



FOUNDATION FOR RESEARCH ON ANCIENT AMERICA

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NEWSLETTER NO. 13

August 22, 1972

Greetings:

Our thanks go to all of you who have responded to our invitation to accept membership in the Foundation, with a view to expanding the spread of the Book of Mormon in Latin countries, for which funds will obviously be needed. Your membership provides these funds, and we have purchased a supply of the Book of Mormon in Spanish for this purpose. We have written to our appointees and local church men in a number of South and Central American countries and Mexico, hoping to be able to enlist their services in gaining contacts with libraries in those areas. It is a bit too early to say what the responses will be, but one encouraging note comes from James Christenson who has recently returned from a trip to Honduras. He successfully approached two of the major librarians in that country and was able to place copies of the Book of Mormon in the North American-Honduran Bi-National Center and Library at San Pedro Sula, and in the National University Library of Tegucigalpa. Brother Christenson is to make another trip to Honduras in October, he tells us, and is willing to take more copies of the Book of Mormon with him with the hope and expectation of placing them in good libraries.

To each of our members and friends we extend good wishes and sincere hopes that your own interest in the Book of Mormon and the use of it in study and research continues.

Our thanks go to Leta Moriarty for the preparation of this newsletter.

--T.D.S.

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PROGRESS OF THE CHURCH IN LATIN AMERICA

- (1) 1959 - first regular church services of our church in Latin America begin, at Matamoros, Mexico, opposite Brownsville.
- (2) 1950-1959 - first missionary work of the church, officially, toward Latin America, with formation of the "Latin America Project" in 1950, assignment of Apostle Charles R. Hield in charge, and of Elder (later Seventy) Wayne Simmons. By 1952, selection of the Texas-Mexico border area of the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas as point of concentration. First baptisms of persons of Mexican descent began in that area. By 1954, second appointee assigned to "project", Seventy Clair Weldon. 1956, Elder Robert Turner replaced Brother Simmons. 1958, Seventy Robert Fishburn replaced Brother Turner. Missionary work on U.S. side, plus first contacts across the border in Mexico, took place during this period.

- (3) 1960 - First missionary takes up residence in Mexico (Seventy Robert Fishburn at Saltillo); church activities in Mexico expand from Matamoros to include missions at Saltillo and Reynosa. Seventy Vernon Peterson (then Elder) assigned to Reynosa.
- (4) 1963 - first reunion for persons of Spanish-speaking descent, at Bandera, Texas.
- (5) 1964 - first reunion held in Mexico itself (Saltillo).
- (6) During this general period, beginnings of our church's activity elsewhere in Latin America: Dr. Blumenschein and family to Honduras in late 1950's, Stewart Wight family to Lima, Peru in early 1960's, both influential in beginning church work in those countries.

Summary of Present Church Progress in Latin America (Excluding Brazil)

- (1) Almost 500 church members (most with some Indian racial background).
- (2) Officially-opened national missions of the church in Mexico, Peru, and Argentina, among Spanish-speaking countries of Latin America.
- (3) Four church-built or owned church facilities (Matamoros has two, one in Reynosa, one in Mexico City), and another being built in Lima, Peru.
- (4) Four U.S. seventies assigned (2 in Mexico, 1 in Peru, 1 in Argentina) and three national ministers (full-time church-supported nationals of their country) in Mexico, including two elders and one seventy, our first seventy of Latin American background.
- (5) A number of elders, priests, and deacons in our congregations in Latin America.
- (6) Developing spiritual maturity in the gospel by persons now receiving the restored gospel, as promised in the Book of Mormon, through the dedication of the "Gentiles" or North American members of the church, in several countries of Latin America.
- (7) By happenstance or design, our largest concentration of members, and our major thrust at present, are in the two countries with largest Indian groups: Mexico and Peru.

--Clair Weldon

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"MYSTERIOUS FORGOTTEN RACES"

Mrs. Pearl Kinnaman, of St. Joseph, Missouri, who has researched numerous Book of Mormon subjects, calls our attention to information concerning the "mysterious forgotten races," as set out in Old Civilizations of the New World by A. Hyatt Verrill, The New Home Library, New York, copyright 1929-1943, (p.257): "The most ancient races . . . appear to have been the most highly civilized. There are no traces of a gradual evolution of their culture, no stepping stones, as it were, from savagery or barbarism which can be credited to these races. Their only known remains prove them most highly advanced and civilized people, each distinct from all others, and presenting the greatest archaeological puzzle of the entire world." (Remains are found in Colombia, South America).

THE OLMEC CIVILIZATION

Americas (Washington, D.C.), vol. 23, No. 6-7, June-July, 1971, gives considerable space to Pre-Columbian America, picturing and discussing "The Newest Ancient Art" by Jane H. Kay, p. S-16, and other phases of Mesoamerican civilization.

Of special interest is the article, "The Olmec: America's First Civilization," by Marion Stirling, p. S-23. "Their 'empire' spread to Guerrero and the Pacific on the west and through Guatemala, El Salvador, and perhaps Costa Rica on the south-east," the author states. "They influenced later civilizations. . . . To achieve what they did, they must have had accomplished artists, engineers and scientists." They had a calendar, writing, some knowledge of astronomy, and political and religious organization.

The Olmec are best known for their remarkable stone sculpture. Colossal stone heads ranging from five feet to ten feet are the most impressive and best known features of Olmec culture. "There are 12 known colossal heads: two from Tres Zapotes, four from La Venta, and six from San Lorenzo. Some of these giant heads have toured the United States and such European cities as Rome, Moscow and Paris. Pictures of them have appeared in many magazines advertising travel in Mexico.

The heads are carved from basalt. They are thought to represent portraits of leaders or gods. The largest has been estimated to weigh 50 tons. The nearest basalt from which the huge stone monuments were carved is 50 miles away by air line, according to the writer.

A photograph of the Tres Zapotes head on exhibit at Jalapa, Mexico appears in Roy E. Weldon's book, The Book of Mormon Evidences Joseph Smith a Prophet (1970).

"Tombs with rich offerings of jade were constructed to contain the remains of important individuals," the author continues on p. S-25. "The Olmec seemed to make a point of having no two tombs alike. Most unusual was a tomb of basalt columns containing the bones of two infants, and a treasure trove of jade offerings buried in cinnabar.

"A sandstone sarcophagus with lid, in the form of a stylized jaguar, also contained jade offerings and was unique in Mexico until the sarcophagus in the Palenque tomb was found.

"In a slab-lined stone cyst, jade ornaments were arranged as if placed on a burial. Still another rich tomb was covered by eleven basalt columns laid horizontally above. Among the treasures deposited in the tombs were objects of jade, quartz crystal, amethyst, turquoise, obsidian, limonite, magnetite, amber and pyrites.

"Human figures represented on large stone monuments are usually males, wearing enormous headdresses, bead necklaces, and ornaments."

From Rochester, New York, Miss Jeri Ann Gracie, sends us "America's First Civilization, The Olmec," printed in Fate Magazine, Highland Park, Illinois, July, 1972. The author of this article, David Techter, bases his writing on the Marion Stirling article in Americas, but gives additional information concerning the discovery of this ancient civilization in the tropical lowlands of the Mexican states of Veracruz and Tabasco. He refers to Mexican anthropologist Ignacio Bernal.

Mr. Bernal estimates the Olmec culture at its height must have numbered some 350,000 persons; that agriculture was the mainstay of the economy. Olmec accomplishments suggest the existence of specialized artisans, sculptors and lapidarists. In addition to

their ability to carve gigantic monuments, the Olmec were the greatest craftsmen in jade in the New World. The carvings are masterpieces.

Mr. Techter answers the question: "Fra Bernardino de Sahagun, a monk, who accompanied the conquistadores in the days of Cortez, recorded an Aztec legend which told of the ancestors of the Mexican people arriving from across the water and landing in northern Veracruz province, then moving southward to found the city of Tamoanchan, led by the wise men who possessed 'the writings, the books, the paintings.' Scholars have questioned the authenticity of this tale, partly because the name of the city is meaningless in Aztec. But Michael D. Coe (archaeologist, Yale University) points out that in Mayan, Tamoanchan has two possible meanings, either 'land of the bird-snake' (that is, the Feathered Serpent) or 'land of the rainy day,' either of which would be appropriate for Olmec land."

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CALL TO THE BOOK OF MORMON

"The Reformation and Protestantism commenced with the battle cry, 'Back to the Bible.' Because of the tremendously vital relevancy of the Book of Mormon's message to issues and questions with which our church, our nation, and our Christian world are now wrestling, it appears high time we were heeding the admonition of the Lord, through the prophet Joseph Smith concerning the Book of Mormon." So states Elder Roy E. Weldon, of Warrensburg, Missouri, in his book, The Nephite Prophets Speak to Our Day, Herald Publishing House (1970), p. 11.

Here is the admonition: "And your minds in times past have been darkened because of unbelief, and because you have treated lightly the things you have received, which vanity and unbelief hath brought the whole church under condemnation.

"And this condemnation resteth upon the children of Zion, even all; and they shall remain under this condemnation until they repent and remember the new covenant, even the Book of Mormon and the former commandments which I have given them, not only to say, but to do according to that which I have written" (Doctrine and Covenants 83:8)

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MONKS MOUND IN ILLINOIS

Larger by three times than the Great Pyramid of Cheops in Egypt, stands Monks Mound, greatest of the mysterious Indian mounds near the town of Cahokia, Illinois. The mounds --all but some 60-- now included in Cahokia Mounds State Park represent the remnants of a culture perhaps a thousand years old. Their story --as much as is known to archaeologists --is told by Anita Notdurft in Dodge News Magazine (Detroit, Michigan) May, 1972.

Monks Mound, possibly the largest single architectural undertaking by prehistoric man on the North American continent, rises 100 feet above the flats around it, according to the author. It covers 16 acres and on its plateau-type top, evidence is being revealed of the presence of what could have been a temple or a central public building. "It would have been 130 feet long and 65 feet wide. Was it perhaps, the center of an Acropolis-type collection of buildings?" she asks. This center of culture may have drawn nearly 100,000 people together in a prehistoric metropolis to live, till the earth, worship, and even make war.

Some scientists suggest the Cahokia mounds area was a favorite gathering place for Indians on their journeys up and down the Mississippi, perhaps even a crossroads of culture and of a limited prehistoric trade. "The dimensions of the mounds, visible for many miles along the flat countryside, would have made them obvious points of reference for such a trade route," Miss Notdurft states.

It is thought that the village on and around the mounds was inhabited by a pretty lively civilization between 800 and 1500 A.D. Much of the excavation work at the mounds has been undertaken only within recent decades. Now the land is becoming attractive to a present-day society which seeks to build roads, supermarkets and housing developments. Much building may be done in the shadows of Cahokia Mounds. Diggers have uncovered the remains of many Indians, some of these in what has been described as a mass sacrificial burial site. Carbon dating places the date of sacrifice at about 1000 A.D.

Why were these mounds built? "Perhaps they were a ceremonial center of worship to the sun god, a kind of prehistoric Mecca. There is evidence that a sort of perpetual flame was kept burning atop one mound, perhaps a tribute to the sun god," states the author.

"The archaeologists searching the mounds area were surprised to find that by using Stonehenge-type calculations they were able to establish the beginnings of some patterns to the layout of the various mounds themselves," the article continues. "They found what appeared to be monuments oriented to the sun and stars."

Whatever the purpose for building the mounds, their designers spared no costs in human labor and time in constructing them. It is estimated that to build Monks Mound alone, would have taken 1,000 laborers five years. With few tools of sophistication, the work must have been tremendous.

No fewer than 100,000 Indian mounds are scattered across the Mid-West landscape. Most are smaller than those at Cahokia; none is as large as Monks Mound.

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"SOILS AND THE MAYA"

"Soils and the Maya" in Americas (Washington, D.C.), vol. 24, No. 1, Jan. 1972, p. 33, is a report of a soil study around an ancient city, to find out how ancient peoples may have been influenced by this important environmental resource. "Although the ancient Maya apparently abandoned the great ceremonial centers of the southern lowlands more than a thousand years ago, structures and artifacts in the soils and even the soils themselves remain to tell us much about how the people lived," state the authors, Gerald W. Olson and Dennis E. Puleston. Mr. Olson is Assistant Professor of Soil Science in Resource Development in the Department of Agronomy, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York and Mr. Puleston is Assistant Professor of Anthropology at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.

Tikal in Guatemala was built on a series of low limestone hills, with construction starting as early as 2,500 years ago, they write. "The population of the central area has been estimated to have been at least 10,000 people. Ruins of buildings constructed of limestone blocks and earth and rubble fill are now generally visible as mounds covered by soils and tropical rainforest. More than 3,000 separate constructions have been mapped within the six square miles of central Tikal."

Ruins at Tikal cluster on silty upland soils that have limestone bedrock at shallow depths. These soils have good foundation support characteristics, the authors recount.

On the other hand, soils in the lowland seasonal swamps generally lack evidence of construction activities. "Soil examinations indicate why they were avoided as construction sites -- the soils are sticky clays that shrink and swell with drying and wetting. Although the Maya avoided those soils for building they may well have farmed them rather intensively. . . ."

"Soils at Tikal are generally fertile, but the fertility declines when the soils are cleared and cropped. The natural fertility of the soils helps to explain how the Maya were able to produce the large food surplus that enabled them to channel so much of their energy into their architectural achievements."

With increased clearing and cropping, as the population grew, it is the belief of the authors that soil fertility and crop yields declined where soils were exposed by open-field cultivation. There is evidence, however, that soils in residential areas would have been protected by shade and fruit trees, including the ramon tree, which may have produced a staple crop. Indeed, the tree crops may indicate attempts by the ancient people to manage their declining soil resources better.

Soil erosion at Tikal was a problem, particularly in areas where large-scale construction was going on. "Some soils appear to have had most of their topsoil removed down to the limestone bedrock, and even today (a thousand years later) have only thin surface layers to support plant life. In some reservoirs many feet of sediments, eroded from topsoil of upland soils, have accumulated. Pottery fragments are mixed with these. . . ."

"The Tikal example of soil resource utilization provides an example worthy of note by modern planners," conclude the authors. "Though decline in soil fertility and soil erosion may have been a contributing factor in the Maya collapse, 1500 years of growth suggests that these people knew much about the successful utilization of the resources of the tropical forests. The remains of the Maya cities clearly indicate the tremendous long-term potential of these regions under careful management. . . . The lesson that Tikal may be able to provide us is that success and careful management are closely related and we must learn from the successes as well as the failures of those who have gone before us. . . ."

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