



Type: Magazine Article

---

## Ancient Ruins of South America: Some External Evidences Supporting the Story of the Book of Mormon

Author(s): Melvin J. Ballard

Source: *Improvement Era*, Vol. 30, No. 11 (September 1927)

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

Page(s): 960–973

---

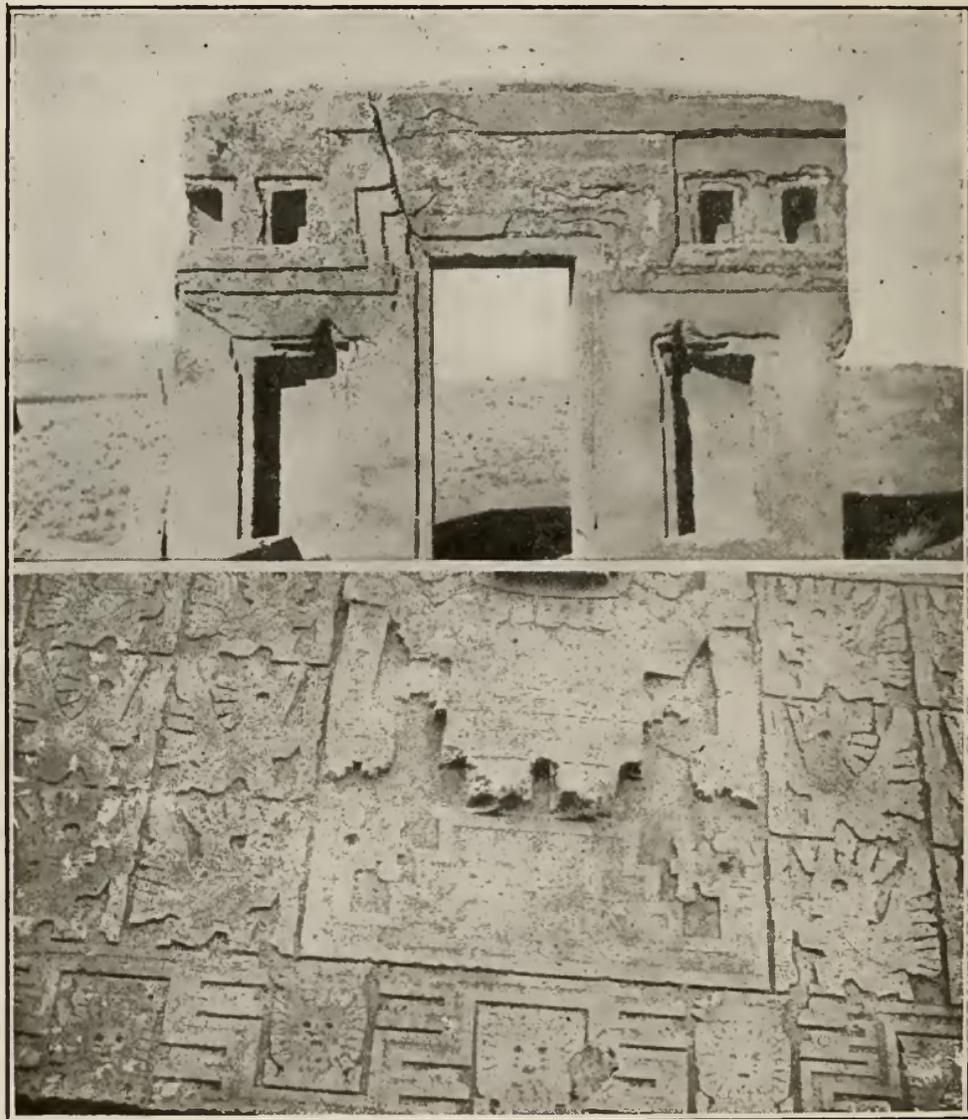
**Abstract:** This piece is largely an account (accompanied by photographs) of a trip by the author to ancient ruins in the Andes Plateau. Monoliths and the ruins of temples in the sites of three ancient cities are described. The workmanship of the ruins is marvelous, states the author, and comparable to ancient Egyptian buildings.

# ANCIENT RUINS OF SOUTH AMERICA

## Some External Evidences Supporting the Story of the Book of Mormon

BY MELVIN J. BALLARD, OF THE COUNCIL OF THE TWELVE AND ASSISTANT GENERAL SUPERINTENDENT Y. M. M. I. A.

When Elder Rey L. Pratt and myself had accomplished the work for which we were sent to South America, namely, the establishment of a mission of the Church; through the kindness of the First Presi-



Top: Picture Number 1. The Stone Gate  
Bottom: Inside of the Great Gate. Number 2

dency we were permitted to return through the Indian countries of South America up the west coast. This journey led us through the northern part of the Argentine where we met tens of thousands of industrious Indians intensively engaged in agricultural work, but not until we passed up over the eastern rim of the Andes mountains and came into what is known as the great Andean Plateau, a territory nearly five hundred miles long and about a hundred and fifty miles wide, with an average elevation of 12,500 feet above the sea, sur-



Hewn Monoliths Around Temple of the Sun. Number 3

rounded by ranges of the Andes mountains, did we find great numbers of South American Indians living in the same territory where their ancestors for generations before them have resided.

It will be remembered that this great plateau stretching over parts of Bolivia and Peru is very nearly under the equator, so that even at this vast elevation—it is an agricultural country, and nearly every acre of this vast territory is under cultivation in small farms, well marked by petitioned fences made of sun-dried adobes. The entire territory is cultivated by hundreds of thousands of Indians who live in small villages and larger cities, and who are scattered over all parts of this



Eastern Entrance to Portal. Number 4

territory, engaged in the raising of barley, corn, potatoes, cattle and sheep.

I wish to describe some of the ruins we visited in three different places of this great Andean Plateau. First of all at Tiahuanaco, near the shores of Lake Titicaca. These ruins are now about twelve miles distant from the Lake, but it is easy to note that in ages past they were on the shores of the Lake, which has receded. Some archaeologists claim that these ruins are the oldest in the world; however that may be, they were decidedly interesting to us, as they give some external evidences of the truthfulness of the story told in the Book of Mormon concerning the ancient inhabitants of the Americas.

I will describe three points of interest only. There are many, because this was a vast city, covering many hundreds of acres of land. The first one to attract our attention is known as the site of the Temple of the Sun. This is on a plot of ground approximately ten or twelve acres and is completely surrounded by great hewn monoliths. There are twenty-eight each on the north and south sides, with thirty-two each on the east and west. These great stones are approximately eight feet wide and two feet six inches thick by about twelve feet high, and are placed on end in the ground. They stand there, as they have stood through the ages, like sentinels about this sacred temple enclosure. The entrance to the temple on the west is through a great stone doorway. The solid stone itself is about twelve feet wide and twelve feet high and seventeen inches thick, with a doorway two feet eight by six feet cut in the center. This stone is beautifully carved on both sides.

Picture No. 1 gives you a front view of this stone gate. You will notice where lightning has cracked it, but it was originally in one solid piece.

Picture No. 2 is a close-up view of the inside of the great gate entering into the Temple of the Sun. These perfectly wonderful carvings are so strikingly Egyptian that they impressed us not only for the skill of execution but the characters and designs that tell something of the culture of the people and from what part of the world they undoubtedly came.

Picture No. 3 gives a view of the hewn monoliths around this



A striking Egyptian-like Image. Picture Number 5

Temple enclosure. Elder Pratt is seen standing by one of these huge stones.

Picture No. 4 shows the eastern entrance to the portal of the Temple of the Sun. I am standing upon the top slab of this stairway. This stone is twenty-seven feet long, eight feet wide and two feet six inches thick and composed of one solid piece.

The great temple itself is tumbled down, many of the stones have been taken in the construction of railroad culverts and hauled to other



Picture Number 6. The Amphitheater

places where they have been used, but still there are many of the huge stones yet lying on the ground where the structure stood.

One of the carved, strikingly Egyptian monoliths upon the site of the temple is shown in Picture No. 5. I am standing by the side of this striking image which was built to typify the deity that is said the ancients worshiped, the God of the Sun.

A little to the right of this temple site is a great, artificial hill covering about ten acres of ground with the earth piled up to about seventy-five feet in height in the form of a Maltese cross, with a retaining wall from the base up to the summit. The center of the great hill is a natural amphitheatre. Picture No. 6 shows this amphitheater. It is approximately three hundred feet long and two hundred feet across it. It is surrounded by hewn monoliths and provided also with stone seats that would accommodate many thousands of people, while in the center was a great playground. From this hill ran a great street about a mile to the west, along which had been erected huge stone monoliths, some of them still standing.

Picture No. 7 shows one of these wonderfully carved stones that marks the street that leads to the site of the greater of the temples at Tiahuanaco, on an opposite hill in the western part of the city.

I will merely describe the center court of four great courts of this temple. The front stone, as shown in Picture No. 8, is a huge stone twenty-five feet, eight inches long, eight feet wide, and six feet thick, of one solid piece. It has on the face of it twelve niches about a foot square and nearly a foot into the face of the stone. It is said this stone weighs a hundred and twenty tons. Immediately behind it on Picture No. 8 will be seen a huge slab fitting tightly against this stone and all of its neighbors, so perfectly even, though this stone is laid in dry masonry, that we could not insert a knife blade between them.

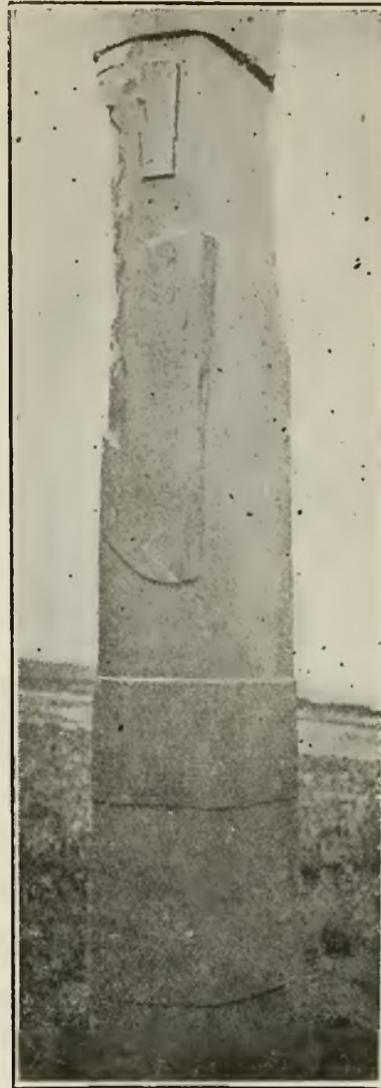
This stone is twenty-five feet, eight inches long and seventeen feet wide and four feet, six inches thick, and is said to weigh a hundred and seventy tons. Mammoth stones were brought many miles across Lake Titicaca from quarries that are still in existence, taken from the shore, laid in place apparently without any damage whatsoever. When we realize that man does not have the ability to move such mammoth stones today, we stand appalled at such evidences of skill and wisdom displayed by these ancient inhabitants.

In Picture No. 9 will be seen a portion of the wall of this temple. Brother Pratt is standing on top of it. You will notice two crosses, one in a perfect condition, carved on the face of the stone. This cross is five feet high and three feet wide, and stands out more than six inches from the face of the stone.

Picture No. 10 is another section of the wall showing perfect inlaid work in a square fashion, and on a stone lying immediately in front you will notice a compass. This is perfectly carved, and is seventeen inches from point to point. When we saw these symbols upon the wall of this temple, we were deeply impressed that whoever built it knew about Solomon's temple. When we read in the Book of Mormon that they builded temples after the manner of Solomon's temple, one is certainly impressed that these were the ruins of the peoples described in the Book of Mormon.

We crossed Lake Titicaca, the surface of the water being twelve thousand, five hundred feet above the sea. This journey was made in an ocean vessel. It crossed the ocean by its own power and was taken apart and conveyed up the Andes mountains and put together again. It furnishes accommodations for nearly five hundred passengers. Our journey covered a length of one hundred and twenty-five miles. All along the shore, and upon the many islands we saw the ruins of an ancient civilization, for they exist everywhere. The whole lake must have been completely surrounded with a great nation of people.

We journeyed three hundred miles north of Lake Titicaca into the northern edge of the great mountain plateau, up to the city of Cuzco, the site of the Inca Empire, and was undoubtedly also the



Number 7. Carved Stone



Top: Front Stone of the Temple. Picture Number 8

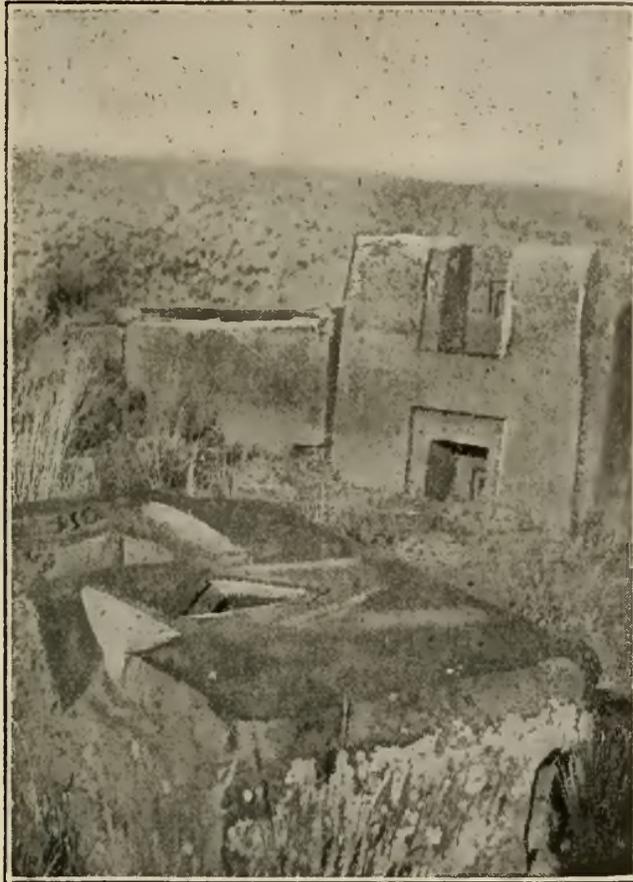
Bottom: Wall of the Temple. Number 9

site of the pre-Inca Empire. It is a marvelous city even today. Thirty thousand people live in it, principally Indians. The city is up towards the pass in the mountains which leads into the Amazon valley. Behind the city and towards this opening lies a hill, about twelve hundred feet in height. This hill is well fortified, and many of those ancient fortifications still remain. A section twelve hundred feet long is still in perfect condition.

Picture 11 shows a section of this mighty fort. The stones of various sizes, are all carved, so that no matter how many angles they may have, each stone fits its neighbor perfectly. There is not space enough to insert a knife blade between them, though they are laid in dry masonry.

As will be noted, the line of the fort diverges, going about thirty feet in one direction and then changing twenty feet in another. On

the top of each angle was a tower, and at the base of the tower a tunnel, leading back to the next fort. The walls are about twenty feet high and there are three great walls, one rising above the other, with a filling of earth behind each back about twenty feet to the next wall, and yet the stone was left protruding above the filling about four feet, that furnished a perfect barricade behind which the warriors fought. Thus the whole structure rises about sixty feet, forming a most formidable defense. The enormous size of some of these stones



Picture 10. Section of Wall

makes the work more difficult; we measured some of them and found them to be fourteen feet high, fourteen feet wide, and six feet thick.

Picture No. 12 shows one of the corners of one of these great forts. I am standing by the stone.

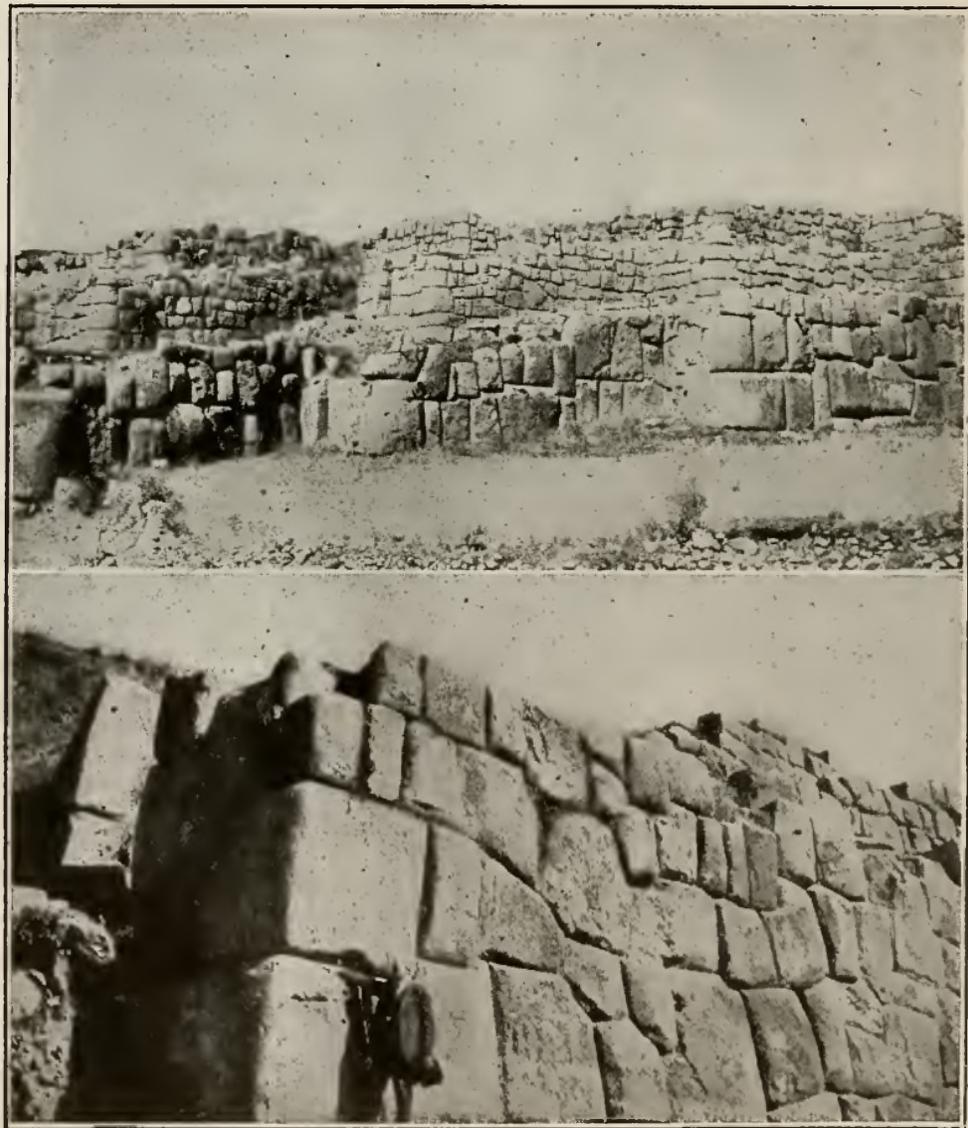
Picture No. 13 shows a cross section of this fort. Notice the space between the walls, it furnishes an opportunity for the soldiers to operate.

On the very summit of the hill were three great towers and tunnels, which led from the base of these towers, a mile long down into the heart of the city and had their exit in the palace of the emperor.

There is a Roman Catholic Church built over the entrance way

to the tunnel. It is said that some years ago three travelers passed down through this tunnel and were gone some three days, at the end of which a gentle tapping was heard under the floor of the Catholic Church. One of the travelers, greatly emaciated, emerged bearing an ear of golden corn in his hand; however, his two companions had perished in the tunnel.

Picture No. 14 gives a section of the wall of the great Palace of the Emperor. This is standing in perfect condition today. These cut stones are laid in dry masonry and are as perfect as anything that can be seen in modern times. This wall is nearly two hundred feet long and is in perfect condition, to the height of nearly twenty feet. In this city also is the Temple to the Sun, the Temple to the Moon, and the Temple to the Stars. How suggestive it was, as we saw them, of



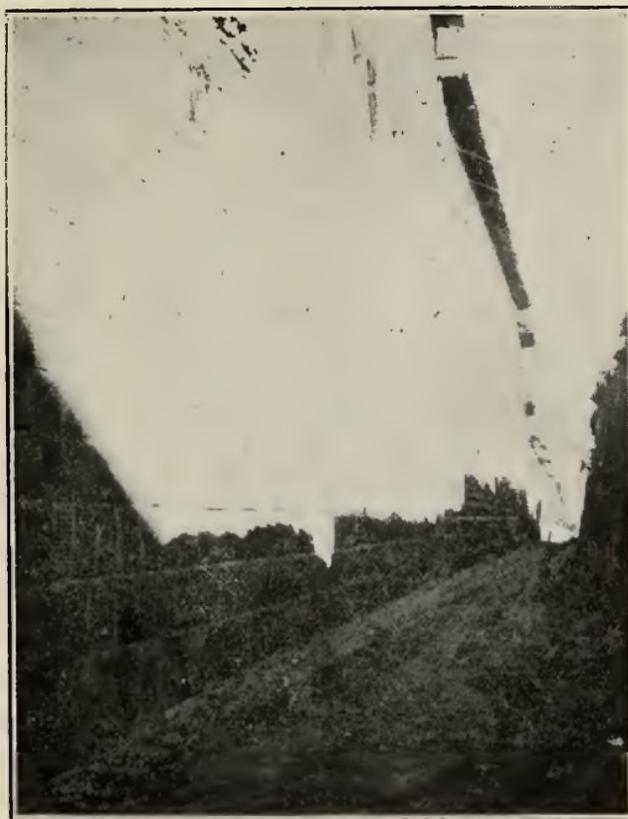
Top: Section of Fort's Fortification. Number 11

Bottom: Corner of a Great Fort. Number 12

the three degrees of glory, as described by Paul and more fully revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith.

Picture No. 15 shows a section of the wall of the Temple to the Sun. You will notice again the perfect work of the masons. The stones are fitted together so tightly that a knife blade could not be inserted between them, though they are laid in dry masonry.

There are hundreds of other buildings in the city of Cuzco, the walls of which belong to the same period, evidence that there were two civilizations. An inferior one followed this once glorious period, as revealed in the Book of Mormon, as proof is furnished in Picture No. 16. Brother Pratt is shown in the picture pointing to the ancient wall done in that same fine fashion, huge stones that fit one an-



Section of the wall of the Emperor's Palace.  
Number 14.

other perfectly; but in the front of it, at a later period, has been builded another wall, as may be seen to the left. This covers the ancient wall and the stones are of cruder type, yet are imitations of the original wall. This was done at a later period by an inferior civilization.

Passing over the eastern ridge of the Andes mountains we went down to the city of Ollantaytambo. This is another ancient city with its mighty fort and glorious temple.

Picture No. 17 shows the walls of the fort, and on the summit of it may be seen the walls of a portion of the temple.

Picture No. 18 shows a doorway and a portion of the wall of the temple. I am standing in this doorway.

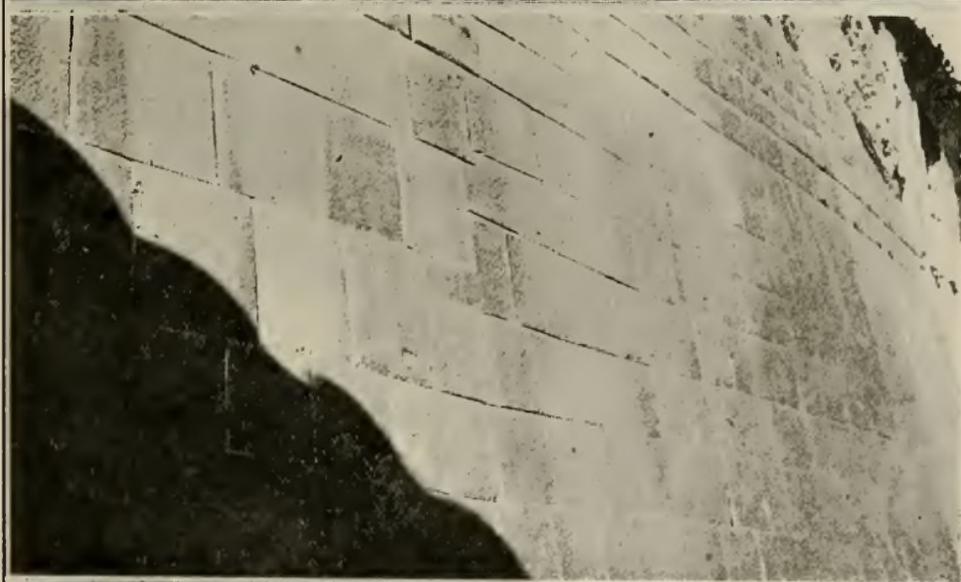
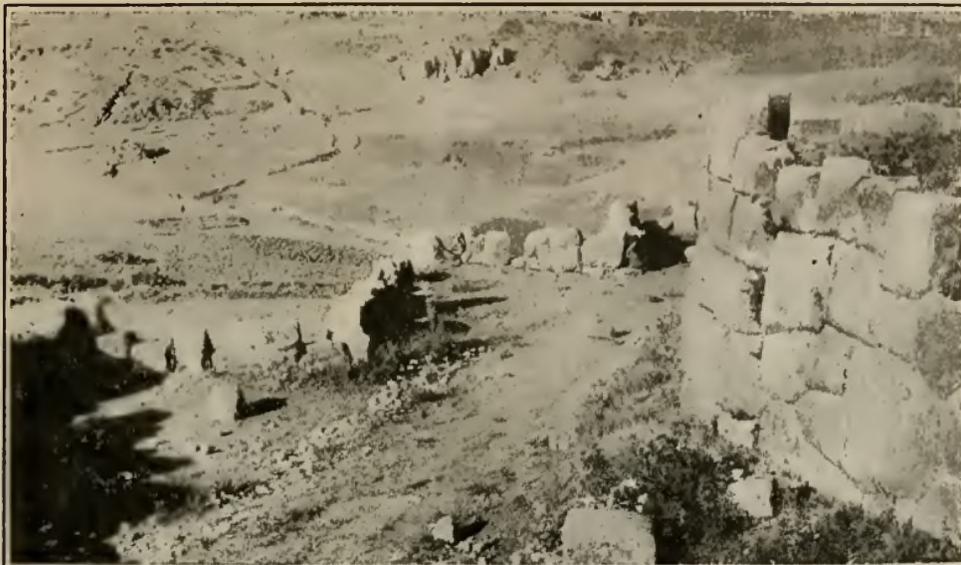
Again you will notice the fine work of the masons in the construction of this magnificent temple.

We were deeply impressed with the fact that this work was not done by crude masons, nor with stone implements. On some of the walls could be seen the evidence of steel chisels upon this stone, and of course the Book of Mormon informs us that those who built these temples were familiar with work in steel. But not until this present year was revealed, in the account given by A. Hyatt Verrill in the *World's Work*, of January, (see *Improvement Era*, Feb., 1927, pp. 311-14) the conclusive evidence that such implements were in use by the builders of ancient structures.

He found in the ruins on the west coast of Panama, some fifteen feet below the surface in a charcoal bed, a bar of steel, one end of which is entirely corroded, but the other preserved by nature in perfect condition. It is so hard that a file will scarcely touch it and it will scratch glass.

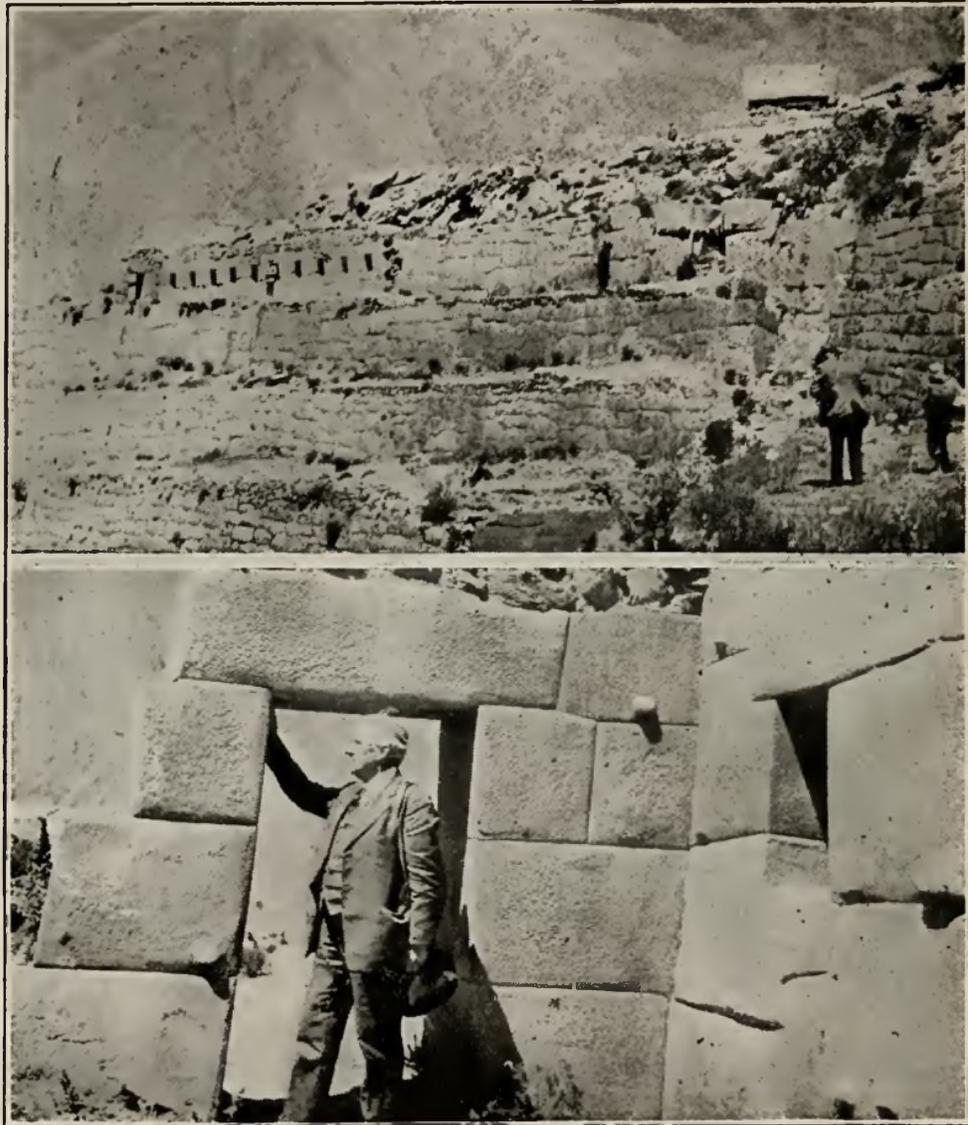
When were these temples built? Some have speculated that eight thousand years ago marks the period of this civilization. It is generally conceded, however, that the same skill is shown in the building of temples found in Central America and Mexico as those which I have described up in Peru and Bolivia, and they were no doubt built by the same people. In a book published last year, under the title of *The City of the Sacred Well*, [this book is named on the Reading Course list this year, see *Era*, July, 1927], by Mr. Willard, is given the story of our American Ambassador Mr. Thompson and his explorations at Chichen-Itza, Yucatan. Mr. Thompson describes the temples of that section and claims to have so fully deciphered the dates upon the stones of the entrances of these temples that he gives the year 113 B. C. as the date that appears over the entrance way to one of these temples, and another date, 47 after Christ, and another, 160 A. D. If he is correct, he is contributing very much to settle a disputed question, and if his figures are at all accurate, they point to a period that would correspond very nearly with that in which the Book of Mormon describes the building of these temples and the period of their glorious civilization.

In the museum at Lima, Peru, Brother Pratt and myself saw in a show case armsful of golden vessels that were taken out of these ancient ruins, and in one case we saw sheets of gold about eight inches long by seven inches wide and very thin, thinner than tin. The stack was about an inch thick. There were no inscriptions upon them, but they were nearly like the plates Joseph Smith describes having been delivered to him a hundred years ago upon which were inscribed in Egyptian characters the story of these ancients. When one realizes that they had gold in abundance, that they knew how to work it, they knew that it would not tarnish, they had the skill to write, not



Top: Cross section of a fort. Number 13. Center: Section of wall, Temple to the Sun. Number 15. Bottom: Evidence of two civilizations. Number 16.

only on soft gold, but they wrote also in hard stone, one is led to believe the reasonableness of Joseph Smith's story that the records were made upon gold plates of which they had an abundance, and upon which they had the ability to write. It was our privilege to meet hundreds of bright, intelligent Indians, and there are millions



Top: Walls of Fort and Temple. Number 17.  
Below: Doorway and wall of Temple. Number 18.

of them living in this South American country. Conversing with them, we found that they are capable of comprehending and understanding the gospel message, and it was our great privilege also to bring to them for the first time the history of their forefathers. We left many copies of the Book of Mormon. While we saw them in a state of semi-slavery, the Indians are nevertheless the most industrious and hard-working people I have ever seen. They do not enjoy political liberty, because only those who can read and write may vote; and,

while Indians are the majority in this section, there are no schools for them in which to learn to read and write, and therefore they are really disfranchised.\* But we had great joy in the contemplation of the future redemption of these descendants of father Lehi. For the promise is made that after the record of their father has come to them, not many generations shall pass away until they shall become a white and delightsome people. It is our fond hope that the way may soon be opened that missionaries will be able to be supplied to enter into this land. We have already had some missionary work done there. Elder James Vernon Sharp, who has just returned from a South American mission, labored several months among the Indians of this country and reports splendid opportunities for missionary work to be carried forward.

Brother Pratt and myself called upon government officials in all of these nations and secured from them assurance that our missionaries would be welcome, so that we are looking forward to the dawn of a better day. We have in trust the sacred volume, the Book of Mormon, for these descendants of father Lehi; and there are approximately twenty-five millions of them in South America awaiting deliverance from the thralldom and bondage of sin and transgression. May God grant that such a day may speedily come, that the full realization of all those precious promises may be brought to them. When that day does arrive evidences will be furnished that will overwhelm even the skeptic, and prove beyond all question of doubt that the Book of Mormon is a true story of the ancient inhabitants of the American continent.

---

\*An Associated Press dispatch from Le Paz, Bolivia, Aug. 12, 1927, reports:

Armed with clubs and slingshots, 80,000 descendants of the ancient Inca Indians are on the warpath in the departments of Potosi, Cochobomba and Sucre, slaying whites, burning farm-houses and endeavoring to destroy every vestige of the white man's civilization.

It is expected that the movement will be stamped out, although perhaps not before many lives have been sacrificed.

The present warfare recalls the time of the Spanish conquest, when San Francisco Pizarro, with a handful of intrepid followers, imprisoned and later slew the great Inca Chief Atahualpa and brought the Inca empire under subjection.

After the Spanish invasion the Inca tribes were reduced to the status of perhaps the humblest people on earth, and today their descendants live in a wretched state.

Approximately 70 per cent of Bolivia's population is made up of these Indians, a large part of whom devote their lives to serving the remaining 30 per cent.

The sudden return of the fighting spirit to the Indians is believed to be due to dissatisfaction over the division of land. The Indians have taken to the warpath garbed in quaint red blankets, peculiar cloth ear-coverings, and funny little hats, cocked atop the forepart of their heads. The women, with babies carried on their backs by means of blankets slung about the neck, follow the warriors on their trail of rampage.—Ed.