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Mughsayl: Another Candidate for Land Bountiful

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Adding to three previous sites proposed as Nephi’s Bountiful, Phillips argues in defense of another candidate—Mughsayl. He evaluates all the candidates and describes the corresponding areas. He proposes that Lehi and his family were not alone during their travels or time in Bountiful and lists ten reasons in support of his proposal of Mughsayl as the land of Bountiful. The merits of Mughsayl include its tributaries, its ability to sustain a large herd of camels and other domesticated animals, and its location on a trade route between Salalah and the Hadramaut region of Yemen.
Mughsayl
Another Candidate for Land Bountiful

Wm. Revell Phillips
For the past ten years I have been associated in some capacity with the search for Lehi’s trail from Jerusalem to Land Bountiful, where Nephi was commanded to build a ship and sail to a promised land in the New World. I have never been to Saudi Arabia or to Yemen and have never received permission to go there, so I will leave that part of Lehi’s journey to those who have. I have traveled most of Oman from the Yemen border to Musandam, on the Straits of Hormuz, and have traveled the south coast of the Dhofar from Dalkut, on the west, to Hadbin, on the east. Three sites along that coast have been proposed as the land that Nephi called Bountiful. I have read Lynn Hilton’s case for Salalah, Warren Aston’s support for Wadi Sayq, and Richard Wellington and George Potter in defense of Khor Rori. Each has a sound argument and may indeed represent the true Bountiful, but I plan herein to muddy the water with yet another candidate for Land Bountiful—Mughsayl.

Let me begin with a very simple explanation for the topography of the Dhofar coast (figure 1). Along the Dhofar coast a thick sequence of limestone layers, deposited in an earlier ocean that flooded much of the Arabian subcontinent, dip gently northward, ultimately disappearing under the sands of the Rub al Khali (“the Empty Quarter”). Occasional rain waters flow north on this monotonous, gravel plain, called the Najd Plateau, forming long, shallow wadis in dendritic patterns that end at the drifting sands of the Rub al Khali. South of the divide, wadis are short and steep and discharge seasonal, monsoon rain waters into the Arabian Sea (figure 2). Extensional faults, running roughly parallel to the coast, drop structural blocks toward the sea, forming east-west valleys that control the orientation of wadis that descend from west to east before discharging into the sea.

Coastal mountains extend east from the Yemen border to form three large mountain masses along

Figure 1. Generalized cross section of the Dhofar coast.

Figure 2. Wadis of the Dhofar.
the southern coast of Oman (figure 3). Jabal al Qamar forms highlands from the Yemen border to about Mughsayl. Jabal al Qana is the name of the highlands east from Mughsayl and north of the Salalah Plain, and Jabal Samhan forms the massive highland north of the Marbat Plain. North of the highland divide, the broad shallow wadis on the Najd Plateau would not seriously influence Lehi’s direction of travel. South of the divide the landscape is rugged, and short, deep wadis descend rapidly to the sea, largely dictating the course of travel. Lehi could follow an eastward course across the Najd Plateau, but once he crossed the mountain divide, his course and ease of travel was largely determined by the wadi he entered. The large wadis follow major faults and lead the traveler east-southeast to the sea, e.g., Wadi Sayq, Wadi Aful, and Wadi Adawnab. Wadi Ashawq is the largest of the wadis in the Raykut Basin and drains a huge area between Jabal al Qamar and Jabal al Qana. Wadi Ashawq does not follow the ESE fault pattern and offers a very large window of opportunity for a traveler to enter from the west and a broad, flat valley floor for him to follow to the sea at Mughsayl (figure 4).

At the mouth of each major wadi, where it enters the Arabian Sea, is a khor, which is the flooded mouth of the wadi, where Nephi likely launched and tested his ship. Today, a baymouth bar of sand separates the khor lagoon from the open sea (figure 5). The bay bars were likely deposited in rather recent times in response to a change in sea level. In Nephi’s time, the khors were probably open to the sea and served as harbors for small ships moving along the Dhofar coast. In the centuries before and after the birth of Christ, Khor Rori was a major port for ancient shipping between the Indian subcontinent and East Africa and the Red Sea, and was a trade center for goods leaving and entering the Dhofar.

Before I embark on my version of Lehi’s sojourn from Nahom into Land Bountiful,
let me reject the idea that Lehi and his party were completely alone in the “wilderness.” Lehi traveled through tribal lands and drank from jealously guarded springs and watering holes. In the desert, no source of water is without a claimant and no one travels or camps or waters animals without permission from a suspicious, and probably hostile, tribal leader. What Lehi offered in return for permission, we can only guess; moreover, iron-age signs of habitation, contemporary with Lehi, are abundant both along the Dhofar coast and inland.

By Nephi’s account, Lehi left Nahom and traveled nearly east. He had come far enough south to skirt the Rub al Khali (“Empty Quarter”) when he turned east, and his route east was most likely between the Rub al Khali sands on the north and the sands of a smaller empty quarter (Ramlat as-Sab’atayn Desert) on the south (figure 6). This passage would lead him into Wadi Hadramaut, which would probably direct him eastward onto the Najd Plateau north of the Oman divide, where shallow wadis drain northward to the Rub al Khali. Somewhere, Lehi crossed the divide into a wadi that would lead him east and south to the sea and Land Bountiful.

The window of opportunity for entry into Wadi Sayq was very narrow, coming from the west, and Lehi would have been traveling near the sea in order to enter Wadi Sayq near its upper end. The area surrounding Wadi Sayq is heavily wooded with brush, which is dry most of the year and endowed with uninviting thorns (figure 7). Wadi Sayq today is a narrow canyon for most of its length and is clogged with huge boulders and unfriendly vegetation, making it almost impossible for anyone to bring a caravan down the wadi.

If Lehi crossed the divide further east, he would have entered a much broader window that would direct him into one of the major branches of Wadi Ashawq, which in turn would lead him to the sea at Mughsayl (figure 4). I have traveled only four kilometers into Wadi Ashawq, but I am told, by the Dhofar governor, that ancient trade caravans from Salalah followed the route of the modern highway up Wadi Adawnab from the Salalah Plain, down Wadi Mudam to the sea at Mughsayl, and then up Wadi Ashawq into the Hadramaut of Yemen, the
reverse of Lehi’s possible route. Wadi Ashawq has a broad, flat floor up to a kilometer wide, although more often it ranges from 100 to 50 meters (figure 8). The floor is cobbles, pebbles, or sand, flanked with soil and grassy vegetation. Hundreds of camels live in and graze the wadi today. A string of watering holes up to a meter deep and ten meters across form a sluggish “river” of clear water that disappears and reappears in the karst wadi floor and form perhaps 10 or 20 acres of wetlands at and near the wadi mouth. These watering holes and wetlands continue up the wadi at least four kilometers. One could easily move a large caravan and drive a large herd of goats and sheep down the wadi, without obstruction, and even rest in the shade of an occasional tree.

Crossing the divide even further east, or crossing over the inviting branches of Wadi Ashawq in his eastward trek, Lehi may have entered the very broad Wadi Adawnab, which would have led him east to Raysut and the Salalah Plain.

I like very much the proposal of Jeffrey R. Chadwick that Lehi may have counted his stay at Bountiful as a major part of the eight years in the “wilderness” and that his journey from Jerusalem to Bountiful took no more than two years. Since frankincense caravans covered the distance in a few months, it is obvious that Lehi settled somewhere for a long period of time. Since Nephi was given a very major assignment at Land Bountiful, which would require countless man-hours and huge resources, it seems reasonable that Lehi and his party must have resided at the Bountiful site for a number of years. Wherever Lehi came to the sea and rejoiced, there were people, anywhere from an occasional visitor at Wadi Sayq to a bustling town at El Baleed (Salalah) and a busy seaport at Khor Rori (figure 9). Would Nephi have rejected the help and resources so badly needed and so readily available? I do not limit God’s ability to do whatever he wishes by whatever means he wishes to do it, but if we chose the supernatural explanation there is no meaning or purpose to all our logic and speculation.

Everything has a price, and I can envision Lehi purchasing land and water rights from local leaders or tribal chiefs and engaging in some profitable business in Land Bountiful. Lehi appears to have been a successful businessman or merchant directing camel caravans to Egypt and elsewhere. Perhaps he raised camels for sale, as the Jabalis do today at Mughsayl and throughout the Dhofar (figure 10), or maybe he leased frankincense trees and gathered the precious gum, said, in a later era, to be more
Lehi probably did not engage in farming for profit, although he may have raised a small crop for his family at any stop along his journey, even at Mughsayl. Lehi appears to have been a merchant, not a farmer, and the soil along the Dhofar coast is infertile, leached of virtually all nutrients by monsoon rains. Today, there is no significant agriculture anywhere along the Dhofar coast, except in the vicinity of Salalah, where perhaps a few thousand acres are under cultivation. For many centuries, almost the whole Salalah Plain was farmland, but in recent years the plain is largely abandoned due to the great demand for water by a rapidly growing, major city. On the southern, coastal outskirts of Salalah, near the ancient city of Al Baleed, are a few hundred acres of beautiful fruit orchards—bananas, coconuts, dates, papayas, mangos, etc. (figure 12). Nowhere else on the entire Dhofar coast are there fruit orchards. Nephi says nothing of fertile land, only that there was much fruit and wild honey. Only at Salalah is there “much fruit” today.
The southern Arabian coast has always been famous for its wild honey, and perhaps the most expensive honey in the world today is produced in Yemen (figure 13). The “Bedouin Bees” (*Apis mellifera jemenitica*) occur wild in the plains and hills of the Dhofar, where they make hives in the countless caves and caverns of the karst limestone cliffs. Several years ago, I encountered a Jabali man who made a living by collecting the wild honey from the coastal mountains. With binoculars, he watched bees swarming and entering specific caves, and he then rappelled into those caves from above.

Several times, I have visited the primitive shipyards at Sur, where shipwrights still build traditional Arab dhows by the old methods (figure 14). I have questioned supervisors about methods and accessibility of materials and learned that the ribs of their ships are made from the Acacia trees that are scattered across the deserts of northern Oman. But the long, straight planks that form the sidewalls and decks are teak wood from India, transported as logs and cut by horizontal band saws at Sur. During my last time at Sur, workers were building a large, beautiful dhow for His Majesty the Sultan of Oman. I, and those with me, calculated that Nephi’s ship must have been about that same size. We stood under the huge hull in awe and amazement and with new respect and understanding for the monumental task which Nephi would undertake.

Nephi made only one request of the Lord, so far as we know. Where could he find ore to make shipbuilding tools? Perhaps he could have purchased such tools at Khor Rori, or perhaps not, and surely Lehi had brought basic tools, like a hammer and...
axe, from Jerusalem. Whatever access he may have had, Nephi chose to make his own tools and, having the ore, seemed to know how to proceed. Perhaps only a geologist would understand the sincere need for divine help, as relatively young limestone layers (Tertiary and Cretaceous) are the surface rocks over nearly all the Dhofar province. Only where these limestone layers have been stripped away by erosion is there a real possibility of finding ore, and the only large area of such “basement” exposure is the Marbat Plain, east of Marbat between Jabal Samhan and the Arabian Sea. On a geologic map (figure 15), the “basement” rock stands out in bold colors, contrasting sharply with the monotonous color representing the youthful limestone, but Nephi had no such map. Only the Marbat Plain and a tiny exposure of basement rock at a small wadi between Raykut and Mughsayl are likely to yield ore, and iron ore is, indeed, present at both locations, not enough for an iron industry, but far more than adequate for Nephi’s needs.

No trees grow in Oman that could provide suitable planking for Nephi’s ship, either today or probably in the past. Trees are very scarce in the Dhofar, and those of significant size tend to yield gnarly, punky wood. A huge baobab tree at Dalkut (figure 16) is essentially one of a kind and might supply enough wood for a ship; however, the wood is soft, yellow, and spongy and is filled with water so that one could chew the wood for water in the desert. We know that Indian teak was transported along the Omani coast from the earliest times, and perhaps Nephi bartered for shipbuilding lumber on the docks at Khor Rori or purchased logs to be dropped offshore at Wadi Sayq or Mughsayl to float ashore with the tide.

Aston has listed twelve criteria that he believes any proposed Bountiful site must satisfy. I will list each of the twelve and add my comments.

1. Nearly eastward from Nahom.
   All of the proposed sites for Land Bountiful in southern Oman are nearly eastward from Nahom.

2. Accessible from the interior.
   Of the proposed sites, only Wadi Sayq has truly difficult access from the interior. The narrow nature of the canyon and huge boulders and vegetation that block the canyon floor would make it very difficult to move a caravan down the canyon in our time. The only real access to Wadi Sayq is from the sea, and even that access is denied almost half of each year when the sea is too violent for small boats to come ashore. However, Wadi Sayq is a charming, pristine site to bring Latter-day Saint tourists, as the high breakers and surf and the “wet” landing on an isolated beach is about the right amount of danger and adventure to challenge the modern tourist.

   Nowhere on the Omani coast is the soil fertile enough for agriculture today, except the Salalah plain (i.e., Salalah and Khor Rori), which was farmed for centuries.

4. Sheltered location.
   At all of the proposed sites there is a sheltered khor where Lehi’s party might erect a camp and construct a ship. The khor at Wadi Sayq (Khor Kharfot) is by far the smallest.

5. Much fruit and wild honey.
   The only cultivated fruit orchards today are at Salalah, and this was likely so in the past as the soil and growing conditions are most favorable there. These cultivated orchards do indeed produce an abundance of seasonal fruits and may have done so in the past. Wild fruits and legumes (figs, dates, tamarinds) grow in all the mountainous areas of the Dhofar relatively near all of the proposed Bountiful sites, but they are seasonal and not really in great abundance. Living “off the land” is always a full-time
job, and gathering wild produce often expends more calories that it provides. Wild honey is available near all of the proposed Bountiful sites.


Timber appropriate for building a conventional, oceangoing ship does not grow anywhere along the Omani coast and probably did not in the past. Either Nephi's ship was not conventional or he obtained appropriate timber from some distant source. We are told that Nephi's ship was not "after the manner of men" and that the timbers used were of "curious workmanship," which opens numerous possibilities. Warren Aston proposes a raft-like ship, which is certainly a possibility and could probably be built with the materials at hand. If the ship were built at Khor Rori or even at Salalah, teak lumber from India was almost certainly available for purchase on the docks at Khor Rori.

7. Year-round freshwater.

All of the proposed Bountiful sites are blessed with abundant freshwater that flows year-round from large springs and that is nowadays impounded as a lagoon behind a baymouth bar. These lagoons and associated wetlands provide habitat for numerous water birds and small mammals, which may well have augmented the diet of a resident family. The smallest of these lagoons and wetlands is at Wadi Sayq. It is somewhat difficult to describe the ancient condition at Salalah because it has been overlaid by the construction of a major city.

8. Nearby mount.

Mountains and hills are everywhere along the Dhofar coast but are several kilometers north of the shoreline along the Salalah Plain.


Cliffs, like mountains, are abundant everywhere, and Nephi writes nothing about cliffs, only that his brothers were desirous to throw him into the depths of the sea. Suitable highlands are not obvious near Salalah, but at Khor Rori two elongated monoliths of rock flank the entrance to the khor and defy an obvious geological explanation.

10. Ore and flint.

Two sources for abundant iron ore have been located by Brigham Young University geologists and have been cited above. Since deposits of ore are very limited in the Dhofar, these two sites are among the most certain sites visited by Nephi; an important observation.

The availability of flint, or chert, is a complete nonissue, as it is abundant in the Tertiary limestones that cover the Dhofar and is everywhere in the wadis and beach gravels. Nephi needed only two hand-sized pieces to strike together to make a fire, or only one if he used the flint-with-steel method of our Boy Scouts. Lehi may even have carried a piece of flint with him on his long journey.

11. Unpopulated.

On this point, I differ sharply with Warren Aston. Lehi would have searched with difficulty to find a suitable site on the seashore that was completely unpopulated. Wadi Sayq is perhaps one of those sites, but it was possibly unpopulated then for the same reason it is today—one can't easily get to it. Modern Jabalis bring camels and cows into Wadi Sayq on a steep and narrow path that descends from the bluffs above, but not along the valley floor. Wherever he reached the sea, Lehi had neighbors, and if he tried to avoid them and was not curious about them, they were certainly curious about him. In a short time, he must have become aware of significant population centers along the coast and of a major commercial port at Khor Rori, where a wide variety of supplies and amenities were probably available. Surely, some members of Lehi’s extended family must have made friends among the local people and must have traded with them, learned from them, and given help and received help in a wide variety of endeavors.

12. Ocean access.

Any of the khors provided easy access to the open sea, and small fishing boats must have departed daily to return with what must have been a staple of Lehi’s diet. In the stormy season, the khors provided shelter for the fishing fleet and Nephi’s shipbuilding project.

Let me now describe the coastal area called Mughsayl and make a case for its consideration in a list of proposed sites to be called Land Bountiful. I might begin with a suggestion that Lehi may have considered much of the Dhofar coast to be a bountiful land and may even have relocated several times during a long residence there.
Mughsayl features a long sandy beach that extends for about six kilometers from Wadi Mudam almost to Wadi Aful, with Wadi Ashawq reaching the sea at almost the center point (figure 17). The modern road from Salalah ascends Wadi Adawnab from the the Salalah Plain at the port city of Raysut, descends again to the coast down Wadi Mudam, and runs west parallel to the beach on a narrow strip between a mountain front on the north and northward and a broad coastal plain, up to a kilometer wide, continues westward until it is cut off by limestone cliffs that descend to the sea. A branch of the modern road descends to the beach blowholes and to a restaurant and beach resort where our archaeological group stayed in July 2007. At the west end of the coastal plain, where limestone cliffs descend to the sea, is a huge olistolith rock (slip block) that forms an overhang known locally as the “cave” (figure 18). It is indeed a cave, with its south side completely open to the sea. The karst overhang provides excellent shelter from sun and rain for a half acre or more, where tourists rest on benches to watch blowholes at the water’s edge, which may cast columns of seawater ten meters or more straight into the air.

Almost at the center of the broad coastal plain is a small, low “plateau” of limestone and cemented coastal sands and gravels. The “plateau” is elongated east-west, about 30 meters wide and perhaps 150 meters long. At the west end of the plateau are stone foundations of the beach on the south. Two small communities of perhaps a hundred residents have been built recently on the mountain front east of Wadi Ashawq and are supplied by water from the wadi, as are the resort areas on the broad coastal plain west of the wadi. The modern road crosses the Ashawq khor and associated wetlands on an artificial bar inland from the natural baymouth bar and continues westward across the coastal plain, ascending over the coastal cliffs to Wadi Aful. At Wadi Ashawq the western mountain front is displaced northward and a broad coastal plain, up to a kilometer wide, continues westward until it is cut off by limestone cliffs that descend to the sea. A branch of the modern road descends to the beach blowholes and to a restaurant and beach resort where our archaeological group stayed in July 2007. At the west end of the coastal plain, where limestone cliffs descend to the sea, is a huge olistolith rock (slip block) that forms an overhang known locally as the “cave” (figure 18). It is indeed a cave, with its south side completely open to the sea. The karst overhang provides excellent shelter from sun and rain for a half acre or more, where tourists rest on benches to watch blowholes at the water’s edge, which may cast columns of seawater ten meters or more straight into the air.

Almost at the center of the broad coastal plain is a small, low “plateau” of limestone and cemented coastal sands and gravels. The “plateau” is elongated east-west, about 30 meters wide and perhaps 150 meters long. At the west end of the plateau are stone foundations of
ancient structures, which were one focus of BYU excavations in July 2007 (figure 19), and which appear to date from the early iron age—Lehi’s time period. Between the plateau and the mountain front to the north is a broad lowland about 150 meters wide and somewhat shielded from the saline fog and sea breezes. This flat valley was obviously used at some earlier time for small-scale agriculture, and a relatively modern irrigation ditch once diverted water from Wadi Ashawq onto the broad valley floor (figure 20). Could the small community (no more than one or two extended families) that lived on the plateau have used that same valley to grow crops?

Let me summarize the merits of Mughsayl and the reasons it might be considered a candidate for Land Bountiful:

1. Wadi Ashawq drains a huge area between Jabal Qamar and Jabal Qana, which provides an abundant and dependable source of fresh water throughout the year.

2. Wadi Ashawq has many tributaries, which provides a very wide entry window for anyone coming from the west.

3. Wadi Ashawq is very broad and flat, with abundant watering holes and offers an easy journey to the sea for anyone bringing a caravan down the wadi.

4. The khor at the mouth of Wadi Ashawq is large and appears from satellite photographs to be almost as large as Khor Rori. It offered safe harbor for at least small ships sailing along the Omani coast bringing supplies to Mughsayl.

5. Wetlands near the khor cover many acres, providing a large habitat for water birds and small mammals (figure 21).

6. A long sandy beach provides access to the sea for small fishing boats and for collecting sea shells and shellfish.

7. Mughsayl was a major stop on the inland, caravan trade route between Salalah and the Hadramaut region of Yemen, and thence to both sea and land routes of the frankincense trade.
8. Karst topography along the mountain front at Mughsayl (figure 18) provides large sheltered areas, at the “cave” and near the khor, for possible human habitation, for dry storage, and for the collection of wild honey.

9. A small area of several acres west of the khor may be a possible site for small-scale agriculture.

10. The wadi and coastal plain at Mughsayl is ideal for sustaining a large herd of camels and other domesticated animals for trade, meat, and milk.

In summary, let me note that I have no vested interest in establishing Mughsayl or any other proposed site as “the” Land Bountiful, but Mughsayl seems to me as likely as other proposed sites. I have nothing to offer but my experiences and observations, but they lead me to propose that Land Bountiful may refer to an extensive expanse of land on the Dhofar coast somewhere between Dalkut and Marbat and that Lehi may have resided at Mughsayl for up to six years, raising camels for a living while Nephi undertook the enormous task of building a oceangoing ship, interacting and trading freely with the local inhabitants for whatever materials or services he needed.
and the vessels of the sanctuary wherewith they minister, and the hanging, and all the service thereof” (Numbers 3:33). Speaking particularly of priests, the Chronicler wrote: “Of the priests [the text then lists names and genealogies] and their brethren, heads of the house of their fathers, a thousand and seven hundred and threescore; very able men for the work of the service of the house of God” (1 Chronicles 9:10, 13).

16. In Exodus 12, the chapter that describes the laws regarding the Passover, Moses emphasizes that the Passover sacrifice is also called service. Moses instructs the sons of Israel, “It shall come to pass, when ye be come to the land which the Lord will give you, according as he hath promised, that ye shall keep this service. And it shall come to pass, when your children shall say unto you, What mean ye by this service? That you shall say, It is the sacrifice of the Lord’s passover” (Exodus 12:25–26).


18. One source notes that “Benjamin’s use of the key words of garments and blood signal this as a temple oration.” Alison V. P. Coutts and others, “Appendix: Complete Text of Benjamin’s Speech with Notes and Comments,” King Benjamin’s Speech, 529.

19. In the above paragraph, I have drawn a connection to Benjamin’s statement “that your blood should not come upon me . . . that I might rid my garments of your blood” with temple sacrifice. In the present paragraph, Jacob’s just-cited statement regarding the blood and garments (Jacob 1:19) is also contextually associated with the temple; two verses earlier, Jacob made the statement “as I taught them in the temple” (Jacob 1:17).

20. For additional references to Jesus’ atoning blood in Benjamin’s speech, see Coutts and others, “Appendix: Complete Text of Benjamin’s Speech,” 554.

Mughsayl, Another Candidate for Land Bountiful

Wm. Revell Phillips


Liahona: “The Direction of the Lord”: An Etymological Explanation

Jonathan Curci

I would like to thank professors S. Kent Brown, Jeffrey R. Chadwick, John W. Welch, Donald W. Parry, and John A. Tvedtnes, as well as Frank Kelland, and James Stevens for the enlightening oral and epistular exchanges on this subject.


2. I believe that one of the purposes of carefully studying the etymology of Book of Mormon names like Liahona is to confirm the historical fact that Joseph Smith did not possess the intellectual tools necessary for the production of the Book of Mormon. All witnesses agree with Joseph Smith establishing that the basic motivation to produce the Book of Mormon started with what he defined as divine manifestations (of the angel Moroni), rather than cognitively fabricating them through a sort of conspiracy intention as critics have attempted to suggest. As it has been widely demonstrated by LDS scholarship, Joseph Smith was not seeking or researching through natural intellectual tools the necessary elements to produce the book. These linguistic findings lend credence to the methodology of acquisition of the information as Joseph Smith described it, i.e., through the regular encounters with a messenger called Moroni sent from the presence of God every 21st or 22nd of September from 1823 until 1827, marking the obtaining of the plates that then were translated by the power of God; see Richard Lyman Bushman, Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling (New York: Knopf, 2005), 56.


5. From these considerations, a question naturally arises: Why did the name Liahona not appear in 1 and 2 Nephi but only in the later book of Alma? The chronology of the translation of the Book of Mormon may provide a very plausible answer. It may well be that once the name appeared for the first time in the translation of the Book of Mormon in Alma 37, Joseph Smith did not feel the necessity to constantly report the original Semitic name of Liahona. After all, the Book of Mormon did not undergo an editorial arrangement of harmonization. From historical and textual evidence of the manuscript of the Book of Mormon, it has been acknowledged that, after the loss of the 116 pages, Joseph Smith started to translate from the period of the reign of King Benjamin. Joseph Smith translated from the book of Mosiah until the end of the Book of Mormon and only afterward did he translate from 1 Nephi. The first mention of the “compass” and “director” is in Mosiah 1:16. The statement by Bushman goes in the direction of my hypothesis: “It also appears that the Book of Mosiah in the current Book of Mormon is not complete. It begins abruptly without the introduction that Moronon affixed to all the other books he abridged. Possibly the first pages of Mosiah were among the 116 that were lost. The evidence implies Joseph and Oliver began work on Mosiah when they began translating together in April 1829, finished the book to the end, and then went back and translated 1 Nephi up through Mosiah” (Bushman, Joseph Smith, 579, n. 63; emphasis added). Until which chapter of Mosiah did they translate? In my line of reasoning, the presence of the word Liahona only in Alma 37 and not in Mosiah 1:16 may serve as an additional element to indicate not only that Mosiah was translated after Alma but that, after the loss of the 116 pages, Joseph started translating after the end of Mosiah 1. Additionally, Royal Skousen validly argues that the 116 pages that were lost contained the two chapters of Mosiah and that the book of Mosiah begins with what would have been Mosiah chapter 3 (see Royal Skousen, “Critical Methodology and the Text of ‘Mormon’,” Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 6/1 (1994): 138–39. Further studies on the original manuscripts may verify the correctness of the hypothesis that Joseph Smith started to translate from Mosiah 3 down to the end and then from 1 Nephi to Mosiah 2.


7. I hasten to add that this is totally different from the proposition that the Book of Mormon text could be Hebrew language written in Egyptian characters.


9. See the note of the Exodus 3:13 of La Bibbia di Gerusalemme, ed. Andrea Tessaroio, 9th ed. (Bologna: Dehoni, 1991), 133; that clearly indicates that the name given to Moses was pronounced Jehovah based on the Hebrew verb “to be” (the yad-waw he).

10. Further studies are certainly needed to locate the exact time of the change in the pronunciation of the tetragrammaton from yahweh to ‘adonay and the exact way in which the yahwistic theophoric names were pronounced.

11. At this juncture, I should spell out some of the relevant Hebrew rules fixed after the masoretic punctuation (vocalization) of the Bible text. The first says that the schwa at the beginning of the word is pronounced as “e”;