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Published several times a year by THE SOCIETY FOR EARLY HISTORIC ARCHAEOLOGY at Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, for the dissemination among its members of information on new discoveries in archaeology throwing light on the origins of civilization in the Old and New Worlds, on the earliest periods of recorded history in the two hemispheres, and on the important historical claims of the Hebrew-Christian and Latter-day Saint scriptures; also news of the Society and its members and of the B.Y.U. department of archaeology and anthropology, of which the Society is an affiliated organization. Included are papers read at the Society's and Department's annual symposia on the archaeology of the Scriptures. All views expressed in this newsletter are those of the author of the contribution in which they appear and not necessarily those of Brigham Young University or the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Subscription is by membership in the Society, which also includes subscription to other publications.

133.0 RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN OLMEC ARCHAEOLOGY. By Fred W. Nelson, Jr. A paper read at the Twentieth Annual Symposium on the Archaeology of the Scriptures, held at Brigham Young University on October 10, 1970; paper revised and brought up to date for this printing. The author holds the Master of Arts degree in archaeology from BYU and is a member of the SEHA Advisory Committee (see Newsletter, 131.3).

Since about 1966 extensive field work has been conducted to learn more about the Olmec civilization and its relationship to other Mesoamerican cultures, both contemporaneous and later. As a result several papers and books have been written which describe the new data, propose hypotheses, and synthesize what is known about the "Olmecs." Because of this it is now possible to describe their civilization more thoroughly than ever before.

In this paper the term "Olmec" refers to the Mesoamerican civilization that occupied the Gulf Coast region of southern Veracruz and western Tabasco from c.1500 to c.600/500 BC. This time period covers the Early and Middle Preclassic periods of Mesoamerican archaeological history. But it should be understood that even though this seems to be the climax region ("climax, meaning the 'phase or phases of maximum . . . intensity of a cultural tradition;'" Heizer, 1958, p. 100) of this civilization, elements of the culture and art style of the "Olmecs" were diffused widely and are found throughout almost all Mesoamerica.

#### HISTORY OF EXPLORATION

Around 1862 early explorations of the Olmec area were made by J. M. Melgar, who explored the vicinity of Hueyapán, later named Tres Zapotes, and found Monument A, a colossal stone head. (See Nelson, 1967, on the colossal Olmec heads. Ed.) Other early explorations of the southern Gulf Coast were conducted by Frans Blom

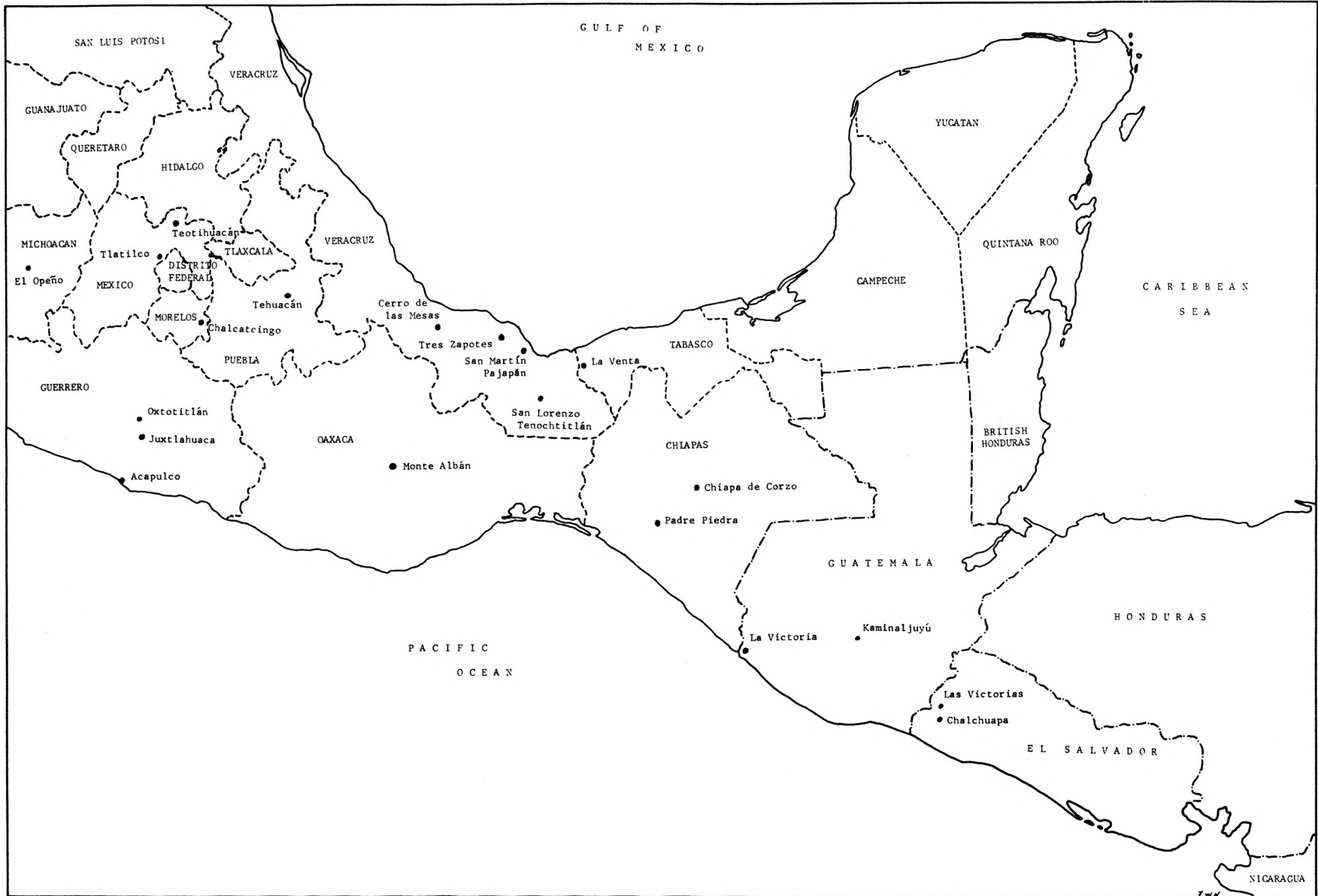
and Oliver La Farge in 1925 and A. Weyerstall in 1932. It was George C. Vaillant who first recognized the distinctive features and unity of the Olmec style and gave it that name (Vaillant, 1932). However, the importance of the area was not generally realized until Matthew W. Stirling excavated at Tres Zapotes, 1938-40, and at La Venta, 1939-40 and 1942-43, and published his results (Stirling, 1943).

Another important step in learning more about the "Olmecs" came in 1955 when Philip Drucker, Robert Heizer, and R. J. Squier conducted extensive excavations at La Venta. Their report (Drucker, Heizer, and Squier, 1959) contains a detailed description of their excavations and of the monuments found, as well as radiocarbon dates which showed beyond doubt that La Venta belongs to the Preclassic period of Mesoamerican culture history.

Important explorations have also been made at a large site called Laguna de los Cerros, near the Tuxtla Mountains south of Tres Zapotes, by the Mexican archaeologist Alfonso Medellín (Bernal, 1969, pp. 46-48; Coe, 1968b, pp. 109, 111).

The latest developments in Olmec archaeology include Michael Coe's excavations in 1966-68 at San Lorenzo Tenochtitlán. Because of this work he has been able to push the known time period of the "Olmecs" back to 1350 BC or even earlier (Coe, 1968a, pp. 41-78; 1968b; 1969; Coe, Diehl, and Stuiver, 1967, p. 1400).

Also, Robert Heizer and Philip Drucker returned to La Venta in 1967-69 to reevaluate and continue their



Olmec Sites in Mesoamerica.

work at that site. They have established that La Venta's most important occupation period was from c.1000 to c.600 BC, that the large pyramid is circular instead of rectangular as was previously thought, and that there are many more monuments than previously supposed (Heizer, 1968, pp. 9-40; Heizer, Drucker, and Graham, 1968).

During the past few years other archaeologists have also been working in various parts of Mesoamerica in an attempt to determine the relationships between those areas and that of the Olmec civilization. Kent Flannery, for example, has been active in the Valley of Oaxaca and David Grove in highland central Mexico.

### SAN LORENZO TENOCHTITLAN

One of the foremost archaeologists in the Olmec field during the past few years has been Michael Coe of Yale University. While conducting his field work at San Lorenzo Tenochtitlán he found evidence of seven archaeological phases dating back to the Early and Middle Preclassic and to the Early Postclassic periods of Mesoamerica (Coe, 1969).

The initial or Ojochi Phase dates from c.1500 to c.1350 BC, and the pottery is quite similar to Ocos pottery, which is found on the Pacific coast of Chiapas and Guatemala. There is nothing specifically Olmec in this pottery or in the other cultural remains of this occupation.

The Bajío Phase has radiocarbon dates which place it from c.1350 to c.1250 BC. This is the time when large quantities of fill were added to form the mound at San Lorenzo and the site was planned as a ceremonial center. This probably marks the beginning of the Olmec occupation. The pottery is quite different from that of other Mesoamerican cultures that might have been contemporary with it.

The Chicharras Phase saw an influx of ideas and/or people at c.1250 to c.1150 BC. This was the time when some of the famous Olmec stone sculpturing took place, and is therefore definitely related to the full Olmec or San Lorenzo Phase, which follows.

Radiocarbon measurements date the San Lorenzo Phase from c.1150 to c.900 BC. It represents the florescence of Olmec civilization, and it was during this time that most of the monuments were carved. A 200-meter-long system of stone drains was constructed, along with artificial ponds apparently controlled by the drains. Pottery decorations show the familiar Olmec motifs of crossed-bands, jaguar-paw-wing, flame brows, and fire-serpent jaws. Pottery similar to that of the San Lorenzo Phase is known as the Cuadros Phase on the Pacific coast of Chiapas and Guatemala and the San José Phase in the Valley of Oaxaca, and is also found at

Tlatilco and Las Bocas in the Central Highlands of Mexico. At the main site itself typical Olmec figurines are present, along with foreign figurine types showing contact with other areas. At the end of this period many of the monuments at San Lorenzo were intentionally and ceremoniously destroyed. Coe interprets this as an indication of the arrival of a new people (Coe, 1969).

The Nacaste Phase dates from c.900 to c.700 BC. The pottery is quite different from that of the San Lorenzo Phase but is similar to that of the Chiapas II Phase at Chiapa de Corzo in the central highlands of Chiapas, the Conchas I Phase at La Victoria on the Pacific coast of Guatemala, and the Guadalupe Phase in the Valley of Oaxaca. Evidence of a major domestic settlement at San Lorenzo appears at this time, and much of the Olmec pattern disappears. Nevertheless, Olmec influence was still felt and may have come from La Venta.

The Palangán Phase dates from c.600 to c.400 BC. This represents a reoccupation of the site after it had been abandoned, and the pottery is similar to that from La Venta, to that from Chiapas IV or Francesa at Chiapa de Corzo, and to some of the Mamóm pottery types of the lowland Maya area.

So far as revealed by Coe's excavations, San Lorenzo was thereafter uninhabited for some 1300 years. The final occupation, represented by the Villa Alta Phase, was Early Postclassic and dates from AD c.900 to c.1200, the Toltec period throughout Mesoamerica.

During the three seasons that Coe spent at San Lorenzo many new monuments were discovered, including another colossal stone head, a kneeling figure which apparently once had movable arms but is now lacking both arms and head, and a figure sitting cross-legged, also lacking its head. A total of 48 monuments has now been found at San Lorenzo.

### LA VENTA

At the same time that Coe was excavating at San Lorenzo, Heizer and Drucker were continuing their work at La Venta. Radiocarbon dates indicate that the principal occupation of La Venta was between c.1000 and c.600 BC. The largest feature is a huge pyramid in the form of a fluted cone with the base measuring 420 feet in diameter. Heizer (1968, p. 19) suggests that the form of the pyramid may be an imitation of volcanic cinder cones located in the Tuxtla Mountains just 70 kilometers west of the site. This seems more logical when it is shown that most of the great basalt blocks weighing up to 36 tons, used for sculpturing the colossal heads, stelae, and altars at San Lorenzo and La Venta, were obtained from the Tuxtla Mountains. In 1969 mag-

netometer studies made at the La Venta pyramid showed that there may be other structures within it (Morrison, Benavente, Clewlow, and Heizer, 1969).

In addition to the work done at the pyramid, many new monuments have been found at La Venta, including a figure seated cross-legged measuring 40 cm. in height. Its head is gone, but in style it is quite similar to the "luchador" or "ballplayer" figure found near Minatitlán. A head with an elaborate headdress was also found at the summit of the volcano San Martín Pajapán in the Tuxtla Mountains. A drainage system was also found, which was similar to the one found at San Lorenzo.

#### OLMEC INFLUENCE OUTSIDE THE CLIMAX AREA

Olmec influence appears to have been felt throughout most of Mesoamerica. For example, at Chalcingo, Morelos, are found petroglyphs in the Olmec art style, also cave paintings at Juxtlahuaca and Oxtotitlán, Guerrero. Olmec art has been found as far away as Costa Rica.

Kent Flannery has found Preclassic occupations in the Valley of Oaxaca dating back to about 1200 BC, with the ceramic material very similar to that found at San Lorenzo, Chiapa de Corzo, and Tlatilco. Much of the iconography found in the earliest phases at Oaxaca (San José and Guadalupe) is similar to that of the Gulf Coast. For example the were-jaguar, the "St. Andrew's cross," the U-motif, and the paw-wing design are found in Oaxaca (Flannery, 1968). Flannery states that the contact came about because certain exotic raw materials, such as magnetite and jade, are found in Oaxaca but not in the Olmec heartland, and therefore trade developed.

David Grove has discovered Olmec sites in Morelos which he believes were founded because they were on trade routes connecting Guerrero, central Mexico, and the Gulf Coast (Grove, 1968). He has also proposed that the Olmec influence in Morelos and at Tlatilco lasted from c.1100 to c.900 BC and that after that time it diminished or disappeared (Grove, 1970).

"Olmecs" also settled in or influenced parts of northern Central America. According to Lowe, "... presently known trait distribution certainly indicates spheres of influence closely allying most of Chiapas with the Olmec climax region. The evidence strongly suggests that the greater Isthmus area from San Lorenzo on the west to Altamira on the east was an Olmec heartland which formed a stubborn cultural (and probably ethnic) block which clung tenaciously to its traditions and effectively resisted acceptance of outside traits between the 11th and 6th centuries BC, broadly speaking. Even Izapa, as a major ceremonial center with strong exposure to its non-Olmec southern neighbors, deviated

remarkably little from the Olmec cultural norm during this period." (Green and Lowe, 1967, p. 71.) At Izapa some of the Cuadros Phase pottery "... is nearly identical to part of the San Lorenzo complex at San Lorenzo Tenochtitlán, and the Soconusco sites may be thought to be rural settlements or even a sustaining area of the Olmec heartland ... ." (Ekholm, 1969, p. 96).

#### THE "OLMECS" IN MESOAMERICAN HISTORY

Ignacio Bernal believes that there was only one tradition of civilization in Mesoamerica; it began with the "Olmec World," which included most of Mesoamerica beginning about 1200 BC and continued with changes—but no basic changes—all through Mesoamerican history until the European conquest of the sixteenth century (Bernal, 1968, p. 136). He sees two periods of florescence in southern Veracruz: an earlier one corresponding to the large monuments in the round and a later one corresponding mainly to stelae and sculpture in low relief. The religious-economic-military-commercial association of traits characteristic of Mesoamerica in this latter period had already been formed by the earlier "Olmecs."

M. Wells Jakeman also sees only one civilizational tradition in Mesoamerica, which he terms the "ancient Mesoamerican cultist-urban co-tradition," and compares with the long-recognized "ancient Peruvian (cultist-urban) co-tradition" (1968).

However, Jakeman recognizes three distinct epochs in the history of the Mesoamerican civilizational tradition, each of which can be called a civilization (cf. the ancient "classical civilization" of the Old World, and yet also the "Greek civilization" and the "Roman civilization"). John L. Sorenson also recognizes the first two of Jakeman's epochs or civilizations as also "civilizations." In the combined chronologies of Jakeman and Sorenson these are: (1) the "Early Cultist" or "Olmec" during the Early and Middle Preclassic periods, with survivals into the Late Preclassic; (2) the "Theocratic" or Maya and related Teotihuacán in the Late Preclassic and Classic periods (c.500 BC to c.AD 950); and (3) the "Decadent Cultist" or "ancient Mexican" (Toltec, Mixtec, Aztec, and other late developments of the Post-classic period, c.AD 950 to the early sixteenth century).

The early Olmec florescence, according to Sorenson (1970), rested on agriculture and trade, with religion subordinate. Among the later "Mayas" and "Teotihuacanos," however, ritual and religious concerns were all-important. This distinction between the first two civilizations is also made by Jakeman (1968). Some of the differences between them lead him to adopt the terms "Early Cultist" and "Theocratic," respectively, for

convenient descriptive reference to the two developments.

### OLMEC ORIGINS

Because of the many new data that have lately become available to archaeologists, several students have attempted partially to reconstruct the Olmec culture and to postulate its beginnings. In order to do these things one must begin to answer the following questions: Where did the "Olmecs" get the technical ability and social organization to build large ceremonial centers and pyramids and to move very large blocks of basalt? Where did their art style come from? Where and when did they learn to make pottery?

Many believe that the Olmec civilization is the culmination of a cultural development that took place in the New World with very little or no influence from the Old World. In other words, civilization in the New World was the result of cultural evolution, beginning with simple hunting and gathering cultures and gradually progressing to the level of civilization (Heizer, 1971, pp. 56-57).

Others, because of the abrupt appearance of the Olmec culture traits with so few apparent antecedents, believe there must have been some sort of influence from the outside world.

Still others have not attempted to hypothesize about its origin because they feel that not enough evidence is available at the present time. ". . . By pushing back the earliest Olmec civilization to such an early date—to a time when there was little else but simple village cultures in the rest of Mexico and Central America—the lack of antecedents is an embarrassing problem. We now have no idea where the Olmec came from or who built the mounds and carved the sculptures of San Lorenzo" (Coe, Diehl, and Stuiver, 1967, p. 1400).

Some, however, have begun to hypothesize on specific antecedents for the Olmec culture. Gareth Lowe of the BYU-New World Archaeological Foundation has stated that the essentially Olmec aspect of the simple pottery shapes found at Tehuacán (the Purrón and Ajalpán phases) and on the Guerrero coast near Acapulco, which date from c.2400 BC, may represent the western progenitors ". . . of a common Olmecan (or pre-Olmecan) stock which maintained a basic ceramic conservatism for 2000 years as it slowly pushed eastward. The esoteric Olmec art style which eventually was slapped onto largely existing pottery forms may have developed entirely within the Gulf Isthmian or Tuxtlas regions as many would believe . . ." (Green and Lowe, 1967, p. 72). In other words, Lowe says that Olmec pottery shows strong affinities to and is probably

derived from the Tehuacán Valley in the Central Highlands and possibly Guerrero, where the earliest pottery found in Mesoamerica dates to c.2400 BC (cf. Brush, 1965, and MacNeish, 1964). However, he believes that the decorative art style may rather be the result of evolutionary development within the southeastern Gulf Coast area.

Sorenson also hypothesizes that the Olmec development first took place in the Central Highlands and that, once advancement had been made in political, social, and agricultural methods, and in trade, the "Olmecs" were able to move to more harsh environments such as the Gulf Coast area.

It appears to the writer, however, that the southern Gulf Coast is the area where most of the developments leading to the Olmec civilization took place. Because of the new data from Morelos (Grove, 1970), it is difficult to see how it could have developed in the Central Highlands and then moved to the Gulf Coast. Grove places the Olmec period in Morelos during the La Juana Phase, c.1100 to c.900 BC, and at about the same time at Tlatilco; whereas, Coe has found that some of the famous Olmec stone sculpturing took place at San Lorenzo on the Gulf Coast during the Chicharras Phase, c.1250 to c.1150 BC. Also, the latter site was planned and the mound built during the Bajío Phase, between 1350 and 1250 BC. This places the Olmec occupation of San Lorenzo 150 to 200 years earlier than that of highland central Mexico.

Ignacio Bernal has long held that the first signs of civilization are found on the Gulf Coast, i.e. the Olmec heartland, where antecedents are also present. Thus the birth of civilization in Mesoamerica took place in the dense jungles of the southern Veracruz-western Tabasco region. (Bernal, 1969, p. 13.) He has said that the antecedents date from c.1500 BC to c.1200 BC, which is the time when regional styles began to emerge in Mesoamerica, and that the 1200-600-BC period represents the efflorescence of the San Lorenzo and La Venta sites.

Jakeman (1968) and Sorenson (1970) have stated that, because of the high degree of sophistication of Olmec society in matters of site planning, sculpturing, trade, and writing, its development must stretch back into the third millennium BC. They agree with Coe, as quoted above, that there was a tremendous amount of development in a relatively short period of time between c.3400 and c.1200 BC. During this time it would appear that cultures in Mesoamerica made the great advance from incipient agriculture to a stage in which the construction of San Lorenzo was possible.

Sorenson lists two ways of interpreting this fast rate of development: (1) cultural evolution: civilization gradually came into existence as the people sought to adapt to their environment; or (2) influence from Old World civilizations. As Coe states, the first seems un-

acceptable because of time limitations and lack of antecedents. The second has always been considered unacceptable because of preconceived notions about lack of transoceanic travel. Sorenson points out, however, that the interpretation of diffusionary influences during the second or third millennium BC is no less plausible than the view of a sudden appearance of full civilization from out of simple incipient-agriculture societies (Sorenson, 1970, pp. 14-15).

Jakeman lists some of the Mesopotamian-like traits in the Olmec civilization (1963, 1968), and Thomas Stuart Ferguson (1958) and Sorenson (1969, 1971) have assembled extensive lists of cultural traits which they believe indicate a Near East-to-Mesoamerica movement. (See also Jakeman, 1958, 1972.) Sorenson maintains that at least "part of that movement could have been early enough to have constituted the basis for civilized life in Middle America" (1970, p. 15).

### CONCLUSIONS

As can be seen, there is still no consensus of opinion as to where the "Olmecs" came from or what their civilization developed out of. This lack of agreement exists because of the relatively few data known to archaeology from the Early Preclassic period as compared to later periods of ancient Mesoamerican history.

Because of the work done during the past four or five years, however, we know more about the "Olmecs" than ever before. It has been shown that their civilization probably dates from at least as early as 1350 BC and that it had reached its florescence and begun to decline by c.600 BC or shortly thereafter. Olmec influences have been found in most of Mesoamerica, with the major exception being the lowland area later occupied by the Maya civilization.

The expansion of the "Olmecs" to areas outside the southern Gulf Coast was probably due to their need for raw materials not found in their homeland. Many believe that jade, serpentine, and magnetite were the exotic materials that caused the "Olmecs" to open and control trade routes to the Central Highlands, Guerrero, and Oaxaca, and along the Pacific coast through Chiapas and Guatemala all the way to Costa Rica.

Along with trade, agriculture was basic to the Olmec economy, and in the heartland it was probably practiced much as it is today, by slash-and-burn techniques. Politics, Coe feels (1968b, p. 110), was controlled by "great civil lords, members of royal lineages," and the religious practices of Olmec times may have formed the foundation for those of later Mesoamerican civilizations.

Because of recent field work the dating of the Olmec civilization is now much more secure, with

archaeological phases established for San Lorenzo, La Venta, and other sites. Also, it is now possible to say more about their culture, including trade, agriculture, and religion. However, the data are still very inconclusive as to who the "Olmecs" really were and where the roots of their civilization lie. If Jakeman, Ferguson, Sorenson, and some other writers are right in their hypothesis that the basis of New World civilization is in the ancient Near East, then some exciting research lies ahead.

### ADDENDUM, 1972

The following statement has been included in order to update the preceding paper, read in October, 1970. Research has continued in the Olmec field at an ever-increasing rate, and several significant papers have appeared in the past year and one half.

Grove (1971) has stated that "... the important cultural developments leading to Mesoamerica's first complex culture, the Olmec, take place in the isthmian region. The initial stages of this development apparently occur primarily along the Pacific coastal region of Guatemala and Chiapas, the later stages along the Gulf Coast." Also, Grove has pointed out that the Gulf-Coast "Olmecs" appear to have been influenced very little in Early Preclassic times from the Central Highlands. However, there are similarities at Tlatilco to the Gulf-Coast Olmec materials (Tolstoy and Paradis, 1971) and also at Capacha in Colima and at El Opeño in Michoacán. At the latter two sites connections possibly exist with the Machalilla culture of ancient Ecuador also. (Grove, 1971.)

Other interesting observations have been made about the possibility of contacts between Mesoamerica and South America. Coe (1962) postulates an Olmec derivation of part of the "pre-Chavín" Kotosh culture of Peru; while Grove (1971) advances the possibility of a common ancestry for the Olmec and Chavín civilizations. Lowe (1971) believes that some ideas and techniques in pottery-making in Mesoamerica may have come from South America.

In a recent paper Heizer (1971, p. 52) has modified his thinking on the period of occupation of La Venta. He now feels that it began c.1200 or 1000 BC and lasted until c.500 or 400 BC. It appears that the orientation of the site represents the astronomical knowledge and beliefs of the "Olmecs." (Heizer, 1971, pp. 60-61; Hatch, 1971.) Hatch has also suggested (1971, p. 10) that the pyramid was constructed as a vantage point to observe the horizon and take astronomical sightings. He further states (p. 35) that "... two of the features of the La Venta-period Olmec culture [were that] ... they possessed an organized practical astronomy whose central function was calendrical [and

that] . . . a certain portion of Olmec symbolism can be interpreted as glyphic records of astronomical phenomena . . .”

Recent evidence also pushes the date of the Olmec influence in Morelos and the Valley of Mexico back to about 1300 or 1200 BC (Grove, 1971; Tolstoy and Paradis, 1971). This places the Olmec appearance in central Mexico at approximately the same time as in the Gulf Coast region. “. . . The earliest ceramic occupation in the Basin of Mexico is culturally ‘Olmec’ ” (Tolstoy and Paradis, 1971, p. 347).

As stated in the writer’s original paper of 1970, Olmec influence extended throughout much of Mesoamerica. Recently, for example, an Olmec stela was found at San Miguel Amuco, Guerrero. The “. . . Guerrero Olmec is an entire complex including ceramics, hollow baby-face figures, portable stone art, and monumental art (both carved and painted)” (Grove and Paradis, 1971, pp. 100-101).

As can be seen, much progress has recently been made in Olmec archaeology. Much still remains to be done, however. It will be interesting to view the developments of the next several years.

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1970 “Magnetometer Survey of the La Venta Pyramid, 1969,” *Contributions of the University of California Archaeological Research Facility*, No. 8, pp. 1-20. University of California: Berkeley.
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1967 “The Colossal Stone Heads of the Southern Gulf-Coast Region of Mexico,” *Newsletter and Proceedings of the SEHA*, 103.60 (No. 103, pp. 2-8). Society for Early Historic Archaeology: Provo. (Reprinted in Ross T. Christensen, ed., *Transoceanic Crossings to Ancient America*, pp. 10-16.)
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1969 “Ancient America and the Book of Mormon Revisited,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Vol. 4, No. 2, pp. 80-94. (This article reviewed in Newsletter, 116.41. Ed.)  
1970 “What Happened in Mesoamerica.” MS. Orem, Utah.  
1971 “The Significance of an Apparent Relationship between the Ancient Near East and Mesoamerica,” in Carroll L. Riley et al. (eds.), *Man Across the Sea: Problems of Pre-Columbian Contacts*, pp. 219-241. Austin and London: University of Texas Press. (This paper briefly reviewed in Newsletter, 132.0, p. 2. Ed.)
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1943 *Stone Monuments of Southern Mexico*. Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 138. Washington, DC.
- Tolstoy, Paul, and Louise I. Paradis  
1971 “Early and Middle Preclassic Culture in the Basin of Mexico,” *Science*, Vol. 167, No. 3917, pp. 344-351.
- Vaillant, George C.  
1932 “A Pre-Columbian Jade,” *Natural History*, Vol. 32, No. 6.
- Wicke, Charles R.  
1971 *Olmec; an Early Art Style of Precolumbian Mexico*. Tucson.

EDITOR'S NOTE. The "Olmecs" have been treated in various past SEHA publications, in addition to the study by Mr. Nelson of the giant stone heads listed in the Bibliography, above. Some of these discuss the correlation of the "Olmec" or first ancient civilization of Mesoamerica, and also of the "Early Maya" or second civilization (chiefly the "Izapan" and "preclassic Petén Maya" developments) and related cultures (e.g. the "Teotihuacán"), with the two ancient Near Eastern-derived civilizations of that area according to the Book of Mormon, the "Jaredite" and the "Lehite-Mulekite." See especially the following:

Ferguson, Thomas Stuart

1953 "Joseph Smith and American Archaeology," *Bulletin of the University Archaeological Society*, No. 4, pp. 19-25.

Jakeman M. Wells

1963 "The Main Challenge of the Book of Mormon to Archaeology; and a Summary of Archaeological Research to Date Giving a Preliminary Test of Book-of-Mormon Claims," in Ross T. Christensen (ed.), *Progress in Archaeology; an Anthology*, pp. 99-103. Provo.

133.1 NEW OLMEC FINDS. A Review of *Xochipala: The Beginnings of Olmec Art*, by Carlo T. E. Gay (The Art Museum, Princeton University: 1972. 63 pp. 41 pl. cloth \$8.00. paper \$3.95). Review by Nona P. Parkin. (Mrs. Parkin, née Patterson, graduated from BYU with the BA degree in archaeology, May, 1971. Ed.)

Accidental discoveries of ancient ceramic figurines from 1967 onwards, in the Mezcala region of Guerrero, Mexico, directed the author's attention to the Xochipala basin as "the center of an Olmec ceramic tradition on a formative level, which preceded and probably prompted the development of related ceramic industries in central Mexico and the Gulf Coast" (p. 11). On July 19, 1970, Mr. Gay and his associate, Gillett Griffin, visited Xochipala to survey its environs. They returned twice in August, 1971, to confirm the existence of a complex including at least four burial sites identified by man-made earthen mounds at each location. Names were assigned each: El Zacatoso (first recognized in 1967) and the more recent ones, Las Mesas, Las Tejas, and Llano Delgado.

The author found that at one time the Xochipala basin supported luxuriant forests with abundant wildlife. Deforestation of the Sierra Madre from colonial times to this day and cultivation of the land by the slash-and-burn method have eroded away the fertile soil. Traces of an ancient lake in the valley support the assumption that rainfall was at one time more plentiful. Since artifacts

have been found at various elevations above the banks of the lake, it must have existed for a considerable time in spite of the porosity of the rock strata beneath.

The assignment of previously unidentified finds of figurines to the Xochipala ceramic complex results from the author's knowledge of a number of distinctive typological classifications not found within the other known Preclassic traditions of central and midwestern Mexico. The strong naturalism in the form of the figurines shows a cultural isolation from the rest of ancient Mexico between 1500 BC and AD 200. The author can justify such an observation "only in a highly creative and sophisticated tradition such as the Olmec, and on its formative level."

The Xochipala figurines now number about 125. They have not resulted from controlled archaeological excavations but rather from occasional discoveries by local persons. They are grouped stylistically on the assumption of an evolutionary trend in the tradition from naturalism to conventionalism. The book contains excellent black-and-white photographs of all major items in the collection.

Figurines assigned to the Early Xochipala period are portrait-like works, generally nude, with anatomical details which are never "vulgarized" by exaggeration. Since no distinctive accoutrements or symbolic motifs are found on them that would suggest a magical or religious function, the author postulates an art at this period free from the dictates of any formalized religion.

Mr. Gay finds the postures, gestures, and facial expressions in themselves so moving and with such spirituality as almost to defy description. He regards these figures as "within the range of the greatest ceramic sculpture of all time." They may represent a beginning phase of Classic Olmec art earlier than 1200 BC.

Moving towards the Middle Xochipala period, there is a slight departure from naturalism in the form of the figurines. Anatomical detail is less fastidious, and at the same time there are added ornamental accoutrements and symbolic motifs. In the reviewer's opinion this could indicate the adoption of a "state" religion or the rise of a priestly class attempting to standardize worship and religious expression, perhaps as the result of new influence from the main Olmec centers in the Tehuantepec Gulf-Coast region. The repertoire of figurative representations becomes increasingly diversified. What may be the feathered-serpent symbol comes into play, and sexual forms are exaggerated. Even the hair of the head is often delineated in such a way as to conform to some motif. The so-called ballplayer figures appear among the standard types in the Middle Xochipala period, as does a dancer or sorcerer wearing garments covered with leaves. Also during this time, hollow figurines first appear in the complex. It is the consensus that these were probably an Olmec achievement, but the



Examples of ceramic figurines from the Early Xochipala period.

“where and when” of their origin remain to be determined, perhaps in this period of the Xochipala complex itself.

The author suggests that the cult of Xipe Totec (an ancient Mexican god of springtime and human sacrifice) existed among the “Olmecs”. This is based on the interpretation of certain paired cuts on “Middle Xochipala” figurines—on the neck and throat, around the ears, and above and below the knees—as representing the wearing of a flayed human skin. But the author also notes that such cuts could just as readily indicate a form of ritual scarification, so we have no actual proof that this gruesome custom came into practice here at such an early date.

The Late Xochipala period is marked by figurines in stereotypes that show little or no originality. We observe a degeneration of style and a decline in the evolutionary trend of the tradition. Perhaps individual initiative was becoming submerged in a collective ideal, and/or religion had lost touch with daily life. In numerous cultures one can note how creative genius is lost when thoughts no longer soar heavenward. When worship declines to the level of empty, formal gestures, the artist no longer feels the reality of man’s relationship to Deity. Was such the case in the Late Xochipala period?

“The Xochipala typology is characterized by a more or less pronounced naturalism at every level of its development.” The author, in his classification into time periods, has assumed the realistic-to-baroque trend common to other artistic flowerings. By examining the figurines themselves the student is surprised by the diversity of expression within the relatively narrow field of basic types. The reviewer agrees with the author that this can only be the result of a profound aesthetic and technical experience.

The Early Xochipala period shows no prototypes: the tradition appears complete from the onset. This could lead an LDS student to give new credence to the idea of oceanic transplanted culture from a preexisting culture. The facial type exhibited by the figurines is not that of the Mongoloid race as seen in many American Indians, but points more towards Near Eastern, perhaps Sumerian, models. (Cf. Jakeman, 1963 and 1968, cited in the preceding paper, 133.0: lists of Near Eastern—Mesopotamian, especially Sumerian—parallels in the Olmec civilization. Ed.)

The anatomical details and sexual traits are handled with such delicacy and restraint as to presuppose a religious ideal embracing the sanctity of the human body. While in other Preclassic traditions one notes exaggerations and distortions to sensualize the subject, the Early Xochipala period is free of such defilements.

The Xochipala (“Guerrero Olmec”) complex has raised many queries as to its cultural relationships with

the previously defined Mezcala complex of the same environs. Strangely enough, there is suggested "a strict separation between the cultures insofar as funerary equipment is concerned." Either the two traditions were not coeval or else they thrived in a state of relative spacial and social isolation. If the Book of Mormon may be considered, we may have here two groups of such divergent moral viewpoints that any incorporation of the Mezcala people would have been noxious to the religious development of the more enlightened Xochipala "Olmecs."

The author has done an excellent job in supporting his thesis that at Xochipala the initial style of the Olmec art tradition was ushered in. The text, incidentally, is taken from a work in progress on Preclassic ceramic figurines from central and midwestern Mexico by the author and Frances Pratt. *Xochipala: The Beginnings of Olmec Art* was prepared to accompany a special exhibition at the Art Museum of Princeton University early in 1972.

**133.2 "OLMECS" AND "JAREDITES": AN EDITORIAL COMMENT.** Students of the Book of Mormon will note that the distinctive "Olmec" civilization of archaeology, treated at length in the preceding papers of Mr. Nelson and Mrs. Parkin, is of about the same antiquity as the latter part of the "Jaredite" civilization of the Nephite scripture.

It is not at present possible to date with precision the Jaredite presence in ancient America. There are two good reasons for this: (1) the 32-page Book of Ether, which is the principal source on this subject, is altogether too sketchy (the prophet-historian Moroni says, "the hundredth part I have not written"; 15:33); and (2) in striking contrast with the remainder of the Book of Mormon, Ether contains no dates whatever.

Nevertheless, in a general way one can postulate the time-range of the Jaredite civilization: from the building of the "great tower" (Ether 1:33) down to some time after the arrival of the Lehi colony; that is to say, roughly from 2400 to perhaps 200 BC.

This 2200-year Jaredite era, incidentally, is more than twice as long as that of the much more fully recorded Nephite civilization, which may be dated from about 600 BC to about AD 400. Other things being equal, therefore, its material remains should also total more than twice as many.

The reign of Lib, at about the midpoint of this Jaredite era—perhaps somewhere near 1300 BC—was a time of great material prosperity. The abridger, despite his felt need for brevity, was moved to comment at length on the city-building of the Jaredites at this time and their industry, commerce, and craftsmanship in metals, textiles, agricultural tools, and weapons, following which he exclaimed that there "never could be a

people more blessed than were they, and more prospered by the hand of the Lord" (Ether 10:28). Surely, the second half of the era, beginning with the reign of Lib, left abundant material remains upon which the archaeologist might practice his profession.

The Olmec picture is still far from clear, but one aspect that has become quite clear is that the archaeological civilization of that name prospered in a state of great artistic and technological sophistication during the latter half of the Jaredite era of the Book of Mormon and in the approximate area where the Jaredites must have lived. The "Olmecs" so far known to archaeologists must therefore have been either late Jaredites or some other people who, although not mentioned in the Book, were in contact with them and had achieved about the same level of civilization.

In view of these considerations it behooves students of the Book of Mormon to keep a close watch on developments in the field of Olmec archaeology.

(For brief preliminary comparisons of the Olmec finds with the Jaredite civilization of the Book of Mormon, see the references at the end of Mr. Nelson's paper, 133.0, above: Ferguson, 1953, and Jakeman, 1963.)

**133.3 ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM PLANNED.** By Bruce D. Louthan. The Twenty-third Annual Symposium on the Archaeology of the Scriptures has been scheduled for Saturday, October 20, 1973, on the BYU campus in the Madsen Recital Hall of the Harris Fine Arts Center. The SEHA Board of Trustees has again appointed Dr. Ellis T. Rasmussen to serve as general chairman of the event.

Dr. Rasmussen, assistant dean of the College of Religious Instruction and professor of ancient scriptures at BYU, is a long-time member of the SEHA and, since October of 1972, has been a member of its Board of Trustees (Newsletter, 132.2). He was formerly a member of the Advisory Committee and was also chairman of last year's symposium (Newsletter, 130.1, 131.3). The author of various articles and books, he has specialized in the Old Testament field.

Dr. Sidney B. Sperry, BYU professor emeritus of Old Testament languages and literature and a leader in the SEHA for many years, will again serve as honorary chairman of the Symposium.

Other members of the 1973 Symposium Committee are: Robert D. Bass (SEHA vice-president); Paul R. Cheesman; Ross T. Christensen; M. Wells Jakeman; Bruce D. Louthan; Welby W. Ricks; and Rebecca Christensen, secretary.

**133.4 SYMPOSIUM CHAIRMAN ISSUES INVITATION.** By Bruce D. Louthan. Dr. Ellis T. Rasmussen, 1973 symposium chairman, has invited every member of

the SEHA to prepare a paper for possible reading before the Twenty-third Annual Symposium on the Archaeology of the Scriptures, to be held on October 20 (see above, 133.3). His guidelines, issued on behalf of the Symposium Committee, are as follows:

"If you would like to accept this invitation, please send us a one-page abstract or summary of your proposed paper by September 15, 1973. Mail it to: Symposium Committee, 140 Maeser Building, BYU, Provo, Utah 84602. (Please do not submit the paper itself at this time—only the one-page summary.) The abstract is being requested at this early date to allow time for the Committee to make its selections, give due notification to participants, and prepare a printed program.

"The only limitation as to subject matter is that each paper should deal with some contribution of scripture-related archaeological research.

"Reading time for each paper should not exceed 20 minutes. Following the reading of each, a discussion period of about 10 minutes will be provided.

"Each of those chosen to participate will be expected to provide us with one copy of his completed paper after he reads it at the Symposium. Selected papers will later be published in the *Newsletter and Proceedings of the SEHA*. Any paper read at the Annual Symposium becomes the property of the Society and may be published only at the discretion of its editors."

**133.5 HAYES SCHOLARSHIPS AWARDED.** Two Brigham Young University graduate students have been named Hayes Archaeological Scholars for 1973.

Bruce D. Louthan, 26, of Kankakee, Illinois, and Payson, Utah, has received \$1,000 to make a detailed ceramic comparison between ancient Mesoamerica and the Syro-Palestinean area. His project is entitled "An Analytic Comparison of Early Maya Pottery of the Late Preclassic and Early Protoclassic Periods with Middle Iron Age Pottery of Syro-Palestine." The Middle Iron Age covers the period from c.900 to c.600 BC in the Near East.

Marilyn Malone, 22, of Phoenix, Arizona, will be awarded \$500 to finance a study of pre-Columbian temples of Mesoamerica to determine whether there exist resemblances in structure, symbolism, and ritual to those of the ancient Near East. Her project bears the name, "Mesoamerican Temples: Symbolism and Ritual."

The Hayes Archaeological Scholarship Fund was established in 1969 by Mr. and Mrs. P. Kennan Hayes of

Seattle, Washington. Past recipients have been Fred W. Nelson, Jr., and Donald W. Forsyth. (Newsletter, 127.5, 131.3.) This year the awards are being generously supplemented by funds from BYU.

Mr. and Mrs. Hayes have given instructions that the annual scholarship "be used in direct support of Book of Mormon archaeology" (Newsletter, 127.5). The selection of scholars is made by the faculty of the Department of Anthropology and Archaeology, particularly those who have specialized in that field.

Mr. Hayes has been a Life Member of the SEHA since February, 1969 (Newsletter, 119.8).

Mr. Louthan graduated last year from BYU, where he is now pursuing the Master of Arts degree in archaeology. As an undergraduate he served as an aid in the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology and participated in excavations of prehistoric sites in Utah Valley. He has also taken part in historic-period excavations at Nauvoo, Illinois, principal city of the Latter-day Saints from 1839 to 1846. In the summer of 1972 he was an intern in archaeology at the Smithsonian Institution of Washington. He has studied under Dr. Philip C. Hammond, outstanding Palestinologist at the University of Utah. For a number of years Mr. Louthan has been on the staff of the *Newsletter and Proceedings* and is at present the associate editor. (Newsletter, 107.20, 132.5.)

Miss Malone graduated *summa cum laude* from BYU in 1972 and is also now seeking the Master of Arts degree in archaeology. She has participated four years in the BYU Honors Program. In 1970 she read a paper, "Parallels Between Canaanite Literature and the Old Testament," at the Twentieth Annual Symposium on the Archaeology of the Scriptures. She has received appointments as a student teaching assistant and a museum aid in the BYU Department of Anthropology and Archaeology and has worked on Forest Survey projects in archaeology. (Newsletter, 123.1, 132.5.)

It is hoped that progress reports on the research of both Mr. Louthan and Miss Malone can be presented at the Annual Symposium on the Archaeology of the Scriptures, scheduled for next October 20 (see above, 133.3).

Mr. Louthan, incidentally, in collaboration with Michael O. Hironymous, BYU senior in anthropology, has also received a grant of studentbody funds in support of the above-mentioned ceramic comparison. According to the *Daily Universe* (BYU student newspaper) of April 12, the pair were awarded \$485 to make "A Comparative Analysis of Early Maya Pottery with Pottery of Syro-Palestine."