<table>
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<th><strong>Title</strong></th>
<th>A Mesoamerican System of Weights and Measures? Did the ancient peoples of Mesoamerica use a system of weights and scales in measuring goods and their values?</th>
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<td><strong>Author(s)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Abstract</strong></td>
<td>Ancient Mesoamericans used some systems of weights and measures; items in the market, though, were usually sold by volume. The Mesoamerican weights and measures may coincide with the weights and measures described in Alma 11 of the Book of Mormon, but more research is necessary in order to make conclusive claims.</td>
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Alma’s experience with the antagonist Zeezrom in the city of Ammonihah as reported in Alma 11 describes a system of standard weights and volumes in use among the Nephites in their commerce. We would expect that in Mesoamerica, quite certainly the area where the history of the Nephites was played out, there might be evidence of standards. Such would include measures of volume for grains plus weights of precious metals of values equivalent to the amounts of grain.

When the Spanish invaders arrived, they reported that in the markets everything was sold by volume. For example, the Aztecs used a wooden box, called *quauhtlcuiquihuitl*, to measure corn and other dry goods; this box was divided until the smallest unit was a twelfth part of the whole. Graded sizes of jars served to measure liquid. They also had special cups to measure out gold tribute payments to the Spanish in units roughly equivalent to our ounces. Maya groups in southern Mesoamerica also relied primarily on volume measures (for example, the “armload” and “the fistful”). From the area around Kaminaljuyu on the outskirts of Guatemala City (the “land of Nephi” to some) archaeologists have, in fact, found bowls manufactured to a standard pattern and of gradually reducing sizes; these may represent socially established measures of volume belonging to the time period—the first and second centuries B.C.—when the Lamanites are reported by the Book of Mormon to be living in Nephi. Further, there is all but conclusive evidence that weights were not used anywhere in Mesoamerica at the time of the Spanish conquest, nor were scales known. The archaeological and ethnological literature has credited Andean peoples and other South Americans with the possession of scales. Fragmentary information hints at the possibility—no more—that scales were known at some points in Mesoamerica in an earlier era even though they apparently were not continued in use for Spanish eyewitnesses to observe. (Many other cultural ideas and objects are known to have been lost since ancient times.)

It has been suggested by some Latter-day Saints that sets of small metal objects used currently in weighing goods for sale in Guatemalan marketplaces are descended culturally from a system of weighing assumed to have been used in pre-Spanish, and indeed in Book of Mormon, times. Objective evidence for this claim is lacking. Indeed, historically the use of scales and weights in Guatemala appears to have been brought in by Europeans perhaps no more than 90 years ago. All the materials and terminology involved in these devices are of Spanish origin.

Yet the studies of Mesoamerican standards for measurement that have been done so far have been extremely limited. The topic deserves in-depth research whereupon greater clarity may be attained.
13. The writings of several prophets are not found on the brass plates are not found in the Talmud, Zeno, Zeno, Nen, and Eraz (see 1 Nephi 19:10, Helaman 8:19–20).


15. Although the biblical text implies that Moses died, the Book of Mormon makes it clear that he was actually translated (see Alma 45:19).

16. Some scholars have even called him an “anti-Moses.” See, for example, Luis A. Solósk, “Jeremías como anti-Moses,” in “We tend to forget that [the Egyptians] were a people who had no plus, minus, multiplication, or division signs, no equals or square-root signs, no zero and no decimal point, no coinage, no indices, and no means of writing even the common fraction p/q; in fact, nothing even approaching a mathematical nota-


18. See John S. Edmonson, The Book of Counsel: The Popul Vuh of the Quiche Maya of Guatemala (New Orleans: Tulane University Press, 1971). See also the reference to balances in Hoerga, “Déplacements; therefore, I will visit them . . . in Helaman chapters 4, 5, and 7, and in Mosiah chapters 1 and 2. Old Testament prophs also condemned the misuse of weights and balances in the marketplace (Moses 12:7; Amos 8:5) just prior to the destruction of the Northern Kingdom.


21. Compare Dever, “Weights and Measures,” 6:906. The Bible also mentions stone weights. For instance, the Hebrew phrase and possibly, therefore, Jaredite proven-

22. The term “shilum” is found in the Book of Mormon, in Mosiah 9:9. These may well be “stones, a large stone and a small” (Deuteronomy 25:13) could be translated literally as “stones, a large stone and a small.”

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8. See Joseph L. Allen, A Historical Geography of the Western Hemisphere (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1998).


6. The bibliographical record of this work was published the same year by Significance Books.


40. See Gordon W. Willey and Jeremy A. Sabloff, A History of Ancient Archaeology, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Freeman, 1976), xi–xii.


2. This series was published later as a book, Carrión: A Nephite Story (1902). Richard Cracroft says this work was turned into a play and performed on Broadway: See Cracroft, "Seeking the Good, the Pure, the Elevating," Ensign, June 1981, 57–62; July 1981, 56–61.

3. See Improvement Era 3, June 1900, 570–74; July 1900, 653–57; August 1900, 760–66; September 1900, 855–43.


43. Relevant to Roberts's argument presented in [here] is unimprovable, so it is provided in God's providence . . . that its truth shall be attested to individuals by the operation of divine agencies to confirm to the souls of men the truth of the Nephite record, that as that record was written in the first instance by divine commandment, by the spirit of prophecy and revelation, and as it was preserved by angelic guardian- ship, and at last brought forth by revelation and translated by what men regard as miraculous means, so it is provided in God's providences . . . that its truth shall be attested to individuals by the operation of the Holy Spirit upon the human mind. . . . This must ever be the chief source of evidence for the truth of the Book of Mormon. All other evidence is secondary to this, the primary and infallible. No arrangement of evidence, however skilfully ordered; no argument, however adroitly made, can ever take its place; for this witness of the Holy Spirit to the soul of man for the truth of the Nephite volume speaks louder than any evidence of more feeble and inferiour nature toward the project of translation in the better opportunity will the Holy Spirit have for testifying to the souls of men that the work is true . . . . However, I would not have it that the evidence and argument presented in [here] are unimprovable, much less necessary. Secondary evidences in support of truth, like secondary causes in natural phenomen, may be of finite importance, and

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11. "It may be that the changes before the rise of Islam; and steel, the horse, and silk are all mentioned in the Book of Mormon, but the question is more complete the statement is, the better truth must be stated and the clearer and more evident; and all other evidence becomes of secondary importance. Especially is this the case when setting forth the Book of Mormon for the world's acceptance; in which mighty work we have no right to expect, and the assurance in the book itself that we shall receive, the co-operation of divine agencies to confirm to the souls of men the truth of the Nephite record, that as that record was written in the first instance by divine commandment, by the spirit of prophecy and revelation, and as it was preserved by angelic guardian-ship, and at last brought forth by revelation and translated by what men regard as miraculous means, so it is provided in God's providences . . . that its truth shall be attested to individuals by the operation of the Holy Spirit upon the human mind. . . . This must ever be the chief source of evidence for the truth of the Book of Mormon. All other evidence is secondary to this, the primary and infallible. No arrangement of evidence, however skilfully ordered; no argument, however adroitly made, can ever take its place; for this witness of the Holy Spirit to the soul of man for the truth of the Nephite volume speaks louder than any evidence of more feeble and inferiour nature toward the project of translation in the better opportunity will the Holy Spirit have for testifying to the souls of men that the work is true . . . . However, I would not have it that the evidence and argument presented in [here] are unimprovable, much less necessary. Secondary evidences in support of truth, like secondary causes in natural phenomenon, may be of finite importance, and