherwood exhibited the following watercolors at the National Academy of Design: *Palace of Palenque, in the State of Chiapas*; *Ancient Arched Gateway in Yucatan*; *Uxmal in Yucatan*; *Well of Bolonchen, in Yucatan*; *Building in Uxmal, Yucatan, Erected by the Indians*; *Casa de las Monjas, Uxmal, in Yucatan*; *Ancient Pyramidal Structure at Copan, in Central America*; *Ancient Building at Palenque in the State of Chiapas*; *Fragment of an Ancient Building in Yucatan*. See Mary Bartlett Cowdrey, ed., *National Academy of Design Exhibition Record* (New York: New-York Historical Society, 1943), I:72. For the American Art-Union, see Manthorne, *Tropical Renaissance*, 96 and note 30, page 209. Many of Catherwood's original drawings and watercolors were destroyed in the fire at his panorama in New York that occurred in 1842.

⁴⁸ Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America*, I:96, 98.

⁴⁹ For a discussion of these individuals, see the introduction of this dissertation.

that had long been of interest to the British, French, and Spanish. In their scholarship on Stephens, both Hinsley and Evans underscore the strong nationalist undercurrent running through Stephens' texts, and each characterizes Stephens and Catherwood's voyages as a type of cultural enforcement of the Monroe Doctrine, an attempt to claim Mesoamerican antiquities for the United States before European nations could do so.⁵⁰ Indeed, returning from his first glimpse of the monuments at Copán, Stephens expressed his fear that a European explorer would acquire the site's antiquities:

Very soon their existence would become known and their value appreciated, and the friends of science and the arts in Europe would get possession of them. They belonged of right to us and, though we did not know how soon we might be kicked out ourselves, I resolved that ours they should remain.⁵¹

Later, in the closing pages of his 1841 work, Stephens also conveyed his hope that England and France,

will leave the field of American antiquities to us; that they will not deprive a destitute country of its only chance of contributing to the cause of science, but rather encourage it in the work of bringing together, from remote and almost inaccessible places, and retaining on its own soil, the architectural remains of its aboriginal inhabitants.⁵²

The "us" to whom Stephens refers in these two passages included not only himself and Catherwood but the United States as well. According to Stephens, the "American antiquities" were located on the United States' "own soil" – the continent

⁵⁰ Hinsley, "Hemispheric Hegemony," 39, and Evans, *Romancing the Maya*, 44.

⁵¹ Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America*, I:115-116.

⁵² *Ibid.*, II: 474.

of North America – and thus the country should have primary rights to them due to its status as the dominant power on the continent.⁵³

The United States government, in fact, partially sponsored Stephens and Catherwood's first expedition. Before departing New York, Stephens applied to President Martin Van Buren for the position of United States minister to the short-lived Federal Republic of Central America.⁵⁴ Stephens' diplomatic duties consisted primarily of procuring the ratification of a trade agreement with the Republic, through which the United States sought to extend its economic influence in the Western Hemisphere.⁵⁵ While he failed to secure the treaty, on several occasions Stephens used his diplomatic credentials to facilitate access to ruins.⁵⁶

While Stephens worried about France's interest in the Mesoamerican sites and monuments, U.S. Americans believed their country's chief competition for Mesoamerican antiquities – as well as for economic opportunities in Mexico and Central America – came from Britain. Despite feeling a natural affinity with Britain,

⁵³ In their publications, Stephens and Catherwood used the ambiguous term "American" to describe Mesoamerican antiquities, rather than the more correct "Central American" or "Mexican." In her research on the use of the term "America" in the antebellum United States, Esther Allen shows that the designation was applied to the United States, to North America as a whole, and to the entire Western Hemisphere. As the use of the phrase "our own soil" demonstrates, Stephens and Catherwood used the term "American" in the continentally inclusive sense of "North American." See Allen, "This is Not America," 72.

⁵⁴ The Federal Republic of Central America existed from 1823 to 1840 and consisted of Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica.

⁵⁵ For Stephens' diplomatic appointment, see Stephens, *Central America* I: 8; von Hagen, *Maya Explorer*, 79-81; and von Hagen, *Search for the Maya*, 111-112.

⁵⁶ For example, recalling his and Catherwood's arrival at the site of Palenque in the Mexican state of Chiapas, Stephens writes: "Respect for my official character, the special tenor of my passport ... gave me every facility. The prefect assumed that I was sent by my government expressly to explore ruins; and every person in Palenque ... was disposed to assist us." Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America*, II:305.

U.S. Americans built their quest for a national identity on a strong sense of rivalry with its former mother country.⁵⁷ British travelers had begun acquiring Mesoamerican antiquities in the 1820s, just after Mexico gained her independence from Spain. In fact, the first exhibition of pre-Hispanic antiquities anywhere in the world took place in London, where the Englishman William Bullock opened the exhibit “Ancient and Modern Mexico” in 1824.⁵⁸ The British also had a long-established settlement on the Bay of Honduras, which was within close proximity to the Maya sites in southern Mexico and Central America. In his texts, Stephens repeatedly reminds U.S. readers of the threat of the British acquiring the antiquities in southern Mesoamerica. Catherwood visually conveyed this threat by including the British settlement of Belize at the center of the large map of southern Mesoamerica that he created for *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan* (fig. 1.14).⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Robert W. Johannsen, *To the Halls of the Montezumas: The Mexican War in the American Imagination* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 305. As Johannsen notes, in the 1830s and 1840s U.S. Americans also believed that Britain was trying to contain the United States in its quest for territorial expansion. In 1839, for example, when Britain took military action against Mexico in order to force it to meet its debt obligations, rumors abounded that Britain was demanding California as payment.

⁵⁸ Locke, “Exhibitions and Collectors of Pre-Hispanic Mexican Artefacts in Britain,” 82-83. Bullock’s exhibition included sculptures, codices, early post-Conquest maps, and casts of monumental works, such as the Calendar Stone. Four celebrated sculptures from the exhibit – of Quetzalcoatl, Xiuhtlicue, Chalchiuhtlicue, and Xochipilli – later entered the collection of the British Museum. For a critical examination of Bullock’s exhibition, see Aguirre, *Informal Empire*, 1-33.

⁵⁹ In addition to the British settlement, the map’s depiction of the narrow bridge of land separating the Atlantic from the Pacific must also have called to mind the growing interest in the United States and Britain in constructing a canal across Central America. In the 1820s, the government of the Federal Republic of Central America had completed surveys for a proposed canal across Nicaragua, and they had consulted with the United States government in order to obtain engineering support and financing. Although the plan fell through due to political instability in the region, the United States never lost interest in building a canal across Central America, and in doing so before another European nation – especially Britain—beat them to it. For the U.S. interest in the Nicaraguan canal, see Lindley Miller Keasbey, *The Nicaragua Canal and the Monroe Doctrine* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1896), 141-148. For the British interest in the canal, see Caleb Phillips, R.N., “On the Communication

The competition between the United States and Britain for antiquities and ruined cities came to the fore when Stephens and Catherwood arrived in the British town of Belize City in 1839. News of the pair's intention to explore the region's archaeological sites quickly spread and prompted the British to launch a competing campaign that aimed to beat the "American" team to Palenque. At the time, Palenque was considered the crown jewel of the archaeological sites in the region, and it was the principal destination of Stephens and Catherwood's expedition.⁶⁰ Superintendent Alexander MacDonal recruited Patrick Walker, a colonial secretary, and John Caddy, an amateur artist and Lieutenant in the Royal Artillery, to make the long, hazardous overland journey to the ruined city. The Walker-Caddy expedition arrived at Palenque several months before Stephens and Catherwood, who reached the site at the end of their voyage. Before returning to Belize, Walker and Caddy spent two weeks surveying Palenque and creating a written description of it, and Caddy made a number of drawings.⁶¹

between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, by way of Lake Nicaragua," *Journal of the Royal Geographic Society of London* vol. iii (1833): 275-280.

⁶⁰ The local British press in Belize covered Stephens and Catherwood's arrival in the settlement and characterized the pair as "American," despite the fact that Catherwood was born in England. In a front-page article in the *Belize Advertiser*, for example, Catherwood was called "an American gentleman." Moreover, Frederick Chatfield, the British consul at Guatemala, described Catherwood as "Yankified." See *Belize Advertiser*, November 23, 1839, cited in David M. Pendergast, ed., *Palenque: The Walker-Caddy Expedition to the Ancient Maya City 1839-1840* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967), 33; and Frederick Chatfield to Alexander MacDonal, April 8, 1840, quoted in Pendergast, ed., *Palenque*, 143.

Regarding Palenque, Stephens writes that the classic Maya site, located in Chiapas in southern Mexico, was "the principal object" of his and Catherwood's first expedition. Palenque was one of the best-known ancient Mesoamerican sites in Europe and the United States due to the descriptions of the site published in the early nineteenth century by Del Río, Waldeck, and Dupaix. See the introduction of this dissertation for more information on these three early explorers. See also Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America*, II: 305.

⁶¹ Following their return to Belize City, Walker and Caddy produced an illustrated report on their expedition, which was sent to the Colonial Secretary in England. This report was later in the

Although Walker and Caddy beat Stephens and Catherwood to Palenque, Caddy's drawings fail to match the quality of Catherwood's. A comparison of the work of the two artists demonstrates Catherwood's superior skill as an expeditionary artist. Both drew the Oval Tablet, a limestone bas-relief set within the wall of the Palace at Palenque (fig. 1.15). The relief celebrates the young ruler Pakal's accession to the throne in 615 C.E., and it depicts the ruler sitting on a double-headed jaguar throne while receiving a headdress from his mother, Zac K'uk.⁶² Caddy's drawing of the tablet, in pen and ink heightened with white, is mistaken in proportions and lacking in detail (fig. 1.16). Catherwood, with his extensive experience working with Robert Hay's team in Egypt, produced a much more accurate representation of the Oval Tablet, correct in proportions and even in such details as the glyphs that identify each figure (fig. 1.17). Catherwood's plan of the Palace at Palenque (fig. 1.18) also surpasses Caddy's plan of the same structure (fig. 1.19). Catherwood produced a more readable, complete, and informative work, with each space labeled and the scale in feet marked at the bottom of the plan.

The Question of Origins

While the British and American teams each spent several weeks uncovering and documenting the ancient Mesoamerican ruins at Palenque, they came to strikingly different conclusions regarding the origin of the site's builders.⁶³ Like

possession of the Geographical Society in London. For a detailed account of the Walker-Caddy expedition to Palenque, see Pendergast, ed., *Palenque*.

⁶² Miller, *Maya Art and Architecture*, 110.

⁶³ As I discuss in the introduction to this dissertation, the question of the origin of the indigenous peoples of North America was widely debated in the nineteenth century. For a discussion of the

nearly all Europeans who had weighed in on the question, Walker and Caddy concluded that the ancient inhabitants had originated in the Old World. Specifically, they proposed that they were of “Egypto-Indian” origin based on Palenque’s pyramidal structures and on the features of the figures sculpted in bas-relief at the site.⁶⁴ Stephens and Catherwood, in contrast, posited that the site of Palenque, like all the ruined cities of Mesoamerica they visited, developed independent of Old World and Asian influences. Stephens has usually been credited with this conclusion, since he devoted a chapter of *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan* to a discussion of it.⁶⁵ Catherwood, however, had much greater experience examining antiquities in Italy, Greece, Egypt, and Palestine, and thus he likely exerted considerable influence on Stephens’ thinking on the subject. While Catherwood remained a largely silent presence in Stephens’ two books on Mesoamerica, in his 1844 solo publication he compared the Mesoamerican ruins to those found in the Old World and concluded that they were, in fact, an indigenous development. The monuments, he maintained, displayed “a high degree of constructive skill,” and attested “in their ornaments and proportions, to the

various theories, which included the ancient Egyptians, the Israelites, the Japanese, and even the mythological people of Atlantis, see Wauchope, *Lost Tribes and Sunken Continents*.

⁶⁴ Pendergast, ed., *Palenque*, 175.

⁶⁵ As Stephens authored the two best-selling books on Mesoamerica, he has usually been credited with the position that the ancient Mesoamerican civilizations were an indigenous development. See, for example, Evans, *Romancing the Maya*, 45. Stephens devotes one of the final chapters of his 1841 work to refuting the various claims that ancient Mesoamericans developed from an Old World or an Asian culture. In addition, he makes the claim again in his 1843 publication. See Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America*, II: 436-457; and Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Yucatan*, I: 94-95.

prevalence of an indigenous and well established system of design, varying from any known models in the old world.”⁶⁶

Catherwood’s images, both in his own publication and in Stephens’ two works, visually conveyed the position that the ancient Mesoamerican cultures were unrelated to the Old World.⁶⁷ His representations of Mesoamerican ruins highlighted the distinctive characteristics of the Maya monuments he encountered in the region, and in this way viewers could differentiate Mesoamerican antiquities from those located elsewhere. For example, the artist made numerous depictions of “triangular” or corbel arches and vaults, a typical feature of Maya architectural construction (figs. 1.20, 1.21).⁶⁸ The artist also focused considerable attention on pyramidal structures, or what he called “pyramidal mounds.”⁶⁹ Writing in his 1844 publication, Catherwood distinguished Maya pyramids from Egyptian examples, noting that the Maya structures had irregular sides of unequal lengths and that they did not “terminat[e] in a point, like the Egyptian examples, but have, on their summits, platforms that support ponderous structures of hewn stone.”⁷⁰ In his image of the Castillo at Chichen Itza, Catherwood pictured the temple on its peak (fig. 1.22). The

⁶⁶ Catherwood, *Views of Ancient Monuments*, n.p. [introduction].

⁶⁷ In his 1844 work, Catherwood concludes that the ruins are of indigenous origin, and he then suggests that readers consult “the following drawings for its [his conclusion’s] confirmation.” *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Catherwood, *Views of Ancient Monuments*, n.p. [caption to plate VII]. The ancient Mycenaeans also used corbel arches and vaults, but it is unknown whether Catherwood was aware of this. For the use of the corbel arch and vault by the ancient Maya, see Michael Coe, *The Maya*, 4th edition (London and New York: Thames and Hudson), 65.

⁶⁹ Catherwood, *Views of Ancient Monuments*, n.p. [introduction].

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

artist also drew the steps up the pyramid that lead to the temple (fig. 1.23) as well as the interior of the temple itself (fig. 1.24).⁷¹

In making a distinction between Maya and Egyptian pyramids, Catherwood challenged the most popular theory set forth by contemporary Europeans regarding the origins of the ancient Mesoamericans, that they derived from the ancient Egyptians.⁷² In 1824, for example, the Englishman William Bullock called attention to:

the close and striking resemblance which exists between the antiquities of Mexico and Egypt. The mighty pyramid, the hieroglyphic writing, the sculptured stone, are almost alike; and their kindred origin can hardly be doubted.⁷³

The French explorer Waldeck in his 1838 book, *Voyage pittoresque*, also drew connections between the ancient Maya and the ancient Egyptians.⁷⁴ Stephens and Catherwood carried a copy of Waldeck's work with them on their two expeditions, and therefore Catherwood must have been aware of his ideas. In the drawings included in his publication, Waldeck altered and "Egyptianized" the Mesoamerican monuments. Such is the case in his depiction of the west front of the Pyramid of the Magician (also known as the House of the Dwarf) at Uxmal, which Waldeck

⁷¹ Moreover, to further differentiate the Castillo from Egyptian pyramids, Catherwood writes that the Castillo's sides are of unequal length, measuring "on the north and south sides, one hundred and ninety-six feet ten inches, and on the east and west sides, two hundred and two feet." Catherwood, *Views of Ancient Monuments*, n.p. [caption to plate xxii]. Catherwood was an excellent observer of the Mesoamerican ruins, and his measurements of the Castillo (or as he calls it, the Teocalli) at Chichen Itza are accurate. The artist did not offer an explanation as to why the pyramids were irregular, and it was only many years later that archaeologists discovered that the structures were often oriented to mark and predict natural phenomenon.

⁷² For an examination of the popular theory that indigenous Mesoamericans derived from ancient Egypt, see Wauchope, *Lost Tribes*, 7-27.

⁷³ William Bullock, *A Description of the Unique Exhibition, called Ancient Mexico* (London, 1824), 3.

⁷⁴ For Waldeck's *Voyage pittoresque*, see the introduction to this dissertation.

represents as a planar pyramid with sharp corners and a single-story, elongated temple on top (see figs. 0.8 and 0.9).⁷⁵ In contrast, Catherwood's image of the structure looks less like an Egyptian pyramid, as he accurately pictures the stepped, elliptical structure, which is topped by a two-level temple (fig. 1.25).

Catherwood's carefully drawn images of Maya bas-reliefs also helped viewers distinguish Mesoamerican sculpture from Egyptian (fig. 1.26). As his illustrations demonstrate, figures depicted in Maya relief sculpture do not follow the standard Egyptian convention for representing figures, by which the feet, legs and head are depicted in profile, while the torso, shoulders, arms, and eye are depicted frontally. Instead, Maya bas-reliefs usually picture figures in profile, or as on more rare examples, with the head in profile and the body represented frontally (see fig 1.17). In order to underscore the differences between Mesoamerican and Egyptian sculpture for viewers, Catherwood created a comparison image of details of ancient Egyptian sculpture from Thebes and Karnak for inclusion in Stephens' *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan* (fig. 1.27).

In another attempt to differentiate Mesoamerican antiquities from those created by the ancient Egyptians, Catherwood made a point of carefully drawing the glyphs that he and Stephens encountered at the ruins. Those who ascribed the monuments to the ancient Egyptians frequently cited the Mesoamerican glyphic writing system as evidence of contact between the two groups. In an effort to show the unique character of Maya glyphs, which had been described but not drawn by

⁷⁵ Evans, *Romancing the Maya*, 41-42. As Evans notes, Waldeck's images of Maya temples owe a debt to Étienne-Louis Boullée's renderings of idealized Egyptian pyramids from the 1780s.

previous European explorers, Catherwood meticulously copied the glyphs that appeared on monuments and on large stone tablets (figs. 1.28, 1.29).⁷⁶ At Palenque, Stephens describes how the artist even labored in dark temple chambers, working by torchlight in order to delineate the large fields of “complicated, unintelligible, and anomalous characters” found within (fig. 1.30).⁷⁷

Whereas Catherwood’s images of Mesoamerican antiquities differentiated them from those of ancient Egypt, early nineteenth-century European archaeological excavations in Egypt served as a powerful model for the exploration of Mesoamerica.⁷⁸ In Egypt, Europeans were “discovering” and reconstructing a lost history through monuments and ruins, all within an era of new European expansionism. Such Egyptian discoveries as the Rosetta stone no doubt inspired Catherwood’s interest in picturing the Maya glyphs. The artist likely intended his meticulous drawings to be studied by U.S. scholars who might eventually decipher them, like the decipherment of Egyptian hieroglyphics by Jean-François Champollion in 1822.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Regarding the hieroglyphic tablets found at Palenque, Stephens notes, “Captains Del Rio and Dupaix both refer to them, but in very few words, and neither of them has given a single drawing.” Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America*, II: 343.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, II: 342-343.

⁷⁸ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 134.

⁷⁹ Catherwood understood the importance of the Maya glyphs as a historic record of the ancient builders of the sites, stating, “we shall for ever remain in ignorance of the history of this people ... unless we succeed in deciphering the hieroglyphic writing found at Palenque, Copan, and other places.” Catherwood, *Views of Ancient Monuments*, n.p. [introduction]. Stephens expressed a similar view on the need for the Mesoamerican glyphs to be deciphered. See *Incidents of Travel in Central America*, II: 457.

Claiming “American Antiquities”

Visiting the ruined cities of southern Mesoamerica, Stephens and Catherwood concluded that the builders of the sites were a highly organized and civilized people. The antiquities at Copán, Stephens wrote, proved, “like newly-discovered historical records, that the people who once occupied the Continent of America were not savages.”⁸⁰ The monuments, they asserted, even rivaled Old World examples. According to Catherwood, the workmanship of the stelae at Copán equaled “the best remains of Egyptian art.”⁸¹ At Labná, the artist noted that the method of constructing the buildings was very good, with the cement equal “to that found in the ancient Roman buildings.”⁸²

Many of Catherwood’s images of Mesoamerican monuments visually convey the idea that the antiquities were the product of an advanced people.⁸³ *Las Monjas, Chichen Itza* (fig.1.31), for example, depicts the end façade of a long building at the Maya site of Chichen Itza called Las Monjas, or “The Nuns,” by the Spanish due to its resemblance to a convent.⁸⁴ Catherwood sets the imposing structure close to the picture plane, drawing the viewer’s attention to the elaborate Puuc-style ornament of Chac masks and geometric designs on the building’s façade.⁸⁵ Using shadow and

⁸⁰ Ibid., I: 102.

⁸¹ Catherwood, *Views of Ancient Monuments*, n.p. [caption to plate IV].

⁸² Ibid., n.p. [caption to plate XIX].

⁸³ My ideas here are indebted to Katherine Manthorne. See *Tropical Renaissance*, 97.

⁸⁴ This image, with a few small changes, appears as an engraving in Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Yucatan*, II: n.p. [facing page 293].

⁸⁵ The Puuc (or “hills” in Maya) style of architecture flourished at the ancient Maya sites located in the hilly Puuc region of western Yucatán and northern Campeche. The facades of Puuc-style

sharp lines, he reveals how the Maya juxtaposed shallow relief carving with elements that extend fully from the surface of the building, resulting in a façade of immense visual interest. Catherwood's *Ornament Over the Principal Doorway, Casa del Gobernador* (fig. 1.32) similarly emphasizes an impressive, intricately decorated building façade at the site of Uxmal.

While Stephens and Catherwood acknowledged that the Mesoamerican ruins were the product of an advanced culture, the contemporary inhabitants of the region were not granted the same status. The travelers repeatedly commented on the “miserable” condition of the people as well as their perceived lack of industriousness and intelligence.⁸⁶ Moreover, in Stephens and Catherwood's eyes, the indigenous population appeared to be in a state of declension. For instance, the travelers encountered many crumbling Catholic churches as they journeyed through rural areas, and these struck Stephens as “evidence of a retrograding and expiring people.”⁸⁷ Although they acknowledged that the indigenous inhabitants were likely the descendants of the ancient builders of the spectacular ruined cities, both Stephens and Catherwood relate that the indigenes appeared to retain no knowledge of their

buildings are usually highly ornamented, which was achieved by affixing numerous carved stones on the exterior of buildings. Representations of the rain god Chac often appear on the facades of Puuc structures. See Miller, *Maya Art and Architecture*, 56-61.

⁸⁶ In the first volume of his 1841 work, Stephens confessed a “regret that so beautiful a country should be in such miserable hands.” Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America*, I: 86. In a passage of his 1843 work, Stephens relates that his indigenous laborers were in constant need of his supervision. “It was necessary,” he relates, “to be with them all the time; for it not watched, they would not work at all.” Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Yucatan*, I: 225.

⁸⁷ Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America*, I: 79.

own history.⁸⁸ Regarding the local population, Catherwood observed, “unfortunately for the antiquarian, they are totally without historic traditions.”⁸⁹ What particularly amazed the travelers was the seeming disinterestedness of the people about their history as well as what Stephens describes as their “ignorance, carelessness, and indifference” toward the antiquities.⁹⁰

Catherwood’s representations of local indigenous people, who appear in many of his images, suggest the idea that they are ignorant and uninterested in their own cultural heritage.⁹¹ In *Portion of La Casa de Las Monjas, Uxmal* (fig. 1.33), the small group turns away from the ruined structure, and appear to be more interested in conversing among themselves than in contemplating the impressive monument behind them. Similarly, the indigenes pictured in *Portion of the Building; Las Monjas, Uxmal* (fig. 1.34) turn their backs to the elaborate building façade behind them, and instead direct their attention to lounging in the sun or to playing with the small dogs that Catherwood pictures in the foreground.

In several other images, Catherwood depicts individuals next to antiquities in order to give viewers an idea of a work’s scale (fig. 1.35; see fig. 1.28). These local people were almost certainly part of Stephens and Catherwood’s team of workers, and as such, they provided essential support to the travelers. However, they are not

⁸⁸ For example, after viewing the stelae at Copán, Stephens relates that he asked his indigenous guides who made the sculptures, and “their dull answer,” he writes, “was ‘Quien sabe?’ ‘who knows?’” *Ibid.*, I: 104.

⁸⁹ Catherwood, *Views of Ancient Monuments*, n.p. [introduction].

⁹⁰ Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America*, I: 98.

⁹¹ In her article on Stephens, Jennifer Roberts describes Stephens’ prose, as well as Catherwood’s images, as conveying a sense of what she calls “indigenous indifference” toward the monuments. See Roberts, “Landscapes of Indifference,” 546.

portrayed as actively assisting in the work of intellectually understanding the ruins. Catherwood's *Temple, at Tuloom* (fig. 1.36) pictures a group of indigenous men clearing the ruined site and cutting down foliage, but the half-clothed men stand in stark contrast to Stephens and Catherwood, who, clad in trousers and jackets, measure the structure behind them. The indigenous Mesoamericans are shown contributing the physical labor required to uncover the sites, but never the intellectual work necessary to document, and so begin to recover the history of, the antiquities.⁹²

Stephens text and Catherwood's images thus worked together to communicate the idea that the ruined cities were in the hands of a people indifferent to their history and who appeared unwilling and unable to properly care for the monuments. Moreover, the antiquities seemed to be under threat both from the ravages of time as well as from the hands of rapacious European antiquarians, who desired objects for their growing collections. By this logic, in order to rescue the so-called "American antiquities," the best course of action was for U.S. Americans to claim custodianship over the monuments.⁹³ Catherwood's images helped to naturalize and legitimize the idea that Mesoamerican antiquities were not only

⁹² In both his publications on Mesoamerica, Stephens repeatedly reports examples of the locals' apparent lack of intellectual curiosity about the antiquities. At Copán, for example, he writes that the local inhabitants did not understand why he and Catherwood were interested in surveying the ruins. "The people of Copan," he relates, "could not comprehend what we were about." Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America*, I: 145.

⁹³ As Jennifer Roberts relates, Stephens applied the "salvage paradigm" of archaeological science to the Mesoamerican ruins. By this thinking, common in the nineteenth century, politically powerful nations aim to "rescue" artifacts from cultures they believe have degenerated beyond the ability to care for them. See Roberts, "Landscape of Indifference," 551. For a discussion of the salvage paradigm, see James Clifford, Virginia Dominguez, and Triuh T. Minh-Ha, "Of Other Peoples: Beyond the 'Salvage' Paradigm," in *Discussions in Contemporary Culture*, ed. by Hal Foster, vol. 1 (Seattle: Bay Press, 1987), 121-150.

available for appropriation, it was in their best interest that they should be appropriated by the United States.

In this context, Catherwood's efforts to survey and draw the sites may be seen to represent what Evans calls "anticipatory acts of ownership" of the monuments.⁹⁴ Catherwood's panoramic views of Mesoamerican sites, in particular, convey a sense of anticipatory ownership, of imaginative control over the ruined cities (figs. 1.37, 1.38). The artist created many such views for Stephens' publications, including a 27 ½-inch foldout panorama of the House of the Governor at Uxmal (fig. 1.39), which Stephens selected as the frontispiece for the first volume of *Incidents of Travel in Yucatan*.⁹⁵ As Albert Boime has argued, in the antebellum period, control over the North American landscape was facilitated by the "magisterial gaze," a mastering and panoramic view from on high that constructs lands as a scenic vista to be gazed at and admired and to thereby be possessed by its viewer.⁹⁶ Within this framework, Catherwood's panoramic images might be seen as preliminary attempts to capture and possess the Mesoamerican monuments.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Evans, *Romancing the Maya*, 57.

⁹⁵ Part of Catherwood's motivation for undertaking the expeditions with Stephens was to make drawings in preparation for a panorama of a Mesoamerican scene for his New York rotunda. No records survive that indicate which site Catherwood intended to portray at his panorama, but the foldout image of the House of the Governor suggests that the artist might have intended to create a panorama of Uxmal.

⁹⁶ Albert Boime, *The Magisterial Gaze: Manifest Destiny and American Landscape Painting, c. 1830-1865* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 20-21.

⁹⁷ My focus here is on how Catherwood's images represented the Mesoamerican sites as objects to be possessed by viewers in the United States, yet the land and natural resources of Mesoamerica were also desirable to many in the nation. The U.S. American filibusterer William Walker, for example, organized several private military excursions into Latin America in the 1850s. For information on Walker, see Brady Harrison, *Agent of Empire: William Walker and the Imperial Self in American Literature* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004).

While Catherwood worked to visually capture and organize the sites, which provided viewers a means of vicariously possessing Mesoamerican antiquities, Stephens endeavored to purchase them. At Copán, he dreamt up a scheme whereby he would remove the antiquities to what he perceived to be the new North American cultural and economic capital, New York City. He suggested to Catherwood:

An operation! (Hide your heads, ye speculators in up-town lots!) To buy Copan! remove the monuments of a by-gone people from the desolate region in which they were buried, set them up in the “great commercial emporium,” [New York] and found an institution to be the nucleus of a great national museum of American antiquities!⁹⁸

After purchasing Copán for fifty dollars, Stephens then attempted to buy the sites of Quiriguá and Palenque, albeit unsuccessfully.⁹⁹

Although no antiquities from Copán were removed to New York in the 1840s, Stephens and Catherwood were successful in carrying away objects from

⁹⁸ Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America*, I: 115-116. In the Appendix to this publication, Stephens further discusses his idea of forming a “Museum of American Antiquities,” which would be to display the monuments of Quiriguá, casts or antiquities from Copán and Palenque, as well as objects from George Catlin’s Indian Gallery. In this way, Stephens hoped to found an institution that would serve as a “memorial of the aboriginal races” of North America. See *Ibid.*, II: 473-474.

⁹⁹ At Palenque, in Mexico, Stephens could not buy the site because Mexican law prohibited a foreigner from purchasing land unless he was married to a Mexican woman. See von Hagen, *Maya Explorer*, 170. At Quiriguá, Stephens observed that the site’s monuments could be transported to the United States since they were located on the shores of the Montagua River and thus they “might be transported bodily and set up in New-York.” Yet, in an example of what Stephens interpreted as European meddling in “American” affairs, the French consul general advised the local landowner to ask for an exorbitant price for the ruined site, and thus Stephens was not able to acquire it. See Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America*, II: 123-124.

While Stephens could not purchase the site of Palenque, he did make arrangements with Charles Russell, the American consul in Isla del Carmen, Campeche, to have plaster casts made of the sculptures at the site, which were to be shipped to New York. In 1842, Russell shipped fragments of the right panel of the Tablet of the Cross from the Temple of the Cross at Palenque to New York. The fragments were later sent to Washington, DC, and they entered the collection of the United States National Museum (later the Smithsonian) in 1858. See Otis T. Mason, “The Group of the Cross at Palenque,” *American Art Review* 1, no. 5 (1880): 217-218; and Charles Rau, *The Palenque Tablet in the United States National Museum, Washington, DC* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1879).

other sites.¹⁰⁰ At Uxmal, the travelers extracted several stone sculptures from the façade of the House of the Governor, or Casa del Gobernador. Catherwood made drawings of these objects (figs. 1.40, 1.41), which were shipped to New York along with a collection of “vases, figures, idols, and other relics” gathered in Mesoamerica.¹⁰¹ At Kabah, the travelers removed a pair of sculpted doorjambs from a temple (figs. 1.42, 1.43).¹⁰² Stephens and Catherwood also worked with a group of local men at one of the site’s buildings to take two wooden lintels, one of which Catherwood “considered the most interesting memorial” found in Yucatán.¹⁰³ Using a crowbar, the team wrenched the beams from the structure, an operation so destructive and dangerous that several of the workers refused to take part in it. Catherwood created an image of one of the beams shortly after its removal (fig. 1.44) as well as another of it being carried from the site by shirtless indigenous porters, who are directed by Stephens (fig. 1.45).¹⁰⁴ Catherwood’s images of the removed

¹⁰⁰ In 1841, after returning to the United States from the first expedition, Stephens actively worked on his plan to bring Mesoamerican antiquities to New York. In a letter to William H. Prescott, he wrote that he was “engaged in a scheme for bringing to this country some very interesting monuments.” John Lloyd Stephens to William H. Prescott, February 2, 1841, photocopy in the Victor von Hagen collection, New-York Historical Society.

¹⁰¹ Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Yucatan*, I: 179. The sculptures from Uxmal were not in Catherwood’s panorama on the night of the fire that destroyed most of the antiquities Stephens and Catherwood had collected in Mesoamerica. These sculptures are part of a small group of objects acquired by Stephens and Catherwood that are now in the collection of the American Museum of Natural History. For the history of these objects as well as their acquisition by the museum, see Herbert J. Spinden, “The Stephens Sculptures from Yucatan,” *Natural History* XX, no. 4 (Sept.-Oct. 1920): 379-389.

¹⁰² These two doorjambs are also now in the collection of the American Museum of Natural History. See *Ibid.*, 389.

¹⁰³ Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Yucatan*, I: 403. Stephens describes the arduous operation to remove the lintels from pages 403 to 407.

¹⁰⁴ The two lintels were lost in the fire that destroyed Catherwood’s panorama on July, 29, 1842. See “Destruction of the Rotunda by Fire,” *New York Herald*, July 30, 1842; and “Stephens and Catherwood,” *The North American and Daily Advertiser*, August 18, 1842.

objects from Uxmal and Kabah not only document the cultural transfer of these antiquities from Mesoamerica to the United States, they also primed U.S. viewers to receive them as part of the continent's cultural patrimony. In the United States, these Mesoamerican antiquities were to be reframed and recontextualized as "American antiquities" in Stephens' proposed "national museum."¹⁰⁵ There, Mesoamerican antiquity would serve as the foundation for a new United States prehistory, one based in the New World rather than the Old.¹⁰⁶

Closing Remarks and Catherwood's Influence on U.S. American Artists

Without a doubt, Catherwood was the most talented and experienced of the early expeditionary artists to depict Mesoamerican antiquities, and his published images were an important factor in the subject's popularity in the United States in the nineteenth century. Catherwood's detailed plans and images of ruined sites and objects introduced U.S. viewers to the impressive antiquities and allowed those in the United States to perceive the unique characteristics of the Mesoamerican

¹⁰⁵ According to Baudrillard, the recontextualization and reframing of objects that takes place when they are collected serves to establish the collector's authority and control over environment, objects, others, and history. See Jean Baudrillard, *The Systems of Objects*, trans. James Benedict (London: Verso, 2005). As I relate in the opening paragraphs of this chapter, Hinsley argues that the process of assimilating Mesoamerican history into the United States' historical narrative served to justify the United States' assertion of economic and political control over the continent. Certainly, Stephens' plan to incorporate Mesoamerican objects into a United States "national museum" reflected the country's ambition to exert control over the continent. See Hinsley, "Hemispheric Hegemony," 28-40.

¹⁰⁶ Evans draws similar conclusions regarding Stephens' museum. See Evans, *Romancing the Maya*, 73. Stephens' attempt to acquire the antiquities at Copán and other sites in Mesoamerica mirrors that of Lord Elgin's removal of the Parthenon marbles, which were appropriated by the British in order to forge a new national identity in the nineteenth century. In his 1841 publication, in fact, Stephens compares his proposed project to exhibit antiquities from Copán in New York to that of the display of the Parthenon marbles at the British Museum in London. See Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America*, I: 89. For the Parthenon marbles and British national identity, see Debbie Challis, "The Parthenon Sculptures: Emblems of British National Identity," *The British Art Journal* VII, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2006): 33-39.

monuments. In addition, the artist's illustrations produced an overall picture of Mesoamerica in which the United States, as the dominant North American power, was seen as the most appropriate caretaker of Mesoamerica's cultural heritage.

The work of Stephens and Catherwood inspired many subsequent travelers to explore Mesoamerica, several of whom published narratives of their voyages. Some of these books were unabashedly modeled on Stephens and Catherwood, such as Benjamin Norman's *Rambles in Yucatan* (1843), Brantz Mayer's *Mexico as it was and as it is* (1844), and Ephraim George Squier's *Nicaragua: Its People, Scenery, Monuments, and the Proposed Interoceanic Canal* (1852). Catherwood's images also inspired several artists in the United States to create Mesoamerican subjects. Indeed, in the decades following the publication of Catherwood's images, Mesoamerican antiquity, or antiquities, became a uniquely U.S. American subject.¹⁰⁷ The majority of U.S. artists who created these scenes did not travel to Mesoamerica, but they instead used Catherwood's images to create their artworks. Catherwood's images were, in fact, the most common source of visual information used by U.S. American artists to paint representations of Mesoamerican antiquity or antiquities. In 1848, for example, the Cincinnati-based artist Robert Duncanson painted a Mesoamerican scene, *Mayan Ruins, Yucatan* (fig. 1.46), which he based on two of Catherwood's illustrations, one of Las Monjas at Uxmal (fig. 1.47) and another of the

¹⁰⁷ Stephens' two publications on Mesoamerica were available in London soon after they appeared in the United States and, according to Victor von Hagen, the publications enjoyed a great vogue in London. However, I could find no examples of British or European artists who painted ancient Mesoamerican subjects in the period 1830 to 1890. As the scholar Hugh Honour writes, in the nineteenth century, "nature, rather than history or art" dominated the European visual image of Mexico and Central America. See Hugh Honour, *The New Golden Land: European Images of America from the Discoveries to the Present Time* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1975), 183. For the popularity of Stephens' works in London, see von Hagen, *Maya Explorer*, 200-203.

so-called First Casa at Kabah (fig.1.48).¹⁰⁸ Other artists who created scenes inspired by Catherwood's images include Emanuel Leutze, Peter F. Rothermel, George Martin Ottinger (fig. 1.49; cf. to fig.1.10), and George de Forest Brush. As I discuss in subsequent chapters, these painters not only borrowed from Catherwood's illustrations to create their Mesoamerican subjects, they also absorbed the ideology implicit in them, that Mesoamerican antiquities were "American antiquities," and as such, were a part of the United States' past.

¹⁰⁸ Duncanson based the structure in the left foreground on Catherwood's image of Las Monjas, and he based the structure at the center on the Catherwood's image of the so-called First Casa. For information on Duncanson and this image, see Joseph D. Ketner, *The Emergence of the African-American Artist: Robert S. Duncanson, 1821-1872* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1994), 25.

Chapter Two

Repainting the Past: Scenes of the Conquest of Mexico Created by Peter F. Rothermel and Emanuel Leutze

In this state of things, it was beneficently ordered by Providence that the land should be delivered over to another race, who would rescue it from the brutish superstitions that daily extended wider and wider.

– William H. Prescott, *History of the Conquest of Mexico* (1843)¹

Every step of our progress was fraught with the associations of three hundred years; and the mind, as it recognized object after object, famous in the history of the conquest, became tintured with the romance of that remote period . . . Time, with his scythe and hour-glass, had brought another and a newer race, to sweep away the moldered institutions of a worn out people, and replace them with a fresher and more vigorous civilization.

– Raphael Semmes, *Service Afloat and Ashore during the Mexican War* (1851)²

In 1843, in the wake of Stephens and Catherwood's travels through southern Mesoamerica, William Hickling Prescott published his *History of the Conquest of Mexico*. One of the most widely read authors of his day, Prescott's book had an enormous influence on U.S. readers' conceptions of the Mesoamerican past. Written in the dramatic, didactic style characteristic of nineteenth-century romantic historians, Prescott's work recounts the early sixteenth-century defeat of the Aztec Empire by the Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés.³ The writer's colorful descriptions and

¹ Prescott, *History of the Conquest of Mexico*, 68.

² Raphael Semmes, *Service Afloat and Ashore during the Mexican War* (Cincinnati: W.H. Moore & Co., 1851), 126.

³ For an analysis of Prescott as a romantic historian, see Eileen K. Cheng, *The Plain and Noble Garb of Truth: Nationalism and Impartiality in American Historical Writing, 1784-1860* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 65-75.

expressive prose transported readers back in time to the splendors of central Mexico.⁴ As one reviewer observed, the narrative brought U.S. Americans “into a new and strange world, inhabited by a peculiar people, where all the institutions and habits of life are novel.”⁵ The immense popularity of Prescott’s work led contemporary readers with an interest in Mesoamerican antiquity to shift their focus northward, from the Maya region explored by Stephens and Catherwood, to the lands once occupied by the Aztecs in northern and central Mexico.

When Prescott’s *History* appeared in 1843, political issues in Mexico also brought attention to the United States’ southern neighbor. The continuing conflict with Mexico over the annexation of Texas in 1845 as well the belief that the United States had a God-given right to expand across the continent led the nation to declare war on Mexico in May of 1846.⁶ Over the next eighteen months the United States Army engaged in a series of skirmishes with Mexican forces in their northern territories, and in 1847 the theater of war expanded to central Mexico with General

⁴ As Cheng relates, romantic historians applied an “expressive theory of art to history, extending to their historical subjects the romantic emphasis on inner experience over action.” To convey an event, an historian could not simply present what happened in the past. He had to recreate his subjects’ experience of the event and enable readers to relive that experience. See *Ibid.*, 67. Levin notes that although Prescott’s text contains no images, it is highly visual, and from Cortés’ landing at Veracruz to the final surrender by the Aztecs, readers follow the narrative “through a series of grand pictures.” David Levin, “History as Romantic Art: Structure, Characterization, and Style in the Conquest of Mexico,” *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 39, no. 1 (February 1959): 28.

⁵ Review of *History of the Conquest of Mexico*, by William H. Prescott, *North American Review* 58 (1844): 159-160; quoted in Evans, *Romancing the Maya*, 75.

⁶ A series of border disputes with Mexico on the Rio Grande ostensibly led to the outbreak of war, with the U.S. Congress declaring war on Mexico on May 13, 1846. But as Robert W. Johannsen writes, the conflict on the U.S. side was largely fueled by expansionist sentiment. See Johannsen, *To the Halls of the Montezumas*, 7. I derived information on the U.S.-Mexican War for this chapter from Johannsen as well as from Paul Foss, *A Short, Offhand, Killing Affair: Soldiers and Social Conflict During the Mexican-American War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

Winfield Scott capturing Mexico City and occupying the “Halls of the Montezumas.”⁷ The war ended in 1848 with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, whereby the United States acquired roughly half of Mexico’s territory.⁸

These events in the realms of literature and politics fostered unprecedented curiosity in the United States about Mexico and her history in the 1840s and 1850s. U.S. American artists, aware of the brevity and “unpicturesque character” of their history and eager to locate subjects rich in pictorial interest, soon added the Conquest of Mexico to their repertoire of “American” subjects.⁹ Indeed, the historian Robert W. Johannsen observes that in the 1840s the Conquest became so familiar to U.S. Americans that many considered it a “part of their own past.”¹⁰

Several U.S. American artists painted scenes of the Conquest as their nation engaged in a series of conflicts with Mexico in the 1840s. Drawing from Prescott’s vivid narrative, these artists sought connections between past and present events that would give meaning to their nation’s ambitions. U.S. artists who pictured the subject included some of the nation’s leading history painters, including Emanuel Leutze and

⁷ According to Johannsen, when the war broke out in 1846, placards suddenly appeared in New York City bearing the slogan, “Ho, for the Halls of the Montezumas.” See Johannsen, *To the Halls of the Montezumas*, 10.

⁸ This figure includes the total territory the United States gained with the Mexican Cession and the annexation of Texas, since Mexico had never officially recognized the independence of the Republic of Texas in 1836 or its annexation by the United States in 1845 until it signed the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo on February 2, 1848.

⁹ At this time “American” subjects also included such events as the “discovery” of America by Christopher Columbus and the sighting of the Mississippi by Hernando De Soto. See Wendy Greenhouse, “The Landing of the Fathers: Representing the National Past in American History Painting, 1770-1865,” in *Picturing History: American Painting 1770-1930*, ed. by William Ayres (New York: Rizzoli, 1993), 54. See also William H. Truettner, “The Art of History: American exploration and Discovery Scenes, 1840-1860,” *American Art Journal* 14, no. 1 (Winter 1982): 6, 24-25.

¹⁰ Johannsen, *To the Halls of the Montezumas*, 180.

Peter F. Rothermel, although lesser-known artists, such as E.A. Holyoke and Charles Hitchcock, also took up the subject.¹¹ How and why did history painters in the mid nineteenth century link the Spanish defeat of the Aztec Empire to the United States? What meanings did this event from the Mesoamerican past hold for contemporary viewers? In this chapter I examine representations of the Conquest of Mexico created in the 1840s, with a focus on works by Peter F. Rothermel and Emanuel Leutze. Painted at a time when many in the United States considered the nation the culmination of Western civilization, with expansion across North America the final step in the unfolding of that historic destiny, these images depicted the Mesoamerican past as a prologue to the U.S. American present in order to justify the nation's expansionist goals.¹² Yet, as we shall see, these scenes did not always function merely as unreflective validations of the nation's present and future goals, and instead they often resonated with the political, social, and religious concerns that accompanied westward expansion in the mid nineteenth century.

Prescott, Expansionism, and the "Second Conquest of Mexico"

Prescott's *History of the Conquest of Mexico* was the first best-selling book in the United States to describe Aztec civilization at length. The publication was almost

¹¹ Holyoke's *Death of Montezuma* was an Art-Union selection in 1848. The painting's present location is unknown. See American Art-Union, "Catalogue, 1848," *Bulletin of the American Art-Union* (New York: American Art-Union, 1848): 14. For Charles Hitchcock's 1848 work, *Montezuma's Last Smile*, see Sotheby's New York, *Latin American Art*, November 17, 2004, lot 90.

¹² As Johannsen notes, nineteenth-century U.S. Americans held a progressive idea of history and viewed history as a stream flowing from the past and into the present and future, emphasizing the organic unity of human development. Thus, knowledge of the past was essential to the present and the future. Johannsen, *To the Halls of the Montezumas*, 180. My thinking in this chapter has been influenced by the work of William Truettner, especially his essay, "Prelude to Expansion: Repainting the Past," in William Truettner, ed., *The West As America: Reinterpreting Images of the Frontier, 1820-1920* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 55-95.

as popular as Stephens and Catherwood's works, selling four thousand copies in its first month of printing.¹³ In its pages, many U.S. Americans read their first descriptions of Aztec life, as earlier books that discussed the Aztecs, such as those by Humboldt and Kingsborough, were so expensive as to be outside the reach of most.¹⁴ Prescott told his story with an impressive quantity of sources. As Keen notes, virtually no known manuscript or printed source on ancient Mesoamerica escaped his notice.¹⁵ He devoted a significant portion of the *History* to an account and an assessment of Aztec civilization, highlighting the numerous achievements of the "Mexicans" in science, agriculture, and trade.¹⁶ Yet, as the historian David Levin observes, despite his high praise for the Aztecs, Prescott's belief in progress and providence ultimately led him to design his work to support a fundamental theme: "civilization" over "semi-civilization," Christianity – no matter how imperfect – over paganism.¹⁷

Published at a time when the United States was engaged in a series of conflicts with Mexico that culminated in the outbreak of the U.S.-Mexican War, readers of Prescott's epic narrative naturally drew connections between the Conquest and contemporary events. Set in the exotic landscape of ancient Mesoamerica, the

¹³ Von Hagen, *Maya Explorer*, 258. According to Von Hagen, Prescott's book was also reviewed by 130 publications in the United States within its first month of printing.

¹⁴ For these two authors, see the introduction to this dissertation.

¹⁵ Keen, *The Aztec Image in Western Thought*, 355. According to Keen, Prescott had Pascual de Gayangos copy and send him masses of manuscript material from Europe.

¹⁶ Throughout his text, Prescott uses the terms "Mexican" and "Aztec" interchangeably.

¹⁷ David Levin, *History as Romantic Art* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1959), 164; and Keen, *The Aztec Image in Western Thought*, 354-355.

heroic struggle between the Spanish and Aztecs not only embellished the U.S. national past, it provided a justification for the United States' present and future expansionist ambitions. As the historian John C. Pinheiro has observed, although nineteenth-century U.S. Americans viewed Mexico as a land with a rich ancient past, Prescott's text subtly encouraged U.S. Americans to view modern Mexico as an inferior country in need of renewal by a republican, Protestant nation.¹⁸ Nineteenth-century readers could therefore view themselves as a newer, divinely ordained group destined to conquer the people of Mexico. Indeed, many held that this more recent conquest would benefit those in Mexico, in contrast to the earlier Spanish Conquest. As one New York newspaper editor wrote in 1847:

The [Mexican] race is perfectly accustomed to being conquered, and the only new lesson we shall teach is that our victories will give liberty, safety, and prosperity to the vanquished . . . To *liberate* and *ennoble* – not to *enslave* and *debase* – is our mission.¹⁹

During the U.S.-Mexican War, Prescott's *History* became a source of inspiration for U.S. Americans, providing them with a sense of historical purpose as their nation engaged in what was often termed the "second Conquest of Mexico."²⁰ Prescott's book was especially popular with U.S. soldiers in Mexico. At the beginning of the war, the Secretary of the Navy ordered that Prescott's book be added to every ship's library, and in their march from Veracruz to Mexico City, General

¹⁸ John C. Pinheiro, "'Extending the Light and Blessings of Our Purer Faith': Anti-Catholic Sentiment among American Soldiers in the U.S.-Mexican War," *Journal of Popular Culture* 35, no. 2 (Fall 2001): 129.

¹⁹ Quoted in Frederick Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History: A Reinterpretation* (New York: Knopf, 1963), 122.

²⁰ Johannsen, *To the Halls of the Montezumas*, 180; and *General Taylor and His Staff* (Philadelphia: Grigg, Eliot, and Co., 1848), iii.

Scott's troops consciously reenacted Cortés' route, frequently stopping along the way to view the vestiges of Aztec civilization.²¹ Like many in the United States, soldiers frequently saw their role as "pioneers of civilization" and missionaries of both U.S. American republican principles and the Protestant faith that would regenerate Mexico.²²

Rothermel's Conquest of Mexico Subjects

One of the best-known history painters of his age, Rothermel was the most prolific painter of Conquest scenes in the 1840s, producing six canvases between 1844 and 1848.²³ The Philadelphia-based artist took up the subject early in his career. After initially concentrating on portraiture, the young artist turned to history painting, then considered the most worthy subject for an artist.²⁴ Rothermel had his first success as an artist in 1843 with a scene of a Spanish conquistador, *De Soto Discovering the Mississippi River* (fig. 2.1), which he displayed in Philadelphia at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and in New York at the National Academy of Design, where the American Art-Union purchased the canvas.²⁵ As Thistlethwaite notes, this early works displays the idealized compositions and expressive rendering

²¹ Ibid., 150 and 156. In Mexico, U.S. soldiers visited the ruins of the temple of Xochicalco and the ancient pyramid of Cholula.

²² Johannsen, *To the Halls of the Montezumas*, 30.

²³ Mark Thistlethwaite includes a list of all of Rothermel's known oil paintings in *Painting in the Grand Manner: The Art of Peter Frederick Rothermel (1812-1895)* (Chadd's Fort, Pennsylvania: Brandywine River Museum Publication, 1995), 30-31.

²⁴ I derived biographical information on Rothermel for this chapter from Thistlethwaite, *Painting in the Grand Manner*, 11-29; and Joseph G. Rosengarten, "Memoir of P.F. Rothermel," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 34, no. 149 (December 1895): 393-396.

²⁵ "Notes of Arts and Artists. Rothermel," *Sartain's Union Magazine of Literature and Art* IV, no. 6 (June 1849): 414.

that would characterize the artist's oeuvre.²⁶ In addition, the painting displays an elevated, romantic vision of the Spanish exploration of the New World, befitting the age of U.S. expansionism in which it was created.

On the heels of his first great success, Rothermel turned his attention to another Spanish conquistador, Cortés, who he depicted in a series of six paintings: *Cortés's First View of Mexico* (1844), *The Surrender of Guatemozin* (1845), *Cortés before Tenochtitlan* (1846), *Cortés Burning His Ships Before Marching on Mexico* (1846), *Cortez. Launch of the Brigantines* (1848), and "Noche Triste" (1848). Of these six canvases, only three are known to survive today, *Cortés's First View of Mexico* (fig. 2.2), *The Surrender of Guatemozin* (fig. 2.3), and *Cortés before Tenochtitlan* (fig. 2.4). Prescott's immensely popular *History* inspired Rothermel to create his first painting of the Conquest of Mexico in 1844.²⁷ After this first canvas, however, his patrons appear to have requested the subject. An 1852 article on Rothermel by Thomas Dunn English, the writer gives a detailed account of the patronage of the six Conquest scenes:

Professor Mapes, who has done so much to encourage art and artists in this country, saw while on a visit to Philadelphia, the picture of "Columbus before the Queen;" and, being struck with some of its points, left with a friend an order for Rothermel to paint one of the same size, suffering the artist to choose the subject; and adding, that if, when finished, any one fancied it, the artist should sell the picture and paint another instead. At the time Prescott's work on "The Conquest of Mexico" was making a great noise, and furnished a number of good subjects. Rothermel selected "Cortez haranguing his Troops, within sight of the Valley of Mexico," and painted, as he says, "a very fair

²⁶ Thistlethwaite, *Painting in the Grand Manner*, 13.

²⁷ Rothermel's 1844 canvas, *Cortez's First View of Mexico*, is possibly the earliest Conquest scene painted by a U.S. American artist. After searching the records of the National Academy of Design and the American Art-Union, as well as the Smithsonian's Art Inventories Catalog, I could find no earlier nineteenth-century U.S. American painting with a scene of the Conquest of Mexico.

picture.” It was much more, however, than “very fair,” – being a glorious composition, remarkable for its vigor, force, and combination of fine tone with richness of colour. It attracted the attention of a liberal patron of the arts, Warrington Gillette, of New York . . . who gave Rothermel without hesitation the price he demanded, and thus an invaluable addition to his own collection. Professor Mapes, saw the picture, liked it so much, that he ordered its substitute to be founded on a similar subject, – “The Surrender of Guatemozin.” This, which was also an admirable specimen of drawing and colouring, was duly executed and delivered. These painting attracted such admiration, that several more, on similar themes, were ordered. One of these, “Noche Triste; or, The Morning of the Retreat on the Causeway,” – was for Mr. Binney, of Boston; another, – “Cortez Burning his Fleet,” – for James Robb, of New Orleans; a third, – “Launch of the Brigantines,” – for J.B.H. Latrobe, of Baltimore, . . . and a fourth, – the subject unknown to me, – which is now in the possession of the artist’s cousin, Samuel H. Rothermel, of Philadelphia.²⁸

As English relates, Rothermel’s first Conquest painting, *Cortés’s First View of Mexico* depicts Cortés “haranguing his Troops, within sight of the Valley of Mexico.”²⁹ The scene from Prescott’s *History*, illustrates an episode from Cortés’ 1519 march from the port of Veracruz to the Aztec capital, Tenochtitlán. Prescott describes that after several days of arduous travel in the Sierra Madre Oriental range, the conquistador and his small party abruptly came upon a breathtaking vista of their intended destination, the Aztec capital:

They had not advanced far, when, turning an angle of the sierra, they suddenly came on a view which more than compensated the toils of the preceding day. It was that of the Valley of Mexico, or Tenochtitlan, as more commonly called by the natives; which, with its picturesque assemblage of water, woodland, and cultivated plains, its shining cities and shadowy hills, was spread out like some gay and gorgeous panorama before them. . . . In the center of the great basin were beheld the lakes, occupying then a much larger

²⁸ Thomas Dunn English, “Peter F. Rothermel,” *Sartain’s Union Magazine of Literature and Art* X, no. 1 (January 1852): 15.

²⁹ As Thomas Dunn English relates, Warrington Gillette (or Gillet) originally acquired this painting in 1844. In 1985, Louise A. Gillet, granddaughter-in-law of the original owner, donated it to the New-York Historical Society. See Richard J. Koke, ed., *American Landscape and Genre Paintings in the New-York Historical Society*, 3 volumes (New York: New-York Historical Society, 1982), III: 115.

portion of its surface than at present; their borders thickly studded with towns and hamlets, and, in the midst, – like some Indian empress with her coronal of pearls, – the fair city of Mexico, with her white towers and pyramidal temples, reposing as it were, on the bosom of the waters, – the far-famed “Venice of the Aztecs.”³⁰

Prescott relates that upon confronting such a spectacular scene, Cortés’ weary soldiers began to lose courage, with many wanting to return to Veracruz:

But these feelings of admiration were soon followed by others of a very different complexion; as they saw in all this the evidences of a civilization and power far superior to any thing they had yet encountered. The more timid, disheartened by the prospect, shrunk from a contest so unequal, and demanded, as they had done on some former occasions, to be led back again to Vera Cruz.³¹

Cortés, however, was emboldened by the dazzling scene, and he urged his soldiers onward:

By argument, entreaty, and menace, he endeavored to restore the faltering courage of the soldiers, urging them not to think of retreat, now that they had reached the goal for which they had panted, and the golden gates opened to receive them. In these efforts, he was well seconded by the brave cavaliers, who held honor dear to them as fortune.³²

Rothermel depicts a fairly faithful rendering of the scene described by Prescott. Standing on a rocky outcrop with his sword held over his head, Cortés urges his troops onward to Tenochtitlán, which is pictured far off in the distance. Rather than the emotionally charged rhetoric described by Prescott – “argument, entreaty and menace” – Cortés appears to calmly and confidently rally his troops (fig. 2.5). Standing above the group, Rothermel portrays the conquistador as an heroic man of action, one who, like De Soto, would establish “civilization” on the new

³⁰ Prescott, *History of the Conquest of Mexico*, 381.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 382.

³² *Ibid.*, 382-383.

continent. Prescott's narrative encouraged this view of history, for as an adherent of the romantic school of history, he looked upon any significant historical event as an expression of an exceptional man.³³ As the author asserts in his work, "the history of the Conquest is necessarily that of the great man who achieved it."³⁴

Like the artist's other images of the Conquest of Mexico, the composition is filled with a number of identifiable figures from Prescott's tale, as well as attributes that recall other passages in the narrative. In the right foreground, Gonzalo de Sandoval, Cortés' "trusty friend" and one of his "brave cavaliers" points to Tenochtitlán in the distance and firmly urges on an armor-clad soldier (fig. 2.6).³⁵ The armored soldier leans on a lance, and this object identifies him as Pedro de Alvarado.³⁶ Months later, when the Spaniards would be forced to flee Tenochtitlán on the *noche triste*, Alvarado would use his lance to vault to safety across a lake.³⁷

Several aspects of the scene hint at the religious aspect of the Conquest. Behind Cortés at the far left side of the canvas, a tonsured monk gazes at the view of the Aztec capital, and this figure suggests the Christian future of the region. The cruciform sword upheld by Cortés also alludes to the arrival of Christianity on the continent, and it recalls the standard that he carried with him during the Conquest.

³³ James Lockhart, introduction to Prescott, *History of the Conquest of Mexico*, xxviii.

³⁴ Prescott, *History of the Conquest of Mexico*, 666.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 882.

³⁶ The painting is described in an 1844 article, wherein the writer identifies Sandoval, Alvarado, and Doña Marina. See "Visits to the Painters," *Godey's Magazine and Lady's Book* (December 1844): 277.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 595. On the evening of June 30, 1520, known as *noche triste* ("sad night"), Cortés and his soldiers attempted to leave the capital quietly but were spotted by the Aztecs. Fierce fighting erupted, and the conquistadors suffered severe losses as they made their escape.

The black velvet standard was emblazoned with a red cross and a slogan in Latin that translated as, “Friends, let us follow the Cross; and under this sign, if we have faith, we shall conquer.”³⁸ This theme of religious conquest is also underscored by the female figure below Cortés who wears a crucifix around her neck. Although she is not included in Prescott’s description of the episode, this is certainly Cortés’ mistress and translator, Doña Marina, who Rothermel often depicted at the conquistador’s side. Doña Marina was the first Mesoamerican to convert to Christianity, and her white Western-style dress and crucifix symbolize the controlled and transformed indigenous culture (fig. 2.7). Lastly, while the Aztecs are not pictured, the featherwork mantle that Rothermel places in the right foreground alludes to Cortés’ adversary, Montezuma (fig. 2.8). Again, Prescott does not relate this detail in his text. However, in an earlier episode, Montezuma sent the Spaniards an embassy bearing elaborate gifts, including “beautiful mantles of the *plumaje*, or feather embroidery.”³⁹ Despite its exotic allure, the mantle appears fragile in comparison to the steel armor worn by the conquistador Alvarado, and this contrast alludes to the downfall of the Aztecs at the hands of what was seen as a more technologically “advanced” culture.⁴⁰

How might this painting have been understood within the context of mid nineteenth century U.S. expansionism? In 1844 this image might have served to inspire would-be U.S. conquerors who eyed Mexico’s territory to the south and west.

³⁸ Ibid., 188-189.

³⁹ Ibid., 253.

⁴⁰ Prescott observes, “the invulnerable armor of the Spaniard, his sword of matchless temper, and his skill in the use of it, gave him advantages.” Ibid., 568.

The image of the converted and reformed Doña Marina might have reassured U.S. Americans that the Mexicans would likely benefit from their contact with the United States. Overall, the canvas expresses the idea of the progress of history, and it implies that just as the Aztecs gave way to the Spanish, so too the Mexicans would make way for the U.S. Americans.

In 1845, Rothermel completed *The Surrender of Guatemozin* (see fig. 2.3), the second in his series of paintings based on Prescott's *History of the Conquest of Mexico*. As English relates in his profile of the artist, Professor James J. Mapes of New York commissioned the work.⁴¹ The canvas illustrates the event that marked the end the warfare between the Spaniards and the Aztecs, the surrender of the last Aztec emperor, Guatemozin, to Cortés on May 13, 1521.⁴² Prescott offers a vivid description of the scene:

Guatemozin, on landing was escorted by a company of infantry to the presence of the Spanish commander. He mounted the *azotea* with a calm and steady step, and was easily to be distinguished from his attendant nobles, though his full, dark eye was no longer lighted up with its accustomed fire, and his features wore an expression of passive resignation . . .

Cortés came forward with a dignified and studied courtesy to receive him. The Aztec monarch probably knew the person of his conqueror, for he first broke the silence by saying; "I have done all that I could, to defend myself and my people. I am now reduced to this state. You will deal with me, Malinche, as you list."⁴³

⁴¹ See English, "Peter F. Rothermel," 15. According to Thistlethwaite, Mapes held the chair of chemistry and natural philosophy at the National Academy of Design. See Thistlethwaite, *Painting in the Grand Manner*, 46, note 2. In 1845, Mapes lent the painting to the Fourth Annual Exhibition of the Brooklyn Institute. For the exhibition, see James L. Yarnall and William H. Gerds, *The National Museum of American Art's Index to American Art Catalogs: From the Beginning through the 1876 Centennial Year*, 5 volumes (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1986), 4: 3060.

⁴² The name Guatemozin also occurs as Cuauhtemoctzín, Guatémoc, Quauhtémoc, and Cuauhtémoc. He was the nephew and son-in-law of Montezuma, and he ascended the throne in 1520 on the death of Montezuma's brother and successor, Cuitláhuac.

⁴³ Prescott, *History of the Conquest of Mexico*, 808.

Like the artist's earlier image of the Conquest of Mexico, the composition is filled with figures and features that compress passages from Prescott's *History* into one scene. Set atop an *azotea*, or roof terrace, the Spaniards, headed by Cortés, have gathered to accept Guatemozin's surrender. Seated beside Cortés is his mistress, Doña Marina, and behind him a soldier holds up his standard emblazoned with the Christian cross the Spaniards believe assured their victory. Emerging from the dark smoke of battle, Guatemozin, with his hands crossed before his chest, reluctantly approaches Cortés. The Spaniard meets the Aztec monarch with open arms in a welcoming gesture, rather than the "dignified and studied courtesy" suggested by Prescott. Princess Tecuichpo, Guatemozin's wife and the daughter of Montezuma, stands next to the monarch, although she does not appear in Prescott's description of the scene. A group of Aztec objects, including a *tlauitolli* (bow), a *macuahuitl* (blade-encrusted club), and a codex page depicting Aztec warriors, rests in the right foreground, and their placement at the Spaniards' feet symbolizes the Aztecs' military defeat.⁴⁴ As Truettner notes, Rothermel's composition parallels Diego Velázquez's *Surrender at Breda* (fig.2.9).⁴⁵ The baroque work might have inspired Rothermel to include the Aztec codex page in his scene, as Velázquez's work contains a similar sheet of paper in the right foreground.

Rothermel's nineteenth-century viewers might have interpreted *The Surrender of Guatemozin* as the triumph of civilization over savagery, Christianity over

⁴⁴ I was unable to resolve my questions regarding which pictorial sources the artist consulted to create his Conquest of Mexico canvases. Thus, the sources Rothermel used to depict the codex page, the *macuahuitl*, and the *tlauitolli* will require further research.

⁴⁵ Truettner, ed., *The West as America*, 79.

paganism, with the Aztec monarch emerging from the dark smoke of ignorance and barbarism and approaching – even if reluctantly and under duress – the light of faith and reason. However, the painting was created a year after the United States annexed the Republic of Texas, and this event might have led U.S. Americans to interpret the scene in other ways. Some might have viewed the composition as the United States welcoming the former Mexican territory of Texas into the Union. Those in favor of annexation believed it was the United States’ destiny to further “the progress of humanity and civilization,” liberty, and “religious freedom” across North America.⁴⁶ Yet for others, the annexation of Texas was a cause of great concern. In this light, the distressed countenances of Princess Tecuichpo and the Spaniard seated in the right foreground might allude to the apprehensions felt by many in the United States at the annexation of Texas, as the event led to a contentious national debate about the extension of slavery into the state.⁴⁷ Indeed, the shackles around Guatemozin’s feet, which Prescott does not describe in his text, encourage this reading of the scene.

In 1846, as the United States entered into war with Mexico, Rothermel created his third painting of a Conquest scene, *Cortés before Tenochtitlan* (see fig. 2.6). According to English, Samuel H. Rothermel of Philadelphia, the artist’s cousin, commissioned the work.⁴⁸ Taken from Prescott’s *History*, the canvas depicts an event

⁴⁶ United States Senator Levi Woodbury, *Congressional Globe*, 28th Congress, 2nd Session, 299; quoted in John Christopher Pinheiro, “Crusade and Conquest: Anti-Catholicism, Manifest Destiny, and the U.S.-Mexican War of 1846-1848,” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Tennessee, 2001), 34.

⁴⁷ Gary Lawson and Guy Seidman, *The Constitution of Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 92.

⁴⁸ See English, “Peter F. Rothermel,” 15. According to Thistlethwaite, Samuel H. Rothermel eventually donated the canvas to the Union League of Philadelphia, an organization whose members included both Samuel and Peter Rothermel. See Thistlethwaite, *Painting in the Grand Manner*, 43.

that occurred during the prolonged siege of Tenochtitlán undertaken by Cortés and his men in 1521. As Prescott relates, the Spanish leader and his troops breached the Aztecs' defenses and entered the city, yet they were soon overwhelmed and were forced to retreat to Alvarado's camp outside the capital. Several of the Spaniards, however, were captured during the retreat, and as Cortés' group arrived safely at Alvarado's camp, they watched a gruesome scene unfold on Tenochtitlán's main temple, or *teocalli*:

They there beheld a long procession winding up the huge sides of the pyramid . . . As the long file of priests and warriors reached the flat summit of the *teocalli*, the Spaniards saw the figures of several men stripped to their waists, some of whom, by the whiteness of their skins, they recognized as their own countrymen. They were the victims for sacrifice. Their heads were gaudily decorated with coronals of plumes, and they carried fans in their hands. They were urged along by blows, and compelled to take part in the dances in honor of the Aztec war-god. The unfortunate captives, then stripped of their sad finery, were stretched, one after another, on the great stone of sacrifice. On its convex surface, their breasts heaved up conveniently for the diabolical purpose of the priestly executioner, who cut asunder the ribs by a strong blow with his sharp razor of *itztli*, and, thrusting his hand into the wound, tore away the heart, which, hot and reeking, was deposited on the golden censer before the idol. The body of the slaughtered victim was then hurled down the steep stairs of the pyramid . . . and the mutilated remains were gathered up by the savages beneath, who soon prepared with them the cannibal repast which completed the work of abomination!⁴⁹

In *Cortés Before Tenochtitlan*, the conquistadors have gathered just outside the Aztec capital. The cactus in the foreground locates the scene, as Prescott explains that Tenochtitlán derived from "*tunal* (a cactus) *on a stone*."⁵⁰ In the distance, looming above the towers and canals of the capital, the Aztec *teocalli* hums with activity, a plume of smoke billowing from its peak and darkening the late afternoon

⁴⁹ Prescott, *History of the Conquest of Mexico*, 773-774.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.

sky. In the foreground, the figures convey the reactions of Cortés' group to the spectacle that Prescott had described:

We may imagine what sensations the stupefied Spaniards must have gazed on this horrid spectacle, so near that they could almost recognize the persons of their unfortunate friends . . . Their limbs trembled beneath them, as they thought what might one day be their own fate; and the bravest among them, who had hitherto gone to battle, as careless and light-hearted, as to the banquet or the ball-room, were unable, from this time forward, to encounter their ferocious enemy without a sickening feeling, much akin to fear, coming over them.⁵¹

In the right foreground, Cortés stands resolutely with the cavalier Alvarado beside him. Yet the leader is unable to watch the events on the temple, and he casts his eyes downward. Behind Cortés a tonsured monk crouches and stares mournfully at the ground rather than at the sacrificial scene in the distance. Similarly, Doña Marina, who rests at Cortés' feet, does not look toward Tenochtitlán, and instead turns her back to the capital. Sitting next to her a Spanish soldier turns from the city and rests his head on his sword hilt. This figure is likely the conquistador Bernal Díaz, a soldier in Cortés' army whose eyewitness account of the incident Prescott cites as the source for his description of the scene.⁵² To the left another group has gathered. They are headed by a second Spanish monk who raises a cross with one hand while shielding his eyes with the other.

In *Cortés before Tenochtitlan* Rothermel presents a melancholy scene that illustrates a moment of doubt and defeat for the Spaniards. Viewers might have interpreted the scene as one that celebrates Cortés' heroic resolve under such difficult circumstances. Yet Rothermel's inclusion of the two religious men, who do not

⁵¹ Ibid., 774-775.

⁵² Ibid., 775, note 19.

appear in Prescott's description of the scene, indicates that the artist intended to address the religious aspect of the Conquest. In his *History*, Prescott blames the downfall of the Aztecs largely on issues endemic to the Aztec culture, particularly their sacrificial religion and its connection to a tyrannical regime. "In this state of things," he observes, "it was beneficently ordered by Providence that the land should be delivered over to another race, who would rescue it from the brutish superstitions."⁵³ However, rather than a scene that celebrates the triumph of Spanish Christianity over Aztec paganism, Rothermel's canvas seems to express a decidedly anti-Catholic message. The Catholic monks – symbols of the Catholic faith as a whole – appear as impotent figures, unable to stop the sanguinary rite before them. In the right foreground, Cortés' cross-emblazoned standard rests on the ground, a broken lance on top of it, thus symbolizing the broken nature of the Catholic faith. Such anti-Catholic sentiment was widespread in the mid nineteenth century. As Pinheiro details in his work on nineteenth-century anti-Catholicism, in the 1840s many U.S. Americans held that "the degenerate and enervated race of Mexico" resulted from their long period under the "spiritual darkness" of Catholic superstition.⁵⁴ Accordingly, Rothermel's canvas might be viewed as a commentary on the spiritually flawed nature of the Spanish Conquest as well as a support for the "second Conquest" by the United States and the spread of the "purer faith" of Protestantism that would renew the continent.⁵⁵

⁵³ Ibid., 68.

⁵⁴ Pinheiro, "'Extending the Light and Blessings of Our Purer Faith,'" 131.

⁵⁵ As Albert Boime argues, the view that the U.S. should spread its republican, Protestant culture was widespread at mid century. For example, in 1845 the Illinois congressman John Wentworth declared

While Rothermel painted three other Conquest subjects during the U.S.-Mexican War, *Cortés Burning His Ships Before Marching on Mexico* (1846), *Cortez. Launch of the Brigantines* (1848), and “*Noche Triste*” (1848), the first two of these works are currently unlocated, and the third was destroyed in a fire in 1977.⁵⁶ Amos Binney, a prominent Boston scientist and businessman who sought to promote “American artists,” commissioned the last of these works in 1847.⁵⁷ During the same year, Binney commissioned pictures from several other artists, including Emanuel Leutze, who completed *The Storming of the Teocalli by Cortez and his Troops* (fig. 2.10) in 1848.⁵⁸ It is not known whether Binney requested that Rothermel and Leutze depict episodes from Prescott’s *History of the Conquest of Mexico*, but it seems likely given that both artists produced scenes from the same text.

Emanuel Leutze’s *The Storming of the Teocalli by Cortez and His Troops*

Painted in 1848 in his studio in Düsseldorf, Germany, Leutze’s monumental canvas, *The Storming of the Teocalli by Cortez and his Troops*, is arguably the best-

that God had designed the original states “as the great center from which civilization, religion, and liberty should radiate and radiate until the whole continent shall bask in their blessing.” Quoted in Boime, *The Magisterial Gaze*, 10.

⁵⁶ *Cortez. Launch of the Brigantines* and “*Noche Triste*” are currently unlocated. According to the Smithsonian American Art Museum’s Art Inventories Catalog, *Cortés Burning His Ships Before Marching on Mexico* was in the collection of the Topeka Public Library in Topeka, Kansas when it was destroyed in a fire in 1977. Online database accessed April 8, 2007.

⁵⁷ English, “Peter F. Rothermel,” 15. Binney descended from an established Massachusetts family and earned a medical degree from Harvard in 1826. He eventually gave up medicine for business, pursuing his family’s ventures in mining and real estate. Later, he became one of the U.S.’s earliest conchologists. It is not known whether Binney and Prescott knew one another, but both were prominent Bostonians and served as trustees of the Boston Atheneum. See Amos Binney, *The Terrestrial Air-Breathing Mollusks of the United States*, vol. 1 (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1851), xxvii-xxviii; and “Boston Atheneum,” *Ballou’s Pictorial Drawing-Room Companion* (March 31, 1855): 200.

⁵⁸ For a description of Binney’s commission and a review of Leutze’s canvas, see “Fine Arts. The Paintings on Exhibition at the Art-Union,” *The Literary World* (September 8, 1849): 204.

known painted image of the Conquest of Mexico produced in the nineteenth century.⁵⁹ After acquiring a copy of Prescott's *History of the Conquest of Mexico*, Leutze chose to depict a scene set on Tenochtitlán's main temple, or *teocalli*, the great symbol of what Prescott characterized as a bloodthirsty religion that served to uphold a tyrannical regime.⁶⁰ Contemporary viewers interpreted Leutze's painting as an image of Prescott's dramatic denouement, the final victorious attack on the Aztecs by the Spaniards.⁶¹ Yet, in his *History*, Prescott relates the incident in just two sentences:

They drove the enemy up the heights of the pyramid, and, reaching the broad summit, a fierce encounter followed in mid-air, -- such an encounter as takes place where death is certain consequence of defeat. It ended, as usual, in the discomfiture of the Aztecs, who were either slaughtered on the spot still wet with the blood of their own victims, or pitched headlong down the sides of the pyramid.

Thus, to create his scene, Leutze drew from Prescott's description of an earlier battle that took place on the *teocalli* before the Spaniards were driven from Tenochtitlán on the *noche triste*. Like Rothermel, then, Leutze's painting telescopes more than one passages from Prescott's *History* into a single scene.

In the earlier incident in Prescott's work that inspired Leutze's painting, the author recounts how Cortés lead a small group of soldiers in a charge up the great *teocalli* where a group of "five or six hundred" Aztecs had gathered to discharge a

⁵⁹ The large painting was prominently displayed at the entrance to the 1991 Smithsonian America Art Museum exhibition, "The West As America."

⁶⁰ When he died in 1869, an 1847 edition of Prescott's work was among the books in Leutze's collection. This suggests he acquired the volume for the purpose of painting his Conquest subject. See lot 44 of Leavitt, Strebeigh & Co., *Executor's Sale of the Late Mr. E. Leutze*, New York: March 4 and 5, 1849. For Prescott's views on the Aztecs' religion, see Prescott, *History of the Conquest of Mexico*, 59-69.

⁶¹ "Fine Arts. The Paintings on Exhibition at the Art-Union," 204.

“tempest of arrows” onto the conquistadors.⁶² Prescott describes the ensuing battle in great detail:

Cortés, having cleared the way for the assault, sprang up the lower stairway, followed by Alvarado, Sandoval, Ordaz, and the other gallant cavaliers of his little band . . . The assailants pressed on, effectually supported by brisk fire of the musketeers from below, which so much galled the Mexicans in their exposed situation, that they were glad to take shelter on the broad summit of the *teocalli*.

Cortés and his comrades were close upon their rear, and the two parties soon found themselves face to face on this aerial battle-field, engaged in mortal combat in presence of the whole city, as well as of the troops in the court-yard, who paused, as if by mutual consent, from their own hostilities, gazing in silent expectation of the issue of those above. . . . The Christian and the Aztec contended for their religions under the very shadow of their respective shrines; while the Indian priests, running to and fro, with their hair wildly streaming over their sable mantles, seemed hovering in mid air, like so many demons of darkness urging on the work of slaughter!

The parties closed with the desperate fury of men who had no hope but in victory. Quarter was neither asked nor given; and to fly was impossible. The edge of the arena was unprotected by parapet or battlement. The least slip would be fatal; and the combatants, as they struggled in mortal agony, were sometimes seen to roll over the sheer sides of the precipice together.⁶³

In his depiction of the scene, Leutze illustrates both sides of the conflict, dividing the composition down the middle with the Spaniards on one side and the Aztecs on the other. The conquistadors advance from the left, with steel armor and drawn swords, toward the half-clad Aztecs armed with variety of deadly weapons, including *macuahuitls*, spears, clubs, and bow-and-arrows. In the background, a group of Aztec women and children have retreated to the upper platform of the *teocalli*, and several appeal to the large figure of the war god, Huitzilopochtli, for help (fig. 2.11). Leutze presents the cruelty of the Spanish Conquest with the actions

⁶² Prescott, *History of the Conquest of Mexico*, 565.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 566-567.

of several of the figures. Standing atop the *teocalli* where Cortés' standard has just been planted, a conquistador flings a small child from the temple (fig. 2.12), and below this scene, another Spaniard is shown looting the body of a fallen Aztec of his gold necklace (fig. 2.13). To the left, a Spanish friar forcefully administers the last rites to a dying Aztec, who turns away from the monk's crucifix and piercing stare. Leutze does not present the atrocities committed in battle as one sided, however. On the right side of the canvas, an Aztec priest engages in the sacrifice of a small child, who he holds over the bloody sacrificial altar, already dispatched by the blade clenched between his teeth (fig. 2.14). To his right, a young warrior beats on a drum using human femurs (2.15), further reminding viewers of Prescott's vivid descriptions of the Aztec practice of human sacrifice.

Leutze sets the highly charged conflict on an elaborate architectural structure based on Maya monuments. The artist used as his source Frederick Catherwood's illustrations of Maya sites and antiquities found in John Lloyd Stephens' two works, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan* (1841) and *Incidents of Travel in Yucatan* (1843).⁶⁴ Leutze combined and adapted several elements from Catherwood's engravings to create his scene. For the temple surmounting the *teocalli*, Leutze copied Catherwood's engraving of Las Monjas at Chichen Itza (fig. 2.16), and for the sculpture of Huitzilopochtli atop the structure, the base of which is

⁶⁴ When he died in 1869, Leutze owned an 1846 London edition of *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan*, and an 1843 London edition of *Incidents of Travel in Yucatan*. This suggests Leutze likely purchased these publications in Europe for the purpose of painting his 1848 work. See lots 36 and 54 in Leavitt, Strebeigh & Co., *Executor's Sale of the Late Mr. E. Leutze*. Leutze likely consulted Catherwood's images of Maya antiquities because few volumes picturing Aztec sites and monuments were available in the 1840s. Moreover, at the time, the differences between the two cultures were not widely recognized

visible at the top of Leutze's composition, the artist used Catherwood's image of a stela at Copán (see fig. 1.4). The serpent head in the right foreground derives from the sculpture at the base of the Castillo at Chichen Itza (see fig. 1.23), while the sacrificial altar above is taken from an altar at Copán (fig. 2.17). Lastly, the Aztec figure who confronts Cortés at the center of the composition – who most viewers identified as Montezuma – wears a feathered headdress and gold pendant pictured on a bas-relief at Palenque (see fig. 1.17).⁶⁵

While Leutze worked from Prescott's *History of the Conquest of Mexico*, the artist's painting does not closely follow the writer's narrative. Leutze conflates the two battles between the Spanish and the Aztecs that took place on the *teocalli*, and he includes figures, such as those of the women and children on the top of the temple, that do not appear in Prescott's description of either scene. Moreover, Leutze's work appears to diverge somewhat from Prescott's central idea, that the battle on the *teocalli* represented the struggle between Christian civilization and Aztec savagery.⁶⁶ At its debut at the American Art-Union exhibition in 1849, several viewers observed that the painting presented both the Spaniards and the Aztecs as morally lacking.⁶⁷

The writer for *The Albion*, for example, observed:

In this work nothing mitigates the terrible ferocity of the action – not even the figure of the monk, whose misguided ideas of the true spirit of Christianity destroy our respect for his devotedness. On all sides are the glaring eyes and

⁶⁵ During the first battle on the *teocalli*, on the *noche triste*, Cortés and his troops fought against Montezuma and his soldiers. Yet on the second, decisive battle on the *teocalli*, Cortés and his men faced Guatemozin and his soldiers.

⁶⁶ Truettner, "Storming the Teocalli," 69.

⁶⁷ The painting was first exhibited in New York *The Storming of the Mexican Teocalli By Cortez* at the American Art-Union. See *Painting on Exhibition*, (July-December 1849), no. 1103; see also "Gallery – No. 3," *American Art-Union Bulletin* (New York: July 1849): 6-8.

bloody hands of a mortal combat, and all the most ferocious passions that can agitate the human heart – the thirst for gold – the blind fanaticism – the relentless cruelty of the Spaniard, and the disgusting superstitions and horrid rites of the Aztec, which obscure from our view the bravery of his defense, and take away all our pity for his fate.⁶⁸

Rather than strictly following Prescott's fundamental theme, Leutze's history painting instead depicts a version of the past in order to address nineteenth-century issues. Indeed, as Truettner has described, Leutze's canvas seems to reflect the events shaping the Western world in 1848, in particular the artist's participation in the uprisings in Germany in 1848 in support of the democratic union of German states.⁶⁹ Contemporary viewers might equally have read the work as a commentary on the U.S.-Mexican War, since supporters of the war often argued that that in the centuries following the Conquest, the people of Mexico suffered under the same type of rule as they had endured under the Aztec Empire. Both, they believed, had been controlled by "a despotic clerical hierarchy with an unrepugnant connection between church and state."⁷⁰ In this light, Mexico could be liberated and renewed by the "purer Christianity" of the Protestant faith and the republican principles brought by the United States.

⁶⁸ "Fine Arts," *The Albion* (July 21, 1849): 345. The two interpretations discussed here, one viewing the Spaniards as rightful victors and the other viewing neither side as morally correct, were also debated by modern viewers after *The Storming of the Teocalli by Cortez and His Troops* appeared in the 1991 exhibition, "The West as America." For a summary of the debate, see Truettner, "Storming of the Teocalli," 74-79.

⁶⁹ William H. Truettner, "Storming the Teocalli – Again: Or, Further Thoughts on Reading History Paintings," *American Art* 9, no. 3 (Autumn 1995): 59.

⁷⁰ Pinheiro, "'Extending the Light and Blessings of Our Purer Faith,'" 132.

Concluding Remarks

Drawing from incidents related in Prescott's *History of the Conquest of Mexico*, Rothermel and Leutze's representations of scenes from the Conquest of Mexico invited viewers to draw connections between past and present events. Created at a time when the United States engaged in a series of conflicts with Mexico that culminated in the outbreak of the U.S.-Mexican War, these scenes invited U.S. American viewers to conceive of their country as a newer, divinely ordained nation destined to conquer Mexico. Indeed, many held that this more recent conquest would renew Mexico, in contrast with the earlier Spanish Conquest. With the success of the "second Conquest of Mexico," the United States acquired a significant portion of Mexican territory, and the absorption of this territory into the United States strengthened what U.S. Americans believed to be the link between the United States' future and the Mexican past. An example of this conceptual link to Mesoamerican history may be seen in the "Frieze of American History" in the rotunda of United States Capitol (fig. 2.18). The frieze illustrates significant events in the history of the nation, including *The Landing of Columbus*, *The Colonization of New England*, and *The Declaration of Independence*. Designed in the 1850s by Constantino Brumidi with input from Montgomery Meigs and Emanuel Leutze, the frieze also pictures an event from the Mesoamerican past, *Cortez and Montezuma at Mexican Temple* (fig. 2.19), here pictured as a key event in the history of the United States.⁷¹

⁷¹ Brumidi created a sketch for the frieze in 1859 but was not authorized to begin work until 1877. For a detailed account of the history of the frieze, see Barbara Wolanin, *Constantino Brumidi: Artist of the Capitol* (Washington, DC: Architect of the Capitol, 1998), 149-154. See also Vivian Green Fryd, *Art and Empire: The Politics of Ethnicity in the U.S. Capitol, 1815-1860* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 143-145.

Chapter Three

Picturing “Old America”: Mesoamerican Antiquity and the Latter-day Saint Artist George Martin Ottinger

We find here in these secular histories and traditions a remarkable confirmation of the historical portion of the Book of Mormon.

– George Martin Ottinger, “Votan, the Culture-Hero of the Mayas,” *Juvenile Instructor* (1879)¹

Working in his studio in Salt Lake City, in 1866 the artist George Martin Ottinger (1833-1917) completed a large painting entitled *The Last of the Aztecs*, an image of an indigenous American amid abandoned and decaying ruins in a tropical landscape (figs. 3.1, 3.2).² Leaning on a stone altar, hand to his head, the figure mournfully contemplates a crumbling relief portrait before him. In the background, the long shadows of palm trees across moldering buildings, as well as the gold and crimson sky above, signal the approach of twilight. A prolific artist, Ottinger painted well over three hundred canvases over the course of his career.³ His oeuvre consisted of a range of subjects, including landscapes, portraits, and genre paintings.

¹ George Martin Ottinger, “Votan, the Culture-Hero of the Mayas,” *Juvenile Instructor* 14, no. 5 (1879): 57-58.

² Currently in the collection of the Museum of Church History and Art (acc. no. LDS 43-183), the museum’s curators have attributed the unsigned work to Ottinger based on its style, subject matter, and provenance. After acquiring the painting in 1943, the museum assigned it the title *Mayan Ruins – Palenque*. I have identified the canvas as Ottinger’s 1866 work, *The Last of the Aztecs*, based on a description of the painting in “Nephite Remains – Interesting Picture,” *The Deseret News*, July 5, 1866.

³ Writing in his journal in 1872, Ottinger states that by that point in his career he had created 223 paintings in the preceding eight years. George Martin Ottinger, *Journal of George Martin Ottinger*, typescript of manuscript, George Martin Ottinger Papers, Manuscript Division, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah, 82. For a list of Ottinger’s works, although far from complete, see Herber G. Richards, “George M. Ottinger, Pioneer Artist of Utah,” *Western Humanities Review* (July 1949): 213-214.

Ottinger was best known, however, for his ancient Mesoamerican scenes, images of what he called “Old America.”⁴

With its ruined structures and twilight sky, *The Last of the Aztecs* evinces standard conventions of romantic painting, in which ruins are typically intended to connote the ephemeral nature of humanity and its constructs, as opposed to the eternal hand of God.⁵ The painting also bears similarities to the many images of “vanishing” indigenes produced in the nineteenth century, with the isolated figure’s doleful posture conveying a sense of the loss of a once-great culture.⁶ While *The Last of the Aztecs* exemplifies both these traditions, the painting takes on greater meaning when examined within the context of Ottinger’s Mormon faith.

An indigenous American religion claiming independence from the mediating influence of European Christianity, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was established in 1830 in upstate New York by Joseph Smith, Jr.⁷ The cornerstone of the Latter-day Saint, or Mormon, faith is the Book of Mormon, a sacred text purportedly unearthed by Smith that stands, as its modern subtitle states, with the Bible as “another testament of Jesus Christ.”⁸ Latter-day Saints believe that the text

⁴ Ottinger uses the term “Old America” to refer to ancient America throughout his journal as well as in a series of articles he wrote in the 1870s. Ottinger, *Journal* and George Martin Ottinger, “Old America,” *Juvenile Instructor* 9, no. 23 (November 7, 1874): 266-267.

⁵ For a discussion of ruins and romantic painting, see Christopher Woodward, *In Ruins* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2001), 93.

⁶ For an analysis of the trope of the “vanishing” Indian, see Brian W. Dippie, *The Vanishing Indian: White Attitudes and U.S. Indian Policy* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1982).

⁷ For a history of the Latter-day Saint Church, see Terryl L. Givens, *The Latter-day Saint Experience in America* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004) and Jan Shipps, *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

⁸ This subtitle was added beginning in 1982, by a decision of the church’s General Authorities.

relates the histories of a series of Israelite groups who journey under divine guidance to a new promised land in the Western Hemisphere.⁹ The narrative traces the rise and fall of these groups in ancient America and foretells a final gospel dispensation on earth – the restoration of the true covenants and gospel of Jesus Christ by a “latter-day” American prophet – before the Millennium.¹⁰

In this chapter I examine select examples of Ottinger’s “Old American” works, including the first artistic representations of scenes from the Book of Mormon. Situating these paintings within the context of nineteenth-century Latter-day Saint beliefs and traditions, I examine how Ottinger’s images took part in a larger effort to align Mesoamerican antiquity with Book of Mormon history in order to corroborate and concretize the Book of Mormon narrative.¹¹ Working at a time when there was no consensus on the precise geographical location of specific

⁹ In accordance with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints’ practice, I will not italicize references to the Book of Mormon in this dissertation. Moreover, in references to the text, I will use the book-chapter-verse citation format commonly applied to biblical citations.

¹⁰ Latter-day Saints are millennialists, believing in the imminent second coming of Christ and his establishment of a one thousand-year reign of peace. Moreover, they believe they were chosen by God to build an earthly kingdom, a new American Jerusalem, in order to receive the second advent of Christ. For a detailed discussion of this topic, see Grant Underwood, *The Millenarian World of Early Mormonism* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1999).

¹¹ Several scholars have examined Ottinger’s work, including Robert S. Olpin, William C. Seifrit, and Vern G. Swanson. See *Artists of Utah* (Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith Publisher, 1999), 186. Breanne Robertson, in her master’s thesis on Ottinger, was the first to critically examine Ottinger’s work in light of his Latter-day Saint faith. She argues that Ottinger’s depictions of ancient Mesoamericans not only stemmed from his religious faith, but also his desire to gain recognition from the non-Mormon community in the United States through the use of original subject matter. Furthermore, she argues that by exhibiting his works in non-Mormon venues, Ottinger sought to legitimize and proselytize the Mormon faith. Robertson does not address Ottinger’s representations of scenes from the Book of Mormon and instead focuses on Ottinger’s more general scenes of ancient Mesoamerica. In this chapter, I place a particular emphasis on Ottinger’s Book of Mormon scenes and argue that Ottinger intended his paintings primarily for a Mormon audience, as they served to affirm Mormon doctrine and concretize memory for the Latter-day Saint community. See Breanne Robertson, “Poster Children of the Sun: Aztecs as Mormon Propaganda in the Paintings of George Martin Ottinger” (M.A. thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 2005).

incidents related in the Book of Mormon, or indeed, agreement about what the book's characters and scenery looked like, Ottinger's "Old American" paintings brought Book of Mormon peoples and landscapes to life. As the earliest attempts to visualize the church's spiritual ancestors and their descendants, Ottinger's paintings helped to shape Mormons' conceptions of these people, inextricably linking them to Mesoamerica.¹² In so doing, Ottinger's art set the precedent for representations of Book of Mormon subjects, one that continues today.

Early Life and Conversion to the Latter-day Saint Church

Ottinger was born in 1833 to a middle class Quaker family in Springfield Township, Pennsylvania, on the outskirts of Philadelphia.¹³ As he later recounted in his journal, Ottinger showed an interest in drawing and painting as a young child. His curiosity was sparked at the age of seven when the artist Peter F. Rothermel visited his town and allowed Ottinger to watch him paint. In his journal he relates,

I would sit for hours looking at [Rothermel] and wonder if I ever would be able to do half as well my self when I became a man. I resolved in my own heart that I would be able to be a painter. Come what would, that should be my profession.¹⁴

¹² My ideas here, that Ottinger's images of Mesoamerica were a means of both affirming Mormon doctrine and of concretizing memory, have been influenced by a number of sources, including David Morgan, *Visual Piety* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); and the introduction to David Morgan and Sally M. Promey, eds., *The Visual Culture of American Religions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001). See also Gregor T. Goethals, *The Electric Golden Calf: Images, Religion, and the Making of Meaning* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley, 1990); and David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

¹³ Ottinger was born in Springfield Township, Montgomery County. Ottinger, *Journal*, 2. Biographical information on Ottinger was derived from this source as well as from: Robert S. Olpin, *Dictionary of Utah Art* (Salt Lake City: Salt Lake Art Center, 1980), 172-181; George Nelsen Ottinger, "Biographical Sketch of George M. Ottinger," February 9, 1940, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah; and "George M. Ottinger, The Utah Artist," *American Phrenological Journal* (March 1869): 109.

¹⁴ Ottinger, *Journal*, 7.

Rothermel completed portraits of Ottinger's father and mother, which Ottinger later inherited and kept until the end of his life.¹⁵

When he was seventeen, Ottinger ran away aboard a whaling ship and spent the next three years sailing around the world, making stops in Africa, Asia, and the Americas. In Latin America, his ship anchored off Valparaiso in Chile, Payta in Peru, the Galapagos Islands, the port city of Taboga in Panama, and Alcapulco, Mexico.¹⁶ In his journal, Ottinger made no mention of seeing antiquities while in Latin America, and it seems unlikely that he journeyed inland to view the major Mesoamerican sites. However, he certainly might have heard accounts of antiquities and ruined cities during his travels in the region.

In 1853 Ottinger returned to his family in Pennsylvania and began formal studies in art while working a succession of jobs, including tinting photographs in a photography studio.¹⁷ At the suggestion of his brother-in-law, he began traveling to Philadelphia to take art lessons. While little is known of his studies, in his journal Ottinger mentions receiving instruction from an artist named W. Lanford Mason.¹⁸

¹⁵ Ibid. Rothermel completed the portraits in 1840. Writing in his journal in 1872, Ottinger stated that Rothermel was "the best American historical painter living." I was unable to discern if Ottinger was aware of Rothermel's paintings with Mesoamerican subjects. See Ottinger, *Journal*, 83.

¹⁶ Ibid., 28-29, 32, 35, 43, 48-50, 53.

¹⁷ Ibid., 60.

¹⁸ Ibid., 59. Several secondary sources state that Ottinger studied at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (PAFA) in the 1850s, including Herber G. Richards, "George M. Ottinger, Pioneer Artist of Utah," *Western Humanities Review* (July 1949), 213; and Olpin, *Dictionary of Utah Art*, 179. Ottinger, however, makes no mention of this in his journal and I could find nothing to support this claim. In her master's thesis on Ottinger, Robertson also concludes that there is no surviving documentation of Ottinger's enrollment at the PAFA. Yet, as she states, there are limited surviving rolls for that period of the institution's history, and thus there is a possibility that Ottinger did study there briefly. See Robertson, "Poster Children of the Sun: Aztecs as Mormon Propaganda in the Paintings of George Martin Ottinger," 15, note 21.

He also studied the lessons in John Gadsby Chapman's *The American Drawing-Book* and copied engravings from several volumes of the *Art Journal*.¹⁹

The year 1858 brought two important events in Ottinger's life. He began to paint in oils, creating portraits of his family, and, on June 7 of that year, the artist was baptized a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.²⁰

Ottinger's mother had previously converted and she likely influenced his decision to do the same.²¹ One of the church's thirteen Articles of Faith, articulated by Joseph Smith, stated that all members must gather together in a new American Jerusalem in preparation for the Millennium.²² Hence, in 1861 Ottinger and his mother joined Saints assembling in Salt Lake City in Utah Territory,²³ the then twenty-seven year-old artist walking alongside a wagon train from Florence, Nebraska, to Salt Lake

Also on the subject of Ottinger's training, Robert S. Olpin, William C. Seifrit, and Vern G. Swanson write that in 1853 the artist studied in Philadelphia with the painter Robert W. Weir. I could not locate any evidence, however, to support this claim. See *Artists of Utah*, 186.

¹⁹ Ottinger, *Journal*, 59.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 60. In his journal, Ottinger does not indicate what motivated his conversion.

²¹ "Veteran Artist Still Busy with Palette and Brush: Sailor, Soldier, Fireman, Pioneer, Actor—All These and More has George M. Ottinger, Octogenarian Painter, Been in a Life Filled with Activities in Many Quarters of the World," *Deseret Evening News*, January 22, 1916. See also Olpin, *Dictionary of Utah Art*, 175.

²² The Articles of Faith outline thirteen basic points of belief of the Latter-day Saint Church. Joseph Smith first wrote them in an 1842 letter to John Wentworth, a newspaper editor, in answer to Wentworth's request to know what Mormons believed. For the full list, see Givens, *The Latter-day Saint Experience*, 296. For a good overview of LDS history, doctrine, and procedures, see Daniel H. Ludlow, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1992). For information on the gathering in Salt Lake City, see Ronald K. Esplin, "'A Place Prepared: Joseph, Brigham, and the Search for a Promised Refuge in the West,'" *Journal of Mormon Studies* 9 (1982): 85-111.

²³ The Mormon Church uses the term "Saint" as a synonym for "member" and thus "Saints" here denotes all members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. See James K. Lyon, "Saints," in Ludlow, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1249-1250.

City.²⁴ While en route, Ottinger completed at least three paintings of scenes along the way, which constitute his earliest surviving works.²⁵

In Salt Lake City, Ottinger had intended to make a living as a painter but he was never able to support himself solely as an artist, as he found most residents lacked the resources to purchase works of art.²⁶ In 1862, he established a successful photography business with Charles Roscoe (C.R.) Savage, selling photographic portraits and landscape views, which the firm displayed in its storefront gallery along with a selection of Ottinger's paintings (fig. 3.3).²⁷ For the remainder of his life, Ottinger painted in his free time while holding a variety of jobs, including photographic colorist at Savage and Ottinger, scenic painter at the Salt Lake Theater, Salt Lake City fire chief, and superintendent of the Salt Lake City Water Works.²⁸ In addition, Ottinger worked to develop the artistic community in Salt Lake City, instructing hundreds of students over his lifetime at the Deseret Academy of Arts,

²⁴ Ottinger, *Journal*, 62-71. Ottinger arrived in Salt Lake City on September 12, 1861.

²⁵ The three paintings, *Burial of John Morse at Wolf Creek*; *Chimney Rock, August 3, 1861*; and *Mormon Emigration Train at Green River*, are now in the collection of the Museum of Church History and Art, Salt Lake City.

²⁶ Writing in 1861 Ottinger notes, "I found the people of Salt Lake could appreciate pictures but they were too poor to pay for them." Ottinger, *Journal*, 71.

²⁷ Ottinger, *Journal*, 72. For an advertisement promoting a display of Ottinger's works in the storefront gallery, see *The Deseret Evening News*, January 18, 1866. For information on C.R. Savage and on the firm of Savage and Ottinger, see "A Rocky Mountain Book Store," *American Phrenological Journal* (May 1868): 195; and Madeleine B. Stern, "A Rocky Mountain Book Store: Savage and Ottinger of Utah," *BYU Studies* 9, no. 2 (Winter 1969): 144-154.

²⁸ Ottinger, *Journal*, 71-72. Ottinger worked intermittently at the theater both as a scenic painter and as an actor throughout the 1860s. See "Old Honesty's Reminiscences of Salt Lake Theater," *The Deseret News*, November 10, 1869; and "Veteran Artist Still Busy with Palette and Brush."

which he helped found in 1863, and at the University of Deseret (now Utah), where he served as art instructor from 1882 to 1892.²⁹

The Book of Mormon: A Story of Ancient American Peoples

The foundation of Ottinger's new faith rested on the Book of Mormon, the sacred text of the Latter-day Saint Church. This work tells the story of three groups of ancient peoples who purportedly once flourished in the Western Hemisphere.³⁰ Mormons identify these groups as the ancestors of later indigenous Americans.³¹ Constructed as a historical narrative and divided into fifteen "books," each named after an ancient prophet-historian, the Book of Mormon centers on the family of Lehi, an Israelite supposedly descended from the tribe of Manasseh.³² The opening chapters relate that Lehi has been chosen by God to establish a new spiritual order in a new promised land, and thus in 590 B.C.E. Lehi leads his family out of Palestine

²⁹ "Prospectus of the Deseret Academy of Arts," *Deseret News*, August 5, 1863. For the University of Deseret, see Vern G. Swanson, et al., *Utah Art* (Layton, UT: Gibbs Smith, 1991), 17.

³⁰ The Book of Mormon concentrates on three groups, the descendants of Lehi (the Nephites and the Lamanites), the Mulekites (also called the people of Zarahemla), and the Jaredites. However, eleven other groups are mentioned in the text. For an examination of these secondary groups, see John L. Sorenson, "Book of Mormon Peoples," in Ludlow, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 191-195.

³¹ Nineteenth-century Mormons believed that all later indigenous Americans were descendants of the Israelite Lehi and thus they were "remnants" of Israel. This belief drove later missionary efforts among indigenous groups in Mexico and in the western United States, as converting – or restoring – these Israelites would hasten Christ's Second Coming. See Bruce A. Chadwick and Thomas Garrow, "Native Americans," in Ludlow, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 981-985; and F. LaMond Tullis, *Mormons in Mexico: The Dynamics of Faith and Culture* (Logan: Utah State Press, 1987), 4-5, 11.

³² Lehi, then, was a descendant of the biblical Joseph. The belief that indigenous Americans were descended from the Israelites was widely advanced in the period 1607-1840. Those who proposed the theory included Cotton Mather, Roger Williams, William Penn, and Jonathan Edwards. For a discussion and a bibliography of this subject, see Samuel Cole Williams' introduction to James Adair, *History of the American Indians* (Johnson City, TN: Watauga Press, 1930), xxix-xxx. See also Wauchope, *Lost Tribes and Sunken Continents*, 57.

and travels by boat to the Americas, “a choice land above all other lands.”³³ After their arrival, the descendents of Lehi split into two opposing fraternal factions, the Nephites and the Lamanites, whose rivalry constitutes the text’s primary narrative. Over the following centuries, the Nephites and Lamanites migrate, establish cities, go to war, follow the word of God, and repeatedly fall into periods of unbelief and sinfulness. All the while a series of prophets foretell the Spanish Conquest, the colonization of the Americas, the founding of the United States,³⁴ and the establishment of a new Zion in North America.³⁵ The climax of the book recounts the destruction of much of the Nephite and Lamanite civilizations at the time of the crucifixion of Christ in Jerusalem. Shortly thereafter, in 34 C.E., the resurrected Christ appears to the surviving righteous people, establishes a church, and delivers many of the teachings that appear in the New Testament.³⁶ There follows a roughly two hundred-year period of peace and harmony, with the Nephites and Lamanites drawing together to form a single Christian community.³⁷ By the mid fourth century

³³ Ether 13:2. For a good synopsis of the Book of Mormon, as well as an account of its production and a summary of early reactions to the text, see Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp, introduction to *The Book of Mormon*, by Joseph Smith, Jr. (New York: Penguin Books, 2008), vii-xxvii. See also R. Tripp Evans, *Romancing the Maya, Mexican Antiquity in the American Imagination, 1820-1915* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 89-92.

³⁴ The Nephite Jacob relates prophecies regarding the future of North America when “this land shall be a land of liberty.” This “land of liberty,” where “there shall be no kings,” is an obvious reference to the United States. Indeed, in editions of the Book of Mormon issued after 1879, it was footnoted as such. See 2 Nephi 10:11.

³⁵ For a discussion of these prophecies, see Givens, *The Latter-day Saint Experience*, 3-5.

³⁶ During his tenure in the Americas, Christ redelivered the Sermon on the Mount, gave instructions for baptism and Holy Communion, and adopted a group of twelve American Apostles. See 3 Nephi 11:8-28, and 3 Nephi 12:11-30.

³⁷ I use of the term “Christian” in this chapter in relationship to the Latter-day Saint faith, yet I acknowledge that the idea that the Mormons are a Christian group is a much-debated issue. The Latter-day Saint Church’s belief that Christ’s original church was lost and was only restored by

C.E., however, members of the community begin to lose faith, and again call themselves Lamanites in order to distinguish themselves from the believers, or Nephites. The saga ends in the early fifth century when the two groups engage in a calamitous war, the bellicose Lamanites eventually defeating the last remaining Christian Nephites.³⁸

In addition to Lehi and his descendants, the Book of Mormon briefly discusses two other groups, the Mulekites and the Jaredites. The Mulekites were purportedly descendants of Mulek, a son of the Old Testament king Zedekiah, who escaped the sack of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in the sixth century B.C.E.³⁹ Mulek journeyed with his followers to the Western Hemisphere, eventually settling in a region called Zarahemla. The Mulekites are later discovered by the Nephites, with whom they join in about 200 B.C.E.

Joseph Smith divides them from traditional Christianity. Indeed, many members of other denominations do not consider Mormons to be Christian, and the incompatibility of doctrines and beliefs has impeded ecumenism between Mormons and a number of Christian denominations. On their side, the Latter-day Saint Church asserts that it is a Christian group, citing the belief in Jesus Christ and the adherence to his doctrines. For an examination of the issue, see John R. Pottenger, "The Mormon Religion, Cultural Challenges, and the Good Society," in *Taking Religious Pluralism Seriously: Spiritual Politics on America's Sacred Ground*, edited by Barbara A. McGraw and Jo Renee Formicola (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2005), 109-110. For the Mormon side of the debate, see Stephen E. Robinson, "Are Mormons Christians?" *New Era* (May 1998): 41.

³⁸ As related in the First Book of Nephi, God cursed the Lamanites with a "dark and loathsome" complexion because of their unbelief and idolatry. See 1 Nephi 12:23; also see Mormon 5:15 and 2 Nephi 5:21. According to the Book of Mormon, when the Lamanites repent and believe in Christ again, they will become "white" skinned. See 3 Nephi 2:15.

³⁹ Zedekiah was the last king of Judah before the destruction of the kingdom by Babylon. See 2 Chronicles 36:9 in the Old Testament. For the Mulekites, or the "people of Zarahemla," see Omni 1:14-21.

The last group introduced in the Book of Mormon, the Jaredites, are the most ancient.⁴⁰ The text relates that the Jaredites left the Near East after the fall of the Tower of Babel and arrived in the Americas two thousand years before the family of Lehi. Like the descendants of Lehi, the Jaredites initially follow the word of God but gradually decline into wickedness until they are destroyed in a civil war. As the Book of Mormon recounts, it was near the site of the ruined and abandoned Jaredite settlements in upstate New York that the Lamanites ultimately annihilate the righteous Nephites in 421 C.E. Near the final battlefield, the Hill Cumorah, the last Christian Nephite, Moroni, hides the records of the ancient American peoples, which had been gathered by his father, Mormon, in order to preserve the original covenant. Written in a hieroglyphic text on golden plates, the historical records are thus sealed until a “latter-day” American prophet would be called by God to restore the church before the second coming of Christ.

Nineteenth-Century Mormonism and Mesoamerican Antiquity

Joseph Smith, Jr., a young farmhand from the village of Manchester, New York, claimed to have excavated and translated the ancient plates after receiving a series of divine revelations and visitations by the angel Moroni in the 1820s.⁴¹ First published in 1830, the Book of Mormon presents a Christian narrative in which the

⁴⁰ The penultimate book of the Book of Mormon, the Book of Ether, relates the history of the Jaredites.

⁴¹ The church currently states that Smith was the translator of the Book of Mormon, not the author. The first edition, however, lists Smith as “author and proprietor” on its title page. See Joseph Smith, Jr., *The Book of Mormon* (Palmyra, NY: E.B. Grandin, 1830). The standard account of Smith’s revelations, as well as his visitations by Moroni, is recounted in *The Pearl of Great Price: Being a Choice Selection from the Revelations, Translations, and Narratives of Joseph Smith, First Prophet, and Revelator to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Liverpool, England: Franklin D. Richards, 1851).

New World, rather than the Old, takes center stage.⁴² While the text provides no specific geographic locations for the events it chronicles, it describes highly developed ancient American civilizations scattered over a large area with “many mighty cities” built of stone and cement, “spacious palaces,” “temples,” and “elegant and spacious buildings . . . ornamented . . . with fine work.”⁴³ As Terryl Givens notes, nineteenth-century readers required a vivid imagination to see such greatness in the vast North American wilderness.⁴⁴ Nonetheless, Smith and early Mormon leaders sought to identify Book of Mormon lands, initially concentrating on Missouri and the West. When accounts of ruined stone temples and palaces in Mexico and Central America began to appear in the United States in the 1830s and early 1840s, however, Smith and his brethren extended their proposed map of Book of Mormon geography to include Mesoamerica.⁴⁵

The most significant factor in drawing early Latter-day Saint attention to Mesoamerica was the publication of John Lloyd Stephens’ 1841 work, *Incidents of*

⁴² As Robert Flanders notes, the account of ancient American history presented in the Book of Mormon fit in with contemporary “popular beliefs about mythic America and dramatized and legitimated them.” Especially appealing were the ideas that North America was a chosen land, that Christ had not overlooked the continent, and that its final destiny was that it should be the cradle of God’s penultimate kingdom. Robert Flanders, “To Transform History: Early Mormon Culture and the Concept of Time and Space,” *Church History* 40, no. 1 (March 1971): 113.

⁴³ For “many mighty cities,” see Ether 9:23; for “spacious palaces,” see Mosiah 11:9; for “temples” see Helaman 3:14; and for “elegant and spacious buildings” see Mosiah 11:8.

⁴⁴ Terryl L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture that Launched a New World Religion* (Cambridge and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 96. Much of my thinking in this chapter has been informed by Givens’ scholarship, especially this work.

⁴⁵ While I refer to a mental map here, recent scholarship has revealed that early Mormons were making geographic maps of the Book of Mormon lands as well. Recently, H. Donl Peterson discovered a hand-drawn map in the church’s archives with an inscription tying it to Smith. The map notes the site where Christ appeared in the New World as located in “Sentral America.” The map is illustrated in H. Donl Peterson, “Moroni, the Last of the Nephite Prophets,” *The Book of Mormon: Fourth Nephi Through Moroni, From Zion to Destruction* (Provo: Brigham Young University), 245.

Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan.⁴⁶ To Mormon readers, Stephens' account of ancient temples, palaces, and hieroglyphic tablets corresponded with the advanced state of Nephite civilization described in the Book of Mormon. Smith himself owned a copy of Stephens' work, writing in an 1841 letter that it "unfolds & develops many things that are of great importance to this generation & corresponds with & supports the testimony of the Book of Mormon."⁴⁷ Smith, then editor of the Mormon newspaper, *Times and Seasons*, also printed an extract from Stephens' book in the September 15, 1842 edition. Following Stephens' account of the antiquities at Palenque, Smith concluded,

The foregoing extract has been made to assist the Latter-Day Saints, in establishing the Book of Mormon as a revelation from God. It affords great joy to have the world assist us to so much proof, that even the most credulous cannot doubt. . . . These wonderful ruins of Palenque are among the mighty works of the Nephites: - and the mystery is solved.⁴⁸

As his words indicate, Smith upheld Mesoamerican antiquities as physical evidence of the veracity of the Book of Mormon narrative. This evidence – that the Book of Mormon was rooted, as Givens states, in "historical facticity" – not only worked to strengthen the convictions of the early Saints, it was also aimed at countering the

⁴⁶ Givens calls the publication of Stephens' 1841 work "a defining moment in the history of the Book of Mormon." Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon*, 101. In his study of pre-1846 Mormon publications, Grant Underwood found that passages from the Book of Mormon were discussed more often in relation to archaeological evidence than in reference to any other religious theme. See Grant Underwood, "Book of Mormon Usage in Early LDS Theology," *Dialogue* 17, no. 3 (Autumn 1984): 41.

⁴⁷ Joseph Smith to John Bernhisel, November 16, 1841, in Dean C. Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Brigham Young University Press, 2002), 533.

⁴⁸ The editorial comment following the extract of Stephens' book was unsigned, yet as Smith was then the editor of *Times and Seasons*, the comment was certainly written by him. "Extract from Stephen's 'Incidents of Travels in Central America,'" *Times and Seasons*, September 15, 1842.

religion's opponents, who ridiculed the notion of advanced-level civilizations flourishing in the Western Hemisphere centuries before European colonization.⁴⁹

In the decades following Smith's assassination in 1844, the Saints continued to their use of Mesoamerican antiquity to contextualize and authenticate the Book of Mormon.⁵⁰ In an effort to gain converts, Mormon missionaries traveling throughout the United States frequently cited Mesoamerican antiquities as evidence in support of claims made in the Book of Mormon.⁵¹ In addition, articles linking Mesoamerican ruins with Book of Mormon peoples regularly appeared in mid- and late-nineteenth-century Mormon periodicals.⁵² For example, the official church publication in Britain, the *Millennial Star*, featured a regular column on the subject entitled,

⁴⁹ Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon*, 103. It is important to keep in mind that the Mormons suffered intense persecution by detractors of their faith during the period under question here.

⁵⁰ As Matthew Roper relates, in the nineteenth century there was a fluidity of ideas regarding the locations of the events chronicled in the Book of Mormon. In essence, two theories emerged. One, the hemispheric geography theory, postulated that the events in the Book of Mormon took place over North and South America. The other, the limited geography theory, proposed that the events were limited to North America and were centered in Mesoamerica. For a detailed account of both theories, see Matthew Roper, "Limited Geography and the Book of Mormon: Historical Antecedents and Early Interpretations," *FARMS Review* 16, no. 2 (2004): 225-276.

⁵¹ As S. George Ellsworth documents in his study of Mormon missions in antebellum America, missionaries regularly used Parley P. Pratt's *A Voice of Warning and Instruction to All People* (1837) as a formula for summarizing the Mormon Church's basic doctrines and arguments. In this book, Pratt marshals archaeological evidence in support of claims made in the Book of Mormon, including the remains of a "stone city . . . full of palaces, monuments, statues, and inscriptions" at the site of Palenque in Mexico. See S. George Ellsworth, "A History of the Mormon Missions in the United States and Canada, 1830-1860" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1951), 46-47; Larry C. Porter, and Parley P. Pratt, *A Voice of Warning and Instruction to All People*, 13th edition (Salt Lake City: George Q. Cannon and Sons, 1891), 133-136. Pratt also describes the earthworks and mounds found in the Mississippi and Ohio Valley regions of North America on pages 131-133.

⁵² Numerous examples of this type of article appeared in Mormon periodicals in the nineteenth century. See, for example, W.H.H. Sharp's series, "The Divine Authenticity of the Book of Mormon," *Deseret News*, May 28, June 4, July 16, July 30, August 6, August 13, September 3, and September 10, 1879; and January 21, February 11, 1880. In these articles, Sharp discusses archaeological sites throughout North and South America, connecting each to locations and peoples from the Book of Mormon.

“American Antiquities, Corroborative of the Book of Mormon.”⁵³ These articles recounted the newest developments in Mesoamerican archaeology, which were unfailingly presented as scientific proof of the Book of Mormon narrative.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, John Taylor, who assumed leadership of the church following Brigham Young’s death in 1877, asserted that Mesoamerican mythology and antiquities confirmed the Book of Mormon narrative in his 1882 book, *Mediation and Atonement of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*.⁵⁴ In his discussion of Christ’s visit to the New World, Taylor linked him to the Mesoamerican deity Quetzalcoatl, who the Aztecs described as a tall, bearded god who came from the sky, spread wisdom and preached peacefulness, and before disappearing, promised to return.⁵⁵ Of this deity, Taylor concluded,

The story of the life of the Mexican divinity, Quetzalcoatl, closely resembles that of the Savior; so closely, indeed, that we can come to no other conclusion than that Quetzalcoatl and Christ are the same being. But the history of the former has been handed down to us through an impure Lamaniteish source, which has sadly disfigured and perverted the original incidents and teaching of the Savior’s life and ministry.⁵⁶

⁵³ “American Antiquities: Corroborative of the Book of Mormon,” *Millennial Star*, January 1, 1859 - June 2, 1860.

⁵⁴ For a short biography of Taylor, see Givens, *The Latter-day Saint Experience*, 279.

⁵⁵ Quetzalcoatl, whose name translates as “feathered serpent,” was a deity worshipped by several Mesoamerican cultures. From the sixteenth century onward, Quetzalcoatl’s identity was the subject of speculation by many European writers, including Bartolomé de las Casas. See *Los Indios de Mexico y Nueva España Antología* (Mexico: Editorial Porrúa, 1982), 54, 218, 223. Some sixteenth-century historians, however, including Diego Durán, saw Quetzalcoatl as a Christian figure and connected him with Saint Thomas. For an examination of the many theories on the identity of Quetzalcoatl, see Jacques Lafaye, *Quetzalcoatl and Guadalupe: The Formation of Mexican National Consciousness, 1531-1813*, trans. Benjamin Keen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

⁵⁶ John Taylor, *Mediation and Atonement of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Publishing Company, 1882), 202. By “Lamanitish,” Taylor means that the legend was

Ottinger's "Old America"

Within a decade of his arrival in Salt Lake City, Ottinger established himself as a local expert on ancient America, painting images, giving lectures, taking part in excavations of nearby burial mounds, and accumulating a substantial research library.⁵⁷ Additionally, in the 1870s, Ottinger wrote dozens of articles on the history of "Old America" for Mormon periodicals.⁵⁸ These articles provide a window onto

distorted as it was handed down by the Aztecs, who nineteenth-century Mormons believed were descendants of the Lamanites.

⁵⁷ Ottinger's reputation was such that he was often mentioned in Salt Lake City newspaper articles in relation to American antiquities. For example, when a missionary returned from Mexico and donated a collection of Aztec items to the Salt Lake Museum, the local press noted that Ottinger should be consulted to help interpret the objects. See "Salt Lake City Museum," *Deseret Evening News*, March 10, 1880, and "Aztec Curiosities," *Salt Lake Herald*, March 20, 1880. Newspaper articles relate that Ottinger frequently lectured on "ancient America." In one lecture, Ottinger recounted the "secular history of the peopling of America . . . showing, in a very lucid and forcible manner, the truth of the history called the Book of Mormon." See "Ancient America," *Deseret News*, April 4, 1877. The artist also excavated at least one ancient burial mound in Utah. In the nineteenth century, many individuals, both Mormon and non-Mormon, believed the ruins in the American Southwest were those of the Aztecs or the Toltecs. For Ottinger's excavation, see "Ancient Mounds," *Deseret News*, October 28, 1868. For the belief that the Southwest ruins were the work of ancient Mesoamericans, see "Discoveries in New-Mexico – Aztec Ruins, Altar Fires, Skeletons, &c.," *New York Times*, September 27, 1870. Regarding his research library, Ottinger acquired numerous books on ancient Mesoamerica throughout his life. Writing in his journal in 1899, Ottinger states that he spent over \$1,500 on books on ancient America since his arrival in Utah. See Ottinger, *Journal*, 116. In addition to John Lloyd Stephens' two works, the artist's greatest resource was Edward King, Lord Kingsborough's *Antiquities of Mexico* (London: R. Havell, 1830-1848). This nine-volume work was extremely costly and rare, with only a handful of copies located in the United States in the nineteenth century. In Salt Lake City, Ottinger studied the copy acquired by Orson Pratt, which is now in the collection of Brigham Young University. For Pratt's copy, see Orson Pratt, "True Christmas and New Year," in D.W. Evans et al., *Journal of Discourses* XV (Liverpool: Albert Carrington, 1873), 259-260; and Susa Young Gates, ed. *Surname Book and Racial History* (Salt Lake City: General Board of the Relief Society, 1918), 282-283. For an examination of Kingsborough's work, see Whitmore, "Lord Kingsborough and his Contribution," 8-16.

⁵⁸ One series, published from 1874 to 1876, consisted of forty-four articles. See George Martin Ottinger, "Old America," *Juvenile Instructor* vol. 9, nos. 23-26 (November 7 – December 19, 1874): 266-267, 278-279, 299-300, 311-312; vol. 10, nos. 1-26 (January 9 – December 25, 1875): 3-4, 14-15, 32-33, 40-41, 52-52, 63-64, 80-81, 87-88, 98-99, 110-111, 131-132, 142-143, 155-156, 167-168, 178-179, 182-183, 194-195, 206-207, 220-221, 230-231, 244-245, 254-255, 266-267, 287-288, 290-291, 302-303; vol. 11, nos. 1-12 (January 1 – June 15, 1876): 8-9, 15, 27-28, 40-41, 51-52, 63-64, 74-75, 87-88, 98-99, 111-112, 128-129, 134-135.

the artist's ideas about Mesoamerican antiquity and its relationship to the American church's history.

In his writings, Ottinger subsumes ancient American history within Book of Mormon history. The artist claimed that the earliest Book of Mormon people, the Jaredites, "landed on the coast of Mexico," and spread northward over centuries, "forming the settlements in the great valleys of the Mississippi and Ohio. Ruins of their cities are now referred to as the 'works of the Mound Builders.'"⁵⁹ The Mulekites also arrived by sea, landing "somewhere north of the river of Darien" in Panama and established a city and religious center at Palenque, which the Book of Mormon calls Zarahemla.⁶⁰ Ottinger further maintained that the Nephites once flourished in what is today known as the Maya region, stating, "the whole country is dotted with ruins and there are unmistakable evidences of its having at one time been inhabited by a dense and industrious population."⁶¹ The great Nephite cities were destroyed due to their clashes with the Lamanites, a people who spread throughout the Western Hemisphere and were the progenitors of the Aztecs.⁶² The Lamanites

⁵⁹ "Old America," 11, no. 12 (June 15, 1876): 134. Ottinger also proposed that the Jaredites were the progenitors of the Toltecs, the Nahuatl-speaking culture who arrived in central Mexico from the north and held sway over the area in the centuries before the rise of Aztecs. See, Ottinger, "Old America," *Juvenile Instructor* 10, no. 7 (April 3, 1875): 80.

⁶⁰ Ibid. For Ottinger's assertion that Palenque was Zarahemla, see George Marting Ottinger, "Votan, the Culture Hero of the Mayas," *Juvenile Instructor* 14, no. 5 (1879): 58.

⁶¹ Ibid. The Maya region encompasses the Yucatán peninsula, Tabasco and Chiapas of present day Mexico, Guatemala, Belize and the western parts of Honduras and El Salvador. Prior to 1879, Ottinger asserted that Lehi and his descendants landed in South America and thus he shifted from the hemispheric geography theory to the limited geography theory. See "Old America," 11, no. 12 (June 15, 1876): 134; and note 50 of this chapter.

⁶² In his conception of Book of Mormon peoples, Ottinger linked the Nephites to the Maya and the Lamanites to the Aztecs. This model bears a resemblance to the one proposed by Mesoamericanists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when the Mayas were considered the "Greeks" of the New World, or the "Classical" civilization of the Americas. The Aztecs, by contrast, were viewed as the

had been Christians for a period after Christ's visit to the New World, and according to Ottinger, this accounted for the state of semi-civilization in which their descendants, the Aztecs, lived when the Spanish encountered them in the early sixteenth century. Indeed, while the Aztecs practiced an idolatrous religion, Ottinger saw remnants of Christianity in some of their traditions, including the practice of baptism, the belief that their primary diety, Huitzilopochtli, was born of immaculate conception to a virgin mother,⁶³ and the belief in the fair skinned god Quetzalcoatl, who Ottinger, like the church's president, John Taylor, linked to Christ.⁶⁴ In sum, Ottinger viewed secular Mesoamerican history and sacred Mormon history as one in the same, with the Book of Mormon as the key to understanding the ancient cultures of the region.

“Old American” Paintings

In the summer of 1866, Ottinger exhibited his first Mesoamerican subject, *The Last of the Aztecs*, in the storefront gallery at Savage and Ottinger.⁶⁵ Measuring sixty-five by thirty-three inches, this ambitious painting was the first Mormon work to visualize an ancient Mesoamerica subject for a Mormon audience. Although

“Romans” of the New World. See, Michael Coe, *Breaking the Maya Code* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1992), 59-61.

⁶³ For baptism, see “Old America,” 11, no. 12 (June 15, 1876): 134; for Huitzilopochtli, see “Old America,” 10, no. 6 (March 20, 1875): 63. In Aztec mythology, Huitzilopochtli, the god of war, was born of his virgin mother, Coatlicue, who was impregnated by a ball of down.

⁶⁴ “Old America,” 10, no. 6 (March 20, 1875): 64.

⁶⁵ The work was on display in July 1866. See, “Nephite Remains – Interesting Picture.” The painting's title, *The Last of the Aztecs*, recalls the title of James Fennimore Cooper's 1826 historical novel, *The Last of the Mohicans*, and indeed, some similarities exist between the two. Both works address themes of historical change and the extinction of a North American culture, the Nephites through apostasy and the Mohicans through the “progress” of civilization and westward expansion.

Latter-day Saints had long maintained an interest in Mesoamerican antiquity, earlier Mormon descriptions of the subject had been textual rather than visual. Ottinger's canvas depicts a scene of desolated ruins within a Mesoamerican landscape.⁶⁶ In the left foreground, a solitary figure mournfully rests on a stone altar in the looming shadow of a decaying temple, gazing at the crumbling relief of a once-venerated idol.⁶⁷ While the painting's title suggests it illustrates an Aztec scene, a close examination reveals that the canvas depicts Maya antiquities, and thus only the figure is an "Aztec." Moreover, rather than depicting one specific Maya site, Ottinger's composition incorporates antiquities from a number of locations. In the center foreground the artist painted the staircase from the site of Chichén Itzá, which leads, to the left, to the Casa de Monjas, from Uxmal. On its façade, Ottinger placed a relief of an idol, at which the figure directs his gaze. In the middle ground, at the center, stands the Castillo from Tulum and, located to the right, is the Palace from the site of Palenque.

Ottinger created this pastiche of antiquities by excerpting elements from illustrated books, a practice he continued throughout his career. The artist copied several elements from Catherwood's illustrations in *Incidents of Travel in Yucatan*, including the staircase at Chichén Itzá (see fig. 1.23), the façade of the Casa des

⁶⁶ As an image of desolation, *The Last of the Aztecs* recalls Thomas Cole's *The Course of Empire: Desolation* (1833-1836). Indeed, both address the idea of cycles of history and convey a moralizing message. However, Cole's image, part of a five-part series, presents the possible results of popular democracy, while Ottinger's canvas addresses the theme of the downfall and destruction of cultures due to the loss of religious faith. For Cole, see Angela Miller, *The Empire of the Eye: Landscape Representations and American Cultural Politics, 1825-1875* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993), 21-37.

⁶⁷ I refer to the relief portrait as an "idol" here as this is how a contemporary Mormon viewer described it. See "Nephite Remains – Interesting Picture."

Monjas at Uxmal (fig. 3.4), and the Castillo at Tulum (fig. 3.5). In addition, he derived the façade and tower of the Palace at Palenque from Lord Kingsborough's *Antiquities of Mexico* (fig. 3.6).

The Last of the Aztecs, then, does not represent the physical truth of one specific Mesoamerican site. Rather, Ottinger imaginatively reshaped Mesoamerican antiquity, selecting striking ruins from a number of impressive sites, in order to thematize degeneration and destruction. The scene conveys the once mighty state of the ancient Mesoamericans as well as the extent of their spectacular decline. In his composition, Ottinger offers an explanation for their collapse. Following the figure's gaze, viewers are invited to contemplate the decaying relief of the once-worshipped idol, an impotent god who certainly failed to prevent the devastation around him.

Ottinger's Mormon audience associated the scene presented in *The Last of the Aztecs* with the fate of their spiritual ancestors, the Nephites, whose destruction by the Lamanites resulted from their fall into idolatry and lack of faith. Indeed, this theme constituted one of the primary moral messages of the Book of Mormon. In an extensive account of the painting that appeared in the church's Salt Lake City newspaper, *The Deseret News*, the writer declares, "it is named 'The Last of the Aztecs,' though it seems The Last of the Nephites would be more historically correct."⁶⁸ Describing the painting, the writer explains that the work depicts a grouping of ancient ruins in one composition

so that the student of ancient American history, as he peruses the Book of Mormon, can see in the picture . . . a faithful representation of works of

⁶⁸ "Nephite Remains – Interesting Picture."

art erected centuries ago by the people whose miraculous travels, increasing greatness and sudden destruction he finds therein chronicled.⁶⁹

At the end of the article, the author urges readers to view the painting, concluding that it “is well calculated to give a good conception, with very brief study, of the power, greatness and works of the once mighty Nephite people, long since destroyed for their wickedness.”⁷⁰

Thus, when seen through the lens of the Mormon faith, *The Last of the Aztecs* recalls the Book of Mormon narrative of the rise and fall of the righteous Nephite civilization. In particular, the canvas suggests the account given by the prophet Moroni at the close of the Book of Mormon. The last remaining Christian Nephite, Moroni describes the downfall and annihilation of his people. Left alone to wander the desolate landscape, once dotted with magnificent cities, he states, “great has been their fall; yea great and marvelous is the destruction of my people, the Nephites.”⁷¹ Moroni gives no specific details, however, regarding what the scene of destruction looked like or where in North America it took place. *The Last of the Aztecs* gives form to this passage of the Book of Mormon, envisioning the scene of Nephite destruction. In so doing, Ottinger’s image concretizes the narrative and conveys the moral message to Mormon viewers with “very brief study.”⁷²

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Mormon 8:7. The annihilation of the Nephites is also foretold by several Nephite prophets in the Book of Mormon. See, for example, 2 Nephi 26:10.

⁷² This last point, the ease with which images can help convey larger ideas, was particularly relevant to Latter-day Saints, as the Book of Mormon was notoriously complex and difficult to read. In fact, its narrative was so difficult to follow that in 1879, with the church’s blessing, Orson Pratt produced an edition of the text with a thoroughly revised structure. In the edition, Pratt altered the text’s

Ottinger produced dozens of paintings with Mesoamerican subjects in the years following his success with *The Last of the Aztecs*.⁷³ Some of these “Old American” works present scenes taken directly from the Book of Mormon, while others do not. Many, like *The Last of the Aztecs*, picture Mesoamerican figures and landscapes that most Mormons understood as Book of Mormon peoples and settings. Still others present episodes from secular Mesoamerican history but refracted through the prism of Mormon theology. As a whole, however, Ottinger’s history paintings are fundamentally didactic and visualize the Mormon/Mesoamerican past so as to affirm Latter-day Saint beliefs and confirm the Book of Mormon narrative.⁷⁴

Ottinger’s *Reclining Woman* depicts an ancient Mesoamerican woman outstretched on a terrace while reading a screenfold codex (fig. 3.7).⁷⁵ Several elements in the composition emphasize the advanced level of civilization and culture

structure by creating more and shorter chapters. He also added footnotes for cross-reference, information, and explanation. Changes in grammar and spelling were made also, as well as some wording in order to clarify meaning. See Royal Skousen, “Book of Mormon Editions (1830-1981),” in Ludlow, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 175-176.

⁷³ After exhibiting *The Last of the Aztecs* in 1869 at the Ninth Annual Exhibition of the Deseret Agricultural and Manufacturing Society, Ottinger sold the painting to the Salt Lake City Council for \$300. See Ottinger, *Journal*, 80, and “List of Awards of the Deseret Agricultural and Manufacturing Society,” *Deseret News*, October 20, 1869.

⁷⁴ Regarding the didactic nature of Ottinger’s work, the artist often had broadsides printed to accompany his paintings, which described in detail the events portrayed. The two broadsides I was able to locate were made to accompany his works *Montezuma Receiving News of the Landing of Cortez* (1876) and *The Gladiatorial Stone* (1876-1877). For the former, see curatorial file, George Martin Ottinger, Museum of Church History and Art, Salt Lake City, Utah; the later’s broadside is attached to the back of the painting, which is in the collection of the Museum of Church History and Art, Salt Lake City, Utah.

⁷⁵ The title of this work, *Reclining Woman*, is descriptive and the work’s original title is unknown. The painting, now in the collection of Brigham Young University Art Gallery, is also of unknown provenance.

of the ancient Mesoamericans,⁷⁶ including the finely crafted pot, the ornamented terrace, the hieroglyphic codex, and the woman's neat appearance and engagement in an intellectual activity.⁷⁷ Mormons frequently cited such elements in response to critics who claimed that indigenous Americans were incapable of attaining the level of civilization described in the Book of Mormon. For example, in an article on ancient Mesomerica in the church-run newspaper, the *Deseret Evening News*, the writer states that,

the remains of great cities, with magnificent temples, kingly palaces, . . . architectural adornments, splendid arches, peculiar terraces, . . . delicate pottery, . . . hieroglyphics, . . . and other evidences of skill and learning have been found under conditions indicating . . . the intelligence and culture of the people who erected and adorned them.⁷⁸

The woman's modest dress and well-kept hair also suggest an advanced state of culture. For these details, Ottinger did not draw on the many images of regalia-laden ancient Mayas created by Catherwood for Stephens' two works, *Incidents of Travel in Yucatan* and *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan* (see fig. 1.17). Instead, the particulars of her appearance more closely resemble the simple garb of the Aztecs pictured in codices such as the Codex Mendoza (fig. 3.8).⁷⁹ Yet the woman's draped garments, sandals, and neatly tied bun also recall classical

⁷⁶ I use the idea of levels of civilization here in the way that it was understood in the nineteenth century. At that time, many held that some races and cultures were superior, or "civilized," and others were inferior, or "savage." For an in-depth discussion of this topic, see Reginald Horsman, "Scientific Racism and the American Indian in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," *American Quarterly* 27, no. 2 (May 1975): 152-168; and Roy Harvey Pearce, *Savagism and Civilization: A Study of the Indian in the American Mind*, rev. ed. (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1964).

⁷⁷ These elements – the ceramic pot, the terrace decorated with a Mixtec-style pattern, the codex – as well as the tropical foliage and blossoms, locate the image in Mesoamerica.

⁷⁸ "American Antiquities," *The Deseret Evening News*, June 9, 1879.

⁷⁹ A facsimile of the Codex Mendoza appears in Kingsborough, *Antiquities of Mexico*, vol. I.

antiquity and the dress traditionally associated with biblical imagery. In these details, then, Ottinger not only conveys the high level of “civilization” achieved by the ancient Americans, he also shows the connection between Book of Mormon people, who were descendants from the biblical Joseph, to the people of the Bible.

Perhaps the most important element of *Reclining Woman* is the hieroglyphic codex, which unfolds in the foreground and invites viewers to examine its text. Mormon viewers likely associated this ancient Mesoamerican hieroglyphic codex with the original version of the Book of Mormon, a bound collection of histories unearthed by Joseph Smith that were written in “reformed Egyptian” hieroglyphics.⁸⁰ The text pictured in *Reclining Woman* is itself a history, the Codex Boturini, which tells of the migration of the Aztecs from their original homeland, Atzlán, to their eventual capital, Tenochtitlán (fig 3.9).⁸¹ In the nineteenth century, interpretations of such codices were fluid, as the pictographic and ideographic writing systems of the ancient Americans were not fully understood.⁸² Many Mormons interpreted the migration imagery within the Codex Boturini as a depiction of historical events chronicled in the Book of Mormon, specifically the story of Lehi, the ancient

⁸⁰ Mormon 9:32. R. Tripp Evans argues that Smith’s claim to have deciphered hieroglyphic tablets with the aid of special stones, the Urim and Thummim, was influenced by the work of Jean-Francois Champollion, who deciphered the Egyptian pictographic system in the 1820s with the aid of the so-called Rosetta stone. Evans, *Romancing the Maya*, 91 and note 4 on 172.

⁸¹ Ottinger almost certainly copied the details from the Codex Boturini from Kingsborough’s *Antiquities of Mexico*, where it is reproduced in volume one. Nineteenth-century scholars believed the codex to be pre-Hispanic, although more recent scholars have argued that it dates to circa 1530. See Donald Robertson, *Mexican Manuscript Painting of the Early Colonial Period* (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), 83-86.

⁸² An 1881 article in *Harper’s Weekly* discusses an example of the “picture-writing of the Aztecs,” and the writer concludes that this form of writing is “now a lost art, and it is very doubtful whether it will ever be recovered. Antiquarians have searched in vain for the key.” “American Antiquities,” *Harper’s Weekly* (June 11, 1881): 377-378. For a history of the decipherment of Mesoamerican scripts, see Michael Coe, *Breaking the Maya Code* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1992).

prophet-historian chosen by God to lead his family from Palestine to the Americas. In fact, images from the codex were used to illustrate the story of Lehi in George Reynold's 1888 young adult version of the Book of Mormon, *The Story of the Book of Mormon* (fig. 3.10).⁸³ Hence, while not a scene taken directly from the Book of Mormon, Mormon viewers would have drawn connections between the Mesoamerican woman pictured in *Reclining Woman* and the literate, record-keeping Nephite civilization described in the Book of Mormon. Indeed, many certainly interpreted Ottinger's painting as a Nephite woman reading the migration history of her ancestor, Lehi.⁸⁴

Ottinger's work of 1884, *Papantzin Explaining Her Dream to Montezuma* (fig. 3.11),⁸⁵ illustrates a scene from the history of the life of the Aztec ruler Montezuma II that the Jesuit historian Francisco Javier Clavigero recounts in his *History of Mexico*.⁸⁶ According to Clavigero, shortly before the Conquest, Montezuma's sister, Papantzin, fell ill and died, yet she was resurrected soon thereafter. Upon returning to life, Papantzin described to her brother the vision she

⁸³ Reynolds was private secretary to Brigham Young. George Reynolds, *The Story of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Jos. Hyrum Parry, 1888), 25, 36. Reynolds' book is an easy-to-read version of the Book of Mormon for children and young adults.

⁸⁴ From the church's earliest days, Mormons have placed a great emphasis on the writing and keeping of historical records, as they believe such activities are a direct commandment from God. Additionally, Mormons believe that the Book of Mormon people were under the same obligation. Therefore, *Reclining Woman* also suggests connections between the activities of nineteenth-century Mormons and with those of their ancient American spiritual ancestors. See Beverly J. Norton, "Record Keeping," in Ludlow, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1194-1196.

⁸⁵ Ottinger began this work in January 1884. Ottinger, *Journal*, 114. The artist signed his name as well as the painting's title and date on the reverse of the canvas.

⁸⁶ In his book, originally published in 1780-1781 in Italy as *Storia Antico del Messico*, Clavigero includes a description of Mexican geography, a chronicle of pre-Aztec peoples in central Mexico, a short account of the Spanish Conquest, and descriptions of Aztec society and culture. For an examination of Clavigero's work, see Keen, *Aztec Image*, 295-300.

had received of a new people who were soon to occupy the land as well as the new religion they would bring. Clavigero ends his account of Papatzin by noting that she was the first Aztec to receive the rites of Christian baptism after the Conquest, in 1524.⁸⁷

Several nineteenth-century historians related the story of Papatzin, including William H. Prescott in *The History of the Conquest of Mexico* and Hubert Howe Bancroft in *The Native Races of the Pacific States of North America*.⁸⁸ Ottinger likely encountered the tale in one of these works. In his painting, the artist sets the narrative within a chamber ornamented with carved stonework, which Ottinger based on an image of a Maya temple interior by Catherwood (see fig. 1.24).⁸⁹ Seated on a dais to the right, Montezuma listens with unease as his sister relates her “dream” of the imminent Spanish Conquest and the coming of Christianity, using a cross and a small model of a ship to illustrate her tale. Behind Papatzin, a group of Aztec nobles have gathered, their bowed heads emphasizing the sacred nature of her vision.

While the story of Papatzin appeared in best-selling historical texts, Ottinger appears to be the only nineteenth-century artist to take it as a subject. This incident from secular Mesoamerican history likely appealed to the artist for the reason that

⁸⁷ Francisco Javier Clavigero, *Historia Antigua de Mexico* (Mexico City: Editorial Porrura, 1964), 66, 190, 138-140.

⁸⁸ The story of Papatzin was also included in Josiah Priest’s *The Wonders of Nature and Providence Displayed* (Albany, NY: Josiah Priest, 1826), 59-61. See also Prescott, *History of the Conquest*, 227, note 11; and Hubert Howe Bancroft, *The Native Races of the Pacific States of North America* vol. 5 (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1876), 467-468. Ottinger met Bancroft when he traveled through Salt Lake City in 1884. The following year, the artist exchanged two paintings for a copy of Bancroft’s historical works. See, Ottinger, *Journal*, 114.

⁸⁹ Ottinger again mixes ancient Mesoamerican cultures here, Aztec and Maya. However, Ottinger likely consulted Maya architecture out of necessity, as very little Aztec architecture survived the Spanish Conquest.

Papatzin's "dream" echoed prophecies recounted in the Book of Mormon.⁹⁰ In the sixth century B.C.E., the prophet Lehi predicted a time when his descendants would "dwindle in unbelief" and foresaw that God would "bring other nations unto them, and he will give unto them power, and he will take away from them the lands of their possessions, and he will cause them to be scattered and smitten."⁹¹ Mormons understood this passage as a foretelling of the eventual apostasy of the ancient Americans and the subsequent European colonization and control of the Americas. For example, writing in 1903, the Mormon author Louise Palfrey recounted Lehi's prediction and interpreted it as presaging the downfall of the Aztecs and other indigenous people at the hands of Europeans, concluding,

This is exactly what took place in history. Europeans came over here, and wrested the lands of their possession away from the Indians. The governments of the Aztecs ... were broken up. Truly were the people 'scattered and smitten,' and 'other nations' came upon them.⁹²

Like the ancient Book of Mormon prophet Lehi, Papatzin foresaw the European colonization of the Americas. Such points of alignment between secular Mesoamerican history and sacred Mormon history certainly interested Ottinger and other Latter-day Saints.⁹³ The cross in Papatzin's hands suggests the significance of

⁹⁰ From the church's earliest days, Mormons have maintained that God discloses himself to chosen individuals—even Lamanites—through visions and other forms of revelation. Mormons believe that such revelations provide a vivid sense of the nature of God and his design for the world. See Allen E. Bergin, "Visions," in Ludlow, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* 1511; and David R. Seely, "Prophecy," in Ludlow, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1160.

⁹¹ 2 Nephi 1:10-11.

⁹² Louise Palfrey, *The Divinity of the Book of Mormon Proven by Archaeology* (Lamoni, IA: Herald Publishing House, 1903), 56.

⁹³ For example, Both Ottinger and the church's president, John Taylor, wrote on the similarities between the story of the Aztec deity Quetzalcoatl and the Book of Mormon narrative of Christ's visit to the New World. See notes 55 and 64 of this chapter.

her “dream” for Ottinger and his Mormon audience: the return of Christianity to the Americas after an absence of a millennium.⁹⁴ Indeed, in the Mormon conception of history as “God’s unfolding plan of salvation for humanity,” the arrival of Europeans to the American promised land constituted the first step toward the restoration of the American church by Joseph Smith, Jr.⁹⁵

Picturing the Book of Mormon

For the remainder of this chapter I will turn my attention to a group of Ottinger’s “Old American” paintings that illustrate scenes from the Book of Mormon. These works were the earliest artistic representations of events described in the Book of Mormon, and consequently, they garnered significant attention within the Latter-day Saint community. Set within an ancient Mesoamerican context, Ottinger’s images influenced viewers’ conceptions of Book of Mormon historicity. Furthermore, these didactic images both reinforced Mormon beliefs and historicized contemporary church practices and struggles, providing a link to traditions and values that stretched back to the church’s ancient spiritual ancestors.

Ottinger began work on his first Book of Mormon painting, *The Baptism of Limhi*, in the spring of 1872 (3.12).⁹⁶ Measuring roughly eight feet by four and a

⁹⁴ Moroni, the last Christian Nephite died circa 421 C.E.

⁹⁵ Douglas F. Tobler and S. George Ellsworth, “History, Significance to Latter-day Saints,” in Ludlow, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 595-598. Although prophets in the Book of Mormon describe the early European colonizers as practicing false religions (2 Nephi 26), Mormons nonetheless celebrate their arrival as a first step in God’s plan to establish the restored church by Joseph Smith, Jr. centuries later. Latter-day Saints believe in the traditional linear concept of human history, viewing it as the unfolding of God’s plan for mankind.

⁹⁶ Ottinger, *Journal*, 82. Ottinger commenced work on the painting on June 5, 1872, and in his journal he noted, “this is the first picture ever painted from a subject suggested by the Book of Mormon.” *The Baptism of Limhi* now hangs in the Salt Lake City Temple, and as I am not a member

half feet, the painting's large size reflects the importance of its subject as well as Ottinger's ambition.⁹⁷ The canvas depicts a scene described in the Book of Mosiah and shows the second-century B.C.E. Nephite priest Alma baptizing Limhi, a new convert, in the waters near the city of Zarahemla.⁹⁸ Details such as the palm trees to the right and the large Maya-style structure in the background, which Ottinger based on an image by Catherwood (see fig. 1.37), locate the scene in Mesoamerica. At the center of the composition, Alma raises his right arm above Limhi while reciting the baptismal prayer. From the top left of the canvas, rays of light illuminate the central scene, signifying God's blessing. Along the banks, onlookers and new converts gather to watch the sacred ceremony.

The Baptism of Limhi underscores the importance of conversion and baptism, the essential initiatory act for all persons who join the Latter-day Saint Church and the primary step for members to gain eternal life in God's celestial kingdom.⁹⁹ Details of the ancient baptism pictured in Ottinger's work resemble modern Mormon practice, and in this way the artist linked the present-day church to its ancient spiritual ancestors in Mesoamerica. According to instructions given in the Book of

of the church, I was unable to enter the sacred space to view the painting. Instead, I have worked from a black and white image reproduced in Reynolds, *Story of the Book of Mormon*, 113. Robert Davis, curator at the Museum of Church History and Art, confirmed that the painting reproduced in Reynolds is the same work that now hangs in the temple. Robert Davis, conversation with author, Salt Lake City, June 2, 2008.

⁹⁷ The work measures fifty-six by ninety-eight inches.

⁹⁸ Mosiah 25:17-18. Mormons believe that the practice of baptism predates the ministry of John the Baptist. In the Book of Mormon, the prophets Lehi and Nephi foresee the baptism of Christ in a vision and taught their people, the Nephites, to follow his example. See 1 Nephi 10:7-10; 11:27; and 2 Nephi 31:4-9.

⁹⁹ Carl S. Hawkins, "Baptism," in Ludlow, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 92-94.

Mormon, the baptismal ceremony may be performed for those over the age of eight in any body of water that is deep enough for complete immersion.¹⁰⁰ The individual performing the baptism goes into the water with the candidate, raises his right arm with elbow bent at a right angle, and places his left hand on the candidate's hands, which are clasped before him. He then issues the prescribed baptismal prayer and immerses the candidate. The candidate's family, friends, and members of the congregation typically attend the ceremony. Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century images of Mormon baptismal ceremonies illustrate how closely the ceremony pictured *The Baptism of Limhi* mirrored modern Latter-day Saint practice (figs. 3.13, 3.14). In particular, the raised and bent right arm of the individual giving the baptismal prayer, a characteristic Mormon gesture, links the two ceremonies, tying the nineteenth-century present to the ancient past.¹⁰¹

After completing *The Baptism of Limhi*, Ottinger exhibited the canvas at the 1872 Territorial State Fair, where Mormon viewers recognized the artist's significant achievement. A writer for the *Salt Lake Herald*, for example, noted that it was "the first painting illustrating a scene from [the Book of Mormon], and considering the difficulties and amount of study required of an artist when entering so new and unexplored a field, we pronounce it a great success."¹⁰² After the close of the

¹⁰⁰ 3 Nephi 11:23-26. According to the Book of Mormon, God revealed to the prophet Mormon that children do not need to be baptized because "little children are alive in Christ" and are without sin. See Moroni 8:5-23.

¹⁰¹ As self-proclaimed followers of Jesus Christ, the Mormon baptismal ritual is also meant to mimic the baptism of Christ by John in the River Jordan, as Christ instituted the sacrament of baptism among Christians. Artists of other denominations have also produced images of Christian baptism, especially the baptism of Christ, but Ottinger was the first artist to picture the ritual in an ancient Mesoamerican setting.

¹⁰² "The Territorial Fair," *Salt Lake Herald*, October 5, 1872.

Territorial Fair, Joseph F. Smith, nephew of Joseph Smith, Jr. and later a president of the church, bought the painting and donated it to the Endowment House, which served as a “temporary temple” until the Salt Lake Temple was completed.¹⁰³ The work now hangs in the baptismal room of the Salt Lake Temple.

Based on the success of *The Baptism of Limhi*, Ottinger wrote in his journal that he planned to create a series of twelve works depicting scenes from the Book of Mormon.¹⁰⁴ The artist completed at least three of these, which are unfortunately now lost. Black and white lithographic reproductions of the three artworks, however, were used to illustrate George Reynolds’ 1888 book, *The Story of the Book of Mormon*.¹⁰⁵ Works by other Mormon artists, including William Armitage and John Held, Sr., also appeared in this text (figs. 3.15, 3.16). Yet these artists placed their Book of Mormon scenes within Old World settings, drawing on traditional representations of biblical scenes.¹⁰⁶ Only Ottinger set his Book of Mormon scenes within a Mesoamerican context.

¹⁰³ Diary of Joseph F. Smith (1872), entry for November 6, 1872, Ms 1325, Church History Library, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City; and James White Tingen, “The Endowment House: 1855-1889,” unpublished manuscript (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 1974), Church History Library, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City.

¹⁰⁴ Ottinger, *Journal*, 84.

¹⁰⁵ Reynolds’ book contains lithographic reproductions of Ottinger’s later Book of Mormon works as well as an image of *The Baptism of Limhi*. Reynolds’ book, the first published attempt to illustrate the Book of Mormon, was a successful seller, with several editions published. Indeed, the church’s General Board of Education recommended it be used in church academies and schools as a text. See “From the Press,” *Deseret Evening News*, December 19, 1888; and Noel A. Carmack, “‘A Picturesque and Dramatic History’: George Reynolds’s *Story of the Book of Mormon*,” *BYU Studies* 47, no. 2 (2008): 115-141.

¹⁰⁶ For a brief discussion of these two works, see *ibid.*, 118, 130. For brief biographical information on Armitage and Held, see Olpin, *Dictionary of Utah Art*, 7, 120.

One of Ottinger's Book of Mormon images, *The Discovery of the Records of the Jaredites* (fig. 3.17), illustrates a scene described in the Book of Mosiah.¹⁰⁷ This work depicts the Nephites discovering the ruins and historic records of the Jaredite culture, the ancient chosen people who were destroyed in about 400 B.C.E. after their apostasy. The story of the Jaredites foreshadows the fate of the Nephites, and the downfall of both groups of chosen people serve as a warning to modern readers of the Book of Mormon. Ottinger sets the story within ancient Mesoamerica, his work again showing a reliance on Catherwood's images. At the center, a Nephite man examines the records of the Jaredites while sitting on a carved stone block that resembles Altar Q from the Maya site of Copán (see fig. 1.7). In the background, to the right, a group of men inspect the ruined building's elaborately carved facade, which Ottinger copied from an image of ornament found at the site of Tonina (fig. 3.18).¹⁰⁸

Another of Ottinger's works, *The Destruction of Zarahemla* (fig. 3.19) depicts a cataclysmic scene of the annihilation of the Nephite capital city, Zarahemla, which took place in the early first century C.E.¹⁰⁹ As recounted in the Book of Mormon, the city's inhabitants had gradually declined into unbelief and wickedness, although a series of prophets had preached to the people to repent and remit their sins. Immediately following the crucifixion in Jerusalem, Christ came to the New World and initiated a terrifying series of natural disasters to punish the

¹⁰⁷ See Mosiah 21:26-27.

¹⁰⁸ Copan is a Maya site located in present-day Honduras. Tonina, also known as Ocosinco in the nineteenth century, is a Maya site in the present-day state of Chiapas in Mexico.

¹⁰⁹ See 3 Nephi 9:3 and 8:8.

unbelievers. According to the Book of Mormon, Christ destroyed Zarahemla and its inhabitants in a great fire.

In his representation of this apocalyptic story, Ottinger pictures Zarahemla as an ancient Mesoamerican metropolis. The artist depicts the smoke-filled city in the midst of the catastrophe, with the dark clouds above symbolizing Christ's displeasure with the wayward populace. In the foreground, individuals struggle and fall as they try to escape the disaster. To the right, a building collapses on a crowd of people. At the base of the stela to the left, several individuals have gathered, raising their arms in plea to the large stone figure. At the center, two men in a chariot drawn by terrified horses race through the scene of devastation.

As was his practice, Ottinger drew from a number of images in order to create his composition. The horses as well as the painting's overall compositional structure suggests the influence of Benjamin West's widely known painting, *Death on the Pale Horse* (fig. 3.20), which depicts the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse from the Book of Revelation. In addition, the large structure in the background resembles Catherwood's image of the Palace at Palenque (see fig. 1.36). To the left, the toppling stela recalls Catherwood's engravings of those found at the site of Copán (see fig. 1.4). This large stela indicates the disaster's root cause – the population has fallen into idolatry – and thus it underscores the moral message imparted repeatedly in the Book of Mormon: the gifts of God are dispensed only to the faithful.

Another of Ottinger's Book of Mormon images, *Moroni Raises the Title of Liberty*, illustrates a scene from the Book of Alma (fig. 3.21).¹¹⁰ At the top of a flight of steps of a Maya-style temple (see fig. 3.5), the Nephite captain, Moroni, upholds a banner in his left hand and a sword in his right, as a crowd of onlookers gathers around him, waving pieces of fabric in solidarity.¹¹¹ As narrated in to the Book of Mormon, Moroni rallied the Nephites who, when they were threatened by invading Lamanite armies, were gradually losing faith in the "church of God."¹¹² Renting his coat, Moroni fashioned a banner, or "title of liberty," upon which he wrote a pledge in support of key freedoms: "In memory of our God, our religion, and our freedom, and our peace, our wives and our children."¹¹³

It was likely no coincidence that Ottinger chose to depict this scene from the Book of Mormon at a time when the Latter-day Saints were involved in their own fight for what they believed to be fundamental liberties. The period from 1850 to 1890 was a turbulent time for the Mormons, during which they engaged in a prolonged confrontation with the federal government over the church's practice of polygamy.¹¹⁴ The conflict significantly disrupted normal church activities, forcing

¹¹⁰ Alma 46:11-24.

¹¹¹ The Moroni pictured here is the first Moroni mentioned in the Book of Mormon, who died circa 56 B.C.E., and not the later prophet Moroni who buried the Book of Mormon near the Hill Cumorah in the fifth century C.E.

¹¹² Alma 46:14.

¹¹³ Alma 46:12.

¹¹⁴ Polygamy, or what Saints called "plural marriage," was the church's most controversial practice. It was based on a revelation articulated by Joseph Smith, who stated that the Lord commanded it. Roughly twenty to twenty-five percent of adult Mormons were involved in this type of relationship between 1850 and 1890, and the church believed the religiously-based practice was protected by the U.S. Constitution. See Daniel W. Bachman, "Plural Marriage," in Ludlow, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1091-1095.

the church's leaders, including President John Taylor, into hiding as federal marshals raided nearly every settlement in Utah.¹¹⁵ The confrontation culminated in the passage of the Edmunds Act (1882) and the Edmunds-Tucker Act (1887), which disenfranchised polygamists – nearly all Mormon leaders – and imprisoned them, disenfranchised all Utah women, abolished the territorial militia, and confiscated nearly all the church's property.¹¹⁶ Hence, *Moroni Raises the Title of Liberty* reminded nineteenth-century Mormons that their spiritual ancestors had faced similar challenges, which were to be met with unyielding faith and unity.

Concluding Remarks

Ottinger's "Old American" paintings gave visual form to Book of Mormon people and landscapes, manifesting on canvas what had previously only been accessible through text. These representations helped shape the way Latter-day Saints conceived of Book of Mormon history and geography, linking them to ancient Mesoamerica. While Ottinger's paintings may fall short of today's critical standards, the impact of his work on Mormon culture was far reaching. Ottinger set a precedent for representing Book of Mormon subjects within a Mesoamerican context, a precedent that was followed by later generations of Latter-day Saint artists, including the twentieth-century artists Minerva Teichert (fig. 3.22), Arnold Friberg (fig. 3.23),

¹¹⁵ Mormons viewed the conflict as an attack on their constitutional right to religious freedom. During his last public sermon, President Taylor, who later died in exile, remarked, "I would like to obey and place myself in subjection to every law of man. What then? Am I to disobey the law of God? Has any man a right to control my conscience, or your conscience? ...No man has a right to do it." G.B. Watt, ed., *Journal of Discourses* 26 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Books, 1974), 152.

¹¹⁶ Thomas G. Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition: A History of the Latter-day Saints* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 4. See also Ray Jay Davis, "Antipolygamy Legislation," in Ludlow, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 52-53.

and John Scott (fig. 3.24).¹¹⁷ Although the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints no longer takes an official position on Book of Mormon historicity and geography, it prominently displays Mesoamerican-tinged artworks in its many publications and in its visitor's centers.¹¹⁸ Indeed, from 1962 onward, editions of the Book of Mormon have included illustrations by Arnold Friberg, which depict scenes from the text set within an ancient Mesoamerican setting.¹¹⁹ Thus, although little known today, Ottinger's paintings of "Old American" succeeded in making a lasting impact on Mormon visual culture.

¹¹⁷ Ottinger's influence may also be seen in twenty-first century Mormon visual culture. For example, the church-produced 2007 film *The Testaments*, which depicts the story of Christ's visit to the New World, is set within an ancient Mesoamerican (Maya) context. For an examination of Teichert's works, see John W. Welch and Doris R. Dant, *The Book of Mormon Paintings of Minerva Teichert* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 1997); for Arnold Friberg, see Robert T. Barrett and Susan Easton Black, "Setting a Standard in LDS Art: Four Illustrators of the Mid-Twentieth Century," *BYU Studies* 44, no. 2 (2005): 25-80.

¹¹⁸ In the early twentieth century, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints assumed a more cautious approach regarding the historicity and geography of the Book of Mormon, and it currently takes no official position on the subject. Yet, the connections between the Book of Mormon and Mesoamerica have continued to be asserted by Mormon scholars, such as those based at the New World Archaeological Foundation and at the church-supported Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies. See, for example, the work of Brigham Young University professor John Sorensen, including *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Publishing Company, 1985). For a response to Mormon claims from a Mesoamericanist from the non-Mormon scholarly community, see Michael Coe, "Mormons and Archaeology: An Outside View," *Dialogue* 8, no. 2 (1973): 40-48.

¹¹⁹ Arnold Friberg's illustrations were first introduced in the 1962 edition of the Book of Mormon. Ron Read, Reference Librarian, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, email to the author, April 9, 2010.

Chapter Four

Fashioning Artistic Tradition: George De Forest Brush's "Aztec" Paintings

In choosing Indians as subjects for art, I do not paint from the historian's or the antiquary's point of view; I do not care to represent them in any curious habits which could not be comprehended by us; I am interested in those habits and deeds in which we have feelings in common.

– George de Forest Brush, "An Artist Among the Indians,"
Century Illustrated Magazine (May 1885).¹

In March 1887, George de Forest Brush exhibited his newly completed work, *An Aztec Sculptor* (fig. 4.1), at the Union League Club of New York.² Painted in a tight, academic manner, the canvas features a lone sculptor, wrapped in a jaguar pelt and with mallet and chisel in hand, carving a bas-relief on a marble wall before him. One of Brush's earliest critical and financial successes, Brush sold the painting to Thomas B. Clarke, one of the most prominent collectors of U.S. American art during the late nineteenth century.³ The following year, Brush returned to the subject of the Aztec artist at work, entering a more ambitious canvas, *The Sculptor and the King* (fig. 4.2), in the National Academy of Design's annual exhibition. Set within a

¹ George de Forest Brush, "An Artist Among the Indians," *Century Illustrated Magazine* XXX, no. 1 (May 1885): 54-57.

² For the March 1887 exhibition at the Union League Club, see Union League, *Exhibition of Paintings* (New York: March 10-12, 1887). I thank Nancy K. Anderson, curator of American and British paintings at the National Gallery of Art, for bringing this exhibition to my attention. In the spring of 2007, Dr. Anderson generously shared her research with me when I served as her volunteer research assistant for the then forthcoming exhibition, *George de Forest Brush: The Indian Paintings*.

³ For Clarke, see "Thomas B. Clarke's Collection of American Pictures," *Brooklyn Eagle*, December 18, 1887; Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, *Catalogue of the Thomas B. Clarke Collection of American Pictures* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 1891), 21; and Barbara Weinberg, "Thomas B. Clarke: Foremost Patron of American Art from 1872 to 1899," *American Art* 8 (May 1976): 52-83.

marble interior, the painting depicts an “Aztec” sculptor who pauses from his work to show a relief portrait to the monarch who stands beside him.⁴ *The Sculptor and the King* garnered favorable reviews, and the canvas earned Brush the National Academy of Design’s first place Julius Hallgarten Prize, awarded for the best work by an American artist less than thirty-five years of age.⁵ Soon thereafter, Brush sold the canvas to Henry Failing of Portland, Oregon, for a reported \$1,500.⁶

An Aztec Sculptor and *The Sculptor and the King* belong to a series of paintings the artist created in the 1880s that depict indigenous artists at work. This series not only includes Brush’s two Aztec subjects, but also images of Native North Americans, represented in such works as *The Potter* (1889; fig. 4.3) and *The Weaver* (1889; fig. 4.4).⁷ These canvases highlight indigenous artistic production – the painting of a pot, the weaving of a blanket, the creation of a bas-relief – and portray the artist as a skilled producer of meticulously crafted works. Several scholars have

⁴ Many contemporary reviewers, as well as Brush, called *The Sculptor and the King* and *An Aztec Sculptor* “Aztec subjects,” although, as I will discuss later in this chapter, there are no Aztec elements in either of the paintings. See “Catholicity in Art,” *New York Herald*, March 31, 1888; and George de Forest Brush to C.E.S. Wood, November 12, 1888, C.E.S. Wood Papers, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

⁵ The *New York Herald* described the picture as “superbly painted,” while the *Art Amateur* reported, “the painting of the fresh chiseling is exceedingly good, and the two figures, carefully studied, are well conceived and well modeled.” See “Catholicity in Art,” and “The National Academy of Design,” *The Art Amateur* (May 1888): 18. For the Hallgarten Prize, see Joan B. Morgan, “The Indian Paintings of George de Forest Brush,” *American Art* (Spring 1983), note 4; “Winners of Academy Prizes,” *New York Times*, April 19, 1888; and “Art Notes,” *The Critic*, April 21, 1888. After winning the Hallgarten Prize, Brush was elected an associate member of the National Academy of Design. See David B. Dearinger, ed., *Paintings and Sculpture in the Collection of the National Academy of Design: Volume I, 1826-1925* (New York and Manchester, Hudson Hills Press, 2004), 73.

⁶ “Art Notes,” *The Critic*, May 12, 1888; and George de Forest Brush to C.E.S. Wood, May 5, 1888, C.E.S. Wood Papers, Bancroft Library.

⁷ The present location of *The Potter* is not known, but it was reproduced in 1918 and 1923 articles on the artist. See Guy Pène du Bois, “Who’s Who in Modern Art – Brush,” *New York Evening Post Magazine*, September 7, 1918; and Catherine Beach Ely, “George de Forest Brush,” *Art in America* 11 (June 1923): 204.

investigated representations of Native North Americans in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century U.S. American culture. Leah Dilworth maintains that such images of Native artisans reveal a profound antimodernism and express concerns about changes in the United States as it became an increasingly urban, industrial society.⁸ In her work on Brush, Emily Shapiro argues that the artist's images of Native American craftsmen reflect his opposition to changes in the realm of high art production that emerged in the late nineteenth century, changes that were marked by an increasing devaluation of manual skill and tradition in art making.⁹ Indeed, the 1880s saw the adoption of progressive styles of painting by a number of U.S. American artists, who rejected the academics' adherence to invented subjects and deliberate technique in favor of rapid brushwork and scenes of everyday life.¹⁰ Threatened by these changes, Brush looked to the indigenous cultures of North America in order to locate a preindustrial artistic tradition based on manual skill.

⁸ Leah Dilworth, *Imagining Indians in the Southwest: Persistent Visions of A Primitive Past* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996), 144. Although it does not discuss representations of Native Americans in depth, for an important analysis of antimodernism, see T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981).

⁹ Emily D. Shapiro, "'A Purpose in Every Stroke': Brush's Images of Indian Artisanry," in Nancy K. Anderson, *George de Forest Brush: The Indian Paintings* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2008), 85. Despite the acceptance of Impressionism by some of the most important critics and patrons of his day, Brush remained opposed to modern art throughout his career. For instance, in a 1901 lecture before the Art Students' Club of Worcester, Massachusetts, he described the "modern artist" as technically deficient and driven chiefly by commercial aims. See Herbert L. Jillson, "George DeForest Brush," *Art Interchange* 46 (April 1901): 76-77.

¹⁰ Brush was not alone in his opposition to Impressionism and other progressive styles of painting. In an 1887 article, James M. Hoppin, professor of the history of art at Yale University, wrote a blistering critique of the "impressionist school," lamenting that, "academic traditions and criticisms are cast to the winds . . . Ugliness is welcomed if real." James M. Hoppin, "Tendencies of Modern Art," *New Englander and Yale Review* 46, no. 206 (May 1887): 465.

While not wishing to override other scholars' readings of Brush's representations of Native North American artists, in this chapter I explore a largely overlooked aspect of Brush's oeuvre, his creation of "Aztec" subjects. Focusing my attention on *An Aztec Sculptor* and *The Sculptor and the King*, I maintain that these works engaged period concerns about the existence of truly "American" subjects as well as an authentically North American artistic tradition, one with ancient roots like those Europeans claimed in ancient Greece and Rome. Brush's Mesoamerican subjects pictured a distinctly New World heritage and allowed him to define for himself an artistic role in the present by supplying him with a long and noble North American artistic pedigree. The artist's romantic images of Mesoamerican sculptors quietly laboring in marble temples present an idealized past, and reflect the romantic view of ancient Mesoamerica. Yet, at the same time, they reveal the impact of new evolutionist views regarding ancient Mesoamerican cultures set forth by Lewis Henry Morgan and other social scientists. As well shall see, Brush's Mesoamerican subjects reflect both these opposing trends at once, and his representations of Mesoamerican artists, which at first seem to uphold ancient Mesoamerican artistry, are ultimately ambivalent.

The Resurgent Popular Appeal of Ancient Mesoamerica in the 1870s and 1880s

Born in Tennessee in 1855 and raised in Brooklyn, New York, and Dairen, Connecticut, Brush came of age during a period of renewed interest in Mesoamerican antiquity in the United States.¹¹ This second wave of interest began in the 1870s and

¹¹ Throughout his life, Brush alternately listed his year of birth as 1854 and as 1855. For example, in the student register at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, Brush listed his birth year as 1854. Yet in an undated biographical statement now in the Nancy Douglas Bowditch papers in the Archives of

was largely driven by accounts of research undertaken by two individuals, the U.S. American antiquarian Augustus Le Plongeon and the French explorer Désiré Charnay.¹² In 1873 Le Plongeon traveled to Yucatán with his wife, Alice, where the couple spent the next twelve years photographing, surveying, and excavating Maya ruins.¹³ Illustrated accounts of Le Plongeon's research regularly appeared in U.S. periodicals, including one notable incident in which he attempted to send a newly excavated chacmool sculpture from Chichén Itzá for display at the 1876 Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia.¹⁴ Le Plongeon's activities eventually attracted the attention of Stephen Salisbury, Jr., president of the American Antiquarian Society, who had a keen interest in Mesoamerican antiquities.¹⁵ Salisbury became a patron of

American Art, Brush lists his year of birth as 1855. Unless otherwise noted, the basic biographical information on Brush in this chapter derives from the biography on the artist written by his daughter, Nancy Douglas Bowditch. For Brush's registration at the École des Beaux-Arts, see H. Barbara Weinberg, *The American Pupils of Jean-Léon Gérôme* (Fort Worth, Texas: Amon Carter Museum, 1984), 102. For Brush's short autobiography, see Nancy Douglas Bowditch Papers, reel 2830, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC. For biographic information on Brush, see Nancy Douglas Bowditch, *George de Forest Brush: Recollections of a Joyous Painter* (Peterborough, New Hampshire: Noone House, 1970).

¹² As I write in the introduction to this dissertation, Le Plongeon and Charnay worked at a time before the development of modern scientific archaeology, and both advanced speculative and far-fetched theories regarding ancient Mesoamerican cultures. Le Plongeon constructed an imaginative ancient history of the Maya, who, he believed, had traveled westward across Asia before establishing the civilization of ancient Egypt. Charnay proposed that all Mesoamerican civilizations had derived from the Toltecs, a culture that, he posited, had originated in Asia and had arrived in North America in about 1000 C.E. via the Bering Strait.

¹³ Le Plongeon was born in 1825 on the Isle of Jersey to French parents, and in 1849 he moved to the United States, where he gained citizenship. For the most complete study to date of the work undertaken by Le Plongeon and his wife, Alice, see Desmond and Messenger, *A Dream of Maya*. See also Brunhouse, *In Search of the Maya*, 137-149, and Evans, *Romancing the Maya*, 126-152.

¹⁴ At Chichén Itzá, Le Plongeon and a team of workers uncovered the sculpture of a reclining figure, which they dubbed chacmool – literally “great or red jaguar.” Le Plongeon transported his find almost as far as Mérida before the Mexican government put a stop to his plan and seized the chacmool. See “An Interesting Discovery,” *Harper's Weekly* (September 1, 1877): 688; Desmond, *A Dream of Maya*, 33-43; Evans, *Romancing the Maya*, 132-135, and Miller, *Maya Art and Architecture*, 146.

¹⁵ For the American Antiquarian Society, see the introduction of this dissertation, pages 2-3.

Le Plongeon, and in 1877 he published a report highlighting the antiquarian's explorations.¹⁶

Inspired by the travels of Stephens and Catherwood, Charnay undertook several journeys throughout Mexico and Central America in the mid nineteenth century in order to photograph and cast Mesoamerican ruins.¹⁷ From 1880 to 1882 he embarked on a highly publicized expedition that was a joint Franco-American project sponsored by the French Minister of Public Instruction and the U.S. American tobacco manufacturer, Pierre Lorillard.¹⁸ Lorillard provided funding for the voyage in order to acquire casts of antiquities from Palenque, Chichén Itzá, and Yaxchitlán, among other sites, for the United States National Museum (now the Smithsonian Institution) in Washington, DC.¹⁹ There, the casts joined Mesoamerican antiquities

¹⁶ Stephen Salisbury, Jr., "Dr. Le Plongeon in Yucatan," *American Antiquarian Society Proceedings* (April 25, 1877): 71.

¹⁷ For an introduction to Charnay, his travels, and his publications, see Davis, *Désiré Charnay*. For the influence of Stephens and Catherwood on Charnay, see pages 11-12.

¹⁸ Newspapers and magazines in the United States regularly covered Charnay's 1880-1882 expedition. In addition, Charnay published an eleven-part series describing his travels in the *North American Review*. See "Lorillard's Aztec Expedition," *New York Times*, April 9, 1880; and "The Lorillard Expedition," *The American Art Review* 2, no. 7 (1881): 38-39. See also Désiré Charnay, "The Ruins of Central America," *North American Review* (September-December 1880; January, February, May, June, October 1881; April, July 1882). For Lorillard's sponsorship of Charnay's expedition, see Davis, *Désiré Charnay*, 12, 25. Charnay named the site of Yaxchitlán "Lorillard City" in honor of his patron, yet the name was soon replaced by its present appellation.

¹⁹ Charnay and his team of local workers made papier-mâché molds, or *moulages*, of antiquities at various sites in Mesoamerica. The new process, developed in France by Lottin de Laval, resulted in paper impressions that were about one-sixtieth the weight of plaster casts. Charnay was thus able to make thousands of square feet of molds and transport them back to France, where plaster casts were made from them. Charnay sent one set of casts to the Smithsonian Institution and another went to the Trocadero in Paris. Given the difficulties of acquiring original Mesoamerican sculptures, these casts were a highly prized alternative. See Davis, *Désiré Charnay*, 25. For Lorillard, see "A Rare Collection," *New York Times*, June 12, 1883. For the casting technique developed by Lottin de Laval, see A.P. Niblack, "Instructions for Taking Paper Molds of Inscriptions in Stone, Wood, Bronze, Etc.," *Proceeding of the United States National Museum*, 1883 VI (1884): 493-497. For a discussion of the formation of early cast collections from Mesoamerica, see Barbara W. Fash, "Cast Aside: Revisiting the Plaster Cast Collections from Mesoamerica," *Visual Resources* XX, no. 1 (March 2004): 3-17.

acquired by Stephens and others earlier in the century to make up the first significant museum exhibit of ancient Mesoamerican material in the United States, which opened to the public in 1884 (fig. 4.5).²⁰ Soon after, Charnay published an illustrated volume describing his Mesoamerican travels, which appeared in the United States in 1887 as *The Ancient Cities of the New World: Being Voyages and Explorations in Mexico and Central America from 1857-1882*.²¹ In his introduction to the U.S. edition, the editor Allen Thorndike Rice commended Charnay for securing casts of “important palaces and temples” and declared that the monuments were of “surpassing grandeur.”²²

In addition to the Mesoamerican research carried out by Le Plongeon and Charnay, the resurgent interest in ancient Mesoamerica was tied to the early development of Pan-Americanism in the 1880s.²³ At that time, U.S. American diplomats and merchants began to advance the idea of Mexico as the “Sister

²⁰ According to records at the Smithsonian Institution, the Lorillard-Charnay collection of 82 casts entered the museum’s collection on June 5, 1883 (accession number 13211). For the accession records as well as object lists and related correspondence, see Smithsonian Institution Accession Records, Record Unit 305, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, DC. See also Frederick W. True, “The Lorillard-Charnay Collection of Central American Antiquities,” *Century Illustrated Magazine* (March 1884): 796; “American Antiquities,” *The Washington Post*, June 18, 1883; and “Accessions for 1883, Department of Antiquities,” *Transactions of the Anthropological Society of Washington* 3 (November 6, 1883 – May 19, 1885): 40. For the fragments of the Tablet of the Cross from Palenque that John Lloyd Stephens had shipped to the United States in 1842, and which entered the collection of the National Museum in 1858, see chapter one, note 99 of this dissertation. See also Mason, “The Group of the Cross at Palenque,” 217-218

²¹ Charnay first published this work in France as *Les Anciennes villes du Nouveau monde. Voyages d’explorations au Mexique et dan l’Amerique centrale par Desire Charnay, 1857-1882* (Paris: Hachette, 1885). To illustrate the U.S. edition of this work, Charnay used engravings made from his photographs as well as engravings by Catherwood that previously appeared in John Lloyd Stephens’ two Mesoamerican works.

²² Allen Thorndike Rice, introduction to *The Ancient Cities of the New World*, by Charnay, xi.

²³ I concentrate here on the movement among U.S. and Mexican diplomats and merchants to promote inter-national commerce and cultural exchange. For a study of the development of Pan-Americanism among the nations of North and South America, which emerged in 1889 with the first of the International Conferences of the American Republics, see Arthur Preston Whitaker, *The Western Hemisphere Idea: Its Rise and Decline* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1954).

Republic” of the United States in order to promote commercial exchange between the two nations.²⁴ As Robert Alexander Gonzalez has shown, U.S. Americans communicated the notion of a special relationship between the United States and Mexico through many of the exhibits at the World Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition held in New Orleans in 1884-1885.²⁵ The fair included seventy-six acres of Mexican exhibit buildings and included an anthropology section that contained roughly seven hundred cases of antiquities, as well as another exhibit of casts of antiquities that was privately organized by the Mexican antiquarian Eufemio Abadiano.²⁶ After the fair’s closure in 1885, this collection of twenty-nine casts was sent to the United States National Museum in Washington, DC, where they remained on view until 1889.²⁷

²⁴ “The Sister Republic, and Her Exhibit at the New Orleans Exhibit,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 20, 1885; “Mexico, American Ideas in our Sister Republic,” *Daily Bulletin* (San Francisco, CA), August 23, 1884.

²⁵ As Gonzalez argues, while both U.S. and Mexican politicians and merchants were keen to promote the idea of a special relationship between the two countries at the New Orleans fair in order to advance commerce, the fair’s exhibits symbolically expressed the idea that Mexico was subordinate to the United States. See Robert Alexander Gonzalez, “Constructing Hemispherism: Pan-Americanism and its Built Environments,” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2002), xxi, 10-33. For Mexico’s interest in the fair, see Gene Yeager, “Porfirian Commercial Propaganda: Mexico in the World’s Industrial Expositions,” *The Americas* 34, no. 2 (October 1977): 230-243.

²⁶ Eugene V. Smalley, “The New Orleans Exposition,” *The Century Magazine* XXX, no. 1 (May 1885): 7; Otis T. Mason, ed. “Anthropology at the New Orleans Exposition,” *The American Naturalist* 19, no. 6 (June 1885): 622-624. See also Eufemio Abadiano, *Descriptive Catalogue of the Archaeological, Historical, and Artistic Collections of Eufemio Abadiano* (New Orleans, privately published: 1885).

²⁷ Otis Mason of the United States National Museum attended the fair in New Orleans, and he arranged to have Abadiano’s collection brought to Washington. The collection of casts was auctioned off in 1889 in order to pay off some of Abadiano’s debts. See “The Abadiano Collection,” *The Detroit Free Press*, May 22, 1886; “Aztec Antiquities,” *The American Architect and Building Review* (March 31, 1888): 152; “Some Old Aztec Relics: The Idols of a Nation to be Sold Under the Hammer,” *Washington Post*, September 3, 1889.

In the wake of the expeditions undertaken by Charnay and Le Plongeon, as well as the well-publicized exhibits of Mexican antiquities displayed in New Orleans, Mesoamerica –its history, geography, ruined cities, and people – was once again a subject popular with the U.S. American public. U.S. tourism to Mexico increased markedly in the 1880s due to the completion of the Mexican Central Railroad, which brought travelers in Pullman cars from El Paso, Texas to “the land of the Aztecs” in Mexico City.²⁸ Articles on Mesoamerica and its ancient monuments regularly appeared in newspapers and periodicals, such as an extensive piece in the December 1881 edition of *The Century* that focused on Mesoamerican antiquities, and a twelve-part series published in 1879-1880 in *Lippincott’s Magazine* that described and highlighted Mesoamerican ruins.²⁹ In 1886-1887 a commercial exhibition dubbed the *Aztec Fair* toured the United States, making stops in Boston, New York, Brooklyn, Washington, Providence, and New Haven.³⁰ The fair drew “admiring throngs” and

²⁸ The Mexican Central Railway (Ferrocarril Central Mexicano) was incorporated in Massachusetts in 1880 and opened its main line in March 1884, linking Mexico City to El Paso, Texas. With the opening of the railway, U.S. companies advertised tours of Mexico that often referenced Mexico’s ancient civilizations. See “To the Land of the Aztecs: The Pioneer Raymond & Whitcomb Excursion to Mexico,” *Boston Daily Globe*, February 26, 1885. For the Mexican Central Railroad, see David M. Pletcher, *Rails, Mines, and Progress: Seven American Promoters in Mexico, 1867-1911* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1958), 100-102. For nineteenth-century U.S. tourism to Mexico, see Garold L. Cole, “The Birth of Modern Mexico, 1867-1911: American Travelers’ Perceptions,” *North Dakota Quarterly* 45 (1977): 54-72.

²⁹ The many articles on Mexico that appeared in newspapers and popular periodicals in the 1880s often focused on the country’s ancient past as well as its modern development. See “The Hieroglyphs of Central America,” *The Century* XXIII, no. 2 (December 1881): 228-240; and Felix L. Oswald, “Summerland Sketches; or, Rambles in the Backwoods of Mexico and Central America,” *Lippincott’s Magazine* (July 1879): 9; (August 1879): 153; (September 1879): 281; (October 1879): 403; (November 1879): 532; (December 1879): 659; (January 1880): 21; (February 1880): 148; (March 1880): 276; (April 1880): 393; (May 1880): 536; (June 1880): 649. For other articles on Mexico that focus on its Aztec past as well as its modern condition, see “Among the Aztecs,” *The Golden Era* (April 16, 1881): 13; “American Antiquities,” *Harper’s Weekly* (June 11, 1881): 377-378.

³⁰ The fair opened on September 20, 1886 in Boston, where it drew crowds, before traveling to New York, Brooklyn, Washington, and New Haven. For Boston, see “The Mexican Fair,” *Boston Daily Advertiser*, September 9, 1886; and “Great Success of the Aztec Fair,” *Boston Daily Advertiser*,

displayed a collection of eighty-one ancient “relics,” including ceramic vessels, small-scale sculptures, obsidian knives, an Aztec slit-drum (*teponaztli*), an Aztec “gladiator’s stone” (now in the collection of Yale’s Peabody Museum of Natural History), and casts of the Calendar Stone, the Coatlicue sculpture, and the Stone of Tizoc.³¹ Lastly, Mesoamerican antiquity even entered the realm of the performing arts in the 1880s, with New York’s Metropolitan Opera mounting a production of Spontini’s *Ferdinand Cortez* in 1888 that featured “gilded Aztec chiefs” and a “barbaric temple.”³² In Cincinnati, the Order of Cincinnatus produced a pageant entitled *Montezuma or the Conquest of Mexico* that drew thousands of spectators, some dressed in Aztec garb, in the summer and fall of 1889.³³

September 29, 1886. For New York, see “Mexican and Aztec Relics,” *New York Herald*, November 8, 1886; and “Scenes at the Aztec Fair,” *New York Times*, November 14, 1886. For Brooklyn, see “Opening of the Aztec Fair at the Rink,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, December 8, 1886. For Washington, see “Amusements. The Aztec Fair,” *Washington Post*, January 23, 1887. For New Haven, see George Grant MacCurdy, “An Aztec ‘Calendar Stone’ in Yale’s University Museum,” *American Anthropologist* 12, no. 4 (October-December 1910): 481-496. A trade card for the Aztec Fair in the collection of the American Antiquarian Society states that the fair stopped at the Music Hall in Providence, although the card does not indicate the dates it operated in the city. See Trade card for Orrin Bros and Benito Nichol’s Aztec Fair and Mexican Village, Providence Music Hall, Trade Card Collection, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.

³¹ “General Mention,” *New York Times*, December 23, 1886; “Scenes at the Fair.” The fair’s proprietors sold an extensive guidebook that included descriptions of each of the eighty-one objects in the archaeology section of the fair. See George W. Orrin et al., *Guide to Orrin Bros. and Nichols’ Aztec Fair: Mexico Past and Present* (Privately printed, 1886), 7-15. The fair’s collection was sold off after its final stop in New Haven in 1887. O.C. Marsh of Yale University purchased the “gladiator stone” (now called a calendar stone) at the sale and donated it to the Peabody Museum in 1898 (ANT.019231). See MacCurdy, “An Aztec ‘Calendar Stone,’” 481.

³² “Amusements. Metropolitan Opera House,” *New York Times*, January 12, 1888; “Amusements. Metropolitan Opera House,” *New York Times*, January 7, 1888.

³³ Pageants, also known as spectacles, were multimedia exhibitions similar in style to tableaux vivants that featured scenery, musical orchestration, dance, and hand-to-hand combat. For a study of the pageant, see Sara Elizabeth Siegrist, “John Rettig’s (1858-1932) *Montezuma or the Conquest of Mexico* (1889): A Case Study of American Pageantry in Cincinnati” (MA thesis, University of Cincinnati, 2002). For the size of the audiences, see page 36, for those in Aztec costume, see page 60.

H.H. Bancroft, Lewis Henry Morgan, and the Debate over Aztec “Civilization”

While Mesoamerican antiquity enjoyed renewed popularity in the 1870s and 1880s, at the time there was a lack of consensus in the United States as to the character of ancient Mesoamerican cultures. Some took a romantic view of ancient Mesoamerican peoples and imagined them as the Greeks or Romans of the New World, while others saw ancient Mesoamerican cultures as “barbaric.” Keen argues that the ambivalent position Mesoamerican antiquity held in the late nineteenth century resulted from the development of the social sciences and evolutionist thought, which, in the 1870s and 1880s, coexisted with earlier romantic ideas regarding indigenous North Americans.³⁴ The tension between these two strands of thought may best be seen in the competing ideas set forth by the historian Hubert Howe Bancroft and the ethnologist Lewis Henry Morgan.

A well-known and prolific writer who, like Prescott, worked in the romantic mode, in 1875-1876 Bancroft published an ambitious work entitled *Native Races of the Pacific States*. This five-volume publication was an encyclopedic summary of everything then known about the indigenous people of Mexico and the western United States.³⁵ Bancroft addressed ancient Mexico in the second volume, presenting a romantic picture of ancient Aztec society based on early documentary sources including Cortés and other Spanish writers. In Bancroft’s history, the Aztecs lived in an urban imperial society ruled by Montezuma, whose refined and opulent lifestyle impressed the Spanish. As described in *Native Races*, the Aztec capital of

³⁴ Keen, *The Aztec Image in Western Thought*, 380-381.

³⁵ Hubert Howe Bancroft, *Native Races of the Pacific States*, 5 volumes (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1875-1876).

Tenochtitlán was a New World Venice, a city of palaces, markets, floating gardens, zoos and canals. Bancroft summed up his ideas with the statement that ancient Mesoamerican cultures were “but little lower than the contemporaneous civilizations of Europe and Asia, and not nearly as low as we have been led to believe.”³⁶

Bancroft’s ideas were at odds with those held Lewis Henry Morgan, a pioneer in the field of U.S. anthropology who was arguably the most influential writer on Native North American social structure in the nineteenth century. In 1876 Morgan publicly challenged Bancroft’s ideas on ancient Mexican society when the *North American Review* published his hostile review of Bancroft’s *Native Races*.³⁷ In his review, Morgan objected to the characterization of Aztec society as a civilized one that was set forth by Bancroft as well as earlier romantic historians, such as Prescott. In contrast to Bancroft’s ideas, Morgan argued that Montezuma was no more than a tribal chief, his palace was a modest communal dwelling, and the city of Tenochtitlán little more than a humble Pueblo.³⁸ Morgan based his ideas on his studies of Native North Americans, whose confederacies and tribes he considered to be fossilized forms of early humanity. In his influential 1877 work, *Ancient Society*, Morgan presented a classificatory system that divided the evolution of culture into stages of savagery, barbarism, and civilization, with each stage separated into early, middle,

³⁶ Ibid., II: 804-805; quoted in Keen, *The Aztec Image in Western Thought*, 390.

³⁷ Lewis Henry Morgan, “Montezuma’s Dinner,” *North American Review* 122 (April 1876): 265-308.

³⁸ Keen, *The Aztec Image in Western Thought*, 381.

and late phases.³⁹ Using his criteria, Morgan determined that the Aztecs were stalled in middle barbarism.

The conflicting points of view held by Bancroft and Morgan set the tone for the debate on the nature of ancient Mesoamerican societies in the 1870s and 1880s. Morgan's evolutionary model of human progress condemned all indigenous North Americans to a lower status than the one held by modern U.S. Americans. Although Morgan died in 1881, his follower Adolph Bandelier continued his ideas, working against what he called the "Romantic School of American Archaeology."⁴⁰ As we shall see, the debate on the character of ancient Mesoamerican groups would be reflected in Brush's ancient Mesoamerican subjects.

George de Forest Brush: Training and Travels to Mexico and the West

Brush began his artistic training in 1870 at the National Academy of Design in New York, where he studied under the painter Lemuel Everett Wilmarth.⁴¹ After three years at the National Academy, Brush sought further instruction in Paris, the then undisputed capital of European art. In Paris, Brush trained at the École des Beaux-Arts in the atelier of Jean-Léon Gérôme, one of the most respected academic

³⁹ Lewis Henry Morgan, *Ancient Society*, ed. Leslie A. White (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1964).

⁴⁰ Adolph Bandelier, "The Romantic School of American Archaeology," paper read before the New-York Historical Society, February 3, 1885 (New York: Printed by Trow's Printing and Book Binding, 1885).

⁴¹ Nancy Douglas Bowditch, *George de Forest Brush: Recollections of a Joyous Painter* (Peterborough, NH: Noone House, 1970), 1-6. I have compiled biographical information on Brush from this publication, written by Brush's daughter, as well as from the Nancy Douglas Bowditch Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC; Joan B. Morgan, *George de Forest Brush, 1855-1941: Master of the American Renaissance* (New York: Berry-Hill Galleries, 1985); Minna C. Smith, "George de Forest Brush," *International Studio* 34 (April 1908): xlvii-liv; Herbert L. Jillson, "George de Forest Brush," *The Art Interchange* XLVI, no. 4 (April 1901): 75-77.; and Anderson, *George de Forest Brush*.

painters of his day who gained fame with his Orientalist genre scenes and depictions of classical antiquity (fig. 4.6).⁴² Under Gérôme's tutelage, Brush developed a precise, highly finished technique and a respect for the importance of tradition in the practice of art. Upon completing his studies in Paris in the fall of 1879, however, Brush looked to North America for his subject matter, rather than follow his teacher's example and paint Old World scenes.

In search of adventure as well as subjects to sketch and paint, Brush embarked on the first of a series of travels through North America in 1880. In the fall of that year, Brush and his brother, Alfred, traveled to Mexico. Few details about the trip survive, but the popularity of Mexico and Mexican subjects in the United States in the 1870s and 1880s certainly must have played a part in inspiring the pair to make the journey.⁴³ Passenger records reveal that Brush and his brother arrived in Brashear,

⁴² Wilmarth had trained with Gérôme a decade before, and he likely encouraged Brush to study with the much-admired French artist. In the French academic system, students adhered to a rigorous regime of repetitive drawing, with the nude figure as the central focus of the student's work. For Wilmarth, see Mark Mitchell, "The Artist-Makers: Professional Art Training in Mid-Nineteenth-Century New York City," (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 2002), 183-229. For Gérôme and training in the French academic manner, see H. Barbara Weinberg, H. Barbara, *The American Pupils of Jean Léon Gérôme* (Fort Worth: Amon Carter Museum, 1984); H. Barbara Weinberg, *The Lure of Paris: Nineteenth-Century American Painters and Their French Teachers* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1991); and James C. Boyles, "Brush and the Academic Tradition," in Anderson, *George de Forest Brush*, 36-53.

⁴³ Only a record of Brush's return from Mexico survives, and thus his date of departure from the United States and his itinerary in Mexico is unknown. Brush was in the United States in the summer of 1880, though, as the census records for June 24, 1880 note that he lived at home with his family in Darien, Connecticut. In his surviving correspondence, Brush makes only one reference to the trip. In an 1888 letter to C.E.S. Wood, Brush writes, "the only superb place I ever got into was Mexico and there the chances that a man would come up to you and shoot you for your shirt were very good." See 1880 United States Census, Darien, Fairfield County, Connecticut. June 24, 1880. National Archives, Washington, DC; and George de Forest Brush to C.E.S. Wood, January 8, 1888, C.E.S. Wood Papers, Bancroft Library.

Louisiana from Veracruz, Mexico aboard the steamer *Whiting* on January 12, 1881.⁴⁴ These records, along with a surviving landscape by Brush of Mount Orizaba from the city of Jalapa (fig. 4.7), indicate that the pair traveled in the state of Veracruz.⁴⁵

From 1882 to 1883 the artist embarked on another trip, traveling through Wyoming and Montana, where he made studies of Plains Indians.⁴⁶ In Wyoming, Brush camped at Fort Washakie, where he sketched members of the Arapahoe and Shoshone tribes who lived on what is now the Wind River Reservation (fig. 4.8, 4.9). After spending the summer of 1882 in Wyoming, he journeyed to Billings, Montana to paint Indians at the Crow Agency, living in a tepee that served as a studio.⁴⁷ As Brush later recalled, during his travels he “got familiar with [the Native North Americans’] life and habits and dances and so forth.”⁴⁸ On his voyages, the artist

⁴⁴ *Passenger Lists of Vessels Arriving at New Orleans, Louisiana, 1820-1945*, M259, roll 63, National Archives, Washington, DC. I thank Colonel Merle M. Moore, Jr., for locating Brush’s passenger record.

⁴⁵ The capital of the state of Veracruz, Jalapa (or Xalapa) is located approximately seventy miles northwest of the port of Veracruz. A railway between Veracruz and Mexico City, the Mexican Railway (Ferrocarril Mexicano), was dedicated in 1873, and thus Brush and his brother might easily have traveled to Mexico City on their trip.

Regarding Brush’s painting of Mount Orizaba, the canvas has passed down to Brush’s descendants living in Dublin, New Hampshire. On the back of the canvas is written, “Monte Orizaba, Jalapa.” I thank Nancy Anderson for sharing her knowledge of this painting, as well as photographs of it, with me.

⁴⁶ For Brush’s account of his travels among Native North American tribes, see Brush, “An Artist Among the Indians,” 54-57.

⁴⁷ In addition to his 1882-1883 trip, in the summer of 1884 Brush briefly visited the Sioux at Standing Rock in what is now North Dakota. He also journeyed to Pierreville, Canada in 1885-1886. For the 1882-1883 trip, see Bowditch, *George De Forest Brush*, 22-23; and Brush to C.E.S. Wood, January 15, 1883, C.E.S. Wood Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California. For the 1884 trip to Standing Rock, see Brush to C.E.S. Wood, August 8, 1884, C.E.S. Wood Papers, Bancroft Library. For Brush in Pierreville, see Brush to C.E.S. Wood, January 24, 1886, Huntington Library; and Brush to Douglas Volk, February 3, 1886, S. A. Douglas Volk and Leonard Wells Volk Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

⁴⁸ Willard de Lue, “Our Summer Visitors,” *Boston Daily Globe*, September 1, 1923, 10.

assembled a collection of artifacts that would later serve as studio props.⁴⁹ Brush also learned many native skills and crafts, and according to his daughter, he “learned how to cut out a moccasin pattern, build a tepee, [and] make a bow and arrow according to Indian rules.”⁵⁰

“American” Subjects and Ancient Mesoamerica

Between his travels, Brush returned to New York City to paint in his studio and to earn money by teaching classes in drawing at Cooper Union and at the Art Students League.⁵¹ By the mid 1880s he established himself as a painter who had been schooled in Europe but who applied his skills to a distinctly “American” subject, Native North American life, which he pictured on canvases such as *Mourning Her Brave* (1883; fig. 4.10).⁵² The decision to paint Native North American subjects must have been a logical one for the artist. If peasant themes attracted European artists because of the indigenous, timeless nature of the subject, and Orientalist imagery was appreciated for its exotic nature, then the customs of Native North Americans combined both.⁵³ In making such a choice, Brush also avoided the criticism aimed at

⁴⁹ Brush’s collection included an eagle feather headdress, beaded moccasins and jackets, white buckskin trousers, pots, bows, and baskets. See Morgan, *George de Forest Brush*, 18.

⁵⁰ Nancy Douglas Bowditch, “Outline of a Biography: George de Forest Brush, a Joyous Painter,” undated manuscript, Bowditch Papers.

⁵¹ Brush began teaching at Cooper Union in the fall of 1880 and he taught there on and off through the spring of 1890. He was hired at the Art Students League in the fall of 1883, and he taught classes at the school intermittently through the spring of 1890. For details of Brush’s work as an art instructor, see the chronology of the artist published in Anderson, *George de Forest Brush*, 188-213.

⁵² In 1883 Brush had his first financial and critical success with *Mourning Her Brave*, which one critic described as a “distinctly American work.” See “American Artists’ Work, *New York World*, December 28, 1883.

⁵³ Like many artists who trained in Paris in the 1870s, Brush traveled to the French countryside to paint scenes of rural peasants. In 1876, the artist painted a scene of a Breton market, *Market Day in Brittany*, and in 1879 he spent time painting in the rural artist colony at Grez-sur-Loing. Brush’s

many of his contemporaries who returned from Europe and painted subjects that were popular abroad.⁵⁴ In the 1880s, many critics called on U.S. American artists to paint “American subjects” rather than “the much trodden fields of France, Spain, and northern Africa.”⁵⁵ One writer exclaimed, “we want in America art originators, not imitators,” and proposed that rather than looking to Europe for subjects, artists in the United States create pictures of “home subjects” such as “Indians” or “ancient life” in North America.⁵⁶

As was true in the antebellum period, in the 1870s and 1880s many in the United States conceived of “America” in a continental sense. In 1882, for example, *Our Continent*, a new illustrated weekly journal that sought to promote “American” culture, began publication in Philadelphia. Edited by the writer Albion W. Tourgée, in the debut issue Tourgée declared, “we desire to be American, and to encourage and aid in developing a healthy and self-respecting sentiment of Americanism in literature and art.”⁵⁷ The publication featured pieces by “native authors” writing in the United States on a range of topics pertaining to the United States, Mexico, and Central

Breton painting is reproduced in Anderson, *George de Forest Brush*, 191. For Brush in Grez-sur-Loing, see Brush to Douglas Volk, March 21, 1879, Volk Papers.

⁵⁴ Anderson, *George de Forest Brush*, 18. In 1891, one writer described how European training was seen by many in the United States to “denationalize” young artists, noting, “instances of young men of vigorous native talent who, after completing their schooling abroad, settle down, not as American painters, but as painters of European subjects, in the European manner, and animated by the European spirit.” Yet, the writer noted, “against Mr. Brush this charge cannot be made.” Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, *Catalogue of the Thomas B. Clarke Collection of American Pictures* (Philadelphia: October 15 to November 28, 1891), 21.

⁵⁵ Thomas Donaldson, “Protection to American Art,” *International Review* (February/March 1883): 104; and “Unique Exhibition,” *Boston Herald*, December 28, 1883.

⁵⁶ Donaldson, “Protection to American Art,” 96, 104.

⁵⁷ Albion W. Tourgée, “Our Name,” *Our Continent* I, no. 1 (February 15, 1882): 8.

America.⁵⁸ The publication's cover even featured a design created by the artist Louis Comfort Tiffany that was based on the Aztec Calendar Stone, which Tourgée noted was "one of the most important works of art left to us by the aborigines of this continent" (fig. 4.11).⁵⁹

As evidenced by the cover design of *Our Continent*, Mesoamerican antiquity was also considered an "American" subject during the late nineteenth century.⁶⁰ Indeed, ancient Mesoamerican cultures were often grouped together with living Native North American tribes to form a single, unified whole, what Tourgée called "the aborigines of this continent." Brush was certainly aware of this idea, for in 1883 he served on the Committee on Aboriginal Art for the National Academy of Design's Pedestal Fund Art Loan Exhibition, which displayed Mesoamerican antiquities, including Aztec stone figures and a cast of the Calendar Stone, together with objects from Native North American tribes.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Advertisement for *Our Continent* in *The Literary News* 3, no. 3 (March 1882), 94. Interestingly, I could find no articles in the publication that mentioned Canada. The journal featured short fiction stories by popular U.S. American writers such as Helen Campbell, as well as articles on artistic culture found throughout North America. For Campbell, see "Under Green Apple Boughs," *Our Continent* (February 15, 1882): 1. For articles on Mexico, see "An Outlook at Mexico," *Our Continent* (July 5, 1882): 332; "Mexican Railroads," *Our Continent* (April 26, 1882): 164. For American antiquities, see "Ancient American Metal Work," *Our Continent* (July 26, 1882): 75-78; and "American Vase Forms," *Our Continent* (March 8, 1882): 53.

⁵⁹ Albion W. Tourgée, "Seal of Our Continent," *Our Continent* I, no. 2 (February 22, 1882): 24.

⁶⁰ In another example of ancient Mesoamerica being thought of as "American," in an 1885 article on the style of the proposed monument for Ulysses S. Grant, one writer noted that many in the United States demanded that the monument be "strictly American," about which the writer remarked that "the only strictly American monuments are Indian earth works and Central American buildings." See "Style and the Monument," *North American Review* 141, no. 348 (November 1885): 453.

⁶¹ For the Pedestal Fund Art Loan Exhibition and a list of objects exhibited in the Aboriginal Art section, see National Academy of Design, *Catalogue of the Pedestal Fund Art Loan Exhibition* (New York: National Academy of Design, 1883), 104-114.

By early 1885 Brush expanded his focus from creating Native North American scenes to include ancient Mesoamerican imagery as well. In the January 1885 issue of *Century Magazine*, a reproduction of a clay bas-relief modeled by Brush accompanied a folktale written by John Vance Cheney (fig. 4.12).⁶² While the relief's central scene illustrates an episode from Cheney's version of the Native American story of Squire Coyote from the Cahroc (or Karok) tribe, the top portion of the bas-relief depicts the stylized sky border copied from the side of the Aztec Stone of Tizoc (fig. 4.13).⁶³ Brush left no indication as to what inspired his use of Mesoamerican imagery. Perhaps he viewed and sketched the Aztec monument on his trip to Mexico in 1880-1881.⁶⁴ His enthusiasm for ancient Mesoamerican civilizations might also have been stimulated by his work with Mesoamerican objects for the Pedestal Art Loan Fund, or he might have been affected by the overall popular interest in Mesoamerican antiquity that took place in the United States in the 1880s due to the expeditions by Le Plongeon and Charnay. In fact, a photographic

⁶²The present location of the bas-relief is not known. Few sculptures by Brush survive today, yet in an 1887 letter to C.E.S. Wood, Brush mentions completing a bas-relief. In addition, a 1919 article on the artist states that he began working in sculpture in the 1880s. Brush's interest in sculpture might have been stimulated by his relationship with Mary (Mittie) Taylor Whelpley, who he married in 1886 and who studied sculpture at the Art Students League. Interestingly, as Brush completed his 1888 work, *The Sculptor and the King*, Mittie was engaged in sculpting a copy of a section of the Parthenon frieze. See Brush to C.E.S. Wood, January 2, 1887, C.E.S. Wood Papers, Bancroft Library; and "Sculpture by George de Forest Brush and Others," *New York Times*, June 29, 1919. For Mittie Brush, see Bowditch, *George de Forest Brush*, 28-29. For Mittie's Parthenon relief, see Brush to Douglas Volk, February 5, 1888, Volk Papers, Archives of American Art.

⁶³ I thank Patricia Junker, curator of American Art at the Seattle Art Museum, for pointing out the relief's resemblance to the Stone of Tizoc. Email message to the author, August 31, 2007. For the Stone of Tizoc, see Manuel Aguilar-Moreno, *Handbook to Life in the Aztec World* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 183.

⁶⁴ The Stone of Tizoc was uncovered in Mexico City in 1791 by workers engaged in repaving the main plaza of Mexico City. In 1825 it entered the collection of the National Museum in Mexico City, where it has remained since then. See Richard Fraser Townsend, *State and Cosmos in the Art of Tenochtitlan* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1979), 43.

reproduction of the Stone of Tizoc appeared in Charnay's article in the October 1880 issue of *The North American Review* (fig. 4.14), and this might have served as the visual source from which Brush drew.⁶⁵

Brush's "Aztec" Paintings

In January 1887 Brush wrote to his friend Charles Erskine Scott (C.E.S.) Wood that he had begun painting a scene he described as "an Aztec sitting on a rug carving one of those of those places of worship in stone, his torso nude and a tiger skin wrapped around his loins."⁶⁶ Brush completed the work, entitled *An Aztec Sculptor* (see fig. 4.1), by March of that year, when he exhibited the canvas at the Union League Club of New York.⁶⁷ The painting then made its public debut in April 1887 at the Society of American Artist's Ninth Annual Exhibition.⁶⁸ *An Aztec Sculptor* was one of Brush's earliest critical successes, with *Art Age* featuring the painting in a double-page photogravure reproduction in its July 1887 issue.⁶⁹ The critic from the *New York Herald* proclaimed the picture "a masterpiece" and noted, "the painting of the stone which is being carved and of the back of the carver are worthy of Gérôme."⁷⁰ Undoubtedly, in *An Aztec Sculptor* Brush demonstrated the

⁶⁵ Charnay, "The Ruins of Central America," (October 1880): 316.

⁶⁶ Brush to C.E.S. Wood, January 2, 1887, C.E.S. Wood Papers, Bancroft Library.

⁶⁷ For the Union League Club, see note 2 of this chapter.

⁶⁸ For reviews of the picture, see "The Society of American Artists," *The Art Amateur* (June 1887): 5; "Society of American Artists – II," *New York Evening Post*, May 17, 1887; and "Fine Arts. Society of American Artists. – II," *The Nation* (May 19, 1887): 435.

⁶⁹ "George de Forest Brush," *Art Age* (July 1887): 8. The reproduction appears on an unnumbered page.

⁷⁰ "Society of American Artists," *New York Herald*, April 23, 1887.

techniques he mastered as a student at the École des Beaux-Arts under Gérôme, most notably the skillful depiction of the human figure as well as the adroit rendering of various surfaces, including marble, metal, human skin, animal fur, and woven textile.⁷¹

An Aztec Sculptor marked an important new direction for the artist. Not only was the canvas Brush's first painting with an ancient Mesoamerican theme, it was also the first of several pictures to depict the subject of the indigenous artist at work. In the second half of the nineteenth century many European artists produced canvases illustrating the early history of artistic production. In Britain, Lawrence Alma-Tadema, with whom Brush was often compared, specialized in meticulously imagined paintings of classical antiquity, including a number of works representing Greek artists, such as *Phidias and the Frieze of the Parthenon, Athens* (1868; fig. 4.15) and *Sculpture* (1877; fig. 4.16).⁷² In France, Gérôme produced several canvases depicting Roman artists at work, including *The Antique Pottery Painter: Sculpturæ vitam insufflat pictura* (1893; fig. 4.17). Whereas these European artists looked to ancient Greece and Rome for artistic origins, Brush turned to ancient Mesoamerica for a North American artistic tradition.

⁷¹ Mrs. Schuyler van Rensselaer, the critic for *The Independent*, noted Brush's skillful handling of the figure as well as his rendering of textures. "The Society of American Artists," *The Independent*, May 19, 1887.

⁷² Several reviewers compared Brush's *An Aztec Sculptor* to the work of Alma-Tadema. For example, one writer noted that Brush "treated the American Aztec in a poetic manner, not unlike the subjects of Alma Tadema taken from scenes in the ancient days of Greece and Rome." "Art and Artists," *Boston Evening Transcript*, July 7, 1887. For other reviewers who compared *An Aztec Sculptor* with the work of Alma-Tadema, see "George de Forest Brush," *Art Age*, 8; and "The Society of American Artists. Ninth Exhibition," *The Studio* (June 1887): 216.

In addition to the precedent set forth by European artists, ideas current in the field of anthropology appear to have stimulated Brush's visual exploration of the origin of artistic production. In Morgan's 1877 work, *Ancient Society*, the anthropologist presented a classificatory system that divided the evolution of culture into stages, each marked by an advance in technological skills. As indigenous North Americans were considered examples of an earlier stage of cultural evolution, nineteenth-century anthropologists believed that the examination of their artworks offered insights into the origins of more recent artistic production.⁷³ Writing in the *Fourth Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology*, the anthropologist William Henry Holmes explained:

For the investigation of art in its early stages and in its widest sense there is probably no fairer field than that afforded by aboriginal America, ancient and modern . . . The advantages of this field, as compared to Greece, Egypt, and the Orient, will be apparent when we remember that the dawn of art in these countries lies hidden in the shadow of unnumbered ages, while ours stands out in the light of the very present.⁷⁴

In 1883 Brush served on the Committee on Aboriginal Art for the Pedestal Fund Art Loan Exhibition with Holmes as well as several other well-known anthropologists, and Brush's service on the committee likely exposed him to ideas current in the field

⁷³ Dilworth, *Imagining Indians in the Southwest*, 154.

⁷⁴ William Henry Holmes, "Origin and Development of Form and Ornament in Ceramic Art," *Fourth Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology* (1886): 443. Holmes devoted his career to exploring the source of artistic creativity, and his work combined the fields of geology, ethnology, and archaeology, as well as art history. He worked at a number of prominent scientific institutions, including the Hayden Survey, the National Museum (later the Smithsonian), the Bureau of American Ethnology, and the Field Museum, before becoming the director of the National Gallery of Art. For Holmes, see Curtis M. Hinsley, *The Smithsonian and the American Indian: Making a Moral Anthropology in Victorian America* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994), 100-109. For an analysis of Holmes as a follower of Morgan, see Keen, *The Aztec Image in Western Thought*, 406-409.

of anthropology.⁷⁵ Moreover, in an 1886 letter to his friend C.E.S. Wood, the artist mentions reading the *Fourth Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology*, calling it “a superb work.” Consequently, Brush almost certainly was aware of Holmes’ ideas.⁷⁶

In *An Aztec Sculptor*, Brush presents an “Aztec” artist in the process of creating a bas-relief. The work thematizes artistic production, with the indigenous artist quietly concentrating on his artistic labor. The close framing of the figure and the depiction of the marble wall, which recalls classical antiquity, lends the sculptor an air of dignity. Brush based the painting’s bas-reliefs on seventh-century Maya sculptures found at the site of Palenque in the state of Chiapas, Mexico. At Palenque, the limestone and stucco carvings ornament the façade of the inner sanctuary within the Temple of the Cross (fig. 4.18). God L, one of the principal gods of the underworld, is depicted on the right jamb, standing beneath a winged monster mask that stretches over the sanctuary’s portal.⁷⁷

In his painting, Brush made changes to the Mesoamerican reliefs. He altered the Maya sculptures’ scale and material, reducing their size and translating the stucco and limestone reliefs into marble.⁷⁸ Additionally, he transformed the inner

⁷⁵ Holmes devoted his career to exploring the source of artistic creativity, and his work combined the fields of geology, ethnology, and archaeology, as well as art history. He worked at a number of prominent scientific institutions, including the Hayden Survey, the National Museum (later the Smithsonian), the Bureau of American Ethnology, and the Field Museum, before becoming the director of the National Gallery of Art. For Holmes, see Curtis M. Hinsley, *The Smithsonian and the American Indian: Making a Moral Anthropology in Victorian America* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994), 100-109. For the list of members of the Committee on Aboriginal Art, see National Academy of Design, *Catalogue of the Pedestal Fund Art Loan Exhibition*, n.p.

⁷⁶ Brush to C.E.S. Wood, January 24, 1886, Wood Papers, Huntington Library.

⁷⁷ For information on the Temple of the Cross and its relief sculptures, see Merle Greene Robertson, *The Sculpture of Palenque*, 4 volumes (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), IV:22-38.

sanctuary's façade into a relief carving, and he also attributed the artworks to the Aztecs, rather than the Maya. These changes suggest that Brush's sources of information about the Palenque reliefs were popular.⁷⁹ The artist almost certainly copied the Mesoamerican sculptures from Catherwood's illustrations for Stephens' 1841 travel narrative, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan* (figs. 4.19, 4.20). Brush might have owned a copy of Stephens' work, which in the 1880s was still considered an important source of information on Mesoamerica. Or perhaps he saw the reproductions of Catherwood's images of the Palenque reliefs when they appeared in the December 1881 edition of *The Century Magazine*.⁸⁰ As Brush frequently contributed images for the publication, he almost certainly would have seen these later images.⁸¹

While *An Aztec Sculptor* was a critical success, several reviewers noted the historical inaccuracies in Brush's work. The writer for *Art Review* remarked,

The famous bas-relief of Palenque is painted on the right and the sculptor is supposed to be finishing the series. It may be asked archaeologically whether the Palenque tablets were the work of the Aztecs.⁸²

⁷⁸ To give an idea of the scale of the carvings as they stand at Palenque, the relief of God L is approximately sixty-seven inches high. Regarding materials, the winged mask is made of stucco, and the bas-relief of God L is of limestone.

⁷⁹ As I relate in the introduction to this dissertation, the term "Maya" was in used in some publications produced from the late 1870s onward. Although in more popular contexts, such as at the Aztec Fair, the term Aztec was applied to almost all Mesoamerican cultures and antiquities.

⁸⁰ Catherwood's illustrations from Stephens' 1841 work (see figs. 4.19, 4.20) were used in an article on Mesoamerican hieroglyphics. In the article, the author states, "it is safe to say that nearly all the current information on the subject of Central American archaeology is still derived from this work [Stephens' 1841 publication], which has not been superseded by any of the writings of later explorers." See "The Hieroglyphics of Central America," *The Century Magazine* (December 1881): 237-238.

⁸¹ For example, illustrations by Brush appeared in the May 1887 edition. See Frederick Schwatka, "Among the Apaches," *The Century Magazine* (May 1887): 41-53.

⁸² Charles DeKay, "Ninth Exhibition: Society of American Artists," *Art Review* (April 1887): 11.

Another critic observed that the painting was “a seriously considered work, even though the historical accuracy of the picture may be open to impeachment.”⁸³

Brush, however, did not intend *An Aztec Sculptor* as an historically accurate image of ancient Mesoamerican life. When asked about his work, the artist resolutely denied his paintings conveyed any specific historical or ethnological truth. In an 1885 article in *Century Magazine*, Brush clearly expressed his artistic objective, declaring:

In choosing Indians as subjects for art, I do not paint from the historian’s or antiquary’s point of view. I do not care to represent them in any curious habits which could not be comprehended by us; I am interested in those habits and deeds in which we have feelings in common. Therefore, I hesitate to add any interest to my pictures by supplying historical facts. If I were required to resort to this to bring out the poetry, I would drop the subject at once.⁸⁴

As his statement indicates, Brush intended his canvases to engage universal matters, rather than historical facts.⁸⁵

Brush’s desire to illustrate universal “habits and deeds” reflects the influence of contemporary objectives in the field of anthropology, which in the mid nineteenth century sought to discover universal and definitive human traits. Throughout his 1877 work, *Ancient Society*, Morgan insisted on “the unity of origin of mankind,” which at every stage of development evolves and transmutes various “original ideas” that he called “underived originals.”⁸⁶ *An Aztec Sculptor* illustrates an impulse

⁸³ Ripley Hitchcock, “The Art of the Year,” *Christian Union*, May 10, 1888.

⁸⁴ Brush, “An Artist Among the Indians,” 54.

⁸⁵ Brush reiterated this aim in an 1888 letter, writing that in his works he sought to include “color, drawing, sentiment, harmony, and the universall [*sic*], to embrace the latter in every way possible.” Brush to C.E.S. Wood, December 31, 1888, Bancroft Library.

⁸⁶ Morgan, *Ancient Society*, 23, 58.

common to ancient Mesoamericans and modern U.S. Americans, the desire for artistic expression. Brush placed the Aztec sculptor's right hand, gripping a mallet, at the center of his composition, and in this way he underscored that the foundation of the sculptor's artistry rested on manual skill. Moreover, through the painting's compositional structure, Brush linked himself to the sculptor, as both the Aztec sculptor and Brush have created images of Aztecs, the sculptor's work on the right and Brush's to the left. Upon close inspection one sees that the two artists have created representations of similar figures, as each is portrayed wearing a jaguar pelt and an armband. A comparison of the two portraits, when judged by nineteenth-century standards, reveals the superiority of Brush's skill as an artist. In this way the canvas alludes to Morgan's idea of an anthropological progression, with the Aztec sculptor relegated to an earlier stage of artistic evolution.⁸⁷

The success of *An Aztec Sculptor* led Brush to produce a second, more ambitious Aztec subject the following year. In February 1888, he wrote his friend Douglas Volk that he had recently completed a large canvas entitled *The Sculptor and the King* (see fig. 4.2).⁸⁸ Depicting an Aztec sculptor who pauses from his work to show a relief portrait to a "king" who stands beside him, the painting addresses the idea of artistic patronage.⁸⁹ In this theme and in the painting's academic style, the

⁸⁷ In *Ancient Society*, Morgan offered an explanation for the mechanics of human progress and argued that human cultures advanced from savagery, to barbarism, to civilization. For an examination of Morgan's ideas, see Hinsley, *The Smithsonian and the American Indian*, 133-137.

⁸⁸ Brush to Douglas Volk, February 5, 1888, Volk Papers, Archives of American Art.

⁸⁹ Kathleen Pyne and Nancy Anderson contend that *The Sculptor and the King* engages the idea of artistic patronage. See Detroit Institute of Arts, *The Quest for Unity: American Art Between World's Fairs, 1876-1893* (Detroit: Detroit Institute of Arts, 1983), 215; and Anderson, *George de Forest Brush*, 166.

canvas recalls Alma-Tadema's 1868 picture, *Phidias and the Frieze of the Parthenon, Athens*, which portrays the ancient Greek sculptor Phidias displaying his work to his patron Pericles (see fig. 4.15).⁹⁰ Brush was an admirer of Alma-Tadema's paintings, and this work might have inspired him to undertake a similar subject, which he translated from the Old World to the New.⁹¹

Many scholars have noted that Alma-Tadema's paintings of ancient Romans and Greeks reflected the concerns of modern Victorians more than those of the ancient people depicted.⁹² Similarly, rather than revealing any truth about ancient Mesoamerica, *The Sculptor and the King* reflected Brush's desire to fashion for himself with an authentically North American artistic pedigree, one with ancient roots like those Europeans claimed in ancient Greece and Rome. Brush's turn away from the traditions of the Old World and his embrace of those of the New may be seen in the original frame for *The Sculptor and the King* (fig. 4.21). Rather than enclosing his canvas within a frame decorated with neoclassical or rococo ornament, as was found on most late nineteenth-century frames produced in the United States, Brush designed a Mesoamerican-style frame for the painting.⁹³ The frame's ornamented

⁹⁰ For Alma-Tadema's 1868 work, see Vern G. Swanson, *The Biography and Catalogue Raisonné of the Paintings of Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema* (London: Garton & Co., 1990), n.p. [catalog number 104].

⁹¹ In December of 1886 Brush wrote to his friend C.E.S. Wood that he had recently perused "a very interesting paper on Alma Tadema and his works--- that is the engravings are interesting." Brush to C.E.S. Wood, December 11, 1886, Wood Papers, Huntington Library.

⁹² For Alma-Tadema, see Russell Ash, *Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1990); and Elizabeth Prettejohn, "Lawrence Alma-Tadema and the Modern City of Ancient Rome," *The Art Bulletin* 84, no. 1 (March 2002): 115-129.

⁹³ Mary F. Failing, the daughter of the original buyer of the canvas, Henry Failing, states in two letters that Brush designed the frame found on *The Sculptor and the King*. See Mary F. Failing to Robert Macbeth, July 24, 1932, Macbeth Gallery Records, roll 2590, frames 365-368, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution; and Mary F. Failing to Robert McIntyre, April 21, 1937, roll 2590,

frieze is made up of a repeating motif that Brush excerpted from an image by Catherwood of a structure at the Maya site of Uxmal (see fig. 1.33, and figs 4.22, 4.23).⁹⁴ It is even possible that Brush produced the frame himself. Although the frame is unmarked and no information survives indicating who fabricated it, Brush is known to have created frames for other paintings.⁹⁵

Brush included several examples of indigenous North American artistry in *The Sculptor and the King*, including a sculpted relief, a woven blanket, a large ceramic vessel, metal jewelry, and elaborate clothing. Rather than depicting objects made solely by the Aztecs, the painting consists of carefully studied details from several North American cultures that Brush assembled into a fictitious composition.⁹⁶ In fact, the image contains no Aztec objects. The large bas-relief at the left is from the ancient Maya, which Brush misattributes to the more widely known and popular Aztec culture. The king's concha belt is of Navajo origin. His buckskin leggings and armband, as well as the sculptor's breechcloth, derive from the Plains tradition. The

frames 385-390, Macbeth Gallery Records. For nineteenth-century U.S. American frames, see William H. Gerdtz, "American Frame References from the Late Nineteenth Century: A Scattering of Attitudes," in *The Gilded Edge: The Art of the Frame*, ed. by Eli Wilner (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2000), 47-53.

⁹⁴ The frame is ornamented by a repeating pattern of a motif found on the façade of the House of the Nuns (La Casa de las Monjas) at Uxmal. For Catherwood's image, see Frederick Catherwood, *Views of Ancient Monuments*, plate XV.

⁹⁵ In a 1918 exhibition review, a critic for the *New York Times* notes that the frame for Brush's painting *A Family Group* was "of the artist's design and executed in part at least by his own hands." See "Annual Exhibition of American Painting," *New York Times*, July 7, 1918.

⁹⁶ Brush mixed the traits and traditions of more than one North American culture on a few of his canvases, including the *The Weaver* and *The Sculptor and the King*. Joan B. Morgan was the first scholar to note this tendency in Brush's work. See Morgan, "The Indian Paintings of George de Forest Brush," 72.

large ceramic vessel and the woven blanket resemble those made by the Pueblo culture.

The art objects pictured in *The Sculptor and the King* derive from a variety of sources. The leggings and the blanket most likely belonged to Brush, as the former also appear in the artist's *The Indian and the Lily* (fig. 4.24), and the latter hangs in the background of *The Weaver* (see fig. 4.4). Brush copied the Maya relief from Frederick Catherwood's illustrations of a sculpture at Palenque that appear in Stephens' *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan* (fig. 4.25, and see fig. 4.19).⁹⁷ At Palenque, the sculpture decorates the left jamb at the entrance to the inner sanctuary within the Temple of the Cross, and it stands opposite the relief pictured in *An Aztec Sculpture*.⁹⁸ The carving depicts the late seventh-century ruler of Palenque, Chan-Bahlum II, and is made of limestone, which Brush translates into variegated marble on his canvas.

As was true of all his depictions of indigenous North Americans, Brush did not intend *The Sculptor and the King* to reflect historical truth. With its arrangement of art objects from a variety of North American cultures, the painting may be understood as a visual expression of the continuum of artistic production on the continent, an "American" heritage reaching back to the mythical time of antiquity. Like the display of "Aboriginal Art" at the Pedestal Fund Art Loan Exhibition, which presented Mesoamerican antiquities alongside Native North American objects, Brush

⁹⁷ Catherwood's engraving was reproduced in the December 1881 issue of *The Century*, and Brush might have known of it from this later source. See "The Hieroglyphics of Central America," *The Century Magazine* (December 1881): 236-237.

⁹⁸ For information on the relief, see Robertson, *The Sculpture of Palenque*, IV:32-34.

presented examples of indigenous artistry both ancient and modern in order to fashion for himself a distinctly North American artistic heritage.

Through the painting's composition, Brush linked his labor to this North American artistic tradition, since both Brush and the indigenous sculptor created profile portraits of kings in regalia, the sculptor's to the left and Brush's to the right. Yet, as was the case in *An Aztec Sculptor*, this compositional structure also invited the viewer to compare the work of the two artists and, when judged by nineteenth-century U.S. American standards, revealed Brush's superior skill as an artist. Thus, Brush's painting again alludes to Morgan's idea of an anthropological progression, with the Aztec sculptor relegated to an earlier stage of artistic evolution. Indeed, when *The Sculptor and the King* made its public debut at the National Academy of Design's annual exhibition in 1888, several critics noted the difference in quality of the work of the two artists. For example, the reviewer for *The Critic* characterized the work of the Aztec artist as "barbaric," while Brush's surface painting was described as "excellent."⁹⁹

Concluding Remarks

Created during a period of renewed interest in ancient Mesoamerican in the United States, Brush's Mesoamerican subjects pictured a distinctly New World artistic heritage, one with ancient roots like those contemporary Europeans claimed in ancient Greece and Rome. Mesoamerican antiquity provided Brush with a usable past, supplying him with an authentically North American artistic pedigree. Yet, as we have seen, Brush's romantic images of Aztec artists were ultimately ambivalent

⁹⁹ "The Fine Arts. The National Academy Exhibition," *The Critic*, April 7, 1888.

with regard to the status of ancient Mesoamerican artistic production, reflecting the contemporary scholarly debate regarding the status of ancient Mesoamerican cultures. Brush never rectified the two opposing strands of thought, as he abandoned Aztec subjects in 1888, and within two years he ceased painting images of Native North Americans altogether.¹⁰⁰ In the 1890s his fascination with the origins and development of the artistic tradition continued, yet at this time Brush changed his focus to the Old World, with the artist looking back to Renaissance Italy for artistic models.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ In the fall of 1888, Brush wrote to C.E.S. Wood that he intended to “go at another Aztec subject soon,” yet the artist left no indication that he attempted another Mesoamerican subject after he completed *The Sculptor and the King*. See Brush to C.E.S. Wood, November 12, 1888, Wood Papers, Bancroft Library.

¹⁰¹ For Brush’s work in the “American Renaissance” style, see Morgan, *George de Forest Brush 1855-1941: Master of the American Renaissance*.

Conclusion

On May 1, 1893, the World's Columbian Exposition opened its gates in Chicago, a crowd of over five hundred thousand people gathering at the White City's Court of Honor to witness the opening ceremony.¹ Held to commemorate the four hundredth anniversary of Columbus' "discovery" of the New World, the exposition covered 686 acres and featured over sixty-five thousand exhibits. Exploring these exhibits, fairgoers encountered numerous examples and representations of Mesoamerican antiquity, including Brush's *The Sculptor and the King* in the Fine Arts Palace, an "Aztec's Village" on the Midway Plaisance (fig. 5.1), and a display of photographs, casts, and antiquities in the Anthropology Building.² Outside the latter, fair organizers erected six life-size casts of Mayan architectural structures (figs. 5.2, 5.3), thus fulfilling Stephens and Catherwood's dream of bringing large-scale Mesoamerican monuments to the United States.³

This dissertation has examined artworks with Mesoamerican subjects created in the United States between 1839 and 1893. Looking at the works considered in this project, what becomes clear is the mutable nature of Mesoamerican imagery in the

¹ For the World's Columbian Exposition, see Robert W. Rydell, *All The World's A Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 38-71.

² Trumbull White, *World's Columbian Exposition: A Complete History* (Philadelphia: P. W. Ziegler and Co., 1893), 429-430. The photographs in the exhibit had been taken by the British explorer Alfred Maudslay at Maya sites in Yucatàn, Chiapas, Guatemala, and Honduras.

³ The plaster casts at the World's Columbian Exposition were created by Edward H. Thompson, who worked for several years in Yucatàn under the sponsorship of Stephen Salisbury, Jr. of the American Antiquarian Society. For the casts, see Hubert Howe Bancroft, *The Book of the Fair* (Chicago; San Francisco: The Bancroft Company, 1893), 636.

nineteenth century. Since little was known of the pre-Hispanic cultures of the region during this period, Mesoamerican antiquity served as a palimpsest upon which a number of narratives could be written. These narratives were often created in times of anxiety and turmoil, and artists turned to the Mesoamerican past to find a sense of clarity about the past, the present, and the future direction of their nation or their community.

Frederick Catherwood's Mesoamerican images, which appeared in John Lloyd Stephens' two Mesoamerican publications as well as the artist's own illustrated volume, introduced Mesoamerican antiquity into the U.S. visual consciousness and helped launch an "archaeological epidemic" in the United States in the 1830s and 1840s.⁴ Catherwood's illustrations constructed an image of "American Antiquity," an august North American tradition with ancient roots like those Europeans claimed in Greece and Egypt. By suggesting that this tradition lacked modern caretakers, Catherwood's images conveyed the idea that it was open to appropriation by those in the United States.

In the 1840s, in midst of Mexican-American War and in the wake of the publication of William H. Prescott's *History of the Conquest of Mexico*, Mesoamerican subjects became important for artists in the United States. Two of the nation's leading history painters, Peter F. Rothermel and Emanuel Leutze, produced works depicting scenes of the Conquest of Mexico. Created during a period when many in the United States considered the nation the culmination of Western civilization, with expansion across North America the final step in the unfolding of

⁴ Haven, *Address from the Proceedings*, 8, quoted in Manthorne, *Tropical Renaissance*, 92.

that destiny, these images depicted the Mesoamerican past as a prologue to the U.S. American present, reflecting and justifying the nation's expansionist goals.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the Latter-day Saint artist George Martin Ottinger created numerous examples of Mesoamerican subjects, or what he called "Old American" paintings. Working at a time when there was no consensus on the precise geographical location of specific incidents related in the Book of Mormon or agreement about what the books' characters and scenery looked like, Ottinger depicted Book of Mormon history in an ancient Mesoamerican guise in order to corroborate and concretize the Book of Mormon narrative. As the earliest attempts to visualize the church's spiritual ancestors and their descendents, Ottinger's paintings helped shape Mormons' conceptions of these people, inextricably linking them to Mesoamerica.

Finally, in the 1880s George de Forest Brush turned to the Mesoamerican past as part of his search for a truly North American artistic heritage. Threatened by changes in the realm of high art production that emerged in the late nineteenth century, Brush looked to ancient Mesoamerican cultures in order to locate a preindustrial artistic tradition based on hand skill and tradition. The artist's Mesoamerican subjects pictured a distinctly New World heritage and allowed him to define for himself an artistic role in the present by supplying him with a long and noble North American artistic pedigree.

The World's Columbian Exposition marked the culmination of the interest in ancient Mesoamerica that I have traced in this project. In the years following the Chicago fair, the U.S. American public's fascination with Mesoamerican antiquity

waned, and artists produced few works with Mesoamerican subjects.⁵ By the end of the nineteenth century, U.S. Americans positioned American Indians and early European explorers and settlers, rather than ancient Mesoamericans, at the starting point of a U.S. narrative of progress, one that traced the country's development from an untamed wilderness to a modern civilization.⁶ This shift may be seen in the activities of the American Antiquarian Society, which in the early nineteenth century focused its attention on the history of the North American continent, including ancient Mesoamerica. By the turn of the century, however, the group began to refine its mission, eventually deciding to concentrate on collecting "American" material related to what is now the United States from the first European contact through the year 1876.⁷ In March of 1895 the Society transferred most of its collection of Mesoamerican archaeological material to the Peabody Museum of Natural History at Yale University, and in 1910 it deaccessioned the large cast of a portal at Labná that had once adorned one of the Society's reading rooms, presenting it to the Smithsonian Institution.⁸

⁵ As I note in my introduction, Mesoamerican imagery reappeared after 1910, especially in U.S. American architecture. See the introduction of this dissertation, note 10.

⁶ For an examination of this rhetoric of progress, see Raymond D. Fogelson, "Red Man in the White City," in David Hurst Thomas, ed., *Columbian Consequences: Volume 3, The Spanish Borderlands to Pan-American Perspective* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991).

⁷ For a history of the American Antiquarian Society and its mission, see Nancy H. Burkett and John B. Hench, eds., *Under Its Generous Dome: The Collections and Programs of the American Antiquarian Society*, 2nd edition (Worcester: American Antiquarian Society, 1992). For an updated electronic version of this text, see "Under Its Generous Dome," <http://www.americanantiquarian.org/guidebook.htm>, accessed August 8, 2007.

⁸ American Antiquarian Society, *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society at the Semi-Annual Meeting*, 9, 12. The Society transferred a large portion of its collection of archaeological and ethnological material to the Peabody Museum in 1895, and the Society gave the entire remainder of the archaeological and ethnological relics to the museum in 1908.

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