

GLYPH

Notes

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Quest to Find King Benjamin's Tower

By Neil Steede

Background: More than ten years ago, I visited the site of Yaxchilán in Mexico with archaeologist Mario Perez Campa. Mario had made several discoveries at Yaxchilán that he was eager to show me. At that time he was planning to publish these discoveries; therefore, I did not document details such as measurements, drawings, and so forth during our visit. Since that visit ten years ago, Mario has changed responsibilities within the archaeological organizations where he works. He has not published his discoveries made at Yaxchilán and, as a result, has granted me permission to recite from memory what he shared with me ten years ago—discoveries that have merit and have driven the writing of this article.”

Book of Mormon believers rightfully expect tangible evidences to exist for statements made in the book (1&2). One of the more notable statements is the one concerning King Benjamin's tower.

At the end of his reign, Benjamin desired to address his people. When they had gathered, he spoke to them; but, they could not all hear their beloved King. So, Benjamin had a tower built in order to address his people. Evidently, erecting the tower to speak to his people was not totally successful, because still not all could hear

him. Therefore, King Benjamin sent out a proclamation. By following the narrative in Mosiah, Book of Mormon believers can obtain several clues to look for in the quest to find King Benjamin's tower.

Over the years Book of Mormon advocates have suggested different locations for Benjamin's tower. I believe the answer really rests on how one reads the story. So, I wish to share my opinion concerning the location of this tower based on the evidence of which I am aware. First, I want to clear away some of the “brush” so that it will be easier to “see” clearly. This “brush,” in my opinion, consists of misconceptions, misquotes, and misinterpretations of not only The Book of Mormon event, but also of archaeological evidence. I have heard more than a few claims that the famous Maya tower at Palenque was Benjamin's tower. Here is where we begin clearing away “brush.”

Most Book of Mormon scholars agree that the archaeological site of Palenque is not old enough to be the city of Zarahemla. They believe, as does most of the archaeological community, that Palenque's heyday was 600-900 AD, thus being outside of Book of Mormon

Continued on Page 2

Illustration 1 — Artist's rendition of Benjamin's tower as it may have been viewed by his people. “For the multitude being so great, that King Benjamin could not teach them all within the walls of the temple; therefore he caused a tower to be erected; that thereby his people might hear the words which he should speak unto them” (Mosiah 1:35).

Quest to Find King Benjamin's Tower (cont. from page 1)

chronology. Since I am sometimes called the “black sheep” of Book of Mormon archaeology, I disagree. But, the focus of this report is Benjamin's tower, and I will attempt to limit my remarks to this topic.

The general concept that Palenque is not old enough to be the city of Zarahemla, in my opinion, is mistaken. I believe it is old enough for a myriad of reasons (3). And, though the extremely obvious tower at Palenque is the only known tower of its type in the ancient Maya world, I do not believe it is Benjamin's tower.

Although I do believe that the site of Palenque is old enough (4), the construction of the tower itself seems to pertain to Pakal's time period. Thus, even in my timeline, it is too late to have been constructed during King Benjamin's lifetime. So, where should one look for Benjamin's tower?

In my opinion, we can turn to a relatively close Maya site called Yaxchilán. Once again reconsidering The Book of Mormon story and comparing the logistics of the two sites in question (Palenque and Yaxchilán), leaves little room for discussion as to which site is most likely to meet the requirements outlined in The Book of Mormon. Scripture states that Benjamin had the Nephite nation gather together that he might address them. By this time, the population throughout all of the land must have been approaching more than a million (5).

And they pitched their tents round about the temple, every man having his tent with the door thereof towards the temple, that thereby they might remain in their tents, and hear the words which King Benjamin should speak unto them; (Mosiah 1:34).

If the average family was comprised of ten members, there would have been the potential for 100,000 tents. One hundred thousand tents would require an extremely large space. But, I believe this number to be optimistically high. Though I agree that the population must have been over a million, we can be relatively sure that the total population did not attend. Some stayed home to take care of sick or elderly, or their flocks and herds.

My estimate would be that only ten percent of the people came to Zarahemla (6). If this were true, then total attendance could have been around 100,000. However, a combination of distance and dissenting groups [such as King's men and [Zoramites] (7), probably would have further reduced the attendees by a large percentage. Thus, I suspect there were only about 1,000 tents at the gathering site. Of course there could have been more—up to 3,000 but, for this mental exercise, I chose the lower number to illustrate the point I am about to make.

The next step in our quest is to look at both sites and to determine if 1,000 tents could have been set up in the space available. In the case of Palenque, the task is relatively simple. Since the tower is obviously present, we need only to determine if 1,000 tents could have fit around the listening area of the tower. Remember, Benjamin

commissioned the tower to be built. This implies that the people were already gathered when Benjamin desired to speak to them. This clue is *paramount*.

And it came to pass that he began to speak to his people from the tower; and they could not all hear his words because of the greatness of the multitude; (Mosiah 1:36).

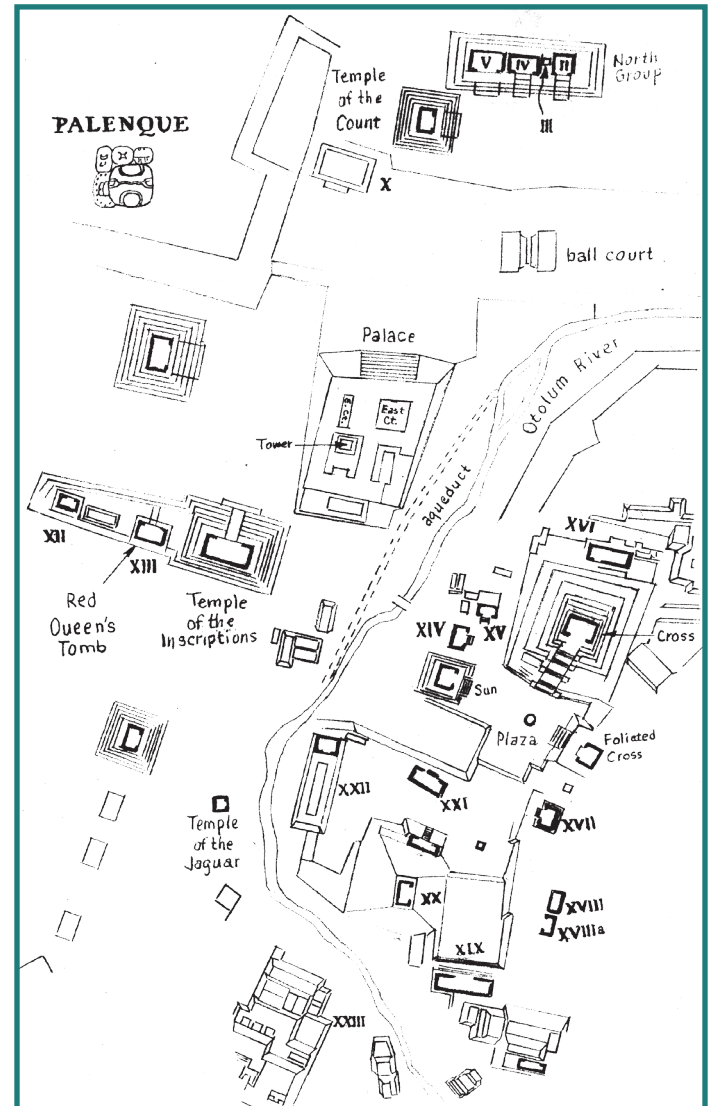


Illustration 2 — Site map of Palenque, Mexico.

The Temple of Inscriptions at Palenque and its adjacent temples would not have existed during Benjamin's time, nor would have the Cross Complex.

The tower at Palenque is located in the center of the Palace complex (see illustration 2). Thus, we must consider the open plazas around the Palace as the area for the tents in question to be erected. To be realistic, the reader must understand that the Temple of the Inscriptions and its adjacent temples would not have existed during Benjamin's time, nor would have the Cross Complex. Thus, there would have been a fairly large area to the south of the tower.

Another consideration would be the type of tent that might have been used. There are several options. It would seem obvious that pup tents could be ruled out since they are a relatively modern invention. A precursor to the pup tent, however, existed in Roman Empire times and was probably used by Hannibal (8). Though contemporary, they most likely were not known of by the Nephites. The tent that would have been known of by their ancestors was the Arab tent. However, if this type is chosen, serious problems arise. The average Arab tent covers an area of 300 square feet (15' x 20'). This large size would greatly reduce the number of tents possible to set up in a given area.

A third option of the tepee would seemingly be the best option. A tepee has historical precedence in the area and covers around one-third of the space required by an Arab tent (100 square feet or 10' x 10'). There had to have been walkways and places for campfires, which would conservatively add 100 square feet to each tepee location. Thus, 1,000 tents x 200 square feet equals 200,000 square feet of space necessary — extremely conservative numbers. Thus the area needed is approximately a half of a square mile. The space is not there. Moreover, sound does not carry well in this area. Experiments have shown that voice projection to the other side of the San Juan River, which runs through Palenque, is nearly impossible (9). The height of the tower does not help.

Therefore, on all three counts—space, timing [more than two centuries], and location—Palenque cannot be the place of King Benjamin's tower. Simple logistics also should be considered. First, Benjamin had his people gather. Seeing the multitude so great, he commissioned a tower to be built. In Benjamin's day, engineering had not advanced enough to do things like "a continuous pour" of concrete. Besides, a tower of cement and stone such as at Palenque could not have been built in the timeframe given within the story context. A large part of the Nephites had already gathered in tents. It makes no sense that a three-story rock and concrete tower could have been built while they waited. This type of construction would have taken three months or more. Remember, quick-drying mortar did not exist. One had to wait at least forty-eight hours for each layer of stone and cement to cure, very possibly more. Though timbers would have rotted away millennia ago, I believe that some vestige of this tower should have remained. My faith dictates this belief. Therefore, I continued my search at Yaxchilán.

At Yaxchilán (which I believe was the city Zarahemla), all of the objections stated earlier about the Palenque tower can be erased. Directly behind the city is a large bowl-like formation which forms a natural amphitheater. This area spans more than a mile square, which gives more than enough room to accommodate the tents required. In addition, the ridge from which Benjamin's address would have been made is perfectly suited for such an event. Acoustic experiments reveal that a strong, loud voice can be heard from the ridge throughout the



Don Beebe

Photo 1 (above) — Measuring the base of the tower are Mike Brown, who is facing the camera, and Terry Scott. The large slab of stone in the middle of the tower base is actually a stela which would have stood in front of Temple 42.

Photo 2 (below) — Standing at the four corners of the proposed tower are Neil Steede and Terry Scott (to the left facing the camera). Mike Brown and Scott Norwood mark the other two corners.



Don Beebe

plain (10). Finally, the site is approximately two centuries earlier than Palenque. Thus, all of the key elements required are present.

Obviously, all of the above means nothing if there are no archaeological evidences. Fortunately there are. At the highest point of the ridge, in front of Temples 40 and 41, lie possible remains of the footings of Benjamin's tower (see photo 1). Most archaeologists agree that these footings were "poured" around wooden logs (11). It is also thought that there had to have been a larger wooden structure on this foundation (12). Let's explore the possibilities. The foundation was constructed to hold 18-20" round logs. The over base was 50' x 9'. Photos taken in January, 2008, show that toward one end is a larger slab of stone (see photo 2). This slab measures

Continued on Page 4

Quest to Find King Benjamin's Tower (cont. from page 3)

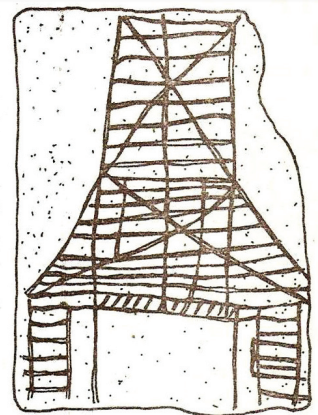


Roy Weldon

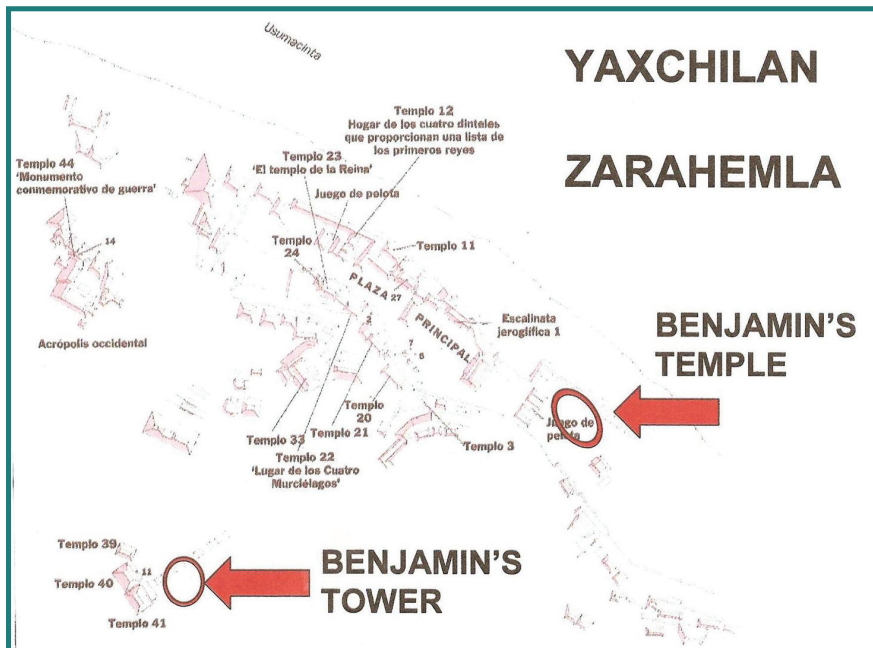
Photo 3 (above) — The tower at Palenque is the only known tower of its type in the ancient Maya world. This photo was taken from the Cross Complex.

Illustration 3 (at right) — An example taken from the bricks at Comalcalco, Mexico, shows that the idea of cross-bracing was a known concept. Glenn Scott used this drawing as a guide to produce the rendition of Benjamin's tower on page 1.

about 10' x 9'. That stone is a stela which stood in front of Temple 42. It was placed there for its conservation. What configuration would call for this type of footing? To answer that, one must look for model towers within Maya archaeology. Most researchers would say that the only model is Palenque's tower. As said before, I disagree. At the site of Comalcalco,



Neil Steede




Neil Steede

Illustration 4 — Site map of Yaxchilán, Mexico, indicating the proposed locatin of Benjamin's tower. There would have been sufficient room for the people to pitch their tents around and in front of the tower proceeding down the hill which forms a natural amphitheater.

bricks reveal quite a few towers (13). A sample drawing of one type of tower found on these bricks was used to produce the drawing of King Benjamin's tower on page 1 (see illustration 3). It should be noted that all of the towers depicted on the Comalcalco bricks are shown only in profile. This notation is important. Three-dimensional or perspective drawings of towers at this time do not exist. Therefore, the depth of any drawn tower on the bricks cannot be estimated. We can only estimate the width. Drawing in perspective was an art not mastered by the Maya. For the most part, they drew only in *carved, low relief [flat]* (14).

However, from the evidence of the foundation work on Benjamin's tower (if this foundation is of that construction) the footing was almost twice as wide as it was deep. Certainly this would give it more stability. Though stability was certainly the major concern, why was there extra footage on the one side? It is my opinion that the extra footage was for a stairway. While most towers probably had vertical ladders, this construction — if, specifically built for

Benjamin — would have been built with much care. The beloved King was about eighty years old at this time. The probability of Benjamin being able to safely climb a vertical ladder might have been in doubt. So, I believe, that it was more than probable that the laborers took great care to make the construction safe and readily accessible for the aged King. A tower of timber would be much more in keeping with the storyline given in The Book of Mormon. Such a tower could have been built in days, not months, unlike a stone tower.

Based on the evidence of the foundation, I asked Glenn Scott to prepare a sketch which could possibly be what the tower in question might have looked like. It is important to stress that at the moment, no one can prove or disprove that a tower on the proposed foundation actually was built as depicted or that it was, in fact, built for Benjamin. However, evidence surfacing at Yaxchilán does show that this site may be the site of King Benjamin's Tower. It could have been. 

Notes:

1. Mosiah 1:27-38
2. Mosiah 1:33-37
3. These reasons range from what I consider to be a misreading of the Maya Calendar, to misinterpretation of archaeological findings. Many times these misinterpretations are done by Book of Mormon scholars—not archeologists. For more details see *Book of Mormon Archaeology: Artifact by Artifact Volumes I-VI*, Steede, Neil, MLK Publications, Early Sites Research Society, Box 4175, Independence, MO 64050.
4. Ibid
5. Ibid
6. Ibid
7. Ibid
8. *Hannibal's Battles Rome*, New York, 1995.
9. These experiments were executed circa 1995 by a class from UNAM (Universidad Nacional Autonumm de Mexico). The class was taught by Dr. Mario Perez Campa [private communication].
10. Steede, Neil, *Archaeology: Artifact by Artifact*.
11. Campa, Mario Perez [private communication].
12. Ibid
13. Steede, Neil, *Preliminary Catalogue of the Comalcalco Bricks*, Mexican Epigraphic Society, ESRS, Box 4175, Independence, MO, 1984.
14. During the Classic Period of the Maya there were artists who were experimenting with perspective drawings which are particularly evident on the Comalcalco bricks. However, all of the tower drawings (of which there are more than 20) are drawn in flat. The best resource on perspective drawing by the Maya is by *The Art of the Comalcalco Bricks*, Steede, Neil, CIP, ESRS, 1994.

GLYPH *Quotes* By Helen Ultican —

Watch ... Your Thoughts and Words—Mosiah 2:48

At the close of King Benjamin's long sermon, he says the following:


And finally, I can not tell you all the things whereby ye may commit sin: for there are divers ways and means, even so many, that I can not number them. But this much I can tell you, that if ye do not watch yourselves, and your thoughts, and your words, and your deeds, and observe to keep the commandments of God, and continue in the faith of what ye have heard concerning the coming of our Lord, even unto the end of your lives, ye must perish. And now, O man, remember, and perish not (Mosiah 2:48-50).

King Benjamin was very concerned about his people's spiritual lives, and for this reason he admonished them to watch their thoughts, words, and deeds. Benjamin loved his people.

The prophet Alma also admonished Zeezrom regarding the importance of thoughts and words:

Then if our hearts have been hardened, yea, if we have hardened our hearts against the word,

insomuch that it has not been found in us, then will our state be awful, for then we shall be condemned; For our words will condemn us, yea, all our works will condemn us; we shall not be found spotless: And our thoughts will also condemn us; and in this awful state, we shall not dare look up to our God; (Alma 9:22-24).

For a long time I have been concerned about the serious nature of these scriptures and how to apply them to my life. I have become convinced that our thoughts can be controlled by making a purposeful decision to change them immediately. If we change our thoughts, it is unlikely that we will be saying "bad words." Occasionally a "bad image" will come into my mind, perhaps from a television commercial or a magazine picture that reflects the decadent ways of the world. When this happens to me, I deliberately think of scenes of beauty in nature which remind me of the greatness of God; or I picture Jesus walking along the Sea of Galilee teaching his followers. I consciously erase "bad words" which are uttered all around me by repeating a favorite passage of scripture in mind. 

King Benjamin was very concerned about his people's spiritual lives, and for this reason he admonished them to watch their thoughts, words, and deeds.



JOY *Line* By David Gilmore

Testimony of the Power and Grace of God

Four years ago, some friends and I organized a not for profit organization, Zion Bound Inc, for the purpose of providing resources to the Saints that were not currently available. Through our deliberations we felt led to focus our efforts on printing a pocket sized Book of Mormon that would be easily transportable and convenient to carry. There were, however, two small mountains we had to climb: we had no experience printing or publishing and we had no money. In order to raise funds, and also provide a service to the camping organizations, we have printed t-shirts every summer (another endeavor with which we had no experience). Four short years later, our first major project has been completed; we now have both soft cover and leather bound pocket sized Books of Mormon available. This entire process has been a testimony of the power and grace of God as He has provided for, and blessed a group of novices as we have attempted to do His will. Our story is far from over, as we now have the charge of getting these books to the Saints and into the world so that they may bear the much needed testimony of Jesus Christ.

David, who serves as a priest, is a young husband and father. He and wife, Kathy, have two children, Emma, three, and Ethan, three months old. The family attends the Colbern Road Restoration Branch.

If you are interested in purchasing a pocket sized Book of Mormon you may contact the Book of Mormon Foundation at www.bomf.org or david@zionbound.com.



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MEMORIES *from Mesoamerica*

For years I had heard testimonies of church members taking Books of Mormon to the Maya people who seemed to be delighted to receive them. But, I always wondered whether they were read and what difference they might have made in the lives of those people.

This year when we arrived at the airport, we met Joyce Heidi who was asking various people to carry some Books of Mormon for her, as her luggage was too heavy. Since I had space in my suitcases, I carried four of the books. What I didn't realize was that I was expected to give the books away myself. I was delighted to discover that my roommate, Linda Barber, could speak Spanish so that made it easier to converse with the native people.

When we approached a person to whom we felt inclined to give a book, we opened it to the page where it spoke of Christ visiting the Americas. We also conveyed to the recipient that the book was a history of their own people, the Maya. Along with The Book of Mormon, we gave a small pamphlet which contained an overview of The Book of Mormon.

One day as we walked on after giving away a book, we glanced back to observe the young man reading The Book of Mormon and another vendor reading the pamphlet. So, I caught the moment on film.

Later that day, we were able to locate another Book of Mormon. Two friends and I walked back up the mountainside to take it to the second vendor. I feel now that these people were truly interested, and at least began to read. I continue to wonder if they read more, but I know that we gave them the opportunity. It was a great experience.

Nadine Ballantyne, Independence, MO
Linda Barber, Bethany, MO

I take *glyph notes* and have always desired to see the ruins in Mexico. I wanted to go on one of the PSI tours and signed up with God's financial blessing. I did not know one person on this trip, but I put my trust in Father God.

I had injured my right knee a week before the trip to Mexico. I totally put it in God's hands and confided in Him that



if I am to go, then my knee will be better. It was, and this was a dream come true to see the ruins, substantiating The Book of Mormon.

I did have problems with my knee on the trip and asked for administration by the Elders. I had immediate relief before getting on the bus in Palenque. Praise God. While on the trip sometimes I needed help getting down steps, and there was always someone to help me.

The trip was like an old-fashioned reunion. Everyone reached out to each other and offered help whatever the needs were. The love was like a little Zion rising on the tour bus. Acceptance and unconditional love abounded along with sharing silly jokes and hearing the youth singing.

We had the most exceptional Sunday morning service sitting on steps of an ancient ruin and in the setting of trees at Kohunlich. Tears came to my eyes as we sang the old hymns, led by the beautiful voice of Lyle Smith, who presided.

I have a more fervent testimony than ever of The Book of Mormon, and it came to life as we visited the sites.

GOD IS SO AWESOME. I hope I get to go next year, too, if only to feel the presence of the Holy Spirit with the closeness of the Saints on the trip.

Julia McGary, Independence, MO 



Recipients of Books of Mormon at Palenque take time to read. Capturing the moment on film brought joy to the givers.



GLYPH *Clips*

Year 2012 Draws Closer

As the year 2012 draws closer, more Web sites focus on the Maya calendar. December 21, 2012, according to the Maya, will end the present era of 13 baktuns, a period of 13 x 400 years, which began August 11, 3114 B.C.

MAYA CALENDAR SITES:

- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maya_calendar
- <http://www.webexhibits.org/calendars/calendar-mayan.html>
Calendars Through the Ages — good site for all the different calendars used throughout the world.
- <http://www.jaguar-sun.com/calendr.html>
- <http://www.pauahtun.org/Calendar/tools.html>
This site leads to converter
- <http://www.michielb.nl/maya/calendar.html>
The Maya Astronomy Page
- <http://mayaportal.lucita.net/>
Mayan Calendar Portal — this site is relatively New Age and includes Aztec gods and goddesses on the calendar round which were not part of the Maya calendar. Nevertheless, the site is beautiful.



Nahuatl Writing

A landmark article discussing a new approach to deciphering the Nahuatl writing system appeared in the Spring 2008 issue of *The PARI Journal* (a quarterly publication of the Pre-Columbian Art Research Institute). Nahuatl is the language spoken in northern Mesoamerica as opposed to Maya in the southern area. It was the language of the Aztecs. The author provides a good case that Nahuatl has not been completely deciphered even after more than 100 years of research, and that a new approach is needed. He proposes that “the decipherment of Nahuatl writing is still a work in progress” and that “it is essential to adopt the methodology of decipherment that has been

employed successfully (and has been amply confirmed) with other writing systems of the Old World and New” (p. 19). The article includes a Nahuatl syllabary.

A companion article in the same issue by Marc Zender reviews the past 150 years of Nahuatl decipherment. He states that there is “ample evidence that literate communities were in contact throughout Mesoamerica since at least Early Classic times” (p. 36).

Articles like these continue to reinforce the fact that the people who lived in Mesoamerica employed writing systems that functioned like those of the Old World, especially Egyptian. When Joseph translated *The Book of Mormon*, he could not have known this.

INSIDE:

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Memories from Mesoamerica

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