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Swine in the Book of Mormon

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Abstract: Miller discusses potential New World analogues to the Old World "swine" that could account for the "swine" mentioned in the Book of Mormon text.

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Swine were designated as another kind of animal used for food by Jaredites (Ether 9:18). It was not stated, however, if these animals were among the ones brought over on the barges by them. As I see it, there are two alternative possibilities regarding their presence in North America. True swine, or pigs, as we understand the terms now, relate to an Old World animal. They were never native to the New World as evidence from fossils and DNA studies show. Thus, if this specific animal is the type meant in the Book of Ether, it had to be imported. To my knowledge there have not been Precolumbian archaeological finds where Old World pigs were found associated with man. But even in the absence of such evidence, it is possible they were in the New World in limited numbers, in a restricted area, and then became extinct when no longer domestically raised. There is another possibility for inclusion of swine in the Jaredite record.

The peccary (or javelina) (Figure 4) is a New World animal that essentially parallels and is closely related to the Old World pigs. There are several extinct forms as well as three living kinds. These, too, are commonly referred to as pigs, and have been used for a food item for several thousand years. In fact they are still used for food throughout their range. Peccaries have been found associated with human artifacts in the Loltún Cave in the Yucatán Peninsula as reported by Arroyo-Cabrales and Alvarez (2003, p. 264-266). These animals were earlier reported in this general region by Hatt from several caves (Lara, Coyok, Spukil, and Chacaljas), which were commonly associated with human artifacts (1953, p. 30-36).

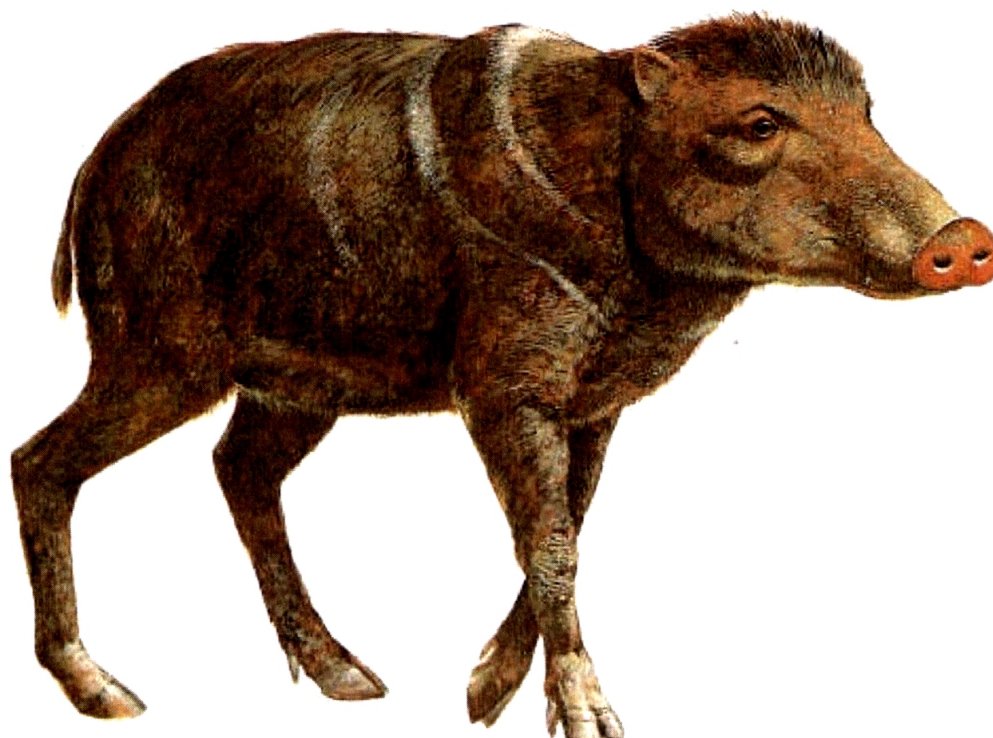


Figure 4. Restoration of the extinct peccary, *Platygonus compressus*, known from many fossil localities in North America, including Mexico. Its size was equal to the European wild boar. Peccaries, both living and extinct forms, are commonly referred to as pigs. They easily could represent the swine referred to in the Book of Ether. Of course the Jaredites could have brought swine from the Old World with them. These animals are not mentioned in the Nephite record as a food item as the Nephites observed the Law of Moses. (Figure by courtesy of the George C. Page Museum in southern California. John Dawson, artist. From Harris and Jefferson, 1985, “Treasures of the Tar Pits.”)

Two living types of peccary still inhabit Mesoamerica. It was thought that one species from South America was extinct; however, it was later found to still be living (Kurtén and Anderson, 1980, p. 296). One type of extinct peccary from Florida survived until at least 7,000 to 8,000 years ago, and possibly to 5,000 years ago (Martin and Webb, 1974, p. 144).

Although I am not aware of any Precolumbian true, or Old World, pigs discovered in the New World, it has to be considered a possibility that they were in America. They are definitely known from very early historic times. Being in limited numbers in a restricted region, their evidence might have escaped detection to date. As more field studies take place, more and more types of life that were “not supposed to be in America” have been discovered. This holds true for fossils and, as reported by Sorenson and Johannessen, certain domesticated plants and animals (2006, p. 238).