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## U.A.S. Newsletter, no. 8 (November 25, 1952)

Editors(s): Ross T. Christensen and Bruce W. Warren

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8.0 Scripture Symposium. The Society's Sixth Annual Symposium on the Archaeology of the Scriptures was presented to the public November 6. One hundred and two persons registered at sessions held in the Physical Science Building, Brigham Young University. The theme was "Problems of Geography."

Dr. M. Wells Jakeman, president of the Society, was chairman of the evening session; while John L. Sorenson, general secretary-treasurer, presided over the afternoon meeting. Lectures were given by Bruce W. Warren, advanced archaeology student at Brigham Young University; Ross T. Christensen, assistant professor of archaeology; Dr. Jakeman; and Mr. Sorenson. The symposium was brought to a close with a motion picture showing what are believed to be Book of Mormon lands.

Abstracts of lectures follow (8.00-8.04):

8.00 THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE BOOK OF MOSES, by Bruce W. Warren. The geographical setting of the Book of Moses in the Pearl of Great Price may be treated under the headings of physical geography (climate, topography, fauna, and mineral resources) and human geography (population, settlements, agriculture, animal husbandry, and exploitative activities such as mining and metallurgy).

The method of approach consists of three steps: (1) Internal reconstruction of the physical and human geography from the text itself.

(2) External identification. Two views merit consideration: the North American and the Western Asiatic. Pertinent are references in the Bible, Pearl of Great Price, Doctrine and Covenants, and the History of the Church, Vol. 3; and views of Church authorities. The historical scene in western Asia at the time of Moses was described. (3) The archaeological test. Both North America and Western Asia were reviewed as to excavated materials that would have a bearing on the problem. Discussion was confined to the time period of 5000-2000 B. C. At present most of the information available from all sources seems to favor the Western Asiatic theory, although not enough facts are available for a final statement.

8.01 THE NARROW NECK OF LAND IN BOOK OF MORMON GEOGRAPHY, by Ross T. Christensen. In order adequately to study the archaeology of the Book of Mormon we must first have a clear notion of the spatial or geographical setting in which the events of the Record took place. We have a much clearer idea of the setting for those events which occurred in the Old World than we do for those in the New. The central feature in the New World setting is the narrow neck of land, separating the land northward from the land southward. At the present time available evidence favors an identification of this narrow neck with the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in southern Mexico, rather than with the Isthmus of Panama.

8.02 VOLCANOES IN THE BOOK-OF MORMON AREA, by Dr. M. Wells Jakeman. Among the geographic features referred to in the Book of Mormon are many "mountains" or "hills." One region of mountains appears to have been the central part of the land southward, i.e. the district of Nephi and the "narrow strip of wilderness" which divided Nephi or the Lamanite country on the south from the Nephite land of Zarahemla in the northern part of the land southward (He.11:24-31; 3 Ne.1:27; 2:17; 3:20-23; 4:1). Other mountains were in the land northward (3Ne.4:1).

Now it is possible that among these many mountains were one or more volcanoes. This becomes highly probable in the light of the Record's description of the great cataclysm of ca. 34 A. D. (3 Ne.8). Here we have an account of what was evidently an unusually violent, "explosive semi-volcanic" eruption. The very same phenomena involved in this cataclysm have characterized various such eruptions of modern times, notably those of Mont Pelée, West Indies, in 1902; and Krakatoa, East Indies, and Consequina, Central America, in the nineteenth century; viz., loud explosions (compare the "terrible thunderings" of the Book of Mormon account), a violent tempest or storm, flashes of lightning above the exploding volcano, earthquakes, tidal waves (in the Book of Mormon account, however, mention is made only of a sinking of the coast at one point), and finally a period of darkness, resulting from the obscuring of the sun and/or moon and stars by the dense pall of volcanic dust or ashes thrown over a wide area by the eruption (note that the period of darkness in the Book of Mormon cataclysm was not due to an eclipse, since it lasted for three days; also the description of the darkness as a "vapor" which could be felt and which prevented the lighting of torches, in other words a darkness which must have been caused by some such phenomenon as volcanic dust spewed into the air by an exploding volcano).

Since the Book of Mormon account places the greater destruction in the land northward, the chances are that the volcano whose explosion evidently caused this cataclysm was located in that part of the Book of Mormon area (probably not far from the central narrow-neck-of-land, feature, however, since a great destruction also occurred in the land southward).

It is of interest to note that the middle region of the New World (Mexico and Central America), which comprised or formed a part of the Book of Mormon area according to the geographic requirements of the Record, is a land of many mountains including numerous volcanoes, some of which were active in Book of Mormon times according to recent archaeological evidence (sub-lava and sub-ash deposits).

8.03 BOOK OF MORMON GEOGRAPHY IN THE LIGHT OF CERAMIC DISTRIBUTIONS, by John L. Sorenson. A characteristic of certain ancient American pottery, the use of four feet for supporting the vessel, proves to be useful for tracing culture movements. The trait appears to be one that was spread from a single center of invention, not one invented over and over at different locations. Highland Guatemalas, Salvador, and Honduras constitute this center. The trait seems earlier here than anywhere else. The Southeast and Mississippi valley have a number of occurrences also. Others are among the Hohokam people of Arizona, and rarely in Mexico, British Honduras, Venezuela, Brazil, and Bolivia. In Ecuador and Colombia the tetrapod is again quite common but only at certain rather late (?) periods.

In Mesoamerica the two systems of interpreting the Maya calendar system (GMT and Spinden correlations) indicate that the period of greatest development and spread of these vessels dates to either ca. 200-300 A. D. or ca. 50 B. C.-50 A. D. The spread of the tetrapod from highland Mesoamerica could be taken to indicate a widespread culture exodus therefrom. These datings fit with the probable periods of greatest migration in Nephite culture history, which were the first century B. C. and the third and fourth centuries A. D. This is but one possible interpretation of the materials. Ceramics must inevitably be of prime consideration on the reconstruction of culture history since remains of this type are more widespread and better preserved than any other.

8.04 THE PLACE OF THE ANDEAN CIVILIZATIONS IN BOOK-OF-MORMON GEOGRAPHY, by Ross T. Christensen. The identification of the narrow neck of land with the Isthmus of Tehuantepec seems preferable to the Panama identification on the grounds of apparent superiority as to the (1) location of ruins, (2) density of population, (3) stratigraphic depth of remains, (4) culture type, (5) traditional history, (6) civilizational height, (7) presence of horizons, (8) dating, and (9) terrain of the former area as against the latter (although the Panamanian isthmus seems to fit the requirements better as to width). Also, a statement by Joseph Smith in the Times and Seasons, if taken as definitive, seems to disqualify the Panama correlation.

The Book of Mormon story, then was probably enacted in its entirety in areas to the north of the Isthmus of Panama. Nevertheless, the Andean region of South America, which was probably colonized out of Mesoamerica, may prove to be of particular significance for Book of Mormon archaeology. Perishable features of the ancient Mesoamerican civilizations, such as conceivably iron and writing on paper, may be found preserved on the desert coasts of Peru in a manner which would never be hoped for in the damp climate of the Nephite-Jaredite homeland.

8.1 Annual Business Meeting. The Society's Annual Business Meeting was held in connection with the Symposium (see 8.0, above). A summary of minutes follows (8.10-8.13):

8.10 Official Statements. Statements on Finance and membership were given by General Secretary-Treasurer John L. Sorenson. Society records show a cash balance of \$385.90, and a total membership of 120, as of October 31, 1952. On both counts these figures are substantially higher than any previously reported.

8.11 Elections. Six new General Officers were elected. Names will be published in the Newsletter upon receipt of letters indicating acceptance of office. (Previously elected General Officers are: Dr. M. Wells Jakeman, Ross T. Christensen, and John L. Sorenson, Department of Archaeology, Brigham Young University; and Dr. Franklin S. Harris, Jr. Department of Physics, University of Utah. Both old and new General Officers are automatically members of the Executive Committee and continue in office indefinitely.) Dr. Jakeman was re-elected President of the Society and chairman of the Executive Committee. Mr. Christensen was elected General Secretary-Treasurer to replace Mr. Sorenson, whose projected field activities (see 8.4, below) necessitate his release.

8.12 Constitutional Amendments. A number of amendments to the Society's constitution, calculated to streamline its operation, were authorized as follows:

The categories of "Departmental" and "Associating" members were combined under the single designation of "Contributing Members." The Society now has three classes of membership: "Contributing," "Institutional," and "Honorary,"

The Executive Council was renamed "Executive Committee," and its chairman was given the additional title of "President of the University Archaeological Society."

Local chapters were authorized to levy fees in addition to the general membership fee of the Society (\$3.00 per annum) upon the majority vote of their respective members.

Pres. M. Wells Jakeman announces publication of the amended constitution in a forthcoming issue of the Society Bulletin.

8.13 Authorization of New Chapter. The organization of the Reno Chapter of the U.A.S., reported in the July 1 Newsletter (7.32), was officially authorized, with Kenneth D. Stephens, director of the L.D.S. Institute of Religion at the University of Nevada, serving as chapter director. Under the constitution, Mr. Stephens automatically becomes a General Officer and member of the Executive Committee.

8.2 New Editor. Ross T. Christensen was named to succeed John L. Sorenson as editor of the U.A.S. Newsletter at a meeting of the Executive Committee, October 17, 1952. Mr. Christensen has chosen as assistant editor, Bruce W. Warren. The retiring editor and his business manager, Robert G. Rigby, have served with distinction since August, 1951, having a total of seven newsletters to their credit.

8.3 BYU Chapter. Now directing the activities of the BYU Campus Chapter of the Society are officers elected October 6: Robert G. Rigby, president; Gareth W. Lowe, vice-president; and Bernese Brough, Secretary. The chapter is currently engaged in the preparation of an archaeological exhibit for one of the large exhibit cases of the new Physical Science Building.

8.4 Archaeological Foundation. To Thomas Stuart Ferguson, a Charter member of the Society, goes credit for organizing the "New World Archaeological Foundation," incorporated in California, October 20, 1952. The Foundation's objective is to ascertain facts concerning the earliest high cultures of Mexico and Central America, particularly the problem of their origins (i.e. the area and problem of special interest also of the U.A.S.)

Mr. Ferguson serves as President of the new organization. First Vice-President of the organization is Dr. Alfred V. Kidder, retired Chief Archaeologist of Carnegie Institution of Washington. A Committee of Archaeologists functions in an advisory capacity. Included are: Dr. Kidder, Prof. Pedro Armillas of Mexico City College, Dr. M. Wells Jakeman, president of the U.A.S., Dr. Gordon F. Ekholm of the American Museum of Natural History and Dr. Gordon Willey of Harvard University. The N.W.A.F. is a private, non-profit undertaking, not connected with or supported by any other organizations. Two U.A.S. members, John L. Sorenson and Gareth W. Lowe, will assist in the Foundation's first season of field work. Explorations will begin about December 1 under the supervision of Pres. Ferguson; Field Director will be Prof. Armillas. Little-known areas of the southern states of Mexico will be the locale of operations.