

Through the Arabian Desert to a Bountiful Land

Could Joseph Smith Have Known the Way?

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There is an obvious test for the claim that the Book of Mormon is an ancient document: (1) determine if the details of geography, culture, language, literature, etc., are actually true to the ancient places and peoples it claims to be describing, and then (2) find out if those details could reasonably have been known in 1830 when it was published. In other words, it may have been possible for an early nineteenth-century American who was uncommonly imaginative and coherent in his thinking to produce a reasonable, even captivating, fiction about an emigration of sixth-century B.C. Hebrews across essentially unknown Arabia and the Pacific Ocean and about their development as a culture in America. But if the story claims to be literally *true*, it must hold up against all the subsequent 150 years of detailed scientific explorations and linguistic study of these areas and cultures. In this essay I will look only at the *route* taken by the Book of Mormon emigrants from Jerusalem across Arabia to the sea, testing the hypothesis that Joseph Smith, or one of his contemporaries, made up the account of that journey on the basis of information available in the 1820s.

A clever, or even sensible, writer of fiction would have been wise to choose a different route, if he had planned to go into detail. Much better information was available about the Mediterranean, including the Phoenician coast, where, for instance, material and skill for building an ocean-going ship would more likely have been known by Joseph Smith to have existed anciently. Much less could have been known of the Arabian

Peninsula south of Jerusalem. The standard geographies of the time, those that were possibly available to Joseph Smith in the public libraries at Canandaigua, Ithaca, and Rochester in western New York, were consistently spare in describing Arabia as “generally a barren uncultivated waste,” [1] with sometimes a little information on the “bizarre” customs surrounding the Islamic holy cities of Mecca and Medina. Some of them added (based on the surviving ancient references to “Arabia Felix” and on Karsten Niebuhr’s account of his explorations of Yemen and the Hijaz, published in English in 1792) this kind of misleading generality: “The southern division is fertile in a high degree, and produces rice, maize, etc., and abounds in frankincense, gums, balsams, honey, wax, spices, and all the tropical fruits.” [2] And this is the extent of the knowledge reasonably available to “an unlettered farm boy” in western New York. But suppose Joseph Smith were a clever, multilingual researcher—or at least had access to one. What was the most he could possibly have known about Arabia?

Actually it turns out that the more he had known based on contemporary expertise the more wrong he is likely to have been, especially in details he included about large river courses, the particular directions traveled, and the specific location of an isolated luxuriant spot (that his emigrants called “Bountiful”), where there were not only flowers and fruit trees but also ore for toolmaking and large trees good for shipbuilding. For instance, had he read Niebuhr in detail he would have known of the littoral zone on the northeast shore of the Red Sea as a possible route, but he would have gotten the impression there was not any such system of wadis (valleys of the seasonal riverbeds) as became important in his story. [3] And if in some way he had gotten hold of John Burckhardt’s information before it was published in 1829 and 1831, or of reports of the British experience in Muscat, he would have been convinced that the earlier popular geographies and gazetteers were far too optimistic about

southern Arabia being a comparatively fertile area. For instance, under the impact of the information that became generally available by the 1830s, McCulloch's *Universal Gazetteer* (New York, 1843) was willing to assert that the ancient references to Arabia Felix were "erroneous" and that the southern coast was dreary and unproductive. This was based on explorations that did not move inland and especially on the reports from Muscat at the eastern end of the southern shore of what is now Oman. Europeans could read imaginative descriptions of heat so great it roasted animals on the plain and fowls in the air; a sailor's account commented "there is only a sheet of brown paper between here and Hell." [4]

Conder's Arabia (London, 1825), the most complete general guide possibly available to Joseph Smith, describes the whole southern coastline as "a rocky wall . . . as dismal and barren as can be; not a blade of grass or a green thing." [5] It is this kind of information, the most up-to-date available for potential explorers, that led James Wellsted, a British naval officer who was able to travel in eastern Oman in the mid-1830s, to write in great surprise about his visit to oases near Minna:

As we crossed these, with lofty almond, citron, and orange-trees yielding a delicious fragrance on either hand, exclamations of astonishment and admiration burst from us. "Is this Arabia," we said, "this the country we have looked on heretofore as a desert?" . . . I could almost fancy we had at length reached that "Araby the blest," which we had heretofore regarded as existing only in the fictions of our poets. [6]

The same expedition explored the coast southwest of Muscat and got some better information on Dhofar (the area in western Oman that corresponds best to Joseph Smith's "Bountiful," the fertile coast where the emigrants built and launched their ship). There they found the same

surprising luxuriance reported by Wellsted and noted the promontory just west of Dhofar, “from which coasting vessels had turned for nearly two thousand years, their monsoon filling sails as their prows pointed to India.” [7] And ten years later the same navy ship that had brought Wellsted, the *Palinarus*, returned to Dhofar, and Surgeon H. T. Carter went ashore and made the first modern examination of the frankincense trees that grow there. But as a twentieth-century account of “the unveiling of Arabia” notes, the reports of these were neglected and their names forgotten, so that in 1894, when Mr. and Mrs. James Theodore Bent went inland in Dhofar, they reported, “That arid Arabia could produce so lovely a spot, was to us one of the greatest surprises of our lives.” [8]

As late as the 1920s Bertram Thomas was surprised at the “thickly wooded wadis” [9] of Dhofar, and even in 1939 a scholarly journal of exploration could write, “It is quite probable that Solomon had to transport his ships, or the material for them, from the Mediterranean, for where on the shores of the Red Sea could timber be found for shipbuilding?” [10]

Clearly the information on Arabia available to Joseph Smith was vague, inaccurate, contradictory. He would have been wise to choose a better-known route—or at least to be vague and general himself about the journey through Arabia and the shipbuilding. But he is not. The account is extremely detailed, leaving itself open on nearly every page to easy falsification through subsequent discoveries. We are told that Lehi, one of the many prophets that came forth (like Jeremiah) to call the Southern Kingdom of Judah to repentance before their captivity under Nebuchadnezzar, is warned by God in about 600 B.C. to flee for his life. He had dwelt “at Jerusalem” [11] and was apparently wealthy but now “took nothing with him, save it were his family, and provisions, and tents, and departed into the wilderness” (2:4). The route and times were quite

specific, even somewhat mysteriously so: “He came down by the borders near the shore of the Red Sea; and he traveled in the wilderness in the borders which are *nearer* the Red Sea” and “when he had traveled *three days* in the wilderness, he pitched his tent in a valley by the side of a river of water . . . And when [he] saw that the waters of the river emptied in the *fountain* of the Red Sea, he spake unto Laman, saying, O that thou mightest be like unto this river, *continually* running into the fountain of all righteousness!” (2:5, 6, 9; italics added).

Using a manner of poetic exhortation that we have since learned was common among the Arabic peoples [12] and a metaphor that, though unusual to Westerners, is exact for that land where seasonally dry watercourses are the most enduring features, [13] Lehi also addressed his other wayward son, Lemuel: “O that thou mightest be like unto this valley, firm and steadfast, and immovable in keeping the commandments of the Lord!” (2:9). Lehi’s family remained in this “valley of Lemuel” for some time, while the sons were sent back to Jerusalem to obtain the scriptural and historical records of their tribe and family and then to bring another family to provide for intermarriage in the developing colony. Then they took “provisions” and “seeds of every kind,” grown during their stay in this valley, and “traveled for the space of four days, nearly a south-southeast direction” to a place they called Shazer (16:11, 13).

At Shazer they began to kill animals for food with bows and arrows and started traveling again, “following the same direction, keeping in the most fertile parts of the wilderness, which were in the borders near the Red Sea” (16:14). After they had traveled “many days” through an area of “sufferings and afflictions” and stopped again to hunt food, Lehi’s son, Nephi, the narrator, “did break my bow, which was made of fine steel” and the bows of the others “lost their springs” (16:18, 21). But Nephi found

wood to make a new bow and used that and a sling to “slay wild beasts” on the “top of a mountain” in that area (16:23, 30, 31). They then again traveled “nearly the same course as in the beginning . . . for the space of many days . . . and . . . did pitch our tents again, that we might tarry” (16:33). In this place, “which was called Nahom,” the father of the second family died and was buried (16:34).

After living at Nahom “for a space of time” [14] (16:33), probably another growing season, the group started out again, but traveled “nearly eastward from that time forth” (17:1). This was a more difficult area of wilderness where they “did wade through much affliction” and “did live upon raw meat” because the Lord directed that they should “not . . . make much fire” (17:12). But then, after a total of eight years traveling and camping, sometimes settling for a season, they “did come to a land which we called Bountiful, because of its much fruit and also wild honey; and . . . beheld the sea, which we called Irreantum . . . many waters” and “did pitch our tents by the seashore” (17:4, 5). Here Nephi went up “into a mountain” and was given directions by the Lord to “construct a ship” (but “not after the manner of men”) and shown where to find “ore to molten” for tools (17:7, 8, 9). At one point the rebellious brothers threatened to throw Nephi “into the depths of the sea” (17:48), but finally he was able to get them to cooperate, and they “did work timbers of curious workmanship” (18:1) until they had a ship capable of ocean voyage. They loaded it with “much fruits and meat . . . and honey . . . and provisions . . . and seeds and . . . put forth into the sea and were driven forth before the wind toward the promised land” (18:6, 8), which was America.

If we assume Joseph Smith is the author of this story, he has provided us with a daring abundance of unique details about matters unknown in his time, which ought to make it a simple matter to show him factually wrong in the light of later discoveries. Most dramatic—and most easy to

falsify—would be the references to campsites at specific locations capable of producing crops; the conditions near a mountainous area supporting wild game that would break a steel bow and cause others to lose their spring and yet where wood for new bows could be found; and most of all, of course, the abrupt turn in direction and travel eastward—over an unusually desolate area but directly to a remarkably fertile area (fruit, flowers, honey) on the seashore that also meets a unique combination of unusual conditions: a beach, but also cliffs from which someone could be thrown into a deep sea; ore for toolmaking; timbers of sufficient length and quality for shipbuilding; and a prevailing wind to take them toward America. But the exploration of the Arabian peninsula by Westerners, which has occurred mainly in the twentieth century, especially since the penetration of Bertram Thomas into the Empty Quarter (1920s) and Wilfred Thesiger into Dhofar, has produced *no single contradiction* of Joseph Smith’s daringly detailed “conjectures” and most remarkably has shown a high correlation of the actual discoveries to his specific details.

Modern research has recovered knowledge of an ancient caravan route, “The Frankincense Trail,” from Dhofar, the ancient source of that precious material, to near Jerusalem; the trail conforms in detail to Joseph Smith’s account of distances, turns, and specific geography. And modern travelers along that route have described details that fit the implications of his descriptions of topography, relative desolateness, weather conditions, etc. Of course, this route, and its remarkable beginning point, the uniquely fertile Salalah area in Dhofar, were known and written about anciently, for instance in the work of Strabo and Pliny, [15] but not with sufficient detail to account for more than a few of the correspondences, even if those documents had been available to Joseph Smith or if they were considered trustworthy or were detailed enough to be related to specific geography by anyone who did have

access to them. The real state of popular and educated belief about the nature of Arabia is best indicated in the sketchy gazetteer accounts I have reviewed, and especially in the great surprise of educated explorers such as Wellsted, when they first came upon totally unexpected realities like the fertile Salalah.

To review, then. The details that we know now, through direct, modern observation and research into ancient sources unknown to Joseph Smith, correspond to what the Book of Mormon describes: An ancient caravan route passed to the east of Jerusalem from Damascus to what is called Salalah in modern Oman, the source of frankincense. Israelite merchants, living in the area of Jerusalem and serving as intermediaries between users of the route and the city, knew the trails and the sheikhs who controlled them, and had the means and knowledge to travel in the desert. Lehi (who lived “at Jerusalem,” and had tents, etc.), when warned to flee for his life, most likely went directly to the Frankincense Trail where it moves along the Wadi Al Araba, part of the same geologic rift valley that forms the Sea of Galilee, the Jordan River and the Dead Sea and thus essentially determines the only route south, to Aqaba on the Red Sea. Aqaba is an ancient metal-smelting and shipbuilding area where Lehi’s son Nephi certainly could have learned those skills “after the manner of men” —or at least what he had not learned in the metal-working centers of Jerusalem and Damascus. The ancient route then moves long the beach for eighteen miles but turns east in the face of impassable cliffs, up the Wadi Umm Jurfayn and then down the Wadi El Afal (“the borders near the Red Sea”) to the coastal plain again (“the borders nearer the Red Sea”).

Studies of a number of travel accounts show that the average desert caravan speed for a group the size of Lehi’s is nearly twenty to twenty-five miles a day. [16] About “three days in the wilderness” from Aqaba

(seventy-six miles) along the Frankincense Trail is the large oasis of Al Beda, in an impressive valley with a riverbed that flows dramatically after rain and a flowing stream that waters substantial crops, all conditions that fit exactly the “valley of Lemuel” where Lehi’s party stayed for some time. In addition the water flows into the Gulf of Aqaba, an arm of the Red Sea which in ancient Hebrew was likely called (in order to distinguish it from an ocean or large sea) a yam, a “source” or “fountain,” Joseph Smith’s exact word. [17] Now paralleling the coast again, the Trail, like that in the Book of Mormon, lies in a “nearly south-southeast direction.” After traveling for “the space of four days” Lehi’s group camped at a place they called “Shazer,” which by normal traveling distance (about a hundred miles) would correspond to the prominent ancient oasis now called Wadi Al Azlan. Here they began to hunt wild game with bows and arrows and continued to do so after traveling for “many days” in the “same direction,” which would have taken them into the general area of modern Jiddah.

This area, midway down the eastern shore of the Red Sea, is known for a combination of heat, humidity, sand, and salt that rusts car fenders in a few months and turns limber any dry wood brought from other areas. Here Nephi broke his steel bow and the wooden bows “lost their spring,” but Nephi found wood for new bows and then found wild game nearby at the top of a mountain. Around Jiddah grows the pomegranate tree, excellent for bowmaking, and to the east, as there are farther north, are mountains with wild asses, gazelles, grouse, partridge, etc., which are still hunted with “slings,” as Lehi’s group hunted. [18] After again traveling “many days” in “nearly the same course,” Lehi’s group stopped “for the space of a time” in a place “which was called Nahom,” evidently a well-established oasis on the route, and then turned and traveled “nearly eastward from that time.” The ancient Trail did indeed take exactly such a turn (because of the interruption of high mountains coming directly to

the seacoast) at modern Al Kunfidah, then going up the wadi system to the ancient caravan city of Najran and branching there. The main route then went south to ancient San'a, which by 600 B.C. had developed into an alternate source of frankincense, and the other route continued east, through the southern edge of the desolate sand desert known to modern explorers as "the Empty Quarter," until it came out to the fertile Qara Mountains in Dhofar, the original ancient source of frankincense and the only such spot (about twenty miles long) on the entire fourteen-hundred-mile southern coast. Joseph Smith's account got the turn exactly right and also the area of increased desolation and "much affliction," including the interesting detail that the emigrants lived on raw meat, not being allowed "much fire," in this the one area of the trail where we now know they would have been in greatest danger of Bedouin raiders. [19]

Most startling, the Book of Mormon provides exactly all the details (now proven, but which no one knew in the 1820s) of Salalah: This small, unique spot is favored six months of the year by southwest monsoon winds that cloak the mountains in mist and produce the anciently precious frankincense which brought the caravan trail there—and also produce flowers, honeybees, fruit, and huge "sycamore-figs." These trees Thomas and Thesiger first described for western man; [20] they can produce long timbers of strong hardwood, remarkably free from knots and resistant to sea water and used even today to make ocean-going dhows. There is also iron ore in the mountains, a beach where Lehi's emigrants could "pitch . . . tents by the seashore" but one which terminates abruptly on the west in cliffs that drop a hundred feet "into the depths of the sea." And the seasonal monsoon winds that produce the fertility of this unique area also provide a unique source of power that we now know opened up trade across the open sea to India in the first century A.D. [21] and by which Nephi's ship would have been "driven

forth . . . towards the promised land” of America. In Joseph Smith’s time, as we have seen, neither the shipbuilding skills and materials nor the favorable winds on this desert shore of Arabia were known about in the west.

What can we make of this remarkable lack of mistakes and the even more remarkable number of correspondences in a nineteenth-century attempt to produce an ancient document? Simply that the hypothesis that the Book of Mormon was written in the 1820s is untenable. It would be equivalent to an average modern person sitting down right now and writing an account of an expedition down a river in ancient Siberia. There are certain popular beliefs about Siberia—that it is forested, with north-running rivers that end in an icebound arctic sea—parallel to those available to Joseph Smith about Arabia. But suppose your account moved your expedition through various turns and a variety of topography and climates, including waterfalls, swamps, and deserts at specific locations, and ending in a *warm water current* that took your travelers through the supposedly ice-bound Arctic Ocean *to the Pacific*. You would be dismissed as a forger. But if it turned out, on later exploration, that you were right in every detail it would have to be assumed that you had actually had access to a true firsthand account.

For Joseph Smith to have so well succeeded in producing over twenty unique details [22] in the description of an ancient travel route through one of the least-known areas of the world, all of which have been subsequently verified, requires extraordinary, unreasonable faith in his natural genius or his ability to guess right in direct opposition to the prevailing knowledge of his time. Of course, any particular detail might be coincidental, and I do not claim that such things as distances traveled can be exactly proven, but the piling up of parallel detail after detail, with *no contradictions*, is conclusive. As Occam first made clear, and many

subsequent logicians have reminded us, of two rationally possible explanations for a phenomenon, the one less demanding of our credulity, the one less dependent on a series of coincidences or complex possibilities, is by that made the most persuasive. If we have to choose between explaining the origin of the Book of Mormon as a nineteenth-century forgery of an ancient account that luckily got a whole series of specific details right, even against the claims of contemporary knowledge, and accepting it as a genuine ancient document, the second possibility is by far the more reasonable.

Notes

[1] Frederick Butler, *Elements of Geography and History Combined*, 4th ed. (Wethersfield, CN: Deming and Francis, 1828), 245.

[2] Ibid. I have examined the great variety of the geographies or “gazetteers” that could possibly have been available to Joseph Smith. They range from R. Brooke’s *General Gazetteer*, published in London in 1794 and very popular, republished in a number of editions (finally, with revisions by John Marshall, in the U.S. in 1844), to Nathaniel Dwight’s *Short but Comprehensive System of the Geography of the World . . . Designed for Children* (Northampton, Conn.: Simeon Butler, 1811), which was also republished many times. All of these are sketchy, very general and vague, and though generally consistent with each other, even obviously all dependent on Brooke’s early work, they are contradictory about a central matter, the nature and location of any fertile areas in Arabia. All of those before 1835, when more careful explorations began to have their effect, subscribe to the ancient Romantic idea of an “Arabia Felix” in the south, but some identify the whole southern third as that poetic area (Butler, *op. cit.*); some speak of “some few fertile spots [in the interior], which appear like islands in a desolate ocean”—Jedediah Morse,

A New System of Geography, Ancient and Modern, for the Use of Schools, 24th Edition (Boston: Richardson and Lord, 1824), 228; some identify such a fertile oasis as in “the south-western [italics added] extremity toward the shores of the Red Sea”—*A System of Geography: or, a Descriptive, Historical and Philosophical View of the Several Quarters of the World*, 4 vols. (Glasgow: Niven, Napier, and Khull, 1805) Vol. II, 273; and some claim that “in the south-southeastern part, called Arabia Felix, there is, in some spots, a fine soil, and luxuriant vegetation” (Dwight, op. cit., 109; italics added). None implies there is any timber such as would be needed for shipbuilding, Dwight stating specifically, “There is very little timber in Arabia of any kind.” None suggests any fertile areas along the coast, some specifically denying it, such as *Conder’s Arabia* (The Modern Traveller Series, London, 1825), 9.

[3] Thorkile Hansen, *Arabia Felix* (London, 1964), 214.

[4] See Robin Bidwell, *Travelers in Arabia* (London: Hamlyn Publishing Group, 1976), 193–94.

[5] Op. cit., 9.

[6] R. H. Kiernan, *The Unveiling of Arabia: The Story of Arabian Travel and Discovery* (London: George G. Harrap, 1937), 196. See also D. G. Hogarth, *The Penetration of Arabia, A Record of the Development of Western Knowledge Concerning the Arabian Peninsula* (London: Lawrence and Bullen, 1904), 138.

[7] Kiernan, *ibid.*, 201.

[8] Bidwell, op. cit., 214.

[9] Bertram Thomas, *Arabia Felix* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1932), 100.

[10] J. Perowne, *Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly*, 1939, 200.

[11] The Book of Mormon (Palmyra, New York: Grandin Publishing, 1830), chapter 1, verse 4.1 will give the verse notations from the “First Book of Nephi” at the beginning of the Book of Mormon as they are in the modern editions (since 1880) of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, but the quotations will be from the first edition.

[12] Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert and The World of the Jaredites* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1952), 99ff. Professor Nibley was the first to call attention to the remarkable correspondences between the Book of Mormon claims (in 1830) about a then unknown area and the modern confirmations that have come through increased knowledge about Arabia.

[13] *Ibid.*, 91ff.

[14] For an analysis of possible Hebrew equivalents for that interesting phrase, see George Reynolds and Janne M. Sjodahl, *Commentary on the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1955), vol. 1, 167.

[15] *The Geography of Strabo*, seven volumes, translated from the Greek by Horace Leonard Jones (London: W. Heinemann Ltd., 1930), vol. 7, 299–365; Pliny, *Natural History*, translated from the Latin by H. Rackham (London: William Heinemann, 1952), 37–63. There is also an ancient anonymous travel account, *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea, Travel and Trade in the Indian Ocean by a Merchant of the First Century*, translated from the Greek by Wilfred H. Schoff (New Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint Corp., 1974), with notes by Schoff. Even in the highly unlikely event that any of these esoteric classical works could have been available to Joseph Smith, they do not contain details in relation to modern geographical terms sufficient to have been helpful with the particular claims about the route we are discussing here.

[16] Gus W. Van Beek, "The Rise and Fall of Arabia Felix," *Scientific American*, December 1969, 41, cited, with other examples of daily travel distances for desert caravans, in Lynn M. and Hope Hilton, *In Search of Lehi's Trail* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 49. The Hiltons' book is a major source for my work here, since it provided many references for me to explore, but especially since it contains the firsthand report of people who actually traveled over much of the Frankincense Trail in 1975.

[17] Nibley, *op. cit.*, 88–89.

[18] Hilton, *op. cit.*, 81–83.

[19] Hilton, *op. cit.*, 95–97 and 101–3.

[20] Hilton, 106; Thomas, *op. cit.*, 100; and Wilfred Thesiger, *Arabian Sands* (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1964), 47.

[21] Hilton, 114; "Geography: Romans," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1971, 10:146.

[22] A quick review of these details: (1) The route south to Aqaba is an anciently primary way out of Jerusalem. (2) The ancient route, the Frankincense Trail, leaves the beach coast at Aqaba, so it is "near" the Red Sea; then it returns to it, so it is "nearer." (3) The location of a major oasis about three days' journey along the trail from Aqaba. (4) The location there of an impressive valley that could be used for poetic metaphor and (5) of a continually flowing river that (6) flows into an arm of the Red Sea called anciently a "fountain" and (7) is capable of supporting extended settlement and growth of crops. (8) Four days from this oasis, in a south-southeast direction, is another major oasis where (9) wild animals that can be hunted with bow and arrow begin to be available. (10) Further in the same direction, still along the Frankincense Trail that is in this whole area the only tenable route, with anciently dug or natural water holes at regular intervals, (11) the area (north and south

of modern Jiddah) becomes more inhospitable, a source of “much affliction,” with fewer water holes, (12) many sand storms and metal-destroying salt air and humidity where a steel bow would break and wooden ones lose their spring but (13) where there is excellent pomegranate wood for new bows and (14) a mountain where wild game is plentiful. (15) Many days further in the same direction is another major oasis capable of supporting a caravan through a growing season, and (16) this is where the Frankincense Trail turns sharply to the east and then (17) skirts the notorious “Empty Quarter,” the worst desert in Arabia, another period of “much affliction” to the group and (18) a place where danger from Bedouin raiders could require traveling without firebuilding. (19) There is, exactly where the direct route east intercepts the southern Arabian coast, a unique fertile area of fruit and wild honey, with 20) a gentle beach and yet nearby high cliffs dropping into deep water, (21) mountains nearby with iron ore for toolmaking, (22) sycamore-fig trees growing on the mountains that are excellent for shipbuilding and (23) strong monsoon winds used anciently for sailing to India and out into the Pacific Ocean.