

Book of Mormon Geography and the Book of Ether

By the time we get to the book of Ether while reading the Book of Mormon, our eyes are tired and we seem to skip over many of the small details and make unwarranted assumptions. This is particularly true of those details related to our understanding of the geographical setting of the Jaredite culture. Although there are only a few verses that contain geographical information, these verses are of extreme importance to our understanding of the location of the Jaredite culture relative to the Nephite-Lamanite cultures. As has been emphasized by many students of Book of Mormon geography, the Book of Mormon is not a geography textbook. Most of the information about geography is only evident after careful examination of the textual context. This is especially true of the Book of Ether. Although Mormon made an abridgement of the Nephite records, Moroni's account of the Jaredites is more of an abstract with commentary rather than an abridgment.

Moroni begins his abstract of the 24 plates of Ether as follows:

Ether 1:

*1 AND now I, Moroni, proceed to give an ^aaccount of those ancient inhabitants **who were destroyed** by the ^bhand of the Lord upon the face of this north country.*

*2 And I take mine account from the ^atwenty and four plates which were found by the **people** of Limhi, which is called the Book of Ether.*

*3 And as I suppose that the ^afirst part of this record, which speaks concerning the creation of the world, and also of Adam, and an account from that time even to the great ^btower, and whatsoever things transpired among the children of men until that time, is **had** among the Jews—*

*4 Therefore I do not write those things which transpired from the days of ^aAdam until that time; but they are **had** upon the plates; and whoso findeth them, the same will have power that he may get the full account.*

*5 But behold, I give not the full account, but a ^apart of the account I give, from the tower down until they were **destroyed**.*

Moroni casually tells us that this is a record of the inhabitants of "this north Country" who were destroyed. He also informs us that it is a limited account and only covers the period beginning at the tower of Babel and finishing with the last battle. Moroni reiterates this limitation in

Ether 15:33

*33 And the Lord spake unto Ether, and said unto him: Go forth. And he went forth, and beheld that the words of the Lord **had all been** fulfilled; and he ^afinished his ^brecord; (and the ^chundredth part I have not written) and he hid them in a manner that the **people** of Limhi did find them.*

In order to interpret the meaning of the phrase "in this north country", we must examine where Moroni was located while working on the material contained in the 24 plates of Ether.

In Moroni 8:1-6, Moroni, having finished the record of his father, informs us that he still has more to write, but he only has room on the plates to write what his father has commanded him to write. He then says

Mormon 8:

4 Therefore I will write and ^ahide up the records in the earth; and whither I go it mattereth not.

*5 Behold, my father hath made ^athis record, and he hath written the intent thereof. And behold, I would write it also if I **had** room upon the ^bplates, but I have not; and ore I have none, for I am alone. My father hath **been** slain in battle, and all my kinsfolk, and I have not friends nor whither to go; and ^chow long the Lord will suffer that I may live I know not.*

*6 Behold, ^a*four hundred years have passed away since the coming of our Lord and Savior.*

Verse 6 tells us that 15 years have passed since the battle at Cumorah/Ramah and it is unlikely that Moroni would have remained long in that Lamanite controlled vicinity out of fear of being caught and killed. Between 385 AD and 421 AD, Moroni traveled from Cumorah/Ramah to Cumorah/New York where the plates were buried and hidden up for Joseph Smith to find. It is reasonable to conclude that he was located somewhere along that journey and that "this north country", the land of the Jaredites, was somewhere north of the land Cumorah/Ramah.

Our next bit of information is found in

Ether 9:

*3 And the Lord ^awarned Omer in a dream that he should depart out of the land; wherefore Omer ^bdeparted out of the land with his family, and traveled many days, and came over and passed by the hill of ^cShim, and came over by the place ^awhere the Nephites were **destroyed**, and from thence eastward, and came to a place which was called Ablom, by the seashore, and there he pitched his tent, and also his sons and his daughters, and all his household, save it were Jared and his family.*

Omer departs out of the land of the Jaredites, travels many days (unspecified direction) and then passes by the hill Shim and then the hill Cumorah/Ramah and then eastward to the seashore where he takes up residence. Omer's goal is the seashore and it is Moroni who informs us of the name Shim and the nature of the hills relative to the last battles of the Jaredites and Nephites, neither of which have yet taken place. It is apparent that the land of the Jaredites was many days removed from the Land of Cumorah and somewhere to the north and west of that land.

The westward location of the land of the Jaredites is confirmed by the following verses recording Ether's account of the first phase of the battles between Criantumr and Shiz.

In

Ether 14:

26 And it came to pass that Shiz did pursue Coriantumr eastward, even to the borders by the seashore, and there he gave battle unto Shiz for the space of three days.

Three more locations are described in the story of the culminating battles between Coriantumr and Shiz.

Ether 15:8-11

8 And it came to pass that he came to the waters of Ripliancum, which, by interpretation, is large, or to exceed all; wherefore, when they came to these waters they pitched their tents; and Shiz also pitched his tents near unto them; and therefore on the morrow they did come to battle.

9 And it came to pass that they fought an exceedingly sore battle, in which Coriantumr was wounded again, and he fainted with the loss of blood.

10 And it came to pass that the armies of Coriantumr did press upon the armies of Shiz that they beat them, that they caused them to flee before them; and they did flee southward, and did pitch their tents in a place which was called Ogath.

11 And it came to pass that the army of Coriantumr did pitch their tents by the hill Ramah; and it was that same hill where my father Mormon did ^a[hide](#) up the records unto the Lord, which were sacred.

The locations are:

1. The waters of Ripliancum
2. The hill Ramah
3. A place called Ogath

The word Ripliancum is interpreted by Moroni as "large, or to exceed all" and Moroni informs us that the hill Ramah is the same location as the hill Cumorah where Mormon hid the Nephite records. Or in other words the site of the last battle of the Nephites where the Nephite culture was destroyed.

There are two possible ways to interpret the meaning of Ripliancum. It is possible that this is the name given to the sea bordering on the seashore mentioned in the above verses. However, although we have no way of knowing whether Ripliancum is singular or plural, the use of waters suggests that this location has multiple forms of water some of which are large and others that are larger than those known to Moroni or the Jaredites. Either or both meanings are possible.

Do we have enough information to build an internal map of the locations described in the Book of Ether? So far we have the following list.

1. The Jaredites were principally located west of the seashore. Except for the possibility that the sea is called Ripliancum, there is no name given to the sea in question.
2. Cumorah/Ramah is west of a seashore.
3. The waters of Ripliancum are north of the land of Cumorah/Ramah
4. Ripliancum is interpreted by Moroni as large, or to exceed all.
5. The land of the Jaredites is many days removed from the land of Cumorah/Ramah
6. The land of the Jaredites is in the north country somewhere along the route Moroni traveled to get to Cumorah/New York.
7. Although multiple seashores are possible, based on the hypothesis that the Book of Mormon lands are somewhere in Mesoamerica, it is reasonable to assume a single extended seashore.

Based on this information the internal map shown in Figure 1 was constructed.

Using this internal map, it is time to hypothesize a real world location for the Land of Cumorah/Ramah and the adjoining Land of the Jaredites. Our first step is to select an anchor point and then test the validity of surrounding real world geographic features relationship to the anchor point based on our internal map. In other words do the real world features in our hypothetical location fit the constraints imposed by our internal map. Based on the list above there are two possible candidates for an anchor point. One is the seashore and the other is the Hill Shim-Hill Cumorah/Ramah pair of mountains. Because seashores can be very extended, the obvious choice is the pair of mountains. The need to have them in close proximity and still isolated from each other places somewhat stringent geographic conditions that should result in a minimum of possibilities in the real world.

Using the criteria listed above, the Google Earth three dimensional mapping program and the hypothesis that Book of Mormon lands were located in Mesoamerica, a search was made of the eastern seashores of the Caribbean sea and the Gulf of Mexico. Four possible locations were found at the following locations.

1. East seashore on southern coast of Belize lat 16.986, lon 88.488, 2000-3000 ft high
2. Northern seashore Gulf of Mexico lat 18.436, lon 98.183, 2500 ft high
3. Eastern seashore Gulf of Mexico lat 20.057, lon, lon 96.870, 2000 ft high
4. Eastern seashore Gulf of Mexico lat 21.257, lon 97.879 3600 ft high

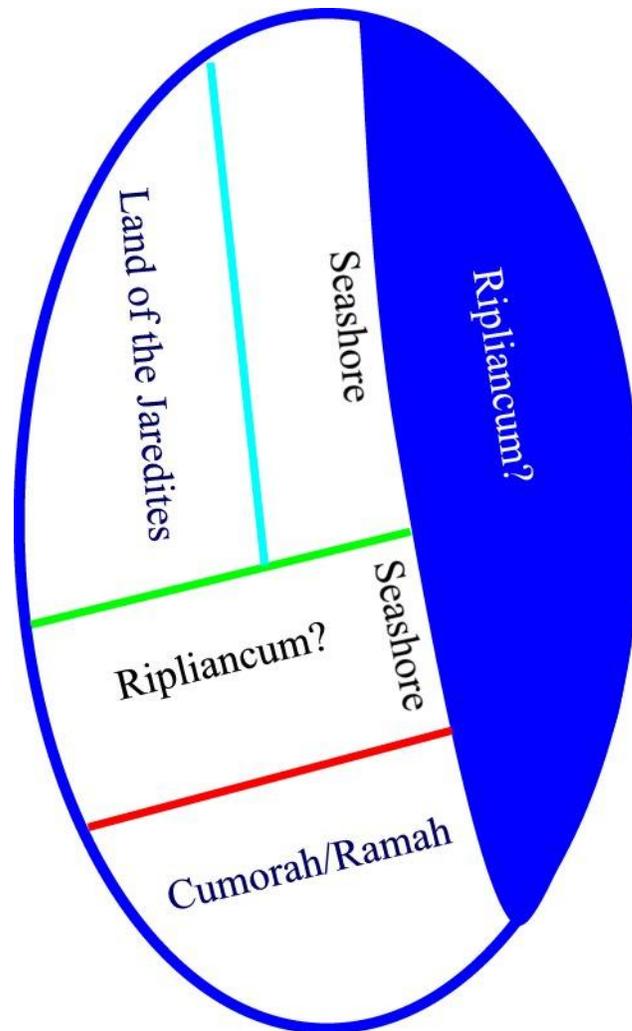


Figure 1. Internal map of the lands described in the Book of Ether. There is not enough information to locate Ogath, however it is somewhere in the land of Cumorah/Ramah.

The one in Belize consisted of two peaks in a small mountain range and was not investigated further.

Number two and number four had both been previously suggested as possible locations for the land of Cumorah/Ramah. They both have a location called Maize Mountain and a nearby hill that qualifies as Cumorah/Ramah. Number two is that proposed by Palmer on the basis that the name of the eastern hill, Cintepic , means Maize Mountain in Nahuatl and the word shim is almost the same as the Mayan word for corn, ixim pronounced ishim. Number four was proposed by Poulsen using a similar rational because the town near the mountain is called Tepetzintla that also translates to Maize Mountain. Location number three had not previously been described or proposed as the Land of Cumorah/Ramah and was therefore selected for further investigation.

In order to evaluate these possibilities, we need a geographic description of the land of Cumorah/Ramah and surrounding areas based only on the text found in the Book of Mormon. A search of the text provides the following verses that contain geographic information related to the Land of Cumorah/Ramah.

Mormon 1:2-6

2 And about the time that ^a[Ammaron](#) hid up the records unto the Lord, he came unto me, (I being about ten years of age, and I began to be ^b[learned](#) somewhat after the manner of the learning of my people) and Ammaron said unto me: I perceive that thou art a ^c[sober](#) child, and art quick to observe;

3 Therefore, when ye are about twenty and four years old I would that ye should remember the things that ye have observed concerning this people; and when ye are of that age go to the ^a[land](#) Antum, unto **a hill which shall be called** ^b[Shim](#); and there have I deposited unto the Lord all the sacred engravings concerning this people.

4 And behold, ye shall take the ^a[plates](#) of Nephi unto yourself, and the remainder shall ye leave in the place where they are; and ye shall engrave on the plates of Nephi all the things that ye have observed concerning this people.

5 And I, Mormon, being a descendant of ^a[Nephi](#), (and my father's name was Mormon) I remembered the things which Ammaron commanded me.

6 And it came to pass that I, being *eleven years old, was carried by my father **into the land southward**, even to **the land of Zarahemla**.

Mormon 2:28-29

28 And the *three hundred and forty and ninth year had passed away. And in the three hundred and fiftieth year we made a treaty with the Lamanites and the robbers of Gadianton, in which we did get the lands of our inheritance divided.

29 And the Lamanites did give unto us **the land** ^a[northward](#), **yea, even to the** ^b[narrow](#) passage which **led into the land southward**. And we did give unto the Lamanites **all the land southward**.

* VERSE 2 (A.D. 327—328); VERSE 9 (A.D. 331); VERSE 15 (A.D. 345); VERSE 22 (A.D. 346); VERSE 28 (A.D. 350).

Mormon 6:1-4

1 AND now I finish my record concerning the ^a[destruction](#) of my people, the Nephites. And it came to pass that we did march forth before the Lamanites.

2 And I, Mormon, wrote an epistle unto the king of the Lamanites, and desired of him that he would grant unto us that we might gather together our people unto the ^a[land](#) of ^b[Cumorah](#), **by a hill which was called Cumorah**, and there we could give them battle.

3 And it came to pass that the king of the Lamanites did grant unto me the thing which I desired.

4 And it came to pass that we did march forth to the **land of Cumorah**, and we did pitch our tents round about **the hill Cumorah**; and it was in a **land of ^amany waters, rivers, and fountains**; and here we had **hope to gain advantage over the Lamanites**.

Ether 9:1-3

1 AND now I, Moroni, proceed with my record. Therefore, behold, it came to pass that because of the ^a**secret** combinations of Akish and his friends, behold, they did overthrow the kingdom of Omer.

2 Nevertheless, the Lord was merciful unto Omer, and also to his sons and to his daughters who did not seek his destruction.

3 And the Lord ^a**warned** Omer in a dream that he should **depart out of the land**; wherefore Omer ^b**departed out of the land with his family, and traveled many days**, and came over and passed by the **hill of ^cShim**, and came over by **the place ^dwhere the Nephites were destroyed**, and **from thence eastward**, and came to **a place which was called Ablom, by the seashore**, and there he pitched his tent, and also his sons and his daughters, and all his household, save it were Jared and his family.

Ether15:7-11

7 And when Coriantumr saw that he was about to fall he fled again before the people of Shiz.

8 And it came to pass that he came to the **waters of Ripliancum, which, by interpretation, is large, or to exceed all**; wherefore, when they came to these waters they pitched their tents; and Shiz also pitched his tents near unto them; and therefore on the morrow they did come to battle.

9 And it came to pass that they fought an exceedingly sore battle, in which Coriantumr was wounded again, and he fainted with the loss of blood.

10 And it came to pass that the armies of Coriantumr did press upon the armies of Shiz that they beat them, that they caused them to flee before them; and **they did flee southward**, and did pitch their tents in **a place which was called Ogath**.

11 And it came to pass that the army of Coriantumr did pitch their tents **by the hill Ramah**; and it was **that same hill where my father Mormon did ^ahide up the records unto the Lord**, which were sacred.

The following list, extracted from the words bolded in these texts , describes the land of Cumorah/Ramah and can be compared to the proposed candidates.

1. It is a land of **many** waters, rivers, and fountains

2. It is located in the land northward in a place where Mormon resided as a child.
3. It is not part of the Land of Zarahemla.
4. The hill Shim and the Hill Cumorah/Ramah are located near each other in this locality.
- 5 The land of the Jaredites is many days journey from this land.
6. It is south of the borders of the waters of Ripliancum.
7. The hill Cumorah/Ramah is east of the hill Shim

The area around location 2 has been extensively described by Sorenson, Palmer and Joseph and Blake Allen and with the exception of requirement 6, anomalous directional relationship between the proposed Hill Shim and Cumorah/Ramah, is a fit to the data, meeting requirements 1-6 , with reasonable accuracy to the textual description of the land of Cumorah/Ramah.

Location 4 appears to meet requirements 2-4 but there is not enough information to fully evaluate the remaining requirements. There is even less easily found information about location number one and it was not further investigated.

Although location number three had never been proposed as the land of Cumorah/Ramah, extensive information is available for this area. The majority of this information is only available in Spanish and this may be one of the reasons for it remaining in obscurity. Fortunately, the Viceroy of Mexico , shortly after the Spanish conquest, required that a report be submitted answering 50 questions about all locations still inhabited by Mesoamerican language groups. These were called Relaciones and are filed in the various archives throughout Mexico and in the Royal Archives in Spain.

Information about location three is found in the "Relacion de Misantla" prepared by Diego Perez de Arteaga and presumably was never submitted to the Royal Archives. It was eventually sold along with other "Relaciones" from Veracruz to the University of Texas at Austin for \$10,000.

After acquiring copies of the "Relacion de Misantla" David Ramirez Lavoignet prepared a revision of the relacion and after adding extensive notes to bring it up to date, published it in 1962.

Using the information in Lavoignet's publication and that obtained from modern three dimensional mapping programs eg Google Earth, a comparison can be made with the seven textual requirements for the Land of Cumorah/Ramah, with the following results.

1. It is a land of [many](#) waters, rivers, and fountains.

Beginning on page 70, the hydrographics of Mislanta are described as follows"

Unos de los aspectos mas prominentes de la region de Misantla, es la abundancia de agua, pues es un distrito, humedo por naturaleza, donde jamas han existidos los problemas dificiles de otros lugares.

En todo su jurisdiccion abunden manantiales, lagunas, y arroyos. Los grandes rios forman una verdadera red hydrographica, y es notable que aun en los cerros, se encuentran pequeños fuentes.

(Rough translation.

One of the aspects most prominent of the region, is the abundance of water, yes it is a district, humid by nature, where have existed the difficult problems of other places.

In the entire jurisdiction there are abundant springs, lagoons, and streams. The great rivers form a true hydrographic net and it is notable that even in the hills, little fountains are found.)

He continues describing the sources and effect this abundance of water has on the area and its inhabitants.

2. It is located in the land northward in a place where Mormon resided as a child.

Misantla is located about 200 miles northwest of the northern end of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, the generally accepted narrow neck of land that separated the land northward from the land southward in the Book of Mormon.

3. It is not part of the Land of Zarahemla.

It is about 400 miles northwest of the Grijalva river valley and Santa Rosa, proposed by Sorenson as the City of Zarahemla.

4. The hill Shim and the Hill Cumorah/Ramah are located near each other in this locality.

See figure 2.



Figure 2. Looking north from Misantla, Veracruz. To the west is a hill commonly called La Espadilla. To the east is a group of peaks one of which is called Omitpetl, a Nautl word meaning "Bone Hill". JUST below and to the south of la Espadilla are the ruins of Paxil reputed to be the legendary origin of Maize known as Maize Mountain. From "Relacion de Misantla" pages 41,42 and page 137.

5 The land of the Jaredites is many days journey from this land.

According to the text, the Land of the Jaredites is located in highlands inland west of the seashore. The highlands begin about 100 miles inland from the gulf and extend hundreds of miles to the west.

6. It is south of the borders of the waters of Ripliancum.

Figure 3 is a hydrographic map of the Misantla basin. The area of multiple rivers and streams extends north to the Rio Remolino-Tecolutla and is described by Padre Motolinia during his travels through the area shortly after the Spanish conquest as:

"... aunque quisieramos volver por otro camino, no podiamos, porque despues que entramos en aquella tierra, habia llovido mucho, y habian crecido los rios, que eran muchas y muy grandes: ... Uno de estos rios es el que los espanoles llamaron Almeria (Nautla), el cual es un rio muy poderoso..."

Translation

"even though we wanted to return by another road, we could not, because after we entered in that land, it had rained a great amount, and the rivers had grown, such that there were many and very large... one of these rivers is called by the Spaniards Almeria (Nautla), it is a very powerful river..."

Relacion de Misantla , page 71

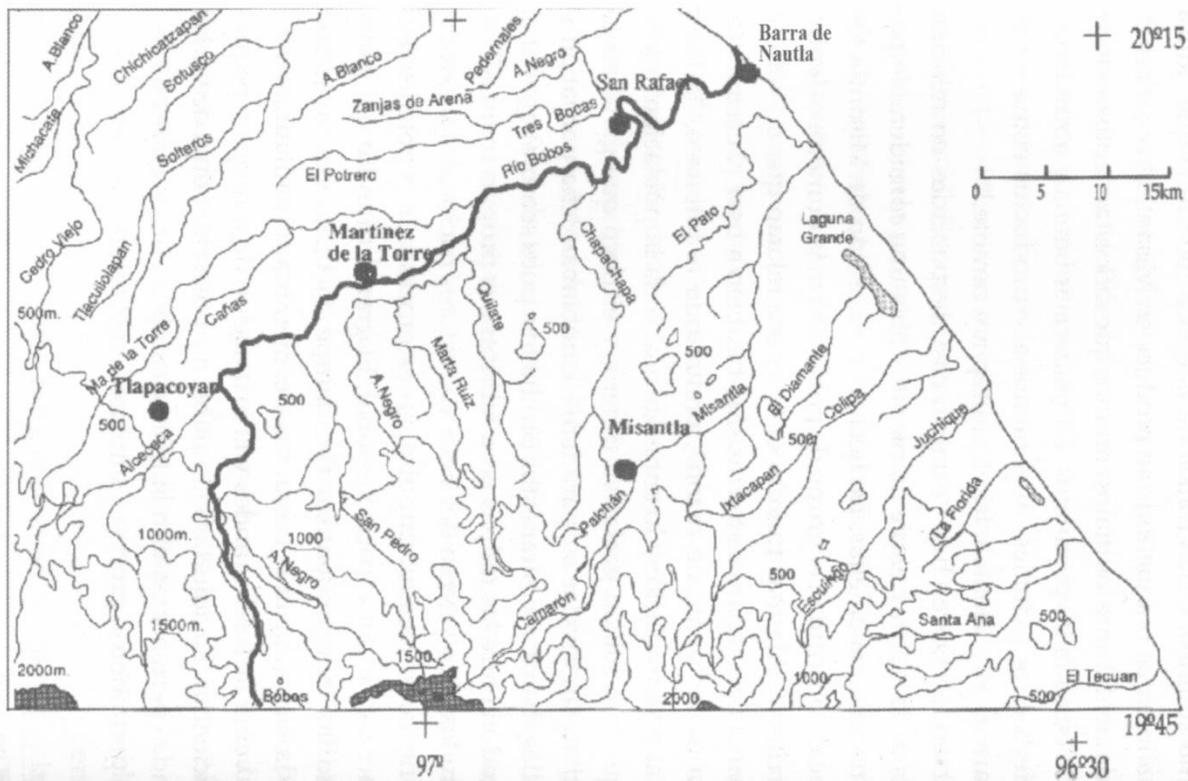


Figura 7. Altitudes y ríos de la región Martínez de la Torre (el Quilate al centro del mapa).
Fuente: Hoffmann, 1994, p. 133.

Figure 3. Translation of the figure legend. "Altitudes and rivers of the region Martínez de la Torre (el Quilate at the center of the map). Source Hoffman, 1994 p. 133. This figure was taken from "De Paso Viejo a Francisco Sarabia en Misantla , Veracruz", Laura Giraudo and Cecilia Sanchez Martinez, 2009 page 30.

7. The hill Cumorah/Ramah is east of the hill Shim

see figure 2.

The area the surrounding the city of Misantla appears to fit the textual requirements in the book of Mormon for the Land of Cumorah/Ramah in every particular. It is in proper orientation with the eastern seashore and is supported by the traditional names for the peaks. Palmer and others assure us that the word shim is related to the word for maize or corn in the Mayan language. Brian Stross (personal communication) equates shim with iksi, the word for shelled corn in Mixe Zoque and the Popul Vuh equates Paxil with Maize Mountain, the primeval source of Maize.

Considering the very important role that corn played in the cultures of ancient America and its role as described in the book of mormon as an important crop grown in the land of Zarahemla and this correlation with the textual description of the geography, strongly supports the conclusion that the Misantla basin is one and the same locality as the Land of Cumorah/Ramah in the Book of Mormon.