

## The Light-Bringer

Cultures around the globe assign the Morning Star a central role in Creation. Yet despite its prominence in ancient myth and ritual, the cosmogonical traditions surrounding the star-god have remained virtually unexamined to date. In the following essay, we will investigate the sacred terminology associated with the Morning Star and argue that its origins and theoretical rationale are likely to be found in that star's unique *and cataclysmic recent* history.

It is notable that the Morning Star is known by similar names virtually everywhere. For numerous cultures the Morning Star was celebrated as the bringer of light. Such is the original meaning of the Latin epithet *Lucifer*, for example, applied to the Morning Star (*Helel ben Shahar*) by exegetes of the Old Testament.<sup>1</sup> An early Greek name for the Morning Star—*Phosphoros*—has the same meaning.<sup>2</sup>

It is equally common to find the Morning Star described by an epithet denoting “Lord of the Dawn.” To the Aztec skywatchers in pre-Columbian Mesoamerica, for example, the Morning Star was known as Tlahuizcalpantecuhtli, Lord of the Dawn. For the Skidi Pawnee of the North American Plains, the Morning Star was conceptualized as being intimately associated with the dawn, the celestial domain of departed souls:

“The Morning Star stands upon the dawn. The dawn is represented as a bed of flint stones, the souls of the dead. As the Morning Star walks, coming up, it makes a blaze of fire so that the red streaks of dawn are seen.”<sup>3</sup>

For Homer and Hesiod alike the Morning Star was conceptualized as masculine in nature and known as *Heosphoros*, “Dawn-bringer.”<sup>4</sup> Thus Homer writes: “At that time when the dawn star passes across earth, harbinger of light, and after him dawn of the saffron

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<sup>1</sup> G. Riley, “Devil,” in K. van der Toorn et al eds., *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden, 1995), col. 467.

<sup>2</sup> W. Eilers, *Sinn und Herkunft der Planetennamen* (München, 1976), p. 65.

<sup>3</sup> George Dorsey as quoted in V. del Chamberlain, *When Stars Came Down to Earth* (College Park, 1982), pp. 57-58.

<sup>4</sup> A. Scherer, *Gestirnnamen bei den Indogermanischen Völkern* (Heidelberg, 1953), p. 79. See also M. West, *Hellenica*, Vol. 3 (London, 2013), p. 110.

mantle is scattered across the sea.”<sup>5</sup> Hesiod described the mythological genealogy of Morning Star as follows: “And after these Erigeneia [Eos] bare the star Eosphorus (Dawn-Bringer), and the gleaming stars with which heaven is crowned.”<sup>6</sup>

Countless cultures referred to the Morning Star by a name that identified it as the “day-bringer” or day-star. For the Polynesian astronomers who charted that culture’s countless long-distance voyages, the Morning Star was known as *Fetia ao*, “Star of Day.”<sup>7</sup> So, too, among the Slavic peoples of ancient Europe, the Morning Star was known as *Denica*, “star of day.”<sup>8</sup>

Analogous names were commonplace among Amerindians of the New World. For the indigenous cultures along the Northwest coastal region of North America, recurring names for the Morning Star include “Bringing the Daybreak,” “Bringing the Day,” “Star of Daylight,” and “Daylight has come.”<sup>9</sup> In the Quiché Maya account of Creation, similarly, the Morning Star was described as the first star to appear in heaven: “This one came first before the sun when the sun was born, the new daybringer.”<sup>10</sup>

All of the aforementioned names are commonly thought to have reference to the planet Venus in its familiar role as the Morning Star, during which it appears as the brightest star in the pre-dawn sky and, so the story goes, seems to announce the forthcoming “light” of the Sun and day. Upon reflection, however, it seems most unlikely that any ancient skywatcher worth his salt would have chosen the relatively diminutive Venus to denote the “day-bringer” or the “bringer of light.” Such names would appear to be much more suitable for the Sun.

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<sup>5</sup> *Iliad* 23:226.

<sup>6</sup> Hesiod, *Homeric Hymns, Epic Cycle, Homerica* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 107.

<sup>7</sup> R. Williamson, *Religious and Cosmic Beliefs of Central Polynesia, Vol. 1* (Cambridge, 1933), p. 122.

<sup>8</sup> William Gibbon, *Popular Star Names Among the Slavic Speaking Peoples* (Philadelphia, 1960), p. 170. This is a dissertation presented to Penn U. in 1960.

<sup>9</sup> D. Vogt, “Raven’s Universe,” in V. Del Chamberlain et al eds., *Songs From the Sky* (West Sussex, 2005), pp. 44-45.

<sup>10</sup> D. Tedlock, *Popol Vuh* (New York, 1985), p. 176.

It must be remembered, moreover, that under the current arrangement of the solar system Venus only appears as a Morning Star during a portion of the year (during Venus's synodic period of roughly 584 days, it spends about 240 days as Morning Star). For an equal period of time it appears as an Evening Star (roughly 240 days, with the remaining days of the synodic period being spent invisible in superior or inferior conjunction). Applying the conventional logic to the ancient terminology attached to the planet in question, one might expect to find Venus invoked as the darkness-bringer. Yet in culture after culture, epithets describing the Morning Star as the "light-bringer" predominate. How is it possible to explain this stellar nomenclature from the standpoint of natural history?

More difficult to explain still are those epithets which describe the Morning Star as the "Lord of the Underworld." In ancient Egypt, for example, the Morning Star was known as "Horus Duat," the latter being a common name for the Underworld. The following passage from the Pyramid Texts is representative in this regard: "O Morning Star, Horus of the Netherworld, divine Falcon, *wꜥdꜥd*-bird whom the sky bore..."<sup>11</sup> The fact that the epithets "Morning Star" (*Neter Dua*) and Horus *Duat* are here set in apposition is a clear indication that they referenced the same celestial entity.

If this much seems clear, the question arises as to why the ancient Egyptians perceived a relationship between the Morning Star and the Underworld? Why would this particular star, rather than another, be invoked as the "Lord of the Netherworld"? It would be interesting to know, moreover, whether this conception is peculiar to ancient Egypt. So far as I'm aware, this question has never been addressed previously.

As it turns out, the question is easily answered insofar as analogous conceptions are attested around the globe. The very same idea is found in ancient Ugaritic literature, wherein the Morning Star Athtar is said to rule the Underworld. Witness the following passage from the most famous myth surrounding this archaic star-god:

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<sup>11</sup> PT 1207a.

“And Athtar the terrible answered: ‘I will not rule from atop Şapon.’ Athtar the terrible came down, from the throne of Aliyan Baal he descended. And he ruled over the Underworld, god of all of it.”<sup>12</sup>

Similar traditions are evident in the New World as well. In Mesoamerica, it was reported of the Aztec Morning Star Cinteotl that “he put himself into the earth” and thereby established the Underworld.<sup>13</sup>

We will return to the Morning Star’s intimate connection with the Underworld throughout the course of this essay. In the meantime, it is instructive to explore the star-god’s role in ancient mythology for possible insights as to the original celestial context behind the archaic epithets enumerated above.

A decisive clue to deciphering the peculiar terminology associated with the Morning Star is its proverbial role as the “first star” to appear at Creation. This idea is particularly widespread in the New World. In the Quiché Maya document known as the *Popol Vuh*, quoted previously, the Morning Star is remembered as the primeval “daybringer”: “This one came first before the sun when the sun was born, the new daybringer.”<sup>14</sup> The *Codex Vaticano Latino* contains a very similar report regarding the Aztec star-god Tlahuizcalpantecuhtli, the “Lord of the Dawn”:

“This was the Dawn god or the god of Light when day wants to come in...at daybreak. They say that it was created before the sun.”<sup>15</sup>

The aforementioned Cinteotl was likewise remembered as the “first light” to appear at Creation: “Cinteotl, also called *Itztlacoliuhqui*, was the ‘Morning Star,’ or ‘the first light of the world.’”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> KTU 1.6, lines 61b-67 as translated in H. Page, *The Myth of Cosmic Rebellion* (Leiden, 1996), pp. 91-92.

<sup>13</sup> M. Graulich, *Myths of Ancient Mexico* (Norman, 1997), p. 268.

<sup>14</sup> D. Tedlock, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

<sup>15</sup> 3738, quoted from E. Florescano, *The Myth of Quetzalcoatl* (Baltimore, 1999), p. 53.

<sup>16</sup> M. Graulich, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

As we have documented elsewhere, the very same idea is attested in South America as well. Witness the following tradition from Inca Peru, wherein the inaugural appearance of the mythical Morning Star is placed at the time of Creation:

“*papa pachapacari ch’aska* (‘father morning star’), which is said to have been the first bright object to appear in the dark primeval sky at the beginning of time.”<sup>17</sup>

Such traditions confirm that, for one reason or another, Amerindian skywatchers conceptualized the “Morning Star” as the first star to appear at the Dawn of Time and thus assigned it a primacy and prominence denied to the Sun, Moon, and other celestial bodies. Yet here, too, a moment’s reflection should suffice to dispel the notion that such widespread traditions have any conceivable reference to Venus’s familiar appearance in the pre-dawn sky. For why would this particular planet, rather than any other, be identified as the “first star” to appear at Creation?

Reports implying that the prototypical appearance of the Morning Star as the “first light” occurred at a time when the Cosmos was enshrouded in darkness are instructive in attempting to understand the cosmogonic traditions in question. For the fact is that a recurring thematic pattern in sacred traditions the world over is that Creation occurred against the general backdrop of an all-prevailing apocalyptic darkness. Indeed, in many cultures, Creation is understood largely as the triumph of light over darkness. This idea is widely attested among indigenous cultures from the New World. For the Inca of Peru, as we have seen, the Morning Star was the first star to appear at Creation, bringing light to a world hitherto covered in darkness. An alternative account of Creation from the so-called Huarochiri Manuscript, a text dating from the colonial period but written in the native Andean language and presumably containing ancient tribal traditions, reports that the Morning Star dispelled the darkness upon appearing from a coffin-like chest:

“An alternative tradition [of Creation] in the *Huarochiri Manuscript* recorded that a box belonging to the Inca Huayno Capac concealed a bright light. This was opened at Titicaca and was first Venus, the morning star, and second the sun.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> G. Urton, *At the Crossroads of the Earth and Sky* (Austin, 1981), p. 107.

This Inca tradition forms an interesting parallel to a Tsimshian account of Creation, wherein Raven (aka the mythical “Morning Star”) appears from a coffin and thereby brings light to a world engulfed by all-encompassing darkness:

“The world was in complete darkness. The Chief of the animal village and his wife had a boy whom they loved very much, but he died. They wailed before his corpse every morning before daylight. One morning a youth, bright as fire, appeared out of the coffin.”<sup>19</sup>

Perhaps the most complete account of Creation preserved in the New World is that of the Aztec myth of the fifth sun, preserved in fragmentary fashion in a number of different sources. According to the account of Fray Bernardino de Sahagún, a pitiful sore-laden god eventually succeeded in bringing light to a darkened world through an act of self-immolation:

“It is told that when yet [all] was in darkness, when yet no sun had shone and no dawn had broken—it is said—the gods gathered themselves together and took counsel among themselves at Teotihuacan. They spoke; they said among themselves: ‘Come hither, o gods! Who will carry the burden? Who will take it upon himself to be the sun, to bring the dawn?’ ...None dared; no one else came forward [apart from Tecuciztecatl]. Everyone was afraid; they [all] drew back...And not present was one man, Nanauatzin; he stood there listening among the others to that which was discussed. Then the gods called to this one. They said to him: ‘Thou shalt be the one, O Nanauatzin.’ ...And then, also, at this time, the fire was laid. Now it burned, there in the hearth...And when this was done, when midnight had come, all the gods proceeded to encircle the hearth, which was called teotexcalli, where for four days had burned the fire...[Tecuciztecatl fails to throw himself on the fire out of fear]...And Nanauatzin, daring all at once, determined...All at once he quickly threw and cast himself into the fire; once and for all he went. Thereupon he burned; his body crackled and sizzled. And when Tecuciztecatl saw that already he burned, then, afterwards, he cast himself upon [the fire]. Thereupon

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<sup>18</sup> P. Steele, *Handbook of Inca Mythology* (Santa Barbara, 2004), p. 254.

<sup>19</sup> D. Vogt, “Raven’s Universe,” in V. Del Chamberlain et al eds., *Songs From the Sky* (West Sussex, 2005), p. 40.

he also burned...And after this, when both had cast themselves into the flames, when they had already burned, then the gods sat waiting [to see] where Nanauatzin would come to rise—he who first fell into the fire—in order that he might shine [as the sun]; in order that dawn might break...And when the sun came to rise, when he burst forth, he appeared to be red; he kept swaying side to side. It was impossible to look into his face; he blinded one with his light. Intensely did he shine. He issued rays of light from himself; his rays reached in all directions; his brilliant rays penetrated everywhere...They could only remain still and motionless [i.e., the two celestial lights Nanauatzin and Tecuciztecatl]...Here endeth this legend and fable, which was told in times past, and was in the keeping of the old people.”<sup>20</sup>

Despite his central role in Aztec cosmogonical traditions, Nanahuatl has generally received little attention from modern scholars. Indeed, I know of no serious scholarly study which attempts to decipher his peculiar role in ancient myth and religion. Nor, for that matter, has anyone attempted to ferret out his probable celestial identity in his singular role as the prototypical “light-bringer.”

To my knowledge, the most comprehensive and insightful analysis of the god was that offered by B. C. Brundage. Brundage summarized the various fragmentary traditions surrounding this god as follows:

“One of the more enigmatic figures in Mesoamerican mythology is the diseased god Nanahuatl. The name itself is curious. Nanahuatl is the word for afflictions of the skin, generally running or pustulous sores. The god’s name is thus simply the name of a disease, and he may be considered to be the god who sends the disease and who can also cure it. Human sacrifices made to him in fact were chosen from among those who suffered from his diseases. He is thus the ‘disease’ Quetzalcoatl. He must have been a very old god, for he appears to have had a limited cult at the time of the Spanish entry, yet he is the central figure in the myth of the five suns that originated in the days of Teotihuacan. His name also appears as Nanahuatzin or Nanahuaton, both translated as Little Nanahuatl, the implication being that he was a dwarf or was thought to be

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<sup>20</sup> B. de Sahagun, *The Florentine Codex: Book 7* (Santa Fe, 1953), pp. 1-8.

strikingly small in stature. He appears among the Quichés as Nanahuac and is one of their early creator gods, along with Gukumatz (Quetzalcoatl), and he is called by them ‘dwarf,’ or ‘green,’ that is, young. I believe he was the seed corn, which, put away underground, is later brought out for sowing in the earth and renewal; that is why the myth stresses his youth. And again, like dried-corn kernels, he is wrinkled and misshapen.”<sup>21</sup>

As is evident from Brundage’s analysis, Nanahuatl is literally defined by his running sores. Yet here, too, scholars have been virtually silent about what this particular trait could reference or signify. For us it is telling that the Morning Star was commonly conceptualized as suffering from “sores” or pimples by indigenous cultures across a broad swath of North and South America. Witness the following myth from the nomadic Sikuani of Venezuela and Colombia:

“In those days the sun and the moon and everyone were human beings and lived on this earth. Sun had a son who had sores all over his body; he was the morning star.”<sup>22</sup>

Analogous traditions are attested in Mesoamerica.<sup>23</sup> Thus the indigenous tribes of Oluta conceptualize the Morning Star Viejito as a dwarfish being beset by pimples:

“The Mixe-Popoluca of Oluta and Sayula, in the Veracruz Isthmus region, view the morning star as an old man, *El Viejo* or *Viejito*, and the east is described as the ‘place of the Old Man’s house’...Viejito is alone, not married. Viejito has a ragged shirt, white is his hair...long is his hair. He is frail, he walks with his staff, dirty little breeches, long is his white beard, his body has pimples all over...”<sup>24</sup>

As a dwarfish stellar being with pimples “all over,” Viejito forms a striking parallel to the Nahuatl god Nanahuatl.

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<sup>21</sup> B. Brundage, *The Fifth Sun* (Norman, X), pp. 224-225.

<sup>22</sup> J. Wilbert & K. Simoneau, “Sun and Moon,” in *Folk Literature of the Sikuani Indians* (Los Angeles, 1992), pp. 25-28.

<sup>23</sup> W. Lehmann, “Ergebnisse einer mit Unterstuzung der Notgemeinschaft der Deutschen Wissenschaft in den Jahren 1925-1926 ausgeführten Forschungreise nach Mexico und Guatemala,” *Anthropos* (1928), pp. 758-781.

<sup>24</sup> Quoted in I. Sprajc, “The Venus-Maize Complex in the Mesoamerican World View,” *Journal of the History of Astronomy* 24 (1993), pp. 35-36.

If we are to take our cue from these Amerindian traditions describing the Morning Star as covered with sores, it stands to reason that the Aztec Nanahuatl is to be identified with the same celestial body. Indeed, this has been our position for many years now.<sup>25</sup> The identification is further bolstered by the fact that native sources identify the sore-laden Nanahuatl with Quetzalcoatl. The so-called *Legend of the Suns* (1558), for example, describes the former god as follows:

“The name of this sun is 4 Motion. This is now our sun, the one under which we live today. This is its figure, the one here, because his sun fell into the fire at the sacred hearth in Teotihuacan. It is the same sun as that of Topiltzin, ‘Our Beloved Prince’ of Tollan, Quetzalcoatl. Before becoming this sun, its name was Nanahuatl, who was of Tamoanchan.”<sup>26</sup>

Yet Quetzalcoatl himself is to be identified with the Morning Star. On this matter, the indigenous sources speak as if with one voice:

“And when he was fully adorned then with his own hand he set himself on fire, he offered himself up in flame. So the place where Quetzalcoatl went to immolate himself came to be called Tlatlayan, ‘Place of the Burning.’ And it is said that even as he burned, his ashes emerged and arose: and there appeared, before the sight of everyone, all the birds of great value which emerged and rose into the sky...And when the ashes were extinguished, then arose his heart, the quetzal bird itself; they saw it. And so they knew he had entered the sky within the sky. The old ones used to say that he was transformed to the dawn star; thus it is said that when Quetzalcoatl died this star appeared, and so he is named Tlahuizcalpanteuctli, ‘Lord of the Dawn House.’”<sup>27</sup>

In the Codex Telleriano-Remensis, a colonial text providing commentary on prehispanic paintings and sacred lore from Mexico, it is stated that Quetzalcoatl—as the “Lord of the

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<sup>25</sup> E. Cochrane, *Martian Metamorphoses* (Ames, 1997), p. 179.

<sup>26</sup> Quoted from translated document in M. Leon-Portilla et al eds., *In the Language of Kings: An Anthology of Mesoamerican Literature* (New York, 2001), p. 58.

<sup>27</sup> *Anales de Cuauhtlan* 11 as translated by M. Leon-Portilla et al eds., *In the Language of Kings: An Anthology of Mesoamerican Literature* (New York, 2001), p. 191.

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**Comment [1]:** Tamoanchan, in turn, was a name for the Aztec Underworld and thus testifies to the tradition that Nanahuatl was a denizen of the Underworld prior to metamorphosing into the “sun” or “Morning Star.”

Dawn,” or Morning Star—was regarded as the first “light” to appear at Creation.<sup>28</sup> The Codex also includes the following gloss offered by an anonymous scribe: “Properly speaking, the first light that appeared in the world.”<sup>29</sup>

Native texts describe Quetzalcoatl as being horribly ugly in appearance, with warts all over his face.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, the god was so intimately connected with skin diseases that he ultimately became understood as an advocate for human beings similarly afflicted:

“The annual ceremony to Quetzalcoatl here is also described, which featured dancing by the merchants and lords and comic impersonations of deformed and diseased individuals and animals on a large platform in the patio of the temple. These had serious ritualistic overtones, for Quetzalcoatl was held to be ‘abogado de las bubas y del mal de los ojos y del romadico y tosse.’ During their mimic performances, the participants uttered pleas to this god for health, while sufferers from these afflictions came to his temple with prayers and offerings.”<sup>31</sup>

As the sore-laden god who brings light to the world, Quetzalcoatl is clearly analogous to Nanahuatl (as the former god was invoked as *abogado de las bubas*, so was the latter god invoked as *el buboso*, “afflicted with pustules or buboes”).<sup>32</sup> That said, how are we to explain the fact that one god was identified with the Morning Star and the other with the sun? Is it even possible, at this late date, to sort out the original celestial identifications in question?

To make matters even more confusing, the Amerindian “Morning Star” is to be identified with the planet Mars, not Venus.<sup>33</sup> This idea is most explicit in the astronomical traditions of the Skidi Pawnee. For the Skidi, Creation occurs against a general backdrop of apocalyptic darkness and is set in motion when the mythical Morning Star (Mars)

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<sup>28</sup> E. Keber, *Codex Telleriano-Remensis* (Austin, 1995), p. 175.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 262.

<sup>30</sup> See the account in the *Anales de Cuauhtitlan* in M. Leon-Portilla et al eds., *In the Language of Kings: An Anthology of Mesoamerican Literature* (New York, 2001), p. 188.

<sup>31</sup> H. Nicholson, *Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl* (Boulder, 2001), p. 107, citing Duran.

<sup>32</sup> I. Íprajc, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

<sup>33</sup> E. Cochrane, *On Fossil Gods and Forgotten Worlds* (Ames, 2010), pp. 28-42.

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**Comment [2]:** “So then Quetzalcoatl looked upon himself, and he was overcome with horror...For his eyelids were swollen, his eyes sunken deep in their sockets, his face all heavily pockmarked and furrowed; he was a monstrous sight.” (188)

succeeds in generating light by overcoming the planet Venus: “In the creation story, fruitfulness and light had come into the world because Morning Star and his realm of light had conquered and mated with Evening Star in her realm of darkness.”<sup>34</sup>

Evident here is the widespread conception of the Morning Star as a bringer of light and fertility to the cosmos. Yet it is the planet Mars, not Venus, which is identified as the “light-bringer.” Venus, in contrast, is represented as a force of darkness that must be overcome in order for Creation to unfold.

The Skidi Morning Star, moreover, was reported to have been the first star to appear in heaven at Creation. Witness the following testimony collected by the anthropologist James Murie, himself a Pawnee:

“The first one he placed in the heavens was the morning star...The bed of flint is the one great source of fire whence the sun gets his light. This being was to stand on a hot bed of flint. He was to be dressed like a warrior and painted all over with red dust. He head was to be decked with soft down and he was to carry a war club. He was not a chief, but a warrior....He was also to be the one great power on the east side of the Milky Way. This is Mars, *u-pirikucu*, the really big star or the god of war.”<sup>35</sup>

The Skidi tradition that the mythical Morning Star is to be identified with the planet Mars, rather than Venus, is disconcerting at first sight. Yet there is good reason to regard the Skidi identification as valid. The fact that the Morning Star and Venus are clearly distinguished by the Skidi with regards to their respective roles in Creation points to the probable authenticity of the identification in question. Most significant, however, is the fact that corroborating testimony comes from elsewhere in the New World.

Perhaps the most compelling evidence comes from the tropical rain forests of South America, where the Makiritare Indians have remained virtually immune from outside influences while pursuing a stone-age lifestyle along the Orinoco River in modern Venezuela. The anthropologist Marc de Civrieux, working in the 1950’s, managed to

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<sup>34</sup> G. Weltfish, *The Lost Universe* (New York, 1965), p. 106.

<sup>35</sup> J. Murie, “Ceremonies of the Pawnee,” *Smithsonian Contributions to Anthropology* 27 (Cambridge, 1981), p. 38.

collect and transcribe for the first time a collection of their sacred oral traditions, the latter known as the *Watunna*. According to de Civrieux, “the myths of the Makiritare are the story of what the ‘Old People’, the Heavenly Ancestors, did.”<sup>36</sup> In the Makiritare account of Creation, it was the planet Mars that was the first star to appear in heaven:

“In the beginning, the night sky was empty, black. The stars were people. They lived on the Earth...They were the first ones to arrive [in heaven]. Right away they changed. They started shining. They were the first two stars in the black night. The very first was Ahishama, then Kutto. Now that Troupial named Ahishama burns orange (Mars). He built the ladder in space. That’s what they say.”<sup>37</sup>

The significance of this sacred tradition from the *Watunna* is immeasurable, for it serves to corroborate the Skidi claim that the planet Mars was the first star to appear at Creation during a time of profound darkness. And if the Skidi and Makiritare reports can be judged to have preserved a relatively accurate account of these formative astronomical events, it stands to reason that the fundamentally analogous reports of the Aztecs, Quiché Maya, and Incas with respect to the cosmogonic primacy of the Morning Star are best understood as originally referencing the planet Mars, not Venus. It will be noticed, moreover, that the Makiritare—like the Skidi, Incas, Aztecs, and Maya—ascribed a masculine nature to the prototypical “first star.” Properly interpreted, this datum also supports a Martian identity of the mythical Morning Star inasmuch as the planet Mars was everywhere conceptualized as the masculine planetary power *par excellence*. The planet Venus, on the other hand, was typically viewed as female in nature.<sup>38</sup>

Equally decisive to deciphering the original planetary identity of the mythical Morning Star is the fact that the planet Mars was conceptualized as having pustulous sores (so far as I know, Venus is never described as covered with sores). Thus it is significant to find that, in ancient Babylonian astronomy, the planet Mars was identified with the war-god

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<sup>36</sup> M. de Civrieux, *Watunna: An Orinoco Creation Cycle* (San Francisco, 1980), p. 12.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 113-114.

<sup>38</sup> See the discussion in E. Cochrane, *The Many Faces of Venus* (Ames, 2001), pp. 7-13.

Nergal and singled out for his pustulous appearance—hence the god’s archaic epithet: *u<sub>3</sub>-bu-bu-ul*: “pus, pustule.”<sup>39</sup>

Granted that the “Morning Star” is to be identified with the planet Mars, and given the testimony that it was the “first star” to appear at Creation, how are we to make sense of such traditions from the standpoint of natural history and astronomical science? Taking the mythological traditions as relatively faithful records of historical reality, it stands to reason that they have reference to a singular astronomical event(s) that occurred at the Dawn of Time, during the so-called mythical time of Beginnings (*in illo tempore*, to employ Eliade’s famous phrase). In addition to the evidence presented thus far, can we say anything else about this event that will stand up to scrutiny?

To start with, we can say with some confidence that the epochal appearance of the “Morning Star” as such occurred during a period when an apocalyptic Darkness gripped the world. As it initially burst forth into view with a nova-like intensity, the Morning Star flooded the nascent cosmos with light and, in the process, dispelled the oppressive Darkness, acts that were widely conceptualized as the victory of light over darkness and the restoring of order to the world. It was this singular occasion marked by the inaugural appearance of the “Morning Star” during a context of universal darkness that gave rise to the global terminology describing the star in question (Mars) as the prototypical “light-bringer.”

Secondly, it seems virtually certain that the Morning Star first appeared at the precise juncture when heaven was initially separated from earth, for light is commonly said to have originated in conjunction with this latter event. On this point Euripides testifies to what is otherwise a global belief-system: “And the tale is not mine but from my mother, how sky and earth were one form; and when they had been separated apart from each other they bring forth all things, and give them up into the light...”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> J. Black et al, *A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian* (Wiesbaden, 2007), p. 47. See also J. Halloran, *Sumerian Lexicon* (Los Angeles, 2006), p. 286.

<sup>40</sup> Fragment 484 as translated in G. S. Kirk, *The Pre-Socratic Philosophers* (Cambridge, 1957), p. 42.

Although virtually every culture has preserved its own account of Creation, it is our opinion that ancient Egypt provides the most informative accounts of the natural events in question. For the Egyptians, as for cultures around the globe, Creation was marked by the separation of heaven and earth:

“Before the creation there were only the primeval water (Nun) and the primeval darkness (*kkw sm.w*). The first thing existing was the primeval hill. From there—that is the second act—the light of the sun-god separates the darkness and heaven and earth are separated.”<sup>41</sup>

By “sun-god” here Borghouts means the falcon-god Horus. Yet Horus was expressly identified with the Morning Star in the Egyptian Pyramid Texts. Again and again the Horus-star is described as the first being to appear at Creation: “Horus the Primordial One, the great god who first came into being.”<sup>42</sup> A text from the New Kingdom invokes the star-god as the prototypical light-bringer:

“Thou art the god who came first into being when no (other) god had yet come into existence, when no name of any thing had yet been proclaimed. When thou openest thine eyes so as to see, it becomes light for everyone.”<sup>43</sup>

One of the most instructive texts in this regard is Spell 257 from the Pyramid Texts. There it is recounted how Horus first acceded to the celestial throne during the formative events recalled as the separation of heaven and earth:

“There is tumult in the sky; ‘We see something new’, say the primeval gods. O you Ennead, Horus is in the sunlight, the possessors of forms make salutation to him, all the Two Enneads serve him, for he sits on the throne of the Lord of All. The King takes possession of the sky, he cleaves its iron...The King shines anew in the East, and he who settled the dispute will come to him bowing. Make salutation, you gods, to the King,

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<sup>41</sup> J. Borghouts, “Review,” in H. van Voss ed., *Annual Egyptological Bibliography 1965* (Leiden, 1969), p. 74.

<sup>42</sup> A. Blackman & H. Fairman, “The Myth of Horus at Edfu—II,” *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 30 (1944), p. 15.

<sup>43</sup> Quoted from H. Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods* (Chicago, 1948), p. 37.

who is older than the Great One, to whom belongs power on his throne...Rejoice at the King, for he has taken possession of the horizon.”<sup>44</sup>

If we are to judge by this particular account, Horus first became manifest as a “new” or “transfigured” star during the spectacular natural events attending Creation and the concomitant separation of heaven and earth (The “cleaving” of the celestial iron amidst “tumult in the sky” is a patent reference to the forcible separation of heaven and earth).<sup>45</sup> And it was in the immediate aftermath of that profoundly awe-inspiring and never-to-be-forgotten occasion—the *prototypical and archetypal Theophany*, as it were—that the Horus-star took possession of the “horizon” (*akhet*) and assumed the celestial throne as the “King of the Gods.”

Spell 519 from the Pyramid Texts provides additional insight into the dramatic celestial events in question. In this most informative hymn, Horus—as the Morning Star—is said to have appeared (*hr*) at the very time that heaven and earth were first separated:

“O Morning Star, Horus of the Netherworld, divine Falcon, *w3d3d*-bird whom the sky bore...give me these your two fingers which you gave to the Beautiful, the daughter of the great god, when the sky was separated from the earth, when the gods ascended to the sky, you having a soul and appearing in front of your boat of 770 cubits which the gods of Pe bound together for you, which the eastern gods built for you.”<sup>46</sup>

As noted earlier, the Egyptian traditions confirm that the Horus-star was indissolubly connected to the Underworld (Duat). Indeed, there is much reason to conclude that the star was stationed or otherwise “hidden” in the Underworld prior to making its inaugural appearance as the “Morning Star.” Witness the following tradition from the god’s temple at Edfu, wherein the star-god is explicitly linked to the break of dawn *in illo tempore*:

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<sup>44</sup> PT 304-307.

<sup>45</sup> In ancient Egypt, as elsewhere, the firmament was thought to be composed of meteoritic stone or “iron.” On the meteoritic nature of the Egyptian sky, see L. Lesko, “Ancient Egyptian Cosmogonies and Cosmology,” in B. Shafer ed., *Religion in Ancient Egypt* (Ithaca, 1991), p. 117.

<sup>46</sup> PT 1207-1210.

“Perhaps the clearest example is found in the theophany connected with the break of dawn. When Horus appears from the dark underworld he is described as *the one with a head beautiful of face, the Hovering-one spreading real marvels, making the darkness mꜣꜣ with his wings.*”<sup>47</sup>

In addition to bringing light to a world engulfed in preternatural darkness, the Morning Star Horus also dispels the darkness—this is the explicit meaning of the term *mꜣꜣ*. Indeed, as Finnestad pointed out in his incisive commentary on the Edfu texts detailing the star-god’s formative role in Creation: “Making the darkness *mꜣꜣ* means, dispelling the darkness and thus turning chaos into cosmos.”<sup>48</sup>

As I have documented elsewhere, the Egyptian account of the inaugural appearance of the Morning Star corresponds in several important respects with the Quiché Maya account of Creation. Thus, in the *Popol Vuh* the prototypical appearance of the Morning Star occurred during a primeval “dawning” recalled as the first day:

“They fixed their eyes on the dawn, looking steadfastly for the coming forth of the sun. They occupied themselves in looking for the Great Star, called Icoquih, which appears first before the birth of the sun. The face of this Green Morning Star always appears at the coming forth of the sun.”<sup>49</sup>

The Quiché word translated as “green” here is *raxa*, signifying “green, new, fresh, sudden, regenerated, revived.”<sup>50</sup> This epithet begs the following question: How are we to understand the Quiché report that the prototypical Morning Star presented a “greenish,” new, or rejuvenated appearance?<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> R. Finnestad, *Image of the World and Symbol of the Creator* (Wiesbaden, 1985), p. 98.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>49</sup> A. Christenson, *Popol Vuh* (New York, 2003), p. 218.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> In his commentary on this passage, Christenson opines: “It is unclear whether this refers to the green color of the planet Venus, or whether it refers to the life-generating power of the Morning Star to assist in the birth of the sun.”

A definitive answer to this query can be found in the Egyptian traditions surrounding the prototypical appearance of the Morning Star. Thus it is that Spell 519, quoted above, describes the Horus-star as greenish in appearance:

“O Morning Star, Horus of the Netherworld, divine Falcon, *wꜣdꜣd*-bird whom the sky bore...”<sup>52</sup>

The word *wꜣdꜣd*, left untranslated by Faulkner, translates literally as “great green.”<sup>53</sup> Yet the same word also denotes “fresh,” “to make green,” and “to make flourish.”<sup>54</sup>

As we have documented elsewhere, the greening of the cosmos associated with the inaugural appearance of the Morning Star formed a supremely memorable phase in the unfolding of Creation and gave rise to the widespread belief that that particular Star had brought fertility to the world with its various activities *in illo tempore*.<sup>55</sup> Recall again the Skidi description of cosmogony:

“In the creation story, fruitfulness and light had come into the world because Morning Star and his realm of light had conquered and mated with Evening Star in her realm of darkness.”<sup>56</sup>

Equally important to elucidating the manifold symbolism attached to the “greening” of the Morning Star is the fact that the color green had a symbolic association with regeneration and resurrection for the Quiché (The epithet attached to the Morning Star at the time of Creation in the *Popol Vuh*, it will be remembered, is *raxa*, denoting “green” but also “new” and “regenerated”).

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<sup>52</sup> PT 1207-1210.

<sup>53</sup> Samuel Mercer, *The Pyramid Texts Vol. 2* (New York, 1952), p. 597, in his commentary on this passage, wrote as follows: “The personage addressed by the lector at this point is called the morning star (1719f), who is none other than Horus of the Dꜣ.t, the divine falcon (cf. 748b), the ‘great green’ (cf. 1720c=802b)...The term translated ‘great green’ is *wꜣdꜣd* (cf. 1530a; also Heb. *yerakrak* and Eth. *warakrik*), which is a reduplication of the word *wꜣd*, ‘green’.”

<sup>54</sup> R. Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian* (Oxford, 1991), p. 55.

<sup>55</sup> See the discussion in E. Cochrane, *The Many Faces of Venus* (Ames, 2001), pp. 88-90.

<sup>56</sup> G. Weltfish, *The Lost Universe* (New York, 1965), p. 106.

A symbolic connection between “green” and resurrection is also attested among the Aztecs. Thus, Sahagún reports that priests were in the habit of placing a green stone in the mouths of deceased kings in order to ensure their resurrection:

“And when the rulers and noblemen died, they put green stones in their mouths...It was said that they became their hearts.”<sup>57</sup>

This peculiar practice apparently goes back to the Olmec period. On this custom Florescano offered the following observation: “Ever since the Olmecs, there was a custom of hanging a *chalchihuitl*, or round, green stone, in the mouth of the dead, as a talisman to ensure later rebirth.”<sup>58</sup>

As bizarre as such conceptions appear to the modern mind, similar ideas are attested in the Old World as well. In ancient China, for example, it was formerly the custom to place a green stone in the mouth of the deceased in order to facilitate his resurrection: “A jade cicada placed in the mouth of the corpse of the deceased is the symbol of his resurrection in this state of transformed being.”<sup>59</sup> Why a green stone would be deemed helpful in effecting “resurrection” is not obvious and has never been explained by scholars of comparative lore.

The same basic conception is evident in ancient Egypt. There, too, priests placed a green stone on the breast (or neck) of the deceased king in order to aid in ensuring his resurrection or rejuvenation.<sup>60</sup>

How are we to understand the origin of such peculiar belief-systems, seemingly widespread across much of the ancient world? Why would a green stone be conceptualized as the “heart” of the deceased king or as a talisman vouchsafing his resurrection?

It is the curious mythology attached to the archetypal Morning Star that provides the

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<sup>57</sup> A. Anderson & C. Dibble eds., *Florentine Codex, Book 3* (Santa Fe, 1978), p. 45.

<sup>58</sup> E. Florescano, *The Myth of Quetzalcoatl* (Baltimore, 1999), p. 147.

<sup>59</sup> A. Vaswamy, “Syayamatrnnā: Janua Coeli,” in R. Lipsey, *Coomaraswamy* (Princeton, 1977), p. 476.

<sup>60</sup> E. Budge, *Osiris and The Egyptian Resurrection* (New York, 1911), p. 277.

probable answer to these otherwise baffling belief-systems. Here it will be remembered that, in the account from the *Anales de Cuauhtitlan* describing Quetzalcoatl's fiery death on a funeral pyre, it was reported that his "heart" rose into the sky in the form of a quetzal bird, thereby signaling his transfiguration or resurrection as the "Morning Star":

"And when he was fully adorned then with his own hand he set himself on fire, he offered himself up in flame...And it is said that even as he burned, his ashes emerged and arose...And when the ashes were extinguished, then arose his heart, the quetzal bird itself; they saw it. And so they knew he had entered the sky within the sky. The old ones used to say that he was transformed to the dawn star; thus it is said that when Quetzalcoatl died this star appeared, and so he is named Tlahuizcalpanteuctli, 'Lord of the Dawn House.'"<sup>61</sup>

The quetzal bird itself was prized for its iridescent green color, thereby suggesting that Quetzalcoatl's ascending "heart" was greenish in color. Enrique Florescano describes the bird in question as follows:

"The green plumed *quetzal*, the most beautiful bird of the tropical jungle. The quetzal's brilliant and brightly colored feathers were a synonym for magnificence, splendor, and wealth for Mesoamerican peoples. 'The feather filaments are light, long, and glossy, so that the smallest movement sets them shimmering. And the color, a gilded emerald haunted by a deep singing violet blue, is extraordinary'."<sup>62</sup>

Equally significant is a passage from elsewhere in the *Anales* likening Quetzalcoatl to a green stone. There it is reported that Quetzalcoatl's mother became pregnant when she swallowed a green stone long *after the death of his father*:

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<sup>61</sup> *Anales de Cuauhtitlan* 11 as translated by M. Leon-Portilla et al eds., *In the Language of Kings: An Anthology of Mesoamerican Literature* (New York, 2001), p. 191.

<sup>62</sup> E. Florescano, *The Myth of Quetzalcoatl* (Baltimore, 1999), pp. 146-147.

“In the *Anales de Cuauhtitlan*, Quetzalcoatl is born nine years after his father’s death, Chimalman having been miraculously impregnated by swallowing a *chalchihuitl* (jade, greenstone).”<sup>63</sup>

Evident here is the regenerative effect of the mysterious “green stone” that somehow represents the unborn Quetzalcoatl. This tradition, considered alongside the report that the green “heart” of Quetzalcoatl rose into the sky to become the prototypical “Morning Star”—itself a symbol of the star-god’s apotheosis or resurrection—allows us to deduce the original historical-celestial context for the curious Aztec belief that a green stone represents the “heart” of the deceased king and serves to effect his resurrection. Such archaic conceptions were evidently modeled upon the spectacular “death” and apotheosis of Quetzalcoatl, the First Ruler of Aztec lore and, as such, the exemplary prototype and model for all subsequent kings.<sup>64</sup> Indeed, it is doubtless because the mythical Morning Star, as Quetzalcoatl, was deemed to have been the first to sit on the throne that a green stone came to symbolize the Aztec king, commonly invoked as follows: “O green stone, o precious turquoise.”<sup>65</sup>

Hitherto unnoticed is the fact that analogous conceptions are also attested in ancient Egypt. In the Pyramid Texts, as we have seen, Horus is described as appearing as the “Morning Star” at Creation—specifically, in the form of an extraordinarily brilliant green bird. Yet elsewhere in the very same texts the god is invoked by the epithet “Lord of the Green Stone.”<sup>66</sup> It was the Horus-star, moreover, that was thought to ensure the resurrection of Osiris when, as the latter’s “seed,” it was forcibly implanted within the womb of Isis by (or as) the strike of a lightning bolt or meteorite.<sup>67</sup> Isis’s impregnation, moreover, is alleged to have occurred *after* the father’s death, thereby paralleling the impregnation of Quetzalcoatl’s mother by means of the green stone.

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<sup>63</sup> M. Graulich, *Myths of Ancient Mexico* (Norman, 1997), p. 180.

<sup>64</sup> E. Florescano, *op. cit.*, p. 56 writes: “Quetzalcoatl is the paradigm of the ruler and creator of the royal insignias, investitures, and symbols. He is the first king of the legendary Tollan, the founder of the dynasty and Toltec power.”

<sup>65</sup> B. Sahagún, 6:47.

<sup>66</sup> PT 457.

<sup>67</sup> See the account in Spell 148 from the Coffin Texts.

According to the testimony of the Pyramid Texts, wherein the Horus-star is repeatedly invoked as the “seed” of Osiris, the seed in question is ascribed a green color. The following passage is representative in this regard:

“Pepi [the deceased Pharaoh] is your seed, Osiris, which is sharp in your identity, (O seed), of Horus in the Great Green, Horus at the fore of the akhs...Pepi has emerged from his house...as Horus...Pepi is your seed, Sun, which is sharp in your identity, (O seed), of Horus are the fore of the akhs, the star that crosses the Great Green.”<sup>68</sup>

Here the deceased Pharaoh is specifically identified with the Horus-star as the “seed” of Osiris.<sup>69</sup> Samuel Mercer, in his commentary on this passage, offered the following observation:

“As the seed of Osiris, the king bears the name ‘Horus in the great green,’ that is, Horus (the seed) in Osiris, the ‘great green.’ This is a mystic name of the king, like ‘Horus in his papyrus (green)...which means the same thing.”<sup>70</sup>

In short, the talismanic value of the green stone in Aztec lore is most likely modeled after spectacular celestial events at the dawn of time, wherein Quetzalcoatl’s green “heart” rose to heaven and became transformed into the “Morning Star,” thereby signaling his resurrection or apotheosis.

To return to the Quiché Maya account of Creation marked by the “dawning” of the Morning Star. As Tedlock has documented with great erudition and insight, there is a wealth of evidence that the “dawning” in question occurred in the immediate aftermath of a period of uncanny and stifling darkness, during which the star-gods were said to be in “hiding”:

*“how things were put in shadow and brought to light: This is ewaxib’al saqirib’al [zaquiribal], ‘being-hidden-instrument becoming-light-instrument.’ The first word is built on a passive (-x) form of ewaj, which FV glosses as ‘to hide’ but then explains that*

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<sup>68</sup> PT 1505, as translated in J. Allen, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts* (Atlanta, 2005), p. 182.

<sup>69</sup> The reference to *spd*, “sharp,” is a play upon Horus’s epithet *spd*.

<sup>70</sup> S. Mercer, *op. cit.*, p. 732.

it has to do with shadows or dark places. The second is built on an inchoative (-ir) form of *saq*, ‘be light,’ which is also found in *saqirik*, ‘to dawn.’...The two words could also be translated as ‘the hiding place, the dawning place,’ since *-b’al* can either be instrumental or indicate place. The ‘hiding place’ would be *ewab’al siwan* or ‘Concealment Canyon’, where the gods were hidden away before the dawn (p. 158); the ‘dawning place’ would be the place (or places) where the founding ancestors of the ruling Quiché lineages were keeping vigil when the morning star and then the sun rose for the first time (p. 160), places which are referred to as *zaquiribal* [*zakiribal*].”<sup>71</sup>

Evident here is the idea that the inaugural “dawning” of the Morning Star as the prototypical “Daybringer” occurred in the wake of a period of apocalyptic darkness wherein the star was imprisoned or “hidden” within the Underworld. Thus it is that, in the indigenous traditions surrounding Quetzalcoatl, it is reported that the god “disappeared” into the Underworld prior to metamorphosing into the “Morning Star” and becoming enthroned as King of the Cosmos:

“The elders used to say that he was transformed into the star that comes out at dawn...They said that when he died, he did not appear for four days, because then he was dwelling amongst the dead (*Mictlan*); and that also by the fourth day he was provided with arrows; so that on the eighth day the great star appeared (Venus, the Morning Star), that they call Quetzalcoatl. And they added that it was then that he was enthroned as Lord.”<sup>72</sup>

To summarize our conclusions: Far from being a metaphorical reference to the regularly recurring appearance of Venus in the eastern dawn sky, the Creation accounts surrounding the Morning Star in ancient Egypt and Mesoamerica describe a singular *and* decidedly extraordinary astronomical event *in illo tempore*—specifically, the spectacularly glorious appearance of the planet Mars in the midst of cosmic cataclysm,

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<sup>71</sup> D. Tedlock, *Popol Vuh: The Mayan Book of the Dawn of Life* (New York, 1985), p. 241.

<sup>72</sup> Quoted from E. Florescano, *The Myth of Quetzalcoatl* (Baltimore, 1999), p. 20. See also the so-called Legend of the Suns, wherein it is reported that “Quetzalcoatl went to hell (*Mictlan*).” Quoted from *Ibid.*, p. 177.

wherein darkness threatened to destroy the cosmos and heaven became separated from earth.

The Morning Star was identified as the “Lord of the Underworld” precisely because it was formerly stationed within a *celestial* Underworld, a situation commonly conceptualized as an imprisonment or “hiding.” Hitherto overlooked by all students of comparative mythology, the primeval “hiding” of the Morning Star within the Underworld constitutes an archetypal mythological theme, one that is absolutely essential to deciphering the original celestial context surrounding Creation. For it was solely because it burst forth from the selfsame Underworld in a spectacular display of nova-like splendor that the “Morning Star” became conceptualized as the prototypical “light-bringer” and hero of Creation, as a result of which it was credited with dispelling the all-encompassing darkness and restoring order to the cosmos. And it is precisely because the Morning Star was once hidden within the dark Underworld, as if “dead,” that its emergence and subsequent apotheosis was widely conceptualized as a resurrection or rebirth.

Remembered as the First Dawn, or as the dawning of a New Age, the inaugural appearance of the Morning Star came to represent the divine and historical prototype for the archetypal First Day, New Year, and Spring (the greening of the world). It is with explicit reference to this dramatic series of natural events, then, that we would understand the Morning Star’s traditional role in heralding a New Year or Age. R. T. Rundle Clark captured the essence of the symbolism in question even though he had no idea what natural events originally evoked the archaic traditions:

“The appearance of Horus in the sky just before dawn is the mark of the new year. Out of the fear and confusion of Seth’s reign, the time of troubles, has come the herald of the new dispensation. The world’s great age begins anew.”<sup>73</sup>

Hitherto dismissed as the stuff of legend and the product of figurative language, the archaic mythology and terminology surrounding the Morning Star are best understood as being remarkably factual and specific in nature—how else are we to explain the striking

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 217.

accord in the mythological traditions around the globe? Properly understood, the archaic names and epithets applied to the mythical Morning Star encode and commemorate a series of extraordinary *and* catastrophic astronomical events at the Dawn of Time and, as such, they constitute compelling evidence that such planetary catastrophes were witnessed by ancient cultures around the globe.