



Type: Magazine Article

American Antiquities (Continued)

Author(s): J.B.F.

Source: *Juvenile Instructor*, Vol. 19, No. 15 (1 August 1884), p. 235

Published by: George Q. Cannon & Sons

Abstract: Correct answers concerning the origins of past civilizations in the Americas were not found until the Book of Mormon was published. Discusses mounds in North and South America. Notes distinct historical periods in Mexico, Central America, and Peru.

AMERICAN ANTIQUITIES.

BY J. R. F.

(Continued.)

NEARLY five hundred years ago the Maya kingdom was at the height of its power. The people were then as ignorant of the writings on those ancient columns as are the natives of to-day. Their written characters are widely different from these, which goes to prove they were not the original builders.

The ruins of Central and South America were mostly composed of stone edifices, while those found in the Mississippi and Ohio valleys must have been built of less durable material, for they are now mere heaps of earth. That they were very old is placed beyond a doubt. Remains taken from graves in Europe, known to be 2,000 years old, are far better preserved than skeletons found in mounds in Ohio. Another evidence is that large forest trees are growing on many of the mounds, some of which are very old. "If," says Baldwin, "they found forests they must have been cleared away to make room for their cities, and a long time must have elapsed before they began again to grow." Moreover, observations show that the trees that first make their appearance are not regular forest trees. The beginning of such growths as will cover them with great forests come later, when other preliminary growths have appeared and gone to decay. Eight hundred rings of annual growth were counted in the trunk of a tree growing on a mound at Marietta, Ohio.

When the copper mines were discovered on Lake Superior, they were buried in what seemed to be a primeval forest. Yet these mines had been previously worked by the mound builders. Trunks of huge trees were found lying across the mines and others equally as large standing in their places. In one mine a large mass of copper, weighing several tons, had been raised several feet and blocked up with timbers and so left. This would indicate that the work of the miners was interrupted and they were forced to abandon it. No remains of cities or highways have yet been found in the copper region. This has led many to believe that the work was carried on only during the Summer season, and that organized bands came from the settlements in the Ohio and Mississippi valleys for this purpose.

All over the Mississippi and Ohio valleys are to be found mounds, fortifications and road-ways. Some of these are very large and show a knowledge of engineering that would be difficult to excel in this age of learning. The great canals found in the Gila valley, Arizona, furnish another proof of the engineering skill of the builders.

At Miamisburg, Ohio, is a mound sixty-eight feet high; one at Graves Creek, West Virginia, seventy-five, that at St. Louis one hundred and covers over thirteen acres. Others of various sizes are to be found almost all over the United States. In Mexico and Central America the mounds resemble those found in this country with the exception that many of them are built of hewn stone. "The mounds in the two regions," writes Baldwin, "are remarkably alike. In both cases they are pyramidal in shape and have level summits extant which were reached by graded ways on either side. The great mound of Chichcu Itza is seventy-five feet high, and has on its summit a ruined stone edifice. That of Uxmal is sixty and has a

similar ruin on its summit. That at Mayapan is sixty. The edifice has disappeared."

Similar mounds are also to be found in South America. The ruins south of the isthmus have not been as thoroughly explored as those north. But they are similar. Not so elaborate perhaps as those of Central America, but of greater solidity. Peru is noted for its great roads and aqueducts, one of the latter being 450 miles long, while the former extend all through the country, and are still monuments of ancient Peruvian greatness. No ancient people have left traces of works more astonishing, so vast was their extent and so great the skill and labor required to construct them. One of these roads ran along the mountains through the whole length of the empire from Quito to Chili. Another starting from this at Cuzco went down the coast and extended northward to the equator. They were built on the beds or deep understructures of masonry. In width they varied from twenty to twenty-five feet. They were made level and smooth by paving and in some places by a sort of macadamizing with pulverized stone mixed with lime and bituminous cement. On each side of the road-way was a very strong wall more than six feet in thickness. Along these roads at equal distances were edifices built of hewn stone for the accommodation of travelers. Extending from one degree north of the equator they went over marshes, rivers and great chasms of the Sierras and through rocky precipices and sides of the mountains to Cuzco and from Cuzco to Chili. It was a marvelous work. In many places it was cut through rocks for miles, great ravines were filled up with solid masonry. Rivers were crossed by means of a curious kind of suspension bridge and no obstruction was encountered which the builders did not overcome. It was quite as long as our two Pacific railroads, and its construction a great deal more difficult.

Some writers attribute the construction of these roads to the Incas, but we find by a close examination of traditional history that the Incas were not the builders. When they rose to power they found the roads much out of repair, and reconstructed them, but they were built many generations before their time. "Everywhere the architecture is regulated by the same idea. The differences indicate nothing more than different periods and different phases of development in the history of the same people."

Of Mexico and Central America Mr. Baldwin says: "The antiquities show that this section of the continent was anciently occupied by a people admirably skilled in the arts of masonry, building and architectural decoration. Some of their works cannot be excelled by the best of our constructors and decorators. They were highly skilled in the appliances of civilized life, and they had the art of writing, a fact placed beyond dispute by their many manuscripts." Columns are still found in various parts of Central America covered with hieroglyphical characters, which would no doubt give us much valuable information, but, who shall read them?

Some historians assert that the Peruvians had no written language, but Montesinuous after spending fifteen years in that country, shows pretty clearly that they had. He says that the books were few, and those who could read them were few, also. He once found a very old man reading to a group of young people, and on asking what the book contained, was told, "Things that no stranger ought to know."

Catholic influence did not encourage the natives to preserve their language. Consequently, when a knowledge of what the books contained was lost they ceased to be of value to the simple Indians and have now disappeared altogether.