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## Out of the Dust

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BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY • PROVO, UTAH

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**Author(s)**

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**Abstract** Evidence suggests that ancient Mesoamericans may have had horses. Excavations have produced horse bones that archaeologists believe date to before the Spanish Conquest.

The article also mentions an artifact found in Bolivia that may have characters in a Semitic script. Locals have asked for assistance in examining the piece, but it is not yet clear whether it is relevant to the Book of Mormon.



## OUT OF THE DUST

### Were Ancient Americans Familiar with Real Horses?

The FARMS newsletter published an Update in June 1984 on the question of horses in pre-Columbian America during the period when human beings were here. That piece was republished in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon* under the title “Once More: The Horse.”<sup>1</sup> Since then, previously unrecognized research has shed new light on the question.

The most striking information comes from excavations that confirm the possibility that a species of native American horse survived the Pleistocene (Ice Age) in Mesoamerica down to an age when humans were familiar with this animal.

Publications from the late 1950s reported results from excavations by scientists working on the Yucatán Peninsula. Excavations at the site of Mayapan, which dates to a few centuries before the Spaniards arrived, yielded horse bones in four spots. (Two of the lots were from the surface, however, and might represent Spanish horses.) From another site, the Cenote (water hole) Ch'en Mul, came other traces, this time from a firm archaeological context. In the bottom stratum in a sequence of levels of unconsolidated earth almost two meters in thickness,

two horse teeth were found. They were partially mineralized, indicating that they were definitely ancient and could not have come from any Spanish animal. The interesting thing is that Maya pottery was also found in the stratified soil where the teeth were located.<sup>2</sup>

Subsequent digging has expanded the evidence for an association of humans with horses. But the full story actually goes back to 1895, when American paleontologist Henry C. Mercer went to Yucatán hoping to find remains of Ice Age man. He visited 29 caves in the hill area—the Puuc—of the peninsula and tried stratigraphic excavation in 10 of them. But the results were confused, and he came away disillusioned. He did find horse bones in three caves (Actún Sayab, Actún Lara, and Chektalen). In terms of their visible characteristics, those bones should have been classified as from the Pleistocene American horse species, then called *Equus occidentalis* L. However, Mercer decided that since the remains were near the surface, they must actually be from the modern horse, *Equus equus*, that the Spaniards had brought with them to the New World, and so he reported them as such.<sup>3</sup> In 1947 Robert T. Hatt repeated Mercer's activities. He found within Actún

Lara and one other cave more remains of the American horse (in his day it was called *Equus conversidens*), along with bones of other extinct animals. Hatt recommended that any future work concentrate on Loltún Cave, where abundant animal and cultural remains could be seen.<sup>4</sup>

It took until 1977 before that recommendation bore fruit. Two Mexican archaeologists carried out a project that included a complete survey of the complex system of subterranean cavities (made by underground water that had dissolved the subsurface limestone). They also did stratigraphic excavation in areas in the Loltún complex not previously visited. The pits they excavated revealed a sequence of 16 layers, which they numbered from the surface downward. Bones of extinct animals (including mammoth) appear in the lowest layers.

Pottery and other cultural materials were found in levels VII and above. But in some of those artifact-bearing strata there were horse bones, even in level II. A radiocarbon date for the beginning of VII turned out to be around 1800 B.C. The pottery fragments above that would place some portions in the range of at least 900–400 B.C. and possibly later. The report on this work

concludes with the observation that “something went on here that is still difficult to explain.” Some archaeologists have suggested that the horse bones were stirred upward from lower to higher levels by the action of tunneling rodents, but they admit that this explanation is not easy to accept. The statement has also been made that paleontologists will not be pleased at the idea that horses survived to such a late date as to be involved with civilized or near-civilized people whose remains are seen in the ceramic-using levels.<sup>5</sup> Surprisingly, the Mexican researchers show no awareness of the horse teeth discovered in 1957 by Carnegie Institution scientists Pollock and Ray. (Some uncomfortable scientific facts seem to need rediscovering time and time again.)

Meanwhile, Dr. Steven E. Jones of the BYU physics depart-

ment has for several years been tracking down horse bones in North America considered to predate the European conquest. Professor Jones’s purpose for this search is to submit the bones to tests by the radiocarbon method (some of that work has taken advantage of assistance from FARMS). So far, one or more finds appear to be possibly of pre-Spanish Conquest date, although definitive results will take more work. Further work is being done by Yuri Kuchinsky, a researcher in Canada who has been pursuing a variety of other evidence, based mainly on Native American lore, about possible pre-Conquest horses in North America.

### **Hebrew Writing in Bolivia?**

In a private communication to John Sorenson, an archaeologist in the Midwest reports that a

group of people in Bolivia who are interested in antiquities of the area have asked U.S. archaeologists for help in evaluating the authenticity of an artifact found in that South American country. The large ceramic basin is modeled to show stylized fauna on its sides. That much can be seen on an indistinct photograph submitted by e-mail, but there are also supposed to be “characters” on it, not perceptible in the photograph, that the people concerned feel might be in a Semitic script. A relevant expert (not LDS) will be traveling to Bolivia to examine the piece firsthand. Even if characters are apparent, it will still probably be impossible to learn the context from which the loose artifact was obtained and thus what it might signify. ■■

building of temples to reveal the ordinances of the temple for both the living and the dead (see *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 224, 307–8, 323).

12. To have “power” to get the full account implies having the power of the Lord. Joseph Smith was given “power from on high, by the means which were before prepared, to translate the Book of Mormon” (D&C 20:8; see D&C 113:3–4). Since the 24 plates are in an unknown language, the translator must have the power of God to get the full account. Another implication, although unstated, is that the translator will be led to find the plates. Moroni definitely led Joseph Smith to “find” the Book of Mormon plates (Joseph Smith—History 1:42–54). Limhi’s people found the gold plates of the Jaredites (see Ether 1:2; Mosiah 21:27; 28:11) that Ether had hidden in a manner that they might be found (see Ether 15:33). Wasn’t the Lord involved in their finding those plates? We can expect that the Lord, in his own due time, will lead someone of his choosing to find the 24 plates.
  13. While Joseph the Prophet was translating the Bible, the information on Enoch was revealed to him (November–December 1830). Several years later, he recorded more information about Adam’s blessing his posterity three years before his death (see *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 38–40). In March of 1835 Joseph included this information in the Doctrine and Covenants revelation now known as section 107.
  14. How all of these things can be included upon just 24 plates is a question that is not answered in the Book of Mormon. While many theories have been advanced, they are all speculative, and so the question will remain unanswered in this paper, other than to note that there may be other Jaredite records among the “wagon loads” seen by Joseph and Oliver.
  15. The Lord revealed to Oliver Cowdery that there were “engravings of old records which are ancient” that he could be privileged to translate (see D&C 8:1, 11; 9:2). While the Book of Abraham was received as a part of those ancient records, the revelations given to Oliver refer to more than one record. Furthermore, the Book of Abraham was only partially translated. Oliver said concerning this record: “When the translation of these valuable documents will be completed, I am unable to say; neither can I give you a probable idea how large volumes they will make; but judging from their size, and the comprehensiveness of the language, one might reasonably expect to see a sufficient [sic] to develop much upon the mighty acts of the ancient men of God” (*Messenger and Advocate*, Dec. 1835, 236). The Lord may have also been referring to the ancient records of the Nephites and Jaredites in his promise to Oliver.
- Many records have been kept and preserved throughout the world for the dispensation of the fulness of times, when all things in Christ will be gathered together (see Ephesians 1:9–10). This article acknowledges these many other records but has focused only on those mentioned in the Book of Mormon.

#### Lehi’s Altar and Sacrifice in the Wilderness

David Rolph Seely

1. Unfortunately there is very little information about the Nephite temples in the Book of Mormon. The most complete study of the Nephite temples to date is John W. Welch, “The Temple in the Book of Mormon: The Temples at the Cities of Nephi, Zarahemla, and Bountiful,” in *Temples of the Ancient World: Ritual and Symbolism*, ed. Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1994).
2. For a brief discussion of some of the issues relating to the sacrifice of Lehi and the Nephites beyond the injunctions in Deuteronomy 12, see *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8/1 (1999): 71.
3. Sidney B. Sperry, *Book of Mormon Compendium* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1968), 99.
4. Hugh W. Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 245–46.
5. Welch, “The Temple in the Book of Mormon,” 320.
6. “As a prophet, Lehi held the Melchizedek Priesthood and by that authority offered sacrifice (*Teachings*, p. 181). . . . The Book of Mormon writers made no attempt to elaborate upon the nature or types of their offerings. The Aaronic Priesthood was the province of the tribe of Levi, and thus was not taken by the Nephites to America. It would appear, therefore, that the sacrifices performed by the Lehite colony were carried out under the direction of the higher priesthood, which comprehends all the duties and authorities of the lesser” (Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987], 1:31).
7. McConkie and Millet further explain: “A covenant-centered religion required a covenant sanctuary. The fact that the Nephites constructed a temple suggested that all remnants of Israel, wherever they had been scattered, if they possessed the priesthood would have done likewise” (*ibid.*, 1:223).
8. For a recent review of biblical scholarship on Deuteronomy 12, see Bernard M. Levinson, “The Innovation of Cultic Centralization in Deuteronomy 12,” in *Deuteronomy and the Hermeneutics of Legal Innovation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 23–52. An excellent discussion of the issue of the restriction of sacrifice to a single sanctuary can be found in Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 459–64.
9. The interpretation of Leviticus in terms of the so-called secular slaughter is much debated. See Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 366 n. 43; and Baruch A. Levine, *Leviticus: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 112–13.
10. Menachem Haran, *Temples and Temple Service in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), 459–64. This commentary is highly recommended as a model presentation of biblical scholarship to an educated lay audience.
11. *Ibid.*, 26–42.
12. This is the prevailing view among modern scholars. In the classic docu-

- mentary hypothesis, the literary strand D—chiefly the book of Deuteronomy—is dated to the middle of the seventh century B.C. While most scholars who hold this view agree that there is older material in Deuteronomy, they believe that the book in its present form was edited in the seventh century and its laws were first applied in their entirety by King Josiah. For a balanced and readable presentation of this view, see Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, xix–xxv; and Moshe Weinfeld, “Deuteronomy, Book of,” *Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 2:168–83.
13. See, for example, Alexander Rofé, “The Strata of Law about the Centralization of Worship in Deuteronomy and the History of the Deuteronomistic Movement,” in *Congress Volume: Uppsala 1971* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 221–26; Baruch Halpern, “The Centralization Formula in Deuteronomy,” *Vetus Testamentum* 31 (1981): 20–38; and Levinson, “Innovation of Cultic Centralization,” 24–25.
  14. A. C. Welch, “The Problem of Deuteronomy,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 48 (1929): 291–306.
  15. See Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1–11: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 65–84.
  16. See Ellis Rasmussen, “Deuteronomy,” *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 1:378–79.
  17. Lehi was a descendant of Manasseh (see Alma 10:3).
  18. The priesthood that Alma<sub>2</sub> held is described as “the high priesthood of the holy order of God” (Alma 4:20; compare 13:1–12, which describes the priesthood of the Nephites as the Melchizedek Priesthood). Responding to the question of whether the Melchizedek Priesthood was taken away when Moses died, the Prophet Joseph Smith taught: “All Priesthood is Melchizedek, but there are different portions or degrees of it. That portion which brought Moses to speak with God face to face was taken away; but that which brought the ministry of angels remained. All the prophets had the Melchizedek Priesthood and were ordained by God himself” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976], 180). He also taught: “What was the power of Melchizedek? ’Twas not the Priesthood of Aaron which administers in outward ordinances, and the offering of sacrifices. Those holding the fulness of the Melchizedek Priesthood are kings and priests of the Most High God, holding the keys of power and blessings. In fact, that Priesthood is a perfect law of theocracy, and stands as God to give laws to the people, administering endless lives to the sons and daughters of Adam” (*ibid.*, 322).
  19. Translations of the Temple Scroll from Yigael Yadin, *The Temple Scroll* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1983).
  20. Yadin, *Temple Scroll* 1.315–20, 2.233–39; Lawrence H. Schiffman, “The Deuteronomistic Paraphrase of the Temple Scroll,” *Revue de Qumran* 15 (1992): 558–61; and “Sacral and Non-Sacral Slaughter,” in *Time to Prepare the Way in the Wilderness*, ed. Devorah Dimant and Lawrence H. Schiffman (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 69–84.
  21. Aharon Shemesh, “Three-Days’

- Journey from the Temple’: The Use of this Expression in the Temple Scroll,” *Dead Sea Discoveries* 6/2 (1999): 126–38; and *idem*, “A New Reading of Temple Scroll 52:13–16. Does this Scroll Permit Sacrifices Outside the Land of Israel?” *Proceedings of the International Congress, Fifty Years of the Discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. Lawrence H. Schiffman, Emanuel Tov, and James C. Vanderkam (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2000), 400–410.
22. Shemesh, “Three-Days’ Journey,” 126–27; emphasis added.
  23. *Ibid.*, 130; emphasis added.
  24. *Ibid.*, 130–32. This may help to explain the fact that the Jews built temples in Egypt in Elephantine (destroyed in 410 B.C.) and Leontopolis (shut down in A.D. 73) where sacrifice was offered. See Haran, *Temples*, 46–47. Shemesh cites Mishnah *Menahot* 13:10 and Babylonian Talmud *Menahot* 109a.

#### What’s in a Word?

Cynthia L. Hallen

1. Noah Webster, *American Dictionary of the English Language* (San Francisco, Calif.: Foundation for American Christian Education, 1928).
2. Calvert Watkins, ed., appendix to *The American Heritage Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992).
3. *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. “quick” ([www.oed.com](http://www.oed.com)).
4. All Hebrew transliterations are adapted from the WordCruncher scripture concordance program (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 2001).
5. *El Libro de Mormón* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1993).
6. *American Heritage Dictionary*.

#### New Light

1. For example, see the April 2001 issue of *Insights*, the FARMS newsletter, for observations about the limits of radiocarbon dating even at its best.

#### Out of the Dust

1. John W. Welch, ed., *Reexploring the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 98–100.
2. See Harry E. D. Pollock and Clayton E. Ray, “Notes on Vertebrate Animal Remains from Mayapan,” *Current Reports* 41 (August 1957): 638; this publication is from the Department of Archaeology at the Carnegie Institution of Washington. See also Clayton E. Ray, “Pre-Columbian Horses from Yucatan,” *Journal of Mammalogy* 38 (1957): 278.
3. Henry C. Mercer, *The Hill-Caves of Yucatán: A Search for Evidence of Man’s Antiquity in the Caverns of Central America* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1896), 172.
4. Robert T. Hatt, “Faunal and Archaeological Researches in Yucatan Caves,” *Cranbrook Institute of Science, Bulletin* 33, 1953. See Peter J. Schmidt, “La entrada del hombre a la península de Yucatán,” in *Orígenes del Hombre Americano*, comp. Alba González Jácome (Mexico: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1988), 250.
5. Schmidt, “La entrada,” 254.