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Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dream Map: Part 2 of 2

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JOSEPH AND THE AMAZING TECHNICOLOR DREAM MAP: PART 2 OF 2

Jeff Lindsay

Abstract: The Arabian Peninsula has provided a significant body of evidence related to the plausibility of Nephi's account of the ancient journey made by Lehi's family across Arabia. Relatively few critics have seriously considered the evidence, generally nitpicking at details and insisting that the evidences are insignificant. Recently more meaningful responses have been offered by well educated writers showing familiarity with the Arabian evidences and the Book of Mormon. They argue that Nephi's account is not historical and any apparent evidence in its favor can be attributed to weak LDS apologetics coupled with Joseph's use of modern sources such as a detailed map of Arabia that could provide the name Nahom, for example. Further, the entire body of Arabian evidence for the Book of Mormon is said to be irrelevant because Nephi's subtle and pervasive incorporation of Exodus themes in his account proves the Book of Mormon is fiction. On this point we are to trust modern Bible scholarship ("Higher Criticism") which allegedly shows that the book of Exodus wasn't written until long after Nephi's day and, in fact, tells a story that is mere pious fiction, fabricated during or after the Exile.

There were high-end European maps in Joseph's day that did show a place name related to Nahom. Efforts to locate these maps anywhere near Joseph Smith have thus far proved unsuccessful. But the greater failure is in the explanatory power of any theory that posits Joseph used such a map. Such theories do not account for the vast majority of impressive evidences for the plausibility of Nephi's account of the journey through Arabia (e.g., remarkable candidates for Bountiful and the River Laman, the plausibility of the eastward turn after Nahom). They do not explain why one obscure name among hundreds was plagiarized — a name that would have the good fortune of later being verified as a genuine ancient tribal name present in the right region in Lehi's day. More importantly, theories of fabrication

based on modern maps ignore the fact that Joseph and his peers never took advantage of the impressive Book of Mormon evidence that was waiting to be discovered on such maps. That discovery would not come until 1978, and it has led to many remarkable finds through modern field work since then. Through ever better maps, exploration, archaeological work, and other scholarly work, our knowledge of the Arabian Peninsula has grown dramatically from Joseph's day. Through all of this, not one detail in the account of Lehi's Trail has been invalidated, though questions remain and much further work needs to be done. Importantly, aspects that were long ridiculed have become evidences for the Book of Mormon. There is a trend here that demands respect, and no mere map from Joseph's day or even ours can account for this.

As for the Exodus-based attack, yes, many modern scholars deny that the Exodus ever happened and believe the story was fabricated as pious fiction well after 600 BC. But this conclusion does not represent a true consensus and is not free from bias and blindness. The Exodus-based attack on the Book of Mormon ultimately is a case where a weakness in biblical evidence from Egypt is used to challenge the strength of Book of Mormon evidence from Egypt's neighbor to the east, the Arabian Peninsula. We will see that there are good reasons for the absence of evidence from Egypt, and yet abundant evidence that the Exodus material interwoven in Nephi's account could have been found on the brass plates by 600 BC. The absence of archaeological evidence for Israel's exodus from Egypt and the chaos in the many schools of modern biblical scholarship do not trump hard archaeological, geographical, and other evidence from the Arabian Peninsula regarding Lehi's exodus.

We will see that some of the most significant strengths of the Book of Mormon have not been turned into weaknesses. Indeed, the evidence from Arabia continues to grow and demands consideration from those willing to maintain an open mind and exercise a particle of faith.

III. The Quest for the Dream Map

The Dream Map Theory

In Part 3 of RT's series at *Faith Promoting Rumor*, RT concludes that the most interesting evidences from Arabia must be explainable by natural means and proposes that Joseph must have had access to a map to guide his description of Nephi's journey.¹⁸¹ Dr. Phillip Jenkins takes a similar stance on his blog.¹⁸² This leads to two questions for consideration here: (1) Can any map in Joseph's day provide the information he would have

needed to fabricate the description of Lehi's journey, with the apparent evidences for authenticity that have excited so many Latter-day Saints? If so, then (2) is it plausible that Joseph had access to such a map and used it in crafting the Book of Mormon?

With "direct hits" from the Arabian Peninsula being impressive enough, at least to some of us Mormons, to make blind luck seem like a rather miraculous foundation for theories of non-miraculous origins, some critics are naturally seeking materials from Joseph's day that could have been gleaned for guidance in writing the description of Lehi's journey. Since forms of *Nehem* were on some European maps predating the Book of Mormon, perhaps *Nahom* can be explained by Joseph having studied or at least glanced at a map. Perhaps the entire story could have been inspired by a map.

Jenkins instructively shows how simple it can be to lose sight of *Nahom* and the entire corpus of Arabian-related evidence. It is as simple as showing that Carsten Niebuhr published a 1792 book with a map showing "*Nehhm*" on it (this is presented as an important discovery that threatens the Mormon position, when it has been a vital part of what Mormons like Warren Aston have presented for many years). And sure enough, maps or works from Carsten Niebuhr, according to a link provided by Jenkins, are listed right in Joseph's vicinity, over at Allegheny College, Pennsylvania,¹⁸³ or in the Medical Library of Pennsylvania Hospital in Philadelphia.¹⁸⁴ Here I define "vicinity" somewhat broadly, for Allegheny College is over two hundred miles away from Palmyra, New York, where the Book of Mormon project started, or over three hundred miles from Harmony Township, Susquehanna County, Pennsylvania (not modern Harmony, Pennsylvania, which is much closer — Joseph's Harmony is near the border with New York),¹⁸⁵ where Joseph went to escape persecution and do the actual translation before returning to Palmyra to publish it. Philadelphia is closer to Harmony but still one hundred seventy miles away — arguably not close enough for a quick Saturday afternoon visit to the library to help plagiarize a place name.

At Allegheny Library, one of the largest and most celebrated libraries in the United States at that time, Joseph could have viewed Niebuhr's *Travels Through Arabia and Other Countries in the East*¹⁸⁶ which features a map of Yemen, to be discussed and shown below, containing the name "*Nehhm*." At the Medical Library of Pennsylvania Hospital, now the library of the Philadelphia College of Physicians,¹⁸⁷ Joseph could have accessed a French translation of one of Niebuhr's works, *Voyage en*

Arabie,¹⁸⁸ which features a version of his map of Yemen that, yes, shows “Nehhm.” In fact, this map appears to display a smaller section of Yemen that puts Nehhm more prominently at the top of the map. Whether this map could account for anything else on Lehi’s trail will be discussed below as we consider several candidate maps.

The presence of “Nehhm” or its variants on some early maps printed in Europe is “damning” evidence, according to Jenkins, and forces us to the conclusion that Joseph almost certainly got Nahom from a map:

The map evidence makes it virtually certain that Smith encountered and appropriated such a reference, and added the name as local color in the Book of Mormon.

Some European maps certainly circulated in the US, and the ones we know about are presumably the tip of a substantial iceberg. I have not tried to survey of all the derivative British, French and US maps of Arabia and the Middle East that would have been available in the north-eastern US at this time, to check whether they included a NHM name in these parts of Arabia. Following the US involvement against North African states in the early nineteenth century, together with Napoleon’s wars in the Middle East, I would assume that publishers and mapmakers would produce works to respond to public demand and curiosity.

So might Joseph Smith have looked at a map in a bookstore, been given one by a friend, seen one in a neighbor’s house, discussed one with a traveler, or even bought one? **After all, there is one thing we know for certain about the man, which is that he had a lifelong fascination with the “Oriental,” with Hebrew, with Egypt, with hieroglyphics, with his “Reformed Egyptian.” He would have sought out books and maps by any means possible** . . . No, no, I’m sorry to suggest anything so far-fetched. It’s far more likely, is it not, that he was visited by an angel, and discovered gold plates filled with total bogus misinformation in everything they say about the Americas, but with one vaguely plausible site in Arabia. Ockham’s Razor would demand that.

And yes, I’m joking. [*emphasis mine*]

The mature Joseph, after translating the Book of Mormon and having many revelations and other experiences, indeed shows a fascination with the antiquities, as we also should. But that’s not the young boy his mother knew, the unschooled farm boy whom she described as “much less inclined

to the perusal of books than any of the rest of our children.”¹⁸⁹ In his earliest history written in 1832, Joseph wrote:

It required the exertions of all that were able to render any assistance for the support of the Family therefore we were deprived of the bennifit of an education suffice it to say I was nearly instructid in reading writing and the ground rules of Arithmatic which const[it]uted my whole literary acquirements.¹⁹⁰

Joseph was not a bookworm and had little time for books, maps, and research before dictating the Book of Mormon at a remarkable rate. He didn’t even have a manuscript with him as he verbally dictated the text to his scribes. If he sought out books and maps, where were they? How did he use them?

If Joseph had a map, how did he use it and why? To be credible, the Dream Map Theory needs to somehow be part of a plausible theory of Book of Mormon fabrication. Adding local color? To this day, almost nobody except a few Mormon apologists and their readers have heard of Nahom in Arabia, so this obscure place certainly doesn’t count for adding local color. Most maps of Arabia in Joseph’s day, like those of our day, did not show Nehem, so it would not be recognized by the general population.

In terms of the overall theory of how Joseph fabricated the book, why would a plagiarist ignore all the abundant details on the map that could have been helpful, and, with the exception of the direction of the Frankincense Trail and the name Nahom/Nehem, instead tell us stories in places that aren’t shown — the River Laman, the Valley of Lemuel, the place Shazer, the camp of the broken bow, and Bountiful? Each of those was a shot in the dark without evidence of being extractable from a map. The Dream Map Theory does not lead to Bountiful nor to the River Laman and the place Bountiful, places that were mocked by educated anti-Mormons for decades,¹⁹¹ right up until field work established surprising confirmation of their plausibility — and now we are supposed to wipe that smile off our faces and admit that yes, it’s all there, easily derived from a passing glance at some magical “dream map” that the voracious student Joseph absolutely must have studied?

By the way, how long would it have taken to “translate” a fraudulent Book of Mormon if Joseph had to pore over books and maps to come up with a made-up concept every verse or two? This question needs to be considered for those who find plagiarism from multiple sources every

few sentences or so in the text, which was generated by oral dictation at a prodigious rate.

Let's return to the issue of the maps that Joseph might have seen or *must have* used (depending on your biases) and see how they could have helped Joseph.

A Treasure Trove of European Maps

When James Gee, an LDS businessman, independent researcher and antiquarian map collector, first read about Ross Christensen's discovery of Nehhm/Nahom on an old map of Yemen from 1771, he began a quest to find an original copperplate print of that map. He reports that it took him many years to find it.¹⁹² Ultimately he also found many more maps that mention a place similar to Nahom. There were also a great many less detailed maps that lacked this minor element.¹⁹³

Gee's list of Nahom-infused maps, all of which can be viewed in his online publication,¹⁹⁴ include:

Map 1. "Asia," Jean Baptiste Bourguignon d'Anville (Paris, 1751). 30" x 40"

Jean Baptiste Bourguignon d'Anville "would become the greatest cartographer of his time."¹⁹⁵ This was his first map of Asia, published in 1751. It is now viewable online in the David Rumsey collection.¹⁹⁶ Gee observes:

On this large-scale map of Asia, d'Anville prominently locates Nehem in the Arabian Peninsula, just above and to the east of Sana. Although spelled differently than the Nahom in the Book of Mormon, it is pronounced the same. D'Anville's location of Nehem seems to match Nephi's description. The fact that d'Anville had Nahom engraved on his map shows that it was important information to those traveling in that area of Arabia because d'Anville had a reputation for providing only important details on his maps.

D'Anville created his map of Arabia based on the records and writings of classical geographers, Arabs, and European travelers. This map excited the European community to learn more about Arabia, and it marks d'Anville "as the last and most important landmark in the old era of Arabian cartography." D'Anville's map of Arabia inspired the Danish

to lead an expedition to the area in 1761 to learn more about it and to fill in the details that d’Anville left out.¹⁹⁷

Map 2. “Yemen,” Carsten Niebuhr (Denmark, 1771). 15” x 23”

Carsten Niebuhr, a Danish explorer, was the sole survivor of a group that went to Sana’a in Yemen. His map of Yemen shows part of the Red Sea and western Yemen, not the entire Arabian Peninsula, making it a poor candidate for use in creating the route for Lehi’s trail. But it does include a version of Nahom. Niebuhr spells d’Anville’s *Nehem* as *Nehhm*, and, according to Gee, elsewhere noted the difficulty of spelling names due to multiple dialects and indistinct pronunciation in the country. He describes *Nehhm* as a district (with an area of over 2,000 square miles) that included a mountain and many villages. This shows Nahom was more than just a burial place or tribal name. A much smaller single color version of this map was printed in Niebuhr’s 1792 book that was, for example, at the library of Allegheny College.¹⁹⁸

Map 3. “Asia,” d’Anville, Revised and Improved by Mr. Bolton (London, 1755). 31” x 30”

Gee observes that this map is used in place of d’Anville’s rare 1751 map in a number of books. It also uses the spelling, *Nehem*.¹⁹⁹

Map 4. “Asia,” d’Anville, F. A. Schraembl (Austria, 1786). 30” x 40”

Map 5. “Arabia,” Rigobert Bonne (Paris, 1787). 14” x 10”

Nahom is spelled *Nehem* here. This map is available online in the David Rumsey collection.²⁰⁰

Map 6. “Asia,” D’Anville, J. Harrison (London, 1791). 32” x 30”

Map 7. “New Modern Map of Arabia,” D’Anville, with Improvements by Niebuhr, Published by Laurie & Whittle (London, 1794). 24.5” x 19.5”

In 1794 Robert Laurie and James Whittle published a guide for travelers in the Middle East called “The Oriental Navigator.” In that publication they printed a beautiful map of Arabia, the “New Modern Map of Arabia.” They used d’Anville’s spelling for Nahom. Available in the David Rumsey collection²⁰¹ and also at the World Digital Library (wdl.org).²⁰²

Map 8. “New Map of Arabia,” John Cary (London, 1804). 25” x 26”

A very detailed map that features Nehem, though the lengthy mountain range to its west makes it appear difficult for Frankincense Trail travelers to reach. Available at DavidRumsey.com.²⁰³

Map 9. “Arabia,” W. Darton (London, 1811). 11.5” x 10”

A map showing Nehem and trails near the coast of the Red Sea and the Frankincense Trail.²⁰⁴

Map 10. “Arabia,” John Thomson & Co. (Edinburgh, Scotland, 1814). 24.5” x 21”

All of these maps are visible in the large PDF document from James Gee,²⁰⁵ and most of these are available individually at the David Rumsey Collection (DavidRumsey.com); some are also available at the World Digital Library (wdl.org), Archive.org, and various sites for map collectors and antique documents.²⁰⁶

What Do the Maps Tell Us? What Could They Tell Joseph?

The issue of what Joseph might have actually known about Arabian geography is a difficult one because of the complete lack of evidence that he saw or even was anywhere near any of the most useful maps. Before we stretch too far, let’s start with the simple foundation that other critics have long given us. Joseph might have known something about Arabia from books and, yes, maps that were known in his region. This was explained to me long ago by a critic who challenged my Book of Mormon evidences page regarding the Arabian evidence.

That critic felt that Jedidiah Morse was the key to Joseph’s knowledge:

You write like an intelligent person. How is it you are still mired in LDS quicksand? Your comments on how Joseph Smith knew so much about the Arabian peninsula is [*sic*] without merit.

There existed in his time a school book entitled Geography Made Easy, Jedidiah Morse, 1813. Smith lived just 2 miles from Palmyra, New York. Where there were several bookstores and a library. No record of his visit though. He also received regularly the Palmyra Register, and later the Wayne Sentinel. The offices of which served double duty as a library. He had ample access to this information.

Not a very big leap of prophecy. More than a small step.

How do you respond to this fact!²⁰⁷

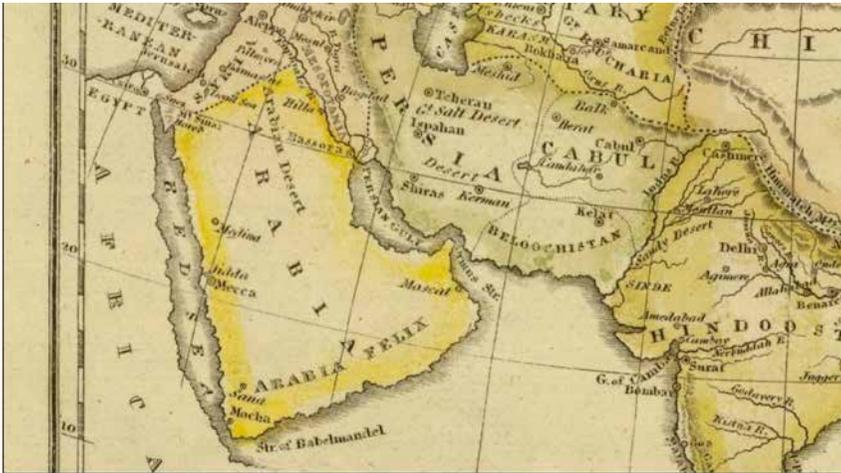
When I looked at *Geography Made Easy*,²⁰⁸ I was disappointed. There was a map there, but the only detail is the shape of the peninsula and the name “Arabia,” plus the names of the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf, and the Arabian Sea. The few lines about Arabia in the text offered scant relief to a young con man struggling to make up details for Lehi’s journey:

[Arabia] is divided into three parts, Arabia Petraea, Arabia Deserta, and Arabia Felix. Arabia Petraea is the smallest of the three, and toward the north is full of mountains, with few inhabitants, on account of its barrenness. ... It differs little from Arabia Deserta, so called from the nature of the soil, which is generally a barren land; but there are great flocks of sheep and herds of cattle near the Euphrates, where the land is good. In the desert are great numbers of ostriches, and there is a fine breed of camels in several places. ... Arabia Felix is so called on account of its fertility with regard to the rest. ...

Arabia Felix produces frankincense, myrrh, balm of Gilead, gum Arabic, and coffee, of which latter they export prodigious quantities.²⁰⁹

There is a mention of Mecca and Medina, and that’s it.

Morse gave us more detail elsewhere. He published a map in 1828 showing the Arabian Peninsula (available from the David Rumsey collection of historic maps).²¹⁰ Though to me it seems to lack any meaningful guidance that could possibly account for the most noteworthy evidences from Arabia, this may be due to my pro-LDS biases. To a more educated, more objective critic, Joseph’s plagiarism might be more evident.



Arabia on the world map of Jedidiah Morse.

While I am not sure if this map actually arrived anywhere near Joseph, a book with a related map and more detail than *Geography Made Easy* was listed in the Manchester Library, where Joseph theoretically could have gone (though he was not a subscriber to this subscription-based library).²¹¹ Morse's *The American Universal Geography* has an entire chapter on Arabia and has a black-and-white map of the Eastern Hemisphere at the beginning that appears to have roughly as much detail as the color map of 1828.²¹² The small section on geography still offers little that could help Joseph in concocting a journey that would later be found to be vastly more plausible than it seemed. There are more names: Medina, Mecca, Mocha, Suez, Oman, Aden, Yemen, Gehhra, Katif, Merab, Kasim, Maskat, Rostak, Labsa, Seger, Dafar, Hodeida, Faitach, and the leading city of Saana [*sic*], said to be at the bottom of a mountain called Nikkum²¹³ (a hint of Nahom?) There is also a description of the terrain:

Face of the Country. The general aspect of Arabia presents a central desert of great extent, with a few fertile *oases* or isles, as in Africa; while the flourishing provinces are those situated on the shores of the sea, which supplies rain sufficient to maintain the vegetation. In Yemen there are mountains of considerable height, but chiefly barren and unwooded; while the temperature and plants form a striking contrast with those of the plains: yet the want of rivers, lakes, and perennial

streams must diffuse ideas of sterility through the Arabian landscape. ...

Rivers. In the defect of rivers strictly belonging to Arabia, the Euphrates and Tigris ... have been claimed by some geographers. ... But in Arabia Proper what are called rivers are mere torrents, which descend from the mountains during the rains, and for a short period afterwards.²¹⁴

Morse also observes that there is little in the way of botany to discuss except “on the western side of the Arabian desert” due to the rivulets that the flow from the mountains that supply plants with moisture.²¹⁵ So if you feel that temporary rivulets from rain in the Western mountains and some vegetation from rain on the seashore is all it took to describe the details of Lehi’s trail, at least you’re in good company with a number of critics. And the “Morse is the Source” theory does have an important advantage over its competitors: given the widespread availability of Morse, we don’t have to speculate about rare and costly European maps or exotic atlases floating down the Erie Canal into Joseph’s hands. At least some of Morse’s works treating Arabia were nearby. He could have held it in his hands, seen it with his own eyes, and stolen from it at leisure, if he were so motivated.

But to me, there doesn’t seem to be much guidance given as to how one goes from Jerusalem to Bountiful, or where Bountiful is. And why not use the many details Morse provides, like place names and, naturally, the hordes of ostriches one encounters when traveling through Arabia?

Morse’s map, sadly, fails to give guidance regarding Nahom, though I have to wonder if the presence of the Nihm tribe not far north of Sana’a could be related to the Nikkum mountain said to be next to it. Morse and other nineteenth-century sources quote Niebuhr about a mountain named Nikkum being to the east of Sana’a,²¹⁶ and which could have a connection to the territory of Nehem/Nehhm and the Nihm tribe. Perhaps there is a connection, though not one that would clearly guide Joseph. However, it may point to the possibility that Nihm/Nehem was once pronounced, or may still be pronounced in some dialects, with a more guttural H similar to the hard H in the name of the Hebrew prophet Nahum. Had Joseph seen a source with Nikkum, however, he would not likely have recognized a connection between “kk” and the hard H of the Hebrew letter *heth* for he had not yet had the opportunity to study Hebrew.²¹⁷

Jenkins argues that a map from Carsten Niebuhr’s 1792 book might be a candidate, since there were two libraries that Joseph could have

visited that had a book by Niebuhr on Arabia.²¹⁸ The more distant library at Allegheny College (three hundred twenty miles from Harmony Township, Susquehanna County, or over two hundred miles away from Palmyra) had the book in English, while the closer Philadelphia library, one hundred seventy miles from Harmony Township, had it in French. Yes, in theory, Joseph could have traveled to remote libraries to track down Niebuhr's work, or perhaps a stranger or friend came through town with a book for the insatiable bookworm to relish. But does Neibuhr's map help? Here is the printed fold-out map bound inside his 1792 book.



View of Niebuhr's Map of Yemen, as printed in his 1792 *Travels Through Arabia*, provided at Archive.org.²¹⁹

Here is a detail showing the region “Nehhm” just below “Bellad” on the right-hand side.



Detail of Niebuhr’s map of Yemen.

This map would do little for the overall journey and might not readily suggest “Nahom” as a valid place name either, if Joseph were looking for help. Recognizing that travel eastward from Nehhm/Nahom could lead to anything fertile would seem to be difficult with this map, which shows nothing of the eastward coast and doesn’t even have the courtesy to identify the Red Sea on the west (shown instead as the Arabic Gulf). Using Niebuhr’s map, one would be motivated to only head directly south from Nehhm to reach what appears to be a place with a river at Aden. S. Kent Brown made a related observation about the misleading guidance Niebuhr’s map would have provided, for it would instruct a traveler to go south from Nehhm to reach the Hadramaut area, when in fact it is eastward.²²⁰

A further problem with Niebuhr’s map was noted by Eugene England, who observed that while Niebuhr’s map shows a littoral zone on the northwest shore of the Red Sea, it gives no clue to the existence of a system of wadis that could provide inspiration for the Valley of Lemuel.²²¹

Clearly Niebuhr’s map of a corner of Arabia just doesn’t qualify as the elusive Dream Map that the critics believe Joseph must have had, though it is the only map that critics have found so far that was physically in

Joseph's area, though still implausibly far away, as discussed above. Let's see what other maps might be more plausible candidates.

RT considers the maps that were available and the details that Joseph must have adapted. He identifies two as prime candidates for Joseph's use:

I have examined a large quantity of maps of Arabia that were circulating in the English world during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and have found only two that would account for multiple features in the Book of Mormon: the 1794 "A New Map of Arabia" by Robert Laurie and James Whittle, which was an English translation of d'Anville's map with improvements based on the research of Niebuhr, and the 1817 atlas map by Robert Kirkwood, which for the most part seems to follow Laurie and Whittle.²²²

RT favors two maps: Map #7 in Gee's list above, the Laurie and Whittle map, and a map not reported by Gee from Robert Kirkwood, also available in the Rumsey collection.²²³ Both are very similar. For the Kirkwood map, however, the publisher's note at DavidRumsey.com tells us of its rarity:

Pub Note:

Rare atlas, also pub. by Wm. Faden & John Smith. Kirkwood engraved some of the maps for Thomson's General Atlas (Edinburgh, 1817), but we can find no record of this atlas in Phillips, Tooley, Jolly (1983–92) or anywhere else — except for a record of a sale in the Map Collector #42. Kirkwood used A. Arrowsmith's maps from Pinkerton's Geography as a base, and enlarged and filled in detail where he could. The result is striking: these maps are more than twice the size of Arrowsmith's and often carry considerably more detail. Outline color.²²⁴

This is a rare map, for which records are exceedingly difficult to find, in contrast to many of the other maps of Arabia. I presume it was also relatively rare in Joseph's day, but this is uncertain. At a minimum, there is no clear evidence I have seen that this map was accessible to Joseph.

An advantage of the Kirkwood map is that it provides more details about trails, which could have been helpful in describing a path to Aqaba

and then further south, but, as with all other maps considered here, provides no guidance on reaching Nehem, no guidance about turning eastward at Nahom, no hint of the specific place Bountiful, and nothing related to the River Laman and the Valley of Lemuel except for the fact that yes, there are mountains near the Gulf of Aqaba.

Here are relevant portions of the Laurie and Whittle map published in London in 1794 by Laurie and Whittle, based on the work of D'Anville with added material from Niebuhr. It can be viewed in detail at DavidRumsey.com.²²⁵ Here is a portion showing Nehem:



Nehem detail on the 1794 D'Anville map of Arabia by Laurie and Whittle.

If Joseph saw this, would it not be natural to assume that the mountain range to the west of Nehem would make it difficult for travelers to reach coming from trails closer to the Red Sea?

Zooming out slightly, we can see the small name Dofar on the coast nearly due east of Nahom. Dofar, of course, is Dhofar, the whole southern portion of Oman where both candidates for Bountiful have been found, one at Khor Kharfot (connected to Wadi Sayq), which I find highly plausible, and another slightly further east at Khor Rori, proposed by Potter and Wellington.



Dofar region detail on the 1794 D’Anville map of Arabia by Laurie and Whittle.

Zooming out further, here is more of the map also showing the Red Sea.



Red Sea detail on the 1794 D’Anville map of Arabia.

And the full view:

To make a story that would sell, who could resist adding a touch about Gold Haven, or having a dramatic experience at Mount Horeb? Or revisiting Midian of Biblical fame, or having an episode in Jethro's Cave? For more fanciful names, why not throw in a touch of Kalaat el Moilah, Eyun-el Karib, or Gebel Iddahab?

Hold on, Gebel Iddahab, at the tip of the Gulf of Aqaba? Could that word Gebel be related to the Hebrew word, *gebul*, meaning border (as discussed in Part 1 of this paper)? Yes, whether written as *jabal*, *gebel*, or *gebal*, it is the Arabic word for mountains, cognate with the Hebrew for borders, and this map helpfully puts mountains/borders right at the tip of Aqaba, in the region where Nephi would first approach the Red Sea, possibly consistent with Nephi's account. So this could have been helpful to Joseph, especially if he had already been studying Hebrew and maybe a little Arabic. Of course, his study of Hebrew wouldn't begin until after the Book of Mormon — but perhaps one can imagine that his technical advisory team included a Near Eastern scholar or two to help with Hebraisms, names, and even maps.

The 1817 Kirkwood map, like the Laurie and Whittle map, features the name Nehem, not as a well or a town, but apparently as a region. As shown below, the Kirkwood map offers the advantage of showing specific trails that could have led Nephi from the Dead Sea to Aqaba (though probably not the trails Lehi took, according to Potter's analysis²²⁶). But as shown further below, these trails do not show a path to Nehem, and in fact, reaching it from Aqaba appears to be impeded by a wall of mountains around Nehem. Further, the name Nehem is in small print, about as small as any other minor feature on Kirkwood's map, and thus hardly would stand out to attract Joseph's attention. In light of these defects and the rarity of the Kirkwood map, RT's other leading candidate, the Laurie and Whittle map would seem to be the map of choice in RT's framework. So far I have not found evidence for it anywhere near Joseph, but that doesn't mean someone didn't bring one through town.

map, RT looks for more evidence of borrowing. Shazer is proposed as an adaptation of the name of the small town Hazire or Hazir listed on some maps. The location could be a four days' journey from the Valley of Lemuel — if Lehi were driving a Hummer. It's far too far south to reach with camels in four days. He also argues that *Irreantum*, the name applied by Nephi's group and said to mean "many waters" by Nephi as he beheld the grandeur of the ocean, obviously derives from the Erythraean Sea, which on some old maps is shown with its Latin name, *Erythraeum*. RT explains:

The conclusion therefore seems inescapable that either Smith had seen the name Erythraeum/Erythraean on a map and recalled it to the best of his ability (or modified it slightly to escape obvious notice) or he had heard it secondhand as the proper name of the Arabian Sea/Indian Ocean in antiquity. Either way, the name demonstrates an interest on the part of Smith in adapting real world place names for the purpose of adding ancient color to the narrative of the Book of Mormon.²²⁷

Irre - an - tum has similar letters to *Ery - threa - um*, though hardly the kind that compels an "inescapable" conclusion of borrowing from a map. The link to *Erythraean* is even less compelling.

Interestingly, neither of the two maps RT puts forward as his best candidates shows the Erythraean Sea, much less Erythraeum. Sounds like Joseph needed multiple maps for the job. Or perhaps RT is falling into a bit of parallelomania.

While several potential but speculative origins for Irreantum from Egyptian are proposed in the *Book of Mormon Onomasticon*,²²⁸ RT discounts any Egyptian etymology because most people in Nephi's group would not have known Egyptian, yet Nephi writes: "And we beheld the sea, which we called Irreantum" (1 Nephi 17:5). This reading may be overly restrictive and literal. In my reading, the verse does not require that every member of the group simultaneously selected and understood the name. It can simply mean that Lehi gave the name and the group accepted it, perhaps after he explained its significance.

Of the Egyptian etymologies listed at the *Book of Mormon Onomasticon*, one has recently received new attention in light of its connection to the Egyptian name for the River Orontes in Syria, site of the famous Battle of Kadesh, a battle whose account by the Egyptians appears to have provided significant motifs adapted by the Hebrews in their own Exodus account.²²⁹ Of the proposed Egyptian etymologies, Robert F. Smith writes:

The closest to Irreantum is the Egyptian name ... for the “Orontes,” the largest river in Syria, site of the great battle of Ramses II against the Hittites, at Qadesh. It is precisely this battle, as described afterward in papyri and monumental inscriptions in Egypt, which provides detailed motifs/tropes used throughout the biblical Exodus account. [The] Israelite Exodus is deliberately reenacted by Clan Lehi as they move through the desert, and their journey ends at Irreantum — just as the Qadesh battle account ends with the Hittites drowning in the Orontes river. As scribes trained in ancient Egyptian, Lehi and Nephi likely read that account of the Battle of Qadesh ..., they had the Egyptian Brass Plates, and Nephi certainly knew how to spell “Orontes” in Egyptian.²³⁰

Nephi or Lehi teaching that story to their group, if they did not already know it, could justify the “we” in “which we called Irreantum.” Of course, RT finds Exodus themes as proof of the fictional nature of the Book of Mormon, a topic we address below. Another problem, as noted in the *Onomasticon*, is that the proposed etymology “does not account for the doubled *r* and would we expect another vowel before the *r*.”²³¹

On the other hand, Irreantum may have a plausible meaning of “watering of (super) abundance” if viewed as South Semitic, as discussed by Paul Hoskisson et al.²³² and provided in the *Book of Mormon Onomasticon*,²³³ though RT critiques this on multiple counts with arguments that seem reasonable.²³⁴ If a South Semitic etymology has merit, we await further research to resolve the objections RT raises.

Meanwhile, returning to RT’s confidence that the Erythraean Sea accounts for Irreantum, perhaps we can ask if the choice of that name might have been influenced by what the Greeks called the Red Sea and the Arabian Ocean, *Erythra Thalassa*? Greek influence was present in the Mediterranean long before Nephi’s day, and perhaps Lehi’s group had heard that name before or during their journey, and found that it resonated with a seemingly suitable South Semitic or Egyptian name they coined or adapted. Perhaps adapting the coined word to fit a related Greek term accounts for some of the problems that can be found in the proposed etymologies. This is mere speculation, but if one insists on seeing “inescapable” evidence of a connection to the Erythraean Sea, the existence of the Greek name before 600 BC might provide an escape for Nephi.

Still seeking for more evidence of Joseph's intimate knowledge of Arabia from a detailed, high-end European map, RT concludes his post on the maps with an ironic and revealing passage:

Finally, one last piece of evidence that Smith used a map is suggested by the single statement that we have from him outside of the Book of Mormon describing the route taken by Lehi. As editor of the *Times and Seasons*, Smith commented on the discovery of archaeological remains in central America that support the existence of Book of Mormon peoples and in passing summarized the account of their origin: "Lehi went down by the Red Sea to the great Southern Ocean, and crossed over to this land, and landed a little south of the Isthmus of Darien." Although to some this laconic statement has been taken as proof that Smith could not have composed the complex narrative of the Book of Mormon, to me it suggests that he had a fairly clear mental image of the route through Arabia taken by the group. He speaks of Lehi coming "down by the Red Sea" and then all the way to the "great Southern Ocean," which can only refer to the Indian Ocean. Launching into the Indian Ocean implies the group had taken a route through Arabia, even though the Book of Mormon narrative is not explicit on this point. In addition, the emphasis on the "great Southern Ocean" matches the accent put on "Irreantum" or "many waters" in the Book of Mormon. Overall, Smith seems to betray a remarkably accurate knowledge of the route taken by Lehi, which he is likely to have gathered in the process of engaging firsthand with a map of Arabia in the construction of the Book of Mormon narrative years before.²³⁵

I find this amazing. The Book of Mormon clearly indicates that Nephi turned east, away from the Red Sea, and reaches a great ocean far south of Jerusalem. Joseph gives almost the crudest possible summary of Lehi's journey from the Red Sea to Bountiful with no mention of the specific places that he allegedly plagiarized to add local color or evidence, or that provide notable evidence today. Simply crossing over from the Red Sea to the ocean — that's all he had to say about all the details he and his technical advisory team crafted based on his careful consultation with an expensive, high-end European map? And just one statement, when he and his cohorts should have been buying up maps and pointing to the

plausibility of Nephi's journey long ago — if they had had any clue that verifiable details were present in the account?

As simple, vague, and unspecific as Joseph's single statement is, RT claims that it "betrays" a "remarkably accurate knowledge of the route" which he likely gathered from firsthand examination of a map of Arabia. This, from the same author who repeatedly dismisses Nephi's account as vague and general, when in fact it is rich with details in terms of directions ("south-southeast" and "nearly due east"), distances (a three-day journey and a four-day journey), and geographical details (borders "near" and "nearer" the Red Sea, the River Laman, the Valley of Lemuel, the hunting at Shazer, followed by the "most fertile" and "more fertile parts," then near starvation, a burial at Nahom, and then Bountiful east of Nahom)? Nephi's account spanning multiple chapters is vastly more detailed and specific than Joseph's statement, yet to RT it betrays evidence of fraud for being hopelessly vague and lacking in detail, while Joseph's blunt one-sentence summary of what he had dictated and read somehow betrays "a remarkably accurate knowledge" that must have been in his head before the book was produced and must have come from a map. This reveals something about RT's methodology.

Questionable methodology is also shown in his claim that Joseph relied on a map to send Lehi and his family on "a route along the shoreline of the Red Sea" as they traveled south from the Valley of Lemuel.²³⁶ His reading of Nephi's route would then fit a shoreline trail shown on his two preferred maps. He claims that the Book of Mormon account requires them to have never encountered the ancient Frankincense Trail until they crossed over it on the way to Nahom, and bases this claim on the statement in 1 Nephi 2 that they came in the "borders" near the Red Sea. But this does not require traveling along the coast after their entry into the Valley of Lemuel. Going out of the Valley and reconnecting with the major trail and the fertile regions east of the impassible shoreline mountains, but still in the "borders"/mountains and then going in a south-southeast direction makes sense. Nephi's account does not require shoreline travel, and every other writer I am aware of investigating Lehi's trail has found following the Frankincense Trail to be consistent with the text. Reading an impossible result into the text is not reasonable at this point. However, RT's statement is helpful in that it illustrates that using the maps he advocates as Joseph's source, a course along the Frankincense Trail must not be obvious from the map. Yet it is undoubtedly the path that a real Nephi would have traveled and a path that works in many ways.

One of RT's more puzzling speculations is that Joseph got the idea for a river near the Red Sea by looking at a map and mistaking the northern tongues of the Gulf of Aqaba for rivers. Rather than be impressed with the actual river of water that has been found three days south of the northern end of the Red Sea, RT now appeals to ignorant Joseph's failure to understand the map as an accidental source for one of the most remarkable evidences from Arabia. This speculation is far from satisfying. Look at the maps for yourself: on the large originals, would a student of the maps mistake the northernmost tip of the Gulf of Aqaba for a river? And if so, how could he place the "river" at a distance of three days south of their initial approach to the Red Sea, when they wouldn't get near the Red Sea until they were already at the end of the "river" where it flows into the Red Sea?

The Nineteenth Century Information Superhighway/Supercanal, Frontier Style — Or, Where Could Joseph Find the Dream Map?

RT in Part 3 of his work addresses an issue that some Latter-day Saints have already raised: there is no evidence that Joseph had access to any of these maps. Libraries close to where he lived, like the Manchester Library, the Palmyra Library, and even Dartmouth College Library in Vermont, don't seem to offer access to information about Nahom, as S. Kent Brown has shown.²³⁷ Brown found that the English translation of Niebuhr's book, with its accompanying map, was not at the Dartmouth library until 1937 and was not in John Pratt's library in Manchester. Only after Joseph's family moved away from the vicinity of Dartmouth did its library acquire English translations of a work from Jean-Baptiste d'Anville that mentions the Nehem tribe and its location. After reviewing the details of relevant books and maps at these two libraries, Brown states:

In this light it is safe to conclude that Joseph Smith did not enjoy access to works on Arabia in either of the libraries that lay near his home at one point or another in his youth. In a similar vein, any hypothesis that Joseph Smith had access to a private library that contained works on ancient Arabia is impossible to sustain.²³⁸

RT properly points out that the absence of Arabian maps in a couple of libraries does not mean that Joseph didn't see these maps. That's a fair point. On the other hand, for Latter-day Saint apologists who are often accused of hiding behind the argument that "an absence of evidence is not evidence of absence," it's refreshing to see that shoe on someone else's foot.

RT takes the argument a few steps further as he describes what one might call the Information Superhighway, or rather, the Information Supercanal of that golden age of data, the early nineteenth century:

Rick Grunder has emphasized the “widespread, informal sharing of both broad and particular knowledge” that occurred at every level of Smith’s local environment, so that there were numerous possible means of discovering knowledge about the geography of South Arabia. After examining the print resources available at Palmyra, Robert Paul concluded, “Clearly Joseph Smith had access to a wide range of books in that he lived in proximity to libraries and bookstores,” so there was no need to travel the greater distance to the Manchester area. More recently, Noel Carmack has described how living near the Erie Canal put the Smith family in reach of a wide variety of books, maps, and pamphlets, thanks to traveling bookstores and museums and the connection to larger urban centers to the east.²³⁹

Recall that information sharing before the electronic age required contact with individuals and with printed documents. When those documents were expensive European imports in the hands of wealthy individuals or remote libraries, information sharing among impoverished farmers might not be as widespread as RT wishes to suggest, even with the help of the Erie Information Supercanal, a theme that is nicely and rather creatively developed in Noel Carmack’s article.²⁴⁰

Carmack, whose lengthy article is filled with imaginative speculations about diverse sources and maps Joseph might have used to come up with names like Moroni and Cumorah (from the Comoros Islands, of course), informs us that “there is no reason to believe that Joseph Smith was so destitute that he could not afford a handful of books and pamphlets to read and carry with him” and makes the not especially surprising announcement that when “news was not transmitted by word of mouth, members of rural New England and New York communities obtained information from newspapers and chapbooks purchased in local bookstores.”²⁴¹ He then extends the scope of Joseph’s information access by highlighting the role of the Supercanal:

Before the coming of a comprehensive railway system, canal transportation improved book distribution in New York’s pre-industrial economy. By 1825, when the newly completed Erie Canal passed through the villages of Palmyra and

Macedon, the water-way was already proving an economic boon to Rochester and other cities near its course. . . . At least three bookstores were supported by shipments of books from printers in New York City, Philadelphia, Boston, Cooperstown, and Albany.

It could not have been more fortuitous that the Smith home in Palmyra was less than three miles from the canal, which put young Joseph Smith well within reach of a wide selection of books, maps, and pamphlets. . . .

The long-held perception that Smith was “unlearned” or “un-bookish” cannot be supported by the notion that printed material was unavailable to him.²⁴²

“At least three bookstores” were supported by shipments of books (and maybe maps?) along the Erie Canal, a claim that is backed by two citations. The first is to Paul E. Johnson’s *A Shopkeeper’s Millennium*,²⁴³ a book exploring the growth of Rochester from 1815 to 1837, where on page 19 we find the key statement supporting Carmack’s claim:

These last testify to a growing prosperity and urbanity in the countryside. By the late 1820s merchants’ stocks of imported silks and fine wines had grown, and the Rochester market supported three bookstores.²⁴⁴

Just when these three bookstores came along is unclear — the use of the comma in the sentence could mean that the “late 1820s” reference does not apply to the bookstores. The only other mention of bookstores in that book occurs on page 45, where we read of someone opening a printing press and bookstore “by 1830.”²⁴⁵ Perhaps we can find more in Carmack’s second reference, citation to Frederick Follett, *History of the Press of Western New-York*, in the section “Monroe County,” which discusses the rise of newspapers in Monroe County and the city of Rochester from the 1820s up to about 1846.²⁴⁶ Foster’s book, though, seems to say nothing directly about the canal and shipments of books to Rochester. A search for “canal” in this book yields nine references, almost all of which are references to commissioners or toll collectors of the canal, and not a single reference to the shipping of books, maps, or other materials along the canal. Of course, Rochester’s growth was supported by the canal, as was Palmyra’s, and printers such as E.B. Grandin in Palmyra benefited from the canal.

So yes, the Erie Canal helped Rochester’s prosperity, and there was at least one bookstore there by 1830, maybe even three then, and

perhaps the books they got came by the canal or by wagon (ditto for other bookstores in town along the canal, including Palmyra). Rochester was big enough to support three bookstores around 1830, when it had a population of over 9,000 people, making it the twenty-fifth largest city in the United States at the time and dwarfing Palmyra.²⁴⁷ It was just fifteen or so miles away from Palmyra, and Joseph at least knew where it was because he first attempted to publish the Book of Mormon with a printer in Rochester before settling on Palmyra's own E.B. Grandin. But three Rochester bookstores do not point to an abundance of materials on Arabia nor do they provide any hint of Arabian maps floating down the EIS (Erie Information Supercanal) — at least not by 1827, when Joseph moved to Harmony Township in Susquehanna County, Pennsylvania, soon after receiving the gold plates, and the translation of the Book of Mormon began.²⁴⁸

If the rise of bookstores and print shops along the Erie Canal in the late 1820s was creating a data-rich environment to feed the ravishing intellectual hunger of young literati along the frontier, why, then, would Joseph make a “reverse Exodus” and depart from Palmyra and his information Bountiful on the vibrant shores of the Information Supercanal to conduct the real work of translation in a virtual Arabian Empty Quarter of information in remote Harmony Township, Susquehanna County? That tiny town is slightly over a hundred miles away from the canal and was in a region with precious little to help Joseph. In that data desert, he would be far from Palmyra, far from the canal, far from major literary circles and universities, and still very far from the two “nearby” libraries critics have identified that actually had the name “Nehhm” on some maps of very limited usefulness.

In RT's description of all the access to “broad and particular information” that Joseph theoretically could have had via local resources and especially the great Information Supercanal with all its floating libraries and traveling bookstores (had Joseph actually stayed in the region, I should add), RT seems to be overlooking an important point made by Robert Paul, whom he quotes. In fact, immediately after the quoted sentence about the wide range of “access” Joseph had through libraries and bookstores, Paul notes that the real question is whether Joseph took advantage of the access such resources might have provided. He reminds us of Joseph's meager education, of his mother's assessment of him as being “much less inclined to the perusal of books than any of the rest of our children,” and states that “it is likely that during the 1820s he simply was not a part of the literary culture, that portion of the

population for which books provides a substantial part of its intellectual experiences.”²⁴⁹

Theories based on Joseph accessing advanced information sources via the Erie Canal don't seem to fit his behavior and other facts. For the task of creating the Book of Mormon, Joseph, not known to be a bookworm at that time, retreated to a remote village where he was still a poor farmer, now probably poorer and away from whatever intellectual resources his impoverished parents might have had, such as a family Bible. Tellingly, on October 8, 1829, shortly after Joseph Smith had completed the translation the Book of Mormon and before he began working on his inspired “translation” of the Bible, Joseph took an important step that would help in that later scriptural project: he had Oliver Cowdery purchase a Bible for him.²⁵⁰ It suggests that while in Harmony, Joseph's personal library was rather small if he didn't even own the most basic book for anyone taking on projects related to scripture. Joseph's collection must have offered little to work with. Local libraries in Palmyra, Manchester, and at Dartmouth University, all reasonably close to places he had previously lived, didn't offer useful materials for crafting the Lehi Trail adventure. Where did Joseph get the map or maps he would need to give us 1 Nephi?

The astute reader might wonder why I have failed to mention the library at Harmony. A passage from John Welch explains my silence:

Harmony was a small town on the border between the states of New York and Pennsylvania. The region was very remote and rural. Recently we asked Erich Paul [Erich Robert Paul apparently is the full name of the author of the “Joseph Smith and the Manchester (New York) Library” cited herein as Robert Paul] if he had ever explored the possibility that any libraries existed around Harmony in the 1820s which Joseph Smith might have used. He responded: “In fact, I checked into this possibility only to discover that not only does Harmony and its environs hardly exist anymore, but there is no evidence of a library even existing at the time of Joseph's work.” Accordingly, those who have considered western New York as the information environment for the Book of Mormon may be a hundred twenty miles or more off target. One should think of Joseph translating in the Harmony area and, as far as that goes, in a resource vacuum.²⁵¹

With no library nearby, no circle of literati surfing the Information Supercanal in his backyard, where would Joseph find information to

support the actual translation (drafting, if you wish) of the Book of Mormon that began in Harmony after his December 1827 move? It took years for James Gee to track down actual copies of the various high-end European maps that show Nehhm or Nehem. More recently, digital collections of maps make it much easier to search through antique works. While Jenkins and RT feel that it would have been easy for Joseph to run into these maps, there ought to be some data to lend plausibility to the assertion. If those European maps were so abundant in the United States, we should expect to see evidence of their presence in the kind of places that share and preserve knowledge — namely libraries. Jenkins links to an ex-Mormon forum where two libraries were identified having writings and maps of Carsten Niebuhr that allegedly could have helped Joseph place Nahom in the description of Lehi’s trail.²⁵² There it was stated that two library catalogs in Pennsylvania at Allegheny College and the Medical School of Philadelphia both had travel logs and maps of Carsten Niebuhr. Beginning with that lead, here’s what I am able to find at these libraries and a few others for comparison.

Allegheny College Library

After a large donation in 1820 and several others, Allegheny College Library boasted a collection of over 7,000 books in the early 1820s that made Thomas Jefferson envious²⁵³ and was said to be the largest collection west of the Appalachian Mountains for many years.²⁵⁴ In the 1823 Catalogue of the library,²⁵⁵ a search for Niebuhr yields one work, his 1792 *Travels Through Arabia*,²⁵⁶ which, as noted above, has a fold-out map of Yemen that might have given Joseph “Nehhm” but little else.

A search for d’Anville, the maker of the leading candidate map, results in three finds:

- *Orbis veteribus notus* [atlas], 1763
- *Ancient Geography*, London 1791
- *Compendium of Ancient Geography*, 2 vols., NY, 1814.

The first listing is a map of the Old World that includes Arabia, but not in much detail and without any reference to Nehem/Nahom.²⁵⁷ However, in a publisher’s note at DavidRumsey.com for a printing of “Orbis Veteribus Notus,” we learn an important thing about the works of d’Anville: “Most of d’Anville’s atlases were made up for the individual customer, so it appears that no two are alike.”²⁵⁸ This helped me to understand some of the differences that I would encounter between digitized versions of some maps. The making of atlases for individual

customers also suggests that d’Anville’s premium maps were low-volume, high-cost productions, which may account for their scarcity even in fine modern collections, as we will observe below.

The second and third apparently refer to editions of *Compendium of Ancient Geography*, which has only a few pages on Arabia and, based on my examination, does not appear to contain d’Anville’s Nahom-related map of Arabia.²⁵⁹

The *Compendium* is a translation of a French work, *Géographie Ancienne Abrégée*,²⁶⁰ which included nine maps, but no map showing Nehem. The only full view of Arabia is on “Orbis Veteribus Notus,” a map of much of the Western Hemisphere which shows the full outline of Arabia and some cities and mountains, but makes no mention of Nehem. A portion showing Arabia is depicted in the detail below taken from a version of the map on a vendor website.²⁶¹ His map of the Roman world and Byzantine empire (“Orbis Romani”) shows much of Arabia also with little detail. A small portion of Arabia next to the Red Sea is shown in the map of the 12 tribes (“Les Tribus”), again with little detail. There is no hint of Nehem or related names on the maps or in the text.



Detail from d’Anville’s “Orbis Veteribus Notus” provided with his book, *Géographie Ancienne Abrégée*.

A search of “Arabia” returns an additional find, Henry Holland’s *Travels in the Ionian Isles, Arabia, Thessaly, etc.* (London: 1815). Nothing

else. A search of “map” brings sixteen finds, but nothing that appears to be a map of Arabia. But a search for “Bonne” reveals that the library had both volumes of Rigobert Bonne and Nicolas Desmarest’s *Atlas Encyclopedique*, which James Gee indicates is a source for his Map # 5.²⁶² Volume 1 of the two-volume *Atlas* contains several maps showing Arabia or parts thereof, lacking Nehem,²⁶³ but a diligent student continuing into volume 2 can find a small, less colorful version of James Gee’s Map #5 showing Nehem,²⁶⁴ or at least part of, as shown below.



Here is a detail showing Nehem, or what’s left of it:



Just under “UL” along the upper centerfold, above and right of Sana'a, is the “em” from Nehem, I believe. Given the unfortunate effect of the binding, it's unlikely that this book could have guided a young plagiarizer to pluck Nahom from the depths of this map. And let's be honest here — what fabricator of tales looking at this map would focus on and select that half-hidden Nehem, such a dull sounding name, when just an inch to the right lies the lure of “*Shibam!*”?

Any theory of fabrication from such maps needs to explain the astounding absence of useful “local color” names like Shibam from Nephi's tale.

So the great library at Allegheny College does offer some Nahom-related gems: Niebuhr's not-especially-helpful view of Yemen (and little else) and an atlas with a better view of Arabia from Bonne, but apparently with Nehem obscured by the binding (made even harder to notice with the fabulous Shibam at its side).

Medical Library of Pennsylvania Hospital (Philadelphia)

A listing of books as of 1806 in the Medical Library of Pennsylvania Hospital shows two entries under Niebuhr:²⁶⁵ *Voyage en Arabie*, 1780, vol. 2, and *Description de l'Arabie*, Amsterdam, 1774.

The French *Voyage en Arabie* allegedly has a map with Nehhm on it, but this does not show up in either of the two volumes available in Google Books. Niebuhr's map of Arabia inside the book, apparently a fold-out map, is visible in the version available at Archive.org,²⁶⁶ but that map and the discussion of Yemen is limited to volume 1, not the lone volume 2 that is shown in the listing of the Medical Library. Volume 2 has other maps for other parts of the world, but I found nothing helpful to Joseph's cause. While Nehhm is visible on the map in volume 1, it does not appear to be discussed in the text. In both volumes, searches for words like Nehhm, Nehem, Nehm, Nihm, Nahm, and Nahom return nothing. Again, Niebuhr's map is not a map of Arabia, but a map of its southwest corner, providing the name Nehhm but little else that could help inform or inspire Joseph.

*Description de l'Arabie*²⁶⁷ is actually a 1779 book (1774 appears to be a typo) also available at Archive.org for detailed review. Volume 1 of this French publication lacks maps, but there are several maps at the end of volume 2, including Niebuhr's map of Yemen on page 377, a map showing the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aqaba on page 371, and a map of Oman showing Muscat on page 367 — none of which would appear to be of any help unless Joseph was looking for a name like Nehhm to

transform into Nahom for some reason. Nehhm is mentioned four times in volume 2, apart from its presence on the map.

No meaningful results were found in other searches using search terms such as Anville, d’Anville, map, and Arabia.

If Joseph were diligent enough to travel one hundred seventy miles from Harmony to the library, the French language and the limited scope of Niebuhr’s map would not be the only barriers he would face. The strict rules governing the library listed on page 1 of the catalog strike me as intimidating.²⁶⁸ Joseph apparently wouldn’t be able to borrow books and might not have been able to just stroll in and read whatever he wanted. It looks like only a limited list of books was available for anyone to walk in and read. This was, after all, a medical library at a hospital, not a reading room for the general public.

Harvard Library

Though not especially close, this library could be a good gauge of what an advanced and highly funded knowledge center could have. Conveniently, there is an 1830 catalog of the great Harvard Library²⁶⁹ that we can search for its books, maps, and other documents. There we find d’Anville’s *Ancient Geography*,²⁷⁰ which we have discussed above but appears to lack d’Anville’s Nahom-related maps of Arabia. We also can find Niebuhr’s *Travels Through Arabia* listed on p. 162 of the Catalog’s *First Supplement* from 1834,²⁷¹ but not in the original 1830 catalog. While Niebuhr can give us Nehhm in Yemen, that’s about all he has to offer for Joseph as a fabricator. Rigobert Bonne doesn’t show up. A search for “map” returns a variety of hits, but nothing that looks specific to Arabia.

Thomas Jefferson’s Collection and the Library of Congress

The US Library of Congress, after being burned in the War of 1812, was rebuilt using Thomas Jefferson’s collection of 6,873 books. Vast as his library was, it’s section on geography was rather sparse in terms of Arabia and in general appears to have lacked much in the way of maps. The library would grow from that august beginning to be one of the world’s premier libraries today. It has an entire section devoted to maps. They do have one copy of d’Anville’s 1794 map that has the name Nehem on it.²⁷² That appears to be the extent of their Nahom-related items. According to their help desk, old maps of Arabia like the 1794 d’Anville map were probably acquired in the early 20th century.²⁷³

The US Library of Congress offers an easy-to-search online tool at www.loc.gov that can target a search to their map collection.²⁷⁴ But they

don't have the rare Kirkwood map of Arabia that is one of RT's two lead candidates (I searched for "Kirkwood"). A search for "Niebuhr" in the maps section returned the 1794 d'Anville map (its description mentions "improvements by Niebuhr"), an 1835 map by Berghaus, and a 1977 work of Dennis Niebuhr. Niebuhr and d'Anville were the authors of the majority of the old maps identified by James Gee. I also searched for the remaining maps, without success. Specifically, I searched for Gee's Map #5 by Rigobert Bonne (searched for "Bonne" in the maps collection), Map #8 by John Cary (searched for "Cary"), Map #9 by W. Darton (searched for Darton), and Map #10 by John Thomson & Co. (searched for "Thomson").

In other words, of the ten maps listed by Gee and the additional Kirkwood map found by RT, only one of these, the 1794 d'Anville map, is currently available in the maps collection in one of the premier libraries of the world, the Library of Congress, and that map of Arabia apparently was a late acquisition, not something Joseph's friends could have spied had they searched there. Maps that were found in these searches were overwhelmingly from North America, which appears to have been the focus of map collecting in the Library of Congress. I'm not sure why maps of Arabia would be any more popular in Joseph's day.

Perhaps relevant maps might be found in books outside of the maps collection, though Niebuhr's books do not appear to be archived here, either, and a 1920 listing of geographical atlases in the Library of Congress offers a section on Arabia showing none of the names of any of the authors of the 11 relevant maps discussed above.²⁷⁵ It does list several maps from d'Anville,²⁷⁶ but not his map of Arabia, which would be consistent with d'Anville's map of Arabia in their collection having only been acquired in the twentieth century, as I was told by their help desk. Could one surmise that there was not an intense interest in Arabian maps in the nineteenth century? Or that expensive European maps of Arabia were not commonplace acquisitions available to literati and farmers alike?

Thomas Jefferson's collection of books, not all of which went into the Library of Congress, has been documented and is available in a work known as the Sowerby Catalog, which can be searched online.²⁷⁷ The digitized version includes a heading for "Geography" of various regions of the world, but exploring the many works there shows relatively little about Arabia. A search for "Arabia" returns one entry in the catalog:

Hakluyt's voyages. fol. 1st. edition.

1815 Catalogue, page 123, no. 269, as above.

HAKLUYT, RICHARD.

*The Principall Navigations, Voiages and Discoveries of the English nation, made by Sea or ouer Land, to the most remote and farthest distant Quarters of the earth at any time within the compasse of these 1500 yeeres: Deuided into three seuerall parts, according to the positions of the Regions wherunto they were directed. The first, conteining the personall trauels of the English vnto Iudæa, Syria, **Arabia**, the riuier Euphrates, Babylon, Balsara, the Persian Gulfe, Ormuz, Chaul, Goa, India, and many Islands adioyning to the South parts of Asia: together with the like vnto Egypt, the chiefest ports and places of Africa within and without the Streight of Gibraltar, and about the famous Promontori of Buona Esperanza. The second, comprehending the worthy discoveries of the English towards the North and Northeast by Sea, as of Lapland, Scriksinia, Corelia, the Baie of S. Nicholas, ...*²⁷⁸

Hakluyt's book apparently was printed with a map of some kind, but according to the entry in the catalog, "the copy examined in the Library of Congress was without the map." A search for "Arabie" returns one work, a Latin text on the basics of the Arabian language. A search for "map" returns forty-six results, but nothing that focuses on Arabia and nothing from key sources like Niebuhr and d'Anville. There is a work from Rigobert Bonne, *Atlas portatif de Grenet et Bonne*,²⁷⁹ which has many maps, but not Bonne's map of Arabia that shows Nehem. It has no map focused on Arabia, though parts of Arabia are shown on several maps and some global or broad regional maps show Arabia, though with little detail. One of the works is an 1804 atlas by Arrowsmith and Lewis with numerous maps that, like many related works, features Arabia in a broad map of Asia, but with little detail and no hint of Nahom.²⁸⁰

While Jefferson's collection is said to have included maps that are not readily apparent from listings of his works,²⁸¹ there is no sign that he nor the Library of Congress had a Nahom-related map in Joseph's day, and even today there seems to only be one at the Library of Congress.

If maps with Nahom were actually accessible to Joseph, we should see evidence that they were known and used within his vicinity. But examining collections of his day in major, distant libraries suggests that the Nahom-containing maps were not abundant and maybe not much easier to find in Joseph's day than in ours — if he even knew what to look for and why. Further, if the major information centers in Joseph's day and vicinity did not contain Nahom-related materials, then it would

seem unlikely that such materials were actually widely available in any meaningful sense. But readily available or not, if Joseph managed to find a Nahom-related map such as one of RT's prime candidates, an important question remains: then what?

Can the Maps Do the Trick?

Consider the maps we've reviewed above with the task of, say, finding plausible candidates for the River Laman and Shazer, or coming up with the many other evidences of plausibility for Lehi's Trail that we now have. Is it just luck that the "most fertile parts" come right after Shazer, followed by the "more fertile parts," after which things become much more difficult and presumably a lot less fertile? "Fertile parts" in Arabia is not part of basic common knowledge. If Joseph understood what "Arabia Felix" meant on the map and knew of reports of that fertile region, he would have placed the most fertile parts way south on the journey, but those fertile parts were not along Nephi's route. Instead of increasing fertility along the main south-southeast path, the fertility in the Book of Mormon appears to decline (plausibly) until they reach Bountiful.

Neither of the maps proposed by RT and none of the maps reviewed by Gee can reasonably explain the bulk of the evidences for the plausibility of Lehi's account. Yes, we all agree, a Nahom-like name is there, in the right place, as Latter-day Saints learned from study of such maps beginning in the late twentieth century. The question, though, is whether that is evidence of fraud or evidence of plausibility?

If Nahom were the only evidence we had for the entire journey, it would still be difficult to explain Joseph's amazing luck. We have evidence of an ancient burial place in the Nehem area that long predates Lehi, making the story of Ishmael's burial in Nahom more plausible. The modern find of ancient altars bearing the NHM tribal name from slightly before Lehi's day makes it plausible that Nephi could have encountered the NHM name in the general region associated with the Nihm tribe. If Joseph just plucked a random name off the map, he could easily have picked a name that lacked ancient roots, while the Book of Mormon requires that it existed anciently. To pick a name that would bring archaeological evidence of its ancient existence in that region seems rather lucky. To pick one associated with an ancient burial place seems luckier still. To pick one that "accidentally" leads to a clever Hebrew wordplay on the name, before you've begun studying Hebrew, seems like another surprising stroke of luck. To pick one where an eastward turn is possible, and where that eastward turn can bring you to a place like

Bountiful nearly due east of Nahom, seems almost eerie — if Joseph were just making up the Book of Mormon, that is. To get that lucky that with just a glance or two at a map was surely beyond Joseph’s wildest dreams. It would make his map a truly amazing Dream Map.

On the other hand, for those willing to exercise a little faith, the evidence related to Nahom alone should be greeted as helpful information. It is information that can guide us to better appreciate Nephi’s journey and the physical reality of the Book of Mormon. It can help us ask better questions to better understand more of its message.

An appeal to Joseph’s amazing Technicolor Dream Map raises more questions than it pretends to answer. If Joseph’s purpose were to add “local color” and evidence, as Jenkins and others imply, why pick a tiny spot whose name almost nobody would ever hear of in his lifetime? Why not use any major names and features from the map? Why did Joseph and his conspirators never allude to the evidence after it was so carefully built into the text? Latter-day Saints were thrilled when Nehem was found on an old map in 1978 — surely a similar boost in morale and book sales could have been achieved in the 1830s. Opportunity lost? Or is this, like the river that never was, actually a case of fraud that never was?

To me, a more reasonable explanation for Lehi’s trail is that whoever wrote 1 Nephi had firsthand knowledge of the region, knowledge going far beyond what anyone in the US could glean from any map in Joseph’s day and virtually any map in ours. The real mystery here is not why Joseph sneaked off to a remote library to gaze at a map, only to never use any of the detailed “local color” he later could have pointed to (but never did) to impress people. The real question, if we are looking for answers, is who knew of these places, apparently from firsthand observation, and how was that information transmitted to Joseph? Better questions lead to better answers.

Where We Stand So Far: Frustrated?

In reviewing the numerous arguments that critics have thrown at the account of Lehi’s trial, some LDS people feel great frustration. Surprising evidence from archaeology, geography, history, ancient languages, etc., including remarkable finds from actual fieldwork using 1 Nephi as a guide, have turned many great weaknesses, long mocked by critics, into strengths of the Book of Mormon. Some are frustrated with how they are minimized with hairsplitting, reading flaws and fiction into a text that is rooted in real terrain. When details that the critic demands

are missing though they can easily be filled in by a “generous reading” of the text, this is taken as evidence of modern origins, yet a world of missing detail can be read into a few words (e.g., Joseph’s solitary, vague statement about Lehi’s journey) to concoct evidence against the Book of Mormon. A word or even a letter (e.g., should “sacrifice” be plural, or does a wordplay with NHM fail if an H sound differs?) is turned into reasons to reject the text. Literary elements and allusions to other events, especially when intricate and skillfully made, are just evidences that the text is merely a literary creation. In explaining the origins of the text, the critic’s eyes only turn toward modern sources for parallels, and finding a few, however unsatisfactory, the work of explaining the condemned text is over. To students of the Book of Mormon who feel frustration with that, I have one message: *Welcome to the world of biblical criticism.*

The methodology of our critics, particularly RT, reflects what I consider to be weaknesses that are hailed as triumphs of scholarship in the secular arena of “Higher Criticism” or “historical criticism,” where some scholars today feel they have eviscerated the case for a living God who has spoken to prophets and given us scripture. Have they succeeded, and have they ruled out the Book of Mormon, without ever having to consider its evidence? This is our next topic.

IV. Does Higher Criticism of the Bible Trump All Book of Mormon Evidence? Or, Could Nephi Have Known and Used the Exodus Story?

RT argues that Book of Mormon evidence related to Lehi’s Trail can be dismissed because Nephi’s use of Exodus themes and related material from what is known as the priestly source (“P”) rules out any chance of historicity.²⁸² Biblical scholarship apparently gives us all we need to reject the Book of Mormon, no reading and pondering required.

While it will catch some Latter-day Saints by surprise, this is a serious argument that RT is raising. His point is related to the modern world of biblical scholarship offering what is known as the “Documentary Hypothesis” and other flavors of “Higher Criticism”²⁸³ (also called “historical criticism”) wherein scholars have dissected biblical texts and created theories about the multiple sources or traditions that appear to be woven together.

In spite of a serious appeal to modern scholarship, RT, like Philip Jenkins, overlooks some important information in his dismissal of 1 Nephi. Significant scholarship provides support for the concept of some kind of ancient Exodus of Hebrews from Egypt and for the existence

of scriptural records regarding the Exodus well before Nephi's time. What Nephi knew of the Exodus from the brass plates is not evidence of fabrication by Joseph Smith.

Suggested Resources

For Book of Mormon students interested in understanding modern debates over the Bible as history and the impact of Higher Criticism on the Book of Mormon, there are several resources I wish to recommend:

- Richard Elliott Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible*²⁸⁴ — a widely read, popular work that has introduced many people to source-criticism, the branch of Higher Criticism that examines the text (especially the Pentateuch) to determine the role of different hypothesized documents that were assembled together. Friedman offers arguments for a priestly source composed in the days of Hezekiah, well before Nephi, greatly weakening RT's argument. He is a strong advocate of the Documentary Hypothesis, discussed below, which is still a subject of debate.
- James K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt: The Evidences for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition*²⁸⁵ — an extremely thorough examination of the plausibility of the Exodus in spite of the absence of clear archaeological evidence (from regions where it is unreasonable to expect the kind of evidence some critics demand). Hoffmeier, a significant scholar, provides a credible and wide-ranging case against the claim that the Exodus account was largely created after the Exile. His approach has some lessons in methodology that are relevant to Book of Mormon studies.
- James K. Hoffmeier, *Ancient Israel in Sinai: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Wilderness Tradition*²⁸⁶ — a book that builds on his previous case for the reality of the Exodus, now exploring what we can learn of Sinai. He shows that archaeological evidence, textual material, geography, place names, and personal names all combine to create a reasonable case for the historical reality of the wilderness tradition. He also updates some of his proposals made in his earlier *Israel in Egypt* to reflect more recent discoveries. Hoffmeier provides evidence, for example, that the wilderness itinerary in Numbers 33 has support from

the fourteenth century BC, in contrast with the widespread view that it must be from the priestly document of much later origin.²⁸⁷ His discussion of the possible connection between Israel's religion and the religion of the Midianites (Jethro's people) is interesting in light of Lehi's Trail, for as he explains, the Midianites took over the copper mines at Timna (near Lehi's trail) after the Egyptians abandoned the mines around 1150 BC.²⁸⁸ If Lehi & Sons were metal workers familiar with Timna, it would be consistent with several elements in the text such as their ability to travel back and forth to Jerusalem from near the Red Sea on their own without help from their father or the Liahona and Nephi's expertise in working with ore and metals.

- K. A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*²⁸⁹ — an extensive and colorful, if not sometimes overly passionate response to the many critics who minimize the Old Testament. Based on abundant data, Kitchen concludes that we can firmly reject the hypothesis that the Old Testament books originated as late as 400 to 200 BC, as many minimalists maintain, and that we have strong evidence for the reality of the Exodus from Egypt and a Sinai covenant that must have originated between 1400 to 1200 BC.²⁹⁰ Kitchen's work is also useful in showing weakness in the methodologies used to downplay the biblical text, many of which may resemble some of the techniques used against the Book of Mormon.
- James K. Hoffmeier and Dennis R. Magary, editors, *Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith? A Critical Appraisal of Modern and Postmodern Approaches to Scripture*.²⁹¹ Relevant highlights in this compilation include Richard E. Averbeck, "Pentateuchal Criticism and the Priestly Torah"²⁹² and Robert B. Chisholm Jr., "Old Testament Source Criticism: Some Methodological Miscues."²⁹³ Chisholm critiques traditional source-criticism (the Documentary Hypothesis) by exploring the two most famous "parade cases" from source-criticism, the Flood story and the account of David in Saul's court. He challenges the reasons given for viewing these as a patchwork from contradicting original documents and goes on to show that their literary design and coherence points to either a single source or

a masterful blending if multiple sources were used.²⁹⁴ He condemns the arrogant attitude of many scholars who seem to say that “if the text does not fit my idea of what literature should look like, it must be flawed,” when in fact a more careful reading can resolve alleged problems and reveal that the Hebrew author was more knowledgeable and skilled than the critics admit. I also recommend Richard L. Schultz, “Isaiah, Isaiah, and Current Scholarship,” with important information relevant to the presence of allegedly late Isaiah material in the Book of Mormon, and James K. Hoffmeier, “‘These Things Happened’: Why a Historical Exodus Is Essential for Theology,” which provides a good review of the rise of biblical minimalism and the devaluation of the Bible as a text with historical content, with a clear review of how vital the Exodus theme is throughout the Bible.²⁹⁵

In addition to the above books, many shorter articles and papers could be cited. A few of note include:

- Joshua Berman, “Was There an Exodus?”²⁹⁶ — a fascinating recent contribution looking at long overlooked evidence from Egypt in support of the reality of the Exodus. This publication in *Mosaic Magazine* includes responses from other scholars, both for and against.
- Yosef Garfinkel, “The Birth & Death of Biblical Minimalism”²⁹⁷ — a bold critique of the biblical “minimalists” and their panicked response to compelling archaeological evidence for the reality of the House of David. The application of his insights to the Book of Mormon was appropriately made by Neal Rappleye and Stephen Smoot in another highly recommended work directly related to the Lehi’s trail, “Book of Mormon Minimalists and the NHM Inscriptions: A Response to Dan Vogel.”²⁹⁸
- Kevin L. Barney, “Reflections on the Documentary Hypothesis”²⁹⁹ — a thoughtful and frequently cited essay from a faithful LDS scholar who explores how Latter-day Saints may respond to widely accepted scholarly theories on the origins of Bible documents.

Is the Exodus Fiction?

Scholars today frequently insist that the Exodus story of the Bible is pure fiction, a belief that supports the assignment of late post-exilic dates to the creation of major parts of the Pentateuch. If the story of Hebrew captivity in Egypt and their escape to Israel is fiction, the Book of Mormon has a problem, and if that story wasn't even written down and accepted by the Jews until centuries after Nephi, it would be fatally flawed. This is why it's important to recognize what scholars really know versus what they might claim.

The case against Exodus is rooted in the absence of evidence. While that absence once was tolerated, today it is taken as evidence of fraud and the Bible, unlike most ancient texts (apart from the Book of Mormon) seems to be treated as guilty until proven innocent.³⁰⁰ Egyptian records do not record the divine humbling of any Pharaoh by their slaves. Archaeologists have not found evidence of Hebrew encampments stretching across the Sinai. The conquest of Canaan and the rise of the House of David have been rejected as fiction due to their lack of archaeological support, making it easier for scholars to criticize the Bible as a literary creation without a connection to actual history.

These many issues are beyond the scope of this paper, though well addressed in the resources given above. But several points should be made. First, the absence of evidence is understandable and need not be evidence that the recorded events never happened. A realistic understanding is needed of what archaeology can deliver. Some significant events in history simply lack archeological evidence. For example, the Egyptian military incursion into Canaan by Thutmose III and a major battle against Megiddo "is one of the best documented reports from the ancient Near East as it is recorded both in royal sources . . . and in private documents and biographies of officers who accompanied the king." But in spite of a large body of textual evidence and a seven-month siege of Megiddo, "there is still no archaeological evidence from Megiddo for the Egyptian attack" — even though Megiddo "is probably the most excavated site in ancient Israel, having been investigated with regularity since 1903."³⁰¹ The Egyptian documents about the attack were "shaped by religious, ideological, and propagandistic agendas," yet are accepted as obviously having historical content by some of the same scholars who see the Exodus as fiction due to its alleged lack of archaeological evidence.³⁰²

In some areas, it is futile to demand much in the way of archaeology. The Egyptian Delta, where the Hebrew slaves were in Goshen and

from whence they escaped, is a surprisingly poor source of ancient archaeological information due to its high water table, flooding from the Nile, and frequent rain. Further, heavy farming has destroyed many potential sites. It was also highly picked over before archaeology became an established discipline. Thus, as Hoffmeier points out, in that region not a single scrap of papyrus from pharaonic times has survived.³⁰³ As for the lack of Egyptian records supporting the Exodus, the highly censored records of grand leaders are unlikely to corroborate their defeat.

However, Egyptian records and other sources of information do provide a great deal of evidence that support the plausibility of numerous details in Exodus, while also pointing to the improbability of Hebrews centuries later fabricating a record rich in authentic details dating to the right era. Hoffmeier's *Israel in Egypt* and *Israel in Sinai* are particularly compelling challenges to those who claim that there is no evidence for the Exodus.

Hoffmeier's treatment of the Exodus is wide ranging. In *Israel in Egypt*, he addresses the question of whether the picture painted in Genesis 39 through Exodus 15 is compatible with history. In reaching his affirmative conclusion, he deals with evidence for:

- The presence of Semitic-speaking people from western Asia who came to Egypt seeking relief in times of famine, as suggested in Genesis, and that this was plausibly in a time frame consistent with the Old Testament.³⁰⁴
- The ability for a Semite like Joseph to have reached a high position in the Egyptian court — an event possibly related to the case of an Egyptian official named Aper-el, apparently a Semite with an Egyptian wife.³⁰⁵
- Detailed geographical and historical details that shed light on the plausibility of the route taken by the Israelites out of Egypt.³⁰⁶
- Plausible relationships between a variety of the plagues and the ecology of the Nile.³⁰⁷

His treatment of the wilderness era in Sinai is equally broad and yet finely granular, exploring such details as the numerous Egyptian elements associated with the Tabernacle, including, for example, the plausibility of silver trumpets in Israel's Egyptian phase versus being a late borrowing from much more recent Roman trumpets in a late fabricated text.³⁰⁸ Not only are the many objects associated with the Tabernacle and garments of priests plausible, many of the terms used

to describe them can be shown to have Egyptian etymologies, which would not be expected if the account is fiction crafted after the Exile. Likewise many individuals in the Exodus and following stories have authentic Egyptian names. Hoffmeier asks if the account were written after the Exile by Jews with no connection to Egypt, how could they have added so many realistic elements appropriate to a remote land and time, including making reference to Egyptian cities such as Ramses that had been abandoned centuries ago? And what motivation would there be to conduct research to add such authentic details to a fabricated text for an audience that would not appreciate them?³⁰⁹

For further dramatic evidence of the ancient origins and physical reality of the Tabernacle, read Joshua Berman's original discoveries and his inspiring perspective in "Was There an Exodus?"³¹⁰ There is compelling evidence to recognize that ancient Jews did experience and commemorate an Exodus from Egypt. Perhaps it was of a smaller scale than we are used to thinking, but there is evidence that real events are behind it, not just stories concocted after the Exile.

Also of note in the dating of the priestly source is discovery of two small silver scrolls found at Ketef Hinnom near Jerusalem that have been carefully examined and dated to pre-exilic times around 600 BC. These silver scrolls quote from a passage in Numbers that is part of the P source.³¹¹ The debate isn't over on these scrolls,³¹² but there is apparent archaeological evidence in favor of an early date for at least some of the material in P.

The theory of the Exodus being a late creation not widely known to the Hebrews before the Exile raises numerous difficulties in accounting for the Hebrew text and the traditions of the Jewish people. In both, the Exodus runs deep. Allusions to the enslavement, the deliverance, the crossing of the sea, the years in the wilderness, and the role of Moses are made throughout the Old Testament. It is deeply engrained in texts from Nephi's contemporaries, Ezekiel and Jeremiah, and his predecessors such as Isaiah (Isaiah 10:24–27, 11:16), Amos (e.g., Amos 2:10), and Hosea (Hosea 2:14–20, 11:1, 13:4, 5).³¹³ It is inseparable from the traditions and theology of the Hebrews, and yet we are to believe that it was a late concoction after the Exile, sold to a gullible people ignorant of their past? That is a radical new theory that comes not from new archaeological evidence but, in my view, from a new breed of skeptical scholars, the "minimalists," who now insist that the evidence is not enough to justify any respect for historical material in texts they desperately wish to reject.

In spite of the evidence not only for the historicity of the Exodus but also for the reality of Jews before the Exile having widely accepted its themes, RT insists that a Hebrew in 600 BC could not make literary allusions to the Exodus:

[T]his situation could not possibly have obtained in the time of Nephi. The broad consensus of contemporary biblical scholarship is that while parts of the Pentateuch may have been written during the late monarchy and been in existence when Nephi supposedly lived, the narrative did not become culturally authoritative for Jews in any significant sense until the Persian and Hellenistic periods.³¹⁴

In Section 1 (in Part 1 of this paper) I've already pointed to RT's radical position that Jeremiah and Ezekiel may not have even existed. But will he tell us that Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah did not exist? I don't think his stance represents the consensus of two centuries of scholarship on these matters (as if there were any consensus in the chaotic and rapidly shifting world of biblical scholarship).

Theories that the Pentateuch was a "modern" fabrication from a post-exilic con man have many of the same glaring weaknesses that we see in theories that Joseph Smith fabricated the story of Nephi's exodus. We are to believe that he researched Arabia and filled his account with authentic details and evidence from Arabia that his audience could not possibly appreciate, and that he would never exploit. In fact, the trek through Arabia, in spite of the latent built-in evidence that Joseph didn't seem to know was there, would be a sore point that critics would mock for a century and a half. The parallels between Nephi's exodus and that of the Israelites are more numerous than we realized.

The evidences in favor of key Old Testament accounts have not received the dispassionate, scholarly interest we might hope for. For example, shortly after the minimalists had declared that the kingdom of David was a myth and that Israel in that era was just a group of agrarian tribes with no king of any kind, several fragments of an Aramaic stela clearly from the ninth century BC were found in 1993 and 1994 at Tel Dan in Israel. The text mentions a king of Israel and a king of the "House of David" (Hebrew, *bytdwd*), that is, a king of the dynasty of David. The response of minimalist scholars, as described by Garfinkel, was one of panic with desperate efforts to justify skewed readings of the text to excise the evidence for David, displaying "paradigm-collapse trauma" through their "compilations of groundless arguments, masquerading

as scientific writing through footnotes, references and publication in professional journals.”³¹⁵

Archaeologist William G. Dever points to such desperate efforts as leading scholars attempting to paint the Tel Dan stela fragments as a forgery, while “other revisionists have turned amusing intellectual somersaults to avoid the obvious meaning of the Dan inscription. The irony is that biblical scholars have long demanded that an archaeologist supplement our ‘mute’ artifacts with texts. But when we do find a spectacular text, they discard it! [emphasis added]”³¹⁶ That response may not be a surprise for students of the Book of Mormon, in light of the reception that the evidence from Arabia has received. Fortunately, the testimony of three witnesses in stone from the altars of Marib and the details of their excavation by non-LDS scholars leave no room for charges of forgery and should keep scholars focused on more pedantic steps to minimize the impact.

One day, I hope that biblical scholars will recognize that in the Book of Mormon, we have found a spectacular text with treasures of information to enhance our knowledge of biblical origins and ancient Israel.

There are many other issues that can be explored with respect to the reality of the Exodus. One potentially controversial but interesting line of thought is from Noel Reynolds in “The Brass Plates Version of Genesis.”³¹⁷ Reynolds argues that the intricate relationship in language and themes between the Book of Mormon and the Book of Moses can best be explained by having the material of the Book of Moses or something similar present on the Brass Plates. The dependence, he argues, can be seen to be one-way: the Book of Mormon appears to be relying upon content in the Book of Moses and not the other way around. It’s an interesting approach, not unlike the textual analysis behind aspects of the Documentary Hypothesis. Part of its significance is that the Book of Moses was given by revelation after the Book of Mormon translation was completed, but the intertextuality appears to reflect Book of Mormon writers drawing upon Book of Moses language and themes, as they do with Exodus and Isaiah, for example, and not the other way around.

To Reynolds’ analysis I can add my own observation about the “strength of Moses” in one of the offending Exodus-related passages cited by RT, 1 Nephi 4:2. Nephi’s words appear to be an allusion to strength and Moses that is not found in the Old Testament, but is clearly found in Moses 1, including verses 20–21 where Moses receives strength from the Lord to overcome Satan, but especially in verse 25, where God tells Moses

“thou shalt be made stronger than many waters; for they shall obey thy command as if thou wert God.” It’s a reference to the miraculous crossing of waters by Moses, endowed with strength from God, and Nephi and his audience appear to have known that concept.³¹⁸ David Bokovoy has also observed that Nephi’s call to be strong appropriately reflects ancient Near Eastern military contexts,³¹⁹ which I suggest adds to the sense of historicity in this passage from Nephi.

Perhaps the alleged weakness of Book of Mormon references to stories of Moses will turn out to be a strength, and will be recognized for its role not only in being a second witness for Christ, but also a second witness for the reality of Israel’s ancient deliverance from bondage, a symbol of the deliverance Christ offers through his Atonement. The literary and theological value of such a symbol in no way detracts from its reality. Were it not real, the theological value would be greatly diminished. Each of our lives can parallel the Exodus of Israel and the exodus of Nephi, and be every bit as real as they were.

Too Literary to Be Real?

RT’s post at *Faith Promoting Rumor* leads up to his use of Higher Criticism by first pointing out that Nephi’s parallels to the Exodus are suspicious.

The first problem that the apologetic argument faces with regard to Nahom as an authentic ancient reference is that the larger journey narrative recounted in 1 Nephi is for the most part implausible as real history. The account contains many story elements and language that indicate it originated as imaginative mythological literature modeled along biblical patterns, whereas it lacks evidence of certain details that we would expect to find if it were in fact a realistic report of an Israelite family journeying from Jerusalem through the deserts of Arabia.³²⁰

Many of the recommended sources above complain of the tendency of modern “biblical minimalists” to rule that a story must be fictional if it has strong literary themes. Texts that may have been carefully crafted are criticized as being literary, theological, etiological, etc., and therefore just fiction, especially when “expected” details are not present, while the same scholars readily find historical value in other ancient documents such as Egyptian reports of battles (e.g., at Kadesh and Megiddo) that

may have similar characteristics, including the presence of miraculous content.³²¹ There is a pervasive bias against the Bible.

For the Book of Mormon, the presence of literary story elements and allusions to other miraculous events is not a problem if one understands that Nephi is writing a sacred text, and that he is likening the scriptures to their situation and creating a moral parable from his journey that he sees as a divinely crafted parallel to the Exodus. In my opinion this fits what we know of the ancient religious mindset. Given the significance of the Exodus to the Hebrews, I think a sacred journey to the Promised Land that didn't consider parallels to the Exodus would raise even more serious questions. The interwoven biblical themes in his text are crafted so well, that it may, in my view, count as evidence in favor of ancient origins rather than modern.³²² Indeed, Nephi's use of biblical allusions and themes in his writing, including clever Hebraic word plays, is a fertile field for ongoing scholarship and discovery, not a trivial exposé of poor modern authorship from young Joseph.

However, RT has a significant point that may overthrow my reasoning above, for if he is right, there is no way that a real Nephi could have written about the Exodus. Let's explore RT's most potent weapon as he unleashes Higher Criticism against the Arabian Peninsula evidence.

The Documentary Hypothesis and the Higher Criticism Axe: Making Mincemeat of 1 Nephi?

Here is what I consider to be the most serious attack RT makes in his post:

[P]erhaps most damagingly, the allusions and references to the book of Exodus in the Book of Mormon show that the form of the narrative it presumes corresponds to that found in the Bible, combining both non-priestly (non-P) and priestly (P) material. As is well known, one of the more significant conclusions of two centuries of biblical scholarship is that the story of the Exodus is actually a product of multiple literary sources/strands that were developed and combined over time, including a non-P source (sometimes divided into separate Yahwist [J] and Elohist [E] sources or early non-P and late non-P strands) and a P source that covered similar material but had distinctive theological emphases and content as well. Although many scholars believe that some of the non-P material may date to the pre-exilic or monarchic period, the P source is at the earliest exilic and more likely

from the post-exilic/Persian period. The P source would also by necessity have been composed before it and non-P were combined together into one continuous Torah narrative, meaning that the project to conflate the sources would have occurred even later during the Persian period. So in direct opposition to what we would expect if the Book of Mormon were ancient, the author of 1 Nephi seems to have known and made use of an Exodus that contained both P and Non-P.

The knowledge of P is reflected in 1 Nephi 1:6 (Genesis 46:8–27; Exodus 6:14–25); 4:2 (Exodus 14:21–22); 16:19–20 (Exodus 16:2–3); 17:7–8 (Exodus 25:8–9); 17:14 (Exodus 6:7–8); 17:20 (Exodus 16:3); 17:26–27, 50 (Exodus 14:21–22); 18:1–2 (Exodus 35:30–33).

The knowledge of non-P in 1 Nephi 1:6 (Exodus 3:2); 2:6 (Exodus 3:18; 8:27; 15:22); 2:7 (Exodus 3:12, 18; 8:27; 17:15; 18:12); 2:11–12 (Exodus 14:11–12); 2:18–24 (Exodus 15:26); 3:13, 24–25 (Exodus 4:21–23; 5:1–2, 6; 7:20; 8:1, 8, 25; 9:27); 3:29–30 (Exodus 14:19–20); 5:5–8 (Exodus 18:9–11); 6:4 (Ex 3:6, 15; 4:5); 16:10, 26–29 (Numbers 21:8–9); 16:35–36 (Numbers 14:1–4); 16:37 (Exodus 2:14; Numbers 16:1–3, 13–14); 17:13 (Exodus 13:21); 18:9 (Exodus 32:4–6; Ex 32:18–19).

The extensive borrowing and revisioning of the Exodus story in the Book of Mormon is thus most easily reconciled with a modern origin for the narrative. Not only would this provide a setting for such an all-inclusive revisioning to have taken place, but it would explain why various aspects of the borrowing do not reflect the social, intellectual, and literary world of ancient Israel.³²³

That sounds devastating. If the cumulative weight of two centuries of scholarship compels us to recognize that the Jews of 600 BC were *not* thoroughly familiar with the Exodus story as Nephi uses it and cites it, then this is a problem for the Book of Mormon.

The Documentary Hypothesis owes much to Julius Wellhausen, a scholar who over a century ago pulled together a great deal of previous scholarship and painted a compelling picture that attempted to reverse engineer the making of the Bible, explaining how different styles of language, different names of deity, and different versions of the same story were patched together in the Old Testament. Using what is now

called “source criticism,” which takes a microscopic look at the Hebrew text and dissects it into hypothetical source documents, he concluded that there must have been four original documents behind the Pentateuch, each known by a single letter:

- J, the Yahwist source (J is the first letter of Yahweh when written in German), written around 950 BCE in the southern Kingdom of Judah, so named because it tends to use Yahweh (Jehovah) as the name for God;
- E, the Elohist source, written c. 850 BCE in the northern Kingdom of Israel, so named because it prefers to use “Elohim” as the name for God;
- D, the Deuteronomist source (essentially the book of Deuteronomy), written circa 600 BCE in Jerusalem during a period of religious reform (Josiah’s era); and
- P, the priestly source, written c. 500 BCE by Kohanim (Jewish priests) in Exile in Babylon.

The Documentary Hypothesis gained growing support over the century following Wellhausen’s work and appeared to have fairly wide consensus among biblical scholars. Some modern European scholars such as Konrad Schmid, whom RT cites,³²⁴ question the existence of several of the source documents of the Documentary Hypothesis, and see the Old Testament as a more complex literary product from the Persian and Hellenistic period long after 600 BC. There are now multiple schools in addition to source criticism contending with differing explanations for biblical origins. These schools include tradition criticism,³²⁵ which explores the influence of Israel’s ancient traditions and oral legends on the modern text; and redaction criticism,³²⁶ which focuses on the work of late redactors and their goals and techniques in shaping the text for theological or other reasons. New hypotheses such as the “Fragmentary” or “Supplementary” Hypothesis have been proposed which build upon rather than overthrow the extensive work behind the Documentary Hypothesis.³²⁷ Through all these lines of thought, there is often a sense that ancient Hebrews couldn’t write history, especially in the early days of the rising people of Israel. While the scholars are not united on numerous points, many loudly agree that the Exodus is not historical and would agree with RT that a Hebrew writer in 600 BC should not be quoting and using Exodus material from whatever is behind what we call the priestly source.

The Priestly Source May Predate Nephi

The Documentary Hypothesis is a theory in flux, as are other theories arising from Higher Criticism that tend to challenge the reality of the miraculous in scripture. While there are reasons to question some aspects of the Documentary Hypothesis and other conclusions from Higher Criticism, if we accept that multiple documents, including a P source, were used to patch together the Bible as we know it, there is still room for the Book of Mormon (another highly redacted document from many original sources). The critical issue would be the date of the Exodus material.

What RT does not acknowledge in his presentation of the consensus of scholars is that there are significant scholars who reject Wellhausen's late date for the priestly source. Richard Elliott Friedman, one of the world's premier Bible scholars and a leading proponent of the Documentary Hypothesis, places P before the Exile, probably in Hezekiah's era, which was before Josiah, before Lehi, and before Nephi. Friedman's academic credentials are impressive. He was a student of Frank Moore Cross at Harvard, where he obtained his ThD. He is now the Ann and Jay Davis Professor of Jewish Studies at the University of Georgia and the Katzin Professor of Jewish Civilization Emeritus of the University of California, San Diego, and was a visiting fellow at Cambridge and Oxford and a Senior Fellow of the American Schools of Oriental Research in Jerusalem. He is the author of seven books, including the bestselling *Who Wrote the Bible*³²⁸ and *Commentary on the Torah*.³²⁹

Let's consider the credible case made by Richard Elliott Friedman in *Who Wrote the Bible?* He identifies three serious mistakes that led Wellhausen and others to place P after the Exile.³³⁰ These were:

1. The idea that the prophets (e.g., Jeremiah and Ezekiel) do not ever cite material from P.
2. The notion that the Tabernacle was not historical but a fiction created after the Exile and inserted into P to provide a rationale in the words of Moses for the centrality of the Temple, which is never mentioned in the Pentateuch. The fabricated Tabernacle, according to Wellhausen, was created in P to help justify the Temple.
3. The idea that P takes the centralization of worship for granted, as if it were written in a time when there was no doubt that centralization was the norm (i.e., after the Exile).

Friedman shows how each of these were serious mistakes. Jeremiah and Ezekiel actually do cite P material several times, showing that P existed before the Exile. For example, Ezekiel 5 and 6 provide a lawsuit of sorts against Israel for not keeping her covenant with God, and the covenant referred to is detailed in Leviticus 26, a P source which Ezekiel relies on with many nearly verbatim passages. Ezekiel and Jeremiah use other portions of P as well (e.g., Ezekiel draws upon P elements of the Exodus narrative).³³¹

The evidence that made the Tabernacle, in Wellhausen's view, seem like a conveniently crafted half-scale model of the Second Temple was based on considering the dimensions of the First Temple, not the second, and Wellhausen got other things wrong in his analysis. Friedman points to a strong strand of textual evidence showing that the Tabernacle was historical and, in fact, was stored in the First Temple.³³² Friedman's conclusion that Tabernacle was finally housed within the First Temple has been criticized, but Hoffmeier, after reviewing the criticism, provides further analysis and finds significant merit in the proposal, even though Friedman's analysis of Tabernacle dimensions can be debated.³³³ Finally, Friedman points out that P sources repeatedly teach the need for centralization of worship at the Tabernacle, rather than assuming centralization is already widely accepted, something Wellhausen missed.³³⁴

Further evidence for Friedman's early dating of P include analysis from Professor Avi Hurvitz of Hebrew University in Jerusalem showing that the language of P is an earlier stage of biblical Hebrew than Ezekiel. Since that 1982 publication, at least five other scholars have published linguistic evidence that P's version of Hebrew comes from before the Exile to Babylon.³³⁵

Finally, Friedman points out that Wellhausen's theory of P being a post-exilic document and a pious fraud to justify the second Temple does not fit the content of P. P emphasizes the ark, the tablets, cherubs, and the Urim and Thummim — relics that were completely absent from the second Temple. "Why would a second Temple priest, composing a pious-fraud document, emphasize the very elements of the Tabernacles the second Temple did not have?"³³⁶

Friedman notes that the person who wrote P "placed the Tabernacle at the center of Israel's religious life, back as far as Moses, and forever into the future." This person had to be living before "They cast your Temple into the fire; They profaned your name's Tabernacle to the ground"

(Psalm 74:7, one of several passages alluding to the Tabernacle having been kept in the first Temple).³³⁷

The data related to the content and the purposes behind the priestly source led Friedman to not only conclude that P was pre-exilic, but that it could be dated specifically to the time of King Hezekiah.³³⁸ That leaves plenty of time for P material to become available to Nephi, or even be recorded on the brass plates.

A thoughtful article for LDS readers on the Documentary Hypothesis was written by Kevin L. Barney,³³⁹ who accepts much of Friedman's thinking, as does David E. Bokovoy in his scholarly work on the Documentary Hypothesis written for an LDS audience.³⁴⁰

In general, I should note, Latter-day Saints need not fear the tentative Documentary Hypothesis and its variants. Indeed, it can be a useful tool for understanding some aspects of the Book of Mormon³⁴¹ and even Joseph Smith's work with scripture. The complexity and textual sophistication of the Book of Mormon record is one that can help us better appreciate the origins of the Bible. This is especially so when we try to infer what was on the Brass Plates and how their content might differ from today's Masoretic text. John Sorenson, for example, wrote favorably of the Documentary Hypothesis.³⁴² He proposed that the brass plates may have largely been related to E, the Elohist document. Evidence for that proposal includes the heavy use of "Lord" instead of "Jehovah" among the names for deity in the Book of Mormon: apart from a quotation from Isaiah, "Jehovah" only occurs once, in the last verse of the book. Further evidence includes the many prophets from the Northern Kingdom that are quoted.

But the Documentary Hypothesis and its cousins should be viewed as tentative and applied with caution.

RT's Questionable Identification of P Material in the Book of Mormon

Closer examination of RT's list is still worthwhile in evaluating his argument and in understanding the relationship between the various sources of the Old Testament and the contents of the Book of Mormon. First, note that the presence of a story or theme that is linked to P does not mean that it did not exist in Hebrew records or oral traditions before P was composed, whenever that was. In fact, making up major story elements that were unknown to anyone in the intended audience would obviously lead to trouble in getting the story to stick. Friedman makes

that point in his famous work, *Who Wrote the Bible?* Another respected scholar, Joel Baden, wrote:

This conclusion can be extrapolated over the entire priestly narrative. Where the priestly and nonpriestly stories diverge (and similarly where the J and E diverge), we may attribute the differences to the unique traditional bases on which the authors drew or to the unique renderings of common tradition among different schools and authors. Where the priestly and nonpriestly stories converge, we may attribute the similarities to the common elements of the tradition known to the authors. Only if it is imagined that the nonpriestly authors invented the entirety of the pentateuchal narrative out of whole cloth can it be argued that the similar narratives in P derive from non-P. If, on the other hand, we accept that J and E wrote their narratives on the basis of common Israelite traditions, then there is no reason to believe that P could not have done the same. The claim that P is a reaction to the nonpriestly text cannot be established on the grounds of its general plot outline, at least as long as we take seriously the insights of tradition criticism.

The bulk of the argument for P as a reaction lies in its specific differences from non-P. Yet a striking number of these differences have no theological or ideological contents; they are simply differences in detail. The genealogy of Genesis 5 presents a variation on that of Genesis 4:17–26, but there is no obvious significance to the variation.³⁴³

With that in mind, let's examine RT's list of P-related verses in the Book of Mormon.

First up is 1 Nephi 3:3, which supposedly draws upon priestly material in Genesis 46:8–27 and Exodus 6:14–25. Already I'm puzzled at RT's approach. Nephi merely states that the brass plates contained "a genealogy of my forefathers." To claim that the brass plates contain the genealogy of Nephi's forefathers somehow requires P? Yes, the long genealogies listed in the OT were hypothesized by Harvard scholar Frank Moore Cross, the professor and mentor of Richard Elliott Friedman, to come from a priestly source, a non-extant "Book of Generations" or "Book of Records."³⁴⁴ Sources that P may have used naturally existed before P. Since the Book of Generations appears to be used by P, J, and E,³⁴⁵ at least some versions of the Book of Generations are likely to be

pre-exilic. Even if one believes priestly sources were all created out of whole cloth after the Exile, the idea of having a written or oral genealogy of one's forefathers surely was not a late innovation in the Hebrew world that had to wait until the Exile.

That's not just my opinion, either. The astute reader will note that Joel Baden in the quoted paragraph above points to a pair of related genealogies, one priestly and one non-priestly, as an example of the differences in detail that occur between purported OT sources. A table of sources for Genesis and other books in the Pentateuch provided at ThreeJews.net³⁴⁶ is helpful in looking up sources. These tables compare assignments made by Richard E. Friedman in *The Bible With Sources Revealed* (2003)³⁴⁷ and Samuel Driver's *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*.³⁴⁸ The Genesis table shows that Genesis 4:17–26 is attributed to J (the pre-exilic “Yahwist” source) by both scholars, while the genealogy in Genesis 5 is almost entirely priestly (listed as P by Driver and as from the Book of Records, a priestly source, by Friedman). So if the genealogical information in Genesis 4 can be found in a non-priestly source, what is the basis for claiming that 1 Nephi 3:3 shows impossible knowledge of P in the Book of Mormon through its mention of genealogy on the plates of brass?

The second item on the list is less of a stretch. 1 Nephi 4:2 definitely refers to the Exodus. Here are Nephi's words to his brethren:

Therefore let us go up; let us be strong like unto Moses; for he truly spake unto the waters of the Red Sea and they divided hither and thither, and our fathers came through, out of captivity, on dry ground, and the armies of Pharaoh did follow and were drowned in the waters of the Red Sea.

RT writes that 1 Nephi 4:2 as well as 1 Nephi 17:26–27, 50 draws upon priestly material in Exodus 14:21–22. The Exodus table at ThreeJews.net, however, shows that the part about crossing the “dry ground” in Exodus 14:21b (the language used in both of the accused passages of 1 Nephi) comes from the J source. The other parts of Exodus 14:21–22 are assigned to P. But this does not mean that the other sources were unaware of the crossing of the Red Sea. (Nephi's use of “strong” in 1 Nephi 4:2 to describe Moses will be mentioned below.)

Next, 1 Nephi 16:19–20 is said to rely upon Exodus 16:2–3, and 1 Nephi 17:20 is said to be related to Exodus 16:3. The murmuring of some family members in the wilderness and the desire to have stayed back in the comfort of Jerusalem have a parallel to the murmuring of the Israelites in Exodus 16:2–3, which is assigned to P. The parallel, possibly

intended, does not require a unique priestly source (many modern parents can attest to such things on difficult journeys away from home). Some language is similar, which may be due to Nephi or may be partly influenced by the translation process in which KJV phrasing appears to be deliberately and frequently used when it fits (yes, sometimes even New Testament wording, too³⁴⁹).

Moving along, 1 Nephi 17:7–8, where the Lord shows Nephi how to make his ship, is said to rely on Exodus 25:8–9, where the Lord shows Moses the “pattern of the Tabernacle.” There may be an allusion here, but it’s not necessary to explain the text. In any case, the Tabernacle was an ancient physical reality, according to investigative work from Richard Elliott Friedman discussed in *Who Wrote the Bible*:³⁵⁰ Also see Friedman’s explanation of why he concludes that Exodus is *not* fiction, shared in a 2014 interview.³⁵¹

Returning to RT’s argument regarding 1 Nephi 17:7–8, the priestly source does focus on the intricate details of how the Tabernacle was to be made, but the idea of an inspired or revealed Tabernacle was not a late invention, and especially not a post-exilic invention, as discussed above. Further, Nephi being shown how to make the ship does not require knowledge of Exodus 25.

Next on the list, 1 Nephi 17:14 supposedly draws upon Exodus 6:7–8, both using the phrases “deliver from destruction” and “bring you out.” This may be Nephi drawing upon a P source, or a related E source, or it may be an artifact of the Book of Mormon translation. The Lord bringing Israel out of Egypt is a pervasive theme in the Bible, one of the indications of just how deeply Exodus themes permeate the Bible in ways similar to its role in the Book of Mormon. But we need not cherry-pick allegedly late P material to find it. In the eighth century BC the prophet Amos wrote that God said “I brought you up out of the land of Egypt, and led you forty years in the wilderness” (Amos 2:10), one of several clearly pre-exilic writings that remind us that the Exodus was known to Jews before 600 BC.

Finally, 1 Nephi 18:1–2 is said to be linked to Exodus 35:30–33. The instructions to Nephi on how to create “curious workmanship” in timber for the building of the ship is supposed to be related to the “curious works” in gold, silver, and brass that an inspired Israelite created. Something of a stretch, perhaps, and not the kind of thing that requires an ancient priestly source. “Curious workmanship” to describe skilled work is a well attested term in the English of Joseph’s day and, while related to “curious works” in the Bible, can plausibly appear in

the English translation without requiring Nephi to have been using a P source.³⁵² It's an acceptable old-fashioned way to say that something was done skillfully, and that's a pretty universal concept.

Overall, the alleged reliance on P material is not compelling (perhaps the murmuring language is the best fit). Even if there were serious evidence of relying on unique material from P, that would not necessarily be a problem, given the evidence that P predates the Exile and, of course, that the Exodus involved at least some real history.

Must Bible Believers Fear the Documentary Hypothesis? Insights from the Book of Mormon

The Documentary Hypothesis, while it has weaknesses and many detractors, must be recognized as having a great deal of serious scholarship behind it. But many people who believe in the Bible as the word of God may feel threatened when they encounter this. After all, it can be quite disturbing to suddenly learn that Moses apparently didn't write the Books of Moses (that is, the Books of Moses as we now have them — the Hypothesis does not prevent him from having written or having passed sacred history on through oral traditions). To be told that the great stories that are the foundation of the Bible might have been cobbled together from multiple conflicting sources can turn the miraculous word of God into a much more imperfect, man-made work. Can that even be trusted as scripture anymore?

The editorial processes that are being uncovered in the Bible actually reflect some of the Book of Mormon's warnings that the record of the Jews in our day, the Bible, would be heavily edited and have significant losses. That complex editorial process is also what Book of Mormon readers see happening right before their eyes as they observe the many records that Mormon and Moroni cobbled together from records written in reformed Egyptian as well as Hebrew and modified Hebrew from the later Nephites, and at least one Jaredite language. These records he then redacted and commented upon to give us the "crazy patchwork" record of the Book of Mormon, which then went through further changes as it was translated into English (or rather, a puzzling mix of pre-KJV Early Modern English influences³⁵³ coupled with KJV English and some later English — what these various influences are and how and why they are there remains a hot topic for research and speculation). To study the Book of Mormon carefully is to unveil a complex combination of sources used by Mormon in his work of redaction. Still today, the more we learn about the Book of Mormon and its translation, the more complex and

varied it becomes. Surely we should be able to be comfortable with a complex and heavily edited Bible, especially when LDS scripture teaches us to expect heavy human editing over the centuries of its transmission.

If we can accept the Book of Mormon in spite of its human influences, we should be able to benefit from the divine richness of the Bible that remains in spite of questions, problems, and abundant human influences. We must temper our expectations and remain flexible, recognizing that some things we thought we understood may not necessarily be that way. But that same recognition needs to be applied to the decrees of scholars: what is declared as fact today may not be so tomorrow, and in my view, it would be a shame to abandon God in the process because of what may one day become an abandoned theory of humans.

In an age when the Documentary Hypothesis is shattering the faith of some Jews and Christians, the true but patchwork and human-smudged Book of Mormon may be just the thing to bear witness of the core truths of the Bible. The Book of Mormon may help remind us that the fingerprints of Deity are still in those ancient records in spite of human influences. The Book of Mormon may be just the thing, that is, if it in turn can withstand the assault of the Documentary Hypothesis and Higher Criticism on its own integrity.

Recognizing that multiple sources may have been combined to give us the Bible may be especially important in considering the content of the brass plates in the Book of Mormon. Sorensen, as previously noted, suggested that the content on the brass plates seems to favor the Elohist (E) source and may reflect northern origins.³⁵⁴ In his study of intertextuality between Nephi's writings and the Old Testament account of David and Goliath, Ben McGuire observed that the apparent allusions to the David and Goliath story in the Book of Mormon are exclusively related to the shorter version of the story found in the Septuagint, and this may be useful in clarifying the origins of the biblical story.

If the assessment of literary dependency holds true [i.e., that Nephi's account intentionally draws upon the David and Goliath story], we have discovered a unique source of insight into the formation of the traditional text of the Bible, as well as into the contents of the brass plates. There has been a long-standing debate with regard to the original composition of the Samuel texts. This debate has lingered because of the differences between various manuscripts and textual families. For the purposes of this study, this is particularly significant because, as Johan Lust writes, "As far as the Books of Samuel

are concerned, the story of David and Goliath is by far the most important of the contexts in which several manuscripts of the Septuagint, among which the early majuscule B, differ considerably from the present Hebrew text. The Greek version ... is much shorter than the Hebrew. It omits 1 Samuel 17, 12–31.41.48b. 50.55–18, 6a.10–12.17–19.21b.30.” Lust further asks: “Which text is to be preferred, the longer or the shorter one? Which criteria allow us to make a proper choice?” The contribution of this study with regard to these questions is to note that the specific markers that Nephi uses within the Samuel text fall exclusively within the shorter source. Nephi only references 17:4–7, 11, 32, 34–37, 45–46, 51, and 54. The notable omission of the longer (and arguably later) additions to the text may well represent the notion that the text of Samuel contained in Nephi’s brass plates did not include these additions. This might also suggest some degree of confirmation for the idea that perhaps the earlier text of the account of David and Goliath stemmed from a northern source. The brass plates, belonging to the descendants of the northern tribe of Manasseh, may represent such a source.³⁵⁵

The Book of Mormon may be exactly what the world of Bible scholars and students need to re-evaluate, revise, and perhaps even validate theories on the origin of scripture. If Nephi uses something from P, for example, and we have evidence for the authenticity of Nephi’s record, that’s the kind of evidence that ought to help us push back on any theories that require P to be post-exilic. When RT applies a popular theory to exclude Book of Mormon evidence, he may actually have things quite backwards. The evidence, if it holds, may be a useful tool in the end for revising weak spots in the theory. Of course, much further work remains to be done.

Conclusion

In his blog post, RT admits that the south-southwest direction, the description of fertile regions, turning east, etc., suggest a realistic trip. I love the way he sums it up:

In my opinion, the most plausible detail provided in the narrative of 1 Nephi 1–18 is the description of the general route followed by Lehi on his way through Arabia to the coastal location of Bountiful. From all the reporting of events that occurs in this part of the Book of Mormon (setting aside

the reference to Nahom), the few comments that clarify that the party of Lehi traveled to the Red Sea (1 Nephi 2:5–6) and then moved along the Red Sea in a south-southeast direction down the western side of the Arabian peninsula (1 Nephi 16:13), “keeping in the most fertile parts of the wilderness, which were in the borders near the Red Sea” (1 Nephi 16:14), and then turning east before reaching the coast of Irreantum (1 Nephi 17:1, 5) seem to represent informational detail most certainly rooted in real world geography. That is to say, the route appears to accurately account for the shape of the Arabian Peninsula in relation to the Red Sea and Arabian Sea and further agrees in a general way with what we know about the topography of the region and where cross-country travel was most practicable therein. Some of the more “fertile” parts of Arabia are indeed in the high western zones and foothills of the Hijaz, where the climate is slightly more temperate and rare rainfall in the mountains has contributed to the creation of oases on the eastern slopes that sustain more diverse flora and fauna. For millennia this strip of land “bordering the Red Sea” has enabled human transit and trade from north to south and facilitated the development of overland roads. So for Lehi to have followed this general track is notable and [here we go!] **in theory could lend support to the assumption that the author of the account was trying to depict real history.**³⁵⁶[*emphasis and “here we go” are mine*]

Hmm, plausible directions and description for going from Jerusalem to Bountiful — a previously mocked and unknown place that now has an excellent and plausible candidate nearly due east of Nahom — all amount to a general track that that is “notable.” OK, at least we have an admission that this achievement is notable. Then comes the fun part, where the impact of the evidence from Arabia gets boiled down to something that “in theory *could* lend support to the *assumption* that the author of the account was *trying* to depict real history.”

In my opinion, RT's treatment here displays the mindset and training of “biblical minimalists,” who use what they feel are advanced tools of biblical scholarship to whittle away evidence and eviscerate unwelcome documents. I think there are good reasons to question the methodology, motivations, and meaning of such scholarship, and no reason to reject Lehi's Trail or the growing body of evidence from Arabia for the plausibility and authenticity of the Book of Mormon. Biblical

scholarship has much we can learn from, but we must also recognize that scholars are not free from agendas, biases, and blindness. Those seeking an intellectually satisfying journey of faith should recognize how little substance can sometimes be behind ponderous claims of vast scholarly consensus.

So where do we stand in light of the new attacks on Lehi's Trail? Here we have examined two creative weapons: 1) the Dream Map Theory, which posits that Joseph must have had access to a high-end European map of Arabia to obtain details such as Nehem in the right place, and 2) the Higher Criticism Axe (or the "Exodus Didn't Really Happen Theory") which would chop 1 Nephi into mere pulp fiction for its implicit and explicit references to Old Testament material from an allegedly late priestly source.

Regarding the second weapon, credible modern scholars have offered plausible reasons why the priestly source predates Nephi's departure from Jerusalem. Scholars also remind us that regardless of when our version of Exodus was finally edited, its basic stories must have been known among the Hebrews long before. Further, there is significant evidence that an exodus of some kind from Egypt actually happened. A written account of the Exodus certainly could have been known to Nephi and his family, allowing him to recognize and refer to parallels between his journey to the promised land and that of Moses and his brethren. Higher Criticism here fails to trump hard evidence from the Arabian Peninsula.

If anything, the evidence from the Arabian Peninsula about the plausibility of Nephi's journey also indirectly becomes evidence for the reality of a written Exodus tradition in his day. When properly understood, the evidence and witness from the Book of Mormon's gold plates (and their citation of content from the brass plates) may ultimately be used to push back on some of the excesses and flawed assumptions that may come from the ongoing academic debates in biblical studies, just as the ancient silver scrolls from Ketef Hinnom near Jerusalem appear to further challenge the dating assigned by some scholars for the priestly source.³⁵⁶ The Book of Mormon teaches of great loss and change that would come to parts of the scriptures, consistent with some of the findings of Higher Criticism, but it also is a witness for the divine origins of the Bible and, among other things, the reality of the Exodus.

As for the first weapon, the Dream Map Theory is buoyed by RT's confidence in the Higher Criticism Axe. Grudgingly recognizing that there is some appearance of evidence that theoretically could support

the *assumption* that Joseph was *trying* to write real history or something, there is a need to explain where this evidence came from. Why, it's the Dream Map, of course. The best single map, though, is pathetically inadequate, as is any combination of the world's best maps in Joseph's day. The River Laman, Shazer, and Bountiful in the right places cannot be plausibly explained. Yes, there were some European maps that could have been used to select the name Nehem as one of many dozens of random names to pick — but why? For what purpose? Local color — color that nobody would notice for over a century?

The inability of even a modern Dream Map to explain the crown jewels of the Arabian evidence for Book of Mormon plausibility is well illustrated by one of the most interesting and counterintuitive aspects of Bountiful: its apparently pristine, uninhabited state when Nephi arrived. Remarkably, after having studied the best maps of Arabia and reviewed extensive information about Arabia, with the world's treasures of knowledge at his fingertips as he prepared his heavily footnoted critique of Lehi's Trail, our very educated and very modern RT concludes that it would "simply be impossible" for a place like Bountiful to be uninhabited.³⁵⁸ That argument was fairly reasonable once, until the day a weary Warren Aston and his fourteen-year-old daughter stepped off a boat to explore a secluded area that didn't look at all promising from the sea, only to discover what careful work would confirm is a remarkable and still uninhabited candidate for Bountiful.³⁵⁹ That's one of many important details in our crown jewels from Arabia that even well trained modern scholars with a world of maps can't quite figure out. If understanding Bountiful is beyond their abilities, it certainly wasn't possible for Joseph to come up with that, no matter how many books and maps he downloaded from the Erie Information Supercanal.

Our modern critics also miss the significance of the eastward turn that so beautifully and plausibly links Nahom and Bountiful. And there are many more details from the evidence that simply cannot be explained from maps in Joseph's day. Plucking Nehem off a map doesn't explain the mystery of Nahom in the "right place" — meaning a Nahom from whence you can physically turn east and survive, a Nahom where you can find a verdant Bountiful nearly due east on the coast, a Nahom that is associated with ancient burial places, and a Nahom with a name linked to an ancient tribe that was obviously present in Lehi's day, courtesy of archaeological evidence — three times over, in fact. Those details aren't on any map that Joseph could have seen, unless it's in somebody's dreams.

I must emphasize that the Arabian evidence, useful as it is, must not be understood as “proving” the Book of Mormon to be true. In the Gospel plan, faith is essential, so we understand that evidence should generally play a secondary role such as helping individuals facing intellectual obstacles to have the courage and hope needed to move forward in faith. Sometimes, however, the evidence, mercifully, can do more than just help a traveler step over a nasty new barrier on the path. Sometimes the evidence is a gift box laden with nutrition and sweet delights for those willing to open it and taste. The evidence from Arabia is such a gift, in my opinion, and must not be minimalized, in spite of secular imperatives to do so at all costs. It is a case where there are mighty strengths in the Book of Mormon that demand to be considered and applied. So far, detailed, lengthy, and creative efforts to turn those strengths back into weakness have failed.

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Endnotes

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