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The Ruins of Monte Albán

Author(s): Paul R. Cheesman

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Abstract: The ruins of Monte Alban ("sacred mountain") date back to 500 B.C. and a composite of peoples occupied it for two thousand years. Such peoples may be connected with those of the Book of Mormon.



The Ruins of Monte Albán

BY PAUL R. CHEESMAN

It would be difficult to find a more beautiful site for a temple or religious center than the one atop a 1,300-foot hill overlooking the beautiful and modern city of Oaxaca, Mexico. The ancient city of Monte Albán was built on this site, approximately 800 years before Christ. It still stands today, a mere whisper of its ancient glory, yet one of the most fabulous excavations in all of Mexico.

The ancient citizens of this era were not without their brilliant engineers. The top of the entire hill was scraped off and leveled in preparation for a magnificent complex of religious temples and buildings. One of the most imposing houses of worship is the massive temple to the north of the quad. It contains crumbling circular pillars, with wide, majestic steps leading to the summit, and is covered with white stucco. The impressive entrance to the temple is believed to be the widest in all America. The stairway represents three separate periods of construction.

Archaeologists have stated that this site has had continuous occupation longer than any other in Mexico. There seems to be a record of more than

two thousand years of continuous human occupation, until the time of the Spanish occupation. Many of the buildings in evidence are still unexcavated, as this work is slow and very costly.

One building to the west of the quad contained the tomb of a very important personage. Its contents are now on display at the Museum of Archaeology in Mexico City. Another edifice to the south and west has been given the name of Templo de los Danzantes, or Temple of the Dancers. Numerous bas-relief figures carved on large stone slabs, which some thought to resemble dancers, were found in this building. Comparative analysis has shown that this construction took place about 500 B.C. Since the buildings in the complex are spread about on the eminences of this mountain range, it does not appear that there was a dense population in the areas immediately surrounding this religious center. However, aerial photographs do indicate residences clustered in the lower terraces of the mountainside. A composite of cultures including Olmec, Maya, Zapotec, Mixtec, and Aztec made up its two thousand years of continuous occupation.

(Concluded on opposite back of picture)



From a Photograph
By Paul R. Cheesman

THE RUINS OF



MONTE ALBÁN

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The Ruins of Monte Albán

(Concluded from opposite back of picture.)

Monte Albán means, literally, "Sacred Mountain," and on this mountain there are evidences of an observatory, ballcourt, staircases, pyramids, temples, and burial vaults. It also appears to have been an excellent site for a military center; however, no weapons or other evidences of military occupation have been uncovered as yet.

Exquisite artifacts have been unearthed here. Beautiful gold work in the style of the Mixtec culture, articles of precious jade and obsidian, decorative shells, and bracelets of gold and silver have been discovered. A gold diadem and a beautiful translucent vessel fashioned of onyx are also among the ancient treasures found.

Where the peoples of these antiquated civiliza-

tions obtained their water is still a mystery to students and scholars; and there are many other questions to be resolved concerning these inhabitants. However, all findings illustrate that a high civilization existed among these peoples; and because of the treasures and wealth found in the tombs. Monte Albán is considered one of the richest archaeological finds in all America.

NOTE: Book of Mormon students will be interested in Dr. Cheesman's illustrated article, "Archaeology and the Book of Mormon," published in *The Instructor*, November, 1968, page 428.

For Course 7, lesson 4 (August 2), "The Book of Mormon Is a Record—How We Got It"; for Course 12, lesson 1 (September 6), "Introduction to the Book of Mormon"; for Course 28, lessons 2 and 3 (September 13 and 20), "Origin of the Book of Mormon" and "Purposes of the Book of Mormon"; and of general interest.

Library File Reference: BOOK OF MORMON—ANTIQUITIES; MEXICO.

MONTE ALBÁN

*As I stood in the stunning silence
Of that dawn
On Monte Albán,
My thoughts swept away
The sight of crumbled ruins,
Of pyramids without temples,
And in vision I beheld
A city in full flower
In its finest hour —
Plaster white,
Its gleaming holy temples bid the flight
Of thousands to its crests.
I could hear a prophet's voice
Resounding in the grand pavilion,
As I stood in the silence
Of that dawn
On Monte Albán.*

—Millie Foster Cheesman.