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Since Cumorah: New Voices from the Dust, The Bible, the Scrolls, and the Book of Mormon —a Problem of Three Bodies—Continued

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Abstract: This series argues that the changing attitudes of biblical scholars toward basic questions about scripture allow room for claims made by the Book of Mormon. It discusses external evidences, the primitive church, Lehi, Zenos, the olive tree, and the Dead Sea Scrolls. The fifteenth part continues the discussion of the "three-Bible" problem.

SINCE CUMORAH

NEW VOICES FROM THE DUST

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*The Bible, the Scrolls,
and the Book of Mormon—
a Problem of Three Bibles—Continued*

● (33) Meanwhile, all men are being tested: both teachings lay great stress on the dualistic nature of this time of probation in which there "must needs be . . . an opposition in all things." (2 Nephi 2:11.) (34) In this and other things both bodies of scripture show a peculiar affinity for the writings of John. (35) Both groups persistently designate themselves as "the poor," emphasizing thereby their position as outcasts. This is strikingly illustrated in the Book of Mormon in an episode from the mission of Alma.

When a large crowd gathered on a hillside outside a certain city to hear Alma preach, one of their leaders told Alma that these people were largely social outcasts, ". . . for they are despised of all men because of their poverty, yea, and more especially by our priests; for they have cast us out of our synagogues which we have labored abundantly to build with our own hands; and they have cast us out

because of our exceeding poverty; and we have no place to worship our God; and behold, what shall we do?" (Alma 32:5.) It is among such people that Alma gathers recruits for his society, meeting with total rebuff at the hands of the upper classes and the priests.

The arresting point here is that a number of recent studies reach the conclusion that the mysterious demise of the Mayan civilization was brought about by just such exclusion of the masses from participation in the life of the great religious centers. The Mayan cities were not "cities in our sense of the word," we are told, but "ritual centres, where the people gathered for festivals but where nobody lived. Priests and nobility resided on the outskirts, the people in scattered settlements."²³ There came a time when "one by one the great ceremonial centres . . . were deserted. In some the end came so quickly that buildings were left

half-finished. . . ." And yet "the peasants appear to have remained in their homes." What could have happened? "The most logical explanation," writes J. E. S. Thompson, "is that the old cooperation of peasant and hierarch broke down, and that the peasants revolted and drove out or massacred the small ruling class of priest-nobles and their immediate followers."²⁴ In the end the poor took their revenge on the haughty priests who excluded them from the ceremonial places which had been built with the labor of their own hands. This would seem to have been an old pattern of things in the New World, by no means limited to the later Mayas. Alma describes it clearly.

Speaking of cities, the ancient Near Eastern "ideal of city planning" was that of Uruk, "whereby Uruk was divided into three equal areas—urban, garden and meadow—plus the temple precincts." The same system is apparent in the Book of Mormon.²⁵ And this brings us to another type of parallel. For after all, there is a good deal of secular information in the Book of Mormon. If the Dead Sea Scrolls are (in Professor Yadin's words) but "a tiny window" on one phase of Israel's past, so is the Church led by Alma but part of a much larger picture, to see which we must look through many more windows and much older ones.

(36) We have discussed at book length the Book of Mormon picture of ancient desert life—the tent-culture, the family affairs, the hardships and secrets of survival, the desert terrain, the ways of nomads and hunters, etc. Many authentic Arabs have read both the Book of Mormon and our commentary and found the former

convincing and the latter not too objectionable. (37) Then there is the Liahona, as strange a gadget as one might well imagine, but completely vindicated by recent studies of those ancient divination arrows which used to guide the Hebrews and the Arabs in their wanderings. In fact Tha'labi, perhaps the most amazingly well-informed of all Arabic writers, knows of a Hebrew tradition that Moses led the children of Israel through the wilderness with the aid of a double arrow mounted on the end of his staff that served as a director.²⁶ (38) To the dozen vivid desert pictures reported in Lehi's dreams, we have added in the present articles the clue of the filthy water—another queer and disturbing image, but thoroughly substantiated in the apocryphal literature.

A much earlier migration than Lehi's, as reported in the Book of Mormon, brings us face to face with (39) the Epic Milieu with its heroic tradition of literature, first brought to light as a historical reality by Chadwick in the 1930's, but again, as we have shown at considerable length, vividly and fully set forth in the Book of Ether. This is good for at least a score of parallels, but we shall take them altogether, only adding the case of (40) the strange ships of the Jaredites, which can be matched in the oldest traditions of the Deluge, and by (41) the shining stones with which they were illuminated, the equal of the Liahona for oddity, but well attested by the earliest records of the race.²⁷

On the technical side we might mention (42) the growing awareness of the use of steel by the ancients, since nothing was more

ridiculed in the early days than the Book of Mormon's mention of steel. In particular Nephi's steel bow, another extreme oddity, would seem to have its companions among his contemporaries.²⁸ (43) Within the last ten years much has been made of the surprising extent to which the ancient Americans used cement, concrete, and gypsum in their building operations; it is now suggested that the overlavish detail, the extremely high relief, and tendency to round off all angles characteristic of early American architecture are the direct result of working in that plastic medium.²⁹ (44) It took a student of modern com-

puter techniques to discover that the monetary system which the Book of Mormon says the Nephites worked out for themselves as the most efficient they could devise actually is the one system which requires the least number of coins to change hands in a large number of transactions.³⁰

(45) So many ancient records on metal plates have come to the world's attention in recent years that it is hard to realize today that the mere idea of a book on gold plates was considered the number one absurdity of the Book of Mormon for generations. We might mention the translation of more
(Continued on page 1165)



President E. Eldon Tanner of the First Presidency examines ancient jar from the Qumran Caves, recently obtained by the Church through the Palestine Archeological Museum.

Since Cumorah
(Continued from page 1091)

gold Darius plates that first came out in 1951, since the content of these is a mixture of history and piety much in the manner of the Book of Mormon.³¹

But of all the possible ties between the Book of Mormon and the Old World, by far the most impressive in our opinion is (46) the exact and full matching up of the long coronation rite described in the book of Mosiah with the "standard" Near Eastern coronation ceremonies as they have been worked out through the years by the "patternists" of Cambridge. Imagine a twenty-three-year-old backwoodsman in 1829 giving his version of what an ancient coronation ceremony would be like—what would be done and said, how, and by whom? Put the question to any college senior or dean of humanities today and see what you get. To the recent pronouncements of the "Cambridge school" that conform so beautifully to the long description of Mosiah's enthronement, we may add another interesting bit of confirmation. In the tenth century AD, Nathan, a Jewish scholar living in Babylon, witnessed the enthronement of the Prince of the Captivity, carried out by the Jews in exile as a reminder of the glories of their lost kingdom. Since no regular coronation is described in the Bible, and since the rites here depicted conform to the normal pattern of a Near Eastern coronation, we have here a pretty good picture of what a coronation in Israel would be like in Lehi's day.³²

The new king is set aside by the elders on the Thursday preceding his coronation. The elders are also in charge in the Book of Mormon, though they do not figure in the precoronation arrangements in the book of Mosiah because this was an unusual case in which the old king was still living—it is he who

designates and crowns his successor. All the people "great and small" are then summoned to the royal presence, each being required to bring the most precious gift his means can afford. In return the Prince of the Captivity entertains them all at a great feast of abundance. The day before the coronation a high wooden tower (*migdol*) had been built. This was covered with precious hangings, and concealed within it was a trained choir of noble youths which under the direction of a precentor led the congregation in hymns and antiphonals preparing for the new king's appearance. This explains how at the coronation of Mosiah all the people would respond to the king in a single voice—it was the practiced and familiar *acclamatio* of the ancient world. Thus the conductor would say, "The breath of all the living. . .," whereupon the choir would answer, ". . . shall bless thy name," and continue until they reached the passage known as the Kedusha, when the entire multitude would join in the familiar words. After this all the people sat down.

When the preliminaries were over, the king, who until then had remained invisible, appeared dramatically on the top of the tower, which until then held only three empty thrones. At the sight of him all the people stood up and remained standing while he seated himself, to be followed after a few moments by the head of the Academy of Sura, who sat on a throne to his right, though separated from him by an interval, and a little later by the head of the Academy of Pumbeditha who sat on the king's left. This of course is the image of the "three men" who represent God on earth—a Book of Mormon concept, as we have noted above.

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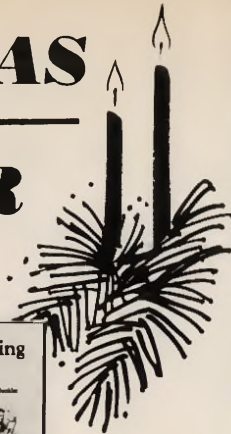
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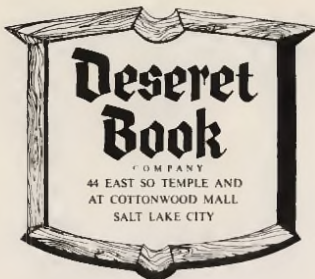
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or royal tent—for as in the Book of Mormon the coronation rite is essentially a camp ceremony. The precentor, who has been the master of ceremonies from the first, then goes under the tent and imparts royal blessings on the new king. In the Book of Mormon the old king, who is still alive, does all this and has general charge of the meeting. Because the blessing cannot be heard by the vast multitude, the chorus of youths standing beneath the throne shout out a loud "Amen!" at the end of it to signify the universal approval.

Then comes the time for the great royal speech, the new king deferring to the head of the Academy of Sura, who in turn courteously defers to the head of the Academy of Pumbeditha, "thus showing deference to one another" and indicating their perfect oneness of mind and purpose. The speech is delivered in the manner of a message from heaven, the speaker "expounding with awe, closing his eyes, and wrapping himself up with his tallith. . . ." The people stood wrapped in silence and overwhelmed by the occasion: "There was not in the congregation one that opened his mouth, or chirped, or uttered a sound. If he (the speaker) became aware that any one spoke, he would open his eyes, and fear and terror would fall upon the congregation."

The royal speech was immediately followed by a question period, in which the king would put questions to the people, who would answer him in the person of a venerable old man "of wisdom, understanding, and experience." Then the precentor (Benjamin) would pronounce a blessing on the people with the special words, "During the life of our prince the exilarch, and during your life, and during the life of all the house of Israel." This is the typical New Year and birthday formula that

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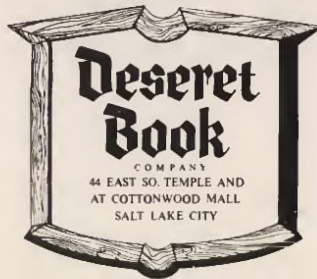
always goes with a coronation. Then the precentor blesses the king and then his two counselors and makes a formal roll call of the people. This is the formal registry of the people described in Mosiah, and while the people are still standing the precentor hands the book of the Law to the new king, who reads to the people the covenant they are entering. When the book of the Law is returned to the ark, all sit down and are regaled by learned discourses on the Law, beginning with one by the king himself. After this the precentor again "blessed the exilarch by the Book of the Law," and all said amen. After a final prayer all the people departed to their homes.

The reader can see for himself how closely these rites conform to the substance and spirit of the coronation of Mosiah. (47) But the most remarkable feature of the whole thing is the nature of the royal discourse on government. In the Book of Mormon Benjamin clearly alludes to the Old World coronation rites in which the king is treated like God on earth, receiving the rich offerings and awed acclamations reserved for divinity; and he also emphasizes the royal obligation to assure victory and prosperity for the land. While he recognizes the value of these things, Benjamin's whole speech is devoted to giving them a special twist—the homage and the offerings are very well, but they are for the heavenly king, not for Benjamin, who is only a man; victory and prosperity will surely follow, but they come not from him but from God.³³

In a study entitled "The Refusal of the Kingship as a Characteristic of Royal Authority in the Old Testament," K.-H. Bernhardt has shown at great length that it was the custom for the king in Israel from very early times to deliver a formal address on government at his coronation, in which he would



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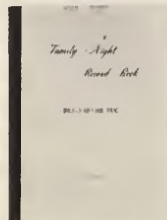
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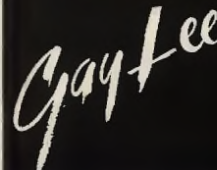
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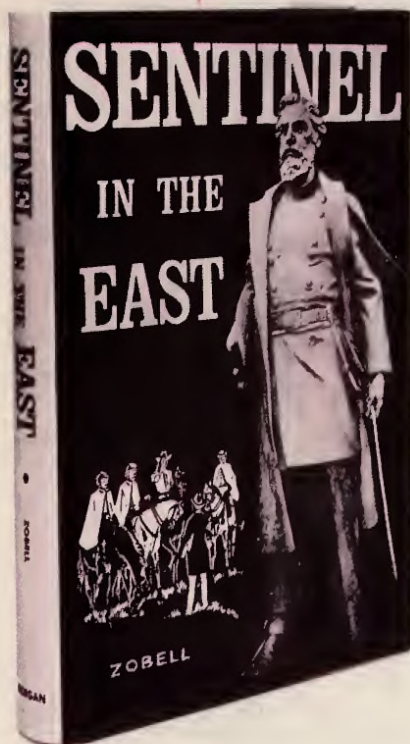
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formally renounce the idea of kingship as accepted by all the rest of the ancient world, specifying that he was merely a humble instrument in the hands of God, the real King. Thus Israel shared the prevailing Oriental forms of the coronation while giving them a very special meaning.³⁴ This is exactly what we have at the enthronement of Mosiah. Bernhardt gets a good deal of his evidence from the Old Testament himself; yet it took the perspicacity of a modern scholar to discover, in 1961, the institution and the idea which are so clearly set forth in the Book of Mormon.

And speaking of conflicting concepts of government, we should point out that at the time Lehi left Jerusalem, the ancient world was experiencing, as the most significant aspect of the "Axial Period," a major cleavage between two philosophies of life, the one excluding the supernatural of "the other world" from its calculations and the other including it in any attempt to explain human experience. This cleavage between what the Greeks called the Mantic (inspired, prophetic) and the Sophic (naturalistic, intellectual) was to mark the history of Western thought forever after. It split Lehi's family down the middle, and they took it with them to the New World: (48) nowhere can one find more lucid and telling expositions of both the Mantic and the Sophic views than in the pages of the Book of Mormon.

The Book of Mormon opens windows on a number of strange and forgotten customs and traditions that are just now being brought to light. (49) Moroni's mustering of the hosts certainly follows the old Jewish pattern as first brought to the world's attention in the so-called Battle Scroll, with its inscribed banners and high-sounding slogans and the rending of the people's garments.

For a while it was disputed whether the order of battle in the Millhama Scroll was not merely an idealized picture of some imaginary angelic army of the future, but today it is conceded that the men of Qumran really did follow a military discipline.

FOOTNOTES

²²J. E. S. Thompson, in Ed. Bacon (ed.), *Vanished Civilizations* (N.Y.: McGraw Hill, 1963), p. 146.

²³*Ibid.*, pp. 166-8.

²⁴C. Gordon, *Before the Bible* (N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 85; a recent discovery "of the greatest interest." Cf. Helaman 7:10.

²⁵Tha'labi, *Quissas al-Anbiyah* (Cairo, 1921). Such a device is depicted as the emblem of the legendary divinity who led the first migration to Egypt; E. Massouard, *Prehistoire et Protohistoire d'Egypte* (Paris: Institut d'Ethnologie, 1949), p. 489. See our article, "The Liahona's Cousins," in *The Improvement Era*, 64 (February 1961), pp. 87ff.

²⁶See Ch. 25, pp. 273-291 in the 1964 edition of H. Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book).

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 187.

²⁸T. Proskouriakoff, *An Album of Maya Architecture* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma, 1963), pp. xv-xvi, 4, discusses the phenomenon.

²⁹R. Smith, in *The Improvement Era*, 57 (May 1954), pp. 316ff. Cf. Alma 11:4ff.

³⁰H. H. Paper, in *Journal of American Archeological Society*, 72 (1953), pp. 169f.

³¹Nathan Ha-Babli, "The Installation of An Exilarch," Ch. X of B. Halper, *Post-biblical Hebrew Literature* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1943), pp. 64-68; the Hebrew text in Vol. I (1946), pp. 37-40, under the same title.

³²See *An Approach to the Book of Mormon* (1964 ed.), pp. 247ff.

³³K.-H. Bernhardt, *Das Problem der Altorientalischen Königsideologie im Alten Testament* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1961), Chap. VI.

(To be continued)

"And when he had said these words, he himself also knelt upon the earth; and behold he prayed unto the Father, and the things which he prayed cannot be written, and the multitude did bear record who heard him.

"And after this manner do they bear record: The eye hath never seen, neither hath the ear heard, before, so great and marvelous things as we saw and heard Jesus speak unto the Father."

(3 Nephi 17:15-16.)