

## Weapons in the Book of Mormon

### Book of Mormon References on the Sword of Laban

1 Ne. 4: 9 And I beheld his sword, and I drew it forth from the sheath thereof; and the hilt thereof was of pure gold, and the workmanship thereof was exceedingly fine, and I saw that the blade thereof was of the most precious steel.

2 Ne. 5:14 And I, Nephi, did take the sword of Laban, and after the manner of it did make many swords, lest by any means the people who were now called Lamanites should come upon us and destroy us; for I knew their hatred towards me and my children and those who were called my people.

Jacob 1:9 Now Nephi began to be old, and he saw that he must soon die; wherefore, he anointed a man to be a king and a ruler over his people now, according to the reigns of the kings.

Jacob 1:10 The people having loved Nephi exceedingly, he having been a great protector for them, having wielded the sword of Laban in their defence, and having labored in all his days for their welfare—

Words of Mormon 1:13 And it came to pass also that the armies of the Lamanites came down out of the land of Nephi, to battle against his people. But behold, king Benjamin gathered together his armies, and he did stand against them; and he did fight with the strength of his own arm, with the sword of Laban.

### Book of Mormon References on Other Weapons

Alma 43:37 The work of death commenced on both sides, but it was more dreadful on the part of the Lamanites, for their nakedness was exposed to the heavy blows of the Nephites with their swords and their cimeters, which brought death almost at every stroke.

Sometime around 200 B.C., Zeniff recorded that his people were attacked by the Lamanites while they were “feeding their flocks, and tilling their lands” (Mosiah 9:14). When the survivors fled to the king, he had to arm them quickly. Thus “I did arm them with bows, and with arrows, with swords, and with cimeters, and with clubs, and with slings, and with all manner of weapons which we could invent” (Mosiah 9:16).

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[http://eom.byu.edu/index.php/Sword\\_of\\_Laban](http://eom.byu.edu/index.php/Sword_of_Laban)

Laban, a Book of Mormon contemporary of Nephi<sub>1</sub> in Jerusalem (c. 600 B.C.), possessed a unique sword. “The hilt thereof was of pure gold, and the workmanship thereof was exceedingly fine, and the blade thereof was of the most precious steel” (1 Ne. 4:9). Nephi was “constrained by the Spirit” to kill Laban (1 Ne. 4:10). Among other things he had opposed the Lord's imperative to relinquish the plates and had “sought to take away” Nephi's life (1 Ne. 4:11). Using Laban's “own sword,” Nephi slew him (1 Ne. 4:18), retained the sword, and brought it to the Western Hemisphere.

Nephi made many swords “after the manner” of the sword of Laban (2 Ne. 5:14) and used the sword in “defence” of his people (Jacob 1:10), as did King Benjamin (W of M 1:13). Benjamin later delivered the sword to his son Mosiah<sub>2</sub> (Mosiah 1:16). The sword of Laban seems to have been preserved as a sacred object among the Nephites, as was Goliath's sword in ancient Israel (1 Sam. 21:9).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tn6QUqR2Cxx> Video: Sword of Laban constructed by Spanish sword makers – 800 BC look.

Roper examines the use of the terms *sword* and *cimeter* in a Mesoamerican setting as well as in the Book of Mormon text. The **macuahuitl** was a fearsome weapon consisting of a long, flat piece of hardwood with grooves along the side into which sharp fragments of flint or obsidian were set and glued. Our knowledge of this weapon comes more from written accounts than actual artifacts because few specimens have survived. **The Book of Mormon sword of Laban was used as a model for making swords, but they were not necessarily made of the same material.** The discussion in Alma 24:12 **having to do with stained swords would make particular sense with wooden swords.** Cimaters, or scimitars, differ from swords in having curved blades. Several kinds of swords and cimaters that were in use in ancient Mesoamerica are plausible candidates for Book of Mormon weapons.

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### Wood-Bladed Swords

Ronald Spores notes that weapons used among the Zapotec people of southern Mexico included “long and short wooden swords” in addition to “clubs” and “macanas” or obsidian-edge swords.<sup>15</sup> Swords with only a wooden blade (probably of sharpened hardwood) are mentioned in early Spanish accounts,<sup>16</sup> and several codices or native manuscripts (the Codex Mendoza, Codex Mexicanus, and Codex Porfirio Díaz) portray such weapons— simple wooden blades, in distinction to the obsidian-lined macuahuitls. Some of these wood blades are clearly pointed.<sup>17</sup> Codices like these suggested to ethnohistorian Brian Hayden “that obsidian-edged macanas were used predominantly by the elite knights, and the plain wood blades were used by peasant fighters.”<sup>18</sup>

### Short Swords or Fighting Knives

Some Spanish accounts also suggest that at least some Mesoamerican warriors may have used long knives which they carried into battle. These might qualify as a kind of **short sword**. One historian related that the Uaymil Maya warriors had “long daggers like short swords.”<sup>19</sup> Archaeologist Samuel K. Lothrop noted from the early documents that the Maya and the Toltecs possessed **“fighting knives”** in addition to **clubs** and the **macuahuitl**.<sup>20</sup>

But we do not need to interpret Nephi’s statement “after the manner of ” as meaning that the swords he produced were of the same material as Laban’s sword, only that their **general pattern was similar—a straight double-edged slashing implement**, in contrast to a cimeter. The same phraseology is used by Nephi 1 in regard to building their temple in the new land. He did so “after the manner” (that is, according to the pattern) of the temple of Solomon, but it was not built of all the same materials (see 2 Nephi 5:1). When Nephi produced enough swords to arm his whole people, he could well have used some other metal, including perhaps obsidian, flint, or even fire-hardened wood, for the cutting portion.

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(See also <https://ojs.lib.byu.edu/spc/index.php/JBMRS/article/viewFile/19854/18420> “Swords and Cimaters in the Book of Mormon,” by Matt Roper