

glyph notes

PRE-COLUMBIAN STUDIES INSTITUTE • JAN / FEB / MAR 2019 • VOLUME 26 NUMBER 1
glyph notes is published quarterly by the Pre-Columbian Studies Institute (PSI), a 501(c)3 nonprofit research and education organization

Warfare and Maya Political Economy: Additional Insights from the 2016 Guatemala Lidar Survey

By Sherrie Kline Smith

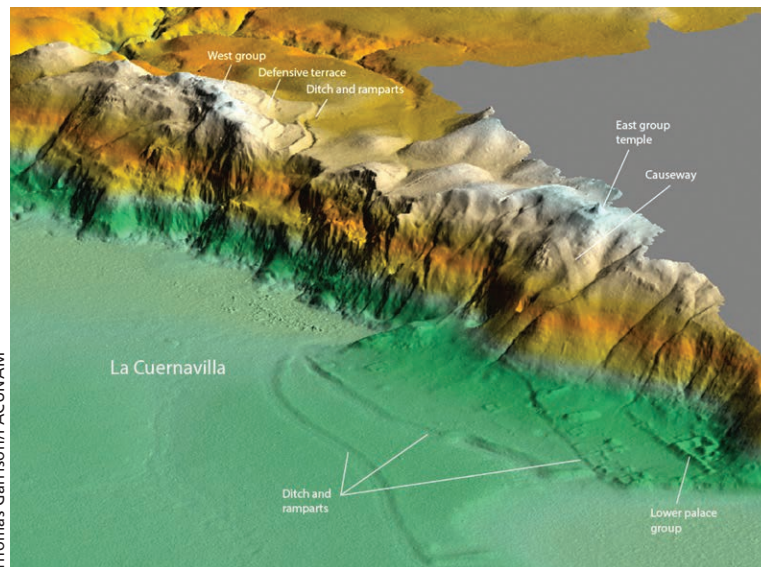
Introduction

Last year's Jan/Feb/Mar issue of glyph notes detailed some of the amazing discoveries of a 2016 lidar (Light Detection And Ranging) survey in the Peten Department of Guatemala and how these discoveries verify the narrative in The Book of Mormon.

Included were the subjects of population (now much larger than believed previously); agriculture and water management (regional agricultural economy of great complexity); roads and causeways, and trade (extensive network of raised roads and causeways allowing for long-distance trade); and, defensive fortifications and warfare (hitherto unknown fortresses, with ramparts and moats, and a system of interconnected watchtowers). Anthropologist Stephen Houston of Brown University, one of those working with the 2016 Peten lidar survey, observed, "Everything is larger, more extensive, more deeply built and engineered than we had thought" (Kiley 2018).

Now, some more recent publications about the 2016 lidar survey provide further details about the surprising discovery of extensive defensive fortifications and what the presence of these defense efforts suggests about the Maya political

Cont. on Page 2



Thomas Garrison/PACUNAM

This lidar image of the hilltop fortress La Cuernavilla shows that it was heavily fortified. There is a palace group below a steep ridge, with a causeway leading to more structures on top of the hill. "Ditches, ramparts, moats and walls indicate that its inhabitants were prepared for war. La Cuernavilla spans about 1.5 miles across" (Scharping 2019:32).



New discoveries in relation to Maya civilization should further bolster the amazing amount of evidences for the Nephite/Lamanite/Mulekite history as found in The Book of Mormon.

Warfare (Cont. from Page 1)

economy. Once again, these new discoveries fit so precisely with The Book of Mormon account.

Defensive Fortifications

One of the most impressive defense works revealed by the survey is close to the site of El Zotz, a neighbor of Tikal which is only 14 miles away and separated today by thick jungle. The largest pyramids at Tikal can be seen from El Zotz's tallest structure.

Archaeological work at El Zotz has been directed by Dr. Thomas Garrison of Ithaca College, New York, who stated that “he’d been getting restless at El Zotz, which had been shaping up to be fairly unspectacular by Maya terms [except for an outstanding royal tomb discovered in 2012].” The lidar survey, however, changed that, by revealing “the ruins of something unprecedented in Maya archaeology” (Scharping 2019:31, 32; all subsequent quotes are from Scharping unless otherwise noted) — a hilltop fortress.

The fortress, named “La Cuernavilla” by Garrison, is on top of an imposing ridge line and “includes a temple, palace, and the remains of housing platforms, as well as a **moat** and a **massive wall** some 25 feet high.” Although one side is protected by a sheer cliff, “the other is strategically fortified with defensive terraces. A **watchtower** sits nearby—another first for Maya archaeologists—part of a newly discovered defensive network that spreads throughout the **entire** Maya lowlands” (emphasis added).

“It’s the first time archaeologists have found Maya structures built expressly for warfare, and it implies an unexpected level of military engineering.” (Stating this is the first time structures built for warfare has been found isn’t precisely true; the moat and high embankment at the site of Becan has been known since the 1960s, as well as the massive earthworks at Tikal. But this complete fortress at El Zotz is a new discovery along with the extensive

system of watchtowers throughout the land.)

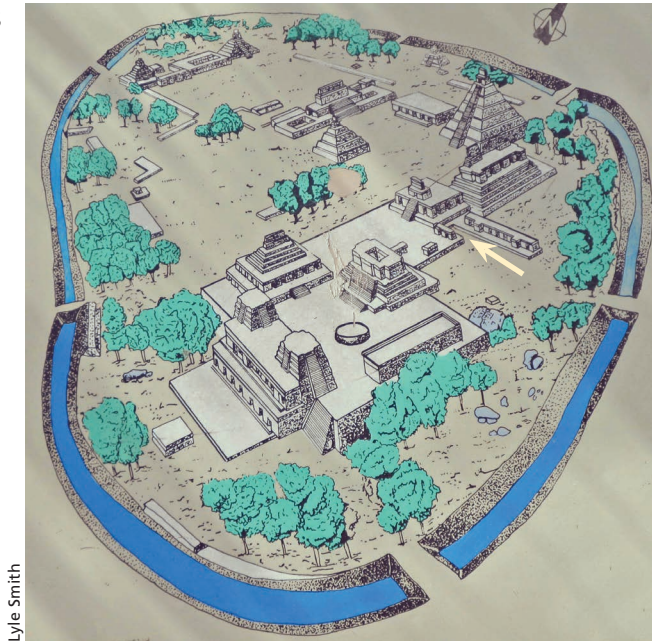
Since the 2016 lidar survey data have been formulated, Garrison and his team have begun focusing on La Cuernavilla. His preliminary excavations “so far suggest the site was occupied for centuries,” although the specific time frame of this fortress and the system or network of towers and fortifications throughout the Maya area is not yet known. To help establish when this hilltop fortress was functioning, Garrison and his team are already “collecting pottery fragments to find out when the site was occupied. The scans are great for finding things, but can’t establish a timeline.”

One detailed report of the lidar survey, complete with numerous charts and color-coded graphics, describes five types of newly discovered (plus on-the-ground verification) built defensive systems: “landscape ditch-and-rampart, hilltop ditch-and-rampart, contoured terrace, stand-alone rampart, and stone wall” (Canuto 2018:13-14). Rampart is a defensive wall of a castle or walled city, having a broad top with a walkway and

typically a stone parapet (a low wall to protect the walkway on top of the embankment).

The discoveries of structures devoted to warfare that exhibit an “unexpected level of military engineering” can’t help but remind us of Chief Captain Moroni’s military strategy that he instituted in 73 BC. He fortified Nephite territory in the Guatemala lowlands in a manner never known before among the Nephites or Lamanites.

The Nephites had dug up a **ridge of earth** round about them... (Alma 21:152 [LDS 49:4]). [T]he Lamanites could not get into their [the Nephites’] **forts** of security, by any other way save by the entrance, because of the **highness of the bank** which had been thrown up and the **depth of the ditch** which had been dug round about, save it were by the entrance. And thus



This site plan of Becan, a fortified area known since the 1960s, shows the moat and six entrance causeways over the moat. The arrow on the right indicates the entrance used today to tour Becan. Some of the structures within the fortified area are very large and high.

were the Nephites prepared to destroy all such as should attempt to climb up to enter the **fort** by any other way, by casting over **stones** and arrows at them (Alma 21:170-171 [LDS 49:18-19]).

Moroni further fortified the cities throughout all the land.

And upon the top of these **ridges of earth** he caused that there should be timbers . . . built up to the height of a man, round about the cities. And he caused . . . **towers** to be erected . . . And he caused **places of security to be built upon those towers**, that the **stones** and the arrows of the Lamanites could not hurt them (Alma 22:1-5 [LDS 50:1-5]). (See "Watchtowers" on p. 4.)

Just this year, Garrison and his team uncovered a mound of **sling stones** at La Cuernavilla, lending additional credence to the accounts in The Book of Mormon of warfare during Chief Captain Moroni's military leadership. This newly discovered fortress, La Cuernavilla, though, is not likely to be one that Chief Captain Moroni had built, but it's clear he set a precedent with his military strategy.

Warfare was almost constant in The Book of Mormon, from shortly after Lehi and his family settled in the land of promise until the sad end of the Nephites in AD 385. Yet, the Lamanites continued warring among themselves for many years as prophesied by Nephi (1 Nephi 3:130-132 [LDS 12:20-21]). For a long time, Maya scholars believed the Maya people were a peaceful, priestly society that spent most of their time contemplating the heavens—this view being in direct conflict with the account found in The Book of Mormon. Only around the 1980s, with the translations of the hieroglyphs, did they begin to realize that war was a chief occupation of the Classic Maya; those that lived ca. AD 250-900.

The lidar discoveries of fortresses and a network of watchtowers further confirm the Maya's preoccupation with warfare. What's more, evidences of constant Maya warfare precisely fit The Book of Mormon account in the exact time frame it should, at least for the

closing years of the Nephite nation.

New Dimensions of Maya Society

"In addition to turning towns into cities, the lidar data occasionally reveals something even more exciting—not just new structures, but *new dimensions of Maya society*" (emphasis added). The widespread defensive fortifications lend credence to a much more centralized political economy among the Maya than previously thought. (*Political economy* is the study of production and trade and their relationships with law, custom and government and the distribution of national income and wealth.)

Houston commented, "[T]o me, it's obvious that these are not just Balkanized little hilltop fortifications, but this represents some kind of system. Someone invested a lot of money in these, a lot of sweat, a lot of effort," and exhibited "an unexpected level of military engineering."

These strategic military defense fortifications required a "level of resources and planning" that implies a society with "powerful

Cont. on Page 4



Sherrie Kline Smith



Sallie Prester

Seemingly, this tower in the palace compound at Palenque has been the only known tower in the Maya area until the 2016 Peten survey. Palenque is in Mexico and west of the Peten Department of Guatemala. When discovered, the tower was missing the top portion. These photos show the restoration work and how the top part might look. This web page www.mexicolore.co.uk/images-71704_16_2.jpg has a photo of its condition in the 1890s. The palace and tower were constructed ca. AD 600, and therefore not a tower built by the Nephites.

Warfare (Cont. from Page 3)

militarist organization, something that researchers have never before suspected.” This in turn, along with the “presence of sophisticated agriculture

Watchtowers

Close to the El Zotz hilltop fortress, “a watchtower sits nearby—another first for Maya archaeologists—part of a newly discovered defensive network that spreads throughout the *entire* Maya lowlands” (Scharping 2019:32; emphasis added).

The discovery of towers throughout the Maya area as revealed by the 2016 Peten lidar survey is most intriguing. I often have found curious the mention of the tower in Nephi’s garden, where he poured out his heart in prayer to God for his people. In fact those verses (Helaman 3:10-11 [LDS 7:10]) provoke a lot of thought about Nephite society around 22 BC. There is a **tower** in Nephi’s **garden** (which garden provided food for his family and others, i.e. agricultural practices) near the **highway** (many roads and causeways facilitating trade) leading to the **chief market** (implying there were markets all over). In the March 2019 *Discover* magazine, the author Scharping commented, “Large community markets were likely common in Maya society” (2019:31).

The other tower well-known in The Book of Mormon (besides the one in the Jaredite record) was constructed for King Benjamin to deliver his message to his people, ca. 150-130 BC. During the time of King Noah, two other towers noted are in Lamanite territory (ca. 178-160 BC). “And it came to pass that he [King Noah] built a tower near the temple . . . so high that he could stand upon the top thereof and overlook the land of Shilom.... And he caused a great tower to be built on the hill north of the land Shilom...” (Mosiah 7:16, 18 [LDS 11:12-13]).

It wasn’t until I read in *Discover* the recent article about the discovery—made possible by the 2016 Peten lidar survey—of a **whole system** of watchtowers that I reread all accounts in The Book of Mormon where the word tower was used. This study forcibly brought

and widespread engineering projects,” suggests that Maya society was “much more hierarchically organized than previously thought.” This means a centralized government with control of economics

to my consciousness that when Chief Captain Moroni first took up his command and raised his title of liberty (ca. 73-72 BC), he went throughout the land causing “the title of liberty to be hoisted upon **every** tower which was in all the land, which was possessed by the Nephites” (Alma 21:71 [LDS 46:36]). This implies a lot of towers!

I’m not sure the watchtowers revealed by the lidar survey are any of those in The Book of Mormon as noted above. BUT—there is one that may very well be part of the newly discovered system of watchtowers in the Peten. During the final battles between the Nephites and Lamanites, when the Nephites were generally annihilated ca. AD 321-385, Mormon writes, in a letter to his son Moroni, about a tower. “[B]ehold, the Lamanites have many prisoners, which they took from the **tower** of Sherrizah; and there were men, women and children” (Moroni 9:8 [LDS 9:7]). This implies a rather spacious tower where people hoped to find safety, yet didn’t. **This tower** could very well be part of the newly discovered system of watchtowers.

Towers had various functions in ancient times. They served as a place to keep watch over property in order to protect crops from marauding animals and/or invading armies, as well as a place where kings and leaders could communicate with a large amount of people. In light of Mormon’s description of the tower at Sherrizah, some towers must have been big enough to provide a place of refuge, like the newly discovered La Cuernavilla. The ninth chapter of Judges relates the conflict of Abimelech, king of Israel and a son of Gideon, with the people at Sechem. The tower at Sechem appears to be like the one Mormon writes about at Sherrizah, because of its implied size. “But there was a strong **tower** within the city, and thither fled all the men and women, and all they of the city, and shut it to them, and gat them up to the top of the **tower**” (Judges 9:51).



Sherrie Kline Smith

While on tour in Israel, we visited Nazareth Village, a well-researched re-creation of Nazareth at the time of Christ. The tower in the village (shown above) overlooks the vineyard. The parable in Matthew chapter one mentions the husbandman who planted a vineyard and protected it with a hedge and a tower.

and military strategies.

For the most part, the peoples of The Book of Mormon lived as nations, except for the few times they broke into separate tribes. When the Nephites fled the land of their first inheritance, because the Lamanites were determined to eliminate them, they joined the Mulekite nation in what is now called the lowlands of Guatemala or the Peten, which is the area of the 2016 lidar survey. Interestingly enough, it was a Nephite that became the ruler of the combined Nephites and Mulekites.

The combined Nephite-Mulekite nations functioned under the leadership of a king until the reign of judges—with a “chief judge” also referred to as the governor—until the years just prior to the great destruction at the time of the crucifixion of Christ; i.e., approximately 125 years from 91 BC-AD 34. The Lamanites had a king, with “lesser” kings that reported to the main king. These were their affairs until the coming of Christ. The record is silent about the government during the next 300 years, but we do know that the Nephites, in their conflict with Lamanites from AD 321 to 385, were united under the military leadership of Mormon. During the same time period, Mormon records that the Lamanites had a king.

From approximately 600 BC to AD 34, the people had a centralized government with all the components of a well-organized political economy: production and trade and their relations with law, custom and government; and with the distribution of national income and wealth.

Following the end of the account in The Book of Mormon of the Nephite nation, AD 385, archaeology and the hieroglyphic inscriptions indicate that the warring Maya (Lamanites) divided and had individual kings at most of the cities; some

were larger and more dominant, like Tikal, Caracol, Calakmul. Some of these larger cities had ties to smaller or satellite cities that were their allies. In other words, beginning around AD 385, the centralized governments disintegrated.


Chief Captain Moroni, and later “leader and commander” Mormon, functioned in a centralized government in implementing their strategic administration of the wars during their respective time periods. The new understanding of the Maya being “more hierarchically organized,” as indicated by the discoveries of the 2016 lidar survey, now aligns more closely with the account in The Book of Mormon.

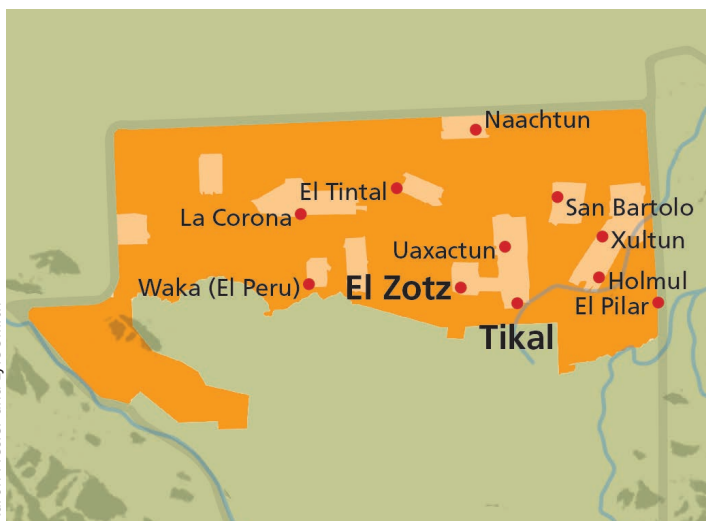
Conclusion

The 2016 lidar survey in selected areas of the Peten of Guatemala has been only one of several lidar surveys carried out in the Maya area. The 2016 survey, however, captured the media’s fancy, resulting in splashing its results all over their newspapers and magazines. The most recent article, accompanied with excellent photographs and graphics, is in the March 2019 *Discover* magazine.

The future promises even more understanding about the implications of the discoveries in relation to Maya civilization, which in turn should further bolster the amazing amount of evidences from this area in Mesoamerica for the Nephite/Lamanite/Mulekite history as found in The Book of Mormon.

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Aaron Presler and Lyle Smith

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Tiny Miracles

E By Patricia J. Beebe

very day each of us faces decisions and challenges. While struggling with these challenges, we miss tiny miracles that surround us daily. Some say, “Timing is everything,” and I tend to agree with that statement. But—how do we know when the timing is right? That is a tough question and, seemingly, there is no “app” for that. Or, is there?

Actually, we have two wonderful applications from the Scriptures of how to put the right timing into our life. The first comes from the John 14:26: “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.” The Holy Ghost/Comforter/Spirit is the greatest gift to help guide us through life.

The second application comes from The Book of Mormon, 1 Nephi 5:11-12 [LDS 16:10]—the ball, of curious workmanship (compass) used to guide Lehi’s family through the wilderness, over the seas, and to the new world. Although these two examples definitely are not tiny miracles, both attest to an inner strength granted to those who profess faith in our Heavenly Father that they may draw upon when facing decisions and challenges.

Nor should we forget Ecclesiastes 3:11: “He hath made everything beautiful in his time; also, he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end.” We live in God’s timing—and it is perfect. Trust him and allow faith to open your eyes that you might see life’s tiny miracles.

The all-volunteer staff of PSI is grateful for the tiny miracles that have helped the organization to grow (25-year celebration approaching) and to enable it to share testimony of latter-day research of the book’s truthfulness, revealed

through archaeology and epigraphy. Support has always been timely and abundant. Prayers, helping hands, and contributions complement God’s timing. A recent testimony of one of PSI’s long-time volunteers, Ted Combs, bears record of tiny miracles in our day, but also of perfect timing.

Testimony of Ted Combs, Treasurer

While at the post office on the Independence square, I was checking the PSI post office box. We have a mid-size box that slides out to retrieve the contents. There are other boxes below and above ours with a metal cover over the box below.


Normally, I just unlock and pull the box out a reasonable distance, so I can get my hand around the contents and lift it out and close the box.

On this particular day, I did as usual, but before I closed the box, I felt impressed to pull the box out as far as it would go. I even pulled up on the front a little. When I did this, I saw

a bit of white envelope under our box and on top of the cover over the box below. I reached in with my hand and used my thumbnail to get the trapped letter. Apparently, the mail person missed our box and the letter lodged between the box and the shelf underneath. I looked at the retrieved letter and it was a PSI contribution envelope. I kept it on top of the stack of mail, and when I went home to sort and process the mail, this “missing” letter contained a \$1,000 contribution!

The Lord was watching out for us and our efforts

to spread the truth of The Book of Mormon. We were not only blessed that the contributor was moved to send such a generous contribution, but also in the prompting to find it. Praise God!

PSI looks forward to sharing more exciting correlations that support The Book of Mormon and to assist in bolstering your faith in its testimony of Christ. We hope you will continue to join us in this work, and may you begin to recognize the tiny miracles in your life. 

PSI is grateful for the tiny miracles that have helped the organization to grow and to enable it to share testimony of latter-day research of the Book of Mormon’s truthfulness, revealed through archaeology and epigraphy.



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is published quarterly by Pre-Columbian Studies Institute (PSI), a 501(c)3 nonprofit research and education organization.

E-mail Address: precolumbiansi@gmail.com
Membership & Annual Subscription to newsletter is \$25.
Send to: Pre-Columbian Studies Institute
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glyph *quotes*

By Eric English

At the end of the prophet Jacob's life, when he brings his writings to a conclusion, he makes a relatively poignant comment. "Our lives passed away, like as it were unto us a dream, we being a lonesome and a solemn people, wanderers cast out from Jerusalem" (Jacob 5:42-44 [LDS 7:26]).

This is a common and most likely universal experience of mankind. In our early years, we can tend to feel invincible; that life will go on forever. In our middle-age years, many of us are absorbed with raising families, pursuing careers, being busily involved in good activities. Far too often, it is not until we reach the sunset era of life that we gain full recognition of just how brief and fleeting life can be. Lee Iacocca, the famous businessman and auto maker, once commented, near the end of his life, "Here I am in the twilight years of my life, still wondering what it's all about.... I can tell you this, fame and fortune is for the birds."

Wanderers in a strange land

~ Alma 10:21 [LDS 13:23]

Socrates said, during his trial, that "the unexamined life is not worth living." And yet, with all the technological benefits and advancements of our culture, we find more and more things that prevent us from examining our lives, reflecting on the journey, and considering those things of eternal value over temporary value; until we begin to slow down near the end. The famous French philosopher Simone Weil commented back in the 1940s that "to find a place in the budget for the eternal is not in the spirit of our age." How interesting to see that perspective since we can certainly observe that the "spirit of our age" in 2019 has only accelerated; and everyone seems to be living in the here and now.

Let us take advantage of the advice that Jacob and Alma share with us—to wake up to the journey that we're on, that this isn't our permanent home, and that we need to ensure that our lives are centered on the eternal activities of living for God and serving one another. 