

AN
ANCIENT
AMERICAN
SETTING
FOR THE
BOOK OF
MORMON

MESOAMERICA

GULF OF MEXICO

Bay of Campeche

TEOTIHUACAN

Valley of Mexico

CULTURE CORE

Tuxtla Mountains

ZAPOTEC

Valley of Oaxaca

CULTURE CORE

OLMEC CULTURE CORE

Isthmus of Tehuantepec

Gulf of Tehuantepec

Canada

United States

ATLANTIC OCEAN

Mexico

MAP AREA

South America

Extent of Mesoamerican culture proper in Classic times.

0 100 miles
0 100 kilometers



AN ANCIENT AMERICAN SETTING FOR THE BOOK OF MORMON

John L. Sorenson

*Foreword by Leonard J. Arrington,
Truman G. Madsen, and John W. Welch*

Deseret Book Company
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and
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Provo, Utah

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Foreword

In 1964 a cynical Gordon H. Fraser published this claim: “The fact that the Book of Mormon is void of any literary content, credible history, biography, romance or ethical teaching, assures that it will not be read or analyzed in a thoughtful manner; hence there is little danger of the average reader studying it to the point of arriving at an opinion as to its credibility.”

The book now in your hands demonstrates the error and bias of Fraser’s bleak assessment. Here is consistent history. Here are the results of careful reading. Here is information credibly establishing the Book of Mormon in its ancient New World environment.

This book has been many years in preparation and will undoubtedly endure for many years to come. It will become required reading for all people interested in the antiquity of the Book of Mormon. Those who comment on the historicity of Book of Mormon accounts henceforth are irresponsible or uninformed if they ignore or neglect Dr. Sorenson’s present work.

Just as this study will be fundamental for future research, it is also the product of a trend toward increasingly serious Book of Mormon scholarship over the past three decades. Many readers of this volume can appreciate how far these studies have come.

During these years, different approaches to Book of Mormon research have been taken. Some have been apologetic, hostile, polemical, or eclectic. Some have represented the book as evidence of the authenticity, fecundity, and power of the Restoration under the leadership of the

Prophet Joseph Smith. Early Latter-day Saint scholars like George Reynolds and B. H. Roberts suggested the need for an earnest and systematic examination of the relevant secular literature, but they could only anticipate the day when serious historical and analytical work would be undertaken.

The rise of historical-critical methodologies in biblical studies (which B. H. Roberts once called “hanging heavy weights on slender threads”) brought techniques for examining the language and composition of ancient Hebrew scriptures, and these skills have often proved effective in examining the texts of the Book of Mormon. The stunning discovery of documents like the Dead Sea Scrolls also invited LDS scholars to compare Book of Mormon materials with the practices of other ancient religious peoples. Sidney B. Sperry took the linguistic tack; he often said that, on the grounds of his knowledge of Hebrew alone, he knew the Book of Mormon could not have exclusively nineteenth-century origins. For some years, his course at Brigham Young University on “Hebrew Manners and Customs” examined case after case in the Book of Mormon narrative demonstrating the volume’s Hebrew background. Hugh W. Nibley and M. Wells Jakeman, meanwhile, looked to context. Jakeman built up a picture of the Book of Mormon’s fit in terms of Mesoamerican tradition, while Professor Nibley pursued with astonishing acumen huge quantities of historical materials that put the book squarely into its claimed time and place in the ancient Near East.

But Nibley made no effort to pin down the New World connections. “What of the mighty ruins of Central America?” he pondered. “Until the people who study that area can come to some agreement among themselves as to what they have found, the rest of us cannot very well start drawing conclusions.” Such extreme caution can now give way to concrete possibilities. With Dr. Sorenson’s approach, the process of spelling out an explicit geographical and

archaeological context has begun in earnest. He presents a credible model for an ancient American background for the Book of Mormon. This model takes notice of details given in descriptions of the Book of Mormon lands, of battle movements, of cities built and abandoned, and of demographic data. He suggests that highland Guatemala is a good candidate for the land of Nephi, that the Isthmus of Tehuantepec fits the requirements of the "narrow neck of land," and that hundreds of other facts fall into place as this theory is carried to its logical conclusions. This is a model and hypothesis for other serious Mormon and non-Mormon scholars to consider. Unlike many of his predecessors, Dr. Sorenson insists that this model must not be held sacrosanct. He invites critical as well as confirming considerations.

How does he proceed? In a word, he asks more questions than he answers. Many stones are turned. His words are probing and carefully weighed. Great surprises and rewarding insights await the reader on every page. He asks questions like "Who were these people?" "What might they have looked like?" "Who were their neighbors?" "How many Nephites were there?" "How did they live, eat, speak, work, and fight?" He then finds plausible answers to these questions by matching specific data from reliable archaeological and anthropological studies of Mesoamerica with the entire spectrum of cultural and historical information found in the Book of Mormon. This approach is panoramic and exhilarating. It sees things that have simply never been seen before.

Just as a good question is half an answer, however, a good answer raises yet further questions. This book is never flawed with any pretension that confirmation is final "proof." The most that a scientific approach can do in this realm, as in any other, is to achieve probability. This volume clearly achieves plausibility, although (inescapably) questions still remain. Thus, the religious dimension is

“bracketed,” however relevant these studies may turn out to be for apologetic purposes. Much to his credit, John Sorenson is acutely and consistently aware of all these limitations.

An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon, for the first time, writes Nephite cultural and natural history in the context of American hemispheric reality. While there may always be resistance and controversy surrounding the Book of Mormon, here is a solid invitation to continuing research and comprehension. The book cannot be dismissed, as by Fraser’s slightings, with a wave of the hand.

Leonard J. Arrington
Truman G. Madsen
John W. Welch

Preface

The knowledge in this book would have waited longer to appear and would have taken another form without the urging and assistance of particular people. By 1974 I had worked on the relation of the Book of Mormon to Mesoamerican geography and cultural data for twenty-five years but had been reluctant to impose my views on the public or my colleagues. David A. Palmer urged me at that point to prepare a paper explaining and documenting my position; he offered to circulate it privately for comment to a selected group, along with a paper taking a different position. Palmer and others became convinced from the interchange of comments that my material should be better known, so he prevailed upon staff members from several LDS Church offices to listen. In the fall of 1975 we met one afternoon each week, and I presented in some detail a version of what is in this book.

Jay Todd, managing editor of the *Ensign*, who was a participant in those sessions, then invited me to prepare a series of articles for the Church magazine. He and his staff (especially Lavina Fielding Anderson and Lane Johnson) worked at length to improve what I produced. Without editor Todd's continued faith in the importance of our project, I would not have persisted. Not until 1983 did our attempts to phrase the material in terms acceptable for publication in the *Ensign* come to an unsuccessful end. By then about 1,500 copies of the manuscript of an earlier version of the book had been circulated to people who had heard about it from friends. It seemed clear that publication as a book would meet a widespread need.

The Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies determined in 1983 to publish the book. John Welch and Kirk Magleby have been strong supporters of that decision and have helped substantially with arrangements. Others are thanked for laying a basis for Deseret Book Company's enthusiastic participation as joint publisher with F.A.R.M.S.

It would be impossible to thank explicitly all who ought to be thanked, but some stand out: George Reynolds, for *A Complete Concordance of the Book of Mormon*, that invaluable tool; Tom Ferguson, for giving me my first experience in Mesoamerica; Hugh Nibley, for his example of patience and integrity that kept pulling me back to this task from lesser ones; Ben Alexander, who taught me the importance of thinking the unthinkable; my friends who have provided the foreword; editors, including Don Norton and Jack Lyon, for forcing me to say what I meant; Kathryn, my wife, who never begrudged the time it took; and the archaeologists, bless them, who kept on digging under absurd conditions when more rational people would have opted for comfort. Tom Patterson and Steve Gordon prepared the valuable maps, and Gary Gillum did the indexes. If there are faults in the book, they are no doubt due to my own limitations, not those of others. Of course, the views expressed are strictly my own and do not claim to represent those of Brigham Young University, where I work, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, or Deseret Book Company.

All royalties from sale of the book go to the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies to continue scriptural research.

Introduction

The Book of Mormon was part of my general cultural environment as I grew up in Utah's Cache Valley—as much an unquestioned given as the mountains to the east of my home. Through my early college courses (in the sciences), the war, and a mission in Polynesia, which took up the 1940s, the book was simply there, a reference point and a source of enlightenment in which I had unquestioning confidence. Neither then nor later did I have to ask, “Is this volume true?” I never asked external support for the private confirmation I already enjoyed.

When I arrived at Brigham Young University in 1949 with a wife and child, I had decided, with no rational motive, to pursue studies in archaeology. Over the next three years Professors Jakeman, Nibley and Sperry led me to understand that the Book of Mormon was not only a religious resource but also a challenging intellectual and historical puzzle. I came to see it as a document so subtle and complex that it virtually demanded to be analyzed and understood in new terms. As my knowledge of archaeology, history and languages deepened, hundreds of questions rose to my attention—questions the academic disciplines I was beginning to probe seemed capable of answering someday. The intervening years have led me to many other interests, yet I have continued to find myself fascinated by many of those questions. Thousands of days of demanding research have since disciplined my initial naïveté, but whatever else engages my attention, I keep returning to this subject, echoing Thoreau's apt counsel: “Do what you love.

Know your own bone; gnaw at it, bury it, unearth it, and gnaw it still.”

The bone I have been chewing through these years is “How did the Book of Mormon events happen?” Rather than somehow “proving” that those events did happen, what has concerned me has been the story’s complexity—the intricate, human, historical process that is the backdrop to its main spiritual message. And as I have returned to the account again and again, even after decades of probing, I find the book taking on deeper and broader meaning as I gain cultural and historical insight into the lives of the peoples it describes. In short, I have been able to gain some knowledge of the context of the scriptures that Brigham Young urged us all to obtain: “Do you read the scriptures, my brethren and sisters, as though you were writing them a thousand, two thousand, or five thousand years ago? Do you read them as though you stood in the place of the men who wrote them? If you do not feel thus, it is your privilege to do so.”¹ This kind of contextual knowledge requires more than merely studying the text as scripture, nor is scholarly study of the setting alone sufficient. Both are needed, in conjunction. Understanding what the Nephites and Jaredites were like—scenes of their settlements, what the people ate, how they thought, and the forces shaping their histories—helps us understand more clearly what was being said through their prophets.

Learning about context seems unimportant to some readers of the book; others consider it impossible. To me the Bible is a model in this regard. Biblical scholarship has illuminated that scriptural text by showing the interplay between human and divine influences and establishing the Bible as a record all the more profound because it is anchored in a complex reality of time, space and behavior. I have sought the same illumination for Lehi’s people and their book.

The task of establishing a realistic setting for the Book of Mormon is a big, challenging one. Research by Latter-day

Saints and others over the past 40 years has made it possible for us to know a good deal of concrete detail about the Jerusalem from which Lehi led his family; in our mind's eye we can now follow his party through a line of campsites down the Red Sea side of the Arabian peninsula and across to a specific "bountiful land" on the Hadhramaut coast.² But the minute the party climb into Nephi's ship and launch their journey into the Indian Ocean, we lose that sense of concreteness. Landed in the New World, they are just vaguely "somewhere." Until recently, after 150 years since the Nephite record was first published by Joseph Smith, we had neglected to pin down the location of a single city, to identify confidently even one route the people of the volume traversed, or to sketch a believable picture of any segment of the life they lived in their American promised land. In many respects, the Book of Mormon remains a sealed book to us because we have failed to do the work necessary to place it in its setting.

Two major advantages would result from doing so. First, the Latter-day Saints themselves could grasp the message of the scripture with greater power, because the events and people would become more believable. The lives and words of its outstanding characters would have more vivid impact on our consciousness if these individuals could be brought out of nowhere-land and portrayed as flesh and blood like us. Second, the significance of the volume could be communicated more forcefully to others, who at present hold the Book of Mormon at arm's length, judging that it lacks reality and substance. Apathy on the part of the Saints could rob us of both benefits. One hears from some of them that we don't really need any more explication or illumination of scripture than we already have, that the Spirit is guide enough. I am in good company—people like Joseph Smith and Brigham Young—in believing that God's purpose can be aided by our exertions to illuminate the meaning of the scriptures. How ironic it would prove if the Latter-day Saints themselves were to reject further light

and knowledge about the Nephite record, in effect paraphrasing 2 Nephi 29:6 thus: "A Book of Mormon, we have got a Book of Mormon, and we need know nothing more than doctrine about the Book of Mormon." Should we not use every means at our disposal to clarify and expand upon this volume so that its message may reach all people, and especially ourselves, with maximum impact?

I need to make some of my intentions and assumptions explicit. The first point is that this work does not undertake to "test" the Book of Mormon for its truthfulness. We shall see as we move along that in many, often remarkable, ways the events and circumstances in the scripture have parallels with what archaeological and historical sources tell us about ancient America. But there can be no sure "proof" in such parallels; no number of them would unequivocally establish the book as an authentic pre-Columbian document, nor would failure to find parallels disprove it. Conclusive results can never be obtained by that procedure, most philosophers agree today. Various readers will judge in different ways the materials and argument that will be presented below. Those who are already inclined to accept will conclude that the parallels constitute overwhelming evidence that the Book of Mormon is an authentic ancient record, while more skeptical minds will chalk up the same parallels to faulty data, or to a series of misinterpretations on my part, or to mere coincidence. I repeat, my intention is not to put the Book of Mormon "on trial" in some make-believe scientific dock. There can be no supreme court on this matter. Each individual has to hold his or her own trial. The scripture itself insists that it be tested by each reader: "Ask God . . . if these things are not true; and . . . he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost" (Moroni 10:4).

Well then, do I present a "hypothesis" to be "scientifically tested"? The whole idea is rather out-of-date. Scientists never did that sort of thing in the cool, "objective" way

many laymen have been led to suppose, except perhaps for minor, uninteresting problems. Nobody ever examines “all” the evidence on any issue, for there is too much to discover or manage. In any case the investigator’s own feel-ings and presuppositions, certainly on a matter like this, enter into phrasing the issues, so ultimate objectivity is all but impossible. My enterprise has been closer to what Michael Polanyi describes in his book *Personal Knowledge*.³ He argues persuasively that investigators’ convictions and interests powerfully shape all inquiry. My subjective views about the Book of Mormon and the culture area with which I shall compare it of course influenced what I have written here. Without a lively interest in both the area and the scripture, I would never have invested the substantial effort even to make the comparison. “A man doesn’t learn to understand anything unless he loves it,” said Goethe. My desire to understand both the volume and its setting inevitably colors all my work touching either. But the same is probably true of any scholar or scientist working on a complex problem, whether it be developing a new variety of rice or reconstructing the history of the Jews.⁴ But strong feelings need not rob disciplined inquiry of merit.

Understanding demands more than zealous concern or even extensive research. Discipline is required too. I have tried to be disciplined by as many of the relevant facts as I could grasp concerning both the Mesoamerican setting and the volume of scripture itself. Many an inviting pre-conception I have given up in the face of contrary evidence or sparse facts. Moreover, a healthy skepticism about one’s knowledge of fact is essential. I am skeptical that I may ever fully grasp all that a particular text is saying. Even more am I doubtful about either my own or others’ full grasp of the facts of science and history that seem to impinge on the text.

Despite all these qualifications, I have now come to a point where what I know seems worth sharing with others.

Specifically, I have developed a picture or model of how Book of Mormon events took place. This model is *plausible*. That means that the setting described could reasonably have been as I represent it. Like a small replica of an airplane or steam engine, this model works, in the sense that the parts fit together to explain point after point in the Book of Mormon that seem inexplicable otherwise.

Some people comment, “But you can’t be sure. All you have is a theory, isn’t it?” Well, if a person comes along with, say, a new kind of “flying machine,” most of us would wisely ask for a demonstration. Once we had seen the device take off, circle around, and come back for a safe landing, and then we had given it several successful spins ourselves, we would take it seriously. Call this a “theory” if you want, but if my model works—the model of how the Book of Mormon account happened in a certain time and place in ancient America—anyone ought to take it seriously. So the rest of this book presents a consistent, plausible system for interpreting the Book of Mormon in specific geographical, historical and cultural terms.

After so many years of studying this topic am I satisfied with the results? No. Many questions remain; anyone should be willing to correct weaknesses in a position once they are pointed out. Certainly I am anxious to do so. Ultimately, only the truth will endure.

This particular book is written mainly to one audience: those eager to learn more truth about the Book of Mormon and pre-Columbian America. My selection of material and my presentation are intended to aid those readers to press on with the task. I have built on the work of many in the past, whose efforts I salute. My professional experience with the disciplines that tell us about ancient life assures me of the truth-seeking motives of the workers in those fields. Latter-day Saints who have studied their scriptures have also contributed vital truths. Both sources are gratefully acknowledged. The extensive footnotes are in part a

tribute to some of those who have gone before. The footnotes are also a guide to those who will push on in further investigation and correction of my errors and ignorance. May many of the next generation explore carefully what lies on the other side of doors I have only cracked open. Besides these eager inquirers and potential contributors, there may be reluctant, curious, or critical persons who wish also to read along. They are welcome, but the message is mainly for the excitedly ambitious.

Book of Mormon chapters and verses are frequently cited below. Failure to read those verses will lead to missing information that is important, yet for me to cite all relevant verses could truly burden the reader. What is given serves at least as an entry point to the inquirer wanting to know more. The same goes for the technical literature cited. All I intend to do is provide points in both the scripture and the professional sources where a person can begin reading, not to exhaust the references. And if a topic is brushed over quickly in the text, that doesn't mean a fuller treatment was not tempting. But we must all cope with the same problems Herman Melville lamented when he published *Moby Dick*—"Oh, Time, Cash, and Patience!"

1

The Book of Mormon Mapped

Before any other type of investigation, we must establish where the Book of Mormon story took place within the western hemisphere. If it occupied all the two American continents, we should know that. If a restricted territory was the scene, then that fact is essential. To mistake the geography would involve us in a set of entrained errors that would inevitably flaw any conclusions we made. If we were not to know where, and of course when, to find our comparative data, we might as well attempt to shed light on the Book of Mormon by assuming a setting in Spain or Siberia.

A Map by Authority?

Many Latter-day Saints facing problems like Book of Mormon geography automatically turn to the leaders of the Church for answers. It seems appropriate, then, to begin by determining whether or not Book of Mormon geography has already been settled by these leaders.

The historical sources give no indication that Moroni's instructions to young Joseph Smith included geography, nor did Joseph Smith claim inspiration on the matter. Ideas he later expressed about the location of events reported in the book apparently reflected his own best thinking. What looks like the first consensual interpretation of Book of Mormon geography among him and his associates was sweeping: The land southward was the whole of South America; the land northward, the North American continent. One indicator of that is an 1836 record in Frederick G. Williams's handwriting attributing the statement to Joseph

Smith that “Lehi and his company . . . landed on the continent of South America, in Chile, thirty degrees, south latitude.”¹ Church leaders B. H. Roberts and John A. Widtsoe, both careful critics, were hesitant to accept the statement’s origin with the Prophet,² yet it certainly wouldn’t be surprising if the Prophet had once held this view, since other early Church members seem to have believed it.³ (Williams later claimed that the statement about Chile was made to him by an angel rather than by Joseph.⁴) In view of the fact that the Prophet’s ideas matured on other subjects over time, his thinking on Book of Mormon geography could also have undergone change. In 1842, an editorial in the Church newspaper the *Times and Seasons* (September 15, pages 921–22) asserted that “Lehi . . . landed a little south of the Isthmus of Darien (Panama).” Joseph Smith had assumed sole editorial responsibility for the contents of the paper six months before (page 710), although John Taylor was the formal editor. The location mentioned is, of course, about three thousand miles north of the point in Chile mentioned in the Williams note.

Within a few weeks, another geographical item appeared in the newspaper. A remarkable bestseller of the time was John Lloyd Stephens’ *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan*, published in 1841. The September 1842 issue of the paper gave an enthusiastic review of the Stephens book, with long extracts from the fascinating account, which described the wonders of the Maya ruins for the first time in a readily available English-language source. In commenting on the first extract, the unnamed writer stated that the Nephites “lived about the narrow neck of land, which now embraces Central America, with all the cities that can be found” (page 915). Two weeks later (October 1, 1842, p. 927), the writer reached a new conclusion:

Since our “Extract” was published from Mr. Stephens’ “Incidents of Travel” etc., we have found another impor-

tant fact relating to the truth of the Book of Mormon. Central America, or Guatemala is situated north of the Isthmus of Darien and once embraced several hundred miles of territory from north to south. The city of Zarahemla, burnt at the crucifixion of the Savior, and rebuilt afterwards, stood upon this land.

The editorialist added, with picturesque phrasing but commendable caution,

We are not agoing to declare positively that the ruins of Quirigua [in Guatemala] 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 one of those referred to in the Book of Mormon.

We lack assurance that the newspaper statements were actually made by Joseph Smith, although he had taken editorial responsibility for the paper. Neither can we be sure from any other source exactly what Joseph concluded on the matter. Whether the Prophet Joseph personally believed that the Nephite lands were in Central America or not, leaders in daily association with him felt that this was the best answer to the question “where?” Even more important for Latter-day Saints may be to realize that they considered it an open question, one to be pondered and re-searched, and they supplemented their scriptural study with the best resources from the limited secular scholarship available to them at that time. Twenty-one months after the *Times and Seasons* statements Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum were dead. The events crowded into that hectic period before the martyrdom left the Prophet scant leisure for studies on the question of geography. However, an 1848 statement of Orson Pratt’s shows the continuing influence of the ideas voiced in the *Times and Seasons* six years before. The Nephites, said Pratt, “inhabited the cities of

Yucatan" at the time they were attacked and driven from the land southward;⁵ this obviously ruled out Panama as "the narrow neck of land."

Sheer survival was the chief concern of the Saints for the next generation. When, later in the nineteenth century, interest in Book of Mormon geography revived, Church leaders were careful not to let the Saints divide into camps on the question or to turn opinion into dogma. Elder George Q. Cannon, one of the intellectual forces in the Church at the time, said in 1890,

There is a tendency, strongly manifested at the present time among some of the brethren, to study the geography of the Book of Mormon. . . . The brethren who lecture on the lands of the Nephites have often been asked to prepare a suggestive map illustrative of Nephite geography, but have never consented to do so. Nor are we acquainted with any of the Twelve Apostles, who would undertake such a task. The reason is, that without further information they are not prepared even to suggest [a solution].⁶

President Joseph F. Smith, Seventies President Anthony W. Ivins, and Apostle John A. Widtsoe were among later authorities who affirmed that the Church took no position on specific Book of Mormon locations. President Smith, for instance, when asked to approve a map "showing the exact landing place of Lehi and his company," declined, saying that the "Lord had not yet revealed it."⁷ Elder Ivins cautioned in 1929, "There has never been anything yet set forth that definitely settles the question [of Book of Mormon geography]. So the Church says, yes, we are just waiting until we discover the truth."⁸ This caution has been the consistent course followed ever since, leaving individuals free to examine and study the topic without getting Church authorities into the predicament of having to defend or refute someone's personal viewpoint.

Even from so brief an overview as this, it becomes clear that Church authorities from the time of Joseph Smith to

the present have come to no consensus, made no authoritative statement, and reported no definitive solution to the question of Book of Mormon geography. Yet the problem has never seemed insoluble to them, only difficult. Elder Widtsoe felt that “out of diligent, prayerful study, we may be led to a better understanding of times and places in the history of the people who move across the pages of the divinely given Book of Mormon.”⁹ No, the Church authorities have not settled for us any of the major issues concerning the setting of the Book of Mormon. We must search elsewhere for answers.

What Does the Book Say?

The first place to seek for knowledge of the Book of Mormon context is in the book itself. Going back to the original is the basis of sound scholarship whenever anyone works with an ancient text. A renowned expert on biblical lands and the Old Testament makes the point this way: “It cannot be overemphasized that the discoveries of archaeology tend to justify the literal meaning of the text as against [any contrary] scholarly and traditional interpretation. This holds not only for the Bible but for ancient texts in general.”¹⁰

But is there enough solid information in the volume itself to produce a consistent, reliable picture? Many Latter-day Saints have scrutinized the Book of Mormon’s clues about geography and constructed various maps showing what they consider to be the relations among the cities and lands mentioned. It is an understatement to say they have reached varied conclusions. We must indeed construct such a map—systematically and comprehensively. Every statement in the volume must be milked of relevant information, and all of it ought to fit together without contradiction. Despite their contributions, all previous maps have been incomplete and inconsistent in dealing with the relevant information in the Book of Mormon. None are fully reliable.

Building an internally consistent map is but the first step. Next we must match up Book of Mormon lands and rivers and mountains with actual places, location for location, as scholars have done for much of the information in the Bible. Short of that, Book of Mormon events will remain in geographic limbo; we would have only a make-believe map.

Our first task is to analyze from the text the key characteristics of the lands described. This will produce a set of requirements. Any area in the Americas proposed as the location of Book of Mormon events must match these criteria or else be judged mistaken. As we check the requirements against portions of a real-world map, we must eliminate from consideration all territories that seriously conflict with the requirements. Conceivably we could end up without sufficient information to identify any location positively as *the* area where the Book of Mormon events took place. Nevertheless, let's proceed.

The most obvious requirement configuration concerns the basic outline of Book of Mormon lands. We quickly learn that a "narrow neck of land" or isthmus separated a "land northward" from a "land southward," in the general shape of an hourglass. (See map 1.)

Alma 22:32 tells us that the land southward was "nearly surrounded by water," but no clear statements are made about the relation of the land northward to adjacent seas. As conceived by the Nephites, the land southward had two main divisions: the land of Nephi in the far south, then to its north the land of Zarahemla, which stretched so far that it nearly reached the neck of land. The southerly portion of the isthmus itself was termed the land of Bountiful. Immediately to the north of Bountiful at the narrow neck was the land Desolation. Not far northward from Desolation was the Jaredites' first major settlement area, the land of Moron (Ether 7:6). Northward from Desolation along the east coast lay a wet land (Alma 50:29; Ether 15:8–11). North of Moron and from Nephi south, the situation remains hazy;

HOURLGLASS SHAPE OF BOOK OF MORMON LANDS

LAND NORTHWARD

Narrow Neck of Land

Land of Zarahemla

LAND SOUTHWARD

Land of Nephi



CARTOGRAPHY: Steven H. Gordon and Thomas H. Patterson

but in between, the overall relationships—land northward/isthmus/land of Zarahemla/land of Nephi—are beyond dispute.

Dimensions

How wide and how long were those lands? The hour-glass model could, after all, fit either the entire western hemisphere or a relatively small portion of it. It is vital to establish the scale of the territory where the scriptural events were played out.

The crucial information in the record for determining dimensions is how long it took people to get from one place to another. Consider the distance between the city of Nephi and the city of Zarahemla. Ammon's party of missionaries trying to reach the land of Nephi "knew not the course they should travel in the wilderness to go up to the land of Lehi-Nephi"; consequently they found the place only after 40 days' journeying (Mosiah 7:4). More helpful is the journey of Alma and his converts, who traveled the same general route in reverse. They left the waters of Mormon, a place probably no more than a couple of days from the city of Nephi, and made it to Zarahemla in 21 days (Mosiah 18:1–7; 23:1–3; 24:20, 25). The party included women, children, and "flocks." How fast could they have traveled?

Mormon pioneers driving ox teams across flat Nebraska averaged 10 to 11 miles a day. In Guatemala it takes drovers eight days to herd pigs 90 miles through mountainous terrain to market—an average of a little more than 11 miles a day.¹¹ Other groups of travelers don't move even this fast. R. E. W. Adams, an archaeologist who has worked in Guatemala, reports that travelers on routine trading trips on jungle trails and streams from the Cotzal Valley to the Peten, about 120 air miles away, take 19 days or more, averaging a little more than six miles a day. Much of their trip is via dugout canoe down rivers. Furthermore, a person walking in that area can cover in six hours a distance that

would take seven riding a horse. If he drives animals along, the time stretches out to ten hours.¹²

Other travelers are much speedier. R. F. Heizer reports that in the nineteenth century small groups of Mohave Indians in California could cover nearly 100 miles a day, sometimes going without food or even water for days. About 75 years ago, one Indian reportedly made a hundred-mile trip, then turned around after only a few hours rest and went back again. Averaging six miles an *hour*, not a day, was not exceptional in their case.¹³ Father Sahagun wrote of a pre-hispanic Mexican people, “The Toltecs were tall, of larger body than those who now live; for which reason they called them *tlanguacemilhuique* which means they could run an entire day without tiring.”¹⁴ During the movements of the Toltecs described in the Mexican chronicles, dawn-to-dusk marches without animals along averaged six leagues, somewhere between 15 and 24 miles.¹⁵

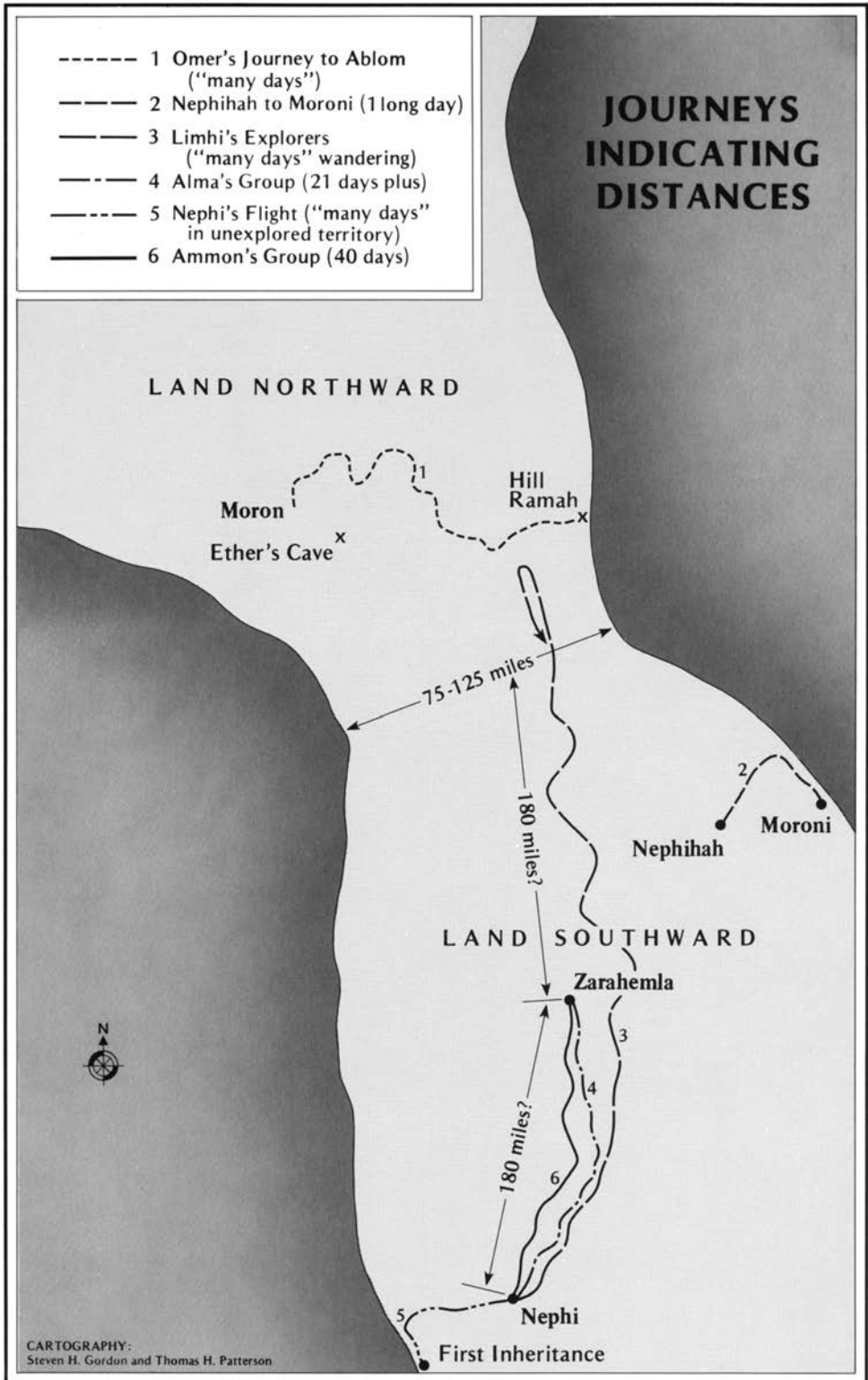
Other data on travel rates fall within these established ranges. There exists a wide range of possibilities, depending on the terrain, how accustomed the people were to traveling, and whether a single messenger, a whole people, or an army was involved.

If we assume that Alma’s people and animals went at ordinary speeds, they might plausibly have traveled at a rate of around 11 miles a day. From the waters of Mormon where Alma’s party started, Zarahemla would then be 21 days or 231 miles of actual travel at 11 miles per day. Helam, the land to which Alma fled, seems to have been off the main route, which might have been a little shorter (subsequent travelers did not go through it; compare Mosiah 23:30, 35). Besides, the text makes clear that part of the journey was through mountainous wilderness (where the headwaters of the river Sidon were located—Alma 16:6; 22:27; 27:14), over a crooked route with which Alma’s party was unfamiliar. The location termed the waters of Mormon was up to a couple of days away from the city of Nephi (Mosiah 18:4–7, 30–34; 23:1). So the actual trail or road

mileage between Zarahemla and Nephi, the two dominant early cities, must have been on the order of 250 miles, assuming an 11-mile-per-day rate of travel. Given the twists and turns a real route would likely follow in such terrain, the distance as the crow flies would be more like 180. (See map 2.)

Using this distance between Nephi and Zarahemla as a tentative standard, we can work out how far it was between some other places. The city of Zarahemla was said by Moroni to be in the “heart” or “center” of the land of Zarahemla (Alma 60:1, 19, 22; Helaman 1:17–18, 22–32). Yet Zarahemla was not very far from the edge of Lamanite lands. One Coriantumr led a Lamanite army down from the land of Nephi straight to the city of Zarahemla “with such exceedingly great speed that there was no time for the Nephites to gather together their armies” (Helaman 1:19). Had the distance from the border of Nephite settlement to the chief city been very great, the Nephites would have had warning of the approaching force. Earlier another Lamanite army from Nephi burst onto the scene near Zarahemla with only slight warning (Alma 2:23–25). Corroboration appears in the account of King Mosiah, who, years earlier, had led his people out of the land of Nephi; they seem to have come “down into the land [and even the city] . . . of Zarahemla” rather abruptly (Omni 1:13–14). These facts suggest that the city of Zarahemla might be somewhat south of the land’s geographical center, though still conceptually in “the heart” of it.

There is another reason to think that the city of Zarahemla might not have been exactly in the center of the land of Zarahemla. North of the city, between Zarahemla and Bountiful, which was still farther north (Helaman 1:27–28), lay “the most capital parts of the land.” This important zone seems to have been along the river Sidon, which flowed northward from Zarahemla (Alma 22:27–33; 2:15). With the most important settlement area lying downstream from Zarahemla, we get the impression that the



Map 2

capital city was nearer to the Lamanite border than was the population focus of the greater land of Zarahemla.

In late B.C. times a continuous wilderness strip separated Nephite Zarahemla from Lamanite territory. Furthermore, at least during the events recorded in the books of Mosiah and Alma, the city of Nephi (also called Lehi-Nephi) was some distance from the “narrow strip of wilderness” proper. On the Lamanite side of the border zone considerable wilderness space seems to have separated the city of Nephi from the transition strip. A good deal of searching for lost lands, marchings and countermarchings of foes, and wilderness travel went on in that extensive space. (See, for example, Mosiah 19:9–11, 18, 23, 28; 23:1–4, 25–31, 35; Alma 17:8–9, 13; 23:14, in light of verses 9–12; 24:1.) No mention is ever made of travel southward from the city of Nephi, so it must have been near the southern limit of what the Nephites recognized as the greater land of Nephi (Alma 22:28). If we take all of these considerations into account, it seems reasonable to divide our tentative mileage figures this way: on the order of 180 airline miles overall separated the city of Nephi from the city of Zarahemla; about a hundred miles of this distance was from Nephi to the midpoint of the “narrow strip of wilderness” (Alma 22:27); then it was 80 miles from that point down to the city of Zarahemla itself. Though only estimates, these distances and relationships are as carefully derived and true to the Nephite record as present information allows.

Northward, beyond the borders of the land of Zarahemla, lay an unnamed “land which was between the land Zarahemla and the land Bountiful.” The place is mentioned only in 3 Nephi 3:23. (The line containing these words was omitted from the printed text for many years, apparently because of a typesetter’s error, but has been replaced in the 1981 edition of the Book of Mormon.¹⁶) The land of Bountiful as a whole seems to have been quite narrow, since Alma 22:31–33 describes it mostly as a zone that ran across the narrow neck of land. Little more is said about it.

How far apart were Zarahemla and Bountiful? If the former city lay slightly south of geographical center, as argued above, it might have been around 100 miles from there to the north border of the greater land to which the name Zarahemla was applied in Alma's day (Alma 5:1; 6:7; 8:1–3, 6, 11–12; 16:1–15; 28:1). If we add the unnamed "land between" and also the narrow land of Bountiful, 80 miles more should be an ample distance to the northern limit of the land southward. Beyond lay the land of Desolation in the land northward, which we will discuss later.

Let's review these distances. The "land of first inheritance" would be at the extreme southward limit, but we cannot be certain of its relation to Nephi or its environs, except that the former was coastal and the latter upland territory. Our first clear point of reference, then, is the city of Nephi. Next comes a 100-mile stretch to the point where Nephite influence begins. An additional 80 miles takes us to Zarahemla city itself. Around 100 miles northward from Zarahemla was the limit of the land which the city directly controlled when the last king ruled (Alma chapters 5–15) and which continued long afterward as an effective geographical unit (3 Nephi 3:23). Eighty more miles covers the combined extent of the "land between" and Bountiful. Thus the total length of the land southward, where most of the Book of Mormon story took place, ought not to be much greater nor much less than 360 miles.

It may be helpful, conditioned as we are to the great distances we can cover by air and automobile, to remember that Palestine from Dan to Beersheba was only 150 miles long and less than half that wide, yet 95 percent of Old Testament events took place within that tiny space. In that perspective, the estimated scale we have arrived at for the Nephite scene seems reasonable.

Of course, additional clues in the Book of Mormon help confirm these dimensions. One vital check on the length of the combined lands occurs in the story of King Limhi's exploring party. Ruling over a people in bondage in the land

of Nephi, Limhi sent explorers to relocate the Zarahemla from which their grandfathers had come nearly 50 years earlier (Mosiah 8:7–8). His messengers were to ask the people in Zarahemla for help in throwing off the Lamanite yoke. Unfortunately, their route somehow bypassed Zarahemla, took them through the “narrow neck of land” without their even realizing it, and brought them to the final battleground of the earlier people, the Jaredites. There they found ruins and a set of 24 gold plates left by the last Jaredite prophet, Ether (Ether 15:33; Mosiah 21:25–27). Sorrowfully, the explorers returned to their home in Nephi to report to Limhi, mistakenly, that the remains they had found must have been those of Zarahemla destroyed. The exploring party would have known approximately how long it had taken their fathers to travel from Zarahemla to Nephi only two generations earlier, so by the time they had gone, say, twice as far as the normal distance to Zarahemla, they must have wondered about their position and probably would not have gone much farther.

From Nephi to Zarahemla, on a direct line, was about 180 miles. Twice that distance would have taken them to the “line” (Alma 22:32, logically a river) separating Bountiful from Desolation, the beginning of the land northward. At such a distance from home they would have thought of turning back. Surely diligent men such as the king would have sent on this mission would not have pressed on much farther. So it is unreasonable that the battleground of the Jaredites where Limhi’s explorers ended up would have been more than 100 miles into the land northward from the “line” at the neck. (See map 2.)

The hill Ramah, where the Jaredites destroyed themselves, was the same hill as Nephite Cumorah (Ether 15:11). This whole affair tells us, then, that the total distance from the city of Nephi to the last battlefield at Ramah or Cumorah is unlikely to have been more than 450, or perhaps 500, miles. Keep in mind that these figures are reasonable estimates in line with statements in the scriptures;

more exact distances cannot be determined. However, any increase in the dimensions would make the story of Limhi's explorers more difficult to handle. The hill Ramah/Cumorah seems, then, to have been within 100 miles of the narrow neck of land, and this is consistent with the Nephites' naming the *southernmost* portion of the land northward "Desolation," which included the last battlefield, strewn with bones and rusting weapons (Alma 22:30–31).

As to the land northward itself, our key data about distances come in the Jaredite account of the last years of warfare among them. As the Jaredites neared their final destruction, the prophet Ether fled for his life from the king's headquarters in Moron, "hid himself in the cavity of a rock by day, and by night he went forth viewing the things which should come upon the people" (Ether 13:13). He lived in that cave while he made "the remainder of this record," that is, the original book of Ether, which Moroni later condensed for our reading. The great Jaredite civil war began the same year as Ether's flight, and the prophet recorded what he could learn about it from his sanctuary (Ether 13:14, 18, 22–24). After eight years of intermittent combat, battles were still going on in the land of Moron, still within Ether's observation range. And he was still in his cave after a population of more than two million, which had covered "all the face of the land," had been killed (Ether 14:11, 22–23; 15:2). Finally, after the cataclysmic battle near the hill Ramah, the Lord sent Ether from his cave to make the last entry in his record and deposit it where Limhi's exploring party would find it.

The conclusion seems clear. The final Jaredite wars all took place in the land northward within a territory small enough that Ether could observe most of the action while moving about only short distances from his cave base. Furthermore, the lineage of Jared had its primary settlement seat in Moron from soon after their landing on the coast until a short time before the final destruction. And the land of Moron was "near" the land called Desolation by the

Nephites (Ether 7:6). A hundred miles from Moron to the hill Ramah would probably accommodate all these facts.

Confirmation of the close proximity of Ramah to Moron lies in the account about King Omer. He ruled early in Jaredite history, when the immigrant population could have been only tiny. Withdrawing from Moron under threat from a rival, he traveled with his family “many days” to find refuge by the east sea. A band of people would have moved slower, and with women and children probably over a longer and smoother route, than lone Ether. On his way from Moron to the sea, Omer passed by Ramah/Cumorah (Ether 9:3). When events returned to his favor at home, Omer learned of the fact and went back (Ether 9:13). If the area to which he fled, and thus of the last battle, was within a hundred miles or so of Moron, Omer’s flight and return make sense; a much greater distance would seem strange, given the small population.

Many Latter-day Saints will have to change their thinking markedly to adjust to the dimensions we have discussed. And we have other evidences in the scripture that the Nephites occupied a fairly compact area. For example, 3 Nephi 3 tells how the Nephites and righteous Lamanites, threatened by Gadianton robbers, gathered to a common stronghold with a seven-year supply of food to starve the parasitic robbers out of the land. The size of the gathered population was described as “thousands and . . . tens of thousands: from the land southward and the land northward,” all assembling from settlements of which Helaman’s record a few years earlier said, “They began to cover the face of the whole earth, from the sea south to the sea north, from the sea west to the sea east” (Helaman 3:8). Yet all of these people are said to have come together to a single area small enough to be besieged (3 Nephi 4:16–18). Clearly the record deals with an overall area only hundreds of miles in dimension.

What are we told about the narrow neck of land itself? First, it had to be wide enough that Limhi’s explorers could

pass through it without even realizing that it was an isthmus. (Remember that upon their return they supposed they had been in the land southward all the time.) On the other hand, it was narrow enough that “it was only the distance of a day and a half’s journey for a Nephite, on the line Bountiful and the land Desolation, from the east to the west sea” (Alma 22:32). Of course we don’t know how long the “day’s travel” might have been. References given earlier illustrate how wide a range of distances might be meant by this term. Interpretations of the expression could also vary. Possibly “*the* distance of a day and a half’s journey” was a standard length. The Nephites may have understood that a “day and a half’s journey” meant so many miles. In parallel fashion the Spanish *legua* (league) meant the distance a loaded mule could travel on the average in an estimated hour; the term said nothing about any particular mule or route or number of hours of consecutive travel. Or the phrase “*a* Nephite” might imply that a special messenger was the one doing the traveling, for the statement occurs in the context of military defense. And what means of transportation might have been employed? If we assume foot travel—probably the normal mode—we can work toward an estimate of the width of the isthmus. As we have already calculated, the rate for “a Nephite,” a single individual, could potentially be up to six miles an hour for as long as 24 hours within the “day and a half.” That would amount to 144 miles. If some mode of travel other than on foot were used, the 144 figure might be increased. Or the distance might be as little as, say, 50 miles. If the low figure applied, it would be harder for Limhi’s explorers to fail to notice they were going through a narrow isthmus; if we push toward the high extreme, the “day and a half’s journey” becomes more troublesome. A plausible compromise range seems to me to be 75 to 125 miles.

Yet another travel account helps us pin down distances, this time on the east coast of the land southward. The Nephite commander Moroni set up a string of garrison

cities there against an anticipated Lamanite assault aimed at Bountiful and the strategic neck zone. The area soon became a crucial battle zone when the Nephite dissenter Amalickiah schemed his way into control of the Lamanite armies and blitzed along the coast, capturing city after city until he was at the very border of the land Bountiful (Alma 51:22–28). Bountiful was the city farthest north on the line of march toward the land northward. At that point one band of Nephite soldiers lured the Lamanite garrison out of their stronghold of Mulek, leading them off toward Bountiful, while a second force slipped around in the enemy rear to take possession of Mulek (Alma 52:21–31). Mulek and Bountiful were close enough together that Teancum's force could go a major part of the distance and back during part of one hot day, although it involved strenuous effort (verse 31). On the basis of these statements, we may infer that it was about a regular day's march for soldiers from Mulek to Bountiful—say nearly 25 miles.

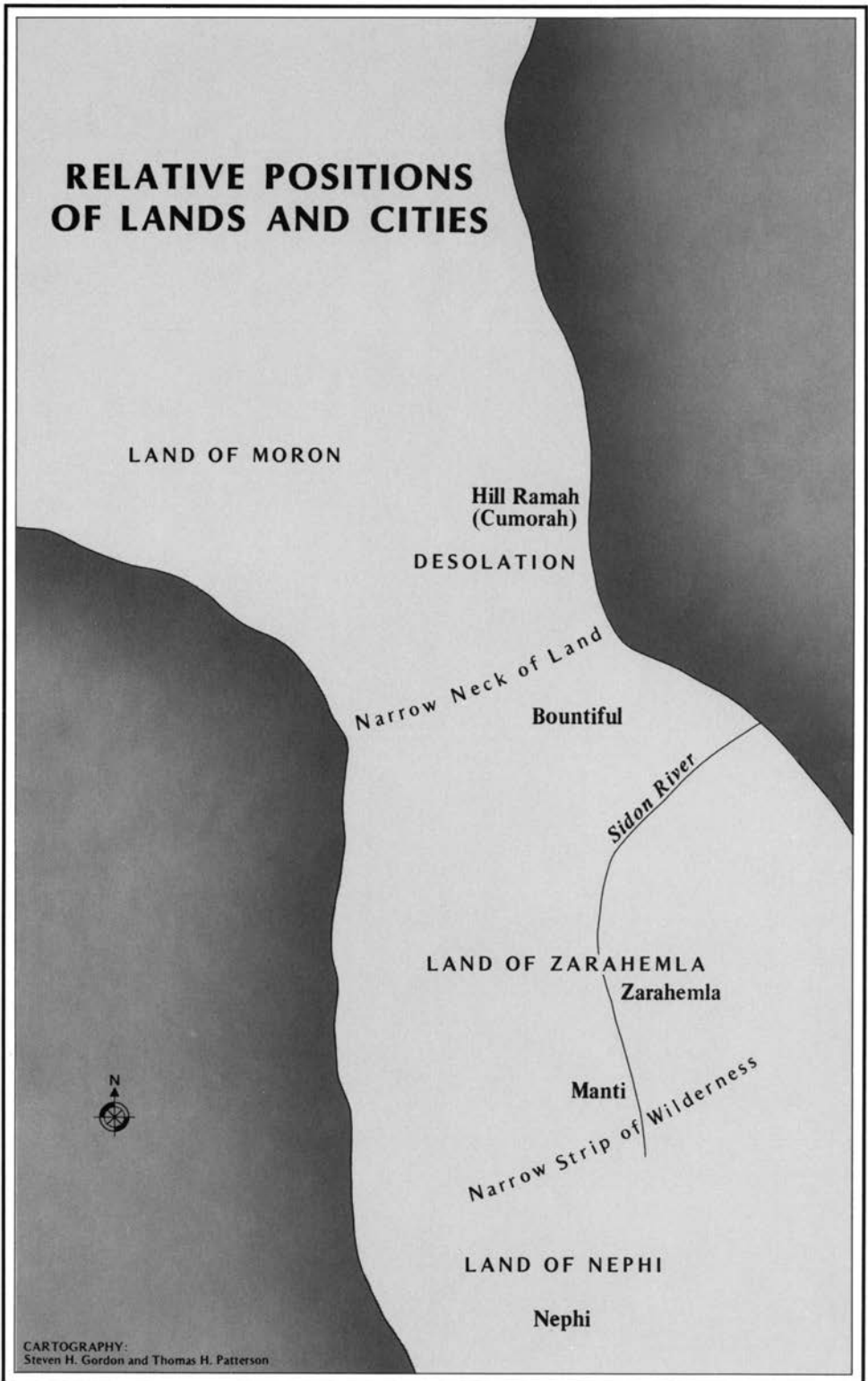
A little later, Gid, the city next to Mulek, was recaptured by the Nephites in a single operation. After more skirmishing, four named cities remained in Lamanite hands: Morianton, Lehi, Nephihah, and Moroni. In one climactic day of battle the Nephites drove the enemy out of all of them (Alma 62:24–35). The Nephite counterattack began, probably at dawn, against Nephihah, the most important of the four. Capturing it quickly, Captain Moroni's army pursued the retreating Lamanites through Lehi and Morianton to the beach (verse 32). Along the shore they then dashed to Moroni, arriving at dark (verse 35). The day was spent mainly chasing the routed Lamanites, not fighting them. With adrenaline flowing, the armies might have gone three miles or more per hour for 15 hours, or nearly 50 miles. The route, we can tell from other evidence about the location of these cities, was more of a semicircle than a straight line. Our conclusion must be that the piece of coastline involved that day could not have been more than 30 miles long.

All these figures combined tell us something important about the length of the Nephite-held east coast. Bountiful to Mulek we saw was about 25 miles. At the other extremity the Nephihah-Moroni sector accounts for perhaps 30 more. That leaves the middle, in which the only named cities were Gid and Omner. Lacking data on that section, I simply add another 30 miles, by analogy with the other sectors. In summation, the distance from Bountiful on the north end to Moroni on the southerly extreme of the east coast cannot plausibly extend much more than 85 miles. (See map 2.)

An east coast of 85 or so miles for the Nephite-controlled area is far shorter than the length of the land southward measured via Zarahemla and Nephi. That axis was on the order of 350 miles. The difference in these lengths is so great that it cannot be due to erroneous assumptions. The Book of Mormon text really does require that the east coast of concern to the Nephites be much shorter than the west, and any map we come up with must accommodate that fact.

At the same time, “the borders of the east sea shore,” as the Nephite writers called this coastal zone, had to be a sizable piece of territory. When Moronihah and his armies were fighting their way back from a disastrous later war that had left the Lamanites occupying all the Nephite territory in the land southward, they regained “half of their possessions,” and the half was constituted by the east “border” area plus the land of Bountiful (Helaman 4:5, 10, 16). Since no indication is given that Bountiful itself was an extensive land, the “borders” had to be a good-sized territory for both areas together to make up half of all Nephite territory. Note further that Amalickiah’s lightning attack in this sector cut a swath “down by the seashore” all along the coast to near Bountiful (Alma 51:25–28), yet it bypassed Nephihah, which was farther inland. Even after Nephihah did finally fall into enemy hands, the Nephites retained an inland tier of lowland territory, where their military base,

RELATIVE POSITIONS OF LANDS AND CITIES



Jershon, was located. The coastal region would have had to be at least 30 or 40 miles wide for this situation to make military sense, and the “half their possessions” statement confirms such a size.

Still, we can tell that the land southward as a whole was not nearly as wide as it was long. Note that migration, travel, missionary journeys, wars—practically all movement—trended northward or southward rather than across. Alma’s missionary journey is one of the few that teach us much about the width. On a preaching tour, Alma left Zarahemla, on the river Sidon, to preach in Melek on the west edge of the settled land (Alma 8:3–5). From there he turned northward, parallel to the west wilderness (Alma 22:27–28), to reach Ammonihah (Alma 8:6). This place, like Melek, was near the western periphery, as demonstrated by Alma 16:2 and 25:2. From Ammonihah, the prophet journeyed eastward toward a city called Aaron (Alma 8:13) without actually reaching it. Later Nephihah was said to be “joining the borders of Aaron and Moroni” (Alma 50:14); Nephihah was one of the defensive cities built in the east lowlands, and the city of Moroni was by the east sea (Alma 50:13; 62:32–34). This information establishes that a string of cities stretched west to east across the land north of Zarahemla: Ammonihah, Aaron, Nephihah, Moroni. (See map 2.) These four places ranging across most of the land southward might have taken up 150 miles, but that is about the limit. The distance coast to coast on this transect probably did not exceed 200 miles. (See map 10.)

The width of the land of Nephi, the highland portion of the land southward, is never clarified. The city of Nephi was evidently not very far from the coast; Nephi’s initial settling party would have gone no farther than necessary to get away from the Lamanites (2 Nephi 5:6–8), who ended up contacting them soon enough (verses 14, 34). Besides, the immediately adjacent west coastal strip was counted part of the land of Nephi (Alma 22:28—“*in the land of Nephi*”), although to the north the strip was conceived as

only “on the west of” the land of Zarahemla. Nothing definitely to the east of Nephi is discussed. The entire area east from the land of Nephi is left undefined, except that it was part of the whole land southward “nearly surrounded by water” (Alma 22:32).

The size and shape of the land northward are also obscure. Beyond the neck it was wide enough that an upland western portion was distinguished from the lowland eastern portion (Ether 9:3; 10:32; 11:15; 14:3, 6–7, 11–12, 16–17). We cannot tell how far Moron, the Jaredite center in these highlands, was from the west coast, but since it was settled by the Jaredites soon after they landed (Ether 6:13; 7:5, 16–17, 20), we can suppose that it was not very distant from the sea. Remember too the limitation imposed by Ether’s observing the final Jaredite wars from his cave location (Ether 13:13–14). In light of all these considerations the land northward in the crucial Jaredite area seems unlikely to have been over a couple of hundred miles in width.

This long excursion through the dimensions of the Book of Mormon scene has allowed us to nail down vital requirements. We can now be certain that the Book of Mormon story took place in a limited portion of the western hemisphere shaped roughly like an hourglass. The size of that territory was measured in hundreds, not thousands, of miles. The movements of peoples, the individual journeys, and the times involved in travels recorded in the scripture fit reasonably in a land southward around 350 miles long and not much more than half that wide at one point north of Zarahemla. The land northward is less well specified but seems not so long. (See map 3.)

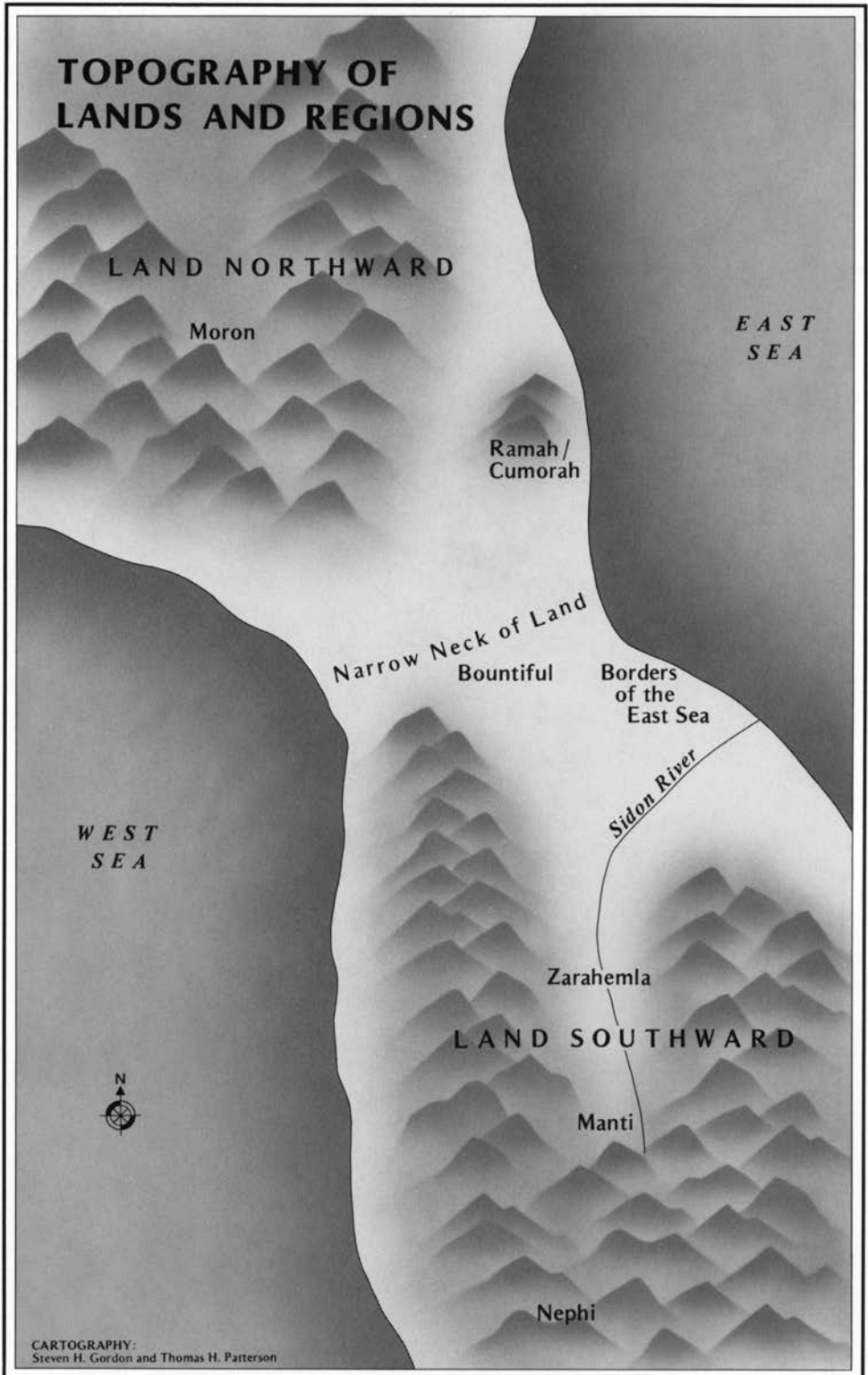
The data in the Book of Mormon and our assumptions that have led to these conclusions are of course not perfectly clear cut. Playing with the information in the text may yield slightly different results. If someone concludes that Nephi to Zarahemla was 25 percent longer than I have said, I would be interested in hearing the argument; perhaps that is right. But anyone who claims that the distance

between the two cities was, say, 400 miles instead of the 180 suggested here could not make a plausible case out of Book of Mormon statements. Some of the text's scale requirements are quite specific. They are also tied together in intricate relationships. It is impossible to solve just part of the problem of locations and distances, for, as in a jigsaw puzzle, *all* the features must interlock. I find that they fit neatly together. The spatial situation thus is consistent, but other requirements must also be met in developing an acceptable Book of Mormon map. Next, let us consider the lay of the land.

Topography

We have more information about the surface features of the land than a casual reading of the scriptures might imply. The recordkeepers consistently wrote about going "up," "down," or "over." (Some readers have maintained that these expressions reflect mere cultural conventions, like the Yankee expression "down South." But in many cases, the scripture connects the words to clear, consistent topographic circumstances; I see no reason not to take the prepositions literally.) This information allows us to draw a neat picture of relative elevations. (See map 4.)

A dominant feature is the major river, the Sidon, which flowed down out of the mountains that separated the lands of Nephi and Zarahemla. This river ran "by" the local land of Zarahemla, which lay mainly on the stream's west (Alma 2:15). The only populated part of Nephite lands surely on the east of the river is the valley of Gideon (Alma 6:7). Since travelers had to go "up" to Gideon, and since there was a "hill Amnihu" just across the river from the city of Zarahemla extensive but gentle enough to accommodate a large battle, the Sidon basin must have slanted up more sharply on the east side than on the west. We also know that the river must have been fairly long. Its origin was deep in the wilderness above the highest Nephite city on the river, Manti (Alma 16:6). Zarahemla was downstream. The



Map 4

city of Sidom was still farther north and probably on the river. (Bearing a name so close to that of the famous port of the Phoenicians, the place by implication was a shipping point on the river; that it was located on the stream is reinforced by the emphasis in Alma 15:14 regarding baptism at Sidom.) The stream must have flowed through Nephite territory at least a couple of hundred miles before it emptied into the sea, given the overall scale of the land southward. It could be crossed on foot with a little difficulty, at one point and presumably during the drier part of the year (Alma 2:27, 33–35; 43:40).

Part of Nephite territory included hard-to-enter wilderness adjacent to settled areas (3 Nephi 1:27; 2:17; 4:1–13), leading us to expect that a portion of the river's route lay through inhospitable hill country. In any case, the city of Zarahemla was at an intermediate elevation, "up" from the coast (Alma 22:31) but "down" from Nephi (Alma 22:31; Helaman 1:17).

The river Sidon likely emptied into the east, not the west, sea. The east lowlands were extensive, as shown above, but the west coastal area seemingly was narrow and for the most part insignificant. Since the lower course and mouth of a major river would be expected to form and flow through a significant plain, the east lowland must be where the river debouches. Descriptions of the battles that took place on the east refer to "seashore" and "plains," but never to any hills of consequence, except in a place called Antionum, which was probably some distance inland (Alma 32:4; 51:25–26, 32; 52:20; 62:18). No mention at all is made of where the Sidon emptied into the sea, even though such a river must have had a considerable mouth. Considering the shortness of the Nephite-held section of the coast, the river likely reached the sea at or beyond the limit of Nephite possessions, where they would have had no reason to mention it.

We know, of course, that the "land of first inheritance" was on the west coast. After the breakup of Lehi's party

into two groups, Nephi led his band to higher elevation; they fled to the interior highlands (2 Nephi 5:7–8; compare Alma 22:28). The coastal land of first inheritance was south of, but continuous on northward as a strip paralleling, the greater land of Zarahemla. That strip ran all the way to the isthmus (Alma 22:27–29). The west wilderness also consisted of a range of uninhabited mountains paralleling the coastal zone, for groups had to cross *over* the wilderness either by one pass (near Antiparah in the south—Alma 56:31–40) or another on the north (Alma 25:2). Naturally the streams on the eastward side of this range would have run down into the Sidon, which clearly drained a major basin. (No other river is mentioned in the land of Zarahemla.) The land of Melek was adjacent to the western wilderness and thus was probably at the margin of cultivable land in the basin (Alma 8:3–5). Its position was conveniently accessible from Zarahemla city (verse 3; compare Alma 35:13–14; 45:18) but was sheltered from the coast by the band of mountain wilderness on the west, for the Ammonites were put in Melek to protect them from Lamanite reprisals (Alma 35:13). (Melek was never attacked by the Lamanites, who at least twice slipped past along the coast to attack Ammonihah farther north—Alma 25:1–2; 49:1, 25.)

The city Bountiful was near sea level (Alma 51:32); it was, after all, near the east coast at the isthmus. Hagoth chose a place on the west coast “on the borders of the land Bountiful, by the land Desolation” to build and launch his ships (Alma 63:5–6). The language here may indicate that the land Bountiful did not extend all the way to the west sea at the isthmus, but at least the land must have been relatively low lying most of the way across, as implied by Alma 22:29–33.

Northward was the land of Cumorah, either a subdivision of Desolation or a continuation of it. It contained at least one “hill” (Ramah/Cumorah), high enough that the handful of Nephite survivors who climbed it hid successfully from their massed enemies who were at its base

(Mormon 6:6, 11). The Jaredites' hill Comnor and two valleys were nearby (Ether 14:26–28), and the hill Shim may have been located in the same region (Ether 9:3; Mormon 4:23). Thus the final battles were fought in or adjacent to a hilly sector, which was, in a larger perspective, “in a land of many waters, rivers, and fountains” (Mormon 6:4). That implies a wet climate and drainage eastward from the uplands, which included Jaredite Moron (Ether 15:8–11). This wet territory must have been the same general area referred to by Morianton as lands “covered with large bodies of water” that he coveted. They had the potential to be formed into a bloc or alliance with nearby Bountiful (Alma 50:29, 32). The Jaredites consistently wrote of their older lands being “up” in relation to the east sea zone, and the political record makes it clear that two areas—presumably the lowland east and the highland west—were longtime rivals (Ether 7:4–6, 15–21; 8:2–3; 11:15, 18; 13:27–30; 14:3–7, 11–16, 26). The lowlands, however, seem to have become the more populous and important by the time of the Jaredite downfall, as shown by the fact that the concluding battles between the rival groups took place there. Thus the geographical division seems to have supported consistent social and political divisions.

In summary, the land northward consisted of at least two parts: lowland eastern and highland western portions. The latter contained the Jaredite capital Moron—although no city of Moron is ever mentioned—within the “land of their first inheritance” (Ether 7:5, 16–17). In the land southward, five major topographical features are notable: the southern highlands, the valley of the Sidon, a substantial coastal plain on the east, a low-lying narrow neck of land, and a thin coastal strip on the west paralleled by mountains rimming the Sidon basin.

Still Other Requirements

Details about climate and vegetation are scarce, but some information furnishes us with additional specifications for

our map. The “wheat” and “barley” said to have grown in the land of Nephi, if taken at all literally, would suggest a temperate climate; in the tropics, that indicates the highlands. A more important crop (Mosiah 9:9, then especially verse 14) seems to have been maize (“corn”), a basically semi-tropical plant. The only references to snow and cold in the entire Book of Mormon are in quotations about the Near East as given by Isaiah. Endemic fevers occurred in some areas of the Nephites’ area, tending to confirm the presence of a near-tropical climate (Alma 46:40). Enervating, moist heat is implied for at least the east sea borders (Alma 51:33; 52:31; 62:35). Droughts were unusual but could be serious (Helaman 11:4–6; Ether 9:28–35).

An important requirement we mention only in passing is social and cultural characteristics. Any area proposed as the Nephite promised land must meet certain cultural criteria. For example, (1) the ancient inhabitants must have been literate, with a long tradition of keeping extensive records; (2) the other basic elements of civilization were also present, such as developed agriculture and commerce; and (3) the area had to contain a total population in the millions, including cities of substantial size, by at least the fourth century A.D. Also, these characteristics and others had to appear in certain places and times but not others.

We now possess a list of requirements in sufficient detail to be valuable: the shape of the land, distances, topography, natural features, and cultural characteristics. We have been able to deal here with only a little of the information in the scriptural text, but all of it is consistent with itself and with other data too involved to cite in this general volume. What we have so far provides a preliminary checklist for use in screening any geographical area on today’s map that might be the promised land of Lehi’s descendants.

Correlating with the Real World

Does any area in the Americas meet these requirements laid out in the Book of Mormon?

In the history of LDS thought on the Book of Mormon, only a few correlations have been seriously proposed between the geography of the record and the map of the western hemisphere.¹⁷ First of all, few possible “narrow necks” are worth considering. The oldest view supposed Panama to be the narrow neck of the Book of Mormon, with South America, or some portion of it, the land southward. The dimensions of Book of Mormon lands alone rule out the whole continent, while any attempt to consider just a part of South America as the land southward runs afoul of a number of points in the text (for example, Alma 22:32, “nearly surrounded by water”). The idea sometimes suggested, that part of the South American continent could have been submerged beneath the sea, leaving a reduced land that the Nephites occupied, is without merit, as abundant geological and archaeological evidence shows. Moreover, for several reasons, Panama could not have been the narrow neck referred to in the Book of Mormon. For example, Limhi’s exploring party could hardly have passed through it and returned without realizing that they had left the land of Zarahemla.

Another correlation has been suggested that calls the Yucatan peninsula of southeastern Mexico the land northward, the land southward being in Guatemala and Honduras. The most obvious weakness of this scheme is lack of an acceptable “neck.” The base of the Yucatan peninsula will not do at all, while attempts to identify a bit of land here or there as a “narrow neck” in other than the literal sense of an isthmus with sea on either side directly contradict plain statements in the scripture itself. No more believable is the suggestion that the entire promised land was located in Nicaragua. The distances and a host of other impossibilities rule that scheme out completely.

The only “narrow neck” potentially acceptable in terms of the Book of Mormon requirements is the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in southern Mexico. All LDS students of Book of Mormon geography who have worked systematically

with the problem in recent decades have come to agree on this. As we learned above, leading Church members in Joseph Smith's time apparently arrived at a similar view, and he likely did also. This would place the Book of Mormon events within Mesoamerica, the cultural region of central and southern Mexico and northern Central America, where the highest intensity of civilization occurred in ancient America. Here the physical requirements of the promised land are met, and here alone the major flaws of other correlations are avoided. For example, the Book of Mormon makes clear that its people kept extensive written records, and Mesoamerica was the *only* place in the entire New World where we know that genuine writing systems were long and regularly employed before the coming of the Europeans.

Students of the Book of Mormon who accept the Isthmus of Tehuantepec as the narrow neck still differ among themselves over how the surrounding territories are to be interpreted in terms of detailed Book of Mormon lands. In the course of 35 years of concern with the subject, I have studied all these views and at times have been attracted to several of them. Until recently the best-known correlation has taken the Usumacinta River, which forms the border between Mexico and Guatemala for part of its course, as the Sidon River. A number of fatal flaws mar that picture. For example, it fails totally to make plausible why Amalickiah would attack on the east coast (Alma 51; 52:1–14), for, should the Usumacinta River be the Sidon, the whole story would contradict sound military strategy. Moreover, the distances along the east coast that an Usumacinta correlation would require defy the dimensions for Nephite territory we have established.

It would be unprofitable to consider here each proposed geographical correlation, in turn pointing out discrepancies between them and the scriptural text. Suffice it to say that when the geographical and cultural requirements are

exhaustively considered, only one correlation survives. It matches the scriptural statements at all significant points.

A few statements in the Book of Mormon cannot yet be squared with what we know today about the Mesoamerican area. (This remains the case with the Bible in its setting, too, for that matter.) More research is needed on those points. But none of the problems is, in my view, a serious one.

Most of the rest of this volume will be devoted to details of the successful correlation and its cultural implications. This correlation adds greatly to our understanding of the Book of Mormon, for it allows us to place most of the events and descriptions in the scriptural text in a specific geographical, historical, and archaeological setting. It creates a feeling of concreteness and deepened meaning comparable to what is now possible for the Bible in its Near Eastern setting.

It is premature to assert precise identification of all the Book of Mormon lands and cities. The general picture is sound and convincing. Naturally, the closer we get to exact spots, the more numerous the questions. A good reason is that while the Book of Mormon gives us considerable information overall, for such details as the route between Nephihah and Gideon we find only a few words or even hints. (This is like the problem of the weather forecaster who can tell you if it is going to rain on your state but not necessarily whether your part of town will get wet.) We do end up with a *plausible* case: our map identifications are believable. Evidence against placing the Book of Mormon events at the locations shown on our maps is not persuasive. Some specific identifications even seem highly probable. Still, we are not absolutely certain about any of them.

One point needs to be emphasized: the Book of Mormon account actually did take place *somewhere*. We who believe the book is authentically ancient are confident that there were indeed real places where real Nephis and Almas did

the things the volume says they did. Someday we expect to identify those locations, to make the Book of Mormon setting concrete. Why could the time not be now? Central and southern Mesoamerica qualifies in such remarkable ways for the geographical and cultural setting for the Book of Mormon that I am convinced this was Lehi's land. For simplicity's sake, from here on I deal only with this one geographical correlation, as if the matter were settled.

The Shape of Mesoamerica

The saddle-shaped Isthmus of Tehuantepec¹⁸ was long considered a good site for the canal that was eventually built across Panama. The neck's Atlantic side is wet and heavily forested, sloping gradually up about a hundred miles to a grassy divide in a pass some 800 feet above sea level. On the Pacific side, the terrain drops in less than 20 miles from the crest to a series of broad lagoons connected to the sea. Frequent drying winds allow only vegetation of a somewhat arid sort around the lagoons. Total width from Atlantic shore to lagoon edge is 120 miles on a straight line. (See map inside front cover.)

The mountain systems on either side of the isthmus belong to different geographical and life zones. South-central Mexico, lying just west and north of the isthmus, marks the end of North America in terms of native plants and animals, since many of those normally found in the temperate, drier areas of Mexico do not appear below the isthmus. On the north and west the climate tends to be drier than to the south and east. On the Atlantic or Gulf side, the Coatzacoalcos River forms a distinct line separating gentle elevations rising toward the north from extensive, soggy plains on the south and east. Despite broad-scale differences on the two sides of the river, many botanical and climatic features are found all along the Gulf Coast plain. The effects of environment on human inhabitation were broadly similar throughout the lowlands or *tierra caliente* ("hot land"). Because it was so agriculturally productive,

this zone supported a large population despite what may look to us like formidable obstacles.

Beyond the Coatzacoalcos River across the Mexican state of Tabasco stretches a poorly drained lowland that is extensively flooded each year. Heavy rains falling on the mountainous areas to the south run seaward during the wet season. The coast is lined with old sand dunes, sometimes miles wide. This strip permits travel, with some difficulty, parallel to the beach, but a tangle of lagoons and swamps right behind the band of dunes interrupts most routes toward and from the shore. Along major rivers, levees of silt deposited by floods are slightly elevated above the surrounding swamp. Much of the settlement is along these slight rises of good soil. Before modern transportation systems, virtually all land travel ceased on this Tabasco coast during the flooding, which peaks in June and again in September. Even in the “dry season,” travelers can pass conveniently along only a few routes.

On the Pacific side of the isthmus the narrow plain is beset by winds caused by the southward push in winter months of large air masses that come out of the U.S. midlands and sweep across the Gulf of Mexico; the air sometimes pours through the gap in the isthmian mountains at high velocity. As a result the lagoon region is markedly drier than the upslope Atlantic side. The west coastal plain is narrow—five to ten miles—almost to the Guatemala border before it broadens out significantly.

Interestingly, the Toltecs of highland Guatemala called the eastern coastal strip of Tabasco the “border of the sea,”¹⁹ and Guatemalans still refer to their south coast as *las orillas del mar*,²⁰ with the same meaning, which reminds us of the Nephite term “borders by the seashore,” as in Alma 56:31.

Southeast of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec lies the central depression of Chiapas. (See map inside front cover.) Through it runs the large river called the Rio Grande de Chiapas, the Mezcalapa, or the Grijalva, depending on

who along its course is doing the naming. This large basin is bounded on the east by a plateau that is an extension of the Guatemalan highlands.²¹ The plateau drops down to the lowlands on its north and east side through a tangle of heavily forested hills and valleys. That whole elevated block intercepts much of the moisture from the Gulf that would otherwise reach the central depression. Since the interior is also shielded from moist Pacific Ocean air on the other side by a continuous range of mountains, the Sierra Madre of Chiapas, the upper Grijalva basin is relatively dry and very warm. In the upper portion heavy crops of corn and cotton could be grown near the streams, but few such areas favorable for cultivation occur. Most of the territory is arid or mountainous. Downstream the middle stretch of the Grijalva is wetter, but the country is too broken to sustain a sizable population. It was possible to use sections of the river for transportation or to follow trails through hills in this sector, but travel to northern Mesoamerica from the central depression of Chiapas was far easier via the open, dry Cintalapa Valley leading westward to the Pacific coast and so to the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. The fact that the Inter-American Highway now follows the open, dry route emphasizes its reliability and easy terrain.

The valleys in the Guatemalan highlands to the south are so elevated that the temperatures are usually pleasantly cool. (Such intermediate elevations are classified as *tierra templada*—"temperate land"—rising in places to *tierra fria*—"cold land.") Along the Pacific edge of these highlands, a picturesque string of volcanic peaks looms over choice valley lands on the inland side and commands the coastal plain on the other. The north face of the Guatemalan upland mass lies in the path of moist winds blowing inland from the seas on either side of the Yucatan peninsula. Exceptionally high precipitation falls on this slope, discouraging human settlement and producing a gigantic wilderness of rain forest. A narrow, mid-highland depression stays quite dry; the deepest sections are actually arid due to the

rain-shadow principle we saw at work in Chiapas across the border.

The temperate valleys of Guatemala are separated from Chiapas by a band of high mountains, including Volcan Tajumulco, Central America's highest peak at nearly 14,000 feet. Precipitous valleys carved by rivers provide difficult routes through the rough area. Travelers from Guatemala to Mexico were more likely to cross over the smoother, cooler elevation of the Cuchumatanes Mountains than through the gorges. The barrier formed by this mountainous band separating the two modern countries continues toward the Gulf coast as the drenched, forest-covered slope already described.

West and north of Tehuantepec on the Pacific coast, a narrow, dry strip rises rather abruptly to a mountain barrier. Inland from this range are rugged, arid highlands that include a few fertile valleys. This pattern stretches all the way across to the towering eastern Sierra Madre, whose impressive volcanoes reach as high as 18,000 feet. From there toward the sea the land drops to wide, flat plains—the border of the Gulf of Campeche already mentioned. Just north of the isthmus on the east coast are the Tuxtla Mountains, blessed with fertile soil because of their volcanic past and the moist winds off the Gulf.

A Comparison

With this brief survey of the physical features of Mesoamerica in mind, it is possible to make a comparison with the lands represented in the Book of Mormon. The general hourglass shape is evident in both. The dimensions are very similar—that is, if we ignore the northern and western extension of Mesoamerica, which we may do, since the Book of Mormon is silent about the corresponding area. We must also ignore the Yucatan Peninsula and adjacent lowlands, for we noted earlier that the Nephite-controlled portion of the coast along the east sea was short and that

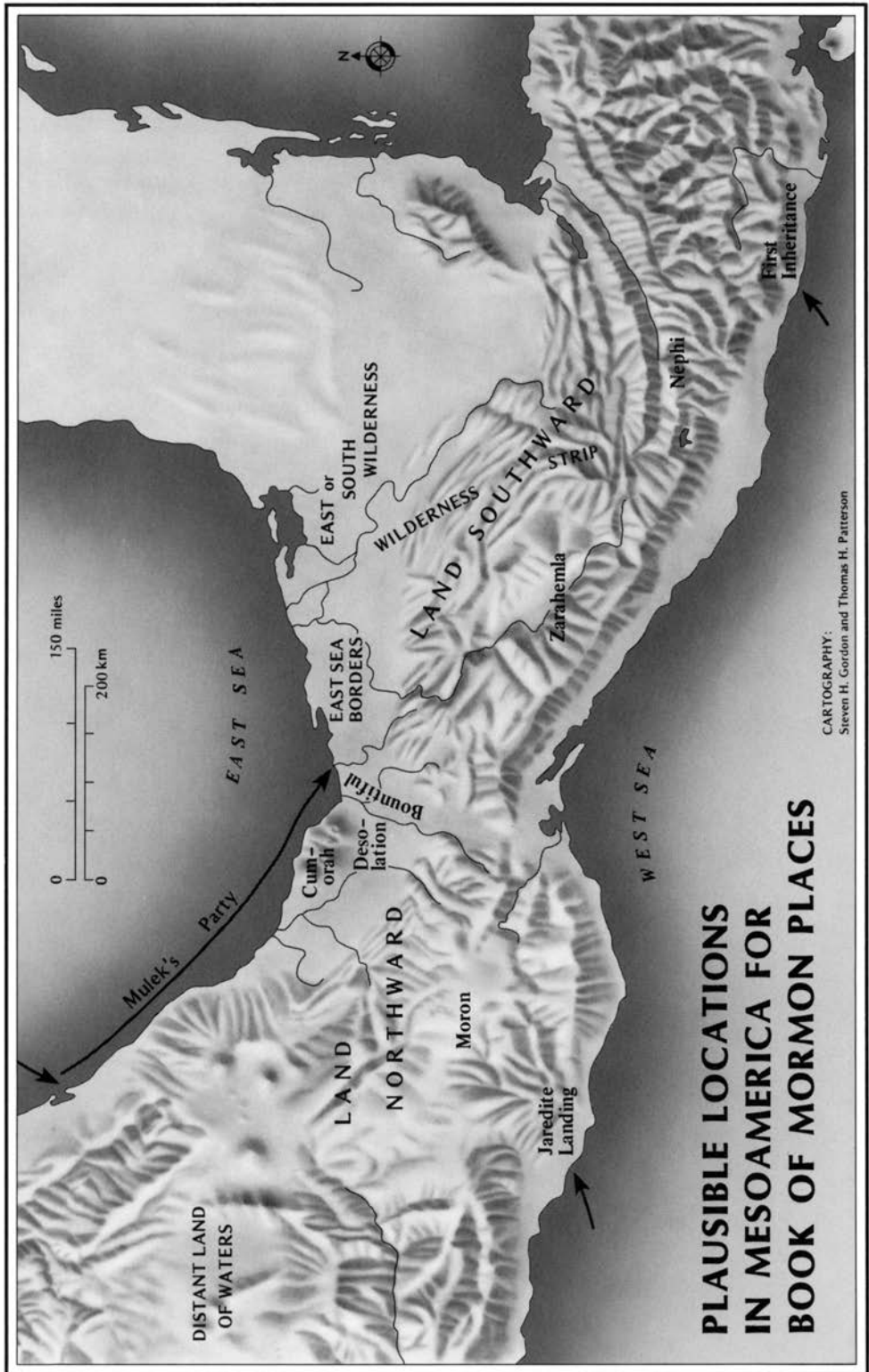
the entire area eastward from the city of Nephi is undescribed in the scripture. Thus the two areas of Mesoamerica that do not fit clearly with what the Nephite record tells us about geography are precisely the regions about which the scriptural account leaves us hazy. There are no contradictions. (See map 5.)

The river Sidon matches the Grijalva River, which comes out of the Guatemalan highlands, runs through a major basin of intermediate elevation, then continues to the sea across a substantial coastal plain. The length of the river, 300 miles, fits what is said about the Sidon, and no other major stream is found in this section of southern Mexico; the Book of Mormon mentions only the one river. The 120-mile-wide Isthmus of Tehuantepec is just within the range of plausibility we established for the width of the "narrow neck." The distance indicated by the Book of Mormon across the land from Ammonihah to Moroni on the east coast is just about the distance across most of Chiapas and Tabasco states, around 150 miles.

The topography also matches. The mountainous band of wilderness separating highland Guatemala from central Chiapas is in the right place to be the "narrow strip of wilderness" of the Nephites. Out of it flow the streams whose confluence forms the Grijalva or Sidon. The bounding coastal strips of wilderness, the presence of a hilly region in an area ideally placed to have been the final battleground, and other features also coincide.

More detail is not necessary at this point. The general agreement between Mesoamerican and Book of Mormon geography can be grasped directly by studying map 5 carefully. Anyone who wishes to pursue the subject systematically can check out each of the requirements listed earlier, marking the close parallels on the Mesoamerican scene.

Many features of south and central Mexico and Guatemala seem to match up decisively with the requirements for the Book of Mormon territory, except perhaps for one major anomaly. The Book of Mormon writers talk about



their geography in terms of “north” or “northward” and “south” or “southward,” while Mesoamerica seems skewed from those standard compass directions. How is this problem to be solved?

Directions in the Book of Mormon

Labeling directions has always presented linguistic and cultural challenges to the world’s peoples. Like other customs the whole business is actually quite arbitrary rather than logical, as modern people would like to think. We in the European tradition say that “east” is “where the sun comes up”; but in the arctic, the sun unconcernedly rises in the south. Even in middle latitudes sunrise is precisely to the east only two days of the year. A knowledge of our own and other cultures can help disabuse us of the notion of one single “right” or “obvious” way to label directions.

Eastern Eskimo language groups distinguish direction primarily as either inland (literally “above”) or seaward (“below”). From this we have the interesting contradiction that in Labrador a word meaning “seaward” translates as “east,” because the sea happens to lie more or less in that direction, while the same word across the strait in nearby western Greenland corresponds to our “west,”²² for there the sea is on the west. Polynesians use a similar pair of terms for basic directions, “inland” and “coastward,” sometimes combined with a “fore” or “behind” distinction.²³ Icelanders referred to directions in terms of where a traveler had come from, not the route by which he arrived.²⁴ (This idea applied to us would mean we’d say a traveler arriving in New York from Miami had journeyed “east,” as long as his trip had begun in California.) At Picuris Pueblo in New Mexico, five directions are distinguished and labeled, none of them equivalent to our own cardinal points.²⁵

The Israelites of Palestine, in their most common mental framework, derived directions as though standing with backs to the sea, facing the desert. *Yam* (“sea”) then meant “west,” for the Mediterranean lay in that direction, while

qedem ("fore") stood for "east." Then *yamin* ("right hand") meant "south," while *semol* ("left hand") denoted "north."²⁶ In Palestine, this model coincided nicely with nature (the coast runs nearly north-south) and also proved neatly translatable to our European uses of the terms east, west, north, and south. (This was not the only model of directions in use among the Israelites, but it was the most fundamental, being deeply embedded in the language.) Other Semitic languages than Hebrew followed similar logic, although their physical settings sometimes confused the model. For example, the Assyrians referred to the Persian Gulf as "the sea of the rising sun," when actually it was south-southeast from them.²⁷

Suppose, for a moment, that you were with Lehi's party as it arrived on the Pacific coast of Central America. By western civilization's general present-day terminology, the shore would be oriented approximately northwest-southeast. When you said *yamah*, intending "westward," the term would mean literally "seaward," although the water would actually be "behind your back" to our southwest. Further, the first step you took inland, away from the sea, would be "eastward" ("to the fore," literally) in Hebrew; we today would say the motion had been northeastward. In the absence of a conscious group decision to shift the sense of their Hebrew direction terms by 45 degrees or more, the little group of colonists would have fallen into a new directional language pattern as their Semitic-language model encountered the new setting.

In fact, we don't know what Laman, Lemuel, Sam, and Nephi *did* call their directions, since the first terms for directions appear in the Book of Mormon only hundreds of years after the first landing (Mosiah 7:5; 9:14).²⁸ Still, it is interesting that in the Mayan languages of Mesoamerica, "south" meant "on the right hand" and north "on the left,"²⁹ in parallel to Hebrew. In addition to *semol*, the Hebrews called "north" *sapon*, meaning "hidden or dark region," recalling the widespread cultural pattern that links bad luck,

evil, and darkness with the left.³⁰ Of course the Nephites considered the land northward, on their left in the Hebrew system, to be “cursed” (3 Nephi 3:24). The ruins and bones of the destroyed Jaredites they discovered in the land northward reinforced that idea. The Quiche Maya of highland Guatemala, from whom we have an important pre-Columbian record, the *Popol Vuh*, connected south with the right hand and the color red; the north (left hand) was identified with the color black and such negative associations as stupidity, death, and hell.³¹ Similar associations, including the colors, prevailed in the ancient Near East.³²

The Toltec rulers of the Quiche, along with other pre-Spanish groups, called the lowland zone bounding the Gulf near the Isthmus of Tehuantepec “the East,” forcing the translators of the *Popol Vuh* into the bizarre statement, “In the lands to the north, that is, ‘in the East.’ . . .”³³ Furthermore, Professor Vogt has raised the possibility that ancient Maya directions were set 45 degrees off ours.³⁴ Another recent discussion of ancient direction terminology in central Mesoamerica is especially interesting:

The Gulf of Mexico, however it is situated in relation to land—eastward in northern Mexico, northward in the southern Gulf coast area, or westward off the coast of Campeche—is the “East Sea,” while in the same manner, the Pacific Ocean is the “West Sea.” In the center of the land, then, around the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, west is on the pacific side and east is on the southern Gulf coast area.³⁵

We saw above that the Gulf of Mexico or Gulf of Campeche matches the “sea east” of the Nephites.

The examples we have reviewed from various peoples show that a simple compass-related north/south/east/west orientation isn’t “natural” or universal and that other cultures have come up with direction-labeling systems that are difficult to translate clearly to the dominant system of language and thought in today’s world. Thus we are not

surprised that the Nephite and Mesoamerican terminologies could have differed conceptually from ours.

Besides, it turns out that Mesoamerican territory is just plain awkward to label directionally in terms of the European compass because it angles across our neat grid. The experience of the European conquerors illustrates the problem. For example, Father Thomas Gage's account of travel from Mexico City to highland Guatemala in the seventeenth century referred to his direction of travel as "south."³⁶ Actually it is more east than south. He crossed the Isthmus of Tehuantepec about where the Inter-American Highway runs today and eventually arrived at Chiapa de Corzo on the Grijalva River. There his travel account mentions having passed through Macuilapa "northward" from Chiapa de Corzo. On a map it is actually south of west. Later on he spoke of Chiapa de Corzo itself as "north-east" of Guatemala's capital (it is actually west-northwest), while Pacific coastal Chiapas was "northwest" to him (in our terms it is south of west). There is a sensible explanation for these odd statements; overall he was headed toward a southerly destination, so naturally the points he had already passed through seemed "northward" to him, even though the map shows that none of his journey was straight to the south in our terms. Incidentally, one region he termed "eastward" from Guatemala's capital actually lies to the north by the compass; here he inadvertently fell into the same framework as the pre-Columbian Toltecs of Guatemala: cardinal north came out easterly. A 1982 statement by a prominent archaeologist stumbles into the same phrasing: "North of the Maya region . . . at Monte Alban in Oaxaca. . . ."³⁷ The actual direction is west-southwest; literal north would lead to Cuba, not Oaxaca.

A semantic point from the Book of Mormon is important. The Book of Mormon usually refers to the "land *northward*" and "land *southward*," rarely to the "land north" or "land south." (The latter terms occur only seven times; *-ward* terms appear 47 times.) The suffix *ward*, of course, signifies

"tending or leading toward." Gage correctly thought of Guatemala as "southward" from Mexico City, even though technically it was more nearly east. Similarly, if you board a plane in Los Angeles for Caracas, Venezuela, do you not mentally consider your direction southward? After all, your destination is South America; but actually you'll end up traveling more east than south. Still, *southward* is correct.

None of these considerations imply that the people involved did not understand directional realities. Ancient inhabitants of Guatemala knew as well as you or I or Thomas Gage where the sun rose. The problem was not one of ignorance but of difference in conceptual framework and language between their culture and ours.

If all this business sounds a little complicated, we can still be grateful for one thing. Mormon and Joseph Smith, who gave us the text of the Book of Mormon, could have made things worse by being "literal." Imagine reading over and over of the "land northwest by west," or perhaps the "sea which is southwest of Zarahemla but southeast of part of the land northwest"! That would have been literally accurate in our terms, but impossibly awkward.

What began as a direction "problem" has been plausibly resolved. We have discovered that the Nephite record makes sense when it is linked to Hebrew thought and language on the one hand and to Mesoamerican conditions on the other.

The Narrow Pass

Another geographical question that keeps coming up as one reads the Book of Mormon is the nature and location of the "narrow passage" referred to in Alma 50:34 and 52:9 and Mormon 2:29 and 3:5. It's apparent from these verses that the pass is not the same as the narrow neck itself. Rather, it is some kind of specific feature *within* that neck area. Alma 50 tells how Teancum intercepted Morianton's fleeing group just as they both arrived at a very specific point, "the narrow pass which led by the sea into the land

northward, yea, by the sea, on the west and on the east.” It is also clear that parties passed near the city Bountiful to gain access to this pass from the eastern seashore area (Alma 51:28–30; 52:9, 27; 53:3–4). Yet the city Bountiful goes unmentioned when the pass is approached from the direction of the west sea, as shown in Mormon 2:3–6, 16–17, and 29 to 4:23. (Perhaps the city was no longer inhabited by the fourth century A.D.)

A solution is found by looking at fine-grained geographical details of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec area. An irregular sandstone and gravel formation appears as a ridge averaging a couple of miles wide and rising 150 to 200 feet above the surrounding country running west from the lower Coatzacoalcos River. It provides the only reliable year-round route from the isthmian/east coast area “northward” into central Veracruz.³⁸ A great deal of the land on either side of this ridge is flooded periodically, as much as 12 feet deep in the rainy season.³⁹ At times during that season the ridge pass would indeed lead “by the sea, on the west and on the east” (Alma 50:34), for the water in the flooded basins would be on both sides of the ridge and would have barred travel as effectively as the sea, with which the floodwaters were continuous. Even in the dry season, the lower terrain is choked with thorny brush, laced with lagoons, and rendered impractical as a customary route. This formation runs from near Minatitlan, the modern city on the Coatzacoalcos, west about 20 miles to Acayucan. From there the normal route leads farther west to the river crossing at San Juan, a key junction. The modern highway runs partly along this elevation to escape the boggy conditions on either side. Where it does so, it essentially follows the pre-European way that had been in use as the road of preference for thousands of years. (See map 13.)

At the east end, the ridge begins at Paso Nuevo, the major ford over the Coatzacoalcos just below Minatitlan. East of the ford the standard route leads across plains and low hills into Tabasco. If, like Morianton (Alma 50:33–34),

one came *from* the Tabascan plain, the ford and the ridge route would be viewed as the gateway to the land northward. Teancum's intercepting army barred the gate, probably right by the river crossing. And the city Bountiful, which must be nearby, should lie near the east (southward) bank of the river somewhere in the ten-mile stretch between the ford and the coast (compare Alma 50:32, 34; 51:28–30; 53:3–4; 3 Nephi 11:1; 19:10–12).

Two Cumorahs?

A question many readers will have been asking themselves is a sound and necessary one: how did Joseph Smith obtain the gold plates in upstate New York if the final battleground of the Nephites was in Mesoamerica?

Let's review where the final battle took place. The Book of Mormon makes clear that the demise of both Jaredites and Nephites took place near the narrow neck of land. Yet New York is thousands of miles away from any plausible configuration that could be described as this narrow neck. Thus the scripture itself rules out the idea that the Nephites perished near Palmyra.

Then how did the plates get from the battleground to New York? We have no definitive answer, but we can construct a plausible picture. Mormon reports that he buried all the records in his custody at the Hill Cumorah of the final battle *except* for certain key golden plates (Mormon 6:6). Those from which Joseph Smith translated, he entrusted to his son Moroni. As late as 35 years afterward, Moroni was still adding to those records (Moroni 10:1). He never does tell us where he intended to deposit them, nor where he was when he sealed them up (Moroni 10:34). The most obvious way to get the plates to New York state would have been for somebody to carry them there. Moroni could have done so himself during those final, lonely decades.

Would Moroni have been able to survive a trip of several

thousand miles through strange peoples and lands, if he did transport the record?⁴⁰ Such a journey would be no more surprising than the trip by Lehi's party over land and by sea halfway around the globe. As a matter of fact, we do have a striking case of a trip much like the one Moroni may have made. In the mid-sixteenth century, David Ingram, a shipwrecked English sailor, walked in 11 months through completely strange Indian territory from Tampico, Mexico, to the St. John River, at the present border between Maine and Canada.⁴¹ His remarkable journey would have been about the same distance as Moroni's and over essentially the same route. So Moroni's getting the plates to New York even under his own power seems feasible.

What About the Great Catastrophe?

The location of Cumorah is not the only question that will have come to the alert reader's mind. What if the physical conditions changed so much from ancient to modern times that the former locations no longer can be found? We learn from the Book of Mormon that "the face of the whole earth" was changed through terrible earthquakes and other destruction at the time of the Savior's crucifixion. Could it be that today there is no way to reconstruct the geography of pre-crucifixion times?

The answer to that is also in the book. Mormon and Moroni both lived and wrote *after* the catastrophic changes. They had no trouble identifying locations they personally knew in their lifetimes with places referred to by Alma or Helaman before the catastrophe. Nothing about the pre-crucifixion geography seems to have puzzled them. The volume itself says that the changes at the Savior's death were mainly to the surface. Bountiful was still in place, its temple still there, when the resurrected Savior appeared (3 Nephi 11:1). Zarahemla was rebuilt on the burned ruin of the former city (4 Nephi 1:8). The narrow pass was still in its key position during the final battles as it had been more

than four centuries before. The River Sidon ran the same course, and Ramah/Cumorah, the landmark hill, presided unchanged over the annihilation of its second people. Thus the record itself gives no justification for supposing that the form or nature of the land changed in any essentials, despite the impressive destruction that signaled the Savior's death. Nor is there reliable evidence from the earth sciences to lead us to suppose major changes took place. Nothing we know prevents our placing most of the ancient places on today's map.

A General Book of Mormon Map

It is now possible to present a summary correlation between Book of Mormon places and features on the map of Mesoamerica. Enough has already been said to make clear that the equations are not all made with equal assurance, and none with absolute certainty—yet. The rest of the book will give many details on the points sketched here. (See map 5.)

The narrow neck of land is the Isthmus of Tehuantepec.

The east sea is the Gulf of Mexico or its component, the Gulf of Campeche.

The west sea is the Pacific Ocean to the west of Mexico and Guatemala.

The land southward comprises that portion of Mexico east and south of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, comprising mainly the states of Chiapas and Tabasco, together with highland and coastal Guatemala and possibly part of El Salvador.

The land northward consists of part of Mexico west and north of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, involving all or parts of the states of Veracruz, Oaxaca, Puebla, and Guerrero (and possibly more).

The river Sidon was the Grijalva River. The city of Zarahemla lay on the west bank of this river and could well have been the archaeological site of Santa Rosa (which is now inundated by waters backed up by Angostura Dam).

The Jaredite land of Moron likely was the Valley of Oaxaca.

The final battleground where both Jaredite and Nephite peoples met their end was around the Tuxtla Mountains of south-central Veracruz.

The city of Nephi was probably the archaeological site of Kaminaljuyu, which is now incorporated within suburban Guatemala City; the land of Nephi in the broader sense constituted the highlands of southern Guatemala.

Identification of these locations is not the end of study but the beginning. Once we know where events and peoples were, we are in a position to inquire about what happened and when. Our locations for Nephi, Zarahemla, or Bountiful should show evidence of the movements of some of the peoples whose story is sketched in the Book of Mormon, and necessarily the evidences must be of appropriate date or else we have made a serious mistake. Still, whatever else we investigate, the locations must remain a basic referent. We will come back time and time again to details and amplifications of the picture laid out so briefly above.

I have said often enough that these results are not conclusive. Yet hereafter I plan to assume that the geography question is settled, in broad terms. It is sensible to assume so in order to get on with other matters. I am personally assured that the Nephite map is now known with quite high probability. Furthermore, no other map correlation will do; all others known to me contain fatal flaws. On the contrary, the picture offered here is thoroughly plausible. That will become more apparent as we proceed with our discussion. So let us examine more detailed evidence about the match between the scripture and external sources.

Joseph Smith, or someone near him, wrote in 1842 that "It will not be a bad plan to compare Mr. [John Lloyd] Stephens' ruined cities with those in the Book of Mormon." Since then all attempts to carry out that project have been

hamstrung by inability to specify the location, dates, and nature of landscapes and sites to be compared with the Book of Mormon. The Latter-day Saints have kept saying that someday, when we know a lot more, we should be able to do the job. Well, now the time has come when we do know a lot more. In fact, so much is known that thoughtful Latter-day Saints can no longer put off the task.

2

Getting Some Things Clear

The heart of our task now is comparison. On the one hand, we must carefully study and clearly understand those aspects of the Book of Mormon we desire to compare. On the other, we must gather, sift critically, and compare with the scripture the results of research in natural science, archaeology, and related disciplines that inform us about ancient times. Some of these findings will expand our views about the Book of Mormon. However, the validity of the comparisons can be no better than the quality and relevance of the data used. We must especially ensure that we are dealing with the right place and the right time. The first chapter set us straight about the place. We still have to consider two other problems. We must be as sure as we can about what the Book of Mormon tells us of its peoples, as well as what it does not. Simultaneously, it will be essential to learn what the sciences have reliably found, and what they have not, that bears on Book of Mormon times and places.

The Book of Mormon Is . . .

The Book of Mormon's title page says the book is a "record of the people of Nephi." Can that be the same thing as "the history of the American Indian," as Latter-day Saints have sometimes labeled the book? Chapter 1 mustered scriptural statements to show that the account gives the history of only a limited territory. The events in America about which it tells directly were confined to a space perhaps 600 miles long and 200 wide. The time dimensions, too, are restricted, spanning 3,000 years or more from the

Jaredite arrival to Moroni's last writing. However, lengthy periods are passed over in almost total silence. Sixty-two percent of the entire Book of Mormon deals with one particular 160-year period (130 B.C.–A.D. 30), while the following three centuries take up only four pages. The Jaredite account is even skimpier; some centuries get no more than a couple of lines. Surely we could not label such a concise volume "the story of the American Indian." Even for "the people of Nephi" it can barely be considered a history.

What most people mean by history is a sequential record of significant events affecting a people or nation, yet the Book of Mormon contains mainly sermons, letters, and other writings of religious intent. All this is strung together in a chronological scheme that many readers never really get straight. From the historian's point of view there are major chronological and other gaps. For example, in the Book of Ether—the Jaredite record—the major figure in the early portion is "the brother of Jared," yet throughout the rest of the account only a single one of his descendants is ever identified (Ether 12:18), and even he is represented as an interloper among the rulers. This is really an odd kind of history. Much the same situation is seen in the Nephite record, where, after we have been told that the people of Zarahemla were more numerous than were those Nephites descended from Lehi (Mosiah 25:2), nothing else substantial is said about that majority. What sort of history is that? The answer is, lineage history.

The Book of Mormon as Lineage History

Lineage as used here means a group of people recognizing descent from a common progenitor and using that shared descent as the basis for their social identity. Elite dominant groups organized on this basis occurred in pre-Hispanic America just as in Europe ("the house of" such and such) and throughout much of the world. An expert on native documents, Dr. Robert Carmack, has shown that

for highland Guatemala each of the major “political-descent groups” of the Quichean peoples who dominated that area when the Spaniards arrived possessed its own written history. Specialist priest-scholars kept and interpreted the records. The books or codices themselves served as symbols of the power of the rulers, who publicly displayed them with pomp and reverence and had portions of them read to their subjects. These documents were consulted to settle questions of history and public policy, and they were used to foretell the future. They recited the formal origin story of the group while also conferring legitimacy and sanctity on the rulers. The books served as well to explain the existing social order, justifying that certain social or ethnic elements were dominant or subservient inside the society and telling why there was cooperation or conflict with surrounding peoples.¹

The Book of Mormon makes clear that it is such a lineage history, for statements abound in it showing that it served and was thought of in the ways mentioned. Nephi, the lineage founder, says in the first sentence of the whole book that it was a personal account “of the proceedings in my days,” made of his own knowledge and “with mine own hand” (1 Nephi 1:3). As soon as he became ruler over a part of Lehi’s descendants, Nephi’s personal record in fact became the record of his rule over the people (2 Nephi 5:33; Jacob 7:26). Thereafter his successors, consisting of direct descendants from him, continued to make entries in the growing account (Jacob 1:2–3, 9–20; Oni 1:11; Mosiah 17:2; 25:13; 28:10–11, 20; Alma 63:1; Helaman 3:37; 3 Nephi 1:2; 5:20; Mormon 1:1–5; 6:6). The record of this ruling lineage was kept on “the plates of Nephi” as the official account of notable events of their reign. Mormon finally abridged and consolidated the entire record of his, that is, of Nephi’s lineage (Mormon 6:6; 8:13). (But the “small plates of Nephi,” which were to be devoted to sacred materials, were given to and maintained by the lineage of Jacob,

Nephi's brother, who was appointed by Nephi as the first high priest of the group—2 Nephi 5:26; Jacob 1:1–3; 7:27; Jarom 1:1, 14–15; Omni 1:3–4, 8–12, 23, 25, 30.)

Possessing sacred records was a source of prestige and a demonstration of authority to rule among Lehi's descendants (Omni 1:14, 17–19; Enos 1:14, 20; Mosiah 1:2, 6, 15–16; 10:15–16). The documents were periodically displayed and read to the subjects (Mosiah 6:3 was apparently such a public presentation, involving the records mentioned in Mosiah 1:16; compare 3 Nephi 23:8). The plates clearly justified the rulership of the lineage of Nephi rather than any other. Historical accounts about relationships between the Nephites and Lamanites—lengthy explanations of how each group got into the position it did historically—are a major concern of the Book of Mormon. Most of First Nephi in our present volume is devoted to the Nephite origin story. Thus we see that most characteristics of the lineage histories of Guatemala as described by Carmack are also true of this account of Nephi's lineage.

The record of the Jaredites is similar. Nothing makes that clearer than the genealogy we find in Ether 1:6–32. Some of the leaders listed were kings and some others claimants to the throne, but all of them were of the lineage of Jared. Jared's descendants carried the right to rule (Ether 6:22–25), as with Nephi's descendants—the ruling line—who kept the official account during the much later era. The brother of Jared, on the other hand, held the prophetic (priestly?) office and had even disapproved of the idea of kingship. Not surprisingly, his descendants are mostly ignored in the dynastic record we have through Ether. Thus, Ether 10:30–31 tells us that after one king named Hearthom had ruled 24 years, the kingdom “was taken away” from him—obviously by another lineage, since the name of the new king was not even recorded in the Jared line's account. Then Heth, Aaron, Amnigaddah, and Coriantum of the Jared-Ether line all lived out their days in captivity. During that time the rulership obviously remained with another

lineage, either that of the brother of Jared or some other descent group (Ether 2:1).

The “history” kept by a lineage is not, of course, a comprehensive account of everything taking place in the area. Instead it is like Abraham’s history in the Bible. That account was fundamentally concerned only with his family group’s affairs, and he mentioned others only incidentally (for example, in Genesis 23). A comparison can also be made to a family history. Notable events of only certain sorts are recorded there, and most of those briefly. For example, if selected Mormon families had kept their own records of experiences in Missouri in the late 1830s, consider how impossible it would later be to construct a history of Missouri from those accounts. The keepers of Nephi’s or Jared’s records put down no more than a selective fraction of even what they were aware had happened. Obviously this is why the Nephite scripture is so silent about “the people of Zarahemla.” They are mentioned when their presence occasionally touches upon the fortunes of Nephi’s lineage headed by the “Nephis” or kings, but we would have to have the Zarahemlaite’s own records to learn anything significant about their history.

Another thing is important about the nature of the Nephite record. All those who kept it were from the powerful and wealthy level of society. We must keep in mind that in archaic civilizations like those of Egypt or the Nephites in America, most people were not literate. The difficulty of becoming competent in the difficult writing system employed on the plates is emphasized. King Benjamin pointedly “caused that [his princely sons] should be taught in all the language of his fathers, that thereby they might become men of understanding” (Mosiah 1:3). It was clearly a notable, uncommon accomplishment to master the system of writing. Moroni confirmed that this mastery was difficult when he lamented that the Lord had not made the Nephites “mighty in writing” (Ether 12:23). Learning based upon writing was time-consuming and thus expensive:

“some were ignorant because of their poverty, and others did receive great learning because of their riches” (3 Nephi 6:12). In other words, the top socioeconomic levels of society alone normally had that chance. Given who they were, we expect the writers of the history to be concerned about big, dynastic, capital-city or priestly matters. Only rarely do we find factual information about common people.

Having these qualifications in mind allows us to see more clearly through some puzzles in the Book of Mormon. Careful study of the term *Nephites*, for example, shows that this name is used with at least six meanings:

1. The specific lineage of Nephi (Jacob 1:13–14; Mosiah 25:12; Alma 3:17; probably 43:14).

2. More narrowly, an elite ruling group consisting of the kings bearing the title “Nephi” and their relatives (likely the senior sub-lineage of category one) (Jacob 1:11; compare “the Nephites” in the interesting phrase “people of the Nephites” as in Alma 54:14; Helaman 1:1; Moroni 8:27).

3. All those validly ruled by the “Nephis” (Jacob 1:10–14; Mosiah 25:13; Mormon 1:8–9). (The two Mosiahs and Benjamin continued the “charter” of kingship held by the “Nephis”; the “judges” or “governors” who succeeded the younger Mosiah were no doubt legitimized by Mosiah’s passing on the same authority, if not the title.)

4. Believers in a particular set of religious practices and beliefs (Alma 48:9–10; 54:10; 4 Nephi 1:36–37).

5. Participants in a cultural tradition (2 Nephi 5:6, 9–17; Jacob 3; Enos 1:20–23; Jarom 1:4–10; Helaman 3:16).

6. An ethnic or “racial” group (1 Nephi 12:19, 23; 2 Nephi 5:21–23; Jacob 3:5; Alma 55:4, 8).

Sometimes the Nephites are said to be numerous in the sense of the third meaning; in other places the first meaning is intended, in which case the population involved would be understandably smaller (Alma 43:13?). The distinctions were no doubt perfectly clear to the keepers of the

records when they wrote, and usually the context implies the intended meaning.

The same principle applies to “the Lamanites.” When “the Zoramites became Lamanites” (Alma 43:4), for example, this does not mean that they took on new biological characteristics, only that they changed their political allegiance.

All this information boils down to the fact that the Book of Mormon is a partial record of events, emphasizing what happened to one group of people, put in their own ethnocentric terms, in the midst of other peoples each with its own version of events. In this way, it is much like other records from the ancient past. The Israelites from Joseph to Moses loomed large in their own account, which reached us through Moses, but in Egyptian records, Israel is apparently not so much as mentioned. Similarly the *Popol Vuh*, a lineage document from highland Guatemala, describes Nahua-speaking groups who entered the land around the thirteenth century and subdued the numerically superior Mayan locals. The native inhabitants are all but ignored in the account. Yet by Spanish times only the merest trace of the language and a handful of cultural traits of the intruders could be detected. At length they found themselves culturally swallowed up by the basic population whom they had conquered.² In a similar case, M. K. Freddolino, comparing a traditional history in the Tarascan area of western Mexico with the archaeological record, found no evidence in the artifacts of any immigrant group such as the tradition reported. She could only conclude that while the story may have been accurate from the point of view of the intruding elite, the tradition they passed down did not reflect the broader flow of events in the geographical area they entered and certainly failed to have noticeable impact on the archaeological record.³ Of course, the end of the Nephite lineage at Cumorah, though involving large numbers of their subjects, was recorded as the termination

of that group's history in a way far more earthshaking than would appear from the outside. Moroni noted laconically that there were plenty of Lamanites and robbers around, fighting each other, but that was no comfort when *his* people were gone, for, "My father hath been slain . . . and all my kinsfolk, and I have not friends nor whither to go" (Mormon 8:5, 8–9). The record came to an end because the lineage did, not because an entire civilization ceased (see Moroni 9:20, 24). The difference is important if we are to relate the volume accurately to archaeological finds.

Cultural Format and Scripture

Any statement is phrased in some cultural context, involving standards of vocabulary, experience, symbols, and assumptions. These are essential in the same sense that one needs some sort of vessel in which to bring water to a thirsty man. When Christ taught the Jews during his lifetime, he spoke of sheep and sheepfolds, vineyards and the winepress, debts and prison, camels and goats. His meanings reached the minds of his hearers as freight riding on the linguistic and visual symbols he used. Nephi recognized the cultural uniqueness of the message coming through the Jewish prophets: "Behold, Isaiah spake many things which are hard for many of my people to understand; for they know not concerning the manner of prophesying among the Jews. For I, Nephi, have not taught them many things concerning the manner of the Jews" (2 Nephi 25:1–2). But he himself "came out from Jerusalem, and mine eyes hath beheld the things of the Jews, and I know that the Jews do understand the things of the prophets, and there is none other people that understand the things which were spoken unto the Jews like unto them, save it be that they are taught after the manner of the things of the Jews" (verse 5). He is telling us that gospel truth is best communicated in culture-specific terms, and we may not fully understand what is being conveyed without learning the meaning system bearing the message. The Book of Mormon

has its own set of Nephite containers in which the “living water” is offered to us. We can drink in some of the word in generalized terms, but to drink deeply, we do best to use the original container.

Latter-day Saints have long assumed that the ancient American scripture was to be read as though it were the Bible. On that premise we have supposed, without taking much thought about the matter, that the Book of Mormon would show Hebrew (Israelite) characteristics of style and cultural background. Some of our scholars have indeed found instructive parallels between Israelite and Egyptian cultures and the book’s style and content.⁴ Yet the Nephite story was set for the most part in America. The New World setting would surely have had at least as immediate and strong an impact on the scriptural text as anything from the Old World. Before we finally understand what the book is and is not, we must see how it was shaped in its American homeland, not only in the Near East.

When Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon text, he naturally phrased it along lines similar to the Bible. The phrasing Joseph had at his command that seemed “scriptural” to him and his contemporaries obviously stemmed from his familiarity with the Bible. Yet some stylistic features in the text definitely reveal ancient Near Eastern patterns, not simply Joseph’s hand or mind.⁵ Someday, when we know more about ancient American styles of expression, we might be able to detect similarities between this scripture and other literature by the early peoples in this hemisphere, but so far that kind of comparison is impossible. Still, another sort of comparing is feasible. It deals with content, not style. Sets of ideas and symbols used in the Book of Mormon appear to be very similar both to those in the codices or books of ancient Mesoamerica and also to what occurred in early Near Eastern cultures. In short, the Book of Mormon can be viewed as a bridge between the two cultural areas it refers to—exactly as it suggests.

When Martin Harris was aiding Joseph Smith at the time

of the translation of the Book of Mormon, Harris took a copy of part of the characters on the golden plates to Professor Charles Anthon at Columbia University to see if he would vouch that they were ancient. Harris's account of his dealings with the professor is well-known among Latter-day Saints.⁶ Some years later Anthon wrote to critics of Joseph Smith his own recollection of the incident. Concerning the characters on the paper Martin Harris brought, the professor said they were in columns "evidently copied after the Mexican zodiac."⁷

There is evidence that the gold plates could be considered a form of Mesoamerican codex. A large number of concepts and images found in the Book of Mormon are similar to what are expectable in an ancient book from Mexico. The fact of such parallels is important enough for what it hints about the history of contacts between the Old and New Worlds. More important for our present purpose is that we learn that the Book of Mormon must still contain much that moderns have not grasped because it is presented in terms of a world view foreign to us. To show some of the flavor of Nephite thought, I give a summary below of what I have discussed at length elsewhere.⁸ The phenomena in the following statement were nearly all shared three ways—in the Book of Mormon (as shown in specific verses, cited in the original paper⁹), in Mesoamerican beliefs, and in Near Eastern thought during Old Testament times.

A Shared Picture

The heavens and the earth are layered: multiple levels above, the earth's surface between, and underworlds below the surface. Natural or artificial elevations are contact points with the upper layers; caves and water holes connect with the lower world. The lion (jaguar in Mesoamerica), a deity of the night and underworld, represents

the sun in its night aspect. The lion is feared, respected, and envied.

Beneath the surface is the region of death and darkness. Some of the dead enjoy a paradise that provides a painless postmortal existence. A hades provides punishment for others. Beneath the surface is an ocean of primal water that may issue forth on the surface from a cave or hole when an artificial mountain covering the spot is breached. Although subterranean water may connote evil, it can also be considered "pure" or "sacred." A monster (earth monster, dragon, crocodile, leviathan) inhabits these waters. It was subdued by divine power in mighty battle in ancient times. The symbol of an overflowing vase whose fluid divides into two or four streams is connected with the idea of the waters issuing forth; this symbol is also linked with the Milky Way, which is conceived of as a stream. In legendary times a catastrophic flood took place that destroyed all people except a handful. The history of the world is divided into a series of ages, each bounded by a major catastrophe, of which the flood was one.

Mountains are holy places, the home of God, whose name often includes the term "mountain." This divinity controls the rain, clouds, and lightning. Dead ancestors and gods assemble at a sacred mountain, where they periodically decide the destiny of mankind. A haven on or in a mountain is provided for blessed spirits. Real mountains or their artificial representations being contact points, men there entreat deity, make offerings, receive visitations, erect shrines or temples, bury the dead, and so on. Climbing such a mountain or mound symbolizes ascent to the heavens. The mounds are periodically enlarged and refurbished.

Honoring the ancestors is extremely important. Descent from father to son is the central principle of kinship organization. Ancestors are honored by deferential burial, often in a tomb, which may be reused for interring other

lineage members. Memorial stelae (large standing stones) are erected near elevations and tombs. The stones may be aligned for the purpose of making astronomical sightings. Seven lineages are considered primary in the origin story of the people. The number seven is itself of sacred significance.

Water holes, lakes, moist caves, and other sources of water are sacred largely because of their presumed connection with the waters beneath the earth. Serpents or other reptilian creatures are conceptually associated with these wet places. A beneficent symbol of divinity is a flying or elevated serpent. This being has power over rain and drought and thus over fertility or famine.

The world is conceived as divided into four quarters, and each major direction is tied to a symbolic color. Prime orientation is to the east, as though an observer faced that direction. South is then termed on "the right," while north is to "the left." The north sector is considered cursed, foreboding, unlucky. The sun's rising in the east, especially at solstices, has sacred significance. Ceremonial centers are termed "the navel of the world." Periodic ritual assemblies of worshipers take place at such sacred spots.

Illness is considered a product of sin; healing may result from removing the effects of the transgression through confession. A form of baptism is known and practiced, as is circumcision. An extensive sacrifice complex is known, including burnt offerings of animals. Human sacrifice is also known, and cannibalism is likewise an occasional ritual element. The taking of human trophies occurs. Other rites are the sacred meal and fasting.

Temples were constructed on the principles of progressively more sacred inner portions and alignment to sun, moon, planets, or stars. Altars include a stepped form, whose terraced layers are symbolic of the layers of the cosmos. Also used were incense burners with and without horns, idols and small figurines whose purpose is not

precisely known. Composite human-animal sacred creatures, such as winged quadrupeds (*cherubim*), are part of the symbol system. Also important is the tree, particularly as the tree of life with its valued fruit. Various peoples are considered to have derived from or to be symbolized by trees.

This list is already impressive, although it could be greatly lengthened. These ideas were part of the system of thought or picture of the world held by the Nephites, much of which was seemingly close to both Mesoamerican and ancient western Asian thought. The fact that these ways of thinking and expression, many of which strike us as strange, are common to the Book of Mormon and to the areas with which it is linked does not mean that the world views match at every point. Differences exist. After all, prophets like Ezekiel in the Old Testament used much of this symbolism, yet we know that Israelite beliefs and practices were also different in important ways from patterns common in the Near East. The Nephite volume, too, has its unique language and ideas. We wouldn't expect the Book of Mormon to be completely Mesoamerican or completely Near Eastern; nevertheless, the degree to which it does fit between those cultural traditions is remarkable and consistent with what it says of itself.

Summarizing, we can say that the Book of Mormon is a translation of the history of a long-lived lineage that originated in Bible lands out of Israelite roots. Its representatives crossed the ocean to Mesoamerica, where they had a career of around a thousand years before becoming extinct as a social and cultural entity. As a lineage history, the book does not purport to tell all that took place among all peoples in touch with the record-keeping group, nor does it report on many mundane aspects of life. The power and glory of the line, which the historians credited to either divine favor and assistance, and their problems, said to be due to the people's sins, are the central concerns. The account is expressed in terms of a language, set of concepts and world

view that share many characteristics with the Near East, where the line originated, and with Mesoamerica, the lineage's New World setting.

With these points in mind we are better able to appreciate what the record talks about and what it is silent on. We are also better able to compare it with the findings of external scholarship. However, there are two sides to any comparison, so next we must consider the nature of the information on the other side of the historical equation. Let us see how scientific and scholarly study gets results and how reliable those results are.

Learning About Ancient Life

The ideal way to learn about a past people would be to find a group still living that had continued the ways of those ancestors unchanged. Of course, that is impossible, but the thought is enticing because there is such a tremendous gap between what we are able to learn from living people and what little we can glean from the remains left to us from former times. Anthropologist Julian Steward years ago studied Paiute Indians of Nevada in the two contrasting ways. First, he gathered as much information as he could from the survivors through questioning and observation. Then he compared his results with what archaeology revealed by digging up Paiute sites. His work with the living identified some 1,400 features (and this is one of the simplest of all societies extending into our day); archaeological research revealed only 40 of those.¹⁰

Most native societies descended from the Book of Mormon peoples were changed in important ways by events between the time the Nephites disappeared (fourth century A.D.) and arrival of the Spanish conquerors. Following the year 1519, when Cortez began the destruction of the Aztec empire in Mexico, revolutionary change became commonplace. As Nephi had foreseen millennia before, the "many multitudes" of his father's descendants were "scattered before the Gentiles and were smitten" (1 Nephi

13:14), mainly by Spaniards, with the Yankees helping later. Nevertheless, in remote areas European influence remained limited, and important parts of the pre-Hispanic pattern of life were maintained.

An enlightening example is the people of Zinacantan, a community in southern Mexico within the area identified in chapter 1 as the greater land of Zarahemla. Harvard anthropologist Evon Z. Vogt and many of his colleagues have for years studied this Mayan-speaking people who dwell in a mountain valley in Chiapas. The researchers discovered a cultural pattern that had remained orderly and comprehensive despite a certain amount of intrusion of Spanish colonial and Mexican lifeways. Many pre-Spanish ideas had continued. Even the few features brought by the Spaniards that have become fairly important—metal tools, sugarcane rum, chickens, wooden crosses, the baptismal rite, Catholic saints—have been integrated so fully into the native ways that their European origin has been forgotten.¹¹ Of course, this does not mean these people live exactly as their ancestors did, but many of the elements in the mosaic of their lives have been preserved. Some of their beliefs appear to relate to what we already knew about the ancient Maya.

A second vital source of information is the accounts left to us by early Spanish writers and Indians whom they taught to read and write. These sources tell us of many aspects of Mesoamerican life not preserved among any surviving group today. Good examples of key Spanish records are Bishop Diego de Landa's account of Yucatan and Father Bernardino de Sahagun's superb books about central Mexico.¹² A few traditional accounts were transmitted to us through descendants of the pre-conquest nobility; and a handful of actual pre-Columbian manuscripts, too, have survived, even though Spanish priests burned others in huge numbers.

The largest store of information about life in the past has been built up by the archaeologists. They frequently

unearth unmistakable physical evidence of foods, tools, and techniques used in the past. For example, actual specimens of corn, beans, and squash have been found so often that we know they were staples in the diet long ago as much as in recent times. Consistent absences also turn into probable fact. For example, nowhere in America has any evidence turned up that flour was used in the form of baked loaves. Quite surely these ancients did not use the risen bread familiar to us but flat, unleavened cakes.

Scientists have been able to trace trade relations among the early societies through studying obsidian or volcanic glass. The razor-like edges of this material made it highly prized for cutting and scraping. Because each outcrop of the mineral has a unique chemical composition, the origin of an obsidian object found anywhere in Mesoamerica can usually be identified, even though it had been traded from hundreds of miles away. Inferences from such data tell us much. For instance, during one period, the obsidian tools used at sites of the Olmec civilization in south-central Veracruz nearly all came from one large volcanic flow on the north. Later on, more distant places to the northwest furnished much of the supply. The difference probably coincided with new political arrangements that made the closer source inaccessible.¹³ Such analysis sheds light on changing economic and political conditions affecting access to resources. Then there are data on cooking vessels, workshop areas, weapons, burials, temples and fortifications—from direct findings and from the study of surviving groups and the early documents. We benefit from all such information.

Art representations add further details. We are able to see costumes, rituals, warfare, and other aspects of ancient life as artists chose to picture them. But most of Mesoamerican art was complex and full of exotic symbols rather than everyday scenes.¹⁴ Little clay figurines by the thousands (we don't know exactly what they were for) sometimes model other aspects of life.

Archaeological Methods

Digging up these material remains of man's past—the work of archaeology—sounds like a direct and simple matter, but it is not. The results can be invaluable, but serious limitations exist, too. To appreciate the strengths and problems of the process, we'll need to review a few key principles. The most useful tool for establishing time-space relationships is "stratigraphy." To illustrate the principle, pile up three books, one at a time. Can there be any question which you put down first? The bottom one, of course. Someone finding the pile later would surely conclude the same thing. This principle, stratigraphy, is illustrated in the strata of the Grand Canyon. It is equally clear in an archaeologist's trench. Exceptions to the principle are very rare; one might think an earthquake could overturn the layers, but that does not happen.

Earlier features can be distinguished from the later ones by another means too. On a pond of water the ripple farthest from the spot where a rock was tossed in will be the first ripple formed. So the distribution on a map of some feature of culture may tell us something about history. Usually a custom or artifact would have originated near the center of its later distribution area, and since in that core area it will have had more time to become elaborated, more variant forms will occur thereabouts. On such geographical principles archaeologists are able to infer some things about the origin and spread of styles of pottery, architecture, and cultivated plants.

A third tool for determining time and space relations is "typology." Every cultural activity or object displays characteristics different in detail from features shown by equivalent activities or objects of earlier or later date. Popular dances, forms of etiquette, clothing, or glass bottles all vary continuously over time in crucial stylistic details. For instance, some young people are able to identify without hesitation any motorcycle or automobile they see, naming

the brand, the model, the year of manufacture, and other facts at a glance. The trick is to note the give-away indicators of fashion trends or new technology that vary from year to year—for example, the profile of the machine, placement of the lights, paint, and sound of the engine. Artifacts preserve a culture's changes as indelible history.

The archaeologist's most useful source for dating events is pottery vessels. Since they were easily broken, everyday dishes, pots and cups were manufactured in a steady stream. Potters would make small changes in their art often without realizing it. Some of the trends would become fashionable and spread to other places. At times an entirely new idea or technique would be invented, borrowed, or perhaps imposed by conquerors. These style modifications, especially when taken together with stratigraphic and distributional data, allow us to construct detailed and generally reliable pictures of where and when certain people and ideas existed and moved from place to place in the past.

Dating in Years

So far the *when* of our discussion has signified only "earlier than" or "later than." These broad methods do not tell us how many years ago. What we wish to do is pin events down to dates on our calendar.

At first glance historical writings appear ideal for this purpose. If we could find documents preserved from the past that specifically described events, named peoples, and identified buildings or artifacts in terms of calendar dates, we would solve the problem of chronology. Unfortunately, the number of historical documents from anywhere in the Americas that contain such information is tiny, and interpreting them is difficult. We do have carved stone monuments and a few codices (native books) from Mesoamerica. The Mayan-speaking inhabitants of lowland Guatemala and nearby areas possessed a superb knowledge of calendrical arithmetic, and they left many stelae (stone monuments)

and other objects on which dates were inscribed in the native system. Two problems have plagued scholars hoping to use these dating sources. The first has been that different interpretations exist of how the Mayan calendar system should be tied to European dates. The second is connecting the information on the carved or painted pieces to surrounding events. For example, does a date on a monument refer to when it was put in place, to some earlier event, or to something expected to take place in the future? And what connections, if any, might it have with nearby buildings? More often than not we do not know.

Fortunately, the first difficulty is now practically resolved. Several lines of evidence in recent years have increasingly shown it very likely that A.D. 1539 included the Maya date written as 11.16.0.0.0.¹⁵ Assuming that the calendrical system in use at the Spanish conquest had been used continuously¹⁶ for millennia, that puts what could be the earliest dated inscription in Mesoamerica in 35 B.C.¹⁷ The period from around A.D. 300 to 900 has produced hundreds of monuments with dates on them. Furthermore, linking the dated objects to their surroundings gets surer the longer research goes on, although problems remain. Studies over the last 15 years have shown, for example, that many of the monuments carved by the Maya commemorated births, marriages, or deaths of local rulers, and these events can sometimes be connected directly to new buildings constructed to mark these events.¹⁸

Radiocarbon Dating

As valuable as the native calendar is to our studies, there are too few of the dated pieces in too few spots and covering too little time to permit us to depend on these as the main means for absolute dating. Fortunately the physical sciences have developed ingenious new techniques in recent decades to use on the problem. The most widely applied technical method uses a common radioactive element (carbon 14 or C-14). Here is how it works. Each radioactive

element breaks down or decays at its own constant rate. In the case of carbon 14, it has been calculated that it takes around 5,800 years for one-half the original radioactive material to decay. Every living thing maintains a stable level of C-14, drawing it from the atmosphere. Upon the organism's death, the radioactive carbon it contained decays at the fixed rate, being no longer replaced. If a test instrument shows that the C-14 in an organic specimen—say a bit of wood—is radiating at half the rate of living things, then the item under test is known to have died 5,800 years ago. This technique can date the charcoal in a fire pit and so determine when the firewood was cut, or we can calculate the age of a bit of corn stored in a pot and thus obtain a general date of the pot's manufacture.¹⁹

Like all technical processes, this one runs into some problems. Certain types of materials tested have yielded odd results. Occasionally laboratory instruments or techniques are at fault. And sometimes the sample tested was not clearly related to any other objects, so we can't be sure what the date signifies. Yet the tens of thousands of C-14 dates made on archaeological objects over the last 35 years have allowed archaeologists to develop a time scale for the ancient cultures that is generally consistent with what we know by other methods, yet much more detailed. In fact, among the objects first measured by the method were pieces of wood from Egyptian tombs whose historical dates were already known from documents; that is how the process was originally calibrated in our calendar.

Continuing research on the carbon-14 dating process in recent years has improved its accuracy. A major breakthrough came when the technique was combined with tree-ring dating or "dendrochronology." Over 50 years ago, Dr. A. E. Douglass noted something about tree rings that most of us do not think about when we look at a newly cut stump. We all know that trees usually add a ring for each year of growth, and we can count those easily. Douglass noted that in some species certain rings were much wider

or narrower than others and that over a period of time these formed patterns. The sequence of wide and narrow rings over a particular 20-year period, say, would never be duplicated precisely in any other 20 years. Trees grown in the same region showed the same pattern of rings, because variations in ring width resulted from annual variations in rainfall, creating a unique “fingerprint” for that area and period of time. Douglass next discovered that he could overlap time segments. Rings from a tree known to have been cut in 1910 might extend back 100 years, but then another tree’s rings could be found to match precisely the early 30 years of that century while also extending back an additional 50 years or so. By such overlaps, a sequence of distinctive ring patterns was built up that extended back well over a thousand years.²⁰ This knowledge allows extremely accurate dating of the Pueblo ruins by establishing when house beams were cut.

In recent years, other workers have used tree-ring dating to establish a sequence of ring patterns for the bristlecone pine, which grows in western Nevada. These trees are among the oldest of all living things; in some cases an individual tree lived thousands of years. Rings from these pines have been used to construct a sequence extending back many thousands of years. Actual samples of wood have been taken from particular ring segments of these pines. The hundreds of samples of exactly known age were then processed by the C-14 method. A piece of wood positively dated by counting rings might, for instance, be 2,675 years old. By the C-14 method, however, the time calculation might come out as only 2,400 years. Clearly the chemical method was off, for the tree-ring count could not be mistaken. Now, after many hundreds of such tests, corrections have been worked out telling how far off any C-14 date is. As a result, these tests are now almost as accurate as if any new material from an archaeological dig had actually been dated by direct tree-ring count.²¹

Incidentally, radioactive carbon readings have been

taken on wooden beams from buildings built by the Mayas and quite clearly dated in their calendar system by inscriptions carved on beams. The carbon-14 dates and the calendrically dated beams (using the GMT correlation) agree reasonably well.

Other technically ingenious ways have been developed to provide dates in terms of our calendar. One of these takes advantage of the hydration or weathering that occurs on obsidian left exposed to the atmosphere. Microscopic measurements are made of the thickness of the weathered layer on an obsidian artifact. The longer the time since the obsidian material was freshly chipped and so exposed to air in manufacturing the tool, the thicker the dark patina on its surface; and this can be converted to years in our calendar.²² Another method, archaeomagnetism, depends on measuring changes in the orientation of the magnetic field surrounding the earth. The heat of a fire permanently aligns the molecules in the scorched soil beneath the fire at the angle of the magnetic lines of force prevailing at that point on the earth's surface at that moment. Earth scientists can calculate rates of change in the magnetic orientation over the years, so when a burned building or a cooking hearth is discovered, the unintended record of its "frozen" magnetic angle can be compared with the angle of today's field. How many years have elapsed since the fire burned can then be figured.²³ These methods are mentioned only to suggest the array of tools science has made available to help establish dates. All of them produce results that generally agree with one another. Naturally our confidence in their accuracy increases as agreement builds.

Using these methods, the experts have established rather stable dates for most ancient remains. For Mesoamerica, the most carefully studied cultures—those since the time of Christ—are now dated with no more than 50 to 100 years potential variation. For the next 2,000 years into B.C. times, dates are probably accurate to within a couple

of hundred years at worst. Still, interesting refinements will yet be made.

Language History

The methods discussed so far deal mainly with physical objects, but it is not only material remains which illuminate ancient life. Language history adds valuable data to the picture. Let's see how with an example from western European languages.

Large numbers of words in English, Swedish, and German are obviously related to each other:

English	Swedish	German
brother	broder	bruder
foot	fot	fuss
door	dörr	tür
day	dag	tag
heart	hjärta	herz

Not only are certain spelling similarities clear, but many of the differences form regular patterns. For instance, words beginning with *d* in English and Swedish have *t* in German. Looking at many more examples we discover the large number and systematic nature of these relationships. From them we can tell that the three languages had a common origin. At some spot in the past, the speech of speakers of the ancestral language changed bit by bit as groups of speakers moved apart. Over a very long time, each group developed unique language characteristics as local conditions and customs varied. Increasing distances would have prevented them from sharing the fashions among their former neighbors. Eventually, change would reach the point where the two would no longer be able to understand each other.

Although this sketch of the separation of a once-unified language is oversimplified, the general principle has been historically documented over and over. Careful comparison

allows us to reconstruct splits and movements of language groups with considerable confidence.

It is also possible to reconstruct a partial picture of the culture of the speakers of the ancestral tongue. When the daughter languages are compared, cultural items can be identified for which every one has a word relatable to the others. Other items may have no word in half the late languages, so we could tell that that particular thing had not been present at the time before the ancestors began to split up geographically and linguistically. On such a basis we know, for example, that in Mesoamerica, Proto-Mixe-Zoquean speakers, probably around 1500 B.C., possessed these cultivated plants: cacao, gourd, squash, calabash, tomato, bean, sweet potato, plantain, maize, guava, papaya, zapote, manioc, and cotton. By this clever method, we learn important facts that archaeology probably could never recover for us. Still more valuable is to learn that the same early population had words for dance, incense, metal, festival, tobacco, to play music, to buy something, and to plane wood, for example.²⁴

Another kind of language study gives us an idea of when language splittings took place. This analysis is known today as "glottochronology." More than a generation ago, Professor Morris Swadesh and others constructed 100- and 200-word lists of "basic" vocabulary (words like arm, foot, head, water, eat) for languages where historical records allowed examining how fast change had proceeded. They discovered that a fairly fixed rate of change could be documented: around 81 percent of these words were still recognizable after a thousand years; then 81 percent of that 81 percent remained at the end of a second thousand years, and so on.²⁵ So if two languages share recognizable roots for 66 percent of the basic list, they would have separated a thousand years earlier (81 percent retention for *each* one gives the combined 66 percent figure). Some critics object to relying heavily on dates calculated in this way, but at the least the method establishes the correct order of the

successive splitting off of daughter languages. It also gives us at least a rough idea of the time in years when splittings took place, against which we can compare findings by other methods.

Consider an example of how this method sheds light on ancient movements. The Navaho and Apache languages are related to nearly 50 other languages in North America, most of them far to the north of where these Indians of the southwestern states are now found. The overall language “stock,” including all 50 descendant tongues of what at one time was a single language, is termed Athabaskan. If we compare Navaho with Kutchin, an Athabaskan language spoken in Alaska, we find they differ from each other about as much as English and German. Checking basic vocabulary shows that they share about 70 percent of the “basic” items (for example, Navaho “-tsin” and Kutchin “tsan,” both meaning “tree”). That converts to around 850 years, using the normal glottochronological rate, so around A.D. 1100 Kutchin and Navaho would have begun to separate.²⁶ Historical evidence suggests that the first Navahos reached the New Mexico area a couple of hundred years later; this supports the results from the language comparison.

A Combined Method

We have learned to exercise care in reading the Book of Mormon for clues to the characteristics of its peoples, lest we substitute our presuppositions and inferences for fact. We have also noted some of the ways in which scholarly and scientific studies tell us about ancient life despite certain limitations on their value. Taking note of these points, we aim from here on to sketch a geographical, cultural and historical setting in Mesoamerica into which the events, people and statements in the Book of Mormon plausibly fit. We will be doing three things as we move on: (1) analyzing what the text says, (2) comparing the information from the text with the findings of expert study that relate, and

(3) deepening the meaning of both bodies of data by comparing one with the other, sharpening our awareness of each as we see how they may be reconciled.

Later on we'll get down to fine detail; in fact, we will consider local geography and archaeological sequences at particular sites. But initially, let us proceed at a more general level. Three big questions immediately spring to the minds of many people when the Book of Mormon and scientific findings are considered together. These three questions illustrate our general method. One question has to do with language: What is the meaning of the scriptural statements about use of "Hebrew" and "Egyptian" among the Nephites? Second, how can we explain the racial characteristics of American native peoples, who usually are labeled "Mongoloid" (East Asian), when the Jaredites and Nephites came from the *Near East* according to the record? Third, in light of the first two questions, did the Book of Mormon peoples find other populations when they arrived?

Hebrew and Egyptian

About 200 languages were spoken in Mesoamerica alone, and seven times that many were used throughout the Americas at the time the European discoverers reached America.²⁷ Some of the languages were as distinct from each other as Chinese and English. The Hebrew and Egyptian tongues were not found among them. These facts warn us that we had better read with extreme care the few Book of Mormon statements about language, particularly those that might refer to Hebrew or Egyptian.

Nephi begins his record by stating, "I make a record in the language of my father, which consists of the learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians" (1 Nephi 1:2). LDS scholars have interpreted this statement in conflicting ways,²⁸ but the meaning seems to be quite clear in the light of other statements. The "learning" Nephi referred to must be essentially Jewish culture prior to the Babylonian captivity (586 B.C.). That becomes evident in 2 Nephi 25:5, where



The earliest writing known in southern Mesoamerica, on Stela 10 from Kaminaljuyu site, Guatemala, of the 2nd or 3rd century B.C. The glyphs are only vaguely like those used by the later Maya. (After J. Kaplan, 1995.)

Nephi refers to the “words of Isaiah,” the “things of the Jews” and “the manner of the things of the Jews.” He makes clear that he knew of those matters from his Jerusalem days. For him to convey clearly any major portion of that cultural knowledge to his descendants, who knew nothing of Jewish life from experience, would seem to require using the Hebrew tongue, which he and they must have used. Nobody who is informed about the Near East would question that the day-by-day conversation, arguments, and decisions of Lehi’s family were carried on in Hebrew in their homeland, then day after day during their flight through Arabia and as they journeyed to America. There is little reason to doubt that they kept their records in the same tongue. If Nephi normally spoke and wrote in Hebrew and thought in the conceptual framework of Israelite/Jewish culture, what would he have meant by his statement concerning “the language of the Egyptians”? Moroni makes it clear: “We have written this record according to our knowledge, in the *characters* which are called among us the reformed Egyptian, being handed down and altered by

us, according to our manner of speech” (Mormon 9:32, my emphasis). Nephi was merely saying that he used Egyptian signs to write his Jewish/Hebrew materials. His phrase “the language of the Egyptians” surely uses the word *language* in the dictionary sense of “a systematic means of communicating ideas or feelings by the use of conventionalized signs.” Nephi’s statement tells us that the Book of Mormon, at least his portion of it, was phrased in the Hebrew tongue, connoted much of Jewish culture, and was written in a system of modified Egyptian characters. That assessment seems reasonable, although we can’t yet be sure of all those statements.

In the first centuries after Nephi’s landing, no indication is given that the Hebrew speech of his group changed to any other tongue, but then little is said about anything for that period, so the possibility remains. When Mosiah’s party of refugee Nephites left the first homeland around the city of Nephi and came among the people of Zarahemla sometime not long before 200 B.C., the two groups spoke distinct languages (Omni 1:17–18), though neither language is named. Under Benjamin, the next king, the non-Nephite masses understood whichever language the Nephite king chose to use for his speech (recorded in Mosiah 2 through 5; see Mosiah 2:6 in particular). That the more numerous “Mulekite” subjects had all learned the language Mosiah brought among them a generation earlier seems highly unlikely. Judging by the history of most contacts of this sort, the less numerous nobility would have made the change, at least in the long run. Later, even when Nephites and Lamanites conversed (as in Alma 17:20–24:30), there is little indication of a language problem or of the use of translators. Perhaps some *lingua franca* is implied. The scripture says nothing definite on the entire subject, or at least Mormon, abridger of the record, considered it unnecessary to explain. A knowledge of spoken Hebrew possibly continued among the Nephite rulers for a time, but that such special elite knowledge lasted down to the time of Cumorah

is harder to believe. Still, the record's silence prevents settling the matter. LDS scholars have found that distinct elements of Hebrew style and phrasing show through the English translation by Joseph Smith, including the portion written by Mormon.²⁹ But can Hebrew speech have been expressed in the Egyptian writing system? We need to examine that point.

The Egyptian system was not an alphabet. Most single Egyptian hieroglyphs stood for whole concepts. Signs representing sounds—syllables and individual sounds comparable to our letters—were also used. "After [the Egyptians] had evolved a set of letter signs for the principal sounds of their language, they might perfectly well have discarded all the rest of their hundreds of characters. . . . But for three thousand years they clung to these multiple characters, and wrote pictographic and phonetic characters jumbled together" because of the force of tradition.³⁰ This type of writing has been labeled the Alphabet-included Logographic System. Not only Egyptian but the Chinese and Mayan scripts fit into this category.³¹ In order to read these systems, a person had the tough task of learning meanings for many hundreds of characters. This is what made mastering the system such a challenge and also an achievement. It also prevented widespread literacy. Moreover, the system made ambiguity inevitable; since the number of characters could never match the number of words or concepts to be represented, any one character could mean several things. For example, the Egyptian sign that resembled a lotus flower was code for both the lotus plant and for "thousand."³² Hints in the context and in adjacent signs ("determinative" modifiers) had to be interpreted in a particular text. Perhaps this is why Moroni complained about Nephite writing: "When we write, we behold our weakness and stumble because of the placing of our words" (Ether 12:23, 25). Mayan writing lacked precision for this same reason, so that "the reader had to have a good background of mythology and folklore to comprehend the texts,"³³ Mayan

expert Sir Eric Thompson informs us. (What he calls “mythology and folklore” are roughly what Nephi, in 2 Nephi 25:1–2 and 5, said one needed to know in order to understand Isaiah as recorded on the brass plates.)

The type of writing we are talking about communicated mainly ideas as such, not sounds; hence it was not tied to one tongue. Thus the same characters are used in many cases by Chinese, Japanese, and Vietnamese, yet these tongues are unrelated. In Mesopotamia, the Akkadian-speaking Babylonians took over and then heavily modified earlier Sumerian writing, and later the Hittites borrowed the system, yet none of those three spoken languages resembled each other.³⁴ The later cuneiform writing could have been called “reformed Sumerian.” We even see the principle at work today, where “Reformed Arabic” numerals—1, 2, 3, 4, and so on—are characters known all over the world. To people using thousands of different tongues, each character carries the same meaning. In principle precisely the same process of representing concepts by characters without regard to tongue could have been true of Egyptian hieroglyphics. In fact, a number of examples have been found in Palestine demonstrating that Egyptian characters were used in Old Testament times to write the Hebrew language.³⁵

We understand in this light how it was possible for the subjects of Zarahemla, for Mosiah’s Nephites, and even for Lamanites to use the same glyphic writing system, termed “the language of Nephi” (Mosiah 24:4), even though they may have spoken different tongues. In parallel fashion, glyphs in the “Mayan” system of writing were used by speakers of several languages—Chol, Yucatec, Tzeltal, and Quiche in the Mayan family, plus others in no way connected.

Since nothing said or implied in the Book of Mormon about the “reformed Egyptian” writing characters hints that the Egyptian tongue was spoken in the Nephite promised land, we have no reason to expect scholars to find

traces of Egyptian speech in the New World. Certainly little trace of it has been brought to light by linguists working in Mesoamerica. But as we have seen, the glyphic writing widespread in central-southern Mesoamerica is identical in principle to Egyptian writing,³⁶ and that may be all the scripture requires by its statements about Egyptian. However, Hebrew speech must have been used, at least by the earliest Nephites, so we might find indications of at least some words preserved in other languages of the area.

Identifying such borrowed words is tricky business. Isolated word similarities appear by chance in some completely unrelated languages. Only if we discover a pattern of linguistic parallels would we be justified in thinking similarities are significant. David H. Kelley of the University of Calgary believes that three names of days in the Mayan calendar are probably related to Hebrew. The Mayan day names and associated symbols follow a definite sequence, whose order matches that of the Semitic alphabet of western Asia; that alphabetic sequence order also carried calendrical significance. The Maya name *manik* was represented by a glyph in hand shape, probably pronounced as *ke(h)*. *Manik* fits in the day sequence corresponding to Hebrew “k,” which was represented by a letter whose shape represented a hand and was pronounced *kaph* (in Hebrew *kaph* means “hand”; in Yucatec Mayan *kab* means “hand”). The next letter in sequence in the Hebrew alphabet was *lamed*, while the next Mayan day was *lamat*. Third in sequence came Hebrew letter *mem* (“waters”; compare Greek *mu* in the same sequential position, which may relate to Assyrian *mu*, “water”), while the next Mayan day name is *mulu(c)*, whose equivalent among the Aztecs stands for “water.” Neither Professor Kelley nor anyone else knows quite what to make of all this, but he certainly has the impression that western Asiatic hands, or tongues, played a part in shaping this segment of the Mayan calendar.³⁷

Other provocative information about Hebrew could be cited; let us note but one study of interest. Word lists

of the language family from just north of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, which included Zapotec and Mixtec, were compared with Hebrew some years ago. A certain degree of similarity in the basic vocabulary of the two groups was discovered. The comparison was not done with rigor or depth, but the results did hint at a systematic relationship. Later another researcher expanded the comparison beyond Hebrew to include other Semitic languages of the Near East, finding even more suggestive results.³⁸ What this research has done is point to the need for much more work to be invested. So far, lack of competent, interested scholars and money has prevented follow-up.

Then there is Barry Fell's book *America B.C.*, which came out in 1976. He claims to have identified in inscriptions in America and around the Pacific basin no fewer than 11 scripts, representing at least five languages, including Egyptian. Fell makes serious errors in his work, but the inscriptions he has collected do constitute a challenge yet to be examined carefully and explained adequately by conventional scholars.³⁹

As to the language of the Jaredites, little can be said. The small list of proper names and untranslated words appearing in the Book of Ether, together with the Jaredites' connection to northern Mesopotamia (Ether 1:33, 43; 2:1), suggests that they spoke a northern Semitic language, one distantly related to later Hebrew. The Zapotec and Mixtec peoples referred to above lived in the area I identify as the Jaredite heartland—Moron and thereabouts. Should further work confirm some relationship between ancestral Zapotec and Mixtec and Near Eastern languages, possibly it would be attributable to the Semitic speech of the Jaredite group.

What may have happened to the Old World tongues of the Book of Mormon lineages is clarified by the case of the much later rulers over the Quichean-speaking people of highland Guatemala. The *Popol Vuh* and other native histories of the area tell us how these foreign elites, small in numbers, entered the highlands, already containing

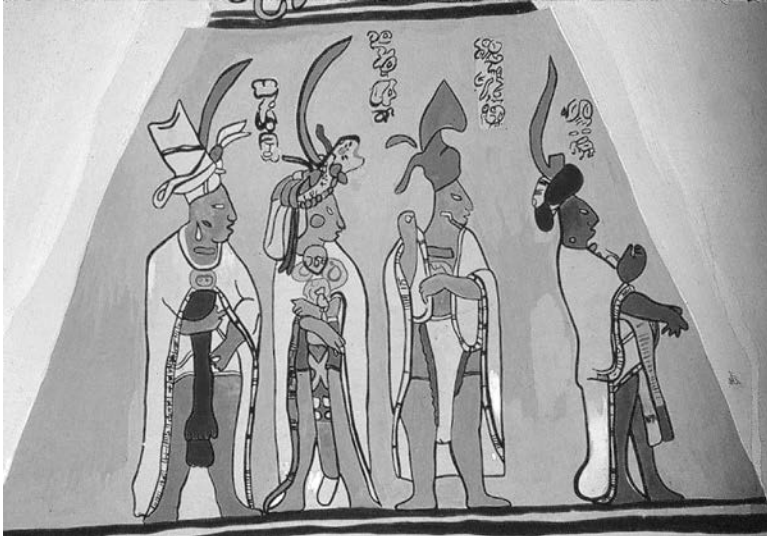
hundreds of thousands of native speakers of the Mayan family. The intruders spoke a Nahua tongue (related to the languages of the Aztecs, and distantly to the Ute languages of the Great Basin). The newcomers gained power over the locals and dominated them for several centuries. After the Spanish conquest, the only traces of Nahua speech detectable consisted of a few words intrusive into the Quiche-Mayan vocabulary.⁴⁰ Likely the fate of the Hebrew spoken by early Nephites was the same.

Clearly the hundreds of languages in Mesoamerica are only slightly, if at all, linked with western Asiatic tongues that Book of Mormon migrating groups might have brought. The large majority of the languages and the peoples speaking them simply have to be accounted for in another way. But let's consider the next question, then return to the language matter.

Strange Faces

The Book of Mormon tells us nothing—literally nothing—about the biological characteristics of its peoples when they left Asia. We do not know from the text whether Nephi was under five feet tall or over six and one-half feet. We know nothing of Laman's hair color, nor of the skeletal frame of Lehi's wife, Sariah. Nor is information of this sort given to us about the Jaredites or the people of Zarahemla. So in a strict sense there is nothing specific for us to compare between scripture and the external sources. Because all we have to go on are inferences, we'll want to be cautious, especially about any biases we might bring to the subject from modern conditions.

We can probably safely infer that Lehi and his party showed physical features in the normal range for people in Palestine in his day. (People of that area haven't changed much right up to modern times, for that matter.) We have skeletons and art representations from early times plus data on living descendants to guide us. All this information together creates a picture like this. Men stood approximately



Figures from the Bonampak murals (A.D. 800), which may illustrate variety in skin color among Mesoamerican peoples. (Photo by Daniel Bates. Courtesy David A. Palmer and the Society for Early Historic Archaeology.)

five feet six inches tall, the women an even five feet. More of them weighed less than 130 pounds than weighed more. Their build was slender and gracile, unburdened by heavy muscles. (This information was not known to the artist who prepared the illustrations used in the Book of Mormon in recent years.) Hair was shaded black to fully brown. Eyes, too, were most often brown, although they could also range into gray, blue, and hazel. Light reddish-brown or copper-colored (untanned) skin was normal, with olive or yellowish-white tints also present in some. A moderate beard appeared on some males. People with these features have predominated at the lower elevations of eastern Mediterranean and Near Eastern lands for thousands of years. Mountainous regions just north of the Near Eastern centers could have furnished genes producing a slightly more rugged build and a more prominent, beaked nose.⁴¹

A small party—a couple of families in Lehi's case—drawn out of the Iron Age population pool of Israel might,

of course, have emphasized certain nontypical characteristics that by chance occurred to an unusual degree in the parents. Still, any of those special emphases would not likely shift the appearance of their descendants very far from the picture just presented.

Suppose such a party was transplanted to tropical America, where their descendants then lived for over 2,500 years. What would they look like now, assuming that they did not mix with others? There is simply no way to tell. Nobody today has enough scientific knowledge of the factors involved to know just how much and in what directions those immigrants might change under the impact of their new environment. Change they would, of course. New diet, new tasks, new climate, and new diseases and stresses would all favor certain potentialities in their biology and disfavor others. The plasticity due to environmental changes could be compounded by their mixing with other groups.

What other groups? Were there other people around? We have already seen, from the information in the Book of Mormon concerning the dimensions of the lands, that it discusses a territory only hundreds of miles long. That leaves lots of space in the Americas that could have held millions of people—those referred to by father Lehi when he assured his sons that even in their day other peoples were waiting in the wings, so to speak: “many nations would overrun the land” if they only knew of it (2 Nephi 1:8). Divine power would restrain those people as long as the Israelite immigrants kept God’s commandments (verse 9), but later, Lehi prophesied, the Lord would “bring other nations unto them.” That would occur when Lehi’s descendants had rebelled and had come to “dwindle in unbelief” (verse 11).

The Lamanites were rebellious almost from the day of the first landing; the Nephites were not faithful for long (see the books of Jarom and Omni). As for the people who accompanied Mulek, they were hardly better than the

Lamanites (Omni 1:16–17). Would not divine justice have brought “other nations unto them” even in those early centuries? Most Latter-day Saint readers have supposed that the “other nations” were the European “Gentiles” (1 Nephi 13:1–3) who overran the land after Columbus’s discovery, but does it make sense that the fate prophesied by Lehi would be delayed until 1,100 years after Cumorah? “Many nations” nearby in the Americas could have entered the lands of the American Israelite groups on short notice. Linguistic reconstruction tells us about one of the later groups—the Nahua speakers, which included the Aztecs. None of them came into Mesoamerica until after the Book of Mormon account had been sealed up, yet soon they came to dominate much of the area.⁴²

Within the very territory first occupied by Nephites and Lamanites, other peoples may have been living when Lehi’s party arrived. Considerable indirect evidence exists within the Book of Mormon that survivors from the time of the Jaredites lived on down into Nephite times and strongly influenced the latter group. Hugh Nibley has drawn attention to some of the evidence.⁴³ But wouldn’t the Nephite historians have said so explicitly? Consider for a moment those historians’ position as they tell us about the early Lamanites. They wrote from the narrow perspective of their besieged little colony (2 Nephi 5:14; Jacob 7:26). Their understandable frame of mind would have seen all people with whom they came in contact “out there” as “Lamanites,” for in the Nephite scheme of thought at that time, who else could those dark-skinned lurkers in the forest have been? We can be assured that they did not chat with them about their ancestry. Whoever they saw were in any case enemies, no doubt soon to be dominated by aggressive descendants of Nephi’s elder brothers.

The archaeological information on coastal Guatemala or El Salvador at the time of the Nephite landing (ca. 575 B.C.) is particularly vague. Evidence is lacking of structures

dating before this time in the Valley of Guatemala, probably the early land of Nephi. Deposits of earlier ceramics and other artifacts representative of a scattered rural population (of the vaguely defined “Las Charcas” and “Arevalo” periods) have been found.⁴⁴

It is consistent with the known data to suppose that only a few scattered farming hamlets occupied the Valley of Guatemala in the earlier half of the sixth century B.C., when we suppose Nephi and his party arrived there. Meanwhile, the clearest archaeological sequence on the coast during this period is near the Mexican-Guatemalan border, where a gap in occupation appears around 600 B.C., although inland at nearby Izapa a degree of continuity may be manifest in the confused archaeological materials.⁴⁵ Whatever peoples, if any, were occupying the region where Lehi’s party landed, they seem not to have amounted to much in population or power at that precise time. It is reasonable that immigrants could find a niche among them and even dominate them.

Another question is what impact a tiny group of colonists from overseas would have on the archaeological culture of an area. David H. Kelley has pointed out the weakness in archaeologists’ emphasis on the apparent continuity of culture at local settlements in the face of a major invasion. He noted that in rural Aztec village sites, even the Spanish conquest (“the most drastic invasion Mexico is known to have suffered”) shows up only belatedly and faintly.⁴⁶ So for Lehi’s initial landing spot, we don’t have an idea what archaeologists might find that would demonstrate the arrival of the score or so persons in the one-ship colonizing party.

A strong evidence in our text for the presence of indigenous peoples is the constant reference by the early Nephite historians to the large numbers of Lamanites they faced. People living under the conditions the Nephites attribute

to the early Lamanites—nomadic, hunting, savage—do not develop populations to compare with people such as the ambitious Nephite cultivators portrayed in Enos 1:21. Then how did “the Lamanites” become so overwhelmingly numerous? About the only believable answer is that the immigrant Lamanites incorporated under their rule native peoples already living in the region.

The picture is further complicated by the “people of Zarahemla.” Mosiah quickly found out when he located them that their chief claimed to be descended from the Jews (Omni 1:14–15, 18), but nothing is said about the ancestry of the people this Zarahemla ruled over. They could well have been a mixed bunch, including many descendants of Jaredite-period ancestors. On philological grounds, Nibley detected “Jaredite influence reaching the Nephites through Mulekite channels.”⁴⁷ The people at the city of Zarahemla considered the destroyed Jaredites “our brothers” (Alma 46:22), after all. Yet “Mulekites” and “Jaredites” as we Latter-day Saints usually think of them cannot account for all who were present. It is impossible to explain the presence of 200 Mesoamerican languages on the basis of Book of Mormon groups alone. As for the scriptural text, Nibley cautions, “There is not a word in the Book of Mormon to prevent the coming to this hemisphere of any number of people from any part of the world at any time, provided only that they come with the direction of the Lord; and even this requirement must not be too strictly interpreted.”⁴⁸

The findings of science provide positive evidence that pre-Nephite peoples were culturally, linguistically and biologically continuous with those found in Mesoamerica after the date for the Nephite arrival. We have seen that in coastal El Salvador and Guatemala, where Lehi’s group probably reached shore, data about peoples who might have been present right around 600 B.C. is ambiguous. Drastic changes were then being completed as a result of the death of the civilizational tradition of which the Jaredites had been

part. Those final throes affected life all the way south to the Nephite “land of first inheritance,” so the archaeological evidence indicates. It seems possible that the population present in the immediate vicinity where the Israelites landed was small and weak enough to be no serious hindrance to the colonizers. Indeed, like the relationship of the Indians of Massachusetts to the Pilgrims, the indigenes may well have passed on the skills and crops necessary to the success of the new colony. (Diseases brought by Lehi’s group, to which they had built up immunity, might soon have affected the locals, further weakening them, but would not have eliminated their genetic and cultural contribution to the subsequent population.) In the south-central Mexico and isthmus area, localized cultures are shown by archaeology to have persisted across the Jaredite-Nephite time boundary despite the spectacular collapse of the main “Olmec” civilization. The people of Zarahemla must have been involved in one of those bridging groups (making Omni 1:17 understandable). They would have combined genetic and cultural elements of the earlier civilization with whatever the Mulek group of voyagers from the Mediterranean had introduced. The scientific information is unmistakable; there was definite continuity of population from earlier times into the days of the Nephites. The Book of Mormon account neither contradicts nor confirms it, but neither does such continuity pose any particular problems for the scripture, as I read it.

What about the “Mongoloid” racial characteristics that physical anthropologists see in the pre-Columbian inhabitants of the western hemisphere? Some facts are clear enough. Such Asiatic features as the characteristic eyefold, the pigmented spot at the base of the spine of infants, and a special shape of incisor are found in varying proportions among every Amerindian group studied.⁴⁹ On the basis of these traits some biological linkage to Asia is safely assumed by every researcher who knows the materials. What is unclear is the extent and historical meaning of these

facts. It is apparent that a part of the native Americans' characteristics is a result of adaptation to New World environmental conditions.⁵⁰ Significant variation is found in the distribution of various bodily traits; that is, some groups are much less Mongoloid than others. That raises the question whether at some time in the past, certain peoples in America might have been totally non-Mongoloid. Some art representations clearly show persons of several non-Indian "racial" groups—"Semitic," Chinese, black⁵¹—although certain Mesoamerican people anciently indeed looked like recent natives inhabiting the same areas. Beyond art, scientific data also point to the presence of Mediterranean and Near Eastern groups within Mesoamerica.

Dr. Juan Comas, Mexico's most eminent physical anthropologist, asked the question, "Are the Amerindians a biologically homogeneous group?" then answered it with a solid "no."⁵² A substantial bloc of other experts agree with him. G. Albin Matson, a leading researcher on blood grouping, took "a sensible position" that "the American Indians are not completely Mongoloid."⁵³ Harvard Professor Earnest Hooton reached a similar conclusion, as explained in the hilarious book *Men out of Asia*, by maverick archaeologist Harold S. Gladwin. Hooton saw bodily features in the New World that would have been quite at home in Palestine.⁵⁴

Most recently, Polish anthropologist Andrzej Wiercinski analyzed a large series of skulls excavated at dated sites in Mesoamerica. He found evidence not only of north and central Asian physical types, but in addition specifically Chinese and also Caucasoid features, including the Near Eastern "Armenoid" subtype whose large nose and beard resemble the classic Yankee figure of Uncle Sam. Wiercinski asserts that "the ancient Mexican series are shifted more towards the white variety of pattern of facial traits than to the classic Mongoloids." Thus, he judged, "ancient Mexico was inhabited by a chain of interrelated populations

which cannot be regarded as typical Mongoloids." In fact, he believed that superimposed upon his three "primary Amerindian stocks" were features "introduced by foreign bands of sporadic migrants from the western Mediterranean area."⁵⁵ Archaeologist Robert Chadwick, who posits the presence of ancient European "prospectors" in the New World, agrees with this position.⁵⁶

Keep in mind, too, the bodily characteristics of the Israelites sketched earlier. Their typical copper-olive skins, dark hair, brown eyes, and slight build would mean that the party of Lehi would not stand out sharply in physical appearance from many Indian groups. The features they brought could fit comfortably in, and possibly disappear into, the biological milieu in Middle America.

So could the Nephites have fitted biologically into the picture we now have of Mesoamerican populations? The answer is yes, when we understand the physical makeup that characterized them and when we see them as a relatively small group living among surrounding peoples who ultimately mixed with and absorbed their descendants. This scenario fits what we have already described in social and political terms—that the Book of Mormon is a record by an elite group who dominated a folk population of undisclosed characteristics whom they found resident on the land. But Latter-day Saints who insist that millions of Nephites looked like Northern Europeans cannot justify that position.

What about the "dark skin" of the Lamanites and the "fair skin" of the Nephites? In the first place, the terms are relative. How dark is dark? How white is fair? An early Spaniard, Tomas Medel, noted around A.D. 1560 that the Indians in the Pacific coastal areas of Guatemala, where I place the earliest Lamanites, were darker than those in the cooler, higher areas, where the first Nephites lived. The highlanders, Medel said, "appeared but little different from the Spaniards."⁵⁷ That observation is underlined by a historical incident that took place at the other end of

Mesoamerica during Cortez's conquest of the Aztecs. Faced by a rebellion at his base on the Gulf of Mexico, the commander sent spies from Central Mexico to assess the situation. Among a party of his Indian allies he sent along two Spaniards of relatively dark complexion, clothed like the natives. They succeeded in being in the camp of the rebel Spaniards for a lengthy period, then returned to report the state of affairs, their own Spanish identity never being detected by their countrymen.⁵⁸ Padre Thomas Gage called the Indian people of central Chiapas "fair of complexion" and the natives of Nicaragua "indifferent white."⁵⁹ On the other hand, the color of other Indians approached what could be called "a skin of blackness" (2 Nephi 5:21; this metaphor was used only once in the text—all other references are only to "darkness").⁶⁰

The skin shades of surviving peoples in Book of Mormon lands include a substantial range, from dark brown to virtual white. These colors cover nearly the same range as were found anciently around the Mediterranean coast and in the Near East. It is likely that the objective distinction in skin hue between Nephites and Lamanites was less marked than the subjective difference. The scripture is clear that the Nephites were prejudiced against the Lamanites (Jacob 3:5; Mosiah 9:1–2; Alma 26:23–25). That must have influenced how they perceived their enemies. The Nephite description of the Lamanites falls into a pattern known in the Near East. The Sumerian city dwellers in Mesopotamia of the third millennium B.C. viewed the Amorites, Abraham's desert-dwelling relatives, as "dark" savages who lived in tents, ate their food raw, left the dead unburied, and cultivated no crops.⁶¹ Urban Syrians still call the Bedouin nomads "the wild beasts." The Nephite picture of their relatives, in Jarom 1:6 and Enos 1:20, sounds so similar to the Near Eastern epithets that this language probably should be considered a literary formula rather than an objective description, labeling applied to any feared, despised, "backward" people.⁶² But all this does not exclude a cultural and

biological difference between the two groups. The question is how great the difference was; we may doubt that it was as dramatic as the Nephite recordkeepers made out.

We have seen that on the entire question of human biology or “race,” the Book of Mormon says little. In reviewing what the people looked like who lived in the Near East, we discovered that, in the eyes of a casual observer, they would not have differed all that much from some Mesoamerican groups. In Mesoamerica we have evidence that groups bearing Near Eastern characteristics could have been present anciently, along with the more prevalent Amerindian population. These facts seem to indicate that the statements in the scriptural text can be sufficiently reconciled with the scientific data. No major problems remain on this point.

Small Land, Big Hemisphere

Both the linguistic and the biological information demonstrate that the cultural and ethnic history of the lands we have identified with the Book of Mormon account—central-southern Mesoamerica—has been complex. That is not surprising. The lands of the Bible prove to be equally complex, historically. A single account, particularly one prepared with religious emphasis, can do no more than sketch a few scenes of either history. What we learn about peoples and the flow of events in the scriptures is not sufficient to lay out for us the big historical picture, of which the religious volume relates but one small part. The law and the prophets of the Israelites touch only briefly upon the history of Egypt or Persia or Greece, and certainly no country farther away in each direction. No more could the Book of Mormon hope to make clear what happened in the entire New World, even had the writers known those facts. But when we grasp the larger historical picture, the scriptural account finds a sensible place within it. In Atlantic-centered lands we can see the unfolding of an orderly scheme of development involving the Reformation, the Magna Charta, and

the American Revolution, plus a thousand other events, all culminating in the restoration of the gospel. Or we see the risky path taken by tiny prophet-led Israel among the power giants—Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon. Happenings of sacred significance have a secular context as much as do merely profane events.

Might not the position of the Nephites follow the general pattern for Old World Israel? The Mesoamerican “promised land” in the New World was in the middle of the civilizing action. Just as Palestine proved to be the cockpit of the ancient world, where everything the Israelites did and said could have their effects magnified abroad, so Mesoamerica was the cultural nexus in this hemisphere. Here was the one place where an archaic civilization (one on the order of Egypt or Babylon in the Old World) could either make it big or be ground up in the intense competition among peoples. If we were to rate the complexity of civilization at any given moment in the pre-Hispanic western hemisphere on a scale of 100, Mesoamerica through several millennia would tend to be top ranked, often near the 100 mark. The Pueblos of New Mexico might get a 20, and the Mississippian culture of the central United States seven or eight hundred years ago a 30. The Paiute gatherers of Nevada would be around 2, the Eskimos a mite higher. Give anything in Nicaragua a 35 at best and most of the people of Brazil from 10 to 25. Peru would score from 80 to near the 100 mark. These comparative levels mark out two zeniths of cultural development—the Mesoamerican and the Andean zones. Only for the former is there evidence of written records. Everything else was substantially less complex and less interesting from the point of view of hemispheric culture history. It would be understandable that the Nephites be sited in the middle of things in the New World.

All the local American histories—the expansion of populations, the creation of monuments, the rise and fall of chiefs, the spread of cults, and the skirmishes among

the little bands—are about as varied as is the history of Asia. Hundreds of tribes and kingdoms, thousands of communities with their own cultural uniqueness, filled up the hemisphere over a long time. How many of them had anything directly to do with the Nephites or the Jaredites? Perhaps about as many, or as few, as were directly related to the Israelites among the peoples of Eurasia. We know that certain cultural features spread out from Mesoamerica at different periods, so few areas of the hemisphere exist that were not somehow affected by influences from Lehi's new homeland. Probably some people—some genes—went with the culture. Overall it appears these diffused effects usually were minor, culturally or biologically, but in certain places powerful results ensued. We know that significant movements of Mesoamerican people and ideas penetrated northern Mexico and the Arizona-New Mexico area.⁶³ The lower and mid-Mississippi Valley and the southeastern states felt strong influence at several periods.⁶⁴ Ecuador in the time of the Jaredites, and Peru, Ecuador, and Colombia at several later times,⁶⁵ also felt the impress of Mesoamerican life and probably of the genes of its peoples. Groups in the receiving areas also sent cultural gifts back to the Nephite area.

The entire subject has too many ramifications to treat fully here. The question uppermost in the minds of Latter-day Saint readers is likely to be this: If all those people are actually not described in the Book of Mormon, then should we consider their descendants to be "Lamanites"? Latter-day Saints speak of them as Lamanites today. Is this true in a direct biological sense?

First of all, Lehi's prophecy about the future of his descendants teaches us that "there shall none come into this land save they shall be brought by the hand of the Lord" (2 Nephi 1:6). And whomever the Lord did bring, "this land is consecrated unto him" (verse 7). The meaning becomes clearer still in the Savior's discourse recorded in the twentieth and twenty-first chapters of 3 Nephi. Those who

have been brought here and desire to take advantage of Lehi's promised blessing are to do so by being "numbered among this the remnant of Jacob" to whom the land has been given as an inheritance (3 Nephi 21:22). This is as true of the "Gentiles" of recent centuries as of the earlier "native" peoples. In short, the blessings of the land were to be available to all arrivals, if they are willing to connect themselves "by adoption" to Lehi, to whom the land was given. The terms of the Savior's statements, if not Lehi's, make clear that the entire hemisphere, not just the immediate land mentioned in the historical record of the Nephites, was to be Lehi's inheritance (3 Nephi 20:13, 20, 22; 21:4, 12, 23–25, 29; D&C 54:8). Thus any people in the western hemisphere could receive the blessings of identification with the American Israelites, either under the label "Lamanite," if descended from pre-Columbian ancestors, or as "Gentiles" (immigrants in the Christian tradition, mainly from Europe), under the terms of 3 Nephi 21:22. All native peoples of the New World may thus be appropriately classified "Lamanites." This says nothing, one way or the other, about "literal" descent, which the Lord considers of no particular significance in regard to receiving blessings (1 Nephi 17:32–35).

Should some investigator find new methods to pursue research on the "blood lines" of a particular individual, family, or people, he or she might find that some native Americans are directly descended from Nephites of ancient times, that some are descended in part from others in Lehi's or Mulek's parties, that some are of Jaredite origin, and that still others have no discernible connection to any of those. Scientific, genealogical, or historical methods to resolve such questions are not available; but, more important, the scriptures indicate that the results would not matter as far as the Church and the gospel are concerned.

In this section we have looked at three questions about the Book of Mormon in relation to the findings of science.

Careful reconsiderations of the scriptural text, examination of research findings sometimes neglected, and an active attempt to bring all these materials into agreement have reduced the “problems” to near insignificance. We find the two bodies of fact largely accommodate each other. There is no particular problem for the scripture, but neither does the information about the ancient inhabitants from outside sources show that the scriptural account is erroneous. Some of us may indeed have to revise our previous *ideas* about both the Book of Mormon and the findings of science, but that would only be a manifestation of our healthy correction of former error. Future work might teach us more about these topics, but for now we seem to have “cleared the decks” so we can get down to some new questions.

3

Culture and History in Book of Mormon Lands

Many of us have observed at first hand the seemingly timeless pueblos of New Mexico and Arizona, homes of the Hopi, Zuñi, Acoma, and other Indian groups. They look as if the passing of a century would make little difference to them or their inhabitants. There is much truth in that statement. Tradition agrees with research: the essence of the Pueblo way has existed in its picturesque, arid setting for a very long time. Some traditional patterns of life in Bible lands have also endured for long periods. Again, if we were to examine the culture of a Chinese village, even today we would be struck by the high degree to which basic, localized customs have been retained.

The chief reason for such community conservatism is clear. The challenges of getting along in a particular environment tend not to change; the sheep, vineyards, and hand-harvested grain fields of Palestine were the key to personal and cultural survival for the inhabitants in Abraham's day as well as in Christ's, over two thousand years later. And the way of planting corn hasn't changed markedly in some rural areas of southern Mexico over an even longer period.

A second reason for continuity is the psychological reluctance of people to change. The meek, who always inherit the earth once the kings and captains have passed, prefer to stay with proven ways. Most changes must first prove themselves useful, and they are usually incorporated into the pattern of a culture without revolutionizing it. The saying among the French applies especially to

culture—"The more things change, the more they stay the same."

While the day-to-day lives of most people do display continuity, the course of the civilization in which they live sometimes may be struck by a genuine revolution, quite suddenly and irreversibly. From the perspective of a particular band of Indians of the Great Plains in the latter half of the last century, life continued day beyond day so steadily that it probably obscured the revolution they were living through—the spread of railroad lines and fences and the slaughter of the buffalo—all within a decade or so. The lands once occupied by the Nephites have undergone both processes. For some persons, families, and remote localities, life has flowed on without drastic restructuring through the centuries. Some of the old ways—human sacrifice, for example—were extinguished, fortunately. Iron machetes, Christian ritual, distilled liquor, horses, and even penicillin have been accepted without altering drastically the basic round of life. Yet the world surrounding these islands of cultural stability has indeed been transformed as broader currents of history swirled about.

Cultural revolution hit part of Mesoamerica with major force in 1519 when Cortez reached the east coast of Mexico near present-day Veracruz. Within two years the Spaniards were in control of the Aztec capital, Tenochtitlan (which became Mexico City), and of large portions of central Mexico. (See map inside back cover.) Within a few more years the new die had been cast. Mesoamerican civilization, a continuous tradition that had developed over the course of perhaps 180 generations, was dying at the core. We can still glimpse parts of it, but the essential transformation had been determined by the fantastic success of the Spanish conquistadores, the earliest "Gentiles" from across the ocean whom Nephi had seen in vision (1 Nephi 13:13–15). The conquerors credited the hand of God for their astounding success. They themselves could hardly believe what had happened. Nor could they clearly grasp the

implications of finding an entire civilization that a few years previously nobody in Europe had even known to exist. Said Cortez, reporting to his king, "I shall speak of some of the things I have seen, which though badly described, I know very well will cause much wonder, that they will hardly be believed, because even we, who see them here with our own eyes, are unable to comprehend their reality."¹

Life in Aztec Times

The culture we know by the name *Aztec* began to take form when a small band of nomadic hunters and gatherers who called themselves the Mexica (pronounced Mesh-ee-kah) entered the Valley of Mexico from the northwest soon after A.D. 1300. The numerous inhabitants whom the valley already contained were bearers of a cultural tradition inherited from the fabled "Toltecs" of a few centuries before. Divided among themselves in small political units, the locals paid little attention to the intruders, whom they considered rude "hicks." The Mexica settled in a swampy portion of the valley that nobody else wanted. They avidly learned many skills of civilization from those around them. By threats and brash political maneuvering, the newcomers built up strength until they were able to enter an alliance with the two most prominent communities along the shore of the lake that then lay on the valley floor. Still later, before A.D. 1500, their own booming city had come to dominate not only its local neighbors, but also peoples hundreds of miles from home. Military prowess, based on the fear their ruthless demand for sacrificial victims induced, had put over five million people under the loose government of this Aztec empire by the time the Spaniards touched shore.

Throughout the territory the Aztecs controlled, as well as in other zones in Mesoamerica that they only influenced, the economic basis of the civilization had long been hand cultivation of three crops: maize (our "corn"), beans, and squash. A few locations could grow two and even three crops per year, and many varieties of scores of crops

existed, adapted to differing climates and soil conditions. Other plants were grown too, but maize was Mesoamerica's kingpin cereal. A diet of these three crops has been shown to be nutritious as long as it contains supplementary protein, in those times obtained mainly from game and a few domestic animals.²

Although good soil and growing conditions particularly favored a few areas, most Mesoamerican agriculture was not highly productive. Vast areas are mountainous, frost threatened, or heavily forested. Certain places, such as the Valley of Mexico, offered special advantages once the right farming techniques were mastered. Favored areas used some irrigation, but reliable water sources and land onto which water could usefully be led were uncommon. Animal power apparently was never used in preparing the fields. No good draft animals were available to pull plows. Instead, crops were hand-planted in unleveled ground and were weeded by hand. In any case, adequate corn crops could be produced by merely dropping seed into holes made with a sharp stick on plots cleared of trees and brush by cutting and then burning the dried debris. Watered by rains (planting was timed just to precede the hoped-for start of the rainy season), maize usually produced a heavy yield of food energy per unit of work invested. Sometimes corn and beans were planted in the same field, for they matured at different times. In rural zones of central and southern Mesoamerica today it is still possible to see farmsteads where the agricultural methods differ little from those employed thousands of years ago.

In the moister, forested areas, the practice of shifting cultivation was often necessary. After a field had been cleared and planted for a year or so, crops became less productive because of fertility loss in the usually thin soils and because of the growth of grass, weeds, and bushes. The cultivator would soon have to clear a new field and start the process again. A piece of land once used needed to recover for as much as ten years before it could again be cultivated. This

type of farming required lots of land and scattered the plots across a wide landscape. Few people could live in concentrated communities, nor could surplus food be easily supplied for towns because of the distances involved and the obstacles posed by terrain.

It is difficult to summarize the picture of settlement without oversimplifying, because of the varied conditions throughout Mesoamerica, but one thing stands out. While the population of the area reached the tens of millions, most settlers were spread out, or at least stretches of “wilderness” separated the more heavily populated sections. Population growth meant pressure on resources. After any period of sustained growth, some people would be forced to settle less desirable surrounding lands, to emigrate to distant regions, or to try to gain resources from neighbors. When none of those options were open, competition for resources caused dissension.

The distance from one area of intensive settlement to another meant also that government operated at a fairly low level of sophistication. “Nations” were not so much unified, centrally governed bodies of people as they were networks of settlement zones linked by loose loyalties manifested by tribute payment (an equivalent of taxation) from the outliers to centralized offices of power. Rulers, however, had limited clout to enforce demands. Nobles in various areas were linked by kinship and marriage, and they shared religious practices, but if the glue of that class’s relationships failed to hold areas under lightly unified government, the only real alternative to ensure political order was force. Subject regions periodically considered the tribute levied too painful to bear, whereupon they rebelled. The Aztec solution was to send an army to teach the rebels a lesson and replace local leaders with someone more compliant. (Yet two nearby groups, the Tlaxcalans and Tarascans, proved too tough even for the bloody Aztecs to subdue.) Institutions we take for granted, like bureaucracy with extensive record keeping, codified laws, courts, and

permanent enforcement personnel, did not exist as such. If for no other reason, limitations of technology prevented the production of enough surplus goods to support a large apparatus of specialists. Nor could a big standing army be maintained.

Local rulers were not just arbitrary bosses. They performed many necessary services, such as settling disputes, deciding how scarce resources were to be allocated, and administering repairs on irrigation systems and other public facilities. They also organized and led armies. In return for performing these often unpleasant, demanding chores, they received and lived off tribute, and certain foods and rituals were reserved to them. Myths, rites, and the priests justified the position of the elites, attributing sacred powers to them. Rulers performed key ceremonies, so in a sense they were priests, too.

Under the Aztecs many sacred beings were recognized and worshiped, although we may suppose that the commoners perceived only a simplified version of the beliefs and ceremonies. What sometimes looks to us like a multitude of gods may have been seen as aspects of a few major gods or even of a single deity.³ Ritual was always of central importance. To the Aztecs, the divine powers needed recharging, so to speak, and rites provided the mechanism for doing this. Fasting and self-punishment (such as bloodletting) were regular practices. Human sacrifice was thought to be essential, the power represented by the human lives being needed to sustain the universal divine power that kept the earth and universe ticking. As a result, warfare became necessary both to produce sacrificial victims and to obtain tribute payments that funded the spectacular Aztec cities.

The scale of the human sacrifices is hard to grasp. During one week shortly before the Spaniards arrived, 70,000 victims were reportedly slain on the altars!⁴

Another aspect of ritual was prediction of the future. Astrology was employed to predict each person's fortune

on the basis of his date of birth; the name of his birth date then became his personal name. The concern with prediction was also tied to anxiety about the weather. With success of the corn crop dependent on the timely arrival of the rains after the seed had been planted, there was a need to determine whether the seasons would proceed according to schedule. Delay in arrival of the rains, or too much rain, could turn into disaster if not forestalled by ritual, they felt. Much of the concern of the Mesoamerican peoples with astronomy and time calculations derived from anxiety over predicting seasonal changes in weather, which they considered determined by the sacred powers. Of course, calendrical mathematics and the intricacies of astrology and deities could be mastered only by specialists keeping detailed records. Thus the “scientists” were really priests. This monopoly of crucial knowledge gave them great power. Naturally they were allied with the rulers, usually being chosen from among the nobility so that “political” and “religious” power were merely two sides of the elite “establishment.” (How tellingly the rebel Koriher in the Book of Mormon tried to gain power by rallying people against priestly power. The language of Alma 30:23–28 is especially revealing.)

Most commoners were scattered on the land as cultivators. They felt in some ways dependent on the activities of the lords and priests, but like the mass of people in the rest of the pre-modern world, their chief concerns were the troubles of daily life. Without time, facilities, or motivation to become literate, they depended on folk knowledge within the community to guide most of their lives, which were often arduous. Their prime concern was probably to be left alone by the power people, but war, famine, and other unpredictable catastrophes left them generally fatalistic, recognizing the severe limits to their power to control their lives. Moreover, the scarcity of resources not already tied up demanded of them that they either toe the line in their

community or kin group or be deprived of sustenance and security. These circumstances discouraged individualism, and especially such socially disruptive manifestations of it as romantic love.

The geographical and ecological separation of population areas also stimulated trade. Sharp differences in minerals, elevation, and water supply meant that certain desirable products were more readily available by importation than at home. Commerce in such products was extensive. Common, heavy items, for example, staple foods, were usually not moved any great distance because of the lack of long stretches of navigable rivers or convenient modes of land transportation. The mainspring of trade was the demand for luxury goods by the elite. Yet some more practical goods were sought and transported. Obsidian or volcanic glass was always in demand from the limited outcrops where it could be obtained. It constituted an essential material for the manufacture of many kinds of cutting implements, the sharp edges of its flakes or chips being more effective than any other available material. Good stone for making *metates* (grinding slabs for preparing cornmeal) was carried to areas lacking it. Then, of course, a variety of decorative and ritual materials for which the elite would pay well—exotic feathers, jade and other precious minerals, gold, cacao (cocoa) beans, incense, seashells and fine cloth—were also worth the cost and trouble of shipment (much as the spices so sought after in western Europe led to the age of discovery). Much of the profit from trade, incidentally, went to those of the nobility who bankrolled the expeditions. Meanwhile the desire to keep trade routes open and safe pushed rulers to maintain diplomatic ties with leaders over distant peoples. At the time of the Spanish conquest, Aztec trading representatives were operating as far away as Panama.

Craftsmen were numerous in and around the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan and in other heavily settled areas.

Gold, silver, and copper ornaments and tools, wooden and stone implements, textiles, pottery, and many other products of artisanry were exchanged in busy local markets. The Spaniards were impressed by the variety of goods and the order the rulers maintained in the markets. Also, specialists functioned in architecture, construction, and engineering of sorts; the building of causeways, defensive walls, drains, and major monuments was extensive. Bulky records were kept by scribes on paper made from the bark of the fig tree.

There were towns—ritual and market centers—scattered at fairly regular intervals in most Mesoamerican regions, but genuine cities were few. By far the most impressive city in Aztec times was the capital. The Spanish invaders considered it on a par with the cities of their homeland. Tenochtitlan had a minimum population of 150,000.⁵ In the absence of wheeled vehicles to provide transport, feeding such a mass of people was a challenge. In this case, water transport was essential; a horde of canoes threaded the lake and canals in the valley of Mexico, carrying provisions for use by the city dwellers. Tenochtitlan actually had been built up on a shallow part of the great lake that occupied much of the valley. The Mexica had slowly filled in building areas, connecting them with causeways or bridges that left a network of waterways to permit canoe transport. On land, slaves taken in the wars, together with workers among the commoners, carried the necessary materials on their backs. Thus, the metropolis was a hub of trade and tribute whose links extended routinely nearly 150 miles outward.⁶ Trading expeditions were sent even greater distances.

The details of the system briefly sketched here varied among the many peoples of Mesoamerica, but by A.D. 1519, when Cortez and his men arrived, the essentials of the pattern extended as much as 600 miles northwestward from the Aztec capital and to the southeast up to 900 miles. The total population affected could have been 30 million.⁷

Elsewhere in the Hemisphere

A glimpse at its hemispheric setting helps us appreciate the complexity of Mesoamerica. The only rival in scale and social elaboration was in Peru and the surrounding Andean area, ruled by the Incas. They appeared on the scene about when the Aztecs did, rising from obscurity to dominance within three centuries before the invasion by the Spaniards in 1532. Technology and cultivation were at about the same level of development as in Mexico. The llama as a beast of burden made a little difference in transport capability, but the ruggedness of the Andes mountains probably counteracted that. No records were kept—no writing was known—but oral transmission of information was highly systematic. The Incas were better administrators than the Aztecs; they positively controlled those whom they dominated by installing some of their own people in governing posts in conquered regions.⁸ Overall, the Aztec and Inca realms were equally complex, though we have no direct evidence that the two societies communicated with each other.

The cultural level dropped lower everywhere outward from these two high spots. Colombia, Panama and Central America formed an intermediate zone that shared some of the features of the two high-culture territories, but it is doubtful that any of these intervening areas contained what could be called a real city. Both Mexico and Peru, on the contrary, held a sizable number of cities.

Indians of the Mississippi River valley and part of the southeastern United States partook of important aspects of Mesoamerican life, watered down somewhat in the transmission northward. The peoples of these areas showed sophistication in some activities, but no scholar would call them civilized in any period, as we must the Mesoamericans. The Pueblo and neighboring peoples of New Mexico and Arizona, and a string of tribes stretching down mountainous western Mexico, also received much from

the civilization to the south. The problems of living in an unfriendly environment limited their ability to exploit the cultural stimuli they received, leaving them at a level no higher than that of the Mississippi Valley groups. In both those North American secondary zones, part of the culture and part of the population were an extension from Mesoamerica and thus probably of Book of Mormon peoples. In fact, all the agricultural peoples of North America, as far north as central Utah, Wisconsin, and Ohio, were more or less influenced by the Mesoamerican tradition. Farther north were only gatherers and hunting peoples, small in numbers and of little consequence to the history of the continent.

The Caribbean area existed at about the level of Central America, somewhat less than civilized. The tribes of eastern South America sometimes reached significant population levels, but problems in their environment, if nothing more, limited their development toward social and cultural complexity. Far southern South America, without agriculture for the most part and a literal end of the earth, counted for little in the big picture. For thousands of years back, roughly the same hemispheric picture prevailed.⁹ Mesoamerica and the central Andean zone were the cultural peaks. Everything else was inferior. At some periods, Mesoamerican influence and perhaps even peoples did arrive in parts of South America, but the two areas were only lightly connected at best.

From the Beginning

As a way to understand the Aztec and general Mesoamerican patterns more fully, let us now begin with the earliest vestiges of civilized life and briefly sketch developments up to the Spanish conquest. We'll detect considerable continuity and a few revolutions in cultural ways. Important patterns were passed on from generation to generation, right up to the time of the Aztecs. We will also look at certain key changes that highlighted this history. The Book of Mormon account will be interpreted as a record

of cultural development, alongside the Mesoamerican account. Space is too limited here to treat the history of the area in extensive detail. Instead, we will concentrate on cultural regularities—typical patterns of thought and action that seem to match up the Book of Mormon account with the picture in Mesoamerica.

The Big Picture

Plunging directly into a detailed presentation on early Mesoamerican life could be overwhelming to readers new to the subject. A brief overview is the best orientation. Examination of the general development of civilization in Mesoamerica will provide context for those portions of the sequence that relate to the Book of Mormon.

The older “world history” books some of us studied in high school simplified things neatly. Great chunks of time and sweeping events were summarized on a scale so that we at least got some idea that the Egyptian pyramids were built long before Rome, which was followed by the Dark Ages, and so on. We must oversimplify with equal daring here, justified by the clarity that results.

What happened in Mesoamerica may be thought of as the unfolding of two successive civilizational traditions, plus remnant half traditions of each. The earlier of the two stretched over the period from perhaps 2500 B.C. to just after 600 B.C. One of the halves is the washed-out remnant of that First Tradition, which dragged on to overlap with the Second. The latter had developed its essential form by 100 B.C.; it continued through an unsteady career to a slow decline, then gasped to an end by A.D. 600. The final half represented attempts at revival; various peoples kept trying to put together the humpty-dumpty of Tradition Two’s glory from A.D. 600 right up until the European conquest.

Tradition, as used here, means more than a civilization per se. For example, Roman civilization had its own unity. The much longer Western tradition of which it was a



Olmec giant stone head, from La Venta, probably portraying a warrior-leader. (Photo by Daniel Bates. Courtesy David A. Palmer and the Society for Early Historic Archaeology.)

part showed variation among its several regional and chronological manifestations. Yet a basic pattern tied those variants—such as the Roman one—into a loose fabric of consistency. Vital threads of history, symbols, values, and behavior significantly united them into a recognizable whole. The two traditions of Mesoamerica were on an equally grand scale.

The Olmec

Mesoamerica's First Tradition culminated in Olmec culture, much as classical Roman civilization was the climax on its line. The name Olmec has been conferred by modern investigators on a people (although more than one may have been involved) and their culture manifested in a remarkable set of archaeological sites and a distinctive art style. The remains are located primarily in a semi-circular area in and just north of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. We have no way of knowing the name the people used for

themselves; *Olmec*, meaning “people of the land that produces rubber,” is a name that legend assigns to a much later group who inhabited about the same territory. Archaeologists have appropriated it to denote a much older art style.

Olmec culture peaked around 1200 B.C. (by comparison, soon after the tribes of Israel occupied the land of Canaan under Joshua). The San Lorenzo Tenochtitlan site in the heart of the Isthmus displays the most spectacular remains credited to this culture. The place was first settled around 1700 B.C. An extensive low hill overlooked a surrounding flood plain that each rainy season turned into a morass. Within a few centuries the settlers set out on a daring project. They rebuilt the site on a grand scale. Millions of basketloads of soil were dumped on the flanks of the hill to extend the building area outward. The hilltop thus took the form of two parallel ridges on which the settlers constructed a spectacular ceremonial site.¹⁰ We suppose it to have been a religious center because of the exotic stone sculptures and structures found there. Ceramic and artifact styles of San Lorenzo spread as far as coastal Guatemala on the south and central Mexico on the north. The sophistication of the sculpture was rarely equaled at any period in Mesoamerica. The entire development has seemed mysterious in both its brilliance and the suddenness of its growth.

Just in the last decade we have begun to see that the Olmec climax was not really so abrupt or mysterious as it at first looked. Actually, a long period of development lay behind it which we are only now beginning to glimpse. Particularly in the Mexican states of Chiapas, Oaxaca, Puebla, and Morelos, sites investigated in recent years push back many of the ideas involved in Olmec life to a time earlier than the flowering of that culture in its Gulf Coast heartland.¹¹

Learning these facts is startling to scholars who only a few years ago realized that Olmec culture itself was far older than they had supposed. Not more than thirty years ago very respectable archaeologists were confident that the

Olmec remains dated not far from the time of Christ. Then an early series of radiocarbon dates showed that 800 to 400 B.C. was a likely duration. Still more recently, improved methods and further work have shown that the correct age for the Olmec and related cultures is from 1500 B.C. to around 600 B.C. And now we are faced with pre-Olmec remains that clearly extend back many centuries beyond 1500 B.C.¹²

A parallel occurrence in the Old World was the realization decades ago that Greek civilization actually had its roots in Minoan and Mycenaean cultures nearly a thousand years earlier. Later research has identified even more distant predecessors, far beyond anything the Greeks themselves remembered.

The rudiments of Mesoamerica's two major traditions were on the scene by about 3000 B.C. Corn farmers then lived in villages and displayed skills in pottery manufacture at a number of locations in south-central Mexico. The picture we have of life at that time is dim, for remains are scarce. We see nothing much of artistic and religious manifestations in public life until near 1500 B.C., but research over the next few years will surely bring more detail to light. What has been learned so far has taken a good deal of the mystery out of the Olmec phenomenon. That pattern of living developed continuously over a respectable period of time. Even at that, development was so rapid and spectacular that we must ask why.

More and more scientists are asking the same question. Dr. Betty Meggers of the Smithsonian Institution, in a major article published in March 1975, proposed that the Olmec development originated by direct transmission of key elements of culture across the Pacific Ocean from China during its Shang period (1750–1100 B.C.), when the Chinese tradition first took on its characteristic pattern.¹³ Earlier, Meggers and her husband, Dr. Clifford Evans, had discovered that certain early pottery fragments from Ecuador on South America's west coast were indistinguishable from ceramics found in Japan before 3000 B.C. They proposed

that voyagers had reached Ecuador from Asia by boat.¹⁴ In another article they discussed possibilities of sea travel across the north Pacific, where the Japan current sweeps up near the Aleutian Islands and Alaska before paralleling the California coast on the way south.¹⁵ Historical accounts from the last century report many Japanese fishing boats being blown out to sea, with survivors landing on the west coast of North America, so a crossing was possible. Meggers and Evans concluded that purposeful voyaging would have been feasible thousands of years ago. The rate of the current is such that a trip from Japan to west Mexico could have been made by a rather simple vessel in approximately a year.¹⁶ (The voyage of the Jaredites across the ocean, which seems to me to have been the north Pacific, in sailless “barges” took 344 days—Ether 2:16; 6:11.) Furthermore, the earliest pottery we know of in Mesoamerica, which may date as early as 2500 B.C., is located on the west Mexican coast, near Acapulco.¹⁷ Various researchers have challenged Meggers and Evans’s interpretation, but it remains a serious possibility to prominent students of the subject. Robert Heine-Geldern, David H. Kelley, Paul Tolstoy, and George F. Carter are among those who have argued in professional circles that we should look to transoceanic sources in order to explain fully how civilization originated in Mesoamerica.¹⁸ Indiana University’s Harold K. Schneider has most recently argued that any explanation for the rise of America’s high civilizations that fails to involve the movement of cultures across the oceans is weak theoretically.¹⁹ Increasingly, some anthropologists and archaeologists—though still a minority—are mustering evidence to show that early voyagers from the Old World could, and probably did, cross the ocean and settle in the New. Mormons have been saying that since 1829.

Much evidence has been published showing important, specific cultural elements present in both Mesoamerica and various Old World civilizations. Articles by Meggers, Tolstoy, and Schneider already referred to lay out some of that

information, mainly comparing East Asia with our area of New World interest. Evidence of a possible connection between Mesoamerica and the Near East, where the Book of Mormon peoples originated, is presented in my article in *Man Across the Sea*²⁰ the standard scholarly work on transoceanic voyaging. A list of detailed social and cultural characteristics shared by the two areas is given there, complete with references. Some of the more than 200 features are highly arbitrary, unusual, and complex. I find it harder to believe that these were coincidentally invented twice than that they were carried across the ocean by voyagers. (Many points of comparison between the Nephite world view and Mesoamerican and Near Eastern ideas, described in chapter 2, are taken from that article.)

Despite mounting evidence of significant transoceanic influence on Mesoamerica, there is no doubt whatever that many—perhaps most—aspects of culture in both the First and Second Traditions clearly did not come from the Old World. A unique configuration of distinctive, ancient patterns of life and thought characterizes this area at a fundamental level; no later introductions by diffusion would have changed those much.²¹ But this is like saying that early Egyptian culture was unlike that of Mesopotamia. Though that is true, it is also clear that Egyptian life was affected significantly by Mesopotamian ways and ideas, and the two areas were in communication from early times.²²

We cannot demonstrate at this time that Mesoamerica's civilizations originated because of influence from across the ocean, but in recent years the idea, once laughed at by the professionals, first became a half-respectable hypothesis and now is argued as plausible rather than merely possible. A trend is clear.

Our picture of the origin of the First Tradition remains dim, but its decline and fall can be seen more clearly. Of course, it didn't happen all at once. Periodic destructions, revolutions, or declines must have preceded the spectacular fall of Olmec San Lorenzo that took place shortly before

1000 B.C.; the place was ravaged, perhaps by some sort of internal upheaval. Scores of the remarkable sculptures were defaced, as far as determined pounding on hard stone allowed, and then ceremonially buried at great effort. The local society lost much of its vigor and influence.²³ Here and there revivals were then attempted. Other major Olmec sites arose, notably LaVenta, on an island in a swamp 60 miles east of San Lorenzo, and Laguna de los Cerros northwest of the fallen cultural capital. Continual shifts in cultural forms and geographical distribution of creative centers went on. Monte Negro, in highland Oaxaca, was thoroughly burned at one point.²⁴ The Oaxaca Valley was always influential. By around 500 B.C., La Venta, which had become a second San Lorenzo for brilliance, had been abandoned, its sculptures, too, defaced by angry people. Most scholars mark its fall as the end of the Olmec tradition.

These rises and falls of cities and regions, the intricate sequence of development and influences, and the complicated factors at play in the history of Tradition One are still being unraveled. After all, the question involves tens of thousands of square miles and more than two thousand years of events. In the present state of knowledge we can tender only a few impressions, though they are vivid ones. First, the technology level was impressive in a few particular ways, but it was vulnerable. The early inhabitants obviously used fewer crop varieties adapted to the many ecological zones than had been developed by Aztec times. The early peoples may always have hung on the edge of ecological disaster, and sometimes, it seems, it overtook them. Political instability could also have been a problem. Striking organizational feats are evident, such as mustering people to build the San Lorenzo site. Giant portrait heads of volcanic rock, weighing up to 20 tons, are thought to show helmeted chiefs or “kings” glorying in their power, yet their faces, too, were eventually battered. Long-distance trade characterized life during the First Tradition; at other times local narrowness seems evident. The long story is revealed

to us in tantalizingly brief glimpses of certain highlights; the historical process—the why of what happened—still eludes us.

As a kind of shorthand, I have used *Olmec* in a larger sense than archaeologists often do. Usually the term is restricted to the remains and people located in the lowland zone around the Tuxtla mountains. The ruins there are the most spectacular of the period. Major developments were taking place simultaneously in the highlands, but no single label exists for them, so I have lumped both coexisting regional developments under the one name, Olmec.

Finally, we cannot help being fascinated by, as one scholar put it, “the way the thing ends. . . . We are left without anything Olmec even to be considered . . . [that is much] later than . . . 600 B.C.”²⁵

The Leftovers

It was the system, not all the people or all the lifeways, that disappeared at the end of Olmec times. The network of rulership, prestige, trade, power, and wealth that produced and maintained the brilliant Olmec monuments and sites had been declining in quality for centuries, though still functioning on an impressive scale. By 700 B.C. the appearance of pyramid structures, ball-courts, and semi-urban centers signaled a culture modified much from the classical Olmec.²⁶ Probably internal conflicts were the cause of the final downfall. In the south-central zone of Veracruz and at La Venta, the revolution apparently was nearly total. Continuity of pottery styles suggests that in swamps and backwater neighborhoods small communities survived, but the notables and their spectacular works disappeared.

Toward the margins of what had been Mesoamerica, new people took advantage of the collapse of society in the center to move in, as the Toltecs and Aztecs would much later. Thus, the inhabitants of Ticoman and Cuicuilco, in the valley of Mexico, apparently came in from beyond the western limit of what had been high-culture country,

spreading their simpler version of life throughout the central Mexican plateau.²⁷

A number of these local developments carried on bits and pieces of Olmec ways between about 550 and 200 B.C.—the Francesa phase in Chiapas, early Monte Alban in Oaxaca, the Totemihuacan development in Puebla. Some of them became rather powerful, for example, Cuicuilco and Monte Alban. Yet they remained localized cultures, trading a little with neighbors, led by chiefs scuffling with others of the same sort as they tried to discover the key to glory and prosperity that legend must have told them their predecessors had enjoyed. Nowhere could they bring it off. At Cuicuilco, with its unusual round pyramid, a flourishing local development fell apart a bit before 200 B.C. under the impact of still newer folks (the Chupicuaro people) from “out west,” beyond the margin of civilization. They sacked Cuicuilco, interrupting throughout most of central Mexico whatever recovery had been in progress, then had their own brief decades of modest success before succumbing to the dominance of rising Teotihuacan.²⁸ Monte Alban in Oaxaca had become a thriving local center too, but its political power was restricted mainly to the valley of Oaxaca. The Mamom-phase settlers in the lowlands of the Yucatan peninsula spread widely, yet they remained scattered and politically inconsequential overall.

It is this clutch of local cultures that I term a “half” tradition. Dr. Ignacio Bernal has referred to about the same set of people as “Olmec III.”²⁹ Some features of the first civilizational tradition passed down through time via these scattered peoples, but the heart or essence of what had been Olmec civilization was nowhere to be found. In place of the former pattern, there was, for some centuries, simply no clearcut, unifying civilizational force.

Just what was the Mesoamerican heritage from the Olmec tradition? First, of course, was a set of successful ecological adjustments. The cultivated plants were a major contribution in themselves: corn, squash, beans, chile, and

several fruits. Physical remains prove the central role of these crops in the diet from long before. Naturally, more than the plants themselves was involved. Also passed down were techniques for planting and harvesting, and a body of knowledge about seasons, soils and climate, plus all the other relevant factors for making a living. The system of hieroglyphic writing and calendar that later became the vehicle for the records of the Maya civilization apparently had begun, at least in part, in Olmec times.³⁰ We know also of specific items of symbolism, lore, and ritual that filtered on down, especially at a folk level. In a sense the First Tradition provided many of the cultural raw materials that the makers of the Second Tradition used in their new configuration. European parallels to the process come easily to mind. Greek and Roman elements were clearly ancestral to the pattern of European life in, say, A.D. 1500. The Queen Isabella who bankrolled Columbus spoke neither Greek nor Latin, but without the Graeco-Roman inheritance she enjoyed from her ancestors, little of her life, or of Spain's, would have been as it was in her time.

The Jaredite Tradition

The words in the Book of Ether tell the Jaredite story in a manner that cannot be compared directly to the picture just sketched. The Book of Ether first has to be translated to cultural and historical terms, beyond what we can do here. The space limitations of this chapter allow only a few comparisons, yet they seem significant.

First, let us spell out the origin of the Jaredites in historical and cultural terms. When did the Jaredites originate as a people? Historical texts and archaeological research on Mesopotamia, their homeland, tell us that big pyramid-shaped temple platforms called *ziggurats* were being erected well before 3000 B.C.³¹ Nothing but one of them qualifies as "the great tower" referred to in Ether 1:33. If the departure of the Jaredite party from their original home had been many centuries later than 2700 B.C. or earlier than about

3300 B.C., their account about “the great tower” would sound odd in terms of Near Eastern history. (Incidentally, the zero date from which the Mesoamerican calendars were calculated was 3113 B.C., which might or might not be a coincidence.) We have already seen that the earliest evidences of some of the basic indicators of civilization—stable agriculture, village life, and ceramics—date in Mesoamerica after 3000 B.C.

There is no sound evidence, by the way, to support the idea from outmoded biblical commentaries that the great tower (“of Babel”) dated to near 2200 B.C., as some Latter-day Saints continue to believe. Indeed, contrary data abound.

The scale of Jaredite territory involved was never huge, as we have already seen. One capital, the land of Moron, was the Jaredite center from first to last. The Jaredites were essentially confined to the land northward until the time of King Lib (Ether 10:21), about 1300 B.C.³² The Book of Mormon reports that at that time Lib built a great city at the narrow neck of land, suggesting increased relationships with the land southward. The impressive “city” represented by the archaeological site of San Lorenzo Tenochtitlan, located on the river line between lands northward and southward, was built at about this time. The archaeological record tells us that earlier First Tradition settlements had been concentrated north of the isthmus, but that after 1500 B.C. significant though still secondary Olmec activity was manifested south of the neck.

After a checkered lineage history came the decline of the Jaredite fortunes. Ether 11 makes clear that from the time Com ruled, the system was in trouble. The internal dating of the account puts the sensational destruction at San Lorenzo close to the time of the troubles mentioned in Ether 11:4 and 6, although we have no way to confirm a direct correlation.

A key difficulty for Jaredite stability seems to have been the rivalry of prominent lineages. Ether’s whole volume is,

Figure 1

A comparison of events and conditions in Mesoamerica, the Book of Mormon, and the ancient Near East.
(Earlier dates are represented at the bottom, as they would be in archaeological excavations.)

Near East	Dates	Scriptural Account	Mesoamerican Sequence
Alexander	200 B.C.	Nephites / Lamanites People of Mosiah of Zarahemla	Second Tradition — “Theocratic”
Cyrus Lehi Isaiah	500 B.C.	Jaredite Destruction • Coriantumr / Ether • Ethem War and disruption • War, famine, destruction	End of Olmec Civilization • Increasing disruption • La Venta • Highland Olmec-related • Weaker San Lorenzo cultures
David	1000 B.C.	• Com / Many years of war • Secret combinations again • Rulers of Ether’s lineage in Moron captive Trade widespread	• San Lorenzo destruction Olmec peak Influence and trade becoming widespread
Moses	1500 B.C.	• Great city at neck • King Lib General stability and prosperity	• Origin of San Lorenzo General development toward civilization presumed from limited data
Joseph Jacob	2000 B.C.	• Riplakish Severe drought • Secret orders	Fragmentary remains show village agriculture life continuing Ceramics, agricultural villages begin
Abraham	2500 B.C.	• Emer rules • King Omer • Pioneer settlements • “The Great Tower”	
Sargon Egyptian pyramids Sumer Towers	3000 B.C.		

of course, a record of his lineage (Ether 1:6–33), that founded by Jared. The lineage of the religious leader, “the brother of Jared,” is given only brief mention, probably because that line concentrated on priestly affairs. (Note the difference in attitude toward kingship expressed by the two brothers [Ether 6:23–24] and the refusal of Pagag and his brothers to touch the political role [verses 25–26].) Yet eventually one of that lineage did seize rulership (Ether 11:17), whereupon the legitimate king, Moron, found himself captive. His sons after him suffered the same fate. There is a hint in all this of the reason for the dynastic rivalry told in Ether 10:30–32 and 11:17–19: the priestly line sometimes sought and obtained the secular power also.

The final destruction of the Jared ruling line could have been as early as 580 B.C. or as late as 400 B.C. The Book of Mormon does not tell us enough to allow a more precise determination, although I believe a date toward the earlier end of that span is preferable. The archaeological record presents numerous evidences around 550 B.C. for the end of the First Tradition. (See figure 1.)

Taking together the geographical setting, the cultural patterns, the agreement in dates, and many specific facts we cannot go into at this point, identifying the culture in which the Jaredites were involved with the First or Olmec Tradition is very reasonable.

Remnants

Nibley’s discussion of “Jaredite survivors” pointed out years ago that many Latter-day Saints had oversimplified how complete the “destruction” of the Jaredites was.³³ He argued, and the evidence is persuasive, that significant Jaredite elements persisted into Mulekite and Nephite times. Later chapters in this volume offer other evidence of cultural continuity from Jaredite into later times. There is really no question about it. Jaredite contributions to the later peoples were substantial, in just about the manner

and degree we have the Olmec tradition continuing into the post-Olmec era.

Now consider the Mulekites, a term commonly applied to the people referred to in the Book of Mormon as the people of Zarahemla, although the Nephite volume nowhere uses the term *Mulekite*. The Nephite record says so little of them that we have scanty material to compare with the external data. They probably arrived in the land southward within decades after 600 B.C., since their departure from the land of Israel was around the Babylonian capture of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. In Mesoamerican terms they come on the scene as the Olmec tradition concludes.³⁴ One gets the impression reading about chief Zarahemla's people in the Book of Omni that they were localized and unsophisticated (for example, they were not literate). Those characteristics ring true for what was going on at the same period in Mesoamerica. Reference to warfare in their background in the centuries before 200 B.C. (Omni 1:17) fits too.³⁵ In light of these agreements it is not unreasonable that the descendants of the shipload constituting Mulek's party were able to find a niche for themselves, incorporating and ruling over some remnant of the people left in the land southward after the abandonment of Olmec La Venta.³⁶ But both cultural and ecological difficulties must have limited them. Neither in size nor vigor did they amount to much by the time the Nephites encountered them. Zarahemla did not even claim the title "king," and the group was confined to a tiny territory. When Mosiah, the Nephite leader, appeared with his party among the Zarahemlaites, the latter seemed almost pathetically eager that somebody lead them toward what they considered real civilization. On the limited basis of archaeological findings, it appears that other groups dating to the immediate post-Olmec centuries had similar ambitions.

A summary of Mesoamerica's First Tradition and its aftermath in relation to the Jaredite account is given in table form in figure 1. That brief overview shows striking



La Venta Stela 3. This massive monument dating about the sixth century B.C. seems to show the meeting of leaders of two ethnic groups. The bearded man on the right looks very much like a Jew of that time. (Courtesy Kirk Magleby.)

parallels between the archaeological picture on the one hand and what the Book of Mormon says on the other. Enough parallels are visible that we can be optimistic about future, more detailed research results. Later in the book some details will be presented, but now we must have a look at the next major civilizational episode.

The Second Tradition

The Mesoamerican cultures best known to the public—spectacularly visible at the Early Classic Maya sites like Tikal and at Teotihuacan—are sometimes termed “theocratic” by scholars. The meaning of that label is muddy, but one thing it conveys is the idea of the dominance of religion or priesthood in society. The single characteristic of the Second Tradition that is most obvious is the centrality of religion and its priestly bearers.

The Olmecs and their contemporaries certainly did not

ignore the religious side of culture, yet it did not seem to loom nearly so large in their round of life as in the successor cultures. For the later peoples, ritual and thought about the supernatural power became nearly an obsession. Religious behavior was closely and complexly linked to all elements in their lives—making a living, marrying, having children, governing, warring, artistic expression, whatever. Intricate, subtle, sacred symbolism infused most of their architecture and artifacts. (When we have discovered more information about the Olmec era, they may, of course, show this characteristic to an equal degree.) The chief cultures of the early centuries of the Christian era in Mesoamerica emphasized the sacred to about the same high degree as the ancient Israelite and Egyptian peoples did.

Where and when did this pattern originate? As we saw in connection with the First Tradition, identifying the beginnings of any cultural pattern is not a clearcut business. Obviously, there will be fewer data the further back in time scholars press their inquiry, for the numbers of people and their surviving remains are sparser. Before we consider the dim beginnings, let us see what the pattern of the Second Tradition looked like when it first took clear form, in the century or so near the birth of Christ. The Late Pre-Classic Period in the terminology of the archaeologists was then turning into what is labeled the “Proto-Classic” or Terminal Pre-Classic, after about 100 B.C.

At that time in several locations in southern Mesoamerica a cultural configuration was evident that provided the essential skeleton for the later so-called Classic period. Some consider the Classic to have begun as early as A.D. 50, but all the experts agree that it was in full bloom by A.D. 300. Recent work demonstrates that no later than A.D. 200 the pattern existed in large-scale urban centers in a number of regions. Its characteristics included strong concern for the calendar and the prediction of key events in terms of that calendar; extensive public ceremonies; a hierarchy of priests whose power came chiefly from knowledge of

the complex symbols used in ritual, art, and architecture; elaborate public buildings for religious purposes; and extensive inter-regional commerce. The buildings were visually impressive, sometimes using cut stone where in earlier times it had been rare. Differences between social classes were also important, and the socially prestigious display of wealth became normal practice.

We must keep in mind that these distinctive features were the frosting on the cake. Beneath this exterior of sophisticated style was the old corn/beans/squash agriculture, supplemented with secondary but valuable foods like the avocado and cocoa. Daily life for most people may not have been markedly different from that of earlier centuries. We cannot tell the effect of showy religious ceremonialism on the private lives of the commoners, though it must have had some. Yet toward the end, from around A.D. 650 in central Mexico or A.D. 900 in Yucatan, while the superstructure passed away, folk life continued little changed. Beneath the pomp and circumstance, basic ways of living endured in many ways.

Before its first century B.C. crystallization, a foundation for the Second Tradition had been developing for several centuries. A large population had grown up in favorable spots, especially south of the isthmus. Major towns, if not cities, came into being. Trade networks began to span larger areas. A writing and calendrical system was elaborated and shared. Significant distinctions in wealth, social rank, and power began to emerge. Then around 125 B.C. among a number of these local peoples, the changes speeded up, moving toward take-off to high civilization, like a plane starting down the runway. By 50 B.C. the results had become impressive. In less than three more centuries, after some delays en route, this pattern had become the full Classic way of life.

Several dynamic centers were the focus of this growth—for example, the base of the Yucatan Peninsula, the foothills above Pacific coastal Guatemala and western El Salvador,

and the Oaxaca Valley. Another focus encompassed the central depression of Chiapas. There a large number of settlements had developed since around 300 B.C. Then in the period between 125 and 75 B.C., growth sped up; the sophistication of local society and evidence of trade rose markedly. From around 75 B.C. a rather sudden change occurred. People abandoned many of the scattered settlements and moved into major communities. That would not have taken place without newly concentrated political power. No doubt a vital element in that power and part of the "glue" holding together the social system was religion. But the rather sudden change in settlement is best explained by the threat of war.³⁷

Within this first century B.C., probably between 50 and 25 B.C., culture traits and perhaps migrating parties moved from central Chiapas to a number of distant spots. Specific evidence shows Chiapas' influence in the Maya lowland centers of Tikal and Altar de Sacrificios, the Oaxaca Valley, Tlapacoya at the south edge of the valley of Mexico, and central Veracruz.³⁸ From a localized culture a hundred years before, the Chiapas pattern had temporarily become something of a model with widespread influence.

The valley of Guatemala flourished at the same time. The giant site of Kaminaljuyu was clearly the center. Roughly between 100 and 50 B.C., dramatic social differences arose there also. The clearest demonstration of new rank distinctions comes from tombs found in one of the large pyramid mounds erected at this time. Most mounds were never excavated before being destroyed in recent decades, but one that was investigated, Mound E-III-3, the largest structure at the site, was about seventy feet high.³⁹ Its bulk was actually larger than the famous *ziggurat* at Ur in southern Mesopotamia, and the earth heaped up to construct the mound contained fragments of a vast number of pottery vessels. The two tombs built into the center of the structure included large numbers of handsome pots as well as other rich goods, left as offerings with the deceased. Those in-

tered must have been prominent leaders, for the bodies of sacrificed servants accompanied the honored figures.

The adjacent coastal region of Guatemala, together with the Kaminaljuyu area, seems to have been the cradle of the Second Tradition. There we find evidence from centuries before the Christian era of that special focus on ritual that was to become so prominent over most of Mesoamerica as time moved on.⁴⁰ Unfortunately, archaeological research so far has been too limited to answer the further questions we would like to pose about the origins of the Second Tradition.

The People of Lehi in Relation to the Second Tradition

This information about mounds, pottery, and social class may seem foreign to the Book of Mormon, but it is not. The Nephites and Lamanites were, after all, of flesh and blood too, burying their dead in particular ways, cooking in pots, trading, being governed by rulers, and otherwise following distinctive patterns of culture. When we read the Book of Mormon story to discover that culture, we find interesting ways in which the descendants from Lehi's party plausibly relate to the Second Tradition and could even have been a catalyst in its origin. Details must await other chapters, but immediately we can look at a few major points of the relationship.

In chapter 1 we identified central Chiapas as the likely land of Zarahemla. Kaminaljuyu in Guatemala was identified as probably the city of Nephi. When Mosiah the elder and the group with him left Nephi sometime shortly before 200 B.C. (Omni 1:12) going down out of the highlands (Guatemala) to a point on the Sidon river (central Chiapas), he began to rule over the "people of Zarahemla," whom he found there. Archaeological work demonstrates for that same period of time that those two vital centers of influence in the development of the Second Tradition in Mesoamerica



A late version of the elaborate Izapan art style, from Cerro de las Mesas, Veracruz (Stela 6). (After Covarrubias 1947.)



The same basic style from Dainzu, Oaxaca, half a millennium earlier. (Photo by Daniel Bates. Courtesy David A. Palmer and the Society for Early Historic Archaeology.)

Both carvings demonstrate extension of cultural influence and people from Chiapas into the land northward beyond the isthmus.

were culturally related to each other to a notable degree, as we would expect from the Book of Mormon.⁴¹

The scripture informs us also that priestly domination and a ceremonial emphasis were characteristic of the early Nephites (see Enos 1:23; Jarom 1:3–5). Moreover, it must have been around 125 B.C., in the reign of Mosiah the younger, when the social and political simplicity that had still prevailed under King Benjamin—who emphasized that he himself farmed—began to get complicated. Before long the rise of social rank, the growth of wealth, the rise of claimants to noble status (the “king-men”) and other indicators show a significantly different pattern from that of the classless farmers who had largely constituted the Nephites until that time. At roughly the same period, Nephite dissenters began to lead the Lamanites living in the old land of Nephi along the same path to class differentiation (see Mosiah 24:3–4, 6–7). The sacrifice of the servants who accompanied the occupant of the tomb in Mound E-III-3 recalls the harsh rule of the king of the Lamanites in the time of the Nephite missionaries (Alma 17:28–29). The “sepulchre” prepared for burying the Lamanite king (Alma 19:1) could well have been a tomb like the ones the archaeologists excavated at Kaminaljuyu. Moreover, the growth of wealth through trade is reported by the Book of Mormon for both the Nephites and the Lamanites at just about the same time we find Mesoamerican commerce notably expanding, according to the archaeological record of the first century B.C.

One of the crucial developments for the Nephites was the protracted period of warfare described in such detail late in the Book of Alma. (Even after it formally ended, war was periodically renewed throughout the next century.) People like Amalickiah, Moroni, Teancum, Helaman and his young warriors, and many others familiar to readers of the Book of Mormon gain their prominence from the account of this war. Because of that conflict, settlers

were sent to new localities for strategic military reasons. Existing settlements were often endangered and sometimes destroyed. Rulers used tough political expediency (Alma 51:15–22; 60:33–36) to deal with the necessities of a war that revolutionized Nephite life (Alma 62:39–41). All this fits strikingly with what we see taking place in Chiapas from around 75 B.C., about the same time as the Nephite record assigns such events.

Evidence of the diffusion of a theocratic pattern of society from Chiapas into surrounding areas occurs at about the time when, according to the Book of Helaman, people from the land southward began to migrate in significant numbers to the land north of the narrow neck while Nephite dissenters were influencing Lamanite lands on the south.

In the midst of this expansion, the southern tradition seemed to lose its thrust, yet activity picked up in the northern territory. The movement toward ceremonial- and class-dominated society that had spurted around the end of the pre-Christian era soon faltered. Something we can see only dimly held up continued development. About A.D. 50, give or take a few decades, in two of the best-known centers in Santa Rosa, Chiapas and Chiapa de Corzo, important buildings burned.⁴² Immediately afterward a drastically different, more restrained cultural development appeared on the scene, evidently interacting now not so much with highland Guatemala, as had been the case earlier, but with the isthmus area. These events bring to mind the Book of Mormon description of the burning of Zarahemla and other cities in the land southward, part of the destruction that marked the death of Jesus Christ around A.D. 30. After that, of course, the Savior appeared to the surviving Nephites at Bountiful. His teachings then led to the establishment of a new classless society in which all things were possessed “in common.” It spread from the isthmian sacred center to surrounding lands, including reconstructed Zarahemla (4 Nephi 1:1–8).

Interesting, though so far limited, evidence exists of natural catastrophes overtaking several Mesoamerican regions at about this time. The pause that occurred during the first century A.D. in the headlong course of development could have resulted in part from natural disruptions.⁴³ (Chapter 8 will discuss the destruction.) Internal social disruption may also have been a reason for the slowing down (notice 3 Nephi 7).

The archaeological record tells us little about the next 150 years, just as the Book of Mormon reveals few details about life from A.D. 50 to 200. The relative simplicity, dignity, and order of society and culture implied in the scripture in no way conflicts with the skimpy record we have from most of Mesoamerica. Art and artifacts seem to reflect an interval characterized as having “grandeur and refinement” or as being “elegant and noble.” Some old ritual ways had been given up (as reported in 3 Nephi 9:19),⁴⁴ yet the flamboyant cults that were to flourish a few centuries later had not yet become obvious. However, it is clear that worship of the god known as Quetzalcoatl goes back at least this early.⁴⁵

There is one important exception to the general rule of a quiet cultural holding pattern through these first centuries A.D. On the northern edge of Mesoamerica at that time lay the Teotihuacan Valley, an extension of the Valley of Mexico. In the first century B.C., about when southern influences had begun to bear noticeably upon the lands northward of the isthmus,⁴⁶ the population at Teotihuacan started dramatic growth. In the following century or more there is evidence of volcanic activity hinting at the possibility of a temporary pause in growth at the site; but mainly we see steady increase.⁴⁷ Construction of the great Pyramid of the Sun, as it was called by the Aztecs, dates between A.D. 125 and 150. By A.D. 200 the metropolis of Teotihuacan had grown to be the largest in the history of Mesoamerica, possibly having 100,000 inhabitants. Around A.D. 250 its influence was spreading at an unprecedented pace to distant

parts of Mesoamerica.⁴⁸ A spectacular flowering of Tradition Two was occurring. Lowland Maya society, too, with dated, carved monuments and elaborate ceremonialism, had by the same date crystallized all the essentials of its pattern. It shared a basic pattern with Teotihuacan, despite obvious style differences between the two. Both were expressions of “an old theocratic system,” as Professor Kubler puts it, in which the art had a “strongly marked liturgical character” and where “every mural or decorated vessel is a prayer.”⁴⁹ Regional variations on Second Tradition themes became visible at other flourishing centers, such as Cerro de las Mesas, Tajin, Monte Alban, and Kaminaljuyu.

This immense vigor—both in its nature and its power—has rarely been described better than in these words from the Book of Mormon:

And now, in this two hundred and first year [about A.D. 200] there began to be among them those who were lifted up in pride, such as the wearing of costly apparel, and all manner of fine pearls, and of the fine things of the world. And from that time forth they did have their goods and their substance no more common among them. And they began to be divided into classes; and they began to build up churches unto themselves to get gain. . . . There were many churches which professed to know the Christ. . . . Two hundred and forty-four years had passed away [since the birth of Christ], and . . . the more wicked part of the people did wax strong, and became exceedingly more numerous than were the people of God. And they did still continue to build up churches unto themselves, and adorn them with all manner of precious things. . . . When three hundred years had passed away, both the people of Nephi and the Lamanites had become exceedingly wicked one like unto another. And . . . the robbers of Gadianon did spread over all the face of the land . . . and gold and silver did they lay up in store in abundance, and did traffic in all manner of traffic [commerce] (4 Nephi 1:24–27, 40–41, 45–46).

This is a very accurate statement of what we know about the surge into full Classic life that was the culmination of the Second Tradition in Mesoamerica. The onset of what I call the Initial Classic (A.D. 50–200) led quickly to a definitive maturing of the pattern, visible in the Early Classic period from A.D. 200–400. This wealthy, influential, and highly authoritarian kind of society—exemplified by Teotihuacan—shows up in the archaeological record precisely when the Book of Mormon describes the sweeping changes quoted above, starting about A.D. 200.⁵⁰

Culmination and Decline

The Second Tradition reached peak vigor between A.D. 250 and 300. Later on, indicators of a bigger but not better version of the civilization appear; nevertheless, this short period was unique in its dynamism, something like Athens in the first half of the fifth century B.C. There was a bubbling vigor, a geographical expansion, and an exploration of the forms and assumptions inherent in the regional cultures that comprised the Second Tradition. Levey's interesting analysis of designs on Teotihuacan pots confirms the picture; his interpretation took certain decorative motifs as indicators of what psychologists label "the need for achievement." That factor correlates with creativity, growth, and progress. He concluded that it was precisely in the century ending at A.D. 300 when this drive climaxed, followed quickly by a precipitous decline.⁵¹

The religious symbolism in murals at the great metropolis has also been interpreted as showing the decline. The priests are thought to have elaborated the Quetzalcoatl-phrased theology beyond what common people could grasp and apply to meet their basic needs in worship.⁵² More manifest use of hallucinogenic drugs, apparently by the priestly class, also is in evidence as the Classic moves on.⁵³ Furthermore, it now appears that few if any significant public buildings were erected after the year 300, despite a continuing large population.⁵⁴ In a sense Teotihuacan may

have been “living off its fat” once it neared the fifth century. Not long after, armed men began appearing in the art, and physical evidence of cannibalism has been found near Teotihuacan dating to A.D. 450.⁵⁵ (Compare Mormon 4:14–15, 21; Moroni 9:10.) We seem to be witnessing in all this the progressive eroding away of civilization and the barbarization of the theocratic tradition.

The same process was taking place among the Maya-speaking peoples of the Guatemalan and Yucatan lowlands. Located toward the margin of Mesoamerican developments, they were slightly slower than other peoples in achieving a full expression of the Classic tradition. That meant that the theocratic pattern among them started disintegrating soon after it reached maturity. These groups, long supposed by scholars to be wholly peaceful, are now seen quite differently. In 1964, Samuel K. Lothrop observed, “It has been held that the Maya pursued a peaceful existence. From the beginning of the Classical era, however, the treading of victors on captives is represented and such scenes carved in stone increase in number and complexity with the passage of time.”⁵⁶ Twelve years later new findings permitted Webster to assert much more strongly that “warfare was practiced in the Maya lowlands from at least Early Classic times (A.D. 300–550) onward.”⁵⁷ Now even that statement fails to do justice to our picture of the military manifestations in early Mesoamerican life.

In such a setting we cannot view the extermination of the Nephites near the end of the fourth century A.D. as an isolated instance caused by a unique ethnic jealousy. What was going on instead in those times was “one complete revolution throughout all the face of the land” (Mormon 2:8). After the Nephites as a group had become extinct, wars continued to be “exceedingly fierce” among the Lamanites and “robbers” who remained (Moroni 1:2; Mormon 8:8). In prophecy Nephi had seen that the “multitudes” of post-Cumora people (1 Nephi 12:20–21) would go right on fighting, generation after generation. The “final” battle

of the Nephites was final only from the Nephite point of view. By the late fourth century, the Nephites were only one group distinguished in no particular way from other groups (Mormon 5:15–17; Moroni 9:9–19) except perhaps by their small numbers (Mormon 4:17; 5:6; 6:8). (In a similar manner, Latter-day Saint accounts naturally tend to make the trek of their ancestral pioneers to Utah a central fact in the history of the American West, but a wider view sees it as a modest, though highly dramatic, part of a vast stream of migration westward across North America—which has not ended yet.)

The beginning of the military phase of the Nephite decline as described in their record began with their being driven out of the Zarahemla area by Lamanites from the old highland Nephi area. In terms of the geography we are using, this would show up as noticeable depopulation of central Chiapas in the Early Classic (around A.D. 350), with highland Guatemalan people filling the void. Chapter 8 will present detailed archaeological data showing just that sequence. In summary, at the site of Mirador, which could be what the Nephites called at that time either the city of Angola or part of the land of David (Mormon 2:4–5), the key public structure represented by Mound 10 was ravaged by an intense fire that totally destroyed the building. A period of abandonment was then followed by a new population that had cultural connections to the Guatemalan highlands.⁵⁸ This was one manifestation, datable to near A.D. 350 in the archaeological record, of a rather general disappearance of Early Classic society from central Chiapas, followed by sparse settlement of a successor group.

Archaeological work done in the area where the final Nephite battles took place—supposing that to be around the Tuxtla Mountains of Veracruz—is not sufficiently detailed to identify evidence of battles. Someday we'll get a clearer picture; however, the story was no doubt complicated, as all wars are. Even as the wars continued, a

measure of normal life obviously went on too. After all, corn and beans had to be planted and harvested annually. And much of the pattern of social structure, knowledge, and values was taught to the younger generation. Between A.D. 400 and 500 ambitious “big shots” from Teotihuacan increasingly spread to other areas, taking over local control as far as they could where they settled. These central Mexicans seem to have enriched themselves off tribute from local communities and off the trade in luxury goods that they promoted.⁵⁹ By A.D. 500 they had installed themselves at key points at spectacular Tikal in the Mayan lowlands of Guatemala, at Kaminaljuyu, and in other spots, even as the level of culture and prosperity back in their home area of Central Mexico ebbed.

In some ways the cultural achievements of this Middle Classic time were notable, but societal stress continued. At Becan, in the middle of the Yucatan peninsula, Teotihuacan adventurers seem to have taken over control from local Mayan leaders, who earlier had erected a huge wall and ditch around the place to fortify it. Excavations showed fragments of human remains in debris around the site, probably battle remains.⁶⁰ War and tensions prevailed in other areas at the same time.

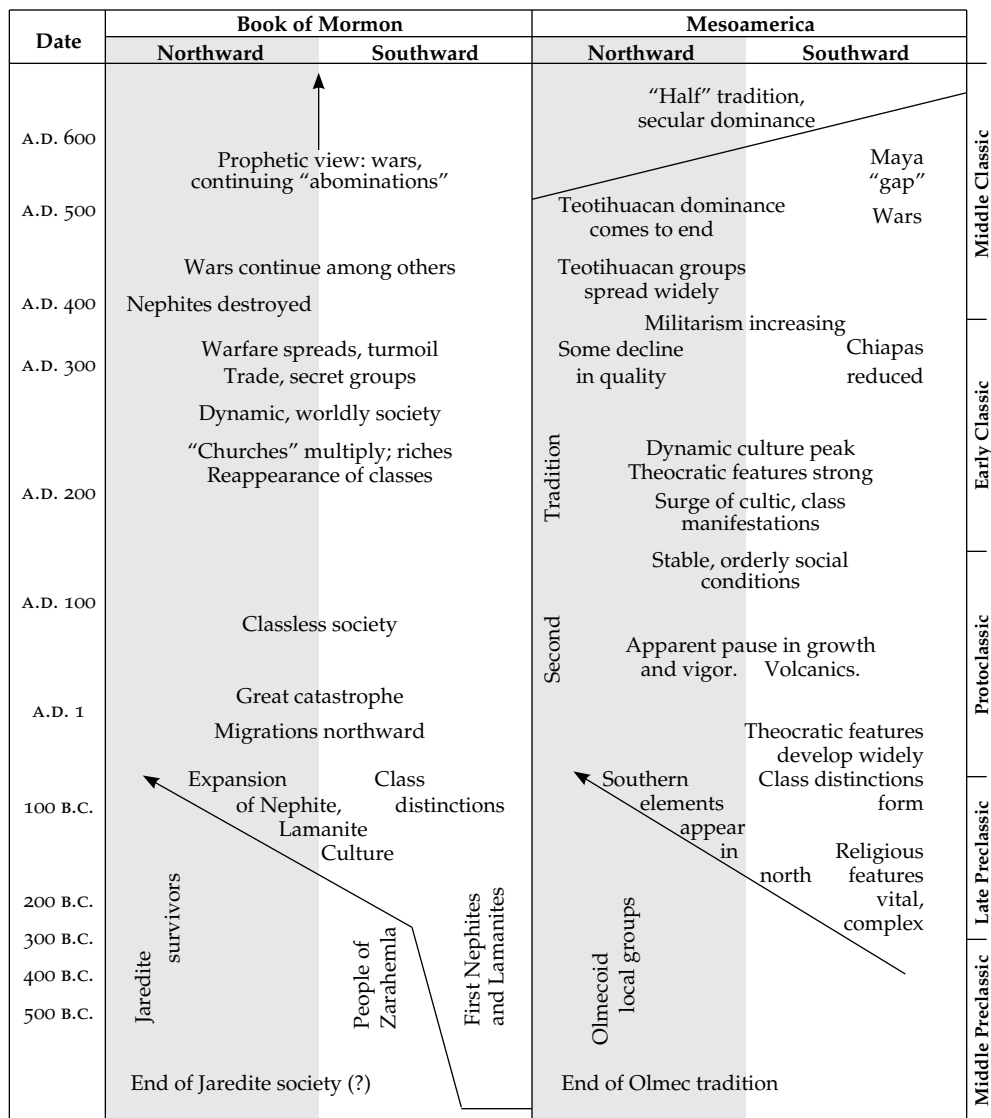
It now seems that the last gasp of what I have termed the Second Tradition came around A.D. 550.⁶¹ About then all the major centers were completing a shift from theocratic to a secular pattern of living. No longer was there the pretense of maintaining the forms of the old ceremonialism. The Teotihuacan system came apart first, and that was like pulling the keystone out of an arch. And after A.D. 534 (the last dated Middle Classic monument), the Maya, at the other extreme of Mesoamerica, defaced many of their carved stela and did not bother making new ones for nearly seventy-five years.⁶² (See figure 2.)

The new “half tradition” that emerged out of the shambles had frankly different aims than did the earlier civilization, even while much of its cultural trappings looked the same as before. “Personal glorification, the cult of war,

Figure 2

Comparison of events and trends in Mesoamerica, and the Book of Mormon, both in the land northward (shaded areas) and the land southward (unshaded).

(Earlier dates are represented at the bottom, as they would be in archaeological remains; therefore, study this chart from bottom to top for chronological sequence.)



and the appearance of dynastic lineages are the traits of the new, emerging society of the centuries after 500 A.D.," J. Eric Thompson noted.⁶³ Under this new order of things, matters having to do with sacredness were secondary instead of primary. Religion became a means to secular ends rather than an end in itself. The priests served the rulers and their purposes; before, there had been at least the appearance that the cults or "churches" were central. In the Late Classic period (A.D. 600–830) the aims were frankly prestige, wealth, and lineage dominance.

At that point, the course ahead for the rest of Mesoamerica's history until the Spanish arrival was clear. Barbaric practices such as human sacrifice (compare Mormon 4:15; Moroni 9:8–10) expanded. Warfare became institutionalized; in fact, scholars have sometimes characterized the whole Post-Classic era (A.D. 900–) as "Militaristic," but it is increasingly apparent that warfare became an important social phenomenon centuries earlier. The "Toltecs" were a set of peoples dating over a period of several centuries who sought to inherit or recreate the glories they saw reflected in the Classic ruins and traditions. Their approach more often than not was to obtain from an existing center of political power a charter to exploit a particular area and its subject population. Traditional documents like the *Popol Vuh* of Guatemala show how the system worked. (A comparison to a Mafia "family" with "territorial rights" to the rackets in a given city is not far-fetched.) And this brings us full circle to the Aztecs, the last of the would-be Toltecs.

What we have seen in this all-too-brief summary of what happened in Mesoamerica is that what the Book of Mormon tells us of culture history, when read carefully, agrees with the main lines of the Mesoamerican sequence. At some points the agreement is really striking. At no point are the two in serious conflict, if we realize the subjective viewpoint that constrained the scribes who kept the record for the lineage of Nephi.

Another point also is vital. Latter-day Saints have always repeated what the Book of Mormon itself says, that it is

mainly addressed to the descendants of the ancient peoples whose story it presents. Yet it has never been clear how the connection was to be made between, say, Nephi in the Arabian desert at one extreme of time, and at the other extreme modern Amerindians. No historical linkage or psychological tie of any substance between the two will work unless believable continuity from one to the other can be established. To do that demands paying attention to those peoples who occupied America, and especially Mesoamerica, after the Book of Mormon account closed. We must be concerned with them, for they are in the line of cultural and biological descent from Lehi to his modern descendants. If those descendants are to turn their hearts to their fathers (Malachi 4:6; 3 Nephi 25:6), how shall they do it unless we help them connect themselves to their ancestors of A.D. 1600, and 1300, and 600? Ways that have been passed down through Mesoamerican traditions are for some people a heritage to be grasped, not merely exotic trivia. We who have a different heritage should be filling in the gaps, linking up real past and real present—concretely, believably, and truthfully—and not just continuing to construct stories and pageants that we then label “Lamanite.” If Latter-day Saints believe the Book of Mormon is real, as they say, they should treat its setting as reality.

4

The Early Nephites in Their Setting

Supposing the geographical and cultural setting laid out in our previous chapters is sound, we can now put events into the setting. From here on, with the exception of chapter 7, we will more or less follow the order of the Book of Mormon account, putting actors and events in their places to see how a knowledge of geography and culture sheds new light on the old book.

Lehi and his party launched their vessel into the Indian Ocean from the south coast of the Arabian peninsula.¹ The winds no doubt bore them on the same sea lanes that Arab, Chinese and Portuguese ships used later, touching India and ultimately the Malayan peninsula. From that point Nephi's ship could have threaded through the islands of the western Pacific, then across the open reaches north of the equator to landfall around 14 degrees north latitude. Nephi left us no information in the Book of Mormon about the route, nor did he tell us in modern terms where they landed. But when we analyze Book of Mormon statements about geography and events, the "land of first inheritance" can lie only on the west (Pacific) coast of Central America (1 Nephi 18:23; Alma 22:28; see chapter 1).

By 75 B.C. the Nephites distinguished three sectors along the west edge of the land southward, all "bordering along by the seashore." From south to north these were (1) "on the west, in the land of Nephi, in the place of their fathers' first inheritance," (2) "on the west, in the land of Nephi," and (3) "on the west of the land of Zarahemla" (Alma 22:28). When Nephi's party fled the first of these zones in fear of his elder brothers, they traveled "many days,"

ending up at a site where they named their settlement for their leader, Nephi. They were still not far from the coast (2 Nephi 5:7–8). That suggests that the city Nephi was not directly inland from the first landing spot (had they traveled “many days” straight inland they would have ended up far from the sea; so I infer they must have moved northward along the coastal strip and then gone inland). The only geographical alignment that will accommodate both 2 Nephi 5 and Alma 22 is something close to what is shown on map 5. Chapter 1 presented reasons why the Valley of Guatemala probably contained the city of Nephi; the southernmost portion of Guatemala’s Pacific coast or adjacent El Salvador is most likely where Lehi’s party landed and first settled.

While in that first, coastal land, the immigrant colony planted seeds they had brought from Jerusalem. These flourished, Nephi reported (1 Nephi 18:24), but what happened to them later? The experience of pioneers suggests that first success for an imported crop does not necessarily mean continued vigor for it. Flourishing plants don’t always yield good seed in turn. Bishop Diego de Landa in sixteenth century Yucatan used language very similar to Nephi’s: “We have set them [the Indians] to raising [European] millet and it grows marvelously well and is a good kind of sustenance.”² Yet nearly four centuries later, when Carnegie Institution botanists researched the plant inventory in that area, they failed to find a trace of the millet about which Landa had been so enthusiastic.³

What happened later to those plants from the seeds the Lehi party carried across the ocean is not stated, but at least by 130 B.C. “corn” (that is, maize)—a native plant of America—had become the leading crop in the land of Nephi. Mosiah 7:22 and 9:9 both list this crop first in the Zeniffite food supply, and the neighboring Lamanites wanted mainly maize (verse 14). Corn is a plant so completely dependent on man that it does not grow in the wild. Ever since it was first cultivated thousands of years before the Nephites arrived, it had had to be tended by human hands and passed

on from generation to generation. We are given no hint of who taught Lehi's descendants to grow corn, nor of who gave them the seed. Of course, the people of Zeniff—the corn growers of Mosiah 9—had come from Zarahemla, but where would *they* have got it? The obvious source in Book of Mormon terms would be Jaredite survivors.

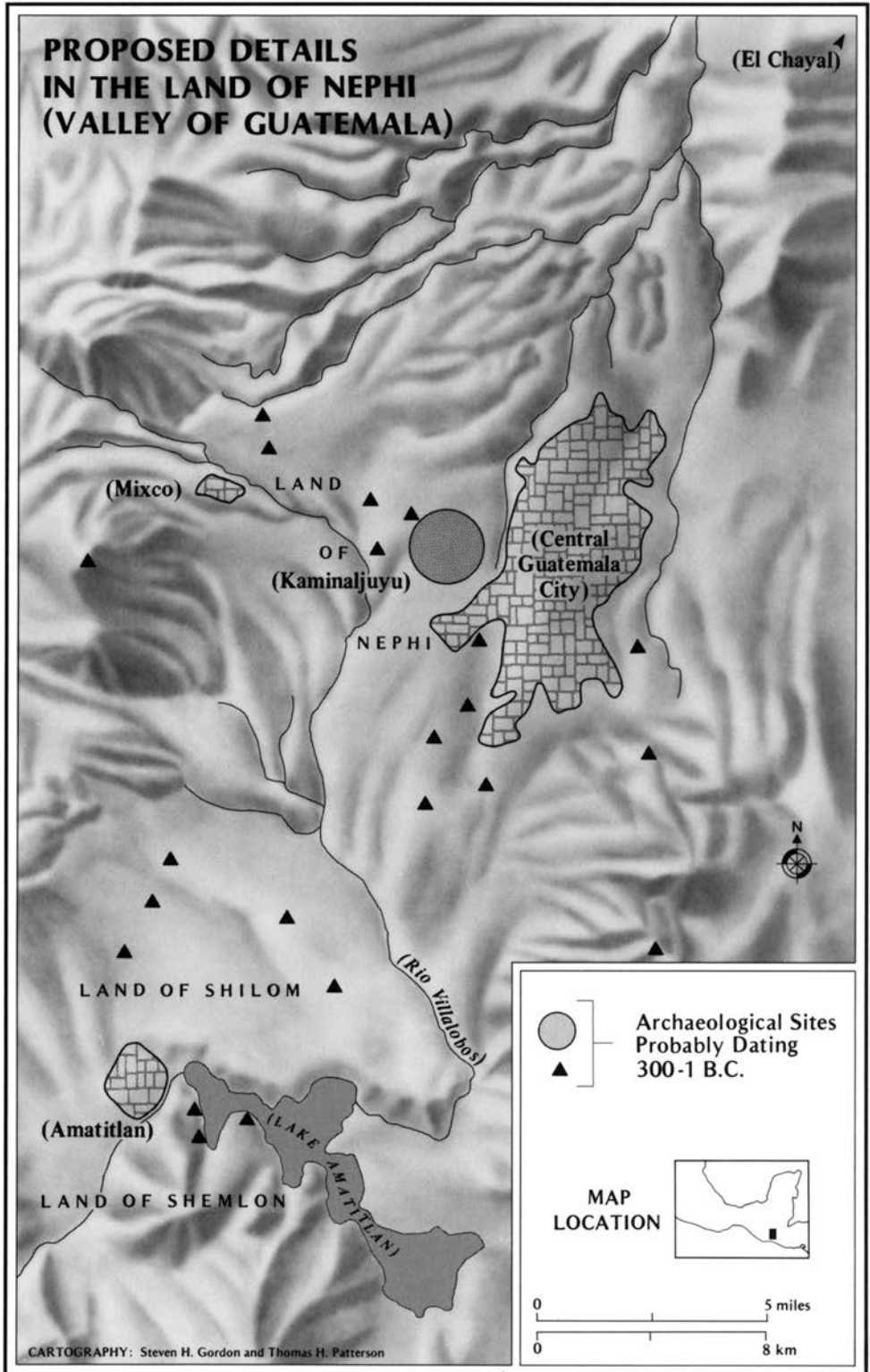
What can we tell about living conditions in the land of first inheritance? The coastal plain where the landing of Lehi would have occurred was uncomfortably hot and humid. That climate favored rapid crop growth, but the weather would be unpleasant for colonizers. The Nephites soon fled up to the land of Nephi, where the elevation permitted living in greater comfort. As Nephi tells the story, the Lamanites down in the hot lowlands were nomadic hunters, bloodthirsty, near naked, and lazy (2 Nephi 5:24; Enos 1:20). The circumstances of life in that environment could account for some of those characteristics. Many centuries later the Spaniards spoke in like terms of natives in the same area. The Tomas Medel manuscript, dating about A.D. 1550, just a generation after the first Spaniards arrived in the area, reported that the Indian men on the Pacific coast of Guatemala “spent their entire lives as naked as when they were born.”⁴ That practice may have seemed a sensible response to the oppressive climate. In the late seventeenth century Catholic priest Fuentes y Guzman contrasted the “lassitude and laziness” of the same lowlanders with the energy of the highland inhabitants.⁵ As for getting a living, the tangle of forest and swamp along the coast itself may have been too hard for the Lamanite newcomers to farm effectively, since they wouldn't immediately get the knack of cultivation in that locale. (They, or their fathers, might not even have been farmers in Palestine.) It may have been economically smart for them to hunt and gather the abundant natural food from the estuaries, while again the damp heat would make their lack of energy understandable.

The Land of Nephi

Where the party of Nephi settled was quite surely the Valley of Guatemala, or, as they named it, the land of Nephi. The continental divide runs right through the valley, present-day Guatemala City, and the ancient city of Nephi (Kaminaljuyu) at an elevation of about 5,000 feet. Water on one side of the city flows eastward to the Caribbean, that on the other to the Pacific. This is the largest and most productive valley in highland Guatemala. The climate is famous: spring-like and temperate, with only infrequent cold rains and squalls—a marvelous spot in which to settle.⁶ The river that drains the valley southwestward provides a pass between the mountains that would all but invite Nephi's party to "come up" as they moved along the lowlands in their flight.

Two strong reasons stand out why the Valley of Guatemala should be considered the original land of Nephi. The first is that the site of Kaminaljuyu was for many centuries the dominant cultural center for all highland Guatemala, the most important spot for several hundred miles around. The great size (at least a mile square) and impressive constructions of Kaminaljuyu underline its key importance and that of the valley. The land of Nephi is portrayed in the Book of Mormon as dominant among its neighbors to the same degree. A second big reason for considering Nephi to have been here is that customs, details of terrain, and the dating of the archaeological remains correlate closely with what is reported in the Book of Mormon. We'll look later at some of those features.

Established in this setting, Nephi's group set about to reproduce some aspects of civilization as they recalled it from the land of Jerusalem. Nephi credits divine inspiration for helping him tackle the problems facing the colony. Certain aspects of Israelite life he was happy enough to let die out because he considered them evil (2 Nephi 25:1–2, 6). He passed on as much practical knowledge as he was able.



Map 6

Metallurgy and animal care are mentioned as part of that technological legacy (both will receive separate discussion in chapter 7). But since a number of statements are made about the temple built under Nephi's direction, let us see what nonscriptural sources can tell us about its probable nature.

Their first temple was constructed "after the manner of the temple of Solomon" (2 Nephi 5:16), a structure Nephi himself had seen many times in Jerusalem, for the old building was still standing when Lehi and his family left the land of Judah. How was this American temple built? Differing in details from its Old World models, Nephi assures us (2 Nephi 5:16). The Nephites used different materials, so the techniques of construction could not be the same as in the Jerusalem model. So when Nephi said that the "manner of construction" was the same as in Jerusalem, he could only have meant that the general pattern was similar. What was that pattern, and what was its function?

The temple of Solomon was built on a platform and on a hill, so people literally went "up" to it. Inside were distinct rooms of differing sacredness. Outside the building itself was a courtyard or plaza surrounded by a wall. Sacrifices were made in that space, atop altars of stepped or terraced form. The levels of the altar structure represented the layered universe as Israelites and other Near Eastern peoples conceived of it.⁷ The temple building was oriented so that the rising of the sun on equinoctial day (either March 21 or September 21) sent the earliest rays—considered "the glory of the Lord"—to shine through the temple doors, which were opened for the occasion, directly into the holiest part.⁸ The same features generally characterized Mesoamerican temple complexes. The holy building that was the temple proper was of modest size, while the courtyard area received greater attention. Torquemada, an early Spanish priest in the New World, compared the plan of Mexican temples with that of the temple of Solomon, and a modern scholar agrees.⁹

The site of Nephi's city is today so covered with buildings



The area of Guatemala City suggested as the immediate land of Nephi. (Courtesy Richard Jones.)



Part of Kaminaljuyu, the large site within Guatemala City that qualifies as the city of Nephi. (Courtesy Richard Jones.)

and despoiled by the growth of Guatemala City that we likely will never learn much more about the ancient city than the glimpse of it that limited archaeological excavation has already provided. There is no hope to recover hard evidence of Nephi's original temple itself, but we would expect the pattern he followed to set a precedent that might be repeated long afterward. The Solomonic features that struck Torquemada could stem from what Nephi and his people introduced over 2,500 years ago.

The centuries after Nephi and his brother Jacob died are barely described in the Book of Mormon. Neither the scriptural record nor archaeology tells us much about how life went on at that time, but Pennsylvania State University in the late 1960s investigated some remains of the occupation of Kaminaljuyu dating from the third to sixth centuries B.C., the period the books of Enos and Omni represent so briefly. The settlement then was already good sized. The excavators interpret it as having been occupied by several kin groups or lineages (notice Jacob 1:13), each living in a certain sector of the site.¹⁰ The central sacred area at that time seems to have consisted of rows of large burial mounds. These were probably where the elders of the kin groups were buried and honored.¹¹ This custom basically agrees with the treatment of honored leaders of Israelite kin groups in Palestine when they died.¹² Perhaps during the centuries of warfare and "stiff-neckedness" after Nephi and Jacob died (Enos 1:22–24), the original temple fell into disuse as a center for religious practices, while burial rites for the group's patriarchs were emphasized. At least we hear nothing about the temple between Jacob's day and the time when the Zeniffites reoccupied the land, about 400 years later (Jacob 1:17; Mosiah 11:10, 12; compare Alma 10:2).

By around 275 B.C. the "more wicked part of the Nephites" had been destroyed, apparently in wars with the Lamanites (Omni 1:5–7), while the Lamanites had apparently flourished, at least in numbers. Why the Lamanites

should have come to be “exceeding more numerous than” the Nephites (Jarom 1:6) was touched on in chapter 2. The Nephites pictured themselves as thoroughly civilized (Jarom 1:8) and so would logically outnumber the Lamanites. Almost invariably, settled cultivators—the Nephites—would reach a far higher population level than a people characterized as hunters. Then where did all those Lamanites come from?

The answer probably is that the Lamanites in the original immigrant group became dominant over a native population already scattered on the land when Lehi arrived. As far as the Nephites were concerned, those subject folk would have been treated the same as the original Lamanites, even if some physical or cultural differences between them were apparent. “Cursed shall be the seed of him that mixeth with their seed; for they shall be cursed even with the same cursing. And the Lord spake it, and it was done” (2 Nephi 5:23). That sounds like historical fact already accomplished more than a mere warning to future Nephites. The fervid ambition of Laman and Lemuel to be rulers would have driven them to try to dominate not only the Nephites (2 Nephi 5:3, 14) but anybody else who happened to be around.

Latter-day Saints are not used to the idea that other people than Lehi’s immediate descendants were on the Book of Mormon scene. Abundant evidence from archaeological and linguistic studies assures us that such people were indeed present, so we need to understand how the Book of Mormon account accommodates that fact. We saw earlier the nature of the Book of Mormon as a lineage history of Nephi’s descendants. It does not claim to be, and clearly is not, a history in our modern sense of that term; it never purports to give a systematic picture of “what happened” throughout its geographical area. Native Mesoamerican lineage records of later date did the same thing—interpreting peoples and events from the viewpoint of the elite record keepers of each lineage.¹³ Some ambitious noble

lineages moved from place to place seeking local people to subjugate. That was true of groups of Teotihuacanos, "Toltecs," Cuicatecs, Mixtecs, and others. If fortune favored them and power came within their grasp, then the subject people often found it expedient to "get on the bandwagon" by doctoring their own genealogies, subordinating their original traditions, and rewriting their history to make it conform where possible to the official version of the rulers. (In some circles in the United States this understandable tendency is seen in the "Mayflower ancestor" phenomenon.) A study cited earlier showed that a traditional history from western Mexico that claimed to give the origin of the Tarascan people could not be squared with archaeological facts; the basic population had been there long before the arrival of the group whose tradition claimed that history began with their arrival.¹⁴ Similarly, the famous Maori tradition claiming first settlement of New Zealand centuries ago by the arrival of a particular set of canoes is now known to be oversimplified; other people were already there. Seemingly inconsequential to the more powerful newcomers, the natives were ignored in the traditions.¹⁵ And now the schoolboy's familiar date of 753 B.C. for the founding of Rome has fallen victim to the same phenomenon. "The latest archaeological evidence suggests that there was a thriving confederation of Latin-speaking cities, of which Rome was a member, for at least 200 years before this," we are told. Classical archaeologist John Ward Perkins put his finger directly on the problem in dealing with this sort of "history": "The old theories were too simple."¹⁶ And so, it appears, is the theory held by many Latter-day Saints that Indian cultures started from scratch in a virgin land about 600 B.C. Descendant rulers, but not necessarily all their subjects, considered Lehi's landing as a key date.

Language and archaeological studies assure us that there were inhabitants in coastal Guatemala at 600 B.C., but the number could have been low. The fact that the Olmec (Jaredite-related) tradition was then in the final

stage of disintegration meant that the remnants living in the area of Lehi's landing would have been disorganized, not about to challenge mysterious newcomers. Laman's and Lemuel's ambition (we might compare them to Cortez) could well have thrust the Israelite immigrants into dominance and led the locals to recast their views to agree with the story told by the immigrant rulers, effectively making the newcomers into a replacement for the former Olmec chiefs they had been serving. The rapid expansion in numbers of Lamanites, suggested in the Nephite record had to owe more to a scenario like this than to an unlikely dramatic demographic expansion and ecological florescence by Laman, Lemuel and company.

From Nephi to Zarahemla

Internal troubles and Lamanite attacks eventually forced the prophetic tradition among the Nephites to seek a new home. Just as Nephi earlier had had to escape from enemies in that first coastal settlement, around 210 B.C. Mosiah, "being warned of the Lord that he should flee out of the land of Nephi . . . departed out of the land into the wilderness." He and his people were then divinely led "down into the land which is called the land of Zarahemla" (Omni 1:12–13). In terms of the geography that was laid out in chapter 1, Mosiah descended from highland Guatemala into the drainage basin of the Sidon river. "And they discovered a people, who were called the people of Zarahemla. . . . At the time that Mosiah discovered them, they had become exceeding numerous" (Omni 1:14, 17)—at least in comparison to Mosiah's band.

"The people of Zarahemla" seem to have been named after their leader, who reported to Mosiah that his ancestors had arrived from the Mediterranean area by boat and that he was a descendant of "Mulek," a son of Zedekiah, the last of the Jewish kings before the Exile. The voyage first arrived in the land northward, then moved on south.¹⁷ Probably they first settled at the east-coast site known

later as “the city of Mulek” (note Alma 8:7). “And they came from there up into the south wilderness” (Alma 22:31), where Mosiah later encountered their descendants. Factions had warred among themselves; Zarahemla was now chief over one group (Omni 1:17). If the city of Zarahemla was named after him (or his father), then his group would not have been in that spot for very long, although they might have lived in the general locale for some time.

Those Mediterranean voyagers probably did what the Lamanites did, that is, use superior skills and knowledge they had brought with them to gain dominance over local remnants of the previous civilization. By the time Mosiah got to them, they must have represented a mixture of characteristics in which American features overshadowed the Israelite culture they retained, as Omni 1:17 implies. Stela 3 from La Venta, which qualifies geographically as “the city of Mulek,” portrays a meeting between a local leader and an immigrant chief with facial characteristics at home in the Holy Land. At least prominent archaeologists have interpreted the scene in that way.¹⁸ Could Mulek be represented in a ceremonial greeting to the natives? The date of Stela 3 is uncertain, but the best archaeological judgment places it in the sixth century B.C., the time when the party of Mulek would have landed.¹⁹ Other data support the possibility that voyagers from the eastern Mediterranean (“Phoenicians”) reached La Venta.²⁰

What Mosiah found is made clearer by a close look at the geographical setting of the city and immediate land of Zarahemla. To do that we jump ahead in time to examine a revealing event among the Nephites approximately 110 years after Mosiah came to Zarahemla. One Amlici was then trying to subvert the Nephite political structure of “the judges” in order to get himself made monarch (Alma 2:1–8). A battle ensued on the east side of the river Sidon. (See map 7.)

Amlici and his followers were driven by the Nephite majority from the initial battlefield south and east to the

upland valley of Gideon. During the night the Amlicites secretly broke camp, descended to the river farther upstream, and crossed it. There they rendezvoused with a big Lamanite army coming down from the land of Nephi by pre-arrangement to attack Zarahemla. Informed by spies of this turn of events, the Nephite forces hastily left Gideon for the river to intercept the invaders before, as the Nephites feared, “they [would] obtain possession of our city” (Alma 2:25). We can imagine their dashing along the most direct route toward the last feasible river ford where they could stop the enemy. Just as they were crossing the stream, the Lamanite-Amlicite force, “as numerous almost, as it were, as the sands of the sea” (verse 27), collided with them on the west bank. In a surge of vigor, the Nephites won the day, scattering their opponents and killing many of them.

From this story we get valuable information about local geography. The city of Zarahemla was on the west side of the river and probably adjacent to it (Alma 2:15, 25–27). Alma later baptized the people of the land of Zarahemla in the river Sidon (Alma 4:4; 6:1–2, 7), which confirms that the city and its nearby settlement area stretched along the river and was quite close to it. Strong reinforcement for this idea comes from what happened the year after the Amlicite affair. A food shortage in the land of Zarahemla was blamed on the “loss of their fields of grain, which were trodden under foot and destroyed by the Lamanites” during the battle and flight (Alma 4:2). Apparently the most productive agricultural lands were concentrated immediately next to the river, upstream a bit from the city.

The battle account underlines how small the immediate land of Zarahemla was in both territory and population at the beginning of the first century B.C. An extensive land would hardly have suffered from famine as a result of the smallish acreage that could be trodden down by the feet of men in battle and flight.

Over a century earlier when Mosiah first arrived at Zarahemla, the scale was even more limited. The Nephites

apparently came upon a “chiefdom,” a small sociopolitical unit centered on a sizable town, with outlying villages dependent on it for trade, administration, and worship. The people there were not only small in numbers but also politically unsophisticated, for Zarahemla did not even claim the title of king. (The actual tasks of rulership were then light, for, years later after further growth, King Benjamin had time personally to support himself by farming while carrying out the tasks of governance [Mosiah 2:14]. Clearly, the essence of kingship in that early time consisted of symbolic presence rather than extensive functions.) The local residents quickly agreed that Mosiah, a total stranger who had dropped in on them, should become their king (Omni 1:14, 19). How could this man and his intruding party find such a hearty welcome and then fit so neatly into a dominant political niche in the society? One piece of the answer must lie in the superior qualifications of Mosiah to be king. Ancient peoples wanted their kings to have valid credentials. The approval of a subject population was one kind of credential, of course, but the ruler’s position would be suspect without another consideration. A king ought really to derive his authority from some royal line whose legitimacy was unquestioned.

It would appear that Zarahemla had only a weak connection to royalty. True, Mulek, a distant ancestor, had been a son of Zedekiah (Helaman 6:10; 8:21), but Zedekiah had at best been a puppet king placed on the throne of Judah by the Babylonians (2 Kings 24:17) and who was soon deposed by them for rebellion (2 Kings 25:6–7). In Jewish memory, furthermore, he would have seemed responsible for, if not the cause of, the national disaster of the Babylonian Exile.²¹ Meanwhile, there had been squabbling (“wars,” Omni 1:17) among Zarahemla’s ancestors after their landing, and claims to kingship by his line may have been tarnished. Mosiah, on the other hand, descended from a line of more immediate kings, the “Nephis” (Jacob 1:11; Mosiah 25:13). The level of civilization was apparently higher in Nephi, from which Mosiah came, and the higher degree of sophistication

probably showed. Specifically, he was literate and possessed impressive volumes of records. Both these characteristics would empower him in the eyes of the naive Zarahemlans. The mysterious sacred artifacts he possessed—the sword of Laban and the Liahona (Mosiah 1:16)—must further have reinforced his position. And finally, I suspect on the basis of what was beginning to happen economically and culturally, as subsequent events showed, that the local people had entered a period of growth where they welcomed the idea of having a genuine king, just about when Mosiah appeared.

Evidence was presented earlier supporting identification of the central depression of the present state of Chiapas, Mexico, as the land of Zarahemla. The Grijalva River (Río de Chiapas), which flows through this broad valley, is the only plausible candidate for the river Sidon. Along the west bank of the river must lie the former city of Zarahemla. As we just saw, the Book of Mormon strongly implies that the settlement region immediately dependent on the city of Zarahemla was located up and down the river and concentrated on the west bank. In just the indicated manner the best-watered and most fertile land along the upper Grijalva was limited to a narrow strip, less than a half-mile wide, on either side of the stream but mostly on the westerly or south side. The headwaters of the river begin across the Guatemala border in rugged mountains. With Zarahemla located in the upper river valley, it would be close enough to this band of mountainous wilderness that invaders from the south could appear near the city with little warning, as the first chapter of Helaman leads us to expect.

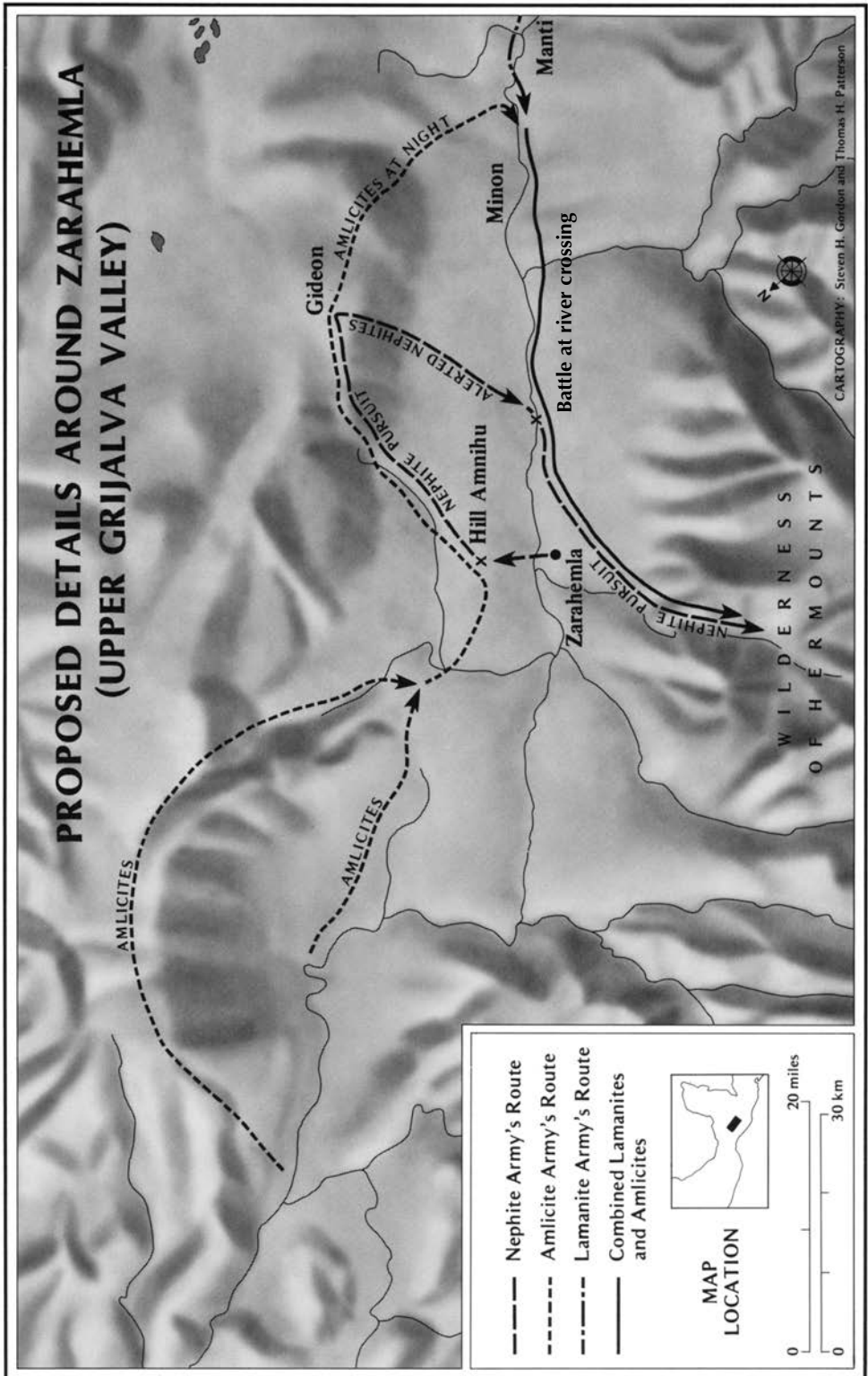
The largest archaeological site on the upper Grijalva in an appropriate position to qualify as Zarahemla is Santa Rosa. The BYU-New World Archaeological Foundation did a modest amount of digging at Santa Rosa in 1956 and 1958. (Nobody involved had in mind any possible connection of the ruins with any Book of Mormon location. In fact, almost all the work was done by non-Mormon archaeologists.) By 1974 the site had been inundated by waters backed up nearly



Laguna Francesa, a site near Santa Rosa which is proposed as Zarahemla. The view is northeasterly, toward Gideon in the distant upland area. (Photo by James C. Christensen used by permission of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.)

70 miles behind Angostura Dam. Some of the specific findings at the site will be considered shortly, but first let us examine the general position of the Santa Rosa area.

Linguistic research tells us that the upper Grijalva lay at the juncture of two major areas where long-established peoples and their languages existed. A couple of thousand years ago the Mayan languages probably extended throughout much of Guatemala to about the mountainous wilderness strip that separates the highlands of that nation from the Grijalva River valley.²² Downstream, from near Chiapa de Corzo and extending north and westward, were speakers of Zoque dialects; in the isthmus proper was the closely related Mixe language. Both blocs, the Mayan speakers on the Guatemalan and groups using tongues of the Mixe-Zoquean family on the isthmian side of Santa Rosa, had been there a long time. Ancestral Mixe-Zoquean has been shown to be the probable language of the Olmecs of the Gulf Coast, while Mayan speakers likely had been in the



Cuchumatanes Mountains of Guatemala since well before 1000 B.C.²³ (Evidence is uncertain, however, whether Mayan languages were spoken until post-Book of Mormon times in the actual areas of the southern Guatemalan highlands where the Nephite and Lamanite settlements are fit best.²⁴) But neither major language group seems to have been established on the upper Grijalva, at least not until well into A.D. times. That intermediate zone seems to have been a linguistic frontier. Zarahemla's people had moved into the area from the Gulf Coast through lands occupied by Zoque speakers for centuries. His local followers in Mosiah's day likely spoke a Zoquean language. Mosiah and his party, coming from the opposite direction, were among the first of a long series of groups who drifted down out of Guatemala into this valley over the next thousand years.

The archaeological sequence at Santa Rosa is interesting in terms of the Book of Mormon, although the findings will always remain incomplete because the site is now underwater. Major public construction in the form of what seem to have been "temple" or "palace" foundation mounds started on a modest scale at approximately 300 B.C.²⁵ That coincided with growth in population, which produced the "city" of Zarahemla that Mosiah's party encountered a couple of generations later. The place remained no larger than a modest town, as we think of size, during the time when Mosiah, Benjamin his son, and Mosiah II reigned. Around 100 B.C. a spurt in the city's prosperity is evident, and a large number of major public structures were erected. That condition continued for around a century.²⁶ Except for the site of Chiapa de Corzo far downstream, Santa Rosa became the largest, most significant city in the Grijalva basin just at the time when Zarahemla is reported by the Book of Mormon as becoming a regional center.

A unique fact about the pattern of this settlement came to light in the excavations by the New World Archaeological Foundation. Archaeologist Donald Brockington, who

helped excavate part of the largest pyramid mound in the center of Santa Rosa, found that in this structure, constructed in the first century B.C., a layer of gravel had been laid which was then stuccoed over as a footing on which the mound was further built. The base gravel was of two completely different kinds, clearly brought there from two sources. The line separating the gravel areas was meticulously straight and was oriented approximately east and west, dividing the structure exactly in half. Furthermore, the site's inhabitants lived in two oval-shaped zones separated from each other by the ceremonial zone oriented along this same line. Brockington concluded that the gravel had been laid down by two distinct social (perhaps linguistic) groups that occupied the site and that seem to have related to each other by formal ritual and political arrangements.²⁷ Could these two groups have been the people of Zarahemla and the people of Nephi? Mosiah 25:4 supports the possibility: "And now all of the people of Nephi were assembled together, and also all the people of Zarahemla, and they were gathered together in two bodies." Also the "churches" Alma organized (Alma 25:19–21) were probably based on ethnic/residential units. If two distinct peoples did live in separate sections within the city, the arrangement would agree with later Mesoamerican practice.²⁸

Further light on the scale and settling of Zarahemla derives from the story of the ceremonial meeting of the populace called by Benjamin, Mosiah's son. Benjamin sent word to his people on one day to come to the temple the following day (Mosiah 1:10, 18; compare 3 Nephi 17:3; 19:1–3). Estimating how long it would take to send messengers and assemble the crowd, it is unlikely that any came from much farther than 20 miles away. (That was still about the size of the immediate land of Zarahemla later, at the time of the Amlicite battle.) The number who attended Benjamin's assembly was somewhat greater than could be accommodated "within the walls of the temple"—likely the plaza or sacred courtyard area (Mosiah 2:7). Initially the king had

supposed that the crowd could fit into the area so that he might speak to them directly, but the group proved too big to hear the aged ruler. (John Wesley, at age 70, was able to preach to 20,000 people in the open in England, which suggests that the size of the assembly in Zarahemla was perhaps a little larger.) The extent of the land plus the number of people assembled suggest that the population centered on Zarahemla at the time of Benjamin, near 125 B.C., was on the order of 25,000, many of whom lived in villages near the settlement, especially along the river.

Could such a small settlement reasonably be called a city? Because we now think of urban areas with millions of inhabitants as cities, we may expect ancient centers to be larger than in fact they were. The term *city* appears to have had a definite, formal meaning among the Nephites and not tied directly to the number of a settlement's inhabitants. The story of Alma and his group clarifies it for us. There were only about 450 of them (Mosiah 18:35) when they fled into the wilderness to escape King Noah. They came upon a valley evidently not settled at the time; they stopped there, naming it Helam. The newcomers "began to till the ground, and began to build buildings" (verse 5). Then, after the basic pioneering had been completed, "they built a city, which they called the city of Helam" (verses 19–20). Here is the conscious founding of an instant city. Creating it was a different thing from merely settling the valley. No more than a decade could have passed between their arrival and the establishment of what was called the city, so their numbers were still only in the hundreds. Moreover, the population was not added to in the act of founding the city; the only inhabitants were the ones present before. Since a large population could not have been the basis for designating the place a city,²⁹ what did the term mean?

This question of what constitutes a city plagues the experts, too. A recent controversy between two anthropologists sees Dr. Smith challenge Dr. Crumley's definition of *city*. Using it, he complains, we would have to call the site of

San Jose Mogote, in the state of Oaxaca, Mexico, a city as far back as the period from 1300 to 800 B.C., which Smith thinks will not do. Crumley responds that by her definition, San Jose Mogote would indeed have been a city, comparable in function to ancient Greek cities whose populations were also unimpressive but which many agree should be termed cities. (Incidentally, San Jose Mogote happens to be the most impressive archaeological site at that period in the Valley of Oaxaca, which I identify as the possible land of Moron of the Jaredites. The Jaredite account nowhere refers to a city of Moron, so either Smith's or Crumley's views would fit the Book of Mormon case.)

The Hebrew word translated as "city" had the fundamental meaning of "temple center." Recent studies have shown that ancient American centers were carefully laid out around a temple so that structures and stone monuments were aligned with points where the sun rose and set at the solstices and equinoxes, and they were also oriented to prominent features of the landscape.³⁰ This was a long-established Old World practice as well. It is clear at this point that a formal temple center had to be consciously planned, not just established by whim (casual choice or historical accident). Certainly religion or world view was at the heart of "city" founding. Alma's group came into existence by reason of their religious beliefs. Alma had earlier been a priest under King Noah and then served his own band as priest (see Mosiah 17:1–2). As one of Noah's priests he likely helped plan the "towers" or pyramidal temple mounds that the king had erected (Mosiah 11:12–13). When the city of Helam was built under Alma's own direction, the fundamentals of Nephite religious practice must have guided the builders. We can be reasonably confident that their city—and every other Nephite city—qualified for the title in part by possessing a ceremonial precinct centering on a formally dedicated temple that proclaimed the status of the community as a political entity of consequence. A city in Book of Mormon terminology had to have a certain authoritative

status, but it didn't have to be metropolis-sized or even contain any given number of people.

We also learn something about settlement form from the history of Helam. A Lamanite armed party pursued Limhi's people when they fled from the land of Nephi, about eleven years after Alma's group left. The pursuers got lost and blundered into Helam. Alma's people, "in the land of Helam, yea in the city of Helam, while tilling the land round about," beheld the Lamanite force coming into their valley. "The brethren of Alma fled from their fields, and gathered themselves together in the city of Helam" (Mosiah 23:25–26). Note the strange phrasing; it seems to confound the difference between "land" and "city." It implies that fields were *in* the city, so the city would not have been compactly settled. Then when alarmed, the people ran to join their religious leader "in the city," which must now refer to the ceremonial precinct. It would have been in the sacred center where he spoke to them, because as their high priest he immediately both gave them spiritual counsel and formally prayed on their behalf (verses 27–28).

The pattern of settlement exhibited in Helam is similar to what we know characterized many ceremonial centers in southern Mesoamerica, especially including the Guatemalan highlands where Helam was located. The Mesoamerican settlement unit that logically fits what the Book of Mormon calls a "land" (centered on a single city) consisted of that area inhabited by all the people who gathered to a central temple center for worship, trade, and civil administration. In lowland Maya country we know that a journey of one day to or from the center was the usual radius of a local land, and the scale was probably much the same elsewhere. (That single-day radius agrees with what we saw in the case of Benjamin's assembly at Zarahemla.) Fields were often interspersed with homes, and a considerable number of the permanent residents in the very center were religious functionaries.³¹ The settlement pattern of Helam clearly makes sense in terms of this Mesoamerican pattern.

What we have seen concerning the population of Benjamin's Zarahemla warns us that the place was not a huge population center, although for the times it was sizable. It was the key politico-religious center for a region containing some tens of thousands, however, there is no indication at all in the time of Mosiah I or his son Benjamin (about 225–125 B.C.) that it was an administrative center controlling subsidiary cities. Santa Rosa at that period had the same characteristics.

Since we have touched on King Benjamin's big gathering, this may be an appropriate place to raise a special cultural question. The people who assembled to hear Benjamin "pitched their tents round about the temple, every man having his tent with the door thereof towards the temple, that thereby they might remain in their tents and hear the words which King Benjamin should speak unto them" (Mosiah 2:6). What was a Nephite "tent"? Would the crowd have been seated in sprawling shelters like Arabs? The term *tent* is used some 64 times in the Book of Mormon, so the question may deserve attention.

Biblical translators have usually rendered the Hebrew root *'hl* to English as "tent"; however, it has a rather wide range of possible meanings. Sometimes it referred to full-fledged tents on the pattern of those used by desert nomads of southwestern Asia; but to semi-nomads like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob the term could also mean "hut" as well as "tent."³² In later usage, as the Israelites became sedentary village or city dwellers, its meanings were extended further. For example, in Psalm 132:3 and Proverbs 7:17 the related word *'ohel* means "canopy (over a bed)," while in the New Testament, John 1:14 says literally "he pitched his tent among us" to communicate the thought "he lived among us." A Hittite account has the god Elkunirsha living in a "tent" made of wood.³³ In writings from South Arabia in Lehi's day and also in classical Arabic, languages closely related to Hebrew, the root stood for "family" or "tribe" as well as tent. In the related Semitic language of the

Babylonians, a word from the same root meant “city,” “village,” “estate,” or “social unit,” and even formed part of the word for bed. An Egyptian equivalent could be read as “hut, camel’s hair tent, camp.”³⁴ Furthermore, Dr. Hugh Nibley reminds us that “throughout the ancient world . . . the people must spend the time of the great national festival of the New Year living in tents.”³⁵ But for this occasion Israelites came to use makeshift booths made of branches, as fewer and fewer of their town-dwelling numbers owned genuine tents. The Nephites, of course, routinely lived in permanent buildings (see, for example, Mosiah 6:3). Alma’s people “pitched their tents” after fleeing to Helam, but then they “began to build buildings” (Mosiah 23:5). Military forces on the move are said to have used tents (Alma 51:32, 34; 58:25), but it is nearly unbelievable that the entire Lamanite army referred to in Alma 51 lugged collapsible tents on their backs through tropical country hundreds of miles from the land of Nephi. Far more likely they erected shelters of brush or whatever other materials could be found in the vicinity, referring to those or any other temporary shelters by the traditional word for tent. Farmers in parts of Mesoamerica still throw together simple brush shelters when they stay overnight at their fields in the busiest work season, and at the time of the Spanish conquest, Bernal Diaz reported that the soldiers of their Indian allies “erect their huts” as they move on campaign.³⁶ So when we read that Benjamin’s subjects sat in their tents listening to his sermon, we should understand that they might have been under shelter a good deal different from what comes to mind when we hear “tent.”

Dissenters

Starting in Benjamin’s day we read of “contention” and “dissensions away” (Words of Mormon 1:16) among the Nephites. This social unrest continued at a high level over the next century and a half. We are never clearly told the causes, but the results are evident: the disaffected people

either tried to rearrange Nephite society in a fundamental way (see, for example, Alma 2:2–4; 3 Nephi 7:2, 6–7), or they moved away to try to bring about their purposes elsewhere (as in Alma 46:4–6, 10, 29; 3 Nephi 7:12–13). Two probable causes of the troubles stand out. One was the lack of adequate cultivable land. In one case we read, “There was a large number who were desirous to possess the land of their [father’s one-time] inheritance,” which was the land of Nephi (Omni 1:27). That could be understood as stemming from a shortage of desirable land in Zarahemla. A later incident is clearer. In the coastal lands of Morianton and Lehi, a “warm contention” arose over disputed land, to the point that one group headed to the land northward, where they thought land was more plentiful (Alma 50:25–26, 29). The large-scale migrations that came a bit later, when the population had risen even higher, were clearly motivated by desire for new lands for settlement (Alma 63:4; Helaman 3:3–12).

The desire for power caused even more dissension than did land. Alma 51 tells the familiar story we read in many other places: “Now those who were in favor of kings were those of high birth, and they sought to be kings; and they were supported by those who sought power and authority over the people” (verse 8). Later, Giddianhi, head of the “secret band” of troublemakers, revealed in a letter to the Nephite leader Lachoneus what his dissenters were after: “I hope that ye will deliver up your lands and your possessions, without the shedding of blood, that this my people may recover their rights and government, who have dissented away from you because of your wickedness in retaining from them their rights of government” (3 Nephi 3:10). The dispute here is not over lands merely “wherewith to subsist upon” (3 Nephi 6:3) or even over material possessions alone, but over power. “Rights” get involved because they are considered means to get power. Over and over this theme emerges in this part of the Book of Mormon.³⁷ Some of the dissenters were no doubt mere

adventurers like “King” Jacob—3 Nephi 7:9–10), but others could have been legitimate descendants of old chief Zarahemla, whose lineage lost out in the power shuffle when Mosiah became king. Then in the days of the judges, after the monarchy had been abolished altogether, various descendants of the former kings, Mosiah, Benjamin, and the younger Mosiah, likely felt that their noble ancestry gave them the right to special privileges.

The right to rule was the chief bone of contention in Nephite affairs. Giddianhi the robber exemplified the concern, shown in his brash insistence to Lachoneus, the Nephite governor, that the “rights of government” had been unjustly taken from those loyal to him (3 Nephi 3:10). The theme is repeated again and again: Ammoron the dissenter complained that Nephi robbed his brothers of “their right to the government when it rightly belonged unto them” (Alma 54:17); war by the dissenters from among the Nephites and the Lamanites was “to the subjecting the Nephites to our authority” (Alma 54:20); Amalickiah “was desirous to be a king,” and he and his associates “were seeking for power” (Alma 46:4); the Gadianton band desired “that they should be placed in power and authority among the people” (Helaman 2:5); Moroni was bitterly angry at rebels “who have desires to usurp power and authority” (Alma 60:27); the secret society “did obtain the sole management of the government” (Helaman 6:39).

These dominators were supposed to hold authority by virtue of their position as heads of leading lineages. The pattern was ultimately from the Old World, of course, but the original Nephi was the first to follow the practice in the American promised land, when he agreed to his people’s request to be their king (2 Nephi 5:18). Before his death he anointed his successor. Thereafter each king bore the title “Nephi” (Jacob 1:11). The lineage founded by the original Nephi continued to hold the charter and sacred emblems of rulership over all Lehi’s descendants, which is precisely why rivals tried to kill off the line. The Nephi lineage

continued powerful until the fourth century A.D., when Mormon became its (final) leader (Mormon 1:5; 2:1–2). In all likelihood he was the senior male in the senior branch of the line, or he would not have been installed so easily in the crucial leadership position over his group's armies at age 15, no matter what charismatic qualities he brought to the task.

The ambitious did not seek power for its sake alone. It was a means to earthier satisfactions: Giddianhi was at least as concerned with "possessions" and "all our substance" as he was with "rights" and rulership (3 Nephi 3:2–12); the secret group under Gadianton and successors were "robbers" and "plunderers" (Helaman 2:10; 6:18) who "set their hearts upon their riches" (Helaman 6:17); the accusation that priests were "glutting on the labors" of the people (Alma 30:27–28, 31–32) had substance to it, we have seen, moreover, that the elite levels of society "possessed" cities, lands, flocks, and people (Alma 8:7; 52:13ff.; compare 51:8, 20; 53:2); and so on. All this is congruent, on point after point, with our picture of Mesoamerican rulership, for example, that of the Cuicatec *caciques* or local rulers of central Mexico so ably described by the late Dr. Eva Hunt.³⁸

Mesoamerican peoples mingled inextricably what we sort out as two separate aspects of life: "religion" and "politics." Religion was intimately connected with all of life, including "contention" among Book of Mormon groups. The younger Alma in his own time was not merely an unbeliever but a glib, learned, "idolatrous" man (Mosiah 27:8). He did not just lure people away from the church of his father into unbelief, but into a competing cult. Other religious figures also opposed the prophets, notably Sherem, Korihor, and Amulon and his priests. Characteristically they used religious issues to get a following that would make them powerful, whether or not they sincerely differed in their religious ideas. We are told at particular length of one dissenter group of unreported origin, the Amalekites, who lived among the Lamanites in the land of Nephi.

They believed in God, had “synagogues,” adhered to “the (priestly) order of Nehor,” and were learned men (Alma, chapters 21–24). Only a single one of this group was ever converted by the Nephite missionaries. Obviously, strong and fundamental belief differences separated them from the orthodox Nephites, although they seem to have had their own orthodoxy (Alma 21:5–6). Still other groups rebelled against the straightforward gospel and ceremonial order taught by Benjamin (Words of Mormon 1:17) and the equally stringent requirements laid down by Alma (Mosiah 26:1–6), including the notorious Zoramites (Alma 31:8–25).

Limited as our data on the organization of Mesoamerican religion are, we still are able to see there the same issues brought out in the Book of Mormon. When a Mesoamerican people was conquered, it usually meant two things: that the taxes were to be paid to new collectors, and that an additional set of religious practices would be imposed on the subject population (compare Alma 24:11; Moroni 1:3). As long as the new ritual requirements were followed, old ways could be continued. Rulers could be extremely harsh against opposing religious views, not so much over issues of doctrine or practice, but over the political power that was validated by religion. The fact that faces and symbols on the stone monuments of the ancient cultures were so often smashed shows the connection. One scholar has said, “How do we know that [Mesoamerican religion] did not have branches similar to, let us say, Catholicism, Protestantism, or other Christian religions? In that case, it wouldn’t be at all extraordinary that monuments with religious connotations were destroyed.”³⁹ The linkage of religious and political issues is illustrated in the Book of Mormon in Alma 43:47, 44:7, 46:7–24, and Mormon 8:7–10, for example. So we see that dissension over “religion,” as well as conflict about the right to rule, with devastating wars a result, was a pattern shared by Mesoamerican cultures⁴⁰ and the peoples of the Book of Mormon.

Our consideration of the sources of dissidence leads

us back to the geographical details of a major story in the Book of Mormon. A party led by Zeniff approached the land of Nephi to “inherit the land” (Mosiah 9:3). The route they followed was used by many other parties before and after. From Zarahemla it led as quickly as possible out of the muggy valley along the Sidon River to Gideon, a mountain valley. This preferred route led through Gideon (Alma 17:1) southward past Manti. (But there is no statement that travelers went through the actual city of Manti.) Then it rose again to cross over the mountains of the wilderness strip enroute to Nephi. But there was more than one way to go, and some routes were more arduous than others (Alma 17:7–9, then 5; Mosiah 7:4). Beyond the worst band of wilderness through the highlands of Nephi to the city Lehi-Nephi, the way was still rugged, and groups could become lost (Mosiah 23:30).

When we examine Mesoamerican geography between central Chiapas and the Valley of Guatemala, a parallel picture emerges. Movement upstream and downstream near the big river has always been limited by difficult terrain, particularly the presence of streams flowing into the Grijalva, which have cut ravines difficult to traverse. Bluffs near the river and small hills on the valley floor further complicate the route. By far the most common way around these obstacles has been to climb up and travel through the Chiapas highlands. Travelers move faster along those smooth, cooler valleys, where the Inter-American Highway now runs. There are good reasons to see movements by Book of Mormon groups through Gideon as duplicating this route. The Nephite way went from the valley of Gideon and dropped down again to the land of Manti along the river (Alma 17:1), as does today’s highway and as did the colonial Spanish *camino real*. Both routes passed through the Comitán Valley (likely Gideon) and down the valley at the head of the Grijalva River, corresponding to the Manti area. From that point one traditional way went up over the most easily traversed portion of the Cuchumatanes massif

or plateau. The surface there was again relatively smooth and the climate and water supply far more desirable than on the alternate routes through the arid, narrow river gorges (where the missionaries might have gone—Alma 17:5). Once in the Guatemalan interior, experienced travelers stuck to a couple of established routes where reliable watering points were to be found. Journeys in those uplands were especially tricky because the streams cut precipitous chasms. McBryde vividly describes the problem: “The immensely deep canyons are often so sharp that the unwary traveler is likely to come upon them most unexpectedly. The white buildings of a village, gleaming in the bright sunlight beyond the pines, may appear to be only a mile or two away, seemingly just ahead. Yet, another hundred yards will reveal that the nearer trees stand upon the brink of a narrow abyss.”⁴¹ Consequently, movements in highland Guatemala/Nephi must be limited to a few sure routes or the traveler gets in trouble (Mosiah 23:30, 35). Throughout the area, trails tend to stay at the less eroded, high, rolling elevations; the main route still goes near the continental divide.

More Details about Nephi

Just northwest of the valley of Guatemala lies a prominent but gently sloping hill elevated a few hundred yards above the pass adjacent to it. This elevation sits in such a position that anyone coming from the northwest would immediately seek it out in order to overlook the entire valley. On the top of that hill are the remains of an archaeological site, including a pyramid structure, named Alux by archaeologist Edwin Shook, who first reported it.⁴² No study of the ruin has been made, so a date for its construction cannot be given; but if it is like many other sites in the area it will prove to have been used over a long time, probably beginning in the Late Pre-Classic period (late centuries B.C.), which is when King Noah “caused a great tower to be built on the hill north of the land Shilom” (Mosiah 11:13). The construction found by Shook is in the proper spot to have

been that very tower. Ammon and his party also paused at this place for a look before they went down to the city Lehi-Nephi (Mosiah 7:5, 16).

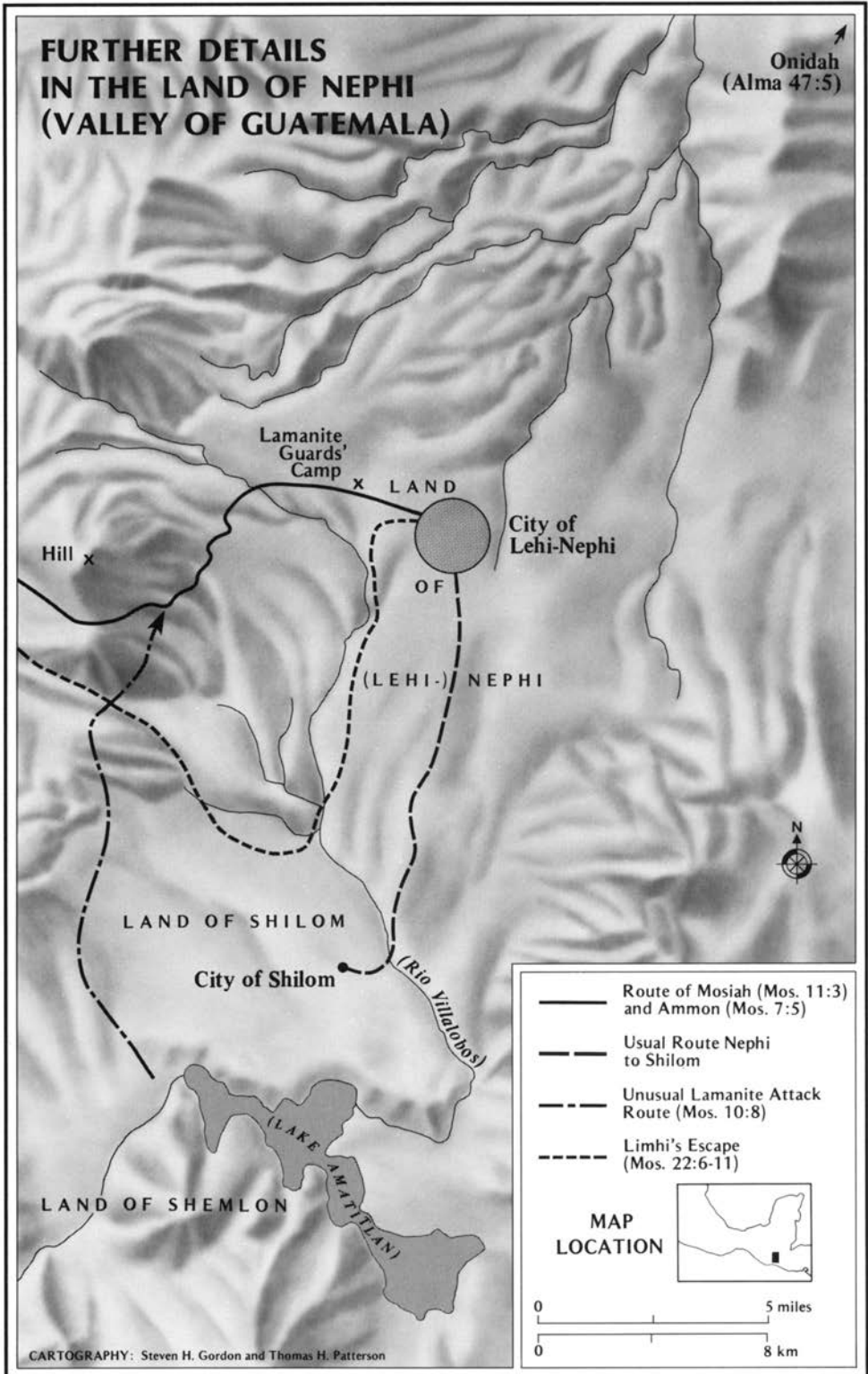
In the Valley of Guatemala distances and topography fit markedly with the geographical statements in the Book of Mormon. The land of Nephi in the narrow sense of the term would have consisted of the upper floor of the valley occupied today by Guatemala City and its suburbs (see map 8). It centered upon the sprawling ancient city that archaeologists have labeled *Kaminaljuyu* ("hills of the dead"). The upper valley's six square miles lie at an elevation between 4,800 and 5,500 feet. The land of Shilom, the lower level of the valley, would have lain between the curving Rio Villalobos and the north side of Lake Amatitlan. San Antonio Frutal, second largest site in the Valley, sits in this flattish zone, near 4,300 feet elevation. "Enormous mounds" found there date in part from B.C. times, although its most important remains are of Early Classic date, near the end of Book of Mormon times.⁴³ It occupies a position in relation to the city of Nephi, about seven or eight miles away, which neatly fits the Book of Mormon statements involving the two. This Shilom area is about half as extensive as the Nephi portion of the valley. The hill spoken of earlier lies about northwest (by our directions today) from San Antonio Frutal; the Book of Mormon (Mosiah 7:16) calls the direction "north."

Quite a different local land was Shemlon. Fitting the requirements for this place is the Amatitlan region, around the modern town of that name and the adjacent south shore of Lake Amatitlan. It is a full 1,600 feet lower than Nephi and well below our proposed land Shilom. The Shilom area terminates in a sharp bluff at whose foot lies the big lake, Amatitlan, which is about six miles long. Its south shore has been well settled for millennia. At least three sites extend back into Zeniffite/Lamanite times, and there are probably others in the vicinity. Geographically and culturally the Amatitlan area was closely tied to the piedmont (foothill)

area a dozen miles away down toward the coast. There, a number of sites dating to the first centuries B.C. attest to a substantial population of probable “Lamanites,” whose remains suggest on style grounds that they descended from Olmec survivors. That would be quite expectable in light of our earlier discussion of Lamanites on the coast whom Nephi and his group had left behind. Later, the Lamanite rulers followed the Nephites up to higher terrain, too, where Shemlon became their stronghold, but that land was geographically and culturally tied to the older lowland haunts.

Shemlon was clearly the Lamanite base in the times of Zeniff, Noah, and Limhi; attacks on the Zeniffites ruled by those men always came from or through Shemlon. When the Lamanite king first welcomed Zeniff and his people, who had come up from Zarahemla, the ruler was willing to pull his own settlers out of Nephi and Shilom back to Shemlon in hopes of exploiting the Nephite returnees (Mosiah 9:6–7, 10, 12); but conflict proved inevitable. The first skirmish between the two groups came when Lamanites attacked some of Zeniff’s people “watering and feeding their flocks, and tilling their lands . . . on the south of the land of Shilom” (verse 14). The Lamanite attack came “up” (Mosiah 10:6) from Shemlon. Thereafter Zeniff put a watch on the Shemlon-Shilom frontier, anticipating a renewed attack. In time the Lamanites did return, but this time they did not try to cut through Shilom on their way toward Nephi. Instead they came from Shemlon “up upon the north of the land of Shilom” (verse 8), hoping to bypass Shilom on the west and attempting to outflank the Zeniffite watch and hit Nephi without warning. Zeniff and his men knew something was brewing, having been alerted by the lookouts they had posted overlooking Shemlon. When they located the advancing enemy, they “went up” onto the hills and fought the Lamanites north of Shilom before the attackers could come around and down into Nephi proper (Mosiah 10:10).

Supposing that the city of Lehi-Nephi was Kaminaljuyu,



Map 8

at present-day Guatemala City, the physical details of this entire event fit perfectly. Shemlon would be the lake-side gateway to the Valley of Guatemala through which forces from the lush piedmont area would approach the city. Shemlon's attractiveness to the Lamanite elite would have included its climate, significantly warmer than at Kaminaljuyu (1,600 feet higher), yet not so oppressively hot as the adjacent lowlands, the old Lamanite base. The border between Shilom and Shemlon would obviously be the sharp bluff overlooking the lake and the curving Villalobos River. Near the river the Lamanite rustlers could conveniently have got at the Nephite flocks, while the bluff would have been an ideal spot for Zeniff's watchmen. The hilly terrain on "the north of Shilom," where the Lamanite force tried to outflank the Nephite defenders, is exactly what the story calls for. The consistency of the geography can be checked on map 8.

We can also see with this geographical setting how King Noah was able to stand on the pyramid tower he had constructed at the city Nephi and look out over Shilom, Shemlon, and surrounding areas (Mosiah 11:12). Shemlon would have been dimly in sight downhill less than twenty miles away. So when angry Gideon chased Noah to the top of that tower, they both could glimpse a Lamanite army coming up at them from the direction of Shemlon (Mosiah 19:5-9).

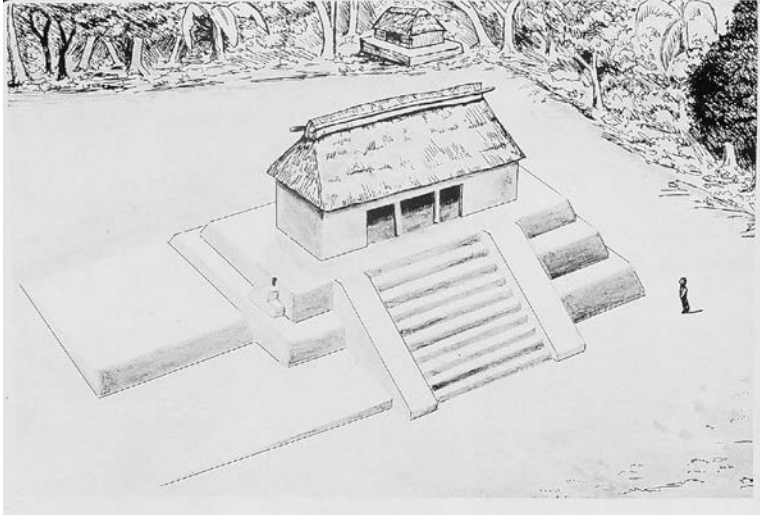
Mention of Noah's tower calls for an explanation, for, as with the word *tent*, the term might mislead readers with a European cultural background. A tower, both in Mesoamerica and according to the Book of Mormon, was much more than a vertical structure from which one could see a long distance. The concepts involved went back to Mesopotamia, dating to perhaps before 3200 B.C. The "great tower" mentioned in the first chapter of the book of Ether was the same structure whose destruction is told in Genesis 11 and is popularly called "the tower of Babel," although nobody knows which ruined structure would have been the one referred to by the Jaredites. It was a giant platform with

stepped, sloping sides, called in the Babylonian (Akkadian) language *zigguratu* (ziggurat in English). They were thought of as artificial mountains on whose tops deity could dwell, or come down to visit men, in sacred privacy.⁴⁴ A ziggurat also modeled the relationships between heavens, earth and underworld, for the topmost layer stood for the highest level of creation above the earth, with other layers representing supposed multiple heavens. By around 2,000 B.C. the sacred tower in the south Mesopotamian city of Ur measured 80 feet high. Fourteen centuries later, when Lehi left Jerusalem, the famous ziggurat of Nebuchadnezzar at Babylon rose to over 270 feet.⁴⁵

These massive edifices had both religious and political significance, as can be seen in Alma 46:36, 48:1, and 51:20. Regarding the religious dimension, for example, Professor A. Wiercinski has recently shown that the largest Babylonian ziggurat, the Egyptian pyramids, and the two pyramids at Teotihuacan in Mexico all contain unexpected information in their dimensions. They turn out to be a kind of coded, numerical representation of time and space relations of sun, moon, and stars and their motions. These “cosmic mountains” of the ancients appear to have been sort of mathematical models of the dimensions of the universe.⁴⁶

In political and civic terms, a pyramid tower displayed the size and prominence of a community. In fact, the presence of such a structure may have been the most essential feature of any “city,” as discussed earlier. The famous Pyramid of the Sun at Teotihuacan was erected to a height of more than 210 feet in the second century A.D.,⁴⁷ a spectacular advertisement, as it were, of the city’s status as the greatest Mesoamerican center of its time. So Noah’s towers must have had great political significance to him, his priests, his people, and the Lamanites, alongside their doubtless sacred meanings.

In Old Testament times Israelites and surrounding nations built and used such holy elevations. The Canaanite



All settlements of any consequence in Mesoamerica had one or more structures of this sort, the equivalent of an Israelite "high place." San Antonio, Chiapas.

"high places" (*bamoth*) to which the backsliding Israelites resorted were strongly condemned by the prophets (for example, in Ezekiel 43:7). Archaeologists now know that those structures were earthen platforms quite like those found by the thousands in Mesoamerica. In Israelite thought, they stood for mountains or hills just as elsewhere in the Near East. On them, it was felt, heavenly powers were especially accessible; this was a divine contact point, "the navel of the earth."⁴⁸ The underworld (not necessarily conceived as hell) was thought accessible at the same "world axis." The Baal worshippers of Canaan believed that El, progenitor of the gods, dwelt at Aphaca, a spot on the coast where a mountain rises immediately above a huge cave. So this great deity of theirs was connected not only with the mountain but also lived in "aqueous and subterranean environs."⁴⁹ That sounds perfectly Mesoamerican. Teotihuacan's Pyramid of the Sun, it was recently discovered, was built over a cavern and spring of obvious sacred significance.⁵⁰

This business may all sound thoroughly pagan, but worship upon elevations was orthodox in Israel if done right. Moses' experience in Sinai comes to mind, as well as Nephi's vision on a mountain (1 Nephi 11:1). The temple seen in vision by Ezekiel was "upon a very high mountain" (Ezekiel 40:2-5). One of the Hebrew names of God was *Sur*, "Mountain" (for example, 1 Samuel 2:2 literally reads, "There is no Mountain like our God"). Chapter 32 of Deuteronomy uses this name for deity eight times.⁵¹ Among the Nephites we find expectable sacred significance for mountains. Nehor was carried to "the top of the hill Manti . . . between the heavens and the earth" to be executed (Alma 1:15). The prophet Nephi got upon his private tower in his garden that, he said, "I might pour out my soul unto my God" (Helaman 7:10, 14); to him a tower was a special place to pray, and like the natural hilltop, it was considered "between heaven and earth." The Zoramites also worshipped at "a place built up in the center of their synagogue, a place for standing, which was high above the head" (Alma 31:13). Alma preached to the Zoramite poor "on the hill Onidah" (Alma 32:4). Both natural and artificial mountains clearly were significant in similar ways in the Book of Mormon, in the Near East, and in Mesoamerica.

It may seem strange to modern readers, used to considering narrow, soaring castle and cathedral spires as "towers," that bulky mounds or ziggurats would be termed "towers" by the Book of Mormon scribes. But when the Spanish invaders saw the Mesoamerican temple platforms, they immediately called them *torres*, "towers,"⁵² so height, not shape, must be the main criterion.

Our look at the setting for the Zeniffites reveals that not only did they occupy a restricted territory, they also were few in numbers. After all, had Zeniff's original group been very large, the Lamanite king would never have allowed them into his territory (see Omni 1:28-29). Trouble began once their numbers grew enough to make him become uneasy about the threat they posed (Mosiah 9:11).

We get hints about the absolutely small size of the population from the casualty reports. The number of victims the Zeniffites reported in their first battle against the Lamanites (279 against 3,043 enemy dead—Mosiah 9:18–19) suggests that no more than a couple of thousand Zeniffites were involved, though obviously their opponents were much more numerous. In Noah's day similar disparity was indicated, or worse; they boasted that "their fifty could [must?] stand against thousands of the Lamanites" (Mosiah 11:19). When Alma's 450 souls fled into the wilderness, their departure depleted Noah's armed force, leaving it "small, having been reduced" (Mosiah 19:2). Subsequent defeats by the Lamanites cut the number of armed men still further (Mosiah 21:8–9, 17), so that by the time Ammon and his party arrived from Zarahemla to search out the colony, the smallish group was tensely huddled together in the main city, Lehi-Nephi, hardly daring to go out (verses 18, 23). When the people did finally flee, the account again makes them sound like a few rather than many thousands (Mosiah 22:11).

The description of the escape route that Gideon outlined to Limhi ("back pass," "back wall," "round about the land of Shilom"—see Mosiah 22:6) remains too vague to allow fitting it surely to a specific trail, but map 8 shows a route that makes sense.

The Waters of Mormon

Alma had been part of King Noah's ruling establishment, but he rebelled when he was touched by the preaching of the martyr Abinadi. Privately carrying on the teaching begun by Abinadi, Alma assembled his own band of believers. Noah would not countenance any challenge to his state-supported priests, so Alma's dissidents had to stay under cover. The waters of Mormon "in the borders of the land" of Nephi (Mosiah 18:4, 31) was their rendezvous. This spot had to be far enough from the city of Nephi that reports of what they were up to would not readily get

back to Noah's court. Events demonstrated that Mormon was located on the Zarahemla side of Nephi. We know this because when the time came that Alma's group had to flee, they got on their way to Zarahemla from Mormon with a significant head start over Noah's army, which pursued them. Alma at Mormon got word about the approaching force after they were en route, yet the people still had time to pack up and make an unhindered escape in the direction of Zarahemla (Mosiah 18:34). Approximately two days of routine travel, or one and a half under pressure, seems satisfactory for the distance from Nephi to Mormon.

The relationship of Nephi and Mormon becomes clearer when we look at the geography of highland Guatemala. With the city of Nephi at Kaminaljuyu (Guatemala City), the only body of water in the direction of Zarahemla that could serve as the waters of Mormon was Lake Atitlan. It is about nine by four miles in dimension. Only a sizable lake would do as the Book of Mormon "waters," for two reasons: (1) the same body of water, it appears, later rose enough to submerge the city of Jerusalem (3 Nephi 9:7), a Lamanite center built after Alma's departure, and (2) it was "away joining the borders of Mormon" (Alma 21:1), implying that the two spots were some little distance apart. The distances and directions relating Nephi, Mormon and Jerusalem are appropriate if the latter two were on Lake Atitlan. Nephi at Kaminaljuyu would be less than 40 air miles from Lake Atitlan.

Recollect that Mormon was praised lyrically for its "pure water" (Mosiah 18:30). The next settlement Alma chose was again notable for "pure water" (Mosiah 23:4). There may be more in that expression than meets the unalert eye. In Mesoamerica water was an exceedingly powerful symbol. That which came from inside the earth was particularly sacred. For ceremonial purposes men made trips down into caverns to gather containers of this fluid, which they considered unpolluted.⁵³ The practice was related to the concept of a vast freshwater sea beneath the earth's surface. At



Lake Atitlan seen from the Panajachel delta. (Courtesy Kirk Magleby.)



Panajachel delta on Lake Atitlan. The Forest of Mormon probably looked like this. (Courtesy Richard Jones.)



The “land of Helam” can be thought of as a small valley like this one in highland Guatemala. (Courtesy Allen Christenson.)

Scenes in the suggested land of Helam, “a very beautiful and pleasant land, a land of pure water,” around Chalchitan, Guatemala. (Photos by Daniel Bates. Courtesy David A. Palmer and the Society for Early Historic Archaeology.)



certain points, such as at an artificial mountain/pyramid where both the upper world and underworld were particularly accessible, this water had the potential of bursting forth.

At the bulkiest of all Mesoamerican pyramids, at Cholula in the Mexican state of Puebla, native priests facing imminent defeat by Cortez's men made an opening in the structure's side, expecting water to flood out of the structure, as their beliefs led them to expect.⁵⁴ The temple at Jerusalem was also considered to sit over a watery abyss, confining the contents from bursting forth as a flood. Ezekiel saw in vision a time when life-giving waters poured as a river from beneath the temple to green a millennial Zion (Ezekiel 47:1, 7–9, 12).⁵⁵ Where it flowed, trees would flourish in the barren lands near Jerusalem (think here of the symbolism of the “forest” adjacent to the “waters of Mormon” in Alma's lyric formula).

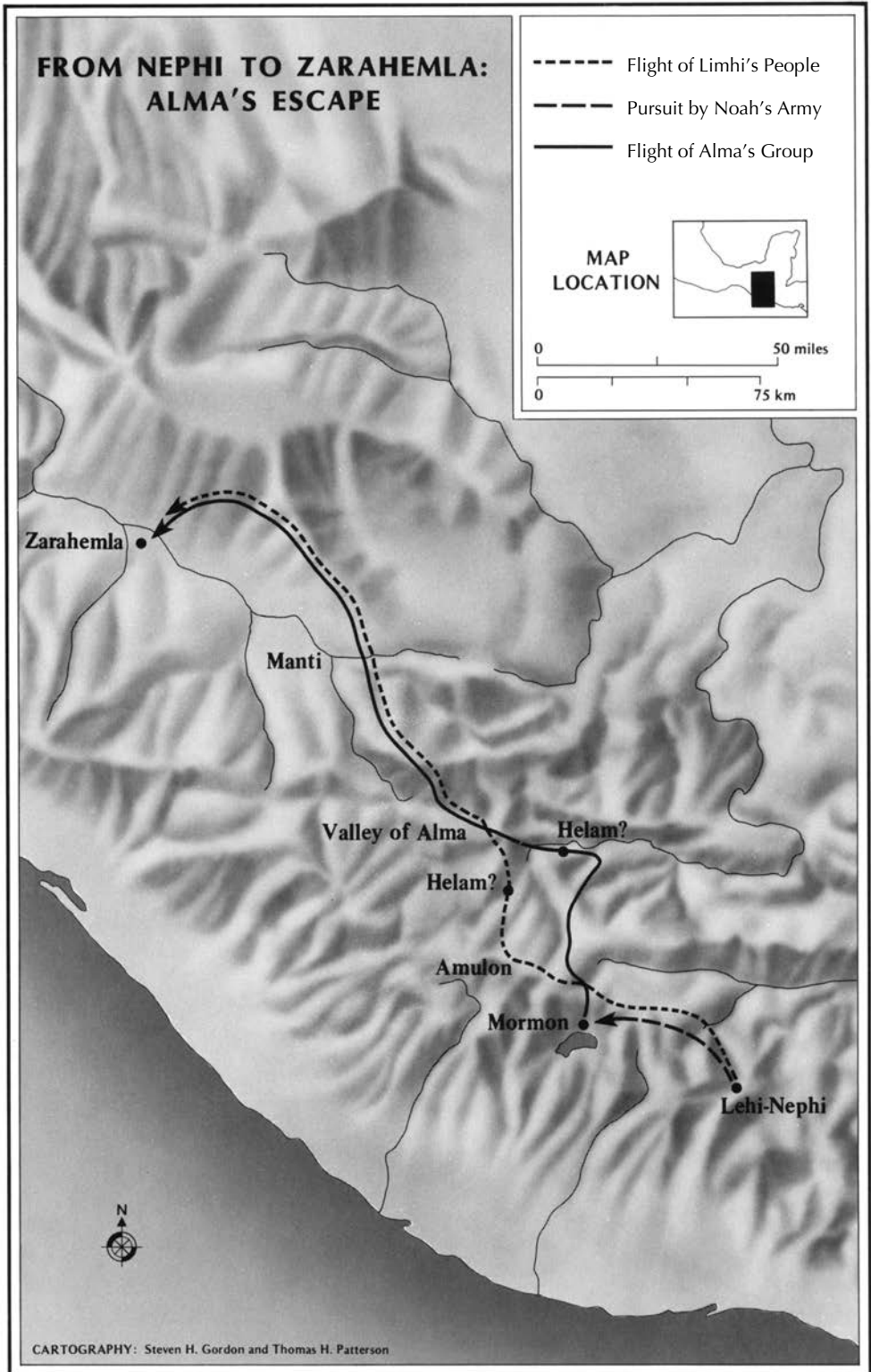
The idea of the subterranean waters occurs frequently in other places in the Old Testament and of course throughout the ancient Near East. The priests of Noah—Alma had been one of them—were highly interested in the interpretation of the Old Testament with special reference to mountains; they questioned Abinadi on the subject (Mosiah 12:19–25). They had built at least two artificial mountains.⁵⁶ Then later they were influential in seeing that Jerusalem, named after the holy city in the Old World, was built adjacent to an impressive “fountain” of waters (Alma 21:1–2). Obviously Alma had grown up immersed in this version of sacred symbolism. There was nothing inherently unorthodox about it, for the Old Testament was already full of these ideas. But he insisted that it had to be interpreted correctly, so when his group came upon Helam, a “very beautiful and pleasant land, a land of pure water” (Mosiah 23:4), he likely saw this characteristic as a manifestation from the hand of God. Mesoamerican peoples would have agreed fully, for they shared this same complex of ideas about the sacredness of water from beneath the earth.

The Land of Helam

The area to which Alma's people fled from Mormon has to be located on a route in the general direction of Zarahemla, but a parallel trail must go in roughly the same direction as well. We know that because of what happened when King Limhi's people got away from the Lamanite domination some eleven years after Alma's escape. Limhi traveled a different way than Alma's people, reaching Zarahemla without ever encountering them in Helam. The Lamanites pursuing Limhi, however, made a wrong turn somewhere and lost Limhi's track (Mosiah 22:16). The Lamanites encountered the newly settled Amulonites (the former priests of Noah who had settled in the wilderness), but even they weren't clear where the city Lehi-Nephi lay! Later the pursuers stumbled onto the people of Alma, but eventually the latter escaped again, moving again in the direction of Zarahemla. One day's flight put them into a valley which they named after Alma. Warned by the Lord to hasten on, they departed "out of the valley" heading for Zarahemla. The Lamanites gave up the chase when they got to that point, no doubt because they could see they were getting into territory completely outside their ken (Mosiah 24:20–24).

Map 9 shows a plausible arrangement of Helam in relation to the other places mentioned in the account. The ups and downs, the "waters," the well-traveled routes, and even the presence—or absence—of archaeological remains in the right spots at the correct times all fit. The geographical arrangement that seems the most logical puts Helam in the well-watered Rio Blanco Valley, and the Valley of Alma around Huehuetenango. Beyond that point, travelers bound northward and westward, like the Lamanite army chasing Alma, clearly pass a threshold—a literal watershed—separating the highlands that look toward the Valley of Guatemala/Nephi from terrain that starts to drop toward the Grijalva River drainage of Chiapas/Zarahemla.

A different geographical arrangement could also serve. That two places are suitable for the land of Helam warns us



that we may not have our other sites for Book of Mormon events pinned down with absolute finality; but all we seek at this time is at least one plausible setting. Later, accumulated information may allow a definitive judgment. The alternative puts Helam around Malacatancito (on map 9, the left of the two possible sites indicated), where an archaeological site of Nephite age lies adjacent to the origin of the Rio San Juan as it “gushes out of an opening in the base of the Cuchumatanes Mountains.”⁵⁷ This might be the “pure water” that impressed Alma. The little valley here would make a comfortable Helam. The same valley of Alma serves as before, still only one day away. This second correlation would make sense if Limhi and his company, expecting pursuit, had thrown the Lamanites off by taking the easterly route. It may have been a trail Ammon and his company had learned about as they traveled up to Nephi not long before and on which they then guided Limhi (he had never passed through the wilderness, since he had been born in Nephi). Both these trails through Guatemala were well established and in frequent use in pre-Columbian and Spanish colonial times.

Glimpses of Mesoamerican Culture Among the Zeniffites

A number of features of life among the Zeniffites and their Lamanite neighbors in the land of Nephi in the late second century B.C. are illuminated by a knowledge of cultural and geographical characteristics of southern Mesoamerica.

The prophet Abinadi warned Noah and his priests on the Lord’s behalf: “It shall come to pass that I will send forth hail among them, and it shall smite them; and they shall also be smitten with the east wind; and insects shall pester their land also, and devour their grain. And they shall be smitten with a great pestilence—and all this will I do because of their iniquities and abominations” (Mosiah 12:6–7). No scriptural record tells of the fulfillment of this

prophecy, but the threat turns out to be a valid one on the Guatemalan scene where it seems to have been uttered. The conditions foretold are phrased in such a way as to indicate they were within the realm of nature's recognized potential, yet they were so rare that the listeners normally did not contemplate such a combination of calamities as a serious possibility. Highland Guatemala does occasionally suffer just those prophesied conditions under unusual circumstances. Abinadi's point was that God would cause these rare phenomena to come about jointly as unusual punishment for the Zeniffites' gross wickedness.

Geographer F. W. McBryde explains that certain meteorological situations produce an extremely drying north or northeast wind. (Recall that the "east" among pre-Columbian peoples in highland Guatemala could coincide with what on our present maps is north or northeast.) These freak "norte" winds hold back the moist air from the Pacific side that normally flows into the highland valleys daily. As a result, the normal pattern of life-giving showers is upset. Fire danger heightens under these unusual conditions, with drying gusts reaching as high as 35 miles an hour. Great hailstorms occasionally (March through May) accompany these winds, as the strong surge of dry air converges along the coast with moist Pacific air, forming huge hail-generating thunderheads that drift inland above the north ("east") wind.⁵⁸ Thus, a period of "east wind" could cause disastrous weather problems in Guatemala/Nephi, in just the terms the prophet used.

He also warned that insects would come to attack the crops. Migratory locusts periodically caused great destruction to corn fields in the Yucatan Peninsula and highland Guatemala.⁵⁹ The dry interior Motagua River valley, only 15 miles "east" from our Nephi, had a climate that particularly favored the pests. The dry "norte" winds could drive the swarms those few miles onto the Zeniffites' fields. The *Annals of the Cakchiquels*, one of the traditional histories from the highlands, mentions two locust infestations

shortly before the Spanish conquest, and there must have been many more.⁶⁰ Food shortages that result from destructive weather and locust infestations are known historically to have brought malnutrition and pestilence in their wake.⁶¹ As Abinadi foretold, the pattern of wind, hail, insects, and famine, which on the surface seems rather arbitrary, turns out to be logically, integrally linked when we have our geography correct. They could happen, and would be devastating, if the Lord chose to trigger them.

The crops of the Zeniffites are of interest in several ways. As we have noted, corn appears as the most prominent food. That is what we would expect in most parts of Mesoamerica. But the “wheat” and “barley” mentioned as among their crops are another story. Botanists today believe that the earliest wheat in the New World was introduced by Spaniards. I am aware of no clear-cut evidence to the contrary, although there are hints that warrant closer examination.⁶² Wheat now grows in Guatemala but only at elevations higher than our Nephi.⁶³ Possibly the Nephites brought seed with them and grew wheat for a time, only to have it disappear from cultivation later on, a not uncommon phenomenon in the experience of migrating groups. But the “problem” may be one of scientific method rather than of the Book of Mormon’s statements. In 1982, for example, apparent domesticated barley was reported found in Arizona, the first pre-Columbian occurrence in the western hemisphere.⁶⁴ That such an important crop could have gone undiscovered for so long by archaeologists justifies the thought that wheat might also be found in ancient sites.

Another possibility is that edible seeds not familiar to most of us were labeled with the names “wheat” or “barley.” (Names do shift: “corn” in England means wheat; in Scotland, oats; in North America, maize.) Amaranth, considered an Old World grain, was grown and used in Mexico at the time the Spaniards arrived. Botanist Jonathan Sauer thought its origin to be American, but he noted too that it was widely distributed in the Old World in pre-Columbian

times. Its uses in the two hemispheres were strikingly similar also (it was popped and eaten as “popcorn balls” on special feast days); the similarities have suggested to some scholars that amaranth seed was carried across the ocean in ancient times.⁶⁵ Could the name translated in the Book of Mormon as “wheat” actually have been amaranth?

Two other puzzling plants are mentioned in Mosiah 9:9, among those cultivated by the Zeniffites: “sheum” and “neas.” The former word has recently been identified as “a precise match for Akkadian *s(h)e’um*, ‘barley’ (Old Assyrian ‘wheat’); the most popular ancient Mesopotamian cereal name.”⁶⁶ The word’s sound pattern indicates it was probably a Jaredite term. This good North Semitic word was quite at home around the “valley of Nimrod,” north of Mesopotamia, where the Jaredites paused and collected seeds before starting their long journey to America (Ether 2:1, 3). (Incidentally, the form of the word as the Book of Mormon uses it dates to the third millennium B.C., when



The valley of Oaxaca, one candidate to have been the Jaredite Moron. (Courtesy Richard Jones.)

the Jaredites left the Near East. Later, it would have been pronounced and spelled differently.) Apparently the Nephite scribe could not translate it to any equivalent grain name, nor could Joseph Smith do so when he put the text into English. The plant and its name no doubt were passed down to the Nephites/Zeniffites through survivors from the First Tradition, just as corn itself was. Since the words *barley* and *sheum* were both used in the same verse (Mosiah 9:9), we know that two different grains were involved, but what “sheum” might specifically have been in our botanical terms we cannot tell at this time. Perhaps *this* was amaranth?

Beans were an important part of the Mesoamerican diet; the fact that Hebrew *pol*, “bean,”⁶⁷ so nearly matches Mayan terms for bean, *bul* or *bol*,⁶⁸ hints that linguistic research on plant names ought to continue vigorously and carefully; the opportunistic poking about in lexicons that characterizes so much research on the Book of Mormon will not do. Another candidate for such study is, of course, “neas” (Mosiah 9:9). On the basis of name, a long shot is that it could be tobacco (compare Mam Mayan *ma’s*),⁶⁹ but if the plant was mentioned because of its practical importance in the diet, possibly the avocado was intended. (“Avocados probably provided the main source of fat to the Indians of pre-Columbian Mexico and Central America, playing the role of the olive in the Old World.”⁷⁰)

“Wine” and the “vineyards” in King Noah’s land (Mosiah 11:15) can definitely be clarified by attention to linguistic matters. Those terms seem puzzling at first glance, since wine is not known to have been made from grapes in Mesoamerica. (Certain grapes were present, but we do not know that they were used for food or drink.⁷¹) However, the Book of Mormon nowhere says that “grapes” were present, only “vineyards.” The Spaniards spoke of “vineyards” referring to plantings of the maguey (*agave*) plant from which pulque is made.⁷² And various sorts of “wine” were described by the early Europeans in Mesoamerica: one from bananas in eighteenth-century Guatemala, another from pineapples

in the West Indies, palm wine from the coyol palm trunk (manufactured from Veracruz to Costa Rica), and the *balche* of the Mayan area, made from a fermented tree bark.⁷³ Clearly Noah the “wine”-bibber in the book of Mosiah could have been drinking something intoxicating besides the squeezings of the grape.

Another bit of Mesoamerican atmosphere appears in a figure of speech the writer used in Mosiah 20:11. “Like dragons did they fight,” he wrote (see also Alma 43:44). What kind of “dragons” did he have in mind? The reference was probably to the crocodile or caiman. There are a number of reasons to think so. One colonial period observer described these saurians thus: “Very ferocious, and greatly feared. . . . Some of the caymans are from twenty to thirty feet and upwards in length . . . and covered with scales through which a musket ball cannot pierce. Their tails are very powerful and dangerous; and their mouths are large, with three rows of formidable teeth.”⁷⁴ But this “dragon” was much more than a dangerous bit of the natural world. In Mesoamerican mythology a giant creature of crocodilian form was thought to float on the supposed subterranean sea. His back was the surface of the earth, and his connection with earth and waters tied him symbolically with productivity and fertility. This “earth monster” is repeatedly shown at the base of relief carvings at Izapa (on the Chiapas/Guatemala border), in early Maya sculpture, and even in Olmec art, hence the idea is very old and fundamental.⁷⁵ Mayan art represented an aspect of this being by a mere jawbone symbol.⁷⁶ (Incidentally, the name Lehi means “cheekbone” or perhaps “jawbone.” To be able to say that one was descended from “Jawbone,” Lehi, could have been impressive among Mesoamericans.) The Book of Mormon and the Near Eastern cultural background from which it developed represents a crocodile-related monster in similar ways. Second Nephi 9:9–10, 19, and 26 picture “the devil” as a dragon or monster dwelling beneath the earth’s surface. The Israelites shared with their Near

Eastern neighbors the idea and image of this being as a symbol of chaos and evil. The Old Testament name of the creature is sometimes given as “leviathan.”⁷⁷ Its scaly back formed the ridges and hills of earth’s surface. The “high places” where early Palestinian inhabitants worshipped were named from a root that meant “back of an animal.”⁷⁸ This sea creature—chaos—was thought to have been conquered by Jehovah in an ancient epic struggle (Isaiah 27:1; 51:9; Psalm 74:13–14). This is surely the dragon referred to in 2 Nephi 9:9 and the “old serpent” in Mosiah 16:3. The entire topic of dragons, monsters, and serpents is obviously too complex to do more than touch on here. We can at least note two things about Zeniff’s dragon imagery: (1) it had powerful meaning to his listeners—beyond being a mere literary phrase, and (2) the complex of ideas is represented not only in the Book of Mormon but in Palestine and in Mesoamerica as well.

The intention of chapter 4 has been to demonstrate that the early portion of the Book of Mormon plausibly, believably, fits a specific area in Mesoamerica at a particular period of time. Its people wrote, thought, spoke, believed, and acted in ways very much at home in that area. The movements of its peoples can be mapped between real places having the characteristics the volume reports. Once that point is established we can draw from Mesoamerican and Near Eastern materials in order to add depth and breadth to our reading of the Book of Mormon. A little of that has been done here. Much more information could have been arrayed on these points, but perhaps enough has been presented to show the way.

Nowhere have I insisted that specific Book of Mormon people must be identified with particular sites, structures, or artifacts. At some points the fit between scriptural specification and external fact seems to me to have passed beyond mere plausibility to the level of probability. As the saying goes, if the shoe fits, wear it. Yet at this moment our situation seems roughly similar to what Professor Bright has

said about some biblical studies: "In spite of all the light that has been cast on the patriarchal age, in spite of all that has been done to vindicate the antiquity and authenticity of the tradition, archaeology has not proved that the stories of the patriarchs happened just as the Bible tells them. . . . At the same time—and this must be said with equal emphasis—no evidence has come to light contradicting any item of the tradition. One may believe it or not as one sees fit, but proof is lacking either way."⁷⁹ Yet, Bright goes on, archaeology has provided "a flavor of probability" for the patriarchal accounts. So much remains to be done on the Book of Mormon in its setting that "a flavor of plausibility" concerning the setting of the early Nephites is as far as we dare go at this time, but ultimately Bright and I are both talking about the same kind of endeavor. Meanwhile, Mosiah, Benjamin, Zeniff, and Alma can now be seen more nearly as real people, because their lives are set in a believable setting replete with its own detail, where before, they were only one-dimensional.

5

Growing Pains

Our considerations of early Nephite life have shown that a number of facts presented in the Book of Mormon fit the Mesoamerican scene. More correspondences appear as we continue the account. We shall look at the growth in Zarahemla's extent and power, Alma's experiences, and the missionary activity of the sons of Mosiah.

The Expansion of Zarahemla

It was three years after Benjamin's announcement that his son Mosiah was to become king that Limhi's and Alma's separate groups arrived in Zarahemla from Lamanite country. Now the new king called an assembly of his subjects in the pattern his father had followed. They were more numerous by several thousands due to the arrival of the refugees, and the social structure had grown much more complex.

Benjamin had allowed his people to assemble themselves family by family (Mosiah 2:5–6).¹ Even then they must have separated themselves informally into two bodies for, after all, they spoke different languages (Omni 1:17–18). But in the later gathering, the social and cultural differences are more explicit. Mosiah's call to assemble positioned the people in two distinct groups, consisting of the Nephites proper and the people of Zarahemla. After the initial business, newly arrived Alma addressed them by speaking in turn to "large bodies" (Mosiah 25:15). Apparently there were seven of these, for immediately afterward he proceeded to organize seven "churches" or congregations (verses 19–23). Alma's own people from the land of Helam

would have been one of the groups. Limhi's Zeniffites no doubt formed another. (Possibly these two were joined together, since Alma's people had once been Zeniffites.) The resident Nephites from throughout the local land of Zarahemla must have been numerous enough and residentially dispersed enough, or they differed enough in kin ties, to require at least two more units. That would leave three of the congregations for the people of Zarahemla, the most numerous segment of the population (Mosiah 25:2). These groups were distinguished from each other by their residence areas, and those areas were probably controlled on a lineage basis.

Mosiah's people obviously existed in a more complex social setting than only a few years earlier. Language and cultural differences inside his kingdom were great. At least three traditions were present: (1) an old isthmian tradition carried by the people of Zarahemla, (2) the Nephite culture brought by the original immigrants from Guatemala/Nephi under Mosiah I but later modified, and (3) the Zeniffite pattern, shaped by new influences received during their residence among the Lamanites in the land of Nephi for two generations. Clearly, Zarahemla was a center of ethnic, linguistic, and cultural mixing at this time—a zone connecting the southern portions of the “promised land” and the narrow neck area.

A community in such a central position at times undergoes a period of rapid growth, taking advantage of emerging trade possibilities and the vigorous exploration of new cultural forms made possible by internal stimulus. Zarahemla certainly seems to have been growing rapidly at this time and for the next few decades. Clues to the growth are scattered throughout accounts of both normal life and serious conflict. “The people began to be very numerous, and began to scatter abroad upon the face of the earth, yea, on the north and on the south, on the east and on the west, building large cities and villages in all quarters of the land” (Mosiah 27:6). This language extends the Nephite domain beyond the small riverine territory we glimpsed earlier.

The sons of Mosiah soon “traveled throughout all the land of Zarahemla, *and* among all the people who were under the reign of King Mosiah” (Mosiah 27:35, my emphasis). That statement indicates that some of the king’s subjects now lived outside the immediate land of Zarahemla, which his father had ruled. With increasing dispersion it became impossible to hold assemblies of all his people anymore. This is evident in Mosiah’s procedure when the issue arose on who should be the new king to replace him. This time he did not call a meeting. Instead, he merely “sent out” among the people, presumably by oral messengers. But almost immediately it proved necessary to send in addition “even a written word” (Mosiah 29:1, 4), perhaps to ensure clarity and uniformity. This is the first clear record of written communication being put to use for administrative purposes among the Nephites. The business of government was getting more complex and time-consuming. Ruling having become a full-time task, King Mosiah did not—could not, probably—claim that he supported himself by his own labor as his father had.

The growing burden of rule helped persuade Mosiah that a reform in government structure was desirable. As a result, the monarchy was abandoned, and a system of “judges” was installed to rule “throughout all the land of Zarahemla, among all the people who were called the Nephites” (verse 44). This language also communicates extension, undoubtedly beyond the local region surrounding the chief city.

Only nine years later we find Alma many days distant, in the city of Ammonihah, then considered to be “in the borders of the [greater] land of Zarahemla” (Alma 25:2). The local leaders there acknowledged their formal, though minimal, allegiance to the chief judge in the city of Zarahemla. The Nephites continued using both the narrow and the broader meanings of the name “Zarahemla” (compare Ether 9:31, where Zarahemla refers to most of the land southward, with Mormon 1:6, where it is clearly more

localized.) Neither are we nowadays consistent in using geographical terms; witness the problem whether “America” means a nation or a hemisphere. Exactly the same problem arises in references to “the land of Nephi,” where the label was applied to part of a valley (Mosiah 7:7, compare verse 21 and 19:26) or to a territory hundreds of miles from sea to sea (Alma 22:27). We have to read such terms in context, of course. Usually the geographical extent intended is evident, but we might be misled by hasty reading.

The size of Zarahemla’s population shows growth to match the expansion. This is apparent in accounts of war casualties. Our first numerical data come at about 90 B.C. from the battle in which Amlicite dissenters suffered 12,532 slain and the loyal Nephites 6,562 (Alma 2:19). All these people were “Nephites,” politically speaking; the account does not talk about Lamanites at all. It is reasonable that not over half the combatants were slain, which means that at least 40,000 warriors were involved, and perhaps somewhat more. Various studies of ancient warfare suggest how to translate that figure to total population. The ratio usually believed to apply is one soldier to about five total inhabitants. Using that figure, we may conclude that the total population of those “who were called Nephites” was 200,000 or more.

A useful statement about Lamanite population at the same time appears at Mosiah 25:2–3, where we learn that all the people under Nephite rule numbered fewer than half as many as the Lamanites. If the estimate arrived at above for the Nephites is sound, that would put Lamanite population over 400,000. Partial confirmation for such a number comes from further casualty reports. A little after the Amlicite affair, a Lamanite attack on the Nephites resulted in “thousands and tens of thousands” being destroyed; however, we are not told how many of these were Lamanites and how many Nephites. Anyway, the reservoir of Lamanite men had certainly not emptied yet, despite previous deaths in battle. A decade after the Amlicite conflict we

get still more data. Alma 28:2 says that “tens of thousands of Lamanites were slain and scattered abroad.” The writer had not used the expression “tens of thousands” when the nearly 20,000 Amlicites and Nephites had been slain, so the term here must mean many more than that—at least 30,000 Lamanite dead. An attacking army on the order of 75,000 or more seems called for. The usual ratio of 1:5 yields a figure of 375,000 for the total population back home, but that is probably too low. (The Lamanites were operating hundreds of miles from home, which leads to the conclusion that somewhat fewer than one out of five were mobilized. It would take more people at home to support them on a lengthy expedition such as the geography suggests for this case.) If the ratio one in six is used instead, the total Lamanite population from which the force had been drawn would be on the order of 450,000. As crude as our estimates must be for lack of more detailed information in the text (and conceding that the Nephite reports of Lamanite casualties might be exaggerated), the size of the Nephite and Lamanite populations we have calculated is probably of the correct order of magnitude.

Let us now consider Mosiah 25:2–3 from a different point of view. It reports fewer of the Nephites, strictly speaking, than of the ethnic or cultural group termed “the people of Zarahemla.” The Nephites descended from Lehi—including Alma’s and Limhi’s people—would reasonably have been 40 percent of the total of 200,000, based on the wording of the text. That could mean that the Nephites proper were on the order of 80,000 people. This little exercise serves to emphasize the disparity between the core Nephite population and the huge numbers of Lamanites, which the recordkeepers keep emphasizing. Realistically as well as psychologically, the Lamanites were a fearsome enemy.

We have been talking about sizable populations. What evidence is at hand that numbers of that order were living in southern Mesoamerica around 100 B.C.? The question can’t be answered directly. Calculating ancient

populations produces heated disputes among the experts. Archaeologists look at the physical remains, then tend to suppose that what they have discovered and counted so far represents all the people there were. Historians and demographers use different data and often judge the ancient inhabitants as many times more numerous. Even when the same information is available to two experts, their individual judgments yield different estimates.² But we do know that about the time when the Nephite record reports the wars and casualties just discussed, the population at Kaminaljuyu (the city suggested to be Nephi, the Lamanite center) was likely at the highest level in its history. For example, the excavators of the tombs in Mound E-111-3 calculated that the debris scraped from the surface nearby and piled up to form just this one huge mound contained broken pottery fragments from around half a million pots. On that basis a population in the tens of thousands at the site before the mound's construction around 50 B.C. has been inferred.³ Certain peoples in highland Guatemala shortly before the time of the Spanish conquest are reported in traditions to have fought with armies of 60,000, 80,000, and even up to 200,000 on one side, for decade after decade.⁴ So there is no question that the scale of inhabitation and of armies supported that the Book of Mormon indicates for the Lamanites were feasible in terms of the carrying capacity of the land we label Nephi. The further question research may answer is, were those numbers actually there at the very time when the books of Mosiah and Alma say they were?

The Amlicite incident has several interesting geographical implications beyond its casualty data. First, there is the question of the home territory of the rebels. Amlici wanted to be king. He was cunning and sophisticated, a follower of Nehor, the professional priest with the Jaredite name. It would be a good bet that part of Amlici's appeal to a sizable population was that he was a descendant of the old chief, Zarahemla. He might well have been a person of

privilege who wanted kingly authority to augment power he already possessed (Alma 2:1–2; compare 51:8). He certainly had a strong political base before he launched his move. His main supporters were geographically distinct from the loyalist Nephites in Zarahemla, for these Amlicites “gathered themselves together” and then “*came* upon the hill Amnihu, which was east of the river Sidon, which ran by the land of Zarahemla” (verses 9, 15, my emphasis). As we have already seen, in the ensuing battle the Amlicites fled up to the valley of Gideon, later dropping back down to cross the Sidon and join a big Lamanite army advancing down the west bank of the river. (See map 7.) It is apparent that Amlici had made an arrangement with the Lamanites whereby he and his followers were to lure the Nephite army away from the city of Zarahemla at a crucial moment to allow the undetected invasion by the Lamanite force. But where was home to the rebels, where they “gathered” and whence they “*came*”? While we are not told, we can infer the location. They would not have come from upriver, of course. Had that been their location, they would simply have joined with the Lamanite force as it came through their territory. Nothing said at any point in the Nephite record suggests sizable populations away from the river zone on either its eastward or westward sides. But there was room downstream. The downriver stretch is rarely mentioned in the Book of Mormon. It was once, during the later attack led by one Coriantumr. Then the Lamanites seized Zarahemla without warning and pushed on downriver through “the most capital parts of the land” (Helaman 1:27).

The geography we are following makes that area coincide with the lower central depression of Chiapas, where the speakers of the Zoquean language had long lived.⁵ They had been in the land long before the Nephites arrived. Their ancestors had been bearers of the Olmec culture in the time of the Jaredites. There is little reason to question that they were of basically the same stock as

the folk followers of chief Zarahemla. Their leaders would have lost a great deal of power and privilege when the Nephite intruders took over rulership in Mosiah I's day. At the time we are now considering, the expansion of the Nephite elite's power throughout the entire valley could well have spurred this "nobility" to wish to regain rulership for one of their own lineages. This is the logical base from which an Amlici probably proceeded. The variety of peoples under Nephite domination was so geographically divided by river and "wilderness" areas and so linguistically and culturally varied that "dissension" and power struggles among the localized groups, like the one started by Amlici, long continued to challenge the "Nephis," the ruling line descended from the original king, Nephi. Evidence from Chiapas suggests that the Santa Rosa/Zarahemla area might be at loggerheads with the area downstream. The Chiapa de Corzo site, the largest city within the entire central depression at this time and the heart of that downstream sector, was larger and more prosperous than Santa Rosa. No wonder it might rebel against overlordship located upstream. Furthermore, at this period of time (the second century B.C.) Chiapa de Corzo maintained clear-cut cultural ties to the Mayan speakers to the south, that is, to Lamanite country in our Book of Mormon terms.⁶ An alliance between Amlicites based in the Chiapa de Corzo area and the Lamanites in Nephi (highland Guatemala) would have formed a vise, putting pressure on the Nephite center in the upper valley. Of course, we cannot say for sure that this geographical arrangement is how things really were. No one knows enough facts yet to be sure, but it very reasonably *could* have been so.

Alma's Circuit

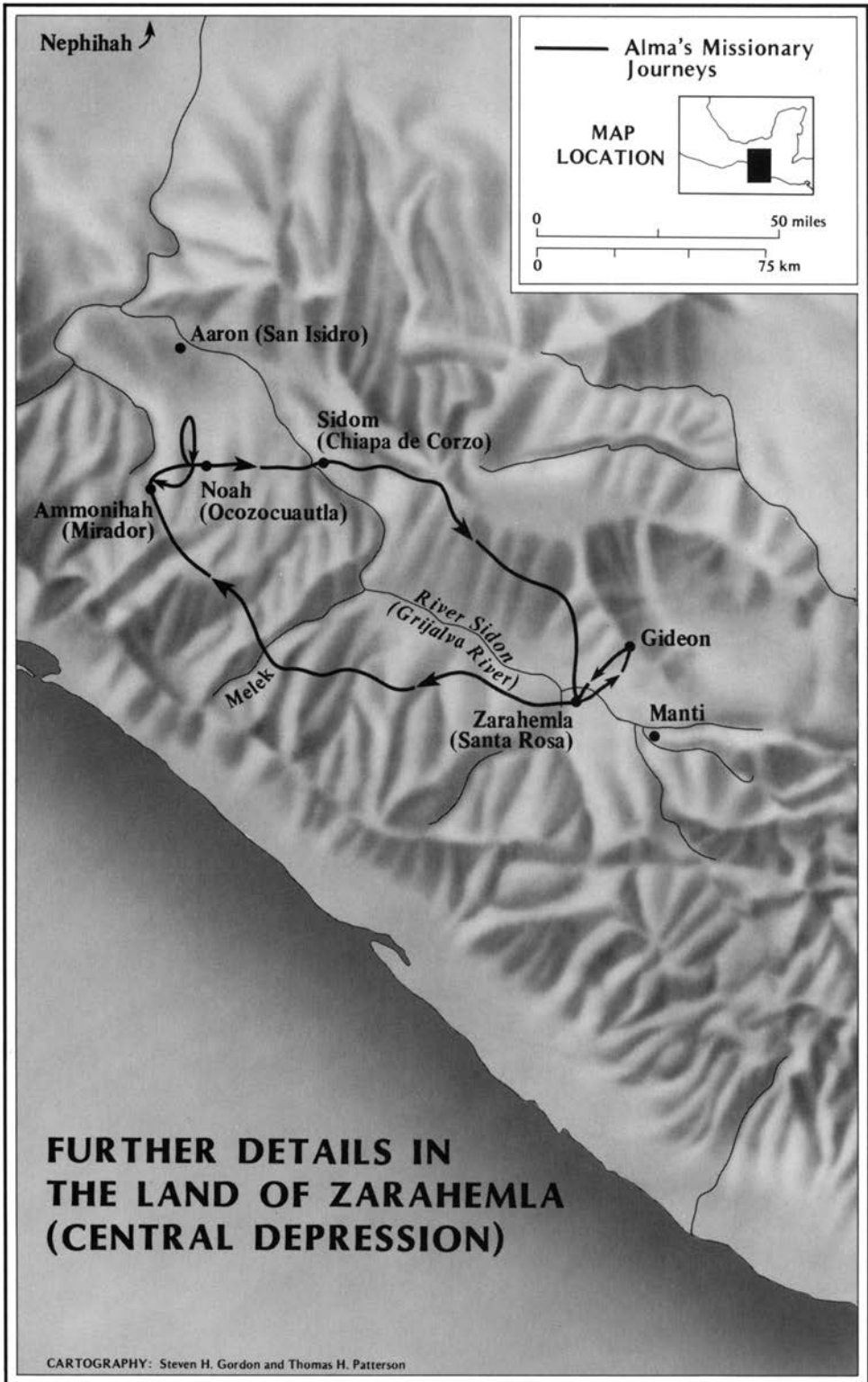
The picture of Zarahemla's expanding influence is clarified further in the story of Alma's preaching mission (Alma 5 through 15). He began his retrenchment effort in Zarahemla itself, among the seven congregations. From

there he traveled over the river to the east and up to the valley of Gideon, where a Nephite city had been established after the Amlicite battle (Alma 6:7).

The first leg of Alma's journey is easily located on our map. Gideon was, we saw before, in the uplands east of the Sidon valley. In terms of our geographical correlation, the Comitán Valley is the likely place for Gideon. Another possibility, but less likely, is the Teopisca-Amatenango area. (An archaeological survey of these highlands revealed that these areas were first settled, but only in a few spots, in about the first century B.C., Alma's time.⁷ That makes sense in terms of the Book of Mormon, which practically ignores the highlands on the east of the land of Zarahemla, except for Gideon.)

The second leg of his preaching circuit took the Nephite high priest to Melek, near the west wilderness. This place is implied in the several references to it to be some distance from Zarahemla (Alma 8:3; 45:18). On the western edge of the central depression of Chiapas one major settlement area stands out. Called the Frailesca, its name came from the fact that the friars of the Dominican religious order of the Catholic Church controlled this productive territory in Spanish colonial days. Near Villa Flores, the heart of the area, is an impressive ruined site now labeled Vera Cruz II. It is the largest settlement in the whole western zone that dates to the late second century B.C. when Alma made his journey.⁸ (However, the Book of Mormon never mentions any *city* of Melek, so no large center need be expected.) A primary route directly linked Santa Rosa/Zarahemla with this Frailesca/Melek region. The several adjacent valleys that together constitute the western zone would have constituted "all the borders of the land which was by the wilderness side," whose people flocked together to hear Alma preach (Alma 8:5). (See map 10.)

The route taken by Alma from Melek ran "on [to] the north" parallel to the mountain wilderness on his left. Beyond it lay a narrow coastal strip. During his three-day





The large mound at Mirador in western Chiapas gives the site its name, "Lookout," and could have been one reason the people of Ammonihah were so proud of their city. (Photo by Daniel Bates. Courtesy David A. Palmer and the Society for Early Historic Archaeology.)



The flat Cintalapa River valley in which Mirador lies is the chief route between central Chiapas and the Pacific coast. (Photo by Daniel Bates. Courtesy David A. Palmer and the Society for Early Historic Archaeology.)

trip he seems not to have gone through any settlement worth mentioning. Since he was an older man by this time, we should not suppose he would cover in three days more than 50 or 60 miles.⁹ From the Frailesca such a trip would have brought him to the archaeological site of Mirador, a major regional center of western Chiapas from Jaredite times until after the Nephites disappeared. Its 30 major mounds are impressively concentrated in an area about 400 meters on each side. This place was prominent enough to justify the pride of the Ammonihahites in its importance (Alma 9:4). Its cultural connections with the Zarahemla/ Santa Rosa area were definite though not intimate, the same type of relationship implied in the Ammonihah people's guardedly hostile response to Alma's message (Alma 8:11–12).

Mirador was the key to a distinct geographical zone, the Jiquipilas-Cintalapa valley. This flattish zone is the most northwesterly extension of the central depression and thus the major route from Chiapas to the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. The city's immediate position is at the low point of the valley, just before the river draining the valley enters a deep canyon on its way to join the Grijalva/Sidon. Immediately east of Mirador the road inland rises dramatically almost 2,500 feet onto an intermediate plateau, so the site appears to be in a "hole" of sorts.¹⁰ This situation may be related to the statement about Ammonihah, that Alma and Amulek, his new companion, "*came out* even into the land of Sidom" (Alma 15:1; my emphasis). Later settlers were also said to "*go in*" to the place (Alma 16:11). In few topographic settings could such expressions have been more appropriate.

Excavation at Mirador has revealed that the place was an important center in Alma's day. One tomb contained remnants of two ancient bark paper books or codices. These are the only definite books recovered so far in Mesoamerican excavations. (Despite extensive consultation with leading technical specialists, personnel of the BYU-New World

Archaeological Foundation who dug at the site have been unable to find any means of separating the congealed pages of the volumes;¹¹ one fragment tantalizingly showed the presence of glyphs.¹²) From their archaeological setting they date around A.D. 450, so this find has no direct significance for the Book of Mormon, but it does vividly remind us of the books, no doubt of the same type, that existed at Ammonihah in Alma's day. The vengeful Nehorite priests of the place burned not only the wives and children of the men who believed in Alma's preaching, but "they also brought forth their records which contained the holy scriptures, and cast them into the fire also, that they might be burned" (Alma 14:8). Other notable events also took place at Ammonihah: two great discourses by Alma and Amulek; their imprisonment and miraculous deliverance; the sudden destruction of the place by the Lamanites, which transformed the site into "the Desolation of Nehors"; and the later construction of fortifications around the city, which foiled a new Lamanite attack (Alma 49:14).

The consistency of the geographical information in the Book of Mormon is confirmed in the account of the attacks on Ammonihah. Around 80 B.C. just after Alma's experience there, "the Lamanites had come in upon the wilderness side, into the borders of the land, even into the city of Ammonihah" (Alma 16:2) and destroyed it. Nine years later they came in by the same route, expecting easy pickings against the partially rebuilt city (Alma 49:1–3). In both cases, it is clear, the Lamanite force had journeyed from the land of Nephi northward along the coastal wilderness strip on the west of the land of Zarahemla" (Alma 22:28); the Nephites never defended that zone, it seems. (They probably never even occupied it seriously, for their record mentions no settlement, no event there; see map 10.) When the attackers got far enough northward, they "went over into the borders of the land of Zarahemla, and fell upon the people who were in the land of Ammonihah" (Alma 25:2). The "over" is precisely correct, for they would have had to

cross the western wilderness chain of mountains from the coast to get to Ammonihah, the first major city they came to on the main route. The western Sierra Madre range can be seen on the skyline from Mirador (compare map 10). The fit of text to terrain would be difficult to improve.

One of these attacks positions another city, Noah, in relation to Ammonihah. As the enemy came upon Ammonihah the second time, they were shocked to discover that chief captain Moroni had fortified the place (Alma 49:4). Frustrated there, they moved farther inland (verse 12) to Noah. The earlier attack had overrun Ammonihah and then carried beyond far enough to capture some prisoners “around the borders of Noah” (Alma 16:3). Moroni guessed that Noah would again be their alternative target, and he was right. These two incidents indicate that Noah was the next city as one came from the west past Ammonihah on the way toward the “capital parts” along the big river. The logical candidate for Noah meeting these requirements is Ocozocuautila, a major archaeological site near the modern community of that name. Like Mirador, it is near the modern highway, which parallels the ancient route. This settlement too has been investigated by the BYU-NWAF. The results show another quite impressive center that was flourishing modestly at about the time the Lamanites attacked.¹³

When Alma was on his preaching tour, he at first departed from Ammonihah toward another city, Aaron (Alma 8:13). No mention was made of Noah then. It is apparent that Aaron lay in a somewhat different direction. Likely Alma at first followed the route toward Ocozocuautila/Noah but branched off toward Aaron before reaching Noah. Later, however, when he and Amulek “came out” of the Ammonihah valley and over the intervening elevation heading to Sidom, they would have passed through Noah (see map 10).

Alma never did reach the city Aaron on his journey. While on the road he was turned back by an angel’s command to teach again in Ammonihah. But our picture of

overall Nephite geography is clarified by consideration of Aaron's position. (This matter was considered briefly in chapter 1.) According to Alma 50:14, the region administered from Aaron abutted on Nephiah's territory, although the latter city was down in the east lowlands (Alma 50:14; 59:5). So we see that Aaron is linked both with Ammonihah, to the north and west of Zarahemla, and with Nephiah, on the eastern and southern limit of Zarahemla-controlled territory. At least one reconstruction of Book of Mormon geography some years ago found these references to Aaron irreconcilable, concluding that two Aarons must be involved. Not so, it turns out. As we saw in chapter 1, with Ammonihah near the west wilderness and Nephiah in the eastern lowlands, Aaron, associated with both, would be about halfway between the seas.

In the northwesterly portion of the state of Chiapas we are considering, one ancient site dominated the middle sector of the land, San Isidro. It lies on the middle course of the Grijalva River. The BYU-NWAF dug at the site just before the waters of Nezahualcoyotl Dam inundated it some years ago. San Isidro was found to be the economic and political key to the whole Middle Grijalva zone and the largest site on the river downstream from Chiapa de Corzo.¹⁴ A person going from Mirador/Ammonihah toward the east lowlands would naturally pass through this city, traveling on or near the great river through the hilly tangle that separates the central depression from the lowlands. The road from Mirador to the east coast would head in a direction such that the traveler would miss Ocozocautla/Noah, as Alma appears to have done at first. The entire arrangement of distances, topography, and drainage involving San Isidro provides a neat solution for the Aaron "problem." Incidentally, the excavation at San Isidro showed that it was not occupied during the first century B.C., the period following Alma's day. This would explain why we hear nothing further of the place through the period of wars and migrations covered later in the books of Alma and Helaman.¹⁵

Sidom, to which Alma moved from Ammonihah, was apparently the center of an area more populous than Ammonihah and Noah. Neither of the latter two is mentioned as having a dependent hinterland. At Sidom, however, those responding to Alma's teaching and affiliating with his church "were many; for they did flock in from all the region round about Sidom, and were baptized" (Alma 15:14). Surely Sidom lay on the big river, the Sidon. The name linkage has to be significant; baptism was especially linked to the spot, and the demands of overall geography put it there. The impressive archaeological site of Chiapa de Corzo seems to be Sidom. During several ancient periods it was the largest city in Chiapas, with many dependent towns and villages in its nearby network. It would have been a rich and crucial target for the Lamanite leader Coriantumr, since it and its zone were the "most capital" part of the entire river basin (Helaman 1:27). As a focal point for trade and the ceremonial center for the entire lower part of the central depression, it would also be the logical place to which refugees from Ammonihah like Alma and Amulek would gravitate (Alma 15:1). A further interesting hint of the Sidom/Chiapa de Corzo relationship lies in names. At the time of the Spanish conquest the name given Chiapa by Tzeltal Indians in the vicinity was *zactan*, "white lime." The Semitic word *sidon* may come from *sid*, "lime."¹⁶ The possibility of a linguistic link invites further study.

Chiapa de Corzo was almost surely occupied, since at least 1,000 B.C., by speakers of some version of the Zoque language. True Nephites, the actual descendants of Nephi, would have been unusual at either place. (Note that Amulek's first statement to Alma in Ammonihah was "I am a Nephite" [Alma 8:20, compare 10:2–3]. Obviously, most people there would not have said that; otherwise it would have been absurd for him to begin that way.) If I am right that Amlici and his forces had come from this area, there is some irony in Alma's preaching success at Sidom. He was, of course, a genuine Nephite, born and bred, one

of the type Amlici had been trying to overthrow. Now he comes in and has a powerful impact on religious beliefs and practices, turning many people toward the (Santa Rosa) Zarahemla pattern.

By the time Alma reached Sidom he had completed two-thirds of a circuit around the central depression and was ready to go back home. (A reasonable guess why he never went on to Aaron is that events at Ammonihah and Sidom had used up the time he had allotted for his tour, perhaps determined by anticipation of seasonal bad weather.) With Amulek along, Alma left Sidom and “came over” to the city of Zarahemla (Alma 15:18). No significant population centers are mentioned en route. In the Book of Mormon the language “came over” plausibly refers to travel across an intervening elevation. The standard, sensible route from Sidom/Chiapa de Corzo would indeed have been “over,” via the highlands, east of, rather than along, the river. The higher route provided smoother traveling and was much cooler. Movement alongside the river would have been interrupted by bluffs and ravines or would have passed through difficult Angostura canyon. Besides, the hot climate at the bottom of the confined valley would cause discomfort. Once more the modern highway, seeking out the easier route, parallels the ancient way up through the highlands. Alma and Amulek would have ascended from Chiapa de Corzo to the 7,000-foot level, around San Cristobal de Las Casas, an area that archaeological investigation shows was settled only lightly if at all in their time.¹⁷ They would press on through the Teopisca Valley before dropping down to the river just downstream from Zarahemla. Map 10 shows the likely route, probably about the same one taken earlier by Amlici and his rebel army to reach the hill Amnihu.

Every Book of Mormon statement about the setting of Alma’s journey works out consistently on this geographical scene. So do the dates of occupation of the ancient sites mentioned, as far as present information allows us to

check. In addition, certain social and cultural parallels are revealed in the story. We'll check their consistency next.

Trends in Nephite Social Structure

The expanding range of Zarahemla's influence demanded and produced important changes in the life lived in simpler times. King Benjamin would have been shocked by the role of paid lawyers, yet such specialists had an acknowledged place in society when Alma visited Ammonihah (Alma 10:14; 11:20). The structure of governmental administration also had to grow as population and distances increased. Benjamin seems not to have had even a minimal staff; but a set of functionaries necessarily served Mosiah, his successor (Mosiah 29:1, 4). The size of government grew enormously in the next generation, for Moroni made clear in his complaints to Pahoran during the Amalickiahite war that the number of governmental officials was great (Alma 60:7–8, 11, 21–22, 33). A century later the text is even more explicit that there were "many officers" (3 Nephi 6:11).

The differentiation of specialists in government was accompanied by the rise of professional priests. As early as the beginning of rule by the Nephite judges, Nehor, the prototype preacher-for-profit, was executed in hopes of staunching "priestcraft," but that did not stop the trend; "there were many who . . . went forth preaching false doctrines . . . for the sake of riches and honor" (Alma 1:16). And in all likelihood, full-time special roles such as craftsmen and merchants were also stimulated by the technical and social developments indicated in Alma 1:29 and Helaman 6:11. By the end of the first quarter century A.D., we are told there were "many merchants" (3 Nephi 6:11).

Part of the social difference arising at this period was due to the increasing significance of priests. The case of the Zoramites is clear; their religious leaders, as part of the wealthier stratum of society, systematically exploited the lay population (Alma 31:23–32:5). The priests of Noah among the Zeniffites had followed the same course

two generations earlier (Mosiah 11:3–6). Later priests repeatedly sought new people to exploit (Mosiah 23:25, 29–39; 24:1, 8–9; Alma 25:4–5). The professionalizing of the priest's role had been proposed by Nehor immediately prior to the Amlicite trouble, and subsequently the "Order of Nehor" grew in popularity (Alma 1:1, 3, 12, 16; 14:16; 16:11; 24:28). Amlici himself, who wanted to be king over the Nephites, was apparently a believer in the principles behind the Nehor cult, "he being a very cunning man, yea, a wise man as to the wisdom of the world" (Alma 2:1). The Nephite priests were accused by Korihor, a dissident with a Jaredite name, which suggests connection to an ancient tradition of priestly exploitation of the people (Alma 30:23). It was false in that case, but the fact that such a charge could make him popular (verse 18) means that some priests must have been in the habit of seeking power and wealth (Mosiah 27:3–5 implies there was basis for the charges). Perhaps the prime offenders were mainly the old-line "official" priests attached to the throne. These had nothing to do with Alma's church (Mosiah 27:1). No doubt they were connected with the sacrificial rites carried out under the law of Moses in connection with the institution of kingship (Mosiah 2:3; note the unspecified "ceremony" of Mosiah 19:24). Priests in Old Testament days were known to profit themselves through their offices.

Part of the power of the priests lay in their superior knowledge. Their control of ceremonial lore and the books preserving it allowed them to associate with and be part of the "power structure." That association would tend to lead them to share with the ruling elite the ambition to control society for their own ends (compare Mosiah 11:3–11).

The Amulonite and Amalekite priests blatantly played the power role among the Lamanites, taking advantage of their crucial position as experts in esoteric knowledge (Mosiah 24:1, 4–8). Before their conversion the younger Alma and the sons of King Mosiah were of a similar type—

sons of the privileged class, wealthy, learned, and nominally religious. Alma “became a very wicked and an *idolatrous* man. And he was a man of many words, and did speak much flattery to the people” (Mosiah 27:8; my emphasis). All this points up how central the role of religious leader or priest was at this period in Nephite and Lamanite society. Every statement made above about functions and abuses of the priesthood could be, and probably has been, made in the scholarly literature concerning the priest’s role in Mesoamerica.¹⁸

The Nephites in Alma’s day were setting out on a sequence of social development that would prove disastrous. Specialization, however, in skills was less significant to the direction the Nephites were going than was the rise of class differences. Even in “the church” Alma “saw great inequality among the people, some lifting themselves up with their pride, despising others, turning their backs upon the needy and the naked” (Alma 4:12). Continued for years, this process produced genuine social classes. Their rise is particularly clear among the Zoramites, where the “poor class” complained that the priests and the wealthy with “their costly apparel, and their ringlets, and their bracelets, and their ornaments of gold, and all their precious things” (Alma 31:28) had excluded them from the places of worship (Alma 32:2–5). As the trend matured, people came to be “distinguished by ranks, according to their riches and their chances for learning” (3 Nephi 6:12). Eventually, “there became a great inequality in all the land” (verse 14).

This development had not occurred overnight. A slow, inexorable process had produced the condition, which reached a climax just before Christ’s advent. At that point there came a respite, due no doubt to the leveling effects of the great destruction and to general acceptance of the gospel of Christ. After an interval, however, the process began again. Within a few generations the expanding population once more separated according to rank and wealth, “and they began to be divided into classes” (4 Nephi 1:26).

That pattern amplified itself until the extermination of the Nephites and continued afterward among surviving groups.

Of course, the Book of Mormon is not a social history. We see certain major developments in society reflected in occasional descriptions or indicators in the scripture, such as I have cited, but it is difficult to see the full picture. We could say, as the prophets did, that the people desired wickedness, but that seems more a description than an explanation. What immediate factors worked to push the Nephites in the fatal direction they proved unable to resist? What has been learned about Mesoamerican life sheds light on what was probably happening in Nephite society.

Geographical circumstances in Mesoamerica favored certain directions of social and political development. One key factor was that the most productive farming areas were small and were separate from other good areas; therefore, extensive nations continuously inhabiting wide stretches of territory did not develop, as they did in Eurasia. Each local area had its unique combination of temperature, soils, water, plants, seasons, and so on. Thus, agriculture, on which the social life and culture of a given locality was based, differed significantly from region to region. Long adaptation had brought each local group into effective adjustment with its special natural setting and had developed correspondingly different customs and ways of thinking. Mesoamerica was more a mosaic of regions—a quasi-archipelago of “islands” of culture amid a “sea” of wilderness—than a harmoniously integrated civilization.

Fragmentation produced a number of effects that compounded one another. First, land resources in any one area being limited, a rise in population could lead to conflict, as “have-not” peoples reached the limit supportable by the lands available to them. Second, these small-scale settlement units did not normally need, nor could they support, large political structures. Rule was usually in the hands of a dominant lineage, often of outside origin (they could be

more objective about petty local disputes). The rulers were required, of course, to carry out certain administrative services for the local population (such as settling quarrels and organizing defense). Their dominance was anchored in religious tradition that justified their right to rule.

The mosaic pattern of culture and nature also meant that certain highly valued resources, such as green jadeite stones and precious feathers, were available only at a distance. Thus, trade was stimulated. However, the long distances separating centers meant that such commerce demanded heavy investment. The ones capable of organizing and controlling it were the elite lineages, a case of the rich getting richer. Trade frequently loomed as so large a concern that it restrained the tendency to war between regions, because the elites cultivated diplomatic relationships with their peers in other lands in order to protect their merchants. A network of elites thus tended to build up, transcending local boundaries, members of which “scratched each other’s backs.”

However, life was not coldly secular. Religion was infused into nearly every aspect of group life. In those times technology was so far lacking in its ability to overcome difficult and unpredictable natural problems that all Mesoamerican peoples, indeed all ancient peoples, felt they must acknowledge their dependence on divine power and cultivate its intervention on their behalf. That concern was usually manifested through elaborate public ceremonies in the charge of the numerous priests. Obviously this sketch is a vastly oversimplified version of the varied reality of Mesoamerican life,¹⁹ but, like a parable, it is still useful as a learning device.

Under these constraining forces of geography and culture, dominant lineages and leaders rose and fell regularly. Beneath those ebbs and flows a fundamental folk population continued quietly. The commoners had regard for priests and rulers only as they could not escape the necessity. Mesoamerican “history” consists of the complex, still

unintegrated record of elites competing for power and glory. That spotty sequence was projected on a background of little-changing folk life.

The general pattern so characteristic of Mesoamerica developed among the Nephites on either side of Alma's time. Looking at the scripture to detect those social factors among its people may seem inappropriately coldblooded to some religious people. Is scripture not, they ask, a religious record? Indeed it is, but religion is not a category divorced from life as it is lived. Moroni's title page to the Book of Mormon makes clear how much of its message is wrapped up in Nephite social history. Fourth Nephi and Mormon underline the point: noble possibilities open to the Nephites were compromised again and again because the people succumbed to social and cultural forces at play on them in their setting. Instead of being what they might have been, a people of God, they let themselves become mere Mesoamericans. Their experience may warn Latter-day Saints about our vulnerability to social and cultural pressures to Americanize, or Europeanize, or otherwise "adapt" to our surroundings in the same fatal fashion.

The archaeological evidence from Chiapas in southern Mexico, where we think Zarahemla was, definitely indicates an increase in social distinctions during this period from around 125 to 75 B.C. One tomb dated about then at Chiapa de Corzo included some 35 imported pottery vessels, which had come from as far away as 600 miles, from Oaxaca, southern Veracruz, Guatemala, and El Salvador. Only a wealthy, socially prominent person could have commanded the resources represented by this lavish cache. All earlier burials had contained only modest local offerings.²⁰ This is but one bit of hard evidence of the social change process we detect going on according to both the Book of Mormon and the external sources of information.

A more intimate level of the society of Alma's time can be observed by examining how Alma made entry into the communities he visited, as shown by his situation at

Ammonihah. On the prophet's first visit he seems to have had no personal contacts, which may help explain the short shrift given his message. Had Alma had close kinfolk in the city, no doubt he would have sought them out. Upon his return, however, he was at least able to locate a man of his own descent group. This was Amulek, an influential member of the local elite in Ammonihah, to whom he was directed by an angel. With such entree, Alma soon began to have some success. Probably many of his converts were among Amulek's own "kindred" (Alma 10:4, 11–12; 14:1). The nature of Alma and Amulek's relationship is notable. As mentioned earlier, when Alma had approached him, Amulek identified himself as a "Nephite" (Alma 8:20). "I am Amulek . . . a descendant of Nephi," Alma 10:2–3 reports him saying. Mosiah 17:2 gives Alma's descent in identical language. We understand, then, that the two were establishing that they belonged to the same lineage. A Mayan practice at the time of the Spanish conquest shows the same principle governing how to get along in strange territory: "When anyone finds himself in a strange region and in need, he has recourse to those of his name [kin group]; and if there are any, they receive him and treat him with all kindness."²¹ Missionary experience in many lands has taught Latter-day Saints that Alma would more likely succeed once he had made connection with a person who would trust him and could be an intermediary between him and some local people. Amulek filled the need nicely. Several bases for trust tied the two men together: they were both of the socially privileged class (Alma 10:4; 15:16, 18; Mosiah 29:42); both were members of the lineage of Nephi; and both were also believers in the same religion (Alma 8:20, 29). With Amulek's aid, a core of support, or at least tolerance, for Alma built up through Amulek's extensive kin network. We can suppose the Nephite prophet proceeded in the same way at Melek and Sidom. In a society of the sort described in the Book of Mormon, as in Mesoamerican groups generally, the building of social ties mostly

went on through kinship connections. Only the most unfortunate in ancient Mexico were without a network of “many kindreds and friends” (3 Nephi 7:4). Trade and migration were normally facilitated by personal connections. The spread of religious ideas, or of any other aspect of culture, also proceeded mainly through such networks of influence. In fact, the structure of both Book of Mormon and Mesoamerican society at certain times consisted of little more than kinship bonds elaborated.

We find two social tendencies described in both the Mesoamerican sources and the scripture. On a basic level continuity is manifest, based on the local, ecologically tied pattern of social relationships that kept kinship and neighboring at the forefront. At the same time, men of ambition, power, and prestige constantly attempted to increase their advantage against the inertia of the folk institutions. Often they succeeded, only to end up bringing disaster on the unstable social system they had created.

A Glance Northward

The fact that Alma was interested in Ammonihah and Aaron, spots that would have seemed far northward from Zarahemla in his father’s day, is indicative of a rising interest in the north. Soon it would culminate in major Nephite migrations past “the narrow neck” into the land northward. After moving from Nephi to Zarahemla, the survivors of Limhi’s exploring group, which had visited the final Jaredite battlefield just before 125 B.C., undoubtedly told their story over and over again. The ancestors of chief Zarahemla surely had passed on their own traditional tales about the north, where their founders had landed before coming to Zarahemla (Alma 22:30–32). They had also encountered Coriantumr, the last surviving Jaredite ruler, north of the narrow neck (Omni 1:21). The passing down of Jaredite names like Morianton, Nehor, Korihor, and Coriantumr (even Moroni means “one from Moron”²²) and the transmission of maize already noted further witness that



The ruins of La Venta, thought to be the city of Mulek. (Photo by Daniel Bates. Courtesy David A. Palmer and the Society for Early Historic Archaeology.)

Mulek's descendants had absorbed cultural and genetic elements from the Jaredite era. Most of that stream of influence must have been brought to bear on the Nephites through the people of Zarahemla. By the time Limhi brought the twenty-four gold plates of Ether with him to Zarahemla, Mosiah felt translating them was urgent "because of the great anxiety of his people; for they were desirous beyond measure to know concerning those people who had been destroyed" (Mosiah 28:11–12, 17–18). Only a few years later chief commander Moroni had intense concern for the destroyed Jaredites, whom he called his "brethren," in the land northward (Alma 46:22, 17). And when Morianton, six years later, wanted to colonize the land northward, both he and Moroni already knew a good deal about the country (Alma 50:29, 32).

This discussion has touched on several aspects of social structure revealed in the Book of Mormon record of Alma's time. The upshot is threefold: (1) Nephite society

was engaged in a marked expansion in geographical extent and complexity; (2) there was societal continuity behind the dramatic changes; and (3) Book of Mormon society around 100 B.C. agrees basically with what we know about Mesoamerica; the geography and culture of that area shed light on the scriptural peoples at many points.

Cultural Contrasts

We have identified some interesting points of similarity between Book of Mormon and Mesoamerican social arrangements. We also see traditional ways of thinking about or interpreting the world that seem to tie the scriptural record to Mesoamerican cultures.

Two religious traditions are visible among the descendants of Lehi, just as among the Israelites in Palestine. In the latter case, the prophets taught a morally demanding, austere, and idealistic faith. It required adhering to specific rites, beliefs, and standards of behavior, yet it was not highly ceremonialized. Its continuing rival I call “naturalistic.” It, too, aimed at a kind of salvation by tribal obedience. The prophets led some of the people of Israel to ennobling truths much above the level of their neighbors. Their system’s chief rival can be called Baalism, mainly a collection of religious practices and beliefs passed on to the Israelites from the Canaanites. The effective main aim of Baal worship was the same as that of other naturalistic religious systems around the world—it sought to control nature to man’s advantage, using principles akin to magic. Such religion at one level was always localized, each region having its own version of the cult. A ceremonially more spectacular version was supported by the people who dominated national life—the “Establishment.” The monuments and artifacts having ceremonial or religious meaning that have survived from the Palestine of Old Testament times were largely products of ceremonial Baalism.²³

Tied to the nature-oriented ritual of the Baal cult was a still more intimate and fundamental layer of worship,

mainly consisting of paying homage to the ancestors and observing rites of passage: birth, reaching adulthood, marriage, death. Witchcraft and shamanistic healing belonged to the same complex. Much of this semi-religious activity was carried out unofficially in family, kin, and neighborhood groups.²⁴

These several public and private versions of Canaanite religion were connected through a unified worldview or conception of what man, nature, and the heavens are like. Most Near Easterners in Lehi's day shared a basic knowledge of the concepts and symbols commonly used to convey that worldview. (Just as today "modern" people the world over tend to share a common worldview centering on poorly understood mechanistic science, rationality, and materialism, even though they may differ rhetorically about certain details, like "socialism" or "capitalism.") The primal sea, the deity controlling rain and drought who was thought to be located at a sacred mountain, mythologically explained movements of sun and moon, the ritual



An altar and stela combination, characteristic of Izapa and related southern Mesoamerican sites of the Second Tradition. (Photo by James C. Christensen used by permission of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.)

awakening of vegetation in the spring, and so on—all those ideas central to Near Eastern thought were ordered and explained in a picture basically common to the minds of all the inhabitants of Palestine, whether Israelites or Canaanites.

The prophetic tradition opposed Baalism. Early Israel's devotion to the naturalistic tradition was shown at Mount Sinai, where the dancing, the golden calf, and other ritual expressions and religious ideas of Canaan and Egypt were manifest. Moses and the other prophets struggled against the cruder system of thought, trying to pull the people upward to a plane of meaning above the cultural background of their times. The chief theme of the religious history of Israel was the interplay between the prophets with their lofty view and the backsliding tendencies of the bulk of the Israelites.

The same situation prevailed in the promised land of America. In addition to what Lehi's descendants brought, the land contained a religious system comparable in important ways to that of the Canaanites. The religious ideals and behavior transmitted by the continuing Mesoamerican population would resonate with the naturalistic, Baalist elements in the minds and lives of the less faithful in Lehi's and Mulek's groups. That contrary worldview constantly challenged the Nephite prophets, who did their best to lift their people to gospel-level faith. Scholars of Mesoamerican cultures have identified elements of belief and practice that reflect a Mesoamerican worldview quite similar to that of the Canaanites in the Old World and, for that matter, many other places in the world.²⁵ The Nephites—here meaning the entire ethnically complex population dominated by the lineage of Nephi—kept drifting toward that substratum of magical worldview. The Almas, Nephis, and Mormons among them tried valiantly to lift this heterogeneous mass of people to a grander view of man and creation, but only rarely did they succeed for long.

The Old Testament prophets used the symbolic language of the Baalist worldview as a vehicle for teaching the people (“after the manner of their language,” as Doctrine and Covenants 1:24 says; teaching has to begin where people’s minds are, not where we wish they were). Prophets have done so in all ages without qualms, for symbolic language is necessary, particularly for talking of the unseen world, and it might as well be language people already know. So the Old Testament is full of allusions to sacred mountains, the great deep, doves, serpents, and what not, used to teach about Jehovah and about principles. Precisely the same phenomenon is visible in the Book of Mormon. Nephi taught about Christ as Redeemer by referring to him in terms of a major Mesoamerican (and Old Testament) sacred symbol, the elevated serpent who blesses²⁶ (Helaman 8:13–16; Alma 33:19–22; John 3:14; Numbers 21:9).

When Alma taught the Zoramites a lesson in faith by referring to the tree of life sprouting from the heart (Alma 32:28–43), he was using Mesoamerican religious imagery.²⁷ As we have already seen, the ideas of pure water and the primal sea beneath the surface of the earth had been employed as a language of religious instruction a generation earlier by Alma’s father. Tradition or culture can be used for good or evil, to teach the gospel or Baalism. The cultural symbols in use among Nephites and Lamanites may look to us as strange as those in the Book of Revelation. But in both cases the symbols are only tools, not substance. The representation of a serpent may be used by respectable prophets or by benighted priests. We can expect that Nephite ideas and phrasings would fit within the Mesoamerican context. Yet isolated concepts or symbols cannot tell us the structure in which they all made sense. The Book of Mormon shows us that structure—a rather pure version of the prophetic tradition. In the surviving native sources, we see glimpses of the naturalistic tradition.



A major tributary of the Sidon or Grijalva River, near its “headwaters” around Manti. (Photo by Daniel Bates. Courtesy David A. Palmer and the Society for Early Historic Archaeology.)



The Sidon or Grijalva at the lower end of the central depression of Chiapas. (Photo by James C. Christensen used by permission of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.)

The Mission of the Sons of Mosiah

The account of King Mosiah's sons and their friends preaching among the Lamanites in the land of Nephi conveys further information on the arrangement of territories and natural features. Once more it proves possible to fit those scriptural features consistently and plausibly into the Guatemalan setting. We also see that social and cultural developments among the Lamanites parallel what was going on in Zarahemla. The characteristics of culture, history, and geography sketched in the scripture for the Nephites of the first century B.C. again fit with the Mesoamerican scheme of things.

The missionaries proceeded up to the land of Nephi by a route that some of Alma's or Limhi's people probably had told them about. (See map 11.) But telling sometimes fails to convey adequate details about actuality. In this case the trip proved more difficult than previous journeys (Alma 17:7–9). The party finally stopped at a landmark junction where they knew they would have to separate to go to various destinations within the general land of Nephi. This spot was "in the borders of the land of the Lamanites" (Alma 17:13, 18). From there Ammon went directly to the land of Ishmael, and Aaron headed for the city of Jerusalem, while others in the group next showed up at a place called Ani-Anti. None of these spots had been mentioned in earlier discussions of the land. Probably they had all been settled systematically, at least by the Book of Mormon peoples, in the time since the departure of Limhi's and Alma's groups a generation earlier. The junction where the brothers parted is very plausibly Los Encuentros. This is both a present-day highway junction and also an ancient meeting point of paths from four directions.

In Ishmael Ammon became a servant to the local king, Lamoni, whom he converted in a remarkable manner (Alma 17:20–19:36). In Lamoni's company he started to travel "down to the land of Middoni," where his brethren had been imprisoned (Alma 20:7). En route they met Lamoni's

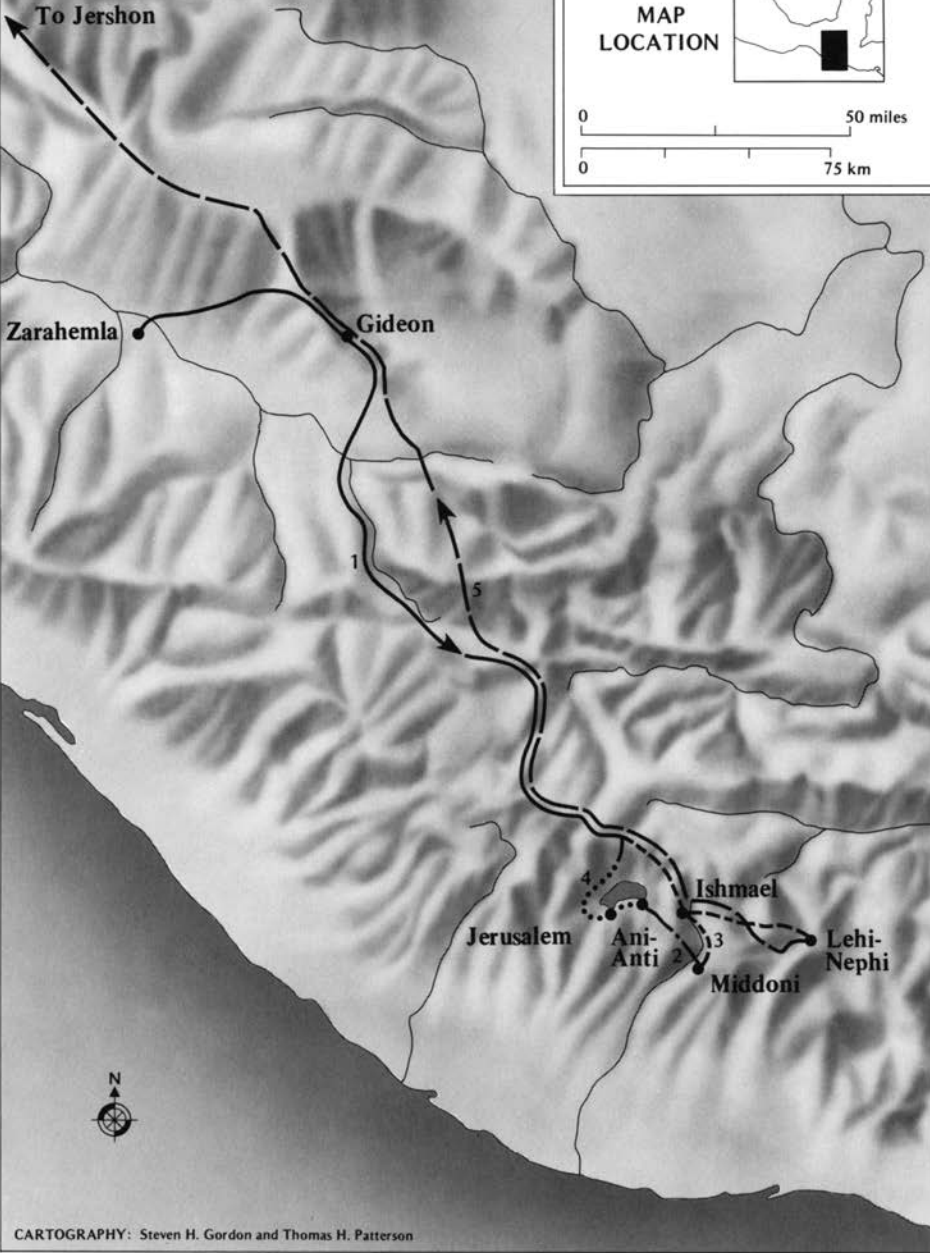
FROM NEPHI TO ZARAHEMPLA: THE MISSIONARY JOURNEYS OF MOSIAH'S SONS

- 1 Whole Group (Alma 17:7-13)
- - - 2 Aaron and Others
- - - 3 Ammon
- 4 Aaron
- 5 Anti-Nephi Lehis

MAP
LOCATION



0 50 miles
0 75 km



CARTOGRAPHY: Steven H. Gordon and Thomas H. Patterson

father, ruler over the entire land of Nephi. A personal combat ensued. The result was that Ammon won for Lamoni independent sovereignty from the old monarch. Lamoni and Ammon then continued on their way to Middoni.

When the original missionary band split up, Aaron went directly to a land called Jerusalem, “away joining the borders of [what Alma had earlier called] Mormon” (Alma 21:1). Nephite dissidents had led the Lamanites in building “a great city” there. (The place had been founded not long before; here is another case where the status of “great city” did not refer to the duration or size of a settlement but to its concept and layout.)

We saw earlier that Mormon best fits near the eastern end of Lake Atitlan, nearest to the city Lehi-Nephi (specifically at Panajachel or nearby).²⁸ Jerusalem fits the sense of Alma 21:1–2 if it was located on the opposite side of the lake, seven miles away, which would still put it “near the borders” of Mormon. The likely spot is near Santiago Atitlan, on the extreme southwestern tip of Lake Atitlan.²⁹ The lake was “obviously deified” in native thought; sixteenth-century Indians considered Lake Atitlan bottomless, a reminder of the great underground body of water with no bottom on which the Mesoamerican earth monster (equivalent to the Hebrew *tannin* or leviathan) was thought to float.³⁰ Impressive volcanic cones tower on either side of Santiago Atitlan, completing the linkage of mountain and “deep.” This Jerusalem had been consciously named after the city of the Jews. Symbols associated with Old World Jerusalem—the “deep,” the peaks, waters to the “east,” and other cosmological features—were used by Old Testament prophets like Isaiah,³¹ who so much interested the dissident Nephites among those people (Mosiah 12:20–26). These symbols would have been on the minds of those who chose this site.

Along the entire shore of the lake, the most favorable spot for a city is on the relatively large piece of flat land near Santiago Atitlan. Boat commerce on the lake (a source



Highland Guatemala, an area where Alma, Limhi, and the sons of Mosiah may have lived and labored. (Courtesy Richard Jones.)

of wealth for a community—compare Mosiah 24: 5–7) centers in this area for good geographical reasons, as explained by McBryde.³² The spot was also close to the main areas of Lamanite population only a few miles away down in the hot but agriculturally rich piedmont zone. Ruins and monuments indicate that elaborate religious and art traditions existed in that foothill region in late B.C. times.³³ The Jerusalem area is virtually an extension of the piedmont up to the lovely lakeshore. The new city no doubt represented symbolic and settlement concepts that the Amalekite and Lamanite priests had already got used to in the lower, hotter zone.

Recall that this Jerusalem was covered up by waters at the time of the Savior's crucifixion (3 Nephi 9:7). Now, the level of Lake Atitlan has shifted dramatically—by as much as 60 feet within historical times, and up to 15 feet in a single year—so a city located on this shore could understandably be submerged quite abruptly.³⁴ So several

interesting and plausible reasons lead to our locating Jerusalem at this site.

Unsuccessful in his preaching at the new city, Aaron “came over” (Alma 21:11) to a village named Ani-Anti. Probably “came over” means that he walked across the foot of Volcan Toliman; the normal path from Santiago Atitlan to the next village runs over those lava outflows. At Ani-Anti he met some of his companions, who had arrived by another route. They must have gone the other way around the lake from their dispersal point, past the old “Mormon” area where Alma had hidden out. San Lucas Toliman, on the southeast extremity of the lake, fits the bill as Ani-Anti.

Aaron and his companions next went over to the land of Middoni, where Ammon and King Lamoni later found them in prison (Alma 20:30; 21:12). The geographical statements made by the Book of Mormon concerning Middoni are neatly accounted for if it was located in the valley of Antigua, Guatemala’s picturesque colonial capital. Here two of the country’s most impressive volcanic cones frame a narrow but lush valley, closely tied in its cultural history to the neighboring Nephi area. Devastating earthquakes and eruptions have periodically struck the place. Only informal archaeological investigations have been carried out in this valley so far. Abundant remains testify to a large population in Book of Mormon times, even though no major ruin has yet been discovered (one could well be deeply covered by volcanic ash).³⁵ Incidentally, no city is mentioned in the land of Middoni by the scripture, only the “land.”

The land called Ishmael, where Ammon had found Lamoni, fits in the Chimaltenango area. That would make it a logical first stop for the Nephite missionary after he separated from his brothers; the place is on the regular route to or from Nephi that the Zeniffites, Alma, and others had followed in earlier times.

We can detect an interesting overall configuration of these Lamanite lands when we read the summary tabulation of converted and nonconverted Lamanites in Alma

23:9–12 (compare 25:13). The converts all clustered around Lehi-Nephi, the principal city of the entire area since the days of father Nephi. This city, we have seen, very likely was located within the bounds of modern Guatemala City. Shilom and Shemlon were in the same valley. Ishmael was separated from Lehi-Nephi by a modest intervening plateau, the Midian of Alma 24:5, a logical rendezvous point. Placing Midian in this area (Sacatepequez) meets all the criteria. From Ishmael, Ammon and Lamoni would indeed have dropped “down” noticeably to Antigua/ Middoni (Alma 20:7). The cities of Lemuel and Shimnilom are mentioned in a context to suggest they were in the vicinity of Lehi-Nephi, but neither is more than listed in passing, so we cannot locate them confidently. One or both could have been near Canchon, or in the Valley of Pinula, where ruins of correct date are found immediately east of the Valley of Guatemala.³⁶

Interestingly, this whole set of converted lands forms a “symbiotic region”—an ecologically connected territory whose economy naturally tended to be integrated. That may help explain why the Lamanites throughout this section came to act as a unit under the converted Lamanite king at Lehi-Nephi, the prime city.

The unconverted areas were in “the land of Amulon, and also in the land of Helam, and . . . in the land of Jerusalem, and in fine, in all the land round about” (Alma 24:1). Very likely the areas “round about” included the populous foothill area. There, at sites like Monte Alto and El Baul, considerable continuity with the old Olmec/Jaredite tradition appears in the archaeological remains.³⁷ A different cultural tradition could have made those places especially resistant to missionizing.

I suspect there was a practical reason why the leaders in the peripheral areas opposed the missionaries and the converted king. His Anti-Nephi-Lehi people chose to “open a correspondence” (Alma 23:18) with the Nephites of Zarahemla through the Nephite missionaries. An interpretation

of the situation in terms of Mesoamerican patterns leads to the following hypothesis. If political, economic, and religious cooperation were to break out between the king's people and the Nephites in Zarahemla, the ambitions of the Amalekite and Amulonite leaders for power and wealth would be threatened. The diehards would then face a potent rival, who would disrupt the current south Guatemalan network of commerce (Mosiah 24:7). Direct ties between the highland region and the Nephite homeland would leave the competing Amalekite/Amulonite area out of "the action."³⁸ While this idea is only speculative, it is completely Mesoamerican, and it also helps explain Book of Mormon events.

The Lamanites who were angry at the missionaries' influence eventually lashed out at the converts, even though they were ethnic brothers. They "came up" to the Nephi core area armed "for the purpose of destroying the king" (Alma 24:20). The vengeance-seeking army probably came from the foothill zone along the normal attack route up through Shemlon/Amatitlan.

Lamanite Kingship

The lands where the sons of Mosiah worked were limited to a restricted part of the highlands, yet the geographical description of the realm under the rule of the king of the Lamanites refers to areas stretching from east sea to west sea (Alma 22).

First, a time sequence is laid out for us in the record. The earliest Lamanite domain was strictly on the west coast. From there the Lamanites exerted pressure on the early Nephites around the city of Nephi and ended up taking control of that zone. By the close of the Zeniffite period, around 125 B.C., Lamanite dominance had spread to include Helam and Amulon. Still later, during the missionary period, lakeside Jerusalem and other peripheral areas had been settled. The culmination of expansion is reported around 80 B.C., when Alma 22:27 informs us that the

Lamanite king had some sort of sovereignty over peoples in regions “bordering even to the sea, on the east and on the west.” The picture that archaeology and the historical sources permit us to paint at this time suggests how rulership could have worked, but it provides no positive indication that such dominion was a reality in 80 B.C. So a degree of cultural and linguistic similarity is evident through nearly all the areas from the Pacific coast of Guatemala to the Gulf of Campeche³⁹ (the east sea and west sea of the Book of Mormon).

The king’s rule at a distance cannot have been based on a coercive apparatus. When the chips were down, he could not even control people in the highland areas near his capital. For example, his son and subordinate local ruler Lamoni told him no when he felt strongly on a point, even though the son “feared to offend him” (Alma 20:11; compare 24:2). “Government” as we think of it was restricted in those times by such factors as lack of routine communications, weak recordkeeping, and poorly developed administrative procedures. Instead of sending subordinates to call Lamoni to account, the king made the trip alone to do it, and he fought Ammon personally. No hint is given that he even had any servants along. The great king’s governing role consisted mainly of conferring credentials on subordinate chiefs or “kings” like his sons (Mosiah 24:2; Alma 20:9). Those local leaders were indeed bound to him in return, probably most visibly through some sort of tribute system (a partial equivalent of taxation in modern times). The title “king” was easily claimed (see Alma 2:9; 47:6; 3 Nephi 7:9), but a ruler’s powers were limited at best; Mosiah 20:25 emphasizes how limited. These leaders were really “chiefs” in today’s social science jargon, for they lacked the structure and enforcement powers characteristic of real state government.⁴⁰ Their strength was reinforced especially by the symbols surrounding the office of king. Rituals, myths, and sacred paraphernalia conferred on a legitimate “king” a degree and quality of power in the eyes

of the people that no army alone could produce. Yet it would be a mistake to downplay the Lamanite monarchical institution too much. For example, one of the only two uses of the term “palace” in the Book of Mormon occurs in reference to the Lamanite king. (Apparently Zarahemla never had a “palace” worth mentioning.) Mere existence of this term points to a significant *concept* of kingship,⁴¹ even though the *practice* may have fallen short. If one location in southern Mesoamerica might have been the seat of a king with a palace and nominal powers extending from sea to sea, it would have been Kaminaljuyu, or Nephi. At the time we are talking about, it was clearly the premier site throughout the area from Campeche to El Salvador.

The best analysis of what was going on in highland Guatemala at the time spoken of in the books of Mosiah and Alma is by Southern Methodist University professor David Freidel. He considers it clear “that social life and public art reached a peak during the Late Preclassic period (300 B.C.–A.D. 100).”⁴² During the rest of pre-Columbian history the area was “balkanized” in political fragments that never again attained even the limited degree of unity enjoyed in Mesoamerica 1,900 years ago.⁴³ The symbols of rulership and worship represented in public art are remarkably abundant and varied at Kaminaljuyu. “Apparently sculptors from many localities resided and worked in this cosmopolitan center.” Moreover, the “rich variety of sculpture found at Kaminaljuyu” no doubt indicates “significant interaction between polities.”⁴⁴ Lack of a “shared ideology and religion” suggests that there was no single, stable political structure mediating among the separate groups or tribes. “Maintenance of each [political unit] was based on a related but separate and equal status.” Yet Dr. Freidel detects “incipient development of a regional elite” identifying itself as an overarching social entity that provided a limited measure of unity.⁴⁵ This highland development centered at Kaminaljuyu soon stimulated similar effects in the lowlands to the north in “the east.” Thereafter, the highlands were

the probable source of the symbols that became popular in the lowlands and the continued source of new imagery.⁴⁶

A sensitive reading of the Book of Mormon confirms these points. Nephi/Kaminaljuyu was the dominant cultural center to which surrounding localized cultures looked, but its political history was checkered—early and small-scale “Nephis” as kings, then disruption, neglect of the city (Mosiah 9:7–8) during a half-hearted Lamanite occupation, takeover by the Zeniffites, then loose Lamanite kingship followed by a Nephite-influenced Anti-Nephi-Lehi interlude, and so on. At the time the Nephite missionaries were there (Alma 17–22, around 90 B.C.), a politically weak “king over all the land” charismatically united the greater land of Nephi (Guatemala). Ideas and symbols (for example, the “Great Spirit” of Alma 18–19) as well as friendship and kinship relations (Alma 20:4, 9), rather than formal administrative bonds, were the links holding together the “balkanized” political scene. Furthermore, key ideas are said to have moved out of the highland Nephi center to stimulate political developments in the “Maya” lowlands (as in Alma 25:5–11; 43:4–7).

Our picture of Lamanite kingship is clarified further by the verb in Mosiah 24:2: “The king of the Lamanites had *appointed* kings over all these lands.” This rings a Mesoamerican bell. Traditions referring back as early as A.D. 700 picture local kings as receiving their commissions to reign from a central ruler in “Tulan.”⁴⁷ Many different centers were recognized as Tulans at different times, but one thing was always required: would-be local rulers had to get a legitimate “franchise” from the prime Tulan of the time. “In Tulan . . . they received their power and sovereignty,” says the *Popol Vuh*.⁴⁸ The most famous Tulan was the metropolis of Teotihuacan. The practice of delegating local kingship charters might have stemmed from there, beginning a couple of centuries A.D. Yet the custom could be still older. Jacinto Quirarte has demonstrated that a particular set of art symbols that had long been considered central

in Teotihuacan culture actually first appeared at Izapa in Chiapas, or at Kaminaljuyu, as early as the first century B.C.⁴⁹ That is precisely the time when the Lamanite king we have described ruled. Might Teotihuacan's status as "Tulan," the center of rulership, have had a Guatemalan precedent? If the king's city of Lehi-Nephi was then functionally a Tulan, and if he had the power to appoint local rulers throughout a territory that stretched from sea to sea, then the Book of Mormon account takes on a new light. Instead of the king's widespread reign being an anomaly, a problem we cannot handle, the scripture becomes a clue that a profoundly important Mesoamerican pattern existed a little earlier than has been traced by the scholars.⁵⁰

Archaeologists may well object that the diversity of local art and artifacts is too great to allow for any measure of political interaction of the kind just sketched. In the immediate pre-Spanish period in Guatemala, however, local variations in ceramic and artifact styles mask what we know from lineage histories to have been rather wide and real political unity.⁵¹ The reverse is also true—styles often crossed ethnic, political, and linguistic boundaries. Obviously the criteria for determining political interaction on the basis of material remains are still uncertain.

The epic of the missionary party ended with one more Nephite-led retreat from the Guatemala/Nephi highlands. The converted Lamanites "departed out of the land, and came over [the Cuchumatanes massif] near the borders of the land" of Zarahemla (Alma 27:14). They camped there, somewhere above Manti, while their Nephite guides went ahead to Zarahemla to assess the reception that awaited them. En route the sons of Mosiah met their old friend Alma, on his way from Gideon to Manti. Fourteen years of joy and pain were recounted on the spot (Alma 17:1–27). Then they all, including Alma the high priest, traveled to Zarahemla. In the end, the news in the capital was good. The Anti-Nephi-Lehis, or people of Ammon, as they now came to be called, were given a land of their own, Jershon.

Informed of that, they moved through Gideon (Comitan Valley), along the upland route, and down to their new home near the east sea without ever seeing Zarahemla itself.

Meeting the Archaeologist Halfway

The section of the Book of Mormon we have just been discussing raises several points that relate to material remains that archaeologists examine. Sometimes the significance of their findings proves elusive in relation to the scriptural text. A few more comparisons between the archaeological and textual materials may sharpen our sensitivity to the methodological problems involved and will underline the need for caution in handling both sorts of data.

Linen and silk are textiles mentioned in the Book of Mormon (Alma 4:6). Neither fabric as we now know them was found in Mesoamerica at the coming of the Spaniards. The problem might be no more than linguistic. The redoubtable Bernal Diaz, who served with Cortez in the initial wave of conquest, described native Mexican garments made of "henequen which is like linen."⁵² The fiber of the maguey plant, from which henequen was manufactured, closely resembles the flax fiber used to make European linen. Several kinds of "silk," too, were reported by the conquerors. One kind was of thread spun from the fine hair on the bellies of rabbits. Padre Motolinia also reported the presence of a wild silkworm, although he thought the Indians did not make use of the cocoons. But other reports indicate that wild silk was spun and woven in certain areas of Mesoamerica. Another type came from the pod of the ceiba tree.⁵³ We may never discover actual remains of these fabrics, but at least the use of the words in the Book of Mormon now seems to offer no problem.

The "money" of Alma 11 is another story, however. It would be nice to say that the problem has been solved, but that is not true. Hugh Nibley has given a sensible

introduction to the difficult topic of “What is money?” from a Near Eastern perspective.⁵⁴ But the question remains, was money used in Mesoamerica, the land of the Book of Mormon? No reliable data show that minted coins were used anywhere in the pre-Columbian New World, despite rare, puzzling finds of Old World coins.⁵⁵ But money need not take the form of coins. It can be any agreed-upon medium in standard units that serves as a public measure of value. Several kinds of money in this sense were known in Mesoamerica. The commonest was the cacao bean, which continued in use at least up to fifty years ago. (People could literally drink up their money then, in the form of cocoa!)⁵⁶ The system reported in the Book of Alma followed Israelite practice before the Babylonian Exile in that the money units employed (such as the shekel) were weight units of metal rather than standardized coins. Minted coins apparently came into use in Palestine only after Lehi left there. Certainly the “money” units given in Alma 11 were proportionate weights. The inappropriate term “coinage” in the chapter heading is an error due to nineteenth century editing, not a part of the ancient text. Research has also shown recently that relating measures of grain to values of precious metal, in the manner of Alma 11:4–19, was an Egyptian practice.⁵⁷ Whether there was Mesoamerican weighed money we cannot say. No serious study of money usage there has ever been done. As I explain at length in chapter 7, the entire subject of metals in Mesoamerica in Book of Mormon times needs far more research to fill major gaps in our knowledge. South American metallurgy is much better understood than that in Mexico and Guatemala, yet startling finds are turning up even in that “well-known” area. Most recently a burial containing 12,000 pieces of metal “money” (though not coins as such) was found in Ecuador, for the first time confirming that some ancient South Americans had the idea of accumulating a fortune in more or less standard units of metal wealth.⁵⁸ Such a startling find in Mesoamerica could change our present limited ideas.

Another aspect of ancient culture also deserves clarification on the basis of archaeology. Three types of religious places are mentioned in the Book of Mormon: temples, sanctuaries, and synagogues. These places of worship ought to leave remains, shouldn't they? We gave brief consideration to temples in the previous chapter, but not to the other two types. A sanctuary is usually considered a structure at a revered spot where unscheduled individual and family worship can take place. In Palestine, Bethel was such a place, in use at least from the time of Abraham's worship there (Genesis 12:8; 28:16–22) to Lehi's day (2 Kings 23:15). The Israelites who came to America would no doubt have followed the practice of designating and worshipping at sanctuaries. Some of these would have existed in homes or residential localities; believers in God were expected "to call on his name and confess their sins before him," "watching and praying continually" (Alma 15:17; 17:4). Native homes in many parts of Mesoamerica today continue a pre-Columbian custom of devoting a corner of the house to quiet, daily rituals. Hilltops too have served, and still do, as sanctuaries where individuals leave offerings. Waterholes and lakes are also frequent worship spots.⁵⁹ Pre-Columbian stone monuments themselves are considered sacred today in many localities. People resort there to confess sins and pray for forgiveness.⁶⁰ Lamanite and Nephite sanctuaries might have taken any of these forms.

On that note we should return to the previous discussion of prophetic versus Baalist religion. Consistently, worship led by the prophets deemphasized (though it did not exclude) sacred objects and places. Its main concerns were spiritual results rather than physical setting. Such religious furniture as archaeologists have recovered in Palestine seems to derive mostly from the nonprophetic tradition. In the American promised land, we would expect a similar distinction. The esoteric sculptures and paintings of ancient Mesoamerica were nearly all of some religious significance,

it is supposed, but they probably had little or no place in the worship of Benjamin or Alma. Of course, before his conversion the younger Alma had been an idolatrous man (Mosiah 27:8), as had his father before him (Mosiah 11:7; 17:2). Visitors to the museums of Mesoamerica or to great sites like Teotihuacan may see remains aplenty of the baser worship, but we should not expect to connect those objects directly with the religion of the Nephite prophets. It is of interest, then, that monumental religious art is largely absent in those areas of Chiapas that I associate with the Nephite presence during Book of Mormon times. On the contrary, the places of prime Lamanite inhabitation, according to this geographical interpretation, do yield many religious images, particularly during the times when the Book of Mormon tells us that religious practices were decadent.⁶¹

What were synagogues? They are mentioned among both Nephites and the Lamanites under dissident Nephite influence (Alma 21:4–5; 32:1–12; Helaman 3:9, 14; Moroni 7:1). Would they have left ruins that might have been discovered? At first glance the very idea seems to pose a problem for the Book of Mormon. Many historians have maintained that synagogues were not known among the Jews until well after Lehi had left Palestine. Another group of experts, however, now argue that the synagogue predated Lehi's departure. They propose that when King Josiah carried out his sweeping reforms of Jewish worship in order to clean out pagan intrusions, he closed the old sanctuaries (2 Kings 23). "The centralization of worship in Jerusalem from 621 B.C. onwards, with many Jews thereby denied a share in temple worship, must inevitably have led to the establishment of non-sacrificial places of assembly"⁶²—in effect, synagogues. So at least the concept of the synagogue could well have been around for a generation by the time First Nephi begins. Later synagogues served as community centers open to any who wished to worship or speak (compare Alma 26:29). According to the Babylonian Talmud, the

Jewish synagogue was normally oriented to face Jerusalem and was also located on the highest place in town and near water.⁶³ A synagogue was not necessarily a building; it might be only an enclosure.

Structures for seemingly sacred purposes that meet most of the Talmudic criteria existed in early Mesoamerican sites. It remains for some ambitious student to make detailed comparisons. That study should look carefully at names as well as ruins. The term *synagogue* is difficult to distinguish in concept from related terms used in the Book of Mormon. The “churches” set up by Alma in Zarahemla, and also the “assembly” of the Lamanites (Alma 21:16), were apparently functional parallels to synagogues. Several Old Testament terms signify “congregation” or “assembly” or the meeting place for such a group, the terms overlapping in translation. One of those words has come to be translated “synagogue,” but anciently words like *synagogue*, *ekklesia*, *kenishta*, and *‘eda* were translated quite freely as though they were equivalent.⁶⁴ Thus, we may find that whatever distinguished a synagogue from a local church by Nephite standards was so subtle that we will be unable to tell them apart on the basis of their remains.

Altars are mentioned twice in the Book of Mormon (Alma 15:17; 17:4). They ought to be identifiable in the archaeological remains. In fact, the Mesoamerican use of an altar together with a stela apparently originated on the Pacific coast of Guatemala.⁶⁵ Perhaps this complex will prove to be related to that in use in Israelite Palestine in Lehi’s day, where a memorial stela (*massēbāh*) was erected for a deceased person at a “high place” or sacred mound where sacrifices were offered; for “each *bamoth* [high place or sacred mound] had to have its altar.”⁶⁶ The stela-altar-sacred-mound complex is, of course, characteristic in the Mesoamerican Second Tradition.

Another construction showing up in the remains of the past is what the Book of Mormon calls a “sepulchre.” The Lamanite queen asked Ammon if her unconscious spouse,



Delicate pots of “curious workmanship” like this have been found as offerings in “sepulchres” such as the one constructed for the king of the Lamanites. (See Alma 19:1.) When this vessel is filled with fluid and then poured out the stubby spout, the animal effigy emits a whistling sound. (Photo by Daniel Bates. Courtesy David A. Palmer and the Society for Early Historic Archaeology.)

Lamoni, should be interred in one of these, “which they had made for the purpose of burying their dead” (Alma 19:1, 5). At Kaminaljuyu tombs of that very time period have been excavated that give us a good idea of what a Lamanite “sepulchre” probably looked like. Tomb I in Mound E-III-3 was found to contain the remains of some highly honored person. The tomb had been dug down into the top of the artificial mountain, the largest single earthen platform at the dead city. Terraces or benches had been left along the walls of the hole cut down into the clay fill. The richly dressed corpse had been carried there on a litter, no doubt accompanied by an extensive procession of mourners (compare Alma 18:43). After the litter bearing the corpse, head to the south, had been carefully placed in the center of the burial chamber, rich furnishings and equipment for use in the life after death were placed on and around the body. When the ceremony was completed, a flat timber roof was constructed and covered with clay

fill. (Eventually the timbers rotted, whereupon more clay was added to fill in the depression and make the surface smooth on top. Still later, tomb robbers dug down to look for precious ornaments.) In a second tomb in the same mound, three skeletons were found in addition to the principal one. Their condition and position suggested they had been sacrificed to accompany the deceased leader. Perhaps they were slaves⁶⁷ (compare Mosiah 7:15; Alma 17:28; 27:8).

We see points at which archaeological findings may touch directly upon statements in the Book of Mormon. Meeting the archaeologist halfway is probably a good idea, but perhaps he will need to come even further if his work is to be significant to elucidate properly the written record.

6

A Setting for War

The latter half of the book of Alma tells of the crucial middle portion of Nephite history. Beginning shortly before 75 B.C. and continuing intermittently for thirteen hard years, the Nephites fought a war for their existence against a canny, determined enemy. The war was part of a process by which Lamanites, led by Amalickiah and other dissatisfied Nephite power-seekers, pressed northward out of their traditional lands into Nephite territory. The Nephites came very near to being overrun. But the political dynamics of that situation will have to be addressed elsewhere. Here we will look only at the conflict to clarify further geographical and cultural aspects of the setting in which the Book of Mormon peoples lived.

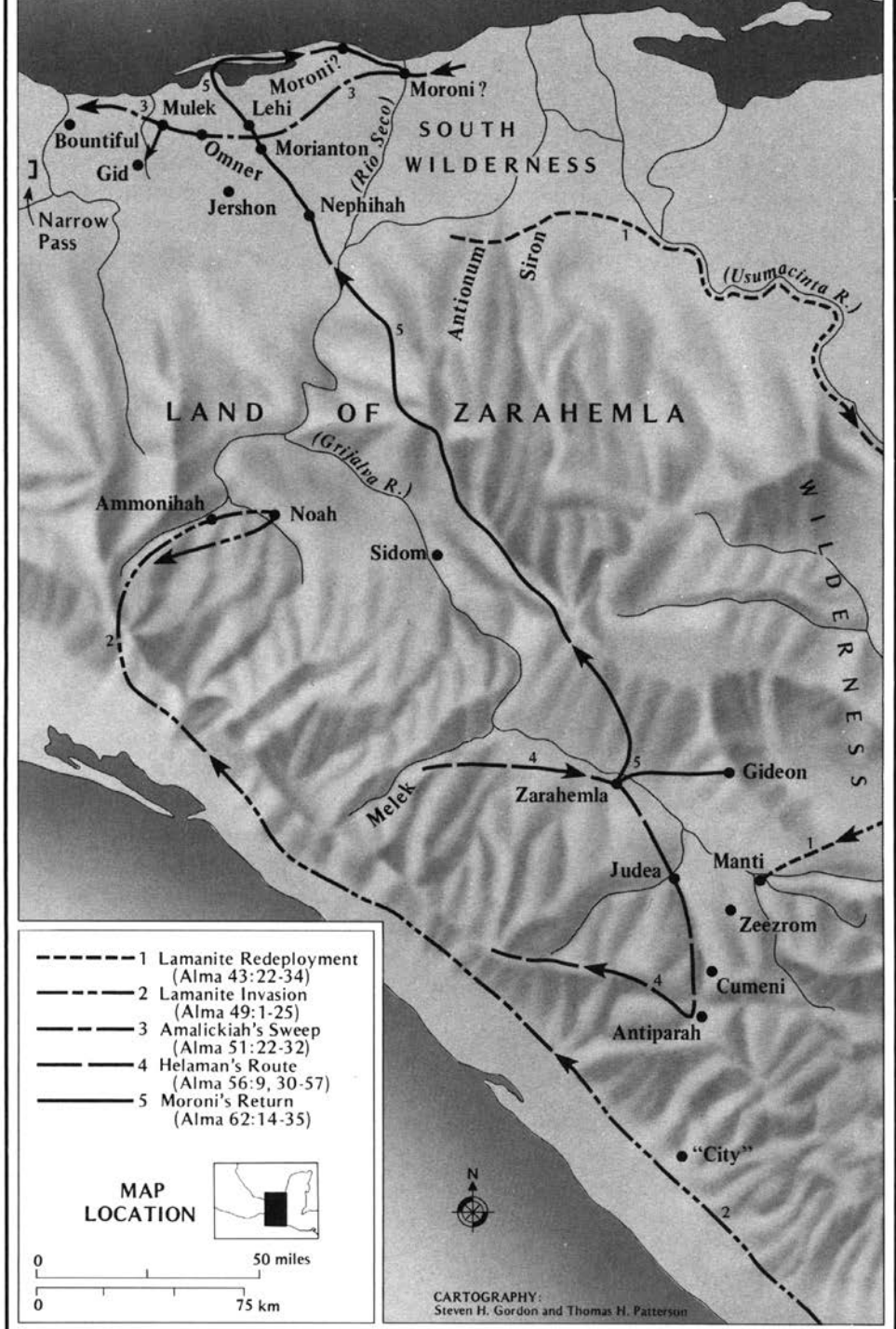
When the converted Lamanites—the Anti-Nephi-Lehis—arrived in the land of Zarahemla, they were sent to the land of Jershon as part of a plan by the government to guard against a possible Lamanite invasion. Jershon was in a region of crucial weakness in the Nephite defenses; the east/sea lowlands needed garrisoning, and the Anti-Nephi-Lehis would serve the purpose. While these former Lamanites had become pacifists, they could at least provide logistical support for the Nephite armies in the zone.

Simultaneously, Alma, the high priest, with friends and two of his own sons, addressed an adjacent problem area with strategic implications. The party traveled into the land of Antionum. (See map 12.) There they sought to reclaim a group called the Zoramites who were wavering in their loyalty to Nephite rule. Antionum was located “east of the land of Zarahemla, which lay nearly bordering upon

the seashore, which was south of the land of Jershon, which also bordered upon the wilderness south, which wilderness was full of the Lamanites" (Alma 31:3). If Alma could anchor the Zoramites within the Nephite political and cultural sphere, it might forestall war. The highland Lamanite culture centers were then expanding into the lowlands—to the Nephites "the wilderness south." To attack the Nephites in that sector, they needed a base, and allies. The Zoramites in Antionum offered both. Thus, "the Nephites greatly feared that the Zoramites would enter into a correspondence with the Lamanites" (verse 4). Political allegiance and religious orthodoxy were closely connected, as in all the ancient world, and Alma's first concern, as high priest, was for the Zoramites' faith. Upon coming among them, Alma was shocked to find how far the Zoramites had veered from the Nephite ideal. Despite some preaching success "among the poor class of people" (Alma 32:2), the missionaries were finally forced by the Zoramite elite to leave the land for Nephite Jershon. Their converts followed (Alma 35:1–6).

It is an interesting commentary on Nephite conceptions of the land that the territory on the south described as "wilderness" should be "full of the Lamanites." Clearly the essence of "wilderness" lay not in the absence of inhabitants but, apparently in the substantial modifications of the landscape that civilization entails. Probably that southern section had been only lightly populated in earlier times but was now being settled seriously. Some of those settlers were Lamanites who had been driven out of the coastal strip to the north ("the east wilderness") by an armed Nephite sweep. The Nephite leaders had made a strategic decision to gain actual control over those coastal lands, which they claimed but had hitherto allowed Lamanite squatters to occupy (Alma 22:29; 50:9). While the population settled in the south wilderness were called "Lamanites" by the Nephites, they must actually have included remnants of earlier peoples who deserved the

PLAUSIBLE SCENES OF THE WARS IN THE EXTENDED LAND OF ZARAHEMPLA



Map 12

label mainly because a Lamanite king was now over them. That ethnic variety prevailed is confirmed by Alma's observation that "*many* of them are our brethren" in the land of Antionum (Alma 31:35; compare 43:13). Highland Lamanites as active rulers in this muggy zone would have had a hard time. They were biologically adapted to a much cooler habitat.¹ Yet if the prime Lamanite king carried the title "Laman," as the title "Nephi" was borne by the king over the early Nephites (compare Mosiah 10:6; 24:3; Jacob 1:11), then all his subjects would have been "Lamanites," even if native lowlanders.²

Before long "the Zoramites became Lamanites" (Alma 43:4), that is, they shifted allegiance to Lamanite rule. Precipitating that action was the Zoramite leaders' anger at the Nephites' sympathetic reception of those Zoramite lower-class refugees who had followed Alma to the land of Jershon. The Zoramites thereupon "began to mix with the Lamanites" (Alma 35:10). Even while the missionaries were in Antionum there must have been regular interchange between the people of that land and the Lamanites farther "south," for Corianton, Alma's son, had been able to travel from Zoramite territory "over into the land of Siron, among the borders of the Lamanites, after the harlot Isabel" (Alma 39:3). So the text is plain that in this sector of the land the border between Nephites and Lamanites was fluid. Gaining the allegiance of this one group of marginal Nephites, the Zoramites, was apparently part of a drawn-out process of political and economic expansion of Lamanite power in which religion likely played only a subsidiary part.

The first military confrontation took place near Jershon. The Lamanites approached it from their newly acquired base in Antionum. The Nephites were heavily outnumbered (Alma 43:13–14, 21). When they did meet their enemies "in the borders of Jershon," they were shielded by personal armor, to the consternation of their foes. Afraid to attack against such an unexpected tactic, the enemy armies departed out of the whole area, going via the wilderness

“round about” to “the head of the river Sidon, that they might come into the land of Manti” (verse 22).

Jershon, we saw, was located in the eastern lowlands somewhere between Bountiful and Lamanite country. Sufficient cultivable land was available in the vicinity to support both the new settlers and at least part of the Nephite army (Alma 43:13; but see 60:9). This was the land farthest east and south that the Nephites could convert into a defensive base at that moment. There the Nephite commander, Moroni, made his headquarters “camp” for the remainder of the war (compare Alma 50:31). (No city of Jershon is mentioned.)

The initial skirmish and retreat made it appear that the threat on the Jershon front had disappeared, but that would not prove true. Strategic geography dictated that the Lamanites would attack later in the same area. The principal aim of the Lamanites was to cut the Nephites off from the land northward by seizing the narrow neck



The “borders by the east sea” was flat, wet coastal plain for the most part, somewhat like this area in Veracruz state. (Photo by James C. Christensen used by permission of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.)

(Alma 50:11, 32; 52:9). The enemy would attack Nephite defenses wherever it seemed most likely they could penetrate to the isthmus. An early attack along the west coast had been discouraging (Alma 16:2–9), yet they probed the same spot again, with no more success (Alma 49:1–15). Anyway, the west coast approach was dangerous; the apparent narrowness of the wilderness strip through which they had to travel to reach the neck on the west side would have rendered them vulnerable to being cut off by the Nephites around Melek. Neither did Lamanite attacks get far through the center of the land (see Alma 2:27–35; Helaman 1:15–32). That left the eastern sector as the obvious front. We saw in chapter 1 that the portion of the east coast controlled by the Nephites was limited; thus the distance a Lamanite attack would have to go to reach the narrow neck was tantalizingly short.

The people of Ammon soon proved more hindrance than help in Jershon. As a result, they were shifted to sheltered Melek (Alma 35:13) in the upper Sidon basin. They probably felt happier at Melek's intermediate elevation than sweltering in lowland Jershon, for they were of highland birth. Moroni pressed on with his preparations for defense, clearing out straggler Lamanites along the coast and installing garrison cities, using colonists from the Zarahemla area (Alma 50:9–11). Some of them may not have been enthusiastic about the conditions they found facing them when they arrived (verses 26, 29). The city of Moroni was practically on the coast (Alma 62:32; 3 Nephi 8:9; but Alma 62:34 suggests there may have been a little wilderness between it and the sea), and it was the most exposed of the set (Alma 50:13). Nephihah was an even more crucial base farther inland (Alma 50:14; 59:8–9). Lehi, Morianton, Omner, and Gid were other settlements established to beef up the southeast sector and to provide a buffer for the headquarters in Jershon. Overall, the Nephites were trying to hold a straight line extending from the sea inland as far as there was any chance of attack (Alma 50:8).

The Lamanite assault did finally come. Led by the Nephite renegade Amalickiah, it first hit Moroni, and then a string of other cities. The Lamanite squatters who had been expelled from the coastal strip in the garrisoning action would, of course, have provided the attackers with knowledge of every trail and obstacle. Nephihah's inland position is confirmed by the fact that the thrust bypassed it. Jershon, too, was far enough inland to be safe (Alma 43:4, 25; compare 50:27), although it was outflanked as the Lamanites poured northward near the sea. The record reports Nephihah's capture at this time (Alma 51:24–26), but that statement is incorrect if we credit Alma 59:9–11. (We need not be shocked to find that the scribes made errors. Moroni on the title page of the Book of Mormon suggests as much, saying, "If there are faults they are the mistakes of men.")

The great amount of interrelated information presented in this portion of the scripture enables us to relate the record to the Nephite physical scene. All the places mentioned can be identified with plausible geographical scenes and archaeological sites. The reasons for settlement in those spots become apparent, and the logic of Amalickiah's campaign and of Moroni's defense are clarified. Map 12 identifies the most reasonable positions for each land or city mentioned.

A line marking the limit of Mayan languages and culture runs through this east central area. This border apparently held at the time of the Spanish conquest, just as it had many centuries earlier in Classic times.³ Even in ancient Olmec days, sites of that culture fell on one side of this line.⁴ It seems that some sort of ecological boundary must separate the territory on either side of the line, inhibiting flows of population and culture across it. Whatever the cause, a narrow zone twenty or so miles wide does seem to have constituted a long-lasting ethnic frontier. The zone falls precisely where the Nephite-Lamanite boundary in the east sea sector fits in the geography developed in chapter 1.

The geographical area of southern Mexico where the Nephite defenders stood against the Lamanites is now called the Chontalpa. Sluggish stream drainage leaves much of the flat land too wet to settle, but here and there higher spots on river levees or slight geological rises permit villages to exist.⁵ The famous site of La Venta is one of these, on a rise a few square miles in extent amid swamps near the Tonala River. Travel through the coastal area is limited to two or three well-established trails that run roughly northwest-southeast along the higher ground. Native warfare at the time of the Spanish Conquest was confined mostly to October through February. Food was then abundant, and the seasonal flooding had mostly abated. Along the coast lies a strip of overgrown old beach dunes up to a couple of miles wide. It is continuous enough to permit travel along it parallel to the beach and free from the swamps just inland, which hold the discomforts of sand, wind and insects.⁶

The Chontalpa zone is bounded on the east by the Rio Seco. Until colonial Spanish times, the main stream of the Grijalva River reached the sea via the channel of the Seco, but then the high-leveed stream in one of its regular floods broke into a new outlet far to the east, where it now runs.⁷ The old course essentially followed the language and culture boundary mentioned above. As R. Gadacz notes, "Many of the rivers in Tabasco served as provincial boundaries."⁸ The river is a formidable enough barrier that it would have made a logical defense line for captain Moroni. The cities of Moroni and Nephiah were key garrisons anchoring this neat "line of the possession of the Lamanites" (Alma 50:13). This geographical picture explains why the Nephite record never mentions the Sidon River on the east coast, because the stream itself constituted the frontier rather than being a feature that the Nephites had need to cross.

The city of Moroni surely was named for the Nephite captain of that time, after the custom of naming a land and settlement after "him who first possessed it" (Alma

8:7). Everything said about Moroni fits neatly if we suppose it was located near Laguna Mecoacan, through which the Grijalva/Sidon formerly emptied. Alternatively, it might have been at or near the site of Tupilco a few miles west along the coast. Sisson found in his archaeological reconnaissance of this area that in the Late Preclassic period, including the time when Moroni was fortifying that section, that “waxy-feeling” pottery characteristic of the Mayan area was distributed throughout the lowlands of Guatemala and southeastern Mexico right up to the eastern side of Laguna Mecoacan, and there it stopped. Quite a different style existed west of the lagoon and ethnic border.⁹ At the time of the conquest, too, a single “economic bloc,” coinciding with the distribution of the Mayan languages, extended all the way from Honduras to this same ethnic limit.¹⁰ That distribution agrees with what appears to have been the realm of the lowland “Lamanites.” If Moroni founded his own new city at the very border near the lagoon, his provocative action would have all but invited the Lamanite attack. The other possible location for Moroni is interesting for an additional reason. An archaeological site at nearby Tupilco in recent decades was washed into the sea by powerful storms on the Gulf, whose waves sometimes pound the shore.¹¹ We are reminded that the city Moroni “did sink into the depths of the sea” at the time of the great storm marking the crucifixion of the Savior (3 Nephi 8:9). Moroni’s location at about this point on the coast would then fit the natural setting, although, of course, the original ruins went under the water 1,900 years ago, according to the Book of Mormon.

The city of Nephiah, founded at the same time as Moroni, plausibly is one of a cluster of sites of Late Preclassic date located by Sisson a few miles west of the Rio Seco frontier. The “plains” near Nephiah (Alma 62:18) would be part of the Chontalpa’s extensive, anciently uncultivable, savanna grasslands. (Bernal Diaz described one of the earliest Spanish battles on the mainland just a

little east of here. Thousands of native warriors waited to fight them on such a “plain,” and this proved ideal terrain on which the Spanish horses could maneuver.¹²) Lehi, Morianton and Moroni seem to have been satellites to Nephiah, the regional (market?) center (Alma 51:24; 59:5; 50:14). Those three were located nearer the coast than Nephiah. But Lehi and Morianton must have been very near each other, for their people quarreled over agricultural land almost as soon as they settled the places, and the Morianton group ended up incorporated politically with Lehi (Alma 50:25–26, 36). Sites of the correct time period and adjacent to each other were located by Sisson coastward from our possible Nephiah and could represent remains of those two minor settlements.¹³

The subject of directions, discussed in the first chapter, is especially relevant now. At points in the account like Alma 50:13–15 reference to the map in terms of our modern meaning of the terms “north” and “south” could lead to confusion. But if we suppose that a certain skewing from the cardinal directions familiar to us today had taken place in Nephite terminology, for whatever reason, the situation makes sense. One added note: this account was written by Mormon, long after the events took place (note, for example, his editorial “I” cropping up in Alma 43:3). The directional terms are from his overall perspective as he wrote while located in the land northward. From his viewpoint the city Lehi would indeed be considered more northerly than Moroni (Alma 50:13–15),¹⁴ even without regard to the other data on Nephite directions in chapter 1.

Jershon, the one Nephite center on the east that the Lamanites never even threatened, must have been well inland. The area around the archaeological site of San Miguel, Tabasco, would fit the geographical requirements for Jershon. As far back as Olmec times it was a significant settlement, though dependent on La Venta about twenty miles away.¹⁵ One confirmatory situation is notable: When Morianton and his people headed out of their city toward the land northward, they traveled by a trail different than

Teancum did. He pursued them with an army on another route, intending to “head them” (Alma 50:33). The feasible trails and distances involved in Teancum’s getting the word in Jershon of Morianton’s flight and then pursuing him successfully work out comfortably with Jershon around San Miguel. There are few options.

Omner, Gid, and Mulek were other cities mentioned by name, all on “the east borders by the seashore” (Alma 51:26). At first reading, this verse appears to make these places of equal importance and to place them in a neat line, but that picture fails to hold up. During the retaking of the garrison cities by Nephite counterattack, Omner was not mentioned at all, apparently having been bypassed, left to die on the vine (Alma 55:24–25, 33). Moreover, when Nephi and Lehi, his brother, launched a preaching mission much later (Helaman 5:14–15), Gid and Mulek were encountered in an order the reverse of what one would have supposed from Alma 51. That must mean Gid was offset inland from Mulek rather than in a line with the other settlements parallel to the coast. We know Mulek was not far from the sea, because Amalickiah’s army passing through Mulek toward Bountiful ended up on the beach (Alma 51:32).

Note that Mulek was not one of the new garrison centers (Alma 50:14–15). It already had a history. The name Mulek links it to old chief Zarahemla’s ancestor, the refugee prince of Judah (Helaman 6:10; 8:21). The party with which he arrived from across the sea landed on the coast of the land southward after reaching the land northward (and staying how long?) (Helaman 6:10; Alma 22:30). These facts make it likely that the city of Mulek was the earliest center of this party of voyagers from the Mediterranean.¹⁶ Mulek’s geographical relationships and suggested history fit the awe-inspiring archaeological site of La Venta, the ancient Olmec center a few miles upstream from the mouth of the Tonala River.

Several items of information support this identification. First is the fact that the place is accessible, via the river, to

a party arriving by sea. La Venta might have been nearly vacant at the moment of arrival of Mulek's party, offering them an unusual opportunity to settle at a proven spot.¹⁷ Alma 52:2 makes a point of the safety afforded a worried Lamanite invasion force by their holing up inside Mulek. Then in the account of the site's reconquest (Alma 52:17–23), the text confirms that Mulek was isolated in an unusual manner. Commander Moroni invited his enemies to fight on the plains between Mulek and Bountiful, but they refused. It took a trick to get them to “come *out*” of Mulek (verse 19) to where the Nephites eventually outsmarted them. La Venta/Mulek's position on an island amid surrounding swamps clarifies why such language would be used, and plains (verse 20) did extend near to La Venta and across much of the space between the Tonala River and Bountiful near the Coatzacoalcos River. The distances and terrain shown by the operation that finally won Mulek for the Nephites correspond well with this area.¹⁸

One cultural fact about La Venta/Mulek also seems significant. La Venta's huge Stela 3 (see page 121) has carved on its face a famous scene in which a person of high status, whose facial features find parallels in surviving people in the Gulf Coast area as well as in Olmec art, is shown facing a gentleman who looks like a born Israelite. His striking beard and beaked nose are so prominent that he has been dubbed “Uncle Sam” by some scholars.¹⁹ This scene is commonly taken as the artist's representation of the leaders of two sharply different ethnic groups, one seemingly “Semitic,” in a formal encounter, as Tatiana Proskouriakoff and Ignacio Bernal have suggested.²⁰ Perhaps we are viewing a Mulekite leader together with a local chief over a group of folk survivors from the Jaredite debacle. The monument on which the scene appears dates, as closely as we can tell, to very near the time when the Mulek party would have landed, in the sixth century B.C. That is about when the First Tradition in Mesoamerica was in its death throes.

Certain culture traits have also been noted at La Venta from this late occupation that compare to features in Phoenician-Israelite Palestine.²¹ Taken all together, these points indicate that La Venta is a good candidate for the city of Mulek. Some remains found at the site date to around the first century B.C., which seems to show that a modest population lived there when Amalickiah made his attack on Mulek.

Where would the land of Antionum be located? It was a zone where Lamanite influence was expanding into and colliding with the Nephite sphere. Taking the Lamanite-Nephite line as the Mayan/non-Mayan boundary near the Seco River, Antionum would seem to fall just beyond, on the Mayan side. Since there was at least one named hill in Antionum (Alma 32:4), it was likely situated at the edge of the foothills rather than on the open, flooded plain nearer the sea. Around Teapa or Pichucalco, Chiapas, or even as far seaward as near Villahermosa, the setting fits the requirements; archaeological materials of appropriate date are also found in the vicinity. Gareth Lowe puts his "Mixe-Zoque/Maya interaction zone," the cultural boundary across which he sees long-lasting conflict,²² at this precise point (and on across the whole width of southern Mesoamerica, about where I see the Book of Mormon's "narrow strip of wilderness," Alma 22:27). Siron (Alma 39:3), still more clearly Lamanitish, would have been farther into Maya country, perhaps in the area around Macuspana, toward Palenque, where appropriately early cultural remains are likewise found. This place lies "over" hilly country into the next watershed from Antionum, as the text requires.

Amalickiah, the Arch-Dissenter

Alma 46 tells how trouble arose once more in Zarahemla over questions of power and privilege. Leader of the dissidents was Amalickiah, who wanted to become king over the Nephites (verses 3–6). Certain portions of the greater land of Zarahemla were more affected by Amalickiah's subversion than were others. Moroni himself took his "title of

liberty” around in the center of the land to various groups and “sent forth” messages elsewhere, rallying the faithful to the principles of liberty and rule by elected judges (verse 28). When Amalickiah and his closest followers saw they had lost the political contest, they fled out of Zarahemla to the land of Nephi for a fresh start (verses 29–33).

In the classic pattern of the ambitious Nephite dissenter, this man went up to Nephi to egg on the king over the Lamanites to war against the Nephites (Alma 47:1). Many of the Lamanite folk, however, did not relish undertaking one more of the seemingly endless series of disastrous wars in which the Nephites always seemed to come out ahead. This time the majority of rebellious Lamanites from the vicinity of the city of Nephi simply fled to a nearby location called Onidah, “the place of arms.” Nearby was a Mount Antipas on top of which they assembled after arming themselves. Onidah clearly was in broken country no great distance from the capital city of Lehi-Nephi. In Mesoamerica, what constitutes a “place of arms” is obvious; it can hardly be anything other than an obsidian outcrop. This volcanic glass was the most convenient, most effective, and cheapest substance for manufacturing arms or any cutting tools. (Note that Alma 49:2 informs us that “arrows and stones” were the chief weapons of the Lamanites.) Trade in obsidian was the mainstay of commerce from earliest times. Some routes over which it moved extended as much as 700 miles.

It happens that one of the most extensive sources of this key material is the hilly zone called El Chayal, approximately sixteen miles northeast of Kaminaljuyu. Spots within the kilometers-wide obsidian exposures at El Chayal are virtually paved with waste chips, where cutting implements have been shaped by chipping. Obsidian from El Chayal was exported widely as early as Jaredite times.²³ So the unhappy Lamanite folk, expecting to have to fight the king’s forces to keep from being pressed into military service,

first went to Onidah, perhaps El Chayal, to arm themselves, then moved to the tactical safety of a mountain top.

After a series of characteristically sly moves, Amalickiah ended up on the throne, having out-maneuvered the anti-war Lamanites, the king's loyal forces, and the king himself, the last by assassination (Alma 47:10–19). Finally the ambitious ex-Nephite “took possession” of the “chief city” and ascended the throne. Once in control of Lamanite forces, Amalickiah first tried for a cheap surprise victory over the Nephites. That was the west coast thrust at the city of Ammonihah, as we saw earlier.

The narrow west “wilderness” (Alma 22:28), composed of mountain barrier and parallel coastal strip on the Pacific side of the greater land of Zarahemla, was apparently never settled or defended by the Nephites. A likely reason was that it was occupied by an old remnant population from pre-Nephite times whom it was easier to ignore than to expel. (Alma 50:11 may imply such an expulsion but is unclear; in any case, the Nephites did not settle it.) Only at the south and north extremities did the Nephites have any notable interest. On the south was “the city beyond” Antiparah, over the mountain pass and down “in the borders by the [west] seashore” (Alma 56:31). At the north end, at least in the fourth century A.D., was the land of Joshua, which the Nephites occupied in their final retreat (Mormon 2:6). The Pacific coastal zone of Chiapas together with paralleling mountains is surely this western wilderness. The great ceremonial center of Izapa is in correct position at the southerly end to be “the city beyond” Antiparah, although other sites in this Soconusco region would serve as well. (The text does not say it was a Nephite city. No other mention is made of this place. It could well have been a pilgrimage center open to various peoples,²⁴ its sacred nature ensuring that military action, such as the Lamanite west coast forays, avoided it.) Twice the Lamanites sent armies along this western route, both times unsuccessfully. It was

in the wake of these failures that Amalickiah decided to mount the attack on the east, whose setting we have already described.

Recall the speed of that east coast thrust that turned the Nephite defense line. Almost before either side could realize what had happened, the invaders were near crucial Bountiful. Later, bit by bit, the flow reversed; the Nephites ate away at Lamanite-occupied territory. After years of struggle, the final action unfolded so suddenly that within hours the last tier of cities fell again into the hands of the Nephites.

War on the Southern Front

The first Lamanite frustration on the east, when they were frightened off as they approached Jershon from Antionum (Alma 43:18–22), redirected their aggression. The next place where they could hope to gain leverage on the Nephites was the Manti region. “Therefore they departed out of Antionum into the wilderness, and took their journey round about in the wilderness, away by the head of the river Sidon, that they might come into the land of Manti and take possession of the lands” (verse 22). A valuable clarification of geographical relationships is offered to us here—how the Jershon-Antionum territory connected with Manti.

Manti was, of course, at the uppermost point of Nephite settlement on the Sidon. Immediately beyond it rose the headwaters of the Sidon in the wilderness that separated Nephite from Lamanite territory. It was thus very close to the Lamanites, but it had not been attacked earlier because it was of limited strategic value compared with the eastern lowlands.

Manti was a long way from the “borders by the east sea,” we are given to understand. Moroni’s informants had time to tell him at his camp in Jershon that the Lamanite armies were abandoning Antionum, whereupon he

dispatched scouts to watch their movements. Simultaneously he sent an inquiry to Zarahemla to ask Alma's prophetic guidance as to where the enemy was headed. The response came back from Zarahemla to Jershon; then Moroni organized his army and headed the long way to Manti. He arrived there in time to alert the local militia and set up an ambush on the trail they knew the Lamanites would follow as they descended toward the river, the Sidon, near Manti (Alma 43:22–33). The route taken by the Lamanites from Antionum to Manti was either circuitous or difficult to travel, for weeks must have been consumed in all this going and coming on the part of Moroni's forces. And Moroni's force had a far more direct and easy way to travel from Jershon to Manti than the Lamanite attackers.

This picture of a long way "round about" in the wilderness agrees with what is implied about another journey by a Lamanite army. That was when Amalickiah was getting into position with his forces for the nearly successful drive on the east seacoast. The big army was already reported to be "coming into the borders of the land" before commander Moroni obtained authority from the governor of the land of Zarahemla to take action against the subversive "king-men," who had refused to take up arms to defend their land (Alma 51:14–16). He then sent his army to attack and subdue the section of the land controlled by those dissident leaders, who "professed the blood of nobility" (verse 21). (I argued earlier that this portion of the land was most likely downstream from Zarahemla, centering on Sidom/Chiapa de Corzo. At that site there is evidence that violence marked the transition from the Guanacaste Phase to the Horcones Phase, around 75 B.C.²⁵ That was about when Moroni's forces went against the king-men "to pull down their pride," the dissidents being "hewn down and leveled to the earth" [verses 17–18].) All this time-consuming activity was going on when the Lamanites were "coming into the borders of the land." They would have headed for the east coast, to

the land of Moroni, by nearly the reverse of the route taken by the Lamanite army on its way to Manti. "Round about in the wilderness" was obviously quite a distance.

A look at map 12 shows how these times and distances work out. Two routes were available to the Lamanites between Antionum and Manti; they could have traveled over either. One slices through the vast Chiapas rain-forest wilderness via a network of jungle valleys. The other way skirts the rough country, going all the way to the Usumacinta River and following it upstream. The second is much longer but more sensible to travel, for there would have been settlements along the way to supply food, and the route was sure. The wilderness way, while feasible, went through some of the toughest country in all Mesoamerica, which was mainly unpopulated throughout the period we are talking about.²⁶ The heart of the section is still called "*el desierto de los Lacandon*" (the wilderness of the Lacandon Indians).²⁷ Either route taken by the Lamanite army would have allowed Moroni's forces time enough to reach Manti first.

No doubt the Nephite commander reversed his track later when they went from Jershon to the support of chief judge Pahoran. Dissidents had reasserted their claim to the government and seized control of Zarahemla, forcing the judge to flee (Alma 61:5). Moroni came up from his base at Jershon through the uplands east of the Sidon. He would have gone straight along the open valleys to Comitan/Gideon, where Pahoran awaited the relief force (Alma 60:30; 62:3–4, 6).

Another incident that took place on Moroni's return after helping Pahoran sheds more light on routes of march. He was headed with his army back toward the land of Nephiah and Jershon when he chanced upon "a large body of men of the Lamanites," captured them, and commandeered their provisions (Alma 62:14–18). Clearly, that particular route was not controlled by either side. The extent of wilderness meant that the boundaries were rarely firm and sure. (Kubler's observations on vague boundaries,

in note 24, shed light here.) The story does not tell us enough that we can establish where the encounter took place, but for both to use the upper Teapa River Valley above Pichucalco would make sense, or it could have been nearer to the Sidon, close to modern Huimanguillo.

On the front south and west of Zarahemla a grinding conflict had developed as the Amalickiahite war dragged on (Alma 53–58). Manti fell to the Lamanites. The city of Zeezrom, too, was captured, although since it was mentioned only one time, it must not have been of pivotal importance (Alma 56:14). Farther toward the west sea lay Cumeni and Antiparah, two more places the Lamanites took. The land of Judea remained in Nephite hands, like a cork under pressure in a bottle, preventing the enemy from moving directly down to Zarahemla (Alma 56:15–18, 22–25).

These geographical relationships fit the scene in extreme southern Chiapas. Map 12 shows a logical arrangement of cities on this front. Their placement in relation to the terrain clarifies how the military events proceeded. The Sierra Madre mountains form an all but impossible barrier to regular travel between the west seacoast and the interior depression all along its southern extremity, with one noteworthy exception: a pass links the upper tributaries region of the Grijalva River via the town of Motozintla to the wide, rich foothill and coastland strip known as the Soconusco. In the opposite direction from Motozintla, a narrow river valley leads down toward the Grijalva.²⁸

Antiparah would lie in the pass across these mountains. We see why by examining the Nephite recapture of Antiparah. Antipus and Helaman, the Nephite leaders on this front, used “a strategem” to get the Lamanites to come out from within the city’s defenses. They sent a small party past the place, teasing the Lamanites to pursue them. The group’s destination was meant to be obvious by the route it took: “as if we were going to the city beyond, in the borders by the seashore” (Alma 56:30–31). So Antiparah lay in or near a pass on a route that led down toward the shore

from Antiparah on the one hand and toward Zarahemla via Judea on the other. A band of men moving seaward within sight of a defense location in the river valley near Motozintla would obviously be headed over the nearby pass and down to Izapa or some other city in the Soconusco region. Antiparah fits well near Motozintla.

Near there occurred the remarkable battle of Helaman's 2,000 young warriors. Helaman and his Ammonite youths had come up from Melek (no doubt via Zarahemla, Helaman's home) to Judea to reinforce the beleaguered army of Antipus. They arrived just in time to thwart a Lamanite attack on Judea. The young men soon took part in the operation to regain Antiparah. Once the Lamanite forces had been drawn out of their stronghold, Helaman's company retreated northward into the wilderness (Alma 56:36–39). Along the open, flattish top of the line of mountains they raced through pine or oak forest.²⁹ Had they tried to move down through one of the canyons wending toward Judea, their base, the Lamanites would have suspected a trap and turned back; and the purpose of the maneuver, to draw the Lamanites away from Antiparah, would have been foiled. After long pursuit, the forces met in a battle that gave the Nephites victory. The prisoners were then guarded from the battle site down to Zarahemla, while the main Nephite force returned to their base at Judea. Finally, once the weakened garrison at Antiparah had given up and retreated, Nephite concern about defending that "quarter of the land" was allayed. The map again makes obvious why.

Archaeological research has hardly begun in this rugged area. A quick reconnaissance from the Grijalva River up the valley as far as Motozintla found no sites of early date, but the archaeologist who did the work recognized that he had only begun the investigation and that much more searching was needed.³⁰ Reports from an earlier day indicate that ruins of significant size do occur near Motozintla and also near Amatenango de la Frontera, farther down the valley, where I judge Cumeni could fit.³¹ The city of Zeezrom would

be down nearer Manti, perhaps at the site of Guajilar, which was investigated in 1976 and 1977. It was a large settlement in the period of these Nephite wars.³² Judea would be in the Chicomuselo area, ideally positioned to cut off any Lamanite movement down against Zarahemla (Alma 56:25). In all these areas very little cultivable land exists; this explains the high degree of dependence of the Nephite and Lamanite forces on imported food (Alma 56:27, 29, 32; 57:6, 8, 11, 15).

The microgeography involved in the battle and marching routes that recovered Manti for the Nephites (Alma 58:13–29) could only be discussed fully with detailed local maps in our hands, and these are not available to me. Regional maps and personal observation suggest that generally plausible locations for those military movements exist. (The same setting also broadly accommodates the earlier battle thereabouts reported in Alma 43:25–54. Closer study is needed to check out details.) Manti itself may have been at the major ruin of La Libertad. It sits at the confluence of three large tributaries that form the Grijalva River just below the big site, and the required wilderness is immediately adjacent. La Libertad was the largest city in the entire upper tributaries “quarter of the land” at about this time.³³

The recapture of Manti ended the great war, but its effect had been profound. Armed power under chief captain Moroni had been used repeatedly to provide the muscle so the central government could overcome the worst of the divisions and indecision that had afflicted it. People had been moved about quite arbitrarily to settle here and there as needed. Settlements would have been consolidated for defense, and drafts of labor were demanded to construct fortifications (Alma 50:10). Casualties on both sides had been heavy. And even after formal hostilities ceased, tension remained; continued Nephite watchfulness was required (Alma 62:42). The entire area ruled from Zarahemla was closer knit than ever. Urgent communication and the

need for extensive movements of armed personnel and the women and children in their camps no doubt regularized routes of travel. Wealth, in part from increased trade, followed (verse 48). Attention had been further directed to the strategic value and resources of the neck area and the land northward beyond (Alma 63:4–10). Literacy and record-keeping apparently also expanded (verse 12).

These characteristics of life in the isthmian area of the Book of Mormon agree with what we know of southern Mesoamerica in the period following 75 B.C. Moreover, the prototypes of many patterns appearing in Nephite and Mesoamerican life in the classic era of the fourth century A.D. are visible at this earlier time, including the wars, social classes, trade, cults and other features Mormon describes at the very end of his peoples' historical career.

Patterns in Warfare

At this point it will be helpful to make an excursion through some data on Mesoamerican warfare so that we might appreciate more fully how Moroni's men fought. The standard treatments of Mesoamerican culture have until very recently followed the line that warfare was a late exception—that the area's earlier groups practiced only the arts of peace. We now know this to be a complete distortion. It appears the Mesoamericans probably were rarely very peaceful. There is increasing evidence that armed conflict was frequent even in Olmec times. David Webster has published a monograph that insists that, at least for the Maya lowlands, "warfare and militarism were significant processes throughout the entire Classic" (in his terms, A.D. 300 to 900). Even earlier, "warfare during late Preclassic times was an essential factor in the political definition of the various subregions of the lowlands."³⁴ And in Honduras, highland Guatemala, central Mexico, and Oaxaca evidence has also come to light that shows that war was of great importance and antiquity.³⁵

When Cortez crossed southern Mexico during his epic journey to Honduras, he discovered fortifications around the Laguna de Terminos (Campeche) area very similar to those Moroni erected in the first century B.C. (Alma 53:1–5) in the east coastal lowlands only a few miles from Cortez’s route. The Book of Mormon describes a ditch being dug around the protected area; the excavated earth was piled inward to form a bank. Atop it a fence of timbers was planted and bound together with vines. That very arrangement is now well documented archaeologically. The National Geographic Society-Tulane University project at Becan in the center of the Yucatan peninsula has shown the pattern to be very old. Webster’s interpretation of the excavations sees a massive earthen rampart around that center somewhere between A.D. 250 and 450, during the period when the final Nephite wars with the Lamanites occurred. The impressive size of this defensive construction is shown by Webster’s observation that from the top of the embankment (not counting the probable timber palisade on top) to the bottom of the ditch the distance was nearly 35 feet. “An enemy force caught in the bottom of the ditch would have been at the mercy of the defenders, whose most effective weapons under the circumstances would have been large rocks.” Moreover, “the extreme width of the defense provides additional protection, for heavy missiles can be thrown only with great difficulty from the embankment to the outside edge of the ditch in most places. To throw ‘uphill’ from the outside is almost impossible. Defenders, possibly screened by a palisade, could have rained long-distance missiles on approaching enemies using spearthrowers and slings.”³⁶ Compare these statements with Alma 49:22: “But behold . . . [the attacking Lamanites] were swept off the fortification by the stones and arrows which were thrown at them.” A full comparison of Mesoamerican tactics, strategy, and defensive constructions—little as has been learned about the subject thus

far—reveals many other instructive parallels with the Book of Mormon, most of them unsuspected only a few years ago.

Other features of military life are described in the scripture. The bows and arrows, stones and slings, javelins, darts, axes, and various sorts of shields are well attested in documents and archaeological remains from Mesoamerica.³⁷ The “thick clothing” worn defensively by the Nephites (Alma 43:19) seems related to the suits of quilted armor (*ichcauipilli*) used by the Aztecs and their neighbors. Salt or some such substance was placed between layers of cloth and the combination quilted loosely. This garment could withstand a direct arrow impact, yet it was so light and cheap that the Spaniards themselves adopted it.³⁸ There were other kinds of armor as well.³⁹ What the Book of Mormon calls a “cimeter” (in the modern dictionary “scimitar”), like its namesake in Asia, was a weapon to be swung. Its smiting power was sufficient to cut through armor (compare Alma 43:44) or to kill at one “stroke” (verse 37). The Mesoamerican parallel would be the weapon the Aztecs called the *maccuahuitl*, a hardwood club edged on both sides with razor-sharp obsidian blades. The Spaniards called this feared weapon a “sword,” said it was sharper than their own weapons, and learned with dismay that one blow with it could cut off the head of a horse. Bernal Diaz, among the conquering Spaniards, also reported “broad swords” distinct from the *maccuahuitl*, but these are not elsewhere described, as far as I know.⁴⁰ Now, a sword in normal European terminology would have a pointed blade that would be used with a thrusting motion. The Book of Mormon never makes clear that such a weapon was in use by Nephites or Lamanites. Only in one case is there description of a “sword” with any kind of point: a Nephite soldier “smote” a Lamanite leader, accidentally scalping him; then he carefully picked up the scalp, “laid it” on the “point” of his sword (rather than spearing it, as

we might expect), and raised it aloft (Alma 44:12–13). This odd description fails to make clear exactly how the weapon looked. While the Book of Mormon text leaves us unclear about the appearance and functions of the Nephites' sword-like weapons, so do the sources on ancient Mexico and Guatemala remain unclear about some weapons. The agreement between scripture and outside sources seems adequate at the moment; no major problem is apparent in reconciling the materials.

One principle of ancient American military organization clarifies certain statements in the Book of Mormon. Sometimes a Nephite or Lamanite "army" is described, but in the larger engagements we read of "armies" on each side. Mesoamerican captains led their own forces composed of men in their kin groups. Leaders did not have absolute power, but they did wield heavy influence in decisions affecting war. They and their advisors chose whether or not to commit their militia units to a particular campaign. (Full-time soldiers were exceptional.) Moroni had much to gain by persuading leaders of these lineage units to join him, it appears from Alma 46:28, 50:12, and 62:4–5. The Amlicites (Alma 2:7–16) and the king-men (Alma 51: 17–21) were composed of kin or geographical units who withheld their support from Moroni's official Nephite cause. In the end the king-men were compelled to commit their forces and to "hoist the title of liberty upon their towers, and in their cities" as a symbol of loyalty to the central government (verse 20). The language used by Mormon to describe the final battle of the Nephites also becomes more comprehensible in this light: "And behold, the ten thousand *of* Gidgiddonah had fallen, . . . and Lamah had fallen with *his* ten thousand; and Gilgal had fallen with *his* ten thousand; and Limhah had fallen with *his* ten thousand," and so on (Mormon 6:13–14). At the time of the Spanish conquest, Bernal Diaz used similar language regarding the organization of the Tlascalcan armies that faced Cortez. Five captains appeared on the battlefield, each

with his ten thousand men—"Of the followers of the old Xicotenga . . . there were ten thousand; of another great chief named Moseescaci there were another ten thousand; of a third, who was called Chichimecatecle, there were as many more," and so on. Each group carried its unique flag. (The Tlascaltec army that opposed Cortez had a great standard "carried" by the commander, although actually the pole was strapped to his back.⁴¹ We recall that "Moroni, who was the chief commander of the armies of the Nephites," took a piece of his coat, wrote a slogan on it, "fastened it upon the end of a pole," and "went forth among the people, waving the rent part of his garment in the air," as told in Alma 46:11–12, 19.) The Tlascalans also wore different uniforms to show their units, and "each captain had a different device [insignia], as do our dukes and counts in Castile." The decision whether to fight was arrived at separately by each captain for his group.⁴² Moreover, a leader of a Mesoamerican military unit had a special relationship to his men: "The warriors serving under him were conceptualized in the kinship framework as 'sons and vassals.'"⁴³ That recalls in the Book of Mormon Helaman and his 2,000 "sons" as warriors.

The "armies" of the Nephites and Lamanites were probably composed of sets of single armies, each under the direct command of a lineage leader, each group coming from a single region and probably speaking a single dialect.⁴⁴ Such a structure of command was brittle. A strange commander could not take over a unit in some purely administrative substitution. Thus "when the Lamanites [at Noah] saw that their chief captains were all slain they fled into the wilderness" and went home (Alma 49:25). In the same light we can understand why the fortifications constructed by astute Moroni resulted in an "increase daily" in his armies "because of the assurance of protection which his works did bring forth unto them" (Alma 50:12). The local political leaders were increasingly willing to back someone who looked like a winner.

The Hagoth Affair

With the onset of peace, pent-up curiosity about the land northward broke out publicly. Morianton, we recall, had envisioned taking over the territory beyond the narrow neck “covered with bodies of water” and had tried vainly to reach that area (Alma 50:29), which we have concluded would be in south-central Veracruz. Moroni had feared that an alliance would be made between that area and Bountiful, just on the other side of the Coatzacoalcos River. Joining those two regions into a single state would have revived the old territorial unit that the Gulf Coast Olmecs had exploited so successfully centuries before. An ambitious man like Morianton (whose name was purely Jaredite, incidentally) must have seen potentials for building political power in the land of Desolation and beyond which could resurrect the old Olmec/Jaredite pattern. Others apparently saw similar possibilities. The motto of the times among the restless after the war ended seemed to be, “Go north, young man.”

The thirty-seventh year into the era of the reign of the judges (about 60 B.C.) saw 5,400 men, plus women and children, leave Zarahemla for the north (Alma 63:4). In the next year many more departed. Perhaps others departed from Lamanite country at the same time. More than curiosity must have impelled such numbers. What was it? Probably as much push as pull was exerted. We saw earlier that the area in the land of Zarahemla that could boast good crop conditions was limited. We have also seen the population increasing over time. When too many bodies occupy a resource area, temporary accommodation may take place with increase in stress (as in the conflict with the kingmen), but eventually some of the surplus people are likely to relocate. A reading of Alma 62:39–41 (note especially the “famines”) suggests that crowding of the resource base had been one cause of the war just past, as much as it had been a result. In any case, the land northward lay before them with the prospect that it could accommodate some of the

crowded southerners. They had already got into the pattern of wholesale resettlement under wartime conditions. But it is most unlikely that mere individuals would have gone off to northern colonies. Only “corporate,” organized units would have the resources to undertake such an ambitious task. The groups likely would have to be strong in a military sense to take control of any areas of much value, for it is a general ecological rule that all the better settlement areas would long since have been occupied. Lineage units are likely to have been the ones to carry off a successful move. As a result, the Nephite colonies may have been quite concentrated geographically (but note Helaman 3:8). They would hardly have scattered by individual families on the face of the land, as did U.S. pioneers in the West. The prime movers were, in all likelihood, ambitious leaders who saw a chance for increased personal and lineage power in the move. Morianton and Jacob (3 Nephi 7:12) illustrate the type.

All this business of seeking new lands and new power sounds very Mesoamerican.⁴⁵

Those going overland (undoubtedly the majority) would mainly have moved via the narrow pass into just the zones Morianton had had his eye on, the eastern lowlands in the land northward near the narrow neck. Others took a sea route, settling along the west sea in the area in the land northward. By neither route would the migrants have traveled farther than necessary. We have no reason to think that distances of more than a couple of hundred miles were involved. (It makes little economic sense to ship a bulky product like timber, for example, very far, at least in ancient times—Helaman 3:10–12.)

There is one apparent exception to the likely rule of short travel. Helaman 3:4 reports that some Nephites “did travel to an exceeding great distance, insomuch that they came to large bodies of water and many rivers.” That statement seems to imply a distance greater than the area in the land northward that Morianton tried to reach, so close

to Bountiful that it might have allied with it (Alma 50:29, 32). In former times the floor of the Valley of Mexico was occupied by a set of lakes that were greater in combined size than anything else in central Mexico. It was this lake system that allowed the Aztecs to facilitate movement of goods needed to support their great city of Tenochtitlan. The exceptional concentration of resources permitted by the lakes as they linked adjacent lands is now considered a prime reason for the prosperity of the valley in Aztec times as well as earlier. For these reasons the region would have been attractive to colonizers and might have been the territory mentioned in Helaman 3. Perhaps the same area is referred to in 3 Nephi 7:12, which tells of a group of dissenters who fled to “the northernmost part of the land” and occupied a city named Jacobugath, which was burned at the time of the crucifixion (3 Nephi 9:9). Thus, very possibly the dimensions of the land northward referred to in the Nephite and Jaredite records could exceed somewhat the figures I offered in chapter 1. If travel went as far as the Valley of Mexico, that would be near the extremity of the Mesoamerican culture area at the time of our record. And if those greater dimensions did turn out to be correct, it would provide an interesting possible connection, through “king” Jacob and his dissenters, between the old Book of Mormon centers and Teotihuacan’s rise to prominence, for those migrants to the Valley of Mexico could have reached that area at the beginning of the first century A.D., just as its growth rate was accelerating.

Hagoth was a major figure in promoting the northward migrations. The location of his home port is clear enough—exactly at the border between lands southward and northward that is right at the isthmus or narrow neck. On the west-sea or Pacific side of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec are large shallow lagoons that have often invited maritime activity. In the hills just inland on the isthmus grows fine timber,⁴⁶ which was so desirable that the Spaniards cut it, floated it downriver to the Atlantic side, and shipped

it to Cuba for building ships. The lagoons and the timber resources were located in precisely the spot on the Pacific side of the neck that chapter 63 of Alma calls for.

Settlements of the first century B.C. have been found scattered along the coast of the states of Guerrero and Oaxaca, a few hundred miles north of the isthmus.⁴⁷ It is reasonable that some Nephite colonization and subsequent trade (Helaman 3:10) was directed there, particularly since good timber is rare on that hot, dry strip. Later on, at least, this area was definitely colonized by people from southern Mesoamerica.⁴⁸ The colonists conceivably could have gone a considerable distance north, even to the state of Nayarit over 600 miles away, but if that was the case, they probably lost contact with their homeland, since even within the land southward over much shorter distances communication was often tenuous. (Note the ineffective, slow messages even among the top leaders in Alma 59; compare Mosiah 7:1.) There is concrete evidence that sea travel along the Pacific coast of not only Mexico but all the way to Ecuador in South America was an ancient, though probably not a regular, practice.⁴⁹

The “ship” of Hagoth, if it was like craft known later on the Pacific coast, was either a very large dugout canoe with built-up sides or a log raft with sails. Whatever its form, it could hardly have been a complex planked vessel at all resembling European ships. There is no evidence so far that such ships were constructed or used in the New World until after the Spanish conquest, and it seems unlikely that so important a technological item would have left no evidence, even in art. Still, the large dugout canoe sighted by Columbus on one of his voyages off the coast of Yucatan was of very respectable size, capable of carrying scores of people for days at a time.⁵⁰ And with so much cultural evidence of coastal voyaging between South America and Mesoamerica, we may yet find that the large sea-going rafts known off Ecuador or Peru, and which were able to

reach the Galapagos Islands off South America,⁵¹ were also made and used off Mexico, although this has not yet been demonstrated for Book of Mormon times.

What about the LDS tradition that Hagoth, the Nephite shipbuilder who failed to return home, was an ancestor of the Polynesians? Years ago I compiled a large body of shared culture traits that indeed suggest historical links between those islands and various parts of the Americas, and this has been supplemented by others. Yet the evidence does not allow our pinning down any single time or place for a migration or trade that would persuasively explain the similarities. It remains impossible to demonstrate any clearcut connection between the two areas, although debate continues.⁵² Having been a missionary in Polynesia, I am well aware of the Hagoth theme in LDS tradition, but the evidence available does not support it as historically based fact. Neither can we rule out the possibility of a rare voyage from the mainland to the islands. Those who choose to believe that Hagoth reached Polynesia must rely mainly on faith rather than on reliable evidence.⁵³ The Book of Mormon itself, of course, says only that the man and his mates disappeared from the knowledge of the people in Zarahemla. For all they knew he might have died at a ripe old age on the west Mexican coast without a suitable vessel in which to make the return voyage. And neither do we know whether his vessel was sunk at sea.

Chapter 3 in this book cited evidence from several central and south Mexican locations that cultural influences and probably elite migrants did arrive from southern Mesoamerica during the first century B.C. and took over local control north of Tehuantepec. Monte Alban in Oaxaca, at the onset of its period II, is a particularly clear case.⁵⁴ As research continues we can expect to learn more clearly how, and how much, these northward movements affected the localities the new settlers inhabited.

Nephite Chronological Reckoning

Scattered throughout the middle part of the Book of Mormon with increasing frequency as one reads on are statements about Nephite dating. Nearly all LDS readers simply consult the footnotes on each page that offer dates (none exactly correct) in our calendar. If we investigate the Nephite calendrical references exhaustively, the footnoted dates are questionable. Perhaps we will be able to clarify this matter by looking at Mesoamerican calendars.

By the time the Book of Mormon account reaches the middle of the first century B.C. (early in the Book of Helaman), it is dear to every reader that the scribes were deeply concerned with detailed chronology. This same cultural emphasis is also apparent in Mesoamerica. The major Mesoamerican peoples kept strict account of the passing of the years. We are best informed about the Maya of the Yucatan peninsula. They measured elapsed years from a distant date (3113 B.C.) of unknown significance.⁵⁵ The earlier Nephites used as their fundamental reference date Lehi's departure from the land of Jerusalem (2 Nephi 5:28 is the first mention). For some six hundred years they followed this practice, although toward the end of that period a secondary reference developed, the date when the Nephite judges began governing in place of King Mosiah, as in 3 Nephi 1:1: "Now it came to pass that the ninety and first year [of the judges] had passed away and it was six hundred years from the time that Lehi left Jerusalem." In that year signs were observed marking the birth of Jesus Christ in Palestine (verses 2–26).

At the early end, the Nephite connection to biblical chronology is "the commencement of the first year of the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah" (1 Nephi 1:4), when Nephi's record began. Lehi's departure from Jerusalem and the start of the Nephite count of years took place within a few months, it appears, and still within Zedekiah's first year. The editorial footnote in the current edition of the Book of Mormon dates that year as "about 600 B.C." We

can now be more accurate, thanks to developments in Bible scholarship. The task was difficult in part because “the first year” of Israelite kings could have two meanings. By one reckoning a king was said to begin ruling in the partial year when he actually came to the throne; by another method, his initial year was the full calendar year following his accession to the ruling seat. The Jews in Lehi’s time probably used the former system.⁵⁶ In addition, there is the problem of connecting the Bible statements about chronology to our present calendar. Dates for the Jewish rulers have been worked out over many years of careful historical scholarship. The key information goes back through the European Middle Ages, through Roman Empire times, the Hellenistic rulers, the Persian empire, and finally to the annals of the Assyrian kings. Eclipses are mentioned in conjunction with events in the lives of those monarchs; astronomers can date those precisely, helping to anchor the entire sequence to our calendar within one or two years.⁵⁷ Today the volume of interlocking information is so great that there cannot any longer be serious question about Zedekiah’s date. The words of Nephi start with events that took place in the Jewish year overlapping our 597–596 B.C.

The second key connection of Old World historical dating with the Book of Mormon is at the birth of Jesus. That event cannot, so far, be dated with certainty in our calendar, since the historical records of that day ignored the obscure birth of the babe in Bethlehem. But there is general agreement among historians that the Herod who ruled at the time of the Savior’s birth died in 4 B.C. Other historical facts are mentioned in the Gospels—Luke 2:2–3 names the ruler of a neighboring province in the Roman Empire at the time of the taxation that made Joseph and Mary go to Bethlehem; and there is evidence regarding the appearance of the “new star” that marked the nativity (Matthew 2:9–10; 3 Nephi 1:21). Putting all these historical considerations together is a complicated, controversial task. Most of the experts now agree that the birth of Jesus was “in or shortly

before 4 B.C.," with a chance of its having been as early as 7 B.C.⁵⁸ But, the reader may object, how can our calendar with its A.D.—B.C. distinction have been mistaken about such an important event? The explanation is that the year of the Savior's birth did not become significant to the calendar used in Europe until centuries after the event. The monk Dionysius Exiguus calculated the date soon after A.D. 500, but he made a mistake, mainly due to the inadequate historical materials available.⁵⁹ So Christ was not born in 1 B.C., neither in A.D. 1, but probably in 4 or 5 B.C., or a bit earlier still.

Consider what this means for the Book of Mormon. Both by prophecy (1 Nephi 10:4; 19:8; 2 Nephi 25:19) and by Nephite historical reckoning (3 Nephi 1:1), the American scripture allots "600 years" for the interval between Lehi's departure in Zedekiah's first year and the birth of Jesus Christ. Yet secular historical records allow no more than about 593 years (597 B.C. to 4 B.C.) between these events. Although there appears to be a problem, an interesting solution exists. To grasp it we must suppose that Nephite time-keeping would have followed the principles of the calendar that was widespread in southern Mesoamerica in the time and place that the scriptural account was written. All the material in this book to this point supports that important relationship.

Note that the word "year" has several meanings in different civilizations. Various definitions of "years" are recognized, each used for a different purpose. An unabridged English language dictionary reveals that even we have several different counts for which we use the one word. Among the lowland Maya, whose calendar is the one we know best in southern Mesoamerica, at least three kinds of "years" were calculated: (1) the *tzolkin* or sacred year of 260 days (thirteen months of twenty days each), (2) the *haab*, which was 365 days long (eighteen months of twenty days each, plus a closing "month" or five "unlucky" days), (3) the *tun* of 360 days. The *tun* was used for most

calendrical calculations, apparently serving as an approximation to the *haab*, having the special merit that it could be divided and multiplied far more conveniently (360 is divisible by many numbers, 365 by very few). The Mayan calendar specialists loved to “play around” with dates that went ahead millions of years and back as far as 400 million years!⁶⁰ The Mayan counting system adapted to calendrical matters, then, went like this:

1 day = 1 *kin*
 20 days = 1 *uinal* (“month”)
 360 days = 1 *tun* (“year”)
 20 *tuns* = 1 *katun*
 20 *katuns* = *baktun* (“cycle”)

Let us not suppose that this recognition of several types of “year” units indicates any confusion on the part of the ancients about astronomical realities. The experts in the Mesoamerican societies knew with great precision how long it took the earth to go around the sun and how this cycle correlated with the moon in its motions, with Venus and Saturn cycles, and no doubt with other information on the heavenly bodies (in the Book of Mormon, compare Alma 30:44; Helaman 12:14–15). Use of the 360-day *tun* year was a conscious compromise of convenience, no more. Suppose the Nephites used the same system of counting time as the Maya.⁶¹ The prophesied “six hundred years” in that reckoning would constitute precisely one and one half *baktuns* (thirty *katuns*), a neat total of 216,000 days. But this count of 600 *tun* “years” would be about 3,156 days shorter than the total using our sidereal year today (approximately 365 days, 6 hours, 9 minutes, and 9.54 seconds long). In other words, “600 years” by the Maya *tun* method of calculating time would turn out 8.64 years shorter than “600 years” in today’s conventional sense. If we mark off 600 *tun* years from Zedekiah’s first year, 597–596 B.C., 216,000 days brings us into the year overlapping 5–4 B.C., an acceptable date for Christ’s birth.

Further confirmation of this connection of Nephite chronology to the *katun* system is provided by the “*baktun* prophecy” that Alma seems to have made. To his son he foretold that the extinction of his lineage and people, the Nephites, would occur “in four hundred years from the time that Jesus Christ shall manifest himself unto them” (Alma 45:10–14). Samuel, the Lamanite prophet, announced the same interval to the Nephites’ destruction (Helaman 13:5). Four hundred *tuns* would be one *baktun* or cycle in the Maya system (144,000 days or about 395 of our years). Omens and prophecies (as well as “generations”) among the Maya were commonly phrased in terms of the beginning or ending of whole calendar units.⁶² In Mesoamerican thinking, Alma’s and Samuel’s prophecies for an entire *baktun* would have been exceedingly profound statements. And, of course, the 600 *tuns* before Christ, together with the 400 after his birth, make the entire Nephite history come out in “even” calendrical terms. We see the same tendency to make history fit a pattern among the Egyptians, the Aztecs, and even the Israelites.⁶³ Yehudi Radday, an Israeli scholar, argues that the history of Israel in fact, not just in literary form, falls into a symmetrical pattern.⁶⁴

For emphasis, let us review these points. If the Nephite “year” had been the same as our present year of 365 + days, then the Book of Mormon prophecies and its history as well would be in error, for from Zedekiah to Christ’s birth is in fact not 600 but closer to 592 of our solar years. But if we suppose that the Nephites used the method of calculating time that was standard in southern Mesoamerica, where the Nephite lands must lie, then 600 of the 360-day *tun* years used there matches rather neatly the apparent interval from Zedekiah to Christ. Not only is the “problem” eliminated, but we obtain an important perspective of the Nephites’ use of the calendar system that prevailed in their geographical and cultural setting.

If space allowed, we could explore other interesting points opened up to us by this apparent relationship to Mesoamerican calendar and time concepts. Let us note in passing just one other scriptural statement. Amalickiah had almost gained victory over the Nephites on the east seashore when Teancum, a Nephite captain, stole at night into Amalickiah's camp "and put a javelin to his heart," then slipped away without awakening anybody. This was the last night of their year. (In that area war would be likely to occur between October and February, when rains and floods did not block movement; since Amalickiah was already well into his campaign at this time, it seems likely that this year end/beginning was at or near the winter solstice.) "And now, it came to pass in the twenty and sixth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi, behold, when the Lamanites awoke on the first morning of the first month [of the year], behold, they found Amalickiah was dead in his own tent. . . . And now, when the Lamanites saw this they were affrighted; and they abandoned their design, . . . and retreated with all their army into the city of Mulek, and sought protection in their fortifications" (Alma 52:1–2). Throughout later Mesoamerican societies immense effort was expended to determine whether a period of time was lucky or unlucky for some endeavor. Omens were regularly sought and frequently were tied to events of the last, or first, day.⁶⁵ It would be highly characteristic of Mesoamericans to act as the Lamanites did upon the death of Amalickiah. To awaken on the first day of a new year to find their leader dead would have been far more unnerving to their omen-conscious feelings than we moderns may appreciate.

The hints about astronomy and calendar that we glean from the scripture fit comfortably in the context of Mesoamerican practices, but we do not yet know when the calendrical knowledge of the area became crystallized into the full form employed in Classic times. It was probably

no later than 100 B.C., according to David Kelley of the University of Calgary, a leading specialist in this field. He also believes that key elements of the scheme were introduced from the Old World.⁶⁶ More recent research seems to demonstrate that 235 B.C. was the actual year, based on astronomical necessities, when the “Maya” long-count calendar crystallized.⁶⁷ (The long-count calendar involves a combination of the 365-day “vague year,” which apparently has been used since about 1322 B.C., with the 260-day count of later origin.) This could have come about by some joining of Olmec knowledge with the developing southern Mesoamerican civilization which I have termed the Second Tradition.

The people of Zarahemla, when discovered by Mosiah, apparently used a lunar calendar, for they spoke of Coriantumr, the Jaredite ruler, surviving with them for so many “moons.” That patently refers to Hebrew *yerah*, “lunar month” or “moon,” reflecting the simple calendar of the non-literate Mulekites. (The Jewish calendar had been strictly lunar-based until the Jews borrowed the Babylonian system in Lehi’s day.) Since “moon” is not referred to after Mosiah’s arrival, it seems safe to suppose that he and his party brought a more sophisticated system from highland Nephi/Guatemala. The date Dr. Vincent Malmstrom believes saw the invention of the complex calendar of southern Mesoamerica, 235 B.C., falls in the reign of Mosiah I. Could there be some connection between combining his calendrical knowledge, brought from highland Guatemala, with the Mulekite system, the amalgam catalyzing the long-count development? Work on elucidating the calendar systems of Mesoamerica may yet shed light on influences and movements of Book of Mormon peoples in the third century B.C.

7

Nephite Life

Our study of the Book of Mormon has concentrated so far on fitting the scripture into a plausible geographical setting. We have found that at point after point the Nephite account describes locations, migrations of peoples, journeys, and settlement patterns that fit consistently into southern Mexico and northern Central America—Mesoamerica. At the same time we have discussed geography, we have caught glimpses of the cultural setting too.

Culture and society among Book of Mormon peoples deserve our closer attention. A people's institutions serve as vehicles, media or mechanisms through which its ideas take their form and are communicated to us. The Book of Mormon is filled with ideas—teachings, principles, meanings. If we wish to grasp them with maximum clarity, we need to understand as well as we can the medium of culture through which they are conveyed to us. We must not expect that Joseph Smith saved us all that trouble by translating the Book of Mormon to English. He aided us, it is true, yet we ourselves still have to seek the true or full meaning from his words, just as we must elucidate the English of Shakespeare. It will help us if we know how and why, in social and political terms, the Nephites prospered and fell, what constraints their economic system imposed upon them, and which folk ideas contradicted the urgings of their prophets. This sort of grasp of a people's way of living comes only by careful study of all we can find out about them. Because there is so much material we could deal with, here we will be able only to introduce topics we cannot treat fully. This chapter will compare scripture

and external data on the following: metals, useful animals, secret societies, commerce, kinship, and government. When we finish, each reference in the volume to “cattle” or “merchants” or “kindreds” should take on deeper meaning for the reader. And the civilizational forces that did so much to shape the fate of those ancient people may make new sense to us.

The Use of Metals

Critics of the Book of Mormon have been fond of pointing out that statements in the scripture regarding use of metals by the Nephites and Jaredites run contrary to authoritative pronouncements on the subject by experts. The position of orthodox archaeologists has long been that nowhere in Mesoamerica were metals used before about A.D. 900. Until recently Latter-day Saints were not in a position to reconcile this conflict. In 1954 I published two articles that presented evidence for the existence of metal objects from Mesoamerican archaeological sites well before the accepted date of A.D. 900.¹ Further finds would be needed, I concluded, before the question of dating could be settled.

Nearly twenty years later I updated the information and included much more data.² Since then additional facts have come out in support of the idea that metal use was much earlier in America than had been thought. One basic lesson we learn from this experience is that the experts were quite wrong. Metals were indeed in use in Book of Mormon times in Mesoamerica.

What kind of evidence is there? The most compelling sort consists of actual specimens found where an early date is positively indicated. Over a dozen of these significantly precede A.D. 900.³ The earliest piece so far probably dates back to around the first century B.C. It is a bit of copper sheathing found on top of an altar at Cuicuilco in the Valley of Mexico.⁴ In addition to surely early specimens, other finds, not firmly dated, could be pre-A.D. 900; a late

date has been inferred for some of them mainly *because* metal was found and “everybody knows” that metal occurs only in late sites. When all current information is considered, it appears that archaeologists should now be asking a new question. The old query was, why was there no metal in early Mesoamerica? Now it ought to become, why do we recover so little evidence of the metallurgical skill that was surely there?

Traditional Mesoamerica accounts from various groups have reported use of metals that dirt archaeologists have failed to document. Evidence from language also indicates knowledge in the metallurgical arts beyond the supposed A.D. 900 barrier. Longacre and Millon reconstructed part of the Proto-Mixtecan language of the state of Oaxaca and thereabouts on the basis of words found in its daughter languages. In identifying terms that must have been in use before the descendant tongues split apart, the researchers were puzzled by the fact that a word for “metal” seemed to have existed in the proto-language at about 1000 B.C.⁵ Of course, metalworking is not supposed to have been going on then.

The same linguistic procedure has been applied to Mayan languages. Proto-Tzeltal-Tzotzil dating to perhaps A.D. 500 had a term for metal. But a related term occurs in Huastecan, considered to be the language that first split off the basic Maya stem, supposedly around 2200 B.C.⁶ Even if we arbitrarily reduced this figure to around 1500 B.C., this linguistic evidence indicates that metal was known to Mayan people at a startlingly early date. Yet Kaufman and Campbell, in an influential study of the Mixe-Zoquean language group, added further support. They concluded that Proto-Mixe-Zoquean was likely the language of the Olmecs known to the archaeologists. That early tongue too had its word for metal by around 1500 B.C.⁷ So work in comparative linguistics shows that metals must have been known, and presumably used, at least as early as 1500 B.C. That date extends back to the time of the Jaredites, for which so

far we have not a single specimen of actual metal. Does it not seem likely that specimens are going to be found someday?

Arguments from comparative studies support the idea that metals were long known in Mesoamerica. Archaeologists only recently learned that metal was being worked in Peru as early as 1900 B.C., and it was being traded in Ecuador before 1000 B.C.⁸ At the same time, all Mesoamerican scholars agree that intercommunication with Peru and Ecuador occurred over a period of thousands of years. Some definitely believe that it was via these voyages that metalworking reached Mexico and Guatemala.⁹ At the same time, we are asked to suppose that something as valuable as metal waited to be carried north until A.D. 900; then, suddenly, the metal connection finally “took.” Such a strange idea of the culture contact process is now impossible to accept. Dudley T. Easby, Jr., one of the most respected experts on ancient American metal technology, wrote in 1960: “The majority of scholars, relying on circumstantial evidence, believe that fine metallurgy in ancient Mexico was limited to a few centuries before the arrival of the Spaniards. Perhaps they are right, but it seems to me that their theory leaves much to be explained.”¹⁰ Now linguistic evidence confirms Easby’s suspicions. A new theory of the history of Mesoamerican metalworking is needed. When it has been framed, the references to metals in the Book of Mormon will not seem as strange as they once did.

None of what has been said here means that point-by-point agreement now exists between the scripture and scientific findings. The trend of the evidence is moving toward agreement, but some serious differences remain to be worked out. In order to see what some of them are, let’s now look very carefully at some statements about metals in the Nephite volume. But we must not let our preconceptions about the text stand in the way of gaining understanding.

Nephi, the son of Lehi, was a connecting link between

the Near Eastern metallurgical tradition and Nephite culture in the New World. In the Arabian wilderness he found ore, refined it, and made tools with which to construct a ship. He required divine guidance for the design of the vessel, but his matter-of-fact description of the smelting indicates that he used his own knowledge to manage that (1 Nephi 17:8–11). What he knew was probably fairly rudimentary—his apparatus certainly was, being little beyond a bellows (verse 11). After all, the Israelites were not highly skilled in those arts. Instead, expertise with metal had been a monopoly of specialist non-Hebrew clans, whose craft secrets were passed down from father to son.¹¹ Nephi could have known the basics of the processes, but he probably did not control the full repertoire of skills.

Upon arriving in the promised land, Nephi made a set of plates on which he kept his record (1 Nephi 19:1). Approximately twenty years later he manufactured more plates (“the small plates of Nephi,” 2 Nephi 5:28–30). By that time he and his followers had left the Lamanites behind in the Pacific coastal lowlands and settled up in the land of Nephi. There he undertook to pass on what knowledge he did have in these matters. He taught his people “to work in all manner of wood, and of iron, and of copper, and of brass, and of steel, and of gold, and of silver, and of precious ores.” (2 Nephi 5:15). This is an impressive list. Unfortunately, the language leaves us uncertain what the Nephites did with these substances. We could infer that practical as well as decorative use was made of some of these (see 2 Nephi 5:16 regarding “precious things”). If so, utility soon took second place. Nephite concern with ores and metals a bit later had come to be with their “precious” quality (Jacob 1:16; 2:12). Only once thereafter, about 400 B.C., was utilitarian metalworking suggested (Jarom 1:8: tillage tools and weapons are mentioned). From that point on in the Nephite history, every reference to metals states or implies that they were strictly precious—a source of wealth. In fact, during the final 400 years of the Nephite

account even gold and silver, the only metals mentioned at all, are noted but four times. Perhaps by that period the labor-cheap surface deposits had been exhausted, making ore harder to obtain. One discussion of American metals has suggested that such a difficulty probably arose generally, for it is a geological likelihood.¹²

Processing ore gets almost no attention in the Book of Mormon. Only a single time are we unmistakably told of smelting. According to the Jaredite account, King Shule “did molten out of the hill, and made swords” (Ether 7:9). One possible Nephite reference to processing states that they did “work all kinds of ore, and did refine it” (Helaman 6:11). Note that Nephi’s plates were “plates of ore,” where we might expect to read “plates of gold” or such (1 Nephi 19:1). There are puzzles here because what the text means about Nephite operations with metals is simply unclear. Refining could have consisted of as simple a process as heating a piece of rich ore and pounding it. Certainly the Jaredite king who had his “fine gold . . . refined” within the confines of a “prison” (Ether 10:7) would not have been hauling bulky ore to such a place for smelting, although it might have made sense to have workers treat small amounts of less-than-fine gold in order to improve its quality. In short, we remain largely ignorant about the technical procedures employed by the Book of Mormon craftsmen, but there is no reason from the text to think they were very sophisticated technologically. It sounds as if they were within the modest range of skill common in later Mesoamerica.

What about the specific metals cited in the book? Were all the metals mentioned present in Mesoamerica? A total of seven are listed: gold, silver, copper, brass, iron, steel, and “ziff.”

Gold and silver specimens are well-known. Some show the “lost-wax” method of casting, known in Mesoamerica, Peru, and also the Near East. However, the only form specified in the scriptures is the flat “plate” on which historical

and religious records were kept. It would not be feasible to manufacture those other than by hammering. Thin hammered metal we know well, but metal sheets for record keeping are not yet attested archaeologically in the New World. (A nineteenth-century historian in Oaxaca said that the ancestors of the Mixtecs made very thin gold plates on which were engravings of ancient hieroglyphs, but we do not know the source of his information.¹³)

Copper, too, was well known anciently. The earliest metal artifact yet known in Mesoamerica is the bit of copper already mentioned. But copper was also basic to alloys. One alloy used in many parts of nuclear America was *tumbaga*, a mixture of gold and copper. Treated properly it had the “appearance of gold” but weighed less and probably was cheaper. R. H. Putnam has argued persuasively that the Book of Mormon plates that were in Joseph Smith’s hands were of *tumbaga*. (Had they been unalloyed gold, they would have been too heavy for a single person to carry.¹⁴) A *tumbaga* specimen from Belize (British Honduras) shows that this material was known in the Maya lowlands no later than the fifth century A.D.¹⁵

A different alloy is bronze, of copper with tin. The word *bronze* does not occur in the Book of Mormon, but “brass” does. The “brass plates of Laban” were brought from Jerusalem by Nephi, as we know. Until a few years ago it was supposed that what we call brass (an alloy including zinc) was developed only in the last few centuries. Yet the Bible speaks of “brass.” Bible scholars have dealt with that apparent misstatement by saying that the word translated “brass” was actually bronze. The Hebrew word now known to refer to both copper and bronze was translated in the King James Version of the Bible as several different English words (in Ezekiel 1:4, 27 it comes out as “amber”).¹⁶ Within the last few years, however, some ancient artifacts from the Mediterranean area have been tested by more sophisticated scientific techniques than before, and the tests reveal that actual brass, with zinc in it, was in use

among the Etruscans, probably as early as Lehi's time.¹⁷ That means that perhaps the brass plates of Lehi's day are neither an anomaly of culture history nor an oddity of linguistic labeling, but a technological feat.

Bronze was used in Mesoamerica, although its composition (that is, the proportion of tin) was not as standardized as in the Old World.¹⁸ Interestingly, Ether 10:23 accurately distinguishes brass from copper in one subtle bit of context. The record says that the Jaredites dug up heaps of earth "to get ore . . . of copper." Naturally they would not have got "ore of brass" or bronze, for those metals must be manufactured by alloying. Rather, the same verse says, they "did make" brass. The terminological distinction comes out exactly as it would from a person who wrote with a real knowledge of metallurgy.

It is tempting to see "ziff" as *tumbaga*, for it is mentioned twice in direct connection with brass and copper (Mosiah 11:3, 8). Several derivations of "ziff" are possible in Hebrew with two general senses—"bright" or "shining" on the one hand and "plated" on the other. Both meanings would be appropriate for an alloy with a gilded surface. But "ziff" could also have been tin, another metal known in Mesoamerica.¹⁹ In fact, even mercury is a possibility, for it too occurred.²⁰

Iron use was documented in the statements of early Spaniards, who told of the Aztecs using iron-studded clubs.²¹ A number of artifacts have been preserved that are unquestionably of iron; their considerable sophistication, in some cases, at least suggests interest in this metal.²² (That is not surprising, since even a culture as simple as the Eskimo found iron—from meteors—valuable.) Few of these specimens have been chemically analyzed to determine whether the iron used in Mexico was from meteors or from smelted ore. The possibility that smelted iron either has been or may yet be found is enhanced by a find at Teotihuacan. A pottery vessel dating to about A.D. 300, and apparently used for smelting, contained a "metallic-looking"

mass. Analyzed chemically, it proved to contain copper and iron.²³ Linné, the same Swedish archaeologist who made that find, accepted a piece of iron found in a tomb at Mitla, Oaxaca, as probably refined.²⁴

Without even considering smelted iron, we find that peoples in Mesoamerica exploited iron minerals from early times. Lumps of hematite, magnetite, and ilmenite were brought into Valley of Oaxaca sites from some of the thirty-six ore exposures located near or in the valley. These were carried to a workshop section within the site of San José Mogote as early as 1200 B.C. There they were crafted into mirrors by sticking the fragments onto prepared mirror backs and polishing the surface highly. These objects, clearly of high value, were traded at considerable distances.²⁵ (This archaeologically established mineral processing was taking place within the valley that chapter I identified as perhaps the Jaredite land of Moron. The Jaredite record, telling of events a few centuries before the date of the San José Mogote finds, tells of the king who confined certain craftsmen who refused to pay taxes. There he compelled them to refine “his fine gold”—Ether 10:7.) But perhaps the strangest interest of all in iron materials on the part of the ancients has recently come to light. There is now reason to think that magnetite was used by the Olmecs to make compasses. (They could have rested a sliver of it on a bit of wood in a pot of water; the metal then would have oriented the wood and itself to magnetic north.²⁶) What a mysterious substance such “precious ore” (Helaman 6:11) must have seemed.

This is still not the whole story on iron, however. In the Near East, Akkadian, Hittite, and Egyptian names for iron meant something like “metal from heaven,”²⁷ for some iron had fallen as meteors. The Egyptians inferred that the sky was made of iron, although smelted terrestrial iron in the Near East was also very early, perhaps 5000 B.C.²⁸ When the Spaniards asked the Aztecs where they obtained iron, they pointed to the sky.²⁹ Their astronomers had seen and

recorded meteors falling.³⁰ The amount of iron obtainable from meteors was not trivial. H. H. Nininger, a leading authority on meteoritics, has estimated that 50,000 tons of this material falls on the earth yearly. Much of this is usable iron.³¹ A number of huge chunks have been discovered in Mexico. One of them, the Bacubirito specimen in Sinaloa, is 13 feet long and is estimated to weigh 27 tons.³² Rural people in its vicinity have made chunks of it into implements. It would not be surprising if the Nephites included meteoric metal among the "all manner of . . . iron" known to them (2 Nephi 5:15).

"Steel" is another complex problem. Nibley has discussed how uncertain we remain about what might be meant by "steel" in ancient Old World texts.³³ The King James translators were unclear on the point; several places where they put "steel," now would be translated "bronze." Even experts have a problem, as suggested by a recent technical article entitled "Steel in Antiquity: A Problem in Terminology."³⁴ In Mexico we face similar obscurity. The native chronicler Tezozomoc reported that the Tarascans (Mesoamerica's most noted metallurgists at the time of the Spanish conquest) wore "steel" helmets.³⁵ Since we know so little about either our Nephite text or the materials and processes in use in prehispanic Mesoamerica, we all would do well not to jump to conclusions about the accuracy or inaccuracy of such a statement. In a recent dispute about the use of tin in the early Near East, J. D. Muhly and T. E. Wertheim emphasized that documents that refer to the unexpected use of a metal are more persuasive as positive evidence than the failure of archaeologists to come up with specimens is acceptable as negative evidence.³⁶ Caley and Easby make the identical argument regarding pre-Columbian tin in Mexico. After demonstrating that specimens of the metal were there all the time despite the doubts of archaeologists, who had failed to examine the evidence, they end by observing, "The results also show that it is not prudent always to discount or ignore historical

accounts as possible sources of technical information; some of the 16th century chroniclers apparently were wiser and more observant in such matters than many of their critics."³⁷ Perhaps the Jaredite historian who talked of steel (Ether 7:9) and Tezozomoc with his steel helmets on the Tarascans both knew something that archaeologists will yet document.

We have seen that the metals mentioned in the Book of Mormon can, for the most part, be accounted for in Mesoamerica. So far as there is a significant problem, it concerns dating. But the chronological picture of metal use is changing too, as we saw earlier. What the Book of Mormon says of these substances has its problems still, but it is interesting how different the entire topic looks today than, say, a quarter century ago.

A related line of research is promising too. Comparison of the names of metals in Mesoamerican languages and those of the Near East may tell us something about metallurgical knowledge among Book of Mormon peoples. Hyacinthe de Charency long ago pointed out that a Maya word for gold, *nab* or *naab*, parallels Egyptian *noub*, "gold."³⁸ Nobody has paid any attention to this man's work for years, so the possible significance of this name linkage between the hemispheres as a reflection of a particular bit of technological transfer has not been weighed. With the help of colleagues, I have turned up additional suggestive parallels in terminology. Egyptian *hmty* (copper) compares closely with Zoquean *hama-tin* (gold or silver). (A prefix was attached to signify which metal was meant. To my knowledge, a Zoquean word for copper has not been recorded.)³⁹ Zoquean is, we saw earlier, descended from the language in use among the Olmecs. Also in Zoquean, *amachil* (lead) could recall Hebrew *anak*, tin, but a link may be more likely to Akkadian (Babylonian), from which the Hebrew word was borrowed and where *annaku* was used for tin or lead.⁴⁰ The Akkadian language would have been near in time and location to the Jaredites' homeland. But the earlier Sumerians, too, were near the Jaredite origin

point, and one of their terms for gold, *GUS.KIN*, recalls the general Mayan word for precious metal, *ta'kin* (*kin* meaning “sun”). Then, to complete the circle, Sumerian *AN.NA.HIA*. means “tin,” while Zoquean *amachil* is “lead.” (The Maya related the two metals: the word for tin meant, literally, “white lead.”⁴¹) There are other provocative word links as well. Whether any of them signify historical connections will require more research to determine, but so far the possibilities seem challenging.

Where is the Book of Mormon left by all the metal data? First, both in the Book of Mormon and in what we know from Mesoamerica, metals were used more for decorative, ceremonial, and “precious” ends than for utility. In neither the scriptural account nor the secular record do we discover good reasons why metals were not more fully employed (or why we fail to find more evidence of it if they were). A bit of light is shed on why the Nephites considered some ores “precious.” But the questions remaining, both for students of the Book of Mormon and for scholars on Mesoamerica, are vast. The conventional scientific view about the role of metal in Mesoamerica, and particularly about its date, is in the process of major change. Scholarly developments on the topic in the coming decade will be worth watching.

Animals in the Book of Mormon

Just as the Book of Mormon’s statements about metals require precise reading and extensive comparison with scientific and historical information if we are to appreciate their significance, so the things said about fauna in Nephite territory have to be carefully analyzed and compared in full awareness of what is known and not known about nature in Mesoamerica as well as the principles known to govern the labeling of natural categories in various cultures.

What sorts of animals are there to consider? Twelve creatures are specified in the Book of Mormon: ass, cow, dog, goat, wild goat, horse, sheep, ox, swine, elephant,

“curelom,” and “cumom.” Some other expressions—calf, cattle, fowl, lamb, fatling—are special cases of the animals just named, we can suppose. It is easy enough to list these names, but what do they signify? The answer is not obvious. Consider for a moment Nephi’s statement that upon reaching the promised land they found both “the goat and the wild goat” in the forests of their new-found land (1 Nephi 18:25). How did an untamed “goat” differ from a “wild goat”? The traits distinguishing the categories are not apparent. Then there are those incomprehensible names *cumom* and *curelom* (Ether 9:19). In order to make sense of these, we must consider a wide range of historical, linguistic and natural scientific information in a search for clues to interpret the scripture’s statements.

Some animals were included in the flocks and herds that the Nephites began to raise (2 Nephi 5:11). In fact, they had “flocks of all manner of cattle of every kind.” (Cattle in Hebrew means either large or small quadrupeds.) Still, goats, wild goats, and horses that the early Nephites were said to “raise” were not included in either the flocks or herds (Enos 1:21). Moreover, the Jaredites “had” animals in two categories, those “useful for the food of man” and others merely “useful unto man” (Ether 9:18–19). So far, not so good. The text does not clarify itself. Then when we read of “flocks of herds” (Enos 1:21), we almost despair of understanding the labeling system.

One thing is clear. The terminology the Nephite volume uses to discuss animals follows a different logic than the scheme familiar to most of us whose ancestors came out of western Europe. Anthropologists tell us that the world’s peoples have many different models for classifying animals or plants, as they do for labeling geographical directions or dividing up time.⁴² Hugh Nibley has made this point repeatedly.⁴³ When the Spaniards reached the Americas, they had trouble labeling the native creatures systematically. Yet the Indians had an even harder time classifying the animals the Europeans brought along.

A good example of the confusion is with the coati-mundi (*Nasua narica*). Landa, the padre who favored us with a detailed description of Yucatan, wrote of the beast, "There is an animal which they call *chic*, wonderfully active, as large as a small dog, with a snout like a sucking pig. The Indian women raise them, and they leave nothing which they do not root over and turn upside down; and it is an incredible thing how wonderfully fond they are of playing with the Indian women, and how they clean them from lice." The flesh of the coati was also widely eaten, and the animal remains a pet today in some rural Mexican homes. Clearly this was a "useful animal," but it would better be termed tamed than domesticated. (Incidentally, the Book of Mormon never uses a term anything like *domesticated*.) What ought the coati to be called in English? One common Spanish name is *tejon*. Unfortunately, *tejon* is also the Spanish name for badger as well as raccoon. Another name, from the Aztecs, is *pisote* (Nahuatl *pezotli*), which means basically glutton. Yet *pisote* is sometimes applied also to the peccary or wild pig. In regard to the peccary, the Nahuatl terms *quauhcoyameatl* and *quahpizotl* were developed after the conquest to distinguish the native species from the introduced Castilian pig, so by extension the coati was sometimes termed *quauhpezotli*, tree-glutton, to distinguish it from the peccary, the ground-glutton. Finally, the Mayan languages labeled the coati for its playful aspect, hence *chic*, clown.⁴⁴

What a complicated picture of terminology and zoological classification. It does little good to ask the question, but what is a *chic*? Our glosses on the Mayan term, whether "creature like a small dog," "sort of a sucking pig," "tree-glutton," or "clown-like pet," help understanding very little. A *chic* is simply a *chic*. Obviously, translation of zoological labels across cultural boundaries has to be approached without the presuppositions we are likely to bring to such questions. We are left to assume that the "goat" and "wild goat" discovered running in the forest by Nephi need not

have been more than generally similar to the Old World creatures we think of when we hear the term *goat*.

We must return to the naming problem later, but another issue has to claim our attention first. What animals were actually present in the area where the Nephites and Jaredites lived? Scientists now feel somewhat confident of their ability to identify which species lived in what areas. If they lack evidence that a particular animal was present in Mesoamerica, they believe there is only a limited possibility that evidence to the contrary will still be forthcoming. Yet we must not rule out the possibility that surprises are waiting; thus, a certain caution is justified about the conclusiveness of the picture. Present knowledge of the species in Mesoamerica indicates there were enough of the right sorts of animals in that setting that all twelve of the Book of Mormon's beasts can be plausibly accounted for.

The Book of Mormon is uneven in the frequency of its references to animals. More is said early in both the Jaredite and Nephite accounts than in the later portions. That might be a literary accident, yet there is a logic to it. As population increases and fills up the better quality lands, more people come into competition with animals for space and subsistence, and the animals lose out. There is little room for animals in a place where "The whole face of the land had become covered with buildings, and the people were as numerous almost, as it were the sand of the sea" (Mormon 1:7). Expectably, the text says not a word about the presence or the use of animals among the Nephites at or near the time Mormon made that statement in the fourth century A.D.

Scholars writing on Mesoamerica hold that the number of animals of potential value to the inhabitants anciently was small. There is some truth to that, but too often the statement ignores evidence that substantial use was indeed made of a wide variety of beasts. The late Dennis Puleston of the University of Minnesota concluded a few years ago that the Maya ate the flesh of "semi-domesticated animals"



Turkey flocks have long been significant in the domestic economy of the Mesoamerican people. (Photo by Daniel Bates. Courtesy David A. Palmer and the Society for Early Historic Archaeology.)

far more often than had been thought.⁴⁵ I have accumulated additional evidence to support Puleston's point. Considering all we now know about animal use in Mesoamerican cultures, it is fair to state that most of what the Book of Mormon says about animals is plausible. Some of the book's statements remain hard to square with present knowledge, but the picture is considerably more acceptable to scientists than a few years ago.

The terms *flocks* and *herds* are easy to account for. Deer and pigs (peccary) could have fallen under those terms. Fowls in flocks were common. The turkey (*Meleagris* sp. and *Agriocharis* sp.) was, after all, an American native. Other domesticated, tamed, or at least caged fowls included the Muscovy duck, Tinamou duck, quail, "pheasant," "partridge," "dove," *curassow*, *cotinga*, roseate spoonbill, macaw,

chachalaca, and parrot.⁴⁶ The term *flocks* could have included such smaller animals much used by native peoples in Mesoamerica as hares, rabbits, and the *paca* and *agouti* (both rodents the size of small pigs).⁴⁷

Dogs are mentioned at five places in the Book of Mormon, but nothing is said of their use. Two types (perhaps two species) were common in Mesoamerica. The large, white, humped mastiff (Nahuatl *itzcuintepotzotli*) was the creature whose noisy descendants plague Mexican villages today. A smaller, hairless sort (Nahuatl *xoloitzcuintli*) was fattened and eaten as a delicacy.⁴⁸ The Spaniards relished the flesh of these animals at the time of the conquest, although they would have been offended, as most of us would be, at being offered the flesh of the bigger dog. Perhaps Nephite “flocks” included fattened dogs.

The Nephites used the term translated as “flocks” to refer to larger quadrupeds also. Where flocks and herds are mentioned together (Helaman 6:12; Ether 10:12), the distinction seems to come close to ours, in which “herd” is reserved for larger animals, but we are not certain that they made that distinction.

It is with the big quadrupeds that some readers think problems exist with the scriptural text. As we examine the writings about Mesoamerica’s large fauna, we find the linguistic problem assails us at every turn. Natives and Spaniards shared the difficulty. The lowland Maya at first named all the big animals of the Spaniards—horse, mule, ass—with the name of the nearest native of equivalent size—the tapir. The Spaniards, however, thought the tapir looked like a pig, although it weighs up to 700 pounds.⁴⁹ Others considered the tapir to resemble the ass; sixty years ago in southern Mexico the beast was called *anteburro* or “once-an-ass.”⁵⁰ The Maya adopted Spanish names for the large creatures the Europeans had introduced (for example, *uacax*, cattle, from Spanish *vacas*). The sheep got a whimsically descriptive name, *taman*, translated as “cotton that you eat,” yet the European goat was called by the

name of the aboriginal short-horned deer.⁵¹ Similar confusion and pragmatism prevailed in North America, where the Miami Indians happened to see European cows before the tribe was pushed far enough west to encounter the bison or buffalo, which they then termed “wild cow.” The explorer DeSoto called the buffalo simply *vaca*, cow. Yet the Delaware Indians named the cow after the deer, and the Miami tribe labeled sheep, when they first saw them, “looks-like-a-cow.”⁵² Back in Yucatan, Father Landa noted that the tapir, while the size of a mule, had a hoof like an ox, and he considered the small brocket deer a “kind of little wild goat.”⁵³

But isn’t it obvious that the “cow” of the Book of Mormon was our familiar bovine, straight out without all this hedging? No, it is not at all obvious. First, we are trying to find out what the Book of Mormon really means by the words we have in English translation; we are not trying either to simplify or to complicate the matter, but only to be correct. In the effort to learn the truth, nothing can be assumed obvious. Second, there is a lack of reliable evidence—historical, archaeological, zoological, or linguistic—that Old World cows were present in the Americas in pre-Columbian times. The same is true of some of the other creatures mentioned in the Nephite record, where modern readers may feel they are already familiar with the animals on the basis of the translated names. In these cases we have to find another way to read the text in order to make sense of it.

So what might the Nephite term translated by Joseph Smith as cow actually have signified? When Cortez’s party crossed the base of the Yucatan peninsula during their conquest, they observed herds of docile deer that some scholars think were semi-domesticated.⁵⁴ Perhaps *they* were “cows.” Moreover, the Mazahua Indians of El Salvador at the time of the conquest were described as a “pastoral people” who “owned and cared for” herds of deer.⁵⁵ (Any kind of herding of animals in pre-Spanish America

surprises most cultural historians, who have generally supposed total absence of that practice. Only recently have scientists demonstrated that a full pastoral tradition based on domesticated llamas existed in pre-Columbian Peru for thousands of years.⁵⁶) But if deer do not seem satisfactory as cows, then how about bison? They were present as far south as Nicaragua in direct association with inhabitants of the period of the early Nephites.⁵⁷ Or, we might consider the llama or alpaca—American cameloids—as cows. They carried loads and provided food and fiber for the people in Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, and beyond. They are not attested by zoologists for Mesoamerica in recent times. (Much earlier, in the Pleistocene, one type of llama definitely lived in North America.) But a Costa Rican archaeologist has discovered an effigy pot in the form of a cameloid, and other such vessels are known there.⁵⁸ A pre-Spanish figurine from Guatemala looks like a laden cameloid.⁵⁹ And on the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in the middle of the last century, alpaca were reported living wild.⁶⁰ A few miles away were the Huave Indians, whose tradition says their ancestors had come anciently from South America, the home of the alpaca and llama.⁶¹

Perhaps we have identified enough candidates for the Nephite cow, but what about the horse? True horses (*Equus* sp.) were present in the western hemisphere long ago, but it has been assumed that they did not survive to the time when settled peoples inhabited the New World.⁶² I recently summarized evidence suggesting that the issue is not settled. Actual horse bones have been found in a number of archaeological sites on the Yucatan Peninsula, in one case with artifacts six feet beneath the surface under circumstances that rule out their coming from Spanish horses.⁶³ Still, other large animals might have functioned or looked enough like a horse that one of them was what was referred to by *horse*. A prehispanic figure modeled on the cover of an incense burner from Poptun, Guatemala, shows a man sitting on the back of a deer holding its ears or horns,⁶⁴ and a stone

monument dating to around A.D. 700 represents a woman astride the neck of a deer, grasping its horns.⁶⁵ Then there is another figurine of a person riding an animal, this one from central Mexico.⁶⁶ Possibly, then, the deer served as a sort of “horse” for riding. (That was a practice in Siberia until recently, so the idea is not as odd as moderns might think. Besides, in the Quiche languages of highland Guatemala we have expressions like *keh*, deer or horse, *keheh*, mount or ride, and so on.⁶⁷) As for pulling a vehicle, there are no data to suggest such a function in ancient America (northern Asiatic people did use reindeer in that manner). Thus, we simply do not understand what might have been the nature of the “chariot” mentioned in the Book of Mormon in connection with “horses.” (Alma 18 and 20; 3 Nephi 3:22). Anyway, this horse and chariot combination is mentioned in the record in connection with only two geographical locations (part of the land of Nephi, and at a point between Zarahemla and Bountiful). Whatever was involved in the way of animal and vehicle, it may not have been widely used. Obviously, we will want to search for further sound information on “horses.” Just a few years ago, nobody could document for Mesoamerican cultures that humans rode on any animal, that burdens were carried by animals,⁶⁸ or that cameloids were present. Discoveries may yet clarify remaining obscurities. At the same time, we need to study the Book of Mormon text with extreme care to be clear about what it does and does not say. For example, the way “horses” are referred to in 3 Nephi 4:4 suggests that their major use was as food, not to carry things. We need constantly to be clarifying our reading of the scripture.

The case of the horse bones, found years ago but ignored by all the archaeologists, tells us that we must constantly scrutinize the adequacy of “current” scientific beliefs. The Eurasian sheep is not supposed to have been in pre-Columbian America either, yet real sheep’s wool was found in a burial site at Cholula, Puebla, Mexico, in an

archaeological setting that gave no other indication of dating after the Spaniards arrived.⁶⁹ This lone specimen doesn't take us far toward a literal reading of the Book of Mormon term *sheep*, but perhaps we should keep this door too ajar a little.

No systematic research has been done comparing the names of animals in the Near East and Mesoamerica. Just as we saw with the metals, perhaps also with beasts: clarifying links may appear through linguistic studies. A hint of the possibilities derives from work on the Yuman language group (located around the lower Colorado River, near the U.S.-Mexican border). Reconstructing the protoculture associated with the ancestral Yuman language by comparing the descendant tongues, an investigator reconstructed a word for "horse" on strong evidence.⁷⁰ That is, the indications are that a term for horse was shared by those people long before European horses arrived. The evidence is not foolproof, of course, but it does demand some alternative explanation if we are not to suppose early knowledge of the horse.

"Swine" and "sow" are mentioned in the Nephite portion of the Book of Mormon with a tone of disgust (3 Nephi 7:8; 14:6). That's what we would expect among people who even nominally followed the constraints of the law of Moses on eating pork. But the non-Israelite Jaredites reveal no sensitivity about using "swine" as food (Ether 9:18). The peccary or wild pig was abundantly present throughout most of Mesoamerica, being valued both for its flesh and because it kills snakes in the wild.

What about the Book of Ether's "elephant"? Mastodons and mammoths once lived throughout North America and part of South America. They are a kind of elephant in the eyes of zoologists. The question is how late they lived. Most experts assume they failed to survive down to the time of the Jaredites. The only place they are mentioned in the Book of Mormon is in the Book of Ether, near the beginning of that record (by my calculations of Jaredite

chronology, the date must have been before 2500 B.C.). Experts agree that the mammoth, and mastodon could have survived in favored spots much later than the time normally assigned for their extinction. The mastodon has already been dated as late as 5000 B.C. at Devil's Den, Florida,⁷¹ and around the Great Lakes to 4000 B.C.⁷² Then there is the remarkable discovery of the remains of a butchered mastodon in Ecuador; pottery associated with the find is said to date to after the time of Christ.⁷³ In its light, the radiocarbon date around 100 B.C. of horse, mammoth and mastodon remains at St. Petersburg, Florida, does not seem impossible.⁷⁴ The Jaredite mention of the elephant a single time—very early in their lineage history—hints that the creature became extinct in their area soon thereafter. Perhaps the Jaredites themselves killed off the last of the beasts within their zone. But the Jaredites might not have been the only people to record the presence of the big animal. Some North American Indians have recounted legends of “great stiff-legged beasts who could not lie down” and of an animal with a fifth appendage, which came out of its head.⁷⁵ Possibly, tribes transmitted through oral tradition some vague remembrance of encounters with these “elephants.” The later the beasts survived, the easier it is to accept the reliability of the tradition. In any case, it is possible that the mammoth or mastodon hung on in Mexico at least as late as 2500 B.C.

Without going into further detail, we may note that other Pleistocene period animals also might have lasted down into times of Jaredite inhabitation. Perhaps the “cumom” and “curelom” were such. The failure of Moroni, the Nephite translator of the Book of Ether, to translate these names from the original tongue of the Jaredites indicates that the animals were probably extinct by his day. A humanly worked bone of a giant sloth, found in Guatemala, hints at one candidate for such a creature.⁷⁶

It's time to summarize. A table will do that best. In

one column are listed Book of Mormon terms for various animals. In the other are names in modern and scientific nomenclature that could reasonably correspond. Several beasts are possible for each Book of Mormon name. Usually there is no basis for preferring one candidate above another. Take your choice. But the purpose is not to finalize identifications. Instead it is to show that there are plausible creatures to match each scriptural term. The table shows this is so. Scientific research, as well as closer study of the Book of Mormon, may yet shed further light on these matters. In any case, the remaining problems are more modest than a few years ago. Dogmatic dismissal of the Book of Mormon on the ground that its statements about fauna are unsupported will not do anymore.

Book of Mormon Name Candidate Animal on the Scene

Elephant	Mastodon (<i>Mammut americanum</i>) Mammoth (<i>Mammuthus columbi</i>)
"Curelom"	Sloth (<i>Megalonyx</i> sp.), Bison (<i>Bison</i> sp.), Tapir (<i>Tapirus</i> sp.), Mastodon or Mammoth
"Cumom"	Same possibilities as "curelom"
Cow	Deer (<i>Odocoileus</i> sp.), Brouket (<i>Mazama pandora</i>), <i>Camelidae</i> (<i>Paleolama</i> sp., <i>Lama</i> sp.), Bison
Horse	Deer, Tapir, Horse (<i>Equus</i> sp.)
Ox	Tapir, <i>Camelidae</i> , Bison
Ass	Tapir, <i>Camelidae</i>
Sheep	<i>Camelidae</i> , Paca or Agouti (both <i>Dasyproctidae</i>)
Goat	Brouket, Deer
Swine	Peccary (<i>Pecari</i> sp., <i>Tayassu</i> sp.)
Dog	Dog (<i>Canis familiaris</i>)

Secret Societies

Few social institutions are of such concern to the Book of Mormon prophets as secret societies, yet they remain unfamiliar to modern readers of the book. What are we to make of this mode of organizing? How do they function, and why did Mormon and Moroni emphasize their threat? Since they are secret, after all, it is difficult to learn much about them, but what we do know could shed crucial light on the scripture.

In the first place, secret organizations have been widespread. They are not an invention of the writers of the Book of Mormon. Scholars have studied such groups in ancient and tribal societies as well as living examples in our society. As a result, we have a profile of what secret groups are often like.⁷⁷ Some recurring characteristics are that they promise power, wealth, and fleshly privilege as recruiting enticements; they use secret signs to allow devotees to fellowship one another without being known to outsiders; they maintain social respectability on the part of participants as camouflage for their radical aims; they initiate recruits via a series of tests until they attain insider status so that the majority, who are in the early stages of induction, do not really know much about the organization.

More than a single form of organization exists. A spectrum of types existed anciently as well as today. College fraternities, organized crime “families,” price-fixing cartels, Watergate “plumbers,” subversive political movements, and secret police all more or less fit under the same broad, dark umbrella. Some seem innocuous and in fact have little power. Others are obviously dangerous, as Moroni understood clearly (Ether 8:20–26). The mere fact of secrecy—withdrawal from public visibility and accountability—opens any of these units to potential abuse. The trouble stems mainly from the ambitions of hidden leaders. They conceal their desires to dominate behind a relatively innocent organizational mask. A commentator on the

Mafia in Sicily has said, “The ideology of the people is the Mafia—to be strong, to be prepotent, to dominate. . . . And the Mafia is first the desire to dominate. To be the *lord of the situation*.”⁷⁸ The publicly-seen group will often publicly espouse very noble-sounding aims—“justice,” “equality,” “preserving the people’s rights”—but behind the facade hidden aims and leaders remain. Webster cites “the constant rule of the secret societies,” which is “that the real authors never show themselves.”⁷⁹

While sheer power is one key driving force in these groups, the gratification of material, carnal desires is frequently another. Despite some famous exceptions, most participants in secret organizations somehow hope to be materially better off as a result of their joining, although the rhetoric of the movement may vehemently deny this. We certainly find these key features in the secret organizations of Mesoamerica, one of the areas where this pattern was well-developed.

Father Sahagun, one of the finest sources on life in Mexico before the Spanish conquest, told of the *nahualistas*: “people like assassins [a famous Near Eastern secret society], daring and accustomed to kill, they carried on their persons pieces of jaguar skin, of the forehead and chest, and the tip of the tail, the claws, the canines, and the lips to make them powerful, brave and fearsome.”⁸⁰ Each one had his *nahual*, a guardian animal spirit that lent its power to the initiated one. To obtain or discover this power, a person had to be trained in black magic after undergoing severe initiation. Sometimes hallucinogenic substances were used to induce visions of an animal guardian spirit. (The Old World secret group known as the assassins, from which our present term is derived, took its name from the hashish drug.) When one’s *nahual* spirit had become accessible by these means, the individual supposedly could actually become that animal. One could, it was claimed, suck the blood of sleeping persons, cause illness, or even eat corpses.

The jaguar *nahual* was the most feared and awesomely admired, for that feline—considered lazy, cunning, and pleasure-loving—was the most subtly terrifying beast to its enemies.⁸¹ Jaguar symbolism, presumably tied to belief in this *nahual* or “were-jaguar,” goes back thousands of years, well back into Olmec or Jaredite times.⁸²

Later Mesoamerican adherents to this belief formed a semi-priestly order known as *nahualteteuctin*, “master magicians,” or *teotlauica*, “sacred companions in arms.” To enter the order one had to undergo tests of pain and self-denial. The Toltec priest/ruler Quetzalcoatl or Kukulcan (not the original being who bore these names) was claimed by some as master and patron of the order, but other deities were also associated.⁸³

Other Spanish documents tell us that the *nahualistas* continued into the colonial period. Of course, they remained as secret as possible, so few Spaniards learned about them. Still, the sources taken together allow us to learn a fair amount about their aims and operations. Those believers “formed a coherent association extending over most of southern Mexico and Guatemala, inspired everywhere by detestation of the Spaniards and Christianity.”⁸⁴ Members were classified under different degrees or levels, each advancement demanding further initiation rites and revelations to the initiate of new secret knowledge. Local chapters or brotherhoods were organized and dedicated to Judas Iscariot or Pontius Pilate, two obvious enemies to the imported Christian pattern. There were certain recognized centers of the association, particularly in Guatemala and the Mexican states of Chiapas and Oaxaca. The most important dignitaries of the organization resided near those centers. Secret councils of the inner circle were held at strongholds of the cult in caves or rocky recesses, not in artificial structures. Black was symbolic of the association’s affinity with the night, caves, and the underworld, a complex of ideas descended from much earlier times. The deity most clearly associated with the *nahualistas* of the colonial



In some cases the jaguar may have signified the aggressive dominance that adherents to secret societies sought, as in this rock carving from Chalcatzingo, Morelos, Mexico (after Gay).

period was Tepeyollotl (an important Aztec god, borrowed by them from older cultures to the south). He was known as the “heart of the earth,” symbolized by the jaguar.⁸⁵ Ceremonies, formulas, and procedures were pretty much the same throughout the area. Nor was this merely a “religious” activity, since the leading *nahualist* priests, whose offices were often passed on through family lines, were organizers and coordinators of a number of anti-Spanish revolts. What the association really represented was the old native beliefs and practices continuing as an underground counterculture to the whole way of life brought by the Spaniards.⁸⁶ There is even reason to believe that at least part of this pattern has continued in isolated areas of Mexico to this very day.

In many essentials the *nahualistas* functioned as a classical secret society. The initiation tests, the secrecy of aim and place, actual or potential subversion of the general social order, and the appeal to power and privilege as a recruiting tactic are giveaways. The leverage of the central dominating clique in a secret society is derived from esoteric knowledge. "In order to acquire influence in a secret society it is always necessary to establish a claim to superior knowledge."⁸⁷ The *nahualist* priest, just like the gnostic adept of the Mediterranean world, claimed to know the grand secrets of the universe and how to control the powers that make important things happen, but in this context knowledge is considered only a tool or a weapon. It is not desired for itself so much as for the influence it will bring to the holder.

Those who turn to secret groups as a means to power and its worldly rewards usually are those who do not detect or desire legitimate, socially approved ways to the same ends. These groups flourish under conditions of rapid, disruptive social or economic change. Some people with ambitions or grievances that existing institutions are not handling seek extraordinary routes to achieve their aims.⁸⁸ That kind of social stress was occurring among the Nephites in the first century B.C. We have already seen how dynamic the growth and spread of Nephite influence were at that time. Trade and wealth burgeoned, ambitions were stimulated in part of the population (for example, the king-men), and the old system of kin-based relationships, which had served fairly adequately during the time of kings Benjamin and Mosiah, appeared too limited and localized to accommodate the new circumstances. Those who wanted to ride the bandwagon of change, to "get ahead," to run things for their own benefit (like the Jacob of 3 Nephi 7:12), were willing to use whatever organizational tool they could grasp, including conspiracy, to hammer conventional society to the shape of their desires.

All this is typical, not strange. Scholars who have

studied the secret groups have been struck by their similar general form across much of the world and over thousands of years. The structural demands of secrecy account for some general similarities, yet very specific characteristics also are widely shared. The question then comes to mind, Is the pattern of the secret organization repeated over the world because of common historical roots? Historian Nesta Webster thinks so: "Even if we deny direct [historical] affiliation, we must surely admit a common source of inspiration producing, if not a continuation, at any rate a periodic revival of the same ideas."⁸⁹ That explanation of the reappearance of secret groups tends to agree with that in Helaman 6:26–29: "Those secret oaths and covenants did not come forth unto Gadianton from the records which were delivered unto Helaman; but behold, they were put into the heart of Gadianton by that same being who did entice our first parents . . . ; and he has brought it forth from the beginning of man even down to this time." According to the Book of Mormon, there definitely was historical continuity from Old to New World in the origin of Jaredite secret societies. They began only a few generations after the immigrants arrived in the new land from the Mesopotamian area. One of the Jaredites who revived the practice said, "Hath [my father] not read the record which our fathers brought across the great deep? Behold, is there not an account concerning them of old, that they by their secret plans did obtain kingdoms and great glory?" (Ether 8:9.) Historian Nesta Webster is more pointed: "The [Near] East is the cradle of secret societies."⁹⁰ When the Jaredite record eventually came into the hands of the Nephite ruler Mosiah, his people were frantic to know about the extinct society that had left behind such impressive, mysterious traces as could be seen around them in the ruins. The king made the story public but withheld any details about the secret groups talked about in Ether's account (Helaman 6:26). Still, simply to have referred to them would whet the concern of ambitious individuals to know more (like telling

a child, “Now be careful not to put beans in your ears”). Thus, the stage would be set for a revival of the combinations, however the organizers may have obtained the actual details of rites and organizational forms.

What do secret organizations possess that kinship and community-based groups do not? The answer is, instant credibility. Suppose, for example, that you as a merchant wished to establish trade connections with a location where you were unacquainted. What you would need most is a relationship of trust with somebody influential there. In societies of the kind described in the Book of Mormon, the whole array of quite recent social inventions we resort to for that purpose—corporations, banks, credit, contracts, embassies—had not yet been developed. If you had kinfolk in that place, they might trust you; but it would be as unlikely for kin to get a foothold in the midst of the strange setting as for you. A secret organization with “chapters” spread throughout the land could provide a person with “instant trust.” In Europe in former centuries, Templar and Jewish secret groups used these kinds of links in the service of the commercial and financial activities of their members.⁹¹ Military officers of many modern nations have their relationships smoothed in new locations by membership in a fraternal order. Secret organizations among the Nephites or Jaredites would have performed similar functions for merchants.

Trade, scholars have discovered in recent years, serves as a great engine that can power a growing society to prominence and wealth—for a few of its members.⁹² Those controlling the throttle usually are the kind of people like Gadianton and “king Jacob” (3 Nephi 7:12), driven to possess power and wealth. It is no surprise to find that 4 Nephi 1:46 makes a direct link between the Gadianton secret band and wealth from trade: “The robbers of Gadianton did spread over all the face of the land. . . . And gold and silver did they lay up in store in abundance, and did traffic all manner of traffic.” In this light we can grasp the

interconnection of factors discussed in Helaman 6. Verse 7 starts by describing a vigorous trade situation and the prosperity that resulted (verses 9, 11). Immediately thereafter (verse 15), the Nephites' chief judge was murdered "by an unknown hand," which turned out to be Gadianton's (verse 18). The link is made in verse 17: "They began to set their hearts upon their riches, yea, they began to seek to get gain that they might be lifted up one above another; *therefore* they began to commit secret murders, and to rob and to plunder, that they might get gain" (emphasis added). A clear picture emerges of how the secret group motivated its members and gained power in Nephite society. The entire discussion fits the picture of secret societies known from many parts of the world.

The close tie of trade with tightly knit, self-serving groups is illustrated in Mesoamerica by the Aztec *pochteca*, a kind of guild or society of long-distance traders, with its own rituals, deities and internal discipline, in important ways like the secret societies we have been considering. The *pochteca* worked hand-in-glove with the Aztec power structure, serving the state as spies when they traveled abroad. In return they enjoyed wealth and many privileges thanks to the leverage they exerted through their unique social function.⁹³ But we still know too little about details of the *pochteca* to be confident that the Nephite "combinations" were more than generically similar.

Another parallel to the Gadianton robbers is evident in the exploitative aims of certain power-hungry groups in Mesoamerica. The entire Aztec (or Mexican) people falls into this class. As a tiny tribe of hunter-gatherers, they moved out of the barren areas of western Mexico into the area occupied by the present-day capital city not many hundred years before the Spaniards arrived. They quickly became ambitious to possess the wealth and comforts they saw among the older, quasi-civilized farming peoples among whom they settled. One of their early leaders, Huitzilopochtli, was a man with "unlimited ambition" who

became “the embodiment of Aztec religious and military aspiration.” This man claimed to know the secret that would bring them the wealth and power they wanted. By committing themselves to “serving the sun (god), for becoming his people and terrifying others,” Huitzilopochtli promised not just luxury but an ever-widening limit to their desires: “nothing will be their bound, nothing will they have to do without.” With this sort of heady promise he led them on in ruthless conquests. So exemplary was he as a leader in this materialistic chase that he was later considered a god. The Spanish Christian conquerors viewed Huitzilopochtli as “the devil” and Christ’s chief rival.⁹⁴ Precisely the same ambition to exploit others characterized the “Toltecs.” They hungered and thirsted after power—especially the power or “franchise” to conquer, take tribute, and “make their fortunes” in a specific territory.⁹⁵

In this consummately Mesoamerican lust for wealth and creature comforts we are reminded forcefully of the self-serving deceptions of Giddianhi writing to the Nephite chief judge Lachoneus: “I am Giddianhi; and I am the governor of this the secret society of Gadianton . . . deliver up your lands and your possessions, without the shedding of blood, that this my people may recover their rights and government” (3 Nephi 3:9–10). “Yield up unto this my people your cities, your lands, and your possessions, rather than that they should visit you with the sword . . . or in other words, yield yourselves up unto us, and unite with us and become acquainted with our secret works, and become our brethren that ye may be like unto us [in other words, “get a piece of the action”]—not our slaves, but our brethren and partners of all our substance” (verses 6–7).

Manifestly, Book of Mormon and Mesoamerican secret groups were up to the same tricks and operated according to similar rules. But were these practices really ancient in America, or were they late developments? Some researchers think the *pochteca* groups’ origin goes back to Teotihuacan (the early centuries A.D.),⁹⁶ but Professor Coe maintains that

a similar institution was vital in Olmec civilization before 1000 B.C.⁹⁷ J. A. Bennyhoff has interpreted masks recovered by archaeologists as indications of the presence of secret societies anciently.⁹⁸ These ritual artifacts are present from about 1200 B.C. to 600 B.C. in the Valley of Oaxaca (Jaredite Moron).⁹⁹ The first mention of secret societies among the Jaredites fell in the third millennium B.C.; the archaeologists have only fragmentary information about that era. But clandestine organizations were revived around 1200 B.C. (Ether 10:33), persisting until the destruction of the Jaredites. So the masks from Oaxaca coincide in time and space with the flourishing of secret societies according to the Jaredite account. (Incidentally, many of the “were-jaguar” *nahual* carvings of this time period are found at remote spots out in the “wilderness,” where we might expect to find the shrines of secret groups.) Masks again are found in large numbers during developed Teotihuacan times, for a few centuries after A.D. 300. This happens to be just the period when Mormon reports the rise of the secret society that was instrumental in the downfall of the Nephites (Mormon 2:8, 10, 27–28; Ether 8:19–21).

We have seen enough to establish these facts: (1) a widespread pattern of secret organizations existed anciently in both the Old World and Mesoamerica, as the Book of Mormon says; (2) these units provided an organizational weapon by which ambitious, scheming men manipulated the less sophisticated to provide the former with wealth, power, and other gratifications; (3) the functions and contexts of the Mesoamerican secret groups make sense if we interpret them as reflections of the “combinations” described in the Book of Mormon, or vice versa; (4) the dynamic changes in society and economy that the Nephite account indicates were in process in the first century B.C. and again in the fourth and fifth centuries A.D. provided a setting that favored the rise of these subversive groups. The rise of Jaredite secret organizations is no doubt to be understood in parallel terms.

The Kinship Basis of Nephite Society

It would be a mistake to suppose that secret organizations were fundamental to societies where Nephites, Lamanites, or Jaredites lived. Rather, they were parasitic growths that flourished only when the main organism was unhealthy. The basic organization pattern among the Book of Mormon peoples was the same as in practically all early societies. Kinship was fundamental to the establishment and regulation of personal and group relationships. In modern urban life we have moved so far from earlier practices that many people today little realize how important kin relationships once were. In Israelite Palestine as well as during the earlier centuries of Nephite existence in the American promised land, kin ties provided the most crucial social connections. The Israelite kin groups of the most widespread significance in Lehi's day was what may be called lineages. Membership in these lineages was determined by virtue of descent from one male ancestor.¹⁰⁰ In societies emphasizing the lineage unit, one's first tendency in getting one's social bearings is to compare notes with others to try to determine the distance back to some common ancestor. One of the first things Lehi did upon obtaining the Brass Plates from Laban was to check the genealogy, where he discovered that he and Laban shared a male ancestor at a remote level (1 Nephi 5:14, 16). That is, they belonged to a common lineage and as a result wanted possession of the same record. Upon arrival of Lehi's party in the promised land, they continued to follow the lineage principle, as Jacob 1:13 shows: "They were called Nephites, Jacobites, Josephites, Zoramites, Lamanites, Lemuelites, and Ishmaelites." We saw the principle at work again when Amulek and Alma met as strangers and needed to establish a relationship (Alma 8:20ff.) Of further note is Amulek's effort to orient his listeners to his social (kinship) position in relation to them (Alma 10:2).

Principles and customs of social organization are not

fixed and unchanging. Peoples modify rules and preferences governing kin, marriage, family, and other social arrangements to fit new circumstances. For instance, as pioneering groups scattered out to occupy a relatively empty new land, they would de-emphasize certain connections that had made more sense in an old crowded community, while discovering that they needed to reinforce certain other links in order to overcome the effects of distance. Yet, if possible, people hang on to old ways.¹⁰¹ So both continuity and change would be expected in the Israelite ways Lehi's party brought with them, once the people began living in the new land. In fact, the former customs might have been largely submerged by patterns they encountered among and borrowed from the Mulekites or others, for their social arrangements would likely be better adapted to the living conditions of the local environment. Interestingly, the social systems of traditional Mesoamerica do not contradict what one might expect from an Israelite background. Some differences are apparent, but they are logical. Nor are the Mesoamerican characteristics surprising in light of the data in the Book of Mormon.

Emphasis on relationships reckoned through the line of the father is clear in both cases. Patrilineal (father-line) descent is clear in the Book of Mormon and among the Maya, as shown in documents from the Spanish colonial period and from interpretation of archaeological and art materials.¹⁰² Lineage organization that existed in southern Mesoamerica also agrees generally with the Book of Mormon social picture.¹⁰³ For example, a Mayan was a member of a somewhat vaguely defined group (Yucatec Maya *ch'ibal*) whose members, while living in different locations, considered themselves descended from a common male ancestor. Members bore a name in common, and often they were forbidden to marry another with the same name.¹⁰⁴ Being a member of the group allowed "individuals to assert claims to one another's protection and hospitality

in their movements from one locality to another.”¹⁰⁵ I suggested earlier that Alma on his preaching tour (Alma 5–15) made initial contact with lineage mates in the various cities he visited. Even at Zarahemla kin ties guided him; apparently he preached mainly to a restricted group, probably kin, whose “fathers” had been with his father among the Zeniffites in the land of Nephi (Alma 5:11–13).

A fast-changing society places strain on kin-based units of any type, for it is difficult to adjust economic, residential, and status differences between kinfolk. All of us have seen how fast ties with our relatives can wane when either they or we move away or drastically change social positions. Yet all other organizational forms in society are under even more stress when change is urgent. The Nephites reached a point shortly before the crucifixion of the Savior when conventional government—politically ordered relationships—collapsed. Little was left to take up the slack but kinship or the bonds forged in secret combinations: “The people were divided one against another; and they did separate one from another into tribes, every man according to his family and his kindred and friends; and . . . every tribe did appoint a chief or a leader over them; and thus they became tribes and leaders of tribes. Now behold, there was no man among them save he had much family and many kindreds and friends; therefore their tribes became exceeding great” (3 Nephi 7:2–4). When all else failed, blood ties remained. This event demonstrated how fundamental the pattern of kin organization was among the Nephites. The organizational pattern did not spring up fresh to meet this disastrous occasion; the connections were of long standing. Amulek confirms that (Alma 10:4). It is only that expanded functions were laid on the kin-based structure in the political crisis.

Shoe-horning all the people into these large “tribes” would require a good deal of adjustment in genealogy and history, but this is normal. The anthropological literature is full of descriptions worldwide of how genealogies are

modified as necessary in order to bring them into alignment with the political and economic facts of life. For example, the 2.5 million northern Somalians of east Africa “ultimately trace descent from the lineage of the Prophet Muhammad and his ‘Companions,’” although “such claims . . . appear to be generally fictitious. But whatever their historical content, their importance lies in the fact that they validate the whole Muslim basis of Somali society.”¹⁰⁶

In similar fashion, Nephite society seems to have been able to incorporate all the people under its social umbrella into a single “charter” or historical theory featuring seven major branches or super-lineages—Nephites, Jacobites, Josephites, Zoramites, Lamanites, Lemuelites, and Ishmaelites (Jacob 1:13; 4 Nephi 1:36–38; compare D&C 3:17–18). This list quite omits any “Sam-ites” (potentially from Lehi’s son Sam; see 2 Nephi 4:11) and as well lumps together all the sons of Ishmael. Also, it ignores the non-Nephite genealogical background of the numerous “people of Zarahemla.” These seven branches remind us of the famous “seven caves” or lineages from which, traditions claim, the inhabitants of Mesoamerica were supposed to have sprung.¹⁰⁷ A Nephite “tribe” or macro-lineage of the kind referred to in 3 Nephi 7 must obviously have been a social-political segment of the population reputed to have sprung from a common ancestor, but with substantial numbers of other people attached so that all belonged to one “tribe” or another (note the “friends” of 3 Nephi 7:2, 4). Such a tribe would have contained component families and sublineages pyramided from closer to more distant relationships. The senior sub-lineage would normally have been in the position of greatest authority, so its eldest male likely was the one whom the people appointed as tribal leader (3 Nephi 7:3). At least this picture plausibly reconciles the Book of Mormon statements with what we know about Mesoamerican patterns of kinship.

That brings up the related matter of political forms. From Book of Mormon descriptions of Nephites assembling

to make political decisions (as in Mosiah 29:39), we might mistakenly imagine that a principle of “one man, one vote” prevailed, but no ancient society followed that concept literally. When they “cast in their voices,” the expressions would have come from the senior male of a family or sub-lineage. To be sure, those patriarchs would first assess the feelings of those they represented before presuming to speak for their unit. Thus was the political process carried on over much of the world until very recent times. Nothing hints to us that it was not the pattern in the Book of Mormon.

Another political question is, did the Nephites have a state? (A state is a central organization that holds a monopoly of coercive power in a territory.) The answer appears to be both yes and no. Certainly the system of kings and judges represented an attempt to centralize force in state form, but the arrangement did not work very well. We see no evidence that King Benjamin used force to control deviant behavior among his people. In fact, it is doubtful that he even used authorized agents (except messengers) to conduct the business of government. The title “king” was applied to him, yet of itself that august title meant little (see Alma 47:6; 3 Nephi 7:10). Nor were the chief judges in the later Nephite government much more powerful. Not a word is mentioned of a police force or a standing army. What impresses us is the relative powerlessness of the central government. Only by leaders’ raising a militia (“army”) could dissidents be controlled (see Alma 2). When the Nephites added formal courts and a code of laws, they were moving in the direction of a state, but the permanent weakness of the apparatus indicates that it never achieved stability.

What unity did exist was based heavily on common values and traditions. When dissident groups arose whose values differed markedly from those of the establishment, they posed a threat to the very existence of the Nephite “nation.” No strong “glue” of practical political institutions

held the overall system together. Only by constant exhortation, backed up by ceremonial activities dictated by tradition, could leaders like Moroni keep the people more or less together (Alma 43:48; 46:19–21; 54:10). Religion was part of what bound them together, so when religious dissent developed, political disunity was inevitable (Alma 8:11–12; 51:5–6).¹⁰⁸ Before the full Classic Period (A.D. 200), Mesoamerican political structure stayed mainly at this level, depending for unifying power and control on shared values and ritual. So long as people governed in a single unit agreed to respect common beliefs and deities, internal peace could be maintained. When worship and sacred values failed to do the job, nothing else held a people or “nation” together for long. And even when an incipient state did appear, it remained fragile.

The ultimate fragility of the Nephites was not, however, determined by the central or governmental structures. Families, lineages, and communities were the key organizational forms. Local communities could accommodate a good deal of stress because of their nature. They were able to cope with internal diversity and were flexible in dealing with external pressures. One arrangement aiding in this adaptability was political “wards” or, better, *barrios*. The idea of these distinct residential sections inside a single town is very old throughout the area.¹⁰⁹ Each sector tended to have its own local political structure based on some version of the lineage principle. The relations of its people with other *barrios* was rule-governed and ceremonialized. Different languages and religious practices characterized some *barrios*. This pattern helps us understand how the Nephites (properly speaking) could deal successfully with the “people of Zarahemla” within the city of Zarahemla. They may well have occupied distinct *barrios* in different residential areas, each probably having its own inner government. Thus, when Alma spoke to the people at Zarahemla, “they were assembled together in large

bodies, and he went from one body to another” (Mosiah 25:15). The seven of these bodies (verse 23) seem functionally equivalent to *barrio* populations.

Space prevents full examination of any aspect of Nephite life. Far more extensive material, both inside and outside the scripture, invites our attention. For example, social and political arrangements are obviously different among Nephites, Lamanites and Jaredites; we’ve paid little attention to those distinctions. There are subjects and materials aplenty to keep researchers busy for a long time.

In this chapter we have read portions of the Book of Mormon as a text whose social and cultural forms deserve close study. Particular passages, often frustratingly brief, have shown us something about metals, animal husbandry, secret groups, kinship, and government among the Nephites and other Book of Mormon groups. By calling upon the extensive literature on Mesoamerican culture, we have been able to see scriptural statements in new ways, shed new light on their significance, and color in details. As a result, the scriptural setting opens up along new dimensions. The consistency of fit between the Book of Mormon picture of Nephite life and the external sources confirms that we have found for the book a plausible ancient American setting.

8

The End of the Nephites

The Nephites set out on the determined road to destruction centuries before Mormon, their last leader, was born. From the time of Samuel, the Lamanite prophet, the Nephites were in rehearsal for extinction. Samuel's dire prophecy recorded in Helaman 13:8–39 is barely conditional. Despite an “except they repent” at the beginning, he turns quickly to language that makes the future clear, such as “*when* ye shall cast out the righteous from among you” (verse 14) and “the day *shall* come” (verse 20). Only five years then remained before the birth of the Savior.

The Nephites had already been tried by famine (Helaman 11), but in the end it was not by natural means that they were to be destroyed. Social chaos was the means, as Samuel foretold. They had experienced a sample of it just before Samuel's appearance in the land (Helaman 11:24–37). Materialism and pride among the Nephites drove the entire people to the brink. Teetering on that social precipice, they experienced full force the dramatic signs that accompanied Christ's birth—a night without darkness and a new star in the heavens (3 Nephi 1:13–21). The shock was enough to pull them back—briefly.

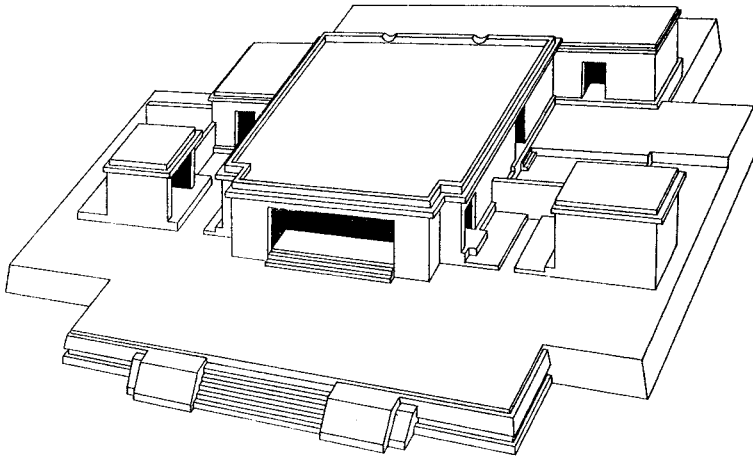
Within a decade Nephites and robber bands were again seesawing back and forth in conflict prophetic of what would happen on a total scale three and a half centuries later. “And thus . . . the sword of destruction did hang over them” (3 Nephi 2:19). But a second reprieve and a new chance came 33 years after the star appeared.

The Great Catastrophe

The Book of Mormon story of the destruction that accompanied the crucifixion of Jesus at Jerusalem is most explicit about the physical destruction it produced. Tempest, earthquake, and risings and sinkings of the land are vividly described. Actually, changes in society turned out to be even more significant. Together this wrenching of the established order set back the clock, so to speak. The survivors faced a new environment, emptied by the disaster of much of the overpopulation that had plagued them. They had an opportunity to start over, comparable to the opportunity Nephi's group had enjoyed when they were new in the land six centuries before.

Before we examine the new society that emerged, let us clarify the extent and nature of the environmental changes that took place. As always, we need to ask, exactly what does the scriptural text say? The eighth chapter of 3 Nephi recounts the basic facts. A great storm arose with violent wind, whirlwinds, and unprecedented thunder and lightning. The extent of this storm was vast, for it affected not only the land southward, which was hundreds of miles long, but even more seriously the land northward. A series of sharp earthquakes accompanied the awesome thunder and lightning, "the face of the whole earth" became deformed, and even basic rock strata were cracked. This entire sequence consumed "three hours," although it seemed longer to the miserable victims. A "thick darkness" could be "felt." "Vapor of smoke and darkness" overpowered and suffocated some people, while thick "mists of darkness" prevented fires being lit for three days.

The wide geographical extent of the catastrophe and the drama of the violence notwithstanding, it was mainly the "face of the land" that was affected. The fundamental features of the landscape were not transformed. The toll of damage announced by the voice of the Lord mentions 16 cities by name (3 Nephi 9:3–10). Three of those places are identified elsewhere in the volume as located in the land



Reconstruction of a building at Chiapa de Corzo, perhaps Sidom, destroyed around the birth of Christ. (From BYU-NWAF publication no. 8, by Gareth W. Lowe.)

southward; it is logical that the other four cities listed with them were also in that area. Nine cities are listed together in verses 8 through 10, one of which definitely was in the land northward; those named with it were probably also in the north. Six cities were destroyed by fire. Eight places were buried in the earth or had earth fall on them, but only one sank into the sea (Moroni, known to be near the coast). Another, Jerusalem, was covered by rising "waters."

However, "there were some cities which remained" (3 Nephi 8:15); and at Bountiful, near the center of Nephite territory, a "great multitude" survived to assemble around its temple (3 Nephi 11:1). Zarahemla and the other cities that had been burned were soon rebuilt on the same locations as before (4 Nephi 1:7-8). Moreover, basic geographical reference points, such as the narrow neck and pass, the Hill Cumorah/Ramah, and the River Sidon continued important and apparently unchanged. So we need to use restraint in the picture we allow our minds to construct of



At Copilco in the Valley of Mexico, a volcanic eruption covered the city around the time of Christ. In this scene the cultural remains are at ground level beneath many feet of lava. (Photo by Daniel Bates. Courtesy David A. Palmer and the Society for Early Historic Archaeology.)

the totality of the destruction. We should not go beyond what the text declares with measured care.

These facts in the Book of Mormon should fit the Mesoamerican scene. The same types of natural destructive forces at work in the 3 Nephi account should be familiar in southern Mexico and thereabouts. After all, it was the intensity of nature's rampage that impressed the Nephite recorder, not the novelty of the phenomena (3 Nephi 8:5, 7). All these kinds of destruction evidently had happened before in the land, but never with such terrifying effect. Not surprisingly, the sorts of natural forces unleashed in that fateful three hours are familiar on the Mesoamerican scene.

That area lies in a zone of intense earthquake activity—the edge of the Pacific basin, along which periodic violent quakes are a fact of life.¹ Scores of volcanoes are scattered along this particular zone of instability from north-central Mexico to Nicaragua. Many of them have been active within historical times.² Antigua, the former capital city

of Guatemala, was utterly destroyed by an earthquake in 1773 and hit heavily again in 1917. The great damage done in Guatemala in 1976 by another series of earthquakes is typical of many previous experiences. Traditions and the presence of hieroglyphic signs signifying earthquakes demonstrate the profound effect they had on the pre-Columbian peoples.³

A description of the eruption of Consegüina volcano in Nicaragua in 1835 hints at the terror and destruction that resulted from the powerful disaster at the time of Christ. A dense cloud first rose above the cone, and within a couple of hours it "enveloped everything in the greatest darkness, so that the nearest objects were imperceptible." Fear-struck wild animals blundered into settlements, adding to the terror. Then came quakes, "a perpetual undulation." Volcanic ash began to fall, like "fine powder-like flour." The thunder and lightning "continued the whole night and the following day." Dust thrown up into the atmosphere combined with heat from the volcano to trigger the storms. Still later the worst tremor of all hit, strong enough to throw people to the ground. Darkness again came on and this time lasted forty-three hours.⁴ These conditions, multiplied in both intensity and territory covered, sound much like 3 Nephi.

In chapter 3, citations were made to scientific literature reporting evidence of volcanism right around the time of Christ. Probably the most spectacular was in El Salvador. Archaeologist and geologist Payson Sheets has worked to clarify the date and extent of the eruption there at "about the time of Christ." One volcano apparently devastated a 3,000-square mile area; ash falls up to 40 feet deep buried settlement after settlement.⁵

Of course, the story in 3 Nephi involved more than volcanoes and earthquakes. The power of the thunder and lightning particularly impressed the Nephite writer; he said they were powerful enough to contribute to deforming "the face of the whole earth" (3 Nephi 8:17). One's first

response to such a statement is wonder; how could these atmospheric phenomena possibly “deform” the surface of the earth? Yet the assertion recalls Don Joseph Mozino’s report on the 1793 eruption in the volcanic Tuxtla mountains of Veracruz. It all started with a build-up of towering clouds over the mountains, then “grand thunderclaps, but underground.” Later “it sounded like all the artillery in Veracruz going off,” some of the more than 400 underground claps being heard hundreds of miles away.⁶ Thus, the “thunder” was probably of two kinds, one resulting from the exceptionally violent storms caused by heat and dust from the eruptions and the other from the fracturing of the strata underground due to seismic action. Both Mozino and the Nephite writer had trouble distinguishing the one from the other.

In addition to the disastrous results of simultaneous volcanism, earthquakes, and local storms, landslides and mudflows are often triggered by the torrential rains that accompany volcanism. It seems likely that part of the burying up of cities “in the depths of the earth” (3 Nephi 9:6, 8) would have resulted from slides, as well as from volcanic ash fall. Also, winds developed by certain meteorological patterns sometimes blow south over the Gulf of Mexico to “pile up” water against the (“east”) coast, inundating areas of low elevation.⁷ Either this effect of a normal storm or the more profound result from a tropical hurricane sweeping across the Gulf of Campeche could well have caused “that great city Moroni” on that coast to be “sunk in the depths of the sea” (verse 4). If a hurricane followed the normal storm track through the gulf, its center would hit the coast of our land northward;⁸ significantly, we are told in the scripture that “the tempest” caused more destruction in the north than in the south (3 Nephi 8:12).

We located Jerusalem in Guatemala on the shore of Lake Atitlan (Alma 21:1). The level of this lake has fluctuated as much as 40 feet due to subterranean shifts in the volcanic material that plugs its exit, according to geologists.⁹

Earthquakes and eruptions could have stirred the base of the lake to make water “come up in the stead” of Jerusalem (3 Nephi 9:7). The nearby land or valley of Middoni, today probably the location of Antigua, former capital of Guatemala, has been fiercely shaken many times.¹⁰ The entire fault system and volcanic chain extending through highland El Salvador, Guatemala, and Chiapas¹¹ must have been involved simultaneously to create the vast havoc described in the scripture. Other volcanic- and earthquake-prone areas lie in a northern system in the Mexican states of Veracruz, Oaxaca, Puebla, and Mexico.

Unquestionably the kinds of natural forces that produced the devastation reported in 3 Nephi are thoroughly characteristic of Mesoamerica. Nothing is surprising about the story except the scale. That was unprecedented. Our archaeological sources, meanwhile, provide us with some hints that a landmark disaster did in fact occur around the time of Christ. As years go on, we may learn more about it.

The New Order

Perhaps we convey the wrong idea when referring to the social order that followed the great disaster as “new.” Inevitably the result of disaster is to force people to return to their fundamental principles. Many of the “new” ways of the post-catastrophe “Golden Age” would have been like those that had prevailed in the simpler days of rural agrarian life before the rise of social classes, cities, and the trade/secret society complex. Historically throughout Mesoamerica, land has often been owned “in common.”¹² Available land was distributed to be used according to need, no one family having more than temporary control over resources beyond their needs. The contrary tendency arose periodically when the old kinship-based system of life was distorted by the growth of an exploiting class.

The social system among the Cuicatec Indians of south-central Mexico at the conquest has been described in a way that provides insights into how Nephite society probably

worked. The role of the rulers among the Cuicatec was in some ways superfluous. Beneath them was a fundamental structure of units based on kinship and other immediate factors. The local people found the ruling stratum valuable, for, as intrusive “foreigners,” they could ignore local biases in fulfilling their administrative duties. These included reallocating lands annually, organizing defense, and resolving disputes. For doing these chores they received the right to a parcel of the communal lands, which the people cultivated for them. While in a formal sense these chiefs might “possess” or “own” the land (compare Mosiah 9:6, Alma 53:2), it was not theirs to do with as they pleased, for they would always act within a defined role as a symbol of the whole society.¹³ Rulers in the Book of Mormon, like Zeniff, probably functioned in about the same manner as the Cuicatec nobles. However, shortly before the great catastrophe, central government had collapsed, and the kinship-based system was left to manage public life. Such a scheme could work well as long as the population was relatively small. Then came the great destruction, followed by the visit of Jesus Christ and the establishment of Christian communitarianism. Reduction in the number of people as a result of the devastation allowed even simpler governmental and social forms to function effectively again, as during King Benjamin’s time. With the fear of war eliminated and disputes few or absent because people faithfully adhered to the same righteous values, the typical administrative role of political ruler became unnecessary. That seems to be what happened (4 Nephi 1:2–3).

Archaeological remains tend to confirm that the society existing in Mesoamerica during the first and second centuries A.D. was marked by minimum social distinction. For example, at Chiapa de Corzo, which we know better than most other sites, the 54 burials of this (Istmo) period contained either no offerings at all or only very modest tokens. The excavators could see “no great social differentiation implied.”¹⁴ This was in sharp contrast to the rich tombs of

both the preceding and following periods. Generally similar conditions prevailed elsewhere in Mesoamerica at this time. In short, from soon after the time of Christ to around A.D. 200, dignified simplicity prevailed in burial practices, and, presumably, this reflected a “subdued” social order.¹⁵

The heavy casualties from the great destruction would also have solved some of the economic difficulties the Book of Mormon people had got themselves into earlier. With reduced population, the crowding of resources that had caused dissensions would have been eliminated. There would be adequate land for all, at least for a few generations, until crowding would again cause stress. Moreover, a normal social response must have been manifest among those people anciently, just as in modern times—when disaster hits, a sense of solidarity and mutual help tends to arise out of the very trouble. Starting over with a clean slate frequently brings out the best in people, even were they without a new faith. All these tendencies provide background to help us appreciate the change that took place, but the sharp turn taken by the Nephites and Lamanites is reported in the scripture to owe to acceptance of the gospel more than to any social or economic factors. The power of the message borne to part of them in person by the resurrected Jesus changed their hearts; that was why the new life was possible. “Every man did deal justly one with another” because “the people were all converted unto the Lord” (4 Nephi 1:2). And “there was no contention in the land, because of the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people” (verse 15).

The resurrected Lord appeared to the survivors at the city of Bountiful, where some 2,500 persons were assembled in the aftermath of the destruction (3 Nephi 17:25). On the day following his first appearance, a still greater body of people, to whom the marvelous account of the first day’s happenings had spread overnight, experienced his presence (3 Nephi 19:2–5). (They would have constituted the population of the “land” of Bountiful, distances being too

great for others to get there on short notice.) Two reasons seem to have dictated this location for the momentous event of the Savior's appearance. First, as we have seen (as in Alma 22:29–30), Bountiful was very near the line dividing the land northward from the land southward; thus, it was symbolic of "the whole land." Second, it was apparently a center of religious orthodoxy; from there a reformation had been launched by Nephi a few decades before the birth of Christ (Helaman 5:14), and there dwelt all the 12 disciples chosen by the Lord to lead his church.

Quetzalcoatl

Many Latter-day Saints know a little about the ancient Mesoamerican figure known by the name Quetzalcoatl ("Precious Serpent"), who bears some striking resemblances to Christ as reported in the Book of Mormon. For instance, his home ground was reputed to be the Coatzacoalcos area—our Bountiful (Coatzacoalcos means "sanctuary of the serpent").¹⁶ By some accounts, Quetzalcoatl wore a long white robe. The "white robe" worn by the resurrected Christ is unique, a garment not otherwise mentioned among the Nephites (3 Nephi 11:8; compare 1 Nephi 8:5). A number of books and articles addressed to Mormon readers have discussed this being, citing evidences from traditional native accounts written down by the Spaniards, art representations, folklore, and analyses of ancient names.¹⁷ These document a widely held belief in pre-Columbian Mesoamerica, as well as in many other parts of the New World, that a sacred being, described as a bearded white man, appeared long ago, taught a demanding set of spiritual principles, then departed mysteriously with the promise that he would return someday. The success of Cortez in conquering Mexico stemmed in part from Aztec hesitancy to oppose him whom they believed to be that returning Deity.¹⁸

This native belief has misled some Latter-day Saints into trying to connect all references to "Quetzalcoatl" to



Symbols of Quetzalcoatl on the facade of a temple in his honor at Teotihuacan, from the early centuries A.D. (Photo by James C. Christensen used by permission of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.)

the visit of Christ as related in the Book of Mormon. After nearly 2,000 years of legend making, things are much more complex than that. A number of beings bore the title Quetzalcoatl; certain traditions and symbols refer to some bearers of the name and some to others. Distinguishing when a given statement points to the god Quetzalcoatl and when to subsequent humans who bore his title is a complex, uncompleted task. Furthermore, a great deal of mythology with perhaps no basis in history also came to be attached

to the various Quetzalcoatl. Confusion attending this subject has gone so far that one historian claims that no ancient sacred being is referred to at all in the Mesoamerican sources, but only Post-Classic priest figures around whom deifying legends grew up.¹⁹ However, that extreme position ignores a large body of evidence that demonstrates that a divine being was known and worshipped as the god Quetzalcoatl for many centuries, perhaps from before the time of Christ's birth.²⁰ This deity was identified with certain sacred symbols whose use is testified to by archaeological material going back thousands of years. The being to whom the symbols refer is often distinguished from any of the later priests who took his name. Miguel Leon-Portilla, one of the great scholars on the traditional literature of Mexico, believes most of the sources agree that the original Quetzalcoatl was the founder of an "elevated spiritualism, a vision of the world that led to ancient Mexico's greatest cultural achievements."²¹

Among the symbols of Quetzalcoatl were marine shells, the quetzal bird, and the serpent, particularly in feathered or flying form. The shell has been interpreted as signifying the concept of resurrection from the dead.²² Why Quetzalcoatl/Christ would be connected to the concept of resurrection is obvious to Christians, even though the reason for the shell as a symbol may not be clear. The green quetzal bird, still Guatemala's national symbol today, was allied with the coveted green stone, jadeite, by virtue of its "precious" color; both the bird and the gem signified life-giving water or rain. Jehovah or Yahweh, the God of Israel, was thought of anciently as a controller of rain and life-giving water in general.²³ The Lord brought on a great drought to humble the Nephites (Helaman 11). There is no apparent reason why he would object to being associated with either the lovely green bird or the precious, cool jadeite stone (note Matthew 21:42; Jacob 4:15). Both symbols recall his control over "the first rain and the latter rain" (Deuteronomy 11:14).

The second half of the name Quetzalcoatl is the word for serpent in the language of the Aztecs. This creature, too, was associated in the Mesoamerican mind with the idea of moisture, hence fertility, but also with wisdom and power.²⁴ The Savior applied the symbol of the serpent to himself: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up" (John 3:14). The occasion for Moses' action was when Israel in the wilderness suffered from stings or bites from "flying, fiery serpents" (Numbers 21:9). Commanded to do so, Moses raised a bronze figure of a serpent on a pole; it had power to heal those with sufficient faith to raise their eyes and look at it. The ceremony obviously stood for the Savior's being lifted up on the cross to save those who look to him in faith as their Redeemer. In their teachings to the Nephites both Alma and Nephi connected the serpent image with Jesus (Alma 33:19; Helaman 8:14–15). The serpent symbol had been a potent one long before then, however. The Jaredites were impressed by it (Ether 9:31–33), and it appeared in Olmec art very prominently.²⁵ Clearly, serpent symbolism would be appropriate in connection with Jesus or Quetzalcoatl.

The early centuries A.D. saw a proliferation of the symbols of Quetzalcoatl.²⁶ Later, many cycles of myth and ritual derived from the original figure, modifying the original exemplar and his teachings in many ways. The Book of Mormon, in 4 Nephi, paints exactly that picture of the influence of Christ on religious life throughout Nephite and Lamanite lands during the early A.D. centuries. Some of the same symbolic motifs are connected with the Savior, and the worship of Christ became modified and distorted as time went on. It does not surprise us, therefore, that over the centuries, strange, apostate characteristics and symbols would have derived from the original pattern of belief. This much comparison is on sound ground, but to go far beyond this to compare extensive details about the two great religious figures without careful analysis would

go beyond plausibility, even though the subject invites careful research.

The Church of Christ

At the time of his ministry at Bountiful, the resurrected Christ ordained disciples to carry on his work through the “church of Christ” (3 Nephi 11:18–22; 26:17, 21). They spread the religion to “all the lands round about” until all were “converted unto the Lord, upon all the face of the land, both Nephites and Lamanites” (4 Nephi 1:1–2). This could mean that essentially all the Mesoamerican culture sphere as it then existed received and practiced the worship of Christ/“Precious Serpent”; or the distribution may have been more strictly limited to the areas specifically dominated by Nephite and Lamanite lineages, no doubt a smaller portion of Mesoamerica (north of the isthmus, mainly in central and southern Veracruz, I would guess). Because of linguistic, cultural and social differences that undoubtedly prevailed from place to place, and also because of difficulties in routine communication, we would not expect a high degree of administrative and ritual uniformity to prevail throughout all that area. The phrasing of 4 Nephi 1:1 (they “formed a church of Christ in all the lands round about”) could suggest that each region or land may have had its own organizational structure, benefiting from only limited central guidance, as had been the case in the time of Alma (see Alma 5, 7, 8, and 15). The communication problems facing centralized administration would have been rather similar to those Peter and Paul and their colleagues faced in the eastern Mediterranean—very difficult. Still, we ought to be able to detect new religious practices in the Mesoamerican materials around the mid-first century A.D. And we can.

A shift in ritual equipment and practices is seen at about the time of Christ. Some old practices quite suddenly were given up. Certain old incense burners went out of use or changed form, and the use of the little clay figurines, which

probably had some sort of religious significance, was abandoned in many places.²⁷ Both those features, the burners and the figurines, had parallels in Palestine, where they represented religious practices either of a folk nature or connected with Mosaic orthodoxy. It is logical that some of Lehi's people brought knowledge of these features and adapted preexisting Mesoamerican forms of them to their purpose. These would have continued for centuries, at least among the folk. These artifacts may have had to do with the official Nephite rites under "the law of Moses" (Alma 30:3), or perhaps not. In any case they were so entrenched both in Mesoamerica and in the Near East that people hardly have given up such customs except under the impact of powerfully felt beliefs such as were incorporated in "the church of Christ."

Another shift in religious practice at the same time was giving up the carving of dated stone monuments. This practice had just built up momentum; examples known at Chiapa de Corzo, San Isidro Piedra Parada, Tres Zapotes, and El Baul had started near 35 B.C.²⁸ The series ends with one whose date is either A.D. 36 or 16 (the reading is unclear). Then nothing new occurs for many years. This "enigmatic gap in dated monuments"²⁹ seems to have begun at about the time when many earlier carved stones were battered and some intentionally buried, as if a religious revolution of some sort had taken place.³⁰ At Chalchuapa, El Salvador, one of these inscribed monuments was said to be smashed in a "ritual of destruction" at the moment of the great volcanic eruption near the time of Christ. Its fragments are covered by the ash fall.³¹ Among the sites where vigorous monument smashing is in evidence are Kaminaljuyu/Nephi and Chiapa de Corzo/Sidom. The Book of Mormon provides a possible explanation for this behavior. It could have been a reaction by the enthusiastic new church against the old worship under the law of Moses or against cults of "idols" (Helaman 6:31). Of course other explanations are possible.

The period that follows these events in Mesoamerica is known to many experts as the Protoclassic, roughly from A.D. 50 to 200. (I prefer the more descriptive label Initial Classic.) At many Mesoamerican locations there then appeared certain characteristic sorts of vessels that have been interpreted as showing intrusion of a new people, or of a group of leaders, a cultural complex, or perhaps a new set of rituals.³² Since the archaeologists cannot agree what to make of these materials, we may suggest that the complex represented a new religious custom, perhaps the sacrament of bread and wine that Jesus instituted (3 Nephi 18:1–9, 28–32; 20:3–9). Book of Mormon Christians put great emphasis on this ceremony, which continued in modified form once the original church began to break up (4 Nephi 1:27–28). This is as plausible a treatment of the enigmatic Protoclassic complex as a number of suggestions by archaeologists. Of course, it could be wrong.

One thing becomes very clear about Mesoamerican life during the first three centuries: It was theocratic in structure. Religion was the center, the driving force, of society at that time. Priests occupied the key positions of leadership. This, too, agrees with the Book of Mormon, which says not a word about “government” or such matters throughout the same centuries. According to the Nephite record (as in 4 Nephi 1:34), religious leaders dominated public affairs.

We see that the scriptural story of the appearance of Christ and its social results in some ways fits into our picture of Mesoamerican culture history. Noteworthy parallels between the scripture and the external records are visible. Further, the events told by the Nephite writers take on consistency and broadened meaning when we view them in terms of Mesoamerican patterns.

The Second Revolution in Nephite Society

The social peace that had prevailed from about A.D. 30 to near the year 200 began to waver well before that tipover date. By around A.D. 180 a few dissidents broke

away formally (4 Nephi 1:20), but we must suppose that unorthodox ideals and actions had started to resurface still earlier than that. By the last quarter of the second century, some of the young could have been as much as seven biological generations removed from the appearance of Christ, and all the eyewitnesses except the three miraculously preserved disciples ("the Three Nephites") were long since gone. The intervening 150 years constituted about the same interval as from the founding of the restored church in 1830 to today. For Lehi's descendants it was then time for the inevitable crisis of faith that prosperity was bound to trigger (4 Nephi 1:23). The social structure began to come apart at the seams. Perhaps it did not seem as dramatic a change to participants at that moment as it does to us in historical retrospect. The process may have been like that at Orderville, Utah, in the late nineteenth century. Those Latter-day Saints then too were trying to possess "all things common," but they found that not quite enough sacrifice and self-control could be mustered. More and more Orderville people chafed under restrictions on what they considered their "individual privileges." Finally they crossed a threshold, and the communal system failed. According to James Moyle, generally the same phenomenon took place among the Latter-day Saints throughout Mormon country after about 1890. Within a three-year period, contracts, "deals," franchises, lawsuits, debts, social clubs, class differences, and all the other social and economic paraphernalia of "modern civilization" sprang up among at least urban Mormons.³³ The new ways immediately overwhelmed the pattern of economic cooperation and Church dominance that had prevailed for two generations.

One could expect the same among the Israelites in Mesoamerica. Suddenly, upon reaching 200 years after the birth of Christ, the Book of Mormon Saints "did have their goods and their substance no more common among them. And they began to be divided into classes" (4 Nephi 1:25–26). Pent-up ambition to get ahead in the world resulted in a surge

of business activity, just as in nineteenth-century Utah. Among the Nephites, the dramatic changes bore bad fruit because, the scripture says, the peoples' hearts had turned to "pride" and "iniquity," and they came to "harden their hearts" (verses 24, 28, 31). Throughout this transition most of the Book of Mormon people seem to have remained good churchgoers. They did not turn away from public religion as such, only against key Christian beliefs and practices. Priests and prophets were the chief leaders in the society (verse 34). Numerous cults ("churches") split off from the original church to follow unorthodox leaders. Elaborate ceremonies and architecture in the ritual centers attempted to make up for spiritual impoverishment (verse 41).

Mexican scholar Enrique Florescano has characterized the changes in religious architecture and activity that took place at Teotihuacan at this time. (Of course we cannot be sure that the Christian church ever existed at the great city, but the types of historical changes in religion might be reflected there.) The picture he draws is strikingly like that in scripture. He finds that from A.D. 150 to 200, before the general apostasy from the "church of Christ," according to the Book of Mormon, the "Plumed Serpent," Quetzalcoatl, was clearly the central divinity at Teotihuacan. Deity was of much greater importance than priests. The theology appeared to be well adapted to the people's real world, and they could understand the teachings directly. But this simplicity and integrity held only briefly, for by A.D. 250 the Temple of Quetzalcoatl had been partially destroyed, then covered with a new, larger structure; the deity Tlaloc had come to the fore, bearing attributes that had formerly been Quetzalcoatl's. Great elaboration in the religious system went on in the third century A.D., new symbols being attached by the priests to other deities. The priesthood now took on heightened power, particularly because the "extraordinary complexity" of the new system demanded priests to interpret the intricate ritual, beliefs, and myths to lay worshippers. Tlaloc became

an “intellectualized god of the priests,” as Quetzalcoatl fell from his leading position.³⁴ While Fiorescano’s reconstruction of this history would perhaps be disputed by other scholars, it agrees remarkably well in nature and timing with the account of apostasy from 4 Nephi and Mormon. A similar shift in the orientation of society and religion can be seen in Chiapas. At Chiapa de Corzo, the Istmo period of the first A.D. centuries—“subdued” and lacking in any trace of social differentiation—was followed after about A.D. 200 by the brief Jiquipilas phase, a time of “extravagant” imports of goods for elite class use, of “pomp and ceremony in keeping with the tradition common elsewhere in Mesoamerica at the time,” and of a “restive socio-politico-religious situation” that would result a century later in “the almost total abandonment of Chiapa de Corzo.”³⁵

The Finale and Its Geography

The conflict that was to result in extermination of the Nephite lineages began in the same place as the earlier wars—where expanding Lamanite power on the south impacted the Nephite presence. “The war began to be among them in the borders of Zarahemla, by the waters of Sidon” (Mormon 1:10). As we noted earlier, southeast Chiapas formed a boundary between speakers of Maya languages and other groups, particularly the Zoqueans, who had been among the bearers of the Olmec/Jaredite tradition. Our glimpses of ethnic history before the time of Columbus indicate that the Maya speakers occupied nearly all the lands we have identified as included in the greater land of Nephi. The mass of folk governed by the Lamanite lineage of rulers probably spoke one or another Mayan tongue. The tendency of the speakers of those languages, as shown by linguistic history, has been to expand in a northern and western direction into Chiapas.³⁶ It seems almost historically inevitable that the Mayan/Lamanite ethnic movement would crowd the southern edge of the Nephite domain.

The renewed conflict in the fourth century at that particular point adjacent to the Sidon and to Zarahemla fits in as a logical continuation of the expansion process begun centuries before.

The Nephites had already pushed northward themselves, under this pressure from the south on the one hand and the opportunity to exploit less heavily occupied territory toward the north on the other. As we noted earlier, the migrations reported in Helaman (3:8) were part of the movement. Bountiful's replacing Zarahemla as the leading Nephite center at the time of the Savior indicates that the process was continuing. By the time the final era opened, young Mormon, who was to be a central figure in it, was growing up in his native land northward, probably not far from where the last battles were to be fought. By the time of his first journey southward into Zarahemla as a youth, the isthmus and the land of Zarahemla had become densely populated (Mormon 1:7). Young Mormon came to maturity in the midst of a society revolutionizing itself (Mormon 1:13–14, 18–19). Because of his ancestral connections (verses 2–6; compare 4 Nephi 1:19, 21, 47–49), his noble lineage (Mormon 1:5), and the consequent high degree of literacy he must have commanded, he was thrust into a leadership role with which no average sixteen-year-old would ever have been entrusted. He was given command of the Nephite forces in the battle area south of Zarahemla. But the situation was hopeless from the first, and retreat was inevitable (Mormon 2:3). The time was about A.D. 325.

The nature of the Nephites' organizational problem is described in the phrasing of the fourth verse of Mormon 2: "We did come to the city of Angola, and we did take possession of the city, and make preparations to defend ourselves against the Lamanites." This statement is remarkable because Angola was already part of the greater land of Zarahemla. Why would Mormon's forces have to "take possession" of it? The key point about the Nephite political structure has already been made several times: there was no unitary Nephite state. What we see in Mormon's

appointment and in the affair at Angola is the system of lineage leadership in the politico-military arena. Leaders held power on the basis of the loyalty given to them by kin or “friends” who had made a commitment to ally with a powerful major lineage. Smaller units had to link themselves with others in order to survive in the dog-eat-dog world of power. That had been true just before the Savior’s appearance (3 Nephi 7:2–6), and it was true again now. Each lineage tended to occupy certain areas and communities. Each was tied with others through interpersonal bonds—distant shared ancestry, trade alliances, friendship, intermarriage, shared religion, and so on—as these connections were cultivated by their leaders. Thus, combined armies would be put together according to the political weather of the moment.

We can get a glimpse of how such a system worked at the time of Cortez’s conquest, twelve centuries after Mormon. The essentials of the pattern had changed little in between. We saw earlier how, when Cortez first encountered the Tlaxcalans, who eventually became his allies against the Aztecs, he found a fragmented leadership. “These same *Caciques* [leaders] . . . came out to receive us, and brought with them their sons and nephews and many of the leading inhabitants, each group of kindred and clan a party by itself.”³⁷ They decided whether or not to cast their lot with Cortez against the Aztecs. Among the Nephites similar fragmentation surely prevailed, the military commander using powers of persuasion and diplomacy about as often as he used his limited authority.

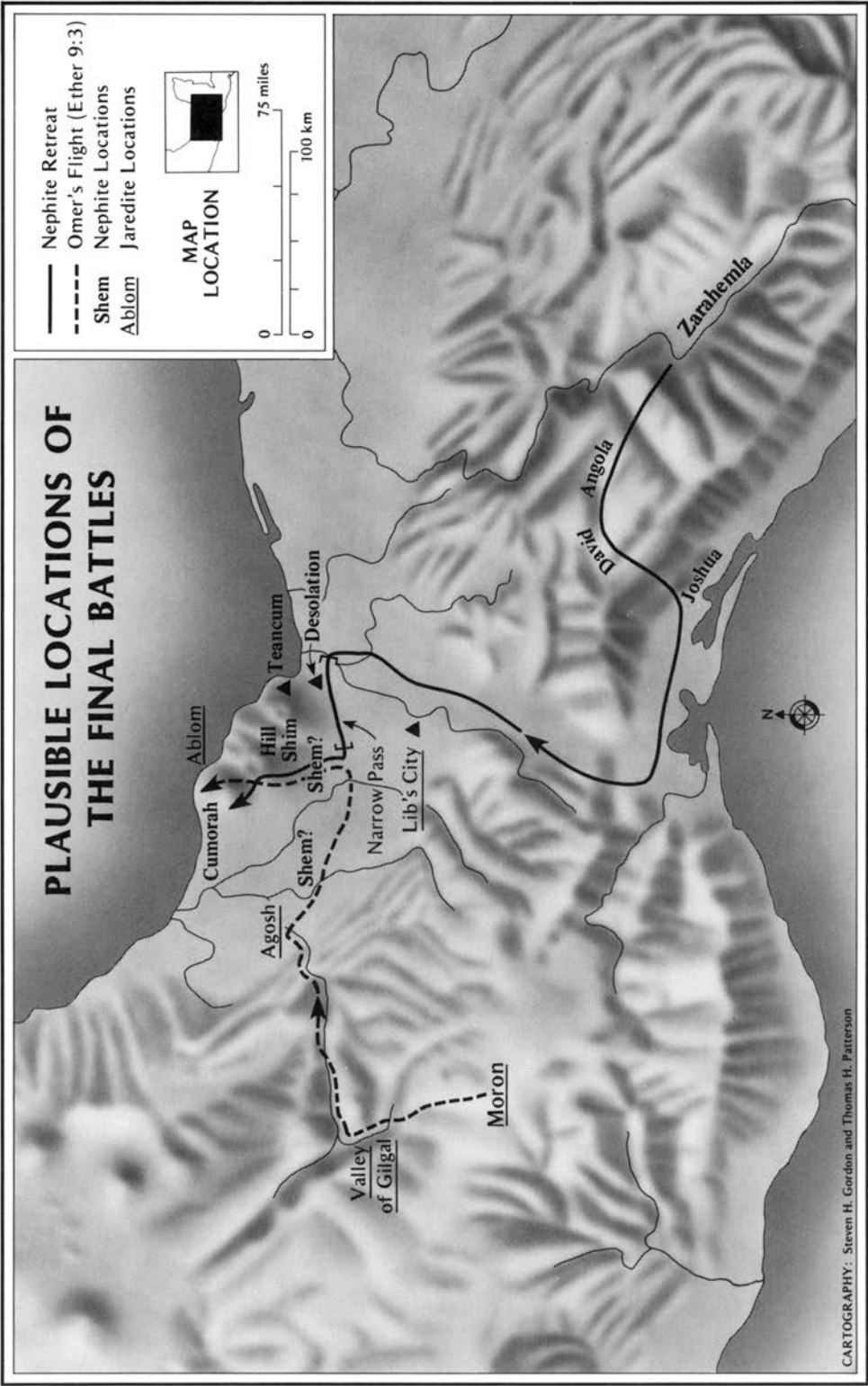
Obviously, Mormon’s father would not have moved to Zarahemla from his residence in the land northward unless a network of kin- and class-based relationships had paved the way. But nobody was related to everybody! Some groups would not be persuaded. At Angola, a stopping place in the Nephite flight out of central Zarahemla, Mormon’s alliance of lineage militias found the locals unenthusiastic about getting involved. The Angola

residents probably felt they would sooner avoid choosing sides in a quarrel that they thought they could ride out quietly. It is no wonder Mormon's armies had to "take possession" of the city. But like it or not, they would have to provide great quantities of supplies to whatever army occupied their area.

As the Nephite forces retreated still farther, they repeated this process over and over, pressuring local people to cast their lot with the retreating armies. All the political and military means available to Mormon and his people they used to "gather in [their] people as fast as it were possible, that we might get them together in one body" (Mormon 2:7).

From Angola they backpedaled to David but were driven from there also. Since Angola and David appear as stopping places on the way from Zarahemla to the west coast near the narrow neck (Mormon 2:4–6), they would lie northwestward, in Nephite terms, from Zarahemla. From central Chiapas the normal way to reach the Pacific coast leads west from the upper Grijalva/Sidon River basin through the Cintalapa Valley to the passes over the wilderness mountain strip above the Pacific coast. (The Lamanites had followed the same route in reverse in their early attacks on Ammonihah and Noah—Alma 16:2; 49:1–14). Angola and David were probably located along that route somewhere, although the brevity of Mormon's record denies us information to pin down the places definitively.

The city of Angola could have been at or near the site of Mirador, identified as Ammonihah in chapter 5; a name change would not be surprising over the centuries since Alma's day. David was a land for which no city was mentioned; it could have been westward along the Cintalapa Valley from Mirador. At length the Nephites fell back to "the land of Joshua, which was in the borders west by the seashore" (Mormon 2:6). The Arriaga-Tonala coastal zone was heavily settled in those times. The text's requirements for Joshua are met there. The temporary success of the Nephites in stemming the Lamanite attack at that point



(verse 9) can be explained by their blocking the two major passes over the mountains above the land of Joshua, so that the enemy could not reach the coastal strip. (See map 13.)

A “complete revolution” had been going on throughout the land of Zarahemla (verse 8), Mormon observed. Archaeological evidence in Chiapas seems to reflect it. For the Mirador site, archaeologist Agrinier has reported on the brief Jiquipilas (Early Classic) phase, which lasted only from roughly A.D. 200 to 350.

The Jiquipilas phase “was ended by an intense fire that totally destroyed” the structure of the largest sacred building at Mirador. “It seems that the temple had been thoroughly cleaned of its contents prior to its burning.” This suggests either a scorched earth policy on the part of retreating inhabitants or looting by the invader, or both.³⁸ Tombs at the site were sacked at the same time.³⁹ After the destruction of the temple, a period of temporary abandonment followed, perhaps as little as a single year. (Ocozocuatla, our suggestion for the earlier city of Noah, was probably abandoned at the same time and never re-occupied.⁴⁰) When Mirador was settled anew, it was by a new people, presumably the conquerors. The buildings suggest “shoddier construction” by “a transitory elite . . . more concerned with quickly-secured grandeur than with long-range durability.”⁴¹ That sounds like what we could expect from the Lamanite invaders who followed on the heels of Mormon’s retreating people.

The cultural connections of the Chiapas area since A.D. 50 had been primarily to the Isthmus of Tehuantepec and beyond to south-central Veracruz. That would tie our Zarahemla area to Bountiful, and also to Desolation and Cumorah, Mormon’s homeland. The Book of Mormon’s statements and implications agree with that picture. It was northward to those areas that the Nephites finally retreated (Mormon 2:16–17, 28–29). On the contrary, practically no connections are evident in early A.D. times between the Chiapas sites and Maya-speaking areas to the south and east. Since that is what we have considered Lamanite

territory, this cultural differentiation again fits the Book of Mormon situation. When the Early Classic Chiapas people did disappear from their settlements, it was a wholesale abandonment. Many archaeological sites of that once-crowded area were simply abandoned and not reoccupied for many generations.⁴² A sprinkling of intruders is evident, but the next occupation didn't amount to much.

We know that the fourth-century Lamanites came out of Nephi, from the south, to attack the Nephites. A dozen campaigns by the Lamanites before the Christian era had moved in the same direction, from the same source. At the date in question the site of Kaminaljuyu in the Valley of Guatemala was regaining some of its former glory. It was already coming under the influence of the sprawling metropolis of Teotihuacan in central Mexico, at that moment the most impressive of all Mesoamerican centers.⁴³ Several explanations have been offered for the developing tie between the two centers. They emphasize Kaminaljuyu's function as a southern trade center for Teotihuacan through which to exploit valuable obsidian deposits nearby.⁴⁴ Whatever the material motivation for the connection, it was a fact.

The Teotihuacan people were real organizers, controlling the population in their home area by the firmest of measures—they “ran a tight ship.”⁴⁵ The Lamanite elites at Nephi/Kaminaljuyu probably learned a lot from their sophisticated northern colleagues about how to dominate their neighbors. In fact, it looks as if the Kaminaljuyu connection of Teotihuacan, not the central Mexican metropolis itself, was the source of much of the widespread influence in southern Mesoamerica that has until now been credited to the northern city.⁴⁶ The Lamanites who attacked Mormon's forces in Zarahemla/Chiapas could well have been bearers of highland Guatemalan culture under Teotihuacan stimulation. Moving northward from their base in our land of Nephi, the Lamanite lineage chiefs must have had big ideas about power, their eyes having been opened to the possibilities for conquest by their Teotihuacan teachers and



Abandoned Nephite lands would have been seen by later settlers as spooky sorts of ruins.

exemplars. They would have been organized and equipped better than former Lamanites had been in their attacks on the hereditary enemy, the Nephites. This picture gets support from the archaeological data at Mirador. It turns out that the invaders who looted and burned there, arriving on the heels of the populace abandoning the site, displayed a mixture of Guatemalan and Teotihuacan traditions. Agrinier notes, "Affinities of . . . [the Teotihuacan-style ceramics at Mirador] with Highland Guatemala seem to point out this area as a major source of influence at Mirador after its destruction."⁴⁷ The date for this Guatemalan-Teotihuacanoid presence is at the end of the Early Classic Chiapas VIII period, about A.D. 350–400, as I analyze the archaeological chronology.

The historical picture in Chiapas in the Early Classic period shows a strikingly close correspondence to the Book of Mormon account of the Nephites' final years in Zarahemla. The inhabitants of Zarahemla in Chiapas in the first two

centuries A.D. had lived in a society showing little internal social difference. This condition had changed by around the year 200. A local version of the Theocratic or Classic tradition then developed in which priests manipulated a complex set of religious symbols and rituals, and social classes sprang up amid burgeoning trade and wealth. Less than a century later, aggressive, determined people from the old Lamanite center in Nephi/highland Guatemala started expansion northward that soon destroyed or depopulated most sites in the central depression of Chiapas. Lamanite/ Teotihuacan-like culture in a Guatemalan mold thereupon took over in Chiapas, but the new rulers could produce only a weak version of their culture on the new scene, perhaps because of the high cost in human and material resources consumed by the continued warfare of the Middle Classic period (compare Moroni 1:1–2).

Nearing the End

Holding the line in a series of bloody encounters allowed the Nephites to stay on for fourteen years in the land of Joshua. Finally their defense collapsed. They fled headlong across the narrow neck and into the land northward, all the way to the land of Jashon.

That was not far from Mormon's original home (Mormon 2:17 and 1:2–3). Nearby was the place where Ammaron had buried the Nephite records for safekeeping, in the hill Shim in the land of Antum. He had charged the boy Mormon to recover them when he was grown. (Apparently it took Mormon some eleven years longer to get back to the area to finish his assignment with the plates than Ammaron had anticipated.)

The brief scriptural statements about these lands do not allow us to coordinate the places mentioned with precise localities on today's map, but we can guess intelligently about them. The Book of Ether tells us that the hill Shim was between the Jaredite land of Moron and the hill Ramah (the Nephites' Cumorah). Not far beyond the

hill Cumorah was the east seashore (Ether 9:3). We saw in chapter 1 that these hills would be located in southern Veracruz state. Hills prominent enough to deserve being named as landmarks on an itinerary, as Shim was, are in the southern part of the Tuxtlas mountain mass. Most likely locations for Jashon and Shem (Mormon 2:17, 20), although no geographical details are provided, would be in the territory around Acayucan and Hueyapan, south and west of the Tuxtlas, or else in the 50-mile sector from San Juan Evangelista in the direction of Tuxtepec (see map 13). All these places were in the eastern, lowland sector of the land northward. According to the text's account of the final wars, there are no clear "ups" nor "downs" in the geography of the Nephite lands north of Bountiful.

A very important point made by the story of the Nephite military maneuvering is that they battled for the next 35 years, right to the bitter end, within a very restricted region in south-central Veracruz. Probably no part of the embattled territory was more than 100 miles from where Mormon had grown up as a boy.

Remarkably, the Nephites sprang back from the defeats that drove them to Jashon. In a fast campaign they actually regained "possession of the lands of our inheritance," including Zarahemla (Mormon 2:27). But they were aware they lacked the power to defend all that territory. They hadn't been able to hold it in the first place, and by now they were even weaker. So they bargained their momentary advantage for what they hoped would be security. They negotiated a treaty with their enemies, "the Lamanites and the robbers of Gadianton" (Mormon 2:28–29). The boundary was to be right on the old Desolation-Bountiful line, where land southward joined land northward at the narrow pass.

It may seem strange, looking at a map, that the Nephites did not concern themselves with the highland mass constituting the western half of the land northward, which had included the Moron of the Jaredites. The reason

is probably simple: few if any Nephite or allied lineages were located there. Those who did inhabit it would have been mainly unrelated in lineage and probably also in language. We know from linguistic and archaeological study that it had long been occupied by groups descended in part from inhabitants back in Jaredite times. (At least it is quite certain that the Zapotecs and various language relatives of theirs were already established in the highlands early on.)⁴⁸ Nowhere in the Nephite record is there any indication that people under label occupied the highlands. The retreat the Nephites had been forced to make would obviously be to areas inhabited by their own folks, not by strangers.

After the treaty had been signed, years passed, while the Nephites prepared for an inevitable renewal of the war. Mormon, their leader, no doubt wrote his abridgment of the plates of Nephi at this time. His people could quite easily have fortified the few routes by which the Lamanites could cross their border-by-treaty. Only one spot was critical. There they concentrated most of their forces—at the “narrow pass,” that gravelly ridge leading through barrier swamps, about which we talked in the first chapter. The base for the Nephite forces defending the pass was the city of Desolation. It would have been near the modern city of Minatitlan. They knew that was where the attack was bound to come. Finally, “the Lamanites did come down to [attack] the city of Desolation” (Mormon 3:7) in great force, out of highland Guatemala and Chiapas. The battle must have been at the ford across the Coatzacoalcos River, a dozen miles up from its mouth. First one and then a second Lamanite attack was unsuccessful; their dead “were cast into the sea” (verse 8), presumably by way of the river that marked the border.

Soon afterward the Nephite armies again tried to knife southward all the way to Zarahemla (Mormon 4:1–2), as they had succeeded in doing a few years before. Not only did this foray fail, their wearied armies were double-teamed by a fresh Lamanite force. The result was that they lost their base at Desolation. Remnants of their armies

found refuge at nearby Teancum “in the borders by the seashore.” That could be around Pilapan, some dozen miles away on the Gulf coast.

Ensuing bloody combat seesawed one way and then the other. In the “three hundred and seventy and fifth year” after the birth of Christ, the scales tipped decisively to the Lamanites because of their vast numerical superiority. Mormon could see “that the Lamanites were about to overthrow the land” (Mormon 4:23). Finally the time had come of which Ammaron had told him, so he took the books of his people out of the hill Shim.

The enemies of the Nephites at this time practiced the sacrifice of women and children prisoners (and no doubt of men also) to “their idol gods” (Mormon 4:15, 14). Later Mesoamerican history saw a fuller development of this bloody practice, along with the ritual cannibalism that Mormon reported among his own depraved followers (Moroni 9:9–10). Among the Aztecs at the time of the Spanish conquest, “ceremonial cannibalism was sometimes practiced in the belief that the eater could absorb the virtues of the eaten.”⁴⁹ For late Teotihuacan times (around A.D. 600), excavation has revealed clear evidence of human sacrifice, with a meal made of the victims.⁵⁰ Sanders has reported earlier data on the same practice from a site near Teotihuacan dating between A.D. 450 and 550.⁵¹ If Teotihuacan culture elements were as deeply involved in the life of the Guatemalan Lamanites as it appears, these despicable rites are not surprising among the Lamanites.

The Nephite retreat was now irrevocable; they made no further counterattacks. Despite the loss of more local lands and cities to Lamanite advances (Mormon 5:4–5), they managed to maintain a defense line that saved some of their base areas. But things had gone so far that only one further move was open to the Nephites. In a desperate gamble, Mormon made an appointment with the enemy for a showdown battle, in a land where he “had hope to gain advantage over the Lamanites” (Mormon 6:4). (Later Mexican



The great swamp and lagoon system of central Veracruz would serve as the “waters of Ripliancum” that blocked the retreat of Jaredite armies. (Photo by James C. Christensen used by permission of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.)

practice attests that making a date for battle was an established custom.⁵²)

Cumorah must be part of the northern or western extremity of the Tuxtla Mountains, some 90 miles from the narrow pass and near the huge site of Tres Zapotes. The Tuxtlas (“place of the macaws”) region has been described by artist-author Miguel Covarrubias as “a land of unprecedented fertility, watered in all directions by streams, water falls, and lakes.”⁵³ Mormon called it “a land of many waters, rivers, and fountains” (Mormon 6:4). A thousand years before, that area had been key in the late Olmec settlement system, no doubt for the same reason. This zone, exceedingly fertile because of rich volcanic soil and abundant rainfall, could probably supply by itself the food needs of the concentrated Nephite forces. (Food was an increasing problem, due to the social and military turmoil, Moroni 9:16 tells us.) The “advantage” the Nephites thought

they might enjoy there could have been due to the broken terrain, which Mormon must have known intimately. Or possibly the Nephites thought the place would be fateful for the Lamanites because of superstitious beliefs or traditions concerning the end of the Jaredites on that very spot. But why would the Lamanites allow a period of years for the Nephites to get ready? In the first place, they would understand from their knowledge of regional geography that the Nephites had no place to retreat beyond Cumorah, for behind them lay only the huge estuary of Alvarado (the Ripliancum of the Jaredites) and the tangle of rivers and swamps known in modern times as "La Mixtequilla."⁵⁴ So both sides knew this would be a decisive battle between the ancient rivals. Another reason the Lamanites would be agreeable to this place and appointed time may have been that they needed a period to build up their own forces for the climactic clash, for they were a long distance from their home base. In any case, the agreed site was deeper into the now-limited territory under Nephite control, so the Lamanites had nothing to lose.

A valid question is "Why didn't the Nephites continue retreating farther and farther north and so escape the Lamanites altogether?" In the first place, we must realize that rarely if ever is there any decent land that does not already contain a sizable population, so they would have had to dispossess other people first. Besides, moving farther on, they would have entered ecologically new territory, and the prospects would be slim that they could successfully feed their numbers in a new environment with no time to learn how to exploit the land. Farther north also lay another military threat. Beyond the big swamps they would come nearer and nearer to the territory of Teotihuacan proper, the powerful state allied culturally if not militarily with the Lamanites on their other side. The Teotihuacan domain of control apparently did not extend quite as far as the Tuxtlas by A.D. 380, but any move farther north by Mormon's people would have encountered this

great power, standing in the wings but uninvolved directly in the present conflict. Yet the real key to the Nephites' standing fast could simply be that the lands they were defending were their own already; they felt they had a right to them and were motivated to defend them if at all possible. For many people, life lived as a refugee far from what one thinks of somehow as home is hardly worth living (compare Jacob 7:26 and Mormon 8:5). So, caught between the millstones of Lamanites on the south and Teotihuacan itself on the north, the Nephites willingly defended their shrunken core of lands because they had to.

Four years of preparation had given the Nephites as good a military position as they could hope for. Then finally came the awesome climax. Since they had left God behind, there remained only their own muscles and heads to fight against the Lamanite horde that came upon them at the hill Cumorah (Mormon 6:7). As in most major



Cerro El Vigia, the best candidate for the Hill Cumorah and the Hill Ramah. The battles of the Nephites and Jaredites would have taken place on the plains, beyond the hill in this view. (Courtesy Richard Jones.)

Mesoamerican and Book of Mormon military campaigns, the families of the soldiers were present. So the outcome was to be genocide, not merely military defeat.⁵⁵ Twenty-three 10,000-man armies made up the Nephite force. All were wiped out on that one grim day.⁵⁶

Could Mesoamerica have been the scene for a war on the impressive scale the Book of Mormon relates? The central Mexican chronicler, Ixtlilxochitl, reported of the Tultecas around A.D. 1060 that in a three-year war, 5,600,000 were slain on both sides.⁵⁷ Even allowing him considerable room for exaggeration, we are left with little doubt that the battle at Cumorah was within the realm of the plausible in Mesoamerican terms.

Two dozen Nephite stragglers survived among the corpses. In the night they made their way to the top of nearby hill Cumorah, from which they could look down on the slaughter-ground. Upwards of 600,000 must have lain dead there (counting the women and children of the Nephites, plus Lamanite casualties). The most likely candidate for that hill is Cerro El Vigia, over 3,000 feet high, and lying at the northwestern extremity of the Tuxtla Mountains. At its base are plains of the required scale where the armies could have been located. David A. Palmer in 1975 made a list of requirements for the hill Cumorah that he thought the text imposed: it had to be big enough that around its base on the order of a million people could be arrayed in battle; it must be high enough that the wounded survivors would be safe on top from being spotted by the Lamanites below; yet it must not be so elevated that wounded men could not climb it during the night, and so on. Palmer later made a trip to Cerro El Vigia, which I had suggested as the best candidate for the hill Cumorah/Ramah of the final battle(s). He could discover no reason why this could not be the hill; it met every requirement in the Nephite account.⁵⁸ If we are correct, then somewhere within it (perhaps in a cavern) Mormon hid the Nephite archive (Mormon 6:6). His own set of plates, on which he had

written his abridgment and to which he had appended the small plates of Nephi, he gave to his son Moroni (Words of Mormon 1:2, 5–6). The latter in turn added to them and eventually delivered them to Joseph Smith.

The “land of many waters, rivers, and fountains” where the final battle took place was too attractive to settlers to be left empty. It wasn’t long before the surrounding zone was again occupied. It looks as if a Teotihuacan stronghold was built in those hills after the Nephites vanished. Successor populations to modern times have continued superstitions about the hills and the ancient monuments.⁵⁹

Were there Nephites left after that battle? Some, yes. The scripture makes that clear. Only they were no longer called Nephites. Mormon noted that “a few . . . had escaped into the south countries, and a few . . . had dissented over unto the Lamanites” (Mormon 6:15). Naturally, large numbers of people of Nephite descent had never consented to flee their lands in the first place (Mormon 2:7–8), but had switched allegiance and renounced their old beliefs and allegiance rather than move out (Moroni 1:2). Mormon observed to his son that “many of our brethren have dissented over unto the Lamanites” (Moroni 9:24). The Doctrine and Covenants says that modern descendants of not only the Nephites but also the major lineages allied with them, the Jacobites, Josephites, and Zoramites, will yet be identified (D&C 3:17–20; 10:48).

Many Latter-day Saints have been fascinated over the years with “white Indians.” They have interpreted sensationalistic reports of such rumored groups as referring to remnants of the Nephites. When we examine the Book of Mormon, we find no hint that any “white Nephites” were to be preserved. Mormon and Moroni repeatedly made clear before the Cumorah battle took place that there was no significant difference in the degree of unrighteousness of Nephites and Lamanites, unless it was that their own people’s “wickedness doth exceed that of the Lamanites” (Moroni 9:20; also Mormon 5:15). Descendants of the

pre-Columbian peoples vary considerably in the degree of their pigmentation, as chapter 2 pointed out. Some groups among them are relatively light-skinned. It appears there have long been Mesoamericans who could be termed at least light-skinned (“pure” or “delightful” could be quite different concepts). But no reproducing groups of dramatically “white” natives are reliably known to have existed in the New World when the Spaniards arrived. Mormons would do well to give up the romantic pastime of searching for mysterious bands of “white Indians.”

The disappearance of the Nephites did not cause any revolutionary culture shift in central Mesoamerica. The people who filled the gap they left were bearers of the same basic civilizational pattern, the Second Tradition of our discussion on culture history. The continued rise of Teotihuacan to dominance over most of Mesoamerica north and west of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec is well documented for the period after Cumorah. By A.D. 400 their militarism was widespread, and during the early Middle Classic period (approximately A.D. 400 to 550) this great city just off the Valley of Mexico formed an axis with Kaminaljuyu/Nephi and Pacific coastal Guatemala. Their joint influence and dominion proved to be the most powerful in Mesoamerica, as measured by raw power. But the aging system of religion and ideology on which this virtual “empire” was based deteriorated progressively. After A.D. 600, only second-rate successors quarreled over the bones of the once impressive civilization.

With the extinction of the Nephites, lineage records were still kept by others. They would, of course, give a very different version of history than the Nephite one. Throughout Mesoamerica thousands of books in all were kept, many of them resembling Mormon’s record in certain respects.⁶⁰ However, none of them contained material quite like the Book of Mormon, just as the thousands of documents from the ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern

area shared much of the form but little of the substance of the scriptures we know as the Bible.

We have seen how the Book of Mormon is simultaneously different from, yet like, other documents from Mesoamerica. We have also learned that the story fits into and is illuminated by a knowledge of its setting. It connects in many ways with pre-Columbian civilization in Mexico and northern Central America. This book has shown a way by which we can learn a new dimension of what the volume has to say. It remains for Latter-day Saints, and others as well, to read the Book of Mormon in the several ways it can be read—to extract from it all the light it holds for us.

Epilogue

This book has not attempted to provide a definitive map that could lead readers to the precise spot where Nephi landed or where Mormon fought. Nor did it aim to prove that the events of the Book of Mormon took place in a particular way or in specific archaeological phases.

What has been done, first of all, is to show that the Book of Mormon story *could* have had a concrete setting—that it is plausible to treat it as a history in a particular geographical and cultural context. The geographical setting identified meets the criteria set out unintentionally by the Book of Mormon as it tells its story. Dimensions, climate, topography, configuration of land and water, and cultural levels exhibited in scriptural statements were found to agree with characteristics of central and southern Mesoamerica. Cultural, historical, and archaeological data substantiate the geographical correlation. In the interest of space, much available data was omitted; still, the agreements have been consistent and arresting.

The comparisons have had two thrusts. First, as already indicated, agreements between the scriptural account and the external materials show that the former is plausible in terms of the latter. The Book of Mormon shows so many striking similarities to the Mesoamerican setting that it seems to me impossible for rational people willing to examine the data to maintain that the book is a mere romance or speculative history written in the third decade of the nineteenth century in New York State. If in the eyes of some this is “proof” of the authenticity of the volume, they are free to draw that conclusion. The correlations

pointed out are probably not yet detailed enough to satisfy everyone on that point, but the issue is at least on new ground.

The second thrust has been illumination of the record. Our knowledge from scholarship on life and culture in Mexico and Central America in early times allows us to envision concretely how Book of Mormon armies fought, dissenters dissented, and farmers farmed. We also begin to see some of the whys of the ancient situation: secret societies, kinship and tribes, trade and conquest, migration and missions. In my view, in the long run this light could be the most significant contribution. As a result of this explication of the setting, readers ought to become convinced that the Book of Mormon is an extremely complex record that deserves far more careful study than it has received in the past.

Whatever else this work may have done, it lays a foundation. Though it does not contain all the answers, it improves the quality of our questions. Serious students of the Book of Mormon, as well as scholars investigating Mesoamerican civilization, should take this as an invitation to press on. I am painfully aware of how preliminary the data are that I have presented. But one step at a time serves best.

Yet the Book of Mormon is not merely a historical volume or lineage record to be studied by “value-free” scholars. Hundreds of lineage histories were compiled in ancient Mesoamerica. This one is unique. As a record of God’s dealings with one unusual people, it constitutes scripture, invaluable for its powerful spiritual teachings, whatever scholars may say about it as history. Because of the book’s importance, if understanding the setting for the book contributes to a clearer grasp of its message, then my effort has been justified.

Notes

Key to Abbreviations

CIWP	Carnegie Institution of Washington, Papers (Washington, D.C.)
HMAI	Handbook of Middle American Indians, ed. Robert Wauchope (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1967–1976)
HUPM	Harvard University, Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology, Papers (Cambridge)
MARI	Tulane University, Middle American Research Institute, Publications (New Orleans)
NWAF	Brigham Young University, New World Archaeological Foundation, Papers (Provo, UT)
PSUO	Pennsylvania State University, Department of Anthropology, Occasional Papers in Anthropology (State College, PA)
SISA	Smithsonian Institution, Institute of Social Anthropology, Publications (Washington, D.C.)
UCAR	University of California, Archaeological Research Facility, Contributions (Berkeley)

Introduction

1. John A. Widtsoe, ed., *Discourses of Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1941), p. 128.
2. Lynn Hilton and Hope Hilton, *In Search of Lehi's Trail* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1976).
3. Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).
4. Cyrus Gordon twenty-five years ago noted that the “drive and stamina to master a whole complex of difficult sources” depend upon some personal commitment beyond abstract scholarship or science. *Introduction to Old Testament Times* (Ventnor, New Jersey: Ventnor Publishers, 1953), p. v.

Chapter 1

1. Franklin D. Richards and James A. Little, eds., *Compendium* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1886), p. 289.

2. Brigham H. Roberts, *New Witnesses for God; The Book of Mormon*, vol. 3 (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1926), pp. 501–3; John A. Widtsoe, “Is the Book of Mormon Geography Known?” in *A Book of Mormon Treasury: Selections from the Pages of the Improvement Era* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1959), pp. 128–29.

3. For example, the statement by Oliver Cowdery in Francis W. Kirkham, *A New Witness for Christ in America: The Book of Mormon* (Independence, Missouri: Zion’s Printing and Publishing Co., 1942), p. 93.

4. Nancy C. Williams, *Meet Dr. Frederick Granger Williams . . . After One Hundred Years* (Independence, Missouri: Zion’s Printing and Publishing Co., 1951), pp. 101–3.

5. *Millennial Star* 10 (November 15, 1848):347.

6. *Juvenile Instructor* 25 (January 1890):18–19.

7. *The Instructor* 73 (April 1938):160.

8. *Conference Report, April 1929* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1929), pp. 15–66.

9. Widtsoe, “Book of Mormon Geography,” p. 130.

10. *Introduction to Old Testament Times* (Ventnor, New Jersey: Ventnor Publishers, 1953), p. 107.

11. R. E. W. Adams, “The Ceramic Chronology of the Southern Maya,” Second Preliminary Report, National Science Foundation Grant GS 610, University of Minnesota, duplicated (Minneapolis, 1966), p. 5.

12. *Ibid.*

13. Robert F. Heizer, “Physical Capabilities of the California Indians,” *Masterkey* 45 (1971):109–13.

14. Bernardino de Sahagun, *Historia de las Cosas de Nueva Espana* (Mexico: Editorial Nueva Espana, 1946), p. 281.

15. Mariano Veytia, *Historia Antigua de Mexico*, vol. 1 (Mexico: Leyendia, 1944), p. 152; Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl, *Obras Historicas*, vol. 1 (Mexico: Editora Nacional, 1952), p. 24.

16. Stan Larson, “Change in Early Texts of the Book of Mormon,” *Ensign* 7 (September 1976):81.

17. Summarized in Paul R. Cheesman, *The World of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), pp. 28–33.

18. The best general discussion of the physical features of Mesoamerica is the initial articles in HMAI, vol. 1. In Spanish, Jorge Tamayo, *Geografia General de Mexico*, 2 vols. and atlas (Mexico, 1950).

19. Robert M. Carmack, *Toltec Influence on the Postclassic Culture History of Highland Guatemala*, MARI 26 (1968), p. 65.

20. Felix W. McBryde, *Cultural and Historical Geography of Southwest Guatemala*, SISA 4 (1945), p. 4.

21. A convenient, brief treatment of the geography, geology,

and climate of Chiapas and especially of the central depression is in Gareth W. Lowe, *Archaeological Exploration of the Upper Grijalva River, Chiapas, Mexico*, NWA 2 (1959), pp. 4–7. An excellent source of broader scope is Robert C. West and John p. Angelli, *Middle America: Its Lands and Peoples*, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1976).

22. Louis-Jacques Dorais, "Some Notes on the Semantics of Eastern Eskimo Localizers," *Anthropological Linguistics* 13 (1971):92.

23. Phil DeVita, "A Partial Investigation of the Spatial Forms of Some Tuamotuan Dialects," *Anthropological Linguistics* 13 (1971):401–20.

24. Einar Haugen, "The Semantics of Icelandic Orientation," *Word* 13 (1957):447–60.

25. George L. and Florence H. Trager, "The Cardinal Directions at Taos and Picuris," *Anthropological Linguistics* 12 (1970):31–37.

26. S. H. Weingarten, "Yam Suf-Yam Ha'adom," *Beth Mikra* 48 (1971):100–104.

27. P. Cornwall, "On the Location of Dilmun," *American Schools of Oriental Research, Bulletin* 103 (1946):8.

28. Some people have thought the Liahona of Lehi (1 Nephi 16:10) was a magnetic device. I find no persuasive evidence for such a view. Hugh Nibley's valuable discussion of it gives an alternative picture of its functioning: *Since Cumorah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1967), pp. 283–96.

29. J. E. S. Thompson, *Maya Hieroglyphic Writing: An Introduction*, rev. ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960):249; idem, *Maya History and Religion* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970), p. 176; Cecelia F. Klein, "Post-Classic Mexican Death Imagery as a Sign of Cyclic Completion," in *Death and the Afterlife in Pre-Columbian America*, ed. Elizabeth p. Benson (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1975), pp. 80–81.

30. Charles E. Osgood, "The Cross-Cultural Generality of Visual-Verbal Synesthetic Tendencies," *Behavioral Science* 5 (1960):146–49; R. Hertz, *Death and the Right Hand* (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1960). Notice Mosiah 5:10–12.

31. Munro S. Edmonson, *The Book of Counsel: The Popul Vuh of the Quiche Maya of Guatemala*, MARI 35 (1971), p. 36. The scheme of colors differed somewhat in other Mesoamerican regions.

32. Weingarten, "Yam Suf," p. 103.

33. Adrian Recinos, Delia Goetz, and Sylvanus G. Morley, trans., *Popol Vuh* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1950), pp. 68–69, 207.

34. Evon Z. Vogt, *Zinacantan: A Maya Community in the Highlands of Chiapas* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), p. 602.

35. Andrew J. McDonald, "The Origin and Nature of Platform

Complexes in Southern Chiapas, Mexico" (draft of Ph.D. diss., University of Texas), p. 80 (copy in possession of J. L. Sorenson). Klein's picture adds to McDonald's statement: "Invariably . . . the north was associated with the east, the south with the west. The north and south, in fact, were comparatively unimportant in Mesoamerican thought and were frequently allied with the more important world directions of east and west. The north thereby shared with the east the connotations of the sky and the 'above,' while the south, like the west, represented the earth and the 'below'" ("Death Imagery," p. 81). The statement by Recinos, Goetz, and Morley about the "east" and "north" is illuminated by Klein's explanation. This pattern of direction linkage may be reflected in the Book of Mormon, where Jesus Christ appears out of the *sky* at Bountiful near the *east* coast, while the two cities destroyed at his crucifixion whose position is clearly identifiable as "on the south" were Moroni, appropriately *sunk* into the sea, and Jerusalem, where waters rose up to *cover* it. The puzzling congruence of "objective facts" of history and a structural model has been presented by Y. T. Radday ("Chiasm in Kings," *Linguistica Biblica* 31 [1974]:52–67), although he cannot explain the agreement. It is no easier to suggest how objective facts of geography may agree with a people's cognized model of space.

36. J. E. S. Thompson, ed., *Thomas Gage's Travels in the New World* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958), pp. 181, 193–95.

37. Kenneth G. Hirth, "Transportation Architecture at Xochicalco, Morelos, Mexico," *Current Anthropology* 23 (1982):322.

38. J. J. Williams, *The Isthmus of Tehuantepec, Being the Results of a Survey for a Railroad to Connect the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans* (New York, 1852), pp. 21–35.

39. Ibid. See also Michael D. Coe, "Photogrammetry and the Ecology of Olmec Civilization" (paper delivered at Working Conference on Aerial Photography and Anthropology, Cambridge, Massachusetts, May 10–12, 1969), pp. 8–9. Only March, April, and early May have low rainfall. The rivers begin rising rapidly in June and reach crest height between July and September, flooding all land below the 24-meter contour in the vicinity of San Lorenzo, the Olmec site.

40. J. N. Washburn has written an interesting speculative piece describing how Moroni might have made such a trip: "The Son of Mormon," no date, no place (available in BYU Library). Incidentally, the volume by J. A. and J. N. Washburn, *An Approach to the Study of Book of Mormon Geography* (Provo, Utah: New Era Publishing, 1939), is valuable as a treatment of Book of Mormon geography on the basis of the scriptural text alone. It was the first serious study of the topic.

41. "Man Alone," *Christian Science Monitor* (June 1, 1967), p. 16.

Chapter 2

1. Robert M. Carmack, *Quichean Civilization: The Ethnohistoric, Ethnographic, and Archaeological Sources* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), pp. 16–18.
2. Robert M. Carmack, *Toltec Influence on the Postclassic Culture History of Highland Guatemala*, MARI 26 (1968), p. 86.
3. Marie Kimball Freddolino, “An Investigation into the ‘Pre-Tarascan’ Cultures of Zacapu, Michoacan, Mexico” (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1973). William F. Albright points to the same manipulation of genealogies by the Israelites in the Old Testament in his *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan: A Historical Analysis of Two Contrasting Faiths* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1968), p. 82.
4. For example, John A. Tvedtnes, “Hebraisms in the Book of Mormon: A Preliminary Survey,” *BYU Studies* 11 (Autumn 1970):50–60; Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert and the World of the Jaredites* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1952), p. 33; M. Deloy Pack, “Possible Lexical Hebraisms in the Book of Mormon (Words of Mormon-Moroni)” (M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1973), pp. 176–77.
5. John W. Welch, “Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon,” *BYU Studies* 10 (1969):69–84; idem, “Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon,” in *Chiasmus in Antiquity: Structures, Analyses, Exegesis*, ed. John W. Welch (Hildesheim, West Germany: Gerstenberg Verlag, 1981), pp. 198–210.
6. James B. Allen and Glen M. Leonard, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), p. 41.
7. Brigham H. Roberts, *New Witnesses for God*, vol. 2. *The Book of Mormon*, vol. 2 (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1926), pp. 95–100; idem, *A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. Century 1*, vol. 1 (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1930), pp. 100–107.
8. “The Book of Mormon as a Mesoamerican Codex,” *Society for Early Historic Archaeology, Newsletter and Proceedings* (Provo) 139 (1976):1–9, which in turn relies heavily upon my paper “The Significance of an Apparent Relationship Between the Ancient Near East and Mesoamerica,” in *Man Across the Sea: Problems of Pre-Columbian Contacts*, ed. Carroll L. Riley et al. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), pp. 219–41.
9. “Mesoamerican Codex,” appendix, middle column.
10. Julian H. Steward, *Pueblo Material Culture in Western Utah*, *University of New Mexico, Bulletin* 287, Anthropology Series 1 (Albuquerque, 1936), pp. 1–63.
11. E. Z. Vogt, “Recurrent and Directional Processes in Zinacantan,” in *37a Congreso Internacional de Americanistas, Buenos Aires, 1966*, vol. 1 (Buenos Aires, 1968), p. 445. A convenient introduction to this people

is Vogt's brief *The Zinacantecos of Mexico: A Modern Maya Way of Life*, Case Studies in Cultural Anthropology (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970).

12. A. M. Tozzer, ed., *Landa's Relacion de las Cosas de Yucatan*, HUPM 18 (1941), is the most useful translation, but many others have been published. Fray Bernardino de Sahagun, *Florentine Codex: General History of the Things of New Spain*, Monographs of the School of American Research 14, ed. and trans. Charles E. Dibble and Arthur J. O. Anderson (Santa Fe, New Mexico: School of American Research and University of Utah Press, 1950–1963).

13. Jane W. Pires-Ferreira, "Obsidian Exchange in Formative Mesoamerica," in *The Early Mesoamerican Village*, ed. Kent V. Flannery (New York: Academic Press, 1976), pp. 301–6.

14. Elizabeth K. Easby and John F. Scott, *Before Cortes: Sculpture of Middle America* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1970), offers an interesting panorama of this art for the nonspecialist, combined with relatively accurate discussion.

15. Linton Satterthwaite, "Calendrics of the Maya Lowlands," in HMAI 3 (1965), pp. 603–31. Munro S. Edmonson, "The Mayan Calendar Reform of 11.16.0.0.0," *Current Anthropology* 17 (1976):713–17.

16. D. J. Schove and D. H. Kelley separately question this continuity, preferring calendar correlations on astronomical grounds that most archaeologists find impossible to accept. Things aren't quite settled yet, but nearly so, in favor of the "GMT" or 11.16.0.0.0 scheme. The richest (indigestibly so) confirmation of the 11.16. correlation is Gordon Brotherston's remarkable *A Key to the Mesoamerican Reckoning of Time: The Chronology Recorded in Native Texts*, British Museum Occasional Paper 38 (London: British Museum, 1982). For Schove's view, see his "On Maya Correlations and Calendar Reforms," *Current Anthropology* 18 (1977):749.

17. Gareth W. Lowe, "Algunos Resultados de la Temporada 1961 en Chiapa de Corzo, Chiapas," *Estudios de Cultura Maya* 2 (1962):185–96; Joyce Marcus, "The Origins of Mesoamerican Writing," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 5 (1976):49–51.

18. Tatiana Proskouriakoff, "Historical Implications of a Pattern of Dates at Piedras Negras, Guatemala," *American Antiquity* 25 (1960): 454–75; Robert L. Rands, "The Classic Collapse in the Southern Maya Lowlands: Chronology," in *The Classic Maya Collapse*, ed. T. Patrick Culbert (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1973), pp. 48–53, John p. Molloy and William L. Rathje, "Sexploitation among the Late Classic Maya," in *Mesoamerican Archaeology, New Approaches*, ed. Norman Hammond (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1974), pp. 431–44.

19. A general introduction: Willard F. Libby, "Radiocarbon Dating," *Endeavour* 13 (1954):5–16. Updates: Joseph W. Michels, *Dating Methods in Archaeology* (New York: Seminar Press, 1973); and E. K. Ralph, H. N.

Michael, and M. C. Han, "Radiocarbon Dates and Reality," *MASCA Newsletter* (Philadelphia: University Museum, University of Pennsylvania) 9, no. 1 (August 1973):1–20.

20. Michels, *Dating Methods*.

21. Ralph et al., "Radiocarbon Dates," p. 1.

22. Michels, *Dating Methods*.

23. Ibid.; Daniel Wolfman, "A Re-evaluation of Mesoamerican Chronology: A.D. 1–1200" (Ph.D. diss., University of Colorado, 1973), chap. 5.

24. Lyle Campbell and Terrence Kaufman, "A Linguistic Look at the Olmecs," *American Antiquity* 41 (1976):80–9.

25. Morris Swadesh, "Lexicostatistic Classification," *HMAI* 5 (1960), pp. 79–115; idem, "Diffusional Cumulation and Archaic Residue as Historical Explanation," *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 7 (1951):1–21. The criticisms are summarized by Campbell in *American Anthropologist* 80 (1978):159–61, but he overplays the objections.

26. Data for this example were drawn from the book by my teachers, Ralph L. Beals and Harry Hoijer, *An Introduction to Anthropology*, 4th ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1971), pp. 490, 487.

27. Terrence Kaufman, *Idiomas de Mesoamerica* (Guatemala: Editorial Jose de Pineda Ibarra y Ministerio de Educacion, 1974). Much of the same information appears in English in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th ed., in Kaufman's article on "Languages: Mesoamerica."

28. Early figures in the argument were Hugh Nibley and Sidney Sperry. The former believes that the Nephite record was kept in the Egyptian language, a view supported by Robert F. Smith. See *Lehi in the Desert and the World of the Jaredites* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1952), pp. 13–19. Sperry held that Hebrew was used: *Our Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1950), pp. 30–33. The latter view is more persuasive to me and most students of the subject today, although not without its difficulties.

29. Welch, "Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon (1981)"; Tvedtnes, "Hebraisms."

30. A. L. Kroeber, *Anthropology*, rev. ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1948), p. 512. Kroeber's explanation of the Egyptian and related systems is unusually clear. See pp. 371–72 and 509–14.

31. C. F. and F. M. Voegelin, "Typological Classification of Systems with Included, Excluded and Self-sufficient Alphabets," *Anthropological Linguistics* 3 (1961):68–80. Also see Marshall Durbin, "Linguistics and Writing Systems," *Estudios de Cultura Maya* 7 (1968):49–57.

32. Voegelin and Voegelin, "Typological Classification," p. 75.

33. J. E. S. Thompson, "Maya Hieroglyphic Writing," in *HMAI* 3 (1965), p. 646.

34. Kroeber, *Anthropology*, p. 514.

35. John Tvedtnes, "Linguistic Implications of the Tel-Arad Ostraca," *Society for Early Historical Archaeology, Newsletter and Proceedings* 127 (1971):1-5; J. W. Crowfoot and G. M. Crowfoot, "The Ivories from Samaria," *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*, o.s. (January 1933):13. Compare Voegelin and Voegelin, "Typological Classification," p. 75.

36. Linda Miller Van Blerkom, "A Comparison of Maya and Egyptian Hieroglyphs," *Katunob* 11 (August 1978):1-8.

37. "Calendar Animals and Deities," *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 16 (1960):325-29; also H. A. Moran and David H. Kelley, *The Alphabet and the Ancient Calendar Signs* (Palo Alto: Pacific Books, 1967).

38. Never fully reported in print, but summarized in A. M. Reed, *Ancient Past of Mexico* (New York: Crown, 1966), p. 10; and *SEHA Newsletter* 112 (February 1969):4-5. R. F. Smith's unpublished work contains the widened version; a copy is in my possession. Brian Stubbs has produced a lengthy report, "Observations in Uto-Aztecan" (1983), on file in the archives of the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies in Provo, Utah. The report compares Semitic and Uto-Aztecan languages on a wide range of features.

39. Barry Fell, *America B.C.: Ancient Settlers in the New World* (New York: Quadrangle/The New York Times, Book Co., 1976). I reviewed it in *BYU Studies* (Summer 1977), too optimistically. The review by E. S. Rowlett in *Archaeology* 31 (March-April 1978):64-65 agrees generally with my current judgment.

40. Carmack, *Toltec Influence*, pp. 71-72.

41. Carleton S. Coon, *The Living Races of Man* (New York: Knopf, 1965), pp. 79-80; C. C. Seltzer, *Contributions to the Racial Anthropology of the Near East*, HUPM 16, no. 2 (1940), pp. 5-9, 11, 60, plates 1, 3.

42. Terrence Kaufman, "Archaeological and Linguistic Correlations in Mayaland and Associated Areas of Meso-America," *World Archaeology* 8 (1976):114-16.

43. Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, pp. 238-42.

44. Richard W. Kirsch, *Mound A-VI-6: A Terminal Formative Burial Site and Early Postclassic House Platforms*, PSUO 9 (1973), p. 328. Compare Michel's statement quoted on p. 280.

45. At Coe's La Victoria site, between "Conchas I" and "II." Dee F. Green and Gareth W. Lowe, *Altamira and Padre Piedra, Early Preclassic Sites in Chiapas, Mexico*, NWAf 20 (1967), p. 73; Lowe, personal communication, 1977. Compare Susanna M. Ekholm, "Mound 30a and the Preclassic Ceramic Sequence of Izapa, Chiapas, Mexico," in WAF no. 25 (1969), pp. 97-98.

46. *Current Anthropology* 15 (June 1974):180.

47. My piece "An Apparent Relationship," p. 245.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 253.

49. Coon, *Living Races*, pp. 152-54 and plates 17-29.

50. Ricardo Ferre D'Amare, "The Origins of the American Indian: A Reappraisal," *Actas, 41a Congreso Internacional de Americanistas, Mexico, 1974*, vol. 1 (Mexico, 1975), pp. 166–71.

51. Alexander von Wuthenau, *The Art of Terracotta Pottery in Pre-Columbia Central and South America* (New York: Crown, 1969); idem, *Unexpected Faces in Ancient America (1500 B.C.–A.D. 1500): The Historical Testimony of Pre-Columbian Artists* (New York: Crown, 1975).

52. "Son los Amerindios un Grupo Biologicamente Homogeneo?" *Cuadernos Americanos* 152 (May-June 1967):117–25. The major literature of the homogenecists versus the diversicists is cited in Comas's valuable summary in his *Antropología de los Pueblos Ibero-Americanos* (Barcelona: Editorial Labor, S. A., 1974), pp. 35–42. See also in that volume his "Paso de Caucasoides Prehistoricos por el Atlantico Septentrional," pp. 52ff. Compare W. O. Hill, "The Soft Anatomy of a North American Indian," *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 21 (September 1963):245–64. Hill concluded, after a unique study of the cadaver of a Cherokee Indian, that "no real evidence is elicited indicative of Mongoloid features. The theory of Brinton that America was peopled by migration from Europe [very anciently] is supported, so far as it goes, by the evidence of the soft parts" (p. 263).

53. G. Albin Matson et al. "Distribution of Hereditary Blood Groups among Indians in South America." IV. In Chile, *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 27 (1967):188.

54. *Men out of Asia* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1947).

55. Andrzej Wiercinski, "Inter- and Intrapopulational Racial Differentiation of Tlatilco, Cerro de las Mesas, Teotihuacan, Monte Alban and Yucatan Maya," *Actas, Documentos y Memorias, 36a Congreso Internacional de Americanistas, Lima, 1970*, vol. 1 (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 1972), pp. 231–48. Also his "Afinidades Raciales de Algunas Poblaciones Antiguas de Mexico," *Anales, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1972–1973* (Mexico, 1975), pp. 123–44.

56. Robert Chadwick, "The Archaeology of a New World Merchant Culture" (Ph.D. diss., Tulane University, 1974).

57. F. W. McBryde, *Cultural and Historical Geography of Southwest Guatemala*, *SISA* 4 (1945), p. 9.

58. Bernal Diaz del Castillo, *The Bernal Diaz Chronicles*, trans. and ed. Albert Idell (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1956), p. 227.

59. J. E. S. Thompson, ed., *Thomas Gage's Travels in the New World* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958), pp. 149, 94.

60. McBryde, *Cultural and Historical Geography*, p. 9; Hugh Nibley, *Since Cumorah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1967), p. 247.

61. William F. Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity*, 2nd ed. (Garden City, New York: Doubleday [Anchor Books], 1957), p. 166.

62. Compare Nibley, *Since Cumorah*, pp. 246–51. Some of his

interpretations on this point are subject to caution because they are based on slim information, but the general thrust is probably sound.

63. C. C. Di Peso, *Casas Grandes: A Fallen Trading Center of the Gran Chichimeca*, vols. 1–3, *Amerind Foundation Series* 9 (Flagstaff, Arizona: Northland Press, 1974); J. C. Kelley, “Mesoamerica and the Southwestern United States,” in *HMAI* 4 (1964), pp. 95–110; B. C. Hedrick et al., *The Mesoamerican Southwest* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1974).

64. C. H. Webb, “The Extent and Content of Poverty Point Culture,” *American Antiquity* 33 (1968), pp. 297–321; C. R. Wicke, “Pyramids and Temple Mounds: Mesoamerican Ceremonial Architecture in Eastern North America,” *American Antiquity* 30 (1965):409–20; James B. Griffin, “Mesoamerica and the Eastern United States in Prehistoric Times,” in *HMAI* 4 (1964), pp. 111–32.

65. For example, Betty J. Meggers, “Cultural Development in Latin America: An Interpretative Overview,” in *Aboriginal Cultural Development in Latin America: An Interpretative Review*, ed. Betty J. Meggers and Clifford Evans, *Smithsonian Institution Miscellaneous Collections* 146, no. 1 (Washington, 1963), pp. 131–40.

Chapter 3

1. Michael D. Coe, *America's First Civilization: Discovering the Olmec* (New York: American Heritage Publishing Co. in association with The Smithsonian Institution, 1968), p. 12.

2. Robert S. Harris, “The Indigenous Plants of Latin America,” *International Review of Vitamin Research* 23 (1952):404–14.

3. Opinions differ on “the gods.” Ignacio Bernal maintains that many of what he considers the recognizable gods of later Mesoamerica “were really invented in the valley of Oaxaca” (my proposed land of Moron), yet Tatiana Proskouriakoff takes a different line regarding the Maya: “There probably were many small local gods, but the notion that the Maya civilization had a great many gods, I think, is completely wrong. We never have gods represented before the Post-Classic period, by which time there is a great proliferation of idols. In neither the Teotihuacan culture nor that of the Classic Maya, nor in any of the earlier cultures, was there really what you might call an idol or god that we could identify. But they do have these . . . symbols which are combined and recombined in various ways, I think to represent cosmic entities.” Elizabeth p. Benson, ed., *Dumbarton Oaks Conference on the Olmec* (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 1968), pp. 142, 176. Noted Mayanist J. E. S. Thompson said: “I have come to believe that the Mayas of the Classic epoch were close to having a monotheistic cult; they had a supreme god, with his assistants who were lesser gods; but the idea of a

single god was very advanced." (Interview in *El Heraldo*, Mexico City, January 27, 1972).

4. George C. Vaillant, *The Aztecs of Mexico* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1950), p. 200. This is one of the best-written sources for the beginning student, although substantially out of date on details.

5. Edward E. Calnek, "The Internal Structure of Cities in America; Pre-Columbian Cities: The Case of Tenochtitlan," *Actas y Memorias, 34a Congreso, Internacional de Americanistas, Lima, 1970*, vol. 2 (Lima, 1972), pp. 347–58.

6. William T. Sanders and Barbara J. Price, *Mesoamerica: The Evolution of a Civilization* (New York: Random House, 1968), pp. 151, 189–93, 209.

7. Henry F. Dobyns, "Estimating Aboriginal Population: An Appraisal of Techniques with a New Hemispheric Estimate," *Current Anthropology* 7 (1966):395–416.

8. A sound, brief introduction to Inca life is in Luis G. Lumbreras, *The Peoples and Cultures of Ancient Peru* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1976).

9. A short, fairly typical introduction to hemispheric prehistory is Thomas C. Patterson, *America's Past* (Glenview, Illinois: Scott Foresman, 1973).

10. Coe, *America's First Civilization*, pp. 73–89.

11. David C. Grove, "The Highland Olmec Manifestation: A Consideration of What It Is and Isn't," in *Mesoamerican Archaeology: New Approaches*, ed. Norman Hammond (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1974), pp. 109–28; Gareth W. Lowe, *The Early Preclassic Barra Phase of Altamira, Chiapas*, NAWAF 38 (1975); Norman Hammond, "The Earliest Maya," *Scientific American* 236 (March 1977):116–17.

12. Much of the current professional literature uses outdated, or at least inexact, chronology. The most detailed published source at the moment is R. E. Taylor and C. W. Meighan, eds., *Chronologies in the New World* (New York: Academic Press, 1978), which includes a paper by Gareth Lowe on "Eastern Mesoamerica." More complete and internally consistent than anything else at the moment, despite some problems, is my "A Mesoamerican Chronology: April 1977," based on an earlier working paper, "Mesoamerican C-14 Dates Revised." Both were published, without my permission, in *Katunob: A Newsletter-Bulletin on Mesoamerican Anthropology* 9, no. 4 (February 1977). This is one in a long series of updatings of my *A Chronological Ordering of the Mesoamerican Pre-Classic*, MARI 18 (1955), pp. 41–70. A new monograph-length treatment is in preparation.

13. "The Transpacific Origin of Mesoamerican Civilization: A Preliminary Review of the Evidence and Its Theoretical Implications," *American Anthropologist* 77 (1975), pp. 1–27.

14. Betty J. Meggers, "Cultural Development in Latin America: An

Interpretative Overview," in *Aboriginal Cultural Development in Latin America: An Interpretative Review*, ed. Betty J. Meggers and Clifford Evans, *Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collections* 146, no. 1 (1963), pp. 132, 139, compare 79–80.

15. C. Evans and B. J. Meggers. "Transpacific Origin of Valdivia Phase Pottery of Coastal Ecuador," *Actas, 36a Congreso Internacional de Americanistas, Sevilla, 1964*, vol. 1 (Sevilla, 1966), pp. 63–67. Critics of their view claim that the ceramic similarities are coincidences.

16. Carl L. Hubbs and Gunnar I. Roden, "Oceanography and Marine Life along the Pacific Coast of Middle America," in *HMAI* 1 (1964), pp. 148, 154–55.

17. Paul Tolstoy, "Mesoamerica," in *Prehispanic America*, ed. Shirley Gorenstein (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1974), p. 38.

18. See articles and bibliographical references to their work in Carroll L. Riley et al., eds., *Man Across the Sea: Problems of Pre-Columbian Contacts* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971). Also see references in article cited in note 19.

19. "Prehistoric Transpacific Contact and the Theory of Culture Change," *American Anthropologist* 79 (1977):9–25.

20. "The Significance of an Apparent Relationship between the Ancient Near East and Mesoamerica," in Riley et al., *Man Across the Sea*, pp. 219–41, which is dealt with by Schneider on his page 19. The same material was compressed somewhat, with documentation omitted, in "Ancient America and the Book of Mormon Revisited," *Dialogue* 4 (1969):80–94.

21. Most of the literature assumes this point, but suitable documentation of it is rare. Good examples are Richard S. MacNeish, "Ancient Mesoamerican Civilization," *Science* 143 (February 7, 1964):531–45, and Peter T. Furst, "Morning Glory and Mother Goddess at Tepantitla, Teotihuacan: Iconography and Analogy in Pre-Columbian Art," in Norman Hammond, ed., *Mesoamerican Archaeology: New Approaches* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1974), pp. 187–91.

22. Henri Frankfort, *The Birth of Civilization in the Near East* (New York: Doubleday, Anchor Books, 1956), pp. vii and appendix.

23. Coe, *America's First Civilization*, idem, "San Lorenzo and the Olmec Civilization," in Benson, *Dumbarton Oaks Conference*, pp. 41–78.

24. Ignacio Bernal, *The Olmec World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), p. 195.

25. Benson, *Dumbarton Oaks Conference*, p. 39.

26. Gareth W. Lowe, "The Mixe-Zoque as Competing Neighbors of the Early Lowland Maya," in *The Origins of Maya Civilization*, ed. R. E. W. Adams (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1977), pp. 230–39.

27. G. C. Vaillant, *Excavations at Ticoman, American Museum of Natural History, Anthropological Papers* 32, part 2 (New York, 1931).

28. Harold W. McBride, "The Extent of the Chupicuaro Tradition," in *The Natalie Wood Collection of Pre-Columbian Ceramics from Chupicuaro, Guanajuato, Mexico, at UCLA*, ed. J. D. Frierman (Los Angeles: University of California, Los Angeles, Museum and Laboratories of Ethnic Arts and Technology, 1969), pp. 33–49; J. A. Bennyhoff, "Chronology and Periodization," *Teotihuacan: Onceava Mesa Redonda* (Mexico: Sociedad Mexicana de Antropologia, 1966), pp. 23–24.

29. Bernal, *The Olmec World*, p. 112.

30. Joyce Marcus, "The Origins of Mesoamerican Writing," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 5 (1976):35–67. The thesis of an Olmec origin for writing and the calendar is not as well established as Marcus' enthusiasm makes out, but it is likely. See especially Vincent Malmström, "A Reconstruction of the Chronology of Mesoamerican Calendrical Systems," *Journal for the History of Astronomy* 9 (1978):105–16.

31. For a generation the scholars agreed on a date in the vicinity of 3100 B.C. for the first appearance of the ziggurat, but radiocarbon dating has now pushed the first occurrence back a bit more. James Mellaart, "Egyptian and Near Eastern Chronology: A Dilemma?" *Antiquity* 53 (1979):6–18; 54 (1980):225–27.

32. All Jaredite dates are from my paper "The Years of the Jaredites," read at a conference on the Book of Mormon at BYU in 1972 but unpublished until made available as a Preliminary Report in 1984 by the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, Provo, Utah.

33. Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert and the World of the Jaredites* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1952), pp. 238–47.

34. The putative ancestor of Zarahemla, Mulek, was held to be a son of Zedekiah, king over Judah until taken captive by the Babylonians in 586 B.C., while he was still in his early thirties. "Mulek" would have been a child at most. We do not know how long his party took to arrive in the New World, but the implication of Omni 1:15–16 is that they did not delay long.

35. Only in recent years has the early occurrence of war in Mesoamerica been recognized, and its scope is still not appreciated even among most Mesoamerican experts. See particularly David L. Webster, *Defensive Earthworks at Becan, Campeche, Mexico: Implications for Maya Warfare*, MARI 41 (1976), pp. 103–13.

36. Theirs may not have been the only transatlantic voyage about that time. See Constance Irwin, *Fair Gods and Stone Faces* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1963).

37. Gareth W. Lowe and J. Alden Mason, "Archaeological Survey of the Chiapas Coast, Highlands, and Upper Grijalva Basin," in HMAI 2

(1965), pp. 217–18. Also see an unpublished paper by Bruce W. Warren, “The Central Depression of Chiapas: Its Role within the Evolution of Mesoamerican Civilization,” pp. 20–21, in my possession.

38. “On Tlapacoya and Tikal,” Bruce W. Warren, personal communications; on “Altar de Sacrificios,” R. E. W. Adams, *The Ceramics of Altar de Sacrificios*, HUPM 63, no. 1 (1971), p. 147. Also the paper by Warren mentioned in note 37.

39. Edwin M. Shook and Alfred V. Kidder, *Mound E-III-3, Kaminaljuyu, Guatemala*, CIWP 53 (1952), p. 45 and figure 56.

40. Some continuity in concept is exhibited from latest Olmec-period centers (for example, Izapa and Tzutzuculi) to ceremonial centers of later times, as Andrew J. McDonald has shown in an unpublished paper. No capable Mesoamericanist would question this point in general. But a very different concept of “ceremonial precinct” may be seen at Kaminaljuyu in the “Majadas-Providencia” phase, from 550–125 B.C., involving conical burial mounds arranged along a “street-like plaza” functioning as “a ritual center for the funeral of an elite element in the population.” William T. Sanders and Joseph W. Michels, *Kaminaljuyu Project—1968 Season. Part 1. The Excavations*, PSUO 2 (1969), pp. 165–66. However, Shook and Proskouriakoff think that Sanders and Michels did not see things straight and that the early arrangement at Kaminaljuyu is not notably different. Tatiana Proskouriakoff, “Early Architecture and Sculpture in Mesoamerica,” in *Observations on the Emergence of Civilization in Mesoamerica*, ed. Robert F. Heizer and John A. Graham, UCAR 11 (1971), p. 145.

41. William T. Sanders, *Ceramic Stratigraphy at Santa Cruz, Chiapas, Mexico*, NWAf 13 (1961), p. 53; Lowe and Mason, *Archaeological Survey*, pp. 217–18.

42. Agustin Delgado, *Excavations at Santa Rosa, Chiapas, Mexico*, NWAf 17 (1965), pp. 77–78.

43. On volcanism near San Salvador and also the Chalchuapa zone, Payson D. Sheets, “An Ancient Natural Disaster,” *Expedition* 14 (Fall 1971):24–31; R. J. Trotter, “Unravelling a Mayan Mystery,” *Science News* 111 (20 January 1977):74–78; Stanley H. Boggs, *Pottery Jars from the Loma del Tacuazin, El Salvador*, MARI 28 (1967); Payson D. Sheets, “Preliminary Results of Research in the Zapotitan Basin, El Salvador,” *Mexicon* 1, no. 2 (May 15, 1979):15–17. Sheets’ chronology of the eruption is not consistent in various reports, apparently being based on too little absolute dating information to be conclusive yet, despite his sometimes sounding certain. On Tres Zapotes’ volcanic indicators, Michael D. Coe, *Archaeological Synthesis of Southern Vera Cruz and Tabasco*, HMAI 3 (1965), p. 695. For the valley of Mexico, Rene Millon and James A. Bennyhoff, “A Long Architectural Sequence at Teotihuacan,” *American Antiquity* 26

(1961):518–19; and “Noticias de los Museos, Pieza del Mes,” *Boletín INAH* (Marzo 1968):51.

44. The argument is presented in my “A Chronological Ordering,” pp. 53, 57, with citations to the literature.

45. Laurette Sejourné, “El Simbolismo de los Rituales Funerarios en Monte Alban,” *Revista Mexicana de Estudios Antropológicos* 16 (1960):85–90. See also note 52.

46. Example: Ignacio Bernal, “Archaeological Synthesis of Oaxaca,” in *HMAI*, vol. 3 (1965), p. 801.

47. Millon and Bennyhoff, “Sequence at Teotihuacan.”

48. René Millon, *The Teotihuacan Map*, vol. 1 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1973), p. 56; Daniel Wolfman, “A Re-evaluation of Mesoamerican Chronology, A.D. 1–1200” (Ph.D. diss., University of Colorado, 1973), p. 30.

49. George Kubler, *The Iconography of the Art of Teotihuacan*, *Dumbarton Oaks Studies in Pre-Columbian Art and Archaeology* 4 (1967), pp. 12–13.

50. My treatment—rather “historical” in its concern with the sequence of specific events—is not the most popular right now. A good deal of current writing on Mesoamerica adopts a cultural ecological position. See, for instance, William T. Sanders’ and Barbara J. Price’s very popular volume *Mesoamerica: The Evolution of a Civilization* (New York: Random House, 1968). A valuable critique of the ecological position is the review of that book by Paul Tolstoy in *American Anthropologist* 71 (1969):554–58. Their approach essentially ignores historical details to lump data into broad stages arranged in chronological order to show increasing scale (“evolution”) in society. A parallel would be if physicians were to tabulate records on the height, weight, and caloric intake of a person from infancy to death and then say that they had produced a biography. The evolutionary, ecological, determinist approach usually ignores chronological niceties of the kind that those interested in history consider vital. On the latter point, see the review in *American Antiquity* 43 (January 1978):127 by Warwick Bray of a volume on the valley of Mexico influenced by Sanders and Price. It is said to suffer from the same inadequacies, from the historical point of view, as their book. These comments should not, however, be taken to mean that I think there is no value in that approach. It supplements, but does not replace, a detailed treatment of events with careful specification of places, peoples, and forces in complex, chronological interplay.

51. The sharp peak occurs in *Early Tlamimilolpa* (A.D. 200–300). W. T. Levey, “Early Teotihuacan, An Achieving Society,” *University of the Americas, Mesoamerican Notes* 7–8 (1966), p. 52. Compare what is said of Periods II and Transición at Monte Alban, which together occupy the third century: “The intense power and individuality of Epoch II naturally flowed into the First Epoch of Transition, which succeeded it.” And there

is “an astonishing monumentality in the design of the urns” and “great force and sensitivity” in this “apogee of Oaxacan art.” F. H. Boos, *The Ceramic Sculptures of Ancient Oaxaca* (South Brunswick, New Jersey: A. S. Barnes and Co., 1966), p. 23.

52. Enrique Fiorescano, “La Serpiente Emplumada, Tlaloc y Quetzalcoatl,” *Cuadernos Americanos* 133 (no. 2, March-April 1964):121–66.

53. Furst, “Morning Glory and Mother Goddess,” pp. 196–201.

54. Ignacio Bernal, “Discurso Pronunciado durante la Visita del Sr. Presidente de la Republica a la Zona Arqueologica de San Juan Teotihuacan,” *Boletín INAH* 17 (September 1964):4. Arguments by Millon and others that the carbon dates on which Bernal’s statement was based are not to be accepted were examined by Daniel Wolfman in “A Re-evaluation of Mesoamerican Chronology: A.D. 1–1200” (Ph.D. diss., University of Colorado, 1973), pp. 35–38, and countered on persuasive grounds. Also, an attempted enlargement of the Pyramid of the Sun after A.D. 400 resulted only in some incomplete foundations. Rene Milton, “The Teotihuacan Map,” *Urbanization at Teotihuacan, Mexico*, vol. 1 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1973), caption to figure 17a.

55. William T. Sanders, *The Cultural Ecology of the Teotihuacan Valley: A Preliminary Report of the Results of the Teotihuacan Valley Project* (State College, Pennsylvania: Department of Sociology and Anthropology, 1965), pp. 179, 183. The date was around A.D. 450.

56. Samuel K. Lothrop, *Treasures of Ancient America* (Geneva: Editions d’Art Albert Skira, 1964), p. 107.

57. Webster, *Defensive Earthworks*, p. 6.

58. Pierre Agrinier, *Mounds 9 and 10 at Mirador, Chiapas, Mexico*, NWAf 39 (1975), p. 9.

59. Ray T. Matheny, “Teotihuacan Influence in the Chenes and Rio Bec Areas of the Yucatan Peninsula, Mexico,” in *Las Fronteras de Mesoamerica: Las Memorias de la 14a Mesa Redonda*, vol. 2 (Mexico: Sociedad Mexicana de Antropologia, 1976).

60. Joseph W. Ball, *The Archaeological Ceramics of Becan, Campeche, Mexico* MARI 43 (1977), p. 170.

61. See appendix and chart to my “A Mesoamerican Chronology, April 1977.”

62. Gordon R. Willey, “The Classic Maya Hiatus: A Rehearsal for the Collapse?” in *Mesoamerican Archaeology: New Approaches*, ed. Norman Hammond (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1974), pp. 417–30.

63. Lothrop, *Treasures of Ancient America*, pp. 96–107; J. E. S. Thompson, “Archaeological Synthesis of the Southern Maya Lowlands,” in HMAI 3 (1965), p. 343.

Chapter 4

1. 1 Nephi 17:1–8; 18:8; Lynn and Hope Hilton, *In Search of Lehi's Trail* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), pp. 105–15.
2. A. M. Tozzer, ed., *Landa's Relacion de las Cosas de Yucatan*, HUPM 18 (1941), p. 196.
3. Ibid.
4. Felix W. McBryde, *Cultural and Historical Geography of Southwest Guatemala*, SISA 4 (1945), p. 148.
5. Ibid., p. 33. Medel also wrote that Indians of the hotter areas were of darker skin than uplanders, who appeared but little different from the Spaniards. Cited in McBryde, p. 9. That the dark skin “mark” placed on the Lamanites could have sprung in part from intermarriage of the earliest of them with an already resident people is a possibility.
6. Of the Guatemala/Nephi area, A. C. and A. p. Maudslay said in *A Glimpse at Guatemala* (London, 1899), p. 24: “The climate seemed to be absolutely perfect, and the brilliant blue sky, the bright sun, shaded now and again by the fleecy clouds one associates with the trade wind, the temperature never too hot or too cold, and the delicious freshness in the air stirred by gentle breezes all together produced in me a feeling of exhilaration I never thought to experience in a tropical country. It all sounds too good to be true, but it is no exaggerated description of the climate.”
7. G. E. Wright, “In the Days of Israel's Glory,” in *Everyday Life in Bible Times* (Washington: National Geographic Society, 1967), pp. 20–27; Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions* (London: McGraw-Hill, 1961), pp. 274–75, 282–87, 313–25; cf. Ezekiel 43:1–17.
8. F. J. Hollis, *The Sun-Cult and the Temple at Jerusalem: Myth and Ritual* (London, 1933); Julius Morgenstern, *The Fire upon the Altar* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1963).
9. Laurette Sejourne, “El Templo Prehispanico,” *Cuadernos Americanos* 149 (November–December 1966):143, citing Torquemada and giving her own picture throughout the article.
10. Joseph W. Michels, “Political Organization at Kaminaljuyu: Its Implications for Interpreting Teotihuacan Influence,” in *Teotihuacan and Kaminaljuyu: A Study in Prehistoric Culture Contact*, ed. William T. Sanders and Joseph W. Michels (State University, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1977), pp. 451–67. Michels stretches his evidence a bit thin, but his general idea is well supported.
11. William T. Sanders, “The Settlement Pattern Test Trenches,” in *Kaminaljuyu Project—1968 Season. Part 1. The Excavations*. PSUO 2 (1969), p. 165.
12. See references in my article “The Significance of an Apparent Relationship between the Ancient Near East and Mesoamerica,” in *Man*

Across the Sea, ed. Carroll L. Riley et al. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), pp. 229–30.

13. Lawrence H. Feldman, “Tollan in Central Mexico: The Geography of Economic Specialization,” *Katunob* 8, no. 3 (February 1973):3.

14. Marie K. Freddolino, “An Investigation into the ‘Pre-Tarascan’ Cultures of Zacapu, Michoacan, Mexico” (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1973).

15. Richard A. Shutler, Jr., and Mary E. Shutler, *Oceanic Prehistory* (Menlo Park: Cummings, 1975), p. 86; D. R. Simmons, *The Great New Zealand Myth: A Study of the Discovery and Origin Tradition of the Maori* (Wellington: A. H. and A. W. Reed, 1976).

16. “When Was Rome Really Built?” *Christian Science Monitor*, March 10, 1976, p. 6. For other fast historical footwork, this time from Africa, see I. G. Cunnison, *History on the Luapala* (London: Oxford University Press, 1951).

17. Suggestive relationships between the Mulekite journey and Mesoamerican traditions are discussed in my article “The Twig of the Cedar,” *Improvement Era* 60 (1957):330ff.; reprinted as “Bible Prophecies of the Mulekites” in *A Book of Mormon Treasury* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1959), pp. 229–37.

18. An interesting discussion of Stela 3 is in Miguel Covarrubias, *Indian Art of Mexico and Central America* (New York: Knopf, 1957), p. 77. An artist’s restoration of the scene is found in Michael D. Coe, *America’s First Civilization: Discovering the Olmec* (New York: American Heritage Publishing Co. and Smithsonian Institution, 1968), p. 59. Tatiana Prouskouriakoff notes of the scene, “The implication is that these figures represent two racially distinct groups of people, and it is suggested that the group of the bearded stranger ultimately gained ascendance and erased the portrait of the native ruler.” “Olmec and Maya Art: Problems of Their Stylistic Relation,” in *Dumbarton Oaks Conference on the Olmec*, ed. Elizabeth Benson (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 1968), p. 122.

19. John L. Sorenson, “A Mesoamerican Chronology: April 1977,” *Katunob* 9 (February 1977):41–55.

20. The “Phoenician” material is in Constance Irwin’s book *Fair Gods and Stone Faces* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1963), pp. 171–75.

21. The statement in 2 Kings 25:7, “And they slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes . . .,” obviously poses a problem for the Book of Mormon’s claim that Mulek was a surviving son. The only possible answer, given by me in the *Improvement Era* article cited above, as well as by Dr. Sidney Sperry in several places, is that Mulek must have been an infant whom loyalists saved from death. Zedekiah was only 32 when deposed (2 Chronicles 36:11), and of course he had more than one wife, in the pattern of Jewish kings, so all his children would have been young, and more than one would have been a concealable infant. New

information suggests that Mulek may in fact be mentioned elsewhere. See "Is Mulek Mentioned in the Bible?" Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies *Update* (June 1984), p. 1.

22. Terrence Kaufman, "Archaeological and Linguistic Correlations in Mayaland and Associated Areas of Meso-America," *World Archaeology* 8 (1976):104; Gareth W. Lowe, "The Mixe-Zoque as Competing Neighbors of the Early Maya," in *The Origins of Maya Civilization*, ed. Richard W. Adams (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1977), pp. 199–201.

23. Lyle Campbell and Terrence Kaufman, "A Linguistic Look at the Olmecs," *American Antiquity* 41 (1976):80–88.

24. Donald L. Brockington, *The Ceramic History of Santa Rosa, Chiapas, Mexico*, NWAf 23 (1967), p. 68; Gareth W. Lowe, Thomas A. Lee, Jr., and Eduardo Martinez Espinosa, "Izapa: An Introduction to the Ruins and Monuments," in NWAf 31 (1982), pp. 10–15.

25. Ibid. A. Delgado, *Archaeological Research at Santa Rosa, Chiapas*, NWAf 17 (1965), pp. 3, 79.

26. Brockington, *Ceramic History*, pp. 60–61. Cf. Levi-Straussian structuralism?

27. Ibid.

28. Rene Millon, *The Teotihuacan Map*, vol. 1 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1973), p. 40; John Paddock, *Problemas Comunes de la Lingüística y la Arqueología en Oaxaca*, INAH, Centro Regional de Oaxaca, Serie Conferencias 4 (1976), pp. 1, 7.

29. M. E. Smith, "State Systems of Settlement: Response to Crumley"; and C. L. Crumley, "Reply to Smith," *American Anthropologist* 79 (1977):903–6 and 906–8, respectively. Details about the comparative size of San Jose Mogote are conveniently given in Marcus C. Winter, "Differential Patterns of Community Growth in Oaxaca," in *The Early Mesoamerican Village*, ed. Kent V. Flannery (New York: Academic Press, 1976), pp. 237–43.

30. Anthony F. Aveni, *Archaeoastronomy in Precolumbian America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1975); idem, *Native American Astronomy* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1977); Ray A. Williamson, ed., *Archaeoastronomy in the Americas*, Ballena Press Anthropological Papers no. 22 (Los Altos, California: Ballena Press, 1981).

31. W. R. Bullard, Jr., "Settlement Patterns and Social Structure in the Southern Maya Lowlands During the Classic Period," *Actas y Memorias, 35a Congreso Internacional de Americanistas, Mexico, 1962*, vol. 1 (Mexico, 1964), pp. 279–87; Stephan F. De Borhegyi, "Settlement Patterns in the Guatemalan Highlands: Past and Present," in *Prehistoric Settlement Patterns in the New World*, ed. Gordon R. Willey, *Viking Fund Publications in Anthropology*, no. 23 (New York, 1956), pp. 101–6. Even though this picture is undoubtedly idealized and somewhat inaccurate, it probably

does represent a frequent, if not typical, pattern. For a critique of the "ceremonial center" concept, see Marshall Becker, "Priests, Peasants, and Ceremonial Centers: The Intellectual History of a Model," in *Maya Archaeology and Ethnohistory*, ed. Norman Hammond and Gordon R. Willey (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979), pp. 3–20.

32. K. Koch, "ohel," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), pp. 119–20.

33. A. Haldar, *Who Were the Amorites?* (Leiden: Brill, 1971), p. 52.

34. A. Rothkoff, "Tabernacle," *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 15 (1972):679.

35. Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1957), pp. 207–9.

36. Bernal Diaz del Castillo, *The Bernal Diaz Chronicles*, trans. and ed. Albert Idell (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1956), p. 133.

37. Hugh Nibley, *Since Cumorah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1967), p. 398.

38. Eva Hunt, "Irrigation and the Socio-Political Organization of Cuicatec Cacicazgos," in *The Prehistory of the Tehuacan Valley*, vol. 4: *Chronology and Irrigation*, ed. Frederick Johnson (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1972), pp. 201–30, sheds invaluable light on the structure and function of rulership in pre-Columbian Mesoamerica.

39. Ignacio Bernal's comments, in *Dumbarton Oaks Conference on the Olmec*, ed. Elizabeth p. Benson (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 1975), pp. 72–77, expand the discussion on monument destruction.

40. Compare the discussion in G. R. Willey and D. B. Shimkin, "The Maya Collapse: A Summary View," in *The Classic Maya Collapse*, ed. T. p. Culbert (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1973), pp. 484–86.

41. McBryde, *Cultural and Historical Geography*, pp. 6–7.

42. Edward M. Shook, "Lugares Arqueologicos del Altiplano Meridional Central de Guatemala," *Antropologia e Historia de Guatemala* 4, no. 2 (June 1952):5.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

44. Richard J. Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972); William F. Albright, "The High Place in Ancient Palestine," *Supplements to Vetus Testamentum* (Leiden: Brill, 1957), pp. 242–58; A. Parrot, *Ziggurats et Tour de Babel* (Paris: 1949).

45. Jacquetta Hawkes, *The First Great Civilizations* (New York: Knopf, 1973), p. 122.

46. Andrzej Wiercinski, "Pyramids and Ziggurats as the Architectonic Representations of the Archetype of the Cosmic Mountain," *Katunob* 10 (September 1977):69–111.

47. Millon, *The Teotihuacan Map*, vol. 1, figure 17b.

48. Albright, "The High Place"; R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, pp. 284–85.

49. Clifford, *Cosmic Mountain*, pp. 49–50.

50. Doris Heyden, "An Interpretation of the Cave Underneath the Pyramid of the Sun in Teotihuacan, Mexico," *American Antiquity* 40 (1975):131–47.

51. William F. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan: A Historical Analysis of Two Contrasting Faiths* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1968), p. 24.

52. Bernal Diaz, *Chronicles*, p. 151.

53. J. E. S. Thompson, "The Role of Caves in Maya Culture," *Museum für Volkerkunde in Hamburg, Mitteilungen* 25 (1959):122–29; idem, *Maya History and Religion* (Norman: Oklahoma University Press, 1970), p. 184.

54. References are in my article "The Significance of an Apparent Relationship Between the Ancient Near East and Mesoamerica," in *Man Across the Sea*, ed. Carroll L. Riley et al. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), p. 227. See also Heyden, "An Interpretation," p. 141.

55. W. R. Farmer, "The Geography of Ezekiel's River of Life," *Biblical Archaeologist* 19 (1956):17–22; Ben Zion Luria, "And a Fountain Shall Come Forth from the House of the Lord," *Dor le Dor* 10, no. 1 (1981):48–58.

56. Note the linkage of "this temple" and "this mountain" as the Lord speaks to Nephi in Zarahemla (Helaman 10:8–9), which could reflect an aspect of ideas prevalent among the Nephites.

57. Ledyard Smith, *Archaeological Reconnaissance in Central Guatemala*, CIWP 608 (1955), p. 11.

58. Felix W. McBryde, "Studies in Guatemalan Meteorology (I): The Climates of Southwest Guatemala," *American Meteorological Society Bulletin* 23 (1942), pp. 259–60; idem, "Studies in Guatemalan Meteorology (II): Weather Types in Southwest Guatemala," *American Meteorological Society Bulletin* 23 (1942), pp. 400, 402.

59. George C. Shattuck, *The Peninsula of Yucatan: Medical, Biological, Meteorological and Sociological Studies*, CIWP 432 (1933), p. 22.

60. Daniel G. Brinton, *The Annals of the Cakchiquels* (Philadelphia, 1885), pp. 167, 192.

61. Shattuck, *Peninsula of Yucatan*, p. 22.

62. For example, G. N. Collins and C. B. Doyle, "Notes on Southern Mexico," *National Geographic Magazine* 22 (1911):315, on a botanical tour for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, found a variety of wheat growing on the hills above San Cristobal Las Casas, Chiapas, which they conjectured "is probably one grown here from very remote times."

63. McBryde, *Cultural and Historical Geography*, p. 27.

64. Daniel B. Adams, "Last Ditch Archaeology," *Science* 83 (December 1983):32. The species is a native American barley not hitherto known to botanists as a cultivar (personal communication, an Arizona State University archaeologist).

65. Jonathan D. Sauer, "The Grain Amaranths: A Survey of Their History and Classification," *Missouri Botanical Garden Annals* 37 (1950):561–632. George F. Carter, "Domesticates as Artifacts," in *The Human Mirror: Material and Spatial Images of Man*, ed. Miles Richardson (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1974), pp. 212–13.

66. R. F. Smith, "Some 'Neologisms' from the Mormon Canon," in *Conference on the Language of the Mormons, 1973* (Provo: BYU Language Research Center, 1973), p. 66.

67. *Fauna and Flora of the Bible* (London: United Bible Societies, 1972), p. 97.

68. Juan Pio Perez, *Diccionario de la Lengua Maya* (Merida, 1877), pp. 33–34 ("bul," "buul"); Alfredo Herbruger, Jr., and Eduardo Diaz Barrios, *Metodo para Aprender a Hablar, Leer y Escribir la Lengua Cakchiquel*, vol. 1 (Guatemala: 1956):165 ("boloss").

69. Norman A. McQuown, "Indigenous Languages of Native America," *American Anthropologist* 57 (1955):509.

70. McBryde, *Cultural and Historical Geography*, p. 144.

71. Tozzer, *Landa's Relacion*, p. 198, note 1079.

72. For example, Thomas Gage, in *Thomas Gage's Travels in the New World*, ed. J. E. S. Thompson (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958), p. 76.

73. McBryde, *Cultural and Historical Geography*, pp. 144–46. Thompson, ed., *Gage's Travels*, p. 76. Tozzer, *Landa's Relacion*, p. 198.

74. Diego Garcia de Palacio, *Relacion hecha . . . en la que Describe la Provincia de Guatemala* (1576), Squier edition (New York: 1860), p. 25.

75. J. E. S. Thompson, *Maya Hieroglyphic Writing: Introduction*, CIWP 589 (1950), pp. 110–11, 274–75; V. Garth Norman, *Izapa Sculpture, Part 2: Text*, NWAF 30 (1976), pp. 30–36, 225–28, and elsewhere; Jacinto Quirarte, "Tricephalic Units in Olmec, Izapan-Style, and Maya Art," in *The Olmec and Their Neighbors: Essays in Memory of Matthew W. Stirling*, ed. Elizabeth p. Benson (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 1981), pp. 289–308.

76. Thompson, *Maya Hieroglyphic Writing*, pp. 110–11, 274–75.

77. Clifford, *Cosmic Mountains*, pp. 52–54; Albright, "High Place," pp. 184–85; Howard Wallace, "Leviathan and the Beast in Revelation," in *The Biblical Archaeologist Reader*, eds. G. Ernest Wright and David Noel Freedman (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1961), pp. 290–98.

78. Albright, "High Place," pp. 248–50. De Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, p. 284.

79. John Bright, *A History of Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1959), p. 67.

Chapter 5

1. John Tvedtnes has discussed the evidence that the assembly and ceremony under Benjamin's direction were a version of the Israelite feast of the tabernacles: "The Nephite Feast of Tabernacles," in *Tinkling Cymbals: Essays in Honor of Hugh Nibley*, ed. and privately published by John W. Welch (Los Angeles, 1978). Available as Preliminary Report TVE-78 from the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (P.O. Box 7113, University Station, Provo, Utah 84602).

2. Henry F. Dobyns, "Estimating Aboriginal American Population: An Appraisal of Techniques with a New Hemispheric Estimate," *Current Anthropology* 7 (October 1966):395–416, with comments by others; William A. Haviland, "A New Population Estimate for Tikal, Guatemala," *American Antiquity* 34 (1969):429–33; E. B. Kurjack, *Prehistoric Lowland Maya Community and Social Organization: A Case Study at Dzibilchaltun, Yucatan, Mexico*, MARI 38 (1974), pp. ix–xi, 5–9, 15–17, 23–27, 94–98.

3. S. F. de Borhegyi, "Archaeological Synthesis of the Guatemala Highlands," in HMAI 3, part 1 (1965), p. 13; but he extends the duration of the heavy population unduly in the light of newer information.

4. Samuel K. Lothrop, *Atitlan*, CIWP 444 (1933), pp. 9–14.

5. Gareth W. Lowe, "The Civilizational Consequences of Varying Degrees of Agricultural and Ceramic Dependency within the Basic Ecosystems of Mesoamerica," in *Observations on the Emergence of Civilization in Mesoamerica*, ed. Robert F. Heizer and John A. Graham, UCAR 11 (1971), pp. 212–48.

6. Gareth W. Lowe and J. Alden Mason, "Archaeological Survey of the Chiapas Coast, Highlands, and Upper Grijalva Basin," in HMAI 2, part 1 (1965), p. 217.

7. T. Patrick Culbert, *The Ceramic History of the Central Highlands of Chiapas, Mexico*, NWAf 19 (1965), p. 79.

8. Carlos Navarrete, *Archaeological Explorations in the Region of the Frailesca, Chiapas, Mexico*, NWAf 7 (1960), pp. 15, 37.

9. Miguel Covarrubias, *Mexico South* (New York: Knopf, 1947), p. 89, reports an old man in Tabasco who completed in a week a trip to and from a town about sixty miles away, apparently walking nearly twenty miles per day.

10. Frederick A. Peterson, *Some Ceramics from Mirador, Chiapas, Mexico*, NWAf 15 (1963), pp. i, xii–xiv, 1–2.

11. Jorge Angulo V., "Un Posible Codice de El Mirador, Chiapas," in *Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (Mexico), Departamento de Prehistoria, Tecnología, Cuadernos* 4 (1970).

12. Pierre Agrinier, *Mounds 9 and 10 at Mirador, Chiapas, Mexico*, NWAf 39 (1975), pp. 3, 96.

13. Personal communications from Andrew McDonald, and unpublished reports, BYU-NWAF.

14. Thomas A. Lee, Jr., *Mound 4 Excavations at San Isidro, Chiapas, Mexico*, NWAF 34 (1974), pp. 1–4, 78.

15. Lawrence H. Feldman, “Languages of the Chiapas Coast and Interior in the Colonial Period, 1525–1820,” UCAR 18 (1973), p. 81.

16. R. F. Smith, personal communication.

17. Culbert, *Ceramic History*, p. 79.

18. G. C. Vaillant, *The Aztecs of Mexico* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1950), pp. 183, 186; J. E. S. Thompson, *Maya History and Religion* (Norman: Oklahoma University Press, 1970), p. 168; A. V. Kidder, “Introduction,” in *Uaxactun, Guatemala: Excavations of 1931–1937*, by A. L. Smith, CIWP 588 (1950), pp. 1–12.

19. This composite picture can be supplemented by studying such readable books as Michael D. Coe, *Mexico* (3rd ed.) and *The Maya*; Muriel p. Weaver, *The Aztecs, Maya, and Their Predecessors* (2nd ed.); and R. E. W. Adams, *Prehistoric Mesoamerica*. All are informative, even while they exhibit notable inaccuracies. Perhaps the widest perspective, because of its sweep into modern times, is provided by Eric Wolf’s *Sons of the Shaking Earth*. However, no existing book is up-to-date or presents a picture in terms I have used.

20. Gareth W. Lowe, “Burial Customs at Chiapa de Corzo,” in *Archaeological Burials at Chiapa de Corzo and Their Furniture*, by Pierre Agrinier, NWAF 16 (1964), pp. 71–72.

21. William A. Haviland, “Principles of Descent in Sixteenth Century Yucatan,” *Katunob* 8, no. 2 (December 1972):64.

22. In Hebrew, as pointed out to me by John Tvedtnes, personal communication.

23. Albright, *Yahweh*, pp. 124–44, 197–99.

24. *Ibid.*, pp. 142–43, 204–5.

25. See my “The Book of Mormon as a Mesoamerican Codex,” *Society for Early Historic Archaeology, Newsletter and Proceedings* 139 (1976), pp. 4–6.

26. References are in my paper “The Significance of an Apparent Relationship between the Ancient Near East and Mesoamerica,” in *Man Across the Sea*, ed. Carroll J. Riley et al. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), pp. 234–35.

27. Sylvanus G. Morley, *The Ancient Maya*, 2nd ed. (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1947), plate 28.

28. Felix W. McBryde, *Cultural and Historical Geography of Southwest Guatemala*, SISA 4 (1945), map 20 and plates 19–23.

29. *Ibid.*, map 20, plate 47, p. 179.

30. *Ibid.*, pp. 132, 168, 179–80.

31. Compare the striking symbols in Ezekiel 36:1; 43:1–2; 47:1, 2, 7, 12, and 20 with the Atitlan site, recalling that the lake, like the Dead Sea

in Palestine, would be on this Jerusalem's "east" and the ocean on its "west." Also note Ezekiel 17 as treated in my article "The Twig of the Cedar," *The Improvement Era* 60 (May 1957):330ff. Isaiah and Jeremiah, among others, use the same symbols.

32. McBryde, *Cultural and Historical Geography*, pp. 97, 99.

33. See, for example, John A. Graham, "Discoveries at Abaj Takalik, Guatemala," *Archaeology* 30 (May 1977), pp. 196–97.

34. Lothrop, *Atitlan*, pp. 60–61, gives evidence for one site so submerged.

35. Stephan de Borhegyi, "The Development of Folk and Complex Cultures in the Southern Maya Area," *American Antiquity* 21 (1956):343–56.

36. E. M. Shook, "Lugares Arqueologicos del Altiplano Meridional Central de Guatemala," *Antropologia e Historia de Guatemala* 4, no. 2 (June 1952):10–11, 30.

37. Lee A. Parsons, *Bilbao, Guatemala: An Archaeological Study of the Pacific Coast Cotzumalhuapa Region*, vol. 1, *Milwaukee Public Museum Publications in Anthropology* 11 (1967); Graham, "Discoveries," pp. 196–97.

38. Concerning the importance of trade to Kaminaljuyu and the nearby Pacific lowland strip, and the focal position of those two regions in trade in southern Mesoamerica at this time, see Lee A. Parsons and Barbara J. Price, "Mesoamerican Trade and Its Role in the Emergence of Civilization," in *Observations on the Emergence of Civilization in Mesoamerica*, ed. Robert F. Heizer and John A. Graham, UCARF 11 (1971), pp. 180–95.

39. Gordon R. Willey, T. Patrick Culbert, and R. E. W. Adams, eds., "Maya Lowlands Ceramics: A Report from the 1965 Guatemala City Conference," *American Antiquity* 32 (1967):298–300; Graham, "Discoveries."

40. William T. Sanders and Barbara J. Price, *Mesoamerica: The Evolution of a Civilization* (New York: Random House, 1968), pp. 42–44.

41. References for the Mesoamerican idea are in my "Apparent Relationship," pp. 239–40.

42. David A. Freidel, "Civilization as a State of Mind: The Cultural Evolution of the Lowland Maya," in *The Transition to Statehood in the New World*, ed. Grant D. Jones and Robert R. Kautz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 191. Compare Lee A. Parsons, "Post-Olmec Stone Sculpture: The Olmec-Izapan Transition on the South Pacific Coast and Highlands," in *The Olmec and Their Neighbors: Essays in Memory of Matthew W. Stirling*, ed. Elizabeth p. Benson (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 1981), p. 257.

43. Freidel, "State of Mind," pp. 191, 204.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 200.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 204.

46. Ibid., pp. 198, 223.
47. Robert M. Carmack, *Toltec Influence on the Postclassic Culture History of Highland Guatemala*, MARI 26 (1970), p. 72; Lawrence H. Feldman, "Tollan in Central Mexico," *Katunob* 8, no. 3 (February 1973):1-6.
48. Carmack, *Toltec Influence*, pp. 72-73.
49. Jacinto Quirarte, *Izapan and Mayan Traits in Teotihuacan III Pottery*, UCARF 18 (1973), pp. 11-30. His chronology can be more carefully specified now, the Izapa and Kaminaljuyu comparisons falling in the earlier half of the first century B.C. or possibly a little earlier.
50. I believe that Mosiah I was readily accepted as king over the people of Zarahemla (Omni 1:19) in part because he had come, with obvious credentials (Omni 1:14; Mosiah 1:16), from the "Tulan" of Nephi/Kaminaljuyu. Milton R. Hunter and Thomas Stuart Ferguson in *Ancient America and the Book of Mormon* (Oakland: Kolob Book, 1950), pp. 149-57, attempt to relate "Tulan" to early Nephite centers, though not to "the city of Nephi."
51. Robert Wauchope, *Protohistoric Pottery of the Guatemala Highlands*, in *Monographs and Papers in Maya Archaeology*, ed. W. R. Bullard, Jr., HUPM 61, part 2 (1970), pp. 237-38. Compare H. E. D. Pollock, "Introduction," in *Mayapan, Yucatan, Mexico*, H. E. D. Pollock, et al., CIWP 619 (1962), p. 13.
52. A. p. Maudslay, trans. and ed., *Bernal Diaz del Castillo: The Discovery and Conquest of Mexico, 1517-1521* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Cudahy, 1956), p. 24.
53. I. W. Johnson, "Basketry and Textiles," HMAI 10, part 1 (1971), p. 312. Matthew Wallrath in "Excavations in the Tehuantepec Region, Mexico," *American Philosophical Society Transactions*, n.s. 57, part 2 (1967), p. 12, notes that wild silk was collected and spun in the isthmus area, and that the cloth had very high value. Clavigero also reported that fiber of the ceiba tree's pod was woven by Mexican Indians into fabric "as soft and delicate, and perhaps more so, than silk." C. Cullen, ed., *The History of Mexico*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Thomas Dobson, 1817), p. 41. Compare A. M. Tozzer, ed., *Landa's Relacion de las Cosas de Yucatan*, HUPM 18 (1941), p. 201, 205 and J. E. S. Thompson, ed., *Thomas Gage's Travels in the New World* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958), p. 149.
54. Hugh Nibley, *Since Cumorah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1967), pp. 255ff.
55. Jeremiah F. Epstein, "Pre-Columbian Old World Coins in America: An Examination of the Evidence," *Current Anthropology* 21 (1980):1-20.
56. McBryde, *Cultural and Historical Geography*, pp. 33, 72, 84.
57. *Weights and Measures in the Time of Mosiah II*, Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, Preliminary Report STF-83 (Provo, Utah, 1983).

58. *Handbook of Latin American Studies* 37, *Social Sciences* (1976), p.70, abstracting a pamphlet published in Ecuador in 1975. This was copper money, each piece being in the shape of an axe head.

59. Evon Z. Vogt, *The Zinacantecos of Mexico: A Modern Maya Way of Life*. (New York: Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1970), p. 98; Tozzer, *Landa's Relacion*, pp. 182–84.

60. Robert Ritzenthaler, *Recent Monument Worship in Lowland Guatemala*, MARI 28 (1967), pp. 107–11, especially figure 7.

61. Suzanne W. Miles, *Sculpture of the Guatemala-Chiapas Highlands and Pacific Slopes, and Associated Hieroglyphs*, HMAI 3, part 1 (1965), pp. 237–75. Compare T. Proskouriakoff's comment in *Dumbarton Oaks Conference on the Olmec*, ed. Elizabeth p. Benson (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 1968), p. 176; she contradicts the usual view that "idols" were abundant.

62. William F. Albright and C. S. Mann, *Matthew* (New York: Doubleday, Anchor Books, 1971):CLIII; I. Levy, *The Synagogue: Its History and Function* (London: Valentine, Mitchell, 1964), pp. 7–14.

63. Megilla 4, 23; Berakot 11; Shabbat 1, 11.

64. Jack Finegan, *Light from the Ancient Past*, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956), pp. 289–91; John A. Tvedtnes, *The Church of the Old Testament* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1967), pp. 24–25.

65. The definition of an altar is unclear. Large stones sometimes termed altars are occasionally shown in art serving as seats ("thrones?") for dignitaries. Jacinto Quirarte, "Terrestrial/Celestial Polymorphs as Narrative Frames in the Art of Izapa and Palenque," in *Pre-Columbian Art History: Selected Readings*, ed. Alana Cordy-Collins and Jean Stern (Palo Alto: Peck Publications, 1977), p. 53, says, "The stela-altar complex is also Izapan in origin." The distribution of "altars" at Izapa can be seen in Susanna M. Ekholm, *Mound 30A and the Early Preclassic Ceramic Sequence of Izapa, Chiapas, Mexico*, NAWAF 25 (1969), pp. 2, 5, 17.

66. William F. Albright, "The High Place in Ancient Palestine," in *Supplements to Vetus Testamentum* (Leiden: Brill, 1957), pp. 247–48, 250–57; Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions* (London: McGraw-Hill, 1961), pp. 284–87.

67. E. M. Shook and A. V. Kidder, *Mound E-III-3, Kaminaljuyu, Guatemala*, CIWP 596 (1952), pp. 56–64.

Chapter 6

1. Compare Alma 51:33 and 52:28 concerning enervating lowland heat with the data on disastrous attempts in Spanish colonial times at resettlement of highlanders at low altitudes. They often would "quickly get sick and die." Felix W. McBryde, *Cultural and Historical Geography of Southwest Guatemala*, SISA 4 (1945), p. 11.

2. A parallel, though of course not necessarily connected, practice of the same manner of naming rulers is reported from highland Guatemala,

where a famous Quichean prince, Keh Nay, furnished the name: "Until the Spaniards came, the kings had this name of Keh Nay, because it is like 'Caesars' among the natives." Munro S. Edmonson, *The Book of Counsel: The Popol Vuh of the Quiche Maya of Guatemala*, MARI 35 (1971), p. 230, quoting a native source.

3. Sylvanus G. Morley, *The Ancient Maya*, 2nd ed. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1947), plate 19. A temporary exception may have occurred in Late Classic times, according to Donald L. Brockington in "The Archaeological Sequence from Sipolite, Oaxaca, Mexico" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1966). Also, a private communication from Brockington, cited in p. and S. Turner, *Chontal to Spanish-English and Spanish to Chontal Dictionary* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1971), p. 335, reporting coastal Oaxaca sites with Late Classic ceramics like those of Tabasco, presumably produced by Mayan speakers. Compare Michael D. Coe's interpretation that a "highly Mayoid" culture occupied the Gulf Coast area in the Late Classic (*Archaeological Synthesis of Southern Veracruz and Tabasco*, HMAI 3, part 2 [1965], p. 705), but this too was temporary.

4. Edward B. Sisson, "Settlement Patterns and Land Use in the Northeastern Chontalpa, Tabasco, Mexico: A Progress Report," *Ceramica de Cultura Maya*, no. 6 (1970), pp. 41-54.

5. Philip Drucker and Eduardo Contreras, "Site Patterns in the Eastern Part of Olmec Territory," *Journal of the Washington Academy of Sciences* 43 (1953):392-93; Thomas A. Lee, Jr., "The Historical Routes of Tabasco and Northern Chiapas and Their Relationship to Early Cultural Developments in Central Chiapas," in *Mesoamerican Communication Routes and Cultural Contacts*, ed. Thomas A. Lee, Jr., and Carlos Navarrete, NWAf 40 (1978), p. 54.

6. Philip Drucker, *La Venta, Tabasco. A Study of Olmec Ceramics and Art*, Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 153 (1952), p. 5.

7. Jorge L. Tamayo, in collaboration with Robert C. West, *The Hydrography of Middle America*, in HMAI 1 (1964), p. 93; Lee, "Historical Routes," p. 57.

8. Rene R. Gadacz, *Pre-Spanish Commerce in the Gulf Coast Lowlands of Mexico* (Calgary, Alberta: Western Publishers, 1979), p. 50.

9. Sisson, "Settlement Patterns," p. 49.

10. F. V. Scholes and R. L. Roys, *The Maya Chontal Indians of Acalan Tixchel*, CIWP 560 (1948), pp. 3, 18.

11. Personal communication, Philip Drucker, 1953.

12. Bernal Diaz, *The Bernal Diaz Chronicles*, pp. 49-50.

13. Site T-2 is appropriately placed for one. Some of the nine or ten surrounding sites will probably prove of the same period; many of them are not yet dated. Sisson, "Settlement Patterns."

14. A recent newspaper article is symptomatic of the tendency in

discussions of Mesoamerican geography even today. Discussing oil prospects in Belize (formerly British Honduras), a reporter refers to dramatic oil discoveries “north of here” in Mexico. In fact, the discoveries were in the states of Chiapas and Tabasco, straight *west* of Belize; of course the area referred to is *northward* (toward Mexico City). *Christian Science Monitor*, 16 July 1977, p. 7.

15. Roman Pina Chan and Carlos Navarrete, *Archaeological Research in the Lower Grijalva River Region, Tabasco and Chiapas*, NWA 22 (1967), pp. 3–11.

16. For parallels between their voyage and arrival and Mesoamerican traditions, see my article in *The Improvement Era*, “The Twig of the Cedar,” 60 (May 1957):330–37.

17. Drifted dune sand covered the site after its Phase IV (last “Olmec”?) occupation, strongly suggesting abandonment after about 550 B.C. Philip Drucker, Robert F. Heizer, and Robert J. Squier, *Excavations at La Venta, Tabasco, 1955*, Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology, *Bulletin* 170 (1959), pp. 81–82, 113, 218–30.

18. Philip Drucker in “The La Venta Olmec Support Area,” in *Kroeber Anthropological Society, Papers* 25 (Fall 1961), pp. 59–72, describes it in detail.

19. Matthew W. Stirling, “Great Stone Faces of the Mexican Jungle,” *National Geographic Magazine* 78 (September 1940):327.

20. See note on the subject in Chapter 3 referring to Ignacio Bernal, *The Olmec World*, p. 59.

21. Constance Irwin, *Fair Gods and Stone Faces* (New York: St. Martins, 1963).

22. Gareth W. Lowe, Thomas A. Lee, Jr., and Eduardo Martinez Espinosa, *Izapa: An Introduction to the Ruins and Monuments*, NWA 31 (1982), p. 306.

23. R. Sidrys, J. Andreson, and D. Marcucci, “Obsidian Sources in the Maya Area,” *Journal of New World Archaeology* 1, no. 5 (1976):1–13, Fred W. Nelson and Barbara Voorhies, “Trace Element Analysis of Obsidian Artifacts from Three Shell Midden Sites in the Littoral Zone, Chiapas, Mexico,” *American Antiquity* 45 (1980):540–50. El Chayal is not the only possible obsidian source near Kaminaljuyu, as these references make clear, but it is the most likely one.

24. Interestingly, George Kubler’s picture of pilgrimage centers, in conjunction with the loose sense of territoriality evident in Mesoamerican cultures, resonates with the tone of the Book of Mormon. He suggests that trade developed along pilgrimage routes to holy sanctuaries “maintained by priestly corporations,” as was more or less the case in later Mesoamerica. He continues: “Thus if we were to imagine the mental geography of Pre-Classic travelers, it would resemble a network of paths rather than a jigsaw map, and it would display the nodes and crossroads

more prominently than the network or the boundaries. Unpopulated deserts and mountains would be less important than towns and their alignment along rivers and roads. Thus a Pre-Classic 'map' would have looked like points, and lines connecting them, rather than a 'map' of areas sharing boundaries." George Kubler, "Comments," in *Observations on the Emergence of Civilization in Mesoamerica*, ed. Robert F. Heizer and John A. Graham, UCAR 11 (1971), p. 160.

25. Pierre Agrinier, *Mound 1A, Chiapa de Corzo, Chiapas, Mexico: A Late Preclassic Architectural Complex*, NWAf 37 (1975), p. 41.

26. Lee, "Historical Routes," pp. 49–60; Carlos Navarrete, "The Pre-Hispanic System of Communications between Chiapas and Tabasco," in *Mesoamerican Communication Routes and Cultural Contacts*, ed. Thomas A. Lee, Jr., and Carlos Navarrete, NWAf 40 (1978), pp. 87–99.

27. Frans Blom and Gertrude Duby, *La Selva Lacandona* (Mexico: Editorial Cultura, 1957).

28. Leo Waibel, *La Sierra Madre de Chiapas* (Mexico: Sociedad de Geografía y Estadística de México, 1946), p. 216.

29. Carlos Navarrete traversed the same area but found even less, not even Mullerried's sites. "Un Reconocimiento de la Sierra Madre de Chiapas: Apuntes de un Diario de Campo," *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Centro de Estudios Mayas, Cuadernos* 13 (1978).

30. Gareth W. Lowe, *Archaeological Exploration of the Upper Grijalva River, Chiapas, Mexico*, NWAf 2 (1959), p. 57, fig. 58c. Subsequent work shows sufficient connection between Izapa Late Preclassic ceramics and those of the Central Depression that the likelihood is seen of communication across the pass near Motozintla at that time and thus of at least some sites along that route then. Gareth W. Lowe, Thomas A. Lee, Jr., and Eduardo Martínez Espinosa, *Izapa: An Introduction to the Ruins and Monuments*, NWAf 31 (1982), p. 14.

31. Manuel Gamio, "Exploración Económico-cultural en la Región Oncocercosa de Chiapas, México," *América Indígena* 6, no. 3 (1946): mapa 3, based on data from Mullerried which showed "piramides" at three locations in the vicinity. Their presence demonstrates the ecological capability for significant sites, though no Preclassic sites have yet been reported.

32. Thomas A. Lee, Jr., A Preliminary Report of the First Phase of Excavations at Guajilar, Chiapas, 1976. Unpublished paper in files of the BYU-NWAf.

33. Donald E. Miller, La Libertad, A Major Middle and Late Preclassic Ceremonial Center in Chiapas Mexico: A Preliminary Report. Unpublished paper in the files of the BYU-NWAf. Miller tentatively ends inhabitation of the site at around 100 B.C. Andrew McDonald, who also examined the ceramics, believes the following phase is also represented

(personal communication). Should that not be the case, Guajilar or Ojo de Agua might prove to have been the city of Manti.

34. David L. Webster, *Defensive Earthworks at Becan, Campeche, Mexico: Implications for Maya Warfare*, MARI 41 (1976), pp. 3, 113.

35. For example, Robert Wauchope, "Protohistoric Pottery of the Guatemala Highlands," in *Monographs and Papers in Maya Archaeology*, ed. W. R. Bullard, Jr., HUPM 61, part 2 (1970):99. Sanders noted: "Evidence is rapidly accumulating to demonstrate that Classic Mesoamerican societies in general . . . were considerably more militaristically oriented than was thought." William T. Sanders and Joseph W. Michels, *Kaminaljuyu Project—1968 Season. Part 1: The Excavations*, PSUO 2 (May 1969), p. 166; Claude F. Baudez and Pierre Becquelin, "Archeologie de Los Naranjos, Honduras," *Mission Archaeologique et Ethnologique Francaise au Mexique, Etudes Mesoamericaines* 2 (1973), pp. 3–4, 69. Angel Palerm was among the first to recognize the frequent occurrence of warfare in early Mesoamerica, in his "Notas Sobre las Construcciones Militares y la Guerra en Mesoamerica," *Instituto Nacional de Antropologia e Historia, Anales* 8 (1954):123–34.

36. Webster, *Defensive Earthworks*, p. 95.

37. Florencia Muller, "Instrumental y Armas," in *Antropologia, Teotihuacan. Onceava Mesa Redonda*, vol. 1 (Mexico: Sociedad Mexicana de Antropologia, 1966), pp. 232–37.

38. A. p. Maudslay, trans. and ed., *Bernal Diaz del Castillo, The Discovery and Conquest of Mexico, 1517–1521* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Cudahy, 1956), pp. 331, 19; H. H. Bancroft, *The Native Races [of the Pacific States]*, vol. 2 (San Francisco: A. L. Bancroft and Co., 1882), p. 410.

39. Bancroft, *Native Races*, p. 407.

40. Bernal Diaz, *Chronicles*, pp. 161–62, 110, 103.

41. Bancroft, *Native Races*, p. 412.

42. *Ibid.*, pp. 107, 112–16.

43. Robert Carmack, *Toltec Influence on the Postclassic Culture History of Highland Guatemala*, MARI 26 (1968), p. 80.

44. *Ibid.*, pp. 106, 112–16.

45. Lawrence H. Feldman, "'Tollan' in Central Mexico: The Geography of Economic Specialization," *Katunob* 8, no. 3 (February 1973):3–6.

46. J. J. Williams, *The Isthmus of Tehuantepec*, pp. 92–93, 97–98, 247.

47. Donald L. Brockington, "Investigaciones Arqueologicas en la Costa de Oaxaca," *Boletin INAH* 38 (1969):33–40.

48. Brockington, "Investigaciones," pp. 33, 35.

49. J. Charles Kelley and Carroll R. Riley, eds., *Precolumbian Contact within Nuclear America, Southern Illinois University Museum, Meso-American Studies* (Carbondale, 1969); Carolyn Baus Reed Czitrom, "Figurillas Solidas de Estilo Colima: Una Tipologia," *Instituto Nacional de Antropologia*

e Historia, Departamento de Investigaciones Historicas, Coleccion Cientifica: Arqueologia 66 (Mexico, 1978), p. 55; Clinton R. Edwards, "Possibilities of Pre-Columbian Maritime Contacts among New World Civilizations," in *Man Across the Sea*, pp. 3–10; Michael D. Coe, "Archaeological Linkages with North and South America at La Victoria, Guatemala," *American Anthropologist* 62 (1960):363–93; Robert C. West, "Aboriginal Sea Navigation between Middle and South America," *American Anthropologist* 63 (1961):135–37.

50. Albert Collier, "The American Mediterranean," *HMAI* 1 (1964), pp. 128–29.

51. Edwards, "Maritime Contacts," p. 8.

52. John L. Sorenson, "Evidences of Culture Contacts Between Polynesia and the Americas in Precolumbian Times" (M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1952); David H. Kelley, "Linguistics and Problems in Trans-Pacific Contacts," *Actas y Memorias, 35a Congreso Internacional de Americanistas, Mexico, 1962*, vol. 1 (Mexico, 1964), pp. 17–18; George F. Carter, "Domesticates as Artifacts," in *The Human Mirror*, pp. 206–15. Several of the papers in *Man Across the Sea* touch on the matter, both pro and con. See especially the paper by Donald Brand, one of my teachers.

53. Jerry K. Loveland, "Hagoth and the Polynesian Tradition," *BYU Studies* 17 (1976):59–73.

54. "The aristocratic bearers of Monte Alban II culture" may have come from "Chiapas or the Guatemalan highlands, or perhaps the highlands by way of Chiapas," says Ignacio Bernal in *The Olmec World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), p. 166. The whole Izapan art style of south-central Veracruz likewise derived from Chiapas. Michael D. Coe, "Archaeological Synthesis of Southern Veracruz and Tabasco," *HMAI* 3, part 2 (1965), pp. 694–96; John F. Scott, "The Danzantes of Monte Alban. Part I: Text," *Dumbarton Oaks Studies in Pre-Columbian Art and Archaeology* 19 (Washington, 1978), pp. 58–59, 70–71.

55. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th ed., s.v. "Chronology: Pre-Columbian America," by J. E. S. Thompson.

56. E. R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings: A Reconstruction of the Chronology of the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), pp. 14–15, 28, 165–66; idem, *A Chronology of the Hebrew Kings* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977).

57. Thiele, *Mysterious Numbers*, pp. 44–46, 294; Jay H. Huber, "Lehi's 600 Year Prophecy and the Birth of Christ," *Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies*, Preliminary Report HUB-82 (Provo, Utah, 1982).

58. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th ed., s.v. "Chronology: Christian;" P. L. Maier, *First Christmas, The True and Unfamiliar Story in Words and Pictures* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971); Werner Keller, *The Bible as*

History (New York: Wm. Morrow, 1956), pp. 343–53; R. A. Rosenberg, “The ‘Star of the Messiah’ Reconsidered,” *Biblica* 53, no. 1 (1972), pp. 105–10; Jack Finegan, *Light from the Ancient Past*, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), pp. 252, 257, 260–61. More recently three English astronomers have concluded that the “star of Bethlehem” was a nova or exploding star, which Chinese records report shone for 70 days in the spring of the year 5 B.C. “Better Late Than Never,” *Smithsonian Magazine* 8 (March 1978), p. 14. See also Owen Gingerich’s review of additional books on the subject, in *Journal for the History of Astronomy* 12, part 3 (1983):212–13.

59. *Encyclopaedia Britannica* article cited in note 55.

60. *Ibid.*

61. Robert F. Smith in unpublished working papers has shown that the Jaredite lineage history works out neatly as covering just 130 katuns, the Nephite history 50 katuns.

62. Arguments have been made that a 360-day “prophetic year” lies behind chronological statements in the Old Testament. Robert Anderson, *The Coming Prince: Or the Seventy Weeks of David with an Answer to the Higher Critics*, 10th ed. (London: J. Nisbet, 1915; reprinted, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1957). The use of time periods of symbolic length, as well as the manipulation of numbers in relation to prophets’ reckoning of time, may be seen in Numbers 14:34; Ezekiel 4:5–6; Revelation 11:2–3; 12:6; 13:5.

63. J. E. S. Thompson, “Symbols, Glyphs, and Divinatory Almanacs for Diseases in the Maya Dresden and Madrid Codices,” *American Antiquity* 23 (January 1958):297; R. L. Roys, *The Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967, originally 1933), pp. 184–85.

64. “Chiasm in Kings,” *Linguistica Biblica* 31 (1974):52–67. Dennis E. Puleston, in “An Epistemological Pathology and the Collapse, or Why the Maya Kept the Short Count,” in *Maya Archaeology and Ethnohistory*, ed. Norman Hammond and Gordon R. Willey (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979), pp. 63–71, demonstrates a fascinating pattern that proves somewhat similar.

65. See note 63.

66. Personal communications; “The World Ages in India and Mesoamerica,” *Society for Early Historical Archaeology, Newsletter and Proceedings* 137 (March 1975); *idem*, *The Nine Lords of the Night*, UCARF 16 (1972), pp. 53–68. Kelley would not accept a 600 B.C. transmission from the Old World as able to account for the Old World elements he believes were incorporated into the Mesoamerican system. Certain of those features he thinks were developed by the Greeks, especially at Alexandria, hence his insistence that 200 B.C. would have been the earliest date possible for the transoceanic transmission, probably via northwest India, but ultimately from the eastern Mediterranean. However, there is

reason to believe that, as with a great deal of culture history, ideas traditionally credited to the Greeks were in reality around earlier. Kelley's 200 B.C. limiting date could prove too late.

67. Vincent H. Malmstrom, "A Reconstruction of the Chronology of Mesoamerican Calendrical Systems," *Journal for the History of Astronomy* 9 (1978):105–16. In a later article Malmstrom amplifies aspects of his argument while holding open the possibility of transoceanic diffusion to the Pacific coast of southern Mesoamerica as a source for some of the calendrical development. See "Architecture, Astronomy, and Calendrics in Pre-Columbian Mesoamerica," in *Archaeoastronomy in the Americas*, ed. Ray A. Williamson, *Ballena Press Anthropological Papers* 22 (Los Altos, California: Ballena Press, 1981), pp. 249–61.

Chapter 7

1. "Preclassic Metal?" *American Antiquity* 20 (1954):64; idem, "Indications of Early Metal in Mesoamerica," *University Archaeological Society Bulletin* 5 (Provo, Utah, 1954):1–15. Only slight attention was paid to the argument, as in Gordon R. Willey, "The Prehistoric Civilizations of Nuclear America," *American Anthropologist* 57 (1955):585.

2. "A Reconsideration of Early Metal in Mesoamerica," *Katunob* 9 (March 1976):1–18.

3. "A Reconsideration," pp. 1–2. I have since gathered more examples.

4. Byron Cummings, "Cuicuilco and the Archaic of Mexico," *University of Arizona, Bulletin IV*, no. 8, *Social Science Bulletin* 4 (Tucson, 1933), pp. 38–39; Robert F. Heizer and James A. Bennyhoff, "Archaeological Investigation of Cuicuilco, Valley of Mexico, 1957," *Science* 127, no. 3292 (1958):232–33.

5. R. E. Longacre and Rene Millon, "Proto-Mixtecan and Proto-Amuzgo-Mixtecan Vocabularies: A Preliminary Cultural Analysis," *Anthropological Linguistics* 3 (1961):22.

6. Terrence Kaufman, "El Proto-Tzeltal-Tzotzil: Fonología Comparada y Diccionario Reconstruido," *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Centro de Estudios Mayas, Cuadernos* 5 (1972), p. 118; Marcelo Alejandro, *Cartilla Huasteca con su Gramática, Diccionario y Varias Reglas para Aprender el Idioma* (Mexico: Secretaria de Fomento, 1899), pp. 84, 88; Hyacinthe de Charency, "Les Noms des Metaux chez Différents Peuples de la Nouvelle Espagne," *Compte-Rendu, Congrès International des Americanistes, Paris, 1890* (Paris, 1892), pp. 539–41.

7. "A Linguistic Look at the Olmecs," pp. 80–89.

8. J. W. Grossman, "An Ancient Gold Worker's Tool Kit: The Earliest Metal Technology in Peru," *Archaeology* 25 (1972):270–75; A. C. Paulsen, "Prehistoric Trade between South Coastal Ecuador and other Parts of the Andes" (Paper read at 1972 Annual Meeting, Society for American

Archaeology). Dates given in these papers need to be corrected backward to accord with bristle-cone pine corrections.

9. J. Charles Kelley and Carroll L. Riley, eds., *Precolumbian Contact within Nuclear America*, Southern Illinois University Museum, Mesoamerican Studies 4 (Carbondale, 1969).

10. "Aspectos Tecnicos de la Orfebreria de la Tumba 7 de Monte Alban," in "El Tesoro de Monte Alban," by Alfonso Caso, *Instituto Nacional de Antropologia e Historia, Memorias* 3 (Mexico, 1969), pp. 393–94.

11. Hugh Nibley, *Since Cumorah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1967), p. 254.

12. Clair C. Patterson, "Native Copper, Silver, and Gold Accessible to Early Metallurgists," *American Antiquity* 36 (1971):292–94.

13. Jose Antonio Gay, *Historia de Oaxaca*, vol. 1 (Mexico, 1881), pp. 4, 62. F. W. Hodge, ed., *Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico*, part 2, *Smithsonian Institution Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin* 30 (Washington, 1910), p. 833, says of a Creek Indian group (the "Tukabatchi") in Alabama that they "had in their possession certain metal records which they had preserved from time immemorial. Adair, (*Hist. Ind.* 178, 1775) says that in his time, they consisted of five copper and two brass plates. . . ."

14. Read H. Putnam, "Were the Plates of Mormon of Tumbaga?" *Papers, 15th Annual Symposium on the Archaeology of the Scriptures* (Provo: BYU Extension Publications, 1964):101–9 (available as a reprint from the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies). Regarding gilding, note Daniel F. Rubin de la Borbolla, "Orfebreria Tarasca," *Cuadernos Americanos* 3 (May-June 1944):XV, 127–38. Rubin points out the quandary of what happened to all the "gold" the Spaniards claimed to see. He concludes that a good deal of it was merely gold-plated copper, even though the documents never mention the gilding process. The plates of the Book of Mormon "having the appearance of gold" come to mind, of course. See also Heather Lechtman, "Pre-Columbian Surface Metallurgy," *Scientific American* 250 (June 1984):53–63.

15. David M. Pendergast, "Tumbaga Object from the Early Classic Period, Found at Altun Ha, British Honduras (Belize)," *Science* 168 (April 2, 1970):116–18.

16. *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: An Illustrated Encyclopedia*, vol. 1 (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), pp. 467, 461.

17. P. T. Craddock, "Europe's Earliest Brasses," *MASCA Journal* 1 (Philadelphia, December 1978):4–5.

18. For example, Guy Stresser-Pean, "American Sources on the Huasteca," *HMAI* 11 (1971), p. 590; W. C. Root, "Mexican Bronze," in *Metals from the Cenote of Sacrifice, Chichen Itza, Yucatan*, by Samuel K. Lothrop, *HUPM* 10, no. 2 (1952), p. 20.

19. Earle R. Caley and Dudley T. Easby, Jr., "New Evidence of Tin

Smelting and the Use of Metallic Tin in Pre-Conquest Mexico," *Actas y Memorias, 35a Congreso Internacional de Americanistas, Mexico, 1962*, vol. 1 (Mexico, 1964), pp. 507–17.

20. A. V. Kidder, Jesse D. Jennings, and E. M. Shook, *Excavations at Kaminaljuyu, Guatemala*, CIWP 561 (1946), p. 144; David M. Pendergast, "Ancient Maya Mercury," *Science* 217 (1982):533–35.

21. H. H. Bancroft, *The Native Races*, vol. 2, pp. 407–8.

22. Rene Rebetez, *Objetos Prehispanicos de Hierro y Piedra* (Mexico: Libreria Anticuaria, n.d.).

23. Sigvald Linne, *Mexican Highland Cultures, Ethnographical Museum of Sweden, Publication 7*, n.s. (Stockholm, 1942), p. 132.

24. Sigvald Linne, "Zapotecan Antiquities," *Ethnographical Museum of Sweden, Publication 4*, n.s. (Stockholm, 1938), p. 75.

25. Jane W. Pires-Ferreira, "Shell and Iron-Ore Mirror Exchange in Formative Mesoamerica," in *The Early Mesoamerican Village*, ed. Kent V. Flannery (New York: Academic Press, 1976), pp. 317–28.

26. John B. Carlson, "Lodestone Compass: Chinese or Olmec Primacy?" *Science* 189 (September 5, 1975):753–60.

27. Lincoln LaPaz, "Topics in Meteoritics. Hunting Meteorites: Their Recovery, Use, and Abuse from Paleolithic to Present," *University of New Mexico, Publications in Meteoritics* 6 (1969), pp. 84–85.

28. J. C. Waldbaum, "The First Archaeological Appearance of Iron," in *The Coming of the Age of Iron*, ed. T. E. Wertime and J. D. Muhly (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), pp. 69–70.

29. H. Hensoldt, "Meteorites and What They Teach Us, I," *American Geologist* 4 (1889):37–38; Jose M. Arriola, "Sellos, Indumentaria, Utensilios Domesticos, Utensilios Industrial, Objetos Rituales, Caracteres Alfabeticos y Numericos," in *La Poblacion del Valle de Teotihuacan*, vol. 1, ed. Manuel Gamio (Mexico: Secretaria de Agricultura y Fomento, Direccion de Antropologia, 1922), p. 218.

30. LaPaz, "Topics in Meteoritics," p. 74.

31. Harvey N. Nininger, *Find a Falling Star* (New York: Paul S. Ereksson, Inc., 1972), p. 238.

32. H. H. Nininger, *Our Stone-Pelted Planet* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1933), p. 75.

33. Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert and the World of the Jaredites* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1952), pp. 210–13.

34. Lenore O. Keene Congdon, "Steel in Antiquity: A Problem in Terminology," in *Studies Presented to George M. A. Hanfmann*, ed. David G. Mitten et al., *Harvard University, Fogg Art Museum Monographs in Art and Archaeology* 2 (Mainz, West Germany: Verlag Philipp Von Zabern, 1971), pp. 17–27.

35. Bancroft, *The Native Races*, vol. 2, p. 407.

36. "Evidence for the Sources and Use of Tin During the Bronze Age of the Near East: A Reply to J. E. Dayton," *World Archaeology* 5 (1973): 116.
37. Caley and Easby, "New Evidence of Tin," p. 515.
38. de Charency, "Les Noms des Metaux," p. 540.
39. R. de la Grasserie, *Langue Zoque et Langue Mixe: Grammaire, Dictionnaire, Bibliotheque Linguistique Americaine* 22 (Paris, 1898), pp. 161, 169.
40. This last point was drawn to my attention by Assyriologist Paul Y. Hoskisson, to whom I am grateful.
41. de la Grasserie, *Langue Zoque*, p. 170.
42. For example, Cecil H. Brown, "Growth and Development of Folk Botanical Life-Forms in the Mayan Language Family," *American Ethnologist* 6 (1979):366–85.
43. *Lehi in the Desert*, pp. 216–21; idem, *Since Cumorah*, pp. 256–58.
44. Donald D. Brand, "The Coati or Pisote (*Nasua narica*) in the Archaeology and Ethnology of Meso-America," *Actas y Memorias, 35a Congreso Internacional de Americanistas, Mexico, 1962*, vol. 3 (Mexico, 1964), pp. 193–202. On a provocative theory of overlapping terms and classification, see the paper by Joe E. Pierce, "Culture: A Collection of Fuzzy Sets," *Human Organization* 36 (1977):197–200.
45. The Role of Semi-Domesticated Animal Resources in Middle American Subsistence (paper read at 37th Annual Meeting, Society for American Archaeology, 1972).
46. Representative sources include: Matthew Wallrath, Excavations in the Tehuantepec Region, Mexico, *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, n.s., vol. 57, part 2 (Philadelphia, 1967), p. 12; Kamar Al-Shimas, *The Mexican Southland* (Fowler, Indiana: Benton Review Shop, 1922), pp. 114–15; A. M. Tozzer, *Landa's Relacion*, pp. 201–2.
47. L. C. Stuart, "Fauna of Middle America," *HMAI* 1 (1964), pp. 318–19.
48. Franz Termer, "Der Hund bei den Kulturvölkern Altamerikas," *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 82 (1957):1–57; Ricardo E. Latcham, "Los Animales Domesticos de la America Precolombina," *Museo de Etnologia y Antropologia de Chile, Publicaciones* 3, no. 1 (Santiago, 1922), pp. 42–73.
49. Richard Perry, *Life in Forest and Jungle* (New York: Taplinger, 1976), p. 91.
50. Al-Shimas, *The Mexican Southland*, p. 115.
51. Rafael Martin del Campo, "Contribucion a la Etnozoologia Maya de Chiapas," in *Los Mayas del Sur y sus Relaciones con los Nahuas Meridionales* (VIII Mesa Redonda, San Cristobal Las Casas, Chis.), vol. 1, *Revista Mexicana de Estudios Antropologicos* 17 (1961):33.
52. August C. Mahr, "Semantic Evaluation," *Anthropological Linguistics* 3 (May 1961):12, 23–24.
53. Tozzer, *Landa's Relacion*, pp. 203–4.

54. Puleston, "Semi-Domesticated Animal Resources," p. 6.
55. Personal communication from Gareth Lowe, citing *Anales del Museo Nacional David J. Guzman* 5, nos. 17–18 (1954), an article by historian Jorge Larde which I have been unable to see directly.
56. Jane Wheeler Pires-Ferreira, Edgardo Pires-Ferreira, and Peter Kralicke, "Preceramic Animal Utilization in the Central Peruvian Andes," *Science* 194 (October 29, 1976):483–90.
57. Howel Williams, "Geologic Observations on the Ancient Human Footprints near Managua, Nicaragua," *Carnegie Institution of Washington, Contributions to American Anthropology and History* 52 (1952), p. 30. On the dating of the associated Usulután pottery, see E. Wyllys Andrews V, *The Archaeology of Quelepa, El Salvador*, MARI 41 (1976), p. 65.
58. Michael J. Snarskis, "Stratigraphic Excavations in the Eastern Lowlands of Costa Rica," *American Antiquity* 41 (1976):348–50. The author reports having seen similar effigy vessels from Costa Rica in private collections, showing blindfolded, burden-bearing cameloids. Their date on stylistic grounds is between 300 B.C. and A.D. 300, when particularly strong connections prevailed between Mesoamerica and Pacific coastal Nicaragua and Costa Rica.
59. Franz Termer, "Antigüedades de 'La Violeta,' Tapachula, Chiapas," *Estudios de Cultura Maya* 4 (1964):90–92.
60. J. J. Williams, *The Isthmus of Tehuantepec*, p. 204.
61. Wallrath, *Tehuantepec Region*, p. 14.
62. Paul S. Martin and H. E. Wright, Jr., eds., "Pleistocene Extinctions: The Search for a Cause," *Proceedings of the International Association for Quaternary Research, VII Congress*, vol. 6 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), pp. 98–104; Robert A. Martin and S. David Webb, "Late Pleistocene Mammals from the Devil's Den Fauna, Levy County," in *Pleistocene Mammals of Florida*, ed. S. David Webb (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1974), pp. 114–45; Jim J. Hester, "Late Pleistocene Extinction and Radiocarbon Dating," *American Antiquity* 26 (1960):58–77; Paul S. Martin, "The Discovery of America," *Science* 179 (March 9, 1973):974.
63. Remains of a horse have been reported found in conjunction with human remains in excavations at Loltun Cave in the Maya area. No date is apparent from the report. *Miami Museum of Science Institute of Maya Studies Newsletter* 7, no. 11 (November 15, 1978):2. More positive is the evidence from Cenote Ch'en Mul, at Mayapan, Yucatan, reported by C. E. Ray. Two lots including horse bones were collected from the bottom stratum almost two meters down. Ray reluctantly concluded that they had to be pre-Columbian ("Pre-Columbian Horses from Yucatan," *Journal of Mammalogy* 38 [1957]:278.) Mercer had found other horse remains in southwest Yucatan caves in association with artifacts. *The Hill Caves of Yucatan* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1896), p. 172.

64. A. V. Kidder, "Miscellaneous Specimens from Mesoamerica," *Carnegie Institution of Washington Notes on Middle American Archaeology & Ethnology* 117 (March 1954):20, figure 4e.

65. David M. Pendergast, "The Prehistory of Actun Balam, British Honduras," *Royal Ontario Museum Art and Archaeology Occasional Paper* 16 (1969):44-45.

66. "Conocieron la Rueda los Indigenas Mesoamericanos?" *Cuadernos Americanos* 25, no. 1 (Jan.-Feb. 1946):opposite 207.

67. Munro S. Edmonson, *Quiche-English Dictionary*, MARI 30 (1965), pp. 57-58. Also kieh: horse; kiehebal: steed; kiehem: mounted. Compare *The War of Conquest: How It Was Waged Here in Mexico. The Aztecs' Own Story as Given to Fr. Bernardino de Sahagun, Rendered into Modern English by Arthur J. O. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1978): p. 28, "The horses—they looked like deer—neighed and whinnied"; p. 55, "The deer-which-carried-man-upon-their-backs, called horses."

68. In addition to the cameloid figures from Snarskis and Termer, see Termer, "Antigüedades," p. 91, concerning modeled figures of dogs and "jaguars" carrying burdens, whatever they may signify.

69. Linne, *Mexican Highland Cultures*, p. 156.

70. Howard W. Law, "A Reconstructed Proto-Culture Derived from Some Yuman Vocabularies," *Anthropological Linguistics* 3 (1961):54.

71. Ibid.; Martin and Webb, "Pleistocene Mammals," pp. 144-45.

72. Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, Inc., *Report for 1974* (New York, 1975), p. 22, reporting work by Dr. Warren L. Wittry.

73. J. Augusta, *The Age of Monsters, Prehistoric and Legendary* (London: Paul Hamlyn, 1966), pp. 11-12.

74. Jim J. Hester, "Agency of Man in Animal Extinction," in Martin and Wright, "Pleistocene Extinctions," p. 185.

75. H. p. Beck, "The Giant Beaver: A Prehistoric Memory," *Ethnohistory* 19 (1972):117; William Duncan Strong, "North American Indian Traditions Suggesting Knowledge of the Mammoth," *American Anthropologist* 36 (1934):81-88.

76. E. M. Shook, "The Present Status of Research on the Pre-Classical Horizons in Guatemala," in *The Civilizations of Ancient America*, ed. Sol Tax (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1967), p. 93. From the southern tip of South America comes a startling bit of information that makes the sloth possibility more believable. In Patagonia around the turn of the century, natural scientists discovered remains of the extinct giant ground sloth with fresh-looking skin and bones having bits of muscle still adhering; in one cave a large section had been walled off as a "stable" where sloth droppings were abundant, and cut grass was piled nearby for food. A. Smith Woodward, "The Supposed Existing Ground-Sloth of

Patagonia," *Natural Science* 15 (1899):351–54. In the 1970s work by archaeologists at the Yucatan site of Coba revealed a walled pen for some domestic animals. Metates found therein suggested that food was prepared for them. No indication was found of what animals might have been kept. Jaime Garduno Argueta, "Introducción al Patron de Asentamiento del Sitio de Coba, Quintana Roo" (Professional Thesis, Escuela Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Mexico, 1979), pp. 107–8.

77. Hutton Webster, *Primitive Secret Societies* (New York: Macmillan, 1908); Camilla H. Wedgwood, "The Nature and Functions of Secret Societies," *Oceania* 1 (1930):129–45; Norman MacKenzie, ed., *Secret Societies* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1967).

78. David Annan, "The Mafia." In MacKenzie, *Secret Societies*, p. 255.

79. Nesta H. Webster, *Secret Societies and Subversive Movements*, 7th ed. (London: Britons Publishing Society, 1955), p. 188.

80. Miguel Covarrubias, *Mexico South: The Isthmus of Tehuantepec* (New York: Knopf, 1947), pp. 77–78.

81. *Ibid.*, p. 76.

82. Peter D. Joralemon, "A Study of Olmec Iconography," *Dumbarton Oaks Studies in Pre-Columbian Art and Archaeology* 7 (1971); but other specialists strongly disagree.

83. Daniel G. Brinton, "Nagualism: A Study in Native American Folk-lore and History," *American Philosophical Society, Proceedings* 33 (1894), pp. 17, 12.

84. *Ibid.*

85. *Ibid.*, 37–41; Covarrubias, *Mexico South*, pp. 78–79.

86. Brinton, "Nagualism," pp. 38–43.

87. N. H. Webster, *Secret Societies*, p. 157.

88. "In traditional China the secret society was the principal instrument for the expression of popular grievances against the superior power of imperial authority. . . . The aggrieved parties would form a society of outlaws or join an already existing one. Proscribed by the law, the men would seek concealment in secrecy and live by their wits and off the land. They would prey upon the countryside and hide in the hills. The popularity so often enjoyed by social bandits stemmed from their actual or imputed identification with the masses, and their opposition to the imposition of imperial authority on local, more or less independent, institutions. In China as elsewhere, social banditry and its attendant agency, the secret society, arose under conditions of stress. . . ." Stanford M. Lyman, "Chinese Secret Societies in the Occident: Notes and Suggestions for Research in the Sociology of Secrecy," *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 1 (May 1964):90. See also Maria Isaura Pereira de Queiroz, "On Materials for a History of Studies of Crisis Cults," *Current Anthropology* 12 (1971):387–90.

89. N. H. Webster, *Secret Societies*, p. 143.

90. Ibid., p. 1.
91. Ibid., 60, 178.
92. Yehudi Cohen, "The Anthropological Enterprise," *American Anthropologist* 79 (1977):390, 393; Nibley, *Since Cumorah*, pp. 399–409.
93. Miguel Acosta Saignes, "Los Pochteca," in *De Teotihuacan a los Aztecas*, ed. Miguel Leon-Portilla (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico, 1971), pp. 436–48; Rudolf van Zantwijk, "Las Organizaciones Social-Economica y Religiosa de los Mercaderes Gremiales Aztecas," *Boletin de Estudios Latino-Americanos* 10 (1970):1–20.
94. Gordon Brotherston, "Huitzilopochtli and What Was Made of Him," in *Mesoamerican Archeology: New Approaches*, ed., Norman Hammond (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1974), pp. 163–64.
95. Munro S. Edmonson, *The Book of Counsel*, MARI 35 (1971), pp. 215–17; Robert M. Carmack, *Toltec Influence on the Postclassic Culture History of Highland Guatemala*, MARI 26 (1970), pp. 72–73.
96. Lee A. Parsons and Barbara J. Price, in *Observations on the Emergence of Civilization in Mesoamerica*, ed. Robert R. Heizer and John A. Graham, UCAR 11 (1971), pp. 169–95.
97. Coe, "America's First Civilization," 110–11.
98. The Preclassic Background for the Emergence of Civilization in the Mexican Highlands (paper delivered at Wenner-Gren Foundation Burg Wartenstein Symposium No. 47, July 4–13, 1970), p. 25.
99. Kent V. Flannery, "Contextual Analysis of Ritual Paraphernalia from Formative Oaxaca." In Flannery, ed., *The Early Mesoamerican Village* (New York: Academic Press, 1976), pp. 338–40.
100. I use the term *lineage* here at a very general level. The anthropological literature defines this and related terms in various ways. A classic discussion is George p. Murdock, *Social Structure* (New York: Macmillan, 1949), pp. 46ff.
101. Harold E. Driver, in "Geographical Versus Psycho-functional Explanations of Kin Avoidances," *Current Anthropology* 7 (1966):131–82, discusses the relative strength of tradition and of functional adaptation.
102. William A. Haviland, *Ancient Lowland Maya Social Organization*, MARI 26 (1968), pp. 95–117; idem, "Principles of Descent in 16th Century Yucatan," *Katunob* 8, no. 2 (December 1972):63–73.
103. Haviland, "Principles of Descent," p. 64. For some possibilities in northern Mesoamerica, Hugo G. Nutini, "Clan Organization in a Nahuatl-Speaking Village of the State of Tlaxcala, Mexico," *American Anthropologist* 63 (1961):62–78.
104. Haviland, "Principles of Descent," pp. 63–64.
105. Ibid., p. 64.
106. I. M. Lewis, "Force and Fission in Northern Somali Lineage Structure," *American Anthropologist* 63 (1961):110. Compare A. I. Richards,

"A Problem of Anthropological Approach," *Bantu Studies* 15, no. 1 (1941):51.

107. For example, G. C. Vaillant, *The Aztecs of Mexico*, pp. 97–98. Ross T. Christensen made this point for LDS readers in "The Seven Lineages of Lehi," *The New Era* 5, no. 5 (May 1975):50–51.

108. The Hebrew language provided no word for "religion." Cyrus H. Gordon, *Introduction to Old Testament Times*, p. 55. The Book of Mormon term translated as "religion" is likely to have meant something like "worship of and beliefs about deity."

109. Rene Millon, *The Teotihuacan Map*, pp. 40–41; Nutini, "Clan Organization," p. 62.

Chapter 8

1. Manuel Maldonado-Koerdell, "Geohistory and Paleogeography of Middle America," *HMAI* 1 (1964), pp. 22–26; Robert C. West, "Surface Configuration and Associated Geology of Middle America," *ibid.*, pp. 42–58, 75–78.

2. Felix W. McBryde, *Cultural and Historical Geography*, p. 6.

3. Maldonado-Koerdell, *Geohistory*, p. 26.

4. Payson D. Sheets, "An Ancient Natural Disaster," *Expedition* 13 (Fall 1971):27.

5. See chapter 3, note 43.

6. Joseph Mariano Mozino Suarez de Figueroa, *Noticias de Nutka* (Mexico: Sociedad Mexicana de Geografia y Estadistica, 1913), pp. 105–10.

7. Jorge A. Vivo E., "Weather and Climate of Mexico and Central America," *HMAI* 1 (1964), p. 195. Note the description of an ancient hurricane and its effects given in the record of Ixtlaxochitl, in Milton R. Hunter and Thomas Stuart Ferguson, *Ancient America and the Book of Mormon* (Oakland: Kolob Book, 1950), pp. 41, 190–91. Compare A. M. Tozzer, *Landa's Relacion*, pp. 40–1, 216, about a hurricane that caused fires that "burned down" communities in the center of Yucatan. In central Mexico particularly the god Quetzalcoatl was frequently shown as Ehecatl, the wind aspect of Quetzalcoatl, perhaps pointing to the power of these tempests in that area.

8. Vivo, *Weather and Climate*.

9. McBryde, *Cultural and Historical Geography*, pp. 132, 168, 179–80; Samuel K. Lothrop, in *Atitlan*, CIWP 444 (1933), p. 83, reported water-worn potsherds from the site of Chuitinamit well above the water level of that time; these can only be explained by extensive fluctuations.

10. Maldonado-Koerdell, *Geohistory*, pp. 25–26.

11. Robert C. West and John p. Augelli, *Middle America: Its Lands and Peoples*, 2nd ed. (1976), p. 35.

12. McBryde, *Cultural and Historical Geography*, p. x; compare

"Economy and Technology," in *Heritage of Conquest*, ed. Sol Tax (Glencoe: Free Press, 1952), pp. 60–62, 74; and Eva Hunt, "Irrigation and the Sociopolitical Organization of Cuicatec Cacicazgos," in *The Prehistory of the Tehuacan Valley*, vol. 4. *Chronology and Irrigation*, ed. F. Johnson (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1972), pp. 193, 203–4.

13. Tax, "Economy and Technology," pp. 200–205, 218–31.

14. Gareth W. Lowe, "Burial Customs at Chiapa de Corzo," *The Archaeological Burials at Chiapa de Corzo and Their Furniture*, NWA 16 (1964), p. 73.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 75.

16. Miguel Covarrubias, *Mexico South: The Isthmus of Tehuantepec* (New York: Knopf, 1947), p. 39.

17. For example, Milton R. Hunter, *Christ in Ancient America* (Salt Lake City, Deseret Book, 1959).

18. Frances F. Berdan, *The Aztecs of Central Mexico: An Imperial Society* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1982), p. 165; John L. Sorenson, "Some Mesoamerican Traditions of Immigration by Sea," *El Mexico Antiguo* 8 (1955):428.

19. B. C. Hedrick, "Quetzalcoatl: European or Indigene?" in *Man Across the Sea: Problems of Pre-Columbian Contacts*, ed. Carroll J. Riley et al. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), pp. 255–65.

20. Stephan F. de Borhegyi, "Shell Offerings and the Use of Shell Motifs at Lake Amatitlan, Guatemala, and Teotihuacan, Mexico," *Actas y Memorias, 36a Congreso Internacional de Americanistas, Espana, 1965*, vol. 1 (Seville, 1968), pp. 356, 359; Laurette Sejourné, *Burning Water: Thought and Religion in Ancient Mexico* (New York: Vanguard, 1957), pp. 25, 83–85; *idem*, "El Simbolismo de los Rituales Funerarios en Monte Alban," *Revista Mexicana de Estudios Antropológicos* 16 (1960):85–90. René Millon, in *The Teotihuacan Map*, vol. 1 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1973), pp. 55–56, notes that the shell-and-serpent decorated Temple of Quetzalcoatl at Teotihuacan was built no later than A.D. 400 and perhaps soon after 150.

21. "Quetzalcoatl: Espiritualismo del Mexico Antiguo," *Cuadernos Americanos* 105, no. 4 (1959):127–39.

22. Sejourné, "El Simbolismo."

23. See references in my article in Riley et al., *Man Across the Sea*, pp. 234–35.

24. *Ibid.*

25. Philip Drucker, Robert F. Heizer, and R. J. Squier, *Excavations at La Venta, Tabasco, 1955*, *Smithsonian Institution Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin* 170 (1957), pp. 199–200, think they see the flying reptile represented at La Venta in Olmec times, but Ignacio Bernal, *Olmec World*, *op. cit.*, 61–62, denies that there are feathers on it or other early serpent

figures. He places the earliest representation of the feathered serpent only shortly before the time of Christ. What has been interpreted as a "Plumed Serpent" from Chiapas definitely dates several centuries before Christ. Agrinier, *Archaeological Burials*, p. 18, fig. 23.

26. George C. Vaillant, *The Aztecs of Mexico*, pp. 160, 174.

27. John L. Sorenson, *A Chronological Ordering of the Mesoamerican Pre-Classic*, MARI 18 (1955), pp. 53–57.

28. Joyce Marcus, "The Origins of Mesoamerican Writing," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 5 (1976):49–55.

29. Lee A. Parsons, "An Early Maya Stela on the Pacific Coast of Guatemala," *Estudios de Cultura Maya* 6 (1976):180. More recently at Abaj Takalik on the coast of Guatemala was found a stela dated A.D. 126, which narrows the "gap."

30. Lowe and colleagues refer to the violent breaking up and burying of carved stone monuments at Chiapa de Corzo, Chinkultic, and various sites in Guatemala and El Salvador. Gareth W. Lowe, Thomas A. Lee, Jr., and Eduardo Martinez E., *Izapa: An Introduction to the Ruins and Monuments*, NWA 31 (1982), p. 28. At this same time at Chiapa de Corzo, the "Horcones occupation ended with its violent overthrow" accompanied by "an attitude of irreverence for both the dead and for certain conventions." Lowe, "Burial Customs," p. 73.

31. Robert J. Sharer, "Chalchuapa: Investigations at a Highland Maya Ceremonial Center," *Expedition* 11 (Winter 1969):36–38.

32. Thought on the problem is surveyed in Robert Wauchope, *Zacualpa, El Quiche, Guatemala. An Ancient Provincial Center of the Highland Maya*, MARI 39 (1975), pp. 49–52.

33. Gene A. Sessions, ed., *Mormon Democrat: The Religious and Political Memoirs of James Henry Moyle* (Salt Lake City: LDS Church Historical Department, 1975), pp. 90, 163ff.

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50. *Ibid.*
51. William T. Sanders, *The Cultural Ecology of the Teotihuacan Valley. A Preliminary Report of the Results of the Teotihuacan Valley Project* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, 1965), p. 179.
52. Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl, conveniently accessible in Hunter and Ferguson, *Ancient America*, p. 383.

53. Covarrubias, *Mexico South*, p. 27.
54. The Aztecs labeled the vast, boggy region *Chalchihuecan*, Place of Lady-Jade-Skirts, the goddess of still waters. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
55. For example, see Alma 56:28 as well as frequent reference to the “camp” accompanying an army, as in Alma 48:6. On Mesoamerican practice see, for example, Hunter and Ferguson, *Ancient America*, pp. 383–84, concerning the Tulteca.
56. As mentioned in an earlier chapter, the 10,000-man unit under a lineage captain was still the norm when Mexico was invaded by Cortez. Bernal Diaz, *The Bernal Diaz Chronicles*, p. 106.
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58. David Palmer, *In Search of Cumorah* (Bountiful, Utah: Horizon, 1981).
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CAL SITES ERICA



About the Author

John L. Sorenson, emeritus professor of anthropology at Brigham Young University, holds bachelor's and master's degrees in archaeology from BYU, a master's degree in meteorology from the California Institute of Technology, and a Ph.D. in anthropology from the University of California at Los Angeles.

He originated the program in anthropology at BYU in 1958, heading it for fourteen of his twenty-four years of faculty service at the university. His primary academic activity was in social and applied anthropology, although he always maintained the strong interest in Mesoamerican studies with which he entered the field. He served as director of social sciences at General Research Corporation in Santa Barbara, California, in the 1960s and later founded Bonneville Research Corporation in Provo, Utah. He is the author of more than 150 publications.

In The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, he has been a missionary, high councilor, and bishop, although teaching has always been his preferred activity. He and his late wife, Kathryn, reared nine children. In 1993 he married Helen Lance Christianson, mother of nine.