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Archaeology and the Book of Mormon - Part III. White and Dark Peoples of Ancient America

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White and dark peoples. Reproduction of mural from inner wall, "Temple of the Painted Walls," Bonampak, Mexico.

Archaeology and the Book of Mormon

by President Milton R. Hunter

OF THE FIRST COUNCIL OF THE SEVENTY

White and Dark Peoples of Ancient America

PART III

AS OTTO DONE, José Dávila, our two Indian guides, Nabor and Juan, and I approached Bonampak early in the morning on January 19, 1955, our right to be there was vigorously protested by a number of wild monkeys. They screamed and chattered while scampering through the trees, highly indignant at our trespassing. Perhaps they felt that they were the guardians of the Mayan temples which had been erected approximately 1300 years ago. However, we paid little attention to their noise because we had been informed by our guides that we were approaching Bonampak's most famous edifice, the "Temple of the Painted Walls," which is considered one of the most important archaeological discoveries made thus far in the twentieth century.

Eagerly we climbed the principal pyramid upon which stands the ancient Mayan edifice. We observed that the building is approximately sixty-five feet in length, containing three rooms. Each of the rooms, approximately ten by seventeen feet in size, contains one door and no windows. The building is constructed of rocks covered with excellent stucco. The interior walls are plastered and are still in a good state of preservation even though hundreds of years have elapsed since their construction. The entire interior wall surfaces of the three rooms, including the sloping convex ceilings, are covered with

murals, "painted in exquisite perspective."¹

We entered each of the rooms and excitedly examined and photographed the colorfully painted frescoes. Then with a machete we cleared the vegetation from the top of the pyramid in front of the "Temple of the Painted Walls," so that we could photograph the exterior of the building.

Also, we examined and studied some of the other archaeological re-

¹Charles Morrow Wilson, "Rediscovering Lost Temples of the Mayas," *Travel* (Baltimore, November 1948), p. 26.

mains at Bonampak, which included other buildings, three large stelae, and two limestone altars. Charles Morrow Wilson states that one of the altars

... is considered one of the best examples of Maya sculpture yet discovered. It rivals the stone carvings at Palenque, which are commonly regarded as among the finest examples of Maya sculpture.²

Bonampak, which is Maya for "Painted Walls," consists of at least

²Charles Morrow Wilson, "Open Sesame to the Maya," *Pan American Union Bulletin* (Washington, D. C., Vol. LXXXII, No. 7, July 1948), p. 379.

—Photographs by Otto Done



Reproduction of a mural depicting white and dark peoples, from the inner wall, "Temple of the Painted Walls," Bonampak, Mexico.

THE IMPROVEMENT ERA



The white, bearded Kukulcan or Topiltzin, tenth-century ruler of Chichén Itzá, Yucatan, whose likeness is carved on a doorjamb of the structure atop the temple of Kukulcan at Chichén Itzá.

eight standing temples which are "... believed to have been built in the sixth and seventh centuries A.D."³ "Although it may have been founded much earlier, Bonampak was in its

³Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

prime during the seventh century, according to date glyphs."⁴

Dr. Sylvanus G. Morley and other scholars of Meso-American cultures have maintained that "painting was a fine art among the Maya and reached a degree of excellence attained by no other people of aboriginal America."⁵ Until the discovery of Bonampak, archaeologists had made only a few fragmentary finds of Maya paintings on which to base their conclusions; however, the Bonampak murals confirm the former statements made by scholars, showing the importance of the "extremely talented painters whom the greatest Indian civilization developed." In the words of Charles Morrow Wilson:

But the amazing find at Bonampak reveals life in the Golden Age of the Maya with all the powers of strong colors, brilliantly used. The 1300-year-old murals show ceremonial processions of warriors and kings; also scenes of sacrifices, rituals, and battles. Painted on a kind of stucco which is superimposed on limestone masonry, the mural depicts a handsome pageantry featuring elaborate feather headdresses, ceremonial bars which were ancient Mayan scepters of authority and the musical instruments of the great Mayas of old—long Tibetan-style horns, huge turtle-shell rattlers

⁴Charles Morrow Wilson, "Backwards a Dozen Centuries," *Natural History* (New York, October 1947), p. 370.

⁵Sylvanus G. Morley, *The Ancient Maya* (Palo Alto, Calif., 1946), p. 412.

and drums made of wood and of clay with ornamented skinned heads.

More revealing are the costumes worn by the great Mayas of old. These are pictured as having been made of deer and jaguar skins handsomely ornamented by jade—probably imported from distant places. Cloth garments, apparently made of cotton, are interwoven with numerous figurines, glyphs, and planetary symbols. The favorite colors include red on white, rich green on brown, dark brown on white, and brilliant sashes. In all instances the ancient Mayas are pictured as a strong and healthy people, of outstanding dignity and charm.⁶

[The principal temple contains more than 1200 square feet of murals] magnificently painted by superbly skilled early American artists who worked at least eight centuries before the great mural paintings of Europe were made. Remarkably enough the heroic wall paintings of the pre-Columbian American artists excels in many respects the best of European mural art. More important they open the way to a greatly improved understanding of what many experts believe was a Golden Age of ingenious American culture. . . .⁷

. . . Artists are impressed by the versatility of the colors—at least eleven colors are used effectively—and it is believed that both vegetable and mineral paints were used. The perspective is amazingly skillful, even by contemporary standards. . . .⁸

During February and March, 1947, archaeologists and artists studied and

(Continued on following page)

⁶Wilson, "Rediscovering Lost Temples of the Mayas," *op. cit.*, pp. 25-26.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 26.

"Temple of the Painted Walls," Bonampak, Mexico. Nabor, Lacandone Indian guide, in the doorway.



Archaeology and the Book of Mormon

(Continued from preceding page)

photographed the Bonampak murals. Also, water color paintings were made, reproducing the scenes as nearly like the originals as possible. The reproductions have been placed in such places as the National Museum and Palace of Fine Arts in the city of Mexico and in the museum in Guatemala City.

A point of great interest which one observes in studying the original murals on the inner walls of the temple at Bonampak and the reproductions made by the artists is that there are life-size paintings which depict three distinctively different colors of people. It is probable that they represent the various races that were living at Bonampak at the time the frescoes were painted.

The murals portray people as white as the Caucasian races of Europe and as the Semitic Hebrews and other races of the Mediterranean world. The skin color of many of the others closely resembles the bronze-skinned natives of America, known since the days of Columbus as Indians. Interpersed among these are also a few representations of black people, as dark as the darkest Negroes.

The question immediately arises: Who were these white and dark peoples depicted in the Bonampak murals?

It is the opinion of the writer that the bronze-skinned persons and the white people are descendants of the Lamanites and the Nephites which races are described in the Book of Mormon. The quetzal feathers shown as headdresses in the murals and those depicted on the lintels of the doors (see photographs) suggest that the builders of Bonampak were worshippers of Quetzalcoatl or the "White Bearded God" who visited the people in ancient America and whom Mormons identify as Jesus Christ.⁹ Since the murals were painted only two hundred years following the close of Nephite history, such a short time having elapsed would practically assure the traditions as those of Christ's appearances and connect the builders of Bonampak with Book of Mormon peoples.

One fact should be kept in mind, namely, at the close of Nephite history a great apostasy from Christ's

true religion occurred. Following the close of the Book of Mormon, the religion of the descendants of the Nephites and Lamanites was pagan, the true gospel which Christ had taught to their ancestors having been greatly adulterated. But since the most important event that had ever occurred in the history of ancient America was the appearance of the resurrected Savior on this continent, the descendants of Book of Mormon peoples carried forward a remembrance of that great event in their traditions. They adopted the quetzal bird and the serpent, *coatl*, as symbols of the "White Bearded God," whom they named Quetzalcoatl and whom they worshiped with their diverse pagan practices.

As is well-known, two peoples—a white race and those of a darker color—inhabited ancient America for approximately one thousand years' time. Speaking of their skin colors, Nephi declared that the Lord

... had caused the cursing to come upon them [Laman and his associates] . . . wherefore, as they were white, and exceeding fair and delightful, . . . the Lord God did cause a skin of blackness to come upon them.¹⁰

Approximately five hundred years later, Alma wrote:

And the skins of the Lamanites were dark, according to the mark which was set upon their fathers, which was a curse upon them because of their transgression and their rebellion against their brethren, who consisted of Nephi, Jacob, and Joseph, and Sam, who were just and holy men.¹¹

The reader may say: "Yes, we understand that there were a white race and a dark race in ancient America from approximately 600 B.C. until approximately 400 A.D., but we have understood also that by the latter date all the white people (Nephites), except Moroni, had been killed in a war with the darker people or Lamanites."

It is true that the Nephite nation ended toward the close of the fifth century A.D., but probably many of the white Nephites were saved from death by joining the Lamanites. These then would not be followers of Christ and would be unfaithful ones. The last great war was not fought entirely on the lines of race, but probably the determining factor was that one group allied itself with the

Lamanite traditions, and the other group followed the Nephite traditions, including a belief in Jesus Christ. Thus there probably were dark and white people in each army.¹²

The Book of Mormon gives evidence that some of the Nephites (white people) survived the last great war; for example, between the dates of 400 and 421 A.D., possibly toward the latter date and approximately thirty-five years after the last great battle, Moroni wrote:

. . . I make not myself known to the Lamanites lest they should destroy me.

For behold, their wars are exceedingly fierce among themselves; and because of their hatred they put to death every Nephite that will not deny the Christ.

And I, Moroni, will not deny the Christ; wherefore, I wander whithersoever I can for the safety of mine own life.¹³

Although prophet after prophet throughout the entire course of Nephite history predicted that the Lamanites would destroy the Nephite nation when the latter people became "ripe in iniquity," the Lord through his holy prophets also promised the Nephites that some of their seed would be preserved forever. The first of these promises recorded in the Book of Mormon was made near the beginning of Nephite history by Father Lehi to his son Joseph. In giving his son a patriarchal blessing, Lehi predicted:

And now I speak unto you, Joseph, my last-born. . . .

And may the Lord consecrate also unto thee this land, . . . for thine inheritance and the inheritance of thy seed with thy brethren, for thy security forever, . . .

. . . for thy seed shall not utterly be destroyed.¹⁴

Jacob, the brother of Nephi, told the Nephites that God

. . . has promised . . . us that our seed shall not utterly be destroyed, according to the flesh, but that he would preserve them; and in future generations they shall become a righteous branch unto the house of Israel.¹⁵

The foregoing prophecy indicates that through an apostate line the seed of the Nephites would be preserved in the land. Alma made a similar statement. He predicted the destruction of the Nephites as a nation, pointing out that some of them, however, would not be destroyed but would be numbered among the Lamanites. To quote:

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⁹Note: A marvelous account of Christ's appearances to the inhabitants of ancient America is given in the Book of Mormon, 3 Nephi.

¹⁰2 Nephi 5:21.

¹¹Alma 3:6.

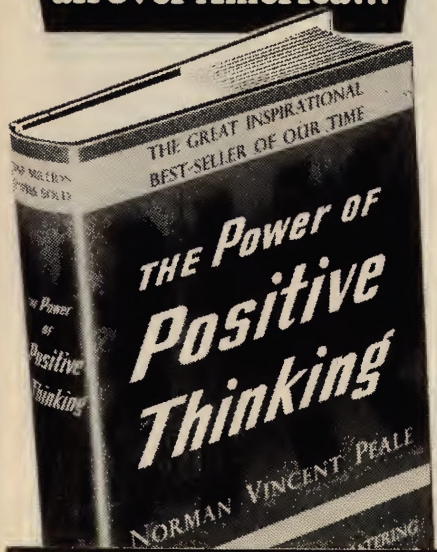
¹²3 Nephi 2:14-16.

¹³Moroni 1:1-3.

¹⁴2 Nephi 3:1-3.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 9:53.

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ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE BOOK OF MORMON

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. . . the time . . . cometh that those who are now, or the seed of those who are now numbered among the people of Nephi, shall no more be numbered among the people of Nephi.

But whosoever remaineth, and is not destroyed in that great and dreadful day, shall be numbered among the Lamanites, . . .¹⁰

¹⁰Alma 45:13-14.

An angel from heaven had previously given Nephi this information, declaring that a mixture of the seed of the Nephites would remain forever among the Lamanites or American Indians. In speaking of the latter days—the days in which we live—the angel declared:

Someone to be safe with . . .

Richard L. Evans

WE HAVE talked of sharing and of keeping confidences. Today for a moment, we should like to talk of someone to trust—someone to be safe with. There are many exciting people, many talented and able and entertaining people, many charming and engaging people, who add interest and usefulness and color to any occasion. But beyond all this, among the greatest blessings of life is to feel safe with someone. In many things we are very dependent upon other people. We don't have the knowledge or skill or ability to do some things for ourselves. And since this is so, it is a surpassing blessing to have someone to trust—someone to be safe with. But there is no real safety or peace or assurance with anyone without integrity, without high qualities of character. ¶It is a blessing and an obligation to see that our children are safe. Blessed is the child who can come with his hurts and his troubles to someone he can trust, and be enfolded in loving arms, with the blessed assurance of being safe with someone. And not only is it so with children, but with others also. ¶We likely wouldn't let an unknown, unbonded messenger carry large amounts of money from bank to bank. But do we assure ourselves how safe our loved ones are? Would we entrust a daughter, for example, to unknown and unproved companions? Is there anything more priceless than virtue? Than chastity? Would we leave priceless and irreplaceable things to chance? This is plain speaking—but not too plain for speaking of life and peace and safety and happiness, and of infinitely important and irreplaceable things. Among the greatest blessings in life is to be safe with someone—someone without evil intent, someone who wouldn't violate a trust, who wouldn't take advantage of innocence or ignorance; someone who isn't planning in his heart to cut across conventions, to compromise principles, or to deprive another person of virtue, chastity, honor, or any priceless or irreplaceable possession. We may have all else in life, but if we can't count on character, on integrity, if we haven't the sense of being safe, we have little that matters very much. O the joy, the surpassing joy of having someone we can turn to, someone we can trust. "O the comfort, the inexpressible comfort, of feeling safe with a person. . . ."¹

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. . . the Lord God will not suffer that the Gentiles will utterly destroy the mixture of thy seed, which are among thy brethren.

Neither will he suffer that the Gentiles shall destroy the seed of thy brethren [Lamanites or Indians].¹⁷

In modern revelation the Lord confirmed the fulfilment of the promise made to his ancient prophets. In speaking of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, he declared:

Nevertheless, my work shall go forth, for inasmuch as the knowledge of a Savior has come unto the world, through the testimony of the Jews, even so shall the knowledge of a Savior come unto my people—

And to the Nephites, and the Jacobites, and the Josephites, and the Zoramites, through the testimony of their fathers—

And this testimony shall come to the knowledge of the Lamanites, and the Lemuelites, and the Ishmaelites, who dwindled in unbelief because of the iniquity of their fathers, . . .

And for this very purpose are these plates preserved, which contain these records— . . .¹⁸

Certainly the Lord would not have made mention of the Book of Mormon record coming to the descendants of the Nephites if there were no descendants remaining in America at the time of its publication.

President Wilford Woodruff accepted the promises of the Lord that some of the seed of the Nephites would be preserved; and he firmly believed that he found some of the direct descendants of the Nephites in New Mexico and Arizona. He spent several months doing missionary work with the Indians in that section of the country, and then, on September 15, 1879, he wrote a letter to President John Taylor and the Council of the Twelve in which he stated:

In my short communication of the 2nd inst., I promised to give a fuller account of my visit to the Isletas, which I will now endeavor to do. I view my visit among the Nephites one of the most interesting missions of my life, although short. I say Nephites because if there are any Nephites on this continent we have found them among the Zunis, Lagumas [Lagunas], and Isletas, for they are a different race of people altogether from the Lamanites. I class the Navajo, Moquis, [Hopis] and Apaches with the Lamanites, although they are in advance of many Indian tribes of America. I class the Zunis, Lagumas, and the Isletas among the Nephites (See D. & C. 3:17).¹⁹

In addition to the famous Bonampak murals, other similar wall paintings made by Indians, depicting white and dark peoples, have been discovered.
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¹⁷1 Nephi 13:30-31.

¹⁸D. & C. 3:16-19; 2 Nephi 29:12-13.

¹⁹Matthias F. Cowley, *Wilford Woodruff* (Salt Lake City, 1916), pp. 521-522.

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ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE BOOK OF MORMON

(Continued from preceding page)

covered; for example, a mural was painted on the walls of a temple at Chichén Itzá, Yucatán—according to archaeologists, painted approximately 1000 A.D.—which illustration shows white people in bondage to a dark-skinned race.²⁰ This mural could be a representation of a historical event at Chichén Itzá or it may refer back to an ancient historical event which

occurred in the days of their Nephite and Lamanite ancestors, since the Book of Mormon gives evidence of the former (white people) being in bondage to the latter (dark-colored) people.²¹ It matters little which it may be, since either constitutes valid Book of Mormon evidence.

In addition to the murals depicting white and dark-colored peoples, considerable documentary evidence has been preserved which maintains that

²⁰Dr. J. Eric S. Thompson, *The Civilization of the Mayas* (Chicago, Ill., 1953), p. 20, dates the erection of New Chichén Itzá from A.D. 968 to 987, and Dr. Morley, *op. cit.*, p. 81, states that Chichén Itzá was reoccupied in 968 A.D. (See front cover.)

²¹Mosiah, Chapters 19-22, pp. 170-178; 23-24, pp. 178-182.



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white people lived in ancient America; for example, in approximately 1600 A.D., Ixtlilxochitl, an Indian of a royal family who lived near the city of Mexico, wrote a history of his progenitors.²² This Indian prince, maintaining that his ancestors were white people, claimed that they came to Mexico in three different migrations from beyond the sea. He said that the first group ". . . were of those of the division of Babylon," and that they came to America from ". . . the very high tower," no doubt meaning the Tower of Babel.²³ A similar claim is made by the Book of Mormon.²⁴ He also stated that two other groups of people crossed the sea and settled in the Western Hemisphere.²⁵ This claim is also in harmony with one made by the Book of Mormon regarding the Nephites and Mulekites.²⁶

Not only does Ixtlilxochitl claim that the ancestors of the Indians were white people, but he also maintains that throughout the entire period following the last great war which, in agreement with the Book of Mormon, took place during the latter part of the fourth century,²⁷ white descendants of these ancient peoples continued to live in the valley of Mexico and in Yucatán until the coming of Columbus and the Spanish conquest;²⁸ for example, we read in the *Works of Ixtlilxochitl* about a tenth-century king or nobleman, named Topiltzin (Kukulcan), sometimes called Quetzalcoatl because he was a priest or worshiper of the ancient white god. He was a white man with a long flowing beard, who lived in the valley of Mexico.²⁹

Enemy peoples defeated him in battle and forced him from the country. Topiltzin and his Toltec associates went to Yucatán. These newcomers united with the Mayas and, under the leadership of Topiltzin, built the New Mayan Empire. The principal cities that this bearded white man from Mexico is said to have built were New Chichén Itzá and Mayapan.³⁰

The principal temple erected at Chichén Itzá was named Kukulcan in

²²*The Works of Ixtlilxochitl*, cited in Milton R. Hunter and Thomas Stuart Ferguson, *Ancient America and the Book of Mormon* (Oakland, Calif., 1950), pp. 1-450.

²³*ibid.*, pp. 24-25.

²⁴Ether 1:1-43.

²⁵Hunter and Ferguson, *op. cit.*, pp. 55ff.; pp. 121ff.

²⁶1 Nephi chapters 1-18; Omni 1:15-16; He. 6:10; 8:21.

²⁷Mormon chapters 3-6, pp. 463-471; Hunter and Ferguson, *op. cit.*, pp. 347-365.

²⁸*ibid.*, p. 382.

²⁹*ibid.*, pp. 390-395.

³⁰Alfred M. Tozzer, *Landa's Relacion de las Cosas de Yucatan* (1941 ed.), pp. 20-26; Gaspar Antonio Chi, cited in M. Wells Jakeman, *The Origin and History of the Mayas* (Salt Lake City, 1945), pp. 95-96.

honor of this tenth-century builder and white ruler of Chichén Itzá. His likeness was carved on one of the door-jambes of the temple, a photograph of which is reproduced here. It takes no more than a casual glance at this bearded, white Kukulcan to convince one that it is not the portrayal of a beardless Indian, but certainly the representation of a white man. Observe the profile line of this nose and the heavy growth of his beard. The feathers of the quetzal bird protrude gracefully from his headdress, indicating that he was a priest of the "Bearded White God" or Jesus Christ, symbolized by the quetzal.

Not only do we have the likeness of this bearded white person carved in stone, but we also have the definite claim made by Ixtlilxochitl that the Toltec kings, including Topiltzin, were white and bearded. To quote: "These kings were high of stature, and white, and bearded like the Spaniards, . . ." ³¹



The bearded Mayan warrior killing a captive. Under surface of west door lintel, "Temple of Painted Walls," Bonampak, Mexico.

Documentary evidence indicates that strains of white blood still remained in the Toltec peoples of the valley of Mexico during the tenth century A.D. The white blood was apparently gradually diluted as years passed until the arrival of the Europeans in the sixteenth century. Ixtlilxochitl, in delineating the events of the tenth century, states that

. . . during the first days they found a

³¹Ixtlilxochitl, cited in Hunter and Ferguson, *op. cit.*, p. 240.

child on a hill. It was very white and blond and beautiful . . . and from that time forth there was a law that wherever a child was born that was very white and blond, when it was five years of age it was right away sacrificed. This law lasted until the coming of the Spaniards.³²

From the evidence that has been presented, it is clearly shown that some of the Nephites escaped death at the close of Book of Mormon history. Since the information is not available, it is impossible to state definitely the exact number of Nephites who denied Christ and joined the

³²*Ibid.*, p. 382.

Lamanites; and yet it is probable (judging from the large numbers of white peoples in various parts of ancient America following the close of Book of Mormon history) that a considerable number survived the last great war. There is much evidence in the Book of Mormon, as has been presented, that such would be the case. Thus the writer maintains that the ancient Nephites are at least partially accountable for the white peoples who inhabited America between the dates of 421 A.D. and the discovery of America in 1492 A.D.

(To be continued)

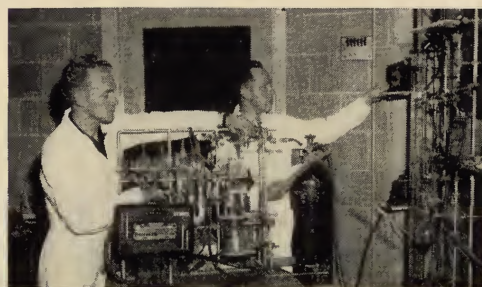
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