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Mound Builders and American Antiquities

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Abstract: Provides circumstantial evidence that the architectural styles of ancient America are similar to ancient Babylonian architecture, due to the Jaredites who left Babylonia approximately three hundred years before the time of Abraham.

MOUND BUILDERS AND AMERICAN ANTIQUITIES.

BY DR. JAMES X. ALLEN.

There are two subjects which necessarily attract the attention of investigators into American antiquity; namely, the architecture revealed, which differs so materially from that of modern times, and the numerous and very large artificial mounds that are found scattered over such a vast extent of country. The architecture is admitted by all writers on the subject to be archaic; that is, of an ancient and a lower order.

The first requisite in building is stability, which is strongly in evidence, not only in America, but very much so in both Egypt and Asia, in all old ruins. The second requisite is utility, and there is no doubt but the ancient American builders knew very well what their necessities were, and they planned accordingly. The third requisite, though not absolutely so, is beauty, which does not seem to have occupied the attention of the former builders to anything like the extent that is manifest in more modern times. Beauty does not seem to have been a prominent feature in the masonry of any of the extinct civilizations.

The American ruins remind one, to some extent, of the feudal strongholds of Europe, before the days of gunpowder and cannon; every castle and palace was a fort. They were built more for defense against an invading foe, than for the convenience and comfort of family life. Another thing which strikes us moderns is the absence of the arch; that is, the semi-circle or a segment of a circle. Of course, there are arches of a kind, but it is doubtful if

one royal or Roman arch has been found upon this continent that was not erected by Europeans.

In Bancroft's work (vol. 4, page 28) there is a description and a cut of a perfect arch in Nicaragua, which the American historian seems to doubt the truthfulness of, and a foot note declares it to be a "pack of lies." The statement is made there that the author of the account never saw the building; and the further statement that he signed a fictitious name; so that the account is more than doubtful. Then, again, on page 451, there is an account, and a cut, of a building with a Roman arch, in Vera Cruz, which, Mr. Bancroft says, "has a very suspicious look." The building most likely was erected by the Spanish invaders.

It, to us, seems strange that the builders of all extinct civilizations should have ignored the beauty and convenience of the arch, of which the Romans made such abundant use. The Roman engineers availed themselves of the grace and beauty of the arch, and at the same time were provident of both labor and materials in the construction of their highways and aqueducts. The highways, hundreds of miles in length, and the great water courses, built by the old inhabitants of the country, could have been built by the Romans, by constructing archways, with a considerable saving of material and labor. There was never a time when the very best samples of the arch were not present with mankind. The great Architect of the universe, always and at all times, has made use of it. There never was a man without a head, and never a head that was not arched.

What would become of our brains and intellects, were our skulls shaped otherwise than as they are? Fractured skulls and concussions of the brain are common enough as it is, but no other shape could possibly be given to our heads which would give us the same immunity from disaster as the one with which God has blest us. Then, again, the arched ribs protect the most vital of our organs—the heart, lungs and liver. The doorways, not only in American antiquity, but also in all extinct world powers, were pyramidal. There were stone door posts inclining towards each other, and capped with a large stone, or the sides of the doorway were constructed of overlapping stones converging to a point, etc. In most cases a lintel was placed for safety across

these rude arches; of course, some doorways were rectangular.

In Egypt, not one large stone arch, built by man, has been unearthed. True, rock tombs have been found with arches cut out of the solid rock, but none that were built. A few small brick arches have come to light, showing that the ancients were not ignorant of the principle of the arch. The same state of things obtains in Asia; crude arches similar to those found in America; but no Roman arch, that I have read of.

It is true that the word, arch, occurs frequently in Babylonish writings; but the word does not indicate the Roman arch. For instance: Rollin, (page 108) in the description of the temple of Bel: "In these different stories were many large rooms, with arched roofs supported by pillars." Evidently they were not segments of a circle, or the pillars would have been superfluous. Again, from the same page: "On the top of the arches were first laid large flat stones, sixteen feet long, and four broad." A long flat stone would not be necessary as a lintel for the segment of a circle.

Again, in the Americanized *Encyclopedia Britannica*, (page 465) "There was no arch in Assyria to span an opening too wide for a stone beam." It should be remembered that Assyria and Babylonia and Chaldea may all refer to the same location, as the name varied according to the location of the seat of government.

I think that enough has been said to show the great similarity existing between the architecture in America and that of ancient Babylonia. But it may be as well to use a quotation from the last named volume, (page 472). Mr. J. L. Stephens says: "Heard of and tracked out in the forests of Yucatan, the remains of a by-gone time, exhibited in sculptural and architectural monuments of a coarse character, affording a strange counterpart to those which Mr. Layard describes as having existed in and about the valleys of the Tigris and Euphrates." Speaking of Peru, the writer says: "The cromlechs are not covered merely by flat stone, but are rudely domed over by overlapping stones," the crude arch of the ancients. The last page quoted speaks also of the artificial mounds on which the edifices are erected.

I now wish to say a few words about these artificial mounds. Quoting from the same work, (on page 457) and under the head of

“Assyrian Architecture:” “The structures were built usually on artificial mounds and are approached, it is supposed, by great flights of steps.”

I do not know of any one who has made any positive statement as to the purpose of these mounds on our continent. It seems more than likely that they were used in great part as fortifications against marauding bands or troublesome neighbors. It is certain that in hand to hand conflicts, the occupants of the mound would have some advantage over a foe on the plain.

But from the fact of their being the foundation of all, or nearly so, of the temples and palaces in both America, and also in the valley of the Tigris and Euphrates, one is led to the suspicion that they (the mounds) had some significant connection with religion, and I think that a passage which I shall quote from a little work by Robert E. Anderson, entitled *Extinct Civilization*, (page 32) shows this to be a fact:

“A remarkable feature of the religion of the Chaldees has been used to explain the shape of their palaces and temples. They lifted their eyes to the hills on the northeast—the father of countries—and imagined it the abode of the gods, the future home of every great and good man. A land with a sky of silver, a soil producing crops without tilling. The mountain of Bel in the east, whose double head reaches into the skies, like a mighty buffalo at rest, whose double horn sparkles as a star, the type of the holy mountain, was, therefore, reproduced in every palace and temple, sometime by building it on an artificial mound with trees and plants watered from above.”

I cannot help thinking that this quotation throws some light, not only on the origin of the mound builders, but also on the architecture of the Jews, among whom the arch was not in evidence, and with whom the high places were much esteemed. Moses went into the mountain to pray, and he received the tables containing the ten commandments in the mountains. “Who toucheth the mountain shall be put to death.” “And the glory of the Lord abode upon Mount Sinai.” “Jacob offered sacrifices on the mountain.” “Elijah fasted forty days and went to Horeb, the mount of God.” “Joshua built an altar on Mount Elab.” “Solomon built the temple on Mount Moriah.” “His feet shall stand upon the

Mount of Olives." "The transfiguration took place in the mountain." "The mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it," etc., etc.

According to the Bible account, Abraham was reared in the valley of the Tigris. He dwelt there seventy-five years, and although converted from his idolatry, it seems more than likely that his future life would be, to some extent, influenced by the usages and customs of his native country. He left Babylonia 1900 years B. C.

The Jaredites, according to the Book of Mormon, left Babylonia three hundred years before Abraham took his departure. The Jaredites did not sojourn in Egypt, as did Abraham, but came directly to the western continent, landing in Central America. Everything that they knew, socially and religiously, they learned in Babylon. Is it any wonder that they erected their dwellings after the pattern of the Babylonians? Is it to be wondered at that they built their temples on raised mounds, after the fashion of their native country?

I do not assert that the similarity of architecture and the presence of artificial mounds in Babylonia and America afford conclusive evidence for the Book of Mormon, but I regard them as strong circumstantial evidence.

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MEDIOCRITY IS NOT GOOD ENOUGH.

We are largely the creatures of our environment and associations. Every person we come in contact with influences us for good or ill, and leaves an impression of his own character upon us.

Beware of anything which lowers the ideals or makes you satisfied with anything less than your level best,—with anything but excellence,—or which tries to make you believe that mediocrity is good enough, or that ordinary will do. It is the mind which will be satisfied with nothing but the best, and which will have nothing to do with anything less than excellence, that achieves that which is worth while.

—*Success.*