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Barley and The Book of Mormon: New Evidence

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Published by: Book of Mormon Archaeological Forum, 2010

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The Book of Mormon mentions barley several times^[1] but was thought for years that it was not introduced to the Americas until brought by the Europeans. "In 1887 M.T. Lamb wrote, "It is a somewhat stubborn fact that *barley* was never found upon either of these western continents until imported by Europeans in modern times!"^[2] This was a popular argument until 1983 when domesticated barley was found in Arizona.^[3] This argument may have affected many people's testimony in the previous 100 years of it being found. Dr. Lund mentions a story of just this happening. He writes about an LDS horticulture student working on a Ph.D. at the University of Washington during the 70's who, during his research, learned that there was no pre-Columbian barley in the New World prior to the Spaniards arrival. This came in conflict with his beliefs about The Book of Mormon since it specifically mentions Barley. Dr. Lund counseled this young man to not lose your "faith in what you know because of what you don't know!" Just because science has not caught up with the claims in The Book of Mormon, does not make it untrue. In time, the Lord will see fit to reveal more and more evidences and insights pertaining to The Book of Mormon. Despite that counsel, the horticulture student left the Church because he could not reconcile what man had discovered at that point in time, with what a spiritual witness was telling him. If he would have held out, relying faith a few more years, he would have been rewarded with the knowledge of pre-Columbian Barleys discovery in Arizona, as well as several other sites.

Since the discovery among the Hohokam archaeological sites in Arizona in 1983, it has been discovered that little barley (*Hordeum pusillum*) is native to the Americas. It was first discovered in the "Midwest during the Middle Archaic period, at two locationally-close sites. The earliest record came from the Koster North site in central west Illinois, dating to 7,300 B.P. *Hordeum pusillum* also occurred at the Napoleon Hollow site, beginning at 6,800 B.P."^[4] Archaeologists are now finding barley in several sites all over North America. Barley has now been discovered in archaeological sites in the following places: Arkansas,^[5] Iowa,^[6] Illinois,^[7] Missouri,^[8] North Carolina,^[9] Oklahoma,^[10] Wisconsin,^[11] and Mexico.^[12]

Since most scholars place Book of Mormon events in Central America, many of these sites and cultures would show that barley was native to the Americas, but outside of Book of Mormon parameters. However, since it is now being found in Mexico and the Southwest, it is becoming more likely that Book of Mormon cultures were in contact with

cultures from the North, and may have possessed barley. The Hohokam who lived in Arizona, where domesticated barley was first found in 1983, are thought to have been in trade with those in “middle America”. “As evidenced by an abundance of ball courts and platform mounds, cultures reigning far to the south clearly influenced the Hohokam. Thus it comes as no surprise to learn that middle America was the source for their principal crops: several varieties of corn, two kinds of squash, bottle gourds, and cotton...All these cultigens originally had worked their way north over time from places like the Valley of Mexico to the peoples of the Sonoran Desert, as had two kinds of grain amaranths and probably cultivated tobacco...they [the Hohokam] may have been the only culture to have cultivated little barley...Hohokam, like virtually all prehistoric dwellers of northern Mexico...”^[13]

While the connection between Mesoamerica and Barley is not made,^[14] it would seem odd that trade of “principal crops” would take place without the trade of barley. Whether the trade came from Mesoamerica to Arizona, or the other way around, it would make sense that barley was part of the crop trade between the cultures. Why make a trade of major crops and not trade barley? They very well may have. But, because of the moisture content and acidity of the soil in Mesoamerica, it may be difficult to find “little barley” in archaeological digs in Central America.

However, the trade did not stop in Arizona. We have evidence of trade from Mesoamerica all the way up the Mississippi River. The Smithsonian states:

“The Maya forged strong political and commercial alliances with the civilizations of central Mexico. Through long-distance trade, luxury goods as well as pan-Mesoamerican beliefs eventually reached the Anasazi people of the American Southwest and Native American tribes living east of the Mississippi River...For a thousand years, Mesoamerican merchants traded ritual objects like macaw feathers and copper bells for precious turquoise mined by the Anasazi and Hohokam of the American Southwest...Social and religious ideas from Mesoamerica eventually reached Native American cultures east of the Mississippi River.”^[15]

As shown previously, most of the cultures of the Mid-west eventually cultivated little barley for food. And we now know that food was part of the trade between Mesoamerica and “Eastern North America”. A recent study tells us that

“Maize (*Zea mays*), the first Mesoamerican domesticate to reach ENA (Eastern North America), did not arrive [until] ≈200 B.C.”^[16]

Again, how could there have been trade of crops between Mesoamerica and so many other cultures who used barley as a staple in their, and not have barley part of that trade, at least temporarily, among those people?^[17]

Notes

[1]. See Mosiah 7: 22; Mosiah 9: 9; Alma 11: 7, 15

[2]. M.T. Lamb, *The Golden Bible, or, The Book of Mormon: Is It From God?* (New York: Ward & Drummond, 1887), 304. As quoted by Matthew Ropers 2001 FAIR Conference address "Right on Target: Boomerang Hits and the Book of Mormon" found at http://www.fairlds.org/FAIR_Conferences/2001_Boomerang_Hits_and_the_Book...

[3]. Daniel B. Adams, "Last Ditch Archaeology," *Science* 83 (December 1983): 32).

[4]. Hunter, Andrea A. dissertation "Utilization of *Hordeum pusillum* (little barley) in the Midwest United States: Applying Rindos' co-evolutionary model of domestication" University of Missouri-Columbia 1992, pg 138.

[5]. Ibid, pg 141

[6]. [Midcontinental Journal of Archaeology](#), "Terminal Archaic and Early Woodland plant use at the Gast Spring site (13LA152), southeast Iowa" [Spring 1998](#) by [Dunne, Michael T.](#), [Green, William](#), pg. 8

[7]. Nancy B. Asch and David L. Asch, "Archeobotany," in *Deer Track: A Late Woodland Village in the Mississippi Valley*, ed. Charles R. McGimsey and Michael D. Conner (Kampsville, Ill.: Center for American Archeology, 1985), 44; see p. 78.

[8]. Hunter, Andrea A. dissertation "Utilization of *Hordeum pusillum* (little barley) in the Midwest United States: Applying Rindos' co-evolutionary model of domestication" University of Missouri-Columbia 1992, pg 173,

[9]. Scarry, John F. and C. Margaret Scarry 1997 Subsistence Remains from Prehistoric North Carolina Archaeological Sites. Research Laboratories of Archaeology, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Electronic document last accessed May 15, 2009 at:<http://www.arch.dcr.state.nc.us/subsist/subsis.htm>

[10]. Nancy B. Asch and David L. Asch, "Archeobotany," in *Deer Track: A Late Woodland Village in the Mississippi Valley*, ed. Charles R. McGimsey and Michael D. Conner (Kampsville, Ill.: Center for American Archeology, 1985), 44; see p. 78.

[11]. Hunter, Andrea A. dissertation "Utilization of *Hordeum pusillum* (little barley) in the Midwest United States: Applying Rindos' co-evolutionary model of domestication" University of Missouri-Columbia 1992, pg 142.

[12]. "...extensive archaeological evidence also points to the cultivation of little barley in the Southwest and parts of Mexico." *Midcontinental Journal of Archaeology*, "Terminal Archaic and Early Woodland plant use at the Gast Spring site (13LA152), southeast Iowa" *Spring 1998* by [Dunne, Michael T](#), [Green, William](#), pg. 8.

[13]. William W. Dunmire, *Gardens of New Spain: how Mediterranean plants and foods changed America*, , (University of Texas Press, 2004)pg. 62-63

[14]. This author is not accurate in saying the Hohokam is the only culture to have cultivated barley. See previous references.

[15]. "Unmasking the Maya: The Story of *Sna Jtz'ibajom*," Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of Natural History, Department of Anthropology. On-line at <http://anthropology.si.edu/maya/mayaprint.html> (last accessed 30 May 2008).

[16]. Bruce D. Smith et. Al., *Initial formation of an indigenous crop complex in eastern North America at 3800 B.P* PNAS 2009 106:6561-6566

[17]. See also John L. Sorenson, "Mesoamericans in Pre-Columbian North America" in John W. Welch, *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: The F.A.R.M.S. Updates* (Salt Lake City and Provo, Utah: Deseret Book Company and the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1992), 218-220.