

Published several times a year by THE SOCIETY FOR EARLY HISTORIC ARCHAEOLOGY at Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, for the dissemination among its members of information on new discoveries in archaeology throwing light on the origins of civilization in the Old and New Worlds, on the earliest periods of recorded history in the two hemispheres, and on the important historical claims of the Hebrew-Christian and Latter-day Saint scriptures; also news of the Society and its members and of the B.Y.U. department of archaeology and anthropology, of which the Society is an affiliated organization. Included are papers read at the Society's and Department's annual symposia on the archaeology of the Scriptures. All views expressed in this newsletter are those of the author of the contribution in which they appear and not necessarily those of Brigham Young University or the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Subscription is by membership in the Society, which also includes subscription to other publications.

112.0 A POSSIBLE LINEAR SCRIPT FROM PRECLASSIC MEXICO. By Welby W. Ricks. A paper read at the Seventeenth Annual Symposium on the Archaeology of the Scriptures and Allied Fields, held at Brigham Young University on October 14, 1967.

The earliest writings in the Old World have been found in the Near East, specifically Mesopotamia, where clay was used as the writing tablet since, being hardened by the sun, it is naturally available in a ready-to-use state. But also flat stamps and later roller stamps were used to impress a signature, thus becoming seals. The designs or insignia impressed on clay tablets with such seals were commonly purely geometric, but some were pictographic.

Cylinder seals were made in three different styles:

1) with handles like a rolling pin, 2) with slight concave depressions at each end for holding between one's fingers, and 3) with a hole through the center lengthwise for the use of a stick or wire to support and roll the stamp.

Cylinder seals have been found in Mesopotamia dating from before 3000 BC down to the downfall of

Babylon in 539 BC. They have been found in such abundance that it has been assumed that nearly every person, and certainly every person of importance, carried his seal with him wherever he went. Wills, declarations, sales of property, and other documents, all in the form of clay tablets, were regularly "signed" by rolling a cylinder seal over the tablet while it was still soft, i.e., before it was baked. Even doors were sealed in this way. When leaving one's house or shop for any length of time, one would simply slap a pat of wet clay on the door in the latch area and roll his seal over it, thereby "locking" the door. When he returned, if the pat of clay had been broken, he knew that someone had broken in. This custom may seem strange to us, but is not our custom of locking glass windows or doors just as strange? If we leave and return to find the glass broken, do we not also conclude that someone has broken in? The "locked" idea is basically within people's minds, and so was it also in ancient times.

In the New World, especially Mexico, Central America, and Peru, flat and roller stamps date back also to ancient times, though not as early as in the Old



Fig. 1. A cylindrical stamp engraved with dog's head (?), found in Yucatan. Enciso, p. 109.

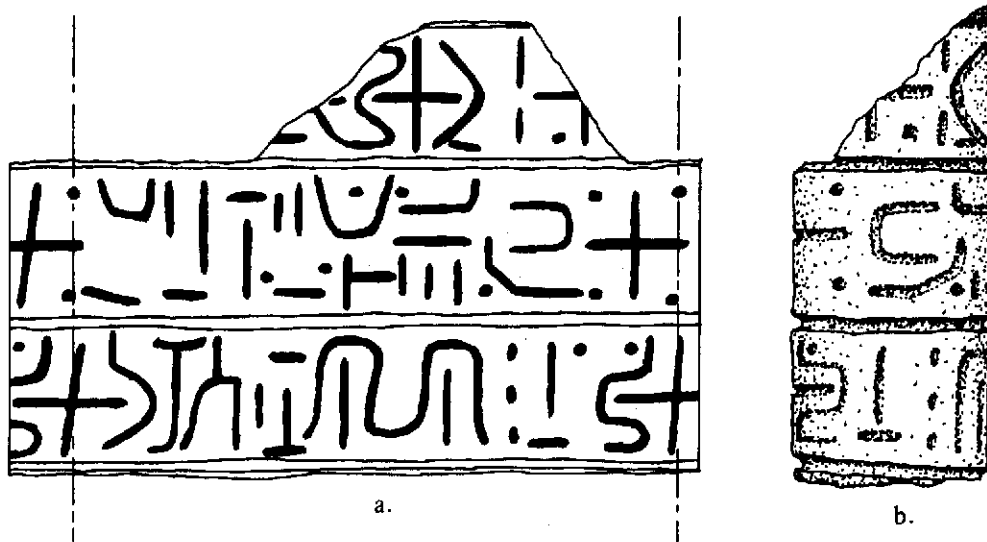


Fig. 2. Roller stamp from Tlatilco, Mexico: a., roll-out drawing of stamp impression; b., drawing from photograph. Milwaukee Public Museum. Kelley, p. 745.

World. Similarities as well as differences exist between the uses of stamps in the two parts of the world. Before the Spanish conquest in the New World, stamps were used to impress designs on skin, cloth, paper, and pottery. In the New World also, stamps were generally made of baked clay. Several, however, have been found made from other materials, such as wood, stone (two examples from Yucatan), copper (examples from Patzcuaro and Xochimilco, central Mexico), and gold. The fact that wood deteriorates much more rapidly than baked clay may account for the sparsity of wooden stamps found today as compared with the abundant supply of clay stamps. The occasional occurrence of differing arbitrary symbols causes unusual interest, since the vast majority of stamps present a definite design of repeating elements.

It is interesting to note that the New World Archaeological Foundation of Brigham Young University found a cache of roller stamps in a stone box in a temple complex at Chiapa de Corzo dating back to Preclassic times. The location and the hiding of the cache would indicate that much religious significance must have been attached to these stamps. All of them appear to be arbitrary symbols.

In the July 1966 issue of *American Antiquity*, a very interesting article by David H. Kelley tells of the finding in 1948 at Tlatilco of a "cylinder seal" or roller stamp, 8.5 cm. long and 3.5 cm. in diameter, which was associated with a type "D" figurine, identifying it as belonging to the "Olmec" horizon (i.e., c. 1000-500 BC):

The seal is in three registers with one end completely preserved and the other partly preserved. Unfortunately, part of one register is

broken away. The other two are complete. All three registers clearly carry sequences of arbitrary symbols which are surely part of a hitherto unknown writing system . . . Except for another seal [with picture writing, also said to have come from Tlatilco] . . . this is the first clearcut evidence of [preclassic] writing from the Valley of Mexico. Chronologically, it may well be the earliest writing known from Mesoamerica. In a typological sense, insofar as it is possible to make such judgments about an undeciphered system, it seems more advanced than any of the other known Mesoamerican systems. Most notable is the complete absence of any recognizable pictographs. In later Mesoamerican systems, the three dots (:) would stand for the number three and the dotted cross (⋈) would stand for Venus, as it did among the Mayas. These symbols, however, are also known in the Old World scripts. By themselves, neither of them is adequate to connect this cylinder seal with any other writing system.

A few stamps have been selected here for the reader's study and comparison. But let me point out that not all are from the same time period. Therefore, there may or may not be any connections among them. The most significant of all is seen in Figure 2, which was reported by Dr. Kelley.

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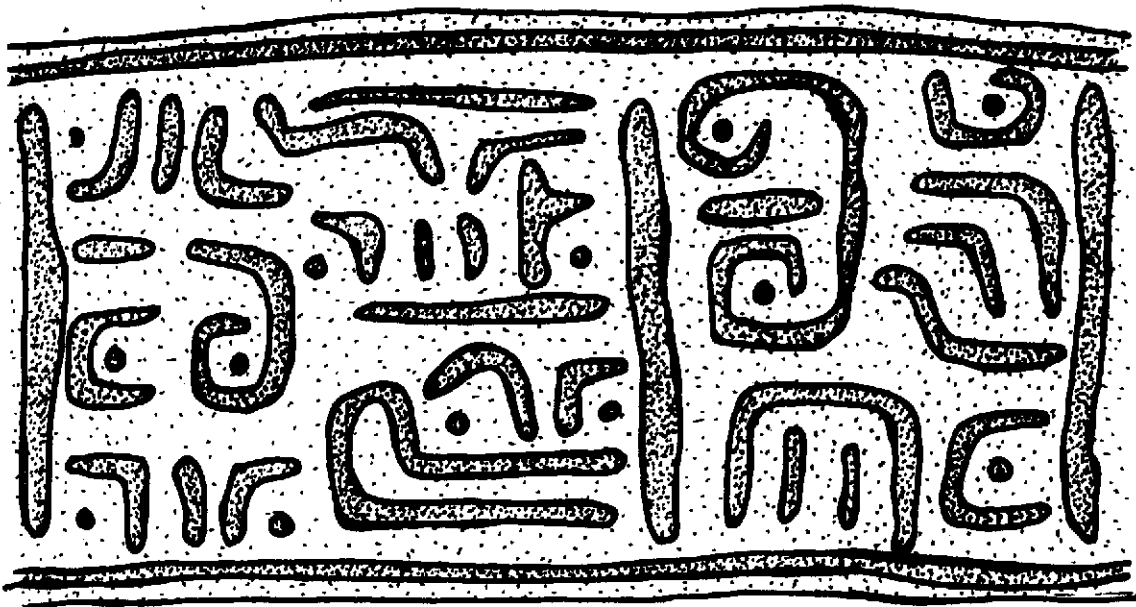


Fig. 3. Roller stamp with geometrical pattern, from the State of Mexico. Enciso, p. 40.

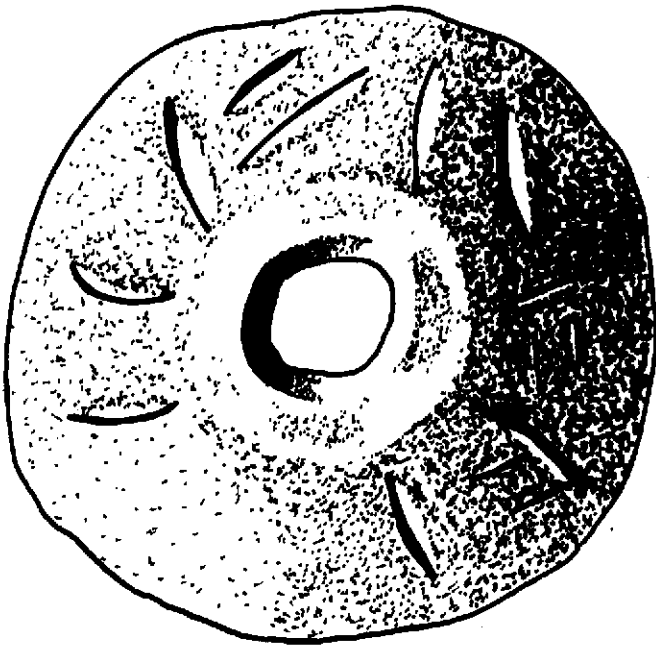


Fig. 4. Stone spindle whorl from Uaxactun, Guatemala. Kidder, p. 40.



Fig. 5. Gualupita III spindle whorl. Vaillant, p. 101.



Fig. 6. Flat stamp from Chimalpa. The crudeness of its geometric pattern is indicative of the antiquity of the design. Enciso, p. 34.

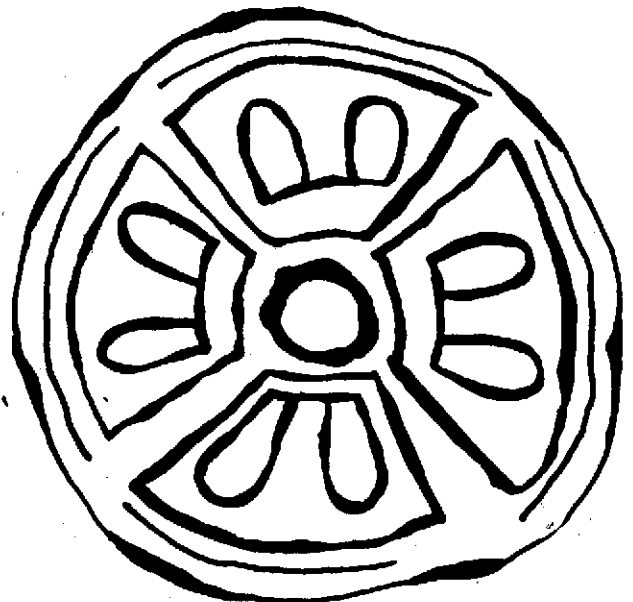


Fig. 7. Design from a cylindrical stamp found at Las Mercedes, Costa Rica. Lothrop, p. 378.

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112.1 LINGUISTIC EVIDENCE FOR THE PRESENCE OF ISRAELITES IN MEXICO. By Pierre Agrignier. A preliminary report by Mr. Agrignier on the progress of beginning research by him into the question of the possible presence of Semitic or other Near Eastern influences in the languages of Middle America. This linguistic research was done under the direction of the late Dr. Morris Swadesh, who until his death taught at the National University of Mexico. In order to clarify the discussion of *Linguistic and Paleographic Studies* appearing on page 9 of Newsletter 111, January 13, 1969, Article 111.01 (*The Phoenician Theory of New World Origins in 1968*, by Ross T. Christensen) and with the permission of Thomas Stuart Ferguson, the following is presented.

The data presented here are the result of five months' research, in the field and the library. To have obtained in this short time some definite although very preliminary results, would have been impossible without the orientation of Thomas S. Ferguson's hypothesis [i.e., that an examination of the early Middle American languages would disclose a direct historical relationship between the Near East and the New World] and the direct guidance of Professor Morris Swadesh, a man with an extensive knowledge of the Mexican languages to be examined. A large part of what follows are notes from several conferences I had with Professor Swadesh. For the Hebrew, I had the help of Mrs. Eva Uxmany Perez. Other data come from my field notes in Mexico or from reference books.

This memorandum is not ready for publication, both because the problem is very complicated and because the brief time available was not sufficient for double-checking all the details of dialectal occurrence of exact phonetics and the degrees of probability of some of the linguistic reconstructions. However, we have exercised reasonable precaution in order to give as much solidity as is possible in such a preliminary memorandum. It is proper to mention that I am not a specialized linguist, but an anthropologist, concerned with the question of ancient American-Asian contacts. In trying to obtain linguistic light on this question, I have attempted to acquire some of the skills and knowledge necessary for the task, but have been able to do what I have only with the help of others.

THE TRIBES AND THEIR NAMES

The kinship of the Oaxacan languages to Hebrew was suspected by Pimentel in the last century, probably because of common features of structure, unlike most languages of America, and because the Oaxacan is strangely similar to Semitic. Some have doubted the kinship because of the difficulty, without possession of the requisite phonological and structural keys, of recognizing any large number of common elements. This problem has largely been solved in the last several years (see articles published by Dr. Swadesh).

Swadesh considers that the proper name of this linguistic stock should be *Sawi-Zaa*, based on the traditional names of the natives themselves for the two largest divisions: the people generally known as *Mixteca* or 'Cloud-People', and those known as *Zapo-teca* or 'Zapotacea-People'. However, these names are Aztec. The former evidently translates in approximate fashion to the native term *Nya-Sawi* or 'People of Sawi', understood as meaning people of the rain god, but possibly different in its ultimate etymology (see notes farther on). As for *Zapoteca*, it may well be a misinterpretation by the Aztecs of the real name. That is, instead of *Zaa-teca*, or 'People of Zaa' (see farther on), they made it into *Zapoteca* from the root of *zapotacea*, a certain tropical fruit. The name of this fruit, it would seem, is in turn based on the name of the people, being an old compound *Zaa-Po'-tli*, perhaps originally 'Zaa-fruit', the 'fruit of the Zaa's'.

Returning to *Sawi*, the Mixtecs understand him to be the god of the rain, whose voice is thunder and whose sword is the lightning. His home is the heavens, *A-n-dwi*, etymologically *A-n-sewi*, perhaps (with a change in the vowel) simply the place of *Sawi*.

As for the Zapotecs, they have no interpretation for their own name. They are the *Benne-Zaa*, 'men of Zaa'. *Zaa* is 'cloud' or 'grease', apparently two words, originally distinct, but which have come to coincide in their phonetic form. They reason that they are neither

fat nor made of clouds, therefore *zaa* must be an altogether different word, the proper name of their people. Linguists have tried to find the origin by taking into account the sound laws of the *Zaa* language. For 'grease' they reconstruct an older form *'sa'ha*, cognate with *sa'a* 'grease' in the common period of the Mixtec dialects; but *zaa* 'cloud' may be from *'sawa*, with loss of the medial consonant, and *'sawi*, the self-same *Sawi* of the Mixtecs. The change of vowel may represent the active idea, the movement of *Sawi*, and for that reason may have acquired the secondary meaning of 'cloud'.

Now why should the *Sawi-Zaas* have called themselves the 'People of Rain'? This is untypical of the New World. (There is only the parallel of the *Mixe*—in Aztec *Mixe* means possession of clouds—neighbors of the Mixtecs who may well have copied from them.) If we think of Mr. Ferguson's hypothesis, we must look into the Semitic languages for an explanation. There are indeed very interesting possibilities. First of all, we should take into account that in most divisions of *Sawi-Zaa* all labial consonants found between vowels have changed to "W". Therefore, *Sawi/Sewi* may come from *'Sami/Semi*. In that case, the old name was simply the 'Sem-ites'. The association with the rain god may be accidental, due to the fact that *'Sewi*, derived from *'Semi*, had practically coincided with *Sawi*, from *'Sawu* related to Assyrian *sa'u* 'tempest', 'God of the Tempest'. The Semites in America may well have brought with them some pagan Assyrian myths, perhaps of Sumerian origin.

Thus far, we have spoken only of the Mixtecs and Zapotecs. The third group in importance among the *Sawi-Zaa* languages is called, in Aztec, *Mazateca* or 'Deer-People'. We do not know their traditional name, but, on the parallel of the other two cases, we may suppose it to be a translation of the native name or some confusion of terms. It is interesting to note then, that the Hebrew word for deer is *tsevi*, which in the phonology of the *Sawi-Zaa* languages would have developed to *'tsewi*, and finally *'sewi*, thereby coinciding with *sewi* from *Semi*.

Well, then, if the *Sawi-Zaa* languages are related to Semitic, one would expect to find a somewhat similar grammatical structure and fair number of similar words throughout the vocabulary. The search we have made so far is no more than a scratching of the surface. Indeed, if we had not had the guidance of Dr. Swadesh, the results would have been very meager.

STRUCTURE

On the score of structure, it has already been noted that *Sawi-Zaa* languages are remarkably similar to Semitic. The prevailing root form is bi-consonantic, but there are etymological evidences of the loss of following consonants; up to now it has been thought that the lost

elements were old suffixes, but it is not impossible that they may have been part of the root. In Mixtec, the past is formed with a change of root vowels, and in all the languages there are fossilized but very numerous evidences of old vowel changes. As seen in some of the examples already cited, the order of compounding is with determinant second, that is, *People-Sawi* for the 'Men of Sawi'. As another example, the Zapotec *Benne-Zaa* or 'Men of Zaa' is remarkably parallel to Hebrew *Benay-Ziyon*, 'Sons of Zion'. Only slightly evident in Zapotec by neutralization of tone, but very evident in Mixtec, is the reduction of the first root known in Semitic as the construct state. The fully reduced forms are today used only in a limited number of words, about thirty in all, including *person, man, woman, land, instrument, substance, affair, tree, animal*, and some others; but it is evident that this must have been a fully general rule in the past.

In the verb, as in Semitic, the causative, the tenses, and the participles are formed by means of prefixes, and the persons are expressed by suffixes. Moreover there are traces of infixes, the doubling of consonants, and, as already mentioned, variations of the root vowels.

In addition to noting the foregoing agreements in the general form of the languages, one finds a certain number of specific affixes which correspond phonetically and have the same or similar functions. In assessing these comparisons it should be borne in mind that the total number of formative affixes in Semitic is quite limited, amounting to about 15 in all.

VOCABULARY

A number of agreements in vocabulary have been noted. In the diagnostic word list, the agreements run about 18% (still subject to restudy). [In Newsletter 111, page 9, the proposed figure of 30% is incorrect.] This figure is far above the index of chance, which is considered to be about 5% at most. But, if it is accepted as indicating a connection, this figure also represents a distinct fading of original identity. In this case, we suppose it to be due to corruption of the language under the influence of the neighboring tongues.

112.2 NINETEENTH ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM PLANNED. By Claudia R. Veteto. Preliminary plans have been made for the SEHA Annual Symposium on the Archaeology of the Scriptures. Saturday, October 18, has been selected as this year's date for the all-day affair which is cosponsored by the SEHA and the BYU archaeology and anthropology department. It will be an occasion when students of scriptural archaeology can exchange with one another the results of their latest research.

112.20 *Chairman Chosen.* The Executive Committee has named Dr. Clark S. Knowlton, who was recently elected vice-president of the SEHA (Newsletter, 109.21), as the general chairman of the event. Other members of the symposium committee are Dr. Ross T. Christensen, Dr. M. Wells Jakeman, and Dr. Welby W. Ricks.

112.21 *Invitation to Prepare Papers.* Dr. Knowlton invites all Society members to prepare a paper for possible reading at the Symposium. The only limitation as to subject matter is that each paper should deal with some archaeological find or development as it bears on the Scriptures: the Bible, the Book of Mormon, the Pearl of Great Price, or the Doctrine and Covenants.

If you have a contribution to make, please send a one-page abstract or summary of your proposed paper by August 31 to: Symposium Committee, 140 Maeser Building, BYU, Provo, Utah 84601. The reason your abstract is requested by this early deadline is to allow time for the Symposium Committee to make its selection of papers to be read and to prepare a printed program prior to the Symposium on October 18.

Reading time for most papers will be 20 minutes. Following each paper a discussion period of about 10 minutes is planned. Selected papers will later be published in the *Newsletter and Proceedings of the SEHA*.

Dr. Knowlton would like to encourage all Society members to accept the invitation to participate in the Symposium by preparing a paper and submitting an abstract by August 31.

112.3 NEWS OF THE DEPARTMENT. By Claudia R. Veteto.

112.30 *Excavating in Campeche.* Former BYU student Evan I. DeBloois, who received his BA degree in 1965 (Newsletter, 96.30) and his MA degree in 1967 (Newsletter, 102.6) in archaeology at BYU; and Fred W. Nelson, Jr., and Richard B. Stamps, both graduate students in the department of archaeology at BYU, departed on January 18 for Campeche, Mexico, to do a season's work at the archaeological sites of Santa Rosa Xtampak, Dzibilnoac, and other sites in northern Campeche. Their work is under the direction of Dr. Ray T. Matheny and is an enterprise supported jointly by the BYU Department of Anthropology and Archaeology and the BYU-New World Archaeological Foundation. The expedition is scheduled to return in the first part of April.

112.31 *Student Club Activities.* The Department-sponsored Anthropology-Archaeology Club

held the following meetings during the latter part of the fall term, 1968:

November 2: A Saturday evening steak fry held at the home of Dr. Dale Berge was attended by approximately 40 students and faculty members. The dinner was followed by a discussion of "Religion and the Natural Sciences—Their Conflicts and Correlations."

November 15: Following a noon-hour slide presentation on the Department field trip of October 10 and 11 to Montezuma Canyon (Newsletter, 109.31), students learned of the advantages of participating in a similar field trip planned for April 17-19.

November 18: Dwight Potter, graduate student in the BYU Physics Department, gave a lecture entitled, "Radio-Carbon Dating: Fact or Fiction?"

November 21: Members of the Club participated in a general "archaeology lab clean-up." By sorting and packing materials, they gave valuable assistance to the Department.

December 4: Graduate students of the Department reported on some of the major archaeological and anthropological societies, associations, journals, and periodicals in an evening meeting designed to help students realize the benefits which they can gain from such.

December 12: The Club helped provide transportation for students to attend a night lecture by Dr. Leakey on "Early Man" which was given in the Assembly Hall in Salt Lake City.

December 14: At the Club's Christmas Party, students and faculty enjoyed a potluck dinner and decorating of a Department Christmas tree with archaeological and anthropological materials and artifacts. This year also the Club sponsored a Christmas basket for an Indian family.

112.32 *Cave and Kiva.* A student newsletter sponsored by the Department and the student club published its first issue in January. Editor Henry G. Knam described its purpose as, "To foster a greater understanding of man, both ancient and present, both at home and abroad. . . ." The first issue contained articles on the Department—its history, faculty, and current projects and activities of both faculty and students. The paper will be published bi-monthly during the school year (September to May) in connection with the Anthropology-Archaeology Club of BYU. Subscription fees are \$2.50 for the school year (18 issues) or \$1.50 for a single semester (9 issues). Interested persons should write to *Cave and Kiva*, c/o Department of Anthropology and Archaeology, 175 Maeser Bldg., Provo, Utah 84601.