



Type: Magazine Article

The Arch and the Wheel in Ancient America

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Source: *Improvement Era*, Vol. 46, No. 7 (July 1943), p. 387

Published by: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Abstract: No abstract available.

The
ARCH AND THE WHEEL
in Ancient America

By DR. CHARLES E. DIBBLE

THE sum total of our knowledge of American Indian cultures is increased with each new archaeological discovery. Some "finds" strengthen existing theories and interpretations, whereas others call for a re-defining of the problem at hand and give scholars a new avenue of research.

It is generally agreed that, with the exception of the igloo of the Eskimo, the "true arch" was not an architectural feature in the New World. Mayan engineers roofed their ceremonial buildings with the corbeled arch. The corbeled arch was formed by placing a stone to project beyond the one below it. The two series of consecutively protruding stones approached each other in the manner of a capital A.

It has also been a popular conviction among archaeologists that the American Indian had no knowledge of the wheel. Smithsonian Institution workers have discovered clay objects in Southern Mexico which suggest that the early inhabitants were not entirely ignorant of the use of the wheel. A small clay dog and a laughing jaguar were found with clay tubes piercing the feet. Associated with the animals, eight small clay disks were discovered. It is possible that the Indians inserted wooden axles in the tubes and used the pottery disks for wheels. This recent discovery suggests that the use of the wheel may not have been entirely unknown to American Indians.



According to Ignacio Marquina

THE CORBELED ARCH OF THE MAYAS. UNLIKE THE TRUE ARCH, IT HAS NO KEYSTONE.

JULY, 1943

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