

Cumorah Messenger

Mysteries and Discoveries

By Mike Brown © 2020

I want to share with you some of the remarkable discoveries we have found in our journeys into the jungles of southern Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador and Belize. To begin, as a young boy, I used to love to come home and watch Disney’s TV series of The Hardy Boys. I loved the adventure of searching, but I truly loved the discovery. I never knew where the adventure was going to take us but I always loved the anticipation and the excitement of what I would see. Now here I am some 60 years later and I find myself just as excited and anxious for our next adventure into a land, time and place, far removed from where we live, work and play in modern-day United States.

I grew up in the RLDS church and though I was not much of a reader, I learned the stories and the

adventures of the people of the Book of Mormon. This was really great because there were wars, beheadings, battles, rivers, bodies floating down the rivers, kings, queens; all kinds of things to get excited about. In Sunday school and vacation church school, I learned the stories. I never doubted them. I felt that this was history. I sensed it really happened a long time ago.

Upon graduation from high school, I enlisted in the military. It was Vietnam era so I chose the military occupation by enlisting rather than have Uncle Sam provide me with an M-14 or M-16 and tell me what I would be doing. I also married shortly after graduation and my wife and I spent a little over three years serving in Germany. On our return to the United States, we learned that my wife Linda

was pregnant, so we started the family thing. I had drifted away from church participation in a somewhat predictable way.

As a young adult, a father, a husband, a student for four years in college and working part-time and then full-time, there wasn’t a lot of time for church. I say that, totally tongue-in-cheek, because I knew that I should be involved in church.

Harry Steede was our Pastor at the Buckner congregation when I began to get involved again. We were always invited to dinners, theater productions, float trips, ski trips and from time-to-time presentations from church leaders that were actively investigating Latin America as the place of the Book of Mormon. Harry’s son, Neil, was one of the adventurers that spent many years traipsing through the jun-

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2020 In Review

By Tim Brown © 2020

The year 2020 began with excited anticipation for our HCETI family and friends. There were multiple events planned for this year.

First, Early Sites Research Society with Neil Steede at the helm planned an exploratory “dig” at Hill Cumorah in the early spring. A Mexican archeologist friend of Neil’s agreed to oversee the project and write the applications for the needed permits. The permits were written and applied for through a university at Tuxtpec, Oaxaca. While this was in process, local housing was secured for the archeologist, workers were hired, a structure was

built on site for the storage of tools and equipment, and plans to secure the site were finalized. The permit as submitted to the university in Tuxtpec could not be approved because they did not have an archeological department at the school. The closest archaeology department was in the capitol city of Oaxaca. The permit was submitted to them for approval. As the archeological school in Oaxaca was reviewing the request Covid-19 was declared a worldwide pandemic. Everything came to a screeching halt. Although there has been verbal approval, an official permit has not been issued at this time. It appears there will

be nothing happening with the “dig” until the pandemic is declared under control and international travel is again restored.

Second, in early 2020 the Hill Cumorah Expedition Team made plans for an expedition to the Mexican Yucatan in the late spring and early summer. We were planning to visit

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Mysteries and Discoveries *continued*

gles discovering archeological evidences and pieces of the Book of Mormon story. I listened to, and watched slides of, Neil's many adventures and some misadventures. And now, here we go again, exploring, investigating, searching for that treasure. It grabbed me with excitement again just as The Hardy Boys had years prior.

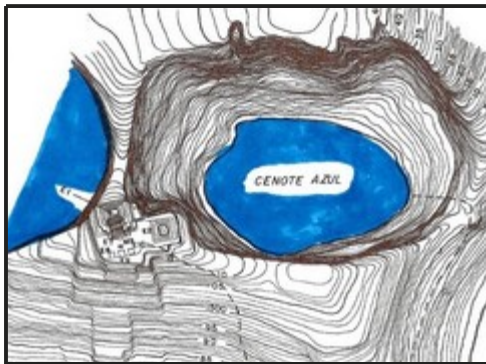
It would be many years later as our Sunday school class was studying the Book of Mormon that we decided to take a two-week bus trip to some of the well-known archaeological sites in Mexico. Key to that was first checking to see if Neil would be willing to be our tour guide. Neil very generously accepted our invitation to join us, so we settled on a date and most of our adult class and Neil headed south for a two-week adventure. Several of us caught fire with the sites and places and the incredible information of finding archaeological sites that could potentially align with Book of Mormon cities. We were hooked.

In the ensuing year following our return, we began to plan for another adventure. We were The Hardy Boys preparing to search for the treasure. We weren't sure what the treasure would look like when we started, but roughly 20 years later, we have volumes of treasures that link the Olmec and Mayan civilization to the Jaredite and Nephite/Lamanite cultures.

My favorite sites and the ones that provide the most wonder and excitement are actually right out of the pages of the Book of Mormon. I didn't choose them because they were Book of Mormon cities, but the beauty, majesty and sophistication of these cities are worthy of distinction even without knowing their history. It is also interesting that these three cities are arguably the most referenced cities in the Book of Mormon.

The first city is Chinkultic in the state of Chiapas in southern Mexico. The Book of Mormon ancients called this city the City of Nephi. The access to the site is off an East-West Highway. Looking to the north from the highway, in the distance (about 3 miles) you can see a beautiful pyramid high on a hill with a solid rock cliff-face behind it. There is a treasure trove of glyphs and a ball court that tell a story of the three major time frames of which we are given stories in the Book of Mormon. One of the most

interesting stories takes place when king Limhi determines that it is time to escape from their Lamanite captivity in this city. They have been paying a burdensome tribute to the Lamanites for some time and they choose to attempt an escape from this area. A military leader named Gideon has a plan. They will escape the city thru a secret pass behind the pyramid and flee northward to seek refuge in the city of Zarahemla. I had heard Neil Steede describe a secret pass at this site behind a temple. I would never have imagined how this unfolded before me. As we climbed the steep incline and rounded the side of the temple, I was shocked to see this land



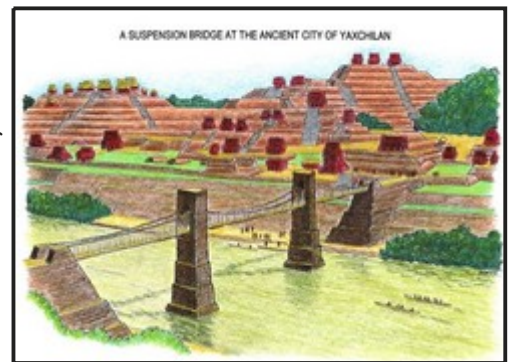
bridge that connected the back of the temple to the cliff face perhaps 60 yards to the rear. The opening in the cliff face is not visible from any angle on the front side of the pyramid. It truly is a secret pass and a geological wonder.

The second city is the site of Zarahemla that I referenced earlier. Today it is known as Yaxchilan, situated on the west bank of the Usumacinta River. The Book of Mormon refers to this river as the river Sidon. It is an amazing site where a tremendous amount of the history is recorded and a full Mulekite king list is chiseled into a stone staircase. There is also a throne building where the Throne Room for the King was changed in ancient time from one seat to five seats. Mario Perez Campa, the lead archeologist at INAH (Mexico's Institute of National Antiquities) was working at this site. Neil Steede had befriended Mario who told Neil about this particular structure and commented to Neil that he thought that the king had deferred his authority to a group of rulers or something along the line of judges. This was the only way to account for the change from one seat of power to five seats of power. Mario was

struck by this change as it was not customary for any king to give up his throne. Of course, it is the Book of Mormon that tells us of the change from kingship to judges when Mosiah's four sons each chose to do missionary work rather than become the next king in succession to Mosiah. We were never told how many judges ruled in place of the king, we were only told that Alma became the first Chief Judge. This find in Yaxchilan implies that there were five judges who ruled over Zarahemla.

There are so many things at this site that point to it being the center, or a center place, in that culture. Two amazing things stand out to me: 1) a suspension bridge that crosses the Usumacinta river. It was the largest bridge of its kind anywhere in the world at that time. And 2) the report of a tunnel that goes under the Usumacinta River from the Yaxchilan site in Mexico to Guatemala on the other side of the river. Because archaeologists don't know what to make of this tunnel, nothing has been published on it, but again, it is a conversation with Mario Campa that revealed this feature to Neil.

This tunnel beneath the river is amazing. Think about all of the things that were going on east of Zarahemla at that



time. The Ammonites (converted Lamanites) had been allowed to occupy land called Jerushon which was situated east of Zarahemla in the Eastern Peten and modern-day Belize. Food and other resources were constantly being transported from Zarahemla to the Nephite army and the people at Jerushon. If the bridge was lost and high waters made crossing difficult, the tunnel would still be an access route for the movement of supplies. Another possible reason for the tunnel could be that many citizens of Zarahemla had just immigrated from the

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City of Nephi, and they had just escaped Lamanite persecution by means of a secret pass. As the Nephites were vulnerable to attack being situated in an oxbow (or horseshoe) of the Usumacinta River, they could have determined that they should have a secret escape should they be viciously attacked. Both of these features of river crossings are amazing.

The third and final site that is particularly interesting is Palenque. This was city Bountiful in the Book of Mormon. If you remember, this is the city where Christ descended from Heaven to visit one flock of his scattered sheep. At this site, there are multiple references to Christ Jesus. As a matter of fact, there is a huge plaza on high-ground at this site that is called the Cross Complex. The people of Palenque wanted to leave a testimony that they knew Jesus, that He died on the cross, that they knew the significance of the cross and the ultimate resurrection from death. Also, at



this site, there are many beautiful pictographs of stories about Christ, our ability to choose to learn from Christ teachings and also our failure to do the same. This West Panel of the Throne Base at Temple XIX illustrates the choice we make to listen and follow or to reject.

In conclusion, our team experience has allowed me the opportunity to rediscover the excitement and the thrill, just like The Hardy Boys, of discoveries that

have exceeded my imagination. I would invite everyone who has an interest in learning and exploring to join our group and share in this amazing journey.

I also invite you to go to our website www.hceti.org and click on the link to David Brown's sixteen YouTube presentations on these sites. You will see that there is a tremendous volume of information.

2020 In Review *continued*

the sites of Tulum, Ek Balam, Chiche'n Itza, Coba, Kabah, Sayal, Uxmal and possibly others in the area. Many of the sites listed we had visited before. We have found that as new information is discovered, the places we had previously researched seem to explode with new understandings. The testimonies left by our ancient brothers take on a new dimension and depth not understood before. We inevitably learn more as we peel away the layers. And there is always something new and more layers to uncover. As mentioned above, Covid-19 postponed our plans for some time in the future.

Third, we used to make annual trips to Jalapa de Diaz and surrounding communities with a trailer full of used clothing. In the fall of 2018 we were not allowed to take the clothes across the border even though we had done so for the last 12 years. We were told by the Mexican authorities we needed permission from the state of Oaxaca, not just the local jurisdiction i.e. Jalapa de Diaz. Beginning in early 2019 we made contact with the officials in the state of Oaxaca to get permission to take clothes across the border. We gave them our

contacts with Jalapa and why we were donating the clothes. This took us well into the summer of 2019. Wheels turn very slow in governmental circles. We continued to try to make contacts, but it seemed we could never make contact with the same people. We don't know whether there was just a high turnover in the office, or they were giving us the run-a-round. I suspect the latter. As the calendar turned to 2020 we still had no permission papers in hand. Then you guessed it, Covid-19 again. As the year progressed and Covid became much worse in Mexico, we were concerned about our friends to whom we had become so close. In August of 2020 we started the Jalapa Project. It is an outreach program to give a hand up for the families in the communities to whom we had been giving clothes for so many years. Our interpreter friend from Tuxtepec buys bulk foods, divides them into family size bags and distributes them to the different communities. That project has been a tremendous success. We are having a greater impact on a monthly basis than we ever did just once a year. That being said, it was those annual trips and the relationships established

over the years that allow us to continue to have influence, even in our absence. We are always looking for anyone who wants to extend their ministry through helping fund the Jalapa Project. Any money sent for that project should reflect "Jalapa Fund" in the memo.

And lastly, the one thing Covid-19 didn't affect was our annual calendar project. For the past five years HCETI has produced an inspirational calendar. Every year we try to share photographs of places we have visited. We pair the pictures with scriptures from the Book of Mormon. The calendars are great quality. We always try to incorporate concepts or understandings of the sites shown in the calendar. It is a teaching tool as well as a beautiful addition to any home. The calendar sales help us fund the different research projects.

We are looking forward to 2021 with hope and anticipation. God has his timing and we know things will open up when He allows it. Whether our plans are "refocused" in the process or allowed to continue is irrelevant. We know He is sovereign. May his blessings be with each of you as we journey together.

The Snake People

By David B. Brown © 2020 (Continuation of Joseph's Land Article Fall 2020)

The research to connect Joseph of Egypt with the cultures of Central America has taken me to places I never expected to travel. Laying timelines of ancient cultures next to one another provided an interesting overlap of cultural shifts that infer some type of connection, especially transoceanic contact.

In the 2020 Fall edition of the *Cumora Messenger*, I laid out the argument for potential connections between Minoa, Egypt and Central American Olmec at roughly the 1650 BC timeframe. This places Joseph of Egypt in contact with the Jaredite people under the reign of King Emer. It is under his reign that we get the first recitation of the riches that the Jaredites enjoyed. It seems to be no coincidence that it is the abundance that Egypt would need in livestock and grains if they were to successfully endure the seven years of lean.

I also realized during this research and discovery that the ancient seafaring cultures carried a strong attachment to the symbol of the snake. The reason for that connection was covered in detail in the last article, but I want to further develop how the snake symbol translated to cultural identities in ancient artwork.

The Egyptian art record demonstrates its use and the evolution of the relationship between Egypt and the mariners. The Apep snake image first appears in the 8th Dynasty of Egypt (2,000 BC). It is revered and honored in writings of the



the Minoans delivering the goods to Egypt were practicing too much control over the supply and it was causing problems for Egypt as depicted with the New Kingdom images of Apep where the powerful serpent is severed from its control over Egypt. The first Apep depiction correlates to the early cooperative relationship between Egypt and the mariners, while the second depiction correlates to the time period when Egypt controlled the ports of Sidon, Byblos and Tyre (15th Century BC). Apparently, Egypt saw a need to cut off the head of the snake from its body, of which the ports of Sidon and Tyre were its head.

Later, the Greek legend of Medusa is portrayed as a daughter of ancient marine deities and may be a symbolic expression of the rise and fall of Minoa sea power; what appear to be beautiful locks of hair on the goddess (and fangs as seen in this early depiction photo below) turn into a hoard of individual snakes who are the real powers behind the Minoan sea culture. The Medusa legend says that Perseus cut off the head of Medusa and used the decapitated image of Medusa as a weapon against its enemies. This may



14th Dynasty (1,600 BC, see photo above). It is after this that Apep begins to be perceived as especially dark and in opposition to Egypt. This deity is seen as something that was not a part of the origin of Egypt, but it is a product of the birth of Egyptian power. In other words, it is something borne out of the development and progress of Egypt. It appears that there were connections between Minoa and Egypt that originate as beneficial to both, but eventually turns to being adversarial. Perhaps in later years

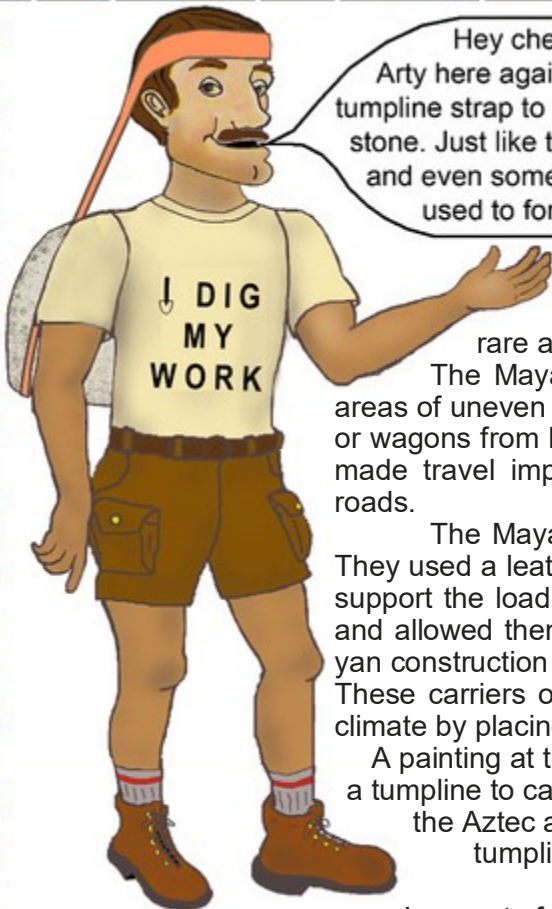


be referring to the historical aspect of how the Greeks took over portions of the declining and fractured Minoan maritime empire.

Additionally, the Greek goddess Pythia is a priestess of Apollo from Delphi. It is said that she (Pythia) approved the Greek colonization of sea ports in the region. It is recorded that she was consulted concerning the establishment of the North African Greek port city of Cyrene. This sounds more like the action of a cabal of interested investors. Is the goddess Pythia actually symbolic for a council of those who govern and rule traffic at the sea ports and on the waterways? Isn't it curious that Pythia is a derivative of the root word of the name given to one of the largest species of snakes; the python. The concept of the snake and its relationship to ports, waterways and rivers seems to be a timeless symbol that is clearly cross-cultural. First Minoa, then the Egyptians, followed by the Greeks.

Eventually, the 15th Century BC explosion of the island volcano at Santorini provides the catalyst for a shift of mariner powers in the Mediterranean. This event appears to not only remove large portions of the Minoan island of Thera, but it is also thought to have caused a tsunami that crippled many cities along the northern shores on the Minoan island of Crete. Because of the prevailing winds in the Mediterranean and the amount of ash blown into the atmosphere from Santorini, this event may account for the Biblical curse of the ten plagues experienced by Egypt in the story of Moses and the Exodus which appears to take place in 1,447 BC. With Minoan influence severely crippled, the shipping industry of the Mediterranean enters a period of transition as the various ports begin to exert their influence. The destruction of the Minoan power-centers may have caused large scale migrations as Minoans see huge cultural shifts occurring. If the destruction of Thera is the genesis of the plagues of Egypt, then the Israelites leaving Egypt exacerbate the situation by severely crippling the Egyptian farming industry; Pharaoh's workforce is now sojourning in the wilderness. Within forty-years the roaming Israelites begin invading Canaan and toppling the powers in that region. First, the destruc-

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Mayan foot transportation

Although the Maya used wheels on toys^[1] and evidence of wagon or cart sized wheels have been found^[1], the availability of horses or other draft (pulling/carrying) animals were rare and certainly not available for regular use by the Maya. The Maya did have roads to travel between cities, but many areas of uneven ground or thick jungle would have kept wheeled carts or wagons from being used. During the rainy season mud would have made travel impossible, even on flat ground where there were no roads.

The Maya developed a way for workers to carry heavy loads. They used a leather strap around the forehead and down their back to support the load they were carrying. This strap was called a *tumpline* and allowed them to carry up to 125 pounds.^[2] This is why most Mayan construction consisted of stones of no more than 125 pound each. These carriers or porters had to rest regularly in this hot and humid climate by placing their load on a platform called a *lab*.^[2]

A painting at the Maya site of Calakmul shows a Maya worker using a tumpline to carry his load (figure 1). The Mendoza codex created by the Aztec around 1541 AD shows that many workers used of the tumpline (figure 2). Even today the use of a tumpline can be seen in Central America (figure 3).

In a part of the world where wagons and carts were not available, the Maya solved this problem with man-power using a tumpline. The Maya word for this device was *mecapal*. The word tumpline came from American Indians like the Mohegan of Connecticut.^[2]

Figure 1



¹Cumora Messenger Volume 13, Issue 2 June 15, 2019; Adventures in Archaeology: Issue 24, 2019

²O’Kon, James A, *the Lost Secrets of Maya Technology: Chapter 11 Maya on the Move*, the Career Press, Pompton Plains, NJ, 2012



Figure 3

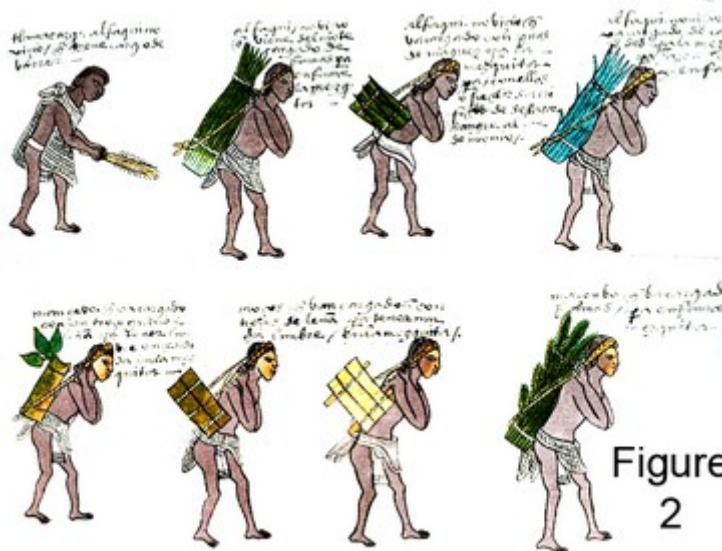
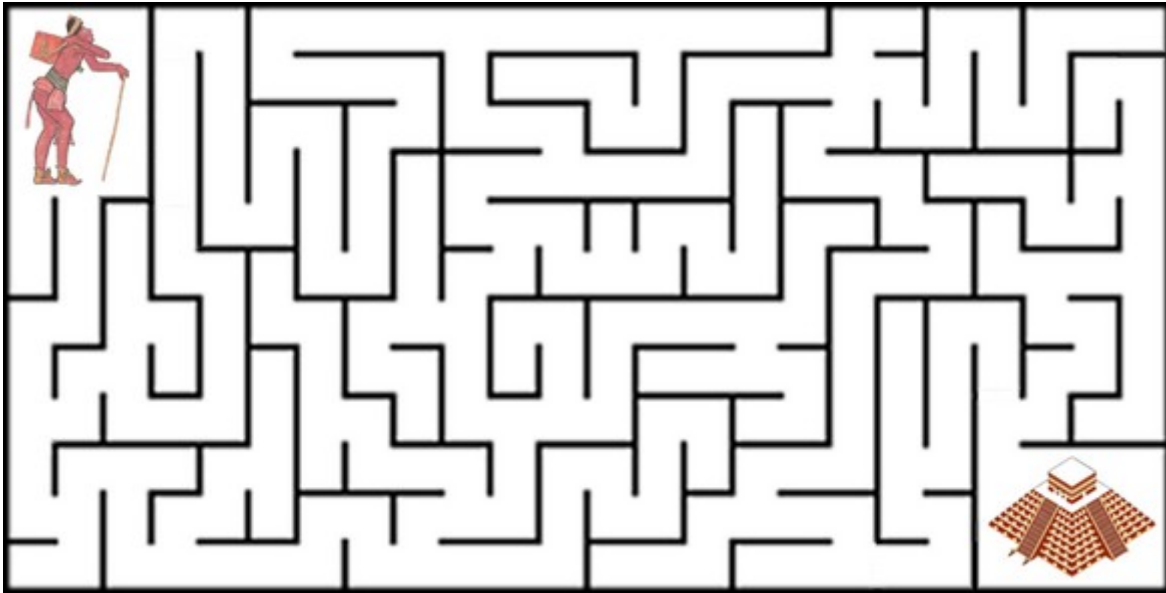


Figure 2

Help guide the carrier as he takes his stone to the pyramid.



WORD SEARCH

Find and circle the words from the story:

T O N E T W E N T Y F I V E T H K H
 M C C F C C A R R I E R S M S Y J H
 M E C I H U M I D N V G T C F I U L
 X O N L I P L E A T H E R A W L N O
 B M H D I S T O N E S M A L R O G I
 J M E E O M Z V L Y G R P A N O L O
 L R A C G Z A A M U D O I K D O E C
 Y A E Y A A A T G F R A U M Y K P O
 T I Z U A P N Y E X F D O U B V W D
 H N B P B H A P B N V X J L Y F J E
 H P L P S Y S L T U M P L I N E B X
 D U N P O U N D S X X U A Z T E C T

- Aztec
- Carrier
- Codex
- Jungle
- Maya
- Mendoza
- Mud
- Pounds
- Road
- Strap
- Calakmul
- Climate
- Humid
- Leather
- Mecapal
- Mohegan
- Onetwentyfive
- Rain
- Stones
- Tumpline

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 - http://research.history.org/Archaeological_Research/KidsPage.cfm
 - <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2007/08/maya-rise-fall/map-interactive>
 - <http://www.digonsite.com/drdig/mesoamerica/15.html>
 - <http://www.smm.org/sln/ma/index.html>
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The Snake People *Continued*

tion of the Minoan power-centers, followed by ash fallout over the cultures of the Near East, and then Israel's warring claim to the land of their inheritance. This must have been a time of great cultural upheaval and mass migration. There are potential evidences of this migration in the Americas.

The Book of Mormon indicates that "serpents" entered the land during the reign of Heth around 1,400 BC. While it sounds like an invasion of slithery reptiles, the passages are absent of any mention concerning actual snake-bites. The passage from Ether goes like this:

"And it came to pass that there began to be a great dearth upon the land; and the inhabitants began to be destroyed exceeding fast because of the dearth, for there was no rain upon the face of the earth; and there came forth poisonous serpents also upon the face of the land and did poison many people. And it came to pass that their flocks began to flee before the poisonous serpents towards the land southward, which was called by the Nephites, Zarahemla. And it came to pass that there were many of them which did perish by the way; nevertheless, there were some which fled into the land southward. And it came to pass that the Lord did cause the serpents that they should pursue them no more, but that they should hedge up the way, that the people could not pass, that whoso should attempt to pass might fall by the poisonous [snake people]."

This implies that the mariner snake people had a poisonous influence over the people, the snake people drove the animal flocks southward and then the snake people became a hedge between the people of Heth and the flocks of animals. Would stealing away flocks of livestock be a reasonable action taken by a desperate body of refugees who just crossed an ocean to a supposed place of safety only to find famine in the land? This sounds like a group of people who were used to taking drastic measures in order to ensure preservation. And, the Lord "caused" that the serpents (snake people) should set up a hedge. In other words, was God providing food resources for the refugees at the same time that He was destroying the wickedness in the native culture? This is similar to what God was doing simultaneously in the Near East with sending the Israelites to invade the Land of Canaan. God was providing a place of promised inheritance to the faithful Israelites at the same time that He was removing wickedness from an existing Canaanite culture. Could the fallout from the Santorini destruction cause issues throughout the Near East? Was the Israelite timing to take cities in Canaan actually taking advantage of a depleted population through starvation and migration?

In this passage there is no mention of snakes as an actual reptile, it is using the characteristics of the snake to indicate how those characteristics and influences are poisonous to the people of the culture. The serpents had a poisonous influence over the people, the serpents drove the animal flocks southward and then the serpents became a hedge between the people of Heth and the animals. I submit that the serpents referenced here are actually refugees of Mediterranean Sea culture who see themselves as belonging and maintaining allegiance to the snake kingdoms ruled by mariners. Or, perhaps some of them are Canaanite refugees from the Santorini destruction event and the

Israelite intrusion into Canaan. The Canaanite refugees would have been conveyed through the burgeoning Phoenician fleets who are still "snakes" in practice. Let's repeat the previous summation and replace "serpents" with "snake people."

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Did a Canaanite mass migration make them vulnerable to a people who had spent forty-years in wilderness conditions? It appears that the Santorini eruption was a huge factor in all of these major cultural events.

Taking the geographic description in the previous passage and placing it on a topographical map, the flocks were driven from the lowland region of Mexico around the Bay of Campeche such as the Olmec sites of San Lorenzo and LaVenta. Southward from these ancient sites takes you into the foothill region close to the ancient Maya sites of Palenque, Piedras Negras and along the Usumacinta where Yaxchilan (Zarahemla) is located. It appears that the "serpents" set up a barrier that no one could go beyond, perhaps along the river systems of the Usumacinta and Grijalva Rivers. It is precisely along the Usumacinta River systems that archae-



ologists have discovered a Maya pre-classic power called the Snake Kings who ruled the lowland Maya in pre-classic times and whose influence appears to extend into the Classical period. While the Jaredite "snake invasion" appears to take place in the 1,400 BC time period and the Maya pre-classic period does not begin until about 1,000 BC, it is known that these "snake kings" are the first occupants of the region who wielded power over the interior river systems in southern Mexico and the Peten of Guatemala.

By about 1,200 BC the seafaring power struggles in the Mediterranean seemed to stabilize with Phoenicia as the prominent power of shipping and ports throughout the African and Asian parts of the Mediterranean. Then there is another apparent period of trade interaction with the Jaredites, only now it

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The Snake People *Continued*

is probably with Phoenician commerce. This interaction takes place at about 1,000 BC with the Book of Mormon King Lib. We are provided with a long list of accomplishments that includes commodities. And, apparently Lib has enough cultural power to remove the snakes from the region.

“And in the days of Lib the poisonous serpents were destroyed; wherefore, they did go into the land southward to hunt food for the people of the land; for the land was covered with animals of the forest. And Lib also himself became a great hunter. And they built a great city by the narrow neck of land, by the place where the sea divides the land. And they did preserve the land southward for a wilderness to get game. And the whole face of the land northward was covered with inhabitants; and they were exceeding industrious;”

It is about 1,000 BC that the serpents (snake people) are destroyed out of the land and that the barriers into the land south of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec are removed. The people of Lib's culture move about without restriction and the

land to the south is preserved for animals to feed the people. I propose it is the control which the snake people had over the land bordering the Jaredites that is destroyed, and that the snake people are relocating to the east regions of modern-day Belize and portions of southern Mexico where this group continues their connection with the mariners of the Mediterranean.

There is an Olmec stela found in the LaVenta area of Mexico (now at Villahermosa) that depicts a man battling a larger-than-life reptile that has fish fins. The Olmec figure is on the lower left side of the stela while the large reptile with menacing teeth is looming overhead on the right. The man appears to be battling the serpent. This is exactly the description given in the text we are reviewing. I believe this is a

depiction of King Lib driving the serpents out of the land. And, it was found in the very region where these “serpents” are located.

This serpent/mariner imagery is also present in cultures along the early trade routes to the Americas. Legend says that St. Patrick “drove the serpents” off of an island that never had reptiles. I believe Patrick drove “serpent people” from Ireland through conversion to Christian values.

But, the serpent imagery arises once more through the Vikings who place the imagery of the serpent on the bow of the ships they sailed. These are powerful cultural images conveyed to us from ancient times and it provides a trail of influence for investigators to follow. We have followed this trail of clues provided from the Book of Mormon to discover major cultural influences. And, there is more yet to find.

