



Type: Magazine Article

Parentage of Ancient American Art and Religion

Author(s): T. W. Brookbank

Source: *The Latter-Day Saints' Millennial Star*, Vol. 72, No. 41
(13 October 1910)

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

Page(s): 644–647

Abstract: This series discusses the Babylonian and Israelite people who established Book of Mormon civilizations. Brookbank suggests that the Jaredites were Semites. The ancient ruins left in America have distinct Babylonian and Assyrian influence. The Nephite-Israelite people of the Book of Mormon have also left their mark upon civilization. The third part discusses embossed work, arched ceilings, ornamentation, sculptured slabs, inscribed walls, sculpture, statues, and dress.

PARENTAGE OF ANCIENT AMERICAN ART AND RELIGION.

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9. EMBOSSED WORK.

To emboss is "to cover with bosses or protuberances, hence to fashion the surface of with raised work, to ornament in relief." Now, we are informed that the embossed work of the Assyrians was very curious and beautiful, and was applied to weapons, ornaments for the person, household utensils, and many other objects.

Specimens of embossed work, or relief designs, of the most exquisite kind occur among the old ruins in this country. Baldwin, in his work, *Ancient America*, quoting other authors, when describing some remains at Mitla, says that "what is most remarkable, interesting and striking in these monuments, and which alone would be sufficient to give them the first rank among all known orders of architecture, is the execution of their mosaic relievos; very different from plain mosaic, and consequently requiring more ingenious combination and greater art and labor. They are inlaid on the surface of the wall, and their duration is owing to the method of fixing the prepared stones into the stone surface, which made their union with it perfect." Later, he adds, speaking of one of the structures at the same place, "It is a bewildering maze of courts and buildings, with facings ornamented with mosaics in relief of the purest design."

10. ARCHED CEILINGS.

A condensed statement from the *Century Dictionary and Cyclo-pedia* follows. It states that the Assyrian palaces "consisted chiefly of corridors and long narrow halls, either arched over with bricks or closed in with ceilings of wood, and surrounding open courts."

Though in this section a knowledge of arch construction among the Assyrians and the ancient Americans, and its application to ceiling purposes, should alone be considered, the other facts set forth in the foregoing quotation, relative to corridors, long, narrow halls and enclosed courts, are of too much interest to be allowed to pass unobserved. The manner in which they sustain a number of points already considered, can not fail to arrest the reader's attention. Other authorities besides the one just cited, also state, coming back to the leading fact, that the arch was a feature in Assyrian architecture.

In America, at Chichen-Itza, there is a building in which the arch was employed to roof a ceiling. At Palenque the outside corridor is roofed with a pointed arch; and arched ceilings were also constructed in other ancient American buildings. The chief point of interest respecting these arches evidently centers in their occurrence in ceilings within palaces.

11. DOOR HANGINGS.

It is thought by some that doors were not at all used in the Babylonian palaces; but it is evident that they were sometimes set up, as the places or recesses for the bolts, hinges, pins or sockets have been found.

On the American side, Stephens speaks of three niches in a wall about eight or ten inches square by which a door was probably secured. The apparent identity in manner by which doors were hung in the respective countries, is rather striking in view of the fact that there are a number of different contrivances by which doors can be fixed in place. If those recesses were not receptacles for some kind of door hinges, their existence in connection with door apertures is a coincidence none the less striking.

12. PROFUSION OF ORNAMENTATION.

From all accounts at hand the Assyrians developed a taste for the ornamentation of their palaces, which could not be satisfied until ornamental designs or figures of one kind or another were worked into or put upon both the inside and the outside walls of their palaces. This work was done, too, in the most "lavish" manner; for at Kouyunjik there are two miles of ornamentation sculptured on stone slabs alone. (*American Encyclopedia Britannica*.) They cultivated their taste for ornamentation to such an extent that, as already observed, pavements in sculptured work were laid; and one might say with little or no exaggeration, that some kind of palace decoration was never out of the sight of the lordly rulers when they were in or about their royal abodes.

It is not necessary to quote any particular authority to show that "lavish" ornamentation in a corresponding degree distinguishes many of the ancient buildings in Southern Mexico and Central America. The ornamentation is profuse on the outside as well as on the inside walls, even in some instances on the interior walls of what were apparently not the principal apartments; it is over the doorways and around them, it is on the piers, it is along and about the broad flights of steps that lead to the main palace entrances; it is lavished on the obelisks, and was trodden under foot just as was done in Assyria in the court-yard pavements there.

13. SCULPTURED SLABS IN WALLS.

It is not a common occurrence to find stone or brick walls in palaces or other buildings cut into large recesses for the reception of carved, ornamental slabs of stone; yet the two miles of carved slabs at Kouyunjik are of this character. McCabe, speaking of the bas-relief work of the Assyrians, in which they excelled, says that it was sculptured on stone slabs, which were set in the lower part of the walls that they adorned. The origin of this style of ornamentation is not found among the Assyrians, for Ridpath

tells us that the walls of the Babylonian palaces were decorated here and there with sculptured slabs, set in both the inner and the outer surface.

In America, a sculptured slab is fixed in the wall of one of the rooms of the palace at Palenque. (Stephens, vol. II., page 318.) On the next page he speaks of another room in the same building where tablets had evidently been set in the walls. Describing "Casa No. 3," at the same ruined city, he mentions two tablets set in the pier walls, and from the connection it is inferred that they were carved in some ornamental design. Tablets, or slabs of stone, occupying recesses in the walls of buildings for inscription purposes, are quite common—some at Palenque, some elsewhere.

14. INSCRIBED WALLS.

The palace walls in Assyria, according to some authorities, were covered with historical inscriptions. It seems that some events were considered of so much importance that the record of them was kept constantly in view, instead of being hidden away in the royal library.

The carving of inscriptions on the walls of buildings was also practiced extensively by the ancient Americans. A quotation or two from Baldwin's work will serve to make this fact apparent. He says, page 100, "In some of the ruins, inscriptions are abundant, being found on walls, tablets and pillars. Again, on pages 107-8, we are told that the inscriptions which are abundant at Palenque, are by no means confined to tablets."

15. PROFUSE SCULPTURE.

According to Assyrian history those people excelled all the other nations of the Old World in their days in the art of sculpturing. Their proficiency in this respect is manifested by the remains of some particular kinds of it which are both excellent and abundant in and about their ruined, but now exhumed edifices.

In America the ruins best preserved afford abundant evidence of the proficiency of the sculptors who lived here in early times: and the numerous examples of sculptured objects in Assyria and America, respectively, show that the artists in these two widely separated countries were about running abreast in the race for supremacy in the excellence of their work along lines that are practically identical. They were, too, about equally profuse in its production.

16. FEW STATUES.

It is strange to find that a people whose artists could handle the sculptor's chisel with such skill, had few statues. In this field the Assyrians were behind many of the ancient nations. Their best works are their bas-reliefs. Their statues are comparatively rare,

and are coarse and clumsy in design and execution. They never succeeded in modelling the human figure.

Stephens gives a cut of a statue found at Palenque, vol. II., facing page 349, which is, he says, the only statue ever discovered among the extensive ruins of that ancient city. Those of our readers who have a copy of his works can judge for themselves as to the merits of this example touching those points, already noticed, wherein the Assyrians were defective in their statuary work. Of other ancient American representations of the human figure, he says that the design and anatomical proportions are faulty. In other instances he makes similar criticisms. It appears, therefore, that the artists in olden times in this land, could not in general model the human figure correctly either, and probably because of a consciousness of this defect in their work, they chiselled few statues, just as the Assyrians did. The close mental and artistic relationship of the two peoples in question, is made quite apparent by these facts.

17. A PARTICULAR HABILIMENT.

A striking similarity in dress that occurs between the apparel on the lower limbs of the statue just noticed, and that of some orders of the Assyrian people, shall now be considered. Stephens says that the lower part of the dress bears an "unfortunate" resemblance to the modern pantaloons—a style of clothing that was not general in ancient times. Nevertheless the noted resemblance is not "unfortunate" for our present use, since among the Assyrians the soldiers and the better class of laborers wore a close fitting trouser. (McCabe's *History of the World*.) This example of trousers on statuary in ancient America does not stand alone, for Fuentes, a Guatemalian historian, assures us that in the year 1700 A.D., there was at Copan the remains of a great "circus" or circular enclosure, surrounded by stone pyramids. At the base of these were figures habited in the Castilian costume. He further states that at a short distance from the "circus" there was a portal constructed of stone: on the columns of which were the figures of men likewise habited in the Spanish dress, with hosen, or hose, etc. Now, the hosen of the Spaniards in earlier times was a close fitting trouser that reached to the knees, and so the close fitting trouser of the Assyrians, as represented on the ancient American statuary, could be confounded very readily with the hose, or hosen, of the Spanish habit. That "circus" so circumstantially described by Fuentes has not been found by more modern explorers, being hidden doubtless somewhere within the dense, almost impenetrable forests surrounding the present known ruins of Copan.

(To be continued.)

LOVE alone can determine who is your neighbor.