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Part 3: "The Place Which Was Called Nahom"

Author(s): Warren P. Aston
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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.

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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 at 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 ***nhm***. 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, ***nhm***, 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 Sabaean, 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 Sabaean dedicatory text from the site of Urwa, **NHM**yn is rendered as "**stonemason,**" (DASI text: GI 1637).

Three Sabaean temple inscriptions at Haram, **NH**y[**M**t]N are translated as "**the stone polishers,**" (DASI texts: Haram 16, 17, 19).

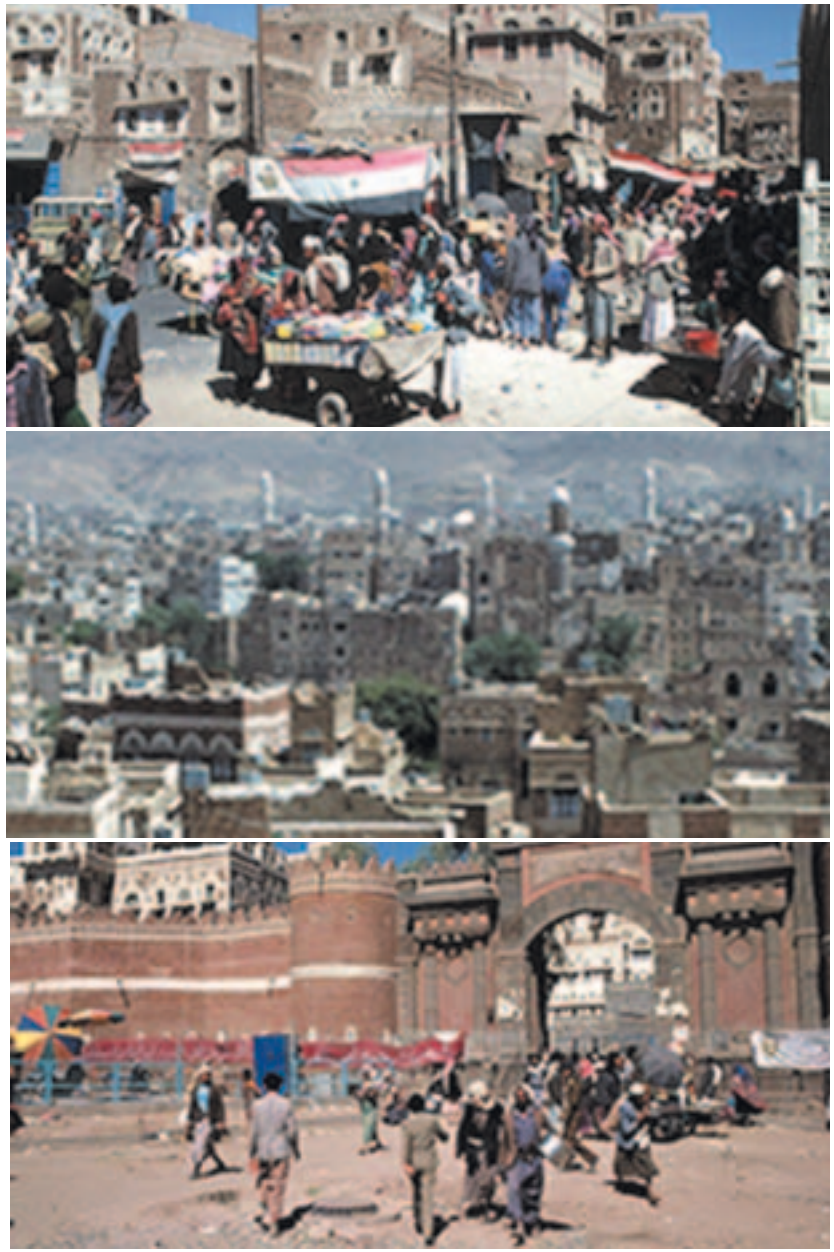
A Hadramitic text from al Bin [**NH**]**M**t refers to "**polished stones,**" (CSAI reference: RES 2687). All texts courtesy of the Digital Archive for the Study of pre-Islamic Arabian Inscriptions (DASI), http://dasi.humnet.unipi.it/

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.



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.

Tribal Structure in Yemen

At the time of Ishmael's death, the Lehites 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 *Qahtan*, 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

(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.

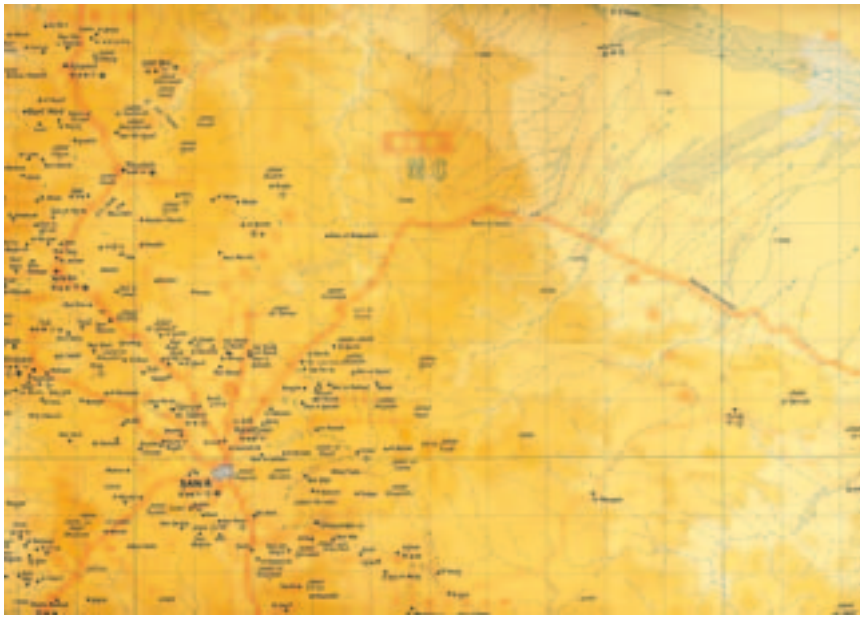
Religiously, the tribe is affiliated with the Zaydi interpretation of Islam, introduced to Yemen when the fighting tribes Hashid and Bakil, as recorded by the tenth-century historian al-Hamdani, were reconciled, about AD 900. Since that early time, Zaydi doctrine and practice has dominated the northern 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 Lehites' 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 Lehites 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 Sabaean 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.

Harrison's 1791 map showing NeHeM.

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 maps[38]
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 maps[41]

NiHM in a 1978 Yemen government map[42]
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

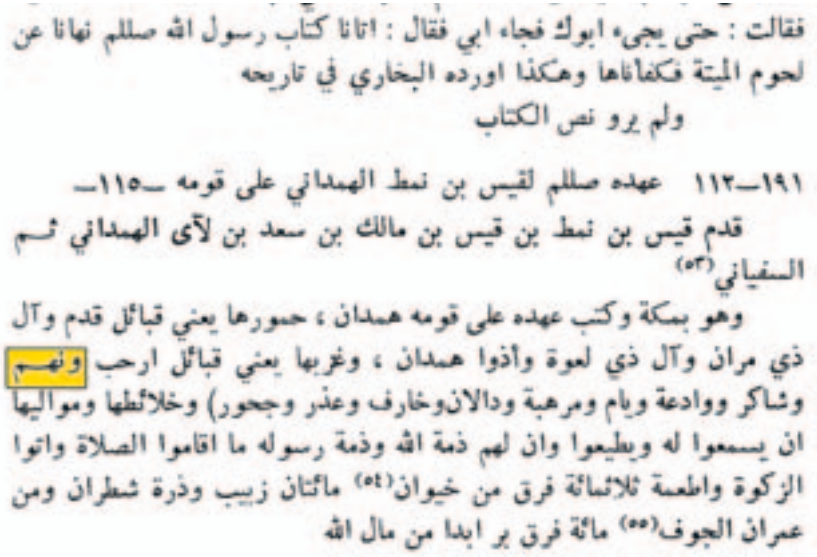
and son-in-law, Ali (Islam's first male convert) then went to Yemen and read an epistle from Muhammad. According to the accounts, the entire federation of Hamdan tribes -which includes Nihm -embraced Islam. Additional missions about two years later by "Wabr" to leading Persians living in Yemen, and by 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*);

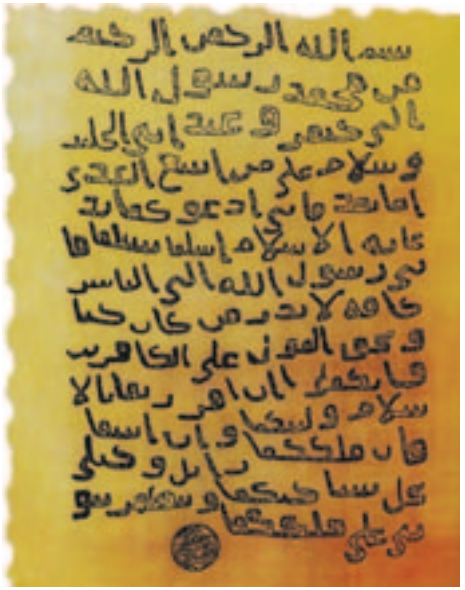
3. If they do all this they will be deemed to be under the protection of the Islamic state and will not be harmed.[54]



فقالت : حتى يجيء ابوك فجاء ابي فقال : اتانا كتاب رسول الله صلى نهانا عن
لحوم الميتة فكفأناها وهكذا اورده البخاري في تاريخه
ولم يرو نص الكتاب

١٩١–١١٢ عهده صلى لقيس بن نمط الهمداني على قومه –١١٥–
قدم قيس بن نمط بن قيس بن مالك بن سعد بن لأى الهمداني ثم
السفياني(٥٣)
وهو بمكة وكتب عهده على قومه همدان ، حمورها يعني قبائل قدم وآل
ذي مران وآل ذي لعوة وأذوا همدان ، وغربها يعني قبائل ارحب ونهم
وشاكر ووادعة وبام ومرهبة ودالان وخارف وعذر وجحور) وخلائطها ومواليها
ان يسمعوا له ويطيعوا وان لهم ذمة الله وذمة رسوله ما اقاموا الصلاة واتوا
الزكوة واطعمة ثلاثمائة فرق من خيوان(٥٤) مائتان زبيب وذرة شطران ومن
عمران الجوف(٥٥) مائة فرق بر 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.

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 sḥr Mḫbḍm **Nhmn**

TEXT Minaean (DhM 386)

1 [..](d)'l w-bhn-(sw)
2 bhny Hn'ḏ-'(ḏ)[..]—
3 n sl' Nbṭ'ṯ[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-Yf'm
5 bn Ḏ'bm

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.

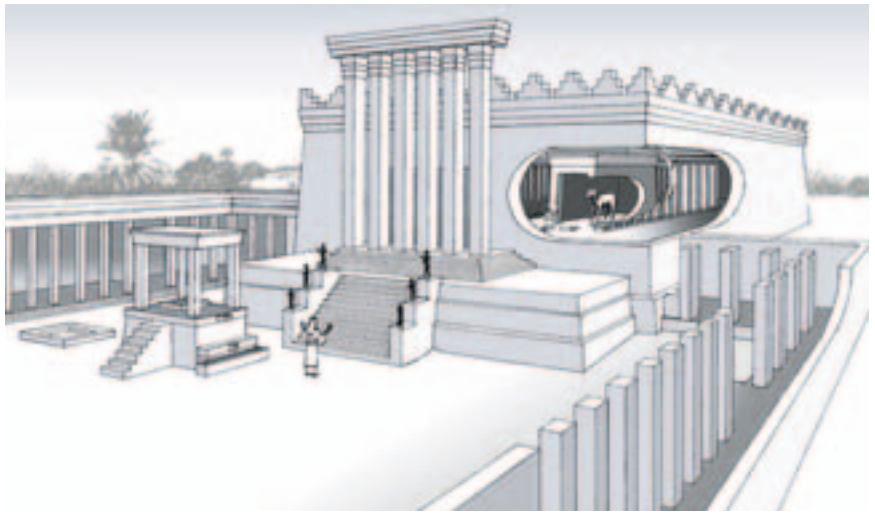
At some point near the beginning of the Christian era, the temple was largely destroyed and the worship of Ilmaqah began to decline. It is possible, but not certain, that the plundering of the temple took place during the campaign of the Roman Aelius Gallus about 25 BC. Repairs and modifications were 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.

(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.



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

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-ʿ ṯtr/bn/Śwdm/bn/Nwʿm/Nhmy* (2) *n/ hqnyʾ/ʾlmqh/Frʿt/b-* (3) *ʿ ṯtr/w-b-/ʾlmqh/ w-b-/Ḏt-Ḥmym/w-b-* (4) *Yd ʾ-ʾl/w-b-/Mʿdkrb*

Translation. (1) Bi'Athtar son of Sawdum, son of Naw'um, the Nihm(2)ite, has dedi[cated] (to) Ilmaqah (the person) Fari'at. By (3) 'Athtar, and by Ilmaqah, and by Dhat-Himyam, and by (4) Yada'-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 Sawdum 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 Sabaean 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-Sabaean 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 Sabaean 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]

LDS Scene

Book of Mormon Linked to Site in Yemen

A group of Latter-day Saint researchers recently found evidence linking a site in Yemen, on the southwest corner of the Arabian peninsula, to a name associated with Lehi's journey as recorded in the Book of Mormon.

Warren Aston, Lynn Hilton, and Gregory Witt located a stone altar that professional archaeologists dated to at least 700 B.C. This altar contains an inscription confirming "Nahom" as an actual place that existed in the peninsula before the time of Lehi. The Book of Mormon mentions that "Ishmael died, and was buried in the place which was called Nahom" (1 Ne. 16:34).

This is the first archaeological find that supports a Book of Mormon place-name other than Jerusalem or the Red Sea, says Brother Witt.

On this ancient altar is written the word Nahom.

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

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 Given's *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture that Launched a New World Religion* provided the following assessments of the altar discoveries:

> *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 chiastic 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

Late Neolithic?	Possible origin of the name connected to burial area
900 BC	Approximate date of Nihm in the Bar'an altar texts
800 BC	Bar'an altar inscriptions refer to NiHM tribe
700 BC	Multiple carved texts in this period refer to NiHM
600 BC	1 Nephi 16:34 reference to "Nahom" as a burial place
500 BC	
400 BC	
300 BC	
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	
1100	
1200	
1300	Likely sources for Anville's 1751 map
1400	
1500	
1600	
1700	Maps and historical references to NeHeM and NeHHM
1800	Numerous maps and historical references to NHM
1900	Numerous maps and historical references to NHM
2000	
Present Day	NiHM tribe located in same location after ca. 2900 years.

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. Grjaznevic 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 Dahbany-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 Awwam 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 1981Thirtieth 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 Knoth 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.GospeLink.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 universalle 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. B Anville'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 Abregee 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 Wustenfeld, trans. Jacut's geographisches Worterbuch (Gottingen: 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 (Tubingen, Germany: University of Tubingen, 1975), 93. Another probable reference to the tribe, NHN, is listed on page 91.

    See also Jawad 'Ali, Al-Mufassal 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* **Sabaean** *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 Rykmans, "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 Sawad 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 Archaologie im Land der Konigin 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 Inschriftenaus 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.*