

## A BOOK OF MORMON

# TOUR GUIDE

## MONTE ALBAN

### Part 2

By Raymond C. Treat

This is the second in a series of articles on major sites in Mesoamerica designed to add to the information usually available to the tourist and to provide information on the Book of Mormon setting for each of the sites.

The first site in this series, Teotihuacan, (*Zarahemla Record* Issue #4) was located on the northern edge of the Book of Mormon lands (Fig. 1) known today by archaeologists as Mesoamerica. We now travel some 300 winding mountainous miles to the south (actually southeast) to take a look at the hilltop site of Monte Alban (Fig. 2).

### LOCATION AND SETTING

Monte Alban is located adjacent (about 6 miles) to the modern city of Oaxaca (wah-HA-ka, Fig. 3) which is the capital of the state of Oaxaca. Monte Alban was also a capital city in its day as it was the dominant site in the Valley of Oaxaca. The Valley of Oaxaca is divided into three arms in a Y-shape with Monte Alban located on a series of ridges near where these three arms join together (Fig. 3).

### ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORK

The first publication on Monte Alban occurred over a century ago (Dupaix 1834) but it was not until 1931 that modern scientific archaeology began at the site. That was the year Alfonso Caso, the dean of Mexican archaeologists in his day, began work, which included 18 field seasons, ending in 1958. He was assisted by Ignacio Bernal, the leading Mexican archaeologist today, and Jorge R. Acosta. Because of their work, Monte Alban is one of the major tourist attractions in Mexico today.

Additional information about Monte Alban has come forth as the result of the Valley of Oaxaca Settlement Pattern Project under the direction of Richard Blanton, Purdue University. Part of the work of the Project was a survey of Monte Alban (Blanton 1978) which was carried out in 1971-1973.

### SITE DESCRIPTION

The total site of Monte Alban consists of a series of hilltops and terraces. The area visited by tourists, known as the Main Plaza (Figs. 4,5,6) is one of five sections into which the site has been divided (Blanton 1978:3). The Main Plaza, which is about 300 meters (984 feet) north-south by 100 meters (328 feet) east-west is on top of the largest hill of the group. The word hill may be misleading since this area, called Monte Alban proper by Blanton, is over 400 meters (1112 feet) above the

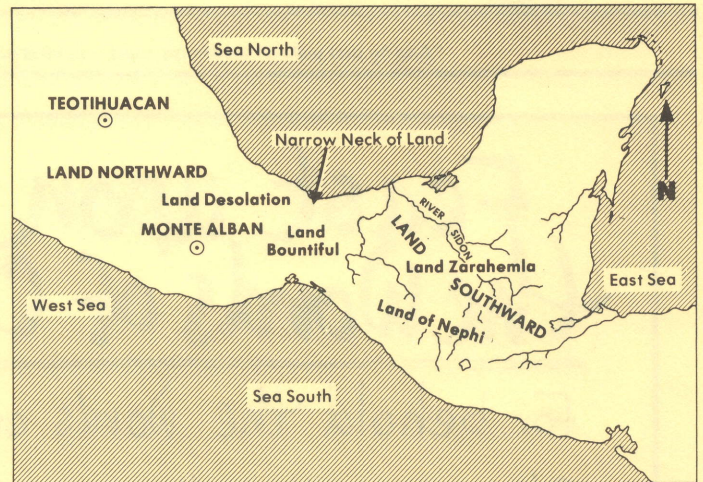


Fig. 1—Map of Mesoamerica showing the location of the Book of Mormon lands according to the most widely accepted theory. Note the location of Teotihuacan and Monte Alban.



Fig. 2—The Main Plaza of Monte Alban oriented N-S with the South Platform, only partly excavated, to the left (after Turok, n.d.).

elevation of the modern city of Oaxaca. The construction of the Main Plaza itself, not counting the buildings, was a major project since the Plaza was artificially flattened and filled in where needed in order to provide this large rectangular area which served as the ceremonial and administrative center of the site.

Most of the buildings as they are seen in the Main Plaza today were constructed in the period from A.D. 450-600/700. They represent the last of several stages of construction that go back to the 500/400 B.C. period. There is a very large platform at each end of the north-south oriented plaza. On the east side are six residential buildings or palaces and a small ball court. There are three buildings in the center of the plaza which are hooked together and another separate building called





# THE ZARAHEMLA RECORD

Issue Number 6

Fall 1979

*"And he that will not harden his heart, to him is given the greater portion of the word..." Alma 9:18*

## ... Feast upon the Words of Christ;

For behold the words of  
Christ will tell you all things  
what ye should do.



II NEPHI 14:4

### "FEAST UPON THE WORDS OF CHRIST"

A testimony by Thelona D. Stevens

**M**y parents, Father from Scotland and Mother from Canada, were both members of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints before they were married. Father's work in the offices of a railroad company took them to Texas where they established their home, unfortunately where there was no congregation of the church. Our parents sent my sister and me to the nearest Protestant Sunday School in our childhood and sought to teach us differences in belief when these occurred, but we actually received very little religious instruction.

My childhood was plagued with serious illnesses. When I was ten years old, Mother brought my sister and me to visit in Independence. I became very ill on the train, and grew worse during the night after our arrival. High fever caused delirium for a number of hours. In the morning the elders were called to administer to me. I recall how I felt as they prayed, and of my desire to know more about Jesus. I was instantly healed and never had that particular ailment again. At the close of the

prayer of confirmation of the anointing, I asked for baptism. My sister and I were baptized at the Stone Church here in Independence.

My religious instruction continued to be most fragmentary. As a young adult I went to Florida to spend

the winter, I thought. There I met Frederick Stevens who attracted me very much, but I repeatedly refused his marriage proposals because I wanted to marry someone in the church. I prayed about the matter, however, and eventually had a spiritual experience in which I was made to know that I should marry this man. Because I had been refusing him on account of the church, I thought this meant that after we were married he would accept the gospel, and we would live happily ever afterwards. It did not work out quite that way.

After we were married, Fred asked questions about the church and its teachings which I was not able to answer because of my lack of knowledge. My answers were vague and he did not accept them. When he

(Continued on page 7)



THELONA D. STEVENS



Mound J or the Observatory. The west side includes the buildings known as System IV and System M and the Danzantes Platform which originated in Period I, (ca. 500/400-200 B.C.).

**Monte Alban Period I (ca. 500/400-200 B.C.)**

During the early part of this period, Monte Alban was one of 84 known sites in the Valley of Oaxaca. This represents a four-fold increase in the number of sites over the preceding Guadalupe (800-600 B.C.) and Rosario (600-500 B.C.) periods in the valley. This would indicate a sharp population rise during the early part of Period I at Monte Alban. The Guadalupe and Rosario periods are found in the Valley of Oaxaca but not at Monte Alban. They, in turn, are preceded by the Tierras Largas (1400-1150 B.C.) and San Jose (1150-800 B.C.) periods. Therefore, archaeology has revealed four periods of occupation covering a span of some 900 years, from 1400-500 B.C. in the Valley of Oaxaca prior to the founding of the great site of Monte Alban.

The estimated population for the early part of Period I is 3500-7000. This estimate jumps up to 10,000-20,000 for the latter part of the period. The Main Plaza, which is the result of leveling the entire summit of the hill, must have been largely completed at this time. No doubt there was a lot of construction around the Main Plaza but because of later construction, only one building, the Danzantes



Fig. 3—Map of the Valley of Oaxaca. Note how the valley is divided into three arms (after Paddock 1966) .

**CULTURE HISTORY**

We will trace the culture history of Monte Alban as we did with Teotihuacan, by describing what is known about each phase or period. But first, a comment about dating.

Most of the dates in Mesoamerican archaeology are based on the carbon-14 dating method. Depending upon how many carbon-14 dates are available, it is possible to arrive at an estimated date for a period that should be accurate to within 50-100 or 200 years. Unfortunately, there are not very many carbon-14 dates from Monte Alban. For this reason, there is a wide range of opinion concerning Monte Alban dates. For example, the beginning of Monte Alban could be 900 B.C., 800 B.C., 600 B.C. or 500/400 B.C. depending on which book you are reading. We will be using the dates given by Blanton (1978) who favors 500/400 B.C. for the beginning of Monte Alban. Blanton's book is the latest report on Monte Alban. It should also be noted that the way in which the periods of Monte Alban culture history have been divided is also a matter of opinion. If more and better dates were available the periods could be divided more accurately.

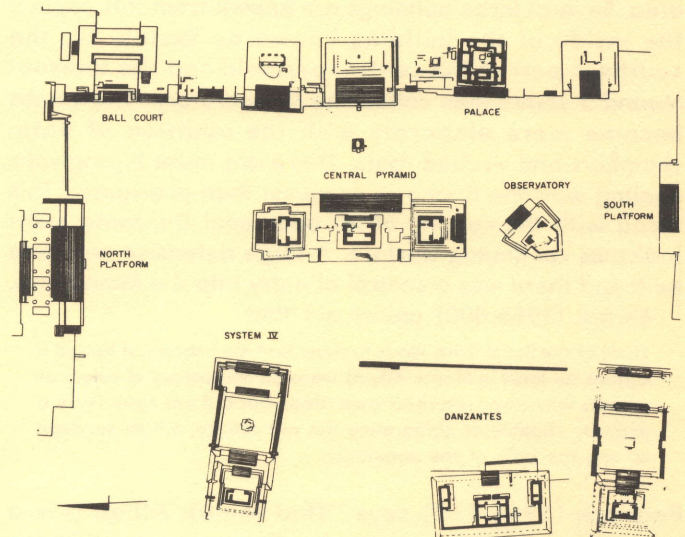


Fig. 4—Map of the Main Plaza of Monte Alban. The Observatory is also known as Mound J. The building at the lower right is System M (after Acosta 1965).

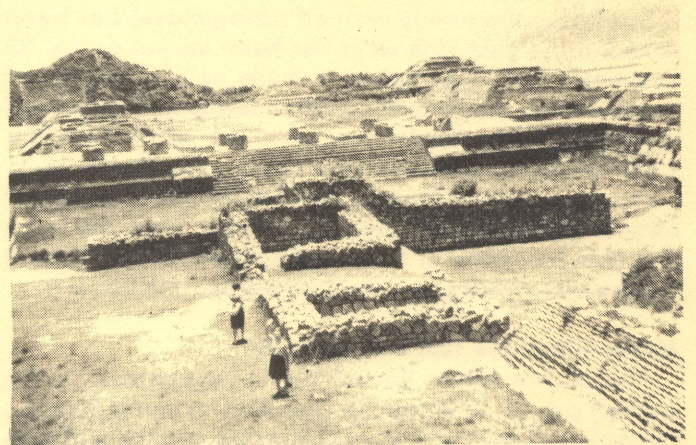


Fig. 5—The center and right side of the Main Plaza looking south from the North Platform.

(Continued on page 4)



Platform, is presently known to be from this period (Fig. 4). Over 300 of the Danzante slabs were carved in Period I. The Danzantes or dancers are so-called because their limbs are portrayed as if they were in motion, either dancing or swimming. However, the prevailing theory is that these nude, male figures represent captives.

The first known occurrence of hieroglyphs and the calendar in Mesoamerica is in Period I (Fig. 8). Marcus (1976:137) states that

Monte Alban showed the first Mesoamerican use of the "emblem glyph" or place sign, the bar-and-dot system of numeration, the 260-day ritual calendar (Caso, 1928), the first political conquest records, and the system of naming rulers by their birth dates. Many of these developments anticipated the "indigenous" developments in the Maya region by at least 500 years. The impact and antecedent role of this early urban and militaristic civilization on other Mesoamerican civilizations have been greatly underestimated.

#### **Monte Alban Period II (ca. 200 B.C. - A.D. 200)**

The population estimate for this period is 9650-19,300, a slight decline from Period I. The construction of the Main Plaza was completed with the plastering of the entire area. Several large buildings are known from this period: the inside of the building known as System IV, the southern part of the central pyramid and the unusual Mound J sometimes called the Observatory. The tombs become more elaborate with the addition of ante-chambers and vaulted roofs. There are more hieroglyphs dealing with the theme of conquest than previously. This along with the carving of 40 additional Danzante slabs indicates continuing warfare. A large defensive wall was built and there was a control of entry into the Main Plaza.

Bernal (1965:800) points out that

Study of the list of traits tends to show that the bearers of Period II culture (at least in Monte Alban) were an aristocracy of rulers or priests who imposed their own ideas but did not constitute a majority capable of obliterating the old culture, which survived among the bulk of the population.

Paddock (1966:119) says "That Monte Alban II is a ruling-class phenomenon can hardly be disputed." These ruling-class traits seem to have appeared at Monte Alban and in the Valley of Oaxaca rather suddenly. Outside of Monte Alban, the Period II traits are apparently found only at the more important ceremonial centers.

Paddock (1966:119) also points out that Monte Alban II (meaning the newly arrived ruling-class) has been linked in the past with what has been known as the "Q Complex". The "Q Complex" is made up of a number of ceramic traits including the swollen tetrapod, the spouted vessel and high annular base and pot stands (Vaillant 1940:300-301), all of which are found in the Monte Alban II ceramic assemblage as well as in other areas of Mesoamerica. Bernal (1965:801) states "that the most probable homeland of the bearers of the Monte Alban II culture was Chiapas or the Guatemalan highlands."

#### **Monte Alban IIIa (ca. A.D. 200-450)**

The Monte Alban Period IIIa is recognized as the earliest period which can be classified as being Zapotec, the main Indian tribe in the Valley of Oaxaca today. This is also the period when Teotihuacan was experiencing its greatest time of influence throughout Mesoamerica.

There was interaction between Teotihuacan and Monte Alban but not in the same sense as with other sites. Monte Alban was apparently independent from Teotihuacan while other sites having evidence of Teotihuacan influence are considered as being dominated by this largest of all cities.

Blanton's population estimate for Period IIIa is 11,000-22,000. He explains the growth of Monte Alban during this time as being a reaction to the threat of dominance by Teotihuacan. Paddock (1966) characterizes this period as one of relative simplicity having a classic art style. This is in contrast to Period IIIb which he sees as a time of enormous prosperity and elaboration having a baroque art style. Then Period IV is a time of loss in quality, having a decadent art style. Period IIIa is a time when Monte Alban is most closely related to cultures to the north (eg. Teotihuacan). In contrast, during Period I this relationship was strongest to the East (the Olmec) and during Period II to the south (Chiapas and Guatemala, the Maya area). Although Period IIIa was part of the climax of Monte Alban and was a time of expansion, there is only one building on the Main Plaza, the South Platform, that is attributed to this period.

#### **Monte Alban IIIb (ca. A.D. 450-600/700)**

As already stated, this is a period of enormous prosperity. Most of the Main Plaza structures were rebuilt. This is why it has been difficult to envision what the architecture was like in earlier periods. Whatever relationship Monte Alban had with Teotihuacan during Period IIIa ceases to exist in Period IIIb. It is recognized that the Zapotec have their own state-type of political organization during this time, probably beginning in Period IIIa. The population hits a peak of 15,000-30,000 and the site reaches its maximum size (40 square kilometers or 15.4 square miles). In contrast to previous periods, IIIb is a time of cultural isolation, with minimum or no contact of the Zapotec state with the rest of Mesoamerica.

#### **Monte Alban IV (ca. A.D. 600/700-950)**

This period is only known at Monte Alban by tombs, burials and offerings made in the ruins of buildings. Monte Alban is no longer the leading city of the area. The major buildings are abandoned. The Main Plaza falls into disuse. There is most likely a sharp reduction in population. Monte Alban is completely abandoned after this period. However, there was no other city which replaced Monte Alban at this time. There were only several smaller ceremonial centers, each with its small sphere of influence.

#### **Monte Alban V (ca. A.D. 950-1521)**

Period V is known as the Mixtec Period. The Mixtecs are the second largest Indian tribe in Oaxaca today and were originally located in what is known as the Mixteca region to the north of Monte Alban. It is during this period that the Mixtecs become dominant in the Valley of Oaxaca. Since Period IV is a Zapotec period and since the Zapotecs continued as a people even though they ceased to be dominant, some writers see Monte Alban Period IV as continuing to 1521, the time of Spanish contact,



contemporaneously with Monte Alban Period V.

Monte Alban itself was used only as a Mixtec burial ground. Previously constructed Zapotec tombs were reused. The Mixtecs are known for their highly skilled metal work. The best example of their work comes from Tomb 7 at Monte Alban, the most famous discovery of archaeological treasure known so far from anywhere in the New World. This tomb was discovered by Alfonso Caso in 1932. Tomb 7 was originally a Zapotec tomb from Period IIIb. The tomb contained 121 gold pieces and 24 silver pieces in addition to many necklaces and other jewelry of a variety of precious and semi-precious materials.

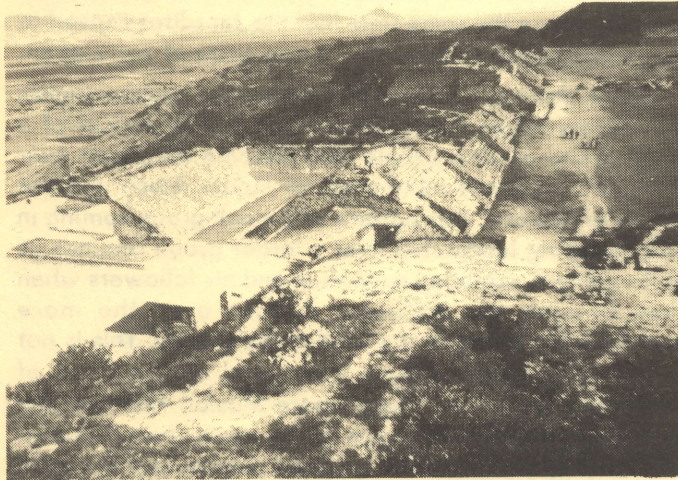


Fig. 6—The left side of the Main Plaza looking south from the North Platform showing the ballcourt. Note the Valley of Oaxaca in the background.



Fig. 7—One of the over 340 Danzante carvings known from Monte Alban.



Fig. 8—Stela carved with hieroglyphs, some of which are dates.

#### BLANTON'S THEORY

Blanton (1978) has proposed a theory to explain the rise of Monte Alban that is based on the idea that Monte Alban was founded as a regional military alliance. Blanton's position is that the military alliance theory

provides a reason why the location was chosen. By normal considerations, due to a lack of water and sufficient farm land, a Precolumbian city should not be located at the site of Monte Alban. In addition, the theory accounts for the content of the stone carvings and the unusual population distribution, which is not uniform as we would expect, but is located in three discrete areas.

#### Location

Monte Alban was founded on an isolated hilltop. There is no evidence of a water supply anywhere on the over 1100 feet high hill. All water would have had to be laboriously carried from the valley floor. There are no known resources such as obsidian or minerals which might have attracted settlement. While most of the hillside areas have been terraced and some of this area was cultivated (about 3%), nevertheless, the hill can not be considered a suitable place for agriculture. Therefore, lack of water, resources or sufficient farm land would effectively rule out the choice of the Monte Alban hill as a settlement for any of the normal reasons.

Another theory, in addition to Blanton's military alliance theory, could be that Monte Alban was a regional market and/or production center. However, Monte Alban's inaccessibility would seem to rule out these reasons.

Let us now consider two factors in support of the military capital theory. Blanton's theory calls Monte Alban a disembedded military capital. He points out that "disembedded capitals are typically located in neutral places, away from existing centers of power, in order to avoid augmenting the influence of any one of the existing centers at the expense of the others (1978:39)." If the three arms of the Valley of Oaxaca each represented one of the parties to the proposed military alliance, then the location of Monte Alban in the area where these three arms join together would appear to satisfy the requirement of neutrality. The second reason supporting the military capital theory is that this type of special disembedded capital would have been supported by taxes thus freeing the choice of the site from normal considerations of local water supply and food production.

#### Content of the stone carvings

Religious themes dominate Mesoamerican stone carving, including sites in the Valley of Oaxaca, with the exception of Monte Alban, which has more carved stone monuments than any other site in the valley. The carved stone monuments at Monte Alban deal only with military themes from Periods I through IIIa. In a study of these themes, Joyce Marcus (1976:133) says

The fundamental theme of Monte Alban I through IIIa sculpture can be characterized as pertaining to militarism: The slain captives of Periods I and II, the place signs of conquered towns of Period II, and the names and/or dates, plus place signs, of bound captives of Period IIIa.

The slain captives mentioned by Marcus are the famous Danzantes. These unusual figures (Fig. 7) have been the subject of discussion for a long time with various interpretations given. The leading viewpoint today is that the Danzantes represent slain captives. A recent review of

(Continued on page 6)



### Marcus' paper says this

Joyce Marcus' excellent analysis of Preclassic iconography in the Valley of Oaxaca provides the most convincing support to date for the widely accepted notion that militarism was the principal sculptural theme at Monte Alban during Periods I through IIIA: the "danzantes," "conquest slabs," and stelae really do seem to deal with conquest and capture (Henderson 1978).

The presence of military themes and the lack of religious themes in the stone carving at Monte Alban supports the military alliance theory in two ways. The presence of military themes implies that militarism was of primary importance at the site. The lack of religious themes implies that the site was supported by more than one group, each with different outlooks on religion. It appears that the military alliance decided to stick to the main purpose of the site, and preserve its religious neutrality by leaving religious themes out of stone carving.

### Population distribution

Blanton's survey has determined that instead of a uniform distribution of the residential population on the Monte Alban hill, there were three discrete areas of population. Analysis of the ceramics from these three areas has shown that the ceramics within each area were more uniform than between areas. This "can be interpreted to mean that the subdivisions were ethnically distinct and as a result got their pottery from separate ceramic production centers (Blanton 1978:39)." Although ceramics do vary with distance in archaeology, the area of the Monte Alban hill is not sufficiently large to normally cause ceramic variation. The variation is much more likely to have been caused by an artificial situation such as the proposed military alliance.

To summarize, Blanton appears to have presented a strong case for the presence of a military alliance at Monte Alban. However, Blanton then goes on to question his theory.

This model for the origins of Monte Alban scarcely has the status of an "explanatory sketch." While it seems to account for these disparate and seemingly otherwise inexplicable facts, it has severe limitations. First, we have no idea what societies may have been involved in the development of the regional polity (Blanton 1978:39-40).

Blanton continues along this line.

A further and more serious problem with this model is that it has nothing to say about why a regional polity would have been formed during Period Early I. Apparently some new military threat appeared at that time that made it worthwhile for several societies to join in a league, in spite of the costs of such a polity, one of which was the construction and maintenance of the new regional capital. What was the source of the new menace? (Blanton 1978:40).

The culture history of the Book of Mormon fits in with the pattern of life revealed at Monte Alban and does offer some possible answers to the above questions.

### BOOK OF MORMON CORRELATIONS

Although Monte Alban is closer to the center of Book of Mormon geography than Teotihuacan, it is still part of what is believed to be the Land Northward (Fig. 1). The Land Northward was the main area where the Jaredites were located until the nation ended about 200 B.C. The culture history of Monte Alban I and II seems to fit in with

this Jaredite pattern. There is no disagreement among archaeologists that Period I is related to the Olmec culture, and we believe that the Olmec constitute a part of the Jaredite culture. As has been demonstrated in previous issues of the *Zarahemla Record*, there is a strong correlation between what is known archaeologically about Olmec culture history and what is known from the Book of Mormon about Jaredite culture history (for example, see *Book of Mormon and Mesoamerican Archaeology Outlines Compared*, Issue No. 5, and *Transoceanic Contact*, Issue No. 4). Therefore, we can say it is possible that Monte Alban Period I was related to the Jaredite culture. This period is estimated to end around 200 B.C., about the same time that the Jaredites ceased to be an integrated culture. This is one point of correlation.

Again, there is no disagreement among archaeologists that Monte Alban II is characterized by the arrival of a small group of elite people who become dominant over the more numerous inhabitants of Monte Alban and the Valley of Oaxaca. This pattern of a small group coming in and assuming leadership over a larger group reminds us of the pattern exhibited by Mosiah and his followers when they became the dominant culture over the more numerous Mulekites in the Land of Zarahemla. This is not to say that Monte Alban is located in the Land of Zarahemla and is the place where Mosiah first met the Mulekites. Rather, the point to be remembered is that archaeology has described a culture pattern, one example of which is also found in the Book of Mormon.

Thirdly, archaeologists say that the elite group came from the south - Chiapas or Guatemala. According to the prevailing theory on Book of Mormon geography, Chiapas and Guatemala are located in the Land Southward. This is the original location for the Mulekites, Lamanites and Nephites and this is where we would expect an elite group to come from.

Who then were the Period II rulers? We can only speculate at this point in time. They could have been a group of Lamanites from the Guatemala highlands. They could have been Mulekites or even Nephites from the southern Maya lowlands of Chiapas and Guatemala. The main archaeological clue to this mystery seems to be in the ceramic assemblage known as the "Q Complex." This unique ceramic assemblage is found both in the southern Maya lowlands and in the Guatemala highlands. The ceramics forming the "Q Complex" were first described from the site of Holmul (Merwin and Vaillant 1932) in the southern Maya lowlands. Unfortunately, the concept of the "Q Complex" has not attracted much attention and does not seem to be a part of current research. It remains to be seen if there is enough information about the dating and distribution of "Q Complex" ceramics to provide further information on the identity of the Monte Alban Period II arrivals.

The slight decline in population for Period II is in harmony with the decline in the Jaredite population. However, the length of time assigned to Period II by Blanton, 400 years (200 B.C. - A.D. 200) is too long to be useful, especially when we consider that there were two major population reductions within this span—the Jaredite decline and the destruction of the wicked during



the great upheaval at the time of the crucifixion of Christ. Nevertheless, it is significant to us that there was a slight population decline during Period II since Monte Alban overall shows a pattern of growth from the beginning through Period IIIb.

One more possible correlation should be mentioned before we leave Periods I and II. Most of the Danzantes were carved during Period I, an Olmec (Jaredite) period which ends around 200 B.C. If the Danzantes do in fact represent captured leaders, then the presence of the Danzantes at Monte Alban fits the Book of Mormon pattern of intense warfare around 200 B.C. The Jaredite pattern of warfare from 600-200 B.C. would provide a reason why Monte Alban may have been originally settled as a military capital.

The best correlation for Period III to the Book of Mormon pattern is in the characterization of Period IIIa as one of relative simplicity having a classic art style in contrast to Period IIIb as a time of enormous prosperity and elaboration having a baroque art style. Period IIIa begins in the Golden Age which was a time of great spiritual enlightenment when human values were uplifted. Simplicity is a fitting term to describe a culture during its spiritual peak. In contrast, the enormous prosperity and elaboration of Period IIIb which occurs after the Golden Age, describes a culture whose hope seems to lie in the works of their own hands. Archaeology measures prosperity by the massiveness of the architecture. Unrighteous Lamanite rulers presided over the construction of an impressive amount of new architecture in many areas of Mesoamerica after the destruction of the Nephite culture. Art historians tell us that art styles, like cultures, also pass through stages. The stage when art is at its best is called the classic stage. This is when art is classified as simple in contrast to the next stage which is classified as baroque or cluttered with elaborate details. Baroque art is viewed as a decline in artistic achievement from classic art. Thus, we see that artistic achievement at Monte Alban reached its peak and began its decline during those times predicted by the Book of Mormon. Period IV art is classified as decadent. Although this period takes place after the Book of Mormon ends, it continues to follow the predicted pattern: the further a people are from the light of Christ, the more they decline in every aspect of their culture.

#### SUMMARY

The culture history from Monte Alban and the Valley of Oaxaca, like that from Teotihuacan, fits in nicely with the pattern predicted by the Book of Mormon. The Olmec presence in Period I, the evidence of warfare, followed by the arrival of a new people from the south, the great achievements of Period III corresponding to the time of the Golden Age, followed by a decline, again present a sequence of culture history that follows the Book of Mormon too closely to be coincidental. Yet, there are still some areas to be filled in. We still need to exercise faith in the Book of Mormon. We are not yet to the point of knowledge in all areas. Nevertheless, Mesoamerican archaeology is providing those with a *desire* to believe with enough "substance" to continue up the ladder to belief, faith and knowledge. ●

#### References Cited

- Acosta, Jorge R.  
1965 Preclassic and Classic architecture of Oaxaca. *Handbook of Middle American Indians* 3:814-836.
- Bernal, Ignacio  
1965 Archaeological synthesis of Oaxaca. *Handbook of Middle American Indians* 3:788-813.
- Blanton, Richard  
1978 *Monte Alban, Settlement Patterns at the Ancient Zapotec Capital*. Academic Press. New York.
- Caso, Alfonso  
1928 Las estelas zapotecas. *Monogr. Mus. Nac. Arqueol., Hist., Etnog. Mexico*.
- Dupaix, Guillermo  
1834 *Antiquites Mexicaines*. Bureau des Antiquites Mexicaines. Paris.
- Henderson, John  
1978 Book review of Nickolson, H.B. ed. *The Origins of Religious Art and Iconography in Preclassic Mesoamerica*. UCLA Latin American Studies Series, Vol. 31:123-139.
- Merwin, R.E. and G.C. Vaillant  
1932 The ruins of Holmul, Guatemala. *Memoirs of the Peabody Museum*. Vol. 3. no. 2.
- Paddock, John, ed.  
1966 *Ancient Oaxaca*. Stanford University Press.
- Turok, J. Kipi  
n.d. *Oaxaca*. Litografica Turmex. S.A. Mexico City.
- Vaillant, George C.  
1940 Patterns in Middle American Archaeology. in *The Maya and Their Neighbors* :295-305. Reprinted. University of Utah Press. 1962.

#### "FEAST UPON THE WORDS OF CHRIST"

By Thelona Stevens

Continued from page 1

would press me for more information, backing me into a corner, as it were, I would grow angry and say cross things, resulting in arguments. After this had gone on for a while, I decided it was terrible to be quarreling about religion, of all things! I think Fred decided the same thing about the same time, as we never had a fuss again over religion. He just stopped asking questions.

Living in a big city with no association with my own church members, I was just drifting along with the world. I had known for a long time that I should study but I found many excuses to the repeated urgings, such as, "I don't have anyone to study with me," or "I don't have a teacher," or "I don't feel like it. If I had better health I would study," but in spite of my excuses I continued to feel the promptings and urgings. Then one day I came to a full realization that I either had to settle down and study about the church and its teachings or just give it up. I would never give up the church! So in deep contrition, I told the Lord that I would study one hour a day at that time.

But where would I start? I thought I should begin with the Bible, recognizing the Bible as the foundation of all Scripture. I wrote to the Department of Religious Education in Independence for a Bible course by our own church. They replied that they did not have anything available! So I turned to the Bible itself. I searched through the concordance and reference sections and chose some Bible stories I thought I should know so as to be able to tell them to our young daughter as she grew up, and I made a list also of a number of passages which I thought I should memorize. Faithfully I tried, but I dreaded

(Continued on page 8)



that hour each day. I found it most difficult and trying. Actually, I learned precious little during the next several months. Then one day I realized that I had never once asked God's help! It was then that I started each study session with a prayer that God would help me to understand what I read and sought to learn. After that I got along much better, and I really became interested in the things I was finding. In fact, there were times that I became so thrilled over something I read that later I would want to read it again, only to discover that I could not find it. After this continued for sometime, I suddenly realized one day that I had not once asked God to help me to remember what I learned and where I found it. To my daily prayer, then, was added a petition for help to remember. It was then that I really began to grow! Soon I had to start watching the clock again, as I wanted to stay with my books to the neglect of other duties. Having grown in understanding, I wanted to share these wonderful things with others, but no one wanted to listen. I had spoiled things so that my husband wouldn't listen to anything I had to say about religion, and all my neighbors and friends brushed me off when I tried to speak of these things to them. Then, one day I started praying that God would somehow permit me to share these things with others. That prayer continued for a long time.

Several years passed, in fact, about nine of them, and then something wonderful happened. My husband wanted to visit Independence. We came here on a visit, and while here he saw some property he wanted to buy as an investment. He had no intention at all of living here. Yet, within the year we were living in Independence. He was still not a member, though he did accept the gospel three years after we moved here, and was ordained to the priesthood sometime later. We had our happiest years together after his baptism, until his death in 1964.

Within the year after our moving to Independence, I was asked to help out in the Department of Religious Education (as it was called then), during a time of emergency. I thought it would be a temporary thing, but actually I was there for about twenty-five years—more than twelve years doing Leadership Training work, and then at the request of the First Presidency I developed the program of Services to the Blind and worked in this area for nearly thirteen years.

Sometime after I joined the Department of Religious

Education, I was sent on an assignment to another state for a District Church School Institute. As I was talking to the assembled group one morning, I urged upon them the necessity for studying and becoming familiar with the Word of God. I recalled mentally my own difficulties in studying, so I said to them that in the beginning I had found it very hard to study, but I asked God to help me to comprehend and understand what I sought to learn, **and he did.** Then I asked him to help me to remember what I read and studied, **and he did.**

As my understanding and love of it all grew, I began praying that God would permit me somehow to share these things with others (always thinking particularly of the church members). As I looked out over that large group that morning, I realized how he had done just that, and I said, "And he did." Just then God spoke to my mind. He said, "Do you remember all those years that you prayed to serve me and my people? I could not answer those prayers until you had studied and learned what you must know before I could use you where I chose to." I hung my head with shame, remembering how slow I had been to respond to God's urgings and how long it had taken me to learn the things which I had felt prompted to study.

I am still seeking to learn the things of God which he has placed in our hands. I am still rejoicing over the discoveries which I often make when engaged in prayerful study, and I still recognize the necessity of including in my prayer the three phases of my prayer developed long ago—the prayer to understand, to remember, and to share with others these wonderful truths. ■

**THE ZARAHEMLA RECORD**

is published by the Zarahemla Research Foundation  
P.O. Box 1727, Independence, Missouri 64055.  
Mail address changes to the Foundation address.

**EDITOR:** Mary Lee Treat  
**CONTRIBUTING EDITORS:** Wayne E. Simmons  
Raymond C. Treat

**Photography:** Frank E. Frye  
**Credits:** Map, p. 2, Ralph Lesh  
Graphics, p. 1, George Knotts  
Layout, J. Robert Farley



Zarahemla Research Foundation  
P.O. Box 1727  
Independence, Missouri 64055

**Address Correction Requested  
Return Postage Guaranteed**

Non-Profit Org.  
Bulk Rate  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Independence,  
Missouri  
Permit No. 219

Have you made your 1979 contribution to the Zarahemla Research Foundation? Your tax-deductible contribution will be used to publish the Zarahemla Record and other Book of Mormon related materials.

Check the approximate box below:

\$5     \$10     \$25     \$

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Zarahemla Research Foundation  
P.O. Box 1727  
Independence, Missouri 64055

**MOVING? PLEASE SEND US YOUR CHANGE OF ADDRESS!**

No portion of this newsletter may be reproduced without written permission.