

FOUNDATION FOR RESEARCH ON ANCIENT AMERICA

NEWSLETTER No. 6

March 15, 1970

Dear Friends,

A specific purpose in sending forth this newsletter at this time is to give you this personal invitation to attend the meeting of the Foundation of Research on Ancient America during the World Conference. The meeting will be held immediately after the business session, April 7 (Tuesday), in the Music Room. The speaker will be Clair E. Weldon, whose subject will be "Book of Mormon Research for the '70's."

The annual meeting of the Foundation was held in the Stone Church Education Building January 25, 1970, when selection was made of the officers who are to serve for the ensuing year -- Thelona D. Stevens, chairman, Chris B. Hartshorn, vice-chairman, Katherine H. Wilson, secretary, and Frances R. Davidson, treasurer. Committee chairmen remain the same -- Kenneth Raveill, publicity and Audrey Stubbart, manuscripts. Speakers for the afternoon were Charles R. Hield, whose topic was "Age of Quetzacoatl," and James A. Christenson, who spoke on "Modern Impacts of Archaeology." Both speakers gave highly stimulating lectures. Attendance was unusually good.

-- T.D.S.

* * * * *

University of Oregon archaeologists, in the spring of 1968, completed a 12-year research project in the reservoir basin of the John Day Dam, in which evidence has been established of ancient human occupation on the Oregon and Washington shores of the Columbia River dating many centuries before the birth of Christ. The story of this project was carried in the Sunday Oregonian, July 28, 1968, and was sent to us by Mrs. Ernest Nelson of Lebanon, Oregon. Dr. Luther J. Cressman, former head of the University's Department of Anthropology, Dr. Arnold Shotwell, director of the University's Museum of Natural History, and David L. Cole, curator of anthropology in the Museum all took active roles in this project, which ended when the reservoir was flooded April 16, 1968.

Over a 76 mile-long area, 84 recorded archaeological sites yielded remains of different types of dwellings extending through centuries of occupation. One house was of stone masonry, dating about 200 A.D. Later houses included communal ceremonial plank houses, with adjacent ceremonial dog burials. Still later were the stepped houses typical of the Columbia Plateau. The most recent houses were small huts built over basin depressions.

Artifacts discovered included harpoons of the type commonly associated with seal hunting, which researchers concluded must have been used for mountain sheep hunting. Aboriginal fish traps and weirs still were in evidence close to the site. At Hobo Cave, investigators uncovered a site that had been occupied most anciently. While there was no evidence of continuous occupation, the site appeared to have been periodically occupied by hunters. At Hook site, occupation was determined to have been about the beginning of the Christian era. A house with log sides was found at this site. Another site, named "Purgatory" because of its unpleasant environment, occupied the researchers three years, during which time they excavated some eight housepits, dating about 200 A.D. These housepits "were of rather spectacular design, bell-shaped--circular on one side and tapered into a flat end. Many carved bone pieces were found at this site, and also one fine sculptured owl lamp." The lamp, in which fish oil might have burned, is considered to be a good example of the formative stages of Columbia River sculpture, according to Mr. Cole. It has been established by carbon-14 dating that the Purgatory site saw occupation for some 1500 years, until around 1700 A.D.

* * * * *

At Tom's Camp site, near Boardman, finished tools were found in a house which dated about 200 A.D., but no tool making evidences were found, which led investigators to believe that the tools were brought to this place from elsewhere. East of Boardman a site was discovered which caused the researchers to believe that the living activities were carried on outside the houses. Large outside hearths were discovered, with rocks arranged for wind shields.

Knives, projectile points, and bone tools, all in excellent condition, were found at a site near Umatilla after extensive excavation.

The oldest house of the project was found on the Lower Blalock Island in the Columbia. The house was probably constructed around 900 to 1000 B.C. Some of the unique bone implements do not resemble other known aboriginal tools.

Another site, at Alderdale, on the Washington side of the river, during three years of research, produced a sequence of houses, dating from 300 to 400 B.C., with some probably older. Vandalism made it impossible to carry on more work here and elsewhere.

Archaeologists theorize that early man settled first along the Oregon shore, where land and weather conditions were more favorable, and then moved across the river, perhaps driven by invaders.

Book of Mormon students might do some theorizing of our own. Some of the early B.C. dates may point to Jaredite occupancy of this area, whereas the dates 200-1700 A.D. would indicate the Nephite-Lamanite periods.

* * * * *

The Liahona described in I Nephi 5:11-35 was a "round ball of curious workmanship; and it was of fine brass, and within the ball were two spindles, and the one pointed the way whither we should go into the wilderness." Alma called it a compass (Alma 17:71).

Hugh W. Nibley, author of Since Cumorah, wrote that he made an exhaustive study of ancient arrow-divination, especially in ancient Israel, and declared, "The shooting of arrows is a universal form of divination, as is evident in the prayers of the legendary heroes of the steppe-Finnish, Norse, and Kakut address of their three enchanted arrows before releasing them, and for instance, in the arrow-prayers of the Indian and Bedouin. . . . The consultation of the arrows by one about to marry was, according to Gaster, an old Jewish custom; the parties concerned would throw rods into the air 'reading their message by the manner of their fall.' This, Gaster observes, is 'tatamount to the shooting of arrows.' Whenever divination arrows are described, they are invariably found to have writing on them. But the original arrangement was that two arrows designated the advisability of a journey; the safr (Go ahead!) and the khadr (Stay where you are!)."

--Since Cumorah, page 283.

Mr. Nibley then quotes T. Fahd: "In view of the importance of religious sentiment in every aspect of the activity of the Arab and of the Semite in general, I do not believe that one can separate these practices (i.e., of arrow-divination) from their consultation of divinity . . . they always believed, however vaguely, in a direct and constant intervention of human affairs." Semitica, VIII (1958, page 71f.

--Quoted in Since Cumorah, page 293.

And Mr. Nibley concludes, "Was the Liahona, then, just old magic? No, it is precisely here that Nephi and Alma are most emphatic -- unlike magic things, these pointers worked solely by the power of God. . . . 'According to the faith, and diligence, and heed, which we give to them'." (I Nephi 5:34)

--Since Cumorah, page 294 (1967) Deseret Book Company, Salt Lake City, 95¢.

* * * * *

As to the chronology of Meso-America, Harry A. B. Robinson of Kerrville, Texas, offers the following:

According to Herbert J. Spinden, curator of the Peabody Museum, Cambridge, Massachusetts, the Mayas of Meso-America invented the Central American calendar in the seventh century before Christ. However, the exact year in which the calendar was inaugurated, when it began keeping successive days and dates, was in the year 580 B.C. This year is recorded in two widely separated sites: at Palenque, Chiapas, Mexico, and at Copan, Honduras. The "Tablet of the Cross" in the Temple of the Inscriptions, at Palenque records the date, in Mayan terminology, 7- 1-3- 4-0, 10 Ahau 13 Yaxkin. This, according to the Gregorian date, that of the present calendar, is May 4, 580 B.C. Altar I, Copan, has the date 7- 1-13- 15-0, 9 Ahau 13 Cumhu, or December 10, 580 B.C. Both of these dates are the year of the inauguration of the Mayan calendar, says Professor Spinden (Reduction of Mayan Dates (1924), publ. by Peabody Museum, pages v, 4, 204).

Prof. Spinden states in the same book (page 11), "The wonderful calendar in the form that it has come down to us must have been the deliberate invention of some individual who made use of traditional materials. It can hardly have been a matter of slow development because its essential structure is arbitrary rather than natural."

The traditional materials of course included the 365-day ancient calendar of Egypt. (See Ploetz' Dictionary of Dates, page 4; also Reduction of Mayan Dates, page 11.) Whereas the Egyptian calendar did not take into account the extra hours of the solar "calendar" year, the Mayan calendar or "day count" does, giving the Mayan calendar 365-plus days. It is in fact more accurate than the present Gregorian calendar in the measurement of time.

Knowledge of the Mayan calendar in areas of the Americas, as Palenque and Copan, or the record of these dates in other areas, becomes a possible identification of the location in which the people of these dates lived. Correlated with the Book of Mormon, the date 580 B.C. would appear to be after the Nephites had settled in the land of Nephi, since Lehi left Jerusalem during the first year of the reign of Zedekiah, in 600 B.C. The city of Jerusalem was destroyed in 589 B.C. (Zedekiah reigned eleven years (II Kings 24:18)). Hence, the date 580 B.C. falls logically between the dates 589 B.C. and 570 B.C. (thirty years after the Nephites left Jerusalem (II Nephi 2:44)), is the conclusion by Brother Robinson.

* * * * *

Gloria (Mrs. B. J.) Malotte, of Augusta, Michigan, who for some years has been making a particular study of ancient cultures of the East and West, makes some comments with regard to the item by Inez Girton in our Newsletter of December 10, 1969. Mrs. Malotte connects the Apaches' howling for the loss of a loved one with a traditional sacred duty in this regard, stating that research into primitive and ancient cultures of America reveals that this custom was most common. She wrote, "The early Israelites were particularly noted for their howling and wailing over the dead. This was a custom throughout the archaic Near East, and it was especially prevalent in Egypt and Palestine (with origin in earlier Mesopotamia). Wealthy families and royalty frequently hired additional sacred mourners to join the family in filling the air with their howling and wailing over the dead, in order to prove their greater piety. In very early Palestine and America this frequently included rending of clothing and sometimes even tearing at the body. In later years it became more symbolic and, in fact, some modern funeral rites symbolize some of these archaic rites. Howling over the dead has been traditionally sacred in both the Near East and Ancient America for millenniums."

* * * * *

There is a "unique and striking cultural parallel between ancient Israel and Yucatan-Guatemala-Mexico" in the peculiar bottle-shaped underground cisterns which they constructed for storage of water during dry seasons, according to Thomas Stuart Ferguson, author of One Fold and One Shepherd. He said that in 1934 Nelson Gluek, Bible archaeologist, discovered several such cisterns at the ruins of Sela, in Eastern Palestine, whose diary reports "Difficult of approach, and commanding a wonderful view over Petra, the position . . . corroborates the biblical passages which refer to Sela as an inaccessible nest. On the flat top of the acropolis are seven pear-shaped cisterns filled with debris. The rain water was led to them by channels cut in the rock surface." (Explorations in Eastern Palestine, The Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research, 1935, Vol. XV, page 82.)

Mr. Ferguson also referred to findings made during a June, 1955 expedition to Sela by the American School of Oriental Research, and quotes William H. Morton: "These cisterns are plastered throughout and bottle-shaped in outline, each having a small mouth about two feet in diameter, but rapidly expanding to a diameter of 8 to 10 feet. . . . Rock-cut channels angling across the natural slope of the incline serve to divert surface rainwater into the cistern mouths." (The Biblical Archaeologist, May, 1956, page 32.)"

Mr. Ferguson then quotes Carnegie archaeologist A. Ledyard Smith regarding a discovery made of the underground bottle-shaped pits in Guatemala and Yucatan: "There is no doubt that in northern Yucatan, where paving and gutters have been found around the entrances and the walls they were covered with plaster, in some cases bearing designs of water symbols, chultuns [bottle-shaped pits] served as cisterns." He describes one of the Central American pits as follows: 'Cut out of living rock, it had a circular shaftlike entrance just large enough to admit a man. The neck of the entrance extended about 40 cm. above the natural rock and was built of small stones and marl with a collar at the top to receive a capstone. The entrance, cut through the hard limestone crust, led down to a small bottle-shaped chamber with a foothold cut in the east and west sides.' (A. L. Smith, Uaxactun, Guatemala, Excavations of 1931-1937, Carnegie Institution Publication No. 588, 1950, pp. 17, 48, ~~84-85~~) O. G. Ricketson Jr. gives the diameter of the circular rooms as measuring up to 2.28 meters--that is, up to about 8½ feet.

"Edwin Shook and Michael D. Coe have each observed that these bottle-shaped cisterns were in use over a wide area of Middle America during the Pre-Classic times--i.e., prior to 300 A.D. Thus we have a parallel with Bible lands involving a highly technical thing--a bottle-shaped cistern for the storage of water, about 8 feet in diameter, plastered, cut into living rock, with small aperture, and with channels on the surface above to direct rainwater into the cisterns. The experts say the chultuns may have also had other uses in the New World."

-- One Fold and One Shepherd (1958), Books of California, San Francisco, Calif., pages 59, 60.

* * * * *

An old Time Magazine (1949) yields a story of interest concerning a mummy found near Pisco on the southern coast of Peru, one of about 400 mummies discovered in the dry soil of the Paracas Peninsula. This one held special interest because it was thought to have been that of a "high priest or a chieftain" because the body was honored by being carefully wrapped in layers upon layers of cloth and buried far out on a barren desert.

This mummy was unwrapped with great care in New York's American Museum of Natural History by Dr. Rebeca Carrion Cachot of the Peruvian National Museum and Junius Bird of the American Museum.

The mummy was a "pumpkin-shaped bundle of coarse brown cloth some 5 ft. in diameter." It was determined that the dry skeleton had once been a middle-aged Peruvian with greying hair. His legs were tightly folded under his chin "because the ancient Peruvians believed that a man should lie in his grave in the position in which he lay in his mother's womb," according to the archaeologists. It was estimated that the man had lived and died some 20 centuries ago, about the time of Christ.

The outer wrappings peeled away easily; inside were the finer cloths. On top of the man had been placed a bundle "like wash in a laundry bag," in which were "some of the gaudiest garments, shirts, kilts, and shawls. . . . Most of them were made of embroidery so delicate that the tiny stitches covering all the cloth looked like meshes of the finest weaving. Across them pranced birds and wildcats in reds, pinks, greens, and yellows almost as fresh and brilliant as when they came from the dye vats. From their edges dripped cataracts of brightly colored fringe; the shirts had masses of fringe instead of sleeves." Taken from the bundle was a striped cloth 12 feet wide and 87 feet long, which Mr. Bird believed to be the biggest cloth ever woven by pre-machine methods." He estimates that the "weavers must have walked 77 miles while laying the warp threads."

-- Time, October 3, 1949, page 62.

*** ** * ** *

A more recent mummy story comes from Cody, Wyoming, as related in the Kansas City Times, September 1, 1963.

This mummy is believed to have dated back nearly thirteen centuries. A cave in a Wyoming mountain near Cody yielded this mummified body. "The firm-jawed skull is covered with tangled, coarse black hair and most of the teeth are intact. The remains, when unearthed, were clad in the tanned skin of an animal, probably a mountain sheep."

Dr. Harold McCracken, Cody archaeologist, who directed the excavation, said that the man was "a prehistoric Indian." He estimated that "he died in about 678, or more than eight centuries before Columbus' voyage to America, and he explained that the antiquity of this man had been established by a radiocarbon dating made by Isotopes, Inc., a New Jersey laboratory recognized for specializing in this highly technical process. The dating was made from some fragments salvaged from the tanned skin clothing in which the man was buried.

The cave in which the mummy was found is at the base of a steep mountain cliff about thirty-five miles west of Cody, and a few miles from the eastern boundary of Yellowstone National park. The mummy was uncovered after a crew had sunk an exploratory pit more than ten feet in the cave floor. It is said that the extreme dryness of the ground in the cave accounted for the well preserved condition of the body and the culture materials.

Dr. McCracken declared, "The discovery is one of major significance, although other circumstances relating to this cave may prove to be one of the most important to be excavated in a good many years." He was referring to the fact that eleven distinct culture layers were found in this cave, each representing a different period of ancient occupation. He said, "We have good reasons to believe that culture levels of considerable greater antiquity will be found below the deepest levels we have reached in the exploratory pit."

It is, however, considered too dangerous to go deeper in such a small hole. Further work was planned to be done in the cave.

The mummified body and other materials taken from the cave have been placed in the Whitney Gallery of Western Art in Cody, of which Dr. McCracken is director.

Newsletter No. 6, p. 6.

They will be exhibited in an Indian museum to be added to the Buffalo Bill Historical center in Cody, which Dr. McCracken also heads.

* * * * *

Your interest in ancient American research is appreciated, and any documented items which you may wish to send us will be gladly accepted. Remember, it is your sharing such items with us which makes our newsletters possible.

* * * * *

All it takes for interested friends to receive free copies of this newsletter and future issues is to send their names and addresses (including zip code numbers) to our address given below.

* * * * *

Foundation for Research
on Ancient America

Non-Profit Organization
U.S. Postage
Paid
Permit No. 138
Independence, Mo. 64050
Return Postage Guaranteed