



BOOK OF MORMON CENTRAL

<http://bookofmormoncentral.org/>

Type: Newsletter

U.A.S. Newsletter, no. 34 (April 30, 1956)

Editors(s): Ross T. Christensen and Alfred L. Bush

Published by: University Archaeological Society, Brigham Young University

U. A. S. NEWSLETTER

Number 34

Editor: Ross T. Christensen

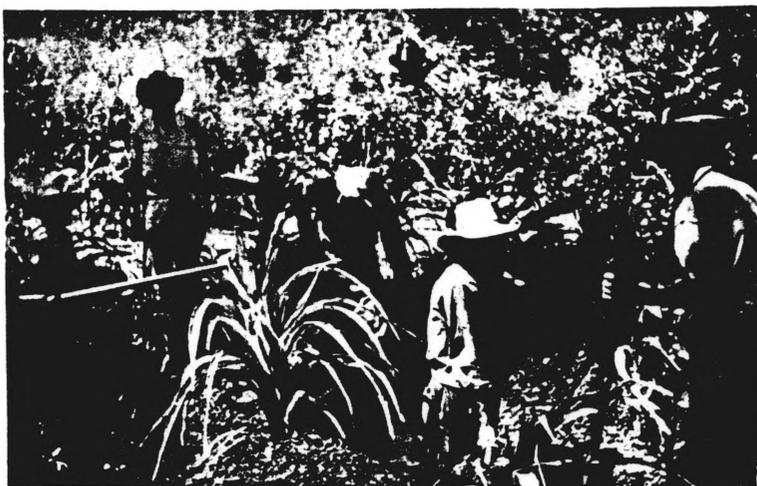
April 30, 1956

Assistant Editor: Alfred L. Bush

Published approximately every six weeks by THE UNIVERSITY ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY at Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. The purpose of the Newsletter is to disseminate knowledge of recent archaeological discoveries bearing on the Latter-day Saint scriptures; also, of the Society and its members. Subscription by membership in the Society: three dollars per year; or Life Membership, fifty dollars. (Membership also includes subscription to other publications of the Society and the Department of Archaeology of BYU.)

34. 0 UAS President Returns from Usumacinta Expedition. President M. Wells Jakeman returned in late March from the 1956 UAS Expedition to Central America. He reports that the expedition was highly successful, resulting in important new evidence on the location of the principal ancient cities of that region in the "Pre-Classic" (i. e. Book of Mormon) period.

34. 00 In the Xicalango Region. Assisted by



Work at Trench 1, ruins of Cerrillos, UAS Central American Expedition of 1956.



Ascending the Usumacinta River by cayuco, in the region of the 1956 exploration. The swift current necessitated poling the cayuco along by the shore, where, however, occasional rapids required hauling also with a rope from the bank. The view is of the east or Guatemalan side of the river, showing the heavy forestation of the region.

UAS members José Dávila (in the field) and Otto Done (in photographic and other Preparations at Mexico City), Dr. Jakeman worked at the previously unexplored ruins of Cerrillos in the Xicalango Gulf Coast region of southern Mexico -- very probably the region identified in the early native chronicles as the "Land of Abundance" of ancient times, and in the Book of Mormon as the "land Bountiful." This city was mapped by the UAS party. The collection of sherds obtained from the trenches definitely established, by the styles of pottery indicated, the "Pre-Classic" or Book of Mormon age of this city.

34.01 On the Middle Usumacinta. The second half of the expedition consisted of explorations on the middle Usumacinta River, which has been identified as the River Sidon and the central Zarahemla region of the Book of Mormon. This region was reached only with considerable difficulty, by jungle trails and by cayuco on the river itself. Located within the tropical rain forest, the dense vegetation and near-inaccessibility of the region have discouraged archaeological activity there in the past, leaving it one of the least known areas, archaeologically, in Mesoamerica. In the present expedition, a preliminary survey of an important ruined city in this region was undertaken. This was a further, on the ground, exploration of the site located in the aerial reconnaissance of 1954. Some of the ruined buildings were examined, and test-trenching was carried out to determine the age of this ancient city. A sketch map of the ruins, field notes, photographs, and sherd material were brought back for further study, and for the planning of future large-scale excavations at the site.

More details of the results of this expedition will be presented in lectures by Dr. Jakeman scheduled for the 33rd Annual Leadership Week in June at BYU. He reports to the Society at this time, however, that these results are highly exciting in respect to certain questions of Book of Mormon geography. He wishes to express his appreciation to each member of the Society for the material help and interest which made this expedition possible.

34.1 The UAS Completes its Seventh Year. A membership gain of more than four hundred marked the seventh anniversary, on April 18th, of the University Archaeological Society, according to a report from Professor Ross T. Christensen, General Secretary-Treasurer. From a nucleus of seven members at its organization on April 18, 1949, a consistently rapid increase has brought the total membership to 445.

This phenomenal growth, since President M. Wells Jakeman conducted the organizational meeting on the BYU campus in 1949, is not only an indication of the development of a widespread interest in the accomplishments of archaeology the world over, but also indication of an increased understanding of the special significance of archaeology in the light of LDS scripture, and of the great need of an organized body of patrons who are eager to lend support to such activities.

President Jakeman expressed confidence that future anniversaries will show a still greater focus of interest on this science, and on the special contributions which are being made by the University Archaeological Society.

34.2 UAS Member Receives High Honor. Dr. Ernest L. Wilkinson, president of Brigham Young University and a member of the UAS, has recently been announced as recipient of an appointment to the Board of Regents of the American Foundation for Greece. This organization, which is under the patronage of the king and queen of Greece, has as its general objectives the promotion of a deeper appreciation in America of the great cultural achievements of ancient Hellas, and the execution of programs for the benefit of the people and institutions of modern Greece; but also, as its special aim, the furtherance of archaeological and historical research in the classical lands and civilization of ancient Greece.

34. 3 New Life Member. Theron B. Butler, UAS member now in El Salvador, was recently issued a Life Membership in the Society. Members are reminded that this new category of membership, which enables them to aid the Society in a more substantial way, is available on payment of a fee of fifty dollars.

34. 4 Special Meeting of the Mexico City Chapter. En route to Utah following completion of the field work of the 1956 Central American expedition, President Jakeman stopped in Mexico City to lecture before a special gathering of members of the Mexico City Chapter of the Society. Dr. Jakeman spoke on the progress of archaeological research in Mesoamerica, especially in relation to the Book of Mormon claims, and pointed out some of the basic issues involved in the archaeology of the Book of Mormon.



34. 5 Biblical Archaeology: The Bronze Dead-Sea Scrolls Opened. The March 8th issue of the British paper The Manchester Guardian reported the long-awaited opening of the now famous pair of bronze scrolls from the Qumran caves near the Dead Sea, a feat of meticulous engineering which has just been completed at the Manchester College of Technology. Of all the Dead Sea scrolls so far found, these were the only metal ones, a fact which has lead some speculators to ascribe a greater importance to these bronze scrolls than to the leather ones found before them, forming part of the library of a religious order which existed by the Dead Sea about two thousand years ago. These two bronze scrolls presented a highly delicate problem of handling. Both were completely oxidized and were described as "more brittle than glass." The problem of how to get at their contents -- they were rolled up tightly like swiss rolls, and were already crumbling -- was finally solved by cutting them into strips and then photographing the contents. Through special preparations of the ancient metal and the use of a circular saw only thousandths of an inch thick, the oxidized metal was cut into segments without damage -- so far as known -- to a single letter. The copies are now in the hands of the Jordan Government, whose property the scrolls are, and scholars of several countries are attempting to decipher their contents. The textual content of the scrolls and even the language used in them is still unrevealed -- nothing can be said about these matters until the Jordan Government decides.

Members of the Mexico City Chapter, in a recent special meeting with Society president M. Wells Jakeman. Photo by Chapter director Otto Done.

34.6 Is Book-of-Mormon Archaeology Valid? An Exchange of Letters. The following challenging letter recently received by President M. Wells Jakeman from a Los Angeles physician, together with Dr. Jakeman's reply, may be of interest to members of the UAS. They are published here with President Jakeman's permission.

My dear Dr. Jakeman:

There is a growing inquiry in some sections of the L. D. S. Church, particularly among the college-trained "intelligencia," as you are undoubtedly aware, concerning the "truthfulness" of the Prophet Joseph Smith in respect to the origin and historicity of the Book of Mormon. This inquiry is engendered by opinions similar to the following:

From the American Museum of Natural History:

"Dr. George C. Vaillant does not mention the Book of Mormon in his book, The Aztecs of Mexico, because he does not believe that it is a legitimate source of information on the history of the American Indians."

From the Museum of the American Indian:

"No serious student of the American Indians has ever given expression to the theory which would support the belief held by the Book of Mormon as to the Palestinian migration of these people."

From the American Association for the Advancement of Science:

"From the standpoint of archaeology and cultural anthropology, there is not one shred of evidence to support the Book of Mormon."

Do you concur in these observations?

A frank statement of the position of the Church on this matter and the scientific evidence which would support it, would be greatly appreciated by many students of the Book of Mormon.

Very sincerely,

(Signed) R. E. C., M. D.

Dear Dr. C...:

Your letter quoting some of the negative opinions of science in respect to the Book of Mormon was read with much interest

You inquire as to my own position and that of the Church on this vital question. Lack of time and space prevents me from attempting more than a brief reply here.

In the first place, the opinion of non-Mormon scientists in respect to the origin or authenticity of the Book of Mormon actually has no real significance. This is because these people without exception, as indicated by their references to the Book of Mormon (in publications and, as I can testify, in my own professional contacts), know practically nothing about the Book. The common notion is that it is a story of the Lost Ten Tribes of Israel. Consequently, when they pass judgment upon it they are violating a cardinal principle of science, which is to refrain from such judgments until both sides of an issue are entirely understood. Invalidating these "scientific" opinions even more, is the fact that too little is as yet known, archaeologically, about the actual period of the Book of Mormon civilizations in the New World. Nearly all our information to date on the region of the Book of Mormon civilizations -- Mexico and Central America -- pertains to the archaeological developments of the periods after that of the Book of Mormon, i. e. to the famous "classic" Maya, Teotihuacan, and Zapotec civilizations, and the empires of the Toltecs and Aztecs. In fact the specialists in the field

of Middle American archaeology will be the first to admit that not enough is known as yet about the "archaic" or "pre-classic" period of the region -- i. e. the period of the Book of Mormon -- to enable anyone, much less a true scientist, to reach a valid conclusion as to the origin and history of the civilizations of that period contrary to the claims of the Book of Mormon. It is not, therefore, the oft-quoted opinions of "scientists" that will decide the authenticity of the Book of Mormon, but the actual evidence on hand and yet to come forth, both internal (i. e. linguistic and literary indications within the Book itself) and external (i. e. archaeological and anthropological data, relating to the actual area and period of the Book of Mormon peoples).

As to the position of the Church, this is of course that of complete acceptance of the Prophet's story of the origin of the Book of Mormon -- in fact, the acceptance of this story is recognized as a cornerstone of the Mormon faith. (If the Book of Mormon is not believed to be an authentic record of ancient America, how can the veracity of Joseph Smith and the authority of his revelations or teachings as a prophet of God be accepted? Or putting it another way, how can one -- like the Mormon "intellectuals" you mention -- be a true Latter-day Saint and yet not believe in the authenticity of the Book of Mormon?) At the same time, however, it must be acknowledged that what the membership of the Church generally believes about the contents of the Book of Mormon or its claims is not always what the Book itself sets forth. In other words, much of the supposed conflict between the Book of Mormon and the scientific findings of archaeology and anthropology is not only due to the present insufficiency of these external findings as to the area and period of the Book of Mormon (as noted previously), but also to Mormon misunderstandings of the Book's historical claims. For example, contrary to a general idea in the Church, the Nephite record does not purport to give the history of all the New World for all the time before Columbus; the area and time dimensions of its story are strictly limited -- from abundant internal evidence -- to only a relatively small part of the American continent and to only one part of the pre-Columbian age. Nor -- as another example of misinterpretation -- does it claim to give the origin of all the American Indian peoples found inhabiting the New World at the coming of the Europeans. What is obviously called for, then, is a careful study of both the Book of Mormon record itself as well as the findings of science as to the civilizations and events of its particular area and period, by both Mormon students and non-Mormon scientists in the field of ancient American studies.

As to my own position and that of the Department of Archaeology here at Brigham Young University, all that can be stated here -- in addition to the comments already made -- is that, although our archaeological data on the area and period of the Book of Mormon (i. e. Mexico and Central America, in the "archaic" period of the archaeological chronology) are not sufficient to disprove the Book of Mormon history, they are, on the contrary, in sufficient abundance to establish it, to a high degree of probability. That is, the findings to date, instead of being in conflict with the Book of Mormon history of this area and period (as assumed, from ignorance, by the scientists who have been quoted on the Book of Mormon), are actually at very many points in striking agreement with that history! (For an indication of some of these many agreements see the past publications of the UAS, especially

Bulletin No. 4, and various issues of the UAS Newsletter.)

I am hoping the above will provide you with a reply to skeptical friends among the college "intelligencia."

Sincerely,

(Signed) M. Wells Jakeman

- 34.7 Publications Still Available. UAS members are reminded that free copies of the first two publications of the Department of Archaeology of BYU are still available, on request (within the limitation of three Society or Department publications per year of membership). These are:

- No. 1. The Ancient Middle-American Calendar System; its Origin and Development. By M. Wells Jakeman. 1947.
No. 2. A Maya Calendar-Calculator. By Charles V. Imeson. 1949.

The special importance of the first of these to students of Book of Mormon archaeology has been brought out in a previous Newsletter (No. 31, Dec. 9, 1955; this publication includes, for example, the discovery of a new chronological epoch of the Middle American calendar, the very significant date April 6, 2 A. D.) Its value also to students of archaeology in general is indicated in a recent letter from Dr. A. V. Kidder, retired chief archaeologist of the Carnegie Institution of Washington, who writes the Department as follows: "Many thanks for the publications you have sent me. I have been particularly interested in your paper on the [Middle American] calendar system. In many ways it seems to me the most useful presentation of that subject that has ever appeared, and should be very useful for advanced classes in Middle American archaeology." If desired, an extra copy of Newsletter No. 31 containing the summary will be sent with this publication.

- 34.8 Relationship of the UAS to the ASOR. Attention of the General Secretary-Treasurer has been directed recently to a number of misunderstandings concerning the relationship of the UAS to the American Schools of Oriental Research. Through special arrangement with the ASOR, members of the UAS receive the excellent quarterly journal The Biblical Archaeologist. But they are not (as some have thought) entitled to receive also the American Schools' Archaeological Newsletter or Bulletin. The UAS and the ASOR are, of course, distinct organizations and without any direct connection.

Brigham Young University, however, is a corporation member of the American Schools, and consequently students of BYU are eligible for studentship, free of tuition, at the American School of Oriental Research at Jerusalem or Baghdad. This arrangement does not apply to members of the UAS who are not students of BYU.

In view of the outstanding work of the ASOR and the special interest held by UAS members in archaeological research in the Near East, many UAS members may be interested in also affiliating themselves with the American Schools. Associate membership may be acquired by forwarding a \$5.00 annual fee to the American Schools of Oriental Research, Drawer 93A, Yale Station, New Haven, Conn. This membership not only includes subscription to the Schools' Newsletter and Bulletin (as well as The Biblical Archaeologist), but also a 15 per cent discount on all other publications of the Schools.