



BOOK OF MORMON CENTRAL

<http://bookofmormoncentral.org/>

Type: Newsletter

U.A.S. Newsletter, no. 17 (January 18, 1954)

Editors(s): Bruce W. Warren and Dee Green

Published by: University Archaeological Society, Brigham Young University

U. A. S. NEWSLETTER

Number 17

January 18, 1954

Published by THE UNIVERSITY ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY
Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah

Editor: Bruce W. Warren

Assistant Editor: Dee Green

17.0 Early Archaeological Sequences in Highland Guatemala, a review by John L. Sorenson. A recent journal contains an article of extreme interest to those concerned with the archaeology of the earliest phases of highland Guatemala (correlated by several LDS students with the land of Nephi). The article (Edwin M. Shook, "Lugares Arqueológicos del Altiplano Meridional Central de Guatemala," Antropología e Historia de Guatemala, Vol. 4, No. 2, pp. 3-40, June, 1952) is by the archaeologist most experienced in the materials of the area around Guatemala City. It details data obtained in a surface survey of over 100 sites, most of which have been unpublished until now. Of these no fewer than twelve were inhabited in the Las Charcas, or oldest discovered, phase of the area. The position of Las Charcas is seen in the accompanying table to be of vital importance in Book of Mormon considerations.

- III. Early Classic Period.....200?-500? AD
 - 2. Esperanza Phase
 - 1. Aurora Phase
- II. Late Pre-Classic Period.....200? BC-200? AD
 - 4. Santa Clara Phase
 - 3. Arenal Phase
 - 2. Miraflores (Verbena) Phase
 - 1. Providencia-Sacatepéquez Phase
- I. Early Pre-Classic Period.....700?-200? BC
 - 3. Majadas Phase
 - 2. Arévalo Phase
 - 1. Las Charcas Phase

(Shook dates Las Charcas at "approximately" 2000-1800 BC, but a number of considerations make the dates in our table more likely, as given by Borhegyi, another leading authority on this material.)

Characteristics of this earliest, Las Charcas, phase include constructions of ceremonial or at least astronomical significance, consisting of a row (three or more) of pyramidal mounds, often connected by low platforms, on the west side of a plaza which was often sunken; while across the plaza at the base of a low platform stood from one to perhaps sixty unsculptured large stones. The alignment of the stones in rows parallel to the line of mounds probably had astronomical significance. The axis of these complexes invariably lies from 19 to 21 degrees east of north.

Construction was almost universally of earth or adobe. Surfaces of mounds were protected by adobe brick or wet-smoothed adobe. Stone was ap-

parently not used in any construction. Evidence was frequently found that structures of perishable materials had stood atop some mounds. Pottery was of high quality, usually in styles of red, grey, and chestnut colors. The three- and four-legged pottery vessels so common in later phases were not found in Las Charcas.

Figurines of baked clay were solid, hand-modeled, and with a white slip or outer coloring. They were in fine naturalistic style. The famed Mesoamerican jade mosaic may have been known, as well as such features as both stamp and cylinder seals, incense burners, a "mushroom stone" (symbolic or ceremonial object), and grinding stones without legs. Animal and plant remains have been recovered but no identification of the species has yet been made.

A number of interesting comparisons are possible between this material and that of the ancient Near East. When more information is available from Guatemala (more will be published shortly), several types of studies may prove of immense importance to Book of Mormon students in relating the above-listed periods and phases to the Book of Mormon sequence.

- 17.1 Abraham and the Famine at Ur. Abraham was 62 years old when he left Haran to enter Canaan (Abr. 3:14) and, after a detailed consideration of all the available evidence relative to this event, it has been dated at about 1935 BC (Jack Finegan, Light From the Ancient Past, pp. 57-61). Working from this date, Abraham's birth can be dated about 1997 BC. Sometime in Abraham's adult life and a few years before 1935 BC, while he was still in Ur, a severe "famine prevailed throughout all the land of Chaldea". At this time Abraham married Sarai, daughter of his brother Haran, Haran having died as a result of the famine. Abraham then left Ur to go to Canaan but stopped first for a while in the land he designated Haran (Abr. 1:29-30, 2:1-5, 3:14-15).

The city of Ur fell to the Elamite peoples from the eastern highlands about 1945 BC and its last native ruler Ibbi-Suen was carried captive to the land of Elam. Abraham must have left Ur shortly before its fall and during the reign of Ibbi-Suen, who ruled 25 years (1969-1945 BC). If this identification is correct there should be historical evidence of a famine during Ibbi-Suen's reign. Such appears to be the case. In Ibbi-Suen's fifth year the Martu (peoples from the west) broke through the outer defenses of his empire and were threatening the heart of the land. "That the Martu break-through was in fact a catastrophe, militarily, administratively, and--worst of all--economically, cannot be doubted. It would act to isolate the major cities of the country from each other and from the capital; the people, forced to seek protection behind city walls, had to abandon their fields to the invaders. Coming at the time it did, just after the harvest, the fields could not be made ready for cultivation that year and a severe famine was accordingly to be expected." Thorkild Jacobsen, ("The Reign of Ibbi-Suen," Journal of Cuneiform Studies, Vol. 7, p. 41, 1953). The famine began in Ibbi-Suen's sixth year and was upon the people in full measure by the seventh and eighth years (for instance the price of grain was 60 times normal). Ibbi-Suen's organization began crumbling around him and this, the greatest and best organized empire prior to that of the Assyrians, fell a few short years later.

- 17.2 True Arch. One of the arguments often used by scholars who fail to see any connection between Old World civilizations and those of ancient America is the absence of the true arch in the architecture of the latter.

Linton Satterthwaite (University Museum, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania) reviewed a publication in American Antiquity, (Vol. 10, No. 2, pp. 216-218, 1944) entitled Archaeological Reconnaissance in Campeche, Quintana Roo, and Petén, by Karl Ruppert and John H. Denison, Jr. (Carnegie Institution of Washington, Publication 543, 1943) in which he states: "It has been usual to suppose that the principle of the true arch was unknown to the American Indian, though here and there in some particular structure it has been argued that the principle, though not obvious, was really present. If the reader will turn to Figures 22 and 23 and Plates 3b and 4a of this report I believe he will have no doubts that the Maya at La Muñeca roofed a long room with with the true arch, and that they knew exactly what they were doing. For text comment see pages 8 and 26." The reason the ancient high civilizations did not often employ the true arch is apparently not because they did not know how but because of factors upon which we can only speculate. The principle of the true arch can no longer be used as an argument against the Old and New World cultural contacts in pre-Colombian times.

17.3 Suggested Research Topics. As an aid to UAS members who desire to carry on individual research projects the following topics are suggested. They are varied in their nature in order to appeal to and fit with the members' various backgrounds and professions:

- (1) Diseases in both hemispheres, for example, typhus and syphilis.
- (2) Religious symbolism in the art of the Near East and ancient America: various animals, hand, weeping eye, serpents, etc.
- (3) Ancient boats and navigation.
- (4) Patterns of warfare and weapons used in both hemispheres.
- (5) Games and sports in both hemispheres.
- (6) Tobacco and pipes in ancient America.
- (7) Masticated-grain beverages in both hemispheres.
- (8) Trepanation in both hemispheres.
- (9) "White Indians".
- (10) Flora of the Mesoamerican and Andean regions.
- (11) Fauna of the Mesoamerican and Andean regions.
- (12) Geology of the Mesoamerican and Andean regions.
- (13) Geography of the Mesoamerican and Andean regions.

In order to do research on any of these problems it will be necessary to have library facilities and in some instances exchange privileges with other libraries. Some help may also be obtained from the office of the Society at BYU.

17.4 Campus Chapter Elections. H. Glen Palmer, of Raymond, Alberta, Canada, was re-elected president of the Campus Chapter at the quarterly business meeting held January 13. Dee Green, of Salt Lake City, was elected vice-president, and Barbara Keast, of Hartford, Connecticut, secretary.

17.5 Improvement Era Series. In the January, 1954, issue of the Improvement Era there appears the first of a series of articles entitled, "In the Steps of Abraham". The author, Stanley Kimball, is a member of the UAS. After his mission to Czechoslovakia and Great Britain, Elder Kimball went to Egypt and Jerusalem to study, and there conceived his plan to travel over the very route of Father Abraham.