

glyph *notes*

PRE-COLUMBIAN STUDIES INSTITUTE • JUL / AUG / SEP 2021 • VOLUME 28 NUMBER 3
glyph notes is published quarterly by the Pre-Columbian Studies Institute (PSI), a 501(c)3 nonprofit research and education organization

City on a Mountain, Monte Albán

By Lyle L. Smith

Monte Albán, a city built by the Zapotec people on a mountaintop in the Valley of Oaxaca in Mexico, rises about 1600 feet above the valley level. Some archaeologists have currently identified people living in the Valley as early as 1600 B.C. as pre-Olmec.

The population in the valley grew very slowly for many centuries. Around 600 to 500 B.C., with the founding of what became the mighty city of Monte Albán the Zapotec population increased dramatically.

The beginning of Monte Albán marks the period when the Zapotec became clearly distinguishable as an ethnic group. They politically controlled the Oaxaca Valley for more than 1400 years and still occupy the Oaxaca Valley today, along with the Mixtec, a group of people who arrived about 1400 A.D. Although the Zapotec used a system of writing, not many examples of complete words have been found; thus, leading to controversy about possible translations. They also had a written numerical system.

Cont. on Page 2

The people of Mulek knew that in Jerusalem the Temple was built on the top of the mountain. Their heritage of many centuries told them that it was always up to the top of the mountain to meet the Lord. Might this be an explanation for the location of Monte Albán?



Four Members climbing one of many stone staircases at Monte Albán. It is a side staircase going up to the main north acropolis.

Don Beebe



Lyle L. Smith

The massive, impressive stone staircase leading up to the north acropolis at Monte Albán. The round stone pillars at the top of the staircase show that there was originally a roof over that part of the acropolis.

Monte Albán (Cont. from Page 1)

Joyce Marcus defines the beginning of Monte Albán this way.

Shortly after 500 B.C., when at least 2,000 people abruptly moved to the top of a mountain in the center of the Oaxaca Valley, they probably had no master plan for converting a mountaintop into an orderly city with a symmetrical layout. Instead, the new residents simply built themselves houses and began work on a defensive wall (Marcus 2009:77).

On the other hand, another archaeologist believes differently.

Monte Albán was a planned population center, it did not simply grow from a small village, as did other cities of Mesoamerica.... Such planned cities, especially those with foundations as labor-intensive as Monte Albán’s leveled hilltop, must be constructed with a vision of the future city firmly in mind. There is no doubt that the Zapotec builders who began to construct their ceremonial center ca. 500 BC were mentally referencing an idealized city of the future as they built their actual metropolis (Hoobler 2010:235).

These observations by Marcus and Hoobler cause us to wonder, “What could

cause a few thousand people to move at the same time to the top of a mountain and begin to build a city? Why did it happen at 600 to 500 B.C.? Who were these people and where did they originate?”

Keep in mind that there were other people (referred to as pre-Olmec) in this area that date back quite possibly as early as 3100 B.C. I believe these were Jaredites. These pre-Olmec people were just east of Monte Albán in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, an area we believe that writers of The Book of Mormon identify as the narrow neck of land. Pre-Olmec people were also near what is known as



Don Beebe

Two photos of stone carvings, apparently from the older time in the city. The corpus of hieroglyphs is not sufficient to be sure of possible translations.



Lyle L. Smith

A man and his donkey offering rides for a small fee. It is important to notice that in the far distance one can see some of the buildings of the modern city of Oaxaca down in the valley.

Mexico City today. A third site of the pre-Olmec is on the Pacific coast of Mexico near where Acapulco is today. (See the map, page 6, to identify these pre-Olmec places.)

Again what happened at 600 to 500 B.C. to cause this amazing building program? According to scholars, it was improvement of the surrounding topography that allowed wide-scale agriculture production.

One of these improvements was the development of crop irrigation systems in the valley below. One of these systems “consisted of a mortared masonry dam which impounded runoff from Monte Albán in a barranca on its eastern slope, and a canal about two kilometers long...” (O’Brien et al. 1982:3).

The second was the terracing around the 1,600-foot-high Monte Albán which allowed considerable agricultural production. Of course,

the population growth did not happen overnight; but the city began and grew in population and importance for several hundred years.

“Monte Albán’s initial population of about 5,000 people increased dramatically—to more than 17,000—in the Late MA I phase” (Sherman et al. 2010:281). [The development of Monte Albán is divided into phases, i.e. Early (or Late) Monte Albán (MA) I, II, etc. See chart below.]

Spencer and Redmond believe, “There is evidence that multiple work groups were involved in the construction of the palace. The associated ceramics and four radiocarbon samples indicate that the palace was built at the beginning of the Late Monte Albán I phase (300-100 B.C.) and **abandoned in the first century B.C.**” (Spencer and Redmond 2004:441; emphasis added).

A recent volume of *Latin American Antiquity*, March 2021, included the detailed, comprehensive article, “Monte Albán’s Hidden Past: Buried Buildings and Sociopolitical Transformation,” which presented the most significant results of the Proyecto Geofísico de Monte Albán (PGMA). Those involved with the project “used geophysical prospection and digital mapping techniques to carry out a systematic analysis of Monte Albán’s Main Plaza” (Levine et al. 2021:77).

The PGMA results demonstrate **the presence of at least three previously unidentified prehispanic structures that lie below the Main Plaza surface.** We argue that all three date before or during the early Nisa phase (100 BC—AD 200) [see chart] and **represent the remnants**

Cont. on Page 4

CHART 1. CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE SHOWING THE PHASES AND EPOCHS OF OAXACAN PRE-COLUMBIAN HISTORY

APPROXIMATE DATES	PHASES based on Lind's chronology (1992) and Winter (2006)	ERAS according to chronology of Caso, Bernal and Acosta (1967)
200 BC-200 AD	Nisa	Monte Albán II
400-200 BC	Pe	Monte Albán Ic
200 BC-200 AD	Daniban	Monte Albán Ib Monte Albán Ia

Source: *The Future in Past, the Past in the Future: Monte Albán and the Zapotec* - Ellen Hoobler, author

Monte Albán (Cont. from Page 3)

of the Late Formative Main Plaza that was significantly different from the one we see today. Furthermore, we argue that **all three structures were intentionally destroyed and buried** during the Pe (300—100 BC) to Nisa (Late Period I to Period II) phase transition and before a major renovation of the Main Plaza in the Nisa phase. Among these structures are the remains of a moderately sized building (18 x 18 m) that we argue was a temple.

We interpret the geophysical data in light of evidence from previous work at Monte Albán to argue that the Pe-to-Nisa phase transition was a tumultuous period of significant political, social, and cultural transformation. Most scholars have not fully addressed this pivotal shift in Monte Albán's early history, one that left its mark on the Main Plaza and **ultimately ushered in an unprecedented period of prosperity**" (Levine et al. 2021:77-78; emphasis added).

So, we have a city on top of a mountain beginning 600—500 B.C. that prospered for several hundred years. A palace was built about 300 B.C. Then in the period of 200 B.C. to A.D. 200. there was **a time of significant political, social, and cultural transformation.** The palace built around 300 B.C. was destroyed as well as the temple. Following these events there was **an unprecedented**

period of prosperity.

To find answers I believe we need to look at the history related in The Book of Mormon. Going back to 600 B.C. we find that two groups of people migrated from Jerusalem to the New World. A number of years ago, Glenn Scott made a good case for the landing areas of the two groups who arrived in the New World *ca.* 600 B.C. The one led by Lehi/Nephi arrived on the Pacific Coast of what we know as El Salvador. The second group, the people of Mulek, had two "landings" (See Alma 13:74 [LDS 22:31]). The first landing was most likely just south of Vera Cruz, which was the heartland of the Olmecs. For some reason, the Mulekites left that area, perhaps at the instruction of the Lord, sailing back east to the mouth of the river they called Sidon (known today as the Usumacinta River in Mexico) and settled in what has become known today as the Maya Lowlands and later, *ca.* 250 B.C. (Omni 1:19-24 [LDS 1:12]), where the Nephites, migrating north from the place of their first landing found them in the Land of Zarahemla.

On the other hand, what is the probability that some did not get back in the ship to go to the second landing? I do not know. They had come across the Atlantic Ocean, and to be on land must have seemed a good thing. What I do know is that when I look at history of people over long periods of time, I find that most change,



over the long haul, comes from outside influence. What I am suggesting is that the people of Mulek who may not have gotten back on the ship formed the nucleus of a group that left the Olmec area around Vera Cruz and went west to the sparsely settled Valley of Oaxaca. Here they proceeded to build their city on the large mountaintop overlooking the valley.

The people of Mulek knew that in Jerusalem the Temple was built on the top of the mountain. Their heritage of many centuries told them that it was always up to the top of the mountain to meet the Lord.

What happened between 200 B.C. and A.D. 200 at Monte Albán? This was the time of Christ's visits to the people of Lehi and Mulek, what we know today as the Maya land and people. One wonders how widespread the destruction of land and people was, just before Christ appeared. The Book of Mormon gives evidence that this destruction covered both the Land Southward and the Land Northward, including the Monte Albán area (3 Nephi 4:9,10 [LDS

8:10-11]). Also remember the Nephites had lost their national government and had broken up into their original tribes. It was a time of great disruption culturally and religiously. It is quite possible that the destruction and great cultural changes effected the Oaxaca Valley also. Today we see, through archaeological efforts at Monte Albán, the evidence of significant political, social, cultural, and physical destruction at that time. First, we see the destruction and then the time of great prosperity.

Following this great time of destruction and cultural change, what happened? The Book of Mormon describes a time of great peace and prosperity (4 Nephi 1:26 [LDS 1:23]). It lasted from A.D. 36 to A.D. 201 according to the dates indicated in The Book of Mormon. It is not by chance that archaeology now provides evidence of an unprecedented prosperity following the great turmoil.

Is there yet more to the history of Monte Albán that might be of interest to us? Years ago, on one of our trips to the Oaxaca

Cont. on Page 6



glyphnotes

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.

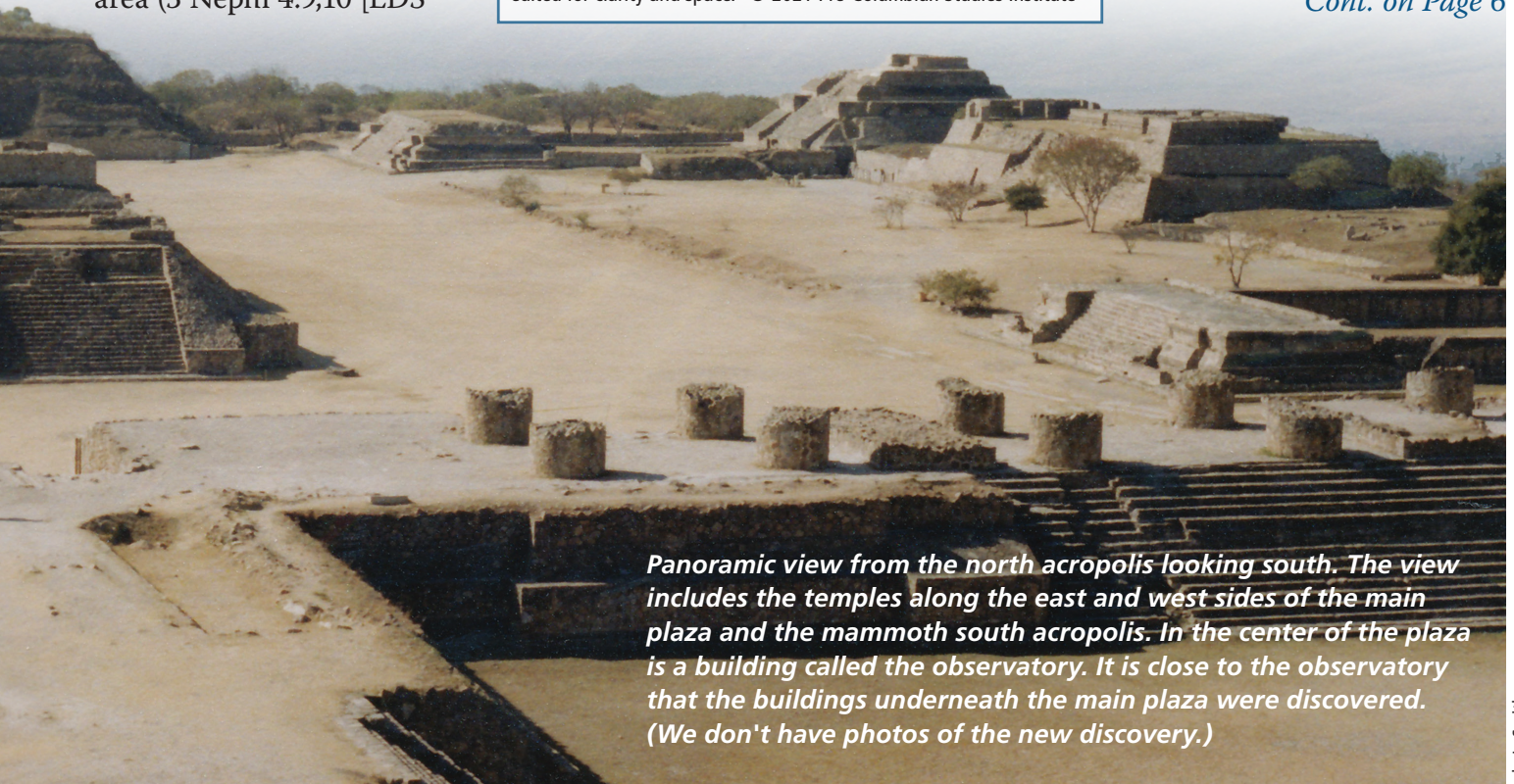
Send to: Pre-Columbian Studies Institute
P.O. Box 477, Independence, MO 64051

Editorial Committee: Lyle L. Smith, Acting Editor; Patricia J. Beebe, Ellen Winston, and Christina Schrunck

Board Officers: Lyle L. Smith, President; Sallie Presler, Vice President; Connie Spivey, Secretary; and Ted Combs, Treasurer

Design: Aaron Presler, Signature Marketing Group, LC

Articles and opinions expressed herein do not necessarily represent the view of the Editorial Committee. All materials submitted may be edited for clarity and space. © 2021 Pre-Columbian Studies Institute



Panoramic view from the north acropolis looking south. The view includes the temples along the east and west sides of the main plaza and the mammoth south acropolis. In the center of the plaza is a building called the observatory. It is close to the observatory that the buildings underneath the main plaza were discovered. (We don't have photos of the new discovery.)

Lyle L. Smith

Monte Albán (Cont. from Page 5)

Valley and Monte Albán, a fellow traveler shared a testimony about Monte Albán. He believed he had inspiration to indicate that Monte Albán was the city where Mormon lived before his father carried him to the land southward, the land Zarahemla (Mormon 1:7 [LDS 1-6]). I do not know if his testimony was true, but I cannot help but feel that Mormon and his father would have been living in a city that had been a part of “the children of Christ” era (4 Nephi 1:20 [LDS 1:17]).

References

Hoobler, Ellen

2010 The Future in Past, the Past in the Future: Monte Albán and the Zapotecs. In *XXXI Coloquio Internacional de Historia del Arte El Futuro*, edited by Alberto Dallal, 235-251. Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México: Mexico.

Levine, Marc N., Scott W Hammerstedt, Amanda Regnier, and Alex E. Badillo

2021 Monte Albán’s Hidden Past: Buried Buildings and Sociopolitical Transformation. *Latin American Antiquity* 32(1):76-98.

Marcus, Joyce

2009 How Monte Albán Represented Itself. In *The Art of Urbanism: How Mesoamerican Kingdoms Represented Themselves in Architecture and Imagery*, edited by William L. Fash and Leonardo López Lujan, pp. 77-110. Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection: Washington, D.C.

O’Brien, Michael J., Roger D. Mason, Dennis E. Lewarch, and James A. Neely

1982 *A Late Formative Irrigation Settlement below Monte Albán: Survey and Excavation on the Xoxocotlán Piedmont, Oaxaca, Mexico*. University of Texas Press, Austin.



Lyle L. Smith

A Tour Member, Aaron Presler, on top of the north acropolis. This is a view from the north acropolis looking south. Notice the sunken area this side of the round pillars we mentioned earlier. You can also see the temples built on the west side of the main plaza. They are matched by temples built on the east side of the main plaza.

Scott, Glenn A., Jr.

1996 *Voices from the Dust*. Independence, MO: School of Saints.

Sherman, R. Jason, Andrew K. Balkansky, Charles S. Spencer, Brian D. Nicholls

2010 Expansionary Dynamics of the Nascent Monte Albán State. *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 29:278-301. doi:10.1016/j.jaa.2010.04.001

Spencer, Charles S. and Elsa M. Redmon

2004 A Late Monte Albán I Phase (300-100 B.C.) Palace in the Valley of Oaxaca. *Latin American Antiquity* 15(4):441-455.



Lyle L. Smith and Aaron Presler

Mesoamerica/Ancient Southwest Chocolate Trade

*O*ver the years we have been interested in the connections between Mesoamerica and the western part of the United States particularly the four corners area.

By Lyle L. Smith

While these new findings are well after the time of Book of Mormon history, we are reminded of the numerous times there were migrations northward out of the Nephite/Lamanite lands. So, when we saw this material we wanted to share it with you.

Trade between Mesoamerica and the Ancient Southwest in macaws, parrot feathers, copper bells, turquoise, turkeys, and pottery was well known for some time.

Only recently have we become aware of the large chocolate trade between Mesoamerica and the Southwest from the 9th Century on.

It has been common knowledge for some time that Mesoamerican's were big chocolate

Ceramic pot found in the Maya site of Rio Azul in North Eastern Guatemala about 30 or more years ago. The glyphs on the lid indicates it was used for a chocolate drink. A more amazing thing is that the pot has a tamper proof lid much like the child proof bottles used today.



Don Beebe



drinkers going back maybe as early as 1500 B.C. Sometimes the cacao beans were used as a commodity as payment for something.

Recent archaeological evidence has provided a big surprise. Chocolate was found further north than the four corners' areas in Utah.

This is an astounding find for many reasons. How did this happen? Why is this so much further north from Mesoamerica and yet the dates are 200 years earlier? Why have there been no finds of chocolate between the Utah site and the New Mexico sites....

It seems we often have more questions than answers about earlier cultures. That is part of the fun of the research. Keep in mind that The Book of Mormon provides accurate information about some of

the early cultures in the Americas. I look to find correlations between Book of Mormon history and archaeological discoveries. When I find that they match I know it is accurate valid history.

All quotes in this article are from the abstract describing a zoom presentation about the "Mesoamerica/Ancient Southwest Chocolate Trade." Presented by Mike Ruggeri in association with the Chicago Archaeological Society, (August 31, 2021.)

Book of Mormon Study: A Comprehensive Review of the Book of Mormon bomstudy.org

This new study guide of The Book of Mormon, prepared by Bob Bobbitt, fills a gap in works devoted to the study of The Book of Mormon. Bob is a teacher of religious studies at Center Place Restoration School and is well known for his study and passion for apologetics and defending the gospel of Jesus Christ as given in the Scriptures. "He has produced many study guides and currently has a couple web sites, one of which is geared towards atheists and non-believers. This curriculum for the Book of Mormon and its plain message is a dynamic work in progress."

This online resource is a marvelous tool for home schoolers, a Zion's League activity, Sunday school classes (both adult and children), and personal study. Bob and his wife Missy were part of our last PSI tour (February 2020), and, on one of our long bus drives, we used a portion of the study guide as a game, each side of the bus was a team. I thought I knew The Book of Mormon quite well but, found out that I need to study more!

PRE-COLUMBIAN STUDIES INSTITUTE
P.O. Box 477
Independence, MO 64051

Address Service Requested

Nonprofit Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
KANSAS CITY, MO
PERMIT NO 1016

Pre-columbian Studies Institute
email address:
precolumbiansi@gmail.com

*City on a Mountain,
Monte Albán*
*Mesoamerica/Ancient
Southwest Chocolate
Trade*
glyph quotes

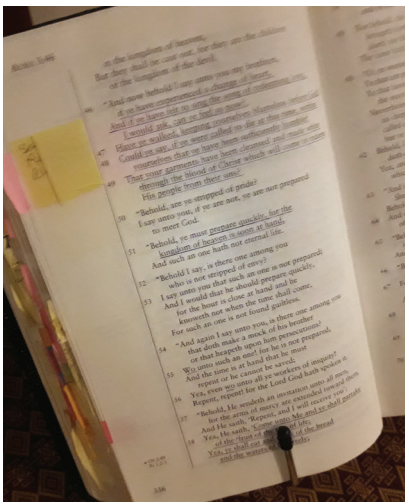
glyph quotes

By Eric English

These words were given by Alma Jr. as part of a sermon that he preached in Zarahemla; and then in multiple cities throughout the land of the Nephites, after he stepped down from being the Chief Judge for the Nephites. Alma was focusing on ministry to the Nephites to encourage repentance. We see similar counsel to this given in other places in the scriptures as well. What I find interesting is that Alma gave this advice to the Nephites in 83 BC.

It was likely that none or perhaps a very small number of young children who heard those words would live to see the signs of Christ's birth 83 years hence; and that none of them would live to see His visitation to the new world after His death and resurrection. However, the Nephites were given the counsel that they needed to prepare quickly, for the Kingdom of Heaven was coming soon.

"Behold ye must prepare quickly, for the kingdom of heaven is soon at hand, and such an one hath not eternal life." ~ Alma 3:51 (LDS 5:28)



Aaron Presler

What we do know from The Book of Mormon record is that only a few years from when these words were spoken, the Lamanites invaded the Nephite lands and destroyed the city of Ammonihah. Thus the Lamanites brought war to the Nephites, until they were repelled back to their lands.

This serves as a good reminder to all of us that while we don't know when Christ's return might be, we are to always live in a state of being prepared to meet our Savior and King. Sickness, accident, war, crime, or other events in life could be the cause for us to be ushered into the Kingdom of Heaven when we might not expect it. It is also comforting as believers to remember that our lives are in God's hands; and that His mercy covers the stain of sin for us, and allows us the opportunity to enter His Kingdom, whenever that may be the case for each of us. Are you prepared? If not, we must prepare quickly. 