

enormous tail of a comet, whose head was concealed in the vapory mist of the horizon, and which, from its length and appearance, presented much similarity to the great comet of 1843. We may conjecture, with much probability, that the remarkable light on the elevated plains of Mexico, seen for forty nights consecutively in 1509, and observed in the eastern horizon rising pyramidally from the earth, was the zodiacal light. I found a notice of this phenomenon in an ancient Aztec MS., the *Codex Telleriano-Remensis*,* preserved in the Royal Library at Paris.

This phenomenon, whose primordial antiquity can scarcely be doubted, and which was first noticed in Europe by Childrey and Dominicus Cassini, is not the luminous solar atmosphere itself, since this can not, in accordance with mechanical laws, be more compressed than in the relation of 2 to 3, and consequently can not be diffused beyond $\frac{9}{20}$ ths of Mercury's heliocentric distance. These same laws teach us that the altitude of the extreme boundaries of the atmosphere of a cosmical

tron. Copernicanæ, t. i., p. 57, and t. ii., p. 893) speaks of the existence of a solar atmosphere (*limbus circa solem, coma lucida*), which, in eclipses of the Sun, prevents it "from being quite night;" and even more uncertain, or indeed erroneous, is the assumption that the "trabes quas *δοκὸς* vocant" (Plin., ii., 26 and 27) had reference to the tongue-shaped rising zodiacal light, as Cassini (p. 231, art. xxxi.) and Mairan (p. 15) have maintained. Every where among the ancients the trabes are associated with the bolides (*ardores et faces*) and other fiery meteors, and even with long-barbed comets. (Regarding *δοκὸς, δοκίας, δοκίρης*, see Schäfer, *Schol. Par. ad Apoll. Rhod.*, 1813, t. ii., p. 206; Pseudo-Aristot., *de Mundo*, 2, 9; *Comment. Alex. Joh. Philop. et Olymp. in Aristot. Meteor.*, lib. i., cap. vii., 3, p. 195, Ideler; Seneca, *Nat. Quæst.*, i., 1.)

* Humboldt, *Monumens des Peuples Indigènes de l'Amérique*, t. ii., p. 301. The rare manuscript which belonged to the Archbishop of Rheims, Le Tellier, contains various kinds of extracts from an Aztec ritual, an astrological calendar, and historical annals, extending from 1197 to 1549, and embracing a notice of different natural phenomena, epochs of earthquakes and comets (as, for instance, those of 1490 and 1529), and of (which are important in relation to Mexican chronology) solar eclipses. In Camargo's manuscript *Historia de Tlascalá*, the light rising in the east almost to the zenith is, singularly enough, described as "sparkling, and as if sown with stars." The description of this phenomenon, which lasted forty days, can not in any way apply to volcanic eruptions of Popocatepetl, which lies very near, in the southeastern direction. (Prescott, *History of the Conquest of Mexico*, vol. i., p. 284.) Later commentators have confounded this phenomenon, which Montezuma regarded as a warning of his misfortunes, with the "*estrella que humeava*" (literally, *which spring forth*; Mexican *choloha*, *to leap or spring forth*). With respect to the connection of this vapor with the star Citlal Choloha (Venus) and with "the mountain of the star" (Citlalpetl, the volcano of Orizaba), see my *Monumens*, t. ii., p. 303.