

## GLYPH

Notes

PRE-COLUMBIAN STUDIES INSTITUTE • SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2011 • VOLUME 18 NUMBER 5

## Why Is Mesoamerica the Site of Book of Mormon Lands? Part 1\*

By Glenn A. Scott, Jr.

*For the first 85 years after The Book of Mormon was published in 1830, the general, I might even say semi-official, opinion in the church was that the small hill in western New York state where Joseph Smith Jr. found that ancient record was the same hill so frequently mentioned in the record as Hill Cumorah. My aim is to show that it was not.*

That small hill was for 1,400 years the last repository of the plates buried by Moroni, son of Mormon, 35 years after he fled from the real Hill Cumorah in Mexico, where the horrendous battle that marked the genocide of the Nephite nation was fought.

Demonstrating their opinion, the April 1894 General Conference of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, held in Lamoni, Iowa, appointed a committee "to outline and prepare a map of Book of Mormon history—the record of the ancient inhabitants of North and South America" (Committee 1898:[3]), certainly a commendable project. Committee members were S. A. Burgess, R. Etzenhauser, William H. Kelley, F. M. Sheehy, Louise Sheldon, and William Woodhead. Their report was presented February 1, 1898. It contained a brief narrative and six maps illustrating Book of Mormon history. These were prepared by George Weston, a professional cartographer. The only problem with the

maps is that Weston followed the instructions of the committee, which of course he was required to do. However, the committee did include a caveat. "It is not claimed that the map is perfect; it approximates. It is not done by plenary inspiration" (Committee 1898:[11]). That has turned out to have been a wise addition. While those maps were never officially endorsed by the church, they did make a *Cont. on Page 2*



*Louis E. Hills (1857-1925) was born at Whitewater, Wisconsin, and died at Independence, Missouri. He served as a minister for the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and often gave lectures about his research and ideas about the geography of The Book of Mormon.*

\*It is suggested that in connection with this article that the reader review the articles "A History of Book of Mormon Geography" (*glyph notes*, May/June 2009) and "Why Book of Mormon Geography Is Important" (*glyph notes*, Nov./Dec. 2005).

*The first fatal mistake made by the committee was failing to understand and correctly interpret the many geographic references found in The Book of Mormon itself.*







*Mesoamerica? (Cont. from page 2)*

Hills compiled a detailed list of every geographical reference and term found in The Book of Mormon. From that list he tested various possible alternatives to Panama as a candidate for *the* narrow neck of land. He had recognized that the long arm of Central America contained a number of narrow places (some even proposed for a second inter-ocean canal). After testing several of these places, he came to the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. Much to his delight, all of the geographical requirements seemed to snap into place. 1) There really is a great river (Usumacinta) flowing north into a Sea North (Gulf of Mexico); 2) there really is a narrow strip of wilderness (mountains up to 12,000 feet high) running from a Sea East (Caribbean) to a Sea West (Pacific) which divides the southern highlands (Land of Lehi-Nephi) from the northern lowlands (Land of Zarahemla); 3) the land mass of Tabasco, Chiapas, Yucatan, Guatemala, Belize, and El Salvador really are nearly surrounded by water; and finally 4) there really are ruins that confirm great cities just as The Book of Mormon describes.

Now let's look at a few of the observations written by Louis Hills which led to his revolutionary revision in our understanding of the lands of The Book of Mormon.

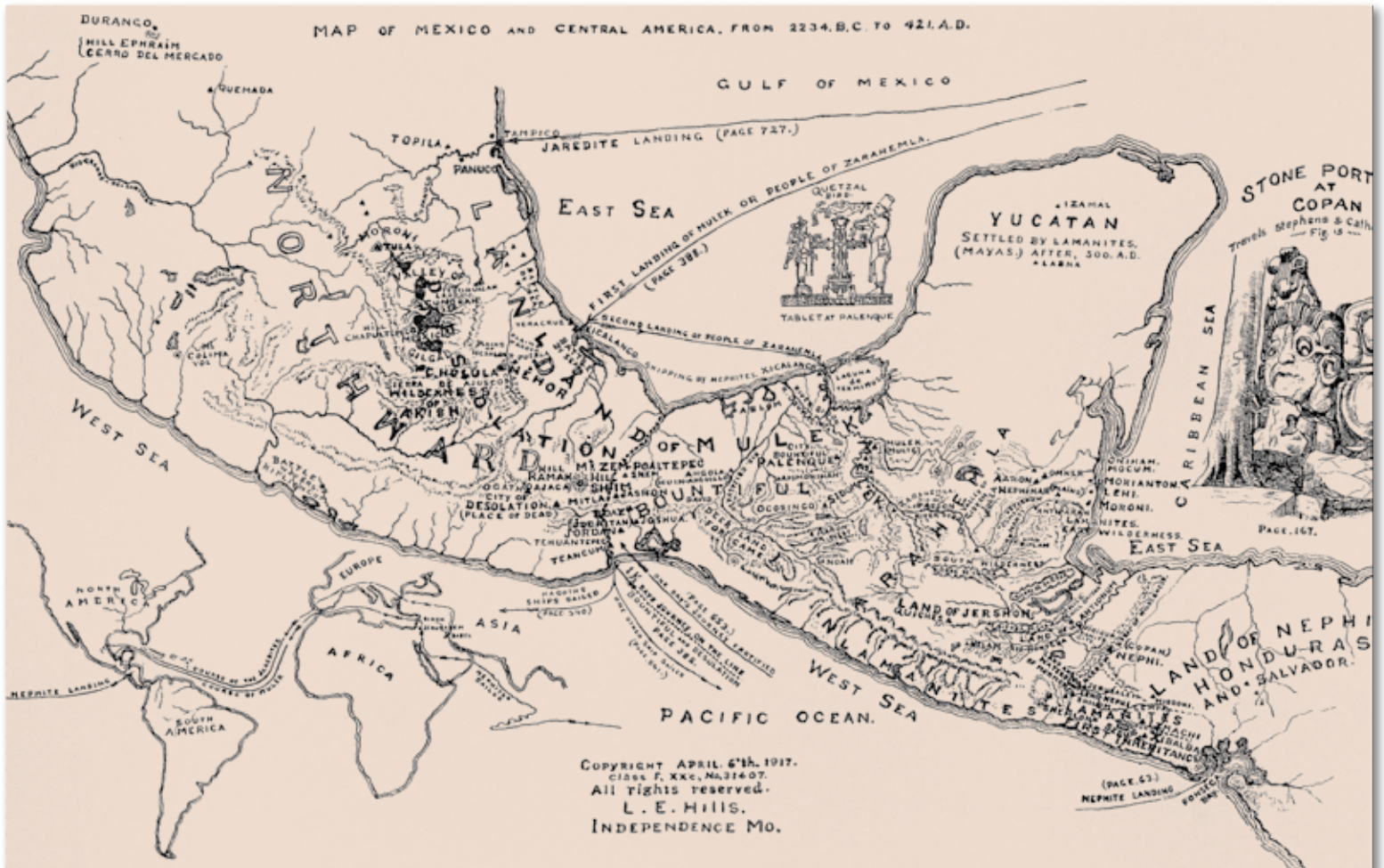
After years of teaching and defending the Book, I am convinced that the geography, taken from a close study of location as found in *the record itself*, is the very best evidence that can be furnished to authenticate the record (emphasis added; Hills 1917:[3]).

A mistake in our starting-point, in working out the geography of the Book of Mormon, would be fatal to success; and this, I am sure, has been one trouble in the past. The *record* tells of "a narrow neck of land, where the sea divides the land," "the narrow pass, which led into the land southward," etc., and I, with others, made the mistake of assuming this to be the Isthmus of Panama. By studying the following description, I discovered the mistake (emphasis added; Hills 1917:30).

He then quotes selected parts of Alma 13:75-77 [22:31-32]:

*Thus the land on the northward was called Desolation, and the land on the southward was called Bountiful. And now it was only the distance of a day and a half's journey on the line Bountiful and the land Desolation, from the*

*Cont. on Page 4*



Louis E. Hills' 1917 map of Book of Mormon lands was a revolutionary concept at that time but today is widely accepted.

*Mesoamerica?* (Cont. from page 3)

east sea to the west sea, *there being a narrow neck of land between the land northward, and the land southward* (emphasis in original; Hills 1917:30).

Hills explains that these verses indicate an isthmus between Bountiful and Desolation and also refers to an incident about Moroni sending an army to head the flight of the people of Morianton (Alma 22:33-35 [50:32-34]). He concludes:

It is about 400 miles through the Isthmus of Panama to the Gulf of Dulce, where the Archaeological Committee locates this isthmus, by the land Desolation, making the army sent by Moroni travel 400 miles through the isthmus before they come to it. This fatal mistake of the committee, to start with, accounts for the error in their maps, as a whole (Hills 1917:30).

In support of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec as the narrow neck of land, Hills wrote,

The question has been raised as to the distance across the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. Different writers disagree as to the distance, but the best authorities say it is one hundred and eighteen miles. Others make it much less... Some say this distance is too great for a man to travel in a day of twenty-four hours, and that it would require more than a day and a half to make the . . . journey... (Hills 1924:70).

Hills also noted that according to some historians:

'The northern part of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec is new land' . . . some time in the past the sea was close to the Palenque ruins.... The distance across the Isthmus, from sea to sea, was, evidently, very much less than it is now.... Southern Vera Cruz and Tabasco . . . exhibit the most luxuriant display of nature's prodigality, **of alluvial and comparatively recent formation** (emphasis in original; Hills 1924:71 and Bancroft 1882:2:90 and 4:288).

Hills added, "I did not know until the last two years [1922] that at one time *there was no Isthmus of Panama*. That came to me like a thunderbolt out of a clear sky" (emphasis added; Hills 1924:63). He tells about a book published by the Los Angeles County Museum of History, Science, and Art in 1918.

On page 23 of this book it is stated that there was no Isthmus of Panama originally.... **'The geological upheaval that brought into existence the Isthmus of Panama, and so connected the two continents, permitted invasion of North America by these southern forms [animals], which in time shared the general extinction'** (emphasis added both by Hills and Scott; Hills 1924:63-64).

This latter reference is to fossils from South America

retrieved from the Rancho La Brea tar pits.

Quoting from the ORC Journal of 1921, Hills wrote:

**'In ancient geological periods there was a natural channel here** [i.e. between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans], **but later the land rose, and left the Isthmus [of Panama] as a barrier between the oceans'** (emphasis in original; Hills 1924:64-65; see also Heater 2005:1).

Hills noted that Jacob, one of The Book of Mormon prophets, wrote, "We are upon an isle of the sea" (2 Nephi 7:35 [10:20]), and that Bancroft said that a peninsula was referred to by the Indians as an island (Hills 1924:67).

'And thus the land of Nephi and the land of Zarahemla, were nearly surrounded by water, there being a small neck of land between the land northward, and the land southward' [Alma 13:77 (22:32)].... We see that in the descriptions, as we look closely at the evidences, everything fits. The Isthmus of Tehuantepec is the narrow neck of land (Hills 1924:67).

In further support of the Mesoamerican location of Book of Mormon lands, Hills quoted a statement from the Bureau of American Ethnology: "All these [evidences] point to a region south of the Yucatan peninsula as the true center of Central American civilization.... **Long before the coming of the Spaniards, aboriginal civilization must have reached its highest point** (emphasis in original; Hills 1924:121-122).

It was not until 34 years after Louis Hills presented his revolutionary new map of Book of Mormon lands that any significant support occurred. But in 1951, Apostle Paul M. Hanson wrote and presented a scholarly paper titled "Archaeology and Geography of The Book of Mormon" at a church-sponsored convocation called "Book of Mormon Institute." Hanson was one of several prominent officials of the church, including the three presidents, a bishop, three presidents of seventy, and six apostles, one of which was Hanson, who made presentations at this institute covering many aspects of the study of The Book of Mormon. Hanson, as has been quoted above, agreed with Hills' conclusion that the events of The Book of Mormon occurred in Mesoamerica. Therefore, Hanson's inclusion in the Institute could be considered implied support of the church for this understanding.

A few statements from his outline follows (Hanson 1951:91-92).

- Location of the "narrow neck of land" of great importance as a key to the geography of the Book of Mormon.
- *The Isthmus of Tehuantepec appears to meet the requirements of the Book of Mormon* (Alma 13:76-77 [22:32]; Helaman 2:8 [3:8]) (emphasis added).
- Considering the Isthmus of Tehuantepec as the "narrow neck of land" separating the "land northward" from the "land southward," the Hill



Cumorah in New York is too far away from the final battle between the Nephites and Lamanites to have occurred.... Hill Ramah, i.e., Hill Cumorah, evidently was in Mexico, not far from the “narrow neck of land.”

The point here is not to critique Hanson’s statements, but to note the general shift away from the 1898 position from New York State to Mesoamerica.

*(To be continued in the next issue.)*

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## GLYPH *Quotes* *Now we will compare the word unto a seed. —Alma 16:152*

By Donald A. Beebe

Good seed is hope for the present generation. It was the same for past generations and will be for generations to come. Planting season for man means preparing the soil to reduce clods, weeds, and rocks to enable the seed to sprout and grow. Once the seed breaks through the ground, the soil is gently stirred to allow for oxygen and moisture to penetrate the root and ensure good health. Neglect prevents the seed from sending down deep roots. Although the care of the soil is extremely important, life is in the seed—but that seed will eventually die if not planted and nourished.

The principle of planting seed is an integral part of the Gospel. Our Lord put this principle into effect as a part of Creation. We can look to Jesus, the seed of our Lord, who demonstrated throughout his life and death the importance of nourishing the seed or word (Alma 16:152). The word seed is used extensively in the Scriptures that we might understand its purpose.

- He asks, “Is the seed yet in the barn?” It must be planted. (Haggai 2:19)
- When it falls under a clod, it rots. It must be in good soil. (Joel 1:17)
- Warns that if we don’t plant the seed, the wicked one comes and takes it away (those who received it by the wayside). (Matthew 13:18)
- Describes those who are “choked with cares, and riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no

fruit to perfection” as seed overrun with thorns. (Luke 8:14)

- Tells us that Lehi and his family took seed of every kind (seed had great value) when they left the Old World. (1 Nephi 5:14 [16:1])
- Upon arrival in the New World, they planted the seed. (1 Nephi 5:214 [18:24])
- The word is compared to a seed. Plant the seed in your heart; see if it grows (was good seed). (Alma 16:152-3 [32:28])

If these words of counsel from the Scriptures were a fake or a fraud, how utterly foolish it was of Moroni to close The Book of Mormon with the following “seed” of promise.

Behold, I would exhort you that when ye shall read these things, if it be wisdom in God that ye should read them, that ye would remember how merciful the Lord hath been unto the children of *Cont. on Page 6*

*Thank you Jesus!*  
*How awesome is that!*  
*Jesus took away all your sins when he died on the cross for you.*  
*God loves you so much that He sent his only son to die for your sins.*


**Answer to Beetzrom's Code**


*GLYPH Quotes (Cont. from page 5)*

men, from the creation of Adam, even down until the time that ye shall receive these things, and ponder it in your hearts. And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true;

And if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost; and by the power of the Holy Ghost, ye may know the truth of all things. And whatsoever thing is good, is just and true; wherefore, nothing that is good denieth the Christ, but acknowledgeth that he is. And ye may know that he is, by the power of the Holy Ghost; wherefore I would exhort you, that ye deny not the power of God; for he worketh by power, according to the faith of the children of men, the same today and tomorrow, and forever. And

again I exhort you, my brethren, that ye deny not the gifts of God, for they are many; and they come from the same God. And there are different ways that these gifts are administered; but it is the same God who worketh all in all; and they are given by the manifestations of the Spirit of God unto men, to profit them (Moroni 10:3-9 [10:3-10]).

Are we leaving this precious seed in the barn still in the sack? It is my hope and prayer that from this day forward we do what was intended by our Lord—plant the seed, nurture it, let it grow and prepare for the harvest. 



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# GLYPH *Clips*

By Sherrie Kline Smith

## It Came to Pass: A Report on the 2011 Maya Meetings — March 23-27

The timely theme for the 2011 annual workshop and symposium held at the University of Texas-Austin was “2012: Time and Prophecy in the Mesoamerican World.” These annual gatherings consist of what has been called the “long workshop,” three or four days, followed by a weekend of open forum meetings where the audience is able to offer ideas about the glyphs and their readings. The weekend format, though, has evolved since Linda Schele’s death in 1998 into simply presentations by scholars about the theme. The “old-timers” miss the interaction present in former years.

For some time, I’ve been privileged to attend the long workshop—either the intermediate or advanced. I was especially looking forward to this year’s because the advanced workshop was going to investigate the “grammatical and discursive patterns used in the hieroglyphic texts to express time.” Daniel Law, a Ph.D. candidate under David Stuart’s direction, taught the class. Stuart, considered the leading Maya epigrapher, was present during most of the class sessions and often added to the discussion.

Prior to the workshop, Law sent class participants a list of materials to read in preparation for the class. After looking these over, I had some concern that the class would be way over my head. Words like incompletive versus completive aspects, enclitic, and split-ergative were not part of my usual vocabulary. I’m not a linguist and thought it may be a struggle to keep up. The topic though, I knew, would involve the verb “come to pass,” one of the

most frequently used verbs in The Book of Mormon and prevalent in Maya texts and writings. Therefore with some trepidation and lots of prayer, I selected this workshop over one on the Popol Vuh understanding that I would get as much out of it as I could.

I was relieved to find, however, many others in the class also struggled with comprehending some of the concepts. But the Lord helped me to follow most of it.

On the first day, in the first hour, my mind was enlightened and filled with a total comprehension of the miracle of the translation of The Book of Mormon. By the gift and power of God, Joseph Smith, an unlettered young man, translated the book within months. For over 170 years, scholars have tried to read the Maya glyphs and understand them. And while in the last 30 years enormous strides have been made, and scholars claim they either read or understand at least 80 to 90 percent, much is still unknown or controversy exists over how to read them. And the “and it came to pass” glyphs are among those still not fully comprehended.

As we examined different inscriptions, we attempted to describe 1) the distribution of time-related morphemes, 2) the organization of temporal phrases (such as dates) within the sentence, and 3) the organization of temporal reference within texts, both explicitly expressed and contextually inferred. Specifically, how did the Mayas indicate what might occur in the future. At times we worked in small groups, “translating” specific inscriptions in an effort to understand how they dealt with time. At the end of the workshop, it was clear to me that epigraphers are still trying to figure out how the *uhti* (it came to pass) verb works, or in other words, how it functions grammatically.

Lyle Smith, my husband who has *Cont. on Page 8*

Hi guys!  
 Last time I talked to you, we were just settling in after finally reaching the Promised Land. We have had so many blessings from the Lord and are so grateful to be here!



# Glyph Dwellers

Dwellers - to live and have a home in a particular place

## The Adventures of Beezrom

by Mindy Mulheron

Illustrations by Aaron Presler

However, with great blessings sorrows sometimes come. So it is with great sadness that I tell you Lehi, Nephi's dad, passed away recently. But before Lehi returned to our Heavenly Father, he had an amazing experience—he saw the future! In his vision God showed him that as long as the people in this land followed the Lord, they would never perish and always be protected. Wasn't that a great comfort?!

Unfortunately Laman and Lemuel decided not to follow the directions of the Heavenly Father any longer, and even threatened Nephi for telling them that they were wrong. So God told Nephi and the rest of the family to leave and travel further inland, away from Laman and Lemuel. God was so angry with Laman and Lemuel for trying to hurt Nephi again, that he caused a skin of blackness to come upon them. They became known as the Lamanites; and quickly forgot everything that Lehi and Nephi had tried to teach them.

Nephi and the rest of the family became known as the Nephites. Nephi was really upset by the separation of his family. (Imagine if your brother or sister decided not to talk to you ever again! It might be nice for a few days, but you'd eventually miss them!) Nephi and his family prayed for the Lamanites, but it didn't seem like God was hearing their prayers.

## Beezrom's Code!

by Beezrom

See if you can figure out my secret message to you!

Each letter of the alphabet is assigned a number. Fill in the message below by finding the alphabet letter that each number represents.

Good luck! 😊

### Alphabet Code:

- |       |        |        |        |        |
|-------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| A - 1 | G - 7  | M - 13 | S - 19 | Y - 25 |
| B - 2 | H - 8  | N - 14 | T - 20 | Z - 26 |
| C - 3 | I - 9  | O - 15 | U - 21 |        |
| D - 4 | J - 10 | P - 16 | V - 22 |        |
| E - 5 | K - 11 | Q - 17 | W - 23 |        |
| F - 6 | L - 12 | R - 18 | X - 24 |        |

However, Jacob, Nephi's younger brother, was given a message from the Lord. God told Jacob that they needed to remain faithful; then everything would work out in time. And eventually there would even be a place called Zion—where everyone would be safe.

Isn't that exciting? To know that God sees us and cares about how we're feeling and wants to bless us? There will be times when we will have problems, but, if we're faithful, our Heavenly Father will always be there to help us through. He's got a plan. We just need to remember that there is a difference between evil and good, and choose the good—even if it's sometimes harder.

It wasn't easy for the Lord to send His Only Son, Jesus, to die for our sins so we could eventually return to Him, but He did it. And Jesus willingly came to earth and died for us, so that we might have a chance to return to our Heavenly Father. Talk about hard! Could you give your life up for someone else? Jesus did. For you. He wants to be your best friend, and He will be the best friend you've ever had if you let Him. Give Him a chance. You can talk to Him anytime, anywhere. He's always listening!

Well, I better get back to Nephi and see how he's doing. See ya next time!

Scriptural reference: 2 Nephi 1-12 [1-30]

### Secret Message:

7 15 4 12 15 22 5 19 25 15 21 19 15 13 21 3 8  
 20 8 1 20 8 5 19 5 14 20 8 9 19 15 14 12 25  
 19 15 14 20 15 4 9 5 6 15 18 25 15 21 18  
 19 9 14 19.

10 5 19 21 19 20 15 15 11 1 23 1 25 1 12 12  
 25 15 21 18 19 9 14 19 23 8 5 14 8 5 4 9 5 4  
 15 14 20 8 5 3 18 15 19 19 6 15 18 25 15 21.

8 15 23 1 23 5 19 15 13 5 9 19 20 8 1 20?

20 8 1 14 11 25 15 21 10 5 19 21 19!

Find the Answer on Page 5.



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*Glyph Clips (Cont. from page 6)*

studied the archaeological aspect of the Maya, joined me for the weekend symposium which addressed the 2012 phenomenon and included such speakers as Dr. Anthony Aveni, the foremost scholar on astronomy and Maya glyphs, Dr. John Hoopes, Dr. Karl Taube, and Dr. William Hanks. Stuart gave the last presentation of the symposium. He mentioned that he had still been wondering about how the Maya wrote about the future, but that during the workshop, the discussions we had helped him solidify his understanding. His presentation was based on his latest book, *The Order of Days: The Maya World and the Truth about 2012*, which came out in May.

Since the inauguration

of these meetings in the 1970s, they have been held at Austin, but a couple years ago a new policy was instituted. On alternate years, the meeting will be held in

Antigua, Guatemala. Therefore next year, March 12-15, 2012, the meetings will not be in Texas but Antigua (<http://www.utmaya.org/maya-meetings/>). The topic is “Beyond the Glyphs: Ancient Maya Inscriptions as Literature,” which greatly intrigues me as already similar literature patterns found in The Book of Mormon, like chiasmus, have also been identified in the glyphs and languages of the Maya. ☺



Elaine Schele

*David Stuart (left, with laptop) and author (in pink sweater) work on inscriptions during class.*