New Light

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Richardson Benedict Gill’s book *The Great Maya Droughts: Water, Life, and Death* provides substantial evidence of the natural physical events that occurred in Mesoamerica. These events are comparable to events recorded in the Book of Mormon.
Volcanic and Ice Dating in the New World

One of the key concerns in interpreting history is accurate correlation of natural physical events with those recorded in documents or traditions. A remarkable new book contains a wide array of data on natural events that affected ancient prosperity and population in what are usually considered the central Book of Mormon lands. The volume is Richardson Benedict Gill’s *The Great Maya Droughts: Water, Life, and Death* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000). Any attempt by a reader of the Book of Mormon to relate its historical happenings in the New World to the course of nature should from now on depend considerably on this crucial source.

While the reading in the book is not easy, generally educated people can still gain valuable ideas and data from it. In fact, the scope of the information it taps would make it difficult even for most scientists to appreciate all it contains (the technical bibliography alone occupies 55 pages), yet, again, there is much to be gained by the attempt.

Earth scientists and climatologists in recent decades have vastly increased what is known about changes in climate over the course of human history. Their facts and theories provide Gill with tools for trying to understand how certain natural events seem to have been key turning points in the archaeological history of not only Mesoamerica but also other parts of the earth. Volcanic eruptions were central to most crisis events. The extensive body of data collected by drilling through the miles-thick ice in Greenland is especially significant. Even more clearly than tree rings, layered ice cores give us a year-by-year count of climatic events recorded in each year’s snowfall. This record goes back tens of thousands of years. Volcanic eruptions are thus datable to the year if they can be detected in the ice record, although it can be difficult identifying which specific volcano may have been the cause. Gill does a commendable job in pointing out the cautions to be observed in using this information, including problems in fitting ice, tree-ring, and history data together.

In general the author (who is, of course, dependent on the huge store of data provided by thousands of scientists) is able to demonstrate persuasively that periods of cultural growth, economic prosperity, and population peaks in Mesoamerica coincided with favorable climatic conditions for agriculture. By the use of sophisticated models that relate all the variables, a sort of prosperity-and-disaster scheme is being worked out. Peaks and troughs in the history of the Maya, the Mexicans, and other populations prove to correlate in very instructive ways with extreme climate changes. Would not the same be true of the Nephites and Lamanites? (see relevant information in “Last-Ditch Warfare in Ancient Mesoamerica Recalls the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9/2 [2000]: 44–53, especially p. 50).

One more value of the Gill book is the author’s demonstration that dating the crucial natural events still may be subject to some uncertainty. So if any archaeologist claims that “we already know” all the dates of major events in Mesoamerican history, as we work to correlate the archaeological and Book of Mormon historical sequences, we do well to doubt that the dates are yet definitely cut-and-dried.1
Hugh W. Nibley, 13. While Joseph the Prophet was translat-
er other records but has focused only on
ered together (see Ephesians 1:9–10). This article acknowledges these many
his promise to Oliver.

Dec. 1835, 236). see a sufficient
will make; but judging from their size,

While many theories have been ad-
not answered in the Book of Mormon.

section 107.

Enoch was revealed to him (Novem-

1:2; Mosiah 21:27; 28:11) that Ether
had hidden in a manner that they might be
found (seeEther 15:33). Wasn’t the Lord involved in their finding those
plates? We can expect that the Lord, in his own due time, will lead someone of
his choosing to find the 24 plates.

While Joseph the Prophet was translat-
ing the Bible, the information on
Enoch was revealed to him (November–December 1830). Several years
later, he recorded more information

What’s in a Word?
Cynthia L. Hallen

2. Lehi was a descendant of Manasseh (see 1 Nephi 10:3).
3. The priesthood that Alma, held is de-
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