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Title Paul Henning: The First Mormon Archaeologist

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Abstract Paul Henning was born in Germany in 1872 and passed away in 1923. He was the first Latter-day Saint to become a professional archaeologist and Mesoamerican scholar. He was also the first to bring his professional knowledge to bear on how to correlate the Book of Mormon record with the physical remains and history of the area now widely considered among church members as the core Book of Mormon location. While his ideas on these matters were never published, he deserves to be saluted as a pioneer of Book of Mormon studies. This biographical article includes information about his association with Benjamin C. Cluff Jr., president of Brigham Young University, and his contribution to the university.

PAUL HENNING:

THE FIRST MORMON ARCHAEOLOGIST

ROBERT W. FULLMER



Paul Henning was born in Germany in 1872 and passed away in 1923. He was the first Latter-day Saint to become a professional archaeologist and Mesoamerican scholar. He was also the first to bring his professional knowledge to bear on how to correlate the Book of Mormon record with the physical remains and history of the area now widely considered among church members as the core Book of Mormon location. While his ideas on these matters were never published, he deserves to be saluted as a pioneer of Book of Mormon studies.

Henning's early life is not documented, although it is known that he studied anthropology, archaeology, ethnology, geology, and languages—at least French, English, Spanish, and Hebrew—at universities in Berlin and Zurich. A growing interest in studying Aztec and Maya antiquities drew him to Mexico. While doing research there in 1899 he was baptized a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He immediately became interest-

ed in the Book of Mormon in relation to the ancient cultures.¹

Coincidentally, that same year Benjamin C. Cluff Jr., president of Brigham Young University, was planning an expedition that was to traverse Central America to reach Colombia where Cluff hoped to locate the ruined city of Zarahemla. In May 1900, with much fanfare, the exploring party left Provo on horseback. Cluff learned of Henning only after their departure and immediately sought to have him join the expedition as an interpreter and teacher of Spanish to the group. The German convert caught up with the group in Arizona after first coming to Salt Lake City to be interviewed by church authorities and to attend the temple. He rode ahead of the main party, making political contacts and arranging for places to stay. He also kept notes on such archaeological sites as they encountered them.

Soon after the group entered Guatemala, Henning became ill and was forced to remain there alone (in Huehuetenango). During his convales-

cence he taught European languages to support himself while he began serious study of the botany and anthropology of the area as well as of the scriptures. Soon, however, the expedition was forced to disband. At that point he was called by the First Presidency as a missionary, the first LDS missionary in Guatemala. In 1903, having had little proselytizing success, he was transferred to Mexico for an additional year's service on his mission.

Soon after returning to Salt Lake City, Henning was called to a mission in Switzerland and Germany, which occupied more than two years. Following his mission, he became a Spanish teacher at LDS University in Salt Lake, but a short time later he returned to Mexico.

By 1909 he was employed by the National Museum in Mexico City where he served with the title "Inspector and Conservator of Archaeological Monuments." (He consistently corresponded with church leaders in Salt Lake City to obtain their counsel and approval for his plans.) In 1917 he returned to Guatemala as a representative of the Museum of the American Indian (Heye Foundation) of New York City (now a part of the Smithsonian Institution); he was responsible for building their Central American collection by purchasing artifacts while traveling in various parts of Guatemala.

Paul Henning wrote many articles involving the Book of Mormon, although he published none. As he wrote out his ideas he would send them to President Cluff at BYU who in turn shared them with students. At one point the scholar wrote from Guatemala, "I found myself face to face with evidences which I had never hoped to find, at least not so soon."² Henning's zeal and knowledge stimulated Cluff as the latter participated, around 1920, in several church-sponsored activities—a conference on the Book of Mormon, a committee on the pronunciation of Book of Mormon names, and another committee concerned with creation of a Book of Mormon map. With the information Henning provided him, Cluff even got permission from the First Presidency to organize an "American Exploring Society" whose purpose was "the exploration and study of the land of the Book of Mormon with a view of bringing forth evidences regarding the divine authenticity of that book." But the ambitious plans for exploration and publication faded away upon Henning's sudden death in 1923 at the age of 51.

Henning's papers were given at his request to

Brigham Young University. They are now in the Special Collections Department of the Lee Library at BYU. In addition to extensive correspondence files, his numerous journals, written in Spanish, German, French, and English, could tell more about the man and his work. Those documents (as well as Cluff's) await detailed scrutiny by historians to clarify this early episode of Book of Mormon studies.³ □

- sion is from third person to second person, to second-person plural.
- This verse presents many difficulties. The above translation reflects the suggestions discussed in *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, 462. Though one may question the validity of this reading, enallage is still attested in the movement from third to second person.
 - As noted above, the pattern seems to be too sweeping to be labeled as either *coincidence* or *textual corruption*.
 - Sidney B. Sperry, *Our Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Steven & Wallis, 1948), 110.

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- Letter to B. Cluff Jr., 20 June 1902, University Presidential File, Cluff Collection, Box 8, Folder 3, Letter #8-3-122, Brigham Young University Archives.
- Among Henning's most important publications are *Apuntes sobre la Historia del Chalchihuitl en America* (México: Secretaría de Fomento, 1911); (with others) *Tamoanchan, Estudio Arqueológico é Histórico* (México: Museo Nacional de Arqueología, Historia y Etnología, 1912); *Estudios Mayas*, 2 vols. (México: Müller, 1919).

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