Chapter Eight

ETHNOHISTORICAL SOURCECS AND THE DEATH OF ABINADI

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INTRODUCTION

The death of the prophet Abinadi in the book of Mosiah in the Book of Mormon is only briefly described, but the details carry considerable significance. In this chapter we examine the circumstances and manner of the death of Abinadi. We propose that his death was not simply a result of being "burned at the stake" per se, but rather was a consequence of an extended process of torture over time by continual beatings with lit firebrands.[1] We provide a historical basis for precisely this type of killing of prisoners through an examination of ethnohistorical, linguistic, iconographic, and archaeological sources from both North and Central America—two areas in the New World where evidence for this type of ritualized killing is now known. This refined view of Abinadi's death contributes to a greater appreciation of his act of willing martyrdom, knowing, as he likely did, the nature of physical torture he would have to endure.

ABINADI'S DEATH

Circa 155 BC, King Noah ruled with an iron fist in the city of Nephi, which was the land of the first inheritance of Lehi (cf. Mosiah 10:13–14). Abinadi went among the people of Nephi, calling on them to repent of "their abominations, and their wickedness, and their whoredoms" or suffer God's "anger" (Mosiah 11:20). Upon hearing of Abinadi's teachings, Noah immediately passed a death sentence on him, ordering that he be brought before him and killed (Mosiah 11:28).

Abinadi avoided detection for two years until he went back among the people of Nephi at the Lord's command to continue preaching (Mosiah 12:1). In a prophecy pregnant with irony, the Lord states that the life of King Noah should "be valued even as a garment in a hot furnace"—a not-so-subtle allusion to the means of the king's final demise ("by fire") at the hands of his own priests, which may also have paralleled Abinadi's manner of death (v. 3; cf. Mosiah 19:20). Abinadi also ominously warns, "But this much I tell you, what you do with me, after this, shall be as a type and a shadow of things which are to come" (Mosiah 13:10).

Abinadi is cast into prison while the king and the priests hold a council on how to deal with him. He is again brought before the king and questioned by the priests, and then instructs all present (Mosiah 12:19–37). Significantly, Abinadi tells the priests that God will not let him be touched until his message is delivered, and he adds, "God will not suffer that I shall be destroyed *at this time*" (Mosiah 13:3; emphasis added). Abinadi seems aware that his eventual fate is to meet death at the hands of Noah, but not yet.

After a lengthy discourse on the law of Moses, Abinadi is surrounded by Noah's guards and returned to prison (Mosiah 17:5). For three days, the priests and Noah debate about what is to be done with him. Finally, they bring him back to Noah's court and pronounce their judgment upon him: "Abinadi, we have found an accusation against thee, and thou art worthy of death" (Mosiah 17:7). And his crime? "Thou hast said that God himself should come down among the children of men" (Mosiah 17:8). As Welch has noted, it was under the pretext of breaking the law of blasphemy (cf. Mosiah 17:8) that Abinadi was condemned to death.[2] Abinadi calmly

refused to recount what he had said, even though it would have preserved his own life.

In a chilling moment displaying both bravery[3] and resolute surety, Abinadi declares, "I will suffer even until death, and I will not recall my words, and they shall stand as a testimony against you. And if ye slay me ye will shed innocent blood, and this shall also stand as a testimony against you at the last day" (Mosiah 17:10). Noah is clearly affected by Abinadi's words, particularly his dire warnings directed against them. The wicked king even considers releasing him, but the priests intervene and convince him otherwise (Mosiah 17:10–11); consequently, they "delivered [Abinadi] up that he might be slain" (Mosiah 17:12).

The Book of Mormon then recounts in brevity the death of Abinadi: "And it came to pass that they took him and bound him, and scourged his skin with faggots, yea, even unto death" (Mosiah 17:13). Traditional interpretations of this event focus primarily on the assumption that Abinadi was tied to a stake and burned, much in line with European and early American traditions. Note, however, that no stake[4] is mentioned; rather, we are given crucial clues that link Abinadi's manner of death to far more sinister means of torture and execution widely practiced in Mesoamerica and among North American Native American groups: death by beating with firebrands.

Let us first analyze the three key aspects of his manner of death mentioned in verse 13: (1) he is "bound" with cords, (2) they "scourged his skin with faggots," and (3) it was "even unto death." In (1), Abinadi is restrained to facilitate his torture. In (2), the phrase "scourged his skin with faggots" is of considerable importance in accurately identifying the method used to kill Abinadi. As Gardner has earlier noted, the verb "scourge" in Joseph Smith's day meant "'to whip severely' or 'to punish with severity.'"[5] In Noah Webster's 1828 dictionary of the English language, it means "to whip severely; to lash," but also "to afflict greatly; to harass, torment or injure."[6] What is clear is that "whipping," "lashing," or "tormenting" is a major factor contributing to the trauma that would eventually take Abinadi's life.[7]

The object that was used in the beating was a faggot, which in 1828 (spelled as "fagot") means what it does in English today—"a bundle of sticks, twigs or small branches of trees."[8] According to the text, the

whipping of Abinadi with bundles of sticks is, in addition to the element of fire, what contributed to Abinadi's death. Note again there is no mention of being burned at the stake as the means of death.[9]

Robert J. Matthews was the first to clearly articulate the idea that Abinadi was killed by the beating of lit torches, not simply by being bound and burned at the stake. He wrote:

> We generally say that Abinadi was burned at the stake—and that may be true, although technically it might not be the whole story. . . . This passage [Mosiah 17:3] seems to say that Abinadi's tormentors took burning torches and poked him with these, burning his skin until he died. . . . In my mind I see Abinadi bound, possibly supported by something, and his fiendish executioners (probably the priests) gathered about him with burning torches (faggots) in their hands, jabbing him and rubbing him with these until they caused him to die. They actively, eagerly, and physically caused his death; they were not merely passive, interested bystanders watching a bonfire. I can imagine them dancing and cavorting about Abinadi, and hear them shouting, exulting, and gloating over what they were doing. And during it all, Abinadi was pronouncing prophecies of God's vengeance upon them—prophecies that were literally fulfilled. The noise, the din, the stench would be awful! Wickedness and righteousness, life and death, are real, and Abinadi's martyrdom really did happen.[10]

Matthews's highly insightful analysis of Mosiah 17:3 is right on the mark in our view. Note that Mosiah 17:14 states that after the "flames began to scorch him" he pronounced his final warning and prophesies, clearly implying he had sufficient time for the discourse before being killed by the flames. It is likely that this, however, represents only the final moment of what was a much more lengthy process of death. Ethnographic sources from North American indigenous groups in which precisely this type of torture by burning and striking with lit firebrands was commonplace show that this grisly form of mistreatment could go on for hours, days, or even weeks, as we will discuss below.

NORTH AMERICAN ETHNOHISTORICAL SOURCES ON DEATH BY FIREBRANDS

Ethnohistorical sources from North and Central America provide a vivid (often *too* vivid, as it were) depiction of just such methods of torture and killing among numerous indigenous groups. Death by whipping with firebrands turns out to be one of the more common yet gruesome means of dealing with enemy captives whom one wanted to humiliate, make suffer, and kill.

There is considerable agreement among ethnohistorical sources, both pre-Columbian and post-Conquest in the New World, that scourging with firebrands was a favored means of torture for captured enemies. Dozens of sources from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries recount the horrors of seeing firsthand this brutal form of torture by many Native American groups in North America.[11] Since most of the extant textual sources describing firebrand torture come from North America, we will first query those accounts in order to provide the most complete picture of the particulars of that practice. We will then review data from Mesoamerica in colonial and pre-Columbian times that, though less rich in detail, demonstrate the antiquity of the practice in a time period closer to that of Abinadi's.

The core elements of firebrand killing vary from group to group in North America, yet the commonalities outweigh the differences. In short, captives are bound to a physical structure, usually described as a "platform," "scaffold," "frame," or "stake."[12] Once secured, members of the community often all participate in torturing the individual by burning the captive with lit firebrands or metal objects heated in the fire. This process is often highly ritualized and can extend over considerable lengths of time. Other forms of torture (scalping, bone breaking, flesh removal, etc.) can accompany the endless singeing and scourging with firebrands. Eventually, all of the bodily trauma leads to death, or, if pity is taken on the individual, death is induced through more direct means.

Du Pratz similarly describes the Natchez methods of torture for captives in the early eighteenth century. They would first construct "the fatal instrument" (or frame with three poles) to "cruelly immolate the unfortunate victim of their vengeance."[13] He continues:

> From the time they begin to take the scalp from the victim the young people go in search of dry canes, crush them, and make packages or bundles of the entire length of the canes which they bind in many places. They bring other dry canes, also, which have been neither crushed nor bound which the warriors make use of against the victim. The one who took him is the first one to take a single crushed cane, light it and burn the place he may choose. But he devotes himself especially to burn the arm with which he (the prisoner) had best defended himself. Another comes and burns another place.

This punishment could go on "three days and three nights without anyone giving them a glass of water to quench their thirst."[14] Based on a broad comparative study, Knowles determined that torture taking place on a frame could last up to several days, on a platform many hours, on a pole a few hours, and on a stake just moments.[15] In an incident in 1788, the Shawnee tortured a captive with fire for three hours till he died.[16] Abler notes that in some Native American communities in the past, "in its most common form the torture ritual appears to have been an all-night affair. The victim was 'caressed' by his new kinsmen, that is burned with torches and red hot irons."[17]

The Hurons were known to be particularly vicious in their methods of killing and seeming delight in torturing captives. For example, in 1639, a captive among the Hurons was systematically tortured by "all" the inhabitants of the village, each one holding a "firebrand in his hand to apply to some part of his body."[18] Later in 1639 the Hurons captured several Iroquois whom they then "mercilessly" struck with firebrands and other objects. They were afterwards displayed on a ritual stand. The next morning they continued burning the prisoners with firebrands until they succumbed to death.[19] Then in December of 1639 other Iroquois prisoners were taken by the Hurons. Among them was Oneiouchronons, a high-ranking captain of the Iroquois. He was tied to a stake and tormented "by the application of flames, firebrands, and glowing irons, in ways beyond all power of description."[20]

Sometimes the Huron were on the receiving end of this torture. On one occasion, a Huron who was also a French military officer was taken

captive by the Iroquois, and he detailed their methods of torture from his firsthand experience. He describes how he and other captives were displayed and tortured on a scaffold for several hours. For the next five or six days they were tortured with firebrands by various members of the community. These horrors continued for over a *month*.[21]

As noted, while being burned at the stake was a common means of killing a captive, in many cases those tied to the stake were held in place primarily to be burned with firebrands, not necessarily to be immediately immolated in an instant by enveloping flames.[22] For example, in 1655 in Yonkers, at Esopus, Dutch captives were tied to stakes and had their skin scorched with firebrands, among various other methods of torture. Only when they had died were their bodies actually thrown into the fire.[23] Similarly in 1616 a French explorer in the region near the Susquehanna River ran into a fishing party of Iroquois who immediately "tied him to a tree tore out his beard by handfuls and burned him with fire brands," only to be saved by a large storm that arose and frightened the Iroquois to the point that they let him go.[24]

Some have noted that simply being burned at the stake would be far more preferable to the slow, painful death of scourging with firebrands. For example, in 1782, Able Janney was captured in Ohio by a local tribe. Of his captivity, he wrote: "All the short biographies of Colonel Crawford that I have seen state that he was 'burned to death,' thus leaving the reader to infer that he was burned at the stake according to the old religious method of dealing with heretics, but that was humane in comparison with the Indian method. The former released the sufferer in a few minutes; the latter was usually prolonged through a day, or sometimes parts of two days."[25] Indeed, the goal of firebrand torture was often "to put off his death as much as possible."[26] Benjamin Franklin once described a case of Shawnee torture in which they burned the prisoner's feet and other parts of his body for six hours.[27] In another instance, a war captain named Aharihon of the Seneca had a young captive tortured. They tortured him until midnight, allowed him to recover, and began again in the morning to burn him "without interruption," which caused his eventual death by the end of that day.[28] In fact, one of the earliest accounts of firebrand torture from 1609 of an Iroquois prisoner at the hands of Algonquin and Huron

captors describes how they would revive the prisoner with water in order to extend the process: "Our Indians kindled a fire, and when it was well lighted, each took a brand and burned this poor wretch a little at a time in order to make him suffer the greater torment. Sometimes they would leave off, throwing water on his back."[29]

More than just singeing the skin, many accounts make it clear that the firebrands were also used to *scourge* the individual (cf. Mosiah 17:13). In Town Creek, North Carolina, Coe describes the torture by local Native Americans of "miserable captives with fire in various ways, and causing or forcing them to run the gauntlet naked, chunked and *beat almost to death with burning chunks and fire-brands*, and at last burnt to ashes" (emphasis added).[30] In one instance, he Seneca relentlessly beat a prisoner with firebrands as they had him run through the village.[31]

In 1736, Adair recorded several of the methods of Chickasaw torture. He states captives were "tied to the dreadful stake, one at a time." The Chickasaw would then prepare "for the dreadful rejoicing, a long bundle of dry canes, or the heart of fat pitch-pine, and as the victims [were] lead to the stake, the women and their young ones *beat them with these* in a most barbarous manner" (emphasis added), leading to their eventual demise.[32]

What becomes clear from these highly detailed accounts is the care given to ensure captives did not die too soon in order to intentionally prolong their agony. Furthermore, striking captives with burning firebrands and heated metal objects was a key component of this ritualized torture. It is therefore important to note that the death of Abinadi is expressly stated to be caused by *both* scourging as well as the flames of fire (Mosiah 17:12).

CENTRAL AMERICAN INDIGENOUS TRADITIONS OF DEATH BY FIREBRANDS

Death by firebrands was also a known practice in colonial and ancient Mesoamerica. In 2001, Brant Gardner keenly connected Abinadi's death to several scenes in sixteenth-century Aztec manuscripts.[33] Gardner noted that the scene in the Codex Mendoza, dating to 1541, shows a youth being beaten with firebrands—a common means of punishment in Aztec society (Fig. 1).[34] He further associated three scenes from the sixteenth-century

Figure 1. Aztec youth being punished with blows from lit firebrands (*Codex Mendoza*, drawing by Asa Hull).

Florentine Codex, produced by Fray Bernardino de Sahagún, in which an adulterer, a musician, and a merchant are being punished with cudgels, very much reminiscent of the description given of Abinadi's death.

Both codices are important since they illustrate and describe this common form of punishment in Aztec society of beating someone, often youths, with sticks.[35] Fifteen-year-old boys in Aztec society were typically sent to the *telpochcalli*, "young man's house," or to the *cuicacalli*, which are military training schools overseen by the *telpuchtlato*, the guards or captains over the youths who were responsible for punishing them if rules were broken.[36] In the Codex Mendoza, a youth who was caught consorting with an Aztec woman is shown being reprimanded by the telpuchtlato, who are bludgeoning him with pine sticks (Fig. 1). The accompanying Spanish text in translation reads: "Telpuchtlato. It means the two telpuchtlatos who are in charge of governing the youth, that when one youth was sleeping with a woman, they punished the youth by striking him with burning firebrands." Note that the firebrands are used not solely used to scorch him but also to strike blows upon his body.

In the Florentine Codex, a man is said to have gone to live with a prostitute, which was strictly prohibited while attending the *cuicacalli* school. His punishment was meted out:[37]

> Therefore they beat him repeatedly with a pine stick; they verily caused him to swoon. They singed his head with fire; his body smoked; it blistered . . . and when they had indeed caused him to swoon, with this they cast him forth; . . . he just slowly crept away; he left going from one side to the other; he just went confused; . . . he withdrew forever; nevermore was he to sing and dance with others.

The text graphically describes how his body smoked and blistered from the flames of the firebrand, which, along with the bludgeoning, caused him to "swoon." Likewise, another illustration in the Codex Mendoza depicts a youth being held by two leaders, one of whom shaves the youth's head while another scorches his bald skull with a firebrand. The accompanying text in translation reads: "the two guides punished him in baldness, and burning his head with fire." Gutiérrez Santos describes a similar practice: "*[Los] que se educaban en los seminarios, incurría en algún exceso contra la continencia que profesaba, sufría un castigo. . . . A la mujer tenida como pública le quemaban los cabellos en la plaza, con haces de pino, y le cubrían la cabeza con resina del mismo árbol*" ("[Those] who were educated in seminaries, would incur some excess against the continence they professed, would suffer a punishment. . . . To the woman held publicly they would burn her hair in the square, with beams of pine, and they would cover her head with resin from the same tree").[38] More than just torture to prove a point, the abuse from scorching heads with pine firebrands by the Aztecs would at times lead to death.[39]

FIREBRAND TORTURE AMONG THE ANCIENT MAYA

In ancient Maya hieroglyphic writing, one of the syllables for "**ta**" is acrophonically derived from the logograph **TAJ**, "pine-wood torch." Indeed, the sign itself is a bound faggot of pine splinters with flame volutes emerging from the top, first identified as such by Campbell.[40] Bound splinters of pine have been traditionally used as torches for millennia in Mesoamerica. Anciently, Aztec and Maya homes were primarily lit by pine torches. Early Classic Maya paintings on walls of the Jolja' cave show pine torches being used in caves themselves.[41] Archaeological finds in caves further

substantiate their use dating back to the Early Classic period in several dozens of caves.[42] Gann also reports that the Maya of the Yucatan and Belize used pine torches secured to their hats for hunting both land and water animals.[43]

Figure 2. Disemboweled victim lying over a spiked incense burner with pine torches burning on his back (doorjamb painting from Tohcok, Campeche, redrawn by Asa Hull after Taube 1998: fig.12.5a).

Firebrands for the ancient Maya were made of bundles of highly flammable pine splinters, which were closely connected to ritual practice as part of ceremonial paraphernalia.[44] Pine firebrands were also commonly associated with the burning of incense, as well as the burning of captives. At the site of Tohcok in Campeche, a mural on a doorjamb depicts a captive lying dead, face down on a large, spiked incense burner (Fig. 2).[45] He is disemboweled, and pine torches are shown in flames on his back.

Another example of a disemboweled individual has remarkable parallels to the details prophesied by Abinadi. The figurine from the island of Jaina in Campeche (K2826)[46] depicts a man screaming out both in pain from the disembowelment and also for the fact that he has wood (perhaps pine) sticks strapped to his back in preparation for immolation. Abinadi prophesied to Noah and his people that they would "have burdens *lashed* upon their backs" (Mosiah 12:5, emphasis added) and that they would "suffer . . . the pains of death by fire" (Mosiah 17:18). The "lashing" of the "burdens"[47] (possibly fire sticks[48]) to their backs could be an allusion to a death similar to that depicted by this Jaina figurine.

The consistent appearance of pine and pine torches in scenes of firebrand torture is significant. The Aztecs used specifically pine sticks for their flogging punishments.[49] It is important to note that pine torches are

resinous and were often soaked in additional resin to ensure they would burn longer.[50] Furthermore, pine torches drip pitch as they burn, which adds a further element of pain when considered in the context of scourging—the introduction of hot pine pitch into open wounds and burns.[51] If pine torches were those used on Abinadi, which is highly likely in light of the ethnographic record, then his wounds may too have had increased trauma from heated, dripping pine pitch.

SCAFFOLDS AND DEATH BY FIREBRANDS

As described above, scaffolds, frames, and stakes were commonly associated with firebrand torture and killing in Native American traditions of North America. Scaffold sacrifice is also well attested throughout ancient Mesoamerica, and even into the colonial period.[52] In his classic work on the subject, Taube argues that the tradition stretches far back in history, originating "long before the emergence of complex Mesoamerican states" with overtones of hunting, planting, and warfare in the ceremonial significance of scaffold sacrifice.[53]

One of the most important surviving depictions of a scaffold sacrifice for our discussion of Abinadi's death is found on a Late Preclassic period (AD 600–900) polychrome ceramic in the Dumbarton Oaks collection (Fig. 3). The scene shows an unfortunate captive on all fours on top of a wooden scaffold structure. He is nearly naked, stripped of all his finery—as is standard practice for captives among the ancient Maya—and is shown with both hands and feet bound to the scaffolding. That he is a captive from warfare is clear from the line of warriors to the left of the scaffold standing in military garb. Two individuals are poised to the left and right of the captive on the scaffold, both brandishing lit pine torches, in the act of scorching the skin of the pitiful captive. Above the captive's back is a Maya symbol known as the "Kaban curl," which Houston has convincingly shown is an iconographic convention to represent "musk" or "strong odor,"[54] no doubt here signifying the smell of burning flesh.

In the left hand of the right-most torturer is a ceramic vessel containing an unidentified substance. We suggest that this pot contains burning embers that were likely poured onto the back or head of the captive—a well-attested practice in North America in conjunction with firebrand

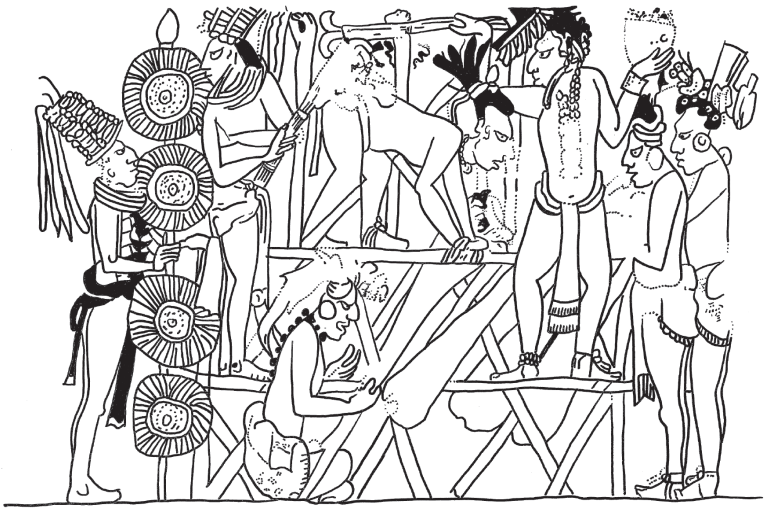

Figure 3. Bound Maya captive on a scaffold being scorched with pine firebrands (K2781, Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collections, Washington, DC, redrawn by Asa Hull after drawing by Alexandre Tokovinine).

torture. For example, in Ohio, a nineteenth-century account involving firebrand torture notes that they "took bark shovels and threw hot embers out of the fire upon his head, whilst other were employed in burning him with fire brands."[55] When the Hurons took Oneiouchronons, a high-ranking captain of the Iroquois, captive, they threw "upon him coals and burning cinders" while "others underneath the scaffold [found] open places for their firebrands."[56] Similarly, in the torture of Able Janney (described earlier) involving firebrands, Janney reported that the "The squaws poured hot coals on his head."[57] This also accords with a practice of the Koroa of Louisiana, who would "fill . . . [the] skin" of their captive "with burning coals, which they replace on his head."[58] We propose a similar phenomenon is occurring on vessel K2781.[59]

A related scene of bundled pine splinters involved in the burning of captives is found on Naranjo Stela 35 (Fig. 4). In the scene, a nearly naked captive from the site of Yaxhá sits with his hands tied behind his back at the feet of his captor, who holds a large pine torch emanating enormous flame volutes. The accompanying hieroglyphic text reads: *puluyi ch'ok yax*

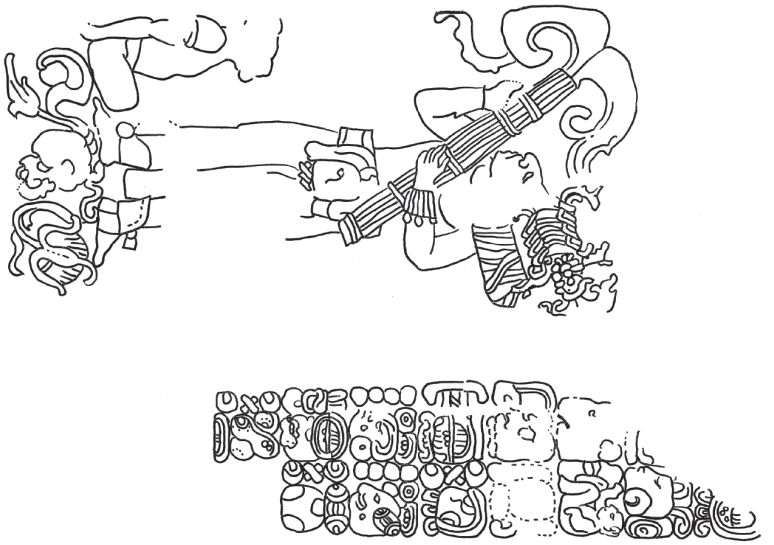

Figure 4. Burning of a bound Maya captive with a large pinewood firebrand (Naranjo Stela 35, drawing by Asa Hull, after drawing by Linda Schele).

unen, "The prince, the young child, got burned," referring of course to the prisoner at the captor's feet. However, this almost certainly has a *double entendre*, as Nikolai Grube has argued, as a secondary reference to the burning of the patron deity of the site of Yaxhá itself.[60] Therefore, this important royal captive is said to have been "burned" by the large firebrand as part of a torture and/or killing rite in similitude of the burning of a local god effigy.

In ancient Mesoamerica, there is a mythological antecedent for firebrand torture and killing of captives that likely informed its use by Maya elite, especially at the site of Naranjo, Guatemala.[61] A number of scenes on pottery vessels show this otherwise unknown myth from distant Maya tradition, even though the actors themselves are well known, even into colonial times. On vessel K4598, a jaguar deity from the underworld is shown seated on a stone throne, which functions in this case as the stand or scaffold, stripped of his finery, with his arms tied tightly behind his back. To his right stands one of the Hero Twins (either Junapu or Xblanque) known from the Popol Vuh, the colonial account of Maya creation mythology that

has deep roots into Early Classic Maya times. To the jaguar deity's left is the other Hero Twin, both of whom are holding flaming firebrands in the act of scorching the jaguar deity. Further to the right of the scene stands the Hero Twins' father, Junajaw, who bears an armful of backup firebrands for the twins to continue their lengthy[62] torture of the jaguar god.

On another vase dating to around the seventh or eighth century AD, K1299 (Fig. 5), the Hero Twins are again shown holding flaming firebrands in front of two depictions of jaguar deities who are likewise bound. The verb given twice near each Hero Twin reads *puluyi*, "he got burned," providing explicit epigraphic confirmation of the nature of the event occurring in the scene. The parallels of these mythic depictions to other Maya scenes discussed earlier are so clear as to suggest they could be considered reenactments of the prototypical myth of the torture and killing of a jaguar god, a powerful underworld deity.

Maya kings themselves, therefore, seem to have tapped into the mythological narrative of the death of this jaguar deity by firebrands by replicating the scene with their own high-profile captives. It is possible that King Noah and his priests were aware of a similar mythological paradigm of torture and deicide through scourging with firebrands, and they may have likewise sought to reenact this event through the ritualized killing of Abinadi.

Figure 5. Mythological scene of a Maya deity being burned with pinewood firebrands by one of the Hero Twins on K1299 (drawing by Asa Hull, after photograph by Justin Kerr).

CONCLUSION

The death of Abinadi was an act of martyrdom, an act of bravery, and a result of obedience. He willingly placed himself in the clutches of evil and corrupt men, who had marked him for death two years before. His bold teaching in the face of certain death represents the very essence of his faith in the words and promises of his God. What we hope to have added to his memory and legacy is a greater appreciation for the suffering he underwent, which was certainly more horrific than many assume. Beyond the pains and physical anguish of possibly being burned at the stake, Abinadi likely suffered for hours if his death conformed to standard ethnohistorical accounts. What we have described above is ethnographic evidence of a widespread indigenous tradition throughout both North and Central America of a drawn out, torturous method of killing prisoners by scourging them repeatedly with burning firebrands. Textual details on Abinadi's manner of death given in Mosiah 17:3 echo perfectly what we find in these ancient traditions.

NOTES

1. Our proposal is a refinement on Robert J. Matthews's important insights on the topic. See "Abinadi: The Prophet and Martyr," in *The Book of Mormon: Mosiah, Salvation Only Through Christ,* ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 1991), 91–111.
2. John W. Welch, "The Trial of Abinadi," in *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2008): 139–210.
3. Relevant ethnographic accounts emphasize the stoic bravery that was expected from the captives in North American indigenous traditions, even in the face of horrific torture and eventual death. According to Lee, not crying out during torture "certified their personal bravery" (Wayne E. Lee, "Peace Chiefs and Blood Revenge: Patterns of Restraint in Native American Warfare, 1500–1800," *Journal of Military History* 71, no. 3 [2007]: 701–41, 730). For prisoners, exhibiting bravery while being tortured also "testified to their great spiritual power," something that could at times win them the respect of their captors (Rachel Wheeler, "Women and Christian Practice in a Mahican Village," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 13.1 [2003]: 27–67, 36). See also Ron Williamson, "'Otinontsiskiaj Ondaon' ('The House of Cut-off Heads'),"

in *The Taking and Displaying of Human Body Parts as Trophies by Amerindians*, ed. Richard J. Chacon and David H. Dye (New York: Springer, 2007), 191–222, 194.

4. Cf. Welch, "The Trial of Abinadi," 202.
5. Brant Gardner, "Scourging with Faggots." FARMS Update in *Insights* 21, no. 148 (2001): 2.
6. Webster's Dictionary 1828–Online Edition, http://webstersdictionary1828.com/Terms.
7. How does one get beaten to death by faggots? A bundle of sticks seems an unlikely weapon for flogging someone to death. In fact, Royal Skousen has proposed a transcriptional error in the word "scourged," which he suggests should be emended to "scorched." Royal Skousen, "'Scourged' vs. 'Scorched' in Mosiah 17:13." FARMS Update in *Insights* 22, no. 154 (2002): 2–3. Skousen notes that Oliver Cowdery misspelled the word "scourged" about 40% of the time, which could open the door to the possibility of a transcriptional error or a mishearing of what was said by Joseph Smith (due to the similarity in the pronunciations of *scourged* and *scorched*). The question of the role "scourging" actually played in Abinadi's death is an important one but not one that we feel can be best answered by assuming an error in the transcription of the text. Indeed, as we argue, whipping or scourging is a standard component of death by firebrands in numerous indigenous societies in North and Central America. Therefore, rather than being an oddity, the mention of scourging turns out to be a crucial detail allowing for a proper contextualization of Abinadi's death when compared to ancient indigenous American practice.
8. Webster's Dictionary 1828–Online Edition, http://webstersdictionary1828.com/Terms.
9. It is possible and even likely that Abinadi was bound to a structure or a "stake," as will be discussed, but the notion of wood placed under his feet and being burned to death "at the stake" is not justified by the details in the text. What killed Abinadi, in our view, was the physical trauma of being slowly singed and beaten by firebrands, for which there is considerable ethnographic support (also detailed below). There is also precedent, however, for a posttorture burning at the stake, which could ultimately result in the death of the individual or could otherwise be the ritual burning of the one already deceased during torture (cf. William A. Starna and Ralph Watkins, "Northern Iroquoian

Slavery," *Ethnohistory* [1991]: 34–57, 40; Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan [London: Allan Lane, 1977], 32).

10. Matthews, "Abinadi: the Prophet and Martyr," 91–111.
11. The reader is directed to the largest study dedicated to documenting the various accounts of torture and killing by North American Indians: Nathaniel Knowles, "The Torture of Captives by the Indians of Eastern North America," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 82, no. 2 (22 March 1940): 151–225.
12. In the seventeenth century, Penicaut described the scaffold ("frame") for prisoners of the Koroa of Louisiana as being "composed of two poles 8 feet in height, 5 feet apart, the two hands [of the prisoner] being well bound above and the two feet below, in the form of a St. Andrew's cross." The captive is bound to this frame and burned with a number of different objects by the whole village. M. Penicaut, *Annals of Louisiana, 1698–1722*, cited in Pierre Margry, *Découvertes et établissements des Français dans l'ouest et dans le sud de l'Amérique septentrionale, 1614–1754* (n.p.: Imprimerie D. Jouaust, 1876), 458–59.
13. Johnston and Johnston describe a similar structure in Ohio where "they made [the prisoner] get upon a sort of stage, where they began to burn him all over the body without any mercy." Charles Johnston and Peter Johnston, *A Narrative of the Incidents Attending the Capture, Detention, and Ransom of Charles Johnston, of Botetourt County, Virginia,: Who was Made Prisoner by the Indians, on the River Ohio, in the Year 1790; Together with an Interesting Account of the Fate of His Companions, Five in Number, One of Whom Suffered at the Stake. To which are Added, Sketches of Indian Character and Manners, with Illustrative Anecdotes* (New York: J. & J. Harper, 1827).
14. Antoine Simon Le Page du Pratz, *Histoire de la Louisiane*, vol. 2 (Paris, 1758), 428–29.
15. Knowles, "Torture of Captives," 194.
16. Knowles, "Torture of Captives," 179.
17. Thomas S. Abler, "Scalping, Torture, Cannibalism and Rape: An Ethnohistorical Analysis of Conflicting Cultural Values in War," *Anthropologica* 34, no. 1 (1992): 3–20, 10.
18. Anthony P. Schiavo and Claudio R. Salvucci, *Iroquois Wars I: Extracts from the Jesuit Relations and Primary Sources from 1535 to 1650* (Merchantville, NJ: Arx Publishing, 2003), 154–55.
19. Schiavo and Salvucci, *Iroquois Wars I*, 155.
20. Schiavo and Salvucci, *Iroquois Wars I*, 160–61.

21. Mary Rowlandson, *The Account of Mary Rowlandson and Other Indian Captivity Narratives* (North Chelmsford, MA: Courier Corporation, 2012).
22. Cf. Chester Hale Sipe, *The Indian Wars of Pennsylvania, Including Supplement* (New York: Arno Press, 1971), 195.
23. Thomas Astley Atkins, *Indian Wars and the Uprising of 1655-Yonkers Depopulated*: *A Paper Read Before the Yonkers Historical and Library Association*, 18 March 1892.
24. William W. Williams and James Harrison Kennedy. *The National Magazine; A Monthly Journal of American History*, vol. 4 (Magazine of Western History Publishing Company, 1886), 702.
25. *Ohio Archæological and Historical Publications*, vol. 8 (n.p.: Society, 1900), 467.
26. Johnston and Johnston, *A Narrative of the Incidents*, 176.
27. John M. Coward, *The Newspaper Indian: Native American Identity in the Press, 1820–90* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1999).
28. Anthony Wallace, *Death and Rebirth of Seneca* (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 2010).
29. H. P. Biggar, ed., *The Works of Samuel De Champlain*, vol. 2 (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1925), 101.
30. Joffre Lanning Coe, *Town Creek Indian Mound: A Native American Legacy* (Chapel Hill; University of North Carolina Press Books, 1995), 93.
31. Rene Dr. Brehaut de Galinee. "The Journey of Dollier and Galiinee, 1669–1670," in *Early Narratives of the Northwest*, ed. Louise Phelps Kellogg (New York: C. Scribners's Sons, 1917), cited in Knowles, "Torture of Captives," 188.
32. James Adair, *The History of the American Indians* (London: Edward and Charles Dilly, 1775), cited in Knowles, "Torture of Captives," 174.
33. Gardner, "Scourging with Faggots," 3–4.
34. Frances Berdan and Patricia Rieff Anawalt, eds., *The Essential Codex Mendoza*, vols. 2, 4 (Berkeley; University of California Press, 1997), 180.
35. Physical punishment in general began very early in the life of an Aztec child. Campos writes: "*A los ocho años los castigos corporales comenzaban por pellizcos y azotes . . . a otro lo azotan con ramas de pino por la misma falta, y a otro le queman los cabellos por desobediente*" ("At age eight corporal punishment began by pinching and whipping . . . they scourge another with pine branches for the same offense, and another burn the hair for disobedience"). Rubén M. Campos, *Talleres Gráficos del Museo Nacional de Arqueología, Historia y Etnografía* (Mexico City, 1936), 67.

36. Davíd Carrasco and Scott Sessions, *Daily Life of the Aztecs: People of the Sun and Earth* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2011), 117.
37. Carrasco and Sessions, *Daily Life of the Aztecs*, 118.
38. Lucas Alamán, *Diccionario universal de historia y de geografía: Apéndice. Colección de artículos relativos á la Republica Mexicana por José María Andrade [y otros*], vol. 2 (n.p.: Andrade y Escalante, 1836), 738.
39. Daniel Gutiérrez Santos, *Historia militar de México*, vol. 1 (Mexico: Ediciones Ateneo, 1955), 24.
40. Lyle Campbell, "The Implications of Mayan Historical Linguistics for Glyphic Research," in *Phoneticism in Mayan Hieroglyphic Writing*, ed. John Justeson and Lyle Campbell (Albany: State University of New York, 1984), 11–14.
41. Andrea Stone, "The Painted Walls of Xibalba: Maya Cave Painting as Evidence of Cave Ritual," in *Word and Image in Maya Culture: Explorations in Language, Writing, and Representation*, ed. William F. Hanks and Don S. Rice (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1989), 322.
42. James E. Brady, "Investigation of Maya Ritual Cave Use with Special Reference to Naj Tunich, Peten, Guatemala" (PhD diss., Department of Anthropology, University of California, Los Angeles, 1989). See also Christopher T. Morehart, David L. Lentz, and Keith M. Prufer, "Wood of the Gods: The Ritual Use of Pine (*Pinus* spp.) by the Ancient Lowland Maya," *Latin American Antiquity* 16, no. 3 (September 2005): 255–74. For similar but occasionally contrasting views, see Holley Moyes, Jaime J. Awe, George A. Brook, and James W. Webster, "Ancient Maya Drought Cult: Late Classic Cave Use in Belize," *Latin American Antiquity* 20, no. 1 (March 2009): 175–206. Also see Christopher T. Morehart, "Ancient Maya Ritual Cave Utilization: A Paleoethnobotanical Perspective" (master's thesis, Department of Anthropology, Florida State University, 2002).
43. Thomas William Francis Gann, *The Maya Indians of Southern Yucatan and Northern British Honduras* (Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology, Washington Government Office, Bulletin 64, 1918), 24, 26.
44. Morehart, Lentz, and Prufer, "Wood of the Gods," 269.
45. See Karl Taube, "A Study of Classic Maya Scaffold Sacrifice," in *Maya Iconography*, ed. Elizabeth Benson and Gillet Griffin (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 331–51, 336, Fig. 12.5a.
46. An image of this figurine can be seen at http://research.mayavase.com/portfolio_hires.php?search=2826&date_added=&image=2826&display=8&rowstart=0.

Vessel numbers with "K" prefixes refer to Justin Kerr's Maya Vase Database, online at http://research.mayavase.com/kerrmaya.html.

47. This could also refer to the situation of Limhi's people when they suffered abuse and "burdens on their backs," in fulfillment of the word of the Lord (Mosiah 21:3–4).
48. Welch first suggested Mosiah 12:5 could refer to possibly having a "bundle of sticks" lashed to their backs. Welch, "The Trial of Abinadi," 202.
49. Cf. Carrasco and Sessions, *Daily Life of the Aztecs*, 118.
50. There are also mythological explanations among some Maya groups for why pine burns so well. Jakaltek and Tojolab'al myths talk about how lightning got stuck in a pine tree, perhaps a mythological explanation for the excellent burning characteristics of pine. Karl A. Taube, *The Major Gods of Ancient Yucatan* (Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1992), 76.
51. There is, curiously, a mythological connection between pine sap and blood. A K'iche' Maya adaptation of a biblical story recounts that as Jesus was carrying the cross "the Jews kept whipping Jesus, and every drop of blood that he bled along the road became an *ocote* [pine] tree." Sol Tax, "Folk Tales in Chichicastenango: An Unsolved Puzzle," *The Journal of American Folklore* 62, no. 244 (April–June 1949): 125–35, 127.
52. In the colonial period in Mesoamerica, Kaqchikel prisoners were bound to scaffolds and shot to death with arrows as part of a ritual blood dance. Ruud van Akkeren, "Sacrifice at the Maize Tree: Rab'inal Achi in Its Historical and Symbolic Context," *Ancient Mesoamerica* 10, no. 2 (July 1999): 281–95, 283.
53. Taube, "*Study of Classic Maya Scaffold Sacrifice*," 351.
54. Stephen D. Houston, "Maya Musk," Maya Decipherment: Ideas on Ancient Maya Writing and Iconography. http://decipherment.wordpress.com/2010/06/17/maya-musk/.
55. *Ohio Archæological and Historical Publications*, 467.
56. Schiavo and Salvucci, *Iroquois Wars I*, 161.
57. *Ohio Archæological and Historical Publications*, 468.
58. M. Penicaut, *Annals of Louisiana, 1698–1722*, 458–59.
59. But see Taube, who interprets this vessel as possibly containing water (Taube, *Study of Classic Maya Scaffold Sacrifice*, 334).
60. Nikolai Grube, "Monumentos Esculpidos e Inscripciones Jeroglíficas en el Triángulo Yaxhá-Nakum-Naranjo," in *El Sitio Maya de Topoxte: Investigaciones*

en una Isla de Lago Yaxha, Peten, Guatemala, ed. Wolfgang W. Wurster (Mainz am rhein, Germany: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 2000), 264.

61. Cf. Grube, "Monumentos Esculpidos," 249–68.
62. How long would an average pine splinter torch last? Based on measurements gleaned from two torch holders found at St. Margaret's Cave in Belize, Petroglyph Cave, and ethnographic accounts of pine splinters sticks found in caves, Antonio Morales and other project members of the Belize Valley Speleothem Project recreated pine torches to test how long they would burn. The torches burned for an average of 22.4 minutes. Holly Moyes, "Charcoal As a Proxy for Use-Intensity in Ancient Maya Cave Ritual," in *Religion, Archaeology, and the Material World*, ed. Lars Fogelin (Center for Archaeological Investigations, Occasional Paper No. 36., 2008), 143–44.