

# glyph *notes*

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## Where Did the People of The Book of Mormon Live? Archaeological and Linguistic Evidences Provide a Key

By Lyle L. Smith

*A few years ago, beginning in 2011, Pre-Columbian Studies Institute (PSI) published a series of articles in its publication glyph notes relating to the geography of The Book of Mormon. Although we know salvation is not dependent upon what we believe about its geography, we also believe it is important to establish the geography of The Book of Mormon. Consider this: if the glory of God is intelligence, light and truth, would it not behoove us to know where the people in The Book of Mormon lived? In a prior article, Shirley Heater proposed an excellent reason for locating the lands and descendants of people in The Book of Mormon:*

*In these Last Days, we are poised on the threshold of the culmination of both Biblical and Book of Mormon prophecies. This understanding leads us to the main reason we need to know the geographical setting—to identify Lehi’s descendants who are part of the House of Israel.... [They] must be brought back into the mother tree as part of the restoration of the House of Israel (Heater 2005:3).*

We begin our search for where the people of The Book of Mormon lived in the Americas by asking four major questions.

1. What do the authors of The Book of Mormon tell us about geography?
2. What geographical setting exhibits major cultural similarities with The Book of Mormon account?
3. Where does the archaeological record match Book of Mormon history?
4. Where do we find a phonetic written language system that works much like other great hieroglyphic systems in the world, such as Egyptian and cuneiform?



*This plate, decorated with two fish, comes from the central Mexican site Tlapacoya and dates from 1000 to 600 B.C.*

*Cont. on Page 2*

*Would it not behoove us to know where the people in The Book of Mormon actually lived? How else can we share the testimony of Christ to the descendants of the people in The Book of Mormon if we do not know who and where they are?*



Lyle Smith and Aaron Presler

for food. During a period of their history they were to become a great nation (Ether 1:20 [LDS 1:43]). Their civilization lasted almost 3000 years, until a few centuries before the time of Christ.

### Support from Archaeology

Archaeologists have discovered that there was a great nation in Mesoamerica north of a narrow neck of land. This civilization began around 3000 B.C., probably on the Pacific

## Evidences Provide a Key (Cont. from Page 1)

By answering all the previous questions, the correct geographical setting of The Book of Mormon will be defined. Without the answers to these questions *there is no basis* for the geography of The Book of Mormon. One cannot define its geography in a vacuum by ignoring these questions. This article will present a sampling of evidences in relation to the last two questions.

We need to recognize that the record written by the ancient prophets is our *primary source*. Therefore, the format followed below first quotes The Book of Mormon and then quotes some scholars whose research in archaeology and epigraphy provide supportive evidence for the truth of this record.

### Early Major Civilization

#### The Book of Mormon

In the Book of Ether we find out about a civilization much earlier than the people of Lehi and the Mulekites. We call this earlier civilization the Jaredites. They were led by the hand of the Lord to the Promised Land from the great tower at the time of the confusion of languages. They settled in an area identified as northward of the narrow neck of land (Ether 4:68-70 [LDS 10:20-21]), bringing with them the knowledge of pottery making and the concept of domesticated plants versus hunters and gatherers

Coast. Later, around 1800 B.C. near the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, the beginnings of great cities, as well as many outstanding achievements, were initiated. Archaeologists call the people after 1800 B.C. the Olmec and the area in Mesoamerica where they resided, the Olmec Heartland. The people before 1800 B.C. are called the Olmec predecessors. “Because of their early achievement in art, politics, religion and economics, the Olmec stand for many as a kind of ‘mother culture’ to all the civilizations that came after, including the Maya and the Aztec” (Stuart 1993:92).

The Olmecs were Native Americans who created a unique culture in southeastern Mexico’s Isthmus of Tehuantepec.

Archaeologists now trace Olmec origins back to pre-Olmec cultures in the region (Diehl 2004:13).

Diehl also wrote that the “Olmecs were the first Native Americans to erect large architectural complexes, live in nucleated towns and cities, and develop a sophisticated art style executed in stone and other imperishable media” (2004:12).

Some of the first evidence of people in this part of Mesoamerica comes from farming. “After 3000 B.C. it is clear that lowland societies began to acquire domesticated plants” (Adams 2005:42).

The museum label with this black Olmec-style bowl, says, "The bowl reveals the crisp, sure-handed carving that characterizes early Olmec-style ceramics from 1200 to 950 B.C., which are known primarily from non-Gulf Coast sites in Central America and the Pacific Coast."



Sherrie Kline Smith

A date of "2400 B.C. is associated with some of the earliest, if not the earliest, pottery in Mesoamerica" which was found at Puerto Marquez on the Pacific coast of Mexico (Adams 2005:42, 45).

"Between 1800 and 1400 BC, they [Olmec] moved 2.2 million tons . . . of earth as part of the initial step in their plan to erect the first capital [San Lorenzo] of the Olmec world" (Cyphers 2010:37). This great building initiative took place on the Gulf Coast and matches the timeline in the book of Ether which indicated major cities being built after the great dearth or famine (Ether 4:32-79 [LDS 9:27-10:28]).

Archaeological finds in Mesoamerica support the history as given in the Jaredite account. There is evidence of a great nation north of a narrow neck of land at the right time. There is evidence of agriculture and culture covering three thousand years that agrees with one of the major civilizations recounted in The Book of Mormon.

Now that we have found a major civilization that matches the Jaredites, we need to find another civilization close by that equates with the peoples of Lehi and Mulek.

## Roads and Highways

### The Book of Mormon

And it came to pass that there were many cities built anew, and there were many old cities repaired, and there were many highways cast up, and

many roads made, which led from city to city, and from land to land, and from place to place (3 Nephi 3:8 [LDS 6:8]).

### Support from Archaeology

One of the exciting finds from archaeology is the recognition of ancient, extensive road systems built by the Maya civilization. *They crisscrossed the whole Maya area.* James A. O’Kon, who described himself as “a crossover engineer with a life-long passion for the Maya civilization,” undertook a study of Maya engineering, resulting in the book *The Lost Secrets of Maya Technology*. His chapter “The Maya Interstate Highway System” provides supportive evidence for the “many highways cast up” (O’Kon 2012:205-230).

Maya technology was challenged to develop a creative solution that would overcome the reliance on rough jungle trails.... The solution was an all-weather road system that facilitated the flow of goods, communications, and the swift movement of military traffic, while enhancing political and economic relations between polities. This innovative roadway system was developed around 300 BC and spread throughout the realm. Maya call these roads *sacbe* . . . which means “white road,” referring to the white color of the road pavement (O’Kon 2012:205-206).

The basic geometric profile of the sacbe required a 10-meter-wide, paved, concrete surface elevated a minimum of 1 meter above the ground surface by stone sidewalls and a cast-in-place concrete base.... The field engineering for the construction of a Maya roadway used a few simple surveying instruments. The basic engineering tools have not changed in contemporary road construction (O’Kon 2012:206-207).

The sacbe system extended throughout the peninsula, interconnecting the major city-states. The concept, purpose, and geographic distribution of the sacbe



Sherrie Kline Smith

Shirley Heater stands on one of the original roads at the site of Edzna.

*Cont. on Page 4*

## Evidences Provide a Key *(Cont. from Page 3)*

system was similar to the interstate highway system in the United States, the Autobahn system in Germany, and the Roman road system in the Roman Empire (O’Kon 2012:209).

Some of these “white roads” are still in existence at such sites like El Mirador and Tikal in the Peten, and Coba, Chichen Itza, and Dzibilchaltun in the Yucatan. One of the 16 roads in Coba is 62 miles long and runs from the ruin known today as Coba to the ruin of Yaxuna (Coe 2015:163).

### Cement in the Land Northward

#### The Book of Mormon

And there being but little timber upon the face of the land [northward], nevertheless the people who went forth became exceeding expert in the working of cement: therefore they did build houses of cement, in the which they did dwell [circa 45-50 B.C.] (Helaman 2:7 [LDS 3:7]).

#### Support from Mesoamerican Archaeology

Discoveries made by archaeologists in Mesoamerica strongly support this Book of Mormon requirement of cement, particularly in the “land northward.” David S. Hyman made an intensive study of cement (concrete, stucco, and mortar) “from many important sites throughout Mexico and Central America including about a dozen representative specimens at Teotihuacan.... All cements proved to be pure or nearly pure calcium carbonate. Extreme hardness and durability of the finished concrete



Don Beebe

*Underneath the grass, the cement of the 400-meter square plaza at Teotihuacan surrounds the Temple of Quetzalcoatl (the building to the right).*

slab or stucco had been accomplished by purity of cement, incredible skill in proportioning and mixing with the aggregates and, in some cases, by the use of additives and surface hardeners” (Hyman 1973:314).

Hyman further comments that his “earliest samples were of the highest quality at this site [Teotihuacan], the products of a sophisticated technology, while specimens taken from later periods were increasingly lower in quality” (Hyman 1973:314). The excellence of the concrete and stucco in the early Classic periods, both at Teotihuacan and in the Oaxaca Valley, motivated Hyman to do more research into an earlier period. Both Teotihuacan and the Oaxaca Valley are in Mesoamerica north of the narrow neck of land (Isthmus of Tehuantepec).

The great plaza at Teotihuacan, measuring more than 400 meters by 400 meters, surrounding the Temple of Quetzalcoatl was cemented over several times during the years of its occupation 100 B.C. to A.D. 700 (Cabrera Castro, et al. 1991:80).

### Writing

It is clearly evident that the Nephites had the ability to write. Nephite scriptures were written in the language of the Egyptians based on the learning of the Jews. Both Egyptian and Hebrew were phonetic languages at 600 B.C. When searching for evidence of people in The Book of Mormon, we must find evidence of writing that is similar to Hebrew and Egyptian. This means that the literary style, patterns, and grammar represents Hebrew, the learning of the Jews, and the script and language represent the language of the Egyptians.

#### The Book of Mormon

Therefore I make a record of my proceedings in my days; Yea, 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 1:1 [LDS 1:1-2]).

And now behold, 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 4:98-99 [LDS 9:32-33]).

#### Support from Mesoamerican Archaeology and Epigraphy

*Mesoamerica is the only area in the Americas where writing systems have been identified* (Pool 2007:290 and Benson 1973:v). While a few isolated examples of written inscriptions have been found



Cliff Herod

The Maya wrote upon all types of materials: mostly stone monuments, but also shells, ceramics, jade, and “books” made of bark paper. Pictured here is an engraved stone ball court marker from Caracol, a site in Belize. The marker has two dates: November 3, A.D. 798—about the time the marker was inscribed—and January 14, A.D. 331. This earlier date comes after an “it came to pass” glyph (last glyph at the end of the second column) and refers to an event that happened on that day. Just prior to A.D. 331, Mormon relates how he defeated Aaron, the Lamanite king, and his army of 44,000 (Mormon 1:31-33 [LDS 2:9-10]).

in both North and South America, epigraphers recognize that the only writing systems in the Americas, earlier than Columbus, are found in Mesoamerica. The largest corpus of examples is the writing of the Maya. Thousands of hieroglyphic inscriptions carved on stone and pottery with painted hieroglyphs provide solid evidence for this. In the quotes below, the dates for the beginning of writing in the Maya area and the fact that their writing works much like Old World scripts, such as Egyptian, match The Book of Mormon requirement.

Monuments, dating to an era [500-200 B.C.] from the Salama Valley in the Maya highlands indicate that [this area] almost surely saw the emergence of the earliest Mesoamerican writing systems (Sharer 1989:169).

The San Bartolo block achieves importance because it narrows the time in which writing first appears in Mesoamerica. Most early finds, regardless of region, now come close to the midpoint [500 B.C.] of the first millennium B.C. (Houston 2006:1250).

These two references about the beginning of writing in the Maya area support The Book of Mormon. Of more importance is the realization that, although the Maya hieroglyphs do not look much like Old World scripts, “the writing system itself worked much like the other great hieroglyphic systems in the world, Egyptian and cuneiform...” (Schele and Freidel 1990:52). See also *Breaking the Maya Code* by Michael Coe and “Egyptian and Maya Hieroglyphs: The Same Writing System” by Sherrie Kline Smith.

## The Testimony of Christ

### The Book of Mormon

The most important event in The Book of Mormon is **the testimony that Christ came to the Promised Land** after his resurrection in the Old World. Christ can be identified by some of the following characteristics. 1) His abode is heaven; 2) He existed before his birth; 3) He was both father and son; 4) He was the creator with God; 5) He taught baptisms by water and spirit; 6) He made the great and last sacrifice; 7) He was resurrected; and 8) He appeared to the Nephites in his resurrected body, descending from the sky.

### Support from Epigraphy

One of the most outstanding achievements among Mesoamerican epigraphers and archaeologists has been the decipherment of the writing in the Maya area. Cracking the Maya hieroglyphic writing system brought considerable new knowledge about the Maya. Among that knowledge was an amazing parallel with Christ and his visit as recorded in The Book of Mormon.

There is a set of three gods identified at several sites, but especially from inscriptions at Palenque. Because they do not know the names—which, by the way, are some of the most difficult words to translate into another language—the set of gods was designated God G1, G2, and G3. Again, while they do not know the names, epigraphers understand that God G1 is associated with the following concepts that parallel those mentioned above about Christ: 1) his abode is heaven; 2) he existed before he was “born”; 3) he is also both father and son; 4) he is a creator god; 5) he is associated with water and wind;

*Cont. on Page 6*

## Evidences Provide a Key (Cont. from Page 5)

6) he participates in a sacrificial event; 7) he descends from the sky; and 8) perhaps the best known quality of this god is that he is a resurrected god. (See Stuart 2006 and Smith 2006:1-5.) There is abundant evidence throughout the Maya area of the concept of resurrection.

The hieroglyphs, carved by the Maya two to four hundred years after the end of Book of Mormon history, show remarkable consistency with the description of Christ as portrayed in The Book of Mormon carved on metal plates two to four hundred years earlier.

**TABLE 1**

THE BOOK OF MORMON Jesus Christ	MAYA God G1
Abode is in heaven	Abode is heaven
Existed before birth	Existed before birth
Both father and son	Both father and son
Creator with God	Co-creator
Baptisms of water and spirit	Water and wind
Great and last sacrifice	Sacrificial event
Resurrected	Resurrection
Descends from sky	Descends from sky

## Conclusions

From our brief look at what The Book of Mormon includes about geography, I feel confident in making these following conclusions. We first looked at the Jaredite history. There is no archaeological evidence in North America that— *in any way*— matches the Jaredite history as found in the Book of Ether. While there was a civilization in South America dating to around 3000 B.C., it was not close to a narrow neck of land or to the civilizations described as the people led by Lehi and Mulek.

Nowhere in North or South America, between 600 B.C. and A.D. 400, is there evidence of a *system of roads* that match Book of Mormon requirements. Likewise, there is no evidence of the *abundant use of cement*. Even more important, no area of the Americas has *writing systems* except in Mesoamerica.

This one last thought about written archaeological evidence is more important than all the above. **Only in the Maya hieroglyphs, written in stone, is there evidence of Christ in Mesoamerica that one can see and touch.**

We can choose to believe what we want about the geography of The Book of Mormon. As I said earlier, I do not see how it will affect our salvation, but please

consider that if “the glory of God is intelligence, or . . . light and truth” (D&C 90:6a), would it not behoove us to know where the people in The Book of Mormon actually lived? How else can we share the testimony of Christ to the descendants of the people in The Book of Mormon if we do not know who and where they are?

As Shirley Heater wrote earlier about The Book of Mormon, “[we] realize the responsibility inherent in embracing it. We are caretakers of this record, and in God’s great scheme of things, it must go to the descendants to whom and for whom it was written and preserved” (Heater 2005:3).

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# glyph quotes *And he shall be called Jesus Christ ~ Mosiah 1:102 [LDS 3:8]*

By Sherrie Kline Smith

About 100 years before the birth of Christ, King Benjamin received an angelic visitor. This angel's message was to announce the coming birth of the Son of God. Later, when sharing the angel's message with his people, King Benjamin used these words: "And he shall be called Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things, from the beginning; and his mother shall be called Mary" (Mosiah 1:102 [LDS 3:8]).

King Benjamin also explains in depth to his people about Christ's mission and his atonement for our sins.

For behold as in Adam, or by nature they fall, even so the blood of Christ atoneth for their sins. And moreover, I say unto you, that there shall be no other name given, nor any other way nor means whereby salvation can come unto the children of men, only in and through the name of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent (Mosiah 1:115-116 [LDS]).

There was much more to the angel message: throughout, however, the angel used the name "Christ" or "Jesus Christ," not simply Jesus.

Christ has other names or titles, such as Only Begotten, Redeemer, Messiah, the Lamb of God, King of Kings, the Prince of Peace, and many more. God calls his Only Begotten Son Jesus Christ in Genesis 6:53, 60 (IV). In modern-day revelation we are told, "Jesus Christ is the name which is given of the Father, and there is none other name given whereby man can be saved" (D&C 16:4f).

A recent study of the name Jesus Christ lends credence to Jesus as his Hebrew name in the society where he lived.

The angel told Mary to call her newborn babe Jesus. At that time, before and after, others in the Hebrew society also have had the name Jesus. To me, "Jesus" denotes his humanity: the son of the Mary. Christ, or Christos, Greek for "the anointed one," on the other hand, conveys his divinity: the Son of God.


Curiously, when reviewing the New Testament, the name Jesus is used mostly in the four testimonies (or gospels) in relation to his life and ministry while in the flesh and before his resurrection. After that, the authors of the New Testament usually call him Jesus Christ or Christ Jesus.

When King Benjamin finished relating the angel's message, the people, with one voice, cried aloud, "For we believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who created heaven and earth, and all things, who shall come down among the children of men" (Mosiah 2:4 [LDS 4:2]).

King Benjamin ends his farewell address by conferring upon his people, who had entered into a covenant to serve Jesus Christ, a new name: "There is no other name given, whereby salvation cometh, therefore, I would that ye should take upon you the name of Christ, all you that have entered into the covenant with God" (Mosiah 3:11, but see all of chapter 3 [LDS 5:8, and all of 5]; and D&C 16:4e-g).

Therefore, those who believe and covenant with

Christ take upon them the name of Christ. We become his sons and daughters. Thus, we are called Christians, and thus, the name of the church is rightly called the Church of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ brings atonement and salvation to those who believe, and the "gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23). What a marvelous reason for celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ, the Son of God! 



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*Where Did the People of  
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*Greeting Friends*

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## Greeting Friends,

Pay it forward! This concept has become widely followed these past years. The dictionary defines pay it forward as “the response of a person’s kindness to oneself by being kind to someone else.”

This time of year is traditionally known as the season of gifting. Amidst the excitement and enjoyment for some and the stress for others while searching for the right gift for a cherished one this Christmas season, please don’t forget that the perfect gift has already been purchased and given. “The gift of God is eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 6:23). Our Lord gave the most precious gift to all.

Although this gift IS for all, not all are aware of the gift, and many do not even acknowledge the gift. “For what doth it profit a man if a gift is bestowed upon him, and he receive not the gift? Behold, he rejoices not in that which is given unto him, neither rejoices in him who is the giver of the gift” (D&C 85:7).

No one could ever repay our Lord for his gift. But, we can show our appreciation and acceptance of the gift by demonstrating in our daily walk of life that we love our neighbor as ourselves (Galatians 5:14), and we “receive . . . one another, as Christ also received us, to the glory of God” (Romans 15:7). In other

words, he asks us to pay it forward.

Pre-Columbian Studies Institute (PSI) is asking you to consider partnering with us as we endeavor to spread the good news of the Restored Gospel that all might learn of Jesus Christ and his gift. Your support and contributions have enabled the organization to reach thousands through its newsletter, *glyph notes*, to publish a children’s resource, *The Adventures of Beezrom*—150 copies are going to Africa in January!—and to conduct seminars and classes. A new project is in the planning stage for a devotional resource along with the development of PSI’s own website to expand outreach.

Your support is vital and greatly appreciated. If you have not already done so, please take a moment to update your subscription to the newsletter and to support PSI in moving forward with new publications and greater outreach. A self-addressed envelope is provided in this issue for your convenience. Again, we thank each one who has been a faithful supporter of Book of Mormon research over the years. Together we can pay it forward to reach as many as possible, for as long as possible.

May the new year bring you peace, joy and happiness.

Patricia J. Beebe, Vice-President  
Pre-Columbian Studies Institute 