

glyph *notes*

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Why Three Temples?

By Lyle Smith

A few months ago my wife Sherrie and I attended the Society for American Archaeology annual meeting in Albuquerque, New Mexico. In conjunction with the conference was a large room full of small booths displaying and selling new and older university textbooks about American archaeology.

One of the new books we purchased is called *Maya E Groups: Calendars, Astronomy, and Urbanism in the Early Lowlands*. The various authors in this anthology of more than 600 pages discuss a unique architectural arrangement of buildings of temple complexes called E groups. The various authors propose that these groups *may be central to Maya religion and beliefs*. The discussion below will examine these groups—particularly *the Triadic Group*—their function, symbolism, and reflection of Maya beliefs and will draw parallels with the beliefs of the people in The Book of Mormon.

E Groups abound in the Maya area of Mesoamerica. “Research over the last twenty-five years increasingly supports the view that they form the earliest identifiable architectural plan at many Maya Centers” (Friedel et al. 2017:3). This means the first structure built at any large Maya center/city was this architectural plan. Because E Groups appear to be the first shared form of Maya public architecture, they “must have been important” (Ibid., 5). E Group temple complexes “are widely distributed throughout the Maya Lowlands” with a concentration in the

Maya heartland of Guatemala Peten before AD 550 (Ibid., 3).

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The Cross Group at the site of Palenque is a Triadic Group.

The building in the forefront of the photograph was built later and is not part of the group.



Don Beebe

Before and after the “Children of Christ” era, there are good reasons to believe that the people of Mulek, the Lamanites, and maybe even some Nephites, were building three temple complexes.

Three Temples (Cont. from Page 1)

Types of E Groups

The designation “E Group” derives from the first E Group excavated in 1916-1920 in an area of buildings labeled E at the Maya site of Uaxactun. Archaeologists recognize three main types of E Groups: the Cenote, the Uaxactun, and the Triadic.

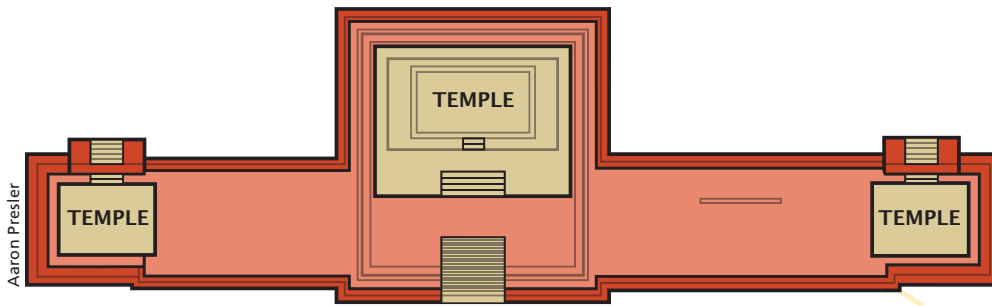


Figure 1. Cenote E Group

Cenote Group

Excavations at the site of Cenote in the Tayasal area near Lake Peten Itza in Guatemala “formed the type-site for this style variant” (Ibid., 47). The Cenote E Group (Figure 1) may have been the earliest of the three types built by the Maya between 600 BC to AD 300. This type, however, may have been built earlier than 600 BC by the Olmec. The original form consisted of a long low platform, from 65’ to 227’ long; later styles had three temples on top. This platform is always situated on the east of a plaza and faces west.

Uaxactun Group

The Uaxactun E Group (Figure 2) is also named for the site where this style was first found. Uaxactun E Groups were primarily built through the years AD 300-800 and comprise the most common type. It also has an eastern platform with three temples on top facing a fourth temple across the plaza on the western side.

“Archaeologists and archaeoastronomers have suggested that this architectural assemblage was constructed in order to permit detailed observations of the sky and the movement of the sun, moon, and stars” (Ibid., 579). Although E groups evolved over time and their function apparently changed, the authors of the concluding chapter of this book *Maya E Groups* states, “There remains

consensus that E Groups were linked to ground and horizon-based astronomy” (Ibid., 578).

Triadic Group

Triadic Groups/Triadic Pyramids differ from the Cenote and Uaxactun types and were constructed as early as 350 BC at a number of sites. As its designation suggests, Triadic Groups had three

temples, with one on the eastern side of the plaza—usually, but not always, the largest—flanked on the north and south by two temples. Some of these three structures were built on the top of monumental structures (pyramids), like those at El Mirador (Figure 3), “the largest Preclassic capital in the Maya

Lowlands” (Sharer 2006:252). Triadic Groups do not appear to have been used as observatories.

The Use of Three

One of the main components of the civic-religious architectural plan of E Groups is the inclusion of three temples of varying sizes. Archaeologists, intrigued by this constant use of three, have suggested some reasons for this, noting that “the focus on ‘three’ is [also] found elsewhere in Maya art and iconography” (Ibid., 19) and indicated

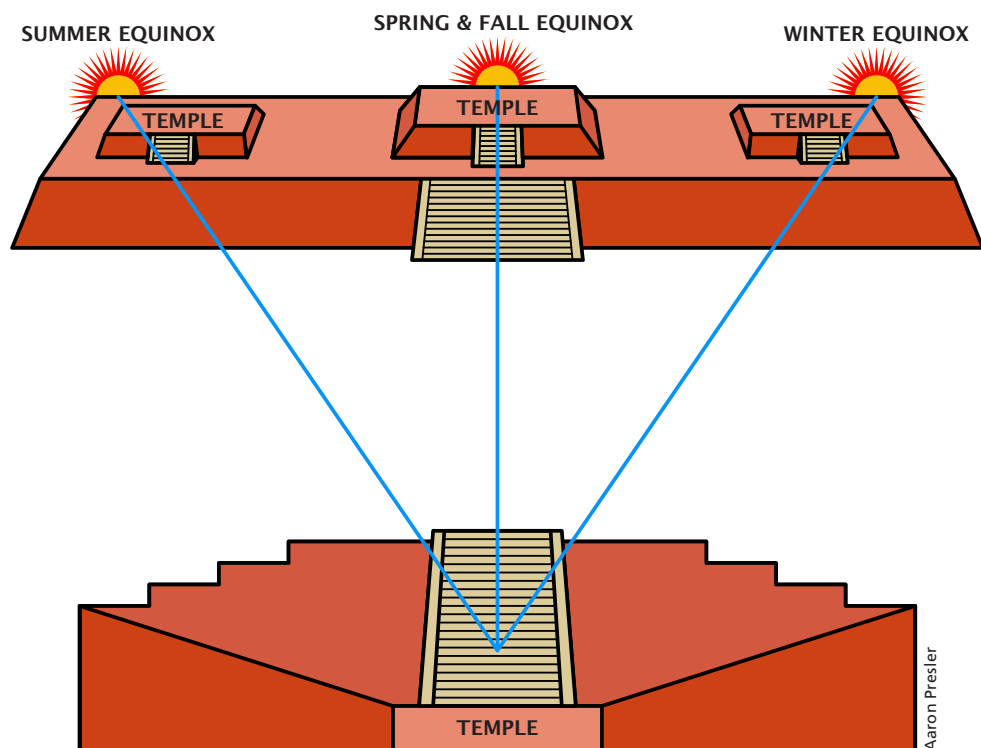


Figure 2. Uaxactun E Group

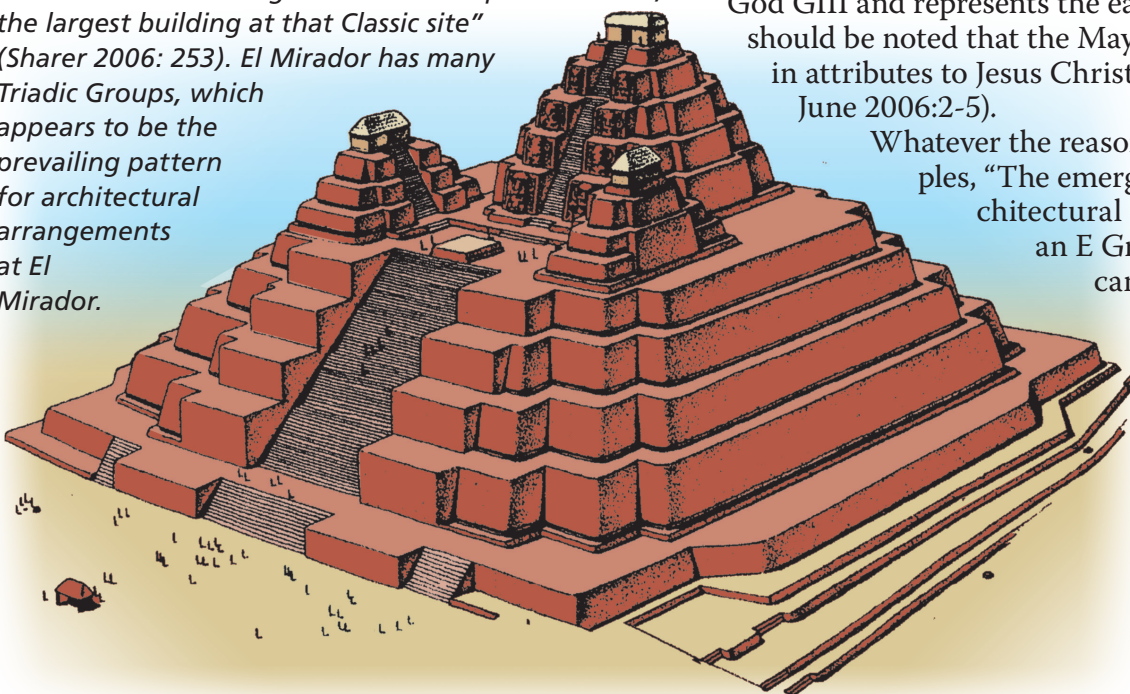
their beliefs in the origin of the world and three founding deities. Kathryn Reese-Taylor in her chapter of the E-Group book suggests “that . . . the triadic complexes were . . . *explicitly religious in nature*” but later became aspects of divine kingship (Ibid., 500; emphasis added).

“The triadic pattern of the so-called E Groups . . . is that they were symbolic representations of the importance of the number three in Maya cosmology” [philosophy dealing with the origin and structure of the universe] (Ibid., 441). Or in other words, the three temples symbolize the three domains of creation: the heavens, earth, and seas/waters.

All Maya common households have three hearthstones which symbolize these three domains (Figure 4). This is perhaps most easily understood from Stela C at Quirigua which details the “raised-up sky Lord” creating a stone/throne in heaven, the earth, and the water (Figure 5). And this creation all took

Figure 3. *Triadic Group at El Mirador. The El Tigre Group or complex of buildings includes two Triadic Groups; the largest of those is shown in this drawing. “The largest documented triadic pyramid, El Tigre, covers a surface area six times greater than Temple IV at Tikal, the largest building at that Classic site” (Sharer 2006: 253). El Mirador has many Triadic Groups, which appears to be the prevailing pattern for architectural arrangements at El Mirador.*

Aaron Presler (after T. W. Rutledge)





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place at the “first three stone place” (heaven). These three stones in Maya households also represent the three stars in the belt of the Orion constellation. As one author in the book noted, the number three was “linked with the ‘three hearthstones’ stars in Orion, which were important in Classic and Postclassic iconography and *survive today in Mayan lore*” (Ibid., 98-99; emphasis added).

Not only is the number three associated with creation but with the three “founding deities that are known in the epigraphy of a

series of sites” (Ibid., 63). The best-known founding deities—designated as God GI, God GII, and God GIII because the names have not been deciphered—are described in great detail at the site of Palenque.

Palenque has a Triadic Group some believe represents the three hearthstones, and others expand this interpretation to “say that the three hearthstones are manifestations of the . . . gods GI, GII, and GIII” (Bassie-Sweet 2008: 121). Palenque’s Triadic Group consists of the Temple of the Cross (built to honor God GI and represents the stone/throne in the heavens); the Temple of the Foliated Cross (built to honor God GII and represents the water stone/throne); and the Temple of the Sun (built to honor God GIII and represents the earth stone/throne). It should be noted that the Maya God GI is identical in attributes to Jesus Christ (See *glyph notes* May/June 2006:2-5).

Whatever the reasons for the three temples, “The emergence of a standard architectural complex in the form of an E Group has great significance . . . in that the appearance of this architectural complex represents the coalescence of formal Maya communities that shared a *unified belief system*.”

Furthermore, “based on the regularities in form that occurred

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Three Temples (Cont. from Page 3)

among early E Group complexes, the *underlying belief system was widely shared, deeply held, and persisted for almost 1,400 years* (Friedel et al. 2017:32, 65; emphasis added).

Discussion

It appears that these E Groups existed for over 1000 years in numerous towns and cities in a relatively small land area that we now know as Mesoamerica. The highest concentration of them is found in the southern lowlands, the northern area of Guatemala, Belize, and parts of Mexico. This continuity indicates their importance to the Maya. *The temple areas are where the central tenets of the Maya religion were remembered and honored.*

The Mulekites arrived sometime around 600 BC. They existed by themselves about 350 years before merging with the Nephites under the leadership of Mosiah. Did not the Mulekites come from the royal court in Jerusalem? While they did not bring records, one should not conclude that they did not have a general understanding of the creation story



Aaron Presler

Figure 4. The three hearthstones in a typical Maya house; each stone representing one of the three domains of creation: heaven, earth, waters.



Don Beebe

Figure 5. Quirigua Stela C, in Guatemala, has a succinct inscription detailing the first moments of creation, according to the Maya. It begins with a date, and then that “the image was made manifest” simply by speaking the word. It goes on to describe the setting of three stones (or thrones) in the heavens, earth, and waters. All this creation was overseen by the “Raised-Up Sky Lord.”

as taught by the religious leaders in Jerusalem. In Numbers 20:11, we find, “For in six days the Lord made **heaven** and **earth**, the **sea**, and all that in them is....”

It seems probable that the Mulekites began the tradition of building an architectural assemblage of three temples that represented the creation of the heavens, the earth and the waters. Later, when the Nephites merged with the Mulekites, their religion and language greatly changed. King Mosiah had the Mulekites taught in the religion and the language of the Nephites. As the form and function of E Groups evolved over time, it seems probable that the “three” temples also came to represent the founding deities mentioned earlier and represent God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Then, following the

	Date of creation / beginning
	By Power of spoken word image was made manifest or appeared
	Three (stones) thrones were set up or planted
	Paddler (gods) set up Came to pass, jaguar throne in heaven
	Ek' Nah Yax (god) set up Came to pass, serpent throne on earth
	Itzamna (god) set up Came to pass, water throne at lying down sky
	At the first three throne place, date
	He caused it to be done, the Raised-Up Sky Lord

Lyle Smith

“Children of Christ” era, around AD 250-300 with the emergence again of kings, the triadic complexes represented *spiritual authority* and were employed to give and enforce the divinity of kings.

Why the use of *three* temples? If two or four or five temples had been built in each complex, The Book of Mormon would not have provided an answer, but the spiritual information in The Book of Mormon helps illuminate why these temple complexes were built with three temples.

Consider what the archaeologists have come to propose as reasons for building E Groups.

1. They define a Maya unified belief system.
2. They were built explicitly for religious reasons.
3. The central tenets of Maya religion were developed there.
4. They were built to represent a triad of Gods and/or the Maya creation story.

These conclusions support The Book of Mormon narrative quite well. The people of Mulek and Lehi would have known about God, the Messiah, the Holy Spirit, and also the creation story. Therefore, *before*

and after the “Children of Christ” era (4 Nephi 1:20 [LDS 8:16]), there are good reasons to believe that the people of Mulek, the Lamanites, and maybe even some Nephites, were building three temple complexes.

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glyph quotes

By Eric English

Have you ever done something so dumb, so selfish, or so insensitive, that when it eventually came to light (because it always does) you were so embarrassed that you just wanted to crawl under a rock? I have—on more occasions than I can count. When I was in my early twenties, I had three car accidents in less than three years, all of which were my fault. In one case, I wasn’t careful enough when driving in bad weather; in another, because I was running late, I was in too much of a hurry and, consequently, missed out on the event altogether. In the last instance, I simply wasn’t paying attention. This last wreck happened only a few months before my wedding. I can still recall how embarrassed I felt when calling my fiancée with the news of what had happened. Even more embarrassing, shortly thereafter, was the call and letter from my car insurance company saying that they were dropping me as a customer, and that I needed to get high-risk insurance someplace else. As Sir James Barrie once said, “Life is a long lesson in humility.”

They humbled themselves and put their trust in the true and living God. ~ Alma 3:25 [LDS 5:13]

In this last accident, I held onto my pride and was unwilling to admit to my mistakes. I didn’t humble myself, but rather I was humbled by external events. Recently, I heard in a sermon that pride is at the root of all sin; it’s the ultimate self-worship where we think only and too highly of ourselves. A quote attributed to Thomas Watson is, “Pride seeks to ungod God.” We want to keep ourselves on the throne. Whereas, humility, the opposite of pride, is a selfless mindset where we seek to put God and others in first place—above ourselves. The subject of pride is found throughout The Book of Mormon. Sadly, pride was the reason for the complete downfall of the Nephites.

God wants us to willfully choose to move from pride to humility—rather than for us to be forced to it. In the title quote above, the Nephites experienced a mighty change of heart when Alma was preaching to them. They heard the Word, responded to the Spirit, and chose, on their own, to humble themselves, place their trust in God, and commit to serve him all of their days. Let us so choose to willfully humble ourselves. 

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ruins, museums, and the ancient towns of Antigua and Chichicastenango. And of course, sites such as Tikal, Kaminaljuyu, Yaxhá, Aguateca and Quiriguá are also on the itinerary.

After the news of the amazing results of the LiDAR survey in Guatemala, we believe it would be a good time to revisit that beautiful country. The site of Tikal was one of the major sites surveyed, and if we go to Guatemala, we will visit Tikal. We always spend two days exploring Tikal because there is so much to see and so much to relate to what is happening in The Book of Mormon, especially its closing hours and days.

We will see the Uaxactun E Group and the Quirigua Stela C, both discussed in this issue of *glyph notes*.

No matter where we go, however, you can be very sure that the experience will change your perspective of The Book of Mormon. We encourage you to consider joining us on an adventure, not only one of enjoying the camaraderie with other believers in The Book of Mormon, but also a spiritual experience—if you make necessary preparations. We have included a couple of excerpts from former travelers on one of our Guatemala tours that we hope will give you a glimpse of what you might also experience.

We hope you will join us in 2020!



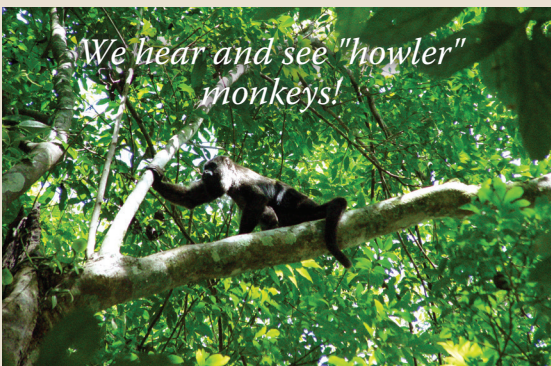
Lyle Smith

We shop at Chichicastenango on market day.



Lyle Smith

We learn together.



Pat Beebe

We hear and see "howler" monkeys!

Lyle and Sherrie Smith

The thing that stands out most in my mind about our "Guatemalan adventure" is the genuine friendliness and graciousness of the "Guatemaltecos." Everywhere we went, I felt that we were treated with warm acceptance and respect. I certainly have a different view of this beautiful country and its people than my preconceived ideas which were formed mostly from the news media in the past.

~ Linda Drown

My faith and belief in the Book of Mormon was greatly increased as a result of the tour. ~ Ann Brown

It is hard to pick out one experience, because they all stand out. Tikal was very interesting because of the large city and spectacular structures. I was impressed by the young Indian boy selling pop that brought me change an hour later after the purchase. The trip to Ceibal was an experience I won't soon forget. We saw the real, every day Guatemala.... ~ Barent Eliason



Don Beebe

We visit museums together to see treasures discovered at the ruins.

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Why Three Temples?

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2020 Guatemala Tour

Close Your Eyes

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Close Your Eyes

A By Patricia J. Beebe
Have you ever thought about where the tradition of closing your eyes during prayer or kissing originated?

Not a deep thought to ponder, I admit; but let's consider it for a moment. Both activities are very personal and more often private. History tells us that closing one's eyes shows respect and humility. Prayer should always contain respect and humility along with praise. A kiss shares these values as well. I can find countless scriptures that speak of prayer when standing, sitting, bowing, kneeling, and with arms outstretched. But I can find no scripture which requires us to close our eyes. Psychology suggests that it allows one to channel the conversation from outward visual to inward reflection.

Communication or prayer to our Lord is not only personal and private but also an outward expression of our inward thoughts. Closing the eyes naturally helps to shut out surrounding distractions and allows one to focus attention and to *feel* the moment through the heart. During these moments we can gain insight into where our earthly treasure lies,

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since scripture tells us that our heart dictates to the mind (Matt 6:21). Christ came that we might have joy. His message was singular to how we can make the Kingdom of God, the "good news," alive in our heart. As the heart feels, so the mind and body

follow. Nelson Mandela said, "A good head and a good heart are always a formidable combination."

The goal of Pre-Columbian Studies Institute has been to share the gospel as it is reflected in narrative in The Book of Mormon and edified through archaeology. Your prayers have been integral, mighty, and are the foundation for the organization's long tenure. Those who have worked closely with PSI over the years understand the feelings of gratitude, respect, and humility for the invaluable assistance from the support base. Without you, we could not have continued publishing *glyph notes* or provided the services of seminars and classes nor ventured out into publishing new resources. Thank you. Our prayer is that you will close your eyes, listen to your heart, and convert your mind to the message of the gospel of the Kingdom of God. We invite you to continue to work with us to share the "good news" as far as we can for as long as we can. 