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The Recovery of the Coriantumr₂ Stelae Stone and the Finding of the Interpreters and the Plates of the Brother of Jared

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Chapter 16

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The Jaredite relics found by Limhi's people are not the only ones recovered by the Nephites. Where were these additional relics discovered? To help us identify where these relics were found, we will first look at when they were found, using chronological analysis.

There is no direct calendrical tie between the Jaredite chronology and the Nephite calendar; however, there are some clues in the book of Omni and book of Mosiah timeframes that may clarify the Jaredite and Nephite chronological overlap and provide us with some more geographical information involving the land northward.

Background Information

According to actual Book of Mormon dates combined with dates provided in the Caractors Document, a basic relevant chronology of the timeframe has been definitively constructed (Grover 2015):

- Mosiah₁ became king: 370 years after Lehi's departure, calculated to be 228 BC
- Mosiah₁ departure from land of Nephi: 389 years after Lehi's departure, calculated to be 209 BC
- Zeniff departure from Zarahemla: 420 years after Lehi's departure, calculated to be 179 BC
- Mosiah₁ death: 436 years after Lehi's departure, calculated to be 164 BC
- King Benjamin death: 479 years after Lehi's departure, calculated to be 122 BC

The relevant sections of Omni related to the recovery of the Coriantumr₂ are:

Omni 1: 20–22

20 And it came to pass in the days of Mosiah, there was a large stone brought unto him with engravings on it; and he did interpret the engravings by the gift and power of God.

21 And they gave an account of one Coriantumr, and the slain of his people. And Coriantumr was discovered by the people of Zarahemla; and he dwelt with them for the space of nine moons.

22 It also spake a few words concerning his fathers. And his first parents came out from the tower, at the time the Lord confounded the language of the people; and the severity of the Lord fell upon them according to his judgments, which are just; and their bones lay scattered in the land northward.

Early in 1830 a man named Fayette Lapham visited Joseph Smith Sr. to learn more about the still unpublished Book of Mormon. Lapham would years later publish an account of their interview that relates enough information about the finding of the plates to verify that the interview occurred. There are some known inaccuracies in the recounting based on known information in the Book of Mormon (e.g. the brass plates were described as papers) and some of the recounting is not in the correct order, but the recounting is fairly accurate in most other regards. As part of the interview, Joseph Sr. described Lehi's journey to the New World and related several of the book's other narratives (Lapham 1870). The relevant section of the Lapham interview is as follows:

After sailing a long time, they came to land, went on shore, and thence they traveled through boundless forests, until, at length, they came to a country where there were a great many lakes; which country had once been settled by a very large race of men, who were very rich, having a great deal of money. From some unknown cause, this nation had become extinct; “but that money,” said Smith, “is here, now, every dollar of it.” When they, the Jews, first beheld this country, they sent out spies to see what manner of country it was, who reported that the country appeared to have been settled by a very large race of men, and had been, to all appearances, a very rich agricultural and manufacturing nation. They also found something of which they did not know the use, but when they went into the tabernacle, a voice said, “What have you got in your hand, there?” They replied that they did not know, but had come to inquire; when the voice said, “Put it on your face, and put your face in a skin, and you will see what it is.” They did so, and could see everything of the past, present, and future; and it was the same spectacles that Joseph found with the gold plates. The gold ball stopped here and ceased to direct them any further.

The key pertinent elements in this recounting on this issue are that Nephites initially came to a country that had a “great many lakes” and “had once been settled by a very large race of men,” and “for some unknown cause the nation had become extinct.” This is clearly referring to the land northward. Further, when they first beheld the country they sent out spies and found it “had been a very rich agricultural and manufacturing nation.” These spies also found the “spectacles,” which had to be utilized in dim light or darkness. They used them in their “tabernacle.” It is also noted that the “gold ball stopped” them there and “ceased to direct them.”

It is notable that the interpreters mentioned in Alma 37:21, 24 were originally referred to as “directors” in the Original Manuscript (Skousen 2007, 2358–2361) indicating the interpreters were able to still provide the direction that the Liahona previously provided.

Chronological Analysis

One key assumption, if made, helps clarify the chronology of this timeframe. If the Coriantumr₂ stone had been brought before Zeniff’s departure, then Limhi would have known from Zeniff’s oral or written record about Coriantumr₂ and the Jaredites/Olmecs, which he did not. This assumption is reasonable since Zeniff kept records, as did Limhi, and Zeniff was the grandfather of Limhi, and thus was not far removed in oral history. The only exception to this assumption is that the stone may have been brought earlier and been untranslatable until a separate arrival of the interpreters. However, it is indicated that the party that produced the stone may have also related to Amaleki that “their bones lay scattered in the land northward,” although it is possible that fact may have also been written on the stone.

Limhi also had no knowledge of the interpreters or the ability of Benjamin or Mosiah₂ to translate, indicating that the interpreters did not arrive before Zeniff’s departure and reinforcing that the stone had not arrived before Zeniff’s departure.

Omni 1:20 indicates that the Coriantumr₂ stone was brought “in the days of Mosiah₁,” which by wide definition could mean any time between 228 BC and 164 BC. Knowing that it must have been brought after Zeniff’s departure narrows the range from 179 BC to 164 BC.

We know from the Fayette Lapham discussion of the “tabernacle” that the Jaredites were in fact by this time extinct, which means that the tabernacle was utilized after 400 BC, so Lapham could not have been referring to a tabernacle in the early travels of Nephi before he was able to set up a temple. The only other time in this period of the Book of Mormon where one would not expect a temple to be in place, thus requiring the use of a tabernacle, is when Mosiah₁ fled from the land of Nephi and before a temple could be built in Zarahemla.

We don’t have any information from the Book of Mormon regarding the tabernacle. It was prior to the temple that was known to be in place (Mosiah 1:18) just prior to the time of Benjamin’s death circa 122 BC, so we don’t have an exact date for a tabernacle as it could have been as early as the flight in the wilderness at 209 BC or as late as the

latter part of king Benjamin's reign. However, since we know that Zeniff was not aware of the interpreters, then the tabernacle must have still been utilized after 179 BC. The completion of the Zarahemla temple must therefore have been sometime between 180 BC and 122 BC.

Since the interpreters were recovered at the time of a tabernacle, after Zeniff's departure but prior to Mosiah₁'s death, the time envelope for the recovery of the interpreters is 179 BC to 164 BC, the same time envelope as the recovery of the Coriantumr₂ stone.

The Lapham recounting interestingly refers to "spies" that were sent out. This is probably indicative of events concurrent with Zeniff's departure, as there were a large number "who were desirous to possess the land of their inheritance" (Omni 1:27–29), which was the impetus for the Zeniff migration. Zeniff refers to himself as "having been sent as a spy" among the Lamanites to "spy out their forces" (Mosiah 9:1). The purpose of the spying was both for military intelligence but also for population expansion. It appears that there was obviously a desire by some to leave Zarahemla.

Amaleki in the book of Omni does not mention who brought the Coriantumr₂ stone to Mosiah₂, but it would seem reasonable that "spies" just like Zeniff could be the ones who recovered the stone and the interpreters. For spies to go in the direction of the land northward makes sense from a military standpoint, as the people of Zarahemla had originated in the land northward (Helaman 6:10). They had landed in the land of Desolation then moved from there "up into the south wilderness," which was named Bountiful by later Nephites (Alma 22:30–31).

No mention is made of how they finally arrived at the land of Zarahemla, but it was mentioned that the people of Zarahemla had experienced "many wars and serious contentions" and "had fallen by the sword from time to time" (Omni 1:17), so it would seem reasonable that they may have ultimately been driven to the location where they were by enemies who were back in the direction of the south wilderness and the land northward. To send spies back in that direction seems a logical decision from a military standpoint.

Based on the above analysis the retrieval of the interpreters and the Coriantumr₂ stone occurred around 425 years after Lehi's departure, calculated to be about 174 BC.

The Interpreters and the Plates of the Brother of Jared

Ether 3:22–23 states that the interpreters were to be sealed up with the plates of the brother of Jared, the implication being that when the interpreters were found, so were the plates of the brother of Jared:

Ether 3:21–28

21 And it came to pass that the Lord said unto the brother of Jared: Behold, thou shalt not suffer these things which ye have seen and heard to go forth unto the world, until the time cometh that I shall glorify my name in the flesh; wherefore, ye shall treasure up the things which ye have seen and heard, and show it to no man.

22 And behold, when ye shall come unto me, ye shall write them and shall seal them up, that no one can interpret them; for ye shall write them in a language that they cannot be read.

23 And behold, these two stones will I give unto thee, and ye shall seal them up also with the things which ye shall write.

24 For behold, the language which ye shall write I have confounded; wherefore I will cause in my own due time that these stones shall magnify to the eyes of men these things which ye shall write.

25 And when the Lord had said these words, he showed unto the brother of Jared all the inhabitants of the earth which had been, and also all that would be; and he withheld them not from his sight, even unto the ends of the earth.

26 For he had said unto him in times before, that if he would believe in him that he could show unto him all things—it should be shown unto him; therefore the Lord could not withhold anything from him, for he knew that the Lord could show him all things.

27 And the Lord said unto him: Write these things and seal them up; and I will show them in mine own due time unto the children of men.

28 And it came to pass that the Lord commanded him that he should seal up the two stones which he had received, and show them not, until the Lord should show them unto the children of men.

Original Location of the Coriantumr₂ Stone

The comment that “their bones lay scattered in the land northward” does not appear to be text actually interpreted from off of the stone, but it looks to be a comment added by Amaleki. Thus the spies who obtained the stone must have passed into the land northward and had seen the scattered bones.

It seems apparent that the “spies” who were sent out as represented by Lapham are the same individuals or at least from the same group that recovered the stone of Coriantumr₂. This group went, at least as part of their trip, to the location of the Olmec colossal heads, as they reported that the land had been settled by “a large race of men,” which follows the narrative and mythology derived from the observation of the Olmec colossal heads at La Venta, San Lorenzo, Tres Zapotes, or Cobata.

While it can't be stated with surety, a likely place may have been near the Coriantumr₂ Cobata head located adjacent to the hill Cumorah.

Location of the Interpreters and the Plates of the Brother of Jared

Late in Nephite history, Moroni₂ refers to the plates of the brother of Jared, indicating that he will need to “hide them up again in the earth,” indicating that the plates were previously buried or somehow otherwise “in the earth” (Ether 4:3). Although it is not known how the interpreters and the plates were found, the use of the Liahona is a possibility. The Lapham interview states that the spies observed a “great many lakes,” which based on the variability of the interview, may perhaps refer to a “land of many waters.” Since the interpreters and the plates were likely found on the same expedition as the Coriantumr₂ stone, the hill Cumorah is a distinct possibility as to where they were buried, and it would be consistent with Jaredite and Nephite traditions. Because the hill Cumorah is also adjacent to the ancient land of Moron, where the brother of Jared lived after arriving in the New World, the hill Cumorah location is consistent with a burial of the brother of Jared's plates and the interpreters, as the Lord indicated to him just prior to his death, that “when ye shall come unto me, ye shall write them and shall seal them up” (Ether 3:22).