

Roundtable

THE PROSPECTS FOR NEW WORLD ARCHAEOLOGY

Participants: Cyrus H. Gordon
Dee F. Green
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An exciting new era of scholarship has opened up which will involve both Mormons and others in a dramatic growth in understanding of the origins and cultural history of ancient Americans. This Roundtable examines some of the reasons for a largely profitable past and some of the evidence and new discoveries that point directions for a much more promising future. Dr. Cyrus H. Gordon, Chairman of the Department of Mediterranean Studies at Brandeis University, first examines why the academic establishment has resisted study of contacts between developing civilizations in the Old World and the New World and presents some of the most impressive recent evidence for such contacts, especially his own extremely important demonstration (cf., TIME, May 24, 1968) that a Canaanite inscription from a stone in Brazil is genuine — the record of a voyage from the Gulf of Arabia to America in the sixth century B.C. Professor Gordon lectures and publishes on a rich variety of aspects of Ancient and Modern Near Eastern Studies and Pre-Columbian America; his books include THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST (Norton, 1965), EVIDENCE FOR THE MINOAN LANGUAGE (Ventnor, 1966), and FORGOTTEN SCRIPTS (Basic Books, 1968). Dee Green, Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Weber State College, who studied archaeology at Brigham Young University, then gives a critical survey of the work of "BOOK OF MORMON Archaeologists," pointing out why their "proofs" are largely illusory and suggesting authentic directions that can be taken in the future to relate the scientific effort to understand Ancient America to the BOOK OF MORMON record. Finally, John Sorenson, a member of DIALOGUE's Board of Editors, who was trained in anthropology at UCLA and then taught at Brigham Young University before joining General Research Corporation in Santa Barbara, surveys the wealth of evidence showing connections between ancient civilizations in the Old World and America and discusses the significance of this data for New World Archaeology and for the BOOK OF MORMON.

TOWARD A HISTORY OF ANCIENT AMERICA

Cyrus H. Gordon

If there is no history of ancient Antarctica, there is a valid reason for it. Stone Age man penetrated every continent except Antarctica, and until modern times, Antarctica was unexplored. Where there have been no men to leave behind any records of their achievements, there can be no history in the humanistic sense. But America — specifically Mesoamerica — is quite different. Anyone who visits the antiquity sites and museums of Peru, Central America, and Mexico is dazzled by the splendor, magnitude, and abundance of the legacy of the pre-Columbian civilizations. But though we know much about the ancient history of Asia, Europe and parts of Africa, the history of our own continent in antiquity is yet to be written, even in outline.

THE FAILURE OF ESTABLISHED SCHOLARSHIP

How have we come to know ancient Egyptian or Mesopotamian history? Certainly not by regarding the forgotten scripts as undecipherable; nor by viewing the monuments and art in isolation, detached from world history; nor again by accepting the prejudices of the Establishment as the badge of intellectual respectability. The pioneers in opening up the ancient history of civilized man in the Old World squeezed out the essential elements of information from Hebrew, Greek, and Latin writings, and applied them as opening wedges to make mute stones tell their story. That is how Grotefend cracked cuneiform in 1801; how Akerblad cracked Demotic Egyptian in the same year; how George Smith cracked the Cypriote form of the Aegean syllabary in 1872. Building on the breakthroughs of such pioneers (whose work, of necessity, had to be crude), Champollion, Rawlinson, and Ventris raised Egyptology, cuneiform studies, and Mycenology to higher levels so that they could become in time scientific disciplines, yielding facts out of which history could be reconstructed.¹

While the pioneers achieved epoch-making results with little or no help or encouragement, the academicians often did everything they could to denigrate, ridicule, and obstruct. When intelligent and educated men challenge the dogmas of the Establishment, it is usually the challengers who are correct and ultimately prevail. But there is some pathos inherent in the word "ultimately." Young Grotefend submitted his paper on the decipherment of cuneiform to the Göttingen Academy in 1801; the Establishment decided to pub-

I owe a debt of gratitude to Mr. and Mrs. Eugene Grant, Mrs. George Ellis and Mrs. Helen S. Slosberg for their help in enabling me to undertake a long-range study of cultural diffusion, of which this article is a part.

¹Cyrus H. Gordon, *Forgotten Scripts: How they were deciphered and their impact on contemporary culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1968).

lish it as a milestone in scholarship only in 1893, long after Grotefend had gone to his eternal rest. It is interesting to note that the authoritative book on Old Persian still calls the flaws in his achievement "sorry stuff."² Pedantry dies hard.

The thesis of this article is that pre-Columbian America was not isolated from the rest of the world, but for thousands of years had been in contact with the Eastern Hemisphere. At times the contacts were sustained and strong, at other times in abeyance, but the process over the millennia was creative. The interrelationships of Old and New World cultures make it possible to begin outlining the ancient history of America, and to process the scripts of America for decipherment by using Old World scripts as opening wedges against a background of available collateral evidence. Sterile perfectionists may cry, "But we don't have all the evidence!"; to which pioneers can only reply, "You've got to begin somewhere, and you can only do it with what is available." In important matters — and the history of mankind is important — it is less reprehensible to do too little than nothing at all.

How are we to explain the paucity of native American tradition concerning Old World contacts? First we must recognize the phenomenon of collective amnesia. The Egyptians and Iranians had completely forgotten their ancestral scripts, so that outsiders in the nineteenth century had to decipher hieroglyphs and cuneiform and retrieve those peoples' ancient history from oblivion. The Iranians, including the native scholars, were unaware of their ancient kings Cyrus and Xerxes, who were known to every educated Westerner from the Bible and classical authors. It takes hundreds of generations to build a great tradition, but only one to forget it. Let us not lose sight of the fact that when the Spaniards discovered and conquered Mesoamerica they were in the grip of the benighted Inquisition. They burned the codices of the Indians, melted down exquisite jewelry for the gold and silver, and did all they could to crush the spirit and destroy the civilization of the natives. Nevertheless glimmerings of historic memory survived; notably the tradition that a bearded white being from the East had sailed across the Atlantic to bring agriculture, metallurgy and other arts of civilization to America. The Aztecs called him Quetzalcoatl, the Mayas called him Kukulcan, the Incas called him Viracocha. The tradition is consistent; only the names are different. Natives of the Mesoamerican cradles of civilization looked toward the Mediterranean and adjacent parts of the Old World for the roots of American culture.

A VISIT FROM CANAAN

The essential correctness of the native traditions has been supported factually in various publications.³ The one thing that seemed to be lacking was evidence of specific contact that could be pinpointed in time and place.

²Roland G. Kent, *Old Persian* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1950) pp. 10-11.

³Constance Irwin, *Fair Gods and Stone Faces* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1963); and Pierre Honoré, *In Quest of the White God* (New York: Putnam, 1964).

Actually such evidence turned up in 1872 when the copy of a Canaanite text was mailed to the Instituto Historico in Rio de Janeiro by a person who claimed in the covering letter that his slaves had found the inscribed stone on his plantation at Pouso Alto near Paraíba. There are two Paraibas in Brazil, one near Rio de Janeiro, and the other far to the north where Brazil protrudes eastward toward the bulge of West Africa. For external geographic reasons, it seemed logical that the northern State of Paraíba was the place, whereas the internal evidence of the text points to the Region of Paraíba in the south near Rio de Janeiro. The inscription describes the locale as "a land of mountains." Since Canaanite mariners would dig in not too far from the sea, their mountainous base should be in the southern Paraíba, where there are high mountains near the coast, rather than in northern Paraíba where the mountains are neither high nor near the sea. In any case the find-site is now being sought in the southern Region of Paraíba by Estanislau Vera, a jurist in Rio de Janeiro, who reappraised the internal and external evidence and concluded that the nineteenth century scholars had not found the site for the simple reason that they were searching in the wrong Paraíba.

In any event the failure to locate the original stone contributed to the decision of the scholars to brand the inscription as spurious. But such would have been the verdict in any case of an Establishment which was not willing then, and is not happy now, to see ancient America brought into world history. Why should this be so? Specialists, such as Semitists, do not want their fields taken out of isolation, because doing so means revising their corporate views. Americans — Anglo-Saxons as well as Latins — tend toward hemispheric culture isolation for another reason. Most of us are descended from people who left the Old World because it was bad for them, and they sought a home in a New World, uncontaminated by Old World evil. For this reason we tend to resist taking the native Indian cultures out of their supposed hemispheric purity.

AUTHENTICATING THE TEXT

Thanks to Professor Jules Piccus, of the University of Massachusetts, who discovered an unpublished 1874 transcript of the Brazil text, the question of authenticity was re-evaluated in 1968. Piccus sent me a Xerox copy of the 1874 facsimile for my opinion. It soon became evident to me that the text was full of data that were unknown to scholars in the 1870's but which have come to light since then in Northwest Semitic inscriptions. This holds not only for vocabulary and grammatical forms, but for the very literary structure of the inscription as a whole. It is a non-funerary commemorative text in three parts: (1) an introduction identifying the author(s), (2) the body of the text narrating the event(s) commemorated, and (3) a finale invoking divine favor. This tripartite format for non-funerary, commemorative Canaanite texts is now known to be authentic from the Karatepe inscription found in 1946. This is the translation of the Brazil text:

We are Sidonian Canaanites from the city of the Mercantile King. We were cast up on this distant shore, a land of mountains.

We sacrificed a youth to the celestial gods and goddesses in the nineteenth year of our mighty King Hiram and embarked from Ezion-geber into the Red Sea. We voyaged with ten ships and were at sea together for two years around Africa. Then we were separated by the hand of Baal and were no longer with our companions. So we have come here, twelve men and three women, into "New Shore." Am I, the admiral, a man who would flee? Nay! May the celestial gods and goddesses favor us well!

The Hiram in question is not Hiram I (tenth century), nor Hiram II (eighth century), but Hiram III (553-533 B.C.). This follows from several considerations, including the script. The year of embarkation was therefore 534 B.C.; two and a fraction years later, when the ship reached America (aptly called "New Shore" — like "Carthage" which means "New City"), it was 531 B.C. (with a few months as the margin of error). Accordingly, in the sixth century B.C. we know of one vessel that crossed the Atlantic with fifteen people from Canaan. "From the hand of Baal" (which means "by an act of God") does not necessarily imply that the crossing was accidental and due to a storm. It could also signify that lots were drawn to see which ship should sail to America and this particular vessel drew the divinely-inspired lot to head for "New Shore," whereas the others were directed to set up posts or stations along the African coast. In any event we have reason to believe that this was not the first successful crossing effected by Near East mariners. Brazil, which is still largely uncharted, was probably even less explored then; but its coastal areas were already known to the great maritime peoples of antiquity such as the navigators of Canaan.

Who were the Canaanites? The term has two meanings in Biblical Hebrew. As a common noun it means "merchants"; as a proper noun it designates a group of linguistically related inhabitants of Lebanon-Syria-Palestine embracing Phoenicians, Hebrews, Edomites, Moabites and others. We often make the mistake of imagining people in terms of stereotypes. Thus all Phoenicians project the image of being sailors, whereas in fact many of them were craftsmen and even farmers. The Hebrews are often fancied to be a nation of Yahwistic landlubbers; but the Bible tells us they frequently lapsed into pagan usages (including Baalism and occasionally human sacrifice) and that three of the tribes (Dan, Asher and Zebulun) were nautical (Genesis 49:13; Judges 5:17). The language of the Brazil text is more akin to Judean Hebrew than to Sidonian Phoenician. This is not surprising for a Canaanite dialect emanating from Ezion-geber (in Edom but on the fringe of Judah) where Israelites had been the sea-faring partners of Phoenicians for over four centuries (i.e., since the days when Solomon and Hiram I embarked on joint overseas trading missions). The text mentions Baal and human sacrifice, both of which ring true for pagan Canaanites and their errant Jewish neighbors (against whom Prophets inveigh).

We do not know the exact ethnic and religious background of the fifteen people who reached America in 531 B.C., but the thing to remember is that crews were picked then (as now) not because of denominational or ethnic affiliation, but because they were skilled and able-bodied seamen. By the same

token, the scribe was not selected because he was a Sidonian, Jew, or Edomite, but because he could write Canaanite. Do we insist today that unless a man comes from a certain part of the Anglo-Saxon world (USA, or Canada, or England, or Scotland, or Wales, or Ireland, or Australia, etc.), he cannot be employed as a teacher of English nor given a contract to write a book in the English language? The fifteen people aboard the ship may have been quite as heterogeneous as those on Jonah's ship, which had aboard people of various backgrounds (who respected each other's religions) including the Yahwistic Hebrew, Jonah (see Jonah 1:15-16). It is our business to point out the range of possibilities in interpreting the Brazil inscription, whenever we cannot pinpoint the meaning and eliminate the alternatives. There may have been Hebrews aboard, but it cannot as yet be proved from the inscription itself. The Canaanite speech-community embraced both Yahwists and Baalists. The text mentions Baal but not Yahweh.

The importance of the Brazil text need not mislead us into oversimplifying the origin of Mesoamerican civilization, which was stimulated by trans-oceanic contacts from both east and west. Alexander von Wuthenau has observed that the myriads of ceramic sculptures from ancient Mesoamerica portray no American Indian types prior to 300 A.D. but only Far Easterners, African Negroes and various Caucasians — especially Mediterranean types, including Semites.⁴

THE NETWORK OF ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS

As soon as we bring America into the global picture of antiquity, new vistas begin to open before us. For example, by the sixth century B.C., the Near East had achieved considerable finesse in mathematics, astronomy and calendrical calculations. Conceivably, sound conclusions in such fields can be based on observations made in one region (such as the Near East), but it is much easier to explain an advanced astronomy and sophisticated calendar through global observations. For instance, the cycle of eclipses (within which all of them recur) is eighteen years, plus eleven and a fraction days. But from cycle to cycle, the same eclipse need not appear in the same part of the world. That is one of the reasons why modern astronomers require observatories in various parts of the globe. The 18+ year cycle, known as the Saros Cycle of Eclipses, can be established through observation only if data are gathered from at least three longitudes, 120° apart. If the observations are limited to one region, the cycle would appear to be 54+ years long. It is striking that the Mayas established the most exact calendar ever devised for any civilization, including our own. They had observatories on step pyramids resembling the ziggurats of Mesopotamia. And Mesoamerica is about 120° west of the Near East. If we go 120° east of the latter, we run into the Solomon Islands to the south and the Kuriles of Japan to the north. (It is suggestive that the pre-Japanese population are Caucasian Ainus.)⁵ The de-

⁴Alexander von Wuthenau, *Altamerikanische Tonplastik* (in the series *Kunst der Welt*), (Baden-Baden, Holle Verlag, 1965).

⁵Dr. von Wuthenau has shown me a Mesoamerican figurine portraying a typical Ainu.

velopment of ancient science, especially astronomy and calendrical calculation, is much more comprehensible against a background of global observations processed in creative centers like the Near East, Mesoamerica, and China.⁶

Cultural influence is always a two-way affair. Even if one side is far ahead of the other, there is still some contribution that the less advanced makes to the more advanced. The Founding Fathers of our country were more developed than the local Indians, yet Indian influence is evident at every turn in the USA: the canoe, corn, tomatoes, potatoes, tobacco, countless place names, etc. We may be sure that even a region of major magnitude in the evolution and dissemination of culture such as the Near East received important impulses from the outside. An objective method for starting further investigation is the analysis of metals and stones found in Near East excavations, to determine their places of origin. Impurities and trace metals can tell a great deal.

The mariners of antiquity were, from at least the Middle Bronze Age, more like a mobile international guild than members of a single ethnos. How could a network of mariners plying their trade on the Seven Seas be otherwise? We speak of the alphabet as a Phoenician invention. The role of the Phoenicians in adapting and disseminating the alphabet is paramount, but the invention of the alphabet has aspects that completely elude those who regard it merely as a graphic device developed by a single people.

The alphabet was not simply a means of spelling words, making it possible to record speech graphically with very few signs. Each letter had a numerical value. The Hebrew-Phoenician alphabet has the following names, phonetic values and numerical values:

	<i>Name</i>	<i>Phonetic Value</i>	<i>Numerical Value</i>
1.	<i>alef</i>	<i>ʾ</i>	1
2.	<i>bet</i>	<i>b</i>	2
3.	<i>gimel</i>	<i>g</i>	3
4.	<i>dalet</i>	<i>d</i>	4
5.	<i>he</i>	<i>h</i>	5
6.	<i>waw</i>	<i>w</i>	6
7.	<i>zayin</i>	<i>z</i>	7
8.	<i>het</i>	<i>ḥ</i>	8
9.	<i>tet</i>	<i>ṭ</i>	9
10.	<i>yod</i>	<i>y</i>	10
11.	<i>kaf</i>	<i>k</i>	20
12.	<i>lamed</i>	<i>l</i>	30
13.	<i>mem</i>	<i>m</i>	40
14.	<i>nun</i>	<i>n</i>	50
15.	<i>samek</i>	<i>s</i>	60
16.	<i>cayin</i>	<i>c</i>	70
17.	<i>pe</i>	<i>p</i>	80
18.	<i>ṣade</i>	<i>ṣ</i>	90
19.	<i>qof</i>	<i>q</i>	100
20.	<i>resh</i>	<i>r</i>	200
21.	<i>śin</i> (or <i>shin</i>)	<i>ś</i> (or <i>sh</i>)	300
22.	<i>taw</i>	<i>t</i>	400

⁶That celestial observations made by Phoenician mariners in distant climes, got back to the Near East is illustrated in Herodotus 4:42.

So deepseated are the numerical values that the Arabic alphabet, which deviates radically from the Hebrew-Phoenician order of the letters, nevertheless retains the old numerical values tenaciously. For example, *y* is the last letter in the Arabic alphabet (of twenty-eight letters), but it retains the old numerical value of "10"; and so with all the letters.

The alphabet was fraught with meaning for the ancients. The rabbinic *Sefer ha-Yesirah*, "The Book of Creation," represents the alphabet as antedating the Universe, with God creating the Universe by means of the alphabet.

In an important article, David H. Kelley⁷ points out that in the New as well as in the Old World there are names for the days of the month. Moreover, these names are linked with the alphabet. For example, the series *k-l-m* (in Hebrew *kaf* "hand," *lamed*, *mem* "water"; in Greek, *kappa*, *lambda*, *mu*) is reflected in the successive Yucatec Maya day-names *Manik* (which is written with the glyph depicting a "hand"), *Lamat* (the same name as Hebrew *lamed*, because *Lamat* has no general meaning in the Mayan languages) and *Muluc* (cf. *Ixil mu*) (the equivalent of the Aztec "water" day). Kelley goes on to show that half the names of the Aztec days recur in Eurasia in the correct sequence as constellation names. It is generally agreed that the alphabet was spread by traders and merchants; but Kelley goes on to propose that the merchants were mariners who used a set of guiding stars, and then adjusted the symbols for these stars into an alphabet.⁸

The most useful invention of man, the alphabet, is the product not of one people or one area but of international merchant mariners. This has a significant bearing on the origin and character of world culture.

Let us approach a specific problem within this framework. The oldest form of the alphabet that has come down to us in its fixed traditional order is the Ugaritic ABC of about 1400 B.C. It consists of thirty letters consistently listed in the following order:⁹

a b g h̄ d h w z ḥ ṭ y k ṣ̣ l m ḍ n z ṣ c p ṣ q r t g̣ ṭ i u ṣ̣

None of the letters are interchangeable except *s* and *ṣ̣*, which are the same phonetically. For instance *ṣ̣sw* ("horse") can also be written *ssw*. Thus the alphabetic principle is adhered to strictly (i.e., one and only one sign for each distinctive sound in the language) throughout the first twenty-nine letters, but the thirtieth was appended as an optional letter. To state things differently: twenty-nine letters take care of the phonetic needs of Ugaritic; the thirtieth is there for some non-phonetic reason. Everything makes sense if we correlate the letters of the Ugaritic alphabet with the days of the lunar month. A lunar month is always longer than twenty-nine days but shorter than thirty. Consequently in a lunar calendar (such as the Neo-Babylonian

⁷"Calendar Animals and Deities," *Southwest Journal of Anthropology*, 16 (1960), pp. 317-337.

⁸I wish to thank John L. Sorenson for calling my attention to Kelley's work, and for showing me a preliminary draft of his own forthcoming monograph on Near East contacts with Mesoamerica.

⁹Cyrus H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1967), p. 11.