

ated December 25 from pagan festivals such as the Dies Natalis Invicti, established by the Emperor Aurelian (cf. Hoehner, pp. 11–27). Controversy, ancient and modern, regarding that date has had little influence in the LDS community (see CHRISTMAS). Presidents of the Church, including Harold B. LEE (p. 2) and Spencer W. KIMBALL (p. 54), have reaffirmed that April 6 is the true anniversary of Christ's birth, but have encouraged Church members to join with other Christians in observing Christmas as a special day for remembering Jesus' birth and teachings.

Some discussion has centered on the actual year of Jesus' nativity. Some argue that the phrase "one thousand eight hundred and thirty years since the coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in the flesh" (D&C 20:1) should be interpreted to mean that Christ was born exactly 1,830 years before April 6, 1830 (Lefgren). This view has been both challenged (Brown et al., pp. 375–83) and supported (Pratt, pp. 252–54). Others assert that the phrase was not intended to fix the year of Christ's birth but was simply an oratorical mode of expressing the current year.

Attempts to determine the exact date of Christ's birth or death are complicated by a dearth of pertinent historical information and multiple dating systems. The present dating system derives from the determination that Christ was born in 753 A.U.C. (*ab urbe condita*—from the founding of the city [of Rome]), made by the Scythian monk Dionysius, commissioned by Pope John 1 in A.D. 525 (1278 A.U.C.). The accuracy of Dionysius' system stands at the center of all discussion concerning the date of Christ's birth (Hoehner, p. 11).

John the Baptist's ministry began in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar (Luke 3:1), the only precise date in the New Testament. The fifteenth year would have begun in September A.D. 28 and ended in September A.D. 29. On this basis alone the dates of Christ's life can be reckoned from the New Testament.

The LDS Church has not taken an official position on the issue of the year of Christ's birth. Bruce R. McConkie, an apostle, offers what for the present appears to be the most definitive word on the question: "We do not believe it is possible with the present state of our knowledge—including that which is known both in and out of the Church—to state with finality when the natal day of the Lord Jesus actually occurred" (Vol. 1, p. 349, n. 2).

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ARCHAEOLOGY

Archaeology is the study and interpretation of past human cultures based on known material remains. Biblical and Mesoamerican archaeological research is of special interest to Latter-day Saints.

Archaeological data from the ancient Near East and the Americas have been used both to support and to discredit the Book of Mormon. Many scholars see no support for the Book of Mormon in the archaeological records, since no one has found any inscriptional evidence for, or material remains that can be tied directly to, any of the persons, places, or things mentioned in the book (Smithsonian Institution).

Several types of indirect archaeological evidence, however, have been used in support of the Book of Mormon. For example, John L. Sorenson and M. Wells Jakeman tentatively identified the Olmec (2000–600 B.C.) and Late Pre-Classic Maya (300 B.C.–A.D. 250) cultures in Central America with the JAREDITE and NEPHITE cultures, based on correspondences between periods of cultural development in these areas and the pattern of cultural change in the Book of Mormon.

Likewise, parallels between cultural traits of the ancient Near East and Mesoamerica perhaps indicate transoceanic contacts between the two regions. Among these are such minor secondary traits as horned incense burners, models of house types, wheel-made pottery, cement, the true arch, and the use of stone boxes. All of these may, how-

ever, represent independent inventions. Stronger evidence for contacts may be found in the TREE OF LIFE motif, a common religious theme, on Stela 5 from Izapa in Chiapas, Mexico. Jakeman, in 1959, studied Stela 5 in detail and concluded that it represented the sons of a legendary ancestral couple absorbing and perhaps recording their knowledge of a munificent Tree of Life. This can be compared favorably to the account of Lehi's vision in the Book of Mormon (1 Ne. 8).

The presence of a bearded white deity, Quetzalcoatl or Kukulcan, in the pantheon of the Aztec, Toltec, and Maya has also been advanced as indirect evidence of Christ's visit to the New World. The deity is represented as a feathered serpent, and elements of his worship may have similarities to those associated with Christ's atonement.

Recent work by LDS professional archaeologists such as Ray Matheny at El Mirador and by the New World Archaeological Foundation in Chiapas has been directed toward an understanding of the factors that led to the development of complex societies in Mesoamerica in general. Under C. Wilfred Griggs, a team of Brigham Young University scholars has sponsored excavations in Egypt, and other LDS archaeologists have been involved in projects in Israel and Jordan.

Another area of archaeological investigation is in LDS history. Dale Berge's excavations at Nauvoo; the Whitmer farm in New York; the early Mormon settlement of Goshen (Utah); the Utah mining town of Mercur; and, most recently, Camp Floyd, the headquarters of Johnston's army in Utah, have provided information about the economic and social interactions between early Mormon and non-Mormon communities.

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An Egyptian gold-covered mummy, excavated in Egypt by Brigham Young University archaeologists in 1988. Courtesy C. Wilfred Griggs.

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ARCHITECTURE

In the first generation the architecture of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints bore the stamp of individuality and originality. With a membership of less than fifteen thousand, Latter-day Saints undertook three daring projects: the KIRTLAND TEMPLE in Ohio, the master plan for the city of NAUVOO, Illinois, and the NAUVOO TEMPLE.

The Kirtland Temple, designed by the Prophet Joseph SMITH and Artemis Millett, has a pristine exterior free of extraneous detail and a well-planned interior bathed in natural light. The master plan for Nauvoo, created by Joseph Smith and others, was similar in concept to Smith's "plat for the City of Zion." It consisted of a grid of streets with gardens adjoining each dwelling. The highest hill was reserved for the temple, which rose above all other structures and made Nauvoo, as originally planned, a clear visual statement of the religious