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Part 1: Lehi and Sariah's World

Author(s): Warren P. Aston

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Abstract: Although desert sands have blown over Lehi and Sariah’s land trail for more than two and a half millennia, substantial traces remain of their world. Arabia’s dry climate has preserved much of the setting in which the Book of Mormon account begins. Modern exploration of formerly inaccessible areas has revealed some surprises. This book reports on that exploration and the data learned so far. *Lehi and Sariah in Arabia* focuses on what we could term its “anthropological underlay,” the various circumstances and settings in which this singular story plays out. These new findings let us place the Lehite odyssey firmly, and very plausibly, into its geographical and historical setting.

PART 1

Lehi and Sariah's World

NOTE: Unless otherwise stated, all scriptural references throughout this book are to the First Book of Nephi as published in the standard Latter-day Saint version of the Book of Mormon. Thus, for example, (17:1) refers to First Nephi 17:1. All scriptural *emphasis* is added.



Introduction

The longest journey begins with a simple, single step. Similarly, pivotal events in the flow of human history can begin quite inauspiciously. An onlooker would have seen nothing beyond the ordinary as a middle-aged merchant retired one evening in Jerusalem some 2,600 years ago. It is easy to imagine him worn down, perhaps hoarse, from another day spent attempting to convince his fellow citizens that their beloved capital, considered impregnable, faced imminent destruction. Likewise, passers-by six centuries later and scant miles distant would have seen nothing especially noteworthy as an anxious husband helped his wife, heavy with child, to shelter. On both nights, Jerusalem slept easily enough.

The merchant, *Lehi*, was likely a smelter and trader in precious metals, an occupation requiring travel. This specialized role may have been the source of his wealth and is likely why he was away from home, apparently traveling in the desert, when God first spoke to him. The dramatic first response to his prayers concerning his people and Jerusalem came in a pillar of fire that “dwelt upon a rock” before him, in which he “saw and heard much” (1:6). This preview of what lay ahead unless his fellows repented began a prophetic career, one dominated by visions and dreams. Lehi joined others who were already called to spread the same message of warning.

During this night God spoke again. Again the message was unambiguous and urgent: his life was in danger. He was to leave. Seemingly immediately, Lehi resolutely gathered his family and led them from their comfortable home down into the wilderness. Only tents and provisions were taken; family wealth and lands were left behind. It was a journey with consequences that Lehi could

not have conceived. He and his wife, Sariah, would never return to Jerusalem.

That the Book of Mormon, the *New World’s* testament of the Christ, has its roots firmly in the *Old*, is sometimes overlooked. Of the three migrations from Old to New World mentioned, only Lehi and Sariah’s story, around 600 BC, is detailed enough to place with confidence on the modern map. It is the subject of this book. In eighteen succinct chapters recorded by their younger son, *Nephi*, the Book of Mormon quickly moves from a Jerusalem on the brink of invasion into the even more exotic world of Arabia. Nephi chronicles a journey punctuated by visions, privation, and death in the desert. Years of hardship are faced before their strangely fertile “Bountiful” is reached. There a ship is built under Nephi’s direction to convey the group across the great ocean to the New World.

It is difficult today to appreciate how strongly the Book of Mormon’s claims of trans-oceanic voyaging ran counter to the prevailing thinking of the nineteenth century. Reflecting cultural mores rather than science, one example of this isolationist thinking will suffice here. It comes from a scholar who spoke in the 1930s of the Americas as “*hermetically sealed by two oceans*.”¹ Indeed, even in the early twenty-first century, the idea that ancient cultures could traverse the oceans still struggles for more than grudging acceptance. Furthermore, even in an age of globe-spanning airliners and routine space travel, the sheer *scale* of the Lehi migration claimed in the opening chapters of the Book of Mormon, across as much as two-thirds of the planet to reach the Americas, still seems incredible. A journey of this distance, using only traditional Iron-Age resources, still challenges anything accepted in mainstream thinking today. It would be, quite probably, the longest journey across the earth made by any group of people in pre-modern times.²

For most of us today, the Old World *setting* claimed for this journey is only slightly less unfamiliar than in 1830, when it was published. And for skeptical readers, other specifics in the account have also seemed at odds with our understanding of Arabia. In particular, Nephi's vivid description of arriving at a lush coastal place of fruit, timber trees, and honeybees -*Bountiful* - has often been judged the book's Achilles' heel. Even quite recently, the notion that such a place could exist in Arabia has been trumpeted as proof that the story was merely a nineteenth-century fantasy.

Although desert sands have blown over Lehi and Sariah's land trail for more than two and a half millennia, substantial traces remain of their world. Arabia's dry climate has preserved much of the setting in which the Book of Mormon account begins. Modern exploration of formerly inaccessible areas has revealed some surprises. This book reports on that exploration and the data learned so far. *Lehi and Sariah in Arabia* focuses on what we could term its "anthropological underlay," the various circumstances and settings in which this singular story plays out. These new findings let us place the Lehite odyssey firmly, and very plausibly, into its geographical and historical setting.

Near Eastern Civilization: Its Rise and Significance

A cluster of unique geographical factors long predating Lehi has helped determine the significance of what we now call the Arabian Peninsula, and of the "Holy Land," the land-bridge above it that connects Europe, Asia, and Africa. It is a destiny seemingly out of proportion to its size and population. This region gave birth to the three monotheist world faiths: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam and, in the period sometimes termed the "Meridian of Time," it provided the setting for the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Its central location

helped facilitate the spread of Christianity, as it did six centuries later the message of Islam.

Although a decade may pass between rain showers in places, the sub-continent of Arabia is home to some of the oldest and most advanced civilizations known in history. Human traces in the region attest to its widespread settlement by at least the Neolithic period (around 4000 BC) and to its early interactions with neighboring cultures.

Jewish and Arab texts and traditions tell of beginnings as early as history records. Arabs hold, for example, that the south of the peninsula was settled as early as the Great Flood, by Shem, son of Noah. Echoing the Genesis account of Abraham's posterity through Ishmael, son of Abraham and Hagar, names such as Midian, Dedan, and Sheba appear in early Arabian history. These names also come down to us through secular history. Traditionally, for example, Sheba settled in the south of Arabia, where the name was attached to the most powerful kingdom in the south, the Kingdom of Saba or Sheba, in what is now Yemen. Likewise, the Midianites were a grouping of semi-nomadic tribes who gave their name to an area south and east of the kingdom of Israel. They, and the Dedanites who eventually conquered them, are often mentioned by Old Testament writers. But the records and traditions that have survived tell only part of the story; the gaps in our knowledge of this area's past are many.³

Lehi and Sariah's era, six centuries before Christ, has been noted by many historians as an axial period in history, one that saw the rise of great thinkers, prophets, and statesmen in many places. Thales, Pythagoras, and Heraclitus were among the Greek philosophers to emerge in this period, while Zarathustra, the Persian prophet, the Buddha, the wisdom of Confucius, and Taoism all began to shed light in their corners of the world. In Greece, Solon developed his fundamentals of statesmanship

and Nebuchadnezzar II ruled the Babylonian empire. In Egypt, the 26th Dynasty was a period of great change and progress.

The florescence and flux of that time certainly included Arabia, a region where later civilizations rivaled and even surpassed European cultures. Arabia's proximity to other early centers of civilization in the Levant, Egypt, Mesopotamia, and the Indus Valley ensured that it played an important role in the region. The Book of Mormon considerably adds to this significance by asserting that at least three distinct migrations of people departed from this region, establishing new civilizations in the distant Americas, lands preserved and set apart for their ancestral lineages.

The Role of the Incense Trade

Despite less than one percent of its land being cultivatable, the original basis for Arabia's wealth was agricultural, enhanced in places by advanced irrigation techniques. Key to unlocking this wealth was the domestication of the camel by at least the second millennium BC, making desert transportation over great distances possible. The trade routes -still developing in Lehi and Sariah's day -were the single most important development in the history of Arabia in thousands of years.

For more than a millennium, no item traded from Arabia approached the importance of the gum aromatics, or incenses. Of the many species of gum harvested for human use, none were more prized in the different cultures surrounding the Mediterranean than frankincense and myrrh. Their trees grew only in the southern coastlands of the Arabian Peninsula, in a small area on the Horn of Africa and on the island of Socotra off the coast of Yemen.⁴

In practices dating far back into prehistory, incense was burned as part of worship. In early Israel, God commanded Moses to burn incense and to make perfume for use in the portable Tabernacle, according to a precise formula (Exodus 30:7-9, 34-39). Incense, including frankincense, was burnt on altars, in censers, and in spoons fashioned after a cupped hand.⁵ Egyptian writings dating back to 1500 BC mention other uses for frankincense and myrrh: their oil was used to perfume royal mummies. The medicinal properties of frankincense, particularly in Greek and Roman cultures, also ensured a constant trade in the products over a long period. The term "frankincense" itself is a reminder of the Germanic Franks who invaded Arabia during the Crusades of the Middle Ages and encountered the resin. And much earlier, as the Christmas story reminds us, frankincense and myrrh were both valued by the Jews as highly as gold.





Trade in gum from Frankincense (pictured) and Myrrh trees brought immense wealth to Arabia. It contributed to the rise of important city states prior to Lehi's day and for hundreds of years after. Both species are still harvested and sold in local markets in Oman and Yemen.

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Contact with the civilizations in the Mediterranean region through trade in scarce materials became the primary stimulus that allowed city-states to arise in Arabia. These eventually dominated the purely agricultural communities. Caravans of thousands of camels carried incense and commodities such as spices, salt, and gold on the two or three month trek from the shores of the Arabian Sea to distribution points in Egypt, Jordan, Palestine, and Syria. Local rulers grew wealthy by offering water supplies and safe passage through their territories, exacting levies according to the size of the caravans.

The incense trade expanded in economic importance, reaching its peak in the second century AD. However, as traders learned to use the monsoon winds blowing across the Indian Ocean, shipping by sea assumed increasing importance, and the overland routes began to lose the monopoly they had long enjoyed. The development of ports such as Moscha and Qana on Arabia's eastern coast accelerated this change.

A series of dramatic geo-political changes then followed. The spread of Christianity, the collapse of the Roman Empire, and internal wars in south Arabia caused the demand for incense to decline rapidly from about the fourth century AD onwards. Regional droughts in the fifth and sixth centuries AD, over-grazing, and the popular use of the trees for aromatic firewood further ensured that most of the incense habitat disappeared. Soon the precious trees remained in only a few places. With the ending of the incense trade, the entire region entered a period of decline, languishing for centuries. Only the discovery in the 1940s of another precious substance from the ground, oil, brought again the

wealth that would allow Arabia to begin moving back into the modern world.

The developing incense trade in Lehi's day is a primary key to understanding the Lehite story, as it made the journey from the Valley of Lemuel to Nahom possible. The trade routes, essentially the shortest distance between water sources, subject to the terrain and political or tribal boundaries, came to support several substantial population centers stretching for more than two thousand miles across the desert. None of these centers were more durable or important than the Kingdom of Saba, more popularly known as *Sheba*.

The Kingdom of Saba (Sheba)

Saba, the most powerful and important kingdom of southern Arabia, arose in the Marib oasis around 950 BC, in what is now central Yemen. Marib and its water came to have a special significance, because its location on the edge of the great desert ensured that virtually all land trade passed through it. The original capital of the area had been Sirwah in the nearby mountains, but Sirwah gave way to Maryab, known as Marib, from the end of the second century AD. Huge, sophisticated, engineering feats, such as the Marib Dam on the Wadi Dhana, begun during the city's zenith about the seventh century BC, allowed the irrigation of large areas.⁶ By supporting a large population, Marib grew powerful. The Kingdom of Saba became the model for the whole of southern Arabia in the areas of commerce, architecture, and language. The construction of several temples led to the capital also becoming the center of pilgrimage for the region.



The prominent ruins of the ancient city of Marib still preside over the area.



The remains of the Marib dam in Yemen are one of the most impressive sights of the ancient world. They predate Lehi's journey through this area by several hundred years.

One of the best-known and enduring personalities from the ancient past - the much-romanticized "Queen of Sheba" - emerges from this time and place. Perhaps dating about four centuries before Lehi, Bilquis, Queen of Sheba, and thus presumably controller of the southern end of the incense route, made her famous journey to Jerusalem to establish friendly relations with King Solomon, ruler of the northern end. Gifts were exchanged between the queen and the king in an abundance that greatly impressed the early writers. While other female monarchs in early Arabia are now known, no inscriptional evidence has yet been linked to Bilquis. The existence of the "Queen of the South" is confirmed, however, by the references to her in the Qur'an, in the Old Testament (1 Kings 10:1-13) and in a statement made by Jesus himself (Matthew 12:42; Luke 11:31). Although Yemen's mountainous terrain generally restricted the development of a single power, the influence of the Kingdom of Saba reached far beyond the Marib area, at times covering the whole of Yemen. An arc of city-states subservient to Saba stretched from Dhofar in Oman to the Hadhramaut, to Najran, Qataban, and Ma'in in Yemen, although there were constant struggles and changes to their status. Saba remained the dominant power in southern Arabia until about the second or third century AD, when the Kingdom of Himyar established control of the southern seaports, replacing the Sabaean dynasty.

Religion in Arabia

To picture Arabia before Islam's arrival as simply a place where pagan gods were worshipped is to do a grave disservice to its people. These descendants of Abraham never fully lost the concept of the One High Creator God (*Allah* in Arabic). Over time, however, the Creator God was conceived of as too remote and transcendent for daily concerns; therefore lesser, more approachable, deities became part of daily life. In

this tribal humanism, these lesser gods became linked to inanimate objects such as stones, mountains, springs, and trees, although these objects were not themselves worshipped. The rise of a moon god ahead of other deities in some places may derive from the fact that desert travel was often done in the cool of nights, preferably by moonlight.

The concept of monotheism, the worship of only one God, had entered Arabia very early, with the arrival of the Israelites. While evidence remains scant, persistent traditions claim at least seven periods of Jewish immigration into Arabia, perhaps as far back as the time of Moses. More generally, it is believed that Jewish traders and merchants began arriving during the reign of King Solomon. The influence of Solomon's naval and trading network eventually extended as far as the south of the peninsula, a reason for the Queen of Sheba's journey to meet Solomon in Jerusalem. This event is generally dated to around 975 BC.

One enduring Yemeni Jewish tradition claims that a large number of leading Jewish families left Jerusalem about 629 BC, in response to Jeremiah's predictions of the First Temple's destruction. Other Jewish arrivals in Arabia have been linked to the destruction of the Second Temple, about AD 70, and to later events. Indeed, throughout much of its history, the ruling classes of Saba's kingdom remained dominated by Jews until just a few centuries before the rise of Islam.⁷

In any event, by Lehi's day, the Jewish presence in southern Arabia was apparently more substantial than many historians have yet acknowledged. In fact, the Jewish presence in Arabia of that period seems to be an integral, even vital, part of Nephi's account. We shall later see that subtle indications in Nephi's account reflect the reality that Israelites were an established part of the religious and cultural world of that day, thus lending support to stories that now survive only in traditions.

While it was Judaism that largely prevailed in southern Arabia, Christian and Zoroastrian influences also made inroads into Arabia in the centuries following Lehi. This process was aided by the periodic occupation of western Yemen by the Christian Ethiopians. A fourth century AD Himyarite king had converted to Judaism, rallying Jews all over Arabia to his military campaigns and eventually dominating much of Arabia. The last of the Himyarite kings, a Jew remembered for instigating a massacre of Christians, reigned in the sixth century AD.

This was the religious landscape at the time of the birth of the Prophet Muhammad about AD 570. The arrival of Islam began a process that would unite the tribes of Arabia, eventually linking them with fellow believers from Spain to India. Both Jews and Christians were accorded special recognition by Moslems as “people of the Book” who worshipped the same God of Abraham. At times, relations between the three religious communities were tolerant.⁸ Of particular interest to those who believe that God’s actual name is “Ahman,” the title “al-Rahman” the “compassionate All-Merciful [One]” appears as an alternative proper name alongside that of *Allah* in some early accounts of Islam. The name survives in Islam today as the chief attribute of Allah and is always invoked in prayers. It also begins each chapter in the Qur’an, the record of the revelations received by Muhammad.⁹

At about the same time as Muhammad’s birth in Mecca, two other significant events took place in southern Arabia: the occupying Ethiopians were defeated and driven from Yemen for the final time, leaving a religious vacuum that Islam quickly filled. And at the ancient capital, Marib, the increasingly neglected great dam failed for the last time. The local population abandoned its fields and soon dispersed to other parts of the peninsula. The city and its temples were abandoned. With a large segment of the population resettled, and their almost wholesale conversion to Islam, the foundation for the modern Arab states was set.

Under Islam, most Jews continued living in Arabia as they had for centuries, albeit often under restrictions and additional taxes. They survived in large part because their craftsmanship with metals, jewelry, painting, pottery, and so forth was important to the local economy. For over a millennium they maintained synagogues and kept feasts and Sabbaths with unparalleled fealty, a diaspora that only ended in the late 1940s when most remaining Jews emigrated to the newly founded state of Israel. Today, only tiny numbers of Jews remain in Yemen, living quietly in several areas.

Pre-Islamic Prophets in Arabia

Lehi’s prophetic call and his journey across Arabia about 600 BC did not happen in isolation, but rather as part of a pattern noted in early Arabian traditions, histories, and in the Qur’an, all of which refer to earlier prophets of God. In concert with Jewish and Christian belief, Islam teaches that God has spoken to people through prophets since the beginning of time. The Old Testament prophets are especially revered in Moslem belief; and even Jesus is accepted as a singular prophet-teacher, born of a virgin, though regarded as entirely mortal. The account of one of the earlier non-biblical prophets, *Hud*, is especially interesting.

The story of Hud is found in the eleventh *sura* (chapter) of the Qur’an and in scattered allusions to him in later chapters. In the account, Hud is one of three prophets called by God to warn the wicked of his day. The personal name Hud (pronounced “Hood”) refers to Jewish things,¹⁰ so the legends may well be based on someone who was Jewish, or was considered a Jew. While still a child, Hud began denouncing the worship of idols, then began a long ministry to the people of ‘Ad, whose city, Iram or “Ubar,” was suddenly destroyed after his message was rejected. In the legends, Hud eventually died and was laid to rest in the Hadhramaut valley in eastern Yemen.

In an annual pilgrimage second in size only to the better-known Moslem “Haj” to Mecca, Hud’s life continues to be celebrated today in a remote corner of the Hadhramaut Valley in eastern Yemen. Some 50 miles/80 km east of the town of Tarim, a sizeable town, *Qabr Nabi Allah Hud* (“Hud, Great Prophet of God”), remains empty all year except for the three-day festival. Hud’s traditional tomb sits on a hillside overlooking the town, attracting thousands of pilgrims from the Hadhramaut, and even beyond Yemen, testament to the enduring power of the Hud stories.¹¹ Hundreds of miles further east, several mausoleums in southern Oman also commemorate the prophet Hud.



The traditional tomb of the pre-Islamic prophet Hud, deep in the Hadhramaut Valley in eastern Yemen. The town at its base remains empty except for the three days each year when Hud is remembered by a pilgrimage, second in size only to the better-known Moslem Haj to Mecca.



There are some interesting resemblances in the Hud stories to the imagery contained in Lehi’s vision of the Tree of Life (1 Nephi 8).¹² It has been theorized that “Hud” could actually reflect a distant memory of Lehi and his teachings, for while Lehi’s ancestry was through Manasseh, he had come from Jerusalem. As a citizen of Judah, he could correctly also be described as a “Jew.” That the legends and traditional sites associated with Hud cluster in the Hadhramaut Valley, close to where Lehi must have passed en route to Bountiful, and in southern Oman, the general area of Bountiful, is interesting, and may also be seen as supporting a link with Lehi.¹³

Dating these stories, however, is very difficult with our current knowledge. Little is known of the ‘Ad tribe to which Hud was sent; however, a sister tribe, the *Thamud*, may date to about the eight century BC. In the Qur’an, the proud and materialistic people of Thamud were largely destroyed after rejecting the warnings of the prophet Saleh (or Salih). Lacking further information, all that can be stated with certainty

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is that the *imagery* used by Lehi and Nephi in their teachings much of it desert-related (and thus far removed from the 1830 environment in which the Book of Mormon emerged) closely fits the general pattern and flavor of pre-Islamic prophets in Arabia and early Israel.

Lehi and Sariah's Jerusalem Home



Jerusalem skyline image courtesy of Alana Aston Orth.

At some point before Lehi's birth, many from the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh had moved south and settled in Judah, perhaps when the Assyrians had invaded eight decades earlier and carried away the tribes comprising the northern kingdom into captivity. Lehi, of the house of Joseph and the tribe of Manasseh, was born and raised "at" Jerusalem, in the southern kingdom of Judah. Although the lands of his inheritance may have laid north of Jerusalem in the original tribal lands of Manasseh, the family home probably lay inside the walls of the city of Jerusalem itself. It also remains possible that Lehi, a man of some means, may have owned properties both in the city and on his inherited land.¹⁴

As the capital of Judah, Jerusalem was caught in the midst of the struggle between the powerful Babylonian and Egyptian empires to control the strategically important area. After King Josiah had restored the temple and instituted significant religious reforms, he was killed in battle against the Egyptians in 609 BC. His successor, Jehoiakim,

introduced further reforms, seen by many as idolatrous.¹⁵ The Babylonians attacked Jerusalem about 598 BC and carried away into captivity another ten thousand people, including the Prophet Ezekiel. The following year, 597 BC, the conquering Nebuchadnezzar placed Zedekiah on the throne; Judah effectively became a vassal-state of the Babylonian empire.

In the midst of such turmoil, Lehi and other inspired prophets labored to make the Jews see the reason for their loss of Jehovah's protection and blessing. In the first year of Zedekiah's reign, Nephi recorded that "many prophets" commenced calling upon the people to repent or face the destruction of Jerusalem (1:4). At about this time, Lehi received his first vision from God, and commenced prophesying to the people of his city. The destruction of their fortified holy capital was unthinkable to the majority of Jerusalem's inhabitants and even, as the text goes on to note, to members of his own family. Lehi records only opposition to his message.

When King Zedekiah broke his oath to Babylon and allied himself instead with Egypt, Nebuchadnezzar returned about 589 BC. He laid siege to the city, and finally Jerusalem was captured and destroyed. Zedekiah was put to death. Although the biblical account implies that all of Zedekiah's sons were also killed, the Book of Mormon informs us that one son, Mulek, or Muloch, escaped this fate. He and others traveled to the New World, perhaps on a Phoenician ship via the Atlantic, thus becoming the third migration recorded in the Book of Mormon. Over time, Mulek's descendants became numerous, and their destiny in the Americas became intertwined with the Nephites.¹⁶ Forewarned, Lehi and his group, the second migration, also escaped Jerusalem's terrible fate, having left some years earlier. Contrary to popular assumptions, the actual year of their departure may have been several years before or after 600 BC.¹⁷

Lehi's Prophetic Call

The personal name Lehi, perhaps pronounced "*Leh-he*," was not uncommon in 600 BC. In addition to appearing in the Old Testament as a place-name and in Safaitic, Thamudic, Minaean, Qatabanian, Sabaeen, and Lehyanite contexts, it (and that of his wife Sariah) has been recently and convincingly attested as a personal Hebrew name from the Iron Age.¹⁸ In the late Judean period known by archaeologists as Iron Age 2C, Lehi was a contemporary of Jeremiah, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Nahum, and the young Daniel and Ezekiel, who would soon be carried off captive to Babylon. With Jerusalem's population at that time estimated at around 25,000, it is certain that Lehi and his family knew at least some of these men personally. This fact surfaces in Nephi's exhortations to his peers, when he mentions without elaborating that Jeremiah had been "cast into prison" (7:14).

Lehi, however, appears to have been the only prophet preaching in Jerusalem at that period who was called to leave his homeland permanently and travel to a promised land. It says much for his character and faith that he responded so quickly and decisively in leaving the security of his inheritance, lands, and wealth when called to do so. Although their four sons would later briefly return twice at the Lord's request, Lehi and Sariah never saw Jerusalem again.



Image courtesy of Leah Aston Puikkonen.

Although he was surely unaware of it at the time, a prime reason for Lehi's call to leave his homeland permanently is found in his ancestry. Lehi, who had dwelt at Jerusalem "all his days" (1:4), was descended from Joseph (5:14) through Manasseh (Alma 10:3). Thus, his travel across desert and oceans to distant America was a fulfillment of the blessing given by Jacob anciently (Genesis 49:22-26). In the blessing, Joseph was told that he was "a fruitful bough whose branches run over the wall." Joseph's branches, or seed, his sons Ephraim and Manasseh, not only constituted part of the ten tribes of Israel's Northern Kingdom who would be scattered and "lost," but would become, through Lehi, a great people on the American continent. Ishmael, whose five daughters married Lehi's sons and Zoram, was also descended from Joseph, but through Ephraim.¹⁹

Ultimately, the move from Jerusalem to the unknown deserts of Arabia was thus impelled by two reasons, although it seems that initially Lehi was aware of only one to escape the destruction of Jerusalem.

Offended by his blunt message, the Jews in the city now sought his life (1:18-2:2). After being warned in a dream, Father Lehi acted quickly, abandoning his house, his lands, and his wealth (2:3-4), taking only provisions and tents for his family. Only after he demonstrated his obedience and prudence do we read of the second reason for the journey being revealed: the Lord promised that a land, choice above all others, was prepared for him.

The account does not make clear when it became known to the group that their escape from Jerusalem was more than a sensible, but temporary, retreat into the desert. Nephi first mentions the "promised land" when recording a revelation he received (2:19-20), without noting whether his father had already taught them of the fact.²⁰ Not explicit in the account is any explanation as to why Lehi and his family were required to make such a dangerously *long* journey to reach this choice place. After all, why travel across Arabia, and then across multiple oceans, rather than simply going to the nearby Mediterranean Sea and crossing the Atlantic (as it seems Mulek's group did)? Only when the entirety of the desert trek is understood do reasons begin to emerge for such an extended, difficult, odyssey.

The Composition of Lehi's Group

Lehi's group was initially made up of only six people: Lehi, Sariah, and their four sons; Laman, Lemuel, Sam, and Nephi. However, Lehi and Sariah were also parents to at least two unnamed daughters, mentioned in Nephi's account as his sisters (2 Nephi 5:6), who were apparently already married at the time the group left Jerusalem. According to early LDS leader Erastus Snow, Joseph Smith had stated that these daughters were married to Ishmael's two sons (*Journal of Discourses* 23:184). If so, the two daughters and their families were among those who joined the others while encamped at the Valley of Lemuel (7:6).

By the time they left the Valley of Lemuel, the group's number had swelled to at least 18, with the addition of at least two daughters; Zoram, the former servant of Laban; and Ishmael's family,²¹ consisting of himself, his wife, five daughters, and at least two sons. Then, as now in Semitic culture, cousin marriages were common in order to protect family inheritances, so Ishmael was probably a brother or uncle to Lehi. In any event, Lehi and Ishmael were already connected through the marriages of their children. That link was now greatly strengthened with the marriages of Lehi and Sariah's four sons to their daughters (16:7) and Zoram to their eldest daughter.

Later, possibly at Nahom, two more sons, Jacob and Joseph, were born to Lehi and Sariah, and other children began to be born to the younger couples. The only death recorded during the journey to Bountiful was that of Ishmael, although it is likely that Ishmael's wife had died earlier, as she is not listed among his mourners. By the time the group set sail from the Old World, the birth of additional children in the desert probably swelled their number to two or three dozen.

“Reformed Egyptian,” the Book of Mormon's Language

While Lehi's native language was Hebrew, the second verse of the Book of Mormon tells us that Nephi's record was written in “the language of my father,” (1:2) which consisted of the “learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians.” This suggests that their Hebrew *language* was written in a *script* of Egyptian origin. Hundreds of years later, Mormon wrote that by his time, the script being used was called “reformed Egyptian” (Mormon 9:32), indicating that its advantage was its compact size compared to Hebrew characters (33). It is not at all certain, however, that Mormon is referring to the same script Nephi described.

Most students of the Book of Mormon assume that Lehi learned Egyptian through trade interactions with Egypt. Around 1400 BC, the classical Egyptian hieroglyphics began to be replaced by a simpler script known as “Hieratic.” Some two hundred examples dating from the late seventh century BC down to the end of the Babylonian captivity attest that Egyptian *numerals* were used by Hebrew scribes, numerals that changed over time in concert with developments to the Hieratic script itself in Egypt. This assures us that there was interaction between the two cultures for centuries. About 650 BC, just prior to Lehi's time, Hieratic simplified still further into the “Demotic” style that continued in use until about AD 500. Demotic is the Egyptian script that Lehi likely used in commercial interactions, and shows some similarities to the characters on the so-called “Anthon transcript,” believed to be the copy of characters made directly from the gold plates by Joseph Smith.

However, while Lehi may indeed have had familiarity with Demotic, a closer reading of Mosiah 1:2-5 suggests the additional possibility that Lehi learned Egyptian in order to read the brass plates containing his genealogy. The plates retrieved from Laban included writings from Lehi's renowned ancestor, Joseph, who was sold into Egypt, and thus were likely written in Hieratic script, or in the little-known “Abnormal Hieratic” variation, both dating to the era of the Israelite captivity in Egypt. Thus, Lehi may have been familiar with Demotic, but then perhaps had to also learn the earlier Hieratic in order to read the brass plates.²²

The Anthon Transcript

The account of Martin Harris's 1828 visit to Professor Charles Anthon in New York City to show him a copy of the characters being translated by Joseph Smith is well known.²³ What is believed to be the original sheet of characters taken to Anthon has long been in the

possession of the Community of Christ, formerly the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The transcript, therefore, offers a glimpse of the “Reformed Egyptian” in which the Book of Mormon was written, making its seven lines containing over 150 characters, about 80 of them unique, of immense interest.

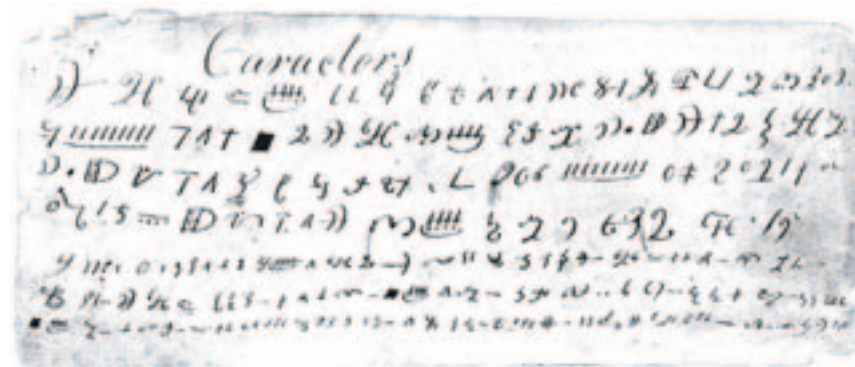
Hugh Nibley noted that the Anthon characters “compares with Merioteic writing - another type of “reformed Egyptian” - developed at the same time as the Nephite script by people also fleeing from destroyers in Jerusalem,”²⁴ with John L. Sorenson commenting that the characters:

...do not resemble writing familiar to any scholars in the 1830s. In fact, the clearest parallels to them are signs on a Mexican artifact that was not discovered until the 1960s...

This is a reference to one of two ceramic cylinder seals bearing marks similar to the Anthon script style, found in Tlatilco and La Venta in Mexico. Another probable example of the script comes from two examples reportedly written down by Joseph Smith.²⁵ These materials combine to present researchers with unparalleled opportunities in understanding the original script in which the Book of Mormon was written and edited so long ago.



Egyptian Hieroglyphics became progressively more compact over time. Using a common Book of Mormon name, *Ammon* (also a common Egyptian deity name) as an example, by about 650 BC the characters developed into the simplified Demotic script shown on the right.



The Anthon transcript displays the “reformed Egyptian” characters from the gold plates that were carried by Martin Harris to Professor Charles Anthon.

The Lost Book of Lehi

The preface by Joseph Smith to the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon informs us that the 116 foolscap pages translated over a two-month period -becoming actually the first Latter-day scripture to emerge -and then lost by Martin Harris, included the “Book of Lehi.”²⁶ While not all the details are clear, it appears that the original record started by Lehi, later named for him by Mormon as he abridged the records, was initially written on some perishable material such as skin or papyrus. Seemingly, Nephi transferred the account to more durable metal plates only after arrival in the New World (1:16-17).

Nephi tells us (1:17) that he made an abridgement of his father’s experiences on his small plates before adding the account of his own life. He then explains (19:1-6) that he was commanded to make a *second* set of plates, apparently transferring a fuller account of Lehi’s life, in addition to his own account, onto these larger plates. It was part of this version that was ultimately lost.²⁷

In Nephi's day, even significant records were often kept only on clay tablets or parchment; metal remained uncommon and expensive, the ultimate investment that could be made in record-keeping. Time and again, the eternal value of records - preserving our genealogies, our families, and interactions with the Divine - is emphasized by the founding stories of the Book of Mormon. Nephi was to discover that in exceptional circumstances, some records are so significant they may require the shedding of blood to acquire.

“It is better that one man should perish...”

The only time in scripture where Nephi hesitates to obey the Lord comes when he is commanded by the Lord to slay Laban, in order to obtain the records containing his family's genealogy. Laban, keeper of the records, had earlier refused a direct request by Nephi for the record, and then tried to take Nephi's life. Now laid drunk in the streets of Jerusalem, he is delivered up to Nephi. The killing of Laban that followed is covered in greater detail than any other subject in Nephi's account, occupying two full chapters (First Nephi 3-4). Led “not knowing beforehand what he should do” (4:6), Nephi eventually heeded the Lord who taught him: “It is better that one man should perish than that a nation should dwindle and perish in unbelief,” (4:13). He slew Laban as commanded, assuming his identity in order to obtain the plates from Laban's servant, Zoram. Nephi then rejoined his brothers, taking Zoram with him, along with Laban's sword and the precious plates.

From that point on, Laban's sword became an enduring, tangible symbol in Nephite culture, recalling a founding event in their history. Even today, the sword continues to play a role by symbolically protecting the full Nephite record repository until the time comes for that to be revealed.

Some readers find the account of Laban's slaying offensive, troubling, and problematic, even unlikely. Efforts to resolve it from legal perspectives and by appealing to earlier precedents in scripture of the wicked being slain, such as David and Goliath, go some way toward helping us reconcile it. A deeper look at the event, however, sees Nephi's action as that of a sovereign prophet-king, someone who was already no longer just another citizen of Jerusalem. The plates, and Laban's sword that he claimed for himself, thus represent his new authority; the slaying of Laban becomes much more than it first appears. Symbolically, Nephi has become a new Moses, properly credentialed to lead his people into a new land. Writing years later in the New World, Nephi ensures that not only is Laban's death justified as lawful capital punishment, but he also places on record the reasons that he is the legitimate ruler of the Nephites.²⁸

Other parts of the story that seem improbable to modern readers accustomed to written contracts- such as the oaths exchanged between Nephi and Zoram (4:30-37) -are exactly how such a situation would have been handled in that day. Even in a life and death situation with a complete stranger, by an exchange of binding oaths Nephi was able to release Zoram instantly, and make him a permanent part of the group.²⁹

The Human Dimensions of Nephi's Account

In his writing, Nephi is mostly focused on capturing the spiritual dimensions of the great saga he is part of. This emphasis has ensured that, aside from a handful of verses, the *human* dimensions are only suggested or implied. Nevertheless, subtle items in his writing can open up whole fields of new understanding. When, for example, he states, “And my father dwelt in a tent” (2:15) and repeats that fact three times, Nephi makes it clear that his family had assumed the desert lifestyle, in which the sheikh's tent is the center of both family and tribe. In the

sheikh's tent, all the important decisions and actions take place, as a further eight verses referring to Lehi's tent illustrate.³⁰

Careful analysis has also sometimes helped to compensate for the cultural bias of that age (present in the Book of Mormon no less than in the Old and New Testaments), in recent insightful studies of Sariah and other women mentioned in First Nephi.³¹ Even more intriguingly, hidden within the recounting of well-known Book of Mormon events are found still other glimpses of higher truths once enjoyed by God's people, but only dimly perceived in our day. Some recent archaeological findings demonstrate that our understanding of Israelite religious thought and practice in Lehi's day is far from complete. Some of these findings even have significant implications for current LDS understandings of Deity.³²

More mundane aspects of Lehite life can be inferred from what we now know about daily life in that time; sources include the travel accounts of explorers and travelers in Arabia in more recent times, such as Carsten Niebuhr, Harry St. J. Philby, Charles Doughty, Bertram Thomas, and Wilfred Thesiger. To date though, few serious attempts have been made by Latter-day Saints to comprehensively fill the gaps in the day-to-day canvas of Lehi's journey. *Discovering Lehi*, published in 1996 by Lynn and Hope Hilton, attempts to show from examples of modern-day Arabian society some of the practical realities of desert life. The authors lived in the Middle East for many years, and their writing briefly covers many aspects of Lehi's life and travels.³³

A different approach was taken by LDS fiction writers. J. Dale Miller's 2000 work, *Lehi's Legacy*, David G. Woolley's *Promised Land* series, and Heather B. Moore's *Out of Jerusalem* series.³⁴ All have speculative content in their effort to accommodate the facts. As an example, the second volume of *Out of Jerusalem* has one of Nephi's sisters kidnapped by desert marauders; this is the author's attempt to account for the eight-year length of the journey to Bountiful. While such an

event remains in the realm of possibility, it is not the only, or even most likely, explanation. Certainly it is not required by the text. Used with caution, however, these books offer much to the reader seeking a fuller picture of what daily life may have been like. The basic story of Lehi and Sariah's family has also resulted in award-winning science-fiction that captures instructive truths in its re-telling, evidencing the strength of the characterizations and situations recorded by Nephi.³⁵

As our appreciation for Nephi's literary abilities has grown, it has been suggested that, as a younger son, he may have received formal scribal training in Jerusalem. This could account for such things as Nephi's proficiency in Egyptian, his emphasis on Isaiah's writings, and his perceptiveness in the framing of his texts to legitimize his leadership. Such a background would not, of course, rule out other skills in crafts such as metalworking.³⁶





The unique mud brick skyscrapers of southern Arabia, lit from inside at night, may be the source of the imagery Nephi used in his account. These views show the mud skyscrapers of Shibam in Yemen's Hadhramaut valley.

Other Subtexts in First Nephi

Still other insights can be gained from careful readings of the text and its underlying assumptions. For example, the appropriateness of the *imagery* used in Lehi's dreams and visions to his Near Eastern

background has been known for some time; aspects that only someone very familiar with those cultures would appreciate.³⁷

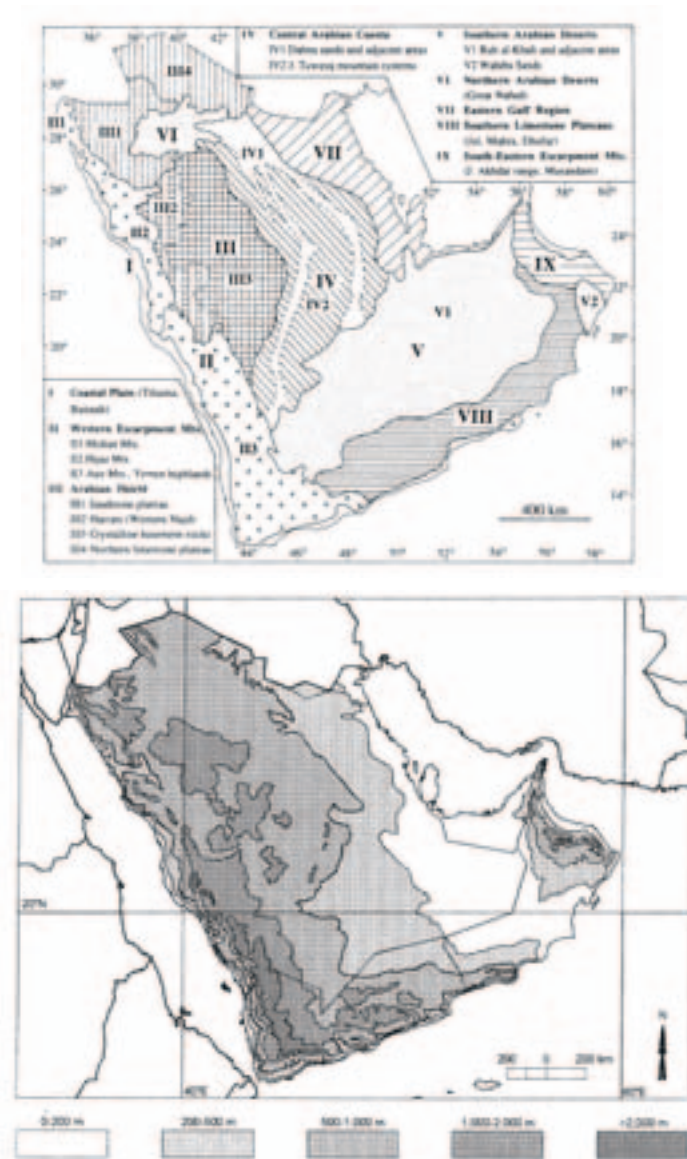
One aspect of Nephi's writing concerning types and motifs was subtle enough to have escaped attention until quite recently. In an age when archetypal events were considered significant, Nephi and those who followed him consciously viewed and documented their travels as parallels to the Israelite exodus from Egypt under Moses, usually regarded as the great pivotal event in Israelite history. Such motifs as the call of a visionary prophet warning of imminent destruction, flight into the desert toward a promised land, complaining of hunger, the provision of miraculous food, periods of rebellion, burial of a prominent patriarch in a significant place, divine instructions given on mountains, and the final deliverance to safety across water are common to both events.³⁸

Terrence L Szink notes:

It seems to me that such a large body of parallels cannot be accounted for by coincidence. It appears that Nephi purposefully wrote his account in a way that would reflect the Exodus. His intention was to prove that God loved and cared for the Nephites just as he did the children of Israel during the Exodus from Egypt.³⁹

In fact, the "Exodus" typology re-surfaces right through the Book of Mormon with later journeys and deliverances, until its ultimate fulfillment in the appearance of the Messiah to the Nephites, six centuries after Lehi. Its appearance is testament to the depth of Nephi's awareness and understanding, and to his ability to capture it within his record.

The Physical Setting of the Arabian Peninsula



Maps showing the relief, geological structure, and the rainfall and temperature cluster in the mountains of Dhofar, courtesy of Shahina Ghazanfar.

It is simplistic to regard the Lehi's roughly 2,100-mile journey as merely traversing mountains and deserts under a blazing sun, before arriving in a place of abundant fruit and timber. The sheer size of the Arabian Peninsula (known anciently as *al Jazirat al 'Arabiyyah*- the Island of the Arabs) ensures a wide range of terrain and climate, ranging from hyper-arid interior deserts to mist-shrouded mountains on the eastern coast, and small areas of tropical forest and lush grasslands in southern Oman and Yemen. The route from Jerusalem to Bountiful stretches some eighteen degrees longitudinally and about sixteen degrees in latitude, covering all the physical types of terrain found in Arabia except sand-dune deserts, which loaded camels largely avoid. Fauna and flora varied accordingly, although a combination of increasing aridity and expanding human activity associated with trade means that they were probably not markedly different in Lehi's day from the present. Understanding this variability is key to grasping the scale of the journey and better appreciating the challenges facing Lehi, Sariah, and their group.

The duration of the journey means that all the *seasonal* variations in climate would have been experienced. As the maps above indicate, rainfall was sparse over most of the land route, and the Lehites likely did not encounter any significant rainfall until their arrival at Bountiful. Even with some prior desert travel experience, probably as traders, once in southern and eastern Arabia particularly, temperatures must have seemed extreme for people used to the mild summers and winter snows of their Jerusalem homeland.⁴⁰

Geologists believe that the Arabian Peninsula, comprising the Arabian tectonic plate, once formed part of *Gondwanaland*, the mega-continent that also included Australasia, Africa, India, South America, and the Antarctic. Over various remote periods, much of the present-day peninsula was successively covered by glaciers and later by the ocean.⁴¹ During their journey, the Lehites also likely encountered black

lava fields that are reminders of the volcanic processes that helped shape Arabia anciently.⁴² Tectonic activity raised parts of the western peninsula bordering the Red Sea so that today there is a general sloping trend towards the northeast. A range of mountains stretches down the entire western side of the peninsula; the northern half (the “Hijaz” Mountains) range from 2,000-3,000 feet/600-900 meters in height, whereas the southern half (the “Asir” Mountains) are much higher, ranging from 5,000-7,000 feet/1,500-2,000 meters high. Most of the eastern side of the peninsula is desert plateau. Highly relevant to the Lehite journey is that rather than facing the enormous sand deserts that make up most of the interior, this easterly sloping plateau offers easily traversable terrain for the eastward journey from Nahom all the way to the mountains on the eastern coast bordering the Indian Ocean. Thus, Lehi and Sariah’s land journey was primarily through mountain passes and over plateaus bordering deserts, but not across the rolling sand dunes of popular imagination.

Whether viewed naturalistically or through the lens of faith, the processes that created the present-day sub-continent of the Arabian Peninsula resulted in a unique environment. It was one that would allow a group transplanted from their homeland to spend years in a harsh, but educational, setting, and then have *all* the resources on hand to embark on a sea journey across two-thirds of the world.

NOTES

1. Referenced in John L. Sorenson, "Ancient Voyages Across the Ocean to America: From "Impossible" to "Certain" *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* (JBMS) 14/1 (Provo: FARMS, 2005), 4-17. See the extended discussion presented by John L. Sorenson in "Transoceanic Voyages," chapter 9 of *Mormon's Codex: An Ancient American Book* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book & NAMIRS, 2013), 150-172. Part 8 of this book, especially notes 19 and 20, offer additional sources on this subject.
2. Currently, the longest uninterrupted ancient maritime voyage generally accepted by scientists is the 2,500 mile/4,000 km one-way distance covered by sailors between Hawaii and French Polynesia thousands of years ago. See Kenneth D. Collerson & Marshall I. Weisler, "Stone Adze Compositions and the Extent of Ancient Polynesian Voyaging and Trade" in *Science* 317/5846 (Washington DC: American Association for the Advancement of Science, 28 Sep, 2007), 1907-1911.
In contrast, a sea voyage from Oman eastwards across the Indian and Pacific oceans to the Central American coast would be in the order of 17,000 miles/27,000 km. See Part 8, note 18 for a recent sea voyage using 600 BC technology that covered an even greater distance.
3. For a discussion of the rise of early settlement in south-eastern Arabia, see Michele Mouton & Jérémie Schiettecatte, *In the Desert Margins: the Settlement Process in an Ancient South and East Arabia* (Rome: L'Erma di Breitschneider, 2014).
*Perhaps the most eloquent historical study that brings the era and the region to life is Simon Schama, *The Story of the Jews: Finding the Words 1000 BCE - 1492 CE* (London: The Bodley Head, 2013). Written from Jewish perspectives, the first 3 chapters particularly are replete with insights into Lehi's era, both pre and post exilic. However, later chapters also have value, such as "Muhammad and the Cohens of Arabia," 230-243 which expands and updates other sources about Judaism in southern Arabia that are highly relevant to the Lehite journey and to Nahom.*
4. Nigel Groom's *Frankincense and Myrrh: A Study of the Arabian Incense Trade* (London: Longman, 1981) remains the foundational text dealing with all aspects of the ancient incense trade. Convenient online sources of current information about research on ancient Arabia include: <http://arabiantica.humnet.unipi.it> and <http://nabataea.net>.
5. For a sensitively written and potent reminder that LDS ordinances have their roots in antiquity, see Lynn M. and Hope A. Hilton, "The Hand as a Cup in Ancient Religious Worship" in their book, *Discovering Lehi: New Evidence of Lehi and Nephi in Arabia* (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 1996), 175-181. Occasional hints suggestive

of connections to the eternal ordinances as understood by Latter-day Saints sometimes appear in the world of early Arabian art and statuary.

- In 1987 local informants in Yemen made the author aware of a little known, unrecorded tribal ritual in Yemen, involving a very specific ceremonial hand-grip given between two people and accompanied by sacred "words" used only in the most special of occasions, including marriages. Any possible connection of this practice to the survival of the Jewish temple ritual remains unclear.*
6. The generally accepted dating of the Marib Dam to the sixth or seventh centuries BC has recently been clarified by new findings. These suggest that while the dam dates to that era, much of the sluice construction still extant was constructed as late as the fifth or sixth centuries AD. See Burkhard Vogt, "Toward a new dating of the great dam of Marib. Preliminary results of the 2002 fieldwork of the German Institute of Archaeology" in *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies (PSAS)* 34 (London: Institute of Archaeology, 2004), 377-388 and in his "The Great Dam, Eduard Glaser and the Chronology of Ancient Irrigation in Marib" in A. Sholan, et al. eds. *Sabaeen Studies: Archaeological, Epigraphical and Historical Studies in Honour of Yusuf M. Abdullah, Alessandro de Maigret and Christian Robin on the occasion of their 60th birthdays* (Naples & Sana'a, 2005), 501-520. This revised dating however has no impact on the dating of the temple complexes at Marib (per email to the author from Dr Vogt, May 19, 2006).
 7. While not exhaustive, S. Kent Brown's "Jerusalem Connections to Arabia in 600 BC" in John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely and Jo Ann H. Seely, eds. *Glimpses of Lehi's Jerusalem* (Provo: FARMS, 2004), 625-646 is currently the most comprehensive LDS source on this point, summarizing the major sources. See Terrence L. Szink's review "Jerusalem in Lehi's Day" *FARMS Review* 16/2 (Provo: FARMS, 2004), 149-160 contrasting the significance of the Book of Mormon's Old World setting against the lesser-known New and offering new data.
*On legends of Jewish immigration into Arabia see Shalom Seri & Naftali Ben-David, *A Journey to Yemen and Its Jews* (Israel: Eeleh BeTamar Publishing, 1991), 43 and Ken Blady, *Jewish Communities in Exotic Places* (Lanham, Maryland: Jason Aronson Inc, 2000), 32.*
 8. J. S. Trimingham's *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times* (Beirut: Longman, 1979), especially chapters 7 and 8, provides useful insights into early Arab humanism and how the monotheistic religions, including Christianity, were adapted. The historical intrigues are detailed, but lack dispensational perspective. A more general Jewish perspective is offered in S. D Goitein, *Jews and Arabs: Their Contacts Through the Ages* (New York City: Schocken Book, 1974).

9. See commentary by Jacob Neusner, Bruce Chilton, William Albert Graham, *Three Faiths, One God: The Formative Faith and Practices of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Boston & Leiden: Brill, 2002), 81-83, discussing the various understandings of “al-Rahman al-Rahim” part of the Bismalah formula that encapsulates the essence of Islam. LDS readers will find great value in Daniel C. Peterson’s *Abraham Divided: An LDS Perspective on the Middle East* (Salt Lake City: Aspen Books, 1992) and his *Muhammad: Prophet of God* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge, UK: 2007) dealing with the Prophet Muhammad.
10. F. Winnett and W. Reed, *Ancient Records from North Arabia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), 45.
11. See D. Van der Meulen and H. Von Wissman, *Hadramaut - Some of its Mysteries Unveiled* (Leiden: Brill, 1964), 158-162. Also see Ronald Lewcock, *Wadi Hadramaut and the Walled City of Shibam* (Paris: UNESCO, 1985), 17, 63, 55, 124-125. For a holistic scholarly treatment of Qabr Hud, see Lynne S. Newton, *A landscape of pilgrimage and trade in Wadi Masila, Yemen: al-Qisha and Qabr Hud in the Islamic Period* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2009).
12. Sura (chapter) 11:50-60, “Hud” (*The Prophet Hud*), of the Qur’an. In some Islamic thought Hud is equated with the Biblical Eber or Heber, great-great-grandson of Noah through Shem.
13. William Hamblin, “Pre-Islamic Arabian Prophets” in Spencer J. Palmer, ed. *Mormons and Muslims: spiritual foundations and modern manifestations* (Provo: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2002), 135-156. An analysis of the Hud stories and the modern Hadhramaut pilgrimage is found in: Nicholas Clapp, *The Road to Ubar* (London: Souvenir Press, 1999), see particularly 81-89, 280-288.
14. Jeffrey R. Chadwick, “Lehi’s House at Jerusalem and the Land of His Inheritance” in *Glimpses of Lehi’s Jerusalem*, 81-130. Chadwick also discounts (105-106) popular claims that Lehi’s “city” or “cave” or his ancestral lands have been located. He published a fuller evaluation in “Khirbet Beit Lei and the Book of Mormon: An Archaeologist’s Evaluation” in *The Religious Educator* 10/3 (Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2009), 17-48. These follow LaMar C. Berrett’s “The So-Called Lehi Cave” in *JBMS* 8/1 (1999), 64-66 which responded to “Is the Mormon Figure Lehi Connected with a Prophetic Inscription Near Jerusalem?” by non-LDS scholar Frank Moore Cross in *Biblical Archaeology Review* (BAR) 14/6 (Washington DC: Biblical Archaeology Society, Nov/Dec 1988), 19.
15. A clear summary of the reforms is provided in Margaret Barker, “What Did King Josiah Reform?” in *Glimpses of Lehi’s Jerusalem*, 523-542. Kevin Christensen argues that Lehi and Nephi actually opposed the reforms, see “Nephi, Wisdom, and the Deuteronomist Reform,” *Insights* 23/2 (Provo: FARMS, 2003), 2-3. This has implications in any discussion of the private practices of Israelite religion in that era; see the discussion about Goddess worship in note 27.
16. See John L. Sorenson, “The “Mulekites”” in *BYU Studies* 30/3 (Provo: Brigham Young University, 1990), 1-22 summarizing what is known and what can be reasonably inferred about Mulek and his people. Recovery of the original translated text of the Book of Mormon indicates that the name Mulek, youngest son of King Zedekiah, should probably be rendered as “Muloch,” see Royal Skousen: *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon* (Provo: FARMS, 2006-2009) at <http://www.mormoninterpreter.com/books/volume-4-of-the-critical-text-of-the-book-of-mormon-analysis-of-textual-variants-of-the-book-of-mormon/part-one-1-nephi-1-2-nephi-10/> and his summary in *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).
Referring to the finding of an ancient Judean stamp seal Jeffrey R. Chadwick concludes it is “quite possible that an archaeological artifact of a Book of Mormon personality has been identified,” in his “Has the Seal of Mulek Been Found?” *JBMS* 12/2 (2003), 72-83.
17. Jeffrey R. Chadwick argues for a departure date of about 605 BC in “Has the Seal of Mulek Been Found?” in *JBMS* 12/2 (2003), his note 24, 117. Other proposals include S. Kent Brown and David R. Seely, “Jeremiah’s Imprisonment and the Date of Lehi’s Departure” *The Religious Educator* 2/1 (2001), 16-17 proposing “after 597 BC.” Additional insight into Lehi’s life comes from an examination of his prophetic contemporary in Jerusalem, Jeremiah; see David R. Seely and JoAnn H. Seely, “Lehi & Jeremiah: Prophets, Priests, & Patriarchs” in *Glimpses of Lehi’s Jerusalem*, 357-380.
18. G. Lankester Harding, *An Index and Concordance of Pre-Islamic Arabian Names and Inscriptions* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 512-513. The meaning of Lehi’s name is that of a “cheek or jawbone,” while that of Sariah is “Jehovah is al my prince.”
Sources for the name are collated in the Book of Mormon Onomasticon project, <https://onoma.lib.byu.edu/onomal/index.php/LEHI>. See the discussions in John Tvedtnes, “Seeking Agreement on the Meaning of Book of Mormon Names” and “Lehi and Sariah Comments” in *JBMS* 9/1 (2000), 28-39 and the more general treatment that follows: “Book of Mormon Names Attested in Ancient Hebrew Inscriptions” 40-51. More recently, Jeffrey R. Chadwick, “Lehi in the Samaria Papyri and on an Ostrakon from the Shore of the Red Sea” *JBMRS* 19/1 (2010),

- 14-21, lays out the substantial evidence confirming the use of Lehi and Sariah as Hebrew personal names in the Iron Age.
- General scholarly treatments on Hebrew features within the Book of Mormon can be found in John A. Tvedtnes, "Names of People: Book of Mormon" and "Hebraisms in the Book of Mormon" in Geoffrey Khan, ed. *Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics* (Brill Online, 2013), available at <http://referenceworks.brillonline.com>.
19. This assumption is discussed by Sidney B. Sperry, "Did Father Lehi Have Daughters Who Married the Sons of Ishmael?" *JBMS* 4/1 (1995), 235-238.
20. For the Jerusalem environment in Lehi's day see particularly *Glimpses of Lehi's Jerusalem*. Also of value in understanding the Near Eastern context of the Book of Mormon is Robert F. Smith's "Book of Mormon Event Structure: The Ancient Near East" in *JBMS* 5/2 (1996), 98-147, especially his "The Arabian Nexus." For a discussion of how Jerusalem can properly be termed both a "city" and a "land" as the Book of Mormon does, see John Tvedtnes, "Cities and Lands in the Book of Mormon," in *JBMS* 4/2 (1995), 147-150. Although now somewhat dated, D. Kelly Ogden and Jeffrey R. Chadwick's text *The Holy Land: a geographical, historical and archaeological guide to the Land of the Bible* (Jerusalem: HaMakor, 1990) remains a good overview of Lehi's physical world and was used as a standard text at the BYU Jerusalem Center for several years. A more recent and more accessible work is Anson F. Ramey & R. Steven Notley, eds. *The Sacred Bridge: Carta's Atlas of the Biblical World* (Jerusalem: Carta, 2005), especially 254-277 "Crisis and Turmoil: Late Seventh to Early Sixth Centuries BCE."
- The "Rechabites" a group mentioned in Jeremiah 35 who may have left Jerusalem at about the time of Lehi, are discussed by John W. Welch in "The Narrative of Zosimus (History of the Rechabites) and the Book of Mormon" in Noel B. Reynolds, ed. *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins* (Provo: FARMS, 1997), chapter 13, including a comparison of Lehi's vision of the Tree of Life with the Zosimus text.
21. Royal Skousen's *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part 1: Title Page, Witness Statements, 1 Nephi 1-2 Nephi 10* (2004) restores the reading of 1 Nephi 7: 5 to read "Ishmael and also his whole household" (emphasis added).
- John L. Sorenson discusses family dynamics in "Transoceanic Crossings" in Monte S. Nyman & Charles D. Tate Jr, eds. *The Book of Mormon: First Nephi, the Doctrinal Foundation* (Provo: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1988), 260. On the likely relationship of Ishmael to Lehi, see Sidney B. Sperry, "Did Father Lehi Have Daughters Who Married the Sons of Ishmael?" 235-238 and Hugh Nibley's "Lehi in the Desert; The World of the Jaredites; There Were Jaredites," reprinted in *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley (CWHN)* 5 (Provo: FARMS & Maxwell Institute at BYU, 1988), 40. John M. Butler examines lineage issues in his "A Few Thoughts From a Believing DNA Scientist" in *JBMS* 12/1 (2003), 36-37.
22. For a comprehensive discussion of the issues see John L. Sorenson, "Mormon's Sources" *JBMS* 20/2 (2011), 2-15, especially 6-7. Sorenson's article cites John Gee, "Two Notes on Egyptian Script" *JBMS* 5/1 (1996), 162-176 which discusses adaptations of the scripts in order to more easily engrave the characters in stone and metal.
- Moroni's statement about the Egyptian characters and their Hebrew being changed (Mormon 9:32-33) fits perfectly with what we know about how all languages change over time; it seems most unlikely that Joseph Smith would have realized that. For a discussion of the original language of the Book of Mormon, arguing that Hebrew language using modified Egyptian characters was used, see John Gee, "La Trahison des Clercs: On the Language and Translation of the Book of Mormon" in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 (1994), 79-83, 94-99 and the discussion in John Tvedtnes and Stephen Ricks, "Jewish and Other Semitic Texts Written in Egyptian Characters" in *JBMS* 5/2 (1996), 156-163.
- For a concise outline of the evolution of Egyptian writing and examples of its varying forms, see William J. Hamblin, "Reformed Egyptian" *FARMS Review* 19/1 (2007), 31-35. See also his "Palestinian Hieratic" in *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* (Provo: The Interpreter Foundation), dated September 1, 2012. The first Demotic-English dictionary is now available online from the University of Chicago at www.oi.uchicago.edu/research/projects/dem/
23. Martin Harris's visit to Professor Charles Anthon in New York City is recounted in *History of the Church* 1: 63-65.
24. Hugh Nibley, *Dark Days in Jerusalem: The Lacish Letters and the Book of Mormon* (available as a Reprint from the Maxwell Institute).
25. See the discussion on scripts and language in John L. Sorenson, "How Could Joseph Smith Write So Accurately about Ancient American Civilization?" in Donald W. Parry et al. eds. *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*. (Provo: FARMS/ISPART, 2002), 274-282. See also John L. Sorenson, "'Anthon Transcript' Writing found?" in *JBMS* 8/1 (1999), 68-70. The dating of the Tlatilco cylinder seal that offers the closest parallels to the Anthon Transcript is updated in John L. Sorenson, *Mormon's Codex*, 222-224. However, based on available samples, the numerous inscriptions mentioned in the *JBMS* update - found from 1921-23 in the Valley of Mexico by William Niven - bear little resemblance to the Anthon Transcript.
- Stan and Polly Johnson's *Translating the Anthon Transcript* (Parowan, UT: Ivory Books, 1999) remains the latest attempt to systematically analyze the symbols on

- the Anthon Transcript and propose correlations with the Book of Mormon. Despite being dismissively reviewed, see John Gee, "Some Notes on the Anthon Transcript" in *FARMS Review of Books* 12/1 (2000), 5-8, it thus has value.
26. The story of the lost 116 translated pages of the Book of Mormon is fully recounted in John W. Welch with Erick B. Carlson, eds. *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations 1820-1844* (Provo and Salt Lake City: BYU Press and Deseret Book, 2005), substantially expanding John W. Welch and Tim Rathbone's "How Long Did It Take to Translate the Book of Mormon?" published in John W. Welch, ed. *ReExploring the Book of Mormon: The F.A.R.M.S Updates* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 1-8.
 27. For discussions on the Book of Lehi and the varying ways it is referred to, see David E. Sloan, "The Book of Lehi and the Plates of Lehi" in *JBMS* 6/2 (1997), 269-272 and S. Kent Brown, "Lehi's Personal Record: Quest for a Missing Source" *BYU Studies* 24/1 (1984), 19 and "Nephi's Use of Lehi's Record" in John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne, eds. *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 3-5. For an examination of possible themes covered in the missing scripture, see Don Bradley, *The Lost 116 Pages: Rediscovering the Book of Lehi* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2013).
 28. See John W. Welch, "Legal Perspectives on the Slaying of Laban" *JBMS* 1/1 (1992), 119-141. On Nephi as ruler, see the invaluable insights in Val Larsen's "Killing Laban: The Birth of Sovereignty in the Nephite Constitutional Order" in *JBMS* 16/1 (2007), 26-41.
 29. Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, CWHN 6:128-129. Those whose roots lie in Near Eastern, rather than Western culture have an immediate appreciation of these oaths and other items recorded by Nephi. See, for example, the response by an Arab member of the LDS Church, Ehab Abunuwara, "Into the Desert: An Arab View of the Book of Mormon" in *JBMS* 11/1 (2002), 60-65.
 30. Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, CWHN 5:51-52 and Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, CWHN 6:243.
 31. An outstanding example of how layers of scriptural understanding can be penetrated is Camille Fronk, "Desert Epiphany: Sariah & the Women in 1 Nephi" in *JBMS* 9/2 (2000), 4-15. For a broader study of the female presence in the Book of Mormon see Camille S. Williams, "Women in the Book of Mormon, Inclusion, Exclusion, & interpretation" *JBMS* 11/1 (2002), 66-79. A popular treatment fleshing out likely details of Sariah's life and her role as Lehi's wife is found in Heather B. Moore's *Women of the Book of Mormon: Insights and Inspirations* (American Fork, UT: Covenant, 2010).
 32. The pre-eminent example of this concerns the Israelite worship of a Goddess. Daniel C. Peterson pursues this significant theme in "Nephi and His Asherah: A Note on 1 Nephi 11: 8-23" in Davis Bitton, ed. *Mormons, Scripture, and the Ancient World: Studies in Honor of John L. Sorenson* (Provo: FARMS, 1998), 191-243; also condensed in his article, "Not Joseph's, and Not Modern" in Donald W. Parry, Peterson and Welch, eds. *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, 214-219 and "Nephi and His Asherah" *JBMS* 9/2 (2000), 16-25. A flood of deeper insight into the well-known account of Nephi's vision of the tree of life is introduced by links to the divine feminine being called Asherah, worshipped in ancient Israel until approximately the time of Lehi. Peterson suggests that Nephi's response to the explanation of the vision by "the Spirit" is best explained by the fact that he knew the doctrine of the Goddess, her role as the consort of El[ohim] and the sacred tree imagery associated with her. This implies that this records another subtle scriptural memory - there are many others - of the being whom Latter-day Saints refer to as "Heavenly Mother" and to the fact that she was acknowledged and worshiped, along with the Father, in periods when the fullness of truth was on the earth.
- Non-LDS scholars, notably Jewish scholar Raphael Patai in *The Hebrew Goddess* (3rd ed.) (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990) and Margaret Barker, establish beyond any question that a female deity was an integral part of worship in ancient Israel until the reforms introduced by Josiah in 621 BC. For LDS commentary on Barker, see Kevin Christensen, "Paradigms Regained: A Survey of Margaret Barker's Scholarship and its Significance for Mormon Studies" in *FARMS Occasional Papers* 2 (Provo: FARMS, 2001).
- For further exploration of this subject more scholarly than its title may suggest, see Kevin L. Barney, "How to Worship Our Mother in Heaven (Without Getting Excommunicated)" in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* (Salt Lake City: Dialogue Foundation, Winter 2008), 121-146. Ancient imagery of "God" as a divine couple is found in several cultures; for a recent Israelite example see William G. Dever, "A Temple Built for Two: Did Yahweh Share a Throne with His Consort Asherah?" in *BAR* 34/02 (Mar-Apr 2008), 55-62. Dever sees a looming "revolution" in our understanding of Israelite religious practice from increasing traces of a "folk" dimension that recognized a female deity. For an LDS response to Dever's book, *Did God Have a Wife? Archaeology and Folk Religion in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), see Alyson Skabelund von Feldt, "Does God Have a Wife?" in *FARMS Review* 19/1 (2007), 81-118. Von Feldt notes that the Book of Mormon chroniclers seem both aware of and positive about a Divine Female.
33. Lynn M. and Hope A. Hilton, *Discovering Lehi* (1996), the updated and expanded version of their 1976 work, *In Search of Lehi's Trail* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book,

- 1976). The latter was excerpted in the official church *Ensign* magazine of September and October of that year. The 1996 book was reviewed by the author in the *FARMS Review of Books* 9/1 (1997). See Dr Hilton's reflections in his article "In Search of Lehi's Trail – 30 Years Later" *JBMS* 15/2 (2006), 4-7 and his DVD "The Lehi Trail in Arabia" (Salt Lake City: Hilton Books, 2008).
34. J. Dale Miller, *Lehi's Legacy* (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2000); David G. Woolley, *Promised Land*. 5 vol. (American Fork, UT: Covenant, 2004) and Heather B. Moore's series *Out of Jerusalem*. 4 vol. (American Fork, UT: Covenant, 2004).
35. The dramatization of the Lehite story by LDS writer Orson Scott Card in the 5 volume *Homecoming* series (New York: TOR, 1992-1995) is examined by Eugene England in "Orson Scott Card: The Book of Mormon as History and Science Fiction" in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/2 (1994), 59-78.
36. Brant A. Gardner, "Nephi as Scribe" *Mormon Studies Review* 23/1 (formerly *FARMS Review*) (2011), 45-55. Jeffery Chadwick's "Lehi's House at Jerusalem" in *Glimpses of Lehi's Jerusalem*, 114-117, proposes ten reasons to consider Nephi (and Lehi) as metal-smiths.
37. Hugh Nibley, *CWHN* 6:253-262. The suggestion that Lehi's imagery may link to the distinctive "skyscraper" architecture of southern Arabia was first made in 1992 by Daniel C. Peterson in *Abraham Divided*, 65 and has since been expanded upon by others; see, for example, S. Kent Brown, "The Queen of Sheba, Skyscraper Architecture, and Lehi's Dream" in *JBMS* 11 (2002), 102-103.
38. Mircea Eliade's *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return* (New York: Harper and Row, 1959), 7 develops this concept. LDS commentary includes George S. Tate, "The Typology of the Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon" in Neal E. Lambert, ed. *Literature of Belief*, (Provo: BYU Religious Studies Center Monograph Series, 1978), 245-262 and Terrence L Szink, "Nephi and the Exodus" in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, 38-51, Mark J. Johnson, "The Exodus of Lehi Revisited" in John W. Welch and Melvin Thorne, eds. *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon* (Provo: FARMS, 1999), 54-58 and S. Kent Brown, "The Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon" in his *From Jerusalem to Zarahemla: Literary and Historical Studies of the Book of Mormon* (Provo: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1998), 75-98. For other treatments of this theme, see Noel B. Reynold's "Lehi As Moses" in *JBMS* 9/2 (2000), 26-35 and his "The Israelite Background of Moses Typology in the Book of Mormon" in *BYU Studies* 44/2 (2005).
- Discussing the events at Nahom particularly, see Alan Goff's "Mourning, Consolation, and Repentance at Nahom" in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, 92-99 and his "Boats, Beginnings, and Repetitions" in *JBMS* 1/1 (1992), 67-84 which examines the archetypes involved in the ocean voyage to the Promised Land, noted by Nephi. Other studies have begun exploring other levels of Nephi's text, see Tod R. Harris, "The Journey of the Hero: Archetypes of Earthly Adventure and Spiritual Passage in 1 Nephi" in *JBMS* 6/2 (1997), 43-66.
39. Terrence L. Szink, "Nephi and the Exodus" in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, 50.
40. Appreciation is extended to Dr Shahina A. Ghazanfar of Oman for permission to reproduce these maps from her book co-edited with Martin Fisher, *Vegetation of the Arabian Peninsula*, *Geobotany Series*, 25 (*The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers*: 1998). This work should be consulted if more information is required in any of these fields.
- Placing early human culture into the Arabian environment is Dr Mohammed Abdul Nayeem's work, *Prehistory and Proto-history of the Arabian Peninsula*. 2 vols. (Hyderabad: Hyderabad Publishers, 1990) and, more recently, Michael D. Petraglia & Jeffrey I. Rose, eds. *The Evolution of Human Populations in Arabia: Paleoenvironments, Prehistory and Genetics* (New York City: Springer, 2009); see 139-150 focusing on central Oman and 251-278 for a discussion about maritime settlement for the peninsula.
- Also useful is H. Stewart Edgell, *Arabian Deserts: Nature, Origin and Evolution* (New York: Springer, 2006), discussing all the land form features of Arabia and their dynamics. W. Revell Phillips, "Weather Report from the Valley of Lemuel" in *JBMS* 15/2 (2006), 94-101 offers an overview of climatic factors in western Arabia in particular.
41. The presumed geological sequence is summarized by Ingeborg Guba and Ken Glennie in "Geology and Geomorphology" in Ghazanfar and Fisher, eds. *Vegetation of the Arabian Peninsula*, chap. 3.
42. The Lehite group likely encountered the extensive lava fields south of modern Medina in Saudi Arabia and later in Yemen. See Peter Harrigan, "Volcanic Arabia," *Saudi Aramco World* 57/2 (Houston: Saudi Aramco, March/April 2006), 2-13 showing typical landscapes from this area.