



Type: Book Chapter

---

## Geographic Correlations in the Jaredite Middle Period

Author(s): Jerry D. Grover, Jr.

Source: *The Swords of Shule: Jaredite Land Northward Chronology, Geography, and Culture in Mesoamerica*

Published: Provo, UT; Challex Scientific Publishing, 2018

Pages: 109-119

---

# Chapter 12

## Geographic Correlations in the Jaredite Middle Period

---

Our method in the previous chapter of identifying early Jaredite locations by correlating Jaredite lands with their Sumerian meanings and with natural events in the Book of Ether narrative can be extended to identifying locations in the middle period of Jaredite history. However, it must be recognized that a Jaredite geographic name could, in fact, be a name known among or actually given later by the Nephites. A name given later by the Nephites would not be surprising, given that they occupied the Jaredite area for a long period of time. In addition, because the Jaredite plates were interpreted or translated, the name form and its underlying meaning could also have been modified to reflect Nephite meaning or etymology.

After Omer was restored to the throne, a few generations passed with little discussion related to geography except that the “people had spread again over all the face of the land” (Ether 9:26). Under king Heth, there was a great dearth, which, as previously discussed, was likely related to volcanic activity. As part of this dearth, there was a migration of snakes and animals “towards the land southward, which was called by the Nephites Zarahemla” (Ether 9:31). The snakes stopped at a certain point and hedged “up the way so that the people could not pass” (Ether 9:33). It has been postulated that the likely location where the serpents blocked passage is the “narrow pass” or passage discussed later in the Book of Mormon (Sorenson 1992, 324; see figure 42).

Moroni<sub>2</sub> writes that after the repentance of the people, “there began to be fruit in the north countries, and in all the countries round about” (Ether 9:35). The “north countries” appears to be a description of political polities and geography at the time of Moroni<sub>2</sub>, not at the time of the Jaredites, since Moroni<sub>2</sub>, at the time he was making the abridgement, indicates that he was present in the “north country” (Ether 1:1). Because a similar reference to “north country” appears during Nephite times (Helaman 4:7), this book will discuss this term in conjunction with the geography of the land northward during Nephite timeframes.

### “Great City” by the Narrow Neck, Nehor, and Moron

Ether 10: 19–20, 29

19 And it came to pass that Lib also did that which was good in the sight of the Lord. And in the days of Lib the poisonous serpents were destroyed. Wherefore they did go into the land southward, to hunt food for the people of the land, for the land was covered with animals of the forest. And Lib also himself became a great hunter.

20 And they built a great city by the narrow neck of land, by the place where the sea divides the land.

29 And it came to pass that Lib did live many years, and begat sons and daughters; and he also begat Hearthom.

Many Mesoamerican models and authors postulate that the most likely candidate for the “great city by the narrow neck” is the Olmec city of San Lorenzo, principally because it is located directly in the narrow neck of land (Stoddard et al. 2011; Norman 2005). Various arguments are made that the Coatzacoalcos River, upon which San Lorenzo sits, can have seasonal flooding that would make it and the surrounding adjacent area appear as a “sea.” While this argument may have some merit, it does not square with the Book of Mormon description in two respects: First, the Book of Mormon states that it was “by” the narrow neck, not *in* the narrow neck. Second, San Lorenzo sits fairly close to the Coatzacoalcos River, and when the seasonal flooding occurs, it is surrounded by swamps and water,

placing it *in* the sea, not “by” the sea, as the text requires. In addition, there is no indication anywhere in the Book of Mormon that a freshwater river or lake is considered a “sea.” The other assumption made in support of San Lorenzo is that the land being divided by the sea is the land northward and the land southward. The text, however, does not say that; in fact, the land southward and the land northward are never described in the Book of Mormon as one land that is divided—they are always referred to as discrete lands.

Those who support San Lorenzo as the city of Lib<sub>1</sub> also assume that a “great city” in the Book of Mormon refers to population size, and San Lorenzo, at least according to current data, appears to have had a much larger population base. As with any Book of Mormon question, instead of making assumptions, the best place to start to determine the meaning of a term is to look at the text.

A careful look at the “great cities” in the text of the Book of Mormon provides evidence that this term probably has nothing to do with population. First, there are other adjectives used that might more aptly refer to population, such as “large” (Mosiah 27:6, 7) and “mighty” (Ether 9:23). The cities identified in the text as a “great city” are Jerusalem (Old World), Jerusalem (New World), Zarahemla, Moronihah, Moroni, Jacob-Ugath, city of Lib<sub>1</sub>, and Ammonihah (self-declared by the residents). There is a general reference to “great cities which are round about, which are in the land of our possession” (Helaman 7:22). These cities are not always referred to as great cities:

City	Approx. Date	Great City (Yes or No)	Scriptural Reference(s)
Jerusalem (Old World)*	600–587 BC	Yes	1 Nephi 1:4; 2:12
	600 BC–420 AD	No	1 Nephi 1:4; 1:7; 1:13; 1:18; 2:12; 3:2; 3:17; 3:29; 4:1; 4:4; 4:30; 5:4; 7:3; 7:13; 7:15; 10:3; 10:4; 11:13; 16:36; 17:20; 19:8; 19:13; 19:20; 22:4; 2 Nephi 1:4; 1:24; 5:8; 6:8; 9:5; 10:5; 25:4; 25:5; 25:6; 25:10; 25:14; 25:19; 30:4; Jacob 1:1; 2:25; 7:26; Enos 1:25; Omni 1:15; Mosiah 1:6; 2:34; 6:4; 28:20; 29:46; Alma 9:9; 11:4; 18:36; 18:38; 28:2; 54:23; Helaman 8:20; 8:21; 8:22; 16:11; 3 Nephi: preface; 1:1; 1:2; 2:6; 4:11; 5:15; 10:5; 10:7; 15:14; 16:4; 17:8; 21:26; 4 Nephi 1:31; Ether 13:5; 13:8; 13:11; Moroni 10:31
Zarahemla	83 BC	No	Alma 6:1; 7:3, 5
	65 BC	No	Alma 56:25
	63 BC	No	Alma 60:1
	52 BC	Yes	Helaman 1:18
	22 BC	Yes	Helaman 7:22
	30 AD	No	3 Nephi 8:8
	30 AD	Yes	3 Nephi 8:24
	30 AD	Yes	3 Nephi 9:3
36 AD	Yes	4 Nephi 1:8	

Ammonihah	82 BC	No	Alma 8:6, 13
	82 BC	No	Alma 9:1
	82 BC	Yes	Alma 9:4
	81 BC	No	Alma 14:28
	81 BC	No	Alma 15:1
	81 BC	No	Alma 16:2-3
	78 BC	Yes	Alma 16:9
	rebuilt 72 BC	No	Alma 49:3, 10, 11, 14, 15
Moroni	30 BC	No	Helaman 5:10
	72 BC	No	Alma 50:13
	62 BC	No	Alma 59:5
	30 AD	No	3 Nephi 8:9
Moronihah	30 AD	Yes	3 Nephi 9:3
	30 AD	No	3 Nephi 8:9
Jacob-Ugath	30 AD	Yes	3 Nephi 9:9
Jerusalem (New World)	90 BC	Yes	Alma 21:2
	90 BC	No	Alma 21:4
	30 AD	No	3 Nephi 9:7
City of Lib	pre-400 BC	Yes	Ether 10:20
Great cities "round about"	22 BC	Yes	Helaman 7:22
	22 BC	Yes	Helaman 8:5-6
Great cities that have fallen	30 AD	Yes	3 Nephi 10:5

\* If neither the city nor land is identified, then the city of Jerusalem is presumed. Does not include biblical citations of Jerusalem. New Jerusalem is not included.

It is clear that the term "great" in conjunction with a city is not a formal part of the name, such as the "Great City of Moroni," because the term is not used exclusively to describe any of the specific cities that have multiple mentions. For example, in the exact same timeframe, Moroni is referred to without the term "great," but when the Savior describes the city of Moroni, he calls it "great." Old World Jerusalem is referenced as a "great city" and just a "city," all in the same verse (1 Nephi 1:4; 2:12).

While "great" can be defined in English as having a large population, it is again advisable to consult the text of the Book of Mormon to determine the definition of "great" in the usage "great city." The New World city of Jerusalem

gives us a clue that “great” is not related to population. Aaron, one of the missionary sons of Mosiah<sub>2</sub>, traveled to the “great city” of Jerusalem, which had been built by the people of Amulon, the Amalekites, and the Lamanites. It was the first city that he visited, and since we know that he left on his mission before the start of the reign of the judges in 91 BC, he likely left sometime in the neighborhood of 95 BC. The Lamanites obviously existed long before that, and we don’t have a date of formation of the Amalekites (probably during the time of Mosiah<sub>1</sub>, long before the existence of the people of Amulon [Grover 2017a]). However, we can approximate the earliest date of formation of the people of Amulon.

Zeniff was still king in approximately 158 BC (Grover 2015), and Limhi sent out the exploration party around 125 BC. Between that time period, king Noah<sub>2</sub> was put into power, fled, and then killed. One of his priests who also fled was Amulon, and the earliest that could have reasonably taken place was around 140 BC. Without going into all the details, considering the time that had to pass for the people of Amulon to form as a recognized group, the earliest a people of Amulon could have existed and be in a position to help create Jerusalem would be around 130 BC. That leaves only 35 years from the creation of Jerusalem to Aaron’s arrival for Jerusalem to become a “great city.” Sorenson (2015) also identifies the inundated city of Samabaj in Lake Atitlan as the likely candidate for the city of Jerusalem. Samabaj was an island city that was principally used as a ceremonial center and has been estimated to have a population of not much more than 100 people, with the entire island covering an area of approximately 35 acres (Medrano 2013, 10–11).

The time span of the city of Moroni, from its foundation to its reference as a “great city,” is around 100 years, which is likely a short period for the formation of very populous city. Interestingly, at the time of destruction, the Nephite record identifies Moroni as only a “city” (3 Nephi 8:9), while, contemporaneously, Christ refers to it as a “great city.” Ammonihah was never referred to as a “great city” by the Nephites at large, only by its own residents, which indicates that a “great city” did not refer to an objective population level, but rather has to do with something else.

One thing every so-called “great city” in the Book of Mormon has in common is that each one was either imminently or later destroyed. Where a reason is given, the destruction is a result of some form of wickedness. The first “great city” mentioned is Jerusalem in the Old World. Other generic references to “great cities” in the Book of Mormon are mentioned in the context of them being ready for destruction (Helaman 13:12–14, 21; 7:22). The word “great” in relation to a city in the Book of Mormon appears to have a literary meaning related to the degree or nature of its pride or wickedness.

The Oxford English Dictionary (2015) provides other meanings of “great,” which match the textually defined Book of Mormon meaning of “great” in the term “great city”:

- Of the heart, soul, speech, etc.: (orig.) full of emotion or an emotional quality, as courage, anger, or pride; angry, grieved; proud, arrogant; (now) filled or bursting with emotion, significance, etc.
- Of things, places, actions, events, etc.: 1) Of considerable importance, significance, or distinction; important, weighty; distinguished, prominent; famous, renowned; impressive, 2) Of a nation, city, etc.: important, powerful, famous.
- Most important of its kind; pre-eminent; chief, main.
- Relating to a high social or official position; conferring high status or considerable power.
- Distinguished or grand in appearance; imposing.
- Arrogantly, presumptuously, proudly.

Thus, a “great city” in the Book of Mormon is a city that serves as an important ceremonial center, generally one that is wicked, and that will be destroyed in the future. It may or may not have a large population.

A major Olmec city that actually fits well with the Book of Mormon’s textual criteria for the “great city” of Lib<sub>1</sub> is La Venta (San Lorenzo would also qualify under this definition). La Venta has been considered primarily a religious

ceremonial center, and thus fits within the just-described definition of a “great city.” Though the city’s description as being “by the place where the sea divides the land” may have variable interpretations, it seems to indicate the presence of barrier islands or other islands cut off by means of the sea or extensions of the sea, such as saline lagoons or saline estuaries. While the paleo environment of hydrological features in the area has a large amount of uncertainty with regard to ancient river courses and shoreline features (which change over time), La Venta is located 8 miles from the Gulf of Mexico and has a current elevation of 74 feet above sea level; it is within proximity to existing lowland lagoons along the sea.

The concept of the “sea dividing the land” is consistent with the use of the Egyptian directional and boundary system shown to exist in the underlying reformed Egyptian glyphs in which rivers were used as boundaries and referred to as “lines.” The Caractors Document indicates that the Egyptian system was utilized for directions in the original reformed Egyptian glyphs (Grover 2015). Examples of the Egyptian system are shown in figure 38.

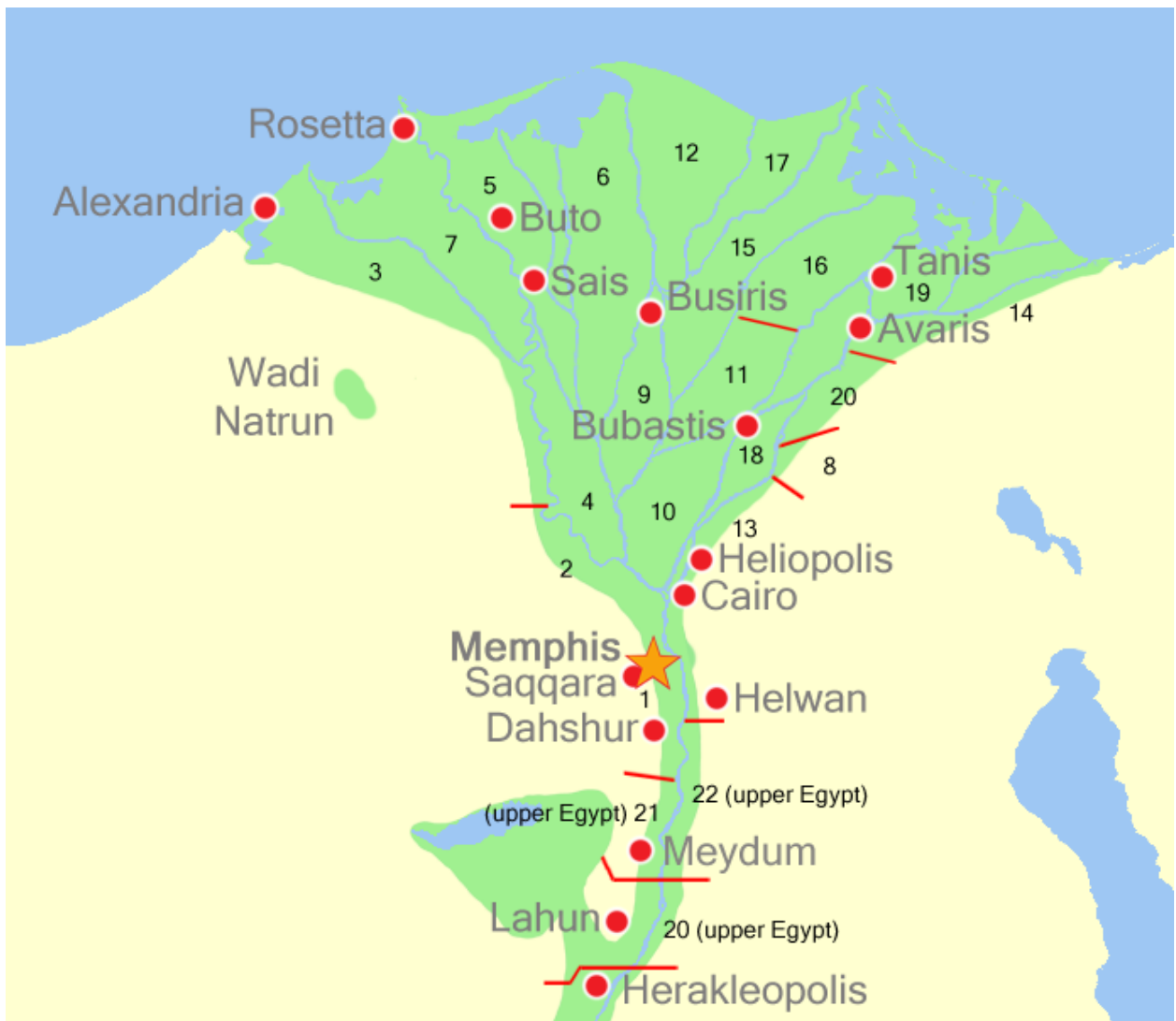


Figure 38. *Sepat* provinces, or districts, in Egypt utilizing rivers or points along the river as boundaries. (www.commonswiki.org 2015)

In the particular case of the city built by Lib<sub>1</sub>, the boundary between the land is provided by some extension of the sea. The extension of the sea in the area of La Venta would have been an estuary. The estuary could have been the

saline estuary at the end of an active river system or an estuary lacking an active river system (typically left when a river changes course). In an estuary where there is an active river, a portion of the water is still saline because of the influence of sea water, so it would still qualify as the place where the sea divides the land as opposed to a river (see figure 39).

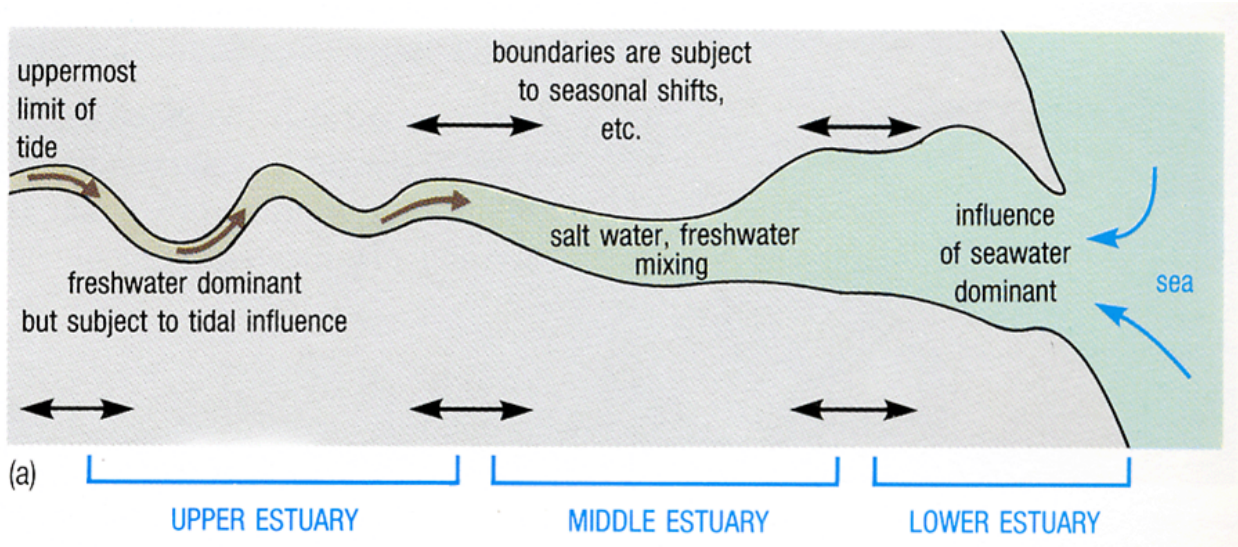


Figure 39. Typical estuary system showing salt water presence.

An example of this estuary feature is demonstrated by the salinity gradient found in the estuarine system of Sydney Harbour, Australia (see figure 40).

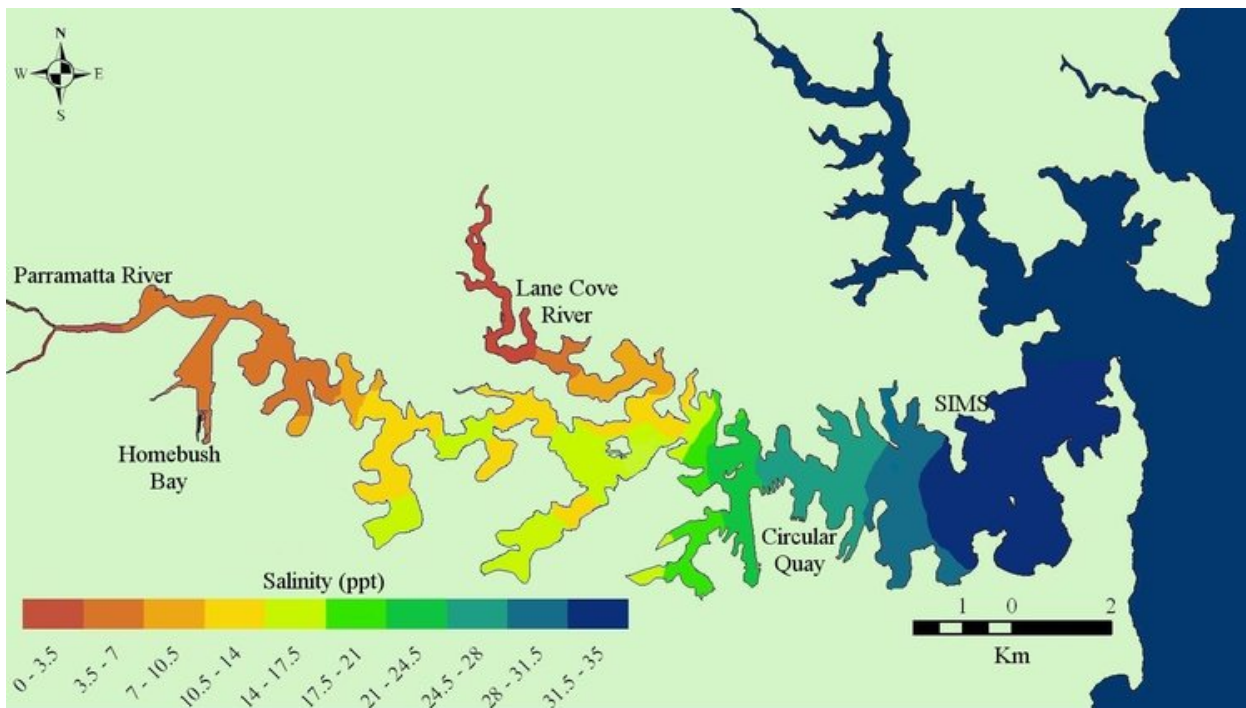


Figure 40. Salinity of Sydney Harbour estuary, Australia. ([www.sydneyharbourobservatory.org](http://www.sydneyharbourobservatory.org) 2016)

If an estuary was left because a river moved, the entire estuary would consist of salt water. La Venta was located in the area where the ancient Bari River (a ancient branch of the Grijalva River) flowed into the Gulf of Mexico (see figure 41).

**Fig. 1.** Map showing the location of the Olmec center of La Venta and the adjacent study site of San Andrés. Indicated are cores SAV2, 3, 4, and LV2 and the ancient channel of the Bari River (dashed line). Hatched lines demarc boundaries between the Grijalva deltaic plain of Tabasco and the Tertiary hills found in Veracruz and at La Venta. The map is based on Landsat Thematic Mapper satellite imagery.

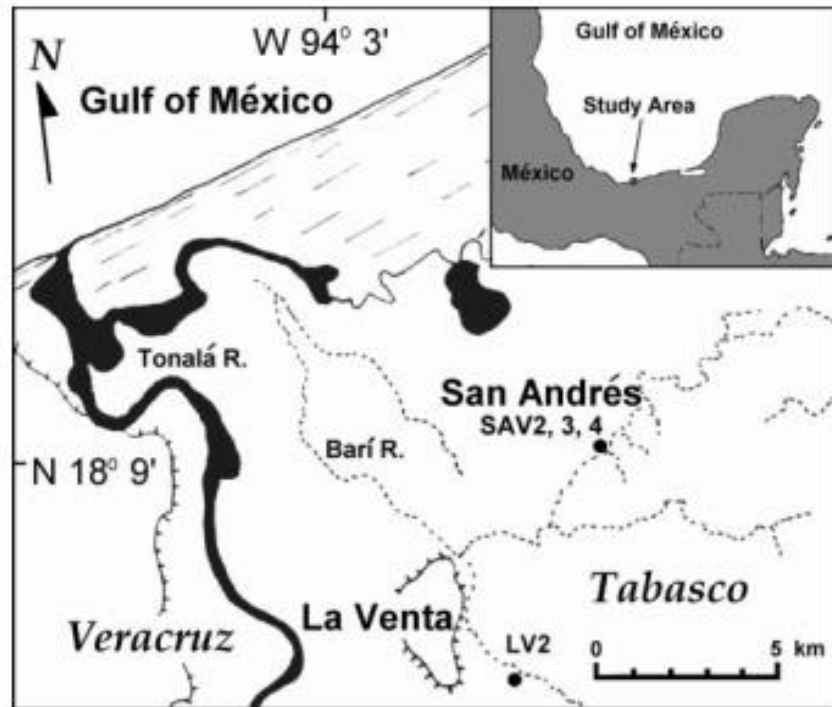


Figure 41. Location of La Venta in relation to ancient estuary channels. (Pope et al. 2001)

Archaeological evidence indicates that the Bari River at this location was a semi-saline estuary established during the Early Preclassic Period (1750–1150 BC) and continued through the life of La Venta (Rust et al. 1988). An initial layer of occupation at La Venta dates to 1200 BC, but La Venta did not reach its apogee until after 900 BC. After 500 years of preeminence, La Venta was all but abandoned by the beginning of the fourth century BC (Diehl 2004).

The “great city” was not identified with being in any particular land, but because it was located along a river, it is a reasonable possibility that it could be part of the land of Nehor, which, as already mentioned, means “river.”

Another fact that supports La Venta as the location of the city of Lib<sub>1</sub> is the indication that the area adjacent and south of the “great city” was in the land southward and was “covered with animals of the forest,” with the area designated as a wilderness “to get gain.” It has been noted that:

Because they are so extensive, the upland savannas to the southeast of La Venta merit additional comment. White-tailed deer, cottontail rabbits, and bobwhite quail frequent their margins, where both food and forest cover are abundant. West et al. (1969:83) speculate that these were important prehispanic hunting grounds, which may have been burned to drive animals and maintain the habitat. (Pool 2007, 85)

Since Lib<sub>1</sub> likely lived in the “great city” that he built and was a “great hunter,” proximity to an area where there was large game to be hunted is a requirement for the city.

The ancient city of La Venta, although adjacent to a hunting area, was in a location where mammals other than howler monkeys are uncommon (Pool 2007, 85). There is evidence of various large-game mammals in San Lorenzo;



however, it does not have the geographic advantage that would allow the driving of game, as does the upland savannas to the southeast of La Venta.

In addition, the Book of Mormon indicates that the location of the venomous serpent infestation provided access to the land southward and that the city of Lib<sub>1</sub> was built near the boundary to the land southward. It has been postulated by Sorenson (1992) that a reasonable geographic location for the poisonous serpent infestation is the “narrow pass” referred to later in the Book of Mormon. The Sorenson model locates the narrow pass within reasonable proximity of La Venta (see figure 42). In figure 42 the location of the city of Mulek corresponds to the location of La Venta.



Figure 42. Sorenson model location of the narrow passage. (Sorenson 2013)

### Ancient Grijalva River Channels

Since the Bari River was an ancient channel of the Grijalva River delta complex, it is appropriate to discuss the changing location of the Grijalva throughout Book of Mormon times. Historically, the Grijalva River has moved and has had multiple branches or mouths, with many of the branches existing at the same time, as is typical in river delta systems. Research on the historical locations of the various mouths of the Grijalva is limited. Kirk Magleby has published an electronic map of the historical course of the Grijalva River (see figure 43), based on various discussions with and resources of local Mexican engineers and hydrologists (Magleby 2016).



Figure 43. Historic course of the Grijalva, created by Kirk Magleby. (Magleby 2011)

Research by Christopher von Nagy (2003) provides additional information about the historical path of the Grijalva River. The Grijalva, like other delta-forming rivers, is constantly making minor course changes in how it meanders and loops over time. These changes generally take place in a discrete geographic band or belt however, generally after long periods of time; sediments deposited by the river raise the general elevation of the discrete meander belt, forcing the river to make a major shift, which is called an avulsion. These avulsions are not always all-or-nothing propositions, and the river may continue going down the existing drainage route, while at the same time partially rerouting to the new drainage. In the case of the Grijalva, a major avulsion occurs roughly every 150 years. There are often more than two drainages on delta-river systems that run at the same time. The discrete belts of areas that von Nagy mapped for the Grijalva are shown in figure 44, with one additional band labelled by the author.

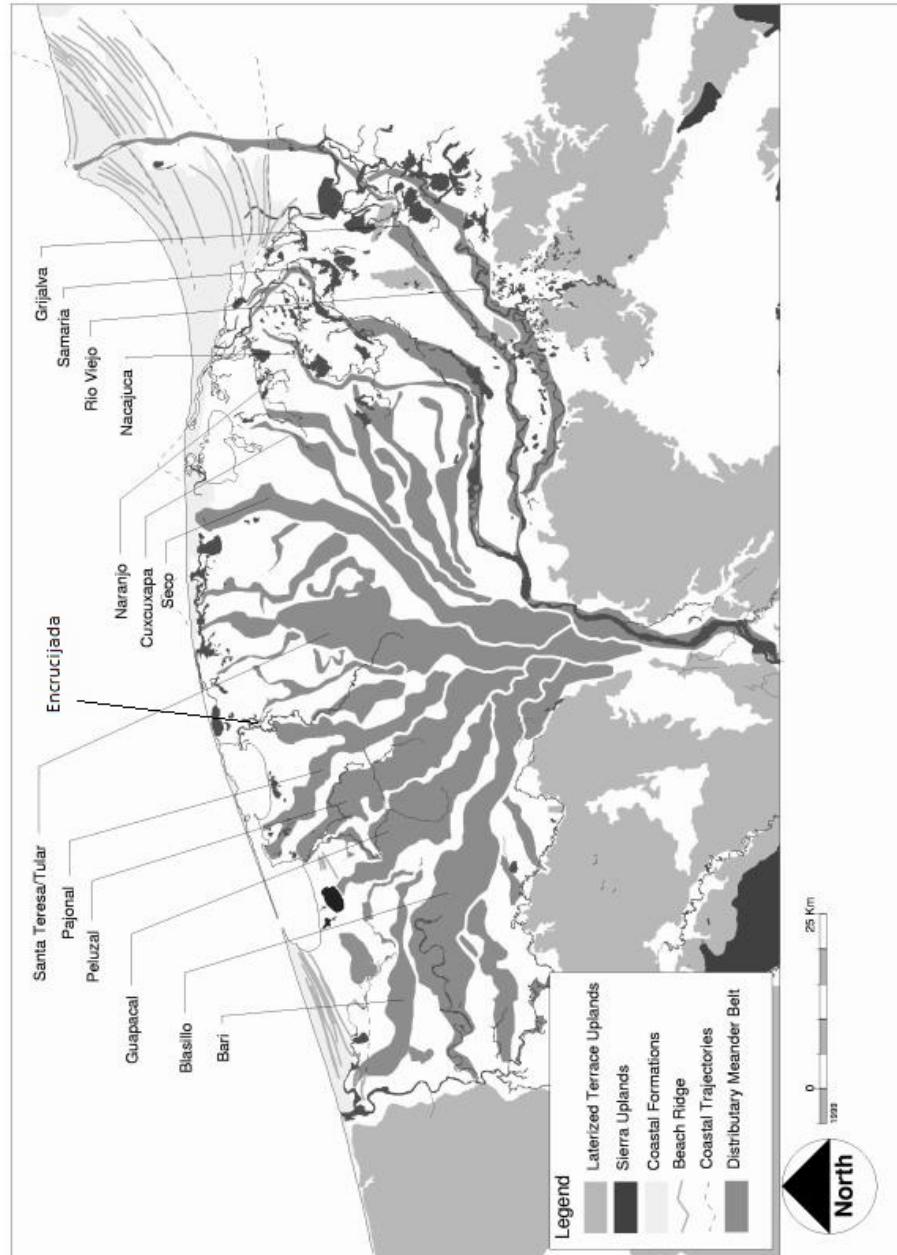


Figure 44. Grijalva River paleo meander belts. (von Nagy 2003, 54; modified by author)

Drawing on von Nagy's analysis, my own study, and other archaeological literature, the ages (where it can be determined) of the various channels are approximated and placed in chronological order as follows:

Encrucijada Paleo channel: earliest formation, 4000 BC

Bari: ancient estuary transition to river; river dominated from 1130 BC to 400 BC.

Guapacal: earliest formation, 1380 BC

Peluzal: earliest formation, 1100 BC

Pajonal: earliest formation, 1000 BC

Encrucijada: earliest formation, 900 BC (Peluzal and Pajonal still existed)

Blasillo: earliest formation, 700 BC

Mecoacan (Cuxcuxapa): unknown, but formed after Pajonal and before Santa Teresa

Santa Teresa: 250 to 700 AD

Tular: 700 to 900 AD

Rio Seco/Dos Bocas: 700 to 900 AD

Grijalva: earliest formation, 1675 AD

For purposes of the Book of Mormon timeframes, the branches of the Grijalva that might be boundaries or otherwise mentioned are the Encrucijada Paleo, Bari, Guapacal, Peluzal, Pajonal, Encrucijada, Blasillo, Mecoacan, and Santa Teresa. The Bari would have only existed during Jaredite timeframes, and the Santa Teresa, during late Nephite timeframes.

An interesting potential linguistic correlation that supports La Venta as the "great city" built by Lib<sub>1</sub> is the name of Lib<sub>1</sub>'s son, Hearthom, who served as king before being dethroned (Ether 10:29–30). "Hearthom" appears to be derived from the Sumerian *a-ra-ah-[tum]* (George 1992, 351; Reiner 1974, 40) or the Akkadian *E-ur-tum* (Gelb 1973, 8), which is the name for the Arahtu River, the westernmost branch of the Euphrates River in Sumer. The Bari River that was adjacent to the ancient city of La Venta was also the westernmost branch of the Grijalva River at that time.

