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## Present Status of Book of Mormon Archaeology, Part II: Principles of Correspondence and Book of Mormon Geography

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**Abstract:** Christensen defines Book of Mormon archaeology as “that branch of general archaeology which studies the discoveries . . . [for] every fact which throws light upon the Book of Mormon.” It can be expected both to elucidate the scripture and to confirm it. Using the study of the Bible through archaeology as a model, he lays out a logic and methods for doing so, notably by establishing “major” and “minor” correspondences. Major correspondences consist of geographical and chronological frameworks in the real (New) world that compare adequately with what the Book of Mormon says. Minor correspondences consider specific cultural elements such as the use of iron, the wheel, the horse, etc. Ultimately it should be possible to test “the historical claims” of the Book of Mormon by archaeology. The status thus far is reviewed in this series and the interim conclusion is reached that “in large part the Book of Mormon is vindicated by archaeological science; but many points still remain . . . to challenge us.” The second part considers historical correspondences with the Book of Mormon and its geography.

# PRESENT STATUS OF BOOK OF MORMON ARCHAEOLOGY

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## PART II

### Principles of Correspondence and Book of Mormon Geography

**W**e have already seen what "Book of Mormon archaeology" is and the sort of help that we can expect to get from it. Further, we have begun to consider the question of just how far this study has been carried. In the present article we shall look into the last-mentioned matter at greater length. We shall summarise what I have chosen to call a "major" correspondence between the Book of Mormon and the archaeological evidence.

#### The Principle of Correspondence

We made quite a point in the last article of the possibility of scientifically testing the historical claims of the Book of Mormon (which means, in effect, testing of the very foundations of Mormonism) by the use of archaeological evidence. This is made possible through what I shall call the "principle of correspondence"—a formidable designation for something that is really very simple. All we mean by "correspondence" is similarity of parts. Where a part or aspect of one thing is similar to the same part or aspect of another thing, we begin to look for an explanation of this similarity. Perhaps it can be explained by mere chance. But where we have a considerable number of such similarities the presumption becomes strong that the explanation is one of common origin, that is, that both things ultimately came from the same place.

Now what does all this mean with reference to the Book of Mormon? It means that when we desire to perform an archaeological test of its historical claims we look for correspondences—between the Book and the material remains of the civilisation which it purports to tell about. If we do not find the similarities, then the Book cannot be authenticated in this way; but if we find a large number of them, and find them similarly combined beyond what chance could have produced, and under circumstances where no "collusion" has been possible, then the authenticity of the Book is well nigh guaranteed.

We have already spoken about the impossibility of "collusion" between Joseph Smith and the archaeological profession when he brought forth the Book of Mormon. It now remains for us to consider the number and combination of these correspondences. For, although the evidence has only begun to come in, it should nevertheless be possible to take stock of the present situation and thus form an idea as to what the final answer is likely to be.

The Book of Mormon story was enacted on two stages: (1) The Near East, which was the homeland of Jared, Lehi, and Mulek alike; (2) a "promised land" which by common agreement is to be located somewhere in the New World. This makes possible, indeed imperative, a three-way search for correspondences: (a) between the Book and the Near East; (b) between the Book and the New World (or more exactly that portion of the New World where the story was enacted); and (c) between the Near East and the New World. The presence of correspondences in any one of these categories strengthens the Book of Mormon case; the absence thereof weakens it.

Drs. Sidney B. Sperry and Hugh Nibley have made outstanding progress in searching for correspondences of the first category, i.e., between the Book of Mormon and the Near East.<sup>1</sup> While their researches have been mostly in the field of philology, this philology has been in turn pretty largely dependent upon archaeological sources. The culture of the Near East in Joseph Smith's day, aside from what was contained in the Bible itself, was practically unknown, a "twilight zone of gorgeous mysteries."<sup>2</sup> The light that has since then been cast upon the scene has been due primarily to the efforts of men and women in the archaeological profession.

The second category, i.e., correspondence between the Book of Mormon and the New World, is the principal field for the operation of the science of archaeology. At some place in the Americas the immigrants from Asia settled, multiplied into mighty nations which flourished for many centuries, built numerous cities and highways, and perished in bloody warfare. The material remains of these civilisations will no doubt be more than sufficient for our purpose when we once learn where they are.

The third category, i.e., resemblance between the Near East and the New World—quite apart from anything which the Book of Mormon itself may say—requires a comprehensive knowledge of the cultural picture in both the Near East and the New World, which is perhaps a large enough order to overtax the capacity of any one scholar in a single lifetime.

A thoroughgoing student of the problem of archaeologically testing the Book of Mormon, then, is really required to become proficient in three separate fields: (1) The Book of Mormon (which is astonishingly complex in and of itself); (2) Near Eastern archaeology and related studies; and (3) American archaeology and related studies.

### Major Correspondences

In these articles I am going to distinguish between major and minor correspondences. By the former term I refer to those great, over-all similarities between the total pattern of the Jaredite-Nephite story on the one hand and reconstructed archaeological history on the other. Under this heading we may include both geography and chronology, or in other words orientation in space and time. We turn our attention first of all to these particular areas of correspondence for a good reason: without a solid foundation in these two elements, no valid comparison is possible. We should have no way of knowing whether we were studying a given incident of the story in connection with its proper archaeological setting, or whether with ruins removed a thousand years in time and a thousand miles in distance.

Under the heading of "minor" correspondences will be considered the myriad **particular** resemblances which may exist between the two—comparatively minute details many of which the layman, at first thought, would regard as inconsequential: such similarities as in wheeled toy vehicles, or in temple architecture, found in Central America and Mesopotamia. But for the present we shall be content to discuss one of the major correspondences, leaving the minor ones for a future article.

## Book of Mormon Geography

We come now to an examination of the correspondence in space between the Book of Mormon account and the archaeological record. This, we may call Book of Mormon geography. The question is, can we locate in space the topographical framework within which the story was enacted?

In the case of the Old World, the scene of events is not difficult to discover. No one has ever questioned the location of Lehi's Jerusalem or his Red Sea. The homeland from which Jared and his company departed in an earlier generation may be more of a challenge to place on the map, but if we accept the identification of Ether's "great tower" with what was later known as the "tower of Babel," its location in the heart of Mesopotamia is assured.

Once our migrants leave their homelands, however, the localisation of their place names becomes less certain. Lehi clearly travelled south-eastward along the Arabian shore of the Red Sea "for the space of many days," then turned eastward across the desert.<sup>3</sup> Neither the place of his embarkation nor the route of his voyage are known, apart from the obvious conclusion that he reached the New World.<sup>4</sup>

The route of the Jaredite exodus is much more obscure. We cannot even be sure from the account itself whether they went east or west. Both routes have been seriously proposed.

When our colonists reach the New World, their movement in space becomes totally obscured for the reason that not one of their place names can we of the present generation locate.

Dr. M. Wells Jakeman has outlined a logical procedure to follow in order to discover the geography of the Book of Mormon:

(1) Internal reconstruction. From the evidence contained within the record itself we should first reconstruct its internal **relative** geography.

(2) External identification. The next step is to examine a map of the New World in search of a configuration of land which will match the picture brought to view by step one. For a satisfactory result it is obvious that we must not proceed to step two until step one has been thoroughly completed.

(3) Archaeological testing. The configuration of land that is selected as matching the internal reconstruction of Book of Mormon geography is then to be tested by the archaeologist's spade. If step two has been correctly taken the very cities, highways, and other features required by step one will come to light and the Book of Mormon will be to that extent corroborated.

How far has this procedure thus far been carried out?

(1) A number of attempts at reconstructing the geography on the basis of the internal evidence have been made. But by far the most thoroughgoing effort is that of Dr. Jakeman.<sup>5</sup> Intensive searching has brought to light over 500 statements in the Book of Mormon which contain geographical information in one form or another. The Brigham Young University professor reports an amazing internal consistency of the evidence. Throughout an exceedingly complex narrative, in which geographical references are often very specific, there never appears a discrepancy.

A basic feature of the geography is the "narrow neck of land" connecting the Land Southward with the Land Northward. From a mountainous region in the Land Southward an important river, the Sidon, flows northward to a hot lowland, apparently a jungle country, and enters the sea somewhere in the vicinity of the Narrow Neck. The Land Southward, moreover, is evidently surrounded by water, except of course at the constriction leading to the Land Northward. With information like this there should be no insurmountable difficulty in performing the first and second steps.

(2) Various external identifications of the internal geography of the Book

of Mormon with an actual part of the New World have been made,<sup>6</sup> only two of which, however, have sufficient appeal to merit consideration here.

The first of these, which we might call the "Panama correlation," has long been widely accepted throughout the Church, at least since the publication in 1882 of a statement believed to have originated with Joseph Smith giving the "revealed" migration route and landing place of Lehi.<sup>7</sup> If the colonists from Jerusalem indeed disembarked in northern Chile, as the statement indicates, then the Nerrow Neck—the central feature of the whole geographical scheme—must be the present Isthmus of Panama. The Land Bountiful would be modern Colombia; the River Sidon would be the Magdalena-Cauca; and so on (see map facing page 244).

The "Tehuantepec correlation," which would identify the Narrow Neck with the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in southern Mexico, seems first to have been reported in 1927 by Sjudahl.<sup>8</sup> According to this proposal, the Land Bountiful would be approximately where the Mexican states of Campeche, Tabasco, and Chiapas now lie; the River Sidon would be the modern Usumacinta; and so on (see map facing page 244).

(3) Since we have two worthy candidates for the fulfilment of Book of Mormon requirements, namely, the Panama and the Tehuantepec correlations, the arcaeological test must be applied to each. However, because of the fewness of researchers who have devoted themselves to the problem, it must be admitted that the testing has only begun. Nevertheless, we should be able at this point to add up the evidence that has so far come in and see what the outcome is likely to be.

The Tehuantepec correlation at present appears to have the edge on its rival. In the first place it has not been possible to show that the above-mentioned statement concerning the landing place of Lehi actually came from Joseph Smith or any other inspired source,<sup>9</sup> or that the Prophet ever claimed revealed knowledge as to geographical details. In the second place, it is possible to show that he did speculate strongly on the identity of the ruins of Quiriguá, eastern Guatemala, with those of ancient Zarahemla.<sup>10</sup>

The city of Zarahemla . . . stood upon this land (Central America) . . . It is certainly a good thing for the . . . veracity . . . of the Book of Mormon, that the ruins of Zarahemla have been found where the Nephites left them . . . We are not going to declare positively that the ruins of Quiriguá are those of Zarahemla, but when the land and the stones, and the books tell the story so plain, we are of the opinion, that it would require more proof than the Jews could bring to prove the disciples stole the body of Jesus from the tomb, to prove that the ruins of the city in question, are not of those referred to in the Book of Mormon.

If the Prophet was correct, it is hardly necessary to add that the Panama correlation is automatically disqualified, for Zarahemla would then be in the Land Northward, which is contrary to what the record says.

Furthermore, Colombia, which according to the Panama theory would be the very heartland of the Nephite civilisation, has not produced any archaeological remains which could compare with what the Book requires. While the Nephite record implies dense populations in this central region over long centuries of time, in Panama and Colombia the remains are few and are highly provincial in type. No great civilisational heights were achieved; indeed, "standing" ruins are a rarity. Also, they practically all date from a time well after the close of the Book of Mormon, nor am I aware of any discovery that would suggest Near Eastern connections.

On the other hand, if we assume the general region of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec to be the heartland of the Nephite civilisations everything else seems to fall into place. The region of Campeche, Tabasco, and northern Guate-

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mala was obviously heavily populated in antiquity and seems to have been the centre of ancient American civilisation.<sup>11</sup> The Usumacinta River, which flows from the mountain country of Guatemala northward to the low, jungle country of the southern Gulf Coast, is bordered by an uncounted number of important ruined cities. It has indeed been called the "river of ruins."<sup>12</sup> Very high civilisational standards were achieved; the occupation covered long periods of time and almost certainly ran back into the pre-Christian era. In addition a number of startling Near Eastern resemblances have presented themselves. Consider, for example, the comment by a group of outstanding Americanists in their report on excavations of a ruin which would be in the ancient land of Nephi, following the Tehuantepec correlation: "Certain groups of Indians achieved civilisations approximately on a level with, and in general extra-ordinarily like, those of our own cultural ancestors of the Near East."<sup>13</sup>

The matter of Book of Mormon geography could profitably be discussed at much greater length, but for now it is perhaps enough to summarise by saying that the correspondence as to spatial, or geographical, requirements between the Book of Mormon and the Near East appears highly satisfactory; while that between the Book and the New World, using the Tehuantepec correlation, is satisfactory as far as we have carried the investigation. We have thus made substantial progress in the problem of testing the Book of Mormon by archaeological evidence, the test having so far substantiated the book.

(To be continued)

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#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> See Notes 6, 7, and 8 of Part I of the present series, last issue, p. 218.
- <sup>2</sup> Hugh Nibley, "The Book of Mormon as a Mirror of the East," *Improvement Era*, Vol. 51, No. 4 (April, 1948), p. 202.
- <sup>3</sup> 1 Nephi 16:13-17, 33; 17:1, 5.
- <sup>4</sup> Cf. C. Douglas Barnes, "Lehi's Route to America," *Improvement Era*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (January, 1939), pp. 26ff.
- <sup>5</sup> Scheduled for publication in the near future.
- <sup>6</sup> Ee. gg., Joel Ricks, *Book of Mormon Geography*. 1939; E. Cecil McGavin and Willard Bean, *The Geography of the Book of Mormon*. Salt Lake City, 1948.
- <sup>7</sup> See Frederick J. Pack, "Route Travelled by Lehi and His Company," *The Instructor*, Vol. 73, No. 4 (April, 1938), p. 160. Salt Lake City. Reprinted in Thomas Stuart Ferguson, *Cumorah—Where?* pp. 71-72. Independence, Missouri, 1947.
- <sup>8</sup> J. M. Sjodahl, *An Introduction to the Study of the Book of Mormon*, pp. 415-418. Salt Lake City, 1927.
- <sup>9</sup> Pack, *op. cit.*
- <sup>10</sup> Joseph Smith, "Zarahemla" (editorial), *Times and Seasons*, Vol. 3, No. 23 (October 1st, 1842), p. 927. Nauvoo, Illinois.
- <sup>11</sup> Cf. Alfonso Caso, as quoted in Sylvanus Griswold Morley, *The Ancient Maya*, p. 42. Stanford University, California, 1946.
- <sup>12</sup> Louis J. Halle, Jr., *River of Ruins*. New York City, 1941.
- <sup>13</sup> Alfred V. Kidder, Jesse D. Jennings, and Edwin M. Shook, *Excavations at Kaminaljuya, Guatemala*, p. 260. Carnegie Institution of Washington, Publication 561, Washington, D.C., 1946.

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The links of happiness are too weak to be bent until they are too strong to be broken.

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