

## Archaeology: Nephite Isolation

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Apologists focus primarily on Middle Eastern and Biblical topics, rather than the archaeology of pre-Columbian North, Central and South America. Undoubtedly they have found the Americas to be unproductive turf for their objectives. Yet even the lay Mormon has heard of problems, such as the consensus among archaeologists, paleontologists and other experts, that horses did not exist in the New World during the past several millennia, in agreement with the eye-witness reports of the first Europeans arriving in the New World, *to wit*, that they found no horses. Indeed, this is just the very tip of the iceberg. Its massive body includes such things as horses, cows, sheep, goats, wheat, barley, iron smelting, steel making, written materials in Nephite Hebrew and reformed Egyptian, and the list goes on.

For many, this is enough to conclude that the Book of Mormon is a nineteenth century historical fiction. But hope springs eternal. Believers have argued that perhaps the material culture of the BOM civilization was such that it would not survive. "They built with wood," some say, "and it all decayed into the soil." Yet, the largest city in prehistoric Europe (Los Millares, copper-age, 3,000 BCE) was built with wood and clay, and protected by a earthen circumvallation, and yet it has survived, and many important remains have been excavated, even though it is thousands of years earlier than the proposed date of the Nephites. Others would like to believe that the remains of Jaredite, Nephite and Lamanite cities lie in some remote valley, yet to be discovered.

This is unlikely. Book of Mormon cartographers, believers all, make the map of the BOM lands in the form of an hour glass. Some use a pure hourglass figure, making no effort to relate it to the map of the Americas. Others use the familiar outline of that map of the Americas, emptied out of all real-world contents, to draw in the BOM lands and cities. The reason for the hour glass shape, in both cases, is due to the fact that the BOM provides a clear anchor: the narrow neck of land:

Alma 22:32. And now, 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; and thus the land of Nephi and the land of Zarahemla were nearly surrounded by water, there being a small neck of land between the land northward and the land southward. (See also: Alma 63:5, and regarding Jaredite geography, Ether 10:20).

Some cartographers, inexplicably desiring to place the BOM lands entirely in Central America, try to make the Yucatan Peninsula that narrow neck of land, although it is far too wide. Crossing from east to west "was only a day and a half's journey." The only feature that works is the Isthmus of Panama. There is no way to tuck BOM geography into some remote valley in the Amazon (and even that region is being archaeologically explored).

And yet, it is what the Book of Mormon does not say that provides the ultimate test, and the most ineluctable conclusion.

The Book of Mormon makes it clear that upon the arrival of the families of Lehi and Ishmael, and the band of Mulek, all leaving Jerusalem during the reign of Zedekiah (c. 597-590 BCE), the land of their inheritance was empty. It was theirs alone, to preserve a branch of Israel to be gathered to Christ in the latter days. The BOM had to go to atrocious lengths to make this happen, since the Jaredites and their civilization was there first, also led there by God, but from the tower of Babel. What to do? Happily, they had divided into two branches, one more righteous than the decidedly wicked other group. Warfare between the two eventually led both leaders to gather their forces to—where else?—upstate New York. These were men of might, Coriantumr, leader of the more righteous group, and Shiz, leader of the wicked group. In their initial battles, Coriantumr “saw that there had been slain by the sword already nearly two millions of his people ... there had been slain two millions of mighty men, and also their wives and their children.” (Ether 15:2-2) One assumes that the casualties among the wicked group were no less. This makes every known historical battle a minor skirmish. At this point, the two leaders, the good guy and the bad guy, realize that this was a fight to extermination of one group or the other. So they took four years to gather every living human being from throughout the two continents, to have available to them the fighting potential of every man, woman and child. (Ether 15:12-14) While doing this, apparently others fabricated armor and weapons for every man, woman and child: “both men women and children being armed with weapons of war, having shields, and breastplates, and head-plates, and being clothed after the manner of war.” (Ether 15: 15) Then, the preparations made, they all fought to the end, to their mutual total extermination. Only the two leaders were left standing. Coriantumr killed Shiz, at which point the former was placed outside the realm of us mere mortals, to become the wandering Jaredite, whom some modern Mormons claim to have encountered. Thus the promise was kept, and the Israelite group entered into the land of their inheritance, purged of prior inhabitants, and totally reserved just for them. Splendid isolation.

The Book of Mormon text reinforces this assertion in its historical narrative. There is no single mention of any people or group that is not descended from Lehi, Ishmael or Mulek. Realistically, upon their arrival they would have found the land full of occupants. Like the arriving European explorers and settlers (and too the Vikings), they would have found all the best lands taken. In addition to accounts of negotiation and cooperation, there would be accounts of conflict and warfare with these other peoples. Even the Jaredite account makes no mention of other peoples in the New World.

The test based on the omissions in the Book of Mormon is more final than that of the commissions, because in the case of the omissions, the data set is fixed. We will not wake up one morning and all suddenly find in our BOM copy mentions of numerous other peoples, and wonder, "how did I not notice this before?" Improvements in the table below will only add more peoples that should have been mentioned. In stark contrast with the BOM, the Hebrew Bible is replete with numerous mentions to many other peoples, both near and far.

Culture	Dates and Details
Nazca	100 BCE—800 CE
Olmecs	c. 1500 BCE—earliest Olmec development (pos. preceded by Tabasco culture) c. 900 BCE—first Olmec center, at San Lorenzo, was abandoned c. 900—c. 400 BCE—founding of La Venta Olmec center. The Great Pyramid was the largest Mesoamerican structure of its time. Even today, after 2500 years of erosion, it rises 34 m (112 ft) above the naturally flat landscape. Buried deep within La Venta, lay opulent, labor-intensive "offerings" – 1000 tons of smooth serpentine blocks, large

	mosaic pavements, and at least 48 separate deposits of polished jade celts, pottery, figurines, and hematite mirrors.
Izapa	600 BCE—100 CE, the period within which the site reached its apogee. A monolithic jaguar was found in 2012 dated to c. 100 CE, the 84 <sup>th</sup> monolith found at the site.
Maya	2000 BCE—250 CE, formative period 250—900 CE, classical period, with Mayan sites at their height
El Mirador	300 BCE—150 CE, a massive Mayan site and political center with a huge pyramid, other stone architecture, and preclassical glyphs.
Paso del Macho	600-500 BCE, a find of cocoa used as a condiment, Yucatan.
El Zotz	350-400 CE, Temple of the Night Sun, with ornate painted stucco inside and out.
Tikal	250-400 CE, the largest Maya dam ever found, 260' long and 33' high.
Early Mayan writing	Slowly, a significant corpus of texts is emerging dating within the period from c.. 100 BCE to c. 150 CE, i.e., the late preclassic period (v. Ch. 6 by J. Kathryn Josserand, and Ch. 7 by Martha J. Macri, in Michael Love & Jonathan Kaplan, eds., <i>The Southern Maya in the Late Preclassic</i> , University Press of Colorado, 2011)
Xno'ha	400 BCE—600 CE, elite residential complex, with pottery dated to this period.
Ceibal	1000 BCE--? Lowest excavation level under a much later temple complex, even earlier than Olmec La Venta, providing data indicating that the Maya did not develop out of the Olmec or from their legacy, but that the Maya and the Olmec developed side by side, influencing one-another. (Guatemala) 400 BCE—200 CE, the late preclassic period 200-600 CE, early classic period.
Miramar Cenote	350 BCE, elaborate Maya ceramics found in the cenote.
Tak'alik Al'aj	700-400 BCE, tomb of a ruler wearing a vulture-headed human figure.
Chan Chich	770 BCE, a midden being excavated in this much looted Maya site, Belize.
Plan de Ayutla	250-550 CE, a theater, in the palace on top of the acropolis.
Bariles	4600-2300 BCE, the Tropical Forest Archaic period, rock shelter sites. 300 BCE—400 CE, Conception stage, first pottery 400-900 CE, Aguas Buenas period, Panama, large villages & small farmsteads
Monagrillo	2500-1200 BCE, Panama, early ceramic site
Sitio Conte	450-900 CE, Panama, primarily a necropolis with important ceramic remains
Sitio Sierra	c. 250 CE to the conquest, a significant site, with periods poorly defined
Chorrera	1300-300 BCE, noted for its advanced ceramic tradition
Las Vegas	8000-4600 BCE, 31 sites, primarily hunting, gathering & primitive agriculture.
Valdivia culture	3500-1800 BCE, impressive ceramic finds
Norte Chile (Caral)	3,000-1,800 BCE, Peru, with large pyramids (contemporary with ancient Egypt)
Chavin de Huantar	1,500 BCE, Peru, largely a ritual center (Chavin being pos. a religious cult)
Valdivia Culture	3,500-1800 BCE
Moche	100-800 CE, particularly noted for their elaborately painted ceramics, metallurgy,

		monumental constructions (huacas) and irrigation systems
Tiwanaku	?	precursor to the Incan culture, the ritual and administrative capital of a major state power for approximately five hundred years. The ruins of the ancient city state are near the south-eastern shore of Lake Titicaca in Bolivia
Chachapoyas		600 CE, located in the Amazonas region of northern Peru. It is possible that they built a settlement called Gran Pajáten where some ceramics have been dated to 200 BC.
Tulor		380 BCE—1200 CE, a village complex in Chile (most surviving structures are post 800 CE).
Lagoa Santa		? The center of Brazilian paleontology, a cave with 15 human skeletons and mega fauna.
Pedra Furada Acre		? Lithic art, pos. prior to the clovis culture. 0-700 CE, Brazil Amazonian site, with c. 300 massive mounds and moats.
Mound Builders		North American civilization, covering both the Jaredite & Nephite periods

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