

## GLYPH

Notes

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## Maya Creation Texts Parallel the Holy Scriptures

By Sherrie Kline Smith

*Author's Note: This article updates "Maya Creation Texts" (Smith 1998) and lectures presented around the Independence area.*

## CREATION

*All cultures of the world have a creation story—something that tells how the world came to be. Ours is found in the Holy Scriptures and The Book of Mormon. The Maya creation story is found not only in legends among the present-day Maya, but in sixteenth-century texts written at the time of the Conquest, such as the Popol Vuh, the Books of Chilam Balam, and the Annals of the Cakchiquels. Maya priests or scribes wrote these creation accounts in their own languages using*

*the alphabet taught them by the Spaniards. Because the accounts bore such a strong resemblance to that found in Genesis, the authenticity of these documents has been questioned. Scholars felt that the Catholic priests who brought Christianity to the New World had influenced the Maya scribes.*

*Within the last 30 years great strides have been made deciphering the Maya hieroglyphs. Presently, scholars claim they can interpret about 90 percent of the inscriptions. Decipherment brought understanding that the creation story found in the *Popol Vuh* and other Conquest-period Maya documents had *not* been influenced by Christianity. The inscriptions—written a thousand years earlier— *Cont. on Page 2**

*Stela C at Quirigua, Guatemala has become famous because its hieroglyphic inscription gives one of the most detailed descriptions of the first moments of creation according to Maya beliefs.*



Don Beebe

Figure 1 –  
Quirigua  
Stela C, East  
Side



Glenn Scott

### Maya Creation Texts (Cont. from page 1)

corroborate the documents. The Maya sixteenth-century creation accounts and the seventh to eighth-century inscriptions tell the same story.

Although I believe decadent descendants of Book of Mormon peoples wrote the majority of the inscriptions around the fifth to eighth century AD, parallels with the original Genesis version shine through. In fact, the creation account in the Maya hieroglyphs matches the Inspired Version of the Holy Scriptures more closely than the King James.

One of these inscriptions is at Quirigua, Guatemala, a site well-known for its many stelae—some of which are the tallest in the Maya area. Discovered by American lawyer and writer John Lloyd Stevens and British artist Frederick Catherwood in the 1840s, Quirigua was one of the first Maya cities to be explored in a systematic scientific fashion. All the stelae at this site have carved portraits and hieroglyphic inscriptions. Stela C has become famous because its hieroglyphic inscription gives one of the most detailed descriptions of the first moments of creation according to Maya beliefs.

All four sides are carved: The north and south sides bear portraits of the ruler who caused the stela to be erected at approximately 775 AD. The west side gives what was at the time a current account of the happenings of this king. The east side has the creation text.

Not only is this inscription an important Maya account of creation, but an excellent example of chiasmus. Chiasmus is a literary style prevalent throughout ancient Middle Eastern writings, especially Hebrew. It's found as well in the Bible, The Book of Mormon, and many Maya hieroglyphic inscriptions and present-day Maya storytelling and prayers. See *Chiasmus in Antiquity* for more details (Welch 1999).

Chiasmus simply stated is writing a phrase and then repeating it in reverse order. Many times described as a mirror image, chiasmus can consist of only two lines or be com-

plicated, involving whole chapters. Here is a simple example.

The **Jews** shall have the words of the **Nephites**;  
And the **Nephites** shall have the words of the **Jews**.  
(2 Nephi 12:72 [29:13])

In the April 1995 Kathryn Jossierand and her husband Nicholas Hopkins taught a workshop at the University of Pennsylvania called "Poetry of the Inscriptions." They illustrated how many of the Maya inscriptions use a couplet and/or chiasmic structure. In fact, Jossierand claimed *almost all* the inscriptions use this format. One of the main examples used in the class was Stela C from Quirigua (Smith 1995 & 1998).

### OVERVIEW OF STELA C'S EAST SIDE (see Figure 1)

The first seven glyphs are calendar glyphs that equate to August 13, 3114 B.C. (only the last two date glyphs, 4 Ahau, 8 Kumku, are shown in Figure 1). This is the Maya day of creation of the present era. Immediately following the date is a block of glyphs that together mean "to speak and the image appears or is made manifest." Creation came about by the power of the spoken word. Next, three stones are set up/planted/laid by certain "gods," implying the laying of a foundation. The first stone laid was for the jaguar throne in *heaven*, the middle one for the serpent throne on *earth*, and the third was the *waters or sea* throne.

After the three stones are set up or laid, the text says this action or creating took place at lying down or closed sky, the first three-stone place or in other words heaven. The inscription ends with a short version of the date, a mirror image of the dates at the beginning. And the last two glyphs tell that the Raised-up Sky Lord directed or caused all this action to take place. The current thinking suggests that Raised-up Sky Lord is called this because he was responsible for raising the sky from the earth. This could also mean that he was a raised-up or risen lord.

Figure 2

On August 13, 3114 BC, creation was made manifest by the power of the spoken word.

Three stones were set up/planted/laid.

It came to pass that the Paddler Gods laid the foundation for the jaguar throne in Heaven.

It came to pass that Ek' Nah Yax laid the foundation for the serpent throne on Earth.

And it came to pass that Itzamna laid the foundation for the Waters throne.

It came to pass at lying-down sky, the first three-stone place.

The Raise-up-Sky Lord oversaw creation when 13 baktuns ended.

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We'll come back to this later.

See Figure 2 for my interpretation of Stela C's inscription based on the translation given by the epigraphic scholars. I keep tweaking it to reflect a "scriptural" tone. I use "laid the foundation" in place of the more literal translation of a "stone was set up or planted."

### THREE PARALLELS WITH THE GENESIS ACCOUNT

#### 1. Creation occurred by the power of the spoken word.

This understanding from the inscriptions is what caused prominent Maya scholars to realize that the ancient Maya thought of creation in the same way as those from the Conquest period. The *Popol Vuh*, an account of creation by the Quiché Maya written in the sixteenth century, explains creation happened by speaking the word. "Then the earth was created by them. Merely their word brought about the creation of it. In order to create the earth, they said, 'Earth,' and immediately it was created ..." (Christenson 2003:71).

The Nephites and Lamanites had the Brass Plates with the five books of Moses that included the creation account found in the Inspired

Version (1 Nephi 1:159 [5:11]). "And this I did by the word of my power; and it was done as I spake" (Genesis 1:8, 15, IV only). The King James Version does not have this added light, although it repeatedly uses the phrase "God said."

Jacob, a Book of Mormon prophet, teaches the people in another beautiful and simple example of chiasmus (Jacob 3: 12-13 [4:9]) that:

- A By **the power of his word,**
- B man came upon the face of the **earth;**
- B1 which **earth** was created
- A1 by **the power of his word.**

The eighth-century Stela C text and the sixteenth-century *Popol Vuh*, written by what I believe are descendants of people who had the Brass Plates and knowledge of creation as recorded in The Book of Mormon, agree creation took place by simply speaking the word.

#### 2. Three\* stones are set up/laid for the three thrones in three domains.

This is the main message and center of the chiasm. Basically what is being conveyed here is the laying of a foundation. The Scriptures use this terminology frequently. "Therefore

thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a **stone...**" (Isaiah 28:16, emphasis added). See also Jacob 3:26 [4:15]. This stone refers to Christ, "a sure foundation," but the metaphor is the laying of a stone.

The three stones are laid (set) for the three thrones which are created at the "first three-stone place" (heaven). On the Quirigua Stela C "each of the stones that was set is associated with one of the three domains of the universe: sky (*chan*); earth (*kab*); and water (*nab ha*)" (Harris and Stearns 1997:157). And according to the Maya writer of the *Popol Vuh*, "The **sky** was set apart. The **earth** also was set apart within the **waters**" (Christenson 2003:73, emphasis added).

Are both Maya texts a rendition of the first verses of Genesis 1:3, 5 IV? "In the beginning I created the **heaven**, and the **earth** ... and my Spirit moved upon the face of the **waters** ... ." Later in Exodus, when the Lord gave the Ten Commandments, it's recorded, "For in six days the Lord made **heaven** and **earth**, the **sea** ..." (Exodus 20:11, emphasis added; see also Exodus 20:4). The Book of Mormon prophet Abinadi repeats the Ten Cont. on Page 4

\*According to Bullinger in *Number in Scripture* (online at [http://philologos.org/\\_\\_\\_eb-nis/](http://philologos.org/___eb-nis/)), three denotes divine. Some examples we know are: trinity (God, Jesus, Holy Ghost); three glories (celestial, teletial, terrestrial); three crosses (Jesus and the two malefactors); three books of Scriptures (Bible, The Book of Mormon, and the Doctrine and Covenants); three hours of darkness at the crucifixion; Jesus rose from the dead on the third day; Jonah three days in the belly of the fish. There are many others. The number three also held great significance for the Maya. Creation happened at the first three-stone place. The Maya arrange three hearth stones in their homes in such a way to match the three stars in the Orion constellation replicating the first three-stone place. Triadic architecture, most prevalent in the Late Pre-Classic (350 BC—AD 250), had a central dominant structure flanked by two smaller buildings facing each other.

Figure 2

	Maya Creation Inscriptions and Texts	Inspired Version of Holy Scriptures	The Book of Mormon
1.	Creation was made manifest by the power of the spoken word.	“By the word of my power: and it was done as I spake.”	“By the power of his word, man came upon the face of the earth; which earth was created by the power of his word.”
2.	Three thrones: heaven, earth, sea.	God created heaven, earth, and the sea.	The Lord made heaven and earth, and the sea.
3.	Created by Raised-up Sky Lord/ God GI/Quetzalcoatl with others.	“By mine Only Begotten, I created these things.” Created by Jesus Christ, the Risen Lord, with God.	God and Jesus Christ created the heavens and the earth, and all things that in them are.

*Maya Creation Texts (Cont. from page 3)*

Commandments which includes the same phrase as found in Exodus: “For in six days the Lord made **heaven** and **earth**, and the **sea** and all that in them is ...” (Mosiah 7:118 [13:19], emphasis added).

In the Quirigua text thrones are being created in these three domains. What do the Scriptures say about thrones? “Thus saith the Lord, the heaven is my throne ...” (Isaiah 66:1). Lehi exclaims, “Thy throne is high in the heavens ...” (1 Nephi 1:13). “He ruleth high in the heavens, for it is his throne ...” (1 Nephi 5:130). Jacob, Alma, and Moroni also talk about the throne of God. See also Colossians 1:16 and Matthew 5:38, which is also found in 3 Nephi 5:82 [12:36]. A scripture search for throne proves enlightening in the context of this Maya creation text on Stela C.

**3. Raised-up Sky Lord with others causes creation to occur.**

The last correlation is who does the creating. On Quirigua Stela C the “Raised-up Sky Lord” coordinates or causes creation to take place. In current anthropological literature, the Raised-up Sky Lord has other names like Hun-Yal-Ne, Maize God, First Father, and what is referred to as God GI who may be the same as Quetzalcoatl (Smith 2006). *This god is known as a reborn or resurrected god.*

This sounds remarkably like Jesus Christ. Do we not call Jesus

Christ, the resurrected Lord, the “Risen Savior,” or as the Mayas call him, the Raised-up Sky Lord? Jesus Christ appeared to the people of The Book of Mormon after he had been *raised up from the dead*. “It had been prophesied among them that Christ should shew himself unto them after his ascension into heaven” (3 Nephi 5:13 [11:12]). It’s only natural that Maya (Nephite/Lamanite/Mulekite) accounts would refer to the Christ as the Raised-up Sky (Risen) Lord.

King Benjamin tells his people that the angel told him concerning the coming of Christ. “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 [3:8], emphasis added). King Benjamin in the same proclamation urges his people to “Believe in God ... **he created all things both in heaven and in earth**” (Mosiah 2:13 [4:9], emphasis added). Some years later, Christ fulfills that angel message to King Benjamin when he appears to the Nephites. He informs them, “Behold I am Jesus Christ, the son of God. **I created the heavens and the earth**, and all things that in them are (3 Nephi 4:44 [9:15], emphasis added).

The Quirigua rendition of creation exemplifies other Scriptures and bears witness that the Maya had these Scriptures. “The **heavens he made**; the **earth** is his foot-

stool, and the **foundation** thereof is his; **behold he laid it ...**” (Genesis 6:46, emphasis added). Nephi echoes Psalm 102:25 in his writings. “**Mine hand** hath also **laid the foundation of the earth**, and my right hand hath spanned the **heavens**” (1 Nephi 6:20 [20:13] and Isaiah 48:13, emphasis added). “That **I may plant the heavens**, and **lay the foundations of the earth**” (Isaiah 51:16 and 2 Nephi 5:99 [8:16], emphasis added).

Who created the world is important. God and Christ want us to know that they are responsible for creation. Descendants of the Nephites/Lamanites/Mulekites knew, even years after the close of the account related in The Book of Mormon, that Jesus Christ, the Risen Lord or Raised-up Sky Lord was the God of creation.

**INSPIRED VERSION VERSUS KING JAMES**

These three parallels between the Maya creation account with those of the Bible and The Book of Mormon are truly marvelous, but of even more significance is that they match the Inspired Version more than the King James Version.

As mentioned above, the Inspired Version makes clear that creation, the laying of the foundation of the world, happened by the power of the spoken word. The King James Version is not as clear about this.

Stela C’s hieroglyphic inscription

indicates that Raised-up Sky Lord had help from others—the twin Paddler Gods, Ek' Nah Yax, and Itzamna. The *Popol Vuh* says it this way, “And there is also the Heart of Sky. This is the name of the god ... . He spoke with the Sovereign Plumed Serpent ... they agreed with each other” (Tedlock 1996:65). Sovereign Plumed Serpent (Quetzalcoatl, Q'ukumatz, or Kukulcan in various Mesoamerican languages) helped create the world and mankind. Maya creation accounts indicate creation was a joint effort.

In the Inspired Version (Genesis 1:2), God told Moses, “By mine Only Begotten I created these things.” In verse 27 God says, “And I God, said unto mine Only Begotten, which was with me from the beginning, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and it was so.” *These references are missing from the King James and other versions.* There is a verse, however, that implies plural entities doing the creating. In Genesis 1:26 (KJV), we read, “And God said, ‘Let **us** make man in **our** image, after **our** likeness’” (emphasis added). It’s generally understood that God is referring to Jesus, but the language or translation in the King James Version does not make it clear.

**CONCLUSION**

In the mouths of two or three witnesses the truth will be established. The Maya hieroglyphic inscriptions from the sixth and seventh centuries along with Maya sixteenth-century documents agree with the Inspired Version of the Bible and The Book of Mormon. They give the same account that Jesus Christ, the Risen Lord, with God, created heaven, earth, seas, and

all things. Joseph Smith could not have known when he translated The Book of Mormon in 1829 that the same creation details would be found in Maya inscriptions and documents.

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# GLYPH *Quotes*

*“As I partook of the fruit thereof, it filled my soul with exceeding great joy...”*

—1 Nephi 2:52 [8:12]

By Mindy Mulheron

I’ve always appreciated imagery in the Scriptures. I am a visual learner, and I’m thankful the Lord included metaphors and stories in the Scriptures so that I could more fully understand what he was saying. One of my favorite images is any reference to fruit.

I remember learning about the fruits of the spirit in Miss Larson’s first-grade class at Oak Valley School. There was a construction-paper fruit basket on the wall, and all of the fruits inside were labeled. (I still remember that charity was on the cherries, and the banana represented long suffering.) I adored Miss Larson, and still do, and am thankful for the lessons she taught me.

This puts me in mind of another type of fruit reference: the fruits of labor. My dad, to me, is the epitome of someone who ministers with the fruits of his labor. He truly enjoys helping others. He comes by it honestly—my Grandma Hazel, his mother, was someone who cared deeply about others. She even always made two of everything, just so she could make sure she gave the best one away. My Grandpa Gus, Dad’s dad, is deeply respected by my father. And although I’ve never known him in this life, I know he was a great man from my father’s stories. I am excited to meet my grandfather in paradise someday and be ministered to by his example and instruction.


Which leads me to another kind of

fruit—the kind that ensures eternal life. In Lehi’s vision, the Tree of Life is filled with delicious, white, sweet fruit. Lehi says,

And as I partook of the fruit thereof, it filled my soul with exceedingly great joy; Wherefore I began to be desirous that my family should partake of it also; for I knew that it was desirable above all other fruit (1 Nephi 2:52 [8:12]).

Lehi beckoned his family to partake of the fruit, that they might experience the same blessing. He goes on to say that he also saw numberless others and wished that they also might partake of the fruit. Unfortunately, many released their hold on the Rod of Iron and were lost in the mists of darkness—even some of his own family members.

During this holiday season, let’s take a moment to reflect on how much the Lord loves us. God beckons us, like Lehi, to come and partake of the fruit. If we have become lost in the darkness, cry out to God and he will guide us back. If we are still holding on, remain strong. It may seem that the mist grows denser and denser, but our reward is sure if we’ll only keep pressing forward. We all know that it’s always darkest right before the dawn.

God bless you as you seek to serve him. It is my prayer that we might retain our steadfast grip on the Rod of Iron. Never let go of the promises God has for us! 

*During this holiday season, let’s take a moment to reflect on how much the Lord loves us. God beckons us, like Lehi, to come and partake of the fruit.*

Sallie Presler bargains for a cornhusk doll with one of many young vendors at Uaxactun.



# GLYPH *Clips*

By Sherrie Kline Smith

## Maya Children at Uaxactun Learn to Read Hieroglyphs

In the March/April 2010 issue of *glyph notes*, the feature story was about the Friends of the Maya and the enthusiasm shown by the Maya for learning about their past and how to read the hieroglyphs. An update was posted on the Internet November 9 about classes being held at the archaeological site and village of Uaxactun (now being rendered as Waxactuun [wash-ak-tune]).

“During the 2010 season, from March to April, workshops were given to 43 students, ranging from Basic 1st. to Basic 3rd. levels. Archaeologists from the Uaxactun Project and some

Aaron Presler

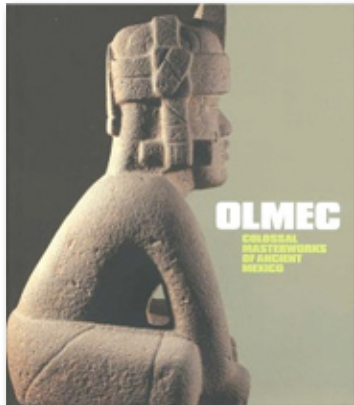
local tourist guides also attended talks concerning Maya epigraphy and culture” (<http://friendsofthemaya.wordpress.com/>) accessed 17 November 2010). This effort introduced the village children to the knowledge of ancient Maya writing as well as cultural aspects like the story of creation according to the *Popol Vuh*.

PSI tour friends who traveled with us in 2005 to Guatemala will surely remember the children at Uaxactun. As soon as a tourist bus arrives in this small community within the midst of the ruins, the children descend like locusts, eager to sell their handmade cornhusk dolls. One of the most memorable moments during our 2005 visit occurred, though when we stopped for our traditional hymn sing. The children, who had faithfully followed us all over the site, became very quiet and a wonderful spirit carried by the hymn reached into their hearts. Aaron Presler poignantly tells about this in the March/April 2005 *glyph notes*, “As we began to sing *The Old, Old Path*, the children became attentive and fell silent. With each verse, that sweet spirit seemed to amplify, growing stronger note by note. As the song came to a sweet close, the children broke into applause. I have to say it was the most appreciative audience we’ve ever had at one of our ‘site songs’” (p. 3).

I recommend a re-reading of Aaron’s article in light of the news that these children are learning about ancient Maya writing and beliefs. If you do not have a copy of this issue, write us at PSI, P.O. Box 477, Independence, Missouri 64501, and we will send you a copy of the article.

## OLMEC EXHIBITION “Olmec: Colossal Masterworks of Ancient Mexico”

A symposium, jointly sponsored by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the New World Archaeology Council in conjunction with the Archaeological Institute of America-Orange County Society, was held in Los Angeles, October 22 and 23, 2010. Lyle and Sherrie Smith attended the symposium and took photos of many of the Olmec artifacts in the exhibit. A few are shown here.



A book about the exhibit with magnificent photographs accompanied with explanatory text is available from <http://www.amazon.com>.

(Photo at right) At El Manati, in the heart of Olmec territory, large offering deposits included, among the 40 “magnificently worked stone axes,” seven rubber balls of different sizes. Fifteen rubber balls have been found to date. On May 24, 2010, MIT posted an article about their research into Mesoamerican rubber products reporting that the people had perfected a system of chemical processing of rubber that produced different types of materials like sandals, rubber balls, and adhesives. The full article was also printed in *The Witness*, Summer 2010.

## CHOCOLATE from *Archaeology Magazine* November/December 2010

Two articles in this issue might be of interest to *glyph notes* readers. “The Power of Chocolate: Tracking the Chemical Signature of Cacao Across Mesoamerica” gives a history of the evidence and development of chocolate as revealed by examining pottery sherds from sites not only in Mesoamerica but also the U.S. Southwest. The Hershey Company has been performing the tests on pottery since the discovery of the famous “chocolate pot” with the screw-top lid from Rio Azul in 1984 (pictured at right).

The article makes mention that “Early Preclassic people were likely fermenting the sweet, creamy pulp of cacao pods in order to make an alcoholic drink similar to the chicha beer some Latin American people still make from maize and that contains about 5 percent alcohol” (p. 24). The making of wine is recorded in The Book of Mormon and has brought criticism because opponents of the book claim grape culture did not

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(Photo at left) This fish effigy vessel (1200-600 BC) was found in a burial at Tlatilco. Archaeologists found over 500 burials containing rich offerings in the Olmec style. Tlatilco, just northwest of Mexico City, is regarded as one of the most important sites in the Central Highlands during the Early and Middle Preclassic (1400-600 BC), not only for the number of objects found, but also for the beauty and quality of the objects—like this fish vessel.



Sherrie Kline Smith



Sherrie Kline Smith



Don Beebe

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*Maya Creation Texts Parallel  
the Holy Scriptures*

*“As I partook of the fruit  
thereof, it filled my soul with  
exceeding great joy ...”*

*Maya Children at Uaxactun  
Learn to Read Hieroglyphs*

*Olmec Exhibition  
“Olmec: Colossal Masterworks  
of Ancient Mexico”*

*Chocolate from Archaeology  
Magazine*

*Gold Plates with Writing*

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exist. Fermented drinks, though, can be made from many other substances besides grapes, chocolate being one of these.

## Gold Plates with Writing

The second article is “Unraveling the Etruscan Enigma.” The Etruscan civilization was basically centered in Italy, and by 700 BC had elite houses, inscribed documents, and tombs filled with gold, silver, and imported luxuries. Of interest to believers in The Book of Mormon was the discovery several years ago in Etruscan ruins of three sheets of gold covered with writing. The article has a color photo of one of these gold plates which date to between 600 and 500 BC, the time of Lehi and Nephi, who tell about writing on metal plates. A major criticism of The Book of Mormon when it was first published and for some years after was this couldn't be true because people didn't write on metal. At that time there was no evidence anywhere in the world for writing on metal plates. Since then, however, numerous examples have come to light. What makes these plates important is that they are made of gold, have writing on them, and are from the right time period.

The *Archaeology* article does not mention the six-page “book” made of gold plates held together by rings written in the Etruscan language found in Bulgaria in 2004. This was the first discovery of a book of metal plates held together with rings—much as Joseph described the plates from which he translated The Book of Mormon. The webpage about the book with rings is still available online at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/2939362.stm>. See also the March/April 2004 *glyph notes* which had photos of one of these gold plates and the book with rings.

