2008

The Nahom Maps

James Gee

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jbms

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Available at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jbms/vol17/iss1/6

This Feature Article is brought to you for free and open access by the All Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Book of Mormon Studies by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.
Several maps from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries support details of Lehi’s journey as recorded in the Book of Mormon. In 1751, the renowned cartographer Jean Baptiste Bourguignon D’Anville became the first to include Nahom (or Nehem), Ishmael’s burial place in the Book of Mormon, in his map of Asia. This map and a 1771 map of Yemen are the basis for most accurate maps of Arabia from 1751 to 1814. The spelling varies among the subsequent maps, with most using either D’Anville’s Nehem or Niebuhr’s Nehhm, but the location of Nahom does not differ between those maps that include Nahom. The mention of Nahom on the finest maps by the greatest cartographers of the times, in a location that corresponds to Lehi’s account, gives credence to Lehi’s travels.
James Gee

Until the last two hundred years or so, the hostile terrain of the Arabian Peninsula deterred explorers and cartographers from thoroughly investigating and recording the area on maps. Thus, Lehi—traveling the land around 600 BC—is not likely to have had a map of Arabia to which he could refer while journeying across the region. However, later travelers and explorers made maps that would support the details of his journey as they are recorded in the Book of Mormon.

In the August 1978 Ensign, Ross T. Christensen, professor of archaeology at BYU, was the first to suggest that Nephi’s Nahom might correspond to Nehm on a 1771 map of Yemen. After reading Christensen’s article, I began a quest to find an original 1771 copper-plate print of the map. It took me many years to find what I was seeking. In the end, I found not only the map Ross Christensen referenced but also many more maps which made mention of a place called Nahom.

Behind each of these maps lies the intricate story of its creation. Who contributed the information? Who outlined, engraved, or printed the map? Who published or sold it? Did the cartographer know more about Nahom than what is visible in his work? Some of these questions are unanswerable, but there is a certain amount of information that we can learn about the mapmakers. The 1771 map to which Ross Christensen referred was made by German-born Carsten Niebuhr, a member of the Danish expedition of 1761. His map was not, however, the first to make mention of Nahom. This honor belongs to a French cartographer named D’Anville.
Jean Baptiste Bourguignon D’Anville was born in Paris on July 11, 1697. D’Anville was immersed in the study of geography at an early age, and he engraved his first map at the age of fifteen. D’Anville would become the greatest cartographer of his time. He was appointed geographer to the king of France in 1719. His maps were highly respected: The French navigator Bougainville used D’Anville charts when exploring the East Indies and remarked on their accuracy and detail, and both Thomas Jefferson and Meriwether Lewis sought to obtain D’Anville maps prior to the Lewis and Clark expedition.
D’Anville published his first map of Asia in 1751. This map extended across southwestern Asia from the Bosphorus and the Mediterranean, to the Gulf of Bengal including Turkey, Persia, Arabia, and India. 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.

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

Carsten Niebuhr was born March 17, 1733, in Ludingworth, Germany. He worked as a peasant farmer in his early years, but he later went to school and learned surveying, mathematics, and astronomy. In 1758, Niebuhr was invited to join a scientific expedition to Arabia. The team included Friedrich Christian von Haven (a Danish linguist and ethnologist), Peter Forsskål (a Swedish botanist and zoologist), Christian Carl Kramer (a Danish physician and zoologist), Georg Wilhelm Baurenfeind (an artist and engraver from South Germany), and Berggren (a Swedish ex-soldier employed as a servant on the expedition). Frederick V, the king of Denmark, financed the expedition hoping that the team would make scientific and religious discoveries on behalf of Denmark. In particular, he hoped the expedition’s religious discoveries would substantiate portions of the Bible.

The expedition sailed from Denmark in early 1761 aboard the man-o’-war Greenland. The members of the party spent a year studying in Egypt and then sailed down the coast of the Red Sea to Yemen in the Arabian Peninsula. After a long delay and the deaths of von Haven and Forsskål from malaria, the team reached Sana. There, Niebuhr explored the area around the capital in order to make his map.

In his journal, Niebuhr mentions Nahom, which he spells as Nehhm. This differed from the spelling D’Anville used on his map, a copy of which Niebuhr had with him on this expedition. Niebuhr explained in his book: “I have had no small difficulty in writing down these names; both from the diversity of dialects in the country, and from the indistinct pronunciation of those from whom I was obliged to ask them.”

Niebuhr gives a description and location of this place called Nahom. He describes it as a small district between Dsjof and Haschid-u-bekil, and he describes the present Schiech as a “warlike character, and often troublesome to the Imam” of Sana and also as “an independent prince.” On the cartouche of his map, Niebuhr lists Nehhm, Hashchid u Bekil, Chaulan, Abu Arisch, and Aden as independent districts from that of Yemen ruled by the Imam of Sana. Niebuhr circles the boundaries of this area of Nehhm on the map; it covers an area of approximately 2,394 square miles. The map shows that the district consists of a few small towns, Charit the largest and Schirra and Elhattaba. Niebuhr writes of a very fertile mountain in Nahom named Tsiba, which has many villages on it. The information provided by Niebuhr establishes that Nahom was more then just a tribe or a burial place. During Lehi’s travels in 600 BC Nahom may even have been larger than what Niebuhr encountered in 1761.

Niebuhr was the sole survivor of the Danish expedition. He confirmed D’Anville’s map by being an eyewitness to the area, and especially to the location and existence of Nahom. He returned home to Denmark and published his journals and maps of Arabia in 1771.

D’Anville’s 1751 map of Asia and Niebuhr’s 1771 map of Yemen are the basis for most of the accurate maps of Arabia from 1751 to 1814. With D’Anville’s indisputable reputation for accuracy and with Niebuhr’s firsthand experience and use of scientific instruments, in addition to the difficulty in mapping Arabia, most reputable cartographers relied on D’Anville and Niebhur in publishing maps of Arabia. Bonne, Cary, Darton, and Thomson, however, all seemed to have their own sources for information on Arabia and Nehem.
The first Arabian map to follow D’Anville’s 1751 map of Asia was a map published in London by cartographer Solomon Bolton in 1755, before the Danish expedition ever set sail. Bolton published a set of five maps referencing D’Anville. This is the earliest English version of D’Anville I have been able to find. It is used in place of the rare 1751 French D’Anville in many books on maps of Arabia. The spelling of Nahom matches D’Anville’s spelling, Nehem.
Map 4. “Asia,” D’Anville, F. A. Schraembl (Austria, 1786). 30” x 40”

In 1786 the Austrian publisher and cartographer Franz Anton Schraembl published his version of the famous D’Anville map of Asia. Schraembl’s spelling of Nahom is in the French, even though he had earlier published Carsten Niebuhr’s map with the spelling of Nahom in the Niebuhr way, Nehhm.
In 1787, engineer, mathematician, cartographer, and Royal Hydrographer Rigobert Bonne published “Atlas encyclopedique” with Nicolas Desmaret. This was a much smaller collection of maps than what was currently being published. In this atlas one of the several maps was entitled “Arabia.” Since the Danish expedition, more attention was now on Arabia itself and this famous cartographer is the first I have found with Arabia as its focus, not just a part of a larger map of Asia. Nehem is of course in the French Nehem, but in this smaller map Bonne also shows Shehra, one of the towns Niebuhr placed in the principality of Nahom. Bonne did not however show boundaries of the different principalities like Haulan and Nehem as Niebuhr did on his maps. Bonne does not cite his sources, so it is not clear whether or not he used D’Anville’s or Niebuhr’s maps.

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

The next map I uncovered was a map of Asia, published in London in 1791 by John Harrison, a famous engraver, printer, and publisher. Forty years after D’Anville published his famous map of Asia, cartographers, engravers, and publishers were still referencing D’Anville’s work because his maps were accurate. Thus, even over time, D’Anville’s maps were still the standard by which all other work was measured.

FOLLOWING SPREAD:

Robert Laurie and James Whittle bought the publishing house and map-making business of Robert Sayer in 1790. They formed a new company called “Laurie & Whittle.” In 1794 they published a guide for travelers in the Middle East called “The Oriental Navigator.” In that publication they printed a beautiful map of Arabia entitled “New Modern Map of Arabia.” This map used both of the foundation influences and created one great map of Arabia. Laurie & Whittle used D’Anville’s spelling of Nahom while also locating the towns or cities within the region referenced by Niebuhr.
A NEW MAP OF ARABIA
Divided into ITS SEVERAL REGIONS and DISTRICTS
From Mons. D. ANVILLE
Geographer to the most Christian King
with Additions and Improvements from M. Niebuhr

LONDON
Published by Laurie & Whittle, at Dept Street,... at the Act of Parliament, 1794.
Many writers regard John Cary as one of the finest of English cartographers. He came on the scene at a time when accurate geographical information from distant countries was being received in greater and greater detail. His fine craftsmanship and ability as an engraver enabled him to make the fullest use of these sources and from them he produced a wide range of maps that are accurate and clear. In his *New Universal Atlas* he published a fine map entitled “New Map of Arabia,” which included a region called Nehem. Cary makes no reference to Niebuhr or D’Anville for the sources of his information, so he may have used D’Anville’s maps for this spelling or he may have had his own sources.

The Darton family had a long history in the mapmaking business. William Darton Sr. published maps from 1755 to 1819. His son, William Darton Jr., published his map of Arabia in 1811, following in his father’s footsteps. This is only the second small-scale map of Arabia I have found that mentions Nahom, again spelled Nehem. Most small-scale maps have very little detail, but this engraved map was an exception. It is very beautiful and very detailed. This highly respected family in the mapmaking industry does not reference D’Anville or Niebuhr and must have had their own sources.


This is the latest map I have been able to find which mentions Nehem. I have not been able to find maps with Nahom, or any of its variant spellings, in the Arabian Peninsula after 1814, even on maps published by cartographers who had printed the district on their earlier maps of Arabia. From the information Niebuhr gives in his journals one could conclude that the Imam of Sana conquered the area, but I could find no information to verify this conjecture.

Conclusion

Of course, not all maps of Arabia between the years 1751 and 1814 recorded the location of Nahom. In fact, it is generally found only on the finest and most expensive maps created by the best cartographers and published by the finest printers. In my searches I found countless maps of Arabia with no reference to Nahom or anything like it. Thus, it is somewhat amazing that the first modern map of the Arabian Peninsula, created by D’Anville in 1751, did record the location of this often ignored or unrecognized district. Furthermore, that same map inspired the Danes to send an expedition to the region to fill in the missing information, and the only survivor was the cartographer, Carsten Niebuhr. Not only did he engrave a place called Nahom on his map but he also gave us more details of the area in his journal. These two maps and the ones that followed all give testimony to Lehi’s epic journey almost two thousand years earlier.

Notes
4. Moreland and Bannister, Antique Maps, 133.
7. Hansen, Arabia Felix. The primary members of the expedition are listed on pp. 14–15, though Berggren isn’t mentioned until pp. 52–53. The entire first chapter (pp. 13–57) elaborates on each of the members of the expedition and the administrators (king and other royal appointees) of the expedition.
8. Carsten Niebuhr, Travels through Arabia and Other Countries in the East, performed by M. Niebuhr, trans. Robert Heron, 2nd ed. (Perth: Printed by and for R. Morison Jr., 1799), 2:47.
10. Niebuhr, Travels through Arabia, 1:35.
12. Niebuhr, Travels through Arabia, 2:47.