



BOOK OF MORMON CENTRAL

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Type: Newsletter

Newsletter and Proceedings of the S.E.H.A., no. 156 (March 1984)

Editors(s): Ross T. Christensen

Published by: Society for Early Historic Archaeology, Brigham Young
University

NEWSLETTER AND PROCEEDINGS OF THE

S. E. H. A.

Number 156

March, 1984

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Published four or more times a year by THE SOCIETY FOR EARLY HISTORIC ARCHAEOLOGY, INC., Box 7488, University Station, Provo, Utah 84602, for the dissemination among its members of information on archaeological discoveries that throw light on the historical claims of the Hebrew-Christian and Latter-day Saint scriptures; also news of the Society and its members. Included are papers read at the Annual Symposium on the Archaeology of the Scriptures. Views expressed in signed articles are those of the respective authors and are not necessarily those of the Society or its editors. Subscription is by membership in the Society, which also includes subscription to other publications and additional benefits.

156.0 **STELA 5, IZAPA: A REVIEW OF ITS STUDY AS THE "LEHI TREE-OF-LIFE STONE."** By Ross T. Christensen, professor emeritus of archaeology and anthropology, Brigham Young University.



Stela 5 as it stands in the archaeological park at Izapa. Photograph taken in 1972 by Hugo Gómez, courtesy Bert D. Lynn. Many students of the Book of Mormon regard Stela 5 as a portrayal in stone of Lehi's vision of the tree of life, recorded in 1 Nephi 8.

Preface. Thirty years ago, the SEHA first published a discovery made by M. Wells Jakeman that Stela 5, found earlier at the ruins of Izapa in southernmost Mexico, was actually a portrayal in stone of Lehi's vision of the tree of life as recounted in the Book of Mormon, 1 Nephi 8 (see Jakeman, 1953, in References, below). A flurry of excitement followed, and keen interest continued for about ten years. Since then, little has been said on the subject in Society publications.

One result of this quiescence of the past 20 years is that many of the newer members of the Society have had little opportunity to become well informed on one of the most significant archaeological discoveries made since the Book of Mormon was published in 1830. It is true that the SEHA, only a year ago, issued a rebuttal of certain anti-Mormon criticisms of Dr. Jakeman's studies of Stela 5 (Griffith, 1982). The rebuttal, however, was specific and technical. What the beginning student needs, it seems to us, in order to gain a clear, well-balanced understanding, is to start out with a general introduction to the whole subject, that can then serve as a foundation for more technical specialties.

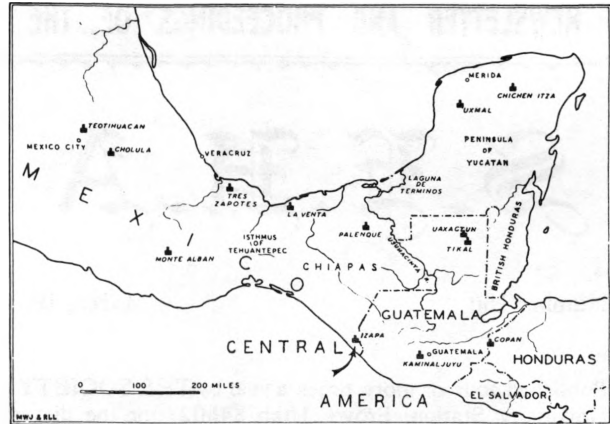
With these thoughts in mind, the editor here offers a brief history of the discovery and summary of the evidence as a simplified and up-dated introduction to the study of Stela 5, Izapa, as the "Lehi Tree-of-Life Stone."

Stela 5, found at the ruins of Izapa in southernmost Mexico, is the most direct and striking evidence in support of the Book of Mormon that has yet come forth from archaeology. I do not know who carved this sculpture—whether the artist was a Nephite, a Lamanite, or of some other lineage—but whoever did it seems to have been quite familiar with the story of Lehi's vision of the tree of life as recounted in 1 Nephi 8.

ON MANY OCCASIONS over the past 30 years I have made such statements before classes in the Department of Archaeology at Brigham Young University and before audiences in the BYU Education Week program. I would still make much the same pronouncement today but with one important change: it seems likely that the sculptor was indeed a Nephite; in light of recent evidence the Lamanites and other lineages do not appear to have qualified.

SCHOLARLY STUDIES

Stela 5, Izapa, is a stone of volcanic origin measuring about eight feet high by six feet wide by two feet



The archaeological area of Mesoamerica. Izapa is located in southernmost Mexico, near Tapachula. Map by M. Wells Jakeman and Robert L. Layton.

thick. It presents a large tableau, or scene, carved in low relief, depicting a fruit-bearing tree and several human and supernatural beings, together with symbols having theological significance. It evidently portrays an actual historical event of great antiquity, whose recollection evoked a deep emotional response among the religious peoples of ancient Mesoamerica.

Although Stela 5 may have been known locally for many years, the name usually associated with its discovery, so far as the scholarly world is concerned, is that of Matthew W. Stirling, who led a joint expedition of the Smithsonian Institution of Washington and the National Geographic Society to Izapa in 1941. His 1943 publication (see References, below) contained an excellent photograph of the carving and careful descriptive notes, but the author made little effort to interpret its meaning.

That task remained for BYU archaeologist M. Wells Jakeman. In 1951 he recognized Stela 5 as nothing more nor less than a portrayal in stone of the Lehi tree-of-life episode, as recorded in the Book of Mormon, 1 Nephi, Chapter 8. His presentation of the evidence appeared two years later in a publication of the Society for Early Historic Archaeology (Jakeman, 1953).

The following year, as he returned from an expedition to southern Mexico, including Izapa, Dr. Jakeman pointed out to government officials in Mexico City the extraordinary Old World parallels appearing on Stela 5 and proposed that it be removed to the National Museum. According to the agreement, the SEHA would fund the project, while a Mexican government archaeologist would undertake the removal of the stone.



Author examines Stela 5 at close range during a field study at Izapa in 1962 (see *UAS Newsl.*, 83.1).



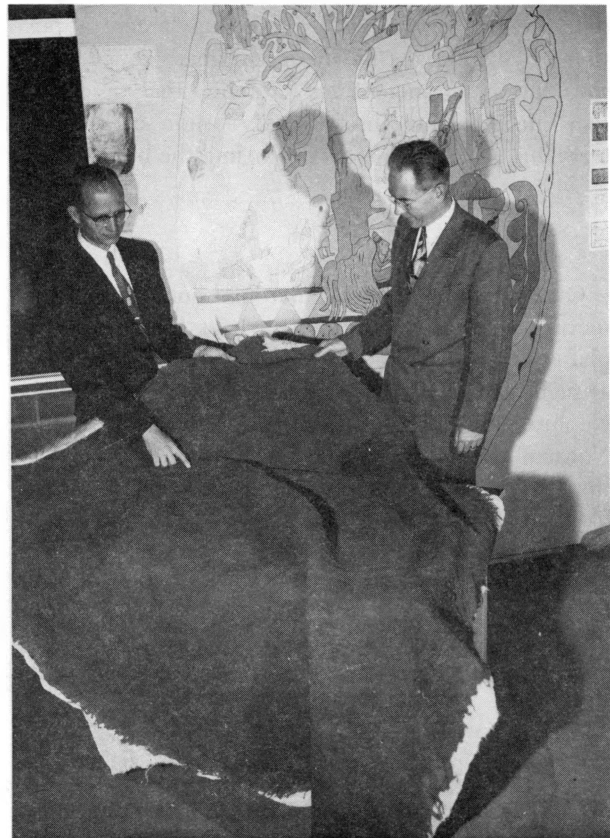
The lower left-hand corner of Stela 5, showing figures identified as Lehi (center) and, behind him to the left, Sariah. Photograph by the author, 1962.

However, the archaeologist's efforts were resisted by the local citizens. Late in 1957, a substitute measure was planned: a BYU Department of Archaeology expedition the following year would obtain a light-weight latex mold of the sculpture, from which a full-size plaster cast could then be made for study and display on the Provo campus.

In January, 1958, the BYU expedition to Izapa obtained the mold of Stela 5, and a little later the cast was prepared. This is the replica that may now be examined in the BYU Museum of Peoples and Cultures, located on the corner of Seventh North and First East streets in Provo, Utah (*Newsl. and Proc.*, 151.1).



Welby W. Ricks applies the first brush strokes of latex (liquid rubber) on Stela 5 during the BYU expedition of 1958 to Izapa. A few days later Dr. Ricks returned with the completed mold to the BYU campus, and shortly afterwards the cement copy now located in the BYU Museum of Peoples and Cultures was cast. Photograph by Alfred L. Bush.



Dr. Ricks (left) and M. Wells Jakeman compare the latex mold of Izapa Stela 5 with Dr. Jakeman's drawing-reproduction of the carving, preparatory to making the cast in 1958.

Two important publications by Dr. Jakeman on Stela 5 carry the same date as the expedition. The first of these, 1958a, was prepared primarily for a Latter-day Saint audience and brings to bear many Book of Mormon parallels. The second, 1958b, was prepared for the Americanist profession and makes no reference to the Book of Mormon. Instead, it stresses the numerous New World–Old World trait correspondences found in the carving.

Between 1961 and 1965, the New World Archaeological Foundation of Brigham Young University carried out large-scale excavations at the ruins of Izapa. Many additional sculptures came to light, including at least 88 stone monuments similar to Stela 5. The Mexican government later made the ruins an archaeological park, and the site is now conveniently accessible to tourists. The nearby town of Tapachula can be reached easily by air, rail, or highway.

In the mid-1970s, V. Garth Norman added to the archaeological literature an important interpretative study entitled *Izapa Sculpture*. It contains a 75-page chapter called “The Supernarrative Stela 5” (Norman, 1973–76, Part 2, pp. 165–239; see also pp. 329–330). Stela 5, the largest and most ambitious of the stone sculptures of Izapa, is shown to occupy a central position in relation to the other carvings, conceptually speaking, in an ancient and profound theological system encompassing the heavenly origin of man, his birth, his life struggles, his death, and the beyond.

Over the years, Dr. Jakeman had noted in his class lectures at BYU many similarities between early phases of the so-called Maya civilization being found at such places as Izapa, and the Near Eastern-derived Nephite civilization of the Book of Mormon. In 1979 Norman explicitly stated the logical implication of these parallels: The ancient civilization emerging from investigations at Izapa and other sites (the “Izapan Culture”) is indeed that of the Nephites and Lamanites of the Book of Mormon; this was in a paper read before the Twenty-eighth Annual Symposium on the Archaeology of the Scriptures (*News. and Proc.*, 144.2, p. 10; cf. 150.2).

These two archaeologists, M. Wells Jakeman and his former student and now fellow trustee in the SEHA, V. Garth Norman, are, as far as I know, the only qualified scholars who have made a prolonged, conscientious effort to understand the carving on Izapa Stela 5. While their interpretations stand out in

contrast with each other in some respects, in their central conclusion—that Stela 5 is an authentic ancient portrayal of the Lehi tree-of-life episode—they are in solid agreement. (For further discussion of Norman’s views, see article 156.1, below).

ANTI-MORMON ATTACKS

In the meantime, anti-Mormon writers launched various attacks on Jakeman’s interpretations of Stela 5. However, with one exception (*News. and Proc.*, 104.2), he did not enter into the polemics, mainly because his energies were absorbed in the preparation of updated editions of some of his earlier publications.

It was against this background that Michael T. Griffith, then a Latter-day Saint missionary stationed in Texas, undertook a detailed study of the evidence with a view to answering some of the anti-Book of Mormon allegations with which he and his colleagues had been confronted. In time this resulted in his paper, “The Lehi Tree-of-Life Story in the Book of Mormon Still Supported by Izapa Stela 5” (Griffith, 1982). His defense of Jakeman’s interpretations is made along precisely defined lines and with powerful effect.

First, he notes that the attacks to which he refers play loose with the evidence and reveal the critics’ lack of expertise in ancient American studies. He then refutes their claim that, because Jakeman’s interpretations are in part symbolic, they are invalid; on the contrary, he shows, symbolic representation is a common and expected feature of ancient American art.

Jakeman’s decipherment of the two name glyphs above the heads of the personages previously identified as Lehi and Nephi, i.e., the *cipactli* and the *centeotl* figures, had come under particular attack. Griffith’s paper demonstrates that the glyphs in question are indeed decipherable as recording the names of the ancient Book of Mormon prophets.

The critics’ objections to a number of “pagan” elements dealt with in Jakeman’s works on Stela 5—for example, that an Israelite prophet (Lehi) would name a son (Nephi) after an Egyptian deity (Nepri or Nepi)—are also answered in Griffith’s reply. These “pagan” elements, it would seem, are simply part of the Israelite colony’s lexical and artistic heritage from their ancestral Near Eastern homeland and do not at all imply pagan leanings on the part of the Book of Mormon prophet.

LEHI EPISODE AND IZAPA SCULPTURE COMPARED

The principal Book of Mormon account of the Lehi tree-of-life episode is found in 1 Nephi, Chapter 8. Also, at least 16 other references to the symbolic tree occur elsewhere in the book. It was obviously a very old and highly revered theme among the Nephites.

(By way of contrast, the noun “cross,” so prominent among Old World Christians, is mentioned only six times in the Book of Mormon. The Nephites themselves, it will be remembered, were not actual witnesses of the crucifixion.)

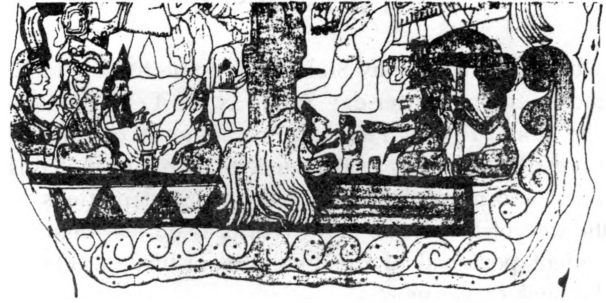
In the Book of Mormon account the prophet Lehi, encamped with his family at the head of the Red Sea, gathers them about and relates to them a dream or vision he has lately experienced. The principal feature is a tree standing in a spacious field, which he approaches after a long journey by foot through a dark, dreary wilderness. The tree’s fruit, white and delicious beyond anything he has ever known, symbolizes the love of God and eternal salvation. He calls out to his family to join him at the tree, but they are divided in their response. His wife Sariah and their sons Sam and Nephi do so, but their sons Laman and Lemuel refuse.

Near the tree runs a river of water. Paralleling the river and leading to the tree are an iron rod and a narrow path. From the heights of an enormous building, numerous unbelievers scoff at those partaking of the fruit. In the expanse beyond, vast multitudes press forward, either toward the tree or toward the building, while many are lost in the depths of the river.

Turning now to the complex carving of Stela 5, practically all the features of the Book of Mormon narrative appear, together with other details not explicitly mentioned. Across the very top is what is known among scholars as a jaguar-mask panel. This makes it clear that whatever the subject matter of the remainder of the sculpture, it has to do primarily with the ancient Rain and Life God of Mesoamerica, one of whose symbols is the jaguar mask.

The central feature of the carving is the symbolic fruit-bearing tree itself, which divides the composition into two balanced halves. Two supernatural beings with bird-like features apparently stand in the air facing the tree. In the sacred art of the Old World such beings would be called *cherubim*. These and other details evidently link the artistic tradition of Stela 5 to the ancient sculptured art of western Asia.

Beneath the “cherubim” and seated on the ground are six human figures corresponding to the six named



Six persons seated beneath the tree of life on the Stela 5 sculpture, Izapa, apparently discussing the tree. From a drawing by M. Wells Jakeman, who provisionally identifies them, left to right, as Sariah, Lehi, Laman, Lemuel, Nephi, and Sam of the Book of Mormon account.

members of Lehi’s family: on the left, a bearded old man corresponding to the patriarch himself and an elderly woman behind him corresponding to his wife Sariah; in the central part, on either side of the tree, two young men corresponding to their two elder sons, Laman and Lemuel; and on the right, a large young man and another young man behind him, corresponding to two younger sons, Nephi and Sam. All face the tree except those corresponding to Laman and Lemuel, which are small figures, apparently asking questions, and seated with their backs to the tree, as if to suggest that they reject what the tree represents. Beneath the ground panel on which the family is seated appear a river of water and features that recall the iron rod and the narrow path in Lehi’s dream.

Dr. Jakeman has identified no fewer than 23 correspondences between the details sculpted on Izapa Stela 5 and the artistic conventions of the ancient Near East, and 20 between the carving and the account set forth in the Book of Mormon (1958a, 1958b). Not all of them are equally impressive, of course. Some are of a rather general nature, but others are more arbitrary, for example the fruit-bearing tree as the central feature, the cherubim-like figures attending the tree, the six family members, and the river of water. Perhaps most important of all are the hieroglyphs seen above the two figures that correspond to Lehi and Nephi of the Book of Mormon. These, he shows to be name glyphs and to be decipherable as actually recording the names “Lehi” and “Nephi” (see Jakeman as cited in Griffith, 1982).

TOTAL EVIDENCE

It is easy to see why Stela 5 has come to be widely known among Latter-day Saints as the Lehi Tree-of-Life Stone. The total evidence combines to confirm in a remarkable manner Jakeman's interpretation of this oldest and most elaborate of the many depictions of the tree of life in the New World as no less than an ancient portrayal of the Lehi tree-of-life episode in the Book of Mormon.

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156.1 ARCHAEOLOGY AT IZAPA SINCE 1960 AS SEEN FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE BOOK-OF-MORMON RESEARCH INTEREST. A review-article by V. Garth Norman.

Izapa: An Introduction to the Ruins and Monuments, by Gareth W. Lowe, Thomas A. Lee, Jr., and Eduardo Martínez Espinosa, is just off the press.¹ This welcome monograph profusely illustrates excavations

of temple mounds and monuments at a ruin in southernmost Mexico that has come to have signal importance in the reconstruction of Mesoamerican archaeological history. Artistic renderings portray the sculptural complexes of the plazas. A foldout topographic map shows the full impressive layout of the ruins.

This well written and handsome volume is a companion study to my own two-part *Izapa Sculpture*, published in 1973 and 1976.² In my study, iconographic details are meticulously deciphered and illustrated. By thorough internal comparative analyses and contextual research in Mesoamerican art, motifs are identified and interpreted, particularly as found on the 32 low-relief, narrative carvings at the site.

The excavational and iconographic data and their analyses in these two papers are highly informative and provide a broad base for ongoing research on the Izapan culture.

MONUMENTS

The main focus of scholarly interest at Izapa has been the uniquely large number of stone monuments found there, carved in the distinctive Izapan narrative style of the Late Preclassic period. The unusual "Tree of Life" carving (Stela 5), is the most complex of the sculptures; it is best known among Book of Mormon students from M. Wells Jakeman's studies in the 1950s, which compared it to the Book of Mormon account of the prophet Lehi's vision of the Tree of Life³ (1 Nephi 8; see overview of Jakeman's research in 156.0, above).

With the recent completion of these two major monographs on Izapa in the New World Archaeological Foundation series, it seems timely to begin a reassessment of Dr. Jakeman's earlier interpretation of Stela 5 as a portrayal of Lehi's vision (hereafter, the Tree of Life Episode, or TLE, hypothesis) and of implications to potential Book of Mormon archaeological research in the whole Izapan endeavor. Because of limited space, this must be brief and incomplete. I accept the challenge at the risk of not doing justice to a very important topic. To approach this task, we must view in historical perspective the development of Izapan research interests and the results to date, as well as consider both immediate and long-range research objectives.

JAKEMAN'S INTERPRETATIONS

Dr. Jakeman's study of Izapa Stela 5 in the 1950s aroused considerable interest among students of the Book of Mormon. It was not only the first interpretative study of its kind to be made of a unique Book of Mormon text but also the first detailed study of any Izapan-style sculpture. If it proves valid, it will be the first discovery of an actual artifact of the Nephite civilization in New World archaeology. Such a discovery could lead to related finds and possibly to the eventual unfolding of much of the ancient American world of that scripture. The importance of such a discovery as Stela 5 in elucidating the Book of Mormon account, the only purported history from ancient America known from the same time period, cannot be overestimated. Such has been the thinking of Book of Mormon archaeology students over the past 30 or 40 years. While progress along these lines has been difficult and slow, for a few at least the vision has not dimmed.

It seems that a major challenge has been to discover some solid ground from which straightforward, non-apologetic research can proceed. Once that gulf is bridged, Book of Mormon archaeology can come into its own with the same intensity and objectivity that have characterized much archaeological research in the biblical field. This can certainly result if research has succeeded in identifying a major artifact within a New World archaeological-cultural context, such as Izapa Stela 5, that can be unequivocally linked to a unique Book of Mormon text. This is one continuing interest in Stela 5 and the TLE hypothesis that potentially embraces ruins of the whole Izapan culture period. This extremely difficult task demands a long-range scholarly commitment that should be second to none if we hope to succeed.

In my opinion, due to limited data, the TLE hypothesis has been neither validated nor invalidated following the Jakeman studies. In order to verify a specific detailed Book of Mormon textual inscription, such as Stela 5, we would have had to reach for the whole picture of both Book of Mormon and Mesoamerican historical reconstruction. Likewise, dealing with the TLE hypothesis would require a broad comprehension of Izapan iconography. By being first committed to these broad goals, I hoped, as I began my field study in 1965, to succeed at some point in elucidating Book of Mormon connections as well, a realistic expectation if indeed the region of Izapa lies within Book of Mormon territory.

NWAF INVESTIGATIONS

Soon after Jakeman's publications on Stela 5 appeared, the New World Archaeological Foundation, funded by the LDS church, shifted its concentration of interest from the Central Depression of Chiapas southward to the Pacific Coast. A permit was obtained from the Mexican government in 1961 to initiate full-scale excavations at Izapa. The Foundation's keen interest in this project grew first from the recognized great importance of the Izapa sculptures to a study of the development of early Mesoamerican civilization, and second, of course, from the implications of Dr. Jakeman's studies for the potential discovery of Near Eastern connections at the site. This potential Near Eastern connection, one of the Foundation's prime theoretical research-approach interests, was outlined in the original excavation permit granted by Mexico.⁴ The Pacific Coastal studies have been part of its unprecedented region-wide study, which is producing a full, cultural-chronological framework for virtually the whole state of Chiapas, from Early Pre-classic down through Colonial times.

Following completion of its fourth season of excavations at Izapa, I began in 1965 to work for the NWAF on the Izapa-sculpture study. I completed the manuscript in 1973 and the publication in 1976.



Stela 5, Izapa, as drawn by the author during his 1965-76 field project. From V. Garth Norman, *Izapa Sculpture*, Part 2, Fig. 4.1. By permission.

It may come as a surprise to some that, during this 12-year period as a research associate of the Foundation, at no time did I discuss the TLE hypothesis with any staff member or, for that matter, with any Mesoamerican scholar. My objective, in keeping with NWAf procedures as established by LDS church policy, was to conduct a thorough internal investigation of all Izapa sculptures, then to attempt preliminary interpretations through comprehensive comparative analyses within the Mesoamerican context.

Many questions had to be investigated before the TLE hypothesis could be adequately tested: Where did Izapa fit culturally and chronologically into the Mesoamerican context? How does Stela 5 relate to the many other sculptures at Izapa and to Mesoamerican iconography? How did the monuments and the ruins function as a complex? While significant progress has now been made, these and related questions are still being investigated.

As we begin to reassess the TLE hypothesis from these recent Izapa studies, we can recognize that data analysis will ultimately lead to one of three possible results: the hypothesis will either (1) be proven, or (2) disproven, or (3) it could remain inconclusive from data limitations. While I can hardly expect fully to answer the questions here, I will at least attempt to open a door or two.

PREDESTINATION?

Izapa: An Introduction contains some discussions that contribute toward the second (negative) alternative result, above, in testing the TLE hypothesis, with which I must take immediate issue. We should keep in mind that this study, as an introduction to Izapa excavations and monuments, of necessity constitutes a data base for establishing cultural and chronological parameters. Its discussions include broad observations, made, however, without conclusions as to sculpture analysis, for an expanding consideration of Mesoamerican cultural connections, particularly in calendrics.

The main disagreement with my 1976 interpretations of the sculptures has to do with their presumed religious function. In Chapter 16, pp. 315–316, Lowe takes issue with my central immortality theme. He questions the view that Izapa religion was really concerned with life after death, basing his argument mainly on a widely held ethnological pronouncement that Aztec religion was one of predestination and had little concern for afterlife and its rewards contingent upon conduct in this life. Such a predestinarian belief reflects a supposed earlier pan-Mesoamerican amoral religious philosophy—an unsubstantiated argument

that stems mainly from the isolationist view of a strictly indigenous development of New World civilization.

Lowe goes far afield in his efforts to educate us on the predestinarian nature of Mesoamerican religion, by comparing a similar popular and I believe equally mistaken notion in the field of ancient Near Eastern studies. According to this view, the Jews supposedly did not acquire the belief that rewards in the afterlife are affected by conduct in this life, until the last few centuries before Christ, when they presumably adopted the belief following the Babylonian Captivity.

As a rule, cultures tend to be distinguished from each other in religious beliefs and practices as much as in any other category. And the greater the time and distance between two cultures, the greater the difference. Izapa is separated from the Aztecs by 1500 years and is on the opposite end of the Mesoamerican map, as foreign to them as dynastic Egypt was to imperial Rome. Furthermore, penance rites among the Aztecs adequately discredit the notion that predestination was an all-pervasive belief, even for them.⁵ In any case, we cannot take seriously the predestinarian view without extensive studies in the history of religion, which have been almost totally lacking in Mesoamerican research. (A religion of predestination at Izapa would of course discredit any presumed Nephite religious culture base at that site.)

A major contribution of the excavational data reported in *Izapa: An Introduction* is evidence that the central temple-complex, together with its sculptures, was planned and constructed as a unit beginning in the early part of the third century BC. This is extremely important if one is to identify and elucidate the culture of the temple center and the monument inscriptions as a single cultural manifestation. Such a rich data base can surely confirm or refute any direct connection with the Book-of-Mormon Nephite culture of Near Eastern origin. The ultimate outcome may well rest on a final test of the TLE hypothesis, but I can already report that the cards are stacking up in favor of the Nephites. I mention below only a few evidences from my study of the sculptures.

RELIGIOUS NATURE OF THE SCULPTURES

A major accomplishment set forth in my *Izapa Sculpture* was the high level of success in deciphering and accurately illustrating weathered and damaged details, by means of cataloguing and comparing all motifs on all the sculptures. Only in the course of this

analytical process did the presence and significance of many details become evident. While some prior interpretations of Stela 5 were invalidated, most motifs previously analyzed were confirmed and elucidated.⁶ For instance the *cipactli* glyph, a bared jawbone and possible name glyph for “Lehi” (meaning “jawbone” in Hebrew), was sustained, in spite of decipherment of significant new details. The “Nephi” name glyph, however, is in serious doubt.

While it is true that the many new details that emerged in my study of Stela 5 require changes in earlier interpretations, these differences by no means invalidate the central TLE hypothesis; rather, they have considerably deepened its meaning. For instance, two of the more pointed meanings that have emerged, corresponding to the Book of Mormon account, are (1) a “dark mists” glyph (related to later Maya *Eb* and *Cauac* glyphs), and (2) the immortality theme.

1. The “dark mists” glyph is located at the far right center of the carving, where the creation life-cycle begins in which rain bands or “mists” cover the eyes and ear of a human head.

2. Symbols connected with the person at the left center of the tree, as I have interpreted them, reveal a life-after-death meaning in conjunction with his partaking of the fruit of the tree.

I would like here to point out briefly that my Izapa sculpture study has demonstrated predominantly religious themes that are consistent with the Book of Mormon. Among these concepts are the following: (1) there is an anthropomorphic god whose prime symbol is the sun and who dwells in the heavens and on mountains, his symbolic day aspect being the Eagle and his night aspect the Jaguar (Stelae 2, 4, 5, 9, 12); (2) he is god of the Tree of Life, which relates to life after death (Stelae 2, 5); (3) at death, the human spirit rises into heaven from the body (Stela 50); (4) there is a physical resurrection (Stelae 9, 89); (5) worship involves sacrifice and a divine sacrificial atonement (Stelae 5, 12, 24); and (6) the spirit of an unborn child originates in the heavens (Stela 10).

Most of these are well-known Book of Mormon concepts. Although given as preliminary interpretative observations in my 1976 study, subsequent research still to be published adds strong confirmation of these meanings. Far from being merely isolated or subjective interpretations, they are woven into the systematic fabric of the Izapa temple center, expressing man’s life cycle, and are tied to individual stelae

that correspondingly relate to the full seasonal and calendrical cycle. Other compatible systems, including the rain cycle and a Mesoamerican world view with directional concepts of birth and death and of heaven and hell, are involved as well.⁷ And the whole of it is set in a matrix of the exact sciences, thus providing further confirmation of meanings in the symbolism of astronomical orientations, geometrical structures, and sacred dimensions.⁸

CONCLUSION

From a perspective of the Book of Mormon as Nephite history, the record is clear on the point that the true concept of God—which happens to be illustrated at Izapa—is strictly a Nephite cultural contribution during the time when the Izapa temple-center functioned during the first few centuries BC. Both Lamanites and Mulekites had lost a knowledge of the true character of God as an anthropomorphic father who dwells in the heavens.⁹ Again, if we are in Book of Mormon territory, the religious concepts at Izapa argue that we are dealing with a Nephite temple-center.

With respect to potential Book of Mormon connections, I regard the foregoing, and other recent discoveries in the field of Izapa research, as a green light for us to pursue historical research within Mesoamerica more openly and energetically.

If major Book of Mormon lands are within Mesoamerica, as accumulating evidence indicates, what is the consequence if we neglect the archaeological approach? It follows that in the absence of other contemporary records we shall never be able to reconstruct a true history of Mesoamerica for the Book of Mormon time period. Professor Moses Coit Tyler of Cornell University, a leading American historian way back before the turn of the century, recognized this possible consequence in lamenting the neglect of Book of Mormon research.¹⁰ What a tragic consequence if that failure to act should continue uncorrected.

If and when success in identifying a major Book of Mormon artifact in a Mesoamerican cultural context is confirmed, it is conceivable that Book of Mormon archaeological research could develop as a valid and vigorous branch of Mesoamerican studies. This branch of study could then develop along lines similar to Near Eastern-biblical archaeology, for expanding our knowledge of early Mesoamerica and of Book of Mormon peoples and places.

NOTES

1. Brigham Young University: Provo, 1982. Papers of the New World Archaeological Foundation, No. 31. (Order from Director of Libraries, BYU, \$20.)
2. V. Garth Norman, *Izapa Sculpture* (Part 1, Album; Part 2, Text). Brigham Young University: Provo, 1973-76. Papers of the New World Archaeological Foundation, No. 30. (Order from Director of Libraries, BYU, \$25; Parts 1 and 2 sold only as a set.)
3. M. Wells Jakeman, *Stela 5, Izapa, Chiapas, Mexico; A Major Archaeological Discovery of the New World*. University Archaeological Society (now SEHA): Provo, 1958. Special Publications, No. 2.
4. Gareth W. Lowe, *The Chiapas Project, 1955-1958: Report of the Field Director*. 1959.
5. In Norman, 1976, pp. 109, 185-186 (see note 2, above), I discuss Aztec practices of penance among the aged and those facing danger in war or travels in order to prepare for death and in the hope of rewards in the afterlife.
6. See Jakeman, 1958, Pl. 5 (note 3, above); S. W. Miles, "Sculpture of the Guatemala-Chiapas Highlands and Pacific Slopes, and Associated Hieroglyphs," in *Handbook of Middle American Indians*, Vol. 2, pp. 237-275 and Fig. 14 (University of Texas Press: Austin, 1965).
7. V. Garth Norman, *Astronomical Orientations of Izapa Sculptures*. Unpublished thesis, Department of Anthropology, Brigham Young University, 1980.
8. *Ibid.*; V. Garth Norman, manuscripts in preparation. My research at Izapa since the completion of *Izapa Sculpture* has been funded in part by grants from the SEHA in 1976 and 1978. See *News. and Proc.*, 140.2, 144.2.
9. *Omni* 17; *Alma* 18:24-31.
10. *Deseret Evening News*, October 26, 1912, Sec. 2, p. 9, as quoted by Franklin S. Harris, Jr., in *The Book of Mormon Message and Evidences*, pp. 79-80 (Deseret News Press: Salt Lake City, 1961).

Editor's Note. Mr. Norman states that Jakeman's identification of the symbol above the head of the large young man to the right of the tree on Stela 5, as a name glyph that actually records the name Nephi, "is in serious doubt" (p. 9, above). Others, however, hold that it is only in *some* doubt—that it is indeed an archaic rendering of the Mesoamerican *centeotl* figure and that in this Izapan-period sculpture it was probably used to record the name Nephi. See for instance the lengthy discussion of this symbol in Michael T. Griffith's paper, "The Lehi Tree of Life Story in the Book of Mormon Still Supported by Izapa Stela 5," in *Newsletter and Proceedings*, 151.0, December, 1982.

Incidentally, Jakeman does not anywhere in his writings claim that the name glyph on the head of the large young man in the Stela 5 carving has been *deciphered* but only that it is *decipherable*, or has been provisionally deciphered, as recording the name Nephi. Of course, if Jakeman's proposed decipherment of the *cipactli* glyph above the bearded old man as a name glyph recording his name as Lehi is correct (and Norman agrees it is), then the chances are high that the *centeotl* glyph above the large young man records the name Nephi.

Conceivably, more sculptures with this symbol will eventually be unearthed at other sites of the Izapan, or Book-of-Mormon Nephite, period.

156.2 THE FLUTED PYRAMID AT LA VENTA: A RESPONSE TO WARREN ON THE *POPOL VUH*. By David A. Palmer.

In No. 154 of the *Newsletter and Proceedings of the SEHA*, Bruce W. Warren presented evidence that the hero-twins story of the Popul Vuh, as preserved by the Quiché Mayas of highland Guatemala, took place, or had its roots, in Jaredite times of the Book of Mormon. He followed his clues to a setting in the Tuxtla Mountains on the Gulf Coast northwest of the Isthmus of Tehuán-tepec. He also demonstrated the antiquity of the Popul Vuh legend by means of archaeological data from Classic Maya times and added evidence from Izapa that goes back to perhaps as early as 200 BC. I believe that even earlier archaeological evidence can now be demonstrated: from perhaps as early as 1000 BC in the Middle Preclassic period.

A little to the east of the Isthmus lies the site of La Venta, occupied from c.1000 to c.200 BC by the archaeological "Olmecs." One of the larger pyramids of the New World dominates the site. When Heizer and Drucker excavated it, they were surprised to find that it was not rectangular and stepped, as were most Mesoamerican pyramids. Neither was it round. Instead, it turned out to be shaped like a cone with ridges (a fluted conoidal frustum). Nothing else like it has ever been discovered.

After dismissing a variety of possible reasons for its unique shape, the archaeologists proposed that it had actually been fashioned in imitation of a natural model:

It may well be that the original model was that of the parasitic [volcanic] cinder cones which occur by the score in the Lake Catemaco region of the Tuxtla Mountains, about 120 km. NW of La Venta. . . . Some of these cinder cones exhibit erosion gullies running from the crater rim to the base and these are strongly reminiscent of the more formalized and regular channels or flutings of the La Venta Pyramid. We note the interesting fact, which may or may not be fortuitous, that the proportions of the basal diameter and height, as well as the angle of the sloping sides of these cinder cones, are almost identical to the same features of the La Venta Pyramid. Further, the source of most of the blocks of basalt (some of which weigh in excess of 36 short tons) used for monumental sculptures at the site of La Venta was the slopes of the Pliocene volcano, now called Cerro Cintepec, in the Tuxtla Mountains. . . . We suggest, purely as a hypothesis, that the La Venta Pyramid was an artifact made in imitation of a Tuxtla cinder cone, and that it was erected at this major ritual centre . . . in order to serve as a surrogate for a familiar and ritually important form. (Robert F. Heizer and Philip Drucker, "The La Venta Fluted Pyramid," *Antiquity*, 42 [1968], pp. 52-56.)

The La Venta fluted pyramid is vivid evidence that the Olmecs had some mythical or religious tie to the Tuxtla Mountains. The relationship which Warren sees between the Tuxtlas and the Popul Vuh hero-twins story makes that connection understandable.

The fluted pyramid at La Venta raises further interest in a correlation made by Warren between the Jaredite name Shiblón and the Quiché Maya name Ixbalanque, one of the hero twins. In my reconstruction of Jaredite chronology (*In Search of Cumorah*, p. 128) I have listed the reign of Shiblón as beginning c.1000 BC, or about the time the Olmecs began to construct La Venta.

These tantalizing coincidences suggest that more research may be fruitful.

Editor's Note. David A. Palmer was the leader of the 1977 photographic expedition of the SEHA to Mexico and Guatemala, sent to study certain views of Book of Mormon geography. The expedition archaeologist was Bruce W. Warren. A brief report by Dr. Palmer appears in the *Newsletter and Proceedings*, 149.0 (June, 1982). The expedition also yielded important information for Palmer's volume, *In Search of Cumorah: New Evidences for the Book of Mormon from Ancient Mexico* (Horizon Publishers: Bountiful, 1981), summarized and reviewed in the *Newsletter and Proceedings*, 147.1, 149.1.

Dr. Warren's study of the Popul Vuh, "A Cautious Interpretation of a Mesoamerican Myth: Reflections Upon Olmec-Jaredite Roots," is published in *ibid.*, 154.0 (July, 1983). A study of a large Olmec center located near La Venta, by V. Garth Norman, "San Lorenzo as the Jaredite City of Lib," appears in 153.0 (June, 1983).

156.3 DR. RICKS NAMED 1984 SYMPOSIUM CHAIRMAN. Welby W. Ricks has been named general chairman of the Thirty-third Annual Symposium on the Archaeology of the Scriptures, to be held later this year.

Announcement was made by SEHA vice-president Esther Phelps Parks. Since 1980 it has been one of the duties of the office of vice-president to appoint the symposium chairman.

Dr. Ricks has extended a general invitation to Society members to submit abstracts of papers for consideration by the Symposium Committee. He suggests that those planning to do so begin their preparations without delay. A form for the abstract, together with instructions, will be mailed soon. In selecting papers to be placed on the program, he will probably favor Mesoamerican subjects.

The Annual Symposium on the Archaeology of the Scriptures has been held nearly every year since 1947. It is an occasion for sharing research findings among Society members on the archaeology of the Hebrew-Christian and Latter-day Saint scriptures, particularly the Book of Mormon, and for fellowshiping among those interested in these fields. Also, the Society's Annual Business Meeting is usually held in conjunction with the Symposium.

Dr. Ricks' 1984 appointment is his sixth as symposium chairman. He previously served in 1960, 1963, 1966, 1968, and 1982 (*News. and Proc.*, 148.2).

Announcement of the date and place of the yearly meeting, appointment of members to serve on the Symposium Committee, and other information will appear in forthcoming issues of the *Newsletter and Proceedings*.

156.4 COMING SOON. "A Possible Survival of the Quiché-Maya Script," by Allen J. Christenson, is planned for the next issue (No. 157) of the *Newsletter and Proceedings*, according to the editor.

Mr. Christenson discovered what may be a late survival of the ancient Maya hieroglyphic script in actual use among the secretive natives of a remote village in highland Guatemala. His paper was read in 1982 at the Thirty-first Annual Symposium on the Archaeology of the Scriptures.

A former student of linguistics and archaeology at Brigham Young University, Mr. Christenson now resides in Los Angeles, California.