

GLYPH

Notes

PRE-COLUMBIAN STUDIES INSTITUTE • NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2008 • VOLUME 15 NUMBER 6

Los Voladores, Principal Bird Deity, and the Son of God

By Sherrie Kline Smith

An ancient Mesoamerican ritual, so ancient no one knows how or where it originated, is the flight of the voladores. Five colorfully costumed men impersonating birds climb to the top of a 75 to 100 foot pole and then “fly” to the ground.

During his presentation at the Maya Symposium October 18 (see p. 6 in this issue), leading Maya epigrapher David Stuart intrigued us with the question, “Could Izapa Stela 25 be an early representation of the *voladores* (fliers)?” If so, then indeed it is a very ancient ritual, well over 2,000 years old!

Los Voladores

Historians claim the flight/dance of the voladores used to be widespread, performed from Mexico to Nicaragua, but about AD 1000 only the Totonac people near the ruins of El Tajin on the Gulf Coast of Mexico continued to enact the symbolic ritual. (The Totonacs are believed to be “cousins” of the Maya.) In recent years, the voladores began performing at major tourists sites like Tulum, Teotihuacan, and in front of the National Museum of Anthropology and History in Mexico City.

Many who have traveled on PSI’s annual tours have watched with awe as the five men climbed to the top of a pole to sit on a square wooden frame suspended by ropes. The fifth man, called the caporal, stands without a rope or safety net on top of a small round capstan made of tropical red cedar and plays a small drum and blows a flute as he bends and sways and dances in this precarious position. Spectators hold their breath. The song and dance invokes the gods of the four cardinal directions, and at the appropriate time, the other four fall back and “fly” to the earth.

The ropes which were tied around their bodies after climbing to the top unwind 13 times for a total of 52 revolutions, a significant Mesoamerican calendar number, before they come to the ground.

“Although the performance varied from time to time and from village to village,

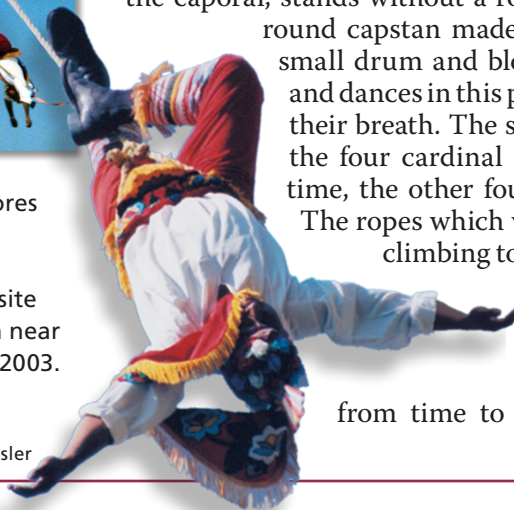
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PAGE 1

The Los Voladores (the fliers) performed for tourists at the site of Teotihuacan near Mexico City in 2003.

Aaron Presler

Lyle Smith





Many who have traveled on P.S.I. tours have watched the "voladores" with awe.

Los Voladores (cont. from page 1)

the Voladores ceremony was basically the same, with differences in detail. In the costume, regardless of variance, the intent was always the same: the impersonation of birds" (Gipson 1971:277).

Prior to the Conquest and the influx of Catholicism, the enactment included human sacrifice. Accounts vary, but Walter Krickeberg "states that through the bird dress of the flyers, the four men impersonated the souls of dead warriors and sacrificial victims who, after they had finished their services to the sun-god, returned to earth in the form of birds..." (Gipson 1971:271). He offers another more probable explanation that "the flyers represented men destined to be sacrificed, and, as potential victims, they fell from the sky" (Gipson 1971: 271).

Two pre-Columbian codices, the *Codex Porfirio Diaz* and *Codex Fernandez Leal*, depict the flight of the voladores along with a person tied and raised on a scaffold who will be sacrificed by arrows. This was actually practiced by the Aztecs where "victims were tied to a high scaffold, shot with arrows, and then thrown headlong from the scaffold" (Gipson 1971:271). Krickeberg notes that the flight of the voladores immediately preceded the sacrifice by arrow.

Another explanation, from a small publication called *La Danza de Los Voladores: Origen y Simbolismo*, states that the dance is a prayer of praise as well as a petition for mercy or forgiveness, for the sown lands to prosper, and for protection against evil (Zaleta 1992:40).

Principal Bird Deity and Izapa Stela 25

In Stuart's presentation, "The Jeweled Eagle and the One King: New Insights into the 'Principal Bird Deity' in Pre-Classic and Classic Maya Mythology," he shared what he called "new insights" about the Principal Bird Deity, commonly called the PBD. Numerous examples of the PBD, a key figure in Maya mythology, exist among the ancient ruins and artifacts, and although studied in-depth by many scholars, remains a complicated icon.

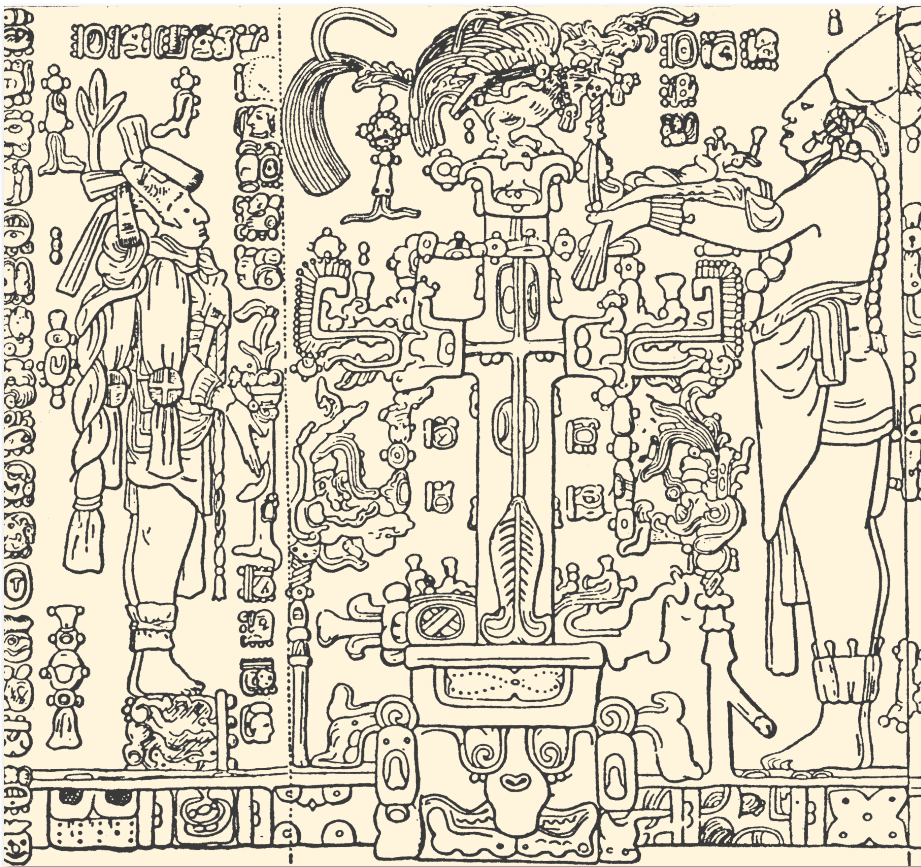
"Very early versions of the Principal Bird Deity formed huge stucco sculptures on the exteriors of pyramids at Cerros and Nakbe, perhaps by as early as 300 BC" (Miller & Taube 1993:137). The bird shares a definite, but not completely understood, relationship with Itzamnaaj, the principal Maya creator god. Julia Guernsey writes, "Importantly, in Classic Maya inscriptions, the Principal Bird Deity appears to have often carried the name *Itzamnaaj-ji Muut-ti*, or "Itzamnaaj Bird" (2006:108).

The PBD is recognized by the jade jewels he wears, which according to Stuart, reflects his "shining," or radiating a "heavenly light" or an "animate brightness." Usually a *k'in* sign (day/light) adorns one wing and an *ak'bal* glyph (night/darkness) adorns the other, indicating his dual aspect. One of the most important events associated with the PBD is his descent to Earth, an act that has been found recorded all the way back to the Pre-Classic era, prior to AD 250.

At Palenque, the PBD perches on top of the cross/tree in the Temple of the Cross panel and the sarcophagus lid from Pacal's tomb. The Temple of the Cross—part of the triadic temple arrangement that includes the Temple of the Foliated Cross and Temple of the Sun—represents the heavens, the abode of the PBD. The inscription in the Temple of the Cross includes a reference to the voladores when it states that "four youths go down from the pole." References to these four youths, four year bearers, four lords are found in other places like Copan

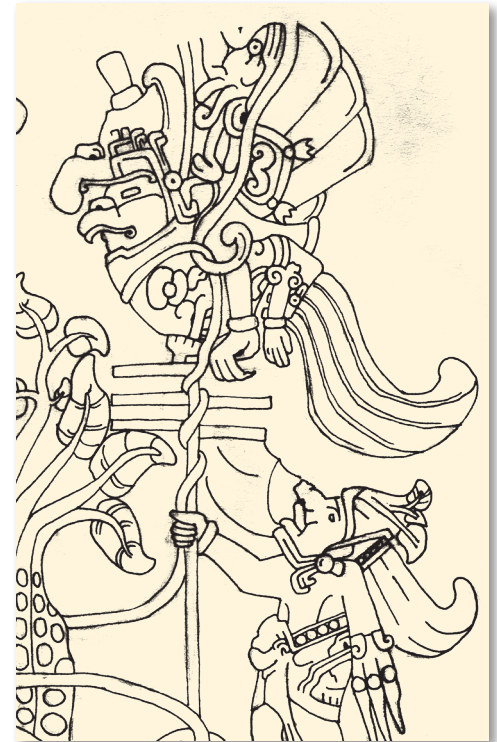
In the sixteenth-century pre-hispanic *Codex Fernández Leal*, a 20-foot long Cuicatec scroll from Oaxaca, the voladores ritual shows the "scaffold and arrow" sacrifice. The sacrificial victim is tied to a raised scaffold.





Above: In the Temple of the Cross at Palenque (AD 692), the central motif is the Principal Bird Deity perched on top of the cross/tree.

Below: Izapa Stela 25 is one of numerous carved stelae at the site depicting the Principal Bird Deity. David Stuart suggests that this stela is one of the earliest examples of the voladores. Drawing by Gabrielle Hallier after Ajax Moreno



and Naranjo and San Bartolo.

The Temple of the Cross was constructed AD 692, and the San Bartolo murals, with not only the four “youths” but also a magnificent depiction of the PBD, dates to 100 BC. The central image of the south portion of the west wall mural at San Bartolo is the descent of the PBD associated with sacrifices. The central image of the north portion of the west wall is the resurrection of the maize god. Eight hundred years separate these representations of the PBD which testifies to its long-lasting importance in Mesoamerican belief systems.

Specific dates for the stelae at Izapa have been difficult to determine because they lack hieroglyphic texts, but most of the site is from 300–50 BC. The Principal Bird Deity is rendered on several Izapa stelae. Stela 25, though, appears to be an early visual record of the voladores. The PBD sits on the top of a pole wound around with a rope reaching to the earth, symbolizing the link between heaven and earth.

Why does the PBD descend to Earth? According to Stuart, when Itzamnaaj, in its PBD identity comes to Earth, it gives away its jewels and also provides food. “Jade and riches come to earth . . . Maize God adorned, resurrection.” Or in other words the Maize God (a resurrected god) becomes dressed with these jewels and assumes the power of the creator god Itzamnaaj.

“The bird’s ‘death’ at Izapa established its glorified role in the supernatural realm. This research dovetails with Taube’s . . . investigations of the relationship between the Principal Bird Deity, scaffold and arrow sacrifice, and accession rituals among the Maya. As Taube demonstrated, the PBD played a prominent role in rituals of human sacrifice and accession in both Classic and Postclassic [AD 250-900] Maya imagery. Such findings confirm a fundamental belief throughout ancient Mesoamerica in inherent cycles of sacrifice, death, and ritual rebirth, which may be related to the seemingly contradictory role of the Principal Bird Deity as both victim and god” (emphasis added, Guernsey 2006:114).

Son of God

While much about the Principal Bird Deity and the voladores does not appear to fit doctrine or theology found in The Book of Mormon, the very core elements are present. God in the heavens becomes human in the person of Jesus Christ who brings us abundant life (riches and food and healing). He is creator and the eternal sacrificial victim who was crucified (on a scaffold/cross) and raised from the dead.

Lehi, in blessing his son Jacob, tells him (and us) that the holy Messiah, “offereth himself a sacrifice for sin,

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Los Voladores (cont. from page 3)

to answer the ends of the law . . . the holy Messiah who layeth down his life according to the flesh, and taketh it again by the power of the Spirit, that he may bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, being the first that should rise" (2 Nephi 1: 71-76).

Later Jacob writes, "We knew of Christ, and we had a hope of his glory, many hundred years before his coming..." (Jacob 3:4; see also Jacob 2:13-18). King Benjamin, whose sermon was written and sent among all the people, expressed it this way, "the Lord Omnipotent who reigneth, who was, and is from all eternity to all eternity, shall come down from heaven, among the children of men, and shall dwell in a tabernacle of clay" (Mosiah 1:96). He continues, "And he shall be called Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things, from the beginning..." (Mosiah 1:102). Further he tells the people that he will be scourged, crucified, and raised from the dead.

When Alma explains belief in Christ to the Zoramites, he reminds them of the "type" that Moses raised in the wilderness, the brazen serpent on a pole (Numbers 21:8-9; 1 Nephi 5:134; Helaman 3:47). "Begin to believe in the Son of God, that he will come to redeem his people, and that he shall suffer and die to atone for their sins; And that he shall rise again from the dead, which shall bring to pass the resurrection" (Alma 16:196-197). Amulek continued teaching the Zoramites after Alma finished that the "great and last sacrifice will be the Son of God, infinite and eternal" (Alma 16:210-215), and that after this sacrifice the Law of Moses would be fulfilled.

Jesus was a creator god (Itzamnaaj) and like the Principal Bird Deity, both "victim and god." He came down to Earth, was scourged and sacrificed and resurrected (Maize God).

With Stuart's additional insight into the Principal Bird Deity and its relation to the voladores, it appears that the meaning of the ancient flight of the voladores enacts the descent of the Principal Bird Deity, or Son of God. Over the years, however, the ritual has changed and varied and later lost much of its former meaning. Since the Conquest, the Spanish priests would not allow the associated scaffold and arrow sacrifice, yet they could not completely squelch the reenactment, and the flight of the voladores remains a core ritual of the Totonacs. And a spectacular tourist attraction.

For believers in The Book of Mormon, the ritual recalls us to remember the "descent" of the Son of God to Earth, his willingly giving himself as an infinite eternal sacrifice that brought about the resurrection of the dead that we in turn may also be resurrected and have eternal life.

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The famous Mexican painter Diego Rivera was so enamored with the performance that he incorporated the scene in one of his murals at the presidential palace in Mexico City.

GLYPH *Quotes* by Clyde W. Noren —

Impart of your substance to the poor —Mosiah 2:43

Are you your brother's keeper?

Cain's words, "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen. 5:19 I.V.) in reply to God's question of the whereabouts of his brother Abel brought about a deeper meaning of man's relationship with his fellow man. The question has evoked a positive meaning for man's responsibility of caring for his bothers and sisters. Each person's spirit was created in the beginning as a part of God's family and within that spirit was created a concern for others.

God's stewardship plan of caring one for another commenced when he created Adam's help meet Eve. Logically, it would seem that God would have one absolute unchangeable stewardship plan for mankind, but man was allowed his agency. "Nevertheless, thou mayest choose for thyself, for it is given unto thee" (Gen. 2:21 I.V.). Agency, thus affects man's stewardship decision.

God gave man dominion over the fish of the sea, the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moved upon the earth (Gen. 1:30 I.V.). This dominion also included every plant growth that produced grain and fruit for the sustaining of life for man's welfare.

Jesus said, however, "That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God" (Luke 4:4). This statement by Jesus implies that the stewardship of man's living is not just indulging in food alone. Jesus is implying that man is to live by the word of God as revealed in His commandments, and we are entrusted to follow these instructions.


An example of following such commandments is found in Jesus' advice to the rich young ruler to sell all that he had and give such to the poor and follow Him. The rich young ruler ignored Jesus' counsel, but the counsel illustrates the principle of the stewardship of caring for the needs of others, particularly the unfortunate ones.

The Book of Mormon adds more light upon the meaning of total stewardship where King Benjamin told his people, "I would that you should impart of your substance to the poor, every man according to that he has, such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick, and administering to their relief, both spiritually and temporally according to their wants" (Mosiah 2:43). King Benjamin's sermon adds another dimension than physical—caring for our brothers and sisters with total commitment of helping them in spiritual matters.

Latter-day revelation in the Doctrine and Covenants tells us to warn our neighbors of the perils of the time in which we now live (D.C. 85:22a). This warning stresses dependence upon the word of God.

The challenge for mankind today is to become zealous about being our brothers' keeper in all phases of their lives, showing them the way to enhance their lives with compassion for others. This is God's commandment, **we are our brother's keeper.**





GLYPH *Notes* is published bimonthly by Pre-Columbian Studies Institute (PSI), a nonprofit research and education organization and is distributed free to members of PSI.

Membership & Annual Subscription to newsletter is \$15.
 Send to: Pre-Columbian Studies Institute
 P.O. Box 477, Independence, MO 64051

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Each person's spirit was created in the beginning as a part of God's family and within that spirit was created a concern for others. Are you your brother's keeper?

PSI Members Attend Conferences

On October 18, 2008, Shirley Heater, also of Quetzal Archaeology Center, attended the annual Book of Mormon Archaeological Forum (BMAF) Conference in Salt Lake City. The featured speaker, Donald J. Parry, Professor of Hebrew Studies at BYU and member of the International Team of Translators of the Dead Sea Scrolls (DDS) since 1994, presented "Isaiah's Poetic Parallels in the Book of Mormon." As a translator of the Isaiah scroll, his intimate knowledge of the Isaiah Hebrew parallel structure provided astounding comparisons with Isaiah in The Book of Mormon. Of particular note was new material confirming that The Book of Mormon Isaiah contains missing lines (not in the KJV nor DDS). Of 20 examples which filled in missing parts, one in particular appears in an edition pre-dating the KJV, evidence to the accuracy of the translation by Joseph Smith as well as evidence that he did not use the KJV as a source.

V. Garth Norman's presentation, "Middle Eastern Design Structure in Mesoamerica," related his discovery of two measuring systems utilized at Izapa, which he later identified as the Royal Babylonian Cubit (49.5 cm) and the Royal Egyptian Cubit (52.5 cm). This initial discovery has been followed by years of accumulating measurements throughout Mesoamerica (found to be used by both the Olmec and the Maya) as well as other locations throughout the world, including Israel. Geometric applications of the square, circle, and triangle have also been documented, attesting to a knowledge and application of standard measures and design tools, with profound implications. This material was also recently presented at a transoceanic conference in Nova Scotia where "Mr. Cubit's" hard data received "slam dunk" accolades.


Other presenters included Stephen L. Carr, Diane Worth, Richard Hauck, and F. David Lee. In addition to the all-day conference, Shirley visited with V. Garth and Cheryl Norman and Kirk and Shannon Magalby, and spent the 20th at a BYU meeting with John Sorenson, Donald Parry, John E. Clark, Fred Nelson, Royal Skousen, and Susan Easton Black. Shirley will publish more detailed reports of ongoing research

projects in Quetzal Codex to be launched in early 2009. Her Book of Mormon research is also expanding with the move of the library and files of Zarahemla Research Foundation (Raymond Treat) to her office. She may be contacted at PO Box 266, Oak Grove, MO 64075 or srheater@earthlink.net.

Also on October 18th, Lyle and Sherrie Smith attended the third symposium sponsored by the New World Archaeology Council (not to be confused with the New World Archaeology Foundation) held at the marvelous Beckman Center owned and operated by the National Academies at Irvine, California. Eight pre-eminent scholars presented sessions relating to this year's theme "Mesoamerican Mythologies."

Among the presenters was archaeologist Michael Coe, author of several books including *The Maya, Mexico, Breaking the Maya Code, The Maya Scribe*, and others. He explored reasons why he now believes that the site of Izapa is truly Maya and not Mixe-Zoquean as most scholars have thought, including himself. Leading Maya epigrapher David Stuart stimulated thought by his work on what is called the Principal Bird Deity or PBD. (See p. 1 in this issue for more about the PBD.)

Mexican archaeologist Leonard López Luján with the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH) shared the newest discoveries in Mexico City at the Aztec Great Temple just behind the cathedral in Mexico City. While the Aztec peoples lived a long time after the timeframe of The Book of Mormon, the presentation and information about how they discovered the monolith depicting an Aztec earth goddess, the largest Aztec sculpture known to date, was fascinating. Karl Taube, Wendy Ashmore, and John Pohl also gave presentations.

And on the same date, October 18th, Don and Pat Beebe gave a presentation, "Righteousness and Truth Will Sweep the Earth as a Flood," at the Annual Fall Women's Retreat sponsored by the Restoration Women's Council of the Conference of Restoration Elders. Using the Bible, so non-members of the church could relate to the evidences, they shared with the 85 attendees about recent archaeological developments concerning Christ in America. 

New material confirms that The Book of Mormon Isaiah contains missing lines not in the KJV, evidence to the accuracy of the translation by Joseph Smith.

JOY *Line* By Joy Muir

Merisa was born and raised in the Catholic Church. She always had a deep desire to know what it was that Jesus said. She loved reading the Bible, and she enjoyed attending mass every day. Eventually she met Steve Mapes, an American, stationed on Guam where she lived.

Steve was a member of the RLDS Church, and after they began dating, he presented her with a Book of Mormon, which she promptly placed in a dresser drawer without looking at it.


They married and moved to Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan. Steve's sister began to ask her a lot of religious questions, and finally she decided to read that book she earlier had placed in the dresser drawer. As she read The Book of Mormon, she was awestruck by the simplicity of the message and how much easier it was to understand than the Bible. As she read it through, she was blessed to receive more light and wisdom. She soon found she had an even richer appreciation

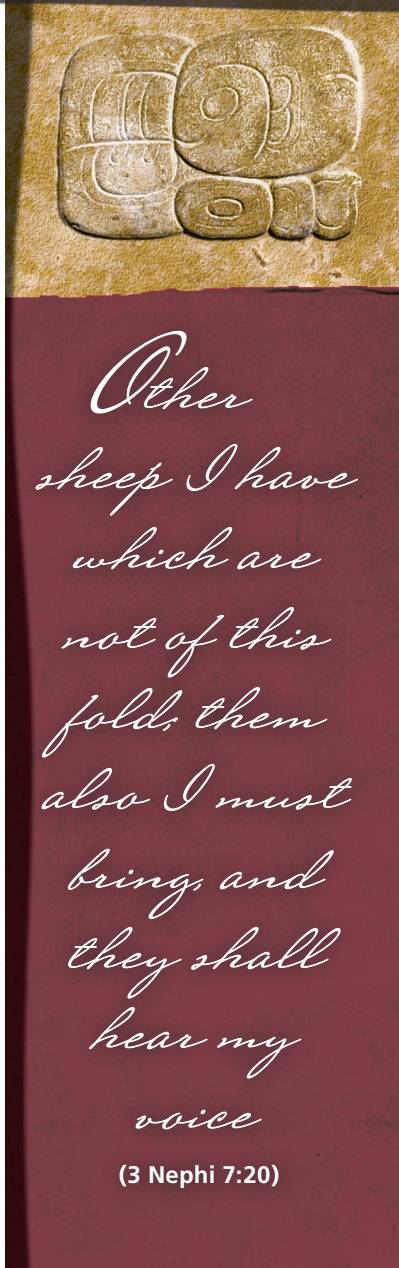
for the words of Jesus as she absorbed every word, just like a sponge.

Because of her complete acceptance of this special book and the incredible experiences Joseph Smith had because of the plates, she was able to know that he was a true prophet. She had no doubts and she joined the church.

Merisa's favorite scripture is:

And, verily, I say to you that ye are they of whom I said, Other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice, and there shall be one fold and one shepherd (3 Nephi 7:20).

The Mapes moved to the Center Place last January and attend Missionary Restoration Branch, where Steve serves as a priest. They have two children and five grandchildren. 



GLYPH *Clips*

Oldest Hebrew Writing Discovered

Archaeologists working at the Isareli site of Hirbet Qeiyafa, discovered a pottery shard with five lines of text written in what is called proto-Canaanite characters. Although the Israelites were not the only ones using the proto-Canaanite characters, Yossi Garfinkel, the Israeli archaeologist leading the excavations, "based his identification on a three-letter verb from the inscription meaning "to do," a word he said existed only in Hebrew." This provides "strong evidence that the ancient Israelites were literate and could chronicle events centuries before the Bible was written. This could suggest that some of the Bible's accounts were based on written records as well as oral traditions — adding credence to arguments that the Biblical account of history is more than myth."

Carbon-14 analysis of olive pits where the shard was found are dating to 1000 to 900 B.C., about "the same time as the Biblical golden age of King David's rule in Jerusalem." The site of Hirbet Qeiyafa overlooks the Elah Valley, the place where David slew Goliath. (The Associated Press, "Archaeologist Says He Found Oldest Hebrew Writing," by Mattie Friedman, October 30, 2008, and other various online sources. Read more at http://www.examiner.com/a-1664698~Archaeologist_says_he_found_oldest_Hebrew_writing.html or at <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/27455148/> to name a few of the online sources.)

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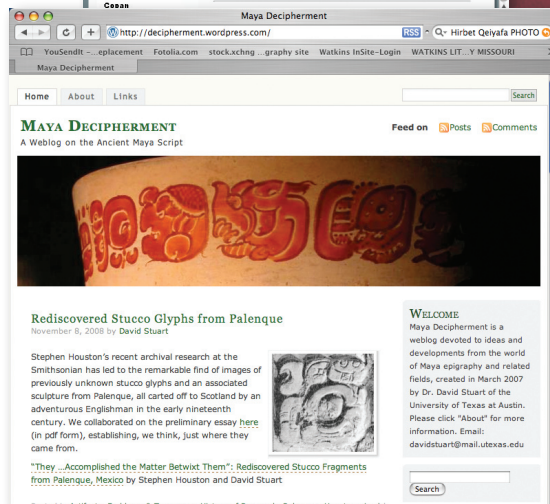
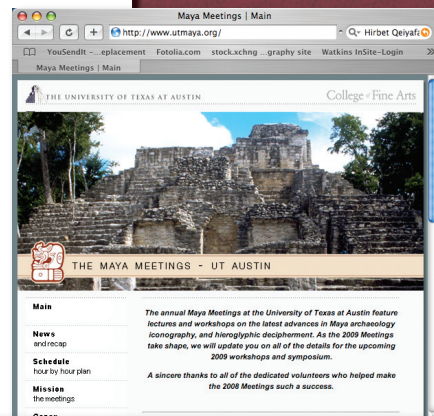
Missouri Picture Cave

A cave on private property about an hour from Columbia, Missouri, has paintings on the walls that “depict cultural beliefs of more than a thousand years ago, and possibly represent the earliest account of the Mississippian Period.” The archaeologist who has investigated the drawings for years believes “the paintings showed evidence of American Indians of many tribes converging for religious purposes in what is now Missouri.” He believes they are equal to the Cahokia Mounds in Illinois and that the drawings in Picture Cave were made by the same people who constructed the Cahokia site. (*The Kansas City Star*, “Cave Walls Present Prehistory Mystery,” September 2, 2008, page B4.)




Maya Meetings in Austin February 23- March 1, 2009

The topic this year, *History and Politics of the Snake Kingdom*, highlights discoveries and decipherments at Calakmul and sites within its large geopolitical sphere. Simon Martin will co-host with David Stuart. The venue for this workshop will be the new AT&T conference center at the University of Texas-Austin. The long workshop will precede the weekend symposium that includes invited scholars. Look for details to be posted on www.utmaya.org.



Maya Decipherment: A Weblog on the Ancient Maya Script

Maya Decipherment is a weblog devoted to ideas and developments from the world of Maya epigraphy and related fields, created in March 2007 by Dr. David Stuart of the University of Texas at Austin. <http://decipherment.wordpress.com/> Watch here for updates about decipherment of the hieroglyphs and also information about the upcoming Maya Meetings in February. 

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