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130.0 THE "STAR OF DAVID" IN ANCIENT AMERICA? By M. Wells Jakeman, professor of archaeology and anthropology at Brigham Young University. A paper read at the Twenty-first Annual Symposium on the Archaeology of the Scriptures, held at Brigham Young University on October 16, 1971.

#### INTRODUCTION

One of the general findings of archaeology and related studies, to date, has been the discovery that the ancient civilizations of the New World—especially those of "Mesoamerica" (central and southern Mexico and northern Central America) but also those of Peru—had numerous Old World-like traits.

The great majority of these Old World parallels were of a simple nature, and therefore are easily explained as coincidental. But some of them were of an arbitrary—i.e. complex or unexpected—nature, and therefore are difficult to explain as coincidences; in other words, are strong evidence that the ancient New World civilizations had, at least in part, an Old World origin.

Many of the correspondences were in the category of "material culture" (subsistence economy, implements, clothing, shelters, furniture, utensils, and so forth). And some were in the categories of social customs and "higher culture" (writing, fine arts, astronomy and calendrics, cosmogony, etc.). But most of them—including most of the arbitrary parallels—were in the category of religion, especially the areas of religious beliefs, ways of worship, and iconography (traditional religious motifs in art, including symbols). In this last category the correspondences were consistently to traits of the ancient religion-centered civilizations of the *Near East* (exclusively or, in some cases, also to traits of the ancient civilizations of Europe, India, or the Far East). They therefore suggest, more specifically, that the ancient American civilizations

derived from the *ancient Near Eastern* civilizations—as, in fact, already long suggested in some of the early Indian and Spanish accounts of ancient Mesoamerica, and explicitly claimed in such early works as the Book of Mormon and the writings of Lord Kingsborough.

A number of the Old World—specifically pre-classical Near Eastern—parallels in the last category, that of religion, which have been found in the Mesoamerican civilizations may be listed here (including several of at least a somewhat arbitrary nature, as indicated by an asterisk):

Belief in anthropomorphic gods.<sup>1</sup>

Among these gods, a supreme creator or father god (Hunab Ku, Tonacatecuhli), never represented in the iconography but briefly mentioned in the early writings, as in the case of the corresponding deity in ancient Near Eastern religions (Anshar in the Sumerian, El in the Canaanite-Phoenician, Elohim—in one interpretation—in the Israelite, "God the Father" in the Christian).

\*The principal deity in the actual worship, however, a god said to be the son of the supreme creator god and to have assisted him in the creation,<sup>2</sup> and worshiped as god of the sky, wind, and rain—the beneficent deity who sent the fertilizing or life-giving waters from the sky (this is the famous "Fair God" of ancient America, the main subject of Mesoamerican religious art and frequently mentioned in the early writings under different names, according to the language of the writing and the god's particular aspect in mind, chiefly "Itzamna" or "Chac" in the Maya and "Quetzalcóatl" or "Tlaloc" in the Aztec, and is sometimes referred to as "the Lord Itzamna [or Quetzalcóatl]" or simply "the Lord"); this great deity paralleled in all respects the principal deity in the actual worship of

the ancient peoples of the Near East, specifically those of western Asia—a sky, storm, rain, or life god frequently mentioned in their writings under different names, e.g. Anu or Enlil (or “Anu-Enlil”) in the Sumerian, Baal (“the Lord”) or Hadad in the Canaanite-Phoenician, and “the Lord” or Yahweh (Jehovah) in the Israelite.<sup>3</sup>

Also in the Mesoamerican pantheon, a deity opposed to the beneficent sky and rain or life god—a malevolent god of evil, darkness, and death, mentioned under different names, chiefly “Ah Puch” in the Maya writings and “Tezcatlipoca” in the Aztec; paralleled Set in Egyptian religion, Mot in Canaanite-Phoenician, and Satan or “the Adversary” in Israelite as well as Christian.<sup>4</sup>

\*And a fertility goddess, popular in the early “Olmec” period, apparently not worshipped in the “Early Maya,” but again popular in late times—the goddess Ixchel of the late Mayas and Cihuacóatl of the Aztecs; paralleled the famous fertility goddess of the ancient Near Eastern peoples—Inanna of the Sumerians, Ishtar of the Babylonians and Assyrians, and Astart of the Canaanites and Phoenicians (also worshiped under the name Ashtoreth by the Israelites in times of “backsliding,” and the prototype of the goddess Astarte or Aphrodite of the Greeks and Venus of the Romans).<sup>5</sup>

Also belief in an afterlife of joy for some, in a heaven ruled over by the sky and rain or life god, or of shadowy existence for others, in an underworld ruled over by the death god.<sup>6</sup>

Frequent prayers, especially to “the Lord Itzamna” or “Quetzalcóatl,” for health, abundant crops, etc.

Sacrifices to the gods, again especially to the sky and rain or life god.

\*Burning of incense for purification, on many religious occasions.

Rites of “baptism” and fasting.

\*Scapegoat ceremony.

Priests and also prophets.

Building of temples, usually for public worship of the sky and rain god, often with an outer and an inner chamber (“holy place” and “holy of holies”).

\*Also stepped towers, often of brick, and usually with a sanctuary on the flat top, reached by a stairway up the side—the stepped tower itself representing a mountain and a place of confined waters, and the sanctuary or temple on top, the abode of the sky and rain god; paralleled in all respects the *ziggurats* or stepped temple-towers of Mesopotamia in the Near East, though called pyramids by modern writers.<sup>7</sup>

Altars for the sacrifices, placed in the inner chamber of a temple and/or in front of the tower substructure of a “pyramid temple.”

Pronged or “horned” incense-burners.

Votive figures, usually “fertility-goddess” figurines.

Tombs and sarcophagi.

Books of prophecy or religious instruction (evidently some of the hieroglyphic screen-books or “codices”).

And religious scenes or figures and symbols painted on temple walls and carved on stelae, including the following Near Eastern-like iconographic motifs:

\*“Sky and rain god,” an anthropomorphic figure or face, usually bearded, with cloud, storm, rain, water, and/or fertility or life symbols (usually on the face as a mask or in the hand as a scepter), and presented either in full front position or in half-profile with feet in tandem, sometimes holding forked lightning with one hand, like an anthropomorphic storm- or rain-god figure occasionally seen on ancient stelae in the Near East, especially Assyrian and Canaanite-Phoenician.

\*“Storm bird,” an eagle or other raptorial bird as a symbol of cloudy sky and rain, as also in Mesopotamian (both Sumerian and Babylonian) art.

\*“Flowing vase,” a vase, jar, or bowl with streams of water often flowing out on each side, at least in one case (in the Maya Dresden Codex) held by the fertility goddess—a symbol, of course, of fertility or life; closely paralleled the flowing-vase motif in ancient Sumerian art, in which the vase is sometimes shown held by the fertility goddess of Sumerian religion.

\*“Water monster” (Olmec version), a bird-feline hybrid, specifically a jaguar with bird and also serpent elements; cf. the dragon Tiamat, symbol of the original “chaos” or “primeval waters” and apparently also the sea, in Mesopotamian cosmogony, sometimes depicted in Mesopotamian art as a bird-feline hybrid, specifically a lion with wings and bird-claw feet, and mentioned in the Book of Daniel, 7:3-4.

\*“Water monster” (Maya version), a two-headed reptile (serpent or crocodile); cf. again the dragon Tiamat, symbol of the “primeval waters” and apparently also the sea, in Mesopotamian cosmogony, sometimes depicted in Mesopotamian art as a seven-headed serpent; also Lotan in Canaanite-Phoenician and Leviathan in Israelite mythology, a dragon that was likewise connected with great waters—the “primeval waters” and the sea, and probably also the “water under the earth” mentioned in Ex. 20:4—and represented (in the case of Lotan) as a serpent with seven heads or (in the case of Leviathan) as a reptile (serpent or crocodile) with two or more heads (Isa. 27:1; Ps. 74:14).

\*“Fire serpent” (only in Maya and later Mesoamerican writings and art): a serpent with flames rising from the body—a symbol of life and the life god; cf. the “fiery serpent” in Israelite writings, a “brazen” or bronze serpent (i.e. one with a glistening or new skin?), a symbol of life and of—by implication—the corresponding Israelite life god, as indicated in Num. 21:8-9 (a partial parallel).

\*“Tree of life” (only in Maya and later Mesoamerican writings and art), another symbol of life and the life god, as in ancient Mesopotamian, Canaanite-Phoenician,

Israelite, and Persian as well as other Old World religious writings and art.<sup>8</sup>

\*“Winged man,” apparently an agent of the sky and rain or life god—at least in one case (Stela 5, Izapa) a pair of such beings shown standing, in half-profile with feet in tandem, facing and attending the tree of life between them (just as the two winged men—genii or cherubim—regularly shown with the tree of life in Assyrian and Canaanite-Phoenician art, and mentioned as guarding the sacred tree in Israelite writings).<sup>9</sup>

\*“Cross patée” (in ancient Mexican art the turquoise cross, in ancient Maya the so-called Kan cross, a vertical, equilateral cross with the radii splayed), usually with a circle at the center—a symbol of the sky, the four directions, the four winds, rain and fertility or life, as also, it seems, in Assyrian and other Near Eastern art (as well as, curiously, in Christian).<sup>10</sup>

In this paper we shall consider the possibility of still another Old World, specifically ancient Near Eastern, parallel in the area of iconography—one of a rather arbitrary nature, like some of those we have listed.

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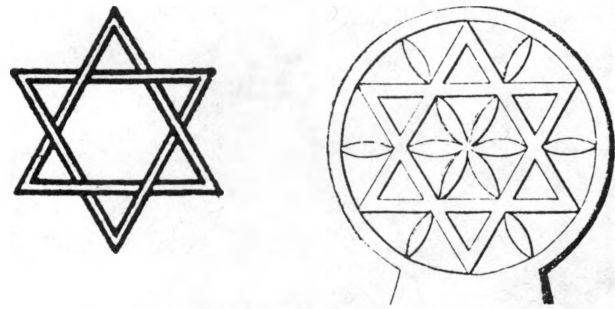
Recently an ancient stone sculpture, in Classic Maya style, was unearthed in Campeche, Mexico, which shows a personage of about the seventh or eighth century AD wearing an ear ornament of unusual design. According to Prof. Alexander von Wuthenau of the University of the Americas in Mexico City (as reported by the Associated Press on March 23, 1971), the ear ornament is an earring which has in its center the “Star of David,” the well-known symbol of Judaism and emblem of the modern state of Israel. See Fig. 1.

Prof. von Wuthenau is quoted as stating, in a lecture at Brandeis University, that “the Star of David is clearly shown in the middle of a round disc, partly covered with horizontal lines which might well mean water”; and that this “proves that Mediterraneans [i.e., specifically, Jews] lived in Mexico as long ago as 700 AD.”<sup>11</sup>

Unfortunately for those interested in evidence of an Old World origin of the ancient American civilizations, this appears to be a mistaken identification. The Jewish “Star of David” is a six-pointed star formed of two equilateral triangles, or by extending all sides of a hexagon to points of intersection, i.e. a hexagram. Its side-lines are often interlaced, and it is usually—in early examples—within a ring which all its points touch. Frequently in early examples it is ornamented with a rosette and/or the petals of a rosette or else a cross patée, and occasionally with concentric circles in the center.<sup>12</sup> See e.g. Figs. 2 and 3.



Fig. 1. Part of sculpture in bas-relief on a stela recently unearthed in Campeche, Mexico, and now in the National Museum of Mexico. (Wide World Photos)



Figs. 2 and 3. The “Star of David,” a symbol of Judaism; sometimes called the “Creator’s Star,” with its six points representing the biblical six days of creation. From left to right: 2, the usual modern interlaced type; 3, a hexagram within a ring and ornamented with a rosette at the center and the petals of a rosette (a seventeenth-century example from a tombstone in southern France, after Colas, *op. cit.*, Fig. 742).

On the other hand, the interlaced and pointed motif in the newly-discovered Maya sculpture is actually a well-known symbol in ancient Mesoamerican art and hieroglyphics, the “imbricated-ray” sign, which never occurs in the form of a star. Although here, uniquely, it is shown within a ring as often in the case of the “Star of David,” its two interlaced elements are never tri-

angles or parts of a hexagram, i.e. never present six angles or points all around. Instead, one of them is a horizontal trapezoid bracket (as here) or else a horizontal rectangle or a square bracket, while the other projects only above it at the center and is either pointed or slightly rounded at the top (as here) or else broadly rounded or even flat at the top. See e.g. Figs. 4-10.



Figs. 4-10. Some examples of the ancient Mesoamerican "imbricated-ray" sign. From left to right, top to bottom: 4, on Stela 6, Copán (early Late-Classic Maya); 5, from a relief in the House of the Magician, Uxmal (late Late-Classic Maya); 6, on the Stela di Roma (Classic Zapotec); 7, from a relief at Chichén Itzá (Early Postclassic, specifically Tula Toltec); 8, from a relief at Xochicalco (Early Postclassic, specifically Tula Toltec); 9 and 10, from the Codex Nuttall (Late-Postclassic Mixtec). Figs. 4, 5, 8, 9, and 10 after Covarrubias, *Indian Art of Mexico and Central America*, 1957; 6 after Leigh in Paddock, ed., *Ancient Oaxaca*, 1966; 7 after Spinden, *The Reduction of Mayan Dates*, 1924.

Moreover in the earliest known examples, dating to the "Protoclassic" period (approximately the first century before and first three or four centuries after the birth of Christ), the two elements are not interlaced but one of them is merely superimposed on the other and usually overlapping it; see Figs. 11 and 12 (also 13 and 14, variants of this early type dating to the "Early Classic" period).



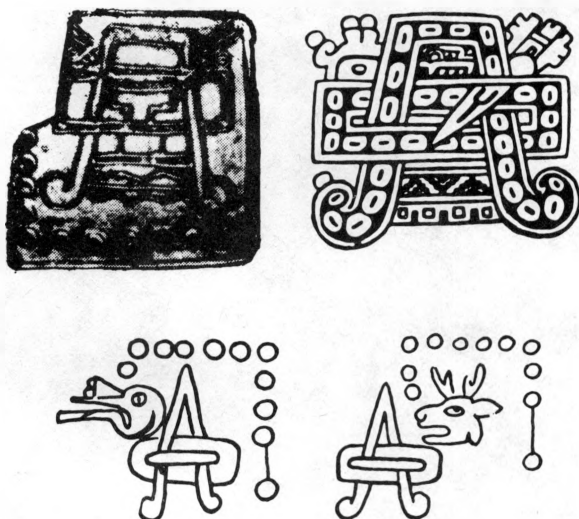
Figs. 11-14. More examples of the ancient Mesoamerican "imbricated-ray" sign. 11, on a stone slab from Teotihuacán, probably occupation phase II (Protoclassic Teotihuacán); 12, part of an ornament of baked clay from Monte Albán, transitional occupation phase II-III (Protoclassic Zapotec); 13, from a mural at Teotihuacán, occupation phase III (Early-Classic Teotihuacán); 14, on a clay plaque from Monte Albán, occupation phase IIIA (Early-Classic Zapotec). Figs. 11, 12, and 14 after Covarrubias, *op. cit.*; 13 after Kubler, *The Iconography of the Art of Teotihuacán*, 1967.

Significantly, these earliest known examples differ in form from the "Star of David" even more than the example in the new Maya sculpture as well as others dating to the "Late Classic" period.

Finally, the Mesoamerican symbol also differed from the Jewish symbol in its *meaning*. For it was quite definitely—at least primarily—an astronomical and chronological sign. The principal indication of this is the fact that the pointed variant of the vertical element in the latest examples is in the form of an inverted V with outward-curling finials, which is identical to "Late Postclassic" (Aztec, late Mixtec) representations of a *ray of the sun*, such as seen on the Aztec Calendar Stone; see again Figs. 9 and 10, also e.g. Figs. 17 and 18 (as well as 15 and 16 for the outward-curling finials). Thus it is probable that the vertical element is a conventionalized ray of the sun, or at least that the symbol as a whole has a connection with the sun. This conclusion is strongly confirmed by Fig. 9, which shows the symbol superimposed on the mask of the sun god (an aspect of the sky god Itzamna or Quetzalcóatl) in Aztec and late Mixtec art; and is further established by Fig. 16, which shows a dagger or knife piercing the symbol—undoubtedly the flint knife, a sign for solar light, seen on the face or forming the tongue of the sun god in Aztec and late Mixtec art.

If the vertical element is indeed a ray of the sun, this suggests that the other main element of the symbol, in both its bracket and rectangular variants, is a conventionalized representation of the *horizon of the earth*. In other words the symbol as a whole, with the

sun-ray element superimposed on or interlaced with the bracket or rectangle and thrusting up from it, not improbably (at least in its original use) represented the dawn, possibly a particular dawn which was the beginning of some chronological count.



Figs. 15-18. Still more examples of the ancient Mesoamerican "imbricated-ray" sign. 15, part of a gold plaque from Tomb 7, Monte Albán (Middle-Postclassic Mixtec); 16, on a carved wooden gong (Middle-Postclassic Mixtec); 17 and 18, part of "year-bearer" dates, here "11 Ehecatl" and "11 Mazatl" respectively, from the Codex Porfirio Díaz (Late-Postclassic Aztec, specifically Cuicatec). Figs. 15 and 16 after Covarrubias, *op. cit.*; 17 and 18 after Spinden, *Ancient Civilizations of Mexico and Central America*, 3rd ed., 1946.

Be that as it may, there is ample evidence that the "imbricated-ray" sign had some connection with the sky god Itzamna or Quetzalcoatl, not only in his aspect as sun or light god (see above) but also as rain or life god, bringer of life-giving water to the earth and mankind. For the symbol occasionally appears as ornamentation of one of the masks of that great deity in his latter aspect (for instance the "Tlaloc mask," which derived from the face of the jaguarlike "water monster" of Olmec art; see e.g. Figs. 4 and 5). Moreover, in the earlier examples it is invariably marked with or accompanied by one or more signs for water, fertility, or life, i.e. signs which related to this aspect of the sky god. Often these are concentric circles, a common Mesoamerican sign for water. Sometimes horizontal wavy lines—a clear depiction of water—fill the lower part of the space between the legs of the vertical element; see again, e.g., Fig. 15; also for possible conventionalizations of this motif, Figs. 10 and 16. Undoubtedly the horizontal wavy lines under or

covering the lower part of the symbol in the new Maya sculpture are this associated water pictograph. (Here we support Prof. von Wuthenau's interpretation of these lines, previously quoted.)

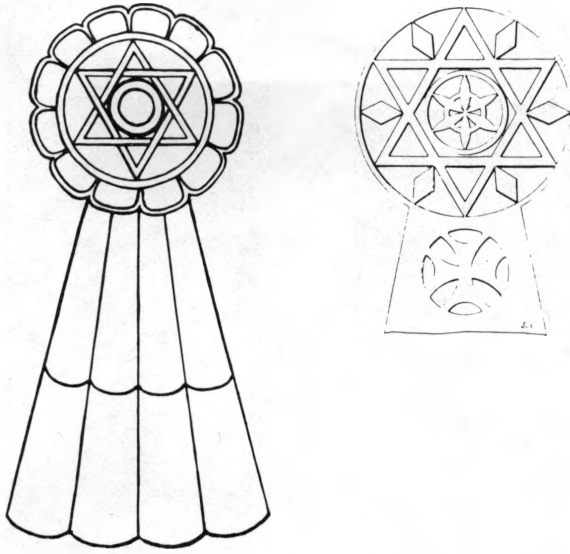
In ancient Mexican calendrics (Classic Teotihuacán and Postclassic Toltec, Mixtec, and Aztec) the "imbricated-ray" sign actually signified the chronological period known as the Calendar Round, a cycle of 52 solar years—more exactly 52 365-day vague-solar years, without leap-year corrections—formed by a permutation of the "solar" or civil calendar of 365 days with the "religious" calendar (Sacred Almanac) of 260 days. And at least in Late Postclassic times it was used in recording dates, specifically "year-bearer" dates. That is, the symbol was used by the Aztecs and other late Mesoamerican peoples to indicate that a given day in the 260-day Sacred Almanac was the beginning ("name" or "year-bearer") day of one of the 52 years of the civil calendar in the Calendar Round permutation. See again, e.g., Figs. 17 and 18.

2

There remain some further observations. In the first place, although the imbricated-ray sign<sup>13</sup> in Mesoamerican art and hieroglyphics—including the example in the new Maya sculpture—is clearly not the Jewish "Star of David," this of course does not mean that the latter symbol was not known in ancient America.

As a matter of fact, a design has been found among the sculptures of Uxmal in Yucatan (an ancient Maya city of the Late Classic period), the main element of which is a six-pointed star formed from a hexagon or two equilateral triangles with the side-lines interlaced, i.e. exactly a hexagram or "Star of David"! Around it is a ring or ringlike frame which all its points touch, just as often in the case of the Jewish star; while in its center are two concentric circles. Finally, its ringlike frame is ornamented with petallike elements which give the design the appearance of a rosette, and also with four long feathers pendent at the bottom. See Fig. 19.<sup>14</sup> This is the only known "Star of David" in ancient Mesoamerican art. Nevertheless, such a star was probably an established—though rare—motif at least in the iconography of the Late-Classic Maya city of Uxmal (not merely a "sport"), since here it is the featured part of a design in which all the other parts—the enclosing ring or ringlike frame, concentric circles in the center, petallike ornamentation, and pennated trail—were definitely motifs of Maya as well as other Mesoamerican symbolic art.

If this Uxmal example is, in fact, documentation of a Maya "Star of David," how is this New World occurrence of the motif to be explained? The predict-



Left: Fig. 19. A design found at the ruins of Uxmal, a Late-Classic Maya city, with its main element an interlaced "Star of David." After d'Alviella, *op. cit.*, Fig. 128.

Right: Fig. 20. A carving on a tombstone in southern France dating to the seventeenth century, with its main element also a "Star of David." After Colas, *op. cit.*, Fig. 869.

able position of most Mesoamericanists is that this motif in Maya art is entirely an invention of the Mayas themselves. For a six-pointed star formed of two interlaced, equilateral triangles is a device that is not too complicated to have been hit upon independently by ancient American artists.

The alternative explanation, however, cannot be ruled out: there are indications that the Uxmal star is not an accidental parallel to the Jewish symbol; i.e., that (unbelievable as it may seem) this motif was in some way acquired by the Mayas from an early Jewish group of the Old World. (Or from an early Christian group, since the hexagram—under its alternative name the "Creator's Star"—also appears in medieval and modern Christian art; see also Fig. 3 with caption.)

First, all the elements accompanying the known Uxmal example—enclosing ring or ringlike frame, concentric circles, petallike ornamentation or rosettelike figure, pennated tail—are not only Mesoamerican motifs *but also Near Eastern- and European-like*. They especially resemble certain iconographic motifs of Assyrian, Phoenician, and Persian art, the main art styles of the ancient Near East that influenced the Israelites and Jews before the dispersion of the latter into other parts of the Old World; namely a ring—sometimes ropelike—framing the figure of a god *or a star* (exactly as here), a circle or concentric circles at

the center of another motif, a rosette or border of rosettes, and a pennated tail attached to a circle, ring, or winged disc or globe. In other words, the "Near Easternness" of the Uxmal design extends to *all* its several parts and not just the featured "Star of David," which is rather difficult to explain as a coincidence.

Second, there is the indication of the *meaning* of this Maya hexagram. The Jewish star, a symbol of Judaism, must be considered primarily a symbol of the religion of Yahweh, the Israelite and Jewish "One God." In fact the six-pointed star itself may simply be a variant of the ancient west-Asiatic star sign for a god (as well as the sky); while the ring often encircling it is probably the ring occasionally seen in ancient west-Asiatic art encircling the figure of a god or a star—i.e. a cartouche or sacred frame, signifying that the figure within is indeed a representation of a god or that the star within is to be "read" as a symbol of a god (and not, in this case, a sign for the sky)—or else held by a god (sometimes also by a king), apparently in this case signifying divine authority. More specifically, the Jewish star seems to have been a symbol of the Israelite and Jewish God in his principal aspect in ancient belief, that of sky, storm, and rain god, giver of fertility to the earth and life to mankind.<sup>15</sup> For the "Star of David" in Old World art is often ornamented with other motifs which, at least in ancient Near Eastern iconography, quite surely had one or more of these connotations; namely, concentric circles (probably water and by extension fertility or life), a rosette (fertility), and/or a cross patée (the sky and rain or life-giving water); see also Figs. 3 and 20.

Turning to the Uxmal star, we discover that the motifs accompanying this Maya hexagram clearly give it this same meaning. The ringlike double-circle around it, in Mesoamerican iconography, is a cartouche or sacred frame; similar ringlike double-circles, for example, enclose many of the signs in the ancient hieroglyphic (basically religious or sacred) writing of the Mayas. The concentric circles in the center of the star are undoubtedly the common Mesoamerican sign for water, and by extension fertility or life. The petal-like ornamentation of the ringlike double-circle, giving the design the appearance of a rosette or flower, quite surely signified fertility. And the pendent feathers are probably green quetzal feathers (the usual interpretation of feathers in Mesoamerican art), which definitely—like green leaves and jade—signified fertility or life. That is, these accompanying elements clearly identify the six-pointed star featured in the Uxmal design as a sacred symbol of fertility or life. And they doubtless identify it also as a symbol of the ancient Mesoamerican deity corresponding to the Israelite and Jewish deity, namely Itzamna or Quetzalcóatl, among

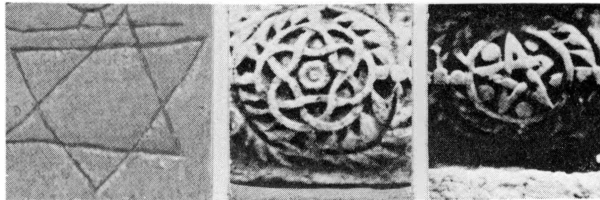
whose aspects was that of wind or storm and rain god, giver of fertility to the earth and life to mankind.<sup>16</sup>

Thus it appears that, although the motif of interlaced elements in the new Maya sculpture from Campeche is not the Jewish "Star of David," the interesting question of whether this Old World symbol was known in ancient America must be given a provisional answer in the affirmative.

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There are two questions still to be answered. Assuming for the present that this Jewish symbol was, indeed, known in ancient America—specifically at least among the Mayas of Uxmal in the Late Classic period (c. AD 650-950)—when and how was it brought to America from the Old World?

The first thing we should note is that, although this symbol was known in the Old World from ancient times, there is no evidence of its use as an iconographic motif in the *early* periods of antiquity corresponding to those of the beginnings of the ancient civilizations of the New World; i.e., in the preclassical periods before 500 BC. In fact, the earliest known examples of the hexagram in the Old World have been found in the ancient Jewish religious art of Palestine dating only to the final periods of the Diaspora—in carvings on tombs and ossuaries of the Maccabean period (167-53 BC) and the ruins of buildings of the Roman period.<sup>17</sup> (For two of these examples from late antiquity in the Old World see Figs. 21 and 22.)



Figs. 21-23. Star motifs in ancient Jewish art, Roman period. 21, simple hexagram or "Star of David," cut into the stone pavement of the courtyard of the Antonia Fortress at Jerusalem; 22, elaborate hexagram, part of a sculptured frieze on the synagogue at Capernaum—it is within a ropelike ring, or torque, with all its points touching the latter, its sides interlaced but continuing beyond the points of intersection and connecting so as to form the inner side of the ring, and a small ring or concentric circles in its center; 23, five-pointed star—"Seal of Solomon"—from the same frieze at Capernaum, also within a ropelike ring and with its points or sides interlaced. Fig. 21 from a drawing by William Bolin, in Samuel Terrien, *Lands of the Bible*, 1957; Fig. 22 after Reifenberg, *op. cit.*, p. 100, Fig. 1; Fig. 23 from *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, 7th ed., Fig. 405.

In other words, the assumed "Star of David" in Maya iconography was probably brought to Mesoamerica by migrants from the Old World sometime after the beginning of the Maccabean period of Jewish history (second century BC), but before the end of the Late Classic period in Mesoamerica or the period of the only known Mesoamerican example (tenth century AD).

Another star motif, it should be mentioned, also occurs in ancient as well as later Jewish art, namely a *five*-pointed star formed from a pentagon, i.e. a pentacle, usually within a ring with all its points touching the latter and often interlaced like the "Star of David"—a design known as the Seal of Solomon (among Christians, from ancient times, as the Star of Bethlehem) and often confused, in modern references, with the "David" star or hexagram (see e.g. Fig. 23). One of these two Jewish (and Christian) stars may well have been the apparent star emblem of the kings of ancient Israel—chiefly David and Solomon?—referred to in Num. 24:17-19 as the conquering "star out of Jacob" (i.e. Israel). In other words, it is possible that the "Star of David" had a more ancient history of use in the Old World than indicated by present archaeological data.

As for the question of *how* this Jewish and Christian symbol was brought to America from the Old World, there are four possibilities. One is that it was brought over in some unrecorded voyage across the Atlantic from Europe, in the medieval period before the crossings of Columbus—a voyage of Jews fleeing Christian persecution, or of venturing Christian seafarers. The resemblance of the Uxmal star to the "Star of David" or "Creator's Star" of medieval and modern Europe is especially striking; cf. Fig. 19 with Figs. 3 and 20.<sup>18</sup> Such a voyage (if that of a large group of Jews who became influential in Yucatan) would also explain the surprising number of Jewish-like traits among the Mayas of the Post-classic period, according to the evidence of the sixteenth-century writings—Hebrew-like words in the Maya language of that time, the practice of circumcision, the scapegoat ceremony, etc.

A second hypothesis is that the Star among the Jews in Iran after the Diaspora was eventually carried by some of them into India and the Far East, and that from the latter region it was still later carried by venturing seafarers, with Jews among them, to islands of the Pacific and finally across that ocean to America. This explanation has less attraction than the preceding one, chiefly because the "Star of David" has not yet been found in medieval Indian or Far Eastern art. It cannot be ruled out, however, since one of the startling results of recent comparative studies of the ancient civilizations of America with those of India



and eastern Asia is evidence that, around the beginning of the Late Classic period of Mesoamerica (c. AD 650), a group of venturing seafarers from Polynesia and ultimately southeast Asia actually did cross the Pacific to America, and established among the Maya people of that time new ideas in religious architecture and art (Hindu, Cambodian, Chinese), including such iconographic motifs as the Hindu "Makhara monster" and the lotus.<sup>19</sup> Possibly the "Star of David," though of distant west-Asiatic origin, was among these traits apparently introduced from the Far East—we can almost say *probably*, in view of the fact that this star symbol evidently appeared among the Mayas of Yucatan at about the same time as the Hindu and Far Eastern traits.

Still another explanation is that, instead of in a crossing of the ocean from Europe or the Far East in the Middle Ages, the Jewish and Christian symbol was brought to the New World by voyagers across the Atlantic directly from the Near Eastern-Mediterranean region *in one of the periods of its known ancient use*, i.e. the Maccabean or the Roman. If in the Roman period, this would date its appearance in Mesoamerica some centuries—perhaps not too long—before the discovered Uxmal example. That there may, indeed, have been a crossing to America in this earlier time (in fact a crossing by a group of Jews fleeing from the Romans!) is suggested by a number of finds in Mexico and the United States which have generally been ignored by professional archaeologists; principally, a figurine in the Roman-Hellenistic style of the second and third centuries AD, found inside the ancient pyramid at Calixtlahuaca in central Mexico in 1960;<sup>20</sup> a stone inscribed in the Hebrew script of the Roman period and dating to the second century AD (actually c. AD 135, the time of the second Jewish rebellion against Rome), dug out of an untouched burial mound at Bat Creek, Tennessee, in 1885;<sup>21</sup> and ancient Jewish coins also inscribed in the Hebrew script of the Roman period and dating to the second century AD (c. AD 135), unearthed at various places in Kentucky in 1936, 1952, and 1967.<sup>22</sup>

Finally there is the possibility, previously noted, that the hexagram or "Star of David" had a greater antiquity in the Old World than indicated by present archaeological data; i.e., was in fact the apparent emblem in ancient Israel referred to as the "star out of Jacob." On this possibility the symbol's occurrence among the ancient Mayas of Yucatan could be explained as the result of an oceanic crossing from the Near East to Mesoamerica at an even earlier date than that in the third hypothesis; i.e., the crossing (or one of the crossings) from the Near East before 500 BC strongly suggested by the many preclassical Near

Eastern parallels in the ancient American civilizations which we partially listed above in the introduction of this paper. It must be admitted, however, that this is the least likely explanation of the hexagram at Uxmal: it would date the symbol's appearance in Mesoamerica much too long—at least a thousand years—before the only discovered example in that area.

In conclusion, although the "Star of David" at Uxmal is not direct evidence of an Old World origin of the ancient American civilizations (since it appeared far too late in their history), it does add to the evidence of occasional transoceanic voyages to the New World before Columbus, even from as early as the beginning of those civilizations.<sup>23</sup>

*Postscript.* It will be noted from the preceding that students of the Book of Mormon, an account of ancient Near Easterners coming to the New World and developing the earliest civilizations of Mesoamerica, cannot—at the present—claim the "Star of David" at Uxmal as evidence specifically supporting that account. In the first place the *latest* of the Book of Mormon peoples from the Near East, the "Mulekites" (a people of Judean Israelite and probably also Phoenician origin) are indicated to have come to Mesoamerica as early as the sixth century BC; i.e., long before the earliest known appearance of the hexagram among the Jews in the Old World. And secondly the Uxmal star dates to a time *long after* the period of the Book of Mormon civilizations (the archaeological "Preclassic" period), and in fact is more easily explained as one of the complex of Old World traits apparently introduced into Mesoamerica from Europe or the Far East around the beginning of the Late Classic period.

This rather negative conclusion for members of the "Mormon" Church should not be disturbing, however. Findings of this kind should be valued by them almost as much as those which tend to confirm the Book of Mormon account; for they protect the student and teacher of the Book of Mormon, as well as the missionary using archaeological evidence bearing on the Book's historical claims, from making false statements and thus embarrassing the Church.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Apparently only two or three such gods are represented or symbolized in the earlier iconography of Mesoamerica—Olmec, Early and Classic Maya, etc.—but definitely many in the late, especially Mixtec and Aztec, and many named and described in the early post-Columbian Indian and Spanish writings. In the ancient Near East, belief in anthropomorphic gods was more characteristic of the peoples of western Asia—the Sumerians, Babylonians and Assyrians, Canaanites and Phoenicians, Israelites, Medes and Persians, etc.—than the Egyptians, many of whose gods are represented in an animal or half animal-half

- human form. (The apparent hybrid forms of gods often seen in ancient Mesoamerican art and the hieroglyphic books—always a human body with a grotesquely animal face—are quite surely [as indicated in the early Indian and Spanish writings] representations of one particular anthropomorphic god, the principal deity in the worship of the Mesoamericans, with his true face covered with various zoomorphic masks—usually jaguar, tapir, or bird—which symbolized his various aspects; see also below, the third listed parallel.)
2. See also, e.g., Paul Henning, "Comments on the Religion of the Toltecs," *Bulletin of the University Archaeological Society*, No. 5 (Provo, Utah, 1954), pp. 16-21.
  3. Clearly a very arbitrary parallel, since not only complex—a correspondence in many aspects or details—but also because the universal worship of a beneficent rain god in ancient Mesoamerica is unexpected, in view of the excessive—at times even destructive—rainfall in much of this area. The early post-Columbian Mayas of Yucatan, themselves, recognized the remarkable parallel of their life god, "the Lord Itzamna," to the life god of the Christians, "the Lord Jesus Christ," and identified Itzamna with Christ. Cf. Newsletter, 78.2, 91.32, 94.4.
  4. Cf. Newsletter, 60.50.
  5. A fairly arbitrary parallel: the fertility goddess at least in late Maya and Aztec religion was primarily (in a young aspect) goddess of sexual love and childbirth, and secondarily also of weaving and—strangely—war; was connected with the moon and the planet Venus; and was commonly represented by unclad female figurines of baked clay—all just as the young fertility goddess at least in Mesopotamian and Canaanite-Phoenician religion.
  6. Paralleled more the belief of the Egyptians as to the afterlife but in part also that of the peoples of western Asia.
  7. See also, e.g., Tim M. Tucker, "A Comparative Study of Ancient Mesoamerican and Mesopotamian Temple-Towers," *Papers of the Fifteenth Annual Symposium on the Archaeology of the Scriptures*, BYU Extension Publications, Provo, 1964, pp. 79-89.
  8. In the later Mesoamerican arts this tree is always conventionalized into the form of a cross, but there is no doubt that it is a symbol of life (and not the Christian cross, as supposed by some popular writers): it is almost always ornamented with or accompanied by water and fertility or life symbols; it is usually in the form of a Tau cross, which was a common Mesoamerican sign for life; it is sometimes in the form of a cross-shaped maize plant, the staple food plant of ancient Mesoamerica; and it is explicitly called, by the Aztec historian Ixtlilxochitl, the "tree of sustenance or life." Its connection with the life god, moreover, is established by its association with symbols of that deity; e.g., the "bird-serpent"—a quetzal-bird with serpent jaws, a symbol of Quetzalcóatl—seen perched on top of the cross-shaped tree on the "Tablet of the Cross" at Palenque. Nevertheless, a tree as a symbol of life in ancient Mesoamerica cannot by itself be considered an arbitrary or unexpected parallel.
  9. A winged man alone cannot be considered an arbitrary parallel. But the occurrence of *two* such figures with the tree of life on Stela 5, Izapa, in the manner of the two genii or cherubim with that tree in ancient Near Eastern art, is definitely an arbitrary parallel, difficult to explain as accidental. See also Irene Briggs Woodford, "The 'Tree of Life' in Ancient America; its Representations and Significance," *Bulletin of the University Archaeological Society*, No. 4 (Provo, Utah, 1953), pp. 1-18; M. Wells Jakeman, *The Complex "Tree-of-Life" Carving on Izapa Stela 5; a Reanalysis and Partial Interpretation* (Brigham Young University, Publications in Archaeology and Early History, Mesoamerican Series, No. 4), Provo, Utah, 1958.
  10. For fuller listings of Old World, particularly ancient Near Eastern, correspondences—or apparent correspondences—that have so far been found in the ancient Mesoamerican civilizations, in all categories of culture, see e.g. Thomas Stuart Ferguson, *One Fold and One Shepherd*, San Francisco, 1958; R. M. Adams, *The Evolution of Urban Society: Early Mesopotamia and Pre-Hispanic Mexico*, Chicago, 1966; and John L. Sorenson, "The Significance of an Apparent Relationship between the Ancient Near East and Mesoamerica," in Carroll L. Riley *et al.*, eds., *Man across the Sea; Problems of Pre-Columbian Contacts*, Austin, 1971, pp. 219-241. Many of the correspondences in these listings need further documentation and critical study. (Most of the important iconographic parallels in the present listing are from a detailed study of the chronology and iconography of the earliest—"Preclassic-period"—arts of Mesoamerica by the writer, now nearly completed for publication.)
  11. See e.g. *The Deseret News*, March 23, 1971, pp. 1 and 3.
  12. See e.g. Louis Colas, *La Tombe Basque: Recueil d'Inscriptions funéraires et domestiques du Pays Basque Français, Atlas d'Illustrations*, Biarritz, 1923.
  13. The "imbricated-year," "trapeze-ray," or "year-bearer indicator" sign of other writers.
  14. *Annual Report of the US Bureau of Ethnology for 1881-1882*, Washington, 1883, Pl. 57, No. 5; reproduced in Count Goblet d'Alviella, *The Migration of Symbols*, London, 1894, Fig. 128; also reproduced, and briefly discussed, in Ferguson, *op. cit.*, pp. 116-118.
  15. See e.g. Ex. 19:16-17; Judg. 5:4; Jer. 51:16; and especially Ps. 104:13-14; also, for Yahweh as the god of waters as the source of all life, Gen. 1:2, 6-7, 9-10, 20-21.
  16. At any rate, this was the secondary meaning of well-known iconographic motifs in Mesoamerican art having the same or a similar primary meaning, e.g. the jaguar mask (abbreviation of the Olmec version of the "water monster"; primary meaning: water; see also this motif in the list of Near Eastern parallels above in the introduction of this paper), the feathered-serpent (*quetzal-coatl* in the Nahuatl language of the Aztecs; primary meaning: fertility), and the tree of life (primary meaning: abundance of plant food, divine sustenance, or life).
  17. See A. Reifenberg, *Ancient Hebrew Arts*, New York, 1950, p. 100.
  18. The resemblance even extends to the fanlike pennated tail; for in the European example in Fig. 20 there is also a fanlike tail, which though not composed of feathers is carved with a cross patée, a motif apparently having, in part, the same meaning in ancient Near Eastern and Christian (as well as Mesoamerican) iconography as feathers—usually representing green quetzal feathers—in ancient Mesoamerican art (see also this motif in the list of iconographic parallels in the introduction of this paper).
  19. See e.g. Robert von Heine-Geldern and Gordon F. Ekholm, "Significant Parallels in the Symbolic Arts of Southern Asia and Middle America," in Sol Tax, ed., *The Civilizations of Ancient America*, Chicago, 1951, pp. 299-309; Gordon F. Ekholm, "A Possible Focus of Asiatic Influence in the Late Classic Cultures of Mesoamerica," in

- Marian W. Smith, comp., *Asia and North America: Transpacific Contacts* (Memoirs of the Society for American Archaeology, No. 9, 1953), pp. 72-89; Ray T. Matheny, "Ancient Chinese-American Contacts? Review of a Series of Articles in the *Bulletin of the Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica*, Taiwan, Dealing with Ancient Cultural Contacts between Asia and America and the Islands of the Pacific," in Ross T. Christensen, ed., *Progress in Archaeology; an Anthology*, Provo, Utah, 1963, pp. 75-79.
20. Robert von Heine-Geldern, "A Roman Find from Pre-Columbian Mexico," *Anthropological Journal of Canada*, Vol. 5. No. 4 (1967), pp. 20-22.
  21. *Annual Report of the US Bureau of Ethnology for 1890-1891*, Washington, 1894, pp. 392-394 and Figs. 272 and 273; see also Cyrus H. Gordon, *Before Columbus: Links Between the Old World and Ancient America*, New York, 1971, pp. 179-182 and 184-187 and photographic reproduction on p. 183.
  22. See Gordon *op. cit.*, pp. 175 and 179 and photographic reproductions on pp. 176-178; also Newsletter 79.0; 125.0, pp. 6-7.
  23. For reviews of the evidence, to date, of ancient crossings of the sea to the New World see especially the following works: Philip Phillips, "The Role of Transpacific Contacts in the Development of New World Pre-Columbian Civilizations," in Robert Wauchope, gen. ed., *Handbook of Middle American Indians*, Vol. IV (Austin, 1966), pp. 296-315; Ross T. Christensen, ed., *Transoceanic Crossings to Ancient America*, Society for Early Historic Archaeology, Provo, Utah, 1970; Gordon, *op. cit.*; and Carroll L. Riley et al, eds., *Man Across the Sea; Problems of Pre-Columbian Contacts*, Austin, 1971.

130.1 **SYMPOSIUM ANNOUNCED.** The SEHA Board of Trustees has set the date for the Twenty-second Annual Symposium on the Archaeology of the Scriptures and has appointed the Symposium chairman.

The Annual Symposium will be held this year on Saturday, October 28. The chairman is Dr. Ellis T. Rasmussen, assistant dean of the BYU College of Religious Instruction. Dr. Rasmussen has long been an enthusiastic member of the Society. SEHA records show that he first joined in June, 1949, within two months of its founding on April 18.

Dr. Rasmussen has appointed the following to assist him as members of the Symposium Committee: Robert W. Bass, Paul R. Cheesman, Ross T. Christensen, M. Wells Jakeman, Merlin G. Myers, W. Cleon Skousen, Benjamin Urrutia, and Rebecca Christensen (secretary).

Further notice of the October 28 meeting will appear in forthcoming issues of the *Newsletter and Proceedings*.

130.2 **RENOWNED DIFFUSIONIST TO TAKE PART IN SYMPOSIUM.** Dr. David H. Kelley, prominent authority on ancient American origins, will participate as the guest speaker at the forthcoming Twenty-second Annual Symposium on the Archaeology of the Scrip-

tures, according to Dr. Ellis T. Rasmussen, newly appointed chairman (see above, 130.1).

Dr. Kelley is a faculty member in the Department of Archaeology at the University of Calgary in Alberta, Canada. His doctoral training was in the Department of Anthropology at Harvard University. But despite his early exposure to traditional Americanist views, he has since become a leading proponent of the minority Diffusionist school.

"Diffusionism" is the view that the early high civilizations of native America arose in response to contacts from a center or centers of advanced civilization in the Old World. The opposing "Isolationist" or "Independent Inventionist" view, on the other hand, holds that the early American civilizations came into being as the result of a slow, stepwise process of cultural accretion that took place within the New World itself, without important contacts from the Old World. Most Americanist scholars, at least since about 1900, have been Independent Inventionists.

Dr. Kelley is not a Latter-day Saint, nor is he affiliated with any organized religious body. It is understood that he will select a topic for his address which will enable students of the Book of Mormon to consider their special view of New World origins against the background of Diffusionism in general.

SEHA members will recall that previous guest speakers at the Annual Symposium have been Dr. Cyrus H. Gordon in 1970 ("America and the Ecumene of the Old Testament," Newsletter, 125.0) and Joseph Ginat in 1971 ("The Cave at Khirbet Beit Lei," Newsletter, 129.0).

130.3 **SEHA MEMBERS INVITED TO PREPARE PAPERS.** SEHA members are invited to prepare papers for possible reading at the forthcoming Twenty-second Annual Symposium on the Archaeology of the Scriptures (see above, 130.1), according to Dr. Ellis T. Rasmussen, recently appointed chairman.

A printed letter dated May 23 has been mailed to all Society members. "If you can accept this invitation," writes Dr. Rasmussen, "please send us a one-page abstract or summary of your proposed paper by September 1. . . ."

Papers chosen for reading at the day-long archaeology meeting, to be held on October 28, should contain some contribution to the archaeology of the Bible, the Book of Mormon, or the Pearl of Great Price. Twenty minutes' reading time is allowed in each case. Any paper read at the Symposium becomes the property of the Society. From time to time selected papers are afterwards published in the *Newsletter and Proceedings* at the discretion of the editor.