A Design Study in Costume for Projected Dramatic Productions Prescribing a Book of Mormon Setting Identified Herein as Late Preclassic Mesoamerican Culture

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A DESIGN STUDY IN COSTUME FOR PROJECTED DRAMATIC PRODUCTIONS

PRESCRIBING A BOOK OF MORMON SETTING IDENTIFIED HEREIN

AS LATE PRECLASSIC MESOAMERICAN CULTURE

A Thesis

Presented to the

Department of Speech and Dramatic Arts

Brigham Young University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Amanda J. Brown

August 1968
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Sincere thanks is expressed by the writer to those who have contributed toward completion of this design study: to Doctor Lael J. Woodbury for enthusiastic encouragement and helpful criticism; to Doctor Ross T. Christensen who, serving throughout most of the study on the thesis committee, gave invaluable assistance with the written work; to Doctor M. Wells Jakeman for information from his personal files; to Doctor Ray T. Matheny whose class lectures and guidance in archaeological research were crucial in this project.

The writer acknowledges also her family's interest and encouragement. Grateful thanks is given to her son, Kay, and to her niece, Alyne, for their devoted assistance with the costume renderings. Finally, acknowledgement is made of the help unselfishly given by Miss Dorothy Behling in preparation of the text and costume renderings for printing and binding.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to create twelve costume designs which are reasonably historically accurate and dramatically effective for film, theatre, and pageant productions relative to ancient inhabitants of Mesoamerica who lived during the late Preclassic period.

The problem involved ascertaining, in so far as possible, answers to the following questions:

(1) What ethnic and geographical factors would have influenced the choice of clothing during this period?

(2) What similarities of clothing and textiles are to be found in the archaeological evidences and early histories of this period?

(3) What did rulers and their subjects wear during Late Preclassic times?

The problem of designing a set of costumes relative to this period grew out of the writer's interest in dramatic costume and the archaeology of probable Book of Mormon lands. The writer has had the privilege of visiting several archaeological sites in Mexico as well as the national museums in Mexico City, and while completing a class in historic textiles, became preoccupied with the possibility of designing a set of costumes which would be useful for dramatic productions drawn from the Book of Mormon.
Justification of the Problem

Latter-day Saint scriptures are interpreted to indicate that present-day populations of Mesoamerica are descended, in part, from ancient Near Eastern colonizers whose record is contained in the Book of Mormon. Increasing numbers of modern Mesoamericans are accepting The Book of Mormon as a history of their ancestry, and dramatists are presently probing the record to comment on the accomplishments and conflicts which are accounted therein.

It is sincerely hoped that costume renderings for this period will influence contemporary designers concerned with the visual aspects of dramatic productions drawn from the archaeological record, and the traditional histories of ancient Mesoamerican cultures.

This study is both historical and creative in approach. The period from which theatrical costume is drawn should be studied thoroughly even though the actual creation of the costume is seldom based on an exact documentation of that period.

The Geographic Area of Study

A region within the geographic boundaries of Mesoamerica was selected for this study based on an assumption that the Nephite and Lamanite nations, whose partial history is recorded in the Book of Mormon, were first established within its boundaries.

This study also assumes the "limited Tehuantepec" theory, defined below, in identifying the geography of Book of Mormon lands. Acceptance of this identification stems from the following considerations:
(1) The major requirements of significant geographic statements within The Book of Mormon itself are met by the "limited Tehuantepec theory."

(2) The comparatively rapid rise of Mesoamerican culture seems to warrant the assumption that the Book of Mormon nations developed in this area. This sudden florescence of civilization suggests the intrusion of an actual colony from some outside source of advanced civilization which would seem to be what the Book of Mormon requires.

(3) In an issue of the Times and Seasons, dated October 1, 1842, Joseph Smith, translator of the Book of Mormon, made the following statement:

Central America, or Guatemala, is situated north of the Isthmus of Darien and once embraced several hundred miles of territory from north to south. The City of Zarahemla, burnt at the crucifixion of the Savior and rebuilt afterwards, stood upon this land...

The writer does not know whether Joseph Smith's statement was divinely inspired. However his editorial comment seems to explain the enigma of the sudden cultural florescence and is in harmony with Book of Mormon geographical specifications.

Therefore, the writer assumes that the Nephite and Lamanite nations were located in Mesoamerica. Zarahemla, according to the Book of Mormon, was the prime Nephite metropolis of the "land southward."

If Zarahemla was in Central America then the "narrow neck" must be somewhere to the north, i.e. the Isthmus of Tehuantepec.

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2Editorial, Times and Seasons, III, October 1, 1842, p. 927. The editorial comment appeared following the publication of an excerpt from Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan by John Lloyd Stephens and Frederick Catherwood.
Review of Literature

Due to the nature of the sources used for this study a detailed review of literature will be made in Chapter II.

Selection of Characters

A selection of twelve characters, for whom costumes are designed, was made with the following purposes in mind:

(1) The time period within the Book of Mormon must include events with great dramatic potential.

(2) Leading and lesser characters must represent a cross section of society within a designated period.

Delimitations

In creating costume designs for this thesis the writer has been guided by historical documents and the dress depicted in ancient Mesoamerican art. However, a claim to complete accuracy is not made. Within the limits of this study only basic costume details and those which seem appropriate to the selected characters will be discussed.

As was stated, the cultural traditions of Mesoamerica appear to bear out the assumption that the Nephite and Lamanite nations developed within this area. If this assumption is factual, we should expect the art work depicting clothed figures corresponding to Book of Mormon times to be somewhat indicative of the clothing actually worn by these ancient peoples.

A costume designer rarely insists on complete authenticity for theatrical purposes. His main concern is to create dramatic meaning and to capture the essence or flavor of a period. By adding a contemporary touch, the gap between past and present is bridged and
museum-like qualities are eliminated. As Laura Zirner has stated:

A rather abstract interpretation of a dress tradition brings theatrical realism closer to its audience than documented re-creation. 

As will be shown in Chapter IV evidence exists that basic similarities of clothing persisted throughout the time span of the ancient Mesoamerican civilizations. Therefore costume designs for this study are not limited to Preclassic culture. However, the elaborate dress pictured during the baroque period of Classic art has been avoided since it is too ornate for the simpler Preclassic style.

Definition of Terms

Costume designs are water color renderings of costumes.

Reasonably historically accurate refers to costumes which would suggest the time period to the viewer.

Dramatically effective indicates costumes which are appropriate to the character and his movement, denote role or status, create mood, capture the flavor of a period, and have aesthetic appeal.

Mesoamerica is a term coined by Paul Kirchoff to define a culture area comprising central and southern Mexico and northern Central America, including Guatemala, Belise, and portions of Honduras and El Salvador. His concepts stress the fundamental unity of a culture based on farming which set the area apart from its hunting-gathering

1 Laura Zirner, Costume for the Modern Stage, p. 6.
neighbors and made Mesoamerica the center of the principal high civilization of the New World.1

Early period of Nephite migrations and expansion is one beginning approximately 200 B.C. and ending near 45 B.C. when a group of Nephites, desiring to possess the land of their inheritance, went up from the land of Zarahemla to the land of Nephi and established a kingdom over which Zeniff reigned as first king. Approximately one hundred years later the Nephites in the land of Zarahemla became so numerous that they began to expand beyond their borders.

Late Preclassic Period, sometimes referred to as Late Formative, is a time period approximately 500 B.C. to A.D. 200 recognized by archaeologists as the latter part of the Preclassic Period 1500 B.C. to A.D. 200.2

Classic Period is a time period A.D. 300 to 900 known as the Golden Age of Mesoamerica and marked by vast building enterprises, hieroglyphic writing, precise astronomical observations, and an elaboration of religious art.3

Nephites were, generally, the more righteous descendants of a group of colonists who came to ancient America from the land of Jerusalem about 600 B.C.


2Michael D. Coe, Mexico, Ancient People and Places, pp. 78-81.

3Ibid., pp. 101-17.
Lamanites indicates the first rebellious group of these same colonists and their early descendants who were cursed by God and marked with a dark skin because of their unrighteousness.¹

Limited Tehuantepec theory is a theory about the location of Book of Mormon lands which designates the Isthmus of Tehuantepec as the "narrow neck of land" referred to in the Book of Mormon and equates Central America with the "land southward," and the land northwest of the isthmus and extending to the arid region of Mexico as the "land northward" to which the record refers. The land of Nephi is identified with the highlands of Guatemala, northwest Honduras, and El Salvador. The land of Zarahemla is situated in the lower hill country and plains of Guatemala, northern Chiapas, Tabasco, and southern Campeche, and the river Sidon which flowed northward is identified either with the Usumacinta River which forms a boundary between Chiapas and Guatemala or the Grijalva River in southern Mexico. The Yucatan Peninsula would perhaps be the land which was northward of the land Bountiful.²

¹Book of Mormon, II Nephi 5:21.
²Ibid., Alma 50:11.
CHAPTER II

ANCIENT MESOAMERICAN COSTUME SOURCES

Early Works

Hieroglyphic Writings and Art Work

Mesoamerican hieroglyphic writings include the glyphs, often combined with clothed figures, which are found on stelae (free standing stone monuments upon which inscriptions are found), on temple walls and stairways, on ceramics, and in the codices. The latter are strips either of fiber paper sized with thin white plaster, or deer skin which was cured and smoked to withstand the onslaught of destructive agents. These strips were covered on both sides with figures and characters painted in brilliant colors. They were then folded, screen-fashion, to form pages and placed between protective boards, a technique which gave them the appearance of bound books.¹

Of the Maya codices only three are known to have survived: the Tro-Corteseanus, the Peresianus and the Dresden. Many others were burned by fanatical Spanish friars who were determined to stamp out "heathenistic" traditions and practices among the Indians by destroying their ancient literature. Maya glyphs are a combination of pictographs, conventionalisms, ideographs and possibly phonetic symbols. Only about

¹D. G. Brinton, ed., The Maya Chronicles, pp. 64-66.
half of them have been deciphered, the known glyphs being "symbols for numbers, planets, the four directions, and such calendrical units as days, months and years."\(^1\)

In the central Mexican area there are numerous codices which survived the Inquisition. Since Mexican writing was pictographic, it was easily followed, and meanings were often explained on the margins by natives of conquest times. Over a hundred "Aztec and Mixtec Codices and other documents are known to scholars.\(^2\)

Non-Hieroglyphic Writings

Native Literature.—The Spaniards were soon to regret the hasty confiscation and wholesale burning of pre-Conquest manuscripts. Eventually they began the slow process of reconstructing past history through oral sources and those written records which had survived. Although the task of deciphering the Maya Codices has not been completed, considerable light has been cast upon the ancient past of Mesoamerica by three outstanding books from Guatemala.

One of these, Titles of the Lords of Totonicapan, cited in Chapter Four, was written by the Quiche Maya and consists of "anonymous accounts of the life of that Indian Nation."\(^3\) The Popol Vuh, first published in the nineteenth century, is a similar book written by

\(^1\)M. Wells Jakeman, "Ancient Maya Hieroglyphic Writings and Their Decipherment and Study," in Progress of Archaeology: An Anthology, ed. by Ross T. Christensen, p. 28. (Hereinafter referred to as "Study."

\(^2\)Ibid.

\(^3\)The Annals of The Cakchiquels, trans. by Adrian Recinos and Delia Goetz, p. vii. (Hereinafter referred to as Annals.)
the Quiche Maya and is considered to be a literary masterpiece. *Annals of the Cakchiquels* is an important document consisting of narrative accounts from the history of yet another branch of the Maya. Daniel G. Brinton published the original text together with an English translation in 1885 and considered it to be one of the most important documents of native literature.¹

The *Maya Chronicles*, known also as the *Books of Chilam Balam*, were written from the Maya languages, in Latin characters, after the European alphabet was introduced to the New World. The *Books of Chilam Balam* include narrations of historical events, religion, chronology, art, medicine, geographical background and indications of cultural influences from other areas.

Sylvanus Griswold Morley, noted Mayanist, informs us that, after the Franciscan friars introduced the Spanish alphabet to the Maya, the Indians made transcriptions of their native texts "not only directly from their hieroglyphic manuscripts but also by word of mouth from those who preserved the ancient learning and from the recollections of the scribes."²

**Early Histories.**--In the central Mexico area Father Bernadino de Sahagun devoted a lifetime to his monumental work, *Historia de las Cosas de Nueva Espana*. This record was written in the Aztec language³


³*Arthur J. O. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble, Florentine Codex, Book I, temporary foreword. (Hereinafter referred to as Codex.*)
with the help of informants from the ruling classes of the fallen Aztec Empire and covered contemporary life as well as the past history of this nation. Additional important histories from central Mexico include Father Juan de Torquemada's Monarchia Indiana, and Ixtilxochitl's Obras Historicas. There are some additional anonymous writings in Spanish by other natives who mastered the Spanish language.

The most outstanding Spanish chronicler from the Maya area is Bishop Diego de Landa whose Relacion de las Cosas de Yucatan, although not as thorough as Sahagun's work in central Mexico, is considered to be an important document. Antonio Gaspar Chi, a native Mayan of noble descent, supplied much of the data from which Landa compiled his writings. Chi had a knowledge of the Maya, Nahuatl, Spanish, and Latin Languages and as interpreter to the Spanish governors, was an invaluable source of information.

Another enlightening work is Fray Alonso Ponce in Yucatan, 1588 translated by Ernest Noyes and found in Middle American Papers, No. 4.

The Book of Mormon, a detailed record of the origin and history of the earliest civilizations of the New World, is a primary source with absolute dating. It is an abridgment of the record of three groups of "foreigners to the land," as has previously been stated. The group which left Mesopotamia during the third millennium B.C. appears to have made an Atlantic crossing, landing on what is presently the Gulf Coast of Mexico. It seems evident from geographical references in the Book of Mormon that the second "settlers" crossed the Pacific to land on the Coast of Northern Central America shortly after 600 B.C.
The third Group, which left Jerusalem when Zedekiah's kingdom fell to the Babylonians, apparently landed on the Gulf Coast of Mexico after having crossed the Atlantic as had the first "settlers."¹

Comparison of Sources

Hieroglyphic Writing and Art Work.—The most valuable sources of the ancient costume of Mesoamerica are the remains of graphic art which have been found among excavated ruins of the former civilization centers. Some of the sculpture realistically depicts various articles of apparel. Mural paintings, decorated pottery, and figurines are also helpful sources of clothing detail. The Codices are an additional source of pictured costume. There are many scholarly works containing photographs and line drawings of the art of ancient Mesoamerica and the Codices.

Unfortunately there is not an abundance of art work which depicts clothing during the Late Preclassic Period. Much of the monumental work of this cultural horizon which has been found, however, is "equal in quality to the best of the Classic Period."² It may be possible that monumental art works were executed in wood rather than stone this early and have not withstood the ravages of time. The Book of Mormon seems to bear out this possibility.³

¹All references are found in the Book of Mormon. First Settlers: Ether 1:33, Ether 6:11-12; Second Settlers: 1 Nephi 1:4, 18:8; Third Settlers: Omni verses 15-16.


³Book of Mormon, II Nephi 5:15.
Non Hieroglyphic Writing—Native Literature.—References to costumes in these sources are usually incidental to, and in connection with, gods and goddesses, the nobility, priests, and warriors. Weapons of war are referred to frequently in accounts of military exploits. There are references to exchanges of gifts such as precious stones and feathers, to cotton and maguey fibers and occasionally to jaguar and deer skins.

Non Hieroglyphic Writing—Early Histories.—Of all the early histories Sahagun's *History* has by far the most detailed and frequent references to costume. Generally, however, he is describing apparel worn by the Azteca following the twelfth century of the Christian Era. There are many references to costume in Landa's *Relacion* which are also largely concerned with late pre-Conquest and Conquest times. Both Ixtliilxochitl and Torquemada make interesting references to clothing worn anciently. Quite significant to this study are extracts from a book, reputedly written in the Quiche language by the Maya culture hero "Votan," which was burned by Bishop Nunez de la Vega of Chiapas in 1691. Both the bishop and one Ordenez de Aguilar had copied extracts from the hieroglyphic manuscript before it was burned.¹ These writings describe early "settlement" as the "Tzequil" ("petticoat-men") because of their peculiar dress.²

The Book of Mormon record contains numerous references to clothing and is the source of much information concerning textiles, ornaments and


weapons of war. The chronology of the Book of Mormon extends back to Archaic times with references to clothing worn in that early period.

Recent Works

Mayan

For an understanding of Maya costume the writer has relied heavily on Proskouriakoff's *A Study of Classic Maya Sculpture* which is a detailed study of apparel and accessories pictured in Maya sculpture. S. Morley's *The Ancient Maya* is a valuable source for information concerning the common people, religion and deities, sculpture and modeling, and is an over-all appraisal of the Maya Civilization. Herbert J. Spinden's *Maya Art and Civilization* discusses symbolism in Mayan art and its relationship to the deities. Tozzer's extensive footnotes in Landa's *Relacion de las Cosas de Yucatan* provide valuable explanations of references made by Landa to clothing and various facets of culture. Covarrubias in his *Indian Art of Mexico and Central America* discusses design motifs and the art of Mexico generally. *Mexican and Central American Antiquities, Bulletin Twenty-eight, Bureau of American Ethnology*, is also a valuable source of costume details.

Non Mayan

*The Aztecs of Mexico* by Vaillant is an informative source concerning the various facets of Aztec culture including clothing. Frederick A. Peterson's *Ancient Mexico*, discusses costume and factors relating to the apparel of ancient Mexicans. *El Lenguaje de las Formas*
en Teotihuacan by Laurette Sejourne has numerous line drawings of costume details. The Middle American Handbook, edited by Robert Wauchope offers a comprehensive digest of Mesoamerican costume. The artistic work, Mexico South by Miguel Covarrubias, artist-archaeologist, presents his concepts of the clothing worn both anciently and presently in Mexico and Central America.

Related Sources

The National Geographic published a volume, On the Indians of America with full color reproductions of paintings done by various artists depicting life in ancient America. A volume compiled under the direction of Armando Ayala Anguiano entitled, Mexico Antes de los Aztecs, includes reproductions of paintings drawn from the ancient art of the area. Wilfrido du Solier has an interesting work on pre-Columbian costume drawn principally from the twelfth century forward. Two volumes on costume, one by Max Tilke, the other by Wolfgang Bruhn and Max Tilke picture native Aztec costumes from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Book of Mormon Illustrators

Some efforts have been made to illustrate the Book of Mormon. Perhaps most notable is the work of Arnold Friberg who did a series of twelve oil paintings. Ernel Leroy Anderson created four oil paintings for a thesis completed at Brigham Young University in 1962. In his review of existing Book of Mormon illustration, he lists the work which had been done prior to 1962.

Reproductions are available at Latter-day Saint bookstores.
A thesis by Larry Berg Prestwich, accepted by Brigham Young University in 1966, contains "visual interpretations of events and personalities from the Book of Mormon." Ronald Crosby has illustrated a book for Mary Pratt Parrish. Raymond H. Jacobos has done the art work for Volume I of a new multivolume work for children entitled, Illustrated Stories for the Book of Mormon.¹

With the possible exception of the Tilke-Bruhn volumes, as cited above, none of the above sources contains costumes which are designed explicitly for dramatic productions, and much of the art work is unsuitable for theatrical purposes.

CHAPTER III

PROCEDURES

Approach

Although this study is primarily creative in its approach, the historical background of ancient Mesoamerica, as recorded by early scribes or as reconstructed by archaeologists, anthropologists, and ethnologists, has provided for the writer a "world" from which to create costume designs.

The problems of designing costumes for a projected dramatic production differ to some degree from those of designing costumes for a production actually in progress. In the latter instance the playwright has already discovered a "world" and made his comment upon it through the characters which he has placed therein. A director then forms a concept of what has been said and of how to communicate this artistically to an audience. Within these guidelines - the playwright's "world" and the director's concept - technical designers, including the costumer, work together to perfect a unified whole by strengthening visual aspects of the production. A costumer's concepts are thus already partially determined.

In creating designs independently for characters of an historical period, a costumer must discover his own "world" and gain his own
understanding of the characters who exist within it. This can be accomplished only through intensive research of available sources.

For the purpose of gaining an understanding of the designated period and in order to answer the questions posed by this study, the following steps were taken:

**Visits to Archaeological Sites and National Museums in Mexico**

While spending the summer of 1964 in Mexico City, the writer visited national museums and archaeological sites of the surrounding area. Numerous preliminary sketches were made from exhibits in the National Museum of Anthropology and History during a subsequent visit in the summer of 1967. Dr. Ignacio Bernal graciously provided a personal guide at the museum and arranged interviews with ethnologist Irgard Weitlaner Johnson, who suggested a list of helpful sources for future research.

**Classroom Studies in Middle American Archaeology**

Two semesters of work in Middle American archaeology were completed in which histories (including hieroglyphic writings, other native literature, and the Spanish Chronicles) and the Book of Mormon were compared. Mesoamerican culture, as examined by archaeologists and scientists in related fields, was studied from its earliest times down to the Spanish conquest. Finally, a guided library research was made with emphasis on historical references and early Mesoamerican art depicting articles of clothing.
Selection of Characters

Costumes were designed for characters selected from a period 200 B.C. to 45 B.C. on the assumption that some of the most dramatic events recorded in the Book of Mormon took place during this time. A colony of Nephites from Zarahemla, returning to the land of their inheritance in the southern highlands established a kingdom wherein intrigue, riotous living, heroism, and martyrdom had part. From the heartland of the Nephite republic, the land of Zarahemla, recorded conflicts between forces of good and evil provide potential situations for dramatic productions.

Design Rendering Techniques

Preliminary experiments were made to determine methods best suited for rendering the costume designs. Both prisma color pencil and water colors were tested for effectiveness as color mediums. Although the former is easy to work with and lends itself readily to small detail, it proved less effective than water color which gives greater intensity and has far more aesthetic appeal.

A water color rendering was photographed in the hope that this process would speed completion of the project. In addition to the high cost of producing an 8½ x 11 inch photograph, the color intensity was dulled considerably. The designs are therefore individually hand painted on 32-weight water color paper.

An attempt was made to transfer line drawings to number 72-weight water color paper from multilith mats. This paper, however, would not feed through the duplicating machine without great waste, consequently
a 32-weight water color paper was substituted. The lighter paper unfortunately yields a less satisfactory color rendering but was used in view of the number of drawings needed.
CHAPTER IV

ETHNIC AND GEOGRAPHICAL FACTORS

Origin of Mesoamerican Indians

Early Man

Four centuries after the discovery of man in the New World, the search for his origin is still in progress. Although scientific research continues to revise old concepts, certain facts, built up over the years through a patchwork of evidence, have become reasonably clear.

In the late 1920's some grooved dart points were discovered among mammoth bones excavated near Folsom, New Mexico. Since that time similar projectile points have been discovered in Mesoamerica, and as a result the previously assigned recent time-span of man in the New World is extended back 20,000 years or more beyond our era.¹

The discovery of primitive weapons, found at many scattered sites in Alaska and Canada beside the remains of extinct animals has established almost indisputably that man entered America from Asia by way of the Bering Strait. A land bridge may have been created

¹Helmut de Terra, Man and Mammoth in Mexico, trans. by Alan Houghton Broderick, p. 19.
between Asia and America when glaciers, absorbing tremendous amounts of water from the oceans, lowered sea levels.

Archaic Period

Near 7,000 B.C. large game became extinct either because man had developed his hunting skills or because the balmy weather of the Hypsithermal transformed vast areas of the new world into desert wastes. Whatever the reason, a shift toward agriculture as an economic base occurred, followed by a long period of experimentation in plant domestication.

When Richard MacNiesh discovered remains of the earliest known domestic maize in a series of dry caves and rock shelters in the Tehaucan Valley of Tamaulipas, Mexico, he probably revealed the origins of early settled life in Mesoamerica. Gradual domestication of plants provided a foundation to support the high civilizations which developed after 1500 B.C.

Preclassic Period

Archaeologists designate 1500 B.C. as the beginning of the Preclassic Period. The cultures of this period, however, appear suddenly as "fully integrated sedentary agricultural, pottery-making

---

1 Period designations are arbitrary devices utilized for the convenient and systematic study of past eras. Archaeologists generally agree on date and name designations for Mesoamerican culture horizons, however, variations do exist. To avoid confusion and provide a simple terminology for presenting chronologically the highlights of Mesoamerican history, the writer has chosen designations most frequently used in ordering of various periods in Mesoamerican past history.

complexes."¹ Evidences for a sufficient period of growth intermediate between primitive, incipient agriculturists, living in small villages, and the builders of the Late Preclassic ceremonial centers have not thus far been discovered.

Foreigners to the Land

According to early documents, three groups of settlers came across the sea, some of whom were ancestral to the early inhabitants of Mesoamerica whose impressive ceremonial centers are dated by radio carbon between 600 B.C. and 200 B.C.² These early documents refer to nomads who were not "settlers" but common to the land. Outside the Maya area they were known as "Mazehuales." The Maya called them "Ah Mayob," dark skinned tent dwellers natural to the land.³

In a letter to the Spanish emperor Charles V, dated October 30, 1520, Cortez reported that Moctezuma, the Aztec ruler, had confided:

> We have possessed a knowledge transmitted from our ancestors that neither I nor any of us who inhabit this land are of native origin. We are foreigners and came here from very remote parts. We possess information that our lineage was led to this land by a lord to whom we all owed allegiance.⁴

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² Ibid.

³ M. Wells Jakeman, lecture on Middle American chronicles given at the Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, January 3, 1968.

An original manuscript written in 1554 by the leading native Maya nobles of Totonicapan, Guatemala, gives the following account of the origin of their ancestors:

The wise men, the Nahuales, ... came from the other part of the ocean from where the sun rises, ...  
\[They were\] descendents of Israel, of the same language and customs.\(^1\)

Evidences of early high cultures in Guatemala seem to indicate also a landing of "settlers" on the Pacific Coast of Central America. An early record of the Cakchiquel Maya of Guatemala makes the following claim: "From the west we came to Tulan, from across the sea; ..."\(^2\)

Father Bernardino de Sahagun writes:

Concerning the origin of these peoples (of Mexico), the report the old men give is that they came by sea from the north ... from the direction of Florida (indicating an Atlantic crossing), and came coasting along the coast disembarking in the Port of Panuco which means 'place where those arrived who crossed the water'.\(^3\)

Prior to the publication of their book, Ancient America and the Book of Mormon, the authors had the works of Ixtlilxochitl translated from Spanish to English.\(^4\) Don Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl, partly descended from the Toltecs, was a learned Aztec prince acquainted with

\(^1\)Titles of the Lords of Totonicapan, trans. into Spanish by Dionisio Jose Chonay, trans. into English by Delia Goetz, pp. 169-70.

\(^2\)Annals, Recinos and Goetz, p. 45.

\(^3\)Fray Bernadino de Sahagun, Historia General de las Cosas de Nueva Espana, Introduction to Book I, cited by Thomas Stewart Ferguson, One Fold and One Shepherd, p. 254.

\(^4\)Milton R. Hunter and Thomas Stuart Ferguson, Ancient America and the Book of Mormon, p. 3.
the history and traditions of his people, which he recorded in Spanish after mastering that language. From his writings we learn:

Those who possessed this new world in this third age . . . according as is found in their histories . . . came in ships or boats from the part of the Orient to the land of Potanchan, at which point they began to settle it.¹

The following statement is from a translation of Relacion de las Cosas de Yucatan by Bishop Diego de Landa:

Some of the people of Yucatan say that they have heard from their ancestors that this land was occupied by a race of people, who came from the East, and whom God delivered by opening twelve paths through the sea.²

Various racial types in the new world provide evidence that there were other migrations than those by way of the Bering Strait. In Mexico alone anthropologists have identified six racial types of Indians with wide variance and much intermixture.³

After examining deformed Maya skulls, Ernest A. Hooten, physical anthropologist, noted that head deformation is found in the Near East and Western parts of the New World but absent among Asiatic Mongoloids. He states:

I am inclined to think that the ancestors of the Classical Mayas /sic/ were not very different from the white hybridized type which we call Armenoid-hook noses from Henry Field's Iranian Plateau race, round heads from the good old Alpines and inspired with similar aesthetic ambitions to improve their

¹Ibid., p. 123.
²Alfred M. Tozzer, ed., Landa's Relacion de las Cosas de Yucatan, p. 16-17. (Hereinafter referred to as Landa's.)
³Fredrick A. Peterson, Ancient Mexico, p. 20.
head form. Eventually they picked up some Mongoloid features—hair, pigmentation, high cheek bones, et cetera.¹

Paul Kirchoff, pointing out that the great cultures of Mesoamerica were high cultures even in their earliest known archaeological horizons, has stated that if their beginnings cannot be found on this continent, they must be found elsewhere.²

The Book of Mormon is a record of a group of "settlers" who migrated to the new world from the Mesopotamian Tower of Babel at the time of the confusion of tongues and of two groups who migrated from Palestine shortly after 600 B.C.³ This record gives eyewitness accounts which supply answers to the enigma of the sudden emergence of high civilizations in the New World. It explains also the fundamental cultural unity which, despite regional diversities of expression, sets early Mesoamerica apart from her nomadic, hunting, gathering neighbors. Furthermore, it explains decorative motifs and costume details of ancient American art which can be traced to Old World influences.

Geographic Setting of Mesoamerica

The Non-Maya Area

Though never extremely cold, Mesoamerica is a region of wide geographic diversity and its varied climate undoubtedly influenced the

¹J. Eric S. Thompson, The Rise and Fall of Maya Civilization, pp. 40-41. (Hereinafter referred to as Maya.)


choice of clothing worn. In the northern highlands, the Valley of Mexico lies above 7,000 feet in an extensive region of volcanic activity and frequent earthquakes. It is surrounded by mountains, and at the southeast rise the snow-capped volcanic peaks of Popocatépetl and Iztaccíhuatl. The lowlands are confined principally to narrow strips along the coast and to the Yucatán Peninsula. Steep escarpments of the Sierra Madre del Sur front the Pacific shoreline of southern Mexico, fusing with the uplands of Oaxaca to form a highland area dissected into numerous ranges and valleys. The Isthmus of Tehuantepec, bridging the Gulf Coast and the Pacific, separates this rugged terrain from the southeastern highlands, a continuous series of ranges extending from the state of Chiapas to the eastern boundaries of the southern Maya territory in Central America.

The Maya Area

This study is chiefly concerned with the Maya area of Mesoamerica and the settlers who arrived after 600 B.C. It assumes that within the designated time period (200 B.C. to 45 B.C.) the Nephite Republic was concentrated generally within the Maya region which includes Guatemala, Belize, the western portions of Honduras and El Salvador in Central America, as well as the Yucatán Peninsula, Tabasco and the eastern half of Chiapas in Mexico. (See Appendix A and B.)

The natural setting of the Maya area consists of temperate highlands and tropical lowlands. The highland area of Guatemala contains a few broad valleys which were important centers of ancient civilization. The Usumacinta River, and its tributaries, which drain
the northern highlands of Guatemala and eastern Chiapas, served as a water highway for the ancient Maya. Many ruins of their cities are found along its course which winds northeasterly to the Gulf of Mexico.

A hot, moist tropical lowland stretches north from the great river, the southern portion being covered by a dense jungle growth. In the northern and western lowlands, where rainfall is less, the tropical forest gives way to a low, thorny jungle with scrub growth along the northernmost shores of Yucatan.

In ancient times game abounded throughout Mesoamerica. The jaguar, largest of the spotted cats and source of coveted skins which lent themselves to the rich furnishings and costumes of Maya nobles, roamed in the lowland forests.

Brilliant tropical birds provided feathers for headdresses, capes, and other apparel. From the macaws, red, yellow, blue, and green feathers were obtainable, whereas the cotinga furnished both turquoise and purple varieties. The roseate spoonbill supplied feathers from pink to red and the hummingbird was a source of many iridescent colors. Wild turkeys from the central Peten area of Guatemala, were valued for their greenish-bronze, peacock-eyed plumage.

Most prized of all birds was the quiet, sedate quetzal. Largest and most ornate of these colorful birds, it is the leading contender for the title of the most beautiful bird in the world. Its feathers range from brilliant iridescent blue-green to the red and white feathers of its underparts. Breeding males grow four upper tail feathers of long shimmering green plumes, two of which attain a length
of up to twenty-four inches.\textsuperscript{1} The quetzal, restricted to regions of considerable elevation in Guatemala, Chiapas and Honduras, was prized throughout Mesoamerica and contributed substantially to the wealth of the highland Maya.

\textsuperscript{1}Oliver L. Austin, Jr., \textit{Birds of the World}, p. 173.
CHAPTER V

EARLY MESOAMERICAN COSTUME

Although various regions of the high cultural area of Mesoamerica had their distinctive ways of dressing, figures depicted in art works and the codices reveal patterns of costume which are basic throughout. Costume similarities can be traced from the time of earliest representations of clothed figures to the Spanish Conquest.

A pottery fragment of a cylindrical vase dating to the Preclassic Period, pictures a figure wearing the characteristic breech clout with its ornamented end hanging apron-fashion from the waist front. The fact that cultural similarities were widespread is born out in the following statement by Miguel Covarrubias:

All evidence shows that early cultures were closely interrelated and shared a common art and ideology, changing simultaneously and with the same character as they entered the transition between the Preclassic and Classic periods.

J. Eric S. Thompson believes that two thousand years ago a traveler in Mesoamerica from the valley of Mexico to Guatemala "would

1Oliver Ricketson, Jr., and Edith Bayles Ricketson, Uaxactun, Guatemala: Group E, Carnegie Institution of Washington, No. 477, plate 56.

2Miguel Covarrubias, Indian Art of Mexico and Central America, p. 241. (Hereinafter referred to as Art.)
not have noticed much difference in the way of life of Indian communities in the whole length of such a tour.\textsuperscript{1}

Proskouriakoff, in her study of Classic Maya sculpture, was able to detect six phases in its evolution. However, in the introduction to her report of this analytic study, she makes the observation:

Motifs on the elaborate costumes on Classic Maya stelae are of ancient origin.

Changes were found to lie not in the selection of definable forms or motifs but in the artist's approach to his subject . . . Significant change was in the artist not the subject of his art.

The Maya priest or potentate, whose power and prestige no doubt rested in large measure on the antiquity of the religious ritual, had reason to preserve intact the costumes and insignia associated from ancient times with his office and his gods.\textsuperscript{2}

Color

Inhabitants of southern climes are usually attracted by the brilliant colors in nature with which they are surrounded. Through use of color in their fantastic dress, ancient Mesoamericans demonstrated an amazing ability to draw attention to their bodies "as something beautiful."\textsuperscript{3} Perhaps they borrowed ideas from the spotted jaguar, the colorful birds, and the exotic flowers of the tropics.

Both vegetable and mineral dyes were used by the ingenious natives to add color to their costume. As the Phoenicians of the Old World, they extracted purple dye from shellfish, and scarlet was

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{1}Thompson, \textit{Maya}, p. 43.
\textsuperscript{3}Peterson, \textit{Ancient Mexico}, p. 217.
\end{footnotesize}
obtained from the cochineal insect which lives on cactus plants. A rich orange-red dye was made from the annatto tree. Landa tells us that colors of many different kinds were made from the dyes of certain trees and flowers.¹ The chacte tree, a Maya redwood, was a source of both red and black dye. Blue was obtained from indigo and the sacatinta plant, and from these two sources almost any shade of blue was possible to attain. A brilliant blue turquoise known as "Maya blue" was made from the mineral, beidellite. During the Classic Period beidellite paint was used in wall murals. Yellow was derived from an ocherous clay and from bird excrement. Highly prized green dye was made by mixing a yellow liquid from curcuma root with the blue liquid from indigo. Dark green was made from wormwood. Sahagun lists in great detail the various dyes which were known in the valley of Mexico.²

**Cotton**

Throughout Mesoamerica cotton was the principal fiber for clothing and household usages. The Tamaulipas caves have yielded evidence that cotton was in use prior to Preclassic times. MacNiesh discovered woven cotton cloth in these dry caves which dates to the Archaic Period.³ Cotton plants were cultivated later and ranked second only to maize in importance in agricultural pursuits. Sahagun speaks of

¹Tozzer, *Landa's*, p. 35.
colored varieties—bright red, yellow, rose colored, violet, green, verdigris—which "were natural and thus the cotton grew." In Guatemala there are two kinds of native cotton; one white, one a natural tawny shade of brown which is not dyed.

**Minor Cellulose Fibers**

Cloth was sometimes made by pounding the inner bark of various trees, most common of which was wild fig, and colorful designs were often painted on this tapa-like fabric. Other cellulose fibers, used for various articles of clothing, were hemp, henequin (sisal), ixtle, mescal, and silvestris. The latter produces long, creamy-white, fine silky fibers used for fine textured fabrics.

**Silk and Linen-like Fabrics**

Although there is no archaeological evidence that true silk was used in pre-Conquest times, the Book of Mormon refers to the use of "silk" and "fine twined linen." The writer has found no reference to linen fabric, however, Father Alonso Ponce speaks of "mantles and scarves of cotton, woven by Indian women that were almost as delicate as fine Dutch linen."  

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1Anderson and Dibble, Codex, Book III, p. 30.


3See Book of Mormon Index.

There are some interesting bits of information which may in part substantiate Book of Mormon claims regarding the use of silks. At the time of the Conquest, Indians were weaving "cotton so fine that the Spaniards mistook it for silk." Verla Birrell, after listing a number of fabrics used by the Axteca, includes one that was woven from the silk of a "special wild moth." Landa speaks of "those who gathered silk," and Willard, referring to the Maya has written:

It is stated that they made silk cloth, probably from a plant which produced very fine silk-like strands. Such a plant grows in this country today but is not utilized at all for such purposes.

From a true ancient Maya romance found by the Spaniards when they conquered the last king of the Itza in Yucatan, the following excerpt is taken:

He recalled his journey in the palenquin of embossed gold with its canopy woven of finest threads of the plant called ci. It was interlaced with threads of pure gold.

The plant called "ci" as defined in Chan Kom, is a general term for the agave plant, seventy-five species of which have been classified.

2 Verla Birrell, Textile Arts, p. 16.
3 Tozzer, Landa's, p. 201.
4 Theodore A. Willard, The Lost Empires of the Itzaes and Mayas, p. 145. (Hereinafter referred to as Empires.)
5 Ibid., pp. 323-24.
There is an additional possible explanation of "silk" for the Preclassic era. The writer has seen a sheer fabric made of pineapple fiber which has the appearance of silk. Pineapple is indigenous to tropical America and through the Spaniards has reached many tropical areas of the world.

**Weaving**

The hot, moist climate of parts of Mesoamerica are not favorable to the preservation of textiles, and few examples of weaving have been found. Funeral customs in some areas also hinder textile identity since many tribes burned their dead. The Zapotecs and Mixtecs, usually after four years had elapsed from the time of death, exhumed the skeleton, painted it red and white and buried it in an elaborate tomb.  

Kidder comments that weavers in Mesoamerica probably never reached the extraordinary heights which the ancient Peruvians attained due to the lack of wool. However, representations of textiles in sculptures and vase paintings along with accounts in the Spanish Chronicles, and some actual specimens which have been found, bear out the excellence of the weaving skills. From the Sacred Cenote at Chichen Itza carbonized samples of complex weaves have been recovered. Some samples of plain, basket and twill weaves were taken from a pit at Mound 1-E Yagul.

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3. Imgard W. Johnson, *Fragments from Yagul*, Mesoamerican Notes, No. 15, p. 79.
Women bore the responsibility of weaving. They accomplished their work on a backstrap loom common to other American Indians. The Maya women took great pride in weaving, regarding it as a sacred undertaking. Thompson informs us that a prayer was offered before each new textile was started.\(^1\) Sahagun describes the qualities of good and bad weavers among the Aztec women:

The good weaver of designs is skilled—a maker of varicolored capes, an outliner of designs, a blender of colors, ... a person of good memory. She does things dexterously ... The bad weaver of designs is untrained—silly, foolish, ignorant, stupid. She tangles \(\text{the thread}\); she harms \(\text{her work}\)—she spoils it. She ruins things scandalously; she scandalously ruins the surface of things.\(^2\)

From the Book of Mormon we also learn that women were given the responsibility of spinning and working "all manner of fine linen and cloth of every kind."\(^3\)

**Metals**

Although little archaeological evidence has been found thus far to support use of metals in Mesoamerica prior to A.D. 900, the Book of Mormon clearly states that the Nephites and Lamanites engaged in metalwork.

And they did have an exceeding plenty of gold, and of silver, and of all manner of precious metals both in the land south and in the land north.\(^4\)

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\(^1\) Thompson, *Maya*, p. 181.

\(^2\) Anderson and Dibble, *Codex*, pp. 51-52.

\(^3\) Book of Mormon, Mosiah 10:5.

\(^4\) Ibid., Helaman 6:9.
Evidence has been found that metal was in use earlier than previously believed, and perhaps further archaeological work will bear out the Book of Mormon record.

**Basic Characteristics of Costumes**

Although the Mendoza Codex pictures numerous scenes from the daily lives of the common Aztec people, little is known concerning the lower classes of the ancient Maya. Nor is there general agreement as to whom the figures in Maya art represent. They may be dieties, priests, rulers, or "an abstract conception symbolically portrayed." To paraphrase Proskouriakoff, the few group compositions which are known, picture minor figures who may be servants or acolytes. Some of these minor figures are obviously captives and sacrificial victims.

Paul Schellhas tells us that Bancroft had drawn, from recorded statements, the conclusion that the dress of the various classes among the Maya did not differ greatly except that "the material used by persons of higher rank was finer." Schellhas points to the varied and manifold representations in the manuscripts, reliefs and other sources as proof that Bancroft's conclusions were faulty.

There have been speculations that dress represented social status with simplicity the rule for the plebian who had not won the

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privilege of wearing elaborate garments. It has been further speculated that a person was known by his costume. Such speculation, if true, is wholly in accord with customs among the ancient Israelites. From the Zondervan Pictoral Bible Dictionary we learn that clothes were remarkably significant:

They were so much a part of those who wore them that they not only told who they were, but were intended as external symbols of those individual's innermost feelings and deepest desires. With certain kinds of cloth and with astonishingly vivid colors, they represented the state of their minds and emotions.¹

There is evidence that at times a stratified society existed among Book of Mormon peoples. The poor were scorned by a haughty upper class. Servants attended rulers and military leaders.²

Men's Clothing

The principal garment of men, whatever their rank, consisted of a breechclout which the Maya called an ex (pronounced eesh) and the Azteca called a maxtli. Landa refers to it as a "band, the width of the hand which served them for drawers and breeches."³ Worn between the legs and wrapped about the abdomen, its long ends usually hanging front and back, it ranged from the simple loincloth of the common people to elaborately decorated varieties worn by those in high positions.

A broader form of the ex made from some stiff material had more the

²Book of Mormon, Alma 31:28; 32:2-3; 52:3.
³Tozzer, Landa's, p. 89.
appearance of a belt and is often seen worn over an apron-like loincloth. This form is pictured in Maya codices.

A kilt-like skirt, ranging from very short varieties to longer ones, is often seen rather than the breechclout. According to Willard this was fashioned from soft deerskin which had been dyed or from cotton or silken fabric richly decorated. Some varieties were made of small ropes or cords woven together with a fringe of tassels around the bottom.¹ Painted walls at the ruins of Bonampak in Chiapas, depict men of rank wearing skirts, or tunic-like shirts made of jaguar skin.²

The codices usually picture the upper part of the body bare. However, elaborate necklaces and ornaments sometimes give a dressed appearance to the upper part of the body. Cloaks are seen only on persons who appear to belong to a privileged class or a rank and as a rule, are highly decorated. Mantles depicted in the Mexican codices are rectangular and knotted at the shoulders, but those pictured in Maya reliefs and codices are rather oval in shape, and are fastened front or back. Capes, some merely covering the shoulders and others reaching below the waist, were often decorated with featherwork.

Although many figures are pictured barefoot, others are shown wearing sandals made of various materials, from simple untanned deer hide fastened with hemp cord, to elaborate creations of jaguar skin.

¹Willard, Empires, pp. 144-46.
²Karl Ruppert, et al., Bonampak, Chiapas, Carnegie Institution of Washington, No. 602, Fig. 27.
Gaiters and garters, some of which cover the whole leg, are not uncommon.

**Necklaces and Collars**

These ornaments were popular throughout all of Mesoamerica. In the Maya region everyone seems to have owned a necklace of beads whether in elaborate or simple arrangements. Jade necklaces were highly prized, particularly the brilliant green varieties. Jadeite ranges in color from dull creamy gray to emerald-green and clouded varieties. Other stones and shells were used in necklaces also. At times a tassel or amulet is pictured suspended on a ribbon or leather support about the neck. Although decorative collars fashioned of feathers are common in the Mexican codices, they are found less frequently in the Mayan manuscripts. Apparently they were worn only by a privileged few.

**Earplugs**

Often referred to as "earspool;" these ornaments have a rather uniform appearance throughout Mesoamerica. At times they were attached to a headdress and in such instances were of elaborate design. They were fashioned of jadeite, stones of lesser value, shells, and even pieces of fabric for the lower classes. Kidder describes earplugs from Kaminaljuyu excavations which consist of a stem, throat, neck, flare, face, and lip. Above the throat a disk was inserted through which, he suggests, a cord was drawn passing through the stem and the ear lobe to a disk-shaped backing which rested against the mastoid
and held the earplug at right angles to the head. This appears to be the basic construction from which elaborations were made. Gold earrings were common among the Azteca, and the lower class wore obsidian earplugs.

Bracelets and Rings

Bracelets of various materials were fashioned in numerous styles. Some of them consisted of single or multiple rows of beads. Some varieties were made of fabrics or leather. Minor figures are sometimes pictured wearing a soft piece of fabric knotted about the arm. Gold ornaments were worn by the Azteca on both the arm and the lower part of the leg. At the National Museum in Mexico, the writer saw many finger rings which were made of clay as well as of semi-precious stones, and metals.

Headdresses

In Guatemala figurines from the Late Preclassic Period have been found wearing elaborate turbans. During the Early Classic Period rulers or priests are pictured wearing fantastic headdresses of green and red feathers built around a symbolic mask. Morley suggests that the framework was probably of wicker or wood carved to represent the head of a jaguar, serpent or bird. Styles of headdresses are far too varied for detailed discussion here. They range from minute conical

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1 Alfred V. Kidder, et al., Excavations at Kaninaljuyu, Guatemala, Carnegie Institution of Washington, No. 561, p. 106.

2 Sylvanus Griswold Morley, The Ancient Maya, p. 174. (Herein-after referred to as Maya.)
caps and simple head coverings to fantastic overloaded creations which dominate works of art. There were numerous ways of dressing the hair also.

Armor and Weapons

Heavily quilted armor filled with cotton or kapok was common over the entire region of Mesoamerica. Generally it consisted of a jacket reaching to mid-thigh or below, shin guards, and arm guards. Common soldiers wore a kind of quilted helmet, but high ranking soldiers wore more elaborate headdresses which were decorated with feathers and covered with a layer of metal. Soldiers in close contact with the enemy wore a cape also and a heavily padded kilt.

Closely knit reeds combined with skins were made into shields. Weapons included a spear thrower (known as an atlatl) and a bundle of darts, various models of war clubs made of wood with obsidian blades or points, and spears. Hatchets, obsidian knives, and bows and arrows rounded out the supply of implements used in warfare.¹

Women's Clothing

Women seldom appear on early monuments, and Proskouriakoff² explains that characteristics of the feminine figure are often suppressed in Maya monumental art making it difficult to distinguish between the sexes. Characteristic poses and actions are largely depended

upon to determine sex. Robed figures of women are obviously wives or mothers of the nobility. Their coiffures are usually elaborate, and headdresses, although lacking feathered splendor, were colorful and at times ornate, with a gamut of styles. Women wore earplugs, necklaces and bracelets.

An excerpt from the ancient Maya romance previously cited leaves us the impression that the nobility and upper classes were acquainted with rich textiles and splendid apparel.

Olal, virgin wife of Hunac-Ceel, empress of Mayapan had left the banquet hall. . . Within her handsome vaulted chamber, still clothed in her misty marriage robes, she awaited the pleasure of her lord. Jade and turquoise glittered on her splendid throat and breast while the dim light of wax tapers glowed in the curtained room . . .

The silken curtains parted swiftly. Before her stood not her royal bridegroom, but the young and handsome king of Chichen-Itza whom she loved. . .

. . . In a secluded spot, a palanquin awaited them. . . . Into the darkness and night of the jungle they vanished—the young lord of Chichen-Itza and the soft-eyed maiden, stolen bride of Hunac-Ceel.1

Common women usually wore only a skirt which in some instances was but a simple short cloth fastened about their hips. Longer skirts were tightly wrapped or pleated around the body and held in place by a broad sash or girdle. Landa informs us that the women of the Gulf coast covered their breasts "tying a folded manta [cloth] underneath their armpits." Some women wore a folded cotton handkerchief open like a cowl to cover their breasts.2

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1Willard, Empires, pp. 323-324.
2Tozzer, Landa's, p. 126.
The basic costume consisted of the skirt, the quechquemitl and the huipil. The quechquemitl is a sort of closed cape that covers the bust, the back and the shoulders, and it is often cut to form a point, center front and back. The huipil is a rather long, ample shirt with a horizontal neck opening and hangs below the knees. Formerly it was worn open at the sides and girdled at the waist or stitched as at present along the sides with slits left for the arms. The latter style was normally left to hang loose from the shoulders. Variations of the quechquemitl and huipil are still worn throughout Mexico and Central America.\(^1\) As Morley has stated, the dress of Maya women "has not changed appreciably in hundreds of years."\(^2\) Sandals were perhaps worn for festive occasions, but usually women are pictured barefoot.

Symbolism

Although the symbolism of Mesoamerica is not well understood, a very brief discussion of symbols pertinent to this study follows.

Spinden suggests that the form of the serpent lends itself to artistic development and was probably more potent in art than in religion. Significant, however, is the fact that ancient Israel used the serpent as a symbol of life as they journeyed through the wilderness. In Mesopotamia the serpent was regarded as a symbol of the river in the sky, source of rain, as well as a symbol of life, rebirth,

\(^1\) Louis Covarrubias, Mexican Native Costumes (entire booklet).

\(^2\) Morley, Maya, p. 32.
and resurrection. Reference is found in the Book of Mormon to the "fiery serpent" which is associated with the life god, Quetzalcoatl, of Mesoamerica.¹

The codices make references to the jaguar, but their meanings are not certain. Covarrubias suggests that the jaguar was a symbol of a rain-god cult.² Concerning the jaguar—or tiger—Kingsborough, who believed the American Indians were descended from the Jews, pointed out usage of the feline symbol in both the Old World and the New World.

In the eleventh page of the manuscript of Bologna, a tiger is represented with a spear; and the place which the tiger occupies in that painting induces us to suppose that it is intended to represent the Lion of the tribe of Judah which the Jews of the New World metamorphosed into the tiger.³

Proskouriakoff points out the ritual significance of design motifs and basic elements of design used during the Late Preclassic Period.⁴ These basic elements included the oblique linear segment, half circle arc, linear step, and hatched triangle. Although the origin is somewhat obscure, there was widespread use of the stepped fret and scroll motif in the Peten region of Guatemala during the Late Preclassic Period. The stepped fret and scroll have been linked to waves, water, and the serpent.

¹Compare Herbert Joseph Spinden, Maya Art and Civilization, p. 236ff.; Alma Reed, The Ancient Past of Mexico, p. 11; Num. 21:7-9; Book of Mormon, Helaman 8:14-15.

²Covarrubias, M., Art, p. 133.

³Lord Edward King Kingsborough, Antiquities of Mexico, II, 21, cited by Thomas Stuart Ferguson, One Fold and One Shepherd, pp. 138-39.

Similarities of Old World and New World Costume

The kilt, or short skirt for men was common not only to ancient Mesoamericans but to ancient Phoenicians, Egyptians, and Israelites. There is little difference between the costume of a jadeite figure, "said to be from near Tehuacan"\(^1\) and that of a Phoenician in a volume on the costume of the ancient Near East.\(^2\) In the *National Geographic Magazine* for December, 1960,\(^3\) an artist's version of a potter and a young farmer depicts them wearing a kilt which could have been copied from the Maya codices. The kilt was a popular article of Egyptian male attire and is represented in the art work of Egypt.

During a recent symposium held by Americanists, John Sorenson presented a list of cultural features common to the Old World and the New World. The list includes the ubiquitous serpent and feline symbols found in pre-Columbian costume on headdresses, ceremonial objects, aprons, footwear, and ornaments. Sorenson's Table of Shared Cultural Features includes eight articles of clothing and three articles of weapons and armor.\(^4\)

\(^1\)John Paddock, ed., *Ancient Oaxaca*, compare Fig. 14.


Extracts from Sorenson's list follow:

Clothing
  turbans
  "night cap"
  pointed shoes
  long robes
  sash
  mantle
  sandals
  loincloth

Weapons and armor
  kettle-shaped helmet
  thickened textile armor
  sling
CHAPTER V

CHARACTERS AND COSTUMES

Figures in Mesoamerican Art

We may not learn the identity of the splendid figures in Maya art until further decipherment of the codices has been made and a better understanding of Maya symbolism has been gained. Because government was theocratic and rulers of ancient Mesoamerica were looked upon as spokesmen of divine will, the ruler is not easily distinguished from the priest. Both of them are richly attired. Obviously the soldier or guard is recognizable through his spear, war club and shield, and the common man by the simplicity of his dress.

Spinden believes that a "ceremonial bar" pictured on some Classic monuments, but absent in the manuscripts, identifies the figure holding it as a priest. The bar itself carries the snake symbol. However, the real purpose of this accessory is unknown. The "manikin scepter," a small grotesque figure which is usually held in the hand, is a second ceremonial object. Spinden is of the opinion that this accessory indicates either a priest or a ruler.¹

Both of these objects appear to have symbolic meaning. Morley

¹Herbert Joseph Spinden, Maya Art and Civilization, pp. 49-50.
also utilizes them to identify priests or rulers, but since neither their exact purpose nor their symbolism is known, and since they appear only in a comparatively late period, they are not utilized in this study. Although picture sources and written records have influenced design, costume adaptations have been made from the writer's interpretation of selected characters.

**Background of Characters**

Because of Lamanite harassment, the Nephites left their highland home shortly after 300 B.C. and went down to the land of Zarahemla. Some of them, longing for their former home in the land of Nephi, returned and re-established a kingdom there. If, as is assumed here, the land of Nephi was located in what is now the highlands of Guatemala, it is not surprising that a colony of Nephites returned. Apparently Zarahemla was located in a hot, moist river basin, whereas the land of Nephi was a veritable paradise of "deep valleys and pine-fringed mountains" rich in natural resources. Eric Thompson, noting the lack of hieroglyphic writing in this area, commented: "It is hard to say why this region, materially so advanced, should have been so spiritually impoverished." As a general rule the Lamanites who possessed the land were lazy and indolent and unconcerned with establishing a great civilization.

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2 Thompson, *Maya*, p. 21.
After the death of Zeniff, first king of the re-established Nephite kingdom, his son, Noah, became king. His reign was one of riotous living supported by heavy taxation. Noah "put down" all the priests who had been consecrated and appointed new ones. When the prophet Abinadi denounced the prevailing wickedness in the kingdom, Alma, one of Noah's priests, was converted to the truth. Faced with Noah's wrath, he was forced to flee into the wilderness to escape death. There he gained a considerable following and eventually led his flock down to Zarahemla to escape persecution. Appointed High Priest over the land he served in this office until his death at age eighty-two.¹

Twelve costume designs in water color renderings follow with an explanation of design details.

⁴Book of Mormon, Mosiah 17-29.
ALMA THE ELDER

... there was one among them whose name was Alma, he also being a descendant of Nephi. ... and he believed the words which Abinadi had spoken, ... Mosiah: 17:2

Alma's costume has been designed for his declining years. Its comparative simplicity is indicative of his humility and greatness of soul. His small cap is modeled after a similar one depicted on a clay head found by Matthew Stirling near Tres Zapotes, Vera Cruz. It bears a striking resemblance to a headdress, referred to as a "stocking cap," worn by King Jehu of Israel as he pays homage to Shalmaneser.

Skirt lengths found in pre-Columbian art vary to some extent. The skirt length chosen for Alma seems in keeping with his age and office. His costume is an adaptation from the sketch of a figurine in the Chiapas collection at the National Museum of Anthropology and History, Mexico City. The principal design motif is a combination of stepped fret and modified tau symbols found in Proskouriakoff's Study, p. 101.

The loin cloth apron has a simple S form motif. His golden amulet bears a conventionalized serpent's head design and depends from a mother-of-pearl support about his neck. Clearly he is a priest who worships the expected Messiah of whom the serpent is symbolic. A bit of "Maya blue" color in the cap, neck motif, girdle, and apron gives contrast to the predominantly off-white color of his costume. He wears simple sandals on his feet.
ALMA THE YOUNGER

... as they were going about rebelling against God, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto them; ... 
... he cried ... saying: Alma, arise and stand forth, for why persecuteth thou the Church of God? Mosiah 27:11-13

Alma, son of Alma, lived during a period of great prosperity. He was numbered among the unbelievers until struck dumb by an angel of the Lord and miraculously converted to the Church of God. He is depicted here as a wealthy young aristocratic companion of King Mosiah's sons. His kilt-like skirt, worn over a shirt-like tunic, is an adaptation from costumes depicted on a lintel at Piedras Negras. (National Geographic on Indians, p. 186) The tunic is not found on the lintel but is frequently pictured in the Mexican Codices. It is used here to suggest an Israelitish influence in Nephite costume.

Figurines found at Teotihuacan as pictured in Sejoune's El Lenguaje, Figures 47, 96, suggested the designs for turban and girdle. Ornaments are fashioned from mother-of-pearl, jade and gold. On the amulet he wears is depicted a Star of David symbol. It was found, slightly modified at Uxmal, Yucatan; as is seen in Alma Reed's The Ancient Past of Mexico, p. 12, and is used to suggest further an Israelitish influence in costume. The simple sandals are in keeping with the earliest sandals pictured in Maya art works.
THE HARLOT ISABEL

... thou didst forsake the ministry, and did go over into the land of Siron, among the borders of the Lamanites, after the harlot Isabel.

Alma 39:3

From Dibble and Anderson's translation of Sahagun comes the following bit of interesting information concerning a harlot:

She ornaments herself well, she places herself at the market place, she adorns herself at the market place.

Book 10, p. 55

She makes herself beautiful; she arrays herself; she is haughty. She appears like a flower; ... she goes about with her head high.

Book 10, p. 94

Isabel's coiffure duplicates a style sketched from a figurine in the Palenque collection at the National Museum, Mexico City. The filmy mantle, to be worn knotted at the throat can be justified from the section, Fiber and Fabric, Chapter Four.

Suggestion for the breast covering is taken from Landa: "They covered their breasts, tying a folded manta under their armpits." (Tozzer's Landa's Relacion, p. 126) Isabel's skirt is the pleated variety held in place by a girdle adapted from one seen on a figurine in the Chiapas collection at Mexico's National Museum. The color is chosen to attract attention. Decorative motifs utilize the oblique line segments integrated to make a continuing pattern.

Necklace, bracelet, earspools, and ankle ornaments are of jade. She wears no sandals since women, generally, went about barefoot.
A NEPHITE MAIDEN

... and they did not wear costly apparel, yet they were neat and comely.  
Alma 1:27

This Nephite maiden was selected from the century just preceding the Christian Era during a period of equality and abundance among the righteous. The selection was made primarily to depict a basic costume.

Sunshine yellow, a color of spring, is the predominant hue suggesting the vibrant loveliness of youth. Under the quechquemetl is a sleeveless tunic. Anciently a skirt, fastened just below the breasts, was worn, however, the tunic is more suitable for stage costume.

Decorative motifs consist of the Z and S figures dating to Late Preclassic times, and the S figure of a later period which has been articulated into an interlaced structure. The tunic is girdled with a fabric whose color matches the scarf and twisted head band. The ends of the girdle interlace guilloche-fashion and are accented with small jade beads. The simple jewelry, a bracelet and hair ornament, are also of jade.

This costume may be of greater elaboration for periods when costlier garments are indicated. Either of the other basic ancient Mesoamerican costumes for women may be used and embellished. A suggestion may be taken from Vaillant's assertion that "elaborate necklaces and pendants, armlets and leg bracelets gave brilliance to costume ..." (Aztecs of Mexico, p. 112)
KING LAMONI

... Ammon was carried before the king who was over the land of Ishmael, and his name was Lamoni. ...

Alma 17:21

Lamoni was selected to represent Lamonite rulers of his time. A remnant of King Noah's unrighteous priests was influential in raising Lamonite educational and cultural standards throughout the land of Nephi.

The king's jaguar tunic, fringed with feathers, is suggested by a similar tunic worn by one of the figures in the Bonampak murals. There is little symbolism involved in the design of his belt and ceremonial apron other than the "life symbol," which is arranged in alternating directions. The cross on the belt ornament is used frequently and Spinden suggests that it represents some "very general meaning such as the sky as a whole." (Spinden, p. 93)

Lamoni wears the oval cape-like mantle of the Maya and the life symbol is repeated on its white border. This ancient symbol was used in Babylonia, Egypt, and ancient Mesoamerica. (Ferguson, pp. 118-122) The king's long hair is bound on top of his head with a knotted turquoise fabric. His headdress is comparatively simple but bears the jaguar mask which has a panache of blue feathers on top and a sweep of scarlet plumes fastened to the back. The feathered scepter Lamoni holds in his hand signifies his kingly office. Ornaments are of jade and sandals are of finest boar's skin.

The costume of Nephite kings may be fashioned of rich fabrics but not of jaguar skins. Their skirts might be similar to the one worn by Alma the elder and decorated with colorful embroidered designs. Although they may wear decorative headdresses these should remain rather simple since Nephite kings, as a rule, did not esteem themselves superior to their subjects.
LAMONI'S QUEEN CONSORT

Now the queen having heard of the fame of Ammon, therefore she sent and desired that he should come in unto her. Alma 19:2

The queen's entire costume, including headdress and jewelry, is designed from a sketch made of a figurine in the Chiapas collection at the National Museum, Mexico City. The white embroidered inset of the long cape, and the girdle were added by the writer for additional elegance.

The life symbol supplies the decorative design motif in the large borders of the costume, and the modified half circle arc forms the smaller borders.

The upper part of the body is covered by a modified quech-quemetl of soft, sheer fabric and is worn under the robe. The queen is wearing the basic, tight wrap-around skirt which is enhanced by a border design and ornamental girdle. Her simple sandals complete the costume.
A ROYAL GUARD

The guard's buckskin skirt and shoulder cape, less highly decorated, might serve as a costume for common men. The loincloth is of cotton fabric, leg and arm bands are of leather, and the "cross" motif links the guard to the king's royal household.

A piece of colorful fabric is worn through the perforated ear lobe. The helmet consists of a wooden or wicker framework covered with leather and ornamented with a panache of three scarlet plumes. Willard describes a royal guard at Chitzen Itza and designates two feathers for his helmet (p. 18). However, the number "three" has more aesthetic appeal than does "two" and a third feather is added here. A scarlet wing of feathers at the side lends balance to the helmet.

The guard's long lance has an obsidian point with a bit of decoration below it. The characteristic simple sandal of this period serves as footwear.
SERVANT TO LAMONI

Now the servants of the king began to murmur...

Alma 17:28

The design for this costume is suggested by H. M. Herget's version of an ancient Maya farmer and may serve for any male servant. (National Geographic on Indians, p. 201) His costume could scarcely be less simple. Herget's farmer wears only the loin cloth but a skirt has been added to this costume for stage purposes.

In his hand this ancient servant carries the coa, a digging stick with which maize was planted. It represents the principal technology which produced the subsistence base that Mesoamerican high civilizations were built upon.

About the servant's neck is hung a gourd containing his drinking water. Gourds were anciently employed as drinking vessels as well as other utensils, (Vallentini, p. 16) and the writer has seen them in use in Mexico even today. Over his shoulder the farmer wears a grain bag in which he carries the corn to be planted.

The sandals are worn to protect the servant's feet from the stony ground. He wears his hair in typical Maya fashion. Although it was a custom of the Lamanites to shave their heads and wear only the loin cloth, the Lamanites here have not been pictured this way since at this time a period of comparatively high culture developed among them.
ABISH

... they had all fallen to the earth, save it were one of the Lamanitish women, whose name was Abish, she having been converted unto the Lord ...

Alma 19:16

A modified huipil and "petticoat" is worn by Abish. The girdle is added for aesthetic appeal but was not commonly worn with the closed-side huipil. The decorative borders have a triangle design motif.

Abish wears a simple head covering on top of which is coiled a contrasting fabric useful for carrying vessels. In her hands she is holding a typical piece of Mesoamerican pottery.
MORONI - NEPHITE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

... now the chief captain took the command of all the armies of the Nephites—and his name was Moroni; ... Moroni... prepared his people... and also they were dressed with thick clothing.

Alma 43:16-19

The thick clothing with which Moroni prepared his armies seems to fit with the quilted armor common throughout Mesoamerica. Moroni's costume is patterned after a spearman's armor found at Chichen Itza, Yucatan as pictured in Follett's Weapons, p. 397, Figure 4.

A conventionalized serpent's head is emblazoned on the face of his brass breastplate. An ornamental apron falls from his broad belt. Proskouriakoff's Study (p. 97) asserts that the decorative twisted band or mat motif which falls from the apron and shield is a design of "great antiquity and duration." A simple conventionalized serpent's head is the design motif on the shield. Justification for the cape has been supplied in the section on Armor and Weapons, Chapter Four. It should be pointed out here that few articles of clothing are more dramatic than a cape.

Moroni wears a protective headdress with metal overlay which is decorated with feathers and a jade stone. This headdress is an adaptation from a helmet sketched in the Classic Maya section of Mexico's National Museum.

Small jade beads fringe the quilted cotton skirt whose predominant color is green. This color was selected since it matches the tropical growth of the assumed location of the land of Zarahemla.

Moroni carries an interesting war club with bone handle and obsidian point. (Follett, Weapons, p. 388, Figure 21) His sandals have protective leather guards, and his arms and legs are covered with protective quilted guards.
MORONI'S AIDE

The costume of the military aide differs only slightly from the one worn by Moroni. A quilted breast shield, secured by leather straps, replaces the metal plate worn by the chief. The aide wears only a small metal pectoral which might conceivably be larger. His short kilt is secured by a broad loin cloth drawn through a brass ornament with a stepped fret design on its face. The kilt is bordered with an integrated half circle arc design.

The war club is a standard type Maya macuahuitl with obsidian points. Covering the aide's head is a quilted helmet with a leather chin guard. It is copied from a Palenque helmet as seen in Follett's Weapons, p. 386, figure 18, and p. 398, figure 16. The aide is wearing protective sandals on his feet.
AMALICKIAH

Now the leader of those who were wroth against their brethren was a large and strong man; and his name was Amalickiah.
And Amalickiah was desirous to be a king; . . .
Alma 46:3-4

Thwarted in his desire to make the Nephite Republic a kingdom, Amalickiah fled to the land of Nephi and through strategy became head of the Lamanite armies. Eventually, through intrigue and murder he became king of the Lamanites.

The costume worn by Amalickiah is designed for his military exploits against the Nephites. He wears the mask of the sun god, ornamented with gold, scarlet feathers and the long, iridescent green plumes of the quetzal bird. (Spinden, p. 74)

The shield on his arm is made of thick woven reeds, whose face has a metal covering and is trimmed with feathers. The design on his apron and breastplate is patterned after one which is seen on the breastplate of a Jaina figurine. The writer has been unable to determine whether or not this design is symbolic.

Amalickiah wears a gold plated belt studded with jade. His apron is covered with cross hatching, which is a design motif common to the Late Preclassic Period. The fringe of feathers on the apron matches that which borders his jaguar skirt—or kilt. Earplugs, necklace, and bracelets are of jade. The covering on his legs is patterned after leg coverings found at Palenque. (Scellhaus, p. 607)

Amalickiah is definitely a villain. The red mark in his forehead, though not specified for him by the Book of Mormon, is characteristic of the Lamanite custom of painting themselves "red in the forehead." (Alma 3:4) Body painting and tattooing were common among ancient Mesoamericans, but the writer has limited discussion of these practices to the Book of Mormon reference here cited.
CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

Summary

The purpose of this thesis was to design costumes for twelve characters, selected from the Book of Mormon, suitable for projected dramatic productions. Selection of the characters was determined by the following criteria:

(1) Sufficient dramatic potential for projected dramatic productions must be inherent in the period from which characters are drawn.

(2) Characters should represent various levels within their society.

The problem involved questions concerning the costume of a typical cross section of Mesoamerican society and a review of available sources of archaeological evidences and early historical documents for information relevant to early costume.

To accomplish the purpose of this study a limited time period from the Book of Mormon (200 B.C.—45 B.C.) was selected. This period, chosen because it meets the specified criteria, is within the time limits of the Late Preclassic Period of Mesoamerica (500 B.C.—A.D. 200). Mesoamerica is an area comprizing central and southern Mexico and northern Central America which includes Guatemala, Belise, and portions of Honduras and El Salvador. It is the area of the highest civilizations in ancient America north of the
Isthmus of Panama. This study assumes that Mesoamerica is also the
area where Book of Mormon civilizations were located since its geo-
graphic composition meets the requirements specified within the Book
of Mormon for locations of mountains, rivers and lakes, and for
climatic conditions.

Early historical documents, including the Book of Mormon, were
studied and compared with historical evidences from archaeological
records. Available studies of pre-Columbian art depicting clothed
figures were reviewed and visits were made to the National Museum of
Anthropology and History at Mexico City.

The writer hoped to find examples of costume depicted within
the designated time period upon which to base the costume designs.
As the study progressed it became apparent that sufficient examples
from the Late Preclassic did not exist. Feminine figurines of this
period are generally nude and may possibly represent a fertility cult.
Women seldom appear on monumental works of art, even during the Classic
Period (A.D. 300–A.D. 900).

However, sources of ancient Mesoamerican costume reveal that
design motif and clothing styles from earliest times down to the
Spanish Conquest are basically the same for both men and women. Some
of them, in fact, persist among various ethnic groups to the present
day.

Research was made to determine various elements of costume which
include color, fiber and fabric, weaving techniques, metals, basic
styles, ornaments, headdresses, footwear, armor and weapons, and
symbolism. A brief comparison was made of ancient Old World and New World costumes to determine possible similarities.

Finally, costumes were designed and water color renderings made of the adaptations necessary to satisfy the writer's concepts of the selected characters and bridge the gap from Late Preclassic times to the present century.

Conclusions

From research made during this study the writer has concluded that enough evidence exists to support the assumption that three groups of settlers came to America anciently by ocean voyage, and were at least partially responsible for the high civilizations which developed in Mesoamerica during Preclassic and Late Preclassic times.

The sudden florescence of culture which appears to be fully developed from its earliest inception has not yet been explained by the archaeological record. Book of Mormon history and early traditions found by the Spaniards among Mesoamericans of the sixteenth century bear striking similarities and provide reasonable explanation for the sudden high level of culture. Some anthropologists and archaeologists now concede the possibility of Old World and New World contacts and probable early transoceanic voyages.

Dr. Ray T. Matheny of the Department of Anthropology, Brigham Young University, attended the Annual Meeting of the Society for American Archaeology held at New Mexico in May, 1968. He reported in a class lecture given May 14, 1968, that an entire session was devoted to papers concerning Old and New World contacts and possible transoceanic voyages.
Factors delineated above have largely determined the costume designs of this thesis. These designs may appear paganistic to some students of the Book of Mormon. It should be recalled, however, that there are numerous references in that record of regression to paganistic practices, wearing of costly apparel, and departure from orthodox views. On occasion Old World Israelites wore elaborate apparel as found in Exodus 28:2-8 wherein the robes of Aaron are divinely prescribed. Furthermore, the hot, moist climate of the assumed location for Zarahemla is not conducive to the wearing of Old World Israelitish costume.

Transported to a land abundant with brilliantly colored birds, rich animal skins, sufficient fibers and natural dyestuffs, and semi-precious stones from which fantastic costumes could be fashioned, it is not beyond reason to conclude that the Israelites of ancient Mesoamerica wore costume similar to that depicted in ancient works of art and described by early chroniclers.

Recommendations for Further Study

This study merely opens the door to further research pertinent to Book of Mormon costume. Further study of the archaeological record of Mesoamerica regarding fibers, dyestuffs, design motifs, symbolism, and other facets of culture pertinent to costume should be made. An exhaustive study of the historical records of Sahagun, Landa, Ixtlilxochitl and other native writers, and of such works as the histories compiled by Bancroft and Kingsborough is needed. Such studies would prove challenging and wonderously fascinating as well as helpful to those interested in the dramatic possibilities and scenic effects of projected Book of Mormon productions.
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A DESIGN STUDY IN COSTUME FOR PROJECTED DRAMATIC PRODUCTIONS
PRESCRIBING A BOOK OF MORMON SETTING IDENTIFIED HEREBIN
AS LATE PRECLASSIC MESOAMERICAN CULTURE

An Abstract of
A Thesis
Presented to the
Department of Speech and Dramatic Arts
Brigham Young University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Amanda J. Brown
August 1968
The purpose of this thesis was to design costumes for twelve characters, selected from the Book of Mormon, suitable for projected dramatic productions. Selection of the characters was determined by the following criteria:

(1) Sufficient dramatic potential for projected dramatic productions must be inherent in the period from which characters are drawn.

(2) Characters should represent various levels within their society.

The problem of creating the costume designs presumed an investigation of environmental factors which would influence the clothing styles worn by a typical cross section of Late Preclassic Mesoamerican society. Origins of the American Indian are briefly discussed and geographical influences on costume are shown. Elements of early costume are discussed including textiles, color, accessories, armor, and symbolism. Basic characteristics of costume for men and women are reviewed and similarities of Old World and New World costume are shown.

Executions of twelve water color renderings are included and explanations of each costume design are given. Recommendations for further study are made.
This thesis abstract by Amanda J. Brown is accepted in its present form by the Department of Speech and Dramatic Arts of the Brigham Young University as satisfying the thesis abstract requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

July 18, 1968

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Chairman of Committee

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