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The Place Which Was Called Nahom:

The Validation of an Ancient Reference to Southern Arabia

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THE PLACE WHICH WAS CALLED NAHOM

The Validation of an Ancient Reference to Southern Arabia

by

Warren P. and Michaela J. Aston

An early version of this paper was presented October 17, 1986, at the 35th Annual Symposium on the Archaeology of the Scriptures, sponsored by the Society of Early Historic Archaeology at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. Based upon field research by the authors in the Republic of Yemen 1984 - 1990, it was revised January 1991.

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That most epic of all recorded journeys, the Book of Mormon prophet Lehi's odyssey across two-thirds of the globe, had its beginning at Jerusalem about 600 B.C. In a general sense, the land route taken by Lehi and his family after leaving their home has never really been in doubt. They travelled in "nearly a south-southeast direction" along the eastern coast of the Red Sea (1 Nephi 16:13), probably following, at least in part, one of the trade routes that carried a huge volume of incense and other commodities north from southern Arabia.

After an unspecified period of travel through the desert, Lehi's party pitched their tents and prepared to tarry "for the space of a time" (1 Nephi 16:33), probably long enough to plant and to harvest crops.[1] During this time Ishmael died "and was buried in the place which was called Nahom" (1 Nephi 16:34).

After a period of mourning for Ishmael, the Lehites resumed their journey and Nephi notes that they "did travel nearly eastward from that time forth" (1 Nephi 17:1),[2] or toward the Indian Ocean. One consequence of this change in direction was to minimize contact with the relatively heavily populated southern region of Arabia, even though doing so meant they then had to traverse the most difficult terrain of their entire journey. Their travel in the wilderness eventually ended at the seacoast in a land and place they called "Bountiful" (1 Nephi 17:5).

Because Nahom is a pivotal point in Lehi's journey, marking a major change in direction, identifying the place on today's map is critical to an understanding of the actual route the journey followed. Its location also becomes a significant clue to the location of Bountiful, the launching place for Lehi's sea voyage to the American continent. Following is the textual, historical, geographical, and archaeological evidence helping us specify the location of Nahom and thus also of Bountiful.

The Place Nahom

Nahom is unique among the places the Lehites tarried during their wilderness journey. Most places in the wilderness mentioned in the Book of Mormon were named by Lehi (see 1 Nephi

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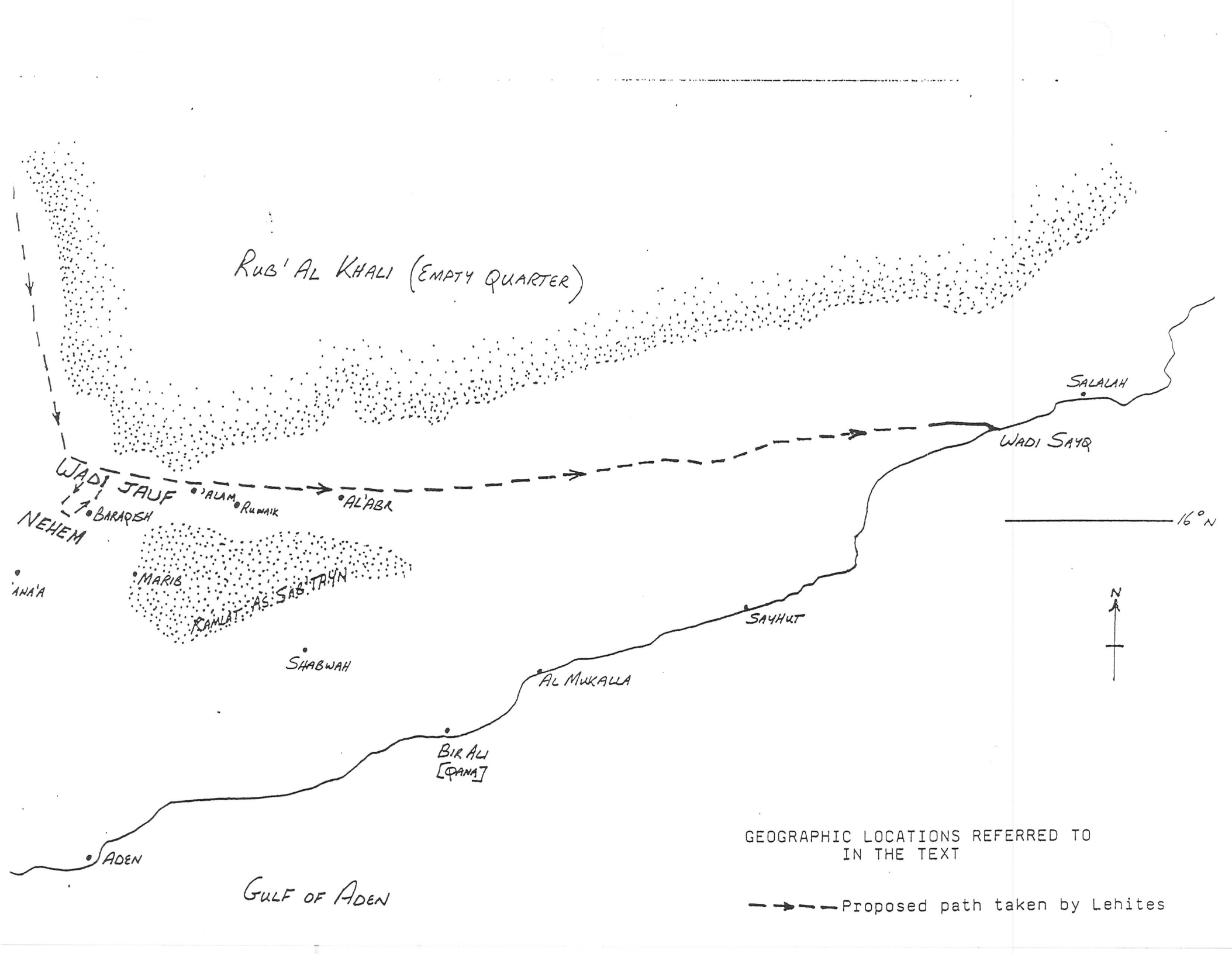
[1] George Reynolds and Janne Sjodahl, *Commentary on the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1955), 1:167.

[2] A written statement by Frederick G. Williams that Lehi turned nearly east at the 19th degree latitude is presently insupportable historically as an inspired utterance and is inconsistent with the data presented in this paper. See Frederick G. Williams, "Did Lehi Land in Chile? An assessment of the Frederick G. Williams Statement," (F.A.R.M.S. paper, 1988). The same writing also designates Lehi's landing place in the Americas as Chile, a conclusion also at variance with the evidence now available.


RUB' AL KHALI (EMPTY QUARTER)
WADI JAUF
NEHEM
BARAQISH
'ALAM
RUWAIK
AL'ABR
SALALAH
WADI SAYQ
16° N
MARIB
AS SAB'ATAYN
RAMLAT
SHABWAH
SAYHUT
AL MUKALLA
BIR ALI
[QANA]
ADEN
GULF OF ADEN
N
GEOGRAPHIC LOCATIONS REFERRED TO IN THE TEXT
Proposed path taken by Lehites

2:8–9, 14; 16:6, 12–13; 17:5). However, the words of 1 Nephi 16:34, "the place *which was called* Nahom,"[3] indicate quite clearly that Nahom was an already existing, locally known place name.[4]

In 1978, Ross Christensen of Brigham Young University noted the intriguing possibility that a form of the name Nahom may have survived to modern times. He referred to a map of Yemen prepared in 1763 by Carsten Niebuhr showing a district called "Nehhm" located about 25 miles northeast of the capital, Sana'a.[5] The following factors argue that Niebuhr's Nehhm is in fact the most plausible candidate for Nahom. *When considered together, all the evidence to date indicates that Lehi's turn "nearly eastward" occurred in or very near the Wadi Jauf adjacent to Nehhm in the present-day Republic of Yemen.*

Indications of Antiquity

Maps which preserve the name of Nahom, as well as descriptions by early historians and travelers, attest that the present-day district of Nehem in Yemen has been known as such since at least the pre-Islamic era.

The earliest map located to date showing the name is the French cartographer Jean Bourguignon D'Anville's 1751 map of Asia which shows Nehem in the same position relative to San'a as later maps do. This map is particularly significant because D'Anville used as his sources the writings and maps of much earlier Arab geographers, including Idrisī (1100–1165), Abū'l-Fidā (1273–1331), and Katib Chelebi (1609–1657).[6]

D'Anville's map showed the western world its ignorance of inland Arabia. Desiring to correct this ignorance, Danish King Frederick V sponsored an expedition to Arabia in 1761–64. Carsten Niebuhr, a German surveyor and mapmaker, was the sole survivor of the expedition; his 1763 map of Yemen showed Nehhm located about 25 miles northeast of Sana'a. Although the expedition's travels covered only the western half of the modern

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[3] This verse is also the clearest textual indication given that Lehi's group had any type of contact with other peoples in Arabia (emphasis added).

[4] Hugh W. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert and the World of the Jaredites* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1952), 90–91; reprinted in the *Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, vol. 5 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1988), 79.

[5] Ross T. Christensen, "The Place Called Nahom," *Ensign* (August 1978): 73.

[6] G. Tibbetts, *Arabia in Early Maps* (Cambridge: Oleander Press, 1978), Map No. 281; see also 29–30; 166–68.

republic and used only the most basic equipment and methods, its maps and descriptions provided Europeans with the most accurate information about the area for more than a century to come[7] (see figure 1).

Niebuhr's original writings describe Nehhm as a "Lordship" and also as an independent "State of Yemen," one of thirteen such states listed as additional to the dominions of the Imam at Sana'a. For example, in a chapter titled "Of the Principalities of Nehhm and Khaulan" we read the following:

> Nehhm is a small district between Dsjof and Hafchid-u-Bekil. The present Sheikh, who is of a warlike character, and often troublesome to the Imam, is an independent prince. He possesses a few small inconsiderable towns, with a fertile mountain, on which are many villages.[8]

Joseph Halevy, a young French Jew, also spoke of the place. In 1869, while searching for antiquities, Halevy traveled through the countryside disguised as a rabbi. He referred to "the independent hill-canton of NEHM on the arid eastern downs" northeast of Sana'a.[9] A lesser-known account of Halevy's journey is that kept by his local guide, Hayyim Habshush. In his record he refers often to the district of NIHM, the NIHM tribe who lived there, and to their uncommon acceptance of and respect for local Jews.[10]

Numerous other maps printed in succeeding years down to recent times confirm the name and location of Nehem or an equivalent toponym.[11]

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[7] Thorkild Hansen, *Arabia Felix: The Danish Expedition of 1761–1767*, McFarlane, trans. (London: Collins, 1964), 232–33. See Z. Freeth and H. Winstone, *Explorers of Arabia* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1978), 61–89, for an excellent summary of Niebuhr's involvement with the expedition.

[8] See the map in Robert Heron, trans., *Niebuhr's Travels through Arabia and Other Countries in the East*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1792); see also 2:46–47, 62–63.

[9] D. Hogarth, *The Penetration of Arabia* (London: Alston Rivers, 1904), 200–203.

[10] *Travels in Yemen*, Goitein, trans. (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press, 1941), 24–31.

[11] Examples of such maps include the following:

NEHEM	on D'Anville's map taken from medieval sources.
NEHHM	on Niebuhr's 1763 map of Yemen.
NEHM	on Ritter's 1852 map.
NEHM	in Halevy's 1869 tribal references.
NIHM	in Habshush's 1869 tribal references.

Nehem today (usually pronounced "Neh-Hem") is a fairly large but somewhat loosely defined district in the Republic of Yemen; it is well known within the country and still identified with the tribe of the same name. However, as it is not one of the administrative provinces of the present-day republic, it seldom appears on contemporary maps.

The Nahm Tribe

The longtime existence of the Nahm tribe, after which the district is named, provides further evidence of the antiquity of the name. Unlike most of the Arab world, the Yemeni tribes have in many instances survived to the present from the earliest recorded Arab history, long before the advent of Islam (see figure 2). Although many tribes in Yemen are named after a common ancestor, it is likely that the Nahm tribal name derives from a place name rather than from the name of any individual.[12] The geographical isolation of the southwest corner of Arabia and the extreme ruggedness of the country has undoubtedly contributed to keeping many of the tribal areas and traditions[13] secure from

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NEHM	is listed as a territory of Yemen in an 1897 geography: (V. De Saint-Martin, *New Dictionary of Universal Geography*, vol. 7, Paris, 1897).
BAHAM	on the 1939 G.S.G.S. map, apparently resulting from a misreading or misprinting of the Arabic name of the tribe, NAHAM (Geographical Section General Staff map, 1939).
NEHM/ NAHM	(Bilad Nahm) in the 1961 Gazeteer of Geographical Names, U.S. Dept of the Interior, Office of Geography.
NAHM	in another G.S.G.S. map printed in 1962.
NAHM	in a 1968 tribal map (D. Schmidt, *Yemen: The Unknown War* [London: The Bodley Head, 1968]).
NAHAM	in a 1974 Y.A.R. Government map prepared by the Ministry of Defense, H.M.S.O., London.
NEHEM	in a 1976 Government map drawn by H. Althmary.
NIHM	in a 1978 Government map, prepared by the British Government Ministry of Overseas development, the Directorate of Overseas Surveys.
NIHM	in a 1985 Survey map (Survey Authority Map, printed by Orell Fussli Graphic Arts, Zurich).

[12] Christian Robin, *Les Hautes-Terres du Nord-Yemen Avant L'Islam* (Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut Te Istanbul, 1982), Tome 1:27, 73.

[13] A little known and likely unrecorded Yemeni tribal ritual involving a specific ceremonial handgrip, accompanied by sacred "words"—given only on the most special occasions (perhaps

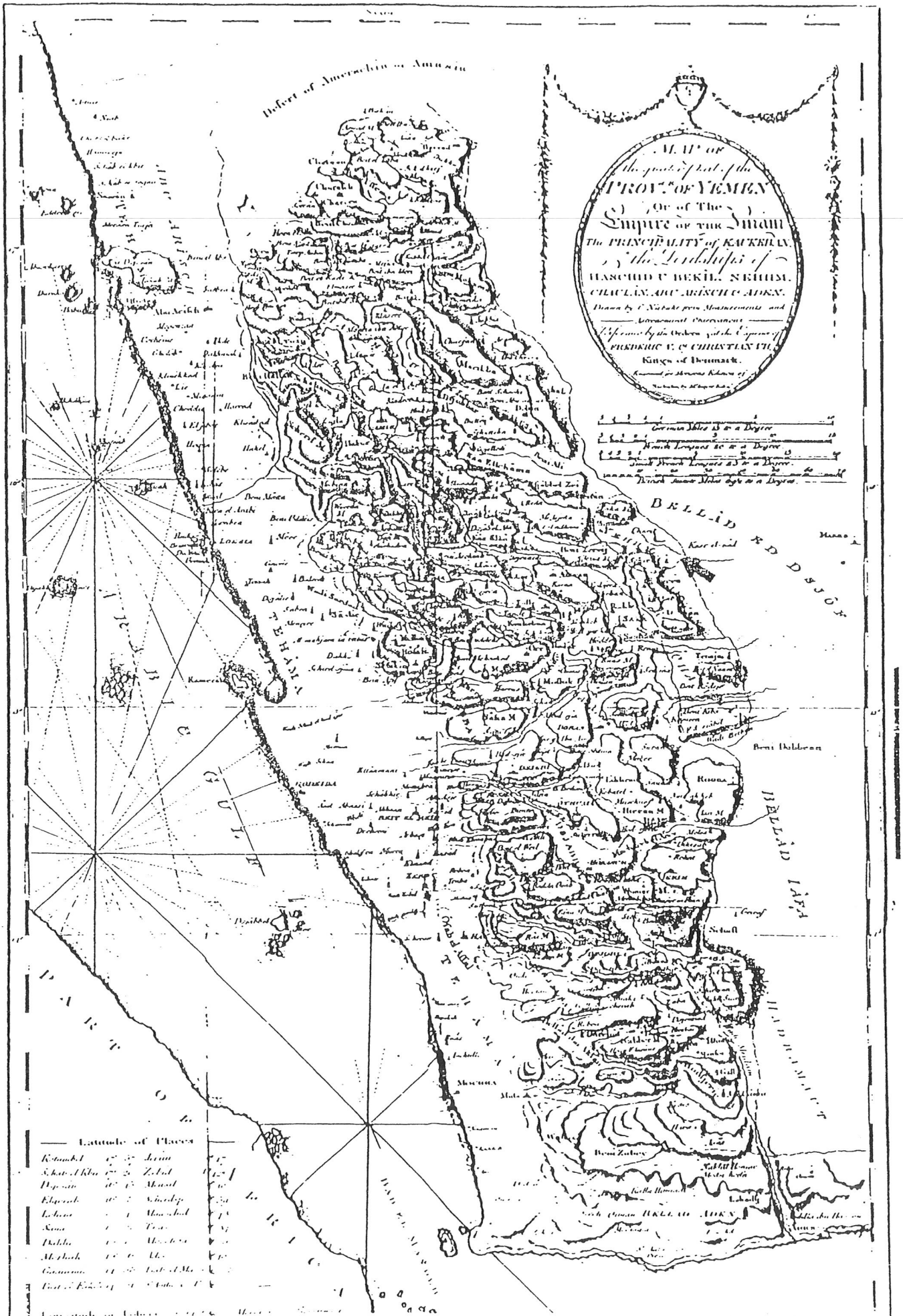

FIGURE 1 - NIEBUHR'S 1763 MAP OF YEMEN

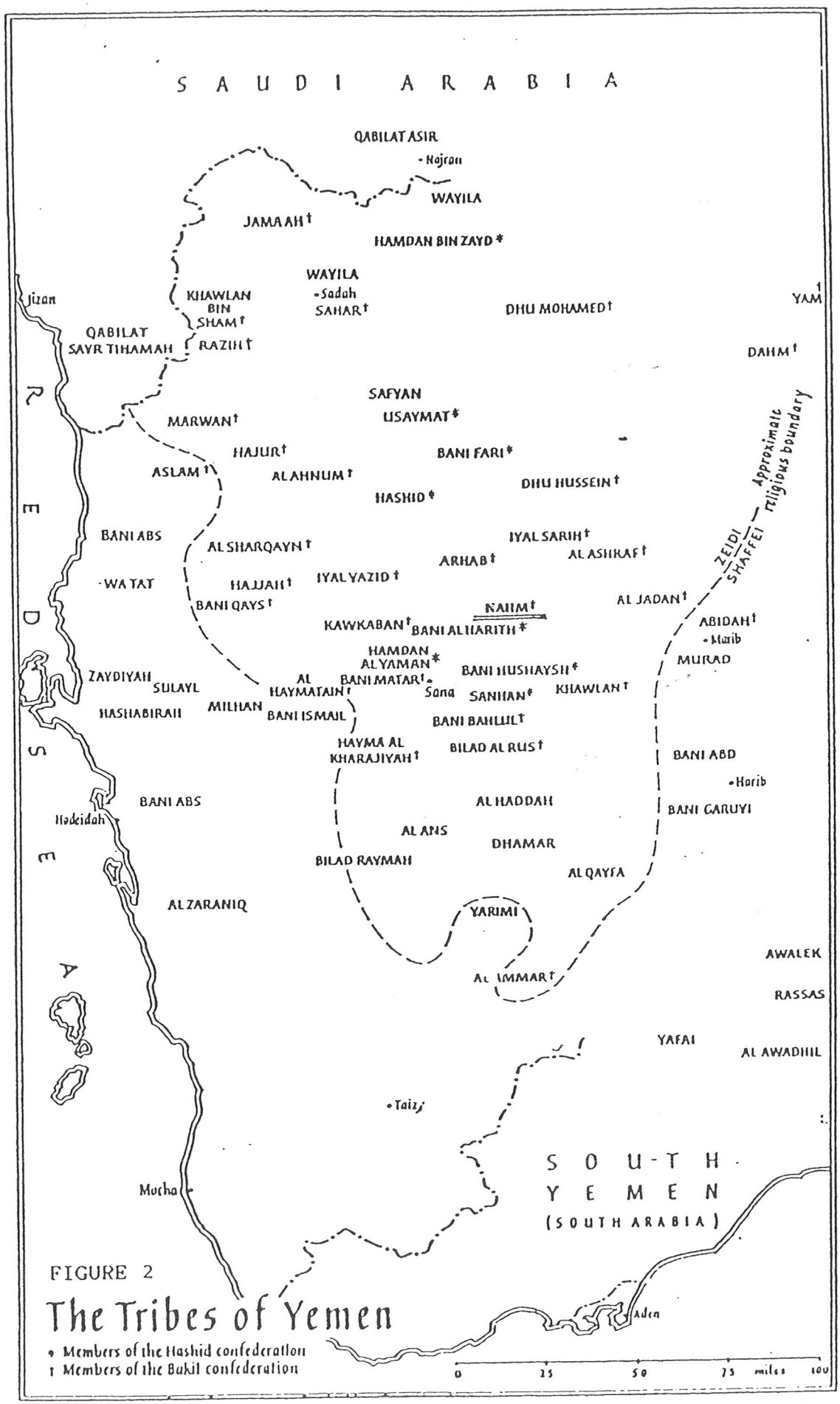

FIGURE 2

The Tribes of Yemen

* Members of the Hashid confederation
† Members of the Bakil confederation

the ravages of famine, migration, and conquest, with consequent population replacement.

> A recognized authority on the tribes of Yemen has commented: The first thing to be noted about Yemeni tribes is that they have been where they are for a very long time. The names Hashid and Bakil are pre-Islamic. Many of the lesser tribal names go back a thousand years, and there are few names of present-day tribes that one cannot trace back at least to the 17th century. Tribes as such do not move. Nor do they over-run each other.[14]

Robert Wilson has also noted:

> . . . substantial traces of the pre-Islamic (tribal) order continued to exist well into the Islamic period.
>
> Over the past ten centuries there is little or no evidence of any major tribal movements in this part of Yemen, and the overwhelming impression is one of minimal change, even if tribal alliances have from time to time altered or developed.[15]

Wilson lists the Nihm tribe as one of the Bakil confederation of tribes referred to by al-Hamdani, the tenth-century Yemeni historian, as surviving to the present.[16] Hamdani, who died in A.D. 945 in Sana'a, left us extensive genealogical and other historical data in his *Sifat Jazirat al-Arab*, a geographical work and the surviving remnants of the ten books comprising his *Al Iklil*, most of which is recorded nowhere else.[17]

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including marriage), is known. Personal knowledge of this was reported to the authors in Sana'a in October 1987. While intriguing, it is mentioned here by the way of general interest only.

[14] Paul Dresch, "Tribalism," unpublished paper, University of Michigan, 1986. See also his book *Tribes, Government and History in Yemen* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

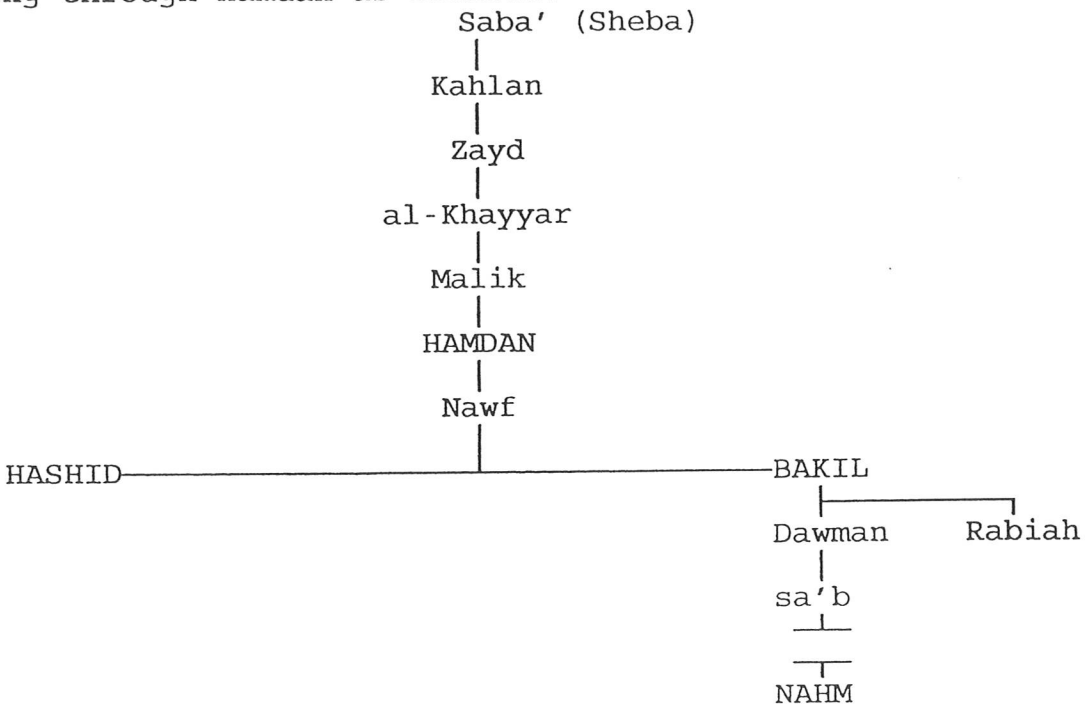
[15] Robert Wilson, Al-Hamdani's Description of Hashid and Bakil, in *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* (London: Institute of Archaeology, 1981), 11:95–96.

[16] Ibid., 99.

[17] Al-Hamdani, *Al-Iklil*, German trans. by Oscar Lofgren (Leiden: Brill, 1965) or 10th Book Ed. M. al-Khatib, (Cairo: 1368).

Al-Hamdani, *Sifat Jazirat al-Arab*, ed. D.H. Muller (Leiden: 1884–91). See also Christian Robin, *Al Hamdani, A Great Yemeni*

The traditional genealogy of the Nahm tribe has them descending through Hamdan as follows:[18]



Another typical reference to the historicity of the tribe is the 1936 comment by the English explorer Philby. While exploring near the Jauf valley, he noted:

> A third tribal area farther back in the mountains [is] known as Bilad Nahm - [one of] an ancient trio of laconic names going far back into the history of Hamdan.[19]

Today the Nahm tribe is a major component of the Bakil confederation of tribes and as of 1987 numbered approximately 24,000 persons. The tribe is affiliated with the Zaydi branch of Islam, introduced to Yemen when the fighting Hamdan tribes (Hashid and Bakil) were reconciled around A.D. 900. Since that time, the Zaydi influence has predominated among the northern tribes and has kept their tribal structures largely intact,

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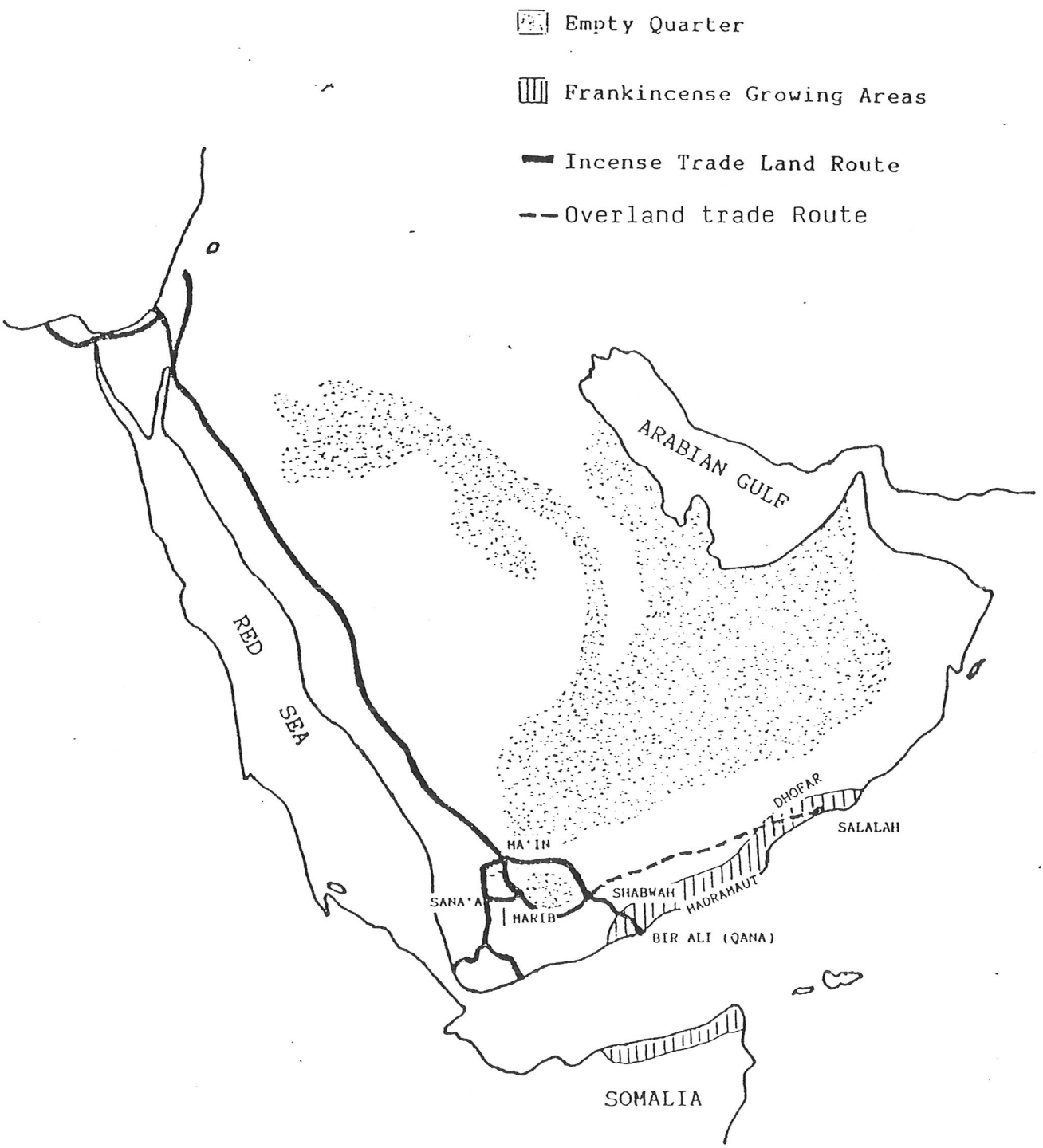
Scholar—Studies on the Millennial Anniversary of Al-Hamdani (Sana'a University, 1986).

[18] While this genealogy may indicate when the *tribe* first appears, it in no way precludes a much earlier origin for the NHM name.

[19] H. St. J. Philby, *Sheba's Daughters* (London: Methuen, 1939), 381, 398.

THE ANCIENT INCENSE TRADE LAND ROUTES



unlike those in the south. The tribe continues to occupy the mountainous areas northeast of Sana'a bordering the Wadi Jauf.[20]

Continued existence of the tribe in this same area since at least the tenth century A.D. and likely earlier, when coupled with the longevity of the place name, suggests the likelihood of a link with the Book of Mormon Nahom.

The Meaning of "Nahom"

Two closely related Semitic language roots are possible for the term *Nahom* on the basis of Nephi's account: NḤM and NHM. Both roots have similar connotations and both relate in significant and very specific ways to the experiences of Lehi's group while at Nahom.

The basic meaning of NḤM is "to comfort, console," and other derivations extend its meaning to include "compassion" and "rest." Hugh Nibley has pointed out that in Arabic, NAḤAMA refers to a "soft groan, sigh, moan" and is usually applied in the third person.[21] In Hebrew, the NḤM root is used extensively with reference to "consoling" the bereaved and "mourning" the death of another (as in Genesis 37:35, 38:12; 2 Samuel 10:2–3; Isaiah 51:19; Jeremiah 16:7), as well as in numerous other Old Testament texts referring to what is translated as the "repentance of God."[22] The root first appears with clear meaning in Ugaritic (NḤM—"console").[23] While the mourning/consoling aspects of the Hebrew verb NAḤAM[24] are clear enough, Nahom may carry still deeper connotations linking the events at Nahom with earlier events basic to the Hebrew nation. Alan Goff has proposed that Nahom/Naham connects several aspects of the rebellion of Laman and other members of the party against Lehi

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[20] Personal interviews by author in Sana'a, October 1987 with Abdulrab Sinan Abuluhom, son of the Sheik of the Nahm tribe and with Dr. Yosef Abdullah, Department of Antiquities and Libraries.

[21] Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert and the World of the Jaredites*, 90–91; in the *CWHN*, 5:79.

[22] H. Van Dyke Parunak, "A Semantic Survey of NHM," *Biblica* 56: 512–532; J. Scharbert, "Der Schmerz in Alten Testament," *BBB*, 8:62–65.

[23] H. Van Dyke Parunak, "A Semantic Survey of NHM," 514.

[24] LDS *Book of Mormon*, 1981 ed. footnote to 1 Nephi 16:34, p. 35.

and Nephi with the Israelite exodus from Egypt; becoming a type of the earlier exodus which the Lehites recognized.[25]

The second root, NHM, is also found in biblical Hebrew, meaning to "roar" (Isaiah 5:29–30), or "to complain" or "be hungry." Similarly, in ancient Egyptian we have NHM meaning "thunder, shout," and NHMHM, "roar, thunder" and in Arabic "growl, groan, roar; suffer from hunger; complain." This clear association with "hunger" may well have reference to fasting as part of the mourning process after Ishmael died,[26] in addition to the complaining and strong references to hunger and hardship outlined in 1 Nephi 16:35. This root is therefore also very apt in any consideration of the meaning(s) of Nahom and it is this root which today appears in the Arabic name Nehem.

Thus, the basic meanings of both possible roots behind the name Nahom are peculiarly appropriate for a place of burial and of mourning, or of hunger and complaining, corresponding in every respect with what is implicit in the account of the death and burial of Ishmael, namely that Nahom was (or at least included) a burial area.

The Rarity of the Name

Although the roots NḤM and NHM are relatively common in the Hebrew biblical corpus in various contexts, both are rare as either personal or place names in southern Arabia. G. Lankester Harding's exhaustive compilation, *An Index and Concordance of Pre-Islamic Arabian Names and Inscriptions*, lists only a single occurrence of NHM in the southern Arabian dialects (as a personal name in the Hadrami dialect) in addition to fourteen instances where it appears in Safaitic texts of north Arabian origin.[27]

There are two occurrences of NḤM in Old Testament genealogies as personal names: "NAḤAM" (1 Chronicles 4:19) and "NEḤUM" (Nehemiah 7:7). The name also makes a prominent appearance with the mission of the prophet NAḤUM (the "consoler") who came from Elkosh in Galilee. His prophecies against the

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[25] A. Goff, "Mourning, Consolation, and Repentance at Nahom," in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, ed. John L. Sorenson adn Melvin J. Thorne (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1991), 92–99.

[26] Stephen D. Ricks, "Fasting in the Old Testament and in the Book of Mormon," (Provo: F.A.R.M.S. paper, 1988).

[27] G. Lankester Harding, *An Index and Concordance of Pre-Islamic Arabian Names and Inscriptions* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 602. Another listing of pre-Islamic place names in South West Arabia, *Die Ortsnamen in den Altsudarabischen Inschriften* (Marburg: Abdullah Hassan al-Scheiba, 1982) does not list NHM at all.

Assyrian capital Nineveh are also a type of the second coming and are outstanding examples of Old Testament poetic forms. While almost nothing is known of Nahum, his prophecies were made between 660 and 606 B.C.,[28] making him a contemporary of Lehi.

The name also appears in Capernaum ("village of Nahum") on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee, probably the present-day site Tell-Hum.[29]

We may only speculate on a possible historical connection between the prophet Nahum, the place Nahom/Nehem and the Nahm tribe. What is very clear however is that when the rarity of the name is considered, the existence of a place long known as Nehem in the same place which other factors indicate is the easterly turning point of Nephi's account, in itself argues strongly for linking Nehem with Nahom.

Burial Grounds in Nahom

Since the Book of Mormon Nahom was a burial ground, it is significant that an ancient burial ground has recently been located in Nehem itself, in addition to a more extensive region of tombs farther to the east.

The tombs in Nehem, circular rock structures built in a typically elevated position in the hills of Nehem bordering the Jauf valley have only recently been examined by archaeologists and may date to 3000 B.C. or earlier. Use of the tombs and even further construction probably continued until about A.D. 1000.[30]

A second area of tombs to the east, made known to the outside world by Philby in 1936, is possibly the largest burial site in Arabia but remains unexamined by professional researchers. Thousands of circular tombs covering the Ruqaik, 'Alam Abyadh and 'Alam Aswad outcrops northeast of Marib (and reportedly the Jidran ridge nearby) are constructed of flat limestone slabs varying in size from 26 ft. in diameter and 10 ft. high to 12 ft. in diameter and 5 ft. in height (see figure 3). Those examined by Philby had a raised floor in the interior burial chamber. Philby also found the remains of a raised stone pathway leading to what appeared to be a ceremonial "high place" atop a hill close to the Ruwaik ridge.[31]

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[28] LDS Bible Dictionary reference to Nahum.

[29] *Harper's Bible Dictionary* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985), 154.

[30] Interview by the author with Remy Audoin, Centre Francais d'Etudes Yemenites, Sana'a, in 1987.

[31] Philby, *Sheba's Daughters*, 370–81, with photographs. The tombs are discussed and pictured in Brian Doe, *Monuments of South Arabia* (Cambridge: Oleander, 1983), 54–55.

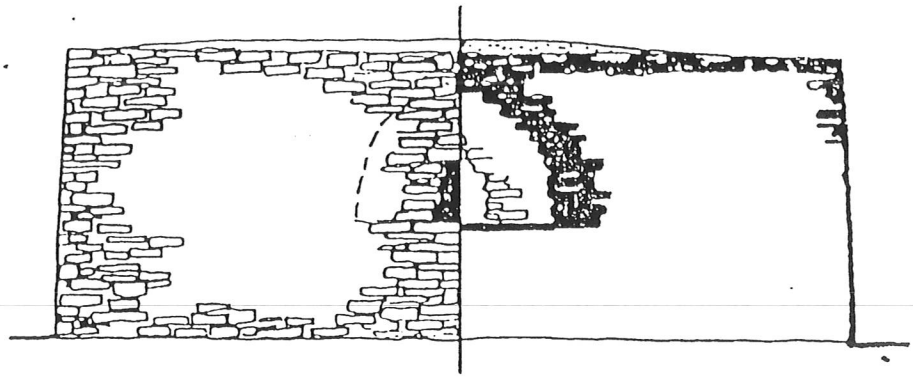
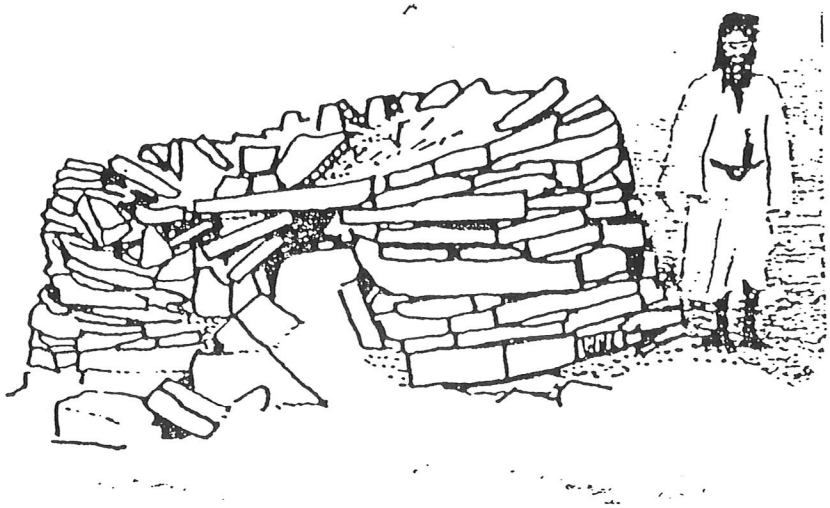


FIGURE 3 - BURIAL TOMBS

Reconstructed side view of tomb.



A partially collapsed tomb at 'Alam Abyadh NE of Marib located in 1936 by Philby.

Ostensibly similar to Arabian tombs elsewhere with their circular shape and elevated situation, this burial area is distinguished by the number of tombs (many thousands) and the unusually large area involved, particularly considering its remoteness from any known areas of past habitation and from present-day water sources. Although much remains to be learned about both areas of tombs, they unquestionably predate the arrival of Lehi in the area and one may well have been the place to which local people led Lehi's mourning party to bury Ishmael.

Ruins, Agriculture, and Climatic Factors in the Jauf Area

Scholars today generally recognize that some major changes to the climate have occurred over the past few millennia in at least some parts of inland Arabia. In many regions, present-day rainfall levels cannot account for the extensive and even extreme erosion that has taken place. It seems likely that the current period of desiccation commenced somewhere around A.D. 300 when the incense kingdoms began their decline during a time of persistent drought.[32]

A picture of a land of perennial streams, extensive vegetation cover and herds of wild animals long since extinct is quite different from the arid wastelands which typify most of the Arabian interior today, but it is one which now has ample cultural, topographical, and archaeological support. Nowhere is this more true than in the Wadi Jauf area, next to the mountains of Nehem. Here lies probably the highest concentration of dams, ancient cities, temples, and burial areas of the Arabian peninsula, clear indications of a more favorable climatic past. These sites include the historically important Minean capitals of Qarnaw and Baraqish (Yatil) which controlled important sections of the developing incense trade routes at the time of Lehi and the great dam complex at nearby Marib which functioned until about A.D. 570.

The import of the burial sites in particular has not been missed by those who have probed the ancient past of the Jauf region. A sampling of their writings and conclusions include the following:

> A large area of ancient tombs north of Marib may be the remnants of a culture of the sixth to third millennia moist period in the Sayhad, which is now a sanddune desert.[33]
>
> The Evidence of more plentiful water in these parts in ancient times argues the presence of a large agricultural and pastoral community in those days. . . . These great

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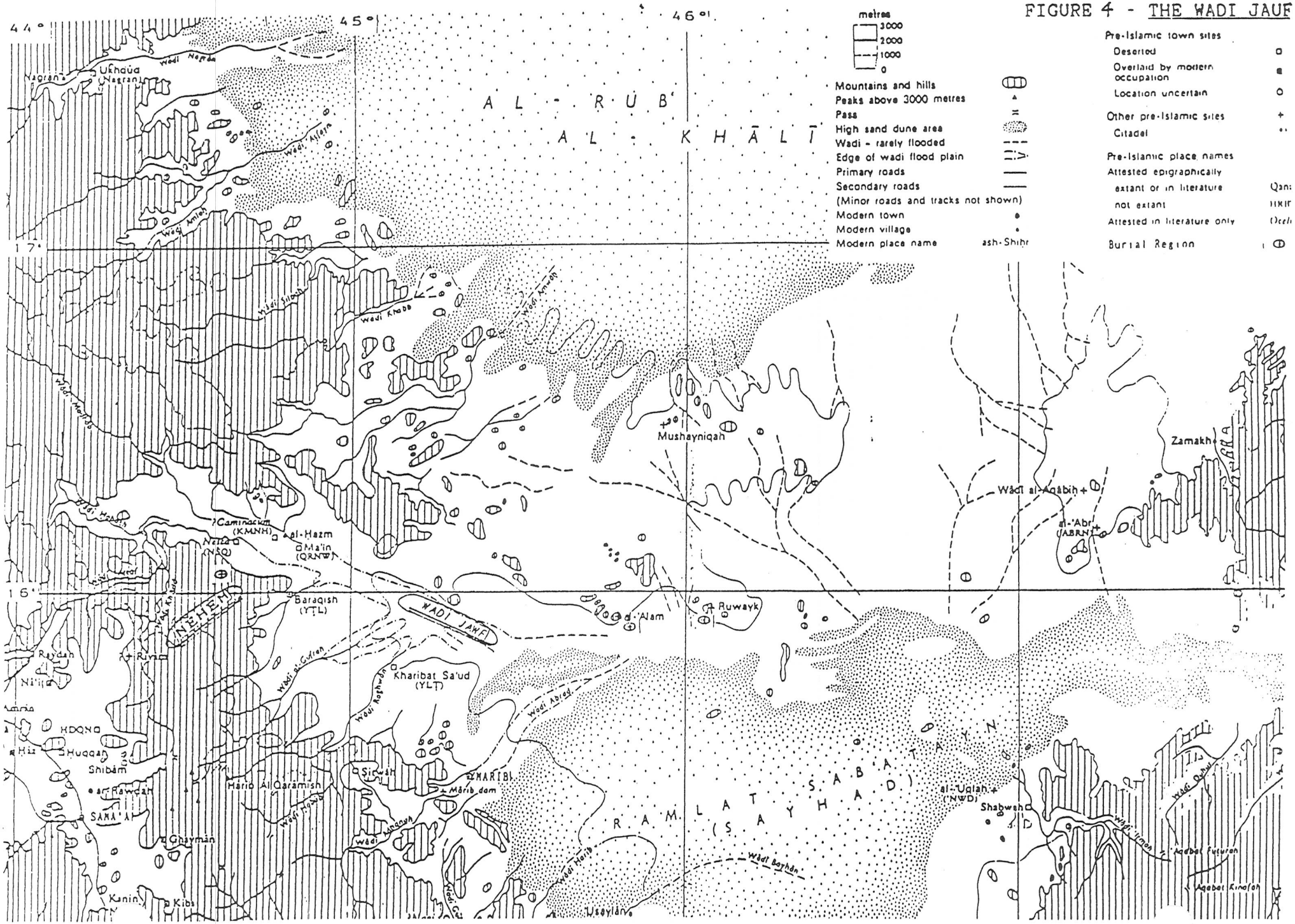
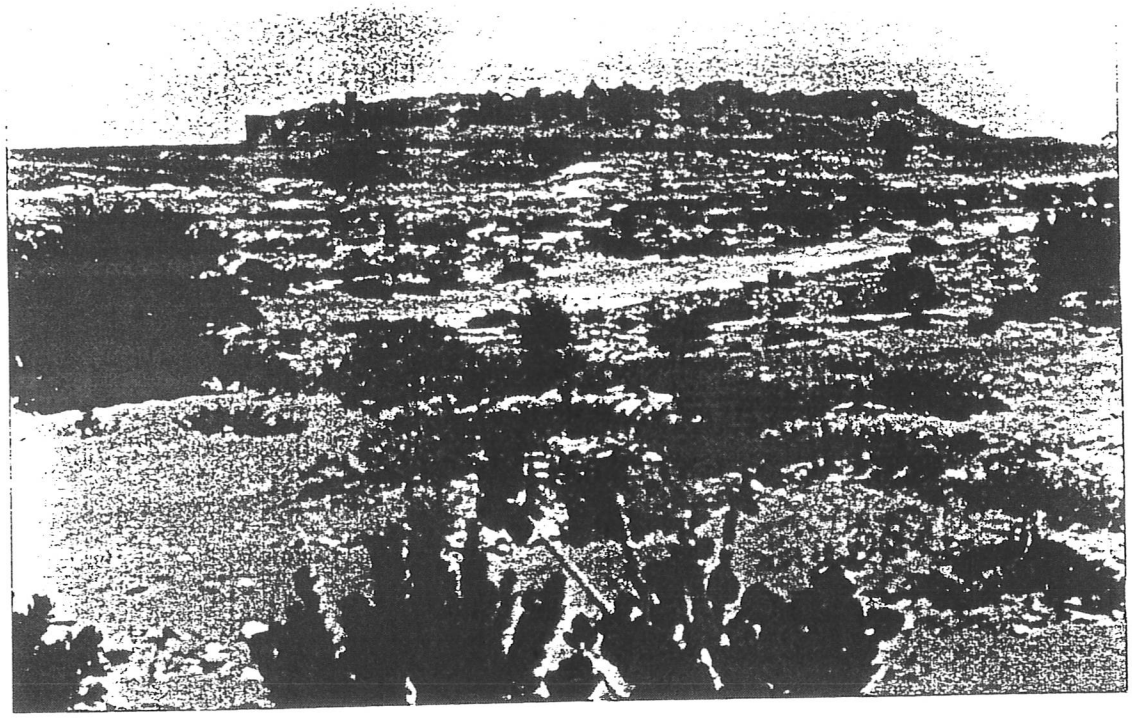
[32] Nigel Groom, *Frankincense and Myrrh* (London: Longman, 1981), 225–27.

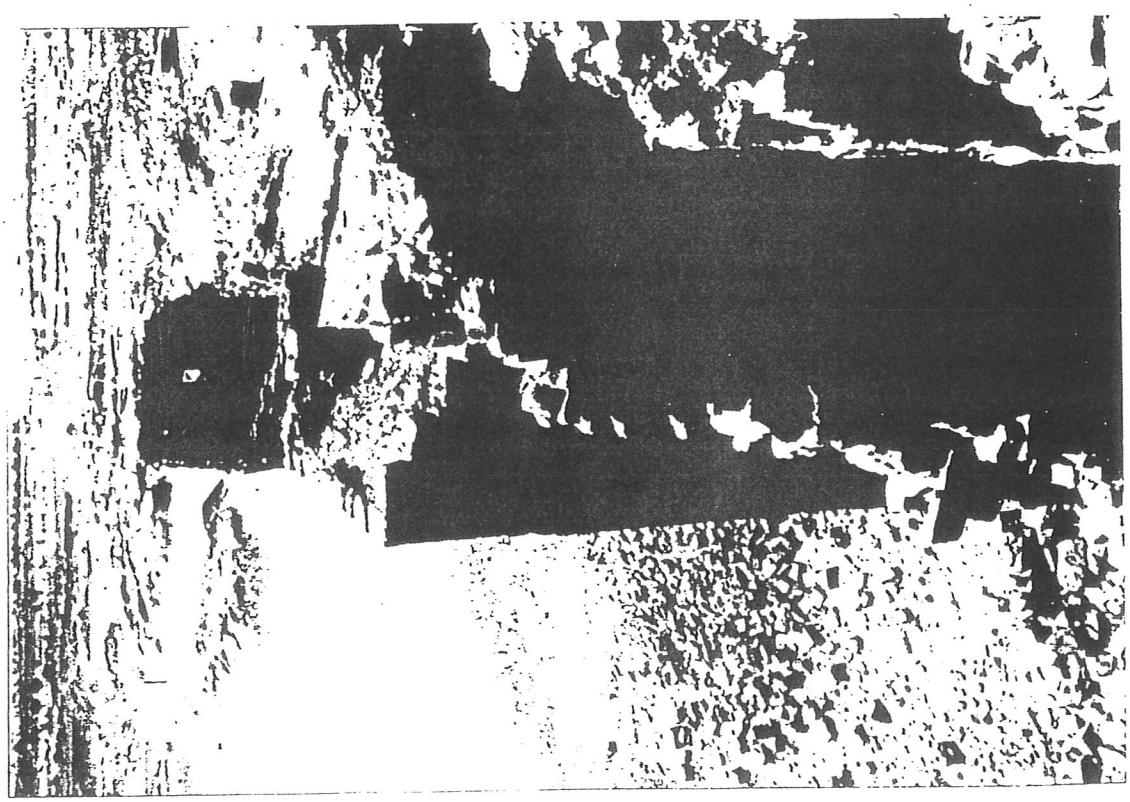
[33] Ibid., 235.

FIGURE 4 - THE WADI JAUF

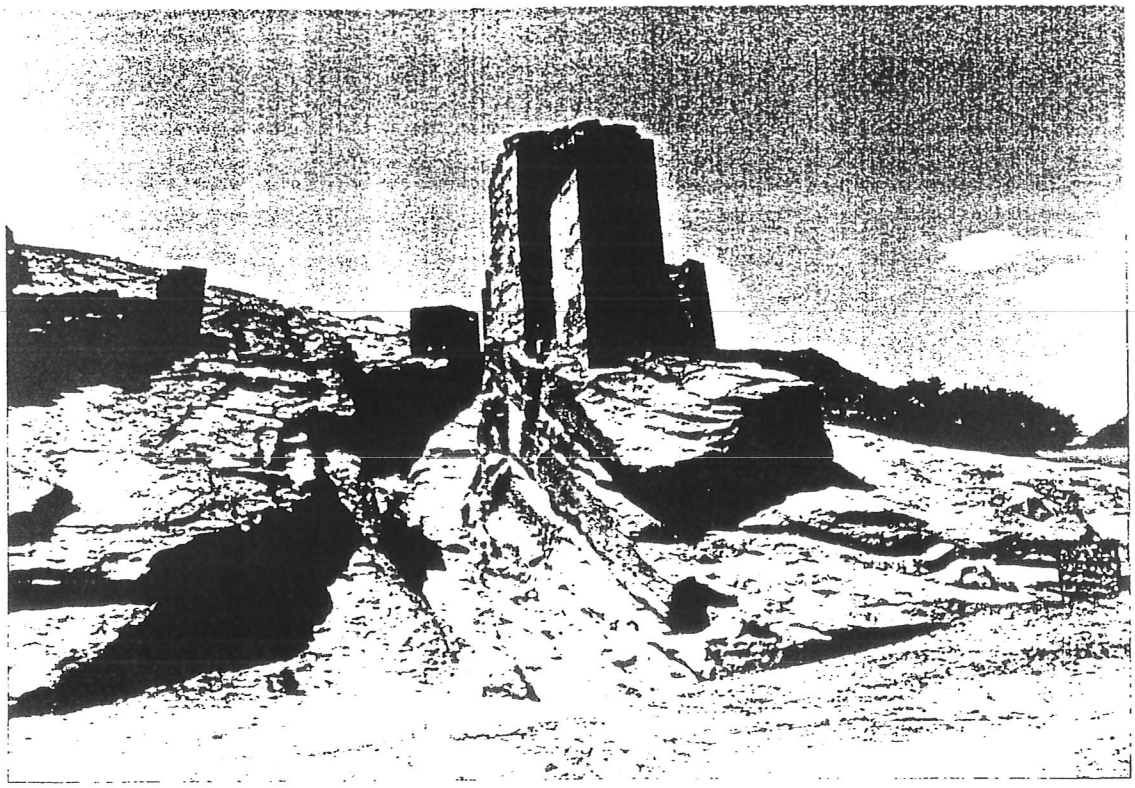




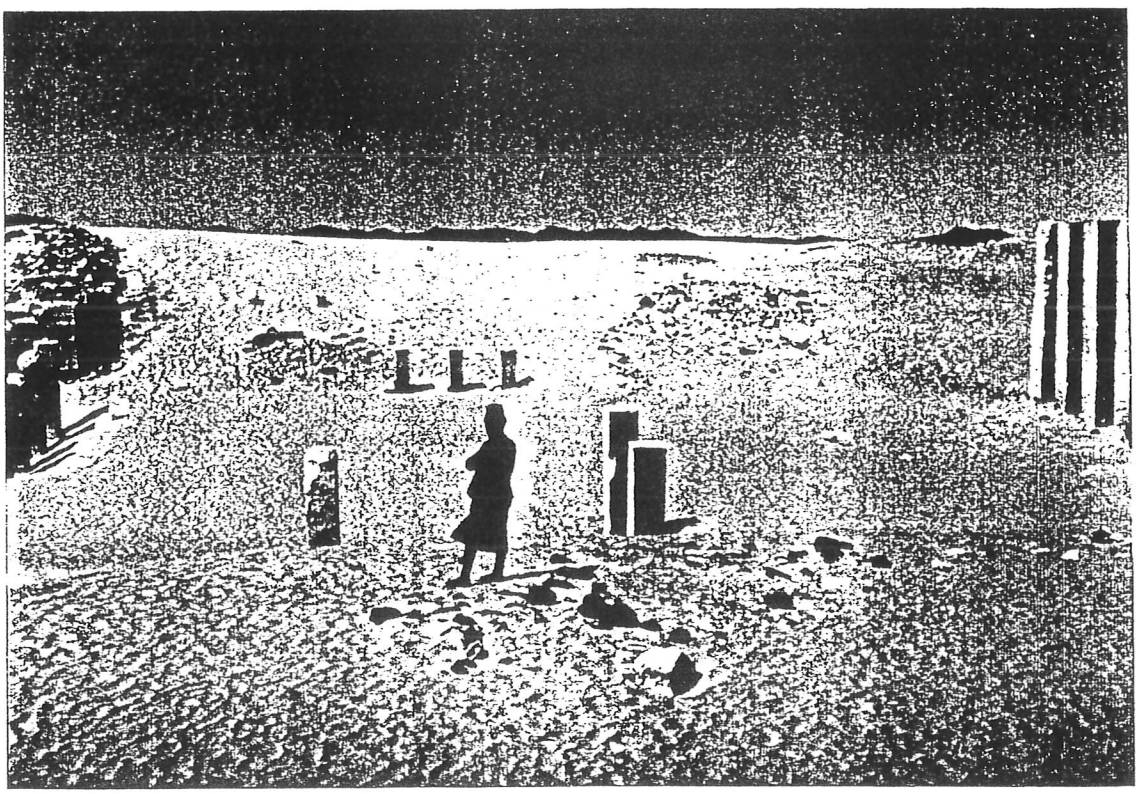
Wadi Jauf today with the ruins of Baraqish in the distance. This is the approximate area where the Lehites were encamped at the time of Ishamel's death.



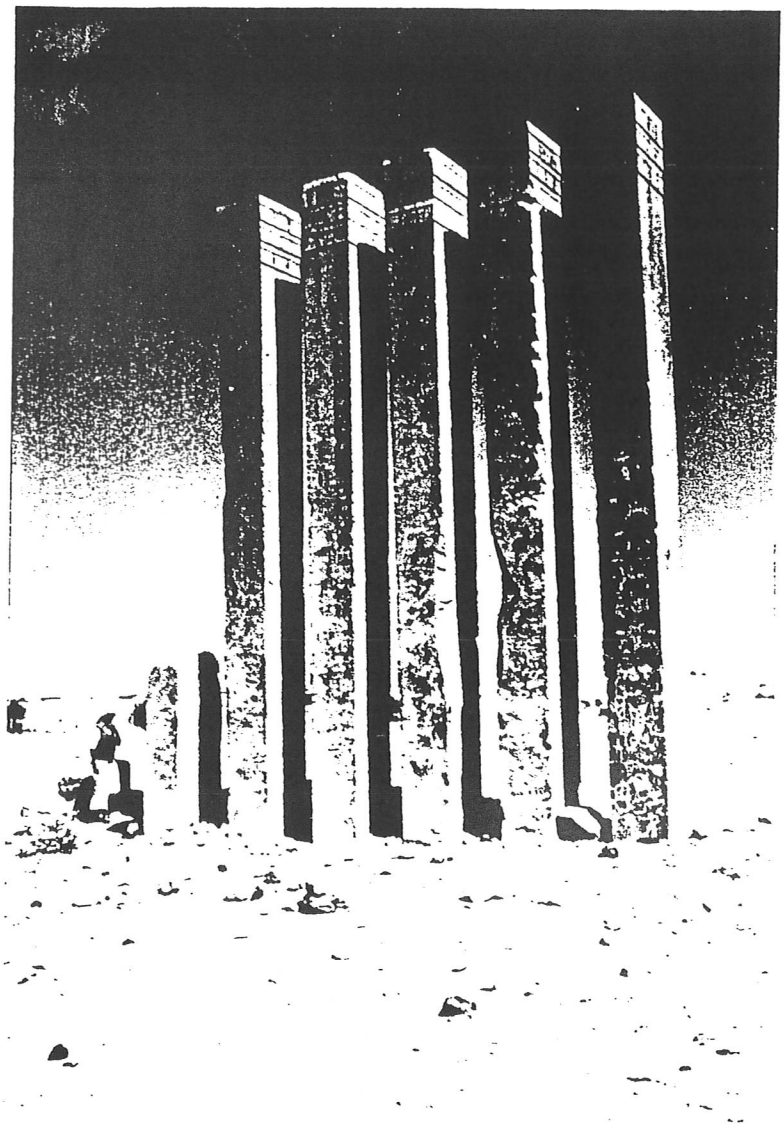
The ruins of the walled city of Baraqish in Wadi Jauf - once a major terminus on the incense trail at the time of Lehi's journey.



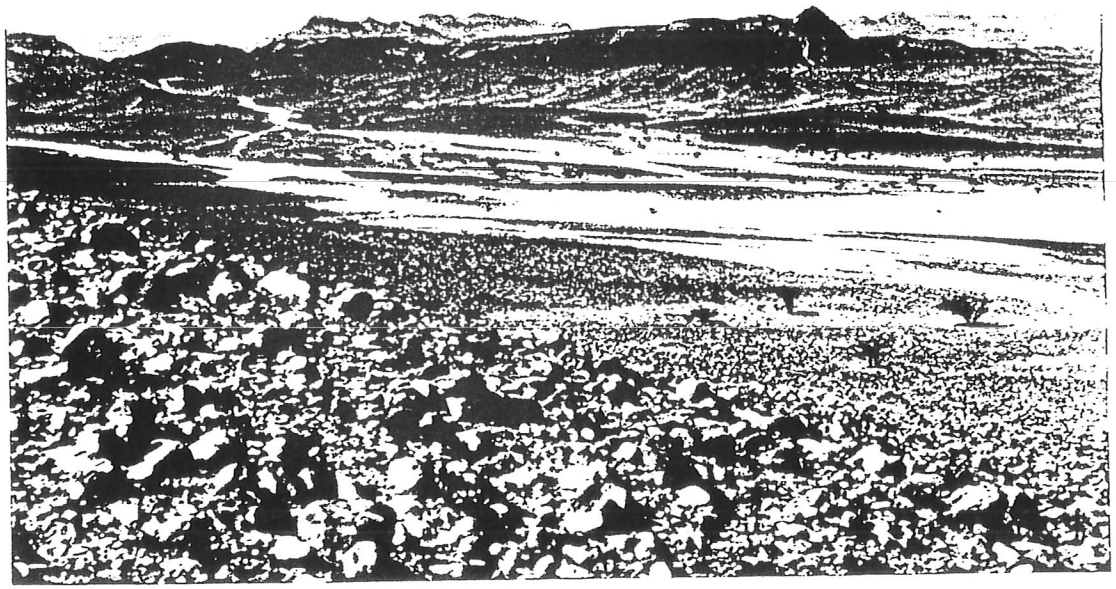
One of the surviving locks of the Marib dam which collapsed AD570.



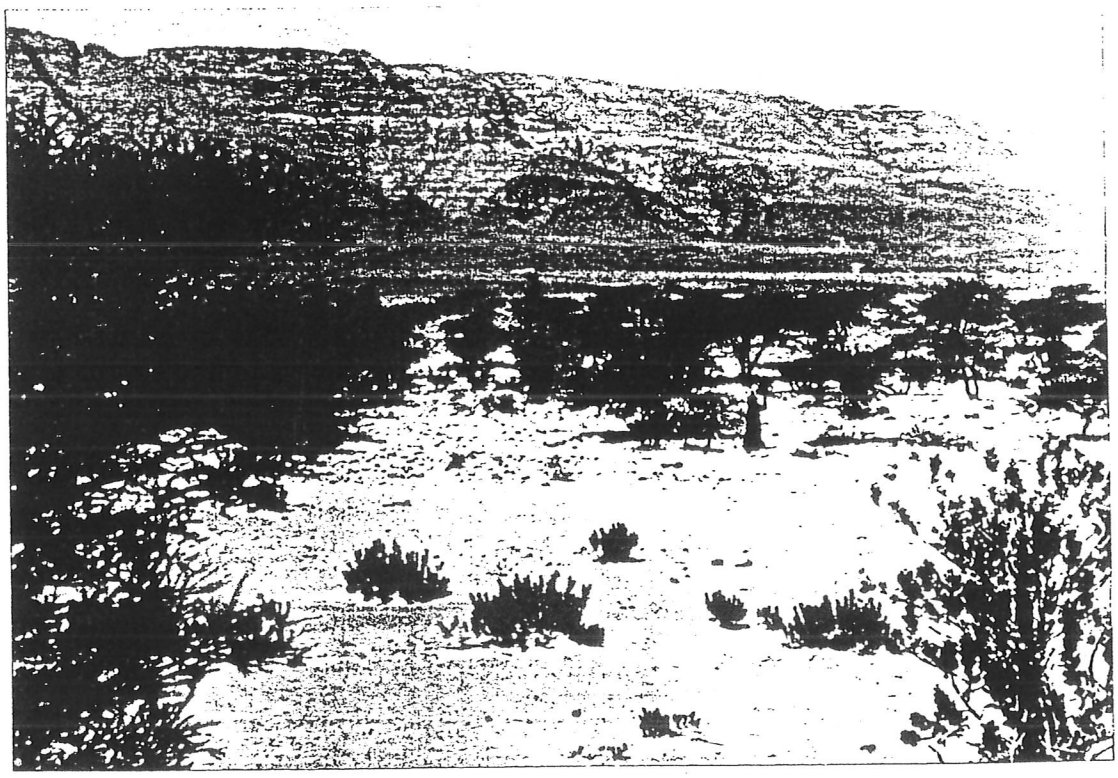
The buried Sabaean temple complex of Awwam near Marib. Situated near the path Lehi would have taken after leaving Nahom.



The unexcavated pillars of a buried temple at Arsh Bilqis, near Marib.



The mountains of Nehem looking NW.



Nehem today viewed from the Wadi Jauf looking S.

> desert cemeteries [are] probably by far the most important discovery of my whole journey. . . . If we could date them and identify their builders, one of the great problems of early human civilization would be well on the way to solution.[34]
>
> These tombs appear to confirm that this area was once inhabited, and extended for many miles. Now dry and arid, such settlements could only have occurred under milder and wetter conditions. This was probably at least before the 3rd millennium B.C. and even earlier.[35]

The physical evidence now indicates that an area which today supports only a few scattered bedouin, once allowed extensive agriculture and a settled population. Such conditions harmonize well with the Book of Mormon account which implies that Lehi's family remained in this region to grow crops and replenish their supplies before departing eastward into the barren deserts skirting the Empty Quarter.

The Easterly Turning of the Incense Trade Route

Perhaps the strongest evidence identifying Nahom and Lehi's easterly turning point lies in the trade routes in use about 600 B.C. (see figure 5). As stated earlier, the general direction of Lehi's travel from Jerusalem followed the incense trade routes until Nahom was reached. Without the time constraints of traders, however, the Lehites—led by the Liahona to the "more fertile parts" of the desert (1 Nephi 16:13–16)—apparently spent long periods in regions where crops could be grown. Clearly some of their journey was probably over tracks away from the trade routes during their eight years travel over a distance usually traversed by trade caravans in two or three months.[36]

The domestication of the camel which made feasible the transportation of cargo over long arid routes also dictated to some extent the paths followed. Top heavy when loaded, the camel is best suited to level ground offering a sand or soil footing rather than rocky or mountainous regions. As a consequence, trade routes tended to follow the plateau and valleys, avoiding higher ground where possible.

It cannot be assumed that the Lehites avoided all populated regions and towns on their journey. The mere lack of clear

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[34] Philby, *Sheba's Daughters*, 381.

[35] Brian Doe, *Monuments of South Arabia*, 54–55; see also Richard L. Bowen, *Archaeological Discoveries in South Arabia* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1958), 133.

[36] Groom, *Frankincense and Myrrh*, 211.

reference to other peoples in Nephi's account is no evidence that they travelled without encountering others. Once safely away from Jerusalem, contacts may have been quite frequent on the journey to Nahom. Indeed, at several points they would have been in close proximity to settled areas in addition to the two-way traffic inevitably encountered when on the trading routes themselves. The Lehites *did* have contact with local peoples at the time of Ishmael's death and burial, but there is no basis to think that other contact with the settlements in Wadi Jauf was avoided. It seems reasonably certain that they grew crops in that area in preparation for the last stage of their journey—it is unlikely they could have acquired significant supplies in the area travelled since the hunger reported in 1 Nephi 16:18–20.

It is therefore of the greatest interest to note that the major trunk of the trade route, the section between Ma'in and Marib, passed through the Jauf valley within a few miles of Nehem.[37] Additionally, the first of several branches of the routes turns eastward in the same area, exactly as suggested by our reading of the account in 1 Nephi. It is evident that Lehi made use of the same trail of water sources which the trade-routes represent upon leaving Nahom and the Jauf area for some distance.

A striking confirmation that the Jauf valley was indeed the juncture where topography and water sources made passage east possible is provided by the account of the Roman invasion of southern Arabia under Aelius Gallus in 25 B.C. Most scholars agree that it was at Baraqish that the Roman army placed a garrison and arranged for food supplies before the march east into the desert, rather than southwards into the fertile Marib region. From Baraqish the most direct route to the source of incense was initially due east. Before perishing from lack of water at 'Marsiaba' (likely the present al-'Abr), prisoners captured there told the Romans that they were only a two day march from the country that produced 'aromatics,' which could be properly described as the Shabwah area, inland from the Hadhramout coast.

Given the very precise directional description ("nearly a south-southeast direction") recorded in 1 Nephi 16:13, it may be significant that the direction given by Nephi after leaving Nahom seems almost nebulous ("nearly eastward" 1 Nephi 17:1) in comparison. One reason of course may be that the water sources followed after leaving the incense trade route may have led the party to meander to the extent that Nephi could justifiably only generalize the direction taken. A more likely possibility, however, is that their path was so close to true east that a more specific direction could not be given, suggesting that Bountiful lies somewhat south and west of the Dhofar bay. In any event, by the Lehites taking a path eastward from Nahom they would indeed

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[37] Ibid., 165–88, especially 167.

have arrived at the only region in Arabia where Bountiful could plausibly have been located.[38]

The Pre-Islamic Origins of NHM in the Yemen Republic

In conclusion, any attempt to account for the antiquity and origins of the place Nehem/Nahom must be cognizant of all the foregoing factors. The following scenario develops on that basis:

The name NHM likely had its genesis no later than the Neolithic period, deriving from the construction and use of a large burial area in the foothills overlooking the [then] fertile Jauf valley. It remains possible that the burial territory originally embraced the large area of tombs northeast of Marib, making it a much more extensive area than the present-day tribal district.

The etymology of the name makes its association with both burial and mourning clear, suggesting the likelihood that the place may have been a neutral ("hawtah") enclave where regional tribes were able to participate in those rituals for their dead.

Control of the site(s) and the resultant close identification with the name by a local tribe or tribal confederation can be confidently postulated at an early stage in the development of NHM. The process of the tribal name itself becoming NHM may not have been complete until near the close of the pre-Islamic era however. Other than the possible reduction in the area encompassed by NHM referred to, there is no indication of tribal relocation at any stage.

The near proximity of NHM to the walled cities of YTL (Baraqish) and Ma'in, as well as to the smaller and less permanent population centers on the Jauf plains, must also have contributed significantly to the establishment of NHM as an accessible burial place utilizing the non-productive surrounding hills. Further, the converging of the trade-routes—still developing in 600 B.C.—at that same juncture would have helped assure its importance and ensure transmission of the name throughout the region.

With the increasing desiccation of central Arabia at the same time the incense trade and its associated city-states began to decline, the resultant population loss would result in NHM eventually ceasing to have more than a purely local importance. A millennia or more of virtual disuse since then would have meant the dwindling of its original significance in the collective memory of its people until the true origins of the tribal name were lost.

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[38] Warren P. Aston and Michaela J. Aston, "And We Called the Place Bountiful—The End of Lehi's Arabian Journey," (Provo: F.A.R.M.S. paper, 1991).

The preservation of this otherwise rare name, with all its inherent parallels to the narrative, down to the present day, in the one place which fits—precisely—all aspects of the Lehite account, must be considered striking confirmation of the historicity of the record in which it appears. The Book of Mormon reference to Nahom as an ancient place-name in southern Arabia can now truly be considered validated.