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142.0 DISCOVERIES AT NIMRUD AND THE "STICKS" OF EZEKIEL 37. By Keith H. Meservy, associate professor of ancient scripture at Brigham Young University. Guest address delivered at the Twenty-fourth Annual Symposium on the Archaeology of the Scriptures, held at Brigham Young University on October 26, 1974. Revised. (A briefer discussion of this same subject by Professor Meservy was published in *The Ensign*, September, 1977, pp. 22-27.)

FROM JOSEPH SMITH'S TIME to the present, the word "stick" in Ezekiel 37:15-20 has been consistently interpreted by Latter-day Saint missionaries

and teachers as a written record or a book, the "stick of Judah" meaning the Bible, and the "stick of Ephraim" meaning the Book of Mormon.¹

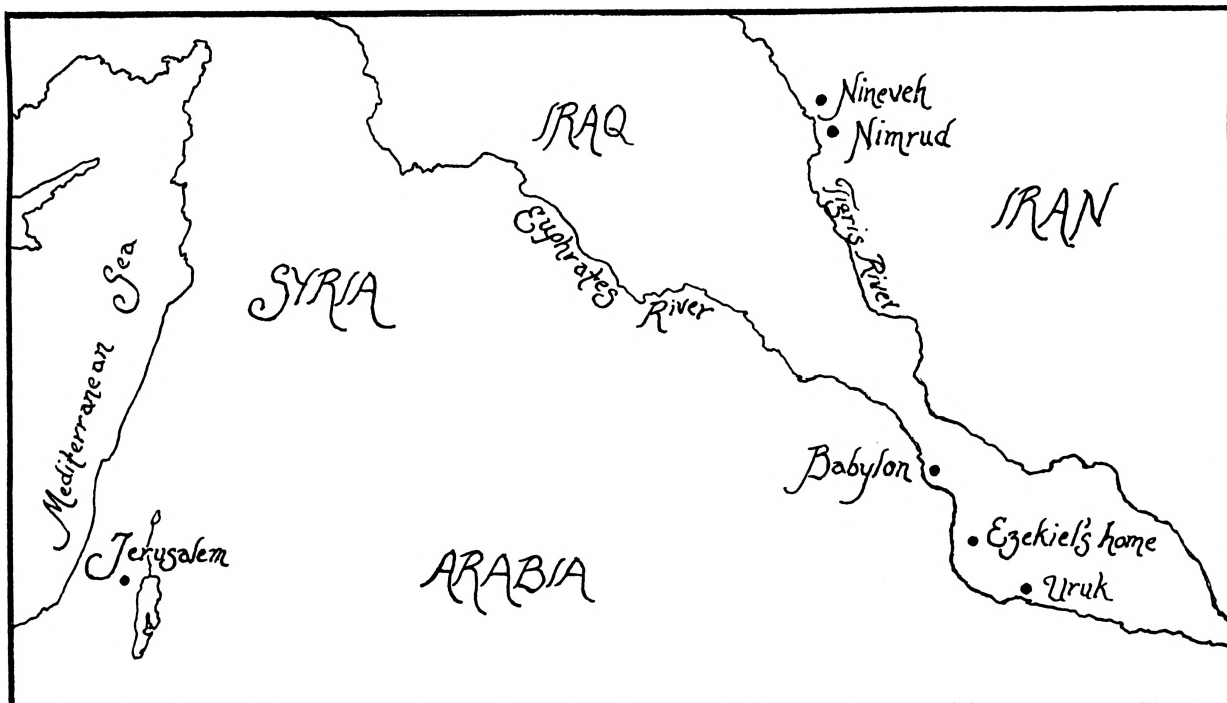


Fig. 1. Ancient Near Eastern sites referred to in this paper. In the bottom of a well at Nimrud, tablets were discovered which make possible a more accurate translation of the "sticks" of Ezekiel, Chapter 37. Map by John T. Olive and the editor.

Because Ezekiel was commanded to write upon them, the meaning of these “sticks” as written records has been taken for granted among Latter-day Saints; but how sticks could provide a writing base has puzzled their interpreters and led them to differing conclusions about what kind of stick was meant: a scroll stick, a talley stick, a scepter stick, or even a nation.² But regardless of how the word is to be explained they have maintained their conviction that each stick represents a scripture.

Non-LDS scholars, taking a cue from the Greek translation, have usually interpreted the word stick to mean “rod” or “scepter”, and some Latter-day Saints who have felt uncomfortable with the traditional Mormon interpretation have tended to agree with them. New archaeological data, however, provide a basis for rejecting either “stick” or “rod” as an appropriate translation and make it possible to select one that is linguistically and culturally consistent with Ezekiel’s milieu. As a consequence, there now seems to be more harmony than ever between the literal meaning of the prophecy and the traditional LDS interpretation.

PREVIOUS INTERPRETATIONS

The earliest known interpretation of Ezekiel 37:15–20 was made in the third century BC by Jewish scholars who translated the Hebrew scriptures into Greek (the Septuagint version) for the benefit of their fellow Jews living in Egypt. The Hebrew word *’eš*,³ rendered “stick” in the King James version, was rendered “rod” (*rabdōs*) in the Greek.

Without question the rod idea is an attractive one, conveying as it does a concept that is basically compatible with the content of Ezekiel’s prophecy. A rod in this light is a tribal scepter and in Ephraim’s hand connotes his rulership over the northern kingdom of Israel. In Judah’s hand the rod symbolizes rulership over the southern kingdom of Judah. Merging the scepters foreshadows the reunification of the two nations and the re-establishment of a monarchy over all Israel. And all this, according to the scepter interpretation, harmonizes completely with what Ezekiel is saying toward the end of this chapter:

I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel: and one king shall be king to them all; and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all. . . . and they all shall have one shepherd.⁴

The obvious harmony of this interpretation with the context indicates why commentators tend to follow it. It also partially explains why critics of the

LDS position might feel that any view other than the scepter interpretation would have to be incorrect. Consequently, the Mormon stick/book interpretation appears by comparison to be so odd and its use so clearly to show a vested interest, that the critics now cite this as an obvious case of “proof texting”—interpreting a text outside its context so as to satisfy a special sectarian purpose. One non-LDS critic has suggested that

. . . of all the proof texts the Mormon missionaries are wont to cite, there is none more far-fetched or less convincing than the identification of Ezekiel’s sticks with two bodies of scripture. If that proof is some day de-emphasized or abandoned, the case for Mormonism will actually be streamlined.⁵

Rejecting the idea that Ezekiel 37 and other missionary passages are merely proof texts and out of harmony with what the original writers intended, as some have said, Elder Harold B. Lee said to LDS seminary and institute personnel assembled at BYU in 1968:

. . . Some teach, according to reports, that the Stick of Joseph does not refer to the Book of Mormon and that the Doctrine and Covenants, Section 27, verse 5, which declares it to be, is not to be taken literally. God forbid that any of you teachers will teach any such doctrine or allow it to be taught without a challenge from you who know the truth and have a testimony.⁶

For Latter-day Saints, then, the issue is not whether the stick of Ephraim is the Book of Mormon; it is accepted church doctrine that it is. The Doctrine and Covenants 27:5 and the consistent interpretation by LDS spokesmen from the days of Joseph Smith to the present, show this. Thus, the question is rather one of understanding how this can be possible.

THE MEANING OF *’EŠ*

“Stick” and “rod” are the respective translations of the Hebrew word *’eš* in the King James and the Septuagint (Greek) versions, and yet these translations differ from one another. This gives rise to the following questions: do “stick” and “rod” connote the same thing? If not, which of the two interpretations should be preferred? Or, would some other translation be better?

Our initial problem, therefore, in understanding Ezekiel’s text relates to the meaning of the Hebrew word *’eš*. We must decide whether either the Greek or the English translation is an appropriate one. If the King James “stick” is, we still must satisfy ourselves as to what kind of stick is meant. If it is not, we must find a more appropriate translation. If “rod” is, then we must harmonize this with the question we raise below.

Based only on the varying translations of 'eš made by the Greek and the English translators, "stick" and "rod" are both very unusual. Out of approximately 300 appearances of this same word in the Hebrew text, the King James translators used stick only 14 times as an English equivalent, and half of these appear in Ezekiel 37. The predominant translations are either "tree" (162 times) or "wood" (103 times). The remaining translations are all less frequent than "stick": "timber," "stalk," "gallow," "stock," "staff," "helve," and "plank." "Wood" is clearly the link among all these ideas.

While "tree" predominates over "wood" in the English version, in the Greek this order is reversed. The Septuagint translators chose "wood" (*ksylon*) 249 times but "tree" (*dendron*) a mere 15 times. Eleven other Greek words appear less frequently than "tree". This 17-to-one choice of "wood" over "tree" by the translators of the Greek version is very significant, for it clearly indicates that the Jewish translators, in contrast with the English translators, regarded "wood" as the primary meaning of 'eš. Later, we shall attempt to show that this is also the primary meaning of the word in Ezekiel 37.

Knowing that "wood" is the predominant Greek translation of 'eš should lead us to expect to find it in Ezekiel 37, but as already noted the word "rod" (*radbos*) actually appears there. Significantly, out of approximately 300 uses of 'eš, this is the only time in the whole Greek Bible when a translator chose "rod" to translate it. This fact makes us wonder how solid this interpretation really is and what justification there is for making it.

It has been inferred that the translator was influenced by an older narrative in Numbers 17:2-3 (in the Hebrew text, vss. 16-17), in which the Lord required each tribal leader to write his own name upon his staff (*rabdos*) and leave it in the tabernacle overnight. Ezekiel's translator apparently drew an analogy between what those men had done and what Ezekiel was to do and made his translation show this. However, the Hebrew word in Numbers is not 'eš but *maṭṭeh*, which does mean "staff." So *rabdos* is a very appropriate translation there; but if Ezekiel meant "staff" why did he not use the word *maṭṭeh* rather than the word 'eš?

Thus, the unique Greek translation of this word in Ezekiel 37, together with the virtually unique English translation, suggests that one or the other translator must have had special insight into the meaning of 'eš in order to justify giving it a special meaning in this passage; or else that both of them were confused about the meaning of so common a word as "wood" in this context. On the basis of the

evidence that follows, we believe the latter alternative actually obtained.

NEW EVIDENCE FROM THE ANCIENT EAST

Fortunately, we live in a day when much light is being shed on the ancient Near Eastern world by archaeology. For our purposes, we are interested in the work being done in modern Iraq—the homeland of the ancient kingdoms of Assyria and Babylonia. In 593 BC, when Ezekiel was called to be a prophet, he was living in exile in Babylonia along with many of his fellow Jews who had been deported by Nebuchadnezzar. The Babylonian world, therefore, becomes the primary milieu of his prophecies. (See Fig. 1.)

In ancient Mesopotamia writing was typically done on moist clay with a stylus. Today, this kind of writing is called cuneiform (wedge-shaped). Some years ago, San Nicolo, a cuneiform scholar, became interested in the fact that some of the ancient writers referred in their clay records to another kind of record made on tablets of wood (*iš le'u*; pronounced "eets lay-oo"). No such record had ever been found in any excavation by any archaeologist, however, so he and other scholars were left to speculate about its nature. Some concluded that the ancients must have painted the cuneiform characters upon the tablets; otherwise, it was hard to see how they could use wood as a writing base.

But a discovery of two clay tablets by San Nicolo in the archives of the Eanna temple in the southern Babylonian city of Uruk or Warqa (biblical Erech) led him to suspect that anciently the wooden tablets were used quite differently. The scribes of these two tablets, dating respectively to 596 and 582 BC, had referred in their texts to drawing beeswax and a certain chemical substance (*tīt kalu*) from the temple storehouse. They needed these substances as filling (*mullu*) for their wooden tablets (*iš le'u*).

San Nicolo, wondering about their use of wax as a filling, recalled that both Greeks and Romans also made wax tablets for record-keeping purposes out of boards by cutting their surfaces lower than their edges. Covering these lowered surfaces with wax then provided the scribe with a surface upon which he could write. (See Fig. 2.) He reasoned that if a Babylonian scribe was filling a wooden tablet with wax, its surface too must have been lower than its edges in order to hold it.

He realized also that the technique for writing cuneiform upon soft wax would be similar to that for writing it upon moist clay. Consequently, a cuneiform writer would have experienced little diffi-



Fig. 2. Double portrait painted on an interior wall of a house at ancient Pompeii. Paquius Proculus holds a scroll to his chin, while his wife carries a waxed writing board and stylus. About AD 70. National Museum, Naples.

culty in shifting from one medium to the other. Painting upon bare wood, on the other hand, would have required a different set of implements and a different technique. He concluded that the Babylonians wrote upon wax tablets, and he published this conclusion to scholars in 1948 in an article entitled, "Did the Babylonians Write on Wax Tablets?"⁷

He further suggested that the reason none of these tablets had ever been found in Mesopotamian excavations was the same reason that no ancient parchment (*kussu*) or papyrus (*ni'aru, urbannu*) records had ever been found there, even though these materials are known to have been used: they are highly perishable.

WAX TABLETS IN A WELL

Just five years later (1953), however, at least two sets of actual wax-coated writing tablets were discovered in ancient Assyria; they confirmed San Nicolò's speculations about their existence and nature. Their discoverer, Max Mallowan, proudly announced to the world that, in the sludge at the bottom of an old well at Nimrud (biblical Calah; Genesis

10:11,12), he had found the oldest example of what he quite properly called an ancient book!⁸

The discovery began when a flat, broken, ivory board approximately six inches square and one-half inch thick was found in the sludge of the water-bearing level of the well about 67 feet below ground level. Before that day's work was over the other half of the broken board was found. And before the excavators had finished their work in the well, fragments of 16 ivory boards, along with an equal number of walnut boards, had been discovered (see Figs. 3, 4).

Both the ivory and the walnut boards were about 13" × 6" × ½" in size. Excepting the covers, both surfaces of each board were cut about one-tenth of an inch below the edges to provide a lowered, flat surface for the wax filling. Thin, biscuit-like fragments of wax still adhered to some of the boards or were mixed in the nearby sludge. (See Fig. 3.) Evidence of writing was still discernible, but in most instances the sludge had obscured it. One fragment, however, did contain clear, legible, cuneiform signs.

There were nine hinge marks on both the long edges of each board, indicating that all 16 had been joined together like a Japanese folding screen to form an extensive written record. These hinges made it possible to fold the whole record compactly so it could easily be carried about or stored. (See Fig. 4.)

Laboratory analysis of some of the wax made it possible to identify the Akkadian *tīt kalu* as orpiment or sulphide of arsenic, which made the wax less stringy so the stylus would leave a clear impression. The proportion of orpiment to wax was one to four. (Other samples vary to as much as one to 10.) This wax mixed with orpiment presented a bright yellowish writing surface.

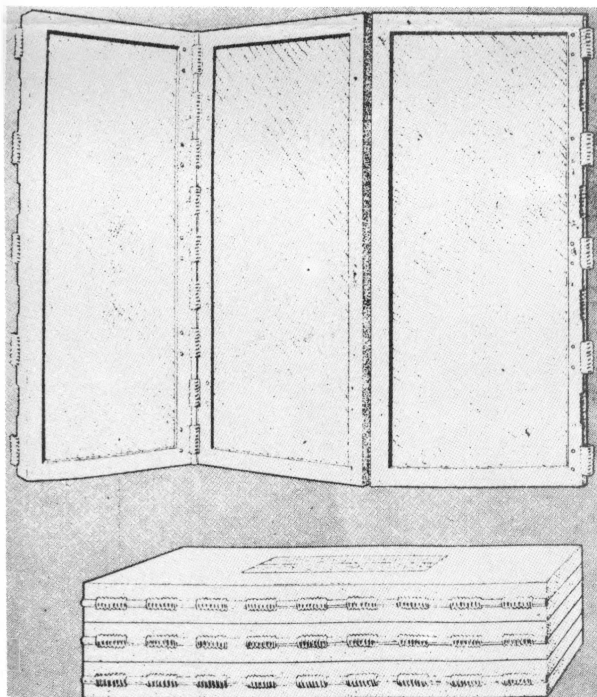
The cover-board inscription identified the set of ivory boards as an *iš le'u*, for this phrase appeared there. They had been made for Sargon, the king whose conquest of Samaria, the capital of Northern Israel, and deportation of its people brought an end to that nation in 721 BC (2 Kings 17:6). The cover inscription reads:

Palace of Sargon, King of the world, King of Assyria. He caused [the text beginning with the words] *Enuma Anu Enlil* to be inscribed on an ivory tablet⁹ and set in his palace of Dur-Sharrukin.¹⁰

It is theorized that this record had been made about 707 BC, and that when the palace was plundered upon the death of Sargon in 705 BC the boards were ripped apart in order to obtain what is presumed were the gold hinges. The unimportant



Fig. 3. Three leaves of an ivory writing board of the late eighth century B.C. Portions of the beeswax writing surface still adhere to the scored ivory. Discovered by Professor Max Mallowan at Nimrud in 1953. Photograph by the author at the British Museum, London.



disconnected boards were then thrown into the well.

The *Enuma Anu Enlil* text¹¹ of these tablets was an extensive reference work of religious significance; it contained a list of omens that the king consulted whenever he needed to know whether a given day was favorable or unfavorable on which to engage in any specified activity. As new omens were regularly added, the work eventually became very lengthy.

Today, several sets of the same sort of work, written on tablets of clay, are also known. These extend over series of 22, 53, 61, and 71 tablets respectively. We can only surmise the difficulty any ancient official might have encountered in consulting such a reference work, written as it was on both sides of so many individual clay tablets. Not so, however, with the newly discovered wooden tablets. The small neat writing preserved on one wax fragment shows that this 16-board set with 30 writing

Fig. 4. Artist's conception of how the ivory writing boards of Nimrud must have appeared, both extended (above) and folded (below). Note the metal hinges.

surfaces must have contained approximately 7,500 lines of text, all of it easily portable and readily available for consultation by the king, whether at home in the palace or somewhere in the field with the army.¹²

To keep extensive records on separate but serially ordered clay tablets is one thing, especially when such tablets contain the successive parts of the same text, but to keep such records on light-weight boards of wood hinged to each other and forming a single volume, is another. It is understandable why Mallowan, the excavator, could claim that they had "... discovered at Nimrud what may fairly be described as the *earliest known form of an ancient book*, complete with binding, the inscribed ivory leaf being the top cover to the whole."¹³

This one archaeological discovery, then, confirmed the conclusion that San Nicolo had already reached on the basis of linguistic evidence: the ancient Babylonians did use wax tablets for making written records. San Nicolo's two tablets of clay refer to such use in 596 and 582 BC; the actual examples from Nimrud illustrate their use as early as 707 BC; and references on other tablets of clay establish their use as early as the Old Babylonian kingdom, some time in the first half of the second millennium BC.

VARIETIES OF WAX TABLETS

During the long centuries when wax tablets were in use many kinds of records were written upon them. Some clay-tablet writers explicitly stated that they were merely copying on clay a record already extant on wax. By neo-Assyrian times (745–612 BC), it is evident that wax tablets were being used for recording

... religious texts, rituals, reports and royal orders, and for registering the names of individuals. The 'tablet of life' in which Nabu was thought to record the account of the names of deeds of the king and his sons was also thought to be a wax tablet. Similarly writing-boards were used for diverse administration purposes such as the registration of details of an estate, the bill of lading of a ship, and a record of oil distributed.¹⁴

Once an actual example of an *iš le'u* had been discovered, it was easy to recognize its contemporaneous use on the bas-reliefs (low-relief sculptures) of the ancient Assyrians (Fig. 5). Similar examples can likewise be identified in the territory of the Aramaeans of northern Mesopotamia (Fig. 6). Moreover, it has been known for some time that the Hittites of Asia Minor, who also used a cuneiform script, wrote some of their records upon wood (Fig. 7). We have already noted that the Greeks and Ro-

mans used waxed tablets; their literary references,¹⁵ artistic portrayals, and actual examples show this.¹⁶ And the use of this kind of record is known to have continued in Europe at least into the fourteenth century AD.¹⁷

As far as extant examples are concerned, the Nimrud ones are the oldest; an Etruscan one dates approximately to the same time; and one from Egypt dates to the third century BC. In addition to these earliest known examples, there are many examples from later periods.¹⁸

The evidence for the use of wax writing boards, therefore, is varied and extensive, including numer-



Fig. 5. Two scribes counting royal(?) prisoners of war. The farther one (beardless) uses scroll and pen, while the one nearer the viewer (bearded) holds hinged writing boards and stylus. Assyrian style, about 700 BC. M.A. Beek, *Atlas of Mesopotamia* (Amsterdam/Oxford: Elsevier). By permission.



Fig. 6. The king's secretary(?), with a folding-board book under his arm, reports to his monarch. Stela of Bar Rekub, Zinjirli, Turkey (neo-Hittite kingdom of Samal). Seventh or eighth century BC. By permission of the Staatliche Museen Zu Berlin Vorderasiatisches Museum.



Fig. 7. A late Hittite sculpture containing what appears to be a book with wooden leaves. Young Prince Tarhoupas(?) is shown facing the book, a stylus in the right hand and a tether holding his falcon in the left. The sculpture suggests how the young dignitary might have divided his time during his boyhood school days. G. Contenau, *Manuel d'Archeologie Orientale*, 4 (Paris: Picard), p. 2215, Fig. 1244. By permission.

ous linguistic references, artistic representations, and now examples of the writing boards themselves. On this basis we are able to conclude that the use of wax boards for writing or keeping records was a rather common practice anciently and that it extended over thousands of years of time (c.1700 BC–c. AD 1400) and throughout many cultures.¹⁹

MEANING OF IŞ LE'U

We must now look more carefully at the meaning of the Akkadian phrase *iş le'u*, since this has a bearing upon how we interpret Hebrew 'eš. The phrase literally means wooden tablet, i.e. a tablet made of wood (*iş* functions here as a determinative). The inscription on the cover tablet of the ivory set, however, identifies this as a wooden tablet (*iş le'u*) made of elephant ivory (*shin piri*). Obviously any ivory tablet would be made of ivory and not wood,

but the author did not say that this was an ivory tablet, but a *wooden tablet (iș le'u) of ivory*. This does not mean that it was made partially of wood and partially of ivory, since it is of solid ivory. Clearly, there is more meaning to the phrase *iș le'u* than “wooden tablet” literally suggests. The fact that it is written on what is known as a waxed writing board shows that this is exactly what it means: a *wax writing board or tablet*. This, in combination with *shin piri*, then, means a *wax writing board of ivory*, rather than the literal wooden tablet of ivory.

Such a development in the meaning of a word away from its strict etymological meaning is not especially unusual. Two other similar examples illustrate this:

(1) The Latin *liber* originally meant “tree bark.” When the smooth inner surface of the bark was used as a writing surface, *liber* connoted its use as record rather than its name as material. Later, when records were composed on papyrus, paper, parchment, or vellum and bound together, the meaning of *liber* was extended further to mean book, though etymologically it still meant “tree bark”. So, today, we agree that a librarian is not actually a tree-bark specialist.

(2) Likewise, the name paper derives from the name of the material (papyrus) out of which it was first made, but this fact never crosses our minds when we think of it.

Similarly, one can explain why scholars today usually understand that *iș le'u* (wooden tablet) meant a writing tablet or writing board and that an *iș le'u shin piri* was an ivory writing board.

HEBREW 'EŞ

With this in mind, let us look directly at the meaning of 'eš (wood) in Ezekiel 37. In doing so, we accept the following as facts:

1. From times already ancient in Ezekiel's day, scribes in Mesopotamia had been composing records on wooden boards.
2. The technical term in Akkadian for such a record was *iș le'u* (wooden tablet).
3. The name of such a record was so well established by use in antiquity that, even when one might write upon a base made from another kind of material, such as ivory, it would still be called a “wooden” writing board or tablet.
4. Extensive records were composed by joining one tablet to another.

5. Tablets joined together in this manner might form such extensive records that scholars appropriately refer to them as books, the Nimrud writing boards being the oldest known examples.
6. Such records were made by people who lived in various places: from the Near East through the Mediterranean world into Europe.
7. This process provided such a convenient and practical means of keeping records that it was used for thousands of years and was not superseded until more efficient ways were discovered in relatively recent times.
8. "Stick," "rod," and "staff" are either unique or at least rare translations of the Hebrew word 'eš.
9. Hebrew 'eš basically means "wood."

Taking the above, then, to be relevant facts; and keeping in mind that a translation is an interpretation and that a translator must consider all that he can possibly know about the cultural and technical milieu of the writer; and knowing that Ezekiel lived in a world where scribes wrote upon boards and that the name of such a board was *iš le'u* in the Babylonian language; and considering that he was commanded to take an 'eš (the Hebrew cognate of the Babylonian 'iš, meaning "wood" or "board") and write upon it and then to take another 'eš and write upon that one also and then join the one 'eš to the other in order to form a single 'eš; then—if we know all these facts—how ought we to translate 'eš? Can we possibly translate it as either "stick" or "rod"? Should we not rather give 'eš what is actually its commonest Hebrew meaning: "wood" or "board"? Moreover, because Ezekiel was commanded to write upon it, may we not call it more specifically a *writing board*? Thus, Hebrew 'eš in Ezekiel's context would connote to us exactly what *iš le'u* does in the Babylonian tongue. And when Ezekiel was commanded to write upon a second board and join it to the first in order to form a single board, this was the exact process, we recall, by which a folding wax tablet (diptych, triptych, or polyptych) anciently was put together.

With these things in mind, how should we translate Ezekiel 37:15–20? Would the following be consistent with what we know?

These were the words of the Lord to me: Man, take one leaf of a wooden tablet and write on it, 'Judah and his associates of Israel.' Then take another leaf and write on it, 'Joseph, the leaf of Ephraim and all his associates of Israel.' Now bring the two together to form one tablet; then they will be a folding tablet in your hand. When your fellow-countrymen ask you to tell them what you mean by this, say to them, These are the words of the Lord God; I am taking the leaf of Joseph, which belongs to Ephraim and all his associate tribes of Israel, and joining it to the leaf of Judah. Thus I shall make them one tablet, and they shall

be one in my hand. The leaves on which you write shall be visible in your hand for all to see.

In view of what we have said, would a Latter-day Saint or any other interpreter regard this translation as slanted? He shouldn't; phraseology might vary, but how else could he translate it and be linguistically and culturally consistent? Nor are Latter-day Saints the only ones who would infer that this is what Ezekiel meant by 'eš. The translation above is that of the New English Bible version—sponsored by the following churches and societies: the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland, the Church of England, the Church of Scotland, the Congregational Church in England and Wales, the Council of Churches for Wales, the Irish Council of Churches, the London Yearly Meeting of the Society of Friends, the Methodist Church of Great Britain, the Presbyterian Church of England, the British and Foreign Bible Society, and the National Bible Society of Scotland.

(Note that the LDS church is not included in the above list; no Mormon has had any involvement with the preparation of the New English Bible.)

The writing-board idea is quite a natural one. When the data first appeared concerning the Assyrian writing boards, I could see the linguistic and cultural relationship of this idea to Ezekiel and began, prior to the publication of the New English Bible, to explain Ezekiel 37 in the classroom in this light. Other scholars have drawn similar conclusions.²⁰

It should be apparent, therefore, that even if at this point we cannot positively identify Hebrew 'eš in Ezekiel's prophecy with the Assyrian and Babylonian writing board, it is highly probable that we should: Babylonian texts from Ezekiel's time and place²¹ refer to such records in Mesopotamian usage; monumental bas-reliefs portray this kind of record in actual use in Assyria and elsewhere; and actual examples in wood and ivory preserved in the soil of Assyria leave no doubt about the identity and use of this kind of record in the world out of which Ezekiel prophesied.

This same interpretation is linguistically harmonious with the Hebrew word 'eš as "wood"; and the explanation of "wood" as a writing board is compatible, in a matter-of-fact way, with the record-keeping practices of Ezekiel's Babylonian world. Therefore, when the Lord wanted Ezekiel to demonstrate to his fellow Jews the importance of unifying the two records as the basis for reunifying the people, could he have shown this any more vividly than he did when he said to Ezekiel, "... take one board and write upon it ... then take another

board and write upon it . . . and join them in thine hand”? (Ezekiel 37:15–17; author’s translation.) “Stick” and “rod” now appear to be very odd translations when viewed from Ezekiel’s cultural milieu.

One further important note concerns the use of the preposition *for* by the King James translator in the phrases “for Judah, and for the children of Israel his companions,” and “for Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the children of Israel his companions.” Ownership or possession of any object in ancient Israel was indicated simply by writing one’s name upon it, prefixed by the preposition *l’* (to/for). Thus, “to David,” i.e. “(belonging) to David,” written on any item meant simply “David’s.”

Ezekiel was instructed to place this preposition before the names of Judah and Joseph when he wrote them on the individual writing boards. The King James translator chose the *for* idea. But the use of the possessive *to* in this context better harmonizes with the idea of a record. Thus, I prefer translating it “to Judah,” i.e. “(belonging) to Judah,” because this clearly shows that the one record was “Judah’s and his companion Israelites’,” and the other was “Joseph’s (that is, Ephraim’s) and his companion Israelites’.”

RECORDS OF JUDAH AND JOSEPH

Ezekiel’s reference in each instance to a specific tribe and associated Israelites suggests that his prophetic concern related basically to the records of the two tribes mentioned. To understand his prophecy we must, first of all, identify what the records of Judah and Joseph were and then find out their significance to Ezekiel.

Today, we have no trouble associating Judah’s name with tribal or national records. More importantly, we know that Ezekiel and his hearers, who included members of the tribe of Judah as well as companion Israelites identified with them,²² knew that Judah had records—their own prophets and scribes had been making and keeping records for hundreds of years prior to his day. All Ezekiel’s contemporaries would have understood his reference to Judah’s writing tablet as a symbolic reference to their tribal records.

Ezekiel’s prophecy, placed as it is in the context of the latter days, suggests that identifying such records will be meaningful in those days. It seems no accident, therefore, that of all the peoples of the earth it is the Jews who have preserved their records right down into these the last days, and that

because of their special concern for their records they are in fact known throughout the world as the People of the Book. This special peculiarity of theirs is reflected by Thomas Tiplady, who says:

The Bible was not written by an individual. It was written by a race. . . . The Bible holds the life blood of the Jewish race. . . . It enshrines the soul of a people and is the Hebrews’ priceless legacy to the world.²³

Ezekiel, his hearers, and we, therefore, all agree that there was in his day and would be in the latter days, special records or, better, a special Book, identified with Judah. Granting prophetic inspiration to Ezekiel, we conclude that he had great insight into the survival of these records until the latter days, including insight into their importance in furthering the work of the Lord at that time.

But the readiness with which we identify Judah’s record makes us wonder about Joseph’s record. By implication, should not his record be as important as Judah’s, and should it not be as recognizable and accessible? And since Judah tells his own story Joseph should be allowed to tell his. Indeed, Ezekiel implies that he has one to tell. Where such a record is to be found and how it is to be identified once it is found, are therefore questions relevant to any student of Ezekiel.

Now the Latter-day Saints claim to have Joseph’s record, and they like to let Joseph tell the story of it. (Actually this is Joseph Smith’s story, for he testified that under divine direction he found, translated, and published ancient Joseph’s story as recorded in the Book of Mormon.) In fulfillment of Ezekiel’s, Joseph’s, Isaiah’s, Jesus’, and other prophecies,²⁴ record-unification must precede and attend tribal-unification; therefore, the association of record-unification and tribal-gathering is not by chance but is a vital necessity.

BY CHANCE OR BY DESIGN?

In conclusion let us consider a fascinating note about the discovery of the Assyrian writing boards at Nimrud—a development that now appears especially fortunate for Latter-day Saints. Max Mallon, the excavator, had reason to wonder whether it came by design or chance. His account of the discovery and its meaning has a dramatic sequel: after noting that the lowest recorded depth below the pavement level at his excavation of the well was 71 feet, he added that the workmen must have gone still deeper. They must have reached a depth

... of between 73 and 75 feet when the board fragments ceased to appear; the actual bottom was probably at about 76 feet or 23.7 metres below the surface. The reason for which we are only able to give these approximate estimates for the last few feet is that the work came to a hurried end. Down at the bottom the bedrock was undercut and seamed with heavy cracks; the lowest courses of brickwork had disintegrated and our aged pickman, deep in water, suddenly found himself in mortal danger. The sides of the well began to give way and water to rush in from the feed or 'eye-opening'. The old man had the presence of mind to collect his miner's lamp, his tools and his kit before pulling at the rope which was the signal for him to be hoisted to the surface by our mechanical winch. Hardly had he stepped out of the bucket and reached safety at the top when the whole of the bottom of the well caved in with a thunderous roar; we did not feel inclined to tempt providence again.²⁵

This and other experiences led him to observe that:

It has always seemed to me impossible to decide whether design or chance plays the greater part on the road to discovery. But whatever answer one may choose to give, the commodity which we call luck and what the gardener calls a green hand are indispensable. The digger after years of experience may become a shrewd judge of soil, he may acquire the eye for the kind of site which is potentially rich, and he may calculate to a nicety where to concentrate his manpower. But no one, however skilled, can predict whether the object of his search will still be there, any more than a man may know what lies in store for the morrow. It is a mark of professional ability to be able to extract information from the earth, and to that extent no site anciently occupied is ever barren to the archaeologist. But from time to time he needs some form of reward which will compensate for the more usual pedestrian rate of progress and act as a spur to further effort. It was design that led us through systematic excavation into the room NN and down to the bottom of its well; it was luck that kept death away from the work and put no stop to its continuity; design that forced us on under water in spite of the temptation to stop; luck that saved for us the treasure in a belt of sludge under a crumbling tower of brickwork which hovered precariously upon the undercut bedrock.²⁶

Elsewhere he reflects upon the "singular good fortune" he enjoyed in making this discovery. Noting that San Nicolo had "insisted upon the improbability of a substance so perishable as a wooden tablet, and *a fortiori*, wax, ever being preserved in the damp and acid soils of Mesopotamia," he continues:

The conservation of this organic matter in the bottom of a well at Calah seems to be little short of a miracle, but in fact is to be explained by the special properties of the sludge.

This singular good fortune has enabled us to rescue from oblivion a class of documents which, though it must once have existed in a hundred other cities of Western Asia, has only survived in one. Here we have the earliest known material evidence of what must then have been a familiar form of scribal record.²⁷

These observations by a professional archaeologist may make Latter-day Saints want to read more into the story than can be proved, but one thing is clear: this discovery comes at an important time in the discussion on the meaning of Ezekiel. For Latter-day Saints it is nothing less than providential.

NOTES

¹See, for example, Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, I, 84; Orson Pratt in *Journal of Discourses*, II, 290-291; and Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, III, 209-210.

²Orson Pratt in *Journal of Discourses*, II, 290; Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon* (Deseret News Press, 1957), 279-281; Heber C. Snell, "The Bible in the Church," in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought and Opinion*, II (Spring, 1967), 62; and Douglas W. Stott, "Ezekiel's Prophecy of Sticks" (unpublished manuscript, April, 1964), 17.

³Pronounced: ate + s (ates).

⁴Ezekiel 37:22-24. See almost any commentary on this passage.

⁵Jon Gunn, "Ezekiel, Dr. Sperry and the Stick of Ephraim," *Dialogue*, II (Winter, 1967), 137.

⁶"Viewpoint of a Giant," BYU, July 18, 1968, p. 6.

⁷"Haben die Babylonier Wachstafeln als Schriftträger Gekannt?" *Orientalia*, XVII (1948), 59-70.

⁸"Excavations at Nimrud (Kalhu), 1953," *Iraq*, XVI (1956), Pt. 1, 99.

⁹Literally, a wooden tablet of elephant ivory; see below.

¹⁰M. E. L. Mallowan, *Nimrud and its Remains*, I (Collins, London, 1966), 156.

¹¹Ernst F. Weidner, "Die astrologische Serie Enuma Anu Enlil," *Archiv für Orientforschung*, XIV (1941-44), 172ff.

¹²Mallowan, *op. cit.*, 157.

¹³M. E. L. Mallowan, "Excavations at Nimrud (Kalhu), 1953," *Iraq*, XVI (1956), Pt. 1, 99; emphasis added.

¹⁴D. J. Wiseman, "Assyrian Writing Boards," *Iraq*, XVII (1955), 10.

¹⁵*Iliad*, VI, 169; *Herodotus*, VII, 239.

¹⁶In this regard it might be noted that John the Baptist's father, Zacharias, is reported to have written John's name upon one of them. See Luke 1:63; table = tablet (Greek: *pinakidion*).

¹⁷T. McKenny Hughes, "On Some Waxed Tablets Said to Have Been Found at Cambridge," *Archaeologia*, LV (1897), 257-282.

¹⁸See references listed in Mallowan, 1966, 158-161.

¹⁹*Loc. cit.*

²⁰R. J. Williams, "Writing," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, IV (Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1962), 917; J. Philip Hyatt, "The Making of an Old Testament Book," in David Noel Freedman and G. Ernest Wright (eds.), *The Biblical Archaeologist Reader*, I (Doubleday, Garden City, 1961), 27; and Herbert G. May, in *The Interpreter's Bible*, VI (Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1956), 270.

²¹Ezekiel's call came in 593 BC. The dates of San Nicolo's cuneiform tablets are 596 and 582 BC. These tablets were found at URUK, near the place where Ezekiel was living on the Babylonian plain. See Fig. 1, above.

²²2 Chronicles 11:13-17; 15:8-15.

²³Thomas Tiplady as quoted in Solomon Goldman, *The Book of Books: An Introduction* (Harper and Bros., Philadelphia, 1948), 231. Cf. 2 Nephi 29.

²⁴3 Nephi 20-21 (esp. 21:1-3, 7); 2 Nephi 3:4, 11-13; Isaiah 29.

²⁵Mallowan, 1966, 63.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 49.

²⁷Mallowan, 1956, 102.

EDITOR'S NOTE. Sir Max Edgar Lucien Mallowan, whose 1953 discovery at the bottom of a well in ancient Nimrud (p. 4, above) made possible Professor Meservy's paper, died on August 19, 1978, at the age of 74. Mallowan had spent his lifetime excavating, writing, and teaching in the field of Mesopotamian archaeology. He was the author of many learned books and papers, including *Twenty-five Years of Discovery, 1932-56* and *Mallowan's Memoirs* (1977). Sir Max's wife was the famous British mystery writer, Agatha Christie. Dame Agatha Mary Clarissa Miller Christie (Lady Mallowan), DBE, had died earlier: on January 12, 1976, at the age of 85.

142.1 SOCIETY ELECTS NEW OFFICERS.

Bruce W. Warren and Virgil V. Peterson were elected SEHA president and vice-president, respectively, at a recent meeting of the Society's Board of Trustees. The new leaders will serve a three-year term of office, 1978 to 1981.

Dr. Warren has been a faculty member in anthropology and archaeology at Brigham Young University since 1972. In 1949 he was one of eight founding members of the SEHA and has been a Life Member since 1956. He has also served as editor of the *Newsletter and Proceedings*, an advisor to the Board of Trustees, and a trustee, and has participated a number of times in the Annual Symposium on the Archaeology of the Scriptures. For many years he worked as a ceramist for the BYU-New World Archaeological Foundation, both in the field in southern Mexico and on the Provo campus.

A resumé of Dr. Warren's professional achievements to 1972 may be read in the *Newsletter and Proceedings*, 131.3. Last May, he was awarded the doctor's degree in anthropology (see below, 142.4).

Mr. Peterson is a retired Salt Lake City businessman, formerly a partner of Morgan-Peterson Enterprises, producers of natural gas. In 1935 he graduated from BYU with the AB degree in geology. As a graduate student at the University of New Mexico he studied anthropo-geography and helped direct an archaeological survey in the State of Chihuahua, Mexico, under Dr. Donald Brand.

In 1957 Mr. Peterson became a Life Member of the SEHA and since then has served as director of its Salt Lake Chapter and as a trustee, vice-president, and president of the Society itself. In 1970 he was chairman of the Twentieth Annual Symposium on the Archaeology of the Scriptures. Mr. Peterson's activities in the SEHA are further summarized in the *Newsletter and Proceedings*, 96.00, 138.4, and 141.4.

Dr. Warren replaces Dr. Robert W. Bass, whose three-year term as SEHA president came to an end on June 30. Mr. Peterson replaces A. Delbert Palmer as vice-president. Mr. Palmer was elected to that office in 1976 when Dr. Ellis T. Rasmussen stepped down upon his appointment as dean of religious instruction at BYU. Dr. Rasmussen had served as Society vice-president since 1975. (*Newsletter*, 138.4, 139.2.)

142.2 BOARD APPOINTS EDITOR. A new editor of the *Newsletter and Proceedings of the S.E.H.A.* was named at a recent meeting of the Society's Board of Trustees. Dr. Ross T. Christensen, BYU professor of archaeology and anthropology, be-

comes editor with the present issue.

Dr. Bruce W. Warren, retiring editor, was recently elected president of the SEHA (see above, 142.1). Because of his responsibilities in this executive office, also because of another heavy publication commitment, in the Mesoamerican field, the Board reluctantly released him as editor.

Dr. Christensen has previously served as editor of the *Newsletter and Proceedings*: intermittently between 1952 and 1976 (*Newsletter*, 138.4). His present appointment comes upon recommendation of Dr. M. Wells Jakeman, general editor of the SEHA.

142.3 DEPARTMENT GETS NEW CHAIRMAN.

Dr. John L. Sorenson has been named chairman of the BYU Department of Anthropology and Archaeology. The appointment became effective on September 1; announcement was made by Dr. Martin B. Hickman, dean of the College of Social Sciences.

Dr. Sorenson earned the BS and the MA degrees in archaeology at BYU in 1951 and 1952 respectively. He also served as a faculty member in this field, 1953-55.

The new chairman completed the doctorate in anthropology at the University of California, Los Angeles, in 1961. He also holds the MS degree in meteorology from the California Institute of Technology, Pasadena.

In his student days at BYU, Dr. Sorenson served the SEHA as president of its Campus Chapter, as editor of the first seven issues of the *Newsletter and Proceedings*, and as general secretary-treasurer of the Society. He has participated a number of times in the Annual Symposium on the Archaeology of the Scriptures (see especially his paper, "The Book of Mormon as a Mesoamerican Codex," *Newsletter and Proceedings*, 139.0).

In 1968 Dr. Sorenson read a paper before the Society for American Archaeology entitled "The Significance of an Apparent Relationship Between the Ancient Near East and Mesoamerica." Writing of the 27 papers presented at that meeting, Benjamin Urrutia expressed the opinion that Dr. Sorenson's was "... destined to be the most consequential piece of the entire collection" (*Newsletter*, 132.0, p. 2). It was published in full in *Man Across the Sea: Problems of Pre-Columbian Contacts*, ed. by Carroll L. Riley et al., 1971.

Dr. Sorenson has continued to the present time with a keen interest in scriptural archaeology. During the coming winter semester at BYU he will teach a seminar entitled, "The Book of Mormon: Geography and Archaeology." Prior to entering this class the student is required to read the professor's

manuscript volume, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*. Xerox copies may be found in the Reserve Room at the Harold B. Lee Library, BYU. Arrangements are being made for its publication at a later time.

Dr. Sorenson replaces Merlin G. Myers as department chairman, who has served in this capacity since 1967 (Newsletter, 102.4). At present on leave of absence from the campus, Dr. Myers plans to lecture and do research at Cambridge University, England, where he earned the doctorate in social anthropology in 1963.

142.4 FACULTY MEMBERS EARN DOCTORATE. Bruce W. Warren, newly elected president of the SEHA (see above, 142.1), and John Palmer Hawkins—both assistant professors in the Department of Anthropology and Archaeology at Brigham Young University—were both awarded the Ph.D. degree in anthropology earlier this year.

Dr. Warren received his degree in May from the University of Arizona. His dissertation is entitled *The Sociocultural Development of the Central Depression of Chiapas, Mexico: Preliminary Considerations*. It is primarily a study in Mesoamerican archaeology, combined with historical linguistics.

Dr. Hawkins received his degree in September at the University of Chicago. His dissertation—a study in social anthropology—bears the title, *Ethnicity and Family in Western Highland Guatemala*. He is a nephew of A. Delbert Palmer of Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada, retiring vice-president of the Society (see above, 142.1).

Both professors received their bachelor's degree at BYU: Dr. Warren, the BA in archaeology in 1958; and Dr. Hawkins, the BS in anthropology in 1970. (Newsletter, 50.3, 121.1.)

142.5 DEPARTMENT ISSUES PROMOTIONAL BOOKLET. "Anthropology and Archaeology: A New Look," is the title of a 10-page booklet which is being widely distributed by the BYU Department of Anthropology and Archaeology. The occasion is the appointment of Dr. John L. Sorenson as the new department chairman (see above, 142.3).

At Dr. Sorenson's request a copy is enclosed herewith. The SEHA member should consider it an invitation to join the BYU students who are major-

ing in this department—if his circumstances permit; also to bring this new program to the attention of family members, friends, and other interested persons who may be in a position to attend Brigham Young University at some time in the future. Dr. Sorenson himself is the principal author.

The Department will be glad to answer any questions, or to send extra copies of this pamphlet on request. Also, if the reader wishes copies sent to friends whose names he supplies, the Department will do so promptly. Write to: Department of Anthropology and Archaeology, 130 MSRB, BYU, Provo, Utah 84602.

142.6 REPRINTS MAILED TO SOCIETY MEMBERS. Reprints of two articles from recent periodicals were mailed free of charge—last August—to all SEHA members as additional membership benefits:

1. "A Reconsideration of Early Metal in Mesoamerica," by John L. Sorenson, from *Katunob*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (March, 1976), pp. 1–8. This paper is an extensive rewriting, with much additional information, of an article by the same author which appeared years ago in an SEHA serial publication: "Indications of Early Metal in Mesoamerica," *Bulletin of the University Archaeological Society*, No. 5 (1954), pp. 1–15.

2. "The Place Called Nahom," by Ross T. Christensen, from the "Comment" page of *The Ensign*, Vol. 8, No. 8 (August, 1978), p. 73. A place-name of key importance in tracing Lehi's route across Arabia may have been identified.

Additional copies of either reprint may be obtained by members from the SEHA office, 140 MSRB, BYU, Provo, Utah 84602, under the "free past publications" privilege of five, selected from the "green list," per year of membership.

142.7 SYMPOSIUM TO BE REPORTED. The Twenty-seventh Annual Symposium on the Archaeology of the Scriptures was held at BYU on October 28, with Dr. Eldin Ricks as chairman. A full report is planned for the next issue of the *Newsletter and Proceedings*.

The Annual Business Meeting held immediately following the Symposium, together with the trustees elected at that time, will be reported in the same issue.