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Abstract Review of *Mapping the Book of Mormon: A Comprehensive Geography of Nephite America* (2002), by Robert A. Pate.

Linguistic Puzzles Still Unresolved

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Robert Pate's *Mapping the Book of Mormon* represents a monumental amount of sincere and well-intentioned effort. Had such effort been coupled with linguistic skills, which the author freely admits he lacks, it might have been a very significant work. While Pate raises a number of very intriguing points that could serve as the basis for further fruitful research, these interesting details are overshadowed by the lack of rigorous scholarship and numerous errors in linguistic interpretation.

Pate begins with the premise that "to trace languages that have endured, and the endurance of the place-names found in the Book of Mormon and in other historical records" is a legitimate and worthwhile area of research in determining the location of events and places mentioned in the scriptural record (p. 2). This is certainly an intriguing approach to the problem of situating Book of Mormon events in their proper historic and geographic settings. This approach has not as yet been adequately explored, however, because the necessary tools to carry out such a line of research are dauntingly difficult to master by

Review of Robert A. Pate. *Mapping the Book of Mormon: A Comprehensive Geography of Nephite America.* Salt Lake City: Pate Family, 2002. xvi + 509 pp., with appendixes, references, and indexes. $19.95.

any one person. The author utilizes dictionaries and place-names from a broad range of disparate languages including Hebrew, Egyptian, Sumerian, Akkadian, Phoenician, Arabic, Chinese, Maya, Nahuatl, and Mixe-Zoque. Pate is absolutely correct that acquaintance with many, if not all, of these languages would be essential to a thorough linguistic analysis of the place-names and vocabulary mentioned in the Book of Mormon text. Yet the author has set for himself an impossible task, considering his lack of expertise with these languages.

My own limited field of work is in the area of highland Maya languages, of which there are at least thirty-two. Each of these is really a separate language within the larger family of Maya languages—something like Spanish, French, Portuguese, and Italian, which are somewhat related based on common roots but are certainly not mutually intelligible. I work with three highland Maya languages (K'iche', Kaqchikel, and Tz'utujil). This does not, however, qualify me to work seriously in any of the other twenty-nine Maya dialects. Considering the scope of the task that Pate sets for himself, it is little wonder that he did not, and could not, succeed in his goal of tracing etymological connections from New World tongues to various Old World language sources. By his own refreshingly frank admission, he is not familiar with the fundamental structure of any of them. His expertise is in Spanish, which can be of little use to him in this effort. He therefore relies purely on dictionaries, including one that I prepared in the K'iche'-Maya language, to compare place-names and words based on their apparent similarity in sound. Without a strong understanding of vocabulary and the way that languages work, however, dictionaries are of little real value in comparative studies.

A good example of the linguistic quagmire in which the author sometimes founders may be seen in his analysis of the place known as Pa Çivan, one of the names for the legendary place of origin for the Highland Maya people of Guatemala mentioned in the Popol Vuh. Pate writes:

> *Civán* is usually translated as the number "seven" and also as "canyon." Our English number seven goes back through Old

> English (*seofon*) and Old High German (*sibun*), bypassing the Latin (*septem*) and Greek (*hepta*) to the Hebrew *sheb-aw'*. . . .
>
> Is there a land named Seven or Cività, and if so, where is it? In Infobase's Hebrew Lexicon, the number seven is *shba* or *shebaw'* which in the English biblical rendition is *sheba* as in the Queen of Sheba. Thus it appears Lehi's family may have set sail from the land of Sheba, not, as some have postulated, from Oman. (p. 47)

Pate's tortuous path from the Maya *Pa Çiván* to the somewhat similar-sounding land of Sheba begins with a fundamental mistake in his interpretation of ancient Maya texts. The K'iche'-Maya name *Çivan* (*Siwan* in modern orthography) does not mean "seven" at all but "canyon" or "ravine." Pate's confusion comes from the fact that in several ancient texts this place is called *Wuqub' Siwan* (Seven Canyons/Ravines). *Wuqub'* (seven) certainly bears no relationship whatsoever in sound or linguistic origin to Sheba.

One of the primary focuses of Pate's book is his identification of the ancient ruins of Kaminaljuyú in Guatemala with the Nephite city of Ammonihah:

> If one makes an effort to pronounce that name with the appropriate Spanish twist, it comes out something close to Ka-mi-nal-who-you. Dropping the leading *K,* which may have been nothing more than an orthographer's way of spelling the sound associated with a glottal closure on a leading *a,* the sound is A-mi-nal-who-you. And, given the tendencies in Mesoamerican orthography as discussed previously, this sound is very close to Ammonihah. (p. 55)

Much of the geographic orientation of Pate's proposed Book of Mormon map is derived from this identification. The ruins of Kaminaljuyú are certainly of the proper date to qualify as a Book of Mormon community, its major occupation dating from approximately 400 BC–AD 400. But the identification based on the name itself is wholly improper. Kaminaljuyú is a straightforward K'iche'-Maya language name meaning "hill of the dead." However, we do not know what the

city's name was anciently. The name Kaminaljuyú was coined by a Guatemalan archaeologist and scholar, J. Antonio Villacorta C., in 1936 when the first mounds were excavated and it became obvious that the remains of a major city lay beneath them. The major mound was previously known as Quita Sombrero (Spanish for "take off the hat"), or by one of the Spanish names of the farms on which the ruins stood—Finca La Majada, Las Charcas, or La Esperanza. Although one complex text inscribed on a stone altar from ancient Kaminaljuyú has been uncovered, it is impossible at this point to read it because of the paucity of related texts and the absence of a Rosetta Stone–like key to its structure and language. It is therefore impossible to know until further texts are uncovered what the ancient inhabitants of this site called themselves or their city. Even were Kaminaljuyú the ancient name, one could not simply delete letters haphazardly to fit a particular theory. The initial *k* is not a "glottal closure on a leading *a*," as Pate suggests, but an essential part of the word *kaminal* ("one who dies," or "dead one"). Without it, *aminal* is meaningless in any Maya language.

One final example may illustrate the difficulties inherent in a study such as Pate's. The author frequently fails to go beyond a linguistic analysis of place-names to establish proper geographic and archaeological context. In his book, Pate associates the hill Cumorah with the ruins of the ancient K'iche' capital Qumarkah (Q'umarkaj in modern orthography), based primarily on the similarity of the name's sound when spoken using Spanish pronunciation (the actual pronunciation begins with a glottalized consonant that is nothing like the English or Spanish *c*). He gives the etymology of this place-name as "rotten bones" and relates this etymology to the final battles of the Nephite and Lamanite people at the close of the fourth century. But this reading is unacceptable. "Bone" in virtually all Maya dialects is *bak,* not *aj*. The name Qumarkah is more literally "ancient/rotten reeds/canes" and likely refers to the ancient Maya concept of the initial place of creation where living reeds first grew out of the primordial sea. It is unlikely that this site could have been seen as a significant mountainous feature such as Cumorah. It is a rather small plateau that can be scaled in five to ten minutes and is not significantly higher than a

dozen other similar small hills and plateaus surrounding it. In addition, the site was founded and named in the fifteenth century by K'iche'-Maya immigrants not native to the region. This is, of course, more than a thousand years after the close of the Book of Mormon record. There is little evidence of significant occupation in that area during the period described in the Book of Mormon.

While Pate's book certainly represents a monumental amount of sincere effort, it unfortunately lacks the well-informed scholarship and discipline that such a study would require to be persuasive. One hopes that his work will inspire further inquiry into this potentially worthwhile area of research.