



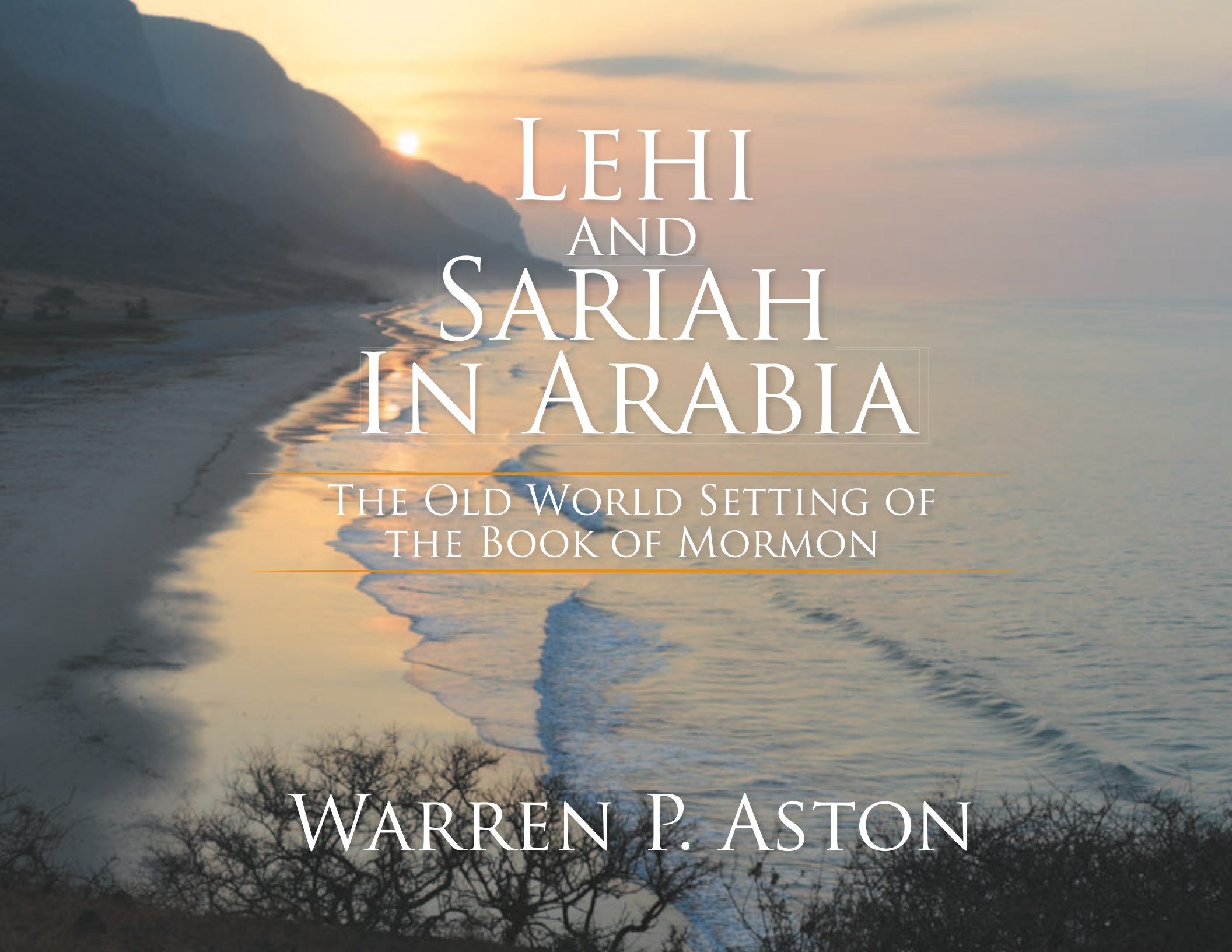
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Lehi and Sariah in Arabia: The Old World Setting of the Book of Mormon

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Abstract: A 21st Century re-examination of the most-read book to emerge from the Western Hemisphere, the Book of Mormon. As Mormonism grows into a world faith, the veracity of its founding scripture has never been more important. The three decades of Arabian exploration reported in Lehi and Sariah in Arabia identifies specific locations for the 8 year journey described in the text, allowing Nephi's account to emerge with new clarity and enhanced plausibility.



LEHI AND SARIAH IN ARABIA

THE OLD WORLD SETTING OF
THE BOOK OF MORMON

WARREN P. ASTON

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*To my beloved children
Claire, Chad, Varian, Mya, Leah and Alana,
their spouses and to their children after them.*



**And righteousness will I send down out of heaven;
and truth will I send forth *out of the earth*,
to bear testimony of mine Only Begotten.**

Moses 7:62

**Truth shall spring *out of the earth*;
And righteousness shall look down from heaven.**

Psalms 85:11

**Surely in the heavens and *in the earth* are
signs for believers.**

Qur'an, Sura 45:3, al-Jathiya, "Kneeling."

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Introduction

This is the story about the world in which the primary migration account of the Book of Mormon unfolds. At its heart are the ancient lands of Arabia, with their rich tapestry of cultures, faiths, and landforms; old Jerusalem around 600 BC marks its beginning and the desert kingdoms of the Arabian Peninsula the setting for most of the account that follows. The scene transitions to the New World only about a decade later.

In the early twenty-first century, the Old World is significantly better known than in 1830, when the Book of Mormon appeared. Still, in many regards it remains misunderstood and underappreciated. *Lehi and Sariah in Arabia* explores what the Book of Mormon says about that world. It comes at a time when the Book of Mormon is considered sacred scripture by an ever-increasing readership, but also in a period when it is under the double threat of skepticism and secular apathy. To understand this dynamic, we must first step back in time to when the Book of Mormon first appeared.

By the early nineteenth century, cracks in the Christian fabric of Western culture were beginning to appear, undermining long-held assumptions about the Bible and its origins. These rumblings foreshadowed a widening rift between orthodoxy, itself divided into

many camps, and the “enlightened” secularism that would intensify throughout the century. Foundational events such as the Creation, the Flood, the reliability of biblical texts generally and, eventually, even the literal existence of Jesus of Nazareth began to be questioned.

That Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon should suddenly emerge in the early decades of that period, and on one of its fault-lines, the American frontier, can be viewed quite differently. Depending on one’s perspectives, the appearance of a new brand of faith in the 1830s either accelerated the fracturing of Christianity, or offered a supremely satisfying solution to its problems. Nearly two centuries later, that dichotomy remains true.

What is new, however, is our ability to re-examine the claims of the keystone anchoring this new religion’s belief system and driving its growth: the Book of Mormon. The book purports to be the translation of a much older record, dealing with an ancient, pre-Christian, world that no-one in the nineteenth century knew much about. Nearly two centuries later, the labors of explorers and scholars and the tools of modern science make that world much more accessible to us.

Uniquely among the world’s religious texts, the closing pages of the Book of Mormon contain an invitation for each reader to obtain the ultimate arbiter of truth - spiritual confirmation of its truth.¹ It is also true, however, that Joseph Smith had the Book of Mormon in mind when he stated in 1842 that “*facts are stubborn things,*” and that the world would eventually prove his prophetic mission true through accumulating “*circumstantial evidence, in experiments.*”²

In this view, rational facts and scholarship have a significant role in any evaluation of spiritual claims. This book reports the efforts of those who have attempted to do just that with regard to the Book of Mormon’s Old World setting. It examines whether *plausibility* exists by

comparing its text with what is now known about the book's real-world setting. Whether the reader ultimately chooses, therefore, to see the Book of Mormon as a book of faith, or merely as a cultural artifact, the plausibility established for it should encourage a more careful reading of the text and a deeper appreciation of its message.

NOTES

1. *Moroni 10: 3-5.*
2. *Times & Seasons, Vol. 3 (Nauvoo, IL: September 15, 1842): 921-922.*

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, Qa'taban, 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

LEHI AND SARIAH IN ARABIA

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.

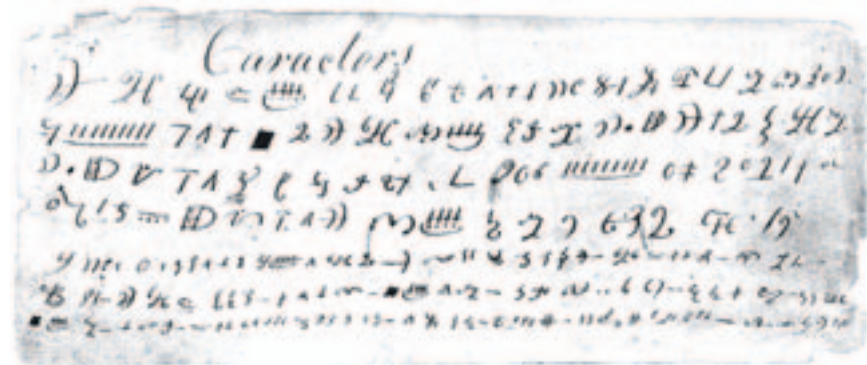
Hugh Nibley noted that the Anthon characters “compares with Meriotic writing - another type of “reformed Egyptian” - developed at the same time as the Nephite script by people also fleeing from destroyers in Jerusalem,”²⁴ with John L. Sorenson commenting that the characters:

...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

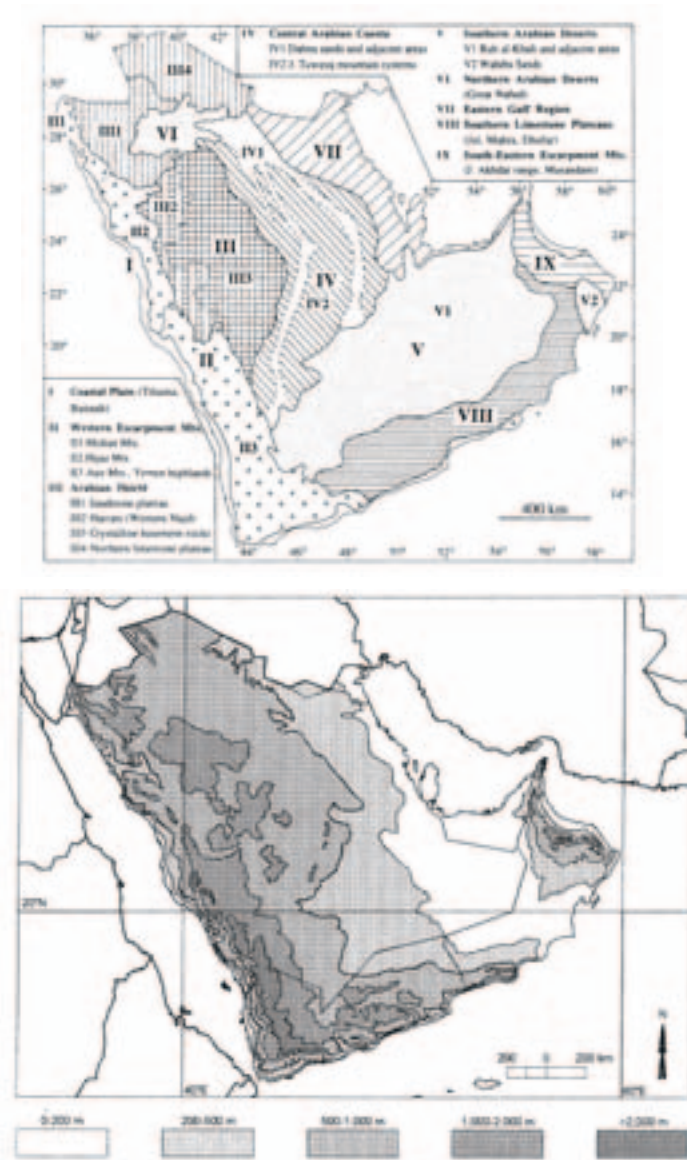
One aspect of Nephi's writing concerning types and motifs was subtle enough to have escaped attention until quite recently. In an age when archetypal events were considered significant, Nephi and those who followed him consciously viewed and documented their travels as parallels to the Israelite exodus 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 Lachish 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.

PART 2

“Into the Wilderness”

“...the Lord commanded my father, even in a dream, that he should take his family and depart *into the wilderness.*”

(1 Nephi 2:2)

Introduction

Nephi's account focuses on the spiritual dimensions of the unfolding Lehite drama. However, he seems to have also been aware of the need to include the broad outlines of its geographical setting. By anchoring this momentous story in the real world of deserts, rivers, and mountains, Nephi gives it more color and depth. Clearly, a thousand years later, Mormon saw the historical and geographical context of a spiritual record significant enough to retain in his editing of the book that now bears his name. These references have become a primary means of establishing Nephi's record as a completely credible account of an ancient journey.

That Nephi kept his own record also proved highly providential when the "Book of Lehi," comprising the 116 pages of translated manuscript, was lost in 1828 through the actions of Martin Harris. As discussed in Part 1, this material was never recovered or re-translated by Joseph Smith. It remains lost today, taking from us the fuller account of Lehi's journey.

Mapping the Journey from the Text

In the introduction to his First Book, Nephi states that his record includes "*the course of their travels.*" A careful analysis of his account reveals that, as promised, Nephi did record a directional statement for every stage of the land journey that his family made across Arabia:

From Jerusalem to the Valley of Lemuel (2:4, 5):

...he departed into the wilderness...by the borders **near the shore of the Red Sea** and...in the borders which are **nearer the Red Sea**.

From the Valley of Lemuel to Shazer (16:13):

...we traveled for the space of four days, [in] **nearly a south-southeast direction**.

From Shazer to the place where Nephi's bow broke (16:14):

...we did go forth again in the wilderness, following **the same direction**.

From the place where the bow broke to Nahom (16:33):

...we did again take our journey, traveling **nearly the same course as in the beginning**.

From Nahom to Bountiful (17:1):

...we did travel **nearly eastward** from that time forth.

Of course, the *general* directions taken by Lehi and his family in their flight from Jerusalem have never been in question. Rather than moving *southwest* into Egypt, usually thought of as the traditional place of refuge, Lehi and his family traveled *southeast* to the Red Sea and on into Arabia, arriving first in the ancient land of Midian. From their encampment in the Valley of Lemuel, the group then traveled initially in "*nearly a south-southeast direction*" (16:13) through the inland desert wilderness. As this is, in fact, very close to being the correct direction for land travel down the western side of Arabia, we have to assume that Nephi's directions meant the same that they do today.

We learn from these verses that Nephi could determine, perhaps with the aid of the Liahona, that the direction of travel from the Valley of Lemuel to Shazer was in *nearly a south-southeast direction*. This

effectively means that he could distinguish between directions of less than 22.5 degrees, or less than 1/16th of the compass. The following verse, reporting travel from Shazer to the camp where his bow broke (16:14), confirms his ability to ascertain that there was no change in direction. However, over the next stage of the journey, from the place of the broken bow to the location where Ishmael died, Nephi notes a deviation (“nearly the same course”) in the direction.

All this makes it clear that Nephi could accurately determine quite precise, not merely general, compass directions. This ability has especially profound implications when later we examine the final stage of travel, from Nahom to Bountiful.

“Up to” and “down from” Jerusalem

Embedded in the opening chapters of Nephi’s account is another remarkable testament to his ability to record accurate, real-world geographical facts. As a native of Jerusalem, Nephi knew first-hand that travel from the city in the Judean mountains in any direction literally meant going “down from” it; and that to travel to Jerusalem was to “go up.” Jerusalem’s elevated geography is further, uniquely, accentuated by the huge Wadi Arabah to its east, containing the Dead Sea, some 1,300 feet *below* sea-level. In no less than 25 instances, Nephi’s first-hand record correctly uses the terms in the same manner that biblical writers also did when discussing the various travels of the family to and from Jerusalem.

Significantly, though, this convention was *not* continued in the Book of Mormon by later authors and editors. While they likely knew that Jerusalem was situated in mountains, that knowledge had less impact and relevance to those who had not personally experienced the topography of the Holy City themselves. Writing years later in the

New World, Nephi himself adapted his terminology to suit, as when he prophesied of a distant day when his descendants would be taught “that we came out from Jerusalem” (2 Nephi 30:4). In this context, speaking of the gradient leading down from Jerusalem or the directions traveled—another point of consistency—would be simply superfluous; unnecessary detail when addressing people who never knew Jerusalem first-hand.

We also find that topographical statements concerning Jerusalem are completely absent from Nephi’s brief introduction to the First Book of Nephi. Although it mentions the initial exodus from Jerusalem twice, and the return of Lehi’s sons to obtain the records of Laban, there are no qualifying terms referencing geography. It was simply unnecessary detail in a summary. Later writers in the Book of Mormon were not unaware of the term to “go up.” In Mosiah 10:10, for example, Zeniff uses the term three times when describing a battle against the Lamanites. Yet, just two verses later (vs. 12), when referring back to the original departure from Jerusalem, there is no “down from” attached to it. This consistency is a striking affirmation of both multiple authorship and of the record’s historicity.¹

Places of Refuge

In this part of the world, Egypt, to the southwest, was long thought of as being the land of refuge, the usual place one would head in exile or if seeking safety. From Old Testament times, figures such as Abraham, Jacob, Jeroboam, Jeremiah, and the “remnant of Judah” all sought safety in Egypt, just as Joseph, Mary, and the baby Jesus did centuries later. However, by heading instead southeast, Lehi was entering the main trade route that led into Arabia proper. In Lehi’s day, this route was already commercially important. Scholars are still uncovering the extent of the ties between Lehi’s land and Arabia, but they are increasingly well attested.²

A related dimension to Lehi's flight into Arabia comes from *another* place of refuge over the ages: Sinai, the sacred mount where the divine law was given to Moses. Elijah, for example, fled to Mt. Sinai and lived in a cave there (1 Kings 19:1-21) and Paul may have traveled there after his conversion (Galatians 1:17, 4:24-25). While the traditional candidates for Mt. Sinai lie in the Sinai, some writers have proposed that the biblical Sinai lay in the land of Midian, in Arabia, where Moses had lived some forty years. This concept has the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea taking place across the Gulf of Aqaba, with the Israelites then moving north through Midian to eventually reach their promised land. If such a scenario is considered tenable it would be significant to the Lehite account, as their route passes close to the distinctive Mt. Lawz, its candidate for Mt. Sinai. In this scenario, Lehi's escape from Jerusalem would thus have followed the time-honored practice of fleeing to Mt. Sinai to avoid persecution.³

Departing Jerusalem

Nephi's plain statement that the family "departed into the wilderness" (2:4) is actually much more descriptive than first appears. Several logical possibilities exist for the route leaving Jerusalem. The eastward descent from Jerusalem down the ancient road past Jericho and across the Jordan River that some commentators have theorized can be discounted; it would have required them to enter the enemy lands of Ammon and Moab before they could turn southwards toward the Red Sea. Escaping eastward would also require days of extra traveling time, a significant factor if some of the group were on foot.

The much more plausible and direct route would see them moving southward past Bethlehem and Tekoa, and then descending through the Arugot valley to Ein Gedi, the freshwater oasis that sits midway on the west coast of the Dead Sea. Known anciently as the *Ascent of Zin*,

many scholars favor this route as the one taken by the wise men from the East who, when warned by God through a dream, "departed into their own country another way" (Matthew 2:12). A less likely, although still possible, alternative has the Lehites continuing southward past Bethlehem and then past Hebron and Arad, down to the southern end of the Dead Sea. In both cases, these routes lead into the wide rift valley of *Arabah*, a name that actually means *wilderness*, just as Nephi had recorded.⁴



Lehi had several options available to him when leaving Jerusalem. The most likely route is marked in **bold**. All possible routes, however, lead into the Arabah ("Wilderness") valley and to the mouth of the Red Sea and the beginning of trade routes deep into Arabia proper. Map courtesy of Jeffrey R. Chadwick.

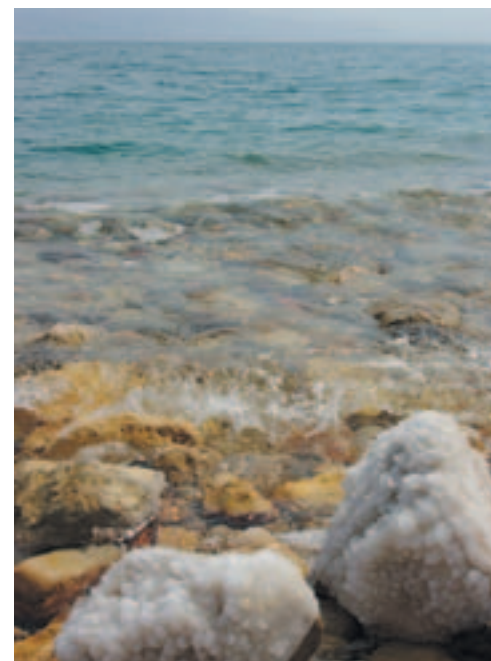


This view facing west shows the two valleys leading down from Jerusalem to the oasis of Ein Gedi on the western shore of the Dead Sea. The most likely route taken by the Lehite group was known anciently as the *Ascent of Zin*. It is the larger valley, Nahal Arugot, visible in the upper left. It has a permanent fresh-water spring.

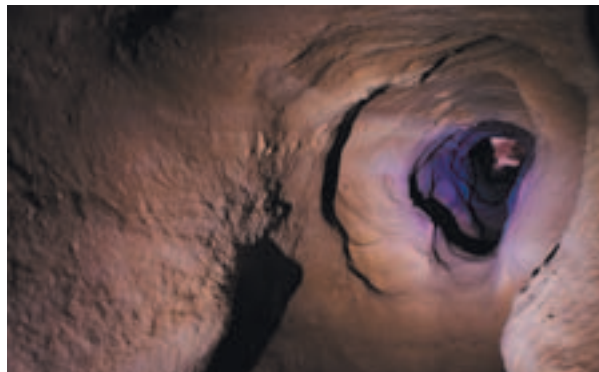
In the most likely scenario, therefore, Lehi and Sariah’s group would have traveled southwards through the Arabah along the west side of the Dead Sea. This offered an easy passage to the Red Sea, known since the days of Moses as the “way of the Red Sea” (Numbers 14:25, 21:4 and Deuteronomy 2:1 are the earliest references). It is probable that Lehi and his sons knew the area well and had often traversed it in their business activities, which certainly included trade with Egyptian traders somewhere, if not in Egypt itself.



The terrain of the Arabah valley offers easy access to the Red Sea. This view on the Jordanian side of the valley faces southwards.



The journey south to the Red Sea takes the traveler past the lowest point on earth, the Dead Sea, seen here on its western [Israeli] side.



Remains of the ancient copper mines dating back to before Lehi's day are visible today at Timna above and below ground. Underground image courtesy of Alana Aston Orth.

The family of Lehi and Sariah seems to have traveled from Jerusalem without any extended stops until they reached the area of the modern ports of Eilat and Aqaba. These ports lie at the arm of the Red Sea called the Gulf of Aqaba, a distance of about 180 miles/290 km from Jerusalem, or some 8-10 days travel. Shortly before arriving at the Red Sea they would have passed close to the ancient copper mines in the Timna Valley, in operation centuries before Lehi's day. Recent excavations

show that the mines were worked extensively from the eleventh to ninth centuries BC, during the reigns of David and Solomon, but probably by the semi-nomadic Edomites.⁵ As there are also undisputed traces of Egyptian involvement with the mines, including an Egyptian temple, they are an obvious possibility for the source of Lehi's Egyptian connections, and therefore at least one source for Nephi's expertise in metallurgy. With the Timna mines being on the major route to the Red Sea and to Egypt, we can be sure that both men were familiar with them.

The arrival of the Lehite group at the Red Sea was in the area of ancient *Ezion-Geber*, or Elath, a stop familiar to the wandering Israelites under Moses (Numbers 33:35) and later the ancient port of King Solomon (1 Kings 9:26-38). Today named Eilat, it remains a vital shipping port at the southernmost part of modern Israel, and sits only a few miles west of the modern Jordanian city-port of Aqaba. At this point, Nephi's text mentions that they "came down by the borders near the shore of the Red Sea; and he traveled in the wilderness in the borders which are *nearer* the Red Sea" (2:5). In this instance at least, while the term "borders" normally just refers to the divisions between places, Nephi's "borders" were likely marked by mountain ranges.



The first stage of the journey: from Jerusalem into Arabia.



To continue into Arabia proper from Arabah, a traveler must travel down the *east* side of the Gulf of Aqaba, visible behind the Jordanian city port of Aqaba in this aerial view. Aqaba's counterpart, the Israeli city port of Eilat, is visible in the foreground. The ground-level view is taken from Aqaba on the eastern side looking across to Eilat.



The interior plateaus of Saudi Arabia can be accessed through valleys crossing the Mazhafah mountains south of Aqaba, visible in these aerial and satellite views looking southward.

To continue in the same direction would lead into the Sinai and into Egypt, so at this point the Lehite group headed *east* past modern Aqaba, thus entering Arabia. This then allowed them to travel southeast along the eastern coast of the Gulf of Aqaba; however, it is possible to remain on the coast for only about the first 45 miles/73 km. Once the modern Bir Marsha in Saudi Arabia is reached, the *Mazhafah Mountains* literally reach right to the edge of the sea (thus perhaps the “the borders which are nearer the Red Sea”), leaving no space even for a narrow pathway along the coast. Forced inland by the terrain, several routes offer the traveler access to the interior mountain plateaus. Both the ancient trade routes and modern roads acknowledge this geographical reality; the modern main route south into Arabia leaves the coast at the town of Al Humaydah, roughly midway in the coastal plains. From here, Wadi Jurfayn leads inland to the eastern edge of the Mazhafah ranges, where the Valley of Lemuel must lie. If Lehi followed this conventional trail, it may explain why he seems to have been initially unaware that the valley extended all the way through the mountains to the Red Sea.

Desert Travel Logistics

While their initial escape may have been on donkeys or mules, there can be no question that from the Valley of Lemuel onwards, the Lehite group traveled using camels, the single-humped Dromedary, to carry them, their tents, and other provisions. A mature camel can carry loads of up to a thousand pounds for days without water, although a more typical load would be about half that. No other animal can survive the long stretches of desert travel required. Once loaded, camels need to keep to level ground, thus trails tended to follow plateaus and valley bases through the mountain ranges, at odds with the popular image of loaded camels crossing rolling, golden sand dunes.

Although goats and perhaps mules likely also accompanied Lehi and Sariah’s group, camels were the primary means of survival. More than any other factor, the omni-competent camel was the key to allowing travelers to survive heat, sand-storms, hunger, and thirst in the desert. Invaluable for carrying people and goods, camels allowed civilizations in the desert to develop. For a group of six people initially, it is probable a minimum of ten to twelve camels would be needed to transport their hundreds of pounds of tents and supplies; as the group’s size increased, more camels could have been obtained by trading.

To the traveler, these remarkable animals provided dung for fuel, skins, hair, and wool for spinning ropes and cloth, and blood and urine for use as liquid in emergencies. Under Mosaic Law, camel meat was forbidden (Leviticus 11:4). Normally camel *milk* would therefore be prohibited also, although it has long been a staple food in the desert diet for the Bedouin, including after the coming of Islam. A less obvious possible contribution of the camel is that otherwise undrinkable well water - often fouled by animals - can be made useable by adding some sour camel’s milk. The same mixture of sour milk and water also seals the pores of skin water-bags to avoid water loss by evaporation.

Early accounts such as that of Strabo attest that in the hotter months, desert travel was usually undertaken by night anciently. Because of the time and effort required, tents were not necessarily raised every night when traveling; travelers would use additional clothing, rugs, and camp fires for warmth. In addition to simple star navigation, experienced desert travelers - as Lehi likely was -commonly used observations of birds to judge direction, distance, and locate water sources.⁶ Under optimal circumstances, a caravan of laden camels can average about 20–25 miles/32–40 km per day.⁷

Sacrifice in the Wilderness

Nephi records that after the three days of travel into the wilderness, Lehi “pitched his tent in a valley by the side of a river of water. And it came to pass that he built an altar of stones, and made an offering unto the Lord.” (2:6-7). This account of offering sacrifice immediately upon arrival is striking: Lehi, as a bearer of the Melchizedek Priesthood, offered sacrifices of thanksgiving on at least three occasions during the journey, and burnt-offering sacrifices to atone for sins on at least two other occasions. As the Nephites lived according to Mosaic Law until the coming of Christ (2 Nephi 5:10, 4 Nephi 1:12), the offering of sacrifice seems appropriate and in accordance with the Law of Moses.⁸

However, it raises interesting questions in the case of the traveling Lehites. Prior to Israel’s arrival in Canaan, the portable tabernacle had served as a place where sacrifices could be offered, wherever it was erected. Biblical scholars have long understood that the 12th chapter of Deuteronomy required sacrifices to be confined to a single place once the Israelites arrived in their promised land, pointing to the centralization of worship in Jerusalem under the mandates of King Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:4-22) and the reforms of King Josiah (2 Kings 23) that followed in Lehi’s day. These seem to rule out sacrifice being offered outside of the Holy City that was home to Lehi. In fact, we now know that numerous altars and at least twelve lesser temples were in use throughout Israel at various times, some continuing after the temple at Jerusalem began operation.

Moreover, the recovery of several early records has shed significant light on temple worship, and allows us to better understand what the Lord actually intended in this regard. Among the Dead Sea Scrolls the “Temple Scroll” indicates that sacrifices within a “three day journey” from the Jerusalem temple - effectively encompassing the whole land of Israel - had to be performed at that temple. In offering sacrifices in the

Valley of Lemuel, much *more* than three days’ distant from Jerusalem, Lehi was not acting against the provisions of the Law.

The “Elephantine Papyri,” discovered in 1925, go further in helping us understand this concept. This eclectic array of papyrus records from two 5th century BC fortresses near Aswan in Egypt affirm that a Jewish temple served the Jewish community there for several hundred years. Nor was it the only temple built in Egypt; Josephus discusses another - often referred to as the “Temple of Onias” - built at Leontopolis in Heliopolis, apparently to serve the needs of Jewish soldiers and their families in the region.⁹

As to the form of Lehi’s altar, the altar uncovered in the Israelite temple at Tel Arad predates Lehi’s day, and suggests what he probably built. A central core of earth and clay enclosed within square walls of uncut stones, the altar stood 3 cubits (about 52 inches/132 cm) tall and measured 5 cubits (about 88 inches/223 cm) on each side, as instructed in Exodus 27:1. Each corner was likely horned, following Exodus 27:2. The flint top had a channel for the blood of the sacrificial animal to drain off. The altar was approached by a gently sloping ramp, ensuring modesty for the one ascending, and also symbolizing humanity’s gradual upward approach leading back to the presence of God.



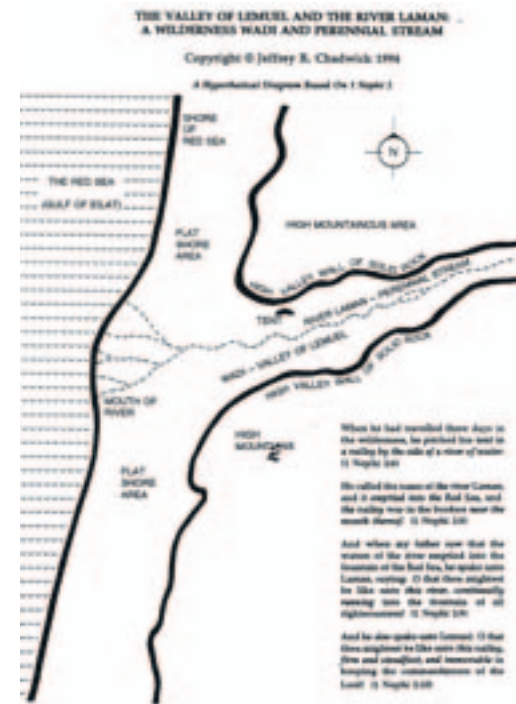
Excavated at Tel Arad, this ancient Israelite sacrificial altar dates to centuries before Lehi's time. Built of stone according to the instructions in the book of Exodus, it has the same dimensions and form as the portable wooden altar of the portable Tabernacle, seen here in a life-sized reconstruction at Timna in southern Israel. Lehi's altar in the Valley of Lemuel was likely built according to this same pattern. Image of Tel Arad altar courtesy of Tim Bulkeley and Creative Commons.

Base Camp in the Valley of Lemuel

A careful reading of 2:5-6 makes it clear that it was not from Jerusalem, but rather from the head of the Red Sea, where the twin cities of Eilat and Aqaba now lie, that the Lehites traveled *another* three

days "in the wilderness." Reaching the Red Sea had already required as much as ten days' travel from Jerusalem, so the "three days" travel further into the wilderness began at this point. This allows us to identify the general area where this significant campsite must have been as three days' travel with loaded camels must be in the order of 50 to 70 miles distant from the Aqaba area.

Here, in a valley beside a "river of water," they set up camp, for what may have been a considerable period. Nephi tells us that their camp was "in the borders nearer the Red Sea" beside a river that "emptied into the Red Sea" (2:5, 8). Lehi used the appearance of the valley, "firm and steadfast, and immovable" (2:10) as an object lesson when exhorting Lemuel, and so the place came to be known as the "Valley of Lemuel" (2:14).



The features of the Valley of Lemuel, based on Nephi's account. Courtesy of Jeffrey R. Chadwick.

Of their eight years in the wilderness, the majority may have been spent here, in Dedan, ancient Midian, safely distant from Jerusalem. The valley was a base camp for them to more properly prepare for the long desert journey that lay ahead and the epic sea voyage that would then follow. Indeed, most of the Old World account takes place while they were living here. From here, Nephi and his three older brothers would return twice to Jerusalem, firstly to obtain the brass records from Laban (resulting also in the unplanned addition of Laban’s servant Zoram), and the second time to bring additional manpower in the form of Ishmael’s family. Their arrival back at the camp would more than double the size of the group, and the need for adequate food supplies. Nephi’s statement that they “gathered together all manner of seeds” (8:1), apparently to augment those brought from Jerusalem, suggests that their stay in the valley was both preparatory and long enough to include at least one growing season.

Ishmael’s family provided wives for all the unmarried men in the group and, as noted earlier, apparently also husbands for two daughters of Lehi and Sariah. The five courtships and marriages of Nephi, his brothers, and of Zoram all took place during their time here, before the trek deeper into Arabia began (16:7). As the natural family patriarch and a holder of the Melchizedek Priesthood, Lehi had the authority in the wilderness to not only offer sacrifices, but to officiate in the saving ordinances such as baptism and marriage.

This period offered Lehi the time to read and absorb the brass plates, including the family’s genealogy. Seemingly, the family was unaware until this point that they were of the lineage of Manasseh (5:14). In ancient Israel, the extended living family assumed a greater importance than tribal membership; others in that era also were not fully aware of their genealogy, as evidenced by accounts recorded in Ezra 2:62 and Nehemiah 7:64. It is also possible that the family had lived in the Jerusalem area long enough after migrating from the Kingdom of

Israel to simply assume that they belonged to Judah, Benjamin, Levi, or Simeon.

The camp was also a place of revelation. Revelations received by Lehi while in the valley include the pivotal dream of the Tree of Life, a revelation recalled in detail in Nephi’s record. Here too, Nephi commenced writing his own account of the events that had brought them to this place. While Lehi retained his prophetic and family roles, we can observe Nephi beginning to emerge as the group’s future leader as the early divisions among the party solidified.

Although the distance traveled by the Lehites from Jerusalem to Bountiful could be covered in a matter of months, a clear statement that their travels involved “many years” of journeying comes later in the text, when Nephi’s older brothers complain at Bountiful that they and their families have “wandered in the wilderness for these many years” (17:20 and again in 21). The Valley of Lemuel seems the most probable location for much of this time to have been spent.

The River of Laman

In the Valley of Lemuel, Lehi and Sariah’s group camped on the north side of the river, which was named by Lehi for Laman (2:8).¹⁰ The text (2:6, 9) makes it appear that upon arrival, Lehi may not have immediately realized that the river reached as far as the Red Sea, which is unsurprising given the sinuous shape of the wadis in this area. The river “emptied into the Red Sea” (2:3), suggesting that water extended into the Red Sea, although it remains possible that this description may refer only to the river *bed* extending that far. Of course, realizing that it reached the Red Sea increased its value to Lehi as an object lesson for his sons. If we accept the textual hints that they lived in this place for an extended period, the description of the river becomes all the more

interesting; in exhorting Laman, his eldest son, Lehi used the imagery of the river as “continually running” (2:9). If they had the opportunity to see the river through all seasons over a long period, it must have been something more than a seasonal stream or storm run-off, as some writers have theorized. That it seems to have been more than just a dry stream bed running to the Red Sea is suggested from the mention of its waters emptying into the Red Sea (2:8-9), and the fact that it was later described as a “river” that was *crossed* as they left the valley (16:12). As the Arabian Peninsula supposedly has *no* perennial rivers anywhere, now or in the past, any attempt to correlate Nephi’s account with the map becomes an interesting challenge.

In fact, while they sometimes include inaccurate and fanciful second-hand elements, two classical accounts support the idea that both northern and southern Arabia two millennia ago had some rivers. In his voluminous *Geography*, the Greek historian Strabo quotes Artemidorus of Ephesus, who lived between the second and first centuries BC, as describing this region of Arabia as “well supplied with trees and water,” before adding that “a river” flowed into *Charmothas*, the modern

Umm Lajj in Saudi Arabia. This is too far south, however, to be a possible candidate for the River of Laman.¹¹ The earlier Greek historian Agartharchides described this region similarly.¹²

Wadi Tayyib al-Ism, a candidate for the Valley of Lemuel, is a narrow fissure stretching from the desert plateau through the Mazhafah mountains to reach the coast of Aqaba, a branch of the Red Sea, in this view facing east.



This view of Wadi Tayyib al-Ism looks inland from the sea. Other images can be viewed at: <http://mapcarta.com/12548670/Photos>.

The only specific candidate for the Valley of Lemuel and River of Laman proposed to date is the *Wadi Tayyib al-Ism*, which lies about 75 miles/120 km south of Aqaba, and thus within the range of three days’ travel. This narrow wadi loops through the southern end of the Mazhafah Mountains and formed the northern border of Midian anciently. There are indications that the small stream running in its base between impressively high terrain, almost to the shore of the sea, may have been larger in earlier times.¹³

However, as there are a number of other wadis arriving at the Red Sea in and near the Mazhafah Mountains, a firm identification remains premature. Moreover, some questions remain about how well this particular wadi fits Nephi’s description that the valley mouth “emptied” into the Red Sea (2:8-9).¹⁴ Until the Mazhafah ranges (which are the mountains that must contain the valley) can be examined thoroughly by competent persons, the location of both valley and river will remain open to question.

Travel Through the Wilderness

Lehi and Sariah’s group now numbering perhaps about twenty or so persons, including children -did not travel in a vacuum. They were traveling on a major trade route, so contacts with other people were likely quite frequent, but inconsequential, until they reached Nahom. That they *had* contact is indisputable; for example, the only way they could have known the name of Nahom and that it contained a burial area was through local people.

While water sources in the desert are scarce and always attract people, compared to the trade caravans that commonly numbered hundreds and even thousands of camels, Lehi’s group was likely inconspicuous enough to attract little attention.¹⁵ Most wells available to travelers were small and irregularly spaced; in only a very few places was there sufficient water to irrigate crops. In accordance with the unwritten laws of desert hospitality, water and pasture resources were freely available to any passing traveler for their personal needs, a courtesy still often practiced today. In this regard, anthropologist Emanuel Marx noted:

...tribesmen do not necessarily reserve pastures for their own use. In South Sinai, for instance, each tribe grants the others the use

of pastures in its territory, but reserves for its members the right to build houses, plant orchards, and use smuggling trails...

From his own Arabian experiences, T. E Lawrence (“Lawrence of Arabia”) learned that:

...each hill and valley in [the desert] had a man who was its acknowledged owner and would quickly assert the right of his family or clan to it, against aggression. Even the wells and trees had their masters, who allowed men to make firewood of the one and drink of the other freely, as much as was required for their need, but who would instantly check anyone trying to turn the property to account and to exploit it or its products among others for private benefit...Nature and the elements were for the free use of every known friendly person for his own purposes and no more.¹⁷

Lehi and Sariah’s small, non-commercial, family group thus represented a non-threatening, low profile to the various tribes they passed along the trade route; it is not likely that they needed to pay levies or other taxes or require special permissions. Where they may have stopped longer to grow crops, their presence likely required negotiation and payment to locals, but would still have remained marginal.

The Place Shazer

After four days’ travel from the Valley of Lemuel, the group arrived at a place that they called “Shazer” (16:13). Although we cannot be certain, the name may refer to “twisting or inter-twining” in Hebrew, in which case it may have referred to the terrain. In Arabic, the name may be related to a term meaning a clump of trees.¹⁸ If the name refers to trees, two locations present themselves as candidates. Roughly four days’ travel southeast of where the Valley of Lemuel must have been

are two large oasis areas; one at al-Muwaylih, and the other at Wadi Agharr (also known as Wadi Sharmah).¹⁹ Almost certainly the group was already well inland at this point, so these inland oases remain viable possibilities for Nephi's Shazer.

As they had only traveled four days from their long stay at the Valley of Lemuel, and food supplies were no doubt still adequate, it seems clear that Shazer was intended to be only a brief stop. This may explain why the men in the group apparently headed off from there to hunt fresh meat, the first time that hunting is mentioned in the account. The fact that game was hunted while at Shazer tells us that they were in, or near, a mountainous area. Having "slain food" they returned to their waiting families at Shazer, and seem to have soon continued their journey. The repeated mention of the plural "families" at this time (16:14, 17) also suggests that the five marriages in the Valley of Lemuel had already produced children before Nahom was reached.

Crossing the Fertile Mountains

The mountainous spine running roughly north-south down almost the entire western length of the Arabian Peninsula, known collectively as the Hijaz and Asir Mountains, can be crossed only in a relatively few places. Hints in the account make it seem clear that the group had left the barren coastal plain and moved inland onto the mountain trail no later than upon leaving Shazer. After Shazer, the Red Sea is never again mentioned in Nephi's account. To travel along the coastal plains meant facing oppressive heat, humidity, and leached soils in which little could grow. In contrast, the mountain ranges offered cooler traveling conditions, and occasional fertile pockets where crops could be grown. Small villages and communities spaced along the natural valleys between the ranges offered fodder for animals, and food and water to travelers. Mountains also offered opportunities to hunt game such as gazelle, oryx, ibex, the wild ass, deer, and hare.

Other animals that would *not* have been allowable food under Mosaic Law include the hyena, baboon, wolf, fox, leopard, lion, and snakes. Some of these names help us understand Nephi's earlier reference to being bound with cords by his brothers, and left in the wilderness "to be devoured by wild beasts" (7:16). In particular, hyenas, who often hunt in packs, would have offered a formidable threat to anyone unarmed and alone in the desert.

Led by the Liahona, Lehi's group continued on for many days through the "most fertile" parts of the mountain trails, hunting along the way (16:14-16). Their next stop, not described and left unnamed, seems likely to have been a place where crops could be grown, as they intended to remain there for "the space of a time" (16:17).²⁰ Their supplies may have been depleted, and it would be some time before crops could be harvested; but in any event, it was necessary that they hunt again.

Nephi's Bow

Then follows the intriguing account (16:17-32) in which Nephi's fine "steel" bow breaks, and his brother's bows lose their spring - almost certainly the result of the change from the milder, moister climate of Jerusalem to the dry desert heat. In response to the need for meat to feed the group, Nephi is given direction by the Liahona and fashions for himself from wood a new bow and arrow to successfully hunt game.

Bow technology can be traced back at least 8,000 years, although the use of *metal* in bows developed much later. Fully metal bows, including steel bows, developed anciently in several widely-separated cultures. When the Old Testament refers to bows of "steel" (2 Samuel 22:35) the phrase should probably be translated as bows of "bronze." While much more remains to be learned about metallurgy in his day,

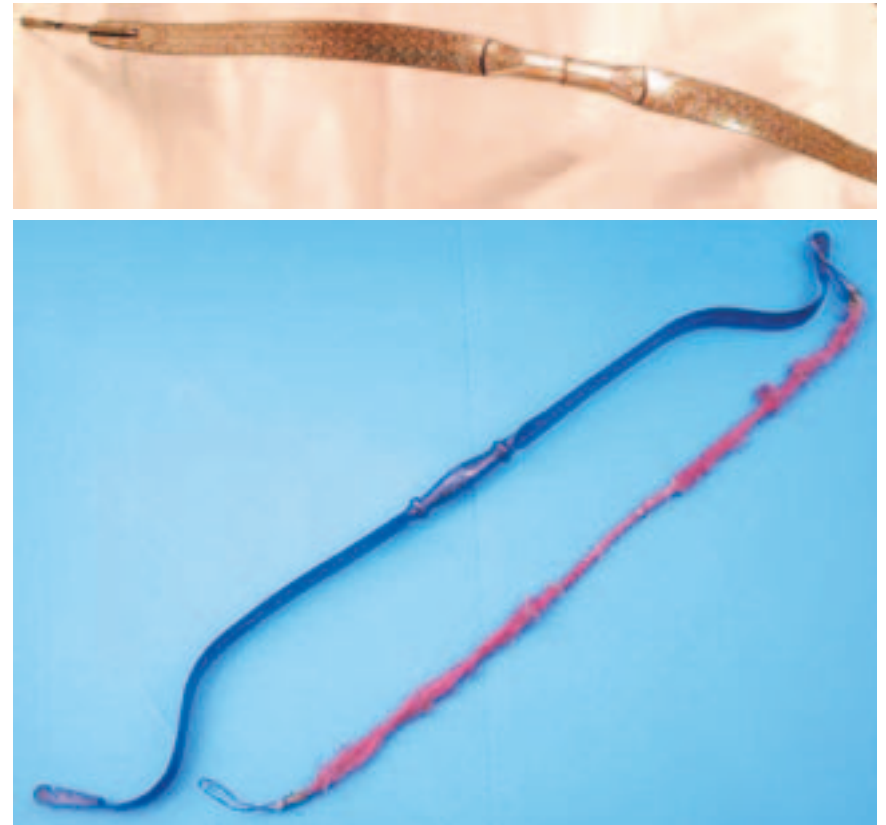
Nephi’s account of his bow made of “fine steel” (16:18) may actually refer to a wooden double-convex, or composite, bow that had bronze parts or plating for extra strength. Several types of wood ideal for bow-making grow wild in the mountains of Arabia, including tamarisk, acacia, jujube, and various olive species.

Once again, this deceptively straightforward account conceals significant details that indicate an origin far removed from the world of Joseph Smith. In the first place, the symbolism of Nephi being the only person in the group left with a functioning bow was not lost on his older brothers. Bows anciently symbolized leadership and political power and, unsurprisingly, we see that soon after this event, Laman accused Nephi of seeking to rule over the group (16:37, 38). There is another significant detail that only an archer would appreciate: Nephi records three times that his bow broke, but mentions no damage to his arrows. When fashioning a new bow, however, he also reports making a new arrow. The arrows for a heavier “steel” bow would have been unsuitable for a lighter wooden bow, thus the need to match a new arrow to the new bow.²¹



The bow and arrow, the most commonly depicted weapon in ancient Arabia, is often mentioned in the New World account of the Book of Mormon. In this ca. 500 BC bronze

plaque from the Bar'an temple in Yemen, the archers carry short, but powerful, composite bows. They also carry the severed hands of enemies as trophies, a practice that also appears in the Book of Mormon (see Alma 17:37-39).



Examples of metal bows from other ancient cultures.

In view of the hunger experienced after Nephi’s bow broke and his brother’s bows lost their spring, it is a testament to the faith of Lehi and Sariah that the seeds they were carrying were not used to alleviate their needs, either then or later on the journey. To readers following the journey on a map it may seem surprising that they did not simply turn west toward the abundance of fish available at any point along the coast. Even if they were now traveling on the inland trade route, as the record indicates, the distance to the coast was not great. It is quite

possible that their knowledge of the geography of the Arabian Peninsula this far south was limited; after leaving Shazer, they may not have been aware that their course through the mountains was still roughly parallel to the Red Sea. They lacked boats and nets, of course, plus the skills of fishermen, but the Liahona seems to have directed them toward places where they could hunt, rather than fish. For reasons related to the regional geography of western Arabia and the Red Sea coasts, fish played no role as food for desert travelers in most of Arabia.²²

The Lehyanites

Southeast of the Valley of Lemuel, and perhaps less than a century after Lehi passed through, the kingdom of the Lehyanites, or the “people of Lehy” arose. The site of their ancient capital is today known as *al-Ula*, in the northwest of modern Saudi Arabia. The Lehyanite kingdom continued for about three hundred years until being vanquished by the Nabateans. The obvious similarity on the name to the Book of Mormon Lehytes was first pointed out in 1984.²³



This circular structure at Al-Ula in Saudi Arabia is among the surviving traces of the Lehyanite kingdom that flourished soon after Lehi and his group passed through this area. Image courtesy of Lynn M. Hilton.

Little is known of the Lehyanite kingdom and its sudden emergence about 500 BC, but it has been theorized that this people may have arisen from Nephi, and perhaps also Lehi, preaching to local people while in the area. This

could have generated converts who became a political force in the area, then taking Lehi’s name in remembrance of a great prophet who lived among them. This scenario suggests some parallels to the story of the prophet *Salih* in the Qur’an, who traditionally preached in this area.

Other interesting hints from local legends about the original Lehyanites, said to be “Jewish,” ruins of a “temple,” and personal names in use by the culture, including “Nefi” (Nephi), all add to the mystery. Until more information is found about this tribe, its emergence so close in time to Lehi’s day means that a connection to the Book of Mormon Lehi can still be considered a possibility. In the end, however, too little is yet known about this period in Arabia’s past to be certain, and we are left with only intriguing possibilities.

The Relevance of the Ancient Trade Routes

The incense trade routes likely developed as expansions of much earlier, shorter local trails used to move commodities such as rock salt. Eventually, the trails linked the southern Arabian coast with the Mediterranean region over two thousand miles distant. While trade routes connected available water sources, they also had to follow terrain that was suitable for camel caravans. Although scholars still debate exactly when camels were first domesticated -likely by the second millennium BC -it was the camel’s ability to store its own water for long periods that allowed the trade routes through the desert to develop. While water was important, fodder is not stored by camels in any way and is needed more often. Trails therefore took advantage of areas where there was also a chance of some vegetation.

Top-heavy when loaded, the camel is best suited to level ground, offering firm sand or soil footing, rather than rocky and uneven mountain regions. Different breeds of camel were used according to the

terrain they would traverse, and that also dictated the routes, to some extent. As a consequence, trade routes always followed the *easiest* path possible - not necessarily the most direct - through valleys and plateaus, usually avoiding higher ground. As loaded camels cannot traverse steep slopes, constantly shifting sand dunes could add days of travel. Since water holes do not move, modern mapping allows us to reconstruct the ancient desert highways with a fairly high degree of certainty, something not possible in 1830. The following map depicts the major trade routes in Arabia about the time of Lehi.²⁴



The main trade routes across early Arabia avoided the waterless Empty Quarter interior.

Travel in “nearly a south-southeast direction” (16:13-14, 33) along the west side of Arabia roughly parallels the inland trade route, which was one of the most significant economic activities in the ancient world. The wealth from the sale and transportation of incense and other products carried out of Arabia into the Mediterranean area allowed advanced civilizations to flourish in Arabia over many centuries. The monopoly held by the Arabian tribes over the trade routes concentrated the wealth; this allowed architecture, dams, and irrigation systems to

develop that often surpassed those of Europe in size and sophistication. They sustained quite large populations at many locations along the trail.

The rapid rise of Islam in the seventh century AD and the practice of the Haj pilgrimage to the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, themselves adjacent to the incense trail, ensured that significant stages of the trade route remained in use long after the trade in incense largely ended. The collapse of the Roman Empire and the banning of incense in Christian funerals during the fifth and sixth centuries AD contributed not only to the disappearance of the trade routes, but the overall economic decline of southern Arabia.

To early LDS writers on the subject, it seemed obvious that Lehi merely followed the water sources making the trade route possible to eventually arrive at the fertile Bountiful, which was assumed to equate with the incense-growing region. While there is no question that the Lehiite odyssey *did* parallel the trade route for a significant distance, the matter is not, as we might expect, so simple. The account of the Lehiite journey makes it clear that more was involved than simply following a trade route.

As their time in the wilderness occupied eight years, a distance usually covered by trade caravans in around a hundred travel days, clearly some extended stops must have been made where crops could be grown. In several places they were led by the Lord to detour to fertile areas, or to places where they could hunt. But, more importantly, after leaving Nahom their travel was “nearly eastward,” to the coast, a direction that almost immediately led them *away* from any of the trade routes. This final and most difficult stage of their journey was across a region skirting the Empty Quarter, a place almost devoid of water sources, and where travel was avoided anciently, just as it is today.

The Liahona

The Valley of Lemuel lay only about two weeks distant from Jerusalem. Until this point, the Lehites had been guided by local knowledge and by Lehi's dreams and visions. The valley allowed both physical and spiritual preparations for their journey to be completed. Family records were now in hand, along with a greater awareness of their spiritual calling. There was additional manpower in the form of Ishmael's family and Zoram. With all adults married, the group was finally ready to embark on its divinely appointed journey. Again, the word of God came to Lehi directing them to leave on the "morrow."

Until this point, the natural assumption (or hope) of many in the group may still have been that their removal from Jerusalem was only a temporary exile. They may have expected a retreat to a desert oasis, perhaps eventually to Egypt, before returning to their beloved Jerusalem home. Perhaps to allay criticism of Lehi's statements and drive the group onward, a new, more tangible, source of direction was now introduced. It was one that all -even the skeptical -could see and handle, for the following morning as Lehi arose, his mind surely set upon packing up the camp, he beheld upon the ground:

...a round ball of curious workmanship; and it was of fine brass. And within the ball were two spindles; and the one pointed the way whither we should go into the wilderness. (16:10)

In the account, this extraordinary device, divinely provided on the very day of departure into Arabia proper, is called the "ball" (for example in 16:28), the "ball or director" (Mosiah 1:16) or "Liahona, which is, being interpreted, a compass," (Alma 37:38). These verses tell us that the name *Liahona* can refer equally to a ball, director, and compass. A detailed analysis of the term "Liahona" has found strong indications that this was an original Hebrew name given by Lehi to this

singular, unique object. The most likely meaning of this name is "To the Lord is the whither," which we would render in English today as "The direction of the Lord." This sense of the name offers rich etymological connections to the *geographical* direction the two pointers gave, as well as the *spiritual* directions given through the sacred writings that appeared on them.²⁵

While we are not given more than the above description of the Liahona, there are interesting possibilities as to its operating principles. In the first place, the ball was made of brass, an excellent choice of metal for a non-magnetic compass housing. It is worth noting that simple magnetic iron compasses were well known before Lehi's day in both the Old and New Worlds. As to the two spindles, one may therefore have retained a normal compass function by pointing to magnetic north as a directional reference, with the second spindle indicating the direction to travel.

An intriguing possibility for the Liahona's operation comes from a modern engineering principle called the "voting of redundant strings."²⁶ Used today in everything from telephone and railroad switching to aircraft and spacecraft systems, this principle requires two identical systems operating at the same time. If both systems perform exactly the same, it is assumed that they are correct, as the probability of two failures is statistically insignificant. While additional systems can enhance reliability further, *two-way* voting is the minimum required to indicate failure. Although Nephi stated that "one" spindle pointed the direction of travel, this principle may help us understand why the Liahona had *two* spindles, not one or many. As a single spindle always points in some direction, inspired directions may have been indicated by *both* spindles pointing together, as one. Thus, when they pointed in different directions, they were not therefore in operation.

The divinely sent Liahona, functioning according to the Lehiite’s faith rather than purely on natural magnetism, was to play a key role from the time of its appearance while they were encamped in the Valley of Lemuel on the borders of the Red Sea (16:10, see also Doctrine and Covenants 17:1). It directed Nephi to a place where he could hunt game (16:30-31), detoured them to the “more fertile parts of the wilderness” (16:16), and functioned as more than a compass in the ordinary sense; it also provided written instructions from time to time. The writings seem to have appeared both on the ball itself (16:27) and also on the “pointers” (16:28-29); presumably in the Egyptian characters used by Lehi and his successors.

The Liahona’s “curious” workmanship (16:10 and Alma 37:39) refers to its striking, highly skilled construction, not that it was “strange.”²⁷ In fact, Laman had initially complained that it had merely been made by Nephi’s “cunning arts, that he may deceive our eyes, thinking, perhaps, that he may lead us away into some strange wilderness,” (16:37-38), which is a revealing commentary about Nephi’s perceived skill in metallurgy. However, the appearance of divine writing on the ball and on its pointers soon made it evident to everyone that the Liahona was divinely sent.

The primary function of the device, however, was always to point the direction of travel. The 37th chapter of Alma has the clear statement that one of the purposes of the Liahona was to show Lehi’s group “the course which they should travel in the wilderness” (39), something that would not have been necessary had they merely been following a trade route. This conclusion is strengthened when Alma points out that the Lehiites “did not progress in their journey” and that they “tarried in the wilderness, or did not travel a direct course” (vs. 41-42) because of their lack of faith. Although it is not stated, it seems probable that the Liahona later indicated the turn “nearly eastward” at Nahom, and pointed the way to water sources en route to Bountiful.

The Liahona is not mentioned again until the incident where Nephi is bound during the sea voyage, a story illustrating its directional function and that its operation was faith-based, not simply mechanical (18:12-22). With its fine workmanship judged as being beyond anything man could create (Alma 37:39), the Liahona and the writing upon it became a vivid symbol for future generations in the New World as a type of “the word of Christ,” (Alma 37:43-46). It remained in Nephi’s possession (2 Nephi 5:12) and was apparently passed on, with the sword and breast-plate of Laban, through the line of Nephiite leadership (Mosiah 1:16), thus preserving it for more than a millennium, until the days of Mormon and Moroni. In 1829, the Three Witnesses to the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris, were promised that in addition to the plates, the breastplate and sword of Laban, and the Urim and Thummim, they would see:

...the miraculous directors which were given to Lehi while in the wilderness, on the borders of the Red Sea. (Doctrine and Covenants 17:1)

The location where the Liahona was given to Lehi is here confirmed in modern revelation. However, the accounts of those who saw and possibly handled it in our day fail to add to our knowledge of this remarkable device.²⁸

Other peoples before and after the Lehiites used various techniques and tools for navigation on land and sea. Simple magnetic compasses gave the ancients basic directions long before Lehi’s time.²⁹ More complex systems also developed; an example being the “Sun Compass” and “Sunstone” used by Viking sailors to plot directions around the clock. Using simple but effective techniques, including light polarized through natural crystals, Atlantic crossings year-round in any weather were made possible.³⁰ The scale of the Lehiite journey, however, clearly

required something more substantial, perhaps something that would also be a constant reminder of the need for faith; hence the Liahona.

With its miraculous provision, Lehi and Sariah's group had done all they could do to prepare for what lay ahead. This sacred instrument, offering directional but also spiritual guidance, must be ranked among the greatest of all blessings recorded in scripture, a tangible, daily reminder of God's awareness of them and of God's desire to continually bless them. With this direction available, a journey of unknown duration into regions of which they had no knowledge could begin.

A Review of Lehi's Arabian Crossing

Using *only* scripture, the following geographical details about the journey can be gleaned from First Nephi (all emphasis added):

Lehi lived "at Jerusalem in all his days," probably in the city proper (1:4, 7) and also had a land of inheritance (2:4, 3:16, 22).

Lehi and his family departed into the "wilderness" (2:4).

They arrived at "the borders *near* the shore of the Red Sea" (2:5).

They traveled in "the wilderness in the borders which are *nearer* the Red Sea" (2:5).

They traveled 3 days journey into the wilderness (2:6).

They camped in a valley beside a river (2:6).

The valley was in the borders near the mouth of the Red Sea (2:8).

The river emptied into the Red Sea (2:8) or into the fountain of the Red Sea (2:9).

Lehi's imagery implies that the river was continually flowing (2:9).

They departed into the wilderness by crossing the river (16:12).

They traveled in nearly a SSE direction for 4 days to the place they called Shazer (16:13), which may indicate a place of "twisting" or "inter-twining" terrain, or a "clump of trees."

They went forth into the wilderness from Shazer to hunt game (16:14).

They then traveled "many days" in the same direction, hunting with bows, arrows and slings in the most fertile parts of the wilderness "in the borders near the Red Sea" (16:14-16).

After traveling many days they camped again to rest and obtain food supplies (16:17).

Nephi's steel bow broke (16:18) and his brother's bows "lost their springs" (16:21), probably indicating a change in climate.

Nephi hunted in the top of a mountain (16:30) using a new bow and arrow made of wood, rather than of steel.

They traveled for many days on "nearly the same course" as before (16:33).

They again camped (16:33), evidently in a place where crops could be grown.

Ishmael dies. He is then buried at Nahom, (16:34), a place already known by that name and seemingly nearby.

They traveled "nearly eastward" from that time forth (17:1).

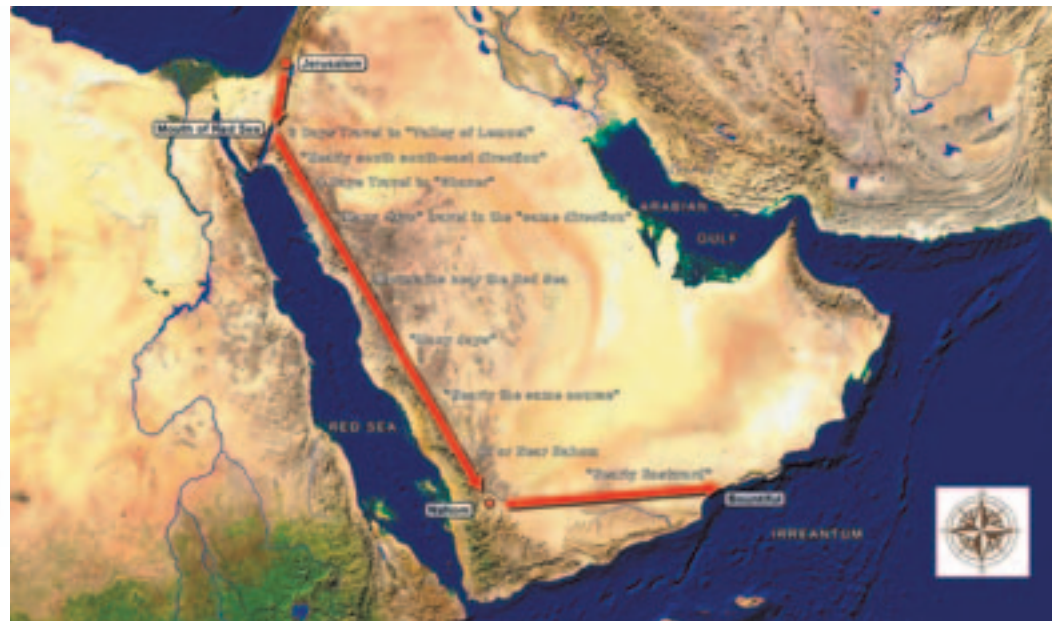
This was the most difficult stage of travel and little fire was used (17:1-3, 6).

They sojourned in the wilderness a total of eight years (17:4).

They arrived at a fertile coast with fruit, timber, a nearby mountain, and ore source (17:5-11).

Cliffs at Bountiful are implied (17:48).

Nephi "went into" the mount oft to pray and receive revelation (18:3).



The Arabian Peninsula effortlessly provides a completely plausible setting for the terrain and other features described by Nephi.

NOTES

1. Warren P. Aston, ““Up to & Down from” Jerusalem: Further indicators of a real-world origin” in *Meridian Magazine*, February 8, 2012. Available at <http://lldsmag.com/article-1-9319/>
2. For evidence linking Jerusalem with Arabia ca. 700 BC see Yigal Shiloh’s “South Arabian Inscriptions from the City of David, Jerusalem” in the *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 119/1 (London: The Palestine Exploration Fund, 1987), 9-18.
3. The evidence presented by proponents for an Arabian Sinai remains controversial and strongly disputed within mainstream archaeology. A current review of 3 candidates for Mt Sinai (the traditional site in the Sinai, the Midian site in Arabia and Har Karkom in the Negev) can be found in Hershel Shanks, “Where Is Mount Sinai? The case for Har Karkom and the Case for Saudi Arabia,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 40/2 (March/April, 2014).
4. For a fuller discussion on the possible routes from Jerusalem, see Jeffrey R. Chadwick “An Archaeologist’s View” in *JBMS* 15/2 (2006), 70-71 and his “The Wrong Place for Lehi’s Trail and the Valley of Lemuel” *FARMS Review* 17/2 (2005), 197-215.
5. See Erez Ben-Yosef et al, “A New Chronological Framework for Iron Age Copper Production at Timna (Israel)” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, 366 (Atlanta: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2012), 1-41, accessible online through the lead archaeologist’s blog at http://humanities.tau.ac.il/segellebenyosel/files/2013/08/Ben-YosefETAL12_TimnaRevisited_BASOR3673.pdf
6. Strabo, *Geography*, Book 17, 1:45 refers to trade caravans traveling “only by night” before his period, ie. prior to his death ca. AD 23. Also see Charles Dougherty’s *Travels in Arabia Deserta* (New York: Random House, 1936), 1:86, 257.
On the role of birds and the species that would be encountered along Lehi’s trail see the observations of Stephen L. Carr partly based on his first-hand experience, published as “Birds Along Lehi’s Trail” in JBMS 15/2 (2006), 84–93.
7. Although capable of even more, the load carried by a mature camel on a long journey in hot weather can range from about 350-600 lb. Depending on the terrain, season, breed, maturity of the animal and the load, an average of 20-25 miles can be covered per day. According to Pliny the Elder, the route from Timna to Gaza was covered in “sixty-five stages” or days, for an average of 24 miles per day; see Gus van Beek, “Frankincense and Myrrh” in *Biblical Archaeologist* 23 (Atlanta: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1960), 69-95. The annual Haj pilgrimages to Mecca over much of the same country that the Lehites traveled over averaged about 20 miles per day. Based on early accounts of the incense trade, Nigel Groom in *Frankincense and Myrrh* (p. 213) estimates a total travel time from the Dhofar or Hadhramaut coasts to Gaza, some 2100 miles, of 65-88 days.
8. See David R. Seely, “Lehi’s Altar and Sacrifice in the Wilderness” in *JMBS* 10/1 (2001), 62-69 and the statements in *Alma 13: 1-19* about the Nephite priesthood and, by implication, Lehi’s. On the types of sacrifices offered, see S. Kent Brown, “New Light from Arabia on Lehi’s Trail” in Donald W. Parry, ed. *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, 62-64 and an expanded discussion in Brown’s *From Jerusalem to Zarahemla*, 1-8.
9. David R. Seely, “Lehi’s Altar and Sacrifice in the Wilderness” explains how Lehi could offer sacrifice away from Jerusalem while adhering to Mosaic law, although he assumes that Lehi’s three days travel into the wilderness was from Jerusalem, rather than from the shores of the Red Sea as 1 Nephi 2:5-6 indicates. In any event, Lehi’s group undoubtedly were aware of and passed close by the ancient city now known as Tel Arad, which contained a small operating Temple modeled after Solomon’s Temple, complete with altar and Holy of Holies. This Temple operated until just prior to Lehi’s time. See D. Kelly Ogden & Jeffrey R. Chadwick, *The Holy Land*, 175-178. Additional commentary is found in Kevin Christensen, “The Temple, the Monarchy, and Wisdom: Lehi’s World and the Scholarship of Margaret Barker” in *Glimpses of Lehi’s Jerusalem*, 449-522. On the Elephantine documents, see Bezalel Porten et al. eds *The Elephantine Papyri in English: Three Millennia of Cross-Cultural Continuity and Change, Second Revised Edition* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 136, 152-202.
10. They departed the Valley of Lemuel in nearly a SSE direction toward Shazer “across the river Laman” (1 Nephi 16:12-13); therefore their camp lay on the north side of the river.
11. Artemidorus of Ephesus, sometimes confused with the second century AD writer Artemidorus Daldianus, also from Ephesus, wrote 11 geographical books based on his own travels. Most have been lost except where other early authors quote from him, as in this instance, see Strabo, *Geography*, Book 7:343, 345.
12. Stanley M. Burstein, transl. *Agatharchides of Cnidus: On the Erythraean Sea* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1990), 151-152. See also John A. Tvedtnes, “More on the River Laman” in *Insights* 25/3 (2005), 2-3 which also discusses another reported river, probably located in southern Arabia, referenced by Herodotus about 440 BC.
13. George D. Potter, “A New Candidate in Arabia for the “Valley of Lemuel”” *JBMS* 8/1 (1999), 54-63.
14. Archaeologist Jeffrey R. Chadwick has proposed that the Valley of Lemuel likely lay in the Bir Marsha area, an assessment based on the distance from the mouth of the Red

- Sea and on the terrain along the coast. See his map and commentary in “The Book of Mormon in the Land of Jerusalem,” unpublished course materials used at the BYU Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies in 1993-94. Chadwick argues for the Bir Marsha area generally in his “The Wrong Place for Lehi’s Trail and the Valley of Lemuel,” in the FARMS Review (2005), 197-215 and in “An Archaeologist’s View” in JBMS 15/2 (2006), 68-77. S. Kent Brown reviews the issues involved in “The Hunt for the Valley of Lemuel” in JBMS 16/1 (2007), 64-73.
15. The need for Lehi and Sariah’s party to seek tribal permissions and pay taxes throughout their journey has been greatly exaggerated by some writers on the subject. The Lehites carried no trading goods or obvious wealth along a route used by trade caravans whose camels typically numbered in the hundreds or thousands. Carsten Niebuhr, for example, witnessed trade caravans that “often numbered more than six thousand camels” see Thorkild Hansen, J & K McFarlane, transl. *Arabia Felix: The Danish Expedition of 1761-1767* (London: Collins, 1964), 156 and described a Haj caravan numbering “six thousand,” 196. Scriptural hints (eg. Judges 7:12 “camels... without number”) and the quantities of incense imported that Herodotus and others recorded suggest that caravans of this size were far from uncommon. Thus, small wonder that the Lehite group, insignificant in comparison, would have attracted little, if any, attention.
 16. Emanuel Marx, “Back to the Problem of the Tribe” in *American Anthropologist* 81 (Washington DC: American Anthropological Association, 1979), 124 discusses why a small family group would have attracted little attention.
 17. T. E Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom: a triumph* (Norfolk, UK: Book Club Assoc, 1973), 84-85.
 18. See the sources documented at <https://onoma.lib.byu.edu/onomalindex.php/SHAZER>, particularly Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, CWHN 5:78-79 which gives related Semitic forms of the name suggesting a connection to a “clump of trees” or perhaps a small water supply, or both. As we have only an English translation of the name its original meaning remains tenuous.
 19. Lynn M. & Hope A. Hilton, *Discovering Lehi*, 111 offers the al-Muywalih site. The Wadi Agharr proposal is found in Potter & Wellington, *Lehi in the Wilderness: 81 New, Documented Evidences That the Book of Mormon Is a True History* (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2003), 73-78.
 20. George Reynolds and Janne Sjodahl, *Commentary on the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1955), 1:167 discusses the practical implications of this phrase.
 21. The standard text concerning the bow, and weapons in general, in the Book of Mormon remains William Hamblin’s comprehensive “The Bow and Arrow in the Book of Mormon” in Stephen D. Ricks and William Hamblin, eds. *Warfare in the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 365-399.
Additional glimpses of possible bow-types and traditional construction techniques that may have been available in Nephi’s day can be found in Lee Lawrence, “History’s Curve” in *Saudi Aramco World* 54/5 (September/October 2003), 2-10. Ancient graffiti suggests that the bow was the most common weapon in early Arabia in warfare and hunting, see Daniel Potts, “Some issues in the study of the pre-Islamic weaponry of southeastern Arabia” in *Arabian archaeology and epigraphy (AAE)* 9/2 (Copenhagen: Munksgaard International, Nov 1998), 200. The illustration giving a glimpse into 5th century BC bow technology in southern Arabia is a bronze plaque recovered from the Bar’an temple at Marib, Yemen depicting archers carrying composite bows; see St John Simpson, ed. *Queen of Sheba: Treasures from Ancient Yemen*, (London: British Museum Press, 2002), 60-61.
 22. The region’s geography provides clues explaining an issue that has long puzzled some scholars - why fish was usually avoided by the Arabs: the 1200 mile length of the Red Sea isolated, rather than united Egypt with South-west Arabia. In particular, the northern half of the Red Sea was bounded on each side by many miles of barren deserts. The coast is plagued by treacherous coral reefs and small islands, which, combined with the lack of harbors, encouraged piracy and discouraged coastal settlements for catching and selling fish. These factors ensured that the trade routes developed well inland. On the other hand, the eastern coast of Arabia developed numerous coastal settlements where fishing was an important food source.
 23. Lynn M. & Hope A. Hilton, *Discovering Lehi*, 75-103.
 24. Perhaps the most comprehensive map of the major and minor trade routes yet published is found in Juris Zarins, *The Land of Incense: Archaeological Work in the Governorate of Dhofar, Sultanate of Oman 1990-1995* (Muscat: Sultan Qaboos University Publications, 2001), 102. Pages 103-104 list 109 locations and archaeological sites from the Neolithic to the Islamic period appearing on the route map, usually associated with a trade route.
 25. Jonathan Curci, “Liabona: “The Direction of the Lord:” an etymological explanation,” *JBMS* 16/2 (2007), 60-67 focuses on likely sources for the name “Liabona” rather than its functioning.
 26. Robert L. Bunker, “The Design of the Liabona and the Purpose of the Second Spindle” in *JBMS* 3/2 (1994), 1-11. Philip H. Harris, *The Voyage: A Sailor’s Viewpoint* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris, 2011), 123-134 offers other possibilities for

the operation of the instrument. For a general treatment of the Liahona, see Alan Miner, The Liahona: Miracles by Small Means (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2013).

27. *Noah Webster's 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language, available at <http://1828.mshaffer.com/d/search/word,curious> confirms this usage of the word "curious" and suggests several related meanings.*
28. *No modern descriptions of the Liahona are known. Joseph Smith, in his History, records that he saw "the plates, the Urim and Thummim and the breastplate" [of Laban] buried in the hill near his home (HC 1:52), but left no description of the sword of Laban or of the Liahona. The passing mention by David Whitmer, one of the Three Witnesses, to the "directors" in some of his remembrances seems to be the only account of the Liahona being seen by the witnesses in fulfillment of the promise found in Doctrine & Covenants 17:1. Other references to or descriptions of the instrument from those who presumably saw, and possibly handled it, in modern times remain unknown.*
29. *While consensus science maintains that the compass first appeared in early China, there are reasons for believing that other cultures discovered at least simple geomagnetic compasses earlier. See the discussion in John B. Carlson, "Lodestone Compass: Chinese or Olmec Primacy? Multi-disciplinary Analysis of an Olmec Hematite Artifact from San Lorenzo, Veracruz, Mexico" in Science (New Series), 189:4205 (5 September 1975), 753.*
30. *See, for example, Balázs Bernáth et. al. "How could the Viking sun compass be used with sunstones before and after sunset? Twilight board as a new interpretation of the Unartog artefact fragment" in Proceedings of The Royal Society A, Vol. 470, Issue 2166 (London: Royal Society Publishing, June 2014), <http://rspa.royalsocietypublishing.org/content/470/2166/20130787>.*

PART 3

"The Place Which Was Called Nahom"

**"And it came to pass that Ishmael died, and was buried in *the place which was called Nahom.*
(1 Nephi 16:34)**

...the daughters of Ishmael did mourn exceedingly, because of the loss of their father...saying: Our father is dead..." (16:35). Monochromatic charcoal image courtesy of Tamara C. E. Allen, 2012.





The mountains of the modern-day tribal region of Nihm in Yemen.

Introduction

Nahom, the burial place of Ishmael, holds a unique place in the Book of Mormon story. In common with Jerusalem and the Red Sea, it was an Old World site that was already known by that name, rather than one named by Lehi. Nahom was the final resting place of the patriarch Ishmael, whose children had married Lehi and Sariah’s sons and probably their daughters, and Zoram.

Finally, the place marked the most significant change in travel direction on the entire land journey, changing from a southerly bearing to the “nearly eastward” last leg.

Over the last decade, Nahom has become the first uniquely Book of Mormon location that is attested archeologically. Indeed, the name has survived to the modern era as the name of an important tribe in the highlands of northern Yemen and of its large territory,

a fact not known in 1830. Recent discoveries now allow us to trace this unique name back to Lehi's day - always in the same general area - revealing indications in its etymology of its origins. Most significantly, they link in multiple ways to Nephi's account.

A Geographical Name in Nephi's Account

Although they undoubtedly bore names already, in true Semitic fashion, most places in the wilderness mentioned in Nephi's account were given names by the group's patriarch, Lehi, during their sojourn across Arabia. Thus, as noted earlier, the *River Laman* and the *Valley of Lemuel* (2:8-10, 14, 16:6, 12) were named by a father who hoped that those straying sons would adopt the qualities of steadfastness represented by those places, and the encampment named *Shazer* (16:13) likely referred to some physical characteristic of the place. Later, the land of *Bountiful* (17:5-6), was named for its abundant fruit; and the great ocean named "*Irreantum*, which, being interpreted, is many waters," (17:5).

But Nephi's wording in 16:34, "the place which *was* called Nahom," makes it perfectly clear that Nahom was the existing, locally known, name of the place. This verse is also the clearest evidence that Lehi and his party had contact with other people during their journey; they could only have known the name from someone outside of their group. Although encounters with others are not specifically mentioned by Nephi, up to this point the journey was not being made in an empty wilderness, but was largely on well-established trade routes. The mere lack of reference to other people is no evidence that they traveled without contact with others which, once safely clear of the Jerusalem area, may have happened with some frequency. Nephi, writing the account of the journey years later in the New World, naturally kept the

emphasis on the spiritual aspects; passing encounters would have held little significance, and not merited any mention.

The Kingdoms of Southern Arabia

Southern Arabia in the period that Lehi and Sariah's group passed through was home to a series of kingdoms. While their physical extent and spheres of influence often overlapped and fluctuated as alliances changed, a basic understanding of these kingdoms helps us appreciate the setting where the story of Nahom took place:

The Kingdom of Saba [popularly known as Sheba] prospered from about 800 BC to AD 275. It flourished from controlling much of the incense trade and from its thriving agriculture based in the capital, Marib.

The Kingdom of Hadhramaut from about 700 BC to around AD 300 was based further east and included the towns in the huge Hadhramaut valley. At times its influence extended as far east as Dhofar, in modern Oman. Its capital, Shabwah, was the primary hub for the incense trade routes, whether goods arrived by sea via the ports on the Yemen coast, or by the land route from Dhofar.

The Kingdom of Awsan lasted from about 700 to 500 BC, although its dating remains poorly defined. This small kingdom was once an important caravanserai on the trade route and, like many of the small kingdoms, its capital, Hajar Yahirr, south of Wadi Bayhan, sat at the mouth of a large wadi.

The Kingdom of Ma'in, home of the Minaeans, lasted from about 600 to about 200 BC in the northwest of Yemen. Its capital is now known as Sa'dah; the walled city of Baraqish in the Wadi Jauf was also

an important center. By about 300 BC, the Minaeans came to control the incense trade route as far north as the Red Sea.

The Kingdom of Qataban was prominent in the second half of the first millennium BC when its ruler was accorded the title of a *Mukarrib*, standing ahead of other kings. From its capital, Timna, Qataban controlled part of the trade route from about 300 BC to AD 200.

The Kingdom of Himyar existed from about 100 BC to AD 525. In the third century AD, the Himyarites eventually succeeded in uniting much of southwest Arabia, ruling from their capital Zafar, the modern Thifar. The Hamdani tribes of Hashid, and of Bakil, which included the tribe of Nihm, allied themselves with Himyar in this period. As noted later, Himyar converted to Judaism in the late fourth century, lasting until conquered by the Ethiopians in AD 525.

The area of Nahom around 600 BC thus lay in the Kingdom of Saba and, later, perhaps also in the Kingdom of Ma’in. In common with the other kingdoms, Saba’s wealth and influence derived primarily from the caravan trade routes. It was a *theocratic monarchy*, that is, a people ruled by a monarch and bound to the worship of a god, in this case *Ilmaqah* or *Almaqah*, a deity usually equated with the moon god.

Ishmael’s Death

The verse immediately preceding the reference to Ishmael’s death states that the Lehites had arrived at a place where they could “pitch their tents again, that we might tarry for the space of a time” (16:33). This wording makes it certain that they were in a place where they could rest and obtain food (see verse 17 for the same wording applied to an earlier stop), probably long enough to grow and harvest crops. It

is possible that the stop may also have been intended to allow the birth of children; at least, it was certainly intended to provide a rest for the group.

The different stages of travel roughly southeast down the peninsula had brought the Lehites to the area of *Wadi Jauf* (“depression” or “hollow” in Arabic), the vast river-plain that lies north of the present-day capital of Yemen, Sana’a. We can be sure of this because of what happened when the Lehite group left Nahom; they were able to travel “nearly eastward from that time forth” (17:1); something that would not have been possible earlier on the journey. The Jauf marks the southern edge of the Empty Quarter, and is thus the first location from which easterly travel to the coast is feasible. They were not only in a place with pockets of fertile land where crops could be grown, but they were now actually in, or close to, Nahom.

Writing years later in the New World, Nephi was careful to place on record the name of the burial place of Ishmael, his father-in-law. It is important to note that Nephi does not state that Ishmael *died* at Nahom, but that he was *buried* there. While it remains possible, it is unlikely that Ishmael conveniently died right at a place of burial. Despite the need in a hot climate to bury the deceased quickly, Ishmael’s body may have been carried by the Lehite group for some distance, perhaps for days, in order to provide him a proper burial.

The Old Testament is replete with stories of the Hebrew people making great efforts to ensure that their dead were buried appropriately. Often this involved returning the deceased to their ancestral lands for burial. This pattern was clearly followed by Jews living in early Yemen for, despite the long distance involved, they sometimes ensured their dead were transported back to Judea. In 1936, evidence for this was discovered when four tombs dating to before the fourth century AD were found in the Jezreel Valley near Nazareth. They contained

sarcophagi brought there from Yemen, one bearing an inscription in South Arabian script identifying the deceased as “A prince of Himyar.”¹ Nephi’s account mirrors the same religious and cultural concerns. Despite their cultural affinities with Egypt, and the recently recognized fact that basic mummification was sometimes practiced in southern Arabia as early as 1200 BC,² almost certainly the Lehites lacked the specialized knowledge of embalming; or else they may well have carried Ishmael’s remains for burial at Bountiful, or even in the New World.

There is no reason why the Arabian people in that era would not have allowed a Hebrew burial on their sacred ground. By Lehi’s time, Judaism had permeated most of Arabia, and its influence later became substantial, especially among the ruling classes. Otherwise, while the concept of a single high God remained in the background, the more accessible sub-gods, in particular the moon, were worshipped in daily life. Long after Judaism arrived, Christianity washed over Arabia. Both faiths often competed for adherents until the coming of Islam, some twelve centuries after Lehi’s day. As will be discussed later, there is a strong possibility that the Lehites may have turned to the people of Nahom for reasons other than convenience or the proximity of a burial site: Nahom at that time probably included an Israelite, or Jewish, component.

The Rarity of the Name NHM

In discussing Nahom, the first point to note is that the name is exceedingly rare; the Semitic consonants NHM (in any of its variant spellings Nihm/Nehem/Nehhm/Naham/Nahm and so forth) do not appear anywhere else in Arabia as a place name. It is unique. In northern Arabia, the name is attested only a few times in Safaitic texts.³ It also appears briefly in the Old Testament; as *Naham* (1 Chronicles 4:19), as *Nehum* (Nehemiah 7:7) and of course, as the prophet *Nahum*,

the “Consoler,” whose brief book provides some of the Bible’s most vivid poetic imagery. The prophet Nahum was from Galilee, probably Capernaum (“the village of Nahum”),⁴ and -interestingly -was a contemporary of Lehi, delivering his prophecies between 660 and 606 BC. These biblical occurrences of the name are geographically far removed from southern Arabia, however, and no historical connection can be made between them and the Book of Mormon place. That the name appears only once in all of southern Arabia as a place name in itself argues strongly that it is the same place referred to by Nephi.⁵

The Meaning of the Name Nahom

All students of scripture know the significance that names can have, and how much depth is added to our understanding of the story once we understand what a name means or refers to. We think, for example, of the significance of the name *Gethsemane* (“the olive-oil press”) in relation to Christ’s suffering in that garden, and of *Bethlehem* (“House of Bread”), the birthplace of he who was called the Bread of Life. In Nephi’s account the name *Nahom* also has special significance. Of the name generally one Biblical scholar notes:

*It appears twenty-five times in the narrative books of the Bible, and in every case it is associated with death. In family settings, it is applied in instances involving the death of an immediate family member (parent, sibling, or child); in national settings, it has to do with the survival or impending extermination of an entire people. At heart, naham means “to mourn,” to come to terms with a death.*⁶

It is hard indeed to imagine a place name that would be more appropriate in view of what Nephi recorded took place there. Not only do the two possible roots of the name Nahom refer to the mourning (and perhaps also to the hunger of fasting) in connection to Ishmael’s

death,⁷ but they seem to go further by echoing the complaining and rebellion that took place after the burial. When 1 Nephi 16:35 is read in this light, we can see how peculiarly fitting, even perhaps as a play on words, the name Nahom is.

And it came to pass that the daughters of Ishmael did mourn exceedingly, because of the loss of their father, and because of their afflictions in the wilderness; and they did murmur against my father, because he had brought them out of the land of Jerusalem, saying: Our father is dead; yea, and we have wandered much in the wilderness, and we have suffered much affliction, hunger, thirst, and fatigue; and after all these sufferings we must perish in the wilderness with hunger.

While the difficulties itemized here may seem somewhat overstated (hunger and thirst are mentioned only twice prior to this point), they now apparently had little or no food stocks left. Since they were then in, or near, a populated and relatively fertile area, presumably with no immediate threat of hunger, we may wonder why they would complain of hunger upon the death of their father. This implies that Ishmael died soon after the arrival at the stopping place and thus before crops could be harvested. Concern over the immediate lack of food, and fear that only more of the same lay ahead, seems to be at the heart of their complaint.

Ishmael’s daughters were not alone in their rebellion, either; for at this point Laman sought to enlist Lemuel and the sons of Ishmael to kill both Lehi and Nephi (16:37-38), but all were chastened by “the voice of the Lord.” After this chastening and their repentance, food was again provided to the group to preserve their lives (16:39). Perhaps significantly, Ishmael’s wife is not mentioned among the mourners, or in the events following his death, thus raising the likelihood that she had already died or become incapacitated earlier on the journey. If so,

we see an additional reason for the sorrow and complaining from their daughters.⁸

As for the name Nahom itself, two closely related Semitic roots are possible: *nḥm* and *nḥm*. Both roots relate in significant and specific ways to the experiences of Lehi’s group while in this area. The first root, *nḥm*, has the voiceless pharyngeal ḥ consonant, the diacritic dot under the *h* changing the pronunciation to the *h* in *hue* and giving it the basic meaning of “to comfort, console, to be sorry.” It is used in Arabic (as *naḥama*) to refer to a “soft groan, sigh, moan.” Likewise, in ancient Hebrew this root is commonly used in connection with mourning a death.⁹

The second root, *nḥm*, has the simple voiceless laryngeal *h* consonant (pronounced as the *h* in *hat*); it also appears in Hebrew where it means to “roar,” “complain,” “be hungry.”¹⁰ In ancient Egyptian the root refers “to roar, thunder, shout,” which is similar to the Arabic meanings, “to growl, groan, roar, suffer from hunger, to complain.”¹¹ This association with hunger may connect to the fasting that was often part of mourning for the dead anciently and survives today in many cultures. Without exception, it is this *second* root, NHM, that appears in every known occurrence of the name in Epigraphic South Arabian text (ESA, but sometimes termed ASA or Ancient South Arabian), whether Sabaeen, Hadramitic, or Minaean in origin. In the Epigraphic South Arabian language of Lehi’s time, the meaning of NHM is “pecked masonry,” i.e., shaping or “dressing” stone by chipping or pecking.¹² It often appears in contexts closely related to masonry, as in the following examples:

In a Sabaeen dedicatory text from the site of Urwa, **NHMyN** is rendered as “**stonemason**,” (DASI text: GI 1637).

Three Sabaeen temple inscriptions at Haram, **NHy[Mt]N** are translated as “**the stone polishers**,” (DASI texts: Haram 16, 17, 19).

A Hadramitic text from al Bin [NH]Mt refers to “**polished stones,**” (CSAI reference: RES 2687). All texts courtesy of the Digital Archive for the Study of pre-Islamic Arabian Inscriptions (DASI), <http://dasi.humnet.unipi.it/>



Finally, in an interesting conjunction of locations linking Nahom to eastern Arabia, the term NHM also appears in the dedication plaque of the city of *Sumhurum* at Khor Rori in Dhofar, Oman. Built by the “King of Hadramaut” in Shabwah ca. 300 BC, the Hadramitic text, still *in situ*, describes the construction of Sumhurum of both “rough-hewn stones” and of “polished stones,” [NHMt] (DASI reference KR 2).

This plaque (behind the plastic cover on the extreme right) on the main gate of the port city of Sumhurum at Khor Rori in Oman records the use of “polished stones” in its construction, perhaps like the polished limestone slabs pictured. While it does not refer directly to the Nihm tribe, this text employs the same *NHM* root found in numerous texts in Yemen, suggesting the name may have originated in this same context (ie. stone working).

While this general derivation - masonry - is consistent and surely provides one indication of the early history and origins of the tribal name, it should be remembered that the Arabic, Hebrew, and Egyptian cognates mentioned earlier also hold valuable clues. Above all though,

the primary characteristic of Nahom in Nephi’s account is that it was a place of *burial*. In that regard, there are some strong clues suggesting its origin. Given the fact that Nahom was, or included, a burial place, it seems possible that the name ultimately derived from the construction of the tombs necessary for above-ground desert burials. Regardless of its origin, however, to Lehi’s Hebrew-speaking group the name Nahom was naturally and appropriately associated with what took place there: death, mourning, complaining, hunger, consolation, comfort, and so on; thus there was no need to give the place another name.



Nahom today includes these highland mountains lying between Sana’a and the Wadi Jauf plateau.

Tribal Structure in Yemen

At the time of Ishmael's death, the Lehitites found themselves in a tribal environment that appears to have been largely stable. Southern Arabia was a society whose basic component was tribal as far back as history records. Long after the arrival of Islam in the seventh century AD and, indeed, in the twenty-first century, the tribe continues to be the basic structure of Yemen. About two-thirds of the population of the modern republic belongs to one of some 1,300 tribes, and the psyche of the country continues to be shaped by a belief in its people's common origin. By gravitating toward the most basic aspects of society immediate family, extended family, and one's place of origin - tribal organization allows scarce resources to be controlled. Tribes usually subdivide into smaller groups upon reaching a certain size. Alliances between tribes are based upon blood bonds and connection by marriage. Individuals ensure their safety, and their inheritance, through family groupings, and take great pride in defending tribal honor. Tribal membership is thus inherited by one's birth; only very rarely can it be changed.

Yemenis as a whole today consider themselves descendants from the tribe of *Qabtan*, the legendary ancestors of the people of southern Arabia. As political forces have risen and fallen in Yemen over the centuries, the tribal structure has been flexible enough to ensure a degree of stability and continuity of the traditional ways of life. The tribes today, especially in the north of the country, retain a high degree of autonomy from the central government in Sana'a, and their authority often still has precedence.

Tribes are often named for their ancestors, as evidenced by the prefix *Beni/Banu* or *Dhu* ("the children of," for example the Beni Marwan or Dhu Ghaylan tribes) or they may simply retain the name of an ancestor, such as the al-Karif and Hashid tribes. A few tribes use names describing the geography of their area, such as the Bilad ar-Rus



The ancient city of Sana'a, capital of modern Yemen, lies about 25 miles southwest of Nahom and is built primarily of mud bricks. Yemen's isolation has preserved a very traditional, tribally-based, way of life for its people.

(land of the mountain peaks) or, as in the case of the Nihm, they may keep a simple proper name of some other derivation. But usually the tribe gives rise to the name of the place, not the reverse. Thus the Nihm tribe has given its name to that region. Many tribes mentioned in pre-Islamic writings still live essentially within the same borders today and have the same name, Nihm being one of them.

Nahom Today

Today, Nihm (usually vocalized as “Neh-hem”) is a large, well-known region in the north of the modern Republic of Yemen, named for its people, the Nihm tribe, and its various sub-tribes. A 2003 census gave the total population of the tribal region as 41,502. Tribes in northern Yemen began coalescing around the two sons of Jashim bin Jubran Hamdan, *Hashid* and *Bakil* sometime late in the pre-Christian era. Nihm is part of the *Bakil* federation, the largest tribal grouping in Yemen, as it has been throughout recorded history, and tribal leaders of Nihm lead Bakil.

Religiously, the tribe is affiliated with the Zaydi interpretation of Islam, introduced to Yemen when the fighting tribes Hashid and Bakil, as recorded by the tenth-century historian al-Hamdani, were reconciled, about AD 900. Since that early time, Zaydi doctrine and practice has dominated the northern tribes, keeping their traditional tribal structure more intact than the southern tribes. As in other parts of the country, loyalty to one’s tribe comes before all others, including the national government, which maintains only a tenuous control over the area. Much of the area today remains off-limits to outsiders and has been little explored.

The tribal area often cuts across modern administrative boundaries. At present, the southern boundary of the Nihm begins in the mountain

plateau about 25 miles/40 km north of the Yemeni capital, Sana’a, and extends north onto the wide plains of the Wadi Jauf. Its eastern boundary stands near the ruins of the remarkable walled city of Baraqish (also known as Yathil) on the Jauf plains, once a major stop on the trade route. The modern road from Sana’a to Marib passes through the most heavily populated part of the tribal territory.¹³ Here in the mountains are scattered small villages, agriculture, and a prominent peak (Jabal Harim, 9,290 feet/3,180 meters high, sometimes referred to as “Mount Nihm.”) Near this peak are the ruins of Mehle (“bitter” or “salt”), the largest town and “capital” of the area when silver mines were operated, at least by AD 900, and perhaps much earlier. Local mining once supported a Jewish community of silversmiths here whose work was greatly prized throughout Yemen.¹⁴ Although small Jewish communities remain elsewhere in Yemen, the last of the Jewish community here left about 1948. In recent years, efforts have begun to revive silver, zinc, and lead industries in this same area.

Rarely seen by outsiders, the town of Mehle in the Nihm highlands is the largest town and capital of the tribal region. For hundreds of years Mehle was the center of a silversmith industry using locally mined silver, zinc and lead. The author is pictured with tribe members in November 2000.

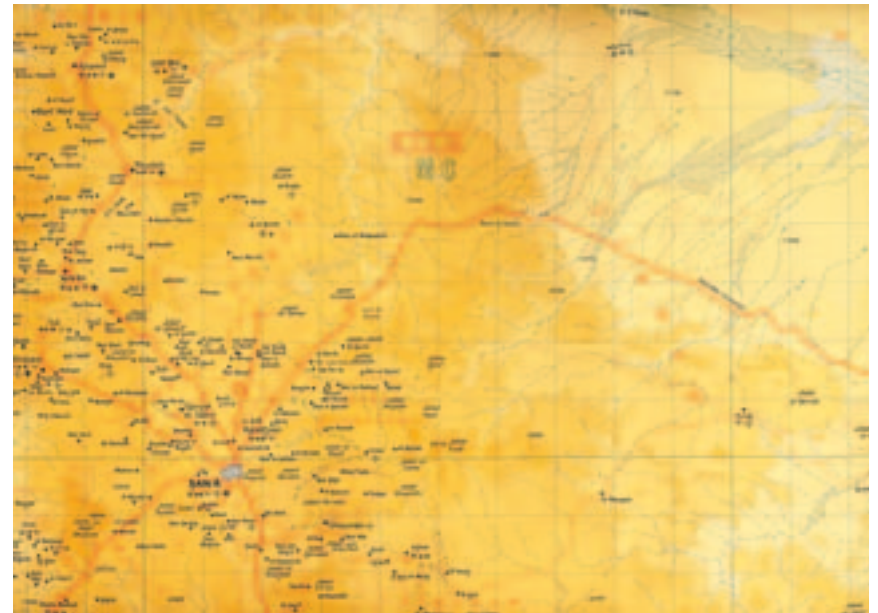




Jabal (Mount) Harim near Mehle is a prominent landmark in the Nihm highlands.



Present-day villages in Nihm.



In addition to the map located in Yemen by the author in 1984 (showing NeHeM), two other maps (NaHM, NiHM) illustrate the variety of spellings of the tribal name when rendered into English.

While there have been many changes among the tribes of Arabia elsewhere, Yemen is different. Its isolation in the southwest corner of the peninsula, and in particular its extreme ruggedness, has kept most of the tribal areas relatively intact and mostly undisturbed by the ravages of war and famine. Paul Dresch, an authority on the tribes of Yemen, expressed it this way:

*The first thing to be noted about Yemeni tribes is that they have been where they are for a very long time. The names Hashid and Bakil are pre-Islamic. Many of the lesser tribal names go back a thousand years, and there are few names of present-day tribes that one cannot trace back at least to the 17th century. Tribes as such do not move. Nor do they over-run each other.*¹⁵

Historian Robert Wilson noted:

*Substantial traces of the pre-Islamic (tribal) order continued to exist well into the Islamic period. Over the past ten centuries there is little or no evidence of any major tribal movements in this part of Yemen, and the overwhelming impression is one of minimal change, even if tribal alliances have from time to time altered or developed.*¹⁶

However, as with other tribes, the *extent* of the Nihm tribal area has fluctuated over time. In the distant past the Nihm tribal area, or at least its influence, may have encompassed the Marib region, where the three altars from the temple of Bar'an have yielded conclusive dating of the name back to around 800-700 BC.¹⁷ The traditional, simplified, genealogy of the tribe has them descending through Hamdan as follows:

Saba' (Sheba)

Kahlan

Zayd

Malik

Awsalah

HAMDAN

Nawf

Jusham

HASHID

BAKIL

Dawman-----Rabiah

Sa'b

NIHM

Climate, Agriculture and Ruins in Nahom

Generally speaking, the popular image of Arabia as a place of desert desolation, or “wilderness” as the Lehites termed it, is accurate enough. In most parts of Arabia there has been little change to the climate since Lehi’s day. However, extreme erosion in parts of Arabia evidences periods of higher rainfall many thousands of years ago. Some data also suggest a slightly moister period that ended about AD 300, contributing to the decline of the incense trade and the kingdoms it supported.¹⁸

Another indication of a more favorable climate than today’s is the fact that the Jauf region of north-western Yemen has possibly the highest concentration of ancient cities, dams, temples, and burial areas anywhere in Arabia. Its cities include the Minaean capitals of Qarnaw and Baraqish that controlled important stages of the trade routes at the time of Lehi. Baraqish in particular has remained well preserved, its high walls and 56 bastions standing impressively high over the surrounding flood plain. Inside the enclosed city, two Minaean temples have now been excavated and are being restored; one of them, the temple of Nakrah, dedicated to the patron god of the city, was in use from the

seventh century BC to the first century AD. Outside the walls lies a small Sabaean necropolis; nearby is the first ever Minaean necropolis ever studied, but these pre-Islamic cemeteries await further study.¹⁹ Of special interest, given the location, are the Jewish burials at Baraqish. In 1870, Halevy’s guide, Hayyim Habshush, found them and dated them to “about four hundred years old,” based on their Aramaic inscriptions.²⁰



Lehi’s group were likely encamped in the relatively fertile Wadi Jauf when Ishmael died, perhaps in the vicinity of the walled city of Baraqish. Today, Baraqish is a reminder of the wealth generated anciently by the trade routes that converged in this area. It still lies in the territory of Nihm.

Some seventy miles to the east of Nihm the great dam at Marib irrigated an extensive area, allowing a substantial population, numbering perhaps as many as 50,000, functioning until about AD 570.²¹ Over time, several temple complexes, including the temple of Bar’an, also flourished in Marib. These remains of the past show that an area today, which supports only scattered Bedouin, once allowed a much larger

population. While many people derived their living from the trade caravans that passed through the Jauf north of Marib, water sources must have been more abundant and crops easier to grow than at the present time. This accords well with Nephi’s account, which suggests that Lehi’s group intended remaining in this region long enough to grow and harvest crops.

Were Jews Once Part of the Tribe?

Along with most of Arabia, the Nihm tribe appears to have embraced Islam from the time of the Prophet Muhammad in the seventh century AD onwards. As noted earlier, however, there are several strong historical hints suggesting that previous to the arrival of Islam, Nihm included a Jewish community, probably artisans, who remained an integral and possibly prominent part of the community long afterwards. This is not as radical as it may seem at first; substantial areas of Arabia followed Judaism in varying degrees before the arrival of Islam. The Himyarite Kingdom, effectively encompassing modern Yemen, converted to Judaism in the late fourth century AD and was ruled by two Jewish kings until conquered by the Ethiopian Aksumite army in AD 525. Throughout Arabia in Lehi’s day there were numerous Israelite outposts and communities dating from earlier periods.²²

After the difficult journey down the Arabian Peninsula, the Lehiters’ stopping place (16:33) was ostensibly chosen simply for its crop-growing potential. Ishmael’s death, however, makes it entirely plausible that the support of fellow Israelites may have been sought to locate an appropriate burial place for him. Jewish burials in southern Arabia are firmly documented from at least the third century BC onwards.²³

Nihm was a distinct tribal entity in the Jauf region centuries before the Lehiters arrived; having strong Jewish connections or sympathies

may well explain why Ishmael's body was buried within its tribal territory and how the name therefore entered Nephi's record. An earlier Jewish connection would also account for the fact, already noted, that the highland capital of Nihm, Mehle, was a center for silver artisans until the mid-twentieth century. Such abilities were in great demand in Yemen, and would have contributed to the tribe's prominence and wealth over a long period. If so, that would dovetail nicely with the comments of Hayyim Habshush (see note 47) that the people of Nihm in his day had an unusually high regard and tolerance for Jews.

Such a scenario significantly enhances our appreciation for the guidance of the Liahona. The foreknowledge of God would thus have directed the Lehites to a suitable place for both replenishing their food stocks, and for laying a great patriarch to rest in an appropriate location, one where other Israelites resided, before continuing.

Burial Tombs in Nahom

In view of Nephi's claim that Ishmael was *buried* at Nahom, it may not be coincidental that probably the largest ancient burial site on the Arabian Peninsula itself is located in the desert close to the present-day boundary of the Nihm tribe. First reported in 1936 by the English explorer Harry St. J. Philby, this vast necropolis consists of many hundreds of above-ground circular "turret" cairns built of roughly hewn limestone slabs, spread out over the Ruwayk, 'Alam Abyadh, 'Alam Aswad and Jidran ridges, roughly 62 miles/100 km north-east of Marib. Varying in size from 12 to 26 feet (3.6 meters to 7.80 meters) in diameter and from 5 to 10 feet (1.5 meters to 3 meters) high, the tombs have a doorway, and some have raised interior floors. Many of the tombs have a "tail" of smaller tombs and piles of stones that can extend outwards for hundreds of meters. The alignments may have served as directional markers, pointing the way across the desert to important

trade destinations and transit points such as Shabwah, Timna, and Baraqish.²⁴ Philby also reported a raised, stone-lined pathway leading to what he described as a ceremonial "high place" close to the Ruwayk ridge.²⁵



Thousands of burial tombs in the desert north of Marib make up possibly the largest ancient burial site in Arabia. This may be the general area of Ishmael's burial.

The significance of this enormous burial area has not been missed by those who have probed the ancient past of this remote region. After encountering the tombs, Philby stated:

The evidence of more plentiful water in these parts in ancient times argues the presence of a large agricultural and pastoral community in those days. . . these great desert cemeteries [are] probably by far the most important discovery of my whole journey. . . if we could date them and identify their builders, one of the great problems of early human civilization would be well on the way to solution.²⁶

Nigel Groom, the leading authority on the incense trade, said much the same thing:

*A large area of ancient tombs north of Marib may be the remnant of a culture of the sixth to third millennia moist period in the Sayhad, which is now a sand-dune desert.*²⁷

Finally, discussing the tombs, Brian Doe observed:

*These tombs appear to confirm that this area was once inhabited and extended for many miles. Now dry and arid, such settlements could only have occurred under milder and wetter conditions. This was probably at least before the 3rd Millennium BC and even earlier.*²⁸

Nor are they the only burial sites associated with Nahom. Varying styles of burials reflecting differing periods of religious influence and other cultural change have been identified all over Yemen, including the Nahom region itself. At least one small area of ancient burial tombs is known of in the mountainous country northeast of Sana’a. It seems to follow a common pattern for Arabia in that they are circular, and built in elevated positions on otherwise unusable land. Dating from the Neolithic period, the tombs seem to have been used and added to until about AD 1000.

A below-ground area of multi-level tombs with more than twenty thousand burials lies adjacent to the Awwam Temple at Marib, which probably lay within the Nihm tribal region when used. A small number of elaborate above-ground mausoleums at the Awwam necropolis were also used for the ruling class of Sabaeen society. In 1983, several mummified bodies were discovered buried in rock-tombs at Shibam al-Ghiras, northeast of Sana’a, dating to around 500 BC. Examples of the ancient burial practice of mummification often thought of as

exclusively Egyptian - have since been found in several other locations, including in the Jauf.²⁹

The first proper examination of the tombs at ‘Alam and Ruwayk was completed in 1999 by a French archaeological team. Bones retrieved from the tombs allowed Carbon 14 dating, which showed that the majority of burials took place between 2900 and 2700 BC, with a second period of construction around 1700-1500 BC. The site is notable for a complete lack of inscriptions.³⁰ But if in fact Nahom extended into this area anciently, as the altars seem to confirm, this megalithic burial area and the smaller sites to the east now take on special significance: one may well be the actual burial place of Ishmael.

Tracing the Antiquity of the Name

Lehi’s group learned that Nahom was already an existing name in their day; Latter-day Saint researchers became aware that the name *still* exists today only in recent decades. Following a 1978 suggestion from Ross T. Christensen (1918-1990) of BYU that the place-name “NEHHM” appearing on a 1763 map of Yemen might correspond to Nephi’s “NAHOM,”³¹ the author began researching in Yemen in 1984.³² This work eventually demonstrated conclusively that the name was connected to the modern *Nihm* tribe, and that its presence could be documented in the same location to within about seven centuries of Nephi’s day, thus greatly strengthening the likelihood that the tribal name and the place-name NAHOM that Nephi had recorded were one and the same.

The link to the Book of Mormon first came about, therefore, by the **mapping** done of Yemen over recent centuries. Maps made in the last century or so always depict Nihm as centered in the mountains. Despite spelling variations in transliterations into English from the Arabic, the

NMH consonants remain the same, and always appear in the same geographical area. In simple terms, it is the same name.

The earliest map so far located showing the name is the 1751 map of Asia by the French cartographer, Jean Bourguignon d'Anville. Not only is this the earliest map, but Anville based it on much earlier sources, notably the Arab geographers ash-Sharif al-Idrisi (1100-1165), Abu al-Fida (1273-1331), and Turkish historian Katib Chelebi (1609-1657).³³ It was the publication of this map in the mid-eighteenth century that highlighted the Western world's ignorance of inland Arabia. Aside from some of the coastal seaports, almost nothing was known of the entire southern half of the peninsula other than legends and myths.

In an unusual move for the time, the Danish King Frederick V therefore sponsored a scientific expedition to Arabia that lasted from 1761 to 1767. Its sole survivor was the German-born surveyor Carsten Niebuhr (1733-1815). An astute observer, his meticulous account is a fascinating true-life adventure that is a tribute to his tenacity under difficult, and often dangerous conditions. The accuracy and completeness of his descriptions remain noteworthy. He noted that he had experienced “no small difficulty in writing down these names, both from the diversity of dialects in the country, and from the indistinct pronunciation of those from whom I was obliged to ask them.” Under the chapter heading “Of the Principalities of Nehhm and Khaulan,” Niebuhr described Nehhm thus:

*NEHHM is a small district between Dsjof and Hafchid-u-Bekil. The present Sheik, who is of a warlike character, and often troublesome to the Imam, is an independent prince. He possesses a few small inconsiderable towns, with a fertile mountain, on which are many villages. The inhabitants of Deiban are free; but they always join the Sheik of Nehhm in his wars with the Imam.*³⁴

The primary map of Yemen that resulted from Niebuhr's labors, his 1763 map showing western Yemen, confirmed *NEHHM* as a general tribal area located north of Sana'a. Its importance was further highlighted by being listed with other independent districts within the cartouche containing the map title. Niebuhr's books were published from 1771 onwards, with the first English translation coming in 1792.³⁵



Anville's 1751 map showing NeHeM.



Lotter's 1774 map showing NeHHM.

Niebuhr's 1763 map showing NeHHM.

Niebuhr's writings and maps provided Europeans with their most accurate information about Arabia for more than a century to come. Eventually, Anville's map, the gold standard of his day, and the original catalyst for the Danish expedition, was itself updated in 1794 as “A New Map of Arabia, with additions and improvements from Mr. Niebuhr.” Both before and long after the Danish expedition, Anville's map continued being reproduced by cartographers, always retaining the NEHEM spelling of the original map. The variations in the rendering of the name are evident when the maps are listed chronologically:

NeHeM in the 1751 map by Jean d'Anville (Paris)

NeHeM in the 1755 map based on Anville's map, by Solomon Bolton (London)

NeHHM in the 1771 map from the Danish Expedition, by Carsten Niebuhr (Copenhagen)

NeHHM in the 1774 map by T. C. Lotter, based on Niebuhr's map (Augsbourg)

NeHeM in the 1786 map by Franz Schraembl (Vienna)

NeHeM in the 1787 map by Rigobert Bonne (Paris)

NeHeM in the 1791 map by John Harrison (London)

NeHeM in the 1794 map by Robert Laurie and James Whittle (London)

NeHeM in the 1804 map by John Cary (London)

NeHeM in the 1811 map by William Darton (London)

NeHeM in the 1814 map by John Thomson (Edinburgh)

NeHeM in the 1852 map by Carl Ritter (Berlin)³⁶

NeHM in an 1897 geography (Paris)³⁷

BaHaM [NaHaM] in 1939 and 1945 GSGS (London) survey maps³⁸

NeHM/NaHM (Bilad Nahm) in a 1961 Gazetteer (Washington DC)³⁹

NaHM on a 1962 survey map (London)

NaHM in a 1968 tribal map (London)⁴⁰

NaHaM in 1974 Yemen and

NeHeM 1976 Yemen government maps⁴¹



Harrison's 1791 map showing NeHeM.

NiHM in a 1978 Yemen government map⁴²

NiHM in a 1985 survey map (Zurich)⁴³

Could Anville’s map or Niebuhr’s account have provided Joseph Smith the source for the mention of “Nahom” in the Book of Mormon? Anville’s maps appeared twice in English-language publications,⁴⁴ but neither were found in the two libraries available to Joseph Smith before 1830. As for Niebuhr’s works, their first appearance in English came in 1792, but this edition was not acquired by one of these libraries until 1937 over a century too late to have been of use to Joseph Smith and not acquired at all by the other library.⁴⁵

After Niebuhr’s visit to Arabia, more than a century passed before the next known reference to the place by an outsider. In 1869, Joseph Halevy, a young French archaeologist who was a Jew, traveled through the area searching for antiquities. His is one of several **travel accounts** mentioning the place, in which he visited “Al Madid,” a town of about 5,000 people and “capital” of NeHM, which he described as “an independent hill-canton on the arid eastern downs” northeast of Sana’a.⁴⁶ Halevy’s local guide, an engraver named Hayyim Habshush and himself a Jew, kept a little-known account of their journey. In it he refers often to the district of NiHM, and the NiHM tribe who occupied the area, noting their acceptance of and respect for local Jews, some of whose communities Halevy visited.⁴⁷ A later reference to the antiquity of the name was made by the English explorer Harry Philby. While exploring the Jauf valley in 1936 Philby noted:

*A third tribal area farther back in the mountains [is] known as Bilad Nahm [one of] an ancient trio of laconic names going far back into the history of Hamdan.*⁴⁸

There are other, much earlier, references to the tribal name. With the dawning of Islam in the seventh century, only a handful of Moslem

historians concerned themselves with early Arabia. But even in the few surviving to the present, the Nihm tribe is referred to often. Notably, the prolific Arab historian Hisham al-Kalbi (ca. AD 737-819) published at least five genealogical works that documented the Arab tribes, although most of his writing has not survived to the present.⁴⁹ Writing four centuries later, the Greek-Syrian scholar Yaqut al-Hamawi (AD 1179-1229) published his encyclopedic *Kitab mu’jam al-buldan* (“*Dictionary of Countries*”) referring to the NuHM tribe.⁵⁰

The most prolific and well-known of all the early Arab historians, however, was Abu Mohammed al-Hassan ibn Ahmad al-Hamdani (ca. AD 893-945), who died at Sana’a. Hamdani mentions the NiHM tribe in his *Sifat Jazirat al-Arab*, a geographical book,⁵¹ and also in the tenth volume of his *Al Iklil*,⁵² listing it as part of the Bakil confederation in his **tribal listings**. Significantly, however, Hamdani also discusses the Bakil tribes in an earlier period, about the first century AD. Although he does not name the individual tribes for this period, the clear inference is that Nihm was one of them. This gives us a probable reference to the tribe of at least AD 50-100, with the implication that the tribe existed earlier still.⁵³

That the tribal name predates Islam has never been in question. In fact, the earliest written reference to the name comes from the Prophet Muhammad himself, in one of his **religious epistles**. Records of the numerous diplomatic efforts made in the early years of Islam are fragmentary, but enough survives to convey the impression that these efforts were multi-pronged and persistent. Nor were they all one-way; as Islam spread and especially after the fall of Mecca, numerous deputations from the various tribes came to Medina. Several historians mention seventy deputations, and other sources add more. Several sources inform us that one “Khalid” was sent to Yemen in the eighth year of the *Hijira* (the Moslem emigration from Mecca to Medina in AD 622) - about AD 630 - but found little success. The prophet’s cousin

and son-in-law, Ali (Islam’s first male convert) then went to Yemen and read an epistle from Muhammad. According to the accounts, the entire federation of Hamdan tribes -which includes Nihm -embraced Islam. Additional missions about two years later by “Wabr” to leading Persians living in Yemen, and by Ma’adh b. Jabal and Abu Musa al-Ash’ari to Yemen, reportedly also found success.

Another account mentions the NiHM tribe by name (as NaHM). It tells of a pact, or covenant that the Prophet Muhammad wrote, giving it to a man from the Hamdani tribes named Kayss b. Namat b. Kayss b. Malek b. Saad b. Lai al-Hammadani b. Sofyany, while he was visiting Mecca. It outlines an agreement with “the tribes of Hamdan and the tribes of Arhab, *Nahm*, Shakker, Wada, Yam, Marheba, Dalan, Kharef, Ozre, and Gohour and those associated with them and those who follow them.” The covenant was that the tribes must be obedient to him and if they would:

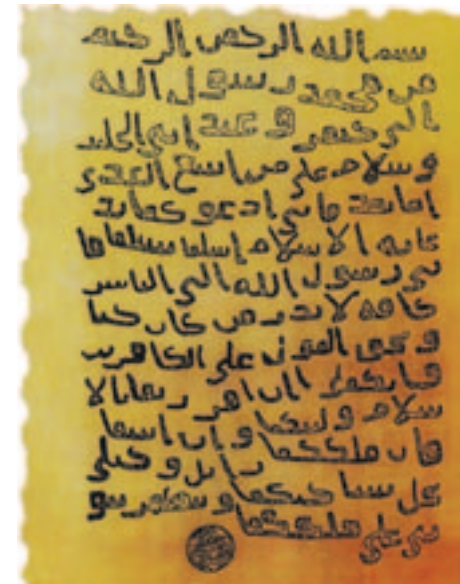
1. Pray and give alms according to the tradition of Muhammad, the prophet of God;
2. Provide three hundred scoops (a measure used when selling wheat and corn; two hundred scoops of sultana and one hundred scoops of (an indecipherable word: *barr*);
3. If they do all this they will be deemed to be under the protection of the Islamic state and will not be harmed.⁵⁴

فقلت : حتى يجيء أبوك فجاه أبي فقال : أتانا كتاب رسول الله صلعم نهانا عن
لحوم الميتة فكفاناها وهكذا أورده البخاري في تاريخه
ولم يرو نص الكتاب

١٩١-١١٢ عهده صلعم لقيس بن نمط الهمداني على قومه -١١٥-
قدم قيس بن نمط بن قيس بن مالك بن سعد بن لآي الهمداني ثم
السفاني (٥٣)

وهو بسكة وكتب عهده على قومه همدان ، حورها يعني قبائل قدم وآل
ذي مران وآل ذي لعوة وأذوا همدان ، وغربها يعني قبائل أرحب **ونهم**
وشاكر ووادة ويام ومرهبة ودالان وخارف وعذر وجور) وخلانها ومواليها
ان يسمعوا له ويطيعوا وان لهم ذمة الله وذمة رسوله ما اقاموا الصلاة واتوا
الزكاة واطعموا ثلاثمائة فرق من خيوان (٥٤) مائتان زبيب وذرة شطران ومن
عمران الجوف (٥٥) مائة فرق ير ابدا من مال الله

A reference to a letter from the Prophet Muhammad to the Hamdan tribes of Yemen, written about AD 620. It lists “NaHM” as one of the tribes and is the oldest known textual reference to the tribe (highlighted in yellow).



The Prophet Muhammad’s letter to the NaHM tribe likely appeared similar to this letter from him to the rulers of Oman, written about AD 630, inviting them to accept Islam.

LEHI AND SARIAH IN ARABIA

Invitations to accept Islam continued to spread. The letter sent about AD 630 from the prophet to the rulers of Oman has survived. It reads as follows:

In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful. From Muhammad, the messenger of God, to Jaifar and Abd, sons of al Julanda: Peace is upon him who follows the guidance. I am calling both of you, in the name of Islam. You will be safe if you submit to Islam. I am the messenger of God to all people to warn all living that Islam will prevail. I hope you will accept Islam, but if you do not, then you will lose your country, and my horsemen will invade your territory and my prophecy will dominate your country.

A replica of this letter with the prophet's seal affixed is displayed in the History Hall of the Museum of the Frankincense Land in Salalah, Oman.⁵⁵

As Yemen's past gradually emerges through the efforts of archaeologists and historians, it is not surprising that other tangible evidences for the powerful NiHM tribe have been found. The NHM name is now also attested in nearly a score of **carved inscriptions** in the Early South Arabian language of the Minaean, Sabaean, and Hadramitic kingdoms, representing three of the four major kingdoms in first millennium BC southern Arabia; only the kingdom of Qataban is not represented to date.⁵⁶



NHM is carved in the top line of **Hadramitic** text BarCra 6; in **Sabaean** text BynM 217; and in **Minaean** text DhM 386, three of the kingdoms of ancient Yemen. Reproduced courtesy of the Digital Archive for the study of pre-Islamic Arabian inscriptions (DASI).

TEXT Hadramitic (BarCra 6)

- 1 **Nhm**
- 2 | bn (R)ÿ
- 3 âm

TEXT Sabaean (BynM 217)

- 1 šhr Mḥbḏm **Nhmn**

TEXT Minaean (DhM 386)

- 1 [..](d)ʼl w-bhn-(sw)
- 2 bhny Hnʼḏ-ʼ(ḏ)[..]—
- 3 n slʼ Nbṭʼṭ[tr b]—
- 4 ḥtn ywm **nhm**[... ...]

While stone and metal normally recorded the conquests and reigns of kings and a powerful elite, another method used in Yemen anciently was cursive (“*Zabur*”) “**miniscule**” **texts on palm-leaf stalks**. At least two of these little-known records are now recognized to contain references to the NiHM tribe. Many thousands of these texts have been recovered (over 3,000 inscribed pieces are kept in the National Museum in Sana’a alone).

Dating back as far as the eleventh century BC, these durable sticks were used primarily to record contracts, debts, lists of names, accounts, letters, and decrees - in short, the whole range of everyday life in early Yemen. The cursive script obviously developed to suit the compact, curved shape of the palm sticks. On occasion they may also have been used by rulers as a secondary “back-up” copy of decrees carved in stone or cast in metal, and seem to have been in use until about the fourth century AD. Scholars are still extracting the information they contain.⁵⁷



This ancient palm stick records the NiHM tribal name in **Sabaean** in a cursive “miniscule” (*Zabur*) script. Text YM11748 is reproduced courtesy of DASI.

TEXT Sabaean (YM11748) (partial transcript)

- 1 ḏ-Nsn 2 bn Hsmr
- 3 **Nhmyn**
- 4 ḏ-Yfʼm
- 5 bn Ḑʼbm

The NiHM Altar Discoveries

Despite all these sources, however, until just a few years ago there remained a gap of some seven centuries between Hamdani’s implied existence of the tribal name in the first century AD, and Nephi’s 600 BC reference to Nahom. Then, in 1997, a nine-year excavation by the federally funded German Archaeological Institute (Deutsche

Archaologische Institut or DAI) of the Bar'an temple site near Marib in Yemen was completed, uncovering over twenty inscribed limestone altars. Although some were damaged, the altars and stelae recovered at the site began to reveal some of the oldest evidence about pre-Islamic belief systems in southern Arabia.

One of the best-preserved altars became part of an exhibit of Yemeni artifacts touring museums in Europe from late 1997 onwards. When hosted by the British Museum in London as *Queen of Sheba: treasures from ancient Yemen*, the exhibition catalog carried significant articles by various scholars. Chapter 11, titled "Religion" by Professor Alexander Sima of the University of Heidelberg, included photographs of various pre-Islamic artifacts from Yemen and the Bar'an temple excavations in particular. The touring altar was pictured, and a translation of its text given. The text was a dedication to the moon god Ilmaqah, that named its donor as one "Bi'athtar, grandson of Naw'um, the Nihmite" (or of the tribe of Nihm). The altar was dated to between 700 and 600 BC, a dating that would later be revised a century earlier.⁵⁸

The LDS scholarly community was first alerted to this find in 1999 through a short article by S. Kent Brown of BYU, published by FARMS in the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*. Based upon the information in the catalog, the article's assessment of the altar inscription concluded that this was "very probably" the same place-name mentioned in the account of the burial of Ishmael, seeing it as "dramatic new evidence" for Nephi's "Nahom."⁵⁹

Although most scholars were slow to recognize it, the discovery of the altar proved to be of great historical significance. Initially, it seemed unlikely that more could be determined about the find; the photograph of the altar in the catalog did not show the full text -including the actual reference to Nihm -and readers had to be content with the catalog's caption and translation. While visiting the Bar'an temple site

in Yemen on September 12, 2000, shortly before it was officially opened to the public, the author, along with two colleagues, Lynn Hilton and Gregory Witt, identified a *second* altar bearing the NiHM name. This first examination of one of the altars by Latter-day Saints revealed that this *in situ* altar was a virtual twin of the first, touring altar, and that the inscription was identical.



On September 12, 2000 a second altar bearing the reference to NiHM was identified *in situ* at the Bar'an temple site in Yemen by the author and two colleagues. The author is shown pointing to the NHM characters on the altar.

Early in November 2000, the author returned to Yemen and, with the cooperation of the DAI restoration team, made a complete examination and photographic documentation of the Bar'an temple complex and its collection of altars. A further eight largely intact altars and several broken altars bearing differing inscriptions were examined. One of the damaged altars proved to also have the same text carved onto it.⁶⁰ Thus, a total of three altars had the same inscription mentioning

NiHM. It is important to understand that the NHM consonants have usually been rendered by modern scholars as *Nihm*, the most common form of the present-day tribal name. However, the original name of the tribe and its territory could well have been designated as Nahm, Nehem, etc. or even the Nahom recorded by Nephi.

The History of the Altar Site

The Bar’an Temple (known locally as al-Amaid or “Arsh Bilqis” -the throne of Bilqis, the Queen of Sheba), is prominent among the Sabaean ruins that survive at Marib to the present. It lies only about three miles from the ruins of the original city of Marib itself. The site seems to have held cultic significance as early as the ninth century BC, but the elaborate larger structure that survives today mostly dates to around the fifth and sixth centuries BC. The temple, oriented to face a few degrees north-east, was dedicated to worship of *Ilmaqah*, although the names of two other Sabaean deities, Hawbas and Athtar, also appear in some engravings. Temple inscriptions tell us that only the priests and rulers could access the temple’s inner sanctuary. Ordinary worshippers left their various offerings to the gods in bowls on the temple steps, seeking divine guidance through dreams or the intervention of an oracle. Sacrifices were offered by the burning of incense or by offering animals.

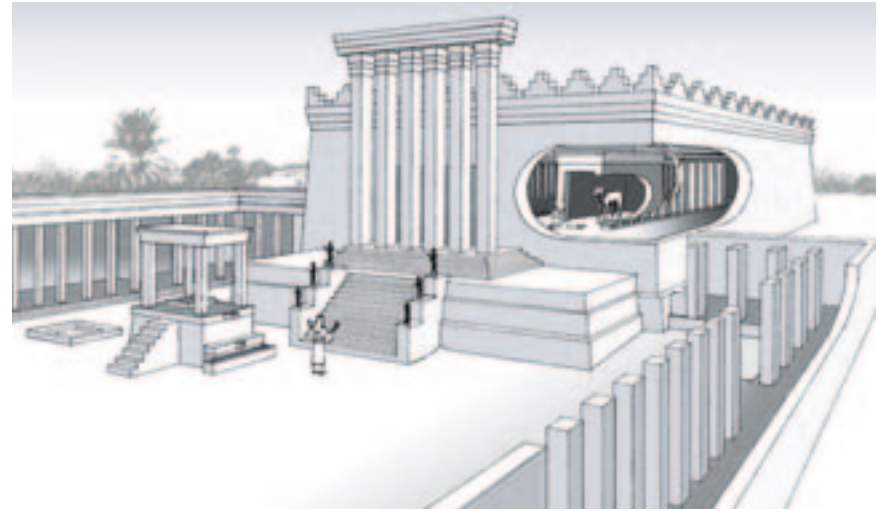
At some point near the beginning of the Christian era, the temple was largely destroyed and the worship of *Ilmaqah* began to decline. It is possible, but not certain, that the plundering of the temple took place during the campaign of the Roman Aelius Gallus about 25 BC. Repairs and modifications were made to the temple, but by then it had had lost much of its original significance and fell into further decline. As southern Arabia increasingly turned from polytheism to Judaism and Christianity, by the late fourth century AD a second destruction of

the temple forecourt took place. Two centuries later, the final collapse of the Marib dam took place and the area suddenly lost much of its population. Over time, the temple site was gradually covered almost completely by desert sands.⁶¹

Providentially, the dry desert sand protected the site from further damage and from looting; until just a few years ago, all that was visible at the temple site were six columns (one broken) projecting above the sand. The structure was first identified as a temple in 1888 by Eduard Glaser, an Austrian explorer who noted an inscription on one of the six columns that referred to *Ilmaqah*, warning against looting the temple treasures. Excavation of the temple began exactly a century later, in 1988, as part of a larger project centered in Marib. Completed in 1997, a further four years of restoration work followed before the site was formally opened to the public on November 18, 2000.

The Bar’an Temple

Although traces of the much smaller and simpler “temple” stages are still evident, they are dwarfed by the present structure. The focal point of the temple compound is the raised platform upon which the six columns stand, probably supporting a ceiling that has long since vanished. A wide staircase leads up to the platform from the large courtyard that faces it. The courtyard has galleries on three sides and a sacred well at its base. In its center stood a second, smaller raised platform on which stood a larger-than-life bronze idol (a bull or ibex), two stone altars, and the statue of a person (possibly the ruler). The altars were mostly excavated in the forecourt of the temple, especially in the western gallery, but may have been disturbed over time from their original location, which remains unclear. Bronze statuettes were also manufactured at the temple for worshippers to purchase, and there is evidence that statuettes were placed atop some altars.



A cutaway reconstruction of the final temple stage. Courtesy of Michael Lyon, FARMS.



(1) Before excavation all that was visible of the Bar'an temple complex were these five and a half pillars. (2) This view shows the complex from the same location after excavation was completed.



Two views of the excavated temple complex following restoration, with the NHM altar in the foreground.

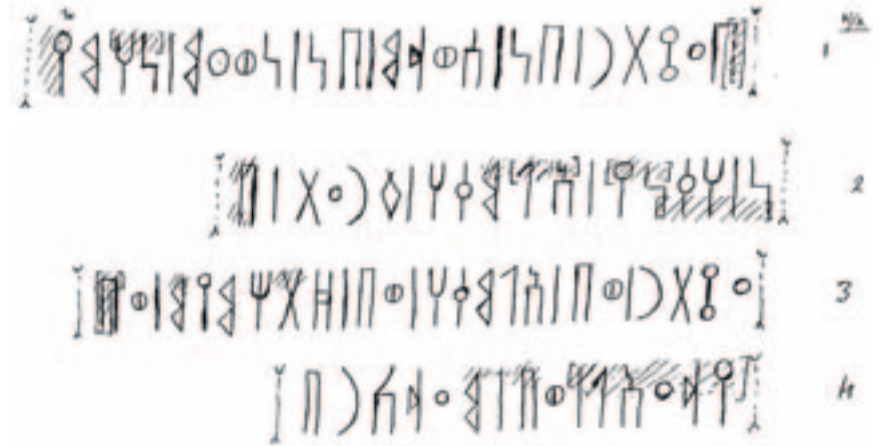
The Bar’an Altars

Constructed of locally quarried limestone, each altar stands about 26 inches/66 cm high on a stepped base, with the top measuring about 21.5 inches/54 cm long and 14 inches/36 cm wide. The dedication inscription carved around all four sides of the altars is in 3 inch/8 cm tall lettering written in the Sabean/Sabaic script of the period, the best understood and best attested of the four Epigraphic South Arabian (ESA) languages (the others are Minaean, Qatabanic, and Hadramitic). Recessed false “window” facades imitating wooden window frames are carved into all four sides of the altars, a common motif in southern Arabian art from the eighth century BC onwards. Traces of red pigment survive on the altars. The altars are very similar but are not identical; their decorative shapes vary a little, and the text is positioned differently around the sides of each. The altars in the Bar’an Temple do not bear

the names of incenses, nor do they seem suited for any kind of animal sacrifice. Instead, they served a purely *votive* function which, in early cultures particularly, almost always meant an offering to a deity in order to obtain a blessing.

In this case, the altars were themselves symbolic gifts to the temple, recording the fulfillment of a previous vow or promise to Ilmaqah. While some temple dedication texts give a reason for the offering being made (expressing

gratitude for their return from a war, for health, or requesting divine intervention for a child’s survival are among the most common topics), the three altars record no reason. However, the fact that *three* altars bear the name of a single donor is unprecedented and underscores Bi’athtar’s status and wealth.



Transliteration. (1) B' ltr/bn/Swdm/bn/Nw'm/Nhmy (2) n/ hq[ny]/'lmaqah/Fr't/b (3) ltr/wb-'lmaqah/w-b/Dt-Hmym/w-b (4) Yd'-l/w-b/M'dkrb.

Translation. (1) Bi'athtar son of Sawdam, son of Naw'um, the Nihm(2)ite, has dedi[cated] (to) Ilmaqah (the person) Far'at. By (3) 'Athtar, and by Ilmaqah, and by Dhat-Himyan, and by (4) Yadi'il, and by Ma'adi-karib.

Transliteration and translation of the altar text. Courtesy of Kenneth A. Kitchen, Liverpool.

The Altar Inscriptions

The inscription, shown above, is identical on all three altars. In simple terms, the text on each tells us that Bi’athtar, the son of Sawdam and grandson of Naw’um of the Nihm tribe, donated the three altars to the temple. The inscription dedicates a female, Fari’at, to the god



Ilmaqah, which, it is presumed, means that she would be admitted to the religious community of this deity and serve at the temple in some way. The name of Ilmaqah is then invoked again, together with two other deities, Athtar and Dhat Himyam, followed by the personal names of the local *mukarrib* (a “unifier,” a ruler whose influence extended beyond his own kingdom), Yada’-il, and a high-ranking official, Ma’adi-karib.⁶²

The god Ilmaqah was the most important of the Sabaeen deities; little is known about the goddess Dhat Himyam. On the other hand *Athtar*, a male deity with a female counterpart called *Hawbas*, is often associated with the morning star, and was worshipped throughout southern Arabia from very early times; the name may have derived from the Babylonian goddess Ishtar. All three deities on the altars are among the five principal early-Sabaeen deities, but a host of other local gods appear in other inscriptions from the territory.⁶³

Dating the Altars

Development of a sacred place at the site probably began before 900 BC, evolving through at least three further stages of construction into an ever more substantial temple complex. Researcher Christian Robin, author of many works dealing with the Nihm area, originally assigned a date of between the seventh and sixth centuries BC for the twenty or so altars.⁶⁴ This dating seemed to link to the altar’s text that refers to the ruler Yada’-il, who may be the prolific builder Yada’-il Dharih 11 (about 630 BC), the best known of the Sabaeen kings, or perhaps to a later ruler, Yada’-il Bayyin 11 (about 580 BC). Subsequently, however, Bi’athtar’s three altars were more firmly assigned to an earlier period--the eighth to the seventh centuries BC--than the other altars recovered.⁶⁵

Since Naw’um of the tribe of Nihm was the *grandfather* of Bi’athtar, the Nihm name must be at least two generations--another fifty or more

years--older still. In any event, the tribal name certainly predates the arrival of the Lehites and the burial of Ishmael, thus confirming that Nephi was correct when he implied in his record that Nahom was already known by that name.

The Historical Significance of the Altar Discoveries

Following the discovery of the second altar, this development was first brought to the attention of the general church membership in a news release November 17, 2000 in the BYU daily newspaper the *Daily Universe* and on the official LDS Church website under “News of the Church.” It was featured in a small article and photograph published in the news section of the February 2001 *ENSIGN* magazine.⁶⁶ Soon after, the altar find was mentioned in a talk in the April 2001 General Conference, published in the May 2001 issue of the *ENSIGN*.⁶⁷

In 2002, the most significant book in many years dealing with the role of the Book of Mormon in the establishment of the church was published by Oxford University Press. LDS historian Terryl Givens’s *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture that Launched a New World Religion* provided the following assessments of the altar discoveries:



The February 2001 *ENSIGN* magazine reported the second altar discovery (used with permission).

Found in the very area where Nephi’s record locates Nahom, these altars may thus be said to constitute the first actual archaeological evidence for the historicity of the Book of Mormon...The most impressive find to date corroborating Book of Mormon historicity, this is one of two known altars with inscriptions referring to the tribe of NHM, corresponding to the place name referred to by Nephi (“Nahom”) when his party passed through what would become modern-day Yemen.⁶⁸

Though they are Old World artifacts, they do represent the first confirmation of a Book of Mormon site and place-name lost to the modern age.⁶⁹

Another landmark publication was Grant Hardy’s *The Book of Mormon: A Reader’s Edition*, published in 2005 by the University of Illinois. This work reformatted the scriptural text for improved readability and added commentary. A simple map situating Old World Book of Mormon places in the modern world commented:

Perhaps the most direct archaeological confirmation of anything in the Book of Mormon is the discovery in the early 1990s of evidence for an ancient people named Nihm in the approximate area where Lehi’s family came upon “Nahom.”⁷⁰

In a conference sponsored by the Library of Congress and held in Washington, DC. in 2005 in recognition of the bicentennial of Joseph Smith’s birth, the altar discovery as tangible confirmation of the Book of Mormon “Nahom” formed part of two presentations. Likewise, in his definitive 2005 biography of Mormonism’s founding prophet, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, historian Richard L. Bushman mentions the discovery of “Nhm” among the discoveries that offer credence to the Book of Mormon account. This assessment is repeated in his review of LDS beliefs, *Mormonism: A Very Short Introduction*, published in 2008

by Oxford University, where Nahom was one of the three representative evidences noted.⁷¹ A further underscoring of the significance of the altar discovery came with the release of the BYU film, *A New Day for the Book of Mormon*, in October 2014. While the documentary is heavily weighted towards a telling of the Book of Mormon’s coming forth rather than its contents, the Nahom altars, along with the discovery of chiasmic literary structures, were the two evidences presented as lending support to its historicity.⁷²

In stark contrast to this growing recognition of the altar find as highly significant, anti-Mormon and cultural-Mormon critics have generally not responded to the development. Revealingly, of those who have responded, most have failed to engage with the facts or have misunderstood them; none have yet offered a coherent response.⁷³ As the significance of the altars continues to make its mark on the thinking of believers and non-believers in the Book of Mormon alike, it is evident that the original assessment of this development as being “dramatic new evidence” in the quest to place Nahom firmly on the modern map holds true. Nephi implied that a place in southern Arabia named Nahom already existed in his day; three chiseled blocks of stone from a tribe whose name may have originated from the cutting and shaping of stone now provide incontrovertible evidence that, in fact, it did.

The documentation establishing the antiquity of the tribal name can now be summarized in the following timeline:

DATING NAHOM

		1100	
		1200	
		1300	Likely sources for Anville’s 1751 map
		1400	
Late Neolithic?	Possible origin of the name connected to burial area	1500	
900 BC	Approximate date of Nihm in the Bar’an altar texts	1600	
800 BC	Bar’an altar inscriptions refer to NiHM tribe	1700	Maps and historical references to NeHeM and NeHHM
700 BC	Multiple carved texts in this period refer to NiHM		
600 BC	1 Nephi 16:34 reference to “Nahom” as a burial place	1800	Numerous maps and historical references to NHM
500 BC		1900	Numerous maps and historical references to NHM
400 BC		2000	
300 BC		Present Day	NiHM tribe located in same location after ca. 2900 years.
200 BC			
100 BC			
Birth of Christ			
AD 100	al-Hamdani infers NiHM is part of Bakil tribes in this era		
200			
300			
400			
500			
600	NiHM mentioned in Prophet Muhammad epistle		
700			
800	al-Kalbi reference to NiHM		
900	al-Hamdani’s mention of NiHM in Iklil and Sifat		
1000			

The Pre-Islamic Origins of NHM

When all of the following is drawn together, a logical and totally plausible scenario for the *origin* of the name and its preservation over thousands of years develops:

As suggested by its roots, the *name* of the Nihm tribe may have had its genesis as early as the late Neolithic (four to five thousand years before the present), commencing with the construction of the huge necropolis at ‘Alam, Ruwaik, and Jidran, northeast of Marib. Construction of the tombs from locally-mined dressed limestone slabs probably began in order to serve the need for outlying desert communities to have a neutral location where the dead could be buried. Such a scenario would neatly account for the etymology of the roots of the name linking to “mourning, consoling” and to its application in the early kingdoms of southern Arabia as the “dressing of masonry.”

In such an environment, any group with expertise in stone masonry would be assured wealth and prominence. Perhaps, as already discussed, Jewish craftsmen were at the head of such an enterprise, thus becoming a factor in the group assuming its own identity as the stone-workers, or the *Nihm*. Over time, this construction effort may have expanded to become linked to the building materials and expertise needed for early Arabia’s largest population centers, nearby Marib and Sirwah, their temples, and the great dam. There was also a need for burial areas for the ruling class and wealthy of these cities; a below-ground, multi-level complex catering to more than twenty thousand burials was built, for example, near the Awwam temple at Marib. As the trade routes converged here, they may then have allowed a natural expansion of the tribe’s wealth and influence to other populated centers, such as Baraqish and Ma’in further west in the Jauf. Bi’Athtar’s generous offering of three altars at the Bar’an Temple may well reflect the wealth and influence of Nihm by his day.

Over the centuries, however, rainfall grew ever less reliable, and most of the desert population gradually retreated closer to the more certain water sources at Marib. It would prove only a temporary reprieve. The decline of the overland trade and the Sabaean Empire, coupled by the final collapse of the great dam, saw a general exodus from the area. In this scenario, the community of Nihm, the stone workers, would have moved west into the fertile mountain plateaus where Nihm is now centered. Rather than stone, its artisans now assured their prosperity by mining and working silver and other metals. Separated by a millennium or more from the original tomb building, the significance of the name and its true origin was lost, now preserved only dimly in its etymology.

While this is a reconstructed and theoretical history, each component is now well established.⁷⁴ Chronologically they hang together well, tracing an entirely plausible story of a corner of early Arabia in which kingdoms, migrations, rainfall, and industries

document the existence of the tribe, which is still known today in the modern Yemeni state by the same name. The numerous parallels to the Nephite account and the preservation of this rare name through inscriptions over some three millennia must be accepted as striking confirmation of the record in which it appears.⁷⁵ The Book of Mormon reference to “Nahom” as the name of an ancient burial place in southern Arabia has now been truly validated.

NOTES

1. For context, see the brief discussion in the section “Before Islam” in Martin Gilbert, *In Ishmael’s House: A History of Jews in Muslim Lands* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 1-7; citing Itzhak Ben-Zvi, *The Exiled and the Redeemed: The Strange Jewish ‘Tribes’ of the Orient* (London: Vallentine & Mitchell, 1958), 24. Gordon Darnell Newby’s *A History of the Jews of Arabia: From Ancient Times to Their Eclipse Under Islam* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1988) offers other, more polemical, perspectives.
2. Yemeni mummies firmly dated to before Lehi’s day (ca. 1200 to 300 BC) have been recovered and are being studied, see Stephen Buckley et al, “A preliminary study on the materials employed in ancient Yemeni mummification and burial practices” *PSAS* 37 (2007), 37-41. Rather than the wood containers used in Egypt, corpses were encased in leather “bags.” Studies continue in an effort to understand the procedures and rituals involved. On mummification practice see also notes 28 and 29.
3. G. Lankester Harding, *An Index and Concordance of Pre-Islamic Arabian Names and Inscriptions*, 602. The only nouns listed are of the simple H consonant in NHM. Despite being a prominent, long-established tribe, the name itself is rare and not always included in listings of pre-Islamic places names in southern Arabia such as Nigel Groom, *A Dictionary of Arabic Topography and Placenames* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban and London: Longman, 1983) and the exhaustive tribal listings in ‘Umar Rida Kahhalah, *Mu’jam Qaba’il al-‘Arab* 3 vols (Beirut: Dar al-ilm li al-malayin, 1968).
4. *Harper’s Bible Dictionary* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 154.
5. The significance of this rarity may not be readily apparent to anyone unfamiliar with Arabic toponyms, where any given name may appear in multiple places throughout Arabia.
6. David Damrosch, *The Narrative Covenant: Transformations of Genre in the Growth of Biblical Literature* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987), 128-129.
7. H. Van Dyke Parunak, “A Semantic Survey of NHM” in *Biblica* 56 (Rome: The Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1975), 512-532 and in J. Scharbert, “Der Schmerz in Alten Testament” *Bonner Biblische Beitrage* 8 (Bonn: Peter Hanstein, 1955), 62-65.
8. A significant study examining what happened in relation to Ishmael’s death is Alan Goff, “Mourning, Consolation, and Repentance at Nahom” in John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne, eds. *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, 92-99.
9. Early commentary about the possible roots of NHM is found in Hugh Nibley, “Lehi in the Desert” *CWHN* 5:79. In his “On Lehi’s Trail: Nahom, Ishmael’s burial place,” *JBMRS* 20/1 (2011), 66-68, and “Some Notes on Book of Mormon Names” in *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* (April 19, 2013) available at www.mormoninterpreter.com/some-notes-on-book-of-mormon-names/ Stephen D. Ricks discusses the appropriateness of the roots. Sources for the etymology of the name are summarized in the *Book of Mormon Onomasticon* (Provo: Brigham Young University) at <https://onoma.lib.byu.edu/onoma/index.php/NAHOM> Of interest is the fact that “Nahom” was rendered with differing vowels as *Nehem* in the 19th Century experimental *Deseret Alphabet*, see the *Deseret Alphabet Onomasticon* (Provo: Brigham Young University) at https://onoma.lib.byu.edu/onoma/index.php/Deseret_Alphabet In the *Deseret Alphabet*, the letter N bears a superficial resemblance to the equivalent character in Early South Arabian script. The entire *Book of Mormon* in the *Deseret Alphabet* can be read online at: <http://archive.org/details/bookofmormdeseretalpha00>. I am indebted to Robert F. Smith for alerting me to this information.
10. For the NHM root see D. J. A Clines, ed. *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 5:631.
11. Stephen D. Ricks, “Fasting in the Book of Mormon and the Bible” in Paul R. Cheesman, ed. *The Book of Mormon: The Keystone Scripture* (Provo: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1988).
12. Joan Copeland Biella, *Dictionary of Old South Arabic: Sabaean Dialect* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982), *Harvard Semitic Studies* no. 25, 296. In Stephen D. Ricks, *Lexicon of Inscriptional Qatabanian* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1989), 103 the term is rendered as “stone dressing.”
13. The present-day tribal boundaries appear in a 2012 map titled “Administrative area of Nihm (Yemen)” available at <http://www.ikimap.com/map/administrative-area-nihm-yemen>
14. See the review of textual sources, including al-Hamdani, that refer to ancient mining in Nihm, in Robert G. Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs: From the Bronze Age to the coming of Islam* (London & New York City: Routledge, 2001), 111. In modern Yemen the tribal name is usually rendered in English as Nihm, but sometimes Nehim or Nehm.
15. Paul Dresch, *Tribes, Government and History in Yemen* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), lists the major Bakil tribes including “Nihm” (p 24) and their location (p 25).

- One work dealing with the recent history of Yemen notes that Sinan Abu Luhum, the Sheikh of the Nahm tribe, became “arguably the most powerful and most successful tribal politician in the YAR from the late 1960s through the mid-1970s, the chief broker of Yemeni politics, able to make and break governments almost at will... [making] the Nahm tribe and region a base of traditional power...” in Robert D. Burrowes, *Historical Dictionary of Yemen 2nd Edition* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 6-7.
16. Robert Wilson, “Al-Hamdani’s Description of Hashid and Bakil” *PSAS* 11 (1981), 95, 99-100. For the genealogy of Hashid and Bakil, see Paul Dresch *Tribes, Government and History in Yemen*, 5.
 17. See Christian Robin, *Les Hautes-Terres Du Nord-Yemen Avant Islam, (The Highlands of North Yemen Before Islam)* 2 vols. (Istanbul: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut Te Istanbul, 1982), Tome 1:13 on the pioneering work by the Soviet researcher P. Grjaznevich and scattered references to Nihm on pages 7, 20, 27, 45, 46, 68, 73 and notes 168, 186.
 18. Nigel Groom, *Frankincense and Myrrh*, 225-227.
 19. Information on the continuing excavations and restorations at Baraqish by the Italian Institute for Africa and the Orient (IsIAO) is available at www.isiao.it
 20. Hayyim Habshush, transl. by Solomon D. Goitein, *Travels in Yemen: An Account of Joseph Halevy’s Journey to Najran in the Year 1870 written in San’ani Arabic by his Guide Hayyim Habshush* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press, 1941), 48.
Baraqish continues to reveal its past to the present. For a concise update and updated mapping of the ruined city, see Alessio Agostini, “Two new inscriptions from the recently excavated temple of ‘Athtar dhu-Qabd in Baraqish (Ancient Minaean Yathill)” in Arabian archaeology and epigraphy 22/1 (May 2011), 48-58.
 21. Michael Jenner, *Yemen Rediscovered* (London: Longman, 1983), 125. Marib’s hydrological system is discussed by Christian Robin, “Saba’ and the Sabaeans” in St. John Simpson, ed. *Queen of Sheba: Treasures from Ancient Yemen*, 54.
 22. See especially Simon Schama, *The Story of the Jews: Finding the Words 1000 BCE - 1492 CE*, 233-235. A summary of Judaism in Yemen, past and present, is Sarah Szymkowicz, “Yemen” available at: www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/vjw/Yemen.html, 1-7. Also see “Pristine Judaism: Teimanim (Yemenite) Jews” including a rare image of Jews in Yemen made in 1886, at www.netzarim.co.il/Museum/Sukkah02/Sukkah02.htm. A Jewish family in Yemen is pictured prior to resettlement in Israel in Dana Adams Schmidt, *Yemen: The Unknown War* (London: The Bodley Head, 1968), facing page 105.
 23. Dina Dabhany-Miraglia, “Jewish Burial Customs in Yemen” chapter 35 in Lloyd Weeks, ed. *Death and Burial in Arabia and Beyond: Multidisciplinary perspectives* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2010).
 24. Nicholas Clapp, *Sheba: Through the Desert in Search of the Legendary Queen* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2001), 213–216 is a colorful but accurate account of a recent examination of the tombs and alignments. The largest prehistoric burial site in the world is generally considered to be the Dilmun burials on the island of Bahrain, dating ca. 2050-1750 BC. Due to modern development, less than ten percent of the 76,000 funerary hills currently remain.
 25. Harry Philby, *Sheba’s Daughters* (London: Methuen, 1939), 370-381 has the original account of the cemetery discovery. For additional photography of the tombs and their associated stone alignments, see St. John Simpson, ed. *Queen of Sheba: Treasures from Ancient Yemen*, 84, 85, 181. Julian Reade, “Sacred Places in Ancient Oman” in *The Journal of Oman Studies (JOS)* vol. 11 (Muscat: Ministry of National Heritage and Culture, 2000), 133-138 offers some interesting perspectives on such structures and their role in early communities.
 26. Harry Philby, *Sheba’s Daughters*, 381.
 27. Nigel Groom, *Frankincense and Myrrh*, 235.
 28. Brian Doe, *Monuments of South Arabia* (Cambridge: Oleander, 1983), 54-55. Further discussion on the tombs can be found in Richard L. Bowen, *Archaeological Discoveries in South Arabia* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1958), 133.
Perhaps the most comprehensive summary of Yemen’s past is Alessandro de Maigret, Arabia Felix: An Exploration of the Archaeological History of Yemen (London: Stacey International), 2009.
 29. The information regarding the burial areas in modern Nehem came from an interview by the author with Remy Audoin, Centre Francais d’Etudes Yemenites in Sana’a, Yemen in October 1987. The Awvam temple tombs are still not fully excavated, but a useful summary is contained in I. Gerlach, “Edifices funeraires au royaume de Saba” in *Les Dossiers d’Archeologie* (Dijon: Editions Faton, May 2001), 263: 50-53. For preliminary data on the Shibam al-Ghiras burials nearer to Sana’a, see J. F Breton, trans. Albert LaFarge, *Arabia Felix: from the time of the Queen of Sheba: Eighth Century BC to First Century AD* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 145. As the mummification process required costly materials it was not common in Yemen. The tombs and a mummy burial are pictured in Burkhard Vogt, “Death and Funerary Practices” in St. John Simpson, ed. *Queen of Sheba: Treasures from Ancient Yemen*, 182.

30. Tara Steimer-Herbet, "Jabal Ruwaik: Megaliths in Yemen" in *PSAS* 29 (1999), 179-182 reports the first significant work done at the burial site and discusses C14 dating. Small numbers of tombs of a similar size, style and dating are known in other locations in Arabia, including the Sinai and Oman. See, for example, O. Bar-Yosef et al, "Nawamis and habitation sites near Gebel Gunna, southern Sinai" *Israel Exploration Journal* 36 (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1986), 121-167 and Mohammed Ali al-Belushi and Ali Tigani el-Mahi, "Archaeological investigations in Shenah, Sultanate of Oman" in *PSAS* 39 (2009), 31-42 focusing on a concentration of Third Millennium BC "beehive" tombs in Oman.
31. Ross T. Christensen, "The Place Called Nahom" in *ENSIGN* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: August, 1978): 73. Christensen later mentioned the possible Nehhm connection to Nahom briefly in a Q&A following his paper, "Geography in Book-of-Mormon Archaeology" at the September 1981 Thirtieth Annual Symposium on the Archaeology of the Scriptures, held by the Society for Early Historic Archaeology (SEHA, formerly the UAS) at Brigham Young University, Provo. See SEHA's Newsletter and Proceedings no. 149 (June, 1982). For the background to Christensen's encounter with the book *Arabia Felix* see part 6, note 14.
32. See the first-hand account "Beginnings" in Warren P. Aston & Michaela Knott Aston, *In the Footsteps of Lehi* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994): 5-10, since released through the LDS Library (LDS Media & Deseret Book, 2006), the LDS Mobile Library (Spanish Fork, UT: LDS Book Club, 2007) and available since 2008 in the Deseret Book Online Library, www.GospelLink.com.
33. Gerald R. Tibbetts, *Arabia in Early Maps* (Cambridge: Oleander Press, 1978), map 281, see also p. 29-30, 166. See also Khaled al-Ankary, *The Arabian Peninsula in Old European Maps* (Paris: IMA & K. al-Ankary, 2001).
34. M. Niebuhr [sic], Robert Heron, transl. *Travels through Arabia and other countries in the East*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: R. Morison and Son, 1792), 62. This was the first English translation of Niebuhr's accounts. Some spelling has been modernized in this quotation.
35. Niebuhr's account first appeared in his *Beschreibung von Arabien* ("Description of Arabia") (Copenhagen, 1772), where the reference to Nehhm appears on p 280. The text is accessible online at <http://gdz.sub.uni-goettingen.de/en> It was followed by his 2 volume *Reisebeschreibung nach Arabien und andern umliegenden Landern* published in Copenhagen in 1774 and 1778. The map depicting NEHHM also appears in Thorkild Hansen, *Arabia Felix: The Danish Expedition of 1761-1767*, translated by James and Kathleen McFarlane, 232-233. Both maps are among several displayed in James Gee, "The Nahom Maps" *JBMS* 17/1-2 (2008), 40-57. For an excellent summary of Niebuhr's involvement with the expedition, see: Z. Freeth and H. Winstone, *Explorers of Arabia* (London: Alston Rivers, 1904), 61-89.
36. See German geographer Carl (or Karl) Ritter (1779-1859), *Comparative Geography* (Berlin, 1852) with a first English translation made in 1865.
37. V. De Saint-Martin and Rousselet. *Nouveau dictionnaire de géographie universelle* 7 (New dictionary of universal geography 7), (Paris, 1897), 437.
38. "BAHAM" from a misreading of the name on Geographical Section General Staff (GSGS) map, (London, 1939) and on GSGS map *World (Asia) 1:1,000,000*, sheet ND-38, nd.
39. *Gazetteer of Geographical Names, Arabian Peninsula*, Issue 54, (Washington DC: Office of Geography, US Department of the Interior:1961).
40. GSGS map, London, 1962 and in the modern tribal map facing p.15 in *Yemen: The Unknown War with other references* 66, 154, 158-9, 222.
41. Ministry of Defense, HMSO, London, 1974 and H. Althamary, *The Yemen*. YAR Government map, 1:1,000,000. 1976.
42. *Series YAR 500 (K 465) Edition 1-DOS 1978*, British Government Ministry of Overseas Development, Directorate of Overseas Surveys, 1978.
43. *Survey Authority Map* (Zurich: Orell Fussli Graphic Arts, 1985).
44. J. B. BAnville's *Premier Partie de la Carte d'Asie* showing NEHEM on a 2 page map with a 1:7,150,000 scale was published in Paris in 1751; his 3 volume *Geographie Ancienne Abreege* was published in 1768 (Paris: Merlin). They were first published in English in John Horsley's *Compendium of Ancient Geography* (New York: R. M'Dermut & D. Arden, 1815) and in Robert Mayo's *An Epitome of Ancient Geography* (Philadelphia: A. Finley, 1818). None of these works were owned before 1830 by libraries in the area where Joseph Smith resided.
45. Robert Heron, trans. *Niebuhr's Travels Through Arabia and Other Countries in the East*, vol 2:46-47, 62-63. For information on possible library sources available to Joseph Smith, see Robert Paul, "Joseph Smith and the Manchester (New York) Library" *BYU Studies* 22/3 (1982), 333-356.
46. David G. Hogarth, *The Penetration of Arabia: A Record of the Development of Western Knowledge Concerning the Arabian Peninsula* (London: Alston Rivers, 1904), 200-203.
47. Habshush, Hayyim, Solomon D. Goitein, trans. *Travels in Yemen*, 24-31.
48. Harry St. J. Philby, *Sheba's Daughters*, 381, 398.

49. Hisham al-Kalbi's works include the genealogical books: *Al-Munzal*, *al-Jamhara*, *al-Mujaz*, *al-Farid* and *al-Muluki* among over a hundred he reportedly wrote. His best-known work *Kitab al-Asnam* (Book of Idols), Ahmad Zaki, ed. (Buluq, Iraq, 1332) mentions “Nahm” as the name of an idol worshipped by the Quraysh in Mecca. For commentary on al-Kalbi's genealogical works, see W. Caskel, trans. *Al Kalbi, Muhammad, Ghamharat an-Nasab* (The Abundance of Kinship) *Das Genealogische Werk des Hisam Ibn Muhammad al Kalbi* (Leiden: E. J Brill, 1966).
50. *Yaqut al-Hamawi, Kitab mu'jam al-buldan*. Published as Ferdinand Wustenfled, trans. *Jacut's geographisches Worterbuch* (Göttingen: Brockhaus, 1866-1873), vol. 3:721.
51. *al-Hasan ibn Ahmad al-Hamdani, Sifat Jazirat al-'Arab*, D. Muller, ed. (Leiden: E. J Brill, 1884-91). Reprinted David H. Muller, ed (Leiden: E. J Brill, 1968), 49, 81, 83, 109-110, 112, 126, 135, 167-168. For more on Hamdani see also Christian Robin, *Al-Hamdani, A Great Yemeni Scholar: Studies on the Millennial Anniversary of Al-Hamdani* (Sana'a University, 1986) and the entry by Oscar Lofgren in B. Lewis et al. eds, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd Edition (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 3:124-125.
52. *al-Hamdani, Al-Iklil*, ed. M. al-Khatib (Cairo, 1368) refers to *Nihm*, *Nuham* and *Nuhm* as personal names belonging to the Hajur and Hashid tribes. For more accessible translations of *Al-Iklil* see the translation by Nabih Faris, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1940), 35, 94; by Oscar Lofgren, ed. *Suedarabisches Mustabih* (Uppsala: Almqvist, 1953) and another German translation (Leiden: Brill, 1965); an English translation (Leiden: Brill, 1968); 46 (nos. 1019-1022) or the reprinted 10th Book of *al-Iklil* (Sana'a: Dar al-Yamania, 1987), 98.
- Iklil* references are discussed in Yusuf Abdullah, *Die Ortsnamen in den Altsudarabischen Inschriften* (Marburg: Abdullah Hassan al-Scheiba, 1982), based on his doctoral dissertation, *Die Personennamen in Al-Hamdani's Al-Iklil und ihre parallelen in den Altsudarabischen Inschriften* (Tübingen, Germany: University of Tübingen, 1975), 93. Another probable reference to the tribe, *NHN*, is listed on page 91.
- See also Jawad 'Ali, *Al-Mufasssal fi Ta'rikh al-'Arab qabla al-Islam* (Beirut: Dar al-'Ilm lil-Malayin, 1969-73), 2:414 referring to *NHM* as a “region” in the ancient kingdom of Saba and 4:187, 7:462 where *NHM* appears as an undifferentiated place-name.
53. See Christian Robin, *Les Hautes-Terres du Nord-Yemen Avant L'Islam*, especially tome 1:27, 73 discussing the origin of tribal names. See also Robert Wilson's “Al-Hamdani's Description of Hashid and Bakil” in *PSAS* 11 (1981), 95, 99-100, which demonstrates that movement and changes among the tribes in North Yemen have been minimal.
- See also the numerous references to the *Nihm* tribe in Hermann von Wissman, *Sammlung Eduard Glaser 111: Zur Geschichte Und Landeskunde Von Alt-Sudarabien* (Vienna: Osterreichische Akademie Der Wissenschaften, 1964), 82, 87, 96, 97, 150, 247, 307, 308, 320, 322, 370 and three maps showing the [NIHM] tribal location on 84, 210, 295. On the more recent administrative division of rural tribal land in Yemen, see Hiroshi Matsumoto, “The History of ‘Uzlah and Mikhlaf in North Yemen” in *PSAS* 24 (1994), 175-182, esp. 176.
54. Muhammad b. “Ali al-Akwa,” *al-Watha'iq as-Siyasiyya al-Yamaaniyya* (Baghdad: Dar al-Hurriya lil-Tiba'ah, 1976), 110. Other examples of such letters from this period are extant; see Sultan Ahmed Qureshi, *Letters of the Holy Prophet* (Karachi: Noor Publishing, 1983). Most are similar to the *Nahm* letter in style and content.
55. *The Museum of the Frankincense Land: The History Hall* (Muscat: Office of the Advisor to His Majesty the Sultan for Cultural Affairs, 2007), 180-181.
56. *NHM* appears, for example, as a personal name in a **Hadramitic** text found near *Shabwa* in eastern Yemen. This text, (BarCra 6), was first published in Jacqueline Pirenne, *Fouilles de Shabwa*, vol. 1, (Paris: P. Geuthner, 1990), 37 & plate 36. See also the **Sabaeen** inscriptions *BynM217* (*NHMn*), *GI1637* (*NHMyn*), *CIH969* (*NHMyn*), *CIH673* (*NHMt*), *CIH541* (*NHMt*), *BynM401* (*NHM(n)*) and **Minaean** texts *Ma'in7* (*NHMn*) and *DhM386* (*NHM*), among the 18 texts known to date that refer to the tribe or its members. They are now available at the *Corpus of South Arabian Inscriptions (CSAI) of the Digital Archive for the Study of pre-Islamic Arabian Inscriptions (DASI)* at <http://dasi.humnet.unipi.it/>
- See Ryckmans, “Inscribed Old South Arabian sticks and palm-leaf stalks: an introduction and a palaeological approach” *PSAS* 23 (1993), 127-140 and “Origin and evolution of South Arabian minuscule writing on wood” in *Arabian archaeology and epigraphy* 12 (2001), 223-235. Also see S. A. Frantsouzoff, “Hadramitic documents written on palm-leaf stalks” *PSAS* 29 (1999), 55-66. The tribal name (*Nhmyn*) is found in the National Museum of Yemen, see item *YM 11748* under “Miniscule Texts.” An image also appears in J. Ryckmans, W. Muller & Y. Abdullah, *Textes du Yemen antique inscrits sur bois* (Louvain-la-Neuve, Publications de l'Institut Orientaliste de Louvain, 1994), plates 3a & 3b. Additionally, a privately owned property agreement mentioning *NIHM* recorded on a palm-wood stick was shown to the author by Sheikh Abdulrab Abu Luhum of the *Nihm* tribe in Sana'a, November 1, 2000.

58. *St John Simpson, ed. Queen of Sheba: Treasures from Ancient Yemen. The altar (catalogue no. 207, Figure 58) appears on p 164 in the chapter titled "Religion" with notes on p 166 under the heading "Limestone altar dedicated to 'Almaqah." The English translation given in the catalogue has an error in the genealogy of Bi'Athtar, reading "son of Sauwad from the tribe Naw' from Nihm" and states that the altar is the "best preserved of three altars found in the Bar'an temple." While it is the best preserved of the three altars bearing this particular inscription, around twenty altars of essentially similar design were taken from this site.*

For a brief, illustrated review of the initial exhibit in Paris from October 1997 to February 1998, see Richard Covington "New Light on Old Yemen" in Saudi Aramco World 49/2 (March-April, 1998), 2-11. While no reference is made to the NHM altar, the article offers good background to the project intended to increase Western awareness of South Arabia's pre-Islamic history. The exhibit items have since returned to Yemen.

59. S. Kent Brown, "The Place Which Was Called Nahom': New Light from Ancient Yemen" *JBMS* 8/1 (1999), 66-68.

60. Warren P. Aston, "Newly Found Altars from Nahom" in *JBMS* 10/2 (2001), 56-61 remains the fullest treatment of the altar finds published to date.

61. Burkhard Vogt, Werner Herberg, Nicole Roring, "Arsh Bilqis" – *The Temple of Almaqah of Bar'an in Marib (Sana'a: German Institute of Archaeology, 2000)* summarizes what is known of the site's history and includes a plan of the temple. Examples of other inscriptions at the site are included in notes in this publication by Norbert Nebes, 16-18. See also Norbert Nebes, "New Inscriptions from the Bar'an temple" a paper presented at the 33rd International Congress of Asian and North African Studies held in Toronto in August 1990, published in A. Harrak et al. eds, vol.1, *Contacts Between Cultures: West Asia and North Africa* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), 160-164.

The altar texts will eventually be available online from the Digital Archive for the Study of pre-Islamic Arabian Inscriptions (DASI) at <http://dasi.humnet.unipi.it/>. Of interest also is the DAI excavation, completed in 2009, of the even larger complex at Sirwah, about 40 miles west of Marib. The temple at Sirwah dates to the mid. 7th Century BC; see <http://www.dainst.org/en/dai/meldungen>.

62. Transliteration and translation kindly provided by Professor Kenneth A. Kitchen of Liverpool, England, May 2001.

63. A discussion of pagan religious practice for southern Arabia can be found in Alexander Sima, "Religion" in *St. John Simpson, ed. Queen of Sheba: Treasures from Ancient Yemen*, 161-165. Further insights concerning altars and practices associated with

them can be gleaned from recent cataloging, such as Mounir Arbach & Remy Audouin, Sana National Museum: Collection of Epigraphic and Archaeological Artifacts from al-Jauf Sites (Sana: UNESCO & SFD, 2006-7), 2 vols, which contains numerous examples of inscribed altars.

64. Burkhard Vogt, "Les temples de Ma'rib" in *Christian Robin and Burkhard Vogt, eds. Yemen au pays de la reine de Saba (Paris: Flammarion, 1997)*, 144 depicts the touring altar, dating it to between the 7th and 6th centuries BC. The Vienna exhibition catalogue followed suit, see W. Seipel, ed. *Jemen – Kunst und Archäologie im Land der Königin von Saba* (Vienna: Kunsthistorisches Museum, 1998), 325.

65. Kenneth A. Kitchen, *Documentation for Ancient Arabia*, vol. 2 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), 744 presents the ruler chronology.

N. Nebes, "Zur Chronologie der Inschriften aus dem Bar'an-Tempel" in the DAI journal Archaologische Berichte aus dem Yemen (ABADY) 10 (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2005), 115 discusses the later dating of the three altars donated by Bi'Athtar. See also J. Gorsdorf & B. Vogt, "Radiocarbon Datings from the Almaqah Temple of Bar'an, Marib, Republic of Yemen: Approximately 800 Cal BC to 600 Cal AD" Radiocarbon 43/3 (Tucson: University of Arizona, 2001), 1363-1369.

66. *The find was reported as "LDS researchers find Book of Mormon link in Yemen" The Daily Universe vol. 87, (BYU Provo: November 17, 2000), 239: 3), released as an on-line news item "Discovery in Yemen Points to Book of Mormon" in the official online LDS Daily News of the same date, then as a feature "Book of Mormon Linked to Site in Yemen" in "LDS Scene" in the ENSIGN (February 2001), 79 and in "News of the Church" in the international Church magazine Liahona (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, April 2001), 11-12. All three articles included an image of the second altar.*

67. Elder John K. Carmack, "United in Love and Testimony" *Ensign* (May 2001), 76.

68. Terryl L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture that Launched a New World Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 120-121. Given's balanced assessment of the significance of the altar discovery is in stark contrast to the deafening silence from both anti-Mormon and the cultural-Mormon communities following this discovery.

69. Terryl Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon*, 147.

70. Grant Hardy, ed. *The Book of Mormon: A Reader's Edition* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 687.

71. Presentations by John E. Clark, note 13, p. 89 and John W. Welch, note 18, p. 108 in the conference proceedings, John W. Welch, ed. "The Worlds of Joseph Smith"

BYU Studies 44/4 (2005). See Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007), 93 and his *Mormonism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 32. In the latter work, the two other evidences chosen to illustrate why the Book of Mormon can be taken seriously on a scholarly level are purely textual: the throne theophany elements contained in Lehi’s prophetic call and the presence of chiasms in the text.

72. The film *A New Day for the Book of Mormon* can be viewed online at: <http://www.byutv.org/watch/90be2679-e6eb-4039-afa1-fee5477b0c20/new-day-for-the-book-of-mormon-new-day-for-the-book-of-mormon>.
73. See, for example, Dan Vogel, *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004), 609 note 17 and Ross Anderson, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Quick Christian Guide to the Mormon Holy Book* (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 2009). Both books were briefly reviewed by Robert Boylan in the FARMS Review 22/1 (2010), 181-189. For a detailed response to the Vogel claims that highlights the failure by critics to adequately engage with the correlation of the NHM text with Nahom, see Neal Rappleye and Stephen O. Smoot, “Book of Mormon Minimalists and the NHM Inscriptions: A Response to Dan Vogel” in *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 8 (2014), 157-185, available at www.mormoninterpreter.com/book-of-mormon-minimalists-and-the-nhm-inscriptions-a-response-to-dan-vogel. It followed Jeff Lindsay, “Noham, That’s Not History (Nor Geography, Cartography, or Logic): More on the Recent Attacks on nhm,” in his *Mormanity* blog, December 21, 2013.

Similarly, career LDS critics Jerald and Sandra Tanner’s objections in their *Answering Mormon Scholars: A Response to Criticism Raised by Mormon Defenders* (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1996), 183 reveal a failure to understand Semitic vowel usage. See the response by Kevin L. Barney, “A More Responsible Critique” FARMS Review 15/1 (2003), 97-146.

A differing strategy is used by Rick Grunder in *Mormon Parallels: A Bibliographic Source* (Ithaca: Rick Grunder Books, 2008), 1052-1054 which attempts to downplay the significance of the NHM inscriptions.

The most serious response by critics to date concerning “Nahom” remains F. Beckwith, C. Mosser and P. Owens, gen. eds. *The New Mormon Challenge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), which was written before the altar find. Page 498 and endnotes 107 and 108 attempt to deal with the subject. Despite being evangelical Christians, they concede that the evidence dealing with Nahom is “impressive only if one assumes a trip through Arabia rather than Sinai.” Of course, Nephi’s account has always

ruled out any possibility that the Lehite journey was across anywhere other than the Arabian Peninsula.

74. Warren P. Aston, “Some Notes on the Tribal Origins of NHM” paper delivered at Cambridge University July 22, 1995 at the annual Seminar for Arabian Studies, proposed that the NHM area may have covered a larger region anciently. Although presented prior to the altar finds, the paper suggested a possible origin for the name taking into account all that was then known about Nahom, including the First Nephi reference. It appears in full as Appendix 2.

Prior to this, FARMS papers had published the author’s research on Nahom. See Warren P & Michaela Aston, *The Search for Nahom and the End of Lehi’s Trail*, AST-84 (Provo: FARMS, 1984), updated in 1986, 1988 and 1989, culminating in *The Place Which Was Called Nahom: The Validation of an Ancient Reference to Southern Arabia*, AST-91a (Provo: FARMS, 1991).

These are accessible at <http://publications.maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/periodical/farms-preliminary-reports/>

75. Most recently, Warren P. Aston, “A History of NaHoM” in *BYU Studies Quarterly* 51/2 (Summer 2012), 78-98 updates the data linking Nephi’s Nahom with the tribal territory of Nihm in the context of LDS scholarship on the subject. For a purely scholarly treatment on the name and its tribal origins, see Warren P. Aston, “The Origins of the Nihm Tribe of Yemen: A Window into Arabia’s Past” vol. 4 issue 1 *Journal of Arabian Studies* (University of Exeter: Centre for Gulf Studies, June 2014), 134-148 in online and print formats. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/21534764.2014.918372#abstract>.

PART 4

*“Travel Nearly Eastward From
That Time Forth”*

**“And it came to pass that we did again take our journey in the wilderness;
and we did *travel nearly eastward from that time forth.*”
(1 Nephi 17:1)**

Lehi, Sariah and their group spent years in the desert wilderness of Arabia. The majority of their actual travel time would have been spent traversing *stony* or gravel terrain like this, rather than sand dunes, which are harder to cross with loaded camels and rarely have water and fodder sources.

Introduction

The Lehiite journey across Arabia falls naturally into three major thrusts: from Jerusalem down to the Valley of Lemuel, from there down to Nahom, and then across to Bountiful. After an extended stay at the valley and the two short stops that followed, travel to the vicinity of Nahom probably took a few weeks at most. With their arrival at Nahom, perhaps intending a stay of at least a year, some 1,400 miles/2,250 km had been covered since leaving Jerusalem. Some 600 miles/970 km still separated them, though, from their destination on the coast, the place they would name “Bountiful.”

Nephi’s account explicitly tells us that the final stage from Nahom across to Bountiful was the most arduous of the journey. The group was now in the Jauf Valley at the southern edge of the Empty Quarter, a place of vast shifting dunes avoided even by the Bedouin. Anciently—and still today—this is the first opportunity for travel across the Arabia peninsula in an easterly direction.

However, while it offers traversable terrain, the stony desert plateau eastward from Nahom remains a forbidding prospect to any traveler. It offers no water or fodder sources, or any crop-growing opportunities. In the twenty-first century it remains without wells, roads, or settlements. With only short-term camping feasible, the leg from the Nahom to Bountiful was thus not only the most difficult, but the *longest* non-stop stage of the entire land journey.

The Irrelevance of the Trade Routes after Nahom

Early LDS commentators made the natural assumption that Lehi essentially followed a trade route from Nahom to Bountiful. More

recently, the suggestion has been made that the Lehiites could have journeyed from Nahom to Bountiful via Marib and Shabwah. A closer look at both Nephi’s account and the historical realities involved reveals a very different story. In fact, from Nahom onwards trade routes become completely irrelevant, ruled out by Nephi’s own statement that they traveled “nearly eastward” from Nahom. *No route ever extended in an “eastward” direction from Nahom.* We now know that this very region, the Jauf, marked a major change in direction. Here the trade route split; a minor leg veering *south* toward Aden, and the major branch tending *southeast* to the oasis of Marib, and then to either Shabwah or Timna. From these two cities the route then led directly to the coast, to the seaport of *Qana*, the modern Bir Ali, and the port of Mouza. Both are listed in the first century AD *Periplus* as the primary ports in southern Arabia in that period.¹ At times a land route went *northwest* from Shabwah for hundreds of miles, avoiding the great Hadhramaut Rift, before descending in a great arc to reach the Dhofar coast. The bulk of the incense trade, however, was shipped by sea.

Re-stated, had the Lehiites traveled along a trade route from Nahom onwards, the direction of travel could *not* be described as “nearly eastward.” Their entire journey from Jerusalem to Bountiful would then have essentially merely followed the commercial trade route, albeit in reverse. This concept is so obviously alien to the journey that Nephi recorded that it is impossible to reconcile with the account. Not only could their journey have been made in a fraction of the time that it took, but there would have been no need for a Liahona, or the difficulties of the last stage of travel from Nahom onwards. Most significantly, their journey from Nahom would have resulted in them arriving at a coastal area far removed from Nephi’s description of Bountiful.

Nephi's Directional Accuracy

While four brief verses (17:1-4) are all that record the journey from Nahom to Bountiful, as discussed previously, Nephi's earlier account of the journey demonstrates that he could ascertain directions with great accuracy. Had the party traveled *east-northeast* or *east-southeast*, for example, Nephi was quite capable of determining that degree of variation and would surely have so stated. When he then describes the direction of travel from Nahom to Bountiful as "nearly eastward" (17:1), there is no reason to not take his statement absolutely literally; i.e., the direction *was* almost due east. As a direction of "nearly eastward" seems almost nebulous compared to his earlier statements, some readers may assume that perhaps the group meandered or wandered in its path, leaving Nephi to only generalize the direction traveled. However, we now know that, in fact, their journey from Nahom to Bountiful *was* so close to true east that he was recording the direction of travel as accurately as was possible.

Nephi's simple statement that they traveled "nearly eastward" from Nahom becomes a stunning vindication of the Book of Mormon's historicity. None of the classical or contemporary references to the incense trade mention this major change in direction, so it follows that Joseph Smith could not have known from them that there was such a turn, nor where it occurred.



The topography from Nahom eastwards to the coast.

And there is a further dimension to the matter of direction after Nahom. It comes from the specification, written well after the fact, that they traveled nearly eastward *from that time forth*. This seems to stipulate that this direction continued to be followed all the way to the coast. Indeed, the account mentions no detours, breaks in the travel, or any reason requiring a change of direction. Exploration and satellite imagery has shown that maintaining an easterly course was actually the only feasible way to reach the coast where Bountiful awaited.

“Nearly eastward” Toward the Coast

Had Lehi's group traveled even east-northeast or east-southeast from Nahom, they would have encountered the shifting sand dune deserts of the feared "Empty Quarter" to the north, or the equally-difficult

Ramlat Saba'tayn desert to the south. Many of the constantly shifting dunes tower hundreds of feet high; they are simply too steep to be crossed by loaded camels. Instead, surely led by the Liahona, traveling almost true east from Nahom placed them on a narrow band of stony plateaus and valleys leading between the two deserts to the coast. A sequence of arid plateaus and valleys averaging 3,000 feet/900 meters altitude leads from the Wadi Jauf or Nahom area to low ranges north of the Hadhramaut Valley. From here, the Mahra plateau leads into the Qamar ranges on the coast of southern Oman.²

Thus, not only is travel from Nahom in a direct easterly direction possible, but it is actually the *most* direct and only accessible route that one would take to reach the tiny area of fertile coast. No physical obstacles, whether sand dunes, mountains, steep ravines, or lava fields, prevent travel between the Nahom area and Dhofar. **That a completely accessible and feasible “nearly eastward” pathway, with no intervening obstacles, from Nahom to the only fertile coast in Arabia can now be shown is one of the most significant findings in recent years concerning the Lehite journey.** Surprisingly, the implications of this fact have yet to be fully assimilated by many writers on the subject.

Lessons from History

A well-known statement from early LDS church history, apparently written by Frederick G. Williams, stating that Lehi turned nearly east at the “nineteenth degree of north latitude” [i.e., just south of modern Jeddah and Mecca] is not supportable as an inspired utterance. This same writing designates Chile in South America as Lehi’s landing place, a conclusion also completely at odds with all the evidence. Both claims must be regarded as well-intentioned, but unofficial, speculation that is not supported by the evidence.³

However, history opens a striking window into conditions in the Jauf area only a few centuries after the Lehite passage. In addition to showing that the region of Nehem was indeed the area where easterly travel was possible, it vividly confirms Nephi’s picture of danger and hardship. Most scholars now agree that it was at the walled city of Baraqish that the invading Roman Army under Aelius Gallus, in 25 BC, arranged for food supplies before marching east into the desert. Their goal was to discover and exploit the source of incense, and the most direct route took them initially *eastward*, not southeast to the fertile plains and dams at Marib, as some writers have supposed. Without a Liahona or other divine guidance, thousands of men died in the desert. Before they perished at “Marsiaba” (almost certainly the present al ’Abr), prisoners captured there told the Romans that they were only a two-day march from the country that produced “aromatics,” or legendary Shabwah, the junction nearer the coast through which all trade routes passed.⁴ Thus, a tragic footnote in the history of southern Arabia provides support for the accuracy of an even earlier travel account that kept by Nephi.

Bondage in the Desert?

Speculation recently advanced that Lehi and Sariah’s group may have been held captive, or kept in some type of bondage by local people while in Arabia,⁵ has little to commend it. In the first place, it is hard to imagine why Nephi would not have recorded such a dramatic and significant event in his account when he showed no hesitation in recording conflicts and difficulties otherwise. Such a major event delaying their progress would have provided unparalleled teaching opportunities for Lehi. It almost certainly would have occasioned revelations, just as other significant events did, and any loss of liberty would have provided a supreme object lesson, one worth recording for posterity. But nothing like this is mentioned, even obliquely.

Captivity or servitude also fails to merit a mention when Nephi's brothers complain about the journey to Bountiful (17:17-22) or in Nephi's response, as he rehearses to them, at great length, the obstacles overcome by faith thus far (17:23-52). Throughout the entire record we find various minutiae; Nephi striking rocks together to make fire, for example, but no stirring account of a delivery from any physical bondage. Later references, written from the perspective of some five centuries of tumultuous Nephite history, record that the Nephite's ancestors were delivered many times "out of the hands of their enemies" (Alma 9:10), and were "brought out of bondage time after time" (Alma 9:22) and speak of them being preserved from "falling into the hands of their enemies."

These are clearly general references to the initial escape of the Lehites from the Babylonian captivity of Jerusalem, and then their survival against the numerically greater Lamanites in the New World, not a reference to their travel from Nahom to Bountiful. Thus, the reference to being brought out of bondage "time after time" is clearly not referring to a single event, but rather the cyclic one of faith and "unfaithfulness" when they were "driven back" (Mosiah 1:17). Without further information, these seem more attractive possibilities than thinking that Lehi and his people endured some kind of captivity or servitude while in the least populated desert of all.

Finally, and most tellingly, Alma who had access to the full account of Lehi's journey actually reveals what the group's afflictions were: as with the Israelites' escape from Egypt, their trials were "hunger and thirst" (Alma 37:41-42, compare Exodus 16:3, 17:3) rather than any bondage or servitude. This fits perfectly with what we now know of the terrain they had to cover to reach Bountiful. While we cannot rule it out entirely, given the scantiness of the record we currently have, none of the Book of Mormon prophets who wrote of the Lehiite exodus recorded any loss of liberty, nor do the logistics of the journey require it.

Mixed Blessings in the Wilderness

Moving far from the water sources of the trade routes, the Lehites' easterly course took them into the vast Mahra Province, one of the least hospitable places on earth.⁶ Even today, al Mahra remains the least developed and most untouched part of the Republic of Yemen. Nephi's repeated emphasis on the difficulty of their travel (17:1, 2, 6) makes it clear that they were far from the regular wells and settlements of trade routes. Probably traveling by night and resting by day, the light or smoke of fires may have invited attack by robbers. In any case, wood to burn would be almost nonexistent. Nephi noted (17:12) "The Lord had not hitherto suffered that we should make much fire, as we journeyed in the wilderness." The subtle inference here is that the Lord permitted them to cook with fire only infrequently; as compensation they are told in the same verse that the Lord would make their food "sweet" so it would not need cooking. Nephi had earlier noted that they ate their meat raw (17:2), certainly sun-dried and preserved with spice and herb seasoning as both Arabs and Western hikers still do.

While not being able to cook is usually viewed as a hardship by the modern reader, it may actually have been one of the great "blessings" that Nephi mentions (17:2), releasing the women from the burden of daily cooking and leaving them more strength and time to take care of themselves and their babies. And, although the women were able to nurse their infants (17:2), camel's milk may also have been an important factor helping all members of the group cope with the lack of water during this final stage of their sojourn. The Liahona, which earlier had led them to the "more fertile parts," now likely also functioned by directing them to water resources until Bountiful was reached. Water wells are non-existent in this remote region, but ephemeral pools of water can last for many weeks in stony desert after rain has fallen, an

event sometimes years apart. Such water pools are not possible in sandy terrain.⁷

All this paints a clear and consistent picture of life *away* from other peoples (among whom, of course, the making of fire would have presented no difficulty), rather than merely continuing on a trade route. Of their eight-year wilderness journey, this longest and most arduous stage must have occupied a minimum of a month and possibly several times that.



This rare water pool on the Mahra plateau east of Nahom, from rain months previously, offers a clue as to how the Lehites may have survived without wells after leaving Nahom. The surrounding terrain is typical of the Mahra plateau.

While the “many afflictions and much difficulty”(17:6) of this final stage were so great that Nephi felt unable to write them all, they were not without their compensations. Nephi records that the women were able to “bear children in the wilderness” (17:1) and “so great were the blessings of the Lord upon us” that the women “did give plenty of

suck for their children, and were strong, yea, even like unto the men” (17:2). The same verse relates that the women “began to bear their journeyings without murmurings,” thus becoming another blessing. Having come from a privileged background in Jerusalem, the women were now hardened by desert life and could fully assume their roles alongside the men.⁸

While it remains true that Nephi recorded very little in the four verses (1 Nephi 17:1-4) covering the journey from Nahom to Bountiful, what he *did* record is surely significant. Of all that he could have written, Nephi chose to focus on the fact that the group had been blessed and that “ways and means” were provided by God in the wilderness as the commandments were kept.⁹ It is likely that the privations and hardships endured during this last stage of travel were intended by the Lord to strengthen the group collectively; they demonstrated God’s power in leading them across hundreds of miles of desert reaches away from trade routes and water sources. Group cohesion would be essential, not only to their daily survival, but to the discipline they would need at Bountiful in constructing their ship and then sailing it for a year or more. In any event, no eruptions of complaining or rebellion are mentioned until after they reached the comfort of Bountiful. After years in the wilderness, ever more removed from their homeland as they traveled, the younger members of the party would have had little or no recollection of Jerusalem life. Solitude and hardship would further dim the adult’s memories of their old life also, and serve to help Lehi and Sariah develop the nucleus of a society prepared for a New World.

In everything that Nephi recorded about travel to and from Nahom we see, once again, a converging of many disparate and subtle details, all coming together to witness the accuracy of Nephi’s deceptively casual account. No-one knew that degree of detail about southern Arabia even a hundred years after the Book of Mormon was given to the world.

NOTES

1. Groom, *Frankincense and Myrrh*, 165-188, especially 167. His updated 2002 summary of the incense trade routes does not show any overland route from Dhofar (Oman) at all. See Nigel Groom, "Trade, Incense and Perfume" in St. John Simpson, ed. *Queen of Sheba: Treasures from Ancient Yemen*, 89.
2. See, for example, TPC satellite-based mapping on GSGS 1:500,000 scale charts J-6C and J-7D, published by the Director of Military Survey, UK in 1982. For an example of less detailed, larger scale topographical mapping that highlights the narrow band of plateau terrain east of Nahom clearly, see the 1:3,000,000 scale Bartholomew World Travel Series map of the Arabian Peninsula, nd. It is now possible, of course, to view high-resolution satellite imagery of these locations.
3. Frederick G. Williams 111, "Did Lehi Land in Chile? An Assessment of the Frederick G. Williams Statement" in *ReExploring the Book of Mormon*, 57-61, provides analysis of the writing and how it came to be accepted as an inspired statement by Joseph Smith, until modern research forced scholars to examine it more closely.
4. Strabo, *Geography*, Book 16, 4:22-24, and Pliny: *Natural History*, trans. Rackham, (London: Heinemann, 1952), 6:32, 160-162 provide the original references to the Roman incursion of southern Arabia. Nigel Groom refers to the event and briefly correlates the modern locations to the text in his *Frankincense and Myrrh*, 74-76.

For a fuller examination of the issues of geography involved in understanding this window into Arabia's history, see Nigel Groom's "The Roman Expedition into South Arabia" Bulletin of The Society for Arabian Studies 1, (London: The British Academy, February 1996), 5-7. Although questions about dating remain, the Roman event is attested by an undisputed Latin tomb inscription found at Baraqish in Wadi Jauf. See Paolo Costa, "A Latin-Greek Inscription from the Jauf of the Yemen," in PSAS 7 (1977), 69-72 and G. W Bowersock, Roman Arabia (Cambridge MA/ London: Harvard University Press, 1983), 148-153. A second Latin inscription supports the Roman presence in southern Arabia ca. AD 144; see Carl Phillips, Francois Villeneuve, William Facey, "A Latin inscription from South Arabia" in PSAS 34 (2004), 239-250.
5. The idea of some type of servitude to account for the length of the land journey was proposed by S. Kent Brown in "Refining the Spotlight on Lehi and Sariah" *JBMS* 15/2 (2006), 44-57.
6. See Francesco G. Fedele, "Neolithic settlement of the eastern Yemen Plateau: an exploration of locational choice and land use" in *Arabian archaeology and epigraphy*

24/1 (May 2013), 44- 50 noting the "very limited sampling" and "considerable unknowns" involved.

7. The photograph by the author of a water pool was taken in April 1992, some 100 miles/160 km inland, in the plateau desert of al-Mahra province, Yemen. Another photograph of standing water, in a gravel desert plain in Oman, appears in Ghazanfar and Fisher, eds. *Vegetation of the Arabian Peninsula*, 188, with notes 187.
8. On the women's role, see Camille Fronk, "Desert Epiphany: Sariah and the Women in 1 Nephi," *JBMS* 9/2 (2000), 4-15.
9. The corrected reading for 1 Nephi 17:3 in Royal Skousen's *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part 1: Title Page, Witness Statements, 1 Nephi – 2 Nephi 10* (2004) is that "ways and means" were provided to Lehi's group by the Lord (emphasis added). This double emphasis in the text clarifies that the Lehi's ability to survive their desert journey was due to multiple factors, not just a single one such as bondage or enslavement.

PART 5

"We Called the Place Bountiful"

“And we did come to the land which we called Bountiful, because of its much fruit and also wild honey; and all these things were prepared of the Lord that we might not perish. And we beheld the sea, which we called Irreantum, which, being interpreted, is many waters. And it came to pass that we did pitch our tents by the seashore; and notwithstanding we had suffered many afflictions and much difficulty, yea, even so much that we cannot write them all, we were exceedingly rejoiced when we came to the seashore; and *we called the place Bountiful*, because of its much fruit.”

(1 Nephi 17:5, 6)



Introduction

The terminus of the Lehite land journey of some 2,100 miles/3,400 km across Arabia was a place that caused the group to rejoice “exceedingly.” Like others since then,¹ the group’s relief and enthusiasm is vividly captured in Nephi’s words as he writes of the group’s arrival at the shores of the Indian Ocean. The green vista they emerged into indicated that arduous years of desert travel were behind them. The place where they arrived from the interior desert was full of trees and other vegetation, including edible fruit, something that would impress anyone after eight years of desert travel. Nephi mentions “much fruit” twice (17:5, 6), indicating that abundant fruit was the specific reason that Bountiful was so named.

The text makes clear that the group was also impressed with the vast ocean panorama spread out before them. Nephi was careful to record a proper name for the ocean, *Irreantum*, as well as the translation of the name into his own language as “many waters.” Despite a superficial resemblance to a Greek term for the ocean (*Erythraem*), a more plausible South-Arabian origin for the name that fits this meaning of the word has recently been suggested. Since Lehi’s group had just spent some eight years in the Arabian wilderness, such an etymology would not be surprising.²

Writing years later on the American continent of the journey from the Old World, Nephi acknowledged that the place Bountiful with all its bounty was “prepared of the Lord” (17:5). Here was everything necessary for them to rest, to regroup and then to begin constructing the vessel that would complete their journey. This place was more than merely a welcome contrast to the desert, especially with the most difficult leg from Nahom just completed; Bountiful was so named because its fertility was exceptional, especially for Arabia.

“Almost equal to Paradise”

From the very beginning, critics of the Book of Mormon have made much of Nephi’s mention of a fertile place on the Arabian coast. Because they relied on sources normally considered authoritative, such as the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, which denied the existence of rivers and forests anywhere in Arabia, the Lehite Bountiful came under attack as soon as the book was published. As early as 1831 a Baptist minister commented on the improbable place described in Nephi’s text:

*After Lehi and his family had wandered in the wilderness, they came to a fertile country, which they call the land Bountiful. This... must have been on the coast of the Sea of Arabia, or the Indian Ocean, which is a barren, sandy desert...The historical part of the book is, all of it, thus fabulous and extravagant...To believe the Book of Mormon, we must suppose that these emigrants... discovered a country **almost equal to paradise**, where nobody else can find anything but a sandy, barren desert.³*

A century and a half later criticism of a fertile location remained just as dismissive, as in this 1985 example from a biologist:

Arabia is bountiful in sunshine, petroleum, sand, heat, and fresh air, but certainly not in ‘much fruit and also wild honey,’ nor has it been since Pleistocene times.

This latter article went on to claim that there has never been “ample timber” in Arabia for building a ship.⁴ Critics thus saw Nephi’s Bountiful as an easy target and for well over a century, LDS commentators could only assign the place to a vague “somewhere” on the Arabian coastline. Without reliable information about the coastline, locations ranging from Aden, near the bottom of the Arabian peninsula, to the United

Arab Emirates near the top, and even Somalia on the Horn of Africa, have been proposed for Bountiful at various times. What has not been done in almost every case, by LDS and non-LDS writers alike, is to first carefully evaluate what the Book of Mormon tells us about Bountiful.

Examining what Nephi's text actually tells us remains the starting point in any serious attempt to locate a location on today's map. The text of the Book of Mormon often offers little or no insight as to the location of events, but when the direct and implied references concerning "Bountiful" in the First Book of Nephi are examined closely, a surprisingly detailed picture of the place emerges.

Nephi's Criteria for Bountiful

1. As discussed earlier, the location of Bountiful is directionally linked to Nahom. Bountiful lay "nearly" eastward of Nahom (17:1). Here, Nephi used the same wording he had earlier used in describing the travel direction from the Valley of Lemuel ("nearly a south-southeast direction," 16:13, 14, 33). Given his ability to accurately determine variations from the cardinal directions, we should therefore expect that Bountiful lies close to the 16th degree north latitude of Nahom. Surprisingly, the clear-cut implications of this basic and unequivocal scripture continue to be ignored or understated by many commentators on the subject, years after the location of Nahom has been firmly established. Such writers still depict the route from Nahom to Bountiful as anything but the "nearly eastward" direction Nephi recorded, defying also geographical realities.⁵

2. Clearly, the terrain had to permit reasonable *access from the interior deserts to the coast*. At some places along the Arabian coast, the terrain is so rugged that overland travel from the interior is simply impossible.

3. Nephi's usage of the name "Bountiful" suggests that *a wider, general area* (17:5,7) *may have enjoyed notable fertility in addition to the particular location where the Lehites initially camped* (17:6), making any candidate location for Bountiful without a comparable surrounding fertile area less likely.

4. Bountiful, logically on the east coast of Arabia, was *a coastal location* (17:5), *suitable for an initial seashore encampment in tents* (17:6) *but also with shelter available on higher ground in more substantial dwellings. It had to also offer a suitable place for the construction and launching of a sizable ship* (18:8). Large vessels cannot easily be constructed over a year or more on a beach exposed to monsoon storms; in ancient times the only practical solution was usually the shores of a sheltered inlet or lagoon that protects from tides and storms while still allowing ready access to the ocean.

5. Bountiful was much more than just a suitable place to build and launch a ship; it derives its name from its fertility, specifically its "*much fruit*" and *honey* (17:5-6, 18:6) and perhaps also small game that could be hunted (18:6). As noted later in item 11, the strong likelihood is that Bountiful was uninhabited when Lehi arrived; this would require that the fruit mentioned was not cultivated but grew wild. The Hebrew term for "fruit" normally refers to *edible* fruit and Nephi's use of the singular "fruit" may imply that there was not necessarily a great *variety* of fruits. The apparent immediate availability of fruit upon arrival may explain the lack of any mention of the growing of crops at Bountiful by the group -unlike the description of their later arrival in the New World (18:24). However, some agricultural and fishing pursuits for additional food during the years of their stay at Bountiful are certain. The group's camels, of course, could still provide milk, hides, and hair, throughout their time at Bountiful.

6. Enough *shipbuilding timber* of types and sizes to permit building a vessel able to carry several dozen persons and remain seaworthy for at least a year were available (18:1-2). While teak was imported from India for shipbuilding in *northern* Oman since about the third millennium BC, the clear implication is that this place “prepared of the Lord” had all the materials needed for the ship without recourse to obtaining timber from elsewhere. The wording of 18:1 conveys the impression that the timber was at hand. It is also worth noting that Nephi uses the plural whenever timber is mentioned, suggesting that more than one type of wood was involved, as is usual in shipbuilding.

7. *Year-round freshwater at the site* is required by the flora described. It would also have been necessary for the extended stay required by the group to construct the ship without diverting significant energy and time to carrying it in from elsewhere.

8. *A mountain*, distinctive enough to justify Nephi’s references to it as “the mount” (17:7, 18:3) must be near enough to the coastal encampment to allow him to go there to “pray oft” (18:3).

9. The incident of Nephi’s brothers attempting to take his life by throwing him into the depths of the sea (17:48) makes no sense unless there were *substantial cliffs* overlooking the ocean from which to throw him. Cliffs typically have rocks at their base from erosion and would constitute a real danger to anyone falling on them from a height, whereas a sand beach would not, especially for a young man who is described as being “large in stature” (2:16) and “having much strength” (4:31), regardless of any lack of swimming ability.

10. *Ore*, from which metal could be smelted to construct tools, was available in the vicinity (17:9-11, 16), perhaps with some type of *flint* (verse 11), seemingly near the ore source. While it remains possible that he carried some type of flint with him to make fire, his wording

implies that it was available at, or near, the location of the ore source. Nephi does not specify the metal he used to make the hatchets, adzes, chisels, twist-drills, hammers and so on needed, but an iron alloy seems the most likely.

11. Despite the attractiveness of the place, the 17th chapter of First Nephi is full of clues indicating that Bountiful apparently had *little or no resident population at that time* who could contribute tools and manpower to the ship building process. Beyond the obvious fact that it required a specific revelation to show Nephi where ore could be found (17:9-10), great effort was then expended by him to fashion his own bellows, locate the ore, smelt it and then manufacture the tools he would need. Such basic items could surely have been easily obtained by anyone living in or near a populated sea-port. It is also clear from the record that Nephi *needed* the labor of his brothers and Zoram; a populated location would offer other sources of labor.

Of course, Lehi could also easily have been directed to bring sufficient wealth from his estate in Jerusalem to purchase an entire ship, or commission the building of one had the group been headed for a shipbuilding area. While one could argue that the shipbuilding stage was part of their preparation for the New World, the group had already faced some eight years of difficult travel dominated by hunger and privation. The more likely reason that they had to construct their own is that no vessels being built in that part of the world were adequate for a journey of the magnitude required.

The continually dissenting Laman and Lemuel seem to have left Bountiful readily enough for a long and dangerous sea voyage, surely their first time on the open sea, when the time came. This suggests that there was little at Bountiful either to distract them from assisting Nephi in building the ship or to entice them to remain. Eight years of encounters with mostly Arab peoples on their journey must have

broadened their cultural outlook; had they been living some time in or near a thriving port, commercial opportunities for wealth would have surely appealed after years of desert privation. Living in or near a center for trade would have given them an easy opportunity to return to their beloved Jerusalem.

Finally, it also seems unlikely that Lehi's group, at such a critical juncture in their journey, would have been intended to settle where they would be exposed to the pagan beliefs then prevalent in Arabia. Rather, the place "prepared" of the Lord may have been intended to keep them apart from other people for that very reason. The fact that any water source in Arabia attracts people, however, requires us to understand why such an attractive place would remain uninhabited most of the time.

12. Coastal conditions had to allow a ship *access to the open ocean and to suitable winds and currents* (18:8-9) which could carry the vessel in an easterly direction toward the Pacific coast of the Americas, as Alma 22:28 seems to stipulate when it mentions that the west coast of the land was the place of "first inheritance." However, travel in an eastward direction from the Indian Ocean onwards appears problematic as the prevailing winds and currents generally restrict travel to a westerly direction. A solution to this dilemma is discussed later in the book.

Such a detailed and comprehensive description of a locale is without precedent *anywhere* in the Book of Mormon narrative. None of the criteria are at all peripheral. Archaeologically, only an inscription could normally definitively establish the presence of a small group at a specific location about 600 BC. The Lehiite Bountiful, however, could plausibly be marked by the remains of the rock dwelling places that must have been built for the months of monsoon rain and high winds annually, together with the inevitable detritus found at any inhabited site anciently: broken pottery. Furthermore, traces of the ship construction site and even of Nephi's smelting of metal ore might still be discernable. Even if

located, however, such traces would still require a dating method to link to Nephi's era; after two and half millennia such dating may remain forever tentative.

From *scriptural* perspectives, however, Nephi's account of the place is so specific that locating such traces is not a necessary prerequisite to establishing its plausibility. The numerous details embedded in Nephi's record are the invitation to locate his Bountiful in the real world. Of course, by describing in precise detail a particular location in Arabia, together with the route to get there from Jerusalem, specific directions and even a place-name en route, Joseph Smith put his prophetic credibility very much on the line. Could this young, un-traveled farmer in rural New York State in 1830 somehow have known about a burial area named Nahom and a fertile site on the coast of Arabia? Could a map or some other writing other than the Nephite record have been a source for him? When all of the evidence is examined, the answer is a clear no.⁶ In fact, long after publication of the Book of Mormon, maps of Arabia continued to show the eastern coastline and interior as mostly unknown, unexplored territory. Until the advent of satellite mapping in recent decades, even quite modern maps have misplaced toponyms and ignored or distorted major features of the terrain.

Classical Writings as Possible Sources

From traveler's reports, the Greek and Roman writers knew that not all of Arabia was barren desert. They divided Arabia very roughly into *Arabia Deserta* - the largest part of Arabia, mostly desert - and *Arabia Felix* ("Happy or Fortunate Arabia"). The latter was the near-mythical source of incense, reputedly a place of great wealth, that they supposed was somewhere south of Arabia Deserta. They did not know, as we now do, that the incense came not from the kingdoms in the south but actually originated from much further to their east. The classical

writings are therefore unhelpful in locating a fertile area in Arabia and most were unavailable to Joseph Smith.

The holdings of the libraries that Joseph Smith, his family and associates could have accessed prior to 1830 are now known. With the possible exception of the *Periplus Maris Erythraei* (“*Circumnavigation of the Erythraean Sea*”), a detailed account or guide written by an unknown first-century AD sailor,⁷ other sources such as the earliest, Herodotus (who died about 430 BC), Theophrastus (372-287 BC), Strabo’s *Geography* (ca. 64 BC-AD 19) and Diodorus Siculus’s *Bibliothēke* (ca. 60-30 BC) were based on the reports of others. Pliny the Elder, who wrote *Natural History* (ca. AD 23-79), reportedly had access to some 2,000 books, for example. Some of these writings contain fanciful hearsay elements such as describing “winged serpents” guarding the incense trees. Needless to say, such mythical elements stand in stark contrast to Nephi’s straightforward, vivid, account.

Similarly, the *factual* elements in these writings fail to account for Nephi’s account. In the *Periplus* the incense land is described only as a “mountainous country, difficult to cross, wrapped in thick clouds and fog.” This is true enough during the monsoonal period, but that fact nowhere makes an appearance in First Nephi. The *Periplus* was translated into English in 1807, but was not acquired by any of the libraries accessible to Joseph Smith until 1908. Likewise, Pliny’s account was in print, but unavailable to Joseph Smith. It referred to the land of the people of Minaei as being “fertile in palm groves and timber” and to the land of the Sabaei [Sabaeans] as “irrigated agricultural land” that produced “honey and wax.”⁸ These references actually originated in reports from the irrigated fertile region of Marib, hundreds of miles distant in the Yemen interior, and would not inform anyone of coastal conditions. Not a single early text describes a fertile location on Arabia’s eastern coast. In essence then, the information sources that *could* have

informed Joseph Smith about ancient Arabia were unavailable to him, and were largely misleading and inaccurate in any case.

Later and Contemporary Writings as Possible Sources

Fourteenth-century Moroccan traveler Ibn Battuta passed through Dhofar twice, describing some of the cultivated crops that he saw and the local custom of feeding sardine to cattle. Nothing, however, in his account signals unusual fertility. Nor did the accounts of other travelers, both before and after Battuta. Marco Polo in the thirteenth century, and two Jesuits passing through Dhofar en route to Yemen in the sixteenth century, for example, described aspects of the incense trade, but never the fertile vistas that Joseph Smith ascribed to Nephi.⁹ In the early decades of the nineteenth century, a number of British ships began surveying the southern Arabian coast, among them the survey ship *Palinurus*, without noting any locations of uncharacteristic fertility. In 1833, geographer Andrew Crichton expressed the prevailing view when, after sailing the southern coast of the Arabian Peninsula, he wrote: “The whole southern coast is a wall of naked rocks as dismal and barren as can well be conceived.”¹⁰

The first note of a fertile coastal location was not recorded until 1844, when a survey of the coast was made by Dr. H. J. Carter for the “government of Bombay.” Buried within his detailed report, *A Geographical Description of certain parts of the Southeast coast of Arabia*, is Carter’s description of this fertile area:

A little further, west of the Kais ibn Ammar comes a third ravine or valley, which has a west northwesterly direction. It is called Kharifot and has a stream of water running through it. It appeared rich in vegetation and at its entrance was a large grove of date trees. . . . the ravine of Kharifot, which is separated from the Kais ibn

Ammar by a low mountainous ridge covered with long grass and stunted trees, and scarped upon the sea...

This description was published in Bombay in 1851, twenty-one years after publication of the Book of Mormon.¹¹ Carter's more extended description of the Salalah area generally as "a land of groves, well watered, with lush vegetation" (later echoed in Bertram Thomas's 1928 description) ensured that the focus remained on the larger and more readily accessible Salalah region whenever fertility was discussed.¹²

In 1895, an English couple, Theodore and Mabel Bent, traveled by boat from Salalah in Oman westward to Qishn on the Yemen coast. In addition to general comments about the fertility of Dhofar compared to the arid interior, they noted during their slow sailing along the coast "vegetation here and there," anchoring one night off Rakhyut. They made no mention of Kharifot in particular. Their account reveals another reason that the Mahra coast remained rarely visited: the tribes along the coast had a well-deserved reputation as plunderers and slave traders ("no wise captain ever ventures to land about here if he can help it.")¹³

Long after publication of the Book of Mormon, therefore, descriptions of the eastern Arabian coast continued to be incomplete and selective. The 1952 expedition led by the American Wendell Phillips was the real beginning of scientific research in southern Oman, but this was limited to the Salalah area and only as far west as Mughsayl. His conclusion, sometimes still quoted: "the narrow half-moon shaped plain of Dhofar...[is] the only major fertile region between Muscat and Aden" is thus ultimately misleading. At about this same time, the English explorer Wilford Thesiger reinforced this view with his statement that of the entire 1,400 miles/2,250 km of Arabian coast, only the 20 miles/32 km [of the Salalah area] "get regular rainfall."¹⁴ There are many subsequent accounts from Europeans in Dhofar that

make it clear that the Qamar coast west of Salalah remained very much *terra incognita*, even to the people and leaders of Oman.¹⁵ Hidden by the Qamar Mountains, the most fertile region of all, the one that most closely mirrors Nephi's Bountiful, was not seen by these men. It would remain unknown to the outside world for more than three decades longer.

Was Bountiful where Frankincense Grew?

It is not exaggerating to state that until quite recently almost all that was known about southern Arabia was in connection with the historically important incense trade. Scholars naturally assumed that a frankincense-growing area would be very fertile and would therefore also have the timber and other vegetation that Nephi describes. Furthermore, it was often assumed that incense production in Arabia was limited to the southern province of Dhofar in Oman; LDS scholars reasoned that Lehi had essentially followed the incense trade route in reverse. On this basis, the Dhofar province, which includes the regional capital Salalah, was first proposed as the most likely area of "Bountiful" in 1950 and most writers on the subject since then - including some very recently - have followed this line of reasoning, sometimes refusing to consider other possibilities.¹⁶ In fact, each of these assumptions has proved incorrect.

In his definitive work on the incense trade, Nigel Groom established that both frankincense and myrrh were grown anciently in parts of a coastline that extended from Dhofar in Oman some 500 miles/800 km west to the Hadhramaut region in Yemen. Some limited production of frankincense, for domestic consumption only, also took place on the remote island of Socotra off the coast of Yemen.¹⁷ The trees also grew in small areas of Somalia and Ethiopia, although neither place developed

any significant trade as a result. Today myrrh and frankincense trees continue to be found growing in areas of Dhofar as a local cash crop.

Nigel Groom also demonstrates that the most frequently quoted sources on the incense trade, first and second century accounts such as the *Periplus* and writings by Ptolemy and Pliny, contain errors. Their vagueness when describing where incense was actually grown is a case in point and has resulted in wrong conclusions being made by later commentators. For example, Pliny’s description, usually applied to Dhofar, actually fits the Hadhramaut area in Yemen better. Pliny, writing in the first century after Christ, described the area as follows:

*Eight days’ journey from Sabota [Shabwah] is a frankincense-producing district called Sariba – according to the Greeks the name means “secret.” The region faces north-east, and is surrounded by impenetrable rocks, and on the right hand side bordered by a sea coast with inaccessible cliffs...there are hills rising to a great height, with natural forests on them running right down to the level ground.*¹⁸

Sariba, the frankincense-growing region, is here described as being eight days’ journey from Shabwah. Early writers attest that an overland journey from Dhofar to Shabwah would have required as much as *thirty* days travel. On the other hand, eight days of travel fits a journey from the Hadhramaut area to Shabwah perfectly.¹⁹ In another account, Pliny described the port of Qana, the modern Bir Ali, near Wadi Hajr in the lower Hadhramaut, as actually being “*in* the frankincense producing district.”²⁰ Groom summarizes the situation as follows:

The belief that Arabian frankincense of classical times came only from Zufar [Dhofar] is incorrect. From Zufar the ancient frankincense growing region extended as far west as the Wadi Hagr [Hajr] area of Hadhramaut, where it has recently been found

*growing. The contention that it grew only at an elevation over 2000 feet is also incorrect, although the quality of gums from trees on the coastal plains may be inferior.*²¹

Additionally, the incense bushes grow under such a highly specific range of soil and climatic conditions that they are usually not found growing with other tree types; in fact they can be absent in the most fertile valleys on the Qamar coast of Oman. Rainfall along this coast is often too high for frankincense and myrrh to grow except on well-drained slopes.

While more remains to be learned about trade routes anciently, it is now clear that the major overland route for the transportation of incense began at the port of Qana in the Hadhramaut, rather than in Dhofar. The lack of water sources and settlements in the interior of Dhofar meant that incense from there (mostly frankincense, with smaller quantities of myrrh) was usually shipped by *sea* westward to Qana and the smaller ports at Shihr and Sayhut. Only then was it transported overland to Shabwah and beyond. According to the *Periplus*, which dates back to near the height of this trade, the precious gums were shipped to Qana by small boats and on rafts supported by inflated skins.²²

The following map based on the *Periplus* summarizes the extent of Western awareness of the region in about the first century AD, some seven centuries after Lehi’s day.



A reconstruction based on the 1st century AD *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* shows the major locations and their primary exports. *Moscha*, situated roughly halfway on the eastern Arabian coast, marks the approximate location of southern Dhofar. Image courtesy of PHGCOM and Wikimedia Commons.

The widely-heralded 1992 claim that the lost city of “Ubar” of Arabian legend had been discovered in southern Oman is very relevant to any discussion of the incense trade. Known today as Shisr, the ruins are of a small caravanserai or watering post built at an oasis spring on limestone plains about 95 miles/150 km inland of Salalah. However, the best authorities today, including the original archaeologist involved, dispute that Shisr was ever more than this, much less a “lost city,” pointing out that “Ubar” actually referred to a general land area and not a “city.”²³ Accordingly, in the view of Nigel Groom, Shisr provides no new reason to believe that this place provides confirmation of major land trafficking of incense from Dhofar at any time.²⁴

It therefore seems very unlikely that large or regular shipments of incense from Dhofar reached Shabwah by the difficult direct land routes at any time. This lack of water sources inland of Dhofar actually provides historical confirmation of the very reason that travel (albeit in the reverse direction) from Nahom to Bountiful was the most difficult

stage of Lehi’s journey. Taking all of these data into account it is obviously incorrect to propose the Dhofar region as Bountiful on the basis of incense production, as has sometimes been done in the past.

The 1988-1992 Exploration of the Arabian Coast

It became apparent very early during the author’s first visit to Oman in 1987 that the Salalah area failed to match the description of Bountiful preserved in First Nephi. The only previous visit to the southern region of Dhofar by Latter-day Saint researchers had been the one day visit in 1976 by Lynn and Hope Hilton; they had time enough only to establish that many of the features required were present. These elements, however, were not found in any one area as the text implied. More seriously, several of them, such as timber trees, natural vegetation, fruit and a nearby mountain, seemed altogether absent. It was evident that further exploration was needed before conclusions could be drawn.

Accordingly, the following year, 1988, exploration by the author of the coast west of Salalah commenced. Almost immediately, this determined that the Qamar ranges in the west had greater fertility than the Qara ranges inland of Salalah, demolishing the prevailing belief among LDS and non-LDS scholars alike that the Qara hills were the only place where large trees grew in Arabia. This find reinforced the need to continue exploration further west along the Dhofar coast and into Yemen. It was clear that only ground examination would give reliable data, rather than relying on inadequate mapping and writings by observers with motives and interests far removed from the Book of Mormon.



From 1988 to 1992, the author explored, in stages, the entire east coast of southern Oman and of Yemen, using 4WD vehicles and boats, sometimes accompanied by an armed guard.

Over the following four years, the entire east coast of Yemen, to Aden near the southernmost tip of the Arabian Peninsula, was examined in stages, on the ground, by the author. A brief civil war in 1990 resulted in the timely political reunion of the two Yemen republics, facilitating access to areas long closed to any outsiders. However, military restrictions and the lack of road infrastructure in one of the most isolated and undeveloped parts of the world made progress difficult and slow. The remote nature of this region is further illustrated by the fact that up

to six ancient *non*-Arabic tongues, usually termed the Modern South Arabian Languages (MSAL), are still in use by small numbers of people in the northernmost province of Yemen (al Mahra) and the southern Dhofar province in Oman. During this period of exploration, parts of the remote desert interior of the Mahra province were also explored, yielding significant new insights into conditions related to the final stages of the Lehi’s desert journey.

Finally, in April 1992, the last stage of the survey, the Mahra coast ending at Hawf in Yemen on the border with Oman, was completed. For the first (and so far, only) time the entire eastern coast of the Arabian Peninsula had been explored from LDS perspectives, making objective data about coastal conditions available.²⁵ In fact, the first non-LDS attempt to thoroughly examine the Dhofar coast did not come until the “TransArabia Coastal Survey” from 1992-95. But even this survey was restricted, however, to the coastline between Hasik west to Ras Sajir and thus the remainder of the Qamar coast remained unexamined.

At the conclusion of the author’s exploration the fertility of southern Oman was established as unique; and the place noted by Dr Carter, Kharifot, now known as Khor Kharfot, remained the most plausible Bountiful candidate.

Climate and Coastline Change since Lehi’s Day

Dhofar, the southern region of Oman, is climatically unique. The annual monsoon that sweeps across the Indian Ocean affects the Arabian landmass only in this one area. Three mountain ranges comprise a chain that lies between the interior plains and the coast: from east to west, the Samhan, Qara and Qamar mountains. The westernmost, the Qamar mountains, extend into present-day Yemen. This mountain geography ensures that the winds from the southwest release their

contents (up to 15 inches/38 cm) over a four-month summer period, from approximately June to late August. The lower temperatures from months of mists, dense fog and rain storms provide ideal conditions for vegetation growth. From mid-September to May of each year little rain falls.

A natural question that arises is: has the climate in this part of the world changed appreciably over the last 2,600 years since Nephi wrote his account? Could changes mean that areas now barren were once fertile? Could the coast be different now in ways that would mask the location of Bountiful? The short answer to these questions is no. The Arabian gulf region experienced a moist climatic period from around 800 BC to AD 200, bracketed by longer arid periods; thus Lehi's day fell in a period that makes a fertile "bountiful" easier to understand. Since around AD 200, therefore, there has been widespread reduced rainfall, but otherwise there has not been any significant or appreciable change to the Arabian climate during the last two millennia or longer. And, aside from localized areas of gradual geological movement, such as noted earlier in discussing the Valley of Lemuel, the Arabian shoreline has changed little, if at all, since Lehi's era.

Some data has been reported that suggests that the sea level on the other side of the peninsula in the Arabian *Gulf* may have been perhaps two feet lower ca. 600 BC than at present, although the data there remain unclear in many areas.²⁶ Other variables such as erosion rates and tectonic movement also come into play. In the case of the southern coast of Oman, however, the ruins of coastal cities and buildings, firmly dated more than two thousand years ago, assure us that both coastline and sea levels there have changed little since Lehi's day.

Nephi's Paradigm Applied to the Candidates for Bountiful

By applying the minimum requirements—an accessible coastal inlet with a freshwater source—only seven locations resulted from the survey of the Arabian coast. Within these seven sites there are wide variations with respect to how well they fit the scriptural profile given to us by Nephi. But here, if nowhere else, there can be absolute certainty in one thing—one of these seven places *must* be the original Bountiful—there are no other possibilities. Following is an overview of the seven locations, listed geographically from west to east:

Wadi Hajr, Yemen

Wadi Hajr is one of only three perennial streams reaching the ocean on the eastern coast of Arabia, the others being at Khor Rori and Khor Kharfot in Oman. Nearby lie the prominent promontory of Bir Ali and the ancient sea port of Qana to which incense and other goods were shipped the real beginning of the "frankincense trail." At the port of Qana the overland caravans assembled and began their long desert journey toward the next major staging post -Shabwah.

At Wadi Hajr low hills approach the coast to within about 3 miles/5km. Despite year-round shallow streams, the vegetation at the coast consists only of bushes and small trees; pure desert resumes immediately on each side of the vegetation. There are areas of cultivated palm groves and crops near the small village of As Sufal nearby and further inland.



Wadi Hajr sits amidst a distinctive volcanic landscape in southeastern Yemen. This was the ancient port of Qana, now named Bir Ali, where incense arrived by sea to begin the long overland journey across Arabia.

At a little more than 14 degrees north latitude, Wadi Hajr may be too far south to be described as “nearly eastward” of Nahom/Wadi Jauf and, despite its historical importance to the incense trade, it lacks most of the scriptural criteria for “Bountiful.”

Wadi Masilah, Yemen

Wadi Masilah is the largest wadi system reaching the coast on the Arabian Peninsula. A continuation of Wadi Hadhramaut, Masilah cuts its way dramatically through hundreds of miles of desert plateau until it reaches the coast at 15 degrees and 10 minutes north latitude, near the small village of Al Aiss, about 8 miles/14 km west of Sayhut. The valley carries seasonal run-off through much of its course and has small standing streams at places inland, but it becomes less defined as the dry coastal delta is reached. Aside from stands of date palms, natural vegetation is minimal and the nearest mountains are about 5 miles/8 km from the coast.

Viewed on a map, Wadi Masilah appears to offer a natural and distinctive pathway to the coast. In reality, however, travel through much of it is difficult, as the first Europeans to do so learnt in 1936.²⁷ Furthermore, the coastline here offers no more than dozens of other wadis in Yemen do in terms of vegetation (unimpressive) and timber (none). Travel from the interior through the Hadhramaut/Masilah route would thus give a picture exactly *opposite* to Nephi’s account: the highly cultivated and populated Hadhramaut valley giving way to the much less fertile Masilah valley to terminate at a barren and unremarkable coast.



Wadi Masilah, a continuation of the largest wadi on the entire Arabian Peninsula, the Hadhramaut, reaches the coast in eastern Yemen near Sayhut.

Dhalqut, Oman

Dhalqut is the most westerly coastal town in Oman, only 13 miles/21 km from the Yemen border. Along with the other two candidates on the Qamar coast, Dhalqut's latitude of 16 degrees 42 minutes north is almost exactly east of Nahom. It lies on a narrow coastal strip about 2 miles/3 km long, backed by the flat-topped Qamar mountains that average 3,500 feet/1,100 meters in height, making access to the ocean from the interior difficult. However, the high rainfall and long periods of fog cover has resulted in extensive areas of luxuriant vegetation and trees, including some of the largest remaining trees in Dhofar. Areas of dense woodland extend to the hills behind Hawf, a few miles inside Yemen. A small permanent spring lies on the coast nearly halfway between Dhalqut and Kharfot. Today, dairy farming is practiced in several small settlements in the surrounding hills. Despite lacking a natural harbor, Dhalqut may have once functioned as a small port from which local products such as incense, honey, figs and leather were traded by sea.



The coastal town of Dhalqut in Oman near the Yemen border has some heavily vegetated areas. Visible in the satellite image is Dhalqut's new harbor east of the town and recent road construction across Wadi Sayq.

Wadi Sayq, the valley leading to Kharfot, lies just a few miles inland. Despite lacking a solitary mountain and any natural sheltered inlet suitable for ship-building, Dhalqut's fertility commends it as a serious candidate for Bountiful.

Khor Rakhyut, Oman

A roughly triangular bay about 1 mile/1.5 km across, Rakhyut, at 16 degrees and 15 minutes north latitude is the mouth of Wadi Jinin. Today it is a village of several hundred people based mainly on fishing. The bay offers some shelter from heavy seas and was used as a port in times past, probably shipping incense. In common with all the other *khors* (inlets) in Dhofar a sandbar now separates a small lagoon from the open ocean.



The bay of Rakhyut in Oman. When the monsoon weather makes fishing impossible, local people often camp in the surrounding hills.

The bay and its interior have become seriously degraded by development; natural vegetation is limited to small trees and bushes. Some larger trees grow in the surrounding hills but Rakhyut lacks the fertility of the Dhalqut area. A small isolated peak overlooks the west side of the bay. Access from the extremely rugged interior is quite difficult.

The Salalah Inlets, Oman

Until the author's work in Oman began in 1987, commentary on the likely location of Nephi's Bountiful referred to the general area of Dhofar province or to its capital, Salalah, as the only place fertile enough to be considered a candidate. The 1976 visit by the Hiltons to Salalah reported that several of the features reported by Nephi could be found around Salalah. For example, access to the coast along the wide Salalah bay from the interior deserts is relatively easy; numerous wadis and the rolling Qara ranges offering an easy descent to the crescent-shaped plain. The plain is from 5-12 miles/9-18 km wide, stretching some 45 miles/72 km from Mughsayl in the west to Mirbat in the east.

Freshwater streams flow in the foothills following the annual monsoon period. The closest year-round freshwater source to the coast is the spring of Ayn Razat about 3 miles/5 km inland. Aside from areas of small trees and bushes in the inland valleys, the plain itself is otherwise barren and dry except where modern irrigation is practiced. The hinterland supports numbers of people whose economy is mostly based on simple grazing rather than agriculture.



Most of the inlets on the Salalah bay are visible in this satellite image.

Interspersed with beaches and cliff areas, a series of inlets (*khors*: without mangroves and *qurms*: with mangroves), lie along the coast. The inlets are a focal point for wildlife; birds in particular. From west to east they are:

Khor Mughsayl (0.6 km in area) is a picturesque bay marking the westernmost extent of the Salalah plain and the beginning of the Qamar Mountains. The small inlet is the mouth of Wadi Ashawa where small-scale human traces are visible near the small inlet. Excavations of those traces concluded early in 2013 and determined the dating to be totally within the Islamic period, not earlier.²⁸



Qurm as Sagheer and Qurm al Kabir are twin lagoons with a combined area of 0.175 km, bordered by mangrove trees forming an important sanctuary for migrating birds.

Khor Awqad joins two lagoons (0.16 km in area). They mark the western boundary of modern Salalah and the ancient city of Awqad.



Khor Mughsayl lies at the base of the Qamar mountains at the western end of the Salalah bay.



Qurm As Saghir is bordered by mangrove trees.



BYU recently excavated atop this headland overlooking Mughsayl.



This aerial view shows Qurms As Saghir and Al Kabir with the Hilton hotel between them.



Khor Awqad.



Khor Salalah is an important sanctuary for resident and migrating bird species. In this view
va Grey Heron swoops over Cattle Egrets; both are migrating species.

Khor Salalah is a large inlet in central Salalah, now reserved as a bird sanctuary.

Khor al-Balid is one of the largest of the inlets (1 km in area). Along its banks in the late Iron Age (ca. 2000 BC) arose the original capital of Dhofar, the rectangular city of *Zafar*. Almost surrounded by water, its natural harbor, described by Ibn Battuta and Marco Polo, made al-Balid a leading port on the Indian Ocean. The extensive ruins of the city and its port were excavated and restored until 2012.



Khor al-Balid is one of the largest inlets along the coast of the Salalah bay. It includes the
extensive ruins of Zafar, the ancient capital of the Dhofar region for over a millennium.

Khor Ad Dhahariz (0.6 km in area) marks the eastern boundary of modern Salalah.



Khor Ad Dhahariz lies on the coast at the eastern end of Salalah.

Minor inlets **Khor Razat**, **Khor Sha'a**, **Khor Awsatt**, **Khor Za'atri**, **Khor al-Asla** and **Khor Janaif** cluster along the coast east of Khor Dahariz.



One of several small coastal inlets east of Salalah.

Khor Sawli (1 km in area) may have once functioned as a small port; extensive pre-Islamic burials and traces of other structures line its banks.



A field of ancient, still unexcavated, ruins lies adjacent to Khor Sawli.

Khor Ali bin Mohammed is a minor inlet near the Taqa inlets.

Khor Taqa consists of four separate inlets (over 1.07 km in area) and lies close to Khor Rori. The largest lagoon is fed by a large spring and has extensive freshwater vegetation.

Khors Hassan and **Sabkhar** are minor inlets on each side of Khor Rori.

None of these inlets offer all of the features described in Nephi's account, or any indication that they were ever any different. In particular, they lack the abundance of fruit and timber trees that Nephi described. This continues to be true of **Khor Rori** (discussed next) further east and other inlets further east and north. A typical example is **Qurm Kalba**, a large inlet in Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates, almost exactly on the northern border of Oman, where extensive mangrove trees and reeds grow.



Lined with mangrove trees, Qurm Kalba lies in Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates, next to the northern border of Oman (visible in the background).

Clear evidence that the coastline and sea level has not changed appreciably for several millennia comes from the ruins on the present shoreline of some of these inlets, including the former ports at Khor Rori and Khor al-Baleed. Today, all the inlets are closed to the open sea by sand bars, although it remains unclear whether this resulted from a singular weather event in the past or just from the normal processes of time. There are, for example, indications that the city-port at Khor Rori was gradually abandoned in the fifth century AD as the inlet began to silt up. Whether this is when the other inlets also became closed to the ocean presently remains unknown, but seems likely.

Khor Rori, Oman

On the entire Qara coast, the only specific location that has been seriously proposed as a candidate for Bountiful is the ancient incense port of Khor Rori. Overlooking this large inlet (8.2 km in area) are the ruins of the city-port known anciently as *Sumburam* (or *Samhar*) in early texts. It lies at the end of Wadi Dharbat, which descends across the Salalah plains from the Qara hills. During the monsoon, water descends over a prominent geological feature, an impressively straight “waterfall” rock-face, before running across several miles of barren plain to the coast. Nearing the coast, small trees and bushes begin to proliferate around the large sea inlet, now closed from the open ocean by a sand bar bridging two high cliffs.



This satellite image of Khor Rori shows its source, Wadi Dharbat, in the Qara hills inland.

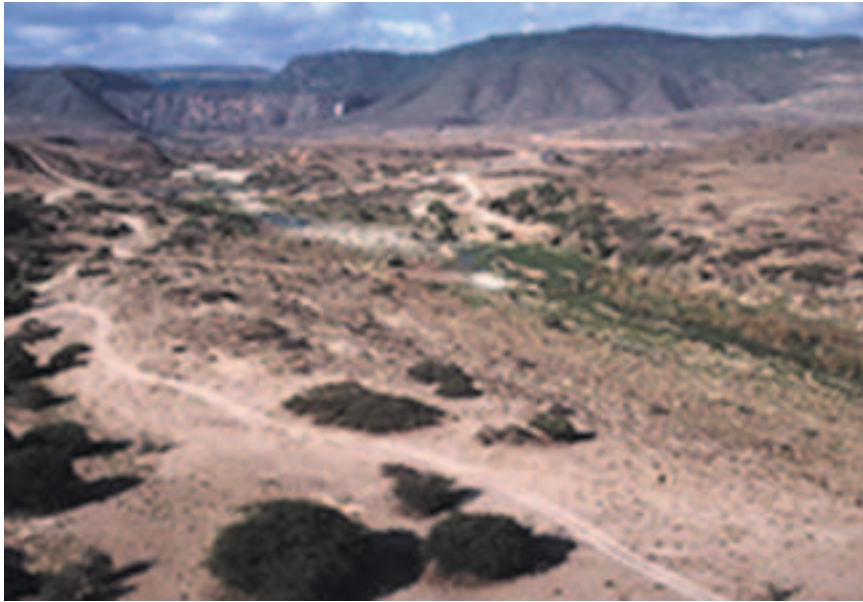
At least from about AD 50 onwards, Khor Rori developed into the major port of the Dhofar area, shipping incense west to Qana. As at 2015 the multi-level ruins of Sumhuram are still being excavated, but are believed to date no earlier than the beginning of the third century BC through the fifth-century AD. Clearly, this dating is too late to have any direct relevance to Nephi’s sixth century *BC* account. And, importantly, there is no evidence that any ocean-going ships were ever *constructed* there or elsewhere in southern Oman.

While Khor Rori is usually equated with the port called *Moscha* in some classical texts, at least one scholar proposed that *Moscha* may lay further west. If that had been the case, it would be another reason why

Khor Rori could not have provided ship-building expertise and sailing information around 600 BC.²⁹ Until the decline of the incense trade Khor Rori was the largest port in Dhofar.³⁰



Monsoonal rain collects in the upper part of Wadi Dharbat before descending across the Salalah plains to Khor Rori. After monsoonal rains, water cascades over the cliff face.



A view looking inland from Khor Rori .



Khor Rori inlet showing the cliffs on both sides of the inlet.



Like all other inlets in Oman, Khor Rori is now closed from the ocean by a sand bar. Aerial image courtesy of the Italian Mission to Oman (IMTO), University of Pisa.



The ruins of the city fortress of Sumhurum looking over Khor Rori. It developed into a major trading port from the 3rd century BC onwards and supported a high population.



A lone Frankincense tree stands among the ruins; a reminder of the port's role in shipping incense.



Unexcavated ruins lining Khor Rori lie below Sumhurum.

In some respects, Khor Rori has much to recommend it as a possible Bountiful. Centuries ago it was a suitable port where ships took on water before transporting incense and other trade items to regional destinations. High cliffs stand at each side of the present sand bar. If climate conditions were more favorable in the past it is possible that timber trees could have grown somewhere inland. Some limited crop growing is probable; however it must be emphasized that even today, the poor soil of the Salalah plains results in little natural vegetation and crops grow only where irrigated. In fact, chapter 29 of the *Periplus*, written within a few hundred years of Nephi's day, describes *Sachalites* - the Salalah bay - generally as a place where locals “perish often from want of food.” Because it had a good harbor and was a source of fresh water, Khor Rori prospered as a *port*, but there are no indications that it ever became a city or settlement of any size.

A straightforward reading of Nephi's account makes it seem highly likely that “Bountiful” had no resident population at the time the

Lehites arrived; if this is so, highly populated Khor Rori is ruled out as a possibility. There is also no elevated place anywhere near the coast; the Qara hills some six miles inland lack any obvious candidates for Nephi's "mount" where he prayed "oft." The nearest distinguishable mountain are the multiple peaks of *Jabal Samhan*, some 25 miles/40 km distant inland, thus requiring a more than 50 mile/80 km round-trip for anyone wishing to pray there. The highest Samhan peaks, about 6,990 feet/2,100 meters high, are not visible from anywhere in this area.



A view from the Samhan mountains overlooking Mirbat, a historic town marking the eastern end of the Salalah bay.

It is interesting to reflect at this point on the situation facing the believer in the divine origin of the Book of Mormon if these six areas were all that Arabia offered. None fulfils all the criteria, and even the best of them falls well short of reflecting the detailed picture Nephi gives us of the place. While most of the requirements for Bountiful can be located scattered over this large region at roughly 17 degrees north latitude, they are not found together in any one place. With the

exploration of the Arabian coast complete, we would have to conclude that either:

The peninsula coast has undergone significant climatic and topographical changes over the past two millennia (for which there is no evidence),

or

Nephi's account is not based on historical reality, but is fictitious.

The skeptic of the Book of Mormon would do well to consider why a consciously fraudulent text would include so many particular and necessary geographical details when its setting, Arabia, was essentially unknown at the time. Logically, a fictional work would keep details to a minimum and descriptions as vague as possible. Instead, we find a text that inadvertently records a wealth of detail, including the names of places, very specific directions and, in the case of Bountiful, extensive descriptive detail. These details have proved to be the means of demonstrating that Nephi's account must have been written by an eye-witness to the events and places recorded.

It was not until the completion of the author's coastal survey in 1992, however, that Latter-day Saints knew that there is another place on the Arabia coast that we can, in the light of scripture and reason, consider as a plausible Bountiful. Hidden from the outside world and remaining largely unknown even within Oman today, unlike the other candidates, this seventh candidate meets all the criteria unusually well. It matches Nephi's description detail for detail. It has also begun to provide us with new insights into the story of Lehi.

Khor Kharfot, Oman



The fertility of Dhofar is evident even from space, in particular the Qara mountains behind the Salalah plains and the Kharfot/Wadi Sayq area. Image courtesy of NASA.



All possible locations for the Old World Bountiful are shown here in relation to Nahom.



The entire length of Wadi Sayq, the primary drainage for the Qamar mountains, stretching eastwards from the interior desert to reach the Dhofar coast is visible in this satellite image.

This remarkable place is the inlet of *Khor Kharfot*. The name *Kharfot* comes from a pre-Arabic *Mahri* term, *Kharifot*, meaning “the monsoon rains have brought abundance to this place.” It is the coastal mouth of *Wadi Sayq* (“River Valley”), a valley some 23 miles/38 km in length stretching eastwards from the interior desert to the Qamar coast of Oman. A much shorter tributary wadi, *Wadi Kharfot*, intersects Wadi Sayq from the north east shortly before the coast is reached. Situated roughly half-way between Dhalqut and Rakhyut, these two valleys provide the major drainage for the Qamar Mountains.³⁰

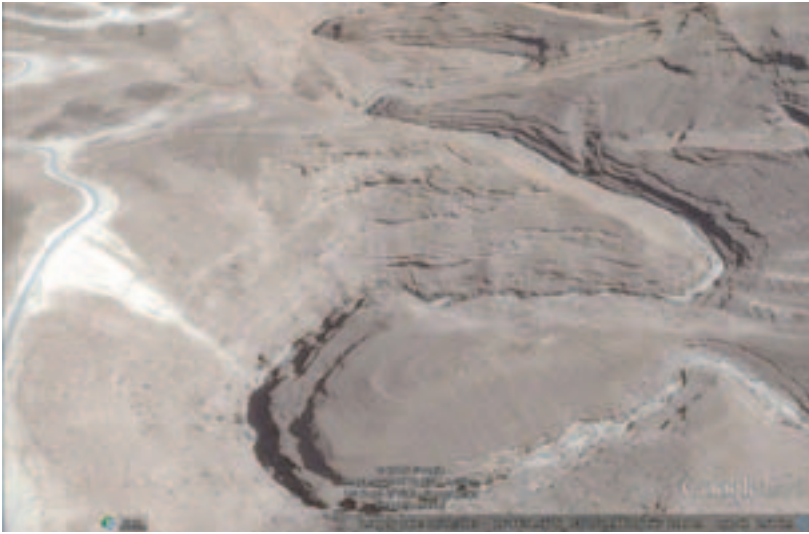
Along with Rakhyut, Kharfot is the only major inlet that lies within the monsoonal zone of Dhofar. This direct rainfall and run-off from the surrounding mountains water results in Khor Kharfot being the *most* naturally fertile coastal location on the Arabian Peninsula, with springs, large trees, fruit and other vegetation.

Even today, our knowledge of the history of the Arabian coast is scant. Politically, for example, over recent centuries Dhofar has suffered periodic occupation and exploitation from the Persian Sassanians, various regimes in Yemen and the Portuguese. Much of the coastal areas of both Yemen and southern Oman have still not been properly examined by scientists of any discipline, and what work has been done is necessarily very tentative. Kharfot lies in the very heart of the most unexplored section of coastline in southern Oman, the Qamar coast at the western extremity of the country. It was not until 1989 that this southernmost region of Oman was properly linked by road to Salalah; previously it could only be reached by sea, or overland by a daunting and circuitous route via the inland settlement of Mudayy. The new road was magnificently engineered to cross Wadi Afawl, a chasm so deep that it almost severs the region from the remainder of the country, and thus real development in the Qamar region became a possibility.

A unique and impressive set of circumstances has kept Khor Kharfot isolated and unpopulated. Enclosed by rugged mountains, land access is very difficult except by traveling through Wadi Sayq from the interior desert, as Lehi would have done. Today this special place remains hidden and unexploited therefore, except for brief visits by local mountain people who bring their livestock down to the coast to graze.



Convex terrain often prevents travel across the Qamar mountains except through the wadis.



Facing eastward, these views of the very beginning of Wadi Sayq show the boundary between the desert plateau and the Qamar mountains.



Within the space of about 2 miles Wadi Sayq changes from pure desert to lush natural vegetation. This sequence of pictures, all taken facing in the direction of travel, eastwards to the coast, makes it clear that terrain and vegetation offer no barriers to a group on camel, or on foot.



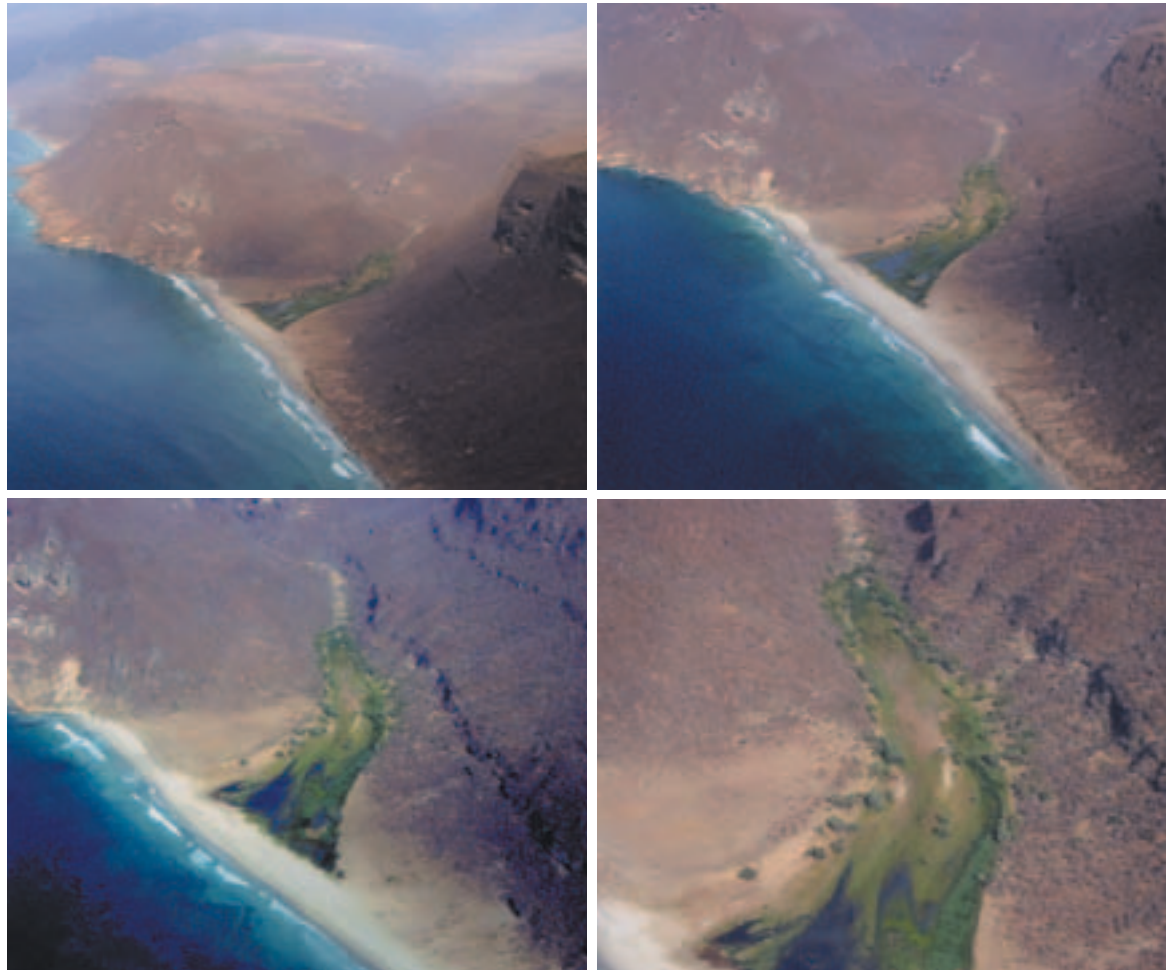
The rocks at the base of Wadi Sayq have been scoured smooth by thousands of annual monsoon floods.

Kharfot itself has escaped attention for another reason. When viewed from the sea, the only other way to access the place, the valley entrance is hidden from view by the oblique angle at which it reaches the coast. The high sand bar across the bay obscures the freshwater lagoon and springs, the trees and most other vegetation from the view of passing vessels. As already noted, early voyages along the Qamar and Mahra coasts typically mention the small port of Rakhyut, but not Khor Kharfot only about five miles away,³² suggesting that not only was no harbor or port then in operation at Kharfot, but also nothing else of particular interest visible to attract attention. In fact, with its most significant features not visible, Khor Kharfot looks rather ordinary when viewed looking inland from the sea. Kharfot's unique characteristics become evident when it is evaluated against Nephi's criteria:

At 16 degrees and 44 minutes north latitude (and 53 degrees 20 min east longitude), Khor Kharfot, lies within one degree of being *eastward from Nahom* which is centered at about 15.6 degrees north latitude. "Nearly eastward" is thus an accurate description of the directional link between the two places. Additionally, the entire roughly 600 miles/970 km route over which a traveler would access Kharfot from Nahom lies in a substantially easterly direction, with no significant detours required by the terrain.

Despite erosion in places, *access from the interior desert* to the coast at Kharfot is feasible even today. As already noted, Wadi Sayq provides a natural, east-bound pathway through

the mountains of the Qamar ranges, easily accessed on foot or on camelback. Scoured by annual run-off floods from the surrounding mountain system that typically reaches 6 feet/2 meters deep, the valley is often less than a hundred feet across. It remains arid until about two miles from the coast. At the junction of Wadi Sayq and Wadi Kharfot are collections of huge rocks carried by annual flash flooding; however these do not prevent movement. Villagers living in the surrounding hills today use narrow trails to bring their livestock down to graze at



These aerial views of Khor Kharfot facing SW show its origin in the Qamar ranges as the end of Wadi Sayq and Wadi Kharfot. The green base of the valley shows the approximate extent of the original sea inlet. Aerial images courtesy of Kim Hatch.

Kharfot. However, Khor Kharfot has remained uninhabited most of the time simply because Wadi Sayq’s beginning lies far out in the desert. For anyone other than a divinely-led prophet, the long miles of travel through the arid valley, with no route out other than by sea, would make little sense. At the present time, the actual beginning of Wadi Sayq lies in a restricted military area almost on the present border with Yemen.



Khor Kharfot can also be accessed via the shorter Wadi Kharfot which intersects Wadi Sayq about a mile before the coast.



This view facing north-east shows Wadi Sayq’s arrival at the coast.

Wadi Sayq has a remarkable concentration of lush vegetation and trees in its coastal delta. Fed by three major springs, the freshwater lagoon stretches to the edge of the beach. Khor Kharfot, and much of the coastline for about 10 miles/16 km further west to Hauf in Yemen, is uniquely fertile. While Kharfot itself best matches Nephi’s description of the “place” Bountiful where they lived and built their ship, *the general area also has remarkably luxuriant vegetation* as Nephi implies in his description. The vegetation includes timber trees at Dhalqut. Otherwise, many hundreds of miles of unrelenting barrenness stretch along the coast in each direction from this one green coastal location in all Arabia.³³



Khor Kharfot is a uniquely-fertile pristine coastal location. Flamingo image courtesy of Sherry Chew.



Although now closed from the ocean by a beach, the lagoon marking the original inlet lies below sea-level, evident in this view facing almost west.

Kharfot was a *sea inlet* until a sand bar formed across the bay and created the present beach. As the coast of Oman is gradually submerging,

allowing the sea to flood the mouths of wadis, long-shore currents soon deposit sand across the mouth of the wadis. The sand bar must certainly have been in place prior to the nineteenth century visits noted earlier; their detailed descriptions of the coast ensure that Kharfot would certainly have rated a mention if it was still then an inlet.³⁴ As a sea inlet, Kharfot would offer the ideal situation for construction of a ship, one sheltered from monsoon storms but still providing ready access to the open sea. Today, the contours of the sea inlet are easily determined; the bay remains from 20-40 feet/6-12 meters below sea level.



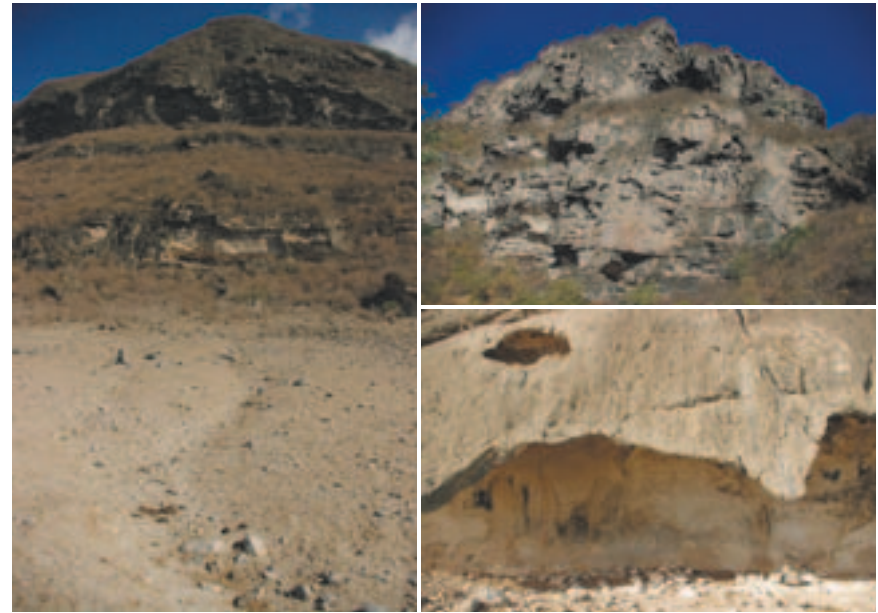


Kharfot is depicted as it may have appeared in Lehi and Sariah's day, a sea inlet with less-eroded cliffs on the western plateau. Original oil painting by Barbara Packham.

Khor Kharfot and its immediate surrounds have a unique biodiversity constituting the most naturally-fertile location anywhere in Arabia. At any time of the year, the vegetation in and near Kharfot is impressive, but - like the remainder of the Dhofar province - it is especially luxurious late in the year, after the monsoon rains. Nephi's enthusiastic description of Bountiful makes it seem highly likely that the Lehites arrived there in the months of September or October, before the dry winter season begins.



The moist summer period in the Dhofar region in southern Oman results from the edge of the monsoon reaching the land. The “Coriolis Force” from the rotation of the earth opposes the direction of the NE monsoon and forces the ocean surface to move eastwards. The up-swelling of colder ocean water results in low clouds, fog and mist that release their moisture along a narrow band of coastline when they encounter the mountains, as in these views of monsoonal mists at Kharfot and near Mughsayl. The landscape also bears the imprint of heavy rain as numerous drip-curtains and eroded gullies. Map courtesy of Shahina Ghazanfar.



Water erosion in the limestone cliffs and gullies show the effects of substantial water activity at Kharfot over a long period.



Bees swarm a date palm and flowers next to the beach at Kharfot. Bumblebee close-up courtesy of Judith Grimes.



A rarely-seen bee honeycomb in a fig tree at Kharfot.

Only at this place could a traveler arrive in ancient times and find uncultivated *fruit* already near the ocean as Nephi indicates, the prime factor giving rise to the descriptive name “Bountiful.” The fruit referred to was noteworthy for its abundance, not necessarily its *variety*. Three species of wild fig, a familiar staple in Lehi’s world, are prolific in this area today and, along with dates, tamarind and passion-fruit, probably constituted most of the “fruit” that Nephi referred to. The mention of honey may refer not only to the obvious wild bee *honey*,³⁵ which is readily found at Kharfot, but also to the heavy syrup extracted from fruits such as figs, dates and grapes.

Other edible food sources include reed bulbs, palm hearts, nuts, berries, seeds, herbs and roots, many of which are used by people in Dhofar today. Reeds in particular had high value in ancient societies as a source of food, fuel, thatch and medicine. A handful of the almost-extinct Arabian Leopard (*Panthera pardus nimr*), together with wolves,

porcupines, rock hyrax and striped hyenas still live here and there is a variety of other small game and over 100 bird species, some of them potential food sources.

Additionally, there remains the strong possibility of an additional and very significant resource for the Lehite group -the coconut palm (*Cocos nucifera*). If the coconut, either wild or cultivated, existed at Kharfot in that period the group would have had a resource whose usefulness can hardly be overstated. As one recent study notes, the coconut’s impact on “the history of human dispersal in the humid tropics is unparalleled in the plant kingdom.”³⁶ Its scores of uses include food, water, oil, medicine, rope, cloth, building materials, utensils and charcoal.

While little is yet certain about the earliest arrival of the coconut in southern Oman, three logical possibilities exist. Firstly, before human settlement, a thick-husked, slow-germinating type may have arrived naturally as floating nuts were carried by Indian Ocean currents, becoming established on the monsoon-watered Dhofar coast, a near-perfect environment for a species that thrives in high humidity, heat and salinity. In the second process, if no coconuts were already present, human settlers bringing seed nuts or seedlings may have been the agent for its introduction. The third possibility would be that wild palms were already found when human settlers brought a thinner-husked, quicker-germinating type with them. Both types can cross-pollinate and be improved by settlers on the coast.



While the coconut is not present at Khor Kharfot in modern times, palms are cultivated a few miles away at the settlement of Khor Rakhyut.

Of course, these three possibilities are not mutually exclusive. In Dhofar today, most coconut plantations are of recent imported varieties, however, the coconut's presence is attested from earlier periods. The fourteenth-century traveler Ibn Battuta's account mentions, for example, seeing coconut groves in Dhofar,³⁷ but there are much earlier historical sources from the surrounding region. The earliest seems to be an ancient text on Indian medicine, the *Susrutas Ayur-Veda* dated to around 1400-1000 BC, which names the coconut as a medicinal plant. This links with the report from a Greek physician named *Ctesias* about 415 BC that he had seen coconuts while traveling in India. Other reports make

it clear that the coconut was well-known and being utilized in the region long before Lehi and his group arrived.³⁸

Although largely overlooked in historical studies, a potentially significant aspect of the coconut's presence lies in its hard, close-grained, outer timber. As with its highly-valued fiber, the palm timber is seawater-resistant and is ideal for boat building. In widely separated places such as the Maldives, Sri Lanka, Hawaii and the east African coast, coconut timber was long used to build ships as large as the large lateen-rigged *dhow*s that traded across open oceans. The wood was used not only for masts, yards, oars and anchors, but the hulls themselves. Some accounts describe the importation of coconut timber from Indian Ocean islands and from Yemen for ship construction; other early records have Arabs journeying to Sri Lanka to harvest the timber and build vessels.³⁹

Genetic studies suggest that the earliest coconut species in Dhofar "shares ancestors with those in East Africa and in the islands of the South-Western Indian Ocean" and likely first arrived by ocean dispersal.⁴⁰ This makes it seem certain that ca. two and a half millennia ago at least *wild* coconut palms were probably present there, something that only dateable coconut shells or *phytolith* (plant micro-fossils) analysis could now confirm. The fact that Kharfot has seen periodic human settlement since at least the Neolithic era also increases the possibility that coconut palms may have been cultivated there, and thus improved, by the time of Lehi and Sariah's arrival. In either case, the Lehites may have had not only all that this remarkable plant offers, but also an additional source of hardwood timber for shipbuilding.

All these land resources are further augmented by what the *ocean* offers anyone camped on its shores. In addition to nesting turtles, shoals of sardine and other small fish can easily be caught by nets from off the beach and could also have been herded into nets in the shallow inlet waters, providing a ready food source not only for the group but for their

animals, just as local people do today. A small canoe or boat would have allowed larger fish to be caught only a short distance offshore outside of the monsoon period. While the abundant lobsters would likely not have been eaten by the Lehites, shell-fish and crabs would provide bait meat and shells for implements. In fact, the plentiful sea life all along the coast likely holds the key to understanding how Lehi's group with its limited manpower could derive enough protein from their environment without diverting substantial time and energy to hunting. Fish not proscribed by Mosaic Law likely formed a large part of the Lehiite's diet once they lived at Bountiful.



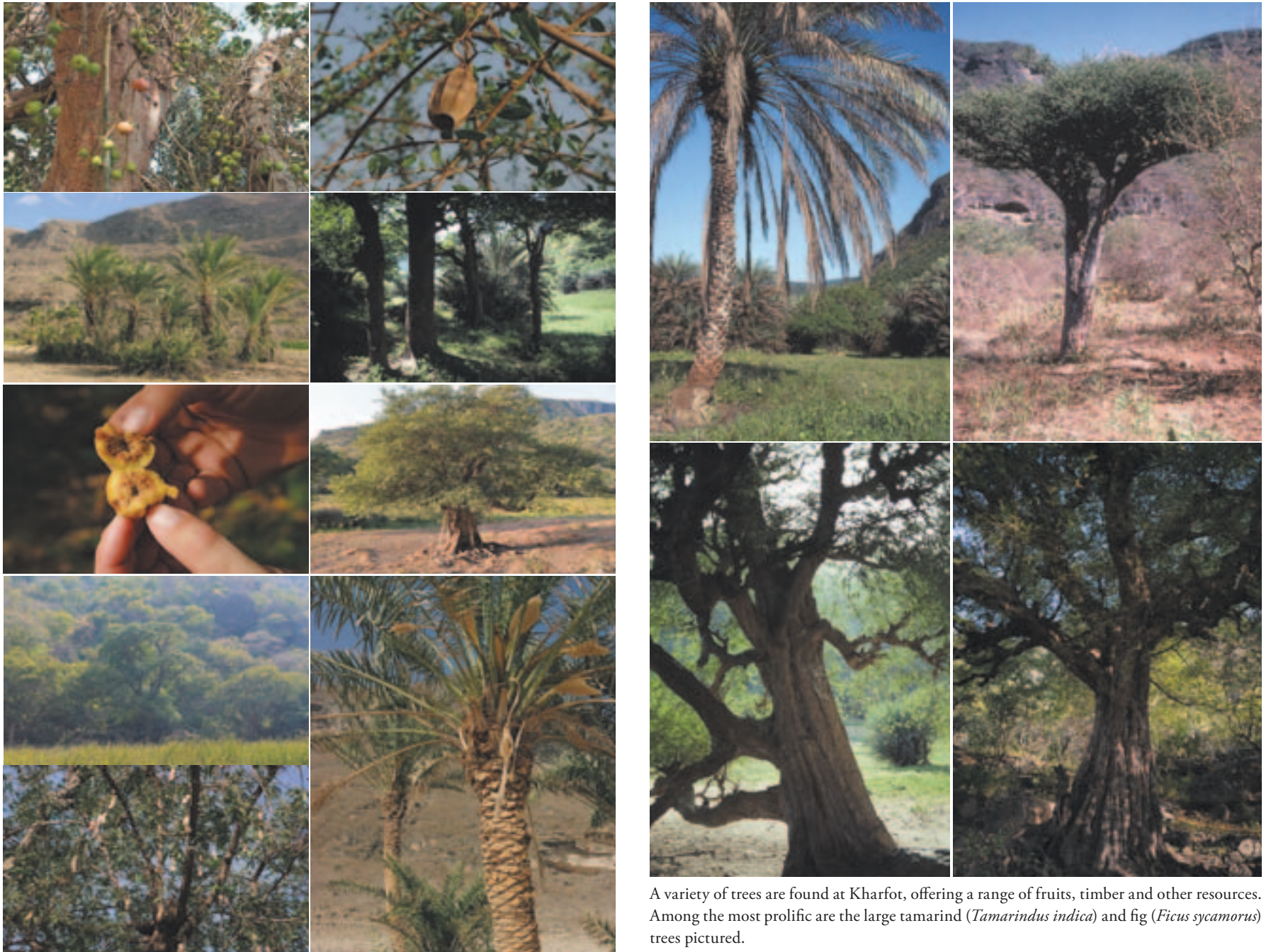


Glimpses of the floral and faunal abundance found at Kharfot today. Flower image courtesy of Alana Aston Orth; butterfly, chameleon, caterpillar images courtesy of Paul Hume; offshore fishing image courtesy of Leah Aston Puikkonen; gecko image courtesy of Brandon Richards; Blue-cheeked Bee-eater (*Merops persicus*) bird image courtesy of Scot Facer Proctor.

Only limited botanical surveys have so far been made at Khor Kharfot itself, but some 850 species of plants are believed to grow in the region. Eventually it is hoped that *phytoliths* will eventually reveal the various species present around 600 BC. But even what we do know paints an impressive picture of abundance.

Kharfot is the last remaining pocket of the subtropical deciduous woodland that existed anciently in parts of Oman. Small pockets of this forest also survive in three locations in Yemen (at nearby Hawf, at Jebal Bura'a east of Hodeidah and on the island of Socotra), but Kharfot is the only remnant in Oman. In addition to the possibility of coconut timber (*Cocos nucifera*) discussed earlier, major **timber** species still growing at Kharfot offer both hard and soft woods; they include the tamarind (*Tamarindus indica*), three fig species including *Ficus sycamorus* - the biblical sycamore tree and various acacia (*Acacia*) species). The heartwood of the tamarind, for example, is highly valued for planking, axles and wheels.

The largest surviving tree in the area today, a relic baobab (*Adansonia digitata*), a few miles away near Dhalqut, measuring over 45 feet/14 meters in circumference, is useful but most of its timber is unsuitable for shipbuilding. However, other tree species at Kharfot ranging up to about 22 feet/7 meters in girth grow almost to the very shores of the inlet. They could thus have been cut and dressed on the spot, allowing Nephi and his brothers to use their time and energy to the maximum in construction. No need whatsoever exists to consider importing timber from outside the area, as was necessary in northern Oman.



A variety of trees are found at Kharfot, offering a range of fruits, timber and other resources. Among the most prolific are the large tamarind (*Tamarindus indica*) and fig (*Ficus sycamorus*) trees pictured.



This large baobab tree measuring over 45 feet/14 meters in circumference grows a few miles west of Kharfot. It is one of only 27 baobabs remaining in Dhofar, a relic of the extensive forests of earlier times.

Kharfot is the largest natural *fresh water* source on the Arabian Peninsula, surpassing all of the other wadis in terms of the volume of water reaching the coast. Drip-curtains on the limestone cliffs overlooking the bay and gullies are clear indications that substantial water has drained down into the valley in the past. Today, water remains abundant all year-round from three large natural springs in the last mile of Wadi Sayq. Its collection would have required little or no effort for anyone encamped there for an extended period. Wadi Sayq serves as the outlet for a large area of the Qamar Mountains and major flooding down the wadi occurs during the monsoonal months. Aside from grass, trees and bushes, there are dense stands of reeds (*Phragmites australis*), rush (*Juncus*) and cattail/bulrush (*Typha*), growing according to the salinity of the groundwater. All are useful species, known in various cultures as sources of food; thatch for roofs, mats and baskets; material for spears, bows, arrows, fencing and tinder.



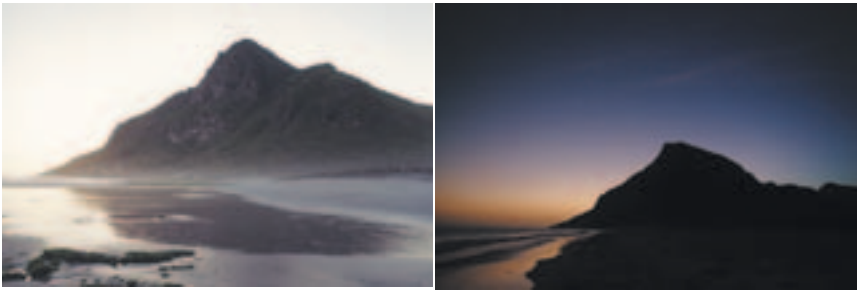
Three springs at Kharfot supply abundant fresh water year-round.



Reed and cattail (bulrush) species are prolific at Kharfot.

On the west side of the bay stands *a prominent mount*, the obvious candidate for the “mount” that Nephi retired to pray “oft.” Towering over the small plateau that is the most likely place for an encampment, this peak would offer seclusion without using valuable time to reach it. The rocky peak contains several natural cavities and platforms that would offer readily-accessed privacy for anyone wanting a place to pray and receive revelation.

At the edge of the small plateau lie *cliffs* averaging 50-60 feet/15 18 meters high with sharp rocks at their base, providing an eminently suitable place to dispose of a troublesome younger brother. Erosion of the cliff face is clearly evident, indicating that the plateau would have extended out further several thousand years ago.



The prominent mount on the west side of the bay.



Seen here in the dry season, the mount's irregular terrain offers a variety of cavities and platforms to anyone seeking solitude. The second view looks down from the summit over one such area.



The level areas of the western plateau beneath the mount would suit a sheltered encampment. Ruins of ancient structures are found there in abundance and cliff erosion leaves a formidable drop to the rocks below. Panorama from cave courtesy of Colin Ligertwood.

Nephi, who may have been a smelter of metals like his father,⁴¹ was familiar with gold, silver and copper for he mentions their presence in the New World (18:25), yet he says only that "ore" was smelted at Bountiful. Long before Nephi's day the smelting and use of bronze (copper hardened with the addition of another substance, usually tin) from about 2500 BC onwards and iron, from about 1300 BC onwards, is attested in Oman. In particular, significant quantities of copper were

LEHI AND SARIAH IN ARABIA

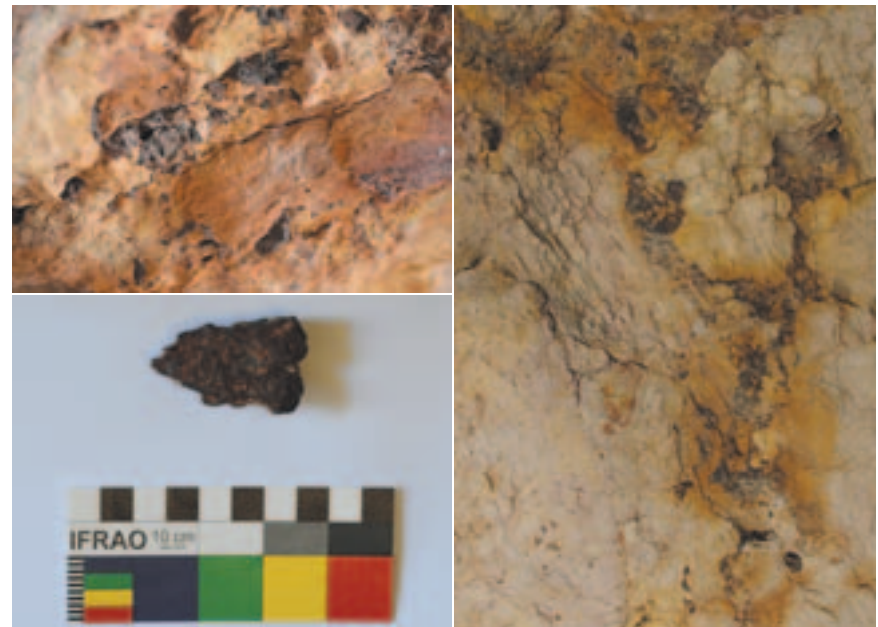
mined and smelted in *northern* Oman. The process that Nephi describes closely mirrors the ancient copper smelting technique. Excavated sites show that small pear-shaped furnaces about 2 feet/0.6 meter high were built. Skin bellows fanned the wood fire to around 1,500 degrees C, allowing small pieces of sulphidic ore, mixed with charcoal, to be repeatedly refined until a fairly pure copper resulted. The copper was then poured into a hole in the ground to cool.

While Nephi's text describes a very similar smelting process, "Bountiful" can only lie hundreds of miles south in the fertile Dhofar region of *southern* Oman. Geologically, the south of Oman is very different from the north and the presence of metals, including copper, has remained almost unknown. However, LDS exploration over the last decade has identified previously unknown iron deposits at several sites, including locations east of Rakhyut and at Mirbat.⁴² While a complete mineralogical survey of Dhofar has yet to be made, beginning in 2009 a variety of iron ore traces were also found in the bay of Kharfot. Any of these locations would have yielded smelt-able iron in the quantities needed to make tools.

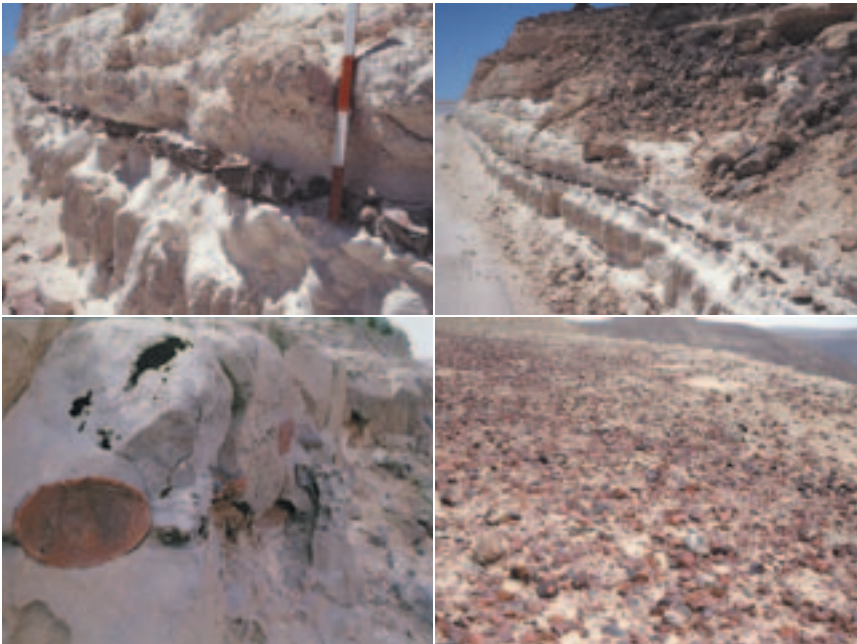
A few miles inland of Kharfot, above the folds of Wadi Sayq, are significant *flint deposits*. Here huge quantities of reddish chert (the color probably indicating the presence of iron) lie exposed in limestone seams and nodules. They would have been readily available for use in making fire. Geologists are still beginning to understand the structure of the Qamar ranges in which Kharfot lies; one geological outline of the Kharfot and Wadi Sayq area suggests the potential not only for metals, but hydrocarbon deposits.⁴³



This reconstruction of Early Bronze Age copper smelting closely parallels Nephi's account.



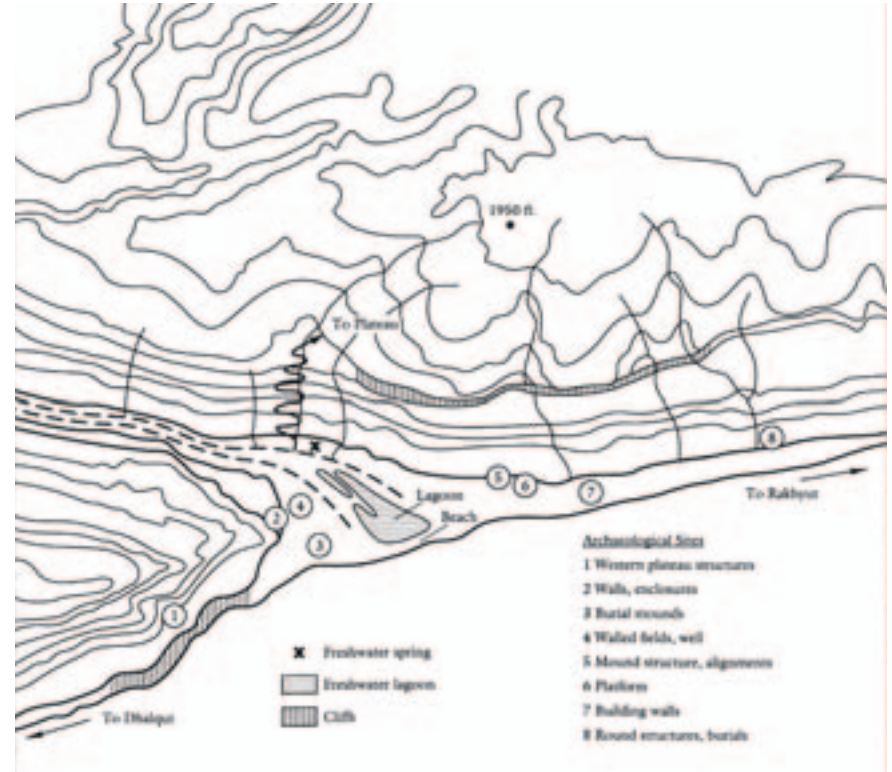
Examples of iron ore recently identified at Kharfot.
Reconstruction image courtesy of Deutsches Bergbau-Museum.



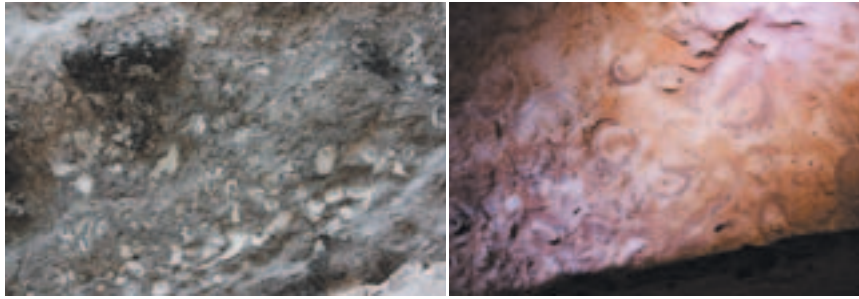
Extensive flint deposits are found inland of Kharfot.

As noted it is evident, for several reasons, that Kharfot has been *unpopulated* for most of its history. These brief periods of occupation increase the likelihood to near certainty that it was uninhabited when the Lehiters lived here, thus explaining why Nephi needed a revelation to locate ore and the work involved in producing basic items like tools. Traces of past occupation are easily observed at Kharfot and seem to be confined to the area immediately adjacent to the coast. The largest and most prominent structure, standing some 20 feet/6 meters high, sits on an elevated vantage point above the beach on the east side of the bay. A rectangular platform is clearly visible at its base and radiating out from it (or to it) are rock-lined channels, some stretching hundreds of feet, where water may have been directed. It has been variously suggested as being the remains of a watchtower, a "fort" or the base of a pulley system to bring goods down to the shore - all unlikely - or as some kind of ceremonial place. Its purpose remains unclear.

Kharfot may have operated at some time in the past as a collection point for incense brought from the interior, perhaps functioning as a small port from where the product was shipped further west along the coast. The structure may be somehow related to this activity. Elsewhere, the outlines of small buildings and animal enclosures are found; along the highest point of the beach are graves and the remains of a small mosque oriented toward Mecca. These structures thus date to a period of occupation since the arrival of Islam. On the small western plateau, however, are the remains of much older buildings, possibly dating to the Iron-Age, reminding us that most of the history of this place remains to be revealed.⁴⁴



A basic map of the human traces at Kharfot, courtesy Paolo Costa.



Hints of fertility in Kharfot's distant past show in these fossil deposits. The left image shows a variety of shell fossils (image courtesy of Paul Hume); the right image shows ancient marine organisms, possibly tubular *Rudist* bivalves or *crinoids*, inside two small caves (image courtesy of Varian Aston).



Traces of human occupation at Kharfot are varied, abundant and still only partially understood.

Only one example of “rock art” exists at Kharfot, a collection of pictograms depicting animals, a ship and a double inscription - one in

Arabic and one in an older, unidentified, script - on a sheltered rock wall that overlooks the eastern side of the bay. The age of the graffiti and possible relationship to the other human traces remains unknown. Various specialists have noted some similarities of the older script with *Musnad* (the monumental South Arabian script) and various ancient North Arabian scripts, but believe it may have developed locally in Dhofar at an early period.⁴⁵



The rock-art and graffiti at Kharfot includes a ship with a sail and a double inscription; the lower script and its dating remains uncertain.

At this time there are no data to indicate that *winds and currents* currently vary appreciably at various parts of the Dhofar/Mahra coast where the only Bountiful candidates can be found. The major climatic event each year is the monsoon in the June to August summer months. A combination of the SW winds and the earth’s rotation, the *Coriolis Effect*, generates a movement of the ocean surface in a SE direction, generating winds that have carried mariners east across the Indian

Ocean for thousands of years. They made it possible for Oman to develop as a major center for maritime trade that extended as far east as China and south to the African coast and to Egypt. In fact, the word monsoon derives from the Arabic *mawsim*, meaning “the date for sailing from one port in order to reach another.” In Dhofar, however, the monsoons bring storms, rain, fog and heavy seas, making launching a boat dangerous. A more significant concern is that the construction site of the ship must offer ready *access to the open ocean*, which Kharfot does.

A Totally Plausible “Bountiful” Candidate Emerges

When considered together, all these factors reveal a location that is totally appropriate for the events that Nephi describes, conforming to *every* detail found in the scriptural account. There are no inconsistencies, nor has there been any need to exaggerate the virtues of the place. Of the candidate sites, Khor Kharfot most closely fits the Book of Mormon Bountiful and does so in impressive detail. Unique circumstances seem to have set this place aside for the special purpose of allowing Lehi, Sariah and their family a place to rest, build their ship and prepare for their monumental sea voyage without competing with others for resources and without outside distractions. While firm dating of the structures remains to be done, the possibility exists that Lehi and Sariah’s group may have even arrived to find various structures such as dwelling places, animal enclosures and fields abandoned from earlier occupants, thus allowing their full energies to focus on the ship construction. As impressive as these findings and possibilities are, however, all that can be concluded in the scientific sense is that a *totally* plausible location can now be demonstrated for Nephi’s Bountiful, effectively removing the burden of “proof” from the Book of Mormon and placing it upon the reader.

While much more fieldwork remains to be done, the LDS scholarly community has generally accepted the implications of the survey of the Arabian coast completed in 1992 and the work done since in southern Oman in connection with Nephi's Bountiful. In late 1993, for example, FARMS reported the first expedition to Kharfot in some detail, concluding:

*Khor Kharfot and its environs have all the features mentioned in the Book of Mormon in connection with Old World Bountiful. It has no features that would conflict with the Book of Mormon account. A survey of alternative sites in the Arabian Peninsula has turned up no others that come close to fitting the criteria for Bountiful so well. On this analysis, Khor Kharfot emerges as the most probable site for Lehi's Bountiful.*⁴⁶

Noel B. Reynolds, past president of FARMS and until 2005 its Executive Director, offers this assessment of Kharfot based on his participation on the April 1993 expedition:

*There now exists convincing evidence that an obscure location at the extreme western end of Oman's Dhofar coast, Khor Kharfot, is the probable location of Nephi's Bountiful.*⁴⁷

A photograph of Khor Kharfot illustrated the authoritative and quasi-official 1991 *Encyclopedia of Mormonism's* entry on "The First Book of Nephi,"⁴⁸ the section dealing with Lehi's trail in the 1992 FARMS book *ReExploring the Book of Mormon*⁴⁹ and is often used in official Church Education System student materials.⁵⁰ A January 2000 *ENSIGN* article by Daniel Peterson, "Mounting Evidence for the Book of Mormon" offered the most current and comprehensive summary of recent Book of Mormon research to the general membership of the Church. In it, he mentioned that in recent decades "Latter-day Saint scholars and explorers have refined our understanding of that route

through actual visits and systematic surveys of the area, enabling us to identify likely Book of Mormon locations in Arabia," footnoting the author's book and papers on Bountiful and Nahom and other materials that have resulted from that research.⁵¹ In 2000 the story of the discovery of Kharfot featured in a popular LDS novel, *Into the Light*.⁵²

Wadi Sayq/Kharfot was referenced in regard to the Old World Bountiful in the 2005 publication of the "Reader's Edition" of the Book of Mormon⁵³ and a photograph of Kharfot was used to depict a possible Bountiful site in the anthology *Glimpses of Lehi's Jerusalem*, published by FARMS in 2004.⁵⁴ The January 2008 issues of the Church magazines *New Era* and *Liahona* contained photography of Kharfot to represent how Nephi's Bountiful may have appeared.⁵⁵

Kharfot's unique features have not gone unrecognized by the scholars and government of Oman either. Beginning in 1987, Kharfot was designated a "Site of Special Value" by the government's Planning Committee for Development and Environment in the Southern Region. In 1990, noting that Khor Kharfot was "unusual in that it is the only major Khawr that lies within the monsoon zone of Dhofar (other than Khawr Rakhyut, which is environmentally degraded)," it and Wadi Sayq were named as a "Nature Reserve" within the larger Jabal al-Qamar Scenic Reserve. This action gave it formal protected status.⁵⁶ In the years since then, Khor Kharfot has regularly garnered attention in the Omani media as a site with unique characteristics and one that is environmentally sensitive.⁵⁷ On November 4th, 1991, Kharfot was the site in the Qamar area chosen by Omani officials for a visit by HRH The Duke of Edinburgh, Prince Philip, in his role of International President of the Worldwide Fund for Nature.



In his role as International President of the Worldwide Fund for Nature, HRH Prince Philip visited Kharfot on Nov 4, 1991.

Comparing Khor Rori and Khor Kharfot

In his archaeological evaluation of Kharfot, Dr. Paolo Costa noted that its features are “indeed comparable to Khor Rori, although on a much smaller scale.” Re-stated, Khor Kharfot is an inlet offering a sheltered harbor with significant natural timber resources on hand and all the food commodities needed to supply a sailing ship. It differs from Khor Rori in its smaller size and in the fact that Khor Rori’s few fertile areas seem to have always existed only well inland. As noted earlier, from a scriptural perspective, Khor Rori also lacks the “mount” that Nephi refers to.

To propose that Khor Rori was where Nephi built his ship and that this area was the place “Bountiful” we must propose major changes in the vegetation of the area from the present day. No evidence for

such changes has yet been identified. Fruit and timber trees must have been present where none are today in a similar climate. Nephi would have required a fifty plus mile round trip journey to reach a mountain where he could pray often. Finally, the last years of the Lehite’s land journey would thus have been spent in the midst of a pagan community who were probably primarily a small livestock farming and fishing community with commercial harvesting and shipping of incense still developing. The entire Lehite land route would thus be reduced to little more than following a trading route in reverse.

Against this improbable scenario the conditions found some fifty miles further west at the indisputably more fertile Khor Kharfot in the Qamar ranges contrast strongly. Here, *all* the elements of Nephi’s description come to light and remain visible to this day. The unique location and features of Wadi Sayq and Kharfot would require divine guidance to locate and could thus truly be described as a place “prepared of the Lord.” It is revealing that the only attempt to link Bountiful to a specific location other than Kharfot came in 2003, not only ignoring significant features from Nephi’s account, but misrepresenting a significant number of facts about Khor Kharfot in order to make its case.⁵⁸ By so doing, the authors inadvertently underscored the fact that Kharfot (a place they had never actually visited themselves until early 2010), remains the most credible candidate for Bountiful.

Of course, as the only two candidates that have been seriously proposed as the Old World Bountiful, they share some commonalities. Both are close enough to being “nearly eastward” from Nahom; both are sheltered inlets accessible from the desert interior. Additionally, both sites have freshwater sources, flint sources, cliffs and offer ready access to the Indian Ocean. Both also have adjacent caves, a valuable resource that ancient peoples in a hot climate would have utilized. The *differences* between the two places, however, are striking. These are summarized below:

<u>Scriptural feature</u>	<u>Khor Rori</u>	<u>Khor Kharfot</u>
Surrounding area also fertile	No	Yes
Much fruit and wild honey	No	Yes
Shipbuilding timber on hand	No	Yes
A nearby “mount”	No	Yes
Metal ore	Nearby	Yes
Unpopulated location	No	Yes

When measured against Nephi’s detailed word-picture of Bountiful, Khor Kharfot overwhelmingly emerges as the better of the two candidates. The fact that such an improbable place exists at all is remarkable enough; that it meets Nephi’s description in every regard, and particularly that it lies almost directly “eastward” of Nahom, marks its discovery as a major development in the unfolding of evidence concerning Nephi’s record.

NOTES

1. *The welcome contrast of abundant greenery after periods of desert travel has been noted in this area by others since Nephi. Compare the elation and relief expressed by Bertram Thomas arriving at the Dhofar coast after only a few weeks in the desert, in Arabia Felix: Across the Empty Quarter of Arabia (New York: Charles Scribner & Sons, 1932), 48-49. Thomas and his party arrived near modern Salalah, a place significantly less verdant and impressive than Khor Kharfot. He did not venture further west of Salalah than Raysut (see p. 101 and main map).*

For evidence that vegetation in the region was sometimes more luxurious anciently, see Margareta Tengberg, “Vegetation History and Wood Exploitation in the Oman Peninsula from the Bronze Age to the Classical Period” in “Charcoal Analysis, Methodological Approaches, Palaeo-ecological Results, and Wood Use,” in S. Thiebault, ed. British Archaeological Reports (BAR) International Series no. 1863 (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2002), 141-145.

2. *Paul Y. Hoskisson, with Brian M. Hauglid and John Gee, “Irreantum” in JBMS 11:1 (2002), 90-93. The Book of Mormon Onomasticon listing for “Irreantum” summarizes possible derivations and sources at <https://onoma.lib.byu.edu/onomal/index.php/IRREANTUM>*
See also “Bountiful” <https://onoma.lib.byu.edu/onomal/index.php/BOUNTIFUL> noting a possible Old Testament analog for the conjunction of the words Bountiful and Irreantum in 1 Nephi 17:5.
3. *The statement by the Rev. Elisha Andrews (1787-1840) appeared under the pseudonym of “Gimel” in a piece titled “Book of Mormon” in The Christian Watchman (Boston, 7 October 1831), 268-274 (emphasis added). It can be accessed at <http://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/BOMP/id/406>.*
4. *See the entry “Arabia” in Encyclopaedia Britannica, 14th ed. (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc, 1959); also see the Encyclopaedia of Islam, 2nd ed. vol.1 (1960), 538 to see how Arabia was viewed. The attack on the possibility of an Arabian “Bountiful” comes in Thomas Key, A Biologist Looks at the Book of Mormon (Issaquah, WA: Saints Alive in Jesus, 1985), 1-2. This quote originates in a longer article cataloging a long list of supposed scientific problems in the Book of Mormon; see “A Biologist Examines the Book of Mormon,” in Journal of American Scientific Affiliation 37 (Wheaton, IL: The Affiliation, June 1985), 96-99. For another example of arguments against the Book of Mormon, see Tal Davis, A Closer Look at The Book of Mormon (Atlanta: Home Mission Board, Southern Baptist Convention, 1993).*

More recent works of this genre typically now ignore the claimed Old World setting to focus almost exclusively on the New.

5. *See, for example, the maps published in S. Kent Brown & Peter Johnson, eds. Journey of Faith: From Jerusalem to the Promised Land (Provo: NAMIRS, 2006), inside front cover; S. Kent Brown, “Jerusalem Connections to Arabia in 600 BC” in Glimpses of Lehi’s Jerusalem, 627; S. Kent Brown, “Voices from the Dust” (American Fork, UT: Covenant, 2004), 29 and his “New Light from Arabia on Lehi’s Trail” in Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon, 58; in Potter and Wellington, Lehi in the Wilderness, 114 and in Hilton and Hilton, Discovering Lehi, 133.*
6. *Eugene England, “Through the Arabian Desert to a Bountiful Land: Could Joseph Smith Have Known the Way?” in Noel B. Reynolds, ed. Book of Mormon Authorship (Provo: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1982). Writing before the discovery of Kharfot, England made his point using the scattered features of the Salalah area; a much stronger case could be made with what has been learned since then about both the coast of Oman and Nahom.*
7. *See the original account by a Greek merchant, The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea, Travel and Trade in the Indian Ocean by a Merchant of the First Century, trans. W. Schoff (New Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint Company, 1974). The Periplus can be accessed online, annotated, at <http://lorias.berkeley.edu/spic/textobjects/periplus.pdf> The holdings of various libraries ca. 1830 potentially available to Joseph Smith and his contemporaries is discussed in S. Kent Brown, “New Light from Arabia on Lehi’s Trail” in Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon, 69-76.*
8. *Pliny, Natural History, 37-63. Pliny the Elder (AD 23-79) commanded a Roman fleet at the time of his death during the eruption of Vesuvius. Of his writings, only Natural History, completed in AD 77, survives. See note 6 (Eugene England) regarding its availability in Joseph Smith’s area and the lack of correspondences to Nephi’s account.*
9. *John Larner’s Marco Polo and the Discovery of the World (London: Yale University Press, 1999) offers a comprehensive perspective on the influence of Polo’s book on European thought and overseas expansion.*

The full text of Ibn Battuta, Al Rihla (“The Journey”) was published in English translation by H.A.R. Gibb, trans. ed. The Travels of Ibn Battuta, A. D. 1325-1354, 4 vols. (London: Hakluyt Society, 1958-1994). An excellent summary is provided by Ross E. Dunn, The Adventures of Ibn Battuta: A Muslim Traveler of the 14th Century (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986). For the Jesuit account, see R. B Serjeant, “A Journey by Two Jesuits from Dhufar to

- Sana'a in 1590*" *The Geographical Journal* (London: Royal Geographical Society, June 1950).
10. Wendell Phillips, *Unknown Oman* (New York: David McKay Co, 1966), 168 carries the Crichton report. The 1833 survey of Arabia's southern coast by the Palinurus and land explorations of Oman in 1835 are recorded in Second Lieutenant James R. Wellsted's *Travels in Arabia* (London: J. Murray, 1838), 2 vols. See also Rev. Charles Forster, *The Historical Geography of Arabia*, vol. 2 (London: Duncan & Malcolm, 1844), 82, 85, 185, 194.
A useful summary of the exploration of the Arabian coast and the papers consequently published is contained in Brian Marshall, "European Travelers in Oman and Southeast Arabia 1792-1950: A Bio-bibliographical Study" in *New Arabian Studies* 2 (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1994), especially "Palinurus Surveys, 1833-1846," 12-17.
 11. See H. J Carter, "A Geographical Description of certain parts of the Southeast Coast of Arabia, etc." *Journal of the Bombay Branch, Royal Asiatic Society* 3/2 (Bombay: Royal Asiatic Society, January 1851), 44.
 12. For an 1844 landing at Rakhyut by Dr H. J Carter see his "A Descriptive Account of the Ruins of El Balad," *Oman Translations of the Bombay Geographical Society* 12/14 (Bombay: Bombay Geographical Society, December 1846), 25-27. See Bertram Thomas, *Arabia Felix: Across the Empty Quarter of Arabia*, 100. Other early seafaring accounts in this region ignore Rakhyut and Kharfot (possibly hidden from view by fog if visited in the monsoon months May to September); see, for example, R. B Serjeant, *The Portuguese Off the South Arabian Coast: Hadrami Chronicles* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963).
 13. Theodore Bent, "Exploration of the Frankincense Country, Southern Arabia" in *The Geographical Journal* vol. VI, no. 2, (London: Royal Geographical Society, August 1895), see 109-133 and the map of their explorations. The account has a sketch of Rakhyut, then the southern limit of "Omani influence." The Bent's book *Southern Arabia* (London: Smith Elder, 1900) has been reprinted (London: Kegan Paul Intl. Ltd, 2004) but lacks the details of the sea voyage westwards from Salalah found in the former account; the maps show that the Bent's land explorations in Dhofar did not extend as far west as Khor Kharfot.
 14. An outline of the 1952 Wendell Phillips expedition which excavated at Khor Rori, al-Balid, Mirbat and Mughsayl is found in Frank Albright, "Explorations in Dhofar" in *Antiquity* (York, UK: Antiquity Trust, 1955), 113: 37-39. See also Wendell Phillips, *Unknown Oman*, 169-171, 194. Personal insights into the interactions between Oman's Dhofar and the Mahra region of Yemen are discussed in Fred Halliday, "Oman and Yemen: an historic re-encounter," at www.al-bab.com/bysl/articles/halliday00.htm.
 15. Wilfred Thesiger, *Arabian Sands* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1964), 47, 183. The account of a 1955 overland journey from Salalah to Muscat by the Sultan of Oman, in Jan Morris, *Sultan in Oman* (London: Arrow Books, 1990) typifies the lack of knowledge at all levels of the region west of the Salalah Bay.
 16. The assumption that Lehi's journey across Arabia essentially followed the incense trade route in reverse, in its entirety, has formed the basis of the commentary on Lehi since Hugh Nibley's *Lehi in the Desert* was first published in 1952. Lynn and Hope Hilton's writings, based upon their one day visit to Dhofar in 1976 and more recent writers S. Kent Brown, George Potter and Richard Wellington have perpetuated this concept by proposing that Nephi merely followed the circuitous trade route to Dhofar and utilized an existing incense port as "Bountiful." Such approaches fail to account for Nephi's statements and the archaeological, geographical and historical evidence. Neither Nephi's account nor history support any possible use of trade routes from the eastward turn at Nahom until Bountiful was reached. Such errors demonstrate that first-hand fieldwork remains essential in endeavors touching upon geography; it is worth noting that none of these writers have actually traveled in the area east of Nahom or inland Dhofar and, in one case, have never entered the Republic of Yemen.
Relying on such faulty data has, in turn, devalued otherwise valuable contributions by others, see for example, Dennis Largey, gen. ed. *Book of Mormon Reference Companion* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 171, 511-515 which contains good treatments summarizing data about Nahom and Bountiful, but reproducing a map depicting an indefensible route from Nahom to the coast.
 17. Groom, *Frankincense and Myrrh*, 109-111. On Socotran incense production, see Miranda Morris, "Soqatra and its place in South Arabia" in *Bulletin of the Society for Arabian Studies* 5, (Spring 2000), 10. The incense-growing regions are illustrated in Juris Zarins, *The Land of Incense*, 51.
 18. Pliny, *Natural History*, 37-63. Other indications of the incense-growing area exist in the maps of Ptolemy (Claudius Ptolemaeus) in his *Geography* written about AD 90-160. On the accuracy of Ptolemy's maps, see Nigel Groom, "Oman and the Emirates in Ptolemy's map" in *Arabian archaeology and epigraphy* 5 (1994), 198-214.
 19. Groom, *Frankincense and Myrrh*, 111.
 20. *Ibid*, 110.
 21. *Ibid*, 96-120, 232 and map, 99.

22. *Ibid*, 146-147, where the harvest cycles are discussed and 165-166 concerning the transportation from Dhofar. Also see *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea, Travel and Trade in the Indian Ocean by a Merchant of the First Century*, 29-35. For a more general summary of the trade routes, see F. Clements, *Oman the Reborn Land* (London: Longman, 1980), 27 and Robert Stookey, *Yemen – The Politics of the Yemen Arab Republic* (Colorado: Westview Press, 1978), 10 and the trade route map.

In 1997 archaeologist Juris Zarins participated in a pioneering reconnaissance of the Mahra coast and interior adjacent to Dhofar that noted numerous unreported sites and probable links to the early overland incense trade. See the *Los Angeles Times* for January 28, 1997 under the overstated title “Ancient Frankincense Trail Discovered,” pages A1 & A10.

23. Popular accounts of the “Ubar” project include Nicholas Clapp’s *The Road to Ubar and*, with much extraneous material, Ranulph Fiennes’ *Atlantis of the Sands* (London: Bloomsbury, 1992). However, team archaeologist Juris Zarins eventually concluded that Shisr could not represent “Ubar” or even “Omanum Emporium.” See his “Atlantis of the Sands” in *Archaeology* 50 (New York: Archaeological Institute of America, May/June 1997), 51-53 and his 2001 work, *The Land of Incense*, 140-141. Zarins has suggested that modern Habarut, located further inland on the western border of Dhofar may be “Ubar” see his “Environmental disruption and human response,” in G. Bawden & R. M. Reycraft, eds, *Environmental disaster and the Archaeology of Human Response* 7 (Albuquerque, University of New Mexico: Anthropological Papers, 2000), 35-47. An excellent summary of the Ubar claims and the arguments against any significant historical role for Shisr can be found in H. Stewart Edgell, “The myth of the “lost city of the Arabian Sands”” in *PSAS* 34 (2004), 105-120.

24. A carefully reasoned examination of the issues involved, Nigel Groom’s “Oman and the Emirates in Ptolemy’s map,” in *Arabian archaeology and epigraphy* 5 (1994), 198-214 and his “The Road to Ubar’ - Pros and Cons,” in *Bulletin of the Society for Arabian Studies* 5 (Spring 2000), 42-43, concludes that the Shisr site provides no new evidence of overland trade routes from the Dhofar area.

25. Warren P. & Michaela Knott Aston, *In the Footsteps of Lehi*, since released electronically in the LDS Collectors Library (2005). The book reports the author’s coastline explorations ending in 1992 and the beginning of work at Kharfot, see “New Book Describes Efforts to Trace Lehi’s Trail” *Insights* (Sep 1994) and the complete review in L. Ara Norwood, “Bountiful Found” *FARMS Review of Books* 7/1 (1995), 85-90. The Review gave it the highest commendation of 1994 books

dealing with the Book of Mormon, see Daniel C. Peterson, “Editor’s Picks.” Also see *Insights* (June, 1995), 1.

Prior to its publication the author’s research had been reported in *FARMS* papers commencing with the preliminary *The Search for Nahom and for the End of Lehi’s Trail* AST-84 (Provo: FARMS, 1984, revised 1986, 1988, 1989) and finally, in separate papers *The Place Which Was Called Nahom and And We Called the Place Bountiful* AST-91 (Provo: FARMS, 1991). In 1998 the author’s article “The Arabian Bountiful Discovered? Evidence for Nephi’s Bountiful” was lead article for the launch issue of the expanded *FARMS Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* (JBMS) 7/1, 4-11.

Since 1994 at least two other [non-LDS] efforts have been made to examine the same coast and its settlements, see for example Axelle Rougeulle, “Coastal settlements in southern Yemen: the 1996-97 survey expeditions on the Hadramaut and Mahra coasts” reported in *PSAS* 29 (1999), 123-136. A planned joint Russian, French and German project entitled “The Yemen coast in pre-Islamic times: ancient environment, human adaptation, subsistence patterns and cultural contacts” was reported in the *Bulletin of the Society for Arabian Studies* (Spring 1999), 30. Lynne Newton describes the only Islamic period non-port settlement site excavated to date in the Mahra province in Yemen in her paper, “Al Qisha: archaeological investigations at an Islamic period Yemeni village” in *PSAS* 37 (2007), 171-186. Al Qisha is NW of Wadi Masilah, a Bountiful candidate. Fieldwork by archeologist Juris Zarins in southern Oman is documented in his *The Land of Incense and* (with Lynne Newton) as “Preliminary results of the Dhofar archaeological survey” in *PSAS* 40 (2010), 247-265.

26. Michael Rice, *The archaeology of the Arabian Gulf : c.5000-323 BC* (London: Routledge, 1994) and M. J Tooley & I. Shennan, eds. *Sea-Level Changes* (Oxford: The Institute of British Geographers, Special Publication Series, 20, 1987) focus on the Arabian Gulf, but provide important context. See also Alessandra Avanzini, ed. *Eastern Arabia in the First Millennium BC* (Rome: L’Erma di Bretschneider, 2010). D. T Potts, *The Arabian Gulf in Antiquity* 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 12-16 provides a useful summary of literature dealing with ocean levels in Arabia. See especially his chart of sea-level variations in the Arabian Gulf from 7000 BC to AD 1000, Fig 1b.

Most recently, the regional studies reported in Erik J. DeBoer et al. in “Climate variability in the SW Indian Ocean from an 8000-yr long multi-proxy record in the Mauritian lowlands shows a middle to late Holocene shift from negative IOD-state to ENSO-state” in *Quaternary Science Reviews* 86 (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2014),

- 175-189 show the latest data, including sea-levels and ENSO activity, that may be relevant for southern Dhofar.
- For a current, far-reaching examination of the geological history of Arabia, see Andrew Thompson, *The Origins of Arabia* (London: Stacey International, 1998). A project with implications for the location of the Valley of Lemuel and Bountiful is reported by Geoff Bailey et al, "Coastal prehistory in the Southern Red Sea Basin, underwater archaeology and the Farasan islands" *PSAS* 37 (2007), 1-16. At this stage there are no indications of significant sea-level changes within the past 3000 yrs.
27. W. H Ingrams, "Hadhramaut: A Journey to the Sei'ar Country and through the Wadi Maseila" *The Geographical Journal* (1936), 88:524-551 gives a rare firsthand account of travel through Wadi Masilah. See also the description and images of the Hadhramaut in general in Ruthven W. Pike, "Land and Peoples of the Hadhramaut, Aden Protectorate" in *The Geographical Review* Vol XXX, no. 4 (New York City: American Geographical Society, October 1940), 627-648, with images of "Wadi Maseila," 641.
 28. In 2007, Mughsayl was proposed as a possible candidate for the "Land Bountiful" in Wm. Revell Phillips, "Mughsayl: Another Candidate for Land Bountiful" *JBMS* 16/2 (2007), 48-59. Factual errors in Phillip's article were noted in Warren P. Aston, "Identifying Our Best Candidate for Nephi's Bountiful" in *Journal of The Book of Mormon and Restoration Scripture (JBMR)* 17/1-2 (2008), 58-64. See Part 6, notes 26 and 27, for details of the BYU and IMTO excavations at Mughsayl and their dating conclusions.
 29. After noting the "discovery of ancient sites" at Kharfot by the April 1992 team, Nigel Groom, "The Periplus, Pliny and Arabia" in *Arabian archaeology and epigraphy* 6 (1995), 184-186 makes the argument that "Moscha" must lay west of Khor Rori. Other scholars maintain that Khor Rori remains the most likely candidate, see Lionel Casson, *Periplus Maris Erythraei* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989). A review of Casson's position by M. Boukharin is contained in the thorough treatments of the history of Khor Rori and excavations there since 1997, Alessandra Avanzini, ed. *Khor Rori Report 1* (Pisa: Edizioni Plus, Pisa University Press, 2002), 323-324.
 30. The title of Alessandra Avanzini's *A Port in Arabia between Rome and the Indian Ocean* (3rd C. BC – 5th C. AD), *Khor Rori Report 2* (Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2008) reflects the dating established for Khor Rori as a port. That these data represent the earliest possible operation of a seaport at Khor Rori (ie. ca. 300 BC) was confirmed to the author from Dr Avanzini by email dated February 21, 2006. This, of course, effectively rules out any notion that an established seaport was functioning in Nephi's day, or that the place could have been a source of instruction for Nephi by experienced sailors. No evidence of ship construction there is known.
- The IMTO (Italian Mission to Oman) excavations are summarized in the *Arabia Antica Newsletter* (Pisa: University of Pisa) at <http://arabiantica.humnet.unipi.it/>. Preliminary Reports of excavations are published promptly on the same website. See also the summary by Juris Zarins, "The Latest on the Archaeology of Southern Oman" in *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 129/4 (Ann Arbor, MI: American Oriental Society, Oct-Dec 2009), 665-674. For a general treatment, see Alessandra Avanzini, ed. *Along the aroma and spice routes: The harbour of Sumburum, its territory and the trade between the Mediterranean, Arabia and India* (Pisa: MB Vision - Bandecchi e Vivaldi, 2011).
- As noted earlier in Part 3, the in situ dedication inscriptions of Sumburum contain an indirect reminder of the Lehiite journey however; noting that the city was constructed under the direction of the king of the Hadhramaut and that it is built of both rough-hewn and polished stones. In this Hadramitic text the term for polished (cut or shaped) stones appears as NHMt, thus hearkening back to the origin of NHM.
- A significant history of climate change and the resulting impact at Khor Rori and Khor al-Balid is documented by Carina Hoorn and Mauro Cremaschi, "Late Holocene palaeo-environmental history of Khawr Rawri and Khawr Al Balid (Dhofar, Sultanate of Oman)" in *PALAEO* 213 (2004), 1-36. Much of these data will be relevant to Khor Kharfot also in reconstructing the past.
- See Juris Zarins, *The Land of Incense*, especially Fig. 28 mapping the known archaeological sites in the Salalah bay. "Ship" graffiti inland of Khor Rori are pictured also, 133, with commentary on 134. See also Ali Ahmed Mahash al-Shabri, *The Language of Aad* (Abu Dhabi: privately published, 2000) for a range of cultural perspectives on Arabian history and culture, with a focus on Dhofar. Ship graffiti are pictured on 135-142, Khor Kharfot on 46. The caption for the image of Kharfot adds an incorrect reference to the Greeks mentioning it in "500 BC."
31. Satellite imagery of Wadi Sayq can be found in Farouk el-Baz, ed. *Wadis of Oman: Satellite Image Atlas* (Muscat: Office HM Sultan for Cultural Affairs, 2004), 149-150.
 32. See notes 9, 10 and 13.
 33. Years before LDS scholars became aware of it, attention had been drawn by a tiny handful of scholars to the unique fertility of the Khor Kharfot and Wadi Sayq area. See "The scientific results of The Oman Flora and Fauna Survey, 1975 (Dhofar)" in *The Journal of Oman Studies: Special Reports* 1, 1977 and 2, 1980), with photographs of Kharfot.

- A recent examination of the hydrological mechanisms allowing vegetation to grow in Dhofar is found in Elfatih Eltahir and Anke Hildebrandt, “Forest on the edge: Seasonal cloud forest in Oman creates its own ecological niche” *Geophysical Research Letters* 33/L11401 (Washington DC: American Geophysical Union, June 2006). The vegetation of Dhofar is cataloged in Anthony G. Miller and Miranda Morris, *Plants of Dhofar, the Southern Region of Oman: Traditional, Economic, and Medicinal Uses* (Muscat: Dept. Conservation of Oman the Environment, 1988) and in the works by Shahina A. Ghazanfar, *Flora of Oman* (2 vols) (Meise, Belgium: National Botanic Garden, 2003 and 2007); *A Vernacular Index of the Plants of Oman* (Muscat: Al Roya Publishers, 2001); (ed. with Martin Fisher) *Vegetation of the Arabian Peninsula and her earlier works Trees of Oman: an illustrated guide to the native trees of Oman* (Muscat: Ministry of Regional Municipalities and Environment, 1997) and *Handbook of Arabian Medicinal Plants* (Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 1994).
34. That Khor Kharfot had been a sea inlet until comparatively recent times has been known since the first of the 1993 expeditions to the site, reported later that year by FARMS and in the 1994 book *In the Footsteps of Lehi*. See also the mechanics of annual sand bar formation across the inlets in Juris Zarins, *The Land of Incense*, 70-71.
 35. For an insightful examination of early apiculture see Ronan James Head, “A Brief Survey of Ancient Near Eastern Beekeeping” *FARMS Review* 20/1 (2008), 57-66. On types of “honey” see *Fauna and Flora of the Bible (Helps for Translators)* (New York City: United Bible Societies, 1980). Carolyn Cartwright, “Reconstructing the use of coastal resources at Ra’s al-Hadd, Oman, in the third millennium BC” *PSAS* 34 (2004), 45-51 offers some intriguing insights into the other resources that would be available to people living on the coast of Oman in an even earlier period than the Lehites.
 36. Bee F. Gunn, Luc Baudouin, Kenneth M. Olsen, “Independent Origins of Cultivated Coconut (*Cocos nucifera* L.) in the Old World Tropics” in the open-access journal *PLOS ONE* 6(6) (San Francisco: June 22, 2011) at <http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0021143>
 37. For Ibn Battuta, see H.A.R. Gibb, trans. ed. *The Travels of Ibn Battuta*, A. D. 1325-1354.
 38. Documentation with original sources is available at the “Coconut Time Line” website, <http://cocos.arenaceae.com/ancien.html>.
 39. Two major studies illuminating the role of the coconut in the region are David Parkin and Ruth Barnes, eds. *Ships and the Development of Maritime Technology on the Indian Ocean* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002) and Dionisius A. Agius, *Classic Ships of Islam: From Mesopotamia to the Indian Ocean* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), especially 148-153.
 40. The observations in Ralf Buckley and Hugh Harries, “Self-Sown Wild-Type Coconuts from Australia” in *Biotropica* vol.16 no.2 (Lawrence, KS: The Association for Tropical Biology and Conservation, June 1984), 148-151 are relevant to Indian Ocean dispersals.

Lalith Perera, et al. “Coconut palms on the edge of the desert: genetic diversity of *Cocos nucifera* L. in Oman” in *Biodiversity and Conservation (CORD)* vol.27 no.1 (Jakarta: Asian and Pacific Coconut Community, 2011), 9-19 specifically notes that Dhofar was “within range” for natural sea dispersal of the coconut across the Indian Ocean.

A summary of the implications if the coconut was present at Khor Kharfot ca. 600 BC is Warren P. Aston, *Timber for Nephi’s Ship* (*Meridian Magazine*, May 6, 2014), at www.ldsmag.com/article/1/1/14306.
 41. Exploring the evidences that might indicate the multi-skilled Nephi’s trade[s], see John Tvedtnes, *The Most Correct Book: Insights from a Book of Mormon Scholar* (Springville, UT: Horizon, 2003), 78-97. After weighing the evidence including several instances where Nephi clearly appreciated fine metalwork, in addition to having the ability to make his own metal plates, Tvedtnes proposes that the most likely occupation for Nephi and also Lehi is that of “metalworker.” Hugh Nibley had earlier concluded that Lehi was a merchant engaged in caravan trade with Egypt and Arabia, see *CWHN* 6: 59-70. Of course, these occupations are not mutually exclusive, nor the suggestion that Nephi may have had scribal training in Jerusalem; see Part 1, note 36.
 42. Copper is the metal traditionally mined in Oman. See G. Goettler, N. Firth and C. Huston, “A Preliminary Discussion of Ancient Mining in the Sultanate of Oman” *The Journal of Oman Studies*, vol. 2 (1976), 43-56. The relative rarity of iron makes the finds at two sites in Dhofar and the 2009, 2010 and 2014 discoveries of ore at Kharfot all the more significant in light of Nephi’s account. A popular update of the iron find is geologist Ron Harris, “Geologists Discover Iron in Region of Nephi’s Bountiful” in *Meridian Magazine*: <http://ldsmag.com/ldsmag/articles/040728ore.html>. See also Juris Zarins, *The Land of Incense*, 61.
 43. A general summary is provided by Osman Salad Hersi, “A glimpse of the cretaceous stratigraphy and hydrocarbon potential of the Jeza-Qamar Basin, a frontier basin straddling the Oman-Yemen border” in *AL HAJAR: Geological Society of Oman Quarterly Newsletter*, Issue 18 (Muscat: GSO, March 2011), 18-23, available

at www.gso-oman.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/18_March_2011.pdf. This provides references to technical papers discussing the “Albian Kharfot Formation.”

44. Paolo M. Costa, “Khawr Kharfut, Dhofar: A preliminary assessment of the archaeological remains” in *PSAS* 24 (1994), 27-33 reports the initial evaluation of the ruins at Kharfot as indicating four distinct periods of human occupation. This data resulted from the first 1993 expedition to Kharfot organized and led by the author, in which Dr Costa participated.

For a broad summary of the extent of Iron Age settlement in Arabia (“total” p. 389), major sites, exploration, metallurgy, ceramics etc. see D. T. Potts, *The Arabian Gulf in Antiquity*, especially vol.1, chapter 10: “The Oman Peninsula, 1300-300 BC.” Although his discussion is restricted to northern Oman, the resulting picture should be indicative of the Dhofar situation for the same period.

An accessible summary of factors impacting Oman’s settlement and development since pre-history is Nicole Boivin & Dorian Q. Fuller’s 2009 paper, “Shell Middens, Ships and Seeds: Exploring Coastal Subsistence, Maritime Trade and the Dispersal of Domesticates in and around the Ancient Arabian Peninsula,” *Journal of World Prehistory* vol. 22 (Springer, June 2009), 113-180. Focused on human settlement is Jeffrey I. Rose, “The Arabian Corridor Migration Model: archaeological evidence for hominid dispersals into Oman during the Middle and Upper Pleistocene,” *PSAS* 37 (2007), 219-237 citing evidence dating human migration from Africa into Arabia between 40,000 and 70,000 years ago. Juris Zarins documents settlement data in Dhofar throughout *The Land of Incense*, see especially 61–97.

Jeffery Rose and Yamandu Hilbert, “New prehistoric sites in the southern Rub’ al-Khali desert, Oman” published on the website of *Antiquity* (Durham: Durham University) in August 2014, reveals indications that human settlement on the edges of the Empty Quarter (north of the Lehi path but close enough to be of interest) may be more extensive than previously recognized. See <http://www.academia.edu/7964937/> *New prehistoric sites in the southern Rub al-Khali desert Oman*

One of the few attempts to synthesize the data resulting from numerous studies and excavations in Oman over recent decades is Serge Cleuziou and Maurizio Tosi, *In the Shadow of the Ancestors: The Prehistoric Foundations of the Early Arabian Civilization in Oman* (Muscat: Ministry of Information & Culture, 2007), especially chapter 11 which deals with Dhofar.

45. Two images of the Kharfot inscriptions were published in Ali Mahash al-Shahri’s Arabic-only book, *Kayfibtidina wa-kayfirtiqina bil-hadara al-insaniyya min shibh al-jazira al-‘arabiyya: Zufar, kitabatuba wa-nuqshuha al-qadima* (How human civilization commenced and progressed in the Arabian Peninsula: Dhofar, Ancient

Inscriptions and Engravings) (Dubai: privately published, 1993), 249. The same work displays a range of “ship” graffiti from various parts of Dhofar, 185-192.

Ali Ahmed Mahash Al-Shahri & Geraldine M. H. King, *The Dhofar Epigraphic Project: A Description of the Inscriptions Recorded in 1991 and 1992* (Oxford: Khalili Research Centre and Faculty of Oriental Studies, University of Oxford, ca. 1993). Reports are available at <http://krc2.orient.ox.ac.uk/aalc/index.php/en/dhofar-epigraphic-project>

Also relevant are the findings in Majeed Khan, *Wusum: The Tribal Symbols of Saudi Arabia* (Riyadh: Ministry of Education, 2000) discussing a phenomenon that also extended to Yemen and Oman. In the opinion of Dr Khan, tribal symbols may be present at Kharfot (email to author, November 5, 2011). An earlier assessment of the text by A. F. L. Beeston of Oxford describes the lower text as not being in any known pre-Islamic script (letter to the author, January 1, 1992).

46. *Insights* 5 (September 1993).
47. Noel B. Reynolds, “By Objective Measures: Old Wine into New Bottles” in *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, 128.
48. See “Book of Mormon: First Book of Nephi,” in Daniel Ludlow, ed. *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (New York: Macmillan, 1992), vol. 1, 145. Both the text and the image describe Kharfot’s location as the “southern coast of the Arabian Peninsula,” whereas the “eastern” coast of the peninsula would be more accurate. The *Encyclopedia* is now available online at http://eom.byu.edu/index.php/Encyclopedia_of_Mormonism. The Kharfot image was also used in the selection from the *Encyclopedia* published as *To All the World: The Book of Mormon Articles from the Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (Provo: FARMS, 2000), 40. In *In the Footsteps of Lehi* was the only work dealing with Old World Book of Mormon geography cited in *To All the World*, (41, 101).
49. Welch, ed. *Re-Exploring the Book of Mormon*, 52. See also John W. Welch and J. Gregory Welch, *Charting the Book of Mormon: Visual Aids for Personal Study and Teaching* (Provo: FARMS, 1999). Chart 148 reproduces the author’s 12 scriptural criteria for Nephi’s Bountiful.
50. See, for example, *Book of Mormon: Seminary Student Study Guide* (Salt Lake City: Church Education System, 2000 and 2004), 28. More recently, the 2010 *Book of Mormon Student Manual* (Salt Lake City: Seminaries and Institutes of Religion Curriculum, 2009): 37-38, 410 reprinted the altar image and the 2001 ENSIGN feature about its discovery, plus the scriptural criteria for Nephi’s Bountiful extracted from *In the Footsteps of Lehi*.

51. *ENSIGN* magazine (January 2000), 18-24. See also Daniel C. Peterson “A Scholar Looks at Evidences for the Book of Mormon, on the “Book of Mormon Lecture Series” (tape) released by FARMS in 1994. See also his “A Scholarly Look at Evidence of the Book of Mormon” at www.bookofmormononline.org/evidence.html.

For a balanced apologetic review of the Old World evidences lending credibility to Nephi’s account see Michael R. Ash, *Of Faith and Reason: 80 Evidences Supporting the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2008), 51-100. John-Charles Duffy’s “Mapping Book of Mormon Historicity Debates-Part 1” in *Sunstone* 151 (Salt Lake City: The Sunstone Education Foundation, October 2008), 48 primarily notes Kharfot and Nahom as the Old World geographical correspondences claimed by apologists for the Book of Mormon.

52. Keith Terry, *Into the Light* (American Fork, UT: Covenant, 2000, 2004), chapter 2 (“Wadi Sayq”) incorporates elements of the author’s early fieldwork in Dhofar.
53. Grant Hardy, ed. *The Book of Mormon: A Reader’s Edition*, 687. Also see Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader’s Guide* (New York City: Oxford University Press, 2010).
54. *Glimpses of Lehi’s Jerusalem*, 77. Other books often now depict Kharfot as Bountiful; see, for example, Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical & Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007) vol. 1: 296; Thomas R. Valletta, gen. ed. *The Book of Mormon for Latter-day Saint Families* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1999), 49 and Randal S. Chase, *Making Precious Things Plain: Book of Mormon Study Guide, Part 1. I Nephi to Mosiah* (Washington, UT: Plain & Precious Publishing, 2013), 2nd Ed. with a front cover image of Kharfot.

Scot F. and Maurine J. Proctor, *Light from the Dust: A Photographic Exploration into the Ancient World of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1993) is based on their 1992 visit to Kharfot. It was reviewed by Fred W. Nelson in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/2 (1994), 146-149. See also: Maurine & Scot Proctor, “Where Did Nephi Build the Ship?” in *This People* 14/3 (Salt Lake City: Utah Alliance Publishing, Fall 1993), 40-53.

55. David A. Edwards, “Was Lehi HERE?” appeared in the January 2008 issues of the *New Era* magazine, 10-13 and the *Liahona* magazine, 14-17.
56. See *Sub-regional Land Use Plans for the Southern Region* (Muscat: WS Atkins International, March 1990), A10.1-A10.8, A11.1-A11.2.
57. Examples of media coverage of Khor Kharfot and Wadi Sayq can be accessed as “Dhofar coastline should be given reserve status, says British society” at <http://www.muscatdaily.com/Archive/Oman/Dhofar-coastline-should-be-given-reserve-status-says-British-society-3ki6> dated November 4, 2014; “Wadi Sayq in Southern west of Oman an important spot for Biodiversity,” at <http://www.timesofoman.com/News/%20Article-16978.aspx> dated June 3, 2013; “Wadi Sayq is the most verdant and biodiverse terrestrial environment in Oman,” in article titled “OCE calls for immediate protection of Wadi Sayq in Oman,” at <http://www.muscatdaily.com/Archive/Oman/OCE-calls-for-immediate-protection-of-Wadi-Sayq-in-Oman-2c87> dated June 16, 2013 and “Mormons at Khor Kharfot,” at www.pinaki.ch/world/oman/kharfot/kharfot.htm dated October, 2007.

58. Potter and Wellington, *Lehi in the Wilderness*. See especially the green-tinted photographs of the beach at Khor Rori on p.131 and an inland wadi (Dharbat) on p. 132 attempting to illustrate Nephi’s “Bountiful.” Other misrepresentations and factual errors throughout the book, especially when discussing Nahom and Bountiful, are too numerous to list here.

On January 18, 2006, the LDS daily e-magazine *Meridian Magazine*, published an article by the author, “Finding Nephi’s “Bountiful” in the Real World” as a counterpoint to George Potter and Richard Wellington’s “Discovering Nephi’s Harbor at Bountiful,” published October 11, 2005. <http://ldsmag.com/ldsmag/bookofmormon/080117nephi.html>. See also the review by Jeff Lindsay: <http://mormonity.blogspot.com.au/2006/06/warren-aston-on-superiority-of-khor.html>.

PART 6

“Out of Obscurity”

“...the Lord God shall bring forth unto you the words of a book, and they shall be the words of them which have slumbered... in that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see *out of obscurity* and out of darkness.”

(2 Nephi 27:6, 29)

Introduction

When the final history of this dispensation is written, *how* the Book of Mormon began to emerge from obscurity will surely be one of its most fascinating stories. Since it was first published, the real-world setting of the Book of Mormon has been a source of fascination and speculation for all who believed they were reading an actual history. While most read the book for its doctrines and principles, the book’s claim to be an actual historical record has ensured that its textual and real-world details will, rightfully, be closely scrutinized.

Also driving the interest in finding physical locations for the Book of Mormon’s setting has been the need to respond to the attacks of critics. These began as early as 1831 with the publication of a critique by Alexander Campbell, one that continues to be mirrored by anti-Mormon writers to the present.¹ Early LDS apostle **Orson Pratt** (1811-1881) published a partial response entitled *Divine Authenticity of the Book of Mormon* in six parts from 1850-51,² refuting criticisms and presenting logical and biblical arguments defending the Nephite scripture. His attempt to locate the New World setting in both North and South America was incorporated into the footnotes of the 1879 printing of the Book of Mormon and would influence LDS thinking on the subject of its setting for the next century.

For most early readers, the fact that most of the account took place in the Americas and the emerging appreciation of central and South American cultures by archaeologists and popular writers alike, blended with natural assumptions about the hemispheric scope of the book. Even today, for example, numerous readers of the book assume that the hill in upper New York State where the plates were recovered by Joseph Smith is the same Hill Cumorah where the Nephite nation met its destruction ca. AD 421. The Book of Mormon’s own text appears to

rule this out, as almost all LDS scholars now accept. Although Joseph Smith left statements that support a hemispheric stage for the unfolding Nephite and Lamanite saga, he was clearly also open to a more limited geography centered in Mesoamerica.³

The LDS Church has never taken an official position on Book of Mormon geography since its organization in 1830. However, with the publication of Orson Pratt’s defense, early leaders and lay readers alike generally saw the Book of Mormon account as spanning North and South America with the Isthmus of Panama as the “narrow neck of land” (Alma 22:27, 32). With the mindset of this apparently obvious correlation the primary focus for early commentators during the first century after publication remained firmly on the New World geography rather than the Old.

Hemispheric assumptions lay behind the Brigham Young Academy expedition of 1900 to Central and South America in search of Book of Mormon ruins. Led by academy Principal **Benjamin Cluff Jr** (1858-1948), in 1903 the first president of BYU, some in the group eventually reached Colombia before disbanding. Although ultimately unsuccessful, the venture remains an interesting commentary of the times. In this period Mormonism’s first qualified archaeologist emerged, **Paul Henning** (1872-1923), a German-born convert to the Church in Mexico. Henning participated briefly in the Cluff expedition following his 1899 baptism, later working for the National Museum in Mexico City and publishing several monographs. While none of his Book of Mormon-related work was ever published, Henning became a primary stimulus to Cluff, eventually leading to Cluff securing First Presidency approval for what would have been the first Book of Mormon research body, the **American Exploring Society**. However, Hennings unexpected death, aged 51, in 1923 ended ambitious plans to conduct scholarly exploration for evidences supporting the authenticity of the Book of Mormon.⁴

Not until early in the twentieth century could scholars, notably **George Reynolds** (1842-1909), **Janne M. Sjodahl** (1853-1939), **Brigham H. Roberts** (1857-1933) and then **Sidney B. Sperry** (1895-1977), begin assembling external evidences that connected Nephi’s account to the *Old World* as well as to the *New*.⁵ An important step in that direction was the establishment of a Department of Archaeology at BYU in 1946, a development Sidney Sperry was involved with.

The new emphasis on the Book of Mormon deepened and broadened significantly with the pioneering studies of historian **Hugh W. Nibley** (1910-2005) in the late 1940s and through the following five decades. His unwavering enthusiasm can be glimpsed in a letter written home while still serving in World War:

...I have discovered the Book of Mormon, and live in a state of perpetual excitement—that marvelous production throws everything done in our age completely into the shadows.

This enthusiasm and his formidable scholarly abilities allowed Nibley to do what no Book of Mormon scholar had done before: see the broad cultural outlines of the Book of Mormon’s Old World milieu, about which considerably more was (and still is) known than its New World setting. Viewed as an “intellectual reconnaissance” by Elder Neal A. Maxwell, his studies revealed subtleties that scholars in many disciplines still pursue today. Nibley later felt that his early discoveries of the Arabian parallels to Nephi’s record were the most significant of his work.⁶

With scant exceptions, it was not until the mid-1970s that the New World setting comprising the bulk of the Book of Mormon account began receiving the scholarly attention needed to develop a coherent geography. By first fully taking account of the book’s internal geographical requirements, anthropologist **John L. Sorenson** (b.

1924) pioneered and refined the correlation most widely accepted by LDS scholars today. Limited to southern Mexico and Guatemala with the Isthmus of Tehuantepec as the “narrow neck of land,” Sorenson’s geography is articulated in his massive 2013 Opus, *Mormon’s Codex: An Ancient Mesoamerican Book*.⁷ The evidence documented in this book seems likely to remain the basis for all serious research in connection with the New World account for the foreseeable future.



George Reynolds



Paul Henning



Ross T. Christensen



Hugh W. Nibley



John L. Sorenson



John W. Welch

Some pivotal Book of Mormon scholars past and present. Hugh W Nibley image screen-capture courtesy of YouTube.

Book of Mormon Research Organizations

Shortly before Hugh Nibley began making inroads into the opening chapters of First Nephi, the first group to promote research

into LDS scriptures was organized in California. In October 1938, archaeologist M. Wells Jakeman, (1910-1998) and fellow students at Berkeley including Thomas S. Ferguson, created the **Itzan Society**. This functioned until the onset of World War Two, when Jakeman became the first chair of archaeology at Brigham Young University in 1945. The department’s first field project took place three years later in Mexico, leading to Jakeman’s establishment of the **University Archaeological Society (UAS)** on April 18, 1949. As an adjunct to BYU’s Department of Archaeology, the UAS was free to focus more on matters relevant to the historicity of scripture.

Meanwhile in California, Thomas S. Ferguson (1915-1983) formed the **New World Archaeological Foundation (NWF)**, <http://nwaf.byu.edu> in October, 1952. The group enlisted several prominent non-LDS scholars from such institutions as Harvard University and the Carnegie Institution in its mission to establish the general origins of the peoples of Mesoamerica. It began excavations in Mexico almost immediately. After years of seeking private donations to finance projects in Mexico, Ferguson received some church financing in 1954. The NWF was incorporated into BYU in 1961. Involved in scores of field projects, often in cooperation with other universities, the NWF continues its work today without direct connections to Book of Mormon geography. After six decades it is regarded as a premier player in Central American Pre-classic (i.e., prior to about AD 200) archaeology, a fact that may become increasingly significant to Book of Mormon archaeology in time to come.⁸

Concurrently, the UAS, re-named the **Society for Early Historic Archaeology (SEHA)** in 1965, provided a broader forum in various fields related to the archaeology of the scriptures, laying a foundation of annual symposiums, newsletters and occasional papers. Much of its momentum was lost following its separation from BYU in September, 1979. However, following three name changes in 1983-1984, SEHA

continued functioning until 1990 when it evolved into the **Ancient America Foundation (AAF)**, www.ancientamerica.org, which continues today.

The year 1979 saw an event of great significance to the entire field of Book of Mormon studies and eventually to LDS scriptural studies generally with the formation, again in California, of the **Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS)**. Founded by John (Jack) W. Welch (b. 1946), a lawyer whose interest in scriptural studies was sparked by his discovery, while serving a mission in Germany, of chiasmic (inverted parallelism) writing patterns in the Book of Mormon, FARMS evolved into the largest and most comprehensive research body of its kind. When Welch accepted a position at Brigham Young University’s law school in Utah the following year, the fledgling FARMS found a permanent base in BYU off-campus facilities. Its independence provided the first opportunity for many LDS scholars and students of the scriptures to share findings and insights.

With support from John L. Sorenson, effectively its first resident scholar, FARMS began to facilitate the correlation of research efforts. It instituted peer reviews, published a wide range of work dealing with the Book of Mormon and funded numerous initiatives. In the process, high standards of scholarship were instituted. Of course, as it still does, over the years *BYU Studies* had published a range of articles on the Book of Mormon. Some of these, such as a 1969 paper by Jack Welch on chiasmus, an ancient writing style found in the Book of Mormon, broke new ground not only for the new findings documented, but for articulating the necessity of reading the scriptural text on its own terms, free of all assumptions. Under the aegis of FARMS these earlier papers now gained wider exposure and became part of an expanding matrix of studies.



Encapsulating several levels of symbolism, the distinctive logo of the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS) highlights the primary cultures relevant to Book of Mormon studies; it was composed of Hebrew, Greek, Mayan and Egyptian characters placed upon four interlocking blocks. The Hebrew “Aleph” in the upper left and the Greek “Omega” in the lower right represent Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, who is Jesus Christ (Revelations 1:17). Image used courtesy of the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, Provo, Utah.

While Hugh Nibley was never formally affiliated with it, from 1984 to 2010 FARMS was instrumental in updating and publishing

his foundational scholarship. The Nibley corpus ensured that the maturing FARMS initially focused on Old more than New World aspects of the Book of Mormon. That focus later expanded to include *all* ancient scriptures, including the sacred texts of other traditions. Wider engagement with the world of non-LDS religious scholarship saw significant involvement of FARMS and its scholars with the publication of the Dead Sea Scrolls, in particular, and the translation and publication of some Islamic texts.

In 1986, the installation of Ezra Taft Benson as president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints marked a resurgence in Book of Mormon studies that has continued to the present.⁹ Benson’s frequent emphasis of the Book of Mormon’s relevance to the whole church initiated a new era for the book. Decades later, it seems safe to say that the achievements of FARMS did more to assist in bringing the Book of Mormon out of obscurity than any other event or process so far, in fulfillment of President Benson’s challenge. A solid platform of scholarship resulted, ensuring that the Book of Mormon’s historical claims could no longer be attacked with impunity. While it always lacked an international advisory board and never fully embraced relevant non-BYU scholarship, FARMS was sorely needed, as evidenced by its rapid growth and the stature it attained in the LDS scholarly community.

In September 1997, President Gordon B. Hinckley directed that FARMS be assimilated into Brigham Young University. Almost from the beginning, however, the implementation of this directive began a period of contraction. Fully-funded plans to build a much-needed FARMS facility were abandoned. A 2001 restructuring then saw the establishment of the **Institute for the Study and Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts (ISPART)**, with FARMS subsumed as one of its divisions. In honor of Apostle Neal A. Maxwell’s (1926-2004) signal contributions to religious scholarship, ISPART was re-named in 2006 as the **Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship**

(**NAMIRS**), <http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu> with several divisions including the Middle Eastern Texts Initiative (METI) and the Center for the Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts (CPART) and in 2013 the Christianity and the Bible Research Initiative (CBRI). Additional private funding resulted in the Laura F. Willes Center for Book of Mormon Studies being established in April 2007, initially in conjunction with FARMS, although the FARMS name completely faded from use during 2012. Echoing these changes, the Institute’s official logo eventually became a variation of the FARMS logo utilizing different examples of the same characters.

The Maxwell Institute’s trend away from the research approaches that originally distinguished FARMS has resulted in a body more focused on symposia and publishing. Publications include the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* (known as the *Journal of The Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture (JBMORS)* from 2009 to 2013), now a small format annual publication for subscribers only; the *Insights* newsletter from 1981 to 2013, the *FARMS Review*, now the *Mormon Studies Review*, and occasional papers and books published under various imprints. The journal *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* commenced publication late 2009.

A further re-structuring of the Maxwell Institute in June 2012 saw an even more overt shift away from studies that could be construed as “apologetic,” or used for apologetic purposes. With almost all the original founders of FARMS marginalized by this change to the original charter, a new organization commenced in August 2012, the **Interpreter Foundation**, www.mormoninterpreter.com, based in Orem, Utah.¹⁰ It publishes *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* frequently, with open online access and a print edition. Along with material published in *BYU Studies*, the *Interpreter* has begun to fill the void left by the collapse of FARMS.



The first Utah home for FARMS was within the Amanda Knight building adjacent to the Provo campus of BYU.

Although generally lacking meaningful funding, several independent groups increasingly fill the research void. Two major LDS research groups exist, each actively promoting differing concepts of the Book of Mormon’s New World setting. The longer established of the two, the **Book of Mormon Archaeological Forum (BMAF)** www.bmaf.org in Salt Lake City, increasingly acts as an “umbrella” organization for a number of smaller bodies and otherwise unaffiliated individuals. It strongly defends a Mesoamerican setting and holds an annual symposium in Utah. Since 2007, the **Foundation for Indigenous Research and Mormonism (FIRM)**, www.bookofmormonevidence.org argues vigorously instead for a USA-centric geography, popularly known as the “Heartland” or “Great Lakes” model. It holds a variety of conferences and tours.

Book of Mormon Central (BMC), <http://bookofmormoncentral.org>, commenced May 2015 under the auspices of the AAF. With affiliates including BYU Studies, BYU Religious Studies Center and Interpreter Foundation, it acts as a large open-access repository and provider of Book of Mormon textual analysis, commentary, publications, and media.

Although the Missouri-based Community of Christ (formerly the Reorganized LDS Church), has relegated the Book of Mormon to the status of an optional secondary “scriptural witness,” organizations founded by its members continue. A merger of the long-standing **Zarahemla Research Foundation** in 2012 with the **Quetzal Archaeology Center for Mesoamerican Research** created **The Book of Mormon Foundation** www.bomf.org, promoting the Book of Mormon as authentic history.

The largest LDS online presence of any kind is the Utah-based **Meridian Magazine**, www.ldsmag.com, emailed daily to subscribers worldwide; it and the **Foundation for Apologetic Information & Research (FairMormon)**, www.fairmormon.org regularly release significant new material in a popular format.

Smaller LDS bodies such as the **Foundation for Ancient American Studies (FFAAS)**, www.ffaas.org and several private websites, such as John Tvedtnes’ <http://bookofmormonresearch.org>; Jeff Lindsay’s <http://mormanity.blogspot.com> and Neal Rappleye’s www.studioetquoquefide.com also offer useful commentary.

The Role of Archaeology

With its roots in the collectors and adventurers of the Victorian era, the development of *archaeology*, the study of the past through its

remains, is one of the greatest triumphs of modern science. Although not immune to the dictates of conventional paradigms, archaeology has nonetheless contributed immeasurably to our understanding of human history. As scientific techniques have improved, archaeology has continued revealing our past in ways unimaginable just decades ago.

Any writing that claims to be literal history, such as the Bible and the Book of Mormon, can expect to be scrutinized according to current historical and anthropological understanding. Despite considerable progress in recent years, our knowledge of New World pre-history has significant gaps; the Old World is much better known. For that reason Book of Mormon archaeology in the New World, the Americas where most of the account takes place, remains controversial and divided. The Old World, Near Eastern, setting has become much less so. However, believers in the book take heart in the fact that as the past of both hemispheres emerges and solidifies, it mostly conforms to the picture painted in the Nephite record, both in a general sense and in a surprising number of specifics.

Archaeology’s history has always included efforts seeking various legendary or controversial sites and artifacts. Usually conducted in the style of popular culture icons such as “Indiana Jones,” discoveries have often been, and sometimes still are, announced with spectacular headlines before lapsing back into obscurity. The history of LDS archaeology has not been immune from such efforts. There have been, of course, some rare exceptions to the general rule: discoveries such as that of the Assyrian civilization by Layard and Botta in the 1840s stand out, but usually little of value emerges from what could be termed “speculative archaeology.” Most archaeological work yields the past slowly and always still tentatively. Contrary to popular assumptions, archaeology cannot “prove” anything, but remains subject to interpretation and later finds.

When our focus narrows to the archaeology of the *scriptures*, additional constraints to what archaeology can reveal become evident. The present-day situation of biblical archaeology is instructive; after more than a century of intensive work in a limited area by hundreds of professionals, some biblical locations are now undisputed. However, others -even some major sites -are not. Many remain mired in controversy. The fact that tangible evidence for many thousands of Israelites living in the days of Moses remains elusive should give us pause when seeking traces of a transient group numbering, at most, in the dozens.

For Book of Mormon archaeology, the first step forward is to attempt a general correlation between the scriptural record and present-day *geography*. The Old World setting of the Book of Mormon is recorded in only 18 chapters in which geographical detail is present, but secondary to the spiritual lessons of the story. The point of departure literally (for the Lehites) and metaphorically (for research) is, of course, Old Jerusalem and the Red Sea. Only their locations are known today beyond any doubt. But, as presented in Part 2, others can quickly be identified with a high degree of probability. The “wilderness” into which Lehi and his family departed can be linked quite firmly to the great Arabah rift valley leading them to the Red Sea, for example, while the “borders” mentioned by Nephi clearly refer to the mountain ranges they encountered.

Until recent decades only this much was certain about the setting of Lehi and Sariah’s journey. None of the other locations mentioned -the major part of the land journey -had real-world candidates. We have come a considerable distance since then. While only partial investigations have been made so far, a plausible location has been identified for the next location mentioned in Nephi’s text, the Valley of Lemuel and River of Laman. No serious attempt has yet been made to locate Shazer. Through converging textual, archaeological, historical and geographical details, however, there is no longer any uncertainty about the location

of “Nahom,” a pivotal place in the land journey. In turn, Nahom points us “nearly eastward” (17:1) to where the Old World Bountiful must lie, the fertile coastline providing timber for a ship that would depart to the New. It is at Nephi’s “Bountiful” where perhaps the greatest archaeological potential awaits us.

One reason for this is that Nephi’s account implies that the stay at Bountiful was not brief, but extended. Only after “the space of many days” (17:7) was building a ship first mentioned by the Lord; then, after making tools, its construction surely required a minimum of 2-3 years. In the meantime, months of monsoon winds (which can topple trees) and driving rains each year would ensure that early on the group constructed dwellings, perhaps of the abundant limestone rock, offering better shelter than their tents. A sacred place for community worship and sacrifice is also highly likely. Locating such structures is quite possible, a prospect enhanced by the fact that the most plausible site has only been inhabited intermittently.

Aside from a smelting site, the ship construction site and their dwellings, a community of 40 or more people unavoidably leaves other traces over several years of use. Enclosures to protect their camels and other domestic animals from local predators are probable, perhaps water channels and field walls, and certainly broken pottery and discarded tools. Locating physical traces marking the presence of a small Israelite group 2,600 years ago remains, therefore, still within the realm of possibilities.

LDS Fieldwork in Arabia Begins, 1976 Onwards

The first attempt by any Latter-day Saint to visit the Arabian locales where Book of Mormon events took place did not come until a full 146 years after the book was first published. In January of 1976,

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Lynn and Hope Hilton of Salt Lake City, with their daughter Cynthia and photographer Gerry Silver, traveled to Oman and succeeded in visiting Salalah in the south of the country for 24 hours. They then traveled in Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Israel. The need for the LDS church magazines to focus on the four year rotating adult scriptural curriculum had resulted in the Hiltons, who were already well-traveled in the Arab world, being invited on behalf of the *ENSIGN* magazine to visit the possible areas where the Lehi story had unfolded. Their trip was reported in the September and October 1976 issues of the *ENSIGN* magazine,¹¹ published in book form as *In Search of Lehi's Trail*,¹² and later updated in their 1996 work, *Discovering Lehi*.¹³ The Hiltons' work, based on the limited evidence they could gather, shed some valuable light in the Arabian Peninsula. They suggested a location for Nahom in Saudi Arabia and proposed that the Salalah area in Oman generally met Nephi's description of "Bountiful."



In 1976, Lynn and Hope Hilton led the first LDS attempt to visit areas Lehi and Sariah traveled. Image courtesy of Lynn M. Hilton.

The next development came in November 1984, when the author and his wife Michaela traveled to the Yemen Arab Republic to follow up the suggestion of Ross T. Christensen, a BYU professor of archaeology, who later helped lead SEHA for many years. His brief letter, published in the August 1978 *ENSIGN* magazine, referred to a 1772 map of Yemen made by the Danish surveyor, Carsten Niebuhr, that showed the tribal district of NEHHM. Christensen suggested three steps in researching the name: an examination of the name's phonetics, a search for other early references to it and finally, fieldwork in Yemen.¹⁴

In Yemen another, more recent, map was located by the author showing "Nehem" in the same general area as the 1772 map, about 25 miles/40 km northeast of the capital, Sana'a. This find established that Nehem was still the name of a tribal area, spawning a major research effort and further visits to Yemen over several years by the author. Eventually the name was documented through maps and early writings back to about AD 100, with strong indications of a much earlier origin.



Warren and Michaela Aston in Sana'a, Yemen in November 1984.



Examples of inscribed and cast metal plates used in ancient Yemen.

These data and some preliminary comments concerning the location of “Bountiful” were presented by the author as the keynote address at the 35th Symposium of the Archaeology of the Scriptures held at BYU in Provo, Utah on October 17, 1986. They were published as *Preliminary Reports* by FARMS in 1984 and updated in 1986, 1988 and 1989 as new information was located. During this time, the author also documented several cast metal plates in Yemen bearing temple inscriptions and dating to about AD 400. This illustrated the use of metal in that part of the world for important purposes. Concurrently, the author began exploring the adjacent Sultanate of Oman. With security conditions more settled since the Hilton’s visit he was able to explore without major restrictions from October 1987 onwards. From the first visit to Oman it became apparent that the criteria for Nephi’s Bountiful were not found in any single place in or near Salalah, as was believed in the LDS community at the time.

With the necessity for data on the entire coastline of eastern Arabia evident, ground exploration of the Oman coastline further west of Salalah commenced the following year. During this exploration Khor Kharfot, the coastal mouth of Wadi Sayq, was observed and photographed in 1988, but not actually visited until October 2, 1989.

On that date the author and his fourteen-year-old daughter Claire became the first Latter-day Saints to visit the site.



On October 2, 1989 the author and his daughter Claire became the first Latter-day Saints to visit Khor Kharfot, a visit reprised 22 years later in October 2011 (2011 image courtesy of Alana Aston Orth).

This first, brief, visit immediately established that Kharfot had some unique characteristics in a very compact area that remained undisturbed by any current habitation. In addition to the abundant vegetation, large timber trees grew close to the ocean. The same visit also revealed the presence of an inland area with huge quantities of exposed hematite-rich “Chert” (Jasper), an early stage in the development of flint, perhaps what Nephi referred to when he said “I did smite two stones together that I might make fire” (17:11). As hematite is iron oxide (Fe_2O_3) it was the first indication of iron being present in the area. Exploration of the interior wadi system leading to the coast and closer examination of Kharfot itself were made by the author over succeeding years, uncovering a complex of ruins indicating past human occupation at Kharfot.



The author during frequent exploratory visits to Kharfot from 1990-1992.

As noted earlier in Part 5, exploration of the entire eastern coastline of Yemen also proceeded concurrently. Facilitated by the timely reunification of the two Yemen republics in 1990 after a brief civil war, the coastal survey was completed from Aden to Sayhut, including an assessment of two wadis on the coast, Wadis Hajr and Masilah as potential Bountiful sites. In 1991, FARMS released two completely updated papers by the author, “The Place Which Was Called Nahom” and “And We Called the Place Bountiful,” thus placing data on Khor

Kharfot into the public domain for the first time. At the conclusion of this exploration the general fertility of southern Oman was established as unique and Kharfot remained the most plausible Bountiful candidate.

The First LDS Expeditions to Oman, 1993-1999

The following year, the author led two expedition teams sponsored by BYU and FARMS to Kharfot. The first team in April 1993 included the President of FARMS, Noel B. Reynolds, to evaluate the site firsthand. It also brought to bear the expertise of an archaeologist, Paolo Costa of Italy, and geologist William Christiansen of Salt Lake City, for the first time at the site. Dr. Costa had previously visited the site briefly by helicopter, on May 10, 1989, while working for the government of Oman and with this background was thus the best-qualified person to begin assessing its history. Finding that Kharfot had been a sea inlet until recent centuries aided significantly in understanding the place; the first evaluation of the ruins defined at least four apparent periods of human occupation at the site. As earlier noted, Dr. Costa later presented a paper on Kharfot, noting its abundant flora and offering a preliminary dating for the human traces at the site, at the Seminar for Arabian Studies, held in London in July 1993. His paper was later published in the *Proceedings* of the Seminar.

The second expedition team traveled to Oman in September 1993. After reassessing Khor Rori, the very beginning of Wadi Sayq inland was accessed for the first time and other fertile areas west of Kharfot to the Yemen border were explored. The extensive area of chert deposits inland of Kharfot was examined and documented more completely and the first examination was made of the interior stages of Wadi Sayq. Access to most of these areas has since been restricted. Several days were then spent by the team at Kharfot, refining work begun five months earlier by the first team. A closer examination of the western plateau

was begun and measurements of the structures there were made for the first time. The hydrology of the lagoon and the inlet was also defined further, assisted by infra-red photography.



The April 1993 team departing by boat from Rakhyut.



The April 1993 Team: (L-R) Jonathan Reynolds, Noel Reynolds, William Christiansen (Geologist), Michaela Aston, Paolo Costa (Archaeologist), Warren Aston.



Noel Reynolds and Paolo Costa.



Paolo Costa, team archaeologist.



The September 1993 Team: (L-R) Warren Aston, Chad Aston, Rosalea McIntire, Malcolm Rea, Michaela Aston, Gary Widdison.



Historian and epigrapher Ali Mahash al-Shahri of Salalah, Oman has made unique contributions to our understanding of the region's past and given invaluable support to research efforts reported in this book.

The material from both expeditions was included in the author's 1994 book, *In the Footsteps of Lehi*, published by Deseret Book, which summarized what was known about the latter stages of Lehi's journey

at that time.¹⁵ In July 1995, the author presented a paper, "Some Notes on the Tribal Origins of NHM," at Cambridge University in England at the annual Seminar for Arabian Studies, the leading scholarly forum dealing with the Arabian Peninsula. This paper traced the NHM name back to its documented beginnings and included Nephi's reference to the place. It is printed here as an Appendix. Also in 1995, Nigel Groom of London, a leading authority on the history and geography of early Arabia as well as the incense trade, published a major paper that referred to the discovery of Kharfot and the still-unfolding picture of early human activity in Arabia as follows:

The recent discovery of ancient sites in the vicinity of Harfut (Kharfot) by Aston and Costa, now being investigated by a Brigham Young University team, and of sites in the vicinity of Ra's Sajir, now being investigated by archaeologists from South West Missouri State University under Zarins, raises new problems of identifying sites in Dhofar with places mentioned in the early sources.¹⁶

In his article, Groom concluded that the trading port of Moscha, in early writings such as the *Periplus* and those by Ptolemy, may not be Khor Rori as most commentators have assumed, but that it probably lay further west. Earlier in the same piece, he stated:

If the measurements of the Periplus are correct, then Moscha should lie some 40 miles west of Salala[h].

The potential historical significance of this can be seen when it is realized that Kharfot lies about 50 miles west of Salalah. Kharfot is therefore a candidate for the port of "Moscha" of early writings.¹⁷ Material and photographs from the research appeared frequently in commentaries on the Book of Mormon, in Church Education System teaching materials used throughout the church and in the authoritative *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (published by MacMillan in 1991). Talks at

BYU and articles by Noel B. Reynolds, Executive Director of FARMS 2003-2005, continued to endorse Kharfot as the most plausible candidate known for Bountiful, as in these examples:

No other site on this coastline meets all these criteria. Book of Mormon critics have long insisted that no site ever would. Only someone who had been to this unique place in ancient times could have described it in such precise detail as did Nephi in 1 Nephi 17.

Contrary to the theories of earlier investigators, [the Astons] have shown that Salalah and other sites do not fulfill the full criteria for Bountiful. Instead, they have discovered an obscure site, little known to people even in Oman, that seems to easily and convincingly meet all the criteria for Bountiful.¹⁸

A 1995 visit to Oman by FARMS-sponsored geologist Eugene E. Clark had resulted in a FARMS Preliminary Report that gave an updated assessment of the geology of the Dhofar region, without any focus on the candidate areas for Nephi’s Bountiful. Clark’s paper noted the existence of minor iron deposits east of Salalah and that they were likely to be present in association with manganese and carbon. Such a combination would result in high-grade steel suitable for tools.¹⁹

In February 1998, a FARMS team including an archaeologist, a geologist, historian, and an archaeo-botanist visited Oman to evaluate the research that could be pursued there. Their visit was reported in the *Church News* of November 14, 1998 and in a *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* article published the same year.²⁰ A brief botanical survey by a BYU team in 1999, joined by faculty from the Sultan Qaboos University in Muscat, resulted in the identification of two plant species never before reported in Oman.²¹



A BYU botanical team working in Dhofar in 1999.



A BYU geological team in Oman during 1999. (L-R) W. Revell Phillips, Jeffrey D. Keith, Jason Aase, Ron Harris, Talal al-Hosni.



(L-R) W. Revell Phillips, Ron Harris, Jason Aase, Jeffrey D. Keith.

LDS Fieldwork in Oman, 2000 - 2012

Late February 2000, emeritus BYU professor of geology W. Revell Phillips led a team of six on a three week geological evaluation of Dhofar. The visit identified small, but totally adequate, iron deposits near Rakhyut and Mirbat, thus giving credibility to Nephi's claim to have smelted "ore" in that general area. In Nephi's day either bronze or iron were the plausible options for making tools. Bronze is unlikely however; while copper has been mined in northern Oman for thousands of years it is almost unknown in the south. Tin, the other component of bronze, is unknown in the region and could only have been used if imported.

It thus seems almost certain that Nephi's "ore" was actually a form of steel processed from iron, with perhaps manganese or carbon added.

Phillips's team found exposed hematite in Wadi Nharat, on the coast a few miles east of Rakhyut. The natural impurities from the matrix of limestone would have helped lower the temperature needed to smelt the ore, making it feasible to forge hardened iron from such sources. Various techniques that harden iron into forms of steel were known thousands of years ago; one could well have been familiar to Nephi and used by him to fashion simple but effective tools. Likewise, at Jebal Ali close to Mirbat, at the eastern end of the Salalah bay, significant surface veins of siderite, an iron-carbonate combination that weathers to goethite-limonite ore (generic formula: $\text{FeO}(\text{OH})\cdot\text{NH}_2\text{O}$), were located. While not present in commercial quantities, they are more than adequate for the tool making Nephi described.²²



The Malachite Kingfisher (*Corythornis cristatus*) was reported in Arabia for the first time in September, 2000 at Khor Kharfot. Image courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

In a September 2000 visit to Kharfot with the author, LDS ornithologist Dr. Steven Carr identified a bird species never before reported in Arabia, the brilliantly colored Malachite Kingfisher, *Corythornis cristatus*. It has since been reported further east in 2004 and 2009-11. No formal survey of bird species at Kharfot has yet been completed.²³

As discussed earlier, the 1999 discovery of the three altars at Marib in Yemen was of great significance, providing indisputable evidence linking the NHM tribal name to the period of which Nephi wrote (16:34). A full discussion by the author of the altar find and its implications was published in the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* in 2001.²⁴

In 2007, a landmark issue of the *Journal* (Volume 15/2) entitled “Lehi and Sariah’s Wilderness Trek: Illuminating the Real-World Setting,” updated the findings of the primary researchers involved in researching the Lehite story. Articles by Lynn M. Hilton, Warren P. Aston, Richard Wellington, George Potter and S. Kent Brown were followed by three respondents. Despite differences over some details by the authors, the overall consensus was appropriately summed up by the title of reviewer Daniel McKinlay’s article, “The Brightening Light on the Journey of Lehi and Sariah.”²⁵ The issue highlighted the abundance of evidence now available from the Old World supporting the Book of Mormon’s credibility, that the most optimistic believer in the book could not have foreseen even a decade earlier.

Following geologist Revell Phillip’s suggestion that Mughsayl could be considered a candidate for Nephi’s Bountiful, S. Kent Brown of BYU and William Glanzman from the University of Calgary led three seasons work excavating two trenches atop a scenic headland overlooking Mughsayl from 2007-2009. The project yielded a small pottery shard identified stylistically as being an import of pre-Islamic South Arabian origin. The means by which it had arrived at the site and more precise

dating could not be determined. This result was summarized in various reports to the Omani authorities and eventually in a 2012 LDS book.²⁶ Nothing potentially relevant to the Lehite account emerged from this venture and the opportunity to work at Kharfot expired.

Beginning late 2012, a University of Pisa team cleared and mapped the ruins at Mughsayl proper where a coastal community had once lived, completing excavations in February 2013. They concluded that the human traces reveal “only an Islamic occupation... no Pre-Islamic period has been detected and our investigation led us to exclude that there were any more ancient levels...”²⁷

Other mooted BYU projects, including development of a herbarium in Provo and in Muscat, Oman to facilitate further research of the flora of Dhofar, and plans to build a general reference collection of microscopic-sized *phytoliths*, one of three general categories of plant microfossils (the others are pollen and starch grains), to aid in identifying plant species in future research,²⁸ have not materialized.

In 2009, continuing degradation to Kharfot’s environment due to water diversion by a water-pumping station in Wadi Sayq, and the threat posed by a renewed road proposal, led to two privately-funded team visits led by the author. The initial visit, in February, saw systematic contingency documentation of all artificial structures using high-definition imagery. The second visit, in October, saw a nine person team including an archaeologist, a botanist and a film crew. Intensive exploration revealed several significant faunal, floral and geographical features not previously documented. These included traces of smelt-able iron ore, fossils and a cave system containing a human burial found at Kharfot. In April 2010, a further team focused on exploration of the cave system and located a further iron ore source.

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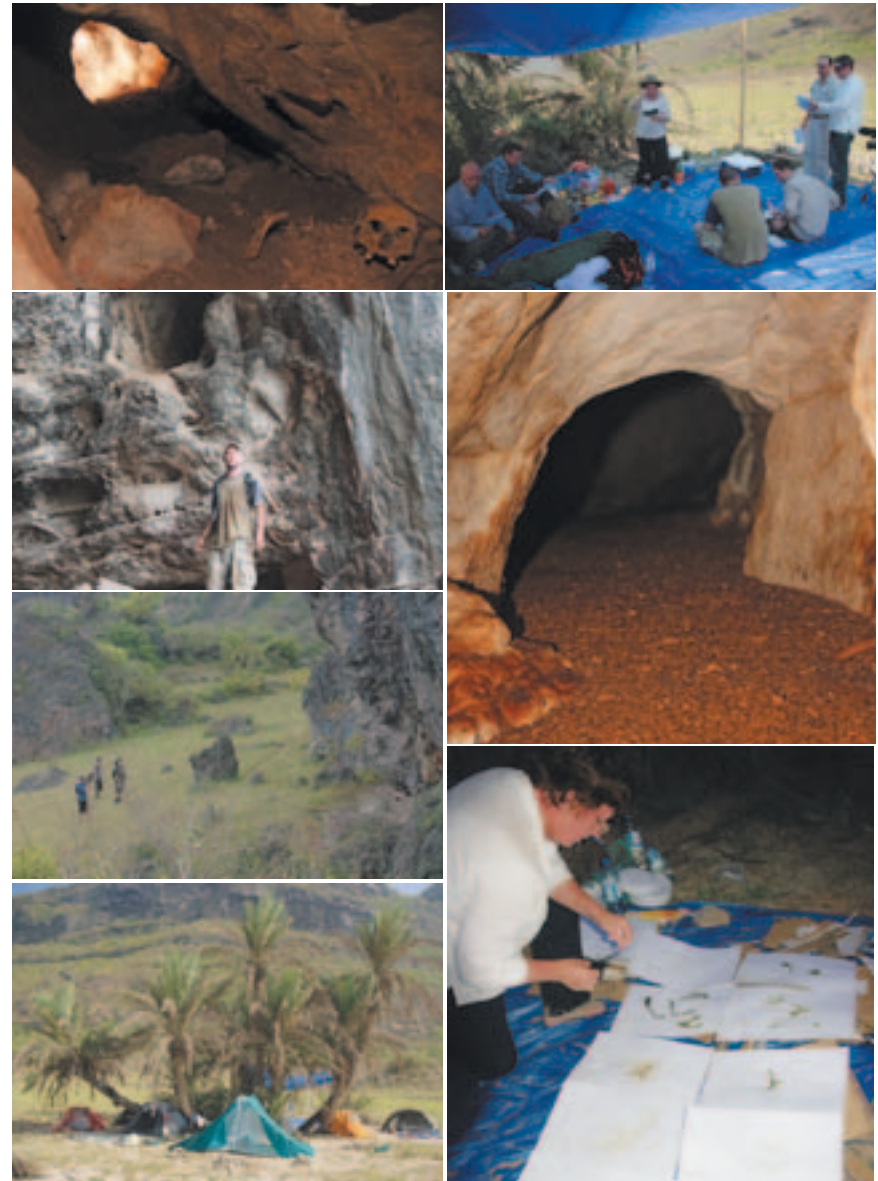
In February 2011 it was reported that the proposed road project had been canceled for the time being, but serious concerns remained over the impact of the diversion of water from the site by the water-pumping station in Wadi Sayq. In October 2011 the largest team yet, thirteen persons, continued exploration of the eastern coastline and a series of caves overlooking the bay.



The February 2009 Team: (L-R) Warren Aston, Sherry Chew.



The October 2009 Team: (L-R) Warren Aston, Chad Aston, Paul Hume, Adam Jones, Judith Grimes (Botanist), Brent Heaton, Neville Terlich (Archaeologist), Scott Gubler, Marty Heaton.



Views of the “Chadam” cave system discovered October 2009; interior cave views courtesy Colin Ligertwood and Paul Hume; Botanist Judith Grimes conducting a flora survey in October 2009; views of team working and the campsite; LDS Sacrament service held on Friday October 2, 2009.



The April 2010 Team: (L-R) Warren Aston, Chad Aston, Colin Ligertwood.



The October 2011 Team: (L-R) Back Row: Warren Aston, Kathrine Durrant McAllister, Alana Aston Orth & Cameron Orth, James Reynolds & Chrystine Heward Reynolds. Front Row: Panu Puikkonen & Leah Aston Puikkonen, Varian Aston, Chad Aston & Felicity Bryen Aston, Claire Aston Richards & Brandon Richards.



The jawbone of a cow drying in the sun at Kharfot reminds us that Lehi’s name in Hebrew means “jawbone.”

The Khor Kharfot Foundation

In 2013, a new effort began to fully document Khor Kharfot and Wadi Sayq and to stimulate awareness of their fragile ecology. With one general assessment of Dhofar biodiversity made in 2000 still largely reflecting the situation in 2013 and another study noting that remnant forest sites in Arabia had not been surveyed for over 15 years,²⁹ a private non-profit body, the **Khor Kharfot Foundation**, www.khor-kharfot-foundation.com was formed by a group of private LDS individuals including the author. Based in Houston, Texas, the foundation solicits funding to ensure that the best-qualified specialists are involved in each aspect of the work and that findings are released promptly in both scholarly and popular formats.³⁰

The first team assembled and funded by the Foundation completed its initial fieldwork at Kharfot in late April 2014 with three archaeologists and a geologist making preliminary assessments as a basis for future

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work. Based on the project, a paper titled “Khawr Kharfut (Dhofar, Sultanate of Oman) re-visited” was presented on July 27, 2014 by archaeologists Carl Phillips and Michele Degli Esposti at the annual *Seminar for Arabian Studies* in London.



The April-May 2014 Team. (L-R) Iftikhar Abbasi (Geologist), Neil Prendergast, Michele Degli Esposti (Archaeologist), Scot Proctor, Mariah Proctor, Carl Phillips (Archaeologist), Maurine Proctor, Mark Hamilton, Chad Aston, Richard Hauck (Archaeologist), Caleb Barnes, Warren Aston. Image: Scot Facer Proctor.



Some of the team arriving by boat.



The team camp site at Khor Kharfut.



Lead archaeologists, Carl Phillips and Michele Degli Esposti.



Team Geologist, Iftikhar Abbasi.



Archaeologists working on the western plateau.

In late October 2014, the Foundation's second team worked at the site. A total of 16 persons, 9 of them from Sultan Qaboos University in Muscat, were involved in making baseline studies of the flora and fauna. The two archaeologists involved assessed the requirements for future projects at the site.³¹ At the time of going to press, several papers resulting from the two 2014 teams were in preparation, reporting on the geology, archaeology and other aspects. They will be published in due course.



A motion-activated wildlife camera being installed by Chad Aston.



The October 2014 Team: Back row (L-R): Warren Aston, Abdullah al Shuraiki (Botanist), Richard Hauck (Archaeologist), Kimball Banks (Archaeologist), Thekra al Mantheri (Botanist assistant), Amina al Farsi (Botanist), Jayanthi Victor (Limnologist), Reginald Victor (Limnologist), Ahmed Jashool (Veterinary Science), David Clayton (Biologist), Ahmed Hardan. Front Row (L-R): Mohammed Haneef, Matthew Thurmond, Ahmed al Wahaibi (Botanist), Abubakr Bouzier, Ibrahim al Zakwani (Biologist assistant).



Botanists Amina al-Farsi and Abdullah al Shuraiki process flora samples.



Biologist David Clayton collecting faunal samples on the beach..



Reginald Victor and Ibrahim al Zakwani retrieving water samples.



Matt Thurmond with archaeologists Ric Hauck and Kimball Banks.

Relevant non-LDS Research in Arabia

Of course, many other non-LDS scholars also work in these locations. In all disciplines, their findings continue to be invaluable in pushing the boundaries of our understanding and helping to build a more complete picture of life and conditions in Lehi’s day. In addition to the German and French teams working in Yemen already discussed, Paolo Costa of Italy was the archaeologist who participated in the April 1993 expedition to Kharfot in Oman. His assessment of the site’s manmade structures provided the first indications of when the place had been inhabited. Nigel Groom of London, the leading authority on the Arabian incense trade, made invaluable contributions by way of review and suggestions over several decades. UK botanists Anthony Miller and Miranda Morris, with experience in cataloging Dhofari plants and identifying their uses by local people, helped evaluate the botanical data from the 1993 expeditions to Kharfot.

In addition to the continuing (as of 2015) work being done by the University of Pisa at Khor Rori noted in Part 5, one of the more significant efforts to uncover the history of southern Oman was the *Dhofar Epigraphic Project*, coordinated by the Oriental Institute at Oxford University. Building upon the efforts of Salalah historian Ali Mahash al-Shahri to record local carved and painted texts, from 1991-1992 the project documented over 800 texts at some 90 sites, including Kharfot.³² However, while some progress toward understanding the Kharfot script (and others like it) has been made, as of 2015 it remains un-translated.

A representative sample illustrates the breadth of what has been done in other research efforts across Arabia. Noting the “total absence of archaeological discoveries of Arabian ships pre-dating the Portuguese incursion,” several Australian and Omani museums jointly investigated the heritage of early Omani seafaring using new underwater techniques to reveal data about ship construction, a subject of obvious interest to Latter-day Saints.³³ Scholars investigating links between the Mahra and Dhofar regions and the isolated island of Socotra off the Yemen coast have learned things about traditional practices that may shed light into Lehi and his family’s environment at Bountiful.³⁴ A joint Russian, French, and German venture conducted a survey to examine the environment and human activity on the Yemen coast in pre-Islamic times.³⁵ Until security conditions curtailed it, a Canadian team led the excavation of the Awwam complex in Yemen, adjacent to the Bar’an temple at Marib that yielded the Nahom altars; Italian and British scholars are digging into the origins of the Lehyanite kingdom in northern Saudi Arabia using newly-found inscriptions.³⁶ A German and Omani effort cooperated in documenting Omani rock art as a way to better understand the very early history of the area.³⁷

Since 2012, another research front has been opened by the British Exploring Society based at the Royal Geographical Society in London. In

conjunction with Oman’s Office for Conservation of the Environment, the BES began a long-term project documenting the biodiversity of two ecosystems; the edge of the Empty Quarter in Dhofar and eastern Wadi Sayq, including Khor Kharfot. From January 31 to March 1, 2012, the first team of over 20 worked at these locations. Similar-sized teams worked in Wadi Sayq in 2013 and 2014, publishing their reports in a timely manner.³⁸ The project will continue yielding data that will be invaluable to all future research efforts.

The fact that large areas of the Dhofar province of Oman and the adjoining Mahra province in Yemen had never been explored until the brief exploratory forays led by Juris Zarin of Southwest Missouri State University from 1990 onwards is a reminder of how much remains to be learnt about this ancient region. Zarin’s milestone 2001 work, *The Land of Incense* remains the premier work available on the history and archaeology of southern Oman and eastern Yemen. Underscoring this lack of data, the only reference in Zarin’s book to sites along the Qamar coast (i.e., west of Mughsayl to Hauf in Yemen) was this author’s 1991 paper on “Bountiful,” reporting Iron-age structures at Kharfot.³⁹ By comprehensively assessing the resources offered to a coastal community elsewhere in Oman, some recent studies point to what remains to be done at the place where the LeHITE ship was built.⁴⁰

Book of Mormon Movies and Documentaries

As the insights resulting from this research, including the first totally plausible Book of Mormon sites, began to penetrate the LDS community, new attempts to bring the LeHITE story to the screen commenced. The first to appear was the privately produced movie drama “*Book of Mormon: The Movie*” in September 2003, covering LeHI’s story from Jerusalem until his death in the Promised Land. Despite the

credentials of some involved in the project, the film’s production values resulted in very limited commercial success.

A documentary of the LeHITE story, filmed on location in the Near East, debuted in August 2005. Produced under the direction of BYU and FARMS, the 90-minute film “*Journey of Faith*,” and the 2006 book of the same name, attempted to depict the LeHITE journey for a general audience through extensive commentary from a variety of BYU scholars and two Arab authorities.⁴¹

The status of a motion picture version with the working title “*A Voice from the Dust: Journey to the Promised Land*,” first mooted in 2002, remains unclear at present. Neither of these films achieved a truly comprehensive treatment of the subject, and neither was entirely free from errors and unwarranted speculation. This was particularly true with regard to the LeHITE journey from Nahom to Bountiful. Ignoring the flat plateau providing access directly “eastward” from Nahom to the coast, the better-known and more photogenic sites SE of Nahom such as Timna, Shabwah and the Hadhramaut valley were instead prominently featured in *Journey of Faith*. Both Khor Rori and Khor Kharfot were presented as possible Bountiful sites, the latter clearly favored in the location filming (done in Oman in October 2004) and in the commentary by Noel B. Reynolds and Peter Johnson. Artwork depicting Nephi’s Bountiful in the film and book was also modeled on Kharfot.

Late in 2014 a privately-made TV documentary titled *Lehi in Arabia: The Search For Nephi’s Bountiful* was completed. The 75 minute film presents the LeHITE account against the background of the LDS exploration of the Near East that has enabled the story to emerge from obscurity.⁴²

Lehi’s Trail Tourism

With the identification of plausible sites for the primary locations on the Lehiite journey, Nahom and Bountiful, the first LDS tourism has begun in the area. A scattering of LDS visitors have made their way to Kharfot since 1992, including small groups of members living in the Gulf and at least one General Authority. In October 1999, and again in September 2000, the first LDS tour groups retraced Lehi’s journey from Jerusalem to Bountiful, visiting Israel, Jordan, Yemen and Oman without incident. Due to the escalation of unrest in Yemen, LDS tour groups since 2000 have visited only the sites in Israel, Jordan and Oman, including both “Bountiful” possibilities. It is hoped that tours of the full trail will resume in the future.⁴³



LDS tour groups, such as these in Oman in 2000 and in 2013, are able to safely visit many of the general areas of Lehi and Sariah’s journey.

Conclusion

While research and field work at the Nahom and Bountiful sites will be on-going for years to come, a strong argument can now be made that both locations are no longer merely conjectural. In the case of Nahom, the dating is substantiated by the most powerful evidence of all: inscriptional; at Khor Kharfot, the weight of support rests upon the way that the place uniquely meets a very detailed scriptural paradigm.

For the longest part of Lehi’s journey from Jerusalem to Nahom more work remains to be done before the remainder of Nephi’s account can be firmly correlated with the modern map. In particular, little competent research has been conducted from Eilat/Aqaba to Nahom, primarily due to access difficulties. Some LDS commentary on these topics, however, has tended to diminish the significance of Book of Mormon studies rather than enhance it. If not competently researched, even well-intentioned writing ultimately often degrades scripture; rather than letting the Book of Mormon speak for itself, geography, history, logic and commonsense are often abandoned in such efforts to force the facts to fit preconceptions and pet theories. Such writings are typically characterized by selective use of scripture, lack of familiarity with scholarly sources and by extravagant claims.⁴⁴

Invariably, such writers also misunderstand the nature of faith and the limitations of evidence, forgetting that ultimately the Book of Mormon, like other sacred gifts, can never be “proved” in any meaningful, objective, sense. No matter how compelling they may be, external evidences can *only* establish plausibility. Plausibility then encourages people to consider spiritual claims and also validates the testimony of those who, having received a spiritual confirmation through the method prescribed by Moroni, already accept the Book as true. As Hugh Nibley succinctly stated years ago:

*The evidence that will prove or disprove the Book of Mormon does not exist.*⁴⁵

More recently, Apostle Neal A. Maxwell stated:

*It is my opinion that all scriptures, including the Book of Mormon, will remain in the realm of faith. Science will not be able to prove or disprove holy writ. However, enough plausible evidence will come forth to prevent scoffers from having a field day, but not enough to remove the requirement of faith.*⁴⁶

The steady, on-going research being done by serious Book of Mormon scholars continues to bear fruit and bodes well for the future. The Book of Mormon is no longer assailed by critics with impunity. However, as with the Bible, while many aspects of the Book of Mormon now find support in various scholarly fields, others do not. Although many Latter-day Saints remain unaware of its depth and breadth, a steady convergence of supportive evidence continues to emerge. It may not be going too far to state that the Book of Mormon's Old World setting is now as plausibly established as that of the Old and New Testaments.



This overview shows the key locations for the Lehite land journey.

NOTES

1. Alexander Campbell (1788-1866), minister of an extreme Baptist splinter group, *The Disciples of Christ*, published his critique “Delusions” on February 7, 1831 in the *Millennial Harbinger* and as a pamphlet in Boston the following year.
2. Oliver Cowdery’s earlier published response to Campbell’s writing was limited to only some of the points that had been raised. Other issues awaited Orson Pratt’s work. Both writings are among the collection “19th Century Publications about the Book of Mormon (1829-1844),” now searchable at www.lib.byu.edu/dlib/bompublications/.
3. Joseph Smith’s comments published in *Times & Seasons* 3 (October 1, 1842), 927 about the ruins in southern Mexico and Guatemala possibly being connected to the Book of Mormon account referred to a popular book by John L. Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan* 2 vols. (New York City: Harper & Brothers, 1841-43), recently re-released by several publishers in the UK and the US.

Joseph Smith’s own statements show that he was quite open to a limited geographical setting rather than a hemispheric one. While we cannot be sure that this statement was personally penned by him, it certainly had at least his editorial approval.

4. A summary of Paul Henning’s contributions to Book of Mormon archaeology is Robert W. Fullmer, “Paul Henning: The First Mormon Archaeologist” *JBMS* 9/1 (2000), 64-65.
5. The names **Reynolds and Sjodahl** are usually linked because of their attribution as co-authors of the 7 volume *Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, however see Bruce A. Van Orden’s review, “Every City, Hill, River, Valley, and Person: Review of [George Reynold’s] *Book of Mormon Dictionary*” in *Review of Books* 8/1 (1996), 51-60. The unauthorized merging, by a Reynolds descendant, of materials from the two scholars in no way detracts from the contributions of each scholar to our understanding of the Book of Mormon.

Brigham H. Roberts’s *New Witnesses for God* was published early in the 20th Century. Some of his work has been misused in recent years by anti-Mormon and cultural-Mormon writers in an attempt to cast doubt on Robert’s belief in the Book of Mormon being authentically ancient. Consult the FARMS and FAIRLDS websites for a range of responses, for example Davis Bitton, “B. H. Roberts and Book of Mormon Scholarship” in *JBMS* 8/2 (1999), 60-69 and Daniel Peterson, “Yet More Abuse of B. H. Roberts” *FARMS Review of Books* 9/1 (1997), 69-87.

Sidney B. Sperry’s work is ably summarized in the special issue of *JBMS* 4/1 (1995), containing most of his writing on Book of Mormon subjects and a full bibliography,

287-296. *The Sidney B. Sperry Symposium at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah annually acts as a fitting reminder of his wide-ranging contributions.*

6. The wide-ranging corpus of **Hugh W. Nibley** (1910-2005) is published as the *Collected Works of Hugh Nibley (CWHN)* series, totaling 19 volumes (1986-2010). On Nibley’s Arabian parallels to Nephi’s account as his “most important” contribution to Book of Mormon research; see John W. Welch “Hugh Nibley and the Book of Mormon,” *ENSIGN* (April 1985), 50. The quotes by Nibley and Elder Maxwell come from a Nibley son-in-law, Boyd Peterson, in ““Something to Move Mountains”: The Book of Mormon in Hugh Nibley’s Correspondence” *JBMS* 6/2 (1997), 1-25.
7. **John L. Sorenson**, *Mormon’s Codex: An Ancient American Book* (2013) is an exhaustive compilation of evidence supporting the Book of Mormon as authentic New World history and a focused examination of the internal New World geography. It follows and enlarges his *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book & FARMS, 1985) and *Mormon’s Map* (Provo: FARMS, 2000).

Sorenson authored an under-appreciated two part summary of the Book of Mormon’s New World issues in his “Digging into the Book of Mormon: Our Changing Understanding of Ancient America and Its Scripture” published in the *ENSIGN* magazine (September, October, 1984). Explicitly referring to the limited Mesoamerican geography and its requirement for the original Hill Cumorah to be located in Central America, publication of this article suggests that his conclusions had at least quasi-official acceptance.

Thorough discussions of the developments in Book of Mormon archaeology by LDS and anti-LDS writers alike can be found in Terryl L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture That Launched a New World Religion* and by Louis C. Midgley, “Who Really Wrote the Book of Mormon? The Critics and Their Theories” in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins*, 101-139. Another wide-ranging treatment that includes references to B. H. Roberts, *Nahom and Bountiful* is the review by Matthew Roper, “Unanswered Mormon Scholars: Review of Answering Mormon Scholars: A Response to Criticism Raised by Mormon Defenders, [by] Jerald and Sandra Tanner” in *FARMS Review of Books* 9/1 (1997), 87-145.

8. See the account by Daniel Peterson “On the New World Archaeological Foundation” in *The FARMS Review* 16/1 (2004), 221-233. Mesoamerican fieldwork has been published by BYU faculty through the Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies, based in Los Angeles, www.famsi.org.

9. *The major addresses concerning the Book of Mormon by Ezra Taft Benson (from April 1975 to October 1987) are found in his compilation A Witness and a Warning: A Modern-Day Prophet Testifies of the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988). For analysis of how the Book of Mormon has been increasingly used by Latter-day Saints as it was intended, see Noel B. Reynolds, “The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon in the Twentieth Century” BYU Studies 38/2 (1999), 6-47.*
10. *A useful summary of these developments is Daniel C. Peterson’s August 2012 essay “The Role of Apologetics in Mormon Studies” available at www.mormoninterpreter.com/the-role-of-apologetics-in-mormon-studies*
11. *Lynn and Hope Hilton, “In Search of Lehi’s Trail” in the ENSIGN (September and October, 1976).*
12. *Lynn and Hope Hilton, In Search of Lehi’s Trail (book).*
13. *Lynn and Hope Hilton, Discovering Lehi: New Evidence of Lehi and Nephi in Arabia. This book was reviewed by the author in the FARMS Review of Books 9/1 (1997), 15-24, available at <http://publications.maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/fullscreen/?pub=1441&index=5>*
14. *Ross T. Christensen, “The Place Called Nahom” ENSIGN (August, 1978), 73 under “Comment,” accessible at www.lds.org/ensign/1978/08/comment?lang=eng Christensen later recalled the event, which happened as he and his wife Ruth participated in an excavation at Tel Bathsheba in Israel. In August 1977 they were given Thorkild Hansen’s book Arabia Felix by a departing fellow volunteer, the Rev. David Hunsberger, a minister from Pennsylvania wishing to lighten his luggage. Reading the book in Jerusalem, Christensen said it “came to me immediately” that the book’s map showing the district of NeHHM (page 232-3) referred to the Book of Mormon NaHoM. Christensen had mentioned the matter briefly in the 1977 Symposium of the Scriptures in Provo before writing his letter to the ENSIGN.*
15. *Part 3 of Aston and Aston, In the Footsteps of Lehi, contains accounts of the 1993 Oman expeditions. The 8 page assessment made by geologist Dr William Christiansen, “Geology of Wadi Sayq” remains unpublished. Copy in possession of author.*
16. *Nigel Groom, “The Periplus, Pliny and Arabia” in Arabian archaeology and epigraphy 6 (1995), 184-185.*
17. *Not all scholars agree. The possibility that Khor Kharfot may have been the trading center “Omanum Emporium” rather than “Moscha” has been suggested by von Wissman in his 1963 map Das Vorislamische Arabien and more recently by H. Stewart Edgell (email correspondence with the author, March 2006). Edgell sees Ptolemy’s association of the trading center with a river outlet (“Ormanos Potamos Exbolai”) and Sprenger’s judgment that it lay on “dem bache Charyfot” (“the brook of Charyfot”), in A. Sprenger, Die Alte Geographie Arabiens (Bern, 1875) as suggesting a coastal river outlet such as Kharfot rather than an inland location. See Edgell’s paper “The myth of the “lost city of the Arabian Sands” in PSAS 34 (2004), 113.*
18. *Noel B. Reynolds, “Shedding New Light on Ancient Origins” address delivered May 27, 1997 at a BYU Assembly, available at <http://publications.maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/home/transcripts> and later published in Brigham Young Magazine 52/1 (Provo: BYU, Spring 1998), 36-45 is also available on video as “The Authorship of the Book of Mormon” from FARMS. See his earlier article in Book of Mormon Authorship: New Light on Ancient Origins. The second quotation comes from Reynold’s article, “Lehi’s Journey Updated” in the sequel, Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins, 379-390. Similar material was used in Reynold’s presentation to BYU faculty and staff in March 2004, as reported by FARMS in Insights 24/2 (1994).*
Richard L. Bushman’s 2007 work Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling, 93 lists discovery of a plausible Bountiful site (Kharfot) as lending credence to the Book of Mormon’s Old World account.
19. *Eugene E. Clark, “A Preliminary Study of the Geology and Mineral Resources of Dhofar, the Sultanate of Oman” Preliminary Report CLR-95 (Provo: FARMS, 1995). The introduction by Noel B. Reynolds offers background, identifying, once again, Kharfot as “a location that appears to meet all the criteria one can infer from the text of the Book of Mormon.”*
20. *See “Searching for Land Bountiful” Church News, (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, Nov 14, 1998), 8, 9, 12 and “Planning Research on Oman: The End of Lehi’s Trail” JBMS 7/1 (1998), 12-21 and J. Lee Simons, “Tracing History in Arabian Bountiful” Bridges: 1999-2000 Annual Report Issue (Provo: David M. Kennedy Center for International Studies, Brigham Young University), 18-22. For a photo-essay showing the organization of the October 2009 expedition to Khor Kharfot, see Warren P. Aston, “Exploring Nephi’s Bountiful: Behind the Scenes of an Expedition” published March 7 2011 in Meridian Magazine, available at www.ldsmag.com/component/zine/article/7599?ac=1*
21. *The 1999 discovery of at least two plant species previously unattested in Dhofar will be reported at a future date by BYU botanist Loreen Allphin-Woolstenhulme.*
22. *W. Revell Phillips, “Metals of the Book of Mormon” JBMS 9/2 (2000), 36-43, discusses the Oman findings. See also a report “Iron Ore Occurrences in Oman” Insights 20/5 (2000). The only report of the geological visits by the BYU teams to date*

- is Jason G. Aase, "Geology of a Carbonate Rich Diatrema-like Structure, Marbat area, Dhofar, Sultanate of Oman: A Reconnaissance Study" a Master's thesis. In discussing the possible Book of Mormon connection, Appendix D of the paper has several factual errors and misrepresents what the Book of Mormon says about "ore." The paper was accepted November 18, 2004 at BYU Provo and is available at: www.geology.byu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/2004-Aase-Jason-G.pdf
23. Reported at www.birdsoman.com/lob16-update.html (item # 831 A). The regularly updated book by Jens Eriksen and Reginald Victor, *Oman Bird List, Edition 7* (Muscat: Center for Environmental Studies and Research, Sultan Qaboos University, October 2013) is the benchmark for avian species in Oman. The Malachite Kingfisher is pictured on p. 154 and Dr Carr's observations of it at Kharfot in 2000 noted within.
 24. Warren P. Aston, "Newly Found Altars from Nahom" *JBMS* 10/2 (2001), 56-61. A human interest account of the altar discovery was published January 5, 2011 by *Meridian Magazine* as "The First Archaeological Support for the Book of Mormon" at www.ldsmag.com/component/zine/article/7240
 25. *JBMS* 15/2 (2006), 78-83.
 26. The BYU excavation was reported by William D. Glanzman, "South Arabian Pottery in Khor Mughsayl, Oman: An Early Settlement Connection" in Andrew C. Skinner, D. Morgan Davis, Carl Griffin, eds. *Bountiful Harvest: Essays in honor of S. Kent Brown* (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2012), 157-174. Notes 4, 9, 27 and 29 of the essay cite the 4 official reports which, however, remain unpublished as at early 2015.
 27. The Italian Mission To Oman (IMTO)'s University of Pisa findings are reported at "Khor Mughsayl: Preliminary Report, February-March, 2013 (KM13A)" at http://arabiantica.humnet.unipi.it/fileadmin/Arabia_Antica_New/Projects/Khor_Roril_KM13_Report.pdf
 28. On phytoliths, see T. Ball, G. Baird, A. al-Fassi, S. Ghazanfar, L. Woolstenhulme, "A survey of phytoliths produced by the vegetation of Dhofar, Oman" in M. Madella, D. Zurro, eds. *Plants, People and Places – Recent Studies in Phytolith Analysis* (Oxford, UK: David Brown Book Co, 2007), 29-40; Terry B. Ball et al. "Phytoliths Produced by the Vegetation of the Sub-Tropical Coastal Region of Dhofar, Oman" a CD distributed 2002 by The Society for Phytolith Research, now available as "The Dhofar Phytolith Reference Collection" at www.phytolithsociety.org. No attempt has yet been made to sample phytoliths from Kharfot in particular. Some useful commentary is found in Terry B. Ball & Wilford M. Hess, "Agriculture in Lehi's World: Some Textual, Historical, Archaeological, and Botanical Insights" in *Glimpses of Lehi's Jerusalem*, 149-192.
 29. A March 31, 2012 email from Dr Reginald Victor, Department of Biology, Sultan Qaboos University in Muscat advised that his 2000 study "Biodiversity Conservation in Oman: Current Status and Future Options" at www.nizwa.net/enu/biodiversity/biodiversity.html still reflects the current situation.
See also M. Hall et al. "Arabia's Last Forests Under Threat, 11" in *Edinburgh Journal of Botany* 66/2 (Edinburgh: Royal Botanic Garden, 2009), 263-281 and Matthew Hall & Anthony G. Miller, "Strategic requirements for plant conservation in the Arabian Peninsula" in *Supplementum 3: "Biodiversity Conservation in the Arabian Peninsula," of Zoology in the Middle East* (Heidelberg: Kasperek Verlag, 2011), 169-182.
See Warren P. Aston, "Arabia's Hidden Valley: A unique habitat in Dhofar captures Arabia's past" in *Wildlife Middle East News* vol. 6 no. 4 (Dubai: WMENews, March 2013), 2-4 and front cover. PDF available online: www.wmenews.com/newsletters/1366812925wmenews_V6_I4_eng.pdf (English) and www.wmenews.com/newsletters/1366812925WMENewsV6I4_ar.pdf (Arabic). This article also appeared May 28, 2013 with added commentary as "Why Arabia's Hidden Valley is the Best Candidate for Bountiful" in *Meridian Magazine* at <http://ldsmag.com/article-1-12748/>
 30. The Foundation was publicly introduced, along with a funding drive, by a series of articles published in *Meridian Magazine* beginning late September 2014; see "Exploring Nephi's Bountiful: All Article Links" in *Meridian Magazine* at <http://ldsmag.com/article-1-14965/>
 31. Reported November 2, 2014 as "Some Thoughts from Nephi's Land of Bountiful in *Meridian Magazine* at <http://ldsmag.com/reflections-from-nephis-land-of-bountiful>.
 32. See Ali Ahmed Mahash Al-Shahri & Geraldine M. H. King, *The Dhofar Epigraphic Project: A Description of the Inscriptions Recorded in 1991 and 1992* available at: http://krc2.orient.ox.ac.uk/aalc/images/documents/mcam/dhofar_epigraphic_project.pdf
 33. Tom Vosmer, "Old Ships' Bones and Anchor Stones: Maritime Ethnology and Archaeology in Oman" in *Bulletin of the Society for Arabian Studies* (Spring 2000), 19-23.
 34. Miranda Morris, "Soqatra and its place in South Arabia" in *Bulletin of the Society for Arabian Studies* (Spring 2000), 9-13.

35. *Bulletin of the Society for Arabian Studies* (Spring 1999), 30 reports the joint coastal project.
36. William D. Glanzman, “Digging Deeper: the results of the first season of activities of the AFSM (American Foundation for the Study of man) on the Mahram Bilqis, Marib” *PSAS* 28 (1999) and an update concerning ongoing work into Lehyanite inscriptions, *Bulletin of the Society for Arabian Studies* (Spring 2000), 28.
37. The Oman rock art project is also noted in the *Bulletin of the Society for Arabian Studies* (Spring 2000), 28. Valuable documentation of physical and linguistic cultural traces of early Dhofar is documented by Omani epigrapher Ali Ahmed Mahash al-Shabri, *The Language of ‘Aad*. See also his useful illustrated paper “Recent Epigraphic Discoveries in Dhofar” in *PSAS* 21 (1991), 173-191.
38. The reports of the British Exploring Society fieldwork for 2012 are presented in “A Rapid Biodiversity Assessment of Wadi Sayq, Dhofar Province, Oman” (*British Exploring Society and Office for Conservation of the Environment: publication pending, copy in author’s possession*) and for 2013 at: <http://oman2014.files.wordpress.com/2014/01/oman-science-report-2013.pdf>.
- Other papers also result. Examples include studies of Dragon Flies made in 2012 and 2013, primarily at Khor Kharfot; see Lawrence Ball, “An Investigation of Odonate Communities within Wadi Sayq, Dhofar Province, Oman [Insecta: Odonata],” in *Check List: The Journal of Biodiversity Data* 10/4 (Sao Paulo: CRIA, 2014), 857-863 and a summary of all bird data to date in Lawrence Ball, Waheed al Fazari & James Borrell, “Birds of Wadi Sayq, Dhofar, Oman: British Exploring Society expeditions January-March 2012 and 2013,” in *Sandgrouse* vol. 37 (1) (Bedfordshire: Ornithological Society of the Middle East, the Caucasus and Central Asia, Spring 2015), 2-12 and accessible at www.jamesborrell.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Ball-et-al_Sandgrouse-37-2-12-2015.pdf.
39. Juris Zarins, *The Land of Incense*, referencing W. P & M. J Aston, *And We Called the Place Bountiful: The End of Lehi’s Arabian Journey* (1991), 128. Archaeological work in Oman under the direction of Zarins ended mid-2012.
- Coordinated by Juris Zarins and Lynne Newton, the *Atlas of Archaeological Survey in Governorate of Dhofar, Sultanate of Oman* (Muscat: Office of the Adviser to His Majesty the Sultan for Cultural Affairs, 2013) summarizes archaeological undertakings in Dhofar. However, it contains numerous editing errors and almost completely neglects Khor Kharfot, the second-largest archaeological site in Dhofar. Kharfot’s name is misspelled and listed as an “Iron Age” site (p. 58), a sweeping categorization based only on brief observation that fails to account for the wide range of sites.
40. The report of a comprehensive survey of the ancient port of Qalhat in north-eastern Oman as reported by marine archaeologist Tom Vosmer in “Qalhat, an ancient port of Oman: results of the first mission” in *PSAS* 34 (2004), 389-404 should be considered a model of what can be achieved toward understanding the past at such a site. Also see Tom Vosmer et al, “Oman Maritime Heritage Project Field Report 1998,” *Western Australian Maritime Museum Report No. 144*, available at http://museum.wa.gov.au/maritime-archaeology-db/sites/default/files/no.144/oman_herit_proj.pdf
41. Brown, S. Kent & Johnson, Peter. eds. *Journey of Faith: From Jerusalem to the Promised Land* (Provo: NAMIRS, 2006), accompanied by a DVD titled “A Filmmaking Odyssey: The Making of Journey of Faith.” The film website is <http://journeyoffaithfilms.com/>.
42. *Lehi in Arabia* was produced by Aston Productions of Brisbane, Australia. www.lehiinarabia.com
43. See www.discovernephisbountiful.com.
44. Examples in this genre include:
- Eugene L. Peay, *The Lands of Zarahemla: A Book of Mormon Commentary* (Salt Lake City: Northwest, 1993), 38-46 offers perhaps the most novel geographical suggestion yet made in connection with the Book of Mormon. The book suggests that after traversing central Arabia, Lehi traveled overland across India and then across Southeast Asia, building vessels several times in order to cross the Arabian Gulf and such rivers as the Ganges, eventually finding “Bountiful” in either Hong Kong or Macau harbor. This book was reviewed by Les Campbell in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/2 (1994), 139-145.
- Robert A. Pate’s *Mapping the Book of Mormon* (Logan, UT: privately published, 2002) makes a proposal, based on supposed linguistic connections between various places, for Lehi sailing from the Yemen coast. Its map of the final stage of Lehi’s journey (p 52) and the commentary on Nahom and Bountiful (p 50-54) betrays a lack of awareness of and disregard for long-published research, ignoring almost all other reference material. Pate’s book was briefly reviewed by Allen J. Christenson, “Linguistic Puzzles Still Unresolved” in *The FARMS Review* 16/2 (2004), 107-111, but without any reference to its Old World ideas.
- George Potter and Richard Wellington’s 2003 volume, *Lehi in the Wilderness*, is the most recent and most useful of these four works. It contains some useful information on the early stages of the Lehite journey, but its overall value is greatly reduced by the incorrect and sometimes nonsensical claims made. The discussion concerning Nahom (never visited by the authors) is unforgivably inadequate and the section on Bountiful, trivializing elements of Nephi’s text, has lost all semblance of objectivity.

The reader is steered toward a pre-determined conclusion in favor of the author's favored site, Khor Rori via multiple factually incorrect assertions about Kharfot (which the authors had also never, to that point, visited). This book was reviewed and its key assumptions challenged by archaeologist Jeffrey R. Chadwick in "The Wrong Place for Lehi's Trail and the Valley of Lemuel" in *The FARMS Review* 17/2 (2005), 197-215. However, a full critique of the book's treatment of the later stages of Lehi's journey remains to be published.

Factual errors and claims by these authors were perpetuated, and added to, in their article "Lehi's Trail: From the Valley of Lemuel to Nephi's Harbor" in *JBMS* 15/2 (2006), 26-43. These errors and those in another article proposing Khor Mughsayl as a possible Bountiful were noted in Warren P. Aston, "Identifying Our Best Candidate for Nephi's Bountiful," *JBMRS* 17/1-2 (2008), 58-64.

More than 70 geographical models have been proposed over the years for the setting of the Book of Mormon, most focusing on the New World that occupies the majority of the Book of Mormon account. While most are based on a North American setting, periodically such places as South America, the Malay Peninsula in Asia and Eritrea in Africa have been proposed.

In 2013, BYU archaeologist Mark Alan Wright made a case for a geography initially centered in Mesoamerica, but one that later expanded northwards (as suggested in Alma 63:4 for example) in his "Heartland as Hinterland: A Look at Book of Mormon Geography," in *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 13 (2015), 111-129; available at www.mormoninterpreter.com/heartland-as-hinterland-the-mesoamerican-core-and-north-american-periphery-of-book-of-mormon-geography/#more-6367

45. Hugh Nibley, *Since Cumorah*, CWHN 7: xiv. On the roles of evidence and faith see John W. Welch, "The Power of Evidence in the Nurturing of Faith" in *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, 17-53. On historicity issues, see Robert L. Millet, "The Book of Mormon, Historicity, & Faith" *JBMS* 2/2 (1995), 1-13. For a discussion on the state of archeological support for the Book of Mormon and the limitations of such evidence, see BYU archaeologist and head of the New World Archaeological Foundation, John E. Clark, in "Archaeology, Relics, and Book of Mormon Belief" a 2004 forum address delivered at BYU Provo, available in *JBMS* 14/2 (2005), 38-49. See John E. Clark, Wade Arden, Matthew Roper, "Debating the Foundations of Mormonism: The Book of Mormon and Archaeology" at www.fairlds.org/FAIR_Conferences/2005_Debating_the_Foundations_of_Mormonism.html A more general summary of Book of Mormon scholarship is John-Charles Duffy, "Mapping Book of Mormon Historicity Debates" in *Sunstone* 151 (Oct 2008),

36-62; 152 (Dec 2008), 46-61. For discussions on the pitfalls of pseudo-scholarship see BYU archaeologist John L. Sorenson's "Instant Expertise on Book of Mormon Archaeology" in *BYU Studies* 16/3 (Spring 1976) 429-431 and BYU art-historian Martin Raish, "All That Glitters: Uncovering Fool's Gold in Book of Mormon Archaeology" in *Sunstone* 6/1 (Jan-Feb 1981), 10-15. Although reviewing two books on the New World setting of the Book of Mormon, Brant Gardner's "Too Good To Be True: Questionable Archaeology And The Book of Mormon" discusses principles that are also relevant to the Old World at <http://www.fairmormon.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/gardner-too-good-to-be-true.pdf>

46. Neal A. Maxwell, *Plain and Precious Things* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983), 4. See also Dallin H. Oaks, also of the Twelve, in "The Historicity of the Book of Mormon" in Paul Y. Hoskisson, ed. *Historicity and the Latter-day Scriptures* (Provo: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2001), 239.

PART 7

New World Memories of “Bountiful”

“...we came from the west, from the place of reeds and of abundance, from the other side of the sea.”
(Mayan Cakchiquel text, AD 1620)



The Tuxtla region in Veracruz, south-eastern Mexico, and Lake Atitlan in Guatemala typify Mesoamerica locations where traditions and legends may hearken back to central aspects of Lehi and Sariah’s journey to the New World.

Introduction

One divine purpose for the years of desert travel by the Lehites was surely to strengthen them for the task of establishing a new civilization on the American continent; to “cleanse” or de-acculturate them from their old ways. Although several members of the party, beginning with Jacob and Joseph, were born in the desert after the exodus of their family, most of the adults carried the mind-set of life in the Jerusalem area with them into the desert and then on to the land that God had promised.

However, once arrived in their New World and busy building a new life, clear references in the Nephite text hearkening back to their Old World origins are understandably rare. Nonetheless, it is reasonable to assume that some aspects of the old world have been remembered, especially by those keeping the records, and in particular, the last place they knew there. The years spent by Lehi and Sariah’s group at Bountiful, its vivid contrast to the desert in which they traveled for so long, the demands of the shipbuilding process and the long ocean voyage that followed, may have combined to leave a significant imprint in the memory of their descendants.

For a *general* sense of origin to have survived through the centuries would be significant enough; but as the ancient records and traditions of Central American peoples become better understood, touchstones to several startlingly *specific* aspects of the Lehite journey are emerging.

Ancient Ocean Voyaging

The idea that at least some of the native peoples of the New World could have first arrived by ocean voyages has long been rejected by

Western historians and anthropologists. The cultural bias that does not allow for such an achievement by “primitive” peoples prior to Columbus still stifles mainstream science today, although it is gradually yielding in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary. Over recent decades, LDS anthropologist John L. Sorenson and colleagues have been at the forefront of scholars attempting to overturn this deeply embedded opposition to ancient ocean voyaging. They have collected thousands of published cultural parallels that link New World populations with the Old, many of them highly specific and unlikely to have arisen independently.¹ The capacity of ancient peoples to cross oceans is, of course, the underlying assumption of the three Book of Mormon migration accounts.

In fact, the common belief among Mesoamerican (“Middle-American”) peoples that their forebears *had* arrived by sea greatly contributed to the Spanish conquest of the Americas. This belief was noted in records of the encounter between the Aztec leader, Montezuma, and the Spanish conqueror Cortez in 1519. When the Spaniards arrived at the Aztec capital, amazed at its scale and workmanship, Montezuma informed them that his own ancestors had come from the east, from across the ocean.² Believing that Cortez and his king represented the predicted return of their legendary white, bearded, leader, *Quetzalcoatl* (“Feathered Serpent”), Montezuma welcomed the 400 Spanish as honored guests, a tragic move quickly resulting in his own imprisonment, murder and the plunder of his city. The collapse and enslavement of an empire totaling some 19 million people soon followed.

The Aztec civilization that arose around AD 1200 was not alone, however, in believing that its original founders came from across the great oceans. Much earlier cultures across Mesoamerica shared this concept, including the peoples of the Yucatan and of Chiapas state.³ In particular, the belief of an origin across the oceans is a primal

underpinning of the great Maya civilization that spread over most of Mesoamerica from around 500 BC onwards. The Maya people survive today in their ancient homelands and most of the existing accounts that document this belief are theirs.

A Memory of the Liahona?

The *Popol Vuh* (“Book of the People”), one of only a handful of pre-Columbian texts to survive the Spanish conquest, is regarded by most scholars as the most complete source offering insight into the early Maya world. Hidden from the conquering Spanish for over a century, this Quiché Maya work remained uncontaminated. It is also the best evidence so far for a sophisticated writing system in the New World during the Book of Mormon’s time frame. The Maya were the most literate of ancient peoples in the New World, their phonetic script giving them the ability to record anything they wished. Copied from an original hieroglyphic text in the early sixteenth century, now presumed lost or destroyed, the *Popol Vuh* was first published in Spanish in 1857, and in English in 1953.⁴ In 2003 a highly-regarded translation from the original Quiché, rather than Spanish, text was made by LDS scholar Allen J. Christenson.⁵

The chroniclers of the *Popol Vuh* claim that it represents a text that arose anciently across the ocean, calling it an *Ilb’al*, a name meaning an “instrument of sight or vision,” an apparent reference to the guidance provided by the text.⁶ The name can also refer to seeing more clearly through spectacles and magnifying glasses; it survives in the use of quartz crystals by modern Quiché priests in ceremonies of divination. This introduces the possibility that the term *Ilb’al* may connect to the use of an actual tangible instrument and introduces the concept of divine instruments playing central roles in the earliest history of their people.

It is far from being the only such reference. In its elegant account of the creation, the great flood and the confusion of tongues, the *Popol Vuh* also records that the ancestors of the Maya were guided across the ocean to their new home by a peculiar instrument called the “*Pizom-Gagal*.”⁷ Another Quiché source, *Titulo de los Senores de Totonicapán* (“Title of the Lords of Totonicapán”), written about 1554, also mentions the “*Giron-Gagal*,” or “sacred bundle” given by his god to the leader of a group about to depart from Pa Tulan on the other side of the sea. Their leader, *Balam-Quitze*, guided his people to their new home by means of this object, which was always kept wrapped.⁸ Finally, a third record from another branch of the Quiché Maya, the *Cakchiquel*, preserves what may be a variation of this story. The 1620 *Anales de los Xabil de los Indios Cakchiqueles*, (“Account of the Xahil of the Cakchiquele Indians”) describes the “*Chay Abah*” or “stone that speaks,” an obsidian stone that guided their original ancestors across the ocean to their promised land.⁹

A mural dating to shortly after the Spanish Conquest and now displayed in the Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City shows a man carrying a round object on a pole in front of him as he leads a group emerging from the ocean. This tapestry has some additional features that may also carry echoes of the Mulekite and Lehite migrations.¹⁰ Given the native view of history as cyclic, it is probable that over time some components of these accounts were compressed and superimposed, resulting in a synthesis of multiple events.

Unsurprisingly, several LDS commentators have suggested that these accounts may preserve a distant memory of the *Liahona*, the sacred ball that led the Lehtes across Arabia and then across the seas, or of a *Urim and Thummim* or *seerstone* divinely given for guidance or translation purposes.



This replica of a Mayan “codex,” a folded screen book fashioned from bark or skin, recalls the almost total destruction of all written records during the Spanish conquest. Of the pivotal *Popul Vuh* codex, only 3 copies have survived to the present. They are now located in Dresden, Paris and Madrid.



The *Tapestry of Jucutacato* in the Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City depicts a man (near the center in this enhanced view) carrying a round object on a pole as he leads a group across the ocean. It reflects, perhaps, a distant memory of the Liahona or a similar revelatory device.

Tulan, Place of Abundance and Reeds

As the early texts became more accessible, some early LDS scholars noted other aspects of interest. In 1950, and again in 1954, Elder Milton R. Hunter drew attention to the frequent use in these accounts of a Mayan term, *Tulan* or *Tula*, which means “bountiful or abundance.”¹¹ In fact, the 1937 translation of *The Annals of the Cakchiquels*,¹² into Spanish had rendered Tulan as *Lugar de la Abundancia*, or “the place of abundance,” wording which is identical to that used in the Spanish translation of the Book of Mormon when it refers to the Old World Bountiful. Soon after Hunter’s publication, John L. Sorenson published his preliminary study *Some Mesoamerican Traditions of Immigration by Sea*, discussing the oceanic immigrations clearly attested in a variety of native accounts and other historical records.¹³

The term *Tulan* is a pre-Classic *Nuahatl* (central Mexican) term meaning “Place of Abundance,” with a derivation that adds the meaning “Place of Cattails [Reeds].” Very early on, it seems, Tulan became almost ubiquitous in the early accounts of origins. Over time the word came to be associated with the creation legends of the early Mesoamerican peoples in which the first life, reeds, emerged from the primordial sea. Elder Hunter’s conclusions were based upon statements such as the following:

*...we came from the west, from the place of abundance, from the other side of the sea.*¹⁴

*...from the west we came to Tulan, from across the sea; and it was at Tulan where we arrived.*¹⁵

*I shall write the stories of our first fathers and grandfathers...that from the other side of the sea we came to the place called Tulan... then we were four families who arrived at Tulan.*¹⁶



Although Khor Kharfor’s inlet, pictured here, is now closed to the ocean, this image captures the main features referred to in the legends describing the original departure place of the ancestors of the Guatemalan highland tribes, *Tulan*: it was a ravine, a watery place of reeds and abundance.

Significantly, arriving from the west and therefore landing on the *west* coast of the New World is what the Book of Mormon implies in Alma 22:28. This has important implications for our understanding of the Lehite ocean voyage that will be discussed later in the book. These passages also make it clear that both the place of departure from the Old World *and* the place of arrival in the New were called *Tulan*. The *Popol Vuh* describes, for example, that the ancestors of the Maya:

*...wept in their chants because of their departure from Tulan; their hearts mourned when they left Tulan.*¹⁷

That the place of departure from the Old World and the place of arrival in the New are given the same name, one that means *abundance* or *bountiful*, is surely significant, making the likelihood of a direct link to the Book of Mormon account go far beyond wishful thinking.

Locating Tulan

The *Totonicapán* account also adds some significant information, actually describing in clear terms the *location* of the Old World Tulan:

*...our ancestors had come from the other side of the sea, from Civan-Tulan at the confines of Babylonia.*¹⁸

*...These tribes came from the other part of the sea, from the East, from Pa-Tulan, Pa-Civan...they came from where the sun rises, descendants of Israel, of the same language and the same customs... they were sons of Abraham and Jacob...*¹⁹

The root *pa* means “at” or “by,” while the term *Civan* refers to a ravine or canyon. This tells us therefore that they came from the “place of abundance,” which was at, or by, the place of the “ravine.”

In English we would say that they came “from the East, from a place of abundance, in a ravine.” The fact that this text refers to the land of Babylonia being in the *east* may, of course, merely refer to the direction of the Near East homeland when viewed from the Americas. Thus, it would not necessarily contradict other texts stating that their ancestors arrived from the west.

The sixteenth century chronicler Don Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl attested that this Babylonian origin was a general belief held by the people of “New Spain” (Mexico):

*It is the common and general opinion of all the natives of all this Chichimec land, which is now called New Spain...that their ancestors came from western parts...their first king was called Chichimecatl, who was the one who brought them to this New World where they settled...and they were those of the division of Babylon, as is declared at greater length in the history which is written...*²⁰

Of course, the mention of “Babylonia” narrows the geographical focus of the place of origin considerably. Although the maximum extent of the Babylonian empire itself did not literally extend as far as the lower half of the Arabian Peninsula, the empire’s influence and impact in that era was considerable and enduring. The Babylonian capture of Jerusalem, warned and prophesied of by Lehi, took place only some ten or so years after Lehi and Sariah left Jerusalem; the news that their beloved homeland had fallen to the Babylonians must have left its mark in their memories. Centuries later in the Americas, the prophet Alma would predict the coming birth of Christ “at Jerusalem,” rather than specifying Bethlehem (Alma 7:10); likewise the Maya historians linked their “Tulan” to *Babylonia*, ensuring that, in a general sense at least, their middle-eastern origin was preserved. The claim that the Maya’s ancestors were also of the House of Israel provides a further connection to the Book of Mormon account.

Many non-LDS commentators have tended to disregard or even dismiss these persistent claims of an Old World origin for the people in the New. However, as John L. Sorenson points out, referring to the inquisitions against Jews in Mexico documented by historian Elkan N. Adler:

...it seems to us that for the Guatemalan native writer to claim relationship to the Jews in the face of general Catholic antipathy of the time toward that “race” would tend to show a singular determination to express, in the only Old World historical terms available, the traditional account of transoceanic immigration.²¹

The sum of all these references to the legendary place that spawned some of the Mesoamerican civilizations is impressively specific. It assures us that their place of origin across the ocean was *middle-eastern* and that it was a *ravine*. They emphasize that it was a *watery place of abundance* and a *place of reeds*.

More recently, the discovery in southern Oman of a fully plausible candidate for Nephi’s “Bountiful,” allows us to re-examine these early pre-conquest texts from the New World in a new light. These texts describe the Southern Arabian site of Khor Kharfot perfectly, but, as they cannot be described as ravines, none of the other candidate locations.

The fact that the Mayan texts name their landing point in the Americas for its abundance is highly significant. This mirrors exactly what Nephi recorded when he wrote that their crops in the New World “did grow exceedingly; wherefore, we were blessed in *abundance*.” (18:24). The verse that follows describes a wide variety of animals suitable “for the use of man,” plus easily mined gold, silver and copper ore. After their long ocean voyage, it is easy to imagine why a place of

plenty would be linked by name to the place in Arabia that had likewise furnished their needs after long years in the desert wastes.

Other Traces of Lehite Origins in the New World

There are still other historical clues that seem to solidify the link between the Maya and Lehite accounts. In addition to the references to the Maya’s ancestors being the sons of Abraham and Jacob, and to being led across the sea by a sacred ball provided by God, a “younger brother” seems to have been their leader.²² The “ancestors” also consisted of seven tribes or lineages. This would fit perfectly the division of Lehi’s family into seven groupings, the Nephites, Jacobites, Josephites and Zoramites who were known as the Nephites, and the Lamanites, Lemuelites and Ishmaelites, collectively known as the Lamanites, (Jacob 1:13-14, 4 Nephi 36-38, Mormon 1:8 and D&C 3:16-18).²³

The *Annals of the Xabil* refers to both Old and New World Tulas and to the seven tribes. It also contains a hint that the place of landing in the New World may have been on the coast of present day Guatemala, as follows:

...the seven tribes arrived first at Tullan and we the warriors followed, having taken up the tributes of all the seven tribes when the gate of Tullan was opened...²⁴

The fact that the seven tribes paid “tribute” to the highland Quiche may imply that the original landing spot of Tulan was somewhere on the Guatemalan coast. This view proposes that the Nephites soon moved inland to the higher, cooler, ground of the Guatemala Valley and that the ruins at *Kaminaljuyu* in the modern capital may link to the City of Nephi.²⁵

Other studies have suggested the coast of Chiapas state in southern Mexico as the landing point, noting in particular the so-called “Tree of Life” carving (Stela 5) at Izapa in south-western Mexico as a possible link. This text has long been interpreted as recording the “birth” or emergence of the seven tribes, their division into two groups and even, perhaps, symbols representing the names of Lehi and Zoram etc. but this interpretation of Stela 5 is no longer considered viable by most scholars.²⁶ However, whether or not the monuments at these two locations prove to link to the Lehite story, what *is* certain is that a name meaning “Bountiful” was in use among Book of Mormon peoples in the New World.

Eventually also, a large area north of Zarahemla, running from “the east to the west sea,” came to be known as the *land* of Bountiful by the Nephites (Alma 22:29-33). Just as the fertile Old World Bountiful lay to the south of a vast desert area, its New World counterpart lay “southwards” of the barren land the Nephites called *Desolation*, from which “all manner of wild animals” came for food. Later in the text, the intriguing story of *Hagoth* provides an even more specific reference to the fertility of the new Bountiful, and impressive parallels to the original place and its role in Nephite history. As had Nephi, centuries earlier and a continent away, Hagoth used the resources of this Bountiful - surely including timber - to construct an “exceedingly large ship” before launching it into the west sea (Alma 63:5-6). Later the ship returned, re-provisioned and departed again, carrying numbers of Nephites northward to an unknown destination. Hagoth built other ships here also (v. 7), so the fact that ships were built at the Old *and* New World Bountifuls points to the availability of adequate, and suitable, timber at both locations.

Whether the New World Bountiful bore other resemblances to the original Bountiful is not clear from the record, only that the Nephites at least saw this part of their Promised Land as a parallel to the place in

the Old World that had facilitated their journey there. The name Tula, or Tulan, continues in use today throughout Central America to signify places of abundance and plenty. It is surely unlikely that so many aspects of the Lehite account could appear in the founding legends of the Maya without some basis in fact. The elements preserved in their history can be simply summarized. They claim that their ancestors:

- were of Israel, with the same language and customs
- came from across the ocean
- traveled from near Babylonia
- left from a watery place of reeds and abundance
- the departure place was also a ravine
- were led by a leader who was a younger brother
- were guided by a curious instrument
- traveled from the west, landing on the west coast
- four families, or seven lineages came
- the place of arrival was also a place of abundance

Finally, it is worth noting that six hundred years after Nephi sailed his ship from the Arabian Bountiful, the penultimate event of the Book of Mormon takes place: the appearance of the resurrected Jesus to the righteous (3 Nephi 11:1). This supernal event that gives the Book of Mormon its primary purpose, ushering in an era of peace for the descendants of Lehi and Sariah, takes place near the temple in the “land of *Bountiful*” (3 Nephi 11:1).

In conclusion, several records of the early Mesoamerican peoples seem to capture significant aspects of the Old World “Bountiful.” Some go beyond mere generalizations with specifics describing the Old World *Tulan* as a place of “abundance,” as a ravine and a place of “reeds” located in the vicinity of Babylonia. This matches the most plausible candidate for Bountiful, Khor Kharfot, perfectly.²⁷

Today, the Mayan name “Tulan,” is used throughout Mesoamerica when describing any productive, fruitful place. The preservation of the name tells us that the original Old World departure point remained immensely important to their history, one potent enough to be still in use over two thousand years later.

NOTES

1. For voluminous (593 pp) documentation of such contacts, see John L. Sorenson & Carl L. Johannessen, *World Trade and Biological Exchanges before 1492* (New York & Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, 2009), updating the data published earlier in John L. Sorenson & Martin H. Raish, *Pre-Columbian Contact with the Americas Across the Oceans: An Annotated Bibliography*, 2 vols. (Provo: FARMS Research Press, 1990) and John Sorenson and Carl L. Johannessen, “Biological Evidence for Pre-Columbian Transoceanic Voyages,” as chapter 9 in Victor H. Mair, gen. ed. *Contact and Exchange in the Ancient World* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006).
John L. Sorenson and Matthew Roper, “Before DNA” JBMS 12/1 (2003), 13 has a valuable and current summary of the best thinking concerning the New World setting of the Book of Mormon, with clear lessons relevant to the Old World geography. Its end notes provide a useful index of other sources related to trans-oceanic voyaging. Sorenson’s article “Ancient Voyages Across the Ocean to America: from “Impossible” to “Certain”” in JBMS 14/1 (2005), 4-17 summarizes the most unequivocal data - the documented transmission between continents of nearly a hundred species of flora and more than a score of fauna species - that demonstrate the reality of trans-oceanic voyaging anciently.
2. Fernando Cortez, Francis A. MacNutt, trans. *His Five Letters of Relation to the Emperor Charles V* (Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark Co, 1908), 234-35.
3. Summarized in John L. Sorenson, “Mesoamerican Traditions of Transoceanic Voyages,” *Mormons Codex*, 161-166.
4. Adrian Recinos, Delia Goetz and Sylvanus G. Morley, trans. *Popol Vuh, the Sacred Book of the Ancient Quiche Maya* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972).
5. Allen J. Christenson, trans. *Popol Vuh: The Sacred Book of the Maya*, 2 vols. (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007). This can now be accessed at: www.mesoweb.com/publications/Christenson/PopolVuh.pdf. Introduction 16-49, text 50-287.
6. *Ibid.* 11, 25.
7. Allen J. Christenson, trans. *Popol Vuh: The mythic sections - tales of first beginnings from the ancient K’iche’-Maya* (Provo: FARMS and BYU Studies, 2000), 18, 36, 70-80, 81-90, 205.
8. Dionisio Jose Chonay and Delia Goetz, trans. *Title of the Lords of Totonicapán* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1953), 170.
9. Miguel Angel Asturias and J. M. Gonzalez de Mendoza, trans. *Anales de los Xahil de los Indios Cakchiqueles* (Guatemala City: The National Press, 1934), 10-11.
10. See the discussion of the tapestry in David A. Palmer, *In Search of Cumorah: New Evidences for the Book of Mormon from Ancient Mexico* (Bountiful, UT: Horizon, 1981), 151-158.
11. Milton R. Hunter and Thomas S. Ferguson, *Ancient America and the Book of Mormon* (Oakland, CA: Kolob Book Co, 1950), 81, 84. Hunter also authored “Book of Mormon Evidences” containing the same material in *The Improvement Era* (December 1954), 914. The original reference to the term “Tulan” is from Martinez Hernandez, *Diccionario de Motu* (Merida, Yucatan, 1930), 824.
12. Georges Raynaud, trans. *Anales de los Xahil de los indios cakchiqueles: Los dioses, los heroes y los hombres de Guatemala Antigua 2*. (2nd ed. rev.) (Guatemala City: Tipografia Nacional, 1937), 9-16.
13. John L. Sorenson, “Some Mesoamerican Traditions of Immigration By Sea” in *El Mexico Antiguo* (Mexico City: Sociedad Alemana Mexicanista, December 1955), 8: 425-437 (also released as FARMS Reprint SOR-55). A broader treatment was his “The Significance of an Apparent Relationship between the Ancient Near East and Mesoamerica” in Carroll L. Riley et al. eds. *Man Across the Sea: Problems of Pre-Columbian Contacts* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), 219-241.
Another migration account, in the Codex Matritense obtained by the Spanish priest Bernardino de Sahagun, is illustrated in Sorenson’s Images of Ancient America: Visualizing Book of Mormon Life (Provo: Research Press, 1998), see 223 and on the subject of Old and New World migrations generally, see 224-227. An abbreviated version of this codex and brief commentary is found in *Mormon’s Codex*, 513-14. See also Sorenson’s “A Complex of Ritual and Ideology Shared by Mesoamerica and the Ancient Near East” in Victor H. Mair, ed. *Sino-Platonic Papers no. 195* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, December 2009), at http://sino-platonic.org/completel_spp195_mesoamerica.pdf.

14. *Asturias and Mendoza, trans. Anales de Los Xabil de Los Indios Cakchiqueles* (1934), 10.
15. *Adrian Recinos and Delia Goetz, trans. The Annals of the Cakchiqueles* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1953), 43, 45. This was the first translation into English of the full text and is based on the 1834 Spanish translation by Father Dionisio Chonay from the original Quiche document. M. Wells Jakeman of BYU had earlier published extracts in English in 1945.
- In 2006, the most complete and current translation of the Cakchiquel records was published, see Judith M. Maxwell and Robert M. Hill 11, trans. *Kaqchikel Chronicles: The Definitive Edition* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006). For a preliminary analysis of the numerous parallels between these texts and the Book of Mormon account, see Kirk Magleby, "Correspondences between the Kaqchikel Chronicles and Mormon's Codex" at www.bmaf.org/node/501
16. *Ibid.* 43-44.
17. *Goetz and Morley, trans. of Adrian Recinos, Popol Vuh, the Sacred Book of the Ancient Quiche Maya*, 62, 174-176, 180-181, 204, 209. For a conservative scholarly analysis of "Tulan" see Frauke Sachse and Allen J. Christenson (2005), *Tulan and the Other Side of the Sea: Unraveling a Metaphorical Concept from Colonial Guatemalan Highland Sources*, at www.mesoweb.com/articles/tulan/Tulan.pdf. The authors suggest a Tulan in Mexico's Yucatan peninsula contra the dominant scholarly position that it is either mythical or refers to the Gulf Coast; the possibility of an earlier and more distant ultimate source is not considered. Likewise, Allen J. Christenson's *Popol Vuh: The Mythic sections has commentary on "Tulan/Tullan,"* but only in a Mesoamerican context that does not deal with possible Old World links.
18. *Chonay and Goetz, trans. Title of the Lords of Totonicapán*, 194.
19. *Recino and Goetz, trans. The Anales of the Cakchiqueles*, 70.
20. *Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl, Alfredo Chavero, ed. Obras Historicas* (Mexico City: Editora Nacional, 1950), 1: 15-16.
21. *Sorenson, "Some Mesoamerican Traditions of Immigration By Sea,"* 434-435, referencing Elkan N. Adler, "South and Central America" in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. 11 (New York and London: Funk and Wagnalls, 1905), 481-483.
- S. C. Compton, Exodus Lost: An Inquiry into the Genesis of Civilization.* (Privately published, 2010) argues for an Egyptian origin for at least some Mesoamerican cultures. This is entirely plausible given the evidence for multiple migrations to the Americas and not necessarily at odds with the Book of Mormon's claims. The subject of "Tula" is addressed pp. 19-22.
22. *Asturias and Mendoza, trans. Anales de los Xabil del los Indios Cakchiqueles*, 10-11.
23. *John L. Sorenson, John A. Tvedtnes, John W. Welch, "Seven Tribes: An Aspect of Lehi's Legacy" in ReExploring the book of Mormon*, 93-95 summarizes earlier material published by Sorenson in his *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, 313 and by Ross T. Christenson, "the Seven Lineages of Lehi," in *The New Era*, (May, 1975), 50-51.
- See also Diane E. Wirth, "Revisiting the Seven Lineages of the Book of Mormon and the Seven Tribes of Mesoamerica," *BYU Studies* 52:4 (2013).
24. *Daniel G. Brinton, trans. The Annals of the Cakchiquels* (Philadelphia: Brinton's Library of Aboriginal American Literature, 1885), no. 8, p 73. Accessible at: www.gutenberg.org/files/20775/20775-h/20775-h.htm
25. *The Kaminaljuyu = City of Nephi correlation is argued throughout John L. Sorenson, Mormon's Codex.*
26. *On the Izapa site in southern Mexico, see Stewart W. Brewer, "The History of an Idea: The Scene on Stela 5 from Izapa, Mexico, as a Representation of Lehi's Vision of the Tree of Life" JBMS 8/1 (1999), 12-21 and John E. Clark, "A New Artistic Rendering of Izapa Stela 5: A Step toward Improved Interpretation," 22-33. A discussion about a similar, more recent, motif on Monument 21 at Finca Bilbao in Guatemala, 85 miles from Izapa, is found in Diane E. Wirth, A Challenge to the Critics – Scholarly Evidences of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Horizon, 1986), 127.
27. *After noting the derivative meaning of Tulan as 'place of cattails,' John L. Sorenson notes the abundance of cattail reeds at Khor Kharfot ("Wadi Sayq"), the "most plausible departure point of the Lehi party" in Mormon's Codex, 165. For a basic summary of the implications, see Warren P. Aston, "Did the Nephites Remember Bountiful?" March 30, 2011 in Meridian Magazine, available at <http://ldsmag.com/article-1-7731/>*

PART 8

“Towards the Promised Land”

“...after we had all gone down into the ship, and had taken with us our provisions and things which had been commanded us, we did put forth into the sea and were driven forth before the wind *towards the promised land.*”

(1 Nephi 18:8)



Sunrise captured at sea offshore of Khor Kharfot.

Introduction

Nephi’s account does not reveal at what point Lehi and Sariah learned that their family would eventually embark on an ocean voyage. In the urgency to leave their homeland the family surely had little opportunity to ponder their ultimate destination. If they had, a natural assumption would have been that their removal from Jerusalem was to a nearby place within their own sphere, such as Egypt, and that perhaps their exile was only to be temporary. An ocean voyage may not have occurred to them until sometime after their arrival at Bountiful. Had the Lord’s object been to simply remove them to the Americas, it would surely have been easier for them to depart from a Mediterranean seaport across the Atlantic, rather than undertake years of desert journeying across the Arabian peninsula, followed by a substantially longer ocean journey.

In our present text, the “land of promise” is first revealed to Nephi by the Lord while encamped in the Valley of Lemuel (2:19-20); we are left uncertain whether the prophet Lehi already knew. The two trips of Nephi and his brothers back to Jerusalem make it seem certain, however, that the full *magnitude* of the journey did not begin to unfold earlier than the Valley of Lemuel, when most of their desert crossing still lay ahead of them. At some point they also came to realize that their promised land lay across the seas; but even after they had set sail in Nephi’s ship they likely had only a faint conception of the distances involved.

Nephi’s Ship

Though they lived in the Judean hills both Nephi, his father and perhaps his siblings and the other men in the group were likely somewhat familiar with the ships of their day. In any event, the long trek from

Jerusalem to Nahom took them past a number of places where ships could readily be observed. The group’s extended stay at the Valley of Lemuel, for example, was only a few days’ travel beyond the major Red Sea port of Ezion-Geber, site of the modern twin ports of Aqaba and Eilat. Thus they had the opportunity to observe a variety of craft and enough awareness of them that Nephi could later comment on the uniqueness of his ship.

A vessel capable of carrying a sizeable group of people from Arabia to the Americas, however, clearly requires better design and workmanship than one making brief fishing forays or regional trading runs. Thus we find that the initial command of the Lord to Nephi concerning a ship indicates that Nephi would be shown how to construct it (17:8) and Nephi’s statement confirming that the Lord did “show me from time to time” (18:1) how to proceed. Too, more was involved in being divinely led than just the overall design of the vessel; Nephi also neither worked the timbers nor built his ship “after the manner of men” (18:1 2).¹ His choice of the phrase “curious workmanship” (18:1) also implies that something different from the ships of his day was being built. Nevertheless, some of the broad principles of shipbuilding and its history can yield insights into the task facing Nephi, his brothers and Zoram.

Nephi’s text offers only four other hints about the vessel that resulted. In several places, Nephi uses the phrase that upon departure the Lehite group went “down into” the ship (18:5-6 (twice), 8), which suggests a decked vessel. In any event, **decking** is virtually a certainty in order to carry the provisions mentioned (18:6, 8) and to allow the dancing recorded onboard at sea (18:9). It is clear that the ship did not merely drift with the prevailing ocean currents; it was purposefully “steered” with some type of **rudder** as, after binding him, Nephi’s angry brothers “knew not whither they should steer the ship” (18:13). At least **one mast and sail** was also involved; Nephi speaks of the ship being “driven forth before the wind” (18:8-9) and that the ship later “sailed

again” (18:22). Finally, it was **robust** enough to weather four days of severe storm, in addition to the long voyage that followed.

We can only speculate about other aspects, such as whether an anchor was carried, the accommodations provided and the size of the ship. One estimate is that a vessel on the order of 60 feet/18 meters in length is likely for housing a group of thirty or forty persons, assuming regular births took place during the eight years in the wilderness. At least half of the group would therefore have consisted of small children. In view of the limited manpower available to help in construction, a realistically sized and utilitarian vessel seems likely.² As we shall see, there are several reasons for questioning whether Nephi’s vessel was a traditional style hulled “ship” as most readers of his account have assumed.

The Resources Required

As noted in Part 5, ships are most easily constructed beside a **sheltered tidal inlet**. Both possible Bountiful sites, Khor Kharfot and Khor Rori, offer such conditions, varying only in their size and the resources available (Kharfot has naturally-growing timber and edible vegetation literally at the water’s edge, whereas Khor Rori has neither). Given the temperatures in the region, it seems certain that some type of simple **sun shelter** or “bowery” would have been built first to allow work to proceed during daytime. A simple slipway of greased logs, for example, would then allow the vessel to enter the water.

Nephi’s brief outline of the vessel construction focuses on the *timber* needed and on the supplies taken on board. The lack of any mention of the **sail and rigging** suggests that the material for them was already at hand and required little effort to utilize. Anthropologists know of at least 8 local species of palms and other plants used to make rope

in southern Oman anciently. Presumably, the Lehite group possessed significant quantities of roping in their tenting brought from Jerusalem that may have also been used at sea³

The whole matter of the **timber** that Nephi says he built the ship of is a non-issue when we examine what Khor Kharfot offers. Tamarind, acacia and sycamore fig wood in particular are species still found at Kharfot suitable for building a ship and are among several species still used today for ship construction in Oman and elsewhere. However, despite a recent claim that it was also available, cedar has never been found growing in southern Arabia.⁴ Ship timbers in the region have long been treated against marine organisms by applying a simple mixture of animal fat and lime, the latter usually obtained by burning shells.

Nephi records a period of gathering “much fruits and meat from the wilderness, and honey in abundance, and provisions” (18:6, 8). This included the seeds they had brought with them across the desert (18:24 tells us that *all* the seeds were planted upon arrival in the New World). Obviously, water, oil and wine supplies stored in skin bags or pottery containers would also have been necessary before leaving. Animals such as goats, together with fodder supplies, may have been taken onboard for milk and meat, and also to allow the offering of sacrifices during the voyage.

It is quite feasible to survive at sea for long periods with minimal supplies. As sailors on Heyerdahl’s “*Kon Tiki*” raft and many others have discovered, at sea fish are an abundant, easily caught food. Fish meat also provides a significant amount of the daily requirements for freshwater. Seawater can be used for washing, cleaning and cooking, while rainwater can be captured and stored for drinking. Dried or salted fish, meat, fruit, vegetables, grains and seeds occupy little room. There was no necessity for the Lehaites to store huge quantities of food supplies and fresh water.

Did Nephi Require any Outside Assistance?

Any attempt to place Nephi’s voyage in the real world must be careful not to ignore or undervalue the ability of the Lord to provide what was needed for the Lehites. Nephi’s Bountiful was far more than being merely a port at the beginning of the incense trade route, but was instead a place “prepared of the Lord” (17:5). Just as there was suitable timber found there, the text makes it evident that there were all of the *other* resources also needed to construct a ship. This becomes clear when we consider what Khor Kharfot would have offered the group:

- Ready access to fresh water and abundant food; thus allowing most of their time and energy to be devoted to shipbuilding
- A variety of timber types on hand
- Iron ore available in the immediate vicinity to make the tools required
- A variety of fibers from local flora from which rigging could be made
- A sheltered sea inlet to allow construction near the water’s edge
- Isolation from the distractions of a trading port and town
- No competition from other people for resources

Combined with the regular instructions from the Lord, such ideal circumstances would go far in compensating for the small labor pool available at the inlet and makes the ship construction quite feasible. Other clues come from the account of another seemingly impossible ship building effort. Ages earlier, God had instructed Noah how to build

a vessel for a critical, specific mission (Genesis 6:13-22), specifying not only the design but also its exact dimensions and the wood types to use. Noah’s earlier experience suggests what may lie behind Nephi’s plain statements that he was instructed of the Lord on the mount “from time to time,” (18:1, 3) in building his ship, rather than improvising from designs he had seen or consulting with an experienced local shipbuilder. Lehi had left his gold, silver and “precious things” back in Jerusalem (2:4) so he had nothing of great value to pay for the services of others.

Most importantly, in a single verse Nephi emphasizes three times that his ship was *not* built after “the manner of men” (18:2). These unequivocal statements surely make assistance in matters of design and workmanship from anyone outside the group, as some have speculated, very unlikely. As already noted, there is no evidence that there was a port in operation in southern Oman in Lehi’s day, and no evidence at all of large ships being built there at any period in the past.⁵ But, even had experienced shipbuilders been available to show him how to build his ship, they could still only have shared information about ships built after “the manner of men,” not the unique long-distance ocean-going vessel that Nephi required.

In a day when teenagers sail, unaided, non-stop around the world, the *sailing expertise* required for an ocean voyage has been exaggerated by some commentators. The basics of sailing are straightforward. To take the position that it was “simply impossible” for Nephi to proceed without training from experienced sailors is unsupported by logic or anything in Nephi’s account. To begin with, there is nothing to rule out Nephi, his father, his siblings or even the other men in the group already having gained some “maritime” experience before leaving Jerusalem. In view of Lehi’s evident trade contacts with Egypt it is quite likely that he at least had seen, and perhaps even sailed on, ships of the day during his career. Additionally, the entire group had passed the functioning Red Sea port of Ezion Geber on its way to the Valley of Lemuel. In

fact, the ability of Nephi's brothers to recognize the fine workmanship of his completed ship (18:4) may stem in part because they already had enough exposure to sea-going craft to appreciate what had been accomplished. The entire group, of course, had also been hardened by their long land journey.

And there are other reasons. The handling characteristics of a ship built to a divine design may well be very different to a conventional craft. Furthermore, they may not have made any stops en route to the Land of Promise and thus only needed to handle a single departure and arrival. The account of the ship's departure (18:6, 8) makes it evident that the ship and its undoubtedly simple sailing and navigation systems needed no trials before setting forth. It had not even entered the water up to that point.

While the Lord is obviously free to use any number of methods to achieve his purposes, the whole sense of Nephi's account is that in this instance *revelation* guided the ship-building and that the timber and other items needed for the project were *on hand*, just as they are today. Once at sea, navigation was taken care of as the Liahona continued to point the direction ahead, as evidenced in the story about Nephi being bound by his brothers (18:12-22). The Liahona may also have continued giving written instructions and directions as it had throughout the land journey. **Whether viewed through scriptural or historical eyes, there is simply no need to claim that the resources of Bountiful and the tutoring of the Lord were somehow not enough for Nephi to build his ship there and then sail it.**

The Construction Period

Given the resources available, and the need to also maintain their home at Bountiful, a likely minimum period required for construction

is at least a year; almost certainly it was longer. One hint is contained in 2 Nephi 1:4 which reports that Lehi, as promised earlier (17:14), saw in vision that Jerusalem had been destroyed. We cannot be sure how long after the destruction of Jerusalem the vision came to him or where he was at the time. However, Lehi had commenced prophesying in the "commencement of the first year of the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah (1:4), which may have been 597 BC when Zedekiah was placed upon the Judean throne. The fall of Jerusalem took place about ten years into Zedekiah's reign (2 Kings 24:18 25:3).

In addition to their eight years "in the wilderness" (17:4), they had been in Bountiful "many days" (17:7) before Nephi commenced work on the ship. If they were at all in contact with local people, word of Jerusalem's fall could have reached them within a few months after the event, or roughly two years after their arrival at Bountiful. Presumably, their ship was still under construction at that point; if so, the fact that Lehi learned of this major news only through a *vision* further supports the idea that his group was alone and isolated from outsiders at Bountiful.

Historical Seafaring in Oman

Oceans functioned anciently much as they do today; rather than being barriers between lands, they *facilitated* contact, travel and transportation. In Oman, sea-going ships were being built in the north of the country many centuries before Lehi's day. In fact, ancient Oman, the land of "Magan," developed trade routes to the Gulf, to India, Malaysia, Africa and China very early on. Because the empty deserts to its west and south made it difficult to trade and to import the food needed for much of its population, Oman's isolation drove it to pursue sea links for trading from as early as 3000 BC. By the third century BC Oman's naval fleet was one of the largest in the world. This ensured

that it was at the forefront of Arab sea exploration and trade, an aspect of the Arab world at odds with the western stereotype of Arabs being a desert people. One archaeologist even describes Oman’s history as “most notably a record of Oman’s marriage with the sea.”⁶

The Arab “Dhow,” actually of Indian origin and usually built of Indian-sourced timber, has been the stereotypical ship associated with Arabia since being recorded by early Greek and Roman historians, but only recently have western historians come to recognize that Oman has been home to ancient shipbuilders and mariners for thousands of years, something that a person in 1830 could not have appreciated.⁷

The archaeological evidence to date suggests that the earliest sea vessels built in Oman, including Dhofar in the south, were simple shell-built dhows, dugouts with planks sewn or lashed to the sides to form the hull, or small rafts with inflated animal skins.⁸ Such boats had no decks and were suitable only for fishing or for carrying incense, down the coast to Qana for example. Simple sewn craft continue to be built and can still be seen in use today, often with outboard engines attached, in a handful of remote places on the Arabian coast. In time, larger craft were built in *northern* Oman using timber imported from India and perhaps Africa. Their greater carrying capacity expanded trade opportunities. Timber vessels also offered greater resilience in heavy seas and could be repaired at stops en route using local materials.

Assisted by innovations such as highly efficient triangular sails and simple star navigation techniques, Omani sailors developed regular sea trade with the African coast and India and, by the eighth century AD at least, journeyed at least as far as China using sewn ships. However, the historical evidence so far reveals that larger vessels seem never to have been built in *southern* Oman, despite native timber being available there. Nephi’s ship, with its singular mission taking it many times

further than local ships were required to go, seems likely to be literally the sole exception.

Ship Possibilities

Until the industrial revolution, hulled wooden sailing ships usually represented the most complex technology of the day. Construction techniques fall into three broad categories:

Mortise and Tenon - interlocking wood planks with sealing (of cotton fiber and beeswax for example) along the joints. A variation of this used bolts or clamps to further hold the timber together. The ancient Egyptians used this method, for example, in the Khufu vessel at Giza, which dates to about 2500 BC, but it was also in use in many other parts of the world. In China the technique may date as early as the Neolithic.

Lashed, sewn or stitched - The simple lashing together of shaped planks with rope, sometimes employing wooden pegs but always without any metal, was the primary method of ship construction used in much of the ancient world. It is known in Oman from at least 4,500 years ago, but may be a much older technique elsewhere.⁹ A later refinement (from about 2,000 years ago in Oman) was the more complex sewing or stitching of beams, a method that has survived down to the present. It was not unique to Arabian craft as some commentators have supposed; examples of ancient sewn ships have survived to the present from places as diverse as Egypt, France, Croatia and Finland. Sewn boats are still occasionally built today in isolated parts of Arabia, Sri Lanka, India and the Maldives.¹⁰

Nailed - apparently first developed in northern Europe and used to advantage by the Vikings, *Clinker* or *Lapstrake* ships used overlapping

planks fastened with wooden pegs or metal nails. Later variations included the *Shell-First* and *Frame-First* styles of construction. When Portuguese and other European ships moved into the region in the sixteenth century, nailed vessels, with their greater load-carrying capacity and durability, also began to be used in Arabia.



Sewn ships are rarely seen today. This example was on a remote beach in al-Mahra province, eastern Yemen in 1992. The close-up of the timber stitching is of an Omani ship.

A Ship not Built After “the manner of men” - a Raft?

Nephi’s clear statement that his ship differed in some significant way(s) from the usual style of his era raises the question of whether he had ever encountered an ocean-going vessel during his Jerusalem upbringing, or along the Red Sea early in the Lehite odyssey. It is also possible that if he had seen only small vessels used for fishing and coastal trading he may have felt that anything else justified writing that his ship was “not built after the manner of men,” (18:2).

Iron Age technology offers limited options for building an ocean-going craft; if it was a hulled vessel as popularly assumed then any of the three primary styles could have been used. Perhaps some unique aspect of its *design* might qualify it as differing from the ships of the day. That the workmanship of the timber ship was “exceedingly fine” (18:4) could, for example, refer to the precision required in sewing a ship together. We should be cautious, however, in how we view such a

subjective phrase. While we may assume that “exceedingly fine” refers to aesthetics, it may instead refer to the caliber of the ship’s rope work, its steering mechanism, or even to some aspect of its design, such as its provision of private quarters or the like.

The best known depiction of Nephi’s ship, Arnold Friberg’s painting of the Lehite group arriving in the New World, shows a substantial lashed vessel. Of course, Nephi had metal enough for tools and could presumably have also fashioned the thousands of nails needed if a nailed ship was built. Perhaps he was familiar all along with sewn ships and the innovation of his ship was that it used overlapping planks and nails. The text offers too little for us to be sure.

There is, however, a further ship design possibility that has received little attention to date: a *raft* of some sort. Raft technology was employed in many parts of the ancient world, including the Americas, where large seagoing rafts plied trade routes from Ecuador to Mexico and beyond.¹¹ Rafts, of course, are themselves built using one of the three construction techniques just discussed, or a combination of them. That is, their timbers were lashed, nailed or bolted, or perhaps used mortise and tenon joints. The raft concept did not develop in Arabia as it required much more timber than more traditional styles of ships. However, for anyone living at Kharfot and at Kharfot alone the availability of timber was not an issue and building a large timber raft was entirely possible.

A raft would have been a design that would be *totally* unfamiliar to anyone in the Lehite group; they would have seen nothing similar back in their Jerusalem days or on the long journey to Bountiful. More than any other possible design in that part of the world, some type of raft could be appropriately described as being “*not after the manner of men.*”

Building an ocean-going raft would still have been a significant project for such a small group, but one that **more closely matched to**

the material and labor resources at hand at Bountiful. A raft also offers a significant number of *additional* advantages for a long ocean voyage than the vessels that our Western-minds envisage when we encounter the word “ship.”

In the first place, it would have offered much **greater deck space for storage** as well as **opportunities for private quarters for each family**. The extra space also **could have even allowed small gardens** all important factors for a long duration voyage that were exploited by other cultures using rafts, notably in Polynesia. Secondly, rafts offer **improved stability and safety. With more forgiving handling characteristics, rafts can ride out storms and heavy seas better** than many narrow hulled styles. With a solid keel formed of perhaps several layers of logs secured by lashing or with large wood pegs or metal bolts, taking on water and sinking would never have been a concern and only an unusually severe storm could have presented any danger. Lashing, nails or bolts, or a combination of these fastening methods, would have allowed the timber to flex as it sailed while still maintaining its structural integrity. This may be a reason that Nephi makes no mention of any difficulties at sea after the storm sent by the Lord early in the voyage. The raft’s inherent stability could have been further enhanced by a pontoon attached to one or both sides, or even by using some sort of “catamaran” design with a central living area.

Finally, as the small *Kon Tiki* raft showed, contrary to popular opinion, a raft can be navigated and even tack against the wind by using its sails and moveable center-boards. Navigating the shallow draft of a raft onto a beach, or into an unknown harbor, **would more easily allow stops** and been less dangerous than maneuvering a hulled ship. It is important to remember, however, that rainwater collection and fishing may have made stops unnecessary or at least infrequent; seafarers in more recent times have recounted voyages lasting up to 14 months without stops.¹² Again, the experience of *Kon Tiki*’s long distance voyage

has been confirmed by modern sailors using other vessels; they fared well carrying only minimal supplies. Rafts also attract a variety of accompanying marine life and thus **fishing is substantially easier** than from higher, hulled vessels.¹³

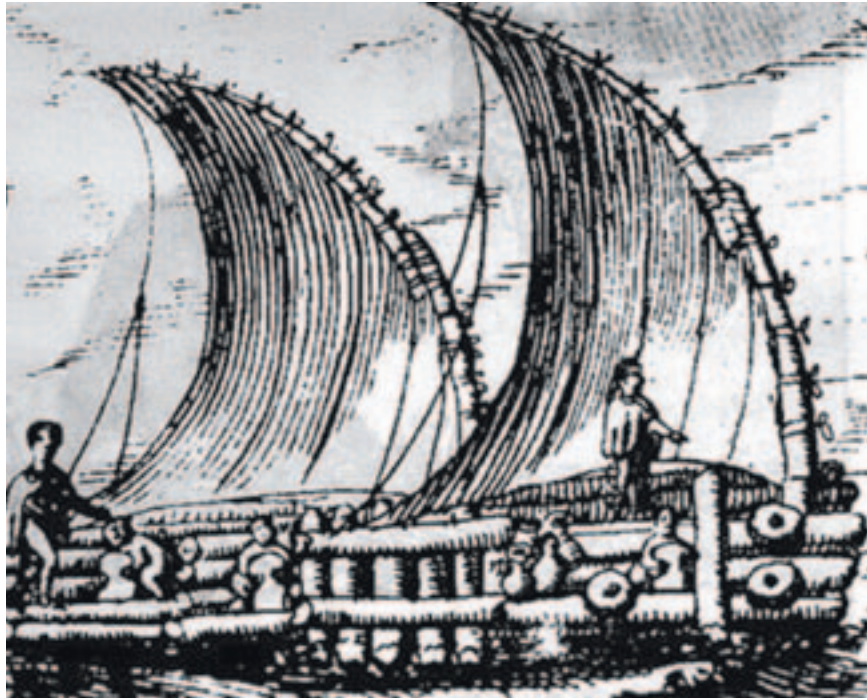
Finally, if Nephi’s ship was in fact some style of raft that might account for the fact that there was apparently no “shakedown” sailing in sheltered waters before the ship was launched into the Indian Ocean. The simplicity of the raft design would have made **pre-departure trial sailing much less of a requirement** than with any other style.



1. A design by Chad D. Aston for an ocean-going decked raft constructed of timber logs.
2. LDS artist Robert F. Fetterly’s painting *On the Fourth Day*, is likely the only published depiction of Nephi’s ship as a hybrid raft. It appeared in the January 1992 *ENSIGN* and the January 3, 2004 *Church News*: www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/print/44921/Book-of-Mormon-examples-Forgiving-others.html. Image used with permission of the Fetterly family.



Constructed of several layers of logs, Thor Heyerdahl’s *Kon Tiki* raft demonstrated in 1947 that rafts were a viable means of transportation over great distances using simple technology. Sailing image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.



This 1619 sketch shows an ocean-going raft off the coast of Peru constructed with layers of balsa logs. It could be steered with great precision.

Archaeologist P. J. Capelotti, referring to the 4,300 mile/8,000 km “*Kon Tiki*” raft voyage across the same ocean that the Lehitites probably crossed, the Pacific, made a general point about the merits of rafts that will strike many Latter-day Saints as significant:

By its very structure, a raft is a floating warehouse. They were therefore the perfect vessel to carry the contents of a culture across an ocean. They are not fast, but they are virtually indestructible. If a conventional sailboat gets a small hole in its hull, it sinks. By contrast, a...raft can lose two thirds of its hull and still keep its crew and twenty tons of cargo afloat.¹⁴

It seems safe to conclude that a raft design not only meets all the scriptural requirements for Nephi’s “ship,” but it remains the minimal and most feasible structure that could be constructed under the circumstances. Indeed, it may have been the most durable, robust style that could be built for a journey of such an unprecedented distance. While it may require an adjustment to the cultural assumptions of most Latter-day Saints, we should therefore consider a raft of some kind as a strong candidate for the type of “ship” that carried the Lehitite group to the New World ca. 592 BC.

Modern Parallels to Lehi’s Voyage

Lehi’s story inspired DeVere Baker (1915-1990), an LDS bishop from Utah, to build a series of rafts with which he attempted to sail with a small crew from the California coast to Hawaii in the nineteen fifties. After a series of misadventures and costly rescues by the Coast Guard, in 1958 the final raft, the *Lehi IV*, eventually made the journey from California to Maui in 69 days, making his point that simple, un-powered craft could traverse great distances on the ocean. Despite the headline-grabbing embarrassments of his earlier attempts, Baker succeeded in focusing some attention on the origins of the Book of Mormon and introduced many to the practical realities of life on a long-distance sea voyage. His choice of vessel, raft, may also have been closer to the truth than even he realized. More ambitious sailing plans, to culminate in a re-creation of the Lehitite voyage from Oman to Central America did not eventuate.¹⁵

With greater resources but a related goal to demonstrate that sea-voyaging between the Americas, the Pacific islands and the Mediterranean was feasible without using modern materials - Thor Heyerdahl (1914-2002) and then others, often using rafts, defied the orthodox views of anthropology by demonstrating that the oceans were

highways *linking* different civilizations, rather than insurmountable barriers separating them. The raft that Heyerdahl is best remembered for, the *Kon Tiki*, sailed some 5,000 miles/8,000 km across the Pacific Ocean from Peru in 1947. His later drift voyages across the Atlantic and from Iraq to Djibouti in East Africa also proved to be seminal events in the development of practical archaeology and in breaking down the bounds imposed by conventional thinking.¹⁶



In 1958 LDS sailor DeVere Baker successfully voyaged from California to Hawaii to demonstrate that Lehi's sea journey was feasible using raft technology. Images courtesy of Baker family.

A modern parallel, in part, to the Lehite voyage was the 1980-81 voyage from Oman to China by Irish author, Tim Severin. Severin, who has made a career out of recreating ancient and legendary voyages, received Omani government sponsorship to construct a sailing ship using only traditional methods and materials. Construction at the old port of Sur in northern Oman by a team of thirty men took 165 days. The ship that resulted was an 80 foot/24 meter long vessel constructed to a traditional design without using a single nail the keel and the planks were sewn into place using coconut fiber rope kept moistened with vegetable oil. With several stops en route for provisioning and repairs, the *Sohar* survived the seven-month journey to Canton, China along the old maritime silk route in good shape and could have been sailed further. The elaborate methods employed to preserve the ship's timbers

from marine worms and to keep the interior ropes oiled may well have not been necessary for the one-time voyage of Nephi's ship.¹⁷



The sewn ship *Sohar* displayed near Muscat, Oman after its 1980-81 voyage from Oman to China.

While the voyage of the *Sohar* is a most interesting and instructive account, we should exercise caution before drawing too many conclusions from it as, lacking a place especially prepared for him by the Lord, Severin relied on timber imported some 1,300 miles/2,050 km from India for his vessel, the practice in northern Oman for as long as ships have been built there. There remains no justification for theorizing that Nephi, in southern Oman, would have needed to do the same - as noted earlier, even today the Qamar coast provides adequate large timber close to the ocean that is eminently suitable for ship building. Severin's ship also required a larger crew of trained sailors than Nephi likely had available to him at Kharfot.

Three recent ship projects also have potential in shedding additional light on the Lehite journey. Each of the three primary building

LEHI AND SARIAH IN ARABIA

techniques is represented: in August 2008, a 72 foot/21.5 meter ship, the *Phoenicia*, built of **nailed wood planks** (pine) in Syria to a 600 BC Phoenician design, was launched in a circumnavigation of the African continent. In August and September 2009, the author was part of the crew as the *Phoenicia* sailed east along the coast of Arabia to Salalah, Oman, traversing the same area Nephi's ship must have traversed. *Phoenicia* continued sailing around Africa and back to Syria via the Mediterranean, completing her historical feat in October 2010. Of note is that the total sailing distance, over 20,000 miles, thus exceeding the distance from Arabia to the Americas via the Indian and Pacific Oceans of about 17,000 miles or 27,000 km.

In December 2008, nautical archaeologist Cheryl Ward led a project in Egypt that built a 66 foot/20 meter **mortise (hole) and tenon (peg)** timber ship, *Min of the Desert*, recreating an ancient Egyptian design and successfully sailed it short distances on the Red Sea. The third project was the 2010 voyage of a wooden ship **sewn** with coconut

fiber and using woven flax sails, the *Jewel of Muscat*, in northern Oman to a traditional 9th century Arab design. With several stops en route, the 60 foot/18 meter ship sailed eastwards across the Indian Ocean from Oman to Singapore.¹⁸



In 2009 the author was part of the crew of the *Phoenicia*, a re-creation of a 600 BC Phoenician ship, as it sailed along the eastern coast of Yemen and Oman while circumnavigating the African continent. Such expeditions have enlarged our understanding of the Lehiite sea journey. Ship image courtesy of Leon Harmse, the *Phoenicia* Expedition.



Recent re-creations of traditional early wooden ships include the construction of the *Jewel of Muscat* which sailed from Oman east to Singapore in 2010. Ship image courtesy of Alessandro Ghidoni, the *Jewel of Muscat* Project.



The gritty realities of long voyages are suggested by the details in this image taken at sea on the *Phoenicia*: a harsh environment, repairs, empty horizons and hard work alternating with periods of inactivity.

Ancient Long-distance Ocean Voyaging

Anthropologist John Sorenson has pointed out that non-sailor commentators are prone to over-estimate the difficulties involved in long distant voyaging, an attitude that has prevented many otherwise open-minded scholars from accepting that Old World peoples arrived anciently in the Americas by sea. He wrote:

One scholar has referred to this attitude as “intellectual mal-de-mer when archaeologists look seaward.” Others have called this isolationist opinion “thalas-sophobia,” or fear of the sea. For instance, Hannes Lindemann, who made three solo voyages from West Africa to the West Indies, said that he and fellow sailors scoff at non-sailor’s views of the “dangers” at sea. He felt that it takes “a damn fool to sink a boat on the high seas.” Charles A. Borden recounts stories of all sorts of unlikely craft that have crossed the ocean. He concluded that “seaworthiness has little to do with size; little ships are often the safest.”

...many hundreds of persons have crossed the ocean in or on all sorts of craft – log rafts, rubber boats, replicas of Polynesian canoes, rowboats, and, more recently, personal water-craft and sailboards, not to mention numerous kinds of small boats...

...[there has been] recent recognition that ancient sailors ages ago were already making remarkable voyages. We now know that the first settlers of Australia crossed open sea from the north as early as 60,000 years ago...Nowadays it is acceptable for an established archaeologist like E. James Dixon to assume that navigators would have been able to come from Asia to America around the North Pacific by “perhaps 13,000 years ago.”¹⁹

Long ridiculed and ignored by establishment science, the “diffusionist” view captured so matter-of-factly in the Book of Mormon accounts of the Jaredite, Lehite and Mulekite voyages is now supported by an overwhelming body of evidence. A broad spectrum of cultural markers, ranging from ancient depictions of plants far from their native habitat (including maize in India in medieval times), the actual recovery of anomalous items (such as maize on the island of Timor dated to 2500 BC), the presence of disease organisms and fauna in both hemispheres and the preservation of specific names and terms for various plants (for example the mention of the sweet potato in early Chinese writings), the recording in art of various racial types (Chinese, African blacks and Semitic portraits from ancient Mesoamerica for example) and linguistic studies that show clear borrowings and adaptations between widely separated languages are but a few of the fields now well documented.

Only human voyaging gives us an acceptable explanation for all these traces of contact. There can be no question that extensive ocean voyaging has taken place globally for at least the past 8,000 years and likely much longer. Increasingly, non-LDS researchers are reaching the same conclusion.²⁰



Departing “every one according to his age”

Although the construction of their ship was under Nephi’s direction, the timing of the group’s departure was still dictated by revelation to his father, Lehi (18:5). Although they could not have fully grasped the distance they would need to sail, they knew at least that their departure marked the closing of one epoch and the beginning of another. With more than eight difficult years in the Arabian wilderness and at Bountiful behind them, we can expect that there was a sense of occasion as they finally boarded “on the morrow.” Some type of prayer and sacrificial thanksgiving offering was likely to have taken place before they embarked, boarding “every-one according to his age” (18:6). By specifying *who* boarded the ship (only family members are listed in verse 6), Nephi’s account makes it apparent that no outsiders joined the voyage. Rather, people who had spent so many years together in the desert constituted the entire complement of crew and passengers.

Recording the details of their boarding may have been more than merely painting a word-picture of a significant moment in their history on Nephi’s part; it may also have been his way of acknowledging with appreciation that the ship-building had come to proceed in harmony. His older brothers had not withheld their labor from him (17:49), but had been humbled to unite with him in the construction effort (18:1, 4).



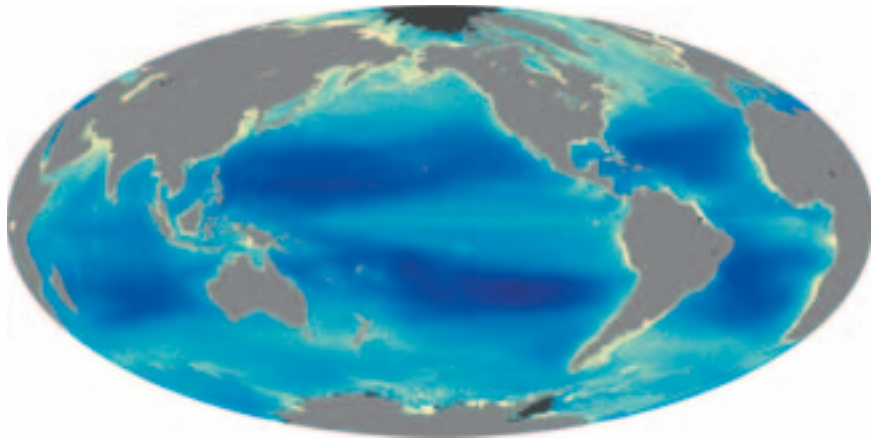
Thus it was that Nephi, the instigator and chief builder of the vessel, boarded without any prominence in the midst of his siblings. Showing respect for elders was deeply ingrained in their culture and, in that sense, the mention about boarding according to their age, rather than randomly, fits perfectly. It is likely that each adult male boarded “according to his age” accompanied by his spouse and their children.²¹

Nephi then matter-of-factly notes, “we did put forth into the sea and were driven forth before the wind towards the promised land.” (18:8) This verse makes it clear that the ship did not enter the sea until its departure. No trial or practice sailing was necessary. The text also reflects the reality that it was the *wind* determining the direction of sailing, rather than ocean currents. After sailing for the space of many days, the attempt by his older brethren to take control of the ship, and the terrible storm that raged for four days before they restored the captaincy to him in fear of their lives is related in harrowing detail (18:9-22). A life-threatening storm encountered centuries later by an Arab-crewed ship evoked similar terms:

*...the typhoon lasted three days and three nights, with the ship tossing up and down without anchor or sail, drifting we knew not whither. On the fourth day the wind began to abate; then it died down altogether and the sea was fair at the end of the day. From the morning of the fifth day the sea was good and the wind favorable; we erected a mast, hoisted the sails and went on our way, preserved by God.*²²

After the storm, Nephi’s silence about the following months of voyaging may well reflect the re-ordering of his priorities as the captain, husband, father and the dutiful son of aging parents. The arduous realities of life at sea likely left little time and energy for record-keeping.

The eight-plus year Lehite sojourn was surely intended, at least in part, by the Lord to develop group cohesion. It may also have been intended to allow their children time to mature sufficiently to contribute to the combined effort in simple ways. During the longest stage of that sojourn that followed the storm, the need to steer the ship, repair sails and rigging, and maintain water and food supplies, would require a consistent and well-organized cooperative effort. Furthermore, until the advent in modern times of solid fiberglass and metal hulls, all hulled ships took on water; if Nephi’s ship was hulled the arduous task of emptying the “bilges” would also be a time-consuming, unending task. Following the storm Nephi described, group cohesion - as a matter of survival if nothing more - seems to have reasserted itself for the duration of the voyage.



The oceans of the world. Courtesy of Earth Observatory, NASA.

There has been much discussion by LDS writers about the direction taken by Nephi’s ship to the Promised Land. The monsoon-dominated Indian Ocean differs from the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans in that its currents and winds change direction seasonally. In the summer months both currents and winds move *northwards*; but in the winter months *southwards*. This would allow travel from Arabia to the Americas in either direction. Alma 22:28, however, strongly suggests an initial

landing on the “west [i.e., Pacific coast] sea,” requiring an *easterly* crossing of the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Most scholars favor an arrival along the Pacific coast of southeastern Guatemala and western El Salvador, or about 15 degrees north latitude. Whether by coincidence or design, this is almost due east of Nahom. A journey eastward to the Americas would involve around 17,000 miles/27,000 km of ocean voyaging.²³ The ancient practice of hugging coastlines for easier re-supplying of provisions would dramatically increase this distance but, as noted earlier, is not at all necessary. Traveling in a *southwesterly* direction below the African continent and then west across the Atlantic is shorter, but the voyagers would be much more likely to encounter danger from difficult weather and stress on the ship.

In either scenario, however, the final stretch of ocean, whether the eastern Pacific or the Atlantic, is empty of islands for many hundreds of miles. The voyagers needed to cope with long stretches without making landfall. Such a journey likely occupied at least a year, perhaps longer. As John Sorenson notes, “...if the journey through Arabia consumed eight years, we need not suppose the Lord would hasten the party across the ocean, more than ten times as far, in hasty, uninterrupted fashion.”²⁴

El Niño and the Ocean Voyage to the New World

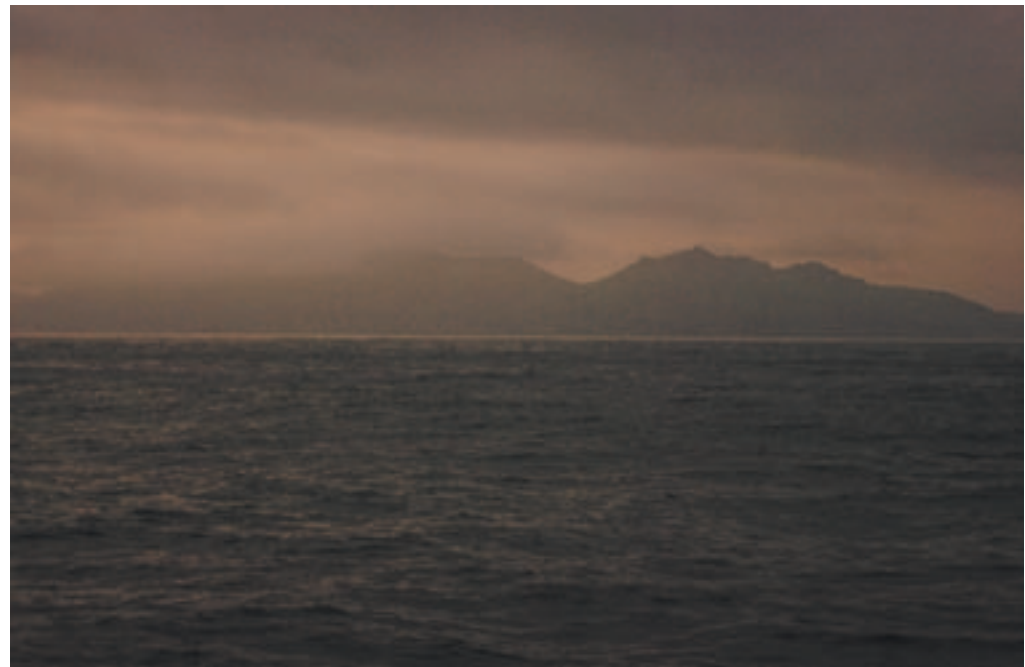
Normally, easterly travel across the Pacific Ocean is ruled out by the westerly movement of wind and currents exactly opposite to the conditions needed to reach the Americas after leaving the Indian Ocean. However, in recent decades science has begun to understand a weather phenomenon known as the ENSO effect. The acronym consists of *El Niño* (in Spanish: “the [Christ] Child,” as the weather patterns resulting from changes to ocean currents commonly reach the Americas about Christmas-time) and *Southern Oscillation*, which refers to the fact that these changes to wind and climate patterns commence in the great

expanses of the southern Pacific Ocean. The globe's major source of weather variation, its effects are felt worldwide.

One of these effects expands the normally narrow and unreliable equatorial counter-current (popularly known as the “doldrums”) for up to a year or more, allowing and even encouraging travel in an *easterly* direction across the Pacific. Data tells us that ENSO events occur at irregular intervals over recent centuries ranging from two to ten years, varying in their intensity and duration, with “major events” taking place every decade or two. Evidence from a variety of sources shows that, although less frequent long ago, El Niño Southern Oscillations have influenced weather in this way for many thousands of years; certainly well before Lehi's day. They may also have assisted the earlier Jaredite voyage to the Americas. Arguing that El Niño conditions permitted the voyages that settled the Pacific Island groups from 3600 to 1600 years ago, one anthropologist concluded:

At present there does not appear to be any reason to suppose that the wind circulation patterns of this migratory period were widely divergent from today's. It therefore seems likely that the voyagers of that expansionary era experienced spells of westerly wind broadly similar in frequency, duration, and extent to those today's sailors face.²⁵

The Lehite voyage to the Americas carried the religion of the future Redeemer to plant in their New World “land of promise.” Along with the Jaredite and Mulekite voyages, the Lehite account effectively linked both hemispheres, with its over-arching theme of the coming of the promised Messiah. From the perspective of believers, if El Niño was,



The Qamar mountains are visible in the distance in these views, taken looking inland while offshore of Kharfot.



The Pacific coast of southern Guatemala, with its extensive reed-lined lagoons, may be the place of arrival for Nephi’s ship, the Book of Mormon’s “land of first inheritance.” The Guatemalan highlands inland are visible in the final view.

in fact, the climatic agent making the Lehite ocean voyage possible, the fact it is named after the Son of God could be seen as very appropriate.

The record of the land and ocean odyssey linking Old and New Worlds reaffirms the universality of Christ’s atonement, accessible to all peoples no matter their location. In doing so, this New World account reinforces the essential accuracy of the Old World records, the Old and New Testaments, as no other book does or, indeed, could. Its focus on

clarifying the core doctrine of Christ’s Gospel and the ministry to his “other sheep” is fundamental to the Book of Mormon’s timeless and enduring spiritual value.²⁶

Towards a Conclusion

At a minimum, the converging evidences recounted in this book require the reader to take the Book of Mormon seriously as potentially

real history. The fact that so many specifics in First Nephi - most notably a sixth century BC “Nahom” with a uniquely fertile coast to its east - can be identified 180 years after publication argues strongly that Nephi’s account is based on a real-world journey. Establishing the plausibility of that journey has provided Mormon’s record the most credible of foundations, one that surely constitutes part of the “circumstantial evidence” that Joseph Smith predicted would validate his prophetic calling.²⁷

The story of Lehi, Sariah and their family is, moreover, the fulfillment of ancient predictions that truth would come forth in the last days from “out of the earth.” Of course, believers have long seen the story of the Book of Mormon metal plates being taken literally out of the earth as a fulfillment of those enigmatic statements. This book introduces a further dimension to that fulfillment by presenting *other* things that have come forth out of the earth: altars, inscriptions, tombs and geographical features, all lending support to the buried record. It confidently looks forward to more such evidences to similarly emerge in years to come.²⁸ This, in turn, augers well for the less-defined New World setting in which most of the Book of Mormon takes place.

The failure of “cultural” Mormonism (which inconsistently seeks to retain the “moral” teachings of the Book of Mormon while denying what the book says about its own origins) and of open critics of the book to otherwise account for the realities presented in this book, is telling. Those arguing that the Book of Mormon is somehow a nineteenth century product have yet to offer any meaningful alternative explanation for these Old World correlations.²⁹ The more astute and honest of those critics have begun to acknowledge the strength of these multiplying evidences in some ground-breaking concessions. Their courage renews hope that eventually the various divisions of Christianity will one day accept the new revelation of the risen Christ found within the Book of Mormon.³⁰ In divided Christendom, it is surely needed. What believers

in the book hope others will discover can be glimpsed in comments such as the following:

Students of the Christian scriptures in all faiths cry out to grasp the grand secrets of the Atonement, which can unlock the further mysteries of man’s nature and life’s purpose. If only they could know what truths lie buried before their eyes in the plain and precious language of the Book of Mormon. These truths are in some sense inaccessible to those whose tools of language and discourse are limited to the terms of art embodied in the academic and jargon-laden discipline of contemporary Christian theology.

Great revelations – literally – await those who will let the Book of Mormon speak for itself about its central message, Christ’s Atonement, ‘according to the plainness which is in the Lamb of God.’³¹

While The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is now the fourth-largest faith in the US, the majority of its over fifteen million members live in other countries. The distribution, as of April 2012, of over 150 million copies of its foundational text in more than a hundred languages, ensures that the academic study of Mormonism has also moved outside of North America as scholars increasingly recognize the Book of Mormon’s significance and impact.³²

Mormonism’s primary text is truly on the cusp of change, beginning to be treated in academic circles as a not-necessarily authentic, but legitimate “world-faith text.”³³ One indication of this came in 2004, when the first *non*-LDS version of the Book of Mormon was published, with approval from the LDS church, by a major commercial printing house. Despite official concerns expressed by the LDS church, “modern-day English” versions intended to expedite the Book of Mormon’s clarity and readability continue to be produced. Best known of these is

the 2005 “Reader’s Edition,” reformatting the original text. It has met favorable reviews.³⁴

From the perspective of the faithful, *The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ* has roles beyond being the “keystone” scripture of the Restored Church and providing a spiritual foundation for the Latter-day work. Functioning as an additional witness of Jesus Christ’s mission, it is also uniquely fitted for the end of an age - something many would argue we are now witnessing. The recurring cycle of pride documented in Nephite and Lamanite history, together with the account of the Messiah’s visit to his “other sheep,” offer the sure antidote against the most pervasive belief systems of our day, materialism, and its destructive twin, ideological extremism.

As its doctrinal clarity becomes more integral to LDS understanding and culture, a process still underway, the Book of Mormon will surely be an instrument in preparing believers to more fully live its principles. At some point the recovery of the sealed portion of the metal plates from which the Book of Mormon sprang will then become a restoration of *additional* truths, many of them glimpsed only dimly at present. Perhaps Elder Neal A. Maxwell had these further truths in mind when he stated that the Book of Mormon’s greatest days still lie ahead.³⁵

As significant as the findings reported in this book are, therefore, they must not be permitted to detract from the *spiritual* message under-girding the Book of Mormon. After the Lehiite saga ends, the account that follows resonates with the directness of record-keepers who witnessed the ghastly waves of genocide that followed rejection of the Messiah and his teachings. Readers more accustomed to diluted and fragmented truth may find such plainness unpalatable, but it allows the message to emerge powerfully. To all whose minds and hearts remain open the book’s central premise - that Deity can, and does, intervene in human history - emerges with unique clarity.

Lehi and Sariah’s descendants preserved a millennium of history documenting their moral decisions and, in confronting detail that remains entirely relevant in our day, the consequences of those choices. Each person’s encounter with the Book of Mormon offers those same ancient, but ever-new, alternatives between darkness and light.

END

NOTES

1. Old Testament scholar Margaret Barker notes parallels to Nephi's statements in other accounts of building feats guided by revelation, such as the Tabernacle built by Moses (Exodus 25) and the instructions revealed to King David (1 Chronicles 28:11-19). She also notes the apocryphal Enoch 89:1 where knowledge received from an archangel somehow transforms Noah's purely human status. This enables him to then build the ark, which can therefore perhaps, like Nephi's ship, be described as "not after the manner of men" (personal com. December 15, 2006).
2. See John L. Sorenson, "Transoceanic Crossings in the Book of Mormon" in Monte S. Nyman and Tate, eds, *First Nephi, the Doctrinal Foundation*, 251-270, and his "Winds and Currents: A Look at Nephi's Ocean Crossing" in John W. Welch, ed. *ReExploring the Book of Mormon*, 53-56. Also see John Tvedtnes, "My First-Born in the Wilderness" in *JBMS* 3/1 (1994), 207-209 proposing that Lehi may have seen his younger sons Jacob and Joseph in some sense as "replacements" for Laman and Lemuel respectively after their continual rebellion. Jacob went on to have custody of the plates after Nephi's death (see Jacob 1:1-4).
3. Data about ancient tents in Israel is found in Michael M. Homan, *To Your Tents, O Israel! The Terminology, Function, Form, and Symbolism of Tents in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Boston: Brill, 2002). The Lehite tents brought from Jerusalem were apparently not entirely used for the ship as Nephi records that they "did pitch our tents" upon arrival in the Promised Land (18:23), the same wording used earlier to describe the arrival at the Old World Bountiful (17:6).
4. Several ancient wooden ships dating to Lehi's day or earlier are known. In the museum on the plateau near the Giza pyramids is housed, for example, the sewn cedar-wood Khufu ship dating to the 4th Dynasty, or about 2700 BC. The ship is about 143 feet/43 meters in length. In 2012 an even older vessel, a sewn acacia-wood ship about 40 feet/12 meters long was excavated at Abu Rawash near Giza. It dates to the reign of King Den, about 2950 BC. Over a millennium later, even larger vessels were apparently being built of sycamore fig-timber in Egypt; a relief in Queen Hatshepsut's funerary temple at Deir el Bahri directs that "all the sycamores in the land" be used to build the massive obelisk barges depicted. See also Cheryl Ward, *Sacred and Secular: ancient Egyptian ships and boats* (Boston: Archaeological Institute of America, 2000) and her "Boat-building and its social context in early Egypt: interpretations from the First Dynasty boat-grave cemetery at Abydos," *Antiquity* 80/307 (March 2006): 118-129, discussing the ancient sewn hulls found at Abydos.

The claim that "cedar" was one of the woods locally available to Nephi at Bountiful, made in *Journey of Faith*, 83, 86, 87 is without any basis. Cedar has never been attested in southern or eastern Arabia. See Part 5, Note 33 of this work for a listing of sources documenting the flora both past and present.

5. On the issue of shipbuilding at Khor Rori, see Part 5, Note 30.
6. A general overview of the beginnings of seafaring is provided in Andrzej Pydyn, *Argonauts of the Stone Age: Early maritime activity from the first migrations from Africa to the end of the Neolithic* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2015). A more focused look is offered in Michael Rice, *The Archaeology of the Arabian Gulf, c. 5000-323 BC*, 248 and in Robert Carter, "The Neolithic origins of seafaring in the Arabian Gulf" in *Archaeology International* (London: UCL Institute of Archaeology, 2002), 44-47. Also see the summary in Noel B. Reynolds, "By Objective Measures: Old Wine into New Bottles" in *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, 128-129.
7. George F. Hourani, *Arab Seafaring* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951) deals with what the Classical and Arab texts reveal of early trade routes, ship types and navigation methods. Concise and sometimes overly conservative (eg. the statement "Arabia does not and never did produce wood suitable for building strong seagoing ships" p. 5; and regarding the Phoenician circumnavigation of Africa ca. 600 BC reported by Herodotus as "legendary" p. 9) it remains a standard text in its field and has been released in an updated version, *Arab Seafaring: Expanded Edition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

A more detailed treatment is N. Boivin, R. Blench & D. Fuller, "Archaeological, linguistic and historical sources on ancient seafaring: A multidisciplinary approach to the study of early maritime contact and exchange in the Arabian Peninsula" in M. Petraglia & J. Rose, eds. *The Evolution of Human Populations in Arabia. Focusing on Arab ship types, navigation practices and sailing dates from Oman is the website <http://nabataea.net/sailing.html> and <http://nabataea.net/ships.html>.*

Also valuable is G. R Tibbetts, *Arab Navigation in the Indian Ocean Before the Coming of the Portuguese* vol. 42 (London: Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, 1981), which discusses monsoon winds in the region and the discussion of literary sources dealing with Arab seafaring in S. Soucek, V. Christides, G. Tibbetts and G. Oman's entry, "Milaha: navigation, seamanship, seafaring" in the revised edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (1999). The most comprehensive discussion of navigation is currently William Facey, Anthony R. Constable, eds. *The Principles of Arab Navigation* (London: Arabian Publishing, 2013). This work includes the account of the 2010 Jewel of Muscat voyage from Oman and attempts to replicate early Arab navigation techniques.

Other sources such as Dionisius A. Agius, *Seafaring in the Arabian Gulf and Oman: People of the Dhow* (Oxon and New York City: Routledge, 2005) which focuses on seafaring in the last 150 years; Marie-Christine Graeve’s *The Ships of the Ancient Near East* (ca. 2000-500 BCE) (Louven: Dept. Orientalalistic, 1981); Paul Lunde’s “The Middle East and the Age of Discovery” in *Saudi Aramco World* 43:3 (May-June 1992) and “The Indian Ocean and Global Trade” in *Saudi Aramco World* 56:4 (July-August 2005) also provide valuable context and insight into aspects of early Arabian seafaring that illuminates Nephi’s account.

The work of eminent Jewish scholar Raphael Patai (d. 1996) deserves particular mention: *The Children of Noah: Jewish Seafaring in Ancient Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press: 1998). Dr Patai referenced Book of Mormon claims and LDS beliefs in his writings, spoke several times at BYU Provo and was invited by LDS scholar John M. Lundquist, head of the Oriental Division of the New York Public Library, to contribute to the 1990 Festschrift honoring Hugh Nibley’s 80th birthday. Dr Patai credited this invitation with helping him complete his seafaring manuscript begun in 1935 and invited Lundquist to contribute an appendix to his book, appearing as “Biblical Seafaring and the Book of Mormon” 171-175. A review of the book (noting Lundquist’s acceptance of Kharfot as the probable Bountiful) mentions several items that may have been part of the Lehite ocean voyage, such as the Jewish requirement to carry soil so that blood spilt during animal sacrifices could be covered with earth (p. 67 in the book); see John Tvedtnes, “Jewish Seafaring and the Book of Mormon” *FARMS Review* 10/2 (1998), 147-155.

8. Email to the author from marine-archaeologist Tom Vosmer, Sep 11, 2003.
9. See Robert Gardiner & Arne E. Christensen, eds. *The Earliest Ships: The Evolution of Boats into Ships* (London: Conway Maritime Press, 2004) for in-depth essays on historical ships and Lionel Casson, *Ships and Seafaring in Ancient Times*, (London: British Museum Press, 1994) for a popular overview of ancient ships. Also valuable is Michael McCarthy, *Ships’ Fastenings: From Sewn Boat to Steamship* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2005) and J. Richard Steffy, “The development of ancient and medieval shipbuilding techniques” in Francisco Alves, ed. *Proceedings of the International Symposium on Archaeology of Medieval and Modern Ships of Iberian-Atlantic Tradition* (Lisbon: Instituto Portugues de Arqueologia, 2001), 49-61.

Ralph K. Pedersen’s, “Was Noah’s Ark a Sewn boat?” in *Biblical Archaeology Review* (May/June 2005) and his extended treatment “Traditional Arabian watercraft and the ark of the Gilgamesh epic: interpretations and realizations” in *PSAS* 34 (2004), 231-238, focuses on sewn vessels, proposing that sewn and lashed ships date to much earlier than previously recognized. Pederson suggested that the Biblical account of

Noah’s ark may suggest a lashed ship and finds strong parallels to the technique in the Gilgamesh account of the Flood, found in Ninevah in the 19th Century.

10. On the worldwide distribution of sewn ships, see A. H. J Prins, “A handbook of sewn boats” (Greenwich: Maritime Monographs and Reports, 1986), no. 59 and George F. Hourani, *Arab Seafaring: Expanded Edition*, 151. For illustrations of both lashed and sewn methods as used in Oman anciently, see *The Museum of the Frankincense Land: The Maritime Hall* (Muscat: Office of the Advisor to His Majesty the Sultan for Cultural Affairs, 2007), 62-65.
11. Robert C. West, “Aboriginal Sea Navigation between Middle and South America” in *American Anthropologist* 63 (1961), 133-135.
12. See Christopher Ralling, *Kon-Tiki Man: An Illustrated Biography of Thor Heyerdahl* (London: BBC Books, 1990), see 104, 142, 204 concerning steering, 112 for other perceived advantages of a raft and 120 concerning food and water. The 1832 experience of a stricken Japanese ship, the *Hojun Maru*, which drifted across the Pacific for 14 months, demonstrated that sailors can survive long periods on fish and rainwater. Historian Hubert Bancroft noted evidence for about a hundred accidental voyages from Japan to North American shores; see Hubert Howe Bancroft, *The Native Races of the Pacific States of North America*, vol. 5 (San Francisco: Bancroft & Co, 1883), 52.
- Latter-day Saints have had more reasons than most to be fascinated by Heyerdahl’s projects. An extended interview with Heyerdahl was published as “An interview with Famed Explorer Thor Heyerdahl” in the *New Era* of April, 1972 and can be accessed online. On April 29, 1989 the *Church News* carried a brief report of a discussion between Heyerdahl and Paul R. Cheesman of BYU as “Thor Heyerdahl’s voyages support Book of Mormon, he tells professor.”
13. See the comments by Tim Severin in *The China Voyage: A Pacific Quest by Bamboo Raft*, (London: Little, Brown & Co. 1996), 315-316.
14. P. J Capelotti, Senior Lecturer in Anthropology and American Studies at Penn. State University and author of *Sea Drift: Rafting Adventures in the Wake of Kon Tiki* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001) made this general comment (emphasis added) in an interview accessed online July 1, 2007: http://rutgerspress.rutgers.edu/acatalog/Capelotti_interview.html.

See the review of nearly 40 modern raft voyages in P. J Capelotti, “The Theory of the Archaeological Raft: Motivation, Method, and Madness in Experimental Archaeology” the *Journal of Experimental Archaeology* (EXARC), issue 2012/1 at <http://journal.exarc.net/issue-2012-1/ea/theory-archaeological-raft-motivation-method-and-madness-experimental-archaeology>

Anthropologist Cheryl Ward, who led a project to build and sail an 1800 BC-design Egyptian ship in December 2008, suggested that a raft would most likely result under the parameters existing at Kharfot (email correspondence with the author March 14-15, 2009).

Grateful appreciation is extended to Stephen L. Carr, MD, of Salt Lake City for his pioneering efforts, following two visits to Oman with the author, to resolve practical aspects of how Nephi's ship may have been built and how it may have functioned on a daily basis for those on board; see his "Another Idea for Nephi's Ship" at www.bmaf.org/node/452. Two seasoned LDS seafarers, Robert Copeland of Washington state and Philip H. Harris of Texas have contributed comments to this section through their analysis of the issues involved; see Philip H. Harris, *The Voyage: A Sailor's Viewpoint* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris, 2011).

15. Captain DeVere Baker, *The Raft Lehi IV: 69 days Adrift on the Pacific Ocean* (Long Beach, CA: Whitehorn Publishing, 1959). Baker was featured in the TV documentary series "Danger is My Business" in 1961, focusing on his fourth and ultimately successful sailing to Hawaii in July 1958. The segment "South Seas Raft Man" aired in the UK on the BBC in 1961. A fairly detailed overview of Baker's efforts is found in Samuel W. Taylor, "Twenty-Five Years on a Raft: the Odyssey of DeVere Baker" in *Sunstone* 21/3 (August 1998), 72-76.
Marking the 20th anniversary of Baker's death a feature by the author, "DeVere Baker and his ocean rafts" appeared January 31, 2011 in *Meridian Magazine*, at <http://ldsmag.com/article-1-7413/>
For another attempt to reprise a Book of Mormon voyage, that of the Jaredites, see: www.ldschurchnewsarchive.com/articles/print/39934/LDS-oarsman-completes-transatlantic-row.html.
16. Thor Heyerdahl, *Kon Tiki: Across the Pacific by Raft* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1950) and his *Early Man and the Ocean: a Search for the Beginnings of Navigation and Seaborne Civilizations* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1978). From April to July 2006 Heyerdahl's grandson Olav re-created the original voyage in the raft "Tangaroa," sailing safely with his crew and with minimal damage to the raft, from Peru to Tahiti. Crew-leader Torgeir Higrav's account, *Tangaroa: Havets Hersker* (Oslo: Bazar Forlag, 2007), was published only in Norwegian.
17. Tim Severin, *The Sindbad Voyage* (London: Arrow Books, 1983).
18. In August and September, 2009 the author sailed as crew on the Aden to Salalah leg of the Phoenicia [nailed] ship's 2008-2010 circumnavigation of Africa, www.phoenicia.org.uk, a voyage totaling over 20,000 miles/32,000 km. This was reported in Warren P. Aston, "Sailing With Nephi" in *Meridian Magazine* on May 27,

2010. The official account of the project is Philip Beale & Sarah Taylor, *Sailing Close to the Wind: An epic voyage recreating the first circumnavigation of Africa by the Phoenicians in 600 BC.* (London: The Lulworth Press, 2012).

An Atlantic crossing is next planned for the Phoenicia, see "Phoenicians Before Columbus Expedition," see <http://pioneerexpeditions.com/phoenicians/>

The Min of the Desert [mortise and tenon] ship project in Egypt is discussed in Cheryl Ward and Chiara Zazzaro, "Evidence for Pharaonic Seagoing Ships at Mersa/Wadi Gawasis, Egypt" in *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology* 39/1 (Portsmouth, UK: Nautical Archaeology Society, March 2010), 27-43.

For the successful sailing in 2010 of the [sewn] Jewel of Muscat ship from Oman to Singapore via India, see the expedition website www.JewelofMuscatArchive.org. It followed an earlier effort by marine archaeologist Tom Vosmer to sail from Oman to Singapore using a vessel based on a four thousand year old design. The 40 foot/12 meter Magan 3 was constructed of bundles of reeds tied together with date-palm fiber ropes and sealed with bitumen. Woven woolen sails were used. See preliminary remarks in Tom Vosmer, "Model of a Third Millennium BC Reed Boat based on evidence from Ra's al-Jinz," *The Journal of Oman Studies* 11 (2000), 149-153. Unfortunately, in September 2005, the reed ship sank just before its maiden voyage.

19. John L. Sorenson, "Scientific Evidence for Pre-Columbian Transoceanic Voyages to and from the Americas," 3 parts at <http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/publications/transcripts/?id=154>.
20. Some non-LDS scholars are reaching similar conclusions. The recent publication by John A. Ruskamp of *Asiatic Echoes: The Identification of Chinese Pictograms in North American Rock Writing* (Amazon: CreateSpace, 2012), for example, illustrates the increased openness of mainstream scholars to a variety of cultural input from early voyages. As mainstream science accepts the overwhelming data confirming ancient long-distance sea voyaging we can expect further insights to emerge into the longest, yet least known, stage of the Lehite odyssey.
21. As in most cultures, respect for age in the family and in community life has always played an important role in Israelite society. Sometime age and gender considerations combine, as for example a Jewish male receiving circumcision and Bar Mitzva at specified ages. At death, the Kadish lamentation over the dead is customarily read by the first-born male over his father's grave. But, in other no less important settings, age alone may play a role. Each year, for example, at the Passover supper, it is the youngest child who asks the four traditional questions whose answers outline the reason for the feast. Even when only the husband or wife is present, the younger of the two asks the ritual questions. Although he was teaching his estranged brothers

- a powerful lesson, Joseph in Egypt had them sit at his table according to their age (Genesis 43:33), later opening their sacks of grain in the same order (Genesis 44:12). The only other boarding of a ship by a family group recorded in scripture, the account of Noah, does not clarify whether there was any priority in either boarding the ark (Genesis 7:7, 13) or in disembarking (Genesis 8:16, 18). It seems unlikely that a New York farm boy in 1830 would concoct these distinctions in protocol.
22. See the account recorded in George F. Hourani, *Arab Seafaring* (1995), 116.
 23. Lynn M Hilton, “Nephi’s “Eastward” Journey (1 Ne. 17:1)” in *AAF Newsletter* 62 (AAF #5 - SEHA News, April 1988), available at www.ancientamerica.org, argues in some detail that Nephi, writing years later, was recording the [eastward] direction of travel from Nahom not only to the Arabian Bountiful, but also across the ocean to the Americas.
 24. John L. Sorenson, “Transoceanic Crossings in the Book of Mormon,” 264. For a recent treatment of the Book of Mormon’s ocean voyages, see George Potter, Frank Linehan and Conrad Dickson, *Voyages of the Book of Mormon* (Springville, UT: CFI (Cedar Fort), 2011).
 25. John L. Sorenson drew the attention of LDS scholars to the potential of ENSO events to facilitate Lehi’s easterly travel across the Pacific in a *FARMS Update*, April 1986 and in his 1988 “Transoceanic Crossings,” 263-264. A fuller discussion was offered by David L. Clark, “Lehi and El Nino: A Method of Migration” in *BYU Studies* 30/3 (Summer 1990), 57-65. Its projected sailing date from Bountiful (in August, the midst of the monsoon storms) is not feasible however.
For concise updates on recent progress in dating past ENSO events and the implications, see Warren P. Aston, “El Nino and Lehi’s Voyage Re-Visited” *Insights* 27/6 (2007), 2-3 and “Is this the wind that blew Nephi to the Americas?” in *Meridian Magazine*, May 9 2011, available at www.ldsmag.com/component/zine/article/7969?ac=1
 26. See Clyde J. Williams, “Plain & Precious Truths Restored” *ENSIGN* (October 2006), 50-54 for an accessible outline for a general readership of the contributions the Book of Mormon has made in clarifying doctrine.
 27. *Times and Seasons* 3, (September 15, 1842), 921-922.
 28. That in the latter-days truth would be restored to the human family “out of the earth” has been a consistent theme of ancient prophets and seers. Enoch (Moses 7:62), Joseph in Egypt (2 Nephi 3:19-20), Isaiah (Isaiah 29:4) and the Psalmist (Psalms 85:11) all saw that in some way truth would come from “out of the ground,” predictions being fulfilled more literally than many may have supposed.
 29. In contrast to the perspectives by Terryl Givens concerning the significance of the Nahom altar finds (see Part 3, note 68), there has been mostly silence from cultural-Mormon and anti-Mormon critics and a refocusing by them on the less-developed New World setting of the Book of Mormon. See Kevin Christensen’s response to attempted naturalistic explanations of the Book of Mormon, “Determining What is “Real”” in *Sunstone* 139 (Nov 2005), 66-70, especially notes 20, 24; and commentary on apologetic LDS websites such as <http://mormanity.blogspot.com> under “Book of Mormon Evidences” and at www.fairlds.org.
 30. As noted in Part 3 (note 73) of this book, the most relevant response to the Old World research to date from non-LDS scholarship is found in Beckworth, Mosser and Owen’s *The New Mormon Challenge*, 498 written before the Nahom altar discoveries. Although convinced that the Book of Mormon has no divine origin, their appraisal is nonetheless refreshingly honest and balanced. More general recognition of the achievements of orthodox Book of Mormon scholarship was offered in the landmark paper “Mormon Scholarship, Apologetics, and Evangelical Neglect: Losing the Battle and Not Knowing It?” by Carl Mosser and Paul Owen, given in a 1997 Evangelical Theological Society conference (Far West Annual Meeting) and later published in *Trinity Journal* (Bannockburn, IL: Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Fall 1998), 179-205. Some rapprochement between Latter-day Saints and Evangelicals in recent years has been evident with co-published books and papers attempting to find common doctrinal ground in the face of growing materialism and atheism worldwide.
 31. Bruce C. Hafen, *The Broken Heart: Applying the Atonement to Life’s Experiences* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 26. Another primary text is Jeffrey R. Holland’s *Christ and the New Covenant: The Messianic Message of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997).
 32. In the academic world Mormon studies, inevitably dealing with the impact of the Book of Mormon, was pioneered by Douglas J. Davies of Durham University in England. Davies, a professor of divinity and an ordained Anglican priest, has authored such works as *An Introduction to Mormonism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003) and *The Mormon Culture of Salvation* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2000). The European Mormon Studies Association (EMSA) holds an annual conference in UK and European locations and publishes the *International Journal of Mormon Studies* (print and online). Other academic centers that focus on, or include, Mormonism are found in France, Italy, Belgium, France, Switzerland, Brazil and New Zealand.
Utah Valley University (formerly UVSC) in Orem has operated a Mormon Studies program since 1999 and Utah State University at Logan, Utah, Claremont

University in Southern California, the University of Wyoming and the University of Virginia on the US east coast are among those who have endowed chairs in Mormon studies.

Other non-LDS scholars and clergy with substantial academic pedigrees such as James H. Charlesworth of Princeton Theological Seminary, historian Jan Shipps of Indiana University, British theologian and Methodist minister Margaret Barker, Harold Bloom of Yale and the late Krister Stendahl, former dean of Harvard Divinity School and Emeritus Bishop of Stockholm have all had some involvement in “Mormon” studies. While maintaining their own denominational beliefs, they are in the vanguard of a rising appreciation for the book given to the world by Joseph Smith. For commentary on this subject, see M. Gerald Bradford, “The Study of Mormonism: A Growing Interest in Academia” FARMS Review 19/1 (2007), 119-174. For another perspective see John A. Tvedtnes, “Scholarship in Mormonism and Mormonism in Scholarship” at: www.fairlds.org/FAIR_Conferences/2001_Scholarship_in_Mormonism_and_Mormonism_in_Scholarship.html

33. *See Paul C. Gutjahr, The Book of Mormon: A Biography (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2012) and the paper presented by religion scholar Ann Taves at the 2013 Mormon History Association meeting, titled “History and the Claims of Revelation: Joseph Smith and the Materialization of the Golden Plates,” available at www.religion.ucsb.edu/wp-content/uploads/B-6-Golden-Plates-Numen.pdf.*
34. *See Grant Hardy, ed. The Book of Mormon: A Reader’s Edition. An approved, non-LDS, commercial version of the Book of Mormon, with text identical to the 1981 LDS printing, was published in 2004 and 2006 by New York based Doubleday. In 2009 Yale University Press published the Book of Mormon incorporating textual corrections from Royal Skousen’s Critical Text Project. On unofficial contemporary versions, commentaries and abridgements of the Book of Mormon, see the First Presidency statement published in the ENSIGN magazine (April 1993), 74 and Shirley S. Ricks, “The Book of Mormon Abridged Anew” in FARMS Review 18/1 (2006), 21-33. For a generally positive review of a non-LDS Book of Mormon interpretation published in 1999 by the Zarahemla Research Foundation, see Brian M. Hauglid, “A New Approach to the Book of Mormon: the Restored Covenant Edition” in FARMS Review 12/2 (2000), 9-20.*
35. *Elder Neal A. Maxwell, unpublished address: “The Ends of the Earth Shall Inquire after Thy Name” delivered at the Missionary Training Center in Provo, Utah, on August 23, 1994.*

Appendix 1

Yemen, the Land of the Queen of Sheba

Yemen is more than just the Republic at the southern end of the Arabian Peninsula. It borders the largest countries within the Council of the Arab Gulf states, namely Saudi Arabia to the north and Oman to the east. On the other side of the Gulf of Aden lie Somalia and Djibouti, and across the Red Sea lie Eritrea and Ethiopia. The exotic Indian Ocean island of Socotra marks the extreme southern border of Yemen and the Bab al-Mandab straits connect the Red Sea and Arabian Seas. Yemen is thus genuinely situated at an important junction between Asia and Africa, commanding a strategic location along the trade routes connecting the Mediterranean Sea and Indian Ocean.

Despite the fact that Yemen has never been within the spotlight of archaeological investigation, the large number of ancient inscriptions collected and deciphered by European travelers and scholars since the nineteenth century provided the first independent clues to the antiquity of Yemen which were described by classical authors as *Arabia Felix* or *Arabia Eudaemon*. These writers also refer to the wealth and prosperity of the Sabaeans and other states of southern Arabia which managed to conduct successful trade not only overland across Arabia but also via

the Indian Ocean and Red Sea from the first millennium BC onwards. Last but not least the Old Testament throws light on Yemen, the land of the Queen of Sheba (Saba'), from which this mysterious monarch is said to have traveled to meet King Solomon in the tenth century BC, presenting him with spices, and much gold and precious stone carried on a great train of camels. Yemen has now opened its doors to foreign archaeological missions and, after centuries of seclusion, the country finds itself the subject of international attention. A large number of important archaeological discoveries have been made here over the past twenty-five years, including, to name but a few, Bronze Age settlements in the highlands near Dhamar and the Sabr culture at Lahj near Aden, the Bar'an temple at Marib, the Hellenistic and later bronzes from Jabal al-Lawdh and the mummies of Shibam al-Ghiras near Sana'a.

Yemen is therefore no longer the least known country in the world. It is a beautiful land with a very rich cultural heritage, where you can see the past surviving into the present. The antiquity of Yemen is gradually revealing its secrets and the future seems very promising.

Used with permission:

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Appendix 2

Some Notes on the Tribal Origins of NHM

Warren P Aston.

Paper delivered July 22, 1995 at the Seminar for Arabian Studies, Cambridge, UK.

At the outset, I wish to express sincere appreciation to Paul Dresch, Christian Robin, Remy Audoin, Yusuf Abdullah of Sana'a, Robert Wilson and to Nigel Groom for their valuable comments and insights in the preparation of this paper. An examination into the history of one of the prominent Bakil tribes of the Yemeni high-lands, the *Nihm* (usually rendered as *Nahm/Nehem*) from historical, linguistic and geographical perspectives has the potential to reveal something to us of tribal structure generally in the pre-Islamic period. For example, the findings of this study may go some way toward dating tribal origins, understanding the processes of tribal naming and to answering questions concerning the extent of movements within the confederations. In this paper I will propose some answers that may account for the *Nihm* tribal name and will assume that some of my data will have some commonality with other tribes in the region. I will also argue that a little-known account of travel across Arabia anciently appears to confirm some historical aspects of the tribe in question. It also fits well with what is now known

with regard to the trade-routes in southern Arabia. Unlike most of Arabia, the mountainous terrain and relative fertility of the peninsula's southwest corner - the present day Republic of Yemen - has kept many tribal areas there relatively intact over time from the ravages of conquest, famine and migration. Another factor contributing to the stability and cohesiveness of tribes in the Zaydi influence in Islam which has dominated the northern tribes since its introduction ca. AD 900. Both of these factors are relevant when we consider the *Nihm*, whose territory is centered on the rugged hill-country overlooking Wadi Jawf, some 25 miles NE of Sana'a.

Responding specifically to the conventional concept that some major changes to the pre-Islamic Yemeni tribes is indicated in the tribal data left us by the tenth-century historian, al-Hamdani, Robert Wilson concluded that:

...substantial traces of the pre-Islamic (tribal) order continued to exist well into the Islamic period. Over the past ten centuries there is little or no evidence of any major tribal movements in this part of Yemen, and the overwhelming impression is one of minimal change, even if tribal alliances have from time to time altered or developed.

...the movements suggested by [al-Hamdani]...were much smaller and more gradual that some of al-Hamdani's statements would lead us to believe.¹

What we can deduce of the history and origins of the *Nihm* seems to echo the general comments that Wilson makes about the southern tribes as a whole. I propose that the relative stability of the tribal areas in north Yemen at least is not confined to the last thousand years alone but may well reflect the overall situation existing in much earlier periods.

Let us first consider the tribal name. While it is true that many present-day Yemeni tribal names derive from a common ancestor,² the Nihm, in common with other tribes bearing a simple proper name, seem more likely to have taken their name from a specific location. In the case of the Nihm the name may date as far back as the Neolithic. The first indication that this may be so appear when the name is examined.

Two closely related roots for the name are possible: NH.M (with the H aspirated) and NHM, with related - but not identical - connotations. The basic meaning of NH.M is “to comfort, console,” with derivations extending this meaning to include “compassion” and “rest.” While the Akkadian NAAMU(M) is possibly the oldest cognate,³ the NH.M root itself first appears with clear meaning in Ugaritic (NH.M = “console”).⁴ In Arabic, NAH.AMA refers to “a soft groan, sigh, moan” and is usually applied in the third person. The Hebrew form is used extensively with reference to “consoling” the bereaved and “mourning” another’s death, as well as in numerous Old Testament texts referring to what is translated as the “repentance of God.”⁵ There are also occurrences of NH.M in the Old Testament as a personal name, “NAH.AM” (1 Chronicles 4:19), “NEH.UM” (Nehemiah 7:7) and most prominently the prophet NAH.UM (the “consoler”) whose origin may be Capernaum (“village of Nahum”), probably the present-day site Tell-Hum.⁶ It is the second root, NHM, that appears in the modern Arabic name of the tribal area. NHM is also found in biblical Hebrew, meaning to “roar” (Isaiah 5:29-30), or “to complain” or to “be hungry.” Similarly, in ancient Egyptian we have two variations, NHM meaning “thunder, shout,” and NHMHM, “roar, thunder” and in Arabic “growl, groan, roar, suffer from hunger, complain.” It must be appreciated that although both roots are relatively common in the Hebrew biblical corpus, both in fact are extremely rare in any southern Arabian context. Lancaster Harding’s *An Index and Concordance of Pre-Islamic Arabian Names and Inscriptions* lists, for example, only a single occurrence of NHM in

the southern Arabian dialects (listing a personal name in Hdrami) in addition to fourteen instances where it appears in north Arabian Safaitic texts.⁷ In view of the etymology of the NHM name, the recent finding of a burial area in the hills of Nihm overlooking the Jawf plains may be especially relevant. The difficulties of attempting fieldwork in the Jawf have always been considerable, yet some progress has been made in recent years to establishing the beginnings of a historical profile of the area. Construction of the tombs at Nihm may date to 3000 BC or earlier, with ongoing construction taking place until perhaps about AD 1000.⁸ Another, better-known, burial area, first reported by Philby in 1936,⁹ lies not far distant in presently disputed territory on the Ruwayk, ’Alam Abyadh and ’Alam Aswad outcrops (and reportedly also on the nearby Jidran ridge) NE of Marib. The thousands of circular rock structures comprising this site remain unexamined, so far as I am aware, by professional researchers. While outside the present boundaries of the Nihm and its sub-tribes, these tombs appear to be essentially the same as the Nihm tombs in their method of construction and their elevated situation.¹⁰

[A recent photograph of a typical burial tomb is shown on your handout.]

So far as the antiquity of the tribal name is concerned, maps and historical references attest that it has been known as such since pre-Islamic times. The earliest map I have been able to locate to date is ’Anville’s 1751 map of Asia showing NEHEM in the same position relative to Sana’a that all later maps do. This map is more significant than the others as it was based on the works of medieval Arab geographers such as Idrisi, Abu’l-Fida and Katib Chelebi.¹¹ Only a decade after ’Anville’s map, another map showing NEHHM was produced by the cartographer Carsten Niebuhr, the sole survivor of the Danish expedition to southern Arabia. Niebuhr also left us first-hand descriptions of the tribal area in his day, recording it as an independent “State of Yemen,”

one of thirteen so listed in addition to the dominions of the Imam at Sana'a.¹² More than a century passes before the next known reference to the place, the 1869 exploration of the region by Joseph Halevy who referred to the "independent hill-canton of NEHM on the arid eastern downs" northeast of Sana'a.¹³ Numerous other maps printed in succeeding years confirm the name and location of NEHEM or an equivalent toponym.¹⁴ I have listed examples of these chronologically on the hand-out. The earliest historical reference to the tribal name located thus far comes from the Prophet Muhammad himself, in diplomatic correspondence addressed to the southern tribes of Arabia about AD 620.¹⁵ Considering the scant attention paid to the pagan period by the early Moslem historians and genealogists, the Nihm are referred to often, as for example in al-Kalbi's *Kitab al-Asnam*, written about AD 821.¹⁶ The more prolific al-Hamdani mentions the tribe in his *Kitab Jazirat al-Arab*, a geographical work,¹⁷ and also in the tenth book of his *Al Iklil*, listing it as part of the Bakil confederation.¹⁸ Al-Hamdani also makes reference to the Bakil tribes in about the first century AD and while the constituent tribes of Bakil are not always defined in his writings we can reasonably **infer** that Nihm was one of them.¹⁹

Most unexpectedly, the name also surfaces in the English translation of the First Book of Nephi, claimed to be the record of a small Israelite group (whom I will hereafter term the "Lehites" after their leader) which escaped the destruction of Jerusalem ca. 600 BC and traveled for some eight years across Arabia. This account was first published in 1829 as part of the LDS or Mormon canon of scripture. The narrative is brief but essentially tells of travel by the Lehites in a south-southeast direction from the Jerusalem area (ie. paralleling the western coast of the Red Sea), then encamping for, quote: "the space of a time," from which we can assume that they had reached a place where crops could be grown before continuing their journey.

Then follows the death of Ishmael, a prominent member of the group, the text informing us that was then buried "at the place which *was* called Nahom,"²⁰ wording which strongly implies that the name was that already given to the place by local people. The account then links the burial at Nahom with other events peculiarly appropriate for a place bearing such a name - a period of mourning (of which fasting, perhaps the "hunger" we see in the root, may have been an integral part); an angry rebellion by some of the party and concerns being expressed about perishing from hunger in the desert. Although the source may seem anomalous there seems little reason to doubt that the "Nahom" in the writings of Nephi is in fact the tribal area of *Nihm* to which al-Hamdani referred. If so, this gives us a clear reference to the tribes of Hamdan some twelve centuries earlier than any other reference extant. This apparent survival of the name - unattested elsewhere in Arabia - is further strengthened by the striking etymological correspondences of the name to the events recorded by Nephi, which are so clear as to not require further comment. But there is more.

The First Book of Nephi then has the Lehite group departing "nearly eastward" immediately upon leaving Nahom. We are safe in stating that desert travelers in any age would have encamped on the relatively quite fertile Jawf plain, perhaps in the general vicinity of where the ruins of Baraqish or Ma'in now lie, rather than on the barren slopes of Nihm. It is surely significant, therefore, that the ancient incense route, representing available water sources as well as suitable topography, did in fact turn eastward in this same area, later veering southeast toward Shabwah and thence to the port of Qana/Bir Ali.²¹ If the Lehite group, however, traveled *nearly* due east as stated in their record, their course from the Jawf valley would eventually have led them onto the Mahra plateau before reaching the uniquely fertile Qamar coast of southern Dhofar, a sequence that fits the subsequent account remarkably well. For several years now my wife, myself and several colleagues have begun

fieldwork at this unusually fertile location and at this Semiar in 1993, Paolo Costa read a paper summarizing his preliminary findings.²² I am fully cognizant of the perils in undertaking a reconstruction of the history of any place, but with the foregoing in mind it becomes possible to now attempt to account for this tribal name with the following scenario: The tribal name likely had its genesis as early as the Neolithic period, deriving rather clearly from the construction and use of a large and centrally located burial place in the foothills, providing the requisite “high place” favored by Semites and also overlooking the [then] fertile and well-populated Wadi Jawf. It remains possible that a link exists between this burial site and that of the Ruwayk tombs, suggesting that the original tribal area may have been more extensive than it now is.

The association of the name with both burial and mourning is clear, thus leading us to the concept that it may have been considered a neutral enclave where the tribes of that region could bury their dead. Control of the site(s) and the resulting close identification of the name with a local tribe or tribal confederation can be confidently postulated at an early period, although this process may not have been complete until near the end of the pre-Islamic period. Other than the possible reduction of the area encompassed referred to earlier, there is no indication of actual tribal relocation at any stage. Indeed, the opposite seem to be true. The near proximity of Nihm to the cities and settlements that developed in the Jawf must have contributed significantly to the establishment of the site as an accessible burial place utilizing the otherwise unproductive surrounding hills. Further, converging trade routes for incense and other commodities at that same juncture for many centuries would have helped assure its importance and also have ensured transmission of the name throughout the region. With the decline of the incense trade and its associated city-states at the same time as the increasing desiccation of central Arabia, the resultant population loss would have resulted in Nihm eventually ceasing to have more than a purely local importance.

The millennium or more of virtual disuse since then would have caused the dwindling of its original significance in the collective memory of its people until the true origins of the tribal name were largely lost. The date presented in this study suggest strongly that the Nihm tribal name ultimately derives from its geographical location and that it appears to have maintained this same position for some twenty-six centuries. This makes it seem more likely that a substantially greater degree of stability and continuity prevailed among the tribes of Hamdan than has been presumed heretofore.

END

Notes

1. Robert Wilson, "Al-Hamdani's Description of Hashid and Bakil," *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies (PSAS)* (1981), 95-96, 100. Wilson was responding in part to an earlier paper presented by Christian Robin, "Le probleme de Hamdan: des gayls aux trois tribus," *PSAS* (1978), 46-52. See also Paul Dresch, "Tribalism" (unpublished paper, University of Michigan, 1986 and his *Tribes, Government and History in Yemen* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).
2. Christian Robin, *Les Hautes-Terres Du Nord-Yemen Avant L'Islam* (Istanbul: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut Te Istanbul, 1982), Tome 1:27, 73.
3. W. Von Soden, *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1959), vol 1.
4. J. Aistleitner, *Wörterbuch der Ugaritischen Sprach* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1963).
5. H. Van Dyke Parunak, "A Semantic Survey of NHM" *Biblica* 56 (Rome: The Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1975), 512-532 and J. Scharbert, "Der Schmerz in Alten Testament" *Bonner Biblische Beiträge* 8 (Bonn: Peter Hanstein, 1955), 62-65.
6. *Harper's Bible Dictionary* (San Francisco: Harper & Rowe, 1985), 154.
7. G. Lankester Harding, *An Index and Concordance of Pre-Islamic Arabian Names and Inscriptions* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 602. Other sources often do not list NHM variants at all. See, for example, Nigel Groom, *A Dictionary of Arabic Topography and Placenames* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban and London: Longman, 1983) and Yusuf Abdullah, *Die Ortsnamen in den Altsudarabischen Inschriften* (Marburg: Abdullah Hassan al-Scheiba, 1982).
8. *Meeting between the author and Remy Audoin, Centre Francais d'Etudes Yemenites in Sana'a, Yemen in October 1987.*
9. Harry St. J. Philby, *Sheba's Daughters* (London: Methuen, 1939), 370-381.
10. Brian Doe, *Monuments of South Arabia* (Cambridge: Oleander, 1983), 54-55 discusses the tombs and the implications of their location. See also Richard L. Bowen, *Archaeological Discoveries in South Arabia* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1958), 133.
11. Gerald R. Tibbetts, *Arabia in Early Maps* (Cambridge: Oleander Press, 1978), map 281, see also p. 29-30, 166-168.
12. Thorkild Hansen, *Arabia Felix: The Danish Expedition of 1761-1767*, trans. James & Kathleen McFarlane (London: Collins, 1964), 2:232-233 and M. Niebuhr (sic), *Travels through Arabia and other countries in the East*, trans. Robert Heron (Edinburgh: R. Morison and Son, 1792), 2:46-47, 62-63.
13. D. Hogarth, *The Penetration of Arabia* (London: Alston Rivers, 1904), 200-203. A little known secondary account of Halevy's journey is that of his local guide, Hayyim Habshush, which contains frequent references to the district and the tribe, see Solomon D. Goitein, trans. *Travels in Yemen* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press, 1941), 24-31.
14. Chronological examples of such maps include the following:
 - NeHeM Anville's map taken from medieval sources.
 - NeHHM Niebuhr's 1763 map of Yemen.
 - NeHM Ritter's 1852 map.
 - NeHM Halevy's 1869 tribal references.
 - NiHM Habshush's 1869 tribal references.
 - NeHM listed as a territory of Yemen, V. De Saint-Martin, *New Dictionary of Universal Geography* (Paris, 1897), vol. 7.
 - BaHaM Geographical Section General Staff map (London, 1939), obviously resulting from a misreading or misprinting of NaHaM.
 - NeHM/NaHM *Gazetteer of Geographical Names (US Dept of Interior, Office of Geography, 1961).*
 - NaHM GSGS map (London, 1962).
 - NaHM Tribal map in D. Schmidt, *Yemen: The Unknown War* (London: The Bodley Head, (1968).
 - NaHaM YAR Government map, Ministry of Defense (London: HMSO, 1974).
 - NeHeM YAR Government map, drawn by H. Althmary, 1976.
 - NiHM YAR Government map, prepared by Ministry of Overseas Development, 1978.
 - NiHM YAR Government map, Survey Authority, 1985.
15. Mohammad Ali al-Akwa, *al-Watha'iq as-Siyasiyya al-Yamaaniyya* (Baghdad: Dar al-Hurriya lil-Tiba'ah, 1976), 110-111. In this text it should be noted that the tribe is here listed as part of the "Arabes" or nomadic peoples, as opposed to the "Himyarites" or settled groups. This categorization seems inconsistent with other data, but may reflect shifting tribal alliances or perhaps a scribal assumption or some other error in the transmission of the text.
16. Al Kalbi, *Kitab al-Asnam*, ed. Buluq, Iraq, 1332.

17. *Al-Hamdani, Sifat Jazirat al-'Arab*, D. H Muller, ed. (Leiden: E. J Brill, 1884-91), 49, 81, 83, 109, 110, 126, 135, 167, 168. See also Christian Robin, *Al-Hamdani, A Great Yemeni Scholar: Studies on the occasion of his Millennial Anniversary* (Sana'a University, 1986) which offers perhaps the most complete summary of what is known of the tribal area of NHM from the time of al-Hamdani down to the present day. No treatment of any earlier period is attempted.
18. *Al-Hamdani, Al-Iklil*, (Sana'a: Dar al-Yamaniya, 1987), 98. Also see the German *Al-Iklil*, Oscar Lofgren, trans. (Leiden: Brill, 1965) or 10th Book, *Al-Iklil*, ed. M. al-Khatib (Cairo, 1368).
19. Christian Robin, "Le probleme de Hamdan: des gayles aux trois tribus," 46-52.
20. 1 Nephi: 16:34 (all emphasis added).
21. Inadvertent historical confirmation that the overland incense trading route turned eastward at the Jawf to the incense-producing region is found in the account of the Roman army under Aelius Gallus in 25 BC. See Nigel Groom, *Frankincense and Myrrh* (London: Longman, 1981), 74-76 and Strabo, *Geographica*, Book 16:4: 22-24.
22. Khor Kharfot, the uninhabited coastal terminus of Wadi Sayq in the heart of the Qamar ranges in southern Dhofar, is the most likely location fitting the quite detailed description given in the account of Nephi and is less than half of one degree due east of the Jawf valley some five hundred miles inland. As this data was unavailable at the time the First Book of Nephi was published, it is an indication perhaps that this text can be considered seriously as a historical account. The unique abundance of fresh-water and concentration of flora at Kharfot first drew attention in "Special Report No. 2, The scientific results of the Oman Flora and Fauna Survey, 1977 (Dhofar)," *Journal of Oman Studies* (Muscat, 1980). Archaeologically, the site remains undisturbed even now. For a recent appraisal of Kharfot, see Paolo Costa, "Khawr Kharfut, Dhofar: A Preliminary Assessment of the Archaeological Remains," *PSAS* (London, 1994), 27-33.

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About the Author



Author image courtesy of Alana Aston Orth.

Since 1984 Warren Aston’s exploration and research in Yemen and Oman has identified the candidates for Nephi’s “Nahom” and “Bountiful” now accepted as most plausible by LDS scholars and historians. He remains the only person who has evaluated all possible locations for Nephi’s Bountiful. Warren’s 1994 book *In the Footsteps of Lehi* introduced his findings to a general audience. His research has also been reported in the *ENSIGN*, *Liahona* and *New Era* magazines, Church Education System manuals, *BYU Studies Quarterly*, the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, and in the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, *Review of Books* and *Insights* published by the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship at BYU. His findings have been presented at non-LDS forums such as the annual *Seminar for Arabian Studies* in the UK and in peer-reviewed publications such as the *Journal of Arabian Studies*.

In 2009 Warren sailed as crew on a 600 BC-design wooden ship in the *Phoenicia* expedition through the waters that Nephi’s ship must have crossed. He is a co-founder of the Khor Kharfot Foundation, set up in 2013 to encourage the study and conservation of the Bountiful site. Field work by the foundation is ongoing.

Currently based in Australia, Warren believes that the best still lies ahead in Book of Mormon studies and continues his research in Arabia and Mesoamerica. He is the proud father of six children and a growing number of grandchildren who help keep everything in perspective.

