



BOOK OF MORMON CENTRAL

<http://bookofmormoncentral.com/>

A History of NaHoM

Author(s): Warren P. Aston

Source: *BYU Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 51, No. 2 (2012), pp. 78–98.

Published by: BYU Studies

Abstract: Around 700 BC, a wealthy man in southern Arabia donated three limestone altars to a temple dedicated to Ilmaqah, the moon god. Inscribed on each altar was a text identifying him as the grandson of Naw'um of the Nihm tribe. The three altars were unearthed in 1988 by German archaeologists amid the ruins of the Bar'an temple near Marib, in modern Yemen. They provide the earliest known reference to the Nihm, who today, nearly three millennia later, retain the name and are one of Yemen's largest tribes.



BYU Studies is collaborating with Book of Mormon Central to preserve and extend access to BYU Studies and to scholarly research on The Book of Mormon.

<http://byustudies.byu.edu/>



Aerial view of Nihm mountains in Yemen. Courtesy Warren Aston.

A History of NaHoM

Warren P. Aston

A century or more before Lehi's 600 BC exodus from Jerusalem, a wealthy man in southern Arabia named Bi'athtar donated three limestone altars to a temple dedicated to Ilmaqah, the moon god. Inscribed on each altar was a text identifying him as the grandson of Naw'um of the Nihm tribe. The three altars were unearthed in 1988 by German archaeologists amid the ruins of the Bar'an temple near Marib, in modern-day Yemen. They provide the earliest known reference to the Nihm, which nearly three millennia later retains the name and is one of Yemen's largest tribes. The tribal territory today is extensive, centered in the mountains northeast of Sana'a, Yemen's capital, but may have been even larger anciently. Because the account of Lehi's Arabian journey mentions just such a place-name, the altar discovery highlights a most significant development: the possibility, even likelihood, that ancient evidence of the Book of Mormon site "Nahom" survives to the present day. This article surveys what has been published or reported and summarizes and updates what is known about this interesting place-name in the Book of Mormon.

NHM—The Name

As background to what follows, two underlying points should be noted regarding Nephi's statement in 1 Nephi 16:34, that Ishmael "was buried in the place *which was called Nahom*" (italics added). This wording makes it quite clear that Nahom was already known by that name. Lehi and his party saw no need to name or rename the place, as they regularly did on their desert odyssey, both before and after Ishmael's death (see "in the valley which he called Lemuel," 1 Nephi 16:6; "we did call the name of the place Shazer," 16:13);



Altar with insert showing NHM characters (the final three characters on the left).
Courtesy Warren Aston.

“the sea, which we called Irreantum,” 17:5; “we called the place Bountiful,” 17:6; “we did call it the promised land,” 18:23). Although the meaning of the name “Nahom” is not exactly clear, it may well have captured in Arabic or Hebrew the human aspects of sighing, moaning, sorrowing, or mourning, as well as the ideas of comforting or consoling, any or all of which meanings would have made Nephi’s mention of this name appropriately significant, given the fact that it was a place suitable for burial.

Second, *Nihm*, which is the name of both a tribe and the territory it occupies, may well have shared the same consonants, *N H M*, as the Book of Mormon name *Nahom*. This would hold true in any of the Semitic languages, whether in today’s Arabic or the ancient Epigraphic or Early South Arabian language of the altar inscriptions, depending on which Hebrew or Egyptian *H* Nephi used in this word on his small plates.

In other languages, including English, the name is transliterated with vowels added. This results in variants such as *Nehem*, *Nihm*, *Nahm* and *Nehm*, but the consonants—and therefore the essential name—remain the same. While many toponyms, or place-names, appear repeatedly in Arabia, *NHM* is unique, always with “a voiceless laryngeal,” a simple *h*. As

a toponym, NHM has not been found to appear anywhere else except in reference to one area.¹

NHM in Scripture and LDS Commentary

Beyond noting the rare name and exploring its meaning, most scholars have had little reason to pay particular attention to NHM.² LDS scholars have had a much greater interest in this singular place in Nephi's account and, examining it closely, have found a series of links that greatly increase the likelihood of a connection between it and Nihm in Yemen.

This process began in 1948 when Hugh Nibley, freshly returned from military service in Europe and fascinated with Arabic, commenced publishing details illustrating how Nephi's text demonstrated "insider" familiarity with Arabian customs.³ He noted the linguistic connections between the two possible Semitic roots of the NHM name (the Arabic root *NHM*, meaning "to sigh or moan with another," and the Hebrew *Nahum*, meaning "comfort") and what happened following Ishmael's death. Both possible roots for the name link to such meanings as "to comfort, console, a soft groan" and "to roar, complain, suffer from hunger."⁴

A conclusion reached forty years later by biblical scholar David Damrosch corroborates the connection between NHM and dying. He noted that the root for *Naham* appears twenty-five times in the narrative books of the Bible and how "in every case it is associated with death. In family settings, it is applied in instances involving the death of an immediate family member (parent, sibling, or child); in national settings, it has to do with the survival or impending extermination of an entire people. At heart, *naham* means 'to mourn, to come to terms with a death.'⁵ This closely mirrors Nephi's description of the mourning and the complaints about looming hunger following the death and burial of his father-in-law, Ishmael: "The daughters of Ishmael did mourn exceedingly, because of the loss of their father, and because of their afflictions in the wilderness; and they did murmur against my father . . . saying: Our father is dead; yea, and we have wandered much in the wilderness, and we have suffered much affliction, hunger, thirst, and fatigue; and after all these sufferings we must perish in the wilderness with hunger" (1 Ne. 16:35).

Stephen Ricks pointed out in 2011 that while these associations seemed appropriate to the Lehites in view of what happened following Ishmael's death, the original place-name itself—the one we can document in ancient texts—may well have had a different origin in early Arabia.⁶ In other words, when Lehi's group heard the name *Nahom* vocalized, it recalled to them the mourning and complaining, despite it having a different *original* meaning. While this is linguistically probable, the material presented below gives

additional reasons to believe that the place Nahom also already had an association with death and burial.

In his later years, Nibley saw the Arabian links he identified as his “most important” contribution to Book of Mormon research.⁷ The characteristically broad sweep of his writing noted the appropriateness of the Nahom name but left it for others to probe more deeply. Following Nibley’s lead, other scholars have continued to find a veritable treasure trove of insights and evidences that support the Book of Mormon’s founding story in the Near East.

A major step forward in Old World studies of the Book of Mormon came in 1976, when Lynn and Hope Hilton visited Oman, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Israel on a Church assignment from the *Ensign* magazine. Their writings further focused LDS scholarly attention on the lands in which Nephi’s account unfolds. On the basis of that visit, the Hiltons tentatively proposed a location for Nahom in southern Saudi Arabia.⁸

In 1978, however, a BYU archaeologist raised the intriguing possibility that Nahom might still be known by that name *today*. In a short letter published in the *Ensign*, Ross T. Christensen noted the similarity of a place-name, *Nehhm*, on a 1763 map of Yemen to Nephi’s *Nahom*.⁹ He recommended research into the origins of the name and a search for other references to this name.¹⁰

Professor Christensen’s letter bore fruit, eventually setting in motion a train of events that resulted in fieldwork in Yemen by the present author and others from 1984 onward. In time, other maps and historical sources have been found that confirm the presence of the tribal name back almost two millennia, always in the same location. Present-day leaders of the Nihm tribe in Yemen proved an invaluable source of information. The physical setting of Nihm and the plateau to its east leading to the fertile coast of southern Oman have also been explored.¹¹

The resulting data were published in a series of reports by the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS) from 1984 to 1991, documenting the presence of Nihm back to about AD 100, or to within roughly seven centuries of Nephi’s reference.¹² The essence of the findings was later published as “Lehi’s Trail and Nahom Revisited” in the 1992 book *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*.¹³

Textual studies continued in the meantime, including a 1988 study by Stephen Ricks entitled “Fasting in the Book of Mormon and the Bible,” taking a more focused look at the hunger and fasting connected with Ishmael’s death and the name of his burial place.¹⁴

In 1991, Alan Goff’s significant essay “Mourning, Consolation, and Repentance at Nahom” provided a holistic overview of Nephi’s narrative.

Goff explored the biblical milieu in which the Lehite narrative is presented, finding that the apparently linear account of Nahom is underlain with sophisticated Old Testament parallels.¹⁵

In 1994, the book *In the Footsteps of Lehi* encapsulated all the research findings into the Lehite journey, including Nahom, to that point in time.¹⁶ The following year, on July 22, 1995, I presented a paper titled “Some Notes on the Tribal Origins of NHM” at the annual Seminar for Arabian Studies at Cambridge University, England. Delivered before the altar discovery was known to LDS researchers, the paper proposed an initial chronology for the name, including the reference to it in the first book of Nephi.¹⁷

Summaries of the Book of Mormon’s Old World setting depicting Nahom, such as that published in 1997 by Noel B. Reynolds¹⁸ and the 1999 study aid *Charting the Book of Mormon*,¹⁹ continued to be expanded and deepened by scholars probing Nephi’s deceptively simple text. In 2002, two major pieces dealing with Nahom were published in a FARMS book, *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*. In it, S. Kent Brown’s “New Light from Arabia on Lehi’s Trail” made new proposals concerning the length of the Lehite journey from Shazer to Nahom and then across Arabia to Bountiful. In Stephen Ricks’s “Converging Paths: Language and Cultural Notes on the Ancient Near Eastern Background of the Book of Mormon,” Ricks incorporated the altar discovery into his overview.²⁰

The year 2004 saw publication by FARMS of the seminal *Glimpses of Lehi’s Jerusalem*, the most comprehensive treatment to date of the setting in which Nephi’s account begins. The book concluded with “Jerusalem Connections to Arabia in 600 BC,” by S. Kent Brown, noting historical Jewish influences in Arabia and the implications of the Nahom account inadvertently confirming that Lehi’s group certainly had some contact with outsiders.²¹

In 2005, the documentary film *Journey of Faith* was released. Filmed on location, *Journey of Faith* showed views of the modern Nihm tribal area, as did the book by the same name the following year. Both showed the use of mummification in ancient South Arabian burials from one of several known burial sites in Nihm.²²

Nahom: A Place of Burial

Nahom was not necessarily where Ishmael died but was where he was *buried*. This insight ties in perfectly with other facts. Adjacent to modern Nihm is the largest known burial site on the Arabian peninsula, an ancient necropolis dating back into the Neolithic period of some four millennia ago. Thousands of burial cairns spread over the hills of ’Alam, Ruwayk, and Jidran, near Marib, have been known to the outside world only since



The vast Ruwayk desert burial area dating to before Lehi's time, some 25 miles/40 km north of Marib. Courtesy Warren Aston.

their 1936 discovery.²³ Unstable security conditions—a perennial obstacle in Yemen—meant that the sites were not examined by archaeologists until some decades later, at about the same time the three altars were unearthed nearby.²⁴ Because Nihm in the ancient Early South Arabian language refers to “pecked masonry,” this may carry an echo of the name’s genesis: the construction of the extensive burial complex and perhaps other structures.²⁵

The Link to an Eastward Bountiful

There are other reasons for believing that the tribal name and Nephi’s Nahom are one and the same. After describing the impact of the death of Ishmael, Nephi specifies the first major change of direction since leaving Jerusalem. Instead of their southerly tending course, from Nahom onwards the Lehtes traveled “nearly eastward” (1 Ne. 17:1), until they arrived at their uniquely fertile “Bountiful.” Only recently has satellite-assisted mapping enabled us to appreciate that after traveling southward into Arabia, as the Lehtes did, people are prevented from easterly travel by the shifting, waterless dunes of the vast Empty Quarter, as much today as in the past. However, a narrow band of flat plateaus beginning in the Nihm area, marking the southern end of the Empty Quarter, presents the first opportunity for travel in an easterly direction.

While the terrain of this plateau makes easterly travel *possible*, the plateau is nonetheless waterless and forbidding. It is still avoided today. The difficulty of travel along this route seems to be reflected in Nephi’s account,

which mentions that the group ate their meat raw (1 Ne. 17:2), they did not use “much fire” (v. 12), and the afflictions and difficulties of the journey could not all be written (v. 6). The Book of Mormon later clarifies these afflictions as “hunger and thirst” (Alma 37:42).

Perhaps assisted by the Liahona, which arrived on the very morning the Lehite group departed into Arabia, Nephi makes it clear that he could distinguish quite precise cardinal directions, not merely southeast or a generic “southwards” for example. A route ENE or ESE from Nahom leads into the Empty Quarter or into the equally forbidding Ramlat Saba’tayn desert. Very significantly, the direction of travel from Nahom is specified by Nephi as *nearly* eastward, a direction that we now know is possible across the plateau.²⁶

Finally, only in recent decades has research shown that eastward from Nihm is the *only* fertile area in over a thousand miles of coastline, the few miles of coast in Oman touched by the annual monsoon rains. This small fertile region lies within just a degree or two (thus “nearly”) of being directly east of Nihm.²⁷

The Significance of the Bar’an Altars

Given the convergence of these facts, it is small wonder that the 1988 altar discovery documenting the name to before Lehi’s day was highly significant.

By 1997, the best preserved of the three altars formed part of an exhibition showcasing the ancient past of Yemen in museums across Europe. Noting the altar inscription published in one of the museum catalogs, S. Kent Brown of BYU published a short article in the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* in 1999. In it he concluded that the Nihm mentioned on the altar was “very probably” the same place as Nephi’s Nahom.²⁸ No images of the text itself were available for study, however, and because the altar was still touring Europe, it seemed unlikely that more could be learned.

In September 2000, I visited the Bar’an temple site at Marib with two colleagues, Lynn Hilton and Greg Witt. Unexpectedly, a *second* altar bearing an identical dedication text was located within the excavated temple. Two months later, with the permission of the German team completing the restoration of the site, I returned to document the site in detail. On this visit, a badly damaged *third* altar with the same text was also located and photographed. Other altars found at the site, numbering about twenty in total, had unrelated scripts carved upon them. The fact that not one but three altars had been offered to the temple by Bi’athtar is unusual and underscores his status and wealth.

With comprehensive images of the altars now available, a more accurate translation of the text was made by perhaps the foremost authority on ancient Arabian chronology, Kenneth Kitchen of Liverpool University.



The second of the three NiHM altars sits in the foreground in this view of the Bar'an site in Marib. Courtesy Warren Aston.

Kitchen was able to date several of the rulers mentioned in the Sabaeen inscription, thus narrowing the date for Bi'athtar. The final dating of the three physical altars belongs to the 800–700 BC period, a century earlier than first thought.²⁹ But since Bi'athtar's grandfather Naw'um lived two generations earlier, the reference to the tribe actually refers to an earlier time, roughly 850–750 BC.

The altar find was briefly reported in the February 2001 *Ensign*, in the international *Liahona* magazine, and mentioned in a talk given in the April 2001 general conference.³⁰ In 2002, Terryl Givens's landmark study *By the Hand of Mormon*, published by Oxford University Press, included a full-page picture of one of the altars and endorsed this find as “the first actual archaeological evidence for the historicity of the Book of Mormon” and “the most impressive find to date corroborating Book of Mormon historicity.”³¹

A 2001 article entitled “Newly Found Altars from Nahom,” published in the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, updated readers concerning the two additional altars and their dating; it remains the fullest account of the altar discovery.³² The discovery continued to be seen as significant in encouraging non-Mormons to take the Book of Mormon seriously as an ancient text. The 2005 Library of Congress conference organized to mark the bicentennial of Joseph Smith's birth thus highlighted the altars as evidentiary support for Joseph Smith's prophetic calling,³³ as they have been since, including in historian Richard Bushman's 2007 biography *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*.³⁴ These evaluations of the significance of the altars, however, stand in stark contrast to the silence from both the cultural-Mormon and anti-Mormon communities about their discovery.³⁵

Further Documenting an Ancient Name

Many Latter-day Saints, however, remain unaware of still other ancient sources now known to mention NHM. These finds further inform our understanding of the tribe and its role in that region in early periods. They contribute toward an ever clearer picture of the setting in which Lehi and Sariah's odyssey played out.

Various categories of sources document the presence of Nihm in Arabia. Most prolific, unsurprisingly, are the maps made over recent centuries showing the tribal areas of Yemen. More than twenty such maps are now known. As noted earlier, it was a map that initiated LDS efforts to understand the history of the name. Interestingly, by highlighting the Western world's ignorance of Arabian geography, an earlier map (D'Anville's 1751 map) was a catalyst leading to the 1761–67 Danish expedition that produced the map Christensen noted.³⁶ D'Anville's map remains the earliest map



Jean Baptiste Bourguignon D'Anville, "Asia" (Paris, 1751), 30" x 40". Used by permission from James Gee.



Carsten Niebuhr, "Yemen" (Denmark, 1771), 15" x 23". Used by permission from James Gee.



Detail from John Cary, "New Map of Arabia" (London, 1804), 25" x 26" (top) and W. Darton, "Arabia" (London, 1811), 11.5" x 10". Used by permission from James Gee.

located to date that shows NeHeM and, importantly, draws on much earlier sources that appear to be no longer extant.³⁷

It is worth noting that the name NHM is not especially prominent in any of these old maps; there is nothing that would draw particular attention to it. More significantly, the name itself on any of these maps does not reveal in any way that the only fertile area on the Arabian coast lay to its east. Indeed, knowledge of the Dhofar region's unmatched abundance began to be reported to the outside world only some sixteen years after the publication of the Book of Mormon.³⁸

Written sources other than maps are fewer but no less valuable; these include several medieval travel accounts, some containing intriguing details about the Nihm tribe.³⁹ A singular written source is one of the very earliest texts, an AD 620 religious epistle from the prophet Muhammad himself, addressed to the tribes of Yemen, including the tribe of "Nahm."⁴⁰ Earlier still are tribal listings documented by Arab geographers and historians.⁴¹ To these we can now add a final category: inscriptional texts. Usually carved into durable stone, they are proving to be the earliest of all. Indeed, some may predate Bi'athtar's three altars.

Stone Inscriptional References to NHM

Several inscriptions now can be added to the altar texts after being recovered from recent archaeological work in Yemen, an activity that continues spasmodically in one of the world's more difficult locations to conduct such work. These new inscriptional references to NHM come from three of the



Top to bottom: Sabaean text, BynM 217; Minaic text, DhM 386; Hadramitic text, BarCra 6. As highlighted, NHM appears in these inscriptions which were carved in ancient Yemen in the Sabaean, Minaic, and Hadramitic languages. Reproduced courtesy of the Corpus of South Arabian Inscriptions (CSAI) project of the University of Pisa, Italy.

four major south Arabian kingdoms (Saba, Ma'in, and Hadramaut). No texts referring to NHM are known from the fourth kingdom, Qataban.

The four kingdoms date from the early first millennium BC down to the third century AD, when a new kingdom, Himyar, united the whole region.⁴² Such widespread references to the name indicate the influence of the Nihm tribe over the millennia.

Palm Leaves: Another Inscriptional Medium

While stone and metal recorded the conquests and reigns of kings and a powerful elite, a further method developed in ancient Arabia—cursive inscriptions on dry palm-leaf stalks. Necessarily small because of the limited, curved writing surface, these texts have created a new writing category designated “Zabur,” or “minuscule texts.”



Writing on an ancient palm stick, YM 11748. It is one of two known that record the NHM tribal name in a cursive “minuscule” script known by historians as Zabur. Reproduced courtesy of CSAI.

The palm sticks were used primarily to record contracts, debts, lists of names, accounts, letters, and decrees—in short, the whole range of everyday life. They may also have been used by rulers as a “backup” copy of decrees carved in stone or cast in metal. In the desert climate, palm sticks have survived remarkably well and, being organic, are amenable to carbon dating. Some date back to the eleventh century B.C.⁴³ Thousands of palm sticks have been recovered (over three thousand are kept in the National Museum in Sana’a alone), and while study of them is still in its infancy, at least two palm sticks—still undated but epigraphically belonging “at least to the 4th century B.C.”—are known to document NHM.⁴⁴

Conclusions

Documenting a tribal name and location back some three thousand years is, of course, rare anywhere in the world; it is likely unprecedented in Arabian archaeology. It is noteworthy that, without exception, each of these maps and texts portray Nihm in its present location, although many scholars assume that the tribal influence was wider in the pre-Islamic period. Together, these sources form a consistent, amply documented tribal chronology, allowing reasonable conjecture that the origin of this name may

A History of NHM

Late Neolithic?	Possible origin of name in connection with construction of the huge desert burial site.
850–750 BC	Approximate date of Naw’um on Bar’an text.
800–700 BC	Bar’an altars inscribed with NiHM references.
700 BC	Monumental texts refer to NiHM in this period.
600 BC	1 Nephi 16:34 reference to “Nahom.”
AD 100	Hamdani infers NiHM is part of Bakil tribes.
AD 600	NiHM mentioned in prophet Muhammad’s epistle.
AD 800	al-Kalbi reference to NiHM.
AD 900	Hamdani’s references to NiHM in Iklil, Sifat.
AD 1300	Likely sources for Anville’s 1751 map.
AD 1751	Numerous maps and references to NHM.
AD 2000	Numerous maps showing modern tribe.
Present Day	NiHM tribe present in same geographical location after approximately 2,800 years.

reach back at least into late Neolithic times and would have been known to many ancient people familiar with that region.

Thus, it is significant that Nephi's account makes clear that "Nahom" was already the name of the area where his father-in-law, Ishmael, was buried. To this Hebrew-speaking group, it was natural and appropriate to mention the tribal place-name in recording and recalling the death and burial that took place there. At just the right location to link directionally to and access the place that they would call "Bountiful," the rare name of NHM still exists today and is now firmly documented back through the centuries to before Nephi's day.

This article by independent researcher Warren P. Aston (who can be reached via email at byustudies@byu.edu) is based on his research in Yemen and Oman since 1984. In addition to papers and articles published primarily by the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship at BYU, available at <http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu>, his research is reported in his forthcoming book, *Lehi and Sariah in Arabia: The Old World Setting of the Book of Mormon*.

1. NHM is listed in G. Lankester Harding, *An Index and Concordance of Pre-Islamic Arabian Names and Inscriptions* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 602. However, in listings of pre-Islamic place-names in southern Arabia in Nigel Groom, *A Dictionary of Arabic Topography and Placenames* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban; London: Longman, 1983), and in the exhaustive tribal listings in 'Umar Ridā Kahhālah, *Mu'jam Qabā'il al-'Arab* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 1985), it does not appear.

2. See the valuable work of non-LDS scholars H. Van Dyke Parunak, "A Semantic Survey of NHM," *Biblica* 56, no. 4 (1975): 512–32; and Josef Scharbert, *Der Schmerz im Alten Testament*, *Bonner Biblische Beiträge* 8 (Bonn: Peter Hanstein, 1955), 62–65.

3. Publication of Nibley's work began with his "The Book of Mormon as a Mirror of the East," *Improvement Era* 51 (April 1948): 202–4, 249–51 (reprinted November 1970, 115–20, 122–25). The article expanded into three essays, including "Lehi in the Desert," which appeared monthly in the *Improvement Era* from January to October 1950. The three essays appeared, slightly modified, as *Lehi in the Desert and the World of the Jaredites* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1952). Since 1988, the book has been available as *Lehi in the Desert; The World of the Jaredites; There Were Jaredites*, volume 5 of *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1988).

4. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert; The World of the Jaredites; There Were Jaredites*, 79.

5. David Damrosch, *The Narrative Covenant: Transformations of Genre in the Growth of Biblical Literature* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987), 128–30, also see 141.

6. Stephen D. Ricks, "On Lehi's Trail: Nahom, Ishmael's Burial Place," in *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 20, no. 1 (Provo, Utah: Maxwell Institute, 2011), 66–68.

7. See John W. Welch, “Hugh Nibley and the Book of Mormon,” *Ensign* 15 (April 1985): 52.

8. Lynn M. and Hope A. Hilton, “In Search of Lehi’s Trail,” *Ensign* 6 (September 1976): 32–54, (October 1976): 34–63. This was followed by Lynn M. Hilton and Hope A. Hilton, *Discovering Lehi: New Evidence of Lehi and Nephi in Arabia* (Springville, Utah: Cedar Fort, 1996).

9. The map drawn by surveyor Carsten Niebuhr, a meticulous chronicler, during the 1761–67 Danish expedition to the Near East, depicts the tribal area as “Nehhm.” Rather than being a typographical error, this spelling probably represents Niebuhr’s best attempt at recording the name as he heard it from locals; Nehhm does not appear in any other maps before or after his.

10. Ross T. Christensen, “The Place Called Nahom,” *Ensign* 8 (August 1978): 73. Christensen later mentioned the possible Nehhm connection to Nahom briefly in a Q&A following his paper, “Geography in Book-of-Mormon Archaeology,” at the 1981 Thirtieth Annual Symposium on the Archaeology of the Scriptures, held by the Society for Early Historic Archaeology (SEHA, formerly the UAS) at Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. See *Newsletter and Proceedings of the S.E.H.A.*, no. 149 (June 1982): 11, available online at http://www.ancientamerica.org/library/display.php3?catalog_id=1048.

11. See the firsthand account “Beginnings” in Warren P. Aston and Michaela Knoth Aston, *In the Footsteps of Lehi: New Evidence for Lehi’s Journey across Arabia to Bountiful* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 5–10.

12. Warren P. Aston and Michaela J. Aston, *The Search for Nahom and the End of Lehi’s Trail*, AST-84 (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1984, updated 1986, 1988, 1989); and Warren P. Aston and Michaela J. Aston, *The Place Which Was Called Nahom: The Validation of an Ancient Reference to Southern Arabia*, AST-91a (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1991). Although the quasi-official *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1992) and the Book of Mormon articles extracted in Daniel H. Ludlow, S. Kent Brown, and John W. Welch, eds., *To All the World* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2000), listed no entry for *Nahom*, the encyclopedia did include a map showing the possible route of Lehi in Arabia. This map in that encyclopedia, 1:144, and references to *In the Footsteps of Lehi* and other works along this line implied acceptance of the scholarship done concerning Nahom’s location to that point. This map has since then appeared in the CES Book of Mormon student guides and elsewhere.

13. John W. Welch, ed., *Reexploring the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1992), 47–52.

14. Stephen D. Ricks, “Fasting in the Book of Mormon and the Bible,” in *The Book of Mormon: The Keystone Scripture*, ed. Paul R. Cheesman (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1988), 127–36.

15. Alan Goff, “Mourning, Consolation, and Repentance at Nahom,” in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Provo, Utah: FARMS; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1991), 92–99.

16. Aston and Aston, *In the Footsteps of Lehi*, is now available through the *Deseret Book Online Library*, www.Gospelink.com. A year earlier, Scot and Maurine Proctor’s *Light from the Dust: A Photographic Exploration into the Ancient World of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1993), 38–39, showed two images of modern Nihm.

17. Warren P. Aston, "Some Notes on the Tribal Origins of NHM," unpublished paper delivered at the annual Seminar for Arabian Studies, July 22, 1995, Cambridge University, England, also proposed that the NHM area extended over a larger region anciently.

18. See the summary by Noel B. Reynolds, "Lehi's Arabian Journey Updated," especially "The Place Which Was Called Nahom," in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1997), 379–89.

19. John W. Welch and J. Gregory Welch, *Charting the Book of Mormon* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1999), 147–48, available at <http://byustudies.byu.edu>.

20. S. Kent Brown, "New Light from Arabia on Lehi's Trail," in *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and John W. Welch (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2002), 55–125; Stephen D. Ricks, "Converging Paths: Language and Cultural Notes on the Ancient Near Eastern Background of the Book of Mormon," in Parry, Peterson, and Welch, *Echoes and Evidences*, 389–419.

21. S. Kent Brown, "Jerusalem Connections to Arabia in 600 B.C.," in *Glimpses of Lehi's Jerusalem*, ed. John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely, and Jo Ann H. Seely (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2004), 625–46. A generic desert image "near Nihm" appears on p. 77; for the Nahom comment see p. 641 n. 6.

22. See S. Kent Brown and Peter Johnson, eds., *Journey of Faith: From Jerusalem to the Promised Land* (Provo, Utah: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2006), 103; followed by pages 104–6 showing a burial mound and the Bar'an site; and page 119, showing a grave.

Not all LDS commentary concerning Nahom has been well informed, however. In George Potter and Richard Wellington, *Lehi in the Wilderness* (Springville, Utah: Cedar Fort, 2003), the claim is made that NHM is found in "a number of places in Yemen" (112–13). In their "Lehi's Trail: From the Valley of Lemuel to Nephi's Harbor," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 15, no. 2 (2006): 32–34, they discuss about five locations. This confusion arose from the various components of the Nihm tribal area (the mountains, hills, wadis, burial grounds, etc.) and varying transliterations; see Warren P. Aston, "Identifying Our Best Candidate for Nephi's Bountiful," *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Restoration Scripture* 17, no. 1–2 (2008): 59.

23. Harry St. J. Philby, *Sheba's Daughters* (London: Methuen, 1939), 370–81. *Nahm* is also mentioned by him on pages 381 and 398.

24. Tara Steimer-Herbet, "Jabal Ruwaik: Megaliths in Yemen," *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 29 (1999): 179–82, reports the first significant work done at the burial site and discusses C14 dating. Small numbers of tombs of a similar size, style, and dating are known in other locations in Arabia, including in the Sinai and Oman.

25. Joan Copeland Biella, *Dictionary of Old South Arabic: Sabaean Dialect*, Harvard Semitic Studies no. 25 (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1982), 296. Similarly, Stephen D. Ricks, *Lexicon of Inscriptional Qatabanian* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1989), 103, renders the root as "stone dressing."

26. Nephi had earlier recorded the direction of travel into the Arabian wilderness as "nearly a south-southeast direction" until Shazer was reached (1 Ne. 16:13), later noting that they had traveled for many days on "nearly the same course" (v. 33).

27. For a comparison of three sites in southern Oman proposed as Bountiful, see Aston, "Identifying Our Best Candidate," 58–64.

28. S. Kent Brown, “‘The Place That Was Called Nahom’: New Light from Ancient Yemen,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8, no. 1 (1999): 66–68.

29. Kenneth A. Kitchen, *Documentation for Ancient Arabia*, vol. 2 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), 744, presents the ruler chronology, while N. Nebes, “Zur Chronologie der Inschriften aus dem Bar’an-Tempel,” in the DAI journal *Archaeologische Berichte aus dem Yemen* 10 (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2005), 115, discusses the altar dating.

30. “Book of Mormon Linked to Site in Yemen,” *Ensign* 31 (February 2001): 79. For the general conference address, see Elder John K. Carmack, “United in Love and Testimony,” *Ensign* 31 (May 2001): 76.

31. Terryl L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture That Launched a New World Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 120–21, 147.

32. Warren P. Aston, “Newly Found Altars from Nahom,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 10, no. 2 (2001): 56–61.

33. See presentations by John E. Clark, p. 89 n. 13, and by John W. Welch, p. 108 n. 18, in the conference proceedings, John W. Welch, ed., “The Worlds of Joseph Smith,” *BYU Studies* 44, no. 4 (2005), published also as *The Worlds of Joseph Smith: A Bicentennial Conference at the Library of Congress* (Provo: BYU Press, 2006).

34. See Richard L. Bushman with Jed Woodworth, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007), 93; and Richard L. Bushman, *Mormonism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 32.

35. The most serious response to date concerning “Nahom” is in F. Beckwith, C. Mosser, and P. Owens, eds., *The New Mormon Challenge* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2002), written before the altar find was known. Endnotes 107 and 108 (p. 498) deal with the subject, conceding that the evidence concerning Nahom is “impressive only if one assumes a trip through Arabia rather than Sinai.” Of course, Nephi’s account rules out any possibility that the Lehite journey crossed anywhere other than the Arabian Peninsula, nor has a Sinai setting ever been seriously proposed and developed by any LDS or other researcher.

36. J. B. B. D’Anville’s *Premier Partie de la Carte d’Asie* showing NEHEM on a two-page map with a 1:7,150,000 scale was published in Paris in 1751; his three-volume *Geographie Ancienne Abregee* was published in 1768 (Paris: Merlin). It was first published in English in John Horsley, trans., *Compendium of Ancient Geography*, 3d ed. (New York: R. M’Dermut and D. Arden, 1814); and in Robert Mayo, *An Epitome of Ancient Geography* (Philadelphia: A. Finley, 1818). As far as can be presently determined, none of these works were owned before 1830 by libraries in the areas where Joseph Smith resided.

37. Ten maps, including the D’Anville and Niebuhr maps, are beautifully depicted and identified in James Gee, “The Nahom Maps,” *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Restoration Scripture* 17, no. 1–2 (2008), 40–57.

38. The first report of a fertile location on the Arabian coast did not come to the outside world until 1846, following the visit of Dr. H. J. Carter to Salalah, “A Descriptive Account of the Ruins of El Balad,” *Oman Transactions of the Bombay Geographical Society* 12, no. 14 (December 1846): 25–27. Nothing in other accounts from the classical period onward suggested that a fertile area existed in southern Oman. See further Eugene England, “Through the Arabian Desert to a Bountiful Land: Could Joseph Smith Have Known the Way?” in *Book of Mormon Authorship*:

New Light on Ancient Origins, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1982), 145, and notes 2, 6–8.

39. One of the more interesting accounts concerns the visit by a French Jew to Nihm, found in S. D. Goitein, trans., *Travels in Yemen: An Account of Joseph Halevy's Journey to Najran in the Year 1870 Written in Sa'nani Arabic by His Guide Hayyim Habshush* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press, 1941), 24–31. Habshush was also a Jew. Possibly significantly, these qualified observers note the unusual respect accorded to Jews by the tribe of “Nehm.”

40. Muhammad b. “Ali al-Akwa,” *al-Watha'iq as-Siyasiyya al-Yamaaniyya* (Baghdad: Dar al-Hurriya lil-Tiba'ah, 1976), 110. Other examples of such diplomatic letters from this period are extant; see Sultan Ahmed Qureshi, *Letters of the Holy Prophet* (India: Noor Publishing, 1983). Most are similar to the Nahm letter in style and content.

41. See al-Hamdani, *Sifat Jazirat al-'Arab*, ed. David H. Muller (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 49, 81, 83, 109–10, 126, 135, 167–68, listing NHM as a tribe or territory; and his *Al-Iklil*, ed. M. al-Khatib (Cairo: n.p., 1368 CE), which refers to *Nihm*, *Nuham*, and *Nuhm* as personal names belonging to the Hajur and Hashid tribes. More accessible is Oscar Lofgren, ed., *Suedarabisches Mustabih* (Uppsala: Almqvist, 1953), 46 (nos. 1019–22) or the reprinted *10th Book of al-Iklil* (Sana'a: Dar al-Yamania, 1987), 98.

Christian Robin, *Les Hautes-Terres du Nord-Yemen Avant L'Islam* (The Highlands of North Yemen before Islam), 2 vols. (Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut Te Istanbul, 1982), esp. 1:27, 73, discusses the origin of tribal names with scattered references to Nihm: 7, 20, 27, 45, 46, 68, 73, and notes 168, 186.

42. For an excellent and current summary of the ancient southern Arabian kingdoms, see the University of Pisa's Arabia Felix at <http://arabiafelix.humnet.unipi.it>.

43. See Jacques Ryckmans, “Inscribed Old South Arabian Sticks and Palm-Leaf Stalks: An Introduction and a Palaeological Approach,” *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 23 (1993): 127–40; and J. Ryckmans, “Origin and Evolution of South Arabian Minuscule Writing on Wood,” *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy* 12, no. 2 (2001): 223–35.

44. The tribal name (as *nhmyn*) is found in the National Museum of Yemen; see item YM 11748 under “Minuscule Texts.” A photograph also appears in Jacques Ryckmans, Walter W. Müller, and Yusuf M. Abdallah, *Textes du Yemen antique inscrits sur bois* (Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium: l'Institut Orientaliste de Université Catholique de Louvain, 1994), see esp. pp. 46–47 and plates 3a and b; the date of these palm sticks is mentioned on p. 13. Additionally, this name appears in a dual form as *nhmynhn* in document number RES 5095 (mentioned in the foregoing work, p. 46, commentary on column 1 line 3 of YM 11748). Also, a privately owned property agreement mentioning Nihm recorded on a palm-wood stick was shown to me by Sheikh Abdulrab Sinan Abuluhom of the Nihm tribe in Sana'a, November 1, 2000.