Lehi's Route to America

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**Abstract**: Traces Lehi’s possible migration route following ocean currents from the Arabian Peninsula across the Pacific Ocean to Central America. Includes a discussion of the theory surrounding the origin of the Polynesian people.

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LEHI'S ROUTE TO AMERICA

IN WHICH IS SET FORTH ONE MAN'S VIEW ON A MootED QUESTION.

By C. DOUGLAS BARNES, Ph.D.

Concerning the migration of Lehi and his colony from Jerusalem, as disclosed in the Book of Mormon, Dr. James E. Talmage in The Articles of Faith, states:

The company journeyed somewhat east of south, keeping near the borders of the Red Sea; then changing their course to the eastward, crossed the peninsula of Arabia; and there, on the shores of the Arabian Sea, built and provisioned a vessel in which they committed themselves to Divine care upon the waters. Their voyage carried them eastward across the Indian Ocean, then over the South Pacific Ocean to the western coast of South America. (Page 271, 9th Edition.)

By referring to the conventional terrestrial globe and tracing the path as outlined by Dr. Talmage, it is clear that the point of embarkation was somewhere on the southeastern extremity of the Arabian peninsula. In order to reach the Americas from this point, it required traversing in excess of 13,000 miles, or more than halfway around the world. While it is unlikely that we shall ever have sufficient information to define precisely the path followed by that group in reaching America, pertinent data have been accumulated which are quite illuminating and which lead to at least a rough definition of the probable path followed in the migration under discussion.

The ocean journey of Lehi, depending as it did upon natural agencies, such as wind and currents, for propelling the craft, undoubtedly occupied many months. Although not claimed in the Book of Mormon account of the journey, which is quite condensed, it is logical to assume that the colony stopped as occasion demanded or opportunity presented to provision the craft and to replenish the water supply. The memory of these stops, or contact with lands and possibly peoples en route, may have been perpetuated through the centuries in the traditions of descendants of the Lehi colony, and we turn for such evidence to the Hawaiians, who putatively are among the posterity of the Lehi group.

As regards the mechanics of this protracted journey, it has been found

Many Book of Mormon scholars will disagree with the point of view herein set forth, and it is presented here, not as the view of the Church, but as the speculation, opinion, and possible conclusion of one thoughtful student of the subject, and is submitted for what value it has as a creator of interest and stimulator of thought in these channels.

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One such account is presented in the Book of Mormon, which states: 'In the days of Lehi there was a prophet among them who was called Nephi. And he was filled with the spirit of prophecy, and he went forth into the wilderness and prophesied concerning the future state of the inhabitants of the earth' (2 Nephi 1:1).

The Book of Mormon, therefore, presents the following scenario of events:

1. Lehi and his family and followers left Jerusalem and journeyed eastward into the wilderness.
2. They established a city called Jerusalem in the wilderness.
3. Lehi and his sons, Nephi and Sam, went down to the Red Sea and built a ship to cross the ocean.
4. They crossed the ocean to the American continent.
5. They established a new nation called Zarahemla.

This account provides a basis for further exploration and study, particularly in the fields of history, archaeology, and geography. The discovery of physical evidence related to these events would be of great significance to scholars and the general public alike.

Diagram showing a speculative possibility

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1 Nephi 18.

As a rule the heating and cooling effect of the continental land masses is insufficient to do more than set up local modifications of the prevailing wind currents, but the Indian Ocean, in its relation to the great and high Atlantic continent, is a striking exception. In the summer months the

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referring to Figure 59 (page 28) reproduced from the same text, an ocean stream running counter-current to the north and south equatorial streams and moving eastward in about the 5° north latitude, finally dividing and reversing itself just off the shores of Central and South America. Thus by a series of currents a path from Arabia to America has been outlined.*

**Point of Arrival in the Americas**

It is proposed by the author that the Lehi colony reached the Americas by means of the current combinations outlined above.

Provided the craft followed the natural ocean stream eastward across the Pacific Ocean, as described, it appears logical that the colony arrived at a point on the western shore of Central or South America, somewhere between the equator and 15° north latitude.

**Expansion and Division of the Lehi Colony**

Reviewing briefly the Book of Mormon history, the colony lived in the new land for a time in relative harmony. Eventually, however, a division occurred, based on religious principles in which the less righteous group followed Laman, one of the older sons of Lehi, while the righteous remained under the leadership of Nephi, a younger son of Lehi. In contrast to their brothers, the Nephites, and as a distinguishing mark set on them by the Lord, the Lamanites became more highly pigmented, and today we point to the American Indian, still carrying this pigmentation, as their descendants.

The colony as a whole grew and spread northward, ultimately and after several centuries, reaching a high state of civilization, as judged both by the written history in the Book and by the physical evidences found in the ruins in Central America. During this development the activities of a portion of the group extended again to the sea, and within approximately the century of Christ’s advent, colonizers were being carried by boats under Hagoth to the land northward, and the claim is made in the record that at least two boat loads of people and provisions were lost at sea.**

It is naturally assumed that these marine activities extended into both the Pacific Ocean and Carribean Sea, and some students of the Book of Mormon claim it resulted in the transplanting of a portion of Lehi’s descendants into the Hawaiian and other of the Polynesian islands, possibly representing the boat loads which were lost as just mentioned. The acceptance of a direct relationship between the Hawaiians and the descendants of the Lehi colony in America is important from the standpoint of what follows, for if it is established, it means that the progenitors of the Hawaiians originated in Jerusalem and came first to America as the Lehi colony, before migrating to the Islands. On this basis any information as to the travels of the Hawaiian progenitors may logically be applied to the travels of the original Lehi colony. With this in mind we shall review evidences of Polynesian origin and of their travels.

**Fornander’s Research on Polynesian Origin**

Judge Abraham Fornander some years ago, and with the help of well-educated native research assistants, investigated the traditions and folklore of the Polynesian races and his discoveries, which are quite illuminating, were presented in three volumes as: An Account of the Polynesian Race: Its Origin and Migrations. Certain pertinent data are summarized in the following excerpts:

That the reader may know at a glance the result to which my investigations in the Polynesian folk-lore, as well as its comparison with that of other peoples, have led me, it may be proper here at the outset to say that I believe that I can show that the Polynesian family can be traced directly as having occupied the Hawaiian Archipelago, from Sumatra to Timor, Gilolo, and the Philippines, previous to the occupation of that archipelago by the present Malay family; that traces, though faint and few, lead up through Deccan to the north-west part of India and the shores of the Persian Gulf; that, when other traces here fail, yet the language points farther north, to the Aryan stock in its earlier days, long before the Vedic ir-

*An interesting account of a recent passage of a craft from Singapore, through the China Sea and finally eastward just north of the Philippines into the Pacific Ocean was published by Alan J. Villiers in the National Geographic Magazine (Feb., 1937, p. 221) under the title “North About.” The feasibility of the journey is outlined in the following excerpt from the account: From Singapore there are two routes by which a square-rigged ship may hope to reach Sydney, New South Wales. Either she may make the best of her way towards the northward, through Sounds (Sunda) Strait, or around the north of Sumatra with the southeast monsoon, standing down the west coast of Australia and latitude down in the wild west winds to the south of that continent; or she may go northward around Borneo and eastward into the Pacific, hoping that when that difficult stage of the voyage is past she may make her southing with the southeast trade.

**Improvement Era, March, 1934, p. 164; Nov., 1935, p. 672; Utah Genealogical Magazine, January, 1933.**

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*These books were published in London: Volume 1, Second Edition and Volume 3, 1890; Volume 2, 1890; Volume 3, L Hodgeten Hill, 1890."
ruption in India; and that for long ages the Polynesian family was the recipient of a Cushite civilization, and to such an extent as almost entirely to obscure its own consciousness of parentage and kindred to the ancient Cushites.

How long the Polynesian family had dwelt in the Asiatic Archipelago ere it debouched in the Pacific there are now small means of knowing, hardly of forming even a conjecture. Its reminiscences of that period are not many, and are confused with memories of older date and of other habitats.*

The author may have startled some and shocked others by seeking a Polynesian ancestry beyond the Malay Archipelago; but their undoubted folklore, their legends, and chants, gave no warrant for stopping there. They spoke of continents and not of islands, as their birthplace. They referred to events in the far past which have hitherto been considered as the prehistoric heirlooms of Cushites and Semites alone.*

Referring to his earlier volume, he says:

To recapitulate in an inverse order the findings to which that folklore led me, I would briefly say that I have found a variety of traditions, body of lore, and legends in some of their legends that the head, and front, and beginning of the Polynesians lay in a white (the Arian) race.

He found they must have come into intimate contact with early Cushite, Chaldeo-Arabian civilization, also evidence of amalgamation with the Davidian peoples south of Chaldea in India. Next they occupied the Asiatic Archipelago from Sumatra to Luzon and Timor.*

Probably there is no race upon earth which, in proportion to its numbers, has been the subject of so much interest and of such minute investigation as the Polynesians. This is owing not only to the interesting character of the race, but also to the mystery, as yet unsolved, which shrouds their origin, and to their extreme isolation. The evidence both of language and tradition points unmistakably to the East Indian Archipelago as at least a stage in their eastward migration.*

Mesara, Logan and Hodgson discovered remarkable, and, as they believed, conclusive analogies between the languages and customs of the Bhotyn races and those of South-Eastern Malayasia and Polynesia. The researches of our author, however, as he believes, have tracked the footsteps of the Polynesian immigrants still farther to the highlands of South-Western Asia, and revealed the impress of the ancient Cushite civilization in their religion and customs.*

Summarizing, Judge Fornander found evidence leading to the following conclusions concerning the Hawaiian progenitors:

1. They were originally a white race. 2. They came from the highlands of Southwestern Asia. 3. They had contact with peoples south

** || **Volume 2, page 2.
** || **Volume 1, page 32.
** || **Page VI of the Preface to Volume II.
* || *Preface to Volume 3, page V, by Professor W. D. Alexander of Punahou College, Honolulu.
* || *Preface, Volume 3, page X.

eastward by the superior forces of hostile peoples they found on the islands in their path.

**Correlating Fornander Data With Book of Mormon History**

Admitting that the Polynesian race came from the Lehi colony, then, as already pointed out, the same basic travel history should apply to both peoples. The Book of Mormon history and Judge Fornander's data coincide, in that originally a white race was involved, and this race came from or occupied in their travel southwestern Asia. The points of occupancy in southwestern India, southern India (Deccan) and the archipelago mentioned by Fornander, coincide with points mentioned earlier in defining the path of existing ocean currents.

It is interesting to note that the date of departure from the archipelago, and therefore the approximate date of arrival in the islands constituting their new homes, about the first or second century, A.D., is startlingly close to the time in which Hagoth and other ship builders already referred to were reported in the Nephite record as being active, and at which the two shiploads of people were missing at sea (roughly 55 B.C.).

Perhaps the Book of Mormon even holds the answer to the question of Judge Fornander as to why the immigrants pushed so far eastward into the Pacific Ocean before settling and establishing homes.

* || *Alma 63:5-10.

(Concluded on page 49)
the March Sunday night conjoint. The following is a suggested program for that occasion. You will note it is slightly modified and in greater detail than the one in the Executives' Manual.

2. Bee-Hive Call by Bugle or Organ.
3. Bee-Hive Girls march up the aisles to soft, appropriate chapel music. Remain standing and sing the Bee-Hive Call.
5. Prayer: Bee-Hive Girl.
8. Oral Reading: "The Bee-Hive Promise with the Salute. (Girls should have Bands.)
9. Finding the Band: A blue paper Band should be fastened where all the congregation can see it. A Bee-Hive girl pins on the awards (which have laved paper or cardboard) on the Band as other girls, following the outline below explain and tell how they may be earned. The Bee-Hive girl who gives the talk which precedes the placing of the awards on the band should conclude by turning or pointing to it and stating that having completed the requirements she may now pin the violets (substitute other awards) upon her band. When completed the Band should resemble the one on the cover of the Handbook. You may, of course, use other symbols.
10. Instrumental trio by Bee-Hive Girls.

11. "As I have seen the Bee-Hive Girls on the Rugosa would:
   a. Personal observation of their activities.
   b. How they need your help.
   c. Their Theme Project: I will taste the sweetness of service by neighborly acts for children.
   d. Call for responses from the three ranks.
   e. One girl from each rank tells of the joy they have found in carrying out the Theme Project.

It is always a pleasure to hear from you and the special activities of your Bee-Hive Swarms. The following report was received from Sadie Sorenson, Stake Bee-Keeper, Benson Stake:

The Benson Stake Bee-Hive Buzz was held October 17th at the stake tabernacle in Richmond. During the evening songs and musical numbers were presented by the girls from each ward in the stake. As a special event of the program recognition given to three stake and two ward Bee-Keevers who were promoted Bee-Keevers during the summer. At the close of the program refreshments were served to one hundred forty girls and their Bee-Keevers. The girls then repeated the "Builder's Purposes," the "Guardian's Resolve," and sang "The Honey Gatherer's Song."

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Those involved in that stage of the migration, if Lehi's descendants, moved westward to the Islands, not eastward, coming immediately from the Americas, rather than directly from the East Indies. Naturally the islands adjacent to America would be given first consideration in selecting their new homes.

A FURTHER POINT

If the relationship of the Lehi colony to the Hawaiians is accepted, there is further evidence that Lehi followed the path defined, and in particular that he entered the Bay of Bengal as a step in his migration to the new land. Sugar cane, claimed to be a native of Bengal, was known in India prior to 327 B. C.; only 270 years after the Lehi colony passed en route to America, and it is probable that it was cultivated there well in advance of that date. Also it is claimed that it was cultivated exclusively in India until the 5th century. A. D. Yet it was found in the Hawaiian Islands by Captain Cook in 1778.

Traditionally, at least, the cane was carried to the islands by early Polynesian immigrants, ancestors of modern Hawaiians. It would not be difficult to believe that Lehi, while en route to America, visited the Bengal shore, or adjacent islands, and that he added to his limited cargo, growing sugar cane plants, cuttings, or perhaps even seeds, which in some varieties are fertile, which later were a source of sugar for his people in America. Naturally, if these plants were available, new colonizers leaving the Americas would take with them the necessary starts, and it is proposed that groups migrating from continental America to the islands carried cane with them, ultimately establishing the plant in many islands, and particularly in the Hawaiian group.

The fact that early explorers in the Americas did not report the discovery of sugar cane need not be considered contradictory to the theory presented, since the native American discovered by explorers in the late 15th or the early 16th century was poorly adapted to agricultural pursuits. It would not be surprising to learn that an industry depending on agriculture had wholly disappeared as the early civilization waned in America.

CONCLUSION

On the basis of material which has been presented, it is not difficult to harmonize the account of the journey of the Polynesian progenitors with the story of Lehi's travels. It appears probable, therefore, that Lehi followed the ocean currents to the new land, as outlined above, and furthermore, that he made the journey in stages, stopping perhaps only for very brief periods at the various places perpetuated in the traditions and folklore of the Hawaiians. This information makes it possible to outline, tentatively at least, the possible path of the journey, as shown in the accompanying chart. In fact, the early stages of the journey appear to have followed the southwest monsoon drift, it might be postulated that the Lehi colony embarked in their craft and left the Arabian peninsula in the spring or early summer, some twenty-five centuries ago.

[Mr. R. S. Kaye kendall, Assistant Professor of History, the University of Hawaii, letter to Dr. C. Douglas Barnes, May 15, 1936; I have talked with members of the Departments of Botany and Anthropology here at the University and with one of our local anthropologists not connected with the University, and they seem to agree that the evidence indicates (they would not say `prove') that sugar cane is not indigenous to the Hawaiian islands, but that it was brought here by early Polynesian immigrants, ancestors of the modern Hawaiians.

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