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## The Gadianton Robbers in Mormon's Theological History: Their Structural Role and Plausible Identification

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# The Gadianton Robbers in Mormon's Theological History: Their Structural Role and Plausible Identification



**Brant Gardner**

The Gadianton robbers are a specific instance of the larger set of events and concepts revolving around what the Book of Mormon calls *secret combinations*. These secret combinations show up in connection with the Jaredites, then they disappear. They reappear scant years prior to the arrival of the Savior in the New World, and then disappear for over two hundred years. Finally, they reappear to play a role in the final denouement of the Nephites. While the majority of the conflicts in the Book of Mormon occur with the Lamanites, the most destructive conflicts are those that come at the hands of the secret combinations, and specifically the Gadianton robbers. The Lamanites might be the Nephites' most common enemy, but the Gadianton robbers are the most dangerous. This combination of longevity, sporadic appearance, and ultimate danger, make the Gadianton robbers and secret combinations an important study in understanding the message of the Book of Mormon. The elucidation of this complex interaction of time, text, and meaning must necessarily center on both Mormon's text and the ancient cultural environment of that text.

The first question we will examine is the role of secret combinations in the narrative of the Book of Mormon. The second issue is the plausible identification of the secret combinations with some historical event or group. This phase of the investigation is complicated not only by known history, but also because this history must also integrate with the narrative purpose of the secret combinations in the text. *What* is told must also conform to *how* it is told.

Finally we must test the identification against the disparate appearances of the secret combinations in the text. Secret combinations make an appearance over nearly two thousand years of Book of Mormon history, but they have no consistent presence. They all seem to be related, but they are separated by hundreds, or perhaps thousands of years. They have similar characteristics, but they are associated with different cultures. The text ties them all together. We are looking for that binding thread.

## **The Narrative Role of Secret Combinations.**

It is popular to describe Mormon as an abridger; some early predecessor of the editors of Reader's Digest who take large texts and distill them into shorter versions. This is a seriously misleading conception. It is true that Mormon is an author with a stylistic penchant for including large citations from his source material, but we do him extreme discredit when we forget his very active role in selecting and structuring his account. Mormon is an historian, but he is unlike a modern historian in the way he perceives his task. Mormon does not write secular history, but rather sacred history. It is this overriding concern that absolutely dictates everything he includes and excludes from his text.

As we approach the Gadianton robbers from the perspective of Mormon's construction of his text, we find that they and secret combinations are perhaps the most complex example of Mormon's authorial art. Secret combinations are a meta-theme that function as both an organizational principle and historical moral. The meta-theme of the secret combinations is not present because history happened in just such a way and Mormon dispassionately recorded that history. Secret combinations are an interpretive layer that Mormon spreads over the events in order for those events to have a greater meaning. In creating this meta-theme, Mormon is following an Old World literary vision that sees history in a larger context of types and patterns.<sup>1</sup> Robinson describes the effect of this conception on the way history was written:

The unifying principle [acted] like a magnet in evoking a pattern amongst iron filings. It created a pattern of history out of all its complexities, a pattern which disclosed the previously hidden purpose of God.<sup>2</sup>

Mormon is dealing in patterns. This patterning of history becomes evident when disparate events at widely separated times are described in ways that make those events obviously parallel. The repetition of the pattern is a marker of authorial formulation. For the secret combinations in the Book of Mormon, the patterning consists in a set of events and characteristics that always accompany the presence of a secret combination. The essential features are the presence of murders, a desire for

wealth (frequently described as “robbings and plunderings”), and the destruction of political order. Mormon orders three historical periods with the presence of this set of events and traits of secret combinations:

1. The earliest manifestation of the pattern in Book of Mormon history is in Jaredite times. The destruction of the Jaredites is explicitly laid at the feet of secret combinations, and all of the elements of the secret combinations are present.<sup>3</sup>
2. The second occurrence in time is actually the first in the text, and it is the most textually complex. It occurs within a period of only about eighty years. In that eighty-year time period the Gadiantons make four separate appearances and four separate disappearances. The appearances and disappearances of this particular set of Gadianton robbers serve as a micro example of the general patterning of the larger meta-theme. In spite of the four phases, however, this set is textually treated as a virtual single appearance. The result of the rise of the Gadiantons is the fall of the Nephite government just before the arrival of the Savior in the New World.
3. The final appearance of the Gadianton secret combination leads to the final demise of the Nephites.<sup>4</sup>

We have three instances that repeat this pattern, and we may be certain that it is no coincidence that all three appear to be so similar, a similarity that is even more apparent in the specific details than it appears in this brief summary. Of this intentional repetition in the Book of Mormon, Richard Rust notes:

Repetition appears purposefully within Book of Mormon narratives as a principle of reinforcement and confirmation. It seems that every important action, event, or character is repeated in the Book of Mormon. These repetitions emphasize the law of witnesses at work within the book ... They link narratives together with what Robert Alter calls “type-scenes.” ...Larger repeated narratives treat escape and travel to a promised land; repentance; and the nature, rise, and effect of secret combinations.<sup>5</sup>

Mormon creates a meta-narrative by the tight repetition of the structures of secret societies in relation to the end of political entities. The triple repetition creates a firm connection for the obvious reason that the pattern, the “type-scene,” is not a coincidence. The narrative sophistication of the use of secret combinations in the Book of Mormon suggests purposeful inclusion and careful planning; planning that is intended to point to the greater pattern that reveals the purposes of God.

## The Gadiantons in Plausible History

The repetition of the patterns clearly shows the hand of the author. Now we must determine whether the author is inventing the patterns, or truly being the magnet that evokes the patterns in the historical iron filings.

We find our textual linkage between type-scene and historical event precisely where Mormon put it, in perhaps the most anomalous narrative sequence in all of his text. When Mormon introduces his historical Gadiantons, he is telling a fairly simple tale but elects to tell it in a most unusual and convoluted way.

Mormon's history of the Gadiantons begins at the forty-second year of the reign of the judges, or about 50 BC. After the initial introduction to the Gadianton robbers in the body of Helaman 2, Mormon adds these comments to the end of the chapter:

And behold, in the end of this book ye shall see that this Gadianton did prove the overthrow, yea, almost the entire destruction of the people of Nephi. Behold I do not mean the end of the book of Helaman, but I mean the end of the book of Nephi, from which I have taken all the account which I have written.<sup>6</sup>

Notice that Mormon has been speaking of an historical event, and at this point makes a shift in narrative time to Mormon's present. It is at this point that we have what must be the most confusing narrative interruption in the Book of Mormon. After this look forward in time, Mormon abruptly changes the subject. He has been talking about the Gadianton robbers. He has even created a foreshadowing link between those Gadiantons and his own time. Now he stops, makes a full chapter break, and begins the next chapter with what appears to be a completely unrelated topic.

Mormon inserts a discussion of migrations to the lands northward. Even more surprisingly, Mormon brackets this migration narrative on both ends with a shift in narrative time to his own day. After this recent shift in narrative time, even Mormon understands that he has interrupted his narrative, for at the end of this sequence he states: "And now I return again to mine account..."<sup>7</sup> The account to which he returns is the Gadiantons, the very subject he interrupted.

As if understanding the now-you-see-them-now-you-don't-Gadiantons were not sufficiently difficult, Mormon introduces these enigmatic figures with a narrative sequence that is equally enigmatic. However, none of this is in error. Each of these anomalies are intentionally placed by Mormon the author for his own narrative purposes. This sequence, awkward though it might appear,

was carefully constructed to elaborate the meta-message of the secret combinations. In this anomalous text we have Mormon's intentional identification of the historical Gadiantons as he sees them.

Mormon's clue to historical events is this very text of the northward migration that is framed by references to the future. Both before he begins this narrative sequence, and immediately afterward, Mormon references his own time. This shift in narrative time is important because it tells us that the narrative in between is the focal point on which the time-shift is made. Mormon is doing more than denoting place; he is connecting time.

The inserted, out-of-place narrative describes a northward migration of the Nephites. Of course, Mormon has discussed northern migrations before, but this description is unique. For example, the northward migration of Hagoth received some notice, but the narrative emphasis was on the departure, not for the ultimate destination.<sup>8</sup> In contrast, this inserted section emphasizes the land to which the people are presumed to travel. This textually unusual fixation on the land of destination is even more curious because there is no indication that any of these people came back to tell about the land northward. As historians, we must ask the serious question of how Mormon arrived at his description of the land northward, since he does not record any of these people coming back to describe where it was or its characteristics. Nevertheless, Mormon describes it in some detail:

And they did travel to an exceedingly great distance, insomuch that they came to large bodies of water and many rivers. Yea, and even they did spread forth into all parts of the land, into whatever parts it had not been rendered desolate and without timber, because of the many inhabitants who had before inherited the land. And now no part of the land was desolate, save it were for timber; but because of the greatness of the destruction of the people who had before inhabited the land it was called desolate. And there being but little timber upon the face of the land, nevertheless the people who went forth became exceedingly expert in the working of cement; therefore they did build houses of cement, in the which they did dwell.<sup>9</sup>

The detail of the description of the land northward is given in such a way that Mormon likely supposed that we should easily understand what he was describing. The passage of time has made this description a little less obvious than it would have been to Mormon, but still he gives us enough information to make an identification of the location to which he is referring. The essential elements that allow us to identify this area are:

- It is northward of the Nephite lands
- There are many waters

- It is nearly desolate of trees
- There are cement buildings

From perhaps 100 BC to 600 AD there is only one area in Mesoamerica that fits all of these descriptions, and that is the city known as Teotihuacán. It is north of the Nephite lands. It is near the lake that at that time occupied the current site of Mexico City. It has buildings made of high quality cement.<sup>10</sup> The lack of trees and the environmental imbalance created by denuding the land of trees is hypothesized as a major factor in creating the downfall of Teotihuacán.<sup>11</sup> We have several very specific requirements that must all converge at one point to fit Mormon's description and there is only one area in Mesoamerica that fits this description well in the time period described. Mormon the author is pointing his finger at a specific location at a specific time because that location serves as the historical fulcrum on which his meta-narrative is leveraged.

In spite of the accuracy of this description of Teotihuacán, there is nevertheless a major problem with the fit. That problem is one of timing. The particular conditions that require the area to be devoid of trees and dominated by buildings of cement, do not belong to the Teotihuacán of 49 BC when the northward migration is described by Mormon, but rather the Teotihuacán of 250AD and later.

It is at this point that we understand the nature of the references to the future that frame the northward migration narrative. Mormon does not have historical records that tell of the land to which these people went, but Mormon nevertheless gives us a particular location for them, a location they may or may not have reached. His understanding of that land is based upon his own current time period. What we have is Mormon describing the Teotihuacán that he knows in his own time, and pushing that description earlier into history. This is not unusual for ancient historians.

However, it also doesn't matter. It really *is* the Teotihuacán of his own time that is his concern. Mormon intentionally links this migration northward to the land of Teotihuacán, not because of historical accuracy, but precisely because he desires to tie the Gadiantons of Helaman's time to the Gadiantons of his own day. Remember that both before and after the narrative insertion of the migration to the land northward Mormon has shifted the narrative focus to his own time period. Whether consciously or unconsciously, Mormon is notifying us that the concern for the land northward pertains to his own day, and that it has a link to the previous time. For Mormon, this migration northward is the bridge over which Helaman's Gadiantons will walk through time and space to become Mormon's Gadiantons.<sup>12</sup> It is those newer Gadiantons who are causing the destruction of Mormon's people that he uses as the historical backbone that will link all of the secret

combinations together, a set of destructive combinations that are culminating in the final demise of the Nephites.

It is important that we recognize that this tie between the first Gadiantons and the last Gadiantons that Mormon makes through this bridge in time and space is an artificial construction. It is at this point that we see the author describing the patterns rather than the iron filings. There is very little chance that the iron filings are the same, even though Mormon makes a pattern of them.

A brief note on the narrative history of the Gadiantons should suffice to show the artificiality of this tie between the two Gadianton bands. After the first Gadianton secret combination accomplishes its fatalistic task of destroying the Nephite government just before the arrival of the Savior, they disappear from the land for over two hundred and sixty years.<sup>13</sup> When they reappear they grow in power and importance until they can be said to have spread “over all the face of the land.”<sup>14</sup> When Mormon reintroduces the secret combination, he does so by calling them Gadianton robbers. This is a different group in a different land and with a gap of two hundred and sixty years between them and their earlier namesakes. Seen with the dispassionate eye of modern historiography, it is highly unlikely that this latter group that appears to be prominent throughout most of the land would have remembered and honored an otherwise short-lived and obscure band of robbers from inside the Nephite polity.

Is there *any* history behind this narrative artifice? If there is, we will find it by looking where Mormon tells us to look. We must look at the land northward that has many waters, is devoid of trees, is made of cement, and is on his mind in his own day. We must look at how Teotihuacán might explain the Gadianton robbers, because Mormon is telling us that they do. It is in Teotihuacán that we must look to see if we can find the “iron filing-events” that underlay Mormon’s patterned history.

Finding a lot of documentation on a secret society in ancient history is almost a fool’s errand, since their very nature was to be secret. In Mesoamerica, this problem is exacerbated by the nature of the available sources. Very few pre-Conquest texts are available, and the vast majority of our information comes from post-Conquest sources. This means that we must do what has been termed “upstreaming.” That is, we must begin with the known and move “upstream” in time to the earlier period with which we are interested. In Mesoamerica, this virtually forces us to the world as it was at the time of the Conquest.

One of the most valuable sources of pre-contact cultural information is the Florentine Codex, which is the Nahuatl text written by the native informants of Fray Bernardino de Sahagun. From these



Nahuatl texts father Sahagun created his Spanish-language opus on the history and culture of the Aztecs. The Nahuatl text has been translated into English, and there is a passage that is important to our understanding of pre-contact secret societies. This passage is cited as translated with the exception of one word that I have intentionally left in Nahuatl:

The [*nonotzaleque*] went about carrying its hide [jaguar]—the hide of its forehead and of its chest, and its tail, its nose, and its claws, and its heart, and its fangs, and its snout. It is said that when they went about their tasks with them—that they did daring deeds, that because of them they were feared; that with them they were daring. Truly they went about restored. The names of these are [*nonotzaleque*], guardians of tradition, debasers of people.<sup>15</sup>

The passage paints an unfavorable picture of these people, but we can sense a duality in the presentation of the information. Sahagun's informants were trained in the religious schools, and they certainly understood the Spanish prejudices. It is therefore not surprising that these *nonotzaleque* should be called "debasers of people." However, this pejorative description comes right after the indication that they were "guardians of tradition," a trait that many would have considered admirable—many, that is, who were not Spanish, nor Spanish influenced. It would seem that these *nonotzaleque* were some kind of group that dealt with pre-Conquest ideas and traditions.

Anderson and Dibble had translated *nonotzaleque* as "conjurers," no doubt because of the connection to the magically powerful jaguar pelt. The reason for leaving the word untranslated is that it is this very word that is important to our discussion, and "conjurers" is not an adequate translation of the concept.

The ending of the word, "*-eque*" indicates a collection of people who do something. It is analogous to the "*-ers*" ending we add to verbs in English. We take the verb *work* and get *workers*. The important information about the people who all do this thing is communicated by the meaning of the verb to which this stem is attached. In this case, we have the Nahuatl word *nonotza*, which has various meanings revolving around the idea of speaking together, consulting, or agreeing.<sup>16</sup> Thus the *nonotzaleque* are "those who agree or consult among themselves" or, in a more sinister and contextually appropriate context, "conspirators."

When Sahagun translated his native source into Spanish, he rendered *nonotzalequeas* "assassins." The connection of this term to the ancient sect is appropriate, for there are two aspects of the conspiracy that are important: the secret agreement, and the intent on disruption of government through murder. Significantly, Sahagun notes that this is a group "accustomed to and daring to kill."<sup>17</sup>

Sahagun presents these conspirators as a pre-Conquest group. Miguel Covarrubias links these *nonotzaleque* to the *nahualista* movement after the Conquest. Covarrubias specifically uses the passage from Sahagun identifying them as “assassins”<sup>18</sup> and applies that definition to the *nahualistas*. Perhaps even more important is the connection the original group had to the jaguar. That connection allowed Anderson and Dibble to translate *nonotzaleque* as “conjurers,” and it probably led directly to the name Covarrubias associated with them. *Nahualista* is a combination word that takes a Nahuatl noun and adds a Spanish ending. The Spanish ending denotes a group of people who hold in common whatever the root of the word would be. In this case, the root word is the Nahuatl word for a shaman.

The persistence of a group attempting to retain the old ways after the Conquest is aptly named for those practitioners of the old religion, and the association between the jaguar and the shaman provides another touchpoint between the description of the *nonotzalque* and the *nahualistas*. The *nahualistas* were a subversive organization after the conquest, and one may suppose that they intended to keep their identities secret. Similarly, the *nonotzaleque* appear to represent a group. Both groups have internal structure, and both are linked to the disruption of political entities. Both of these are at least grossly similar to the Book of Mormon descriptions of secret combinations.

We have a complex of information that we may use as a native set of characteristics of these “conspirators.” When we attempt to upstream this set of characteristics from the immediate post-Conquest to the immediate pre-Conquest, the connection between a group of people ready and willing to kill who wore the pelt of the jaguar at least suggests that we look at the various orders of the Aztec military. One of the Aztec military orders was the *ocelomeh*, or the “jaguar warriors,” whose battle attire consisted of pelts of the jaguar.<sup>19</sup> The wearing of the pelts or other representations of the jaguar marked this particular military order from others. It was not the only identifiable order, but each was marked by particular clothing.

Of course wearing distinctive clothing is hardly the way to keep one’s group affiliation a secret, but it can keep a specific identity secret, as the Ku Klux Klan learned. In this case, however, it is not specifically the secrecy, but rather the conspiracy that links these groups. It is not the secret, but the combination. They have an internal allegiance and code, and may operate as a group outside of other structural influences.

So far we have a very tenuous description of a pre-Conquest conspiracy that might be described as a secret combination. We can identify some of the characteristics of that group that include the readiness to kill as well as sorcery in the use of the jaguar pelt. The task is now one of “upstreaming”

to Mormon's time. Is there any reason to connect this tenuous later military order from Central Mexico to the secret combinations that Mormon reports in the lands farther to the south?

In the greater context of Mesoamerican history, there is every reason to suppose that Mormon was concerned with militaristic influences coming from Teotihuacán. The time period ascribed to Mormon's last Gadianton robbers directly parallels the timeframe for the expansion of Teotihuacán and their particular brand of militarism throughout the Mesoamerican region. The rise of the Gadianton influence beginning after 200 AD in the Book of Mormon is a direct parallel to the rise of Teotihuacán's expanding influence, and the time period that saw the construction of many of the cement buildings in that city, including the temple of the feathered serpent which is now understood as dedicated to the cult of war.<sup>20</sup> This influence increased in geographic spread and physical presence from about this time until the time of Mormon, and continued after the close of the Book of Mormon.

The epigraphic record of Tikal records the installation of a new ruler, Siyaj K'ak', who founds a new dynasty in 378 AD. By iconographic and epigraphic representation, it is absolutely certain that he came from Teotihuacán, and his descendants thereafter ruled in Tikal.<sup>21</sup> Many sites of the time witness either a change in ruling dynasties or an increase in militarism that is represented in new ways that clearly point to Teotihuacán influence.<sup>22</sup> When we place known Mesoamerican history side by side with Mormon's spiritual history, we find in both accounts a militarism exacerbated by a small contingent of a foreign element from the lands northward. The Book of Mormon timing for this description corresponds directly to the secular history of the expansion of Teotihuacán throughout all of Mesoamerica, but particularly the Maya region to their south.

In addition to the importation of militarism and political leadership from Central Mexico, the Teotihuacán influence extended to the transmission of religious ideals that accompanied the political power structure from Central Mexico. Here we recall our touchpoint for a Mesoamerican secret combination, the *nonotzaleque*. The *nonotzaleque* were an association that was willing to advance their political ideas through murder, but were also associated with the powerful shamanic symbol of the jaguar. The modern world tends to forget that politics and religion were virtually inseparable in the ancient world. Where politics were involved, religion was involved. The incursion of Teotihuacán into the Maya area also brought in new powerful symbols and a new religious perspective. It is in this connection that we see another of Mormon's descriptions of the Gadiantons:

And these Gadianton robbers, who were among the Lamanites, did infest the land, insomuch that the inhabitants thereof began to hide up their treasures in the earth; and they became slippery, because the Lord had cursed the land, that they could not hold them, nor retain them

again. And it came to pass that there were *sorceries, and witchcrafts, and magics*; and the power of the evil one was wrought upon all the face of the land, even unto the fulfilling of all the words of Abinadi, and also Samuel the Lamanite.<sup>23</sup>

While Mormon never describes the Gadiantons as a military caste, he does specifically note that they were “among the Lamanites,” implying that they *were not* the Lamanites. He also notes that at this time there is an increase in “sorceries, and witchcrafts, and magics.”

Another of the characteristic traits of Mormon’s secret societies parallels the invasion from Teotihuacán:

And it came to pass that the robbers of Gadianton did spread over all the face of the land; and there were none that were righteous save it were the disciples of Jesus. And gold and silver did they lay up in store in abundance, and did traffic in all manner of traffic.<sup>24</sup>

Mormon’s particular experience with these Central Mexican invaders would have come near the height of their power when they were literally “spread over all the face of the land.” These Gadiantons, who are not Lamanites, but who are “among” the Lamanites, are actively interested in commerce and gain. While little is known of the specifics of tribute from the Maya area into the city-state of Teotihuacán, we may readily assume that it existed. Thus we have a foreign presence, likely part of a military caste and bringing new religious ideas, who are “robbing” the land of goods to send to their foreign city—for their own gain, and not for the gain of those in the Lamanite or Nephite area. Assuming a Mesoamerican context, there is no better candidate for the Gadianton robbers who are contemporary with Mormon. A military association from Teotihuacán that brought a new militaristic philosophy tied to a new emphasis on “sorceries, witchcrafts, and magics” is a remarkably apt description of Mormon’s contemporary Gadiantons as well as the Teotihuacanos. The known history of that time period completely supports the nature of the description that Mormon gives for the Gadianton robbers with which he is personally familiar.

To this point in our process of historical upstreaming, we have a very likely candidate for the Gadiantons of Mormon’s day. Of course our problem, as was noted earlier, is that this Teotihuacán influence is not known for the earlier periods. How do we continue upstream if we know that the stream wasn’t there?

Interestingly enough, we return to Mormon the author and his artificial patterning of secular history. We are not looking for the presence of Teotihuacán in an earlier instance of the Gadianton robbers, we are looking for the *thread* that Mormon uses to draw them to the earlier period. As

Mormon moves his understanding of the Gadiantons as a Central Mexican influence earlier in time, he brings with the concept some of the set of meanings associated with the Teotihuacán Gadiantons. In particular, we have murder and plunder for gain. When we are introduced to the Gadiantons who gain control over the Nephite government in Helaman, we see them as a similarly separate entity carrying with them these traits of greed and murder:

For behold, the Lord had blessed them so long with the riches of the world that they had not been stirred up to anger, to wars, nor to bloodshed; therefore they began to set their hearts upon their riches; yea, they began to seek to get gain that they might be lifted up one above another; *therefore they began to commit secret murders, and to rob and to plunder, that they might get gain.* And now behold, those murderers and plunderers were a band who had been formed by Kishkumen and Gadianton. And now it had come to pass that there were many, even among the Nephites, of Gadianton's band. But behold, they were more numerous among the more wicked part of the Lamanites. And they were called Gadianton's robbers and murderers.<sup>25</sup>

We have a parallel description of a group of people who are among the Nephites, but are not Nephites. That same group is among the Lamanites, but they are not Lamanites. They are intent on seeking gain, and therefore they murder, rob and plunder. They are Gadiantons. These are the traits of the Central Mexicans of Mormon's time, and Mormon clearly links the Gadiantons of his own time to this earlier time period, both by name and attributes. Of course the characteristics described, that of murder for political gain and robbings and plunderings, could easily fit with the developing cultural pressures among the Maya at this time period. There is no particular need to see this group as foreign, except in the construction of Mormon's meta-theme. For Mormon, there is a characteristic of secret combinations that ties together all of the thousands of years of history, and that is a connection to the Jaredites.

## **A Millennium of Disappearing and Reappearing Secret Combinations**

The final piece of the puzzle of Mormon's Gadianton robbers is in the nature of this conceptual thread with which Mormon ties together nearly two thousand years of New World history. Both textually and conceptually, Mormon ties the secret combinations together based on the underlying inheritance from the Jaredites. Although Mormon takes pains to show that the secret combinations were not learned from the records of the Jaredites that the Nephite record-keepers preserved, he nevertheless takes equal pains to state that they had the same source as the Jaredite secret combinations: "that same being who did plot with Cain."<sup>26</sup>

The connection between the Jaredites and the Gadianton robbers of Helaman's time would have been an easy correlation. Jaredite names frequently appear in the Nephite faction that is associated with the pro-king separatists.<sup>27</sup> Gadianton might be a name of Jaredite origin, but Kishkumen almost certainly comes from the Jaredite heritage among the Mulekites.

Mormon's "problem" is the making the connection between the Gadianton's of his own day and the Jaredites. If, as is proposed here, Mormon is seeing a Central Mexican, or Teotihuacán influence and describing it as "the Gadiantons," then he must have some reason to connect this completely foreign culture to the Jaredites.

Mormon makes his connection explicit by his insertion of the northward migration text. Since there were Nephites who went North, Mormon can conceptually have them "carry" the secret combinations with them. That is the *mechanism* Mormon uses, but what was there about the Teotihuacán invasion that allowed him to justify it as being connected to the Jaredites? For this answer, we need more historical information about the Mesoamerican culture area.

The Olmec is the name used for the people who occupied the territory that the Book of Mormon knows as Jaredite.<sup>28</sup> We should resist the temptation to equate the Olmec with the Jaredites, because that would imply that the Olmec began with the Jaredites. This is known to be incorrect. However, just as the Lehites entered a world with other people in it, so did the Jaredites. They happened to enter the precise area of the most highly evolved culture of their day. It would be accurate to say that they participated in Olmec culture. This participation would have extended to the language of the Olmec, and to the entire Olmec cultural catalog.

One of the mysteries about the Olmec that found its resolution in the late 70's, was the reconstruction of their language. Kauffman and Campbell presented a ground-breaking paper that noted the large number of loan words coming from the Mixe-Zoque language. They also noted that Mixe-Zoque would have existed in precisely the location of the archaeological Olmec, and at the same time. Thus they suggested, and their suggestion has been widely accepted, that Mixe-Zoque was the language of the Olmec, a culture so influential that they lent both culture and vocabulary to many other groups in Mesoamerica. As the language of the Olmec, Mixe-Zoque would also have been the eventual language of the Jaredites.

The Mulekites would have participated in that cultural zone, and their historical move up the valley of the Grijalva parallels the movement of a daughter language of Mixe-Zoque into that same region. Based on the connection to the Olmec and the geographic distribution of Zoque, this daughter

language would have been the language of the Mulekites, and likely the lingua franca of the Nephites. Thus the connection between the Jaredites and Mulekites was evidenced by language as well as historical and cultural ties.

Until recently, a similar understanding of the linguistic affiliation of Teotihuacán has been among the greatest of Mesoamerican mysteries. This city might be called a Mesoamerican Rome because of its size and regional importance, but there was absolutely no trace of the language they spoke. It was a situation analogous to knowing about the Romans from their architecture and engineering feats, but never finding even a scrap of Latin, nor any Romance language.

This situation has recently been resolved. Although the results are currently unpublished, John Justeson has indicated the time-depth of many Mixe-Zoque loan words suggests that the language of Teotihuacán was Mixe-Zoquean.<sup>29</sup> This linguistic affiliation gives us the last tie that Mormon would have needed to connect the secret combination of his day to the Jaredite combination of old. For Mormon, Teotihuacán would have come from the same source!

Mormon certainly knew the linguistic affiliation of the Mulekites, and knowing that same language affiliation for Teotihuacán, a language different from the Maya languages that are spoken by most of the peoples Mormon would identify as Lamanite, Mormon would understand Teotihuacán as having ties to the ancient Olmec, or to the Jaredites as Mormon knew them. To Mormon, these were yet another branch of the old Jaredites. For Mormon, the Gadianton secret combination continued to rise from its ancient Jaredite roots.

## The Gadianton End Game

Mormon uses the literary concept of the type-scene to reinforce a spiritual pattern that emerges from historical events. This historical pattern consists of an internal secret combination that is interested in power, gain, and political ascendancy through murder. The moral of the type-scene is that the secret combination causes the destruction of a people, as defined by their religio-political structure. The quintessential type-scene to which all others refer is that of the Jaredites. Mormon links each of his parallel type-scenes back to this Jaredite level.

The second type-scene in historical order is that of the Gadiantons of Helaman's time and just prior to the arrival of the Messiah in the New World. This secret society is the one that is most elaborately described, with multiple internal parallels that highlight the same characteristics as the secret combinations of the Jaredites. Mormon explicitly connects these Gadiantons to the Jaredites, and the correlation may have been heightened by the Jaredite names associated with the movement.

This tie to the Jaredites would have come through the historical connection between the Mulekites and the remainder of the Jaredite civilization, a connection that not only lent ideas such as secret combinations, but also a language that was derived from that of the Jaredites. The result of this named secret combination is the destruction of the Nephite polity.

The third and final type-scene occurs in Mormon's day. The secret combination is called the Gadianton robbers, and Mormon links the secret combination of his day to that of Helaman's time by the northward migration narrative as well as the linguistic ties to the Jaredites or Olmecs.

Each of these type-scenes is built upon historical data, but the data are related in such a way to tell us more than history. They also tell us the future, for they form a predictable pattern. As complex as this meta-theme is in the Book of Mormon, it is expanded by yet one more meta-theme that Mormon saw, or at least hoped for. Not only is the *presence* of secret societies repetitive and predictive, Mormon likely saw the *aftermath* of the secret societies as repetitive and predictive.

Mormon's text shows us that the Gadiantons of Helaman's day ushered in the destruction of the Nephite polity. After that terrible end came a marvelous beginning. The Atoning Messiah came, and altered the world. To appreciate this fundamental alteration, we must understand the Book of Mormon conception of this Messiah. Even though the Book of Mormon prophets clearly understood the difference between the mortal mission of the Messiah and the final mission of the Messiah at the end of this world, they primarily preached the mortal Messiah and the mission of Atonement. Nevertheless, we give the Book of Mormon prophets little credit if we therefore presume that they did not also understand the Messiah of the end times—the Triumphant Messiah.

Mormon certainly understands that these two "comings" of the Messiah are the same person, but two different times. The Triumphant Messiah is he who will transform the world into a single political/religious entity, and who will usher in a complete and final peace. When the Atoning Messiah came, even though his mission was in mortality, he could not help but bring with him the influence of who he truly was. In different circumstances he was the one who would usher in a permanent peace. However, the mortal mission and the timing were different. So there are similarities, and there are differences. For Mormon, the difference is one of permanence.

The Messiah who appeared at Bountiful brought peace, just as he will at the end of the world. However, since this first time was related to a mortal ministry, it was not a permanent peace—it was a peace that lasted for two hundred years before it began to fade. Nevertheless, this peace was directly



related, inexorably related, to the appearance of the person of the Messiah. His essence required that he bring peace, even though the particular mission did not yet allow that peace to be permanent.

Mormon would have seen the arrival of the Savior in Bountiful as connected to the future arrival of that same Messiah in new circumstances. We may suppose that Mormon's naming of the Gadiantons in the two time periods tells us of his expectations of the parallels. Mormon is facing the decimation of his own people, yet he retains his optimism in the future. Mormon is saying that in the time of Helaman the destruction of the Nephites by Gadiantons was followed by the coming of the Messiah, a miracle that restored the Nephites. Mormon is expecting that after the destruction of his own people by the new Gadiantons, that the Messiah will come again, and will similarly restore the Nephites. His record will be the guide for that restoration. His optimism lives in his text, even though its fulfillment is taking longer than he would have hoped

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Louis I.J. Stadelman, *The Hebrew Conception of the World* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1970), 26.

<sup>2</sup> H. Wheeler Robinson, *Inspiration and Revelation in the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946), 129.

<sup>3</sup> Alma 37:21; Ether 14:8-9 sets up the destruction of the Jaredites because of secret combinations.

<sup>4</sup> Helaman 2:12-14.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Dilworth Rust, "Recurrence in Book of Mormon Narratives," *FARMS Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, vol. 3, no. 1 (Spring 1994), 39.

<sup>6</sup> Helaman 2:13-14.

<sup>7</sup> Helaman 3:17

<sup>8</sup> Alma 63:5-8.

<sup>9</sup> Helaman 3:4-7.

<sup>10</sup> "Concrete Evidence for the Book of Mormon," *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, edited by John W. Welch (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1992), 213. Citation is to David S. Hyman, *A Study of the Calcareous Cements in Prehispanic Mesoamerican Building Construction* (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University, 1970), ii, sect. 6, p. 7.

<sup>11</sup> George C. Vaillant. *Aztecs of Mexico* (New York: Penguin Books, 1966), 78-90.

<sup>12</sup> Not only does this bridge occur in the passage describing the northward migration, but it is reinforced by an explicitly named migration of Gadianton's just prior to the destructions at the time of the death of the Jesus. See 3 Nephi 7:12-13.

<sup>13</sup> 4 Nephi 1:41-42.

<sup>14</sup> 4 Nephi 1:46.

<sup>15</sup> Bernardino de Sahagun, *Florentine Codex* (Salt Lake City: The School of American Research and the University of Utah, 1963), 11:3.

<sup>16</sup> Molina and Simeon.

<sup>17</sup> Bernardino de Sahagun, *Historia General de las Cosas de Nueva Espana*, vol. 3 (Editorial Porrúa, 1969), 222.

<sup>18</sup> Miguel Covarrubias, *Mexico South: The Isthmus of Tehuantepec* (New York: Knopf, 1967), 77-78. Covarrubias is cited in both Sorenson (1985, 303) and Bruce W. Warren, "Secret Combinations, Warfare, and Sacrifice," *Warfare in the Book of Mormon* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1990), 229.

<sup>19</sup> Ross Hassig, *Aztec Warfare* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), 45.

<sup>20</sup> It may be one of the greatest ironies in LDS attempts to link the Book of Mormon to historical Mesoamerica that the feathered serpent symbol that has seen so much print as a representation of Christ may actually have been a representation of the Gadianton robbers.

<sup>21</sup> Simon Martin and Nikolai Grube, *Chronicle of the Maya Kings and Queens* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000), 29.

<sup>22</sup> Rene Millon, "The Place Where Time Began: An Archaeologist's Interpretation of What Happened in Teotihuacan History," *Teotihuacan: City Of The Gods*, edited by Kathleen Berrin and Esther Pasztory (London: Thames & Hudson, 1993), 26.

<sup>23</sup> Mormon 1:18-19, italics added.

<sup>24</sup> 4 Nephi 1:46.

<sup>25</sup> Helaman 6:17-18.

<sup>26</sup> Helaman 6: 25-29.

<sup>27</sup> Sorenson has noted the Jaredite connection to the kingmen, see Sorenson (1985, 265).

<sup>28</sup> The application of the designation *Olmec* to these people is actually the result of historical error. The Olmec were known historically, and their name was first associated with the archaeological finds before they were understood to be as old as they are. The name stuck. The group that lent their name to this ancient people is now referred to as the *historical Olmec*. We do not know what the ancient Olmec called themselves.

<sup>29</sup> John Justeson, personal communication.