The Book of Mormon as a Mirror of the East

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By Dr. Hugh Nibley

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● “The average man,” wrote the great A. E. Housman, “believes that the text of ancient authors is generally sound, not because he has acquainted himself with the elements of the problem, but because he would feel uncomfortable if he did not believe it.” The Book of Mormon has enjoyed no such popular support. Indeed, the “average man” would like nothing better than to see it thoroughly exposed once and for all; it has made him feel uncomfortable for over a century. What is holding up the show?

For one thing, the Book of Mormon is immune to attack from the West. No matter how much archaeological evidence may pile up one way or the other, the fact remains that the Book of Mormon never claims to be telling the story of all the people who ever lived in the western hemisphere. Even within its own limited compass it is, as Professor Sidney B. Sperry has shown, for the greater part “a minority report” and does not deal with various branches of several groups that came from the Old World. Thus, where research in America may conceivably bring forth a wealth of evidence to support the Book of Mormon, no findings can be taken as unequivocal evidence against it.

It is a far different story when our book presumes to invade the soil of the East, giving specific names, places, and dates. Here any imposter of the 1820s would be on dangerous ground indeed. No better handle could be asked for unsparing and rigorous criticism than the outright commitments of the Book of Mormon on matters Egyptian. By harping on the peculiar neo-Egyptian language of the Nephites, by furnishing a list of their personal and place names, by pretending to describe political conflicts originating in the Old World, the author of the Book of Mormon plays right into the hands of modern critics. For the Near East of 600 B.C. is no longer the twilight zone of gorgeous mysteries it was in the days of Joseph Smith. Any fabrication by him or even his most learned contemporary would necessarily appear today as a mass of blunders in which some accidental resemblance to truth might be detected once, but hardly twice.

Does the author or translator of the book display any knowledge concerning that part of the world in which it claims to have had its origin? That is the question. By way of answer—a mere opening wedge as it were—we shall briefly discuss a few short years in Book of Mormon history, that stormy time during which the system of rule by judges passed through some of those severe tests which finally proved its undoing. We shall match the story step by step with a number of Old World parallels, and after a few general observations let the reader decide for himself just what significance should be attributed to these parallels.

Book of Mormon

Acting on the recommendation of King Mosiah, who was anxious to avoid a throne controversy, the people substituted for the kingship a system of rule by priestly judges:

... we will appoint wise men to be judges, that will judge this people according to the command-
We are not told where Mosiah got the idea, but the eagerness and ease with which the people adopted the system imply that they were familiar with it. (See Mosiah 29:37-41.) This is definitely indicated by the account of one Korihor, who was able to gain a great following in the land by charging "the high priest, and also the chief judge over the land" with reviving "ordinances and performances which are laid down by ancient priests, to usurp power and authority" over the country. (Al. 30:21-24.) That there was a real danger of reviving an ancient priest-rule is apparent from the fact that the new system had no sooner been established than a certain Nehor, in the first case to be tried by the new chief judge, is charged with being "first to introduce priestcraft among this people." The chief judge on this occasion observes that such priestcraft if allowed by the people "would prove their entire destruction." (Al. 1:12.) So we are told that priestcraft had not been practiced in the New World, but that a tradition of priestcraft was vividly remembered; its origin must therefore be sought in the Old World, if we would believe the Book of Mormon.

The Old World

From the eleventh dynasty on, the history of Egypt is largely concerned with the efforts of the priests of Amon, with the chief priest of Amon at their head, to gain control of the country. About 1085 B.C. the chief priest of Amon actually seized the throne of the south, and from that time on "the high priest of Amon . . . could and constantly did reduce the king to a position of subservience." The name of the great priest who crowned himself in Thebes was Herihor or Kherihor. The cornerstone of the priestly rule was a new system of popular law
courts, in which the priests of Amon were the judges, and which at first competed with and then supplanted the regular courts everywhere. The separatist tendency, which remains characteristic of the priestly history, may have been foreshadowed in the unifying of all the south countries as a single administrative unit under Nehi, the great governor of the eighteenth dynasty, as well as in the appearance, beginning with Count Nehri, of a separate ruling family at Thebes, under the patronage of Amon. Nehri's successor, by taking the name Sam Tawi, "uniter of the lands," serves notice of a new dynasty.

Whether or not Nehi and Nehri are in any way related to the name Nephi (there are other Egyptian names that come nearer) remains to be investigated. But no philologist will refuse to acknowledge the possible identity of the Book of Mormon Koriishor with the Egyptian Kherihor, and none may deny, philologist or not, a close resemblance between Sam and Sam (the brother of Nephi).

Book of Mormon
The so-called "people of Amon," a community noted for its piety, took Koriishor before their leader, Ammon, "who was high priest over that people." Thence he was "carried before the high priest, and also the chief judge of the land." This higher court in turn "sent him to the land of Zarahemla . . . to Alma, the chief judge, who was governor over all the land," as well as head of the church. (Al. 30:19-20; 29ff.)

The Old World
The chief governor of Egypt was "the high priest of Amon" (or Ammon)," his title being in Egyptian neter hem tep—"chief servant (Hem) of the God." Hem is an element in Egyptian proper names.

THE END OF AN ERA
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and means the same as the extremely common Abdi element in western Asiatic names of the time (cf. the modern Arabic Abdullah, "servant of God"). It is most interesting that the brother of Ammon in the Book of Mormon actually bears the name of Hem. (Mosiah 7:6.) As for Amon (or Ammon), it is the commonest proper name in the Book of Mormon, and also the commonest and most revered name in the Egyptian Empire. Here it is time to point out that the Egyptian Empire at all times during the later period (after 930 B.C.) pretends to embrace Palestine and regard Jerusalem as a dependent. The reverence shown the name of Amon in no way indicates the slightest concession to paganism on the part of the Jews, since Amon is no less than the Egyptian version of their own universal, one, creator-God, the Great Spirit, who is never conceived to be in animal form nor represented by any image. He first appears about 2140 B.C. in southern Egypt, at Thebes, where he seems to have been an importation from western Asia. Can he be the God of Abraham? It is significant that the name first rises to prominence in the years following the time of Abraham's sojourn in Egypt, and at a place where the most famous Jewish colony in Egypt was settled. This colony at Elephantine may have been very ancient, since according to Egyptian records it had been the custom of the people of Palestine and Syria from time immemorial to seek refuge in Egypt and settle in such communities. It is conceded, at any rate, that the colony is a good deal older than the Hebrew records which came from it in the fifth century B.C.; possibly it dates from the middle of the seventh century. This would make it old in the time of Lehi and furnish a possible explanation for the strange tendency of Book of Mormon names to be concentrated in Upper Egypt.

A reflection of the Egyptian picture may be detected in the coast cities of Palestine, regularly under Egyptian influence, where government was also by priests and judges, who occasionally usurped the office of king. This happened both at Sidon and Tyre; in the latter city two priestly usurpers bore the name of Maatena or Mattena—a name which has a number of variants and strongly suggests the Book of Mormon Mathoni. Book of Mormon

The experiment with government by priestly judges collapsed, largely due to a rivalry for the chief judgeship among three candidates, all sons of the great chief judge, Pahoran. Their names are Pahoran, Paanchi and Pacumeni. (Hel. 1:1ff.)

The Old World

Such family rivalry for the office of high priest is characteristic of the Egyptian system, in which the office seems to have been hereditary not by law but by usage.

The name of Pahoran reflects the eastern Pahura, which is "reformed" Egyptian, i.e., a true Egyptian title, but altered in such a way as to adapt it to the Hebrew-Canaanite speech. Pahuia (also written Puhuru) was in Amarna times an Egyptian governor (rabu) of Syria. The same man, or another man with the same name, was placed by Pharaoh as governor of the Ube district, with his headquarters at Kumedi (cf. the element Kumen in the Book of Mormon place names).

Paanchi is simply the well-known Egyptian P'ainkh (also rendered Pianchi, Paanchi, etc.). The first important man to bear the name was none other than the son of the above-mentioned Kherihor. He did not succeed his father on the throne, being content with the all-powerful office of chief high priest of Amon,
but his son, Panezem, did become king. In the middle of the eighth century another Pi-an-khi, a king of Nubia, conquered virtually all of Egypt, and claimed for himself the office of high priest of Amon at Thebes as well as the title of Pharaoh. His successor, when the Assyrians invaded Egypt, in the days of Lehi, fled to a fortified city, as yet unlocated, which bore the name of Kipkip or Kibkib, a name that strongly suggests the Book of Mormon city-name Gidgiddoni (cf. also Gigmim-no). (3 Ne. 9:9.)

Pacumeni, the name of the third son, resembles that borne by some of the last priest governors of Egypt, whose names are rendered Pa-me-nech, Pa-monkh, Pa-menches, etc. The Greeks (who often furnish the key to the correct reading of Egyptian names) put the guttural before the nasal, as in the Book of Mormon form, Pachomios.

The most famous man of the name commanded all the forces of the south, and was also high priest of Horus. At least one other governor-general of Egypt bore the name.

A striking coincidence is the predominance among both Egyptian and Nephite judge names of the prefix Pa-. In late Egyptian this is extremely common, and has simply the force of the definite article. For the Egyptian chief priests Panezem, Pakebis, and Panaswe have no Book of Mormon parallel, but from the Nephite list we must not omit the name of Pachus, since, though I have not found it in the limited documents at my disposal, it is perfectly good Egyptian (meaning "he—Amon—is praised"), both elements occurring frequently in Egyptian proper names. Another Book of Mormon judge, Casoram, has a name that suggests that of an Egyptian governor of a Syrian city: Chi-zir (Knudtzon, Am. Taf. 41, 2). It should be noted that the above Panezem, upon becoming king, took the name of Meriamon,
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which has a Book of Mormon ring, even if we don’t read it Moriamon—a perfectly possible variant.

Sidon was the official port through which the Jews traded with Egypt. Since Lehi and his people were in the mercantile business, it is not surprising that Sidon is the only Palestinian city besides Jerusalem whose name figures prominently in Book of Mormon geography. Moreover, since Sidon was the common meeting ground between Hebrew and Egyptian, and since names in both languages occur in the Book of Mormon, one would expect the name of this most popular place to appear in its Egyptian as well as in its Hebrew form. The Egyptian form (Albright’s list XXII, B, 4) is Dfi-du-na, which is remarkably close to the Book of Mormon personal name Giddonah.

For easier comparison we get the following tentative lists by placing the Old World (OW) words with the New World (NW) or Book of Mormon (BM) words:

Amon (Ammon), (OW), the commonest name in the latter Empire; originally from south Egypt
Ammon, (BM), the commonest name in the Book of Mormon
Amanathabi, (OW), chief of a Canaanite city under Egyptian domination. The name is "reformed" Egyptian.
Aminadab, (BM), Nephihi missionary in the time of judges
Chiziri, (OW), Egyptian governor of a Syrian city
Gezoram, (BM), Nephihi chief judge
Dji-du-na, (OW), Egyptian name for Sidon
Giddonah, (BM), i. high priest who judged Korihor
ii. father of Amulek
Hem, (OW), “servant,” specifically, of Amon
Hes, Khesi, (OW), praised,” an Egyptian proper name
Pa-chus, (BM), leader of the
faction that drove Pahoran from the judgment seat

Kherihor, (also written Khurhor, etc.) (OW), great high priest of Amon, who made himself king in South Egypt

Korilhor, (BM), a political agitator who charged the judges with priestcraft, and was seized by the people of Amon

Kipkip, Kibkib, (OW), a city in the extreme south of Egypt

Gingim-no, (BM), a Nephite city

Manti, (OW), Semitic form of an Egyptian proper name, e.g., Manti-mankhi, a prince in Upper Egypt about 650 B.C. Derived from Egyptian Mnti–Month of Hermonthis

Manti, (BM), the name of a Nephite soldier, a land, a city, and a hill

Nehi (OW), great administrator who “united all the south under his direction”

Nehri, (OW), Count of Thebes who claimed independent dominion in the south of Egypt

Nephi, (BM), founder of the Nephite nation

Pahura, (OW), ambassador of Egypt in Palestine

Pahoran, (BM), i. great chief judge

ii. son of same

Paanchi, (OW), i. son of Kerihor, the chief high priest

ii. ruler of the south who conquered all of Egypt; he was high priest of Amon at Thebes

Paanchi, (BM), son of Pahoran, Sr., and pretender to the chief judgeship

Pamenches (Gr. Pachomios), (OW), commander of the south and high priest of Horus

Pacumeni, (BM), son of Pahoran, Sr., and rival pretender to the chief judgeship

Maitena, Mattenos, etc., (OW), two judges of Tyre, who at different times made themselves king, possibly under the Egyptian auspices

Mathoni, (BM), a Nephite disciple

Sam Tawi, (OW), successor to Nehri, who took the name Sam (uniter) upon becoming king in the South

Sam, (BM), brother of Nephi Sidon, (OW), the port through which all Jewish trade with Egypt had to pass

Sidon, (BM), the only city name of the Holy Land, beside Jerusalem, which is a prominent Book of Mormon name

It requires no great effort of the imagination to detect a sort of parallelism between the two short listings. But aren’t we using unjustified violence when we simply take the names at random and place them side by side? That is just what is most remarkable; we did pick names at random, and we had the whole Near East to draw on, with Egyptian names by no means predominating numerically in the lists before us. Yet the only Old World names that match those in our Book of Mormon episode all come from Egypt, nay, from one particular section of Egypt, in the far south, where from an indefinite date, but at least as early as the mid-seventh century, a Jewish colony flourished. What is more, all these names belong to the later dynasties, after the decline.

The Book of Mormon tells us that Lehi was a rich merchant, who, though he “dwelt in Jerusalem all his days,” enjoyed an Egyptian education and culture, which he endeavored to transmit to his children. The book continually refers to the double culture of the people of Lehi: Hebrew to the core, but proud of their Egyptian heritage. “Egyptian civilization was one to be admired and aped,” writes H. R. Hall, speaking of Lehi’s own land and time. The only non-Hebraic
names to enjoy prominence among the Nephites should, by the Book of Mormon's own account, be Egyptian, and such is found to be the case.

It will be noted that the names compared are never exactly alike, except in the case of the mono-syllables Sam and Hem. This, strangely enough, is strong confirmation of their common origin, since names are bound to undergo some change with time and distance, whereas if the resemblance were perfect we should be forced to attribute it, however fantastic it might seem, to mere coincidence. There must be differences; and what is more, those differences should not be haphazard but display definite tendencies. This brings us to a most impressive aspect of Book of Mormon names.

Let us take for example the case of Ammon. Being so very popular a name, one would expect it to occur in compounds as well as alone, and sure enough, it is the commonest element in compound names, in the West as well as in Egypt. But in compound names Amon or Amun changes form following a general rule. Gardiner, in his Egyptian Grammar (page 431), states:

"A very important class of personal names is that containing names known as theophorous, i.e., compound names in which one element is the name of a deity. Now in Graeco-Roman transcriptions it is the rule that when such a divine name is stated at the beginning of a compound [the italics are Gardiner's] it is less heavily vocalized than when it stands independently or at the end of a compound."

The author then goes on to show that in such cases Amon or Amun regularly becomes Amen, while in some cases the vowel may disappear entirely. One need only consider the Book of Mormon Aminidab, Aminadi, Aminihu, Amnor, etc.
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to see how neatly the rule applies
in the West. In the name Helaman,
on the other hand, the strong vocal-
ization remains, since the “divine
name” is not stated at the begin-
ning of the compound. Since the
Semitic “I” must always be rendered as “y” in Egyptian (which has no
“I”), Helaman would, in “un-
reformed” Egyptian, necessarily ap-
pear as the typically Egyptian Hé-
ramon.

To return to our question: What
did Joseph Smith, translator of
the Book of Mormon, know about the
Old World? So much seems cer-
tain, that he knew:

1. A number of typically Egy-
pian names, queer-sounding words
in no way resembling Hebrew or
any other language known to the
world of Joseph Smith’s time.

2. He knew the sort of plot and
setting in which those names
would figure in the Old World and
seems quite at home on the Egy-
pian scene.

3. He gives a clear and correct
picture of cultural relationships be-
tween Egypt and Israel, with due
emphasis on its essentially com-
mercial nature, in the remarkably
convinving picture of Lehi—the typi-
cal merchant prince of the seventh
century B.C. The picture of life
in the ancient east which the Book
of Mormon allows us to reconstruct
is the more wonderful in the light
of those fantastic conceptions of
the gorgeous East which bedizened
the heads of even the best scholars
at the time the book came forth.

The whole field of Book of Mor-
mon names still awaits the careful
study it deserves—the purpose of
the present sketch being merely to
indicate that such a study will prove
anything but a blind alley. As a
parting example of the validity of
this claim, we cite a principle stated
by Albright (Vol. 10, p. 12); “The
loss of the ending on is quite com-
mon in Palestinian place-names.”
In Egyptian or "reformed" Egyptian such an ending would be preserved, and so we have Book of Mormon place-names Emron, Heshbon, Jashon, Moron, Morianton, etc.

It is no small feat, as was demonstrated in the article "Original Words of the Book of Mormon," to simply have picked a lot of strange and original names out of the air. But what shall we say of the man who was able to pick the right ones?

**FOOTNOTES**


3 The vowels are largely guesswork: Thus F. W. Budge, *The Mummy* (Cambridge, 1925), p. 20; W. F. Petrie, *A History of Egypt* (London, 1905), Vol. 3, pp. 302, 309, the latter giving phonetic values "Flankh" and "Pankh" respectively. Franchi is settled as the correct reading, however, by the principle stated in Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, p. 521: the "a" as here occurring "is always final consonant.

4 Lists of priest-kings in the original form may be found in Aug. Zichr., Vol. 20 (1880), Taf. ii., V (7a); Budge, *Mummy*, p. 103.


6 The Assyrian Text (British Museum Cyl. No. 2568) is given in L. W. King, *First Steps in Assyrian*, pp. 791f.


8 Id., p. 89, note 2.

9 Nos. 7 and 9 in Spiegelberg's list, p. 91.

10 108, op. cit., p. 91.

11Winlock, *NIES*, p. 275, finds Egyptian conumbers at Thebes with names Hemem, Hem.


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**The Spoken Word**

October 5, 1969

Take time for your children

By Richard L. Evans

We shall not pass again this way—and in these swift-passing scenes and seasons there seems to come—insistently, almost above all else—this compelling cry: Take time for your children.

More and more, professional people are telling us that children are shaped and molded at a very early age—so early that it is a sobering fact to face. Home, parents, early impressions set the pattern for the future—and the evidence is overwhelming that nothing in this world is ever going to take the place of wholesome, happy homes. And there is more to this than food, shelter, and physical sustenance. There is the shaping of attitudes, of minds, of morals; opening avenues of interest and activity; instilling honesty, respect, reverence; prayers at a mother's knee; correction with fairness and firmness, "showing forth afterwards an increase of love" and kindliness. All this we cannot be, all this we cannot do, by not being there, by living separate lives, by an over-absorption in outside interests. Take time for your children. They are so soon grown, so soon gone. "Is mother home?" "Where is mother?" are the questions asked when they come home from anywhere. Oh, let them have the blessing of your being there. Take time for open arms; for talking, for reading, for family prayer: for home evenings and hours. As one discerning poet put it: "Richer than I you can never be—I had a mother who read to me." Take time for making memories; for fixing sure foundations that will last long after less essential things are far forgotten. Mothers need to be home. A mother, a father waiting is a source of safety and assurance. Parents need to give their children wholesomeness and wholeness by the very lives they live. Oh, the blessedness of coming home and finding mother there, with love and kindness and encouragement. Life goes quickly. Don't brush them off and turn them over to others. Take time for your children—before they're grown, before they're gone. Oh, take time for your children.

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1*DC 12:43.

2Brickland Gilliam, The Reading Mother.

Era, November 1970 125