

## **The Mysteries of the Mayans and Tikal, an Archaeological Treasure**

**By Robert L. Smith**

In the Peten Jungle of the Guatemalan lowlands lies the ancient ruins of Tikal, a deserted Mayan city state, which includes temples dating from 600 BC to 900 AD. Tikal is the largest excavated site on the American continent, where over 4,000 structures have been found to date.

Most of the structures in Tikal were built between 250 and 850 AD. However, in the Lost World (a section of Tikal) there are 38 structures which date to 600 BC. The Pyramid of the Lost World was built over four earlier pyramids, the oldest of which dates to 600 BC.



Pyramid of the Lost World

Who were these Mayans, and where did they come from? Many archaeologists have pondered these questions, since their civilization appeared suddenly around 600 BC.

Dr. Morley of Carnegie Institute wrote: “With records cut in imperishable stone, the Mayas suddenly made their appearance upon the historical scene on August 6, 613 BC. Why on August 6, 613 BC? Where were the Mayas on August 5th? Nobody knows ... They may as well have dropped down from Mars or some other planet on the 6th day of August.”

(Quoted from “Popular Science”) The America’s Before Columbus, by Dewey Farnsworth, page 12. 1

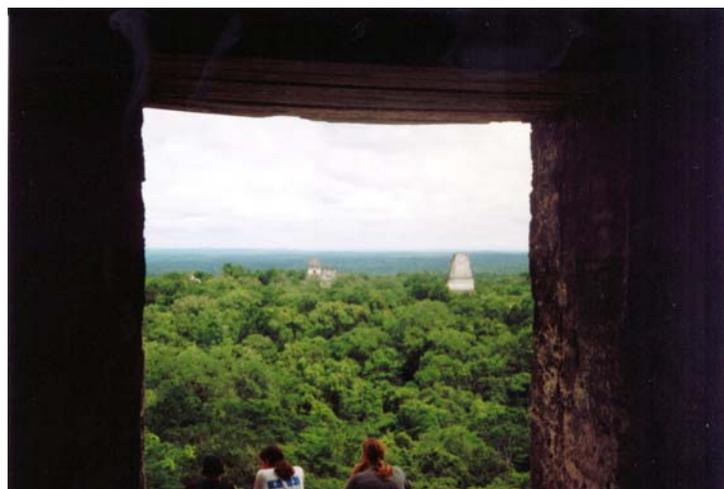


Temple 1 in Tikal, built in 695 AD (shown under restoration)

The main plaza of Tikal is situated between Temple 1 and Temple 2. Under the grass, this plaza was paved with limestone stucco, and is now covered by a thin layer of topsoil and grass. The limestone to construct these temples was hewn from a nearby quarry which was also lined with stucco to create a reservoir, since the porous limestone will not hold water.



Temple 2 across the plaza from Temple 1



At the top of each temple is a small opening into a small room, approximately 6' x 8' with a stone bench large enough for one person. It may have been the place where ruling Priests spoke to the people, observed the heavens.



The main plaza of Tikal is surrounded by palaces, which may have been residential dwellings for the wealthy elite, or may have been used for civic or ceremonial purposes.

A walk through Tikal reveals a huge city of ancient architectural accomplishments, strangely deserted after 900 AD. The name, Tikal, given by later descendants, means “place of voices,” or “place of whispers,” indicating a belief that the spirits of the ancient inhabitants still roam these ruins. The local tour guides tell that modern Mayans do not visit Tikal.

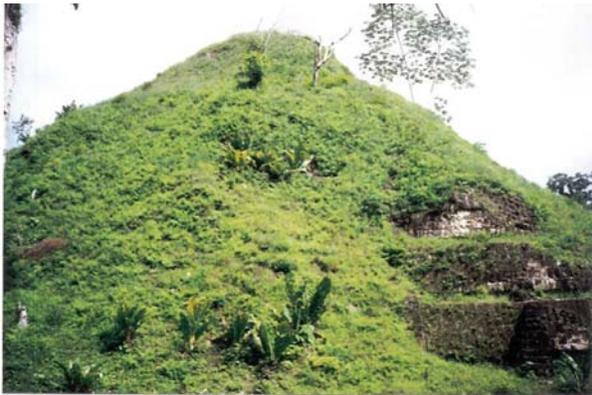


Tikal Central Plaza is lined with stela depicting rulers of Tikal



The perimeter of the main plaza is lined with stela depicting the rulers of Tikal. Below each stela of a ruler is an alter or pedestal representing his conquests over enemies.

On the back of many of the stela is carved the name of the ruler and the dates of his reign.



The terrain is flat except for scores of curious mounds which resemble small hills covered with grass and trees. Limestone decays into soil which supports plant life. Closer observation reveals a hidden temple only where vertical walls in some areas have prevented growth of plant life.

Ruins of an ancient temple in Tikal which has not been excavated. Vertical walls reveal an otherwise hidden structure.

Archaeology is a science that attempts to reconstruct history, where no written or oral history exists. It involves systematic recovery and examination of material evidence, such as graves, buildings, tools, and pottery, remaining from past human life and culture. It is a painstaking process of digging in the earth for buried artifacts in hopes of finding evidence of a previous civilization, and of finding articles or relics that might give some clues about the people who left them. Using the scientific method, archaeologists postulate a theory for the origin of their findings, and test this theory, based on a priori accepted findings to see if the theory fits the hypothesis for the culture being studied. When new evidence is unearthed, the theory may need to be modified to fit with the new findings. It is not an exact science, however, since a great deal of interpretation and opinion is required in order to come to conclusions about the meaning of the artifacts and their relationship to the area, time period, and application of the civilization which created them.

Anthropology is the scientific study of the origin, and the physical, social, and cultural development and behavior of humans. Since all recorded human history has included some form of religious beliefs of the cultures being documented, anthropology and archaeology must consider the religious beliefs of the cultures being investigated, and indeed, such scientific study would be incomplete without considering the religious beliefs of these cultures.

Some of the history of the Mayans is carved in stone stela, which give an account of their rulers back to 250 AD, but little history exists before this time.

But a religious history, if it existed, could be of great benefit to the scientific method of investigation. If such a history exists, however, archaeological investigation may serve to corroborate the religious history, lending credence, where some skeptics may doubt the authenticity of the religious history.

Such is the case with the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon, published by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, purports to be a religious history of the ancient inhabitants of Central America. This history begins in Jerusalem, 600 BC, with a Prophet named Lehi, who receives a revelation in a vision, commanding him to preach repentance to the people, telling them of their wickedness, and that if they do not repent, they will be destroyed. This occurs a few years before the Babalonian captivity of the Israelite nation from 597 to 586 BC. Needless to say, Lehi's preaching was not well received by the people of Jerusalem, and his life was threatened. The Book of Mormon tells that the Lord then commanded Lehi to take his family and flee Jerusalem, and that he would be lead them to a new promised land. Lehi's takes his family on a journey into the wilderness, along the banks of the red sea to an oasis in the desert where his son Nephi is instructed by the Lord in how to build a ship. The story chronicles the journey of Lehi's family across the oceans, and describes a new land that closely resembles Central America in its geographical descriptions in the Book of Mormon.

The Book of Mormon describes three different migrations to Central America that correspond remarkably with three civilizations in Central America documented by Archaeologists:

<b>Archaeology</b>	<b>Book of Mormon</b>	<b>Time Period</b>
<b><u>Name</u></b>	<b><u>Name</u></b>	<b><u>Archaeology &amp; B of M</u></b>
Olmecs/Tultecas	Jaredites	2500 - 600 BC
Mayas	Lamanites/Nephites	600 BC - 1519 AD
Zapotecs	Mulekites	580 BC - 200 BC

The Book of Mormon, published by Joseph Smith in 1830, long before archaeological discoveries in Central America were available for publication, tells of great highways and aqueducts, fortified cities, and of the building of ancient temples, and of cities buried under lakes and oceans by earthquakes and volcanoes, at the time of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ in Jerusalem.



Lake Atitlan, near Guatemala City, Guatemala has an underwater city that was buried at approximately the time of Christ, according to archaeologists.

Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl (Isht-lil-sho-chit-il) a Mayan historian with Spanish and Mayan parents wrote in 1600 AD:

... the sun and the moon eclipsed and the earth quaked and rocks were broken into pieces and many other signs that had been given came to pass, although man was not destroyed. This was in the year Ce Calli, which, adjusted to our calendar, happened at the same time that Christ, our Lord, was crucified. And they say that this destruction occurred in the first few days of the year. (Ixtlilxochitl: 16)

The Book of Mormon covers the history of the Nephites and Lamanites which corresponds to Mayan history from 600 BC to 400 AD, and tells of the final destruction of the Nephites by the Lamanites, (descendants of Lehi) in 400 AD. It tells of the visit of Jesus Christ to Central America, which is also told in traditional histories of the Mayans under the name of Quetzalcoatl. (See TNAR, Issue IV, Feathered Serpent). It also tells that several hundred years after the visit of Christ to America, the people became wicked and turned away from his teachings, resulting in great wars and much destruction. By 400 AD, the Lamanites had destroyed the Nephites, and the teachings of Christ were no longer followed.

Archaeologists are puzzled about the origin of the ancient Mayas, Olmecs or Tultecas, and the Zapotecs. They spend lifetimes digging in the dirt to find artifacts they hope will help them piece together a possible history of an ancient civilization. They are thrilled at the discovery of ancient writings or paintings and hieroglyphs which add greater insights than artifacts. If a written history of the inhabitants of ancient America exists, it would be of enormous worth to archaeologists and anthropologists in recovering ancient history and restoring knowledge of these civilizations.

The stumbling block, which prevents men and women of science from examining the contents of the Book of Mormon for clues to these ancient civilizations, is the method in which the Book of Mormon came into existence. Joseph Smith, a young farm boy living in up-state New York in 1820, was confused by the many religious revivals occurring in Palmyra, New York. He appealed to the Bible for answers to these conflicting teachings, and after reading a passage in James 1:5, which reads, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God...". In response to this advise, Joseph, then a 14 year old boy, went to a grove of trees near his father's farm, and prayed

to find out which of these conflicting religious groups was correct. In a vision, where Joseph said he saw God, the Father and His Son Jesus Christ standing above him in the air, Joseph said he was commanded to join none of these sects, and that God had a work for him to do at some future time. Several years later, Joseph tells that he was visited by an Angel, who told him of an ancient record, written on thin sheets of gold, that contains the history of the ancient inhabitants of this (the American) continent, and includes the account of the visit of Jesus Christ to these people after his resurrection in Jerusalem. This angel, whose name was Moroni, and who was the last of the ancient American prophets to write in this record, showed young Joseph the place where he had buried these gold plates in a hillside in Palmyra, New York centuries earlier. The plates were buried in a stone box covered with a stone lid. After meeting with the Angel Moroni for five years, Joseph, at the age of 21, was allowed to remove the plates from the stone box, and the ancient reformed Egyptian characters on the plates were translated by Joseph Smith by the gift and power of God. At the conclusion of the translation, the gold plates were returned to the Angel Moroni, who showed them to three other witnesses, who saw both the plates and the angel. The Angel Moroni also allowed Joseph to show the plates to eight different witnesses. The testimonies of the eleven witnesses are published in the introduction to the Book of Mormon.

Non-believers often stop their study of the Book of Mormon after hearing of this miraculous and incredible story. However, the old adage, "You can not judge a book by its cover," could not be more profound than when applied to the Book of Mormon, whose cover includes the title, and the phrase, "Another Testament of Jesus Christ." Between the covers of the Book of Mormon, in addition to the religious history of the ancient inhabitants of Central America, is a wealth of geographical, social, cultural, and physical information that describes the origin of these three civilizations, the Omecs, the Mayas, and the Zapotecs. It describes great civilizations, temples, highways, and wars among the people. It identifies the source of the Hebrew and Egyptian cultures found in Central America. It explains the origin of the Great White God, Quetzalcoatl, and explains why Cortez so easily conquered Montezuma, who believed that he was this Great White God who had visited his ancestors and promised someday to return.

Evidences of the authenticity of the Book of Mormon as a history of the ancient inhabitants of Central America include 1) Dates and Languages 2) Archaeological, 3) Documentary or traditional histories, and 4) Geographical, as detailed in the book, [Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon](#), by Dr. Joseph L. Allen, Ph.D.

Although there is no proof that the Book of Mormon is an authentic history of these people, the collection of evidence is overwhelming. While many critics cite a lack of archaeological evidence for certain passages of the Book of Mormon, the lack of evidence is often overcome by additional exploration which eventually reveals the evidence long hidden by time and earth. For a wealth of evidence of the Book of Mormon go to <http://www.jefflindsay.com/BMEvidences.shtml>

## Bibliography

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The Holy Bible, James 1:5

<http://www.jefflindsay.com/BMEvidences.shtml>

Robert L. Smith is an amateur student of archaeology and the Book of Mormon, and personally visited Tikal and personally took all of the photo's in this article, except for the photo of the Pyramid of the Lost Word, which was found on the following Web Site:

[http://mayaruins.com/tikal/a2\\_692.html](http://mayaruins.com/tikal/a2_692.html)

Most of the information about Tikal was obtained first hand from the tour guides in Tikal.