



Type: Magazine Article

---

## Old America - Ancient Ruins (5)

Author(s): G.M. Ottinger

Source: *Juvenile Instructor*, Vol. 10, No. 15 (24 July 1875), pp. 178-179

Published by: George Q. Cannon & Sons

---

**Abstract:** Series of articles dealing with archaeological, anthropological, geographical, societal, religious, and historical aspects of ancient America and their connections to the Book of Mormon, which is the key to understanding “old American” studies.

---

## Old America.

BY G. M. O.

### ANCIENT RUINS.

(Continued.)

IN the northern part of the Mexican State of Chiapa, hidden from sight by the dense forest, and forgotten long before the arrival of Cortez, the extensive ruins since known as Palenque were discovered during the year 1750. Whether the discovery was due to chance, or to divine revelation made to the Indians, as is asserted in that country, one thing is certain: they were never mentioned before that year. The news of their discovery excited considerable interest in Spain, and two explorations were made by order of the government (Bernasconi's, 1784, and Del Rio's, 1785). The expedition of Del Rio alone was productive of any result, and that only in the form of a brief and superficial description. Eighteen years afterwards Charles IV., of Spain, caused a careful reconnoissance to be made of them, but the results of this expedition long remained unknown. During the period of the revolution the three memorials of Captain Dupaix and the drawings of his companion, Castaneda, remained forgotten in the archives of Mexico. Finally, by exchange, they became the property of M. Baradere, who published them in 1834 in a work called *Recueil des Antiquites Mexicaines*. Waldeck (1834) and Stephens (1843) have added much to Dupaix, by giving fac-similes of the hieroglyphical tablets. Other explorers have since visited the ruins, and with pen and pencil excited our curiosity. And still it is possible that many of the ruined edifices have not been seen, but lie buried and unknown in the forest. The largest building at Palenque is called the "palace." It stands near the river on a terraced, pyramidal foundation 40 feet high, and 310 feet long, by 260 broad at the base. The building, which is built of hewn stone and laid in cement with remarkable precision, faces the east, and is 228 feet long, 180 feet wide and 25 feet high, and has fourteen doorways on each side, with eleven at the ends. A corridor nine feet wide and roofed by a pointed arch went around the building on the outside; this was separated from another within of equal width. The "palace" has four interior courts, the largest being seventy by eighty feet. They are surrounded by corridors, and the architectural work facing them is richly and elaborately finished. Around the top of the building runs a broad cornice of stone. The whole building has been originally coated with stucco and painted, remains of red, yellow, blue, black and white paint being still visible in many places. Between the doorways are square pieces adorned with spirited figures in stucco. A flight of broad stone steps leads up the side of the terrace to the principal doorway. From the north side of one of the courts rises a tower three stories high, built of stone; it is thirty feet square at the base. Within the courts of the palace are several other buildings, all much ruined. The great mound used for the foundation of this building was encased with stone, the workmanship here and everywhere else about this structure being very superior. Where the stucco, or plaster, has been broken, six or more layers or coats are revealed, each layer presenting traces of painting. This indicates that the building had been used so long before it was deserted that the plastering needed to be many times renewed.

It would be beyond our limits to attempt to give a detailed description of the sculptured bas-reliefs, the groups and figures in stucco which decorate the walls of the innumerable rooms and corridors in the palace; we therefore refer our readers to the beautiful drawings by Catherwood and the graphic descriptions of Mr. Stephens' works. Two other buildings marked by Mr. Stephens in his plan of the ruins as "Casa No. 1" and "Casa No. 2," are remarkable. No. 1 is seventy-five feet long, by twenty-five feet wide, and stands on the summit of a high truncated pyramid; it has solid walls on all sides save the north, where there are five doorways. In the interior are a corridor and three rooms, and between the doorways leading from the corridor to these rooms are great tablets, each thirteen feet long and eight feet high, all covered with elegantly carved inscriptions. A similar but smaller tablet, covered with an inscription, appears on the wall of the central room. This building resembles the palace in architectural and ornamental features, and also displays the same workmanship. Casa No. 2, generally called "La Cruz," is built on a steep and lofty pyramid, which stands on a terraced foundation. The building is fifty feet long, by thirty-one wide; it has three doorways at the south, with a corridor and three rooms. This edifice has, above the height required for the rooms, "two stories of interlaced stucco-work, resembling a high fanciful lattice." Here I may say, as to ornamentation, the walls, piers and cornices of all the ruined buildings of Palenque are covered with it; everywhere the artistic skill and workmanship is displayed, Mr. Stevens going so far as to say "In justness of proportion and symmetry of form, approaching the Greek models." This building is usually called "La Cruz," because the most prominent object within the building is a great bas-relief, on which is sculptured a cross and several human figures. The building is approached by a flight of steps. Dupaix says, "It is impossible to describe adequately the interior decorations of this sumptuous temple." This cross is supposed to have been the central object of interest. It was wonderfully sculptured and decorated, and occupies the centre of the sculptured tablet. It stands on a highly ornamented pedestal, and is surmounted by an extraordinary bird, the wings and tail of which bear a strong resemblance to many of the plumes in the head dresses of the figures on the walls of the palace. Around the bird's neck hang strings of beads, from which is suspended an ornament resembling the curious flower called by the Aztecs "macphalxochitl," or "flower of the hand," the pistil being in the form of a bird's foot, with six fingers terminating in so many nails. On each side of the cross, with their faces turned towards it, are two male figures, carved with a justness of proportion equal to the sculptured remains of Egypt. One of these figures seems to be making an offering of a child to the bird. The infant held by this figure suggests the idea of a Christianity. The other figure is looking on, and being shorter than his companion, is mounted on a kind of footstool, in order to bring his head in a line, and properly balance the composition. The costume of the men is different from that of the other figures found among the ruins; for while the garments of the latter in many cases indicate the warrior, the robes of these two figures are made of a pliable texture, more resembling the loose cotton drapery of the priest.

The cross is one of the most common emblems found in all the ruins, and this led the early Catholic missionaries to assume that the knowledge of Christianity had been brought to that part of America long before their arrival; and they adopted the belief that the gospel was preached in Yucatan by St. Thomas.

In one of the other "casas" there is a tablet containing two figures very much resembling the two in adoration before the cross in Casa No. 2. Here they appear to be making offerings of infants to a hideous mask with the tongue lolling out of the mouth, and supported by two crossed batons richly ornamented. The floors of these adoratorios were excavated by Del Rio, and found to contain an earthen vessel and a circular stone, beneath which were a stone head, two small pyramids, with the figure of a heart made of dark crystal and two covered earthen jars containing a substance resembling vermilion.

Among the stucco ornaments in these buildings are beautiful designs of plants and flowers. Mr. Stephens also found the sculptured head and two bodies of figures of most just and perfect proportion and symmetry of form. One statue only has been found similar to those of Copan. It is ten and a half feet high, elaborately carved and engraven with hieroglyphics.

What more may be discovered at Palenque when the whole field of its ruins shall have been explored it is impossible to say. The chief difficulty in the way is explained by Mr. Stephens, who states that the forest is so dense that without a guide he might have gone within a hundred feet of the buildings without discovering them. More, much more, has been discovered by explorers than I have mentioned.

The ruins of Palenque, or Otohun, as it is called by some writers, are deemed by archeologists of the greatest importance, on account of the abundance of inscriptions found there, which it is believed will at length be deciphered, being similar to the written characters of the Mayas, which are now understood.

### NOT MY WORK.

How often do we hear boys, when asked by their parents or others to do anything, exclaim petulantly, "That's not my work!" How often do we hear thoughtless sisters jar and contend and make one another quite miserable over some trifling labor required, because each considers it not her work. How often too do employers meet with a spirit of careless indifference or open opposition to their wishes when they require some slight service at the hands of an employe who consider it not his work.

The fact is, if we should study our own interests as parts of families, as employes, or as members of society we would not be such sticklers for what we may consider our own particular rights and specified duties. The person who by acts of kindness and pleasant words makes himself most agreeable in the family will find his presence most wished for and enjoyed; and his reward will not be lacking, either, for he will have it every day in kindness returned, in additional peace of mind and in the consciousness he can always carry with him that he is making others happy.

The workman who is cheerful, always ready to study, respond to and even anticipate his employer's wishes, and be equally obliging to his fellow workmen, is not likely to lose anything by such a course. On the contrary, the chances are that it will be a stepping stone to his advancement; for his affable obliging disposition will succeed, while twice the amount of ability, combined with a surly, obstinate, contentious disposition might fail entirely.

The following anecdote from an exchange illustrates the disposition of those who claim that certain things are not their work, as also the estimation in which such persons are held by their employers:

A dispute having long existed in a gentleman's family be-

tween the maid and the coachman, about fetching the cream for breakfast, the gentleman one morning called them before him, that he might hear what they had to say, and decide accordingly. The maid pleaded that the coachman was lounging around the kitchen the greater part of the morning, and yet was so ill-natured that he would not fetch the cream for her, notwithstanding he saw she had so much to do as not to have a moment to spare. The coachman alleged that it was not his business.

"Very well," said the master, "but pray what do you call your business?"

"To take care of the horses, and clean and drive the coach," he replied.

"You say right," answered the master, "and I do not expect you to do more than I hired you for, but this I must insist on—that every morning before breakfast you get the coach ready, and drive the maid to the farmer's for milk; and I hope you will allow that to be part of your business."

The coachman and the maid soon after came to terms.

### HOW HE DID IT.

I RETURNED to Ashville after an absence of three years and found my friend Truffles grown fat and jovial, with a face the very mirror of peace and self-satisfaction. Truffles was the village baker, and he was not like this when I went away.

"Truffles" said I, "how is it? You have improved."

"Improved! how?"

"Why, in every way. What have you been doing?"

Just then a little girl came in with a tattered shawl and barefooted, to whom Truffles gave a loaf of bread. "Oh, dear Mr. Truffles," the child said, with brimming eye, as she took the loaf of bread; "mamma is getting better, and she says she owes so much to you. She blesses you, indeed she does."

"That's one of the things I've been doing," he said after the child had gone.

"You are giving the suffering family bread?" I queried.

"Yes."

"Have you any more cases like that?"

"Yes, three or four of them. I give them a loaf a day, enough to feed them."

"And you take no pay?"

"Not from them."

"Oh! from the town?"

"No; here," said Truffles, laying his hand on his breast. "I'll tell you," he added, smiling. "One day over a year ago a poor woman came to me and asked for a loaf of bread, for which she could not pay—she wanted it for her poor suffering children. At first I hesitated but finally I gave it to her, and as her blessings rang in my ears after she had gone, I felt my heart grow warm. Times were hard, and there was a good deal of suffering, and I found myself wishing, by and by, that I could afford to give away more bread. At length an idea struck me. I'd stop drinking and give that amount away in bread, adding one or two loaves on my own account. I did it, and it's been a blessing to me. My heart has grown bigger, and I have grown better every way. My sleep is sound and sweet, and my dreams are pleasant. And that's what you see, I suppose."—*New York Observer*.

The best practical moral rule is never to do what we should at any time be ashamed of.