



Type: Magazine Article

Some Facts Concerning Costa Rica and Its Ancient Inhabitants

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Source: *Improvement Era*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (February 1941)

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

Page(s): 68

Abstract: A series of brief comments in which the author presents archaeological findings, architectural notes, and myths and legends that deal indirectly with the Book of Mormon. Dibble discusses the wheel, ancient irrigation methods, metals, Mexican and Mayan codices, Quetzalcoatl, ancient buildings, and numerous other related items. The third part covers Costa Rica.



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SOME FACTS CONCERNING COSTA RICA and Its Ancient Inhabitants

By Charles E. Dibble

A RECENT booklet on the archeology of Costa Rica by Jorge A. Lines reveals an evolved native population in prehispanic times.

Within Costa Rica three aboriginal cultures were found: the Huetar, whose graves yield expressive stone idols; the Brunka, known for their gold work; and the Chorotegan, famous for polychrome pottery and jade ornaments. The Brunkas and Huetar were affiliated with the Chibchan of northern South America, and the Chorotegan show relationship to the Otomi-Tlapanec and Maya of Central America.

The Huetar Indians were discovered by Christopher Columbus on his fourth voyage. Columbus is reported to have described them as follows:

The natives were not hostile to the newcomers, but were rather well disposed to barter their goods, and also made many presents to the Spaniards, of fruits, animals, and gold ornaments which they wore as necklaces. They were of a very amicable disposition, acute, intelligent, and displayed much surprise and interest in whatever was shown them. They knew the arts of weaving, of casting gold, and were clever wood and stone carvers, and no mean potters.

The discoverer's brother, Bartolome Colon, is also credited with a description of the same Indians:

. . . he saw, within the hut, sepulchres, over which were embalmed bodies, without bad odour, wrapped in beautifully woven blankets; that upon the graves there were sculptured animals or effigies of the dead, and with them, jewels of gold and necklaces of beads, which were held most precious.

Subsequent excavations confirm the exactness of these colonial observers. Cemeteries and individual graves have yielded an abundance of statuettes, portrait-heads, gold work, and exquisitely decorated pottery.

Lines also quotes a letter from Fray Agustin de Zevallos to Philip III, King of Spain (1610), concerning the peoples of this land:

They are a reasonable people, well disposed. They wear cotton clothing very well made. Although they are given to celebrate many festivals in which they intoxicate themselves with drinks, a general fault in all the Western Indies, they are very strict in observance and very punctual in the rites and ceremonies of their religion.

They have idols and priests appointed and designated for the administration of their religion; the latter are wizards, to whom very often the devil gives replies in matters wherein they consult him, and they communicate them to the people, wherefore they are held in great veneration, it being believed that they have in them some divine quality, as prophets who predict what will happen.