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## The Olmec and the Jaredites

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# Chapter 1

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All Book of Mormon Mesoamerican models asserting that the narrow neck of land is the Isthmus of Tehuantepec equate the Jaredites of the Book of Mormon with at least a portion of the Olmec culture, or as Brant Gardner describes it, as “participants” in the Olmec culture. It is important to note that the record that recounts the Jaredite civilization is not a history or an archaeological book. It is primarily a religious lineage history, which crosses into political realms to the extent that the lineages do. The Olmec civilization is defined by modern archaeologists, whose main tools are remnants of structures, monuments, pottery, and urban detritus. One would not expect the geographic boundaries proscribed by modern archaeologists for the Olmec civilization (which most likely is not what they called themselves; no one yet knows what they called themselves) would match the Jaredite geographic boundaries. For example, there might be groups that left the main Olmec body but continued to participate in Olmec culture and practices. These groups would probably be included in the Olmec culture based on the definitions of modern archaeology, but they would probably not be considered in the Jaredite record since they are no longer in the area of the lineage history. Comparing the archaeological record of the Olmecs and the religious lineage record of the Jaredites is like comparing tangerines to oranges, as opposed to apples to oranges. They are similar but not exactly the same.

Just as the Book of Mormon Jaredite record is severely limited, much the same is true of the Olmec archaeological record. Besides the standard issues of skew of the past (e.g., concentration on ceremonial centers, prioritization based on touristic interest, etc.), when it comes to archaeological research of the Olmec area, other issues have severely limited the archaeology that has taken place. The massive impact of 500 years of cattle ranching and agriculture, as well as the burying of archaic and early formative sites deep in the flood plains, requires deep excavation that has not occurred. In addition, the change of climate and sea level, acidity of soils, water table dynamics, and volcanic activity distorts the reality of the past when it comes to the Olmecs (Oryuela-Caycedo 2013, 595).

The ancient Olmec civilization was centered around the southern Gulf Coast of Mexico area (today the states of Veracruz and Tabasco). The Olmec culture developed in the centuries before 1200 BC, and declined around 400 BC. Figure 1 shows the core or heartland Olmec area with principal archaeological sites.

Other cultures that originated after but were partially concurrent with the Olmec and exhibited some Olmec elements or influence were located to the north (figure 2) and south (figure 3) of the Olmec heartland.

Significant trade and exchange between the Olmec and sites to the north and south have been documented in the archaeological record (see figure 4).

This work is not intended to be a complete discussion of the similarities between the Jaredites and the Olmec culture, since those comparisons have been extensively documented in John L. Sorenson’s work, *Mormon’s Codex* (2013) and in other prior works. The reader is presumed to have some background knowledge of the foundations of the Mesoamerican models for the Book of Mormon; if not, a concurrent consultation of this work and the relevant sections in *Mormon’s Codex* is recommended.



Figure 1. Olmec heartland archaeological sites. Yellow markers indicate major sites, and red, minor sites. (www.latinamericanstudies.org 2015)



Figure 2. Archaeological sites to the north of the Olmec heartland (www.latinamericanstudies.org 2015)

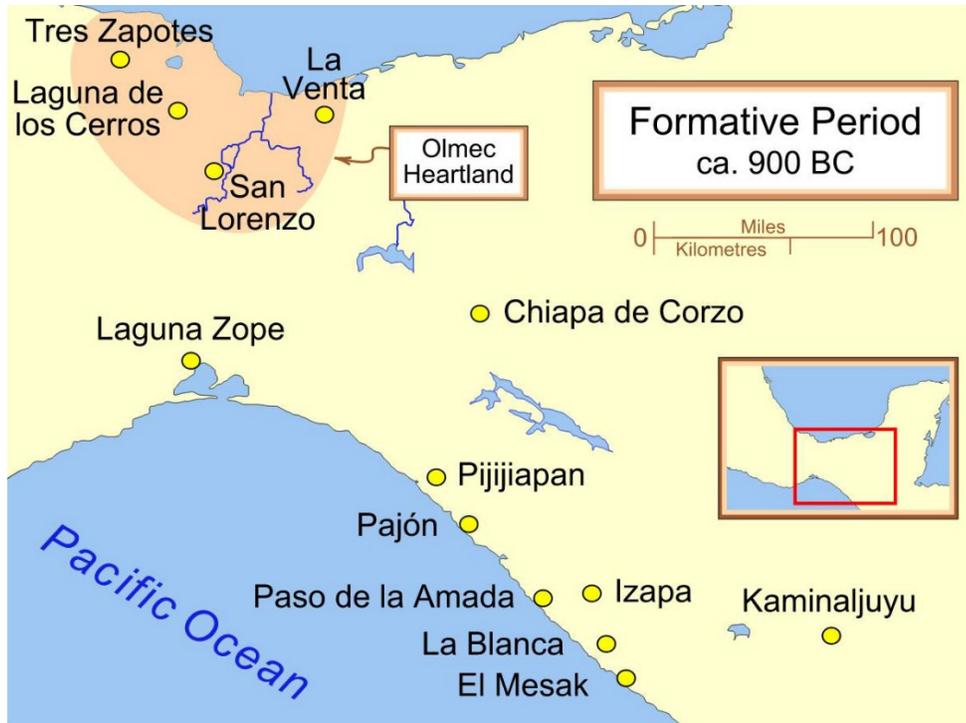


Figure 3. Archaeological sites to the south of the Olmec heartland. (www.latinamericanstudies.org 2015)

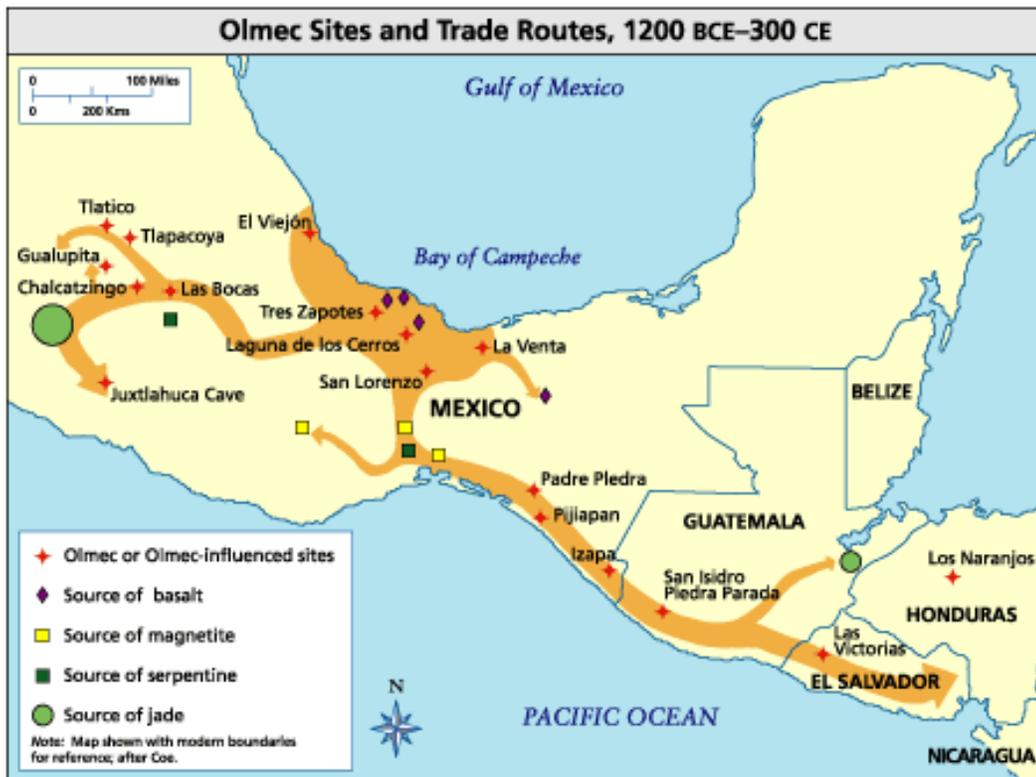


Figure 4. Olmec trade routes (www.latinamericanstudies.org 2015)

